S F COMMENTARY 24

GILLESPIE discusses

STANISLAW LEM discusses

U K LE GUIN & M K JOSEPH

S F COMMENTARY 24

NOVEMBER 1971 50 PAGES

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Available for letters of comment, contributions, or traded magazines; but I need money as well. $3 for 9 in Australia. USA: $3 for 9 surface mail; $8 for 9 airmail, from Charlie and Dena Brown, 2078 Anthony Avenue, Bronx, New York 10457. England: £1.50 for 9 surface mail; £4 airmail, from Malcolm Edwards, 28 Kinch Grove, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 9TF.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT: See pages 49 and 50 for details. AND ALSO: Adelaide Convention, January 1 to 3. $2.50 to Alan Sandercock, 1 Michael St., Lockleys, South Australia 5032. AUSTRALIA IN 75!

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

WHERE WE'RE COMING

* Last weekend was very pleasant. The sun took control of Melbourne's weather, and, as happens here, summer came abruptly. (Some years we get spring as well, but not often.) As the temperature rose, the surfaces of cars and roads began to glitter. Moisture began to disappear from the ground and the leaves of the trees. The cat roamed in the garden instead of sleeping in the living room. Heated air muffled street sounds.

Our house, made of solid brick, stays cool for several days during a heat-wave. I closed down most of the blinds, opened some windows, and settled down to finish my review notes on YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN, by Wilson Tucker. My parents had gone out, so there was no noise around the house. The sound of car tires subsided to a soft hiss. Bruce Gillespie was at peace (as Tucker might say).

* During the previous two weeks, I had received the welcome and long-delayed news that S F COMMENTARY 21 had arrived in USA, only four months after it was posted. (SFC 22 arrived in the same week, of course.) In one mail, I received letters from Damon Knight, L Sprague de Camp, and Brian Aldiss. A few days later I received very long letters from Philip Jose Farmer and Hank Davis. Very quickly I lost that familiar "why bother?" feeling. During the same fortnight I had rediscovered films after losing a lot of my enthusiasm during 1969 and 1970. (Elia Kazan's THE ARRANGEMENT converted me back to film fandom.) At long last I had begun to write reviews again - perhaps there's a chance of finishing the Brian Aldiss critique, after all. Forty letters written within a few weeks. Mail flooding in (including 500 pages of APA-45).....

And, like Brian Chaney, I began to notice the effect of travelling by time machine.

* At the end of 1968, the Education Department of Victoria sent me a letter, asking me to report to "Ararat High and Technical School" on the first Tuesday of February, 1969. After a frantic month during which I arranged accommodation in Ararat (and typed all the stencils for S F COMMENTARY Number 1), I arrived at the "Ararat High and Technical School". My arrival rather puzzled the administration. Halfway through the day I found out that the Ararat Technical School was now a separate institution within the same buildings, and they found out that the Education Department had sent me to the Technical School.

Things never picked up after that. They only got worse, so I shall draw a curtain over the two years that followed. Occasionally I peek behind that curtain, but usually I hope to take advantage of Freud's observation that we forget the most painful experiences of our lives. Like Philip Dick's electric ant, I've tried to snip 1969 and 1970 out of the ribbon of my life. But what happens if two years disappear so abruptly?

* On the first day that I began my new job at Publications Branch, I stared non-obtrusively (I hope) at one of the girls who joined the Branch at the same time. About two hours later I finally asked her if she had attended Dip. Ed. tutorials with me in 1968. Cautious recognition followed. Since 1968 she had married, had taught in Technical Schools for two years and enjoyed it, and had entered the Branch to "try something new". She had cashed her two years well; she had changed, but almost imperceptibly, and for the better.

The time machine worked well, in this case.

* Several weeks later, I was travelling home by tram (or "streetcar" if you prefer). As usual, I was reading vigorously (and if you don't know what a vigorous reader looks like, observe me sometime). Appropriately enough, the book was some volume or another by Proust. I happened to glance up, possibly because some woman had nudged me, trying to make me stand up and let her have my seat (not on yer life, lady, not on Melbourne trams). A face was smiling guardedly at me, a face ringed by a beard which hadn't been there two years before. MMy Ghawd," I said, or words to that effect. Perhaps I even said, "Hello". The inscrutable face belonged to one of my best friends at university. I completely lost track of him during 1969, mainly because neither he nor I is a particularly good letter writer. By the beginning of 1971 I had no idea where he lived, or how I could get in touch with him, provided I could be bothered. Only accident had made this friendship survive.

I met my friend a few times afterward, but we had very little to say to each other. He'd bought a lot of records in two years (mainly pop and blues, which he used to scorn) and I had bought a lot of records in two years (mainly classical, which I only discovered in 1968). So what? Neither of us had changed very much. The time loop had closed, the time machine had dumped us both in 1971, but we were still "rapping" (as you Americans say) about the same subjects in the same way. In most encounters of this sort, the earlier and the later images overlap to form a stereoscopic picture that is more interesting than the two original images. The time machine did not work in this case, because, in a way, no time had passed.

* When I was at university, I met quite a few girls who were interesting, or attractive, or both. I met one of these girls more often than most. We might begin to talk about films (and I was really a film fan then), or some other subject of mutual interest. Sometimes the conversation would proceed to the point of "Have you seen? No? Well, you ought to see...", and only later would I hit myself over the head and realise that I should have asked if I could take her to see... But I was painfully shy (or stupid) (or both) (and still am), and I didn't choose the right moment (I never do), and besides I lived at Bacchus Marsh and I never stayed in town at nights anyway, and I didn't have a car (still don't) and... By the time I had debated all this inside my own head, I was usually sitting alone.

I saw her a few times after that. She worked during the summer vacation in a cafe in Melbourne, and the last time I spoke to her, she was going to do her MA. Exit me to Ararat; exit the lovely lady to the graves of academe.

I came into the Editor's office one Friday morning and found that he was talking to somebody who look vaguely familiar. A few minutes later, I found out that the interviewee, who would begin work on the next Monday, was my wistful acquaintance of two years before. On the next Monday, I had a chance to talk to her...

...and I found that the time machine broke down altogether. I tried to place the new image over the old image, and the picture made no sense at all. She had started MA, but had dropped out, no reason given, and all questions evaded. She had taught for about a year, but had dropped out, no reason given, and all questions evaded. Her manner is far more guarded than I remember. Lots of other details didn't match. It was like meeting a different person, a twin maybe. It seems that time has rasped her very badly, while it has, in the long run, treated me well. My blank years may have been her life-time; but I don't know and I'm puzzled.

* Three encounters; three skips in time; three effects of the time machine, or rather, the relationship between people's different time machines. The uninitiated might think that the time machine is science fiction's most fanciful and "impossible" invention; for me, the time machine is s f's most pervasive and coherent image, the point where the literary field comes closest to our own lives. Look what Wilson Tucker does with a simple time machine, for instance.

* THE YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN (by Wilson Tucker; Ace S F Special 94200; 1970; 252 pages; 75 cents) is about a time machine, and it is a time machine. Or, to choose another metaphor, it is like a tree whose trunk is embedded in the last twenty pages, and whose branches extend backward in time to the book's beginning. While we read the book, we slither down the branches toward the ground. We know that we are falling faster and faster, but we don't see the ground until we hit it. When we crack our skulls against the end of the book, we find an image of ourselves carved in the bark of the tree. Or, like Alice in Looking-Glass-Land, and like Brian Chaney in YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN, we head forty years into the future in order to find out about ourselves in the present.

(Now, a warning. If you don't know YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN, don't read on. Go away and read it quickly. Then come back to this article.)

Tucker writes most of the book from the viewpoint of Brian Chaney. He is the main branch of the living organism that is YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN; he travels in its time machine, and is its time machine. The other "branches" are Katherine von Hise (called Katrina during most of the book), Gilbert Seabrooke, Major William Moresby, and Arthur Saltus. The height of the tree stretches from 2000-and-something backwards to June 7, 1978, where the book begins.

On the book's first page, Brian Chaney sits on a Florida beach, recovering from his recent trip to Israel. He thinks about his past and present, and does not care much for either. Katherine von Hise, from the "Bureau of Standards", walks up to him. "The leggy girl was both alpha and omega: the two embodied in the same compact bundle," writes Tucker, and few readers would guess that this is not merely an ordinary pop fiction cliche. However, if you have read to the end of the novel (and, as in many matters, you must know the end before you can see the significance of the beginning) you will realise that Tucker's first sentence is quite precise. Katherine appears at the beginning of Chaney's "new" life, and meets him at its end. The reader must also notice the reference to Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Rev. 22: 13; RSV).

> * I've pulled down the blinds. The tired afternoon sunlight illuminates my book, touches my typewriter, and spreads a beam of heat over the wall opposite. The temperature inside my room rises into the middle 60s. I begin to wonder: if Tucker makes a religious reference so early in the book, does he have some religious or mythical framework for the whole book? Does Tucker want to give Katherine von Hise the status of the angel in Revelation? If so, what is Brian Chaney's position? Is he a St John-figure? No, anything but. Tucker's book has none of the thunderclap-and-umpteen-angels flavour of Revelation. Tucker's prophecy proceeds by means of tiny details and delicate steps.
>
> From its beginning, its alpha, this book puzzles me greatly. Tucker announces that his simple words and sentences bear a huge weight of meaning. I must sift every sentence and weigh every word. "We have seen a sign, and his name is Bob Tucker." But YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN doesn't read that way; it doesn't hit us over the head but insinuates its human meaning into us in a very quiet way.
>
> I shake my head, give up these speculations, and get another cup of coffee.

* During the first chapter, Tucker almost makes Chaney sound like a Campbell-hero. Katherine wants him to join the "Bureau of Standards"; Brian objects to offices "cluttered with top-heavy bureaucrats speaking strange dialects". Katherine tells him "You were selected" (sounds more like a van Vogt superman-story every minute). She offers him a bribe: the Bureau wants to make a physical survey of the future. Tucker writes that Chaney "felt as if he'd been hit". This sounds very familiar and hackneyed; like any time-travel book written during the early 50s, in fact.

However, I had read the whole book when I read the first chapter again, so I knew that it got better. I realised that Tucker laughs at some of Chaney's opinions in this chapter, as well as supporting some of them. "When Chaney realised that the girl was coming at him, coming for him, he felt dismay and wished he'd had time to run for it." The contrast between Katherine's beauty and her official position and manner disturbs Chaney. In the first chapter Tucker shows us (although the casual reader could be excused for missing the

point) that Chaney will not face the consequences of his actions. Chaney has written a book which gives a complete, and controversial, translation of the first two scrolls of Qumram. However, he refuses to admit to himself that he is now a celebrity whom many people might hate. He spends so much energy escaping from this facet of his life that he nearly misses the new open door offered by Katherine. As Tucker says in the last chapter, Chaney won't "open the doors" in front of him.

As soon as I began to look at the second chapter, I found that I could not write sensibly about the early part of the book without referring to the last few chapters. THE YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN is so good because every section relates to every other part. As Tucker projects his time machine backwards and forwards in time, he ties time together into one knot. Or, as I've said before, he creates a time machine of his own. In one sense, the novel depends upon one sentence; in another sense, that sentence depends upon the rest of the book.

If you want to understand the book at all (on your second reading) you must know that by the end of the book Chaney has become stranded in the year 2000-and-something. (All clocks have stopped, so nobody knows what year it is.) In the first half of the book, Moresby, Saltus, and Chaney go forward two years and find that Chicago has split into a black section and a white section, divided by a fifteen-mile-long wall. Moresby then goes forward to 1999, where negro guerillas kill him. Saltus reaches 2000, from which he barely escapes with his life. Chaney goes forward to 2000-plus, from which the Time Displacement Vehicle cannot push him backwards.

On the day before the three men carry out their missions, they gather beside the swimming pool inside Elwood Station. Saltus and Katrina swim in the pool. Chaney and Moresby sit separately by the side of the pool. Gilbert Seabrooke, the project's director, comes down to the side of the pool and sits beside Chaney. This is the first time the two have met. Chaney makes a snap judgment: "Seabrooke's pipe jutted out straight to challenge the world. He was Establishment." As usual, Chaney's snap judgment is liable to correction. At first Seabrooke speaks in double talk: "I make it a practice to explore every possible avenue to attain whatever goal is in view". He regards himself as a "practitioner of science" battling it out with the Senate subcommittee in charge of the project's funds. However, although Seabrooke talks glibly, he fears the future more than Chaney does. Chaney, translator of the strange ESCHATOS, denies the disturbing pictures shown in the ancient manuscript. Seabrooke's views are consistent, and as hard-headed as possible without giving way to despair. By contrast, Chaney says, "I can predict the downfall of the United States", but adds airily, "I mean that all this will be dust in ten thousand years." At the same time he reminds Seabrooke:

> "...Worry about something worthwhile. Worry about our violent swing to the extreme right; worry about these hippy-hunts; worry about a President who can't control his own party, much less the country."

Chaney's two statements do not match up. His facts should show him clearly that by 1978 the United States is well on its way to disintegration. But he assures Seabrooke that USA might endure "at least as long as Jericho"!

Chaney does not have his mind fully on the problem. Out of the corner of his eye he watches Katrina and Saltus swimming in the pool. "Chaney looked at the woman's wet body and felt something more than a twinge of jealousy." Saltus

claims all of Katrina's attention while Chaney tries to listen to Seabrooke. The project's head tells how nine men died when a TDV returned to its exact time of origin. "It was an incredible disaster, an incredible oversight, but it happened. Once." Chaney becomes suspicious, and questions Seabrooke's certainties, until finally the project head can say that "every phase of this operation has been researched so that nothing is left to chance".

Through Chaney's eyes, Tucker has already shown the reader that everything has been left to chance, among other things the "certainty" that the USA has a future. Nobody notices the one fact that eventually dooms the whole project: the fact that the TDV must have a power source at both ends of the "journey". Like the most important clue in a mystery novel (and Tucker's main field is the mystery novel) everybody knows all the relevant facts, but nobody can quite guess their meaning. Like any device, the time machine is no better than its builders. Tucker shows us that the builders have committed hubris. They express certainty about matters which only time itself can reveal to them. Either they want the Answers (which a conservative extrapolation of the events in 1978 can give them) or they want to travel through time, and face the risks. Only one man proves equal to the task, but he cannot provide any Answers for the world of 1978. Having slipped through the net of time, he cannot wriggle back again.

In the pool scene, Tucker appeals to our own sense of remembered time. The sun shines, the pool sparkles, a beautiful woman and a lively man chase each other around the pool, Chaney looks on jealously and thinks nobody notices his discomfort, while Seabrooke spells out the end of the USA in matter-of-fact statements. This scene is not the calm before the storm, as I thought when I first read the book, but part of the storm itself.

The sounds of this scene echo throughout the rest of the book. When Moresby steps out into the embattled world of 1999, he notices that "the pool was drained, the bottom dry and littered with debris":

> The next-to-last time he'd seen the pool... Katrina had played in the blue-green water wearing that ridiculous little suit, while Art had chased her like a hungry rooster, wanting to keep his hands on her body. A nice body, that. Art knew what he was doing. And Chaney sat on the sun deck, mooning over the woman - the civilian lacked the proper initiative; wouldn't fight for what he wanted.

Although Chaney had thought that nobody noticed him by the pool-side, Moresby had been watching him keenly. Major Moresby contemptuously thinks of Chaney as "civilian". When Moresby crosses twenty years of time, he must immediately call upon all his military skills. William Atheling has often warned authors not to change viewpoints within a novel, but Tucker does so successfully. During this section, Tucker changes his viewpoint from Chaney to Moresby. However he judges Moresby just as effectively as he sizes up Chaney during the rest of the book. Moresby can call upon nothing but his military skills. He dares too much. As Moresby remembers the pool incident, he brushes off Chaney as a man without "the proper initiative". Moresby shows too much initiative, too much certainty in the face of the completely unknown. In the world of 1999 he dies for his efforts. Chaney loses a great deal in 1978, but he continues to live in the 21st century.

When Saltus emerges in the year 2000, he finds only an "eerie silence". (Another side track: When I read that phrase, I thought, "Aha! I've caught you

now Tucker! You've used a common cliche"; until I thought that maybe Tucker had tried to show that Saltus is the kind of person who would use that kind of cliche. However, I found it so hard to believe that an s f writer could be that careful that I gave up the idea immediately.) The barracks have burned down, someone has taken supplies left for the time travellers, and bodies lie in the snow. Saltus sets out on his "survey" in a jaunty manner. Into the tape-recorder he gives Chaney some good-old-fashioned Republican American advice, "You'd damned well better shoot straight if you have to shoot at all. Remember something we taught you." When Saltus passes the swimming-pool it is

> Nearly empty: a half dozen long lumps huddled under the blanket of snow at the bottom, lumps the shape of men... Saltus turned away, expelling a breath of bitter disappointment; he wasn't sure what he had expected after so long a time, but certainly not that - not the bodies of station personnel dumped into an uncovered grave.
>
> He remembered the beautiful image of Katrina in that pool - Katrina, nearly naked, scantily clad in that lovely, sexy swim suit - and himself chasing after her, wanting the feel of that wet and splendid body under his hands again and again... And Chaney! The poor out-gunned civilian sat up on the deck and burned with a green, sulphurous envy, wanting to but not daring to. Damn, but that was a day to be remembered!

Dead bodies in the pool replace the glittering water, the two swimmers, and their watchers. In the year 2000 Saltus only has the memory of Katrina, although in 1980 he finds out that he will marry her in the years between 1978 and 1980. He also remembers the "poor out-gunned civilian", still the man to whom he condescends. Saltus and Chaney form a firm friendship in the early part of the novel, but the soldier always presumes that he can kick around the scholar. In fact, the scholar outlives the soldier and, in a very ambiguous way, out-manoeuvres him. By the end of the book, all the soldiers have killed each other. The only knowledge that remains rests within Chaney's head - his knowledge of the ways in which the ancient tribes of the Negev desert survived in the middle of desolation.

When Chaney emerges from the TDV he finds that all the electric power is off. The station is in complete darkness. He explores a desolate world. A headstone rests in the ground. Its inscription reads, "A ditat Deus K". Someone has tied skulls to the station's gatepost, warning away all intruders. When Chaney looks at the swimming pool he sees

> A few inches of dirty water... - residue from the rains - together with a poor collection of rusted and broken weapons and an appreciable amount of debris blown in by the wind: the pool had become a dumping ground for trash and armament. The sodden corpse of some small animal floated in a corner. A lonely place. Chaney very carefully put away the memory of the pool as he'd known it and backed away from the edge.

In this passage, Tucker shows his extraordinary attention to detail. Why had the pool "become a dumping ground for trash and armament"? Because the destruction of the whole world took place in the air around the pool. But even so much violence leaves few fragments. What is the "sodden corpse of some small animal" that "floated in a corner"? It is the last remainder of the human bodies that lay in the pool when Saltus saw it. What is the "memory of

the pool" that Chaney so carefully "puts away"? The same memory that Moresby and Saltus recalled with gusto. At this point, Chaney cannot face the memory of the steps he should have taken.

I could explore this book for several thousand words more. THE YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN is a living, trustworthy book. Tucker has considered every line and detail, he has imagined every scene fully, and weighed every word.

But where does he place the full weight of the book? Where does the time machine actually arrive; what does lie at the base of the "tree"? I'll go back to the last meeting between Katrina and Chaney, and proceed from there. Compare the whole of the rest of the book with these lines:

> He said: "When this survey is completed I want to leave..."
>
> Quickly: "Is it because of something you found up there? Has something turned you away, Brian?"
>
> "Ah - no more questions."
>
> "But you leave me so unsatisfied!"
>
> A moment of silence, and then... "Ask the others to be here at ten o'clock in the morning for a final briefing. We must evaluate these reports. The probe is scheduled for the day after tomorrow."
>
> "Are you coming downstairs to see us off?"
>
> "No, sir. I will wait for you here."

Again Tucker shows that he has learned a writing skill that evades nearly every other s f author - the ability to convey the greatest possible meaning in the smallest possible number of words. Of course there is something that Chaney found "up there" - he found out that Saltus marries Katrina between 1978 and 1980. However, Chaney determined the direction of that future in 1978, as he sat by the pool-side while Saltus wooed Katrina. And shouldn't he have shown some reaction when Katrina cries out in deliberate ambiguity: "But you leave me so unsatisfied!"? Chaney misses the point of the conversation, although the reader does not. Because he misses the point of the conversation, he must go thirty or forty years into the future so that he can meet Katrina again. Chaney only says, "I wish you luck, and I'll think of you often in the tank". (Hell, what do you say in such a situation?) Katrina sees which future Chaney has chosen, or rather, failed to choose. She addresses him again as "Mr Chaney" instead of "Brian". She gives her farewell, "No, sir. I will wait for you here."

And when Brian Chaney steps out of the TDV in the year 2000-plus, he finds that Katrina has kept her word:

> The aged woman was sitting in her accustomed chair to one side of the oversized steel table... As always, her clasped hands rested on the tabletop in repose. Chaney put the lantern on the table between them and the poor light fell on her face.
>
> Katrina.
>
> Her eyes were bright and alive, as sharply alert as he remembered

them, but time had not been lenient with her... The skin was drawn tight over her cheekbones, pulled tight around her mouth and chin and appeared sallow in lantern light. The lustrous, lovely hair was entirely gray. Hard years, unhappy years, lean years...

Katrina waited on him. Chaney struggled for something to say, something that wouldn't sound foolish or melodramatic or carry a ring of false heartiness. She would despise him for that... He had left her here in this room only hours ago, left her with that sense of dry apprehension as he prepared himself for the third - now final - probe into the future. She had been sitting in the same chair in the same attitude of repose.

Chaney said: "I'm still in love with you, Katrina."

That last line is the most moving line in any recent science fiction novel, but not unless the reader has caught the meaning of the rest of the novel. Katrina has waited her entire life, she has endured the decline and fall of her world, she has brought up her two children under the worst possible conditions, and she has seen her husband die. No heat, light, or time remains in the station. From the past comes a man who might be a ghost; a man who lacks the experience of thirty years' continuous disaster, a man who has not changed at all. But finally, thirty years too late, he does show that he has changed. Not much, but enough. He says the words he should have said in 1978; he realises the meaning of his time journey; for once, he carefully observes the scene in front of him, places his image-of-Katrina-past over the image of Katrina-present, makes the right judgment, and says the right words.

But, you might say, there are no time machines. That's part of the book's significance, as well. As Chaney explores the deserted station, he reflects that but for the time machine "he would have plodded along in his slow, myopic way until the future slammed into him - or he into it." That's us; we're the people unblessed by Time Displacement Vehicles who are busily walking myopically towards the brick wall of the future. Isaac Asimov puts it more bluntly: the present world outlook reminds him of the tale of the man who fell off the Empire State Building; as he passed the tenth story, he said, "Well, I've fallen ninety stories and I'm all right so far." (page 99, F&SF, May 1969). But Tucker has not written the book in order to warn us about certainties that should strike the readers of any newspaper. He has written about time-travelling, rather than The Future; about saying and doing the right things and words at the right time. THE YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN is about ourselves. That's all. That's enough.

* But why have I written five thousand words to introduce a magazine which contains letters from people who are far more interesting than myself? For a start, you're a captive audience. You didn't really know what I was going to say until I said it. This is one side of a conversation. If you want to write an answer, you will need to sit down and take some trouble over your reply. In other words, both you and I will hold a much better "conversation" than if we met each other at the Space Age Bookshop or the Degraves Tavern. This piece became very confessional. Usually I cannot say these things in conversation (which is usually the art of saying as much as possible as wittily as possible about as little as possible). I tried to follow a single series of thoughts, a series which started in a single room while studying a book on a sunny afternoon. This piece is primarily about reading books, but it's also about you, me, this magazine, this world, and where we're coming. *

* On that note, we begin to discuss book-reviewing: I hope that you see the connection. *

* LEON TAYLOR (Box 89, Seymour, Indiana 47274, USA)

Reviewing. Why?

Because it supplies the missing half of any published work: the reader's response. Because the reader and writer can pool their experiences about one common subject. Because it's important. Because it's necessary. Because it's fun.

I don't have the simple "to buy or not to buy" quickie in mind. I don't have any grudge against them, but I just think that there are more artistic chalices to attain. A review should discuss a science fiction work on its three basic levels - as literature, as extrapolation, as philosophy - and articulate its emotional impact. (Note how cleverly I separate basic inseparables.) Literature has its own criteria, extrapolation is grounded in facts, and philosophy has its established body of theories. People who judge by these standards will come to more or less set conclusions: everybody agrees that Delany is poetic, Anderson is strong on extrapolation, and Dick is a philosopher. But those three categories have constituted nearly all fannish reviewing (if you discount minor diversions such as feuds, muggings, etc.). Most of it has been limited to the one level of literature.

The fan reviewer may also draw on a Wealth of Tradition. Ted Pauls is an ideal model: erudite, impersonal, somewhat pedantic. He is mainly analytical. He lists a book's technical strengths and weaknesses and then dissects them. He proceeds according to established rules and carefully supports his judgments with acceptable proofs. Pauls makes judicial decisions - dispassionate and disinterested.

The End?

Not quite. A reviewer should also articulate the emotional impact of a book. And that, as Abner Doubleday said, is a whole new ball game. We may weigh objectively the means of transmitting the emotional impact, but the impact itself is subjective. It's a docking of souls, not a meeting of minds. Ted Pauls doesn't even nuzzle up to subjectivity; hell, he's dedicated to the precise opposite. Sometimes he uses vague, communal adjectives such as "beautiful" or "thrilling" (really informative, no?). A reviewer who uses such frayed modifiers denies his own role in the writer-book-reader-review cycle. We want the reader's personal reaction, not some goddam spelling list.

At this juncture strides boldly in the Walker Phenomenon. Paul Walker writes from the gut just as the oldtime gunslinger shot from the hip. He is almost the Ellison of reviewing: dashing, impulsive, immediate. You know all about the book's emotional impact from Paul Walker. Sadly, I must quote Dick Geis' damning words when he sized up Walker as a "sloppy thinker". Paul Walker and Ted Pauls are at two opposite ends of the scale of reviewing; neither of them gives a final solution.

We need reviewers who can cover the whole field: people who can

transmute from analysis to imagery at the drop of a conjunction. We need a New Wave in reviewing.

If we want to find language that describes a book's emotional impact, we are most likely to turn to poetry. Most of our language proceeds in a logical way... Poetry tries to find concrete sensual language. It uses the most illogical tools we have: the images of our existence. Where logic demands expansion, poetry employs compression. Poetry mystifies, logic explains; poetry is intuitive, logic deductive. How do you combine logic and poetry in one smooth review? According to Lenin's theory, the elements of a contradiction can interchange and become each other. The answer probably lies there, for logic can mystify, and poetry can explain. The properties don't stick, they flow, so a hybrid is possible. And <u>that</u> is what I mean by a New Wave in reviewing.

I understand that NEW WORLDS used to tinker in this field, but I've also been told that it was mainly for showbiz purposes. I'm not sure who's reviewing this way in the mainstream - and, anyway, s f has its special problems. And knowing my fandom, I know this has never been attempted in hobby mimeo.

So it's just you and me, baby. How does it feel to be a pioneer?

Think of this "new style" as a fusion between prose and poetry, logic and emotion. Think of it as the emergence of a style equal to the fiction it looks at. Think of it as inclusive rather than divisive. Think of it as impossible. And despite an old American saw about the impossible taking a little longer, I do get bogged down. We know what we need: a consciousness. Out with the half-sentient dredges that have masqueraded as critiques. SFR accomplished a plethora of good deeds, not one of which was its induction of a smug sluggishness among "reviewers". Read a lot, scribble a lot, be witty, be controversial, and collect your Hugo. That is life. No artistry, just new titles.

So... I've tugged at your mindtails. Now jerk back. *

* I received this letter several months ago. It had the title ALL ABOUT SHOCKING READERS, and no other comments. I wasn't sure whether Leon meant it as an article or a letter, and further enquiries haven't produced any reply. I must confess that I've left out some of it, because I just don't understand what Leon is talking about. (It's strange how I find it easier to understand Lem or Blish than some fan writers.) Leon lists as one of his possible solutions, "The Image". ("If one could characterise the specific s f work as an elaborate overall Image, then that may prove a suitable framework for rational and emotional judgments," he says.) But I have a horrible suspicion that Leon means one of those maudlin cliches called "sensies" which have appeared in several recent fanzines (e.g. "Roger Zelazny: marvellously smooth dark tropical wood carved all over with intricately interlaced cords and tendrils"!! Sorry, Sandra, but...). At the same time, I've been worried about the same problems ever since I started reviewing. <u>My</u> current solution, for what it's worth, appears at the beginning of the previous few pages. I suggest that Leon tries reading the criticism of Henry James, T S Eliot, the Leavises, Wilson Knight, I A Richards, D A Traversi, Edmund Wilson, and even a few of the better art, music, and film critics, before he comes back to s f. <u>Some</u> people have thought about these problems before. *

* PAUL WALKER (128 Montgomery St., Bloomfield, New Jersey 07003, USA)

I've tried to break the reviewing habit, but I can't. I have been criticised for not taking enough care with my reviews, for not writing serious criticism rather than "superficial" observations, but the truth is that if I wanted to criticise a book accurately I would have to read the book twice, do pages of notes, then some research, then some correspondence, two drafts or more of copy, and produce an article that few fanzines would have room to print.

When I began I did mostly conventional reviews: short, to the point, polite and not so polite. Dick Geis needed someone to handle the great load of books he had on hand and he began to send me carton loads. I decided that I wasn't writing very interesting reviews. They did what they should, but they said absolutely nothing. There was more to a book than its bare statistics.

If you've read my longer reviews, you should have noticed that they vary considerably in treatment. This is because books vary, and each should be regarded individually. To me, reading is a private, personal experience, whether it is only a casual amusement or a prolonged involvement. I don't believe in pretending to be objective, for I prove the validity of a book, its emotional impact, in my reading of it. In order to make the reader understand why I liked or disliked it, I must make him understand in what frame of reference I regarded it. For instance, I did a review recently of John Lymington's THE NOWHERE PLACE, which I disliked. It is the story of mysterious goings-on in a small hamlet in Wales, and I explained before I mentioned the book that there was almost a sub-genre of this sort of thing in mystery and s f: Zenna Henderson's The People, Christie's Miss Marple etc.; and that I was very fond of the genre, and that I disliked the book because I was so disappointed by Lymington's gross abuse of the possibilities of the genre.

If I had said simply that the plot was attenuated, the characterisation excessive, etc., the reader would still understand that I disliked the book and why, but he could not judge my biases if he had not already read the book. From my review the reader can understand my position clearly and make a judgment about the sub-genre as well. In any case, he can enjoy reading the review, and I feel it is important that the writer should entertain his readers, even when writing a review.

I do not regard myself as a critic. I prefer to think that those who read my reviews read them for sheer entertainment; that they are entertained, amused, stimulated, rather than "enlightened". I have to say that I support the writers over the readers. I know what an agony writing can be, even the writing of a bad book. In fact, especially the writing of a bad book. I know how lonely and frightening it is to be a new writer, and I like to make a big deal about any new writer.

I am not fond of ORBIT or the NEW WORLDS school. I find them very dull, very old-hat, and frequently pretentious. ORBIT reminds me of those NEW COLLEGE WRITING volumes I used to buy and loath - precocious art, not art at all, but their authors' conceptions of what art should be like. Art, to me, is an accident. It is a man doing the

best he can do about something that interests him, and leaving art to the reader's judgment. Of course, here in America artists have rarely been recognised in their lifetimes. Mark Twain, Ezra Pound, Eliot, and Faulkner all found fame in Europe long before they were recognised here. I just know that ORBIT makes me wince. *

* I think that letter makes it clear just why Paul and I disagree on just about everything. I still don't think he talks about the books he writes about, and he thinks he does. But I enjoy disagreeing with Paul Walker, and also with: *

* CHRIS PRIEST (1 Ortygia House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Middlesex, England)

There is one thing you should be aware of, and that is a sense of professionalism. Or, to put it another way, awareness of a professional ethic. To be brutally frank, you don't have this. At least, not at the moment. My evidence for saying this lies in the tone of your reviewing. The best example I can quote back at you is the review you gave to THE PERIHELION MAN ((in SPEC 28 and SFC 21)). (Incidentally, believe me that this is not working off a personal grudge; I chose this one simply because I have the most information, for obvious reasons, about the story itself.) The review you gave it was the sort of reaction a fan would have, not a pro. You didn't like it, and you said so. To prove your point, you quoted four sentences which, presumably, demonstrated your point. You then called it The Worst S F Story Ever, or something, and finished off by implying a cynical motive to the writing. Now my feeling is that had you been aware of the professional ethic, you wouldn't have done this. Clearly, you have the right to dislike a story, and to say so, but the job of a good reviewer isn't simply to react to stories. He should at least try to see what the writer was trying to do, get under the skin of the story in a sense. Critics can be very helpful to a writer... but the four-sentence quote told me absolutely nothing about why you thought the story was bad. Writers, by and large, are a sincere and innocent mob, and very few of them will write a deliberately cynical story and put their own name to it. Give a writer a bit of tolerance; perhaps his story isn't quite as good as he himself would have liked.

For another example I'd refer you to two reviews of INDOCTRINAIRE, my most recently published novel. One, by Tony Sudbery in SPECULATION 29, has the professional ethic. He criticises the novel honestly and helpfully... and I would go along with the things he finds wrong with it. In his manner of expression, I learn a lot. The other review is Dick Geis's in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW 43. This review is dishonest and damaging. In its ill-temper, I learn only that he disliked the book and was unwilling to meet it on its own terms. Tony Sudbery is a good critic; Geis is not. OK, this is a highly personal view, but it comes from the experience of a full-time writer at the mercy of amateur critics. (May 20, 1971) *

* I don't write reviews for the benefit of writers, although many of them have said that I do give them useful pointers to their own and other writers' work. I write mainly for other readers and any people who may wish to avoid stories like THE PERIHELION MAN. Looking back at my review, I still

think that my quote (SFC 21, page 31) shows that the story is almost comically bad. How does that wretched space-ship "change direction" and "make sudden and quick... movements" in space? If even I have heard of concepts like acceleration, momentum, and the catastrophic consequences of making "sudden and quick" movements while travelling at umpteen thousand miles per hour, then I would have thought you would have too. And the "fifteen separate outer skins" of the spaceship don't inspire any more confidence. Am I supposed to tolerate a story which doesn't seem to show any factual knowledge on the part of the author?

Apart from all that, I just don't agree that there is much division between professional and fan criticism, provided that there is much criticism at the moment in either field. When I published the review of THE PERIHELION MAN, I thought that I had got "under the skin of the story" and shown that there was nothing there. Either a reviewer (a term I would prefer to "critic") seeks to show what he thinks about a book, or he doesn't. Geis' review of INDOCTRINAIRE was bad because he didn't do that; he said that he didn't like it, but he didn't give much idea why. But there are plenty of professional reviews that do the same thing, usually in the pages of the most widely read newspapers. Also, you presume something that I don't presume: you presume that a fanzine review will affect your reputation and the sales of your book. That may be true for SFR, with its 1700 circulation, but SFC doesn't reach that figure. The point of my review in SFC 21 was that Carnell accepts very bad stories for NEW WRITINGS and not many good stories, probably because the issues that included bad stories sold very well. The form of the review (detailed discussion of only three stories) should have warned any reader that I was only picking out examples which illustrated a general impression of NEW WRITINGS. From the start, I intended that any "blame" should fall on Carnell rather.than Priest. :: But now I'm telling my own trade secrets, and that would be unfannish, let alone unprofessional. *

* DAMON KNIGHT (Box 8216, Madeira Beach, Florida 33738, USA)

S F COMMENTARY 19, which you mentioned you were sending last June, arrived about a week ago ((early October)). I write to let you know I've got it, in case this is not the usual transit time, and also because I think I owe you some comment on such a major project, although paradoxically I didn't feel I owed Foyster any when these issues first appeared. The whole project was so thoroughly fuggheaded (e.g. if I wanted to discuss first principles with Blish, Delany and co., why should I need to go through Foyster?), and then Foyster himself, expecting snubs, puts on that rude mask in order to show that he expects them, and so of course he gets them. And so on.

Foyster's famous statistics about the "lag" in s f anthologies are worthless, not because his sample is too small but because the statistician is an idiot. The "lag" date is just the median point between 1939 and the date of the anthology, give or take a year or so, and all that Foyster has proved is that the anthology selections are randomly distributed over that period, as you would expect. And then all that natter about whether H Bruce Franklin was a professor or an associate professor: good God. Rottensteiner is entertaining and I like him when he is kicking the same people I would like to kick, but his work is riddled with astonishing errors. Either he has forgotten the books he is discussing, or just never understood them in the first place. He is pathetic when he tries to be one-up about the supposed reference to Houseman in the title of Heinlein's STRANGER IN

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 37

STANISLAW LEM
Lost Opportunities

THE HOLE IN THE ZERO

by M K JOSEPH

Victor Gollancz :: 1967
192 pages :: $A 2.70

Avon V2284 :: 1970
191 pages :: 75c

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

by URSULA K LE GUIN

Ace Books 47800 :: 1969
286 pages :: 95c
An Ace S F Special

(The discussion of HOLE IN THE ZERO is reprinted from QUARBER MERKUR No 27. The discussion of THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS is reprinted from QUARBER MERKUR No 25. Both essays were translated from the German by Franz Rottensteiner, and revised for publication by Bruce Gillespie.

Readers of S F COMMENTARY should note that Stanislaw Lem's discussion of SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION (No 22) was written before the current discussion of LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. Franz Rottensteiner assures me that Lem would have paid a great deal of attention to Ursula Le Guin's book in SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION, if he had read it in time.)

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PART I: THE HOLE IN THE ZERO

I THE HOLE IN THE ZERO promises an infinite amount. The blurb says that it is an attempt to free us from all the limitations that not only shape our very existence, but make it possible in the first place. Taken seriously, this promises too much. If we remove all restrictions from experience, we annihilate it altogether. We cannot experience anything except in some restricted form.

However, artists of all types now find it popular to attack every possible paradigmatic, traditionally established, limitation. It seems that the creative artist will no longer subject himself to any kind of order, thinking that he can redeem and renew himself through his liberation from fixed forms. If an s f writer makes such an attempt, then immediately his works will expand as if through elephantiasis. The s f writer does not accept human, psychologi-

cal subjects as the limit of his vision, but he sets out to push beyond these borders, even if, in doing so, his works become "inhuman" or "extrahuman".

In HOLE IN THE ZERO, M K Joseph carefully prepares to press this attempt at liberation to its most advanced phase. He writes about advanced technological instruments, and the knowledge sufficient to work them; he accumulates enormous means in order to "break through" the "wall" of space itself. This preparatory section of the novel makes us trust in the author. Carefully, and with a sure hand, he depicts the whole background, the human characters, the robots, and the situation. This leads us to hope justifiably for great things to come, for together we readers and the characters will leave the whole universe, the space-time continuum and all its adherent physical laws. We shall experience and comprehend the alien, the extra-physical, and the incomprehensible. The author cannot hope to realise this program to its whole extent (except by means of abstract mathematics, whose language today and forever lies outside the range of literature). But even if we know that the author cannot realise his task, we may at least hope for many things.

In M K Joseph's novel, the story begins near the border of space, at its zero point. There the characters expect to break through into the "beyond". However the author cannot simply construct this beyond, this extra-physical phenomenon, out of the elements of "ordinary metaphysics". The basic contracts that bind all s f exclude something like this. We can be sure of the fact (which accords with the spirit of science, and arises out of it) that in principle, no technology today nor in a billion years time, no physical instruments nor other empirical means, could transport us into the kingdom of metaphysics, as it is understood by all kinds of beliefs, myths, and sagas. No technological-physical method could shoot us into the heaven or hell of a belief. Science will always remain powerless in that realm; and empirical and technological tools could not reach such metaphysical regions even if they did exist. If we consider this, we may be particularly interested in the premises that Joseph develops at the beginning of the novel, i.e. his loudly proclaimed program of a "departure from the world". If we embark upon such a journey, then we may be certain _a priori_ that "there" we will meet neither physics nor any species of anthropomorphism.

II The author develops a program - the annullment of the universe - that takes out a colossal mortgage. In the novel he incurs a gigantic debt towards us although we know _ab initio_ that the author cannot realise his program to its whole extent. I was all the more curious to find out how the author intended to cover his debt, to fill "the hole in the zero". My vague expectations took the direction of certain general logical lines.

Taken literally, the departure from the universe is identical with the departure from life, but I have already excluded from possibility an extra-physical description of the fate of corpses. However, since the author may remove the principle of causality from life as well as death, is there still perhaps a chance that he will show a total transformation which will finally remove for all time the space that separates subject from object?

What did I expect? I can describe it only in the vaguest outline. Joseph could have written about a descent into the "force centres of the will", as Schopenhauer understood the term, i.e. that immanent, unattainable force hidden from us within the interior of the total phenomenalism of existence. We might have expected the author to make an attempt, employing continuous contradiction, self-denial, and the straining of language to its utmost limits,

to describe an active principle, no longer human nor physical, but only a pulsating focal point, unconscious of itself, contradictory, conglomerate, within which the author would have to join the serious with the whimsical and grotesque, the plausible with the forever impossible.

I cannot and will not say any more here, for I ought not to tell you here what I would have done in this author's position after I had made the promises that he made. On my own accord, I wouldn't choose such a path at all. I've developed above a sketch with general references. I have shown which starting points I would have tried out, if for some reason I had nevertheless had to investigate the "hole in the zero". In any case, I expected great virtuosity, something unique, a break-neck exploit of a literary performance, because, like the author, I am no longer a child who will do anything to follow arbitrarily formulated proclamations. If an author announces great, even immeasurably great things, then we cannot be content with some trifle.

III But in HOLE IN THE ZERO, we have a mountain of promises and hopes that gives birth to a mouse. Beyond the "hole in the zero", the author merely shows us the dubious paradise of fairy tales and myths. My disappointment was great, and it corresponded with the greatness and stringency of all the differences from the here-and-now that I expected to find in the book. At first I was so disappointed that I could not recognise properly the aesthetic and semantic qualities of the work. And even if HOLE IN THE ZERO contained the highest achievement in, the best of all fantasy, I still could not appreciate it, for the same psychological reason that makes me unwilling to listen to a teller of fairy tales in the lecture room of a university which I visited, lured by the promise that I will learn real secrets of cosmogony. I may even hear some fairy tales that are quite brilliant in themselves, but I hoped for something quite different: a piece of real information. A dream may be marvellously beautiful, but if I intend to remain awake, I don't wish to be lulled to sleep.

Finally I accepted the rules of the novel, as I recognised them, for there was no way out. In cases like HOLE IN THE ZERO, the only alternative is to refuse to go on reading. In retrospect, I had to re-interpret all that I had read before, so that I could rob it of its literal meaning. At the beginning of the novel the preparatory "physical" apparatus and occurrences only have the function, as I saw later, of magical incantations or sorcerers' spells. They are close to metaphors. Only after I had "changed my wave-length" could I consider the intrinsic quality of the goods that Joseph offers.

However, the author proclaimed that he would put out of commission all known types of order. Therefore he incurred a literary mortgage which by no means stops at the literal, realistic, and empirical borders of fiction. He had to cover a debt of immense size by equally immense means. Even if we can no longer expect physical happenings to allure us, we can at least expect their equal value in the currency of pure fantasy. Therefore, Joseph commits an inexcusable offence when he mends the "hole in the zero" with the stuff of old fairy tales and myths. Submitting myself to the dictates of the author, I was prepared to forget that he introduced realism and physics at the beginning of the book - but I continued to expect the dazzling, the unique, and the original. I expected to read something which hadn't been said before, because only in this way could the author have sufficiently compensated the debt. I am willing to renounce in a novel the whole universe with all its stars, suns, and planets, if the rules of the game demand this - but not for a dime! If I promise a child to get him the moon, the child may be well-sa-

tisfied if I show him a fisherman's net, but I doubt if such a demonstration would satisfy adults. If so, I don't belong to their number.

If one inadequate measure fails to realise the announced achievement, a number of similar measures, of any size you may choose, cannot realise it. I consider that this problem is extraordinarily important, because here is the point in fantasy where the escalation and inflation of language begins. It seems as if this book is merely a thousandth attempt to confirm the appropriateness of Goethe's phrase, "In der Beschrankung zeigt sich erst der Meister" ("A master proves himself only by restraint"). We cannot destroy such limitations foolhardily.

IV Therefore what do we find in HOLE IN THE ZERO? An anthology of fairy-tale forms, all of them well-known motifs which we have seen used many times before. In the book we see the motif of a world with princesses, magical swords, monsters, and castles. We find a world of final inventions (the trouble-maker); duels between espionage and counter-espionage agents at the speed of light; a world of "lyrical" objects (trees of feathers, small golden suns, birds of metal); a world with a time structure that branches out (although perhaps this is only a binary time structure), etc.

From this catalogue, I will examine just one specimen, the world with simultaneous, parallel time-streams. In this world we can observe the consequences of normal, but alternative, human decisions. Joseph's development leads to two difficulties. One of them is purely ideographic in character. He wants to describe consecutively time streams which ex principio occur simultaneously. Mr Joseph does not even seriously try to solve this difficulty. He is satisfied with the most simple solution; he describes sequentially events which are simultaneous.

The other difficulty is of a semantic and ontological nature. Parallel time-streams are neutral, semantically and ontologically indetermined only so long as they are not filled with happenings. Here we encounter Mr Joseph's greatest weakness - banality. THE HOLE IN THE ZERO shows us an employee who may lose his post because he does not show proper devotion to his work; but on the other time-stream he isn't lazy, so makes a splendid career for himself. He can marry the daughter of his employer - or not marry her. In the first time-stream, his wife may commit adultery, and so he may kill his rival and escape punishment. But if he doesn't succeed in his escape, he will be executed; and so on, ad. lib. So these are the author's great revelations, his blood-curdling truths about the deepest meaning of human life, truths that we could never recognise in a mono-temporal world! At the same time, an author who writes about the binary time-matrix may possibly hope to formulate some really interesting propositions about the determination of our fates, and he might test out some ontological principles.

Let me cite some examples of such possibilities:

(a) If we adopt an equi-final ontology, we can prove, by surveying parallel time-tracks, that whatever decisions a human makes, these decisions cannot in the least change his ultimate destiny, because either the inherited structure of his character determines this, or because a person can only exchange one sequence of sufferings and passions, victories and defeats, for a sequence whose quality of experience is intrinsically similar, or even identical with the other. The principle of this equi-finality of destiny shows

that all human lives are intrinsically the same, and that they only differ strongly from one another in their outward appearances. The sorrows and sufferings of a king or a tyrant are quite similar to those of a slave. It's just that the people of a world with single time-lines cannot prove this, and therefore they fail to understand the consequences. (Equi-final ontology also offers other solutions to the problem, but I cannot prove them for lack of space.)

(b) In a stochastic world, environmental conditions determine the character of a human being. We become saints or criminals according to the guiding force of stochastic chance coincidences (described as "good luck" or "ill luck"). In this world, personalities are not predetermined, and existence is a game motivated by the asymmetrical function of winning.

Now, an author can present either of these statements (or both of them) in an ironical, pseudo-realistic, or dramatic way. What does Joseph make of such different possibilities? Nothing at all. He is content to wirte banal and naive occurrences which have a superficial, colourless character. He doesn't even recognise that such problems exist.

This blindness towards the intellectual and reflective aspects of an idea, is quite typical of all fantasy, and characterises all kinds of adventure fiction. Fantasy writers heap up fantastic happenings in order to hide their insipidity. It's not accidental that it is only the most stupid and superficial writers who quite seriously strive after omnipotence. To them, the limitations of creative work do not appear as an intrinsic, constructive part of existence, but they feel like enforced restrictions which prevent the unlimited imaginative flights that these authors so desire. If they attempted historical novels, they would only prove their total ignorance of history by writing anachronisms, so they justify their ignorance in the fantasy field just because their work is fantasy. Their own perplexities form the walls of the frequently visited asylum of their creative impotence.

An author who writes about a bi-temporal universe may allow us to answer the question of whether or not man and his world are connected to one another as two variables of chance, and whether they are secretly correlated in the physical (or in the metapbysical) realm. But M K Joseph is not interested in such problems - for he is not at all interested in <u>real</u> problems.

From the treasure trove of fantasy, Mr Joseph has borrowed everything that is trite. He uses a large number of motifs in order to make up for their innate poverty. But he cannot fill the hole in the zero with a number of zeros.

However, I must add here that Mr Joseph is quite skilled in developing his fantastic sight-seeing tour, that he offers his short stories with a certain elegance, that he shows the influence of a literary culture, and that he can invent a wide range of "lyrical" metaphors. He has a good ear for the different forms of style, and he knows how to visualise fantastic objects and whole scenes precisely, distinctly, and clearly. All this is true.

For these accomplishments form only the ABC of literature, as they are only the basic requirements, the absolute minimum of literary accomplishment and craftsmanlike skill. Mr Joseph does all this much better than the "classic" s f writer, A E van Vogt, who constantly falls flat on his face in elementary things, and becomes lost in his own story structures. But van Vogt's "classic" status only proves how poor s f standards are. The audience only acclaims one's partly coherent speeches enthusiastically in an institution for

the feeble-minded where one's speeches contrast beautifully with the stupid mutterings of the other inmates of the asylum. Because of this phenomenon, either science fiction becomes normal literature, equal to other genres, or it doesn't repay the effort with which we seriously consider its works and problems. And even if only a few singular works escape general condemnation, then we should remember that Sodom could have been saved by ten just people.

PART II: THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

It is indeed a rare phenomenon to find an s f novel to which we can seriously apply the criteria of great literature. It is impossible to forget LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS as soon as you finish reading it. It forces you to think - and that's wonderful in s f. The reader can see that Mrs Le Guin is the daughter of the great Kroeber. The author's description of the alien civilisation is full of ideas and done with a sure hand; the anthropological knowledge and imagination that went into the novel are first-rate. Perhaps she has written that rare bird, an s f novel which belongs to great literature?

However, if a work of s f succeeds in breaking through the ghetto walls to join the world of literature, then it must belong to the peak of world literature, because the scope of the problems in s f tend to stretch to cosmic and ontological dimensions. Typically, gigantic problems in s f are wrongly put and wrongly solved. It is a pity, but THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS does not fit the category of "great literature". It carries an important message, but it does not develop the message. It runs short of breath; it places the emphasis of the plot on the wrong things.

The novel's main problem is the struggle for the entry of the planet Winter into the Cosmic Federation. On the other hand, the strange bi-sexuality of the Karhider is only part of the (interesting) background. There are many elements that we think may acquire an ontological depth. In the end we find that these elements are only rich pieces of alien phenomena. What a pity!

Mrs Le Guin should have proceeded in the opposite way. As she developed the plot she should have made the play about the acceptance of "the other mankind" into the Galactic Alliance, disappear into the background. In its place, she should have shown how the strange quality of the fate of the Karhider teaches us something about our own lot. Why so? Because the question of whether or not Winter will gain admittance to the Galactic Federation cannot cause any basic differences to the further lives of the Karhider. To join or not to join? However this question is resolved, the resolution will not change the essential nature of the people, and it is this nature which shows us so much about our own fate.

Any path in s f which does not eventually lead back to Man can offer us nothing except the riches of a galactic freak-show. Regrettably, Mrs Le Guin's novel leaves a gaping hole. Although her anthropological understanding is very good, her psychological insight, on the other hand, is only sufficient and sometimes even insufficient. Mrs Le Guin invents a biologically plausible and fictionally valuable creation. She invents "other humans" who not only become sexual beings periodically (we find such things in s f, including bi-sexuality) but who become periodically male or female during their "kemmer" period (sexual period). Not only this, but also they do not know beforehand which sexual incarnation they will experience next time.

The author would not create, could not create, or did not know how to create the cruel harshness of the individual's destiny in such a system. She gives us some hints in discursively developed chapters, but she does not transform this anthropological material into the shapes of individual lives.

However, let us imagine ourselves in the situation of the people in this novel. Two questions about basic existence force themselves upon our minds:

(i) Who will I become during the next "kemmer" (sexual) period, male or female? Contrary to all stereotyped opinions, the normal uncertainty of our lives, already well-known to us, becomes painfully extended by this sexual indeterminism. We wouldn't need to worry merely about the trivial question of whether next month we impregnate or get impregnated, but we would face a whole new class of psychic problems about the roles which await us at the two poles of the sexual alternative.

(ii) From a circle of totally indifferent people, to whom will we feel erotically attracted during the next "kemmer"? For the time being, everybody else is a neuter as well, and so we can never determine our biological future. The changing pattern of sexual relationships will always surprise us with new and always doubtful changes within the already known environment. If we put ourselves in the position of the Karhider we can understand how this race's sexual system causes a complete uncertainty and challenge, which will paralyse the weak and rouse the strong to a powerless struggle against this kind of biological moira. For we never remain "that man" or "that woman" on this planet, but must submit to unpredictable metamorphoses, as a slave of the sexual glands.

Can love - not sexual attraction, but its sublimation - keep its place under such circumstances? Would we cease to love as soon as the "kemmer" period finished? But such a claim would be totally false, for we know enough about the erotic mechanisms of the human psyche in order to refute that claim. History tells of castrates who fell madly in love with women. Does love end at the beginning of either the male or female climacteric time? Usually love continues into old age. It is only necessary that love "ignites": this must happen during the "kemmer" period. After the sexual attraction is extinguished, the psychic flame continues to burn. In any case: such occurrences would need to happen quite frequently.

But consider the cruel irony of fate: Let's assume that a person as a male happened to love somebody else as a female during the "kemmer" period, and that after some months both became "women" or "men". Can we believe that both will then simply search for biologically suitable (heterosexual) partners? If we answered "yes" to this question, then not only would we speak nonsense, but we would also tell a flat lie, because we know more clearly how the power of cultural-psychological conditioning may form our inner lives in defiance of our biological instincts.

Therefore, Winter's people must experience a lot of unhappiness and grief, as well as a lot of "perversion", as "past" males remain more strongly attracted by their "past" female partners - perhaps now neuters or males - than to those people who, because of the dictates of their glands, are now prepared to play the female role. What cruel, bizarre, even hellish possibilities may an author find here! These possibilities hide within them the roots of a malignancy that would strike us as openly hellish and intentional - and from this situation mankind would have to form the core of its civilisation. Earth's whole history shows us that man was never willing to accept blind sta-

tistical forces as inevitable, as the only principles that rule his life and death. Mankind invented culture as religion and mythos in order to turn the cruel indifference of blind statistics into a meaningful transcendence. And as the challenge that faces the Karhider is much more difficult than any that has ever faced homo sapiens on Earth, their civilisation would show the stamp of this challenge. For a human being could not simply become a passive slave of his or her "kemmer" periods; he or she would fight against the inevitable, and perhaps this irrationality makes him or her truly human.

However, because I cannot delineate this other novel, which Mrs Le Guin did not write, I will deal rather with what "is contained in the book". On the book's back cover, Ted White compares LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS with Herbert's DUNE. However, the political intrigue leaves me cold, for this book shares that aspect in particular with DUNE - that is, the superficial stereotypes and cliches of s f.

I take from the novel the truth about me (i.e. about all human beings) that however painful our sexual lives may be, the limitation of our sexual unequivocality is a blessing, and not a curse. Of course, the Karhider must think quite differently from us, and think of us as abnormal, as Mrs Le Guin rightly shows, because we can only judge, evaluate, and react upon the basis of our own ethnocentrism. The Karhider have won some things that we lack (they do not know war, for instance), but miss other things much more. And, although it might sound a bit comical to say it, Mrs Le Guin's novel proves to me that our bodies, as the process of evolution has formed them, are not the worst possible development in the universe. Most certainly we aren't the final losers in the anthropogenetic process. Even if I say such things in abstracto, I only needed a concrete proof - such as LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, for me - to help me to understand what would have awaited us but did not occur. Therefore the book taught me about certain attributes of my own human fate, in its ontological, because final qualities, although the text itself does not embody this ontological idea of fate, but only suggests it. Many thanks for the book, because I value such an experience in s f.

Now back to the novel. Stylistically, it is very well written. Also it contains the richness and variety of the mores and customs of an alien civilisation, although it is not wholly consistent. Whatever the author may try to tell us, she has written about a planet where there are no women, but only men - not in the sexual, but in the social sense - because Karhider garments, manners of speech, mores, and behaviour, are masculine. In the social realm, the male element has remained victorious over the female one.

Furthermore, Mrs Le Guin apparently did not want to shed the orthodox s f structure. The delegate from Earth thinks his best friend an enemy because of qui pro quo; Mrs Le Guin shows rather weak caricatures of a bureaucratically centralised state, and of a feudal nation; she writes of imprisonment, liberation, heroism, sacrifice, and finally writes a happy ending as the star ship sets down on the planet. Was all this necessary? Again I must ask: how does the new political situation change the realm of the Karhiders' most intimate existential problems? Are we such little children that we must have happy endings to comfort us? Was it necessary that the author should allow the annoying relationship with s f, the similarity to DUNE, to destroy all the ontological, deeply moving possibilities that she did not realise? What sort of curse lies over all s f so that even the most brilliant ideas are doomed to wither in it, and disappear so quickly?

- Stanislaw Lem March 1971

BRUCE R GILLESPIE

Steps into the Heart of Nowhere

Bruce Gillespie discusses

SOLARIS

by STANISLAW LEM

translated from the French
by Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox
afterword by Darko Suvin

Walker :: 1970
216 pages :: $4.95

Faber :: 1971
216 pages :: $A 6.15

Original Polish
publication :: 1961

I SOLARIS begins as Kris Kelvin enters his space capsule so that he can travel to the surface of the planet Solaris. The speed of his descent takes his breath away. "When is lift-off?" he asks his control ship through head-phones. "You're on your way, Kelvin. Good luck!" comes the answer. Kelvin suffers physical disorientation: "I could not recognise a single constellation." In two pages, Stanislaw Lem sweeps away Kelvin's friends, his past life, and every stable piece of Kelvin's mental furniture.

When Kelvin reaches the observation station suspended above the surface of the planet Solaris, he becomes even more confused. Three men should man the station. For the moment Kelvin can find none of them. Instead he finds that "the oildrums were covered with a tangle of ticker-tape, torn paper, and other waste". No one is taking care of this station, set up to investigate the most puzzling phenomenon space-faring man has ever found: the planet itself.

At first, the peaceful chaos of the scene merely puzzles Kelvin. However, he becomes highly disturbed when he meets Snow, one of the station's crew members. For the reader, Snow's reaction seems over-written and silly: "Snow's eyes widened in amazement as he looked up and saw me," notes Kelvin. Kelvin's presence terrifies Snow. None of Snow's reactions make sense, and only after several minutes does he exclaim, "From Earth? Good God! Then you must be Kelvin." After Snow realises this, he offers a lame excuse for his behaviour: "We're a bit disorganised here." Within the first seven pages of the book Lem has "put the reader on a roller-coaster", as some reviewers might like to describe the effect. The reader can see that some aspect of the station and/or Kelvin's arrival utterly terrifies Snow. What is it? Read on for the next exciting chapter.

At the same time, Lem's precise style reveals other puzzles which the reader may or may not choose to consider. Snow is very worried - we discover that very quickly. But why does Kelvin become so angry at Snow's incoherence? "Obviously he was drunk and raving," Kelvin tells the reader. "My anger rose. I should have controlled myself, and left the room, but I had lost patience. I shouted: '...Snow! What's going on here?'" At the book's beginning, we think that Kelvin is just another space traveller, one of the thousands that space opera presents every year. However, during the very first crisis he meets, Kelvin loses his self-control and aggravates an embarrassing situation. At the same time, as I have shown, Lem isolates Kelvin from the rest of mankind, even in making Kelvin the story-teller. However the next few chapters show us that there are few people better fitted academically for the situation than Kris Kelvin. Lem shows us that Kelvin is not just an archetypal Everyman; but the isolated situation forces him into that role.

Kelvin soon finds out just how odd the situation is. The station's three resident crew members barricade themselves in their rooms whenever possible; Kelvin sees what looks like the ghost of a Negro woman as she walks into the room of Gibarian, one of the crew members; another, Dr Sartorius, refuses to open his door. Fear reigns, leaving insular, scholarly Kelvin even further isolated. From its beginning, SOLARIS takes the form of a first-class mystery story, but for the moment the victims won't reveal any of the clues, let alone help to solve the mystery.

Shortly, Kelvin discovers the reason for the mystery, and becomes as frightened as the other two crew members (in the meantime, Gibarian kills himself). During a conversation of attrition, Kelvin tries to make Snow give him the reasons why Gibarian died, and why Kelvin found the living, frozen body of the Negro woman laid next to Gibarian's dead body.

> He seemed constantly on the point of unburdening himself, only to pull himself up at the last moment...
>
> "Do you intend continuing with the experiments?"
>
> He gave a contemptuous shrug:
>
> "What good would that do?"...
>
> He dragged himself out of his chair.
>
> "Kelvin!"
>
> I looked at him. He was no longer smiling. I have never seen such an expression of weariness on anyone's face... I waited; his lips moved, but uttered no sound. I turned on my heel and went out.

As Kelvin tries to find out more and more of the truth, he finds out less and less. Snow can <u>do</u> nothing, he says that he <u>knows</u> nothing, and when he tries to speak his mind, he can <u>say</u> nothing. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, Kelvin's observation, "I have never seen such an expression of weariness on anyone's face", is one of the novel's most chilling sentences. He faces knowledge that is, for him, beyond comprehension.

Kelvin becomes even more frightened when he tries to talk to the self-barrica-

ded Dr Sartorius. As in the first chapter, Kelvin loses his temper because he feels his own helplessness in the situation:

> No longer able to control my growing fury, I burst out:
>
> "Dr Sartorius, I have not made a sixteen-month journey just to come here and play games! I'll count up to ten. If you don't let me in, I shall break down the door!"
>
> In fact, I was doubtful whether it would be easy to force this particular door... I could not draw back now; I could not go on playing an insane game with all the cards stacked against me.
>
> A hoarse, high-pitched voice spoke:
>
> "If I open the door, you must give me your word not to come in."
>
> "In that case, why open it?"
>
> "I'll come out."
>
> "Very well, I promise."

In the back of his mind Kelvin still considers himself as a visiting student engaged in important research ("I have not made a sixteen-month journey just to come here and play games!"). When he threatens to break down the door, he finds that this action in particular frightens Dr Sartorius into acknowledging his presence. Sartorius comes out, provided that Kelvin will not force his way in. Sartorius' "lower jaw was elongated; he had bluish lips and enormous, blue-tinged ears." It sounds as if a vampire had attacked him.

Kelvin bumbles on. He accuses Sartorius of complicity in a possible "murder" of Gibarian, but Sartorius is so distracted that he won't or can't listen. He only wants to get back inside the door:

> His voice betrayed such exhaustion that instinctively I put out my arms to help him control the door. At this, he uttered a cry of horror, as though I had pointed a knife at him. As I retreated, he was shouting in his falsetto voice: "Go away! Go away! I'm coming, I'm coming, I'm coming! No! No!" He opened the door and shot inside. I thought I saw a shining yellow disc flash across his chest.
>
> Now a muffled clamour rose from the laboratory; a huge shadow appeared, as the curtain was brushed momentarily aside; then it fell back into place and I could see nothing more. What was happening inside that room? I heard running footsteps, as though a mad chase were in progress, followed by a terrifying crash of broken glass and the sound of a child's laugh.

In Kelvin's attempts to discover the "secret" of the station, Lem coalesces an atmosphere of almost unbearable horror. What is the "thing" inside Sartorius' room? What is the "shining yellow disc"? Why the "mad chase", the "terrifying crash of broken glass and the sound of a child's laugh"? All Snow can say is, "When you've received some visitors yourself, you'll understand".

The next morning, Kelvin receives his "visitor", and during the rest of the

novel he tries to estimate the significance of the event. At first he thinks that nothing could be less horrifying. When he awakes the next morning, Rheya, his wife, sits beside him. However, Rheya killed herself at the age of nineteen, after Kris Kelvin left her. "Poor little thing, have you come to visit me?" says Kelvin. In these words, Lem establishes the mixed mood of tenderness and incongruity which lasts for the rest of the novel.

At first, Kelvin cannot believe that he is awake. But he certainly is awake - or rather, from now on, he begins to awake. From the beginning, Kelvin responds to Rheya's resurrection in two contradictory ways. After a separation of ten years, he says, "My body recognised her body. My body desired her beyond reason, ...beyond thought, beyond fear". On the other hand, his reason, thought, and fear show him that this figure is not "his" Rheya: "The skin was soft, like that of a newborn child. I knew then that this was not Rheya." When Kelvin leaves the room, closing the door, "Rheya" bursts it open. Physically, she cannot stay away from Kelvin; her mind blanks, and she tears through doors and walls to follow him. Kelvin's wonder and delight in her resurrection fade away altogether. He tries to handcuff her:

> I was holding her in my arms and gazing into her eyes.
>
> Imperceptibly, almost instinctively, I began to pull her hands together behind her back at the same time searching the room with my eyes: I needed something with which to tie her hands.
>
> Suddenly she jerked her elbows together, and there followed a powerful recoil. I resisted for barely a second. Thrown backwards and almost lifted off my feet, even had I been an athlete I could not have freed myself. Rheya straightened up and dropped her arms to her sides. Her face, lit by an uncertain smile, had played no part in the struggle.

In passages like these, Lem's seemingly dispassionate prose penetrates most perceptively. In this one passage, he sums up Kelvin's peculiar position. Kelvin holds his resurrected wife, "gazing into her eyes", and she seems to reciprocate his intense emotion. However he is a scientist, and a very puzzled husband - he must explore every aspect of the problem. Already he has proved that Rheya is very strong, and that he cannot separate himself from her. Can he keep her a prisoner in his room? However, he cannot bind Rheya's strength, and she throws him off easily. So Kelvin has tested this element of Rheya, more conclusively than he guessed. However, he is most shocked by the chilling sight of "her face, lit by an uncertain smile" which "had played no part in the struggle". Despite his investigations, Kelvin knows no more about Rheya than before. He only reveals new mysteries. Not only does Rheya possess powers stronger than Kelvin's, but it seems as if she obeys powers stronger than his. What is the secret of her nature?

However, Kelvin cannot let things be. He tests Rheya's physical nature to the furthest possible extent, and tries to rid himself of this "ghost". He lures her into a small shuttle rocket used to ferry stores between the Station and the overhead satellite. Surely he can get rid of her in this way! Instead:

> As I was tightening the last screw but one, I felt a vibration in the three-pronged clamp which held the base of the shuttle. I thought I must have loosened the support in my over-eager handling of the heavy spanner, but when I stepped back to take a look, I

was greeted by a spectacle which I hope I shall never have to see again.

The whole vehicle trembled, shaken from the inside as though by some superhuman force. Not even a steel robot could have imparted such a convulsive tremor to an 8-ton mass, and yet the cabin contained only a frail, dark-haired girl...

Frenziedly, I rushed to the control panel and with both hands lifted the starting lever. As I did so the intercom connected to the shuttle's interior gave out a piercing sound - not a cry, but a sound which bore not the slightest resemblance to the human voice, in which I could nevertheless just make out my name, repeated over and over again: "Kris! Kris! Kris!"

Whirled within a kaleidoscope of action, Kelvin sees that he deals with some quite incalculable force. If Rheya's was merely a "superhuman force", then he could dismiss her as a monster. But the "simulacrum" knows as little about the forces that shape her as he does. Rheya feels herself in love with Kelvin, and she must stay with him for emotional as well as physical reasons (for the simulacrum disintegrates when put into orbit). Therefore, as she feels herself disintegrating, Rheya's inhuman cry of terror seems as much like a cry of emotional separation as one of physical torture. Yet Kris Kelvin presses the lever.

The emotional certainties of Kelvin's life further disintegrate when Snow tells him that each other crew-member has tries exactly the same trick; that each time the figure reappears several hours later; that the figures do not even "remember" what has been done to them. And so Rheya reappears (recreated? re-resurrected?); she bears him no grudge; Kelvin settles down to the idea that he is "stuck" with his shadow-wife. Instead of fighting off Rheya, Kelvin decides to make some ultimate scientific test of Rheya's physical nature.

He takes a slide of tissue from Rheya and looks at it through his atom microscope (Lem often casually introduces inventions, and aspects of technology, which are still impossible) and slowly he increases the magnification:

At any moment, I should reach the limit of this exploration of the depths; the shadow of a molecule occupied the whole of the space; then the image became fuzzy.

There was nothing to be seen. There should have been the ferment of a quivering cloud of atoms, but I saw nothing.

Kelvin asks himself, "Was this body, frail and weak in appearance but indestructible in reality, actually made of nothing?"

I had followed the procedure faithfully: first the cells, then the albumen, then the molecules; and everything was just as I was accustomed to seeing it in the course of examining thousands of slides. But the final step, into the heart of the matter, had taken me nowhere.

The first and the final sentences tell the full story. The resolute researcher, the rigorous investigator, expends all his resources and finds an impossibility. No - not an impossibility, but an incomprehensibility. He

pours acid on blood taken from Rheya's veins, but the blood, although destroyed by the acid, re-creates itself. It's not impossible, but, within Kelvin's present framework of thought, it's unknowable.

As I've described this process that "takes him nowhere", I haven't forgotten my original observation that Lem always has more up his sleeve than a few tired scientific tricks. As Stanislaw Lem knows only too well, "monsters" are legion in science fiction, and so are suitably horrified young scientists. However, Lem is not interested in adolescent superman and/or monster fantasies. Rheya has extraordinary powers, but she does not know they exist. She sees herself as Kelvin's wife, so all his suspicions only offend her. She does not want to harm him or any of the people on the station. She loves Kelvin, and she expects him to love her.

Of course, Kelvin does come to love this "creature" in a very precise, understated way. With a few sentences in the first chapter, Lem shows us that Kelvin has never come to terms with his own anger and dissociation from general human activity. At first, Kelvin reacts to Rheya's existence with anger, desperation, attempted detachment, and finally with love and an acceptance of the situation. To this extent, SOLARIS does not show us any slam-bang physical miracles, but the subtle transformation of two people.

II Stanislaw Lem himself has described the ideal novel about the mysteries of existence. Perhaps no one can ever write such a novel, for it would "make an attempt, employing continuous contradiction, self-denial, and the straining of language to its utmost limits, to describe an active principle, no longer human or physical, but only a pulsating focal poimt, unconscious of itself, contradictory, conglomerate, within which the author would have to join the whimsical and the grotesque, the plausible with the forever impossible."

I can think of no better way in which to sum up Lem's investigation of the planet Solaris, after which the book is named. Lem cannot reach this extraordinary ideal, of course, but which writer could? Lem comes very close to describing this "active principle", even in very simple language.

Kelvin first begins to tell the story of Solaris and the Solarians in the novel's second chapter. As soon as he lands on the station, and before he discovers much about the Visitors, Kris Kelvin explores the resources of the station's huge library. It contains everything ever written about Solaris. "The discovery of Solaris dated from about 100 years before I was born," he thinks, and relates the epic tale of the attempts of humanity to find the truth about Solaris. Lem does not write boring ANALOG-prose; he gives no sense of "Let's have a little lecture before our next cup of coffee". Instead, the "history" of the Solarists is also a "history" of Kris Kelvin: as Lem tells the story of the researchers and theorists who try to come to terms with a planet that forbids research or theory, he also shows the growth of Kelvin's intellectual development.

The first discoverers found that Solaris could vary its own gravity. Already some held the suspicion that the whole planet might be "alive". Gradually researchers found that its surrounding "sea" was in fact organic, but they could find out nothing more about the nature of the organism. Lem has quite a bit of fun at the expense of scientists in general, and at the same time writes passages in celebration of the unending search for knowledge. Lem's researchers form a credible group of indefatigable followers of the will-o'-

the-wisp, compared with the race of imbecile monkey-wrench "scientists" found in most American s f. At times, waves of jargon threatened to drown the whole debate at birth, so that one theorist said that "the ocean was the product of a dialectical development". On the other hand, a reporter went so far as to suggest that "the ocean was no less a distant relation of our electric eels".

The whole debate begins to sound like a huge practical joke made by Solaris at the expense of its observers. After the publication of yet another hypothesis "the scientific world was torn by one of the most violent controversies of the century". Finally the debate, fed only by evidence gathered by a small number of scientists who had actually explored Solaris, settled down into a multi-volumed encyclopedia of despair. Lem shows us how Kelvin grew up among its literature, and became a Solarist himself. By this time, the human scientific community has given up the attempt to find out what Solaris is. Instead they direct all their efforts towards Contact - the almost mystical attempt to find a way to communicate with this unique life-form. Worshippers (researchers) offer their vain prayers to the mysterious god (Solaris) and often dress themselves in scientific sackcloth-and-ashes when this god thumbs its nose at them.

Solaris' own strange antics do not help the situation. In Chapter 8, THE MONSTERS, Lem treads a ricketty path between humour and awe, as he describes the shapes that Solaris' ocean makes on its surface:

> Genius and mediocrity alike are dumbfounded by the teeming diversity of the oceanic formations of Solaris; no man has ever become genuinely conversant with them... Giese devised a plain descriptive terminology, supplemented by terms of his own invention, and although these were inadequate, and sometimes clumsy, it has to be admitted that no semantic system is as yet available to illustrate the behaviour of the ocean.

These shapes in the ocean, rigorously investigated over many years and catalogued by a Solarist called Giese (who must still admit failure), can take fantastic, seemingly mathematical shapes:

> The interior of the symmetriad becomes a factory for the production of "monumental machines", as these constructs are sometimes called, although they resemble no machine which it is within the power of mankind to build... When they geysers of oceanic matter have solidified into pillars or into three-dimensional networks of galleries and passages, and the "membranes" are set into an inextricable pattern of storeys, panels and vaults, the symmetriad justifies its name, for the entire structure is divided into two segments each mirroring the other to the most infinitesmal detail. ...The completed symmetriad represents a spatial analogue of some transcendental equation.

On the other hand, the shapes called mimoids recall Earth's own birth pangs:

> Concealed at first beneath the ocean surface, a large flattened disc appears, ragged, with a tar-like coating. After a few hours, it begins to separate into flat sheets which rise slowly. The observer now becomes a spectator to what looks like a fight to the death, as massed ranks of waves converge from all directions like contorted, fleshy mouths which snap greedily around the tattered,

> fluttering leaf, then plunge into the depths. As each ring of waves breaks and sinks, the fall of this mass of hundreds of thousands of tons is accompanied for an instant by a viscous rumbling an immense thunderclap. The tarry leaf is overwhelmed, battered and torn apart; with every fresh assault, circular fragments scatter and drift like feebly fluttering wings below the ocean surface.

The story-teller notes in various passages the ocean's complete indifference to its human watchers. However, in these passages, Lem's prose comes nearest to poetry, because the ocean's alien activities contrast so strongly with the terrestrial similes that a writer must use to describe the phenomena. Passages such as the one above remind me most of Coleridge's KUBLA KHAN. The writer strives at all times to observe the phenomena as factually as possible. "A large flattened disc appears", and "it begins to separate into flat sheets". The writer tries to separate his observations from the terrestrial analogues that spring to mind: "The observer now becomes a spectator at what looks like a fight to the death." However, the simile immediately dominates the prose. Although the writer previously tried to avoid saying whether or not he thought the ocean was "alive", now he lets biological images ("contorted, fleshy mouths... snap greedily", there are "fresh assaults", and "the tarry leaf is overwhelmed, battered and torn apart") drive onwards into a magnificent crescendo. The wave breaks and dissipates at the end of the "assault", and leaves "circular fragments" which "scatter and drift like feebly fluttering wings below the ocean surface". Lem's powerful verbs create a world that is archaic, anarchic, and primitive, but at the same time breaks all known physical laws in displays of pyrotechnics, and performs what looks like mathematical puzzles within its own substance.

By the centre of the novel, Lem sinks his reader in the growing love between Kelvin and Rheya and in Kelvin's love for the grandiose, indifferent, and playful planet, Solaris.

III Where is the link? I've already quoted a passage in which Lem inadvertantly gives some idea himself of what he tries to do in SOLARIS: "a pulsating focal point, unconscious of itself, contradictory, conglomerate". SOLARIS is like the point at which an unbreakable drill tries to penetrate an invulnerable barrier. The bit of the drill screams and dances on the surface of the barrier, and somehow Lem makes the resulting noise and violent energy into verbal music. A fanciful metaphor perhaps, especially as both the "drill" and the "barrier" represent mutually exclusive metaphysical notions, and not merely opposing physical entities.

I could give the easy answer that the planet Solaris is the invulnerable barrier and Kelvin's (and the human race's) doggedness is the drill. However, Kelvin is not unbreakable, and the history of Solarism shows a parade of men broken by the planet's puzzles. I could answer slightly better if I said that the unknowable planet and the unselfconscious Rheya together form the drill and Kelvin's mind is the impenetrable barrier. Or, if you like, perhaps Lem invests so much of his own character and experience into the book that the metaphor represents his battle with his own ideas.

Lem's own metaphor is Kelvin's search for knowledge. He comes to the planet at the time when Snow and Sartorius actually do make some "Contact" with the planet. Illegally they radiate x-rays into the "ocean's" surface. The planet makes its "Contact" in the form of the Visitors. Sartorius is so ashamed

of his Visitor that he never allows Kelvin to find out what it is. Snow says that "(In the Visitors) we can observe, through a microscope, as it were, our own monstrous ugliness, our folly, our shame!" All the reader sees or hears of Sartorius' "Visitor" is a yellow straw-hat and a demoniac giggling behind closed doors. Kelvin's "demon" is a wife who killed herself because of his own actions.

However, Contact ultimately makes no sense in human intellectual terms. Perhaps Solaris has found a way to understand the human mosquitoes that crawl above its surface. Perhaps it "learns" something about a universe outside its own skin and "teaches" mankind about itself. But perhaps the whole incident only triggers some tiny pulse in some remote "nerve-end" of Solaris - always provided that we accept the scientific theory that Solaris is alive and sentient! The total structure of the novel shows that it does not really matter whether the planet changes or not. However, Lem always brings Kelvin back to the "heart of nowhere" - himself. Kelvin comes to accept the parameters of his doomed "second marraige", for emotionally he cannot leave Solaris without Rheya, and physically Rheya cannot leave Solaris without disintegrating. Dr Sartorius finds a way to eliminate her, and Kelvin possesses nothing more to hold at the end of the novel than he held at the start.

Or so the reader thinks if (like Algis Budrys, and presumably many others) he thinks the book is only "about" Solaris. I suppose it's "about" the frontiers of the mind - or, if you like to tack a technical expression to it, it's about the body-mind problem; about the relationship between two fundamentally different substances, our thoughts, and the world we try to think about. Lem is not only interested in a well-documented philosophical problem, however. He invents a planet which mankind could encounter one day, but hasn't and probably won't. He shows several generations of human beings who feel compelled to understand the unknowable. As Snow says to Kelvin, "We are searching for an ideal image of our own world... We arrive here as we are in reality, and when the page is turned and that reality is revealed to us... then we don't like it any more". Kelvin is the one who comes closest to penetrating the unknowable (or perhaps this is when Solaris comes closest tounderstanding humanity) but still he must retreat from the impossible task. And when he retreats, what does he take back with him? Self-knowledge, certainly, but not some cheap maharishi-style conversion. Perhaps, for want of a better term, he discovers the personal integrity to help him extend his knowledge in a universe (both inside and outside his mind) that he can never "know" in a systematic way. And where lies the balancing-point? Lem refuses to offer any cheap solutions. Instead the last pages of SOLARIS show the moving meeting between Kelvin and his antagonist. The chapter harmonises all the elements of the novel in this beautiful largo:

> With the flitter a few paces behind me, I sat on the rough, fissured beach. A heavy black wave broke over the edge of the bank and spread out, not black, but a dirty green. The ebbing wave left viscous streamlets behind, which flowed back quivering towards the ocean. I went closer, and when the next wave came I held out my hand... The wave hesitated, recoiled, then enveloped my hand without touching it, so that a thin covering of "air" separated my glove inside a cavity which had been fluid a moment previously, and now had a fleshy consistency. I raised my hand slowly, and the wave, or rather an outcrop of the wave, rose at the same time, enfolding my hand in a translucent cyst with greenish reflections. I stood up, so as to raise my hand still higher, and the gelatinous substance stretched like a rope, but did not break. The main body

of the wave remained motionless on the shore, surrounding my feet without touching them, like some strange beast patiently waiting for the experiment to finish. A flower had grown out of the ocean, and its calyx was moulded to my fingers. I stepped back. The stem trembled, stirred uncertainly and fell back into the wave, which gathered it and receded... I sat unseeing, and sank into a universe of inertia, glided down an irresistible slope and identified myself with the dumb, fluid colossus; it was as if I had forgiven it everything, without the slightest effort of word or thought... I hope for nothing. And yet I lived in expectation.

- Bruce R Gillespie September 1971

(The best review of SOLARIS you can read is Darko Suvin's afterword to both editions. Suvin's essay, THE OPEN-ENDED PARABLES OF STANISLAW LEM AND "SOLARIS", gives a concise account of the multiple "theologies" of the book, as well as some useful biographical and bibliographical material about Stanislaw Lem. I thought it vain to repeat or embroider Suvin's thesis, so I've tried to look at aspects of the novel not covered in his essay.

I should mention, if only in passing, that the book was translated from Polish into French, and from French into English. Only the author could tell us if and how the translations lost the qualities of the original. As you can see from the passages I've discussed, the prose still reads extremely well in English.)

DISCUSSED IN THIS ISSUE (S F COMMENTARY 24 CHECKLIST)

Isaac Asimov: THE POWER OF PROGRESSION (F&SF May 1969) (11) * John Bangsund (44) * Ben Bova (48) * John Boyd: THE LAST STARSHIP FROM EARTH (43) * John Brunner: STAND ON ZANZIBAR (46-47) * L Sprague de Camp (46) * John W Campbell (ed.): ANALOG (39) * E J Carnell (ed.): NEW WRITINGS (16) * CORNMARKET REPRINTS (48) * Desmond Cory (45) * Sten Dahlskog (38-39) * Samuel R Delany: ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY FIVE WORDS (40-41) * Samuel R Delany: NOVA (45) * John Foyster: I LIED WITH FIGURES FOR MY COUNTRY AND FOUND.. (SFC 19) (16) * John Foyster: OKO-NO-HOSOMICHI BY MATSUO BASHO (SFC 19) (42) * John Foyster (ed.): S F COMMENTARY 19 (16, 37-39, 41) * Richard E Geis (ed.): SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (12-16) * Bruce R Gillespie: THE ORIGINAL FICTION ANTHOLOGIES PART 1 (SFC 21) (15-16, 49) * Bruce Gillespie: I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS (SFC 23) (46) * Bruce Gillespie (ed.): S F COMMENTARY 9 (49) * Robert Heinlein: STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND (16, 37) * Robert Heinlein: WALDO (33) * Frank Herbert: DUNE MESSIAH (43) * HOUSTON S F SOCIETY (48) * Philippe Hupp (48) * Aldous Huxley: APE AND ESSENCE (42-43) * Aldous Huxley: BRAVE NEW WORLD (43) * JOHN W CAMPBELL SYMPOSIUM (43-44) * M K Joseph: THE HOLE IN THE ZERO (17-22) * Arnie Katz (ed.): FOCAL POINT (46-47) * Damon Knight (ed.): ORBIT (14-15) * Jerry Lapidus (ed.): TOMORROW AND.. (49) * Ursula K Le Guin: THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS (22-24, 48) * Stanislaw Lem (48) * Stanislaw Lem: ROBOTS IN SCIENCE FICTION (SFC 19) (37-38, 40) * Stanislaw Lem: SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION (SFC 22) (17, 42-43) * Stanislaw Lem: SOLARIS (25-34) * Stanislaw Lem: UNITAS

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BARRY GILLAM
The Old Dark House

Barry Gillam discusses

ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES

directed by DON TAYLOR; written by PAUL DEHN; director of photography JOSEPH BIROC; music by JERRY GOLDSMITH; produced by APJAC PRODUCTIONS; released by 20th Century-Fox.

With: RODDY McDOWALL (Cornelius), KIM HUNTER (Zira), BRADFORD DILLMAN (Dr Lewis Dixon), NATALIE TRUNDY (Dr Stephanie Branton), ERIC BRAEDEN (Dr Otto Hasslein), WILLIAM WINDOM (The President), SAL MINEO (Milo), RICARDO MONTALBAN (Armando), MARSHALL STEWART (Arthur, the Zoo Keeper).

1971. 98 minutes.

While watching ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES, I realised something about the nature of s f movies; they are constructed in terms of story and not of style. This may seem obvious, but my denigrations and defences so far have been analytical and largely based on style. I think that criterion is valid, but when faced with something like ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES, I must employ other criteria.

ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES warrants the epithet "interesting". And the interest lies in the implications of the narrative rather than in the visual forms of the movie.

Two principals from the earlier "Apes" movies, Zira and Cornelius, escape the holocaust at the end of BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES, and go back in time to contemporary Earth. Zira is pregnant, and her child may well be the seed that will one day allow apes to become the rulers of Earth and eventually destroy it.

The apes are the springboard of the film rather than its movers. I can divide the film into three sections: investigation, evaluation, and action. The apes, however, are the investigated, the evaluated, and it is against them that the action is taken. The real protagonist is Dr Otto Hasslein, a scientist and presidential advisor. The apes come before the presidential commission (attended by the press) and reveal to the world that they are intelligent. But the public takes the apes to their collective heart between the time of the dislosure and the final decision of the commission. They fete and applaud Zira and Cornelius, and make them into the celebrities of the hour.

Roddy McDowell and Kim Hunter act the apes very well. They play them as two very civilised scientists whose habits, both professional and personal, give them very finicksty tastes. However, this quality makes them more endearing, and the script gives them a sense of humour and compassion that ensures our sympathy. In fact, some of the nicest things in the film are the ape's accessories: a beautiful, embroidered carpet bag which they have with them and which we see even before we are told that they are intelligent; their very names, which suggest a certain degree of leisure and taste; their humour, es-

pecially in reaction to the rather gross actions of the humans.

As I mentioned above, Otto Hasslein is really the subject of the film. Eric Braeden, whom I found rather ridiculous in THE FORBIN PROJECT, gives a fine performance here. Hasslein is a sharp, intelligent scientist who, with his ability to communicate his ideas to laymen, has become the President's science advisor. His sight also extends further than that of anyone else around him. When he sees the threat that Zira's child poses, he explains it to the president. The president understands, but says very practically that he will no longer be in office 2000 years from now, and right now the voters love the apes.

Thus, at the centre of the film is a man who opposes pollution and overpopulation and who wants to kill our friends. We know that Hasslein is right, and yet we want to ignore sense for sympathy. This is the tension of the film. The director draws out the options: he shows two veterinarians who befriend the apes at the beginning, in simple trusting faith; we see the boisterous humanism and accommodating fatalism of Armando, who helps the apes when they are pursued; and finally there is Hasslein's realisation that if he does not remedy the situation, public sympathy will disallow any preventative measures. There again we feel the correct attitude intellectually but not morally.

Something very interesting happens at the end of the film. We have accepted the pliable makeup-cum-masks for three movies, and now we are introduced to a real baby chimpanzee as Zira's child. In one way, this poses a test which the makeup passes, for we are amazed that the chimp's face so resembles Kim Hunter's makeup. But, on the other hand, as Penelope Gilliat has pointed out, after we have seen chimps talk and act intelligently for three films, we find an astonishing level of intelligence in the baby chimp's blinks and gestures. We feel that it is very likely that the chimp will talk, and that, even more than Hasslein's own arguments, is the ultimate, clinching point that allows us to share his fear. We realise, in the last shot, how much possession of intelligence means and also how fragile the possessor still is. S f seems particularly well adapted to convey such a salutory point.

Don Taylor directs actors very well, and I found that I could remember with clarity bits of business from the principals. Partly because of their roles, some of the other actors seem somewhat pathetic, especially Bradford Dillman and Natalie Trundy ("Oh, my God!"). As I indicated above, the film is visually conventional, if efficient. Taylor handles a moment at the beginning, though, very well. We see at a distance a large bleached bulk as it floats in the sea. As we approach the object what looks at first like a dead whale is revealed as a spacecraft. Taylor neatly shows the object's assumption of planned lines, and gives us hope for the rest of the movie.

The real star of the film is Paul Dehn's script. Even here, some of the satire seems rather frivolous, but that is a minor objection. Upon second thought, a lot of it hits closer to home than it seems at first: the commission's behaviour and composition (a scientist, a Negro, a clergyman, a politician, etc.) has its current point. And the Jacob's coat bathrobe that Cornelius wears looks the very thing for a visiting celebrity in California. We can see the parody in the maddeningly heavy-handed and infuriatingly simple television interview with Hasslein.

I recommend ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES, and if you don't expect too much you're in for an enjoyable couple of hours.

- Barry Gillam 1971

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

A STRANGE LAND. The title is from EXODUS 2: 22: "And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land."

Etc. There are some things of interest in the later issues, particularly the Cordwainer Smith/Linebarger bibliography and Lem's several contributions. (October 10, 1971)

((In your last letter)) did you mean to ask for an example of Rottensteiner's errors? On page 4 of CHEWING GUM FOR THE VULGAR he says about WALDO, "Only after a friend has convinced him that he isn't as independent as he had thought and, more important, that human society can be understood just as the universe detected by him has been understood does he return to Earth." This is wrong from beginning to end. There is no such friend, and no change of heart precedes Waldo's return to Earth (he goes back the first time because he needs to talk to someone who won't go to him or use any communication device; the second time, permanently, because he has cured his myasthenia gravis), and no one has to convince him that human society can be understood, with or without italics. Rottensteiner's descriptions of other Heinlein stories are equally odd. It makes a fellow wonder whether Rottensteiner has read the books only in German translation, and if so, have they been tinkered with by the translator?

(October 29, 1971) *

* JOHN ALDERSON (Havelock, Victoria 3465)

In SFC 19 Stanislaw Lem contributes an essay on ROBOTS IN SCIENCE FICTION that shows a great deal of penetration, and I don't query his general conclusions. But I do query some of his facts. Presumably when he means myth, he means Greek myth (he does mention this once) and presumably when he mentions "classical" fairy tales he means European fairy tales (Greece is not renowned for its fairy tales). But he seems to confuse myth with fairy tales, as he talks about them in the same terms. Now myth is fundamentally different from fairy tales. Myths are old and tell of things that so affected the imagination of man that they remained a fundamental part of his sub-conscious, and they are, to my mind, awe-struck memories of historical events, probably of a cosmic nature.

Fairy tales are another matter entirely. One may put out milk for the "good folk", and one may not wander around at night, but fairies do not strike awe in man. One people takes the land of another and the aboriginal population either dies out or is absorbed, or lurks for centuries carrying out a guerilla war from inaccessable hills and deep forests. The Picts became pixies, and the red-haired Goidelic Celts became giants in the stories of the smaller Brythonic Celts who took their land, who in turn became the "small dark men" of the Milesian. A lot of Highland clans have fairy ancestors, who are, in plain English, of Pictish origin. Many fairy stories are "historical" and many are fanciful. But "good always remaining victorious" only happened when they were rewritten for children. Tales of murder, torture, cannibalism, and general viciousness constitute the bulk of fairy tales. They are on a par with the horrific tales of our

dealings with the aborigines of Australia. Myth goes back to origins; the fairy tale belongs to the sordid world of today, and therefore relevant to robots. (from CHAO IV, June 1971, page 18)

Whatever may have been the wisdom originally of restricting EXPLODING MADONNA and THE JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY to what was virtually a circular letter, it is certainly wise now to republish it for the wide world... well, fandom and libraries.

I would like to comment upon two points, both of which have permanent interest. The first relates to the assumption that "s f is the one and only form of literature capable of describing the impact of change in a technological society, and the second concerns the totalitarian nature of at least American s f.

I am amazed at the statement that "S f is the one and only form of literature capable of describing change in a technological society". It is shocking that it should be made by people who regard themselves as more than ordinarily literate. Because it is absolute rot. The statement is first made by Sten Dahlskog (page 26) and quoted apparently with approval by John Foyster (page 46) for Samuel R Delany who dismisses it with the comment, "I agree... as far as they go" (there were two points, hence the plural). Admittedly Dahlskog added a rider connecting the point with ecology. Delany proved that Dahlskog's rider was wrong, but everybody seems to have accepted the general truth of the statement.

I don't see what "technological" has to do with the question, for man has depended upon his technology ever since he picked the first figleaf to cover his nakedness. The writers may mean "technologically sophisticated". This limits the historical aspect to recent decades. Nobody advances a reason for the use of the adjective "technological" and I must ask why the people of a technological society are so special. The adjective seems to remove from the field of argument all but the most recent works of literature - a somewhat underhand business.

This statement immediately dismisses from consideration the historian. Really! Probably the works of history in the past two decades exceed the total of those in s f. Several hundred history books will be referred to and quoted in a century's time. Would anyone be brave enough to say that twenty recent books of s f will stand the wear of the coming century? There is a more successful description of the <u>impact of change</u> in the recently published ENGLISH HISTORY by A J P Taylor, than in any selection of s f of similar wordage.

The great master of speculation, H G Wells, speedily found that science fiction was a poor vehicle for his speculations and he dropped that form of literature in favour of other types of literature that allowed him to speculate more freely without the nuisance of also writing a story. The kindest things that can be said about his OUTLINE OF HISTORY and the shortened versions of the work is that they are speculations on history. As history they are bloody awful. Other volumes dealt with war, socialism, religion, and politics.

What of the contemporary novelist working in the contemporary literary brainstorm so that he can depict changing society? Should we dis-

miss him as an utter failure? I think not. And what of the poets? Some poets began telling the world about the dangers to their environment back in the twenties: No, the statement is wrong, and we must conclude that other forms of literature can and do depict the impact of technological change.

In SFC 19, various writers note the totalitarian "might is right" nature of the writing of van Vogt, Heinlein, and Cordwainer Smith. As far as I know van Vogt and Heinlein have not appeared in ANALOG a great deal since it changed from the name ASTOUNDING. But an ANALOG story, when not covered by nuts and bolts, mainly concerns the value of power and the attempt to make an ordered universe. No wonder the magazine's editor writes about the necessity of putting the young the n-----, and other lesser breeds, in their place with a rifle butt. Perhaps ANALOG represents the utmost right wing of the whole of American periodicals. The writers for GALAXY and IF use blood and guts for ink, exterminate the weak and the women. The F&SF writers are out of this world in dreams of pixies and penises. Sometimes the magazine prints a piece of s f.

Several years before s f fans realised that American writers were reflecting the theories and ideals of Niezsche, people in religious circles regarded it as a matter of great concern that American university students were taking Niezsche too seriously, even citing him in court cases involving murder. But they didn't need a European madman to enlighten them. They already had the tradition of using a gun to gain their ends.

Several centuries ago there was an interesting speculation that a nation of atheists could not exist. We'll soon know whether this statement is true or not. USA is now a nation with a philosophy of materialism and an education system with an utter lack of morality and a religion that might is right - and its citizens armed to the teeth. Well might Americans wonder at the British s f writers' preoccupation with world catastrophe: America is that catastrophe.

(August 20, 1971) *

* SFC has taken a dismal dive all of a sudden; surely things aren't <u>that</u> bad, John? Well, probably they are, but I'm inclined to think that the only people who can mend America are the Americans, and quite a few of them are engaged in the attempt. Besides, as Franz Rottensteiner pointed out in CHEWING GUM FOR THE VULGAR (and I thought it was <u>the</u> point of the essay, but nobody else seems to) America's "might is right" pattern doesn't spring from any conscious malevolence, but rather from an unconscious naivety about almost everything. "The road to imagination is easy," said Proust approximately "while the road to introspection is difficult and uphill." Americans, not even university students, don't seem to do much introspection; a nation dedicated to "action" will find that many of its actions contradict each other. But this is all very sanctimonious; you Americans should breathe a sigh of relief that you don't live in a country where nobody thinks <u>or</u> acts (or, better still, read John Baxter's BEACH, which sums up the great Australian wish-dream).

I think you've misinterpreted Dahlskog, Delany, and Foyster, but they leave themselves open to misinterpretation. As I've said quite often, we mainly support s f for what it <u>could</u> be, rather than what it is. Lem's point (in SFC 22) about the reasons why Robbe Grillet doesn't write novels about astronauts, probably covers this point as well.

I must agree with you, John, about your comments on myths and fairy tales, although you may have slightly missed Lem's intended point here. I think he said that myths and fairy tales were once serious statements that had complete ontological validity. How did we get fire? Prometheus took it from the gods; not, "Now, people, we know that we can really get fire by rubbing two sticks together, but here's a pretty story about it anyway". Myths described how things really were for the people who first told them. During the Renaissance people began to discover a lot more things about the way the universe really worked. The myths remained, but they had ontological value for fewer and fewer people. Lem complains because of s f writers who say to themselves, "Now here's some nice simple plot lying around in this old book, and I've got this real cute idea about a robot, so I'll bung the two together and sell the story to F&SF. If anybody worries, I'm writing a new mythology which will attempt to explain the marvels of science to modern man. They'll probably write a thesis about me." Well, perhaps I've slandered both Lem and our hypothetical s f writer. Lem would say: it's likely that we will have working robots within the next few years; what will they really be like? how will they really affect our lives? and, what kind of fiction can we write about these real robots? Probably we will invent a new mythology, but they will be stories that actually follow the configurations of reality (so to speak). *

* VALDIS AUGSTKALNS (1426 22nd Street, Parkersburg, West Virginia 26101, USA)

(**brg** Valdis' first letter came from Antigua... my first letter from the West Indies!**)

A few nights ago, circa 3am, I heard a noise at the back door toward the beach. I am brave. I opened the door, stuck my head out, and found myself face to face with the hotel's automatic lawn mower. I have not been so close to a horse in twenty-five years, but at least I got no new scars from this encounter.

Re. S F COMMENTARY 21; A SYMPOSIUM OF INNOCENCE, by Franz Rottensteiner: I used to speak German, still speak English, and neither is my native tongue. Furthermore, I haven't read the translated book which Delany talks about. This is about as objective a slant on this controversy as you will find.

"Gray smoke rose and curled from the slate chimney" is good serviceable prose. The meaning a reader invests in these words will depend entirely on the context. The words would fit into a placid setting, like a calm Impressionist country scene. But they wouldn't betray a menacing situation - say, a northern fir forest or a sullen October afternoon with groaning trees and gray clouds racing low and witches brewing something in the cauldron below. The sentence can just as easily carry overtones of doom. The Gurney version does not intrude upon nor disrupt whatever came before and what will follow.

Tench is a disaster area. "Elevated" is a poor excuse for a verb; "contorted" is a little better because it has overtones of snaking, twisting, turning, and so conflicts with "billows". The verb idea in the sentence - smoke rising - is mutilated by the use of inappropriate two bit words in a context where nickel and dime words will do a better job. Even "billows" is a better verb to use. In our fir-forest, October setting, "Smoke, gray and gloomy, billowed up from the slate chimney" would be acceptable pulp prose at least. All the

other words are excess verbiage. And any other kind of context - neutral or positive - makes even my modified version of Tench read badly.

Bad prose forces a reader to work harder, as Delany says. He has to figure out what is appropriate and what the author really had to say. A poor author forces the reader to cheat on the meanings of words in order to compensate for the author's sloppiness (or the translator's). Any time a reader must cheat with meaning, the language is debased a little, and the perpetrator commits a mortal sin. In a sloppy and convoluted language like German such sins make little difference; but in English, so much more economical and precise, the writer must choose precise words. The bludgeon vs the rapier.

Rottensteiner's point about the reader learning to read properly is utopian nonsense. Where in this day and age are we going to find a sane, telepathic reader interested in probing the depths of an author's mind to find out what "he really meant" to say? The truth of the matter is that most people who write are damn ignorant, don't know what if anything they want to say, and couldn't write their way out of a paper bag if they did. So they slap something together and trumpet to the world, "This, brother, is IT". And don't have the foggiest notion of what IT is.

I have to stop now. They are taking the lawnmower down to the beach for a swim. And that I've got to see. (September 11, 1971)*

* Almost as strange as watching $5000-per-annum-plus teachers shifting furniture around our building. (In another letter Vardis writes that he stayed in Michael Coney's hostelry on Antigua and sailed for a week with Captain Jon Lucas. "Every other person you meet down there is a part time s f writer, or so it seems.")

I'm willing to admit that your interpretation of the two passages may be right, although I much prefer the rhythms of the Tench translation. However, your last comments make me rend my clothes and gnash my teeth. What do you think this magazine is <u>for</u> (among other things) than to help people read better? Surely it's not a matter of telepathy; many people just do not bother to read the words in front of them. As John Foyster relates in SFC 19, he found when he began to review books for ASFR that many professional reviewers just did not bother to read the books they reviewed. Take Thomas Mann's JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS, for instance, which I am reading at the moment. Many of the sentences are half a page long and connect long streams of subsidiary and adjectival clauses. The lazy English reader can either reject this type of writing out-of-hand, or he can try to find out why Mann employs such long sentences, and what meaning he creates within them. By that time he shouldbe able to perform the actual mechanical trick of reading half-page sentences fairly easily. It took me the first fifty pages to re-adjust to Mann's style, for instance, but the effort was worthwhile. It's all a matter of humility and judging the position of the writer. Mann has obviously put such a vast amount of erudition and wisdom into JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS that I can only hope to discover a little of what is there, no matter how many times I read it. But under no circumstances can I give the excuse that Mann should have written in some other way, and Lowe-Porter should have made a snappier, more easily-read translation. (I realise this rebounds on me. The only excuse I have for making Lem read more easily is that I don't have access to the Polish original, and Franz's translation doesn't make <u>enough</u> sense to make good jour-

nalism.) As I implied in my answer to John Alderson's letter, my main quarrel with the Americans is their search for the simple answer, the handy gizmo, the snappy word, and even the easy translation. For the best exercise in translation that I have seen, look at John Foyster's essay on Basho in SFC 19, where he compares two translations, each of which is entirely different from the other, but neither of which is "easier" than the other. *

* PHYRNE BACON (3101 North West 2nd Avenue, Gainesville, Florida 32601, Florida)

In privete life I am Mrs Phillip Bacon. I got an MA degree last quarter (mathematics - my thesis title was ON HJELMSLEV PLANES WITH SMALL INVARIANTS). I am now trying to get an article on strongly uniform Hjelmslev planes in shape to send off. But it is slow going. I get distracted by fanac too easily.

I am somewhat amazed that you have met anyone with the name Phyrne. I have never met anyone with that name who had not been named after my grandmother. I once spent a month in a house in which four of the six of us were named Phyrne: my grandmother, my aunt, my first cousin, and myself. My other first cousin was named Margaret (called Bitsy) and my uncle was named Bruce.

I notice that you mention being an agent for Hal Hall's index. Which reminds me of the index I have been working on publishing. Piers Anthony (he worte a long article on it in BEABOHEMA 5) compiled an index (with help from others) through 1963 of book reviews in s f magazines. It's awfully long and I fear that I have been neglecting it of late. But anyway it exists. The xerox copy is arranged by title. The IBM card dump of what I have done so far (most of which is both unproofread and uncorrected) is by author. I have something like 15,000 cards so far.

Philip Jose Farmer has always been one of my favourite s f authors. When I read Stanislaw Lem's article SEX AND SCIENCE FICTION (SFC 22) I wondered if he had read FLESH. I will admit that I haven't read it all myself. But somehow I get the impression that sex was sacred among the natives. And in APE AND ESSENCE (another book I never read completely) by Huxley I get the impression that again there was sacred orgy.

Whenever I think about sex in relation to s f, the thing that comes to my mind is the simply amazing number of times that the joyful ending depends to some extent on having found a lush new world to populate. I guess the first that I really noticed was COSTIGAN'S NEEDLE. But RING AROUND THE SUN and POLLINATORS OF EDEN are two more. Why are these happy endings? In a way they could be viewed as expressions of a desire to return to a simpler, more challenging (socially unchallenging?) world. A retreat from the pressing problems of the present. To a world where women are women, and sex equals reproduction.

How can anyone in this day and age discuss sex without mentioning birth control? Lem did run through the plot of THE LOVERS... But he comments that MEMOIRS OF A SPACE WOMAN does not even make "honest" pornography. But note that the author is a woman. And the pornography in this case is largely concerned with childbearing. In fact it

is easy to apply the criteria of the paragraph following, to this book. The trappings of s f justify the savouring of repeated pregnancy. Satisfaction of a desire which may be much frustrated in these days of birth control. Seen in this light, it is not insignificant that the last pregnancy is a "real" one, so to speak.

I started to think about contraception and abortion (or lack thereof) in science fiction. And I had to think quite a while before I could think of even a small number of examples. Strangely enough I could think of only one example of what might be called "personal" contraception - successful contraception, that is, on a personal basis.

Herbert: DUNE MESSIAH - Contraceptive used to thwart hero. (That's the example.)

Huxley: BRAVE NEW WORLD. Used unsuccessfully by a leading character (Malthusian drill fails for a beta who becomes mother of hero.) Portrayed against a background of successful use.

Huxley: APE AND ESSENCE. Castration (?) not adopted by central character.

Boyd: THE LAST STARSHIP FROM EARTH. Not used by central characters. Also there is a populate-a-planet syndrome.

Farmer: THE LOVERS. Contraceptive failure due to misunderstanding leads to tragedy.

Farmer: THE MAKER OF UNIVERSES. Contraceptive in water controls population on the world of Tiers.

Farmer: NIGHT OF LIGHT (pages 35 and 36). Hero had tried to talk his wife into abortion. She refused and he murdered her.

A number of stories mention government regulated births, with no discussion of use of contraception or abortion. Stories that talk about genetic engineering rarely mention contraception. I can only think of two books (AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT, RITE OF PASSAGE) that talk about the "new family styles" that would result from effective contraception. (August 20, 1971) *

* Thanks for these extra comments. In the next issue Philip Jose Farmer replies to Lem's article. Your notes support most people's impressions that sf is a mainly sexless medium. Further additions to Phyrne's list, anybody?

* When I began to type this column, I had 48 letters of comment from which I could choose. Elementary calculations based on the distribution of letters so far should show you that I would need about 100 pages to fit in all those letters. And yet I would really like to print them all. So far in this issue I have tried to group the letters according to subject matter, but since I have only a few pages left, here are some scattered responses to matters that have been raised during recent issues:

* JOHN JULIAN (112 Park Drive, Parkville, Victoria 3052)

SFC 23 read right through - rare these days - and I'm highly impressed. Such industry astounds. Ego boosted suitably about the

nice comments about the old masturbator, but my wall is suitably annoyed. When I held up page 49 for it to read, it threw the skull and lesser bleached bones of John Bangsund at me.

Who by the bowels of Christ is "the Edmund Wilson of Mulgrave"? I know who Harold Wilson and Edmund, the ponce chicken sexer from Mulga Creek, are. And also incidentally John Foyster, who was rather good at the Symposium thing. I believe I insulted him. Well, that's nothing mate. You should have seen the time I insulted the grandmother of my old Science teacher. Not only is she Chinese and cannot understand a word of the Queen's E, she's half blind as well. A man can take a pride in an insult like that.

Further to the origins of the Symposium: When I waylaid the happy band leaving the Railways Institute (what a marvellous opening to a GOON SHOW <u>that</u> line would make!) I had just spent six hours at a wedding taking snaps of the whole sacrifice and knocking off their very splendid Sea View and McLaren Vale at more than a gentlemanly pace. (After all mate, the stuff was free.) I had also fallen down the stairs while trying to entice the bride to slide down the bannisters with me, and my conk had come into sudden contact (juxtaposed, they say in the best books nowadays - the perils of erudition, I suppose) with a bloody great Metz flash gun. As a result I don't remember too clearly the exact wording of the conversation.

However I didn't mean to imply that the "seriously interested people" who read s f are "most likely to attend university, or at least hold some affiliations with a university". What I am pretty sure I did say (and what I certainly meant) was that the easiest group of these so-called seriously interested people (whatever that might mean) to contact and bring together were in this category, which is a totally different thing. I'm not complaining, as your summary of the discussion otherwise is admirably to the point, but I wouldn't like to be on record damned by others' words.

Now how about something more permanent from that Symposium? There are quite a few ideas there worth chewing over. A call to thee of the fleeting typist's digits. Your comments on the attendance I think proved most of the points John Bangsund (God rest his ~~soul~~ memory) and I eventually agreed on, although I am not sure that the same reasoning should apply again to another meeting. The most discouraging thing was the numbers. Even a dissertation on SYMMETRY ELEMENTS IN LINEAR B SCRIPTS can usually raise that many people in the Classics Theatre. (October 20, 1971) *

* As some people may remember, John Bangsund has already hinted that he will print the proceedings of the John W Campbell Symposium. In fact, I distinctly remember that he asked Merv Binns for a photo of Campbell last Wednesday, so the Symposium will almost certainly appear. I haven't heard any more information about further meetings of the Science Fiction Discussion Group.

* <u>FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER (A-2762 Ortmann, Felsenstrasse 20, Austria)</u>

There are, of course, some things I have to quibble with in SFC 21. Mr Turner's sensitive reader must be very sensitive indeed, I feel;

at least LITERATURE AND CRITICISM, one of Austria's only two literary magazines, found Lem's UNITAS OPPOSITORUM of sufficient worth to reprint it in an issue, and if this isn't a world's first, then I doubt that many fanzine pieces can boast of having been reprinted in a general literary periodical of such stature.

I read Mr Gillam's letter with great interest, and I think I should reply to at least some of his points. For instance, he seems to imply that my not naming any novel that is better than NOVA has some significance, and perhaps even indicates some inability to do such a thing. There's nothing easier than to give long lists of s f novels: A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ, THE CRYSTAL WORLD, MESSIAH, THE DROWNED WORLD, SOLARIS, GUNNAR CADE, THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH, UBIK, MARTIAN TIME-SLIP, BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, AN AGE, and so on. Each of these books is better than NOVA, and what is more, I think that there are even some good ones among them.

I accept (i.e. know) that there is a tradition of American s f leading up to NOVA. But knowing something, and its evaluation, are two entirely different things. Such a tradition doesn't interest me. There seems to be, to give another example, a tradition in American s f criticism to be on one's knees in worship as soon as a trace of some old myth is detected in an s f novel. I will just think that the author has no ideas, and probably doesn't know much of the sciences, structuralism, and epistemology. :: Mr Gillam's ideas of irony are very different from mine. :: I don't care to look them up, but there have been numerous instances where writers like Delany or Zelazny or Vance were praised for the poetry of their emeralds and amethysts; Mr Gillam is no isolated example. I'll have to live with the possibility that I may miss so much in life by not caring for NOVA; but since there are already several thousand books much better that I'll never be able to read because of my limited life-span and the dreary necessity of having to work and to sleep and do similar things, I don't think that my loss is insufferable. (July 5, 1971)*

* Could we now consider the NOVA correspondence closed, since it started early in 1970 and quite a few current readers would not have read the original articles that led to the debate? Personally, I would like to start a debate based on the proposition that this year's Hugo winners fulfill Dick Jenssen's New Year proposition that "Science fiction fans like bad writing". Especially as the only good novel on the Hugo list came 4th in the voting. *

* JOANNE BURGER (55 Bluebonnet Court, Lake Jackson, Texas 77566, USA)

I would like the following in British editions: I don't know the status of E Phillips Oppenheim in Australia, but I am collecting him, both in book and magazine appearances. I also like Desmond Cory's books. I would be happy to get any British editions of his works. I would also like to see some of the British MAN FROM UNCLE books; I am told that Ace took out a lot of the British slang when they reprinted them. (May 18, 1971) *

* During the last year or so, Joanne has been sending various odd books that I couldn't find in Australia, but I've had nothing to send in return except SFC. I don't know Oppenheim or Cory, but I will pay the postage to send to Joanne any of these books that Australian readers may be able to find. *

* L SPRAGUE DE CAMP (278 Hothorpe Lane, Villanova, Pennsylvania 19085, USA)

Thank you for S F COMMENTARY 23, with Mr Gillam's extremely kind remarks about me and my little stories. I have another collection, THE CONTINENT MAKERS, coming out shortly from New American Library in paper, and I hope that Mr Gillam likes that, too.

For biographical purposes, I am trying to locate, to borrow for photocopying, letters (other than those in the Lovecraft Collection at Brown University or in possession of my colleague Glenn Lord) from H P Lovecraft, Robert E Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, and other members of the HPL-WT circle of the 1930s. Any help that American readers of SFC could give me in this matter would be much appreciated.

(October 10, 1971) *

* JOHN FOYSTER (c/o 6 Clowes Street, South Yarra, Victoria 3141)

I'm not quite sure what the editorial in S F COMMENTARY means. Perhaps the paragraph which mentions your two weeks of holiday explains it all, but I'm not sure that that is enough. I guess you aren't complaining that all fanzines aren't reflections of SFC - but I suspect that you will get some response to that view. While you aren't holding out for discussion of s f in fanzines, there are places which would support that view. Reviews of one kind or another may be the staple diet of most fanzines, but that doesn't mean that they must have that role. Reviews are simply the easiest material to write, and therefore the commonest ingredient of fanzines. Or perhaps I should say, easiest-to-write-competently. Book reviews, or movie reviews, or fanzine reviews will almost always actually have something to say, and on some occasions this breaks through. On the other hand reviews can easily be incomplete or irrelevant or (most often) just boring. An editor who wants people to read his fanzine is going to worry about the boredom of endless reviews.

So there's a pretty good reason for getting away from review-material. The problem is that no one really knows where to go, these days. Should one be serious, and worry about the world's major problems, or should one be funnee (as you put it) which is the only sensible reaction to the world's major problems? At various times different approaches have been used. Mine, of course, is the only true solution.

Mrs Le Guin's remarks on Franz's anti-Americanism interest me. The grounds for anti-Americanism (very much the same as the grounds for the slave's hatred of the master) seem to me to be quite reasonable - and at the same time it is possible to understand the Americans' alarm and inability to understand ungratefulness on the part of the n------ who have been well looked after. But until Americans have a clearer view of their role in the current history of the world they will continue to incite hatred and bloodshed. It may not be as simple as "Go Home Yankee", but it is almost that simple. To be anti-American now, in the extracolumbian universe, is merely to have one's eyes open. Bigotry maybe (as Perry Chapdelaine talks of it later in the issue), but bigotry based on the world as she is.

I was able to check up on Robert Silverberg's reference to Brunner and STAND ON ZANZIBAR (thanks to your jim-dandy index). He is right,

of course, in saying that the book itself should be the critic's target. And you are right in suggesting my motivation for making the remark I did. The back-handed slap, if such it was, was at John Brunner, not at John Brunner's STAND ON ZANZIBAR. This may be reprehensible in itself, but let's get our sights adjusted. :: Your inability to finish a particular book is not, I think, so terrible a matter. It rather disqualifies you from making any remarks about the book, but at least it releases you for something you will enjoy. :: Silverberg says, "I've probably ceased to be the sort of s f writer they (the fans) really want". Was he ever? This is not personal, but RS's remark seems to assume that "fans" and "average readers" can be equated. The collapse of the Ace Specials would certainly be evidence against this belief, and I suspect that it may be Robert Silverberg's fan background which has led him into this insupportable assumption. The tastes of fans and readers are widely separated. So the circulation of ANALOG is double that of F&SF. And the tastes of "intelligent and dedicated fan critics" are very different from those of fans or average readers, as Bruce has just been showing. It is terribly dangerous to identify these differing opinions as "uniform" in any sense at all.

You are unfair to Big-Ears in your story about his interview with TIME. Later reports have suggested that events went more like the following:

McMahon: Well, I really must leave now; my plane leaves in x minutes. Have you perhaps got a last short question?

TIME interviewer: Well, yes, what do you envision for Australia's future?

At least that is consistent with TIME's attitude towards the world.
(October 17, 1971) *

* My complaint was mainly directed at Arnie Katz, who doesn't seem to read much beside fanzines, and is proud of the fact. He also criticises fanzines like GRANFALLOON, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, and now even OUTWORLDS (just count the good ideas I've stolen from that magazine, folks), which are light years ahead of any fanzine Katz has produced. My temper has abated a little since I wrote that editorial, possibly because I don't have any more holidays until the end of December, and also SPECULATION 29 has been published since then. (Weston sounds very cheerful, but I don't want to wait until this time next year for another copy.) But it would be pleasant to read more serious, well-considered material in other fanzines. I don't write humour myself because I can't.

* I have a small amount of space to fit in an enormous amount of material. I don't have room to print reviews of recent Australian fanzines (do you realise that in the month of September 50-pages-long S F COMMENTARY was the <u>smallest</u> Australian fanzine published?) or recent fan news (remember to attend the Adelaide Convention at New Year) or even mention all the People that We Heard From. Here's some items that may interest you:

<u>FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER</u> is currently snowed under with interesting and renumerative projects at the moment, but he will publish QUARBER MERKUR 28 (100 pages) within the near future. At the Frankfort Book Fair, he met for the first time <u>STANISLAW LEM</u>, who will publish four novels in USA next year. Wendayne

Ackerman has already translated THE INVINCIBLE for Herder and Herder, and it will be quickly followed by THE INVESTIGATION, PROJECT MASTER'S VOICE, and MEMOIRS FOUND IN A BATHTUB. Six other Lem novels will follow. The second German tv network will film Lem's short novel, THE FUTUROLOGICAL CONGRESS. In the meantime, I've just received Faber's edition of SOLARIS, and I hope to get an "independent opinion" from a non-s f reader within the next few issues. :: CORNMARKET REPRINTS (42/43 Conduit Street, London W1R ONL, England) will publish in 1972 a series called THE HISTORY OF THE FUTURE, "a series of reprints of utopian and predictive classics" which "is designed to meet the growing demand for science fiction material for serious study". Their titles "will interest the wide readership who buy science fiction... collectors of scarce works in Europe and the English speaking world... and general readers and... students in the university/college/6th form group". A few sample titles: THE LAST MAN, by Mary Shelley. First published 1826. Three volumes. £12.25; THE COMING RACE, by E Bulwer Lytton. First published 1871. £4.75; and NEWS FROM NOWHERE, by William Morris. First published 1890/91. £4.50. Cornmarket Reprints will also do an edition of LOOKING BACKWARD at £6. :: PHILIPPE HUPP (34 Rue Bossuet, 57-Metz, France) is the assistant editor of the French fanprozine, L'AUBE ENCLAVEE, and he also writes a regular fanzine review column for the professional magazine, HORIZONS DU FANTASTIQUE (circulation 6000+). Philippe would very much like to see other Australian fanzines, and correspond with Australian fans. :: And, in case you hadn't heard, BEN BOVA is the new editor of ANALOG. The big question is: will he change that heading to "Engineering Fact-Engineering Fiction" at last?

* WE ALSO HEARD FROM: The first letter in my pile is dated December 14, 1970, and comes from JOHN BROSNAN. I meant to print this letter, like lots of others, because it has some interesting comments about SFC 16 and Barry Gillam's review of NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD. Well, better luck next time, John. Anybody who can work out an economical way to publish 100 page fanzines will solve a lot of my problems. :: DAVID GRIGG did a review of Shaw's PALACE OF ETERNITY which I was going to use as a letter. "A thoroughly irritating book", says David, and that's about all of that letter I can use. :: PHIL HARBOTTLE wants fanzine reviewers to lay off books that s f publishers must sell in order to make any money. No go; we have "intelligent, dedicated" readers here. :: ALEX EISENSTEIN relates the story that Darko Suvin roasted Sam Moskowitz at last year's Secondary Universe Conference for calling THE TIME MACHINE a "prose poem", and suggests that I made the same mistake. :: SANDRA MIESEL tells how she (literally) knelt at the feet of Philip Jose Farmer. :: RON CLARKE guesses that John Foyster must keep reading s f "under his hat" although he says "he doesn't read (much) s f lately, and doesn't (seem to) like it when he does". :: LEIGH EDMONDS wanted a happy ending for THE FORBIN PROJECT (Australian fans!!). :: ALAN SANDERCOCK sent a list of his favourite s f books read in 1970, but I haven't room to list them here. :: BARRY GILLAM sent lots and lots of long letters, some of which will appear next issue. Thinks RINGWORLD is "godawful", Compton is dull, LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS "overpraised", and thinks "there's something missing" in Calvino's work, although he likes it a lot. :: SHAYNE McCORMACK sent a report of the Easter Q-Con, but I don't have room to print it. If Brisbane stages another convention, I'll try to go next time. :: WYLIE TOM GILLESPIE (the only other clansman in fandom?) tells how he became an s f fan, and gives some details of the Houston S F Society (c/o Joe Pumilia, P O Box 1698, Alvin, Texas 77511). :: BILL BOWERS says that every subscription Dennis Stocks receives for OUTWORLDS goes towards Bill's Australian trip in 1975. I hope everybody else in USA is saving for the trip as well. :: CY CHAUVIN directs my attention to Ursula Le Guin's LATHE OF HEAVEN, if I wasn't too impressed with LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. He thinks Lee Harding's THE CUSTODIAN is an "outstanding story".

:: GEORGE HAY sent some news of the Science Fiction Foundation, of which he is an Executive Vice-President. The Foundation was going to set up a lecturer agency in October, and is working closely with schools and colleges re. interdisciplinary studies based on science fiction. The Foundation would also like to establish academic contacts in Australia. :: R A LAFFERTY said that he would drink to "Australia In 75" and admits that it's twenty-eight years since he's been near Australia. "Hey, I'm glad that my stories puzzle you," he adds. "I've always wanted to puzzle an Aussie: they've puzzled me so much. They tell all their jokes from the wrong end, run their horses the wrong way around the race-track, and tell the damndest straight-faced lies in the world. ...You are a bunch out of science fiction, you know." Mr Lafferty would like to see copies of Australian fanzines (1334 South Quincy Avenue, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74120, USA). :: KENNETH W FAIG Jr liked SFC 19 very much, and admits that he is puzzled by John Bangsund's publication schedule. :: SPIKE McPHEE (Bruce McPhee to his enemies, and fanzine publishers) got ink all over his hands from the covers of SFC 19 and 21 (so did I), and voted David Boutland and Barry Gillam as the best reviewers in recent issues. :: RICHARD GEIS said "Don't burn out, Bruce. If you go... Well, it will really mean an end of an era in fandom." After that, I feel like ordering a wheel-chair. Dick thinks that Silverberg may be "leaving us... into a deep, metaphysical area of writing." :: MALCOLM EDWARDS thinks that my reactions to THE BIG FLASH were, to put it mildly, naive. "I've sat about ten yards in front of a bank of - what? - 5000 watt amplification without a twinge... Spinrad's depiction of the rock experience is much like what I might expect one of my parents to write, never having been near a concert, but hating it for all that." Well, I remember going to see a Roy Orbison concert in 1968 (loud snort of derision from Edwards) and coming out half-deaf. Also re. SFC 20: "Graham Hall has never read W H Auden". :: SYDNEY J BOUNDS wanted some news of Ron Graham, and found it fascinating to hear from Bill Temple again - via Australia. :: In between appearing in several plays, writing vast tomes for APA-45, and publishing TOMORROW AND.. (more information later), JERRY LAPIDUS sent a letter telling me why he doesn't have time to comment on SFC 19. He likes the thorough mixture of serious and "fannish" material in Australian fanzines. More comments on the Hugos, but I think Jerry has said just about enough on that score. :: JEFF SMITH "tried writing a sympathetic, beautifully-argued-and-documented, lucid article defending the stories of Harlan Ellison, but it didn't work out." Jeff is pleased that Barry Gillam wrote one of the few reviews about A FEW LAST WORDS, and draws his attention to a story called THIS ONE, which Barry didn't mention. :: ANDY PORTER says that one of the problems in publishing ALGOL is that it costs $250 an issue for printing costs. However, a new ALGOL has appeared ($2.60 for 4 issues from Australian agent, John Bangsund, GPO Box 4946, Melbourne, Victoria 3001), with articles by Robert Lowndes, Bob Bloch, John Bangsund (JOHN W CAMPBELL AND THE MEAT MARKET, already a fannish classic), Dick Lupoff, Bob Shaw, Greg Benford, and numerous prestigious letter writers. He adds: "I also think you should stop publishing SFC and start a smaller, more personal fanzine." More evil fannish propaganda.

* If your name isn't here, then either I've saved your letter for next issue, or, more likely, your letter lies under a vast pile of unsorted, unanswered mail (which is itself lying on a vast pile of unsorted, unlocced fanzines). Do not despair; leave that to the editor. Two important matters are outstanding: JERRY LAPIDUS (54 Clearview Drive, Pittsford, New York 14534) publishes a fanzine called TOMORROW AND.., which has a growing reputation in America. It seems likely that Jerry will, in the near future, republish Part 1 of S F COMMENTARY 9 (subject to the consent of Philip Dick and George Turner; certainly my article THE REAL THING, about Philip Dick). Many people have asked me for this issue, which has been out of print since it was published. You can obtain TA.. for $2 for 5, from Jerry. Part 2 of SFC 9 appeared in WSFA

JOURNAL 74, published by Donald Miller, 12315 Judson Road, Wheaton, Maryland 20906, USA. That was the Stanislaw Lem half, including POLAND: S F IN THE LINGUISTIC TRAP and INTRODUCTION TO A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF S F. Jerry Lapidus will publish Part 1 after he arrives back in USA from Amsterdam in June 1972. This gives people who are interested plenty of time to forward their money to Jerry.

* For over a year, I've had in my file a letter from WILLIAM F NOLAN (1337½ South Roxbury Drive, Los Angeles, California 90035, USA). Time after time, it has been squeezed out of the letter column, but it may still have some interest. Mr Nolan writes in reply to David Boutland, who reviewed Nolan's A WILDERNESS OF STARS in SFC 17. Here are some of the objections to David's review: "I find that many fans tend to think of me as a "newcomer" to s f - having heard that I co-wrote LOGAN'S RUN, which garnered quite a bit of publicity when it sold to MGM for $100,000. But I've been active in the field since 1950, and sold my first s f story to IF in early 1954. Have sold 35 more stories in the field since then and 10 books, and was managing editor for GAMMA for its first three issues in the early 1960s. So I'm hardly a newcomer, despite the fact that LOGAN'S RUN was my first novel." William Nolan lists among his books: IMPACT 20 (US, 1963; GB - Corgi - 1966); THE PSEUDO-PEOPLE (US, 1965; GB - ALMOST HUMAN, Souvenir Press - 1966); LOGAN'S RUN (Gollancz hc; Corgi pb - also English S F Book Club); THREE TO THE HIGHEST POWER (GB - Corgi - 1971); MAN AGAINST TOMORROW (US - Avon - 1965); A SEA OF SPACE (US - Bantam - 1970); THE FUTURE IS NOW (US - Sherbourne Press - 1970); THE HUMAN EQUATION (US - Sherbourne - 1971 - includes short novels by Dick, MacDonald, Bester, etc., plus short biographies); SPACE FOR HIRE (US - 1971 - second novel). "All of this self-history," says Mr Nolan, "is my way of saying to Australian fans: hey, I've been around for a long time... Finally, I want to make one small point with regard to the review of my anthology: I think it unfair to the editor of a book, and to the authors in it, to use the cover and jacket blurb data against them. Jacket blurbs are NOT written by the editor/authors in most cases, and they are not responsible for living up to some copywriter's image of them. It seemed that the main thing your reviewer held against my book, while basically praising it, was that it did not entirely live up to its jacket notices." That letter came on December 17, 1970, and I can only apologise for not printing it sooner.

* Christmas cometh in Australia; thanks to those people who sent me Christmas cards. I don't send them myself, but I'll try to write to everybody who was kind enough to send me something. I look forward to seeing lots of people in Adelaide, lots more in Melbourne at Easter, and perhaps even some overseas subscribers at the Aussie national convention in Sydney in August. *Last stencil typed December 1 1971*

S F COMMENTARY 24 CHECKLIST - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

OPPOSITORUM (SFC 20) (45) * John Lymington: THE NOWHERE PLACE (14) * William MacMahon (47) * Thomas Mann: JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS (41-42) * Sandra Miesel (13) * Naomi Mitchison: MEMOIRS OF A SPACE WOMAN (42) * Michael Moorcock (ed.): NEW WORLDS (13) * Frederick Niezsche (39) * William F Nolan (50) * E Phillips Oppenheim (45) * Ted Pauls (12) * Andy Porter (ed.): ALGOL (49) * Chris Priest: INDOCTRINAIRE (15-16) * Chris Priest: THE PERIHELION MAN (15-16) * REVELATION (6) * Franz Rottensteiner: CHEWING GUM FOR THE VULGAR (SFC 19) (16, 37, 39) * Franz Rottensteiner (ed.): QUARBER MERKUR (47) * Franz Rottensteiner: A SYMPOSIUM OF INNOCENCE (SFC 21) (40-42) * James Sallis: A FEW LAST WORDS (49) * SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION (49) * Robert Silverberg (47) * Norman Spinrad: THE BIG FLASH (49) * Darko Suvin: THE OPEN-ENDED PARABLES OF STANISLAW LEM AND "SOLARIS" (34) * Don Taylor (dir.): ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES (35-36) * Wilson Tucker: THE YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN (3-11) * A E van Vogt (21) * Paul Walker (12, 14-15) * H G Wells (38) *