

S F

COMMENTARY

2 9

**CLOCKWORK
ORANGE**



Director Stanley Kubrick.

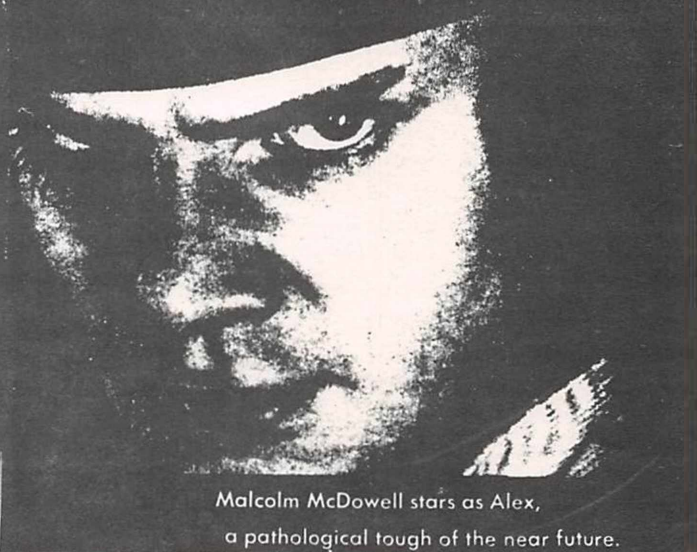
**SPECIAL
VIOLENCE
ISSUE**

**LEM battles with
FARMER**

**FOYSTER confronts
ATHELING**

**GILLAM
assassinates
KUBRICK**

**GILLESPIE
wields the scalpel
on ALDISS**



Malcolm McDowell stars as Alex,
a pathological tough of the near future.

AUGUST 1972

48 PAGES

STOP PRESS

HUGO RESULTS, received from John Foyster, received from Robin Johnson in Los Angeles: Novel: TO YOUR SCATTERED BUDIES GO (Philip Jose Farmer); Novella: QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS (Poul Anderson); Short Story: INCONSTANT MOON (Larry Niven); Dramatic Presentation: A CLOCKWORK ORANGE (Stanley Kubrick); Professional Magazine: FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION; Professional Artist: FRANK KELLY FREAS; Fanzine: LOCUS; Fan Writer: HARRY WARNER JR; Fan Artist: TIM KIRK.

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Available for letters of comment, contributions, or traded magazines; or money because I'm poor at the moment: \$3 for 9 in Australia; USA: \$4 for 9 surface mail; \$10 for 9 airmail; from Dena and Charlie Brown, 3400 Ulloa Street, San Francisco California 94116; England: £1.50 for 9 surface mail; £4 airmail, from Malcolm Edwards, 75A Harrow View, Harrow, Middlesex, England.

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THE BEST OF THE BEST..

I AM AGENT FOR:

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VECTOR, edited by Malcolm Edwards for the British S F Association. Excellent material by and about British s f authors and fans. 10 for \$5.50.

SPECULATION, the best English-language fanzine has reappeared (see page 47)! \$2 for 5. Editor: Peter R Weston.

Hal Hall's new edition of SCIENCE FICTION BOOKREVIEW INDEX. \$1.50 each.

* "I must really say to you all that I have nothing to say" - to misquote the star writer of the previous issue of SFC. Now it will probably take me twelve pages to say why I have nothing to say.

The problem is this:

(1) For more than four months most of the contents of this issue have been typed on layout sheets. If I recall correctly, they were typed before I printed SFC 26. Since SFC 26 appeared, an extraordinary series of events has delayed work on SFC. At one time, I was wondering whether another issue would ever appear. Fortunately, John Foyster, who always knows the right time to lend a hand, offered to type and print SFC 27, so my schedule did not look quite so ragged as before. In the meantime, I knew that SFC had made the Hugo ballot form, so I had to make a token effort to publish some more issues; and also SFC was on the nomination form for the Ditmar award. People had actually showed that they liked the magazine, so Gillespie's rapidly-flagging spirit had to regain inspiration somehow.

Not to stress the point too strongly, 1972 was a disastrous year until the middle of August. It took quite a struggle to gather the contents for SFC 28 - but at last it has appeared, and in many ways it is my favourite issue ever.

(2) But what to do with this issue? Four months ago, I could see that there would not be enough space left for letters. Therefore I wrote a long report about the Melbourne Convention held at Easter. The report was not exactly in the same class as the one I wrote about the Adelaide Convention - but the Melbourne Convention wasn't in the same class as its predecessor, either. But I was quite sure that this issue of SFC would appear long before Syncon. It didn't.

(3) Now that Syncon has happened, there is little reason to write about Eastercon. At the same time, I don't yet trust myself to write about Syncon: to describe that circle of fannish heaven, we need a Dante (or a John Bangsund), not some hack writer of the fannish Grub Street, like me. Perhaps by next issue, I

I
MUST BE
TALKING
TO MY
FRIENDS

can look at the event without talking sentimental drivel. All I can say at the moment to the organisers is that it was a great convention - no, a Very Great Convention; probably the most important event ever for Australian fandom, except perhaps for the 1966 Melbourne Convention. The organisers did a very fine job, under some difficult conditions. The members of the convention gave me a Ditmar Award (about which I spoke on the last page of SFC 28), and also gave awards to Best Australian Fiction 1971 - FALLEN SPACEMAN, by Lee Harding; and Best International Fiction 1971 - RINGWORLD, by Larry Niven (received by Lesleigh Luttrell on behalf of the author).

And so, this issue will not contain either a report on Syncon or on Eastercon. Next issue, perhaps. Meanwhile, I seem to have here about a hundred letters of comment and other brilliant goodies waiting in the files. I must confess that right at this moment I have little interest left in science fiction, and my attitudes to various other subjects may have been changed so much that you won't even recognise the Old Gillespie. If I may refer back to SFC 28: although Professor Humphrey Tape and Honest Joe didn't have much luck with the Gillespie creature, yet another Gillespieologist appeared on the scene in the nick of time, and has made some major renovations. It's not all bad being mad; people are sometimes kind to you.

* Meanwhile, people have continued to comment favourably about the Adelaide S F convention, and my report on it. MICHAEL O'BRIEN wants to correct the details of one of my anecdotes: "It was I and not John Bangsund who suggested that the world had ended: this remark was brought on by an early morning walk through the absolute stillness of the district around Melville House. Bangsund's immediate response was that he should (a) corner the opposite-sex supply, and (b) send Mike O'Brien to forage in the ruins for quality liquor."

* And I want to correct one unforgivable mistake in SFC 26: I did not mention A D, the new magazine of the Adelaide University S F Association. The first issue appeared in time for the convention, but John Bangsund forgot to include its name on the "Australia-In-75" back cover for SFC 26. Since I discussed Australian fanzines in the order that they appear there, I forgot about A D until No 26 was all typed. A D had a promising first issue, with mainly reviews by Paul Anderson and Alan Sandercock (and there are a lot of SFC readers who enjoy Paul's reviews here). Darryl Lindquist provided very good cover artwork. No 2, when it appears, will contain a complete Advention report, including tapes of many of the proceedings. I don't know whether No 2 will have a special price; for the moment you can obtain A D for 5 for \$1 from John Hewitt, 11 Kyre Avenue, Kingswood, South Australia 5062, or ask for copies from Paul Anderson, 21 Mulga Road, Hawthorndene, S A 5057, or from Alan Sandercock, 1 Michael Street, Lockleys, S A 5032. A D 4 appeared at Syncon.

A few days before the first issues of SFC 26 began to circulate, I received a packet with a Canberra post mark. I opened the packet, and immediately began to chortle. By the time I reached the corner of Elizabeth and Collins Streets, I was laughing out loud. This must have disconcerted passers-by, but the occasion was worth it. I met Bill Wright, and showed him the cover of the magazine that I had received. "Oh, you've published S F COMMENTARY 26?" said Bill. This was surprising to him, because a few days before he had heard, correctly, that my duplicator had broken down after I had printed less than a quarter of the issue. "Look again at the cover, Bill," I said. "Look closely." Quite clearly, the cover said, "S F COMMENTARY 26". Below that was a Lindsay Cox robot drawing, and a list of names that included "I Asimov, R Heinlein, T Sturgeon, A C Clarke, Y Yevtushenko, J L Borges, L Durrell, M Proust, A Pushkin, and "L Edmonds". (That should have been the tip-off).

Bill still looked puzzled. I pointed to the top of the heading. "THIS ISN'T ... S F COMMENTARY 26," read Bill. And the rest of the page said, "In this issue, I Asimov, R Heinlein, etc... are mentioned". Bill saw the joke too. "Where does this come from?" he said. Well, the cover fooled Robin Johnson as well, and anybody else who has seen it. The magazine was, of course, published by John Bangsund, and THIS ISN'T S F COMMENTARY 26 was really SCYTHROP 26 in a very clever disguise. John Bangsund published it as a tribute to SFC because it made the Hugo nomination form, but, as I said to John in a letter, his tribute was worth even more than a Hugo nomination. Also, it might be the first time that one fanzine editor has published a mock-issue of another fanzine. THIS ISN'T SFC 26 features I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS, with letters from Jerry Lapidus, Joanne Burger, Jack Wodhams, George Turner (to name some people familiar to SFC readers), and John D Berry, who might make his first SFC appearance this issue. The final page features AM I STILL TALKING TO MY FRIENDS? The most valuable (to me, at least) section of the magazine is George Turner's essay about THE PHENOMENON THAT IS BRUCE GILLESPIE/SFC, plus John Bangsund's footnote to it. George's article provides that rarest of opportunities, the chance to see myself as another sees me, and I'm still not quite sure what to think about the result. Certainly George provided a different picture of me than the one that I had of myself; and John revealed a few things that he's never said before. THIS ISN'T SFC 26 also features an interview with Stanislaw Lem, whose name will be familiar to readers of the real SFC; plus CRITICANTO, which includes three reviews that you would never have found here. You can obtain SCYTHROP 26 from John Bangsund, P O Box 357, Kingston, ACT 2604, for 6 for \$3 in Australia; in UK 6 for £0.90 from Ethel Lindsay, Courage House, 6 Langley Avenue, Surbiton, Surrey; in USA for 5 for \$3 from Andy Porter, P O Box 4175, New York 10017; and 6 for DM 10.00 in Germany, and 4 for Kr 10.00 in Sweden. John also likes traded fanzines, contributions, and letters of comment. I've sent a long letter to John about this issue of SCYTHROP, and he published it in PHILOSOPHICAL GAS 13.

Since SFC 26, I have received the latest copy of COR SERPENTIS, the magazine edited for the Monash University S F Association, by Carey Handfield, 2 Banoon Road, South Eltham, Victoria 3095. COR SERPENTIS 3 makes me green with envy, for it is printed offset, typed with an IBM typewriter, and has a Rotsler cover and illustrations by Lindsay Cox, Rotsler, Jeff Schalles, Terry Jeeves, and Christine McGowan. John Foyster also helped greatly in the production. Much of the money came from the funds of the Monash University Union, which explains the lavish production, and the fact that you can get COR SERPENTIS for free. This issue contains articles by Andrew Edquist (SCIENCE FICTION SHOULD SERVE THE PEOPLE), Christine McGowan (PING PONG TO THE DEATH), Bruce Gillespie (TO MAKE THE FUTURE - THE DE-SCHOOLERS, a revised and expanded version of my article which appeared in THE EDUCATIONAL MAGAZINE), John Foyster (BOOK REVIEWS), and letters by Cy Chauvin, Robert Bloch, Terry Jeeves, and Patrick McGuire. A very worthwhile magazine, and I hope that Carey and the other members of the Association can spare enough time from their studies to produce another issue this year. :: CHAO 9 also arrived recently, and I can only repeat the laudatory remarks that I made about CHAO in SFC 26. In No 9, John Alderson continues his autobiography, John Bangsund asks IS AUSTRALIA FUNNY?, John Alderson talks about BOOKS, Clive Morley and Iain Ban provide articles, and there are lots of letters and illustrations. "It occurred to us that not everyone can read Gaelic, a deficiency which we cannot but deplore," says John Alderson on the back cover. "We mean, well, it's going to be the first thing you have to do when you get through the Pearly Gates isn't it: learn the language of the place?" John's address is Havelock, Victoria 3465, and CHAO costs 40 cents a copy, or "the usual". :: Dennis Stocks has contributed fanzines to ANZAPA before, but his first general-circulation fanzine,

MITHRIL 1, is a considerable step above anything that he has done before. A Jim Steranko drawing appears on the offset cover, and the rest of the magazine is liberally illustrated by such people as John Dixon, Australia's most successful comics artist, George Metzger, Mike Williams, Marie and John Severin, and Alicia Austin. I stress the choice and excellent repro. of the illustrations, because Dennis has a much greater interest in this side of fanzine production than I have. He also prints articles by John Ryan (a profile of John Dixon), Petr Wright-Smith, Dennis Stocks, and Isaac Asimov, plus poems by David Grigg, Janet Back, and Petr Wright-Smith, and assorted other things. I don't know where Dennis gets the money from, but MITHRIL has that luxurious look that evades most other Australian fanzines. In fact, MITHRIL has many resemblances to ENERGUMEN, one of this year's Hugo nominees. You can write for your copy to Dennis Stocks, GPO Box 2268, Brisbane, Queensland 4001; he would like in payment "art, poems, contributions both fictional and fact, letters of comment, etc., with monetary support gratefully accepted if you feel any of those beyond you." Next issue appears this month, says Dennis, so don't miss out.

Several fanzines were published in time for Syncon. I haven't had time to read most of them yet, so I will just list them. They include CHAO 10, the best issue yet of this Aldersonzine; FANARCHIST 8A, a small issue of David Grigg's fanzine - at least he had his heart in the right place, though not a very big magazine to go with it; A D, official number 4, with lots of articles and reviews by such stalwarts of Adelaide fandom as Alan Sandercock, Paul Anderson, John Hewitt, and suspicious-sounding characters such as "L Sanders" and "Winston Rogers"; ENIGMA, edited by Van Ikin for the Sydney University Science Fiction Association, Box 126, Old Union, Sydney University, NSW 2006 - mainly fan fiction, but the editor and staff have made an attempt to present it attractively in ditto; the final edition of TERRAN TIMES, edited by Shayne McCormack, 49 Orchard Road, Bass Hill, NSW 2197 - a magazine that began as a STAR TREK fanzine, but has gained a nice style of its own just as it finishes (a pity, that); Michael O'Brien's SYNCON SAMPLER, which should have had a few more pages of that individual O'Brien style; CANBERRA SCIENCE FICTION CONFERENCE: PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT, which you can get from PO Box 544, Civic Square, ACT 2608, if you really want it - good ole John Bangsund wants to run a very expensive convention in Canberra, and not many people at Syncon said they would be going; however, this is a Bangsund Document, and makes interesting reading; Ronald Graham's valuable piece of Australian fan history, EARLY AUSTRALIAN FANZINES, in which Ron looks at some of the early Sydney fanzines in particular; no doubt he still has copies left, from PO Box 57, Yagoona, NSW 2199; and, also given out at Syncon, copies of STARLING, smuggled into Australia by Lesleigh Luttrell, in order to make Australian fan editors grind their teeth in envy - for the moment I'll claim STARLING as an Aussie fanzine, even though you can only get copies by writing to Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 West Main St, Apt 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA. :: I've probably forgotten somebody or other; I know that Eric Lindsay has published recently the best issue yet of GEGENSCHEIN, but I can't remember quite when I received it, or whether I've already reviewed it, or what. (No reflection here on the quality of the magazine; I'm just confused, that's all.)

* But not nearly as confused as I am when I look at the backlog of letters on file. I won't even pretend that the rest of this column is "edited"; here are just a few letters that peek out from under the mountain:

* JACK WODHAMS
P O Box 48, Caboolture, Queensland 4510

You are lucky to have lost only two years so far. If you live long

enough, you will doubtless lose some more. Gurgle your lions, and be prepared.

The currency of time is something like having a dollar to spend - you may buy steak and chips and coffee with it, or buy a pair of socks, or buy a pint of vino, or half-a-dozen roses, or a train ticket to wherever. It is a dollar that cannot be saved, has to be invested in something, and is outlay irrecoverable once the purchase is decided, with refunds a strictly dwindling pro rata concession. We cannot devote ourselves to the study of law, fulfil our obligations as an auctioneer's assistant, undertake a boat-building apprenticeship, and work to play lead trumpet, all at the same time. It is amazing how old many aspirants get while doggedly pursuing their careers, before they do become envied for being experts.

Time does not exist anyway; our consciousness of its passage can never be anything but subjective. And sometimes we wonder if yesterday was really there, and we wonder how many times we may have lived today, and we may wonder why we so strive for a tomorrow which in fact is totally immaterial. Some live a lifetime very quickly - while yet some few at ninety expire prematurely when still remains more exploring that they might do. Methinks that you could be so a patiently plodding child of empirical introspection, of scepticism, or prognosis to be procured through painfully protracted personal experience, to repeat experiments and performances, and to ponder all proceedings pensively. You are pregnant, lad, and gestating, and we may hope for you to come to term eventually, and pray that you will not lay an egg.

Re S F COMMENTARY 24: I have congratulated you before on your Lem transcription, and do so again. He reads very well - take another bow, both of you. However, Mr Lem did strike me as overly hard upon his subject authors. There was a note of the uncompromising here, too much as though he expects some absolute solutions, to receive satisfaction only from incontrovertible extrapolations of valid argument.

S f will save the world - but only if the message is rendered readable enough to require no literary dissectors to dismember. Perhaps that is what is wrong with some writers - they say what they mean so specifically, so patently clearly, that they leave nothing for the priesthood of intellectual pundits to interpret to the ignorant masses. Somehow my feeling is that neither Ursula K LeGuin nor M K Joseph affected quite the portentousness with which Mr Lem would here invest them.

Mine is a serious approach to s f also, and it is marvellous how disparate we all can be, isn't it? Of course, much of my prose is boring, ANALOG-type, wherein the lecture section can be recognised and understood without needing helpful middlemen, such perhaps as Foyster, Gillespie, et al, to explain to the unperceptive hoi-poloi the abstruse ambiguities disguised as subtleties that masquerade as profound speculation. Clarity is not good literature - it leaves the cognoscenti with no mysterious unrevealed depths to guess and suppose and propose as a second-hand insight...

Oo-la-la, as the Mexicans say, we do so get caught up to ramble on, don't we? For SFC, more letters, please; more concise reviews, less sad songs. Alas, to advocate the upbeat is a predilection of very few.
(December 28, 1971)*

* Now, 'oo brung Lem into this conversation? Here I am, poor innocent fan editor that I am, wearily trying to fill a few pages so I can send another SFC out to the screaming minions; I pick up a letter from Jack Wodhams, who starts to talk about what I really want to talk about - i.e. me - and after a few paragraphs the wretched man starts to talk about science fiction and Lem. In No 26, I would have brilliantly countered every one of your points, and then returned and just as brilliantly proved that you were quite right. You're wrong, of course, but just for once I'm going to ask somebody else to counter your arguments. Thanks for all those other comments; at the rate I'm going, I will be lucky to lay an egg.

Let's lucky-dip again:

* DAVE PIPER
7 Cranley Drive, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 6BZ, England

We're on a "low-risk" day at the moment, so I'm taking the opportunity to catch up with some carry. If you don't know what I mean by "low-risk" then it must be because those insular colonial newspapers you have Down There only concern themselves with the latest nickel strike or the latest Bastard Pommie Immigrant who lands in the morning, decides he don't like it, and poodles off in the afternoon. We've had a miners' strike. Oh, wow, yes. Cuts in the supply of electricity for three hours at a time, three times a day from 6am to 12pm. Monday, Wednesday, and tomorrow are our high-risk days so it looks like another fabulous Saturday Night... It goes off at 9pm, so I miss MATCH OF THE DAY (still, that's not so bad this week, as I managed to get a ticket for the tie with Leyton Orient; I support Chelsea by the way; twenty years man and boy and all that crap). Last Saturday we went to bed at 9pm and played Scrabble until a quarter to twelve, by candlelight. Trouble is, y'see, that I ain't got any other form of heating than storage heaters and electric fires, I wouldn't even know how to light a proper fire now, and it's fleeing breezing in this house with no fire. So it's bed and scrabble. Or bed and anything else we can think of.. And at my age that's usually all I do do.. think! Wonder how many births will be registered around November??? Next week I'll be going to Wembley to watch the formality of Chelsea run around for ninety minutes against Stoke and then ~~ALL~~ ~~WALK~~ walk off with the League Cup.

Gotcha letter at Christmas. Thanks for your good wishes. The way my years have been turning out these past few I need all the good wishes I can get - even from a geezer who fills up his fanzine with articles by and about Mr Lem! Ha! I bloody knew there was a reason for this letter, other than to give me two fingers a little practice before I type the important letters. You've really blown it now, lad. Ho Yes. "It helps when reading Lem to have studied philosophy and mathematics and science and German." Ha! Gotcha. Yes, it's obvious that if, to fully appreciate, and all that bit, Mr Lem's waffle, one must have studied all the above then as a novelist he must be considered a total failure, and as a non-fiction writer on any subject his abject failure to interest me must be due to his complete inability to call a fucking spade a fucking spade. If you see what I mean. Ideas and an opinion, to have any validity to the general reader (and I'm not talking about two professors muttering in their beards at each other) surely must be of a basic nature and should, by instinct (for want of a better word), be communicable, I think... But I've lost me back there.

(February 25, 1972)*

* I'm doomed. I tried to pick up the letter of another person who can usually brighten up Gillespie in even his dreariest moods; and Dave Piper does this for one paragraph; then even he starts to talk about Lem. Now I'm starting to get a taste of what the non-admirers of this magazine must think whenever they pick up each issue. Not that I would have had it any other way; my relationships, such as they are, with Messrs Rottensteiner and Lem are still cordial (although I'm still waiting for the Austrian splutters of wrath that will greet SFC 28); but I'm in such a peculiar mood at the moment that I just cannot crank my brain into handling any concepts larger than how to pay for the next issue of SFC, or whether Robin and Bill and Lesleigh are all going to try to receive that Hugo, in the highly unlikely event that it goes this year to a certain Australian fanzine.

So, the only way to rest a ghost, for this issue at least, is to bring him out in the open and onto paper. However, the real Mr Lem is so much more pleasant a person than SFC letter-writers would have you believe: *

STANISLAW LEM *
Cracow, Poland

Thank you very much for S F COMMENTARY 25; it arrived at last. My reply to Mr Farmer's letter is enclosed. I know that Mr Farmer will not be moved even 0.1 of an angstrom by my arguments; nevertheless, I did not spare any effort of analysis to magnify one single spot - the crucial point of his novel. To give a reasonable, impersonal, full analytical treatment to s f - a truly Herculean task - one should mobilise some two divisions of good professional critics. But of course one should first give them a good training in all scientific matters. This must cost some money. So let us suppose that in time the set of all s f writers will become co-extensive with the set of millionaires, and no one will then speak anymore about bad working conditions, and this mobilisation of professional critics will be needless.

Two remarks now to all whom this may concern: (1) I was not being ironical to claim that my aim was to be a defender, and not a prosecutor, of s f (and of the work of Mr Farmer, in particular). Firstly, any work of art deserves the best treatment possible - and not something like picking to pieces. So one should search for a level of discourse where the involved work has its "significance peak". It is difficult to write something meaningful; and this implies that any critics' attempts at analysis should be a difficult task, too. (But the critic is a defender who does not have the right to lie.) Secondly, it is not the task of an s f critic to consider the scientific content of an s f work in the first place, and to prepare a list of its scientific sins. So my answer to Mr Farmer is an exception to this principle: he asked for this, and only for this, mode of treatment.

(2) Why so? Because an s f writer has not only the right of, but is sometimes obliged to sacrifice a high-ranking scientific truth, if such a sacrifice is the necessary precondition to attain a new value - e.g. to realise a breakthrough into a new range of possibilities. We have this right, because we are not scientists. For instance: At the moment I am playing with an interesting idea. Both energy and matter one detects that if very big computers work for a long time, they show

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STANISLAW LEM

A Letter to Mr Farmer

Dear Mr Farmer

((In reply to your A LETTER TO MR LEM in S F COMMENTARY 25)) There has occurred a big misapprehension. In your opinion, I suppressed or simplified some details of your works, either because I was badly informed, or because I had in mind the malice aforethought to slander you.

Now, the opposite was the case. I was not your prosecutor, but your defender. Really I suppressed some of the evidence, as a defender should do, because it spoke against your case. My intention was to show THE LOVERS in the best possible light. The suppressed evidence is of a scientific character; it cannot be defended, in your manner of presentation, because it is nonsensical. Nevertheless, the basic idea that underlies THE LOVERS is truly original. It is the idea of biocultural parasitism, invading the most private sphere of a man's life, i.e. his love relations. The lalitha notion is an essay to translate the ancient succubus mythology into the language of real facts. Not the man's body, but his soul, his intimate ties with the woman who bears him children, his longing for fatherhood, provide the "host" of this parasitic invasion. This theme could be exploited in two ways - either in the grotesque, or in the pseudo-realistic manner. You have failed, because you chose the second way, of an earnest presentation, but you slipped into the first mode, and so you wrote an unintentionally grotesque book. Such a "grotesque" comes into being when one tries to represent as possible something that is unbelievable. The more serious the attempts at verisimilitude, the more comical (since it is nonsensical) the result. If I had a fault in my review of your novel, it was only this: I did not try to show in which way the failure could be avoided. See: in such cases the alternative is always of a strongly dichotomical character. One cannot create a serious narrative and a grotesque narrative at the same time. This is a plain impossibility.

You should not have defended your novel on scientific grounds, because the claim for scientific validity is untenable - in THE LOVERS. My aim was to show the kind of antinomies that endanger the s f creation, even if its central idea is a brilliant one. I did not try to ridicule your novel. But you, like some clients of the late Perry Mason, have forced your defender to reopen the case. I will now prove beyond all reasonable doubt that your bioevolutionary scheme has no scientific validity whatsoever. Then I shall sketch some nonantinomical possibilities - how this work could be optimised. So let us start.

1 I shall consider one single point only, namely the "photokinetic ontogenesis" in the lalitha species. As stated in your novel, the sexual union of a human male and a lalitha is not a true fecundation. The human sperm is not involved in the act at all. The man could use an artificial member and nevertheless beget children. All that is needed is the coitus, the lalitha's

orgasm, and the copulator's face before her eyes (and some light, of course). The zygote is fully capable of embryonic growth before the act - and awaits only, in the lalitha's womb, the "final touch", i.e. the impregnation plus the external appearance of the copulator's face. The "photokinetic reflex" transmits the "picture" of his face to the womb, where genes undergo a change of such a selective nature that the offspring, when grown up, will strongly resemble the man involved.

What is all this for? This arrangement is the nodal point of your "parasitism and mimicry" pattern. The pseudo-father will recognise the likeness of the offspring, so he will think that this offspring is his own; so he will care about it; and in this way the lalithas infiltrate man's erotic and paternal feelings, relations, and obligations, as their parasite. So far, so good. I repeat: this is an ingenious idea - for a grotesque novel, perhaps of a macabre variety. Alas: it cannot hold water - as an evolutionary hypothesis. Why not?

2 This parasitism, with its ingenious mechanism of photokinetic reflex, is a device capable of attaining its goal in a cultural environment only. And even then, not in every type of culture - e.g. this mechanism would be useless in a Triobriand culture. The Triobriand did not recognise the causal link between sexual intercourse and childbearing. In their culture the uncle "is" the "true" father, so the resemblance between the biological father and his children does not count at all. There this likeness is devoid of any significance. This likeness does not influence the behaviour of all the involved family members. So your device can perform its parasitic function in such a culture only, where the man acknowledges his fatherhood, because the said resemblance is a sign, meaning the fatherhood.

3 Now we shall look at the Ozagen Neanderthal man. It is an absurdity to think that he could explain, when he sees for the first time a teenage lalitha, "Why! But you are the very likeness of me! You must be my daughter! Come here! Let me embrace you! Now you will be introduced into my primitive social group of cavemen!" Since the lalitha died in childbirth, and since she did give birth to "little larvae", she was forced to seek protection from other lalithas, who nursed her offspring. This is a unique possibility; the human females were surely not the best candidates for babysitters of the "little larvae". So the whole situation comprised one cave, where the Neanderthal man hocked, and another cave, where the Neanderthal lalithas nursed the "little larvae". Only when they were grown up, and then resembled the "father", could they try to re-infiltrate the human social group. If we shall give you, Mr Farmer, the benefit of the doubt, stressed to the utmost implausibility, we arrive at the picture of this Neanderthal man who recognised the said likeness of the offspring, who enjoyed it, and who introduced the teenage lalithas into his family group. So let this be so.

4 But now we shall retreat to the protohominid stage of evolution. The protohominids did not mate face to face, as humans do, but modo bestiarum, as all mammals perform the act. Well - so the protohominid lalitha knelt while copulating, and the male mounted her from behind. In this position she could very well see some grass and stones before her, but not a trace of the copulator's face. So what? Was she to give birth to an offspring who resembled grass and grit? But surely this was not your intention. So perhaps she held in her paw a mirror, so that she could stare at it, so that she could see the copulating male's face, in the moment of her orgasm? This is not bad as a joke, but not as an "evolutionary mechanism". So what? Did she have occipital eyes? But then, with those eyes, she could not per definitionem

resemble the protohominid. So perhaps she possessed a miraculous gift of "extrasensory perception" of the male's face? But since the nature of such a perception is extrasensorial, the whole "photokinetic reflex" is totally useless. And we have already arrived at the "extrasensory perception" level. Even this level does not suffice. Which ever way you turn the stuff, every time the result is plain nonsense.

5 So (a) the whole "photokinesis" could evolve only if "aimed at" by the evolutionary process. So this process must have anticipated the rise of human culture some millions of years before man came into being and his culturalisation started.

So (b) this reflex could not evolve in a natural (biological) way. The lalitha must have concocted its scheme in the Ozagens Tertiary, or even earlier. So she had not only practised intentionally controlled, goal-oriented evolution, but she was capable of a phenomenal "futurological targeting" of her own biological destiny. Namely - she must have anticipated the rise not of some kind of culture, but of a very specific one - of a culture where the resemblance between father and children represents a social sign, i.e. a value of the first order of magnitude. So now we are already speaking about true wonders and miracles, Mr Farmer. But where you have miracles, you can have neither science nor s f. But you want us to take it all as earnestly as possible, while it is really a big farce.

6 We have shown that the photokinetic reflex could not evolve in an early phase of the evolutionary process, since then it had no survival value whatsoever; and that it could not evolve in the culturalisation phase, since the culture is of brief duration, while an evolutionary change of the involved kind requires hundreds of thousands of years at least (and any competent biologist would tell you that this interval is too short - but again I am giving you the already painfully stressed benefit of the doubt).

7 So what? There were, as stated, two possible ways of creation open. (a) That of an intentionally grotesque novel: you should have stressed all the comical sides of the material, e.g. a lalitha masturbates in front of the snapshot of an Ozagen Napoleon or Caesar, to bear children resembling such a celebrity; etc. (b) That of a pseudo-realistic narrative, e.g. the lalithas were constructed by means of genetic engineering, by some wogs perhaps, and used as "teleguided succubi" to infiltrate human society (Trojan horse tactics in the erotic and sexual domain).

But no. You will have your novel to be valid on all counts - and especially as a "scientific hypothesis". You believe this nonsense, twenty years after writing it? So truly, you have learned nothing during this time. So now at least I understand why all that has been written by you since THE LOVERS is as it is.

Truly yours

STANISLAW LEM (Cracow, Poland)

(May 7, 1972)

JOHN FOYSTER

William Atheling Jr : A Critic of Science Fiction

(This article accompanies John's review of MORE ISSUE AT HAND, in SPECULATION 30. This article first appeared in COR SERPENTIS No 1.)

The critical function consists in saying what you like and why you like it: less often it is a matter of dislike which is involved. No one, however, who has any pretension to critical skill could care to leave it at that, for while it is a relatively simple principle it may be applied in many ways. Furthermore, since many human beings are inclined to pretend that they are so much above their fellows that their judgment is impartial, we also have a class of critics who relate their work to absolute "objective" standards..

THE ISSUE AT HAND
STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY
SCIENCE FICTION

by WILLIAM ATHELING Jr

edited and with an introduction
by JAMES BLISH

Advent: Publishers :: 1964
136 pages :: \$5

In practice a critic does in fact simply state his likes or dislikes: but since, thanks to John W Campbell Jr., not all opinions are of equal worth the critic seeks to demonstrate that his opinion is a reasonable one, based on criteria which have wide acceptance. The skill with which critics do this varies greatly. On the one hand, amongst critics of science fiction, we have those who simply assert that such-and-such is a great s f novel because

(i) the critic likes it, and

(ii) he has read a hell of a lot of s f and therefore knows what he is talking about. (The extreme forms of this disease occur when the critic adds that the work in question may be added to the "s f canon".) On the other hand we have those critics (few though they might be) who attempt to appeal to wider sensibilities. And at the extreme and most remote from our near-sighted canoneer we have William Atheling Jr.

That part of Atheling's s f criticism to which I shall refer appears in THE ISSUE AT HAND. It should be noted that the reviews currently ((**brg** 1968)) appearing in AMAZING STORIES do not represent Atheling-as-he-was, as Atheling's close associate, James Blish, admits in AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW 19.

It would be pleasantly simple if everyone could agree on just what constitutes reasonable grounds for liking a work of art, though it could be a trifle boring. As it happens, it is rather difficult to find much more common ground than my broad assertion above that one has to do more than claim that the work of art is "good". In WARHOON 25, Robert A W Lowndes took a minimal line and suggested that criticism "consists of three elements: reporting, interpretation, and evaluation". To a certain extent this is true (even though, as I

stated above, it is practically minimal), but the following might be noted. Reporting, as Lowndes implicitly defined it, incorporates almost all of what is currently accepted as "criticism" in the s f magazines. For Lowndes suggests that this is just a matter of telling the reader what he will find in the book provided that he "can read with any degree of proficiency". Since Lowndes admits that this is an area in which almost every critic shows weaknesses on occasions, it is clearly not as simple as it superficially appears. Atheling makes a good fist of this kind of work, particularly, for example, in his discussion of THE WEATHER MAN (Theodore L Thomas) (pages 101-103 of THE ISSUE AT HAND). This is not to say that this is all there is to that particular review, but it is an excellent piece of "reporting".

Interpretation and evaluation are closely linked. If the critic's interpretation is incorrect, then almost certainly his judgment as to whether the work is good or bad will be incorrect. As it happens, Lowndes singled out Atheling's article on his own BELIEVER'S WORLD for considerable praise, so it is hardly necessary to repeat the exercise. But let me add that the piece following the article on BELIEVERS' WORLD in THE ISSUE AT HAND (pages 62-70) seems quite a tour de force on the interpretation side.

In his essay CRITICISM AND PHILOSOPHY (in THE COMMON PURSUIT) F R Leavis gave a short formula, but one which is perhaps harder to interpret: "the ideal critic is the ideal reader." By this Leavis means the reader who fully appreciates what the writer had done, and is able to perceive the relationship which this work holds with the rest of the works of literature. Atheling seems to fulfill these conditions rather well. He has certainly read widely in science fiction; he is not unlettered when considered against the larger realm of general literature. Furthermore he shows himself to be able to appreciate both sides of any piece of science fiction - as science fiction, and as literature. As an example we might take Atheling's well-known review of Arthur Zirul's FINAL EXAM. As Atheling himself puts it:

To begin on the most elementary level, Mr Zirul's prose contains more downright bad grammar...

- an instance of Atheling as schoolteacher or, as he suggests himself, as the editor that Zirul should have had. Then, on page 85, he moves off into slightly higher realms to discuss the approach Zirul has taken in writing this story ("the author is omniscient"), something which few editors and (almost) fewer writers appreciate, at least in science fiction, so that we may suggest without stretching the point too far that here Atheling is acting as rather more than an average s f critic, and that he is endeavouring to take a larger view. And finally Atheling the s f fan reveals to us that Zirul's plot is really old-hat. I have deliberately chosen this unpromising story to show how Atheling could apply himself to even the meanest story. I don't suggest that Leavis had this sort of thing in mind when he wrote LITERARY CRITICISM AND PHILOSOPHY - merely that, viewed within the s f framework, Atheling seems to meet some of Leavis' requirements.

At the risk of becoming even more boring, I'm going to see how Atheling measures up to the strictures of yet another critic: Marcel Proust. In a footnote to his essay IN MEMORY OF A MASSACRE OF CHURCHES (superficially about Ruskin) Proust remarks that the critic's first task is to make "some...attempt to help the reader feel the impact of an artist's unique characteristics". This is one of Atheling's strengths, though it can so easily be a weakness, a mere pigeonholing of each author which results from overlooking the word "unique". Even when reviewing Garrett's parody (pages 74-75) Atheling fastens

onto the "unique" characteristics of George O Smith and Anthony Boucher. This sort of critic is worth ten of the fellow who merely says that "A is like B". But in his book Atheling goes rather further than this, and says rather careful things about writers like Bester, Budrys, Kornbluth, and Shiras. These are the names which occur to me first, but I am sure the list of careful characterisations is much longer. But Proust asked for something more, and if I can boil down a sentence of over 150 words accurately, he also wanted the critic to investigate the writer's vision of reality (cave Philip K Dick?). This is not something which can easily be done in science fiction, where the writer's vision often stops at 3¢ a word, but Atheling attempts it, and the subject is, as might almost be predicted blindfold, Robert A Heinlein. Whether Atheling succeeds in his attempt is another matter, and one upon which I cannot comment: my interest in Heinlein is so slight that it hardly seems worth the effort.

Now Atheling is no Leavisite, and he does not seem to me to be likely to be much of a fan of Proust. Yet it is pleasing to note that his criticism manages to at least be consistent with what these two very different writers thought about the nature of criticism. He is speaking the same language, and in this he is almost alone amongst writers on science fiction.

More important than Atheling's performance as measured by others is the extent to which he manages to live up to his own standards. Atheling has never been reluctant to say what he is trying to do, and this makes our task much easier. Let us begin at the beginning.

If science fiction is really growing up (a proposition that could use some defining), however, it is going to need a lot more criticism than it's been getting. The nature of the criticism will be determined by just how far science fiction readers would like to see the idiom grow. (page 11)

When Atheling wrote this (1952), s f criticism was really limited to the writings of Damon Knight: beyond that was chaos, consisting largely, however, of rather unscrupulous puffs.

Since then there have been no new major critics of s f: in a moment of weakness Atheling listed Anthony Boucher (a fair middle-of-the-road reviewer), P S Miller (good at cataloguing), Frederik Pohl (???), Lester del Rey (only moderate), and Sturgeon (whose reviews were characterised by little thought and lots of writing). Later enthusiasts might add the names of Alfred Bester and Judith Merril: I blush for them. So, apart from Atheling and Knight, s f seems to be totally lacking in good professional reviewers. Among the amateurs have been some writers of more or less the same class as Knight and Atheling (Arthur J Cox being the most obvious example), but there has not been this "lots more criticism". There has been, in fact, a swing away from this towards a deification of s f writers, though no one, to my knowledge, has gone so far as to claim that they are above suspicion. Criticism of J G Ballard, to take the most recent example, has tended towards either of two extremes: that Ballard is great because he is Ballard, and that Ballard is bad because he doesn't write like the other fellers. Neither of these two arguments, which have consumed vast quantities of paper and time, constitute what Atheling had in mind when he wrote of "more criticism".

In this early piece, Atheling develops his argument: that science fiction, to advance, must shake off the bonds of being a ghetto literature, and try to establish itself as literature without any modifiers whatsoever. And it is here

that Atheling first describes the critic's functions. It will be noted that they are rather different from the criteria that I have quoted already. First, he writes (page 12), the critic must bring to the attention of editors and writers reasonable standards to be observed in the writing of s f. Secondly, he must explain to his readers what these standards are.

Atheling makes no grandiose claims for what he is to write: his intent is clearly to try to improve the writing of science fiction by getting down to the wordsmith level. This he does consistently throughout his career, but also attacks the problem at higher levels, as I have indicated above. The technical criticism, Atheling continues, will be essentially destructive at least at first glance: but its intent is constructive in the long run. In this prediction Atheling was completely correct: he did tend towards destructive technical criticism throughout his career. But on many occasions Atheling was constructive and even interpretative: there is little in his review of STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND which is destructive or even anything which would suggest that Atheling was capable of such blasting as Zirul received. The chapter, A QUESTION OF CONTENT, is entirely constructive, although little has come of it.

Atheling continues by asserting that "every science fiction editor operating today is flying by the seat of his pants" and that this explains the publication of much of the poor s f of the period. But a commercial editor must operate in this way to maximise profits. Campbell's great success stems from his willingness to bend in whichever direction his reader response suggests will increase sales most while at the same time giving the impression of being the most immovable man in science fiction. Atheling's point may well be true when considered in absolute terms, but a science fiction editor is not hired to publish good fiction; he is hired to publish stories which will sell large numbers of copies of his magazine(s). It is worth comparing the sales figures of ANALOG today with those of other magazines suffering from rather less resilient editors.

This is the one possible flaw in Atheling's position: that of half-pretending that science fiction is not commercial (or even hack) literature. This is no great fault, for Edmund Wilson had the same trouble when he wrote about detective stories and the writings of H P Lovecraft. The sales of both of these forms indicate that Wilson must have missed some inherent enchantment (me too, by the way), and though his criticism remains sound and thoughtful it is not very helpful to fans of Agatha Christie or HPL. Atheling's attitude is by no means as extreme as Wilson's and as the prophets of science fiction continue to claim its impending (or now past) maturity it is probably that more and more science fiction stories (and perhaps even, in some remote heaven, science fiction editors) will meet the most exacting standards.

Nevertheless, most, if not all, of Atheling's criticism is directed towards faults which are as grave in commercial fiction as they are in fiction which claims a little more for itself: that the faults are so common in the fiction now appearing in NEW WORLDS suggests that although Moorcock is headed in the right direction he has by no means arrived. Thus, on pages 18-20 Atheling is able to list some fairly common faults of science fiction - phony realism and "deep purple" - and still find them around many years later. I suspect that there is more of the former than of the latter in today's science fiction, probably because it is more difficult to recognise. In a recent issue of NEW WORLDS (to return to the magazine which claims to be above such things) I found a great deal of phony realism and very little "deep purple" (after making due allowance for the style in which NEW WORLD's authors write). But

there is still a lot of deep purple in Zelazny's writing, for example, and Atheling's words have clearly not yet reached all the important ears.

Atheling's aim, as he has indicated right from the start, was to improve science fiction by working on those best placed to perform the task of really improving it: the editors. This is discussed at some length in the chapter, A SPRIG OF EDITORS. But later in the book (page 76) Atheling discusses the editor who regards himself as the perfect judge of writing and who insists on "helping" writers. It is terribly true that there have been many such pests, but as Atheling indicates elsewhere, s f does need strong and demanding editors. This difference between the editor who muddles in affairs that he knows nothing about and the editor who directs a wayward author onto the correct path is something that Atheling never seems to have investigated at length: indeed, to do so would have required more space than Atheling ever had in fan-zines. Instead he has concentrated on particular instances (Zirul and McLaughlin, and on Crossen/Wolfe). This makes for lighter reading but there's also a slight laziness about it all. This is something that I would like to have Atheling write about now.

Atheling's chapter on negative judgments does reveal his preoccupation with this aspect of his craft. Here his attention is concentrated on it, and yet he still manages to be constructive (as in his provision of information about a good chess story by Carl Gentile, or in his giving Algis Budrys a pat on the back) in an apparent orgy of destruction. Though his intent is harsh, Atheling sees light at the end of the tunnel and cannot help but be softened by it.

A major failing of s f critics in general is the tendency for them to examine the "science" which may or may not be present in any given novel or short story. To some slight extent this is justified if the fault in the science interferes with one's enjoyment of the story: and it is possible, after all, to enjoy a story in which the science is dubious. Atheling almost puts this point of view (page 116) when he writes about the unpleasant practice of allowing s f reviewers to review popular scientific works or even more serious books. As Atheling remarks, one goes elsewhere for that kind of review. But he does not extend this argument to those who criticise "science" in novels or short stories. Perhaps he feels that an s f reviewer will react in much the same way as the average reader towards scientific bloopers. I don't think this is quite the case, and s f critics have fallen on their faces (say, into a bowl of water?) in overextending themselves. Perhaps Atheling had this partly in mind when he wrote of "expertitis" on page 52. There's only one really gruesome example of Atheling in this role: his review (page 24) of a story by Dean Evans. He devotes some five lines to detailing the horrid errors in chemistry and pathology by Evans, though he never gets around to saying just how these hamstring the story. He does go on to make it plain (though only in passing) that these errors are less important than the problems concerned with the writing itself. Further on (page 46) Atheling has listed himself as having been on the side of "science" (as against "fiction"), but he now indicates that he has changed sides (or rather that the "sides" have merged towards the left): in the same paragraph he makes the following remark, which probably expressed a feeling that he had been harbouring for some time: "Bradbury writes stories, and usually remarkably good ones; he is of course a scientific blindworm, but in the face of such artistry, it's difficult to care." There is no need for me to underscore the importance of this passage: for Atheling, as for every critic worth his salt, it is writing first, frills afterwards. The advent of Bradbury undoubtedly lowered the relevance of science to science fiction (though it never really mattered) and Atheling here

acknowledge a fact which many have not yet become aware of. Science is needed. Yes (see Sturgeon, page 14) but it is not all important and perhaps should not even be considered unless it becomes very obtrusive (in which case it is at fault anyway).

Science was obtrusive in Clement's MISSION OF GRAVITY, and this was made rather worse by the publication of WHIRLIGIG WORLD in ASTOUNDING, which Atheling discusses in the chapter on editors already mentioned. Atheling was then suggesting that Campbell would back science against fiction: this deplorable tendency has been observed in action far too often in recent years in ANALOG/ASTOUNDING.

Though science per se is not all-important in science fiction it is necessary in the context of Sturgeon's rule, which Atheling finds a useful scale. His discussion of Kornbluth's THE GOODLY CREATURES is instructive. He demonstrates fairly clearly that a story which science fiction fans may like, even like for its supposed scientific content, may not be science fiction at all. Assuming, that is, that you hold to Sturgeon's rule. Of course vast quantities of modern science fiction fit into this category but Atheling's time has always been limited.

Atheling touches lightly on the connections, if any, between art and science fiction. In discussing STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND (in which art is conspicuous by its absence) the subject is naturally raised, though not in a way disparaging to Heinlein. Reviewing Miller's THE DARFSTELLER Atheling manages to make some approaches to the subject, but the major statement on the subject remains James Blish's anthology for Ballantine, NEW DREAMS THIS MORNING. Perhaps Atheling felt that the connection was tenuous and not yet ready for any full exploration: the situation has unfortunately scarcely changed.

The ability to sum up all the flaws in something is a rare quality: Atheling did this for science fiction when he wrote, "Failure to grapple thoroughly with the logical consequences of an idea is one of the most common flaws in science fiction, as it is in all fiction." Even with that last phrase, which tends to weaken the whole idea, Atheling has succinctly made the point which, though it has remained true enough through all these years (as might be expected of so general a statement), has as yet had little impact on thinking about science fiction. To my knowledge only one fan critic uses this as a starting point, and it is not surprising that this attitude makes Franz Rotensteiner the most important writer about science fiction today. This approach, which applies to science fiction so much more than to other forms of fiction, is of such grave import that it should be blazoned on the walls of all who think they know where s f is at, right up there with the quotations from Chairman Mao. He had something to say on the same subject, naturally, but let's not range too widely.

Sadly, Atheling's most important ideas have not borne much fruit. Though he was often brilliant, perceptive, and articulate, as I've tried to indicate, he was too often far ahead of his time. His major points have been forgotten in favour of Judith Merrill's asides, the steady drone of P Schuyler Miller, and the ugly squawks from elsewhere. It is hardly surprising, then, that Atheling's gift to the future has also fallen by the wayside.

Two of the chapters in THE ISSUE AT HAND are not fanzine items: AN ANSWER OF SORTS has to do with bread-and-butter matters, and A QUESTION OF CONTENT is rather more important. It is unquestionably Atheling's magnum opus. While his indictment of the fumbling of s f writers, mentioned just above, is

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 24

BARRY GILLAM

Clockwork Kubrick

You are all going to see A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. You have no choice. I would just like to warn you that it is not the movie that the critics have acclaimed it to be. I would like to warn you, in fact, that it is a boring, pretentious, awkward, and very annoyingly manipulative film. It is composed of so many "brilliant" effects that the movie looks like a junkyard at noon, glittering but worthless.

First, let us talk about Kubrick. Several people (SFC's editor among them) have expressed their admiration for Kubrick in these pages over the last year or so. Now I like Kubrick; DR STRANGELOVE, LOLITA, and THE KILLING are all very entertaining and very well made. DR STRANGELOVE has an ironic sense of narration and style that is wonderfully apt. LOLITA will always be a favourite of mine, as much as I love the novel, for the film extracts one comic-tragic strain from the book and teases it around Sue Lyon's pubescent figure. THE KILLING is the kind of tough but loose caper movie that the Don Siegel of THE LINE-UP (1958) might make in collaboration with the Don Siegel of THE BEGUILED (1971). And it does resemble Siegel's THE KILLERS (1964) in its multiple viewpoint and violent sensibility.

What of Kubrick's style? (as John Brosnan asks in SFC 26). Admirably, in the three films mentioned, he has been able to suit his style to his material. With the exception of SPARTACUS (which is practically ungovernable) and his first two films (FEAR AND DESIRE, 1953, and KILLER'S KISS, 1955, which I have not seen), I detect a sense of irony in his style independent of, but often consistent with, the screenplay and acting. (LOLITA is the Kubrick film which has least of this, and that puts it apart from the rest of his work, for better or worse.) Thus a robbery story is fragmented into the overlapping time segments through which the different robbers see their parts of the caper. Kubrick handles the device very well, and not only does he help to create suspense, but prepares the viewer for the final, violent breakup of the group. Kubrick's motive here is to follow the characters and let them fill the

Barry Gillam discusses

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

directed by STANLEY KUBRICK;
produced and written by STANLEY KUBRICK, adapted from the novel by ANTHONY BURGESS; lighting cameraman: JOHN ALCOTT; editor: GILL BUTLER; electronic music composed and realised by WALTER CARLOS.

With: MALCOLM McDOWELL (Alex); PATRICK MAGEE (Mr Alexander); ADRIENNE CORRI (Mrs Alexander); AUBREY MORRIS (Deltoid); JAMES MARCUS (Georgie); WARREN CLARKE (Dim); MICHAEL TARN (Peta); SHEILA RAYNOR (Mum); PHILIP STONE (Dad); MIRIAM KARLIN (Cat Lady); GODFREY QUIGLEY (Chaplain).

1971. 135 minutes.

screen, but to keep them in an ironic mode, each unable to escape from his own limitations and circumstances. This is the heritage of film noir (Wilder's DOUBLE INDEMNITY, Siodmak's THE KILLERS, Lewis' GUN CRAZY, Aldrich's KISS ME DEADLY) which is on its way to becoming another genre: the brighter sixties caper film.

Kubrick's next film, PATHS OF GLORY, is shrill and claustrophobic. Watching it is like being caught in a child's dream. The film has enough empathy to knock down a battalion, but not enough style to stand them up again. I don't object to the simplicity of the politics; Fuller is no better. But Fuller has a command of movie-making that Kubrick will never reach. The attitude of PATHS OF GLORY is one of righteous indignation. We are forced to despise the officers and to pity the men. And this viewer, for one, resented having his emotional response programmed. In LOLITA, Kubrick's camera takes the point of view of one character. But its objectivity renders a second view to the audience of everything that Humbert Humbert sees. In the film, Humbert Humbert does not have the strength of his art, which is his backbone in the book, and therefore he is somewhat weaker. Played as black comedy, the film comes off splendidly: Humbert's first sight of Lolita, Charlotte Haze's death, the night at the Enchanted Hunters, Quilty's death, etc.

The performances are excellent and provide the solid base of Kubrick's best films: Sterling Hayden, Vince Edwards, Jay C Flippen, Marie Windsor, Ted de Corsia, Elisha Cook, and Timothy Carey in THE KILLING; Mason, Lyon, Winters, and Sellers in LOLITA; and Sellers, Scott, Hayden, Slim Pickens, and Keenan Wynn in DR STRANGELOVE. DR STRANGELOVE is a collection of mannerisms, gestural, stylistic, verbal, and conceptual, which allows us to laugh, albeit hysterically, as we sit on the edge of disaster. Kubrick plays the moody lighting of Hayden's General Jack Ripper against the cinema verite attack on his air-force base, and the broad comedy of Slim Pickens against the gum-chewing belligerence of Scott. I can accept the delirious ending as parody, where I cannot accept the sanctimonious, straight-faced ending of PATHS OF GLORY.

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY is a very laboured movie. The years of preparation left it with a calculation which Kubrick forgets only occasionally. Kubrick has stepped from behind the cameras, where he stood in his earlier films. When the audience laughs or gasps, they do so to the director, not to the film. The control of DR STRANGELOVE becomes a death grip in 2001. The narrational gaps can only be justified as Kubrick's Kilroy. The BLUE DANUBE sequence and much of the trip to Jupiter is excellent, but it is caught in a morass of natural sunrise and electronic sunset. There are pieces of a much better movie in 2001, but they are trapped, like the viewer.

Sarris writes of Kubrick: "His metier is projects rather than films, publicite rather than cinema. He may wind up as the director of the best coming attractions in the industry." 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, after everything else, is a trailer for A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. Kubrick has proved that he can sell a film with his highly successful personal control of the distribution and advertising for A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. The film is successful with both critics and audiences. Critics have committed themselves in print, but audience success is measured by how many people are lured to cinemas, not how many enjoyed the film, liked it, or even sat through it. This is where you come in.

You are going to see A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. It is the major s f release of last year, in the terms discussed above, if not in terms of quality. I find less to like about it than I did about 2001. In A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, Kubrick's self-indulgent display of a record album entitled MUSIC FROM 2001 in one scene

indicates the general level of the film and seems to confirm my view that 2001 is an enticement to A CLOCKWORK ORANGE.

Should I recount the story? Read Burgess' novel. It is far better than the film, although hardly top Burgess, at that. Alex is a young hoodlum in the near, British-socialist future. His interests - classical music, violence, and sex - lead to his imprisonment. He volunteers for a rapid rehabilitation program, and is subjected to conditioning that deprives him of his free will and induces him to meet a violent physical reaction to thoughts and acts of violence. When he meets those he had beaten in his pre-prison days, in turn he is beaten and tortured to an extent which purges his prison conditioning. As we leave him, he has decided to work within the system, just as rapaciously, but without the obvious paraphernalia that branded him to the police during his earlier reign.

I am going to do something in this review that I would condemn in another's work as evidence of a literary approach to film (and that is a dire curse from a film buff). I will compare the book and the film and complain when the film is not up to the book. However, I think that this is justified here because Kubrick has followed the book very closely in some respects and departed very widely in others. In addition, the film fails largely where it misunderstands or mistranslates the book.

In LOLITA, Kubrick didn't try to find a visual equivalent of Nabokov's style (and luckily). In A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, however, he strains for a style equivalent to Burgess', but the strain is more visible than the style. Nabokov has said that Joyce's fault in his monologues is that he gives the words too much body; that we do not think in words, but in the shadows of words. True enough. But his fault is also his strength. Burgess is a devoted explicator of Joyce as well as an admirer of Nabokov. In A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, he creates a language that lives as it speaks. In the first section, he uses his key sentence ("What's it going to be then, eh?") as one clear line that cuts through the multitude of neologisms introduced. It sounds like a repeated exterior noise in the midst of a dream and its function is partly to call Alex back from his reverie to the present. The gaudy terms that Alex uses help to depict his state of mind. Burgess has injected the Russian and the invented slang into the bloodstream of the language and produced a nightmare. Its indefinite, fuzzy, but suggestive strangeness is appropriate. Alex' heightened language, picking up the Russian declamatory style, reveals his mind, supercharged with drugs.

In Vincent Canby's review (THE NEW YORK TIMES), he says that A CLOCKWORK ORANGE is "so beautiful to look at and to hear that it dazzles the senses and the mind." This is what Burgess achieves, but Kubrick short-circuits the book. He uses very little of Burgess' Nadsat (teenage slang) and directs the whole film like a delirious packrat: slow motion, speeded-up motion, etc. The decor of the film has been widely praised, but it is generally too flashy and fragile to look viable outside a movie set. Kubrick is wise enough to use a voice-over narration but this is too sparse to be really effective.

In the novel Alex' whole world is tainted by his words. Burgess transliterates Russian words more or less exactly but uses English cognates to deprive the English meaning of its neutrality and give it a distinct and distasteful flavour. "Pol" (sex) resembles pool; "nuking" (smelling) is puking; "brat" (brother) has no exact English meaning. Teeth are "zoobies", breasts "groodies". Alex implicates the middle-class world when he calls them "lewdies" (people). And he reveals his own kinship to the mechanical world he abhors

in his word for seeing, to "viddy". "See" is blunt, quick, and physical; "viddy", however, with its Latin derivation, is mechanical and distancing and sounds like a mixture of "telly" and "sinny". He describes rape ("in-out-in-out") in the same way that he does the blinking of a light ("on off on off"). The richness of his dialect invests mechanical objects with personality. He speaks of robbery, of making off with "the till's guts".

Alex constantly refers to any unpleasant smells (almost everyone he meets smells bad to him). Accompanying the smell he detects in everyone (while he keeps himself perfectly clean) a widespread decay - of a way of life, or morality, of language. Girls in the Korova Milkbar are described with "rainbows round the glazzies ((eyes))... and the rot ((mouth)) painted very wide." Society's extravagant hopes are belied by its own inner crumbling. Alex speaks "out of the corner of my rot", but nevertheless he castigates others. In Part One Alex' aberration is matched by his flamboyant style. (The cheaper the crook, the gaudier the patter, Dashiell Hammett once wrote.) As Alex is forced to conform in Part Two, the style becomes more functional, like the prison and the hospital that he inhabits. There is no change of style from Two to Three, even when he is twice cured. Alex is just as violent at the end as at the beginning, but he is finally no different from anyone else, and in his uniformity, he is much more dangerous. Burgess echoes the KING LEAR expansion of a casual phrase into an all-encompassing statement when Alex' "Out out out out!" (to the "droogs") is taken up by the newspapers in their demand for a resignation: "OUT OUT OUT". Society's acceptance of this outcast marks a break in the skin of the body politic. The disease is no longer something to fight against. It is the disease that sustains life.

That is Burgess' novel. Obviously Kubrick cannot use the same device of verbal corruption as extensively. One substitute is the music. Kubrick uses it very widely and usually ironically. Burgess set up the central paradox in the novel: Alex fantasises and masturbates while he listens to the ODE TO JOY in Beethoven's NINTH SYMPHONY. Kubrick uses a great deal more music, and I could not ascertain whether it is to be understood as Alex' comment, or Kubrick's. The often-mentioned use of Rossini's THE AMIEVING MAGPIE OVERTURE to counterpoint a rumble with another gang is Kubrick's, but Alex indicates later by smiles that he is replaying in his mind the music that we hear reproduced on the soundtrack. The world collaborates, too. Patrick Magee's doorbell chimes are the opening notes of the FIFTH SYMPHONY. Kubrick uses the music very well (and again, 2001 served as prelude), and it does create a textural richness that the film lacks otherwise.

This is necessary because the images themselves are so sharply photographed that they have a two-dimensionality, like cutouts in motion, detached from the background. Alex is excited by the Bible that he reads in prison, and responds to the rhythmic style (which Burgess occasionally borrowed for Nadsat) and the stories of violence and sex. However, when he pictures them to himself, the flat images and tacky, vinyl colour are disappointing. The film both evokes and lacks physicality. Kubrick also uses a wide-angle lens which makes all corridors and roads seem very narrow and makes them curve inward over the viewer.

The much-talked-about violence isn't what it's pegged to be. Almost all of Alex' victims get theirs in long shot. Kubrick distances the viewer and makes the action impersonal. We never clearly see much of the violence dealt to Patrick Magee and Adrienne Corri, as it is either off-screen, after the scene as we see it, or obscured. Also, the victims usually lie inert when hit, as if they were sacks of potatoes rather than reacting human beings. However,

Alex reacts visibly and painfully to the correction officer's fist in his "yarbles". Dim does also when Alex fixes him, but when Alex reprimands Georgie, the film goes into slow motion. Even when Alex brings the two young girls to his apartment for a friendly session, Kubrick shows it in accelerated motion to deny its physicality. The gang fight with Billyboy's mob is accompanied by THE THIEVING MAGPIE OVERTURE, choreographed, and made into a comic set piece.

Besides all of this, the viewer never knows any of the victims well enough to feel any sympathy for them. When the Ludovici technique is administered to Alex, he is seen in closeup and when he is trapped by Magee, the viewer is also trapped. In fact, the two best moments in the film involve psychic violence: when Magee realises, from hearing Alex sing SINGING IN THE RAIN in the bath, that the victim of society that he has succored is his own attacker; and the torture of Alex by Magee by means of the NINTH. However, these incidents are exceptions. It has been charged that Kubrick attempts to distance the violence to allow the viewer to participate in Alex' enjoyment of it. Not at all. The film merely disembodies its violence, as well as almost everything else, leaving us unaffected viscerally, emotionally, or intellectually.

Howard Hawks said of the action sequences in Peter Bogdanovich's TARGETS: "That's good. And that stuff's hard to do." Kubrick seems to have intellectualised himself out of the potentialities of his earlier films and totally out of the action frame of THE KILLING. Don Siegel in DIRTY HARRY and Sam Peckinpah in THE WILD BUNCH can implicate the viewer in the violence of their films because the violence is inviting, attractive, and sensual. Kubrick may be trying for an ironic effect here as well as in other parts of the film, but he does not make it clear.

Alex has been called a likable young man. McDowell gives a fine performance, but the film's cold frames don't allow the viewer to get close to him. His humour is more boorish than bright and his love of music is only part of the physical world that he inhabits, and is on a par with rape and beating. Our value system when applied to music is not Alex'. He uses music. There is one moment when he seems to rise out of his shell. After he is released from prison, he stops by the bank of a river and watches an eddy in the water. He thinks of a musical phrase, but it is the one purely aesthetic delight that he has in the film.

Sarris again: "2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY also confirms Kubrick's inability to tell a story on the screen with coherence and a consistent point of view." Well, Kubrick manages to keep a consistent point of view in A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, but he still can't tell a story. Recently, several critics have hailed THE GODFATHER as a return to narrative cinema, a triumph of the story-telling film. The joke is on them: THE GODFATHER is as dull and disconnected as these same people probably imagine Godard to be. A CLOCKWORK ORANGE tells a chronological story with a single, first-person narrator. But it is coherent because it is static. The real problem is that each scene is self-contained and the only link between one and the next is Alex and his voice. Kubrick puts us off with a series of all-too-set pieces which never develop any momentum. I would say that the scenes are compartmentalised and the doors keep getting stuck, but no scene ever involves us deeply enough for us to feel wrenched from it.

The film ends just as the book does: Alex learns from his experiences that you can get what you want more easily if you agree with people. He has learned how to manipulate people through indirect, rather than purely physical means. Compare the lesson that he gives his droogs (a beating that only makes them

THE S F NOVELS OF BRIAN W ALDISS

BY BRUCE R GILLESPIE

PART TWO: POOR LITTLE WARRIORS

This is the second article in a series about the s f novels of Brian W Aldiss. The first article appeared in SFC 10, April 1970, and was revised for reprinting in SFC 26, April 1972. These articles are intended as preliminary notes for a much longer work; therefore I would welcome all and any comments from readers while these articles are appearing in this magazine.

NOVELS AND EDITIONS USED IN THIS ARTICLE

THE INTERPRETER (Four Square 1970; first published 1960; 126 pages); THE DARK LIGHT YEARS (Four Square 1437; 1964; 159 pages); THE PRIMAL URGE (Sphere 10820; 1961; 191 pages). This is not a bibliography. These are the editions that I used in the preparation of this article, and in some cases they may vary from the US editions of the same books. I have listed US titles in the text of this article.



THE S F NOVELS OF BRIAN W ALDISS

by BRUCE R GILLESPIE

PART TWO:

POOR LITTLE WARRIORS

1960: THE INTERPRETER (US title: BOW DOWN TO NUL)

THE INTERPRETER begins "in" the mind (if Gilbert Ryle will excuse the expression) of Wattol Forlie, a Partussian citizen who was formerly "Third Secretary of a Commission on a planet full of bipeds", i.e. Earth. Marooned on a planet halfway between Earth and Partussy, penniless, and nearly resigned to his misfortune, he thinks about thought, which "wraps around me, as my senses go about their endless job of turning all the external world into symbols." He attempts to sort through his impressions, but he finds that they do not make a coherent picture. "My name is Wattol Forlie," he says to himself. "Is that not an interesting thought? Not particularly. My feelings, my precious feelings, they are more important."

At this stage of the story - halfway down the first page - the reader may have the impression that Wattol Forlie speaks more like Brian W Aldiss than like the average out-of-luck nul (whatever a "nul" is). What miraculous conditions can give an alien the ability to speak like an English science fiction writer? Or, if we presume that nuls just happen to think in the way that Aldiss writes, how can the author make the huge jump in space and time that will allow him to find out the thoughts of this nul?

The easy thing is to evade both these questions altogether, which is what Aldiss does. At first sight, the reader might think that Aldiss tries to write the most difficult type of narrative: that which proceeds from the unknown to the known. Instead, Aldiss soon reassures us that Forlie is actually a familiar figure. A tripedal thug tries to rob Forlie; after a melodramatic scuffle on the beach, the thug apologises to Forlie. "You're a gambler, aren't you?" he (it?) says. "A thousand apologies, sir! I mistook you for an ordinary loafer." Forlie tells his troubles to Jicksa, his unexpected confidante. He receives the advice, "At the rate you're going, friend, it'll take you twenty years ((to reach Partussy)). Stay here with me and fleece the tourists."

Neither Forlie nor Jicksa are really aliens, you see, although both of them have three legs and regard Earth as just a "backward little dump". They are only pleasant rogues, really people, despite appearances. Within a few pages, Aldiss draws little character sketches of these "people" and sets out Step One of the plot. In this way, Aldiss need not apologise for showing us the inner workings of the minds of alien beings; that is, not unless his readers reject this uneasy convention.

But why does Aldiss make aliens behave like people, or give aliens' bodies to people, which is what he has really done? Aldiss makes it plain within the first few pages of the book that the nuls are made to think like humans yet

remain detached from the human race, so that they are in a position to look down on humans, both physically and culturally. Like Swift's Houyhnhnms, they form a race of counter-humans. Aldiss allows them to judge humans, and make ironic and pithy comments about them.

Even though this convention sounds tricky, probably Aldiss could have made it work if he had tried harder. However, he contracts a severe case of Wandering Viewpoint Character, a disease which William Atheling Jr diagnosed six years before *THE INTERPRETER* was published. In *THE ISSUE AT HAND*, Atheling complains (page 85) about the science fiction writer who "has no consistent point of view" and who "tells us what each and every character is thinking (including the horse)." In *THE INTERPRETER*, it's a nul, not a horse. During the first chapter, Aldiss jumps from the mind of Wattol Forlie to that of Signatory Arch-Hiscount Armajo Synvoret, an important official who has undertaken to investigate Wattol Forlie's complaints about corruption on the little colonial world of Earth. After a few more pages, Aldiss jumps to Earth and the viewpoint of High Hiscount Chaverlem Par-Chavorlem, the corrupt official who worries Forlie so much. Par-Chavorlem robs Earth's till in an unrepentantly villainous way. At the same time, Aldiss gives some idea of the scope of the Galactic Empire, of which Earth is only a tiny part.

Finally, and disastrously, Aldiss changes his viewpoint to that of Gary Towler, a human, who is the interpreter to Par-Chavorlem:

Chief Interpreter Gary Towler was shopping. In the afternoons when he was not required to work or wait at Par-Chavorlem's palace, he liked to do his own shopping...

"I would like a pound and a half of that best shoulder bone cut, if you please," Towler said... The butcher grunted, serving Towler without speaking. Terrestrials who actually came into contact with Partussians every day were despised even by terrestrials who earned their living in the Commission by other means.

We don't find anything particularly offensive or incongruous in this passage, the first in which Aldiss introduces his main character. However, the reader of the first of these articles will notice immediately that Towler is an Aldiss "hero", one of that race of nice-mannered, earnest clowns whose naivety trips them up in one Aldiss novel after another. Towler does not enter the scene firing a gun, or making love, or singing the praises of free enterprise. He leaves all that to the heroes of Heinlein and the rest. Enter Towler, as he does his own shopping. He can only shop freely because he is the servant of the hated ruler of Earth. The humans of the City, including the butcher, seem to regard Towler as a collaborator. In turn, people outside the City regard the butcher and his fellow-workers as collaborators. While he introduces Towler, Aldiss also introduces us to a divided-and-conquered race which has maintained a vestigial social structure. At this stage of the book, it seems to us that Aldiss has justified his final abrupt change of viewpoint.

However, Aldiss wants us to transfer our attention from the personnel of the Galactic Empire to the problems of the colonised humans. Already you have guessed the logical problem that makes the novel absurd. Aldiss has created alien-humans in order to write a comedy about humans. Now he introduces "real" humans. Are they the same kind of creatures as the nuls, separated only by social position, language, and physical shape? Nothing in the first half of the book contradicts this view. On one page Towler shops in the city, and he must face the personal problems that arise from his peculiar position

in Partussian society. When Synvoret arrives on Earth, he prepares to find evidence of corruption in Par-Chavorlem's regime. It's a fairly typical human situation. "His mind was revitalised and his will to see justice done increased tenfold," writes Aldiss. He shows that Synvoret spends most of his time congratulating himself on his own sense of justice and fair play, or pitying himself because his well-developed sense of justice causes him so much discomfort. In a spare moment he reflects that "their combined travelling and additional expenses would cost the Greater Partussian Government something like a megabillion byaksis... The cost of sending impartial investigators to any outlying planet was colossal." In other words, Synvoret is an incurable nuisance who spends public money on worthless causes. Also he is naive, for, from a sense of bureaucratic duty, he sent a forwarding message to notify Par-Chavorlem of his impending visit. Par-Chavorlem has had time to prepare a convincing charade for his "inspector".

All of this sounds very familiar. THE INTERPRETER is a very pleasant book to read because we can recognise easily Par-Chavorlem's manoeuvres, and the pattern of Synvoret's bumbling. "People" like these inhabit every government office in the country, and these types belong particularly to the British colonies during the last two hundred years. So far Aldiss has made no psychological distinction between the aliens and the humans. So far, Towler shopping is the same kind of being as Synvoret fumbling or Par-Chavorlem scheming.

Towler is an undercover agent for the band of human guerillas that a man called Rivars leads in ineffectual forays against the Partussians. Rivars instructs Towler to show Synvoret the true extent of Par-Chavorlem's exploitation of Earth's resources. Rivars says that Synvoret will not believe Towler's story unless Towler shows some tangible evidence to the investigator. The evidence does not arrive, so Towler evades Synvoret's eager and well-meant questions. Towler does not know that Synvoret would have believed any damning evidence against Par-Chavorlem, from the start. During the story, Synvoret grows increasingly disgusted with the human race in general (because humans kill each other) and sympathises more with Par-Chavorlem's point of view.

Aldiss seeks to explore all the possibilities of his ironic situation during the marvellously contrived comic scene that finishes the story. But this scene also shows why we cannot take the book seriously. (I should explain that Par-Chavorlem has imported a large number of Starjjans - who look like humans - to Earth in order to justify the huge amount that he "spends" on labour. The "evidence" that Rivars eventually sends to Towler is a severed Starjjan foot.) Towler lures Synvoret to his apartment so that he can show the evidence to the investigator. At the same time he has come to believe that Synvoret is "evil" just because the Partussian has believed all of Par-Chavorlem's lies. Towler hands the bloody parcel to the Partussian. "Examine it, sir!" he shouts. "You told me once that you were after the truth of the situation on Earth. Here's the truth." Synvoret looks at the foot. "Remove this disgusting object at once, Interpreter," he says:

"You can see it's not a human foot, can't you?"

"I have no idea what a human foot looks like, you fool. What are you playing at?"

Never for a moment had it occurred to Towler that the Signatory, despite all his years on Starjj, might have no knowledge of the structure of a Starjjan foot. But whether he knew or not, he was unaware of the structure of a terrestrial's foot.

Aldiss has a great joke at the expense of the two characters: at Towler, because he has not questioned the fairy-tale nature of the "evidence", and at Synvoret, because the bulky alien takes fright so easily, despite all his earnest resolutions to get to the "heart of the matter". However, this passage depends also upon an illegitimate factor that Aldiss introduces during the second half of the book. Aldiss tells us that Partussians, who have no visible organs or orifices, are "secret" creatures who despise any openly demonstrated emotions. Synvoret is upset because Towler is violent rather than by the particular instance of violence. Set in context, this last confrontation between Towler and Synvoret derives much of its effect from Aldiss' assertion that the Partussians and the humans are basically alien to each other. This assertion contradicts the impression that the first half of the book gives (that the nuls and the humans are two sides of the same coin, like the British and the Indians) and the impression that we could gain from reading the above passage out of context.

So Aldiss destroys the conventions that he should have made into a successful novel. At the beginning of THE INTERPRETER, the galaxy of the Partussians is very cosy, for Synvoret can cross half the galaxy in two years. Even Par-Chavorlem's "Earth" is cosy, for the scope of the novel rarely moves outside the area that surrounds Earth's colonial capital. In order to maintain this cosiness, even, in places, the fabled Aldiss jollity, the author must treat the aliens as humans-in-reverse. However, Aldiss destroys this convention when he writes also from the viewpoint of a human-human, Towler. Why not write the whole book about humans in the first place? Why didn't Aldiss write about the British in India, instead of about the Partussians on Earth?

I cannot read Aldiss' mind, so I cannot give breezy answers to this question. But... In 1960, Aldiss appeared in science fiction magazines, and science fiction readers bought his books. The walls of the s f ghetto already surrounded him, and he did not step through its gates for another ten years. In 1960 Aldiss had to conform to most of the Procrustean limitations of the medium, even when they destroyed the individuality of his work, as in the case of THE INTERPRETER. As Aldiss says in the introduction to the book, he wanted to write a book about "four pretty hard types each trying to out-think each other." I cannot regard Towler and Synvoret as "hard types" (and the book would have been much more interesting if they had been), yet Aldiss could have shaped his idea much more effectively if he had not poured it into the mould of science fiction.

However, Aldiss still wanted to have it both ways, with one foot inside the ghetto and the other foot stuck out over nomansland. In 1960, Aldiss was, as he is now, perhaps the only s f writer who knows what a novel is, let alone how to write one. Although Aldiss complicates the elements of THE INTERPRETER in a fussy and page-consuming way, always he tries to show us what it would be like to be Towler, or Synvoret, or even Par-Chavorlem, no matter how this renders the book ineffective as an extrapolated ontological exploration. Aldiss tries to give life to some of the inhabitants of this cardboard s f habitat, but because he tries to write a complicated joky novel, he runs from character to character, and has little time for any of them. Aldiss tries to make us laugh at this world, but often he confuses us so much that we can only laugh at Aldiss' clumsiness.

1964 THE DARK LIGHT YEARS

THE DARK LIGHT YEARS resembles THE INTERPRETER in many ways. Unfortunately, it is worse.

During the first chapter of THE DARK LIGHT YEARS we see events from the viewpoint of aliens called utods. The utods are definitely not counter-humans, or at least not in the way that the nuls first appear to us in THE INTERPRETER. "Languidly ((Snok Snok)) retracted a limb, scooped up a mass of slime and mud, and walloped it over his chest." The utods love mud, and almost everything else that humans (or, civilised British humans) call dirty. "The stench, encouraged by the Sun's mild shine, was gorgeous. Their droppings, released in the thin mud, supplied valuable oils which seeped into their hides, making them soft." Not only do the utods use, enjoy, and worship their own excreta, but they can ignore pain, they live for a thousand years, and they show little interest in those skills which human beings describe as "civilisation".

Unlike the nuls, these creatures have little in common with human beings. Then how can Brian Aldiss delve so easily into the minds of these alien-alien? He is so familiar with their ways of thinking and their patterns of speech that he can relate a complete conversation between Snok Snok and his "mother", Quequo. They talk about Aylmer Ainson, the old, lone Earthman who lives on their planet:

"His speech is growing less distinct than it was," Quequo remarked...

"I had noticed it, Mother. He complains about it himself. Increasingly he mentions this phenomenon he calls pain."

"It is difficult to exchange ideas with Earthlegs because their vocabularies are so limited and their voice range minimal, but I gather from what he was trying to tell me the other night that if he were a utod he would now be almost a thousand years old."

Perhaps we can accept alien small talk in light-hearted s f novels, but I'm more inclined to think that the utods are so different from humans that the world's greatest linguist could not translate their conversations. Brian Aldiss is not the world's greatest linguist, although in this passage he tries to convince us that he is a humourist. For Aldiss makes it plain in the above passage ("because their vocabularies are so limited and their voice range minimal") that he has tried to invent aliens whose behaviour and thoughts make a strong contrast with those of human beings - that is, he has invented counter-humans; he seeks to present a mirror-view of human nature. When the utods grow old, they do not die, but they "evolve into the carrion stage". Compared with the utods, man "is not an efficient mechanism." Although (or because) the utods spend all their time wallowing and excreting in the mud, they can say that "life was wonderful when you thought deeply about it." As we cannot imagine that the author really knows what would make these aliens feel wonderful, we can only presume that they feel wonderful because they do what no humans would ever do.

The confusion in the first chapter of the book dooms the rest of it. Most of THE DARK LIGHT YEARS reveals what the humans think about the utods - or rather, what they cannot discover about them. Aldiss has an ideal opportunity to create a mystery novel, for a quick survey of s f books will reveal that in all the best yarns about aliens, from WHO GOES THERE? to SOLARIS, the hero knows nothing about, or can never know anything about, the aliens. THE DARK LIGHT YEARS could have followed this pattern successfully (for the humans make little contact with the utods until near the end of the book) if he hadn't given away the answer to the mystery in the first chapter. And why did he give it away? To score the rather obvious moral point that the "dirty, uncivilised" utods can justifiably feel superior to human beings.

Aldiss makes a second major mistake during the first chapter of THE DARK LIGHT YEARS. As in THE INTERPRETER, he changes quickly from viewpoint character to another. During the first two pages of the book, we look through the eyes of Aylmer Ainson, the only human to live among the utods. Ainson is old, tired, and (as we see more clearly at the end of the book) nearly inarticulate. Yet, in the first sentence, the book talks about the "new blades of grass" that "sprang up in chlorophyll coats. On the trees, tongues of green protruded from boughs and branches, wrapping them about - soon the place would look like an embicile Earthchild's attempt to draw Christmas trees - as spring again set spur to the growing things in the southern hemisphere of Dapdrof."

This is an impressive opening to the novel, but it is obvious that when Aldiss evaluates the strange beauty of the planet, he does not look through Ainson's eyes. Aldiss speaks like some disembodied spirit who makes a quick tour of pretty planets. For a few sentences, Aldiss makes us think that he feels passionately about this planet, and therefore he can justify the use of this rhetoric. Quickly he makes it plain that actually he sees things from a detached, almost cosy, vantage point.

Where does that leave Ainson, who does live on the planet, and who does not have a detached viewpoint? On the same page (and why should a critic ever need to move far from the first page, as an author usually reveals there all the qualities of the work that follows?) Aldiss looks at Ainson in the same way that he looked at the landscape. "This leaden effect was caused by gravity... His body had grown round-shouldered and hollow-chested accustoming him to it," writes Aldiss, and adds the patronising note that "His brain had grown a little round-shouldered in the process." In other words, Aldiss has taken up his least endearing role, that of master magician. He is the super-author who leaps universes with a mighty bound and demolishes characters and aliens with a speeding phrase. Even on the first page he shows a kind of careless contempt for everything that he looks at. He shows this carelessness, this irremediable lack of concentration in the manner in which he leaps from character to character, from humans to utods, from men to women. The impression that we receive is that Aldiss does not understand or empathise with any of the elements of the story.

Aldiss' confusion muddies THE DARK LIGHT YEARS in several important ways. Worst of all, the book lacks a central character. At first we think that Aldiss introduces Master Explorer Bruce Ainson as his central character in the middle of chapter one. Aldiss shifts backwards forty Earth-years and he shows the first encounter between utods and humans:

"How delightful!" exclaimed the second Politan, hurrying to get ahead. "I do believe they are trying in their primitive way to communicate!"

"What fortune that we came!" said the third Politan.

"Greetings, creatures!" bellowed two of the priestlings.

And it was at that moment that the creatures on the bank raised Earth-made weapons to their hips and opened fire.

Aldiss laughs at, and shows his disgust about, both sides of the confrontation. The utods appear constitutionally naive, because previously they had never met creatures who want to "convert them into the carrion stage". The humans demonstrate a different type of naivety: they fire automatically at the alien creatures. Relationships between the two races grow steadily worse from

then on. The main difference between the antagonists is that the human race provides no antidotes to the evil or stupid actions of some of its members. The only man who protests about the wanton killings is Bruce Ainson (father of Aylmer Ainson, who appears in the first chapter of the book):

"Do you wish me to take what you are saying seriously, Ainson?" ((Captain Bargerone)) asked. "Or are you merely trying to delay take-off?"...

"The two creatures we captured last night have definitely attempted to communicate with me, sir... They stood quietly on the other side of the bars and spoke to me."

The captain's left eyebrow arched like a foil being tested by a master fencer.

"Spoke, Mr Ainson? In an Earth language? In Portuguese, or perhaps Swahili?"

So the "hero" of this novel is not an impressive figure. Aldiss does not attempt to sympathise with Ainson, although paradoxically he shows from the start that Ainson is another of his "poor little warriors", that race of impatient British everymen who scurry around nearly all of Aldiss' books. Unlike Complain, Soames Noyes, and even Algy Timberlaine, Bruce Ainson has no gift for self-knowledge or self-irony. Ainson maintains his straight-laced attitudes to the end of the story. Aldiss pokes merciless fun at him or leaves him out of events altogether. The author despatches Ainson in a curiously peremptory way, and we discover little of whatever makes him tick.

After reading the first few chapters, we see that Aldiss has resolved to treat all his characters with equal disdain. Aldiss tries to become the Alexander Pope of science fiction in THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, but usually sounds like a poor man's Dryden. Aldiss can never decide where he should rest the point of his novel, and when he does decide to balance everything upon one scene or another, he demonstrates the failings of the entire book. In chapter six Aldiss takes us to a conference of notable people who meet to discuss the captured utods. At first we think that Aldiss writes from the viewpoint of Bruce Ainson, who eyes Mrs Warhoon, and compares her with his wife:

Though only in her mid-forties, ((Mrs Hilary Warhoon)) was well-known as a leading cosmoclectic, the new philosophico-scientific profession that attempted to sort the wheat from the chaff in the rapidly accumulating pile of facts and theories which represented Earth's main import from space. Ainson looked at her with approval. To think she should be married to some dried old stick of a banker she could not tolerate! She was a fine figure of a woman, fashionable enough to be wearing one of the new chandelier style suits with pendants at bust, hip, and thigh level... In fact, Ainson could not help comparing her with his wife, to Enid's disadvantage. One, of course, would never dream of indicating one's inner feelings to her, poor thing, or to anyone else, but really Enid was a poor specimen; she should have married a shop-keeper in a busy country town. Banbury. Diss. East Dereham. Yes, that was about it...

In this passage, Aldiss carefully changes the relationship between himself as story-teller, Mrs Warhoon, Ainson, and Enid, his wife. When Ainson looks first at Mrs Warhoon he judges her with a little contempt, "as a leading

cosmoelectic", a member of yet another profession designed to muddle man's approach to knowledge. However, Ainson does notice that Mrs Warhoon is "a fine figure of a woman". This comfortable English euphemism judges both Mrs Warhoon and Ainson. Ainson would never admit, even to himself, that he would like some casual variety in his sexual life; Mrs Warhoon looks good to Ainson because, and not in spite of, the fact that she wears "one of the new chandelier style suits with pendants at bust, hip, and thigh level." In the last few lines of the passage, Aldiss deflates Ainson and shows us why his marriage is in a bad state. Ainson despises Enid, his "poor thing" of a wife, and when Ainson says that "she should have married a shopkeeper in a busy country town" we realise that Ainson gives an accurate description of the type of man that she did marry.

Look back to the beginning of the passage. There Aldiss agrees with Ainson's summary of Mrs Warhoon. By the middle of the passage, Aldiss shows that in some ways Ainson resembles Mrs Warhoon, because he admires at least one of her most objectionable features, her style in clothes. By the end of the passage, Aldiss has removed his attention from Mrs Warhoon and he shows his scorn for Bruce Ainson alone. This is a very clever piece of writing in which the author shows that no human can ever finally "judge" another human. The rest of the book proceeds in much the same way - no matter which character becomes the focus of Aldiss' scornful eye, he or she shows the same level of nastiness and stupidity. The book's final brittle, gloomy scenes only amplify the message that we are all as nasty as one another.

But, we may object, if we are all equally nasty, is it not true that we are equally pleasant, or naive, or cruel, or clever, or generous, or whatever? Is there no variety in the picture; no reverse side to Aldiss' single-faced moral coin? Either Aldiss chooses not to, or he cannot, present us all shades of the moral spectrum in one book. We know from the evidence of other Aldiss books that he can show the whole of human nature within a unified fictional framework. We can only ask why he chooses not to, for if all men are necessarily and equally evil, surely it follows that the author must be as evil as his characters, and in the same kind of way? If he excuses himself, then he shows that the world of the novel is false.

If Aldiss had been as evil as his characters, he might have injected some invigoratingly unpleasant blood into the book. Unfortunately, Aldiss merely loses control of his material here, and sounds nearly as impotent as a writer as Bruce Ainson is as a man. Look again at the chapter which begins with the passages quoted above, the chapter where Ainson attends a meeting of the "cream" of the English intelligentsia. Obviously, Aldiss wants to make great fun at the expense of several well-known people he knew or had seen on television. One after another, Aldiss sticks his knife into Wittgenbacher ("Oxford's professional philosopher" who "nods his head six times with the frightening assurance of a clockwork doll"), Gerald Bone, best-selling author of *MANY ARE THE FEW* (his face "lit at a new thought like a child's at the sight of a new toy"), Dr Bodley Temple (who "had the reputation of being a sound and imaginative scholar, and offset it with some of the nattiest waistcoats in London University"), and several other easily recognisable types. These figures make fools of themselves and of each other. Although they meet in order to discuss the puzzling aliens, by the end of the meeting they succeed in justifying their continued ignorance of the whole matter. Even better for them, they find a way to blame Ainson for their own mutual failure to understand the evidence about the utods.

Aldiss makes this scene read very amusingly, but he cannot erase our initial

impression of the scene: that he judged the whole group before he began to write and found them all guilty of blind egotism and villainy. Aldiss might have proved his case, if only he had not pretended at the same time that these are the finest flowers of British civilisation. (And the rest of the novel demands this scene, because Aldiss talks continually about British civilisation, and not British people.) Actually, Aldiss scoffs at puppets, including Bruce Ainson, and so in THE DARK LIGHT YEARS he makes himself into a puppeteer and not a novelist.

Why does Aldiss write bad books like THE DARK LIGHT YEARS and THE INTERPRETER? I suspect that he misjudged his material when he wrote both books. While he planned THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, I suspect that Aldiss said to himself, "I will write a funny social satire that will expose the foolishness of some aspects of modern British 'civilisation'." He might even have thought something like, "I will satirise The Evil And Violence That Lies In The Heart Of Man." Well, perhaps he didn't think these things, but the novels show the results of shallow thinking. In THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, he writes about a group of baddies - the entire human race - and a race of goodies - the utods. The baddies destroy themselves in a mildly amusing way, and a small group of goodies survive. Unfortunately, we cannot believe that the utods are really different from humans, because Aldiss makes the utods into just another tribe of humans, in which case they should act like humans. Nothing in the novel shows me why the utods act so pleasantly. As in THE INTERPRETER, Aldiss fails to resolve the contradictions that surround the idea of a "science fiction novel": THE DARK LIGHT YEARS is "science fiction", or "speculative fantasy", or "mimetic fabulation", or what you will, because Aldiss tries to show what will happen when warlike humans escape from a ruined Earth in order to ruin all the other planets. That's the Big Idea. THE DARK LIGHT YEARS is a novel because Aldiss tries to see through the eyes of some of the actors in this general human movement. He imposes the Big Idea on people who should have ideas for themselves; he "builds" the book like a mechanism, and does not let it "grow" from the inside out, like an organism.

Fortunately, Aldiss has written at least one successful comedy:

1961 THE PRIMAL URGE

For London it was one of those hot July evenings in which the human mind is engulfed in a preoccupation with the moist palm, the damp brow, the armpit.

Sweating continently, James Solent emerged into the motionless heat of Charlton Square. With a folded newspaper raised to his forehead in an odd defensive gesture, he came down the steps of the grey trailer onto the grass and paused. The door of Number 17, where he lived, beckoned him; but competing with the wish to go and hide himself was a desire to overhear what three men nearby were saying.

"Such a gross imposition could only be swung onto a politically indifferent electorate," one said.

The second, lacking words to express what he thought of this sentiment, guffawed immoderately.

"Rubbish!" the third exclaimed. "You heard what the Minister of

Health said the other day: this is just what's needed to give Britain back her old sense of direction."

Aldiss begins *THE PRIMAL URGE* with a characteristically expansive flourish: he claims to speak for "the human mind". However, the second sentence shows us that this is not the statement of Brian W Aldiss, your genial master-of-ceremonies (as in the first sentences of *THE DARK LIGHT YEARS*), but it is the statement of a particular character, James Solent. Therefore the first sentence shows us that James (hereafter known as Jimmy) Solent is literate (like Aldiss), ill-at-ease (like most of Aldiss' main characters), and liable to utter grandiose statements (as Aldiss does). However, Aldiss shows us that Solent is not just Aldiss in thin disguise. The author quickly defines Jimmy Solent's characteristic gestures (he carries "a folded newspaper raised to his forehead in an odd defensive gesture") and social position (he fights a battle between the comfortable safety of: "The door of Number 17, where he lived, beckoned him", and the curiosity of wanting to "overhear what three men nearby were saying").

We see quickly that Aldiss defines Solent further as part of a political field that extends beyond the range of the first few sentences. "This is just what's needed to give Britain back her old sense of direction," says one man, so immediately we want to find which event agitates the nation so strongly that it disturbs this small group of people and Our Hero before we have had time to read more than a few sentences.

Soon we find that Jimmy takes centre stage of this event. "What's it feel like, mate?" says one of the bystanders. "You really don't feel a thing," says Jimmy, although we can almost hear in the background Aldiss' hint, "Until afterwards..." But what is Jimmy supposed to feel? Aldiss does not tell us immediately. Instead, he shows us Jimmy's small-time, busy, but unimportant life. "From the hall he could hear Mrs Pidney, the landlady." Jimmy has a brother named Aubrey who has gone out. Jimmy doesn't mind, because Aubrey "had grown uncommonly touchy of recent weeks." Jimmy wears a suit from Harrods and "he was twenty-five, his brown hair not objectionably curly, his face round but not ugly, his chin neither aggressive nor recessive,"

Aldiss lets Jimmy judge himself; the author lets the person speak, and does not mouth judgments on his behalf, as happens during most of the pages of *THE INTERPRETER* and *THE DARK LIGHT YEARS*. Aldiss advances another step; he prompts us to ask whether Jimmy Solent really fits that image of stolid British ordinariness that he draws around himself. In *THE DARK LIGHT YEARS*, Bruce Ainson has many self-delusions, but he always fits the image that Aldiss creates for him during the first few chapters of that book. Yet in this part of *THE PRIMAL URGE* Aldiss hints that Jimmy has a mistaken view of his own identity, and so he might surprise us during the rest of the novel - for, as well as his suit and his brown hair and his ordinary chin, Jimmy has a shining disc on his forehead.

Some extraordinary change has overtaken Jimmy, and later, all of England. Jimmy has not merely followed the crowd; he is one of the first people to wear a Norman Light. Aldiss puts together two contrary impressions of Jimmy: his self-image of the cliché Englishman, and our as-yet-undefined image of Jimmy the dissatisfied thinker who jumps out of his cliché social role whenever possible. We gain a similarly contradictory impression of the England that contains Jimmy Solent: for the first few pages we think that all is right with the world and the politicians are up to their old tricks; but slowly we realise that mysterious changes have affected the whole country. Jimmy represents the whole nation, but he does not represent its cliché idea of itself. Aldiss

does not destroy the novel (as he destroys THE DARK LIGHT YEARS) by making his main character "typical", yet he can only awaken the potentialities of his main character if he shows how Jimmy embodies the dilemma that faces all the people in the country. In THE INTERPRETER, Aldiss escapes from this balancing problem when he makes the colonial society resemble that of a simple little village. In THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, he substitutes formula Aunt Sallies for the members of a society. How can he animate the spirit of a society in THE PRIMAL URGE?

We can only sigh thankfully when we realise that Aldiss does not mean to flit among his characters as he does in THE INTERPRETER and THE DARK LIGHT YEARS. One portent for success. Aldiss continues to follow Jimmy Solent, and to examine the world only as it affects directly the experience of Jimmy. Why does he wear a metal disc in the middle of his forehead?

The government has ordered that all British subjects should wear these discs, and as governments usually do, they have covered the situation with a mess of gobbledegook:

The man in charge of the loudspeaker, being hot and bored, was not talking into his microphone properly. Only occasional phrases were intelligible. One bit sounded like "We are free to sit here in a fine old state"; he must have been saying something equally preposterous, like "freer citizens in a finer state."

"government's assurance... many eminent doctors agree... nothing but healthful... far from being an affront to national modesty... greatest assets... no expense... only a minor operation..."

The government's agent cannot give a clear explanation why he mans a caravan outside Jimmy's window and surgically fits metal discs to people's foreheads. Instead he calls out phrases which he doesn't care about to people who don't believe them, but who submit to the operation because they must. The man in charge of the loudspeaker merely reveals that the members of the government are hiding all their real motives.

The "real" purpose of the metal disc is revealed not by careful technical explanations (as in all those other s f novels) but by Aubrey Solent's girlfriend Alyson Youngfield, who comes to visit Aubrey but instead finds Jimmy at home:

She was wearing the green suit with the citron lining that Aubrey had bought her at Dickens and Jones. Underneath it, she wore a citron blouse, and underneath that could have been very little; all the same, Alyson looked warm. And, ah, undeniably, warming... He could still see her ankles and calves, curved like a symbol against the plum background of the divan. They looked, indeed, very beautiful; as if he were having his first glimpse of the Himalayas, Jimmy felt humbled by them. Then a hint of colour made him hold one hand up before his face; a pink radiance covered it. The disc on his forehead was doing its stuff.

The metal discs, also called Norman Lights, are "emotion registers", and the main emotions that they register are sexual in nature. From now on, everybody will betray their love or lack of it.

I must admit that I don't believe a word of all this, although my judgments

may be unduly influenced by the actions of Australian governments, who are scared to madness by the subject of sex. No government can afford to allow its citizens to become more honest. No government can afford to foster love, even for financial gain. I find it hard to believe that the sturdy citizens of England (or any other country) would allow their government to implant emotion registers in their foreheads.

However, Aldiss does explain the cynical motives for the government's actions; and he nearly convinces us that people will accept nearly all varieties of pain and pleasure in the name of democracy. Besides, in other novels, such as THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, Aldiss seeks to demonstrate social theories that are just as one-sided; in that book, all people were killers, given half a chance. In THE PRIMAL URGE, most people will become lovers, provided somebody forces them to shed some of their inhibitions. However, in the latter book, no miracles happen, and society divides in a much more believable way than it does in THE DARK LIGHT YEARS. In THE DARK LIGHT YEARS Aldiss inflicts a whole theory of behaviour on the human race, then lets individuals writhe under his curse. In THE PRIMAL URGE, Aldiss lets loose a neutral invention in society - he prods people - and then waits to see how people behave "naturally".

The emotion registers are not funny little gadgets, as they would be in most of novels. Aldiss realises that they force him to prove the whole range of his powers of invention, for he has unleashed the force of honest emotions in the world and he must try to register its force. I suspect that the result should read more like KING LEAR than THE PRIMAL URGE, but I'm satisfied that Aldiss meets the challenge very skilfully. He takes Jimmy Solent to a party where Jimmy is the only person who is wearing a Norman Light. The other partygoers are "London people... living useful days and efficient nights." Like all other English conversations at this time, this conversation centres around the Norman Lights. Guy Leighton, a "dark young man, who balanced perpetually on the balls of his feet", says that the Norman Lights do not match his views about life. "They don't solve anything," he says. "Such an infringement of personal dignity is only justifiable if it solves something." We can guess that Aldiss does not hold the same views, and that he will resolutely refuse to solve anything. Merrick, the psychologist, says that "they're merely registers - like a raised eyebrow." The conversationalists reveal little about the Norman Lights, but they show their own neatly boxed views about life. Jimmy Solent, who has few views about life and a great dissatisfaction about its current progress, becomes more and more bored and unsettled. Finally he tells the group that he had the register installed because "'Penny Tanner-Smith, my fiancée, broke off our engagement last week. I hoped that if she could see how steadily my ER glowed for her, she would agree to begin again.'" There was much sympathetic laughter at this."

Into the room walks Rose English, and instantly Jimmy Solent takes a greater interest in the party:

A tall, silver man had just come in escorting a tall girl with a hatchet face who, in her survey of the company, seemed to "unsee the traffic with mid-ocean eye", to borrow a phrase from a contemporary poet Jimmy disliked... As Rose English glanced round the company, she was making no attempt, as most of the others present would have done upon introduction, to conceal the engagement of her mind and feelings in her surroundings. In consequence the unconventional face, less a mask than an instrument, drew to itself the regard of all men and most of the women. Her countenance was at once intelligent and naked; invulnerable perhaps, but highly impressionable.

Her clothes, although good, seemed to fit her badly, for the jacket of her suit, in the new over-elaborate style, did her disservice, making her look to some extent top heavy. She was tall; "rangy" was the word which occurred to Jimmy. She might have been thirty-five, perhaps ten years his senior...

Merrick and several of the others were watching his Norman Light with eagerness.

"It is just turning faintly pink, I think," the sandy woman said.

"The maximum intensity is a burning cerise," a clerical-looking man informed them all.

In this passage, Aldiss writes some of the most intense sentences of the book. At the same time, he evaluates Jimmy's response as well as his own closely-scrutinised admiration for his creation, Rose English. When Jimmy first notices Rose English, he can only react with "a phrase from a contemporary poet Jimmy disliked". As he sees her individual features more distinctly, he refines his own responses into phrases that form his personal poetry. She does not "conceal the engagement of her mind and feelings in her surroundings", but the other people at the party conceal themselves with as much energy as Rose English spends to project herself. Provided, of course, that Jimmy has not made an incorrect judgment. For the moment we must trust his feelings.

As Rose English's face and figure make their full impact upon Jimmy, Aldiss evaluates the changes in his reactions. If her face is "unconventional", how can the self-admittedly "ordinary" Jimmy evaluate it? Is her face really "less a mask than an instrument"? If it were a mask, how could Jimmy tell what lies beneath it? Perhaps the woman manufactures her face like a beacon so that it can "draw to itself the regard of all men and most of the women"? How does Jimmy know that the face is "naked"? He doesn't, but his observations are so striking that we feel that Jimmy has risen from his "ordinary" self-image and has created for himself a vision that will outlast the truth of any later revelations or events.

Jimmy, who always regards himself as diffident and naive, follows the truth of his new conviction. His Norman Light turns faintly pink when he is introduced to Rose English, and she returns the compliment (although at the same time she makes it appear that she can turn her light on and off at will). "She was so without embarrassment that Jimmy, too, remained at ease, interested in the experiment." Jimmy thinks wildly and says to the woman, "I know a fellow - he was at Oxford with me - who's got a private swimming pool. Would you care to come for a bathe with me?"

From then on, Jimmy has no idea where he is going. He can only hope to turn his brief poetic vision into a "real experience", to let his body make real his words. Aldiss transfigures Jimmy during his wild search for a suitable direction. "Only his old aunt Indecision had been shut away," thinks Jimmy, as he drives Rose towards the house of the "old friend" who probably forgot him years before. They stop by the side of the road. Jimmy makes a tentative approach to Rose English, and "he took a long, deep kiss from her. She shaped up round him immediately like a young wrestler. Together, they plunged. The next thing he recalled afterwards was cursing loudly because he could not unhook her brassiere." Jimmy plans the seduction; Aldiss shows how Jimmy succeeds in spite of his plans; and this reader, at least, becomes increasingly excited by the scene. Aldiss cheers his hero, but he laughs at him as well,

and directs our attention to the more sinister connotations of the words with which he describes the scene. Rose English is like a "young wrestler"; "together they plunged"; and "he hardly realised what he was doing". We experience Jimmy's pleasure, but we realise, as Jimmy does not, that Rose controls their love-making. Yet we feel that Jimmy would not take any alternative course of action; everything is just right, although it might be all wrong as well. After Jimmy finally unhooks Rose's brassiere, she says, "Let's have a swim first, sweet." As they resume their drive, Jimmy tells himself that "he was going to be a proper man and take the correct tempo."

Rose and Jimmy drive to the house of the "old friend". They discover that the only people in the house are the "old friend's" daughter and her boyfriend, who are learning about love in a different way. After the daughter makes an adolescent attempt to seduce Jimmy, he excuses himself and Rose, and escapes to the garden. By the side of the pool, moonlit, the two become almost transfixed by the passion, compassion, and humour by which Aldiss illuminates the experience. Like Jimmy, Aldiss takes everything "at the right tempo":

Inside the door with the frosted glass window was one room with a partition down the middle, opposite sexes who changed there together being trusted not to look around it - a simple-minded but ideal arrangement, Jimmy thought.

"Can you see to undress?" he asked Rose.

"Yes, by the light of your ER," she said.

"Sorry," he muttered, turning tactfully away.

"How's the costume?" he asked, when they emerged into the night air a minute later.

"A bit tight."

"So'm I. Feel OK?" She looked like a lusty goddess.

"Hungry," she said, wrapping her arms around her middle...

...He fed upon the riches of the wide world on that cramped wooden floor. Sometimes he wondered, with only the mildest concern, whether she would not suffocate him, sometimes whether she would not crack his ribs; sometimes whether he had not bitten off more than he could chew, but always he rose triumphantly to face a fresh attack, always they were matched. She had spoken at the party against making a mockery of sex; of that she was not guilty; the core of earnestness Jimmy sensed in her was there even in her gladdest abandonment; she swam with him up the mountainside of love like a salmon leaping up a waterfall. In the end, he was flooded with a delighted and transcendent surprise, cast on a shore beyond Ultima Thule. Exhausted, thrilled, jubilant, panting like a dog.

At first Jimmy and Rose recognise the restraints of polite English society, represented by the "door with the frosted glass window". Jimmy still recognises the restraints, and therefore Rose can reprove him mildly. ("Can you see to undress?" "Yes, by the light of your ER.") Jimmy removes the threat with a joke ("A bit tight." "So'm I.") and Rose removes all pretence with her

single word, "hungry". They go swimming, and Jimmy admires the beauty of the scene: "He floated on his back, gazing into the clear night sky with its complement of stars." We presume that both Jimmy and Rose share the same feelings, but increasingly Aldiss narrows the focus of attention until it burns only on the figure of Jimmy. After they finish swimming, Jimmy says that he has "forgotten the towels", so Rose must take off her swimming costume to let it dry. From clever seduction, Jimmy's passion flares. This flare brightens the scene more and more. Aldiss makes the whole scene part. We are back in the wider world of novels like HOTHOUSE and GREY-BEARD, with their rich sense of plant, animal, and human life combined in one pattern. Aldiss does not explain that Jimmy has lived through perhaps the first revelatory experience of his life (for so often in his other books he explains that things happen). Instead Aldiss lets us share Jimmy's experience directly, as he feels suffocated (drowned?), his ribs nearly crack, he feels like a "salmon leaping up a waterfall" (compelled, rather than choosing his path) and "panting like a dog" (surrendered, as well as triumphant).

Aldiss does not show that Rose shares any of these feelings. Jimmy seems to direct the whole scene, until we look at Aldiss' words, as I've quoted above, and see that Jimmy can only take actions which Rose allows. A few days later, when Jimmy tries to speak to her again, Rose English says, "You didn't give me a thing" and rejects him completely. This deadening sentence haunts the rest of the novel. Jimmy discovers that "Rose English" is really Rachel Norman, the inventor of the Norman Light itself. She sleeps once with each man who she meets, and usually she makes sure that these men are members of the government or people who can influence its members.

The last thing that Jimmy realises is that "Rose English" may have given pleasure to people other than himself, either in person or through the invention of the Norman Light, and that she might act for entirely mercenary, loveless motives. Jimmy searches for Rachel Norman, while the rest of the population make its own adjustment to the Norman Lights. Some members of the army object strongly to the Norman Lights. A group led by Colonel Bourgoyne mutinies, and during the second half of the novel it captures the house where Jimmy and some of the other employees of his company, International Book Association, are staying one weekend. For both Jimmy and most of England's other inhabitants, the Norman Lights are only crude devices that let people express emotions that they usually keep hidden. While Jimmy finds that Alyson Youngfield makes his light shine, members of Captain Bourgoyne's mutineers put sticking plaster over their Norman Lights and try to overturn the government. After the troops capture the house, events move much faster than Jimmy's understanding. Two men named Biggs and Mainfleet point rifles at the members of Jimmy's group.

"He saw in ((Mainfleet's)) pleasant, rather soft face, a type he liked and recognised; his own." However, Jimmy becomes unsettled when Mainfleet shows that he is the maniac of the two, the soldier who kills rather than betray his "cause". Biggs comes from the "wrong" social group, but he is the soldier who shows mercy when it is convenient, changes sides after Bourgoyne loses, and gains a citation from the British government. Bourgoyne takes Jimmy and Guy Leighton, his oily and well-hated fellow employee (and another of Rachel Norman's one-nighters) from the house, and the author whirls Jimmy through a kaleidoscope of funny, fractured events, until Jimmy lies captured in an old country house. "The ceiling below seemed capable of bearing his weight,"

thinks Jimmy as he tries to escape from the attic. "He let go of the cross beams, putting his full weight on the lath and plaster. It was as rash as letting go of morals and trusting to conventions; the ceiling caved in." With similes like this one, Aldiss shows the blind, ongoing, likable, yet maddening energy with which Jimmy tackles every task. He does not succeed very often, especially when he does confuse "morals" and "conventions" and offends both, as well as the law of gravity. He usually reaches the wrong conclusion, whether he decides to chase Rachel Norman, help a friend, or step onto the ceiling.

But somehow, no matter how many mistakes he makes, Jimmy always makes mistakes in the right way. "He lay breathing hard, covered from head to foot in chalky dust. He had tumbled out behind the garage." As Jimmy tries to escape from the house, "he saw that he was being watched from one of the ground floor windows in the wings. A woman stood there, looking out. It was Rose - Rachel Norman." Before Jimmy can attract her attention, a helicopter lands. A thin man climbs out, breaks into the house (while Captain Biggs is capturing his former chief, Colonel Bourgoyne, at the front of the house) and captures Rachel Norman. Jimmy tries desperately to make her notice him:

His immediate feeling was one of awe to find this impressive woman, so strong, so vital, standing quietly helpless; this changed to sorrow as he saw that she did not recognise him in his present literally plastered state. Once more she was giving him the cold shoulder.

Aldiss reverses all the images from the scene in which he first introduced "Rose English". Previously, Jimmy saw her strength combined with strange vulnerability. Now he sees her as "quietly helpless". He once thought that he was important to her, and did not see the mask that hid her real reactions. Now she does not recognise him "in his literally plastered state". At the end of the story, we find that Rachel Norman does not resemble any of Jimmy's illusionary images of her. Jimmy has changed slightly because of his experience. His physical appearance has "changed" completely since the last time that he saw her. But the eye of the author has not changed its position - Aldiss sees as clearly here as he did during the first few chapters, so he lets us judge all the implications of the scene without feeling that the author has changed or softened his gaze.

No matter how many times Jimmy is wrong, we admire him because he still trusts his illusions. He does not retire behind other people's views of life. He rushes out from hiding and tries to "rescue" Rachel Norman from the helicopter pilot. The thin man and Rachel get into the helicopter, which begins to rise into the air. Jimmy clings to the helicopter and rides up with it:

Staggering under its unbalanced load, the helicopter climbed with a reluctant crabwise motion over the garage, barely missing its roof. Jimmy hung on frantically, shouting. He saw the thin man, his dark, narrow face wizened in anger, lean across Rachel and strike out with the clubbed gun. The butt came down on Jimmy's knuckles.

He let go. He was falling, the helicopter seeming to lurch away from him. Next second he hit the ancient haycart, landing bottom first on the pile of antique hay, sprawling among cow parsley and nettles. Under his sudden weight the rotten axles of the cart broke, the wheels crumpled outwards, the body crashed to the

ground. An immediate exodus of rats was partially screened by a vast outward-bound cloud of hay particles which obliterated everything from view.

The casual reader might think that this crazy adventure ends only in wild farce. Science fiction books often have sinister men who bang gun butts down on people's knuckles. However, even as Jimmy falls, Aldiss writes about the scene in a meticulous, graceful way that clarifies Jimmy's relationship to his surroundings from moment to moment. As in all of Aldiss' best novels, the most serious themes of THE PRIMAL URGE emerge during the most "melodramatic" scenes. "He was falling" - and the movement and surrender continue the motion of Jimmy's constant "fall" throughout the novel. However he falls after, and because of, his finer moments, such as his swim with Rachel Norman, or his aerial suspension that happens only because of an act of courage. All his best moments "lurch away from him". Constantly he falls into "the ancient haycart" of all his, and England's, inherited prejudices about his and other people's social relationships. Because of the Norman Lights, Jimmy and millions of other people have managed to rise above the "antique hay" for a few moments on history's clock. Some may stay airborne for all their lives, but most people and Jimmy descend, and for him, as for other people, such as Bourgoyne's sad band of mutineers, "the rotten axles of the cart broke". Does this show the end of "revolution" (to put THE PRIMAL URGE in 1972's terms) or the revolution itself? In sections of the novel which I haven't discussed, Aldiss describes how some of the "rotten axles" of English society break easily and bloodlessly under the weight of the freedom that people allow themselves after they acquire the Norman Lights.

Jimmy just keeps falling. "The wheels crumpled outwards, the body crashed to the ground." After the final movement of Jimmy's comic fall "a vast outward-bound cloud of hay particles.. obliterated everything from view." Jimmy returns to the mysterious daze of existence where he started, and, we find during the book's last chapters, everybody else returns to their own private "clouds of hay particles". There is no apocalypse, but only a growth of personal maturity; nobody ever sees the final vision or the final collapse of everything, but Aldiss still hopes that people may use scientific inventions like the Norman Lights to find out more about themselves. As for the readers - well, we laugh so heartily that we don't know whether to admire the beauty of the "vast outward-bound cloud of hay particles" or nurse our bruises, like Jimmy.

Why does THE PRIMAL URGE succeed as a social comedy while THE INTERPRETER and THE DARK LIGHT YEARS do not? I've already answered my question in bits in other parts of this article; but I want to suggest that Aldiss himself provided a suitable metaphor for these books in the "poor little warrior" character of the story of the same name. In THE INTERPRETER, Towler is merely "poor" because Aldiss pays too little attention to him, and the structure of the novel takes our interest away from him anyway. In that book, as in THE INTERPRETER, Aldiss does not provide a focus of attention. We lose interest in the sufferers and Aldiss points to the theoretical processes which make people suffer. As I've said before, the Big Idea, science-fiction style, dominates THE INTERPRETER and THE DARK LIGHT YEARS. The latter novel does not have a single "poor little warrior", but only little people who do not convince us that they belong to human society at all. Again, in THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, the structure of the book prevents us from seeing any of the people, ideas, or words, clearly. In THE PRIMAL URGE, Jimmy is a warrior of the spirit, a poor little bloke who keeps going no matter how many times he is knocked out. Aldiss does not impose any social theories on him, but lets him live in a society

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miniscule mass increments. From this discovery we can extrapolate to arrive at the revelation of how the world was made. The Lords Countdown from Infinity to Zero made the world. The Zero Point was the explosive creatio mundi (hence, confirmation of the "big bang" cosmological theory). So here we open a way from physics to theodicy. Very well; what then? There are various possibilities to explore. Say that there exists a critical information mass. Above this threshold the already accumulated information turns into matter. God has done this once, but men can now attain this threshold. Then, in a single stroke, all the information concentrated in the memory banks of the computer net vanishes - we are left with no knowledge at all, and we have unintentionally created a couple of atomic nuclei!

[illegible]

From some remarks in SFC 25, I saw that a fog arises around those mysterious Siamese twins Rottensteiner and Lem. Since we are all professionals, the best thing to do would be perhaps to turn the involved persons into an s f yarn. There exists no person called Lem, but only a computer program with this code name, meaning LAUDATOR EVERSORIS MISSIO, or LUCIPHERUS EXTORQUENS MENTEM. This is a part of a subversive conspiracy with its mastermind a doctor of Austrian origin, named Rottensteiner. Well, he is hell's creature, of course; to prove this would be but a child's task. ("Rotten" is not even German. It's English of course. His mind is rotten, or rather his motives, of breaking and entering the s f palace. And "steiner" - from "steinigen", to lapidate - is the other part of the terrible plan. Ortman is of course an underground base, from where ICPM (Intercontinental Philosophical Missiles) are shot. Now the Abominable Doctor has pushed the button "ON", so LEM has shown its secondary strike capability.) LEM is a parallel working computer - this letter, and the reply to Mr Farmer's letter were written simultaneously, in 0.1 nanoseconds, of course.

As to Mr Turner's exegesis of THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, I have nothing to say. There is a big mountain in our Tatra-Giewont. If you look at it from the north, you see a dormant knight. If you look from the west, you see an over-turned ship. If you look at it from the east, you do not see it at all - other peaks over-shadow it. The same applies to a literary work. Is there anything new to be invented as an idea in s f? I am not sure. My above-stated idea is not totally new, for something of a presentiment of it can be found in FIRST AND LAST MEN (the mysterious force which pulled down the moon so that it shattered Earth's surface while the civilisation's growth was accelerating: perhaps this pull was caused by the mass of accumulated information...)

Dear Mr Gillespie:-- You have a somewhat idealised image of my working conditions. We have no trash in Poland; this is so. But I am not happy because of this. You do not have glaciation in Australia. Does this make you happy? (**brg** No.) We must withstand some pressures that are not just economic in character. They are not to be called "attenuating circumstances", if the quality of written work is low. There are no attenuating circumstances in literature at all. But you know about all this. We are, so to speak, the underground of the second order, if s f is that of the first one. We are not the mole in the hole, but only the ant in the mole's hole. A very intelligent ant, of course. But the mole gives a damn about its intelligence. And the world cares little about the mole. (May 7, 1972)*

* "There are no attenuating circumstances in literature at all." I wish I had said that first; I must pin that to the masthead of this magazine. That is just what most of the writers for this magazine have been trying to say all along. :: Mr Lem sent me another letter, which I don't think I am at liberty to publish, showing me just how well he does economically. Only Heinlein and Asimov would be in the same category in terms of US currency. But Lem does not sit back and look smug, as Asimov seems to. :: And just to prove that that little story is really true, here is the Secret Master of the Intercontinental Philosophical Missile: *

* FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER
A-2762 Ortman, Felsenstrasse 20, Austria

What sort of madness is this: 120 pages? I was struck by a similar madness in the last few weeks: I've postponed all professional work, and instead produced three issues of QUARBER MERKUR during the last few weeks: Nos 29, 30, and 31: 90, 94, and 96 pages. If you ever find a translator from the German I've lots of goodies in these issues: Soviet cosmonaut German Titov, Jan Blonski, L A Anninski, Malgorzata Szpakowska, Professor Ketterer (a section from a forthcoming Doubleday Anchor book), and Lem, of course.

It seems that I still owe you an answer to some of your questions. I don't agree with you that George Turner launched the major attack on Lem. He seems to prefer a different kind of essay-writing, and there seems to be little point in attacking his position: you either share his premises or you reject them. As it happens, Lem feels that Turner is a very interesting writer, and if he disagrees with our ideas, or rather our way of presenting things, that can't be helped. Whether it is more difficult to write this or that way: who can tell? It is true that Lem has a heavy philosophical bias, and that's to be expected of a writer who has been published in STUDIA FILOSOFICZNE or ETYKA in Poland, and NOVYI MIR and VOPROSSY FILOSOFII in the Soviet Union. I can well imagine Mr George Turner writing criticism for one of the big national dailies, but surely he would be out of place in a journal such as, say, THE BRITISH JOURNAL FOR THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE. I for one don't find Lem that difficult; compared with Ernst Bloch or Theodor W Adorno his essays (but one should bear in mind that they were written in a foreign language, in German) are very easy to read. But I seem to recall that you once found it necessary to delete the word "stochastic" in one of his essays: it seems strange to imagine a readership of science fiction who, you must have thought, has to be saved the effort to find out the meaning of such a common word (although it can be found also in J G Ballard). I find that Lem's essays

(in German, at least) show a fine rhythm. But even in English, unless I'm totally mistaken, there are passages that are very witty, and elegant. For instance, I find his short and precise logical analysis of Boucher's A QUEST FOR SAINT AQUIN (in ROBOTS AND S F) wonderful: it is, incidentally, an ironic comment on Blish's remark on the same story in his CATHEDRALS IN SPACE (in THE ISSUE AT HAND), and shows how much more penetrating a critic Lem is. Where both Mr Turner and Lem have written on the same books, I find Lem's analysis much deeper: i.e. on Sturgeon, or on Blish's CASE OF CONSCIENCE. Turner's review of CASE makes pleasant reading, but it isn't very insightful.

I have a confession to make to my femme-fan No 1, Mrs Sandra Miesel: Although I vowed, when I was five years old, never to smile on my life, not even when reading Mrs Miesel's letters, I once did smile, when I, a boy of fifteen, read my first s f story; and such reckless endeavour was punished at once: my face did indeed crack apart (which I've hidden so far but can keep secret no longer): but this abnormality serves to distinguish me from people who go around with a cracked head, as one can deduce from their letters. And while I am at confession, what little honesty I have forces me to admit that I do indeed find Mrs Miesel's criticism interesting, and probably think much better of her than she does of me. Indeed, perhaps she is even a tragic case of almost classical proportions: it is rare to find combined in one person so much knowledge, enthusiasm, and industry, with so little judgment. For no amount of critical effort will make the dull writers she has undertaken to explicate to us - from Tolkien via Delany and Zelazny, to Poul Anderson - any more interesting. True, she also likes Cordwainer Smith (because he is a conservative or because of the mythic patterns in his work?) and Philip K Dick (because of the Eastern thought in his work?), and pained as I am to admit it, none of us is perfect, not even I, not even Sandra Miesel. We cannot trust that the writers she commends to us may safely be disregarded: alas, we still must read them ourselves.

And may I add one final correction: What she or your correspondent Mr McGuire say about Eastern scholarship may be true or not: but even she should have recognised that I don't belong to any scholarly tradition: I am a polemicist, if I may say so. (July 27, 1972)*

* I'm not sure how that missile explosion shook the ground; probably it just chased away a few more readers of SFC, for whom I don't have spare copies anyway. :: In 1969, I didn't know the word "stochastic", so it didn't go in my fanzine. When I looked up the word in the CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY, even the explanation of the word didn't make much sense, and it had "(obs.)" for "obsolete" beside the word, anyway. I still dispute Franz's use of the word "antinomial" in translations: it's a word that very few English-speaking people use, and as far as I can tell, it means the same as "contradictory" in all the places where Franz uses it. There is quite some difference between "the English language" and "English usage", and I'm fairly committed to English (or rather, Australian) usage, whenever possible. :: In the same letter Franz sent me a lot of interesting news about his professional career. The next day he wrote to say that many of his big plans had had to be cancelled or pushed back, so I'm not sure what the situation is at the moment. All I can say is that anybody who still thinks of Franz as a fan writer is mistaken; for he is well on his way to becoming one of the major influences in world professional s f publishing. :: As you can see, it takes very little to make the "new", drippy, even slightly fannish, Gillespie disappear. I feel fine this morning, and I like a good barney, so here to take her right of reply is:

* SANDRA MIESEL
8744 North Pennsylvania Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46240, USA

While I wouldn't care to give you a serious answer to "Why do you bother to exist?", a facetious reply would be: "I have a dream of one day hanging Franz Rottensteiner from a sour apple tree." Since you and your readers by now realise my profound aversion for Rottensteiner and all his opinions, further demonstration is a waste of everybody's time. But a few points of information require answers. When I think of Poland - which is seldom - it is a place with a dull native cuisine. I have a working (although not letter-perfect) knowledge of Latin, French, and German. (I spent the sleepless night before my biochemistry departmental exams mentally composing a Latin parody of the DIES IRAE suited to the occasion, which partly goes to show why I was happier studying medieval history.) The valid question of Lem's knowledge of English has now been settled, more or less, but what is proven by invoking his command of German and other people's lack of same? A flash of linguistic pride? No, I do not read the modern French novelists. I read French historians. My pleasure reading is concentrated on history, archaeology, art history, and comparative mythology, which accounts for the content-orientation Christine McGowan observed in my TAU ZERO essay. What I see in Philip Dick is aptly summed up in the prologue to THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH. But is there nothing good to be said about Rottensteiner? Astonishingly, I can think of one: he has yet to inflict detailed accounts of his sex life on fanzine readers.

John Gibson's article is one of the few which make the obscure classic under discussion sound interesting enough to search for.

The Anderson title you couldn't remember is TIME LAG.

Fie, Harry Warner; de Camp displays an excellent sense of humour in person!

I withdraw my criticism of the ancient documents in YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN, pending re-study. (July 19, 1972)*

* Now it's easy to find out the main point of disagreement between me and Sandra Miesel. At least for the time being, I will defend the proposition that fiction is The Only Thing Worth Reading. I don't mean for people like John Foyster who can read most of the non-fiction that appears each year, as well as all the fiction. I mean for people like me who are sometimes gulled into the idea of "catching up" on some subject or another, and then wonder why we get sick and tired of dull books. The great works of fiction, books such as MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES and Flaubert's novels, are worth far more to me than any and all of the University subjects I've ever read for, and all the billions of pieces of information that we could unearth about these books' authors, or their sources, or the Mythology of The Pale Young Man in Modern Bourgeois Literature.

* But that's a Statement of Faith, which is what Peter Weston talks about in SPECULATION 30, which I received yesterday. "At last!" I thought, "a real fanzine." And indeed, SPECULATION is back; a real fanzine, with plenty of statements with which I can thoroughly disagree. Pete Weston talks a lot about Australian fans, and me in particular, so I will be sending him a letter of comment. In case that letter does not appear in print for another

eight months or so, I might just say that Lem's statement, "There are no attenuating circumstances in literature at all", is my answer to Pete Weston's Statement of Faith. However, I don't see a complete division between our views: mine is more interesting, that's all. The Philip Dick Debate didn't shape up quite as well as I expected, but SPECULATION contains something that gives me the greatest pleasure: Pete Weston, actually writing to his audience. He says some very sensible things too, like "I often wish that Bruce Gillespie, too, would get married... That would soon fix him!" But to whom? Now that Peter has actually produced a magazine that I can flog to SFC's Australian readers, let me say that the world's best fanzine has appeared, and I am agent: 4 for \$2.

* The magazine that I expect to win next year's Hugo, however, is RICHARD E GEIS, which I would have called "the world's best fanzine" if Pete Weston hadn't returned to fanzine publishing. Because of this magazine, Dick Geis was a sort of Ghost Guest of Honour at Syncon; his magazine seems to have affected John Bangsund more than it did to me, and REG No 1 really bowled me over. Dick Geis puts his diary on stencil - which wouldn't be very interesting if only Geis wasn't one of the most extraordinary people in fandom. In some ways, he lives the perfect life - enough savings so that he will hardly need to work again for the rest of his life; he writes for a living when he does work; and almost infinite time to spend on his fanzine, letter-writing, and other activities. I must confess that I found his sexual customs rather - er - strange ("But you must have led a sheltered life if you haven't met people like Dick Geis," said John Bangsund at Syncon) but probably Geis has added immeasurably to the education of innocent young fans like me. I nearly forgot to say that RICHARD E GEIS costs \$1 a copy, or trade, and that Dick's new address is P O Box 11408, Portland, Oregon 97211, USA. As I said, next year's Hugo winner, curse him. (I have a few letters on file from Dick, but like many other things, they must wait until next issue.)

* Two news items: GRANADA PUBLISHING, 155-159 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, announce the following new titles that may interest SFC readers. In PALADIN books, they have THE HUMAN BRAIN (from SCIENCE JOURNAL) (July 1972), HUMAN REPRODUCTION (from SCIENCE JOURNAL) (July 1972), HOW THINGS WORK - THE UNIVERSAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MACHINES (August 1972), THE FUTURE OF WORK AND LEISURE (Stanley Parker) (August 1972), LIFE OF MAN (Theodor Rosebury) (August 1972), SOCIETY SCHOOLS AND HUMANITY (Douglas Holly) (September 1972), EDUCATION IN EVOLUTION (John Hurt) (November 1972), INTERVENTION AND REVOLUTION (Richard J Barnet) (January 1973), WITHOUT MARX OR JESUS (Jean Francois Revel) (January 1973), LINGUISTICS AT LARGE (ed. Noel Minnis) (May 1973), SCIENCE AND SOCIETY (Leslie Sklair) (May 1973), and FOLK DEVILS AND MORAL PANICS (Stan Cohen) (July 1973). PANTHER has SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (Kurt Vonnegut) (July 1972), THE DOOMSDAY BOOK (G Rattray Taylor) (July 1972), GOD BLESS YOU MR ROSEWATER (Kurt Vonnegut) (September 1972), TRIPLANETARY (E E Smith) (September 1972), WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE (Kurt Vonnegut) (November 1972), FIRST LENSMAN (E E Smith) (November 1972), GRAY LENSMAN (E E Smith) (February 1973), MOTHER NIGHT (Kurt Vonnegut) (May 1973), SECOND STAGE LENSMAN (E E Smith) (June 1973), and TARANTULA (Bob Dylan) (July 1973). :: GREENWOOD PRESS (51 Riverside Avenue, Westport, Connecticut 06880, USA), has recently reprinted PILGRIMS THROUGH SPACE AND TIME: TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN SCIENTIFIC AND UTOPIAN FICTION, by J O Bailey, billed by the publishers as "the first comprehensive survey of the origins of, and trends in, scientific fiction." Recommended by the Science Fiction Research Association. \$11.25 cloth; \$3.50 paper.

* Thanks to the support of so many people Out There, the schedule of SFC is likely to improve during the next twelve months. Remember: AUSTRALIA IN '73!
G'bye. Last stencil typed September 2, 1972.

where a few social factors have changed. Aldiss lets Jimmy discover his limitations and strengths for himself, instead of putting him through some pre-planned obstacle course. (In THE INTERPRETER and THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, Aldiss presumes that his characters will fail the course, anyway). Towler and people like Ainson succumb to the forces of ordinary existence without much of a struggle: Jimmy Solent does not quite win, but he does not lose either. In short, we could take Jimmy's place, and feel that we faced some of the same problems. Aldiss has the wit to get out of the way of his own brilliance, but at the same time writes his funniest book, and, except for the last twenty pages, comes closest to writing a perfect book. And THE PRIMAL URGE gave me some glimpse of what Aldiss' books are really about... but I won't discuss such grand topics in this article.

- Bruce R Gillespie February 1972

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MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE - S F COMMENTARY 29 CHECKLIST

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