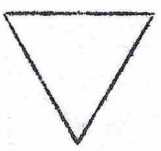
SCIENCE FICTION FORUM



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SCIENCE FICTION

FORUM

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Vol. 1, No. 1 March, 1957

CONTENTS

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EDITORIAL

by Lester del Rey

There is an old saying that a preface is a statement of intent and a book is an attempt to explain the preface. Perhaps that applies to editorials and publications, too. Certainly the Forum must demonstrate its own purpose in the long run; yet some statement of intent and function seems necessary, to judge by letters and comments from subscribers.

As stated in the advance notice, the Forum is meant to improve communication among writers. By communication, I mean far more than an exchange of words or even ideas, important as those may be. In fact, I am considering the word from its basic roots; the process of uniting-together--or communion. I feel that the most damaging thing to any man engaged in a creative activity is a state of mental isolation or spiritual separation.

Science fiction has always tended to be group-minded. Our fiction shows the urge to this in a number of often-repeated themes---men who unite with aliens, cultures fusing together, telepathic joining of minds, etc. Our readers have joined in fan clubs and organizations more than the readers of any other type of fiction. Our authors are, on the whole, a tighter clique than usual in any field. And, in my opinion, our "golden" periods have been ones in which the writer-to-writer and writer-to-editor relationships have been closest.

In the past, the problem of achieving a sort of group consciousness was fairly simple. Usually, there was only one dominant editor who served as a focus for enthusiasm and ideas--John Campbell, for example, infused his writers with a truly remarkable sense of something akin to brotherhood. I've never met Heinlein or Kuttner in person, yet they are inevitably "Bob" and "Hank" to me, and I automatically consider them friends and close compatriots. A vague idea from one writer went into the Campbell mill and came out with added bits from half a dozen other writers, probably in the form of a dozen stories--most of the top-notch--that would provoke ideas. While it lasted, it was wonderful.

Today, the situation has changed, radically. There are many editors with divergent views, no one of whom clearly dominates the field or has even enough force within his own circle to mold it into a coherent group. The small list of writers has grown to legion, and at least two major groups have developed with all too little common understanding, interest, or goals. The old writers are still with us, but a new group of writers has grown up. These younger men have their primary interest centered on writing as a thing for itself. and their secondary interests lie in the fields of the social sciences rather than in technology. Also, perhaps as a result of the general reaction against the dangers of technological weapons in the

(Continued on page 45)

OF GUTLESS WONDERS

by Frederik Pohl

I make the greater part of my living from science fiction---have done so, in fact, for most of my life. I like science fiction. I was weaned on it---at the age of ten or twelve I spent as much time on Barsoom as I did in Brooklyn; my shop project at summer camp was a model of the Skylark of Valeron. And yet I don't recall when I last bought a copy of a science fiction magazine on a newsstand.

Speaking as a reader, the plain fact of the matter is that science fiction is no longer very much fun to read. There is very little on the newsstand today in magazines that is worth the trouble of turning the pages, much less the cost of purchase.

It's easy to blame this state of affairs on gutless editors---or what is almost worse, monomaniacal editors, who find it easier and safer to repeat the good old reliable drivel, or who embark on foolish odysseys into the lands of deroes and dianetics, or their more recent successors. I have done my share of this blame-casting, particularly when a story of my own in which I took some pride has wound up in the bargain basement. But it isn't all the editors. It isn't nearly all the editors. An editor can louse up your story before he prints it, an editor can bounce your best work; but having done that he has done his worst. He can't make you unwrite a good story; he can't keep you from sending it off to someone else. And it simply is not so that---bearing in mind the hordes of magazines, competing for every halfway decent story in existence---very many really good stories can fail to get published somewhere. I know at least a dozen science fiction writers, myself included, who haven't a single unsold manuscript; what's good has been sold, along with what's bad; if the stuff isn't good, it isn't the editor's fault, it's ours.

§ § §

Probably the worst piece of advice that anyone ever gave a reasonably good writer is this: Study your markets.

For the hopefuls in the slush pile, it figures. They're learning their trade. But for a writer who has it within himself to write a good story, the advice is poison; it produces not writing but rewriting; it produces yard goods--perfectly publishable, sometimes amusing, but devoid of...well...guts.

Study your market means: Slanting. Slanting means: Learning what buttons to push, and even more important, what to avoid.

The longer a writer has been around the more buttons he has isolated and labeled in his mind. Since ordinarily he wants to copper his bets---if Campbell or Gold doesn't buy it, he'll want to try it on Gold or Campbell; if they won't bite, Boucher must be considered. There are two or three sets of buttons that must be pushed or not pushed if a writer expects to sell to these markets.

Now, each of these men is absolutely and entirely within his rights. More than that, each is morally obligated to print what he considers good and avoid what he considers bad. I happan, as an individual, to pretty much disagree with Campbell's present policy, to endorse Gold's and to be on the fence about Boucher's; but that has nothing to do with it; an editor's job is to edit; a magazine worth reading is one which reflects the editor's personality; a great sickness that has come over American magazine publishing in general, not science fiction, is the tendency toward editorial boards and other averaging-out managerial techniques that squeeze the personality out of everything they print, leaving only a residue of pap. God forbid that this should happen to science fiction; but if it does happen it won't be the fault of the editors; it will be the fault of the writers.

For that is where the array of buttons comes in.

God forbid that this should happen; but it is happening. I mentioned a moment ago that I hardly ever buy a science fiction magazine, but I don't mean to disqualify myself as an expert witness. The stories that are thought by someone or other to be any good are usually anthologized, and I have read most of the anthologies; the magazines that contain stories of my own I do read; a fair number of my friends leave magazines around the house; and, more than all of this, I have recently been doing a spot of editing. All in all, I should think I've read a couple million words of science fiction in the past few months, including what were offered to me by reputable sources as the best stories money could buy.

What emerges from this reading is an inescapable conclusion that as a class, we science-fiction writers have been doing our homework faithfully, studying our markets, and so contriving our stories as to offend no one, appeal to the least common denominator ef editorial policy and---therefore, q.e.d.--be dull, trivial and pointless.

A good story can't run an obstacle course. If you choose to set your story on the second moon of Aldebaran XXIX, it is your job to tell us something interesting about that moon; about its people, if it has people, and their customs, if they have customs. If, in attempting to describe these people and folkways, you find yourself automatically writing around great areas of their culture---i. e., Joe won't print it if I discuss sex; Sam says to lay off politics; Harold won't let me touch on religion--well, what have you got left?

The answer is this: What you have got left is a cross-section of the best available stories, by good writers, that are being offered to editors today.

Frank Munsey was a tyrant, but about at least one thing he was right. He insisted on being the sole authority on his magazines because, he said, no magazine can survive the mistakes of more than one man. But even though today's science-fiction magazines are one-man affairs, they are being forced to suffer under the defects of committee rule; not because the editors want it that way; but because the writers make it that way. There is entirely too much fooling around with little bits and pieces of stories, with handling of silly and peripheral themes; there is all too much concentration

on the urbane joke and on weary gimmickry. The story that anybody might buy is the story that nobody really wants. It is a story that does no harm to anyone--and no good.

§ § §

The kind of story that we all have to write is the kind that will bring us a check. All right; that is a fact of life; even science-fiction writers have to eat.

Still, the kind of story we ought to write is the kind that will keep on bringing us checks because it is a good story. It is not necessary to be poor but intellectually honest; if we will take the trouble to write stories that are worth writing, we will find ourselves doing rather better than the button-pushers. There are plenty of writers around---fill in your own list of names---who learned their manual of button-pushing so well that they forgot the knack of creation. They can sell so-and-so every time, they brag; and they're perfectly right; they do. Or at least they do up until the time so-and-so loses his job, or changes his feelings. And then what?

But a good story is worth doing for its own sake; and it is one of the great joys of our field that quite often virtue is ultimately rewarded; a story that the author has taken the trouble to make good quite often pays for the investment of time and talent not once but many times over. How often has John Campbell sold "Who Goes There?" How often has Lester del Rey sold Nerves---or Philip Klass "Child's Play"?

In a high-type cultural periodical like this one here, I deplore my tendency to equate money with merit; I excuse it by saying that I only wish to point out that writing good stories can and should be at least as profitable as writing bad stories, so that excuse hardly holds water.

In fact, there is no excuse that holds water. There is a reason why potentially fine writers limit themselves to trivia and trash; and the reason is a sort of coyly assertive "professionalism" that makes it almost a point of honor to sell a story on tricks and button-pushing instead of on merit. Writer A did a story in three and a half hours and, boy, it was lousy, but he got four cents a word for it. Writer B figures: Well, I'll show that son of a gun something, so he does a story in two hours, and it's even worse; but he gets four cents and an advance against the sequel. B is pleased as punch; by selling a worse story than A, he has demonstrated that he, B, is a "bigger name". Or, perhaps, that he knows better than A what buttons to push. That is a reason, yes; but hardly an excuse.

For less brilliant, but still capable, writers there is the other reason, aforementioned: "It's what the editors want."

And that's no excuse, either. The hell with what the editors want! The only kind of story an editor can possibly know in advance that he wants is bound to be yard goods. The occasional really great stories that come along he can never "know" he wants until he sees them, because they are a line of produce that doesn't exist until they are created. Hugo Gernsback didn't know he wanted "A

Martian Odyssey" until it came in over the transom---how could he? There had never been anything quite like it. Weinbaum didn't push buttons; he didn't slant; it was his first story and he was too ignorant to slant. All he could do was write a story the best he knew how, and produce something that is being copied and imitated at fifth and tenth hand today. The same can be said, for example, of The Skylark of Space. Maybe you think that's old-fashioned space opera; but I wonder if any of you young fellers have any idea what an impact, what an eye-opening revelation, that story had for the field in 19--what? 28? Around there somewhere.

This isn't to say that unless you can write a true masterpiece that will leave an indelible mark on the field, don't bother. No, not at all.

But, damn it, why not try?

§ § §

It happens that I am editing a magazine.

Heretofore, I have been speaking in general terms, as a "science-fictionist", whatever that is, availing myself of a science-fictionist's privilege of criticising editors---mildly enough; but still, it is hardly decorous for one editor to criticize another editor at all. For this I blame everything on Lester del Rey; he told me this magazine is supposed to be on the level, pulling no punches and paying no lip-service to custom. Well, that's an interesting experiment right there.

For the preceding remarks, I therefore claim special privilege. What follows I wish to put in different terms.

As an editor, whose business is buying stories, I find myself in the position of having to ask for something without knowing exactly what it is. Simply, I want good stories. But what I want, very very badly, is great stories, and how one goes about getting them someone may know, but I don't.

There must be someone, somewhere, who can write great stories--the kind that one can sell without throwing in green stamps or, their moral equivalents, button-pushing and tricks. There must be someone who can do for some aspect of science fiction---

§ What S. Fowler Wright did for Evolved Humanity with his giants and amphibians in The World Below, so real that you could taste their food and feel the texture of their tunnels.

§ What Fritz Leiber did in a vignette, in "A Bad Day for Sales", a story so perfectly written that it has hardly been imitated, because he made it unnecessary for anyone ever to tackle that story again.

§ What T. L. Sherred did with a Time Viewer in "E for Effort"---brilliant, convincing and, most of all, complete.

§ What Jerry Bixby did with a Strange Kid in "It's a Good Life"--once again, complete; you know everything you need to know about the kid, and nothing you don't. (Editor's note: Think about this for a while! How many stories are complete--and why not?)

§ What Jim Blish did in translating the moods and motivations of a Jesuit into extra-solar space, in "A Case of Conscience."

§ What Arthur Clarke did in "Rescue Party", a l-o-n-g story that is merely very good until you feel the tangential jolt of the last two lines.

§ What Alfred Bester did in the way of kidding the pants off the medium itself in "5,271,009".

--What, for that matter, Henry Kuttner, Cyril Kornbluth, or Ted Sturgeon--and a dozen others--can do; but what nobody can do while making a conscious effort to work on an editor's idiosyncratic likes and avoid his taboos.

What science fiction needs, what very little of the current crop appears to have, is: Guts.

END

CONTRIBUTORS

FREDERIK POHL, one of the earliest "big name" fans, became the first editor of Astonishing and Super Science before he was twenty. He wrote a great many stories, all under pen names. After the war, he turned literary agent, handling many of the major s-f writers, and edited numerous anthologies, including the "Star" series. Since retiring from this to full time writing, he has established himself as a leading author in science fiction. Space Merchants, written in collaboration with C.M. Kornbluth, received rave reviews in the IWW publication and in Advertising Age! His article is the result of a recent return to editing a magazine, with the perspective on current manuscript submissions gained from being away from professional reading for several years.

LESTER DEL REY graduated from a letter hack to a writer in 1937. He has edited a writers' magazine and four s-f magazines, written technical and juvenile books, and been managing editor of a large literary agency, where he wrote at least five million words of story criticism--a good bit more than his total fictional output. He has appeared in nearly every field of magazine fiction.

DAMON KNIGHT has been fan, writer, assistant editor at Popular Publications, a critic for a literary agency, editor of the short-lived but excellent Worlds Beyond, and was voted science fiction's leading book reviewer. His reviews have been collected in a book, In Search of Wonder, which demonstrates that he has the extremely rare talent of creative criticism.

JAMES BLISH has established a reputation as a serious critic outside as well as inside science fiction. He is an authority on Joyce and Ezra Pound, a technically trained epistemephile, and a writer whose work is noted for depth of content and breadth of concept.

ALGIS BUDRYS has been a full-time writer since his first sale, about six years ago. He has worked as an assistant for Galaxy and Gnome Press. Lion books will soon issue his second novel and Ballantine Books has contracted for his third.

THE MARKET

These market reports were gathered just before going to press, and are therefore current. So far as possible, we have tried to determine what is wanted and what is not wanted. However, the current sellers' market situation makes most editors reluctant to refuse any type of story and means that inventories are so low that there are few stories on the "don't want, overstocked" list.

Rates and times for reporting are as given to us. If readers of the Forum have reason to question this or any other detail, we shall very much want to hear it. In the long run, we hope to get as many writers as possible to share their experiences of the markets here; only by such pooling of information can it be of full value. However, certain facts--perhaps unfair, but standard practice--must be borne in mind. Editors are forced to pay their top rates to men who are well-established and in high demand, or whose agents handle enough such writers to demand better treatment for all writers (not as common as some writers think). This means that the newer writer must accept minimum rates, mostly. Also, in some cases manuscripts are divided into "rush" (from agents and established writers) and "slush" (all non-rush mss.), with the slush being read much later. It sometimes helps to enclose a brief letter telling where you have sold previously, though it cannot guarantee rush treatment. Wherever not otherwise stated, treatment should be for all manuscripts.

This is a sampling of the market, not a comprehensive list. We must devote extra space to each market when first covered, but hope to cover all others next issue. Also, we are trying to set up a system of "scouts" and forms which will permit full coverage in the near future in each issue.

STAR SCIENCE FICTION, Frederik Pohl, editor; 386 West Front St., Red Bank, N. J. Published quarterly, at least initially. Rates: see below. Any length up to 20,000 words. Reports usually within 48 hours, payment within 24 hours of acceptance.

This is an open market, now buying for both the first and second issues; since the editor wants to build an inventory and can pay for one, it will remain open and active for some time. It is published by Ian Ballantine, but is not part of Ballantine Books; it will have a regular magazine format (though a pocketbook-type format is to be issued for export markets). No particular type of material will be given preference; Pohl declares he has an open mind, and has even bought a story based on psionics and the Heironymous machine which he considers uncomfortably related to another market.

The rate of payment is flexible here: "never less than 1 cent, nor much over 3 cents per word." The payment is based on the story rather than on the reputation of the writer. Pohl says it depends on how well the writer combines the various elements of a story--writing skill, characterization, background, theme or idea, and a good plot. As an example, a story with a good idea or interesting

writing might be worth 1 cent a word. With both, or with some other combination, it might be worth more. With all elements, it would be worth maximum rates. If the writer has written interestingly about something interesting, he has an excellent chance for the top rates. So far, Pohl says he has bought some good stories and some bad ones--and expects to buy more of each type.

At least some art work will be used. Artists should approach Ian Ballantine at 101 Fifth Avenue, New York City. Agents may also use that address as a mail drop, though manuscripts will receive faster reports if sent directly to Pohl at the above address.

GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION, H. L. Gold, editor; 421 Hudson St., New Work 14, N. Y. Published monthly.

This magazine has an individual angle on most things. Rates are based on 3 cents per word base, with half a cent bonus from fourth sale on; starting with the seventh sale, a writer receives 4 cents regularly. Reports to established writers go out within a week and frequently even faster; slush submissions receive reports in about three weeks, normally. Payment is on acceptance. Preferred length in shorts, up to 6000 words; novelettes, 7500 to 12,000 words; novellas, 15,000 to 18,000 words; two to four-part serials in instalments of novella length.

Up-beat stories are preferred here, though most submissions seem to be heavily down-beat. No psionics wanted in stories. Also not wanted are post-atomic-war stories, or the cliché socker endings---such as the hero turning out to be Adam or Christ; these, it seems, are still being submitted regularly.

Gold most wants stories where the writer makes a full extrapolation from the background and idea, and digs out all the peripheral ideas. However, these should not be reserved for a pay-off punch, but should be worked into the main body of the story. The use of the final paragraphs to salvage a story is not wanted. The theme and problem should be honestly stated at once, and everything then worked out logically.

ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION, John W. Campbell, Jr., editor; 304 East 45th St., New York 17, N. Y. Published monthly.

Here, also, payment is based on a system of basic rate--3 cents--plus bonus. For best story in an issue, bonus is 1 cent, for next best, half a cent. Choice is determined by reader vote, but a story often receives the bonus in advance according to editorial rating--not subject to retraction. Payment is on acceptance. Reports are exceptionally prompt to established writers, and may take about two weeks for other submissions.

This market is now wide open, with no overstocked lengths. From short-short to novel will find an eager reception. This is not the normal rule here, so if you have a novel in the works, it would be the ideal time to query.. All types of fiction based on ideas, not on mere writing tricks, will be considered. (But putting psionics into a story probably won't help it here; Campbell prefers balance, and can also spot the hastily psionicised gimmick.) Personal contact is welcomed, and often profitable to writers here.

VENTURE SCIENCE FICTION, Robert P. Mills, editor; 527 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Published bi-monthly. Rates: 1 to 2 cents per word. Any length up to 25,000 words. Reports go out in one week, usually sooner. Payment is on acceptance.

This magazine has almost no inventory at present and needs material badly; in fact, Mills says it is "starving" for stories. It is not a typical "reject" market, though no history of rejection will prejudice the editor against a story. Mills most wants science fiction which has the elements of writing found in a general adventure story. He doesn't get enough about people in trying circumstances. Sex is a desired element here, but not in every story; and it should be an honest part of the story, not mere teasing thrown in. Technical ideas or gadgets are okay, but they must not interrupt the story. On the unwanted list are stories which are nothing but clever plot gimmicks or depend on symbols instead of ideas.

Incidentally, word count here is based on final accepted length, and excess wordiness may be cut. The final count is based on the number of characters per page (spaces per line times number of lines per page) divided by six. This relates word-count to the space on the final printed page. Generally, it will work out in favor of the writer. It might be advisable to examine your manuscript against the method used by Mills. If you find that you come out with more words by using his system, change your figure. This is entirely fair and will help insure getting maximum payment for your work.

INFINITY SCIENCE FICTION, Larry T. Shaw, editor; 47 East 44th St., New York 17, N. Y. Published each six weeks. Rates: 1 to 3 cents. Report in three weeks. Payment is promptly on scheduling; this means that material accepted before making up an issue must be held until the issue is made up for payment, but that checks go out far ahead of publication.

Stories are needed here up to 15,000 words, with a particular need for fiction from 4000 to 6000 words long. There is little inventory on hand (which means prompter payment, also). Shaw claims sales have been good, and the change from bi-monthly to an issue every six weeks should make this a more active market. He reports that "slush" has been too little and too weak, also.

What is particularly wanted is a strongly plotted story. Too many submissions are of the minor gimmick type, without a real story. Also, too many involve what Shaw calls the "domestic problem"; that is, they revolve around a little man who is pushed around by the developments and who does too little himself. The reasonably strong hero who fights and beats the odds should go well. Humor is wanted, but must have a sound story behind it.

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES, same address. Rates 1 to 2 cents--- lengths 12,000 to 15,000. No shorts. Slant on a stronger level of action. Shaw sees too many big, invulnerable superman heroes, off on a mission. Needed are underdog heroes (even with internal weaknesses) who take a beating while fighting to victory.

Both magazines welcome free-lance art. Pay about average. Artists must not be too far from New York for personal contact.

NOTICE

It will be appreciated if the Science Fiction Forum is not mentioned in columns which normally review publications in this field. The Forum is intended for circulation only to a limited list of subscribers with a professional interest in science fiction. We will not normally exchange copies with other publications, nor do we intend to attempt increasing our subscription list, except as such an increase will let us reach a larger group of s-f professionals.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions, as indicated elsewhere, are very much wanted. We cannot lay down any hard or fast rules for what is desired--probably the very best articles are the ones we haven't yet thought of. If you have an idea on the subject of science fiction which might be of interest to others in the field, then it should be something in which we are interested. It may be critical; it may involve work methods; it may simply prove that some other idea is wrong. About all we are not interested in is general chitchat about being a writer--and even that isn't a hard and fast rule, as yet.

However, to save time and trouble, it is strongly advisable that you query first; queries may be addressed to either Damon Knight or to Lester del Rey, at the addresses on the table of contents, page 1. This will save duplication of effort in case someone else had the same general idea, or if we should already have something that is on the same subject. If so, incidentally, it may be possible to work out an approach which will let us make use of the material in your suggestion where it does not overlap, even in closely related subjects.

We should appreciate receiving your ideas and suggestions at the earliest possible time. We have a later deadline and more freedom, naturally, than most publications, but it is still of great assistance to us to have a rough idea of an issue well in advance.

Our rate of payment for all material is fixed at absolute zero, of course. We can only offer you our own gratitude and the knowledge that your contributions may help others in the field, or even make some progress toward improving the whole field. We will try to be reasonably prompt in replying; but in some cases, there may be some delay, since the joint-editorship requires time for consultation.

CORRESPONDENCE

So far as possible, we'll try to answer all correspondence that requires a reply as quickly as we can. However, our time is limited, and there may be some delay.

DEADLINE

The deadline for all copy for the next issue is set for May 1.

MAGAZINE REVIEWS

This department will cover the three major magazines from month to month, and will try to hit the high spots in the rest of the field as space allows. The ratings are from A (excellent) to F (hopelessly bad). They represent the individual reviewer's judgment and one man's A may be another's C; but as assignments rotate, we hope these differences will tend to level out. The issue scores are arrived at by averaging story ratings, for convenience.

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Reviewed by Damon Knight

February, 1957		March, 1957	
THE LAST CANTICLE	Miller C	SURVIVAL TECHNIQUE	Anderson/Gray B
EXPEDITION	Brown B	THE PROPER SPIRIT	Bloch C
THE DARK BOY	Derleth C	UP	Fontenay D
WATCH THIS SPACE	Clarke D	DAWN INVADER	Sheckley C
A QUESTION OF RESIDENCE	Clarke D	THE CANVAS PYRAMID	Roberts C
THE INFERLAB PROJECT	Edmondson C	THE SPLENDID SOURCE	Matheson D
OLD DEVLIN WAS A-WAITING	Wellman D	ADDED INDUCEMENT	Young D
		VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET	Vidal C
JOURNEY'S END	Anderson A	LAST	Leiber A
Score - C		Score - C	

Science fiction editors (their brains canalized, according to Mr. Hayakawa) frequently wind up taking their own speculations too seriously; this interferes with story judgment, and the results we see all around us. I offer the sobering thought, with these two issues as documentary evidence, that an editor can also err through failing to take the stuff seriously enough.

Of eight stories in the February issue, four are jokes. The March issue has nine stories; again, four are jokes. If these seemed uproariously funny to me, I suppose I wouldn't mind, but the best of them is Fred Brown's mildly amusing pun on the word "expedition". The Anderson-Gray story belongs to the series of second looks Anderson has been taking at overworked plots---in this case, the one about the American go-getter who has himself a time transforming ancient Rome, or Athens, or what have you. It would have made a dandy long novelette; as it is, it's synoptic, and the joke itself is not good for more than a gentle smile.

The Edmondson is sort of New Yorker-style parody of almost everything, from the private-eye mystery to whithering science fiction. It's agreeably written but is neither meaty enough to take seriously, nor funny enough for more than the aforesaid smile. At the Bloch, the smile begins to slip, unless you love a pun at any price. The two Clarke stories are unutterably trivial: one is nothing but an inept rehash of Heinlein's advertising gimmick in The Man Who Sold the Moon (this one has been stolen all around the lot recently); the other, God help us, is about taxes on lunar authors.

The Matheson (from Playboy) was written for an audience with

very little attention to spare for the text; it's labored and nauseously cute. Vidal's script was not bad on TV, where s-f is still in the neolithic age, but in cold print it is an embarrassingly sloppy job, heavily padded, static, badly organized, and with four of the five principal characters lifted bodily from The Man Who Came to Dinner.

This leaves us nine stories which are more or less serious in tone and intent. From these we can deduct three out-and-out fantasies: Derleth's standard ghost story, which has some moving moments but no surprises; another of Wellman's peculiarly unconvincing mixtures of folk balladry and superstition; and the Young, in which the old sell-me-your-soul plot is so mishandled that you're left thinking, not how devilishly clever the Adversary is, but how incredibly stupid his victims.

Six stories remain. The best of these to my taste are Leiber's vivid little one-pager, crammed to bursting with visionary meaning, and Poul Anderson's "Journey's End". Here, just as he did in "The Man Who Came Early", Anderson has performed the parodist's duty to the hilt: he has not only destroyed the previous sentimentalist conception of this theme (the first meeting of the only two telepaths in the world) but has put up something artistically enduring in its place.

For the rest, Sheckley is on hand with his usual ingenious but irresponsible job; the sloppiness of the language ("planets...contained no life") extends to the logic as well: we are asked to be in doubt about the issue of a conflict staged on a ground and with weapons which exist only in the imagination of one of the contestants. Jane Roberts' second F&SF story is substantially the same as her "First Communion" in Fantastic Universe; both are fairly obvious treatments of the pied piper theme, enlivened only by the occasional vividness of the Bradburian prose.

"Up," the March novelette, is a one-punch story with the punch plainly visible from the fourth page on (the story is 22 mortal pages long); it has an impossibly dumb geologist-engineer for a hero, and for most of its inordinate length the story treats him as the butt of a primitive joke. The first Mars-landing boat is stranded for lack of fuel oxygen; one of the other crew members mentions levitation for a gag, and the hero takes it seriously. In a fantasy magazine this has only one possible outcome. For a twist, Fontenay makes the hero come to realize that his mystic power is no good unless used for others' benefit; he stays on Mars, hoisting the boat and the rest of the crew by psi-and-grunt power. Dramatically, this depends on the "fact", planted earlier, that the hero is a compulsively selfish man. But this plant is so little integrated into the story that it does not register at all: Fontenay shows you that the hero is stubborn and stupid; he only tells that he is selfish.

Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s "The Last Canticle" is the concluding third story in the series that began with "A Canticle for Leibowitz". This one carries the Leibowitzian order forward 1,824 years from the present (I suppose, via exact analogues of classical Greece and Rome, medieval and modern Europe) to another armed truce before

Armageddon. Not only have the atom bomb and the cold war come around again; not only has the Roman Catholic Church passed through nearly two thousand years, doubling its age, without any perceptible doctrinal evolution, but Miller's secular culture is a carbon copy of this one, from newscasts to ballerinas. Now this in itself is flatly incredible; but even if it were the most normal thing in the world for history to swallow its own tail, what must be the state of mind of a writer who would imagine there is anything artistically to be gained by writing about 1970 and calling it 3781?

It seems to me this is one of the classic negative speculations that have to be ruled out of science fiction, except as gags. If a rocket ship goes to Mars and finds that all the Martians speak English and live in nice Ohio towns; or if a time traveler winds up in the year 20,000 and finds it's exactly like 1910, this is funny once, but as meat for the table it will not do: it cancels out what we write and read science fiction for in the first place.

A craftsman as adept as Miller could have rescued this with pyrotechnics and good plotting and good characterization. But the story is almost unbelievably pedestrian; the chief characters, Joshua and Zerchi, are a pair of Don Camillos dedicated to the proposition that being a monk is (a) soul-wrenching torment, and (b) fearfully droll. I've never met anybody who remotely resembled these people, with their baby talk and their two-second rages; I doubt that Miller has, either, in or out of a monastery. Celibacy is one thing; castration is another.

As for Miller's theology, I generally find myself moved, but remotely, by its earnestness, and repelled---in this case, strongly--by its bloodlessness and its reliance on dogma. Miller, I judge, is a man on the track of something powerful and important to say, but he hasn't said it here.

As for science fiction, I have the feeling it is being lost in the shuffle. Boucher is said to believe that his readers "do not dislike fantasy, but think they do." I think I do, too, and I wish Boucher would let that tail wag the dog a little harder.

ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION

Reviewed by James Blish

January, 1957		February, 1957	
GET OUT OF MY SKY (Pt 1)	Blish D	OMNILINGUAL	Piper B
NUISANCE VALUE	Russell C	GET OUT OF MY SKY (Pt 2)	Blish C
SECURITY RISK	Anderson C	UNLUCKY CHANCE	Pease B
FOR THE FIRST TIME	Cottrell C	THE MAN WITH THE CORK-SCREW MIND	Mullen E
THE EDUCATION OF ICKY	Correy F	THE WAR IS OVER	Budrys B
Score - D		Score - C	

From the professional's point of view, the primary interest in this magazine continues to center on the editor's preoccupation with "psi" forces as a springboard for stories. By my rough count, 113 pages of the total editorial content of these two issues are devoted to psi, and 172 to non-psi material. This would be dull enough for readers not sharing Mr. Campbell's enthusiasm, but even

these figures probably do him a favor he doesn't have coming. I arrived at them by crediting the first instalment of my own serial to the non-psi side of the ledger, but this is not quite fair, since as an entity the yarn would certainly be judged a psi story. With this allowed for, the total for the first two issues of 1957 is 145 pages of psi copy, and 140 pages of non-psi.

In the non-psi category is the Russell novelette. It is the third of three recent long ASF stories to propose that apparently helpless military prisoners can bollix up their powerful captors crucially; one of the earlier yarns was also by Russell, the other by Christopher Anvil. The theme appears to be made to order for Russell's gleeful iconoclasm, and true enough, the first story was funny. The Anvil piece was only mildly so, and this third go-around on the idea just leaves it gasping, exhausted, and bleeding from the mushy little ball of wishful thinking which lay at its core all along. "Nuisance Value" in particular gives its protagonists a pushover for a problem, by making the very idea of an escape-attempt inconceivable to their jailors.

The Piper is also non-psi. The central problem here is that of translating a long-dead Martian language, and Piper attacks it in sophisticated fashion. His point is that translating a tongue which belonged to a scientific culture is a problem inherently different from, and in the long run easier than, translating a pre-scientific language---because the basic clues are not philological, but physical. This is probably true, though Piper makes some assumptions about continuity of symbols which I think doubtful.

A more fundamental objection, however, is that this long story has almost no content as a story, despite its technological interest. The gimmick about the problem of translation is the center of the piece, rather than being, as it should, an important part of the background. The human relationships are thinly sketched, trite, remote from basic human emotions, and never at any point as interesting as the technicalities are. There is plenty of intellection in "Omnilingual," but virtually no insight.

I raise this point because I think there is no inherent reason why a story has to be dull because of its intellectual frame---even a psi story. But when an editor becomes convinced that a concept like psi is more than just a device---that it is real---then he becomes more interested in the gimmick-thinking than he is in the fiction. This is an old problem in science fiction, but it becomes acute when the editor's intent is frankly pedagogical.

/This is Knight taking over temporarily:

The Blish serial is a different problem. The story is about two imaginary planets, Home and Rathe, which revolve around each other, as the third element in a double-star Trojan system. In the first instalment, their mutual distrust has led to an arms race which is about to obliterate both planets; in the second, this hard problem is solved the easy way, by psi.

The poverty of the original idea is revealed by what Blish makes of it: a one-for-one analogy with the present situation of America

and Russia. (In the second instalment, this is varied by an equally crude analogy with the Arab nations.) The variations introduced in part 1 are insignificant. This story does not begin to say anything about the cold war which could not have been said more strongly and directly if Blish had called his nations the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

The symbol of the overhanging planet in the sky is a good one, or would have been if Blish had not loused it up by putting it on the blind side of Home---facing the all-water hemisphere, which at the time the story opens has recently been explored for the first time, and in which local superstition locates the Isle of the Dead. The Homebodies' clamor of "Get out of our sky", in this context, has about the same logic as an American jehad over real estate rights in Hell.

The protagonist, Aidregh, is a dismal milquetoast. The narrative is dead slow. When something does happen, it is usually a cliché (e.g., the spaceship captain who gasps out his news and then drops dead). The story is padded in nearly every conceivable way. The writing itself is full of Hollywood and Broadway witticisms, mangled metaphors, bromides and cuteness. All this applies to the main body of the story, but not to the prologue, which is vivid, compact, and fairly crackling with emotion. In the second instalment, also, there are some bits of honest writing; but in the epilogue, the other half of the frame, Blish throws his one solid achievement away by revealing it as a cheap trick.

The psi element in the second instalment is oddly enough the liveliest part of the story proper: as Blish says, any springboard will do, and psi is at least legitimate as science fiction; current affairs isn't. For my money, it was not, in this case, Campbell's direct interference which bollixed up the story. That was done by the author himself, in an attempt to push another of Campbell's buttons---the cockeyed-solar-system story, for which in the old days Bonestell would have done a cover. If there is a moral, this is it: The damage is already done when a writer says to himself, "This is a bad story which I can sell, and I'll make it up to my conscience later."

-- D. K./

The psi-based short stories in these two issues suffer uniformly from a failure to take any real interest in the characters, with the exception of the Pease. Here a dull-minded woman meets two aliens, discovers that she has psi powers, and scares both them and herself into fits. It is worth noting that Pease <u>did</u> try to set up his story primarily as a human problem, centered on his reluctant and dim-brained central character; whether or not it comes off for you depends on whether or not you find his protagonist too dull to be interesting in herself. It's supernally difficult to make an intentionally dull woman interesting in spite of herself, and I tihnk Pease lacked the skill to bring it off, but it was an honest attempt.

The Mullen, on the other hand, shows that he has learned nothing important about the craft of fiction since his moist, lumpy 1951

novel. The plot--a telepath set to trap an alien turns out to be a telepath himself, to his own surprise--is ancient and not improved in the retelling. The dialogue is devoted mostly to criss-cross lecturing for the benefit of the reader, so pompous in tone as to suggest that what you are reading is really a Perelman burlesque. The setting in a mental hospital is ill-imagined, and full of Mullen's familiar idiot-plot discrepancies (violent patients are quartered on the ward floor; isolation cells turn out to be unlocked at exactly the wrong moment; attendants are brutal and stupid in the presence of the doctor in charge, and go unreproved for it; the alien could bolt the hospital at any time, but waits until a moment of maximum danger for him.) The expository sections are overwritten, loaded with imprecise words and with such clumsy devices as dropping into the second person. The appearance of a story this ill-carpentered in a major magazine like ASF is a rebuke to every writer in the field who is struggling to perfect his craftsmanship.

The Anderson is readable. It has a mechanically competent plot, with a small snapper at the end. It does nothing with its psi frame but graft the old alternate-Earths hypothesis onto it, and does not provide any rationale for either. As idea-fiction it is thus an exercise in the interweaving of clichés; and its emotional content is limited to an echo of F.B. Long's old girl-in-the-moon dream-tales.

Cottrell gives us an immortal man turned into a moron by lobotomy, who got his immortality from a faith-healer in one of five possible ways--no one of which is more than mentioned, let alone defended. Its emotional content is kept at the lowest possible level by presenting this potentially pitiable human being as nothing more than a problem in life-insurance payments.

Lee Correy reduces the whole question of psi to that of a djinn who talks jive-talk with singular inaccuracy and has to be sent to a university before he can hope to understand modern science even as well as Correy does. The idea is wholly irresponsible to begin with, and it is executed with nauseating archness.

That leaves us with nothing left but Budrys, usually a dependable performer even at his most minor; and his is the only short story in these two issues which is non-psi. However: it is a puzzle-piece, the solution to which comes out of the author's hat. When it finally emerges, furthermore, it turns out to be a golem. Since this is not (to put the matter gently) a new idea, since Budrys has only a minute variation of it to offer us, since the variation itself comes unequipped with any rationale, and since the plot is so set up as to lead the reader to expect that it will be emptied of emotion by the ending (as indeed it is)...all these things being so, we will have to agree sadly that the whole thing is no more than a thin notion thinly executed--a sort of aborted sneeze.

Budrys at his worst is a serious technician with an unfailing ear for the language. This makes him look like a master next to Correy and Mullen, men who have no real knowledge of English, let alone fiction. But is this enough? A magazine like ASF, I submit, ought to be demanding the best of a writer like Budrys---not just making his weakest work look good by publishing it embedded in trash.

Unfortunately, these days Mr. Campbell seems to be more interested in education than in fiction---not a new situation for him, but no less deplorable for being familiar. Fiction should enlarge our understanding of our fellows first of all, or it will be entirely replaced by non-fiction, which can easily embrace every other function that communication serves. Now, it seems to me, Mr. Campbell is in a position to ignore this primary function of fiction more completely than ever before, because he believes that it is possible to short-circuit the process, and create rapport with "psi powers" and "psi machines". I think he is wrong, but that is not the issue. What is important is that such powers and machines are the antithesis of fiction. Fiction-writers who help Mr. Campbell to propagate them and the myth they serve are cutting their own throats.

If you doubt it, ask yourself this: Where are the fictional votaries of d.....s now? They genuflected; they served; they sold ASF---but the powers and machines didn't produce the hoped-for universal rapport and were jettisoned---and so were they. To be sure, psi is a good subject for stories; there are no bad springboards. But I submit that we dare not let ourselves be cajoled into becoming Assistant Propagandists instead of fiction-writers. We know what will happen to us if we do.

GALAXY SICENCE FICTION

Reviewed by Algis Budrys

February, 1957		March, 1957	
MY LADY GREENSLEEVES	Pohl C	THE IGNOBLE SAVAGES	Smith E
ADVANCE AGENT	Anvil C	SURVIVAL TYPE	Bone D
I AM A NUCLEUS	Barr C	AN EYE FOR A WHAT?	Knight C
THE BOMB IN THE BATHTUB	Scortia C	THE OTHER CELIA	Sturgeon A
THE MARTYR	Sheckley D	THE DEEP ONE	Ruzic F
		THE LIGHT	Anderson D
Score - C		Score - D	

It's often as nearly pointless to review any one issue of Galaxy as it would be in the case of any true slick. The quality may vary somewhat from month to month, but the feel seldom does. Horace Gold as an editor seems most concerned with overall tone--with dipping on a kind of stylistic overlay that's a flavor coating with some stories and a hard glaze on others.

This kind of trademark-aura is not to be taken as a good or bad thing in itself. Galaxy works hard to achieve the painstaking issue to issue content reliability that marks tho overt slicks of the recent past, and for the same reason. It assures the mass reader--the fellow eternally on the run for his train, in the famous figure of speech--that he will always snatch up the mixture as before. And once an editor has isolated the most popular mixture, his circulation will steadily increase with no finite end in sight. Or so the theory goes, and is exempt from argument by me. The only working test of whether a man's policy is good or bad for his sales lies in his circulation figures.

But if we cling to the narrower idea that a story ought to make

the point it started out for, and if we pretend that the stories as they appear are always the stories as they were originally written, then critical disagreement becomes possible.

In the February issue, the Barr is a funny, smoothly told story that forsakes its own logic whenever it can to make a joke by doing so. We come to the Anvil. As it happens, Anvil is one of my picks for a writer who will go good once he finds his own kind of story. But this one follows the now classic pattern of introducing the protagonist into an improbable society of which he is as ignorant as the reader, and having them find out about it together. The practical result is that the first half of such a story is usually full of fascinating incidents and evocative situations followed by a steady downhill slide of explanation. However, this mode accomplishes a purpose for a mass circulation audience. Before it tails off, this kind of story presents dozens of "crazy" notions that would easily make teasers for Doubleday Book Club ads. E.g.: "The Story About the Mysterious 'Sweepers'--who ate the children the lions guarded!" So, in short, this kind of story's strongest appeal lies precisely where the seeds of its downfall as a story are located.

Scortia, again, is a newcomer with talent. This is another humor piece---Galaxy seems to run a high percentage of these---in the vein of Lewis Padgett somewhat misunderstood. It is, by and large, pretty damned good for a second or third published story. But it depends too much on horsedoctor logic: "If the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is giving you trouble, enlist the aid of the inevitable Society for the Promotion of Cruelty to Animals." This isn't a solution. It's a punchline for the kind of joke that wins the annual Liars' Club contest.

While we're at it, I might state that using an acquaintance's name for a story character's--with or without his permission or urging--is an amateurish trait.

The Sheckley I take to be the unfortunate result of hurried writing--or rewriting. Sheckley obviously knows better. This one holds that science has no business discovering polio vaccine because it will only have to discover a suitable emetic for those patients whose nature leads them to drink it. (Sheckley made it an immortality drug in this particular story.) The fact that this circumstance would require moron doctors ministering to moron patients is completely neglected. The effect on the reader is to tell him that all doctors are morons of a disagreeable type, and that all patients are also morons, but of a good, sensible, you-and-me type.

"My Lady Greensleeves" is a good, typical Pohl story, told with enormous facility and a deal of forced inventiveness. The title, for example, is justified by placing the heroine in a prison disciplinary block nicknamed "The Greensleeves", and just to nail things down, slipping her into a green straitjacket. But perhaps forced inventiveness isn't the phrase I'm looking for. Twenty thousand words of that kind of thing represents a prolonged effort, and so prolonged an effort deserves a nobler description. Perhaps what I mean is "deliberate inventiveness", and that brings up the question of why Pohl chooses to work at it so consciously.

"My Lady Greensleeves" is set in a society ruled by occupational

class prejudice, and the crime which sends the heroine to the penitentiary is that of setting fire to a segregated public lavatory. One of the villains involved is a Negro--a Negro who acts exactly like a white man, who is fully accepted as a member of the human race by all the characters in the story, and who acts the part, in one of the standard subplots developed for prison riot stories.

So far, this reads like potentially "hard" copy, in Jim Blish's phrase. But pulling these elements out of the story and setting them off in a separate paragraph gives a seriously distorted picture of what the story reads to be about.

What it is, is a standard prison-riot story. The bulk of it depends on the standard prison-riot incidents to give it suspense and movement. Fro something like ten thousand words, the only indications of science fiction appear in the stage directions and asides. It is in this section that the Negro villain appears, that a great deal of the background is filled in, and that the prison doctor--a delightful figure--moves serenely about in his flowing white robe. All this is window-dressing, every bit, and when the story shifts course--when the riot dies down in a welter of anticlimax--all this goes away, as inconclusively as it came. None of it has actually furthered the story's progress, though it obviously took more auctorial effort than the standard, glib, unconvincing, unresolved plot.

Now why? Why does an intelligent man turn out a job like this? Presumably, he had his editor in mind. It's about the only conclusion I can come to. Trying it on for size, I get a sequence of logic like this: What Fred Pohl wanted to write about was prejudice. Everything that's fresh and shows signs of hard work in the story revolves around the subject. But he felt a necessity for giving the story "action", "excitement", "suspense", and--I would say --familiarity. Like almost all Galaxy stories, this one shouts of an effort not to give the reader something that'll genuinely startle or provoke him. No matter how many alien beings or wonderful inventions a story may contain, this reader must nevertheless be able to feel that he's read something like this before. Since, presumably, he has never read science fiction before encountering Galaxy, this element of familiarity must rise from a relationship to mainstream fiction, adventure fiction, Hollywood fiction in particular, or confession magazines. It may be that this is why Galaxy's vaunted "extrapolations" frequently consist of calling a cocktail party a vilbar party. I think it's at least a good explanation of why there is so much emphasis on humor, the most popular universal.

In the hands of unskilled writers, or of writers unfamiliar with what science fiction can do, this bare bone frequently dominates the story. In Fred Pohl's case, we have a different breed of writer, not quite able to stop after the average Galaxy producer would be satisfied. Thus the deliberate inventiveness. I'm thoroughly convinced that what some critics have called a smart-alecky streak in Pohl, or Pohl-Kornbluth, is a more or less deliberate attempt to be innocuous. Further, I would say that the habit Pohl/Kornbluth has of letting the overt plots resolve in any old way shows where his true interest lies.

One of this kind in an issue would mean little. But there isn't

a story here that does not, with greater or lesser skill at disguise, deliberately avoid the point it could or should have made.

The March Sturgeon story represents Galaxy's high point for the year. It is one of Horace's nice traits that he will run so much Sturgeon without deviscerating it, but even so this is an extraordinary example. As a story to read it's good enough, but as a story for writers to read it's quite a good deal more.

It's a story about a congenitally curious man, who discovers a girl with two bodies---one to wear and one to wash, on alternate days. I defy any reader---ordinary or specialized---to resist the intrigue of that notion. And when, in the end, the man's curiousity kills the girl, I defy the ordinary reader not to feel a definite emotional wrench. But as far as writers are concerned, there are even more lingering effects.

Someday, someone will be doing an analysis of Sturgeon and his writing in an effort to see what makes the man tick in that particular fashion, and what new thing about human relationships it is that he's discovered. When that effort is made, this story will furnish some of the most valuable clues. In a way, it seems to be the quintessence of Sturgeon to date. I get the distinct feeling that although it finally misses the mark, "The Other Celia" represents Ted's closest approach so far to a complete crystallization of what it is he's trying to say.

He has pared his human interaction down to just two characters, who never meet and never speak, either to themselves or the reader. They move in a world of just two rooms, both as bare as the insides of two packing cases, with a knothole in between. The only point in contact between these two figures is Celia's skin, and she's not in it at the time. And still there is conflict, action, development, suspense, characterization, and mood, all of them conveyed to the reader by wordless symbols. The whole business is done the way the Chinese paint, and this kind of refinement in prose is so rare even in the usual Sturgeon that examples like "Celia" become memorable even when they eventually lapse into broadness, as this story does.

The Knight is a funny animal story--decent railway reading, but no more---told with all of his talents and displaying no sign that he is also a thoughtful man. The Anderson gives no indication that the man can create ideas. The punchline reveals that Leonardo da Vinci journeyed to the Moon; this plot appeared as a Planet Comics filler when I was twelve. The Bone is about a man in an alien jungle. His problem, to learn how the natives survive insect bites, diseases, etc., which kill Earthmen at the drop of a hat. He has a native guide who eats a revolting stew the hero will not touch. Surprise, surprise! Evelyn Smith is standard Evelyn Smith. "The Deep One" by Neil P. Ruzic, proves conclusively that the intelligent sensitive members of the human race, who would carry us all to glory if only they were let alone, must inevitably be destroyed by the blundering morons. And very badly written, too.

The March issue reads as though the editor, having bought one story that cannot possibly be made shallow, has tried to take away the sting by putting it in an issue in which none of the other stories say anything whatever worth remembering.

INFINITY SCIENCE FICTION

Reviewed by Lester del Rey

February 1957		April 1957	
HUNT THE HOG OF JOE	Gilbert D	DEEPER THAN THE DARKNESS	Ellison C
THREE CORNERED KNIFE	Bulmer D	CASE OF THE SNORING HEIR	Clarke D
THE ENGRAMMAR AGE	Wellen D	EYES OF SILENCE	Tubb D
UTTER SILENCE	Wellen F	FRIENDS AND ENEMIES	Leiber D
LET'S GET TOGETHER	Asimov C	NOON'S REPOSE	Christopher D
THE GUEST RITES	Silverberg D	MARTIAN SHORE	Fontenay C
ALONE AT LAST	Sheckley D	GENTLY ORBITING BLONDE	Peterson E
		DENY THE SLAKE	Wilson C
Score - D		Score - D	

Infinity is now in its second volume. It pays good rates, close to the top. Logically, it should be the fourth best market for stories, and any good ones left after Campbell-Gold-Boucher should cross Larry Shaw's desk. Shaw is an old hand at science fiction who proved to me long ago that he has good story judgment. He's a nice guy to work with and for; at his rates, he should be able to get writers to do original work directly for him---and apparently he does get many stories that way. In addition, he has no particular editorial fads that distort his needs, and can look a good story in the eye without wondering about its side effects.

He should have a darned good magazine. Unfortunately, after the dubious pleasure of reading the last three issues, I can only report that he has a mess. The best that can be said for it is that it's dull and lusterless. Sometimes it's downright silly. The only positive thing about it is the blurb style; no other magazine in existence has ever had such admiring blurbs. The fiction under the blurbs, however, just barely reaches the heights I've assigned in the ratings.

Gilbert writes a little piffle up to long novelette length by some of the least ingenious padding I've seen. Problem is to kill a big animal something like a hog. This he more or less does. And that's all. Pages are wasted in getting permission after the hero is summoned to the planet to do the job; more pages on the dopey and unimportant society; still more on reaching the hog for the first useless attempt. When he finally does get the hog after a spate of excess wordage, it proves to be the only sympathetic and likable character present. So someone else shoots it just as it's making a deal with the hero. To add the touch of high satire that seems to be the essence of s-f in the magazine, there's some business about x-tops (box-tops?) being used as currency. Oh, well.

Bulmer does a considerably better job, though it's nothing but a standard detective story of the old private eye school, with the change being run in by having a professional assassin in place of the shamus. Hero's problem is that he is hired to kill and protect the same man. He does this by a cheap evasion, first insulting the reader (in first person, too) by saying he's already found the answer long before it appears in the story. The writing is competent, and some of the background development is good, but it's wasted in this Howard Browne type mishmash.

Asimov's yarn, blurbed as his "most brilliant robot story" has a suspense idea that Ike could probably have turned into a damned good novel. Ten robots have been made, sent to Us by Them; each has 10% critical mass of a new total conversion nuclear explosive; when they get together, boom! Each apes a man among Us, of course. Problem, find them in time. Not bad. But then we get the results of what must have been extremely hurried work from rough idea to final form. Instead of a story, we have repeated conferences wherein the problem is discussed. Finally, hero figures things in a flash of insight, and--surprise--the eleventh robot proves to be the man who tipped them off to the menace. I wish Ike had written it up as a story. Still, it's the best in the issue.

Silverberg has discovered that idols--this time on Venus instead of Cambodia--have eyes made of jewels that can be stolen. The villain comes to no good end. Sheckley pulls a trick ending that has no relation to the rest of his brief story, but there isn't enough here to worry about.

Then we have two stories by Wellen, plus a blurb one page long to explain this unprecedented idea; no credit is given to Ray Palmer who often used two stories by the same man in an issue. Maybe the blurb has something to do with the Second Coming; in any case, no writer could live up to it, and Wellen doesn't try.

"Engrammar Age" (cf. engram, dianetics) deals with an idiot (a genius in the story) who accidentally gets his artificial memory switched and finds his wife has been cheating on him. I don't blame her, though she's also an idiot.

"Utter Silence" should have been left as such. The science consists of some cloudy notion that a "gravity strain" too weak to hinder walking can produce synaesthesia. The writing style seems to have been borrowed from a Martian who learned English from being bitten by Gertrude Stein's parrot. Its individuality comes from repetition and pointless inversion of clichés, with a little pure babble thrown in loosely. But all such minor faults pale into insignificance before the monumental stupidity of the plot. It seems that the hero is marooned on some planet by the crew of his spaceship. He stumbles into a mysterious underground section of that planet, where he finds "statues" that he thinks are paralyzed beings who came here before. He sees a frieze on a wall which seems to show the decline of a "great race"---and this almost paralyzes him, too. Then he reads it backwards and realizes that way it shows the rise of the culture. (Though anyone who can't tell the difference between the picture of building a structure and tearing it down shouldn't be permitted near pictures.) I quote the rest, to avoid missing any important steps: "When the mutineers landed on Tellus, he was waiting there with a detail of spaceport police to welcome them."

This is the worst story I have ever seen in print.

Ellison does the best job in issue number 2. He has a rather nice beginning to a story of a man with the inevitable psionic powers. This ends halfway through, and we suddenly switch to a different story, somewhat moody and pleasant in flavor. At the very

end, the final sentence almost ties the two parts together into a whole, to my pleased surprise. The writing is the best Ellison has done, and the whole effect is readable. Ellison should examine a theremin, however, before describing one; the theremin has no keyboard.

Clarke's story is the least satisfying of all his "Tales of the White Hart" I've seen. It's an insignificant little leg-pulling job about a man who could be cured of snoring only by (1) an anti-sleep drug; (2) a drug that induced permanent sleep. Easy reading, but very little water under the froth.

Tubb makes a point, vaguely, about his hero being able to stay sane in prison solitary for two years, hence being suitable for life in a space station. In the test, his hero survives--but only by the introduction of a sudden touch of telepathy, previously not mentioned. Readable, but barely worth the time.

Leiber gets a cover blurb, indicating that only he could have written his story; the implication here is more impressive than the results. It's about the anti-intellectual world after the Bomb, in which there's a conflict of ideas between a Poet and a Scientist, with a Female thrown in. The philosophy wavers its way to the end, where a supposed bombing proves to be only nature in the raw in the form of a California earthquake. The Female keeps femaling, if anyone cares about preserving such a race.

Christopher tries his hand at a eugenic society where "cupids" condition love between unwilling couples. In the end, a cupid succeeds in uniting the couple, but fails to overcome the sanctity of true-love-by-accident. If you have never read Campbell's "The Escape", look it up to see what can really be done with this basic idea; if you have read it, go back and reread it.

Fontenay does some weird things with science in his story. He has plants trap enough air with their leaves for breathing, though they are so weak that the hero can easily push his head through them into the Martian semi-vacuum. (It won't work.) He also has a pretty thin plot about a man who decides to start a new race of humans who can survive on Mars without mechanical aid. But somehow, he manages to get some of the feeling and spirit of honest science fiction into his story, and it's quite easy to read.

Wilson also overcomes a weak plot well enough to make for pleasant reading. He has little but a race of hopeless androids dying on a world at the whim of a mechanical little monster---but he does cover it up with a nice mood and good writing. Adequate for its length.

Peterson tries a humorous story. At least, I get the feeling that it's supposed to be humorous. Personally, I split my sides groaning. It involves anti-gravity, newlyweds, a blonde and some unbelievably bad dialogue. It also unwittingly denies the basic Newtonian laws of motion by having the characters circling around and around instead of moving in straight lines; and the action of friction has been completely overlooked, though they are in air, not in a vacuum; at least, it's only a mental vacuum.

Anybody got some old copies of Peter Rabbit I can read?

VENTURE SCIENCE FICTION

Reviewed by Lester del Rey

January, 1957		March, 1957	
VIRGIN PLANET	Anderson D	TOO SOON TO DIE	Godwin C
MAN OF THE WORLD	Cole C	THE LADY WAS A TRAMP	Sharon D
WOMAN OF THE WORLD	Sharon D	FRIEND FOR LIFE	Dickson D
DUST OF DEATH	Asimov D	THE QUEER ONES	Brackett C
HERO AT WORK	Jakes D	BLIND ALLEY	Fontenay D
OH FATHER OF MINE	Beaumont D	VENGEANCE FOR NIKOLAI	Miller A
THE GIRL HAD GUTS	Sturgeon B		
Score - D		Score - C	

In one of the periodic s-f "booms", like the one we seem to be enduring now, there is a flood of new magazines on the newsstands. Most of them serve little purpose, beyond siphoning off sales from the established publications; by glutting the market, they usually ensure the speedy decline that follows. Yet when a good magazine does turn up among them, it's worth noting.

Venture apparently has no right to be such a magazine. The rate of payment is a little more than minimum, but hardly enough to command original stories from top writers; and theoretically, all the good manuscripts should have been snapped up by better-paying markets before they land here. Bob Mills, the editor, is comparatively new to science fiction, and hasn't had time to develop a stable of loyal writers yet.

Nevertheless, in my opinion this is a magazine which changes the big three to the big four. It's an honest, adult adventure magazine of science fiction, where even the poorer stories seem to avoid the curse of dullness. It also uses a fair amount of outright sex, but whether this is good or bad I haven't quite decided. Above all, it has a subtle feeling of rightness in tone and character. With a bit more freedom in payment, this could well prove to be the best magazine to appear in years.

Unfortunately, the best stories seem to be buried in the back of the book, and we must begin with lesser material. Anderson's January lead novelette has moments when his ability to spin a good action story makes it fun, but generally it's not his best work. The adventure and sex are both on a low level, as if he had mixed Playboy and Planet in his mind. The story deals with a man on a planet inhabited only by frustrated females who fertilize their ova mechanically. Against this background, he moves from teasing to titillation; often to bed and easy to rise makes a man frustrated, but he never gets wise. Formula stuff, somewhat out of place here.

The Cole short is a brief, ironic, pointed story of a civilized man after the Bomb, familiar, but extremely well done. The rest of the shorts are just good enough to read through. Sharon tells an over-long story from the viewpoint of the girl in Cole's story---a stunt which adds nothing to his original idea. Asimov does a murder-by-chemistry piece with some nice background; but since he has shown us the murder before giving us the puzzle, it isn't exactly suspenseful. Jakes mixes up his usual guns, blood and gut-shooting

with an accident as his big plot twist. (When will writers learn that plot-by-accident is no better than a dream-ending as a solution?) Beaumont goes back in time to show it's a wise man who can know his own father, and to swear a little.

Then comes the Sturgeon story. Wow! It's a wonderful shocker that's more than a mere shocker. Logical (except for the effect of HCl on human tissues), clever, with no cheap trickery. I won't give the plot away because I advise everyone to read it. It should be an "A" except that the human relationship at the end is just a bit too obvious, and it depends too heavily on shock. Anyhow, it's a story I'll remember for a long time.

The March issue is a distinct improvement, though all the shorter pieces are undistinguished. Sharon has another willing lady, this time as seen by a naïve young space cadet. She handles him rather well, but the reader is always six jumps ahead of the hero, and the big point of it all is a fizzle. Polyandry isn't such a radically new idea in s-f. Dickson shows just how tough settling a planet can be, sometimes with excellent detail---but he doesn't quite convince me that men would settle there; something has to lure them to colonize, surely. Fontenay mixes a mechanically ingenious plot with cardboard characters pushed around by the author for a time-travel jigsaw piece which I promptly forgot.

The novelettes are all much better, happily. The Godwin lead is in the old, outward-driving, romantic tradition of s-f. He covers the desperate efforts of a colony, stranded on a horrible planet, to survive 200 years--and to avenge themselves on those who put them there. There are moments of real power in it; and even when it lags a bit at the end, it remains good reading. Brackett's story deals with smuggling aliens to Earth. There is a lot of familiar material here, or it would have rated much higher, but her quiet, highly competent style milks all the suspense from it and makes it a pleasure to read. I enjoyed it all, which isn't as normal as it should be.

Again, however, the best story is the last in the issue, and it's a lulu! Miller gives us something with life and guts to spare, to get under our skins and stick. It deals with a Russian woman who is given a fatal infection in her milk to kill the general of the American armies that are invading her homeland. The reversal of the usual fictional politics is justified by her character; it is not a trick to shock the reader. I've got a few quibbles: I don't object to brutal American soldiers, but I do object to monolinear villains. I also feel that Miller could have made his point without stopping the story for a heavy-handed analysis of the general's perversions. But the over-all effect is one of extraordinarilly good writing---a story that may well become a classic.

Damn it, reading s-f can still be fun. Also, it seems that writing it can be something done with more than a time-clock and a cash register. Whether Mills gets his stories by some strange hypnotic-psionic power over writers or whether he's just clever enough to see what others are missing, I don't know. But Venture should last.

END

UNCONSCIOUS SYMBOLS IN S-F

by Damon Knight

Part I

People who write on this subject generally seem to begin with what amounts to an apology for bringing the matter up at all. For instance, Freud, in Leonardo da Vinci: a Study in Psychosexuality, goes out of his way to disclaim any intention "'to blacken the radiant, and to drag the sublime into the mire.'" Ernest Jones's Hamlet and Oedipus opens by speaking of "the fear that beauty may vanish under too scrutinizing a gaze, and with it our pleasure."

Writing for a specialized audience, and about twenty years later, I think I can afford to ignore this kind of oversensitivity. There's another kind, though, that turned up to my great surprise at the first Milford S-F Writers' Conference. A couple of people vigorously opposed any discussion of unconscious symbolism; not because they thought there were any bogies in their own minds, but because they were afraid of insights which would "cure" them and leave them happy and healthy, but no longer able to write.

I very much doubt my ability to write anything which would suddenly transform a neurotic, successful author into a normal nobody. There seems to be some ground for believing that I'm not likely to hit upon anybody's personal, private symbols, even by accident. Common symbols communicate; private ones don't.

I get embarrassed when I find myself talking about a high-order abstraction as if I had been there in person, and counted the knobs on it, and chipped off a piece to take home. I do not think I know much about the unconscious. But I am certain I have one, because I use it (or it uses me) every day; it does about ninety per cent of the creative work I put out. My unconscious gets ideas (as opposed to gimmicks); "I" never do. My unconscious dictates the form and mood of stories, and often supplies whole scenes and characters. I am just the scribe; I tinker with the work as it goes along in order to give it surface coherence and logic, but I have to keep in touch at intervals with the unconscious as I do so; if I don't, the product gets very flat indeed.

It's a commonplace of criticism that great writing has a richer texture of meaning than could ever have been deliberately woven into it; the unconscious of the writer has not only determined the form of the work, but has fleshed it out too. I hope to show that this is also true of tolerably good writing, and of some tolerably bad writing as well.

There are some axiomatic assumptions embedded in this work, and I may as well state them here for the benefit of those who will disagree with them. I believe that "the unconscious" is in a sense a misnomer; that the submerged portions of our minds are aware and govern our thinking to a larger dergree than we usually realize. I believe the activity of the unconscious is structured, not random. I believe that in translating unconscious expressions we can demand

a high order of coherence, and get it. To sum up, I think the images that recur in our creative work are not the products of a child or a moron; neither are they illegible riddles--they are exasperatingly hard to decipher, but that seems to be because of a conscious habit of looking the other way. I believe that the symbols which animate our best work are healthful, and that finding out more about them can only make us better artists.

I owe very grateful thanks to Jim Blish, whose insights in this field surround mine on every side; to his wife, Virginia; to my wife, Helen, to Algis Budrys, Phil Klass, Cyril Kornbluth, Lester and Evelyn del Rey for invaluable suggestions, reproofs, and shoves in the right direction.

Mysteries of Birth (I)

To find an unconscious symbol in art, look for something that affects you powerfully without your knowing why. Not every symbol will do this to everybody every time. Here's one that sometimes does it to me:

> A sense of elation swept through him. He felt as he had once felt standing alone at dusk in a wind-tossed forest. He could not speak. His breath stopped...
>
> (-- "The Far Look," by Theodore L. Thomas)

What I feel when I imagine this scene is the shadow of something I've experienced directly in similar times and places--a particular kind of emotional tension; "anticipation" is the nearest word I can find for it, but anticipation at a very high pitch. It is not what I would call pleasure; it seems to belong at the moment just before pleasure. It has suggestions of joy and anguish in it. Apparently it's a very common human experience. It seems to be one form of what C. S. Lewis is talking about as "joy" in his autobiographical Surprised by Joy.

Here it is again, this time in an eyewitness account of a hurricane:

> Two minutes had scarcely elapsed, when the whole forest before me was in fearful motion... Turning instinctively toward the direction from which the wind blew, I saw, to my great astonishment, that the noblest trees of the forest bent their lofty heads for a while, and unable to stand against the blast, were falling to pieces... Some of the largest trees were seen bending and writhing under the gale; others suddenly snapped across, and many, after a momentary resistance, fell uprooted to the earth.
>
> (-- "The Hurricane," by John James Audobon.)

Now, what is it about the idea of wind in a forest that calls up such a response? One explanation might be that when you are in imminent danger of your life, during such a natural catastrophe as a hurricane, you may feel a kind of exhilaration, which is fear turned inside out.

> I drove on. The wheat would have been as tall as your waist. It went undulating up and down the hills like a great

> green carpet, with the wind rippling it a little, kind of thick and silky-looking. It's like a woman, I thought. It makes you want to lie on it.
>
> (-- Coming Up For Air, by George Orwell)

I am suggesting, with due caution and qualification, that this is a procreation symbol. Intuitively, the resemblance of the two experiences seems to me very striking. Traditionally, the earth and its foliage have feminine associations that go back as far as we can trace human thought. The wind's symbolism is equally ancient: it is the male life-giving principle, the "pneuma". The Greeks believed the wind could impregnate mares; the Egyptians had a similar belief about vultures.

These scholarly comparisons may seem remote, but they aren't: we are all pagans, in spite of two thousand years of Christianity, tight collars and cold baths. Nobody teaches us the religious beliefs of the ancient world, except as a series of quaint myths--but the forest is a chapel to us, all the same.

The story which originally aroused my interest in the symbology of science fiction was Jim Blish's "Common Time." Summarized as briefly as possible, the plot went like this:

A man named Garrard is the pilot and sole passenger of an experimental interstellar ship, the "DFC-3",§ bound for Alpha Centauri. Two previous ships of the same class have failed to return from the same journey. Garrard is put into the ship anesthetized (n.b.); he wakes up after the ship has gone into "overdrive", to the mental reminder, Don't move. (The story begins and ends with these two words.) The reminder saves his life. Garrard finds that ship time seems to be almost stopped relative to his consciousness; he can move, but with long delays between impulse and muscular response; he is not breathing. Imprisoned in his own body, he estimates the relationship between ship time and subjective time (by counting seconds between successive jumps of the clock's second hand) and calculates that the ten-month trip will take him 6,000 years, subjective time. When he has almost resigned himself to this horror, he finds that ship time is speeding up until it equals and then surpasses subjective time. He again loses control of his own body, and as the differential increases, he goes into "the pseudo-death."

He awakes when the ship nears its destination and comes out of overdrive. Hovering around his hammock is a dreamlike being or group of beings calling itself "the clinesterton beademung;" it speaks to him in dream-language, which he understands perfectly: viz., "'Let me-mine pitch you-yours so to have mind of the rodalent beademung and other brothers and lovers, along the channel which is fragrant to the being Garrard.'" From this point the narrative becomes equally dreamlike and is written in the same terms, giving the impression that Garrard's experiences with the beademung are wonderful but indescribable. This ends when the ship's automatic controlling mechanism is about to take it back to Earth; Garrard once more

§ Kornbluth points out that this stands for "Distinguished Flying Cross". Probably it's a wry Freudian pun, combining intercourse with the agony on the cross.

goes into the pseudodeath, and does not come out of it this time until the ship nears Earth. He lands safely, but learns that he can never go back: no other interstellar ship will go out in his lifetime. He cannot even remember any more what the beademung was like, or even if it was real; he has only a haunting sense of loss: "He had returned to humanity's common time, and would never leave it again."

Now, on the face of it, except for some ingenious manipulation of the differential time problem in the first half of the story, this is not a science fiction story at all; the plot is extremely simple, not to say half-formed, and I could not see why the story hit me as hard as it did. Blish and I had been discussing the supposed womb symbolism in his stories; I took a second look from that standpoint, and was astonished to discover a whole series of puns, running all through the story, which could be tabulated under two headings, like this:

Page	INTERCOURSE	DEATH
306 §	"Common time,"	
	i.e., common rhythm, or:	length of life; common term in that sense, or:
	as the genital contact; common divisor in both senses; common measure (six inches, or	six feet).
"	"Don't move,"	
	i.e., at the moment of orgasm, or: after the moment of death.	
307	"Calendar: stopped," (in both senses)	
308	"Not breathing," (in both senses)	
309	"plunged into Hell":	
	followed by a description that would serve equally well for orgasm, or:	death.
310	"vessel of horror,"	
	i.e., the womb, or:	the uterine abyss of death.
"	"trickles of reason,"	
	i.e., during orgasm, or: after physical death of the brain.	
"	"eternity in hell had taken three seconds,"	
	i.e., the suspension of time in love, or in death: cf. "his whole life passed before his eyes."	
311	"transports of love,"	
	paired in a sentence with "agonies of empires."	
314	"The normal human hand movement, in such a task as lifting a pencil, took the pencil from a state of rest to another state of rest..."	
316	"come up with the solution to the Problem of Evil"	
317	"put his finger on the First Cause!"	

§ Page numbers are from the Permabooks edition.

317 "the situation demanded someone trained in the highest rigors"
319 "the pseudo-death"
321 "clinesterton" from Greek klino - sterto, tosnore in bed? §
" "the All-Devouring"
322 "'on Earth as it is in Heaven'"
326 "old and compressed, constricted"
327 "found myself in /a/ box"
" "The whole situation was now utterly rigid--and, if effect, I died."

§ § §

As the Blishes point out in a recent letter, "to die" is a wide spread popular usage for orgasm; it is still current in French, and turns up in English poetry as late as Shelley's "Indian Serenade":

O lift me from the grass!
I die, I faint, I fail!
O let thy kisses rain
On my cheeks and eyelids pale!

So what we have here is apparently only a highly expanded metaphor: "death" as orgasm, which is what the story seems to be about. But look at it more closely again, and it again becomes puzzling. If intercourse is taking place in the story, who are the partners in it? Garrard seems to be a part of the male act, but is completely passive; the female appears nowhere unless as the ship: and this relationship, we see at once, is the wrong one. Clearly Garrard is inside one of the organs engaged in copulation; sometimes he seems to visualize himself as an unborn child, sometimes as a kind of analogue of the penis.

I think there is one clear answer to this, one which also satisfactorily explains the metaphor itself. "To die" is understandable as hyperbole: but the adult male partner in intercourse doesn't really die, as a rule. There is just one male human creature for whom orgasm is literally death; and that's the sperm.

I'll come back to this, and answer some possible objections, in a moment. First, let me read one other Blish story into the record.

Intrigued by the string of puns I had pulled out of his "Common Time," Blish began browsing through the rest of his stories. He found that in most of them--particularly in his best-liked and most-reprinted stories--for the last fifteen years he had been writing

§ Most of this dream-talk is fairly easy: for instance, rodalent is evidently a combination of radiant and redolent. Beademungen stopped me, though, and I appealed to Blish for more light. Between them, he and his wife came up with this: "'Beademungen', as it turns out, is not essentially German; the weak German ending is a piece of dream-work designed to turn the Latin verb 'to bless' into a noun, 'the Blessed'. Thus, 'the clinesterton beademung' turned into a proposition reads: 'Blessed are they who snore in bed,' and the text goes on to say in English, 'on Earth as it is in Heaven.'"

what seemed to be the same covert plot, over and over. Blish's name for this theme was "Being Born," and he anatomized it for me in a story called "Solar Plexus." It was his ninth published story, and technically was pretty crude.

Ostensibly, the story is about a man in a floating space observatory out near Pluto, who is approached by a pirate ship and lured aboard it. Following light signals§ down empty corridors, he reaches the control room but finds it also empty: the ship's pilot is a renegade scientist who has had his brain surgically removed and its nerve-endings connected to the electronic "nerve system" of the ship. ("'Where am I? I'm all around you... I'm the ship.'") This villain proposes to use the hero's brain to manufacture another such robot, and incarcerates him with a second captive. Here the hero learns, by kicking the wall, that the brain can "feel" shocks of this kind. The two join forces and succeed in reaching the control room again, where the hero smashes the ship's autopilot. The autopilot turns out to be analogous to the villain's solar plexus; the blow hurts, the brain "faints", and the hero seizes control of the ship.

As Blish points out, this story is made up of passages through tunnels from one chamber to another; each of these repeated episodes could be regarded as a birth symbol. But look again: the hero (1) is expelled from a hollow sphere down a long tube, at the end of which he sees light; (2) is drawn by successive waves of light down a second long corridor, at the end of which (3) he finds himself in another empty chamber, which he learns is part of the body of a being who means to take him apart, and from which he is expelled to (4) still another, where he finds an organism like himself, with whom he combines forces, and (5) returns to the second chamber, where he causes the imprisoning being pain by kicking it in the abdomen.

It seems to me that birth is the only step in this sequence which does not happen symbolically in the story: The hero, a sperm, is expelled from his hollow sphere (the testis), down a long tube (the epididymis), down another long tube (the inguinal canal) into an empty chamber (the uterus), from there to another cavity (the space between the ovary and the oviduct) where he joins forces with a second captive (the ovum); and together they return to the uterus, where they grow more powerful and kick mama.

I had better say here, for the benefit of nervous people, that I don't think all this is any sort of evidence for Hubbard's engrams, or Jung's archetypes, or prenatal memory in any form. Blish is a highly sophisticated reader and critic who (with his wife Virginia) has some reputation as an expert on James Joyce's multi-punned Finnegans Wake; he is also a scientifically oriented man who studied to be a limnobiologist in college; he could probably draw the complicated internal plumbing of the male genital organs from memory. (I had to look it up.) But I must insist that these chains of symbols were not deliberately written in as a prank or a Joycean exercise. Blish did not even suspect they were there until I pointed them out. Since then, I may add, I've been on the receiving end of

§ Blish suggests these symbolize pain or muscular contractions.

this same experience, and it is startling.

I don't think Blish can remember his own experiences as a sperm, but I don't actually care whether he can or not; it isn't necessary to the hypothesis. In fact, if this notion should get logically into the argument, I would do my best to clear it out again: the idea of blind and compulsive recapitulation would make the whole process revoltingly meaningless. If there is any one dominant impression which every analyzed symbolic story gives, it is one of immense meaning.

A more serious objection, it seems to me, is this one: If Garrard, the hero of "Common Time", is a sperm, and the story chronicles his journey from testis (the Earth) to uterus, where he meets an ovum (the beademung), what about the return journey?

Watch out; here comes another hard, fast one. I think the first part of the story, containing all the intercourse symbolism, is told backward.

Look again at the list of puns on pp. 30-31, and this time read it from bottom to top. Omitting the bottom three items (which are taken from Garrard's recounting of the outward trip), first you find a cloud of passive images; next a clear series of erection puns ("the highest rigors," etc.); then the intercourse and vagina symbols themselves begin; and finally, at the top of the list, you reach the orgasm and the terminal pun, "Come on time."

For confirmation, here's another note from Blish:

"About the Greek: very evidently it had more to do with the intercourse theme you spotted than I had any idea it had up to now. The reference to the a-Centauri stars as 'the twin radioceles' obviously comes from varicocele, a common form of hernia involving the testicles, and I think now that the whole thing was suggested by the Earth-Moon balls on the cover around which I wrote the story. The main a-Centauri star and Proxima Centauri stand in about the same relationship as the Earth and the Moon, and both pairs might be described as one-hung-low. Also, the story is about love-and-death; it says it is. But I'm just now beginning to believe it. Writing frightens me. I don't know why I do it."

§ § §

This one story shows every sign of being inexhaustible, but let's pursue it a little farther. The inverted time scheme I propose here is not really as unlikely as it seems; it turns out to be common in science fiction, as I'll show in a moment: but even granting that, why should one part of the narrative run backward and the other part forward?

The time inversion, and the whole sperm fantasy, express a longing to return to the beginning. But this is an impossibility; it can only seem to happen by the trick of telling the story backward. Once that has been done, then the story must unreel the other way, as if to emphasize that the reversal was an illusion. This is what the story is really saying: You can't go back.

§ § §

In the synopsis of "Common Time," I asked you to notice that the hero was anesthetized before being put into the spaceship, so that in effect he woke up without any knowledge of how he got there. This curious little trick turns up repeatedly in science fiction. My guess is that it's a death-or-birth symbol§ and accordingly a signal, when it happens to an adult hero, that the story is being told backward. I have used the device myself without knowning why in "Stranger Station" and elsewhere. Something very similar occurs in Christopher Morley's Where the Blue Begins: At the beginning of the story, the protagonist, a dog named Gissing (all the characters are Disney dogs), is leading the life of an elderly well-to-do bachelor, although, we are told, he is only a few months old. The rest of the plot lends some support to the notion that the story runs backward--Gissing becomes in turn a business magnate, a lay preacher, an escaped criminal, and winds up a stowaway on a ship, which he appropriates by a trick and sails off by himself; the ship turns into a toy boat on a pond, and Gissing briefly becomes a real dog, worshipping at the feet of a tramp.

Morley is a writer you might expect to do a thing of this kind intentionally; he's a sophisticated and excessively whimsical artist with a nostalgic preoccupation. But Blish thought he was writing space opera. So did I. Entirely without conscious intention, I wrote in "Four in One" the story of a cell-division in reverse; four people enter a single living cell, are stripped down to their essential components, merge, and only two of them get out alive.

The hero of my "Cabin Boy" is an active gelatinous ovoid, who propels himself by an ion stream, and who lives with others of his kind inside another living organism who is his father. Again, I thought I was writing space opera, this time with a dirty joke for the punchline. But I don't know how you could ask for a clearer description of a sperm in the testis.

§ § §

One of the puzzling repeated motifs that I noticed while accumulating material for this article was the longing for union or communion with an alien being. It turns up all the time in my own work, but a better example is Raymond Z. Gallun's classic "Old Faithful." As you may remember, this story describes the efforts of some Terrestrials and a Martian astronomer to get into communication with each other. Forbidden to waste any more energy in so useless a pursuit, the Martian finally builds a spaceship and by "hitching a ride" on a comet succeeds in reaching Earth. However, he's injured in the landing and dies shortly after; his friends preserve him in alcohol.

The Martian is one of Gallun's most elaborate and convincing aliens: Gallun describes him chiefly by indirection, but here is the scene in which the Martian, Number 774, visits his son in the communal nursery:

> The floor was covered with thousands of boxes of clear crystal; and in each box was a purple gob of something feeble and jellylike and alive.

§ Cf. Auden's Age of Anxiety: "...there's a white silence / Of antiseptics and instruments / At both ends..."

...He had dismounted from his automaton, and now, creeping forward, he thrust a slender appendage into the crystal case.

A score of nerve-filaments, fine, almost, as human hair, darted out from the chitinous shell that protected them and roved caressingly over the lump of protoplasm. Immediately... its delicate integumunt quivered, and a thin pseudopod oozed up from its jelly-like form and enveloped the nerve filaments of Number 774. For minutes the two remained thus, perfectly motionless.

This is not a description calculated to inspire affection; the whole impact of Gallun's story is in the affection it creates for an apparently unlovable object.

Notice in the quotation above the repeated suggestions of softness, strengthlessness, and so on. These are typical, not only for the young Martian, but for Number 774 himself. The effect, it seems to me, is foetal, and I think that is the explanation of its ambiguous appeal.

Beginning with Wells' War of the Worlds, the monsters who have landed on Earth in science fiction stories have frequently had this boneless, pickled-specimen character. I think it is safe to postulate that "an alien lands in a spaceship" is dream-talk for "a baby is born," and that the passengers of such ships are bound to be foetal.

§ § §

The protagonist of Theodore Sturgeon's bewildering "And Now the News..." is a successful and happily married family man in his forties, who Sturgeon tells you is not named MacLyle, and who has one eccentricity--he's a compulsive reader of newspapers and listener to newscasts. When his wife tries to break him of this by shock methods (cancelling the newspaper, putting radios and TVs out of commission), he promptly leaves her and the children, provides for them financially, and heads west for "one of those square states with all the mountains." On the way, he loses first the ability to read and write, and then the ability to speak and understand speech. Somewhat later, a psychiatrist hired by his wife finds him living in a deserted cabin. He has repaired and improved the place, decorated it with his own cockeyed sculptures, installed a wonderful gravity-flush w. c. (the seat overhangs a precipice), and is as happy as a kid in a jam factory. "Always there was this absorption in his own products and processes, and the air of total reward in everything. And there was time, there seemed to be time enough for everything, and always would be."

The psychiatrist "cures" him with drugs and takes him back to civilization, where he runs amok and kills four people before they get him.

This story bothered the bejesus out of me at first; for one thing, it made my hackles rise by breaking up the man's marriage without a word of broken emotional ties, sexual anxieties, etc., etc. Then I looked again and saw that there were actually no adult emotional relations between that guy and his wife at all. That was

where the bother came in--Sturgeon describes those people as adults, but they aren't; they're children.

Perhaps the rest is more obvious to you now than it was to me for a long time. Symbolically, this is the story of a physical regression to the womb. The loss of ability to speak and read is one signal; there are dozens of others. "And his satisfaction? Why, it must lie in this closed circle..." "...a happy one, in his own matrix." And so on. The sculptures described are all mother and generation symbols---"free-forms and golliwogs, a marsupial woman and a guitar with legs." The hammock strung up in front of the picture window is compellingly womblike, and, of course, the cliff-hanging toilet symbolizes the foetus' ability to just let go; mama takes care of it. ("Trouble-free waste disposal.")

I confess I do not know how to explain the ophicleide, the enormous obsolete musical instrument played by MacLyle; the name means "snake-key", and perhaps it's the serpent in his Eden---the psychiatrist fells him by putting drugs in the mouthpiece.§

The ending, which also bothered me, seems to make sense in this light. Like Blish, Sturgeon is saying: This retreat is an illusion. You can't go back.

It goes almost without saying that stories of this character are not confined to science fiction. They are, however, so frequent in fantasy and allied fields that it would be next to impossible to catalog them all. Here's one example which some of you may remember from "Miss Mulock's" Little Lame Prince:

> When I was a child, I used often to think how nice it would be to live in a little house all by my own self--a house built high up in a tree, or far away in a forest, or halfway up a hillside--so deliciously alone and independent. Not a lesson to learn--but no! I always liked learning my lessons. Anyhow, to choose the lessons I liked best, to have as many books to read and dolls to play with as ever I wanted; above all, to be free and at rest, with nobody to tease or trouble or scold me, would be charming.

This passage provides the clue, if any were needed, to the symbolic sense of the lame prince's long confinement in a lonely tower in which,

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§ About twenty minutes after writing these lines, having moved on to the next topic, I happened to think of the phrase "the complicated internal plumbing of the male genital organs," and immediately the pieces of this puzzle fell into place. (The Blish section came after this one in an earlier draft.) As usual, I am now wondering how I ever missed it: "Snake" and "key" are both phallic symbols. I'm afraid there is no doubt that MacLyle here demonstrates his self-sufficiency by performing on his own instrument (an act that fascinates Sturgeon by its near-impossibility; cf. "Fear is a Business"). That a retreat to onanism is included in MacLyle's journey is confirmed by the punning language of this passage: "...season after season's souvenirs of a particular resort to which he had never brought his wife and which he had not visited since he married her."

> Within twenty feet of the top some ingenious architect had planned a perfect little house, divided into four rooms--as by drawing a cross within a circle§ you will see might easily be done...here was a dwelling complete, eighty feet from the ground, and as inaccessible as a rook's nest in the top of a tree.

Regression in size, as in the English Tom Thumb legend, is another common type. Tom, "as big as his father's thumb," goes through a series of repetitious womblike situations: he falls into a bag filled with cherry stones, a hot pudding, a cow's mouth, a salmon's stomach. His sojourn with the queen of the fairies, who sends him back into the world dressed in green, suggests that he was originally a Dionysus, dying and being reborn each spring.

The numerous man-among-the-ants stories in science fiction belong to this type; also the man-in-the-atom stories, and the dwarfed men of "Little Hercules" and others of Neil R. Jones's remarkable "Durna Rangue" series.

Some stories, like H. G. Wells's "In the Abyss", make the regression to the womb into a chilling horror. (A unique example, so far as I know, is Victor Endersby's "Dispossessed", in which an inversion of gravity occurs---the protagonist falls up, into the uterine abyss of the sky.) Not exactly horrible, but queerly disturbing, is Edison Marshall's "The Star that Fell". Marshall builds up casually and deftly the story of a feature writer's acquaintance with an old man who has only one dull story in him: how when he was a little boy, on a sea voyage home with his father, the ship put in at an island and he met a man who must have been somebody important. At the end of the story, when you realize that the island was Elba and the man Napoleon, you get a sudden sharp shock--like touching a live wire into the past.

Time travel, either into the future ("the womb of time") or the past, is of course the classic expression of the theme. Historical novels--regressions to the past cultural stages--fall into this category; this probably explains the curious persistence of medievalisms in science fiction. Nostalgic stories and articles, even autobiographical works, I believe, make the same basic appeal. Author and reader alike are seeking one thing: the everlasting summer of childhood.

(Part II of this article will appear in the next issue.)

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§ This odd floor plan, I believe, is a primordial womb symbol. Something very like it obtruded itself obsessively into my story, "Stranger Station," in which the womb symbolism was important and deliberate. The diagram ⊕ itself is one of the oldest written symbols; it's one form of the astrological symbol for Earth, another form of which is ♁; the first is said to represent the four quarters of Earth, and the second, the cross and globe as symbols of authority. Both of these, like the crux ansata ☥ as the sign of immortality, seem to me to be late interpretations, although not far from the original meaning, which I take to be a simple schematic rendering of foetus and womb.

END

A DOOR INTO HEINLEIN

by James Blish

In the years since World War II, Robert A. Heinlein has become one of the only three science fiction writers since E. E. Smith to make the novel his major vehicle, the others being C. M. Kornbluth and Wilson Tucker. He has been fabulously successful at it, and one reason for his success has been the high grade of machinery that goes, today as always, into his story-telling. Heinlein seems to have known from the beginning, as if instinctively, technical lessons about fiction which other writers must learn the hard way (or often enough, never learn). He doesn't always operate the machinery to its best advantage, but he always seems to be aware of it.

(I don't mean to imply that this is the sole source of Heinlein's strength as a writer. It is simply that aspect of his writing which I want to talk about here.)

One of these technical lessons is that of the unified point of view. This discovery--that the continuity of a story and its feeling of unity is improved if it is told throughout from the point of view of a single character, usually the protagonist---is only about a century old, and though it is a particularly powerful device in the short story, some of the world's greatest short stories (especially the Russian) make no use of it. Nevertheless common practice has awarded it a triumph; other ways of "seeing" a story range now only from rare to obsolete.

Heinlein's use of this device was once generally remarkable only for its irreverence--in, for instance, the way he dropped out of the point-of-view for one or two thousand words of straight lecture whenever he pleased. In the novel form, however, Heinlein has shown a special interest in the most difficult of all points of view: the first-person story, told by the principle actor. Among the adult novels he has handled in this way are "Gulf", "The Puppet Masters", "Double Star", and "The Door into Summer".

First person is the most difficult of all masks for the writer to assume because it is the most difficult persona to keep separate from that of the writer himself. A skilled writer does not adopt it arbitrarily, but for good technical reasons (for instance, it is virtually obligatory when the point-of-view character does not know that he is the hero, as in "Double Star"), and he is under the same obligation to make the first-person narrator real as he would be to make a third-person viewpoint-character real. To the unskilled writer, on the other hand, first person is a trap. It becomes an exercise in autobiography; that constantly recurring word "I" irresistibly leads the writer back to himself, and away from the kind of narrator the story being told needs.

Heinlein is a highly skilled writer, but by instinct--and he has now caught himself in this trap three out of four times. Twice he

has bailed himself out by dazzling virtuosity in handling other aspects of the story. The third novel, however, proved to be so closely tied to the problem of viewpoint that its failure to solve the problem killed the story.

The failures of masters are usually more interesting to the technician than the triumphs of tyros, and this one is no exception. The only first-person narrator Heinlein has created who is a living, independent human being is The Great Lorenzo of "Double Star". Lorenzo is complete all the way back to his childhood---the influence of his father upon what he does is one of the strongest motives in the story---and his growth under the pressure is consistent with his character and no-one else's. On the other hand, the heroes of "Gulf", "The Puppet Masters", and "The Door into Summer" are all the same man: the competent young engineer-operative, sentimentally hard after the model of the private eye, politically conservative, contemptuous of the ordinary man, philosophically wedded about equally to "common sense" and to the doctrine of Progress, fast-talking, wise-cracking, and quick with his fists. By drawing on all three novels, a critic could produce quite an extended portrait of this man, but in no one of the novels is he produced in the round; and I think it is quite safe to assume that he is in actuality an idealized self-portrait of the author. On the few occasions when Heinlein has spoken for himself in print, he has offered opinions and attitudes completely coherent with those of his triple hero---which I offer not in proof but simply as additional documentation; the appearance of the same hero in three independent novels should be proof enough.

In "The Door into Summer" Heinlein has apparently come to take this hero so for granted that he does not even try to set him forth clearly for the reader--a defect which is fatal to the novel. Presented with the task of showing us not one, but two future societies, Heinlein boggles both because he has failed to visualize exactly who is seeing what there is to be seen. Dan Davis has so little personality of his own that there is hardly anything in the world of 2000 A.D. in which he can legitimately be interested; he has no interests beyond robots and his own financial affairs, and so when he looks around at 2000 A.D. he sees nothing but a few abstractions. The major detail that comes through is not Dan Davis at all, but pure Heinlein without even a false beard: this is the attack upon the parity system of farm price supports, which is applied in 2000 A.D. to automobiles. This is marvelously funny and well done, but it in no way emerges from anything we have previously learned about Dan Davis' interests. (It is surely an odd novel that's at its best when the author is openly editorializing.)

What about the novel's heavy emphasis upon cat protocol? This, surely, is characterization? No, not in any major sense. Davis' affection for Pete, and the elaborate pains he takes toward securing the animal's well-being, form a part of the broad stripe of sentimentality that lies just beneath the hardness of Heinlein's self-portrait, and they do help to make the portrait more believable (an exaggerated regard for animals is a common trait in people who are unusually callous toward human beings). But in "The Door into Sum-

mer", the hero's love for his cat is simply a funny hat that he wears; were Dan Davis instead to speak with a stutter, or collect postmarks, the effect upon the credibility of the novel would be about the same. (I don't deny that it would deprive the novel of its title gimmick, but this would not be a large loss.) There is nothing to be seen in the world of 2000 A.D. for which the cat protocol is illuminating.

Unless my memory has failed me, "The Door into Summer" is Heinlein's only major essay in time travel§, and as such it should have been a major novel. Every other important subject of science fiction which Heinlein has examined at length has come out remade, vitalized and made the author's own property. It didn't happen here, for the first time in Heinlein's long and distinguished career--and not because Heinlein didn't have something to say, but because he failed to embody it in a real protagonist.

Evidently, Heinlein as his own hero is about played out.

§ Apparently, Blish's memory failed. Heinlein's long novelette, "By His Bootstraps", must be considered a major essay in time travel in its effect, if not its length. -- The editors.

END

DEPARTMENTS

All the departments mentioned here exist in embryo. It's up to you which ones get born. We'd like to have your suggestions about other departments, but most of all we want your response. This, the most important part of the magazine, is one that the editors cannot write--you have to do it.

CORRESPONDENCE: As many pages of the Forum as necessary will be given over to letters. If you disagree with some statement made in the magazine, if you want to defend yourself against innacurate or unfair criticism, if you have anything to say on a professional topic to your fellow professionals, say it here.

CAN'T-BE-DONE: Do you have a creative problem that keeps bothering you although it's apparently hopeless? Try it here--maybe half a dozen different approaches can come up with an answer.

QUESTION AND ANSWER: This one may spark some discussion. If you have a tough question about some phase of s-f, directed to some specific person in the field, send it on. If it's embarrassing, don't worry about that; the recipient can answer or not, as he chooses.

GRIPES: Have you been the victim of sharp practice or editorial discourtesy lately? Complain here. If the Forum can't do anything about it, at least we can warn other subscribers.

SERVICE: There are numerous ways in which writers might operate their business with greater ease or economy. If you've found a way of doing something better, faster or cheaper, pass it on. If you want to know how to get the best new typewriter or how to count up words more rapidly, ask it here. If you've licked some annoyance in your routine, probably others need your guidance, just as someone's probably loaded with the answer to one of your problems.

PILLAR TO POST

by Lester del Rey

For some strange reason, "pulp" is an ugly word to apply to any branch of literature. Science fiction, in particular, seems to have an almost frantic urge to be considered something else. With one or two doubtful exceptions, all the magazines in the field have been pulps, but that apparently has nothing to do with it. We became "specialized slicks"---a contradiction in terms, since a characteristic of most real slicks is a lack of rigid specialization. Then that wasn't good enough for us, and we tried to convince ourselves that our writing was really a type of "quality" fiction. It still came out in the same magazines, was reprinted in books from older and even "pulpier" magazines, and appealed to the same basic desire for entertainment, but the label was changed. And with the new label, some of the rules for writing it were turned upside down.

Basically, unlike the subjective slicks, pulp fiction was built on a fair degree of objective action. The villain chased the hero, or vice versa, through untold pages of our classics. Now all this was changed. Such action was a "chase", and "chase" became a perjorative, capable of blackening any story's reputation. I've heard the word used to condemn a story without further reason. I've seen as capable and careful a critic as Damon Knight use the word as if it were synonymous with "bad". I've even observed writers struggling as hard to remove a chase scene from their stories as they might once have worked to insert one.

This automatic assumption that the chase is bad hardly seems fair. The chase has been used in great works of literature, as well as in the lowest grade-C movies where Rossini's Overture sounds to the tempo of driving hooves. Since literature began, protagonists have been driven from pillar to post, and the quality of the resulting story depended only on skill, intent, and all the other factors of good writing. The chase by itself is only a device, like the problem-to-solution movement of modern stories as opposed to the aimless wandering-through-marvels of the old tales.

Moby Dick was written as a chase, whatever other virtues it may have as a story; without the chase, there's a great deal of material left, but it hangs in midair, without full significance. Tarzan the Terrible is also a chase story; without the chase, there is little beyond a few interesting items on the language and habits of Pal-ul-Don. The fact that these two novels depend on the chase would hardly confuse any critic into classifying them together! One of the great chases of literature comes in Hugo's Les Miserables, when Jean Valjean is in flight. (It also includes an excessively lengthy travelog through the sewers of Paris.) One of the best-known ones in American literature involves little Eva and some unnaturally vicious bloodhounds. The raw elements of the chase are similar in the two, but motivation, characterization, plausibility and writing are so dissimilar that one is gripping, the other laughable.

Did the chase hurt any otherwise good book in which it appeared? I cannot believe it did. At the very least, in the hands of a good writer, it put the hero through a peak or crisis of emotional and physical stress which forced him to prove himself. It also provided a good vicarious kick to the adrenals of the reader. (Without that in fiction, I'll stop reading science fiction and go back to the electronics magazines.) In the hands of even a fairly bad writer, a chase sometimes can at least help to dispel the dullness, if it is not too horribly done; and since dullness is the curse of fiction, even greater in sin than shallowness, it can lift a story one notch nearer acceptability. (Significantly, the one thing remembered by most people about Uncle Tom's Cabin is the chase across the ice--it isn't a very well-done chase, but it still comes as a relief after the dullness that precedes it.)

Let's strip the chase down to its basic elements. Essentially, a chase is composed of (1) an urgent need to escape from--and/or to--something, or to capture something out of reach; (2) some limit on time or ability which makes it difficult; (3) some pursuing or escaping force in opposition to the protagonist or out of his control; and (4) a protagonist who is of sufficient importance and credibility to the reader to make it desirable that he succeed.

Recognize it? It's nothing in God's scheme but a basic plot! And that, gentlemen, is what a chase should be---a plot or subplot. (Naturally, there are other types of plots, and the chase is not an essential ingredient of all stories, but the basic elements of all plots will prove to be surprisingly similar.) Most faults with bad chase scenes come from the absence of one or more elements. If (4) is not provided, the reader has no reason to care about the action of the story. Without (1) you have no suspense. Without (2) you have the too-common idiot plot; that is, the story where everything could be solved at once--and hence, no story--if the protagonist did not act like an idiot to keep things going.

The most common error of all is probably the ommission of (3). If there is nothing pursuing the character in motion, or if he has no goal he must logically reach, you have what I call the travelog. This is often confused with a chase, but it isn't; it's purely a substitution of mere action through a background for a story. I've made the distinction between travelog and chase for a long time, but it was Damon Knight who finally pointed out the fact that the difference lay in the absence of the pursuer. At the same time, he admitted that he'd been confusing the chase and travelog in condemning certain stories as bad. I think it's a common error, and that much of the disfavor in which the chase is held may be due to it.

Taking the full pattern of the chase, let's see what we can make. We can drop to the lowest level of writing. Cowboy (who is a "good guy" only because we're told he is, not because he shows it) must reach beautiful ranch gal to warn of rustlers. They pursue him and mean to kill him. He's already wounded, of course, and outnumbered badly. He almost gets caught, gets away, gets caught and beats the whole mob. Pretty sad--because the chase here had nothing to do in this feeble story. The real story was the fight after he was caught and the rest was just padding and stalling. The chase was built of

trite elements and not integrated into a convincing story.

At the other end of my arbitrary scale, we can take a man who has failed himself all his life--who has let others run him and has made no effort to do what he really wants. Now a situation arises which makes him realize that he has only a little time in which to gain the real desire of his and which he must achieve for himself and perhaps for others involved with him. He has to escape his habits and the increasing efforts others make to control him as he seeks a measure of freedom. His past chases him, his present buffets him, and he runs through his little time toward his goal--or toward suicide (psychically if not physically). Isn't this a chase? Can't a man's own other nature be the pursuer through time? It's the culmination of a chase through time and his mind which actually began years ago, and of which we see only the dramatic fulfillment. I claim this is a chase in every sense of the word--and that it can be the basis for fiction as great as the writer can handle.

Go to Josef Conrad and see how the men in his stories are driven and buffeted as they fight, often against the outside pressures of their fate and environment, but always largely within themselves. The protagonist may be pursued, pursuer---and goal! And yet every element of the chase can be used directly as well as subtly.

A chase doesn't have to cover physical ground or have the Overture in the background. That's just the writer grabbing for a cliché. Certainly in science fiction, the chase in time can not be considered invalid. We've had that overtly in Simak's first Galaxy novel, in van Vogt, etc. Nor can we rule out a man who is chasing himself--or has one side of his psyche chasing another.

Science fiction should be the last form of literature to sneer at the chase. We have wide opportunities to use the device to some real purpose and without repeating clichés. We also have a large part of our best literature built around the chase. Who would be so unfeeling as to cut the chase from Leiber's wonderful Conjure Wife? Or Gather, Darkness? Slan was loaded with chases--and at its best during them. Nor need we go so far back to our "pulp" past. According to the critics, Highways in Hiding was one of George O. Smith's best novels; it's hard to find one more closely connected with the chase. Gunner Cade, by Cyril Judd, did rather well, though it seems to be about 90% chase. Bester's Demolished Man has some marvelous chase scenes, even if we see them from both sides--and get the kick of suspense from both sides, too--a nice trick, indeed! I wonder how many of us wouldn't like to write stories of the average level of these consistently? I don't wonder what they would be like with the chase scenes removed; I prefer not to think about such idiocy.

My Nerves was deliberately plotted as a chase story, through time. I have the men here pursued by a threat from the changes in the radioactive magma, chasing a solution madly and wildly. On a basis of time, I wrote this as I would a physical chase, though it's less obvious in space. When I rewrote it into a novel, I added material that increased the physical level of chase. The flight of Jorgenson to save others and himself in the atom chamber was straight spatial chase material, with the magma literally at his heels. I'm surprised nobody spotted something so obvious. To me, it is one of the

best bits I've done in a long time, perhaps because it has some of the emotional force that I can only bring to full focus in my work when something like a chase is involved. His character is built on the idea that he feels all his life he has been chased by normal men toward conformity or insanity, incidentally. He's a hounded man--a man driven mad; and the immediate chase is only symbolic of the larger chase, as is often true with well-integrated chase scenes.

On the other hand, movement across space, even from an enemy, is not necessarily a chase. In my "For I am a Jealous People", Strong flees, but no man (or alien) long pursueth. The aliens drop out and physically there is only a travelog as he returns to his church. The real chase is mental---the devils of his old beliefs and attitudes hound him from the past, and he has to escape them to a new and difficult adjustment to reality and duty. If I bungled this as I may have done, it was from inability to show the real chase, not from the presence of his physical movement in this section.

One of the best examples of good chase development was Herbert's "Under Pressure" in Astounding. This was based almost entirely on a protracted chase---with the chase both on the physical and the psychic levels. There, probably, is the key to its effectiveness. It was always more than a mere physical movement through distance from enemies. I believe that all really good chase stories must provide more than motion, important though the movement may be.

But this brings us back to the basic rules of good writing again. The action should always develop and try the lead character, and his actions must come from within himself. The action can be good only when it makes more of him than before---and hence, to some extent, more of the reader.

If you want to write good pulp, for the love of heaven, don't throw away the chase. Just re-examine it and see why it is there and what it can accomplish. At its worst, it is still better than empty words to fill dull pages of stories with no plot. At its midling level, a careful use of well-motivated and developed chase can give a good adventure story. And if you will study it to make the most of all its elements, it can give a story the guts needed to lift it above mere pulp levels. If you want to write quality fiction, I don't think you or I or any other writer in this field can succeed often, at our present stage of skill and understanding; but I'm doubly sure you can't do it without using the elements of the chase to the maximum--and that little bit further which must always be the mark of excellence.

One of the marks of a good craftsman in any field is his ability to handle his tools well, through understanding and practice. The chase is one of the writer's most usefel tools. In the hands of a poor writer, it may merely fill paper, substituting motion for plot. In other hands, it can provide the dramatic intensity necessary to full development of the human values of the story. Like most other devices and techniques of fiction, the chase is no better and no worse than the ability, the honesty and the intent of the writer who uses it.

END

EDITORIAL (Continued from page 2)

hands of those whom we select to practice our "social science", the former uniform enthusiasm for science has waned, with the result that we have one group still writing somewhat uncertainly of progress by technology and another group who automatically assume that the same technology threatens to ruin all that is good in our culture.

In such a situation, communication becomes difficult indeed. It isn't surprising that the old lines of communion have broken down. Instead of sharing our ideas, we seem to hoard them carefully, as if we could lock them in a vault or grow them like fungi in the dark. Writers no longer know half the names of their fellow contributors, and they seldom read each other's stories. We have become a scattered group, living apart, dropping our ideas into the pool with no awareness of the ripples and cross-currents already present.

Yet the need for group thinking has never been greater. Our diversity can be a means of enrichment to the field, provided our divergence can be overcome. An artist--of any kind and to any degree--cannot be a man apart. To do his job, he must have something to express that is related to, but not a mere duplication of, the statements of others. He cannot mine his own brain forever without exhaustion of the lode of fresh ideas and without developing a leaden sameness. Just as security restrictions have hampered science, so isolation must vitiate science fiction.

A creeping paralysis is already at work. Editors find that they get less and less really good fiction to publish; writers find that the magazines grow poorer and porrer and unconsciously drop their sights to fit what they see; and editors get less and less really good fiction to publish! Instead of a contagion of excitement, there seems to be a pendemic of apathy. In writers' gatherings and at fan meetings, I hear the same complaint over and over again: Something has been lost; it's hard to read the magazines today; they don't write that kind of story anymore; there are no new ideas. These laments would be nothing but age probably, if they were coming only from the old-time writers and fans. But I've heard them from young writers who are selling everything they write, who have no long experience in reading science fiction, and who should seemingly be tickled pink with the status quo.

Breaking such a pattern of negative feedback is not easy, but it must be done, if science fiction is to survive as more than a dull and gloomy exercise in juggling words and extrapolating microideas. It can be done, if the men who are aware of the need can communicate their ideas and work together to start enough positive feedback of ideas and enthusiasm. It is to serve as a sounding board for such communication between writers that Damon Knight and I—with an enormous amount of help and encouragement from almost every writer we know--have begun the Forum. The number of subscribers seems to indicate that such a sounding board is genuinely needed.

Our objectives are many, but all relate to the problem of a deeper and closer communication, communion and community of understanding among those who practice the craft, the hobby and the love of good science fiction.

We want to examine in our reviews what is being done--to increase our understanding of just what is going on and to check the spread of some of the most common errors into which it is easy for any writer to fall when he receives no outside, honest reaction to his work --something friends and even editors cannot be expected to give. We want to bring together the ideas of everyone who has been thinking or is willing to think about our common problems and goals. We want to share any techniques or methods which will make it easier to do good work, or which will fan the faint spark of the enthusiasm that still appears here and there. And above all, we want to bring the writers in the field together—with each other and with the editors; we want to make them aware of how much they have in common and how much they can communicate to each other.

With your coöperation and your contributions, this can be done. After all, there isn't a writer who doesn't want to communicate, or he wouldn't be a writer. And no matter how much we differ, our similarities will always be greater. We're not hopelessly divided into groups; we are still one group in our body of common interests. We enjoy science fiction and we want to see it the best it can be, or we wouldn't be paying our money for this publication or putting our work into it. We are all fundamentally enthusiasts, or we wouldn't take time from our writing and other work to devote to this.

When these facts are recognized and used, the purpose of the S-F Forum will have been accomplished.

§ § §

Some preliminary correspondence has already brought up important points for consideration. James Quinn, publisher of If, reminds us that, along with improvement in working conditions and rewards for writers, there must be the same for publishers. There is no question about this, though it is sometimes forgotten. We hope to have an honest and detailed article on this subject shortly.

Science fiction is a field where the interests of writers, editors and publishers are bound together more tightly than usual, and where all involved are usually enthusiasts. Most editors were writers; many publishers operate their science fiction magazines at a lower than normal margin of profit because they enjoy publishing it more than other literature. Part of our problem in communication is to develop better understanding generally. We don't consider the interests of any one group as paramount or inimical to the interests of any other groups. The voice of an editor or publisher will be given the same consideration as that of a writer or other subscriber. We hope to have no class discrimination in the pages of the Forum!

Another point was brought up by Anthony Boucher and Sam Moskowitz and is one which is perhaps the most troublesome problem we were forced to face in planning the Forum. Tony wrote: "I'm not at all sure how well the combination of a critico-analytical magazine and a writers' trade journal will succeed. Depends on the bluntness of the hides in the profession..."

We worried about this ourselves. We wanted reviews as well as critical articles because we thought they were needed. At one time

the magazines published extensive correspondence from readers which gave writers at least some chance to see how their work was received but this is no longer true. Yet certainly a writer needs an honest appraisal of his work, even if from only one source. Also, these reviews of the magazines would serve to show better than anything else just what we were talking about; without them, all our theoretical discussions would be in a vacuum, like an experimental psychologist's report without his case histories.

There were easy solutions, of course. We could have pulled our punches--and rendered the whole thing pointless. We could have rated on the average for each issue, rather than on how a story rated in terms of general literary excellence. But we preferred to avoid such easy solutions-by-trickery. In the end, our decision was that a spade should be called a spade, even when it seemed to be used as a tool for grave-digging.

The results may hurt in some cases; they were sometimes painful to write. They are harsher than we expected---but they are as honest as we could make them. I don't believe writers have blunt hides but I do believe that most of us hunger even more for honesty than for praise. Certainly the former is the rarer commodity. Our reviews will not be written with our circulation in mind, nor to be kind or cruel deliberately. It is the only possible solution. Certainly, however, we can make errors in judgment; therefore, we will make sure our pages are always open to valid rebuttals.

§ § §

There used to be an old German lady who cleaned my room whenever I tidied it up enough to let her in. Her heavy sighs at the sight used to haunt me. Then one afternoon I came back from breakfast to find she'd already entered through my unlocked door. She stared at half a ream of paper all over the floor and at page 1 in the typewriter. Again there was the deep sigh. "Ah yes," she said. "Aller Anfang sind schwer." Wonderful, understanding old lady.

All beginnings are hard, and seldom perfect. The Forum proved to be much more work than was expected as the result of numerous difficulties in dummying, stencilling and mimeography. In the future, it will be mailed on time, made easier by experience and probably by elimination of justified right margins, which double the work. For the delay in mailing this issue, I hold myself wholly at fault.

I won't apologize for its lack of prefection, however. This can be no more than a pump-priming issue, designed to get it started and stimulate a response from the readers. It is filled mostly with the work of the edtiors, and we hope this will soon be unnecessary. In the long run, the Forum must be a wholly coöperative affair, and it must become what the readers want, not the personal property of the few who put it together.

We need to hear from you, if it is ever to serve any part of its true function. Your reactions--whether you hate us or love us---or can't make up your mind--are absolutely essential to the future success of the Forum.

END

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