Speculation

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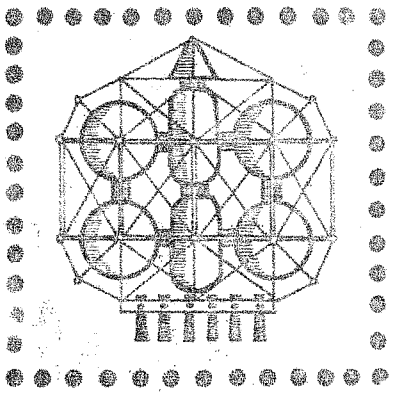
THIRDMANCON 1968: G.O.H. SPEECH

KENNETH BULMER



Speculation

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Presented with this issue;

SPECULATION:DATA, a new magazine and information source. Contents include all rates & data on SPECULATION, THE MULTI-MAN (review) by David Redd; READERS START HERE (article) by George Hay; news, cuttings, other features.

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The news has just come in as I write of the murder of Robert Kennedy. Few things have shocked me so deeply as this terrible, senseless shooting. I do not know what the future holds for the United States, but I'm sick to see that such evil has happened again to another great man.

THE SPECULATOR:
STATE OF THE ART

How impossible it is to 'keep up with' science fiction! The last three months have been filled with the regular 'thunk' of review copies coming through my letterbox, and with subsequent reading sessions until 2.00PM. For me there's been the very real danger that reading SF will become a chore rather than a pleasure - it's just not possible to read and review everything and still have time to live a little.

Panther Books frightened me a few weeks ago by sending a huge crate of new books, SF, general fiction, everything, easily £30-worth. When I found they weren't for review, my dreams of wealth were speedily dispelled. They said their new computer was distributing largesse at random; and please could I send the books back ?

Most enjoyable stories of the quarter for me have probably been 'This Moment of the Storm' by Roger Zelazny, 'Slowboat Cargo' by Larry Niven, and THIS IMMORTAL, which I finally managed to get hold of. New Worlds continues to publish fascinatingly different material; notably 'Bug Jack Barron', but I wonder, could the tide have at last begun to turn for the New Wave ? This is a mainly subjective opinion; - I'm jumping from here to there without a great deal of evidence, but it seems to me that recent comments have begun to question some of the New School's more expansive claims.

We've been very nearly 'brainwashed' into believing that the old disciplines of SF - or indeed of most fiction - should be discarded, but now I wonder again; surely another name for this abandoning of recognised standards is 'self-indulgence' ? (I see, for instance, that 'Bug Jack Barron' has been criticised by many sources; by Donald Wollheim in his Lunacon speech (see Scotische 48), by The Guardian, and by Ted White in Psychotic 25. "I'll bet that already it is outdated" he said last month. How terribly correct he was!)

I said up above that reading too much SF could drive you crazy; how much more fanaticism is required to produce something like this fanzine ? I've just got engaged to Eileen, you see, (many of you met her at Easter) and at the moment we've every intention of enjoying the summer. Speculation may suffer somewhat, for although I've dropped the Young Conservatives, I'm now attempting to handle some part-time free-lance publicity work, in addition to my regular job. And oh yes, I'm also writing a book, or half of a book, but you'll hear a great deal more about this if it ever comes to anything !

So New Wave science fiction is on the retreat, or at least is no longer on the attack. What else has happened recently to science fiction ?

I'd like to quote Harry Warner here, who said that I deserved at least a couple of Hugos for an 'unparalleled accomplishment' in the last issue. My editorial dealt at length with significant developments in science fiction during 1967, he said, and not once linked them to the latest Beatles album, a break-through in electronics, or the statuary of Easter Island in a cause-and-effect chain. "I doubt that this will ever happen again in a fanzine," concluded Harry, "so you will always have a special place in my memory as the person who dared to state facts about the SF field without drawing cultural and sociological conclusions from them !"

Thank you Harry ! But in conclusion last time, perhaps I SHOULD have asked one question: What is the true value of science fiction ? Can it ever be a real 'literature of significance' ? John Wyndham once called SF "The adventures of galactic gangsters in space opera", and SF has always been just another branch of action/adventure fiction with the primary function of entertainment. Can such a medium carry meaning without destroying the story in question or degenerating into polemic ? Occasionally SF might be able to shed some light on problems of human relations, simply by exposing those relationships to new, undreampt-of stresses and situations. But this is a marginal virtue, it is seen very rarely, and it is not the prime motive of fiction. A story does not HAVE to carry a 'message'.

Looking back, almost all science fiction written before - arbitrarily say 1955 - seems shallow, lacking in literary values, and even sadly short on speculation, its avowed reason for existence. Leaving aside the fact that a lot of modern SF has the same faults, the point is that in their own way, these older stories were a step forward at the time of writing.

Poor extrapolation is better than no extrapolation. History is a record of advances, each step on the shoulders of the one before. Science fiction has had a revolution every decade, with Campbell in the Forties, Gold and Boucher in the Fifties, and now the New Wave of the Sixties.

Ken Bulmer presents a good case for not abandoning our past achievements "Science fiction is not 'literature'," he writes in this issue, and "In attempting to make over SF into 'literature' we are throwing away one of the reasons for SF's existence." Well, you can read the rest of this in Ken's Guest of Honour Speech, but my own personal interest has always been in the novelty of settings and sheer mind-stretching qualities of a story, rather than in the antics of its characters.

ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE

CAMP CONCENTRATION might be regarded as the first major novel by Thomas M. Disch, and so deserves careful study. At Graham Hall's suggestion we asked Bob Parkinson to write a critique of the book, and along with previous comments in Speculation this should reveal a lot about the novel. Also at Graham's prompting we recently wrote to Michael Harrison, a young author lately beginning to sell in the SF field (NEW WRITINGS IN SF: 12). Mike has already sent some stimulating letters, which we don't necessarily agree with, and now provides an excellent review of THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION, on Pages 19-21.

Finally, Graham reviews Joseph's THE HOLE IN THE ZERO, and wins himself a Gold Medal for Effort. This critique appears in our new feature, "Critical Front", which is really a fancy name for a review column-in-depth. (Or should that be a review-in-depth-column ?) Other contributors here include Peter White, returning to UK fandom after 3 years absence, Brian Stableford and Chris Priest. The balance of the issue is made up by my own book guide and by an extensive MELTING POT letter column.

Next time the commanding heights of the magazine will be taken by Richard Gordon with 'A MAN IN HIS TIME', an article about the science fiction of Brian W Aldiss. This particular item, I might add, was planned some six months ago and has since seen a great deal of work by Richard, myself and by Brian Aldiss. The final version has been built up from some two dozen letters, quotations and passages of relevant material, on top of Richard's original MS. It is concerned primarily with Mr Aldiss's more important recent works, such as AN AGE, REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, and I believe the 8000-word article will be a major analysis of our leading British SF writer.

Other material can be predicted fairly safely. Buz Busby may appear with another installment of 'The Plough', and the Critical Front will contain long critiques of books such as THE WITCHES OF KARRES: A TORRENT OF FACES: THE DOLPHIN AND THE DEEP: CHOCKY: NEUTRON STAR, PAST MASTER, and Sladek's THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM. Bob Parkinson has another article, this one concerned with Philip K. Dick, and Panshin's just-published HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION will probably be reviewed. There will also be the OPINION and WORLD'S WORST features (both of which need your support) and a discussion on the book DANGEROUS VISIONS, an item postponed from the current issue.

Congratulations to Pam Yates, who has just had a son, Timothy. Pam is now working on further artwork, in-between washing nappies ! Bad luck Bob Rickard, who is not at all represented in this number; he is instead working around the clock on his University finals and has had to skip all of the critical work we hoped to include this time. John Boardman also writes to inform us about his Eleven-Foot Poll, for science fiction you wouldn't touch with a 10-foot pole. This parallels the original conception of our WORLD'S WORST feature, although we've now decided not to list contenders but to write about one really bad story each time (see Page 7).

Might I make a request ? I'd personally like to publish more material by people who haven't previously written for the magazine. There are also a number of topics on which I'd welcome your comments, particularly on the book, DANGEROUS VISIONS, and/or the stories therein. I'd also like to receive critiques on the novels BUG JACK BARRON, and THE MEN IN THE JUNGLE by Norman Spinrad; NOVA by Samuel Delany; and THE JUDGEMENT OF EVE by Edgar Pangborn. Wouldn't you like to appear in Speculation ?

England sometimes feels like a remote interstellar colony, as far as the fan-scene is concerned. Surface letters and fanzines take 4-5 weeks to arrive from the USA, and I feel like a colonist on Centauri, eternally behind the mother-source because of the limiting velocity of communication. For these reasons I'd like to hear more from American fans; it's been a long time since we printed any material from the USA. Speculation this time is almost exclusively an English production, but it wasn't always this way !

Peter Weston 1968

Opinion!

SOME VIEWS ON CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION

I was greatly tempted to add my own editorial remarks to some of the comments below: luckily lack of space has spared you this little self-indulgence. Remember, your opinions of science fiction will be welcomed.

8: WRITTEN BY DICTAPHONE (Tony Sudbery)

"...Not the least of Dick's faults is his abominable style; you may be interested in these notes which I made after reading THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH:

Dick's writing is a disgrace. He disrupts his sentences with long, clumsily-placed parentheses; if he cannot think offhand of the mot juste or the phrase juste he puts down several alternatives and lets the reader take his pick; he will always prefer the long, jargony word to the short simple one (utilise for use, subsequent to for after or since, etc, etc); he is a master of the ugly, ignorant back-formation (destruct for destroy; deduct for deduce, cessate for cease). The dialogue is superb, but the rest of the book is also like dialogue. It reads as if it were written by dictaphone.

THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH is the first draft of an over-sensational but fairly good thriller. "

9: A HOARY ANTITHESIS (Thomas M Disch)

"...I admired MAKE ROOM ! MAKE ROOM ! for all its evident virtues and for making an all too rare gesture in the direction of naturalism. What puts me off most SF, Zelazny's for instance, is the unrelievedly romantic colours - as though an entire museum were to be hung with paintings by Delacrois. On the other hand, I will admit that some of the best SF I have read, Zelazny's for instance, defies this prescription and that the only first-rate examples that obey it have been by people who were poaching in SF territory; Orwell, Burgess, Golding, Elliott. Perhaps the chief virtue of the New Wave/Thing, if it exists, is that it has managed to sidestep this hoary antithesis altogether."

10: A MANIFESTO (Bob Parkinson)

"...It came to me (after our recent correspondence) that the surrealist camp had been issuing a lot of manifestos of late; and eventually I began to wonder whether I ought not to lead off with manifestos and polemics also;-

> No enigmatic, unconscious time-streams. No songs by Messaien. No white-hot corrosive desert landscapes. No multi-valued rectilinear highways of Joycean overtones and significance, ready to haul clean off time and space and the edge of the world.
>
> The problem is not how to make science fiction significant, it is how to maintain its significance.
>
> Vonnegut and the Ray-O-Vac Patent.
>
> Look, you idiots.
>
> No art.

(Notes; The Ray-O-Vac Patent was to put a strong metal sheath around the walls of the zinc cup in a dry cell to make it leak-proof. Obvious ? for half a century people had been trying to cure leakage and swelling in dry-cell zinc batteries. Ray-O-Vac got its patent.) "

11: A MISS AND A HIT (two opinions by Chris Priest)

"...I was very disappointed with THE IRON THORN when I first read it, about a year ago I think. My feeling at the time was that it was conceived as a juvenile. All the interesting facets of the hero were played right down. The ending was obscure and the motivations of everyone seemed unclear. I believe this current edition has been re-written and expanded from its publication in If, though that version was padded enough.

STAND ON ZANZIBAR is Brunner's tour-de-force. It should be published in this country. There's never been an SF novel like this one before. (Don't misunderstand me, I don't rate it as one of the best I have ever read ...the ending is too hurried, and some of the extrapolation is too weak.. but it's a book that should be read by everyone who calls himself an SF reader.) Simply because it shows what an experienced and mature writer can do with a theme he believes in passionately. Someday some English publisher is going to make a fortune with it. (Doubleday are publishing it in September, I believe)."

12: REAL TALENT AND IMAGINATION (Peter White)

"...Budrys is one of the small handful of SF writers that I think have real talent and imagination. ROGUE MOON, for all its painful faults and overblown pretentions was really magnificent in parts, and a lot of his short stories, particularly the grotesque macabre fantasies, have been wonderful."

This 'Award' idea of ours for the World's Worst SF just isn't going to work - there seem to be far too many bad stories! But we are going to publish one readers' nomination in each issue as a Horrifying Example. Please pick your own choice, and tell us why it's so terrible. The demolition job is carried out this time by DAVID REDD.

THE WORLD'S WORST S.F. -1967

"The Worst SF Award strikes me as a nice idea. Sadistic, but nice. It's so much easier to pull a story to pieces than it is to put one together. My award goes unhesitatingly to Jack Wodham's WHOSAWHATSA from Analog. I'm afraid I can't offer "reasoned analysis" without reading the whole lousy story again. Mercifully I had forgotten most of the details until now.

The opening of WHOSAWHATSA has a textbook hooker, incredibly padded, leading us into the legal problems of a sex change. The author does develop his basic situation, after a fashion, although most of the time is spent in telling us how indescribably funny the situation is. Various pieces of dialogue are attached to various names; the author is apparently able to distinguish between his characters with little more than the names to go on. This is a remarkable gift and I wish he could pass it on to his readers.

He has an amazing ability to extract the maximum wordage from a single idea. Consider this brilliant paragraph:-

> He rolled his head on his pillow. 'Mr Heldsworth and Mrs Gregg. Mr Gregg and Mrs Heldsworth. Mrs Gregg and Mrs Gregg. Mr Gregg and Mr Gregg. Mr Heldsworth and Mrs Heldsworth. Oh, God. '

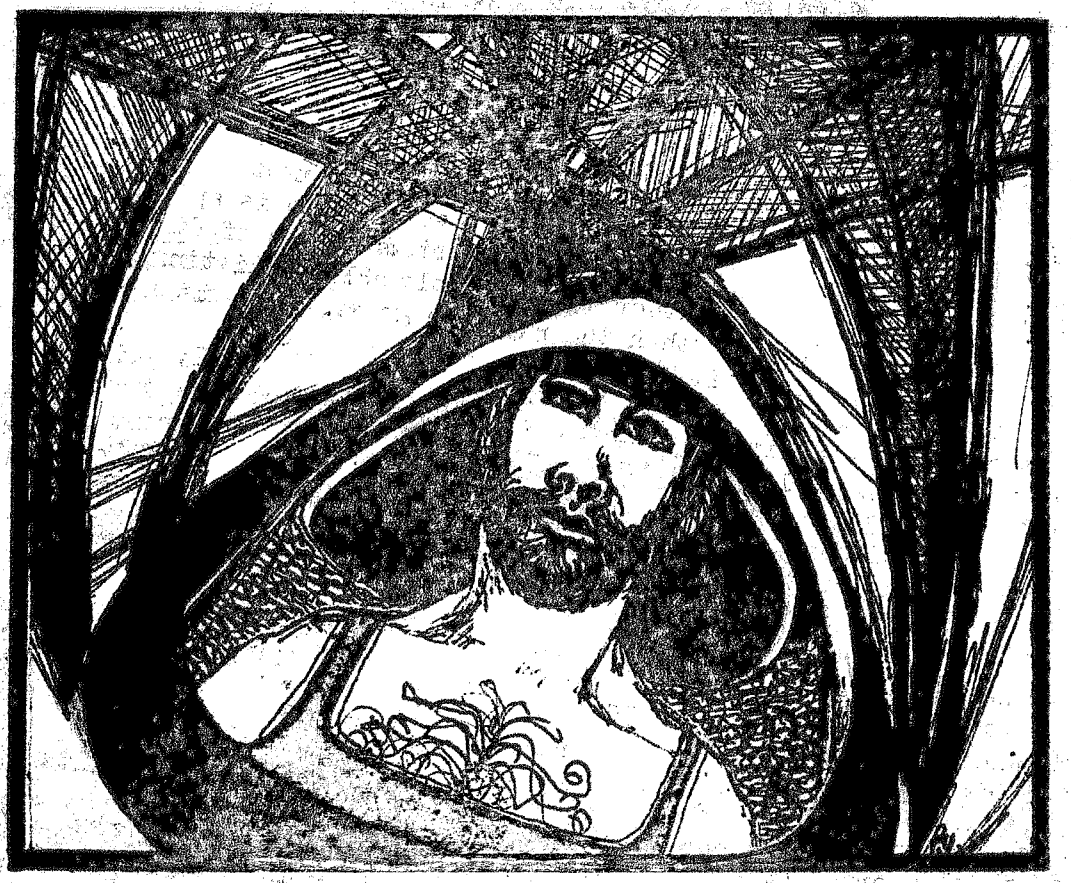
Note the artistic effect obtained by omitting the combination "Mrs Heldsworth and Mr Heldsworth" (And there are others he missed!) It takes real guts and a genuine artistic conscience to leave out words like these at 3¢ a time with a possible ½¢ or 1¢ bonus.

I could criticise this story in a similar vein on many other points. One thing which shook me was the characterisation of the "Old Jarvis said slyly" species. Such animals should be hastily exterminated, not domesticated. Well, many other SF stories of this year have similar faults. WHOSAWHATSA is merely the most extreme example that I have noticed recently. I apologise to Mr Wodhams for this rather unkind treatment. He's new, so he should be able to learn from his mistakes. I just hope he realises they are mistakes.

That's all the explanation of my choice I feel up to giving. It would be much easier and much more fun to slam away at the old Badger Books which you so unsportingly disqualified. My favourite was CYCLOPS IN THE SKY, a really tempting target !

David Redd, 1968

The Aesthetics of Evil: Thomas M. Disch and the Faustus theme



BY BOB PARKINSON Illustrated by Pam Yates

LAST TIME Mike Ashley thought CAMP CONCENTRATION was one of Thomas M. Disch's worst literary pieces, while Richard Gordon thought the author knew what he was talking about, and said it well. In this issue other voices might be heard with similar undocumented assertions; although we haven't elsewhere quoted him, David Redd thought the novel deserved a Hugo and so did Joe Patrizio, while Mike Harrison said that "Disch has proved himself to be a 'mainstream' writer by writing a piece of SF".

All in all, this novel has proved to be one of the talking points of the last year and one of the most important literary works to come out of the new New Worlds. In an effort to get a more-or-less intellectual opinion of what Disch has accomplished, we asked Bob Parkinson to write 1500 words about the novel. After much coming and going on various train journeys by both editor and critic, the best of three different versions of this critique appears in Speculation.

There are two points which seem to me important about the work of Thomas M. Disch, both of which are relevant to the novel CAMP CONCENTRATION, the subject of this essay. The first of these involves Disch's choice of subject matter, which I shall tentatively label as a 'concern for the aesthetics of evil.' And the second relates to technique; specifically to Disch's position somewhere within the 'nouveau garde.'

To take these in order; it seems to me that Disch constantly deals with evil, bad, or ugly subjects. In, that is, the subjects themselves, and not in his handling of them. This is permissible. The artist is still allowed to choose his own subjects, and Disch is after all concerned with the aesthetics of evil. In CAMP CONCENTRATION the quotation from Rilke, from the first of the Duineser Elegien, is relevant:

> "For Beauty's nothing but the
> beginning of Terror we're still just able to bear,
> and why we adore it so is because it serenely distains
> to destroy us."

(Disch's interpretation of that alone, that sense of Terror, is sufficient to identify him as being among the 'nouveau garde', except that in the original it was a sense of Horror).

CAMP CONCENTRATION is a version of the Faustus legend. In it the inmates of Camp Archimedes are given (or have thrust upon them) the miraculous gift of accelerated intelligence through the agency of a mutated syphillis spirochete which will destroy them in nine months. And all the ghosts of the old Faustus legends congregate in the pages to watch - from Marlowe to Thomas Mann.

At times indeed, the parallels between the Disch story and that of Thomas Mann are suprisingly close. So that the East German composer(ess) who appears at a distance in Item 36 as "Adrienne Leverkuhn" is merely a metamophosis of "Adrian" - the protagonist of Mann's Dr. FAUSTUS.

The Faustus legend must be one of the two unique myths of the Rennaisance (sorry, I mean post-Rennaisance), the inevitable dark counterflow to the developing control by Man over his environment. (The other, Anna, is Tristan and Isolde). It haunts us with alchemy in the halls of science - which is half magic to most even at the best of times. And inevitably the myth raises the question of the nature of evil.

Leaving everything else out, this theme of the tragedies of increased intelligence has been handled before; dramatized and dramatized with compassion. Keyes' FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON, and Hersey's THE CHILD BUYER spring at once to mind. Disch does not treat his subject with compassion - or at least not directly - but instead proceeds straight into its ugliness and from that path attempts to wrest some aspect of beauty. The possible achievement thereby is that much the greater; the poetry, where it catches fire, has a tough directness.

The question of poetry enters the novel in several ways, because Sachetti - Disch's protagonist - is himself a poet. This is always dangerous for an author. For to say that a man is a great composer - as in Mann's Dr FAUSTUS - may allow him to convince the reader at second hand. It may not even be necessary to know how to make music. But once remark that a man is a poet (especially if, as here, that man is also the narrator), and the reader will insistently demand evidence for the fact.

Which is not quite as impossible as it might seem. Many prose writers hide away verse scribblings. If nothing else it is a useful stylistic exercise. But poetry? Poetry is a very personal thing in this age of fragmented myths.

I am tempted (and will succumb) to compare Disch's CAMP CONCENTRATION with Roger Zelazny's short A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES. These stores are both by young writers, both educated, both (in themselves) competent poets, and both use a poet as narrator. But on a purely subjective level, I find that Zelazny's work catches fire, while Disch's barely fails to. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the best known test for poetry.

Self-examination suggests two possible reasons for this difference. First, Zelazny's poet only exercises his talent at a secondary level in the narrative; on the primary level, through the whole story, is the long poem of Ecclesiastes itself, part of the bedrock of our civilisation. it is a common and powerful source of myth and imagery upon which to build, and yet is translated by Zelazny into an unfamiliar aspect. If poetry is such a subjective thing, then perhaps we have to find as well as form common denominators in our subjectivities. Disch's sources tend to be a little too abstruse, too individual.

And secondly, on a much less important level, Disch's subject of ugliness and evil builds up its own barriers. Because poetry is, like everything else written, not merely a way of speaking but a medium for things to say.
(Thus I refute J.G. Ballard.)

Here perhaps I should return to what I earlier termed the 'nouveau garde.' The term is vague and inexact, and if I define it I risk excluding those whom I wish to include. This new 'thing' in science fiction is concerned primarily with structure and presentation and much less with content. It is an attempt to move away from the conventional linearities of science fiction writing, and in itself that may be a good thing. However, something often seems to be missing, because it is not the material that has forced the new mould but the writer. The usual reaction to such work is that "they don't build plots like they used to." (They never did, but never mind).

There is not much unconventional in Disch's structure for CAMP CONCENTRATION The differences show in minor ways; the diary form that becomes a long slow countdown upon oblivion being perhaps the most blatant. This countdown (except that it is a count-up, and therefore less obviously proceeding towards a conclusion) may provide some added tension, but the form has inevitable difficulties too - the most obvious of which is that realistic writing of the climax becomes impossible. A diary pre-digests events, provides recollections of action in contemplation - and it must disappear at just those points of action and excitement where the novelist needs to give his story impact. Thus it is in CAMP CONCENTRATION, when Disch's structure deserts him in his hour of need.

Most of Disch's problems come home to roost, it seems to me, at the ending of this novel. If the numbered items of the narrative are to meet their destined century they must do so in measured tread. And yet the seventies and eighties of this progression skip by with undignified haste.

Next, the termination of the individual problem (Sachetti's death) does not provide any solution to anything else. Outside the world ends, the Faustus legend has been turned to Götterdamerungen. Inside, one man is saved. One man, by a near deus ex machina that he has apparently done little to deserve, and that will hardly solve the larger problem. And so, the ending is no ending.

Perhaps this was the author's intention. But it lacks a certain dramatic impact.

Finally, right at the end, Disch makes a promise that belongs elsewhere, outside this world of whitewash-grey barrenness that he has presented. In Disch's novel the hope offers little hope:

> "100.
> "A good round number to end on.
> "It is December 31st, another tidiness. Today Mordecai said; 'Much that is terrible we do not know. Much that is beautiful we shall still discover. Let's sail till we come to the edge.'"

Or was Columbus, after all, a Faustian man of the Rennaisance?

Contrarywise, to measure oneself along the Faustus legend is to measure oneself alongside giants. To try and to have fallen short of perfect is a considerable progress on not to have tried at all.

Bob Parkinson, 1968.

THE CRITICAL**FRONT
BOOK REVIEWS

THIS IS the battleground, the front line of SPECULATION. What with so many new books being published we couldn't possibly review them all; so here we've chosen just the most comment-worthy. The rest is up to you; if you want to do any sniping from the gallery the MELTING POT will welcome your comments and disagreements !

THE CALTRAPS OF TIME by David I Masson (Faber & Faber; 21s.)

Reviewed by Chris Priest.

A large part of David Masson's success as a writer must come from his apparent inability to write formal English prose. This is by no means a form of innuendo; Masson is a man with impeccable linguistic and literary background. My point is that his own peculiar brand of prose, which he adopts either by choice or through necessity, evokes a mystique that distinguishes his work. A particular example is his dialogue;

"What direction now, chief ?" asked Mehhtumm over breakfast.

"Press on south, simply."

In two sentences Masson curtly summarises a directionless quest, and a dogged resolution to continue its pursuit. ('Mouth of Hell'). It is interesting to note how the dialogue in this story expands as the great magma-filled pit is further explored. This is a stylistic device used in 'Traveller's Rest', where the extreme geographical time-dilation creates its own problems.

'Traveller's Rest' lays good claim to being the short story that may one day be known as the one best representative of the Sixties' science fiction. Its aura of mystique is evoked from the first sentence ("It was an apocalyptic sector") through to the last ("Into an unbelievable supercrescendo of sound, light, heat, pressure and impacts he ran, on and on up the now almost invisible slope....."). In this story, too, is clearly marked a feature of what was once known as 'British New Wave': a subjectivity of writing that extends even to the style. The dialogue, as mentioned above, is crisp and to the point when H (the central character) is in the thick of the fighting at the forward sight-barrier. (Cont/d)

(Cont/d);
Later, when he travels to the South (becoming called progressively H, Had, Hadol, Hadolar, Hadolaris, and Hadolarisöndamo) the narrative prose becomes more explicit and relaxed, the dialogue open and natural. At the end of the story, when Hadolarisöndamo has forgotten the war far to the North, and has a wife and family and a prospering business, three men in military uniforms take him, without appeal, back to the front. Quickly he loses his new identity, reverting to H, and as he steps back into the top-bunker he finds only twenty-two minutes of its subjective time have elapsed.

It is a story which is difficult to interpret, and almost impossible to describe. It does something which has been falsely claimed for a lot of recent stories; it discusses the nature of Time rather than its effects. But mainly, 'Traveller's Rest' is an exercise in subjectivity.

A POSITIVE JEST

Compared with the serious intentions of this, 'A Two-Timer' is a positive jest. An observant, intelligent and opportunistic Elizabethan stumbles across a time-machine and transports himself to 1964. This too is a subjective view of a world; in this case it is our world, or rather our world as it was four years ago (things change so fast these days). The story is played for fun, and it is not the innocent abroad who comes off the worse. On the contrary he does rather well, what with rooking antique booksellers, finding much to satirise, and having a bit of adultery on the side.

'Lost Ground' is an unusual story, concerning an area of England that exists in several planes of time. Gradually the area is expanding (rather like J.G. Ballard's jewelled forests) and swallowing up more and more of the present. To wander into it is never to return. This, the author tells us, is the caltrap of the title, yet he is never more specific.

The worst story of the book, showing to a marked degree the author's inability to write formal dialogue, is 'Not So Certain', which is 95% dialogue. In this the author is attempting to write a straightforward semantics story, and fails badly. The publisher's blurb refers to it as being 'perhaps the first attempt at the science fiction of linguistics'... evidently never having heard of Analog. Masson fails with this story because he is attempting to write the wrong kind of story - he is floundering with a style that is not his own. The dénouement of the semantic subtlety of the alien language at the end of the story is too academic a point to involve the reader.

A book of stories, then, that demonstrates its author's limitations. This is not to say it isn't a tremendously stimulating book to read. At least five of the seven stories will bear repeated re-readings over a period of time. Some of them, like 'Traveller's Rest', or 'Psychosmosis' require careful re-readings anyway, to appreciate some of the subtleties of idea that the author is writing about, yet partly obscures with his form of presentation and expression.

I think Masson should write a novel.

Chris Priest, 1968.

* Some bibliographical notes on David I. Masson.
*
* "Born in Scotland in World War I, with a university background," says the
* author, "I am a rare-books librarian. I am fascinated by poetry, languages
* linguistics, land- and skyscrapes, scientific information and the oddness
* of time. For a dozen years around the 1950's I wrote articles on phonetic
* sound in poetry, published in learned periodicals and encyclopedias."
* Mr Masson continues, " 'Not So Certain' may well be the first short-
* story attempt at science fiction on linguistics, as distinct from signal-
* ling systems and psycholinguistic guesswork. My interests in language and
* sound bring, I believe, a novel outlook to all the stories in the book,
* (THE CALTRAPS OF TIME) and two of them demonstrate the changes of language
* in time, a thing most writers ignore. The names people call things and the
* sensations and emotions of a situation seem to me important."

THE HOLE IN THE ZERO by M.K. Joseph (Gollancz; 21s).

Reviewed by Graham M. Hall.

Every so often a novel appears that demonstrates clearly both the limitations and the immense scope of science-fiction as a genre. Miller's CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ, Vonnegut's CAT'S CRADLE and THE SIRENS OF TITAN, Ballard's DROWNED WORLD, Delaney's THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION all spring readily to mind, and it is a compliment to M.K. Jospeh that his book, THE HOLE IN THE ZERO, although a lesser work, must be classed in the same category.

Joseph, Professor of English at the University of Auckland, takes in fact as his hero Milton's concept of Chaos, the area of no-space where anything is possible - it is 'hero' in the same sense that language is the 'hero' of Joyce's ULYSSES and time is the 'hero' of Proust's A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU. And the combined idea of chaos and probability is as rich in potential and 'importance' as time or language. Why then is the contrast so yawning that it seems faintly sacrilegious to mention all three in the same paragraph ?

The most obvious reason is that Joseph is no genius. His two earlier novels, both non-SF, were competent but no more, and in spite of his professorship - or perhaps because of it - he is no great shakes in the technique stakes. The major fault with THE HOLE IN THE ZERO as a novel is that it isn't. I don't care to define what The Novel is, but any definition would contain elements of development and structure that Joseph either ignores or (heaven forbid) of which he is ignorant.

Yet even beyond not being a Great Novel, ZERO is hardly comparable with the ordinary run-of-the-mill publisher's list-filler novel. It is only when lowered to the less demanding standards of the SF yardstick that it begins to take on any stature at all.

BEYOND THE UNIVERSE.

The book-length story is set up in the first thirty pages. which introduce Joseph's four characters; the tycoon, Boss Krang; his daughter, Helena; her paramour Billy Merganser; and their guide, Seth Paradine. The four take a trip 'otherside', beyond the fringes of the universe into Chaos, the 'region of pure subjectivity'. (Cont/d)

When the referents of the real Universe break-down, the book really begins. Joseph has written himself into a position where he can legitimately and credibly create anything; but he seems to baulk, and squanders the opportunity (which is as infuriating as these pools-winners who insist on carrying on work at the factory...) He permutates his characters through a string of vividly-drawn and original science fiction episodes which, for all their beauty, are basically trivial. Then he moves into a loosely-coherent search for the Troublemaker, a machine which destroys the relationship between cause and effect (why this should interest anyone in no-space, an area where the law of cause and effect is specifically suspended, is never explained).

At times the book reads like a BEST OF NEW WORLDS anthology, accidently run together by the printer. It does have a certain fresh identity and power of its own, but where all the identity and power is taking you is unclear. The memorable evocations and beautiful images alternate with passages of atmospheric repetition and even stagnation. And be prepared to wince at the final denouement, which is That Cliche.

THE HOLE IN THE ZERO isn't going to revolutionise the Novel, or change the direction of science fiction. The only novelist I can think of who had the ability to do both and who actually wrote SF was C.S. Lewis and he was too hung-up on the theological kick to actually do it.

The book is, however, worth reading - even Not To Be Missed - and really suffers heaviest from being too good for itself; it is disappointing because it doesn't live up to that promise. A science fiction novel that would do full justice to the scope of science fiction would need someone like Joyce or Proust - or of Joycean or Proustian intellect - to write it; and if we ever find another writer of that ability, could we honestly be selfish enough to ask that he write science fiction ?

Graham M Hall.

THE IRON THORN by Algis Budrys. (Gollancz, 21s).

Reviewed by Peter White.

It cannot be said too loudly or too often that if science fiction is to appeal to an audience of grown-ups, rather than remain a passing taste most schoolboys grow out of, it must provide ideas, images, and writing, as sophisticated and adult as are available in other less gimmicky books that compete for our reading time. Science fiction that offers nothing but the genre's well-worn convention-bound originality is ultimately boring to all but the young neophile or the nostalgic old addict. Call me jaded but there is a simplicity, an escapist false-naivety, about most straight science fiction that I find irritatingly juvenile.

Sad then that Budry's new novel is no more than this, a tired two-finger exercise for a writer of his immense potential. However, on the most basic level of storytelling, THE IRON THORN has considerable power to hold the attention of a reader. A simple conventional narrative leads to fast compulsive reading, even if it is finally unsatisfying, and the novel is straightforward enough even by SFstandards.

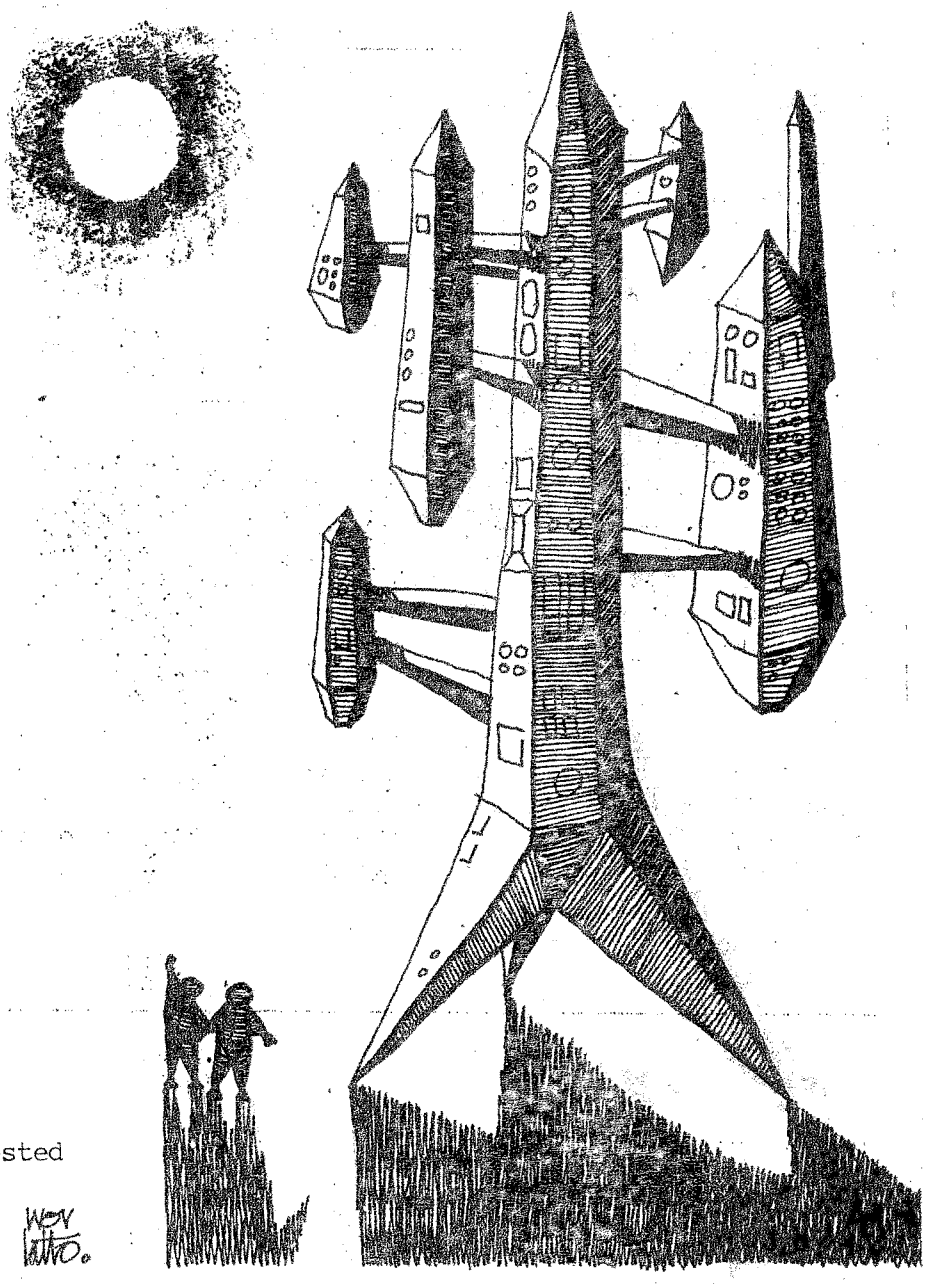


Illustration suggested (very vaguely) by THE IRON THORN. WOV Litho.

The setting is Martian, and a small community clusters around a tall tower - the iron thorn - which provides atmosphere and water. The hero is a 'Honor', who lives by hunting strange bird-like aliens called 'Amsirs', the only trade apart from farming. He is, of course, a malcontent, and driven by arrogant curiosity allows himself to be captured by an Amsir. The creature takes him out across the desert to a community not unlike his own, and one similarly centred on a thorn. Here the Amsirs make him try to open the door of a mini-thorn that has defeated their efforts to gain entrance for as long as they can remember. Being a rather special malcontent, he succeeds where so many others have failed and is soon inside - maybe you guessed it - the spaceship.

Now all is revealed by a hoary science-fictional deus ex machina; a super teaching machine drugs Jackson and pumps him full of degrees in liberal arts and psychology within two paragraphs. He now knows that the Amsirs are mutated humans, and that the whole setup is a genetic experiment initiated by Earth, many generations before. Just in case you think you'd already guessed this without resorting to a super teaching machine, bear in mind that you've read more science-fiction than our hero had until he got his degree. Anyway, he now blasts-off for Earth itself, and the novel ends on a rather sad note when the hero fails to adjust happily to a futuristic society in which people talk and play endlessly in gentle rolling parkland.

The quest for enlightenment in a mysterious claustrophobic environment is an old theme. Aldiss managed it perfectly in NON-STOP, surely one of the best science fiction novels written, and Budrys manages to hold the reader's curiosity with it, even if the intellect and deeper emotions are never touched. The novel makes fairly compulsive reading, and is one which I would recommend to anyone for light entertainment on the train. Younger readers, or those new to SF are more likely to be impressed, but for me it must remain a disappointment.

The opening passage aims at poetry and succeeds in being heavily overwritten, and though the writing settles down after a while, long passages of blatant padding make obvious the expansion of the story from the shorter magazine original. All the classic SF faults appear; the power of the writing is sadly behind the power of the imagination; the characters are mere cardboard cut-outs, and sexual elements are treated with extreme shyness. Here is none of the savage irony or powerful fantasy that forms Budrys' particular talent, and which made stories like 'The Executioner', 'For Love', and 'Wall of Crystal, Eye of Night' so memorable. Anyone who has read that eccentric, complex, imaginative and burning novel ROGUE MOON, and hopes to find the same power in THE IRON THORN will be sadly disappointed.

Peter White, 1968.

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* Perhaps I may make a few comments on THE IRON THORN which tend to confirm Peter White's judgement of the book. When I passed it on for review, I enclosed a message to the effect that, "...I believe I'm missing something here.... I suspect the book is saying something subtle... I'll welcome an opinion about the novel, to straighten-out my own value-judgement...." Whereupon Peter wrote back to say how disappointed he was, that I'd led him to expect something special and this was a fairly routine story. And so perhaps I wasn't missing anything - there was nothing there to be missed ! Other opinions will be welcomed - meanwhile, to further confuse the issue here is a quote from Algis Budrys, excerpted from Galaxy, February 1968;-
*
* '...The story is of a young man raised by apes on Mars. He hunts, he rebels, he slays friend and foe, and periodically he creates..... Now, we all know people like that. Based on my long-standing interest in processes, ... in the step-by-step and perhaps boring developments that transform a likely or a unlikely lad into a werewolf, for instance,... I messed around with this idea for a very long time, finally got it out at the last possible moment, and may not have had anything there for you in the first place, after all. But I thought I knew what I was doing and I enjoyed it.'

CHTHON by Piers Anthony (Ballantine Books, 75c -)

Reviewed by Brian M. Stableford.

CHTHON is not a novel which can be followed easily, nor understood at a glance. This is partly because of the author's use of an unusual writing technique, misleading because of its unfamiliarity.

In his brief afterword Piers Anthony claims that CHTHON took seven years to write, and is not autobiographical. I think, however, that both the length of time spent on the book and the writer's intense style indicate a deep personal involvement with its hero. From the reader's point of view certainly, a close identification with the hero is extremely helpful in appreciating the chronological distortion of events in the sequence of chapters.

The layout of the book is odd since although the story begins and ends in the prison mine of Chthon, the "middle" features both flashback and flash-forward, so that nearly a quarter of the story is chronologically displaced from a time after the story has ended. This is where a reader can easily be mislead, for when two stories are being told in parallel one usually thinks of the temporally advanced sequence as being the main story line. In Part One of CHTHON this is so, but in Part Two, the reverse is the case.

Eighteen sections make up the main line of the novel, which depicts Aton Five's life in a prison mine, from the moment of his incarceration to his release. There are similarly eighteen sections of flashback and flash-forward, each of which ties in with its numerical equivalent. In the early part of the novel the links are weak and artificial - most of the flashbacks are simply informational. In the middle and latter portions however, these flashes are used to explain the relevance of Chthon and what happens therein to Aton. Some of these links are axiomatic, particularly the last one, which parallels that chimera which is Aton, to that chimera which perpetually dogs his footsteps as he leads the prisoners of Chthon on the Hard Trek.

('Chimera' - (dict.) 'a fabulous fire-breathing monster; a creature of the imagination'.)

What is Aton's situation, what is his crime ? He has committed something terrible, has loved a minionette. He first met her as a child, had an affair with her as a young man, and finally deserted her to pass some time on the pleasure planet Illyria, where he meets Coquina, the human girl he loves. He is imprisoned in Chthon, a legendary dead-end cave-prison.

Chthon is a garnet mine, its lower caverns ramify endlessly and are filled with monsters, the worst of which is the never-seen chimera. One man, Doc Bedside, has found a way out via the caverns, and Aton, by means of a rather dubious plot-device, induces the prisoners to follow his trail, the so-called Hard Trek.

After all this is over he embarks upon the quest for the planet Minion, to solve the enigma of the minionette. In doing so, he finds that he himself is a chimera of sorts, and that the reasons for his imprisonment and release were far more complex than he had imagined.

THE CRUX OF THE NOVEL

It must be emphasised, I think, that the crux of this novel is Aton. The story is totally concerned with its hero, and especially its heroe's association and relationship with Chthon. It is not about the events which happen to him. This is why the order of events is sacrificed to the ordering of the reader's understanding of what makes Aton tick.

Even without the confusion of its structure, the plot is detailed and full of imagination. There are some ingenious back-references and hardly any irrelevancies. The very use of the name 'Minion' will be seen to be one example of the author's making his plot-elements work hard. Perhaps there are similarities to vanVogt novels, but the story ties up far more neatly than ever did any VanVogt epic, besides lacking the author's notorious 800-word per scene plot-device. Some of Piers Anthony's ideas are brilliantly conceived; the plant, hvee, which responds infallibly to love is one of these. Another is the chill, a weird disease (?) which sweeps the galaxy like the hand of a clock, and yet another is the very concept of the minionettes, who bear names like Malice, Misery and Horror. All these examples are woven firmly into the plot, and all have a direct and tangible influence upon Aton, and upon the solution to his numerous problems.

The climax of the book, its revelation about the true nature of Chthon and the chimeric manifestation of Aton's mind, may be a little difficult to accept. The question of sanity is raised, but to me not fully discussed. Possibly by this time the author knew exactly what he wanted to say and said it in as few words as possible, without bothering to emphasise his main points by repetition. So much in this book is conjecture that the reader really needs a little help in sorting out what he is supposed to believe and what he isn't.

This book deserves re-reading, and certainly needs it to be fully understood. I don't think that any greater clarity could have been achieved, save by greater emphasis in the concluding chapters, but what does suffer is the continuity. The techniques employed in CHTHON will, I'm sure, be used again and in all probability this novel will be overshadowed and forgotten. CHTHON deserves a Hugo or a Nebula, and won't get either.

Brian M Stableford, 1968

THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION by Samuel R. Delany. (Gollancz 21s, Ace.)

Review by M. John Harrison.

Samuel Delany has a mind full of fireworks and poetry and compassion; THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION is our most densely-structured and beautiful glimpse of it yet, a dreamhole window on something I suspect to be the nearest thing to art that science fiction possesses. I don't want to review it. I want to say, without preamble or any attempt at analysis; Go out and buy it. Now.

(cont/d)

Initially: there is just too much packed into a small space to give a gift-wrapped account of everything that is happening in this book. For those who demand a synopsis; to give one would be to write the book out. Delany's already done that. Briefly (and without much hope that it will be sufficient) the Einstein Intersection of the title refers to the meeting of two vastly differing but complementary realities (modes of existence, univererses, what-you-will), which produces on an Earth of the far, indistinct future, a sort of temporal double-image that is slowly coalescing into a wholly new reality. The resulting milieu is peopled by characters that are partly human, partly symbolic, and, in the main, something altogether different. The central figure, one Lobey, armed only with his incredible musical machete and his power of hearing the music in other minds, sets out on an Orphean journey to wrest his dead love, Friza, from the grasp of Kid Death (who is just that - Devil, King of the Netherworld, Kid Death).

The basic line in fact is simplicity itself - a clean, efficient simplicity - a neat re-work of the Orpheus-thing; what counts is the subtlety of side-reference Delany has brought to the theme... Kid Death, born gilled and white-skinned in a desert, tempts a Christ-figure: 'Hey, Green-eye..... Turn that rock into something to eat.' Lobey fights a man-fingered bull in a Labyrinth, talks with a latter-day Phaedra, personified in a computer; an inn-keeper who appears to have escaped directly from Henry IV & V offers him advice as he herds dragons down a mutated Chisholm Trail... One gets the feeling that Delany's every image has at least two facets, a fact which brings a satisfying complexity to the novel - one can delve deep and bring up each time a bright-polished and almost Metaphysical conceit.

FULMINATIONS OF WORDS

Conversely, the narrative lacks the constipation that usually dogs such efforts; it moves, it is never static, even in introspection. The action sweeps one to the last page - and beyond it - and it is handled by a craftsman. One hesitates to mention Hemingway, but Delany has certainly, where necessary, caught his crispness of movement. (Somebody told me recently; 'Of course, Hemingway's OUT. You know, dead. Nobody reads him anymore.' Thus nullifying one of the most telling contributions to prose this century. What do they think literature is ? Some kind of pop-music ?) A swift narrative, then, well-seeded with convincing conflicts. Dragons, stockwhips and telekinesis. There you go.

Fireworks and poetry, Delany has translated his mind into fulminations of words, the book is a verbal explosion. Yet it never becomes a mere sterile list of sentimental adjectives a la Bradbury/Sturgeon. No down-homey similes, thank God. Delany's words are controlled and apt, never wasted. Consider this passage from the author's journal which is the novel's major structural innovation;

> 'Each night for a week I have lingered on the wild flags of the waterfront, palaces crowding to the left, brittle light crackling over the harbour in the warm Autumn.'

And from the text, P.106:

> ' "Soon we shall be able to do more than dream across the silt of the ocean floor..." '

And again from the journal:

> 'At the horizon right and left monstrously beautiful mountains gnaw to the sky. The ship is easy on the morning.'

This balancing of an author's journal against the narrative of the novel deserves an article of its own. It has the effect of a strong illumination, imposing on the text new patterns of light and shade, altering and complementing the chiaroscuro. Let it speak for itself: 'Back outside this morning I wonder what effect Greece will have on TEI. The central subject of the book is myth. This music is so appropriate to the world I float on. I was aware how well it fitted the capsulated life of New York. Its torn harmonies are even more congruent with the rest of the world. How can I take Lobey into the centre of this bright chaos propelling these sounds ?' Later, we find Lobey there - 'There is no death. Only music.'

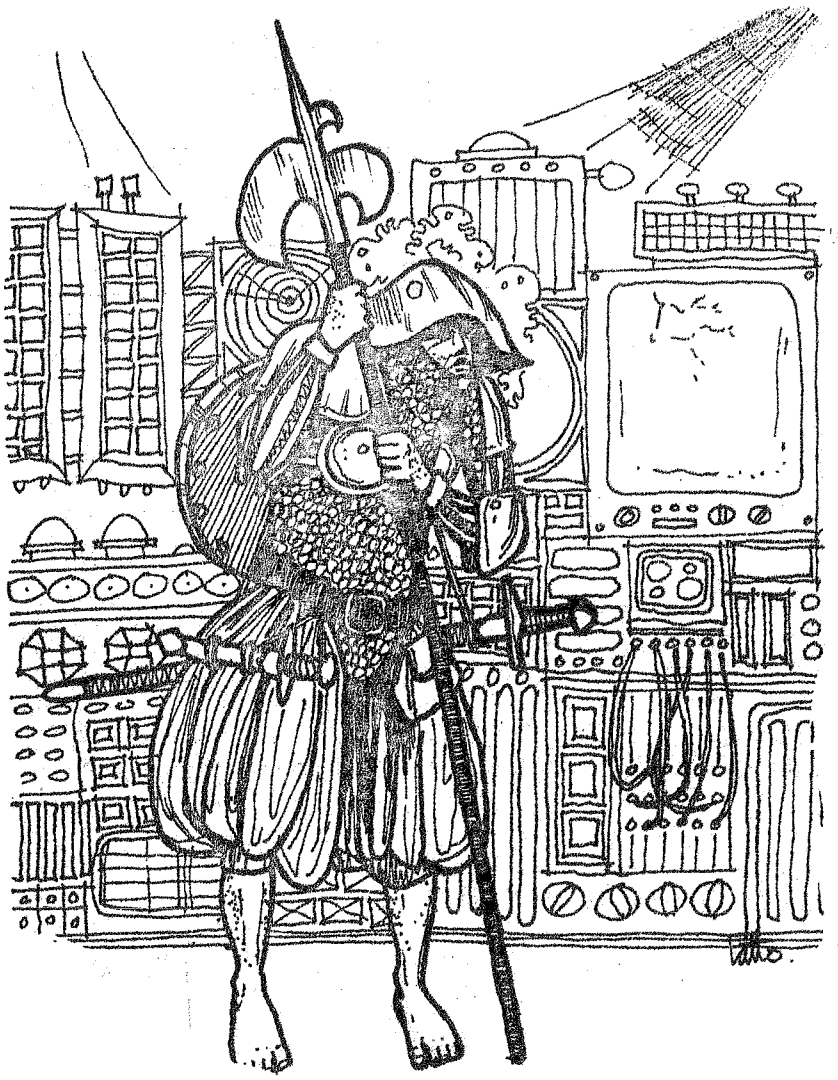
The classic review, I suppose, should make some attempt at dealing with characterisation. If you deman the formal approach, all well and good; Lobey is motivated on the whole by fairly human considerations - life, love, death. He is portrayed well and consistently. Solid as you could wish. On the other hand, he is as massive and multivalent a character as Gunter Grass's 'Oskar', the dwarf who drummed his way through Second War Europe. At times he even acts like Oskar. Possibly he represents Every Man, but I'll agree that that is a little too facile as an interpretation. Of the other two protagonists, Kid Death and Spider are most striking; of the former mostly inhuman and driven by commendably well-presented Satanic motives; the latter grimly and pathetically human - despite his overt four-armed inhumanity - as he makes his sad predestined Pilate-Iscariot choice.

I make these statements reluctantly, and with the full realisation that they may be inadequate and/or fallacious; the real point about the characterisation is that it is something that must happen between Delany and you. The concepts and characters involved are complex enough to compel a purely personal interpretation

Complex, amazing, beautiful; Delany has taken elements of the Classical and woven with them the harsher fibres of the modern legends, creating a luminous, mythopoeic tapestry in which Jean Harlow becomes Circe, Lennon-McCartney a folk-tale, and the villain a grotesque and whimsical soul-descendant of Billy the Kid. Lobey exists at a nexus of incompatibles, is himself a coherent incoherency, summed-up in the paradox of his sword, - bringer of death and music. (And are these things so incompatible ? - 'There is no death. Only music'.) In fact, the most serviceable analogy one can draw is musical; Delany has created a word-music in which apparently clashing lines become harmonic and contrapuntal. He has written an SF madrigal which is, on one hand powered by the transistorised, acid-rock zeitgeist of the late 60's, and, on the other, as simple as the music of the lyre. Dragons and the Old West - some eclectic !

An astonishing balance of poetry, wit, sheer action, and metaphysical physics, THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION hardly deserves to be labelled SF: and, depending on your viewpoint in the New Rave controversy, you may take that comment for the biased ambiguity it is. All that aside, I urge you - go out and steal this book if you don't have the bread to come by it honestly !

M. John Harrison, 1968.



"... detailed descriptions of Greek galleys, Victorian steamships, spaceships and all these other wonderful things..." (p.26)

THIRDMANCON 1963
Guest of Honour Speech
by KENNETH BULMER

Ken Bulmer began his Buxton Guest-of-Honour speech at a furious pace, clutching a huge vari-coloured pile of notes and pausing only to ad-lib at Ted Tubb's expense. "I've divided my talk into a number of sections," he said, "each with a centre, some soft and some hard." And by putting something for everybody into his speech, Ken held his audience for well over an hour.

- PART I -

"The hatred of science remains the single dominant thread in modern speculative fiction."

Herbert George Wells, and David Herbert Lawrence. These are two writers who in one way epitomise what is happening to science fiction today. Most of us cut our teeth on Wells, and we regard him as the Great White God of speculation about the future. Although a slap-dash writer, concerned in writing to preach what he had to say rather than to create literature, he yet produced many books and stories that will remain forever very high in the all-time best lists. I think every SF writer owes Wells a debt, even those who revile his name.

However; because of his interest in telling his readers what he thought, Wells tended to adopt a technique that demanded the chief character - or more, if that became necessary - should be a projection of himself. The satellite characters were mere dark flat props to the central sun. Whether the angle-character (what we vile pros call the 'hero') was handled in first- or third- person, he still remained a clear projection of the writer. Wells' reasons for this were obviously to propagandise.

But within the science fiction field (and this means the magazines) the angle-character's identification became above all else associated with the reader. Can Joe Phan identify with the red-blooded all-American scientific wizard swinging equally a two-handed sword and a slide rule? Can he identify with a six-headed, four-foot green Martian called xiziz? The pulp writers took great care that the reader <u>should</u> be able to identify, and in so doing they carried on what Wells had been doing, but in a debased and reverse-oriented form. The effects of this were that the readers began to see not only their world, but also the universe around them from a single viewpoint that did not admit of other people. For Wells there had been only <u>Wells</u> and the universe. For the SF reader there was only <u>himself</u> and the universe.

Any fourteen-year-old kid curled up with a magazine and lost to anything but the scenes flickering away in his mind proves this absolutely.

Wells always claimed that he wrote journalism, and an interesting case could be made out to show that all science fiction up almost to date has been merely journalism, without a single real literary work amongst the lot.

Wells called novelists 'uneducated' who analysed character and struggled for artistic expression. He never despaired of the use to which mankind would put science, until the last few years of his life.

And so we can pass on from Wells, with the backward-looking remark that much of Wells' work has been forever rendered away, because his pre-1914 world is no more, He was a child of his time, but the world made by men today, although not the world Wells envisaged, is still susceptible to his type of stricture and criticism.

HATED AND DETESTED MECHANISATION

Certainly the world of today is also not the world that D.H. Lawrence would have expected. Lawrence's ideas have been generally misrepresented and attacked with hysterical rancour, but he also had a 'message', incoherent though that message often appears. Like Wells, he wanted to liberate men and women in matters of sex; but this deeper thinking led him into theories of 'blood-knowledge' and of other centres of consciousness than the brain. (These ideas have been scorned for man years - obviously the brain houses all of a man's mind; but some recent work is now pointing up interesting possibilities that perhaps the body cells are more aware than we had thought. Much work on DNA and the life sciences still has to be done).

But the important point about D.H. Lawrence is that he actively hated what industry had done to the people and the scenery of his world. He hated and detested mechanisation - it is surprising that he allowed Birkin, (of WOMEN IN LOVE) to drive a motor car - and, as the progenitor of the dark chaos that he saw about him, most of all he hated science. For all his own slap-dash faults as a writer, D.H. Lawrence was in places a great writer, and he was also a poet of very great stature. But he was, fellow SF enthusiasts, a deadly enemy of science. (And he also gave an early lesson on how to use those little words that have recently been getting Norman Spinrad into trouble!)

I submit that today in our speculative writing the influence of D.H. Lawrence is in the ascendancy and that of H.G. Wells in on the decline. This doesn't mean that we are obsessed with the machine, either for or against. It's not just a question of knowing that people count. It concerns a fundamental way of approaching life. For one reason or another, H.G. Wells wanted to change things in the hope that they would improve and the world would become a better place. In our Freudian and guilt-ridden age this is now often dismissed as Victorian wish-fulfillment and impossible of achievement. D.H. Lawrence, on the other hand, wanted the deeper blood-brotherhood of men without science.

Well, whether you like it or not, science now dictates your life. Science has produced the nuclear bomb, thalidomide, napalm. No wonder that people today are actively turning against science. No longer is the cosy, naive, Victorian steam-powered (regd trademark) image possible; people today think they know too much and that the anti-science attitude is the 'correct' one. (As far as machinery is concerned, this anti-science attitude that we can't change our world logically has been around since 1914 or so.)

More important today, this attitude extends to all of these so-called 'soft' sciences that various would-be authorities keep pleading for SF writers to utilise instead of machinery; as though science fiction hasn't been written about mental problems for years already! Every time some johnny-come-lately starts to tell SF writers what to write about, he yaps "don't tell us about spaceships and rayguns, tell us about the inner workings of a man's mind." What he fails to realise is that if SF writers produce what they've always written, the true meaning of their work remains the same, no matter if the subject matter is a spaceship or a DNA molecule or a schizoid psychopath.

No, the hatred of science, - the fear of science - remains the single dominant thread in modern speculative fiction. This is a depressing state.

FEELING OF MEANINGLESSNESS

No wonder many SF writers have given up even the pretence of thinking it's their job to prophesy what can happen - to suggest what may happen and then, in the fullest meaning of prophesy, to say what they think is good or bad about what they have presented. Even the terms 'good' and 'bad' are now relatives; terms on nodding acquaintance, I suppose. It's not fashionable to be positive, because up-dated phrenology indicates that no such thing exists. There is a general feeling of meaninglessness in the world, yet this cannot be logically used to justify a parallel meaninglessness in the arts, for that is abdicating our root essence of life.

Let me make this absolutely clear; I am not condemning stories only because they don't attempt to show us the light ahead (this is still a naive way of thinking about the difficulty) and merely show us the muck in which we now struggle. For art in one aspect does merely illumine life and reality and is not called upon even to make any comment on that life, let alone suggest what should be done about it. But this criterion applies to art - to literature. And SF is not literature.

All right, perhaps I'd better look more closely at this 'literature' terminology. In attempting to make over science fiction into literature we are throwing away one of the reasons for SF's existence. Literature and art have only to make their statements, if that, in the tenuous upper strata of real art. But SF, surely, should make statements, draw morals, and try to point answers?

Science fiction deals with science, machines, the human brain, the universe, things affecting human beings. The object is to present a possibly-real picture of the way humans will react to changes in the world outside or inside them.

Fantasy presents marvellous happenings of a similar nature without the need for reality.

Literature deals with human beings reacting with and against each other, and where this happens is not important. If a novel is to be 'literature' then everything in that novel must tend towards the persons in the story, to make them real in the round and understandable to us. If space is spent on presenting other things instead of peoples relationships then the novel is not literature.

All this means is that if you really enjoy detailed descriptions of Greek galleys, Renaissance theatres, Victorian steamships, spaceships (amply fuelled by hot copies of New Worlds, perhaps!) or other mind-translating and expanding phenomena you are perfectly entitled to do so. But if you want this sort of material to be regarded as literature then you must accept the fact that all these wonderful things are there merely in order to reveal more clearly the workings of human beings with one another and not with those wonderful things. And if these relationships are not successfully revealed then these wonderful things are quite likely to be thrown out!

Call SF 'speculative fiction' if you will, and instead of reading a 'tec story, read a spec' story. Of course it won't be art, it won't be literature; - but that's a mere matter of terminology, long dead as an argument.

I'm not asking artists and novelists to stop being that, but just to say that "I am really a novelist writing about people, but today I shall put on my non-literature hat and write SF". To carry on this line of thought then the argument runs that SF should be presented not as fiction but as essay and polemic. And to be frank, that might have been a good idea.

But I, for one, would be sorry to miss the glamour and excitement of all the fictional scientific worlds we've traipsed through, space helmet in place, hand on blaster, clutching a Bergey-breasted girl. Poor old Gernsback thought he had latched on to a good thing when he published what he called 'sugar-coated science', but it really wasn't a valid idea. If you wanted science facts you would go to texts or magazines. SF might have brought in a few uncommitted youngsters, if it did not alienate them, on the one hand by the scientific gibberish published, on the other by the crudawful writing.

To end this section, then, all hail to H.G. Wells and also to D.H. Lawrence - but let us see clearly where we're at. Let us have our great literature and fine writing; and also let us have a little more serious pre-occupation with the future; with a realisation that ecological foresight demands more from us than pretty word baubles.

- PART II -

" A writer has to learn to write before
he can forget about writing ".

Science fiction tends to imagine the future wholesale. Big strides are made all over an area - for example organ bank technology - with big issues and big statements. When the actuality arrives it is harder, more practical, tougher, it brings up many more issues than SF forsaw in the big picture. We've been speculating on organ banks for years; they've become part of the background as well as the story line. But now Professor Barnard has brought up all kinds of new problems for today. Very often when SF has tackled the details they have been quite wrong or have produced a merely twee form of SF.

Coming on to stuff nearer the knuckle, Margaret Drabble has said that she would sooner stand at the end of a tradition she admires than at the beginning of one she deplores. This is eminently reasonable; if a writer sincerely doesn't like the way things are going he doesn't have to be a trend hound and jump in waving his copy of Ambit.

If you don't like or understand the 'new wave' in today's SF field and you can find readers who still appreciate your writing, then there is no compulsion to change. The motor car did not displace the horse in a day, neither did the public conscience dispense with capital punishment overnight. So you don't have to experiment, you don't have to write a short story so full of crossheads that it looks like a cheap Sunday paper. I can't yet see Campbell issuing Analog in separately bound parts, as B.S. Johnson issued his new novel, in a box.

The basis of revolutionary cant is that language changes thought and thought changes society - the Surrealists motto was "changer la vie"; generally this has not yet happened. Perhaps we still await a valid new language?

TRANSCENDING THE RULES

I'd like to state a simple proposition here. It is one of the centres of this talk, and is simply, "It doesn't matter what you do as long as you gain your effect." This means the understanding of the techniques of realism, it means that the job of a writer is to do that job, no matter what. Henri Bergson puts it finely when he says 'the truth is, the writer's art consists above all in making us forget he uses words'.

Personally I detest split infinitives. I have also been given to understand that a sentence must be properly constructed and must possess a verb, while punctuation also points things up. These things are lightly tossed aside today. To given an example where it does damage, I will cite Sonya Dorman's 'Go,Go,Go, said the Bird' in DANGEROUS VISIONS. This is a fine female-viewpoint story of an old woman being chased for the pot. Her children have caught her, she has pictures of the past in her head, and her son says: "We're all hungry." The last paragraph is;- "The ax fell, breaking her pictures into pieces, and they fell like snowflakes to the ground, where a little dust rose up and began to slowly settle. The small children began to squabble over the thumb bones."

That last sentence has a tremendous impact when you go back and read it again, but as a part of the story it is lost in the reverberating of that ghastly infinitive being split from - well, breakfast comes into that! The whole ending is ruined, you're wincing away from that split infinitive. It's like puckering up to kiss someone in a pink and romantic glow and being met by a gust of bad breath. Of course, in Sonya Dorman's favour, I suppose, just, it could be the dread hand of Cheech Beldone!

Now in ordinary writing, correct English structure is of value in enabling the writer to present what he has to say in the most easily understood way. But it is well-known that it isn't what you say that matters, but what the reader takes in. If by transcending the rules of grammar you can make your point more effectively than I'm in favour of so transcending.

John Brunner and I were discussing split infinitives in The Glob (there's a quote for you) and we agreed to disagree. He said he didn't mind them; my view is that if something interferes with your attention to the reading then it destroys the effect the writer is after. I do agree with John when he says that our English grammar is the result of pundits trying to cram English into rules laid out for Latin, and therefore shouldn't be adhered to with fanatical puritanism. I say again, do as you like as long as you successfully create the effect you want.

As a successful example of a knowledge of the rules which are then discarded I would like to cite Graham Hall's 'The Tennyson Effect'. Not only does Graham have something to say he uses the techniques of poetry and chatter and direct quote to achieve a synthesis that adds up to an emotive short story.

As for all sentences having to possess a verb - so let's not always write in sentences!

The technique of interposing a paragraph of story with a paragraph of comment is a fresh approach to old problems, and is well exemplified in Chris Priest's 'The Ersatz Wine'. At first I had reservations about Charles Platt's deserted city stories, but now I believe he is quite right and that the anonymous authorities are quite capable of abysmal stupidity even to this extent. In these stories the writing is what can be called traditional, while here it is the outlook and approach that breaks new ground.

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER!

Anyway, I was talking about getting away with murder in order to create that illusion a writer must aim for if he is to express himself and extend his reader. The so-called revolutionaries of SF, whilst producing much good and rewarding work also produce a fine crop of weeds. A writer has to learn to write before he can foreget about writing. He has to subject himself to literary discipline before he can throw off that restraint.

To make two points together, there is current today this freedome from grammatical tyranny and there is the takeover by poetry. One example is a very fine story called 'The Coming of the Sun', by Langdon Jones. We've often heard of nature imitating art, and here is another example, for all who read of the fire at Shelton Mental Hospital on the 26th February, 1968 and who had read Lang Jones' piece must with a little shudder have compared the two. The way of treating the inside story of patients as they met their fates, a sort of science-fictional Grand Interior Hotel, with the realisation of outward events building up like a long slow wave, gave the story a greater emotional, psychological and gut-wrenching impact than a conventionally-handled account could have done. (On a ghoulish note, patients who had been in locked rooms were in 'better condition' than those who had not, whereas Lang suggests that padded cells would have had an opposite effect.)

'The Hall of Machines', also by Langdon Jones, has an odd Jules Verneish aura about it which perfectly resigns one to a search for the unconscious pattern striating it. The last of the three stories, or rather the third of this recent trilogy from New Worlds and the one that gives its name to the whole, 'The Eye of the Lens' presents contrasting techniques, reminiscent of G.B. Shaw, of scripts for film scenaries, of Goya, of TV comic shows. Perhaps the final confrontation with JC is the weakest in handling because of imperfectly-grasped concepts and a righteous anger blinding the cool eye of art. Certainly Lang Jones deserves more than his own modest polite applause, at least from we supposed-to-be-experts.

Perhaps the idea of a sectioned script presented as prose is what fails; maybe the poetry that has been taking over SF should come right out into the open and declare itself. This ties in with my earlier remarks about the hatred of science - primitive poetic writers like Bradbury hated and feared science and that attitude persists. But the 'good' aspects of poetry are what I'm trying to envisage now. Now we are more and more using the so-called soft sciences in science fiction, perhaps the poetic element can genuinely return.

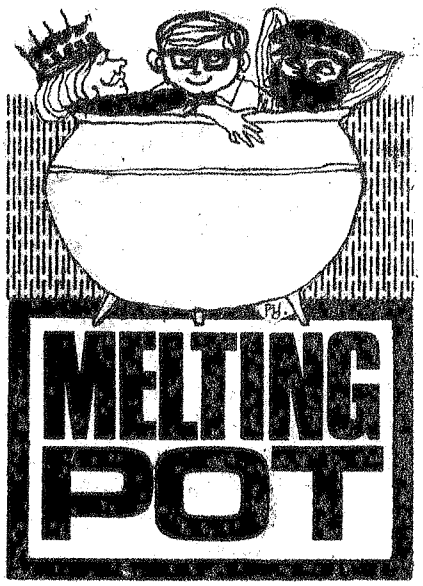
PARTITION OF PURPOSE

And, finally, there is in mankind a centre of consciousness, of will, of soul, of spirit, call it what you will, a centre of being that cannot be touched or analysed by any techniques we have yet developed; the deepest levels of our unconscious in which we live, each one of us, separate and alone and yet reaching out one to the other in blind seeking.

The modern world - and the immediately foreseeable world of the future - is dominated by a partition of purpose stimulated by automation and mechanisation and the bewildering fecundity of science. The individual's psychic levels are being inundated with impressions and sensory data for which our animal heritage has not prepared us. Our egos, our psyches, are being bombarded to near disintegration. Thus we suffer from mental aberrations which in themselves are merely symptoms of this basic confrontation.

Much superficial writing seeks to pander to the fleeting impressions of the moment. In sf - and call it what you will, science fiction, literature, spec fiction - we must try to seek a fusion of being of the individual, to establish a mental climate of health and psychic well-being at the deepest levels - and this, of course, has been the role of the greatest writers of the past and will continue to be of the writers of the future.

Kenneth Bulmer, 1968.



Letters please, and comments will be most welcome on this issue of SPECULATION. Do write as early as you can to catch the next number.

Chris Priest, 18 Harrington Gardens
London S.W.7.

Dear Pete

"...My feelings on current SF are rather simple. I'd like to put an embargo on the writing (or rather, the publication) of SF novels for five years. In this time, every person who is writing SF should reconsider the field as a whole, and his own place in the field. There is too much formula-writing these days and not enough innovation. The result of this is a massive mediocrity. The latest novel from Algford D. Budrak reads just like his last three. For relaxation I'm beginning to find other forms of escapism more rewarding. (Hell, have found for about the last three years). The cinema, for instance. Science fiction has a lot to learn from the cinema. The cross-pollination of the arts usually seems to leave SF unmarked...

Worst novel of the year ? Some question that. Didn't like RESTOREE by Anne McCaffery. I believe her later work is rather better than this one... but this novel had me snarling with rage. I wish I had sufficient critical vocabulary to put my feelings onto paper, but I felt that the overall 'feminist' aspect was irritating beyond belief. Also, CHTHON by Piers Anthony annoyed me. Here was an example of a writer turning out something that he thought was worth (in this case) seven years' work, and yet which appears to the reader to be an empty and sensational meander through the overt and covert subconscious. Lastly I felt that ASHES, ASHES (Doubleday, I think) if it was allowed to be read in the wrong places, such as serious newspapers with review columns, it might well put SF back the twenty-five years it's taken for the novel to appear in English."

Brian W. Aldiss,
Oxford.

Dear Pete,

"...The best point you make (in SPECULATION-17) is that there are no clear opposite sides among the 'old' and 'new' writers. A writer, if he is any good, can only stand under his own banner; but in the present conflict, even if you aren't any good, it is difficult to find a clearly-defined banner to stand under. For instance, in DANGEROUS VISIONS, I see no sign that Harlan Ellison understands what contemporary writing is about, though some examples of it may have crept into the volume unrecognised. I have long struggled against Judy Merril's wish to include me in the 'New Wave', which I consider to be her and Moorcock's invention (a jolly good one, too, since it has pepped our tiny scene up no end!) - but if there was a wave, then it has surely already broken on the forbidding shores of mediocrity. The result is that excellent writers like Disch, who is presumably a Dadaist, stand out the better."

Graham Boak, 85 Broad Walk,
Knowle Park, Bristol 4.

Dear Pete,

"...Chris Priest understates the case (OPINION, Spec-17) - some of the Ballard pieces in New Worlds (especially the reference to Grissom, White and Chaffee) were in bad taste, but the reference to Jackie Kennedy in Ambit belongs on the same level as the lamp-shades made from Jews' skins in Hitler Germany.

I must agree with Bertil Martensson; Moral judgement must be distinguished from literary criticism. This is what flaws so many comments on Heinlein's work, to name the obvious example. Also, I believe, the reviewer's personal taste should not be allowed to bias the review unless specifically stated within. Objectivity is not always attainable, but should always be striven for. Maybe then we outsiders who are too busy earning (or learning) a living to study literary values will be able to recognise talent on other levels than "I know what I like".

This is the main problem with SF reviews; the reviewer allows his personal prejudices and interests full rein, the poor reader is left with (at best) a misleading view of the work under review. Brian Stableford's LORD OF LIGHT critique is a fine example. He has concentrated on one aspect of the novel to fine effect (I'm glad to have read it). I have read the excerpts from LORD OF LIGHT that have appeared in F&SF: while admitting that Bria.. is correct in his view, I feel that it is far too narrow to be adequate.

* The points made by Bertil Martensson last time have a long and intricate history. Originally Beryl & Archie Mercer reviewed Harry Harrison's BILL THE GALACTIC HERO (back in Spec.9 or thereabouts), to which Harry replied with hot claims of 'prejudice'. Then, of course, Beryl & Archie replied to that, and some readers had their say. And Carl Brandon Jr. wrote a piece for Speculation-15 which by now had very little to do with BILL THE GALACTIC HERO. And so it goes on ! *

Michael Harrison, 62 Anson Road,
London, N.7.

Dear Peter,

"...With reference to 'In Lousy Taste' (Chris Priest, Spec-17): that's what they said about D.H. Lawrence. But 'good taste' is as fickle a concept as all your other value-judgements. It mutates at an incredible rate; 30 years later it means nothing, Lawrence becomes tame stuff, school-syllabus material. An unstable criterion at the best of times, 'taste' has become a middle-class restriction applied to the writer like a muzzle; a form of 'soft' censorship more pertinent to Woman's Own than Ambit. And surely it is a singularly empty gesture to "defend to the death the right of Ballard to write what he wants" if you aren't going to let him print it afterwards? In fact that statement is quite enough to gain anyone an honorary membership of the Townswomen's Guild - and Godfrey Wynn is going to lose his mind with joy when he finds out about it.

Patrizio has missed the point about the moon (Colin Wilson, THE MIND PARASITES): archetypal symbolism ? The moon has always been '...sovereign mistress of true melancholy...' (remembering Burton's ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY) so what better place to base the mind-killers ? Also, who cares about the scenic effects ? To comment '...it's all been done before...' is to approach the book from the point of reference of its trappings, rather than its theme. On the other hand, Patrizio is telling nothing less than the truth in saying that the existentialist kick has been better presented: Wilson is not a good novelist - just examine the structural weakness of ADRIFT IN SOHO."

* Now I'm agin you: 'who cares about the scenic effects ?' - I do, most strongly. They're the reason I'm reading science fiction. This argument and conflict between people/places as the reason for reading/writing SF is better expressed by Ken Bulmer in his speech. (the bit under A QUESTION OF TERMINOLOGY). As for Colin Wilson, here is that comment from The Hollins Critic, crowded out last time:- 'Colin Wilson... began writing his first book, THE OUTSIDER, late in 1954. The book became a best-seller as well as a critical success, but his second book, RELIGION AND THE REBEL was met by a universally negative critical response. He has since written books of philosophy and criticism, eight novels and several plays. All of the novels are concerned with the same basic theme, an awakening and activating of the slumbering god in man, so that to some degree they are repetitive, but they are better seen as variations and developments of a theme, each one growing out of the preceeding ones. Together they reveal the steady growth of Wilson's talent and his progressive creation of a viable hero for an existential realism.' *

Richard Gordon, 226 Ladykirk Road,
Benwell, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Dear Pete,

"...THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS is very readable; although I don't see that the no-articles style has any especial justification, it isn't too annoying. Unfortunately Heinlein has never had the slightest notion of how to represent human beings who convince you that they could actually walk and breathe and so forth. His characters seem to be walking textbooks or manifestos more than anything else."

John Brunner,
London

Dear Peter,

"...I was really very surprised to learn that you were bored by 'La Jetée'. (Speculation-16) I first saw it at the Academy cinema in a double bill with 'Alphaville', which to my mind it overshadowed completely. I thought the latter was affected, the director striking poses without integrating them into a complete work of art, whereas the former took a standard SF theme - that of calling in another time-zone to rescue humanity from its own silliness - and managed to give it a fresh and wholly visual treatment. But then I love Chris Marker's work, and perhaps it was an advantage to have seen some of his previous films ('Jour de Mai' and 'Siberia', to name but two) in order to get with his particular visual vocabulary. There was some more of his work at the recent NFT science fiction film season, including an item directed by Pierre Kast but edited by Marker, which also seemed to me to be exceptional, in that it displayed insight into what SF is about without confining itself to standard SF imagery. On the other hand, I thought Tony Sudbery's discussion of 'Relativity' was very sound; having corresponded with Ed Emshwiller about this picture, I suspect he'd entirely agree with the conclusion in the last paragraph ! "

* Possibly I disliked 'La Jetee' for the same reasons that I've disliked every science fiction film I've seen; somehow SF doesn't come over in the visual medium. However, it proved very thoug -provoking for the majority of the audience at the '67 Convention. Incidentally, in SPECULATION-16 we misquoted John Brunner in his GoH Speech. He didn't say "unfortunately we cannot all be Harold Robbins" but asserted "and fortunately..." Apologies are offered (it was Rickard's fault; he typed it!). *

Peter White, 75 Ashley Road,
Epsom, Surrey

Dear Pete,

"...I was interested to see Richard Gordon put forward such a well-worn argument (OPINION, Spec-17). Most science fiction is fantasy that only just falls within the remotely possible. To take an unreal character in an unreal situation, totally divorced from contemporary life, and then to proceed to explore his psychology is to become pretentious and absurd, not to produce a 'life-oriented' literature. All we should ask is that science fiction should fulfil its possibilities, not transcend the limitations of its genre form, which are more its strength than its weakness. Ballard did this and has now passed on to other forms of writing, Aldiss has also done it, and a host of other writers have done it less consistently. HOTHOUSE is a perfect example of an SF novel that would not satisfy Richard Gordon's pleas for depth psychology, but which succeeds in being a success because it is perfect in itself, it makes full use of the potential of its genre without pretentions to the mainstream novel."

* Peter White's letters and reviews are pretty well travel-stained by the time I receive them; he has been flying Boeing 707's from Shannon Airport for the past month or so and sending various missives on Irish-green Shamrock Inn notepaper. Talk about a sense of wonder; to me science fiction can hardly compare with the miracle of heaving that huge chunk of metal into the stratosphere. And what about the motivations of its pilot ? *

Special comment from Chris Priest:

On reading Bob Rickard's review of I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM for the second time, I must say what an excellent review it truly is. His second paragraph is perceptive writing exemplified. But my opinion of the book, and opinion is what we're talking about, is not the same as Bob's. My opinion of the book at the time of reading was that it was mutton dressed up as lamb (to resort to the vernacular). That is, Harlan Ellison is an egotist after my own heart... But I wouldn't have the nerve to do it publicly. He is a good writer. He is sometimes a very good writer. Every now and then he makes noises like an excellent writer.... But he is not a great writer and I think he wishes he was. (Don't we all ?)
I would like to read an Ellison book neat, that is without any explanatory or self-claquish material. The stories in I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM made a very passable collection by today's standards...but an emotional response can be produced in their introductions, where the feeling was given that these were the greatest stories ever written by Ellison, or anyone else. In my case the response was away from and against the stories. It is fair to guess that such an emotional response could be evoked towards and for the stories, but that isn't how it worked on me. Now I expect Harlan Ellison will come and punch me.

Larry Niven,
California

Dear Mr Weston,

"...Graham Charnock's review of WORLD OF PTAVVS seems harsh, but fair. (At least he seems to have understood the plot. Panshin didn't: he wound up totally confused and blamed it all on me.) I'm sorry Charnock found it disappointing, but he should realise:

1. It was my first novel, and an expansion of my third (!) professional sale.
2. I put funny parts in this "serious" novel because they were there to find. The situation did have funny aspects.
3. True, there are too many characters in there. Put it down to inexperience.

The plot was complex, but it was all there. A friend once told me that a reader should read WORLD OF PTAVVS halfway through, then start over and go all the way, otherwise he'll miss important details. My uncle is still trying to get through it. But it was my first brain child and I'm proud of it.

Brian Stableford's review of LORD OF LIGHT seems to miss something. I can't really blame him for assuming that Nirriti the Black One is a Christian. But he should carry it further:
1. There are many branches of Christianity. 2. One of these is voodoo (voudun). (Look it up). 3. That's the branch Nirriti belongs to.
It's obvious now, isn't it ? What else would he be doing with an army of zombies? "

Rick Norwood, 640 Linden,
Riverside, California 92507, USA

Dear Pete,

"...The outstanding issue at the convention (Bristol, 1967) seems to have been that of New Wave vs. Old, with a choosing-up of sides that goes something like this: For New Wave we have experimental writing, human problems, soft science and subjective viewpoint, as opposed to technical problems, hard science and objective viewpoint for the 'Old Wave'. The convention seems to have been a rally for the New Wave with very little said for the opposing point of view. The one point in the Speculation picture of the con (Issue 16) where it looked as if there would be a real confrontation, the process got bogged-down in definition. This was where James White brought up the question of hard science vs. soft. Judith Merril dismisses the issue: "It is very easy to research science." Apparently she has never felt the need to go beyond Freshman Physics in her research. It is very hard indeed even for a technically trained writer to keep up with modern discoveries - Judith Merril's casual dismissal of the problem simply shows her lack of interest in the subject.

There seems to be some questioning of the value of science in science fiction. Unhampered by scientific restraints, writers still talk of colonisation of the planets as a way to ease overpopulation, write glibly of laser death-rays, and attribute fantastic physical changes to "mutation". I can enjoy SF of the Bradbury and Ballard schools, but I object to the implication that fiction like that of Clement and Niven is no longer worthwhile. For John Brunner to say that all fiction must have human beings as its primary concern seems as ridiculous as the assertion that the only good paintings are portraits. Realistic characterisation is the only virtue in much modern mainstream writing; Heaven keep science fiction from this dismal fate !

Some very good stories exist in which the characterisation is clearly of secondary interest: 'Burden of Proof' by Bob Shaw; 'Prostho Plus' by Piers Anthony; 'The Billiard Ball' by Isaac Asimov, and 'Black Corridor' by Fritz Leiber come readily to mind. This is not to say that characterisation should be inadequate; it should be as good as possible without interfering with the story. But unless characterisation is the primary purpose of the story, the story should not be judged by the quality of the characterisation alone."

* Larry Niven has two gifts denied the vast majority of SF writers. One is a seemingly inborn sense for good storytelling. No tricks, no typographical wonders, but just that power we used to say Heinlein possessed. The second and complementary virtue is an imagination. Not a Mack Reynolds 'formula' imagination (let's divide the world into Black, White & Grey. Call one West-World, one Neut-World, etc. Revive gladiator combats, ad nauseum) but the real thing; a way of looking at old, stale concepts with a wholly fresh approach. Take 'At the Core'; 'Neutron Star': in each there is a wonderful new concept, yet not new to science fiction, only badly-handled in all previous attempts. Compare Niven to Poul Anderson, who in recent Analog stories has been attempting the same exercise. (Expand the imagination: What would happen if:- a) a planet was next to a super-nova; b)was inside a dense star-cluster: c) was outside the galaxy.) Compare the two authors, each trying to use their imagination. Notice how stale, flat, uninspired the Anderson stories appear in comparison. This, authors, is what you should develop. A fresh 'sense of wonder': (and Niven has got it!). *

Tim Hildebrand, 818 Terry Place,
Madison, Wis. 53711 USA.

Dear Pete,

"....SPECULATION-17 was interesting, even if the reviews/articles were superficial. Too much plot-telling and not enough reactions of the writer. But you could do worse. World's Worst SF nominee - DESTINATION VOID by Frank Herbert. Gibberish, jaberwocky, clownish, pseudo-pseudo-scientific nonsense words piled up in a heap on the page. I kept reading, naive as I am, believing that no publisher would print stuff this bad unless maybe at the end it all Made Sense. It didn't. Now I'm disillusioned and cynical. Garbage, garbage, G*A*R*B*A*G*E ! "

* Is that story an expansion of Herbert's Galaxy epic, 'Heisenberg's Eyes'? If so I thoroughly agree with you; never has the James Blish-technique of kitchen-sink narrative been so abused to no purpose! *

Bob Parkinson, 106 Ingram Avenue,
Aylesbury, Bucks.

Dear Pete,

"...This MIND PARASITES book of Wilson's (see review, SPEC-17) is not a good book. Firstly, bad science never made good science fiction. Having said which, I recognise that I have somehow to explain why Bradbury's MARTIAN CHRONICLES and Aldiss' HOTHOUSE series were good SF. But Bradbury's stories are of men in alien environments, and to call it 'Mars' is merely a problem of nomenclature, not science. And Aldiss' fantasy inhabits quite deliberately a location of the improbable, and keeps consistently in style.

But Wilson is writing about a condition in our own world. And there are too many conjuring tricks, "dei ex machina", in the whole thing. Indeed, all the science in it is a branch of magic, which is to say a dabbling with arcane and mysterious forces. That Lovecraft plays a major part in the story is telling; Wilson seems to have gotten hung up on Lovecraft's visions of the paranoic subconscious on the level of comic-book 'creepies'. Given the prime assumption of the story there is no need to make the archaeology necessary to its discovery such a fantastic enterprise. There is no necessity to degenerate into space-opera. There is no necessity (but it is predictable that one will be arranged) for telepathy and psychic forces to be revealed.

Science apart, I do not think that the book is any too ably written. I tried to think where this sort of thing had been done before (apart from SINISTER BARRIER, of course) and two titles came to mind. First, William Burrough's NOVA EXPRESS, which seems to me the way it ought to have been written; or - if you are not of an avante-garde frame of mind, Heinlein's PUPPET MASTERS. Both are incomparably better than MIND PARASITES.

And finally, Wilson's book suffers from a form of intellectualism that we could well do without; name-dropping. Instead of saying, for instance, "Look, this is the way it is done.." he says "Husserl's phenomenology", which is intellectual exhibitionism. If you want to give credit where credit is due you add afterthoughts, "...an idea which goes back to Husserl". But Wilson gives me the impression of a keen undergraduate would-be-intellectual busy reading all the right books and regurgitrating them half-digested. Simple test; How good would this book have been if it were written by neophyte John Smith ? I doubt if it would have got past the publisher's reader.

As a contrast, to see what can be done, consider Roger Zelazny's LORD OF LIGHT, also reviewed in the last issue. I am afraid the novel is not quite as good as the promise of the two forerunners from F&SF, 'Dawn' and 'Death and the Executioner', but it is still a good yarn. And beneath the two levels at which it can obviously be read, there is deeper stuff. Zelazny is also educated, - in terms of his story ever bit as well as Wilson - and the products of that education are buried in the story. In a lesser way perhaps this is a Hindoo LORD OF THE RINGS, with SF background. At regular intervals Zelazny deliberately slants his story along Buddist or Hindu myth or legend, and then lets the educated reader wonder about it. But if you happen to be interested in something else it does not detract from the story. You may find in it what you wish. Early on, Sam gives a speech to the monks of the monastary in which they are staying, which begins "Names are not important.." and the echoes are of Budda's Fire Sermon. This is intellectualism at its best. (Plus of course, Zelazny's prose - or should I say poetry ?)."

Harry Warner Jr., 423 Summit Avenue,
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740 USA.

Dear Pete,

"...I can't agree at all with Michael Moorcock's arguments in THE NEW FICTION (SPECULATION-16). For one thing, the different literary techniques which he plugs are new only to SF; the derive mostly from prose written centuries or decades ago, from Sterne to Joyce, and from the kind of poetry that began to please the avant-garde around the start of the 20th century. For another thing, the public awareness of the accomplishments and achievements of science came around the middle of the 19th century, not with the emergence of Ballard. I am enthusiastic about getting away from pulp-magazine narrative techniques, just as Moorcock is. But it makes SF people look ridiculous, to claim that "the psychology of the times" has put into science fiction some of the subtleties that mainstream literature has had for generations. And social organisation hasn't suddenly become important enough to influence the SF story; science fiction writers haven't paid the proper attention to social organisation since the era of the utopia novel and Wells."

* From your letter, Harry, the facts seem to indicate that Moorcock must be right! For if all these things are not new, have been around for ages and have merely been neglected by SF, then surely it is time that science fiction caught up with 1968 ? *

Jerry Kaufman, 2769 Hampshire Road,
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44106, USA.

Dear Pete,

"...What I like about Harlan Ellison's short-stories (review, SPECULATION-17) is that they reach for the gut and make it. Very few SF writers even try to touch the emotions strongly, and so Harlan is a refreshing change.

It seems to me that what Harlan has been doing is learning to put more and more of himself into his works. Having watched him at two Worldcons I can say that the Printed Harlan is just a weaker version of the Vocal Harlan who makes his arguments more often through the gut than the mind and to whom emotion comes before logic."

Franz Rottensteiner,
2762 Ortmann, Austria.

Dear Pete,

"...Why is LORD OF LIGHT a bad book ? I may well begin with your own remarks at the bottom of Page 25 (SPEC-17). I think it is irrelevant whether the book is the story of a starship crew, but I'll offer an explanation that seems more sensible to me; it's the story of some adolescents playing cops and robbers in a Disney Land of the future, organised along Hindu lines.

One objection is against the whole kind of fiction to which LORD OF LIGHT belongs; just as A YANK IN VALHALLA, EXILES OF TIME, or Emil Petaja's rapes committed upon the Kalevala, it's an example of the process of diminution going on everywhere in SF. An SF author will take a powerful myth that hasn't been created by him, and, because he is unable to write anything that transcends this original myth or even approaches it, turns it into rubbish. Those apparently simple structures, the myths of fairy-tales of all peoples, are actually great literature, infinitely complex and inexhaustible in meaning, and any introduction of elements foreign to them (e.g. modern gadgetry) can only result in a loss of stature. It can be used for humourous effects, but it cannot be treated well in a serious way.

And the stupidity of the subject matter, the bastardisation of ancient myths owith modern science, cannot help but affect the quality of the writing, (and especially the dialogue is thoroughgoing juvenile). This mixing of incongruent elements is as startling as it is wholly unpleasant. After the puerile notion of gods who are Fire, or Dance, or Destruction follow the fascist banjos; Brahma, Vishnu, Krishna, Yama in the company of Thomas Alva Edison, with "It's a long way to Tipperary" and the "Blue Danube" thrown in for good measure. The Gods communicate from Heaven with their priests in the temples by means of telephones that permit them the transmission of the most banal thoughts in a very short time; the Indian Gods are turned into little reactionaries fighting against a progress that Zelazny calls, for some reason, "acceleration" (they don't know where they're going but they want to get there pretty fast !). For Zelazny, "acceleration" means 'can-openers and cans that can be opened', surely one of the most trivial statements upon progress ever made by a writer.

The book is full of meaningless violence, violence for the sake of violence, and its characters, like many of the strange beings that people SF novels, are given to explicate their motives before they are going to kill each other. It usually transpires that they don't quite understand their own -without doubt deep- natures. They are going to die so that they can make a speech about it beforehand.

Mahasamatman himself is incomprehensible. Somewhere in the book Zelazny tells us that the character of human beings varies between saint and sinner and so the character of Sam changes - but always off-stage, and in the next chapter Zelazny brings another hero on the stage. Surely a convenient way to escape from the difficulties of character development ?

The strongest impression we get from the novel - despite all that talk about the Most Important Things, such as Progress and the Clash of Philosophies, - is one of banality. I think that LORD OF LIGHT will divide the admirers of Zelazny (among whom I count myself) neatly into two camps. The one group will think that LORD OF LIGHT is an improvement (or at least is

equal to) over his previous work; the other will deem it an ill-considered attempt to cash in on the current escapist sword & sorcery movement. I have now changed my views about Zelazny and think that Disch and Spinrad will emerge as the two most important American SF writers of our time."

Willem Van Den Broek, 1128 Birk Avenue,
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103, USA.

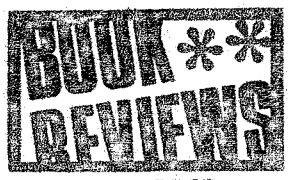
Dear Pete,

"...The biggest problem remaining before SPECULATION, as I see it, is that most of your reviewers still fail to make themselves entertaining. Although I don't doubt that they are recording their reactions accurately, it takes a lively reaction to be interesting. People like Algis Budrys or Damon Knight will always have a stimulating reaction to any book, no matter how awful, because they're interesting writers. Too many of your reviewers just aren't stimulated/ing. Since Riverside Quarterly seems to have taken up most of the critical review category it looks as if the area that you are trying to carve out is that of the 'interesting comment by an interesting reviewer', the sort of thing you get here in a magazine like Newsweek. Things are improving with SPECULATION, and I usually find myself more motivated towards SF after an issue than when I first pick it up."

* Those comments were originally going into 'State of the Art' in this issue. First, of course, our reviews aren't always of professional standard because we don't pay. Material of the proper depth isn't always easy to find.. Second, the area we are trying to carve out is indeed that of lively somment on SF, on current SF with the occasional broader statement like that of Ken Bulmer in this issue. There was a need when we started for intelligent criticism, for notes from authors, and for a discussion forum of opinions and views, plus the purely informational side of things. That need isn't so great, now; there is Australian SF Review in business. Incidentally, your comparison between Budrys/Knight is very apt. The Galaxy review column has donned Damon Knight's mantle and I personally hope that Advent will collect Budrys work in a more permanent form. *

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Rick Sneary, who said that Harlan Ellison has been doing an increasing number of 'good' things for people of late (he wrote and told SPECULATION that it was useful); Tony Sudbery who thought that Joe Patrizio took an unnecessary swipe at Graham Greene last time, because Greene writes good SF: Joe Patrizio himself, who thought the 'World's Worst' idea was holding some currently-producing author up to ridicule and that he didn't agree with it; and Brian Stableford who thought the only complete analysis in the last issue was Bob Rickard's commentary on I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM. Allan Lloyd thought we revealed things about Michael Moorcock's writing, such as that his fiction was conventional as opposed to his extreme proclamations; Frank Wyers who said MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS was not the World's Worst novel of 1968, but was the most disappointing in the ending. Others who wrote included Roger Zelazny; Richard Tiedman; Mike Ashley: Dave Garnett; Buz Busby; Jack Marsh: Phil Harbottle: D.M. Jeffris; Harlan Ellison; Andy Porter; Thomas M. Disch and several other kind people. Franz Rottensteiner has a long piece on Harlan Ellison for the letter-column next time; of particular interest will be any comments from you all on DANGEROUS VISIONS.



Strictly speaking that 'Book Reviews' label up in the top left-hand corner is incorrect; these aren't reviews, they're mentions of new titles. Obviously there isn't space to give every item the full treatment in the Fifth Column or Critical Front or whatever we're calling the real review department; and so here is the remainder of the quarter's releases. Some of them are worth reading, even well worth more detailed reviewing....

TO BE REVIEWED IN DETAIL IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

CHOCKY by John Wyndham. Ballantine, 75c.
NEUTRON STAR by Larry Niven, Ballantine, 75c
THE WITCHES OF KARRES by James H. Schmitz, Ace, 75c
THE JEWELS OF APTOR, by Samuel Delany, Ace 50c.
PAST MASTER, by R.A. Lafferty, Ace, 60c.
ALL FOOLS DAY by Edmund Cooper, Hodder PB, 3/6d.
THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM, by John Sladek, Gollancz 21s.
A TORRENT OF FACES, by James Blish & Norman L. Knight, Faber 25s.
THE DOLPHIN AND THE DEEP, by Thomas Burnett Swann, Ace 50c
REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, by Brian W Aldiss, Faber, 21s.

COLLECTION TIME

The most remarkable thing about current science fiction is its quantity; the second most noteworthy thing is the number of collections now being issues in both bound and paperback format.

BACKDROP OF STARS (Dobson) has an interesting reason for existence; it is a collection of not only stories but of the authors' own notes on those stories. The general air is similar to DANGEROUS VISIONS; in fact the fiction in this volume is very nearly as good. You must have read 'Sail On, Sail On', by Philip Jose Farmer ? - if not, here is a convenient place to find this story, much less trouble than digging for Startling Stories, 1952 vintage. There are others equally as hard-to-find, stories you've probably missed until now but which are well worth reading. Try 'Consumer's Report', by Theodore Cogswell (1955: Imagination), 'Myths My Great-granddaughter Taught Me' by Fritz Leiber, or perhaps 'Tiger Ride' by James Blish & Damon Knight (1948). This is a surprisingly good collection; I like Harry Harrison's taste in SF nearly as much as I admire his own writing ability.

Another good anthology bearing the Hand of Harrison has been published under the original and inspiring name of 'The Year's Best Science Fiction'. Admittedly, this does have a good claim to that title, for editors Harrison and Aldiss really have attempted to pick science fiction, the best science fiction, science fiction published in the year (1967). Which is more than any of this volume's namesakes sometimes do. But the fact remains that we don't need another annual series of collections; there are neither enough good stories or paying readers to make so many competitors stay viable. As said above, this is a good anthology; but goodness knows why you'll want it if you have already bought the SF magazines for 1967.

And there is some rubbish therein; no-one (not even Michael Moorcock or John Sladek) can convince me that '1937 A.D.!' is good science fiction. I also have no doubts in rejecting Bertram Chandler's drawn-out funny story from Australian SF Review, no less. Some of the best items present will have to among 'The Wreck of the Ship John B.' by Frank M Robinson; 'Mirror of Ice' by Gary Wright; 'Hawksbill Station' by Robert Silverberg; and 'Fifteen Miles' by Ben Bova. (a small distinction; the first Bova story I have enjoyed!)

SF HORIZONS 1 has been on the Dobson SF list for so many years that I am sure the publishers are glad to see the back of it. And what have we waited for ? Just another collection, rather badly-timed because two of the ten stories are right now on sale in other formats ('Transfinite Choice' by David Masson and 'Shipwrecked Hotel' by Blish & Knight). Of the rest, two are short send-ups ('My Son the Physicist' and 'After a Few Words') and another, the Aldiss 'Comic Inferno', is very difficult to take seriously. (This is a seriously-intended collection, is it not ?). On the credit side, Fritz Leiber contributes 'Game for Motel Room' and Thom Keyes 'Period of Gestation'. But all in all, this anthology is far from worth its 21/- price tag.

As an afterthought, let me mention that someday, someone is going to ask me about the SPECULATION anthology of stories, some choice items picked from the last 25 years of SF magazines. I guarantee that you haven't read more than one out of the ten; but I'm not saying what they are!

A final entry in this section is THE STARS AND UNDER, edited by Edmund Crispin and published as a Faber Educational title at 5/6d. As a school text book this is ideal; it contains old favourites like 'The Ruum'; 'Null-P': 'The Forgotten Enemy': 'Little Lost Robot', etc. Nine stories in all.

NOVELS: SOME OLD TIMERS

Harry Harrison and Arthur C Clarke are old-timers, while John Rankine writes like one. The first two produce very different books; THE TECHNI-COLOUR TIME MACHINE is an outrageous parody with a sense of wonder: THE DEEP RANGE is deadly serious, humourless, and not the way things will be at all. How did Arthur Clarke get his reputation as an SF writer ? In 1957 the New York Herald-Tribune was able to say this novel had 'vividly convincing extrapolation'; today, there seems something missing. THE DEEP RANGE is a fine story of farming the sea, but it is a story that could not be written today. Or would not be written today; one good result of the 'new wave' is that a currently-producing author would be more than likely to begin at about the place Clarke leaves off. DEEP RANGE is a wonderful undersea adventure, a book highly recommended to new readers of SF, but conservative for cynical old readers like myself.

In his 'Time-machined Saga', Harry Harrison pulls off a difficult feat of SF storytelling, one that he did not quite make, except in parts, with BILL THE GALACTIC HERO. That is, he has written a 'funny' science fiction novel, without degenerating into farce, slapstick, or the ridiculous. Obviously Barney Hendrickson and his time-machine cannot be taken seriously, and yet there is a strong flavour of wonder and the unknown in his adventures. Are those dirty words, today, perhaps ? In any case, they combine with a lively narrative to make a thoroughly enjoyable, relaxing book. It is a really pleasant and unusual thing to sit down to a humourous SF novel that has no trace of 'message' or philosophy. More power to Harry's elbow !

The final entry under this heading is John Rankine's NEVER THE SAME DOOR. This author wrote a previous novel in which an interstellar starship was dragged manually across half the face of a planet; this latest novel has a slightly more credible theme, although one built around a concept which is at first sight unlikely. Solid-state intelligence, a sentient mountain, somewhat resembling Fred Hoyle's BLACK CLOUD, perhaps, but throwing all sorts of dangers in the way of a party of explorers. I can't complain at the idea; development and characterisation seems a bit laborious, but as a fairly solid example of average SF, this novel moves along well.

** BOOKS REVIEWED ABOVE:- BACKDROP OF STARS, Dobson Books, 25s; YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION, Penguin, 5s; SF HORIZONS 1, Dobson 21s; THE STARS AND UNDER Faber 5/-d; THE DEEP RANGE, Gollancz 25s; TECHNICOLOUR TIME MACHINE, Faber 21s NEVER THE SAME DOOR, Dobson, 18s.

AUTHOR'S COLLECTIONS

Any author who has written more than a half-dozen published stories is likely to find them assembled in a single volume, if he's fortunate enough. If he somehow manages to produce our SF equivalent of a best-seller, or otherwise becomes well-known, he is liable to find collections built around one lead story, in much the same way that pop LP's are assembled on the strength of one 'hit' and a lot of misses. If an author becomes very well-known he is liable to find in print some of his earlier, clumsier efforts, resurrected from the oblivion of 1940-pulp magazines.

For instance, I can see no other reason for the appearance of 'Artnan Process', by Theodore Sturgeon in STARSHINE (Gollancz, 21s). Of the six items in the book, this is the only really b*a*d one, far, far outclassed by 'The World Well Lost', 'The Haunt', or even 'How to Kill Aunty' which isn't even science fiction, although it is great fun, even for aunty ! 'Derm Fool' is also a light piece of nonsense, as might be guessed from that horrible pun in the title. Sturgeon at first struck me as another Bradbury, when I first began reading SF. Then I found I enjoyed his stories immensely. Now I think he has lost some of his power, was after all a little over-rated, but in any case was producing ten years ago what the rest of the field is only now beginning to discover. 'Pod in the Barrier' always annoyed me because the astrophysics is so lousy; a trivial matter, but you don't discover galaxies that easily! Why oh why didn't the author attach the label 'star cluster' instead ? A recommended collection (originally from Pyramid).

Another bunch of oldies can be found in the Murray Leinster Omnibus, from Sidgwick and Jackson. Now there are a great many writers whose work could with profit be amalgamated into omnibus form, and to their credit S&J have done excellent jobs on the work of Bester, Heinlein, etc. But Murray Leinster is not one of these instances. With the best will in the world, I can report on no Murray Leinster story which more than raised a faint flicker of a smile, or perhaps a slight glimmer of interest. Every yarn I have ever read by Leinster has been utterly bland, sopcrific, a tranquilliser with a happy ending. Don't shout 'First Contact' at me too loudly - I have considered that story and must decide that it shares these faults, but is redeemed only by the sheer novelty of concept.

Those are some of the characteristics of a Leinster story. They are not necessarily flaws, are certainly not virtues. Against these can be placed an occasionally-vivid descriptive passage, a smooth commercial style and a certain readability.

In an attempt to pin down the Leinster method, I carefully skimmed through this omnibus looking for what I wanted. I found it on Page 43 of the 3rd novel, CHECKPOINT LAMBDA. This was the first page of a new chapter, and I knew that somewhere in any novel, Leinster must always begin a sequence with a tired description of some astrophysical scene. It usually begins something like '...the stars rolled along their paths and the planets rolled around them and the drunks rolled round their planets...etc'. But sure enough, Chapter Three of CHECKPOINT LAMBDA began, "The Five Comets moved in toward the sun Canis Lambda. They moved with a seeming deliberation, each in its own individual fashion and from its individual direction. There was one which was very large. Its nucleus - its coma - its head - was the centre of a misty brightness scores of thousands of miles across. The actual heart of it, of course, was something else.' etc, etc, for 5 paragraphs.

A careful eye (ear ?) for style may notice something else. Leinster writes in simple sentences, main clause-subordinate; subject-verb-object. He does this all the way through each of the novels in this book. The average length of sentence is 9.4 words, measured over 50 randomly-picked examples in the omnibus. The longest one of these was 27 words, and this length is rare ! When you get wise to this habit, it very nearly drives you mad at a sustained reading!

And so, back to the review. As I said above, this is another bunch of oldies, although none of them are earlier than 1962 in copyright date. No printing history is given, but keen students may be able to trace the three novels, OPERATION TERROR, CHECKPOINT LAMBDA, INVADERS OF SPACE. With the observations above in mind, I refused to read this volume; I know exactly what will happen without bothering and I can't afford the wasted time! This book, from what I know of Murray Leinster's work, will be popular with juveniles and extremely conservative veterans of SF as-it-used-to-be. In this day and age I demand something better.

Another collection is from Daniel F Galouye, who has been a promising newcomer for about 10 years now. DARK UNIVERSE I found intensely irritating; the author's other recent collection (Corgi) I found excellent for short novelty-idea items. PROJECT BARRIER comes somewhere in between, comprising mainly middle-aged stories from 1957 through 1963. 'Recovery Area' gained my nomination for most absurd (just try using Venus as a launching base for missiles against the Earth, because the Soviets have got the Moon. Has the author ever heard of energy-expenditure ? Accuracy of placement ? Transit time between orbits ?) There are several other idiocies also presented therein. In contrast, 'Project Barrier' is rather well told, while 'Rub-a-Dub' is possibly the most ambitious idea explored here by Galouye. Generally this book is entertaining and recommended, despite the occasional rough spots.

I like Arthur Sellings and his sense of humour. He has been around for quite some time in Galaxy and elsewhere, a less-flamboyant Robert Sheckley with a style that seems not quite as obviously contrived. 'Blank Form' is a pleasant little yarn about an alien visitor, and so is 'One Across', in another sort of way. Now in THE LONG EUREKA, both are taken from Galaxy if

memory is correct. Both are amusing little pieces. Fortunately 'That Evening Sun Go Down' from New Worlds is not included (although I think I can see why Sellings wrote gibberish, I don't think he should have bothered, he doesn't need to be 'trendy' if he is already capable of writing this book). 'Birthright' is perhaps an early ancestor of the above-named item; it also follows the same pattern of development and is also hardly worth the effort. Other stories are 'The Long Eureka', 'The Scene Shifter', 'The Well-Trained Heroes'; 'Homecoming'; 'Verbal Agreement' and 'Trade-in'. Good collection.

** BOOK REVIEWED ABOVE ARE: STARSHINE, Gollancz 21s; THE MURRAY LEINSTER OMNIBUS, Sidgwick & Jackson, 30s; PROJECT BARRIER, Gollancz 25s; THE LONG EUREKA, Dobson Books, 21s.

RECENT ACE BOOKS

It has now proved impossible to review all of the many new Ace titles that are published each month, although most of the outstanding items will be caught, eventually, in CRITICAL FRONT. Other books received are as below:-

SOLAR LOTTERY by Philip K Dick, 50¢ Reissue of 1955 title, in England released as 'World of Chance'. Tricky dealings, fast plotting, implausibility cubed! DOOMSDAY ON AJIAT by Neil R. Jones. Fifth in the Professor Jameson series. THE REVOLVING BOY by Gertrude Friedberg, 60¢ An Ace 'special', an excellent novel. But then, Speculation has said this in a previous review, and someone at Ace H.Q. has splashed this across the covers as a blurb. An unexpected spot of glory; but the book certainly deserves the recommendation! BEDLAM PLANET by John Brunner, 50¢ . This new novel looks interesting and probably deserves more detailed treatment in the future.
THE PRISM by Emil Petaja/ CROWN OF INFINITY by John M Faucette, 60¢. The Faucette title is superior space-opera, grand stuff. The Petaja isn't! PITY ABOUT EARTH by Ernest Hill/SPACE CHANTEY by R.A. Lafferty, 60¢. For some reason this is the third Lafferty novel to be published this month; the two others being PAST MASTER (Ace) and REEFS OF EARTH (Berkeley). Or on second thoughts that last item might be a collection. Lafferty is an unknown factor, and for that reason SPACE CHANTEY will get further attention. (Incidentally, read his superb short story in DANGEROUS VISIONS). The Hill title is so-so. VICTORY ON JANUS by Andre Norton, 50¢. You either like Andre Norton - or not. WE CLAIM THESE STARS by Poul Anderson, 50¢. Highly superior space-opera, far better than I remembered it. One of the 'Flandry of Terra' stories - did you notice that 'Merseia' was mentioned in the recent novelette 'Supernova'? THE YOUTH MONOPOLY by Ellen Wobig/THE PICTURES OF PAVANNE by Lan Wright, 60¢ STARWOLF 2 by Edmond Hamilton, 50¢ 'The Closed Worlds'. Space-opera series. THE BEGUM'S FORTUNE, 60¢; YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW, 60¢ by Jules Verne. The 'Fitzroy' editions, handsomely produced and edited by I.O. Evans.

THREE JUVENILES

'Juvenile' is a vague description, meaning only that a book is cheap and has a teenage hero, in a great many cases. And of course, a great deal of SF is juvenile in both writing and concept while being packaged under allegedly adult covers. None of the three books here actually bear the label 'for younger readers', but they so obviously are that we'll assume I'm correct.

THE DOLPHIN RIDER by Roy Meyers is the UK edition of 'Dolphin Boy', from Ballantine last year. It is, as said before, a saga of the later-day Tarzan, but it is surprisingly good reading, on a very superficial, almost 'camp' level. (That is, it is so easy to chuckle at the seriousness of the book, while appreciating that younger readers will eat it up as solemn truth.) Dolphin Boy is more daring than Tarzan ever was - he makes love with his wench, so we gather, in full view of the children. But since this is intended as first of a series boy falls out with girl and they don't live happily ever after. (Oh yes, like Tarzan our hero is a rich nobleman gone wild). Quite nicely written in place, and good fun.

STARMAN'S SON is a peculiar title for Andre Norton's new novel from Gollancz, which has nothing whatsoever to do with stars. Although I generally avoid Norton books it is very well-done for the 12-15 age-group. I liked it.

Gordon Dickson's THE SPACE SWIMMERS seems to carry on the world cooked up in Galaxy a few years ago, where a part of the human race have returned to the sea. To me this is a depressing sort of idea, but Dickson handles the mores and situations fairly well. This novel is nearly adult enough for the magazines, and would have been in pride of place in some of them if it had been written a few years earlier.

** BOOKS REVIEWED ABOVE: THE DOLPHIN RIDER, Rapp & Whiting, 21s; STAR MAN'S SON, Gollancz 18s; THE SPACE SWIMMERS, Sidgwick & Jackson, 18s.

OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

A FISH DINNER IN MEMISON by E.R. Eddison. Ballantine 95¢. Third in the series beginning with THE WORM OUROBOROS.
NEWS FROM ELSEWHERE, by Edmund Cooper, Mayflower 3/6d. Seven stories.
MUTANT by Henry Kuttner. Ballantine SF 'Classic'. 50¢. Unreadable.

SEARCH THE SKY by Frederik Pohl & C.M. Kornbluth. Rapp & Whiting, 18s. This is the neglected fourth of the collaboration-novels produced by this team. Previously available only in Digit or US paperback, it is a fine story of the future worlds of man, separated and running-down because of Genetic Drift and the gap between the stars. Scietifically it doesn't hold water, Story-wise it is more disjointed than the other Pohl-Kornbluth offerings. Idea-wise it is excellent, introducing several strange cultures + 'The Marching Morons'.

ALL JUDGEMENT FLED by James White, Rapp & Whiting, 21s. Only just finished in If, this is the story of James White's communications problems between alien and man. Conventionally-enough written, the book is handled well and develops its basic theme carefully and consistently. I enjoyed it very much.

WATCHERS OF THE DARK by Lloyd Biggle Jr. Rapp & Whiting, 21s. The new novel about the adventures of Jan Darzek, New York detective extraordinary in 1988. First introduced in ALL THE COLOURS OF DARKNESS, this 'hero' succeeded in raising my hackles last time by his very inaction. Once again he is involved with matter transmitters, but this time gets further than the Moon and visits a far galaxy. I don't see what Darzek can do in the face of the unknown menace, I don't see why he had to be dragged away from Earth. Accept that and the book runs smoothly the rest of the way. (Incidentally it is worth noting that the new concern of Rapp & Whiting have several interesting titles in preparation including ORBIT 2 (ed Damon Knight); ROK! by Avram Davidson; THE TRAPS OF TIME, ed by Michael Moorcock, and JUDGEMENT OF EVE, by Edgar Pangborn.)

THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE (Gollancz 1968, 21s)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford.

Clifford Simak, like the old campaigner, never dies but merely fades away; THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE is but a shadow of Simak at his peak. There are echoes here and there, but faint ones.

The plot of this novel is of the clockwork variety which James Blish once called 'the idiot plot'. Andrew Blake has been found in suspended animation somewhere away in space, complete with lost memory and perfect body; he has strange lapses into amnesia which lose him hours at a time. Having milked this cliched situation to death, Simak has Blake recover his memory all of a sudden for no apparent reason. He is, in fact, an android built two centuries previously with the ability to metamorphose in order to meet new environments and contact alien life-forms by imitating them and assuming the personality of one of them.

But of course, two of the said personalities have stuck, thus(?) aborting the experiment. All three identities are loose in his mind, - Changer, the human; Quester the wolf-with-hands; and Thinker, who makes the occasional helpful comment but generally just clutters up the plot. So, like an idiot, Blake changes into Quester physically, and goes on the lam. Simak spends the rest of the novel picking up the pieces and gluing them together again. He also pitches a smattering of philosophical whimsy and Brownies into the plot, the latter adding a touch of absurdity.

As I've said, Simak is buried somewhere in this book (inside every piece of hack work there is a writer trying to get out) but Clifford Simak is not a hack and I wish he wouldn't write books like this one.

SPECULATION READER SERVICE (additional entry)

Rapp & Whiting Ltd, (SF publishers). 76 New Oxford Street, London WC1. (We believe that lists of titles should be available on request. Overseas readers should enquire direct as to whether books may be despatched abroad.)

THE SECONDARY UNIVERSE

This is the title of a conference devoted to science fiction, fantasy, science and literature, presented by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee on May 10th - 11th 1968. Speakers include Samuel Delany; Judith Merril and Bruce Pelz, among other familiar names. It is hoped to feature a report on this event by Tim Hildebrand in our new issue.

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