

speculative review

Speculative

Flinching something fierce, I opened another letter and found that it made a total of fifteen letters and reviews which gave me the needle for not explaining how to get any further copies of SPECULATIVE REVIEW.

It was a case of my being opaque again, I guess. You see, SPECULATIVE REVIEW is meant as an arena or I mean a field for comment on current stf and fantasy, and will presently become a subzine; but after all, the Washington SF Association hasn't published a club magazine for eight or nine years, and it'll take a bit of preliminary practice to get the stiffness out of our joints (so to speak.) In effect, the first three issues of SPEC REV will be trial flights -- how many different metaphors does that make? I forgot to keep count -- and it'd be a little crusty of us to ask you to pay for what we know will be substandard stuff.

Anyway, this issue -- SPECULATIVE REVIEW, Vlm 2 Nr 2 -- comes to you free as a sample, as V2N1 did...or free for a request, if you're reading somebody else's copy. So will the next issue, but we still love people who write us letters of comment. Even nasty ones, if you really feel you must. Address them to Dick Eney, 417 Ft Hunt Rd, Alexandria, Va, who edits and distributes this magazine as Operation Crifanac CLXIII.

Another thing people asked for, after the last SPECULATIVE REVIEW was "some sort of explanation of (our) basis for judgement". Bill Evans has made a significant start on this in his definition of what he means, in the first place, by calling a story "science-fiction" or "fantasy"; I hope our other contributors will do more with this theme.

One thing, though; I don't think it matters whether a story is science-fiction or fantasy or something mundane if it's a bad job. And too blasted many examples of modern stf are horribly bad -- the people who complain about modern stories being elegant trifles are talking utter nonsense; as Vernon McCain would have said, they wouldn't know an elegant trifle if it bit them in the leg. Your average prozine writer merely knows that Little Magazine Writing is an OK-word this year; he knows the mechanics of that form of writing; but that's about his limit -- oh, he'll turn out the sort of stuff that Bill Evans rightly sneered at, last time, as Little Magazine Writing, but that doesn't mean he's doing genuine elegant writing; he's only going thru the motions. He's an artistic writer -- I suppose I should have capitalized that -- only in the sardonic sense in which Campbell is an Advanced Thinker or L Ron Hubbard is a Scientist. Which, purely by coincidence you understand, brings me to the subject of inept writing, and I just happen to have an illustration of what I mean here...

REVIEW

SPECULATIVE Review

... Sam Moskowitz, as everybody knows, has complained that the field today no longer has the old interest because it no longer possesses or inspires what he calls the Sense of Wonder.

I'm afraid that T.H. White, in The Once and Future King (Putnam, \$4.95), has suffered the same loss for the same reason. This revision of his Arthurian trilogy is altogether without the zesty forcefulness of the original books. An author returning to a theme after the intervention of twenty years cannot recapture his original mood -- look what happened to Lewis Padgett when he tried to finish the Baldy series, after only ten years -- nor can an author returning to a cheerful tale of adventure after he's lived thru a world war and a series of police actions deal in a carefree fashion with the themes of war and tyranny at which he mocked once; but the flaws and botches in The Once and Future King aren't simply what you'd expect from loss of sympathy with the subject.

White's purpose is a wonderfully ambitious one: no less than to deal with the Matter of Britain -- the great national epic of King Arthur's doom, a theme to tax the Shakespeare of the Lancastrian Saga or the Wagner of the Ring Cycle. Thus shooting at the sun, White has indeed shot higher than if he'd aimed at a bush; but, alas, he's also clean missed his mark. In trying to draw parallels between Arthur's time and our own, he has botched the job; he's produced neither an image of antiquity nor a mirror of our own day.

Of the Three books originally published, which here appear as sections of the work, the first is most mangled. The Sword in the Stone was originally a thoroughly delightful tale of the magical education of Sir Ector's fatherless ward, Wart ("...it more or less rhymed with his real name, which was Art.") When first written, in 1939 -- it would be nice to know whether this was before the idea of re-working the entire legend-cycle occurred to the author -- it told how Wart found his tutor, Merlyn, by going on a Quest; met the witch, Madame Mim, and was rescued from her oven after a duel of magic; went on a rescue expedition with Robin Hood's band and passed through the bizarre temptations of a fairy castle on their behalf; visited the Giant of the Burbly Water, Galapas, and saw some of the ludicrous shifts and deceits by which that grisful ogre maintained the impression of his power; learned of the origin of Man by reading a friendly badger's Ph.D. thesis; and saw the Beginning of Things in a dream sent him by the Goddess Athene -- a dream, by the way, very like the "Sacre du Printemps" passage of Disney's "Fantasia".

It is hard to imagine the crudest bungler spoiling notions so rich in delightful fantasy -- inconceivable that an able writer like White should do so. And yet, for all that, he has ruined most of them, and by the most effective method: by converting them into Little Moral Lessons, and going to every length to make sure we got the Message.

I except the Quest, which is unchanged, and the adventure with Madame Mim, which is altogether excised. (Maybe it's better so, though I miss that hilarious account of the sorcerers' duel which Merlyn wins by changing himself into a cloud of bacteria and giving Madame Mim chickenpox.) Apart from these, every one of the episodes is the worse for revision. The castle of Morgan le Fay originally tempted Wart with cakes, sweets, and fresh strawberries (if he'd eaten any food in the fairy castle, you see, he'd've been in her power forever); now it is simply made out of rich food -- butter, milk, custard and cheese -- which in combination stimulates nausea, not appetite, so that it's no temptation at all. Instead of seeing the weak side of totalitarianism in the deliciously sarcastic visit to Galapas' castle ("But you must understand...I only invaded the Queen of Sheba's country because of her indirect aggression!"), Wart observes its sterility in the trite form of a magical visit to an ant's nest. (Just to make sure we understand that they are Allegorically Significant Figures, the ants hate Othernest ants and work themselves into Patriotic Fervor by mass singing of "Antland, Antland Over All".) The visit to Athene becomes a visit to the Wild Geese, an episode of rare imagination and much dramatic power in itself but utterly ruined by the addition of a Five Minute Lecture on the Virtues of Pacificism. Even Badger (thank heaven his story wasn't razed!) delivers -- punchline-fashion, god help us -- the question whether the Wild Geese or the Ants were better.

The second book, The Queen of Air and Darkness -- originally The Witch in the Wood -- is hardly changed; perhaps there is little in it that needs or invites distortion into parallel with our own day. (I except from this a rather painful, tho unintentionally hilarious, set of lectures by Merlyn on the Evils of War.) It is a fairly straightforward narrative of King Arthur's defeat of the rebels against his rule in his first year of kingship, and of how Queen Morgause of Orkney is to rear the child Modred who eventually destroys Arthur's realm.

It is in book three, The Ill-Made Knight, that we find White again showing traces of ineptness hard to credit as the product of a veteran writer. It is this book -- the tale of Lancelot and Guenever, and of the search for the Holy Grail -- that originally closed the trilogy, and did so fittingly. Like the larger tale -- Arthur's life from happy youth to triumphant age -- it is almost cyclic in form; it takes Lancelot thru the clashes which led up to the miracle (saving Elaine of Astolat from boiling in a magic cauldron) that proved him the best knight of all the world; thru his betrayal of Arthur; thru the long suffering of the Round Table by the corruption thus brought in ("fashion" and "modernity", White calls it, significantly); and then to the search for the Grail -- an evil time for Arthur, who sees his peerless Table almost all lost; an evil time for Lancelot, who loses his preëminence to a younger man (his son Galahad), and at last is rejected by God himself as unfit to achieve the Grail -- and ultimately thru Lancelot's triumphant struggle to redeem himself and the second miracle which avouches him once more the best knight of the world.

If, like Siegfried, The Ill-Made Knight closes with the hero triumphant at the pinnacle of his fortunes, White's fourth volume, The Candle in the Wind, is like Die Götterdämmerung in being a tidying-up effort which is not merely unnecessary but which spoils the effect of the whole work. The thematic conclusion of Wagner's Ring Cycle -- the replacement of the reign of gods by the reign of heroes -- is also the end of Siegfried, when Odin's world-governing spear is cleft by the sword Nothung Siegfried has forged. Similarly, the conclusion of this Arthurian Cycle -- whose theme, to White, is the triumph of Law as Power -- should fall at the end of The Ill-Made Knight, when Lancelot's redemption is testified by his miraculous healing of Sir Urre the Hungarian. But, alas! The Nibelungenlied has Siegfried's death as its theme, and so -- the title shows it -- does Le Mort Darthur. So Wagner goes on to a burst of melodramatic grand opera so outrageously out of step with the rest of the Ring Cycle that Bernard Shaw could account for it only by supposing it the effect of the composer's share of Original Sin; and White is lured into a Significant Work which actually overthrows the point and effect of the entire story.

In this last section we encounter Modred, Arthur's bastard son by his half-sister Queen Morgause of Orkney, who explains the reason why he hates his father. Now, this hatred is a major theme; it is the mainspring of Modred's corruption and destruction of the civilization Arthur has built up. Yet it is presented in only a few paragraphs; in fact, it cannot take more. The reason behind this hatred is this: the King, on learning of his birth, had all the children born at the time collected (shades of King Herod!) and set adrift in a leaky ship; Modred alone was saved from the wreck. Such a deed -- in view of its result -- should be a central event, but as I said it cannot be. It must take place offstage and appear only in reports because the King Arthur that White has drawn cannot be represented doing such a thing. He is no more capable of wanton cruelty than of flying by flapping his arms; the man who let himself be held as a cuckold for twenty-five years not despite but because of his power to order Lancelot and Guenever to summary execution simply cannot have ordered the death of several hundred children in order to conceal a premarital peccadillo.

Nevertheless, this is presented to us as Modred's grievance against the king -- and here begins a scene of Dastardly Plotting whose absurdity fairly took my breath away. The pure ancient race of the Gaels, it appears, is to be turned against King Arthur by sleights -- by a movement which "must be against large numbers of people, like the Jews...We want a banner, yes, and a badge, too. You could use the Fylfot..."

Here I sprang to my feet with a dreadful cath and started to pitch the book across the room; for I knew that the Fylfot, a kind of friction firestarter, is represented graphically thus ✻. But remembering the \$5 I'd paid, I read on to find that, sure enough, Modred's group was referred to as a New Order; his friends the Storm Troo -- beg pardon, I meant to say The Thrashers -- are to overthrow Arthur by stirring up some domestic

difficulty. "Then would be the time for discontented people, Lollards and Communists and Nationalists and all the riff-raff...We could break them up, because they were broken among themselves."

This is a sufficient sample; for all his experience, White still seems to think that allegories require him to spell out for us the analogy he's trying to draw between fiction and present fact. And of course this is just the sort of thing that makes the allegory invalid the minute his images become obsolete; the banner and badge as symbols of unity have many analogies, but when Modred and his crew are shown specifically as knights in armor with swastika armbands it's hard to restrain a horse-laugh.

Anyway, the end comes when Modred resorts to Weapons too Beastly to be Used ("It is incredible! To use cannons against men!"); before the final battle at Camlan which will destroy both sides, Arthur sends young Sir Thomas Mallory off to Warwickshire, so that somebody will remember his deeds Afterward.

But has he left anything to remember?

Well, if the tale had broken off with the end of The Ill-Made Knight, there would have been something; but at the end of The Candle In the Wind Arthur has found the Round Table he organized to be just a different version of Fort Mayne, the law of the strong arm. There is, indeed, a vision of replacing the Rule of Might by the Rule of Right, and of setting the Round Table on one great Quest for something greater than man; and something might have been done with these themes if only White had not been overcome by the urge to spell out everything that he should have been content to hint at. The Rule of Might is not merely challenged but actually replaced by the Rule of Right -- and it turns out that the latter is the codification of the English Civil Law! The noble Higher Truth is not just pursued, but caught -- and may heaven smite me if it doesn't consist in detailed conformity with the dogmas of the Church of Rome! It would've been pretty ridiculous to offer any concrete examples of concepts so mystical and abstract, of course; but it is absolutely farcial to identify them with things that have already been found failures.

The theme and characterization in The Once and Future King present defects very like those of the story-line. Unnecessarily explicitness...well, if I haven't made that point yet I give up. But why this curious piece of stupidity by a veteran?

I think that, like the centipede in the poem, White was doing well until he became consciously arty and Introspective and Significant; Merlyn and Wart and Kay (Wart's companion) are perfectly drawn and vividly alive; they were even better in the original Sword in the Stone -- yet there is hardly a scrap of direct exposition of their characters. The same can be said for the Orkney clan in The Witch in the Wood; they are excellent characterizations because, their characters being secondary to White's story, he lets their actions and not his explanation show us what they are. And conversely, in The Ill-Made Knight, Lancelot's personal character is vital to an understanding of his actions, so his characterization is wretchedly poor: White simply doesn't trust his readers to see character for themselves, and so to make clear Lancelot's motivations he explicitly tells us what they are. This is open to a double objection: first, that it is not worthy of the methods of serious writing, and second that we are not impressed by what we are told nearly as much as by what we are shown.

And thematically there's an odd anachronism that makes me wonder more than ever whether T.H. White is that curious thing, a writer developing backwards. For he's written his book too late for his message. It's in the period between the First and Second World Wars that we expect to find such gibes as "...the modern world is apt to forget that several people were Christians in the remote past, and in Lancelot's time there were no Protestants..." There, too, we'd find the audience who, seeing a hero driven as Wart is driven to conclude that Statism Is Wicked, Nationalism is Folly, and Might is Wrong Even When Used on the Side of Right, acclaimed the writer as a being of profound wisdom and penetrating intellect. He'll not receive that acclaim from people who take those ideas as premises. If he wanted to give a message to us, White should have started from those ideas; but instead he's stopped there. What he has to say is no message you and I need to listen to.

- - - Dick Eney

SPECULATIVE

Review...Bill Evans up from this point.

Before preceding with the reviews I'd like to use a little space to discuss science-fiction (and fantasy) and the problems of reviewing such a specialized field. First, what is science fiction? And what is fantasy? After all, one of the leading lights in the field is The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.

These are deceptive questions, especially the first one. I've been looking for a good answer for a long time -- at least 25 years. One trouble is that so many things have been lumped under the general category "science fiction" that a comprehensive definition becomes almost impossible. Included are Tom Swift and His Electric Locomotive, Galactic Patrol, A Princess of Mars, Brave New World, The Time Machine, Nerves, "First Contact", "A Martian Odyssey", The Martian Chronicles, Last and First Men, Odd John, I Remember Lemuria, "I, Robot", and thousands of others. Some are space opera; some are frankly westerns or detective stories that have been rewritten with new gadgets. Some are sociological essays, some are pure (or maybe not so pure) entertainment. Any definition that can encompass such varied themes and treatments must be so general that it loses its validity. So I have evolved something that more or less satisfies me, though at the expense of putting a lot of "science-fiction" back into the other categories, and, perhaps, adding some stories not usually considered as belonging to the field.

Of course, such a definition does not mean I immediately remove all such reclassified works from my shelves; I read what I like, be it fantasy or s-f.

The definition I've adopted as a working basis is:

"Science Fiction is the fiction that is based on contemporary science and extrapolations of that science, and which is not in opposition to the knowledge of the period; extrapolations that change basic theories must do so logically. The science must be an integral part of the plot, and the development of the story must be consistent with the assumptions made."

Such a definition, of course, excludes all time travel stories, except for the suspended animation type, and makes faster-than-light travel require a change in some of the properties of space. By custom, time travel is admitted as a possibility for the sake of the story; likewise, C-plus velocities are assumed, usually without explanation other than "hyperspace" or some such lipservice to Einstein.

As a companion definition, we substitute and obtain:

"Fantasy fiction is fiction based on assumptions impossible according to contemporary science; but, again, the assumptions must be an integral part of the plot, and the development must be consistent with the assumptions."

Of course, science includes not only the physical and biological sciences, but the social sciences such as anthropology, this bringing in the standard creatures of mythology -- vampires, werewolves, ghouls, Cthulhu -- and the usual spells and curses of witchcraft and demonology.

So there is a start for a definition of science fiction. You'll notice that certain stories that are considered stf are certainly not included (Starship Soldier, for one, might not qualify -- see the last SpecRev) while items usually ignored fall into the elect group -- Tom Swift certainly does, in many cases.

The treatment of the plot and theme can also be a deciding factor in placing a story in one or the other (or neither!) class. Thus Darker Than You Think, though dealing with fantastic elements like witches and werewolves, by its treatment and slight sidewise extrapolations on today's science falls into the science fiction group. And most space opera of the old Planet Stories type falls into neither, being based

not on s-f or fantasy assumptions but on those of the adventure story, laid in a distant country with exotic modes of transport. (On second thought, maybe they're fantasy in a special sense -- the worlds they depict, like that of A Princess of Mars, being impossible by current science.)

There, briefly, you have some of my ideas on science fiction. Discussion?

Which brings up the second point, that of reviewing the field. I may be wrong, but I feel that reviews of specialized material addressed to a specialized audience should not necessarily follow the standard type of review. (Of course, there are those that will disagree with me. Go right ahead; that's your privilege.)

I don't feel I'm trying to review great literature -- should any appear, I hope I'll be able to recognize it and acclaim it with loud cheers. I'm merely trying to indicate what is good reading in the current crop of magazines -- good reading either because of writing, storytelling, plot, or just the entertainment value. If I feel a story is well written, but doesn't have any plot or substance -- Heinlein, again -- I'll say so. If I like the gimmick, but don't like the characters who people the story, I'll try to indicate that, too. I've been reading stf for 30 years now, and have probably lost that Sense of Wonder that everyone is looking for; at the same time I think I can spot a new idea, or a different twist of an old gimmick. And, while I don't pretend to be an expert writer, and don't like the "little magazine" type of writing, I can indicate it, to let its avid followers know what's awaiting them. I'll try to do an honest job; if I err, it'll be an honest mistake.

Thus my reviews will include something of the plot (I'll try not to give the ending away), a little on the development, a note on the characterization, a note on the style, and an over-all appraisal -- as I see it.

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AMAZING SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES, February 1960

A Long Way Back, by Ben Bova; 18-page short...: A better than usual first-space-flight type of story. With most of the earth in ruins from atomic war and fuel sources exhausted, the last chance seems to be to assemble a solar-power satellite that had been sent up before the war. Tom Morris goes only because the project leader -- who seems to have a dictator complex -- promises that the ruined cities will be explored to recover the lost knowledge, which the rocket group does not have. The satellite is assembled, but the transmitter is focussed elsewhere than the base. Morris manages to move the focus near to a large city -- Philadelphia -- but uses his oxygen up and cannot return. The story is reasonably well written -- although with an oversupply of italicized inner thoughts -- and the character of Morris, an historian-teacher in his early 40s, is brought into proper focus; given his convictions and background, his actions are logical and predictable. The other characters appear only via radio and through Morris' thoughts about them; none exist except Jason, who develops into the would-be dictator, who wants to run his little show and is afraid of anything but what he knows (which is rockets). Except for those extra italics, the writing carries the story well. It's science-fiction, too. #

Divvy Up, by Milt Lesser; 12-page short...: A rather weird culture, post (atomic) war, with enough technology to continue fighting with jets and AA guns, but without missiles and A-bombs -- and the blasted cities are still occupied. The general occupation seems to be looting, with organizations and civil service and rules concerning it. (The Red Cross serves coffee to the diggers after buried loot, for a 10% commission.) All values are inverted, with a premium on doing the other person in. Even accepting this society -- which I found hard to do; it just didn't make sense in too many ways -- the story doesn't hang together. There is too much rambling; too little plot. And none of the characters come to life; even the central character -- must we call him "hero"? -- seems no more than a stick figure moved around by the author -- and moved rather obviously. I didn't like it, in spite of the blurb: "...a fine, hard story of the inverted ethical system of the post-war world where inhumanity is the norm and cruelty pays dividends."#

A Jar of Jelly Beans, by

Franklin Gregory; 16 page short....: The world of 2060, with a population of millions, all food supplies giving out, no space even for living. The only hope for years has been migration to Venus or elsewhere, and all luxury and most "necessity" industry has been stopped to divert effort into the space program -- which has had no success. Dr. Justin Weatherby, biochemist, etc, advisor to the president, has an idea, which he tries out successfully: make midgets out of every child, thus giving more room and more material things to every person. He perfects a process to be used before birth, and a second for children under two, which result in humans 2.5 feet high, but perfectly formed in every other way. (He tried the first on his wife, and the second, secretly, on orphans.) The first successful midget baby is born just before the president comes up for election; he has suspended the space program, and bases his hopes on the midget process. The story ends with the feeling that he will be elected and all will be well -- for a while. And I didn't believe a word of it. Nor did I like the way the story was told. Nor did I feel the background details were convincing. Nor did I feel anyone in the story could ever have lived; they were much too stiff. But it is science-fiction. #

#Transient, by Ward Moore;

80 page novel....: This is one of the most unusual stories I have read for a long time -- if indeed it can be termed a "story". As far as I can see, it is nothing but the transcription of a nightmare, complete with the illogical logic of dreams, the sudden changes of scene and in scene, the characters that appear time and again, always in different guises. And yet, I liked it. The plot seems to concern the torments of a politician when he revisits an old, small town and its old hotel he had once known when a travelling salesman. He seems to have gone into a nightmare, trying to justify his vast number of guilt actions. Plot? There isn't any. Characterization...well, how do you make the inhabitants of a nightmare -- even the dreamer -- real? But the writing is vivid, interesting, fascinating, and repulsive (in spots). There are enough sequences here for a dozen stories; some of the scenes remind me of Thorne Smith's department store in Rain In The Doorway, without the light satire involved in that. Read this and judge for yourself. At least, such fantasy is certainly a change from the usual space opera.

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FANTASTIC SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, February 1960

The Priests of Psi, by Frank Herbert; 56 page novel....: This one is an obvious escapee from ASF (analog, that is); it is a sequel to a previous story which appeared there, and is full of the Campbell "sticky plate" gimmick. Lewis Orne, a latent psiman and secret agent of the I-A, goes to the world of Amel ("sanctuary of all the religions in the known universe") to investigate a supposed plot against interplanetary peace. He is required to go thru the seven ordeals, which develop his latent powers so that he skips the last three, and finally -- after discovering the reason for the "revolt" -- finds himself on the other side. All ends well, with the I-A peacefully displaced, and the psimen taking over the successor agency; such is the brief outline of the novel. On reading it, it's easy to see why Campbell rejected it: it's heavily loaded with religion -- in the general, mystical sense. It does not fit into the mechanistic picture of psi Campbell is trying to put over; here psi is a part of mystical experiences and they are part of it. I felt this was an interesting story -- for about half the distance. Then it fell apart and lost itself in a series of philosophical/mystical discussions. The flip-flop reminds me of the change between Act I and Act II of Mozart's Zauberflöte, in which the villains abruptly become Good Guys, and the Queen of the Night a wicked witch...the only three who don't change are the hero, the heroine, and the bird-man Papageno. Here the hero alone doesn't flip ("and I'm not too sure about him...") His character, in the first part of the story, doesn't jibe with that in the latter, although he has been through much. And the rest -- sounding boards for the author to declaim through, or against. The writing is vivid, with a number of good scenes (and some very poor ones, too; but as the Irish would say, the good ones are better than the poor ones are bad.) Galaxy would have liked the plot, but not the development or the writing -- it's much too lucid for H.L. I enjoyed reading it; it shows the improvement both Fantastic and Amazing have made in the last year.

Tyrants Need To Be Loved, by Murray Leinster; 20-page short....: The dictator wants a machine to keep him in power, a machine to sway people's thoughts as he wills. The underground group invents one for him -- and through it overthrows him. As you expect from Leinster, this is a gadget story, with the gimmick based on overuse of a good thing; the characters are typical Leinster characters -- every one a shadowy puppet, moving along as he must. The writing is the typical Leinster writing, but the story, though science-fiction, is not as good as the typical Leinster space-opera story. The whole tale is in a kind of haze, with nothing standing out clearly in focus. From other writers, this might be a good story; from Leinster, I feel it is poor. Perhaps it is because there is no one I can identify with. ^{if}

^{if} Mariana, by Fritz Lieber; 5 page short....: Mariana found that the house and the grounds and the husband and the universe were all just part of her imagination; maybe it was all part of "wish-fulfillment therapy" or maybe that was only part of her imagination. And maybe Mariana was, too... This is little magazine writing -- but Lieber makes me like it. He goes on just long enough, just fast enough. And, somehow, Mariana seems real. A thoroughly nice little fantasy.

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THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, March 1960.

The Martyr, by Poul Anderson; 16 page novelette....: I like most of Poul's stories; I feel that he can be counted on for an interesting, entertaining story. This is no exception, although I have read better Anderson. In its spaceward expansion, mankind has encountered an advanced telepathic race -- which refuses to give any help toward making man telepathic, although it helps in many other ways. The government is convinced that this is being done on purpose, and decides to set up a special, hidden group to kidnap several telepaths, and -- using a special scrambler to prevent transmission -- use them as laboratory subjects. In spite of the precautions, the aliens communicate and are rescued; in the process the reason for not giving man telepathic help is revealed -- quite logical and quite unsuspected. The inner conflicts of the leader of the scientists are well built up; the decisions he would like to make and cannot are logically presented. The brief pictures of the aliens are equally well drawn; the whole is written well, and yet -- it didn't quite click with me. Maybe the mood is too even, with the conflict all on the philosophical level. Even the research is glossed over; the stress throughout is strictly intellectualized, and it doesn't grab you. But it is interesting science-fiction. ^{if}

^{if} Death and the Maiden, by Ray Bradbury; 7 page short....: This is the Bradbury I like, the Bradbury who does not pretend to be a science fiction writer, but is content to paint word-pictures that remind me in some ways of that other master of the fantastic, Dunsany. Bradbury, though, is more vivid, more colorful in imagery. This is a deal-with-the-devil story, but a different one. Here we have no scheming wretch trying to evade his fate; the whole of the story is concerned only with the pact. And the description is in images that are often almost purple but which escape by just enough to be correct. The plot isn't important; the people are nothing but pieces of the picture; but the writing can carry the whole. ^{if}

^{if} Man Overboard, by John Collier; 22 page novelette.: The search for the sea serpent -- and just when he is found, the interfering character, the Person from Porlock, appears. An old plot, but an effective one, when handled as well as Collier does. The characters are built up into living people; then the events follow from their actions, rather than from the writer's pen. The writing carries through, and the over-all effect is a good one, giving a nice science-fiction story...science-fiction, from John Collier!! Except for the anticlimactic last page, I like this one.

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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION, February 1960.

The Lunar Lichen, by Hal Clement; 44 page novelet...: A ten man expedition exploring the moon, and one of them goes mad. First he reports finding lichens alive; they are probably -- but not certainly -- fakes. When their status is questioned, he steals the food supply, tries to dump the ship's reaction mass, and decamps with a tractor -- he has discovered a deposit of snow in the vicinity. Plan: after the others are weakened by lack of food, he'll go back, replace the reaction mass with the snow, and return alone to Earth. The others go after him, and subdue him after a tractor fight -- the poor chap made a slight error in forgetting about free radicals. A typical Clement story; the science is well worked out, the writing more than adequate, and the characters move with the precision of clockwork. This is science-fiction, and would have made Gernsback's heart glad. Twenty years ago, it would have been acclaimed; today, it lacks the humanity that readers demand. #

#Through Other Eyes, by R.A. Lafferty; 17 page short...: A gadget that lets one see and feel through someone else's senses, but a plot that's only a variant on girl-and-boy. The well-done descriptions of the same world through various personalities makes the story interesting, in spite of a somewhat jarring, flip-pant style. Naturally, the character have to be developed -- but only as a means of presenting various viewpoints. (Remember Weinbaum's Pygmalion's Spectacles?) Interesting, with strong fantasy overtones. #

Passage to Sharanee, by Carol Grey; 28 page novelet, reprinted from April '42 FUTURE...: A reprint by Doc Lowndes, and the best item in the issue. I remember enjoying it then, and enjoyed it again. Strange things take place on a spaceship, with a shape-changing Thing on board, trying to get back to its own world. A haunting theme; a fascinating development with a sort of dreamy feeling. I liked it despite the passages of purple prose.

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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, March 1960.

Artery of Fire, by Thomas N. Scortia; 71 page novel...: The Artery is a pipeline of uranium, mined automatically on Pluto and shot in a stream of vapor to the Moon, where it is collected and used for power on Earth. The stream is controlled by magnetic lenses at each end, generated by space stations. All operations on Pluto and the Plutonian space station are handled by robots, remote-controlled by super-C communications. The time has come when the stream must be altered, because Pluto has crossed the ecliptic plane and the stream is now arching up through the plane, causing trouble in control. A changeover, requiring several months, is in progress, under the direction of the original builder. There is opposition on Earth to the huge expenditures required for the Artery, with feeling that it should be replaced by fusion power; and just before changeover is complete, there is sabotage, and a section of wild uranium is on its way to graze Earth. Oh, yes -- and Bayerd, the director, is subject to fainting spells. In the end, by his sacrifice and a rabbit from a hat, everything is corrected and Earth gets fusion power. First, this is science-fiction; I'm unhappy about the faster-than-light communication, but even this can be allowed. The rabbit at the end isn't convincing; the detective element (a secondary plot) doesn't come off too well, either -- it is a much less successful "Murder of Roger Ackroyd". I found the writing dragging, the action choppy. And several times I found I had lost contact with the characters entirely and didn't know who was who. This is the worst feature of the story; none of the characters seem real -- even the central figure, Bayerd, seems no more than a puppet, and the actions of the other characters are two-dimensional in the extreme, with little attempt to show why they did what they did.

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Speculative
Review
from

Mr. Richard H. Eney
417 Fort Hunt Road
Alexandria, Virginia

because

you trade
you are Talked About
you sub
you belong to WSFA
you contributed
you wrote
just for kicks

PERIODICALS
No commercial value

Eva Firestone
Upton, Wyoming