Lhyte

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ARTWORK CREDITS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

to Greg Hills, the patient and reliable printer

to Rex Thompson, FFANZ-winning artist-on-demand

to Deb, for the birthday present

to Geoff and to everyone else who didn't laugh too hard
when I said I was going to put out a 2nd issue

This has been a dn əpᴉs ʇɥbᴉɹ production,
brought to you by Roger Weddall, who may be reached at:
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Hi. Welcome... or should that be Welcome Back? If you couldn't make it to an earlier issue then I should explain we're up to the Third Act: _Lhyfe_ in its incarnation as a fanzine proper, rather than as a live event or as a transcription (a transformation into print) of the same.

But it has been a long time between drinks, so perhaps a recap would be in order. April 1990 came the Initial Performance. Then, in October of that year, ~~the/film/rights/and/+~~ the written fanzine.

So what have we here: a sequel? No, what we have are a few...

LETTERS OF COMMENT

<u>Gary Deindorfer</u> wrote in to say:

'I have heard before about these strange things called "live" fanzines but I have never seen one before yhos. Doesn't a "live" fanzine have to be presented by real people on a dais at a convention? Isn't real live people such as yourself and your friends doing a fanzine on paper actually doing what is called a one-shot?'

[A one-shot, I thought, was a once-only effort, which _Lhyfe_ was never intended to be... and I don't believe you could have missed all the references to the fact that the printed version you received was just that: a printed version of a live perfomance.]

'All kidding aside about live fanzines,' Gary continued, 'Irwin Hirsh's fan history elucidation was invaluable.'

Invaluable, I would agree, although as <u>Harry Bond</u> pointed out, the list was incomplete:

'Irwin Hirsh omits at least one live fanzine, to wit, _Stomach Pump_ #8, "edited" by Steve Higgins at a 1980s Eastercon. _SP_ was a fanzine devoted largely to fanzine criticism, and the con committee roped Steve in to run their fanzine panel - without, so I believe, very much success. That fanzine was never put on paper, so far as I'm aware.'

<u>Glen Warminger</u> added:

'Steve Higgins did... an edition of his fanzine _Stomach Pump_ - all about criticism in and of fanzines. Could be said to have worked because it stuck to the principles that his fanzines (up until then) stuck to. Not long after that he had his shins ground away by his infant child Joseph (or was it Hugo?) (or was that my mate's pet Spaniel?) and was never seen in fandom again.'

It's nice to be able to set the record straight - which makes it especially nice to hear from the person who, apparently, invented the concept of the live fanzine, <u>Steve Miller</u>:

'Deep down in my memory there is a kernel of recall telling me that I suggested the live fanzine idea to Suzle and Jerry. Please bear with me.

'Once upon a time there was a convention known as BaltiCon.... It had begun as an extra-large election meeting of the Baltimore SFS [and] the BaltiCon crew was a combination of fanzine fans, media fans, plain ol' fans and convention fans. The push, though, seemed media oriented: the convention grew to absurd size for a so-called local convention (2000 plus!) and the tru-fans began staying away in droves, attending instead the fannish mecca of MiniCon, held the same weekend every year in Minneapolis.

'While the media fans saw no problem with this - not knowing who Harry Warner, Walt Willis or Bhob Tucker were (for that matter they didn't know who Wilson Tucker or Murray Leinster were either...) - the few fanzine/con fan types knew we were missing some of the nicest, most interesting people in fandom.

'In proper fannish style I gave an impassioned speech to this effect at a committee meeting. The immediate impact: I was delegated to do something about it on a "you're worried about it? you take care of it!" basis.

'*SpanIng* was the best fanzine at the time and Jerry and Suzle among the nicest people I knew. So I called and offered them the opportunity to be Fen GoH at BaltiCon. They were appalled. They were stupified. They were scared. They were... speechless. It was this element that both Jerry and Suzle stressed on the phone. Suzle's voice quavered: "But then I'd have to do a speech..."

'Jerry's voice didn't quaver as much: he tried reason. "But if you have a lot of non-fanzine fans they won't *know* us...."

'It was pretty convincing. On the other hand I'd become adept at helping things happen. I was elected BSFS Minister of Propaganda and I'd gone to schools and public libraries talking about science fiction; not just as literature abut about the sheer *joy* of it: the fun, the good times, the good people....

'So, I insisted that Jerry and Suzle be our Fan GoHs, and eventually they accepted, with much trepidation. But it was after the initial phone call that I was working on a library presentation about fanzines. Trying to explain what a genzine was, I came up with a description of a general fanzine as 'an amateur variety show in print'.

'Light broke on Gorm's intellect.

'Why not *present* a fanzine to the general membership of a convention? Let them see it as the variety show that it was?

'A quick phone call and the worst of it was done (for me). All I had to do now was to fight all the other programme items and the film programme for prime time stage space, and then pick Suzle and Jerry up when they came into town, and squire them to the hotel.

'It was Suzle and Jerry who had to *really* invent *The Live SpanIng*; who had to struggle with co-ordinating people, props, ideas and energy. It was Jerry and Suzle and the other sometime reluctant participants who had to overcome stagefright. Of course, too, it was Jerry and Suzle *et al.* who got to reap the instant egoboo of a genuine, handclapping applause.

'I got to watch the talented crew work. The performance went longer than expected, and for part of the time I was standing at the door holding Judy Kurman (Keeper of the Schedule) back by force. I got to applaud, too... that's how I recall the first Live Fanzine.

'There's no doubt that the Live Fanzine was a success. Thankfully, the idea hasn't been overdone - in part I suppose because fans

understand the amount of effort it takes to put one together.'

Jerry Kaufman had this to add:

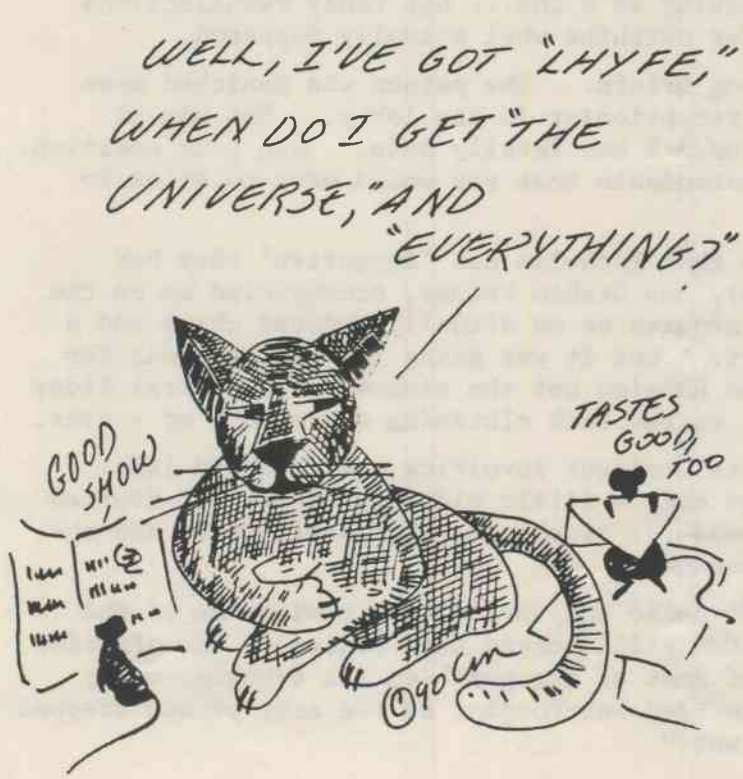
'Irwin has the general outline of the Live *SpanIng* right (it was *The Spanish Inquisition*, the year was 1976, the published issue was #7/8 (a "normal" issue of *SpanIng* surrounded the "live" material) and we were nominated for a Hugo and won the FAAN Award for best single issue, tieing with *Outworlds*). We had most of our regular contributors, both writers and artists, there at the con, plus a filksinger, a clown/juggler, a TAFF wiiner, and Tom Lehrer *in absentia*. The thing went on (and on) for over two hours.

'When we do our Live One-Shot at Minicon and Westercon next year, I hope we will put to use all the lessons of the many succeeding live fanzines Irwin mentions (several of which we've been at). One lesson, I think, is a sense of what a live fanzine *is*. It is not a transcript of a convention. It has to be premeditated, like murder. It has to be done with the intention of duplicating the spirit and experience of reading a fanzine. The Live *SpanIng*, you'll note, went beyond that; we thought we needed to give a little more, though we felt the juggling and the music were a part of the spirit if not the experience of our fanzine.'

Just as, Jerry, I felt that the use of music and the physical use of artwork during the performance of *Lhyfe* brought something of the spirit of the written fanzine to the production. And then there was the challenge of bringing the feel of the performance to the finally-printed product.

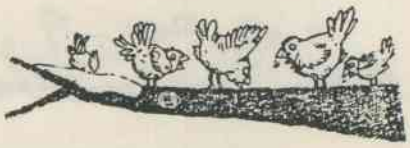
Speaking of artwork, Teddy Harvia kindly sent some more as well as the comment that: 'Since your use of my art did not involve animals or small children I am more than satisfied with it.' Rest assured, Teddy, I feel that art is something that should only be shared between consenting adults. The bit about involving animals, I'm not so sure about: several people commented on how much they liked Craig Hilton's rat illo... but on the other hand Mae Strelkov seems to share your view:

'I don't care for the theme of the cover... it's bad enough to have real mini-bugs whenever I go walking up in our mountain heights. A giant one should want to cuddle and not take a bite too? Silly girl in the illo! I guess I'm a tired old fan and draconian beasties leave me cold these days.



'The tiny folk crowding into the room party from the Fannish History book look like Chinese old-fashioned characters! I enjoyed "reading" them.

'I'm not sure whether my reaction is prurient or anthropological, but you Aussies do get up to things. Yourself "not between the sheets but between the top blanket and the bedspread! Coyest person out!" Yeah! In your way you're the mystery lad of Australia, from this far away viewed. And Michelle Muijsert, quite to the contrary, *reveals all.*'



Well, not quite! Mike Glicksohn also thought it was an...

'Interesting cover. Joan's style has definitely changed along with her change of name [Joan (Hanke) Woods = Delphyne Mori] and there's a definite Japanese influence present.

'I was very flattered to have a walk-on part in one of Marc's songs (or perhaps that should be a "stagger-on" part?) and more than somewhat amused to learn that Bruce lost his virginity at the WorldCon I was so busy helping run I didn't even get laid.

'It all ended with a general sense of appreciation of the way Michelle demonstrated that the nature of fans and cons (good and bad, noble and asinine) is apparently universal (although the sight of two men French kissing at an American con in 1983 would scarcely have sent anyone - not even their girlfriends - screaming into the night).'

The point - perhaps not clearly explained in Michelle's article - was that (at the time) only one of the men involved had a girlfriend... but why let facts get in the way of a good story? Tom Cardy wrote to clarify a point:

'I was in hysterics, reading Michelle's convention piece, where she referred to her encounter with Graham Ferner, and the other one with Rex Thompson caught kissing Mark Harris! Only, the next time you see Michelle remind her that her first convention was Octacon *not* Halleycon. That convention, as you well know, was in '86. She wasn't there, unless I was in even more of an alcoholic haze than usual at the time.'

Rex Thompson had more to add to the story:

'"Betty" is unsure of the exact details of the incident you describe. While she concedes that she was upset, she also says: "I'm hardly the screaming type."

'It is also alleged that "John"'s first words after said incident (to "Fred") were: "Mmmm, you taste of butterscotch."'

Peter Hassall alleges that, 'Regarding Michelle's "The Best of Cons, The Worst of Cons", and my streaking at a con... her randy recollections through rose-coloured glasses far outshine what actually happened.

'I was not nude, but wearing briefs. The person who panicked upon seeing the event was the hotel receptionist in the lobby. She saw me from the waist up only and presumed I was totally nude. [In your position, Peter, I think it's quite understandable that you would want to stick to your version of the story....]

'It is interesting to note that Michelle has 'forgotten' that her current boyfriend (at that time), one Graham Ferner, accompanied me on the streak. It took us about two minutes as we actually ordered chips and a can of drink each at the piecart. But it was going to take too long for the chips so, cheered on by fans hanging out the windows of the first floor bar which we had departed from, we ran back clutching our cold - er - cans.

'It was an entirely separate incident involving a little old lady. At another time (during the same con) a little old lady saw myself dressed in Rocky Horror underwear, suspenders, stockings, high heels etc., and she freaked out. She called the manager.'

Steve Miller said that 'Michelle Muijsert's talk reminds me of the invention of Balticoke. BaltiCon still served hard liquor in the official party then. The bar ran out of most of the potables one evening, on my shift. I was bemoaning this to Fred Saberhagen, as the next person stepped up and said "Give me something wet!"

'Taking a bottle of coke in my right hand and a bottle of vodka in ny left, I poured approximately equal amounts over some crushed ice. The victim hadn't been paying attention because he was faunching over Sylvia Starshine; he took a hefty sip, and then a deep breath. With wide eyes he asked "What's this?" "That's a BaltiCoke!" Ten minutes later we had a line....

'The bed incident reminds me of another convention occasion when a room-mate glared at me as I walked out from 'his' room with one of the other three roomies. "Yep," he said to the lady. "Just a platonic, pen-pal friend you were going to have dinner with...." Standing behind him were half a dozen smiling fans waiting to help collate his fanzine. So we turned around and helped them staple the issue.'

"the after-effects of drinking BaltiCoke"

This brings to mind Rex Thompson's comment on what Bruce Gillespie had to say about being young and single at conventions:

'Bruce is definitely right about enjoying conventions more when one is young and 'available'. I'm not saying that cons are just another kind of flimsily disguised meat market (although I'm not exactly denying it either...), but room parties are far more interesting when you've got hormones as well as alcohol coursing through your bloodstream.'

Buck Coulson thought otherwise:

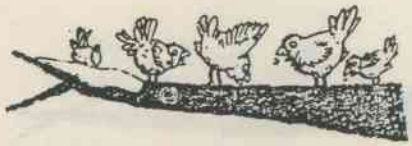
'I disagree with Bruce Gillespie's comment that having a Significant Other changes the way one approaches conventions, but then I only attended two cons before I was married, soethe change came mostly because of more knowledge of fans and science fiction, and any possible changes due to my married state were so small in comparison as to be unnoticed. (I *tried* to attend a third convention before marriage, but the hotel wouldn't admit my party because one of us was black, and we had to go back home. Or maybe two of us were black, come to think of it: I later got my biography published in a book titled *Leaders of Black America*. Check with Eric Lindsay on my color status....)'

Harry Warner Jr. echoed the feelings of many others when he opined that:

'Bruce's memories of his early fannish years were a good addendum to the various articles on Australian fan history that have appeared from time to time. [I'll butt in here to mention that I'm interested in giving space in this fanzine to such articles or reminiscences. There's a lot of Aus. fan history that has never been set down in print, and I'd like to help correct that situation.]

'However, Marc's law of fannish activity which he cites has never applied to me. I have probably spent more time on fanac in several recent years than I did during my first few years as a fan. I didn't write many locs as a youthful fan and my annual fanzine production was about the same as today, although at the start it consisted of genzines and now it's apazines.'

I suppose that such 'laws' are more guidelines as to how things often occur for people, although then there's the possibility that we can become caught up in how things "should" be done. I suspect that Kim Huett has a few ideas....



'I hope you intend to publish further issues of *Lhyfe* as I'm very interested to see what you might do with the genzine format. [Me too!] If you do continue then I hope you realise that by having this first issue performed live you have held a launch party. Just like you, too, starting your fanzine in the same manner as many books and records.

'The interview with Bruce Gillespie was my favourite piece. There wasn't much I hadn't heard already but it was nice to see it talked about from a slightly different perspective. Most of the descriptions of the 1966 convention, Australia in '75, etc. I have read were written by John Bangsund who, while an excellent writer, can only give the John Bangsund point of view.

'All in all it was an interesting first effort marred by very uneven material. Maybe Bruce Gillespie and yourself should form a commune for the acquisition of fanzine contributions. You could provide Bruce with the quality artwork he longs for, and he could send a few solid articles your way. Could be the start of something big, you know.'

Curiously, Kim, you have suggested what you could not have known was already the case. About eight years ago - six years before the first issue of this fanzine saw the light of day - and while I was still editing the newszine *Thyme*, I decided that I wanted to try my hand at publishing a general fanzine.

At that time, Bruce was snowed under with his freelance workload, he had no money to publish his fanzine *and* the longer he waited before publishing, the larger the pile of unused articles grew... to the point of Bruce despairing of ever being able to print them all. (Okay, so nothing has changed in eight years: you're surprised?)

In his customarily generous way, Bruce suggested that perhaps I might want to avail myself of some of the material he had no space to publish immediately. We went through the files and he selected out the stuff he wasn't going to be able to fit in in the next issue, and that was almost that. Between then and now he asked for some of the material back, when he finally (or is that momentarily) caught up with the backlog. Still, the bulk of the remainder of this issue was originally intended for *SF Commentary*. Okay Bruce, so it's time for you to come around and look at my artwork files... and thanks for the leg-up.

We Also Heard From: Sheryl Birkhead; Peter Brodie, who sent in a page from the Cronulla/Sutherland Pink Pages (er... thanks?); Arthur Hlavaty; Waldemar Kumming; Irwin Hirsh, who realised that 'I have *already* responded with a loc. Not only that, but my loc on the first (?) issue appears in the first (?) issue. That sent my mind on a metaphysical spin you wouldn't believe.' Charlotte Proctor responded with a short loc and an official "Death From Beyond" Birmingham SF Club t-shirt which I wear with delight at very fannish occasions; Alexander Popov; Ben Indick; Donald Franson; Damir Coklin, who has since moved from Zagreb, Yugoslavia to Melbourne, Australia; Bruno Ogorelec, who has moved from Zagreb, Yugoslavia to Zagreb, Croatia; Jean Lamb, who 'loved Marc Ortlieb's filking! [as did many other people] Watch out, or I may inflict some of mine on you, too!' Paul Gibson; and Elizabeth Bromham, who said that *Lhyfe* 'left me a little confused.' Hmmmn, yes, it had that effect on me too, Elizabeth.

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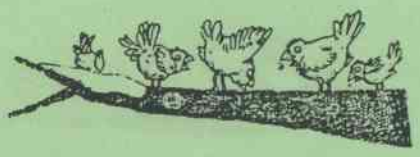


Terry Carr was brought to Sydney early in 1979 to co-host a writers' workshop. He and local author George Turner each spent a week with their charges before being spirited down to Melbourne for a small convention at which Terry was Guest of Honour. It was while he was in Melbourne that Terry was interviewed by Anne Brewster, then a lecturer in English at an Adelaide University, who more recently has been working at the University of Western Australia.

TERRY CARR DOWN UNDER

AB: As a longstanding and widely recognised editor of science fiction in the States what do you see the role of science fiction as being in American society?

TC: I don't really see it as being anything more important than simple entertainment. There are the hard core fans, of course, for whom it is a source of intellectual stimulation; I suppose it is so to an extent even for the casual reader. Beyond that I don't think there is any major impact. Some people have said that science fiction is a cure for future shock but I think that's an overstatement.

AB: There have been comments made in several of your introductions to *Best Science Fiction of the Year* as to an improvement of quality of the science fiction short story. Do you see this as an indication that science fiction is approaching mainstream status?

TC: In terms of quality?

AB: Yes, and recognition.

TC: It's only in the science fiction field that the short story has any real current life. Mainstream short stories that are being published today, although they are very good, are essentially stagnant; they're redoing things that have been done before and in commercial terms they're certainly not going anywhere. There are fewer and fewer short stories being published, in the mainstream.

If a new story by John Updike comes out and appears in *Esquire*, for example, it's unlikely you'll see his name on the cover to advertise a new story by John Updike. Instead you'll see whatever articles are in there. Non-fiction seems to have captured the imagination of Americans.

AB: In that case what would you see as being the distinguishing quality of science fiction short stories, that gives them this excellence, ar at least this popularity?

TC: For one thing the short story form is particularly suited to a certain type of plot, of construction which is to say that you take one simple idea, or a complex idea, but one idea and follow it to its logical conclusion, and show how a situation can develop out of that, and how that situation reaches one sort or another of climax.

In that sense the science fiction field is a literature of ideas, although these ideas are normally rather simple, and I prefer to call them 'notions' rather than 'ideas'. There isn't that particular dimension available to the mainstream writer, who is more or less confined to writing about slices of life or simple experiences, which approach has pretty much exhausted itself. Although there are a couple of exceptions it is no longer what I would call a 'moving' field.

AB: Would you say that this literature of ideas takes its impulse from scientific discoveries? Do you still think, for example, that science is an essential ingredient of science fiction?

TC: I don't feel that science fiction need necessarily be based on science. But one trend that is current in science fiction stories is a return to the science or technology-based idea or notion, particularly within the last couple of years, with explorations into cloning and black holes, for example. I think what's happened is that there are new areas of scientific thinking that can be explored and these offer new gimmicks, essentially, so that

writers are coming up with what passes as new ideas in science fiction or as close as we can get to new ideas.

AB: There's been a lot of debate about gimmicks and technique. What sort of role do you see sensationalism and commercialism plays in science fiction? Is it debilitating or do you see it as an integral part of it all?

TC: It's always an integral part of science fiction, yes, and necessarily so. You have to appeal to a readership, you have to tell a good story first. One thing, the main thing that has improved science fiction in the last ten years is the introduction of characterisation, writing about the future with a tighter and tighter focus on the protagonist.

Since we are more and more dealing with old ideas they can be refurbished and presented to the public once again, made to seem new and more relevant than before by the introduction of real people who are reacting to future situations brought up by this or that aspect of technology, this or that trend in sociology. To that extent the old gimmicks are being examined for what they really mean.

AB: What writers would you name as being competent at characterisation?

TC: Many. Ursula Le Guin is one, Thomas M.Disch, Brian Aldiss, Gene Wolfe; Edgar Pangborn before he died was great.

AB: It seems that science fiction is the product of highly industrialised nations: the U.K., the U.S., Canada, Australia, the U.S.S.R. and Japan, for example. The link between technology and the production of science fiction is obvious. Do you have science fiction coming in from anywhere in Asia?

TC: Zero. We get no stories from Asia. The thing that is operational here is not the level of technology per se but the perception of the effects of technology to the extent that the populace of a country understands more or less, at a gut level, the fact that science and technology are changing the present and the future. To that extent, science fiction automatically generates within that culture. Although in the case of Russia, the science fiction that's been written there in the last ten years seems extremely old-fashioned, by Western standards. And I wonder about that because Russia is highly developed. Possibly it's because of the social structure under which they live, which is aimed at setting up a society that won't change, that will be steady and predictable day by day, so that the future in Russia is perhaps not perceived to be a continually changing thing.

AB: Lem, who is perhaps the best science fiction writer of that area, has been very critical of American science fiction yet his own work is based very much on science...

TC: The trouble with Lem is that I find him completely unreadable, both in his criticism and his fiction.

AB: You have said that the New Wave is a movement that has dug its own grave through its emphasis on style, and that there is a return to hard core science writing. Do you see change ahead for the popularity of hard science?

TC: Yes. For three or four years it has been very strong. It will go on for another, say, ten years. Essentially what we have is a new generation of readers who have come into science fiction recently and are starting from the ground up. They're not going back to 1926* because they don't have to, but they go back to 1942 or '55. They can understand the concepts of science fiction exceptionally easily at that level, and some of the more recent concepts are readily available to them too but by and large they do have to go back to the basics and build from there. The speed of change in science fiction style, emphasis and theme will correlate with the speed of change in the understanding of the new readers who currently make up the bulk of the readership.

AB: What age group is this new readership?

* This was the year that Hugo Gernsback coined the term 'scientifiction' in the editorial of *Amazing Stories*.

TC: The bulk of the readership is always primarily teenage. However it does go all the way and it is drawing older age groups simply because it used to be a thing that people would start when they were about twelve and quit when they were about seventeen or eighteen and going to college, whereas currently they don't feel the need to quit , because there is much better science fiction around and they're not suddenly turning away from the things of childhood. People are attracted to science fiction by essentially flashy things. The analogy can be made with the special effects in the science fiction movie. But the special effects aren't the only thing we have to offer, and continuing numbers of adults are reading through their twenties and thirties.

AB: This new generation of older readers would be particularly important in Australia, which lacks a science fiction reading tradition amd where current writing is essentially experimental.

TC: My impression, quite honestly, is that Australians are flailing about, looking for a voice. What might pass as experimental writing is merely confused. There is a certain amount of accomplished science fiction being written; it doesn't really have a focus. Chandler is the most popular writer. He has, of course, been writing since 1944 and has been writing in the style he started out in and has had all these years to establish a reputation. George Turner is also very good. Also Cherry Wilder, Philippa C.Maddern and - who was it who wrote 'Pie Row Joe'?

AB: Kevin McKay.

TC: Yes; I think that's an extremely accomplished story.

AB: It's difficult to call science fiction.

TC: Oh it's pure fantasy, and then there's no endemic fantasy tradition here either.

AB: And you don't think the ocker caricature kills the story?

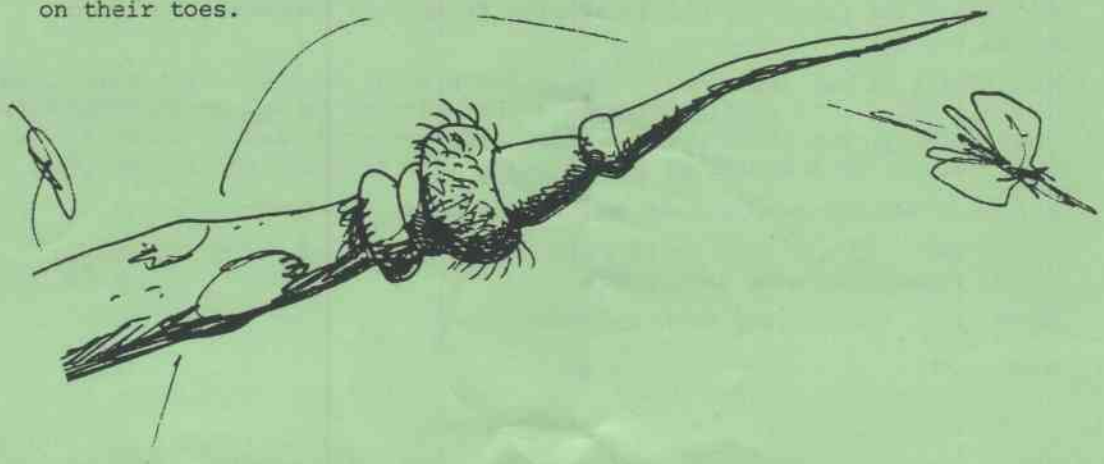
TC: Well, to an outsider that's not caricature. At least it isn't so broad that you can't read the dialect. But I happen to like dialect stories... Damien Broderick is another writer of considerable talent.

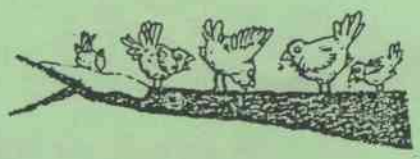
AB: Moving on to a different topic, fandom in Australia is a relatively recent phenomenon. What role does fandom play in the States and how does it differ from that in Australia?

TC: It gives valuable feedback to the authors. The most important way is encouragement... and it keeps them on their toes. They don't feel that they're writing into a void. Also to an extent it's a hindrance because it can lead to an inbreeding of ideas in the field. As for Australian science fiction fandom, one thing I've noticed is that there are far fewer professionals, per capita, in any gathering. I'm used to seeing from a quarter to a third of the people at any gathering being professionals: writers, editors, artists, whatever. Because of that not being the case here there's not the dynamic relationship between fandom and pro-dom.

AB: Do you think many writers are shy of fandom or do you think it makes them treat their work more rigourously?

TC: Fans love to find loopholes and the authors know it. It does keep them on their toes.





AB: Have you any comment to make on women writers?

TC: There has been an incredible lack of women writers in the past. We have had very few and they have been noted by the fact that they are exceptions. C.L.Moore, Leigh Brackett, Margaret Sinclair... you can name the major ones on one hand. Now we have Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Anne McCaffrey, Pamela Sargent, Kate Wilhelm, Vonda McIntyre.... They're doing things which in many cases the men haven't done before and wouldn't have done... there's a kind of humanism that's come into science fiction since the arrival of women writers. I think this is a product of a culturalisation... all the clichés are true. It's led women to approach science fiction from a slightly different angle, which is valuable; it is something that simply hasn't been there when there weren't women writers or when these women were simply imitating men, which is what Leigh Brackett and C.L.Moore too did. It has given a new dimension to science fiction.

That's not to say that there aren't women writing hard science fiction. Katherine MacLean has always been a reasonably hard science writer. But by and large they're bringing new things to the field and, incidentally, causing the male writers to stop and say, hey, why haven't I thought of that before... which I find rather interesting....

AB: What sort of problems do you see that they've had to face in the past?

TC: It's twofold: they get told that science and science fiction are not feminine pursuits and science fiction traditionally, say up to the death of the pulps in the fifties, had its empahis on science and adventure. Secondly, since there were so few women that made their way into the science fiction field as readers, even fewer wrote. I don't believe the stories about women not having got into science fiction writing because they were discriminated against, in the sense that they were discriminated against way back in the schools, not by editors.

AB: What sort of pressures come to bear on writers of science fiction? Do editors simply tap trends?

TC: They don't lay down the law to writers who produce the material in the first place, in fact they feel at the mercy of writers because they can only buy what they can get. They can generate things by saying, "hey why don't you write about such and such' but they can't twist anybody's arm.

AB: To return once more to the question of the borderline between science fiction and mainstream literature: do you think it's fading?

TC: There's one essential difference between the two. I don't agree with any of the comments I've heard in my life about science fiction being on its way to joining the mainstream; approaching the mainstream, yes, but only that. We're using their techniques and the quality of our prose is comparable, but the difference is that in mainstream fiction the assumption is made that there is such a thing as the human condition. The degree of believability of a story is judged primarily by the degree of recognition in that story - 'yes, that's how life is' - whereas in science fiction what we're talking about is how life can be and may be. And if the writer writes about the world in 2152 and the point of the story is that the quality of life has not changed at all, as far as I'm concerned that writer has not written a science fiction story at all.

AB: What about the legendary misfit science fiction is supposed to attract to its ranks?

TC: That misfit is not legendary! Well, let's agree at the outset that 'misfit' is a misnomer. It really only means that someone is not assimilated into society fully, but in many cases there are very good reasons someone does not assimilate or as a matter of fact shouldn't be assimilated into society.

AB: You would see science fiction as social criticism, then?

TC: It can be. If it often falls short of the ideal, of being effective social criticism, most things do.

AB: Terry Carr, thanks very much for your time.

TC: Thank you.

At this year's Australian National SF Convention there will be presented a number of Ditmar Awards - for various fannish endeavours, and for professional, written SF - as well as the William Atheling Jr Award, presented for accomplished criticism of science fiction. The award is named in honour of the *nom de plume* adopted by James Blish when writing as a critic.

Concerning the two pieces printed here, the first was initially published in a student journal in 1968, then in Bruce Gillespie's *SF Commentary* (#29, August '72), and most recently in *The Tale That Wags The God* (ed. Cy Chauvin, Advent Press, Chicago, 1987). In that anthology, the editor had this to say of John Foyster's article:

> 'I know of no-one who has better pinpointed Blish's strengths as a critic, or explained more competently why his criticism is of such value to science fiction. The essay is especially useful if read with a copy of *The Issue At Hand* alongside for reference.'

The second essay, also by John Foyster, I ampleased to be able to present for the first time in print, although it was written some twenty years ago. I think you will agree with me that the passage of time has not in any way dulled the edge of either piece, just as it has not lessened the relevance of what Blish, as Atheling, had to say. Now Read On:

A CRITIC OF SCIENCE FICTION:

(I) a review of William Atheling Jr's 'The Issues At Hand'

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

In practice a critic does simply state their likes or dislikes: but since, thanks to John W.Campbell Jr, not all opinions are of equal worth the critic seeks to demonstrate that *their* opinion is a reasonable one, based on criteria which have wide acceptance.

The skill with which critics do this varies greatly. On the one hand, amongst critics of science fiction, we have those who simply assert that such-and-such is a great sf novel because (i) the critic likes it, and (ii) they have read a lot of SF and therefore know what they are talking about. (The extreme forms of this disease occur when the critic adds that the work in question may be added to the 'SF canon'.)

On the other hand we have those critics (few though they might be) who attempt to appeal to wider sensibilities. And at the extreme and most remote from our nearsighted canoneer we have William Atheling Jr.

That part of Atheling's SF criticism to which I shall refer appears in *The Issue At Hand*. (Advent, 1964, 1967, 136 pp.)

It would be pleasantly simple if everyone could agree on just what constitutes reasonable grounds for liking a work of art, though it could be a trifle boring. As it happens, it is rather difficult to find much more common ground than my broad assertion above that one has to do more than *claim* the work of art is 'good'. In *Warhoon* #25, Robert A.W.Lowndes took a minimal line and suggested that criticism 'consists of three elements: reporting, interpretation and evaluation'. To a certain extent this is true (even though, as I stated above, it is practically minimal), but the following might be noted. *Reporting*, as Lowndes implicitly defined it, incorporates almost all of what is currently accepted as 'criticism' in the SF magazines. For Lowndes suggests that this is just a matter of telling the reader what they will find in the book *provided* they can 'read with any degreee of proficiency'.

Since Lowndes admits that this is an area in which almost every critic shows weaknesses on occasions, it is clearly not so simple as it superficially appears. Atheling makes a good fist of this kind of work, particularly, for example, in his discussion of *The Weather Man* (Theodore L.Thomas) (pp. 101-103 of *The Issue At Hand*). This is not to say that this is all there is to that particular review, but it is an excellent piece of 'reporting'.

Interpretation and *evaluation* are closely linked. If the critic's interpretation is incorrect, then almost certainly his judgement as to whether the work is good or bad will be incorrect. As it happens, Lowndes singled out Atheling's article on his own *Believers' World* for considerable praise, so it is hardly necessary to repeat the exercise. But let me add that the piece following the article on *Believers' World* in *The Issue At Hand* (pp. 62-70) seems quite a *tour de force* on the interpretation side.

In his essay 'Criticism and Philosophy' (in *The Common Pursuit*) F.R.Leavis gave a short formula, but one which is perhaps harder to interpret: 'the ideal critic is the ideal reader'. By this Leavis means the reader who fully appreciates what the writer has done, and is able to perceive the relationship which this work holds with the rest of the works of literature. Atheling seems to fulfill these conditions rather well. He has certainly read widely in science

fiction; he is not unlettered when considered against the larger realm of general literature. Furthermore, he shows himself to be able to appreciate both sides of any piece of science fiction -- as science fiction, and as literature. As an example we might take Atheling's well-known review of Arthur Zirul's *Final Exam*. As Atheling himself puts it:

> 'To begin on the most elementary level, Mr Zirul's prose contains more down-right bad grammar.....'

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

At the risk of becoming even more boring, I'm going to see how Atheling measures up to the strictures of yet another critic: Marcel Proust. In a footnote to his essay 'In Memory of a Massacre of Churches' (superficially about Ruskin) Proust remarks that the critic's first task is to make 'some... attempt to help the reader feel the impact of an artist's unique charact

Ruskin) Proust remarks that the critic's first task is to make 'some... attempt to help the reader feel the impact of an artist's unique characteristics'. This is one of Atheling's strengths, though it can so easily be a weakness, a mere pigeonholing of each author which results from overlooking the word 'unique'. Even when reviewing Garrett's parody (pp. 74-75) Atheling fastens onto 'unique' characteristics of George O.Smith and Anthony Boucher. This sort of critic is worth ten of the fellow who merely says 'A is like B'. But in this book Atheling goes rather further than this, and says rather careful things about writers like Bester, Budrys, Kornbluth and Shiras. These are the names which occur to me first, but I am sure the list of careful characterisations is much longer.

But Proust asked for something more, and if I can boil down a sentence of over 150 words accurately, he also wanted the critic to investigate the writer's vision of reality (*cave* Philip K.Dick?). This is not something which can easily be done in science fiction, where the writer's vision often stops at 3c a word, but Atheling attempts it; and the subject is, as might almost be predicted blindfold, Robert A.Heinlein. Whether Atheling succeeds in his attempt is another matter, and one upon which I cannot comment: my interest in Heinlein is so slight that it hardly seems worth the effort.

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

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

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

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

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

In this early piece, Atheling develops his argument: that science fiction, to advance, must shake off the bonds of being a ghetto literature, and try to establish itself as a literature without any modifiers whatsoever. And it is here that Atheling first describes the critic's functions. It will be noted that they are rather different from the criteria I have quoted already. First, he writes (page 12), the critic must bring to the attention of editors and writers *reasonable* standards to be observed in the writing of SF. Secondly, they must explain to their readers what those standards are.

Atheling makes no grandiose claims for what he is to write: his intent is clearly to try to improve the writing of science fiction by getting down to the wordsmith level. This he does consistently throughout his career, but he *also* attacks the problem at higher levels, as I have indicated above.

The technical criticism, Atheling continues, will be essentially destructive at least

at first glance; but its intent is constructive in the long run. In this prediction Atheling was completely correct: he did tend towards destructive technical criticism throughout his career. But on many occasions Atheling was constructive and even interpretive; there is little in his review of *Stranger in a Strange Land* which is destructive or even anything which would suggest that Atheling was capable of such a blasting as Zirul received. The chapter 'A Question Of Content' is entirely constructive, although little has come of it.

Atheling continues by asserting that 'every science fiction editor operating today is flying by the seat of his pants' and that this explains the publication of much of the poor SF of the period. But a commercial editor *must* operate in this way to maximise profits. Campbell's great success stems from his willingness to bend in whichever direction his reader responses have suggested will increase sales most while at the same time giving the impression of being the most immovable man in science fiction. Atheling's point may well be true when considered in absolute terms, but a science fiction editor is not hired to publish good fiction; he is hired to publish stories which will sell large numbers of copies of the magazine(s).

This is one possible flaw in Atheling's position: that of half-pretending that science fictoon is not commercial (or even hack) literature. This is no great fault, for Edmund Wilson had the same trouble when he wrote about detective stories and the writings of H.P.Lovecraft. The sales of both of these forms indicate that Wilson must have missed some inherent enchantment (me too, by the way), and though his criticism remains sound and thoughtful it is not very helpful to fans of Agatha Christie or HPL.

Atheling's attitude is by no means as extreme as Wilson's, and as the prophets of science fiction continue to proclaim its impending (or now past) maturity it is probable that more and more science fiction stories (and perhaps even, in some remote heaven, science fiction editors) will meet the most exacting standards.

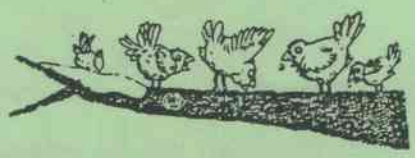
Nevertheless, most if not all of Atheling's criticism is directed towards faults which are as grave in commercial fiction as they are in fiction which claims a little more for itself. That the faults are so common in the fiction now appearing in *New Worlds* suggests that although Moorcock is headed in the right direction he has by no means arrived. Thus, on pages 18-20 Atheling is able to list some fairly common faults of science fiction - phoney realism and 'deep purple' - and still find them around many years later.

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

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

A major failing of SF critics in general is the tendency for them to examine the 'science' which may or may not be present in any given novel or short story. To some slight extent this is justified *if the fault in the science interferes with one's enjoyment of the story*; it is possible, after all, to enjoy a story in which the science is dubious.

Atheling almost puts this point of view (page 116) when he writes about the unpleasant practice of allowing SF reviewers to review popular scientific work or even more serious books. As Atheling remarks, one goes elsewhere for that kind of review. But he does not extend this argument to those who criticise 'science' in novels or short stories. Perhaps he feels that an SF reviewer will react in much the same way as the average reader towards scientific bloopers. I don't think this is quite the case, and SF reviewers have fallen on their



faces (say, into a bowl of water?) in overextending themselves. Perhaps Atheling had this partly in mind when he wrote of 'expertitis' on page 52. There's only one really gruesome example of Atheling in this role: his review (page 24) of a story by Dean Evans. He devotes some five lines to detailing the horrid errors in chemistry and pathology by Evans, though he never does get around to saying just how these hamstring the story. He *does* go on to make it plain (though only in passing) that these errors are less important than the problems concerned with the writing itself.

Further on (page 46) Atheling has listed himself as having been on the side of 'science' (as against 'fiction'), but he now indicates that he has changed sides (or rather that the 'sides' have merged). In the same paragraph he makes the following remark, which probably expressed a feeling he had been harbouring for some time: 'Bradbury writes stories, and usually remarkably good ones; he is of course a scientific blindworm, but in the face of such artistry, it's difficult to care'. There is no need for me to underscore the importance of this passage: for Atheling, as for every critic worth his salt, it is writing first, frills afterwards. The advent of Bradbury undoubtedly lowered the relevance of science to science fiction (though it never *really* mattered) and Atheling is here acknowledging a fact which many have not yet become aware of. Science is *needed*. Yes (see Sturgeon, page 14) but it is *was* all important and perhaps should not even be considered unless it becomes very obtrusive (in which case it is at fault, anyway).

Science *was* obtrusive in Clement's *Mission of Gravity*, and this was made rather worse by the publication of *Whirligig World* in *Astounding*, which Atheling discusses in the chapter on editors already mentioned. Atheling was then suggesting that Campbell would back *science* against *fiction*: this deplorable tendency has been observed in action far too often in recent years in *Analog/Astounding*.

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

Atheling touches lightly on the connections, if any, between art and scince fiction. In discussing *Stranger in a Strange Land* (in which art is conspicuous by its absence) the subject is naturally raised, though not in a way disparaging to Heinlein. Reviewing Miller's *The Darfsteller* Atheling manages to make some approaches to the subject, but the major statement on the subject remains James Blish's anthology for Ballantine, *New Dreams This Morning*. Perhaps Atheling felt that the connection was tenuous and not yet ready for any full exploration: the situation has unfortunately scarcely changed.

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

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

Two of the chapters in *The Issue At Hand* are not fanzine items. 'An Answer of Sorts' has to do with bread and butter matters. 'A Question of Content' is rather more important. It is unquestionably Atheling's magnum opus. While his indictment of the fumbling of SF writers, mentioned just above, is important, it pales into insignificance besides Atheling's insight into the somewhat plainer problem besetting science fiction: nothing ever happens - that is worth worrying about. 'Look', says Atheling, 'if we want anyone to take science fiction seriously then we must have authors who are *saying something*'. Of course we also need the writers to grapple with the logical consequences of the 'something', but unless a novel has *some* 'content' it is not worth considering.

Many science fiction novels are overloaded with message; this we have seen too often. But very few actually have something embedded in the story (as opposed to 'grafetd on') that is worthwhile. Atheling lists a few: *1984*, *Player Piano*, *Limbo*, *Brave New World* and *Star of the Unborn*. Would he add any to that list, some eight years later? Perhaps three or four books, at most, some of them probably even published before 1960 (I am thinking of *Magister Ludi*). But the number remains small: authors prefer to fake a background by having the *action* important. Little Billy is the first man to Mars; Jack Barron is a powerful personality in popular entertainment; the harlequin draws the attention of the whole world to himself: now I am Prince, Immortal, discoverer or editor of an SF magazine. Yet they are all empty, these novels; they have no content in the way Atheling suggested. There is no advance beyond *The Skylark of Space* in any way but the most trivial fashion.

Was Atheling wasting his time, after all? Will science fiction ever become worthy of the kind of criticism he was able to bring to it? Will it ever reach the maturity he urged upon it?

Now read on....

John Foyster

A CRITIC OF SCIENCE FICTION:

(II) a review of William Atheling Jr's 'More Issues At Hand'

(Advent Press, 1970, 154pp.)

This volume is dedicated to four faneds, not the least of whom is Richard E.Geis. But the real dedication is that of James Blish, who seems to have read more bad science fiction than you and I dreamed of, Horatio. Nevertheless I, anonymous decipherer of page 5 and recipient of a cruel '(sic)' (page 111), here take to paper with no intent of emulating Sir Blish in his pursuit of the putrid: indeed, contra.

Daring Willy Atheling, weilder of wild yet wistful words, here upholds and actually magnifies the reputation formerly crowned by *The Issue At Hand*. Blish, in that ugly phrase so popular with the intellectually distressed, 'knows where it's at'.

A couple of years ago the SFWA published a round-robin titled *Criticism - Who Needs It?* An ever-watchful providence has kept the circulation of this object appropriately low, thoug there has been one item in it which would bear saving. And, friends, it has been! The introduction to *More Issues At Hand* is more or less James Blish's contribution to *Criticism - Who Needs It?*, and though it does not represent Blish at his best (a point to which I shall return) it was so far ahead of its fellow warm, thrusting breasts (Geis, am I getting confused here?) that it most certainly deserves hardcover publication.

In this introduction James Blish writes in general terms about criticism as he sees it. Anyone who has read *The Issue At Hand* will already possess a quite accurate knowledge of Blish's attitudes and idiosyncrasies, but it is nevertheless fascinating to see him weaving and bobbing around these at times. Take, for example, his often-proclaimed attitude (which appears on the dust jacket of this book) that 'A good critic is positively obliged to be harsh towards bad work.' This theme spreads throughout the introduction. But in the years since 1964 James Blish has only thought it worthwhile to add one essay on bad writers/writing to his hardcover work: an essay on Abraham Merritt. It is not, as James Blish suggests in the introduction, that Atheling has softened his tone, or that his anger is directed towards the work rather than the author. It is simply that James Blish avoids the bad books (at least, if this collection is representative of his criticism).

It is hard to say why this should be so. Increasing age is not a good example; perhaps an increasing preoccupation with the works of James Branch Cabell is a better one. Again, this is only apparent. My attitude is only the inverse of Blish's. Some years ago I was offered the opportunity of reviewing school mathematics textbooks. Since I believed that almost all (probably all) school mathematics textbooks are inexcusably bad, it seemed to me that I should find myself recommending Unpleasantness A over Unpleasantness B, when in fact there was little to choose. It is not difficult to draw a parallel with one's attitude to science fiction.

These essays are selected from a period of fourteen years. In that period Blish's most important essay was 'A Question of Content' - but it has already been printed in *The Issue At Hand*. Nevertheless some worthwhile things of a quality not far distant from that high point are included in this volume.

There are three essays on major writers (not my opinion - Blish's). The essay on Heinlein I must count as a failure because it, like all the other essays I have read on this writer, failed to give me the slightest inkling as to why Heinlein's novels (or works) of the fifties have caused so much of a stir. Heinlein's work has always seemed to me insipidly bland (if you can imagine that) and the only explanation I am able to offer for the interest in him is that in a TV-oriented society readers prefer half-digested pap to the normal, coarse bill-of-fare offered by science fiction. Heinlein's 'political' endeavours seem very much a McLuhanistic 'telling-it-like-it-is-or-as-much-as-the-sponsors-allow-but-you-needn't-worry-about-that-because-we-are-all-honorable-men'. Paul Goodman has remarked that there are members of society for whom the mass media are the only reality: under the circumstances the role of a writer who more-or-less does the thinking for the reader can at least be slightly understood.

But if Blish has failed there it may only be my own stupidity: at worst, he has only been unable to improve on the efforts of others. The essay on Algis Budrys has become, sadly, a reflection on promise not fulfilled. James Blish's appreciation of Budrys's earlier works is thoughtful and accurate - and more than a little heartrending. The essay on Sturgeon is incomplete: as is admitted, this essay was largely written for a Sturgeon-Appreciation Issue of *F&SF*.

There is more to it than that. Even allowing that such an essay would tend to be laudatory, I cannot imagine the work of a writer as wide-ranging (yet, as Blish notes, as single-minded) as Sturgeon. If a book or two can be written about Robert A.Heinlein, then the same can most certainly be done for Theodore Sturgeon. And James Blish would be the person to write it. Science fiction, it seems to me, has reached the stage at which some long-range and intensive examinations can be made, and the results published. A study of the work of Sturgeon or Kuttner or Budrys would tell us more about science fiction itself than I would like to contemplate.

The remaining essays are slightly more general. The first chapter investigates some problems of definition. Here, and later (page 118) James Blish takes the fruitful attitude that something happened to science fiction in 1926. (Fruitful because I agree with it, of course.) The dreary results of regarding SF as being of One Substance and time-independent are rather too well-known, I think.

Chapter two is Blish's survey of the talent in the room. He is generous to most 'critics of science fiction', the only possible exception being Sam Moskowitz, who isn't a critic

at all. This is also revealing in the light of the abjuration to be 'harsh towards bad work'. Is Blish really so sympathetic towards the writings of his fellows, one wonders?

Chapter three is a nice little jape which calls for the return of 'predictive SF' and 'gadgetry'. Properly read and used, this chapter could have an immensely beneficial effect on science fiction. No bets taken.

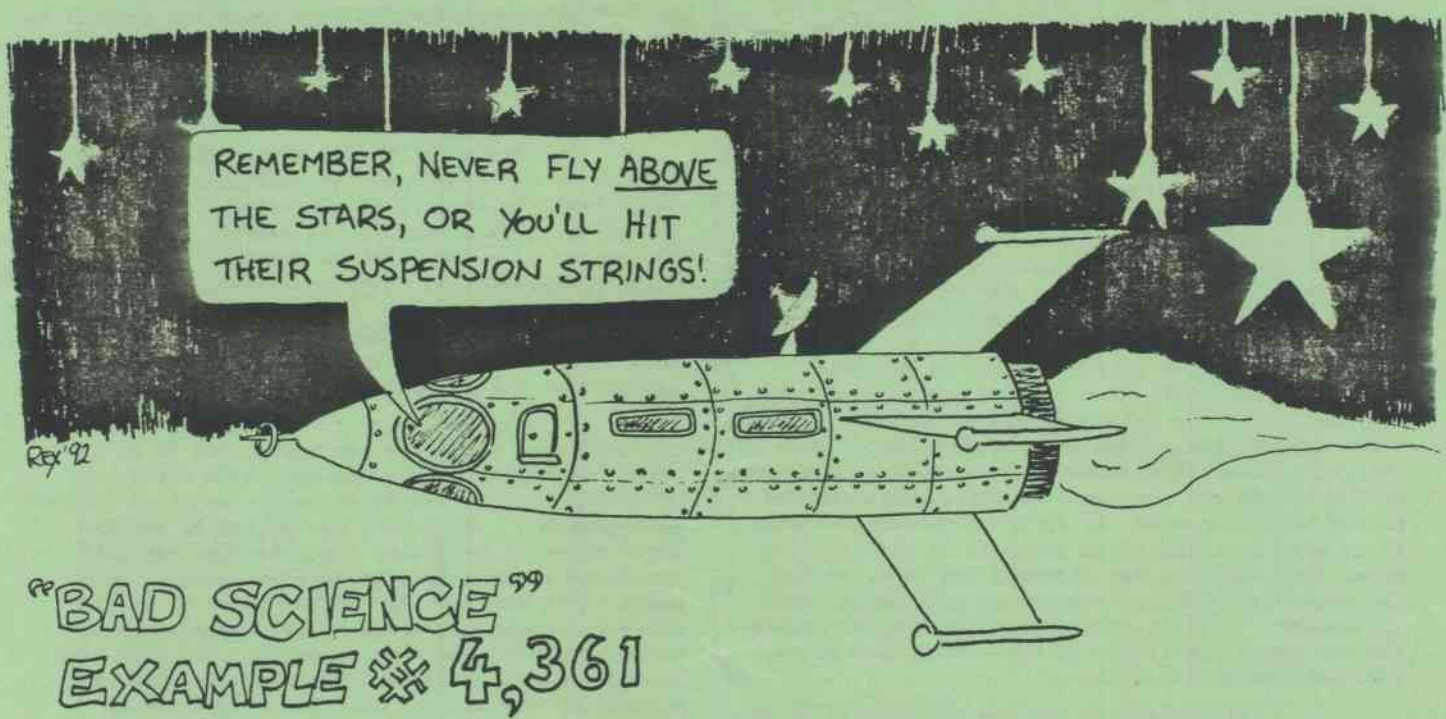
In chapter eight Blish uses some of the magazine reviews which were a most satisfactory aspect of *The Issue At Hand*. Here he tackles the subject of psi in Campbell's *Astounding* and also a couple of R.A.Lowndes's magazines. The January and February 1957 issues of *Astounding* contained a bit too much psi for J.Blish, apparently. 'This would be dull enough for readers not sharing Mr Campbell's enthusiasm,' remarks James Blish, following a trend which has continued to the present day: the belief that J.Campbell likes psi stories. The evidence, however, indicates something rather different. Consider the following:-

When a Bert Chandler fantasy/psi story was run in 1952 (or thereabouts) the blurb suggested that the story should have run in *Unknown*.
When the bonus scheme was introduced, Campbell made a point of saying that he would be guided by the ratings and that since he would occasionally pay bonuses ahead of the voting he would learn quickly.
When announcing the publication of Jack Vance's 'Telek', JWC remarked that he was hesitant because it was a psi story. After its high rating in the AnLab, he again expressed his surprise.
Now we establish that JWC does indeed follow his readers' suggestions.
Which SF magazine has [had] frequent reader polls?
When did JWC publish that Dianetics article?
When did JWC begin to feel pressure from his competitors in the magazine field, and by the rumours of new magazines such as *The Magazine of Fantasy*?
And how long before was it that Ray Palmer ran the circulation of *Amazing* way up using nutty cult articles/stories?
Which magazine's circulation had risen while the other's suffered losses?
Which policy would *you* favour?

But so much for oversights. The article on Lowndes is again too short, but that is hardly Blish's fault. What is there brings out rather well the nature of *Future* and *Science Fiction Stories*.

'Science-fantasy and Translations', the ninth chapter, makes some nice distinctions and is a counter balance to chapter three. Thus we have 'it seems perfectly clear to me that a man with no respect for the facts (scientific or otherwise) is going to be too poor a reporter to write acceptable fiction', which is used as a stick to beat a number of writers, the first being Brian Aldiss. Blish takes the view that to be *useful* ('to have any value as social criticism') SF must be *believable*. This may be an interesting theory, but it seems to me to be of little practical use. I don't think many readers of SF *want* it to be useful or believable - it is certain that the 'escape value' view of SF is very strongly represented these days. And given those wishes of readers, and a feeling that readers get that they want, it becomes natural to view the nature of James Blish's 'science fantasy' as the wish fulfillment of chapter three. The point deserves a great deal of amplification, but unfortunately I shall not be able to investigate it more usefully than by making this passing mention of it.

Finally, in a chapter titled 'Making Waves', we have a survey of currently-important writers, in the guise of an examination of the 'New Wave'. Most of James Blish's opinions here are identical with my own (though rather better expressed), and I think I would be wiser not to make comments in those areas. However there are one or two points which arise and which cannot be ignored.



"BAD SCIENCE" EXAMPLE # 4,361

The discussion of J.G.Ballard's short stories (pp.127-128) seems to be too easily generalising. What Blish says, in essence, is that those stories which don't fit an obvious series in Ballard's work actually make up another series. This is much too easy to say without thinking, and that seems to be what has happened here.

Blish seems to be talking about the stories collected in *The Atrocity Exhibition* (well, he says as much, but you wouldn't think this to be the case from the earlier sentences in the discussion). Now what is true is that Ballard's personality strongly affects his work, so that a story by him is relatively easy to identify. Thus there is a wholeness about the Ballard short stories which isn't really shared by the stories of any other writer (with the possible exceptions of Sturgeon and Bradbury). But, for example, *Thirteen To Centaurus* does not seem to me to fit any 'identifiable, conventional series', and it is certainly not part of the 'condensed novel' series, which is what Blish is really seeking to identify.

Nevertheless it is true that there is a more-than-normal wholeness about Ballard's work. His repetition of the names of characters which shows in peculiar quirks (such as that the surnames of doctors begin more often than one would expect with the letter 'M'), and his intermittent use of time-binding phrases to open stories (previously noted by Bruce Gillespie, though inexhaustively). This sort of thing does not place a story in any 'series'. And to write about Ballard usefully requires the investigation of larger slabs of his work than are normally tackled.

James Blish agrees with Michael Moorcock's assertion that Ballard is the originator of this 'condensed novel' form: this suggests that George Macbeth copied *The Ski Murders* from J.G.Ballard, which may or may not be true. I am unable to believe that Ballard is so original as this, unfortunately - but at least he copies *interestingly*, which is the point at which so many New Wavers waver.

In the latter part of the chapter some space is devoted to what James Blish calls 'mytholatry'. Now what James Blish means by 'myth' is not quite what James Campbell or Mircea Eliade mean by 'myth': indeed, as James Blish uses the word, it is not far removed from 'fairy tale'. But let that pass. Blish takes the opportunity to hop into Zelazny's *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, which 'tries to turn Egyptian mythology into a serious science fiction novel.' (The use of *mythology* in that sentence will tell you a great deal by what Blish means by mytholatry.) Nevertheless the works of Delany and Zelazny also contain genuine mythic elements and these are alluded to in passing (page 137, and perhaps carelessly). But it is here that the lack of an overview - a really long piece by Blish examining many facets of science fiction - is made painfully apparent.

For there is one writer whose work has scarcely any non-mythic aspects, is a major success in the sense of having had a lot of novels published, and

. . . and then there were some forms of criticism that Harold really couldn't stand . . . .

to whom eleven words are devoted in *The Issue At Hand*. While James Blish there notes that Leigh Brackett writes/wrote space opera ('a cliché'), he doesn't seem anywhere to have attempted to explain the success of space opera as a form. In the chapter on 'gadgetry' Blish calls for a return to the writing of 'daydreams', but for some reason he has not done the same for the more universal daydream. Yet the appeal of Leigh Brackett's space operas is precisely that they follow a simple ritual which is thoroughly familiar but which doesn't lose any magic as a result. Rayguns and invisibility can become boring, but not the eternal quest.

Here, as elsewhere, my regret is that Blish has not been able to follow up particular byways. I think most readers will find the same: that *More Issues At Hand* is an excellent volume - but oh, that James Blish could take the time to write a *long* essay (perhaps as long as Stanislaw Lem's).

In *SFR* #42, Marion Zimmer Bradley notes that 'reviewing is a mug's game': for most of us this is true - but James Blish is a notable exception.

John Foyster, 25/4/'72

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