

Speculation

VOLUME 2. NO.12.

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AFTER 30 YEARS: SYMPOSIUM
 ON THE WORK OF ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

Speculation

VOLUME 2. NUMBER 12. (Issue 24)

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A SYMPOSIUM

HEINLEIN: AFTER 30 YEARS

AS YOU will see from the cover caption, under Ivor Latto's illustration for the title 'The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress' (although his sketch has absolutely nothing whatever to do with the novel of that name!), this issue of SPECULATION is devoted to commentary on the work of Robert A. Heinlein. Our cover, by the way, has suffered from much the same troubles as outlined by Richard Bergeron in Warhoon-26 in that the Bob Rickard photo-montage I originally commissioned would have finally cost more to be printed than the entire remainder of the issue, so that it has ended-up with regret, like Dick Bergeron's own expensive offering, in the Department of Over-Ambitious Ideas.

Two months late as it is this issue was intended to appear in August, exactly thirty years after the publication of Mr Heinlein's first story, 'Life-Line', in Astounding. With publication, an interesting nine months of work comes to an end for me during which I have been fascinated to see once again how many different meanings can be read by different people into the same story (or stories). As a result, I think some of the material in the following pages will reveal slightly more about its writers than about Robert Heinlein. Compare the contrasting viewpoints of Robert A.W. Lowndes and M. John Harrison, or Richard Gordon with Daniel F. Galouye, to see what I mean!

The idea behind this 'anniversary' number came from Algis Budrys' column in Galaxy, June 1968, in his review of Alexei Panshin's critical volume HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION where he said, slightly inaccurately: "...science fiction writers for, oh, thirty years, have been actively learning from Robert A. Heinlein. All of us, I think, have influenced our own careers by our private assessments of his technical accomplishments and his professional criteria."

To an enterprising fanzine editor this was a perfect opportunity although until Daniel F. Galouye pointed it out to me I did not realise how closely this August 1969 anniversary coincided with the launching of the Apollo XI mission to make the first moon-landing.

(Cont/d)..

And so, through a rather grand piece of stage-management by Fate, on the 30th year of his entry into speculative fiction almost to the week Robert Heinlein was an honoured guest at Cape Kennedy to watch the Apollo blast-off. That seems a particularly fine way to celebrate the occasion!

(That paragraph, incidentally, comes from a letter from Daniel F. Galouye when I contacted him about this symposium and I also used it to begin an article about Heinlein which I wrote for Books and Bookmen. It seemed a good opportunity to try and give some mention of Heinlein to the general literary public who read B&B (and who, since they presumably read little SF have probably never heard of Heinlein), and I was very pleased indeed to see it appear in their October issue.)

Some of you may regard this Heinlein number with resignation, since with the possible exception of J.G. Ballard Heinlein is the most-discussed of all SF authors. But although there might seem very little left to say about his work, particularly since the publication of Alexei Panshin's book last year, I don't think there has been any recent study of contemporary attitudes towards Heinlein.

While I suspect that only the future can make the final evaluation, in the meantime I have collected together some current sentiments which range from the once-universal adulation to what Harlan Ellison terms in his somewhat back-handed compliments (P.17) "a vague disrepute". One of the interesting things I've noticed is that American writers seem to like Heinlein rather more than do their British colleagues featured here; another observation of mine is that if Heinlein is really as bad as some maintain, then why have the rest of us thought he was so good for so long?

To enlarge on this last point a little; Heinlein was once considered so beyond criticism that even Damon Knight could make only two complaints, both of which he regarded as trivial, in IN SEARCH OF WONDER. It seems to me that if this present "vague disrepute" has any meaning at all it must be because either i) Heinlein wasn't really a good, an entertaining, an important writer (in which case the judgement of the whole field has been wrong over a 20-year period and critics like Knight and more recently Budrys have missed consideration of a whole area of evaluation); or ii), more likely, that Heinlein was good for and at the time but the general upheaval in science fiction has somehow knocked standards so topsy-turvy that he is now suddenly 'dated' and must take a back seat. I think both possibilities could stand a little more discussion.

One of the things I wanted to do with this issue (and which to be honest I don't think we have succeeded in doing) was to present a reasoned case both for and especially against Heinlein. This is by no means a 'tribute', you see, in the sense that the following pages contain unanimous praise of Heinlein's work. I would genuinely be interested to hear why Heinlein has fallen from favour in the eyes of some people -- but I hope it is through reasons more relevant than his supposed politics or his supposed personal beliefs.

My own feelings? That there have always been flaws in Heinlein's writing, particularly noticeable ones in his last six books (Panshin's 'Period of Alienation'), but that he remains to me an intensely readable author with a tremendous flair for imagination and innovation. If Mr Heinlein himself is reading this, I would like to thank him, personally, for the many hours of pleasure his stories have given me over the years.

In Chris Priest's words, he is a compulsive writer; and as Brian Aldiss says, it is fashionable to knock Heinlein but (paraphrasing Budrys now) we need a great deal more perspective before we can do so with impunity. And when Charles Platt expresses admiration for John Russell Fearn but not Heinlein; when Michael Moorcock calls Heinlein a 'trivial writer with the same faults as Fleming' and 'just as unreadable' (SPECULATION-20), I really wonder what kind of standards they are using.

THE REASON for two weeks of the total lateness of this issue can be firmly laid at the door of Richard Bergeron, editor of Warhoon. With his editorial in the 26th issue, recently received, he so depressed me that in a state of quiet despair I have been sitting here destroying first drafts after the initial letter just like that would-be novelist in Michael Frayn's THE TIN MEN (Ace).

Convinced that I can never equal Dick Bergeron in the sheer wit, urbanity and intelligence of his editorials I have acquired a mental block against creating anything, a state of mind only slowly-broken down through the reading of other people's first issues and the current trade journals. Warhoon is definitely not recommended to anyone with a sense of humour or an interest in such things as science fiction, music, the arts, and who has ever considered producing their own magazine. Far too discouraging! Contents are by Willis; Carr; Warner; Bloch; Lowndes; Shaw and Breen. (Warhoon-26: 60c from 11 E.68th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10021.)

IF SOMEONE were to ask me just what I thought SPECULATION was all about I could do a great deal worse than quote briefly from a letter by John Foyster. He says "...if people keep building up castles with bricks of straw (as many SF writers tend to do about their own work or about the work of their buddies) then I'm not averse to leaning against them occasionally - and I wish more people would. Many could." Or I might quote Damon Knight's more precise sentiments from his book IN SEARCH OF WONDER (Advent): "...science fiction is a field of literature worth taking seriously, and .. ordinary critical standards can be meaningfully applied to it: e.g., originality, sincerity, style, construction, logic, coherence, sanity, garden-variety grammar."

However you define the end-product the fact is that genuine science fiction criticism is very hard to find and there should be more of it. Plenty of humbug is written by and about the field, and countless reams of plot synopses circulate each year disguised as reviews, but talking about the real thing doesn't make it any more plentiful in supply. At the present moment the only professional critic regularly writing in the SF field who has any perceptivity is Algis Budrys in Galaxy, despite the arguments his reviews seem to provoke. We have lost Messrs Blish, Knight, Pohl, Silverberg and one or two others from regular review departments at the time we need them most, because, for instance, times have changed and Knight's decade-old rule-of-thumb above might be thought no longer to apply in some quarters. We only occasionally see critical pieces from writers such as Aldiss and Ellison: I don't know what the answer is.

JUST TOO late to do anything about it I discovered the usual quota of mistakes had been made in the previous issue, Number 23. They both concern the convention photopages, where on Page 3 line 3 I identified the face between John Brunner and James White as Walter Gillings when I should have said Brian Aldiss. This incredible error only came to light when I recognised Brian for the first time after I had posted nearly all copies of the issue. On top of that, the cheap student labour I employ (that's probably the wrong word since it implies they get paid) evidently collated the photopage the wrong way around in a number of cases, judging by the letters I've subsequently received. Did anyone succeed in identifying anyone else through use of the last issue?

While mentioning my discovery of errors and omissions I've slowly realised that the Post Office apparently stopped delivering my mail for a time at the beginning of this year. This was before I left my previous address to get married, incidentally. So far it has come to light that I failed to receive Warhoon-26; Riverside Quarterly Vol.3 No.4; a copy of BLACK EASTER from Faber and two parcels of Ace books for January and February. If I could have failed to receive something you sent at that time, do please let me know. (Cont/d)..

SPECULATION

SOME INTERESTING letters have arrived too late for publication this time, including ones from Ted White, John J. Pierce, Michael Moorcock and Sam Moskowitz. In the latter Sam says "I am a little baffled at the reason for J.G. Ballard's curt dismissal of SPECULATION. I thought he and the 'new wave' had been treated rather well in recent issues. In fact, you had bent so far backward that I feared you would present a rather awkward figure in your later years if you maintained the position much longer. You might explain what peeved him in some future issue."

In answer, Sam, I can only imagine that possibly the issues of SPECULATION which I sent to Mr Ballard (Nos. 21 & 22) were of too low a standard of literacy and intelligence to interest him. My 'open letter' last time has brought in a variety of comments including those from one correspondent who wrote, "I thought your Ballard letter was absurd, uncalled-for, ludicrous and laughable."

Strangely enough I wasn't surprised; I wrote the thing expecting this reaction full well, although I knew it would be only one of a whole selection of other reactions. Generally everyone else took a more sympathetic line. After hearing from Ballard my first thought was "that's the end of that!", but then I started to wonder why it was that every other author I've contacted (including all the 'new wave') has been so much more helpful. So rather than 'forgetting it' as every instinct of caution urged me to, I decided to write my reply as an honest retort to Ballard. After all, anything not done my rote and because it has to be done has some value; and if I can't publish my own feelings in my own magazine I can't do so anywhere!

EXTRAPOLATION is a perfect illustration of a state of affairs which would have been thought completely ridiculous a few years ago. It is an academic journal sponsored by the Modern Languages Association and is exclusively concerned with discussion of science fiction, the same general aims which first breathed life into this present magazine with the similarly-sounding title. While the one is produced from the literary standpoint of a college English professor and the other by a fan (or 'enthusiast' if you prefer), the similarities are considerable. While many fans might find the going somewhat hard in Extrapolation the subject matter is the same, and the remarkable thing is the synthesis that is taking place before our eyes between the serious academic world and readers of that crazy Flash Gordon nonsense!

The same thing is happening, by the way, with science fiction conventions so that eventually they could end up as very literary events indeed. Although behind the United States in this as in almost everything else, England could see the beginnings of serious academic study of science fiction within the near future, through classes and symposiums sponsored by universities and colleges. (Extrapolation: biannual, \$1.25/year, Box 2515 Wooster College, Ohio, 44691)

SOME OTHER useful addresses are worth noting: Science Fiction Review is the only competitor with Wrhn and won the Hugo this year at St. Louis. Edited by Dick Geis (whose editorial are nearly as discouraging as Bergeron's) the current issue contains material by Terry Carr, Poul Anderson, Charles Platt, Andrew J. Offutt, Banks Mebane and extensive letter and review columns. (SFR: 50¢ P.O. Box 3116, Santa Monica, California 90403. 4/- from Ethel Lindsay, Courgae House, 6 Langley Ave., Surbiton, Surrey). Riverside Quarterly is edited by Leland Sapiro and costs 60c (Box 40 University Station, Regina, Canada.)

NEWS MAGAZINES worth obtaining are Locus from Charlie Brown, 2078 Anthony Ave., Bronx, N.Y. 10457 (biweekly, 6 for \$1.00) and Luna Monthly from Frank & Ann Dietz, 655 Orchard St. Oradell, N.J. 07649 (monthly, 25c each.) ADVENT PUBLISHERS may be contacted at P.O. Box 9228, Chicago, Ill. 60690.

Peter Weston 25/10/69

HARRY HARRISON

'a natural born writer'

NO-ONE has ever pretended that Robert Heinlein is a master stylist — least of all, Heinlein himself. But this is really the last thing that one thinks about when reading a Heinlein work. If it is the authentic stuff, the pure quill of the early days, the magic of detail and concept sweeps up the reader and that is that. Style? You don't read it, you experience it.

I had the feeling, so I know. I teathed on Verne, grew up on Wells, and matured on Heinlein. This was the real stuff. Looking back from the vantage point of years I can perhaps explain what happened, but, of much more interest, is the fact that it did happen.

Firstly, Heinlein was, and in his heart I believe John Campbell still is, a crypto-technocrat. This is the same school as the old-line atheist who knew there were cog-wheels in everything, or by Ingersoll, it just wouldn't work. Heinlein is at home in technology, he has studied and has a degree in cog wheels and wires, and during his military service worked with them. He knows that he knows about technology and he follows all the literature. It's his world and he knows all about it; past, present and future. Yes, future. He sees the development of science and man's knowledge as a linear thing; if he did not feel that way he could never have composed the future history series. He has the kind of mind — an SF writer's mind if you want a word for it — that follows the sweep of development in time with scarcely a pause at the present. He does this with such surety of purpose that the reader cannot help but become involved and be carried along.

The reader is carried along because Heinlein is a natural born writer. All writers are natural born, no matter what the writing school ads say. One either has the spark to communicate in writing, in fiction particularly, or one doesn't. No amount of training can make up for its lack. The gift can be polished with study, that it about all that can be done. Heinlein has it in great quantities. He is a story-teller, and a science fiction story-teller, one of the very first of the modern pack.

Certainly he has affected my own writing, if not the shape of my life. True SF fen know that, at certain periods in their life, SF is the most important thing around. I passed through that period at the best time, the golden years of Astounding when Heinlein was flexing his muscles, Van Vogt writing his best, and all the other giants doing their thing. It was a horrible time to be alive in the external world, but a fine time to be alive in science fiction.

I can go back to the stories that filled my life then, and in the light of present knowledge, see their faults. Is that important? They made their impression on me at a certain time in a certain way. Now I know that 'The Roads Must Roll' is an anti-union work based on some pretty strange technocrat ideas. So what? It is still a great yam. As we mature we find that all our childhood deities have great spots of rust. But don't we also, as adults, share this lack of perfection? John Buchan, upon rereading, is an upperclass snob anti-semite — but isn't he still a rousing adventure writer?

(Cont/d).....

And early Heinlein is not as bad as some would like to paint it. There are more things to writing than perfection of style. It is late Heinlein that bothers me, all polemic and no story, a writer who forgot his obligations to his readers, that I would argue with. If I felt like arguing, I don't. Heinlein is the father of us all; let us not point to the scrawny shanks of his old age and make the big ha-ha. That is too easy to do. Let us instead do what is important; discover what made him great.

It must be his sense of presence. You are in whatever future world, machine, spaceship, or device that he cares to place you in. It is always a complete world with a technology to match the time and occasion. You are being led by the hand by an inventive genius who knows how the gear wheels of the universe fit together. He also knows how to write so he can take you into that world with him. It doesn't matter that all of his people are middle-class 1930 American WASPS, you probably are too. (At least, his American readers of the time were, or if they weren't, certainly wished they were. And the values aren't that different from the British middle-class who were reading him on the other side of the Atlantic).

The parts of Heinlein, just like a Heinlein world, all fit together. The gears mesh, the cogs spin, the people move -- and you are being led through all this by a story-teller.

And what must never be forgotten is that he did it first. That he did it so well at the same time is the wonder of wonders. As a seminal writer he shaped the future of the field. I tip my hat to him and suggest that a portrait bust of Robert Anson Heinlein be placed in the science fiction hall of fame, right next to that of Herbert George Wells.

Harry Harrison.

FRITZ LEIBER

'awareness of mortality'

I MUST speak out for Heinlein, my favourite science fiction writer. Class him with Ian Fleming? - (whom I also enjoy) - Fleming's work is almost entirely derivative, incestuously "marrying" the relatively realistic spy stories of Maugham and Ambler to the glamorous but unreal master-criminal melodramas of Sax Rohmer. He works entirely with existing gadgets, his books teem with improbabilities, while the plots of his master-criminals (consider GOLDFINGER) fall apart at the touch of serious analysis.

THE PUPPET MASTERS is the closest Heinlein ever came to a Fleming book in subject matter and characters, - the tough secret agent, his dedicated and heartless boss, the beautiful and sexy female (in this case another agent), and the world-menace. Many SF and fantasy writers have presented parasitic beings that control men directly through the nervous system, from Clarke Ashton Smith's THE VAULTS OF YOH-VOMBIS to Colin Wilson's THE MIND PARASITES. But none that I know of comes close to Heinlein in exploring in detail the consequences of such a situation, in making it plausible on a world- or at least national-scale, and in working out the strategy and tactics of such a conflict.

It would be fairer to compare Heinlein with Kipling; the tough-minded conservative viewpoint that occasionally verges a little towards jingoism; admiration for the military; great and loving ability to do children's books (rather, books appealing both to adults and children); interest in engineering and technology; admiration for courage, individualism, inventiveness, and the man who knows his job; and an underlying pessimism, or rather, deep awareness of mortal-
/ity.

In America, Heinlein's ability is shown in that he four or five times made The Saturday Evening Post, a magazine which recently brought out its last issue. No-one could do that who couldn't write convincingly and sympathetically for the family - a criterion some may scoff at, but not I.

When it comes to writing hard SF dealing with the immediate future and anticipating scientific and technological developments just around the corner, Heinlein is to my knowledge equalled only by Clarke and Asimov. Where is hyper-space travel handled half as convincingly as in *STARMAN JONES*? Waldos, the nuclear stalemate, powered armour, space navigation by radar screen rather than by eye - the list goes on and on.

This hard material, incidentally, is produced by 5 percent of SF writers (a generous estimate) and is used by the other 95 percent. Without a steady supply of it, science fiction would become wan and anemic within five years. It is an absolutely essential raw material even for New Wave writers such as Sam Delany, William Burroughs, and Ballard. Add psychedelics to SF concepts and you get some interesting and refreshing results, at least for a while. Or frame it with realism, for that matter. But alone, psychedelics rapidly become an aimless, subjective, arbitrary bore.

Fritz Leiber.

ALGIS BUDRYS

'most scrutinised SF writer'

I THINK Heinlein is an excellent writer, on most of the major technical grounds, and furthermore, the uncontested best writer of the Heinlein school. To call him 'meretricious', or to accuse him of not being able to characterise convincingly, is to accuse him of not being true to the standards he gathered together and made into a working, general method that has afforded entertainment, employment, - and critical success - to many of us. (That is the least such accusations are; it is the only aspect of those accusations that I would care to discuss here)

He is not master of the complete spectrum of literary techniques. No-one has ever been. Within the remarkably broad range of capabilities he does display he is not always in sure control, and, in addition, there are times when he seems to have unlearned something. There is nothing unique in this, but it is noteworthy in his case because whether you like it or not -- this would be the same "you" that remains unconvinced by his characterisations -- he is the most thoroughly and consistently scrutinised science fiction writer alive, or except perhaps for Wells, dead. No -- I'll take that back. He is the most consistently scrutinised SF writer, dead or alive, although in my opinion he ought not quite to be.

Like every other creator known to me in person or by repute, he has ways of doing things which obviate the possibility of his doing the same things in some other way. Accordingly, there are kinds of things he can not do, either by choice or through an inability to be more than one person. These can certainly be interpreted as weaknesses by observers who are biased toward doing things in some other way. But to discover these places, to become committed to the judgement that they are indeed weaknesses, and to use that judgement as a base for attacking either him or the kind of work he does, is to make several very daring logical leaps, and to assume that time will not embarrass the leaper. (Cont/d)....

I don't think, and have never thought, that Heinlein is unassailable as science fiction's greatest writer. I think I would draw a distinction somewhere in the area Damon Knight approached, when he said, "the nearest thing to a great writer the SF field has yet produced", back in 1960. A great writer is just as much of a personality as he is a technician - perhaps even more of a great mind, or a great soul, as reflected in his verbal constructs, than he might be a great constructor -- and, in a group that has what appears to be more than its share of outstanding personalities, we are perhaps still looking for that final increment which distinguishes the great individual from the remarkable one.

That leaves a deal of territory open, and on that field there are many contenders, with Heinlein always to be accounted for by each of the others. This is the thing, you see: you cannot show me the other SF writer who can afford to ignore Heinlein. We can all see several who think they can, but that mistake becomes less common the closer you get to the championship circles.

A.J. Budrys.

DANIEL F. GALOUBE

'the literary scientist'

OF ROBERT A. HEINLEIN it has been said, and by critics outside the realm of science fiction, that the "mainstream's" loss is SF's gain. And we, in the genre, can feel fortunate indeed while commiserating with conventional literature over its deprivation that resulted from Mr Heinlein's choosing the medium he did.

Hemingway? In Heinlein, whenever he so elects, there is a parallel crispness of style and presentation, equally developed complexities of plot, characterisations even more vivid than those of the American mainstream novelist.

Michener? This highly-regarded craftsman strives towards, but doesn't always reach, the intriguing circumstances in which Heinlein consistently involves his so-credible casts.

Proust? The Proustian complexities of social interaction and character relationship at most inspired, in the least presaged the fullness of psychosociological insight with which the "Dean of Science Fiction Writers" cloaks his works.

Mr Heinlein stands out as the embodiment of many writers over many ages, and, were he not voluntarily and enthusiastically involved in the restricted field of science fiction, would certainly be one of today's literary giants.

He has brought to the considerable body of his works a thoroughness and economy of presentation that relegates 70,000 words on some 300 printed pages to their sole function - that of conveying a concise plot line. No unnecessary phraseological trimmings qua phraseological trimmings. In no Heinlein story have I ever encountered a single word whose 'editing-out' I should have recommended. Others may argue this point, particularly with regard to his later works, and, in some instances, with reference to entire passages. But without these controversial passages the book or books in question would surely have been lesser ones.

It's quite apparent that Bob's secret of success lies in bringing to bear on his literary endeavours the precision of the 'scientific method' - observation, experimentation, empirical verification. In this sense, Mr Heinlein may truly be regarded as a scientist. Shall we say a "literary scientist"? (Cont/d)..

Observation: He studies persons and personalities and explores motivations more profoundly than I have ever observed an observer observing his "subjects" before. His microscope's field? Normally the scene of social functions.

At one such function several years ago he surrounded himself in his own home with so heterogeneous a group as to be comprised of an Air Force general, an Admiral, newspaper editor, teacher, housewives, and several others of various pursuits. Though the most genial of hosts, Mr Heinlein (it did not escape my attention) was an acute observer of the various behavioral patterns on exhibition all about him.

Both my teen-age daughter and I were impressed that he elected to spend almost an hour of that evening engaged in conversation with her. But, I soon sensed, here again was Heinlein the observer, the literary scientist - with an invisible "At Work" sign posted nearby.

It was more than a year later that PODKAYNE OF MARS was published. Could the isolated adult-juvenile conversation that night in Colorado Springs have possibly established some minor parameters in limning 'Poddy's' character?

Mr Heinlein is a more than occasional visitor to New Orleans, where we share the friendship of a quite knowledgeable newspaper columnist, -octogenarian Dr. Hermann B. Deutsch, who was a former journalistic colleague of mine.

Dr. Deutsch appears to be cynical, gruff, disputatious - but only superficially. Beneath, Hermann is warm and gentle and projects as much a fatherly image to me as I'm certain he does to Bob.

Heinlein the empiricist:

When I read STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND I was most surprised (though I shouldn't have been, by then) to see Dr Deutsch peregrinating from page to page in the person of "Jubal Harshaw" - mannerism for mannerism, almost. Many of the scenes in SIASL - those involving "Jubal's" secretaries - could readily be recognised as having been inspired by Hermann's home and swimming pool-setting. Mr Heinlein later admitted that "Jubal" was a composite of Dr Deutsch and two elderly science fiction authors whom he deeply respected.

Heinlein the experimenter:

Laboratory? Caribbean cruise out of the Port of New Orleans. Subjects? Passenger list comprised in large part of not-completely-Reconstructed Southerners. Stimulus? Whirl around the dance floor with a not-completely Caucasian partner. Doubtless Bob had many notations to make that night under the heading "Response".

There's no doubt that Mr Heinlein ought to depart momentarily from fiction. He, more than anyone else in his genre today, is eminently qualified to produce a "How to Write" book. For one, I should treasure such a volume as much as I do any of his works which I already possess.

In my own writing the occasions are legion when I reach a sticky bit of plotting or encounter difficult character delineation. At these junctures I customarily lean back in my chair, pinch the bridge of my nose, and mutter: "How would Bob handle this?"

He ought to produce a volume that would bestow at least a few of his secrets upon the rest of us.

-Daniel F. Galouye.

JOHN BRUNNER

'down a blind alley'

- A PERSONAL REACTION TO ROBERT HEINLEIN.

IT IS indisputable that Robert Heinlein has made major contributions to the development of science fiction in the narrow sense of the field dominated by the magazines and the authors who grew up through them. A number of his early short stories and novelettes - 'All You Zombies', 'Universe', 'The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag' - set standards which later writers have unashamedly imitated.

On the basis of the talent exhibited in such stories, he developed into a very good writer of fast-moving adventure novels; I well recall how impressed I was in my teens by SIXTH COLUMN, for example, which is what's been graphically termed a "magic story" (defined by the reviewer of one of my own recent books as one in which rabbit after rabbit is pulled out of the hat until finally the hat is turned upside down to let loose a whole stampede of them).

Now this is an approach to the novel which is understandably popular. It's kept the books of Haggard, Buchan, to some extent Edgar Rice Burroughs, and other relatively minor writers selling and selling for decades. The complications are confined to the action, and the actors are direct, straightforward and predictable. So is the outcome.

Unfortunately in the long run it may turn out to be a shallow approach. Pace and excitement continued to sustain Heinlein's work through such subsequent novels as DOUBLE STAR, and CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY, but by the time the latter appeared the weaknesses were beginning to show. For example, in CITIZEN, the most fascinating elements (such as the culture of the spacefaring people) were forced to the background instead of being developed, so that "we can get on with the story". (I'm not here concerned with his juveniles, where it's much more appropriate to lay such heavy stress on the action, only with his novels aimed at adult audiences; the lack of pretentiousness in a book like THE STAR BEAST lent it a quality of charm which made it worthwhile reading for grown-ups too ... but not worthwhile re-reading.)

Then, paradoxically, in what I believe Heinlein himself regards as his most important and significant novels, the weaknesses of his technique became shriekingly and horribly obvious.

STARSHIP TROOPERS, much more of a book with a message than any he had previously attempted, is scarcely even a novel. It's a bad piece of didactic exposition, overloaded with lecturing of one so-called character by another (although to call them "characters" is an exaggeration - they're mouthpieces) and dedicated to a proposition which I find utterly incredible. Since we already have the power to exterminate ourselves right here in the twentieth century, it's probable that the encouragement of the so-called "military virtues" is contra-survival, and I simply don't believe that as arrogant and intolerant a species as is depicted here would last so long or get so far - it would more likely fall apart like the Republican forces in Spain, because no-one could tie the various competing factions together long enough to achieve solid results.

If anything, FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD is worse; the protagonist (Farnham himself) is one of the few truly repulsive characters I've ever encountered in science fiction. And by the time we get to GLORY ROAD, it appears that even Heinlein's former talent for constructing good taut fast-moving action-adventures is deserting him; in that book he plays the nastiest possible trick on the reader by staging the various menaces the hero has to cope with.

I've not so far dealt with STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, because it's a little askew from the rest of what Heinlein has been writing in the past decade. While acknowledging that it includes not just flashes but long stretches of his former exceptional action-writing, so that most of it moves at the kind of tempo which could have been the salvation of STARSHIP TROOPERS, and wasn't, I still feel disappointed when I review it in my mind. He chickened out on a couple of his responsibilities in that book.

Primarily, I think, he dodged the necessity of inventing characters and settled for Characters with a capital "C". In the case of Jubal Harshaw this fact is obvious, but I think it extends even to Valentine Michael Smith and takes in most of the subsidiary personae en route.

And, secondly, he failed to follow through some of the most stimulating social speculations broached, but not analysed, during the spread of the new religion in the book. It's clear, from the original exposition, that sexual relationships between male friends followed logically from the principles Smith was teaching - but, as the text stands, it seems that Heinlein's own preoccupation with currently-accepted masculinity would allow him to push this no further than friendly pecks on the cheek by way of greeting (something which exists in our own culture in such countries as France and Greece).

At this point someone will probably say, "What you want is a different book!"

Well... Yes, frankly, I do! It's my impression that the enormous adulation accorded to Heinlein by the hard-core of SF fans, combined with his own social attitudes and beliefs has led him down a blind alley in his writing. Losing sight of the very genuine talents which first caused him to attract notice, he's been concentrating on basically unfruitful lines of development in his recent books and relying on his popularity to get away with them. (That he's correct in assuming he can is illustrated by the award of a Hugo to THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS, a book which quite apart from being a one-for-one reconstruction of an event in the eighteenth century and therefore scarcely qualifying as SF except by courtesy, suffers from some agonising inconsistencies, not just in the characterisations, which one might expect, but even in the logic of the plot!)

I once said (at the 1965 London Worldcon, to be precise) that the chief attribute of a science fiction hero is that he knows what he is doing, and in consequence generates in the reader a kind of wistful envy - as it were, "Wouldn't it be nice if the universe would jump through hoops when I told it to?"

As time goes by, it becomes more and more apparent that this process simply doesn't work in real life. Scientific advance is more like a Pandora's box; every time you open it, you let out not only some new marvel, but also the attendant evils, and they're currently coming thick and fast. It's the refusal to acknowledge this unpleasant but incontrovertible truth that, for me, mars Heinlein's current work and causes me nowadays to rate him far below Dick, Delany, Blish, Leiber.... Heinlein is still putting the universe through his hero's hoops, and the illusion is becoming progressively less convincing.

Much of the time he doesn't even seem to care.

John Brunner

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RICHARD GORDON

'using invisible strings'

WHEN I started reading science fiction, aged 14 or thereabouts, Heinlein gave me the same variety of vicarious emotional thrill that I'd got in even earlier years from being exposed to patriotic marches, like the 'Dam Busters' or 'Lillibulero'. In other words, he stimulated a sense of ersatz patriotism - but as applied to the human race en masse - except that in his case, I suspect that the emotion was more akin to interstellar racism. Heinlein might perhaps be called the Powell of the Stellar Confederation: his stories express the Terrans-Are-Better-Than-Anyone attitude typical of Eric Frank Russell, but replacing the humour of the latter with a particularly unpleasant brand of arrogance.

His characters tend to emphasise this arrogance. Their White Anglo-Saxon Protestant backgrounds tend to be taken for granted; although he employs many other backgrounds and racial characteristics for his characters, I suspect he does so for specific purposes. In facing a Heinlein character one is exposed to a composite simulacra which opens its mouth and proselytises as required; simulacra which are determined and predetermined; mouthpieces who move in accordance with Heinlein's beliefs rather than accordance with any degree of free-will another author might grant his creations.

The situation is confused by his skill in maintaining the pretence of granting his characters their free-will, such that they might even do something unexpected. But although his puppets might occasionally appear to be dancing for joy at their release from the puppeteer's strings, it's really just that he is using invisible strings. As in FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD, the strings are very subtly disguised indeed. In a situation where a character alien to Heinlein's beliefs might seem to hold the upper hand, there's really no chance for him. ~~God~~ according to the Gospel of St. Heinlein must always triumph !

And in that particular book, Good seems to be exemplified by the especially odious figure of Hugh Farnham. So, of course, he has to win; even if his victory is qualified; even if it seems to be partial because of the defection and deaths of various members of his family. But even in these apparent negations of 'Good', Farnham is shown to triumph because he has the correct attitude to apply to the situation - as conceived by the author. Fair enough. As Puppet Master he can twist his characters to do anything he wishes!

THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS was much more blatant, and therefore less culpable in one sense, if a worse book. Vast tracts of depersonalised revolutionary seaweed dripped soggly from selected mouths, which were opened and closed at the required moments. One is almost reminded of Peter Sellers' Indian Doctor - 'Put your tongue out please' - 'Put it back in again'. The characters exist in an allegorical or idealogical sense; to mouth particular points of view. They are points of view first and foremost, their personal characteristics, designed to give belief and weight to those views that they express, appear to be tacked on rather sloppily to their pre-prepared speeches.

Heinlein uses his undeniable narrative skill to propagandise his strong views. He is unwilling simply to present his views and say, 'this is what I believe, I hope you agree', he disguises them by placing them in the mouths of those characters with whom the reader is supposed to identify, by virtue of their superior likeability, morality, or whatever. Of course, almost all writers do this to some extent or other, but Heinlein carries it to an extreme.

(Cont/d).....

If he were more subtle about his propaganda, one could call him clever, while deploring his methods. But too often, he is merely crude. Perhaps his lack of regard for such subtlety arises from impatience, or even from lack of regard for the intelligence of his average reader, such that he believes he must ram his beliefs down the throat of everyone who reads his books merely for the narrative enjoyment they provide.

In his more recent books, Heinlein's characters have been possessed not only of arms, legs, bodies and brains; but also of genital organs and various assorted vices. Perhaps I'm being over-cynical to suggest that the inclusion of 'realistic' sex - FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD, mechanically running the gamut of popular vice - is merely a further prop for his own arguments. I'd be interested to know the author's reaction to the underground popularity of STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND - or even from what viewpoint he wrote the book. But, at any rate, many of his arguments would lose much of their impact and immediacy if delivered by the standard science fiction hermaphrodite.

I can't help feeling that Heinlein's characters are Tussaud figures - they resemble human beings in every way; and dissection would prove them to be authentic, scientifically, - but they lack any soul, free will, individuality. They are like reaction-tested consumers, whose response to any given situation can be calculated with a fair degree of accuracy. Though I reckon I'd back the irrationality of any mindless urban consumer against the ability for unexpected action on the part of a Heinlein character, any day!

Richard Gordon.

BRIAN ALDISS

'a very foreign writer'

THAT HEINLEIN has great merit is attested by the fact that after hundreds of thousands of dismissive words have been written about him, he remains undismitted. You may not like the idea, but, within our ghetto, his is the statue at the end of the street, undefiled by piddling urchins.

Remember the trouble the frogs had with King Log? It may give you the idea that if you climb out of the little pool someone beyond might be able to sum things up for you. To emerge from behind my metaphors - if you could get someone to read SF and Heinlein, someone who was not astigmatic from years of SF-grokking, as we all are, you might expect him to deliver a clearer judgement. It so happens that one such judgement is available. In THE STRENGTH TO DREAM, Colin Wilson (after some praise of Bester and Aldiss) says this:

"The work of Robert A. Heinlein deserves special mention in this context. Like Lovecraft, Heinlein has tried to build up a kind of mythology - in this case, a mythology of the future. Most of his volumes have an appended chart of 'Future History - 1951-2600'. Heinlein's work varies in quality; at its worst, it can be sentimental, whimsical, or melodramatic, but at its best it combines imagination with a careful realism; he might almost be described as the Zola of the future. Among living writers of science fiction, he has the most consistently high quality; he and Weinbaum are the writers whose work most deserves to be considered as literature."

I'm sure your sophisticated readers will enjoy the dizzy gulf that lies between the two halves of that last sentence. "...He has the most consistently high quality." Mmm, fine, very judicious in tone. "He and Weinbaum are the writers..." What! Who? He and which? Not Stanley G. Weinbaum, author of THE PARASITE PLANET, MARTIAN ODYSSEY, THE BRINK OF INFINITY and other gems from the

(Cont/d)....

Golden Treasury of Science Fantasy?-- The same? So that's who Heinlein's as good as, eh? It does kind of demonstrate, doesn't it?, that even the impartial lords of literature beyond our pale have some difficulty in assessing merit. It'll be interesting to see what your contributors make of the subject.

My personal feeling about Heinlein, none of whose novels I can really pretend to have enjoyed (I feel that way about Balzac, too) is that he is, from an English point of view, a very foreign writer; his topics are often conspiracy and revolution, which are expressed through somewhat monolithic characters that would be classified over here as classless conservatives - somehow a contradiction in terms; so that we are on the whole less likely to appreciate Heinlein than his fellow-countrymen.

A correction is needed there - I was forgetting DOUBLE STAR, a novel I read with much enjoyment when it appeared in Astounding as a serial. I have no idea how it would read now. Heinlein showed sympathy with the underdog in that, which he does not always; of course, his perky little underdog hero becomes the overdog, but memory suggests it was all rather nicely worked-out.

You'll gather these remarks are rather more pro- Heinlein than con-. Not that I'm trying to con anyone, but I imagine you will get a lot of anti-Heinlein comments, simply because being anti-Heinlein is fashionable. There are good reasons for being anti-Heinlein, but to be in the fashion is not one of them!

Brian W. Aldiss

ROBERT A.W. LOWNDES

'he believes in freedom'

HEINLEIN: PROPHET OF FREEDOM

THERE ARE two kinds of prophecy, and two kinds of prophets. What you are likely to think of first is the prophet who foretells coming events, which in time will be checked against his predictions. The other kind of prophet is the person who simply states the law of the universe, a "this is the way it is" sort of thing, with or without directly stating that unless some sort of change is made, the current trends of behaviour are going to lead straight to disaster.

Science fiction writers' speculations have often been taken for the first type of prophecy, and in some instances were intended as such. More often, I think, they were written as speculation, without not so much a lack of belief on the part of these inventions, etc., actually coming to pass, but no particular concern as to whether they did or not. And with the second sort of prophecy, some extrapolations into disaster have represented an author's convictions about what really is going to happen "if this goes on", while others represent no more than speculations about what seems most likely to happen, on the basis of what can be seen at the time of the writing. Some science fiction has indeed been polemical, has been consciously written as early warning and exhortation; most, however, has not.

Some of the things that have actually come to pass in the last decade or two have been described in the stories of Robert A. Heinlein, but I doubt that his record is any higher than that of some other science fiction writers of the same period. He hit the jackpot when the device called the "waldo" turned out to have been described in convincing detail in his 1942 story by the same title. Other science fiction writers have been less fortunate with their hits. (Cont/d)..

It is in the second sense that Robert Heinlein can be described as a prophet. And here I want to stress a point which may have been made before, but which I haven't seen made before; Heinlein is an especially deceptive writer, in that if you read just a few of his stories you will obtain a very misleading impression.

He seems to be the solid citizen, let-us-praise-conventional-attitudes-and-virtues, sort of author. In almost every story you will find what is mis-called "bourgeois" attitudes and values affirmed. (I say 'mis-called', simply because this label has only been in existence for a couple of centuries, while the general human attitudes of which these are a more or less specific expression go back much, much further. They were not invented by the triumphant Middle Classes which came into political and economic power toward the close of the 18th century.) But when you have read close to the entire corpus of his published fiction, as I have, something else leaps out at you: In almost every major work, and in some minor ones, too, some conventional attitude or manner of behaviour is stood on its head and made to look imbecilic at the very least, if not downright evil.

Sometimes this is a direct attack, other times it is an oblique one; but there is nearly always an assault upon the conventional ways of thinking about about something that gooses the reader -- and not always gently. There's more than a touch of Mark Twain and George Bernard Shaw in Robert A. Heinlein.

Read one or two of his stories, and you may feel that surely you know how Heinlein feels about this, that, or the other; read a lot more, and if you haven't been shell-shocked by his bombardment, you should feel doubtful. Undoubtedly he has put some aspects of his own beliefs at a particular time, or revealed the straight line of his convictions, into his stories; no writer who lets himself be himself, when writing, could avoid this.

But this, too, can be deceptive. A good writer and entertainer, as Robert A. Heinlein is, in some ways is like a good actor for the stage. The good stage-actor is neither a darfsteller (who loses himself completely in his conception of a part, and can't be told anything) or a schauspieler (who can do what he's told well enough, but has to be told everything), but one who is "in" the part, yet not by any means lost in it. He himself is still there, on stage, watching and listening; he knows that anything can go wrong during even the most fantastically rehearsed performance -- and often does; when something goes wrong, either some other member of the cast, or a case where he hears himself saying or sees himself doing something fantastically out-of-line, he is ready to make the necessary ad lib adjustment (words or business) to get the play back on the track, without breaking up. Not once does he step out of character and become his actual self, trying to pick up the pieces; the result is that no-one who is not thoroughly familiar with the play suspects that anything has really gone wrong.

The good writer has similar control. He may or may not follow the rules, as it were, of the novel or whatever that he is writing; and he lets inspiration come as it will, but whatever it is, he doesn't lose himself in it. If it fits his purpose, he works it in so that the overall story-line is not lost, or his characters suddenly lose their individual identities, where he has given them distinct personalities. (Every character in a story needn't have one; every good play may need spear carriers, etc, who perform necessary business, or give needed cues, and the good spear carrier does not unduly call attention to himself.)

Of course, perfect control is an ideal, rarely achieved by any author or actor. It isn't a flunking mark if the control at times is somewhat imperfect, so that the experienced reader or member of the audience can spot a slight slip. So long as only the experts notice, we still have a good performance. (Cont/d)....

And I have found Heinlein to be a good performer in this sense; the occasional slips just weren't that important, however they may have been belaboured by either perfectionists or so-called critics who lost their sense of proportion through outrage at the assaults on precious ideas and attitudes - or who never had a sense of proportion to begin with.

Is there a straight line of conviction running through Robert Heinlein's fiction from the first (or nearly the first) to the last? I think there is. I do not know (and am not terribly interested in) what other things Heinlein may or may not believe in, but of one thing I'm certain; He believes in freedom, and the burden of his prophecy is that there can be no such thing as freedom without responsibility.

This is a most heretical line in a society (such as we have been living in for the past thirty years or more) whose slogans can all too easily be reduced to "Gimme!" and "I'm as good as you are!"

(Do you think you're as good as I am, Gentle Reader? Then remember this; If you're as good as I am, you're also, inevitably, as bad as I am. How does the thought of being as bad as I am strike you?)

Freedom does not mean getting everything you want, free, the moment you want it. It has never meant that, and never will. Freedom means, the right to decide for yourself what is good, what is bad, and to choose for yourself which you want - not to live in a society where all, and only, good things abound, and the decisions are made for you. That's the first half of it. The second half is that, whatever you decide, whatever you seek, you are going to pay for it one way or another, and that just wanting does not necessarily mean getting.

Even Thomas Jefferson, bemused as he was with his "all men are created free and equal" nonsense (or perhaps, being among other things a rather clever politician, he knew better but realised that it would sell) drew the line and stopped at the pursuit of happiness being one of the rights of man, that good government should guarantee; he knew, at any rate, that no government can guarantee anyone the attainment of happiness.

The universe allows us all freedom within the restrictions of our physical and mental-emotional-spiritual equipment. Whatever the laws of man may say, we're all free to try anything we're capable of trying. The laws of man may prescribe penalties even for so much as trying, if we're caught trying. But where human laws go against the laws of the universe is where they seek to guarantee success. Or make handouts of unearned bounties.

There's an old Spanish proverb: Take what you want and pay for it, says God." Whether you want God in it or not is none of my business; the fact remains that this is the law of the universe, and there are no cosmic police, no cosmic courts, no cosmic judges to enforce it, it enforces itself. In the end, one way or another, all debts are paid - and only the least important of them are paid with money.

This is the straight line you will find running through Heinlein's fiction and it doesn't matter at all how many of his expositions and illustrations can be faulted. (It would be utterly fantastic if some could not be faulted!) If this line offends you, then it follows that you will enjoy few, if any, of his stories -- at best, only those few where it is not apparent.

So far as literary excellence goes, there have been and are and will be better writers, but you'll have to go far to find another prophet of freedom, in science fiction, who has so consistently put on such a good show for so long.

Robert A.W. Lowmides

HARLAN ELLISON

'he set the tone'

IN SO many ways it is literally impossible to ignore Bob Heinlein and what he has done. It may be literarily possible to ignore him, but in almost every other way that matters to a writer of speculative fiction, it is literally impossible.

He was the first man to "familiarise the future" with slang, with the commonplace of minutiae, with the bland acceptance of scientific developments other writers (to this day) stand about declaiming over. I recall with what a sudden shock I encountered his description of a door that "irised closed behind him". He never went into a long-winded explanation of how a door could thus operate, he simply tossed it in. And without belabouring it, he had given enough of a shadow impression of architecture and technology that the mind and imagination of the reader was able to conjure up the city that surrounded the iris.

In this way, he is in the great tradition of all true storytellers. He allows the imaginative strengths of the individual reader to fill in much of the canvas for himself; the very same attribute that made old-time radio so much more rewarding than modern-day television.

It has steadily saddened me to see the vague disrepute into which Heinlein and his oeuvre have fallen with many people, these last seven or eight years. The brickbats (even from the most highly-regarded critics) seem to me on a level of intellectualisation with the put-downs suffered by Hemingway. It is far too easy, following the most chic trend or the transient nouvelle vague, to dismiss the enormous impact Heinlein and his work have had on our genre, merely because his politics seem reactionary or his style dated. I consider this in the nature of ingratitude, if not downright silly.

There is no serious writer working in the field today who can deny that he has ever written a time-paradox story that was not pre-informed by Heinlein's gorgeous 'By His Bootstraps'. No writer who would attempt to sum up the derangement of the world around us as 'The Year of the Jackpot', because Heinlein already did it once.. best. No writer conceiving of a psionic story who could ignore 'Project Nightmare'. And what of all the writers now publishing 'juvenile' novels that aren't juvenile? Bob Heinlein was there first. He set the tone. He bootstrapped the entire genre of SF juveniles, which till he wrote the first half-dozen of his Scribner's novels was mired down in infantilism and conception of speculative fiction as hardly fit for thinking young people.

What alien invasion novels chill half so well as THE PUPPET MASTERS? What messiah novels capture half so well the dangers of swaying masses with the fervour of the 'true believer' than 'If This Goes On'? One runs out of fingers on which to count-off the writers who have tried to emulate Heinlein's self-contained world-in-a-starship a la 'Universe'. And none of the foregoing considers the bulk of his 'Future History' stories.

I, for once, consider Heinlein one of the three or four most important factors in the formation of my own direction in writing speculative fiction. Had Heinlein not been there before me, much of what I consider to be my best work would never have come to be.

The term 'giant in the field' is easily thrown around. Too often it is applied to pygmies. Sense, and a serious consideration of the man's work can lead only to a conclusion that Heinlein is more than a giant. He is a colossus.

Harlan Ellison.

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HARRY WARNER

'information-packed style'

ONE THING that I've often wondered about Heinlein's fiction is this; what sort of grades would it get, if he were to submit stories to an instructor in a course in fiction-writing? He consistently and successfully breaks almost all the silly rules that you are expected to learn if you take a correspondence course, or specialise in creative writing at college. For example, every now and then some professional writer will comment on a story published in a fanzine, by hopping on the author's liberal use of variants for "said" as verbs to introduce direct quotation of conversation. There is an old saw among teachers of writing and among bad writers that this is the sure sign of the amateur; that the professional with real ability sticks to "said" or omits the explanation of the quotation altogether.

I can't think of anyone writing science fiction today who is a professional in more senses of the word than Heinlein. Turn to pages with much conversation in any of his stories, and you'll find alternatives and synonyms for "said" in quantities sufficient to stock the entire NFFF amateur fiction contest with verbs. For example, look at the fourth chapter of THE DOOR INTO SUMMER:

Belle answered, "Keep your nerve, Chubby."

Belle shrilled, "Stand clear, Chubby!"

"You too," he answered, "in spades."

"He's nutty," Miles commented.

"Assigned it!" repeated Miles.

"To us," corrected Miles.

Miles returned later, and announced, "It's not anywhere."

"Oh yes!" I grinned with relief.

"Yes," agreed Belle, "I'm his sister."

There are lots of other dialogue fragments that are introduced with "saids" in this chapter, and more than half of Heinlein's dialogue pops in without explanation of who is speaking and how. The true professional simply remembers not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Another ancient phobia of beginning writers and their mentors is overuse of the first person pronoun. I can remember back in elementary school how repeatedly I was warned against beginning sentences with "I" except in the most critical cases of necessity. The explanation usually given for this rule is that your reader will consider you an egomaniac if you keep referring constantly to yourself. There might be a morsel of logic behind this reasoning, but unfortunately the rule produces two nasty habits in many persons who try to follow it.

It seems to be the cause of the custom of many letterwriters to omit the subject altogether from sentences that would naturally begin with "I":

"Wrote to John last week. Don't know what to think about the way he refuses to answer."

English can't afford to dispose with the pronouns, as Italian does, because the verbs aren't sufficiently inflected in English. The other bad habit is too extensive reliance on the passive voice:

"It was noted that the sunset was beautiful" is substituted for "I thought the sunset was beautiful."
(Cont/d).....

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Now, if you keep this useless taboo in mind, then add to it the current belief in literary circles that fiction narrated in the first-person became obsolete at the end of the 19th Century, you can understand another way in which Heinlein consistently and successfully breaks these little clay gods.

Much good Heinlein fiction is written in the first person. I haven't taken the trouble to make a statistical survey, but I suspect that there are chapters in *THE PUPPET MASTERS* where at least 15% of all the sentences start with the first-person nominative pronoun. I think it's begging the argument to say that the hero who constantly tells about himself will repel the reader for his self-absorption. The hero who is too invariably heroic and triumphant will be an unbearable bore, whether the story is told by himself or by the impartial and invisible third-person narrator that today's teachers and editors recommend. I can't imagine anything except first-person narration making as concisely effective and clear the hero's actions in a page like this one from *THE PUPPET MASTERS*:

"I had to keep her from killing me -- and I had to kill the slug -- and I had to keep the slug from getting at me or I would not be able to save her. I let go with one hand and jabbed her chin. The blow did not even slow her down. I grabbed again, with both arms and legs, trying to encase her in a bear hug to immobilise her without injuring her. We went down, Mary on top. I shoved my head into her face to stop her biting me. I held her so, curbing her strong body by sheer muscle. Then I tried to paralyse her with nerve pressure, but she knew the key spots as well as I did - and I was lucky that I was not myself paralysed."

Note something else about that quotation. Heinlein seems to have managed to sell some fiction without heeding another bugaboo of the writing courses, the one invoked whenever the writer describes violent action. As the pace of the story increases, the books on writing insist, the writer must shorten his sentences to convey a greater sense of urgency and increased ease of writing. If anything, Heinlein does just the opposite.

One more example, and then we'll go onto another way of looking at Heinlein's writing excellences. This last matter involves the very opening of stories. Many teachers of writing impress on their students the value of beginning the story with an opening sentence that will grab the reader's attention irrevocably. Judging by some instructions on this matter, I would consider the story a failure if the reader did not utter a piercing scream of excitement and leap six feet in the air, the instant he had reached the period that concludes that first sentence!

I think that this is complete hogwash, probably a dim distortion of the instructions that city editors gave their reporters on the sensational tabloids of big-city newspapers back in the old days when the public was expected to read the news instead of the advertisements. Heinlein gets along very well by opening story after story with a sentence that is either neutral in effect or contrived to give the reader some hint of the general situation, but never demands that he simply must read the next sentence to obtain still more excitement! Here are several Heinlein opening sentences, followed by the title of the story they begin:

"It wasn't much of a fair, as fairs go." ('Requiem')

"Just as they were leaving, the telephone called his name!" ('Space Jockey')

"It takes both agoraphobes and claustrophobes to colonise the Moon"

('Gentlemen, Be Seated')

"What the hell goes on here?" Whitey Armore demanded. ('SIXTH COLUMN').

After all that attention to the things Heinlein does not do to write fine science fiction, let's try to figure out some of the methods that he does adopt to stay among the favourite authors, over a span of two decades or longer.

(Cont/d).....

One little trick that I've not seen described in any analysis of Heinlein occurs in the dialogue. He is one of the very few writers who realise that conversation contains a very large proportion of sentences that lack either subject or predicate, sometimes both. It would probably be absurd to think of Virginia Woolf as a cohort of Heinlein, but her direct quotations are effective for exactly this reason. You don't even notice this bit of verisimilitude unless you go through any good Heinlein story and pick out the sentences which are sentences in the direct quotations only through the technicality that Heinlein makes use of a period. Here are a few, pulled out of context from 'The Man Who Sold The Moon':

"Sure." "The old space-station setup." "Then—." "Right." "Why not?" "Take the landing arrangements for the fifth-stage power ring." "Looks like we made a mistake in trying to launch it from the States." "Might work." "Two years - eighteen months with luck." "No good, Bob." "You can't build a moon ship?" "Money." "What sort of trouble?" "More or less."

These come from just two pages of the paperback edition. They also demonstrate accidentally and yet logically, another important thing about Heinlein's writing. Both in narration and in dialogue, he uses a tremendously high proportion of monosyllabic words. This is one of the few ways in which his science fiction style's evolution can be traced.

He started out as fond as any pulp writer of an occasional avalanche of long words. As the years passed and his ideas became more serious and his messages more complex, the language that he used to express himself became more plain and lean. In a very early story like 'Let There Be Light', you can find narrative sentences that are almost unthinkable in the later Heinlein:

'In all his long and unsavoury career he had never had the etiquette of shadowing treated in so cavalier a style. He left the outer door open and the elevator down in anticipation of Doctor Martin's arrival, then he busied himself by trying to locate the cause of an irritating vibration in his centrifuge.'

Worse yet, his characters in early stories like that one often take deep breaths and plunge into the kind of conversations that gave Gernsback's prozines their present reputation:

"Great Scott, kid! I think you've hit it!" He got up, and strode up and down, talking as he went. "They use ordinary quartz crystal for the usual frequencies, and tourmaline for short-wave broadcasting. The frequency of vibration depends directly on the way the crystal is cut. There is a simple formula —" He stopped, and took down a thick Indiapaper handbook. "Hmm, — yes, here it is. For quartz, every millimetre of thickness of crystal gives one hundred metres of wave-length. Frequency is of course the reciprocal of wave-length. Tourmaline has a similar formula for shorter wave-lengths."

Contrast that with the way Harriman talks in 'Requiem':

"Oh, yes. Don't sell those. Set up a trust. Should have done it long ago. Tell young Kamens to draw up the papers. He knows what I want."

This, I submit, is the way a man of the world would talk under these circumstances. A less experienced author than Heinlein would go to the library, take out a couple of books on law and finances, and would put into his character's mouth some highly impressive technical terms involved in drawing up a will, in order to impress the editor with the research he had done for the story. He would ruin the yarn in the process.

I'm reminded of Harlan Ellison's famous description of the sensations of a man about to fire a rifle, in some story or other. At interminable length, the reader learns the feel of the weapon, its appearance to the eye, the mechanical movements involved in readying it for fire, the impression that its weight makes on the body, and a host of other details involving all the senses of perception.

(Cont/d)....

This tells the reader one thing; that Harlan took the trouble to get hold of such a rifle and go through the motions of using it. He couldn't have described it so vividly without this personal experience.

Unfortunately, we also know that this was something new to Harlan, and it is out of place in the story because an individual accustomed to using such a rifle is unaware of these sensations, just as you are not aware of the exact height above the ground at which you hold your key, the degrees of arc through which you turn it, and the amount of resistance that it offers to you, the tiny noise that is produced when the mechanism obeys to the key's command; all these things do not register on your mind unless something goes wrong and you can't get the door unlocked and you try to recall how it should be done.

At his best Heinlein now writes in an astonishingly compressed, information-packed style that produces a bigger effect on the emotions and glands with grammar-school words and plain syntax than you will find in the works of any contemporary science fiction writer on a consistent basis. I think that Heinlein would make a superb librettist for operas. I don't know how long he spent on the first three sentences of *THE DOOR INTO SUMMER*, but they set up the whole environment and background for the story as if they had been condensed from an entire introductory chapter:

"One winter shortly before the Six Weeks War my tomcat Petronius the Arbiter and I lived in an old farmhouse in Connecticut. I doubt if it is there any longer, as it was near the edge of the blast area of the Manhattan near-miss, and those old frame buildings burn like tissue paper. Even if it is still standing it would not be a desirable rental because of the fallout, but we liked it then, Pete and I."

And consider the climax of the book. The grown-man plus little-girl theme has produced complicated literary results, all the way from *Portrait of Jenny* to *LOLITA*. When Heinlein comes to the climax of his happy ending, he may not attract the attention of the entire nation in *THE DOOR INTO SUMMER*, but I admire very much the effect that he puts over. He has the man, the suddenly-matured girl, and the cat as his characters, and he tells the climactic part of his story in exactly two sentences:

"She raised both arms — and I saw that she was wearing my Tech class ring on her left thumb. Pete chirrlupped and jumped on the bed, started doing shoulder-dives against her in an ecstasy of welcome."

We badly need a really long, thorough study of Heinlein's science fiction stories. ** The amount of misinformation contained in the occasional article about them is entirely too generous. Mark Reinsberg wrote a little article in 1951 that shows how completely and promptly the facts in the matter are forgotten by someone in a hurry to fulfill an assignment. He refers to the future that Heinlein had invented, as "a bid for the kind of future he wants... He is fascinated by the possibilities of tomorrow and he's doing what he can, in his writing, to influence the vote."

Only two years earlier, Heinlein himself had used the clearest sort of language to tell exactly what this 'history of the future' really was. In his preface to *THE MAN WHO SOLD THE MOON* (*Shasta*), he predicts a surprised Heinlein if any of his stories turned out to be prophetic; he denies that he was attempting prophecy; he explains that he simply imitated Sinclair Lewis' creation of an imaginary state and city in order to prevent inconsistencies between his stories; he laments the fact that he was forced to use pseudonyms when he wanted to write a story that didn't fit into the basic pattern, and he points out that advances in technology had already made some of his datings impossible. (Cont/d)....

** This was written before publication of *HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION* (see editorial).

Other statements made by Heinlein make it unlikely that he is eager for the "gradual deterioration of mores, orientation and social institutions, terminating in mass psychoses" that he had scheduled for the 1960's, the lack of space travel for the first three-fourths of the 21st Century; the puritanism and priestly controls soon after the turn of the century, and the failure of civil liberties to return until a century from now.

One strange thing about the popularity of Heinlein in fandom is the scarcity of detailed information about his biography. I recall in fanzines nothing but the most vague sort of sketchy information about what he has done besides write science fiction and take a stand on current international questions. I don't recall the appearance of any autobiographical material in either fan or professional publications. Undoubtedly, many fans have heard a lot of his experiences, viva voce, but that doesn't do me any good! It would be very nice to see a lengthy account of his life published, to supplement the tantalising morsels of information that appear on the jackets or back-covers of his books.

It's very obvious that Heinlein has spent a lot of time around politicians, big-business men, union men and scientists; the stories dealing with those trades are written with a confidence that would be impossible for anyone who has obtained the details on his characters by reading books about those occupations. But I would like to know what experiences he had, where, and when.

It would also be nice to know, as an irrelevant sidelight, if accident or intent caused the man on the cover of the Signet edition of THE MAN WHO SOLD THE MOON to look so much like Heinlein's younger self.

Harry Warner Jr.

G. D. DOHERTY

'the use of language'

* (It must be noted that I had intended to ask Mr G.D.Doherty for a contribution *
* to this issue, to discuss Mr Heinlein's use of the language in his stories. *
* Unfortunately I have found it impossible to do this, and so I am reprinting *
* an excerpt from a longer and overall very interesting piece in SF HORIZONS 1, *
* (Spring 1964), which raises one or two points along these lines. PRW) *

....THIS VERY sketchy attempt to illustrate some current stylistic weaknesses of SF, reveals three major evil influences at work: (i) a too introverted audience, (ii) an over-grown supply of conventional images and stock-responses both at the level of story background and in more specific uses of language and (iii) a tendency to accept the values and language habits of inferior modes of fiction, whether it be the Woman's Magazine, the novel of violence, the Western, or sensationalism, etc. The net result is nearly always language which is dead, without emotional force, unpoetic in the widest sense. As a final example, STARSHIP TROOPERS by Robert Heinlein will illustrate that major SF writers are not immune from these tendencies. The following quotations are taken at random, as there is no space for a more detailed analysis:

'If it has to be done, a man, a real man - shoots his own dog himself; he doesn't hire a proxy to do it for him.'

'....we were still standing around wondering what to do with the meat - two policeman, it was that sort of a neighbourhood.'

(Cont/d).....

'Then for twenty minutes we went through calisthenics that left me as dripping hot as I had been shivering cold. Zim led it himself, doing it all with us and shouting the count. He hadn't been mussed that I could see...'

'That left me with nothing to worry about for twenty seconds, so I jumped up on the building nearest me, raised the launcher to my shoulder, found the target and pulled the first trigger to let the rocket have a look at its target - pulled the second trigger and kissed it on its way, jumped back to the ground. "Second section, even numbers!" I called out... waited for the count in my mind and ordered, "Advance!"'

'I didn't know what I had cracked open. A congregation in church - a skinny flophouse - maybe even their defense headquarters. All I knew was that it was a very big room filled with more skinnies than I wanted to see in my whole life.'

This is the imagery and diction of the novel of violence, war-story type, which was so popular in the fifties. It is well-enough written of its kind, tough, sharp, hard and slangy. It would be fair to say that the author obviously likes what he is writing about, he likes the idea of men who have been trained to act and feel like this. One can sense this in the gusto (to be as kind as possible) with which it is put over.

As in (Bulmer's) 'Flame in the Flux-Field' (probably much influenced by Heinlein and thus second-hand at third-hand, so to speak) the SF element is stuck on and not emotionally united with story. Heinlein could have written this theme in this language about leathernecks at any time from the Civil War onwards. The skinnies are just anybody who happens to get in the way. The language in which this book is conceived thus reflects the unsophisticated tastes and limited values of the author; it has the ethos of an inferior brand of fiction and is characteristically repetitive and tedious to a degree. Of course, it might have been a better book, better written, if Heinlein had shown a modicum of 'scientific' interest, tolerance, and above all, doubt.....

G.D. Doherty

KENNETH BULMER

'in our blood stream'

AT THIS DATE the chances are still good that Robert A. Heinlein's name will remain high in the Pantheon of writers of science fiction. Ironically, the modern speculative fiction which has been so busy knocking Heinlein owes its name to his invention of the term (or so the story goes)!

So much has been written about Heinlein and his work that apart from a general genuflection to the indisputable fact that he was the cornerstone on which Campbell built his New-Model Astounding, I feel this 30th Anniversary can regard the critical front as a continuing flow of print. Cleverly, then, editor Peter Weston asks; "What does Heinlein mean to you?" That is, me. My first answer is, I must confess: "Not as much as perhaps he should."

A number of things need to be said at the same time now, but as linear technique has not so far been superseded they will have to take their turn.

My discovery of hard-core science fiction and my impressionable age more-or-less co-incided, and as I learned about SF and absorbed the ideas and concepts current at the time I imbibed a ground-base on which would be erected my own SF structure. It must have been rather like sucking in a concrete mix to form ideological foundations. One of the most important contributions to this influx

(Cont/d)....
SPECULATION

was Robert Heinlein, although we soon parted company. At the time he seemed to be saying what was in the air of SF, what we were all thinking about, his next story always seemed to concern itself with what we had all been arguing about. I clearly recall heated arguments with Arthur Williams over Heinlein - I maintaining that his style was flat and dead and, then unaware of Campbell's dictum about splitting content from form and making everything of the former, settled into an ostentatious and juvenile attitude of regarding Heinlein as a competent word-mechanic.

Little of Heinlein's later work has relevance to me and I feel a little sad that I can only apostrophize on material he wrote prior to about 1950. All novels are unsatisfactory in one way or another, and the trick is to find those that are least unsatisfactory to you as a reader.

So when Peter Weston asked for a comment, I was reluctant to participate, not wishing to introduce a note less than the totally-committed adulation I had expected to be the norm. That, Peter says, is not the case.

The plain fact is inescapable that I, along with many other SF-writers, grew up with Heinlein in our blood-stream. We were influenced by him because he contributed a loud and important voice to the whole cacophonous mass of data we were assimilating. Talking to SF-writing friends, one is continually surprised at the way in which the same ideas crop up between us. Yet, one should not really be surprised, simply because we all work from the same heritage; and this in itself is dangerous and one of the sources of the newer writer's discontent with Heinlein and with the whole more-mature SF medium.

Writers, and particularly reviewers who have a negative attitude towards life - probably caused by guilt feelings during childhood, and therefore not altogether their own fault but demanding of pity on our part - love the neurotic protagonist and detest the protagonist who tries to come to terms positively with life. Many books are damned or praised today because a baby once dirtied his cot and grew up to be a reviewer.

Heinlein's heroes have been called sane. What one demands of a person before he can be called sane must differ from person to person and differ in various circumstances. But, just for the dialectic - No-one knows what the fate of humanity is to be, and those who deride Heinlein are in exactly the same position as he is; they don't know what will happen, either!

Heinlein borrows ideas from Rudyard Kipling, and there are people who equate Heinlein's role in American society with Kipling's in British. Of course, the scales are immensely out of proportion, but the notion remains.

The difference between Heinlein and his detractors, surely, must lie in the simple matter of belief. He must believe that mankind has a chance in the Universe against all the forces arrayed there, forces that detractors and upholders alike do not understand, if mankind makes the necessary efforts. Modern myth-mongers cannot subscribe to this necessarily naive belief because they have lost all faith, not in any fancifully-psychologically-motivated excuses, but in themselves.

Sometimes, Heinlein leans over too far, draws too far right out away from the drop-puts and the no-hopers, becomes unbalanced in terms of his own calculations. But in this guise he is just as valuable as a balancing-and corrective. If there are two sides to a question, as there usually are, then if only one side contains extremists the contest becomes dull and unfair.

Perhaps it would be true to say - although impossible of performance on any but the most limited of objectives - that only when the contest is decided if it ever can be, and the truly sane people have prevailed, can a true appreciation of Robert A. Heinlein, science fiction writer, be written.

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

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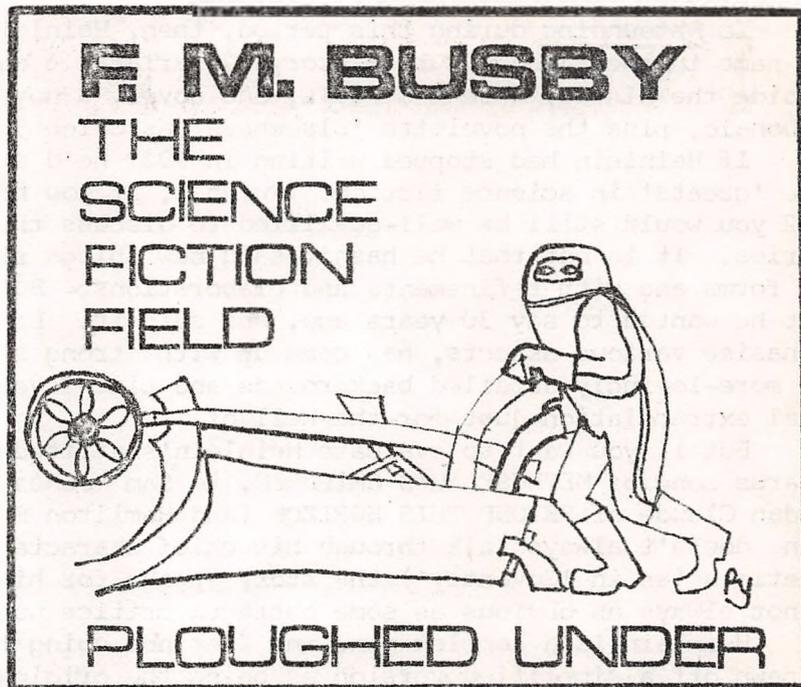
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GOLLANCZ **SF** GOLLANCZ

THE FOLLOWING material is not exactly a Plough column. It is somewhat edited from a piece written late in 1961 and published in IPSO FACT 4, January 1962. Thus it does not cover such later Heinlein works as GLORY ROAD, FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD or THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS. But I don't think any of those books undercut the following evaluation, so, READ ON ----

Buz Busby.



ON A Summer's day, some years ago, I entered a doctor's office in considerable discomfort and trepidation. Haltingly I explained to the medico that perhaps a quick frantic romantic moment in a small town, a few days previously, had resulted in consequences not only painful and alarming, but also utterly unlike any I'd ever heard of. Of course, the Orient abounds with exotic diseases, but...

I suppose it was pretty funny, but all the same it was hardly courteous of the man to laugh his fool head off at first sight of the areas of my suffering. Of course, I'd had no way of knowing any better, in a strange area and in the dark. But that damn fool girl, who lived there, should have known that the park was all fun of poison ivy! Wonder how she explained it to her doctor...?

The prospect of spending the next few days in a bath-tub of lukewarm soda solution lacked something in entertainment value. And soda solution or no, a little distraction would be welcome. So I stopped by a drugstore for some reading material. Now I had long had a yen for science fiction pulps, but money had been scarce for so many years that it took something on the order of ivy-poisoning to spark the revolutionary idea that it might be feasible actually to buy magazines, rather than restricting myself to quick-skimming under the druggists baleful eye.

So I bought an Amazing, an Astounding and a Startling. The latter had a novel about a man named John Dark who went miniscule and prowled the bloodstream of his enemy; the Amazing led off with a story called 'Beast of the Island', the menace of which was a homicidal mining-robot left over from Mu or some such place. The Astounding's lead-piece was "The Luck of Ignatz' by Lester Del Rey. And I found each of these stories to be quite as fine and gosh-wow and distracting as I'd hoped they'd be. And among these fine stories, in the Astounding, was 'Life-Line', the first published story of Robert A. Heinlein.

From 1939 through 1942, Heinlein sold 28 stories, of which 20 appeared in ASF, 3 in Unknown, 2 in Astonishing, 2 in Super Science, and 1 in Future Fiction. The five latter were all under the Lyle Monroe pseudonym and are the least-memorable and least-remembered of the lot. In Unknown were 'The Devil Makes the Law' ('Magic, Inc'); the classic 'They' and the effective 'Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag' (as John Riverside).

(Cont/d)....

In ~~astounding~~ during this period, then, Heinlein had 12 pieces under his own name in the ~~Famed Future History~~- 2 serials, 6 novelettes, and 4 shorts. Outside the ~~History~~ were 2 serials, one novel, 3 novelettes and 1 short as Anson MacDonald, plus the novelette 'Elsewhere' as Caleb Saunders.

If Heinlein had stopped writing in 1942 he'd still loom as one of the all-time 'greats' in science fiction. Further, if you had stopped reading him in 1942 you would still be well-qualified to discuss the basic attitudes in his stories. It is not that he hasn't said new things since then, nor old things in new forms and with refinements and elaborations. But on basics, Heinlein knew what he wanted to say 30 years ago, and said it. Lately he's found new ways to emphasise various aspects, has come up with strong side-thoughts, and has gone in for more-lovingly-detailed backgrounds and plot-developments, as well as the usual extrapolation-just-for-the-hell-of-it.

But if you want to evaluate Heinlein's attitudes toward people, listen to Lazarus Long of METHUSELAH'S CHILDREN, to Sam Jones of 'Logic of Empire', to Mordan Claude of BEYOND THIS HORIZON (and Hamilton Felix too, of course!); Heinlein doesn't always talk through his chief character, nor through any character; sometimes (as in 'Coventry') the story speaks for him directly. And the message is not always as obvious as some outraged critics would have us believe.

Heinlein is a complex man, and I am not going to be damnfool enough to try to pawn off a simplified version as being the original unabridged translation, lacking only the illustrative woodcuts; we've seen too much of that already from those whose tails were pinched by a couple of the man's recent books. But still, it should be possible to pick out a few basic ideas underlying all or most of Heinlein's works - some attitudes, some beliefs, some rock-bottom views of life.

First, last and always, Heinlein's fullest liking is reserved for people who can - the able, the competent, the gutsy ones - oh, they may lose, but they don't quit; they may get killed, but not without being downright nasty to the juggernaut that gets them. In particular, he likes trained competence that can control natural egotistic heroism in pursuit of a particular goal. However, those who 'can' are not necessarily limited to action-types - Heinlein's 'can do' types may be any sort of people, (thinkers, singers, beings with a flair for projective empathy); but one and all they contribute to the well-being of the rest of the gang, and also are basically good-hearted and constructive-minded types in their own ways; Heinlein has never detailed a really nasty protagonist who loathes and scorns all his associates. Neither is his banner carried by Futiles and Sicksicksicks, in any story that I can recall.

Not that he ruthlessly jettisons those who can't. The incompetent or feeble or helpless or copeless play all sorts of various roles in Heinlein's stories. Quite often they are the protected, by those who can, sometimes they must be left to their own copelessness. But Heinlein never dumps them as a matter of policy, only of necessity and with more-or-less regret, per circumstances.

Let's not, here, get into the "wolves-vs.-sheep argument". I've said my piece too many times already, and sheep stirk. Leave it that Heinlein likes such wolvis virtues as alertness, initiative, co-operation between independant-minded (thinking) types who freely bend their efforts into a co-operative pattern; further, that he has no use for herd-type blind following that knows not who the leader is, where's he's going, or even whether ther is a leader at the front end of the stampede.

Heinlein, though, has no use for the doctrine that the competent should be shackled so as to make the copeless look passable. He is bugged by those who seek to simulate competence by rigging the copeless-vote to slap restrictions on the competent.

(Cont/d)....

SPECULATION

If I've distorted the picture in any way, I did so to my own preferences. But where John Campbell a few years ago was saying out loud; "The Universe does not forgive mistakes". Campbell emphasised that "natural law" never bothers to argue: it's right, and if you goof, you're Wrong, and that's that! Heinlein implied this but incorporates it into a less-arbitrary (but, in a sense tougher) code. Heinlein's Universe contains people as well as equations, which makes it easier for you if you're competent, and tougher for you if you're not.

So when Heinlein says (as he often does) that you can't win if you won't try (and that regardless of the outcome it is not only worthwhile but imperative to try) he strongly advocates that you try knowledgeably and with full realisation of what you're up against and what you are trying to accomplish. There's an old saying: "God grant me the strength to change that which can be changed, the grace to bear what cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference" I don't know whether Heinlein ever used that line directly or not, but it is implicit in the attitudes of his favourite characters.

Now consider STARSHIP TROOPERS, which is not so much a story as a series of episodes illustrating a related succession of points adding up to one coherent portion of Heinlein's View of Things As They Are. Seldom has a book been so criticised by so many who never allowed it to penetrate past their initial thalamic reactions. You know the sort of thing: 'Heinlein wants military Fascism'; 'he says we have to have thermonuclear war'; 'he sees aliens as beings to be hated and killed'; -- oh, they do make a monster out of a man who stirs up their comfy li'l prejudices!

A few things generally overlooked in STARSHIP TROOPER: The Mobile Infantry Unit of the Filipino protagonist Juan Rico is a very polyglot affair, including several now-hostile nationalities. It is specifically pointed-out that the MI's hazardous raids are undertaken to shake up the enemy rather than simply H-bombing them: ("the object of war is not to kill people but to remove the threat their actions pose"). The Skinnies, objects of the first raid in the book, eventually become our allies. The active military does not have the vote. The veteran-only franchise is depicted as having come into being more-or-less by accident, the instructor says "No, there is no theoretical reason why this system is preferable to several possible others; there are some reasons why it does work; the only reason it still exists is because it does work".

Heinlein's MI is on a super-volunteer basis, very difficult to join and very easy to leave (except in the 'committed' situation, such as in action, real or simulated; you do not cop out on a specific job to which you are committed and in which others are depending on you); even on the ship before a drop, a man can decide he's had it and resign, up to the moment he climbs into the capsule.

Heinlein is not exempt from misgauging his audience and losing a point through overselling, the "I like fallout" sequence is an example, and not the only one. Let's consider his SeaCon Speech (1961) for instance:

That speech hammered on the theme that current events would inevitably wind up in total war or in surrender by our side ($\frac{1}{3}$ of us dying in the next decade or so in either case). At least 90% of the audience took it at face-value whether or not they agreed. It was pretty obvious to me that the speech was intended to have a deliberate effect and to rouse a specific response; I asked Heinlein about this, and in such a way as not to tip off my guess unless it turned out to be correct. As I'd guessed, his idea was to shatter complacency and to spark the listener to insist and act upon the third (unstated) alternative; that we can tough it out without either precipitating Atomigeddon or surrendering. About 10% of the audience responded in that fashion and not one of them seemed to realise that he was doing anything but refuting Heinlein!

I found STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND highly interesting, and was very disappointed at the treatment given it by reviewers, both fan and professional. In most cases, the reviewer's prime concern appeared to be getting himself tabbed as Safely Square, particularly on the Sex Angle. OK, I'm as square as the next - but I don't see what this has to do with a fictional sex-sharing group or the rationale behind it in a given story. Or maybe we are a touchier batch than I would have thought possible without this example to hand.

Most reviewers also appear to lose all powers of discrimination in confronting the "religious" content of the book. Orville Prescott (New York Times, Aug. 4th, 1961) scoffed Mike Smith's little ol' training school off as "his own religion, a compound of Martian metaphysics and a mass sex orgy" ("A friendly little orgy", said Mr Prescott, "can be funny in fiction if described with a proper combination of farce and ribald gaiety - a la Thorne Smith". OK, Mr Prescott, you're Safely Square; pass, friend) we see that Prescott somehow does not feel that even a "friendly little orgy...in fiction" can be treated otherwise than as a farce.

Alfred Bester, (F&SF) was more cautious: "It was, we believe, Mr Heinlein's intent to weave religion and sexual matters into a related design.." But Bester joined Prescott in choosing "sophomoric" as the scoff-word to excuse him from any deeper consideration of Heinlein's premises.

James Blish (Warhoon-13) was the best of the lot; he not only closed and grappled with a number of points evaded by other reviewers, it was also obvious that ol' Blish mostly knows what he is talking about. But even Blish fell for the fallacy that 'Heinlein proposes a religion that compounds orgiastics with the worst of BillySunday-type revivalism'.

Heinlein proposed no religion. Valentine Michael Smith advocated no religion. Heinlein set up a satire (the Fosterites) that Kingsley Amis would have swum the Atlantic to pin laurels on, if Pohl and Kornbluth had written it. Mike then set up a religious 'front' for his limited-clientele School of the Grok. Jubal Harshaw (who speaks for Heinlein if any character does) was as nauseated by Mike's trap-pings as by the Fosterites.

The religious angle of STRANGER is fully contained in the implications of the universal phrase, "Thou Art God", which can be interpreted to mean that Godhood and awareness are synonymous - or in several other ways, to be fair about it. But any reader who was paying attention could see that neither Heinlein, Jubal, nor Mike plugged for the Fosterite hoopla as a religious principle.

The book runs to five parts and 408 pages. The first 2 parts (216pp) are a straightforward high-powered science fiction story that drew no fire at all; it's that final 196pp that gets 'em all churned up. I do not necessarily hold a brief for the free-sharing of sexual favours with a group, but I do find it odd that no reviewer has attempted to discuss the possibly-insurmountable problems that would confront real, live, non-Martian humans in such a situation. And my religion is my own business... but I think Heinlein once again oversold his point, that jealousy is destructive. And I'm afraid you will just have to take my word for that statement, as of now.

Elinor once asked me how I would describe Heinlein-the-man in as few words as possible. The phrase that leapt to mind was "Guts, with Grace". That was some time ago, but I have not as yet thought of a better description. A man could do a lot worse than that.

F.M. Busby

SCI-CON 70, the 1970 BSFA Convention, will be held over Easter weekend, 1970, at the Royal Hotel, Southampton Row, London. Details and preliminary registration:- George Hay, chairman, 411 West Green Road, Tottenham, London N.15.

POUL ANDERSON

'nourished whole generations'

IT IS an honour to be asked to contribute to a symposium on Robert Heinlein, but there probably isn't much I can say that others have not already said. To me he is a towering figure, and no other writer in science fiction has influenced me more. To meet him at last, some years ago, and find that he is also warmly human, was quite an experience.

I might offer a brief remark on a couple of aspects of his work. One is his pioneering. Almost everything he has done has broken new ground - the future history, the political realism, the intelligently-written juvenile, more recently the use of science fiction techniques to explore depths of sociology, psychology, and the spirit - to say nothing of innumerable marvelous, fresh ideas which have nourished whole generations of less original writers.

The second aspect is his devotion to liberty. Far from being dictatorially or militaristically minded, as his detractors claim, he is one of the most eloquent advocates of freedom that we have had since Jefferson. It's only that, like Jefferson, he realises that freedom is not easily gotten nor cheaply kept. Robert Heinlein is more than a good influence on science fiction, he is a good influence on the world.

Poul Anderson

M. JOHN HARRISON

'the answer is Chicago'

HEINLEIN IS essentially a purveyor of shoddy goods; his stereotypes are mental and emotional cripples; his ideologies are shopsold and terrifyingly obsolescent; his image-vocabulary is quite barren, his books are as undernourished as a Jew in a Konzentrationslager.

One could forgive the rotten prose, forget the whole sordid bag of 'professional' gimmicks, even regard his blatant crypto-Fascist militarism with a certain amount of amusement, if it were not for the tragic receptivity of his audience - their adolescent need for this sort of comfort.

The package-deal of overt xenophobia, martial oppression and controlled violence advocated in STARSHIP TROOPERS; the inept sexual voyeurism of THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS (so delightfully reminiscent of those Peeping Tom devices advertised in Heinlein's true medium, the American stag magazines); these things are comforters, part opiate, part masturbation. This is a full-grown man pandering to disturbed and uncomfortable children, supplying catharsis by feeding back their own fears and desires (in STARSHIP TROOPERS we bring back the lovely lash, in THE MOON ETC we cohabit vicariously with our mothers).

Fair enough, you can't quarrel too hard with a man's subject matter (although if he really believes those things I feel sorry for him); but feedback of that kind acts as an amplifier of the original distorted signal - how many little plastic models of himself has Heinlein created, and each one primed to zip out and implement the savage bipolar creed? The answer is Chicago.

M. John Harrison

JACK WILLIAMSON

'the Indo-European tradition'

HEINLEIN, BALLARD, AND THE GREAT DEBATE:

The basic business of science fiction is entertainment. But, more than most fiction, or at least in a different way, it makes entertainment out of dramatised ideas. I'm delighted with Jannick Storm's interview with J.G. Ballard in the February number of SPECULATION, because Ballard pigeonholes himself and his whole "new thing" so neatly in my favourite scheme for the discussion of those ideas.

Ballard is an outspoken pessimist about science and the future it is shaping. He attacks "this optimistic literature, the Heinlein-Asimov-Clarke type of attitude toward the possibilities of science" for being "completely false." But this pessimism is not so new as he implies when he says, "I am the new wave!..... I think it's only at the beginning."

Zamiatin was equally pessimistic, back in the twenties, when he looked at the Soviet efforts to build a scientific utopia and wrote his great satire, WE. Wells was just as pessimistic at the beginning of his career, when he saw the flaws in the nineteenth-century idea of progress and wrote such things as THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU. Swift was no more hopeful about science and human reason two centuries earlier, when we wrote GULLIVER'S TRAVELS. The same gloomy attitude, I suspect, might be traced all the way back to the builders of the pyramids.

Now and then for the past dozen years I have been making occasional efforts to look objectively at science fiction, and this classification into optimists and pessimists is the most useful one I have found. (Heinlein and Asimov and Clarke were the leading optimists discussed in my unpublished thesis for the master's degree, balanced by such pessimists as Ray Bradbury and Aldous Huxley.)

It occurs to me now that this great debate might be followed back through five thousand years of history, to the cultural contrast between the old Egyptians and the primitive Indo-Europeans, whose most enduring monument is their language. The significant difference between the two cultures, I think, lies in their different solutions to the fundamental human conflict between society and the individual.

In Egypt the self was nothing. Every individual from Pharaoh to slave was crushed into subjection to the ponderous theocratic social machine, all fixed blocks in a human pyramid. Even today, a glimpse of the weathered stone pyramids and the shattered symbols of the cruel pantheon of monster-headed gods is acutely depressing to me.

Among the Indo-Europeans the self stood for more. Odysseus is the type, in fact he's the typical Heinlein hero. Possessing a flexible competence and a wide-ranging freedom that even a pharaoh might envy, he's the favoured friend of Athena, by no means her slave. Men of his pattern challenged the pharaohs, sacked Rome, discovered America ahead of Columbus.

These two contrasting cultures have been colliding and interacting for many thousand years. The consequences are so complex that clear statements are hard to make about them, but we are the heirs of both. We can see the shadow of Egypt, I believe, over the Jewish Jehovah, over Assyria and Persia and Rome, over the Catholic Church. It reaches all the way, I suspect, to Ballard and his dark new wave.

(Cont/d)...

The brighter spirit of the Indo-European Greeks is still visible, I think, since the Renaissance, in Protestantism and democracy and modern science. I think it persists in what Sir Charles Snow calls the "culture of science".

Such sweeping statements, I realise, are dangerous over-simplifications. Nobody is fully optimistic or fully pessimistic. There is a kind of Egyptian solidarity in the scientific establishment which tries to crush each new idea. Yet, teaching a college course in science fiction, I have come to organise most of the materials in terms of this old debate about the human meaning of science.

Swift makes a convenient starting point for the course. Wells confessed his admiration for Swift, and showed it in many early works - in his second phase he achieved a sort of desperate now-or-never optimism, for which he gives credit to the Greek influence of Plato's REPUBLIC.

A whole train of pessimists followed the early Wells. Zamiatin's WE was translated item-by-item into Orwell's better-known 1984. There's Huxley's BRAVE NEW WORLD, and most of Fred Pohl, and Ballard's own work. - I like 'The Drowned Giant'. The pessimists appear terrified by science and change. As a group they tend to seek their values in the past, as the pharaohs did. They are likely to retreat from objective reality, as Ballard does, into "inner space". The most Egyptian of them tend to deny that the optimists have a position at all.

Yet, in spite of all this bitterness and gloom, the optimists survive. In the practical world, I think Marx and Darwin and Freud belong to the Indo-European tradition. So do the cosmonauts and the astronauts. So do Heinlein and Clarke and Asimov.

It's by no means true, of course, that these three writers see the whole Universe bathed in rose-coloured light. But Asimov's robots - unlike my own humanoids - are useful servants of men. Heinlein, especially in the wonderful juvenile novels he did for Scribners, shows science exploring space and conquering new worlds for humanity. Clarke's 2001 is a dazzling panorama of human evolution from the caves to the stars.

Trying to be an objective judge of this epochal debate, I find no overwhelming evidence on either side. First of all, I think one must admit that the best pessimistic fiction has been more interesting and more popular than the best optimistic fiction. But this difference, I believe, is more an accidental psychological effect than it is a logical basis for pessimism.

The interest of fiction comes largely from suspense and conflict, which in turn come from evil and danger. Plato's REPUBLIC and Bellamy's LOOKING BACKWARD and Well's A MODERN UTOPIA are slow reading because of the absence of any convincing dramatic menace to human progress. Thus the technical demands of suspenseful writing lead to a pure adventitious exaggeration of everything the pessimist can dread. A forest burning is always more exciting than a forest growing.

Personally, I feel reasonably cheerful about the future, yet my own most successful stories, 'With Folded Hands' and THE HUMANOIDS have been as gloomy as Ballard. Even when I set out deliberately to write an optimistic utopian novel, BRIGHT NEW UNIVERSE, as a more hopeful reply to Huxley's BRAVE NEW WORLD - the result was an ambiguously pessimistic statement that the forces in human nature opposed to progress are so powerful that the creation of a really better society requires an improbable intervention from external benevolence.

In the last analysis, I suppose one's choice is less a rational decision than a purely emotional attitude - which is likely to become less hopeful with advancing age. In spite of all the literary power of the pessimists, and all their sanctions, from religion and tradition - as useful to them as to the first pharaohs - each new generation is born full of optimists. Consequently, the world is always full of people eagerly digging for new knowledge, recklessly trying to build a better world, and hopefully reading such optimists as Heinlein and Asimov and Clarke.

Jack Williamson.

NORMAN SPINRAD

'a two-edged sword'

THERE IS little doubt that the works of Robert A. Heinlein have had great influence upon modern genre science fiction, and, through this moulding of modern non-genre science fiction's literary forbearer, upon what is variously called 'speculative fiction', 'New wave science fiction' or 'serious science fiction', as well. On an obvious level, two generations of hack writers have mined the Heinlein lode for basic story-ideas. The colony-starship that goes astray and becomes a world unto itself, the invasion of Earth by hidden mind-controlling aliens, and innumerable other genre SF cliches were once bright new original ideas introduced by Robert A. Heinlein. All too many SF writers owe Heinlein a debt that can actually be measured in dollars and cents.

Probably the Heinlein juveniles have had the broadest effect on science fiction, of any of his work. Many (perhaps a gross understatement) of the people reading and writing all kinds of science fiction today were first introduced to SF by the Heinlein juveniles. So much fiction aimed at young teenagers in the 1950's was purile drivel that insulted our intelligence and attempted to make us enjoy what we ought to enjoy reading, that the existence of the Heinlein juvenile novels gave science fiction an overwhelming advantage in competing for the attention of intelligent pre-teenagers and young barely-post-pubic types. Heinlein had a proper grasp of the true level of intelligence and sophistication of the audience that publishers marketed "juvenile novels" to, and he wrote directly for the young teenage audience, not to please adult notions of what juvenile tastes were supposed to be. Heinlein was our introduction to science fiction, and because his juvenile science fiction novels were so superior to everything else in the juvenile category, our enthusiasm for Heinlein SF juveniles became an enthusiasm for science fiction, by extension.

This influence, however, is a two-edged sword. Although the Heinlein juveniles oriented a great many intelligent adolescents toward science fiction, the SF that was produced in the late '50's tended to cater to this juvenile enthusiasm as a result. Because of the Heinlein juveniles, there was a huge preponderance of teenagers in the SF audience of the 1950's. Because of this, the commercial SF of the time became a literature written for juveniles. Because of this, genre SF reached stagnation when its juvenile audience reached adulthood in the early 1960's.

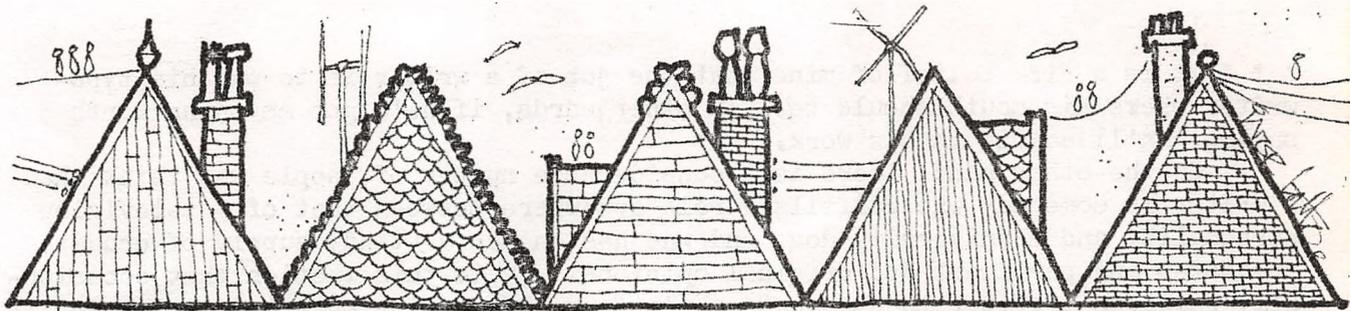
Because of the sterile quality of commercial SF in the early 1960's, serious science fiction writers were forced to step out of the traditional science fiction parameters in the mid-sixties in order to write genuine science fiction of literary quality and a level of sophistication suitable for an adult readership. And because people need labels for such phenomena, we have the 'new wave'.

Thus, by stretching a valid point to its outer limits of elasticity, I have proven that Robert A. Heinlein is the bastard grandfather, twice-removed, of the 'new wave'. How does that grab you, Lester?

Norman Spinrad.

OPINION 26: Ed Meskys (IPSO FACTO 4, 1962)

"After the 'Hoag' story in the Oct. '42 Unknown, Heinlein had nothing published until 'The Green Hills of Earth' in the Feb. '47 SatEvePost, a gap of 5 years. Now I know he stopped writing in 1942 because he went into the service at that time, but what kept him from resuming before he did? What did he do in that interval? And what was he doing while IN the service that kept him SO busy that he couldn't write ANY SF? Finally, why (after his initial successes) did he abandon the lucrative slick field? Did he find the medium too restricted?"



CHRISTOPHER PRIEST VIEW OF SUBURBIA

* * * Before I began this month's section of the column, Pete Weston suggested that I include in it a piece about Robert Heinlein. This is an all-Heinlein issue of SPECULATION for all that, so it seemed a reasonable request. However, on looking at the rest of the competition that Pete showed me, it seemed that all the worthwhile things to be said about this man are being said by people more articulate and better qualified than myself.

In which case, I'll confine myself to a small anecdote which seems to me to help express my point of view.

A few months ago Charles Platt visited us for a day, and a generally amiable time was had by all. However, at one point Charles went over to the bookcase and looked at my collection which, in a bored moment about a fortnight before, I had sorted into alphabetical order by author. Peering at the top shelf, Charles said in that sneer he reserves for his best moments: "Got lots of lovely Asimov books I see!" The implication being, presumably, that for all my renouncement of hard-core SF, I still clung thoughtlessly to the trophies of my adolescence. All this fits into Charles' basic philosophy, since the hoarding of now-worthless relics (such as old and once-loved SF novels) represents in Freudian terms a shit complex which every child is supposed to pass through, but out of which some people never grow. Charles takes this theme to its limit in GARBAGE WORLD which, read as an allegory of fandom, certainly has its amusing moments.

Anyway, hanging my head I had to admit that I was reluctant to part with my beloved Asimov's, and that I wasn't the true-blue new-waver I pretended to be. Later, when Charles had gone, I went to the bookcase and furtively counted my Asimovs. I had twelve, and suddenly their presence on the shelf seemed to be a condemnation. In defence, I began counting my Disch's, and Aldisses, and Ballard's and Delany's and Zelazny's. Only much later did I discover with an almost horrific thrill that the author of whose books I had by far the most was Robert A. Heinlein.

Without going into details and specifics, my generalised attitude to life is poles apart from Heinlein's. I do not like or agree with most of his heroes. I do not like or agree with his philosophies. Sometimes, I cannot stand his writing style.

But there is something about a Heinlein book which reacts chemically with my brain, and which sucks me down into his private world against all my better judgements. Only once in my life have I ever read a book which has so interested me that I have become oblivious to the real world. That occasion was on a train journey several years ago, when I missed my destination by four stops and suffered great inconvenience as a result. The book was THE PUPPET MASTERS, and it is the compulsive quality in this novel and in so many others of Heinlein's, that is for me what distinguishes his work.

(Cont/d)....

* * * It is a firm belief of mine that the job of a writer is to put his type-writer where his mouth should be. In other words, if he's got anything worth saying, he'll say it in his work.

On the other hand, there is a considerable number of people who think that a writer is somebody who fulfills a role somewhere between that of a television personality and a university don, and who has on tap a steady supply of erudite anecdotes and pertinent and original opinions. It is this faction that occasionally requires a writer to step onto a platform and provide entertainment. And it is also this section of the public that provides the audience for such events as literary conferences.

Which brings me, by my usual roundabout route, to talk about one particular conference I recently had occasion to attend. In fact, my attendance there was largely accidental and the result of several last-minute panics on behalf of the organiser, the gist of which was: "Anyone, but anyone at all will do." Hence me.

Thus armed with a hastily gathered supply of anecdotes and opinions, and in the good company of Norman Spinrad and Terry Champagne, we departed virtually the same day for John Calder's Third International Literary Conference (the somewhat imposing title was his) in Harrogate.

....And were duly met by Mr Calder in a pale blue Daimler amid an infectious air of nervous tension and makeshift plans. Somehow those first few minutes in Harrogate Station car-park set the pattern for the entire conference; the unnatural formality, the awkward introductions, the jostling for seating-position in the car, and the overall self-consciousness of it all. To take the parallel even further, it is tempting to observe that when Mr Calder took the wrong turning and drove his Daimler down a flight of steps, and wrenched away a lot of what is normally found underneath cars, the fate of the entire conference was sealed.

Without going into details of what went on (most moments of least non-happeningness were extracted by the Press coverage) suffice it to say that a lot of people came a very long way to listen to writers talk about writing, and, I think, a lot of them went away disappointed. At one point in a totally absorbing discussion between three members of the audience as to whether or not the lay-out of the seating was 'democratic', it came home to me with perfect clarity that it is almost impossible to collect writers together and make them talk about writing.

Unlike any other profession which meets in conference (cf. almost anything you like) when writers get together there is very little to say to each other about writing. And this, I think, is part of the reason the Harrogate audience didn't get what it thought it paid for.

Not that this was the whole reason. Without mincing words, about 90% of the formal proceedings of the conference was just plain boring. (I was the tall thin one on the end of the row, yawning behind my science fiction label.)

Anyway, for a few minutes on the last day the discussion looked as if it might actually begin to breathe, if not live a little. The topic turned to the novel of the future; what it will look like, who will write it, who will read it, how it will be produced and so forth. Wild statements issued forth from the panel; the novel will be very short, the novel will be very long, the novel will have no plot, the novel will have no sentences, the novel will have no words, even. Novels will be televised, filmed, videotaped, recorded, concrete-sculpted, thrown away after use like paper knickers.

It was somewhere around here that a spark of interest gleamed through the alcoholic haze (before each session, nerves were heavily sedated), and I began to rouse myself to speak. Almost as if this were a signal, the subject changed again and I subsided, as the psychological break-up of the family unit in the cities of tomorrow was once again argued interminably.

(Cont/d)...

SPECULATION

What had stirred my reaction, I think, was the widespread assumption that the novel, as a succession of paper pages with words printed on them, was a form that was in the process of changing into something else. In other words, that its days were numbered and that the Great Era of Mixed Media would soon be upon us.

This assumption was largely the product of certain writers on the platform who choose to call themselves 'experimental writers'. It is these experimentalists who are more concerned with fashion than society, and it is surely the latter and not the former that decides the evolution of art.

It is true to say that the novel as we know it is in a state of development; but then everything's on the move. But does the word 'development' necessarily mean (a) obscurity, fragmentation, esotericism, non-linearity, etc, etc, or (b) that the written word is on the way out?

Perhaps I'm bedevilled by an over-simplistic mind, but I tend to see a novel as a sequence of words which becomes, through the medium of a book, a series of resonances in the mind of the reader that means something to him. And I see a writer as someone who puts those words onto paper.

When a novel is presented as a piece of tape in a video machine, or a voice on a recorder, or an image on the TV screen, it becomes something else and can no longer be called a novel. And if that happens, then the person who creates it is no longer a writer.

While accepting that these bastard art-forms will almost certainly come into being, I would say that the Novel-as-a-Book will continue to exist.

People will go to their cinemas, televisions, recorders, mixed-media projectors, or whathaveyou for whichever vicarious experiences they wish to receive. But they will still turn to a book for the peculiar, personal reaction they get from it.

And I state that (prediction? prophesy?) in the full knowledge of the inadvisability of so doing.

But what, then, will be the role of the writer? The answer, I think, is that in the future, as now, the writer will be encumbered with three basic responsibilities.

(1) He must write for himself; putting onto paper that which he can justify to himself, and that which pleases him. From the artistic point of view this is the most important of the three.

(2) He must write for his editor; putting onto paper that which he knows or hopes his publisher will invest in, and thus will enable himself to reach an audience. From the commercial or financial point of view this is the most important.

(3) He must write for his reader; putting onto paper those words that will so please the reader as to set up the kind of communication between them that both desire. From the reader's point of view (and it is he that calls the ultimate tune) this is the most important of the three.

What all this means in effect is that the novel will not alter basically in the future. We may see a change in different kinds of narrative, in new kinds of plotting, in an overall condensing, perhaps, of the literary form; but narrative will continue to exist, and so will plots. We will continue to see experiments, and they will continue to affect the novel form in whichever way they choose to push. A novel by Len Deighton, for example, would be virtually incomprehensible to a contemporary reader of (say) Anthony Trollope's. Yet both kinds of work are of the novel form, and can be recognised by us as such. In a hundred years, the readers then will probably acknowledge a similar situation.

Anyway, that's approximately what I was going to say, and if it seems a particularly deathless set of opinions, then it's about par for the Harrogate course.

(Cont/d).....

* * * Lest anyone think that the above is an entry into the New Wave/Old Wave controversy that is presently boring everyone to death, let me run hastily away from the topic. (Was it me, incidentally, who first applied the phrase 'new wave' to New Worlds...? See SPECULATION-8, back back back a few years. If so, apologies to all.)

The odd thing about the conference was that it was supposed to include all the exciting and progressive writers, and yet the various staggering concepts of literature and the future that they proffered were the sort of thing that New Worlds discarded as old hat three years ago. I kept wishing Mike Moorcock, J.G. Ballard or Brian Aldiss would suddenly pop up through a trapdoor and do a turn. The best thing about the conference, on the other hand, was that it was an opportunity to meet people, and the rest of this column is about just that. If you object to name-dropping you may as well leave me right here.

As I said before, we travelled to Harrogate with Norman Spinrad and Terry Champagne. Norman's appearance is deceptive. He is short, fair-haired and has a mild expression. In fact, he has an enviable capacity to talk fluently and forthrightly on almost any subject (he calls it gibbering), and most of his opinions are radical. In many respects Norman was the star of the conference, mainly, I think, because he was so unexpected. At one point he became involved in a verbal brawl with Erich Fried (qv) and produced a fantastic piece of impromptu invective that livened things up no end. But he goes on acting out of character. Apparently he often smokes a pipe when he's writing. Can you imagine BUG JACK BARRON being written through a cloud of pipe-smoke, for God's sake?

Terry Champagne is an incredibly beautiful person who wrote an incredibly beautiful story in New Worlds called 'Surface If You Can'. Terry said she once worked as a topless dancer in a Californian club, though whether it was with or without nipple-tassles she didn't say. I'm fascinated by nipple-tassles.

Of the other delegates at the conference, the one I was most interested to meet was William Burroughs. Mr Burroughs is nothing like you would expect, once you've grown accustomed to his cadaverous appearance. Like a lot of people there he was very nervous. Once, when he stood up to speak, his hands were shaking so much that the microphone began to click and splutter through the P.A. system, and a member of the audience at the back interrupted to enquire whether Mr Burroughs was radioactive or not.

I was going to devote a whole section to Erich Fried, but decided against it. I gather from what I was told that he writes quote experimental prose unquote, and is Germany's foremost translator of Shakespeare. It seemed to be his intention in coming to the conference to create a public scene, and at the very first excuse he blustered angrily at the world, and then walked in protest from the hall. God help German students of Shakespeare.

In a recent issue of New Worlds, B.S. Johnson's latest novel (the one packaged loose in a box, THE UNFORTUNATES), was described as being "ten per cent inspiration and ninety per cent desperation". The unfortunate Mr Johnson was there, looking somewhat ill at ease. His most inspired contribution to the desperation of the conference was throwing paper darts at the audience.

Alan Burns, also billed as an experimental writer, has a gentle manner and a persuasive tone. He was recently awarded £2,000 by the Arts Council, and his latest novel, (BABEL) seems to be nowhere available. It does not appear to be stocked by our local bookshop, and the public library has refused to obtain it. (I asked them to.) Perhaps it's dirty.

Finally, the only lady-writer on the platform was Eva Figes, who tended to steal a large part of the show by wearing a white mini-dress. Miss Figes, who has a lot of things to say worth saying, had had part of her expenses paid by her publisher, and I-wish-I'd-thought-of-that-one-myself.

People, we meet people.....

(Cont/d)....

Before finishing this thing off, I'd like to add that I recently met Keith Laumer at John Brunner's. It is with authority, then, that I can now report that Mr Laumer is certainly not Robert Heinlein. He is, though, witty, interesting, and polite (or at least he was the evening we saw him).

Try as I might I can't think of any more names to drop, so that's the lot. Thirteen in eight hundred words isn't too bad, I suppose. Keith Laumer has gone to tour Europe on a borrowed motorcycle (he said he was going to learn how to ride it on the way to Dover); Norman and Terry are doing the same in an incredibly beaten-up Ford Popular without an air-cleaner. Americans can get away with almost anything.

Christopher Priest.

OPINION ! - Some views on current science fiction.

OPINION 27: Intellectual snobbery ? (Pam Bulmer)

"...Most of the bad feeling around, about the 'new wave', isn't about the 'new wave' at all, it's about the inverted intellectual snobbery that's crept into SF, and to me it implies a sense of intellectual inferiority in those who use it!

OPINION 28: Far above his fiction ? (Barry N. Malzberg)

"...Budrys is an interesting figure: I've long felt that his criticism is far above his fiction which with a few exceptions strikes me as quite routine. A critical article on Budrys book reviews might be genuinely useful but I'm convinced that a good scholarly study of his fiction would only show gthat he writes like William Tenn or Damon Knight would, if they had been educated in Analog/Astounding and had done a little reading in the antique romantic novel. "

OPINION 29: Not Much Difference ! (John Foyster)

"...I was intrigued by David Redd's remarks (in SPECULATION-19) about the low stage of literary development of the SF 'classics'. It's an argument and a feeling I've nurtured in myself. But about ten days ago I read my first Lensman novel - TRIPLANETARY - which surely fits this category. Smith is even upheld as the master of cardboard puppets and soppy dialogue. Well, I guess it is true. But I found to my astonishment that there wasn't really much difference between the characters in TRIPLANETARY and the characters in the average story in current issues of New Worlds or Analog (to bracket the leaders). Indeed, Smith seems somewhat better in some respects, and I'm now looking forward to reading SKYLARK DUQUESNE which I had previously avoided like poison. "

OPINION 30: Water-filled balloon! (Brian Stableford)

"...Unfortunately I haven't yet read a story by Larry Niven that I've liked. I was appalled that NEUTRON STAR should have won a Hugo. As Niven says - boasts, even (SPECULATION-23), he lacks empathy. Not only does this make his characters dull (something else he seems unworried about), it makes any sort of communication via his stories both difficult and superficial. He just does not reach me in his writing. The rather uninspiring idea behind NEUTRON STAR came across with the impact of a water-filled balloon."

*** Your own thoughts on science fiction are welcomed for future OPINION columns, as are further reactions to the comments published above. ***

MELTING POT

Letters from readers

I would like to thank all those who have written to me during the past months, and your comments upon this current issue will be very much appreciated.

PRW



Frederik Pohl, New Jersey, USA

Dear Mr Weston, "Since your deadline is tomorrow I have little hope of making it. Which is a pity. Bob Heinlein has always struck me as the Compleat Science fiction author; what is good about his work is what is good about SF in general, and the few things that are wrong with it are matters which would be more serious in any other field than they would be in SF. I know of no other SF writer who has produced so much over so long a period at so high a level of inventiveness and competency ... and I only wish I could say all this properly and at more length for you to print."

David Redd, Haverfordwest.

Dear Pete, "I can't really say that Heinlein means much to me. All I can offer is a personal thought or two on some aspects of his work. His main influence was on an earlier generation of writers, when he began writing for Astounding and showed what could be done in the medium. Pulp fiction was generally terrible, but people were beginning to realise that better things were possible. Heinlein appeared in the right place and at the right time to help improve the medium a bit. I suppose you could say he provided a focus of intentions, giving a practical demonstration of Campbell's brilliant new (prewar) editorial policy. While recognising his importance in this way, I must admit that stories such as 'Universe' and BEYOND THIS HORIZON are practically unreadable - for me, anyway. I can remember being extremely disappointed when ORPHANS OF THE SKY came out and I discovered what everyone had been comparing NON-STOP to!

(Cont/d)...

SPECULATION

I was much happier with Heinlein's post-war juveniles. At the age of ten I read STARMAN JONES and thought it pretty good. I still do. In later life I've read most of the others, regarding them more-or-less as dramatised articles on the future. As such they stand up remarkably well, in particular RED PLANET and FARMER IN THE SKY. The scientific extrapolation is the aspect of Heinlein which I admire and would like to emulate someday.

Coming up to his more recent novels - well, let somebody else tackle these. The only one after STARSHIP TROOPERS I have the slightest desire to open again is PODKAYNE OF MARS. Incidentally, in the useful HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION, Panshin says that brother Clarke would not be able to accomplish all the twelve feats listed in the book, not with an IQ of only 160. Obviously Clarke's 13th feat was cheating in an IQ test...!

Larry Niven has a point when he mentions Heinlein's humour (SPEC-23). In TUNNEL IN THE SKY, Heinlein has turned his usual hero upside-down and is happily throwing rocks at him. However, Heinlein is in deadly earnest most of the time, it seems. Someone might like to look closely at the inversions in FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD, as well. I'd be interested in a theory which would account for the dialogue-only opening. Panshin says the book is odd and leave it at that. Perhaps he or someone else will return to the matter in your special issue."

Daniel F. Galouye, Louisiana.

Dear Peter, "Our rendezvous with Bob and Ginny, and Bob's subsequent schedule did come off exactly as I outlined them in my last letter - with one exception: Before meeting RAH on the day prior to blastoff we enjoyed the most delightful experience of "bumping into" Arthur C. Clarke in a dining room in Cocoa Beach, just south of the Cape. Hadn't actually met him before, although we'd appeared side-by-side in symposiums and tables of contents. So this encounter was, indeed, a crowning bonus in our visit to Florida. When, later that day, we were able to manoeuvre Bob and Art together, we were rewarded by seeing these two esteemed gentlemen embrace each other like long-separated brothers. It was quite gratifying to be together with these two giants who vie only with each other for the distinction of being the world's most capable and most accomplished science fiction author.

In his first telecast over CBS-TV during the moon landing, Bob was beside himself with exuberance and had this to say (slightly paraphrased): "Strike down the old calendar! This is the First Day of the Year One, New Era!" "

** This is the end of the material about Robert A. Heinlein in this issue, and the remaining letters in MELTING POT have been received over several months and refer to previous issues of the magazine. Nevertheless, I shall be surprised and disappointed if no further comments on Mr Heinlein's work are received for future issues! PRW **

Bruce Gillespie, Baccus Marsh, Australia.

Dear Peter, "I don't take very kindly to reviews that start "Like all really good writers, Thomas M Disch has a style that is unique to himself!" Apart from the fact that the last two words are redundant, this statement poses the automatic basis of all reviews as an original statement. Even the so-called 'hack' or house writer would need to be the legendary author-computer in order to completely hide his personality in the web of words that he creates. However, even on David Pringle's assumptions about fiction, assumptions I will have to guess at, one cannot call Thomas M. Disch a great individualist (SPECULATION-22).

Disch represents a cross-section of writers who all-too rarely invade the science fiction field. Disch likes to tell his stories as sparingly as possible, in the most efficient and the clearest, most attractive prose he can shape.

In the UNDER COMPULSION collection the all-pervading slickness of the prose eventually led me to write the Doubting Thomas review that appears in SCIENCE FICTION COMMENTARY-2. When one considers the magazines where many of Disch's early stories appeared, it is easy to see why Disch gained such an enviable reputation so early in his career. 'Descending' comes from a Cele Goldsmith Fantastic, for instance. Disch's attitude to life is fairly constant - doubt the world, but don't trouble yourself too much doing so. CAMP CONCENTRATION breaks the rule, of course, but even in that novel the Disch persona does not quite mesh with that of his main character. Pringle's statement no doubt referred to the word-conjurors; - Delany, Zelazny, and the like. Through under-statement, not over-statement, Disch uses words, and is a verbal personality, to a far greater extent than either of those writers.

A SPECTRE IS HAUNTING TEXAS is a poor book because the acting is very bad. The mask on Leiber's face never looks like a separate identity called La Crux. All of Scully's gestures are empty. Texas is ^{so} shadowy a fantasy that Scully never grapples with any of the props, let alone the sterilely-glamorous girlfriends. Is the old actor losing his touch, or did he simply place a wrong step? Judging from Leiber's other work of recent years, I see no reason to believe the former view. "

** I had better explain that at frequent intervals I receive closely-typed letters from the Bruce Gillespie/John Foyster duo in Australia, both engaged in turning out similarly-spaced fanzines devoted to SF criticism (much of which I'd welcome in SPECULATION, hint). I feel both grateful for their thorough commentaries on SPEC and at the same time guilty because I haven't been reciprocating to anything like the same degree. Normally, as Dick Bergeron said to me (editor of Warhoon), you either produce a magazine or write letters of comments to other people's offerings. You don't get time to do both. **

Barry N. Malzberg, New York.

Dear Mr Weston, "I really have less and less to say about science fiction while, in general terms, hating it more and more. I might point out for the possible interest of your readers my observation that for a field which has always prided itself on its originality and time-blasting universe-heaving investigation of new frontiers, science fiction has had great difficulty in developing a linguistic (to say nothing of a body of work) of its own. The current "new wave"/old wave controversy, for instance, wheels about a term imported from France ten years ago to describe the work of a certain minor film-makers, and the term 'Milford Mafia' which is a fighting thrust here among the US intelligensia is similarly imported from the cheerful habit of the Kennedy years when the phrase 'Irish Mafia' was thought to be descriptive of the administrative people surrounding the President. In short, the spectacle of polarisation is depressing enough, but when the polarisers are shredding themselves to death on terminology which is not even original, one senses the gloomiest implications for the field. "

Perry A. Chapdelaine, Tennessee.

Dear Peter, "For thirty years, continuously and constantly, I've read science fiction. If John Campbell told me to roll over and play dead I'd probably do it. Eighteen years ago I knew quite a handful of the greats in the field on a non-fan, other-kind-of-activity basis, never dreaming that such things as fans often made their lives heaven or hell, as the case might be.

In all that time I neither talked to a fan nor saw a fanzine or speculation about science fiction! Would you believe it? - how great was my surprise and consternation to learn of people who not only could remember every science fiction story they had read, but how it related to every other SF story. (Cont/d)..

Further, they could tell what the story really meant, why it was good, and they could compare it against every other story. The mental permutations and combinations made me dizzy. A writer's conference I recently attended with some of the modern greats gave me the same feeling. "Could this be real?" I asked myself again. And I had the audacity to think that I could learn to write!

One more comment on me and I'll get back to you and yours. Harlan Ellison has taboos. He's rejected three stories of mine on the following basis; Story 1, too confusing; story 2, not capable of being understood; story 3, poorly done. I agreed with his analysis on every one. Looks as though DANGEROUS VISIONS number 2 will be non-confusing, understandable, and well-done, story by story.

Back to SPECULATION. I asked John Campbell who should replace him when he left. He did not mention Harry Harrison. He did say, loud and clear, that it ought to be Poul Anderson, because Poul could handle hard SF as well as fantasy.

I liked the analysis on DANGEROUS VISIONS by Pamela and Ken Bulmer. It was a genuine, honest evaluation - that I like. Neither was it pretentious - the-see-how-smart-and-clever-I-am sort of thing. I told Harlan, nose-tip to nose-tip, so to speak, that I thought his DANGEROUS VISIONS was a real contribution to the field; but, I don't understand everything in it!

Pamela and Ken are a cut above me. They were able to understand everything in it. As a professor in college (and a very beginning SF writer) I sold my soul to the devil and spent hours designing a story which was sure to break every taboo in Harlan's carefree heart. It was impossible to understand on first or second or third reading. Once my explanation was read, it flowed like watered honey. Yes, Sylvia, Harlan has taboos!

I appreciated Christopher Priest's comments on distribution of SF, and in particular his struggles with W.H. Smith and their return to cowboy stories. I'm with W.H. Smith. So long as the standard for SF is New Worlds anti-heroism, slobberism, Hitlerite-Ghenghis Khan-ism type of literature, I'll go with the cowboy stories.

Funny thing, when I was young, thirty years and more ago, the greatest heroes were those scientists who also wrote some science fiction. Here I am, a scientist, I write some amateur SF, and not a single soul has beat a parsec to my door! What happen'd to the World? There it is, though. I've found famous SF writers who are scared to death of science, the scientific method, a scientific world and the products of science. Some are even psychotically afraid of airplanes, not to speak of rockets!

In the fan groups I've read about, and the very, very few I've met, I've found an extremely high verbal intelligence and practically a moron's index for science and math - especially in math. The very heart of science is mathematics; indeed, if it could have a soul it would be called mathematics. How many of your readers, for example (or writers that you know) can cypher beyond elementary calculus?

Is literary value of more importance than SCIENTIFIC values? Note that I am not asking if one should be dominant over the other. Rather I am posing the obverse of what I think now exists in the field. The name Science Fiction has been twisted during the past thirty years of my reading.

One very great editor I know analyses every story submitted to him by use of Freudian psychology. Not a single professional psychologist in the world who is current with the state of the art will admit that Freudian structures can apply to more than about 10% of the European culture. Why, then, do literary critics insist on symbolism within this framework? Too rigid in their own thinking to change? In the event, when symbolism becomes written for its own sake, except as an interesting intellectual exercise, I begin to wonder what the author is trying to tell us. I also think that if he knew, he would find a way to tell us!

(Cont'd)...

What I see and read about today in SF is pure anti-heros, slobbism and anti-everything. One story I read recently in New Worlds was typical of its kind, not one particle of success, decency, honesty, integrity, etc. An ordinary reader could not identify himself with it and say, "Look, this is me. Here is what I want to be".

This is all right in one story, or two, or three. But a whole school of writing? Paperback after paperback of it? If those writers are so good, why aren't they out there with the literary mainstream leaving the SF people to their own little world? I support George Hay's comments in your publication, as you can see (SPECULATION-22)."

** I used to be one of these odd people who read every piece of SF published, and who remembered every story, cover illustration, plot theme and author for many years of Galaxy, and Astounding in particular. Funny thing is that since 1960 or so, when I began to receive large amounts of SF from the U.S.A. and in the bookshops as the publishing boom began, I can remember less and less about it. The stories in last month's Analog are a mystery to me.. Your comments about the importance of scientific values and the scientific method remind me that I recently read Ballard's collection, THE DISASTER AREA. Some of the writing and ideas here are first-class, but I was struck by the deliberate attitude of anti-science expressed so blatantly in some of the pieces; in 'The Concentration City', and 'Now Wakes the Sea', for example, a science-fiction idea is deliberately made irrational in the end paragraphs.

Don Lundry, New Jersey.

Dear Pete, "Interesting as it was, I'm afraid the interview with Ballard in your issue Number 21 really antagonised me. I tend to agree with Bob Parkinson in Issue 22, that it's a 'giveaway about Ballard himself'. I know very little about him, but the picture the interview gave was of an arrogant man completely insensitive to the views of others. I find myself wishing to answer in kind by being equally bombastic, but that's hardly courteous.

Ballard states, as part of his reason for saying Analog has nothing to do with science, that he has 'studied medicine, chemistry, physiology, physics, and worked for five years on a scientific journal.' So what does this prove? If he considers this a statement of his ability to judge science, I have to disagree. Just to have 'studied' something does not give you a sound knowledge of it. And writing for a science journal is no superior credential, either. I can only conclude that he gives his credentials either to muddy the waters or to impress someone.

I'm not sure that Analog really claims to be in the same category as Nature. The science fact article usually run is a considerably more detailed write-up than Nature traditionally gives, since it is usually written by a practicing scientist or engineer. But Analog prints science fiction, and if their definition doesn't suit Ballard's, then that's too bad. There's room for disagreement in that respect but hardly a call for complete dismissal of the magazine. Analog has good points and bad points, much I'm sure, as Mr Ballard's writings have

I can't agree either that the Heinlein/Asimov type of science fiction is completely synthetic. In both men there is a conscious attempt to extrapolate aspects of today into tomorrow. If this is synthetic then I'm getting hung up on semantics! And where did Freud come in? If Freud said that synthetic activities are a sign of immaturity, fine - I don't agree with that, either. Not, at least, in the sense that Ballard uses 'synthetic'. Freud has been so consistently misinterpreted by the lay public that I'd have to check in what sense he was using the word to decide whether I truly agree or disagree with a statement which was probably pulled out of context. In any event, why use Freud to bolster your argument? If Ballard thinks Heinlein/Asimov type of SF is immature, let him say so!

(Cont/d)..

Of course, the closing comment about all us illiterate fans was arrogantly insulting. I suspect that no-one will change his mind, but it would be interesting to introduce him to some of the really literate, outstanding fans. He apparently has forgotten that in any group, fans or not, there will be some he will like and others he won't. So he met a poor selection. I've never met anyone yet who didn't have some interesting facet to him. Maybe Ballard should start looking for the good in people (and particularly fans) instead of automatically dismissing them."

** I have to apologise to people such as David Piper and Vic Curtis, among others, for continuing to publish so much about J.G. Ballard when I promised, in a much earlier issue, to drop the subject! Amid threats to terminate subscriptions, I have to point out that a lot of new people who have started getting SPECULATION since then are determined to say their pieces, and now I am beginning to get some response to the last issue, once again on the same subject!

--Bob Parkinson, Aylesbury, Bucks.

Dear Peter, "Once again there is somebody attacking me for what they imagine I said. You had better publish that sequence to George Hay, also to Robert Coulson in reply to his somewhat grumpy (I thought) letter in SPEC-23:

To George Hay (re: SPECULATION-22)

Thank you, George, if for nothing else than that delightful metaphor about navigating through one's rear-view mirror. I am, of course, aware of the relative sales figures of nursing romances, westerns, sword-and-sorcery stuff, and -- er -- 'literature'. But the point you raise is an important one, I feel. That the sort of reading that passes an odd hour and leaves you unchanged after is so widely preferred is a fact. But I do not believe that merely because a thing is so, it necessarily ought to be so. It is one of the malaises of our age, to mistake fact for morality.

This isn't a matter of being naughty and unprogressive, or being nice and progressive if that is the opposite. Nor is it something that has always been so. I see it after this fashion. If I read one of the Conan books, to take an example from your list, then nothing very important has happened. The best is that nothing has happened. The worst is that I finish slightly dissatisfied with the world I live in, and want to go back more and more. I have become 'hooked'. If, on the other hand, I read, for example, James Branch Cabell's JURGEN, then not only am I delightfully entertained for a couple of hours, but I have been brought into contact with all sorts of curious things which are equally at home in Poictesme or the world I live in. It maybe has disturbed me (meaning altered my position). Maybe it has helped.

Note that this is not a contest between 'entertaining' and 'good'. I would argue that the two go together much of the time. My impression is that whereas an author like Cabell delivers what he promises, the lesser literature fails to. Titillate is a good word to use if you think about it.

Nor do I suppose that the question is merely between realism and dreams. I would even quote from Cabell's SILVER STALLION (1926):

"...But dreams ought to be wholesome, they ought to be worth while, they ought to teach an uplifting moral, and certainly they ought not to be about incomprehensible thin nonsense that nobody can half-way understand. They ought, in a word, to make you feel that the world is a pretty good sort of place, after all - "

"But, wife, I am not sure that it is," said Miramon, mildly. '

Here, you see, I am on Miramon's side, against common sense. Both end alternatives are not worth the candle. Heroes you want? You're right, in my literature there are no heroes who simply solve problems and no more. (Cont/d)

But there are the people in Phil Dick's stories who have what I Ching (if I remember correctly) calls "persistence in adversity". There are grand defiant characters like Ben Reich in THE DEMOLISHED MAN. There is Neil Harrison in Robert Crane's HERO'S WALK.

'And then, how cleverly we manoeuvred to get the Beta time schedule postponed! Would the little girl in the car who called me a brave man understand this example of high diplomacy?

.....
He thought, It goes on and on and on.'

(I'm picking my examples deliberately from SF). These are heroes who have depth, and as a consequence lose their miraculous powers. But because of that we can find ourselves given depth, where the superman-type gives only dissatisfaction, because we cannot be like him.

Do you really want to sail with Ulysses? Remembering that most of the crew didn't get back. Remembering that it was both a dangerous and a boring life. Mainly you worried whether you were going to make landfall before the water and food ran out, and if you did make landfall, what sort of trouble you were going to find yourself in. Remembering that you yourself are not a superman

Mostly we would like to pretend that we could sail with Ulysses, etc... Or that we could be Ulysses - able to solve problems without trouble. Heinlein's hero in GLORY ROAD was prepared to go. He at least was saying, "Do you think you're going to get it sitting in that chair?" But his hero is to my mind shallow. The passage quoted was essentially an infantile one - "I want..."

Perhaps even then we would go, because it would give our lives some sort of significance. The trouble is that it is always there, never here. We desire lives with significance, with depth. The sort of 'nice, progressive' literature I am advocating makes this a possibility here. Else you can sail singlehanded around the world.

Good grief, here we are sitting at the far end of the Renaissance, and you want significance? If we can ride it out somehow, this is possibly one of the most significant times in the entire history of man. Get the record straight. Look at the Renaissance as it really was. Mainly, things were happening so fast that you never did catch up. SF at least has the perspective to see the situation as it is!

To Mr Coulson (re: SPECULATION-23)

Yes, sir, I am a puritan. A sybaritic puritan maybe. But if you stop to consider for a minute, a puritan is somebody who thinks the real world is not so unlivable with that you have to escape from it just as soon as you have finished earning enough to pay for your escape. I mean, if it is just for enjoyment, why not go the full stretch into heroin and real escape routes?

But then, I am coming to the conclusion that I am somehow different - that I seem to be able to distinguish between reading about Ulysses and being him.

And all this highfaultin' rubbish about the "struggle between Art and Reality". The Oxford English says 'art is skill as the result of knowledge and practice', so what I mean is what most of us do to some degree every day. Or at least, it is what I do (and, - surprise - I am a research engineer, not one of your airy-fairy literary types), and I enjoy it, 'cause the real world bites back a bit. What I was trying to say with that Heinlein quotation in SPEC-21 was that it was rather an infantile reaction, really. But you're obviously convinced, and don't want to be confused further....

To Mike (Jerry Cornelius) Moorcock:

I think I lost you somewhere back there. I mean, after you've thrown out all those things that fiction is not, what are you left with?

A story is a story is a story?

(Cont/d)...
SPECULATION

It's a good old-fashioned literary rebellion isn't it - getting back to the real nitty-gritty vitality of the proletariat and away from all this aristo sophistication. Which, I guess, was what the man who wrote up Gilgamesh argued. All right, if you've got to the point at which the critics can't distinguish between the merits of James Bond and James Joyce, it's criticism that needs a blood transfusion, not literature.

(Though personally, Jerry Cornelius seems to me to be closer to the former than to the latter).

Sure you can give up the argument, but why do you think that silence or intuition or whatever are going to settle anything?

And politics, morality, etc, etc, - if you write honestly those are going to be there. Whether you like it or not. It's like religion. It's all very well to say (especially in the light of the papers currently), let's get away with the fanaticism of religion - until you realise that the people who say it have the same mania. Make it new, please. But make it good.

I mean, how did we get to this state with music in the twentieth century, so that Stravinsky comes to be the last great accessible composer, and the moderns are so abstruse that you can't really tell whether they have anything or nothing, and the standards slip so that you cannot tell whether the Beatles are good or no - only that you like them? And literature?

What are we being offered? That writing is something you do for yourself, and the public be hanged? Or that it is the public who decide - vox populi - and talent is decided by sales figures? Hell (I use the word advisedly) no!

Samuel Delany is onto it when he says "...an envisioned future where, perhaps what we think of as our humanity may have been dampened in some areas, yet where others have been opened up and developed beyond that which is conceivable now..." "

Graham M. Hall, Brighton.

Dear Pete, "Frankly, it's a pity that both reviews of THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST to appear in this country so far have both been by someone as notoriously ill-judging as Charles M. Platt. And anyone who has in the immediately-previous issue praised a no-good hack like Vargo Statten (bang go my chances of ever selling to Vision of Tomorrow) has dealt his critical credentials a death-blow. "An unusually successful gothic-fantasy novel"? I didn't think so. I didn't think it was an unusually successful anything. Just a sloppily and hastily written piece of hard porn. I don't mind porn, it's just a pity that people should cover up their embarrassment by making ludicrous claims for it - either as writers, or critics, or social dynamists.

It's a pity to see Farmer writing trash in any category or non-category and an even greater pity to see Ted Sturgeon justifying him. "

Gabe Eisenstein, Illinois.

Dear Peter, "The argument of ideas vs. writing (Michael Kenward's comment in SPECULATION-22), which is basically the New-Old controversy, is one which has pretty well exhausted the well of discussion. We are at the stage now of two groups vainly trying to convince each other of their own beliefs, all of which are totally subjective and can only be backed up by saying "that's the way I think it should be". Dan Morgan proves nothing by his quotations. His line from Fred Pohl is interesting, in that it is the summation of Pohl's and DelRey's put-down of 2001; he happened to be referring to the visual techniques of the film in that quotation, but I would agree that it is still applicable. Yet when he says "Make sense?" I can only say no. But I can't argue the point any more effectively than Mr Morgan.

(Cont/d)..

Anyone who thinks that Clarke and Kubrick would have had a better product if they had explained every movement and gone through pages of dialogue, closing with a solid plot wrap-up, making it look something like junk movies shown on TV every week in the afternoons is simply of a different mind than I, and I wouldn't try to convince him of the value of 2001. Similarly, should one try to convince Bill Linden that BUG JACK BARRON is a fine novel, if his mind is made up after reading some (presumably sex-filled) excerpts? Not me, that's for sure.

The only other observation I have to make on the situation, having thus concluded that it is endless controversy to those who wish to participate, is that I have a tremendous advantage over people like John J. Pierce; I can and do appreciate a whole lot of books that they glorify, in addition to all of the works which they are unable to accept. It is a wonderful thing about the realm of science fiction, that it can encompass an Edgar Rice Burroughs and a Philip Jose Farmer, and that the former is admired by the latter! "

** I've been thinking rather carefully about the whole 'new/old wave' business, although enough has been said, now, and my conclusion is that the whole thing is a too-easy way of making a noise. It is far easier to generalise about a mysterious 'school' of writers and critics rather than to take each new book and new author as they come. For instance, I am what Charles Platt, Michael Moorcock and one or two others would call an 'Old Guard' enthusiast, as I think this special issue will show, and yet I enjoyed such items as BUG JACK BARRON (despite the sex scenes, which were, for me, unnecessary); CAMP CONCENTRATION; many stories by J.G. Ballard, nearly everything by Tom Disch, and so on. True, I don't like the novels of J.G. Ballard, didn't like Aldiss's AN AGE and REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, didn't like THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION or most stories of Harlan Ellison. But what does this mean - only that tastes remain as individual as ever for each individual reader!

My own philosophy of life runs along the lines that extremes, of any kind, are wrong and harmful. The 'hippies' are as big a menace as Colin Jordan's views of the world are, or could be. Where I think the science fiction fan-world has become excited is over the pretentious and arrogant claims that have been made, from time to time, by the so-called 'new wave' writers and editors, or by at least some of them. Asking for tolerance for their own work, they refuse to allow it to others. It is as big a mistake to dismiss Heinlein as it is to dismiss Ballard, I feel, although I admire the one and am not an enthusiast of the other.

In SPECULATION we have been aware of the dichotomy of present-day speculative fiction for longer than most. In our seventh issue (December 1964) we find the first stirrings of this controversy, with a long and still-topical letter from Michael Moorcock (the odd thing is, to current readers, that he refers to the 'new wave' in its original sense in fandom - that is, to refer to a small group of new fanzines as opposed to the existing order). In the following issue, March 1965, Brian Aldiss wrote to define the principles upon which we have pontificated ever since. Isn't four years enough?

Incidentally, looking back some more, I believe Chris Priest was correct in thinking himself responsible for the first use of 'new wave' in its present meaning (see his column this issue). For John J. Pierce, whom I have so far heard of only by repute, I offer an article in our 10th issue, titled 'The New Establishment' by Ian R. McAulay. In many respects this is an exact statement of Pierce's current comments (October 1965), although at the time they may have appeared justified, and, to be frank, I felt largely in sympathy with this viewpoint. Such are the evils of polarisation - may I repeat once again that there is no organised 'new wave'; there are only stories! PRW **

SPECULATION book guide

The GUIDE contains mention of every SF title received since the previous issue of SPECULATION. In addition, some of these books will be reviewed at length in future issues, including NOVA by Samuel R. Delany (Gollancz); THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, by Ursula LeGuin (Ace); BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD by Brian W. Aldiss (Faber); THE PALACE OF ETERNITY by Bob Shaw (Ace 'Special').

FLESH by Philip Jose Farmer (Rapp & Whiting, 25s, 212pp)

- One of my favourite stories, revised from the Galaxy PB edition in 1960, and far more entertaining than Mr Farmer's recent two novels (review, SPECULATION-23)
THORNS by Robert Silverberg (Rapp & Whiting, 25s, 222pp)

- The British edition of the Ballantine paperback of 1967. This was generally well received despite a deus ex machina ending.

THE GOBLIN RESERVATION by Clifford D. Simak (Rapp & Whiting, 25s, 192pp)

- For me, Mr Simak's last readable book was the collection, STRANGERS IN THE UNIVERSE. This current novel appeared in Galaxy last year.

SCIENCE FICTION ODDITIES ed. Groff Conklin (Rapp & Whiting, 21s, 160pp)

- Ten stories, chosen for their 'odd' little twists, generally entertaining and one original for the collection. From Berkeley Books, 1966-7.

BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD by Brian W. Aldiss (Faber & Faber, 30s, 281pp)

- Complete with poems, Mr Aldiss' new title is, in the words of the d/j blurb, "far beyond the conventional territories of SF". It has of course been appearing as individual stories, out-of-order, in New Worlds and is regarded by some as the most successful innovation in writing to come out of the magazine.

QUICKSAND by John Brunner (Sidgwick & Jackson, 27s, 240pp, close-set)

- John Brunner has been 'working up' to Award-winning books during the past few years, and this is a 1967 title from America which did not receive a great deal of attention apart from a bad review by Algis Budrys. (for review, next issue).

SPACE LORDS by Cordwainer Smith (Sidgwick & Jackson, 24s, 204pp)

- Five stories from the unique mythology of Cordwainer Smith, first reviewed in SPECULATION-10, 1965, in the original Pyramid edition.

CRADLE OF THE SUN by Brian Stableford (Sidgwick & Jackson, 24s, 190pp)

- A first novel by one of our own reviewers, also in Ace Books edition.

NOVA by Samuel R. Delany (Gollancz, 25s,)

- The third spectacular novel by Mr Delany to appear from this publisher. To be reviewed at length in our next issue, but certainly recommended.

WORLD'S BEST SF 1969 ed. Wollheim & Carr (Gollancz, 35s, 352 pp)

- One of the many annual collections available, but my personal favourite. Just published by Ace, the volume contains 19 stories from the magazines or original books during the past year. Generally a first-class selection.

A SPECTRE IS HAUNTING TEXAS by Fritz Leiber (Gollancz, 30s, 245pp)

- From Galaxy magazine, reviewed in SPECULATION-22 by Brian Stableford. (Cont/d)

WANTED - REVIEWERS. I would be interested in hearing from anyone who would like to try their hand at writing reviews at length for our 'Critical Front' column. Copies of new books would be provided where possible. - Peter Weston.
SPECULATION

OFF CENTRE by Damon Knight, (Gollancz, 25s, 192pp)

- Eight stories by the author from a spread of 17 years of publication.

THE PEOPLE TRAP by Robert Sheckley, (Gollancz, 25s, 222pp)

- Fourteen stories, genuinely refreshing to read. Recommended.

SPACE FAMILY STONE by Robert A. Heinlein (Gollancz, 21s, 267pp 'juvenile')

- Retitled edition of THE ROLLING STONES, from Scribners (See Page 26)

DARK PIPER by Andre Norton, (Gollancz, 21s, 249pp 'juvenile')

PICNIC ON PARADISE by Joanna Russ (MacDonald, 21s, 157pp)

- Nearly an Award-winner this year as an Ace 'Special' title. One of my recent most enjoyable books, and well worth investigating.

THE DEMON BREED by James H. Schmitz (MacDonald, 21s, 156pp)

- Another Ace 'Special' in British edition. Was 'The Tuvela' in Analog.

A GIFT FROM EARTH by Larry Niven, (MacDonald, 25s, 254pp).

- Last year's Ballantine title and 'Slowboat Cargo' from If magazine. The second novel by one of my favourite authors, fitting into his 'Known Space' series and principally concerned with the author's anticipation of spare-part surgery. A fast-moving and inventive novel of the 'hard' science fiction school.

PAPERBACKS

THE SHAPE OF SPACE by Larry Niven, Ballantine 75c; 12 stories in the vein of 'Neutron Star', from the magazines of the last two years or so. I thought this was excellent for entertaining reading. UP THE LINE by Robert Silverberg, Ballantine 75c; a bawdy time-travel story, in the author's own words. STAND ON

ZANZIBAR by John Brunner, Ballantine \$1.65 - the Hugo-winning novel this year.

THE SEED OF LIGHT, Edmund Cooper (Ball. 75c) - reprint; THE SILVER STALLION by James Branch Cabell, Ballantine 'fantasy' title, 95c; LILITH by George MacDonald Ballantine 'fantasy' title, 95c; APPOINTMENT ON THE MOON, by Richard S. Lewis

- a handsomely produced documentary on the Apollo programme, Ball.\$1.25. Illust.

THE SILENT MULTITUDE by D.G. Compton, Ace 'Special', 75c. An English title, following Ace publication of the author's SYNTHAJAY. MECHASM by John Sladek, Ace 'Special', 75c - retitle of THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM, Gollancz 1968, reviewed in SPECULATION-19. THE PALACE OF ETERNITY by Bob Shaw, Ace 'Special', 75c. To be reviewed in the next issue.

OTHER ACE TITLES: MASQUE WORLD by Alexei Panshin (60c); THE WARLOCK IN SPITE OF HIMSELF by Christopher Stasheff (75c); THE DIRDIR by Jack Vance (60c); TEENOCRACY by Robert Shirley (75c); THE PANDORA EFFECT by Jack Williamson (60c); SECRET OF THE LOST RACE by Andre Norton (60c); THE WORLDS OF ROBERT A. HEINLEIN (60c); PERRY RHODAN No.3 GALACTIC ALARM (75c); THE WAGERED WORLD Janifer&Treibich/ TONIGHT WE STEAL THE STARS by John Jakes (75c); CARDLE OF THE SUN by Brian M. Stableford/THE WIZARDS OF SLENCHURIA by Ken Bulmer (75c); KALIN by E.C. Tubb/THE BANE OF KANTHOS by Alex Dain (75c); THE ETERNAL SAVAGE by Edgar Rice Burroughs (60c); THE LOST CONTINENT by Edgar Rice Burroughs (60c); THE DEMON OF CAWNPORE by Jules Verne (60c); THE FRANKENSCIENCE MONSTER by Forrest J. Ackerman (on Boris Karloff, 95c);

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