

VECTOR

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APOLOGIA....

This issue of Vector has been assembled in great haste, in the hope that it will be ready by Easter. If you get it by then, we will have succeeded; if not, well, we did our best. As a consequence of this rush it is in several ways not all that I might have hoped. Many of the stencils were typed very fast, and while I corrected all the mistakes I spotted at the time, many more have undoubtedly slipped through. Though I had no illustrations planned, there were at least to be electrostencilled headings, but there wasn't enough time to do them. In all, this may be a rather tatty looking Vector.

The contents were originally scheduled to appear in my own fanzine Quicksilver, and there need be no apology for them. I was planning to devote a large part of an issue to Stanislaw Lem, and most of this material now appears here. My thanks go to Franz Rottensteiner for his help, both for providing me

cont.on p.35

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Publisher's comment: As Malcolm says, this issue is being produced in a hurry. The BSFA's duplicator is long overdue for an overhaul. Please bear these in mind when judging the quality of the reproduction. AGE

This issue of Vector is edited by

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All blame for the contents should be directed at him.

It is duplicated by Graham Boak.

All blame for smears of ink should be directed at him.

Production was aided by a motley crew of helpers, including Dave Rowe, Fred Hemmings, Vic Hallett, Rob Holdstock and Andrew Stephenson, to whom other blame may be directed indiscriminately.

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An Introduction to

STANISLAW LEM

by

Franz Rottensteiner

Let us begin by admitting that I consider the interest shown by fans in sf writers quite unhealthy. Too much in sf criticism depends on the contact between writers and fans, on the writers visiting conventions etc. Personal acquaintance is likely to cloud one's judgement. This may be the reason for the abominable state of sf criticism, and the reason why criticism tends to get better the further the critic is from the places infested with sf pros (e.g. British criticism as a rule is much better than American, and Australian better than British, though of course there are such exceptions as A.J.Cox in the U.S.A. and Brian Aldiss in the U.K.). The important thing about fiction is the work itself, not the man who created it.

Lem is a writer who developed apart from fandom and apart from the sf field, its pulps and paperbacks: an almost essential prerequisite for any good work -- the intellectually sterile atmosphere of the sf field is too big a hurdle for most new talent. Lem, thank god, wasn't exposed to this stifling influence although he read enough sf to learn what to avoid. Some people, like Suvin, like to claim that he was influenced by the sf of the 40s and 50s, and this may be true of some of his early (and mediocre) work; but his best efforts owe nothing to commercial sf. From the beginning, he was a part of Polish letters -- although he always held a rather unusual place in Polish literature. The fact that his development reflects (and transcends) that of the whole field has made his position particularly difficult.

He came from a family of physicians who naturally wanted their son to become a doctor too; and he started studying medicine in the town of his birth, Lemberg, then a part of Russian-occupied Poland. When the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union he had to give up his studies and worked as a mechanic in a garage, "where I learned to damage German cars in a way which wasn't instantly detectable". Lem had some connection with the Polish resistance, for which he was decorated after the war. His war-time experiences form the background of his contemporary novel Time Not Lost, written from 1948 to 1950, but not published until 1956. During the war, purely to amuse himself, he wrote a short novel called "The Man from Mars" which saw print in a magazine in 1948; despite later demands he never allowed this story to be

reprinted. After the war he finished his studies in Cracow (where he has resided ever since) and worked for a time as a gynaecologist at the University there, as well as developing psychological tests to examine students' talents. He published a number of papers on this in the magazine "Life of Science". His plans for a career in theoretical biology came to an end when at the height of the Lysenko affair he put together an array of excerpts from "Pravda" which were quite contrary to the position held up until then by "Life of Science".

So he decided to try his hand at sf, aided by a piece of good fortune. In 1950, while on leave in Zakopane, where he was finishing Time Not Lost he met (without knowing who he was) the director of the Warsaw publishing house Czytelnik. They happened to talk about the total absence of Polish sf, and Lem blamed the publishers' policy for this state of affairs. Some time later Lem, much to his own surprise, received a contract for an sf novel: he had only to fill in the title. He called the thing The Astronauts, and proceeded to write the story of an expedition to Venus, where a civilisation destroyed by atomic war is discovered. This moralistic story proved very successful, especially in the socialist countries, and was translated into some 14 languages (today it still leads the translation list of all Lem's books). Incidentally, the novel was filmed in East Germany under the title of "The Silent Star" -- a film which Lem thinks is lousy. His second sf novel, an ameliorative utopian story called The Magellan Nebula was also filmed (pirated) in Czechoslovakia as "Icarie XB 1". At present, Tvardovsky in the USSR is filming Solaris, while "The Futurological Congress" will be filmed by Wajda for German TV. Many of his stories have also been turned into TV plays.

Despite the many sf novels and collections which followed these early attempts, Lem was never exclusively an sf writer. Besides his philosophical, literary, futurological and other papers which were published in various distinguished journals ("Nurt" in Poland and "Novy Mir" and "Vosprosy filosofii" in the USSR among others), he also published a number of non-fiction works, from his early cybernetic Dialogi (now to be reissued in his collected works), The Philosophy of Chance (a theory of culture and literature) and The Summa Technologiae (a huge futurological work, so far translated into Russian and Hungarian) up to Fantastyka I Futurologia, a merciless dissection of sf for which he was just awarded an important literary prize in Poland.

It troubles him that his more difficult theoretical works haven't had the number of translations of his sf (although I'm optimistic that this will be remedied soon). Only in the USSR has Lem been equally represented by his theoretical work, and it is there that his fame is greatest: the astronaut Herman Titov, for example, wrote an introduction to one of his books (which had a hardcover edition of 214,000!). The dean of the Soviet Academy of Sciences was among those to congratulate him on his 49th birthday, while he has been invited four times to symposia held by the

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Academy. The most recent of these was a meeting on extraterrestrial civilization last September in Armenia, with only some 50 scientists from Europe and the USA attending. Had he been able to attend he would have been the only sf writer and non-scientist at a meeting which saw among its members celebrated scientists like Dyson, Feynman and Shannon.

* * * * *

Some readers have wondered at the fact that Solaris is so free from dogmatic assertions, quite unlike the usual sf from socialist countries. But the freedom of thought to be found in Lem's work can surprise only those accustomed to thinking of spiritual freedom in terms of geography. But intellectual freedom depends upon the individual, not upon some political system, whatever its colour; and compared to Lem the supposedly "free" writers of mass market sf are but atrophied fossils who don't realise that their time is past by several decades.

True, he had his difficulties -- some of his books couldn't appear in Poland for some years -- but they were all overcome, and every word that he cared to have published has now appeared in his own country. There were also occasional attacks on his "idealism" (for instance, when there was a project to film Solaris but now he is recognised (and not only popular) even in his home country, although he is still much more famous in the Soviet Union, where some of his best work could never appear: the short story "Diary", the novel Memoirs Found in a Bathtub (a satire on the Polish secret police) or some Ijon Tichy tales, while Solaris and Project Master's Voice exist there only in mutilated versions. Nevertheless, his autobiographical short novel "The High Castle" was reviewed in "Vosprosy filosofii", and this piece, or a similar long article on Project Master's Voice in the literary monthly "Nurt" were of a quality and depth and detail of analysis that you never encounter in sf criticism in the West. In Poland, book-length studies have already been written on Lem; "Nurt" will devote a special issue to him; his Cyberiad was turned into an opera, for which Krzysztof Meyer, a young Polish composer, was awarded \$5,000 at a competition in Monaco; a school edition of his stories is in preparation; and so on.

I expect a similar development in Germany. Now that I'm an editor with Insel/Suhrkamp, one of Germany's best publishers, we'll publish at least two of his books per year, with major promotion. And in the USA I have just sold no less than 10 of his books to Herder and Herder, who are bringing out the first 4 next year -- Project Master's Voice, Memoirs Found in a Bathtub, Cyberiad and The Invincible (contracted for originally by Ace Books) -- with more to follow in quick succession. They'll even do his non-fiction I hope, and his reviews of fictitious books.

Even now Lem is one of the most-translated sf writers in the world, and these editions will markedly increase the demand for him (as I already see from the American appearance of Solaris:

since then, offers from the West have been far more numerous). It is often claimed that the many translations of American and British sf are due to its excellence and the comparative backwardness of the rest of the world. This is true only insofar as English-language sf has indeed achieved a higher level of mediocrity, though with very few works that can be measured with serious literary standards; but it has acquired the image of being better than the sf of other countries, even to the extent of sf being considered a typically American phenomenon. Another reason for this is language: any moderately educated person in Western Europe can read English, whereas there are very few with a knowledge of, say, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian or Rumanian. Even if excellent works of sf exist in those languages, they will most likely pass unnoticed. Evaluation of an MS in such an "exotic" language costs an editor much more than that of an English story he can read himself. The same again for translations: translators for English can be had in any number; usually the people doing sf translations are also very little qualified. Translations of Polish or similar languages, on the other hand, are usually expensive. The translators are highly qualified; most of them wouldn't even stoop to doing sf.

Considering these economic factors against him, Lem's international success is all the more astonishing, and more proof of his quality. Without exaggerating I can also say that he is currently one of the most difficult Polish writers (in his best work). Only a short time ago an experienced translator turned down Project Master's Voice, finding the work too difficult. I've never heard of a translator refusing any English language sf on similar grounds: they do it, even if they aren't qualified. The trouble with translating Lem is that he is linguistically very inventive, coining new terms by the dozen (but following the way real scientists invent their terms), and a translator unfamiliar with scientific terminology is likely to be unable to distinguish between what is real and what is Lem's own invention. Also, his most sophisticated grotesque efforts, such as The Cyberiad really cannot be translated: the translator must recreate the work in his own language. I'm very curious to see how the American translators will do.

Finally, a few words on the work itself and not on external circumstances. I base my case for Lem's greatness in sf principally on four books: Solaris, for imaginative scope and emotional impact; Memoirs Found in a Bathtub for subtle political satire and existential meaning; Project Master's Voice for social responsibility and for faithfully reproducing, in a highly inventive way, real scientific thought and the philosophy of science; Cyberiad for its wonderful embodiment of scientific theories in the material of old fairy tales and myths, creating an effect of contrast that is the most strikingly original thing I've ever seen in sf. Each of these books is utterly different from the others. They might have been written by different authors. There is nobody

else in sf with that versatility.

Among his shorter work, "The Futurological Congress", "Diary" and "The New Cosmogony" rank highest. At his best Lem writes with a density that equals the best of Borges, while being at the same time much more original. And although Borges' materials are known to most educated people in the West (although not to the same depth or extent) so that his stories were bound to attract the attention of intelligent people, Lem had it less easy. He writes of things that the literati know little or nothing about: information theory; cosmogonic theories; theory of games; cybernetics etc. -- and yet the effect of some of his inventions, such as the "Demon of the 2nd order", an analogue to Maxwell's Demon, is such that even people who have never read Ross Ashby will be able to enjoy him. In his work he has always been a pioneer, and I have no reason to distrust his claim that his stories showed certain anomalies of information theory before the scientists discovered them. How poor his Cyberiad, with its wonderfully complex and melodious sentence structure, its inventiveness on every page, makes the sf writers praised for their "ideas" look! There are more ideas in Cyberiad than in Heinlein's complete fiction. No other sf writer can pack so much information in so short a space, and none could do it so gracefully.

He has also succeeded in the extremely difficult task which the New Wave writers only talk about: that of finding new forms for the new content. In books like Solaris and Cyberiad, or stories like "Diary" or "The New Cosmogony", the content is married inseparably to the form.

Lem is a highly original writer. These days he only tries things which have never before been tried in literature, and it is from this position that he wonders about the bad company in which his writing got him. It is this originality that will always make his influence on sf negligible. The popular success of a writer like Heinlein and his influence on his colleagues is based precisely on the banality of his method: it can be emulated perhaps with less success, by any writer who isn't quite a hopeless case. But where are the people who could follow Lem, even if they wanted to, and did recognize what he does as valuable? I see nobody in sf who has the knowledge, the depth, the width of interest, this unique set of talents. What so enhances him to me is that he is a systematic thinker: there is nothing of the fuzzy thinking, the inability to recognise even the most trivial consequences and implications of an idea, that mars the work of the people who are today acclaimed as "sf thinkers".

But the same things I admire in him, the average fan will object to -- this much I can already say from the reactions to Solaris (and it is amusing to see how well these reactions confirm my opinion of the people who write them). In a field where a Niven is a "thinker", a writer of "hard sf", and where a Sturgeon or a Heinlein are significant writers, a Lem isn't likely to get very popular.

--- Franz Rottensteiner

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Trurl i n v i t e s K l a p a u c i u s

to the Machine for the Fulfillment of Wishes

(Translated by Franz Rottensteiner. First appeared in the collection Bajki Robotow ("Robotic Fairy Tales"), Cracow, 1965)

THERE WAS A KNOCK at the door of the constructor Klapaucius. He opened it, stuck out his head, and saw a bulky machine standing on four short legs.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"I'm a Machine for the Fulfillment of Wishes and I have been sent by your friend and great colleague Trurl. I'm a gift from him."

"A gift?" queried Klapaucius. He had very mixed feelings towards Trurl, and he particularly disliked the machine calling him a 'great colleague'. "Oh well," he answered after some consideration, "come in."

He told the machine to put itself in the corner beside the oven and carried on with his work, apparently taking no notice of it. He was building a spherical machine with three legs. It was nearly finished, and he was busy polishing it. After a while the Machine for the Fulfillment of Wishes spoke up again: "I wish to remind you of my presence."

"I haven't forgotten you," Klapaucius said and went on working. A little later, the machine spoke again: "May I ask what you're doing?"

"Are you a machine for the Fulfillment of Wishes or a Machine for the Asking of Questions?" Klapaucius said, and added, "I need some blue paint."

"I don't know if I have the exact shade you need," the machine said, and it gave him a can of paint through a flap in its belly. Klapaucius silently opened the can, put in his brush and began to paint. During the day he also asked for emery, carborundum, a drill and white paint, as well as screws; and in each case the machine supplied it immediately. In the evening he covered his creation with a tarpaulin, and after eating he sat down on a footstool in front of the machine, and said: "We'll see what you

can do. You say you can do anything?"

"Not anything, but many things certainly," the machine answered modestly. "Weren't you satisfied with the paint, the screws and the drill?"

"Certainly, certainly," Klapaucius replied. "But now I have a more difficult task for you. If you can't do it I'll have to return you to your master -- with a few words of thanks, of course, and a couple of suggestions."

"What is it?" asked the machine, hopping from one foot to the other, full of curiosity.

"Well, a Trurl," Klapaucius explained. "You shall make me a Trurl, just like the real thing, so that noone will be able to tell the difference."

The machine buzzed, hummed, rustled, and said finally: "Very well, I'll make you a Trurl. But take good care of him, for he is a very great constructor!"

"Of course I will, don't worry," Klapaucius said. "Now, where is this Trurl?"

"What? So quick? It's no little thing," the machine said. "It takes time. A Trurl --- it's more than just screws and paint!"

Nevertheless it trumpeted and tinkled and worked with astonishing speed. A large door opened in its belly and out stepped Trurl. Klapaucius rose, walked around him, peered at him from close quarters, tapped him and felt him very closely, but there was no doubt about it: there in front of him was Trurl. This Trurl and the original were as alike as two peas. Trurl blinked in the light, having just crept out of the belly of the machine, but apart from that his behaviour was quite normal.

"How do you do, Trurl?" said Klapaucius.

"How do you do, Klapaucius? B-ut what am I doing here?"

"Well, you just happened to be passing... I haven't seen you for a long time. How do you like my home?"

"Not bad, not bad at all. What's that there under the tarpaulin?"

"Oh, nothing special. Won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you. It must be getting late. It's dark outside. It's time I went home."

"Not so fast, please, not so fast!" Klapaucius protested. "First you must come into the cellar with me. I've something there that you'll find interesting."

"Have you something special in your cellar then?"

"Not at the moment, no. But I soon will have. Come on."

Klapaucius touched Trurl soothingly on the shoulder and led

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him into the cellar, where he tripped him up and, when Trurl fell headlong, he bound him and began thrashing him expertly with a thick bar. Trurl shouted at the top of his voice, yelling for help, alternately cursing and begging for mercy, but it was no use -- the night was dark and there was nobody about, and Klapaucius beat him black and blue.

"Oh, oh, the pain! Why are you beating me like this?" cried Trurl as he tried to evade the blows.

"Because I enjoy doing it," Klapaucius explained, and lifted his arm for another blow.

And he hit him on his head, which resounded as if he had struck a barrel.

"You let me go at once, or I'll go to the king and tell him what you've done to me, and he'll throw you in prison!" Trurl cried.

"He'll do no such thing, and do you know why?" Klapaucius said, sitting down on a bench.

"No, why?" asked Trurl, glad of a pause in the beating.

"Because you aren't the real Trurl at all: he is sitting at home. He built a Machine for the Fulfillment of Wishes and sent it to me as a gift; I wanted to test it, and ordered it to make you. Now I'll unscrew your head, put it under my bed, and use it as a bootjack!"

"You're a monster! Why are you behaving like this?"

"I've told you once already -- because I enjoy it. And now, I've grown tired of your empty babble."

Having said this, Klapaucius grasped the bar with both hands, and Trurl cried: "Wait! Wait! I've something very important to tell you!"

"I'm curious to know what could be important enough to stop me from using your head for a bootjack," Klapaucius replied, but nevertheless stopped thrashing him. Then Trurl said: "I'm not a Trurl made by the machine! I'm the real Trurl, the only real Trurl in all the world, and I just wanted to find out what you've been up to all this time, shut away in here. So I built the machine, hid in its belly, and had it carried to your house, under the pretext of it being a gift for you!"

"What kind of cock and bull story is this!" Klapaucius exclaimed, rising and gripping the thicker end of the bar firmly in his hand. "Don't worry, I see through your lies. You are a Trurl made by the machine: it fulfils all wishes; I have had from it screws and drills and other things. If it could make them it could make you too, my friend."

"I had prepared everything in its belly!" Trurl cried. "It really wasn't hard to guess what you'd need for your work. It's the truth, I swear it!"

"If this were so, it would mean that my friend, the great constructor Trurl, was just a common cheat -- and I'll never believe that!" replied Klapaucius. "Take that!" And he dealt Trurl a blow right from his ear across his back.

"Take this for slandering my friend Trurl. And take this too.

And he dealt him a blow from the other side. Then he was beating him, giving him a good hiding; he drubbed him until he grew tired. He threw down the bar. "I'm going to have a rest now," he explained. "But I'll be back soon, just you wait..."

As soon as he was gone, and his snoring filled the house, Trurl twisted in his bindings until he had loosened them; then he undid the knots, crept upstairs and into the machine, and drove it home at once.

Meanwhile, Klapaucius watched his flight from the upstairs window and laughed up his sleeve. Next day he visited Trurl, who asked him inside, looking rather morose. The light there was dim but the clever Klapaucius could still see that Trurl's head and trunk showed signs of the beating they had sustained, although he could also see that Trurl had tried hard to repair and even out the dents caused by his blows.

"Why are you looking so gloomy?" Klapaucius asked cheerfully. "I've come to thank you for your fine gift, and it really is a shame that he ran away while I was asleep, without even bothering to shut the door, just as if the place was on fire."

"I'm under the impression that you have not made proper use of my gift, to put it mildly!" exclaimed Trurl. "The machine told me everything, so you needn't try and talk your way out of it," he added angrily, seeing Klapaucius about to speak. "You lured him into the cellar and beat him up horribly! And after this insult you've done me, after the gratitude you showed for my splendid gift, you dare come to me as if nothing had happened! What have you to say to this?"

"I fail to understand why you're so upset," Klapaucius replied. "Indeed I ordered the machine to make a copy of you. And I must admit it was truly excellent. I was really amazed when I saw it. As for the thrashing: the machine must have exaggerated in rather I did cuff the simulacrum a few times, for I was curious to see how he would react. He turned out to be very clever. He made up a story there and then, pretending he was really you. I didn't believe him, and then he began to swear that the magnificent gift was no gift at all, but a cheat. I'm sure you'll understand that I had to beat him in order to protect your honour -- the honour of my friend -- against such impudent lies! But I could see that he was gifted with an extraordinary intelligence, and reminded me of you intellectually as well as physically, my friend. Truly, you are a great constructor, and the reason I've visited you at such an early hour is to tell you so."

"Ah, well, indeed!" Trurl replied, somewhat mollified. "To

be sure, it seems to be that you didn't make particularly fortunate use of my Machine for the Fulfillment of Wishes, but it may be that...."

"Oh, yes, I did want to ask you what you've done with the artificial Trurl?" Klapaucius asked innocently. "Could I see him please?"

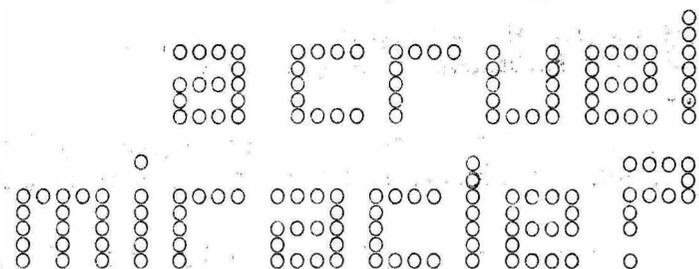
"He was nearly beside himself with rage!" Trurl replied. "He threatened to smash your skull, and intended to lie in wait for you at the big rock by your house, and when I tried to dissuade him he quarrelled with me, and in the night he began to set traps and nets of wire for you, and although I thought you had insulted me in his person, I took him apart into very small pieces, remembering our old friendship, to save you from the impending danger (for he seemed mad), and because I saw no other way out of the dilemma.."

While he was saying this, Trurl absent-mindedly pushed fragments of mechanisms on the floor around with his foot. Thereupon they took leave of one another very warmly, and parted as affectionate friends.

From then on, Trurl told everyone (whether they wanted to hear it or not) how he had presented Klapaucius with the Machine for the Fulfillment of Wishes; and how ungratefully Klapaucius had acted in ordering the machine to make a Trurl and then giving him a good hiding; and how the superbly-made copy had tried to extricate himself from his predicament by inventing many skilful lies; and how he had escaped as soon as Klapaucius had had to take a rest; and how he himself had taken apart the Trurl, the fabricated Trurl, who had come running into his house; and how he had only done it in order to save his friend from the revenge of the beaten up machine. And he told the story, and praised himself, and puffed himself up, and called upon Klapaucius as a witness, until the tale became known in the Royal Court, so that nobody there talked about Trurl save with the greatest admiration, even though only a short time ago he had been called the constructor of the most stupid intelligent machine in the world. When Klapaucius heard that even the king had given rich gifts to Trurl and had awarded him the Medal of the Great Spring and the Helikonoidal Star, he cried in a loud voice: "What? Because I succeeded in outwitting him, when I saw through his deception, and gave him a good hiding, so that afterwards he had to pound out his dents and patch himself up, after he fled from my cellar, utterly humiliated and on crooked legs! Now -- because of this! -- he is accumulating riches; and, what's more, the king is handing him decorations! Oh, is there no justice in the world?"

Terribly angry, he went home and shut himself inside his house. For he had been building a Machine for the Fulfillment of Wishes, just as Trurl had done; only Trurl had finished it first.

--- Stanislaw Lem



Solaris

by Stanislaw Lem

Faber, \$2.00

A review by
Malcolm Edwards

Since its discovery, Solaris has been the centre of a great deal of scientific controversy. The planet is almost completely covered by an ocean whose anomalous behaviour has caused some scientists to suggest that it is sentient; the question has, however, remained unresolved, because all attempts to communicate with it have proved unsuccessful, and all attempts to interpret its behaviour fruitless. Perhaps its chief peculiarity is the production of solid extrusions in a substance which "externally resembles a yeasty colloid". The significance of these huge mimoid structures remains a mystery.

Kris Kelvin is sent to join the three man station on Solaris. On arrival he discovers a very confused situation: one of the three is dead; the other two are reduced to an apparent state of terror, and refuse to divulge anything of the circumstances surrounding their colleague's death. Later, Kelvin discovers that since one particular experiment carried out on the ocean by the three men, it has been able to form for each of them a mimetic structure superficially indistinguishable from some person they have known. Soon enough, the ocean produces such an 'Other' for Kelvin: it is his lover Rhexa, who committed suicide some years before.



Looking at certain of the reviews of Solaris which have appeared in the USA, it becomes apparent that the very existence of Stanislaw Lem causes no little discomfort to some members of the sf fraternity: they simply don't know where to fit him in. It has generally been a paradigm of Western sf

that the stuff written by foreign authors is years behind that which appears in English; and a corollary to this has been the idea that the establishment of a set of ground rules -- of codes of practice, as it were -- developed through the years is practically a necessary precondition for the writing of good sf. This blatantly insular attitude has been easy enough to maintain (God knows, I've expressed it often enough myself) in the absence of good translations from foreign sf -- but that, of course, is an entirely different distinction. If it does nothing else, the publication of Solaris should at least show up this attitude as nonsense which should have been dismissed as such in the first place.

Although Darko Suvin claims in his Afterword to this book that Lem read -- and was influenced by -- a number of sf writers, one of the immediate fascinations of Solaris is that it is clearly written without significant reference or debt to what we know of sf. The result is a novel which in a number of ways could not be the work of any Western sf writer, despite the attempts of people like P. Schuyler Miller to tuck Lem away in a neat pigeonhole (a Polish Sturgeon, or whatever). It's hard to define these differences exactly: more than anything else it's a feeling which pervades the whole novel; you can't pinpoint a series of divergences and point them out there, there and there.

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Perhaps the major strength of Solaris is that it is a science fiction novel quite without precedent in the extent and depth of its extrapolations. Such a book requires very clear and precise descriptive writing, and this is what Lem gives us. Pictures are drawn vividly and concisely; scarcely a word is wasted. Consider the passage in the first chapter where Kelvin's capsule is approaching the Solaris station:

"The green and white checker-board grew rapidly larger and I could see that it was painted on an elongated silvery body, shaped like a whale, its flanks bristling with radar antennae. This metal colossus, which was pierced with several rows of shadowy apertures, was not resting on the planet itself but suspended above it, casting upon the inky surface beneath an ellipsoidal shadow of even deeper blackness. I could make out the slate-colored ripples of the ocean, stirring with a faint motion."

The exact attention to detail establishes a very clear image. The station stands out like a gleaming toy in the bright sunlight. There is a similarity here to some of the writing of Arthur C. Clarke who, at his best (by which I mean books like The Deep Range rather than over-romantic stuff like City and

the Stars) writes with similar clarity of expression. However, this similarity, while instructive, is superficial. Clarke is a useful example because he is perhaps the model of the Western idea of a 'hard-core' sf writer. And, indeed, he is when in this mood, a very good popular novelist. I emphasise the word 'popular'. The science of his books is simplified so that the average reader will be able to follow it without too much difficulty. Lem, on the other hand, makes no such concessions. He expects his readers to make the necessary intellectual effort to follow him, sometimes through page after page of quite complex exposition. There is a world of difference, it becomes apparent, between writing a popular science fiction novel -- which Clarke does expertly -- and writing a true science fiction novel -- which is what Lem, like him or not, has tried to do.

Having embarked upon this, he inevitably comes up against the consequent problem: how do you write an sf novel which is both good science fiction and a good novel? There is no question here of glibly incorporating the scientific bits into the narrative so as not to interrupt the flow (You know the kind of thing: Stanley turns on the matter-transmitter/f-t-l drive/time machine, and says, "You know, Harold, I've used this a million times but I've never really understood how it works." "Well," says Harold (who knows about such things), "it's really quite simple..."). I don't know whether it was a definite decision on Lem's part to eschew any attempt to maintain this balance, or whether it is something he has worked towards, but in any case I am sure his decision was the right one. It means a certain sacrifice of traditional novelistic values, but the gain far outweighs the loss. (This is one example of the kind of thing a British or American writer probably couldn't get away with -- everyone would accuse him of lecturing the readers.) For instance, pages 111-124 comprise what is virtually a complete essay on the mimoid structures produced by the ocean. For this space the novel proper pretty well stops, but the piece itself is one of the most fascinating (probably the most fascinating) speculative essays I have read, a complete, thorough extrapolation of an imaginative concept.

* * * * *

In structure, Solaris is a fairly conventional mystery-puzzle-sf novel; and here there are certain weaknesses, although these are counter-balanced by some unusually clever pieces of construction. When Kelvin arrives on the Solaris station, the atmosphere is one of unreasoning terror, and Snow practically collapses into a gibbering wreck at his appearance. This is really a red herring. It may be a logical reaction given the circumstances of Gibarian's recent death (whatever they may have been), but it doesn't really fit in with any of the characters' subsequent behaviour. It is, of course, an effective narrative hook. Further, and more contrary to the spirit of logical extrapolation of the novel, the 'Others' are, for

reasons unexplained, shown to have superhuman strength. This we must presume to derive from their structure, which is hypothesized as being based on neutrinos (Perhaps there is some reason why such a structure should be indestructible, as it appears to be in the novel, but none is given.) I would think the purpose here is a dramatic one. The phantoms literally cannot bear to be parted from their human companions. When Kelvin and Rhexa are forcibly separated we are confronted with the spectacle of the seemingly-human, seemingly-frail girl clawing her way through a heavy door and shattering it, unaware of what she is doing. A scene like this at once breaks the easy illusion that she is human, acting like a dash of cold water in the reader's face, and further provides a convenient expression of the paranoia of the situation. It's like the old scene in a horror film where the hero thinks Frankenstein (or whatever) is safely caged up, only to see him smash through the inch-thick steel bars and come at him -- the nightmare of the implacable pursuer who you can't shake off. That Rhexa only wants to be by Kelvin's side because she loves him makes it worse, if anything.

On the other hand there are, as I said earlier, some very clever touches. Perhaps the best example of this comes at the beginning, when Kelvin (like the reader, not knowing what it is) is confronted with his first sight of a phantom -- a large black woman, naked save for a grass skirt, who enters Gibarian's laboratory while Kelvin is looking through it. Later, he goes to the cold store to look at Gibarian's body and finds her lying beneath it, unconscious, but obviously alive. At the time, these incidents reinforce the quality of inexplicable nightmare; only in retrospect does their true meaning work its way to the surface. Obviously, the negress was Gibarian's familiar. When he dies, she wanders about, searching for him; finally, finding his body in the freezer, she lies down where she can be next to him forever. Thus an incident which was initially nightmarish is shown as actually being tragic. Further, what does it tell us about Gibarian, that the ocean should have dragged from his subconscious and made flesh such a woman? Lem makes none of this obvious. He plants the incident in the reader's mind, and doesn't refer to it again; he lets it make its own point, which it does gradually and effectively. Such subtlety of narrative is uncommon in sf.

The brief summary which I gave at the beginning of this review is only one way of looking at Solaris: like most good novels it can be synopsisized in varying ways, depending on which aspect you select. Solaris is, to put it in rather facile terms, about Han, and his relationship to the Cosmos, and to himself. The theme is very clearly articulated in the novel (so there's no excuse for reviewers who missed it), in a conversation between Kelvin and Snow (one of the other Station Personnel). Here are

one or two extracts from Snow's statements:

"We don't want to conquer the cosmos, we simply want to extend the boundaries of Earth to the frontiers of the cosmos....We don't want to enslave other races, we simply want to bequeath them our values and take over their heritage in exchange. We think of ourselves as the Knights of the Holy Contact. This is another lie. We are only seeking Man. We have no need of other worlds. We need mirrors....We are searching for an ideal image of our own world....At the same time, there is something inside us which we don't like to face up to, from which we try to protect ourselves, but which nevertheless remains..."

At this point, Kelvin is not yet ready to understand. His response? "But what on earth are you talking about?" Snow continues:

"I'm talking about what we all wanted: contact with another civilization. Now we've got it! And we can observe, through a microscope, as it were, our own monstrous ugliness, our folly, our shame!"

Solaris provides a possible solution, but only on its own terms: so Kelvin will discover by the end of the novel. In his expansion to the stars, Man is making two fundamental, related errors: firstly, he is attempting to impose his own pattern on the Universe, instead of trying to understand the pattern that exists; secondly, he is doing this without even being aware of what his own pattern is, except superficially. Such futile ambition is wasted on Solaris. But it enables Kelvin, eventually, to come to some sort of understanding (and this is, perhaps, the true purpose of the 'Others'), and he is then ready to begin the first real exploration of Solaris: one which will not try to fit it into a human mould, but will observe, and attempt to understand it for what it is. At the end of the novel Kelvin goes out for the first time to set foot on the planet. He lands on one of the extrusions. There he sits by the ocean's edge, and reaches out his hand towards a wave, which hesitates and then enfolds it: "A flower had grown out of the ocean, and its calyx was moulded to my fingers." It is a phenomenon which has been observed before, but now perhaps it offers fresh hope.

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In every way this is a rewarding book, and one which has made me think hard about my assumptions about sf. One thing I have not touched on here is style, mainly because one hesitates to say anything too definite about such an individual matter in a novel which has been translated from Polish into French and thence into English. However, I think that there is enough evidence to say that in the original this must have been a finely written book; for the most part it still is. I suspect that the translators were probably more at home with the expos-

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Reviewed by:

John Bowles
Pamela Bulmer
David Conway
Vic Hallett
Ted Pauls
Hugh Stewart
Tony Sudbery

The Moment of Eclipse, by Brian W. Aldiss (Faber, £1.50)

Reviewed by Tony Sudbery

No excuse is too thin for the dedicated anthologist. The only thread linking the stories in Brian Aldiss's latest compilation is the thoroughly accidental one that their authors all have the same name---an effective answer to those reviewers who think that a book is a book is a novel, and a refreshing lesson in taking each moment as it comes.

Actually, this selection isn't quite as arbitrary as that. (Not quite.) Introducing another of his anthologies, Brian Aldiss once remarked that what matters in sf is the images (thus establishing, in one sentence, almost the only solid principle of sf criticism---an anti-philosopher's stone on which many a would-be Berkeley has stubbed his toe). In The Moment of Eclipse he is still concerned with the primacy of the image. The title story, for example, must have been chosen for its description (so improbable that it's probably factual) of the loiasis worm: a human parasite that wanders about its host's skin, surfacing from time to time and occasionally eclipsing his sight. This is clearly a powerful metaphor, though it isn't clear to me what it's a metaphor of. This seems to elude the author too; he states two themes, which intersect with each other and with this image only in the notion of "eclipse", and drops them at various stages of development in the course of an oddly static narrative. This story is by the author

of Earthworks; he writes a stiff, half-baked Edwardian prose soured in a ketchup of exclamation marks which swamp all other flavours with their fatuousness.

Some of the other authors represented here take their images more lightly. They have what their anthologist once attributed to Michael Moorcock, an aesthetic view of life. In "The Day We Embarked for Cythera..." fragments of a sustained conceit equating cars with carnivores are inserted into a witty and superficial conversation on metaphysics, deliberately brilliant. "...My stout friend Portinari insisted on wearing his scarlet conversing-jacket. So he was conversing on grandiose scarlet themes, and I was teasing him." Perhaps the last station on this line is "Confluence", a lexicon of an alien language which simply presents us with a list of such concepts as

AB WE TEL MIN: The sensation that one neither agrees nor disagrees with what is being said to one, but that one simply wishes to depart from the presence of the speaker.

CA PAPA VATUZ: The taste of a maternal grandfather.

This sort of aestheticism, of course, can come very close to childishness---delightfully so or irritatingly so, depending on the reader's mood and the writer's deftness. To take a musical analogue, musique concrete and free form music stem from the same source as the schoolboy's interest in twanging a ruler; the musician is successful if he persuades the sophisticated listener not to feel superior to the schoolboy (i.e. if he takes the listener inside the schoolboy's mind, rather than leaving him feeling that he is watching from the blackboard). By this criterion, translated back into literary terms, "Confluence" and "The Day We Embarked for Cythera..." are completely successful; they are pure delight (though I suppose those sad souls---I'm told there are some---who didn't enjoy The Goon Show won't like these stories either). But in some of the other stories the author doesn't manage to make his private glee public---like "Heresies of the Huge God", which is about a continent-sized lizard that lives in outer space and lights on the Earth like a butterfly on a leaf. Yes, nice; but not when it is made, as it is here, the basis for an obvious and heavy-handed satire on organised religion.

The three most substantial stories in the collection are "Orgy of the Living and the Dying", "The Worm that Flies" and "The Circulation of the Blood". These are all fairly pure science fiction, though they are also rather more than that label might imply. The first is the best of a number of stories set in India and Pakistan (at some time there must have been a busload of Brian Aldisses

trundling round the subcontinent); it concerns an official of the U.N. Famine Abatement Wing who is troubled by a slight derangement of the temporal lobe manifesting itself in verbal fragments, past, future and imaginary, running through his head. Like many science fiction stories, it features its hero's marital problems; but unlike most of them, it relates these meaningfully to the rest of the story. I find it hard to analyse this and say exactly how the various elements of the story fit together; I can only report my sense that they form a well-integrated whole. This author is anyway a very intuitive writer, I think; you don't, as with Nabokov, Nicholas Mosley or William Butler, suspect the existence of a tightly logical structure which may not be able to discern through the surface but which the author could explain to you if he cared to; and I have to respond on the intuitive level on which the story was written.

"The Worm that Flies" and "The Circulation of the Blood" are both on the theme of mortality (a theme that appears in many other places in the collection---even in "Confluence", which has a concept of "Suddenly divining the nature and imminence of old age in one's thirty-first year"). "The Worm that Flies" reads like high fantasy; it's hammed up a bit, but still it comes off very well. Nevertheless, it looks hollow beside "The Circulation of the Blood". This is a beautiful story, a well of sensitivity and passion. In form it is a straightforward realistic narrative, and the theme of immortality is explicitly discussed and illustrated in the lives of the central characters. It is also illuminated by a play of symbolism and a delicate control of mood. Every time I read it I find a different scene giving me one of Housman's shivers. The plot---no, I won't explain it in detail; these cliches will have to do. Go and read it for yourselves.

The writer of this story must have been in a bad way one night in India (he was on the trip; out of it he got the moving "So Far From Prague", included in Langdon Jones's anthology The New SF but not here), for he allowed one of his less gifted companions to write a sequel and call it "...And the Stagnation of the Heart". It's pretty bad.

I also enjoyed "Swastika!", an article by a Reader's Digest staff writer whose most unforgettable character is a Hitler alive and well and living in Ostend, and "That Uncomfortable Pause Between Life and Art...", in which a critic muses on his---exactly, uncomfortable---profession (his views do not coincide with those recently expressed in various places by the anthologist). In general, those authors who adopt a light tone invariably produce happy results; the more serious Aldisses are not so reliable. But when they do succeed, as in the three stories I have mentioned and in particular in "The Circulation of the Blood", they are superb.

Figures of Earth; The Silver Stallion; Jurgen, by James Branch Cabell (Tandem, 35p each)

Reviewed by David Conway

I had already begun to type a review of these books when I was fortunate enough to come across Cabell's Special Delivery, a delightful book which it is worth attempting to summon via the public library system. In it, he makes very explicit, in his typical elegant, witty, and venomous style, his views on, amongst other things, adulation and criticism, in such a way as to make anyone think twice before venturing an opinion on his fiction.

Some of his admirers, however, have gone so far as to set up a society in his honour. They have produced a little introductory pamphlet to the works of the Master, consisting of a preface, an essay, a bibliography and some large correcting footnotes by the editors re.dates, Mark Twain, etc. One can but dream what Cabell himself would have said about all this. (Incidentally, the bibliography is incomplete---there is no mention of Taboo, the satire on the trial of Jurgen.)

With Cabell, of all people, to apotheosize the man is to deny his teachings---unless, of course, the JEC Society turns out to be an utter failure, or, better, it transpires that Cabell never really existed. "The comedy does not vary. The first act is the imagining of the place where contentment exists and may yet be come to; and the second act reveals the striving towards, and the third act the falling short of, that shining goal,---or else, the attaining of it, to discover that happiness, after all, abides a thought farther down the road." Thus Horvendile, whom one might misleadingly call a persona of the author, explaining the epitome of Cabell's vast 'Biography of Dom Manuel, of which the three volumes reviewed here are components. The quote comes from another volume as yet unobtainable over here except in obscure bookshops---The High Place (Ballantine, 95c). Dom Manuel, the simpleton swineherd who in Figures of Earth becomes metamorphosed successively into duke, emperor and god in the realm of Poictesme, is the first to undertake this spiritual odyssey, and his successors and descendents relive it, each in his own fashion, culminating in the story of Manuel's modern American descendent, Felix Kennaston, which is The Cream of the Jest---the finest of the books I have read; but, alas, out of print for forty-four years. In The Silver Stallion---the title refers to the steed on which it is prophesied that the god Manuel will return to redeem Poictesme---we follow the fortunes of Manuel's associates, like him scoundrels elevated to nobility through the stupidity and incompetence of others, after their leader's surprising translation to divinity; and Jurgen relates the story of the sole witness to that apparently rather painful deification, Manuel's bastard son, the contemplative Isaac to his father's

restive Abraham, the introvert Elisha to his Elijah.

These mythological parallels are important in Cabell's work and are always present. His eclectic world of anthropology and pure fiction is extremely convincing---sufficiently for the judge, when Jurgen was being prosecuted for obscenity in the twenties, to swallow Cabell's po-faced 'scholarly' introduction hook, line and sinker. Furthermore, they impart an unusual universality to his books that enables his inevitably sardonic and resigned message to shine through the wit and eroticism that make him such a delight to read, without allowing the novels to become thereby overloaded. One recalls particularly the sad tale of Jehovah (in Something About Eve, Ballantine, 95c) as an example of the author's combined humour and learning.

Cabell's potential appeal is so great that it is difficult to imagine someone to whom he would not appeal. Joyceans, Nabokovians, and crossword addicts will spend many a happy hour unscrambling his anagrams, pondering his obscure allusions and sorting out the enormously complex underlying structure of the Biography and each of its components. Sensible fellows will find the funny bits hilarious and the erotic bits very elegant, though be warned that Cabell is not averse to taking his reader for a ride, sometimes for extraordinarily long passages. The talisman that is passed down to each of Manuel's descendants, which, the Duc de Puyssange explains to his son, "enables us to go farther than most men in our dealings with the ladies", plays a prominent part throughout the saga---hence Cabell's notoriety in the twenties. Perhaps it is a bit tame by modern standards, but I for one find it more moving than Last Exit to Brooklyn.

In terms of literary history, Cabell's achievement in structure of fiction will be best remembered. Cabell was very conscious of the power of form---everything in Poictesne goes by tens (more fodder for those to whom literature is a crime, and must be solved), and dragons may be reduced to quivering hulks by reciting to them multiplication tables or trigonometrical equations. One of the continual amazements, as I work my way slowly through the Biography, is how each book not only contains staggering turns of plot itself, but also sheds light on all the others---a process that is almost overwhelming in The Cream of the Jest and renders the latter one of the most powerful tours de force in literature.

But to achieve all that and still be readable---to blend the world's mythologies, Petronius, Sterne and Thackeray---to presage Ulysses and Ada---to be able to warm at once the brain, the heart and the loins....

This can't be a proper review. I can't find anything bad to say about the bastard.

The Broken Sword, by Poul Anderson (Ballantine, 95c)

Reviewed by Ted Pauls

The latest thing for which we have to be grateful to Lin Carter's Ballantine Adult Fantasy series is the reissue of this little known 1954 sword-and-sorcery novel by Poul Anderson. It should delight an entire generation of readers who look upon Anderson's Three Hearts and Three Lions as a classic and wonder why the author never wrote another novel in a similar vein. For those of us familiar with both of these works, the paperback publication of The Broken Sword revives the long-standing question of why Poul Anderson has not continued to write novels of this sort, adult fairy tales, to which his abilities are so admirably suited.

This reviewer considers Anderson to be quite possibly the master craftsman of the genre. His versatility is unmatched, spanning from light fantasy to technological science fiction and including everything in between, and his average level of quality is as high or higher than any other prolific writer in the field. I've never read an Anderson story that wasn't at least competent. Craftsmanship, however, has its inherent limitations; there is always about it a sort of formalized professionalism which excludes uniqueness. Anderson realises his limits as a stylist and chronicler of humanity, and is always careful to work within them. He never reaches for anything, creatively, that he knows or suspects he won't be successful in grasping. This sort of professionalism, valuable though it undoubtedly is, has an aspect that stifles and precludes the soaring genius of that which is truly great in art. Only in his "adult fairy tales" does Poul Anderson transcend the careful boundaries of this professionalism. He has an intuitive feeling for mythic sagas of fantasy, he is tremendously knowledgeable in the lore of the "Northern Thing" and, most of all, he loves writing about such characters and such events. In everything else he is exceedingly skilful; but in this he is magnificent. For him to have spent the last fifteen years almost wholly involved with other kinds of fiction is something like Rembrandt, in the name of versatility, putting down his brush and deciding to spend half a generation working with sculpture and frescoes.

To the book in hand, in any case. The Broken Sword derives from a somewhat different mythic background than Three Hearts and Three Lions, and strikes one initially as very much modeled on L.Sprague de Camp's fantasies. Against a background of a war in the land of Faerie between the elves and the trolls, aided respectively by the Gods and the Giants of Old Norse mythology, Anderson reveals the saga of Scafloc Elf-Fosterling, his love for the mortal Freda Ormsdaughter, and his fated death struggle against his changeling doppelganger, Valgard Berserker. It is marvelous. For 200 pages, the author leads us through a

world of trolls, spells, gods and unescapable destinies, describing the characters and landscape in the rich language of mythology. A more somber work than Three Hearts and Three Lions, this saga achieves far greater emotional depths. It avoids portraying struggles in pure Good vs. Evil terms, and eschews the Hero Complex that sometimes seizes authors of S&S fantasy: i.e., the Hero must emerge triumphant because he is the Hero. In this it is more faithful to its mythic background than to the tradition of Conan, et al. Scafloc is neither infallible nor invulnerable, and the very power which allows him to lead the elf forces to victory over their enemies inevitably dooms him. The Broken Sword, like many of the Norse Sagas, is a tragedy whose leading characters play predestined parts, and both Scafloc and his evil counterpart Valgard are in many ways tragic figures. It is a magnificently told story that should have been reprinted long, long ago.

The Cube Root of Uncertainty, by Robert Silverberg (Collier, \$1.25)

Reviewed by John Bowles

This is another of the Collier-Macmillan series of retrospective single-author collections. Of the twelve stories ("10 superb sf tales" proclaims the cover, presumably the work of the same man who described Eight Fantasms and Magics as "a science fiction adventure"), seven have appeared in other Silverberg collections: four in Needle in a Timestack; one each in Dimension Thirteen, To Worlds Beyond and Moonferns and Starsongs. Add at least one other story which has appeared in a couple of recent anthologies, and the initial impression is of a collection of rather familiar stories.

Silverberg's introduction sets out what is supposedly the theme of the collection: that through sf we can vicariously experience the nightmares of the future and thus convince ourselves that however bad things are now, "it's going to be uncertainty cubed in centuries to come". The collection also demonstrates his progression from a fairly naive, light-hearted writer to the happy pessimist he now is; nevertheless, one cannot help but feel that the majority of these stories are neither nightmare views of our uncertain future nor signposts along Silverberg's road of development: they're just a group of sf stories, some good, some not so good.

A typical example of the latter is TRANSLATION ERROR, a 1959 "Astounding" story which, unsurprisingly, hasn't previously been collected. It's a mish-mash of a number of old, old ideas: aliens directing Earth history; parallel worlds; man meeting himself; autokinesis; the old bit about setting off in a slow spaceship to Centauri or wherever only to find when you get there that the folks at home have in the meantime developed a faster way and are already there. The plot staggers off in several

different directions and finishes up by taking you absolutely nowhere except from page 55 to page 80 by, unfortunately, the longest route. ABSOLUTELY INFLEXIBLE isn't a lot better: a time-loop story with a 'surprise ending which you can see coming at least ten pages beforehand (and it's only a 16-page story).

One oddity which crops up once or twice in this collection is a fairly close duplication of themes. This is especially apparent with ABSOLUTELY INFLEXIBLE, and endows it with a degree of redundancy it can't readily cope with, having been pretty redundant in the first place. In fact, it is almost exactly the same story as MUGWUMP FOUR, allowing for necessary cosmetic alterations. Both hinge in different ways and to different degrees on a time-loop---it is the crux of ABSOLUTELY INFLEXIBLE, but provides the ho-hum predictable twist in the tail of MUGWUMP FOUR. More specifically, each deals with the problem of a sterile future faced with germ-laden time travellers from the present. Again, this is admittedly more incidental in MUGWUMP FOUR, and probably just as well, because it is used very heavy-handedly in the other story. MUGWUMP is in fact preferable in every way: a dash of Sheckley here, a touch of Tenn there; hardly earth-shaking, but moderately good fun.

DOUBLE DARE is another of those stories upholding what appears to be a central tenet of American philosophy, at least as exemplified in its sf: that any two red-blooded, hard-drinking American engineers, with their backs to the wall, will always be able to knock together some marvellous new invention to save the day. A fine example of this was, of course, the Skylark series, where you could always rely on Dick Seaton in a crisis to cobble together a sixth-order projector or two, given a spanner, three tintacks and about ten minutes uninterrupted labour. The philosophy was put on a scientific (?) footing by Raymond F. Jones, in NOISE LEVEL, his theorem being that if you showed a group of scientists or engineers something which apparently worked, then if they believed in it they'd just be certain to come up with something in no time at all, yes sir! In fact, Silverberg's story is just NOISE LEVEL done over again, but at least he doesn't take it seriously.

Aside from THE IRON CHANCELLOR, a fairly successful black comedy, that's all the old Silverberg stories. Since about 1963, however, he's been developing into quite a different writer. Early signs of this can be seen in THE SIXTH PALACE, NEIGHBOR and THE SHADOW OF WINGS: not outstanding stories, but solid enough. In the first two the hopelessness is far more unrelenting than hitherto, while THE SHADOW OF WINGS, potentially a fine story, was, I felt, undercut by a rather flippant-seeming ending.

In HALFWAY HOUSE, Silverberg has it all drawn together. It is the story of the man who tries to cheat death but is, in

fact, cheated himself. Nothing unusual there, except that Alfieri's motives are not selfish ones, and he accepts his responsibilities willingly. But, says Silverberg, that doesn't matter: if the axe is going to fall it will fall, one way or another. It's a bleak outlook, 180 degrees removed from the usual pulp conventions which say that if you mean well you'll luck out, however stupid you may be otherwise.

TO THE DARK STAR is just as bleak: here it's the innocent bystander who gets caught in the crossfire: his unhumanness providing a channel through which the two human characters may funnel their bitter hatred for one another. A three member expedition is sent to witness the singular end of a dark star (a happening, incidentally, which pops up in another context in HALFWAY HOUSE). The man and the woman hate one another and seek ways to destroy one another. One of the three is to monitor the final collapse on machinery so sophisticated that it seems as if the observer himself is undergoing the experience. The man and the woman try to trick one another into this probable self-destruction, but ultimately join forces and compel the alien, the microcephalon, to undergo the experience. It destroys him; it unites them in shared guilt (or shared humanity, as they rationalise it). The point made is that we can only live peacefully amongst ourselves if we destroy something else: aggressions must be channeled. The story, tersely told in the first-person present by the male human, conveys the point admirably.

The remaining two stories are probably also Silverberg's best: PASSENGERS and SUNDANCE. Opening and closing the book they provide the meat of a rather uneven inverted sandwich. PASSENGERS is too well known for me to say much about it, except that it is perhaps the most merciless sf story ever written, in which mankind is robbed of hope, of free will, and even, by the end of the story, of the illusion of free will. The only weakness is that it necessarily rests on an old sf cliché: the Central Computer which provides for all mundane needs---necessary because without something like it human society would have crumbled completely under the impact of the passengers, would not be able to act out its old, meaningless daily rituals. That's a tiny point though. It is perfectly sustained, very carefully and well written (like TO THE DARK STAR, making necessary and effective use of the first-person present tense), and is utterly inexorable.

SUNDANCE is thought by some people to be the better story of the two. I can't really see this: it is perhaps more ambitious, but it is not quite as successful. James Blish might call this a Short Story of Apparatus, switching constantly from one tense to another, but there is nothing random about this. Each of the four tenses is used for a different aspect of reality: the first-person present describing the subjective reality, be it real or hallucination, of Tom Two-Ribbons (an Indian member of an expedition to an alien planet who is alone in believing

the autochthonous lifeform to be intelligent); third-person present reporting his relationships with the other members of the expedition and his (again, real or imagined) conversations with them; second-person present, a very unusual usage, but here used accurately to convey the interface between the two preceding realities, the interpretations, the possibilities; and a fragment of ordinary third-person past tense narrative from which the 'true' meaning may, like a jigsaw, be constructed. Silverberg in this story demonstrates an impressive technical mastery and a good deal of sensitivity. In many ways it's a greater achievement than PASSENGERS, but it isn't quite as effective a story.

Two excellent stories, then; two others very good; the rest ranging in quality from mediocre to good. If you are unfamiliar with the stories the high points are, I think, sufficiently high to carry you over the troughs and give you your money's worth, even at the ludicrously inflated price which Collier are asking for this book.

INDOCTRINAIRE, by Christopher Priest (Faber, £1.40; NEL, 50p)

Reviewed by Pamela Bulmer

Expanded from a short story in New Writings in SF 15, this is Christopher Priest's first sf novel. It is not necessary to adopt an indulgent attitude towards Indoctrinaire since it does not read like a first novel; indeed, it is of a standard frequently not attained by many third or subsequent novels.

Dr. Elias Wentik is researching into indoctrination drugs at the Concentration in the Antarctic when two strangers, purporting to be under Government orders, escort him to the Planalto District, a clearing in the Brazilian jungle which exists simultaneously two hundred years in the future. Here Wentik is subjected to interrogation by his captors, Astourde and Musgrove, and when he finally escapes to another area of the future he discovers that he is expected to find a cure for the Disturbance Gas, which was the result of his research in the past.

There are some remarkably vivid and realistic scenes throughout the book, like striking camera stills from a moving picture. The construction is tight and the action intriguing; and though at first it seems absurd, it becomes comprehensible and logical when the facts are explained. The character of Astourde is convincingly drawn, and skilful use is made of his actions in character to further the plot. This is particularly noticeable in the incident in the maze, which escapes being contrived because Astourde's action with the jerrican is one of a number of absurd and inexplicable actions, and though the outcome is predictable, it is so only because it is inevitable in the light of what we know of Astourde's character and Wentik.

Christopher Priest uses a clean, economical style, which although at times rather colourless is very effective when used as a descriptive catalogue. The danger to a new and inexperienced writer of using descriptive imagery which employs rich, dense language steeped in denotative as well as connotative meaning is that it requires a high degree of skill in the use of language, amounting to a healthy respect---even love---for it; and without this skill it is all too easy to slip into cliché, so that the effect is stale and dull instead of rich and vivid. Priest achieves his vivid imagery by paring down the language but at the same time reporting minute and accurate detail, so that the scene has a high visual impact. This is particularly effective when Wentik finds a rotting corpse in the jungle: a quite gruesome and horrifying scene.

However, this technique does have its pitfalls. One is that loaded words---those which have acquired an associative depth of meaning---may acquire more significance than the author intended, when there are less of them, by the mere fact of their use. For example, when we first meet Wentik he "sat comfortably in a soft plastic chair, and fondled the muzzle of the rat which lay in his lap. The creature pushed its snout affectionately against his hand as he absent-mindedly stroked it." We regard rats as dirty, evil vermin. They thrive in sewers and act as carriers of disease; the spectre of the plague haunts even modern society. Rats are used as a symbol of evil, and the idea of a man being on such friendly terms with the creature makes us assume that there is something evil and repulsive about the man too. By the time we find out that the rat is tame it is too late; the associative depth of the word has done its work, and though the average reader will not analyse why, the effect is to make him feel unsympathetic towards Wentik. Add to this the fact that Wentik works in the Concentration, a word which when used with a capital 'C' to describe a place picks up the association 'Camp', and we are well on the way to being alienated from the central character. This is fair enough, except that the author gives us no further justification for the feeling, and the reader's irritation and perplexity at Wentik's neck and passive behaviour contradict the initial impressions, and the subsequent discovery that he is a very rational scientist.

The second danger is that the reader may mistake these images or pictures for symbols, and at present the author is not fully exploiting the potential significance which these scenes could have. One of the devices Astourde uses in his interrogation is a hand which stabs and points at Wentik. Although the hand as a symbol is somewhat banal, it would have had a much more impressive effect on the reader (and on Wentik) if Wentik had been experiencing feelings of guilt and fear. The difficulty here for the author was that Wentik could hardly feel guilty about a crime he was unaware of and in fact did not commit, but after what he had been subjected to only an utterly insensitive man

would have felt that guilt free. Similarly, the jail standing locked in desolation by the jungle could stand for the future locked in desolation by the present. All imagery depends for its success on acute observation and perception; and the use of symbolism, which in this book would have required a very deft touch, requires even more acute perception and mature insight.

The character of Wentik is crucial to the acceptance by the reader of the situations he finds himself in. This characterisation is convincing enough for most of the book, but in the opening chapters Wentik's passive role would have been far more convincing if he had been shown as a more sensitive, emotional man. A nervous man with something on his conscience is highly susceptible to the kind of menace Astourde and Musgrove present, but I do not feel that an intelligent rational man would have allowed himself to be manoeuvred quite so easily. While it is true that "when a frightened man has no idea of where his next step may take him, a complete breakdown of normal mental processes can quickly follow", an expert in methods of interrogation and indoctrination ought to be less susceptible than the average man. In other words, he should have been able to spot Astourde's crude interrogation devices more quickly, and should have been less frightened by them, even allowing for his disorientation at the jail.

Nevertheless, these criticisms as to the depth of characterisation of Wentik and the overall cohesion of images themselves imply a high standard of achievement for a first novel. In using the unfashionable view of the immutability of time---"As time is unalterable, so is the progress of events"---Priest handles the time paradox in a neat and logical way, reinforced by Wentik, who stands as evidence that the present does have a responsibility for the future, though paradoxically also that events will take place on a large scale regardless of what action an individual takes.

Narziss and Goldmund, by Hermann Hesse; trans. G. Dunlop (Penguin, 35p. Rosshalde, by Hermann Hesse; trans. R. Manheim (Cape, 21.75)

Reviewed by David Conway

And now, two more versions of the archetypal Hesse story; yin versus yang, yin wins, but you can't have one without the other. As with the books of Cabell, the author's moral purpose never varies, and an assessment of his work depends on two factors---whether one is sympathetic to his Weltanschauung and whether one enjoys the various moulds into which he pours it. With Hesse there is the added difficulty that we cannot be bothered to plough through the original German and therefore must inevitably lose something of the stylistic effects in translation.

So it boils down to whether we prefer Hesse's storyline to be set in mediaeval times (Narziss and Goldmund), the future (The Glass Bead Game), the timeless orient (Siddhartha), a fourth dimension (Journey to the East), or the present (Rosshalde). For my money, the Middle Ages come out tops. They are at a sufficient remove for us to accept the fantastic turns of plot of Narziss and Goldmund, but close enough culturally to the modern Western mind for us to get the message without having constant reference to Teach Yourself Zen Buddhism.

Narziss and Goldmund is, without qualification, a superb book, of which, I now feel, The Glass Bead Game was a feeble and flatulent rewrite. Narziss and Goldmund, scholar and adventurer, are students together in a monastery. Narziss devotes himself to the scholarly life; Goldmund, with whose activities most of the book is concerned, rides out to become a lover, a murderer, a sculptor, a vagabond, chasing the vision of perfection that is the mother he never knew, and returns to die at the monastery where Narziss, through diligence and piety, has become abbot. For once, however, Hesse's characters really live: they are more than strip-cartoon incarnations of particular qualities. Goldmund's crusade for art and Narziss's quest for god are outlined through a set of situations that are exciting, wholly credible, and make their point exquisitely. Cf. particularly the description of lovemaking on p.73, which is one of the finest I have encountered. Dear reader, you will gather that I enjoyed the book and urge you to try it yourself.

Rosshalde is by comparison an extremely sombre work which, however, demonstrates that Hesse was able to deal with more 'kitchen-sink' situations than we normally associate with him. Veraguth, an artist, lives on the eponymous estate, with his wife and darling son, the latter being the only thing connecting the lives of his parents. He has another son, a bit of a ponce, who comes for a visit; and a friend, Burckhardt, who has apparently made his fortune on the sweat of Malayan peasants. Nice son dies, father sells Rosshalde, packs up to live out East on friend's rubber plantations. Neat, but mainly for addicts.

SHORTER REVIEWS (but just as interesting!)

Anywhen -- James Blish (Faber 31.75): A new short story collection by James Blish is always to be welcomed and Anywhen is, by and large, no exception. The qualification is because some of the stories irritated me; but none of them left me indifferent, which I would find a far greater sin.

I never did like Damon Knight's symbolic assessment of two early Blish stories, so I am not likely to react well to "How Beautiful With Banners": it seems too densely loaded and leaves me with the feeling of being lost in a pea-souper. Also I am not an admirer of Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and "A Dusk of

"Idols" is modelled on it so closely that the narrator instantly started me nodding off (this is in a way a compliment to the story). The prose of "A Style of Treason" is just as dense but here it works well, since enigmas, hints and half-truths are a likely part of a society of traitors and these, combined with very formal dialogue, make it very enjoyable. "None So Blind" is very short and is possibly the most perfect story in the book. "The Writing of the Rat" and "And Some Were Savages" are both straightforward mysteries concerned with the nature of aliens and, like "Skysign" they show what can be done with a standard plot by an author with as wide a knowledge and abilities as Blish. (Vic Hallett)

The Warlord of the Air.-- Michael Moorcock (NEL, \$1.75): This comes close to being a very good book; perhaps with a little more care extended to the second half, which might profitably have been several thousand words longer, it might have been one. As it is, the whole thing folds up rather too easily.

Nevertheless, for about the first two-thirds of the book we get an excellent pseudo-Edwardian sf novel. Captain Oswald Bastable (a name, perhaps, exposing E.Nesbit as a Secret Influence on Moorcock?) gets catapulted from 1903 to 1973 -- a 1973 where the great wars never happened and where heavier-than-air flight was never invented; a world dominated by the great colonial powers, their superiority maintained by means of the airship. Bastable, an upright British gentleman, is delighted to see the dreams of Empire so brought to fruition, although when he ends Chapter 5 wondering "Who on earth could be insane enough to plot the destruction of such a Utopia as this?" you don't need to have read many such books to realise that All Is Not As It Seems.

As always, Moorcock puts a lot of little references and jokes into the book -- part of the fun is digging them out. Various familiar historical characters appear under thin disguises (I must say that Lenin, who would have been 103 in 1973, appears remarkably agile!). The opening chapter is a straightforward bow to Conrad (who later appears in the flesh as a (presumably) ageless airship captain). Good entertainment, well worth reading. It's just a shame it isn't the book it might have been. (John Bowles)

New Worlds Quarterly 3 -- Michael Moorcock ed. (Sphere, 50p): I am glad to see that with NWQ3 we are back to the good old days of the Roberts & Vintner period when the pocket book format concealed a splendid mixture of styles and subjects. Here we have formal storytelling, offbeat pieces, science fiction, parody, fantasy and horror, all laced with some very attractive illustrations. There is a remarkable long Keith Roberts story about giant combine harvesters, whose central image burns itself into the brain. Christopher Priest contributes a really nasty story, and there is another from Hilary Bailey. Both were bought for "Sword & Sorcery", a magazine which never appeared; from the evidence of these two it was a great loss. Other good items are a comic literary story

apiece from Brian Aldiss and John Sladek and a strong atmospheric story from Alistair Bevan. I think my favourite, other than the Roberts, is Laurence James' "And Dug the Dog a Tomb", which tells of the events on the night that Godot almost came. I am sure that this is the right format for "New Worlds" as seen by Michael Moorcock -- the traditional items show to advantage, and the experimental items are more inclined to surprise because there is no indication of their nature. If you have given up reading "New Worlds" during the past few years then please try it again. It's well worthwhile. (Vic Hallett)

The Flying Sorcerors -- David Gerrold and Larry Niven (Ballantine,

95c.): I started this book without any great expectations, and was surprised to find myself enjoying it thoroughly. It's the story of a friendly, primitive group of aliens fortunate (?) enough to be visited by a well-meaning human anthropologist. To the village magician, the Earthman is a rival wizard, who must be destroyed. The book divides into two distinct parts: firstly the attempts of Shoogar, the wizard, to cast a spell to destroy his rival, or at least his flying machine, culminating in a remarkable success; secondly, the marooned Earthman, to get back to his mother ship, persuades the villagers to help him build an airship (they are only too eager to give any assistance to get rid of him). Written with constant good humour, the novel, though long (516pp), rarely loses impetus. I expect Gerrold and Niven had a lot of fun putting it together, and I expect most readers would get similar pleasure from it. Better than Ringworld, to my mind. (Hugh Stewart)

Tomorrow is too Far -- James White (Joseph, \$1.50): One often

hears complaints about sf's inability to produce good detective stories, but I have found plenty in my reading, the only difference being that the usual concern is not "who?" but "What?" or "where?" (just take a look at Second Foundation if you doubt me -- it's complete to the last red herring). Now we have one from James White. His Sector General stories are good investigatory mystery pieces, but with this latest novel we have a "what is the nature of the project?" story set in the near future -- so be warned that the sf content is only really apparent at the very end. However, it has been showing through in the earlier parts as clues, hints and allusions.

The security officer of an aerospace factory finds out about a project so secret that even he has been told nothing. Things are complicated by a handyman called Pebbles, who seems an idiot, but, equally, seems more complex. The story is well told, with small surprises exploding at intervals until the major revelations come at the end, and there are some very good flying sequences on the way. Regular James White readers may have noticed something odd -- the hero is not a doctor! He does, however, fall in love with a beautiful lady doctor during the course of the book. (Vic Hallett)

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It was a phase we probably all go through at one time or another. A sort of nervous condition that affects the fidget regions of the body. A malady that manifests itself in a variety of ways.

I was smitten quite hard. Too much R.L.Fanthorpe and Ted Tubb had brought it on. There was just no escape. Infection passed the acute and became chronic. I was going to be a science fiction writer!

Being illiterate in those days didn't help. In fact, hindsight has proved that it wasn't all that much of a disadvantage; still, I definitely needed some sort of instruction. My initial attempts at story writing were lamentable.

"What you need is a course, boy," an acquaintance advised. "One of them Correspondence Courses. Put you straight in no time!"

That's the very thing for me, I thought! A few hours daily. All done in the privacy of the bedroom. Sent under plain cover. Results guaranteed!

The Empire Writing School didn't have a science fiction department, but they did promise to turn me into a Writer, and that, after all, was the main consideration.

"Let's take H.E.Bates as an example," the first lesson said.

ensues and the thief makes off in a stolen vehicle. All the while people are screaming things like: "Aieeee peon! You comma back wit zoz bananas!" All very authentic.

The police arrive seconds later and chase after the banana felon over what would, geographically speaking, have been the whole of South America. The various towns the chase passed through ranged from Mexico City to Montevideo. This grand tour lasts all of ten minutes, with the thief finally losing the police in a cloud of dust. The thief then makes for his hideout in the stolen Ford trailer. (The term "trailer" got me into a small argument with the school. They thought it meant "trolley", and the subsequent substitution by the examiner looked a bit silly.)

Back at his hideout, the thief rushes in with his prize, only to be accosted by his partner.

"Whya do ya allaways steala da bananas!" the partner cries in music hall Italian, an unaccountable change of accent considering my grasp of dialect in previous chapters. Nevertheless, for the next few hundred words I proceeded to display my grasp of dialogue, the grip of which got less and less as I progressed. It all got very jokey and ended up as a sort of latin "Steptoe and Son" (my creative influences are rather obvious I'm afraid). The police finally arrive to round off the whole laborious story. Now comes the twist. That box of bananas is Not What It Seems. Our poor Mexican master criminal has unwittingly pinched a batch of plastic bananas full of uncut gems that some international gang was hoping to smuggle out of the country. A very believable tale, you will agree.

As a piece of writing the story was pathetically inadequate. The construction was terribly messy and the whole thing was too long anyway. Still, I thought it had something, and I posted it off to the school to be criticized.

The school returned it with the verdict that the story showed "promise". They liked the character of the thief, but suggested a few alterations to the plot. These alterations, they explained, were all part of their attempts to turn me into a writer capable of producing saleable material. So the revised version didn't have the plastic bananas at all. Indeed, the main character was no longer a Mexican thief, but a Cornish farm worker who gets drunk at a fete and proposes to the ugliest girl in the village, or something. He gets out of this difficult situation by getting even drunker and rushing around proposing to all the unmarried girls in the vicinity. It wasn't really the same story I suppose. Still, I was assured by my mentors that this tale was much more believable and would undoubtedly sell. So much for my artistic integrity.

I had high hopes of a sale though. I eagerly submitted the story to various publications, but needless to say it never sold. The final rejection came with the brief inscription: "Our readers might not find this story very believable. Sorry." Sorry indeed.

And with that, my shining career as a man of letters came to a withering halt. I just had no enthusiasm left. Perhaps if I had stuck to my guns and worked away at writing on my own, made all the mistakes on my own and just damn well written what I wanted to write, I might have got somewhere. As it was, that correspondence school so brainwashed me with their "correct way" and their "believable characterisation" that in the end I was incapable of constructing even the simplest of tales.

The moral hangs thereby.

--- Dick Howett

cont.from p.1

with the Lem story and for writing, at rather short notice, a useful introduction to Lem's work. Being very pressed for space I had to omit some of Franz's more waspish comments about Western sf and its reviewers, since it was not strictly relevant. This is a pity, because they were rather entertaining. I also had to alter the translation of the story quite a bit, to make it read better, and I trust that in doing so I have not altered the sense or the emphasis.

Dick Howett's article is perhaps not the kind of thing you would normally expect to find in Vector, but I enjoyed it so much that it would have been a great pity to leave it out.

But what do you feel about this? I won't know unless you tell me. It's taken for granted that Vector never draws any letters of comment, but I hope you will ignore this unhappy precedent and get down and write and tell me what you thought of this issue, and what you would like to see in the future. It doesn't take a lot of your time, and it would repay some of mine. Doesn't matter if you thought everything in this issue was rubbish -- I still want to know. Please.

I don't yet know what will be in Vector 60: all I can definitely announce is an article about Kobo Abe's novel Inter Ice Age 4 by Australian critic Bruce Gillespie. There are any number of other things in the melting pot, some of which can be expected to emerge soon. Vector should settle down to a quarterly schedule, and as of next issue it will be printed again. See you then.

--- Malcolm Edwards

PAMELA BULMER

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SF CRITICISM IN
THEORY & PRACTICE

In James Blish's talk yesterday*, he paid tribute to the work of Damon Knight, but modestly omitted to mention the work done in the area of sf criticism by William Atheling Jr. He has himself pointed out the lack of a body of scholarly criticism in the sf field, and I think it's generally accepted that we do not have enough good and responsible critics. My concern is how conditions can be created where good criticism can flourish. Last night John Brunner, James Blish and our group were discussing the moral right of one artist to shape the development of another---the classic example of this is Ezra Pound's influence on Eliot's "Waste Land". James Blish acknowledges that his criticism has focussed chiefly on the technique of fiction; what I want to explore here are some of the more subtle aspects of sf criticism.

How do we evaluate a work of science fiction?

You may wonder why I have taken as my subject 'How do we, etc' instead of talking about how I personally evaluate a work of sf. You may even question quite validly why I should pose this

* "All in a Knight's Work", reprinted in Speculation 29.

question at all to what is essentially an informed audience. You all---each one of you---know how to evaluate a work of sf. You make a judgment each time you read an sf book, and you are entitled to make that judgment. Each reader has a private set of criteria by which he assesses the quality of a book. He's probably not conscious of these criteria, and makes his judgment intuitively. What I want to suggest is that it is time the field as a whole codified a set of criteria of evaluation so that we can sort out the subjective from the objective judgment and---what is far more important---spell out for the reader the criteria which good critics should be applying, so that their work too may be subject to scrutiny.

But why do we need critics? Why can't the reader simply pass judgment on an author by either buying or not buying his work? The answer is that things just aren't that simple. A reader, like an author or a publisher, is subjected to all kinds of influences. The reader's choice, for instance, is influenced by that of the publisher: an evaluation has already been made before he gets a look in. The publisher will then try to persuade readers that his choice is a good one by means of his advertising---or, paradoxically, his lack of it---and the blurb and jacket: the packaging of his commodity (though one is bound to wonder, looking at some of the abominations masquerading as book jackets, whether the publisher's intention is not---again paradoxically---to persuade the public not to buy the book!).

I would like to suggest three justifications for the existence of a body of informed criticism in a field of fiction---and especially in the sf field. Firstly, each writer makes a particular contribution to his own age. Sf has been around in a popular form long enough now for the present day writer to be influenced by the traditions of his field, whether he likes it or not. He may claim to be a rebel writer uncontaminated by, for example, the undeniable pulp influence on the field---but that rebellion is itself evidence of influence. Criticism is a continuing dialogue between writer and reader; none of you could deny the existence of such a dialogue in the sf field. But is it a useful dialogue to either side? The sf addict is, by and large, more involved than the average non-sf reader: he wants to meet other readers and share his reading experience, be it good or bad. In varying ways each one of you here is concrete evidence of this fact. This dialogue or discussion can be a valuable thing. Disagreement within the field can make a contribution; this may be constructive or destructive, depending on what form it takes. The average sf reader is intelligent and articulate---if not in person then on paper---clever, but untrained in making objective assessments. Of course, there is no reason why the average reader should be

trained in this way, nor am I holding it up as a virtue, but it is an aspect to be taken into account in the discussion---unique at least in the extent to which it continually goes on between readers, writers, publishers and editors---within the sf field. On the positive side it can contribute a freshness of perception: an uninhibited and sincere response which should not be underestimated. But it is informed and objective analysis which can help a writer assess how far he is succeeding in what he set out to do. This function cannot be performed unless the criticism is of a high standard; only if it is can the writer recognise it as a barometer of his work. He does not have to agree with the criticism, but can use it to sharpen his own critical faculties. The critic must, therefore, compensate for his lack of specialized knowledge in every field which the sf writer may touch on with a high degree of intellectual discipline, if his contribution is to be of any use to writer or reader.

Secondly, I have said that publishers influence the reader by their choice of book. I would like to suggest that publishers need a body of informed judgement to which they can refer when selecting their lists. I am not suggesting that critics should be publishers' readers, but that publishers' readers should have some set of criteria of evaluation which they can apply when making their selection---which is ultimately a selection on your behalf. Without a body of criticism their yardstick of success is sales, and by then, lamentably, it is often too late.

Thirdly, the prime object of reading is enjoyment. Good analytic criticism can help to enhance this enjoyment for the reader by sharpening his awareness. The best sf requires more than casual attention from the reader; like good wine it can be, for some people, an acquired taste. If the reader demands a high quality---which he can indicate by his response---then the quality of sf books will go up.

Having justified the need for criticism, let me briefly list the criteria which I think should be applied. I will obviously not have space here to go into these in great detail, but my aim is to set up an area for informed discussion. I have deliberately used the term 'we' at the beginning of this talk, because I do not think that any critic, myself included, has the right to be dogmatic about such a many-faceted field of fiction. With this in mind, the criteria are: readability, language, content, structure and meaning.

It may seem strange that I have put readability first, but I return to a point I just made which cannot, I think, be over-emphasised: the prime object of reading fiction is enjoyment. A good sf book should give enjoyment to the reader. Individual readers will have different ideas of what constitutes enjoyment, but I think it can be divided broadly into three areas.

Enjoyment can be on the level of entertainment, as in the escapist, fast-paced adventure story; it can be on the emotional level---that is, concerned primarily with the exploration of human, or non-human, feelings; it can be on the intellectual level, challenging the reasoning powers of the reader. Of course, not many books fall exclusively into any one of these three categories; very many sf books contain, in varying proportions, a mixture of all three ingredients. But before assessing a book it is imperative that the critic recognise what kind of book the author is writing---it is obviously downright immoral to condemn an adventure story because it isn't a profound philosophical tome. Both have their place, and their own particular kind of excellence. The extent to which sf writers are successful in blending some or all of these ingredients may enhance or impair the readability of their work, but this is an aspect which I do not have time to deal with here.

Next, language. Critics and reviewers speak blithely of a book being 'well-written' or 'badly written'. What precisely do we mean by 'good style'?

It's virtually impossible for me or anyone else to give a definition in the short time I have available. However, I will attempt to focus on one or two of the essential components of good style; one or two guide lines, so to speak. But first let me stress that style is as important---no, I think it is more important---to the sf writer than it is to the mainstream writer. The sf writer has, after all, an extra dimension to convey to his readers, and cannot therefore afford to waste a single word. I would put the failure to recognise the power of language as the major deficiency in the bulk of sf writing.

Style basically is the unique way in which each unique individual expresses him- or herself: therefore the first ingredient is honesty. Let me give you an illustration of what I mean. If I attempted to impress you all by delivering this speech in the style of Ken Bulmer, James Blish, or John Brunner the result would be bad style. Of course, if my object were to demonstrate my powers of parody or imitation---assuming I possessed such powers---the result could be good, because I would be giving you my perception of what those three erudite gentlemen do. If a writer tries to write in what he believes to be a 'literary style', or to be profound about a subject he doesn't understand, or to be sincere about a subject he doesn't care tuppence about, then you can be sure his style will find him out. The reader may not be aware precisely why that writer irritates him, but without sincerity good style cannot exist.

The other ingredients essential in good style are lucidity, fluidity and freshness. Lucidity is not so much a matter of saying a thing so that it will be clearly understood; it is more a matter of saying it so that it will not be misunderstood. Good grammar is the key to fluidity and lucidity. Let me

demonstrate with a few examples:

"The rear wheels were sunken up to their hubcaps..."

"Our parents had tried to discipline him in the past, I knew, never very successfully."

"I had walked these streets before, however, that I knew or ones very much like them."

"All the surviving brothers, we princes of Amber, I am sure, felt it much better, each in his own simple way, personally to achieve this status and thereafter let the Shadows fall where they might."

"Caine would find some, for it was probable, were I to depart, the fleet could not sail the Shadow seas with me, and would be left as sitting ducks upon the real waters here."

Now these sentences do mean something, but in each case the reader must make an unnecessary effort to grasp the meaning. Trying to decipher them is liable to give the reader mental hiccups. This, I submit, is a discourtesy to the reader.

Of course, dogmatic adherence to grammar can be stultifying. Codification of grammar is of comparatively recent origin, and the important thing to remember is that language is a living thing, and it is constantly changing with usage. Grammatical rules come about largely through usage, and I think it is wrong to blame a writer because, for example, he splits the odd infinitive. Jane Austen often splits infinitives, and her language has a silky fluidity. There's also the vexed question of dangling participles. One of the finest sentences in the English language is attributed to Francis Bacon: "Houses were made to live in, not to look on.": very succinct, compact, neat, and I don't think it could be expressed better in any other way. And of course Churchill had something to say about things up with which he would not put.

I think it is also important here to draw a distinction between original grammatical structures---that is, attempts at making new patterns with language, which may be a perfectly valid device for the sf writer---and bad grammar, i.e. mistaken, misleading or confusing grammar. Meaning should not be sacrificed for gimmicky or sloppy writing.*

Another quality of good style is freshness and liveliness. Modern sf's sojourn in the pulp magazines has left it peculiarly prone to cliché and over-writing. Cliches were originally precise and vivid images; now they're dead but they won't lie down---they're just pensioned off. "Margaret, heavy with child"; "tensions gnawed at his stomach"; "Slaughter's eyes nearly disappeared into the shadowy caverns of their sockets";

* I was very tempted to reproduce this exactly from Pamela's manuscript, which reads: "gimmicky or sloppy writting"!

"the sarcasm in Cory's eyes dropped into his voice". Of course I hardly need mention the penchant of characters have for groaning, gasping, thinking quick as a flash etc.---you all know the kind of thing I have in mind.

However, I'll stick my neck out here and say there are worse things than cliches. The mere absence of cliché does not make a good writer. The mere presence of good grammar does not make a good writer. There is a certain kind of baroque richness which is attractive because of the enthusiasm of the writer to tell his story: a certain gusto and inventive ingenuity which I personally prefer to pretentious dead obscurity. (Now, of course, I'm being subjective.) This is the 'born storyteller', the 'good bad book'.

The danger here for writers is that in attempting to avoid cliché and over-writing, writers may eschew adjectives, any words with strong connotative meanings, and that wonderful device, metaphor. Of course, any writer who is really aware of the power of language will realise that the simplest of words have acquired an enormous connotative charge. Words like light, dark, cold, ice, chastity, virginity. The fewer the adjectives, the heavier the weight they will be likely to carry---which is OK if the writer knows the effect he is creating.

But the power of the metaphor lies in the invitation to the reader to make a selective comparison between two unlike things. It combines an idea and a feeling, so that it can convey more meaning than a non-metaphorical phrase. When we say "she moved like a gazelle" we do not mean that she has all the attributes of a gazelle---such as four legs---but only certain ones---grace, speed, daintiness, the way a gazelle moves. We have made an act of selection. Let me demonstrate further with an example from Brian Aldiss's Barefoot in the Lead: "The bed was made for chastity and early rising." Now I hope you are all interpreting away like mad. What the author is suggesting is that the bed is too uncomfortable even to make love on---and I'm sure you all know precisely what that means. For me the damn thing creaks when you so much as breathe out; and I can imagine nothing which will dampen ardour so effectively as creaky bedsprings.

At its best, then, metaphor is extremely powerful, and is often the element which gives life to style. How does one arrive at good metaphor? We're back to sincerity again---plus perception. To use metaphor the writer has to see with fresh eyes---as if he had always been blind and could now see for the first time. Some writers adopt a different technique and build 'scenes' by cataloguing minute details. The danger here is that the reader may mistake these scenes as having a symbolic significance the writer did not intend. If the writer paints a certain picture in great detail, the reader is entitled to assume that he is being invited to examine this picture:

that it has some special meaning. The inference is often that the particular scene is symbolic and forms part of a central symbolic tone to the entire work. If this is so, then the next question to ask is: "Of what is it symbolic?" To say that a work is symbolic is only half a statement. A symbol is, broadly, something which stands for something else. Beware the critic who says "Ah, but you see it's all symbolic", leaving the poor reader feeling he must be too obtuse to understand the thing. If neither critic nor reader can make some sense of the symbolism then the reader is entitled to assume that it may well be the writer who is at fault.

You will, of course, realise that I have drifted across from discussing style to discussing content. They are of course indivisible, but for purposes of analysis we divide the two roughly into what is being said (content) and how it is being said.(style). To sum up, then, on style. The total overall effect is what counts. Blemishes are important in relation to the frequency with which they occur, and whether they occur at a centrally important point. And the key question to ask is: "Why is the writer using or breaking a particular stylistic convention?" If he is doing so to enhance meaning, to convey something beyond our experience, and he succeeds in this, then it is valid. If he is doing it to sound literary or profound and the result is obscure and awkward, then it is not.

Now, as to structure. I don't want to go into basic plot construction here: you all know the kind of thing that's contained in dozens of 'How to write novels' books---the mastery of basic dramatic formulae. What I would like to say here---and again I am sticking my neck out---is that much harm has been done to many writers by the influence of these 'How to' schools, particularly in America. (We should bear in mind the distinction between talent and genius: the sf field is bursting with talent, but I would hesitate to name a single genius. The influences which may not harm a genius may well harm a talented artist.) This is not confined to sf, of course, but it does give a kind of lazy rule-of-thumb guide to publishers and their readers---and of course writers are influenced by what they can sell. The sort of thing I have in mind is "Author intrusion is bad", that kind of blanket statement. The truth is that author intrusion is not bad---unless it is handled badly. Some of the subtlest effects can be achieved by author intrusion, and only on examination is it apparent that the author is behind the book, adding another dimension. This is called 'distancing', and is an important technique. Another dictum which must inhibit many writers is "Never tell---always show". Again, many of the finest writers have achieved their effects by telling---though they usually proceed to show as well, thus gaining a greater effect still. The point here is that a writer should merely be guided by rules, not put in a straitjacket by them. And of course the critic should be aware of this and should not condemn the writer simply because he uses

author intrusion, or sometimes tells the reader in addition to showing---again, the important thing is whether the writer is achieving the effect he set out to achieve.

When looking at structure, pace is very important. The way an author handles the tightening and release of tension will determine how put-downable that book is. Here, what is most disastrous is lack of variety in pace, which leads to stylistic flatness. But in an sf book there are two forms of structure to consider: the basic form I have briefly outlined, and the special one of the structure of the world the author is creating. I don't need to point out to you that an sf book should have its own internal logic; it must be believable within its own terms, even though it may not be in terms of our world. If this quality of consistency is not maintained, the writer may fail to maintain the reader's suspension of disbelief. Of course, some may aim to portray inconsistencies---they may be deliberately ambiguous---but the point where the reader forgets the story and remembers the book with an irritated ejaculation of 'nonsense' is a point of failure.

The quality of inventive ingenuity is particularly important if the book is a fast-paced adventure or a fantasy. This liveliness, vivacity and vigour is a quality much of old sf possessed and is lacking in much present day work. It's a quality which many under-rated possess. There is much to be said for the honest, rollicking roller-coaster ride; by and large I would prefer this to the pretentiously profound tome. Much of this, of course, has to do with the author's sincerity; many writers feel they must try to be profound and meaningful, perhaps because they do not recognise their own particular forte; they have been persuaded by the field that the adventure yarn is somehow very inferior.

Now let me return to content, and meaning. Every book should have some meaning (obviously---if it didn't it would be meaningless). That is not to say it should have a message. But if the writer is patently setting out to propagandise, to write a work of contemporary social relevance, then he must accept that this aspect of his work is open to critical analysis. This brings up one of the most difficult aspects of criticising sf. An sf book may be philosophical, theological, scientific, sociological, psychological and any other -ogical you can think of. Obviously no critic can be an expert in all these fields---but neither can the reader. The critic should assess how specialised the treatment is: whether it will only be intelligible to an expert in that particular area; whether it can elucidate for the reader who has a special, but not an expert knowledge; and whether it is intelligible to the reader who is ignorant in that area. Too often an sf novel is dubbed 'profound' because it deals with a profound subject. To be really profound it should add something to the reader's aware-

ness, or should leave him questioning what he had previously accepted. In other words it should make an impact on him, either emotionally or intellectually.

I would now like to deal with some of the pitfalls which the critic may encounter. Firstly, it is of course impossible to be entirely objective. Every individual begins to be affected by the socialisation of his environment from a very early age, and acquires political, social, moral and ideological opinions. The critic who professes himself purely objective is either trying to fool himself or the reader. The honest critic will try to make his prejudices and preconceptions clear, so that the reader can discount them if he wishes. This concerns the professional self-respect of the critic. To eliminate value judgements from sf is to eliminate the subject itself, since it is based---even if fictitiously---on our own lives; it is, however, quite possible to avoid being entirely subjective.

The critic must read closely, but avoid careless "intuitive reading" and prosaic over-literal reading. When reading a book, the critic must read primarily for enjoyment, but should have more patience, more flexibility, more receptiveness and a lower threshold of boredom than the average reader. He must try to be aware of his own prejudices and personal likes and dislikes, and be able to declare his own subjective reaction. He must try to stand back from his reading experience and recollect the moment when his attention wandered to the cracks in the ceiling and ask why? His analysis, if it is to be a good analysis, must rely firmly on the **text**. Of course, there are occasions when reviewers have to discuss anything but the text, as a diplomatic smokescreen. But he should stick to analysing the book in hand, and not the book he wishes the author had written. This is not to be confused with an assessment which says the book would have been much better if handled differently---and gives valid reasons for such an assessment.

The threshold of boredom is important because it is tied up with a receptive mind: a mind which is prepared to give a writer a chance. The reader who says bluntly "I only like soace-opera" should not set himself up as a critic---or at least, if he does, he should declare his prejudices so that his readership may judge his analysis accordingly.

The critic himself should have an awareness of and delight in the power of language, and a genuine liking and feeling for sf. His own work should be perceptive; his style interesting, lively and lucid. The critical analysis should stand as an essay in its own right, to be enjoyed by its readers. He should be prepared to acknowledge his ignorance on a given subject, to research when necessary (and take this into account

in his assessment), and should accept his own fallibility, admitting and acknowledging a mistaken judgment if he makes one.

Lastly, the critic should be aware of his responsibilities. To lavish praise where it is not merited is a disservice to a writer. It may take years to come home to roost, but the writer who is overpraised too early may gain an inflated view of his work, and this may hamper his advancement. The halfway good receives at the moment a kind of adulation which often reads like a Hollywood film trailer, with the excessive use of adjectives such as "fantastic" and "marvellous" and all the rest, and one hardly dares to point out faults. And if a book has won a Hugo or Nebula the inference seems to be that the book is faultless, and any criticism is taken to mean that you're attacking the book. This is not so. There should be more moderation and more responsibility in the criticism and less touchiness. After all, we can afford to rock the boat; think sf has come of age. The flawless work of literature does not exist. Why cannot we accept that it doesn't exist in

Therefore the critic must be honest. This, as I have found, is easier said than done in such an incestuous field as sf. He may have to employ tact and diplomacy, but if he is consistent his readers will soon recognise this.

Now I'd like to go over a review of a book, which I think will bring out more clearly some of the points I've made.

The most incredible thing about The Flowers of February by Kenneth Harker* is that it should ever have been published. When publishers offer books for sale, they have a responsibility to the readers to see that certain minimum standards---of style, story telling, and basic grammar---are maintained. There is no evidence that any standard at all has been applied in this case, and I can only think that whoever chose the book must have read it with his eyes closed---which, come to think of it, is a splendid idea.

Such a harsh assessment should never be made, of course, unless it can be backed up. Although it might at first seem that the best policy is to ignore such rubbish, I think it would be useful to explain just why this book is so bad, if only to prove that this is not a subjective evaluation, and to show how not to write science fiction.

To begin with the plot---if that's the word for it---this is basically very simple. Our Hero, Ted Fulton, communications expert and a widower, is researching on extra-sensory perception at his Cumberland outpost when the Flowers begin to arrive. He finds out all about the Flowers and saves the world. To

Published by Robert Hale, if you're interested

do this, he journeys to London, meets up with Alice (the love interest) and her boyfriend, goes back to Cumberland and disposes of both Flowers and boyfriend in a 'fiendish duel' where 'our hatreds came from more than just us. From every racial root; every animal inheritance...Fire versus steam, like the primeval forces of creation.'

(I should add here that when I review a book I do try to look for the good points, because, after all, when a writer writes a book he puts a lot of work into it and it's very easy to see the bad points. But every book has got a good point, and one ought to try to recognise this.)

As to the science fiction ideas: it is February 2062; no spaceships have been built for 20 years, and the old ones are in mothballs. Earth is in the grip of freak winters, caused by a ring of crystalline dust, made up of microamplifiers drawing on solar energy, which screened off the Sun. An attempt has been made to solve the population problem by dosing everyone with an anti-natal drug in foodstuffs, then giving selected mothers a negation drug allowing conception in May, so that all children will be born in February as this is the severest month and will thus give us a herdier race of humans.

Unfortunately, the anti-natal drug produced permanent sterility in a goodly proportion of the race, but the children born just before the February children reached maturity, and we have a population boom again. By my count that means the breeding population is aged around 35-40 at the time of the story, and just how they were born when their parents were taking the anti-natal drug in food isn't explained---unless---no, don't worry if you can't make head or tail of it; neither can I.

To continue: when the population 'boomed in a world of hardwinters, you had to grow up tough'. This ought to even things up with the February Children, but from here on in the author forgets all about it. While all this is going on, strange signals called "Z-node mosaics" are arriving from Space, and non-February people are dropping dead with Sponge Fever. Meanwhile, up in Cumberland, Prof. Byron and his assistant Alice are researching into breeding an edible crocus (to solve the food problem) and Ted Fulton has discovered a strange piece of metal which could come from Space. Strange icicles start appearing, which turn out to be Flowers growing in the snow. They grow rapidly, and have a blue blossom which bursts and scatters spores everywhere, which produce more Flowers etc etc. These spores produce a kind of lethargy in humans so that they fall down and die of exposure in the snow.

It turns out that these Flowers have been sent from Proxima Centauri, four light years away, to test whether Earth is suitable for the Centaurans, who can see the blue flowers as marker

dyes. The flowers exist in a kind of mental symbiosis with humans, and the Z-mode mosaics tell us all about them. (I may well have got some of these explanations wrong, since they are so confusing.)

At one point a character asks, "Have you no smatterings of scientific knowledge?" I wish to God I hadn't Mr.Harker; I might then be able to swallow your nonsense.

Writing a science fiction story doesn't just entail shoving in all the wildest possibilities that might happen, without regard to logic. A good many of these ideas could have been used, even though most of them are cliché ideas, had they been thought through logically. Unfortunately, Mr.Harker reveals only too clearly that he has only a smattering of scientific knowledge.

The irony, of course, is that a science fiction writer can get away with a smattering of scientific knowledge, if he is intelligent enough to know how to use textbooks and reference books. And the simplest of ideas can make a first-rate story if it is well-written and perceptively handled. What do I mean by well-written? Well, it helps if the author knows the meanings of the words he is using. "Her breath was an icy vacuum" is a ludicrous contradiction, for example. Language has an accepted grammatical structure, and if the writer is aware of this he can convey his meaning to the reader. The reader should not have to figure it out for himself. For example: "The roof, skimming beneath, kicked back at the jets, tipping her towards the flames"; "Weren't those people, he kept passing?"; "The hardwinters were going insane." (Inanimate objects do not have feelings, or act independently---unless, of course, they are the central idea in a hack science fiction novel.)

When the writing does make sense, it consists of an almost continuous stream of clichés or gaucheries: "clutching his folder like the straw of a drowning man"; "...crushed his grief aside"; "His fists clenched in a conflict of responsibilities"; "In his brain, threads of understanding slowly knitted together."; "Maddison's jaw hardened a shade"; "Denham brandished a fist"; "Denham's eyes glittered with malice"; "Grunting fiendishly, his marbly orbs glistening,."; "Pounder's face darkened."; "His lips compressed with disbelief"; "...if you weren't seeking straws to clutch".

As to the characterisation---which is something I didn't mention, because there isn't time to go in to everything---to say it is bad is to imply that there are characters, when in fact the book is peopled---if that's the word I'm looking for---with children's stickmen with labels on. They resp, sneer (mildly), subside wapishly, grunt (peevishly), mutter (darkly), say (gruffly, ill-temperedly), gather wits for the fray, stride (wistfully!), retort (reedily), beam (mildly),

nod (glumly), interpose, clarify, rant, grunt, smirk, moan, rumble....Mr. Harker must have swallowed the entire section of Roget's "Thesaurus" on 'say', and the result is to make the reader wonder if the action is not in fact taking place on the Planet of the Apes. Any actions which are remotely human are explained as being due to Februaryism.

I think I have indicated, by reference to the text, that this book is bad by the most minimal standards that could be applied. There might perhaps be some excuse for Mr. Harker if this is his first book; unless he is prepared to study the most elementary techniques of the craft of fiction, I hope, for the sake of the sf field, that it is his last. The reason I wanted to quote from it is that here is a book where no minimum criteria have been applied. This book has been accepted for publication, it has been published, and the public have been asked to pay money to buy it, and to read it. And I think this is evidence that some set of criteria needs to be codified, if only to stop this kind of thing happening, because it really does give sf a very bad name.

---Pamela Bulmer

itory material than with dialogue, since the latter is sometimes rather clumsily phrased (e.g. when Kelvin says "Oh, talk away if it gives you pleasure." when obviously what is meant is "Oh, go on if it makes you happy."); the cumulative effect of such phrases can be rather deadening) and cliched, whereas the former is very elegant (compare with the above piece of dialogue the opening of the essay on the mimoids: "Genius and mediocrity alike are dumbfounded by the teeming diversity of the oceanic formations of Solaris). It may be, of course, that these weaknesses are faithfully reproduced from the original. There is no way of knowing, and I have no wish to go around apportioning blame. If other Lem translations read as well as this one we will be very lucky.

I have carried on at some length about this book, mainly because I believe it to be a landmark. It only remains to make the formal recommendation. I do not guarantee that you will like it, but if you are at all interested in the possibilities of science fiction as a form of literature, then Solaris is a novel you must read.

--- Malcolm Edwards