

SCIENCE FICTION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

CHAIRMAN
BOX 3186
THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER
WOOSTER, OHIO 44691

TREASURER
7 AMSTERDAM AVENUE
TEANECK, NEW JERSEY 07666

SFRA NEWSLETTER #17-18

Volume 2, Numbers 11-12

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1972

The SFRA NEWSLETTER is published monthly by the Science Fiction Research Association, Inc, a nonprofit scholarly organization. It is sent to all SFRA members, and is included in their annual dues. Editor: Fred Lerner, 7 Amsterdam Avenue, Teaneck NJ 07666 USA. Associate Editor: Janet Kagan, 1292 River Road, Edgewater NJ 07020 USA.

THE DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE

Science fiction as an identifiable literary genre is still young. It is less than fifty years since that April 1926 issue of Amazing Stories appeared: and many of the people whose work in those days shaped the science fiction we read today are still among us. Science fiction has always been a close-knit genre; and most of its practitioners, whether in the twenties or in the seventies, have been well aware of what has gone before them. Few SF writers have worked from the cloister: a gregarious lot, science fiction people have sought each others' company; have gossiped, conspired, and collaborated; and have profoundly influenced each other personally and artistically. There is much that they can tell us, about themselves and about their colleagues.

And they are doing this. As the Gernsbacks and Bouchers and Campbells and Derleths pass from our midst, those who worked with them and were influenced by them set down their remembrances of them. And those who have grown up in science fiction, and are happily still with us, are recalling in their memoirs the history of modern science fiction as they lived it.

Literary historians and skilled critics know the pitfalls of overdependence on eulogies and obituaries, on memoirs and anecdotes. But they also know the value of this documentary material. And now that science fiction is preparing for its sixth decade, more and more of this documentation is becoming available.

In The Universe Makers (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), Donald Wollheim gives a personal statement about the meaning and value of science fiction: an insight into the attitudes of a man who has been intimately connected with the genre for most of his life. Those who read The Universe Makers for scholarly history and criticism of SF are missing the book's point: Wollheim has given us a memoir, which scholars may use as a source for their own interpretations of the genre.

Several science fiction anthologies and story collections contain autobiographical or anecdotal material; in several recent publications, a considerable portion of the work is devoted to material of this nature. Both in Dangerous Visions and Again, Dangerous Visions (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967 and 1972, respectively), Harlan Ellison's introductions to the volumes and to individual stories say much about their authors and more about Ellison and his own attitude toward science fiction. The authors' own comments range from the terse to the expansive. More personal biographical data is presented in Ellison's anthologies than is customary in such books; and those who find it useful to speculate on literary influences will find documentation for some of their researches here.

The Early Asimov (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972) contains 27 stories from Isaac Asimov's beginning days as a writer. Some of the stories are fine ones; others are of interest only to the student of Asimov's literary development. But between the stories is a continuing autobiographical account: Asimov's descriptions of his trials, successes, and failures; why he wrote and what he hoped to accomplish with his fiction. It is this material that justifies the book's subtitle, "Eleven Years of Trying", and makes the difference between exploitation of a famous name and valuable literary history.

Clarion (New York: New American Library, 1971) is primarily "an anthology of speculative fiction from the Clarion Writers' Workshop"; so is Clarion II (New York: New American Library, 1972). But the Clarion Workshops themselves are important events in the history of science fiction; we are hearing more and more of the Clarion writers as time goes on. The two anthologies contain a lot of information about the purposes and methods of the Clarion Workshops, written by those who founded and taught them; the historian must be sure not to overlook them.

An ambitious fanzine called Is devoted its fourth issue to a tribute to August Derleth, founder of Arkham House. Editor Tom Collins solicited contributions from many eminent fantasists; their memoirs of Derleth contain much that will enlighten the student of modern fantasy fiction. Shorter eulogistic notes in the letter-column also contain valuable tidbits. Copies of Is #4 are available at \$3 each from Tom Collins, 4305 Balcones Drive, Austin TX 78731.

Quite a lot of valuable documentary material has been published in fanzines; the process continues. In future issues of the SFRA NEWSLETTER, we hope to identify some of these little-known and hard-to-find sources.

NOTES AND NOTICES

The annual Seminar on Science Fiction at the 1972 Modern Language Association conference was devoted to Mervyn Peake. Glenn Sadler (Westmont College) led the session. Veronica Kennedy (St John's University) discussed "The Graphic Art of Mervyn Peake"; John Cox (University of Chicago) spoke on "The Painterly Vision of Peake"; and Richard West (University of Wisconsin, Madison) discussed Peake's shorter fiction. Prof Sadler spoke of the increasing attention being paid to Peake in Great Britain, and remarked that there still remain some fragmentary notes for parts of the Gormenghast Trilogy not included in the expanded Eyre & Spottiswoode version of the novels. Expanded versions of the seminar papers are scheduled for future publication in Extrapolation.

Darko Suvin (McGill University) and Dale Mullen (Indiana State University) have announced the founding of a semiannual review, to be called Science Fiction Studies. The journal will have a theoretical and poetological bias. It will include a regular survey of secondary literature in the field, as well as annotated bibliographical surveys of major SF writers. The first issue is scheduled for publication in Spring 1973. Subscription correspondence should be sent to the Managing Editor: E Kleiner, Indiana State University, Terre Haute IN 47809 USA.

Unicorn, a thrice-yearly journal edited and published by Karen Rockow (1153 East 26th Street, Brooklyn NY 11210 USA) is looking for "short, gracefully scholarly papers directed at a general audience". Areas of special interest include folklore, medieval studies, and popular culture.

SFRA DUES FOR 1973 ARE PAYABLE and should be sent to the new Treasurer: Ivor Rogers, Box 1068, Des Moines IA 50311 USA. Please send him your current mailing address in legible form, as well.

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

Brian Aldiss' history of science fiction, The Billion Year Spree, will be published by Doubleday (USA) and Weidenfeld & Nicolson (UK) in April 1973. The chapter on Edgar Allan Poe will appear in the journal Works in Progress; the chapter on Mary Shelley and Frankenstein will appear in Extrapolation; the chapter on Campbell's Astounding will be in New Worlds. Anchor Books has expressed an interest in acquiring the paperback rights. ## And Aldiss' wife's bibliography of his writings will be published during 1973.

Doubleday has announced the publication of A Spectrum of Worlds, edited and with an introduction and notes by Thomas D Claeson. The volume contains "fourteen stories that trace the development of modern science fiction", and is designed for use in courses taking an historical approach to modern SF.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Paul H Kocher, Master of Middle-earth. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972). 223p, notes, index. \$5.95

Tolkien-lovers now have the opportunity to become Kocher-lovers, and one trusts they will avail themselves of it. Houghton Mifflin has just published an admirable piece of scholarship in Prof Kocher's Master of Middle-earth. One reads it with several kinds of pleasure: first, that of seeing canard after canard of Tolkien mis-criticism knocked into a cocked hat. Showing minute intimacy with Tolkien's works, Mr Kocher displays their moral complexity and their finesse of characterisation, racial and individual, good and bad. This critic scarcely deigns to brush aside his hostile or inept predecessors, nor does he flaunt his own competence in Tolkien's medieval field; yet the competence becomes clear, and the mis-critics can crawl back to their dens.

Besides one's glee at the redressing of critical wrongs, one can enjoy the book's own savor. Mr Kocher's thesis -- eminently sane -- is: "Tolkien is not a philosopher or a theologian but a literary artist who thinks." (p34). Kocher examines the author's thought, with observations on how he brings his art to his support. Tolkien's shorter fiction and poetry receive their meed of attention along with The Lord of the Rings. (In calling the latter an epic, by the way, Prof Kocher invites static from such genre-enthusiasts as hold out for its being a romance, a saga, etc) Among Master of Middle-earth's shorter criticisms I found that on "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son" outstanding, with its demonstration of the complex sadness of Tolkien's attitude toward war. Indeed, the sadness in Tolkien's works is unusually clear to Mr Kocher; many a reader of LotR will blink to hear the tale described as hopeful "at bottom" (55, italics mine)

Master of Middle-earth is pleasingly free of critical hobby-horses. Mr Kocher is conscious of Tolkien's Christianity, but never tries to make him a preacher or his characters Christians. He uses the sexually-oriented psychoanalytic method ONCE -- to all the more telling effect. (The dwarves' love of art and craft is a sublimation due to their prevailing wifelessness.) The study of Aragorn (chapter 6) is notably sensitive, and Mr Kocher's emphasis on will and choice illuminates a vital aspect of Tolkien's theme. Master of Middle-earth belongs in every self-respecting Tolkien library.

-- Deborah C Rogers

Walt Lee, Reference Guide to Fantastic Films: Science Fiction, Fantasy, & Horror. Volume 1, A-F. (Los Angeles: Chelsea-Lee Books, 1972). LC card #72-88775. xli, 154, 24, 11p paper. \$9.50

This is the first of three volumes, "the skeleton for a planned multi-volume study of the fantastic film". Lee attempts to list all fantastic films, regardless of country of origin.

Films are listed alphabetically by title. Information given includes date, company, length, production personnel and cast, fantastic motif used, references to reviews, and literary source or basis. Variant titles are listed; cross-references are provided. A very inclusive definition of the fantastic seems to have been used: An Evening with the Royal Ballet is included because it contains highlights from "Les Sylphides" and "Sleeping Beauty". This is a positive feature; since no two people agree on a definition of SF or fantasy, the more inclusive a definition, the more reference needs it will meet. An appendix is devoted to "Problems" -- "titles which have not been determined beyond reasonable doubt to satisfy two conditions necessary for inclusion in the main listings: 1) significant fantastic content and 2) existence, at one time or another, as a film". Another appendix of "Exclusions" lists titles which "have been determined beyond reasonable doubt not to be fantastic". This is a practice which should be followed by any bibliographer of the fantastic in art of literature.

Walt Lee provides excellent explanatory notes; even one unfamiliar with the cinematic medium should have no difficulty in using this book. The typeface and design make for good legibility; the stills used for illustrations are reproduced clearly; the only fault that can be found with the book's production lies in its binding: it is a perfect-bound paperback in quarto size.

This book, and its successors, will be indispensable in the SF library or the general film collection.

-- Fred Lerner
Columbia University