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SFRA NEWSLETTER #5

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OF TIME AND THE RIVER

This is a hurried issue of the SFRA NEWSLETTER, squeezed between Secondary Universe and a month's visit to Britain. Some material originally planned for this issue will have to be held over till next time.

Plans for future issues include a column covering the scholarly and professional activities of SFRA members, and others active in SF studies. If you have a new book at the printer's, or a new project in preparation; if you're planning a trip and want to make contact with your colleagues abroad; if you want to call attention to a new publication -- send a note to the SFRA NEWSLETTER.

There are not as many reviewing media for studies in science fiction as there should be, so we'll continue printing short reviews in these pages. All reviews will be signed; the letter column will be open to dissenting opinions. If you'd like to do one, by all means let us know (or just send it in). And be sure to send us a review copy of your next publication.

We also plan to publish letters of comment, changes of address, and anything else we get which would be of interest and value to our readers. But we can't make up news out of whole cloth; if the SFRA NEWSLETTER is to serve its readers well, it must have more reader participation.

Why not send us something today?

MINUTES OF SFRA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (TORONTO, 11 OCTOBER 1971)

The meeting was called to order at 9.15 by SFRA Chairman Thomas D Claeson. Ivor Rogers sat as Parliamentarian; Fred Lerner served as Secretary.

The Secretary-Treasurer's report was read and accepted. A report was made on site selection for Secondary Universe V. Two offers had been received, from Drake University (Des Moines, Iowa) and Pennsylvania State University (University Park, Pennsylvania). The bid from Drake University was accepted; SecCon V will be held there over the 1972 Columbus Day weekend. An SFRA-sponsored special conference will also be held at Penn State during 1972.

The Nominations Committee reported that it had nominated three retiring members (Dale Mullen, Dennis Livingston, Madeleine Morton) to serve three-year terms as members of the Executive Committee. No nominations were offered from the floor, so the committee's nominations were accepted. (to page 4)

FIRST IN

Since no two people ever attend the same conference, this is only a beginning on the task of finding out what Secondary Universe IV accomplished. I can see four points to make.

First, it was a conference of significant accomplishment; many of the younger people were turned on by new ideas practically to the point of hysteria. Among the older people present, the phenomenon manifested itself in a rash of new projects, new working partnerships, and ambitious writing commitments. As at SecCon III, the intellectual intoxication process culminated during the last afternoon when some had already gone and when my own plane was panting on the runway. It will be a long time before my gratitude to Judy, Madge, Max, et al, wears out; their labors helped make my own field come alive again for me -- and that's what a conference is all about, isn't it?

Second, it was the most comfortable conference I've ever been to. Between the Park Plaza Hotel and the excellent facilities afforded us by OISE there are scant grounds for complaint. In particular, the arrangement of that huge second floor lounge at OISE made intense small group communication possible, frequent, and rewarding. Some suggested that it would have been good to have had a twenty-four-hour place in the hotel where conference members could find each other. Perhaps that would have been an additional excellence, but most of us were so overstimulated anyway that we couldn't have used it. Toronto is a city where decency and graciousness are still the rule rather than the exception, so that the conference organisers were largely helped rather than hindered by the ambiance of the place.

Third, a debate that will probably continue for some years as a necessary part of SFRA growing pains seemed to be surfacing during the three days of the conference. There is something of the Big-Endian/Little-Endian battle about it all, yet at the same time I am firmly on one side and care a good deal about the outcome of the debate. Some good ideas were presented at the peak of obfuscatory elegance, while others came dressed in the style of Hume or Russell. I hope, of course, that the elegance of economy will eventually prevail over the more baroque elegance of decoration. If the pulp origins of SF serve us in no other way, perhaps they will at least hold us down to basic communication. (Since I chair the Proceedings Committee, it is proper to add here that my editorial ethics are in reasonably good repair and that there will be an honest try at representing the best of the happy obscurantists in its pages.)

Fourth, I found out a few things about going to the intensive sort of conference the Secondary Universes are apparently going to be. One must arrive in a state as close to absolute freedom as possible to get the good out of the thing. One's own contributions must be in their fifth revision, preferably already mimeographed; certainly one must not be still internally questioning the pros and cons of minor points. Further, one must bring none of the daily hangups along -- no papers to grade when everyone else is out to lunch, no letters to write, deadlines to meet, or lessons to prepare; baggage must be restricted to a change of clothes and a bottle to talk by. Again, one must be free of geography; a very good museum that was a delight of my childhood lies just across the street from the Park Plaza. Tho I wanted badly to scoot thru it, I was never even on the same side of the street. One must be free of old friends and non-SF relatives, too. But especially, one must be in physical and mental shape for a sleepless, restless marathon. And, under no circumstances may one develop laryngitis.....well, next year, I'll try.

-- Virginia Carew

(Virginia Carew chaired Secondary Universe III last year in New York.)

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Donald Wollheim. *The Universe Makers: Science Fiction Today*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). 122p, index. \$4.95

This one is required reading for any SFRA member and well worth the time the reading takes. My impression is that a good many reviewers have missed the intention of the book, have thus failed to approach it on its own terms, and have therefore failed to understand its value. It is a personal memoir; the dust jacket refers to it as "personal statement"; the first line begins, "Ever since the day that I first heard..."; and Chapter Two is called "A Life for Science Fiction". The book is not meant to be definitive, either critically or historically; it would be fairer to take it as ostensible definition of the ways in which SF affects, creates, changes personality and the individual life. The literary comments and opinions then fall into place as samples of the thinking of the book's subject.

Since Wollheim has been one of the decisive influences in our field thru his editorial labors mainly, but also thru his own fiction, a personal statement from him is both immediately interesting and historically valuable.

The style is one of the good things about the book, and it reflects favorably on the quality of the mind behind it. Altho not free of errors, it is direct, usually clear, well paced. The language of the book is a blessed relief to any who have had to plow thru academic word-butcery. Further, I found the ninth chapter especially informative: it lists in eight steps the vision of the future history of man as it has come to exist in the minds of people steeped in SF. That list took something out of the back of my head and laid it out where I could look at it and think about it; I suspect that I'll be using it as an analytical tool for the next twenty years.

One small objection: at some point some forsaken graduate student is going to have to edit the book -- because there is no documentation provided. (There is a good index, thank you, Harper.) Full titles, names, dates, and so forth are never given, not even when the implicit reference is to an obscure periodical. I had a similar objection to another recent book of Wollheim's, his collected short stories. They seemed various, often excellent, and I planned to adopt the book for use in my college classes. Then I realised there were no dates of first publication on the copyright page and no indications in the text that could serve as an adequate substitute. Since I could not efficiently provide a historical and intellectual context for my students, I gave up on using the book.

So far, I seem to be almost alone in my mutterings about indexes and documentation; I do wish colleagues would add their voices. SF writers are graciously responsive to reasonable requests, while publishers eventually notice market demands.

-- Virginia Carew,
Queensborough Comm Coll

Darko Suvin. *Russian Science Fiction Literature and Criticism 1956-1970: A Bibliography*. (Toronto: Secondary Universe Conference IV, 1971). 35p pamphlet.

This bibliography consists of three parts: a checklist of "new Russian-language science fiction published in the USSR in book form from 1956 to 1970 inclusive" (275 titles); a list of "all known book translations of 20th century authors" into English or French (56 titles); and a selective annotated list of Russian- and English-language criticism of Soviet SF (104 entries). All names of authors and titles are given in transliteration. Prof Suvin, in his introductory notes, refers to

other bibliographies, and offers advice on selection of titles for small libraries. Despite some annoying flaws in bibliographical technique, and its somewhat pedantic prose, this pamphlet will be a useful interim checklist for librarians and bibliographers concerned with Russian science fiction.

-- Fred Lerner
Research Foundation,
City Univ of New York

Sonya Dorman. *Poems*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1970). 74p. \$5

This beautiful little volume has escaped the attention of most of us who are familiar with Sonya Dorman's science fiction thru *F&SF*. Better even than the existing anthologies of SF poetry, it demonstrates the disciplines of SF and 20th century scientific thinking bodied forth in verse. There is a lucid, logical -- hard-minded -- approach to the softest, most evanescent image. The result is, I think, true poetry, truly contemporary poems, and several examples of what SF can do for literature. If you wish, the book is also a bridge between the two cultures, but its value does not lie on that cliché level.

The book was a 1969 National Council on the Arts Selection, which means that apart from honorable recognition the book had publication help from the National Endowment for the Arts. Most of the poems appeared in little magazines -- one of them in *F&SF*, while still another is inscribed to Damon Knight.

-- Virginia Carew

A CORRECTION

The Philadelphia Science Fiction Conference will be held the weekend of 3-5 December 1971, not 10-12 December as announced in the last issue of this newsletter.

ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES (continued from Page 1)

It was moved and passed that the Chairman send to Peter Kuczka a letter of greeting to the Conference on Slavic Science Fiction being held in Budapest in October.

R Dale Mullen, Chairman of the Pilgrim Award Committee, read the citation honoring Marjorie Hope Nicolson, who was unanimously chosen to receive the award for 1971. The meeting then adjourned, at 10.00.

Additions and corrections to these minutes are solicited. Respectfully submitted,

-- Fred Lerner,
SFRA Secretary

A REMINDER

Dues for 1972 are now payable. They remain the same as last year: \$20 Voting or Supporting; \$30 Institutional; \$12.50 Student. Husband and wife can join for \$30, receiving one set of publications. Dues are payable in American or Canadian funds, and checks may be drawn on American or Canadian banks. Remit dues to: Fred Lerner, 7 Amsterdam Avenue, Teaneck, New Jersey 07666 USA.