

of mind. And mind is so fashioned that it can never renounce the pursuit of meaning.

'Perhaps it is part of the celestial paradox that only the microcosm of mind can discover a purpose in the random drift of the galaxies. And perhaps it was the function of the stars simply to create mind. For, without mind, there can be no meaning.'

Science fiction is full of passages of which the two quoted above are typical. For the most part they are mere literary pretensions, in the words of Shakespeare, 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. That about sums up the majority. Typical of these writers is Ballard, who persists in producing passages which seem to be full of some hidden meaning which persists in eluding the reader in most cases. Even if the author is being sincere in what he is writing—which he probably is—there appears to be a continual striving after some hidden philosophical truth which is beyond the literary powers of the author to represent. So for the most part they resort to clichés and purple passages to explain something quite unexplainable, because even if their passage means nothing, it looks impressive enough.

However, in the very occasional passage there is the glimmer of light showing through the murk, which makes one wonder if they have something or not. And this fact makes all this sort of pseudo-philosophizing worth while in my estimation, for amidst the great mass of turgid maunderings there is the occasional truth of some sort or another, perhaps produced by mistake, yet saying something which may have meaning for the reader of the story. Maybe it is a phrase which temporarily rekindles the much-maligned sense of wonder, and surely that makes it worth while! Whether meaningful or not, this sort of philosophizing adds to the variety and interest of sf.

The basic purpose of this sort of philosophizing is, as far as I can see, the search for some sort of reason or purpose to existence and the universe. Nothing new of course:

'He sought for purpose with a sharp-edged mind that probed at the roots of existence and of happenstance and sought to evolve out of the random factors that moved beneath the surface of the universe's orderliness some evidence of a pattern that would be understandable to the human mind. Often he had it, but it always slid away from him like quicksilver escaping from a clutching hand.'

This passage is from a story by Clifford D. Simak, and it describes perfectly the tantalizing sense of knowledge that all of us have had at one time or another—the sense that there is some universal key to knowledge round the next corner, and if only we could stretch just a little further . . . .

is a kind of vicious circle, taking for granted that we stand equally condemned by other and fictional ways of life as well as by our own, the authors being so thoroughly enmeshed in the workings of the circle that they are unable to perceive anything else.

Pity it may be, but there is also much truth in what such authors have said. Science fiction novels incorporating philosophies which blast Man and his ways also have a lot of pertinent points to offer, which anyone would do well to study. The third kind of sf philosophizing presenting Man in relation to the terribly large universe he finds himself in, also has much to offer from the midst of the *mélange* of pompous phraseology that we have pumped on us.

Science fiction and sensible philosophy can and do mix, but in many cases the resulting mixture is only a tasteless mess which serves merely to intrude on the consciousness of the reader and spoil the story. Writers who tend to philosophize no doubt mean what they say, but only too often what they say is only a tasteless rehash of some other authority. Many people complain about the pseudo-intellectual element in modern sf: in many cases they are right to complain, for there is little more nauseating than the spectacle of some author trying to be intellectual and only succeeding in being transparently obvious. Some people complain about the pseudo-science in sf: it is the pseudo-thinking they should be complaining about, though even this has luckily disappeared from the best of modern sf. Of course such faults are as much typical of other forms of literature as of sf, but, sf being in the precarious position that it is, it can ill afford to suffer the criticism that such faults automatically bring down upon its head.

There is always room for genuine and mature philosophy, whether depressing or not, and there is an encouraging amount of that to be found amidst the still great dominance of trashy theories and concepts, many of which are at last beginning to disappear, except in comic magazines and on television.

Modern sf is pessimistic in many ways, but there are many passages of common sense and good philosophy to be found, whether one agrees with them or not. It is usually possible to see when an author is playing down (or up) to his audience, and equally it is possible to spot when he is indulging in some clear and original thinking of his own accord. There is now quite a lot of this latter class in present-day sf, and it promises well for the future.

Let us hope there will be more.

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