

As far as I can see, when literary critics talk about the human condition, they mean the most unpleasant attributes of the most unpleasant people, and never the nobler ideals of humanity. For the critics, the ideal hero seems to be a treacherous, thieving, homosexual drug addict—just look at the critical adulation of Genet and you will see what I mean. It'll be a pity if science fiction follows the trend of peering into other people's moral lavatories which now seems to be a prerequisite for successful contemporary literature.

Even a few years ago there would have been good old reliable *Astounding* to fall back on, but we no longer have this consolation. The only bright spots on the horizon seem to be *If* and *Worlds of Tomorrow* which, even if not as exciting as some of the science fiction we have all read at one time or another, are at least largely without pretentiousness.

To a certain degree the present situation seems to have arisen from the desire to be 'with it' on the cultural scene on the part of editors, without having to have any actual understanding of the different branches of literature. Science fiction yearned for years to be accepted as a literary form; this has been achieved now by the writing of people like Amis (who does have some critical standards even if he doesn't really understand much about science fiction, unless it is by a few of his pet authors). After this the trend-hounds took up the scent and now we have the position where an editor can publish an eighteen-year-old reprint from *Astounding* (without acknowledgments!) in a much-vaunted special issue, without apparently being able to distinguish between it and the contemporary inner-space format. Presumably Moorcock, the editor in question, must have thought that it was as valuable in its comment on the human condition as the rest of the stuff in the issue. Mind you, I agree with this estimate, though not for the same reasons; the story, *Time Trap* by Charles Harness, was trivial, and even in 1948 wasn't good for much but passing a wet half-hour. Part of the blame, too, must be attributed to the authors, many of whom seem to be too lazy to do anything but cash their cheques. They don't give a damn if their facts are wrong, and of those I've asked at conventions and elsewhere, most make no secret of the fact that they never even bother to look at the popular science journals to see what the latest developments are. In no other branch of literature would an author get away with blatant disregard of facts, yet Aldiss can write about cobwebs to the moon and actually get praise for the story.

Until a few years ago science fiction may have been poor, but at least it was honest. Nowadays it is not worth the effort to plough through thousands of words of obscurity in search of a worthwhile idea which usually isn't there anyway.

[This article first appeared in *Zenith Speculation*.]

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