

This will be a collection of my shorter pieces.

In November, 1957, *Only a Trillion* will be published. This is a collection of my non-fiction science essays.

I am presently engaged in two more non-fiction books, one of organic chemistry and one of cardiovascular research. And naturally, I write science fiction stories whenever I can.

The reason all this depresses me when I run through it is that (1) it represents a hell of a lot of work and makes it difficult for me to grin when some jackass says 'Boy, what a racket you have; just bang out a book and collect money,' and (2) my wife is getting tired of being a typewriter widow and the sugar has been tasting funny lately."

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[We read *The Naked Sun* in "Astounding," where it was serialised—the best Asimov yet.

For the Club, he writes "Your book choices are indeed excellent and prove the success to be well-deserved. I am proud that two of my books are of the company."—Ed.]

ARGUMENT

The late Professor C. E. M. Joad coined a useful phrase—"It all depends what you mean by" It certainly all depends what you mean in SF circles! In SF News for May/June '57, what Brian Aldiss meant is not what member Duncan Maclean means when he thinks of s-f and in one of those interesting letters (of which we wish we could print more) he tells us why:—

"One thing wrong with both Edmund Crispin's and Brian Aldiss's definitions of s-f is that it is usually impossible to define any literary genre in less than ten- to twenty-thousand words. Of the two Crispin's is the better because it provides a basis on which a full definition could be built up. Aldiss has a good point when he speaks of s-f making 'the future . . . as vivid as the past.' Yet when he makes the main part of his definition the statement that s-f 'produces in its readers a shock,' he makes the writing of s-f no more than sensation mongering.

"There is no such thing as the 'ordinary novel' or the 'novel proper.' The term 'novel,' like the term 'grey,' covers a wide range of phenomena. Although some parts of this range are sufficiently different to be called detective novels, western novels, or science-fiction novels, it is impossible to draw distinct boundaries to mark these off from other novels.

"It could be said that one of the distinguishing marks of the s-f novel is that the natural or social background is changed in some way. This can be a change in time from two days to many thousands of years, or in place from a space-station to the furthest star we can imagine. In Wilson Tucker's *Wild Talent* it is one telepath in an otherwise contemporary background; in Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity* it is a completely new world with its own extremely peculiar problems.

"The important thing is that this background, however unusual, must be convincing, coherent, and Brian Aldiss suggests that a good background and its workings are enough to put a book in the first rank of s-f. This is not so, and the books by Alfred Bester which he mentions will show why. By the end of the story the whole novel has passed beyond science-fiction into fantasy.

"What then is in the first rank of s-f? What about Robert Randall's *Tales of the Nivodians*? Among the SFBC publications, what is wrong with *Earth Abides*, *Fahrenheit 451*, or *Voyage of the Space Beagle*? In all these the background circumstances are meticulously worked out, for without this they would not be first class. But, in addition, each of them tells a story about 'people'—people of some part of the universe—and of how those people meet and react to the problems which their circumstances present.

"To write a good story, it is essential to have two things—a good plot and live characters. This is as much true of s-f as any other type of novel. In *World of Chance* it is the struggle of the various characters—however poorly developed the background—which gives the story its interest.

"One thing should be made clear: literature is an all embracing term; the novel is a branch of literature with a very wide