

Form and Content

EVER since we sent out *A Canticle for Leibowitz* we've been receiving letters about it. Mostly they have been complaints about the regrettable fact that the book was not the same size as previous SFBC editions. Few members could bring themselves to comment, either favourably or unfavourably, on the book itself, which suggests that sf enthusiasts are pretty keen on regularity at all costs.

Be that as it may—and we don't wish to imply that members haven't read *Canticle* though we do wish they'd tell us if they liked it—an explanation seems called for.

Canticle was an odd size because—well, chiefly because it started out that way. In other words, its format was different in its original edition from that of most novels and certainly from most sf novels (probably because the original publishers were once bitten by a Venusian and wanted *Canticle* to look as little like sf as possible). By now some wiseacre is probably muttering in the back row that by means of photo-lithography (the process by which we printed our edition) it is possible to reduce the page size to that of the usual $7\frac{1}{2}$ by $4\frac{7}{8}$ in. True—but not in this case because we were using existing lithographic plates and to reduce the size would have meant re-photographing, which we could not have afforded on our already expensive production.

But—now that that is out of the way—this raises a wider issue. Do we turn down books because—and only because—they can't be poured into a $7\frac{1}{2}$ by $4\frac{7}{8}$ in. mould? Sure, we say the books are standard format and we mean it, but is it worth deviating (once in a year or two) when we have an exceptional 'odd man out'?

We say 'yes, emphatically'. We don't refuse champagne in a tumbler, nor do we insist that every related book on our shelves be precisely the same size although we do endeavour to maintain a uniformity of style. But the important point is that the originals from which we work are issued by different publishers and hence no absolute identity of size, style or typography can be ensured.

We do what we can, but within limitations, to ensure that club editions look like club editions—but we cannot always achieve absolute similarity.

However, chances are that *Leibowitz* will remain the exception for as long ahead as we can see. And we still think it's a masterpiece.

O. C.

THIS MONTH'S CHOICE IS
GALACTIC CLUSTER by James Blish
(Faber & Faber 15s; SFBC 5s 6d)

NEXT MONTH'S CHOICE IS
MUTANT by Henry Kuttner
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson 9s 6d; SFBC 5s 6d)

SOME MEMBERS' LETTERS

ONCE again I would like to tell you how much I admire the choice of books you are publishing. They really are so comprehensive and I look forward to each one with pleasureable anticipation.

A. H. W. · S. Rhodesia.

I am afraid I do not think it a good idea to have older books reissued as probably many people already have copies of them.

P. M. · Bradford.

Why not go after classics that are now out of print and unobtainable.

A. L. K. · N. Wembley.

We welcome letters. Do let us hear from you. · Editor.

CHANGES IN SFBC

MEMBERS, we hope, will have greeted the news of a sf book a month from next January with glee (sf is booming, not only are more people writing good stuff but more reviewers are reviewing it, people are taking notice of it as a serious art form—if that is not a contradiction in terms. And SFBC booms with it). We hope now that members will welcome the new format of the *News*—the expandable column instead of the four-pager which gave us no extra room when we wanted to say more. With more books reaching your doormat we hope that you will be inspired to write to us more often with constructive criticism of what we are doing, and with more space in the *News* at our command we can publish your opinions; thus engendering each month a greater and greater interest in the genre.

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