

READERS' LETTERS

'In your December "Newsletter" you say that you welcome letters, well, here goes. On the subject of controversy about the size of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* I appear to be in agreement with most members that the size is most awkward. I had a nice, neat row of books in a bookcase until that book arrived. Finding that the book was a quarter-inch too long I have had to build myself a new bookcase! I have a suggestion, if in the future you have an odd format-sized book, why not issue it as an additional extra book, and then you won't upset the fans' nice neat bookshelves, as the additional choices are usually stacked flat at the end of the row. As to the contents of the book, I enjoyed reading it, but I can't rave over it as everyone else seems to. Maybe it's just not my type of book.

'Now for the credit side of my letter. Firstly my congratulations on the fine selection of books you are making (and have made)—I haven't had a bad one yet. . . . I like the new dust jacket—it's a great improvement on the old one—but don't give up yet, I think that a slight improvement is still possible. . . .

'The book a month idea is excellent. I wouldn't complain if it came to two books a month (but maybe your staff might feel the pressure). Keep up the good work.' · D. G. H. · Wiltshire.

'You say you would like to hear of readers' reactions to *Canticle for Leibowitz*; perhaps you would be interested in its reception in this household. It was the first book I received from you, and it arrived while I was on holiday, so it was read first by non-members, and my own enthusiasm for the book in no way coloured their reaction. This may be judged by the result; my brother applied forthwith for membership of the SFBC, and my father and sister, not content with having two copies in the house, asked me to order extra copies for them.

'I am horrified by the idea that works of this quality should be criticized on the irrelevant grounds of format. That it is the wrong shape is surely a very petty objection to bring against any book—one might as well object to *crêpes Suzette* on the grounds that they don't look like rice pudding—but it is absurd that it should militate against a book such as this. . . .

'I found the world Walter Miller creates in *Canticle for Leibowitz* convincing in a way I have found in only one other book in recent years—Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Both, for me, not only absorbed me completely while I was reading, but also haunted me for days afterwards—an experience common enough in childhood but rarely vouchsafed to the critical adult.

'Please, if Walter Miller can do it again, even if his publishers produce his next book printed diagonally across circular pages—give it to us.' · R. W. · Salford.

'I have just received my monthly sf book and was amazed to read your little note on *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, in which you were rather surprised at the lack of criticism (good or bad).

'This definitely triggered me off as, when I received this book, I slapped it down on my bedside table and that night eagerly took it up. I have never "flipped" so many pages in a sf book before. As a really radical atheist I cannot stand religious cant, especially Roman Catholicism, and this book, in my opinion, was chock-a-block with it, with a smear of sf rubbed on to conceal the fact that it was a vehicle of R.C. propaganda.

'I eventually finished it many nights later after more "flipping" of blocks of pages to duck the religious cant, and my first thought on finishing it was to drop you a line to say that it's a good thing that the bulk of SFBC does not consist of books like this, as I should have ceased to be a member long ago.

'I can only think that the reason you have no remarks on this book is that most of the members have "flipped" a damn sight more than me and written it off as "one of those".

'As to your remarks on the extra size of this book, I should like to comment that if the author had cut out the religion and padding, we should have had an even smaller than usual format, and in my humble estimation this would have been all to the good. No complaints re the bulk of your selections.'

P. C. · Yorks.

'With reference to your editorial in December *News*. I was astonished to note that you found few members who could "bring themselves to comment either favourably or unfavourably on the book itself". I have no hesitation in saying that this was, in my own estimation, one of the most memorable, the most soul-stirring and best written books that I have read for many years. The conception was magnificent, and I have read this book several times since it was published. I was indeed glad to possess a copy of my own. As to size, I feel that a variation is at times a good thing. A bookcase, after all, should surely not become a stereotyped affair, but an expression of individuality, even in its outward appearance! A room without a bookcase is like an Asimov robot with no soul!' · D. H. · Birmingham.

'I enclose an enrolment form for Mr F. Mather, who wants to join the club after reading *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. To one who considers that *Canticle* is the best story I have read in the genre, I am gratified that it should have served as a form of conversion. With regard to the comments you say you have received about the unusual size of the book I can only believe that the complainants collect sf solely to fill bookshelves of uniform size! If this is the case perhaps you could call upon them to read some of the books they receive. Had *Canticle* been the size of *Mrs Beeton* I would willingly have bought a new bookcase. More of books the quality of *Canticle* and to hell with the size.

'Congratulations on the new format of the letter, I expect to find in a few months' time that unfolding a "Newsletter" will be quite an occasion with the whole family becoming inextricably tangled within its length.' · E. W. · Middlesex.