

'One of the basic premises of sf, not so common in mainstream fiction, is that established laws, customs, morals and taboos are not constants, not all-time truths, but part of a planetary culture that may be good or bad, but whose value must be assessed in terms of that culture's ability to give the individuals who comprise it the freedom to develop themselves to the full extent of their capabilities. . . .

'Science fiction is as critical of the new gods as of the old, and in fact a fairly hefty proportion of the medium is taken up with the defects, moral or otherwise, of the scientist. Even where there is no direct criticism the sf writer tends to cut the scientist down to size by putting him in a situation where his science is useless. . . . The type of scientist who acts as handmaiden to the military always comes in for fairly rough handling, as does the military mind. Sometimes, it is true, one finds the "I'm only a simple soldier doing my duty" bit, but in the overwhelming proportion of stories the professional killer is lampooned, satirized or shown as the villain of the piece.

'A criticism that has been levelled at sf since it was discovered by the university intellectuals . . . is that if its writers are going to concern themselves with ethics and sociology they might as well write mainstream fiction which can do the job better. . . . In fact the premise is untrue. If fiction is to deal with large general issues it can do so better by recourse to fantasy than by the methods of mainstream fiction; something that Thomas More, Swift and Butler had already shown. . . .

'Thus, although sf stories on the simplest level of appreciation can be regarded as fairy-tales, they differ from conventional fairy-tales in carrying a massive load of religious, political, ethical and sociological implication and so provide intellectual stimulation of a kind not met with in contemporary fiction. The critical examination of humanity and its institutions that plays so large a part in the medium could be considered destructive in that dilemmas and problems are pointed out far more often than solutions are suggested, but writers are not social engineers, and it is enough that, as the stupidities and cruelties of human governments and their pernicious effect on individuality are presented, sf gives to many people their first glimpse of what is wrong with our society. This is what really matters: in an age when all the pressure is on non-thinking conformity, sf enlivens and provokes the intellect and strikes a blow for free, creative thought.'

(We should welcome comment from members on Mr Pilgrim's argument.—ED.)

## Two and One

*A Note about the May CF Choice*

### CASSANDRA AT THE WEDDING

by Dorothy Baker

THIS book received a great deal of praise when it was first published, but, like so many really good novels, it was jostled out of the way to make room for more obvious—but probably less lasting—successes. This is one reason why we are very pleased indeed to be able to give *Cassandra at the Wedding* a 'second hearing', bringing it back to readers' attention. Here are extracts from some of the very enthusiastic reviews it received when it was first issued:

'Miss Baker's *Young Man with a Horn* has become a modern classic, far and away the best of the many novels inspired by jazz. *Cassandra at the Wedding* is equally remarkable in a totally different way. Like Miss Carson McCullers, "one is dazzled by the pyrotechnics of such an artist". That is to say, the novel, narrated largely by Cassandra and partly by her twin sister Judith, is technically faultless. Yet "pyrotechnics" suggests a flashy brilliance, totally lacking here; it is all alight, is incandescent indeed, but without any obvious artifice.

'Cassandra is at Judith's wedding. The twins, in their early twenties, have been inseparable, and Cassandra regards Judith's marriage as a betrayal. The stronger of the two, she is the more vulnerable. . . . [She] drives home for the wedding and attempts suicide. She is brought back to life ("saved" is scarcely the word) by Judith's doctor husband.

'This sounds like melodrama. but there is nothing morbid or melodramatic about it. The book has the bare, classic outline of pure tragedy.' *Observer*.

'The week's most perfect book, if by "perfect" I may be allowed to mean a union of form, style and matter which leaves nothing to be desired, is *Cassandra at the Wedding*. . . . The book's greatest merits are these: economy, wit and a supremely subtle understanding of the depths of deceit which one is capable of practising upon oneself.' *Sunday Times*.

'Dorothy Baker's skill is dazzling and sure.'

*Books and Bookmen*.

'It succeeds on any number of counts: as a psychological find-the-lady; as a superb study of inward-spiralling anguish; and as glittering entertainment.' *Bookman*.

*Gollancz 16s; SFBC 7s*

THIS MONTH'S CHOICE IS  
**ORPHANS OF THE SKY**  
by Robert Heinlein

(*Gollancz 13s 6d; SFBC 6s*)

NEXT MONTH'S CHOICE IS  
**TALES OF TEN WORLDS**  
by Arthur C. Clarke

(*Gollancz 16s; SFBC 6s*)