

DISESTABLISHED FICTION

I would like to say how much I agree with the argument of John Pilgrim. It is sadly true that most people do not seem to be aware that even the ideal of anarchism exists, and if they are, it is regarded by them as 'synonymous with chaos'. Indeed, one dictionary definition which I came across defined the word as meaning 'governmental confusion'.

One of the greatest attractions that sf holds for me is (and always has been) the liberal ideas, critical and even satirical comment on social and political attitudes which it contains. It is one of the greatest qualities of a free society to be able to present subversive ideas—ideas that take a knock at 'the supporter of the *status quo*'—and sf is one of the best mediums in which to achieve this presentation of opposing ideas.

It is also true to say that science fiction can do the job better than mainstream fiction. There is no situation, theme or plot, be it political, social or otherwise, represented in contemporary fiction which cannot be exploited better through the medium of science fiction—which presents the writer with a far greater freedom and scope for his argument.

Finally, it must be said that although problems may be pointed out without any attempt to provide the solutions, it is still imperative that the problems be recognized. The first step to the solution of a problem is this very recognition of it. I do not think the argument could be better summed up than in Mr Pilgrim's own words: 'In an age when all pressure is on non-thinking conformity, sf enlivens and provokes the intellect and strikes a blow for free, creative thought.'

M. F. G. · Salford.

THE NEW NONCONFORMISTS

As a beginning I would like to express my sympathy with the proposition that government is irrelevant to those not actively engaged in it; consequently I am inclined to go along to some extent with John Pilgrim's analysis.

Certainly I agree that sf contains a heavy load of subversive content—i.e. where 'subversive' means a habit of thought which takes little account of the efforts of those already entrenched in authority to impose their will upon the rest of us: for example, by what right does the government presume to tell me that I am incapable of reading *Fanny Hill* without moral damage, consequently refusing me access to the work of another mind?

I agree with Mr Pilgrim that government, industrial pressure groups, advertising campaigns, hierarchs and oligarchs and the pervasive Establishment do nothing but harm to the individual whose conduct is not changed by their *existence*, but whose character is so often weakened in formative years by their *influence*.

To a large extent I feel that sf attacks the entrenched organization, the 'dyed in the wool' frame of mind, the pursuit of narrow self-interest by a powerful cartel. The science-fictioneer has an altogether different outlook on life, and this is where your famous Amis comes unstuck. He simply does not understand that ordinary literature is completely alien in outlook to the world view of the science fiction fan. *New Maps of Hell* was a classic case of someone who know nothing whatsoever about the medium being embraced by those who were by no means his peers. Judith Merrill has the right attitude to Kingsley Amis.

To hell with respectability and new, respectable titles; to hell with attempts to increase the popularity of the *genre* at the expense of its content; to hell with intellectual approbation (which is death to innovation). Gone now is *Astounding*—and that is a shame, because it was! Gone the naked bird and BEM from the front cover to put off all but the fan and the idiot—both of whom knew better. Let us get rid of good taste, once and for all.

Mr Pilgrim, we who are about to go under in the sea of authority and commercialism salute thee!

Now print that lot. . . .

A. C. S. · Market Harborough.

(We do thank these members for their letters, and we should like to be able to print more comments of this kind—not simply on Mr Pilgrim's article, but on any aspect of science fiction. They do not need to be in the form of a letter—some really critical articles would be an excellent thing for the *News*.—Ed.)

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