

REFLECTIONS ANTHOLOGIES

Robert Silverberg

Yesterday's mail brought me a fine, fat (574 pages) science fiction anthology called *Lightspeed: Year One*, edited by John Joseph Adams. It's a collection of forty-eight stories published, as its name indicates, during the first year of existence of *Lightspeed*, a weekly online SF magazine that you can find at www.lightspeedmagazine.com. Twenty-six of the stories were original to *Lightspeed*; the rest were reprints.

I was glad to see it, not only because it looks like a terrific anthology—among the contributors are such estimable writers as Ursula K. Le Guin, Nancy Kress, Stephen King, James Patrick Kelly, Robert Reed, and George R.R. Martin—but because it rescues a story of mine, “Travelers,” from existence in cyberspace. I have never really made a good accommodation to online publication, a fact that marks me as a hopelessly twentieth-century sort of guy. Oh, I don't mind having my stories and novels distributed in electronic versions—far from it. I make deals practically every day for e-reprints of Silverberg work. But such electronic publications have no *reality* for me, beyond the nice checks that they bring in. I like to receive a printed version of what I've written, and stick it up there on the shelf amidst the yards and yards and yards of published material I've spawned since I began writing nearly sixty years ago.

In particular I like to see the shelf of anthologies that contain my work growing ever more crowded, because anthologies have a special place in my affection. Since boyhood I have thought of the appearance of a story in an anthology as the real validation of that story's quality. It's good to get them published in magazines, of course—but only the very best of the magazine stories, I have always felt,

make it into the anthologies. And so I am grateful to editor John Joseph Adams and his publisher, Prime Books, for allowing me to add that very solid and tangible volume, *Lightspeed: Year One*, to my collection of anthologies that contain my work. There are hundreds of books in that collection now, as thorough a validation as my ambitious adolescent self could ever have asked for.

I began to develop my thing for anthologies in 1948, when I was in the eighth grade and my hope of becoming a science fiction writer was merely a wild boyish dream. I had already discovered a few science fiction novels by then—H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and one or two others—and then I had stumbled upon some of the pulp magazines of the era, *Amazing Stories*, *Weird Tales*, and *Astounding Science Fiction*. I knew that I liked the stuff and I was hungry for more of it. And one day in the book section of Macy's department store, which I haunted because they sold books at huge discounts from retail price, I came upon a big book in a blue jacket, Groff Conklin's *A Treasury of Science Fiction*, the cover of which told me that it contained “30 MARVELLOUS STORIES of superscience and the future, Atomic Power, Interstellar Space, Time, Travel and Adventures in Dimension. . . .”

Yes, there was that comma between “Time” and “Travel.” And that wasn't how I had been taught to spell “marvelous,” either. I didn't care. The book cost something like \$1.72, discounted from the list price of \$3, and that was a huge amount back then for a boy barely into his teens, but I bought it on the spot, and I'm afraid my eighth-grade homework suffered that night.

The names of the authors of those 30

MARVELLOUS STORIES meant very little to me at first, but the stories themselves were marvelous indeed. There was one haunting item called “With Folded Hands,” in which humanoid robots from another solar system quietly conquer the earth, and one called “Vintage Season” in which time-traveling tourists from the future come for a visit, and one called “Tomorrow’s Children,” portraying nuclear devastation a couple of decades ahead. I could go on and on: “Child’s Play,” “Loophole,” “The Ethical Equations,” “Rescue Party,” stories that even now, more than sixty years later, many readers will remember fondly.

When I finished the book I read it again, and again. The second and third time around some of the authors’ names began to stick: Arthur C. Clarke, L. Sprague de Camp, Lewis Padgett, C.L. Moore, A.E. van Vogt, Robert A. Heinlein. And a careful study of the copyright credits revealed that most of the stories were reprinted from *Astounding Science Fiction*. I began to conclude that the writers whose work had been chosen for this book—I had not yet heard the word “anthology”—must be the best SF writers there were, and that *Astounding* was the magazine that published most of the best science fiction. I resolved to buy *Astounding* every month, another big investment, and to keep an eye out for stories by the top writers, meaning the ones I had encountered in Conklin’s *Treasury*.

And then I ran back to Macy’s and found a second of these big books, and this one was even better than the first: *Adventures in Time and Space*, edited by Raymond J. Healy and J. Francis McComas. Practically everything in this thousand-page whopper (twice the size of Conklin’s *Treasury*) came from *Astounding*, and here were the newly familiar names of Heinlein, van Vogt, de Camp, and Padgett, and some new ones, Alfred Bester, Don A. Stuart, Isaac Asimov. What a strange name “Asimov” was, and how I loved his story, “Nightfall”! And Heinlein’s mind-blowing “By His Bootstraps,” Stuart’s “Who Goes There?,” van

Vogt’s “The Weapons Shop”—one unforgettable experience after another. I was hooked, and hooked for life.

Donald A. Wollheim’s “The Pocket Book of Science Fiction” was next, twenty-five cents, the first paperback SF anthology: another Heinlein here, another Don A. Stuart, and some more new names, Theodore Sturgeon and Stanley G. Weinbaum. Sturgeon, Heinlein, Stuart, Padgett, and Asimov turned up again in my next purchase (we are into 1949 now), Conklin’s *The Best of Science Fiction*, which had come out before the *Treasury*: Heinlein again, Padgett, Sturgeon, van Vogt, Stuart, Asimov. You get the picture. The anthologies, I saw, preserved the best material from those gaudy pulp magazines, and the writers whose work showed up most frequently in them were plainly the cream of the crop, the aristocrats of science fiction.

I have never lost that belief. I learned, before long, that there was even more Heinlein in those books than I realized, because he was also included under the name of “Anson MacDonald,” and that “Don A. Stuart” was really John W. Campbell, Jr., the editor of *Astounding*, and that “Lewis Padgett” and “Lawrence O’Donnell,” whose stories were everywhere, were pseudonyms for C.L. Moore and her husband, Henry Kuttner. So there were fewer aristocrats than I had thought: a tiny band of writers, turning out astounding science fiction with wondrous skill. They were the true masters; their presence in those anthologies was the emblem of their superiority.

In time I began my own career—only six years went by between my eighth-grade discovery of those pioneering anthologies and my first story sales, in 1954, though to me those six years were an eternity. I did not, naturally, expect to find my early published stories jostling those of Asimov and Heinlein and Sturgeon off the contents pages of new anthologies, since I was just a beginner, a novice, glad enough to be getting published without having delusions of being the equal of the *real* writers, the ones

whose stories got into the anthologies. (And for a while there were no more jumbo anthologies of the Conklin and Healy-McComas kind, either.) But then came the wondrous day when a story of my own was picked for anthology reprint. The first one seems to have been "Road to Nightfall," a story I wrote when I was eighteen, which was chosen for *The Fantastic Universe Omnibus* in 1960. Then came "Double Dare," reprinted in *The Fifth Galaxy Reader*, 1961. Donald Wollheim, he of the legendary *Pocket Book of Science Fiction*, put my "Sunrise on Mercury" into 1963's *More Adventures on Other Planets*.

And so it went, a story or so reprinted every year, more or less, and then two or three, and then, by the late 1960s, when there was a great boom in science fiction anthologies and I was turning out some of my own best work, whole bundles of them. It has been that way ever since, until my collection of Silverberg-containing anthologies has come to fill eight lengthy bookcase shelves, with ten or fifteen more books (including yesterday's *Lightspeed*) as yet unfiled and overflowing onto a chair in my office. I suppose by now I am one of the most anthologized writers in science fiction history, having probably written more stories than anyone else over a career that now is longer than those of Asimov, Heinlein, Sturgeon, van Vogt, and all my other idols of eighth-grade days. (I've also edited fifty or sixty anthologies myself in a hopeless attempt to equal the work of the editors whose

books so excited me when I was young.)

But, let the shelves overflow as they may, I will never be able to think of myself as the equal of the writers whose names I came to know as I read and reread those great anthologies of the 1940s. For me they will always be the *real* writers, and the presence of their work in those books marks those stories as the *real* stories. Hardly a month goes by without some story of mine being chosen for a new anthology, which means that readers of those anthologies who notice authors' names must surely think of me the same way I thought of the writers whose repeated appearances in the anthologies of my boyhood signalled that they were writers to remember. But I can't. It's not just false modesty that leads me to say that I can never see myself that way: I still carry around within me the awe-stricken boy of 1948, turning the pages of *A Treasury of Science Fiction* in wonder and delight, and I will always see that anthology and the others of its era as the true canon, to which I as a writer of a later generation have no access. Still, each new anthology that goes up on my shelves gives me a more secure foothold among the titans of my youth. And so, thank you, John Joseph Adams, for sending me that big, thick book yesterday. For me, online publication can never replace the pleasure of finding room for one more highly tangible anthology in the long array.

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