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Science Fiction Studies

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Petunias In the Crabgrass

Olena H. Saciuk, ed. *The Shape of the Fantastic. Selected Essays, from the Seventh International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts.* Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy #39. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990. xiv+270. \$42.95. **Michele K. Langford, ed.** *Contours of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Eighth Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts.* Same series #41. Same publisher, 1990. xiii+232. \$45.00.

Much of what Donald M. Hassler had to say about the fifth and sixth books of this on-going series (*SFS* #46, 15:381-3) remains highly pertinent for these, the seventh and eighth publications of selected essays from the annual Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (held in 1986 and 1987 respectively). Heterogeneous and eclectic by nature, these collections contain a vast array of essays on fantasy, horror, SF, critical theory, and film from a variety of countries and reflect a multitude of critical perspectives and methodologies. The generic and thematic scope of the yearly conference itself seems to be purposely all-inclusive (as the title of each book suggests), and it is difficult to find a common denominator among the many papers chosen for publication. Such lack of focus is regrettable. But be that as it may, a limited number of them might be of some interest to SF scholars and therefore warrant being singled out from the others for special attention. For example, in the first volume (and in chronological order): Jill Milling's "The Ambiguous Animal: Evolution of the Beast-Man in Scientific Creation Myths" (103-16), Carl Schaffer's "Exegeses on *Stand on Zanzibar's* Digressions into Genesis" (193-99), Brian Aldiss's "What Should an SF Novel Be About?" (221-34), Leo Daughertys "The Response of Wonder: Science Fiction and Literary Theory" (235-48), and Brooks Landon's "The Insistence of Fantasy in Contemporary Science Fiction Film" (249-56). In the

second volume: William Lomax's "Epic Reversal in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*: Romantic Irony and the Roots of Science Fiction" (7-18), Peter Malekin's "The Self, the Referent, and the Real in Science Fiction and the Fantastic: Lem, Pynchon, Kubin, and Delany" (29-36), Brian Stableford's "The British and American Traditions of Speculative Fiction" (39-47), Vivian Sobchack's "Terminal Culture: Science Fiction Cinema in the Age of the Microchip" (101-12), Lisa M. Heilbronn's "Natural Man, Unnatural Science: Rejection of Science in Recent Science Fiction and Fantasy Film" (113-19), and Gregory L. Zentz's "Physics, Metaphysics, and Science Fiction: Shifting Paradigms for Science Fiction" (173-84). Several of these conference papers targeting SF (and perhaps others, but I am in no position to judge) are of top-notch quality. It seems somehow a shame that they are buried in the nebulous generic crabgrass of such collections.

--**ABE**