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I Will Fear No Evil by Robert A. Heinlein

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BOOK REVIEW

I WILL FEAR NO EVIL. By Robert A. Heinlein. G. P. Putnam's Sons. Hardback. 401 pages. \$6.95

Robert Heinlein has written almost thirty novels and six collections of short stories. He is an acknowledged master in the field of science fiction. He has won the coveted Hugo Award for the best science fiction novel of the year on four separate occasions, an unequalled record. A scientist, engineer, former naval officer, traveler, motion picture writer, novelist, and critic, he has been writing since 1939. His work has been selected for over fifty American anthologies and nearly one hundred foreign editions.

But why review a science fiction novel? Or more important; is science fiction a relevant, legitimate form of literature? To the latter question; yes. SF, for two many years, has been disregarded as being *escape literature* (whatever that elusive term may mean). Granted, the bulk of the science fiction written in the last twenty years has been strictly entertainment; but who will doubt the prophetic genius of Jules Verne? A few SF writers, Heinlein being one of the leaders, have dealt with issues and problems which we live with.

In recent years Heinlein has turned his attention to the social and moral aspects of our society. In **STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND** (1961), he is concerned with the morality of our religions, philosophies, and laws. He predicts their ultimate faults and downfalls in terms which are all too easy to see. In **THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS** (1968), he sees the moon breaking away from mother earth to become a separate nation;

much like the American Revolution. This novel is a revolution handbook for the computerized world of the future.

I WILL FEAR NO EVIL is his first novel in five years; explained in part by the fact that he has been seriously ill for some time (I found this out through correspondence with his wife), and partially due to the depth in which he probes his subject: surgical transplants. I WILL FEAR NO EVIL is a book which asks many questions; supplied with possible answers. If the book seems confusing at times, it is due to the fact that he deals with the possible and likely, not the fact.

Johann Sebastian Bach (the main character) is one of the richest men on earth, but he is dying of old age. There is no medical hope for him; his body is more alive through mechanical than physical means. His only chance is a transplant. A new body. A donor is found and the surgery, the first brain transplant, is a success. What Johann did not count on was that his new body was female. How does an old man act with the body of a young, beautiful, *active* woman? The resulting dilemma is the substance of the novel.

There is another unforeseen, gigantic complication. For some unknown reason (well within the bounds of limitless science fiction) the soul of the woman has not left the body when Johann's mind takes motor control. She remains with him; offering advice in two-sided conversations, which are at times confusing to the uncautious reader.

There are legal problems. Johann's four ex-wives file suit in court for his fortune, contending that Johann the man is dead and that there is no indisputable proof that he and Joan Eunice (the woman) are one and the same. The resulting battle is good exploration into the legal entanglements which surround transplants.

By far the deepest moral and psychological complication is Johann's desire to have a son. In his four previous marriages he had not had one and his passion for one had eventually terminated each marriage. In desperation, he left a deposit in a sperm bank so that even when he was gone, he might have a last chance at this dream. Joan Eunice is his fifth and last chance during his lifetime. She (he) goes to the sperm bank and is implanted with his (her?) own sperm. It takes and she (he) is another medical first: the father *and* mother of his own child.

Several minor twists add to a seemingly endless list of involvements. Joan Eunice marries one of Johann's oldest friends; she confronts her donor's husband.

But the most confusing, and therefore the weakest plot development, is when Jake, Joan's husband, suddenly dies. Eunice (the woman donor, also inside of Joan Eunice's head) somehow snatches his soul from St. Peter's very doorstep and the three of them are united inside of Joan Eunice's mind. The thought dialogue between the three of them is very confusing, leaving the reader unable to keep their three intermixed thoughts separate.

I see this novel, along with the two I mentioned earlier, as transitional. They are the effort of an excellent writer to branch himself out, to explore new horizons. Heinlein is an explorer par excellence. This novel, overlooking one or two slow sections, is fast moving and entertaining. It is what debaters call a *shot-gun attack*. I WILL FEAR NO EVIL comes through with both barrels.

Ronnie M. Lane