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Gumbo's Variations

John D.

I have noticed that, in fannish circles, there is a growing belief in a peculiarly unique form of writing connected with fannish fanzines. The belief is that this form of writing is somehow special by comparison with other written matter (whether in fanzines or elsewhere) and that it should be the aim of the fannish editor and writer to seek out these creative jewels and use them to their best advantage. Malcolm Edwards was one of the first to propose this theory of fannish writing (in this decade anyway: I'll wager it's appeared in similar guise before), and it was later taken up with gusto by D. West, then by many others, even unto the very least in the fannish horde.

"Fanwriting", (or 'fannish writing' whatever it may be called), "is marvelously well suited to communications about people and experiences", the pundits say. 'Fannish writing' becomes then something that can be short on style, or on writing ability, but long on context, mentioning all the right people and happenings, and therefore worthy of inclusion in the exclusive 'fannish' category. Meanwhile, in a dark corner, excluded from the company of good fans and true, there is a pile of material, some of it exceedingly well written, but unfortunately about subjects that are rather, yer know, 'unfannish': they are about ideas and concepts; about authors and their works; about films and their makers. Hell, I even see the corner of one article poking out there that's about the painter Constable — well, I mean, how unfannish can you get!

What? I'm being rather heavy-handed in showing my bias? Of course I am! Producing a fanzine like the Ship I would be, wouldn't I? I mean, here I am, running into an exclusion clause in the fannish contract, aren't I? So I've got reason to be a little put out. I'm not the only one to fall foul of the small print in the fannish contract either. The most recent WIZ to arrive from Richard Bergeron (numero 11) details his own problems with exclusion clauses, this time relating to his non-attendance at cons, which,

according to Avedon Carol, places doubts on the validity of anything Richard might want to say about TAFF, its candidates and its purposes. If a guy like Bergeron has trouble with the small print, well, I guess we can all worry about what else is lurking down there among the codicils, can't we? Here we all were, thinking that the only thing we had to worry about was exercising the creative freedom of our fanzines in a responsible way, turning out zines and writing to the best of our ability, honing our meagre skill with each issue, trying to communicate with our readers on any subject that we felt interested in, which, by extension, other fans might be interested in too. But, sniggering in the small print all this time there have been clauses that restrict the freedom, that limit the creativity to rather more specific areas of concern, which one steps outside at one's peril. No wonder I've not been able to get an overall response to my zines that is better than 60%: I've been doing it wrong, the zine's simply been breaking the rules so fans haven't been taking any notice of it all this time. Damn it, I wish I'd known before!

Alright, alright, I'll stop being sarcastic and state my own objections to the idea of 'fannish writing'. They are quite simply stated: I don't believe there is such a thing as 'fannish writing'. Now I suppose you'll want me to justify that statement. I thought you would. No one takes a gentleman's word for anything nowadays!

I read a lot of fanzines from all over the world. Their contents range from the sublime to the thoroughly ridiculous, and the writing abilities displayed are just as varied as the contents. Those zines which stick in my mind are ones which produce a good mixture, that manage to balance interesting content with enough writing skills to convey the writer's thoughts to the reader. When it comes down to it, that is the nub of any form of writing:

you take a subject (any subject) and you write about it skilfully enough to transfer what you have in your head to the reader's head. There is only one problem — no amount of writing skill will get a subject across that the reader doesn't want to know about. So, the writer has two hurdles to surmount before he can communicate with his reader. The first is the technical one of how to write, while the second is a strategic one: where to place a piece so that it finds the reader it was meant for.

In other words, the writer must not only master the techniques of writing enough to communicate, but must also know his 'market'. It's obvious really, isn't it? There is not much point in writing pornography and expecting it to sell to 'Woman's Own', or doing a sparkling piece on 'How to become a Satanist' and asking 'Church Times' to buy it. The same applies in fannish circles. Send me a convention report, and the chances are you'll get it back by return of mail. Send Rob Hansen a piece on the life and times of Robert Heinlein and it'll come back so fast it'll blister the postman's fingers. Switch 'em round and you stand a much better chance of acceptance. There may be no difference in the writing skills in the two articles, and to my mind they could both qualify as 'fan-writing', being written by fans for fans to read, and so having a certain degree of assumed knowledge that would not be so applicable if the same material were being submitted outside the fanzine 'market'.

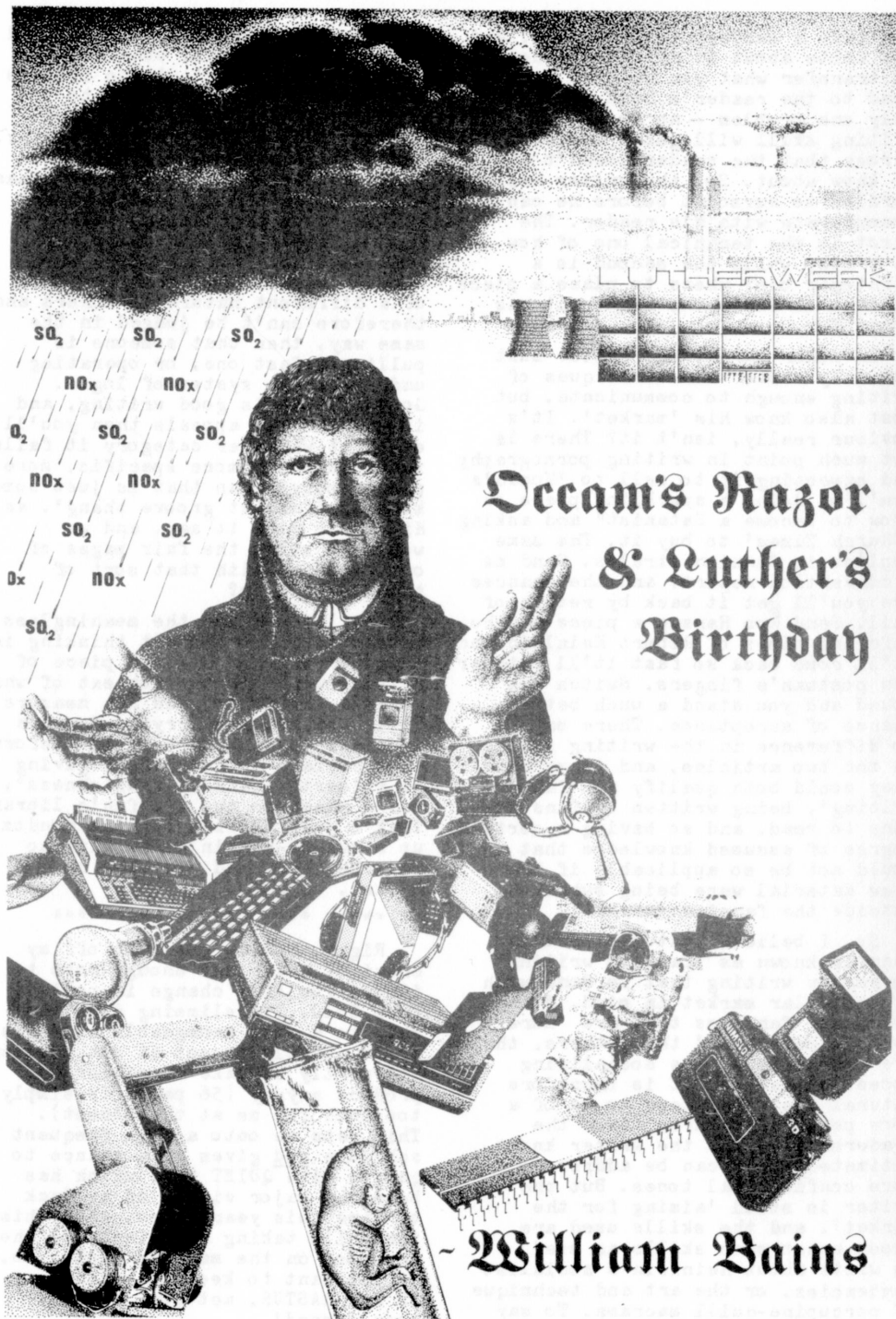
So, I believe that the peculiar beastie known as 'fannish writing' is merely writing that is done with a particular market in mind, done for those fanzines that are 'more context dependant' than others, that are offshoots of the socialising aspect of fandom. It is therefore natural that they tend to be of a more personal nature, since the readership is one the writer knows intimately, and can be addresses in more confidential tones. But the writer is still 'aiming for the market', and the skills used are those exact same skills as used to write about Heinlein's socialist tendencies, or the art and technique of porcupine-quill macrame. To say

that the one form is 'unique', and to laud it above all others as something 'fannish', is to confuse the issue, and, in truth, to propagandize a favoured form of content over others no less worthy. And that is what we are really being subjected to with these paeans of praise for the 'fannish way of writing': propaganda and self-aggrandizement, nothing else. As West says in 'Performance', when someone claims that their work is of a different nature to others and therefore can't be judged in the same way, then that someone is pulling a fast one, or operating under a false system of logic. Good writing is good writing, and if the subject appeals then you'll enjoy it whatever category it falls into. Anything more specific, more proscriptive than that is just some kind of 'fascist groove thang', as Higbo is wont to say, and we wouldn't sully the fair pages of our fanzines with that sort of thing, would we?

So, let's ditch the meaningless categories, let's start thinking in terms of whether a given piece of writing works in the context of what it sets out to do, and not measure it up against some crypto-fannish censor's list, to see if it conforms to a certain 'norm' before giving it a 'certificate of fannishness', and a place in the truefan's library. That's just driving fanzine fandom up a cul-de-sac in a car with no reverse gear, and probably no brakes, either.

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Right, having got that off my chest, I have just enough room to inform you of a change in policy. From CS10, I'm slimming down the Ship to a more manageable 40 pages or so, partly to get it out quicker, and partly to make it easier to produce anyway (56 pages is simply too much for me at the moment). This gets me onto a more frequent schedule and gives me a chance to get on with QUIET SUN, which has been the major victim of my lack of time this year. Also, with this issue I'm taking a chainsaw to the deadwood on the mailing lists, so, if you want to keep on getting CS and RASTUS, act now. You haf been warned!



The biography section of the local library is a marvelous source of inspiration, information and real-life blood and guts. What a shame I read so much SF in my mis-spent youth, and only recently strayed outside the yellow rocket-and-atom labels, to discover biography. Of religious figures, mostly — religion fascinates me. Indeed, to such an extent does it do so that I have become a professional scientist.

Having got in my Initial Inflammatory Statement, we can all sit back for the polemic, about Luther.

Luther, Martin, 1483-1546. Yes, 1983 was the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth, November 10th, to be exact. Now, I seem to recall that a year or so back was the 100th anniversary of Einstein's birth. For an entire year, we all heard about special editions of books, magazines, monographs, conferences, documentaries and so on, that were to be dedicated to this momentous event, even though the guy had only been dead 25-odd years. However, Luther seems to have kept a low profile, despite doing as much for the Church as Einstein did for Physics. A sign of the time, perhaps. But curious, because the religious changes of the 15th and 16th centuries were ancestral to our entire modern worldview, and particularly the seeds from which all of modern science, including Einstein's physics, were to grow. So sit back gentle reader, while we take a ramble through the origins of the latest, and greatest, world religion.

It starts with Thomas Aquinas, who organised and updated centuries of impenetrable medieval thought by arguing a comprehensive, coherent worldview in which the Christian faith was central to, and supportive of, most of everyday life. God suffused the world, and his presence and nature could be deduced from the world. This was one of the crowning intellectual products of medieval theology. And before we fall about laughing, with jokes about angels on pins and quotes from the Monty Python 'Spanish Inquisition' sketch, let us not forget this: A/ Medieval theology laid the basis for nearly all modern thought (literature is a notable exception, having many

secular roots too); B/ It kept Europe's cerebral hemisphere's active for the 11th to 16th centuries (much like what will be said of modern physics in 2984, no doubt); C/ It, and the Church, was a unifying political philosophy and machine which had not been equalled since the Romans, and has not been equalled since; D/ it was not about angels or pins. However, it did delve into extraordinary debates on the scriptures, which were its major input of 'new' ideas. Whole lecture courses lasting for months would dwell on one psalm, and some enthusiasts wrote whole books amplifying, examining and ultimately burying two or three verses of the Good Book. The Thomist school integrated much of this background into a coherent Christian statement without being swamped by it, a statement that is still used by some Christian apologists today. Meanwhile, the traditional Schoolman added layer upon layer to the libraries, and ordinary people ignored them, getting on with the important business of starving and dying of the recently introduced Bubonic plague.

Such a concise body of thought was too inviting a target for many academics to resist, and William of Occam (Ockam, Ockham, take your pick) did not resist hard. Applying his principle of rhetoric least action, Occam's Razor, he put the boot in much of this, and unwittingly set Europe on the way to the era of Science. He, and the 'Nominalist' school that followed, said that the vast edifice of medieval learning was based on the fallacy that it is possible to know what God wanted in the same sense that it is possible to know that it is raining. There are two sorts of knowledge, he said — Human Knowledge (birds and bees) and Divine Knowledge. The former is what can be seen from the world around us, but the latter is, by the very nature of God, forever mysterious unless revealed by 'revelation'.

This struck at the heart of medieval scholarship, the Church, and most of the knowledge accumulated since Plato. For all philosophical schemes are based on the idea of deducing the ineffable from the mundane. The Church's power was derived from the Pope, the college

of cardinals and their decrees by way of medieval scholasticism. They were at the head of a vast political machine that taxed, organised and sometimes defended all of Europe, and was such a cohesive force that the majority of local kings and princes overlooked the corruption and abuses of power in Rome simply because civilisation 'as they knew it' would collapse without the Church. However, by the 15th Century the power of the Papacy was weakened due to internal political problems - there were two Popes from 1378 to 1415, for example, one in Avignon - and to an increasing Italianisation which alienated the North Europeans. Northern Europe was also fragmenting as the Holy Roman Empire distented under external pressure and the growing ambition of its princes, and the cohesive power of the Church in Germany, in particular, was seeming increasingly unconvincing. Now Occam appears, and says that the Pope cannot know that his various powers of taxation and control are supported by God from terrestrial facts, thus undermining the philosophical basis of an already shaky power structure. If it is not revealed to him, or his predecessors, by God, then the Pope has no more idea than William of Occam.

Of course, Occam was a medieval scholar, so now we think of him as limited by the bounds of medieval thought. That he broke out of them as far as he did was an achievement to stand alongside Einstein's in Paradigm-busting. But today we may carry his thought further, and arrive at the second axiom of science: Reality is not Cryptic. (ie, there are no hidden bits of the Universe. Quarks are as obvious as cows if you look at them properly. This contrasts with the Christian view, where part or all of causality derives from God, and is in principle not accessible to man. The first axiom, 'The External World is Real', is only of interest if you are Bishop Berkeley. The Third is 'Deductive logic is universally applicable', and of course implies all the rules of deductive logic. All seem reasonable and are unprovable.)

This is all obvious, you cry! But not to the Middle Ages. To us, the phrase 'In the beginning was the

Word' has a mystical ring. To them it was an obvious, earthy fact, exactly analogous to 'in the winter there was frost'. The world was suffused with The Word, and God made the flowers grow, the apples fall, and the perihelion of Mercury advance, by pushing at the right moment.

Well, that may be so, said Occam, or it may not, but we cannot know from observation and deduction. We can only know through faith and revelation.

Other scholars took it from there in different directions. Galileo looked upwards and: "Hey guys, the stars seem to be running themselves without any cogs or angels pushing". Even the elaborate, Earth-centred clockwork of Ptolemy was breaking down. Machiavelli took a long, cold look at politics and decided that kings and Popes do not rule because God put them there, but because they were the pick of a power structure that perpetuated itself by means that individuals would be locked up or hung for (Machiavelli was 500 in 1969). The very concept of 'Nature' began to take shape as a system of rules and laws which needed no God for their perpetuation. The circles of the planets and the circulation of the blood stem from the same concept. Only chemistry resisted this push away from the mystic until well into the 18th Century, as it was just too complex for the limited technology of the day.

As others were dechristianising politics, astronomy and medicine, Erasmus and Luther took opposite roads to dechristianising Christianity. Erasmus was an academic, and heartily loathed the popular, down-to-earth Luther, regarding him as a rabble-rouser, although that did not prevent him from penning many well-turned insults aimed at the Papal court. Luther had had his fill of the dry arguments of academics, and took Nominalist ideas to their applied, popular conclusion. If we cannot know about the Divine except by faith and revelation, then neither can the Pope, he said. As most of the papal powers of political manoeuvring and repression were derived from medieval scholasticism, and not from revelation, then they have no

validity. So sod you, he said, (frequently, with various degrees of diplomacy) to the Pope, I am going to follow the scriptures and my faith, not interpretations of interpretations. (Incidentally, the much quoted saying actually goes: "Where the Scriptures stand, there stand I. I can do no other." And it could well be apocryphal anyway.) And, carrying his watchword of 'Justification by Faith', he and rather a lot of Northern Europe went off to found all the multitudinous non-catholic churches of Europe. Those churches carried with them the idea that there were two sorts of knowledge - Divine (usually revealed through the Bible and faith, although some, like John Wesley and Joseph Smith, have claimed more direct routes), and the Human. And that although the former is the only relevant one for moral and religious questions, the latter is applicable on its own to the external world.

Now, this all sounds pretty dull and obvious, in a world where anyone trying to publish a new advance in Higgs field theory based on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans would be locked away. But was Occam actually on the right track?

Of course he was not. It is ludicrous to suppose that religion has nothing to say about Higgs fields. The whole point of a religion is its global exploratory power. This distinguishes a religion from a superstition - the latter has no global relevance, being instead an arbitrary rule for a specific case, like rules about walking under ladders, finding aberrant clover plants and so on. Medieval Christianity explained how the world worked, why, where it came from and what man's place in it was. Occam said that there was no logical reason for it to do so. If he was right, the rational response would have been to junk the whole thing, not emasculate it by removing all its terrestrial parts. Modern Christianity, especially liberal Protestant Christianity, claims to know nothing about how the world started, where it is going, what our place in it is, indeed, even such fundamentals of most religions as the causes and cures of our psychic disorders. Human knowledge has been split away from this religion, leaving a vague set

of rules moral, and a belief in an afterlife, in short, the outward manifestations of a superstition with the remnant philosophy of a religion. Unsurprisingly, people have been leaving this anaemic belief system in droves for more than a century, preferring the rabid excesses of American-style evangelism, the Moonies or, the most popular option, TV and apathy.

Not all cultures have been theocidal. Islam in particular has stuck to the global explanatory power of Mohammedism since the 7th century, with a few hiccups, which, as they invented chemistry, optics, basic maths and much of astronomy as systems for describing the world without the intervention of God, is no mean feat. Mohammed taught that whether you go to heaven or hell, whether your spouse lives or dies, whether the third day of the Test is rained off or not, is the implacable Will of Allah. Nothing you can do will alter that. Although the wicked man is urged to try and be good, whether he succeeds or not is predetermined and nothing to do with him. A depressing thought? No more than, say, the inevitable senescence and death of every cell in your body due to 'error catastrophe' predicted by some theories of aging. That's just the way it is, kid: Allah's got thermodynamics on his side. This contrasts to Christianity, where God's will can be swayed by the acts of his creation. The Christian believes that he has free will, that his acts are self-determined. The fundamentalist Moslem has no such belief. Perhaps this is why the Lutheran revolution occurred in Europe. Man and God are two separate agencies there, with the rest of the world in an uncertain hinterland between them, ready to be claimed by the mundane or the divine. No such dichotomy existed for Mohammed.

Several other religions still believe in their Global explanatory power - Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism all believe in powers or spirits permeating and at least partly motivating the whole world. Only Northern Europe and its colonial offshoots have abandoned this idea.

Tut, tut, what sort of Godless

society is this?" the Europeans cried, and immediately began to build a new system of global explanation to replace the Christian one and, ultimately, to replace Christianity entirely. Divine knowledge had been emasculated as an explanation for Life, the Universe and Everything, so the computers had to step into the breach.

The exponential growth in scientific knowledge, and of scientists, which is showing no signs of stopping in this century, began at the end of the 16th Century.

It is indisputable that Science has replaced all religions as the global explanatory system of choice in Western society. A few 'outside' beliefs have made a belated push for the power vacuum left when the Nominalists pushed over the first domino of the Papal power structure. The Rosicrucians in the 17th Century, satanists and spiritualists in the 19th, what might loosely be called Beate Buddhism in the 20th. The Rosicrucians are a fascinating case: they seem to have appeared overnight like a sort of spontaneous combustion of spiritual unrest which only subsequently gave itself the conventional trappings of a Founder, a Book, a Revelation. The need for a new religion dragged the same response from several independent founders. The freemasons were unusually active around the same time. But these represented only small incursions into the growth of the scientific viewpoint, each rising to produce a following from thousands to millions for a few decades before retreating again, leaving the name of Aleister Crowley or Bhagwan behind in history. None has gained a foothold since the mid-19th Century, without some of the trappings of science, a theological tax paid to the majority belief. Today, science reigns supreme. It is, in effect, the new system of global explanation. 'It must have a scientific explanation' is the cry of the day, as once were 'It is the Will of Allah', and 'Liber scriptus proferratur/ In quo totum continatur/ Unde mundus iudicatur'. Science is, in all but name, the religion of the Common Age.

There are some differences between it and previous Western religions, which confuse some people. There is

no Godhead (as is true of most major religions). There is no Pope (although the Nobel Prize committee create a few new saints every year). However, there are cathedrals, pilgrimages, and a career structure that has been likened to the medieval guilds, but would more profitably be related to the cleric's life on which the Guilds themselves were based. And, of course, there is the total necessity that all of this, especially the expensive and time-consuming parts, Not Be Questioned. If anybody thought that building York Minster was a stupid waste of time, their voice was drowned by the same multitude that put a man on the Moon nearly a thousand years later.

Along with this comes exclusivity. The majority of scientists today are openly atheistic or of such indeterminate, liberal Christian background that their nominal religion does not actually impinge on their life at all. Indeed, the only self-professed, active Christian I have ever encountered among the research community was regarded as something between an amusing anachronism and a nut by his colleagues. The same exclusivity applies to other systems of global explanation, of course, but the transition is most marked when considering Christianity.

This is not to say that there is not disagreement within Science. But it is internal. Environmentalists form their own schisms within the new church to battle the doctrine of nuclear power, using not any external values or the weapons of the older religions, but rather those of science itself. Galileo, remember, was criticised not because he had not made his observations accurately, but because his logic was at odds with Aristotle, and his conclusions with the Bible. No such attacks are tenable today.

Today we see the medieval church in terms of a political monolith, and our perspective makes invisible the smaller schisms and fringe religions around its periphery. But they were there, preaching the end of the world in 1000AD, trial by fire or water for witches (which only had general hold in the more primitive areas of Europe, like Britain), and merging Christianity

with earlier religions as happened in Scandinavia in the 10th and 11th Centuries, and in Hungary and Romania somewhat later. Today, the fringe of science is very visible, as often as not because of the over-reaction of the orthodoxy to the threat from the UFO followers, the chrysanthemum conversationalists and those wanting porpoises for president. As in the Middle Ages, and as in other religions today, this fringe merges with fantasy on one side and orthodoxy on the other. On the orthodox side, where once maps were filled with dragons because the Bible mentioned them and, hell, they weren't in my yard so they must be in his, now we have what Brian Aldiss called the Bestiary of Science. The CETI projects fill the Universe with civilisations, because one of the tenets of science is that we must be typical and, hell, the BEMs aren't in our solar system so they must be somewhere else, despite a paucity of evidence for them that would have killed any frailer theory decades ago.

On the fiction side, we, of course, have our morality plays, our mysteries, and ultimately our equivalent of the medieval literature where all acts had to play to the Christian background. Where a wooden 'Hand of God' prodded the protagonists into action, now simulated laser beams and polychromatic computers urge them, and their angelic/demonic companions, to greater effort. Of course, science fiction is not really about science, is it? Think of Watson and Priest and (shudder) Vonnegut. And think how popular their books are compared to the latest Perry Rhodan, or "2020: A Space Sequel". The people want reassurance that, despite all the evidence, the new religion really will bring utopia, or annihilation if we follow the devil's path. And they get it, while in practice the world continues pretty much as it always has, being mildly unpleasant for nearly everybody most of the time. This does not condemn all science fiction, even all 'hard' science fiction filled with the new theology of starships and gene manipulation, to illiterate junk. Bach wrote reams of church music, which is nevertheless masterly composition. But the literature must be breathed into the scientific faith. Trying to separate the

science from science fiction will produce masterful, innovative works of imaginative writing that no one will want to read.

Because Christianity has been so effectively ousted by science, there is a feeling that allowing your life to be run by any religion is a Bad Thing. But what can we Do About It All? Nothing, of course. Even if we wanted to, we could not overthrow science as a world religion without providing a more attractive substitute. Thomas Kuhn argued that scientific Laws fall into self-supporting groups he called Paradigms, and that paradigms are very socially stable and need a lot of pushing to topple. He did not point out that the whole of science is itself a super-paradigm, a vast edifice of all possible scientific laws interconnected with each other and with the core belief in the so-called 'scientific method'. As such it is so socially stable and so entrenched that it will take a thousand Galileos and a million Einsteins to overthrow it.

I would argue, anyway, that we do not want to overthrow science. The new religion is not noticeably worse than the old, not significantly more expensive or repressive. And it is as good a method of finding The Truth as any - better than most if by The Truth you mean the little facts that make up the consumer lifestyle. There is no need to root it out. One day someone may root it out for us, or our descendants. Until then, share and enjoy your position on the fringe of the priesthood - all the fun of speculative science without actually having to do the damn experiments.

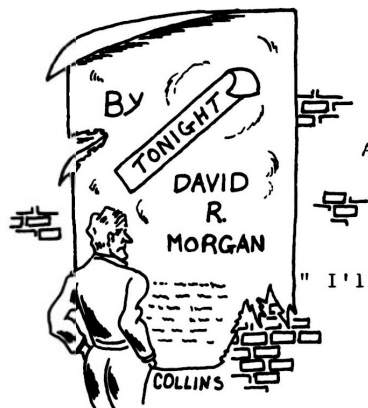
You might say a short prayer for Martin Luther, though, when you watch your next TV documentary on brain transplants, or go to your next convention. The poor sod is not turning in his grave - you could scientifically prove it. But with what's been done with the seeds of dissent he sowed, he most certainly would rather like to!

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David

As I walked out ,
I saw the first Spring Onion
In Fortnum's Fine Food Store .



Walking on past a peeling poster ,
I fell into an absurd plot ;
' Carry On Thinking.'
Kenneth Williams as Jean-Paul Sartre ,
Liz Fraser as Simone De Beauvoir .
Outside the closed-down Roxy Cinema
A man gave his girlfriend flesh-eating lilies;
She's not his girl-friend any more ...
And I hear the self-same conversation
In every nook and social cranny :
" I'll never ever forget what's-his-name - hate him
But can't remember why! "

As I walked on ,
The drive-in all-new Gospel Crusade
Had on it's huge gold-plated video screen,
That face that no one remembers ;
That face that never forgets :
" My People, the hated Dictatorship is over .
Now you will elect me Democratically . "
He laughed . I couldn't see the joke !
But in my second-rate hotel the Porter had told me :
" If you require anything Sir , just speak into the lamp ."

As I walked on ,
Into the glistening party that never ends ,
All the Hosts began saying :
" He's not my guest. "



As I

R. Morgan

" God, I thought he was yours, darling ."

" Who do you mean ?"

" Who cares !"

There's piped music installed in all these prison cells ,
And air conditioning in the 'Hole' .

In the next door flat the young son asks, "Daddy ,
Can I borrow the gun tonight ?"

The television yells out another frenetically paced
half-hour of zany humour ,

As Mummy picks up the phone to Dial-a-prayer
And the Kids' beds rise from the floor .

As I walked out ,
The people in the skyscraping office blocks ,
That covered all the concreted ground around ,
Watched a lone Holly leaf fall...
And one frog saying to the other:
" It's no use Prince ,
No one believes in Fairy Stories anymore ."



As I walked out ,
Into the gathering crowds finally before the one raised stage ;
We were one being , waiting for a way .
The roll of drums ; the invisible Orchestra , Crescendoeed into
The tall figure dressed in radiant white .
We longed for answers...Reason to be given ,
But underneath the burning Arclights
Her grease-paint began to melt ;
It peeled on me , it peeled on everyone ;
There was no face beneath -
And the show had just begun.



Walked Out

Martyn Taylor

The Philosopher's Stone

(A Critical Re-examination of Alfred Bester's 'The Demolished Man')

I was a babe in arms when Alfred Bester's *THE DEMOLISHED MAN* was first published and received as hot stuff. It won the first Hugo and despite this honour has since assumed a niche in the pantheon of SF creations deserving (rather than merely claiming) the epithet 'great'. It has been available more or less constantly since first publication, which is the highest accolade for any book out in the real world where real readers pay real money to buy real books (as opposed to being sent them for free like us jaundiced reviewers). When I first read the book some years ago, taking it at my customary hard gallop, I considered it a cut above yer average skiffy tale and so, when John D. suggested I 're-examined' a classic for his series on re-examined classics, this seemed like a good choice to me.

Peter Nicholls has this to say about *THE DEMOLISHED MAN*: "It is the pace, the style, the passion and the pyrotechnics that make the novel extraordinary. The future society is evoked in marvellously hard-edged details; the hero is a driven, resourceful man whose obsessions are explained in Freudian terms which would seem too slick if they were given straight, but are evoked with the same sceptical, witty, painful irony, typical of New York, which informs the whole novel." (from *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION*)

I couldn't have said it better myself. The story combines space opera - planet hopping, vast constructs, boy-next-door megalomaniacs, and everything not too far removed from the way we live now - with psychology, linguistic gymnastics, and a suitably moral futuristic ending, and Bester wraps it all up in 187 breathless pages. All in all, a most serviceable formula for reading fireworks.

Literary analysis is all too often detailed scrutiny of the component parts of a work, a process less than

enlightening in this case because the component parts are no more this book than a 'rocket' is merely a cardboard tube glued to a stick, stuffed with saltpetre and a few crystals of heat-reacting chemicals, and blocked off with a twist of blue touch paper. While they may be the 'how' of all those oohs and aahs, they are not the 'why'. Examination of the book's components will show us the reasons.

The setting of the tale - Ben Reich and his megacorporation ('Monarch', oh, subtle, Mr.B, subtle) bestride the solar system and go about their daily business like a cross between Cesare Borgia and a rhino with gutsache - is standard pulp SF stuff, conceived for readers who haven't the least idea, and care even less, about the way business gets done. Bester does no more than genuflect towards stereotypes - which is galling if you are trying to plough your way through the plot (sic) of *GOD'S BANKER* and know full well that the machinations of big business are far more outlandish than anything even Paul Erdman could devise - BUT that is all he needs to do. He is not attempting to create a realistic future - which would probably show him way out of his depth - but to use those standard references, embedded in the consciousness of most of his readers, to create a serviceable backcloth for his story without having to slow the pace by describing it in greater detail. What Bester provides is a movie set, stimulating extant references in the reader's memory. His store fronts are merely flat surfaces propped up by off-camera scaffolding, but within the context of the 'movie' they create a perfectly realistic setting acceptable to the viewer, essentially functional within that context, not intended to be 'real' or even realistic, per se.

Characterisation works on much

the same level. The twin protagonists - the homicidal Reich and the policeman Powell - are both suggested as real personalities. The colour of their hats advertise them as oddie and goodie but they are not entirely evil or virtuous, just the way you and I aren't. As well as being ruthless, Reich is charming, and really suffers from nightmares, while Powell is an arrogant prick much given to extravagant fantasy when faced by intellectual inferiors. The reader, hurtling past at the pace of the plot, is just given sufficient information to generate recognisably genuine images, rather than those typical SF stereotypes which would never merit the sympathy of anyone possessed of the intellectual distinction to read Alfred Bester. Slow down the movie to frame-by-frame speed and it becomes obvious that those 'real' people are cardboard cutouts adorned by some cutesy decoration, lovely to look at but bereft of life. Of course, that decoration is effective. Bester wields a mean paintbrush, and those gestures towards characterisation - Reich's obsession and mental torture, Powell's dilemma in reconciling his urge to power with his responsibilities - are undoubtedly convincing when viewed from the careering carriage of THE DEMOLISHED MAN's plot. They prove inadequate only before more thorough consideration, the sort yer average skiffy reader isn't going to make.

With only one exception the plotting of this book is both taut and convincing. That exception comes at the crucial moment when Reich reveals to Powell that he is the killer by letting slip information only the killer could possess. This slip is so obvious that even the dullest reader must light up and cry "Gotcha!" when it is made. Yet Reich is presented as a very clever man, having successfully plotted and executed a 'perfect' murder. At the time of the slip he is firing on all mental cylinders, hyped up to the gills on bloodlust and the conviction of his own superiority. The likelihood of Reich making that slip at that time, when it is certain to hang (demolish) him, is minimal; minimal, that is, unless he wants to be caught.

I say, Holmes, isn't that a bit...

and here we come to probably the major factor in the book's spectacular reception in 1953. Reich wants to be caught. Hey, that's heavy. Gosh, wow, boyohboyohboy, this guy's talking Freud, man, he's hitting us with Jung! It's all there, just look. Sibling rivalry, Barbara D'Courtney is fixated on her father as a sex object, and could it be more obvious that the murder scene - the Orchid Room, fer Christ's sake - is the womb? It is straight Freud. All that nightmare symbolism is pure Jung. Crazy man, crazee. Now, even allowing for yer average skiffy reader of today being unable to tell Sigmund Freud from Clement Freud, and probably thinking that Carl Jung plays synth with Kraftwerk, anything more than a cursory glance ought to be enough to show that Bester's exposition of these psychological nuggets is pretty sketchy (just like his exposition of everything else in this book). The reason he doesn't give his Freud Freudian explanation straight is that anything more substantial than flashes of 'Freud' and 'Jung' at regular intervals would reveal that his grasp of these theories is at the John and Janet stage, that of the colour supplement reader rather than the serious student (just like his readers, in fact). Even when he wrote THE DEMOLISHED MAN, it was a widely acknowledged heresy that Freud's infantile sexual theories were based not so much on real insight as his inability to accept that the dream-revealed obsessions of his patients were not illustrations of their repressed desires ("I wanna screw Daddy"), but echoes of their genuine experience ("Daddy screwed me"); and it was known that Jung's 'death wish' was nothing like so definite, but passed into common parlance as such because of a mistranslation - any relationship to Biblical scholarship on this point being purely coincidental.

Of course, Bester was not writing a book about Freudian theories. He was utilising those theories to create a story, to entertain, and at the same time massage the egos of his readers. Psychology is notoriously a problem area for the practitioners (in fact and imagination) of the harder edged sciences,

which accounts for the frightened contempt in which yer average skiffy reader still holds it (and how much more so was it in 1953? Anyone?) That Bester's use of these insights is so obvious as to be instantly recognisable as such can only reinforce the nervous reader's self esteem. This could be simply bad writing, but there is ample evidence in *THE DEMOLISHED MAN* that Bester is a highly skilled writer, and a better, more satisfying conclusion is that it is a very subtle manoeuvre by Bester to win over his readers. You can almost see yer average Skiffy reader of 1953 grinning to himself when he reads page 8 and realises that Reich's 'Man With No Face' has to be Reich himself, and marking one up to himself, saying "I gotcha that time, you smart-assed New York writer feller, you. You can't put one over on good ol' Johnny Doe." Whereas, in fact, Bester is doing precisely that. Dead Cunning, Mr.B., dead cunning.

Of course, Bester may have been sincere in believing that he was laying heavy conceits on his public and dealing with them in a truly insightful way. In which case, not very clever, Mr.B., not very clever at all. But I don't think that I'm wrong. I think Bester is having a good game with his reader, who he knows very well. At the very end of the book he gives a recapitulation (strictly unnecessary in terms of the plot) in which Powell (Bester) spells it out to Crabbe (yer average skiffy reader) just how all the loose ends have been neatly spliced, and no reader has any excuse for reaching the last page still scratching his head. This recapitulation smacks of those obligatory last scenes in which Perry Mason spells it out in words of singles syllables (or less) for Della Street (aka yer average tv viewer), all the while wearing a confiding smirk to Paul Drake which says "But of course we knew all the time, didn't we, ole buddy." And of course the reader, relieving both information and the sly nudge and wink, just like yer average tv viewer, can do nothing but nod enthusiastically to this compliment, and not notice the curl of contempt on Mason/Bester's lips as he turns away from the last shot. Bester leads his reader through this

story by a ring through his nose. He is brazen, and I, for one, can't help but admire his audacity.

Taken one by one the components of this story are unexciting, having little of genuine quality by way of invention, character, background. Yet Bester combines these ingredients into a whole that is a lot more than the sum of the parts. How does he do it? He presents everything at breackneck pace. The reader is given only the merest glimpse of every step in the plot before being whisked on to the next step, leaving a memory of first impressions rather than substantiative reflection. We all know that first impressions can be deceptive, but that is all Bester intends us to have, and he serves up only the best crafted of impressions. Like the movie maker he resembles, he is red-hot on presentational impact. From his very first words : "Explosion! Concussion! The vault doors burst open!" he has you by the throat. His words give off vigour like steam. The pace at which event follows event bludgeons. This is the secret. Peter Nicholls calls it passion, and there are very few books written with such fervour, such conviction, such relentless dynamism. *THE DEMOLISHED MAN* is story telling con brio, and Bester is like the ancient mariner, stopping one in three and fixing him with a glittering eye. If you are among the excluded two you may wonder what the hell is going on, but if you are that one there is no doubting the fact that you are spellbound. You may be rolling over and playing dead, but Bester assuredly has you under the flurence. Yes, yes, yes, as Nicholls says, *THE DEMOLISHED MAN* has pace, style, passion and pyrotechnics, but even they are not sufficient explanation of the success of Bester's transformation of his raw material into this gem. Or should I say gold? It is plain what the additional factor is. Writer's alchemy, that's what it is. And we all know that alchemy has been banished from the world by the advent of science, don't we?

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OX TALES

by DAVID BATEMAN

A memoir of a very minor theatre group

I went to the magic ox,
and I said, "Magic ox, how do you do?
And do you have anything sensible to say?"
And the magic ox said,
"I'm fine, thank you, and indeed I do:
won't you try this on for size.
Where necessary, attempt the impossible;
and where possible, celebrate your failures.
It's a little maxim I picked up somewhere.
It's difficult picking things up when you've only got hooves,
but the magic helps considerably."

(From "The Magic Ox" by Dimba Vedanta, c.1410-1524)

There are times, especially lying in bed unable to sleep after drinking a quarter-bottle of whisky with no chaser, when one falls to wondering about the purposes of one's life; and there are times, especially in the morning (and not even necessarily the following one) when those doubts return, taking up the space in one's mind that was previously occupied by any confidence one had in anything.

Standing around in a silver body-stocking in Granada TV's Exchange Flags studio last Wednesday morning, waiting to perform our three-minute slot for the programme on the Chinese New Year, was one of those latter occasions. The Granada people had by now realised that we were weird, and in just a few minutes they would be realising that we weren't really a theatre group at all: that it was all a hoax. "You're a writer, David," I was telling myself. "Well, that is, you write poetry, and some of it's quite good. You know you can't act for toffee, so why insist on making a fool of yourself in this manner?"

I'd probably have felt a little more confident if we'd had a proper rehearsal at all.

What we were about to perform was supposedly an excerpt from our show, "Tricking The Pig", that we were due to perform in Chinatown the following Sunday. In fact, this three minute 'excerpt' was still the only part of the show that existed: and I could think of more comfortable places than a TV studio for our first dress rehearsal.

Three of us were acting in that slot. There was Les, who was playing the Pig who kept wandering away from his rightful place in the heart of the magic time-controlling machine, and Margaret and I, as Wind-wood and Metal, two of the five elemental powers (the only powers other than Pig unaffected by the subsequent stopping of time), who were trying to fetch him back.



The other three members, Helen, Ian and Jonathan, were standing at mikes off-camera, ready to provide the 'music'. From their platform, Jonathan, clutching a tin whistle that all of us knew he couldn't play, happily called over to us, "Hey, look at us! We're musicians!" In fact, of the three of them, only Helen could actually play. Jonathan's remark cheered me up a little: if they three were musicians, then I supposed that we three must be actors.

For a lot of the time, but especially at times like that, I feel that Magic Ox is actually a pretend theatre group; but on the other hand, I know that we are usually very good at that pretence. So convincing are we, in fact, that most people still believe we are a theatre group of sorts, even after seeing us perform. Some of them are even under the impression that we are quite a good theatre group, and I do not like to argue with them.

On Wednesday morning we were a street theatre group from Liverpool who had never performed in Liverpool or even in a street of any description. Our performances and small reputation were things confined almost entirely to the world of summer fairs. In autumn 1983, we lost Berni and Yon, the founder members, and now, months later, Magic Ox was coming out of a sort of hibernation and entering the bright new future of 1984.

The basic ideas for "Tricking The Pig" had come out of a group meeting a month earlier; but in typical Magic Ox fashion, no one began work on props or costumes or even the plot until two weeks before the show, booked for Sunday, 5th February. Indeed, to spend even two weeks in preparation is unusual for Magic Ox. As a rule, ideas for shows are conceived beforehand in a very vague fashion, then the show itself is dreamed up and knocked together in a week, performed once, then dropped altogether. Ideas from a particular show may recur, but the same show is never repeated. This may seem an odd way of working - and it may change as Magic Ox begin to work more on home territory - but it is well suited to, and contributes to, the unique character of summer fairs. Until it's already started, no one really knows what a particular fair is going to be like. And summer fairs are where Magic Ox spent its infancy (and it is still only a calf really, bless its thick-skinned little soul).

Most people will have heard of the Glastonbury Fairs (in recent years expanded by the CND), but may not realise that similar fairs occur all over England from May to September. The size and the level of organisation varies a lot, but generally they are two-day events which bring together a mixture of activities and entertainments including music of many kinds, theatre and circus-type activities, performances of all sorts cropping up all over the site. The larger fairs have dozens of stalls as well as the usual beer-tent, wine-bar, cafes and crafts. They are modern versions of the medieval fair, and the effect is the creation of a temporary and unusually festive village. At the busier fairs, you will generally want to be in at least two places at once, but you won't mind settling for one.

Admittedly it is unfair to judge a fair on the basis of the number of famous names performing, since the less-known performers and less-organised activities are just as important to the atmosphere of a fair; but I will give one (extreme) example of the range of performers. At Cornwall's Elephant Fair '83, I saw, amongst many other acts, SPK, The Cure, Benjamin Zephaniah and Mr. Spratt's Twenty-First Century Popular Motets. And on the last day alone, there was Ivor Cutler; Robin Williamson (ex Incredible String Band); Rip, Rig & Panic; a mask-mime show by Trestle Theatre; Roy Harper and Alternative Cabaret (from London's Comedy Store). Fairs give you quite a lot of experiences to gloat over afterwards.

Magic Ox was conceived in Liverpool in the autumn of 1981. Berni Armstrong and Yonian Chivers - who had first met at a Welfare State theatre company workshop in Liverpool two years earlier, while playing the characters of Death and Life respectively - had spent the first part of that summer as temporary members of Welfare State, and then spent the rest of the summer at fairs, running puppet, mask and sculpture workshops and doing a little acting. Now, with the confidence and photos of the summer's activities, they began badgering friends to form a theatre company.

By May 1982, they had a basic group of five people, had sorted out story-line and roles, and were concentrating on prop-making and other preparations. Though there was to be a special emphasis on immediate visual impact, and though there were some plans to involve the public in the show, these were the only features of the company that were at all unusual. The basic idea was to tour a single show - "Yinka's Quest" - from fair to fair, in the manner of a conventional theatre company.

The play, "Yinka's Quest", owed its setting to Berni's childhood in Nigeria. The girl Yinka goes in search of a moon-totem which was stolen from her village by a demon; and through various encounters during her quest, she gradually achieves a sort of enlightenment.

Due to a series of twists of fate, "Yinka's Quest" would never be performed, though the props produced for it would be used again and again. Similarly, Magic Ox, rather than becoming the projected neat little street theatre company, instead became something quite different.

The first twist was that the first two fairs of that year, though welcoming Magic Ox to perform, didn't have any spare money. So, in mid-June, with no transport expenses available, Magic Ox set off for the Green Fair in Suffolk without their props: Jonathan hitch-hiked from Doncaster; Tristan, Berni and Yon cycled from Liverpool with cloth, glue, string, nails and hammers; and Helen cycled from Birmingham with a melodeon and a Death mask stolen from Welfare State.

Lacking the vital props for "Yinka's Quest" at those two fairs, the group were forced to make up new shows on the spot, and this tendency was reinforced by two more twists; firstly, two bookings requiring shows to fit "theme" fairs later in the summer; and secondly, the

erratic line-up of the group, which was changing from fair to fair. Berni, who was still trying to see Magic Ox as a theatre company rather than as a flexible group, was, not unnaturally, disturbed by these changes; then he gradually came to realise that this flexibility in both line-up and performance was in fact one of Magic Ox's most important assets. "Theme merchants", he dubbed the group, which is probably as good a description as any.

When I first went to visit Magic Ox and read poetry at north Norfolk's Fire & Water Fair in August 1982, the group had already developed a distinct and unusual identity, one aspect of which was the inevitability with which I wound up as a member. I recall being surprised that none of the group really seemed to know what was going to happen in the impending show. They were going to build a ship as a set, the performance was to represent the voyage of a ship of fools, and the ship was going to be burnt as the finale: that much was known, and the group were apparently content to leave any finer details until the last moment, preferring to spend the meantime swimming in the sea, building curious structures on the beach, and going to considerable trouble to collect enormous quantities of pine-cones for no particular reason. That the group did ultimately manage to build a ship in the middle of a field and put on a show seemed to me to be a small miracle.

But I was with Magic Ox for only their last two fairs of 1982, after which the group scattered and went into a winter's hibernation; so it wasn't until the next summer that I got any overall impression of the group beyond its high-speed production of shows, its semi-professional amateurism, its sudden changes in size and its evident preoccupation with archetypal and mythological themes.

The actual nature of performance varies quite a lot: it may consist of constant interaction, in character, in an environment of the group's own construction, such as the partly underground Earth environment at the Earth Fair, or the village of Peaceful Green for Norwich's Peaceful Green Fair; or it may be a straight show, performed to a static audience. Generally, even Magic Ox's straightest acting is highly stylised, unrealistic; and since the actors are often representing animals, trees, spirits, elemental powers et cetera, masks and costumes are used to powerful effect.

This is a quote from Berni, on his intentions in performing: "A performance should work on a number of levels, not just entertainment. You need to make the show, or the environment, whatever you're doing, a reality for the audience, however unreal or weird it seems at first glance; getting them to make leaps of imagination to get involved in it. You should intrigue them, get them to contribute imagination to it. Their interpretation should be personal. If the audience bring something of themselves to the show in response to it, it's worked."

All well and good. Then, in October 1983, Yon began a Dramatic Arts course in Kent, and with she and Berni (the only real actors in the group) planning to spend summer 1984 in the U.S.A, it seemed at several points as if Magic Ox might retire to those great Magic grazing grounds in the sky. Except that the rest of us didn't know how to stop.

Which Is how come I wound up standing around looking weird and feeling weirder in the TV studio of February 1st, trying to convince myself that all this was going to be extremely enjoyable in retrospect. Being able to hide behind a silver half-mask to some extent made up for the exposed feeling of the silver body-stocking, but not enough really: I would have preferred to be hiding in bed. Even my silver monkey-boot were poor compensation, and my silver hair kept rattling in my ears and catching in the silver rays sticking up from my forehead. This was no state to be in at ten o'clock in the morning.

Our state of unpreparedness for that day can only be described as consummate. Helen had called round and woken me up at 3.15 on the previous afternoon with the news that our TV spot was confirmed and that we were due at the studio at 9.30 the next morning. At that time, only two of the six costumes were anywhere near completion, virtually none of the props were made, and we hadn't even talked the story through yet, let alone rehearsed.

We spent a concerted evening of prop- and costume-making and argument and reconciliation, and even found time for three or four rough walk-talk-throughs (all with lots of stopping to sort things out; and I confess it was me who sparked off that night's Big Row by suggesting that another couple of walk-throughs might be a good idea); and by shortly after nine o'clock on the Wednesday morning everything was ostensibly ready (excepting the red paint on the giant magnet, which Les was hurriedly blowdrying with a hair dryer) for us to take a taxi to our first argument in a real dressing room.

All of this was a prime example of Magic Ox's tendency to leave things until the last moment and to trust to fate. This tendency allows a great deal of spontaneity in performance, but it also demands the same, sometimes more than is forthcoming. It is a characteristic that is both endearing and irritating.

The studio manageress called out that they were ready for an unrecorded rehearsal. Wind-wood and I, standing to one side, gave each other a squeeze, and the Pig began his dance-walk to the front, and snuggled down to go to sleep. Wind-wood and I moved into shot, searching for him.

In a performing area of about ten by fifteen feet, it's difficult to search convincingly, especially if the object of your search is as big as a Pig. In moving around and trying to look everywhere except at the Pig, you tend to fall over it by mistake. So after what seemed like about two minutes of trying to keep moving and yet not find the Pig while right next to him, I was glad when Wind-wood finally signed to me that she's found him. I couldn't hear her sound because of the noise of the Magic Ox Incidental Music Ensemble wailing and banging away at their 'instruments'. She was breezing around all over the place and I wound up on the wrong side of the Pig, but still the bit with the magnet went fine (except I forgot to mime-explain what my plan was) until we got the magnet unstuck from my silver jacket, at which point I blanked out completely. I had no idea of what was meant to happen next. I recalled what my old mentor, Tesco

Foods, had taught me to do in such situations: "KEEP COOL. DO NOT FREEZE." It might work. Keeping moving and trying to look purposeful, I struggled to work out what was supposed to come next. It's hard to keep up for very long, though, and after a few seconds of it I gave up, stood straight and laughed. Wind-wood was keeping going, though, I noticed, swishing around and gesturing hopefully to me in gestures which it was a pity I didn't understand. Then she was blowing and swooshing at the Pig, and Pig was starting to shiver. Ah, that seemed familiar. I suddenly remembered that I had to put my metal jacket in place of Pig's pink woolly scarf before he reached out for it. Unfortunately I was on the wrong side of Pig to do that, and Pig was already waking up. I swooped around the front in a very unMetallic fashion, and swapped the garments just in time, and the rest went more or less fine except that the ever-exuberant Wind-wood was still swooshing at Pig from all directions when I was supposed to be moving up close behind him with giant magnet at the ready.

So much for the unrecorded rehearsal. Next was the recorded rehearsal, which went slightly better. Unfortunately at the end, where the Pig was supposed to be being drawn backwards by the magnet, he veered wildly off-course and crashed into the back of the studio.

On the third take, though, the producer was happy, which was just as well, seeing as how part of my mask had come adrift during the scuffle with Wind-wood in the second take, and had had to be fixed with sellotape, and seeing as how during the third take I was having to hide the fact that the giant magnet was now falling apart.

By Sunday, the day of the celebrations, we were altogether better prepared, and it was a relief to remember how much easier it is to perform when there's an audience in front of you: except for a couple of things at parties, this was our first live performance for five months. Unlike at fairs, where we may have to bark up an audience before we begin, on Sunday it was more a matter of crowd-control. Anticipating this, we had designated crowd-control as the Pig's responsibility.

This was our first show to juxtapose comedy with a mythologically-based story: in the midst of the serious business of the elemental powers trying to get the Pig back into the time-controlling machine so that there might be a next year, there was a fair bit of audience interaction and even slapstick. The final luring of the Pig into the machine by Earth was disgustingly slimey, and the transformation of the Pig into the Mouse (or Rat, whichever you prefer) was accompanied by a suitably extreme flash and bang: kids' show stuff. As we sometimes do, we'd worked out the show on an adult level (of sorts) and then performed it just as much for children.

Considering this was our first actual street performance, and considering there'd been yet another row and one near walk-out just before, the show went surprisingly smoothly. (I hasten to add that we exceeded our argument-quota with this particular show: we usually aim to get by with only one major row per production.) There were only two really dodgy moments during the show. One was when, moving to bring forward a chair for the Stupid Bird to jump off, I discovered that we'd forgotten to bring it with us. Fortunately we had a large wicker basket full of muddy carpets on hand as an instant substitute. (On returning to the preparations room

after the show, we found the chair sitting there in full view exactly where the rest of the props had been, but blending irritatingly with the furniture.)

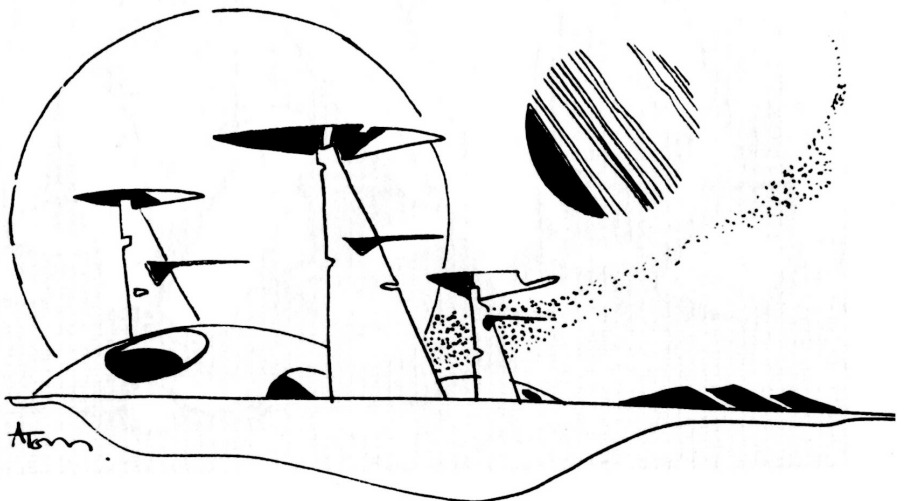
The other dodgy moment, as Les revealed after the show, was when the explosion blew the flash-box clean off its mounting, sending it crashing down onto Les's back while he was attempting to change from a Pig into a Mouse and would have preferred to do without such distractions as How Not To Catch Fire In A Time-Controlling Machine. (Tom the photographer also swears that a dog nosing around the side of the time-controlling machine simply disappeared when the explosive transformation occurred; but we regard this touch as unnecessarily H.G.Wellsish, and prefer not to believe him.) The fortunate thing is that the audience never actually notice most of the cock-ups that happen during a performance.

Anyway, the show went down well, we got no half-bricks thrown at us, and we got an unofficial invite to do a show for next year's celebrations.

Now it is June, and Magic Ox is properly back in action, and it also seems likely that Yon and possibly also Berni will be joining is for certain shows this summer after all. It was good to get down to East Anglia's Tree Fair, the first main fair of the year, and meet all the fairs people again. Sadly, one result of our concentrating now on local bookings is that we won't get to many fairs this summer, but we'll be doing at least another couple.

There is an open question over to what extent Magic Ox should follow its natural tendency to move into comedy and clowning, and to what extent it should stick to its more serious artistic and mythological roots. "Tricking The Pig" was a happy compromise in this respect, and in the future there may be more tendency to alternate between the one and the other.

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WHAT I HATE ABOUT FANDOM

by KEV RATTAN



'Ghod, there I was at the bar, and up comes this guy and asks directions to a programme item. What a bloody neo — a programme item! Haw, haw, haw! So I decides to do 'im a favour, and explain what yer supposed to do, like drink till you fall over an' that. "Mine's a pint", I says, and explains, and 'e just says that he thought cons were about SF. When we'd finished laughin', I grabbed 'is lapel, like, 'cos 'e hadn't got the bheer in yet, and I was gettin' thirsty. Well, I pricked me finger on his bloody name badge, didn't I? So I told him what a shit 'e was for actually wearin' it, and 'e was so surprised 'e dropped 'is books. Well, people were kickin' the Dicks and Ballards back to 'im, when someone noticed a Heinlein, and when we finished laughin', we...'

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'Know what you mean, John. I always say that anyone who's come into Fandom since Mancon isn't worth talkin' to. Ghod, do you remember Mancon, though, what a shit con! Just goes to prove you can't hold a good con at a university. Unicons might be alright for fringe fans, but they aren't really fannish, know what I mean? And it was so bloody far away! I mean, talk about the sticks, I bet 'alf of them can't read or write up there, too busy eatin' tripe and black puddin', and trainin' their racin' pigeons. Next thing you know, the Scots will be wantin' us to let them run conventions! What do yer mean, they 'ave? Don't call them cons, do yer? I wouldn't be seen dead at one. Nothin' but neos and media fans everywhere...'

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'Ch-ris, you're telling me! Just who do those media twerps think they are comin' to our cons and goin' around in fancy dress carryin' guns? I've got nuthin' personal against them, if only they could stop actin' childish

and join in the bargames, and gettin' pissed with the rest of us. And they've gotta be stupid. I mean, I don't care how many degrees you've got, as far as I'm concerned, if you're a trekkie you're mindless, Q.A.D. And that's another thing — all these films are damaging real SF...'

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'Damn right! All the SF written today is crap. Not that it ever was much better. Just think of the Big Three. Couldn't write at all: no prose style, nonsensical ideas and fascist ideology! Come to think of it, much as I love the genre, I've got to admit that there's never been a single decent SF story. It's really only fit for inadequates and children. Personally, I don't read any of that escapist nonsense anymore, I stick to fanzines...'

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'Speakin' of which, I got this thing a while back, callin' itself the first issue of a fanzine. I took one look at it, and just had to write sayin' what a twat the editor was for producin' this heap of manure that proved he had the mental age of three. I mean, it was A4. A-bloody-4! What kind of size is that for a fanzine? And it wasn't even duplicated! So I told him where to get off callin' it a fanzine. Great Ghu, it even had fiction in it! So, he writes back sayin' I should have read the story before slaggin' it off, and that I was just being destructive! Well, that really pissed me off. Fancy suggestin' that I read fan fiction! So I told him what a fuckin' wimp he was for not being able to take a little advice, and that he'd totally missed the point that I was gently prodding him towards standards of excellence. Well, I ask you, after I'd taken all that trouble to help him, he never did a second issue...'

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RIPPLES

the letters

Phew! Let me tell you, editing some kind of coherent loccol in a heatwave has really been a task to tax my endurance. I thought it was bad enough cutting down the hundred or so locs to the thirty or so used here, but the refinement required to fit that thirty into the available space has been a herculean task. Let's hope that it's worked out all right in the end. Space is short, so my own comments will be kept to the minimum, only appearing where relevant. Otherwise, the stage is all yours!

Let's kick off the proceedings with Harry Warner Jr., who has some odd things to say about receiving CS8.

423, Summit Avenue,
Hagerstown,
Maryland,
21740
USA

Harry Warner, Jr.

I had an amazing experience when I took the mail from the mailbox this morning. The moment I touched one envelope, I told myself that the new Crystal Ship must be inside. The back of the envelope happened to face me when I got the mail so I couldn't recognise your handwriting. The envelope obviously came from England (I don't think this particular type of envelope paper is used in the United States) but how did I know which fanzine was inside? Did my subconscious sort rapidly through the possibilities, and arrive at Crystal Ship because of the firm feeling of the contents and the weight which your heavy paper stock imparted to the contents? Or has long practice enabled my fingertips to read the title of a fanzine through a protective envelope, like those Russians who are supposed to be able to read a newspaper blindfolded, by running their fingers along its columns.

...You shouldn't worry too much about adverse reviews of Crystal Ship. They happen to the best of

fanzines. But I do wish someone with plenty of time and knowledge would write someday an extended study of the dynamite inherent in criticism, in the hope of making fans think twice before firing off critical salvos in all directions in an effort to become famous overnight. It's all very well to say that adverse criticism should inspire the subjects to do better and that the capable people will shrug off unwarranted bad knocks. But the fact remains that in every artistic field - writing, painting, music, and so on - quite talented individuals, and even geniuses, have been shaken so badly by severe criticism that the world is deprived of the things they didn't create during months or years of inaction caused by those nasty words. You and I keep going in fandom after people are harsh about our fanac. But how many potentially fine fanzines and fan writing and fan art have never come into existence because neofans were crushed by someone's adverse criticism before those neofans had gained enough confidence to do well?

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I'll settle for the critics thinking once, Harry! Next, there is a new voice to the CS lettercol.

67, Robslee Road,
Giffnock,
Glasgow,
G46 7ER

Oscar Dalgleish

...Your editorial about reviews seems to me to be asking the question "what do you do about reviews?" Why not do what anyone with a modicum of self-respect would do, and completely ignore them, unless you agree with them. A name which is well known doesn't imply that the quality of their opinion is necessarily any better than any other, and if people are gulled into the straight acceptance of these views as the gospel truth, then perhaps it is their loss for

not reading your zine, rather than yours. Put it this way: when the Fanzine Standards Review Office is opened, I will be at the head of the queue, ready to deliver to them my offering of a can of petrol and a lit match. A fanzine is entirely the property of its editor, and, sadly, some people seem incapable of remembering that fact when reviewing. Personal opinions often say more about the reviewer than the reviewed, and also not a little about the people who will listen to such reviews. Just keep doing what satisfies your need to edit, and the rest will come behind you, or stop reading as is their nature, but that isn't an excuse for you to worry over the intellectual inadequacies of others.

...Ian Covell's piece about the work of H.Beam Piper seems to say as much about the man, and Ian's regard for him, as it does about Piper's considerable contribution to the world of speculative fiction. Ian obviously cares for the author, and that is never a bad thing in reviewing, especially when it is kept to the point of a gentle regard for the real person, and softens the potential criticism, rather than causing considerable distortion of the views expressed. Even so, I was left with a distinct feel for the nature of the man himself, as much as an overview of his writing, and that, I feel, is as important and valid an approach as a completely cold review of the work of an author, all the more appropriate, in context, because Piper wrote with the feelings and natures of his characters well worked out before hand, and allowed their inner feelings to show through at the appropriate times. Thus, I feel that this approach to the work of Piper is a wholly correct one, which led to and informative and highly entertaining article on a man who, to my mind, crucified himself on his regard for others.... Piper comes across as a man of his feelings, and a little more emotional honesty in writing wouldn't go amiss in any field of writing, least of all in science fiction. I feel that even in taking his own life, Piper left the story unfinished.

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Flat 2,
17,Hutchinson Sq.,
Douglas,
Isle of Man.

Martyn Taylor

...Thanks for those few kind words, though I would point out that I didn't describe CS7 as your best issue, simply as the latest issue of the zine that has consistently made the deepest impression on me of all the zines I have received. The combination of serious material and really quite subversively amusing stuff makes for a mixture that ought to satisfy all but the bigots....

Actually, I only began to give serious consideration to what I was doing with the MATRIX column after I gave it up - ie, after it became a whole lot of work and not a lot of fun, with seemingly no acknowledgement by that imbecile at the other end of the letter. That's probably because I tend to react to things from the entirety of my experience, which is of necessity confused, rather than from a previously formed intellectual position. 'Down Palace Walls' was never intended to be "...vast, weighty, considered pieces of criticism", but rather a review of what I had received and what I liked. I make no apologies for being human and having my own sincerely held likes and dislikes.

...If Piper understood economics, well, that puts him in a minority of one so far as SF authors are concerned, most of whom seem to have precious little idea that society is an organic whole, evolving and changing in response to that great law of nature: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Libertarian 'economists' tend to annoy me intensely for various reasons, mostly by their tendency to invoke 'The Market Place' as though it was some omniscient deity instead of being individual people executing individual transactions designed to make for themselves the maximum profit at that particular time. Economics is more than Adam Smith and Samuel Smile...

I'm afraid I wouldn't grab any of our copies of LOTR if the Vogons arrived. In fact, I'd probably be

incorporated into the road while dithering between the boring 'Collected Works of William Shakespeare', the somewhat improbable 'Works of Blake' and 'Works of Milton', and 'The Bible'. I think Shakespeare would probably win.

Music would see me dithering between Kantner and Slick's 'Baron von Tollbooth and the Chrome Nun' and Mike Westbrook's 'For The Record' with the remarkable Westy winning, if only because I've met him and 'For The Record' has the music I want played at my funeral, his setting of Blake's 'I see the form'.

As for movies...groan. I could



tell you of the weeks I spent gathering myself for a movie issue of RAA, listing best and favourite movies (they are different, you know) and would narrow my choice down to Tarkovsky's MIRROR, which is simply the weirdest movie I've ever seen and it spoke straight to my heart, and Welles' CITIZEN KANE. Again, the roadroller will get me 'cos I can't decide. And, in any case, if I'm not allowed to take Cathie and Matthew James (born 17th January 1984) with me, I'm not going.

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1771, Ridge Road East,
Rochester,
New York,
14622
USA

Eric Mayer

...Don't worry about what critics say about Crystal Ship. What counts is what your readers think. Fandom's critics aren't a very creative bunch - most critics aren't. The sort of people who find it attractive to devote much time to criticism usually have axes to grind and heads to lop. I can't imagine how anyone, presented with your fanzine, would see only the spacing between the type. It is more a reflection on their pitiful powers of discernment than anything else. We all have our priorities. I've figured that critics' priorities tend to be much different than my own and, I suspect, than yours. Lately, it's become possible to make a big splash in fandom by producing nothing creative at all, but just by creebing about everything. It's also easier to criticise someone else's work than to do anything original yourself. I find it disheartening, but it's best, I think, to pay as little attention as possible.

...As you probably figured, the question of what three artifacts of civilisation one would choose to take on a space journey is most commentable. My first reaction was, "Three? He's got to be kidding". But, like you, I found the choice quite easy to make. I assume, first, that the aliens would have some sort of typewriter available. Putting words to paper is the one occupation I wouldn't want to give up. Well then, here are my three:

The Kinks Greatest Hits. I knew there would have to be some kind of music and I've listened to such a wide variety of the stuff that I was at first puzzled. Although classical can be enjoyable it doesn't affect me, personally, as much as rock. The rock album I decided on was one of the first I ever bought - found it on sale for a dollar. If it had the power to get me interested in music, I figure it should hold up pretty well. Well, it still does sound good 15 years later (and though I suspect some of the records I bought this winter will sound good 15 years from now I can't

really be sure). There's also a good deal of variety, a lot of musical styles, and the Kinks remain my favourite band all in all.

The Baseball Encyclopaedia. One of my regrets, in moving from Pennsylvania to New York, has been that I can no longer pick up Phillie broadcasts with Richie Ashburn. Going off to the ends of the universe I might not be able to pick up any baseball broadcasts, and baseball is simply too important to me to leave behind. This reference book contains the lifetime records of every pro ball player who ever lived. (Major league pro that is.) Practically everything done on a major league field during 100 years of games is recorded. I can, and often do, get lost reliving the 1908 season, or comparing performances from different eras. There's always something new to stimulate the imagination here — some odd number to ponder — some previously unknown fact. How many times did Frank Crossetti strike out? A perfect book for endless wanderings in space.

One Man's Meat, by E.B.White. My literary selection is a collection of essays written from, and often about, White's saltwater farm. It has always seemed to me that it would be ideal to live on a farm of that sort, and earn one's living by writing about it, so the book gives me vicarious pleasure in that way. More, the essays are so well done that they are eminently re-readable, rather like poems would be, I imagine, if I liked poetry. The essays are also the finest example I know of what, in my opinion, writing should be. The style is perfect, clear, concise, straightforward — without literary effects. And it is honest. It is White trying to figure himself out really. Not worrying about what others might think of his writing. Finally, E.B.White himself seems such a civilised person, such a decent, thoughtful man, that I can think of no other author I'd prefer to have on board.

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Well, there's one odd selection for you to ponder, but you ain't seen nothing yet, believe me.

18, Frederick St.,
Brantford,
Ontario,
Canada,
N3T 4N4

Carl Wilson

...Re Gumbo's Variations: I find my fur bristling at the mention of what reviewers think 'should' and should not' be in a fanzine, irrespective of quality. Those who view fandom as some sacred order with inviolate rules ignore the fact that fandom is a social and informal activity — one could conceivably spend one's entire time in fandom without concerning oneself with SF at all. What right would any cretin have to pillory you for it? So, claiming that there is a right or wrong format for a small press publication, like Crystal Ship, is painting oneself ignorant green beneath the raw light of reality.

...Literary Ecstasy? Ah, someone's been touching my buttons again. I realised a short time ago that the decisive factor in my life was a search for an ecstatic, almost mystical experience in all my endeavours. In childhood, my perspective on the world was a heavily bejeweled one, gleaming with constructs of imagination and exchange and extremes of emotion. The common rite of 'growing up' is for the inspired nature of the child to atrophy and acquiesce to self-conscious foolishness. And so my activities are high-risk ones — the creation of literature and music, theatrical performance (particularly improvisation) and whole-hearted communion with the spheres of love that dance about me. Failure can be devastating, but success produces (you guessed it) unabashed ecstasy. 'Happiness' does not produce satisfaction. I am driven to find an enthrallment that transports the mind and soul miles beyond the horizon. My impatience with mundanity unjustly springs from such desire. Where does all this madness end?

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Hmm, there's probably an answer to your last rhetorical question, Carl, but I don't know it, just like I don't know many, many things. But it sure as hell don't stop me enjoying life!

42, Green Lane,,
Belle Vue,
Carlisle,
Cumbria
CA2 7QA

Shep Kirkbride

...Confusion over criticism does not seem to me to be something that you should remotely worry yourself with. I'll accept that constructive criticism is the 'dog' that fandom is structured around, but comments as diverse as Martyn Taylor's and Richard Geis' just serve to illustrate how opinion can divaricate when you least expect it. That's fandom, isn't it? The two reviews you quoted from neither exonerate nor denigrate you as a fan editor. 'Crystal Ship' is the beast you chose to create and flesh out the only way John D. Owen knows. You decide finally how it lives and breathes. Criticism only affects your changing attitudes, not directs.

You wouldn't want your world peopled with Geis or Hansen clones, but I suspect Taylor clones would be equally unacceptable?

...I don't believe that anyone could possibly have been offended by 'In The Halls Of Meritocrassee'. From what I remembered about it at the time of first reading, it was a bit of a giggle. Thinking I had missed out on something, I had to go back to it and came up with opposite conclusions to the ones Pam Wells had made. If anything, the second reading proved it to be very light, fairly amusing, but harmless. Fair enough, you obviously were indulging in a bit of stereotyping for your characters, but are not we all subject to that system, both in fandom and life in general?

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16 Rockville Drive,
Embsay,
Skipton,
N. Yorks.

Mal Ashworth

...Interesting point in your editorial, comparing reviews of the previous issue. Seems to me, on one very simple ground, regardless of egoboo, the MATRIX one is preferable to Geis' sour put-down, and that is this - the former would guide someone who didn't know the zine to it, the latter, away from it. I can't imagine anyone being grateful to Geis for that. I have done a fair

amount of reviewing (not in the fannish sphere) and it always seemed to me that the reviewer's prime role is to be as transparent as possible and where he can't manage that, to make his own prejudices known. His job, which is entirely different from that of the critic (I was amazed to hear Roz Kaveney maintain the opposite on a Channelcon panel), seems to be to give as accurate a picture as possible of what he is reviewing so that the reader can then decide for himself whether or not that is for him. Hence there is nothing at all incongruous in giving a very positive review to something one may not personally like very much. And the reverse. (An analogy would be the situation which applied until recently when I had the heady Cosmic power of being the sole selector of a dozen pubs to represent the 560 or so square miles of Skipton and Craven in the GOOD BEER GUIDE. I certainly included both pubs and beers which I personally didn't like, on the grounds that my personal preferences had no relevance to the criteria being used, nor to the needs of real ale fans visiting the area, perhaps for the first time.)

Why, I wonder, do I seem to agree enthusiastically with so many of the things you say? I have just been agreeing with you on religion in a letter to Lilian Edwards and now you come out with: "There are many, many ways to produce a fanzine, and as many reasons for doing so". Exactly. And I think the kiddy-winkies who pretend otherwise only do so so that they can inflate their own egos by panning whatever varies from their own arbitrary 'standards' (which is what you said, more or less). In fact, an interesting phenomenon I have noticed about one section of leftover Seventies fans is that they are mortally afraid of praising anything - and that, in my book, is a sure sign of arrested adolescence. In the Fourth Form it is 'uncool' and in some way puts down one's own mighty importance to wax enthusiastic or to praise. In this one respect (hoo, boy, watch them brickbats come! But prior to their launch, please note the very limited nature of the point being made) I

think I descry one of what may be very few significant differences between Fifties and Seventies fandom. The one had a relatively adult general ethos, the other a relatively adolescent one. But since there will be many who would not accept those criteria anyway it is not worth a general argument. But it is, perhaps, worth noting that what others believe to be true of water — that it should be kept in motion — is certainly true of egoboo. And the flow can not be restricted to a one way affair either; and the corollary of that is that if you are not prepared to dish out any then ultimately you are not going to get any back and the flow will be dammed up. Which would be a damned shame.

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Hmm, I wonder where that leaves the Seventies fans now, Mal? Does it mean that they have now matured into adulthood, or are carrying on their arrested adolescence — thinking about it I suppose the answer is both, depending on who you are talking about at the time.

12, Hurst Lane,
East Molesey,
Surrey.

Joan Daniels

...I feel I must make a brief comment on your very controversial editorial, re fanzine reviews, etc., as I was extremely interested to learn that faneds can also become confused.

And if such as they can be confused, what are newcomers (like myself) to the BSFA and the zine scene supposed to do? Are they, from the overwhelming bewilderment of their first mailing, supposed to pick it all up and put it together by their fourth or fifth? Springing, like Athene from the head of Zeus, fully-informed into the fanzine scene?

A few months ago I would have agreed with you that the function and purpose of these reviews was to act as an unbiased guide, or an impartial assessment or indication to and of each production.

Now I am totally confused and unsure. I allowed myself to be

'guided', my judgement to be influenced, if you like, by a MATRIX review of certain fanzine — which shall remain unnamed — and consequently altered my original viewpoint in my comments. Incidentally, it was the second such letter I had ever written and I have not yet heard the last of permitting a review to give me another opinion.

Because of this, I am now led to believe that the function and purpose of reviews would seem to hinge upon what the reviewer believes his responsibilities to be and upon what he considers the task of reviewing a fanzine (not a book) involves, and also whether he considers that his task stretches to personal criticism and judgement of specific material by contributors and disregarding the fact that the editor has set certain requirements, therefore all published material has met with approval by him/her, ie, fulfilled editorial requirements.

If the reviewer does consider such criticism to be within the sphere of his job, does this constitute an unbiased 'guide', an impartial 'assessment', or an unprejudiced 'indication' as to what is around in the way of fanzines? Perhaps the reviewer thinks that it does? But my unfortunate experience seems to suggest otherwise, doesn't it?.

So, if the reviewer is offended, or takes offence, by the act of using his review as a guide (or to re-educate an opinion?) we are back to square one: what is the reason for fanzine reviewing?

As to the second, closely related query (what should a fanzine be like and what kind of material should be used), well, if there is no specific 'blueprint' or pattern, then it is as the editor wants or likes, followed by what the readers want and like. What the reviewer wants and likes is completely irrelevant to the fanzine, which is the result of the combined efforts of editor and contributors, and it is this 'team effort' that produces the completed image. If the editor likes fiction — or even poetry — why not include it? Some of his readers will appreciate it and who is he aiming to please anyway?

Choosing a reviewer to 'form your opinions for you' is a dead end, I feel. You can find a particular reviewer that has similar tastes to yourself, and then follow their recommendations to find new zines, but the opinions you form must be your own, ultimately, otherwise there is little point to being a fan. But, to the newcomer, the whole scene must be very, very confusing, and there is not a lot of help given to new fans to find their feet, unless they are lucky enough to be 'inducted' by some fan group or other.

5, Maes yr Odyn,
Dolgellau,
Gwynnedd,
Wales,
LL40 IUT

Margaret Hall

...I had heard rumours of CS's excellence and I was not disappointed - though I almost had to agree with Paul Skelton that CS is "too for-bidding" to respond to. Where does one start with such excellent layout and printing, and such serious articles? ...Perhaps I could start by coining Hall's Law of Fanzines? Which is that, judging by the loccol, the issue of any fanzine before the one you first receive always seems more interesting than the one you actually get, whichever issue that happens to be...

'Men Who Wear Hoods...' struck me with horror. I find Dave Thiry's attitude worrying. Perhaps he, as an American, doesn't share my terror of guns: but I know that merely trying to dismiss Ku-Klux Klansmen as amateurish, overweight, muddled-aged slobs doesn't make them harmless. No one who carries a gun is harmless. Admittedly, as a white woman, I presume I have nothing to fear from Klansmen - though there's always the danger of being caught in the cross-fire should they decide to have a shootout with some rival group. My fear of people like the Klansmen, who try to stir up racial hatred, is not fear for my own safety, but fear for the group persecuted (one of my best friends happens to be a Jew) and fear for the well-being of the community; there can be no peace in a community torn by racial hatred. Alright, most Southern Americans probably consider themselves fairly liberal - and compared

to a Ku Klux Klansman they are! But what a standard to measure yourself against. To a liberal Britisher they are not liberal at all. For instance, it's only very recently that South American schools have become multi-racial. Dave makes no mention of the black people's views of the Klansmen. Has he any black friends? Has he asked them what they think of the Klan? He did say that if any blacks had shown up at the cross burning he'd have run a mile. A few fanatics with guns can make a town, a city or a country unsafe for the normal law-abiding citizens, who ought to be able to go about their ordinary affairs in peace without the risk of being blown up or shot. No, Klansmen - and their like the world over - may be fat, stupid, crass, deluded, even deranged, and I agree that they shouldn't be encouraged, but they are not clowns and they are not funny. I don't think they are for laughing at.

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808, Goodson Drive,
Columbus,
Georgia,
31907
USA

Michael Sherrod

...As usual, Dave Thiry came up with something worth reading. I, being a suthun bo' myself, know a few Klan members, and they seem to fit Dave's general description: overweight, underbrained, macho-backwoods types who seem more into the childish glee of being in a secret society and shouting their prejudices, than making any serious political statements. I believe it stems from the very roots of human prejudice, in that "I like me, and I like people like me, so we must be better than everyone else".

Dave did neglect to mention that some Klan rallies take the form of picnics, with hot dogs, beer, and booths set up to push the Klan's cause. I have even been told that a Klan slide show exists, complete with a soundtrack recording. They also sell buttons, 'I Luv the Klan' t-shirts and other nest stuff. The only Klan rally I went to (as a photographer's flunky) only had one disturbance. One GBI agent wanted to arrest a Klan member who was

demonstrating his war-surplus bazooka to an interested crowd. This agent, with his mirrored sunglasses and his 'Georgia Bureau of Investigation' windbreaker had been taking pictures of Klan members, press people, FBI agents (dark business suits on an August afternoon) and the varied crowd of onlookers. He got upset when the bazooka demonstrator put his weapon down on the agent's camera bag (dropped it, really). The next thing you know there were Klan members with shotguns and rifles, agents with revolvers, and even kids with BB guns all yelling and screaming at each other. The incident ended when some bright government operative noticed that he and his compatriots were outnumbered and outgunned ten to one. They all bugged out and the picnic continued.

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Hmm, is it any wonder that the good ol' U.S. of A. turns up such wunnerful human beings as their President as Ronald Raygun? The wonder is that it doesn't happen every time. Just think what a great Pres John Wayne would have made!

233, Maine Road,
Manchester, 14.
England.

Mike Don

...I found Dave Thiry's piece vaguely disturbing. It would be pleasantly reassuring to think that all Ku Klux Klansmen are (with the exception of a few self-styled 'leaders') harmless beer-belly bigots. It would - but I honestly can't. Like the National Front lunatics over here, ignorant yobs who spend most of their time in pubs talking about what they're going to do the the 'Reds', 'Coons', whatever, and going on paramilitary 'training' (which means they put on camouflage jackets and sit in country pubs talking about what they're going to do, etc, etc.)

Hitler's Nazis started with seven bigots sitting in a pub talking about what they were going to do about the Reds, the Jews, etc. They were fairly harmless - then! Just like Alf Garnett in this country, a figure of laughter, albeit nervous laughter. It only takes the right looney to come along with the right style of raving, and you have something very

nasty indeed.

Imagine, if you will, some American rabble rouser with the sort of magnetism and political clout that Ian Paisley has among some Northern Irish Protestants, but appealing to the redneck Klansmen (like Paisley, it could well be a fire-breathing preacher; there are plenty of them about). He's have a much bigger power base to work on - that is one of the fortunate things about the Reverend Ian: as an Ulsterman, he's got no appeal to mainland Britain's bigots.

Imagine further, that said rabble-rouser beings covertly backed for some reason by big-money power (which Hitler had, Moseley didn't quite manage, and the NF have never come within miles of getting under their own brand name). Imagine those, and you have a very dodgy problem. So, sorry, I can't laugh off the Klan (or the NF). As long as their hatred festers away in the southern swamps, so the danger remains. Gawdelpus, I'm beginning to feel an attack of the Stephen Kings coming on...

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Rt.5, Fox Run, Apt.8,
Lauringburg,
North Carolina,
28352,
USA

William Goodson

...'Men Who Wear Hoods...': right on. The Klan is ninety percent (make that ninety-eight percent) made up of ignorant rednecks incapable of planning anything. The other two percent are collecting small amounts of money from them and don't want any real trouble.

However, when these guys get on a hate high, usually after a speech, and get some beer and boasting, they are quite capable of rolling out in a pickup six months overdue at the bank, and shooting up someone who looks black. No plotting, no vast conspiracy, but a fool with a gun is a dangerous fool.

Harry Truman is reported to have said: "The head of the Klan has to be Jewish, cause nobody else could sell a bunch of damn fools some \$9.98 bed sheets at \$45.00 a piece."

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2677W - 5CON,
Hartford City,
Indiana,
47348
USA

Buck Coulson

...No, I don't think about 1920s lynchings when I think of the current Klan; I think about bombing churches, murdering 'communists' (Thiry's version of the shoot-out neglects to mention that the only people killed were the left-wingers - who were not American Communist Party members, but members of some left-wing labor organisation), juries who refuse to convict whites who kill blacks (bunch of them just got found 'not guilty' a couple of months ago) and general magazine, newspaper and TV reports, including articles in THE CRISIS (the NAACP magazine) which I doubt that Dave reads. Fear the Klan? No, I don't need to fear them personally, and of course they are not a danger to the country at large. But then I'm white, and so is the country at large. Incidentally, US left-wingers seem to approximate to British leftish moderates, so the 'communists' killed in that shoot-out mentioned were more or less equivalent to the British Labour Party.

...'He Walked Around The Horses' is based on fact - a British diplomat disappeared in just that fashion, at just that time. What happened to him is, of course, Piper's imagination; nobody knows what happened in the real event. I met Piper only once, at a convention, and came away with a very bad impression of him as a person (he was a crying drunk, which is an improvement over a belligerent drunk but just as noisy). But he was a brilliant writer, agreed. (And not always a crying drunk; I believe it was Piper who had a room next to friends of ours at one con, and who kept them awake one night because he, Poul Anderson and perhaps Jerry Pournelle - I'm not positive of the third party - were sitting on the floor, singing Old Norse ballads, and keeping time by beating their heads on the wall.)

Unfortunately for the arguments, the New Wave, like science fiction itself, adheres to Damon Knight's definition of 'what we mean when we point at it', and not all of the

debaters are pointing at the same thing. (Except for Ballard, of course; everyone points at him. I'd think it would make him nervous; I wouldn't like to walk into a convention and have everyone go around pointing at me.) Personally, I think Ballard was an excellent writer who wrote some godawful crap because it was easier to sell failed experiments to the British editors of the time than it was to make them successful - as soon as he had a reputation, he started riding on it.

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1811, Tamarind Avenue, apt. 218,
Hollywood,
California,
90028
USA

David Palter

...David Thiry's article is an interesting and informative look into his neighbourhood in North Carolina, and quite well written; I am expecting good things from David's future writing. I will, however, offer one disagreement. David's reassurances as to the harmlessness of the KKK are, I trust, accurate for the region he is writing about. I am also aware of clearly more dangerous Klan activities in a number of other places such as Northern California and the state of Washington, where the resemblances to an authentic American version of Hitler's National Socialism is much greater than it is in North Carolina. Unfortunately, on a nationwide basis, the KKK is not so easily dismissed. There is, alas, much political insanity here in America. So far it is at least somewhat under control; there is no guarantee for the future.

...Feminism is an essential philosophical understanding, since it deals with very real and very serious injustices and errors in the conception of self and others. However, like anything else, it can be abused. Some would like to replace the existing iniquities with a new and different set of iniquities; this represents an exaggeration of feminism beyond the point of usefulness. There are suggestions of this in the

letter from Joy Hibbert.

Her claim that men are more emotionally dependant on women than are women on men, and that men are trying to avoid thinking about this, serves no other purpose other than to insult your male readers, and bears no more relation to reality than would a more traditional sexist assertion, such as that women are less capable than men in all areas except child bearing. The evidence she cites - that there are more SF stories dealing with women living in the absence of men than there are of men without women - is not even true (not that it would prove the point even if it were). I can recall innumerable stories of men on long space voyages without women, as well as planets of men only, etc. The topic has not been avoided by emotionally insecure male writers. The statement is just not true.

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The Bower,
High Street,
Llantwit Major,
S.Glamorgan,
CF6 9SS

Helen McNabb

...The most interesting article (in CS8) was Dave Thiry's on the Ku Klux Klan. I can see what he is getting at, that the majority of Klansmen are ignorant swamp rats without power or the ability to achieve power, but that seems to me to evade the issue, or part of the issue at any rate.

That such a society continues to exist and continues to attract members is socially devious. There seems to be a legacy of race hatred of which the Klan's existence is a constant reminder, a constant taunting towards hatred. To ban the Klan would not remove the hatred - unfortunately life is never that simple - but to act as apologist to it seems to take a step onto dangerous ground. Positive incitement to hatred, especially when aided by costumes, cross burnings and guns going bang, is an attraction to the ignorant who will become more deeply involved in their bigotry. If I got the impression that most people were laughing it would be less disquieting, but I don't. I get the impression that people just ignore it, which is not helpful either way. As a

complete outsider, it's always easy to make an impractical judgement, but I wonder if Dave Thiry would be able to laugh at the Klan if he were black, rather than Aryan in type.

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P.O.Box 42,
Lyneham,
ACT 2602,
Australia.

Jean Weber

...Dave Thiry's piece on the Ku Klux Klan is a good demonstration of a favourite theory of mine: many of the really negative things which one reads about America (I'm thinking mostly of crime and violence here) aren't nearly as noticeable when you actually live there - or as bad as the reports make them sound. This is probably true of a lot of other places too - I often wonder what it is like to go shopping in London, for example, with all the bombing of stores. Or do people just reckon that the chances of actually being bombed are less than, say, that of being hit by a truck, and simply go about their business as usual?

Getting back to Dave Thiry though: he passes rather lightly over the few (outsiders) in the KKK who are dangerous. Surely if one were a black person who wanted to 'make waves' (even legally and non-violently), one might realistically fear the dangerous ones, and their possibly drunken friends going along for the fun. Maybe not in North Carolina, but what about some of those other states, eg, Alabama?

*** **

1950, Cooley Avenue,
no.5207,
East Palo Alto,
California,
94303,
USA

William Bains

...Dave Thiry's article on the KKK was fascinating. I have seen a couple of documentaries (in the UK) on the survivalist movement and, although I cannot vouch for the documentaries' accuracy, they seemed to be a bunch of loonies. Recently, a couple of articles in 'Science' by a major group of

Earth Science and Life Science researchers headed by Paul Ehrlich and Carl Sagan described an effect they call 'The Nuclear Winter', and their studies deserve as far-flung appreciation as possible. In brief, they studied the effects of meteor and asteroid impacts on the earth, of volcanic eruptions and other sources of smoke and dust on climate. They then extrapolated the results to what would happen in a nuclear war. They concluded that in any full-scale nuclear exchange the amount of dust thrown into the air and smoke generated from the burning forests and cities would be enough to cause temperatures to drop below freezing for months over most of the farmable areas of the Earth, because they would reflect much of the sunlight currently warming said farmland. The result of that would be the extinction of quite a range of animals, possibly including man, from starvation. The crops would die in the fields, the forests would die, the sea would start to freeze over in temperate latitudes, killing off much of the plankton. Most large animals would undergo drastic population reduction if not extinction. We are not talking just about whales and gorillas here — this also includes cattle, sheep and water buffalo. Ever try to grow rice in a frozen paddy field? As few as 500 nuclear bombs of 100 kilotonne to 1Mt range would cause such an effect, although a full-scale blowup would be worse. That is quite apart from the effect of radioactivity in the fallout, which would wipe out most of the more specialised forms of life in the main battle-zones. The survivalists would face hordes of starving refugees from the cities for a few days, then the refugees would die of exposure and the survivalists would face arctic weather and starvations for months, and a ruined ecology for decades. As I stressed above, this is not SF. This is the result of studying what happens when large amounts of dust and smoke are injected into the atmosphere. Unlike most studies of nuclear war, therefore, it is based on experimental fact and cannot be dismissed as a theoretical study of no relevance to the real world.

Interestingly, a 'limited war' in

Europe would have extensive climatic effects in both hemispheres of the world. This point was brushed aside by Pentagon officials as meaningless, which shows what they are planning!

For comparison, it seems likely that at the end of the Cretaceous, 65 million years ago, a 10km asteroid hit the Earth and produced similar effects to what Ehrlich, Sagan et al think a full nuclear war would do. No animal, land or marine, larger than 25kg weight survived. Most of the major species of plankton became extinct. Paleontologists describe the sedimentary layers immediately above (formed after) the terminal Cretaceous event as extraordinarily impoverished in fossils of most sorts. This is, of course, the infamous 'death of the dinosaurs'. In their cold, technical papers the group does not say that nuclear war would send us the way of the dinosaurs, but in less formal contexts they have since suggested it. The military planners are unimpressed. One commentator even said "We have known about this for some time, so this does not significantly alter our planning". (This was on a discussion which followed the US screening of the film 'The Day After'.) I find that remark incomprehensible. I do not believe that a rational human being could plan for the use of weapons that he knew would result in the extermination of a significant proportion of the biosphere, quite possibly including man. It has one good side, I suppose. The Ku Klux Klan would not survive either.

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Feeling suitably chilled to the marrow, are we? Good — the more people frightened to the point of protest at such a possibility, the more likely it is that we will get governments prepared to step back from the nuclear brinkmanship that so obsesses the military nowadays. Anyone who knowingly plans the total annihilation of his own species must be, by definition, clinically insane. The last world leader who was so inclined was Herr Adolf — is there really any difference now?

Sildan House,
Chediston Road,
Wissett,
nr Halesworth,
Suffolk,
IP19 0NF

Chuck Connor

...Dave Thiry's 'Men Who Wear Hoods' caught me for six. When I first took to reading it I thought it was a piece of his fiction. In fact, it wasn't until the paragraph "As a Southerner, I put up with KKK jokes..." that it fell into place and I realised that this was a true account. Full marks for the style and the way it was handled (the alternative could've been to do an Archie Bunker on the subject, which is one positive way positive way of bringing this form of racialism home to people). Why it's allowed to carry on I just don't know, and to say that it's harmless is a little beyond me - it's like saying that the National Front are harmless, and should be allowed to 'perform'. The thing that cracks me is that I can see no sense to it all - or for that matter the black against white racialism that is also around at the moment (and has been with us for quite some time as well - and even the white against white/black against black thing). Okay, so maybe it's a return to the tribal instincts (etc,etc,etc). but surely we've grown out of it in these 'enlightened' times of ours? But how right Dave is when he says that the press were there to 'see trouble'. Hell, I can remember the first anniversary of the Falklands conflict, and the way the press in this country were disappointed that nothing hostile happened or that anyone was killed. True, I have a vested interest in seeing that things don't happen down there again, but the way it was handled by the likes of THE SUN and the other tabs was disgusting - trying to outcoop each other with the least bit of information or the latest casualty figures. As Dave so rightly says, "Clowns are for laughing at, not encoraging".

...And so to Marty Cantor. I shall pass over your obvious cheap shot opening comment about 'crazies' and 'look who's first in line' and go straight for your mouthpiece direct (I've told you before, you just can't get away with shoddy

imports). So, on with the spiked gloves and into round one...

"Anyway, as a person who published poetry in the little mags of the late fifties, I find it upsetting to be considered a non-literati..." Oddly enough, as a person who has published poetry in the little mags of the late seventies, and is still publishing poetry in the little mags of the early eighties, I find it deeply upsetting that people are still trying to live off the past glories (saying that they were glories in the first place, that is). For Cantor's edification (though he is probably too wrapped up in his own ego to understand this), there is a lot more to poetry than just the Beat of the 50s, which has done more to hold back writers than any bloody-minded editor ever has. There is a hell of a gap between the late 50s and the early 80s...which has seen such things as the Absurdists, the Neo Futurists the Neo Dada movement, a surrealist revival, along with a beat revival, the angst Mod Machine, and of late, the Ranters. One wonders if you'd let a doctor who retired from practice several decades ago perform open-heart surgery on you?

Seconds away, round 2...I openly am told that "there is something much more important to SF than the didactic and soul-destroying reasons for its existence that (Connor) postulates". SF isn't soul-destroying and didactic? Off my somewhat small bookshelf I take the following exhibits. A/ THE AMTRAK WARS, BOOK 1: COLD WARRIOR (Patrick Tilley). This is a sweet little tale about how the world has been almost totally destroyed by the War of a Thousand Suns, only to be ruled by the Amtrak Federation which is at war with the Mutes. B/ THE SAVAGE STARS (Richard Reinsmith), and here I quote from the back cover...."War erupts with a vicious alien race that is scattered across galaxies. The USS Corsair, severely damaged, is forced to land on an uncharted world inhabited only by savage animals". Lots of goodness and light that one, I can assure you, and lots of hope and salvation as the characters are maimed, killed or raped. C/ A SECRET HISTORY



-SL-

OF TIME TO COME (Robbie Macauley): actually, the front cover looks like Milton Keynes, lots of bits and pieces of concrete and rubble and overgrownbits here and there (and I bet that comment gets edited out!) ((why should I edit it out when it displays your ignorance, Chuck? JO)) - this one reminds me very much of THE COMING DESTRUCTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, so need I say more? D/ TAROTOWN (Bruce Jones): again a quote, "For one thing, everyone in Tarotown was young and exceptionally beautiful. Then the strange disappearances began - and their suspicions turned into deadly fear!" I would have included at this point Michael Kring's CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT, but I can't get past the prologue without going into hysterics (and I've tried, believe me, I've tried!).

So, what has SF to offer? Mostly mass war, maiming, death and destruction, and no doubt there's a Sunday school mass-rape kicking about there somewhere. When I said 'possible future pictures' I wasn't talking about the 9 o'clock news, or News at Ten material that, barring the methods of killing, maiming etc., seem to make up 99% of SF (and it will only be a matter of time before we get SHOOTOUT AT THE OK SYSTEM, complete with 3D Graphix, in an attempt to slake Cantor's thirst for real SF - yeah, get it while it's hot, kiddies).

Round 3. I'd like to know how the hell he can say I seem "to be one of those people who jumps to specious conclusions..." and then goes on to say that he despises "Ballard and the other New Wave twits..." And I'm being condemned for making sweeping statements? Pah! Let's see him justify that all-encompassing statement pretty damned quick.

After reading Cantor's comments, I am now solidly convinced that Pattie Hearst was right when she said in an interview in the Sunday Express colour supplement (dated 5th February 1984) that there are a lot of cuckoos in California. I'll now write to the Times and tell them I've seen the first cuckoo of 1984.

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Hmm, I've always wondered who it was that bought those really crap hackwork books that occasionally

make their way onto the book lists. Now I know. People like Chuck buy them so they can get righteously indignant about the state of the genre! I see no other reason to buy such trash, do you?

3111, Sunset Crest Drive,
Los Angeles,
California,
90046,
USA

Robert Bloch

...CS8 arrived and much appreciated, thank you. And while I enjoyed the articles, it was the letter-col which really intrigued me with its pros and con views of New Wave vs. so-called Golden Age SF.

It seems to me that science fiction is suffering from the same polarisation which increasingly affects every aspect of our culture today: we live in a society of extremes. And the extremists at either end are united in only one thing - their hatred for those who prefer the median. Thus, in SF, the New Wave adherents and the Golden Age devotees alike despise any and all writers whose output fits into neither category. I don't know exactly where to place the feminists in all this, but if pressed I'd put them alongside the New Wavers, inasmuch as they seem to have a similar disregard of story-telling for the purposes of entertainment, and a fixation on the value of style above content - once their basic postulate has been stated.

My guess is that little of the obfuscatory and obscurantist work will stand the test of time - and my personal conviction is that all of this material put together is not worth a tinker's damn, let alone one page of Arthur Machen's THE HILL OF DREAMS, THE HOUSE OF SOULS, THE THREE IMPOSTERS or HEIROGLYPHICS. I'm very pleased to see his work given consideration in your pages. I wouldn't mind New Wave stylisation if any of its practitioners could write as well as Machen or achieve his effects in terms of establishing mood.

Even so, as remarked in your pages, little of Machen remains

in print today, and this reinforces my conviction that there'll be little New Wave material around fifty or sixty years from now, and probably no feminist SF at all, unless anthologised as quaint examples of how some people wrote back in Grandma's day.

Nor do I believe that 'hard core science' SF will suffer a better fate. If a current rumour is founded in reality, there may soon be an announcement forthcoming that could rattle the cages of the orthodox scientific establishment and their literary priesthood, and give SF back to the middle-of-the-road readership who deserve better than they are getting at present.

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9, Shaftesbury Park,
Dundee,
Tayside,
DD2 1LB

Iain Byers

...When writing your Vagon piece, did you forget your comments in RASTUS 1? I mean, there you are taking but one book and two 'perishable' information stores, a tape/record and a video tape, when you yourself sang the praises of the 'simple device of sheets of paper bound together'. What happens if you drop 'Kagemusha' in that puddle? ((It gets wet.JO))

Personally, I hate reading a book twice, the very thought. The old saying about a good book being one that one can read and reread is to me nothing more than a stupid cliché. A good book is one that is supremely relevant to the person reading it, and to be so has to be encountered at precisely the right moment in that person's life. As a dynamic, evolving entity, there can only ever be a one time relevance. A book when read and found not to possess such relevance cannot be reread in the hope that the second reading will occur at that right moment, because once read any future relevance has been pre-empted by the previous knowledge. Factual books are probably the only exception.

I'm not sure if this makes it more or less difficult for me to choose those 'cultural anchors'. In fact, the very concept seems strange, the more I think about it. The idea of one's mental stability resting upon

books, films or music, and not upon other people. Sartre hit the nail upon the head. Maybe, though, such things are just substitutes for people, objects we can control, characters we can dismiss if they become too disturbing? It may be significant that during my college days, when I was at my most disturbed, I read three times what I do now, despite being unemployed now and theoretically having more time.

...Anyway, an interesting, and thick, CS, as always. I don't mind saying that I liked the previous issue's 'In The Halls Of Meritocrassee' and saw it as a harmless and humorous piece of satire. The adverse reaction seems only to demonstrate the vanity and paranoia, the sense of self-importance, that can be found in those sections of fandom depicted in it. One could rename it, though, 'The Halls Of Mediocrity'. Many in the 'upper echelons' of fandom deny hostility towards you or CS, but I detected a certain animus at the last Albacorn. I was not there for long but I managed to see the fanzine quiz. A question was asked, something about the orient, a reference to CS6. It was the first question I knew the answer to, but the ultra-fannish panel were baffled, or pretended to be. From the tone of the question, and especially the comments after the answer, it was obvious that envy of the well-produced appearance of CS had entirely prejudiced certain people. Whenever I read the denials of such feelings in your lettercol I take them with a pinch of salt. As you say, the response is what you go by, and there are plenty of faneds who would love to have a loccol as extensive as that of CS...

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Naturally enough, I'm expecting a few people to rise to the bait over that last paragraph!

As for Iain's contention that a book is only good for one read, well, I'm dumb-founded. Just as an example, I read MOBY DICK for the second time a few months ago, some twenty years after my first reading.

There is no way that enough of a memory remains after that length of time, so it was as if read afresh. I suppose it might be different if one had an eidetic memory, but us normal folks have to make do with equipment that requires refreshment every so many years!

17, Alexandra Road,
Chadwell Heath,
Essex,
RM6 6UL

Colin Greenland

Three items to represent my cultural past to me after the destruction of Earth? Three items not counting a quarter of Broken Orange Pekoe, a towel and a municipal bulldozer? I wonder if anyone else will want to take artifacts which aren't artworks? Plainly, since your challenge arises from thinking about the relative importance of different media, you are interested in artworks, so ok. I'd like to take a movie too, but don't have a video in my home, so no CASABLANCE, PERFORMANCE, MONKEY BUSINESS or THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT. Two books and a record.

BREWER'S DICTIONARY OF PHRASE AND FABLE. Not the more boring later editions, with all the emendations and corrections; this is the facsimile of the 1894 edition, available from all good remainder shops and sale counters of W.H. Smith. It's full of wonderful idiosyncrasies, prejudices and definitions as exotic and incomprehensible as the phrases and fables themselves. Example: BOAR'S FLESH. Buddha died from a meal of dried boar's flesh. Mr Sinnett tells us that the 'boar' referred to was the boar avatar of Vishnu, and that 'dried boar's flesh' means esoteric knowledge prepared for popular use... the protreptics of Jamblicus are examples of similar interpretations. Another: EASTER-DAY SUN. It was formerly a common belief that the sun danced on Easter Day. Sir Thomas Browne combats the notion in his VULGAR ERRORS. A third: GOLDEN GIRDL. Louis VIII made an edict that no courtesan should be allowed to wear a golden girdle, under a very severe penalty.) More astounding notions, wild fantasies and great ideas for stories than a whole wall of SF. Down with accuracy, and up with vulgar errors and esoteric knowledge prepared for popular use. A snip at £3.95.

THE RUPERT BOOK 1956. The best one ever, I reckon. I was two. Rupert meets the Spark-man and flies on his eiderdown through a psychedelic galaxy to the land of the Blue Moon, where nothing is ordinary and everything is perfect. Emerald-green castles and wishing powder. How to make Rupert's Spark-man by folding a square of paper. Rupert has an adventure with Bingo the brainy pup and the Girl Guides, tracking bandits who turn out to be forestry workers. A picture of Bingo squeezing head-first through a crack between two gigantic rocks filled me with a kind of pleasurable alarm, while the endpapers (Rupert and Bill lying in a tawny wood looking down into a silent black pool) is still, for me, the edge of the Universe, the beginning of the Unknown. Not to mention Rupert and the Flying Sorcerer on the island of the darkies, oh dear.

JOY DIVISION'S CLOSER. I don't know how this would wear, but it has a perfect balance of gloomy beauty and jagged excitement, glory and melancholy. Haunting melodies and torn metal riffs. Uncompromising. A terrible beauty is born. I even laugh at it sometimes, and love it still. If I took my, ahem, cassette of it, I could have the Glove's BLUE SUNSHINE as well. Lysergic effusions lovingly recreated with eighties rhythms and production, by Robert Smith of the Cure and Steve Severin of the Banshees. "Move inside my dream like the fingers in a glove". "Don't be afraid, there's no marmalade." Far out, as I believe someone once said. Also very funny. W.B. Home Taping is Killing Music. But then Joy Division, The Cure, The Banshees and The Glove already play killing music.

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Er, yes, thank you Colin. Mind you, he is right about one thing, that my 'challenge' was on the level of what the relative importance was of the various media to different people. A lot of you folk missed that very important element out of it, going on about the terrible impracticality of my choices. A rum lot, SF fans!

4, Commercial Street,
Norton,
Malton,
N. Yorkshire,
Yq17 9ES

Roger Waddington

...The Vogons Are Coming! seems to be Desert Island Discs writ large, constructed like that bypass, to a Galactic scale; but interesting all the same. If I had to take things from home, and nowhere else, my three items would have to be a trilogy in three separate books, the only way I've got them, them being the Brensham Trilogy ('Portrait Of Elmbury', 'Brensham Village' and 'The Blue Field') by John Moore, one of the best writers about English and country life this century: his vision is the one I'd like to take with me of England, if I'm condemned to the life of a galactic hobo, not knowing which star I'll be laying my head down under each night. Written just after World War II, the life he was recording was already changing, but it's the life I'd like to take with me. As he says (through the mouth of one of his characters):

"It was good while it lasted. It was merry and sane and comic and fantastic; and from certain aspects, it looked very, very fair. I am glad to have belonged to it, to have been a part of it."

...I'm taking the coward's way out in agreeing with Nic Howard's piece, and without stating my reasons as well! But I'd like to point him in the direction of Robert Nathan, who seems to me to have always had the same message as the authors in Nic's canon, through all his thirty or so books. Indeed, in the frontispiece of THE SUMMER MEADOWS, the one book for me that sums up his message, he says:

"It always seems to me that I have always wanted to say the same thing in my books: that life is one, that mystery is all around us, that yesterday, today and tomorrow are all spread out in eternity, together, and that although love may wear many faces in the incomprehensible panorama of time, in the heart that loves, it is always the same."

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21, Moorfield Grove,
Tonge Moor,
Bolton,
BL2 2LQ

Bernard Earp

...What's this about us BaD guys saying we were only kidding? Here's me putting down on paper the results of much soul-searching and late-night oil-burning, and you say I'm only kidding. Is this the editorial comfort I've come to expect? It is not. I'm surprised at you, John, being taken in by that trickster Rattan (stress on the first part of the name).

Richard Faulder makes me think that I've not made myself clear, a common failing of mine, I fear. Sure, people are different one from another, but we have to make 'value judgements' about the worth of different characteristics and the extent to which an individual possesses them. We have to decide what we each consider worthwhile features in our fellow creatures, and whether we will accept those who don't measure up to our individual standards.

No one will convince me that there are people who are not my equals as long as I can also say that those people over there are inferior, but I'll also admit that this argument has its reverse side, since there are also those who are better than me.

I live near the worst slums in Bolton (indeed, the worst crime blackspot in Lancashire) and no one will convince me that I'm not better than someone, say, who goes out drinking with their partner, leaving the children alone in the house after the electricity has been cut off, with the only light being candles balanced on saucers. This made the papers because the house burned down, with the children's lives lost.

Or one of their neighbours, who decided that the radio/TV next door was too loud, so he took a large axe and smashed their downstairs windows. I could go on, but are these people really my equals? Are some of them even human?

...The Vogons Are Coming: funny, I thought it was just the way they walked (sorry). Can't agree with

your choice. Oh, not on grounds of taste (to each his/her own) but on purely technical grounds. What's the use of a round, flat plastic disc with a hole in the middle, covered on both sides with grooves, when the last device capable of playing it went to dust just a minute ago?

As for the tasteful plastic cassette full of a broad tape with a metallic film on one side, well, the same goes, doesn't it? Those two items are so much junk unless you get off on the record/cassette cover art...

So, if I'm going to make a choice of my own it looks like I'm going to be limited to books, doesn't it? I'm discounting personal stereo-players as no-one's invented a solar-powered one yet, and how long would their batteries last?

So, three books: LORD OF THE RINGS so we agree on one point.

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, since, with luck and novelty value added, I might be able to work my passage across the galaxy playing all the great roles. Yeah!

My bound collections of Crystal Ship - we can't let all the great literature go boom, can we? (How's that for sucking up to an editor?)

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See what I mean about the way SF fans are far too practical? Mind you, Bernard's missed one point: when he gets out there with his renderings of Willie's Greatest Hits, he's going to be competing with the likes of the BBC plays, even now winging their way to the farthest corners of the galaxy! Tough luck, Bernie, you've got a hard act to follow!

4109, Pleasant Run,
Irving,
Texas,
75038
USA

Brad W. Foster

...A thought resulting from your 'The Vogons Are Coming!'. I've major doubts that I would bother to take anything at all were I placed in that situation (well, maybe a towel and digital watch). Really, I sat here for a long time thinking, and could not come up with anything. The problem is the situation you put me in

- here I am about to "journey round the universe". Hell, I think I'm going to be too busy discovering new wonders to worry about rereading some book I've read already. The better scene is the old 'stranded on a desert island' where the situation is one of nothing to do, so what do you want with you.

...I'm not certain what the notation 'contents uncertain' referred to in the listing of GOLDEN DREAMS at the end of the Piper article, but in case it means that the author isn't sure of the exact content of the book, it is another Fuzzy novel. But I'm afraid that's all I know. I'm working with Ardath Mayhar right now on two children's books, so I'm familiar with GOLDEN DREAMS from her, but I haven't read it yet.

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See what I mean? Another oh-so practical SF fan.

16, Southam Road,
Hall Green,
Birmingham,
B28 8DG

Judy Buffery

...Strangely, all the articles in CS8 seemed to inter-relate, but perhaps this was intentional? For instance, your discussion of criticism I thought was perfectly answered by the quotation from Arthur Machen's HEIROGLYPHICS in 'Dark Things And Light'. As a gal I was also taught that the way you write is more important than what you write, but when it boils down to it, even the most erudite critic is influenced by his personal taste. If the subject matter is not to his liking he will not enjoy the work, however well written. For myself, I am a particular admirer of Roger Zelazny, because I like his style, but if he had chosen to write about the characters in Crossroads instead of the immortal Princes of Amber, then I would never read any of his books. It's like food really: you can have a superbly cooked dish, but if the main ingredient is something you detest, then you can't eat it.

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The CS8 articles were pure serendipity - that's the way

to do it, since it means that even the editor gets a surprise when the issue finally escapes into general circulation.

9, Friars Lane,
Barrow-in-Furness,
Cumbria,
LA13 9NP

Sue Thomason

...I disagree with Nic Howard. Life is not the pursuit of ecstasy. Most of the time, for most people, life is the pursuit of life. Water, shelter, food — after the basic requirements have been satisfied, life is the pursuit of comfort (and the flight from boredom). Most people are happy with these as goals. Those individuals who seem to know something about ecstasy stress very strongly that the harder you pursue it, the less chance you have of finding it.

If by 'life' (what the best fiction deals with) Howard means the totality of human experience, real and imagined, then fiction, being the creation of human minds, can't very well deal with anything else.

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2, Copgrove Close,
Berwick Hills,
Middlebrough,
Cleveland,
TS3 7BP

Ian Covell

...Nic Howard's first line is a bad one, especially the first phrase. I disagree with it totally while not quite understanding why I do: no, I disagree partially with it. Life includes the pursuit of ecstasy, but it is not the purpose of life, as he implies. Were that so, then Van Vogt's SHIP OF DARKNESS would be right: to seek oneness (death) with the basic stuff of the universe would be our goal in life. It isn't. I know about nirvana and trance-states, and such ecstasies, but do not seek to attain them. His second phrase is even more awkward, surely: the only content of fiction is life? Can Nic name any fiction that isn't about life?

Maybe he should just have said: "The living pursue ecstasy".

I'm also not sure what he then goes on to talk about is ecstasy at all. You and I (in our letters) have been talking about those works that move us, make us respond, or

think deeply, or become angry... but basically react, a frisson of delight...ah. I see Nic's point now. He is defining ecstasy as delight, where I see ecstasy as a stage beyond pleasure/delight, which is an often thing, where true ecstasy is rare.

I suppose my basic antipathy to this article stems from my dislike of Derleth, Kerouac and Machen. I'll bet many quarrel with defining 'Literature' in personal terms. I think we need a new set of words for what we're discussing here — if only part of a work makes him ecstatic, does that make it semi-literature? Not facetious; I mean that the delight arises from images and streams of images conjured by words, but the prose that does this can be of virtually any kind (of style). 'Literature' surely is a matter of clarity and density (as I understand it): I feel strange arguing about because...I don't like what many call 'literature'. I'd like the word to mean prose arousing a delightful emotion in the reader's breast, but it doesn't.

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4, Thistelbank,
Walderslade,
Chatham,
Kent.
ME5 8AD

Mike Ashley

... Arthur Machen is one of the greats of supernatural fiction, so I'm always interested in reading anything about him. As Andy says, I do suspect Machen is more known than read and indeed, when I set about doing a piece for TWILIGHT ZONE about him, I tracked down some of his books and stories that I knew about but hadn't read myself, and that included THE HILL OF DREAMS. It really was a first class book, and there are moments in it when Machen excels himself. As Andy says, it isn't an easy book to read, but it is well worth the effort. To some extent it is similar to Blackwood's THE CENTAUR in that respect, as that requires effort on the part of the reader to reap rich rewards. It's a salutary experience reading THE HILL OF DREAMS, and I hope Andy's article has encouraged at least a few readers to track down a copy.

2, White Hart Close,
Buntingford,
Herts.

Mark Greener

...The view of Machen was excellent, overdue, and inspired me to re-examine some work of his that I have. Reading this, I believe that Andy underestimates the role played by the Golden Dawn. The occult aspect is obvious all through Machen's stories, and in the extracts which you have published.

Machen was able to induce a 'mystical feeling' because he was able, by use of symbolism, to describe concepts and ideas which tap into our collective unconsciousness - which, after all, is what magic does. Thus, his work is dream-like and mystical - but it is something we can all relate to, as the same symbolic keys act on all of us.

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As if by magic, the next letter is from Andy Sawyer, about the Golden Dawn, so pardon me folks, while Andy puts Mark in the picture.

45, Greenbank Road,
Birkenhead,
Merseyside,
L42 7JT

Andy Sawyer

I'm interested in the comments you had re Machen and the Golden Dawn and I'd like to reply at length... I did feel while writing the article that perhaps I should have put in a bit more about the Golden Dawn, but I also felt, and specified, that in a sense Machen's involvement was only tangentially relevant to his books. I did a bit of research on the Golden Dawn and discovered a book by Ellic Howe called THE MAGICIANS OF THE GOLDEN DAWN: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF A MAGICAL ORDER 1887-1923 (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972). This appears to be a definitive history of the order from surviving manuscripts and published sources. It mentions Machen twice, but I'll go into that later. Unlike most of what I've read concerning magic (or Magick, if you follow Crowley) it's written from a coolly sceptical viewpoint. Briefly, the Order was founded by William Wynn Westcott and S.L. MacGregor Mathers, who were involved in Theosophy, Freemasonry and the Occult generally. Although the actress Florence Farr

and the poet W.B. Yeats were heavily involved in the order, more typical members seem to have been Benjamin Cox, the town accountant of Weston-super-Mare, and F.L. Gardner, a stockbroker. They seemed to have spent most of their time devising rituals and taking 'examinations' in matters occult. The order finally split apart in a flurry of personal recrimination when Westcott was accused of having forged letters from a certain 'Fraulein Sprengel', a supposed Rosicrucian Adept, authorising him to found an English branch of an occult order, 'De Goldene Dämmerung', (The Golden Dawn). Westcott also claimed to be in occasional astral or telepathic contact with a group of Adepts known as the 'Secret Chiefs', who were the true rulers of the Order. When the Order fell apart, each faction discovered its own Adepts to receive instructions from. Interestingly enough, Aleister Crowley's involvement with the Order seems to have been brief, though he undoubtedly contributed to its collapse. He was in the Order from 1898 to 1900, and seemed to feel that much of the membership were a bunch of posers. He hated Yeats, and "imagined that Yeats used black magical practices in order to 'destroy' him". (Howe, p195)

Returning to Machen: his own involvement seems to have been overstated. Most references to him I've seen have mentioned his involvement with the Golden Dawn, and certainly the most cursory glance at his fiction shows someone obsessed with the Occult, the 'mystery beyond the veil'. Both Nic Howard and I quote relevant passages, so I go no further. Funny enough, though, I can't remember where I got the link between Machen and the Golden Dawn - I can't trace the biography of Machen I read about ten years ago; I haven't his autobiographical works to hand (I think I'm right in saying they cover this period with implication rather than outright statement) and all I've got is what I suggest may be many people's link - Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier's THE MORNING OF THE MAGICIANS, which discusses the Golden Dawn at length in terms of the Nazi occult system. (It seems

to have been in fact proscribed by the Nazis (Howe, p.284)). Now Pauwels and Bergler may be an entertaining read, but they seem to have a pretty cavalier attitude to minor things like truth, fact, logic. Certainly according to Howe, "Neither Arthur Machen...nor Algernon Blackwood... was ever very prominent in the Golden Dawn, and both joined when the Order's most interesting period belonged to the past". (Howe, p.52) Howe later writes: "I have discovered only two references to Machen (Fratr Avallau-nius) ((NB - note the link with THE HILL OF DREAMS)) in the available documents. He was...a relatively unimportant member of the Outer Order in 1900". (footnote, p.285)

Two points, obviously: if not all the documents relating to a secret organisation have survived, proving the extent of one member's involvement is tricky. And Machen's emotional attachment to the occult is clear from his writings. I could quote passage after passage which suggests this, but I can't help returning to HIEROGLYPHICS (p.8) where the narrator describes the 'Hermit', whose literary pronouncements are the bulk of the book:

"He sought for a key that would open, and a lamp that would enlighten, all the dark treasure-houses of the Universe, and sometimes he believed that he held both the Key and the Lamp in his hands."

It is a confession of mysticism, but I incline to think that he was right in the belief. I recall that hollow, echoing room, the atmosphere with its subtle suggestion of incense sweetening the dark odours of the cellar, and the tone of the voice speaking to me, and I believe that once or twice we both saw visions, and some glimpses at least of certain ineffable shapes."

My own suggestion is that Machen found in the rituals of the Golden Dawn an emotionally satisfying link to what he was also trying to achieve through his writing, in the same way that Yeats appears to have done (I know very little about Yeats, so I'm on shaky ground here). I don't know the real nature of Machen's involvement with the Golden Dawn; I think a proper look at its influence on his

writings (or not as the case may be) would be fascinating. He was, presumably, a participating member at the time he wrote most of his best work. But it demands a level of skill at teasing out the relevant facts from the mass of speculation which arises which I don't think I've got.

Going back to HIEROGLYPHICS, it is interesting that Machen is not arguing for a purely subjective approach to literature:

"You may say that a book which interests you so intensely that you cannot put it down, that affects you so acutely that you weep, that amuses you so immensely that you roar with laughter must be very good. I don't object to 'very good' but, from my point of view, 'very good' and 'fine literature' are two different things." (p.21)

and: "I think that the question of liking a book or not liking it has nothing whatever to do with the consideration of fine art. Art is there, if I may say so, just as the Tenth Commandment is there, and if we don't like them, so much the worse for us." (p.44)

Machen's 'ecstasy' isn't the everyday: for him, 'literature' "does not content itself with repeating or mimicking the emotions of private, personal, everyday life" (p.30). Anything that does so may be very good, may be entertaining, but it isn't literature!

Machen is also pretty strict when it comes to qualitative judgments within his categories. He talks about PICKWICK PAPERS and puts it fairly low down on the 'ecstatic' pile: he talks of Thackeray, and puts VANITY FAIR high on the 'mundane' pile. The piles, however, remain separate. Thackeray is, however brilliant a craftsman, of the essence of political pamphlets and hack journalism; Dickens, however he allegedly misunderstood the nature of his talent, is of the essence of the Dionysian ritual and the Catholic Mass. According to Machen, the distinction between, say, Thackeray and Jane Austen is a matter of taste - he prefers Thackeray, some

would prefer Austen. But the distinction between 'ecstatic' and 'mundane' literature is absolute — not so much that one is 'better' than another (as Machen remarks, a tub is not a tabernacle), but they are different in kind.

All this is very well, but I tend to veer away at a couple of places. Machen himself suggests that it can be difficult to identify the presence of 'ecstasy' in certain works. I find this in Nic's piece with some of the writers he quotes. Machen seems to say that 'ecstasy' is fundamentally religious and his literary theory is very 'occult' in terms of using expressions like 'mysteries', 'the other world', etc. I think you can hide a great deal by using language like this — Machen hides what I think is a very moving sense of empathy with human yearning — another version of ecstasy? — in MIDDLEMARCH, because George Eliot is, to him, a writer of the everyday world. If I find this is a work which isn't 'ecstatic', am I wrong, or is Machen, or is the true case that it's impossible to classify things as neatly as Machen does. Machen suggests that ecstasy is objective rather than subjective, not even a matter of liking the book. But what if he was wrong?

I think, though, Nic's pointing out this approach is a useful one... because it does explain why writers who may not be good 'craftsmen' do have a magnetic appeal. Or, if it doesn't explain it, it suggests an explanation. It suggests why we have personal attachments to books which we 'really' shouldn't like — something which our current taste theoretically doesn't allow room for. I find it very hard to criticise ERB's Martian novels, for example, because they struck me so explosively when I first read them.

Actually, true ecstasy comes in 'Astral Weeks'...What, I think, would Arthur Machen have made of Little Richard yelling 'Awopbopaloobop-alop-bamboom!' in 'Tuuti Frutti', of John Lennon's scream in 'Twist And Shout', of Roger Daltrey's final 'YEEAAH!' in 'Won't Get Fooled Again'? Maybe I'm betraying myself here, but I find it easier to talk of ecstasy when discussing rock and roll than literature. I read Machen or any other writer who is intent on portraying

emotion rather than reason, and find 'ecstasy'. But am I right? Am I just being 'subjective'? I listen to any of a hundred rock and roll tracks and I know that there's a vastly complicated yet outwardly simple set of emotions going on! I've never read Rabelais but I have got 'Gonna Have A Good Time' by The Easybeats.

I'll end here, but before I end, I'll chuck in my tuppenny-worth by giving my definition of ecstasy — simply, an 'opening outward' rather than a concentration on the 'daily round'. I think Machen was fundamentally wrong in dismissing the 'realistic' approach because a work which is purely realistic can serve to open up a new world of experience to the reader. Ecstasy as 'opening outward' — a supercharge of reality as experienced — includes Machen's use of the term but goes beyond it. You get from it a new way of looking at things, a new experience, a new image.

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Hmm, I forget at the moment just how long the original article was, but just having typed out Andy's gloss on it in one sitting. I wonder whether the gloss isn't longer than the original! Good stuff though, which is why I have taken up so much space with it!

8, Princeton Drive,
Jacksonville,
North Carolina,
28540
USA

David Thiry

...Hmm, I suspect that few people dug that I'd deliberately over-written my story in CS7. No matter: I'm used to being misunderstood. Only one out of ten are able to understand my masterpiece 'Life At The Rainbow's End', despite that its got such an obvious theme!

What I was trying to do, of course, was to show what 'femininity' means to my world. Joy Hibbert was way off: if there were no females in the world, men wouldn't substitute men for a more natural need. (I don't equate homosexuality with heterosexuality. It's an entirely different head, to misuse a phrase.)

The men would kill each other,

or go mad. Homosexuals would do alright until they realised that the other men are not females. Not having the choice would force them to see this. (I've gone through this with a female bisexual I know, and, natch, we hardly agree. But I'm conjecturing, being adamantly, happily, hetero-sexual.)

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351, Ditchling Road,
Brighton,
Sussex.

Ken Brown

...Allan Jones seems to have produced one of the most straightforward, non-academic descriptions of a virus disease I know of. It also approaches cancer - I hope he realises. ((He does - and did so from the start, being a clever chap, and all that.JDO))

Joy Hibbert seems to remember (no doubt from badly taught Religious Knowledge classes at school) that the "oppression of women stated in the Bible is clearly stated to be a punishment (for eating of the apple) rather than an ideal state..." Not quite accurate. The whole fallen state of our species, for both sexes, is blamed on the initial disobedience (as a consequence of it rather than a vengeance-type punishment). The explicit prediction of trouble to come is that from then on food would have to be obtained by hard work (not that there was no work in Eden, but that it wasn't oppressive) and that childbirth would be painful, and that the man would, in some way, 'rule over' the woman. All of these things are definitely put down as consequences of the Fall, so as Joy says, its not an ideal state...As an interesting aside, I've just been reading John Locke's 'Treatises On Civil Government' written in the 17th Century to counter-act the work of one Robert Filmer, who was just the sort of 'slightly different sort of bloke' that Joy refers to. Filmer wrote a book called 'Patriarchy' in which he tried to defend the divine right of kings and all that by claiming that God had given the rule of the world to Adam, and that the 'natural' form of government is a complete autocratic patriarchy, where fathers have complete power of life and death over their children, husbands over wives, and the King (he didn't really know how to cope with Queens) was, as a sort of father to the whole nation,

heir to Adam, and had total, unaccountable power over absolutely everybody.

Locke points out (first Treatise chapter 5, if anyone's interested) that the attempt to claim that women were forever subject to their menfolk because of the casting out from Eden in GENESIS ch.3, if taken to the limit, would make it sinful for a woman in pain during childbirth to resort to medical aid. Even further from the point of anything that was actually in CS8, I found reading Locke interesting because he helps to remind me just how much crap the 'wrong but romantic' vs. 'right but repulsive' attitude to the English Civil War that is the establishment line we're all fed in England actually is. The Royalists of the 17th Century followed one of the most repulsive political philosophies ever to disgrace these shores, and one that with the current oppression of women, and subjugation of everyone to an all-powerful state, we still haven't disposed of entirely. (No, I'm not seriously claiming that sexual oppression was the creation of the Tudo/Stuart period, but I am claiming that the distortions of political and religious life introduced into this country during that period have left us less able to deal with it.)

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There are times when I wonder exactly what I do to deserve these erudite and abtruse little missives that come through the letterbox. Not that I am in any way objecting, you understand, just that the directions the arguments take tend to leave me behind at times!

58, St. James Street,
Milnrow,
Rochdale,
Lancs.
OL16 3JY

Lawrence O'Donnell

...I suppose others will reply to Joy's letter better than I, but why does this brand of feminism come across like a distorted mirror image of male chauvinism? Babies grabbing for the nurse? Not all nurses are female anymore than everyone's male except nurses, and what 'sensible' system excludes males from being doctors? I thought

the aim was equality, not an imagined reversal of the situation. Wow! Out comes the primitive society routine ...there are enough of those to prove male and/or female dominance and every shade between. Perhaps I should be made of sterner stuff, but I don't consider hunting big game with a sharpened stick 'goofing off'. Life wasn't easy in any primitive society: them that didn't pull didn't survive. So Joy is right in that the so-called female role was just as important. I mean, they were responsible for so much! They probably invented agriculture, which in turn led to domestic grains, communal and individual property, land as an economic factor, feudalism, commerce, mass warfare, capitalism, socialism, fascism, the Bomb, CND, filter-tipped cigarettes, VD and tight t shirts! In short, if you try hard enough using logic and 'common sense' you can blame anything on anyone!

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Flat 1,
11, Alunhurst Road,
Westbourne,
Bournemouth,
BH4 'EL

Mary Gentle

...'Ripples' is very interesting reading this time around, but then you always do manage a good loccol. I think this adds to the impression that...this CS is less bland than some previous issues. You don't want too many people at each other's throats, but all the same, it would be a pity not to have one or two...

There seems to be quite a thing brewing about sequels to successes (VALENTINES CASTLE, COVENANT, etc); I wonder if we're not looking at this the wrong way. After all, does it matter what motives were in the author's mind? The question is: does the reader enjoy what she or he is reading? Or do they feel cheated, and that this is sub-standard stuff? I wonder if most of the complaining isn't coming from people who didn't like the first book in question anyway, in which case we're in the middle of a different argument altogether: not 'should authors write sequels to please the market', but 'why does this kind of book please the market at all'?

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4, Westfield Way;
Charlton Heights,
Wantage,
Oxon.
OX12 7EW

Pamela Boal

...So many points of interest in the letters. Helen McNabb's remark about the meaning of the word 'civilisation' altering with semantic drift set various thoughts going...Not only has it drifted, it has for the main part become a coupled word, 'Western c.', or 'Eastern c.', or an historical coupling with Roman, Greek, Chinese, Indian, etc. It has come to mean the socio-political set-up of a geographically identifiable area. The word 'civilisation' is not coupled with 'The Third World', not because there are not cities and art of living in them (though there are, even in this day of mass media communications, those who believe any country designated 'third world' consists of huddled settlements) but because the more affluent (effluent?) countries do not accept their socio-political set-up as civilised in the new meaning of the word. There has been at least one good SF story based on the power of semantics (my lousy memory refuses to divulge its title or author) and here's a case where the omission of a word is the excuse for fighting wars (or funding them, giving civilised people employment and arms manufacturers profit) on their soil, or stimulating sales of unsuitable products such as powdered baby milk. It's called charity or aid, but it means that as they are uncivilised we can work our civilised problems out at their expense.

Lettercols tend to reflect the concerns of the day, with feminism, euthanasia etc., and there was once much concern with overpopulation (as there was once concern in SF stories, more than one depicting a world where everyone was obliged to live in shared cubby holes). There was also concern about a future where the privileged few had employment. Oddly, now we have a situation where, just in Britain, over four million people (true figures, not dole drawing figures) who would normally be working for wages are unemployed, where more and more people are

factually, never mind technically, homeless, not because of over-population, but because of depletion of the housing stock and lack of income to pay for what is available, yet fandom in its zines is silent. Where are the great concerned SF novels extrapolating this situation? Is it that the Bomb overshadows and pushes aside all other sociological concerns? Is it that established writers are not truly touched by the recession, that struggling writers who are, simply stop struggling and writing? Is it that fans who are truly affected cannot afford to be active and gaffiate, so their voices are unheard? I suspect that the propaganda machine, the use of semantics has done its job, and those who are not directly affected do not believe in the suffering of those who are, and of course, you cannot care about something you do not believe in.

Sorry, I seem to have got carried away a bit there. It wasn't so much a reaction against CS8, but to several zines of late. Of course fandom is an elite, any self-electing group is, in a way. I have no objections to that, since it is one I chose to join. I do sometimes get a little irritated when people smugly denigrate the rest of the world brushed aside as 'mundanes', and think those who do not have their intellectual, educational, or life-style advantages (the hidden pluses that gave them the option of joining the particular SF fandom elite) are worthless by definition.

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I agree completely with Pam's statements above: there are many aspects of fannish thought which strike me as extraordinarily narrow-minded, and the lack of comment, or the lack of articles, about the problems of being out of work, of being a 'statistic' on the Government files rather than a living, breathing person contributing to the well-being of society, etc, etc, strikes me as being a stunning example of the indifference of fans in general. I know that many of the readers of this zine are unemployed, for example. So, come on, let us know what kind of problems you face in getting through life, what kinds of things in fandom get to you as a result of those problems. Get

talking about it, through CS's columns first off, and then we'll see what kind of people fans are made of, shan't we? And no, I'm not going political, or anything like that — the reasons why there are such problems are a different thing to the results, and it's the results, the problems that I want to hear about, to make people aware of within fandom. Just as a passing shot, as an off-the-top-of-the-head example of what we could do to help, would be to put unemployed and impecunious fans who want to pub their ish despite their problems in contact with those fans with the facilities to print fanzines inexpensively. We could cut the crap about TAFF or GUFF for a year or two, and use the money to get the unemployed fans to British conventions, (or the respective 'local' conventions in whatever country you happen to live in): think how many fans you could help in this way with the cost of a Trans-Atlantic ticket! In short, get fans to stop sitting on their arses in the bars and get them to do something for their less well-off compatriots.

Hmm, now it's me that has got carried away. Guess Pam's remarks got through to me deeper than I thought. Straight onto the WAHFs, though, before I have a change of heart about the above!

Right, with any luck, the following list is accurate as at September 16th: John Alexander, Harry Andruschak, David Bateman (who insists that "clowns are for laughing at and laughing with and are to be encouraged" and could do with out Dave Thiry's "inept metaphors"), Michael Bernardi, John Berry, Sheryl Birkhead, Sydney J. Bounds, Terry Broome, Simon Clark, Dave Collins, Phil Collins, Anthony Cooney, Mat Coward, Peter Crump, Chester Cuthbert, Andy Darlington, Dorothy Davies, Nicholas Davies, Iain Dickson, Jim England, Steven Fox, Alan Freeman, Colin Grubb, John F.Haines, Sean Hanley (who says that CS8 made him thoroughly miserable: sorreee!), Joy Hibbert (who might have made it into the full loc columns if it hadn't been for the fact that she didn't make a single point under two pages!),

Arthur Hlavaty, Nic Howard, Ted Hughes, Terry Jeeves, Toni Jerrman, Mick Johnson, Paul Kennedy, Ken Lake (who sent in a revised Piper bibliography which is available to anyone who wants it - just ask me), Steve Lines, Jim Meadows (hmm, I can't remember whether it was CS8 or CS7 you locced this time, Jim - have you caught up yet?), David R.Morgan, Peter Muller, Bill Munster, Lawrence O'Donnell, Marc Ortlieb, Peter Presford, Marilyn Pride, Kev Rattan (back in the Wahfs again, eh Kev?), Dave Redd, Nigel Richardson, Andy Robertson, Mic Rogers, Nicks Shears(a doubting soul, who actually went and checked my remarks about there being no mention of Honda motorbikes in Pirsig's ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE: fortunately I was right, for once!), Mike Shoemaker, Bernard Smith, Steve Sneyd ("Cover is horrifying proof that Cabbage Patch dolls come to us courtesy of the Evil Dawn of Mankind"), Alex Stewart, Alan Sullivan, Arthur Thomson (who didn't like Pete Lyon's tortured clown illo last time - says it put him right off the issue), Tony Tomkins, Ted Tubb, Julie Vaux, Jon Wallace, Imelda Walsh, and last, but by no means least, Ted White, who wrote at length, making terribly far-out and boring criticisms of CS which I'm sure you wouldn't really want to read, would you? You would? Bloody sadists, the lot of you!

Ah, a latecomer arriving just in time from the Antipodes: Leanne Frahm.

And that was it. To all those who wrote and sent fanzines (zines, zines, I'm up to my ears in zines!) and who didn't get any answer, I send my profuse apologies (come to think of it, judging by the state my head has been in this last few months, apologies to those I did reply to as well!). The last six months or so have been very, very busy, and I've not had time to do much more than keep the issue you hold in your hand moving along, with fannish correspondence taking a very poor second place. I could say that I hope to do better with replies to this issue, but I'm not going to stick my neck out that far, as I'm pretty sure that the next couple of years at the OU are going to be as hectic as the last half year has been.

So, no foolish promises, just a guarantee of continuing supplies of CS and RASTUS to those who do respond, and the assurance that I'm pleased to see the locs and zines arrive (indeed, it's one of the things that keeps me going through these trying times). So, keep 'em coming, even if it does seem to be the equivalent of casting them into a black hole!



