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ngs) to leap lightly and swiftly for some tance through the air: *he flew over the lge as a hound.* **4.** To be borne up, spread agitated, by the wind; to stream out, tter, wave in the air or wind: *with garments, r, flying behind him; flags flew from every st.* Phr. *with flags flying*, as a conqueror, triumph. **5.** a (of persons) To go with ut speed, move in given direction with ste and impetuosity; to hasten, rush: *I e to meet him; to fly in a person's arms; I ply flew down the road; it is getting late, must fly*, must hurry off; Phrs. *time flies*, pass rapidly; *to fly in the face of Providence*, to take a course which is clearly nscious. b (of inanimate things) to be ovel violently, rapidly, and violently; to be rled; *the window flew up; the door flew n; the wheel flew round*; Phrs. *to fly to ns*, prepare hastily for war; *to send things ing*, scatter them by hasty, sudden movement; *to send a person flying*, dismiss him ruptly, drive him away; *to fly in pieces* (of ttle substance), smash to atoms; *to make money fly*, squander it. **6.** (Pret. *fled*) To rest hastily, run away, take to flight, flee n. used now instead of *flee*). **B.** trans. To cause, allow, to fly: *to fly a hawk, ons &c.* **2.** To bring into position, ndition &c. for flight, direct flight of, trol while flying: *to fly an airship &c.*, to *ntise mail; a kite.* **3.** To display from mast flag-pole, allow to stream in the wind: *fly a flag.* Phr. (nav.) *to fly one's flag*, assume, exercise, admiral's functions. Special (athletics) to jump (an obstacle) by ringing from one foot and alighting on the ner: *to fly a hurdle.* **C.** (Pres. *fly*) To run av, flee from: *to fly the approach of danger.* Followed by preposition or adverb. *Fly* intrans., a to rush violently upon with int to assault; to attack: *the dog flew at the mp*; b (fig.) to attack with words, vituper. *Fly* unto, intrans., to be carried away, unparted; esp. *to fly into a temper, rage, fit.* *Fly off*, intrans., to hurry, rush, dart, ay. Phr. *to fly off at a tangent*, to start a ne quite unrelated to the matter in hand. *y out at*, intrans., to burst out suddenly into ge with, assail with abuse.

III.), n., tr., prec. The relation in sense twen this n. in some of its senses, & the vb. not always apparent. **1.** Act of flying, ght; distance flown: *to have a fly in an ophine.* **2.** In various senses, derived perpe from idea of rapid movement, e.g. four-wheeled covered one-horse carriage working hire (probably abbreviated from *fly-by-ght*). **3.** Flap of cloth (variously applied): part of flag at side opposite staff; width of g from staff to outer edge; b flap of canvas ering entrance to tent; c flap of cloth, ne ment, covering buttons. **4.** Contrivance for ulating speed of clockwork or accumulat power; fly-wheel &c. **5.** (pl.) Space with llery or galleries over proscenium of theatre.

fly-boat. n. Du. *vlieboot*, ' flat-bottomed coasting vessel ', fr. *vliegen*, ' to fly ', & *boot*, ' boat '. See fly (II.) & boat. Long, narrow canal boat for passenger traffic.

fly-book. n. Kind of pocket-book or case specially adapted for keeping artificial flies for fishing.

fly-by-night. n. [1. fli bi nit; 2. fli bi nit]. **1.** a Person who goes about by night; b debtor who decamps by night. **2.** (obs.) Kind of wheeled sedan-chair.

fly-catcher. n. **1.** One of several small European birds that feed on flies; one of several American birds unrelated to these. **2.** Device for catching flies. **3.** Plant which entraps flies in a kind of cup-shaped receptacle and assimilates them.

fly-fish. vb. intrans. To catch, or attempt to catch, fish with artificial, more rarely with real, flies.

fly-fisher. n. Person who fly-fishes.

fly-fishing. n. Act, art, of catching fish by means of flies fastened to a hook.

fly-flap. n. Implement with long handle and one broad plant end, for driving away or killing flies.

flying (I.), adj. [1. flīing; 2. flāiing], fr. Pres. Part. of *fly* (II.). **1.** a Capable of habitually practising flight in, or the air: *flying insect, dragon &c.*; b adapted, prepared, for F *machine*; c hurried, hasty, ar ring during brief suspension *visit.* **2.** Streaming loose, fl *flying hair; flying colours, v* standards. Phr. *with fl* triumph, with great success flight through the air: fl. **4.** Speedy, very fast: *flyi* detachment of police prov mobile—[illegible] &c.

flying (II.), n. (Vb. **II.**) & ns. motion, of person or thing that wings), (attrib.) *flying country*, n. which horsemen can ride fast; *flyin* shot at a flying or rapidly moving object.

flying-bridge. n. **1.** a Ferry-boat attached by rope to fixed object, and swinging across river, usually by action of current; b pontoon bridge or other floating bridge. **2.** Highest of several bridges on ship.

flying-buttress. n. Buttress built into an outer wall so as to give extra support and carry part of the weight, with the top sloping to an inner wall, or, if the buttress is in the form of a detached column, bearing one end of a half-arch, the other end of which is connected with the wall.

flying-column. n. Military force equipped for rapid movement, and supplied so as to be practically independent of main base.

flying-fish. n. One of several allied fishes found in warm seas, that when pursued leap out of the water, and make a short flight, resembling that of a bird, by means of pectoral fins.

flying-fox. n. A large fruit-eating bat.

resembling, covered with, foam.

fob (I.), n. (1. fob; 2. fŏb). Of L.G. origin; cp. the L.G. dimin. *fobke*, 'little pocket', & H.G. provinc. *fuppe*, 'pocket'. Small pocket for watch &c., opening from waistband of breeches.

fob (II.), vb. trans. Back-formation fr. M.E. *fobbere*, ' cheater ', fr. *fobbe*, variant of *foppe*, ' fool '. See fop. (obs.) To cheat, deceive. Survives only in *fob off*: a to impose (something worthless or undesirable) upon a person by fraud or trickery: *to fob off a spurious antique on one*; b to delude (a person) into accepting something worthless: *to fob one off with empty promises.*

focal. adj. (1. fōkal; 2. fookal). Fr., fr. *focus* & -al. Pertaining to focus: *focal distance or length*, distance from focus to centre of the lens or mirror; *focal plane*, plane parallel to that of lens or mirror, passing through its focus.

focalization. n. [1. fōkăliżāshun; 2. fookalaiżeŋan]. Next word & -ation. Action of focalizing; state of being focalized.

focalize. vb. trans. [1. fōkăliz; 2. fookalaiz]. -t & -ize. To focus (lit. and fig.).

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n. [1. fosimeter; 2. fousimita] ng form of focus, & -meter, easuring focal distance. imetri; 2. fousimatri]. As Measurement of focal

2. fowk(a)nal]. Phonetic e.

2. fookas]. Lat. *focus*, fireside, home'. Prob. *scus*, q.v. under bake; I v. Lat. *focies*, 'appear- e, beauty; face'. See ine wd. thus be shining.

1. a Point at which converg ight, heat, or waves of sound direction or reflection; b also ce, point at which rays appear to ce or would meet if prolonged in a straight line; c adjustment of instrument or distance so as to produce sharp definition of image; Phrs. in *focus*, (of optical instruments) adjusted so as to give clear and sharp outlines in image; (fig., of description &c.) clearly and definitely presented: *out of focus*, not adjusted, distorted (also fig.); d focal length. **2.** (geom.) One of two points having a definite relation to a curve. **3.** (fig.) Point or area of greatest intensity or activity: centre of radiation or dispersion: *a focus of medium: focus of a disease*, part of the body where it originates or is most active; *focus of an earthquake*, subterranean centre, below epicentre.

focus (II.), vb. trans & intrans., fr. prec. **1.** trans. a To cause to converge: *to focus the sun's rays with a burning-glass*; b to adjust (instrument or eye) to object, so as to produce a clear image, to focalize; c to obtain a clear image of (object) by adjusting

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MEMBERSHIP of the British Science Fiction Association costs £7.00 per year. For this sum, members receive six mailings per year, containing Matrix, Paperback Inferno and Vector; every third mailing brings an issue of Focus. Matrix contains news and views of the BSFA and the science fiction world. Paperback Inferno reviews newly published SF paperbacks. Vector is the BSFA's critical journal. Focus is a magazine about science fiction writing. Membership also gives access to a number of other BSFA services - printing and duplicating, library, information service, magazine chain and 'Orbiter', a postal writers' workshop. For full details of BSFA activities and membership, write to the membership secretary:

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EDITORIAL

WHEN WE TOOK over the editorship of Focus, we had no definite idea of how many issues we would do - although we obviously recognised that the time would come for us to bow out and move on to other things. Now, four issues and just over two years later, that time has come. We are therefore resigning the editorship, and this issue will be our last.

Focus needs a new editor or editors, as quickly as possible. Interest has been expressed, but as yet nothing certain has been arranged. Anyone who fancies a go should contact Alan Dorey at the address on page 2. We wish very much to see Focus continue, and it goes without saying that we'll be happy to give advice and support to any future editors. In the meantime, if anyone has comments or contributions to make, then they are welcome to send them to us, to be passed on; continuity is vital to any magazine.

We've enjoyed doing Focus, and have had no regrets about taking it on. It has been a very educational experience, inasmuch as we've been forced to think more clearly about what constitutes, in our view, good fiction - and also, of course, we've learned much of interest from many of the articles. We hope that we've managed to infect a few people with our enthusiasm for the magazine.

From comments made to us we gather that there is still a misunderstanding concerning the nature of Focus, in that some people believe it to be a fiction magazine, a showcase for new writers. They are therefore puzzled that so little of the magazine has been given over to fiction. In fact, this has not been the purpose of Focus under either of the two editorial teams that have so far been in charge. Focus has been a magazine about the writing of fiction, dealing with both the creative and the commercial aspects. This doesn't mean that we haven't taken the fiction seriously - it seems entirely appropriate that a writers' journal should contain fiction by new writers. We've given careful consideration to the stories submitted, and have given our honest views to the authors. But this has never been

the main purpose of the magazine. In spite of having said this, though, we would still have liked to have published a little more fiction than we did, but we never received enough stories that we considered to be suitable.

The whole question of amateur fiction magazines is a vexed one. It hardly needs saying that aspiring writers can benefit from having outlets for their fiction which are not subject to commercial pressures. A writer can gain encouragement from merely seeing his or her stories in print, and criticism is often useful. Yet such magazines can also do a disservice to writers. If editorial standards are not rigorous enough, if poorly written and derivative stories are regularly published, writers can be deceived about the quality of their work. People are very good at believing what they want to believe, at the expense of their better judgement. It is therefore very important that magazines are selective and have standards below which they will not fall.

In this context, we'd like to mention Cassandra, a regular anthology published by an SF workshop in Northampton (see 'Market Space' for details). You don't have to attend workshop meetings to write for the magazine, but the influence of a group of people committed to writing, and to thinking about writing, must surely help to maintain and improve editorial standards. Hopefully, the editors will be kept on their toes. Of course, there's always the danger that this sort of thing will become a mutual congratulation society. The impact of fiction from outside the immediate group may help Cassandra to avoid this fate, but ultimately the preservation of quality must depend on the perception and honesty of the participants. We hope that those responsible for Cassandra will be aware of this. Their approach may well be a fruitful way for amateur fiction magazines to develop, and we wish them well.

Finally, we turn to the contents of this issue. We're pleased to offer a further piece of fiction from Peter Tasker. The mood of 'Steve London's Greatest Hits' is impressively different from that of 'The Survey', and the story is powerfully presented. For our main feature we revisit ground trodden by an earlier Focus, namely research, but this time with a slightly different emphasis. We've asked John Brunner, Steve Gallagher and Ian Watson to describe the research each one of them did for a particular book. The differences in approach that emerge are illuminating. From the BSFA meetings held monthly in London we have the edited transcripts of two speeches. John Bush and Maxim Jakubowski give us the benefit of their experiences as publishers, and as with the research feature the contrasts are interesting. Anne Warren provides a perceptive piece on the specific use of language in fiction - this is a field which we wish we had been able to explore more in previous issues. We also have a workshop report from David Piper, short pieces from Philip Mann and Dorothy Davies, and last but not least a sizeable letter column.

Our final words as Focus editors must be those of thanks to all the people who wrote for us and to us. In particular we are grateful to Steve Gallagher and Chris Priest for their willing contributions and advice. Mention should also be made of Rob Holdstock and Chris Evans, who, although they haven't appeared in the pages of our Focus, bequeathed us a magazine to work with.

Of course, once you've got all the bits and pieces together, you have to actually produce the magazine - and this would not have been possible without the work of John and Eve Harvey. We can't thank them enough for their help at all stages of production. Their uncomplaining compliance with our most outrageous requests has been a source of wonder. Long may they both live and prosper.

Cheerio.

LETTERS

Malcolm Edwards, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 14 Henrietta St., London WC2E 8QJ

Thanks for the latest Focus which I read with interest, despite Dave Garnett's unusual self-control and restraint. As always I have simple - not to say simplistic - solutions to complex problems.

On the question of gender pronouns [Colin Greenland's letter], my own solution is to write in a way that avoids them, or that permits me to use the neutral 'they', 'their', 'themselves' etc. without appearing excessively clumsy. People complain that these are plural, and that therefore you can't use them in singular cases...but in fact that isn't so, as a little consultation of the OED or Fowler [see part 11 of his entry on 'Number'] will reveal to you. Still, I'm sure each Focus reader will arrive at their own solution.

[I hate 'person/s' too. But again, one can usually manage with less intrusive words like 'people' or 'humanity' - the latter particularly for Man or Mankind.]

I was once a librarian. I've been a freelance writer. I'm now a publisher. I see the PLR question from all angles. I agree with Helen McNabb that the present scheme is a botch. I couldn't even be bothered to register, as the likely reward seemed so minimal. My own feeling is that the library service shouldn't be free, and that libraries should pay a one-off supplement for books (instead of, as at present, getting them cheaper than thee or me), which would go to the author. How would this work? Okay. Let's say the supplement is £2.00 per book, so that they pay £8.95 for a £6.95 book (or they could pay £6.95 less 10% plus £2.00, since their 10% discount doesn't at present impinge on the author's royalty). Borrowers would then pay 5p a go, which is pretty trivial really (16 books for the price of a pint). After 40 loans - well below the life expectancy of a novel in a library - the library is actually in the black on the deal, from which it can finance free loans to pensioners, students etc. If that £6.95 novel sells 1000 copies to libraries, the author makes an extra £2000 on top of the £695 royalty. QED.

The difficulty is that the Library Association always goes on about the 'principle' of a free library service, though no principle is actually involved. In all these systems somebody is paying, and in this case it's a few authors paying a lot (lost income) rather than a large number of readers paying a little. Of course the system wouldn't be perfect - one can see difficulties in invoicing (differentiating library sales from others; getting the extra cash to publishers). But they aren't insurmountable, and even if the system operated at 75% efficiency it would still benefit authors greatly.

We too can foresee administrative difficulties. But we would also question your figure

of 40 borrowings - at least within any realistic time-span - for many books, such as SF novels by obscure authors, or non-fiction books on recondite topics which are stocked by the library as a public service. Wouldn't libraries only back certain winners?

Paul Baxter, Flat 7, Stevens Close, Woodstock Road, Oxford

I think that David Piper (Letters, Focus 7) has a point. Focus, as I understand it, is a magazine aimed at helping young writers by exposing their work to an audience. That is, the emphasis is shifted from entertaining the readership (as in a professional fiction magazine) to helping the author improve his or her work. This means that Focus does not necessarily need to print 'good' fiction. Indeed it is a story's inadequacies that make its publication in Focus useful.

The point will be made that the membership of the BSFA do not want to read reams of hopeless stories. Agreed. But I find it difficult to believe that you do not receive three or four stories by each deadline date that, while not being of professional quality, are at least readable. Most will be - to quote - 'slightly dubious', but that is just why they should be published.

To print fiction is not the sole, or even the main, function of Focus, but insofar as there is a fiction content then you are correct in the ideal that you describe, and it is an ideal we put at the top of our priorities when we took over Focus. We haven't achieved it for two reasons, the first being the low volume of submissions; we have not had a satisfactory pool of material from which to pick and choose. The second reason is more important and is evidenced by the reaction to the eleven pages of fiction we printed in Focus 7 - to be precise, not one word of reaction. Clearly, BSFA members do not want to 'workshop' and, given that attitude, we may as well print only that material which we happen to have enjoyed, in the hope that a few of you out there will (quietly) share that enjoyment.

David Pringle, 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU

Thanks very much for your intelligent editorial remarks on Interzone in the last issue of Focus. You're quite right when you point out that we have deliberately started small and that we hope to appeal to a discriminating, if limited, readership. We were aware from the beginning that to over-stretch ourselves would be to court disaster.

However, there are limits to how 'limited' a readership the magazine can survive on! Right now we do need rather desperately to expand our sales and subscriptions. So far Interzone is just failing to support itself - and we are surviving on Arts Council largesse. But grants won't always be forthcoming, so we are determined to increase the readership to a point where the magazine really does pay for itself. A few hundred additional subscriptions (or assured bookshop sales) would see us over the hump.

Of course we find ourselves in the usual Catch-22 predicament: we need those extra subscribers but we don't have the money to advertise widely in order to get them. One possibility we're investigating is the idea of cheap mailing shots to the subscribers of other magazines (the Post Office has some good deals to offer in this area). But basically we need all the help and advice we can get.

If you, or any of your readers, can suggest ways in which we can gain low-cost publicity and drum up extra subscribers, please let us know. Interzone is not exactly a charity, but it is performing an important function for British SF. Where else can young hopeful writers send their stories?

Please note that my address (above) is now the main editorial address of the magazine.

Hana Khalef, The Old Science Block, West Heath, Limpsfield, Nr. Oxted, Surrey

I read without surprise the news that the British SF magazine is not in a very healthy state. I for one did not know that Interzone even existed until I received my first copy of Focus and it was pure luck in the first place that I discovered the existence of the BSFA. I happened to open a copy of Pulsar 1 in my college library and in the introduction reference was made to the BSFA and the Science Fiction Foundation. It was a pure fluke that I noticed this book. If something could be arranged with publishers of SF novels whereby groups like the BSFA or SFF were mentioned, I feel sure you would gain more subscribers.

The BSFA did, or perhaps still does, have a reciprocal arrangment with Arrow Books - ask Alan Dorey for details if you're interested. But as regards general publicity, cost-effectiveness is the key; see David Pringle's comments on the economies of scale elsewhere in this column.

William Bains, 1950 Cooley Ave., 5207 Palo Alto, California 94303

Several pieces in Focus 7 prompt me to mention to you, and I hope to your readers, the name of the Small Press Writers and Artists Organisation, which I joined after a letter to Matrix mentioned it a while back. Your editorial praises the smaller-circulation magazine that rejects visions of Omni-like circulation figures for the novelty and up-market literary quality a smaller readership can support. Jim England in 'Consolations for Disappointed Writers' also seems to come down on the 'art for art's sake' side of the expression/mammon divide, but feels that mere self-expression is not enough - your masterpiece must be read by someone, even if not by millions. And the dearth of markets for SF is a constant complaint in the BSFA's various letter columns.

The 'Small Press' is an answer to the lack of markets, and one that your editorial and Jim's article would seem to support. 'Small Press' is, of course, a rather subjective term. Interzone is on the larger side of small. Amazing or whatever, with a circulation of about 10,000 would mark the borderline with the large presses. But smaller than any of these are the more professional fanzines, grading imperceptibly into what one might call the miniscule press of perzines, one-shots and the vanity presses. In this size range are produced, yes, dozens of potential markets for short SF, many of them paying real money for your work, the rest paying only with copies of the product or fame in the fannish style. The magazines are not 'successful' in terms of finance or WH Smithdom, but are successful in terms of satisfying an audience that does not move its collective lips when it reads.

Where can I find out about these discerning and enlightened folk? you cry. The S.P.W.A.O. (which I cannot help vocalising as SWAPO) is an informal organisation bearing as much relationship to, say, the SFWA as the BSFA does to the

Freemasons. Its prime directive is to publish a newsletter telling members who to send things to and who not to send things to. Also it provides members with Othergates, an independent market guide which is available for $7 (plus postage, I guess) from Millea Kenin, Unique Graphics, 1025 55th St., Oakland, CA 94608, U.S.A., and lists everything both alphabetically and according to size in the SF, horror, fantasy and related fields. The address for S.P.W.A.O. is Janet Fox, 519 Ellinwood, Osage City, KS 66523, U.S.A.

Not everyone will be happy with the small presses, of course, feeling that they are a combination of the worst features of fanzines and the vanity presses. And there is something a bit feeble about looking through directories for your own level, rather than trying to improve that level. But you are far more likely to get a few words of genuine criticism from a Small Press editor than you are from the rejection slip of a more financially successful publication.

Paul Brazier, 75 Hecham Close, Walthamstow, E17 5QT

I'd like to comment on Sue Thomason's piece 'SF Poetry' in Focus 7. This problem of defining genres within literature is extremely knotty and, if I'm not mistaken, just a little elitist. Surely the idea of definition is to exclude unwanted inclusions, and to include anything of worth. This is of course totally subjective, and not at all the kind of reasoned objectivity one would expect from serious critics. But I suspect that it is the real underlying motivation for definition debates and the kind of empire building that claims The Tempest and The Faerie Queen as SF.

I believe there is a valid method of definition: definition by example. Surely we can all point at a work and say, 'that for me exemplifies SF/poetry/whatever'. Of course, it would put an end to all those delicious debates, but it might simply give rise to another set of debates. SF fans being the argumentative crowd they are, I think the latter more likely.

I once found a very useful definition of poetry in a small American poetry magazine. Poetry was defined as a process of naming, and I would add to that that it is a process of naming otherwise recondite emotion. Surely this is the reason some poetry achieves great fame: Shakespeare's sonnets are recognised as the masterpiece of love poetry, and any alien desiring enlightenment on the human emotion called love would probably be directed to them as supreme achievements in the expression of that emotion.

I seem to remember that Wordsworth wrote somewhere that for poetry to remain a vital and alive literature, it would have to find some way of digesting the Industrial Revolution. If SF doesn't set out to instruct us in the nuts and bolts of physical science (and anyone who has read Jules Verne will probably agree that if it does, it's not very interesting), then we must come to the conclusion that SF attempts to come to terms with the human consequences of advances in technology (look at Blade Runner as a crude example).

Thus it seems to me that SF is attempting to be a process of naming for recondite emotions associated directly with advances in technology. In fact, SF is performing exactly the function that romantic poetry performed for Keats, Shelley, Byron, Coleridge and Wordsworth; it is a literature of revolution.

The point about use of language is well taken. In both poetry and SF, proper use of language must lead the reader to new understandings of the words

used. But it won't appear only in these genres. Recently I've been reading a novel by Michele Roberts called The Visitation. And over and over I feel that I'm reading an SF novel because of the insights that I draw from it, the point being that on re-examination I find it is the poetry of the use of words that is affecting me in this way. Isn't it finally a question of not only having something to say, but the ability to say it?

SUE THOMASON replies:

I am very worried by the way that definitions are often used as empire-building tools, sticky labels that can be slapped onto this book and this one and this one but no, not that one. I am more interested in what is written on the label than what we stick it on. I was trying hard not to play the 'does this book count' game, but I wanted to make it clear what I was talking about. Both SF and poetry have a great concern with boundaries, the boundaries of the possible, but instead of exploring the boundaries of the field I wanted to look at the crop growing in the middle of it. Used this way, definitions are not elitist, they are a necessary precondition of profitable discussion. We are not likely to have a very interesting, or even mutually comprehensible, conversation, if I think that SF is 'really about' Lost in Space and E.E. Smith, and you think SF is 'really about' the examination of the inner landscape of consciousness and perception exemplified in 'New Wave' writing and we talk about SF without telling each other this.

Mostly I agree that definition by example is a good idea. I mention the work of several poets and SF writers in the Focus piece so that people will have some idea of what/who I'm talking about. But again, I was trying to talk about the idea of the category itself, not what goes in the category: the difference is that between, say, the idea of Law (as an abstract) and particular acts which a particular culture considers lawful or not. Provoking debate is exactly what I'm trying to do!

Poetry as a process of naming: that's a good definition. But isn't all literature about naming? Also I don't consider emotion, recondite or otherwise, the exclusive province of poetry; what about the catharsis of Greek (and other) tragedy? Wouldn't your alien in search of instruction on love do as well with Plato's Symposium, or even a selection from some major novelists?

I agree absolutely about poetry digesting the results of the Industrial - and Post-Industrial - Revolutions: necessary. This doesn't mean that we've all got to stop writing pretty nature poems about larks and cornfields, and write poems about tractors and combine harvesters instead. The Industrial Revolution didn't suddenly eliminate nature, it simply put Western culture in a new relationship to it. Nature poetry has recently grown strong again with the assimilation of ecology as a rigorous scientific and spiritual discipline; an old idea rediscovered. I dispute your view that SF dealing with 'the nuts and bolts of physical science' is boring: Jules Verne is a bad example. I can't cite counter-examples because I'm not quite sure what you mean by 'the nuts and bolts of physical science' - stories based on valid scientific principles? on the 'hard' sciences? All can be interesting.

SF as 'the human consequences of advances in technology': well, I think that's nearly right. 'Advances' should obvously mean advances from the story's point of view, not our point of view, to include (say) Keith Roberts' Pavane, and I would change 'technology' (from techne, art/craft/skill) to 'science' (from

scientia, knowledge (of), learning). And doesn't your definition of SF as performing the function of Romantic poetry limit it to something like Wells' 'scientific romance'? SF may be the 'literature of revolution' but far from inciting us to revolution, I believe it is a way of adapting to revolution; using the imagination as a safety-valve, preparing to continue facing the shock of the new in our 'real' lives. SF is thus a literature of fear and retreat as well as one of exploration of boundaries. Perhaps so is poetry. Perhaps so is all writing ...

Finally, maybe the reason that we have yet to produce a really powerful SF/poetry is because so many of the SF 'myths', the symbols with archetypal power, are visual ones. The rocket blasting off ... earthrise over the moon ... Perhaps the media fans have been right all along!

CONTRIBUTORS

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MAXIM JAKUBOWSKI has been a fan, editor and occasional writer of SF for many years. He was Managing Director of Virgin Books and now holds a similar position at the newly-formed Zomba Books.

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DAVID PIPER is unemployed and lives in Liverpool. He would like to become a full-time professional writer.

PETER TASKER works for an investment company, dividing his time between England and Japan. His story The Survey appeared in Focus 7.

ANNE WARREN works as an occupational psychologist. She has sold artwork professionally and is a member of Jomsberg, the Cambridge Fantasy Society's spa, and of several other writing groups.

IAN WATSON came into prominence with his first SF novel, The Embedding, in 1973, and has had many other SF novels published since. His most recent work, The Book of the River, is currently being serialised in F&SF.

RESEARCH

Several people have told us how much they enjoyed the 'reference books' feature which appeared in Focus 4 and we decided that a miscellany on the more physical processes of research might be a good idea. Lists of Good Libraries and Useful People to Brainpick were clearly going to be impractical and so we settled for asking three writers to describe how they went about researching their most recent books. Their experiences might not help you in your own specific quest, but you will gain some idea of the sheer amount of work involved. None of them answered the layman's first question - 'Why don't you just make it all up?' Obviously, they enjoy research too much...

RESEARCHING 'THE GREAT STEAMBOAT RACE'

John Brunner

IN THE SUMMER of 1975 I was making a very bumpy flight across the Atlantic. The longer the seat-belt sign stayed on, the more I found myself reflecting on the advantages of paddlewheel steamboats and dirigible airliners. By the time I reached California I'd decided I was going to write my very first historical novel. And the theme was going to be a race between two steamers on the Mississippi, patterned on, but dramatically superior to, the most famous of all such races, between the Natchez and the Robert E. Lee.

So far, so good. Everybody I talked to about the idea was keen on it; my US agent even secured me double the best advance I'd ever had for any of my SF. It wasn't until the dust had settled, long after my return home, that I started to ask the all-important question.

Given that all I knew about the Mississippi was what it looked like from its east bank at Memphis, Tennessee, and moreover that I was a British writer, domiciled in England, whose last encounter with an actual steamboat had occurred at the age of ten and consisted in being taken for an excursion by my parents aboard one of Salter's Steamers from Henley-on-Thames... how in hell was I going to research my chosen subject?

Well, there was one obvious target to aim for: the New York Public Library at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. And another: the city of New Orleans, ocean and river port, which I had dreamed of visiting ever since my teenage years as a dedicated jazz-fan. Besides, there turned

out to be still one long-haul paddlewheeler operating, the Delta Queen - though since she was built in the Twenties to run on the Sacramento River in California, she bore scant resemblance to any of the boats I was going to write about. At least, however, taking a weekend ride on her would acquaint me with the river from water level.

Everything looked feasible after all.

So I blithely arranged another trip to the States at the end of June 1976, armed with camera and binoculars and a lot of notebooks.

What I confess I hadn't reckoned with was the nationwide extent of the American Bicentennial celebrations...

Almost the first thing I learned on reaching New York was that I couldn't ride the Delta Queen. She'd been block-booked by some gang of history buffs for the voyage she was going to make during my stay in New Orleans. Setback number one.

Setback number two was the regrettable discovery that owing to the financial crisis in the city's budget much of the material at the NY Public Library was being allowed to fall apart, including useful items such as the only extant map of the Mississippi dating from anything like the period I had in mind, 1870. Hastily I ordered a photocopy before it degenerated any further. (Actually it was published in 1863, and that river changes its course faster than the map-makers of the day could keep track of it. Despite being wrong by seven years, though, it proved to be among the most useful of my many purchases. More of that in a moment.)

However, I applied myself vigorously to the job, and after less than a week I had a huge reading-list. I found books like Louis C Hunter's Steamboats on the Western Rivers (what am I saying? There isn't a book like it! It's the most exhaustive scholarly study of the subject, crammed with valuable data), and Manly Wade Wellman's classic Fastest on the River, a definitive account of the Natchez-Lee race which took place over just that weekend in 1870 which I'd chosen for my own imaginary contest.

Also I pulled some strings. At the time a namesake of mine, another John Brunner, was working for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey; he's the guy who designed the Windows on the World restaurant on top of the World Trade Center.

Thanks to him, I left New York with an introduction to a certain Bob Carr at International House in New Orleans. I spent about five or six days in that handsome city, most of it in the Vieux Carre. My hostess was Astrid Anderson, who had already lived some time on North Rampart Street and was full of helpful suggestions, and Bob Carr contrived to put me next to a lot of people interested in the history of the river and the city. I went to every museum and historical exhibit I could spare time for, and also a great many bookshops. (I'd done the same in New York, naturally.)

Now the Bicentennial started to pay dividends. Publisher after publisher turned out to have dug through the backlist for books that would be saleable while history-fever gripped the nation. I found John W Blassingame's Black New Orleans, which covered precisely the period I was researching; I found Asher & Adam's Album of American Industry, first issued in 1876 and made available in facsimile a century later; I found

books about steamboats and railroads and traditional medicine and the aftermath of the Civil War...

And, of course, I read Twain's Life on the Mississippi - and stole from it wholesale!

Then, on the Friday prior to the actual Bicentennial, I had a phonecall from Bob. He'd arranged for me to ride the towboat John D Geary, leaving for Louisville at 10 p.m. This was an amazing privilege, and my greatest stroke of luck. Later, Captain Lloyd Arnold told me he'd been on the river 27 years and had never shipped a passenger before.

I confess I was a little nervous when I left my cab at the Geary's wharf and made myself known to the reception committee, her chief engineer. He seemed a bit put out at my arrival - small wonder, since it was his room (not cabin) I was to be accommodated in - and as he was showing me to it he said, 'I'm from Paducah! Guess you never heard of it!'

So I donned a reflective expression and said, 'Paducah? Ah, yes. It's on the Ohio. Must be about 50 miles from where it branches off the Mississippi.'

His face lit up at once. He exclaimed, 'Say, you know your rivers!' And thought for a moment, and added, 'Yeah - it's 47 miles!'

I didn't really have to tell him - did I? - that the reason I knew about Paducah was that I'd been told where it was on the phone at four o'clock that afternoon! But afterwards I couldn't seem to do anything wrong.

Oh, I exaggerate. The crew were a little suspicious of me at first, but when they found I was aboard to work, not just to amuse myself - I was spending fourteen hours a day in the pilothouse, making notes and taking pictures - they relaxed, and eventually we got very friendly. What was especially interesting to the captain and his deputy, Pilot Bill Lanier, was that chart of the river as it had been in 1863. They were working from a recent edition of the US Army Corps of Engineers Flood Control and Navigation Maps, which are revised annually (and when I quit the boat at Memphis the first thing I bought there was an up-to-date copy), so it was a source of endless fascination to make comparisons between what was and what had been before.

It was Lloyd Arnold who told me about Captain Tate, of Memphis, and suggested I call on him: not only one of the few surviving people to hold a paddlewheeler licence (he's one of the pilots of the Delta Queen) but also a keen model-maker with a fine collection of classic boats in miniature.

I came home imagining that I'd covered all the ground I needed. I was wrong. I'd overlooked things like the design of horse-drawn carriages (but a friend here in our village turned out to be a member of the Four-in-Hand club); current news and gossip (but I inherited a bound set of Punch from 1841 to 1927), my relative ignorance of the Civil War as seen through American eyes (but I re-read Stephen Vincent Benet's John Brown's Body), and the fact that whereas during my trip I'd begun to attune my ear to Southern speech I was bound to lose it again within months (so I re-read Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus)...

And so on. But another stroke of luck was waiting for me. When I was a good two years into the project, and sadly aware how much longer it was going to take than I'd estimated, I went back to New Orleans for

Nolacon and to fill in a few gaps in my knowledge, and ran across David Drake, now of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, but formerly of the riverside cities Clinton and Dubuque, Iowa. He turned out to be a specialist in the history of just the period I needed help with. The debt I owe him for consenting to check my script for Briticisms and inaccuracies is as great as the one I owe Bob Carr for putting me aboard the Geary.

Well, in the end the book cost me over seven years from conception to publication. I learned the hard way how much more difficult it is to write historical fiction than SF if, like me, you're desperate to get every petty detail right. I've been saying ever since that I'll never try it again. In SF, if you paint yourself into a corner, you can conjure up a spacewarp through the wall. In historical fiction you have to make do with what actually existed.

And, for all my attempts to render the novel flawless, I did have to fudge things now and then. For example: my plot required that two characters meet on the wharf at New Orleans, a journalist and an ex-slave. The latter had learned to run steam-engines in a sugar-mill; it seemed logical to give him a steam-crane to drive. Do you think I could find out whether there were steam-cranes on the dockside in New Orleans in 1870? No way! They existed in the east; they existed in Europe; but not even the Maritime Museum in New Orleans itself, nor the Louisiana State Museum, could tell me when they were introduced down there.

In the end, I 'sold' the wharf to a go-ahead consortium from the victorious North, determined to install the latest gadgetry...

Now I trust your appetite has been whetted to read the actual book, so it's with vast regret that I have to tell you that it hasn't yet found a British publisher. It's sold in Germany, and in the States it's getting me some very flattering reviews, but - !

Any publishers out there listening? Ballantine will supply plates or even sheets, on reasonable terms!

Meantime, I have to get back to a new book and pay for the time I invested in my one (and probably only) foray into the historical novel.

THE JOURNEY TO CHEKHOV

Ian Watson

THE EDITORS OF Focus have asked me for a piece on what kind of research I did before writing Chekhov's Journey, a book which presumably involved a certain amount of prior spadework.

In fact there's quite a fat file of notes, and I think the best way to answer this request initially is just to go through the file.

What do we come to first? A scribbled map of the part of Siberia around Krasnoyarsk, with notes such as 'To Yeniseisk, district town of 12000,

330 versts = 219 miles by steamboat, generally flanked by rocky banks.' Steamboat? Was I perhaps planning a great steamboat race to Tunguska? Ah, this is from Baedeker's Guide to Russia, which Dolores Jakubowski tipped me off about. An edition published just before the First World War was reprinted about twenty years ago; though of course I had to subtract the effects of the Trans-Siberian Railway, built in the interval since Chekhov visited the region.

Next page: more from Baedeker, on the hotels and restaurants in Krasnoyarsk. ('Hotel candles are included in the bill; separate charge for bed-linen and towels.) Actually, I ingnored most of this when I wrote the book.

Next: a photo of the central sports stadium in Krasnoyarsk, clipped from Soviet Weekly, to which I subscribed for six months.

Followed by: sixteen pages of notes on Hingley's A New Life of Chekhov. Twenty-five pages of notes on Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov edited by Hellmann. Four pages of notes on a book called Chekhov's Leading Lady. (Did you know that in 1900 Chekhov was wearing long woollen underwear manufactured by Jaeger?) Then: a photocopy, 'Konstantin Tsiolkovsky and his Work on Interplanetary Travel', which Brian Stableford kindly furnished me with. Next: two pages of notes on Siberian Shamanism, from Mircea Eliade's Shamanism which, in fact, I already used in connection with God's World. Followed by more on Tsiolkovsky (also courtesy of Brian Stableford); then a pull-out centrefold of Siberian heavy industry from Soviet Weekly. An article from ditto on the Biotechnology Institute in Krasnoyarsk. Next, a letter from the Novosti Press Agency inviting me to use their picture library... but I never went. (I don't like doing research in libraries... though I did pop down to the Bodleian in Oxford to check out Baedeker.) Another map, of Siberian rivers. Forty pages of photocopies of letters of Chekhov covering the period of his real Siberian journey. Alas, I wasn't able to lay hands on the actual travel articles he wrote.

Onward: notes on a couple of books on the Tunguska phenomenon. (The reincarnation by hypnosis stuff stems from a couple of books about 'psychic research behind the iron curtain' which I read a few years back.)

Next: historical notes on world events in 1889-90, about the only one of which I used was 'Eiffel Tower built'. Nobly I refrained from mentioning in the book that the 'Red Flag' was written in 1889 in London after a dock strike.

Notes, next, on Tsiolkovsky's On the Moon, and on early Russian rocket pioneers in Bainbridge's The Spaceflight Revolution which George Hay gave me years ago. (Thanks, George. I used it.)

Oh God, did I really do all this? Now it's Yuri Semyonov's Siberia: its Conquest and Development.

Stanislavsky. The Trans-Siberian Railway. The topography of Kansk. Another biography of Chekhov. Oodles of notes on most of Chekhov's short fiction and all his plays... (Woven into the narrative of Chekhov's Journey are quite a few allusions. But the point of such allusions is to convey the right flavour, not so that some slavic scholar can leap up and cry, 'Nice one, Sir!')

Heavens, I'm exhausted just looking through this file.

The last scrap of paper says: 'Letter style chapters - enables one to leave out junk'. Quite. That's why some chapters are written in epistolary form: in order to dump excess baggage which had accumulated. (Not dump it into the narrative; dump it by not mentioning it.)

Actually, all this research suggests some kind of Master Plan. But it wasn't really that way. The way the book came about in the first place was by sheer serendipity. I was thinking of ironic juxtapositions, as in my short story 'To the Pump Room with Jane', where Jane Austen collides with eco-catastrophy. (I like to think of that story as Stand on Zanzibar, as written by Miss Austen.) Wouldn't it be nice - Judy and I tossed the idea around, in between tossing darts at the board, above the cats' toilet, and tossing pints down - wouldn't it be nice to juxtapose something cataclysmic, Lucifer's Hammer and all that lot... Ah, Tunguska! Nobody's had a go at Tunguska. Now, who on earth could I juxtapose Tunguska with? Dostoevsky? Dostoevsky was in exile in Siberia. Yes, but that wouldn't be much of a juxtaposition. Dostoevsky is a sort of literary cataclysm anyway.

Aha... Chekhov. The Jane Austen of Russian Literature! As it were.

Now in the past Chekhov always sent me to sleep; he wasn't really on my wavelength. Yet a few weeks later I was loving the man, and totally identified with him; he seemed to reflect all my own sentiments. He came totally alive, as a brother. (This, perhaps, reflected in my choice to resurrect him by hypnosis and refract him through past, present, future.)

Anyway, let's check Chekhov out, thought I... and bless me if to my complete surprise the man hadn't made an epic journey all the way across Siberia - quite out of the blue, quite out of the context of the rest of his life, and writings, to all appearances; the biographers are still a bit puzzled.

In fact, 'research' is often like this, for me at least. In retrospect it seems to possess logical coherence and inevitability; but often it wasn't like that at all. It's full of lucky accidents, things that just fall into your hands at the right time (and maybe never would if you went painstakingly bulldozing for them), which of course means that something - a pattern, a fictional fabric - is coming alive, organically.

And, of course, this isn't always the way it is. For my previous novel, Deathhunter, the only 'research' I did was to consult a couple of books on the psychology of death and dying. The novel itself stemmed from a completely spontaneous short story, 'A Cage for Death', a story which just wrote itself, from the title onwards. The title came into my head. I wrote it down; the rest followed.

It's nice when this happens; but it's also nice doing 'research'. You plunge into something which may never have particularly interested you before - with a committed fervour. And this expands you a bit; it's like undergoing a change of personality.

But then you have to cry, 'Enough', ignore most of what you have learnt, and start to write the book. Which has to be fiction, your own invention.

PUTTING THE FEATHERS ON THE INDIANS

Steve Gallagher

THE BOOK THAT I've just completed is called Oktober, and it began as a vague idea of a chain of consequences set in motion after a piece of sharp dealing by a transnational drug company. The first move was to begin a steady trawl of current newspapers and magazines, looking for ways of developing the idea. There's no real method that can be applied to this, because it's too early a stage in the game for setting targets; the clippings file grew and grew, with pieces on the generics vs branded drugs controversy, the illegal manufacture of Bromo-STP in a lab at Sussex University, the appearance of Valium as a substance in demand on the illicit drugs market, the newly-launched controversy over the administration of Depo-Provera without patient consent, psychiatrists fighting legislation that would give every patient the right to refuse unwanted treatment, the inequitable pricing of drugs in different countries, the use of volunteer Egyptian children in the conducting of open-air toxicity tests of a new crop spray...

The first positive step forward was finding a review of a booklet called Drug Diplomacy. It was published by Social Audit, a London-based consumer group with international connections. This booklet, plus other publications from the same group, provided me with a stack of documented facts and examples of the operating methods of the transnationals as seen from a non-corporate point of view.

Libraries next; some of the pharmacology textbooks that I waded through were heavy enough to make the reference section tables creak when I dumped them down. Most of them were pitched way over my head, but popular science books on the same subject tended to be superficial, another danger with these is that the material has already been digested and worked-over once. The best approach for me seemed to be to use the pop science texts as a means of access to the heavyweight stuff - that way, I could get an idea of what to look for in the indices and then zero in on the parts that I'd be needing.

Another useful place to be was the commercial section of Manchester's Central Library. They keep a clippings file which is broken down country by country and which is crammed with practical business information; it's aimed mainly at business types needing basic commercial intelligence, but a browse under the relevant heading is a good, fast-study way of getting acquainted with the way a country works. I assume there's something similar in most major centres, although I wouldn't be prepared to bet on it, about a year ago I heard that there was pressure to have the section closed down in response to spending cutbacks. Madness

Telephone directories and international commercial yearbooks in that same section gave me some addresses that I was going to need and also were a good source of names. I made long lists, and when character names had

to be fixed at a later stage I was able to swap around forenames and surnames until something appropriate came out. Hardly what you'd call a vital trade secret, but it's worth trying if your made-up names tend to sound as phoney as mine do.

The storyline was beginning to coalesce by this stage, so I was able to start the plotting. A few key texts were of the most help here; apart from Drug Diplomacy there was also Drug Disinformation and Insult or Injury? An Enquiry into the Marketing and Advertising of British Food and Drug Products in the Third World, both also from Social Audit. Switzerland Exposed by Jean Ziegler, a Social Democrat member of the Swiss parliament, gave an unusual and well-informed view of that country as 'an oligarchy that has never been unmasked... (and which) functions as a fence for the world capitalist system.' Behavioural Pharmacology, by Iversen and Iversen, currently leads the field as the most overpriced paperback I've ever bought, but it yielded up a couple of nuggets of information on which the plot subsequently came to turn. Mind Control, by Peter Schrag. Suffer the Children, the story of the launch of Thalidomide and the subsequent rearguard action fought by Distillers and Grunenthal against claims for compensation. The British National Formulary, picked up second-hand in a junkshop. Health in the Third World, a collection of study booklets originally published in Hanoi.

To London, and some notes on the layout of Piccadilly's Underground station followed by a trip out to New Cross for a quick look at the area. The next day, in pursuit of atmospheric details for a theatrical nightmare sequence, I went to Davenports, the old-established magic shop across from the British Museum, and was given a chair in the corner and some time to go through their catalogue.

The project was now beginning to turn around in that I was looking for specifics instead of casting wide and hoping that I'd get something promising. Firstly 'Oktober' itself, the computer password which gave access to the central mystery of my story. I spent some time with a computer freak hearing about how an artifical intelligence program could be fed into a computer in secrecy so that it could then exist self-sufficiently within the system, like a rat in the drains, and then I spent some more time with another computer freak being told that such a proposal could never work. Confusing, but more enjoyable than the unpleasant morning I spent researching the fate of one of my characters in textbooks of forensic pathology, reading up on the effects of drowning and of the long-term submersion of human tissue in seawater. Lavishly illustrated, in full colour.

About ninety per cent of the final phase of research involved the gathering of what the tax-accounts people charmingly call 'local colour'. The image that immediately springs to mind is of the writer in terylene slacks and a loud floral shirt, sitting at an outside table in a continental cafe and soaking up the ambience and the afternoon sun in equal measures. Unfortunately, this approach wouldn't get you a book - it would only get you pissed and sunburned, like any other holiday.

Location research is mostly a matter of detail, as much as can be scribbled down or mumbled onto tape. It's not just a question of collecting journalistic asides so that authenticity can be sprinkled over the writing like salt; this is the point at which the still-malleable material is held up against the real world and checked for holes. If

the story involves actual locations, then the need for this shouldn't have to be argued; details lifted from guide books or travel books are no substitute for the subjective impressions of the storyteller. Out of all this observation, only the most telling scraps will be used - but the rest, like the sand in a gold pan, is necessary. Even if the locations are fictitious, I believe that this process is essential... the difference is that we have to take a more ingenious approach in finding and adapting real-life analogues for our invented places.

And so I set out to trace the footsteps of my main character across Europe. Most of the places were going to be new to me, although a few were remembered from holidays years ago. This was true of the first stopover after the ferry; it wasn't yet dawn when I got into Bruges, so I had to walk around until it got light enough for me to follow the railway lines out of town to get a look at the freight sidings and the surrounding countryside. Paris by that evening, and a stroke of real good fortune; the one-star hotel that I was sent to by an accommodation bureau had exactly the kind of layout and rear-courtyard arrangement that I'd planned to spend half a day looking for.

The second stroke of luck came later that same evening, at the Tuileries gardens. Part of the plot involved the spring showing of a fashion house, and marquees had been erected in the gardens for that purpose... in all my reading, it had never actually clicked with me that a spring show would actually take place six months <u>before</u> the spring to give time for orders and deliveries to be sorted out. The marquees were opened up so that the sound and lighting crew could work on their setups, and it was no problem to drift in with them and mooch around. This was as close as I thought I was likely to get, but then the next morning I was able to slide past Security and sneak into one of the shows for a first-hand look. Exactly how this happened, I won't try to explain here; it's a little bit complicated, and it went into the book almost unchanged. After this, it was a simple matter of sussing the interior layout of the Louvre and watching the security procedures they were using there. Then the luggage-locker system in the <u>Gare de L'Est</u> along with the surrounding area, a ride out on the Metro to check that a place I was citing as a residential area didn't actually turn out to be a thirty-acre industrial estate, and finally down to the station for the overnight train to St Nazaire.

A piece about the Grande Briere national park had been in the clippings file for some time, and it seemed to offer itself as an unusual and interesting hiding-place. Although it's got national park designation, there isn't even a roadsign to tell you where it is... as I found when I hired a car from St Nazaire and tried to find it. Only the edge of the Briere is accessible by road, the rest of it consisting of fenland, peat bogs and canals. My newpaper piece, as it turned out, had glossed the reality with just a tad too much romance, and so I was glad that I'd now be able to write from first-hand observation.

Then to the Hilton Hotel, Basle. Unfortunately I didn't get much further than the foyer, but then that was the part that I needed. Apart from picking out areas of desirable residence for two of my characters, one of the main reasons for being in Basle was to get a look at the city-outskirts factory sites of the major pharmaceutical companies, to ensure that the description of my fictional outfit wouldn't correspond to any of them. A libel suit is something I can quite happily live without.

The final target was a place called Eigergletscher, one of the small mountain stopovers of the Jungfrau railway above Interlaken. I'd planned

this as the model for the location of my big finale; writing in advance hadn't got me anywhere, so I presented myself at the railway offices in Interlaken and asked if I could have an interview with the director of the husky breeding centre at Eigergletscher. About thirty dogs are housed there, most of them big Greenland freight-pulling huskies, and they and the compounds in which they're kept had become an important part of the story's central mystery. After a phonecall it was all fixed up, and the office even gave me a complimentary ticket to make the journey. I spent a couple of hours with Philippe Oriet, the husky wrangler, using my appalling French to question him about his work and about the practical setup of the centre.

This part of the research - the whole overseas bit - took two weeks, five notebooks, and two rolls of film. Merged with all the earlier stuff, it filled one lever-arch file, one ring-binder, and one deep pocket-file in my desk drawer. Of all the specifics collected along the way, I'd say about 20% made a direct appearance in the final text. The rest was, as they say in Colemanballs, like the proverbial iceberg.

The Great Steamboat Race by John Brunner is published by Ballantine Books, trade paperback, $7.95. Oktober by Stephen Gallagher is still at the editorial stage; his previous book, Follower, is due out from Sphere in February, 1984. Chekhov's Journey by Ian Watson is published by Gollancz, hardback, £7.95.

IN BRIEF

What Every Good Writer Should Know

Dorothy Davies

This item is all about presentation. If you know how to prepare your manuscript, I give you permission to turn to the next page, which is probably infinitely more interesting than this. But if you don't know the rules, and there appear to be many who don't, then this is for you.

No matter how brilliant your story, how flowing the dialogue and gripping the narrative, no one will want to know if it isn't typed. And it needs to be typed on A4 paper too. Quarto, foolscap and all the other funny English sizes have disappeared, and A4 is the standard now preferred by everyone from the BBC to Focus. I buy good quality A4 from my local printer by the ream. Flimsy paper might cost less to post, but it tears, creases and generally looks shabby in a remarkably short time. So don't risk it. You waste more on retypes that way.

A lot of editors like a title page, which should look something like this -

(address)

title
author
wordcount

and inside, repeat of title and your name, with good 25mm to 35mm margins all round, and double spacing. None of this half spacing to save paper! Second and all subsequent pages should carry in the top right hand corner -

title
author
page no.

so should it all come apart whoever is reading it should have no trouble in putting it back together again.

Check your spelling! Nothing irritates so much as the misspelling of words which are in common use.

Always enclose the right sized sae (stamped, self-addressed envelope for the return of the manuscript if not required.) One author's wife who had worked for a publisher (but obviously not for a magazine editor) told me always to send a small envelope, so they would think twice before rejecting. When I tried it, in my far-off naive days, the magazine rejected with a curt note demanding a proper sae in future. I've never tried it since.

Be professional. The publishing world, whether fee-paying or not, is a professionally conducted business. Neatly typed mss and letters, proper sized envelopes, correct return postage, all these things matter very much, and go a long way to creating a good impression when your story arrives. Watch your typewriter ribbon too. People shouldn't be expected to strain their eyes in order to read an almost illegible smudge of grey on the sheet.

Presentation takes time, and money. I seem to spend a lot of time looking for the right sized envelopes in which to submit my written and photographic work to editors, but I'm sure, by the number of acceptances I've recorded to date, that it pays off. And after a while you'll find that it becomes a habit, second nature, to check that all looks good before you seal the envelope and despatch another masterpiece on its way.

The Rocking Of The Boat

Philip Mann

I feel diffident about writing about myself as a writer. I have only had one novel published and at present I am still working at evolving a more disciplined and productive approach. Still, I'm happy to pass on what I have learned so far ...

Firstly, the mechanics of writing. I can write anywhere and frequently do. Just as a smoker feels more confident when he knows he has cigarettes in his pocket, I like to feel that there is a typewriter within easy reach wherever I am, and getting a typewriter of my own that I felt at home with was a most important step. I use a big heavy Olympia manual which has now acquired for me something of the personality of a well used spoon or cup. I would not exchange it for the fanciest word-processor. Electric typewriters I consider to be bait for a power cut.

I write very quickly in the first instance but much of this material is usually abandoned later. Perhaps the odd sentence stands out. I find that the act of putting words down on paper clarifies what exactly it is that

I am working towards. I revise and rewrite continually. As I progress the characters and situations become very real and I start to wonder who is in control. For a while the aliens I wrote about in The Eye of the Queen were like guests in the house. Writing the book was sometimes like taking dictation.

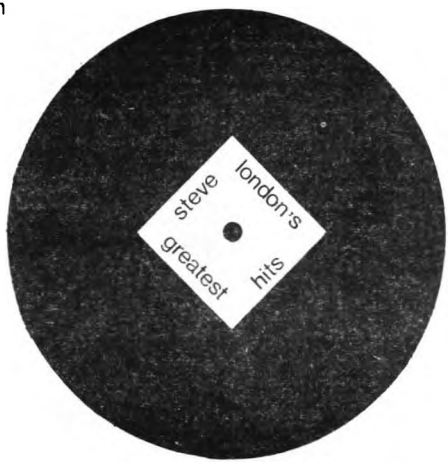
The Eye of the Queen started as a short story which just kept on growing. The first draft was a third person narrative and then I hit on the idea of trying to present part of it as though written by the aliens, which in turn lead to my protagonist writing a diary, and so on; the whole novel became much more alive to me. I did not know how it was going to finish, but was strangely unworried by that. Then the ending came in one sustained burst and I realised that the final paragraph was what I had been heading towards all the time. In that light, many sections of the book were rewritten and large parts were cut. I was still unhappy with the opening but was at a loss what to do with it. Finally I sent the manuscript to Gollancz and Malcolm Edwards said the right words at the right time and I found the impetus to rewrite the first forty pages.

Part of the book was written while I was working in China and that experience left its mark on it. I was preoccupied with the question of how cultural values could be translated, but I am also very insistent that the Pa-Ellians are not Chinese dressed up in alien costumes. For whatever reason, the question of translation and understanding is of great importance to me, and is the backbone of the book. I believe that when we do finally meet alien intelligence, first communication will be through pattern, form, colour and rhythm and that our ambassadors will be potters, weavers, painters and sculptors.

When I began The Eye of the Queen I wanted to know what it felt like to sustain an idea through 120,000 words; to try long distance running rather than the short story sprint. I am now working on another - quite different - book and I find myself all at sea ... which says something about how I feel about writing in general. Starting a book (or for that matter any sustained creative effort - by day my profession is that of theatre director) is like pushing a boat out to sea on a fine spring morning. You row and row and eventually the land slips below the horizon. Clouds appear, perhaps a muttering of thunder, and you realise for the first time that you are completely alone. Great slabs of ocean bear you up revealing glimpses of distant mountain tops. You are aware that night may fall at any moment. What to do? Turn round and head back? You can't, so you push on in hope of a friendly landfall on a far shore.

I enjoy the rocking of the boat and never regret the journey though I have sunk three times and been marooned on several occasions.

fiction



peter
tasker

A1 THE JACKET HAD cost so much; he didn't dare tell anyone just how much. But it was worth it, every penny. He put it on and felt the living tissue tighten around the contours of his body, become firm under the arms and taut across the line of his shoulders. He took a deep breath and it expanded in immediate response. That was quality.

A braided half-belt, tucked waist, and Regency lapels. Those lapels had taken him an age of plucking and smoothing to get absolutely right. But tonight he wanted to look absolutely right. And the whole thing set in a gentle pastel oscillation. He gazed at his reflection in the mirror and approved it. The effect was... well, truly Other...

As he left the house, he felt that familiar surge of excitement, the tingling scalp, the slight itching of his skin. Already, the pulse of the city was growing stronger, drawing him in. He glanced back through the window at the inert figures of his parents, sitting in front of the screen flickering violet and blue across their silent faces. Perhaps one day they had understood about things like braided half-belts, Regency lapels, and Other music. But not any more.

2

TONIGHT FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY
STEVE LONDON PLAYS THE APOTHEOSIS CLUB
THE CONCERT OF A LIFETIME
BE THERE

3 It is the night of the vernal equinox. On a remote mist-covered hillside a young man on a wooden rostrum addresses a crowd of his followers. Lean, but well-muscled, he stands bolt upright, his bare forearm rising and falling with the rhythm of his words. He wears baggy trousers and a thick, brown shirt with rolled sleeves. His blond hair, though short at the sides, flops over his forehead to touch his eyebrows. The top half of his face is delicate, almost feminine in appearance, but the mouth below works violently, pumping out jets of breath into the chill air.

'Alone, we are nothing. But together, brothers, we are invincible. Today they may condemn us, they may mock the clothes we wear, they may pass by on the other side of the street. But the time is coming, coming very soon, when they will cross over, go down on hands and knees, and implore our forgiveness. Yes, the time is coming when the earth itself will shudder with the music we make.'

4 Steve London - his style.

Food - 'I don't eat much nowadays because I don't have enough time. I like avocados and toffees and tempura, which I have specially flown in from Japan.'

Clothes - 'I don't wear any around the house. Outside, I favour things with a nice spacey feel, like cloaks and pantaloons.'

Hobbies - 'I'm a karate black belt, and I'm heavily into spiritualism.'

Philosophy - 'Nothing significant has happened since Kant. Wittgenstein is interesting.'

Girls - 'I've got a marvellous girlfriend who I love very much, but we have an open relationship. I like Melanesian girls. I have them specially flown in from Melanesia.'

Sounds - 'I only listen to my own music. I can't stand anyone else's.'

5 London is arguably the most conceptually significant artist to appear for generations. By exploding the semi-fossilised artist-audience relationship, he has opened up new vistas of achievement. In his performances, the dissociation of sensibility so characteristic of post-Renaissance Western culture is temporarily negated by a richly creative fusion. London's methodology involves presenting us with the naked reflection of the alienated reality we see in him.

In his finest work, he communicates the futility, indeed the ultimate crassness, of all attempts to impose definitions, whether verbal or non-verbal, on the polymorphous complexity of experience. Again, by his brilliant use of the device of total mimesis, he poignantly reminds us of the ephemerality of the world we inhabit and which inhabits us.

B1 His first million. His picture on every wall, on every screen. The building of the castle. The move away from simplicity. Crazy moments. The time he came onstage with a casket of jewels and flung them to the crowd. The burning of the Botticellis. And the people yearning for a touch of his cape. And the smiles of the women. And the sacrifices.

When did Otherness start? He didn't know exactly. Perhaps it had always been somewhere deep inside him. From the earliest days, he had experienced black-outs during performances; the bigger the concert the longer the black-out. It all developed from there.

First came the feeling of floating, gazing far down on the manic puppet that was himself. Then losing sight of himself entirely. He was in the music somewhere, pulsing blindly, coursing past strange bodies. Then came the flashes, rushing images, too fast to catch. Voices he had never heard before, places he had never seen, joy and sadness he had never known. Otherness.

2 His manager's face appeared on the vidscreen. He looked grim. 'Sorry to bother you, Steve, but we've got problems.'

'Let it wait. Can't you see I'm busy?'

'This is urgent.'

Steve rolled away from the group of women and rose unsteadily to his feet. 'What's the matter?'

'The new single. It hasn't taken off.'

A blank-faced beauty crawled over to the bed and conveyed him on her back to the jade dresser where his medication was kept. Her nipples danced in his face as she slipped the needle into his arm.

He turned to the vidscreen again. 'What do you mean? I thought it was number one.'

'Nobody bought it, Steve. We had to buy back every copy ourselves.'

'Okay, okay. I'll get myself busted again.'

'We've done it too many times before.'

'I'll go down to the terminal ward and heal some children.'

'It's no good, Steve. You can't delay any longer. I'll have to call him.'

3 So the phone-call had finally come. That was good. He had been on the road for so long now, living in motels and flop-houses, idling away his time in anonymous city centres, just waiting for that phone-call. Now he could get the whole thing over with.

For the last time, he unscrewed the barrel of his pistol, blew down it, checked the trigger, the chambers, everything. Then he took some wax and polished the metal until it was gleaming like new.

Oh yes, and the LP. He would need to have that with him. He picked it up and looked at it. It hadn't been played yet, and probably never would. Come tomorrow, they would be calling it Exhibit A.

He gazed for a moment at the cover photograph of a slightly epicene, slightly menacing face. He checked in the mirror, and the same face was there gazing back at him.

4 Under the mauve canopy of a midsummer night, a vast crowd stands gathered in one of the city's great parks. Some are weeping, some clutching amulets, some staring vacantly into the distance. As the full moon edges out from behind the clouds, a frantic murmuring rises from their lips.

A spotlight lances the night. A figure stands before them, alone, decked in robes of saffron and gold, his shaven head crowned with a garland of flowers.

'He has come,' cries the multitude.

The figure slowly kneels, bending his head. A second spotlight pierces the gloom. A boy of twelve steps up to the kneeling man and takes the garland from his head. A great sigh breaks forth from the crowd.

The priests come forward, faces cowled in shadow. They form a circle and shuffle around him, sprinkling water, beating tin cymbals, chanting. Gradually, the rhythm of their chant rises, until the night is pulsing with it. And then it snaps.

A dozen curved blades climb towards the moon, then plunge downwards. A shriek of anguish rends the air, and the crowd surges towards him, its throat wild with wordless sounds.

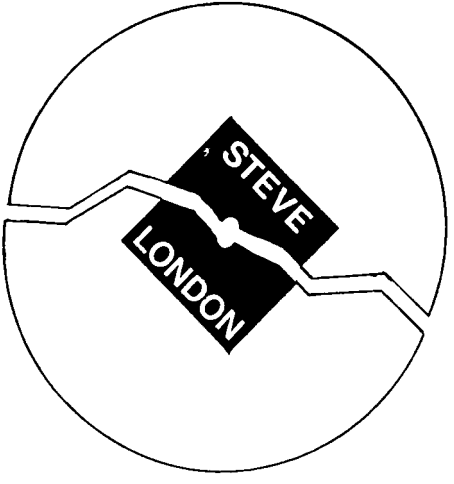
He lies there sobbing deep liquid sobs, while the several stains on his robe spread to commingle. The knives rise again and fall again. And he is still. The priests slip back their hoods and shake loose their long tresses.

And they take him and tear him asunder and rain his body on the multitude that it may feed. And his head is carried to the river and set afloat. It bobs and rolls and drifts downstream, all the while moaning softly to the waters.

5 Steve steps out into the monochrome evening, his mind littered with the fragments of a thousand different colours. Behind him, a crowd of other Steves, just as dead-eyed and drained as he, spills out of the Club and sweeps him along the street. Gradually, it thins. He finds himself alone.

His consciousness flickers back into being, and he begins to realise where he is, who he is. It's Friday night, and all his money has gone. The story is over, at least until he can afford it again. It goes so fast, you just can't hold on to it. You're left with nothing but the needlemark in your arm and the two stigmata on the back of your head.

He shivers. The street in front of him is the one where every day he drives the company's truck.



Anne Warren

Sense and Sensibility

STRATEGIC USES OF SENSORY DESCRIPTION

A RECENT PREOCCUPATION of mine has been the effect of describing scenes in different ways; specifically, the effect of describing in terms of one sense rather than another. An author usually has a choice of several sensations to use when putting across a picture. He may describe what can be seen or heard, or what a character smells, touches, tastes. Some of the senses may be more appropriate than others in building up an image - sleighs will usually elicit some mention of the chime of bells, for example, since that is an obvious feature. However, good descriptive passages do not only aim for accuracy of description, but also to establish emotional tone. The words should not only convey a precise picture in the reader's conscious awareness, but also manipulate him in more subtle ways. It is this, the way in which the sense used to perceive the scene affects the reader's sensibility, that I am hoping to explore in this article.

My first thoughts on this subject arose out of the observation that certain pieces of writing I liked very much were distinctive in that they evoked sensations of touch. Somehow such descriptions always seemed nearer to me in some way than purely visual descriptions - they made me become more involved, putting me inside the character's skin. Once I was sensitised to this, it became obvious to me that this kind of writing is not very common. Some authors manage to do without the sense of touch almost entirely. Zelazny, for example, rarely uses touch description. This is one reason why he can get away with what I would call 'clean' or 'heroic' torture scenes (as at the beginning of Creatures of Light and Darkness) - because he does not involve the reader in the painful sensations. I began to form a rough theory at this stage, categorising the types of sensory description in terms of the distance or intimacy they imposed on the reader. Perhaps not surprisingly, the senses which can operate best at a distance could be more impersonal, less involving, than those which operate at short range. In order of their range of application then, the senses would be:

sight	(horizon)
hearing	(miles)
smell	(yards)
touch	(skin contact)
taste	(internal)

It is also worth noting that a group of people can stand together and see, hear and smell the same things; but that touch and taste are entirely individual. So description in terms of touch and taste could be expected to be particularly involving. Perhaps I should make it clear at this point that I am not saying that visual description is necessarily not as involving as the 'closer' senses - but that it has the capacity to be more remote. Thus if the author wishes

to create a sense of ethereality - perhaps a dream sequence - he is likely to stick to vision only, possibly hearing, in order to convey the sense of non-involvement. If the hero is experiencing touch and taste sensations, it creates a feeling that he is bound up in the dream, being swept along by it, capable of being harmed by it. Touch and taste create a feeling of earthiness and sensuality, of solidity. If you can imagine a sequence in which the hero is dreaming purely visually - he can't hear, or use any of the 'closer' senses - it will become obvious that an aura of unreality will pervade the experience. Turn the situation on its head, however, and imagine a situation where the only description is touch/taste/smell, and a closer identification with the character is achieved. In fact, loss of the long range senses implies vulnerability, perhaps because of their traditional function as warning channels.

Another factor which may affect the capacity for different senses to convey immediacy is the number of descriptors which are available for each. There is a vast range of words which can be used to describe the visual appearance of objects accurately and non-emotively - round, blue, bright, symmetrical, etc. - but far fewer when it comes to taste. In fact, it is suggested that we can only discriminate along four dimensions of taste, these being sweet, sour, salty and bitter. I don't intend to speculate on why this is, although it is obviously linked to the acuteness of the receptors involved. In terms of writing, it is the effects of this which are important. With fewer accurate words for the 'closer' senses, the author tends to fall back on simile; 'skin like rose petals', 'tart as lemon', 'it felt like a red-hot needle'. Simile tends to be more powerful, more immediate by its very nature, since it relies on the reader to seek and match two internal sensations. This is an active rather than a passive response, and should help bind the reader into what is happening.

An interesting phenomenon is the use of metaphors across the senses (something I'm very fond of in my own writing!) A phrase like 'it looked as soft as velvet', which goes from a 'far' sense to a 'close' one may imply movement - an urge to move nearer, and to touch. Whether this is merely because the implied sensation is a nice one, I don't know. 'It looked as soft as slime'? Hmm.

In the next section, I want to demonstrate the difference between 'far' and 'close' sensory description, and to use it to move on to another way in which choice of sense can be used by the author for strategic purposes. First, two pieces of text.

> 'Cecil walked into the room, stepping over a brown cardboard box full of old books as he did so. The room was unbelievably cluttered. A set of maroon encyclopaedias lay in a staggered pile, green port and wine bottles stood on shelves and floor, and a ragged curtain let in only a little dim light. He removed an untidy pile of papers from a ricketty chair and sat down to wait.'

> 'Celia stood with her hand on the silky mahogany of the door. The air was thick with dust like soup; it caught at the back of her throat, so that her nose tickled and her mouth tasted gummy. The furniture was soft and padded and harboured more dust, as did the limp pages of the books and the dull, furred surfaces of the bottles. She slid some damp papers from a hard, knobbly chair, and sat down to wait.'

I hope this demonstrates my point; the reader becomes more involved with Celia than with Cecil, more curious about why she is there and more concerned if something nasty begins to coil down from the ceiling above her head ...

However, these two bits of description also serve to reveal character and this is another way in which sensory description could be used strategically. If a person walks into a room and notices it mainly in terms of the textures, smells, etc., then that tells us something about their character. Celia, above, comes over as a more sensual person than Cecil. The same difference is interesting; try swapping round the names for the two paragraphs. Women are expected to be more sensual than men, so that if the first paragraph is seen as experienced by Celia, and the second by Cecil, there is something of an anomaly. Celia in the first paragraph seems harder than Cecil did in the same piece of writing.

This use of sensory description to put across character can be taken further for effective use in unusual situations. For example, a blind person will perceive in a more tactile way than a sighted person. Descriptions of a room entered by a blind person can be done with 'close' senses to give an impression of his experiences. This need not be explicitly done; the reader can be manipulated more subtly if the author's camera quietly becomes a taperecorder when describing the scene. You could also have fun in using unusual cross-sense similes - 'her fingers moving in his felt like music', for example, but here it is important to use a light hand. A piece of writing with a multiplicity of cross-sense similes runs the danger of being merely risible rather than atmospheric. A hallmark of good writing is that the reader is affected by, but is unaware of, the uses of senses in description.

The final strategic use for sensory description that I have identified is implied by my categories of 'far' and 'close' senses. One feature of 'far' senses is that they can describe conglomerates. Someone can see a cavalry charge, or hear an orchestra or a mob. You can smell a bouquet or a stable. With touch and taste, your 'field of perception' is much more limited - with touch to a few (different parts of the body may be in contact with different surfaces), taste to one. This allows the author to use the different modes of description as a kind of 'zoom lens' to take in or isolate parts of the scene as he chooses. A purely taste/touch description, as suggested above for a disabled person, would therefore be likely to result in fragmentation of the image. Judicious use of visual description could expand the scene as much or as little as the author wishes.

I have described the use of sensory modes as strategic devices for establishing remoteness or involvement; and for limiting the field of perception, as well as for a few specialised purposes. However, I would not suggest that authors normally think in these terms when constructing a story. It is likely to happen intuitively, out of a 'feel' for description, and what is the right word for the occasion. I see the usefulness of any strategic use of sensory description as being in the final revision stage, rather than at first draft level. However, an added benefit is definitely the understanding of your own style and its likely effects; so that each sense is used flexibly. An awfully large percentage of authors hardly ever allow their characters to <u>feel</u> anything.

"KEEPING A TIGHT SHIP"

The two pieces which follow are edited transcripts of informal talks and question-and-answer sessions which took place at BSFA London meetings during 1983.

JOHN BUSH

CHAIRMAN AND JOINT MANAGING DIRECTOR, VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD.

It's a bit of a nightmare being a publisher. If I suffered from insomnia I couldn't last. Thank God I sleep like a pig. You have a worry nearly every day in publishing - libels, disasters such as printing the author's name wrong. You haven't noticed that they've got 'ei' instead of 'ie', and the book is in the warehouse, all 2000 copies of it. What are you going to do? You've got to keep a very tight ship to make it work.

This leads me to say something about the economics of publishing. If you call the price of a published book £1.00, then 40p goes to the retailer, the wholesaler or the library supplier. He gets a discount of, on average, 40 per cent. The normal bookseller gets 35 per cent, but Smiths and other big wholesalers get more, so it averages out at about 40 per cent. There's a ten per cent royalty to the author. About five per cent goes to the representative who actually sells the book. About five per cent goes on packing and getting it there. That's whopped up 60p. Then you have to produce the book. The cost of putting a book together - designing it, getting it proofed, printed, bound and jacketed - works out proportionately at about 25p. So you've 15p left. That 15p is the publisher's, to pay all his overheads, which are salaries, rent, rates, light, heat, stationery - the whole lot. Hopefully, there's a bit left for profit.

I say hopefully, because quite often there isn't any. If you've paid, perhaps foolishly or generously, the author too big an advance against

royalties, and the royalties aren't earned, then you won't come home. Or if you've printed too many, foolishly again, then you won't come home either. But if everything goes beautifully, and you sell just what you print, and perhaps a few more on reprint, you'll make a small profit at the end of it.

I'm not saying that publishers are badly off and don't make money - we have managed over the years to make enough profit to keep going.

When Victor allowed Hilary Rubenstein and me to start an SF list, I knew nothing about the history of science fiction. But you have readers in publishing. Victor once said to me, 'Of course, the real secret of publishing is never to read a book, but to have marvellous readers. They give you a report. You know their foibles, you know what they are keen on and what they don't like. You can take their reports and read between the lines. You decide to publish on that, and if you can do that you'll make a lot of money. But of course, all publishers are human. I take on books that I rather like, but that nobody else likes at all. They're a choice of mine, and I sometimes lose money on them. The art is really to rely on other people.' And this is so - all publishers have readers, and rely on experts.

I had heard that authors have a pretty foul view of publishers, and that publishers think that authors should be kept at the end of a letter. Well, that is true to a certain extent with some publishers and some authors, but I think that it's very far from the truth generally. It was very far from the truth at Gollancz. I was absolutely determined that for anything for which I was responsible I was going to get to know the authors, and be in touch with them and work with them.

The basis of publishing a book is the contract. This lays down various royalties to be paid to the author, and various responsibilities on the publisher - he's got to bring it out within such-and-such a time, and use his best endeavours to sell it, and so forth; and the author warrants it isn't libellous, and says that it's his own work, and so forth.

The publisher puts down some money and takes the financial risk. A 2500 print run, which is quite normal for a new science fiction novel in hardcover these days, costs something like £5000 to produce physically, before you get it in the warehouse. You've hopefully paid the author some advance on top of that, so you've got quite a lot of finance outstanding. As the author can't finance it himself, because he hasn't got £5000, the publisher finances it. He therefore has a certain right to say how he's going to sell it. He doesn't want somebody else telling him how to get his money back. If he pushes that money out, he wants to row his own boat and try to get it back.

But it's not a question of the author producing, by the sweat of his brow and by years of work, a typescript which is a work of art, and the publisher then taking it and trying to make as much money as he can. It's not like that at all. In fact, you'd be hopelessly unstuck, you'd be out of publishing, if you did it that way. You've got to be very involved with your author.

I'll say a few words about the editor's job. I think that an editor should say if he thinks there's something wrong, but I've always

followed Victor Gollancz, who was adamant that you don't muck about with people's manuscripts. You either take them, or you decide that they're not worth publishing and send them back. Within that, you do sometimes tell the author that you don't think he's got it quite right, and you suggest that he might change it. But if he says no, then you publish it.

I came across a rather interesting letter concerning this business of altering manuscripts, written by Victor. American publishers love editing manuscripts, really editing them. They'll take things out and they'll alter things. You have to submit to this a lot if you want to be published by an American publisher. The idea is to make the book more saleable. I don't think one or two of the better ones do it, but a lot of them do. In the letter, Victor said, 'The one golden rule is that the author should write what he or she wants to write, and not what he or she imagines the publisher or the public would like him or her to write. Though of course it's the publisher's duty to tell an author bluntly just what he thinks about the book. My own view is that he should then leave the author completely free, either to leave the book as it stands, or to make such modifications as he sees fit. In other words, the publisher should act as a literary critic, as a sort of reviewer in advance, and not at all as someone who does the author's work for him. After all, this editing business is comparatively new (as it was then in the States, when he wrote this) and is only applicable to prose writing. Imagine a music publisher editing a composer's work, or an art dealer insisting on an artist modifying a painting. If I were an author, I would sooner very nearly starve than let someone hack my book about.' I think this viewpoint is dead right.

Publication day is very important for an author. He's giving birth to his baby. This long gestation period has been going on - it is actually about nine months. And he's been biting his nails like mad - I know, because my wife's an author, and she bites her nails like mad running up to publication day, wondering what the hell the critics are going to say. You expect that everyone's going to slam the book. You think that it's no good at all, it's a dreadful book, and God knows why you wrote it, and why they've published it, and so on. It's extremely important for the relationship, it's very important for the friendship, to push out those early reviews to the author. Send a telegram, ring him up, tell him there's a smashing review in The Times, tell him he's got the lead, which is super, because that'll set it going for the libraries. This is very important. I was rather determined to get things operating in this way and I hope I did, although I don't think that I always succeeded.

I used to aim at about sixteen SF books a year, not because it wouldn't have been nice to have published 20 or 26, but because sixteen was what fitted in with our other publishing. Also, I found, over the years, that I couldn't find more than about sixteen really good books a year. We do turn down an awful lot. We have the slush pile, as it's known. This is the stuff that comes in direct, in the post. We get, not just in SF, but in all, 30 to 35 typescripts coming in from the blue every week. Every one has to be looked through and read, and a lot of them are totally useless.

Sometimes, but very, very rarely, a good manuscript comes out of the slushpile. Ian Watson did it with The Embedding. It was looked at by me, and immediately I saw that here was a man who could write. With so many of the submissions, people just can't write at all. They can't

get over what they want to say in words which convey their meaning to the reader. And here was immediately something rather exciting, although with faults. There have been one or two others, but there are very, very few. Most of the authors that we publish come through literary agents.

Literary agents are people who act for the author on a ten per cent commission basis, and look after the author. They try to place the book with the publisher who they think is best for that book. If that firm won't take it, they try the next best, and so on down the scale. They'll only take it on if they think there's a chance of it being published. They'll sell your book to a publisher, negotiate the terms, and look after quite a lot of the subsidiary rights. They'll hopefully sell the foreign rights, serial rights, and other things like that. Most of the books which English publishers publish tend to come from literary agents, because they are a first screen through which the books have to go.

But I think that every publisher, and we certainly do, watches the direct submissions - because the great, exciting thing in publishing is to have something come straight in to the firm, not from an agent, not with push behind it, and be able to say, 'My God, this is marvellous'. In publishing, this is the most exciting thing of all that can happen in a year's work. You can say, 'Here's a new author', and the person will hopefully be one of your authors for years and years to come.

Sometimes one turns a book down wrongly. For example, Victor turned down John Updike's Rabbit Run. There was a particular passage that Victor couldn't stomach. I turned down Fritz Leiber's Nebula Award winner, The Wanderer. There's a scene in there that I thought that Victor was going to loathe so much that we couldn't possibly publish the book. So I told the London agent of the American agent of Fritz Leiber that if he'd take this out - it was only three lines - we'd love to publish it. The agent said there wasn't a chance of taking it out - there wasn't a hope of him altering it.

I met Fritz in Milford some years later, and I summoned up courage to say to him that I was terribly sorry we'd turned down The Wanderer because of that passage. He said that he didn't like the passage, he was worried about it, but the Americans insist that he keep it in. This is where sometimes an agent can come between an author and a publisher. You get on much better talking with an author, finding out what he feels about the book, then you do writing a letter to the agent, who then writes to the author, and puts a bit of a slant on it, and so on and so forth.

Question: In the old days with Victor Gollancz, there always used to be a political association. Do you still have that today?

John: No. Victor was a socialist. He ran the Left Book Club, which was the first political book club. It was the first serious book club in a way, and it had a membership of 60,000. It started in 1936 and ran through to 1947, when it tailed off, when Labour were in power. It was a left-wing education thing, to try and educate people about how the world

worked. Victor himself was very knowledgeable, he knew all the politicians, particularly the left wing. We're still a bit left-wing - I think we're Social Democrat now! As a firm, we used to attract certain people. Like attracts like. But now we have nobody who knows enough about it. You've got to have a person who knows what they're doing to publish any specialist list, and we have nobody there at the moment.

Q: On the question of selling books, I was reading in The Guardian a few months ago that the WH Smith/Doubleday Book Club spends more on advertising than the whole of British publishing put together. Don't you think that if British publishers were to advertise a bit more they'd sell more? I mean, they missed out on the Star Wars/Close Encounters boom.

J: The book clubs advertise extensively, full-colour in huge, double-page spreads, in all the most expensive media, like colour supplements and Radio Times - a colossal expense. I don't know whether they spend more than all the other publishers put together - they probably do. Book-clubbing is a purely merchandising operation. They're nice people, but their job is not to decide what is good, but to find what will attract members, what will bring in income. That's their sole criterion. If they don't achieve that, they're out.
I suppose you've only got to watch commercial television to know that huge, expensive advertising is what sells vast quantities of a product. When we publish a book, we don't expect, in general, to sell vast quantities of it - it isn't merchandise, it's not saleable in that way. We've tried spending lots of money on particular books and we've found that if the book is good it'll sell anyway and you don't really have to advertise it much at all. If the public don't like it, if it's not popular, nothing on earth will make them buy it.

Q: What I meant was not anything actually connected with Star Wars, but just the boosting of science fiction. There's a noticeable lack of science fiction in newspaper review columns, even in The Guardian.

J: You can't buy reviewing space. You could take reviewers out to lunch at the Savoy every day, but they wouldn't review your books for you. There's a certain integrity amongst reviewers, and they won't be bought. They flog the copies they get around the bookshops and get half-price for them, that's alright, but they won't be bought, in terms of praising a book. They'll get interested in a book if you take them along to an author's party. They'll meet the author and get interested in the author. They'll look at the book, and they'll be more inclined to write something about it than if they hadn't met the author and got interested. What I do is to write every six months to all the reviewers, some 36 of them, from the Irish Times, the North of England papers, the lot, by name. I tell them what we're publishing during the next six months, with the odd comment about it, particularly with new novels.

Q: This is connected to the present list. Earlier, you mentioned people like Kingsley Amis and Hilary Rubinstein. It seems to me now, twenty years on, that Amis, for example, is not very enamoured of modern science fiction. I gather that to some extent that's true of Hilary Rubinstein as well, and I was just wondering what your own feelings are.

J: Well, I think that it's just as exciting as ever it was.

Q: So there's not a kind of generation problem?

J: No, I don't think there's a generation problem at all. You see, I've handed over to Malcolm Edwards and I'm no longer science fiction editor. I'll answer the question which I think is coming up, which is what I think of Malcolm. God, if we had more people like him in publishing, people who were knowledgeable and who cared, publishing would be a lot better. He cares very much about what's good. I'm looking after Fred Pohl and Frank Herbert, and one or two others, but the new list will be Malcolm's. We think very much alike - we always have done. He was my reader, and you don't employ readers if you don't agree with what they say - you get somebody else. I think that he wants to build up new authors on the list. He's looking out for things which perhaps I would not have quite gone for. Malcolm will go for them because he's of a younger generation. Yes, there is a difference. But I'll go along with him - I won't say no, it shouldn't be published at all, but I don't take to it perhaps as easily as he does because of the generation gap.

Q: How do you decide who gets the famous yellow jacket with SF on the spine?

J: It depends on whether we think that a book has considerable bookshop potential in hard covers at a high price. Obviously a new Arthur Clarke will, or perhaps a new Asimov, Frank Herbert, or Bob Silverberg. They'll have a bookshop sale, particularly overseas. In Australia, they will take 500 to 1000 copies of a new Bob Silverberg just like that, because he sells out there, at a very high price. We put on, say, £8.95, because it might be a very long book, and they sell it for 27 dollars or something awful in Australia, but they wouldn't take them at all if we didn't have a full-colour jacket on them - we'd be cutting our own throats not to do that, purely commercially. But take Fred Pohl - printing number probably 3000, 3500, something like that. If you put him into the colour jackets, you would up the price by about £1 straight away. That's what it does, if you have a colour jacket. And we still wouldn't sell him in bookshops, because he hasn't got a big bookshop sale in hardcover. People buy his books in paperback, and they borrow them from libraries. We have been told - and I know this is true - that people go around looking for a yellow spine. We've been told this by so many librarians. Somebody comes up and asks for a good thriller or science fiction book, and the librarians just go and find something with a yellow spine. We've tried putting one or two SF authors in different jackets - they've written a book which is not really science fiction, a bit of fantasy, perhaps. We've tried to get a science fiction sale in the bookshops outside the SF genre and we've sold five or six hundred fewer because of this, because it just gets lost among everything else. The SF reading public is very, very faithful, and if you like an author I suspect you're going to borrow the new book when it comes out. You don't want to wait a year for the paperback, when you can borrow it from the library now.

Q: Have you had any SF books that have taken off through not being marketed as SF?

J: We've tried it. We tried it with Philip Dick's A Scanner Darkly, and it didn't go at all. We thought it would, we thought it was such a brilliant novel of madness. It wasn't really science fiction anyway. I mean, there's a sort of weird concept in it, but it was more about drugs and madness than anything else - the pressures of life. We thought it would be good for the fiction market, but it didn't go at all.

Q: Then you did his last one. That wasn't packaged as science fiction, The Transmigration of Timothy Archer.

J: No, that wasn't. That wasn't done by me. That was done by a straight fiction editor. It got marvellous reviews, but it didn't sell. We've got stacks left. We lost money on that. We lost money on A Scanner Darkly. We didn't actually lose cash as such - we got in more cash than we paid out. But we didn't cover salaries, the packaging, these things. It didn't cover the advance we paid him either, anything like. So we were deeply out of pocket. We couldn't care a damn, we still publish him. There's a lot of books you do lose money on - you make it on the big stuff. You make it on Frank Herbert's Dune, hopefully.

Q: Can I ask you about the various awards, like the BSFA, the Hugo, and the Nebula, and what sort of effect they have on the sales, if any?

J: Absolutely none at all. Totally nil. I've never discovered that they've sold a copy more of anything. We used to do the Nebula Award series. The sales went down and down, until we got down to about fourteen or fifteen hundred, and it was just becoming so costly, losing money, that we had to stop. No, no effect.

Q: One thing that interests me about publishing SF in this country is the superstitious dread - yours is a house that seems largely immune to it - that most paperback houses have of short-story collections.

J: I don't know why, because some of the best SF is short stories.

Q: It's not only in SF, is it?

J: Oh no, it's the same with ordinary short stories. They don't sell so well. We gave the printing number for Orbitsville Departure yesterday. I won't tell you what the figure was. We had the figures for the previous three books' sales in front of us; we had two novels, and the last one was stories. And the volume of stories sold two thirds the number of a novel. But they were still publishable - they just tend to sell fewer. It depends on the author, of course. When I was first with the firm, your first printing of a new Daphne du Maurier novel was 100,000 and you were reprinting within a month. You printed 45,000 of a short-story collection, just because it was short stories. That was the kind of ratio for her. In science fiction the ratio is much higher. You sell, not as many, but far closer to the number, because it fits the genre - they're usually very, very good. You never turn down a book just because it's short stories. We wouldn't, although I think the paperbacks might.

MAXIM JAKUBOWSKI

MANAGING DIRECTOR, ZOMBA BOOKS

MY WHOLE YOUTH and schooling occurred in France and it was there that I first came into contact with SF, usually translations of English and American titles, but also some French SF. The road to SF was a clear one. I was an only child and pretty much introverted, and I was reading a hell of a lot; I think I was the epitome of the SF fan or SF writer at an early age. I'd started out with thrillers, but had the feeling that there was something pretty shady about thrillers. I came to England for my final grammar-school year at the French Lycee in London and this is where I began my first writing and my first fanzine - in French. I'm probably the only English SF writer who has done nine fanzines in French and none in English.

During that year I came into contact with the BSFA, which was then in its early days, at an Easter convention in Peterborough. At the age of sixteen and in a drunken mood I volunteered to become a committee member of the BSFA, and so I became one of the first-ever BSFA Secretaries - there's a forgotten fact for you. After the post of BSFA Secretary I went back to France for university and I started meeting many French SF writers. I began doing some translations, probably for the equivalent of a penny per page. I asked the writers, 'the stories you do; how much are you paid a page?', and they said, 'we're paid one pound per page'. So I gave up all my translating work and started writing.

I was rather unfortunate, in that the first story I ever wrote was published; my next year at university was wasted while I wrote another 300 stories, which were all rejected. But on the basis of that one story published, I went to the most prestigious publisher of SF in Paris and persuaded him to let me do an anthology of British SF writers, which was the first of many; it has become a regular feature over the last twenty years. After the anthology, I thought, 'SF is too good for me; I'm going to write a big mainstream novel!' So I wrote it - it was all about a sex-maniac who chases girls all round the world and ends up in South American brothels - and again I was unlucky because somehow it was bought by a publisher and as a result of this I spent the next two years writing mainstream novels which were all rejected.

I wanted to get into publishing, like everybody does, and I sent letters to all the people in London. The only person who replied, and gave me an interview, was Giles Gordon at Gollancz, but I didn't get the job. And I had to get a job; my writing wasn't going to pay the rent. On the strength of my languages, I got a job in the food industry, which I proceeded to conquer; after twelve years I ended

up as Vice-President of Continental Foods, which is a rather large American food group. Throughout that time I wrote very little SF. I probably wrote and published about one story every two years, mostly in France but with some here in New Worlds, although there were some more novels, some pornographic (and highly pseudonymous!) My activities on the SF side have always been marginal. As much as I like SF, I can't write it very well. I'm not really an ideas person, i'm more of a mood person. This is why I find mainstream writing, and also pornography, easier.

After this lightning twelve-year career in the food industry, I began to feel that something was wrong with my life. At the time I was doing a few SF pieces for Science Fiction Monthly and I was also doing record reviews, as music has also been one of the great things in my life. At the party for the launch of a record I came across Richard Branson, the head of the Virgin Group, and we started talking. He wanted to expand Virgin, which included getting into publishing; he invited me to prepare a plan, which I did, and six months later I was given a budget and made Managing Director of Virgin Books.

This was a great experience in that from a writer's point of view I'd seen a lot of the publishing industry, but I'd also been trained in the food industry, which had been a very high-powered marketing experience, using American marketing techniques. And everything I could see about publishing simply amazed me. How could companies make money, how could they be run in such a way? So being given a publishing company and a substantial budget on a silver platter and being told, 'this is yours, create a publishing house according to your own standards', was great.

I'm still very proud of a lot of the things that we did at Virgin Books, even if we did very little SF. We published Jane Saint, a much-criticised book, but I still stand by Josephine Saxton's only novel ever published in England. We published experimental books; we did Rudy Rucker's White Light, which sold 60,000 copies in America and only 4,500 in England. (An aside here on reviews and their effect on sales. White Light had incredible reviews, and in all the prestige places; the Guardian, half a page in the TLS. And the book sold just 4,500 copies.) We also did a few frivolous books, which I enjoy doing, like Rock Stars in their Underpants and Cluck, the true story of chickens in the cinema. Obviously the idea was to get the right balance in the list, and it was a list which was turning in a small profit after eighteen months. There were difficulties, mind you, particularly on the retailing side; for instance we had very few books on sale at WH Smith, who disliked Virgin for its record discounting. And working with Richard Branson can be a difficult experience. Eventually I resigned.

Having been managing director of one publishing company, I couldn't really phone up the managing directors of all the other publishing companies and say, 'could I have your job?' This is the great disadvantage of starting at the top! And obviously there was no way that I wanted to go back as junior editor at the age of 36. So I decided to try something that I'd wanted to do for a long time, and to see if I could do it - write full-time. Most of the books which I'd done at Virgin were ones that I originated; I would go to writers and say, 'I think you should try this sort of book', and they would then do the writing, but

in close contact with me. I still had a lot of ideas for books when I left Virgin. I went to see my agent - Sheri Safran, a high-powered American agent living in London - and gave her all my ideas and we did resumes and she started selling them faster than I could write them. One of these ideas was for a book of rock reviews. I'd review every record which came out in a year and compile a book that way. The only reason I wanted to do this was so that I could keep getting all the review copies free from the record companies. (Records are rather expensive these days, and I'm a maniac collector) My agent seemed keen but as an ex-publisher I knew that the idea wasn't going to be that easy to sell, so I said that I would sell the book for even a nominal advance as it wasn't so much the money I was after as the review copies. I gave her a minimum of £1,000 and she went and sold it for three times more than any fiction book I'd ever done!

I sent round circulars to all the record companies and the records kept on coming through the post. However, there are many independent record companies who don't release many records, and I hadn't bothered sending them my circular. I would just ring up and ask for a review copy whenever they had something coming out. I was on the phone to Jive Records one day and I was asked to hold and I thought, 'what's this?' Then someone called Clive Calder, the chairman of the company, came on and told me that my name had been brought up at a board meeting that morning. They wanted to get into books and they liked what I had done at Virgin - was I interested in setting up another publishing house? About three months later, after a series of talks and budgetary plans which I drew up on the basis of my experience at Virgin, I came to an agreement, not with Jive Records, but with their parent, the Zomba Group.

For about two months we called the company Box Books and we registered it in England. We also had to register in New York, because we wanted to be active in America too. We sent the name to our New York attorneys, who came back seeing that we could register Box Books in America; however, did we realise that 'box' has sexual implications in America? This was important; Beaver Books, a children's book imprint of Hamlyn Paperbacks, haven't sold a copy in America owing to a similar slang nuance of 'beaver'. As a result, we finally decided, with a bold stroke of the imagination, to call the company Zomba Books.

So Zomba Books is now in existence and is launching in Spring, 1983. We'll be doing all types of books, apart from literary fiction, to my great regret. Much as I would love to indulge myself, my commercial acumen, which obviously I have to rely on, tells me that I can't do literary fiction, at least not for some time. We won't be dealing with children's books, but apart from that we'll hope to publish virtually anything. The fiction will have to be category fiction, i.e., thrillers, or SF, or something which falls into a certain slot. Although Zomba Books is the name of the company, most of the books that we publish will be coming out under separate imprints, with a series of names; Lifestyle Books, the Bee in Bonnet series, Black Box Thrillers. We might eventually have a science fiction series called Space Box Adventures, so somehow we're keeping our 'box'. We have a sizeable budget and our target is to be profitable within two years. We managed it within eighteen months at Virgin, and that was with a number of problems. But in this case I'm happy to

say that we've really made our peace with WH Smith. Five of our first seven titles have been taken by the book clubs, so we've got a number of major titles.

I do intend to use names from within the SF field; for example, the launch title for the Bee in Bonnet imprint is on a controversial non-fiction topic from Michael Moorcock. There is a lot of talent within SF, and also within fandom to a certain extent, which can be funnelled into interesting but commercial areas, and I'll be looking at this closely. It's my publishing house, and I'm pleased to say that the Zomba Group have given me wide powers and a greater degree of independence than I had at Virgin.

Question: How tight was the control on your work at Virgin?

Maxim: Well, I did have a lot of independence, but Richard Branson is very much a gambler. Taking one instance: Richard finds out that a book is being auctioned in London for a very high sum, and suddenly I get a phone call, telling me to get the book at any cost. He disregards all my costings, showing that if we pay £20,000 for that book then we can only lose money, and insists, 'do the book, do the book'.

Q: Everybody who's in publishing has something to say about WH Smith. Are they really as bad as people make out?

M: Well, they are just a big, impersonal organisation. That's really all one can say. They have a rather - I wouldn't say an odd system, but a system which is disliked by publishers, whereby ratings are given to books on a very haphazard basis, which I think is very unfair to books and to authors. A programme on BBC2's 'Book Week' (autumn 1982) showed a WH Smith selection committee. I've been at WH Smith and done my talk to their people, but I've never seen what happens after I leave, and that's what we saw on this programme. The basis on which a book was chosen was absolutely dreadful; and the cover counted for an awful lot. However, one has to accept it, that's the way the book trade is in this country. You find that WH Smith get a 55 per cent discount on a book, which leaves the publisher with a very small margin. Let's take a book with a theoretical price of one pound. WH Smith take 55p, so you're left with 45p. The average book will cost 22p for printing, paper and binding, so you're left with 23p to pay your writers, your sales force, your publicity and your overheads. You're lucky if you've got any profit left out of that. Publishers are not saints. Our job is basically to make money for our investors, and it would be foolish to pretend otherwise. Unfortunately, readers and writers have got a very wrong impression of what publishers are trying to do and have very little idea of the impositions which publishers have in their job. Take the expectations that SF readers have. These days, if an SF paperback is not Heinlein, Dick, Asimov, van Vogt or three or four other names, then it won't sell more than 8,000 copies in this country. A few years ago, the average sales for even the worst SF book would have been 15,000 copies in paperback. People say, 'science fiction, it's great, it's commercial', when in fact, ever since Star Wars, SF sales have been going down.

Q: Is it because more books are being published, or are people buying less? Could films and video games be having an effect?

M: I don't know. Video games perhaps, but they have only really come into being over the last couple of years.

Q: Is it due to the recession, people having less disposable income?

M: Oh yes, very much so. Book sales in general are down, but why is it biting SF to a greater extent than, say, romances or thrillers? In fact, thrillers are up twelve per cent in the last year.

Q: Perhaps it's because there are all these SF films now. The lower end of the market, who previously could only get their kicks through the written word, can now get them through films.

M: I'm not sure, but it does worry me, not so much as a publisher, because as a publisher I've never been involved in science fiction in a big way, but as a staunch SF fan; I'm a collector and a reader. I write very little, because I read so much and see so many good ideas coming from my peers that I think, why should I inflict a new variation on the time-travel story on the world? I know that I can write a family saga for a £15,000 advance, and I can write it in three months with my eyes closed. I would have to work really hard for a couple of years to produce a science fiction book which would earn me a minimal advance. But I do love SF, and produce the occasional piece about it for New Musical Express, on a very irregular basis. In one recent piece I tried to analyse what was going wrong. I have a gut feeling that there are now very few new SF writers coming up in Britain, and I think that the general audience is becoming less literate. But science fiction readers are very much the upper echelon of readers, literate and intelligent, and that is why they are suffering. SF isn't catering for them. In America, there are new writers coming up and they are coming up through George Scithers, whether one likes it or not.

Q: But they can't be very good, can they?

M: No, but how many writers are good for their first few years? If there's a market, the writer will write to it, and hopefully some of the people who are producing for George Scithers at Asimov's or Amazing will get away from that market eventually and start writing better stuff. Ninety percent of them won't, but at least something is happening. In Britain, we have no new SF writers coming up.

Q: Do you honestly think that any of these writers are actually going to develop into anything of worth?

M: If there's just one out of one hundred, then yes, I think that the existence of Asimov's is justified. Any new writer needs that training ground, even if he writes bad stuff in the process.

Q: The only prominent writer who has come up through Asimov's that I can think of is Barry Longyear.

M: He's an awful writer, but I'm sure better ones will be coming up. In this country, I think that the big problem is the lack of literacy amongst younger readers, due very much to the educational system, which is deteriorating fast. To go back to an earlier

question, yes, there is the Star Wars phenomenon to consider with the younger readers. I'd defend Star Wars as a very good film, and I thought that it would do a lot for science fiction, bringing a lot of people to it. However, the majority of these new people then went on to comics and video games rather than literary science fiction.

Q: Is the deterioration in the readership a world-wide trend?

M: Well, there are good British writers, but they can't seem to sell in America. That's another problem. Rather than going for Ballard or Priest novels, readers are going for Asimov reprints and things like that. They are looking for the easy option, for escapism.

Q: Is that because that's what they're supplied with?

M: A question of availability, yes, it's a vicious circle. Any publisher will say, 'if it sells, let's do more'.

Q: Has there been a backlash from corporate policies in America?

M: The latest problem is that in America, as in Britain, science fiction is losing ground, but in America it's very much a wholesaling problem, because the large majority of paperback selling in America is done through wholesalers. Basically, the publisher subscribes with the wholesaler, who will say to him, 'okay, this month I'll take X copies of science fiction from you'. And the wholesaler knows that he has 200,000 racks to fill. A few years ago he would have said, 'for my 200,000 I'll take 60,000 SF, 40,000 thrillers, 50,000 romances and 50,000 war and westerns'. But romance has now become so popular that they're taking say 100,000 romance, and science fiction has been suffering as a result. And obviously publishers, seeing that the wholesalers are taking less are publishing less and doing smaller print runs.

TOTLEIGH BARTON SF WRITING COURSE 1983

David Piper

I was one of sixteen people who attended a science-fiction and fantasy writing course with tutors John Brunner and Lisa Tuttle which was held at Totleigh Barton in Devon last July. Totleigh Barton is an ancient manor house owned by the Arvon Foundation and used throughout the year for courses of interest to writers, poets and playwrights. Having never attended such a course before I was rather uncertain about its value: would it be a waste of time and money? The price was quite reasonable for an event of this sort but certainly not inconsiderable for someone on the dole. My conclusion now is that participation in workshops, conferences, or writing courses can be an extremely valuable experience for any person who seriously wishes to improve the quality of her writing. The purpose of this article is to give some impression of the five-day course in the hope that others will be encouraged to participate in similar events.

Totleigh Barton is an ideal place for a writer to work. An outlying barn has been converted into a large work room with plenty of tables and typewriters. The spacious garden containing two large wooden tables is, in good weather, another favourite place for composition and relaxation. The lounge with its huge fireplace is cosy enough to produce a suitably warm and intimate atmosphere for any meetings. But above all else, the fact that the place is set up to facilitate writing and that is what you are all there to do, produces an atmosphere of respect for the writer at work. There's a sense of acceptance: you don't have to feel apologetic if you walk around in silence thinking over an idea - people understand. You don't have to ask people to leave you alone or have to try to explain to them what you're doing. It was a great encouragement in itself simply to be able to relate to other people who were seeking to write successfully and to hear about other people's difficulties and triumphs in this area. I have always written 'in a vacuum' and have had almost no contact with other writers, let alone with writers who share my interest in SF. Since the thought of a huge SF convention still terrifies me, this workshop was a good place to start.

I realized that John Brunner and Lisa Tuttle were not god-like figures with spectacular creative abilities that I was unfortunately born without. They are, apparently, as human as anyone else. The course did not consist of a formal and structured programme with students being bossed around and made to feel inferior, but rather of John and Lisa willingly and gladly sharing their experience with us, perfectly content either to make suggestions or be guided by the specific interests and needs of a particular person. Throughout the course they were always totally approachable and eager to help with a writing problem. I was particularly impressed by the positive tone which they adopted at group readings. This was not a savage tear-each-other-to-bits course which may be appropriate at a more advanced level. Perhaps the greatest difference between the amateur and the professional attitude to writing is self-confidence. When amateurs suspect that a piece of work is no good, they generally lack the confidence to examine it critically. The professional

attitude involves the confident use of one's personal critical faculties as well as the ability to accept criticism from others and learn from it. And who better to foster a professional approach to writing than people who have successfully learned to do it themselves? Not only that, but the whole process need not always be traumatic, harrowing, or deeply intense - it can actually be a great deal of fun!

The course began on Thursday evening and ended the following Tuesday morning. This gave people enough time to get to know each other and get over initial nervousness before beginning four solid days which could be used for workshop purposes. I felt that this was a sensible way of arranging things. In the rather nervous atmosphere of our first evening session on the Thursday night, we all introduced ourselves, saying what we had written, if we were published and describing our particular difficulties in writing. The wide range of age, experience and interest was one of the factors which, I think, helped to make the course so successful. We had professional working people, unemployed people, students, people who work at home or who were retired. We had people in their teens, twenties, thirties, forties, fifties and sixties. Some of us were primarily interested in writing SF, others had more catholic interests whilst some had never even read SF before and didn't even know what it was. One man had published a single novel, one woman had a large collection of friendly rejection slips for her several novels, others had never made any attempt to get their work into print. As we moved around the circle one by one describing our needs and difficulties, I realized how each one of us, at whatever level, was involved in the same creative process and, during the course of that session, the group became, for me, a cohesive unit rather than a random collection of individuals.

That first evening session was the most formal we ever had. John Brunner stressed some of the principles of writing, for example, that 'the essence of story is change' and that the place where this happens is inside a character. Referring to the famous dictum that there are only three plots (boy meets girl, the little tailor, and man learns better) he said that these plots are precisely equivalent to the only three ways in which people can change (emotional involvement, self-discovery, and the force of uncontrollable outside circumstances). From this and similar thoughts arose a general discussion which lasted most of the evening, in the course of which we were set our first exercise to be presented the next day.

The days at Totleigh Barton quickly assumed an idyllic routine of their own, with no friends popping round for a chat, no children who needed feeding or loving, no responsibilities, commitments, or other demands on one's time. We were free to write, and to write at the pace and intensity which we chose for ourselves. Nobody kept tabs on anybody else and there were no prizes for number of words produced nor any other sense of pressure but one's own desire to write.

On most evenings we would get together after eating and each person would read out something they had produced. Every piece was subject to constructive criticism and appreciation and these readings proved to be a central and popular feature of the course. Exercises were of the usual sort - in our case, the writing of a single incident from two points of view, describing an event in a totally inappropriate style, and the 'single change' exercise in which one tries to imagine a single change that might happen in the world and write about it, so that, without mentioning it specifically, the audience is able to guess what it is. Although such exercises may sound relatively unexciting, they are valuable spurs to the imagination, forcing the writer to focus on areas that might other-

wise be ignored. Not only did the overall standard of writing improve dramatically over the space of the four days, but the groups showed a strong talent for humour with some readings having us all rolling about with laughter. Most popular were a Western told in the style of Deuteronomy and a radio report about the Ayatolla of Canterbury....

An interesting feature of the course was the total lack of emphasis placed on SF itself: all the emphasis was on good writing and labels became an irrelevance in such a context. SF is characterized by imaginative, speculative writing and most of the writing we produced would probably have met this description, but it never even occurred to me to wonder if a certain piece being read out was SF or not. Personally, I am beginning to think that the label is becoming increasingly useless as time goes by.

In addition to the group exercises our hard-working tutors took time during the first day to interview every single person separately in order to discover more about their individual needs and difficulties. As a result of these interviews, we were all set personalized exercises. I cannot speak for anyone else but my own exercise was invaluable: I was asked to write a story of a specific type which I would normally avoid; this forced me to think in an entirely new way about my material. I spent long hours agonizing over how to approach it, but once I got started it came quite well and the eventual result was most satisfactory. The exercise helped me to realize what was lacking in my normal approach to fiction.

At the beginning of the course people were invited to submit any material they had brought with them to the course tutors who spent long hours heroically wading through it all and further hours explaining to hopeful authors what was wrong with it, why it had been rejected by publishers, how it could be improved, etc. They also read all the individual exercises that were produced and gave constructive criticism on these as well. At the end of the course they emphasised how impressed they were by the progress we had made - from the frankly self-conscious style that characterized the material written before the course, to writing that was far more self-assured and precise.

The keynotes of the course for me, then, were flexibility and positive feedback. I found the critical comments tremendously helpful and the appreciations most encouraging. In addition to all this there was plenty of time for relaxing and getting to know each other, for walks by the river, visits to the local pub or long conversations lasting into the small hours of the night. All in all there was a very good mix of work and play at Totleigh Barton.

The final night was the best of all: a gourmet creation by John Brunner was followed by a reading from John Sladek, guest for the evening. This was followed in turn by a last, hilarious reading of group exercises and entries for the 1983 Totleigh Barton limerick competition. The evening ended with the reading of an eerie tale by Lisa Tuttle and a selection of Brunneresque poetry.

I came away from the course feeling far more confident about my abilities as a writer, far more aware of my faults, a lot clearer about the difficulties that lie ahead of me and a hell of a lot more determined to overcome them. I think that virtually all the other participants found the course to have been a beneficial experience and if you are an aspiring writer I can only urge you to attend a similar course. I don't think you'll regret it.

MARKET SPACE

DOROTHY DAVIES REPORTS:-

What can I offer you this time, in an ever-shrinking market?

FANTASY BOOK, PO Box 4193, Pasadena, CA 91106, USA.
A well turned-out magazine, nicely printed, fast reply time. They say they are looking less for 'gimmicky' stories than for those which have strong characterisations. Aren't we all?

SPECTRUM STORIES, PO Box 13945, Arlington, TX 76013, USA.
They are looking for stories of between 3000 and 8000 words in the fields of SF, fantasy and heroic fantasy adventure which achieve literary excellence and have good characterisation and entertaining plots with resolution. Try them. A manuscript I sent didn't arrive/come back, but that could have been the postal services.

MOONSCAPE, Box 1858, Swan River, Manitoba, Canada ROL 1ZO.
They're looking for SF, fantasy, horror, but no space opera or sword and sorcery. I sent a story and received an airmail reply, nice, but no ms, not so nice. Send photostats or good carbons.

SWANK, 888 7th Avenue, New York 10019, USA. A 'glamour' magazine, but they accept SF, word limit 3000. I once had a strange wordy letter from the editor, which in essence boiled down to the fact that 3000 words doesn't give you enough space to establish an alien landscape/civilisation, so they prefer earthbound stories.

Back to Great Britain ...

SHADOWLAND, Margaret Hall, Kings Youth Hostel, Dolgellau, Gwynedd, LL40 1TB.
Imaginative and literate SF/fantasy wanted. Artists should submit duplicates only of representative work as the editors wish to commission illustrations. No payment other than complimentary copies.

CASSANDRA, 8 Wandsford Walk, Thorplands Brook, Northampton.
A writers' workshop that hopes to publish a regular anthology of its output, and is willing to entertain submissions from outside the workshop. Again, don't look for payment.

If anyone knows of any good small press publications that print SF and are worth supporting, let me know and I'll mention them here. Small press can become big press if enough people give a helping hand, or a free story or two. I've watched some promising small press publications go down under the weight of submissions and not subscriptions. If we all support one magazine each - all of us - a few might become something really good. Think about it.

.. Arizona (U.S.A.).
. Arkansas (U.S.A.).
M.S., Associate of the Royal Society of
nature Painters.
P.S., Associate of the Royal Photographic
ety.
R., Lat. anno regni regis (reginae), in the
r of the king's (queen's) reign.
arrives (of train &c.).
S.A., Associate of the Royal Scottish
demy; Associate of the Royal Society
Arts.
S.L., Associate of the Royal Society of
rature.
S.M., Associate of the Royal School of
es (now Royal College of Science).
S.W., Associate of the Royal Scottish
of Painters in Water Colours.
article.
W.A., Associate of the Royal West of
and Academy.
S., Associate of the Royal Society of
ers in Water Colours.
Anglo-Saxon.
senic (chem.).
A., Amateur Swimming Association.
A., Associate of the Society of Incor-
ed Accountants and Auditors.
., St. Asaph, in signature of Bishop.
Army Service Corps (since 1918,
.C.
Associate in Science.
., Amalgamated Society of Engineers.
E. & F., Associated Society of Loco-
e Engineers and Firemen.
S., Amalgamated Society of Railway
ants.
association.
., associate, association.
assistant.
astrology.
astronomy.
C.L., Associate of Trinity College (of
, London.
-Gen., Attorney-General.
atmosphere(s).
., atomic weight.
ngstrom unit (physics).
aurum, gold (chem.).
C., Lat. anno urbis conditae or ab urbe
a, in the year of, or from the foundation
e city (Rome).
August.
Austria; Austrian.
auxiliary.
Authorized Version.
verage.
avoirdupois.

on (chem.); black (of pencil lead).

; (cricket) bowled, bye.
Lat. Baccalaureus Artium, Bachelor of
, British Academy; British Association.
arium (chem.).
ertebrology.
gr. sc., Bachelor of Agriculture.
-Slav., Balto-Slavic.
S., brandy and soda.
W., Bath and Wells, in signature of

Baronet
St. Bartholomew's Hospital.
& Well., Bath and Wells, in signature

Battery; Battalion.
battalion.
double black (of pencil-lead).
Blue Book.
treble black (of pencil-lead).
C., British Broadcasting Corporation.
Before Christ; British Columbia.
., Lat. Baccalaureus Chirurgiae, Bachelor
Surgery.
.D., Bachelor of Dental Surgery.
L., Bachelor of Civil Law.
om., Bachelor of Commerce.
S., Bengal Civil Service.

B.D., Bachelor of Divinity.
Bde., Brigade.
Bde. Maj., Brigade Major.
B.D.S., Bachelor of Dental Surgery.
B.E., Bachelor of Engineering; (Order of the) British Empire; Board of Education.
b.e., bill of exchange.
Be, beryllium (chem.).
B.E.A., British East Africa.
Beds, Bedfordshire.
B.E.F., British Expeditionary Force, r
War.
Belg., Belgium; Belgian.
B.Eng., Bachelor of Engineering.
Berks, Berkshire.
B.E.S.A., British Engineering Association.
B. ès L., Fr. Bachelier ès Lettres,
Letters.
B. ès S., Fr. Bachelier ès Sciences,
Science.
B.F.B.S., British and Foreign Bible
B.G.G.S., Brigadier-General, General
B'ham, Birmingham.
B'head, Birkenhead.
b.h.p., brake horse-power.
B.I., British India.
Bi, bismuth (chem.).
Bib., Biblical
bibliog., bibliography; bibliographical.
biog., biography; biographical.
biol., biology; biological.
bk., book, bank.
bkg., banking
bkrpt., bankrupt.
bkt., basket
B.L., Bachelor of Law; black letter; breech-loading.
b.l., bill of lading.
bl., barrel; bale.
B.Litt., Bachelor of Letters (Literature).
B.LL., Bachelor of Laws, more commonly LL.B.
B.M., Bachelor of Medicine, more commonly M.B.; Lat. Beata Maria, Blessed Mary, the Virgin, more commonly B.V.M.; Lat. beatae memoriae, of blessed memory; Brigade Major; British Museum.
B.M.A., British Medical Association.
B.M.E., Bachelor of Mining Engineering.
B.M.J., British Medical Journal.
B.Mus., Bachelor of Music, more commonly Mus. Bac.; British Museum.
B.N.C., Brasenose College, Oxford.
B.N.O.C., British National Opera Company.
b.o., branch office; buyer's option.
B.O.A., British Olympic Association; British Optical Association.
B.O.A.F.G., British Order of Ancient Free Gardeners
B. of E., Bank of England; Board of Education.
B. of H., Band of Hope; Board of Health.
B. of T., Board of Trade.
bomb., bombardier.
Bom. C.S., Bombay Civil Service
Bom. S.C., Bombay Staff Corps.
B.O.P., Boys' Own Paper.
bor., borough.
bos'n, boatswain.
bot., botany; botanical.
B.P., British Pharmacopoeia; the British public (humorous).
b.p., below proof (of spirits); bills payable; birthplace; boiling-point.
B.-P., Baden-Powell.
bp., bishop.
B.P.B., bank post bills.
Bp. Suff., Bishop Suffragan.
B.Q., Lat. bene quiescat, may he (she) rest well.
Br, bromine (chem.).
Br., Brother; Brigade; Brig.; Bombardier; Bugler.
b.r., bills receivable.
Brazil., Brazilian.
B.R.C.S., British Red Cross Society.
b. rec., bills receivable.
Brecon, Brecknockshire.
Bret., Breton.

brev., brevet; brevier.
Brig., Brigade; Brigadier.
Brig.-Gen., Brigadier-General.
Brit., Britain; British; Britannia.
Brit. Mus., British Museum.
Brit. Pharm., British Pharmacopoeia.
Britt., Lat. Brittaniarum, of (all) the
ions.

mercial).

; Bachelor of Science

sale.
ion; Birmingham
School at Athens.

f London.
Rome.

ology.
ermal unit.
oard of Trade unit.

bu., bushel.
Bucks, Buckinghamshire.
Bulg., Bulgaria; Bulgarian.
B.V., Bible Version (of the Psalms).
B.V.M., Lat. Beata Virgo Maria, the Blessed Virgin Mary.
B.W., Board of Works; bonded warehouse; Black Watch.
B.W.G., Birmingham wire gauge.
B.W.I., British West Indies.
B.W.T.A., British Women's Temperance Association.

C., Roman numeral, centum, 100; carbon (chem.).
C., Cape; Catholic; Centigrade; Conservative.
c., Lat. circa, circum, circiter, about; cent; centime; chapter; child; (cricket) caught.
C3, lowest in physique, state of health, efficiency, &c.
C.A., Chartered Accountant; Chief Accountant; Commercial Agent; County Alderman; Court of Appeal; Church Association; Church Army.
Ca, calcium (chem.).
ca., cathode (elect.).
ca., Lat. circa, about.
cad., cadenza (mus.).
cet. par., see cet. par.
C.A.F., Curates' Augmentation Fund.
Cal., California (U.S.A.).
C. Am., Central America(n).
Cambs., Cambridgeshire.
Can., Canada; Canon; Canto; Cantoris (of choir).
c. & b., caught and bowled (cricket).
Cant., Canticles (O.T.); Canterbury.
Cantab., Cambridge University; member of Cambridge University.
cantab., cantabile (music).
Cantuar., Lat. Cantuariensis, of Canterbury, in signature of Archbishop.
cap., Lat. capitulum, chapter; capital letter; number of statute in year of reign of sovereign; captain.
caps., capital letters.
Capt., Captain.
Car., Lat. Carolus, Charles.
Card., Cardinal.
Cardig., Cardiganshire.
Carib., Caribbean.
Carliol., Carlisle, in signature of Bishop.
Carmarths., Carmarthenshire.
cat., catalogue; catechism.
Cath., Catholic; Cathedral.
cath., cathode (elect.).
Cathol., Catholic; Catholicus.
cav., cavalry; caveat (law).
C.B., Companion of the Bath (civil or military); confined to barracks, as punishment in army; Cape Breton (Canada); County Borough.
Cb, columbium (chem.).
C.B.E., Commander of the British Empire.

C.B.S., Conf
ment; Chu
C.C., Caius
ony; Cham
Common C
County Cou
Club; Cycl
c.c., cubic ce
C.C.C., Corp
Cambridge
C.C.P., Cou
Civil Proce
C.C.S., Ceyl
ing Station
C.D., Chance
Cd, cadmium
Cd., Commar
cd., could.
C.D. (Acts),
c.d.v., carte-
C.E., Civil En
of England.
Ce, cerium (
Cels., Celsius
Celt., Celtic
C.E.M.S., C
Cent., Centig
cent., Lat. c
Cent. Am.,
cert., certif
C.E.S.S.I.,
Institution.
Cestr., Chest
cet. par., L
being equal
C.E.T.S., C
Society.
C.E.U., Chri
C.E.W.M.S.
Men's Socie
C.F., Chaplai
cf., Lat. conf
C.F.G., Fr. C
General Co
c.f.i., cost, fr
C.G., Captain
Coast Guar
missary Ge
cg., centigram
C.G.H., Cape
C.G.M., Con
C.G.S., Chief
gramme-sec
ment.
C.H., Compa
Court Hous
Ch., Church
Chap., Chapl
Chap.-Gen.
Chas., Charl
Ch.B., Lat.
of Surgery.
Ch.Ch., Chri
chem., chem
Ches., Chesh
Chev., Fr. C
Chin., China
Ch.J., Chief
Ch.M., Lat.
Surgery.
Chmn., Chai
chq., cheque.
Chron., Chro
chron., chron
chrs., chamb
C.I., (Imperi
(for ladies)
Cicestr., Chi
C.I.D., Crim
Scotland Y
C.I.E., Comp
c.i.f.c., cost
mission.
C.I.G.S., Ch
C.I.Mech.E.
Mechanical
C.-in-C., Co
circ., Lat. ci
cit., citation

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