

FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

9

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editorial

Peter Nicholls

We hope our long-term readers, who have been hearing of our publication difficulties in editorial after editorial for some years, will be relieved to hear that we've finally given up any attempt to keep a regular schedule. I have received a number of sympathetic letters from readers who, after following the convoluted saga of our publication schedules for several issues, have been moved to write worried letters enquiring about the state of my nervous equilibrium. We will continue to aim at three issues a year (and subscriptions will continue to be for three issues), but we now announce ourselves on the title page as an irregular magazine. Don't worry. There is no doubt at all about our continued life and vigour. Subscriptions are coming in faster than ever, and interest in the magazine has never been higher. The material we are receiving from contributors continues to be strong, too.

The move to an irregular schedule and the new rise in subscription rates were both inevitable, with conditions in the printing industry being what they are, and our staff being as small as it is. We will hold the new subscription rates as long as possible, but they will be readjusted again, probably in about a year, if inflation keeps on at the present rate. For the same reason — THIS IS IMPORTANT — we will no longer accept subscriptions for more than three consecutive issues. Those loyal but lucky readers who paid for twelve issues back at the beginning, are getting the sort of bargain which if it were multiplied a few times, might well bankrupt us.

There are two innovations in this issue. The first is a much longer letter column, in response to many requests (and — to be candid — more

good publishable letters). The second is a separate 16-page Index to our first eight issues. There will be more innovations again in our next issue: there has been a reshuffle of staff. I will continue as editor, Ian Watson is coming in to replace Malcolm Edwards as associate editor, and Christopher Priest will be an associate editor rather than reviews editor.

The next issue, Foundation number 10, will be in four parts. Ian Watson will be primarily responsible for Features; Christopher Priest will edit a new Forum section of the journal; and I will continue with the Letters and take over the Reviews. In practice (as before) the editing of Foundation will be very much a team effort. We welcome all letters commenting on our present editorial policies, and would be interested to learn of any reforms you would like to see. (At the moment our mail is evenly divided between readers who feel that our policy is too flippant, and those who feel we're too serious. The other great dividing line turned out to be Bob Shaw's review of Malzberg's Beyond Apollo, which aroused torrid passions in the readership, part of which supposed Mr. Shaw to be an illiterate, while others saw him as the keenest analytical mind to emerge from Ireland since Jonathan Swift.)

The biggest single success of the Science Fiction Foundation in recent months was the Lecture Series we sponsored at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in January, February and March. The audience, interestingly, was not fannish. It consisted of that intelligent general readership which we all know exists, but seldom meet. It is possible (some people — not myself — would say desirable) to have a strong interest in science fiction without ever attending a convention. Nearly all the lectures were delivered to full houses, and on one evening over a hundred had to be turned away. The speakers were Ursula Le Guin, Dr. Edward de Bono, Professor John Taylor, John Brunner, Harry Harrison, Alvin Toffler, Alan Garner, Thomas Disch, Robert Sheckley and myself. The lectures will be published in a book entitled Science Fiction at Large by Gollancz in 1976. It will also contain contributions by Samuel Delany and Philip K. Dick (who was unfortunately prevented from giving his scheduled lecture because of ill health).

Finally, the Science Fiction Foundation, which for years has been building up a substantial research collection of books and magazines of and about science fiction (all contributions welcome, especially off-prints and xeroxes of critical articles), is moving into a new area. We are beginning a collection of materials relating to science fiction in the cinema. If any reader has still photographs from films, production handouts, advertising posters, or any related material that they want to dispose of we would be glad to reimburse them for the postage.

Richard Cowper is the tenth contributor to this series, The Profession of Science Fiction. Although he has been writing science fiction for a decade, it is only comparatively recently, with the publication of Clone, that his international reputation has reached a respectable size. I find this a little surprising. My own two favourites among his sf books are Breakthrough and Twilight of Briareus, and Breakthrough has been in print for a number of years now. It is patently a very much finer book than innumerable others, by a variety of hands, that seem to have won more ready acceptance from the science fiction fans. Mr. Cowper is far too polite to say so himself (and I've no idea whether he would agree with me) but I wonder if the slowness of his acceptance is not connected with his non-membership of the sf club. He is not an ex-fan writer, or an attender of conventions. He is not a writer of short stories, and therefore has no apprenticeship in the sf magazines to point to. He has not followed sf trends and fashions in his work. (He may even be unaware that part of the problem with Breakthrough is that its subject, e.s.p., had become unfashionable among sf readers – after the boom of the 1950s – by the time he wrote it.)

the profession of science fiction: x:

The title I have chosen for this piece was not intended to be fanciful: I was searching for some phrase which would capture the 'Who? Me?' sensation I experienced when Peter Nicholls suggested I might contribute to this series. I felt deeply flattered – who wouldn't? – but I was also conscious of the sort of misgivings familiar to a man who arrives at a party and finds he is wearing the wrong clothes. Let me try to explain what I mean.

All the science fiction novelists I have ever spoken to seem to have entered the field by way of the main gate; they cut their milk teeth, as it were, on *Astounding/Analog*, *Amazing*, *Fantastic* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. I crept in over the back fence using an 80,000 word novel called *Breakthrough* as my step ladder. At that time (1964) I had published three previous novels under the name 'Colin Murry'. The reason I chose a pseudonym for *Breakthrough* was, quite simply, that I desperately needed a change of luck. Various Freudian friends of mine

“Richard Cowper” is a pseudonym for Colin Middleton Murry. He is the son (by a second marriage) of the famous writer John Middleton Murry (an excellent critic, but more generally known among literary gossips for being a prominent member of D.H. Lawrence’s circle, and the husband of Katherine Mansfield). Under his real name of Colin Middleton Murry, Cowper has recently had a fascinating memoir of his childhood published by Gollancz. It is called One Hand Clapping. However, it is as Richard Cowper, the science fiction writer, that he is welcome in these pages.

One thing that Cowper does in his books perhaps better than any of his predecessors is to evoke the mysterious landscapes of dreams that surely come to many of us, with precision and beauty, and to ponder their relation to our waking lives. It seems almost a compulsion with him, and indeed it makes for compulsive reading. Cowper is science fiction’s poet of déjà vu.

backwards across the frontier

Richard Cowper

have hinted that there were other, darker, psychological motives, but I still prefer my own explanation if only because it appeals to my superstitious nature.

For all those *Foundation* readers who have not read *Breakthrough* I should perhaps point out that its ostensible subject is E.S.P. — a phenomenon which had fascinated me for many years before I got around to writing the novel. As a matter of fact I had already made fringe use of parapsychology in two of my previous ‘straight’ novels. The difference between them and *Breakthrough* was purely one of emphasis. Even so I had considerable difficulty in getting the book accepted. My previous publishers rejected it out of hand on the grounds that they had no sf list, and when I tried the main British sf houses they shot the manuscript back at me with such alacrity that I doubt if it ever got beyond the office boy. Finally, after its fourth or fifth refusal, I handed the script to a friend of mine who was an ardent sf

reader and asked his opinion. He read the book and told me he thought it was a good novel (which was heartening) but that it wasn't what *he* called sf (which was not). Nevertheless I parcelled it up and cast it once more upon the waters, depressingly aware that, at this rate, I would soon have run out of possible publishers.

But my friend's criticism bothered me and finally I sought him out and taxed him with the question: 'How was it possible for *Breakthrough* to be (a) a good *novel* about E.S.P. and (b) not a good *sf* novel?'

His reply completely floored me. 'Your problem', he said, 'is that your characters are too real. They dominate the ideas. Hell, I almost found myself *believing* in them!'

My reaction to hearing this is best summed up in the words of the Victorian "Punch" caption: *Collapse of Stout Party*. It was, I think, my first indication of how thin the ice was on which I had chosen to skate. What I appeared to have produced in *Breakthrough* was the sort of hybrid which would satisfy nobody. And yet it had satisfied *me* when I was writing it. There was no question but that I had willingly suspended my own disbelief. In that book I had been able to say things about the nature of the human psyche which I could have said in no other available literary form. But if I had not written an sf novel and I had not written a 'straight' novel either, what, in God's name, *had* I written?

I was still trying to decide on the answer when I learnt that the book had at last been accepted — as sf. It appeared in print about a year later and such press notices as I saw treated it kindly. The publishers asked me for another and I offered them the one I have called *Phoenix*. That too got a friendly reception. I was even written to by a couple of people who had read the books and appeared to have enjoyed them. At first it felt rather odd being addressed as 'Dear Mr. Cowper', but I got used to it. Yet, at the back of my mind lingered the uneasy suspicion that I was engaged in perpetrating some outrageous confidence trick and that one day I would be exposed for the fraud I was. Maybe this essay is just a way of crying out: 'Believe me, I am innocent!'

There now follows a straight autobiographical section for which I feel bound to apologize because, although it has undoubted relevance to the question of why I came to be a writer of science fiction, it cannot, such is the nature of things, concern itself specifically with my first tottering footsteps in that exotic field. After all, 'Richard Cowper' was 'born' in 1964 — Colin Murry first saw the light of day in 1926,

and it is way back in the early 30's that the seeds of Cowper's science fiction were first sown.

Those seeds were, I'm almost certain, the stories of Hans Andersen and the tales, myths and legends collected by Andrew Lang into his multicoloured anthologies. As a child I devoured fairy stories voraciously, possibly as an avenue of escape from a rather Grimm family situation. Yet I was far from being a bookish child. If anything, quite the reverse. I was blessed (or cursed?) with an extraordinarily vivid visual imagination and had somehow acquired the ability to identify effortlessly with whatever caught my interest. I don't think I was ever *bored* in my life. I was forever pulling machines to pieces and putting them back together again – not always so successfully. Academically I was the archetypal drop-out. Hopeless at Maths; an imbecile at Latin; and, for the first fourteen years of my life, seemingly incapable of writing any sort of imaginative composition. Since my father had been a child prodigy, an Open Classical Scholar and heaven knows what else besides, there was probably a psychological block somewhere.

At about the age of ten I stumbled across the work of H.G. Wells. I gulped down the *Complete Short Stories* and thought *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* the two most marvellous tales ever written. The same year I read James Jeans' *The Mysterious Universe* and built myself my first telescope and a crystal set. Another landmark was *The Modern Boy*. I can still recall a 'Captain Justice' serial in which the members of a mysterious South American civilization were kept in a state of zombie-like subjection by means of some sort of radio-receiver(?) bracelet clamped around the biceps. Come to think of it, there must have been a good deal of quasi-sf in those boys' magazines between the wars. *The Wizard*, the *Hotspur*, the *Rover* and the *Adventure* were frequently trotting out something rich and strange to pep up their usual bland fare of public school, sport, and healthy high jinks on and above the Western Front. There was also a library of fourpenny paper-back novels – weren't they called *Tales of Science and Wonder?* – which purveyed a pretty hair-raising line in covers if little else.

However, at no time did science fiction dominate my reading. All was grist to my insatiable mill. As well as my never-forsaken H.G.W., I went through a Rider Haggard period; a Conan Doyle period; an M.R. James period (terrifying!); a Karel Čapek period (why, oh why doesn't somebody reprint *The War With the Newts?*); a Richard Jefferies period;

a John Buchan period; a Sax Rohmer period and several others. In between were always the legends and the fairy tales to which I returned again and again. What I demanded of a book was that I could lose myself in it — dive deep and live it out in my own mind. Nowadays few things make me more depressed than those people who affect to sneer at ‘escapism’. I think I realized early on in life that the ability to ‘escape’ is but to exercise the divine faculty of the human imagination. A great writer lends us his whole sensibility. The intensity of the imaginative experience communicated is what counts. This, basically, is what distinguishes the first rate from the second rate — or worse. The rest is peripheral.

I emerged into adolescence to find myself in a rather peculiar psychological state. For one thing I had considerable difficulty in distinguishing between what was real and what was unreal. Very Berkeleian, to be sure, but also unsettling. Fortunately I had also discovered that I could write. I wrote furiously; desperately: stories, sketches, poems, plays, anything. I lived in a sort of hazy dream — rather isolated but not unhappy. I also discovered Walter de la Mare’s poems. One in particular opened a door through which I wandered. It was called *The Song of Shadows* and began:

*Sweep thy faint strings, Musician,
With thy long, lean hand;
Downward the starry tapers burn,
Soft sinks the waning sand . . .*

Some quality in those lines really haunted me and started me off writing a series of fairy tales. Most of them were sad; a few wildly funny. Tragedy and farce were the two poles between which my creative compass needle lurched dizzily back and forth. When, many years later, I told someone that I regarded my science fiction as ‘fairy tales for adults’ he accused me of denigrating the genre. He could not have been more wrong. I was, indeed, awarding it my ultimate accolade. By then I had discovered in sf the sole extant literary form which would allow me the *total* imaginative freedom I craved, without the inevitable limitation upon adult experience which the fairy tale proper must of necessity impose.

Having reached this point I find myself in something of a dilemma. Do I now skip forwards some twenty odd years and emerge fully-fledged in 1964 as ‘Richard Cowper’, or do I try to show how he came

into existence? Consoling myself with the reflection that the original title of this series was *The Development of a Science Fiction Writer*, I press on regardless.

I managed somehow to scrape through my senior grade exams, specializing in Art, History and Literature, left school and found myself in the lowest possible rank of the Fleet Air Arm. The war still had a year or so to run and I was dimly aware that I might be unlucky enough to get killed. I don't think the prospect worried me unduly. Anyway my spare time was fully occupied in writing and falling romantically in love with a married woman. Then, in 1946 I think it was, a magazine called *Lilliput* accepted one of my short stories. They actually *paid* me for it! Aha, says I to myself, Messrs. Greene and Waugh will be sleeping uneasy in their beds tonight: this, my friends, is *it*. However, the walls of literary London remained strangely impervious to my Lilliputian trumpet blast. During the next two years I sold perhaps half a dozen stories to little magazines and then, suddenly, the magazines weren't there any more. The party was over and with it my hopes of taking the literary world by storm. Talk about waking on the cold hillside!

A deus ex machina in the guise of the Welfare State now came to my rescue and informed me that, by reason of my skill in having avoided a hero's death, I had qualified for a financial grant if I should choose to go to a university. To be frank I didn't fancy it particularly but at least it seemed preferable to any alternative course of action I could think of. Consequently, in October 1948, I found myself at Oxford studying English Literature. The facility in stringing words together which I had by then acquired helped me to squeeze by, and I surfaced eventually with an honours degree and a lot more unpublished stories. That same year (1950) I married a girl who had been so improvident as to allow me to fall in love with her two years previously. She was now studying science at Leicester and thither I sped to join her, having, with commendable forethought, signed myself on in the Leicester University Education Dept. for a teacher's Diploma Course. Anything to postpone actually having to *earn* my own living.

Unlikely though it must seem, I was by now firmly convinced that I would be a professional writer one day. My conviction seemed to grow in direct counter-proportion to my literary success. Nothing seemed able to deter me though my constantly rejected stories came

thumping on to the doormat with monotonous regularity. Eventually I read the message between the lines of the rejection slips: magazine editors, one and all, were moronic, purblind, deviant idiots. Obviously the time had come for me to write a novel. So I did just that. It was called *Before the Snows* and was prefaced by an enormously long quotation from *The Research Magnificent* by H.G. Wells. Its style was an undigested mixture of E.M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, dos Passos, H.E. Bates, various Russians, Flaubert, Maupassant and just about everyone else I had ever read. Here and there were a few fugitive fragments which seemed to have got in by mistake. These were my own. Its ostensible subject (surprise! surprise!) was a young man's falling in love with a married woman. It was pretty bloody awful, but at least it *was* a novel — all 75,000 words of it. Naturally I thought it was a masterpiece. I wrote it in six weeks.

When it had been typed out I sent it off to Messrs. Curtis Brown, having selected them as worthy recipients of my august patronage. That they did not immediately consign my novel to the incinerator now strikes me as wholly remarkable. In fact they even wrote to say that they considered it showed promise while, at the same time, hinting delicately at certain 'flaws in the construction'. I would, I am sure, have contested the point vigorously had I not by then been fighting desperately to hold down my first job as a teacher in a school in Brighton.

In the summer of 1952 I started work on another novel. It was better than the first but also a good deal longer. This meant that I couldn't finish it in one summer holiday. Although I did not realize it at the time, this break was to prove fatal. If I am anything at all I am an *organic* writer. I tell myself the story as I go along. I want to find out what happens next: what my characters are going to say. Each book is in the nature of an exploration, sometimes towards a selected point (which is why I am addicted to the 'forward-flash' technique), sometimes away from one. The genesis of *Clone*, for instance, was this single gnomic paragraph scribbled on the back of an envelope — 'The apple was good', said Norbert. 'The apple was *very* good. But bananas are the best yet.' I watched the novel grow towards that point of post-lapsarian revelation like a plant searching for the light.

Time to Recover — my second attempt at a novel — died from lack

of nurture just when it was bursting into flower. So involved in the story had I become that I went on writing the book in my head while I was back teaching at school again. When I eventually came to take up the story where I had left off, the vital impulse had died. I knew what was going to happen and there was nothing left for me to discover. The sense of real *loss* I experienced might well have been comic if it hadn't been so painful. But at least it taught me a valuable lesson about the *kind* of writer I was. Since then (with one exception) I have finished the first draft of every book I have written in a single burst — usually within five or six weeks. The second draft (longhand like the first) may take anything up to two or three months. Such art as I can command goes into the first draft; the craft into the second. Shaping the first draft — assuming the writing has gone well — is rather like riding a surf-board just ahead of a breaking wave-crest, very much a matter of balance and instinct. My first drafts tend to sprout wild metaphors in profusion. I let them come, knowing that on the second go through I can weed and prune to my heart's content. Probably I'm far too self-indulgent and don't cut severely enough, but I persuade myself that weeds are only flowers growing in the wrong place — a sure sign of fertility of some sort.

In 1954 I wrote my third novel, *The Golden Valley*. It was quite short, about 55,000 words, and highly laconic in style. I had at last discovered the value of short sentences. What's more I had discovered my own *voice*. It may hearten any aspiring novelist who happens to read this to learn that *The Golden Valley* had been turned down by no fewer than nineteen publishers before it was eventually accepted. It was published in 1958 and got the sort of rapturous press reception which might well have turned my head had it not been for all those previous rejections. Two particularly unpleasant traps await the novelist: overnight, best-seller success with a first book at the start of his career, and, at the other end, recognition too late in life to be meaningful. I suspect that the first has proved to be a kiss of death for a lot of promising young talents.

My publishers were naturally delighted with the reception given to *The Golden Valley* and urged me to write another like it. That's a great drawback in publishers, they tend to want you to go on writing the same book for ever and ever. Reviewers are almost worse. How often they appear to take a perverse delight in castigating an author for not

having written a book like his last one, conveniently choosing to forget that when that one appeared they lamented that it wasn't like the one before — which, incidentally, they hadn't liked! Rare indeed is the critic who has sufficient sense of perspective to judge a book purely on its own merits. A writer *has* to experiment if he is to grow. His school is failure. What he reaches for must for ever remain fractionally beyond his grasp. Above all he has to believe in himself — in his own judgement. Ultimately, if he is any good at all, he will create the taste for his own work, but only if he has hacked out his own chosen path. This is not to disparage constructive criticism — would there were more of it! — but simply to reaffirm my belief that the only durable touchstone is a writer's own deepest conviction.

Then again there are those things called 'rules'. Frankly I don't set much store by them. A helpful publisher once showed me a reader's report on a novel of mine which he was in the process of rejecting. Among the reasons for turning it down was the contention that my book broke a 'golden rule' of science fiction, which says that a story is not allowed to have two major catastrophes in one book. Now with all due respect this strikes me as nonsense. If need be a novel can have a dozen catastrophes *providing* they have all been sufficiently intensely imagined to convince the reader of their own inevitability. That, I submit, is the only acid test.

In the four frustrating years which elapsed between *The Golden Valley's* writing and its eventual publication I wandered off and explored various other literary forms. One of these was a quasi-sf radio script called *One Man's Nightmare* about a chap who dreams prophetically that he sees a hydrogen bomb fall on London. It was rejected by the B.B.C. on the grounds that it was too alarming. So I collected together a group of friends and we made a tape-recording of it ourselves. We then played it over to another group of friends and alarmed *them*. Quite pleased with the success of this venture I wrote a second script entitled *Room 2004* about what befalls a disparate group of people *after* they have been killed in a train crash. Quasi-sf again. This one was rejected by the B.B.C. on the grounds that it would be expensive to produce. We went ahead and taped it anyway. By now I had become firmly convinced that I had what it took to write good radio scripts. To prove it to myself I wrote a quite simply non-sf radio play about a sad, middle-aged spinster. I called it *Taj-Mahal by Candlelight*. It was rejected without any reason being given. Ten years later, with-

out a word having been altered, it was to win a prize in a B.B.C. radio play competition and be broadcast. By then, understandably perhaps, I had lost interest in writing for radio.

By this point the perceptive reader (if he's still around) may have observed that though 'Colin Murry' is shuffling sideways and backwards across the frontier into sf, 'Richard Cowper' has still not been conceived, let alone born. But hang on. We're getting there.

Having failed signally in my attempt to rape the B.B.C. I next wrote a couple of full length stage plays. One of these was called *Living by the State* and was set a hundred years into the future. It too was quasi-sf. Not knowing quite what to do with it I sent it off to Granada T.V. They hummed and hawed and made encouraging noises before sending it back to me with various suggestions for improvement. I might well have been tempted to follow these up if *The Golden Valley* had not been published that year. Wisely, I think, I returned to novel writing.

During the next two years I wrote two more novels — *Recollections of a Ghost* and *A Path to the Sea*. They were well reviewed and sold badly. Both, to a minor degree, explored certain phenomena and attitudes of mind familiar to readers of science fiction but they were far from being sf novels. It was almost as if I were reacting to some inner need to stretch the fabric of the 'straight' novel until it could accommodate what I felt I had to say about the nature of human existence. The fabric still held — but only just.

At no time did I ever lose contact with science fiction. I have just dug out a diary for 1960 in which I jotted down a list of some thirty odd books which had impressed me over the previous decade. Among them I find *Childhood's End*, *The Illustrated Man*, Anthony West's *On a Dark Night* (an astonishing *tour de force* of a 'fringe' sf novel), *Tiger! Tiger!*, *A Case of Conscience*, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, *Earth Abides*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Lord of the Flies*, *The Chrysalids* and *More Than Human*. Had I made another such list in 1970 it is quite likely that several of those would have reappeared because I am addicted to re-reading. But alongside them would feature Arthur Koestler's great *Act of Creation* trilogy, Mumford on *Cities*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Zelazny's *A Rose for Ecclesiastes* (now there's a man who ought to be paid a fat retainer on condition that he wrote no more than one book every three years!), *Future Shock*, Ballard's *The Drowned World*, William Golding's *The Inheritors* (a *perfect* book and the only sf novel I would love to have written myself), Rosalind Heywood's

The Sixth Sense and Rattray Taylor's *The Doomsday Book*. The only thing these have in common is that they have all impressed me at one time or another and have, in their different ways, contributed their mite to shaping my own outlook.

Reading back through the list it does not strike me as being in the remotest sense *avant garde* and I daresay I could, if pressed, produce a parallel list which would appear to have no bearing whatsoever upon *sf* and yet which would contain books which have been equally influential upon my own writing. This one would carry a good deal of poetry, a fair amount of art and literary criticism, some history, archaeology and psychology, and – most recent discovery of all – a totally indescribable but wholly remarkable book by Robert Pirsig called: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

1963 was for me one of those years which, at the time appear to be an unholy and chaotic mess but which, in retrospect, can be perceived as genuine watersheds. I spent most of the spring and summer possessed by a demon. The 'art bug' which had been in the habit of biting me from time to time had given me a real working over. I got so badly infected that I didn't want to stop painting even though I had a novel to write. Finally I reached the beginning of September and there I struck a bargain with myself. I would shut myself up in my study for three days. If by the end of that time I wasn't *into* a book I'd call the whole thing off and go back to my paints. In fact the book took off like a rocket from the very first sentence. I all but disembowelled myself in 60,000 words. In three and half weeks the book was finished and so was I. I called it *Man Alive!* (subsequently altered to *Private View*) and waited for the publishers to beat a path to my door. All they beat was a very hasty retreat. I discovered at first hand what it feels like to be called 'a purveyor of pornography'. As a matter of fact the book came within a hairsbreadth of being accepted by Tom Maschler who had just taken over at Jonathan Cape, but the other directors took fright and rejected it *en masse* as being altogether too erotic for their chaste imprint. My heady visions of myself defending my book from the dock of the Old Bailey, reading out selected passages to the jury and watching them rolling around in paroxysms of mirth, evaporated overnight. Truth to tell I became somewhat melancholy. That book had meant more to me than I cared to admit. It was, indeed, somewhat ahead of its time. Ten short years ago – incredible though it seems today – the one thing a writer could not be about *sex*, in a novel, in

England, was *funny*. After all, had we not recently been told in sober judicial tones at the *Lady Chatterley* trial that sex, like Religion, was a Very Serious Matter? So I dried my eyes, put *Private View* away in a drawer, and became 'Richard Cowper'.

Between 1964 and 1969 I wrote the two more or less mainstream sf novels, *Breakthrough* and *Phoenix*, and one off-beat quasi-sf story called *Domino*. In 1967, acting on the sage advice of that supreme iconoclast and literary lonewolf Edmund Cooper, I had sent the first two books to the United States where, to my astonishment and delight, they had been accepted by Ballantine. *Phoenix* was even picked up for The American S.F. Book Club. For the first time in my life I was actually making some real money (as opposed to pocket money) out of my writing.

Then, at just the right moment, I came across an article in *The Author* by John Brunner. It was called: "Dealing in Futures" and it set out in clear, no-nonsense terms the basic economic facts of science fiction writing in Britain. It was far and away the most helpful article I had ever read in *The Author* and undoubtedly it went a long way towards tipping the scale for me. Within a week of reading it I had made up my mind to give free-lancing a go for two years. This particular time span was chosen because my wife and I worked out between us that, if she went back into teaching, her salary — together with such money as we had managed to save over the years — would just about keep us and our two daughters afloat until the summer of '72 even if the worst came to the worst and I didn't manage to earn a penny from my pen. Ah, they don't make wives like that any more!

That July we hauled up our metaphorical anchor and headed out into the shark-infested seas. In the middle of September I began to work on the novel I have called *Kuldesak*. I set it two thousand years into the future and mainly underground. As I went along I worked out in considerable detail the possible nature of a cultural dead-end as well as the mores and vocabulary which might accompany it. I sometimes think that it is the only novel of mine which 'Colin Murry' was surprised to find that he had written. The first draft was completed in six weeks and I went straight into the re-write. A month after that had been completed I dived into the first draft of *The Twilight of Briareus*. It took me two months and by the time it was finished my nerves were vibrating like glass springs. Surfacing from that book was like pulling the plug out of a deep, deep bath. Of all my novels to date (*Private*

View excepted) *Twilight* is the one in which I was most deeply involved. What I was saying in it could *only* have been said through the medium of science fiction. It is my stock answer to all those friends of mine who still persist in lamenting that I have given up writing 'straight' fiction (I haven't, but that is beside the point).

I posted *Twilight* off to my agent, convinced that my gamble had paid off and that I could now safely look forward to extending my two years to three. A month later we set off for a long, well-earned holiday in France and Yugoslavia.

I arrived back in Wales to find a stack of mail awaiting me. Among it was a letter from my agent. She informed me, in worried tones, that *Twilight* had been rejected as unsuitable by the very publisher who, three months previously, had accepted *Kuldesak* with cries of joy.

The effect this rebuff had on me was to make me sit down and read the typescript of *Twilight* through again from beginning to end. Long before I had finished I knew that I was right and they were wrong. My conviction was absolute and unshakable. But what now? In an effort to collect my thoughts I set off for a long walk across the top of the cliffs. After a couple of miles I found I was laughing like a maniac — much to the indignation of the gulls. I had just realized that my grandiloquent gesture of chucking up a well-paid job and going freelance was virtually at an end. Either I locked myself in my study and wrote another *Kuldesak* and then another and another, or I had one final quixotic fling before calling it a day and renewing my subscription to *The Times Educational Supplement*. I chose what seemed to me the cleaner death. Next morning I opened a fresh notebook and wrote the opening sentence of *Clone*.

I started that book with no clearer idea in my head than to 'send up' sf to the skies — or, perhaps it would be truer to say, to send up the kind of sf mind which could not accept *Twilight*. To relieve my frustration I had determined to push the medium to its absolute limit — and then give it one final shove right over the edge. But it didn't quite work out that way. What happened was that by the time I had written the first five hundred words I was completely hooked on Alvin and Norbert. I fell in love with them: it's really as simple as that. I suppose that if there is a sub-category of science fiction known as 'inspired lunacy' that book must qualify for it. And some of the most lunatic episodes are those that are closest to life, which, no doubt, is why it has been classed as dystopic satire. Its literary progenitor was

certainly *Candide*. I don't think I have ever enjoyed writing a book more. As I recall it I spent much of the time laughing out loud.

By the time *Clone* was finished I was quite certain that it was now a case of 'Come in Richard Cowper, your time is up!' even though *Kuldesak* had by then been accepted for hardback publication in the States. I just could not believe that *Clone* would be wanted by anybody. In fact it turned out to be the book which put me on the map as a science fiction writer and has brought me more friendly letters than anything I've ever written. Which just goes to show. Just *what* it goes to show I'm far from certain.

Since *Clone* I have produced two other sf novels and an autobiographical account of my childhood. Checking back through the notebook in which I jot such things down I find I have brief outlines for at least four further science fiction novels and about a dozen sf stories of varying lengths. None of these theme-notes is longer than fifty words and many of them are records of dreams. The ideas for about three quarters of my fiction ('straight' and sf) have come to me in this way, and I know for a fact that I have lost at least one potential supernova of a book simply because I couldn't find a pencil in the bedside table and was too lazy to get out of bed and look for one. By the time I woke up again that dream was gone beyond recall. Too bad. It might have been another *Clone*.

Having just read through those notes for future work it occurs to me that, if there is one single theme, one subject, which intrigues me above all others it is *the nature of human perception*. I suspect that this preoccupation may well be a hangover from that period in my early adolescence during which apparently solid things had a way of seeming to melt beneath my touch — when I experienced what Wordsworth in a marvellously evocative phrase has called: 'Fallings from us, vanishings . . .' In three of my science fiction novels (*Breakthrough*, *Twilight* and *Worlds Apart*) I set out to explore different aspects of the problem: 'What is Reality?' and now, with the books written, I feel I am just as far from knowing the answer as I was when I started out. Nor is orthodox science much help. It has a way of drawing down the blinds just when I want them raised. It dismisses E.S.P. on the grounds that it breaks the Inverse Square Law while, at the same time, it blithely accepts the 'unthinkable' concepts of modern particle physics. What could be more wilfully perverse? I wish someone would have the courage to write up in letters of fire over the doors of every

university in the world Keats' profound observation: 'The only way of strengthening the intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing — to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party.' Try telling that in Gath — or publishing it in the columns of *Nature*!

So on to Peter Nicholls' two final questions: '*Where do I feel myself to be right now?*' and '*Where do I think Science Fiction is at right now?*'

The answer to the first seems simple enough: I feel I have at last joined that small, fortunate minority who are able to do what they enjoy doing most *and* make a living of sorts out of it. Indeed, if Public Lending Right ever gets on to the Statute Book in this country, it might even be a reasonable living. For over twenty years I dreamed of being a full-time professional writer. By that I meant being able to earn a living by writing *only what I myself wanted to write*. By nature and upbringing I am a compromiser (it was a pre-requisite of survival where I came from) but over that one thing it seems that I am constitutionally incapable of compromising. Instinct says no. For fifteen years I was able to arrange my life in such a way that I wrote a novel or play at least every other year. I wrote fast — I always have — and was able to get a first draft done in the eight weeks of a summer holiday. Because I did not *have* to sell what I produced I was able to write to please myself. In the end I found I could write no other way. At times this has tended to make me the despair of agents and publishers, though nowadays, I must say, they seem more inclined to sigh philosophically and hope that, though this particular book isn't exactly what they had in mind, perhaps the next one will be. All I can tell them with confidence is that the next one, like the last, will be about human beings and their relationships — for the rest I just don't *know* — yet. However, I suspect that I may shortly be presenting them with a story set within the framework of some awful global catastrophe if only because, in common with that latter-day Ezekiel J.G. Ballard, I find I really do get a kick out of chronicling disaster.

Being a full-time professional in the field of science fiction has certainly alerted me to some very real dangers facing the writer. Unfortunately, awareness does not render one immune. The most obvious threat is the pressure to over-produce. However much creative energy he has a writer simply cannot go on and on turning out book after book without some loss of vitality and quality. To use a homely metaphor the cistern has to be given time to refill before the toilet will flush properly. In the last four years I have written six books, five of

them science fiction novels. I *could* have written eight: I would *rather* have written four. Here again I find that having a different literary 'persona' provides me with a useful bolt-hole. I am convinced that having spent the last year and a half working on something right outside science fiction I am now in better heart to return to the battlefield. Time alone will show whether I am kidding myself.

Concomitant with over-production is frustration with the genre itself. This is a tricky one but I suspect that a lot of other sf writers will know what I am getting at. In part it stems from the pressure upon the writer to go on repeating himself. Yet each time he does this he inevitably loses a tithe of his freshness of vision and with it a precious fragment of his *respect for himself as a writer*. I liken repetition to drinking hemlock by the teaspoonful. It brings a fatal relaxation of self-imposed critical standards and leads, ultimately, to paralysis of the imagination, for which there is no known cure. We can all name at least half a dozen excellent writers of science fiction who have either opted out of the field or have stopped writing altogether. I am sure their motives for doing so were mixed, but I would be prepared to bet that boredom and frustration were among them. I don't know the answer to this problem and even mentioning it here may seem like biting the hand that feeds me, but I would not like to pretend that I was unaware of it. I am inclined to believe that deepening despair over the general reading public's refusal to take any science fiction writer seriously *as a writer* so long as he works within the genre, may have some bearing on the matter. Jonathan Swift was luckier than he knew!

Last — and perhaps the most pernicious danger of them all — is isolation. A vision that sometimes comes to my mind when I think of the full-time professional writer of science fiction as a *species* of writer is an image of a little spider scuttling back and forth in some obscure corner, spinning endless webs out of its own guts. What nourishes it, I wonder? Are there not times when it pauses to ponder what it is all *for*? Enough! That way madness lies.

'Where do I think *sf* is at right now?' Publishing crises and the international economic situation apart I feel bound to say that from where I am sitting right now, it seems in a reasonably healthy situation. I should guess that the amount of first class science fiction being written, proportional to the dross, is about the same as first class 'straight' fiction to 'straight' dross. Anything else would surprise me because, as

I have tried to explain in this ill-organized account of my own development, I refuse to recognize a difference in *kind* between the two sorts. Of *emphasis*, yes, but that's only to be expected. After all, historical fiction, spy fiction, war fiction, children's fiction, are all leafy living branches of that gnarled old *genus* 'the Novel'. Nevertheless, I can't help regretting that Hugo Gernsback saw fit to erect a special artificial category called "Science Fiction" where none was called for. Wells, Stapledon, Čápek, Doyle, Huxley *et al* wrote imaginative fiction in which science played a predominant part. Those books were read by all who read novels. Nowadays one comes across far too many people who say smugly: 'Oh, I *never* read science fiction.' Well, that's not just their loss, it's ours too. It is a sad reflection on our culture that maybe the only way to undo the damage *is* through the literature departments of the universities, because in the last resort what matters is not what *kind* of fiction it is, but whether or not it is well written. This the literature faculties are (hopefully!) equipped to demonstrate. Anyway it is surely a healthy sign that the pressure is coming up from below. Sf is alive and well and living in the imaginations of the young.

As John Brunner aptly put it — we deal in futures. The 'present' is an abstract philosophical concept. In a very real sense all novels which claim to be realistic or contemporary are doing no more than describing what is already past. Now whatever else the future may be it is sure to be uncomfortable for most people. Perhaps that is why there is, in some quarters, such staunch resistance to reading vivid imaginative projections of what lies ahead. Be that as it may, science fiction remains the only specifically *literary* form which tries to probe the future and lend imagination to those who have not got it. And, God knows, never was a loan more badly needed! The professional futurologists from Kahn downwards appal me because, one and all, they insist on dehumanizing humanity. We can at least do something to rectify *that*.

Earth Abides, A Canticle for Leibowitz, Brave New World, Fahrenheit 451, A Case of Conscience, The Inheritors, 1984: these are all fine novels deeply concerned with positive human values. Yet read Adrian Berry's *The Next 10,000 Years* which purports to be about the future of the human race and you will find that, for all its technological ingenuity, its human values are almost wholly negative. Berry sees the future simply in terms of the present — only more and bigger. Well, we all know plenty of sf novels which do just that too — the majority of them I'd say — but now and again one elbows itself above the ruck and protests passionately that there *must* be something better than

I.T.T. on a galactic scale, something that can feed that spiritual 'hunger of the imagination which preys upon life'. And, let's face it squarely, unless that hunger is satisfied, there may well be no future for the human race at all.

THE SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SCIENCE FICTION CRITICISM

At its Annual General Meeting on July 16th, the Science Fiction Foundation agreed to inaugurate an annual award for excellence in science fiction criticism. It is planned that the award ceremony should take place annually; we hope it will be presented at the banquet of the annual Easter Sf Convention in the U.K. (to be held at Manchester in 1976). The award will consist of an engraved metal plaque, and a cheque.

The award will be judged by an annually elected panel of five or six judges, at least two of whom will come from outside the U.K. Judges and their families, of course, will be ineligible for the award, as will (for the first two years at least) Council Members of the Science Fiction Foundation. This year's panel will be chaired by Peter Nicholls. As we go to press, the names of the other judges have not been definitely established. They will all be well known in the field, and will include writers and academics, and possibly a fanzine editor.

The award may be given to any work of science fiction criticism printed in English during the calendar year, anywhere in the world. Translations will be eligible. For the first award only, which we hope to announce next Easter, we will take two calendar years into consideration, 1974 and 1975. The award may be given to a book, a critical article or series of articles, a review or series of reviews. If a writer has produced a substantial body of work during the year, as, for example, any of several critics in the professional magazines, then *all* of that work may be nominated. That is, the award does not have to go to one specific work, though it does have to go to one specific person.

Any reader may make a nomination, by writing to Peter Nicholls, the Science Fiction Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS, U.K. All nominations will be considered by the judges. In fact, the success of the award partly depends on the amount of co-operation the judges are given by the general readership of sf and its criticism. We would also be interested to hear of critics considered by readers to be the *worst* of the year. The judging panel, in its award speech, intends to point to the worst abuses in the field, as well as the greatest successes.

The article beneath was originally delivered as a lecture at the Easter 1975 Science Fiction Convention, Seacon, at Coventry. It has been slightly revised, mainly by severely cutting the opening jokes, which were intended to lull an audience of potentially restive fans into a sense of false security. (They failed.) It suffered a little from the compression required to fit a detailed thesis into an hour's talk, but on reflection it's better that way.

jerry cornelius at the atrocities exhibition: anarchy and entropy in "new worlds" science fiction 1964 - 1974

Peter Nicholls

I recently gave a talk as part of the sf lecture series at the Institute of Contemporary Art. The talk was entitled "Science Fiction: The Monsters and The Critics". It was written at a time when I had contracted one of the commoner diseases of science fiction fandom, second only to acne. I had boils. To be precise, one boil, the location of which I refuse to reveal. Anyway, it was painful, embarrassing, and clear evidence of what I had long suspected: that God, jealous of my good looks and devious intelligence, was persecuting me. The end result, as far as the talk was concerned, was that I identified myself with that well-known Old Testament Character, a fellow-boils-sufferer — Job.

So it was in a Job-like mood that I wrote "Science Fiction: the Monsters and the Critics", and the tone I adopted was one of thunderous condemnation. I attacked all my enemies in science fiction, and went on to attack all my friends. I named names. I spelt out in nauseating and pustular detail exactly what, in my view, was wrong with both the critics and the writers of science fiction. I spoke with bile and spleen. Science fiction itself had come to seem to me a kind of externalised emblem, a metaphor, for all the multifarious foulnesses I felt to be afflicting my own body, and just as millions of little white blood corpuscles in my own blood stream were fighting a courageous

but losing battle against my own personalised staphylococci, so I saw myself as a solitary but brave little leucocyte taking on the great infection which is science fiction.

As part of the attack, I spoke about the Monster of Anarchy, which I saw as characteristic of science fiction from 1964 to 1974 in general, and science fiction in *New Worlds* magazine in particular. I said, in part:

The Monster of Anarchy is characterised above all by his Cool. He saunters laconically through landscapes pitted and scarred by the stigmata of self-destruction, resting occasionally in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking and expecting no advice or assistance from any quarter, human or godly. He fucks a lot, and does so most cheerfully when surrounded by the detritus of destruction, the crashed car, the dully gleaming carbine slung over the shoulder, the empty syringe lying on the toilet floor.

I want to use this passage as an introduction to this article.

It was in May 1964 that Michael Moorcock, all of 24 years old, took over the editorship of John Carnell's magazine *New Worlds*, which had hit hard times. So began a legend. It's sometimes called the legend of the New Wave. An opponent of the legend, Donald Wollheim, put it crudely but succinctly thus:

The *New Worlds* group . . . represent a group of socially sensitive writers who have decided that the battle for the future is a lost cause. In the tradition of *après nous le déluge* thinking, the sensual pleasures come to the fore as the only immediate real values left. Hence a great deal of the New Wave writing concerns itself with shock words and shock scenes, hallucinatory fantasies, and sex. (*The Universe Makers*, Gollancz, 1972, p.105)

In *Billion-Year Spree*, (Doubleday, 1973) Brian Aldiss takes a friendlier and more moderate line: He says of Moorcock's new editorship:

The old gang was kicked out. A new gang entered . . . The new *New Worlds* seized on an essential truth: that the speculative body of work contained in the sf of the past had been directed towards just such a future as the mid-sixties: the Sunday colour mags, proliferating LP's, drugs, promiscuity, cheap jet flights, colour TV, pop music that suddenly spoke with a living mouth — and the constant threat that the Middle East or Vietnam or South Africa or Somewhere would suddenly blow up and end the whole fantastic charade forever and ever amen. (pp. 297-298)

It is interesting to look back at the Contents pages of Moorcock's *New Worlds*. A number of supposedly New Wave writers, including Roger Zelazny, Samuel Delany and Harlan Ellison are very minimally represented, although Delany's "Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-

Precious Stones”, which won a Nebula, appeared in *New Worlds*. Among the regularly appearing names are several which have, as yet, made little impact outside *New Worlds*. David Masson, Langdon Jones, and Hilary Bailey for example. (Masson wrote some fine stories indeed, many of which were later collected in *The Caltraps of Time*. There is also a Langdon Jones collection in Collier Books, *The Eye of the Lens*.) Barrington Bailey, Graham Charnock and James Sallis all appeared occasionally or regularly, as did Peter Tate. But although much of this work was interesting, there is not enough yet to create a legend. We can add the early work of Christopher Priest and Ian Watson, both of whom have gone on to larger things, but their *New Worlds* stories were not especially strong, could not be said to sum up an era, or to be particularly representative of Swinging England — the phenomenon which took Judith Merrill’s fancy. Then there were the eccentricities, of which the most notable was the publication of Jack Trevor Story’s disastrous *The Wind in the Snotty Gobble Tree*. Nothing yet to point to with any confidence or even, in my censorious view, with a great deal of interest — with the major and under-valued exception of David Masson.

We get onto much more substantial ground with the many *New Worlds* stories of John Sladek, some of which are to be found in *The Steam Driven Boy*. Indeed, the best way at pointing to the achievement of *New Worlds* may be to pick out those works which first appeared, in whole or in part, in *New Worlds*, and have since appeared as books in their own right. These would include the following:

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|----------------------|--|
| By Brian Aldiss: | <i>Barefoot in the Head</i>
<i>Cryptozoic</i>
<i>Report on Probability A</i> |
| By J.G. Ballard: | <i>The Atrocity Exhibition</i> |
| By Michael Moorcock: | Many Jerry Cornelius stories including the novel <i>A Cure for Cancer</i> |
| By Norman Spinrad: | <i>Bug Jack Barron</i> |
| By Thomas Disch: | <i>Camp Concentration</i>
334 |
| By Charles Platt: | <i>The Garbage World</i> |
| By Keith Roberts: | <i>The Chalk Giants</i> |

It is a surprisingly short list, but a very interesting one. I propose to concentrate on three writers, all British. The American contributors, although like the English ones notably ironic, are not really a part of what I regard, (along with Donald Wollheim, I confess) as the central anarchy which was at the heart of *New Worlds* — a philosophy of

nihilism. Disch is too resilient, Spinrad too bumptious and crude. (Michael Moorcock himself made rather a different distinction. Or at least he did back in the early days. In an introduction to a 1965 anthology entitled *The Best of New Worlds*, Moorcock explains why the only American contributor he uses is that well-known Anglophile, Harry Harrison. Moorcock says Harrison was OK because he had lived in Europe – a lovely bit of passing snobbery. [The great tradition of expatriate OK Americans now runs Henry James, T.S. Eliot and Harry Harrison.])

Explaining why he concentrates on British writers, Moorcock says:

What British writers have done, I feel, is to bring a less strident and perhaps less earnest note to the sf field while making it no less entertaining.

It's a surprising claim. We don't usually think of *New Worlds* as a less earnest, light-hearted magazine. Nor do we find it remarkable for its absence of stridency. But the three writers I want to concentrate on, the three writers who seem to me to have been at the heart of what was both best and worst about *New Worlds*, were *not* strident. And all three of them *were* wits – not humourists, but wits. (I could follow up that red herring, and try to define the difference, but it would save time to assume that you all know what I mean.)

The three writers who dominated *New Worlds* were J.G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, and Michael Moorcock himself. They dominated it in the literal sense of providing more words than the other contributors, and they dominated it, too, by what they came to symbolize.

I don't at all want to suggest that Moorcock, Ballard and Aldiss were three musketeers. So far as I know, although they knew each other socially, and liked each other, as writers they were all three loners. They didn't, so far as I know, consciously work together, nor imitate one another, nor commit themselves to the same literary philosophy. And indeed, they all write very differently. They were all senior writers, and their work for *New Worlds* was not necessarily central to their careers. Moorcock was best known, back in the mid-sixties at least, as the prolific writer of sword-and-sorcery fiction in *Science Fantasy* and elsewhere. He first made a name for himself as a writer with the Elric stories. Both Aldiss and Ballard were well-known figures long before Moorcock took over *New Worlds*. Ballard in particular had a high reputation amongst the *literati*, and Aldiss too was to become known for his mainstream fiction as well as his science fiction. Both Aldiss and Ballard, especially Aldiss, were to become known as arti-

culate spokesmen on matters of science fiction in particular and the Arts in general. They broadcast, and appeared on television, quite often. In 1964 Michael Moorcock was 24 years old, Jim Ballard was 34 years old, and Brian Aldiss was 38 years old. Their backgrounds, ages, life-styles were all quite different. One thing they did have in common was a link with the old Carnell *New Worlds*, for which all three wrote.

It's very tempting in arguing this sort of case to over-stress the similarities in order to make a point. I'll try not to do that.

To make my point at all, I have to begin by back-tracking, and talking about the great British science fiction theme of the disaster story. Many disaster stories neatly fall into the sub-category that Aldiss has very accurately named "the cosy catastrophe", marked out by the fact that the hero continues to have a pretty good time, even though the word itself is going to hell. Disaster, Catastrophe, Apocalypse are traditional British themes, and not only in science fiction. Within science fiction itself it's more difficult to think of British science fiction writers who haven't written about the end of the world – at least the end of the world as we know it – than to think of those who have. The latter group consists of H.G. Wells in *War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*, Olaf Stapledon in *Last and First Men*, R.C. Sherriff in *The Hopkins Manuscript*, M.P. Shiell in *The Purple Cloud*, Arthur C. Clarke in *The City and the Stars*, John Wyndham and John Christopher in almost everything they wrote, and many others as well. Who knows what masochistic streak in the British character has brought out this obsessively repeated theme? It presumably has to do with the progressive impoverishment and shrinking of a once great nation. Perhaps intimations of autumn and winter, change and decay, come more readily in the cool damps of this soft island than in harsher landscapes whose skeletons, being a daily, dry reality, provide an ever-present *memento mori* which does away with the need of a literary equivalent.

Anyway, as others have pointed out, the nature of the catastrophe began to change in the 1960s. Perhaps not so much to change, as to revert to the original bleakness of, say, Wells' *The Time Machine*, where the individual strength of humanity is shown as impotent in the face of the inevitable running down of things. John Christopher was the John The Baptist who heralded the way for Ballard, Aldiss, Moorcock, Brunner, and the other sf writers of the sixties whose disasters were harsher and more immediate. Christopher's *Death of Grass* has a hero whose gallantry is minimal to begin with, negligible by the end of the book. There is little of John Wyndham's middle-class decent-chappery in *Death of Grass*. In its hero we see the gaunt phantom of a Jerry Cornelius to be.

The disasters of the sixties were more immediate. They very often had proximate causes rooted in the civilisation we are all familiar with. The writers rejected the mysterious aliens, creatures from the sea, passing comets — all the literary devils that used to cause the trouble in the disaster stories. Instead we had pollution, racism, the bomb, drugs.

This emphasis on realistic causes of disaster was sometimes reflected in a direct realism of narrative and language, as in John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*. But the catastrophes depicted by Aldiss, Ballard and Moorcock were realistic neither in narrative nor language — and it is here, I believe, that the genre of the disaster story took on a new shape, a shape very closely connected with *New Worlds* magazine. Although the basic furniture of these disaster stories is both realistic and commonplace, it is given unusual conjunctions, seen with an eye not so much realist as symbolist.

I have a sort of ideal, Platonic *New Worlds* story in mind. I have entitled it **JERRY CORNELIUS AT THE ATROCITY EXHIBITION**. More fully entitled, it would be **JERRY CORNELIUS GOES BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD AT THE ATROCITY EXHIBITION**. The best critical account of this archetypal *New Worlds* story known to me was published by William Butler Yeats in a fit of clairvoyance back in 1921, in a poem called "The Second Coming". It starts off like this:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

There are some key phrases in that Yeats poem that I'd like to return to. I'd like to ask the question, with him, of whether the symptoms of anarchy and decay presage a revelation, but I won't. More immediately, I'd like to examine the implications of his phrase "the best lack all conviction".

To do so, I have first to make a personal statement. I believe in the old cliché, that the fundamental subjects to which a writer must always return are love and death, in no matter what literary form they

appear. For far too long, most science fiction dealt with these subjects tangentially, if at all. I think the genre of the catastrophe story is a good one, and that we need it. It gives us pause, it gives us warning, and it gives us a dark dimension against which our every-day lightnesses are seen to glow more brightly. I believe that anarchy is an appropriate and necessary subject for science fiction. The important question for me is, what is the relationship between the writer and the chaos he depicts?

If a writer imagines a maelstrom, a whirlpool, must he also imagine himself *in* that whirlpool? I think it is necessary for part of him to stay safe on shore. I have to use some old-fashioned phrases here. I think a writer needs a moral viewpoint, some system of belief to which he is both emotionally and intellectually committed. People often talk about "a set of values", but I don't like that phrase — it sounds like something one has accumulated, like a stamp collection. None of us, of course, are rock-solid in our beliefs — but a feeling of disorientation and alienation, such as we all feel at times, is quite different from the voluntary abdication of all beliefs. In fact Aldiss, Ballard and Moorcock have, none of them, visibly abdicated their beliefs, but they have come perilously close, it seems to me.

I am talking too much in generalities, and moving rather uneasily around that Yeats phrase, "the best lack all conviction". Aldiss, Ballard and Moorcock are among the best. Three obviously intelligent men, they are demonstrably three of the finest writers in science fiction. But I'm not able to accept the position they seem to stand in, in relation to their writing. In fact I'm not sure they stand in any firm position at all. Yeats also spoke of passionate intensity, contrasting it to the lack of conviction in the best. Passionate intensity — heat and fire — is precisely what I *don't* find in the *New Worlds* fiction of Aldiss, Moorcock and Ballard.

What I do find is a whole series of aesthetic distancing devices. Having abandoned the possibility of arguing from a moral centre, presumably because they thought it was the most honest or the bravest thing to do, they force themselves, it seems to me, into an aesthetic commitment instead. The distancing devices I'm thinking of are irony, cool, wit, and style. There is a jauntiness of style in their books, very different in each case as I'll go on to show, but at the moment I'm concerned to make generalisations that fit all three. Each of them depicts worlds in which most of *us* would go instantly mad, and I suspect Messrs. Aldiss, Ballard and Moorcock would too, though I have a lingering doubt about the case of Mr Ballard. Their way of swimming in the maelstrom (having left, you'll remember, the safety

of the shore) without drowning is to wear a protective suit. This suit is their style.

It is in the nature of the catastrophic worlds they depict, that meaning and rational choice are drained of solidity. Their characters are depicted as being at the mercy of natural processes. Concepts of good and evil have become irrelevances. When rape, death, violence and decay are witnessed simply as neutral events, when they are cleansed of their conventional load of disgust and pain, then the only emphasis left is style and aesthetics.

I'll take my first example from Ballard. Although *The Atrocity Exhibition* was the dominating Ballard contribution to *New Worlds*, I prefer to take my example from its barer and plainer sequel, *Crash!* The passage I quote is from that section of the novel where the protagonist, whose name by an unhappy coincidence is Ballard, discovers that the enigmatic scientist Vaughan has been acting as a peeping Tom on him ever since he had the terrible car crash which took place near the beginning of the novel. Vaughan has been tracking Ballard around the freeways of West London and Heathrow, photographing him without his knowledge. Vaughan is now showing the photographs to Ballard:

In these crude photographs, Vaughan had frozen my uncertain embraces as I edged my wounded body into its first sexual encounters since the accident. He had caught my hand stretching across the transmission tunnel of my wife's sports car, the inner surface of my forearm dented by the chromium gear lever, my bruised wrist pressing against the white flank of her thigh; my still-numb mouth against Renata's left nipple, lifting her breast from her blouse as my hair fell across the window-sill; Helen Remington sitting astride me in the passenger seat of her black saloon, skirt hitched around her waist, scarred knees pressing against the vinyl seat as my penis entered her vulva, the oblique angle of the instrument panel forming a series of blurred ellipses like globes ascending from our happy loins.

Vaughan stood at my shoulder, like an instructor ready to help a promising pupil. As I stared down at the photograph of myself at Renata's breast, Vaughan leaned across me, his real attention elsewhere. With a broken thumbnail, its rim caked with engine oil, he pointed to the chromium window-sill and its junction with the over-stretched strap of the young woman's brassiere. By some freak of photography these two formed a sling of metal and nylon from which the distorted nipple seemed to extrude itself into my mouth.

Vaughan's face was without expression. Childhood boils had left an archipelago of pockmarks across his neck. A sharp but not unpleasant smell rose from his white jeans, a blend of semen and engine coolant.

The whole point of the passage is that it is devoid of emotional con-

notations, or almost so. The attention is clinical, aesthetic. It is very well done. The terms used of human bodies are those conventionally used of machines. The "extruded nipple" for instance. Ballard feels no outrage at Vaughan's invasion of his perverse sexuality (perverse because Renata and Helen Remington are both accident victims, this being the nature of their attraction. Indeed Helen Remington's husband was killed by Ballard in the crash from which he and she are slowly recovering. Before the crash they had been strangers.) Vaughan's semen stains are no more and no less significant than the smell of engine coolant, the engine oil in the rim of his fingernail. The significance of the scene is in the conjunction of body with car — the forearm dented with the gear lever, the nipple in the apparent sling of metal and nylon, the juxtaposition of penis and vulva in aesthetic opposition to the obliquely angled instrument panel. The whole novel, *Crash!*, is no more than a prolonged variation on this single theme.

I can see how it might be possible to argue that Ballard is so outraged at the draining away of human significance by the world of the machine, of airports, advertising hoardings, film stars, slot machines and hospitals, that the extreme coolness of the manner is simply the only way he can bring himself to describe it. The whole thing could be seen as a gigantic metaphor, a kind of scream of pain deliberately muffled by sound-proofing. In fact, this is very much how I read the predecessor of *Crash!*, that collection of related images which was published in book form under the title of *The Atrocity Exhibition*.

But *Crash!* is crystal clear. Ballard gives himself no alibis, and clearly wants none. He calls his perverse protagonist Ballard, thus wittily preempting all the critics who might desperately have wanted to make excuses for him. There are no excuses. Ballard's world is the world we all live in, with this difference: that the worst of its minglings of flesh and technology, advertising and death, are accepted and welcomed by him with a placid, Buddha-like smile. He has gone one better than your average, unimaginative run-of-the-mill nihilist, who denies that life has a moral centre or a meaning. Ballard denies the same thing of death. He sees no dramatic magnificence in death. It is simply the final aesthetic conjunction.

I have been interested in the reaction to *Crash!* Even ten years ago, I think, there would have been Philistine howls of fury. Now the critics have been brain-washed by the very cult of cool from which Ballard draws his aesthetic strength. Few of the critics even hazarded that the book was indecent. Obviously it was felt that it would be very un-cool, very square as they used to say, to express any outrage at the thought

that this man Ballard is advocating a life style quite likely to involve the sudden death of yourself or those you love. The critical response to *Crash!*, as in the parallel but less interesting case of Warhol's films, proves that from one point of view the artist is right. Ballard's triumph in *Crash!* (it's a real triumph, and the book deserves to be remembered for it) is to have correctly analysed the disease from within, while simultaneously being its most obvious symptom. In *Crash!* we find the ultimate alienation. Did you notice, for example, how the single out-of-place word in the passage I quoted was "happy"? The phrase was "like globes ascending from our happy loins". Happy is a word with conventional everyday connotations totally removed from the love-making that Ballard describes. The word jarred me by its ineptness in the context – or if it was used ironically, by an irony too strained to be effective. That was my aesthetic reaction. My human reaction was to grin to myself at this lingering evidence, shrunk to a single misplaced word, that within the mind of Ballard, that cool metallic terrain where chromium neurons discharge themselves across their transit zones, a faint trace of residual humanity still lurks.

Ballard's humanity in the earlier work is undoubted, and it returns to a small extent in *Concrete Island*. The truth a novel tells of its writer is only temporary. I believe that in the act of writing *Crash!* Ballard allowed himself to be obsessed, to be effectively mad, with the inhuman alienation of the schizophrenic. I don't for a moment believe that it tells any complete or lasting truth about Ballard on the one hand, or the world on the other.

Nevertheless, *Crash!* didn't just appear out of thin air. From the beginning, Ballard's theme has been alienation, obsession, and entrophy. The whole of *The Drowned World* tells of man's need to slough off his humanity and return to the primordial ooze which still whispers to him in his blood stream. The difference is that Ballard now seems to accept what he once held off at arm's length. He makes the point explicitly in his recent introduction to the Cape edition of *Vermilion Sands*, a short story collection which includes some of his earliest work. Ballard says that now (though I am sure not then) he would like to live in Vermilion Sands. He ends the introduction with a genuinely funny pun, which I haven't yet heard anyone point out, so I'll mention it for you. He says he waits "optimistically" for Vermilion Sands to "take concrete shape around me". I love that "concrete", especially in the context of the last two novels. Ballard has plenty of wit, and not just in the pejorative sense that Dr. Johnson used when he spoke of wit in the metaphysical poets.

The passage is worth quoting in its entirety, because it catches perfectly exactly what worries me most about Aldiss, Ballard and Moorcock. It is from the Life of Cowley:

Dr. Johnson said (thus describing Ballard's work with much the same clarity in the eighteenth century as Yeats did in 1920):

Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of "discordia concors"; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. (By "they" he meant the metaphysical poets, but he could easily have had *New Worlds* in mind.) The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtilty surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.

From this account of their compositions it will be readily inferred, that they were not successful in representing or moving the affections. As they were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising, they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasure of other minds . . . they wrote rather as beholders, than partakers of human nature; as beings looking upon good and evil, impassive and at leisure; as epicurean deities, making remarks on the actions of men, and the vicissitudes of life, without interest and without emotion. Their courtship was void of fondness, and their lamentation of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had never been said before.

Dr. Johnson's verdict was harsh, when applied, say, to John Donne, and it may be that it is equally harsh of me to apply it to Aldiss, Ballard and Moorcock. I hope you all recognize that I have chosen to discuss three writers I very much admire, that being much more challenging than throwing stones at the whimpering curs that scuttle like Pariah dogs through the pages of Elwood's anthologies and elsewhere.

Ballard is capable of wit quite different from that so adversely defined by Dr. Johnson, and I hope you notice a kind of muted admiration even in Johnson's angry description. I came across one actual joke in *Crash!* which came so unexpectedly that I found myself laughing for an unreasonably long time. It is a dialogue between Ballard and Vaughan which just for a moment parodies the entire book. Ballard says to Vaughan, a little shocked at his intense vulture-like concentration on the re-enactments at the Accident Research Centre, "They're trying to reduce the number of accidents here, not increase it." Vaughan's reply is given quite bare, but I see it as being uttered in a very doubtful voice and with a polite shake of the head: "I suppose that's a point of view".

Let's get onto Brian Aldiss. I don't believe for a moment that Brian Aldiss as a general thing "lacks all conviction" as a writer, reverting to Yeats' phrase. But I am less than happy with most of his writing for *New Worlds*. Most of Aldiss's writing in the mid-sixties, and indeed since, is notable for its constant experiment. Each book, each story even, was different from the one before. One admires his courage, and the professional risks he never hesitated to take. But I sometimes feel a slight desperation in the search for a proper voice, a proper theme — the desperation is usually manifest in some form of rather self-conscious verbal fireworks, although his best books, in my view — I'd name *Non-Stop* and *Greybeard* as two of them — spoke with a limpid directness.

In the writing Aldiss published for *New Worlds* he allowed the anarchic side of his literary personality full play, and I'm not always convinced by it. I feel a bit as if in *Report on Probability A* and *Barefoot in the Head* he is wearing a skilful disguise. *Barefoot in the Head* is a charade. It's not a genuine acid head book — its freakouts are too self-conscious, too literary. His flirtation with Ouspenski comes from the mind and not the gut. The book is a *tour de force* in one way — it contains some of the most sustained invention and word play I have seen in literature, but I always feel it to be play indeed.

The two books, *Report* and *Barefoot* are quite opposite in style, and *An Age*, the third of the *New Worlds* novels is different again, and in my view, despite some flaws in the construction, it's by a long way the most considerable of the three. *Report On Probability A* is the most perfect and the most boring. I am simply unable to attend for as many pages as that, to an experiment which involves the pretence of total objectivity — the only human participation being that of the dispassionate voyeur, not even getting the minimal kick of sexual excitement from peering through windows. I find myself yearning for some brisk hand action beneath a dirty raincoat in this novel; a bit of common human dirtiness and weakness. The voyeurism is perfectly objective though, and the joke is that there is no joke. It's like Hitchcock's *Rear Window* as Andy Warhol might have made it, but at least Warhol would have put a few freaks in long shot somewhere. It is another version of the same old *New Worlds* nihilism: the intense concentration, with hallucinatory accuracy, on the utterly insignificant — and stemming from this, a kind of draining away of meaning and life. It's all a grown-up version of a child's pretend game. None of us, in real life, are immune to choice, preference, judgement. We all like some things more than other things. To pretend that all objects have equal significance is to tell a conscious lie. I know, of course, that Aldiss's intention may

have been quite different – he may, conversely, have been focusing on the numinous mystery of the only half-understood. But that’s not the way it affects me.

Barefoot in the Head is on the face of it a more ambitious book, and a more anarchic one. I’m assuming that most of you know the story and the setting: a Europe of the near-future freaked out by an Arab State dropping containers of LSD. A young Serb, with the British name of Colin Charteris, travels to England, becomes an acid-head guru, and leads a great motorcade of rockers and freaks back through Belgium and Germany. In Germany, Charteris and his girl-friend (significantly, as in Ballard’s *Crash!*, she is the wife of a man whose death he had caused in a road accident) leave the party, and opt for the contemplative life, moving back into the Balkans, where Charteris attains old age, a near Sainthood and ultimately, a memorial tree.

It is not fair to say that the novel preaches anarchy, although it certainly accepts it. The mood swings between despair and loss on the one hand and exultation on the other at what is an effective end of Western Civilisation, or “Wesciv” as Aldiss persists in calling it. Specifically, the Christian tradition is rejected by Charteris at the end in favour of an ill-defined Eastern acceptance, apparently mediated through Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, the twin gurus who hover over most of the intellectual action.

Barefoot in the Head is not an easy read. Charteris is constantly faced, in his freaked-out condition, by choices and multi-value logics as they are called. These are symbolised by the network of motorways covering Western Europe, on which nearly all the action takes place, and also by a fractured language which contains an extraordinary amount of difficult puns, each pun representing, I take it, a kind of multi-value word. Thus the very language of the book is made to reflect its theme.

Inasmuch as Charteris does finally choose, and inasmuch as there is no sign that this choice is not endorsed by the author, we can’t in any strict sense call *Barefoot in the Head* a nihilist work. But I am not convinced that Aldiss is convinced that Ouspensky et. al. had anything very useful to offer. The language of the final section of the book runs counter to the overt message, and undercuts it. Whether this is deliberate or accidental, I can’t say.

The Final Part of *Barefoot* is entitled “Ouspenski’s Astrabahn”, and somewhere during it, the charge of the book seems to trickle away. The verbal energy which had kept the language alive before seems to peter out into linguistic cobwebs, crabbed and tortuous with little

pleasure or exultation. The book's flesh is sloughed off and we are left with a skeleton, ultimately with a notional diagram. Aldiss's attention seems increasingly withdrawn from Charteris, who comes to be seen more and more in long shot. Although the *words* seem to say that a new and better Europe will be born, that choices must be made, that strength comes from the soil and the spirit, and not from the motorway, the *feeling* is not there. Ultimately, because of this trickling away, the book comes to seem more nihilist than it is.

I think the trouble is not that Aldiss is an anarchist, but that his hero Charteris is emblematic of the author, but pushed too far. For all of his literary life Aldiss has made fresh choices, new experiments, kept a kind of search going for a value system which satisfied him. In this he is like Charteris. But Charteris has his roots in Jugoslavia, a country which in his travel book, *Cities and Stones*, Brian shows that he loves, but which is his not by right, but by emotional adoption. In other words, Aldiss is more of a Wesciv man than he allows Charteris to be. I believe he withdraws his authorial patronage from Charteris at the point where Charteris makes the final rejection of Wesciv which Aldiss, too much a part of it, is unable to make. *Barefoot in the Head* can be read as a kind of spiritual diary, an autobiography with a dishonest ending. Thus despite all the energies of feeling in the book, the rollicking sex and so on, it is allowed to be somehow more anarchic than one believes Aldiss to be.

He takes a natural human pleasure in the destruction of those aspects of Industrial Europe that he loathes, but he doesn't know where to go from there: not because he's really a killer, but — and this is only conjecture — because he has fragmented his own mental landscape and doesn't know which pieces to pick up, doesn't know how it might be made whole again. This is not an anarchy of conviction, but an accidental anarchy of uncertainty.

The self-consciousness of the language renders the story symbolic rather than realistic. The vocabulary is far too rich, dense and mannered to be natural when applied to the young central characters, who are shown to have no such articulate background as would justify their consciousnesses being displayed in these terms. Yet Aldiss's love of words carries him triumphantly through at times, notably in the sexual encounters and sexual jealousies of the section entitled "Auto-Ancestral Fracture". Here we have Angeline, Charteris's girl, sounding off at him about his affair with another girl, Marta:

'You subserbiant Dalmation! From now on you go adriantic up some mother tree — just don't profligant me! Didn't I the one who moist you most with nakidity remembrane to membranefever pudentially, or if not twot hot

hand gambidexter pulping lipscrew bailing boat in prepucepeeling arbor of every obscene stance?’

She now had the big bosombeating act, buckaneering in the dusty half room before his ambiguity, riding to master and be mastered, knowing he punched her husband in the traffic, gesturing with scatologic to the greyer girl, Marta on the master’s corner couch cuckoobird unsinging.

Difficult stuff to read aloud, but very alive on the page. The dense difficult language is kept alive by its rhythms which are perfectly realistic and mundane, the angry vibrances of a jealous woman shouting.

Elsewhere, though, the language is not a magnifying glass to see through in close up. It’s a smoke screen.

In his third *New Worlds* novel, *An Age*, which has also been published as *Cryptozoic*, a similar basic point can be made about an intellectual uncertainty, an attempt to have it both ways, being mirrored by an uncertain and rather unhappy structure. Once again the theme is entropy and decay, but the plot is much closer to Aldiss’s deepest concerns (one of which is the convolutions of time and memory), and in patches, like a large and mainly edible Curate’s Egg, it’s very fine indeed. The opening section is one of the best things Aldiss ever wrote.

Moorcock is perhaps the most difficult of the three to discuss. For one thing, we are on safe ground with Aldiss and Ballard. We can point with confidence to other books of theirs where they have earned the right, many times over, to be taken not just as pulp writers, but as serious artists in a strong British tradition. Moorcock is younger and more enigmatic. He has published over 40 books by my count, and well over two thirds of them have been his own version of sword-and-sorcery. Moorcock’s reputation as a serious writer, and a serious force in science fiction, comes largely from his work as editor of *New Worlds*.

I have read eight or nine of the sword-and-sorcery romances. By and large I found the earlier ones to be more alive. I enjoyed the perverse logic of the Elric books, the albino decadence of the hero, the fact that he was under the control of his phallic sword and not vice versa, and the fact that it was never possible (quite the reverse of Tolkien) to tell which were the goodies and which the baddies. Moorcock, obviously not a philosophical absolutist, finds much to criticize in the forces of Law, “the cosmic fuzz”, (as he should have put it, but never did) on the one hand, and the forces of Chaos on the other.

As the various series of Elric, Erekoze, Hawkmoon and Corum continued, my impression is that they came more and more to adhere to a pattern. I have just read *The Quest for Tanelorn*, which at a stroke

appears to put a much-needed end to all four series, and it's clear that the only remaining interest for Moorcock has come to be intellectual. The book is not a novel but a diagram, a brief philosophical statement, where the dialectic of the previous series is wound up with a neat quasi-Marxist synthesis, and the need for heroes is done away with. The book has little colour (as opposed to the earlier fantasies, which often had an amusing 1890s glitter about them, and occasionally produced truly memorable visual images), and little flesh. It is purely notional.

As the fantasies continued in the late sixties and early seventies, Moorcock began consciously to link them thematically with his other writings, and with each other. Jerry Cornelius, for example, began to appear in various enigmatic incarnations, such as Jehamiah Cohnalius. This is fun, but rather misleading. I find Elric a more convincing analogue of Jerry Cornelius than the know-it-all Cornelius incarnations who pop up occasionally in the fantasies. Cohnalius reminds me of nothing so much as that smug red-haired patronising Horvendile of James Branch Cabell's Poictesme books, which are in many respects fore-runners of the Moorcock oeuvre, at least in respect of their wit and cynicism. In Moorcock's fantasies, the Cornelius incarnations are more contemplative than heroic, and play a secondary role. Cornelius only really comes into his own in the twentieth century, where heroes are themselves anachronistic.

Many critics have claimed that Moorcock's maturity began with the Karl Glogauer book, *Behold The Man*. Aldiss comments, in *Billion Year Spree*, that *Behold The Man* is a more serious work than the three Cornelius novels, *The Final Programme*, *A Cure for Cancer* and *The English Assassin*. This is hedging his bets rather. It's not clear whether Aldiss intends "more serious" to mean "better", though he implies as much. I don't like *Behold The Man*. I thought it was predictable throughout, in both narrative and attitude, and lacking in meat. It's not more serious, just more solemn.

It is only in the past two years that I have begun to rethink my attitude towards Moorcock, and this is mainly on the basis of comparatively recent books. Previously I was content to argue that all those people who said Moorcock wrote better science fiction than fantasy (I understand Moorcock himself used to argue this) were talking rubbish, and that Elric was more fun than Glogauer any day of the week. Since then I've read four books and a number of short stories that have changed my mind. The books are *The Warlord of the Air*, *An Alien Heat*, *The English Assassin*, and *A Cure for Cancer*.

The English Assassin and *An Alien Heat* seem to me so obviously, and by a very substantial margin, the best things that Moorcock has written, that I am completely at a loss to explain why the critics haven't stood up and shouted "Bravo!" as one man. In the recent review of Moorcock's work in *Science Fiction Monthly* by Michael Ashley, a review that was rather shaky in its facts, and resolutely made a minimum of critical judgements, there was almost no implication that Moorcock has advanced in any direction since he began, and no emphasis at all on the recent work. My own journal *Foundation*, I am ashamed to say, has never reviewed a Moorcock book. This at least will be put right. Obviously part of the reason for this neglect has been Moorcock's sheer grinding productivity. I understand that he speaks with cynicism himself about much of his output. His fate may yet be the same as almost overtook John Brunner, whose run-of-the-mill entertainments so far outstripped his more important accomplishments, that if he hadn't produced *Stand on Zanzibar* in the nick of time, he may have been known today as the English A. Bertram Chandler. This wouldn't have been fair, but it would have happened, and there is some danger of a similar fate for Moorcock. He is stuck with a predominantly teenage audience, who have grown to expect watered down *fin-de-siècle* wit-and-wisdom in the sword-and-sorcery vein — a kind of dilute blend of Baroness Orczy and Max Beerbohm with a dash of Grand Guignol thrown in for angostura bitters.

The English Assassin, in my view, is superior to the also interesting *An Alien Heat*, and as it also carries on the central *New Worlds* Cornelius tradition, I'll concentrate on it. (Although those who haven't read *An Alien Heat*, incidentally, should be aware that the dandy of the far future whose sophisticated and self-indulgent naiveties are central, is called Jherek Carnelian.)

I have already mentioned that Aldiss and Ballard are pre-eminently witty writers. So is Moorcock, but here the wit is closer to open humour, though humour that is distinctly black. *The English Assassin* is set in what seems to be a series of closely parallel worlds of the near future. Each of the futures envisaged, (and one of them is stressed over all the others,) can readily be allowed its plausibility. In each one, Western Civilisation has emphasized *things* over people, and finally decayed into violence and casual cruelty. The Cornelius books and stories operate (even in the case of those written by other *New Worlds* writers, such as Spinrad's "The Last Hurrah of the Golden Horde" and Mike Harrison's "The Nash Circuit") by accepting the logic of the Cornelius world of disintegration perfectly blandly, and appearing at least to mirror its preoccupations.

The emphasis on objects is constant. In the absence of morals, as I said before, style and aesthetics become all-important. And style can be defined in terms of clothes, houses, records, girl-friends, guns, cars, swimming pools. This introduces the moral problem which haunts all the Cornelius stories, and *The English Assassin* which is the finest of them, in particular. Where does the author stand? It is exactly the same problem as with Aldiss and Ballard, and it is the central problem of this article.

We can assume that the entire Cornelius oeuvre is ironic. That is, that its cool acceptance of the equality of all values, the meaninglessness of death, and the inevitable decay of order is all a pose. Perhaps we are meant to react against all this by its very excess, its very opposition to our own beliefs.

But it's very difficult to be sure. The game consists of keeping a straight face, of not giving the reader any clues as to which side if any you're on. Moorcock's irony might, as I like to suppose, be a device to mask him from the worst outrages of pain and violence, and to allow him to approach closer to his subject. It might, that is, be as irony so very often is, an inturnd form of anger and compassion.

But there is another possibility after all. It is the essence of the Cornelius position that all possibilities be considered, and in discussing it, the same courtesy should be extended. The other possibility is that the Cornelius books allow their various authors, notably Moorcock, the most considerable of them, a magnificent nihilistic freedom, in a world where there is no longer anybody about to say DON'T. They may be the ultimately anti-authoritarian books. No-one says don't fuck your sister, don't commit cannibalism or necrophilia, don't torture, don't take drugs. The balance is a just one. In the Cornelius world we have lost meaning but we have gained freedom.

This is to say that the irony has a subtle, second-order form — as with Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The irony is not just to be sarcastic, and say a thing is good while exaggerating it so grotesquely as to show it to be bad. The second-order irony invites the complicity of the reader — it shows him the genuine *attraction* of the extreme position. The reader, sensing this in himself, is shown that implicit in *everyone* is the ability to dive off the moral shore into the heart of the maelstrom, immune from the buffeting waters because (we all know we inwardly possess one) of his protective style, his cool, his meta-physical wet-suit.

This sort of irony cannot be sustained, in my view, at novel length. Because it depends on surfaces, it becomes boring. After all, much of the enigma of Cornelius is fortuitous. He is revealed only through

action and style, as are most of his friends and enemies — his sister Catherine, the redoubtable Miss Brunner, Una Persson and the rest. We never share their thoughts. The protective glitter of the surface has robbed us of the subterranean pull of the depths. In *Lord Jim* by Joseph Conrad, a philosophical character says “In the destructive element submerge yourself”. The advice is metaphysically good, but the Cornelius world sprays us all with silicone repellent, the water slicks off our protected surfaces, and the destructive element is held at bay.

I was not, however, bored with *The English Assassin*, and I think this is because although it seems at first the most notably anarchist of any of the works I’ve considered here, it is ultimately the most humane.

The first thing about the book is its order and symmetry. Moorcock is no William Burroughs, fragmenting his narrative and language to reflect as in a broken mirror the discrete shards of his nightmare world. *The English Assassin* is narrated in cool, traditional, good Bare English. The book is structured very carefully indeed, with complex symmetries running throughout its four sections, almost four interweaving narrative spirals, each one advancing closer towards some central well of meaning. This extreme order of language and structure gives the book a solid, reliable framework. It implicitly supports the claims of order in the world of chaos it depicts. Because the language is very much that of the central tradition of English prose, which has always been a moral tradition, it almost seems to invoke a morality and order in itself.

Secondly, the book is interlaced with a great many newspaper cuttings, given without comment, all dealing with the arbitrary death and violation of children. Comment is not necessary. The fact is enough I think. These cuttings are emblems of the Cornelius world culled from our own, and they show that the Cornelius world is a corrupter and violater and hurter of innocence, and that in this respect our own world is in very great danger of becoming the Cornelius world. Here too is a moral position implied without being stated.

Thirdly, powerfully, and enigmatically, Cornelius, the well-known English assassin, spends nearly all the time off-stage. He is neither dead nor alive, but a bestial, moaning, water-logged hunk of decaying flesh, dredged from the sea. His style, that is to say, although inherited by his friends, has left *him*, and underneath we are permitted to see pain, decay and horror. He haunts the book, being constantly transported in his coffin like some Dracula from the sea, and used as an object of barter, as one might use a thing. His symbolic force in the book is the stronger for his absence from it. (Indeed, the book is so logical an

end to the series, I'm not clear why Moorcock plans a fourth. I take it that his enthusiasm for the fourth, provisionally entitled *The Condition of Muzak*, must have ebbed, inasmuch as it has not appeared in the last three years, while he is known to be working on other projects.)

Fourthly and finally, *The English Assassin*, unlike Ballard's *Crash!*, plumps for life rather than death. It accepts entropy as inevitable, but doesn't wave flags in the street and cheer as it walks past. *The English Assassin* contains a splendidly realized life force, in all its grotesque detail, in the person of Mrs. Cornelius, Jerry's mother. She is Moorcock's greatest creation by far, and Dickens himself would have been proud of her. Mrs. Cornelius is not a representative of order, but nor is she decayed. She reminds us that there are other relevant dichotomies aside from Law and Chaos, Order and Disorder, and one is Life rather than Death. A fearful old harridan of monstrous appetites, she is the old abortionist upstairs, she is the malicious gossip in the fish-and-chip shop, she is the fat old whore who denies the menopause by acting as if it never happened, and good luck to her. She lends a quite remarkable life to the book.

For coolness and knife-edge precision I value Ballard most highly; for richness of texture, and a readiness to value all kinds of experience, the award goes to Aldiss; I'm not certain, but I am inclined to value Moorcock highest of the three for the alertness of his human observation, and for a potentiality of compassion. Like the others, he plays the nihilist game, and like Aldiss, he does not seem wholly satisfied with it. In Moorcock I see the greatest potentiality for balance. I don't like nihilism, you see. I know it can hurt and destroy the things and people I love. Although it attracts Moorcock, I cannot see that he is committed to it.

The last thing to be said about Moorcock is that his most recent works are demonstrably the best. This is arguable in the cases of Ballard and Aldiss, though there is no reason at all to suppose that either of them are spent forces. Indeed, *Frankenstein Unbound* is one of Aldiss's best, though the recent enigmatic short stories, and the Space Opera *Eighty Minute Hour* both emphasize baroque surfaces in a way I find injurious to both meaning and feeling. But it is Moorcock who at this point of time, shows the growth potential. This is a tip to future investors. He is the youngest by a decade; he has recently slowed down, taken thought, and seems to be changing direction. This is good.

There are a few more points to make. The first is that I have nowhere considered the question of whether or not the stories I have been discussing are science fiction. I regard it as a boring and unproductive question, and I don't honestly care what the answer is.

The second thing involves that word "entropy". It was a little-used technical term, some fifteen years ago, referring to the second law of thermodynamics, and the fact that all energy in the universe tends ultimately to the same level, so that the complex shall become simple, the hot shall become cool, the living shall become dead. Life itself, both of people and societies, is a kind of backwards vortex in the continuous stream of entropy. By living, we are in effect against nature.

I think it was Philip K. Dick who first brought the word "entropy" into general use in science fiction, though it may have been James Blish. It was someone in the late fifties. It became the central emblem, the prime symbol, the ultimate metaphor around which *New Worlds* fiction has always revolved. (*The English Assassin* is sub-titled "A Romance of Entropy".) With this adoption of responsibility, which happened elsewhere too at about the same time, notably with Philip Dick and Ursula Le Guin, science fiction reached adulthood. It admitted death. It gave gimmickry, heroism, restless exploration, a context of meaning.

But at the same time, in *New Worlds* at least, it became an obsession. The *New Worlds* world-view, with few exceptions, insisted that things were running down, and fast. One of the recent exceptions is Thomas Disch's 334, which admits decay while giving equal weight to organic continuity, and to a continuity of human feeling. But *New Worlds* generally tended towards the hectic and the hectoring. They wouldn't let entropy alone. A perfectly commonplace, neatly told little story by Pamela Zoline, called "The Heat Death of the Universe", has been described by Brian Aldiss as superlative, and I feel this is less for its intrinsic qualities as for its summing up of the *New Worlds*' "zeitgeist", (not to mention "schadenfreude" and "weltschmerz", while I'm talking in German).

The better writers dealt with the theme as good writers always have done. The theme itself isn't new. Death has been with us from the beginning. But the emphasis was new. The well known sf disaster story no longer featured an apocalypse which was random and accidental. Catastrophe was now seen as inevitable, overwhelming, and in decent conformity with God's laws. There is something almost Cromwellian and Puritan about the rigour with which this belief (one with which I agree with modifications) was proclaimed. The voice of Cassandra, the voice of the prophet of Doom, was heard in the land, and rang loudly down Ladbrooke Grove in the sixties. Only, in this case, Cassandra was dressed

in Music Hall gear, and gave her prophecy while strutting her stuff on stage, a fixed rictus of mirth on her over-powdered face. Quite a phenomenon.

The adverse side of the phenomenon can be found by going back to *New Worlds*, and seeing how often the same basic plot, the same philosophy of entropy, was worked out by bad writers, or by obsessives, mutilation fetishists who had found an unexpected niche under the protective wing of the softly clucking Arts Council.

I like the best of *New Worlds* even though it gave shelter to the Monster of Anarchy. But there does exist a sort of typical third-rate *New Worlds* story too. It would be bad manners, and dramatically wrong, to turn around and analyse any of these in detail. But I think it can be said that the successive editors, Michael Moorcock, Charles Platt and Hilary Bailey sometimes leaned over too far in giving living space to some of this stuff. Perhaps just one example: I came across it only yesterday: "I Remember, Anita" by Langdon Jones, published amazingly in a volume called *The Best of New Worlds* in 1965. It contains the following passages. First:

"Mike!" you screamed in an agonised voice, and fell into my arms, sobbing. You buried your face in my shoulder. "Oh, Mike, why? Why?" I stroked your hair with trembling fingers.

"It's a funny thing about people," I replied shakily, "they always try to hurt those they love the most."

Suddenly my mouth was on yours and our bodies were pressed violently together. My tongue found the fever heat of your mouth, and my hands ran over your body.

That passage, which any self-respecting *Woman's Magazine* would have instantly rejected, is shortly followed by another which, this being *New Worlds*, is absolutely inevitable:

I remember, Dear God, I remember! Your clothes had been burnt away, and you were naked, save for the remains of the little lace pants that I had bought you, which had been burnt into your skin . . . Oh, Anita, Oh, my darling, my darling! Your right leg was broken and the whiteness of the bone could be glimpsed through the gaping wound torn in your thigh. Your thigh, where my mouth had so often lingered.

Not even Tom Lehrer could have parodied the tone better. If only I could think Langdon Jones had done it on purpose. It is amazing how many male writers in *New Worlds* mutilated and maimed their female characters in story after story. There is a point to be made there, and an interesting one, but I am saving that study for the safety of my retirement far away and later on.

New Worlds continues still, though without quite the same function it once performed. It never made anyone rich, it lived from hand to mouth, but it won its important battles. In recent years it has seemed to be floundering, and even now it has an air of self-protective cliquishness about it, but I wouldn't like to see it die. The last issue was a good one. No matter how defensive, how strident, how paranoid, how nihilist it was or is, it deserves, I think, our affection and support.

There is necessarily something schizophrenic about an editor who is also a contributor to his own magazine. As editor, I became uneasily aware that some of the views I expressed as contributor (author of the previous article "Jerry Cornelius at The Atrocity Exhibition") were open to argument. Though I have absolutely no wish to recant, I must listen when my editorial persona suggests to me that here is a case where the "equal time" rule might properly be applied — especially, perhaps, regarding one of the most controversial statements I made: that J.G. Ballard "is advocating a life style quite likely to involve the sudden death of yourself or those you love". The word which will strike some readers as dubious is "advocating".

*Luckily I knew that Mr. Ballard had written (and spoken) very articulately about the intentions behind his recent work in some French publications, and I determined to get hold of them if I could, and print them for the first time in English. The first of the two pieces below is the specially commissioned introduction to the French edition of *Crash!*, published by Calmann-Lévy in 1974 as part of their Dimensions series which is edited by Robert Louit, who was also in this case the translator of the novel. (The French translation [which includes the exclamation point ! in the title] is extraordinarily precise and natural.) The second piece is an interview with J.G. Ballard — again by Robert Louit — which appeared in Magazine Littéraire No. 87, April 1974. The interview was made when *Crash!* was released in France.*

*I telephoned Mr. Ballard, who generously gave me permission to use the Introduction to the French edition of *Crash!* Robert Louit of Calmann-Lévy also gave his permission, and provided me with the original English text. The magazine interview, on the other hand, was in French. Any solecisms in the English translation below should be imputed to me because, in the absence of all my bilingual friends on summer vacation, I had to translate it myself.*

Mr. Ballard had a number of interesting things to say on the telephone about the reception of Crash! He commented that it had been received less enthusiastically in the U.S.A., and more enthusiastically in France, than he expected. He now believes this is because "there is a tradition of intellectual pornography in France, while in America pornography is still disreputable". Certainly, though I continue to see Crash! as a kind of science fiction (technological fiction, anyway), it makes more sense to me to see it as part of a tradition to which de Sade and Réage also belong, rather than a work in the line of Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke!

Incidentally, both pieces below were originally published before the French publication of Concrete Island, so no reference to this most recently published novel of Ballard is made, though much of what he says is relevant to it.

Foundation gives its warmest thanks to Calmann-Lévy, Magazine Littéraire, Mr. Ballard and M. Louit for their kindness in letting us publish these interesting statements for the first time in English.

some words about Crash!

J.G. Ballard

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE FRENCH EDITION OF CRASH!

The marriage of reason and nightmare which has dominated the 20th century has given birth to an ever more ambiguous world. Across the communications landscape move the spectres of sinister technologies and the dreams that money can buy. Thermo-nuclear weapons systems and soft-drink commercials coexist in an overlit realm ruled by advertising and pseudo-events, science and pornography. Over our lives preside the great twin leitmotifs of the 20th century — sex and paranoia. Despite McLuhan's delight in high-speed information mosaics we are still reminded of Freud's profound pessimism in *Civilisation and its Discontents*. Voyeurism, self-disgust, the infantile basis of our dreams and longings — these diseases of the psyche have now culminated in the most terrifying casualty of the century: the death of affect.

This demise of feeling and emotion has paved the way for all our most real and tender pleasures — in the excitements of pain and mutilation; in sex as the perfect arena, like a culture-bed of sterile pus, for all the veronicas of our own perversions; in our moral freedom to pursue

our own psychopathology as a game; and in our apparently limitless powers for conceptualisation — what our children have to fear is not the cars on the highways of tomorrow but our own pleasure in calculating the most elegant parameters of their deaths.

To document the uneasy pleasures of living within this glaucous paradise has more and more become the role of science fiction. I firmly believe that science fiction, far from being an unimportant minor offshoot, in fact represents the main literary tradition of the 20th century, and certainly its oldest — a tradition of imaginative response to science and technology that runs in an intact line through H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, the writers of modern American science fiction, to such present-day innovators as William Burroughs.

The main 'fact' of the 20th century is the concept of the unlimited possibility. This predicate of science and technology enshrines the notion of a moratorium on the past — the irrelevancy and even death of the past — and the limitless alternatives available to the present. What links the first flight of the Wright Brothers to the invention of the Pill is the social and sexual philosophy of the ejector seat.

Given this immense continent of possibility, few literatures would seem better equipped to deal with their subject matter, than science fiction. No other form of fiction has the vocabulary of ideas and images to deal with the present, let alone the future. The dominant characteristic of the modern mainstream novel is its sense of individual isolation, its mood of introspection and alienation, a state of mind always assumed to be the hallmark of the 20th century consciousness.

Far from it. On the contrary, it seems to me that this is a psychology that belongs entirely to the 19th century, part of a reaction against the massive restraints of bourgeois society, the monolithic character of Victorianism and the tyranny of the paterfamilias, secure in his financial and sexual authority. Apart from its marked retrospective bias, and its obsession with the subjective nature of experience, its real subject matter is the rationalisation of guilt and estrangement. Its elements are introspection, pessimism and sophistication. Yet if anything befits the 20th century it is optimism, the iconography of mass-merchandising, naivety and a guilt-free enjoyment of all the mind's possibilities.

The kind of imagination that now manifests itself in science fiction is not something new. Homer, Shakespeare and Milton all invented new worlds to comment on this one. The split of science fiction into a separate and somewhat disreputable genre is a recent development. It is connected with the near-disappearance of dramatic and philosophical poetry, and the slow shrinking of the traditional novel as it concerns itself more and more exclusively with the nuances of human relationships.

Among those areas neglected by the traditional novel are, above all, the dynamics of human societies (the traditional novel tends to depict society as static), and man's place in the universe. However crudely or naively, science fiction at least attempts to place a philosophical and metaphysical frame around the most important events within our lives and consciousnesses.

If I make this general defence of science fiction it is, obviously, because my own career as a writer has been involved with it for almost twenty years. From the very start, when I first turned to science fiction, I was convinced that the future was a better key to the present than the past. At the time, however, I was dissatisfied with science fiction's obsession with its two principal themes — outer space, and the far future. As much for emblematic purposes as any theoretical or programmatic ones, I christened the new terrain I wished to explore “inner space”, that psychological domain (manifest, for example, in surrealist painting) where the inner world of the mind and the outer world of reality meet and fuse.

Primarily, I wanted to write a fiction about the present day. To do this in the context of the late 1950s, in a world where the call-sign of Sputnik 1 could be heard on one's radio like the advance beacon of a new universe, required completely different techniques from those available to the 19th century novelist. In fact, I believe that if it were possible to scrap the whole of existing literature, and be forced to begin again without any knowledge of the past, all writers would find themselves inevitably producing something very close to science fiction.

Science and technology multiply around us. To an increasing extent they dictate the languages in which we speak and think. Either we use those languages, or we remain mute.

Yet, by an ironic paradox, modern science fiction became the first casualty of the changing world it anticipated and helped to create. The future envisaged by the science fiction of the 1940s and 1950s is already our past. Its dominant images, not merely of the first Moon flights and interplanetary voyages, but of our changing social and political relationships in a world governed by technology, now resemble huge pieces of discarded stage scenery. For me, this could be seen most touchingly in the film *2001: a Space Odyssey*, which signified the end of the heroic period of modern science fiction — its lovingly imagined panoramas and costumes, its huge set pieces, reminded me of *Gone with the Wind*, a scientific pageant that became a kind of historical romance in reverse, a sealed world into which the hard light of contemporary reality was never allowed to penetrate.

Increasingly, our concepts of past, present and future are being forced to revise themselves. Just as the past itself, in social and psycho-

logical terms, became a casualty of Hiroshima and the nuclear age (almost by definition a period where we were all forced to think prospectively), so in its turn the future is ceasing to exist, devoured by the all-voracious present. We have annexed the future into our own present, as merely one of those manifold alternatives open to us. Options multiply around us, we live in an almost infantile world where any demand, any possibility, whether for life-styles, travel, sexual roles and identities, can be satisfied instantly.

In addition, I feel that the balance between fiction and reality has changed significantly in the past decade. Increasingly their roles are reversed. We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind — mass-merchandising, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the instant translation of science and technology into popular imagery, the increasing blurring and intermingling of identities within the realm of consumer goods, the pre-empting of any free or original imaginative response to experience by the television screen. We live inside an enormous novel. For the writer in particular it is less and less necessary for him to invent the fictional content of his novel. The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent the reality.

In the past we have always assumed that the external world around us has represented reality, however confusing or uncertain, and that the inner world of our minds, its dreams, hopes, ambitions, represented the realm of fantasy and the imagination. These roles, too, it seems to me, have been reversed. The most prudent and effective method of dealing with the world around us is to assume that it is a complete fiction — conversely, the one small node of reality left to us is inside our own heads. Freud's classic distinction between the latent and manifest content of the dream, between the apparent and the real, now needs to be applied to the external world of so-called reality.

Given these transformations, what is the main task facing the writer? Can he, any longer, make use of the techniques and perspectives of the traditional 19th century novel, with its linear narrative, its measured chronology, its consular characters grandly inhabiting their domains within an ample time and space? Is his subject matter the sources of character and personality sunk deep in the past, the unhurried inspection of roots, the examination of the most subtle nuances of social behaviour and personal relationships? Has the writer still the moral authority to invent a self-sufficient and self-enclosed world, to preside over his characters like an examiner, knowing all the questions in advance? Can he leave out anything he prefers not to understand, including his own motives, prejudices and psychopathology?

I feel myself that the writer's role, his authority and licence to act, have changed radically. I feel that, in a sense, the writer knows nothing any longer. He has no moral stance. He offers the reader the contents of his own head, he offers a set of options and imaginative alternatives. His role is that of the scientist, whether on safari or in his laboratory, faced with a completely unknown terrain or subject. All he can do is to devise various hypotheses and test them against the facts.

Crash! is such a book, an extreme metaphor for an extreme situation, a kit of desperate measures only for use in an extreme crisis. If I am right, and what I have done over the past few years is to rediscover the present for myself, *Crash!* takes up its position as a cataclysmic novel of the present-day in line with my previous novels of world cataclysm set in the near or immediate future — *The Drowned World*, *The Drought*, and *The Crystal World*.

Crash!, of course, is not concerned with an imaginary disaster, however imminent, but with a pandemic cataclysm institutionalised in all industrial societies that kills hundreds of thousands of people each year and injures millions. Do we see, in the car crash, a sinister portent of a nightmare marriage between sex and technology? Will modern technology provide us with hitherto undreamed-of means for tapping our own psychopathologies? Is this harnessing of our innate perversity conceivably of benefit to us? Is there some deviant logic unfolding more powerful than that provided by reason?

Throughout *Crash!* I have used the car not only as a sexual image, but as a total metaphor for man's life in today's society. As such the novel has a political role quite apart from its sexual content, but I would still like to think that *Crash!* is the first pornographic novel based on technology. In a sense, pornography is the most political form of fiction, dealing with how we use and exploit each other, in the most urgent and ruthless way.

Needless to say, the ultimate role of *Crash!* is cautionary, a warning against that brutal, erotic and overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological landscape.

2. INTERVIEW

— *What's your position today with respect to science fiction?*

— When I began writing, towards the end of the fifties, science fiction was the only branch of literature which permitted *speculative* writing — making evaluations of human reaction to the various upheavals, scien-

tific, technological, political, which were happening them. I turned naturally towards the genre. I'm tempted to say that half of my work preceding *The Atrocity Exhibition* was science fiction; the other half belongs to fantasy or to allegory pure and simple — for example, my short story “The Drowned Giant”. I consider that I left the genre completely with *The Atrocity Exhibition*, but I don't have any substitute terminology to offer you for what I actually write. *Crash!* is not a science fiction novel, but could nevertheless be read as one, because it contains elements of political and “sociological” thought which one finds in certain works of the genre. I wouldn't want a reader tackling *Crash!* to let himself be fenced in by the limitations (which don't, however, necessarily imply a pejorative judgment) that are habitually attributed to science fiction.

— *You once defined science fiction as “the literature of technological optimism, born in America in the twenties”. It seems to me that your work takes the exact opposite course to the one implied by this. Perhaps the subject matter remains to a certain extent technological, but you are less occupied in speculating on the future than on the present, whose strangeness and fascination you unveil. The result is not always optimistic.*

— Exactly. I don't see much I could add to that description. For some years I have been trying to show the present from an unusual angle.

— *This evolution of yours culminates in the “fragmented” stories of The Atrocity Exhibition.*

— In effect. The determining factor for me was the assassination of John Kennedy in 1963: it is, among other things, the subject of *The Atrocity Exhibition*. I wrote a lot about the Kennedys at that time because they seemed to me a kind of twentieth century House of the Atreides. Their history illustrates particularly well the way in which, little by little, the fictional elements of everyday reality have ended up by completely masking the so-called “real” elements. For some years we have been living in the middle of what is in fact an enormous novel. More and more our lives are affected by advertising, by politics conceived and carried out as an exercise in publicity, by mass commerce, and so on. We live in a media-landscape. Elements of fiction mingle with our lives and transform them, right down to tiny details. When you get an air-ticket from London to Paris you are buying not only a travel voucher,

but also and above all a trademark, an image — of a certain airline, its style, its hostesses, its decor, whether or not it has a bar, or a film show, during the flight. The fictitious elements are interwoven with the reality of the trip. It's the same in politics: presidential elections in the U.S.A. are nothing less than the crashing together of two spheres of fiction, like the collision of two galaxies. As to private life, it too is obedient to the influence of images projected by newspapers, television, advertising posters, etc. These can be sensed in the way people decorate their homes, the way they dress, in the whole apparatus of their relation to others. To speak of this new world I was led, in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, to fragment contemporary reality so that I could reassemble its elements paragraph by paragraph and show its springs. This method allowed me to examine simultaneously the different strata that make up our own experience of the actual world: the level of public events such as war, the conquest of space or the story of Kennedy; the level of everyday life, of people who get into the car every morning, work at the office, convalesce in a hospital etc.; and the level of our fantasies. In *The Atrocity Exhibition* then, I tried to blend these three levels just as we constantly do in life, every day. The conventions of the ordinary "realistic" novel don't allow this approach. Linear narrative is like a railway running from one point to another from which one cannot deviate; it prevents simultaneous perceptions. Now, my aim is to show that these three levels, public, private and fantastic, cut backwards and forwards across one another: that points of intersection exist between them. In spite of the linear aspect of its narrative, *Crash!* relies equally on this technique, which you could compare to a kind of radar.

— *So the construction of your latest books exactly reflects our way of seeing the world every day.*

— Yes. It's a little as if I were leading the reader to a deserted laboratory, and that I put a collection of specimens and all the necessary equipment at his disposal. It's his job then to relate these elements together and create reactions from them. I believe that contemporary fiction has to direct itself more and more in this direction. The novelist must stop looking at things retrospectively, returning to past events which he lays out meticulously as if he were preparing a parcel which he will afterwards deliver to the reader, telling him: "It was like that". The essence of the traditional novel is in the formula "that's what happened". I believe that today it's necessary to write in a more speculative way, to write a kind of "investigation novel" which corresponds to the formula "this is what's happening" or "this is going to happen". In an enterprise of this kind, the

author doesn't know in advance what he's going to produce. He loses his omniscience.

— *For the classical novel, which is an object enclosed and complete within the spirit of its author, you substitute an open narrative in which the act of reading itself becomes part of the creative process, or rather, the process of investigation.*

— That's it. In *Crash!* I'm content to give the reader a spectrum of possibilities, but it's up to him to choose between them. In the classical novel, we can discover the moral, political and philosophical position of the author in every event described. In *Crash!* my position hasn't been clarified, since I'm content to supply a cluster of probabilities. It's the reader's reactions that assure the functioning of the book: in the course of the story, everyone has to reach a limiting position beyond which he is not able to accept what is proposed to him. I don't say that I expect the world to end in a sort of automotive apocalypse fed on sex and violence; I offer this vision as one extreme hypothesis because it seems to me inscribed in the present.

— *In Crash! you systematically establish correspondences between parts of the body, parts of the automobile, elements of the landscape, real people and the mythical images of the media.*

— I wouldn't want to give the impression of being excessively schematic, but I'm convinced that when an event takes place on one of the three levels of reality we spoke about earlier, it necessarily affects the other two in a more or less perceptible way. So, when I evoke the suicide of Marilyn Monroe in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, it's because it doesn't appear to me as simply the death of a woman, but as a kind of space-time disaster, a catastrophe which created a rupture in our perception of time and space, as if we saw the abrupt subsidence of an immovable object before our very eyes. In effect, Marilyn Monroe, the Kennedys, the astronauts, are part of our mental landscape with as much right as the streets and houses that we frequent.

— *I feel bound to repeat the celebrated epigram of Dali, made from the same perspective: "The soul is a condition of landscape".*

— That seems a very important point to me. I'm very interested in a certain period of surrealism, particularly among the painters, for it seems to

me that I recover from them a demeanour of the spirit close to my own. Dali splits up the elements of reality and assembles them to constitute a kind of Freudian landscape. We entertain certitudes about the subject of reality which permit us to live: I'm sure that there is an elevator at the end of this corridor which will bring me to a level whose solidity is not in doubt. The work of Dali and other surrealist painters is to undermine these certitudes. There again, it's necessary to propose an extreme hypothesis.

— *This surrealist influence applies especially to your work before The Atrocity Exhibition.*

— But surrealism itself is behind us today; it is a finished period. For Dali to be able to paint soft watches, it was necessary that real watches be hard. Now today, if you ask someone the time in the street you might see the effigy of Mickey Mouse or Spiro Agnew on the dial. It is a typical and entirely commonplace invasion of reality by fiction. The roles have been reversed, and from now on literature must no so much invent an imaginary world as explore the fictions that surround us. I realize that I am hesitating more and more to invent things when I write. In *Crash!* I reduced the number of characters and situations to the minimum, because from now on it seems to me that the function of the writer is no longer the addition of fiction in the world, but rather to seek its abstraction, to direct an enquiry aimed at recovering elements of reality from this debauch of fiction.

— *The first part of your work seems directly inspired by painting, while your more recent books find their sources in photography, the cinema and television. This corresponds also to a change of construction material: you are moving from the beach sands of Vermilion Sands to the motorway concrete of Crash!*

— The reason for this change is that until *The Atrocity Exhibition* I was describing imaginary places. Afterwards, I turned to the landscape of technology and the communications industry. And it's photography and the cinema above all which provide us with reflections of this landscape. Television seems to me to play a particularly important role, in the continuous flood of images with which it inundates our brain: it perceives things on our behalf, and it's like a third eye grafted onto us.

— *You even integrate certain specifically cinematic techniques, such as slow-motion, into your writing.*

— Slow motion introduces a different sense of time, a fresh perception of things — often associated today with acts of violence, or more or less physical excitements. It happens in the violent episodes in the films of someone like Sam Peckinpah, and in the sports programmes on television, where important incidents of a contest are shown a second time in slow motion only an instant after they have taken place. A moment of terrifying violence like the collision of two cars hurtling together at full speed can in this way be metamorphosed into a kind of slow and gracious ballet. What interests me in this technique is that while it suppresses the classical emphasis on character, it brings about a stylisation of events which confers on them a formidable weight.

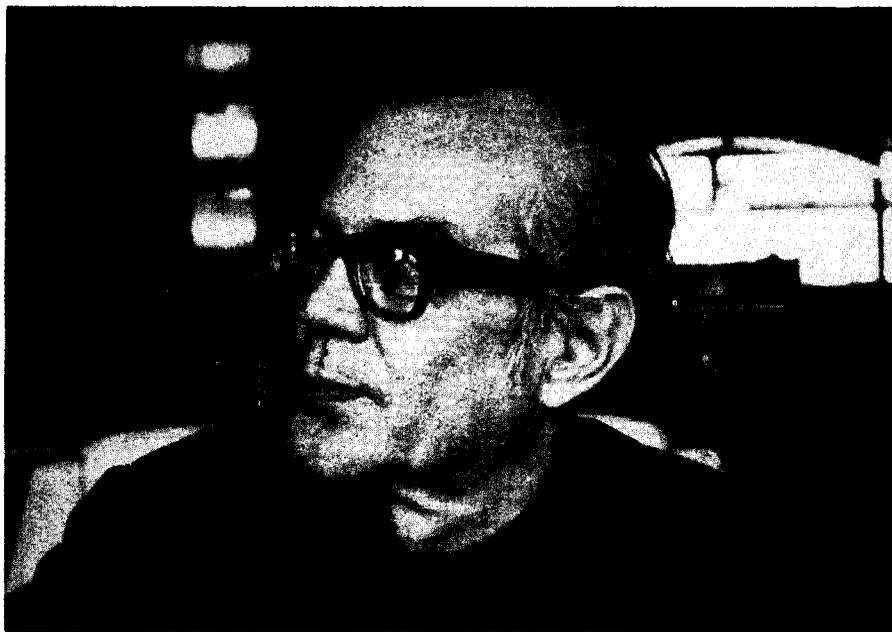
the death of James Blish

Peter Nicholls

Life is seldom tidy and often unhappy. This notice, put into the journal at the last possible moment, is more of a hurried stop-press announcement than a considered obituary.

Jim Blish died of cancer on the 30th of July, 1975. He had lived with the illness for many years: it would seem to be conquered, then strike again in another place. He underwent two operations for it, the first successful, and the second (in 1974) apparently so. During the four years of my friendship with him he was under-weight, found difficulty in eating, often in pain, and looking much older than he was; he had just turned 54 when he died. Yet after getting to know him, these things are not what I remember.

He had a remarkable and not wholly illusory vigour. He could talk, passionately and well, for many hours, stoking himself up with beer and Guinness which only seemed to sharpen his sobriety. He was my first friend in science fiction, and I never knew him to be other than wholly generous and wholly kind, with no whisper of patronage to his juniors, and an unwavering loyalty to his many friends among his peers, no matter what intellectual disagreements he might have with them. Inexorable in argument, and despite anything said before, not remotely saintly in manner (he could gossip and grumble with the best of them when he felt like it, though not often and more wittily than most) he nevertheless seemed always a *good* man. There aren't many.



He was a scholar, who felt that England was the home of scholarship. He loved the idea of Oxford, and left his native United States with his second wife Judith Lawrence in the late sixties, to live in Oxfordshire. His own favourite among his books was *Dr. Mirabilis*, the partly fictional biography of Roger Bacon. I, too, think it was his finest book. Our friendship began when I told him so.

In science fiction, he was of the pulps in the beginning, but transcended their limitations, and was one of the writers directly responsible for the extraordinary rise in the standards of magazine sf in the early fifties. He was trained in science, and scrupulously accurate so far as he could be in matters scientific. He was a thinker in a field much devoted to action, and it is difficult now, so great has been his effect, to remember the vivid sensation of surprise many of us felt at first meeting his taut, metaphysical speculations in the pages of *Astounding*. He loved science fiction but, an obsessive reformer, he kept trying to improve it (with some success I believe) through argument, example, and the astringent criticism he wrote under the name of William Atheling Jr.

I will always remember him especially for the novels *A Case of Conscience* and *Dr. Mirabilis*, the Okie stories now collected in one volume

as *Cities in Flight*, and many of the short stories, including “A Work of Art”, “Surface Tension”, “Beanstalk” and “Beep”.

In a period when much science fiction was conservative and right wing, James Blish stood up for the rights of the small man, disliked communism but had no great love of capitalism either, attacked McCarthyism when it was still dangerous to do so, and adhered to a rather pessimistic and Spenglerian view of history.

He was a scientific puritan who was drawn to the miraculous, but would not accept it without proof. He loved the idea of e.s.p. (see *Jack of Eagles*) but in real life he felt unable to accept it. He found something poetic and beautiful — a miracle he *was* able to accept — in modern theoretical physics, especially the relativity theories, the uncertainty principle, and the quantum theories, although he insisted that if Einstein were right, then we lived in a deterministic universe. This never prevented him from giving ample evidence of a will not only free but very strong indeed. It took a brave man, for example, to argue with him on the merits of *Finnegans Wake* or the operas of Richard Strauss, which were the works of art he most talked about.

In recent years he found trouble working, and was unhappy about it. The years of his illness were not the most productive of his writing career, but they did produce *Black Easter* and *The Day After Judgment*. Indeed, in the last twelve months, before he became too weak to continue, he seemed to have found a renewed fluency, and with it, a renewed appetite for life. Although some of us knew that his life expectancy was short, his energy and courage were such that it was difficult to *feel* this to be so, and his death, though expected, seemed shocking. (I am told that it was fairly painless, and the terminal stage of his illness was fortunately brief. He was still able to walk about in the last week.)

Foundation expresses its sorrow at James Blish’s death to his wife, Judith, and his two children from his first marriage (to Virginia Kidd) Beth and Ben.

I hope we can print a proper assessment of Blish’s work in a later issue of *Foundation*, and also print the article which he was recently working on for us himself. Knowing how Jim disliked being cosseted I sent it to him for revision, even though I knew he was gravely ill, and I believe I was right to do so.

The world of science fiction (and the Science Fiction Foundation on whose Council he sat and which he helped to build up) has lost one of its most formidable members. And many of us have lost a friend whom we loved.

Ms. Bengels, the author of the article below, has been teaching English Literature for eight years, after taking her M.A. (on Paradise Lost) at Hunter College. She has just finished teaching a science fiction course at Hofstra University (Long Island, New York) for the second successive year; they have agreed to make it a regular offering. She is married, has two daughters (Elizabeth and Emily), and two dogs of doubtful pedigree.

olaf stapledon's "odd john" and "sirius": ascent into bestiality

Barbara Bengels

To read Olaf Stapledon's *Sirius* is in essence to re-read his *Odd John* for it seems that he has played much the same trick as Stanley Weinbaum who took the early manuscript for "Martian Odyssey" and re-played it as "Valley of Dreams."¹ The 1944 *Sirius* is a more clearly defined, edited, and characterized version of the 1939 *Odd John*, but the plot, theme and technique remain much the same. Even the titles themselves hint at the lurking similarities, *Odd John* being sub-titled "A Story Between Jest and Earnest" and *Sirius* surely being not merely a reference to the dog star but also a pun on the nature of the content, a form of irony in itself for while the dog is serious, the author often isn't (and occasionally *vice versa*). Perhaps the jest derived from Stapledon's use of animal imagery in *Odd John*; if John is the representative there of *Homo Superior* then the narrator plays the part of man's best friend. By chapter four the narrator admits that he was John's "slave . . . his faithful hound" who "must come at heel",² and through much of the book thereafter we know of him only as Fido.³ How irresistible it must have been to reverse the roles in Stapledon's sequel, to show another aspect of the man-dog relationship where the dog is infinitely the more sympathetic and certainly as capable of illuminating man's strengths, foibles, and latent bestiality.

Right from the start then we have the same principles at work: a scientist (Thomas Wainwright, a doctor in *Odd John*, and Thomas Trelone, a psychologist in *Sirius*) who produces a superior creation, one his own child, the other a dog raised as his own child. Whereas John's father is rather coldly scientific, Sirius's mentor takes special joy in his accomplishments, but neither Thomas is fully aware of either the capabilities or torment of his protégé. Unlike his literary predecessor, Victor Frankenstein, Thomas Trelone at last learns to understand his responsibilities to his creation, even if he never lives to fulfil them. In both cases, it is the wife of the scientist who more truly appreciates the special burden these extraordinary children must bear: Pax achieves an almost superhuman rapport with John, while Elizabeth is the one to warn Thomas of Sirius's potential difficulties adapting to a world which can never accept his unusual abilities. In the case of both sets of characters, the movement from *Odd John* to *Sirius* is in the intensification and complication of characterization. Thomas Trelone and Elizabeth are more complex and believable, the creator who expects his *wunderkind* to follow him into the research lab while still considering him a super-sheepdog, and the mother whose ambivalence is understandable, who longs for her "natural" child to reign supreme but who dedicates the end of her life to giving Sirius a life of his own.

Likewise, the framework Stapledon establishes for these works is really the same in both. They are related retrospectively by an ordinary but sympathetic friend who appreciates the special abilities and hardships of the protagonists. This allows Stapledon to gain a double point of view; we see John and Sirius from the stance of the average man and we see ourselves and our foibles from the super-normal viewpoint.⁴ But as J.O. Bailey suggests in *Pilgrims Through Space and Time*, even the handling of the narrator is more complex in *Sirius*. For one thing, Robert has a translation problem; it is obviously difficult to translate dog sensations into man-language. Secondly, Robert has the traditional human bias toward dogs, considering them an inferior race. Most significant, however, is the fact that Robert is certainly not just a sympathetic friend; he is, instead, torn between his frustrated love for Plaxy and his compassionate admiration for Sirius.⁵ Thus, even here too, we have a much more subtle interplay of motivations, a far more fascinating view into the struggle to be truly human, even when human-born.

It is, of course, in the characterizations of John and Sirius that the similarities are most striking, again Sirius being the more interesting and likeable of the two. Both emerge from infancy slowly — and share a similar fate in a world that will not allow them to live. Their attempts to find a place for themselves in that world are the focus of both books and to find a place, both must know exactly who they are and what they are capable of. As exceptional creatures, or wide-awakes, the term used throughout, they both become outsiders, observing human conventions but not restricted by them. Here Stapledon uses them as vehicles for criticizing and mocking man's myriad insincerities, from his religion, to his politics, to his picking his nose and masturbating when his dog is present. John and Sirius flex their muscles, learning to fight and kill, discover their own sexuality, deplore then return to human society after conquering the wilderness — and in all these instances, the experiences seem more appropriate and better handled by Sirius than by John. *Odd John* is a pedantic book, heavy in its philosophy and unsophisticated in its style. Here Stapledon is burdened by his task of characterizing the superior mind which has transcended mere humanity, yet John is a dullard in his own way. Sirius, on the other hand, is far more human, far more vulnerable in his desire to attain true humanity, hampered as he is by his animal form. His conflict with the wolf within is certainly symbolic of the same struggles man must wage, his body and his soul warring eternally for predominance, the same conflict which John refers to as “the difficulties of beings that are neither sheer animal nor fully human”.⁶ Sirius, like John, sees the human race for what it is, mocks the intellectuals who undervalue their most valuable asset — hands — yet has a far more human reason for wishing to transcend his animal state than John has for seeking his own kind. While we understand John's need for companionship, his need to make his own music, we *feel* the pathos of Sirius who wishes to love Plaxy and to fulfil his potentialities. Sirius, while noting man's shortcomings, still has a dog-gish affection and loyalty to them; while he can create his own kind of music, he will also sing Bach.

It is in the creation of a love object for Sirius that Stapledon truly transcends his accomplishment of *Odd John*. John is not without his dalliances, first with Stephen, then with Europa, finally with Pax — homosexual, heterosexual and incestuous love all handled in one chapter (8). When in the last chapter Pax tells us she has seen John and Lo “walking together on the shore, like lovers at last”⁷ we may breathe

a sigh of relief — or we may not. John has not been a particularly loveable character; love, in fact, is of very little importance to him, and it is difficult to care whether or not he has ultimately found his perfect soulmate. Sirius, on the other hand, is the very essence of love, and it, in part, destroys him. True, he too begins with dalliances, the smell of bitches in heat driving him wild. He, too, involves himself in an incestuous relationship — but even this is far more complex for incest with Plaxy, reared as his sister, is also sodomy — but more important, it is a true demonstration of his all-encompassing love for Plaxy, his human alter-ego. She has toyed with him, has caused him great sorrow, in short has treated him as she would any lover — but neither of them has ever doubted their deep and extraordinary emotional relationship. The complexity and ambivalence of Plaxy's feelings for Sirius are a perfect reflection of his approach-avoidance of her — and of her human race. But the force and depth of that love can never be questioned.

In the telling of this fascinating involvement, Stapledon demonstrates another virtue of *Sirius*. Love between two species could be seen as wholly tragic, but Stapledon has maintained a lighter touch here. When humour is employed in *Odd John*, it is generally ironic, solely at the expense of mankind. The comic element in *Sirius* exists in many forms throughout the novel, from the irony of man's indiscretions before his dog, to the childish whimsy of the urination ritual Sirius and Plaxy share, but even here it is interesting to note that this same ritual ultimately leads to the death of Sirius. Perhaps another good example of this complex use of humour is Sirius's lifting his leg on the gatepost of the church. "You might have relieved yourself somewhere else", says Geoffrey but Sirius quickly responds, "No . . . It was a religious act. I have poured my libation in honour of your God. And I have relieved my spirit of impurity."⁸ Sirius, of course, is serious; it is Stapledon who jests.

Ultimately, then, whereas the technique and structure of both books are essentially the same, whereas the same details are used by Stapledon to emphasize the disparity between man as he is and as he could be, there is nevertheless a greater richness and vitality to the later work. In *Sirius*, Stapledon has not only dispensed with much of his ponderous, pedantic musings, but he has also enriched the work with a somewhat lighter tone (thereby accentuating his darker moments when he wishes to) and more interesting human characterizations, characters who feel

as well as think. As Brian Aldiss points out, love is a rare thing in the works of Stapledon, and it is the element that makes Sirius more admirable than John.⁹ Even when this love resides outside the bounds of conventional *mores*, we empathize far more with those who can love so strongly. Unlike Odd John and his friends, Sirius and Plaxy are not alienated from us by their superiority and need to form a community apart from us, but rather they are torn apart themselves by trying to reconcile their aspirations and their abilities, what they wish and what society will allow them. While John is an oddity who can interest us, Sirius is a soul we can feel for — and in the end, we are far more closely related to the transcendent bestiality of Sirius than to the transcendent humanity of John. By focusing on a dog instead of on a human in his later novel, Stapledon has said more about mankind, for in leaving humanity behind, John has left us behind. In being driven to bestiality, Sirius has nevertheless achieved a kindred humanity for he is the beast — and the man — in us all.

FOOTNOTES

1. Sam Moskowitz, *Explorers of the Infinite* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1963), p. 300.
 2. Olaf Stapledon, *Odd John and Sirius* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972), p. 20. Henceforth, all references to both works will come from this edition.
 3. *John*, p. 42
 4. J.O. Bailey, *Pilgrims Through Space and Time* (New York: Argus Books, Inc., 1947), p. 201.
 5. P. 201.
 6. *John*, p. 58.
 7. *John*, p. 157.
 8. *Sirius*, p. 258.
 9. *Billion Year Spree* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), pp. 207-8.
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letters

Dear Sir,

9th October, 1974

I picked up a copy of *Foundation 3* a couple of months ago in London on my way to Moscow (where I am now, the above address being for the diplomatic pouch; I'm researching a dissertation dealing with Soviet sf at the University of Moscow), but have just gotten round to reading John Brunner's speech "Parallel Worlds". Though No. 3 was the most recent issue I saw, one trusts there have been others since then, and hence my

comments will be a little stale; but even if you think it too late to publish them, you might forward this to John Brunner.

In general, I think he makes valid points about the usual butchery of sf in translation. I myself have a fairly extensive discussion of the not-too-bad job done on the Strugatsky brothers' *Hard to be a God* in the American fanzine *Notes From The Chemistry Department* 5. I would, however, bring up a couple of minor points with regard to Soviet sf. First, the relative popularity of science fiction in the USSR and the West cannot be gauged directly from the size of the editions. There is a general practice in the Soviet Union, carried over into science fiction, of printing large editions of a relatively few works rather than smaller editions of many works. Darko Suvin, in *SF Commentary* 35/36/37 states that 285 new sf books were published in the USSR in 1956-1970. This averages out to only nineteen books a year, though the average Soviet book is probably twice as long as the American or British one. Even if we double this figure to take into account reprints, translations, and sf published along with other material in popular science magazines, adventure-fiction yearly anthologies, and so forth, it will be clear that the number of sf titles published in the USSR is substantially less than in the West. It will also be recalled that while there are two more-or-less-annual anthologies in the USSR (*Fantastika* and *NF*), no sf magazine exists. What the size of the Soviet sf readership may be depends on how one defines the term — a very great many people have read the Strugatskys, Lem, Asimov, and Bradbury, but beyond those names there seems to be a sharp drop-off — I would currently guess that the “regular” readership in the USSR is at most four or five times as large as in the US, and may in fact be no larger at all.

A similar modification must be introduced in comparing American and Soviet educational levels. Obligatory schooling starts for the Soviet child two years later than the American. But the child, of course, has continued to grow and learn in those two years. Indeed, especially in urban areas, he may well have spent them in *detskii sad* (a loan-translation of “kindergarten”, but in the Soviet case an institution lasting for at least three years and up to ten hours a day, in contrast to the American one year of three hours or so a day). Consequently, to compare American first grade with the Soviet first *klass* is misleading. (And where British “forms” fit into this business I have no idea.) However, despite this toning down of the contrast, I certainly would not argue that, at least until recently (there have allegedly been reforms), the American school-child acquired a vocabulary in spite of his primer and not because of it.

Patrick McGuire

Helsinki,
Finland.

Dear Peter Nicholls,

29th June 1975

Aren't you just the true-blue, dinkum ocker, Bazza McKenzie type! You smother with charm, assume the mask of a fellow traveller, and then deliver a kick in the balls. I haven't enjoyed an exchange so much in years. (See Foundation 7/8 — *Editor*.)

For 'The Tempest' and allegory, I haven't even Sam Johnson's bare-faced excused of 'sheer ignorance', because I know perfectly well what an allegory is. Sheer carelessness!

As you say, we agree more nearly than we differ, but (just an example of all the 'buts') —

Did *Canticle For Leibowitz* really 'investigate the relationship between religion, science and civilisation'? Did it even pretend to? It simply emphasized what is already there. Think of Pt.1 in terms of the Irish monasteries preserving written knowledge during the dark ages, of Pt.2 as the interest of the church in the sciences, (18th - 20th centuries) and Pt.3 as the practical interest of the church in its physical role as protector of man from himself. What emerges is a statement of faith in a continuing influence. What Miller did was to extrapolate the roles of the church into the future — and come up with the answer that it will repeat its historical roles. What he did *not* do was postulate any future which might *test* the roles of religion. James Blish did something like that in an intelligent way in *Case of Conscience*, thus justifying his use of the sf mode (while del Rey did it unintelligently in some shorter works, justifying nothing). So Blish investigated where Miller only sought to confirm. (Yet *Canticle*, minus investigation, supersedes *Case* by sheer literary power.)

Sf rarely extrapolates, even when it looks as if it is doing so, which is one of the reasons why so much has to be dismissed as unimportant. So often a perfectly good set-up for extrapolation is wasted because all the writer can do with it is plaster a dreary adventure story over his excellent idea (remember how the 'luck' theme became drowned out in *Ringworld*?) when he should have set up a situation and let it work itself out in terms of the experience-variants involved. But, far from being extrapolative, 95% — perhaps more — of sf is just contemporary fiction in fancy dress.

George Turner

East St. Kilda,
Victoria,
Australia.

Dear Mr. Nicholls,

18th November, 1974

I'm unconvinced that you can say *Time Enough For Love* and its immediate predecessors "cast a dark shadow retrospectively over Heinlein's early work". Isn't that the critic's fault rather than the author's? Essentially, you're saying that the message was there all along, but you were too dumb to notice until he started bellowing it at the top of his voice and writing it in mile-high letters all over the countryside.

Malcolm Edwards

Harrow,
Middlesex.

Dear Peter Nicholls,

20th June 1975

Foundation, numbers 7 and 8, at hand, with my sincere appreciation. Such a rich issue deserves accolades.

May I quibble with one of your writers, however? Chapman's assertion that religion to Miller was not a life-giving force but simply an absurd means for man to continue his meaningless life makes me wonder if he and I read the same novel. I grant that *Canticle* is marvelously ambiguous in its attitude toward religion, almost as though Miller has had a love-hate relationship with the Catholic church — as what few Catholics today had not had? Indeed, his acknowledgement includes St. Frances, St. Clare, and Mary among those who made the book possible, and I cannot picture a virulent anti-Catholic, or even a compassionate secular humanist, admitting contributions from that triad of saints.

But whatever Miller's personal religious beliefs, I feel that Chapman has overlooked the brilliant theological ending of the novel where Rachel, the second head of Mrs. Grales, is quite clearly identified as a new Mary or an unfallen Eve, both created without original sin; Rachel is the Immaculate Conception, in other words. I do not wish to take time to explicate the gradual theological development of this thesis in the novel. To do so would take several thousand words, but one paragraph from the novel itself might suffice: "The image of those cool green eyes lingered with him as long as life. He did not ask *why* God would choose to raise up a creature of primal innocence from the shoulder of Mrs. Grales, or why God gave to it the preternatural gifts of Eden . . . He had seen primal innocence in those eyes, and a promise of resurrection."

That doesn't sound like an absurd means of man's continuing his meaningless, hopeless life to me. It is rather a brilliant sf conjecture about the ultimate bounty of God. We need not agree with Mr. Miller's use of (or belief in?) the Roman position to admire his novelistic craft, but coming as it does on the last page of the book, I do not find it strongly stressing "the futility of religion and the pessimistic and existential nature of life," as Chapman avers.

Willis E. McNelly
Professor of English

California State University,
Fullerton.

Sir,

28th January, 1975

I doubt whether Lem's *The Invincible* is merely "interstellar adventure" as James Blish says in *Foundation* 6. I have only read this novel in German, not the East Berlin edition of 1967, but the paperback one of Hamburg, Fischer, 1971; the version is by Roswitha Dietrich, and has eleven chapters, as in the American version. It seems to me to have some quietly horrible implications, and to end in deep irony. The closing words in this German version are more faithfully echoed by Mrs. Ackerman, but both she and the anonymous British translator do sacrifice some of the meaning there from the German; and perhaps from the Polish original?

In M/s Dietrich's German these words are merely the tail-end of a huge triumphal procession of a sentence of 47 words, but they run (I translate: ". . . he went straight up to the 20-storey space-ship which stood in its floodlighting against the paling sky; so majestic in its motionless vastness, it seemed truly invincible." ("*. . . ging er geradenwegs auf das zwanzigstoeckige Raumschiff zu, das in seiner Lichterflut vor dem verblassenden Himmel stand, so majestaetisch in seiner reglosen Groesze, als waere es wirklich unbesiegbar.*") (I have dissected the umlauts, etc.)

The Invincible is *NOT* invincible. Man is shown in full retreat before a development as yet unknown to the Universe, and his clumsy machines (including the atomic ballistic robot) are in vain. Only by cerebral camouflage and abasement does Rohan get away alive. He returns exhausted to the space-ship as to a Mother F-6, protective and superior: but though Something a-biotic *is* invincible, it is no machine made by a living being, and, unit for unit, it is neither majestic, nor motionless, nor great.

David I. Masson

Leeds

Dear Mr. Nicholls,

27th January, 1975

While I appreciate that there is not exactly space to spare within the pages of *Foundation*, have you considered a review of Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*? Way outside of the traditional sf field you react? Maybe, but it seems to me to go a long way to fill the cognitive (perhaps a misleading word) gaps in the speculative works of people as diverse as Stapledon and Delany — they chronicle events and situations to perfection but they do it intuitively and inevitably balk at mechanistic explanations, although one often feels that they are groping toward them (the word 'but' does not mean to imply a value judgement). Every sf writer concerns himself almost completely with man's passage through the present (or very rarely an extrapolated future) mythos without really defining the relationship between the two. I feel that Pirsig provides an adequate working definition which will be of great use to Science Fiction. Just a thought!

Jim Hall

Crew,
Cheshire.

Dear Editor,

20th January, 1975

In *Foundation* 6 you asked readers' views on the propriety of editorial footnotes to reviews. I am inclined to think them proper, at least in the case of a magazine which appears rather infrequently so that the countervailing force of readers' comments, which might otherwise help to keep reviewers within bounds, cannot be properly brought to bear.

In No 4 you did in fact publish a reader's comment on your review of *Ringworld* in No 2. I thought that your reply to him was perhaps kinder than he deserved. As far as I have been able to make out from reading Adrian Berry's *The Next Ten Thousand Years* Dyson did not postulate a solid sphere around his sun, but rather a shell consisting of substantial fragments, like the rings of Saturn in three dimensions. But whatever Dyson said, I can't see any justification for chiding sf writers for not taking up his ideas any earlier.

I found Berry's book very strange and its author a very unsympathetic character. (Since it is not presented as fiction I take it that it is legitimate to associate the author with the views he expresses.) Berry seems to be the technological fixer *par excellence*: according to him, the life of Man will be nasty, brutish, and much too long!

Going on to *Foundation 5* we have a review of *Rendezvous with Rama* by young Mr Priest. I have still not made up my mind whether Arthur Clarke was having a sly joke with his readers and critics over Newton's Third Law. (Remember the upside-down rainbow in *The City and the Stars*?) Although he has one of his characters say: 'There goes Newton's Third Law' we know that in reality all's right with the world, whether God's in his heaven or not (or should I say 'whichever god's in his heaven?'). The law must be obeyed whether we can see the mechanism of the space drive or not. Assuming that the mysterious hardware in Rama provides a method of interaction with a gravitational field the momentum needed to counterbalance the additional velocity of Rama can appear in the form of a perturbation of the motion of the sun, which would, however, be undetectable in view of that luminary's vastly greater mass. As a homely example, it's rather like turning a corner in a car: the car and the Earth must move in opposite directions, but by very different amounts. I felt, by the way, that Chris had a cheek to take Clarke to task after producing *Inverted World*!

John Feather

London N21

Dear Mr. Nicholls,

26th June, 1975

I have been deeply angered by David I. Masson's review of my book *The Chalk Giants*, published in the March issue of *Foundation*, (no.7/8), and ask that in fairness, having given Mr. Masson his head, you allow me to answer the more unpleasant of his remarks.

I stress that I am fundamentally indifferent to Mr. Masson's views of my own or anybody else's novels. It was borne in on me long ago that the type of petty sniping he seems to specialize in is one of the minor irritations of any writer's life, and I deal with it in the main by the simple but effective expedient of not bothering to read it. However there are overtones to his latest effort that as a matter of principle I cannot ignore.

The Chalk Giants is a straightforward story sequence concerning itself superficially with social collapse and neo-primitivism. In fact its real theme is guilt; specifically, sexual guilt and its associated pain, which pain is symbolized throughout the book by deliberately chosen images of suffering. I would have thought this principle to be fairly obvious, even were it not explicitly stated at at least one point. It's evidently not obvious to Mr. Masson though, as he not only finds the book 'a bloody muddle' but adds insult to injury by using the phrase as a headline. From the lengths to which he afterwards goes to qualify the remark

I suspect that when taxed with it he will take refuge in some claim of *double entendre*; but this just won't do. He seems to have taken my writing at its simplest face value throughout; and I must do the same for him. His title as it stands is malevolent, pointless and wholly unworthy both of a serious magazine and of a serious critic, which he no doubt considers himself to be.

Since muddles, sanguinary or otherwise, are under discussion, I must point out that Mr. Masson's article is one of the most muddled I have read for some time, and one in which he certainly commits about every error open to the literary reviewer. Initially, as I have said, he throws the baby out with the bath water by not really understanding the book he is attacking at all; but he compounds this unpleasantness with a combination of sneering and patronage that I have rarely if ever come across before. 'So far so hopeless' is all he can really find to say of my long and extremely complex opening sequence; his snide remark about not having been able to 'appreciate my development' is wholly unnecessary and makes no sort of point, while a little farther on I find him questioning whether the chapters of my book are in fact worthy of the name. By which I gather *The Chalk Giants*, for reasons he nowhere troubles to explain, is not even to be accorded the courtesy of a normal reviewer's vocabulary. What praise he does give is waspishly qualified, as in his comments on 'Monkey and Pru and Sal', while he loses no opportunity of deriding both my prose and my characters. 'The God House' he describes as 'a great drama of sexual diplomacy', Rand must be not a war leader but 'the king of this bunch'; Marck becomes 'another oddball' — the right thing said for the wrong reasons — while my last chapter is found to be 'the most tainted with pastiche', a phrase that apart from being in dubious grammatical taste reflects on the entire book. At no point though does Mr. Masson trouble to name, or even hint at, the authors from whom he so arbitrarily accuses me of stealing. Even where my source material is explicitly stated he gets it wrong, accusing me for instance of creating 'chunks of symbolism' despite my having made it perfectly plain that such symbolism as exists in the book is drawn not from my own 'turgid' imagination but from the work of the quasi-mystical painter Paul Nash.

My point about all this is simple. I should hardly need to state that Mr. Masson is welcome to hold what views he chooses, and to air them if he must wherever he can find an audience; what he is not entitled to, what nobody is entitled to, is condescension. In ten years of writing I've never felt myself in the position to damn any other author's work with faint praise; and I frankly stand in awe at his temerity and arrogance.

Perhaps he would care to explain to me personally sometime, since he seems incapable of doing it on the written page, from what imaginary eminence he dares to slight me — or any other writer — in this fashion.

I was equally impressed by Mr. Masson's seemingly limitless capacity for the discovery of the obvious. His parenthesis on 'Monkey and Pru and Sal' is particularly striking. 'Did it', he asks, apparently in a moment of revelation, 'start life as a short story?' Neither I nor my publishers have made the slightest bones about the book being a story cycle rather than a consecutively-plotted novel; had Mr. Masson troubled to check up he would have found the first outings of most of the individual units scattered, as short stories, all over British and American pulp. Later he announces, again with something approaching a fanfare, that Martine/Mata/Mavri/Miri is nothing but a 'pure-erotic fancy'. I cannot for the life of me see how from the outset I could have made this salient fact more plain. Indeed if Mr. Masson cares to read the prelims of the book he will find it hinted at before he even reaches the title page, in the grim little mediaeval fragment 'Foweles in the Frith', the dumb yearning of which partly suggested and largely shaped the book. What more can one do? I suppose, like Mavri, I might try cutting my arm and bleeding a little.

A more indivious habit is that of arguing from 'literary absolutes' that in fact are nothing of the sort; as when Mr. Masson becomes preoccupied with whether my protagonist's dreams are 'genuine glimpses of the future' or merely 'the self-indulgent fancies of one fat vision-spinner *in extremis*'. If the latter, he decrees that they are 'though pathetic', of no value whatsoever'. I would like to know of him just when the pain of the ageing and defeated, be they fat or thin, ceased to be a proper subject for authorship. If he can prove his point I will be quite prepared to flush *The Chalk Giants* down the nearest lavatory; but logic would seem to dictate that we would have to send King Lear down after it.

Having like Lord Ronald galloped off in all directions for a couple of pages Mr. Masson gets down to what is evidently a highly congenial task; the process known, inelegantly but graphically, as nit-picking. Now in the last hundred years or so I can think of just one writer in English who could do this superbly well, and make valid and funny points as a result; and that writer is not Mr. Masson. His absurdities come in all sizes, and are far too numerous to deal with individually; but taking a few at random, I find him at one point scratching his head over the reappearance of wolves in a devastated Britain. I can only wonder if he has never heard of zoos. He also waxes querulous about the human recolonization of the British Isles, which makes me question whether he has ever come across the principle that wood floats on water. He speaks of my 'Worm'

with some disapproval as 'evidently mutated', which it isn't, and observes jocularly that at least it's 'not Nessie'. I have no intention of doing his homework for him and can only suggest that he look up the history of the 'Water Horse', starting with Babylonian bas-reliefs, continuing through Classical, Chinese and Nordic legend and coming up to date with the folklore of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and most of Europe. He might then consult the transactions of the Chicago Museum of Natural History concerning the fossil evidence for *Tullimonstrum Gregarium*. It will take him several weeks, as it did me; but at the end he might have some inkling of what I was talking about.

I was also intrigued by his attempts to discredit my plot structure with regard to my division of the British Isles by a new arm of the sea. 'How? When? Where?' he asks, aggrieved. Well, the 'when' is stated quite categorically early on in the book. The event took place as the two girls fled from the farmhouse on Warbarrow Bay to Smedmore House at Kimmeridge, and will be found accurately described — though not spelled out in the way Mr. Masson evidently requires — in Martine's notes on the journey. The 'where' will be apparent if he looks up the geological history and probable future of the South Highland Boundary Fault; and if that doesn't suggest the 'how' I can't be bothered to spell it out for him any farther.

His final attack, a complex attempt to disprove an historical sequence that never had a real existence anyway, all but subdues my patience. The various fantasies of the cycle spring laterally from one salient fact — the existence of a pretty barmaid — and can obviously be just as readily considered coincidentally as consecutively. However since book pages come one after the next they had to be put into an order, and a rough historical progression seemed as logical as any; so if I haven't allowed enough apparent time between this or that episode or minor detail I remain unmoved. There is no 'time', in Mr. Masson's stolid and earth-bound sense, involved at all. Let him try reading the cycle again, this time from back to front; I guarantee he will get just as much (or just as little) from it. I'd bet incidentally that he doesn't like contemporary music either; or anything that calls on him to think beyond a shallow and unpleasantly flippant level.

Beyond this point his 'logic' becomes frankly unanswerable. Why the obvious resemblance of my 'ithyphallic giant' (*I much prefer my own description*) to the Cerne Abbas figure should worry him I fail to understand; though perhaps he thinks I don't actually know where Cerne Abbas is, and is trying in his homely way to put me right. He also asks why on earth future ages should 'throw up a king's jester'. I ask, with equal heat, why on earth they should not; while his remarks on my pos-

tulated resurrectionist cult frankly cross the border into total absurdity. Surely the merest nodding acquaintance with comparative mythology must convince even Mr. Masson that not only would such a myth reappear in any future society but that the odds are it would reappear in a distinctly recognizable form. Osiris/Balder/Jesus has always been with us, fulfilling one of the basic human needs; as long as our race remains recognizable, he will presumably remain.

Finally Mr. Masson falls into a trap I had previously only associated with very young fans, and certainly wouldn't have expected from somebody of his maturity and presumed experience; that of gleefully knocking down Aunt Sallies that he has in fact set up himself. Hence, presumably, his final deduction that the book's 'message' is the 'impossibility of cooperation and peace without Christianity', which occurs at the end of his article and is obviously intended to be the high point of his argument. Because this 'message', invented by Mr. Masson, not me, doesn't come across, the book fails. It's a Hell of a way to finish a thesis, but I don't think it would win him many Doctorates. I drew no conclusions about Faith, conventional or otherwise; and my priests are only 'silent and unconvincing' on the presumption that they're somehow critically important. All that's really happening is that the wheel — Nash's sun wheel, not a taradiddle of my own — is turning again; there is to be more burning and slaughter, in the name of yet another God of Love. Atha has made a flying start on it before the book even finishes. Mr. Masson's hoots of indignation could not be more wholly misplaced; I've already hooted, much, much louder, myself.

It's obvious that with such a rich source of absurdity to draw from this letter could be indefinitely prolonged. It's also obvious that this would serve no useful purpose. In fact I would not have taken up valuable working time at all had Mr. Masson not climaxed his performance by going to the totally unacceptable length of drawing overt conclusions about my personal outlook and moral attitude. He charges me with the production of 'gratuitous horrors', and therefore by inference with prurience and sadism, while likening the book in his summing up to a 'brutal Western' glossed by a happy ending. I'm by no means certain that some of this isn't actionable; it's certainly grossly offensive, and having opened your pages to it I feel you owe it to me to print my total repudiation of it. Violence of any kind fills me with horror and repugnance; so much so that I viewed the writing of *The Chalk Giants* as something in the nature of an extended penance and inserted the 'framing device', which Mr. Masson seems to regard as wilful obscurantism, to make wholly clear to any reader that the sufferings of my cypher-characters are not 'real' in any physical sense. My personal

reasons for tackling the book in the first place are of no interest to the public at large and of no concern in this dispute; but I could wish Mr. Masson had experienced a tithe of the distress I felt while recreating the horrors he presumes me to have played with so glibly, or in living through the very real events for which they have become symbols. Certainly I hope the next time he feels a rush of vitriol to the pen he finds a subject more fitted to his carping. For my part, I feel that if he cannot come up with something containing at least the elements of maturity and responsibility he would do himself the greatest possible favour by remaining silent.

Keith Roberts

Henley-on-Thames,
Oxfordshire.

(Editor's Note: Some of our reviews are titled by the author, others by the Reviews Editor, and quite a few by myself. I can't honestly remember which was the case in this instance. Certainly, as Editor, I accept the responsibility. The fact that the title was a bad pun suggests it was my own. In any case, although it was certainly not "malevolent" in intention, it was — I now see — offensive in a way in which, in my opinion, the review itself was not. I apologize. A copy of Mr. Roberts' letter was sent to Mr. Masson, and we print his response below.)

Dear Mr. Nicholls,

12th July, 1975

"All complexities of mire or blood": this beheaded line from Yeats's *Byzantium* was my choice for a heading for my review of Mr. Keith Roberts's novel, but proved too long for the space. If it had been used, would Mr. Roberts have taken my review in this violent way? Down with headlines, say (I should think) both Mr. Roberts and myself: would you as editor now consider abolishing this practice?

I am very glad he has explained so much about the book in his letter, though naturally sorry he has misunderstood in many places what was an honest critical attempt to assess an extremely difficult work and to find out what it was really about, and has therefore wasted much emotion and sarcasm. I have always felt it's a pity more authors don't reply (more judiciously, perhaps) to critics.

Authors tend to hate reviewers. The reason is (if Mr. Roberts will forgive my proclaiming the obvious yet again!): an author pours (so to speak) his life's blood into a book; along comes some wretched reviewer who pronounces on it as *Which* might on a new gadget, or worse, as a

Food Guide agent might report on a mediocre restaurant.

Words can be deceivers. Mr. Roberts misunderstands as condescension and patronage what is in fact a search (in this case led astray by the ambiguities) for something like an absolute critical truth. He misunderstands as sneering what is merely a set of perfectly innocent statements. He takes for a reflection on his character what is simply a judgment of the effect of the book as a piece of writing. Mr. Roberts hears a sniper's bullets where none exist.

Skipping the imaginative rhetoric about such matters as moments of revelation, a fanfare, vitriol, and my possible personal shortcomings musical or other, and attending to the realities of Mr. Roberts's forgivable misunderstandings and complaints, let me take his points one by one. "So far so hopeless" he takes to be a sneer at his writing: not at all, it is merely a description of the situation at that point in the story as it strikes a reader. "Appreciate his development" meant, precisely, that I hadn't been following the development of Mr. Roberts as a writer in most of his books, and therefore, regrettably, was unable to relate this novel to them. My wondering whether "chapter" was the correct word for the larger sections in roman type has absolutely no, repeat no, pejorative implications. On "Monkey and Pru and Sal" I discuss an interesting question about the likelihood of certain points, and praise the power of his symbolism. Neither there nor anywhere in the book do I "deride" either his prose or his characters; or, indeed, anything else, unless my dismay at meeting a king's jester, cap and bells, and some "thou's" in a supposed future, can be dubbed derision. The short phrases I used to describe "The God House", Rand, and Marck, were not sneers, just simple short convenient neutral labels, and I cannot see that a reader would suppose them anything else. As for the last chapter being "the most tainted with pastiche", I plead guilty to a hasty mixed metaphor; but it does not accuse the author of plagiarizing specific writers, it merely indicates that phrases, etc., have been apparently set in the future which read as if lifted unchanged from past ages. "Turgid" is a word I applied once specifically, *not* to Mr. Roberts's imagination as he implies, but to occasional excesses in his powerful style, and in the context no reader could take the meaning otherwise.

Mr. Roberts says he made it perfectly plain that any symbolism in the book comes from Paul Nash. [What, even Monkey and Co.?] This is very interesting and important information, but I'm afraid it will not be clear to the book's readers any more than it was to me. And if Mr. Roberts now says there is to be an eternal wheeling back to "burning and slaughter", surely he and I agree in this interpretation?

In writing a review I have, I fear, neither time nor cash to check up

the “scattered” short stories of Mr. Roberts “all over British and American pulp” (his phrases).

Mr. Roberts, I think, may feel, quite apart from his charges of sneering, that some of my expressions are too flippant in the face of a serious book like *The Chalk Giants*. Two points here: (1) a reviewer must compress; (2) surfacing from under the weight of so much convincing horror and agony read and re-re-read, one almost unconsciously seeks to “distance” it by a lighter modern touch.

The author, crucially, objects to my suggesting that if the visions are fantasies of a dying man they are of no value. The pain of the aged and defeated, he says (but I never thought of Potts as aged), is surely a proper subject for authorship (and appeals to *King Lear*). Well yes, but this pain is *not* the subject of the book as a reader will understand it: the subject is a series of detailed (visionary?) narratives of the future, which if they prove fantasy-engendered and untrue, are surely valueless by definition. If there is some transcendental sense in which they are true, author should nudge reader a bit harder. If they merely symbolize Potts’s sexual guilt and pain, is it possible that the author has given himself and the reader one interpretative handicap too many?

Mr. Roberts accuses me of “nit-picking”. I always assume that the intelligent and informed reader will be bothered or irritated by details that don’t seem to fit. Excellent ideas deserve exceptional care with verisimilitude and consistency.

Mr. Roberts cannot really, can he, have expected me or any other reader to spend “several weeks” consulting water-horse and other water-monster legends *and* the transactions of the Chicago Museum of Natural History in order to assure ourselves that the author intends to posit an already-established giant invertebrate in lakes, etc.? (This is, by the way one explanation sometimes given for Nessie; I only brought her in [in short form to save space] to clarify the geographical issue.) As for the scientific evidence, etc., for the future of the South Highland Boundary Fault, no, the reader does want a bit more of a clue.

Given that the future seemed to be the subject, the incidence of zoo-escapes implies many wild species at large; to stick to wolves confuses the past/future issue once more. The Cerne Abbas resemblance is “worrying” for exactly the same reason. I’m sorry I couldn’t swallow for a future the author’s jester, or his “cap and bells”, or the tight resemblances of the late Wheel cult (very ingenious if non-future) to Christianity (Osiris and Balder are hardly to the point).

I cannot pretend to have enjoyed the book, and I fear that there may be some readers who may enjoy it for the wrong reasons. *Have I* said that the author “played with” horrors “so glibly”? – of course

not! (No one, I hope, has any concern with why Mr. Roberts might have written the book: solely with its impact on readers.) I still think the endings (the italic more than the roman) extremely confusing.

May I make a truly humble suggestion? It is that Mr. Roberts should give his powerful book (dammit, I have praised its power again and again) a better chance with the readers, by providing it next time round with (beside the "Foweles in the frith" quotation) just a few notes or hints, either at the end, or in a brief introduction. (Some authors would scatter a few hints in the text.) Mr. Keith Roberts is a superb stylist (even when hacking up a critic and stamping on the gob-bets): let him give his readers a helping hand to appreciate what the book is really about. It is easy for a writer of real imagination to forget, as it were, that a reader, however bright, has not "lived" through the creative surge and agony and the research backing that a book embodies, and that he will only read (if he chooses to) what he understands and likes.

David I. Masson

Leeds

review section

edited by Christopher Priest

what do do you want – the moon?

The Dispossessed

by Ursula Le Guin (*Victor Gollancz, 1974, pp319, £2.80, ISBN 0 575 01678 7.*)

reviewed by Ian Watson

The Dispossessed is located upon twin planets of the star Tau Ceti, Urras and Anarres, that are revolving round a common centre of gravity so that each is the other's moon. However, a centre of gravity is about all that is common between the two worlds, for 170 years before the book begins Utopianist revolutionaries from Urras – a rich, lush, watery world – set up their ideal society on the poor, dry, landlocked moon, and since then contact between the two worlds has been kept to the minimum. As an aid to memory: Urras is the *Ur*-world – the original

home-world of the two; Anarres is the same word with an alpha negative prefix, as 'anaerobic', absence of free oxygen, or 'anaesthetic', absence of sensation. Anarres is the deprived, barren world; it is also the world of absence, of chosen exile.

Urras, politically, seems a fairly direct analogue of Earth, with a capitalist state, A-Io (where life is A-OK if you don't scratch the surface too deeply), an authoritarian state capitalist model next door to it, then some third world countries where the two superpowers engage in interventionist politics without directly threatening one another. A United Nations headquarters is located upon A-Io soil.

The Urrasti manage their nastinesses a little less stupidly than we Terrans, however. Despite the possession of a nuclear fusion technology, there's no evidence of nuclear weapons, nor any nuke-rattling during nominal states of war. Nor, for that matter, any apparent racial conflict — the Urrasti being racially homogeneous. The analogue is a simplified one, with less variables than Earth.

Indeed, at times the reader may feel that Urras is too simple and obvious an analogue of Earth, particularly during the various political 'eye-opener' disputes between the Utopianist scientist-hero Shevek and the capitalist 'propertarians' of Urras, where he sounds a little like a Red Guard reared all his life on a Chinese rural commune denouncing the evils of the Stock Exchange, Madison Avenue and the Bunny Club (particularly the latter — Shevek's sheer astonishment that men and women can possibly have different social rôles assigned to them, and his indignant refutation of this unworthy notion smacks of, let us say, the obvious); or between Shevek and the state capitalist spokesman, where he is the perfect Trotskyist denouncing Stalinism. Arguments with his own friends, too, back on Anarres, about the way their own permanent revolution is being subtly subverted and his indignant astonishment that this can be so, prompt the thought, "out of the mouths of babes . . .". But I think this is unfair. What is sf, after all, but a distancing device? Le Guin has created, in Urras, a world both familiar and very alien: alien because it is looked at innocently from outside (with a fierce and angry, not a soppy, innocence) — by, I would say, a brilliant but gawky child (in the person of Shevek), if that didn't suggest that our own forms of devious dishonesty in personal and social relations are somehow 'mature' and 'grown-up' by contrast. The point is, that as soon as we start saying that this or that argument (about class or capitalism or female liberation) is 'obvious' or 'gauche' or some such formulation, we condemn ourselves out of our own mouths as slickly and contentedly corrupt. (In writing her trilogy for children, one might say, Le Guin has devised a method of writing for

us adults-who-are-children!)

The reader may also feel disconcerted to find such obvious 'humans' living on a planet of Tau Ceti (so that the realistic decays into allegory). Particularly when these humans have horses and otters and other Terran fauna on their world! However the perfectly reasonable explanation for this is that *The Dispossessed* is the latest volume in Le Guin's 'Hainish' cycle of novels, and in the distant past the people of Hain seeded a large number of worlds, including Earth, apparently using genetic manipulation techniques and not so much 'colonizing' as planting 'aboriginals' who would have to make their own way upward to civilization.

But *The Dispossessed* is only the latest volume so far as order of writing goes. In the scheme of Hainish chronology it's the earliest: located around 2200 A.D. in Earth terms. This backtracking represents a major structural break in the whole Hainish cycle; it is only, in fact, by this deliberate reversal of chronology that Le Guin *can* approach the socio-political concerns of *The Dispossessed* — since paranormal elements were getting progressively out of control throughout the earlier Hainish books, tending inevitably towards mystical, asocial solutions (as I argue in an essay on *Lathe of Heaven* which appeared in *Science Fiction Studies* in March 1975, which also contains a chart for Hainish history, dates and themes). Here again, *The Dispossessed* is defiantly and courageously realistic.

Paradoxically, the sheer realism of the book brings about a 'distancing effect' that makes *The Dispossessed* more truly science fiction in the best sense than many zany frivolities set amongst more obvious 'aliens' on weird worlds throughout the cosmos. Its alienation effect genuinely *alienates* — sets apart for political and epistemological inspection — whereas many other sf aliens only succeed in alienating the reader in the unhealthy sense, from social reality at its broadest: the sense of oneself as an organic part of a society, a species, a universe.

Two magnificent examples of distancing within the book immediately spring to mind, where the reader truly 'sees with other eyes': the take-off from Anarres into space (which says more to me about the experience of leaving a world than any comments to date from NASA astronauts), and the haunting glimpse of a horse, seen by Shevek when he arrives on Urras — so unfamiliar, yet so familiar, and therefore for the first time a wonder.

A further shock distancing occurs when Shevek meets the ambassador from Earth and we see Urras (which has seemed all along to be Earth, lightly veiled, with its woods and fields and birds and beasts) through Terran eyes: the eyes of a person from a world that has wantonly destroyed itself through greed and exploitation, and we realize that Urras

couldn't be *our* world. A person grows old, yet never looks in the mirror, but preserves the fantasy of youth and beauty, while the reality is a sick, tired hag. That hag is our planet — or *will be*. Yet we only realize it for the first time now. And, beyond Urras, almost unimaginably, hangs yet another possibility: the communalist Utopia on the moon.

The Urrasti have, in fact, survived the ecological/resources crunch which we are heading towards at breakneck speed, with tact and wisdom. They too have had their age of conspicuous consumption and planetary plunder, some hundreds of years before. (A slight time hiccup here: the year when Shevek arrives on Urras is Urrasti Year 8,940 (p.76) and all other dates (the first mining settlement on Anarres, the Odonian uprising etc.) are located in this 9th millenium; yet the "self-plundering eras" are described (p.80) as the 9th and early 10th millenia. Strictly, this should be the 8th and early 9th.) The Urrasti have recoiled from the ultimate big splurge lunacy ('onwards and upwards, at 3% G.N.P. per annum, to the Dyson-sphering of Jupiter!'). Earth hasn't. Le Guin's Earth is a greenhouse-effect desert, with a post-Crash recovery economy struggling to survive; it is only bailed out into space by the arrival of the altruistic Hainishmen, recontacting their seeded worlds. The Terran ambassador, Keng, a Chinese woman, is frankly amazed that revolutionaries should still be protesting that life isn't all it should be, on fertile graceful inventive Urras (nothwithstanding the iron hand in velvet glove conduct of the A-Io government, and its bloodymindedness in face of a General Strike). She is even more awed that revolutionaries on utopian Anarres, doubly displaced from the horrors of Earth, should still fiercely discover internal faults in their society. Yet the Anarresti revolutionaries are right to, for the concept of permanent revolution that the Anarresti have founded their society on, cannot admit of anything less than a constant dialectic of change-within-continuity.

And indeed Anarres provides a valid, and feasible, social model, which Le Guin explores on many levels: the linguistic, the educational, the economic, the sexual. It is perhaps because we have no verb 'to revolution' (but only 'to revolt' — or 'revolutionize', which isn't the same thing) that revolutions imply a once-for-all violent overthrow of an ancien régime. Revolution becomes, not a process, but a named event (for English, at any rate) — a reified, static object, rather than a process that should involve the permanent, creative remaking of society. Thus revolutions are easily betrayed.

Yet not so easily on Anarres.

Bedap had forced [Shevek] to realize that he was, in fact, a revolutionary; but he felt profoundly that he was such *by virtue* of his upbringing and

education as an Odonian and an Anarresti. He could not rebel against his society, because his society, properly conceived, was a revolution — a permanent one, an ongoing process. To reassert its validity and strength, he thought, one need only act, without fear of punishment and without hope of reward: act from the centre of one's soul. (p.147)

The constructed Anarresti language, Pravik, presumably has a verb 'to revolution'; just as its term for work/play (for which we can only rather clumsily use 'praxis') breaks down the labour/leisure dichotomy which, by dividing the process of living into two opposed domains, ensures the exploitation of both: the subordination of the individual to the wage nexus on the one hand, and on the other the generation of discretionary leisure industries to soak up the spending power accumulated in the first.

Pravik certainly deprograms sexual anxiety and chauvinism — indicating that language reform need not necessarily lead to Newspeak! Thus the verb 'copulate' only has a dual usage; so that a woman cannot be the 'object' of male sexuality . . . (One point worries me about Anarresti sex relations, however, and that is the question of contraception. Urrasti women, proprietarian 'objects', take the Pill; however in the self-responsible society of Anarres, while we have free adolescent and adult sexual experimentation, babies are only conceived by choice. So that one of the partners is obviously taking precautions, in transient relationships. But what are these? There's no mention of this. I'm slightly afraid that there might be no answer to this one, since if the woman is expected to 'see to it', she is once more rôle-typed; and her self-responsibility consequently turned against her!)

The permanent revolution isn't a single, violent act which allows new bureaucratic orthodoxies to emerge out of the interregnum of freedom, nor is it a constant process of pulling down and destruction. Rather, it is the application to society at large of the idea that motion is essential to balance. Gregory Bateson, analysing the ways in which traditional Balinese society was structured on a dynamic, mobile, yet nonviolent steady-state basis, wrote:

Ashby has pointed out in rigorous terms that the steady state and continued existence of complex interactive systems depends upon preventing the maximization of any variable . . . He has also pointed out that in such systems it is very important to permit certain variables to alter . . . A tightrope walker with a balancing pole will not be able to maintain his balance except by *varying* the forces which he exerts upon the pole . . . It seems that the Balinese extend to human relationships attitudes based upon bodily balance, and that they generalize the idea that motion is essential to balance. This last point gives us, I believe, a partial answer to the question of why the society not only continues to function but functions rapidly and busily, continually undertaking

ceremonial and artistic tasks which are not economically or competitively determined. This steady state is maintained by continual non-progressive change. ("Bali: the Value System of a Steady State" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*.)

'Non-progressive', in this context, signifying: not proceeding via the maximization of any particular variable in society (economically, say, the rich getting richer, the poor poorer) towards a point of schism and rupture: the violent once-for-all revolution. The Anarresti revolution follows this model of balance-by-movement within the social organism. Hence, on the gravestone of the founder of the revolution, Odo, it reads, "True revolution is return." And this inscription is only one of a whole set of interlocking and balancing binary oppositions that operate throughout the book (harmony/disharmony; freedom from/freedom to; sequency/simultaneity) which reflect one another on different levels: the sexual, the socio-economic, the scientific. "Revolution is return" is no mere aphorism. It is a legitimate statement about the dynamics of a sane society. It is also a statement of the dynamics of the book itself, with the thesis of Anarres and antithesis of Urras interacting via successive time-displaced chapters. Furthermore, this pattern of dialectic interaction applies to the *science* of the novel too; here lies the marvellous strength of *The Dispossessed* as science fiction — if science fiction is indeed a literature which characteristically subsumes technological and scientific 'concepts' within the overall metaphorical 'idea-complex' that defines the actual *meaning* of the work. *The Dispossessed* is one of the most valid science fiction novels yet written, for not only does it subsume a social 'concept' into its structure organically, but a new science of Time too — meaningful in its own right, yet sustained by virtue of, and in rapport with, the social concept. Physicist Shevek can only devise his General Temporal Theory by virtue of his growing revolutionary awareness of the dynamics of the social, the political, and the emotional. Science and Society are meshed.

Shevek is thus in complete contrast to Dr Haber, the dream manipulator of *The Lathe of Heaven* who attempts with hideous results to short-circuit the dialectic of the social and the scientific. Haber denies the unity of science within society by imposing a 'scientific' solution from outside (literally, from outside reality). Now, without the temporal science of *The Dispossessed*, the social content would be somewhat lame (an unreal allegory); equally, without the social debate, temporal theory would be largely a form of words leading to a gimmick 'breakthrough'. The science 'application' of the book in the form of the ansible, the instantaneous communication device — momentous as it is — can only evolve as a result of Shevek's particular life experiences, where the social dynamizes the

scientific, and vice versa, in dialectical interaction. *The Dispossessed*, in this sense, definitively solves the question of whether science fiction mainly exists to generate, promote and exploit scientific concepts. To be valid, science fiction has to subsume its 'concepts' into a metaphorical unity which is the 'idea-complex': and this is a social synthesis, since metaphor is a mode of social thought, not a form of words for use in the technological patent office.

Moving on, then, to the actual science of *The Dispossessed*: Shevek is struggling to unify two views of Time — the Sequency concept which sees Time as an arrow, a linear axis along which all physical events unfold in one direction, and the Simultaneity concept which posits the eternal coexistence of all space-time. His work begins with a rigorous analysis of the concept of "interval", with which he has been preoccupied since early boyhood; a major catalyst is Shevek's discovery of Einsteinian Relativity in an Urrasti translation of the Terran original. Yet it is only the bringing together of Cetian Physics and Earth Physics that produces the intellectual breakthrough, for Einstein, though founding his physics upon "*number*, the bridge between the rational and the perceived, between psyche and matter", nevertheless felt compelled to delimit his physics to the "physical mode" and as a consequence never arrived at a unified field-theory — leaving his successors to plunge ever deeper into "the magnificent incoherences of quantum theory". Le Guin's evocation of an alien scientific viewpoint — its methods, terminology, and insights — is beautifully handled, and convincing. As is Shevek's 'leap into the beyond' to a General Theory of Time. Le Guin actually does give the sense that she has thought her way into an alien science — in a distancing that is as startling, intellectually, as Shevek's glimpse of the horse is visually.

Yet, to be fair to Terran Physics, Fred Hoyle's ex-colleague J.V. Narlikar has published a paper recently showing how 'Action at a Distance Electrodynamics' (read: 'Simultaneity Electrodynamics') meshes with Einstein's General Theory — and ADE, as it's known for short, is a viable methodology that already supersedes the arrow-of-time Sequency concept without resorting to Jung's 'psychic synchronicity'. Richard Feynman as long ago as 1945, and John Wheeler (perhaps the most speculative theoretical physicist, whose gravitational theory increasingly tends towards an epistemological view of Physics) in 1949 supposed that when a charge is jiggled electromagnetic waves (light) not only radiate outwards into distant space and the far future, but also *converge upon it* from the past and distant cosmos, such that a reaction from B arrives at A instantaneously with the emission of a wave from A to B — no matter how far B is from A! (Ansibles, anyone?)

And, to be fairer still to Terran science, much of what Le Guin presents as Cetian Temporal *Physics* is in fact deftly reformulated Terran *Mathematics* — particularly those areas concerned with concepts of succession, interval and series, and of infinity approached not by accelerating particles physically towards the speed of light, but rather by considering infinite mathematical subdivisions, transfinite numbers, and — by way of set theory — the possibility of assigning cardinal numbers to the continuum: a grand tradition stretching from Anaxagoras in Ancient Greece, through Kant, to Brouwer, Cantor, Gauss, Weyl, and their successors.

Shevek devotes many years to refining the concept of interval, yet twenty-five hundred years ago Anaxagoras made the vital point that, “in the small, there is no smallest. There is always a smaller. What is, can by no subdivision, no matter how far driven, be made to disappear” — a concept which already implies that the elements of the continuum do not exist *per se*, but rather are *generated* through the practice of Mathematics. The infinite — both the infinitely small, and infinitely large — consists in the activity of Man. Which is why we can only write, mathematically, where m is a number variable for natural numbers, that m is never ‘infinitely large’, but only in the process of *becoming* so ($m \xrightarrow{\lim} \frac{1}{m} \infty = 0$). And perhaps, somewhere along this line of reasoning, mathematicians may find a method for circumventing the ‘infinite mass’ barrier to translight travel, when this is synthesized with an ADE structured cosmology. So that Le Guin’s prognosis may be accurate in this respect, that sheer technological bullying of matter towards higher and higher fractions of the speed of light, and bullying of particles into smaller and smaller subparticles, is a dead end, and the secret of the infinite resides quite simply, say, between 1 and 2, in the infinite fractioning of number (which is a mental construct, not a physical ‘fact’), or in analysing sets of transfinite and irrational numbers. And this can only be achieved through human *practice*, as Herman Weyl suggested. “The leap into the beyond,” to quote Weyl, “is taking place here, when the sequence of numbers, being legitimately constructed and being open towards the infinite, is turned into a concept comprising objects existing *per se*.” The continuum thus becomes, in Weyl’s words, “a medium of free generation”. Human practice thus determines the infinite, in a scientific sense — just as human practice in the social sense must mesh with science.

Le Guin’s Shevek is working in this general area, and the remarkable flavour of an alien science seems to me to owe much to Terran Mathematics, displaced and transformed. (Atro’s “Infinite Sequency Hypothesis”, and so forth, relates to Kant, Cantor, Weyl, Brouwer.) But this is

precisely what makes Cetian Science so substantial and meaningful in the context of the book: it is successfully *alienated*, in the same way as the world Urras is alienated, socially. It remains an invention, yet is no hocus-pocus of pseudo-jargon — for it relates in one direction to real human mathematical problems (projected and transformed); while in the other direction it relates logically to the whole social and emotional nexus of the book. Thus the circle is completed. Le Guin delineates a science of social life, and reveals the life of science — in a complex, dynamic unity. The more I think about this book, the more significant it seems: both as a social statement, and as a breakthrough to a new level of *science fiction*. I wouldn't say the novel is 'flawless'. There are passages where sincerity and simplicity shade off for me into an urbane sentimentalism ("Dear heart, don't cry" doesn't work for me at all) — and some 'felicities' aren't quite so felicitous in the cold light of dawn. But what do you want — the Moon?

Well yes, actually — as the Anarresti said. And Le Guin shows that it is possible; that it can be done.

birdie lives

334

by Thomas M. Disch (*Sphere Books, 1974, pp247, 40p, ISBN 0 7221 2973 4, first published: MacGibbon & Kee, 1972*)

reviewed by Tom Shippey

"334" is building 334, East 11th Street, "one of twenty units, none identical and all alike, built in the pre-Squeeze affluent '80s under the first federal MODICUM programme". The opening description tells you a lot about the future world Disch has imagined: as in *Make Room! Make Room!* or "We All Die Naked" or *Stand on Zanzibar*, the dominant feelings are overcrowding, imminent collapse, erasure of individuality. But unlike all those books, 334 continually presents us with people struggling to ameliorate the inevitable — the building has been individualized (as far as possible), it contains a reasonable 3000 people instead of an optimum 2250, the government provides federal aid (with the unambitious title of MODICUM), the streets haven't yet become a nightmare, and so on. For all that, the world of the inhabitants of 334 is totally depressing, all too easy to connect with what we know about reality, and not offering even the stimulus of fear and oppression.

At its centre lie flabbiness, inertia, good intentions. The author's tone is one of disgusted pity.

This comes over particularly well in the first story (or section, or strand), that of Birdie Ludd. Birdie's relationship with Milly the air-hostess — the petrol hasn't run out, you notice — is threatened by his downward re-evaluation on the points scale to the level where paternity is no longer legal. The re-grading, typically, is not his fault — his father develops diabetes, which loses him three points (a gently bureaucratic alternative to the death sentence he would have got in an *Analog* story). Again typically, he can get the points back by improving his educational score or getting some marks for creativity. But here Disch goes over to what can only be fascinated loathing (I imagine) by showing us the whole horrible educational mill at work. Poor Ludd is continually exposed to literature he can't understand, tortured with questions he can't see the point of, and forced to write an essay (reproduced in full) on "The Problems of Creativeness". The essay is an agony in five paragraphs, packed with intellectual vice from its first grandiose banality ("From ancient times to today we have seen . . .") to its final limping half-truth ("Creativeness is the ability to see relationships where none exist"). It proves only that even by the *Reader's Digest* standards against which he is judged, Birdie doesn't stand a chance. He gets one point less than he needs: and joins the Marine Corps guerrillas in despair.

But the real pain of the story is, of course, that whatever else Birdie is, he's sincere — he tries to study, he's affected by beauty, even in his essay there's a kind of sense screaming to get out. In a TV serial he couldn't lose. But as things are the world is Hell and he is Tantalus, seeing what he needs, being offered it, and then having it gently but fairly taken away. We are not invited to sympathize with him, because he's such a deadhead, or to blame the bureaucrats, because they give him more than a chance. All we can do is pity (and despise). If there's a moral it's the unhelpful one that someone always has to be bottom; or perhaps that, unlike sense, you can't learn creativity (and shouldn't be asked to try).

The prostitute that Birdie flogs in his final and uncharacteristic outburst acts as a lead to the next story. For she arrives in hospital on that statistically improbable day when no one dies; and so she gets murdered, because the morgue attendants need a body, having just sold one to the necrophiliacs only to find that it had paid its freeze-insurance and needs to be handed over to Macy's. In a way it's a kind of favour, if freezing bodies for future doctors ever works, and this thought again gentles the ironies of chance. In fact, though this story is the closest of any in the book to the horrific, it is still curiously

slow-paced and benevolent: we get reams of stupid, hopeful conversation between the morgue attendants, and even when Ab Holt finds the bits of the body he has sold, the strongest feeling we are offered is his fear of getting fired. As for the murder itself, it's almost unnoticeable. The murderers are anaesthetized by watching too many programmes about medical responsibility on television.

And so the stories zig-zag on. Everyone's defeated, everyone keeps going. Behind it all there's the sense of a great literary culture decomposing. We get images from Plato, from Dostoevsky, from the Bible — all of them failed or inverted. When Lottie Hanson tries to commit suttee at the end a fireman puts the pyre out, and she and her mother end up acting out their favourite TV programme, *Terminal Clinic*. But in spite of it all, we are forced to recognize the power of the culture that is dying, shown just in keeping all those people alive, fed, housed, entertained. It is hard to think that any of the traditionally violent sf answers — revolution, emigration, a new sociology — would be of the slightest use.

In a way, then, *334* is a kind of riposte to the extrapolators. Disch uses much of the "hardware" of Brunner or Pohl or Asimov — the host-mothers, the genetic regulations, the mathematical cartoons, the institutionalizing of historical research, etc. But he denies two of their commoner assumptions: the pessimistic one that you can't trust human rapacity, the optimistic one that something can be done. So, for all the hints of Oswald Spengler in the background, morals are not to be drawn. One is left, instead, with a set of characters and a map of their relationships: accidental, pointless, and so claiming the more insistently to be real.

refrigerated meringue

Winter's Children

by Michael Coney (*Victor Gollancz, 1974, pp192, £2.30, ISBN 0 575 01851 8*)

reviewed by David Pringle

Michael Coney is one of a breed of relatively new British sf writers, which includes such people as Richard Cowper and Bob Shaw, who are proving to be both prolific and highly competent. Over the last few years a solid 'second rank' has emerged in British sf, a testament to the general health of the genre in the 1970s — at least on this side of the Atlantic. We now have a fair number of what Kingsley Amis, many years ago, termed 'sound minor writers'. Increasingly, the British sf scene is coming to resemble that of America in the 1950s. Talent proliferates whichever way one looks. A handful of major writers — Clarke,

Ballard, Aldiss — preside uneasily over a scene that includes the mercurial — Brunner and Moorcock — as well as the highly promising — Christopher Priest, Ian Watson, M. John Harrison and others. All in all, it seems a healthy time. In a year which has produced Ballard's *Concrete Island*, Priest's *Inverted World* and Shaw's lovely *Orbitsville*, *Winter's Children* does not loom large, but for me it consolidates Coney's position in this rapidly-developing pattern of talent.

Winter's Children is a post-disaster novel, set in a landscape of ice and snow. It is a tale of a future ice-age, in short, a theme which has become topical since the recent dire warnings of some climatologists. This is a setting which has not often been used in sf, John Christopher's *The World in Winter* and Michael Moorcock's *The Ice Schooner* being the only examples which come to mind. Christopher's is the best of these books, if they are to be judged as descriptions of what a future ice-age might *really* mean in social, political and human terms. Any reader coming to Michael Coney's novel for similar advice on what the future could be like, if the climatologists' worst predictions come true, will be disappointed. For Coney has not written a sombre disaster novel at all, but a comedy-romance, a light and effervescent entertainment curiously reminiscent of Shakespeare's late plays, including, appropriately enough, *The Winter's Tale*.

The novel is episodic, revealing its origins in a series of novelettes originally written for 'Galaxy'. But the lumpiness of the plot is appropriate to the theme, which is, simply, the survival of the group. Perhaps the most admirable thing about Coney's book is that it does not have a hero, as do most disaster stories. The group, with its mixture of weak and strong, pathetic and resourceful, is the collective hero. Shrug and Switch, Bog and Jacko (Coney's fondness for ugly, mono-syllabic names is matched only by M. John Harrison's in *The Committed Men*), each have their moment of heroism or low-down cunning which saves the day. Much of the action takes place in the crumbling bell-tower of a church which protrudes from the snow above a buried English village. The group fights off successive attacks by 'flesh-hunters' and 'pads' (a species of mutated polar bear, it would seem) and eventually sets out in search of more hospitable territory to the south, struggling against incredible odds all the way. When they are not fighting their almost pathologically hostile environment, the members of the group are squabbling among themselves. Coney creates a mood of tense, distrustful 'togetherness' very well.

Samuel R. Delany once made a distinction between 'foreground' and 'background' in fiction. He was referring to different narrative

modes, 'foreground' being the immediate presentation of action and dialogue, 'background' consisting of narration in resumé or of reflections on the action. Delany added that British sf is written, for the most part, in the background mode — British writers from Wells to Ballard being fond of a leisurely narrative told from a distance, philosophical interludes and authorial interjections — whereas American sf tends to be all foreground (Delany's pre-eminently). Although he is British, Michael Coney's style defies expectation: *Winter's Children* is 100% foreground. Some readers may find this irksome. One turns the pages with a continual vague anticipation of some discursive passages or of a resumé of the events that preceded the opening of the story, but this anticipation is never satisfied. The result is a sensation of speed and jerkiness, a bumpy sleigh-ride of a novel. It is almost as though Coney deliberately set out to write his book in 800-word wedges of direct narrative, as A.E. van Vogt is supposed once to have done. It is like watching a 1918 Keystone Kops comedy — and that is not a bad comparison, since much of the novel is in fact slapstick: characters keep popping up when presumed dead, villains make pratfalls into holes in the ground, and gore spurts like custard-pie cream.

There is no profundity in this novel (unless it is the archetypal profundity which I intended by my reference to Shakespeare — the theme of scattering and germination, of seeds beneath the snow), and there are no ideas, just a glittering narrative surface. The sf concepts are old hat, and I find the rote use of ESP particularly irritating. Isn't it time we declared a moratorium on telepathy in sf? It gives too many easy answers . . . In short, *Winter's Children* is likeable but slight, well-done but all air, rather like a meringue.

another sphere book from gollancz

Orbitsville

by Bob Shaw (*Victor Gollancz*, 1975, pp224, £2.60,
ISBN 0 575 01909 3)

reviewed by Tom Shippey

The best part of *Orbitsville* is the start: a situation which has the essential quality of all good nightmares and ghost-stories, a mixture of frantic speed and compulsive delay. Vance Garamond, a starship captain for Starflight — the operation that is trying to find other habitable planets

and export Earth's surplus population to them — is left alone with the nine-year old son of the company's megalomaniac director, Elizabeth Lindstrom. The boy climbs up a statue while Garamond is thinking, and when Garamond comes to himself the boy (a clumsy child) is high up and in danger. Straight away Garamond is in the position of having to do something quickly, but — so as not to panic the boy — of also making it look slow.

It doesn't work. The boy falls to his death, the event taking place "on a leisurely timescale, like the slow blossoming of a spiral nebula". And Garamond is immediately on the run, in a desperate panic, so that his ship can escape on a waning solar tide, so that he can get off before Lindstrom finds out. But he still has to look normal, to go through channels, to collect his infuriatingly foot-dragging wife and child. It's a good start, a first-rate start, that gets you well into the story while its background data are still being unfolded.

But what about the background data? In this area I had, from early on, two insistent queries. First, though cheerfully and gullibly prepared to swallow any number of FTL drives, and any explanation thereof, I felt that there was perhaps too close a relationship between Shaw's presentation of the "flickerwings" (they might as well be called "clipper-ships", for that's the sort of time-scale and relationship implied between captain, crew, and central authority) and the needs of the plot.

For the essence of the plot is a revenge story, Garamond versus Lindstrom. But on Einsteinian terms, as we have all heard, a flight of any length into space by Garamond would make Lindstrom safely dead by the time he got back: so Einstein has to go, and a conventional time-scale of months and years is allowed to co-exist with stellar exploration. Shaw explains these points at the start of chapter 4, and they read slightly uneasily, not from a scientific point of view, but as if the storyline needed to be spelt out. Still, anyone who can tolerate Galactic Empire stories will not let this quibble bother him, and it did not hold me up more than momentarily.

More worrying was the whole idea of emigration by starship. For though we know nothing about stellar exploration we *do* know something about population growth, and a basic axiom of that is "that emigration increases the home population rather than cuts it" — I quote from Blish's *Seedling Stars*, but there are plenty of more scholarly formulations. If you know (or think) there's a way out, you don't bother to control your own breeding. This would suggest (a) that the idea of Starflight isn't a good one, at least not for the species as opposed to the rich individual, and (b) that even a Dyson sphere (an inhabitable sphere

built round a sun) is not — as Shaw says at one point — “infinite”.

This is the old tale of the grains of wheat and the chessboard. Orbitville (the Dyson Sphere refuge first deduced and then located by Garamond) is 625,000,000 times the size of Earth, an inconceivable figure. If however, the population of Earth was shipped to Orbitville and allowed to breed unchecked, how long would it take to fill Orbitville to the same population density as Earth? If one accepts that human beings can double their numbers in a generation — as they did in the unparalleled situation of pioneer America, with unlimited land, but little war, disease, famine, or contraception — then it takes about 33 generations, or eleven hundred years, a ludicrously small figure. Of course it wouldn't work like that; there would be transport problems; war/famine/disease situations would develop. But the point is that mere space is no answer to population growth on an astronomical time-scale, over millions rather than thousands of years; the reason why the Earth is not clogged solid with people is not its size but the limitations of (as Malthus put it) vice, misery, and moral restraint. This point applies whatever the real size of Orbitville is; nor can we forget that Orbitville is supposed to hold all the other galactic races as well as humans. It's meant to defuse them by giving them *Lebensraum*. But *Lebensraum* is a feeling, not a space.

And that is, actually, the answer to this problem offered within *Orbitville*, as was pointed out by a speaker other than myself at the Coventry sf convention (Chris Priest, I think). The sense we get of Orbitville is placidity, “sunlit grass and woodlands . . . sun-gleaming kilometres.” The races found in it have entered their long hot summer afternoons, coming in as invaders and exploiters, turning into vapid, harmless, hobbyists — flies in the honeypot is one of Shaw's images. This lack of drive might lead also to an end of the whole upward-and-outward, new-frontiers feeling which (perhaps) has fuelled human population statistics.

Inside the story this comes over as a series of contrasts, the purposeful Garamond against his marooned and sluggish crew, the rapacious Lindstrom feeding off the discontents of crowded Earth, and so on. As always, Shaw gets this across in short and striking scenes: the invisible membrane that separates the black of space from the green meadows of Orbitville is almost symbolic, for to penetrate it is to move from vacuum to amplitude, from history to racial eternity. The men looking downwards at the stars are a good picture too, and so is Garamond's irrational rage at his men wearing coolie hats — they imply China, peasants, stasis, sun, absorption of conquerors, and an end to the Western history that Garamond represents. Shaw does this very well.

He does well too by his characters, Garamond's wife Aileen, especially, keeping up the theme of one man's desperate urgency not understood by others, and figuring in a tense final scene that matches the nightmarish initial one. But the real problem of the book, as Shaw often says, is the essential concept of *size*, especially since that size is combined with changelessness. In Niven's *Ringworld* (a comparison bound to come up, and invited by the publisher's nervous blurb) one was always getting sectarian kzinti, wandering immortal whores, enormous meteors, monofilaments from the skies, puppeteers' tassets, and similarly interesting things, objects, or gimmicks. But the essence of *Orbitsville* is landscape, and this is difficult to grasp via description. The theme itself damps out excitement, just as the end of the story recedes with startling abruptness from all the human drama involved.

There may be a feeling, indeed, that Shaw has had to keep his plot moving by a series of violent kicks — looking at the chapter endings on their own suggests this, as the explorers see “a spaceship over three million kilometres in diameter . . . a fleet of about three thousand ships in parking orbit . . . the lights of an alien civilisation . . . a city of some kind ahead of us” — and so on. As another speaker at the Seacon said (Peter Nicholls) any one of these crises would keep most authors going for the best part of a book. A theme like *Orbitsville*, perhaps, demands a series not a novel; we are reluctant to accept the thought of history just fading out.

nobody feels any pain

Real-Time World

by Christopher Priest (*New English Library*, 1974, pp158, £2.25, ISBN 450 02141 6)

reviewed by Ian Watson

When I woke up this morning in midwinter darkness, the electricity was off. Idiотically fumbling with plugs and switches I tried to activate lights, radios, TV sets. Nothing worked. I found a torch, checked the fusebox. But the fusebox was fine, it was just the house that was wrong. Reality was wrong. There was no input from reality. Reality nowadays is information. Electric light, TV, radio. Yes, even an ordinary light bulb is information; because it illuminates, makes it possible to carry on with modern, non-medieval life. Electricity is information, transmitted from outside. And now the system had broken down, and the dark world began to warp and bend, became distorted and fantastic. Time stretched

out, and out, uncouped by clocks or time signals. Things had a dream-like fuzziness and elasticity, a lack of definition, and I grew slightly paranoid. Civilization had collapsed, perhaps? And all because there was no input of the most basic information, electricity, and I hadn't the slightest idea why. With zero information, fantasy burgeons, trying to generate its own facts. And this is Priest territory, typically. For this is the theme and mood of the title story of this collection, a penetrating study of an enclosed society deprived of free access to news as part of an experiment in conditioning, stress and isolation.

As the story proceeds towards catastrophe, the tone remains eminently cool and detached — the madness of the situation enhanced by the sheer sanity of the discussion. And indeed this clear, transparent tone is characteristic of the best stories in this collection — even when these are about mutilation, destruction and death. Thus "The Head and the Hand" recounts the last performance of the originator of a future Theatre of Mutilation: his amputated, castrated husk contriving to guillotine itself for public spectacle in a Kafkaesque apparatus. Yet this story of horror and violence never loses its limpid watercolour demeanour (this, reinforced by a Marienbad-style landscape décor); no ravaged bloody carcasses in bright colours and thick paint à la Soutine, here!

However, as I read these stories, I wondered whether this stylistically unexceptionable purity was perhaps a shade too perfect — whether the detachment from pain was too successfully executed? Beneath the paranoia of the power-cut was a feeling that things are quite safe actually; though intellectually I know they are not, that nothing is guaranteed whatever, not power supplies, nor civilization, nor life itself. And I have an uneasy feeling about several of these stories, that there is the same contradiction: a knowledge that horror, that wild swings of history, are possible and indeed plausible — yet there is a kind of safety-net woven of art. A suspicion, in the words of the Dylan song, that 'nobody feels any pain'. In "The Run", for example, we have mobbing and nuclear war seen from the cocoon of a car; and even when the bomb goes off, killing everyone, and there is *inferno* outside, it doesn't kill the narrator — it only sweeps his car into a ditch, and his mouth bleeds a little.

"Fire Storm" is a similarly elegant treatment of the insanity of war — a meditation on the theme, 'We had to destroy the City in order to save it' (as an American military spokesman explained with such exquisitely bent logic à propos the destruction of Huế in Vietnam). Priest gives this logic yet another twist: 'We had to save the City in order to destroy it'. For Captain Maast in "Fire Storm" fetishistically preserves a captured city intact, putting out fires, repairing the street lighting, and so forth, so that the city will be in a perfect condition for total destruction —

which he carries out with a fierce aesthetic dedication (the aesthetics of mutilation, again, as in "The Head and the Hand") that requires for *pièce de resistance* his own immolation in his work. Yet somehow Maast remains a detached observer, even while buildings are falling upon him and the very metal of his parked aircraft is melting. The riot scene at the end of "The Head and the Hand" is similarly encapsulated and anaesthetized, so that it is slightly unreal — both happens, yet does not quite happen. The eruption of mass violence triggered by the guillotining of Todd Alborne, the Master, is perfectly appropriate. What else is this otherwise excellent story about, but an artist's appeal to latent violence? Yet the riot itself is skimped, and tossed away — almost as though it is too hot to handle.

However, "A Woman Naked", the most recently written of the stories in this collection, rips this safety cocoon to shreds devastatingly. The lead character here is totally vulnerable — and so is the reader. The central image of punitive nudity and legalized, punitive rape of mind and body is the perfect symbol of the stripping away, thematically, of Captain Maast's aircraft or Senator Robbins' car (in "The Run") — of any device for distancing and safeguarding oneself. "A Woman Naked" is far from being a male chauvinist fantasy — as far from this as Pauline Réage's *History of O*, the finest fictional study of the humiliation of the Second Sex (and what is secondary about it? Why, there's the rub). It'll probably be misunderstood. *History of O* has been — as though it was written to titillate males! As social criticism "A Woman Naked" is fine, moving and true. As a rupture of the safety cocoon, it represents an important breakthrough.

This collection is, as they say, nicely balanced. There are seven serious and thoughtful stories; while hiding away in their midst are three exercises in comedy and/or hi-jinks that personally give me the same sort of squirmy feeling as is only induced in the Captain of the *Glory Whore* by one form of alien life in the whole universe (Gee whiz!): space mites in his underpants. "Breeding Ground", "Sentence in Binary Code" and "The Perihelion Man" must be there for the balance — or something of the sort. Don't read them first (unless you like space mites and ruthless fleets erupting from Venus à la Dan Dare to hold Earth to ransom). Don't read them last, either, or you might feel slightly let down after such fine stories as "A Woman Naked", "The Head and the Hand" or "Real-Time World". Read them . . . damn it! in the order they are already. And hope for many more short stories by this laconic author, blending the elegant limpid clarity and important subject matter of "The Head and the Hand" or "Real-Time World" with the deeply-felt involvement of "A Woman Naked".

robot roi

Soul of the Robot

by Barrington J. Bayley (*Doubleday, 1974, pp206, \$5.95, ISBN 0 385 01772 3*)

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

Alfred Jarry, a man a long way ahead of his time, was once asked why everything that he wrote was absurd. Jarry explained that if he wrote things which were ordinary, mundane and thoroughly sensible then his audience might as well be asleep, because he would merely be confirming the boring illusions to which they were already over-committed. He preferred to try and open their minds, making them receptive to new ideas by making them expect the unexpected. His contemporary, H.G. Wells (whose novel *The Time Machine* stimulated Jarry to write his brilliant essay "How to Construct a Time Machine" in 1899) followed quite a different policy in his literary work. Wells introduced one ideative element into a story, and tried to help his audience accept it, at least on a hypothetical basis, by being logical and realistic about the development of that one idea.

Wells became popular. Jarry didn't. Much of Wells' sf has remained in print for 70-80 years, while one of Jarry's major sf novels (*Doctor Faustroll*) was only published after the author's death, and both of them (the other is *The Supermale*) had to wait until the nineteen-sixties for an English translation. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the modern science fiction establishment very much aware of Wells and the Wellsian method, while remaining quite oblivious of Jarry. Nevertheless, if one looks at science fiction as a collective phenomenon, we can discover an astonishing richness of absurdity, and one cannot help but think that many sf writers have entertained Jarryesque methods unawares ever since *The Skylark of Space*.

Soul of the Robot is an absurd book, and I mean that as a compliment. It is light-hearted and ironic in tone, and casually melodramatic in content. Ideas are simply thrown into it and considered with uniform mock-seriousness — and, thus disguised, might easily slip through the portal of an open mind, there to remain available as food for thought. I really see no reason why food for thought shouldn't have the texture of angel cake instead of rare rump steak. There is a lot to be said in favour of rump

steak, and it is very nutritious, but it does take some chewing.

The hero of *Soul of the Robot* is Jasperodus, a robot who begins life believing — according to the principle of *cogito, ergo sum* — that he has a real identity, and is therefore a fully-qualified person. Various humans, however, do not agree, and they take merciless advantage of his robotic susceptibility to logic in convincing him that he only thinks he thinks, and that his self-consciousness is illusory. He accepts this verdict, but notes that by the same logic there is no way that human beings can know that their own self-consciousness is not a similar illusion. In between masterminding a couple of *coup d'états* and getting killed once now and again, he ponders the enigma of consciousness. In the course of his search for a satisfactory answer he discovers such intellectual delights as the hypothetical totalitron (a Jarryesque idea if ever there was one). I believe that the author of this book has read Jarry, and that his method is therefore self-conscious. Most sf writers have not, and their literary method is their own. It doesn't really matter, either way.

Soul of the Robot is an amiable book, and I find it thoroughly likeable. It is possible, I suppose, that serious-minded readers may not find likeability the highest recommendation of a book, and maybe man does not live by angel-cake alone, and if your mind is slimming perhaps you'd better pass it by. But nobody enjoys dieting, so why not treat yourself?

(A footnote. *The Supermale*, in paperback from Jonathan Cape at 40p. is the best sf buy of the year.)

calling all crypto-adolescents

The Electronic Lullaby Meat Market

by John Spencer (*Quartet*, 1975, pp117, 40p, ISBN 0 704 31187 9)

reviewed by Joanna Paul

Piped into every home, the soothing strains of the electronic lullaby have addicted the human race. Brainwashing possibilities are endless, and megalomaniac pop stars realize that the world is going for a song.

Only Gros Fynn can save it . . .

This is a short picaresque novel. Being that it is (to use one of the author's favourite solecisms) the adventures of a rogue. Quick change is of the essence here. Each chapter — and there are twenty-four of them — announces itself like a cinema serial, and then the ensuing scurrilities are indicated elliptically at the head, to encourage the

reader to read on — a device traditional to the picaresque form. There is also an opening scenario before we are plunged once more into action. This device saves space in a book which is already short.

Fantasy must have an inherent consistency at whatever level it is written. However wild or illogical it must keep its own rules. To live outside the law you must be honest. It is a shame if a writer must bring in disparate or extraneous elements which do not lead the reader into the vision or enrich the pattern but which only serve to pep up or diversify a bleak narrative.

The narrator, Gros Fynn, is twenty-two years old. He has been married four times, divorced twice and is currently living at home in an oedipal imbroglio. He doesn't know why he does the job he is in although he supposes that it serves to give his life a purpose. The purpose is to prevent rival pop artists, with their factional gangsterism, from harming the population at large.

Even so, when he is not copulating, Fynn is curiously vulnerable to the machinations of people who seem brighter but no less unpleasant than he.

Fynn's sub clockwork-orange mentation turns mainly between cynical ingratiating confession and nonplussed (yet unbelievably resilient) subjection to G.B.H. In a narrative which relies upon the saving or inconveniencing epiphany of pinbrained superheroes, who are often pathetically mistaken in their targets for assassination, Fynn's survival must be attributed more to luck than to assiduity or natural justice. It is doubtful that he can be classified as an anti-hero. He is a voice devoid of depth, a protagonist of marginally preferable loyalties. When the going gets tough his competence is minimal. He embodies a narcissistic masochism, neatly complemented by his monotonous sexual fugues. These come timely, sublimating Fynn's limitations as a subject of fiction. Although he tells the book in the first person, he is often less than a pawn in its climactic progress.

All is not lost, however. Fynn rises hearteningly to the annihilation of the entire complement of an astrocruiser; but he miscarries. The side-kicks of villainy perish and Hiram Mervin Herman Melville, the prospective Führer of a 1000 year Tin Pan Alley Reich, is taken out at the last moment when Fynn snips the lines of his parachute. This incident seems to give Snakeman, one of the subnormal superheroes, a bad dose of repressed libido. No worries. The moment anything is to be faced you can crash out with booze and pills.

Fynn flees from reflection. The inexplicable Septus Sorcerer vanishes in the *de rigueur* 'blinding flash' but leaves the silver dagger of Amurzan

lying in the sand:

I'd never before considered that maybe my mental stability could be in question, but then the roving clinics were full of people who hadn't sussed out it could happen to them. Okay, if you're safely installed in your local metropolis. A ten minute mind service and it's like it never happened. But out here was something else. I gazed at the sword, willing it to vaporize, at the same time praying that when I touched it, it would remain as firm and real as the sand beneath my feet.

Which was when I could have got dangerously metaphysical had it not been for the approaching activity in the undergrowth behind me.

Lucky. On an earlier occasion, faced with a walk across open country, Fynn, seeing a forest, reflects that his problems become insignificant, indeed that the whole plot becomes insignificant when set against the great scenario of eternity!

Centuries would pass, yet these proud trees would remain, thrusting upwards towards the light, unaware that man had been and gone – unaware even that he had been.

A moment's armchair banality and the masterpiece is flawed. Or was the author momentarily brought up short by a sense of inconsequence? Such second-hand questionings: a sign of doubt? And then, why such pains taken to ingratiate the narrative by telling us at the head of each chapter what it contains?

The book runs forward between lays like the Gadarene swine toward the cliff. Improbability becomes monotonous and makes for an unfulfilling stasis for the reader as great as would arise if all the characters were saints in nirvana.

Oh, the rude bits. These are sometimes ruined for Fynn. They take place against the background of his shadowy father's decease. In fact he is interrupted in the first bout by a video call from his mother asking him to come home because his father has died. Sex and sexuality is always mixed up with water and/or violence. Why this should be, the reader must surmise. The congresses when they are brought off are 'normal', both in their missionary position and their gratifications. Ego chauvinism rules the day and the night. Only twice can Fynn be said to submit: once when serviced to a second orgasm by a murderess and again when he falls to an ambivalent pop idol. Fynn's own appearance is a mystery. He is a mirror of erotic opportunities. His luscious appreciation of breast and buttock leads the reader to believe that beyond adolescent studdishness, Fynn doesn't relate, has no coherent sexual nature, no confident role.

Her arms slid up around my neck, and she pulled me down on to the deliciously sharp barbs of her breasts.

and then again:

Her dress rode high in the water allowing me a delicious view of her familiar behind.

At this point Fynn is fighting for his life in a swimming pool. He stays masturbated by events to the last. Outside of sex we are invited to commiserate with him. Inside of sex we are invited to envy him. Sex is an 'important business'. No one is sent up when Fynn is banging, except those who are not.

In a world of fantastical succubae and numb non-relationship, nothing but a leering, self-congratulatory circus novelty about the act of love will key with the psychological bankruptcy of the rest.

The cover blurb confesses the book improbable as a fantasy but one cannot endorse its judgment that the author has done for sf what the Beatles did for pop music. There is neither involvement nor the courage of black humour, only an hysterical casualness and rootless flippancy. This is a fiction of *Playboy* sensibility, and owes nothing to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* except the naming of names. Unlike the Beatles, it redeems and justifies nothing and takes nothing further. It cannot be read merely as a joke, but then again it shies away from comment. It commits itself to nothing and no one. As Fynn says at the end, having through self obsession left a man to drown nastily:

I don't wish to know that . . .

broken fast

A Touch of Infinity

by Howard Fast (*Hodder & Stoughton, 1975, pp182, £2.20, ISBN 0 340 19133 3*)

reviewed by Tom Shippey

Howard Fast will be a godsend to structuralist critics of meagre ability, because most of the stories in this collection follow such an obvious and simple pattern. This may be defined as: (1) introduction of Central Character, either Nice Guy or Bad Guy (2) occurrence of Damn Funny Thing (3) drawing of Moral from the intersection of person and event.

To give an example: in "A Matter of Size" Mrs Abigail Cooke is the Central Character, clearly a Nice Guy since she is interested in ecology and the New Left and so on. But she has the misfortune (this is the D.F.T.) to swat an insect with her fly-swatter, and find out too late that it is really a tiny man. A Plague of tiny men ensues, some of whom do not take kindly to fly-swatters; and so the non-ecologists, including her husband, spray the lot of them with DDT. The Moral is, of course, that we do it because we're bigger than they are; but, Mrs Cooke asks plaintively, on the scale of the universe, "How big are we, Herb? . . . How big are we?"

There are of course some implausibilities about this story. For one thing, an intelligent race of half-inch men would (one imagines) cause such a scientific furore that the most hardened DDT-sprayer would protect them more carefully than a clutch of dodos, praying all the time for a Nobel prize. But the needs of the parable, about the way we, or rather you, or they, or someone, assumes callous domination over nature, are too strong for probability to be allowed in. Anyway, Mr Fast has a low opinion of (official) humanity, making his Bad Guys generals and businessmen and politicians, his Nice Guys black policemen and innocent researchers and other classes of victim.

He prefers people, also, to have very slow and peaceful reactions extending almost to paralysis (this is the kind of thing Americans used to say about British stories). When Alfred Collins sees a hand snuffing out the sun (D.F.T. again) he neither reports himself to a psychiatrist nor (realizing that his entire world-view has just been shattered) gets down on his knees to pray — two reasonable and purposive reactions. He just chats about it, gets into bed with his wife, and puts on an extra blanket! He exhibits, in fact, what one might call the Charlie Brown Reaction.

It's apparent that all this is trying to tell us something, and that something — the wickedness of industrial man — may be endorsed heartily by many people. The stories have one fault as fiction, though, and that is the coy way in which extremely heavy morals are expressed in throwaway lines — like "How big are we?" or "We are as we are", or "Everything is precisely the way it has always been", or "everything was about as good as it could be". These assume that we are receiving a sudden insight or epiphany of something we have never understood before, when in fact we've almost certainly seen them coming. And the stories have a further fault as *science* fiction: and that is the way they so blatantly abandon the strange for the marvellous.

To explain this distinction: it's been said that the strange is the fantastic event which turns out to have some rational if unexpected cause

— like Frankenstein's monster, or FTL drives, or telepathy in *The Demolished Man*, and so on. The marvellous, however, is the fantastic event that turns out to be irrational and inexplicable on any terms — like talking bears in fairy-tales, or the metamorphosis in Kafka. Obviously there can be a lot of play between these ideas, since opinions of what is rational or explicable are only subjective. But Howard Fast's stories are on the extreme edge of the marvellous, spilling over quite often into what one might have to call the miraculous.

In fact several of the stories display a strong religious streak. "Show Cause" has God asking the world to show cause why we should not follow Sodom and Gomorrah — something that most of us would find extremely cheering, as indicating there was a God who even cared. But the characters in the story (Charlie Brown Reaction, again) just concentrate on finding an answer, which is (produced by pot-smoking Nice Guy after tip-off by computer) "We are as we are," a re-write of *Exodus* 3.14. This leaves God several comebacks, such as "I know, but what about what you OUGHT to be!", or, more simply, "Are you trying to say this is all MY fault, you complacent little vermin." But these would be too savage for mild modern Christianity, so He lets the answer pass.

The readers' letters even in *Analog* often show a strong, naïve desire for a rapprochement between science and folk-Christianity, so Mr Fast's stories may well hit the mark with a lot of people. They're just the thing to "spark off lively discussions" (as they say) among ideologically innocent teenagers, and are written, on that level, slickly and well. But I have to report the mixture of everyday-humdrum and miraculous-impossible intensely cloying.

that has that such people in't

New Worlds 7

edited by Hilary Bailey & Charles Platt (*Sphere Books*, 1974, pp213, 50p, ISBN 0 7221 6202 2)

New Worlds 8

edited by Hilary Bailey (*Sphere Books*, 1975, pp221, 50p, ISBN 0 7221 6187 5)

reviewed by David I. Masson

These two numbers contain thirty stories, eight poems, and some articles. There's an awful lot of American stuff; don't the British write sf shorts?

Michael Moorcock had just handed over editorship to Ms Bailey. Each number has one of his end-of-time tales. I have to confess that I have something of a blind spot for this kind of thing. They are, perhaps, pleasant escapist reading.

For the rest, five stories and one trio of poems show real imagination or wit, also style; and nine more stories deserve honourable mention. Maybe one shouldn't expect too much from a paperback magazine, but too many of the others might be called fantasticationalizations, i.e. they are the sf analogy of pornography; that is, they pander, without much literary merit, to a lust for the strange — and the horrible. (Perhaps for future reference we might make three additions to the critical vocabulary, distinguishing feeds of mindblown mash, highflown mash, and flyblown mash.)

First, the successfully imaginative or witty. John Sladek, "The Kindly Ones", takes the doctor/hypochondriac relation and turns it deftly into something both funny and revelatory.

Brian Aldiss, "The Secret of Holman Hunt and the Crude Death Rate" (whew!) is a typical dead-pan combined swipe at earnest researchers and their jargon, doomwatchers and their extrapolations, and meditationist saviours on the make.

M. John Harrison, "The Wolf that Follows" (actually a long extract from *The Centauri Device*), is verbally expert enough to create a whole worldlet and its minutiae. I don't believe a word of it, of course: it is an exercise, a romp, held up and para-gothicized with quotations from Swinburne, Beardsley (oh yes, Aubrey could speak, didn't you know? [*the silver swan, that living had no note, when death approach'd unlock'd her silent throat*]), and others of the Decadent era; improbably but enjoyably welded on to space-battles. (But something went badly wrong with the single French quotation on pp.126, 134 — or is this a gaffe quoted from *Trilby*?) Could the story have started as a skit on Poul Anderson?

Coming to *NW8*, the same writer's "Running Down", also well written, a realistic, detail-studded and much more powerful (indeed disturbing) piece, even if it lacks perfect glue and is here and there a little over-worded, produces an entropic Jonah and an earthquake which somehow combine with and prefigure the fascist downfall of Britain. (Perhaps the implication is that fascism is founded on personalities like the protagonist's.)

In both of Harrison's pieces there are Kipling echoes and in this one an acute Kipling eye.

Barrington J. Bayley's "The Bees of Knowledge" is a stolidly built

up discovery about the very alien nature of an alien race, which comes off very well on the whole, and has, I suppose, an implied moral.

Libby Houston's Three Poems are imaginative if chilling, full of feeling and observation, and technically very good. "Weather Clock" in free-verse quatrains, is a vividly seized scene with something more behind it, and plenty of sound-subtleties, of which the most obvious is that it begins and also ends with a rhyme. "Ghost Bread", two more such quatrains, is a brilliantly evocative statement with sf overtones. "The Queen Lies Dying" (never mind the unclosed parentheses in the printing) acutely notes an expiring monarch's dwindled consciousness focused on one tiny discomfort, and contrasts it with her fame and her rival. Intricate, partly instinctive sound-echoes (the most obvious is "Lies . . . ease)/flies tease" in the first three lines) enrich the piece and give it authority.

Now for honourable mentions. Gerard E. Giannattasio's "G.I. Sparrow", though lacking bite and emotional imagination, has the right ideas. It's the skeleton, or at any rate the rib-cage, of a good story.

Bertil Martensson, "A Modest Proposal", attacks Nixon and current world politics, with surrealist touches.

Eleanor Arnason, "The Warlord of Saturn's Moons", has a spinster writing neo-Barsoomian fiction amid news of violence and pollution.

Gwyneth Cravens, "Miss Subways", is a slight, too mild, too obvious attack on questions to the beauty queen, etc.

Ian Watson, "The Ghosts of Luna", is slight but amusing "speculation".

Jean Charlotte, "Red Sky at Night", well written, has sub-adolescent moods and murder.

Bruce Boston, "Break", is tolerable, but the sf intrusion is too obscure.

Coming to *NW8*: the late Mal Dean (*NW*'s old illustrator, on whom there is a special commemorative article) is also honoured by his first and last story, "Slow Drag", unexplained, violently comic: promise indeed, cut off.

Robert Meadley, "Conversations at Ma Maia Metron": I have the feeling that Borges, and Hesse's *Glass Bead Game*, are being vaguely sent up here, and there is a touch of Joyce/Blish casuistry; or is it just that their flavours are re-exhaled to express the author's nihilism?

Some of the stories and reviews are oddly written. Rick Gellman, whose vision is cinematic, writes a depersonalized, machine-English, with much use of the oblique stroke. No harm in that, but a stylistic experimenter should start from a mastery of ordinary language: to

write twice “of he who” for “of him who” (NW7, p.63) does not inspire confidence. The story almost asks to be mistitled “The Return of Fu Manchu”. He should choose a real theme.

The reviews are insightful, even if John Clute’s are too clottedly, exuberantly allusive. Why print the reviews to look like stories?

There are a fair number of misprints, notably in NW8 in Meadley’s “Conversations” with “theogeny” on p.167, and a wrecked sentence plus “seige” and “scald” for scold on p.175. Several contributors to NW7 are left out of the biographical snippets at the end, and conversely one “contributor” described there did not contribute (unless Stephanson equals Gellman?). The new text-illustrations (some not relevant to the text?) are very unequal and some are 1930s-surrealist; Moorcock is well served in NW7, once superbly – echoes of the more epic of Tove Jansson’s Moomin illustrations.

his fall was destin'd to a barren strand,
a petty fortress, and a dubious hand;

Ice and Iron

by Wilson Tucker (*Victor Gollancz, 1975, pp181, £2.50, ISBN 0 575 01908 5, and Doubleday, 1974, pp181, \$4.95, ISBN 0 385 00485 0*)

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

Ice and Iron, so the blurb informs me, is Wilson Tucker’s twenty-first novel. Of the remainder, perhaps a quarter have been science fiction, and his work in the genre falls into two periods – the early fifties and the seventies. One of his early works, *The Long Loud Silence*, was one of the most impressive of the post-holocaust stories so prevalent in that period, and the novel which signalled his recent return to the genre, *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, was also impressive. *Ice and Iron* deals, like his best work, with disaster. Unfortunately, it is something of a disaster itself.

The main part of the story is set in the future a century or two hence when, after the relatively brief intermission which has included

all of human history, the ice age resumes, with the attendant southward spread of the glaciers. The entire northern half of the North American continent is being abandoned by stages. There is, alas, no plot — only a central idea. The idea is that during the next glacial intermission the continent is being reconquered by an army of warrior women, who dispose of the neo-Iron Age primitives who have moved in ahead of them by gunning them down with time machines. These weapons operate in the most peculiar fashion, and cannot be fired at all unless they are grounded. The book leaps back and forth from the people trying to find out why dead bodies are turning up where no dead bodies ought to be to the people responsible for the saidsame dead bodies. The basis of the theme — and apparently the whole inspiration for the novel — is that it provides an “explanation” for one particular set of the anomalous phenomena laboriously catalogued by Charles Fort.

There is nothing wrong with trying to explain away Fort’s collection of odd observations, but I only wish there were some sort of explanation for the explanation. The book does absolutely nothing with the idea except contain it. The actual story is the account of one man’s brave attempt to concoct a theory which will account for all the miscellaneous debris which drops from nowhere on to his ice-sheet. He takes a long time to deduce what Tucker informs the reader by flashforwards into the chain of events responsible for the rain of rubbish. Nothing else happens. The scenes from the further future are discontinuous and consist of simple descriptions of events, without any revelation of the logic which might lie behind them. The reader is not accorded the privilege of knowing how come the invaders are all women or why their weaponry operates in such a manifestly ridiculous manner. (Actually, the all-female army has cropped up in Tucker’s work before — in *The City in the Sea* — with no logic to support it. It seems he just thinks that it’s a good idea.)

There is perhaps material enough in *Ice and Iron* to fill a fairly respectable short story (especially as so many sf short stories present their ideas naked rather than bothering to dress them up) but it seems to me that one is entitled to expect a little more from a novel. This book contains a higher percentage of non-functional wordage than anything else I have seen recently, and I find that very disappointing, in that it comes from a writer who is usually interesting to read.

[Note: Mr. Nicholls apologizes to Mr. Stableford for the title he has inflicted on this review. The lines remembered from Dr. Johnson’s *Vanity of Human Wishes*, right down to the prophetic pun of “petty fortress”, seem miraculously apposite to the narrative, and to the (hopefully temporary) decline of Bob Tucker’s literary powers.]

beep x 2 = quincunx

The Quincunx of Time

by James Blish (*Faber & Faber, 1975, 112pp, £2.50, ISBN 0 571 10707 9*)

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

Bookbuyers who assess the value of what they are buying in terms of the number of words they get, per penny that they spend, may have become rather disgruntled with James Blish in recent years. His last major work was issued in two parts (*Black Easter* and *The Day After Judgment*) and his most recent novel, *Midsummer Century*, was short enough to pack into one issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* along with a profile, an article, a bibliography, four short stories and F&SF's usual features. Now, here is *The Quincunx of Time*, which is not only extremely short but is expanded from a short story called "Beep" previously published by Faber (along with four other shorts and a novella) in *Galactic Cluster*.

Comparing "Beep" and *Quincunx* reveals the following: "Beep" is, I estimate, 14,500 words long. *Quincunx* runs to about 29,200 words. The original, therefore, has just about doubled its dimensions in being transmogrified. Of the ten chapters of the novel's main section only two (chapters 3 and 10) are new. Blocks of prose about 300 words long have been added to chapter 2 and to the epilogue. Apart from these sections the increased wordage has come about by expansion of the narrative.

We find, for instance, that the following sentence from "Beep":

"Not", Dr. Wald said sourly, "if it's already leaked out."
(*Galactic Cluster* p.114)

becomes:

"Not", Thor Wald said with a sort of sad sweetness like Sauerbraten gravy, "if the secret has already found its way into other hands."
(*Quincunx of Time* p.36)

But this economic approach is manifestly unfair. We should not simply be asking *what* Blish has done to "Beep" in order to convert it into *Quincunx*, but *why* he has done it at all. To explain this he has

included a critical preface (marked "To Be Skipped by Friends of Science Fiction" though I don't know why — perhaps we are expected to understand without being told or supposed not to care much anyway). In this preface Blish explains that "Beep" was *about* something, and that *Quincunx* is even more *about* it. It is the problem of determinism and free will — the story concerns a way of recovering data from the future. "I have", says Blish in this preface, "tried to make a great deal more out of the speculations that prompted the story in the first place. I had set out to dramatise these speculations in the short versions; here, I am **still** going about that work, I hope more thoughtfully."

This is fair enough as a statement of intent. It explains, for instance, why certain sentences remain unchanged when — had Blish been primarily concerned with upgrading the quality of his prose — they might otherwise have been exterminated. For example:

Weinbaum sailed up out of his chair. He felt as though copper-coloured flames a foot long were shooting out of each of his ears. — (GC p.128, QT p.71)

(One cannot help feeling that it would have been in keeping with the general policy of expansion to make the metaphorical flames two feet long in the new version.)

One might expect, though, in keeping with this declaration of intent, that the two new chapters added in turning the short story into the novel might be serious speculation about free will and determinism. The longer one, however (ch. 3) simply adds a description of the search to find the character who has the key question to pose, and merely serves to delay its posing. The other (ch. 10) is very brief, and points out that given the fact that information about the future is available in the present a five-dimensional model of space-time is necessary (thus providing the revised work with a nice title).

Chapter 9, which is the most expanded of the chapters, contains little that is new except for three more "messages from the future". At least two of these drive from the plots of stories Blish has written fairly recently (one from *Midsummer Century* and one from "A Style in Treason").

So what *is* new? How much deeper into the thorny question of whether we can have free will and still receive messages from the future does *Quincunx* really go? Well, for one thing, its characters do take the trouble to make it absolutely clear to the reader that this is what they *are* doing. Thus, the following bald question in "Beep":

"Do you accept as a fact that I can read the future in detail, and that that, to be possible at all, means that the future is fixed?" — (GC p.129)

is followed, in *Quincunx*, by this emphatic corollary:

"The question has nothing whatsoever to do with strategy or tactics or politics or passion or any other footling notions of that kind; it is instead one of the seven or eight great philosophical questions that remains unanswered, the problem of whether man has or has not free will."
(QT pp.71-72)

So much for footling notions. But how, exactly, do Blish's characters cope with this great philosophical question? Basically, they decide to avoid it. They express their utmost determination to comply with the dictates of the beep and assiduously avoid any possible challenge to its implications. If this is an answer, was it really worth asking the question twice, doubling its length second time round?

There is one point which must be made, and that is the fact that James Blish was a pioneer in the exploration of some of sf's imaginative territories. He was one of the first — and remains one of the few — writers who have been prepared to make use of the potential which sf offers for "thought experiments" in philosophy. He has always been ambitious enough to tackle the "seven or eight great philosophical questions" using the symbolic vocabulary of sf to construct hypothetical situations. This willingness is, I think, wholly laudable and deserves every encouragement. The story "Beep" was "about something", though it never really got to grips with the most interesting aspects of the questions it posed. The idea of building "Beep" up into a longer work which *would* confront these questions and explore the potential imaginative avenues leading from them was a good one. I only wish that Blish had done it.

Blish is, by nature, a careful and tentative thinker. His best work — that which comprises the *After Such Knowledge* group of novels — explores ideas without ever riding roughshod over them in the manner of so many sf writers who never confront an ideative Gordian knot without an Alexandrian sword to sweep it aside. Blish does not deal with glib, all-inclusive answers in the manner of Heinlein. He has a genuine sensitivity to the depth and complexity of the subjects he tackles. In more than one case, however — and *The Quincunx of Time* is a cardinal example — he has allowed his sensitivity to hold him back so far that he is lost in rapt contemplation of the mysteries of life, and never really gets involved with them at all.

The thought must count for something, but in terms of results, this book is a sad disappointment.

[Editor's Note: This review was written before Mr. Blish's death and in ignorance of his illness. Perhaps considerations of "good taste" should have led me not to use it, but because it points to the positive nature of Blish's achievement even while finding this latest book disappointing, I think it should stand.]

lonely children

Hell's Cartographers – Some personal histories of Science Fiction Writers.
Edited by Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison (*Weidenfeld & Nicolson*,
1975, 246pp, illus., £3.50, ISBN 0 297 76882 4)

reviewed by Richard Cowper

"How comes it, then, that thou art out of hell?" demands Faust, and Mephistopheles' sardonic reply: "Why this *is* hell, nor am I out of it!" has rung down the ages, gathering force with each succeeding generation, until today the Manichean heresy that mankind is fundamentally diabolic seems only too plausible. In Marlowe's sense all writers could claim to be 'cartographers of hell' simply because they have made it their self-appointed task to map the human condition, but ever since Kingsley Amis preempted 'Hell' as the *terra cognita* for Science Fiction, the label has been worn like a convention badge, a proudly defiant symbol of the sf writer's ability to look facts in the face without flinching. Let me say at once that I do not think any of the six contributors to *Hell's Cartographers*, if approached individually, would claim half so much. By and large they are a surprisingly modest lot and nothing if not self-effacing, while one at least is plainly worried –

Most of the science fiction being written is disappointing, and not merely on literary grounds; so many of its basic assumptions are fossils of thought. The philosophy and politics behind the average sf novel are naive; the writer takes for granted that technology is unqualifiedly good, that the Western way of life is unqualifiedly good, that both can sustain themselves for ever, out into galaxy beyond galaxy. This is mere power fantasy. As I have often argued, we are at the end of the Renaissance period. New and darker ages are coming. We have used up most of our resources and most of our time. Now nemesis must overtake hubris, for this is the last act of our particular play.' (*Aldiss*)

Apart from the ugly word 'unqualifiedly', that passage strikes me as an admirably expressed statement of the indictment which can be brought against too much sf and I regret that I had to wait till page 201

before I reached it. But to say this is perhaps to fall into the trap of criticizing a book for not being something it was never intended to be.

The six writers featured in *Hell's Cartographers* are Brian Aldiss, Alfred Bester, Harry Harrison, Damon Knight, Frederik Pohl and Robert Silverberg. Each describes how he first became interested in Science Fiction, then involved in it and, eventually, a successful writer of it. I must confess that, on the whole, I found the accounts made depressing reading, and nowhere more so than when Damon Knight described the awful scene in Scott Meredith's Literary Agency (a real purlieu of Hell if ever there was one) when Knight, James Blish and other 'damned soules' sweated over manuscripts which had been submitted to the Agency for criticism at \$25 a time. Each manuscript was to be analysed under five headings —

1. A sympathetic and believable *lead character*; 2. an urgent and vital *problem*; 3. complications caused by the lead character's unsuccessful attempts to solve the problem; 4. the *crisis*; 5. the *resolution* in which the lead character solves the problem by means of his own courage and resourcefulness.

Knight asserts that the training this gave him was 'invaluable' (for what, one wonders?) and in so doing conjures up the spectre of 'The Editor' who broods balefully over the greater part of this book like some leviathan risen from the lower deeps. His name is Legion, but one of his many aliases was undoubtedly 'H.L. Gold' who, as Knight reports, 'had an incurable habit of over-editing stories; as Lester (del Rey) once said, he turned mediocre stories into good ones, and excellent stories into good ones.'

The one thing The Editor is conditioned to distrust above all else is genuine originality. By this I do *not* mean mere innovation, but that quality in a writer which is inimitable, which makes him what he is. Call it style, call it vision, call it what you will, it is the bloom upon the grape and is the first thing to vanish beneath the clammy editorial hand and the hungry pencil. If the experiences of the contributors to this book are in any sense typical — and I presume they are — then the wonder surely is that *any* good writing ever managed to see the light of day in the American pulps.

Perhaps understandably all these authors appear to think of themselves primarily as 'sf writers'. This point which, on the surface, may appear too obvious to be worth making, strikes me as profoundly significant. The keynote is sounded loud and clear in Brian Aldiss's 'Introduction'. It is a sort of deep, reverberant throbbing, reminiscent of a gorilla beating its chest in the jungles of Kilimanjaro —

We have been the weather-men flying above alien cities, and we have not delivered our reports before. When we began to write, it seemed as if we were doomed by our beliefs to work in obscurity . . . We are an entirely new sort of popular writer, the poor man's highbrows. We wrote against the grain and were accepted against it. We wrote for kicks and ha'pence . . . we had faith in what we were doing; individualists though we were, it transpired that the faith virtually created a movement . . .

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Well, these are certainly substantial claims, none more so than that the contributors are 'an entirely new sort of popular writer' — did I hear somebody whisper the name of H.G. Wells? — and, on the evidence presented in *Hell's Cartographers* not entirely beyond question. As a matter of fact Aldiss questions some of them himself, albeit indirectly, in his own contribution "Magic and Bare Boards" which is, along with Alfred Bester's, one of the two best pieces of writing in the book. But if we assume that in his 'Introduction' Aldiss is speaking on behalf of his friends (and he makes no bones about the fact that he chose his contributors principally because they *are* his friends) then it strikes me as odd that he nowhere makes the claim that they are *per se* good writers. He tells us they are 'innovators' (Knight) 'popular' (Bester) 'polymath' (Pohl) 'a millionaire' (Silverberg) 'co-editor' (Harrison), but for the vital question — the *only* vital question — he passes the buck to us.

It may seem that I am over-labouring my point. If so I am unrepentant. It cannot, in my view, be sufficiently stressed that an sf writer is not a different *species* of being from any other novelist or short story writer, much as some would like to have it so. Nevertheless he or she is faced with a peculiar problem. Robert Silverberg puts his finger on it precisely when he says: '. . . I had stumbled into the world of science fiction fandom, a world much more comfortable than the real world . . .'

'Comfort', 'cosiness', '*camaraderie*', these, oddly enough, are the words which seem best to describe the peculiar atmosphere evoked in these accounts of the sf scene in the United States during the inter and post-war years. The same names occur over and over again, bouncing back and forth like Alpine echoes across an enclosed valley above which tower the craggy peaks of Mt. *Astounding*, Mt. *Galaxy* and Mt. *Amazing*. Only in Alfred Bester's hilarious account of his one meeting with 'the great John W. Campbell, Jr.' (surely the Dalai Lama of this strange *Shangri-La*) does a gust of cool refreshing air come blowing in from the great world beyond. At once the mist disperses and we see things plain. And one of the first things we perceive is that all mutual admiration societies have one enormous, built-in disadvantage. Their critical coinage

rapidly become's debased. I sometimes get the impression that the sf field sports more 'geniuses' per square metre than all the rest of literature lumped together.

As in most autobiographies the sections dealing with the writers' childhoods and adolescence proved, on the whole, to be the most interesting parts of the book. The majority of the contributors were 'loners' and if not all are, technically speaking, 'only children' they certainly seem to have regarded themselves as such. Judged on this particular statistical sample it would appear that over 50% of all sf writers have solitary childhoods and find some difficulty in relating socially to their fellows of either sex. It is this, no doubt, which accounts in some measure for the compensatory uterine cosiness of sf fandom, though I found that Damon Knight's description of the 'Futurians' made genuinely sad reading. Our cartographers fed their hunger on fantasy (didn't we all?) and developed thereby an appetite which could be assuaged only by their producing their own. In the end they made it, wrote books, became established and, finally, famous. At least one, Robert Silverberg, appears, by phenomenal industry, to have amassed a considerable fortune.

Yet their world has, for the most part, remained circumscribed by sf — a sub-culture within a wider culture. True some of them go out of their way to make token obeisance towards other types of imaginative writing — poetry, 'straight' fiction, drama — and Brian Aldiss is very widely read outside the field; indeed, his own contribution gains tremendously from the perspective this gives it; but for the most part the world of the other five contributors is the sf world and their yardsticks of literary excellence are sf yardsticks. This seems to me a great pity because, when all is said and done, sf writers are not different *in kind* from other writers. Even the celebrated impulse of the 'New Wave' of the 60's which did much to re-animate those rapidly ossifying forms so dearly cherished in conservative hearts, came from outside the citadel and not from within it. The eyes of too many an *aficionado* of the genre are focussed inwards. Few things are more dispiriting than to hear people who ought to know better proudly claiming as original to 'New Wave' those very stylistic innovations which were setting literary London and Paris by the ears as long ago as the 1920's.

Any review of a symposium is bound to be something of a lucky dip. The best one can hope for is to convey something of the flavour and to leave it at that. If I found *Hell's Cartographers* less compelling reading than, say *The 'Paris Review' Interviews* that is not because its contributors are less interesting people in themselves, but rather that most of

them tell the same sort of story against the same sort of background and, from the evidence they offer here, too few of them seem to have much of interest to say (even incidentally) about the problems fundamental not only to sf but to all writing. Their concern has been predominantly with 'the market', in other words with the struggle to make a chancy living as professional writers in a rather specialized field. They describe their triumphs and disasters, their friendships and, on occasion, their internecine conflicts. The accounts are given individual flavour by iconoclasm (Bester) bewilderment (Silverberg) perspective (Aldiss) *wanderlust* (Harrison) candour (Knight) dogmatism (Pohl). By and large the values they subscribe to would appear to be those most widely held in our culture viz: Success = money = success. It is as well to remind ourselves that, if the evidence of history is anything to go by, literary excellence bears very little relation to the amount of money a work earns for its author.

The final section of the book is given over to descriptions of the individual working methods of the contributors. I found this interesting and informative.

Last, but by no means least, I feel in honour bound to record how, while wandering like a parched wombat through the middle regions of the text, I stumbled upon a waterhole in the form of a gallery of portrait photographs of the six cartographers. There I lapped my fill, reflecting sadly that to do the experience justice would, in Max Beer-bohm's pellucid phrase, require 'a far less brilliant pen than mine'.

a circumnavigation of self

Grimus

by Salman Rushdie (*Gollancz, 1975, pp319, £3.50, ISBN 0 575 01871 2*)

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

Grimus is a book which defies the kind of pithy description and dexterous pigeon-holing with which one likes to begin a review. The only way to begin to convey some of the flavour of the book is to quote.

Ergo:

Virgil Jones had not told Flapping Eagle about his own travels. In his day he had rejoiced in those interdimensional trips. There had been the voyages to the real, physical, alternative space-time continua. So close, yet such an eternity away. And there had been his own annihilating journey into the

Inner Dimensions, like the internal inferno which now clutched Flapping Eagle, which had left him hollow and impotent and lucky to be alive. And there was the third kind.

The bridge between the first two kinds.

With sufficient imagination, Virgil Jones had found, one could *create* worlds, physical, external worlds, neither aspects of oneself nor a palimpsest-universe. Fictions where a man could live. (p.91)

Grimus is about one of those voyages of the third kind — the voyage undertaken by the immortal hero Flapping Eagle into the fiction created by Grimus, where men can and do live. This web of alter-reality extends around Calf Mountain and the town of K. Grimus sits at the heart of the web, in a space-time fold where only those who can find the interdimensional gateway can reach him. K is continually under the threat of disintegration, its citizens living in fear of losing touch with the irreality where they live. Only Ignatius Q. Gribb's *All-Purpose Quotable Philosophy*, which preaches the policy of strategic involvement with trivial obsessions, permits many of the citizens to hang on to their fictions.

The key to the whole business of fiction-creating may well be the Gorfs, amazing creatures from Thera (planet of the star Nus in the Yawy Klim) who are engaged permanently in the Divine Game of Order. They have ultimate control over all existence through the power which they have of altering their environments and their physical forms anagrammatically — by playing with words they play with everything that exists.

The actual plot of *Grimus* must now be familiar to every reader of surrealistic literature in general and surrealistic sf in particular. The hero, alienated from his own reality, follows his sister into Grimus's fiction, where she is used to bait him into a final confrontation with the mysterious presence which permeates the whole book. It comes as no surprise to learn that Flapping Eagle and Grimus are different aspects of the one person, and that the climax of the book must be their reunion — the forging of a new ego from disparate, uncertain identity-fragments. What is new in *Grimus*, however, is the recognition that such self-confrontation is neither the whole, nor the end, of what is going on. The Gorfs and the Divine Game of Order remain to be reckoned with, even after Flapping Eagle has conquered dimension-fever (or endimions-fever) and escaped the emotional traps of life in K to inherit the legacy of Grimus.

Grimus is reminiscent of such classic exercises in strangeness as *A Voyage to Arcturus* and Ruthven Todd's *The Lost Traveller*, but it does not possess the extreme convoluted self-involvement of those books. It is broader in its outlook — it has humour and satire and its mysteries are

open to investigation, not closed and secret. It has its veiled meanings, but the veils are shed one by one (as in the classic dance routine) until the ideas within stand naked. In the meantime (as in the classic dance routine) the audience is not permitted to lose interest. Salman Rushdie's prose is clever, his presentation sparkling. He is an inventive writer and he has created a gaudy, ironic and quite brilliant novel.

The reviews editor tells me that this book was submitted for Gollancz's sf competition last year, but wasn't quite the kind of thing they were looking for. Well, perhaps not — Gorfs and dimensions notwithstanding there is no reason why this book should be labelled and categorized. Whether it is read as sf or as an unstigmatized novel it will be found to be unusual. It is not unique, for it deals with the same kind of myth-exercise as a number of other inner-space journeys written since the first great explorers circumnavigated the self, but it is new, and it is fascinating.

the bad critic as car mechanic

The Science Fiction of Isaac Asimov

by Joseph F. Patrouch Jr (*Doubleday, 1974, pp276, \$6.95, ISBN 0 385 08696 2*)

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

The introduction to this book includes the following cautionary anecdote:

Asimov once listened to a college teacher explicate one of his stories. Afterward he went to the teacher and said, "Nothing of what you found in the story was in the author's mind when he wrote it." The teacher asked, "How do you know?" "Because," Asimov announced, "I am the author". "Well," replied the teacher, "just because you wrote the story, what makes you think you know anything about it?"

Some two hundred and fifty pages later, Patrouch discusses Asimov's short story "The Immortal Bard", in which the same thing that happened to Asimov happens to Shakespeare — brought out of the seventeenth century by time machine he is astounded by analyses of his work and cannot make the grade in a college course dealing with his own works.

Patrouch seems to have little sympathy for either Asimov or Shakespeare on this point. "Academic criticism," he comments, "is intended

to train a reading audience, not the writers themselves." Nevertheless, he has been careful. He has conducted an extensive correspondence with Asimov, so that he can at least compare what *he* thinks with what *was* in the author's mind when he wrote the stories. In so doing, alas, he seems to have lost sight of his own prospectus. This book does virtually nothing to help a reading audience relate better to Asimov. Instead, it spends a great deal of time explaining how Asimov could have improved his stories if only he'd had a little more in his mind when he wrote them.

In reviewing this book I feel compelled to defend Asimov against Patrouch, and I can't help feeling that this is rather ironic, for Patrouch admits to being a dyed-in-the-wool Asimov fan, which I am not. It seems that such is Patrouch's admiration for Asimov that he takes it completely for granted, and he spends the whole book qualifying it without ever having explained it in the first place.

One thing the correspondence which Patrouch quotes makes very clear — indeed, Asimov is almost aggressive in making the point, and has made it elsewhere — is that Asimov is content to know nothing about writing technique. He constructs his stories intuitively, in the manner which seems to him to be "natural". Such method as he has is apparently unconscious (and perhaps, therefore, it is not so surprising that nothing the teacher said was in his head when he wrote the story). It therefore strikes me as rather absurd that Patrouch should concentrate his analysis of Asimov almost entirely on the mechanics of story construction. His chapters are catalogues of "errors" in method of presentation and "faults" in plausibility. It is often difficult in reading this book to remember that Patrouch likes Asimov, and that the long essays in nitpicking are not to condemn but (somehow) to illuminate.

Most of what Patrouch says about Asimov's stories is true — they *are* often clumsy, and their background often collapses under rigorous logical analysis. But the question which Patrouch never gets to grips with is why they are successful in spite of their faults. He will end a catalogue of complaint with a sentence to the effect that "Nevertheless, this is one of Asimov's most brilliant stories . . ." but he is apparently unequal to the task of telling us why. The book would surely be a greater compliment to Asimov — and do him more justice — if Patrouch had tried to be more objective, and to divorce himself from his own enthusiasm. In order to subject it to some kind of scrutiny.

Patrouch's critical method is that of the car mechanic. With the aid of his trusty spanners he dismantles stories into their components: *plot* (itself subdivisible into "initial situation", "the complication", "the

conflict”, “the solution” and “the resolution”); *action vs. summation*; *narrative point of view*; *character*; *setting*; and *theme*. He hangs these labels on bits and pieces of every Asimov concoction, extrapolating back from the machine to its nuts and bolts. Some things tend to get lost in such an analysis – notably the fact that the finished product had a function to fill as well as a formula. There has always seemed to me to be a terrible poverty about this approach to literature – it concentrates on the text to the absolute exclusion of everything else, including the reader-experience.

One particular difficulty which Patrouch finds again and again in fitting his preconceptions as to what makes a story to Asimov’s particular products is the difficulty of identifying “the central character”. So often, in Asimov, the characters are anything but central. The notion of “the idea as hero” has obviously never occurred to Patrouch (and yet he is an Asimov fan!).

It has always seemed to me that Asimov’s more admirable work is his non-fiction, especially the kind of short article he does so well every month in *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. It also seems to me that these are excellent examples of Asimov’s narrative technique and literary method – they are science fact short stories. But Patrouch knows too well what “fiction” is and what “stories” consist of to adopt such perspectives. I think that’s a pity, and I think Patrouch’s too-narrow view made certain that he was always going to miss the point. If this book was ever really intended to “train a reading audience” to appreciate Asimov, it had no chance – and in any case, Asimov himself does the job rather well, in his articles and in the commentaries to some of his collections. Asimov, at least, knows what he has to offer his readers – Patrouch seems to know only what he has not. Here, negative criticism is balanced only by effusive compliments, not by any analysis of what Asimov *can* do well, and *does*.

This is perhaps a sad book rather than a bad book, because I can’t believe that Patrouch meant it to turn out the way it has.

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