



I don't know how many of you have read "The Hole in the Zero" by M. K. Joseph. I reviewed it, in a fashion, in ASFR 13 (December 1967: good grief, how time goes). It was an excellent novel of its kind, but as far as I know my review influenced only Damien Broderick to read it and (with all respect to a friend) I don't know that he learnt anything from it. Certainly, I never saw it reviewed in any other fanzine.

Another author who seems to have gone unnoticed is Colin Cooper. In an unguarded moment I remarked to the company at 1/166 Glen Eira Road (which places it towards the end of 1968) that the writing reminded me of Aldiss's, and Bruce Gillespie (if I remember correctly) subsequently attributed the book to him. Whether Aldiss was Cooper or not doesn't matter a great deal: the point is that his book seems to have been passed over by fandom at large - and yet it was most enjoyable.

A few months ago I read the third science fiction novel by another neglected author - and that, I must admit, started off this train of thought. (From thought to paper took only a few minutes; from paper to stencil several months; but no matter.) "Domino" by Richard Cowper is very readable indeed - although I notice that George Turner doesn't agree with me. It is not up to the standard of "Breakthrough", his first novel (which also I talked about in ASFR 13, and have not seen reviewed elsewhere), but a very pleasant, very credible story, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. I was a little disappointed with the novel between these two - "Phoenix" - but perhaps that was because there Cowper attempted too much.

About half an hour after finishing "Domino" I started reading John Brunner's "Double, Double". I lasted sixteen pages. The characterization, the dialogue, the technique - all were so inferior when compared with this pleasant little book by Richard Cowper that I could not bring myself to read any further.

I like John Brunner. I was enthralled by "Stand on Zanzibar", loved "The Long Result", and have enjoyed more of John's fiction, in total, than possibly any other sf writer's - which is probably more fiction than Richard Cowper has written. Perhaps it is simply that, in this case, Brunner is about a decade younger than Cowper and did not have the good fortune to be born into such an eminent literary family ("Richard Cowper" is really Colin Murry). I don't know. What I do know is that "Domino" will sell far less copies than "Double, Double", and perhaps John can take some consolation from that.

What I have said so far has been entirely in the subjective field of personal reaction. But one could go further. It seems to me that there is a very cogent reason for John Brunner's selling while Richard Cowper does not. John Brunner - despite the fact that he doesn't support Australia in Seventy-Five (adv't) - is One Of Us. Cowper is not. John writes for fanzines and goes to conventions and supports TAFF candidates and is known to all of us. I do not know that Richard Cowper has done any of these things. He is an Outsider.

That is a sad thing about science fiction. We have curled up into a tight little enclosed community, and by crikey you have to be lucky to break in. David Compton achieved it by publishing a couple of Ace paperbacks which captured the imagination of some of the regular sf fans. Ursula Le Guin, after three or four novels, did the same thing. John Boyd is on his way; his professed admiration for John Wyndham and Arthur Clarke might be held against him in some quarters, but probably not as much as Ursula's predilection for Proust and Patrick White.

There are times when I feel that I am not a fan at all, and maybe the above comments support that. I don't care much. I love Ursula, and Compton, and Boyd - and Thackeray and Lennie Lower and Flann O'Brien and Halldor Laxness and Joseph Furphy - and John Brunner and Bob Silverberg and Bob Tucker and (need I say?) the immortal author of "Nightmare Abbey". If that kind of taste lowers me in your estimation, that's hard luck.

Ultimately, though, I am hooked on science fiction fandom, and I know it, and cannot entirely explain it. But I do know that fandom has nothing to do with literary taste.

It is therefore singularly depressing that we, the fans, in our little enclave, can literally make or break the careers of new authors - whether they deserve it or not.