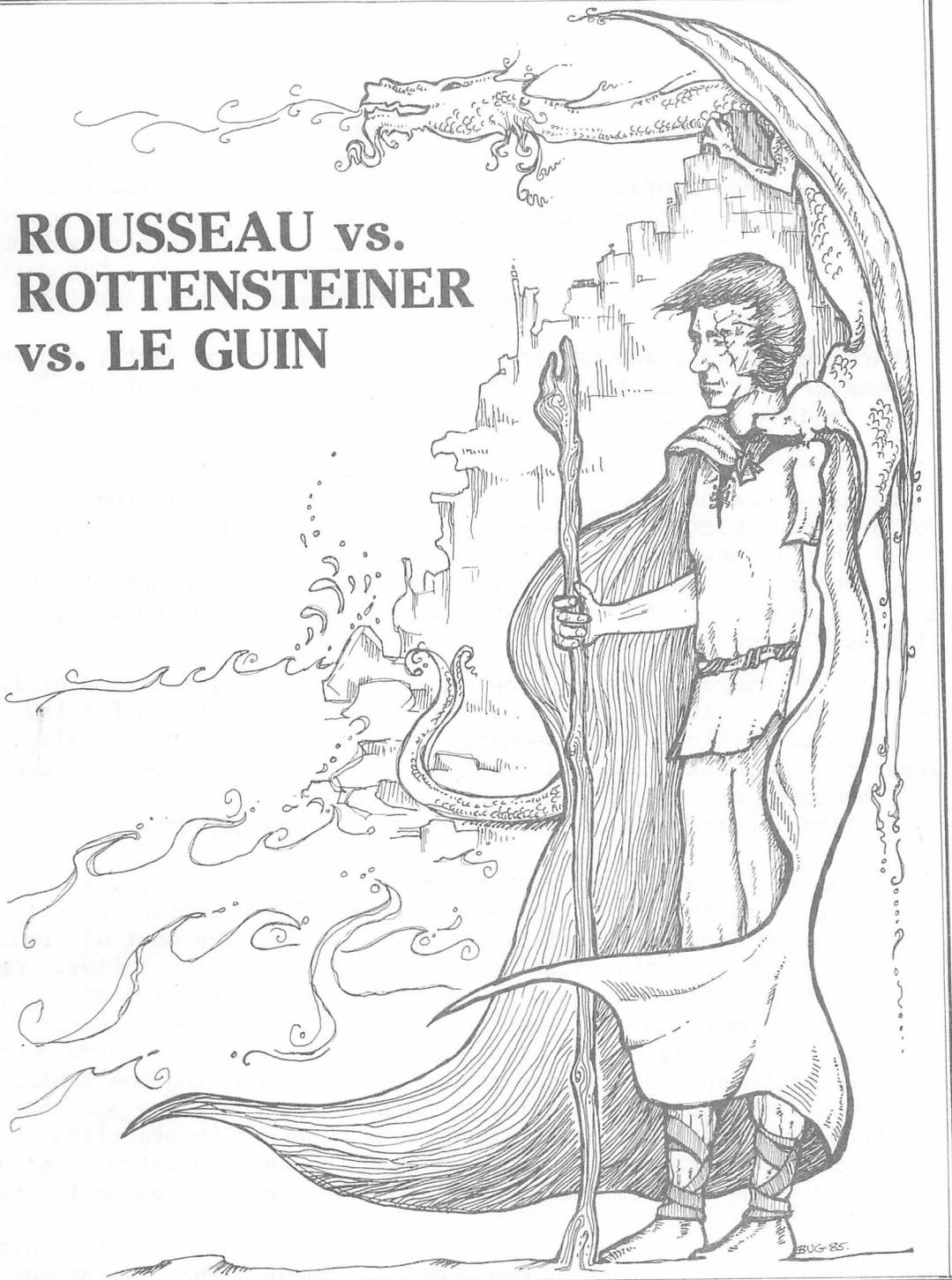


THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

No. 5/6

Oct. '85

ROUSSEAU vs. ROTTENSTEINER vs. LE GUIN



I MUST BE
TALKING
TO MY
FRIENDS

Nobody drives me out of fandom; nobody could, anymore than anybody could drive any one of you out of fandom. This is where our friends are. This is where our community is. This is what we feel most comfortable with. This is why we come together at conventions, regional conventions, and parties, and all the rest of it. It's because we are fans, because we are primarily fans.

Ted White,
Fan Guest of Honour Speech, Aussiecon II

And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached the heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Genesis 29:12

There was a moment during the third day of Aussiecon II (the 43rd World Science Fiction Convention, held in Melbourne, 22-26 August 1985) when I looked upwards from the ground-floor lobby of the Southern Cross Hotel, surveyed the concourse of people hurtling up and down the stairs to the convention rooms above, and thought, 'I love all you people.'

I don't, of course. Some of those people I dislike, and some dislike me, and many dislike each other. But this feeling of pan-fannish fellowship, emitted from somewhere inside a tired and emotionally strained mind, was truer than most of the thoughts I have. I love the community of fans, the idea of fandom; I felt this most strongly when listening to Ted White's Fan Guest of Honour Speech:

I was in London a couple of months ago for a wedding... and while I was there I met a fan who I had always wanted to meet, a man named Greg Pickersgill, who wrote some of the most vigorous and fascinating and exciting fan writing of the 'seventies. Greg is a fascinating chap who can argue, I guess, any side of a point. We found ourselves in a pub together. The background level of noise was fairly high. We'd been in pubs on and off throughout the afternoon. Our voices rose. We began pounding the table. And at some point Greg said, 'I made a decision years ago that fandom was my life', and I thought to myself with startling clarity, Why are we arguing? We made the same decision. We're on the same side of this fence. This is a common community that we're in.

Ted White,
Fan Guest of Honour Speech, Aussiecon II

My mind was infected anew by the idea of fandom - of a self-governing,

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anarchic community, whose members meet together for the sake of doing so, in defiance of most of the unwritten rules of mundane society. For a few days the sf fan's world really seemed a heaven separated from everything mean, trivial, barbaric, and competitive in the 'real' world.

That lovely notion has not yet disappeared, a week after Aussiecon. It has been kept alive partly by the fact that I must go back to work tomorrow, after three weeks of holiday mainly spent on fannish activity. And it will be kept alive by memories of Aussiecon itself, which ran very smoothly and enabled that great concourse of people to take part in a five-day party, spread over three hotels and innumerable halls and meeting rooms. The members of the organising committee did a remarkable job. It's a pity they paid the price of our enjoyment: most of them looked like lightning-struck zombies by the end of proceedings. Special thanks to the Free Press team, Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown, who (I'm told) volunteered to do this job only at the last minute, and Marc Ortlieb, whose compering of the Hugo Awards ceremony qualifies him for a 1986 Hugo for Best (Impromptu) Dramatic Presentation. (Mentioning the Hugos and Leigh Edmonds in the same paragraph reminds me of the only real disappointment of Aussiecon: Leigh's near-miss failures to gain two Hugos. I feel a bit angry at the local fans who were just too lazy to send in their Hugo ballot forms voting for Leigh or for George Turner.)

I attended Aussiecon to meet other people, not to attend the programme. Like many other people, I found some items on the programme so interesting that I attended them anyway. This is not supposed to happen to the truly fannish fans, but even the fannish fans - those who stayed in the Fan Lounge all convention - played host to some worthwhile programme items. The enjoyable fannish panels usually featured Ted White or Joseph Nicholas, or both. Ted White, as Fan Guest of Honour, gave great value for money. From whom else could I have found out the endless, unrepeatable details of the fan feuds that have sundered overseas fandom for the past year, and were nearly forgotten at Aussiecon? Who else could tell authentic stories about Phil Dick, and New York fandom, and much else besides? Ted's Fan Guest of Honour Speech was my highlight of the convention, although Race Mathews, during the Opening Ceremony speech, came a close second by reading out extracts from a letter written by Lee Harding when he was fifteen years old.

I had a few official duties at Aussiecon. I was one of the judges of the Short Story Competition. I appeared on some panels. My main job, however, was to share with Rob Gerrard the Norstrilia Press table so that the other NP partner, Carey Handfield, was free to run the convention. Carey's friends, the Dennises, watched the table when Rob or I had to be elsewhere, and Kitty Vigo helped as well. Norstrilia Press sold quite a few books, but I sold very few magazines or Reprints. (Looks as if I'm fated never to make money, not even at a world convention.) I met quite a few ex-SF Commentary subscribers, including Ed Bryant, who didn't take out a TMR sub, but who bought lots of NP books, and Angelo d'Alessio from Newark, New Jersey, who had not intended his subscription to lapse in the first place. It was my impression that overseas sf trade people - authors, professional editors, and publishers - were not much interested in Australian sf, but many Australian readers became aware of the Australian sf publishers (Norstrilia, Paul Collins, and Ebony) for the first time. Paul had his own troupe of book-signing authors to help him.

There were a lot of overseas people at the convention - perhaps as many as five hundred, mainly American. My feeling was that many of the authors were a bit distant to the natives, but perhaps they just didn't recognise us. Not so Gene and Rosemary Wolfe. They were particularly hardworking - always available, seeing people, signing books. I wish I had seen more of the items that featured Gene Wolfe, although I did attend the Question and Answer Panel on the last day. (At one point Gene called out, 'Don't you shake your head at me, Gillespie', as if I were denying some revelation he had just made about his own work. Not denial, Gene; just astonishment that I had missed some particular point when reading 'The Book of the New Sun'.) Several of the Academic Track papers discussed Gene Wolfe's work, and gave Wolfe-detectives a chance to pool information about the nuts and bolts of Wolfe's novels and stories. Norman Talbot's paper was rather interesting: it appears in a book, Contrary Modes, produced by Ebony Books and the University of Newcastle, which was supposed to have been ready to sell at the convention, but did not arrive in time. It's available now, for \$7, from Ebony Books, PO Box 1264L, Melbourne, Vic. 3001.

If there was a theme to the convention, it was the difficulty that Australians have in breaking into the professional sf field. At the start of Aussiecon, Ebony Books and Hale & Iremonger boldly displayed their new anthologies of Australian short sf, Urban Fantasies and Strange Attractors. At the end of the convention (my spy tells me) Ken Methold, of the Australian Society of Authors, told Australian sf authors that they are too arty and not philistine enough, and should be writing for a mass audience. Both events ignored the fact that the sf audience in Australia extends not much further than the numbers of Australians who gathered for the convention. You can sell quality short sf if you leave off the sf label (or even the hint of such a label), or you can try selling punchy commercial sf in Australia, only to find it ignored by the locals because it is Australian. All this leaves Australia without a professional sf industry. At one panel I sat among John Baxter, Ted White, and Malcolm Edwards, each telling how he went from fan writing and editing to making a living from the field. John Baxter travelled from Australia to Britain; Ted White, in New York, lived among fans who became professionals, and he lived near the markets; and Malcolm Edwards went from fanzine publishing to the SF Editor position at Victor Gollancz in London. All I could say for myself was, 'Norstrilia Press was meant to make money sometime.' There is no large publisher in Australia where a fan editor could gain a position as sf editor. Several people on other panels suggested that Australian writers should do their best to break into the American market. Of course. But the same people don't realise how difficult that is to do from this side of the world, given the peculiarities of the mailing system and the exchange rates.

But it's still true that Australian writers need to break into the overseas markets, if only to get Australian readers to notice them. That's what I tell potential writers who ring Norstrilia Press. That's what we Writers Workshop veterans told each other when we met at the convention. What were we actually doing, ten years after the famous Le Guin workshop? Some are earning fortunes in computers, some are starting families, and some (in my case) still publish fanzines. But most are writing very little fiction. I haven't written any fiction in four years, let alone sent it overseas. Maybe Aussiecon will stir some action from us all.

As I said earlier, the main purpose of attending Aussiecon was to meet people. This could be difficult, or serendipitous. I did not meet Eve Harvey, the GUFF winner, and met Chris Atkinson only once. But I kept running into Joseph Nicholas and Judith Hanna, and we kept promising ourselves that we would make time for a conversation. This finally happened at the Nova Mob party, a week later. I kept walking past Adelaide fans at high speeds, and learned to recognise many of the Western Australian fans at a distance. But on the first night of the convention I ran into Alf van der Poorten, somebody I had not seen for ten years. He used to be an SFC subscriber, but we lost track of each other. Since the first Aussiecon he's become Professor of Mathematics at Macquarie University, and he told some good stories about life in the mathematical world. He said kindly that he thought I would become similarly successful in my own field, to which I could only reply that I haven't yet found out what my field is. Also, I've shown no ability to turn a buck at anything interesting. The next night Elaine and I went out to a secret fannish rendezvous in the wilds of West Brunswick, and there met Art Widner (again) and Terry Hughes (for the first time, although we had shaken hands once at the convention). And John and Sally, of course. Art and Terry must be two of the most pleasant people in all fandom. I get to 'talk' to Art through FAPA, but have been out of touch with Terry for some time. It's conversations like these that make world conventions, even if they don't take place at room parties.

As a matter of fact, I didn't get to any room parties, except for the Ebony Books launch party on Thursday afternoon. And I didn't see the Masquerade or the Art Show, although I was pleased that my old cobbler Steph Campbell won the prize for the best painting based on a work by Gene Wolfe. And I saw none of the films, although there were many I wanted to watch (especially the full-length It's a Wonderful Life). Too much to do, too many people seen or just missed in the corridor, too little energy. I began to flag on the fourth and fifth days, and was most grateful to Yvonne Rousseau, also flagging, for someone to droop with over a cup of coffee. Ten years before, I had stayed in the hotel, and had four hours sleep each night; but I was twenty-eight then, not thirty-eight. For a thirty-eight-year-old veteran fan, I had a lot of fun at Aussiecon. Thanks, committee. Thanks, everybody.

A SHORT STORY

I was one of three judges of the Short Story Contest held in conjunction with Aussiecon II. The other judges were Yvonne Rousseau and Jenny Blackford, and Marc Ortlieb organised the whole thing. We thought we might take hours to wrangle over a list of winners, but instead we agreed on the list in about ten minutes. The winners were: 1. 'The Deciad', by Sean Macmullen. 2. 'The Sargasso of Four Singularities', by Eric Harries Harris. 3. 'To Cook a Kooty-Pooka', by Tony Jones. Special Commendations: 'Alley Ghost' by Rick Kennett and 'Such is Life' by John L. Davis.

Very instructive exercise, judging a short story contest. You find out that most entries to such a competition are very bad. If you're any good at all, and you keep entering short story contests, you're bound to win a prize sometime. (I must take up my own advice for once.) The professionals don't tend to enter, perhaps because they think other professionals are entering. And... for whatever reason... most of the entries written on word processors were bloody awful. Just thought you'd like to know these things, before we get on with THE LETTERS....

(Please turn to Page 69)

Franz Rottensteiner is an Austrian-based critic and editor who is well remembered for his contributions to Australian fanzines, in particular, during the last eighteen years. He still contributes to Science-Fiction Studies (Canada) and edits books (The Slaying of the Dragon, an anthology of fantasy from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).

LE GUIN'S FANTASY

by Franz Rottensteiner

(This article appeared first in Science-Fiction Studies, Vol. 8, No. 1, No. 23, March 1981.)

DISCUSSED:

The Language of the Night:
Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction

by Ursula K. Le Guin

(G. P. Putnam's Sons;
1979; 270 pp.; \$US 9.95)

Barkley 0-425-05205;
1982; 262 pp.; \$US 2.75)

Edited and with an Introduction
by Susan Wood

This volume, edited and introduced by Susan Wood, collects a number of Ursula K. Le Guin's writings on sf and fantasy, many of them from the fanzines, but also a few speeches, introductions to her own books, observations on other writers and assorted other shorter pieces. They are organised in the sections 'Le Guin Introduces Le Guin', 'On Fantasy and Science Fiction', 'The Book Is What Is Real', 'Telling the Truth',

and 'Pushing at the Limits'. From humble beginnings, Ursula K. Le Guin has risen to become one of the most important authors in American sf, and has become known even outside the pale of sf, and for that alone her book deserves attention and respect. She is one of those writers, so rare in sf, whose work and theoretical statement form a unity. She doesn't say one thing and practise another: in her, reflection and action are one. Above all else, she tries to write beautifully; her books are intended to be fully rounded works of art, with human characters, meaning and import, aesthetics and ethics in one. What matters to her is the whole atmosphere of the writing, the sensual concreteness, rhythm, symbol, tone and metaphor. She is not for abstract theses barely covered with a pretence of fiction. Mrs Le Guin is intelligent and well read, modest and possessed of a sense of humour (e.g. her '30 years of malpractice'), sympathetic to other writers yet firm where essential issues are touched upon.

In some respect all her essays circle around the twin poles of beauty and truth, aesthetics and ethics. Where these are concerned, she can get quite passionate. Truth she is willing to concede only to great literature, whereas fantasy is to be content with imagination. Her preference and love in literature, including sf, is definitely the great traditional novel of character that helps to understand human nature. This view is spiritedly expounded in her long essay 'Science Fiction and Mrs Brown', starting from a remark of Virginia Woolf's. This stressing of common human beings and psychologically tenable

characterisation is also visible in the introductions to her own books and in her piece on Philip K. Dick.

While such a view is certain to meet with sympathy and is persuasive because Mrs Le Guin writes so modestly, reasonably and gracefully, there arises the principal doubt concerning whether sf can compete in this respect and whether this understanding of literature, which is apparently also shared by other sf writers, isn't at best only partially true, and more appropriate for the nineteenth than the twentieth century. There are, after all, many other ways of writing literature, even writing novels, than 'getting into the ring with Mr Tolstoy', as Gregory Benford, for instance, quotes Hemingway as having described the novel - a hopeless fight for any sf writer. There exist some sf novels that are quite decent as novels of ideas, but none that would make the grade as novels of character. Patrick Parrinder's reply, 'The Alien Encounter: or, Mrs Brown and Mrs Le Guin' (Science-Fiction Studies, No. 17), seems to be much more sensible - and realistic. Mrs Le Guin herself, attempting the kind of psychological or psychologising novel that appears to be her ideal, comes off as at best second-rate, and often her concern with myth (which is perhaps more appropriate for fantasy) gets in the way of the characterisation. Mrs Le Guin has a good ear for language, and a genuine striving for truth and justice: but her books lack vigour and the determination to get to the bottom of a problem or a person. Above all, her fiction is dominated by a striving for balance which appears to be detrimental to truth: and for this reason she often lacks depth, the ability to face the full consequences and implications of something. She tends to glide over unpleasant truths, and therefore she simplifies - though for the sake of beauty, it would seem. The depths of the human heart are not touched in her prose, and while she is an honorable person and a respectable writer - a shining exception in the desolate wastelands of sf - she is not a great writer. As novels, not even her best sf is exceptional, and her celebrated and award-winning longer and shorter stories like 'The Word for World Is Forest', 'Nine Lives', 'The Day Before the Revolution' or 'The Eye of the Hexon' are first and foremost banal - ethically and morally commendable, but essentially shallow. These stories have more human warmth than they have the power to move, and I think as an aesthetics of sf, Mrs Le Guin's views on 'Mrs Brown' could only further the self-deception to which sf and sf criticism tend anyway: the pretension that mediocre but popular works are first-rate works of literature. (Consider, for example, the insider praise for the work of the arch-sentimentalist Theodore Sturgeon, who is so often cited as a great writer unduly ignored outside of sf.) But this preference - or prejudice - for 'good characterisation' is certainly shared by the readership at large, which favours long books with 'serious' characterisation (but which nevertheless must not offer any difficulty in instant comprehension). Why else would books like Stardance by Jeanne and Spider Robinson or Dreamsnake by Vonda N. McIntyre be so popular, except for a fundamental misunderstanding of characterisation? These are hardly books that a literary critic would notice.

Mrs Le Guin's inherent tendency for illusionism, which is in part explainable by her own development as a writer from modest beginnings in Amazing Stories and with Ace Books to the pre-eminence in the field today, may best be gauged from her enthusiastic attitude to the currently popular brand of fantasy. What was for the German romanticists the blue flower of Novalis are for her the dragons, and

the difference between a beautiful and elegant flower and a rather crude animal like a dragon is indicative of the worlds that separate romantic fantasy from its modern incarnation as a phenomenon of the mass market. For Mrs Le Guin, dragons are symbols of a nocturnal, somewhat more noble world, far from everyday life and its personal and political conflicts - not mere escapism, but rather a poetic transformation of life, a metaphor and a symbol. Again and again she defends these dragons and sorcerers as symbols of a deep psychological truth, often citing Jung's psychology, his shadow and other symbols of the unconscious. Polemically it could be said that the psychological basis of modern fantasy lies not in its power of individuation but, on the contrary, in its appeal to common symbols, perhaps directly influencing the subconscious - i.e. its appeal to the mass mind. This may explain its success in the market place, but is not necessarily indicative of great literary merit. Mrs Le Guin also polemicises against sword and sorcery and the pretentiousness of the stolen myths found in so much sf: but she rarely cites particular examples. Samuel R. Delany and Roger Zelazny, the main culprits in this respect, are probably not meant by her, although she says a few words about a misdirection of Zelazny's development as a writer. She loves above all J. R. R. Tolkien, whom she thinks is a most profound writer often slighted by certain reviewers who claim that his philosophy and ethics are simplistic (because they are simple minds themselves, such as the writer of these lines). Is Tolkien more than a British Robert E. Howard with a university education and tenure? Yet she seems to be seriously of the opinion that fantasy is a suppressed literary form that doesn't get due attention. Dragons are symbols of freedom, i.e. of the freedom of imagination, and therefore disliked by librarians and similar unimaginative people. Why are Americans afraid of dragons? she asks in a speech given in 1973. Can there be a bigger misunderstanding of the situation? Tolkien isn't exactly an unread, suppressed writer, and if he may have suffered some attacks, and was ignored by other critics, the readers stood solidly behind him: in commercial terms, he is one of the most successful writers of the century. Tolkien is a romantic writer, and Mrs Le Guin says in one place of herself that her imagination is romantic and not ironical, and this natural disposition - in her case surely without any commercial intentions - explains, perhaps more than the beauty of her writing, her success: identification is what insures success in American sf or fantasy, not critical distancing and an ironical stance. And why are Italo Calvino's so much more sophisticated and ironical knightly fantasies known to only a few? 'I suspect', Mrs Le Guin writes 'that almost all very highly technological peoples are more or less anti-fantasy. There are several national literatures which, like ours, have had no tradition of adult fantasy for the past several hundred years: the French, for instance, But then you have the Germans, who have a good deal, and the English, who have it, and love it, and do it better than anyone else' (p. 40). But about what kind of fantasy is she speaking here? Surely fantasy is as old as literature, and has existed in many countries, including, most emphatically, France. But nobody there or in Germany thought, as Tolkien did, and the modern fantasy writers in England and America do, of creating complete parallel worlds: they fluctuated perhaps between a fairy-tale world or a world glimpsed in dreams and the real world, but they did not think of firmly occupying a fantasy world to such an extent as to create whole alternate geographies, cultures, languages - invariably simple worlds close to nature and the physical attributes of all its

creatures. All the parallel 'inner lands' of Tolkien and others like him are 'inner' only in the sense that they have sprung from human minds - as cannot be otherwise in literature, just as the euphemism 'imaginative literature', sometimes used for fantasy, is a presumption. More important than the spiritual values in these books are the descriptions of purely physical things, of external landscapes, and of physical feats. But in the eyes of the apologists for fantasy, any stumbling around in a fantasy world becomes a spiritual quest.

Contrary to what Mrs Le Guin thinks of the anti-fantasy attitude of highly technological people, modern fantasy is a reaction to industrial society and its pressures, and could hardly have arisen in another society; a peasant people would hardly have any use for such a literary genre. It is not chance that this kind of fantasy arose in nineteenth-century England, the country that first felt the full pressure of industrialisation: that its main practitioners, whether Morris, Lord Dunsany, C. S. Lewis, E. R. Eddison, or J. R. R. Tolkien, all profoundly disliked their own time; or that this literature reached its greatest popularity in the scientifically and industrially most advanced country on Earth (the US), and then spread from there to other countries. Modern fantasy is a literature for a discontented city population, and especially for the young people fed up with their civilisation: seeing no sense in technological progress, dissatisfied with things as they are, and unable to create new values, they turn to writers who re-create at great length what genuine fairy tales told much more poignantly and with greater charm; and Le Guin's short remarks on H. C. Andersen suggest, at least to this writer, that Andersen is so much better than the touted J. R. R. Tolkien. For Mrs Le Guin and a few others, myth may indeed be a living reality and the proper expression of what they want to say. But in general, the myths presented in fantasy are dead, and perhaps it is exactly for this reason that they can, with impunity, be varied and recombined in literature, just as the dead languages Greek and Latin provide a ready reservoir for scientific terms. Writers who lack an inner guide that would enable them to create something truly new and appropriate for our times may approach them with the unconscious habit of grave robbers in search of 'eternal verities' to give significance to their pulpish stories. Again it is perhaps not merely chance that the fantastic writings of Mircea Eliade, as archaic and anti-scientific as they are (but Mircea Eliade knows whereof he speaks), are not even mentioned in American discussions of fantasy - for they have nothing in common with the currently popular brand of fantasy. Now, of course, even the writings of Tolkien (and Le Guin's 'Earthsea' trilogy, which is so much better than Tolkien) have a proper, if only very minor place in literature: only when they rise to mass phenomena do they become a regrettable symptom of what is wrong with our times.

Le Guin's book is a well-written, intelligent, witty, and above all coherent statement of a world view: but at the same time it is ameliorating, and for all its love for truth often is illusionistic and lacking the courage and the insight to perceive the true state of things. These latter qualities may all contribute to Mrs Le Guin's popularity with readers, but they stand in the way of her being a great writer of lasting significance.

- Franz Rottensteiner 1981

Yvonne Rousseau is a book reviewer (for the Age, Australian Book Review, and radio's Books and Writing), writer (The Murders at Hanging Rock), and publisher (Porous Pasternak).

THE RIGHT HAND OF LIGHT:
or MR ROTTENSTEINER AND MRS LE GUIN.

by Yvonne Rousseau

Light is the left hand of darkness
and darkness the right hand of light.

Former's Lay

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Details of the books discussed in the following article are supplied in the notes at the end. The main texts discussed include The Language of the Night (Le Guin, ed. Wood) and Franz Rottensteiner's article, republished in this issue.)

Ursula K. Le Guin's The Language of the Night consists of her essays on fantasy and science fiction - which Franz Rottensteiner has reviewed as if they were written by a well-meaning though shallow little thing, with too many stars in her eyes.

A failure to acknowledge or assess Le Guin's underlying convictions - or even her arguments - is Rottensteiner's pervasive method of misrepresentation. He will criticise her by stating an opposing view as if Le Guin were unaware of that view - even when she has examined it in her book, and has vigorously argued against the assumptions that underlie Rottensteiner's criticisms. As a single, preliminary example: it is misleading for him to downgrade Le Guin's fiction for lacking 'the determination to get to the bottom of a problem or a person' (FR, p. 88),¹ when he neglects to acknowledge that, from Le Guin's viewpoint, this 'getting to the bottom' might well be evidence of a writer's evasion and faithlessness. Writing about evil, she argues against its presentation as

a problem, something that can be solved, that has an answer, like a problem in fifth grade arithmetic...

That is escapism, that posing evil as a 'problem', instead of what it is: all the pain and suffering and waste and loss and injustice we will meet all our lives long, and must face and cope with over and over, and admit, and live with, in order to live human lives at all. (LN, pp. 59-60)²

In this essay, I shall be testing Rottensteiner's criticisms against the book that has supposedly provoked them. People who have not read The Language of the Night are likely to find his remarks very convincing - whereas, in fact, they are often flatly contradicted by what Le Guin has written in the very book he is reviewing. Rottensteiner altogether ignores Le Guin's account of the creative process; this is so central, however, that refuting Rottensteiner

will involve expounding Le Guin, and even examining some of her books in the light of Rottensteiner's more general criticisms. I shall begin by examining some of Rottensteiner's methods of misrepresentation, and outlining the wider relevance of some views that he misrepresents.

The Mephistopheles-Rottensteiner

It is interesting to treat Rottensteiner's review as a Mephistophelean exercise in author assassination, rather than as merely somewhat hasty. Consider, for example, his report: 'Truth she is willing to concede only to great literature, whereas fantasy is to be content with imagination' (FR, p. 87). Anyone who has read The Language of the Night will be astonished, at first, by so undisguised a contradiction of Le Guin's own statement in this book: that

fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. (LN, p. 34)

A search reveals that Rottensteiner's statement is derived, not from any essay that the book's editor, Susan Wood, selected for the text, but from an earlier essay that Wood quotes in one of the editorial introductions, with a consequent remark upon the speed with which Le Guin's

own experience, discovering universal truths in that inner land, led her to modify and even discard the view of fantasy as a form that must necessarily fall short of greatness... Finally, in the essays reprinted here, most notably 'Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?' Le Guin asserts that fantasy, like any other art responsibly created, can present both truth and the joy of the imagination. (LN, p. 12)

If (to enliven reviewing) we agree to credit Rottensteiner with a devilish subtlety and an aim of misrepresenting Le Guin, then we must ask ourselves why - having adopted the strategy of treating Le Guin's definitions as changeless through the years - Rottensteiner does not simply accuse Le Guin of contradicting herself. In the extract he chose as her view of fantasy and truth, Le Guin wrote that fantasy

will fall short of tragedy, because tragedy is the truth, and truth is what the very great artists, the absolute novelists, tell. It will not be truth; but it will be imagination. (LN, p. 12)

Having ignored Wood's observation that these essays are 're-examining and developing certain key ideas' (LN, p. 7), why shouldn't Rottensteiner simply juxtapose the two 'contradictory' quotations about truth (from 1974 and 1971), and confront them with the following quotation (from 1976), which seemingly denies tragedy even to 'absolute novelists'?

The beauty of fiction is always troubling, I suppose. It cannot offer transcendence, the peace that passes understanding, as poetry and music can; nor can it offer pure tragedy. It's too muddled. Its essence is muddle. Yet the novel, fiction concerned with individuals, in its stubborn assertion of human personality and human morality, does seem even now to affirm the existence of hope. (LN, p. 109)

Rottensteiner's hand was stayed, perhaps, by an awareness that such quotations would also contradict his initial portrait of static elegance. They would show Le Guin engaged in what she consistently sees as a writer's job: making a map of her own

inmost mind and feelings... The map is never complete, or even accurate... there is nothing to do then but say OK; that's done; now I come back and start a new map, and try to do it better, more truthfully. (LN, p. 190)

Le Guin's view (again consistently) is that such a map has significance for others because, as Jung suggests,

we are all fundamentally alike; we all have the same general tendencies and configurations in our psyche, just as we all have the same general kind of lungs and bones in our body. (LN, p. 53)

Accordingly, 'there is a vast common ground on which we can meet, not only rationally, but aesthetically, intuitively, emotionally' (LN, p. 70) - a ground which is discovered by looking inward:

Pain, the loneliest experience, gives rise to sympathy, to love: the bridge between self and other, the means of communion. So with art. The artist who goes into himself most deeply - and it is a painful journey - is the artist who touches us most closely, speaks to us most clearly. (LN, p. 68)

This is a vision also expressed by Joseph Conrad, who wrote (about 'workers in prose') that 'the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal.'³ Although Le Guin never mentions Conrad, she agrees with him, moreover, that to be 'deserving' is essential, yet not sufficient:

the intent, however good, guarantees nothing. You can try your heart out, work like a slave, and write drivel. But the opposite intent does carry its own guarantee. No artist ever set out to do less than his best and did something good by accident. (LN, p. 223)

The Mephistopheles-Rottensteiner reviewer denies to his readers any inkling that Le Guin has expressed that vision of how the artist communicates. His nearest approach is: 'Again and again she defends these dragons and sorcerers as symbols of a deep psychological truth, often citing Jung's psychology, his shadow and other symbols of the unconscious' (FR, p. 88). This is a complex and masterly misstatement. To unravel it will mean confronting Le Guin's conception of the unconscious - and of her own 'shadow', not Jung's.

'Again and again she defends these... sorcerers'

To begin with, Le Guin does not repeatedly mention sorcerers in relation to the unconscious. Once, instead, she admits that in the Earthsea trilogy the wizard's discipline can be equated with the artist's - they share in 'the creative experience, the creative process' (LN, p. 43) - and to be satisfied that one has the 'true name' of a thing is essential both to Le Guin's wizards and to herself as artist; before she wrote about Ged (the trilogy's protagonist), Le Guin spent

a long time trying to 'listen for' his name, and making certain it really was his name. This all sounds very mystical and indeed

there are aspects of it I do not understand, but it is a pragmatic business too, since if the name had been wrong the character would have been wrong - misbegotten, misunderstood. (LN, p. 42)

This does not defend 'sorcerers as symbols of a deep psychological truth': rather, it describes how one artist experiences the creative process. In ascribing an autonomous reality to the artist's seeming 'invention', the description is paralleled by similar confidences from other artists. Thus, the artist Escher writes:

While drawing I sometimes feel as if I were a spiritualist medium, controlled by the creatures which I am conjuring up. It is as if they themselves decide on the shape in which they choose to appear. They take little account of my critical opinion during their birth and I cannot exert much influence on the measure of their development. They are usually very difficult and obstinate creatures.⁴

Alan Garner has said, 'the feeling is less that I choose a myth than that the myth chooses me; less that I write than that I am written';⁵ and Mircea Eliade suggests that

one can speak of an extension of myth into literature: not only because certain mythological structures and figures return in the imaginary universe of literature, but especially because in both cases it is a matter of creation, that is of the creation (= revelation) of certain worlds parallel to the daily universe in which we move.⁶

Flannery O'Connor may serve to summarise these intuitions:

If a writer is any good, what he makes will have its source in a realm much larger than that which his conscious mind can encompass and will always be a greater surprise to him than it can ever be to his reader.⁷

'Again and again she defends these dragons...'

Returning to Rottensteiner's mastery of misstatement: although he has given an incorrect account of how The Language of the Night treats sorcerers (the doubting reader may object), perhaps he is correct in saying that Le Guin keeps defending dragons as 'symbols of a deep psychological truth'? However, Rottensteiner's formulation implies that Le Guin is extolling 'these dragons' as 'symbols' that need no qualification beyond being dragons: just introduce a dragon, and you introduce profundity. If Rottensteiner is impersonating Mephistopheles, then he must really intend this implication; whereas The Language of the Night argues at length that 'the presence of mythic material in a story does not mean that the mythmaking faculty is being used' (LN, pp. 64-5); and Le Guin explicitly distinguishes among dragons:

A dragon, not a dragon cleverly copied or mass-produced, but a creature of evil who crawls up, threatening and inexplicable, out of the artist's own unconscious, is alive: terribly alive... It frightens us because it is part of us, and the artist forces us to admit it. (LN, p. 70)

Le Guin also mentions (LN, p. 69) that the artist may find no dragon but, instead, 'the secret police' crawling up.

With fiendish subtlety, Rottensteiner later reports that Le Guin 'polemicises against sword and sorcery and the pretentiousness of

the stolen myths found in so much of' (FR, p. 88); he even concedes, eventually, that 'for Mrs Le Guin and a few others, myth may indeed be a living reality and the proper expression of what they want to say' (FR, pp. 89-90). For an analogy of this technique, imagine that Le Guin has thrown water all over a room because it is on fire, and that Rottensteiner then describes Le Guin to strangers who know nothing of the fire: first, he tells how she is always throwing water about and saying what an excellent habit this is; a few sentences later, he mentions her opinion that some people throw water about in a far less admirable manner; later still, he becomes expansive, and says that, of course, in certain circumstances, water-throwing might even seem a proper thing for Le Guin (and similar people) to do; but he never mentions fire. In both cases, Rottensteiner could have contested (instead of concealing) the main point; he could have proclaimed his disagreement with Le Guin's theory of how artists create and communicate (or his disbelief in the fire she says that she fought). Instead, he scatters surface elements of her arguments here and there, to create an illusion of justice; she did, after all, speak of dragons in connection with the unconscious (or water in connection with throwing); and hasn't Rottensteiner scrupulously mentioned her denunciation of certain other practitioners? Hasn't he gallantly agreed, even, to let her be a special case? When he describes her as 'often citing Jung's psychology, his shadow and other symbols of the unconscious' (or when he alludes to her throwing water 'in certain circumstances'), hasn't he given sufficient information?

'Jung's psychology, his shadow and other symbols...'

The implication of Rottensteiner's 'often citing Jung's psychology', however, is that Le Guin has to rely on Jung's authority for her justification - and that her 'shadow', which is so important in A Wizard of Earthsea (1968) and The Left Hand of Darkness (1969), is really 'his shadow'; a fanciful decoration, filched from translations of Jung. On the contrary, it is clear that Le Guin wrote these books before she ever read Jung - 'I wish I had known Jung's work when I wrote (The Left Hand of Darkness)' (LN, p. 157) - and that she is citing Jung not as a First Cause but as the psychologist 'whose ideas on art are the most meaningful to the most artists' (LN, p. 52), with his emphasis 'on the irreducibility of symbol, and the compensatory, mutually creative relationship between the conscious and the unconscious' (LN, p. 71n.). Le Guin was ten years old when she first read Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Shadow', and she says that the story spoke to her unconscious - 'to the unknown depths in me... which responded to it and, non-verbally, irrationally, understood it, and learned from it' (LN, p. 52). The man and the shadow in the story 'are symbolic or archetypal figures, like those in a dream. Their significance is multiple, inexhaustible. I can only hint at the little I'm able to see of it' (LN, p. 50). Her hints are so effective that even Rottensteiner admits that 'Le Guin's short remarks on H. C. Andersen suggest, at least to this writer, that Andersen is so much better than the touted J. R. R. Tolkien' (FR, p. 89).

An important message of 'The Shadow' is that

if you want to enter the House of Poetry, you have to enter it in the flesh, the solid, imperfect, unwieldy body, which has corns and colds and greeds and passions, the body that casts a shadow. (LN, p. 52)

Our shadow, here, is 'all the qualities and tendencies within us which have been repressed, denied or not used'; but 'the shadow is not simply evil. It is inferior, primitive, awkward, animal-like, childlike; powerful, vital, spontaneous' (LN, p. 54). To accept your shadow is to accept the responsibility of seeing your actions (and their relations to other things) as clearly as your faculties allow: to eschew the well-known harm done by people who insist on having been justified in all their actions - who see fault wherever misfortune occurs, and that fault always somebody else's - who (in short) project their shadow on to others.

If the individual wants to live in the real world, he must withdraw his projections; he must admit that the hateful, the evil, exists within himself. (LN, p. 54)

Thus, Andersen's 'strength, his subtlety, his creative genius, come precisely from his acceptance of and cooperation with the dark side of his own soul' (LN, p. 51). The shadow becomes the 'faithful and frightening guide' (LN, p. 58) to the 'creative depths of the unconscious' (LN, p. 54) - and in those depths we find 'the things we most fear (and therefore deny), the things we most need (and therefore deny)' (LN, p. 143).

'The shadow is not simply evil'

The shadow is important both in its 'evil' and in its 'animal-like' aspect. With regard to evil, Le Guin writes that 'the ethics of the unconscious - of the dream, the fantasy, the fairy tale - are not simple at all' (LN, p. 56). Evil

appears in the fairy tale not as something diametrically opposed to good, but as inextricably involved with it, as in the yang-yin symbol... The hero or the heroine is the one who sees what is appropriate to be done, because he or she sees the whole which is greater than either evil or good. (LN, pp. 56-7)

Mircea Eliade also speaks of this ethic:

Intriguing coincidences in the history of the spirit. For the Kogi of Sierra Nevada, perfection does not consist in doing good, but in acquiring a balance between the two antagonistic forces of good and evil. That reminds me of Goethe and especially of C. G. Jung, for whom the ideal of man is not perfection, but totality.

However, in advocating that we confront and accept our shadow, Le Guin is not recommending the attitude to evil held (as Eliade reports) by the demons of Indian doctrine:

many demons are reputed to have won their demonic prowess by good actions performed in previous existences. In other words: good can serve to make evil. By his ascetic efforts, a devil gains the power to do evil; asceticism leads to the possession of a reserve of magical powers which allow any action to be undertaken without distinction of 'moral' value.

Le Guin's attitude to doing evil seems closer to Estraven's, in The Left Hand of Darkness. Estraven's gift (as Genly Ai reflects) is 'perhaps not strictly or simply one of foretelling, but is rather the power of seeing (if only for a flash) everything at once: seeing whole' (LHD, p. 139).¹⁰ In response to that vision, Estraven (recognising necessity) commits what the people of Winter consider

the two basest crimes - theft and suicide - but, as Genly observes of Estraven's theft of provisions:

He was not proud of his exploit, and not able to laugh at it. Stealing is a vile crime on Winter; indeed, the only man more despised than the thief is the suicide. (LHD, p. 140)

Later, during the ascent to the Gobrin Ice, Estraven's journal also mentions the theft: 'If I wrote a new Yomesh Canon, I would send thieves here after death. Thieves who steal sacks of food by night in Turuf' (LHD, p. 156). The self-description of 'thief' - a perpetrator of evil - is accepted with no attempt at extenuation, but also with no thought that this small contribution of evil is helping to maintain a universal balance or totality. The tragic events of Estraven's youth have left a strong tendency to melancholy, and to self-blame expressed in private reflections - 'I have done ill in all things' (LHD, p. 57); 'It is my fault. I have done nothing right' (LHD, p. 112). Thus, 'seeing whole' - 'seeing what is appropriate to be done' - can never liberate Estraven into the transcendental viewpoint, from which (as Eliade explains the Indian doctrine) good and evil are 'as illusory and relative as all other pairs of opposites: hot-cold, agreeable-disagreeable, long-short, visible-invisible, etc.'¹¹

Knowing whereof you speak

To digress for a paragraph: I have quoted Eliade, in preference to others, because I choose to be agreeable (whenever it is not a higher duty or pleasure to be disagreeable), and Eliade is the one authority for whom Rottensteiner (in this review) professes respect. In the midst of a complaint that American discussions of fantasy never mention Eliade's fantastic writings, he says: 'but Mircea Eliade knows whereof he speaks' (FR, p. 90). If, in Mephistophelean mood, Rottensteiner intends to imply (however) that a Certain Other Writer (not hundreds of miles distant from Le Guin) is ignorant whereof she speaks, his implication cannot be justified absolutely: Le Guin reveals that her anthropologist-father provided an environment in which, as a child, she read a lot of

myth, legend, fairy tale; first-rate versions, too, such as Padraic Colum, Abjornsson, etc. I had also heard my father tell Indian legends aloud, just as he had heard them from informants, only translated into a rather slow, impressive English. (LN, p. 15)

I had heard Norse myths before I could read, and read The Children of Odin and later the Eddas many, many times, so that mythos was a shaping influence on both my conscious and unconscious mind. (LN, p. 126)

If any readers find this insufficiently reassuring, they will be soothed to see, in subsequent quotations, how Le Guin's opinions are mirrored by Eliade - the bearer (whether he knows it or not) of the Rottensteiner guarantee.

'Greater than either evil or good'?

Returning to the shadow in its 'evil' aspect: Le Guin has admitted, of her writing:

I wish I wasn't so moralistic, because my interest is aesthetic.

What I want to do is make something beautiful like a good pot or a good piece of music, and the ideas and moralism keep getting in the way. There's a definite battle on. (LN, p. 117)

This battle may partly explain why, as a child, she hated Andersen's story of the man and his shadow - 'I hated all the Andersen stories with unhappy endings' (LN, p. 51) - while, at the same time, she understood and learned from it. Le Guin believes (LN, p. 34) that 'all the best faculties of a mature human being' exist in the child, and that children understand archetypes

as fully and surely as adults do - often more fully, because they haven't got minds stuffed full of the one-sided, shadowless half-truths and conventional moralities of the collective consciousness. (LN, p. 56)

This view is supported by Eliade:

The depth psychologist has taught us that a symbol delivers its message and performs its functions even when its meaning escapes the conscious mind.¹²

'Inferior, primitive, awkward, animal-like...'

The shadow has an 'animal-like' aspect because, as Le Guin remarks,

We are rational beings, but we are also sensual, emotional, appetitive, ethical beings, driven by needs and reaching out for satisfactions which the intellect alone cannot provide.

(LN, p. 64)

Indeed, 'the rational mind notoriously cannot see what is happening in fantasy, or why it happens' (LN, p. 115).

Myth is an expression of one of the several ways the human being, body/psyche, perceives, understands, and relates to the world... To pretend that it can be replaced by abstract or quantitative cognition is to assert that the human being is, potentially or ideally, a creature of pure reason, a disembodied Mind.

(LN, pp. 63-4)

Animals which befriend human beings in fantasy are one manifestation of our embodied or 'animal' aspect; animality might also be manifested in our response to fantasy, as to poetry. Le Guin has written that 'fantasy is nearer to poetry, to mysticism and to insanity than naturalistic fiction is' (LN, p. 74), and with poetry, at least, a purely animal chill is some people's test for authenticity. Thus, A. E. Housman tells us that, when he is shaving, 'if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act';¹³ and my own experience is that the chill comes in advance of consciously perceiving the reason for it in the text (in prose works, that is, where a reason can more plausibly be isolated). Le Guin herself makes no explicit reference to such phenomena, or to possible 'scientific' explanations, such as the Papez-MacLean theory that the 'archaic structures of the brain which man shares with the reptiles and lower mammals' are in 'uneasy coexistence' with the 'specifically human neocortex'.¹⁴ I do not think that she even refers to the different functions of the right and left hemispheres of the neocortex. But, referring to the language in which she has tried to convey that 'what makes a novel a novel is something non-intellectual, though not simple; something visceral, not cerebral', Le Guin does observe that

This lamentable concreteness of the mental processes is supposed, by some, to be a feminine trait. If so, all artists are women. And/or vice versa. (LN, p. 5)

Lovers of popular science might like to assign the 'visceral' part of this to the Papez-MacLean theory, but to equate 'concreteness of the mental processes' with the efficiency of the corpus callosum, which integrates the right and left hemispheres of the neocortex. They can then point out that Dr Christine de Lacoste-Utamsing (of the University of Texas) is said to have found 'that the corpus callosum in women is always larger, more bulbous and probably richer in nerve fibres than it is in men';¹⁵ unless - as the fantasia of popular science will instantly predict - unless, of course, those men are artists...

Ingenuous use may likewise be made of Le Guin's assertion that 'a symbol is not a sign of something known, but an indicator of something not known and not expressible other than symbolically' (LN, p. 65): thus (again, in the fantasia of popular science), a dragon will be a hint from 'archaic' reptilian structures in the human brain; and their conflict with the neocortex is expressed in Ged's observation (in The Farthest Shore) that

It is hard for a dragon to speak plainly. They do not have plain minds. And when one of them would speak the truth to a man, which is seldom, he does not know how truth looks to a man.¹⁶

Le Guin eschews such distractions, which are probably part of the 'flight from subjectivity' (LN, p. 108) which she perceives in much of science fiction. Rather, she mentions Marie Louise von Franz's observation that in fairy tale the only 'unfailing rule' is that 'anyone who earns the gratitude of animals, or whom they help for any reason, invariably wins out' (LN, p. 57). Le Guin sees this as hinting, in the 'language of daylight' (LN, p. 52), that 'our instinct... is not blind':

It is the animal who knows the way, the way home. It is the animal within us, the primitive, the dark brother, the shadow soul, who is the guide. (LN, p. 57)

Mircea Eliade corroborates these observations: he writes that, in myths and legends,

the animal reveals and man behaves according to these revelations; it is the animal that determines the orientation in an amorphous, indefinite space, it is the animal that predicts the future, and it is again it that determines the path, which is equivalent to breaking through to another level; the path, that is the solution of an impasse.¹⁷

Since Le Guin is both 'a congenital nonChristian' (LN, p. 45) and 'a consistent unChristian' (LN, p. 3), it is unsurprising that she does not follow the Judeo-Christian tradition of setting oneself apart from - and above but besieged by - anything animal (whether it is in the outside world or in the human body that, notwithstanding the doctrine of 'resurrection of the body', is seen as cumbering one's immortal soul). But she also makes no pretence to

'explain' these deep strange levels of the imagining mind. Even in merely reading a fairy tale, we must let go our daylight convictions and trust ourselves to be guided by dark figures, in silence; and when we come back, it may be very hard to describe where we have been. (LN, p. 57)

'The springs of creation...'

In writing thus of the inexpressible - in pointing out that

the artist deals with what cannot be said in words. The artist whose medium is fiction does this in words (LN, p. 148)

- Le Guin is acting for other writers as Lord Dunsany, long ago, acted for her: as 'a liberator, a guide' (LN, p. 16). That is, she joins other (similarly helpful) writers in pointing out that the ways the finished text operates - the ways in which it can be analysed by the various schools of criticism - have very little resemblance to the artist's experience of the work's creation. Samuel R. Delany, for example, has written:

Among those stories which strike us as perfectly plotted, with those astonishing endings both a complete surprise and a total satisfaction, it is amazing how many of their writers will confess that the marvellous resolution was as much a surprise for them as it was for the reader, coming, in imagination and through the story process, only a page or a paragraph or a word before its actual notation.¹⁸

Every writer is also a reader, and can therefore find interest, amusement, and instruction in literary criticism; but when one is reading, as Le Guin observes,

The author's work is done, complete; the ongoing work, the present act of creation, is a collaboration by the words that stand on the page and the eyes that read them. (LN, p. 117)

Moreover, as Delany says,

Writers cannot make any objective statement on what they were trying to do, or even how they did it, because - as the only residue of the story process the reader has is the writer's words on the page - the only residue of the story process in the writer's mind is the clarified vision which, like the 'plot' synopsis, is not the story, but the story's result.¹⁹

As Le Guin expresses it:

The springs of creation remain unsounded by the wisest psychology; and an artist is often the last person to say anything comprehensible about the process of creation. Though nobody else has said very much that makes sense. (LN, pp. 129-30)

Elsewhere, Le Guin has professed herself to be 'without the slightest leaning towards occultism or obscurantism'.²⁰ Thus, in addition to reassuring any writer that other writers, too, find the creative process obscure and unexpected, Le Guin gives a good deal of very practical advice; as Rottensteiner says (although I think he is referring to her critical opinions), she is 'sympathetic to other writers, yet firm where essential issues are touched upon' (FR, p. 87).

There are good reasons, however, for casting Rottensteiner as a Mephistopheles on this occasion; nothing in his review suggests that Le Guin's book is tackling themes so interesting to other writers, and so complex, as those outlined above.

'Not even her best sf is exceptional...'

Rottensteiner writes that Le Guin 'doesn't say one thing and practise another' (FR, p. 87); thus, for him, the quality of her fiction is a test for the quality of her critical doctrine - a test that in his view her fiction fails. Since Rottensteiner ignores what Le Guin has written of the unconscious and creativity, it is not surprising that The Lathe of Heaven is not among the works he finds interesting enough to list as 'essentially shallow'. Both this novel and The Farthest Shore, however, contain extended metaphors of the unconscious and of contemporary attitudes to it; they dramatise Le Guin's view that fantasy 'is a real wilderness, and those who go there should not feel too safe' (LN, p. 74). Thus, before tackling Rottensteiner's more specific deviltries, it is worth noticing how close these novels are to The Language of the Night - bearing in mind Rottensteiner's judgment that Le Guin 'is not a great writer. As novels, not even her best sf is exceptional' (FR, p. 88).

For me, Le Guin's four most effective books - in ascending order - are The Tombs of Atuan, The Farthest Shore, The Lathe of Heaven, and The Left Hand of Darkness. Of these, the two Earthsea books evoke things already familiar to me - Atuan's sexuality, The Farthest Shore's understanding of death - whereas the 'adult' novels work more like the dreams described by Catherine in Wuthering Heights:

I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind.²¹

In The Lathe of Heaven, George Orr sometimes, in response to great stress, has dreams which he calls 'effective': they appear actually to change the world, so that nobody in the 'new' reality remembers anything of the old - except for Orr himself - and for Doctor Haber, when he hypnotises Orr into effective dreams designed to improve the world to Haber's specifications - and for Heather Lelache, who on one occasion witnesses Haber's instructions and the resultant change, and on another occasion herself prescribes a change which she then witnesses. The book brandishes before the reader the huge anxieties always lurking in a modern consciousness - insoluble problems of world proportions: the dreaded probabilities of nuclear attack, plague, overpopulation, starvation, racial conflict, eugenics. Haber is confident of his own ability to solve these problems - all he needs is the power to alter and manage other people for their own sake, in spite of themselves. When Orr's dreams give him that power, he uses it again and again, in spite of Orr's remonstrances. Thus, under Haber's conscious instruction, Orr's dreaming solves the world's problems - unpredictably, but with elegant simplicity; for example, racial conflict is ended (indeed, has never existed) when Orr produces a world where everyone has always had grey skin. These problems seem so truly intractable that one is hardly surprised when Orr's unconscious solves them absurdly or otherwise undesirably; yet to see them solved at all - to see the whole world effortlessly revolutionised beyond the wildest revolutionary's dreams - is exhilarating, like seeing custard pies accurately thrown at a firing squad which will nevertheless, we know, go on with its task of shooting us dead in the next few minutes.

Dialectically, this book - like The Farthest Shore - is a response to the 'no more hang-ups' philosophy so popular in the 'sixties, which held that conventions and inhibitions were merely bad, while

completely open spontaneity was possible and good. Thus, Orr argues that dreams 'come from the unsocialized part of us - at least partly' (LH, p. 17) and are therefore not a suitable tool for Haber's humanitarian goals; but Haber answers Orr's objections by informing him, categorically, that the unconscious mind 'is the wellspring of health, imagination, creativity. What we call "evil" is produced by civilization, its constraints and repressions'; in the unconscious, 'there is nothing to fear' (LH, p. 78).²² Haber is himself a nightmare embodiment of the authoritarian public figure, out of touch with us because, in his devotion to achieving his ends, he has no time for humbler everyday experience:

he had avoided entanglements. He kept his sex-life almost entirely to one-night stands... He got what he wanted and got clear again, before he or the other person could possibly develop any kind of need for the other. He prized his independence, his free will. (LH, p. 100)

Haber discovers much too late that it is the world itself, not just the uncooperative Orr, that is 'fighting' and obstructing him. Twice Haber has almost seen Orr as he really is - as a case of 'holistic adjustment', not 'self-concellation' (LH, p. 118). The first time, 'the strangeness of the experience scarcely registered on his conscious mind' (LH, p. 14); the second time, 'he seemed to recoil, as a man might who thought to push aside a gauze curtain and found it to be a granite door' (LH, p. 124). Haber is simply too self-obsessed to understand Orr's warning that 'there is a way, but you have to follow it. The world is, no matter how we think it ought to be' (LH, p. 120).

The dialectical element is interesting enough, but does not account for the book's overall effect, in which Heather Lelache - a compound of 'anger, timidity, brashness, gentleness' (LH, p. 112) - is more important than Haber. As Orr tells Haber, 'the unsocialized part of us' is only partly the source of our dreams: 'Everything dreams. The play of form, of being, is the dreaming of substance. Rocks have their dreams and the earth changes' (LH, p. 143). One of the chapter-epigraphs, taken from Victor Hugo's Les Travailleurs de la Mer, speaks of

...shapes floating in shadow, the whole mystery which we call Dreaming, and which is nothing other than the approach of an invisible reality. The dream is the aquarium of Night. (LH, p. 79)

Le Guin has reported how she found in her unconscious the Senoi - 'the quiet people who do not kill each other' (LN, p. 143) - when she had no idea the Senoi people existed, and thought she was only inventing some 'imaginary aliens' (the Athsheans of The Word for World is Forest). In the same way, when Orr has dreamed up the Aldebaranians, who are 'on his side', he reflects that they 'definitely weren't around until I dreamed they were, until I let them be' (LH, p. 133); but he cannot tell in what sense he has 'invented' them. Ian Watson suggests as 'the dominant probability' that the Aldebaranians

have been attracted to Earth like the Waveries of Fredric Brown's story, only by dream-waves rather than radio-waves.²³

Orr finds it impossible to express in words what the Aldebaranians do; one of them explains to him that 'language used for communication with individual-persons will not contain other forms of relationship' (LH, p. 132), while Orr himself suggests to Haber that the Aliens are very experienced 'at what dreaming is an aspect of' (LH, p. 143).

The world in which we first meet Orr exists only because of an effective dream he had in April 1998 - the response to complete nuclear catastrophe - the final effort of a 'life that had ended on the concrete steps of a burnt-out house in a dying city in a ruined world' (LH, p. 109); as he says to Heather Lelache, 'This isn't real. This world isn't even probable... We are all dead, and we spoiled the world before we died. There is nothing left. Nothing but dreams' (LH, p. 93). This is made uncomfortably relevant by Orr's having asked Haber whether he had ever thought

that there might be other people who dream the way I do? That reality's being changed out from under us, replaced, renewed, all the time - only we don't know it? Only the dreamer knows it, and those who know his dream. (LH, p. 64)

Under the spell of the book (in the 'wilderness' of fantasy), readers must ask themselves which alternative is more unlikely: that so many years of nuclear threat have gone by, with so many Haber-like people in governments and military establishments, and yet without a final catastrophe; or that we are living in somebody else's effective dream - itself just one in a lengthy series brought into being by catastrophe after catastrophe...

The Lathe of Heaven was succeeded by The Farthest Shore, of which Le Guin writes that it 'is about the thing you do not live through and survive', and that 'it is the dream that I have not stopped dreaming' (LN, p. 46). In that book, the dry cold land of death which Arren crosses - endurance outlasting hope - has a definite form, unlike the region of Haber's effective nightmare, where George Orr's heroic traverse is made with only his sense of touch staying true; thus,

Up on the top story, the floor was ice. It was about a finger's width thick, and quite clear. Through it could be seen the stars of the Southern Hemisphere. Orr stepped out onto it and all the stars rang loud and false, like cracked balls. (LH, p. 147)

The world-perils in these books have obvious similarities, and Philip K. Dick's remark about The Lathe of Heaven may be applied to both:

the dream universe is articulated in such a striking and compelling way that I hesitate to add any further explanation to it; it requires none.²⁴

Le Guin's own remarks about archetypal images also apply: 'the more you look, the more there they are. And the more you think, the more they mean' (LN, p. 71).

Rottensteiner, however, is devoted to presenting a shallower novelist.

'Striving for balance'

Typical of Rottensteiner's initial presentation of Le Guin is the sentence, already discussed, in which he ascribes to her a viewpoint that (as I have shown) she no longer adhered to by the time she was writing the essays chosen for this book: 'Truth she is willing to concede only to great literature, whereas fantasy is to be content with imagination' (FR, p. 87). His phrasing conjures up a genteel aesthete, with Truth as an unsullied unsociable goddess; Imagination, a bedraggled seamstress or milliner, hitching up her petticoats to dance among the tankards on the public-house tables, but insanely nursing the ambition of gaining an invitation to just one of the goddess's tea-parties. The impression is intensified by his remarks upon balance:

Above all, her fiction is dominated by a striving for balance which appears to be detrimental to truth: and for this reason she often lacks depth, the ability to face the full consequences and implications of something. (FR, p. 88)

The impression is of 'balance' attempted in very constricted circumstances - balancing on one's knee, perhaps, a well-filled teacup on its fine porcelain saucer, while accepting (with the proper inclination of the head) an exquisitely fragile cucumber sandwich. In saying that Le Guin's 'balance' is 'detrimental to truth', Rottensteiner may mean either that she assigns undue weight to trivial factors on one side of the balance - in order, for example, to substantiate her ideology that 'yin does not occur without yang, nor yang without yin' (LN, p. 133) - or else that she carefully confines herself to such themes as a shortsighted convalescent can pick up in the shallows, her balance being maintained at the cost of not venturing very far or attempting to carry very much. Neither of these is Le Guin's conception of balance, as is shown in her stricture upon

that business about 'there's a little bit of bad in the best of us and a little bit of good in the worst of us', a dangerous banalization of the fact, which is that there is incredible potential for good and for evil in every one of us. (LN, p. 59)

Mephistopheles-Rottensteiner is too subtle to mention exactly where in Le Guin's fiction he detects her failures - by being blandly general (even when he mentions, later, the names of some of her well-received stories), he imparts to his remarks a flavour of 'all intelligent readers agree', while enticing his own (perhaps rather different) readers into the labour of ferreting out (to prove their intelligence) all elements in Le Guin's work that might conceivably deserve his depreciation.

There is a good deal more depth and resonance in Le Guin's work, however, than Rottensteiner allows. This may be demonstrated by abandoning his question of whether her 'striving for balance' is 'detrimental to truth', and demanding instead whether there is not a 'detrimental' ideology associated with it.

Le Guin conceives of a Balance or Equilibrium (in the Earthsea books), and of a 'whole' of which one must be consciously part. Thus, in The Lathe of Heaven, she writes of Heather Lelache:

A person who believes, as she did, that things fit: that there is a whole of which one is part, and that in being a part one is whole: such a person has no desire whatever, at any time, to play God. (LH, p. 94)

Le Guin also writes, concerning The Left Hand of Darkness,

To me the 'female principle' is, or at least historically has been, basically anarchic. It values order without constraint, rule by custom not by force. It has been the male who enforces order, who constructs power-structures, who makes, enforces, and breaks laws. (LN, p. 155)

Thus, for the planet of Winter, Le Guin saw a model of

balance: the driving linearity of the 'male', the pushing forward to the limit, the logicity that admits no boundary - and the circularity of the 'female', the valuing of patience, ripeness, practicality, livableness. (LN, p. 155)

The detrimental aspect of such a model is the ease with which the reader makes the 'leap to the familiar' which, as Robert Scholes points out,²⁵ a writer must constantly guard against - a leap, in this case, to the prescription (derived from believing 'that things fit') of acquiescence in whatever status quo is surrounding one. To define a 'male' and a 'female' principle is to limit still further the scope of this acquiescence; and when Le Guin indicates a 'model for this balance' in 'Chinese civilization over the past six millennia' (LN, p. 156), the reader will not be cheered by reflecting on the condition of real women in the Chinese society that acknowledges this 'balance' - whether under Confucianism or Maoism, or in modern days of murdered female infants. (Read, for example, Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior.) Le Guin herself has written of

the rage and fear that possess me when I face what we are all doing to each other, to the earth, and to the hope of liberty and life
(LN, p. 131)

whereas the ideal, in The Lathe of Heaven, is people like George Orr: 'people without resentment, without hate... Who recognize evil, and resist evil, and yet are utterly unaffected by it' (LH, p. 88). Orr's 'natural mode of being' is described as 'an equanimity, a perfect certainty as to where he was and where everything else was' (LH, p. 123). However, 'being part of' a larger pattern (too large for any but rumoured initiates to decipher) belongs to a philosophy traditionally used to reconcile the oppressed to their circumstances; acquiescence brings a transfiguration known to oneself alone - at best perceptible, although incomprehensible, to a small circle around one. The idea of the 'whole' and 'the Balance' would certainly be interpreted thus by a materialist revolutionary. If one believed, however (despite Greek generals and German Nazis), that political changes have a relatively inconsiderable effect - that the individual will always suffer and be obliged to endure - then the figure of George Orr might be a useful ideal of emotional discipline. George Orwell's opinion, for example, is that

Most people get a fair amount of fun out of their lives, but on balance life is suffering, and only the very young or the very foolish imagine otherwise.²⁶

Yin and yang

The issues raised by Le Guin's writings are so inconsistent with Rottensteiner's shallow-aesthete image that it is instructive to investigate them further, before returning to the finer details of the Rottensteiner construct.

With regard to the balance of 'male' and 'female', Le Guin describes how, in her presentation of the characters Jakob and Rolery in Planet of Exile,

Where some see only a dominant Hero and a passive Little Woman, I saw, and still see, the essential wastefulness and futility of aggression and the profound effectiveness of wu wei, 'action through stillness'.
(LN, p. 131)

Any character conceived as part of a yin-yang system has limitations: their nature is demonstrated by a counter-example - the wild and unpredictable female of Le Guin's 'Intracom', a story outside the model of 'balance'. Nora Gallagher outlines the effect:

In one wonderful story, she swept up the male image of a space ship and sex-changed it: 'Intracom' is about a small space vessel that finds it has an alien on board. The alien? A fetus. The ship, a pregnant woman.²⁷

The ship's crew (while remaining splendidly unbalanced) contains something more than the woman's consciousness. For a time, the First Mate, Mr Balls, might be interpreted as the rational, self-protective part of the brain, expressing the natural doubts and regrets of pregnancy:

Now do you mean to say that when we finally get rid of this monster, when it gets too big for the ship and breaks its way out, causing terrible damage to the tubes, perhaps wrecking the whole Engine Room on its way - have you thought of that, 'Bolts'? - and quite possibly destructing the entire ship - that is, if we survive that ordeal, you intend to turn back, take the mindless, helpless thing in tow, and limp on after the Fleet at half speed for five years, ten years, twenty years (Ship Time) - while it keeps getting bigger, and stronger, and smarter, and wilder?²⁸

This interpretation becomes insufficient, however, when it is suggested to Mr Balls that the alien might be 'a little boy alien', whereupon he becomes so overwhelmed with sentimentality that the Captain has to remind him to 'Keep your duties in mind, and the obscure dignity of your position. We need you.' The Insane Second Mate reports from the Bridge that

Beneath us, above us, on all sides of us is the abyss; unsounded, full of unimaginable horrors, unpredictable disasters, undeserved beauties, and unexpected death. Like a flying yarrow stalk we shoot forward, if it is forward, through the gulfs of probability.²⁹

The Captain's response, of course, is 'Very good'.

In fantasy-writing it would be much more difficult to express such a characteristically female experience of the adventure, perils, and wonder of life - because a fantasy-world is highly social; therefore the adventurers in fantasy are almost always male. Le Guin suggests that female authors have fallen in with this tradition because

it's ever so much easier to write about men doing things, because most books about people doing things are about men, and that is one's literary tradition... and because, as a woman, one probably has not done awfully much in the way of fighting, raping, governing, etc., but has observed that men do these things...

(LN, p. 131.)

Male writers of fantasy seem likely to have done just as little as women 'in the way of fighting, raping, governing' - I am less certain about 'etc.' - but their inexperience does not involve them in the same anomaly; they are not forced to embody their vicarious battling and general heroics in a character of their opposite sex. A female adventurer inevitably provokes a consciousness of all the reasons her sisters are not out there adventuring too; thus, instead of fading to a comfortable background, the actual world intrudes itself - however resolutely the writer refuses to consider it - with dragging problems, consequences, and responsibilities (including the possibility of pregnancy if a heroine is raped, or even indulges in a lighter interlude). Any adventurer risks death and torture, but a male is not thought to be perversely seeking them when he goes among villains.

The detrimental aspect of such a model is the ease with which the reader makes the 'leap to the familiar' which, as Robert Scholes points out,²⁵ a writer must constantly guard against - a leap, in this case, to the prescription (derived from believing 'that things fit') of acquiescence in whatever status quo is surrounding one. To define a 'male' and a 'female' principle is to limit still further the scope of this acquiescence; and when Le Guin indicates a 'model for this balance' in 'Chinese civilization over the past six millennia' (LN, p. 156), the reader will not be cheered by reflecting on the condition of real women in the Chinese society that acknowledges this 'balance' - whether under Confucianism or Maoism, or in modern days of murdered female infants. (Read, for example, Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior.) Le Guin herself has written of

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Thanks to Freud, however, women are often interpreted as if, from birth, they were heavily under the influence of cocaine, and thus in constant somnambulistic search of indignity and maiming; therefore, the female adventurer must defend herself from the imputation, even on her reader's part, of an unconscious urge to be raped - while, paradoxically, the less likely it is that anyone would consciously have these motives, the more difficult it becomes to rebut the accusation of possessing them unconsciously. Moreover, a villain will not at once identify a male hero as akin to the police - to whom criminals are naturally averse - whereas another stereotype of women is as 'God's Police': 'entrusted with the moral guardianship of society... expected to curb restlessness and rebelliousness in men and instil virtues of civic submission on children.'³⁰ The persistence of this stereotype is vividly dramatised in Helen Garner's Monkey Grip, where the narrator, Nora, is thinking about her lover Javo, a heroin addict:

I remembered Javo that last afternoon by my fire, how he had lifted his chin and opened his eyes wide, and declared,

'Anyway, I'm never gonna get off dope.'

My hands fell apart in despair. 'I never - I never - I never asked you to!'³¹

Thus, the villain (or even the hero) sees the woman as an emissary of the restrictive authority that seeks to lock him in, while the woman sees the villain's expectations and proclivities as the barrier that locks her in. How much easier, then, for the female writer to express her aspirations for bravery, and grander gestures, in an untrammelled male character; yet how galling the realisation that, by doing so, she acquiesces in the image of women as lacking such aspirations - as being merely the kinds of objects that boys seem when viewed by paedophiles; a view pleasantly expressed by Oscar Wilde:

There is something tragic about the enormous number of young men there are in England at the present moment who start life with perfect profiles, and end by adopting some useful profession.³²

One response of women, on the other hand, is conveyed by the delirious Catherine Linton, in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights:

I wish I were out of doors! I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free... and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed?³³

Failures and the male protagonist

People can readily understand the tradition (not upheld universally, however) that female writers of fantasy select a male hero to indulge their own yen for exotic quests and daring stratagems. In a more naturalistic novel, however - as in Le Guin's A Very Long Way from Anywhere Else - I agree with Joanna Russ's suggestion (within a review of The Dispossessed) that Le Guin might try 'abandoning male protagonists, with the burden of tour-de-force characterization they inevitably impose on a female writer'.³⁴ Since Owen Griffiths, the first-person narrator of A Very Long Way, has been devised by a woman, I see no reason to believe anything that he recounts about his adolescent sexual feelings. Adolescence, after all, is a time of maximum sexual polarisation; and no male I have ever encountered (in person or in the pages of a book) reports having felt at all like

Owen Griffiths. If a male had described such untraditional feelings, I should have been startled and impressed; but as it is, the book seems to me tendentious - a case of Le Guin succumbing to what she has called 'the lure of the pulpit' (LN, p. 141). Similar uneasiness is aroused by The Beginning Place (published as Threshold in England) - where, in addition, my imagination refuses to go beyond a simple reductionist reading of the fantasy elements. Thus, the dragon remains just the Mother that everyone has to break free of; the Master remains just the Mills-and-Boonish empty handsomeness that pubescent girls become infatuated with. For me, neither dragon nor Master passes Le Guin's test for a creation with 'vitality': that 'it can "really" be a dozen mutually exclusive things at once, before breakfast' (LN, p. 43) - a test, moreover, which another of her 'coming-of-age' books, The Tombs of Atuan, triumphantly passes. In The Beginning Place, only my intellect engages with the possible applications and implications - as in the heroine's reflections on the elderly Lord Horn and the newly estranged Master:

It was all too late. She had paid no heed to the wise and dangerous man, and had made her promise to the empty-hearted one. She had mistaken herself, and chosen to be a slave.³⁵

This contrasts strongly with an extract from The Tombs of Atuan, holding all the pain of what can never be re-done. Tenar is remembering the death of the eunuch Manan, her guard and servant from childhood onward:

'He died because he loved me, and was faithful. He thought he was protecting me. He held the sword above my neck. When I was little he was kind to me - when I cried -' She stopped again, for the tears rose hard in her, yet she would cry no more. Her hands were clenched on the black folds of her dress. 'I was never kind to him,' she said.³⁶

But in The Tombs of Atuan, as in The Beginning Place, a male hero eventually dominates; once outside the Tombs, there is a strong feeling (despite all that is said of freedom) that Tenar has no place in a 'male-order' world. In Malafrena, the same problem arises. Piera Valtorskar reflects on

what freedom is for a woman, what it might consist of and how it is to be won. Or not won, that seemed the wrong word for a woman's freedom; worked at, perhaps.³⁷

And yet, despite all the work put into Malafrena, at the end of my reading Piera has dwindled to a dark head, a white blouse, and a red skirt. Along with Piera, the book's whole revolutionary struggle dwindles, and its male hero as well; Itale Sorde has not revived, and is going nowhere.

The faults here are in reality - not in Le Guin's presentation of it. I do not mean simple objective reality; it is a mistake, as Le Guin herself points out, to

think an artist is like a roll of photographic film, you expose it and develop it and there is a reproduction of Reality in two dimensions. But that's all wrong, and if any artist tells you 'I am a camera' or 'I am a mirror', distrust him instantly, he's fooling you, pulling a fast one. (LN, p. 188)

Le Guin's inner reality - her 'truth', which overrides fact - cannot reconcile a complete woman with a complete male-dominated world.

A man in Le Guin's world can be a complete person, and his completeness is only intensified if the 'search for balance and integration' (LN, p. 159) results in his finding a complementary female partner. A woman is much more fragile - her identity much more relative. Observations by Russ and Delany, about Le Guin's The Dispossessed, are relevant here. Russ speaks of the 'rifts... between what we are shown and what we are told', such that

The author's artistic and intellectual impulses seem to be travelling subtly, but persistently, in different directions.³⁸

One of Russ's examples is that 'although we are told that children are raised communally after the age of about three, the only children besides Shevek that we see at close range have (by some fluke) been raised privately.'³⁹ Delany mentions that

We see two of Shevek's prepartnered affairs, one heterosexual, one homosexual; there is simply no mention, one way or the other, of any prepartnered sex at all for Takver... There is simply no hint of Takver's ever giving another man a thought.⁴⁰

Delany interprets this as 'the traditional liberal dilemma'. Le Guin herself has mentioned that, with human sexuality,

in general, we seem to avoid genuine licence. At most we award it as a prize to the Alpha Male, in certain situations; it is scarcely ever permitted to the female without social penalty.

(LN, p. 156)

Delany's statement of this is

Our conservative forebears postulated symmetrical spaces of possible action for women and men and then declared an ethical prohibition on women's functioning in that space...

In our own time, a liberal's desire to 'repeal the punishments' may conflict with a leftover conservative guilt; consequently,

at the level of praxis the conflict is repressed, and with it all emblems of the existence of the space in which it takes place. It is not mentioned, it is not dealt with, it is not referred to - and this silence is presented, hopefully, as a sign the problem has been resolved.⁴¹

This unresolved problem seems to explain the way Takver's sexuality is presented; I admit that it is also an unresolved problem for me, conceptually and emotionally; and (unless I misread her) it is a tribute to Le Guin's courage, honesty, and clarity that such problems become so apparent in some of her work, even when she appears unable to confront them. She portrays (however metaphorically) what there is now, rather than what might seem ideologically desirable.

Beautiful style

The focus of Rottensteiner's attack upon Le Guin is very different. One of his finer touches is: 'Above all else, she tries to write beautifully' (FR, p. 87). This leads the reader to conclude that Le Guin, somewhere in these essays, has confessed this ambition - which most writers would consider an ignoble one (not to mention the implication in 'tries' that she has not been successful). But Le Guin never mentions 'beautiful writing'; her attention is on the very practical problems of communicating (LN, p. 108) 'a vision'. Her criterion for 'the real work of art', consistently, is that

Like a stone ax, it's there... It may be wonderfully beautiful, or quite commonplace, and humble, but it's made to be used, and to last. (LN, p. 225)

And 'making something beautiful' is not the same as choosing to write in a 'beautiful' style. For Le Guin, 'the beauty of the novella and the novel is essentially architectural, the beauty of proportion' (LN, p. 101), and the style is not something you can separate from a book's other elements:

The style, of course, is the book... from the reader's point of view. From the writer's point of view, the style is the writer... Style is how you as a writer see and speak. It is how you see: your vision, your understanding of the world, your voice. (LN, p. 85)

Moreover, although Le Guin describes Zamyatin's We as 'beautiful' (LN, p. 203) - or says that Philip K. Dick uses science-fiction metaphors 'with power and beauty, because they are the language appropriate to what he wants to say' (LN, p. 168) - Rottensteiner's suggestion of beauty valued 'above all else' is misleading. Beauty is not Le Guin's ultimate test; your work

may be beautiful but you realize that you have fudged here and smeared there, and left this out, and put in some stuff that isn't really there at all, and so on. (LN, p. 190)

Rottensteiner ignores this when he says, 'she simplifies - though for the sake of beauty, it would seem' (FR, p. 88); and he ignores at the same time (what he might have contested) Le Guin's opinion that fantasy, 'instead of imitating the perceived confusion and complexity of existence, tries to hint at an order and clarity underlying existence' (LN, p. 77).

The Galahad-Rottensteiner

But Rottensteiner is too subtle to be content with his initial false image of circumscribed gentility - of a Le Guin who 'glides over unpleasant truths' (FR, p. 88), writes 'gracefully' (FR, p. 87), and will later even be called 'witty' (FR, p. 90), but whose 'genuine striving for truth and justice' (FR, p. 88) is doomed to failure by her ladylike preoccupation with beauty and balance. The Mephistophelean transition to another view is masterly. On Rottensteiner's first page, Le Guin is twice credited with modesty - 'modest and possessed of a sense of humor'; she 'writes so modestly' (FR, p. 87). Slowly it becomes clear that this modesty has called forth all Rottensteiner's gallantry; that it is this which has led him to credit her with such gentility; that secretly he holds another opinion and (alas! poor honest gentleman) the opinion emerges, in spite of his struggles; it asserts itself, and sweeps aside her pitiful pretensions. Thus, Mephistopheles-Rottensteiner contrives a double degradation: he first creates the unappetising image of the drawing-room aesthete (an image, as my quotations from Le Guin have demonstrated, that she neither resembles nor aspires to); he supersedes this with his second image of her, as a climbing little creature with very vulgar tastes; how sordid, then, is the failure of such a creature, for whom the piffling first image (which she bungles) is the utmost achievement that can be imagined, even by someone so kindly disposed as the Galahad-Rottensteiner - who even called her 'respectable' (FR, p. 86), as well as modest!

The image of a climbing Le Guin is a curious artefact. Rottensteiner's first reference occurs during his gallant phase:

From humble beginnings, Ursula K. Le Guin has risen to become one of the most important authors in American SF, and has become known even outside the pale of SF, and for that alone her book deserves attention and respect. (FR, p. 87)

This develops later into:

Mrs Le Guin's inherent tendency for illusionism... is in part explainable by her own development as a writer from modest beginnings in Amazing Stories and with Ace Books to the pre-eminence in the field today. (FR, p. 88)

(Here I pause momentarily to set the record straight: some of Le Guin's early work did appear in Amazing Stories, but it was in Fantastic that both she and Thomas M. Disch achieved their first short-story publication, during Cele Goldsmith Lalli's editorship of both Fantastic and Amazing Stories.) In what sense are these beginnings more 'humble' than the beginnings of other eminent writers? Are science fiction magazines simply low in status; would Rottensteiner also say that J. G. Ballard rose from humble beginnings in New Worlds to being a finalist for the 1984 Booker Prize? The impression is of rising in social class, like H. G. Wells winning his way, by means of his writing, from a childhood position in the servants' hall to adult opportunities for hobnobbing with duchesses; but this does not apply in the least to Le Guin, who grew up in academic surroundings and is married to an academic. What, then, of her writing? It was first published when she was relatively (although not altogether) unpractised and when her name was unknown to readers - but this is true of almost all successful writers; their practice grows as they write more, their names become known as they publish more. And Le Guin did not begin her writing within the constraints of science fiction markets; before she attempted science fiction, she had written five non-sf novels, and had published poems and a short story in 'little magazines' (LN, p. 18).

Rottensteiner applies the term 'illusionism'. In literature, this is the technique or philosophy expounded by James Joyce and Henry James, where the book is constructed as a self-contained illusion. Since this is still the almost universal practice, there is something odd in Rottensteiner's using the description as an accusation. Opponents of illusionism appear to believe that readers (by whom they mean not themselves but 'the public') are unconscious except when actually reading, so that if you wish to jolt them, the actual process of reading must become jolting. They therefore aspire to create Brechtian alienation - Verfremdung - which, for my own part, I have not yet seen actually achieved. But perhaps the Mephistopheles-Rottensteiner means something more personal. Perhaps he is implying, by 'illusionism', that Le Guin ascribes her increased popularity both to improvement and to some kind of merit in what she is attempting, whereas it is really caused (in Rottensteiner's account) by something dreadfully wrong with the general public. He is not saying that Le Guin at first wrote rather worse than most, then developed to writing rather better than most. Instead, he says that her work promotes 'identification... not critical distancing and an ironical stance' (FR, p. 89); and that this, 'perhaps more than the beauty of her writing' (upon which Rottensteiner has, of course, already subtly cast doubt), is the explanation of her success. When he calls her 'an honorable person' (FR, p. 88), we are to understand only that her self-deception is

genuine; that her success is not the result of ignoble calculation; that her 'ameliorating' outlook (FR, p. 90) is a product of her 'natural disposition' (FR, p. 89); in short, that she really cannot help being a vulgar little thing with an 'enthusiastic attitude to the currently popular brand of fantasy' (FR, p. 88). Obviously it was a sad mischance for her that she became so popular, but Mephistopheles-Rottensteiner is tolerant; he concedes that even Le Guin's and Tolkien's fantasies

have a proper, if only very minor place in literature: only when they rise to mass phenomena do they become a regrettable symptom of what is wrong with our times. (FR, p. 90)

To make his viewpoint persuasive, Rottensteiner lumps together Le Guin's books, some other books that she esteems, and a far greater number that she explicitly deplores. For him, it seems, the 'mass' is so powerfully indiscriminating that, if it plumps for fantasies, every fantasy with the 'currently popular' general approach is thereby flattened to a uniform low level. (By the same argument, the popularity of Mills and Boon books, and of Barbara Cartland, would mean that no one ought to waste time reading Jane Austen or John Fowles - who also concentrate on romantic love, and are therefore just the same as Barbara Cartland.)

Verfremdung - and Novalis?

There is, however, an alternative approach to fantasy-writing, which Rottensteiner seems to approve. For him, the 'currently popular brand of fantasy' is separated by 'worlds' from the nineteenth-century Novalis, with his 'romantic fantasy' (FR, p. 88), and it has 'nothing in common' with the twentieth-century Eliade and his 'fantastic writings' (FR, p. 90). This is true, in that Novalis and Eliade have an approach quite different from Le Guin's, for example; in their work, the fantastic emerges in an everyday world. Quotations from two of Eliade's books are convenient:

Novalis... rediscovered 'the dialectic of the sacred', to wit, that nature, such as it shows itself to us, does not represent absolute reality but is only a cipher.⁴²

...that the 'sacred' apparently is not different from the profane, that the 'fantastic' is camouflaged in the 'real', that the world is what it shows itself to be, and is at the same time a cipher... In a certain sense, one could say that this theme constitutes the key to all the writings of my maturity.⁴³

These two share a 'religious' attitude: Novalis tends 'to seek in Christianity the answers to the problems of life and death',⁴⁴ while Eliade believes that "'the sacred" is an element of the structure of consciousness, and not a moment in the history of consciousness'.⁴⁵ Their approach to fantasy differs from that of the equally religious J. R. R. Tolkien, who is reported as arguing that

man is not ultimately a liar. He may pervert his thoughts into lies, but he comes from God and it is from God that he draws his ultimate ideals... Therefore... not merely the abstract thoughts of man but also his imaginative inventions must originate with God, and must in consequence reflect something of eternal truth. In making a myth, in practising 'mythopoeia' and peopling the world with elves and dragons and goblins, a storyteller, or 'sub-creator' as Tolkien liked to call such a person, is actually

fulfilling God's purpose, and reflecting a splintered fragment of the light.⁴⁶

As an attentive agnostic, I feel that being moved by one type of fantasy and not by the other is a matter of temperament - Rottensteiner might also prefer Wordsworth to Coleridge, whereas Coleridge writes as follows:

Should children be permitted to read Romances, and Relations of Giants and Magicians and Genii? - I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative. - I know no other way of giving the mind a love of 'the Great' and 'the Whole'. - Those who have been led to the same truths step by step, thro' the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess.⁴⁷

('Want' here means 'lack' - a fleetingly useful fact for anyone who never otherwise reads eighteenth-century English.) It is obvious that Le Guin's essays will be about her own style of fantasy, and it is absurd to condemn her because another style of fantasy is less popular than hers. Nevertheless, that Eliade's fantasies are little known is the only reason Rottensteiner actually gives for preferring them (apart from Eliade's knowing 'whereof he speaks', which I have dealt with already). For my own part, I read more of Eliade's type of fantasy than Le Guin's type, but I think the forms so different that it is pointless to compare them in order to determine which is 'better'.

As for Novalis, I cannot decide whether Rottensteiner admires him, or only thinks that, if people must be romantic, they need not be vulgar as well; that they ought to look higher than 'a rather crude animal like a dragon' (FR, p. 88). Again, it is a matter of temperament whether a flower with a woman's face in it ('the blue flower of Novalis') will impress one chiefly as more 'beautiful and elegant' than a dragon. (Some readers may like to detect significance in Novalis's flower having been described as 'a universal mother image',⁴⁸ whereas Jung has called the dragon 'a negative mother-image'.)⁴⁹ Followers of Novalis derived from his work a vision of life and art as forces hostile to one another, and of genius being associated with disease; but Novalis also exhibited 'ardent enthusiasm for the spirit of the Middle Ages' and for that period's imagined harmony.⁵⁰ Perhaps (if he admires Novalis) Rottensteiner can tolerate an idealised period of history, but not an idealised parallel world; or perhaps he feels only that the time for such visions has passed; it was allowable for Novalis to respond thus to eighteenth-century society, but it is not allowable for moderns with Novalis-like dispositions to develop fantasies that are responsive to twentieth-century society - fantasies which do not simply react against technological advances, but incorporate some of the changed conceptions brought about by those advances. Rottensteiner seems to think it is a merely negative point that modern fantasy 'could hardly have arisen in another society' (FR, p. 89), and that it creates 'whole alternate geographies, cultures, languages' - whereas the earlier fantasies of France and Germany did not. But the need or capacity to create 'complete parallel worlds' is not just a sign of unbridled escapism; it is linked with the developing idea that one inhabits a biosphere, and not just a cottage in the woods; that is, it reflects a wider awareness of environment, brought about in part by technological advances such as the steamship and the aeroplane, the telegraph and television. Rottensteiner, however, seems determined to believe that Le Guin's type of fantasy

died when 'genuine fairy tales' died; that Eliade's type supersedes it, rather than simply coexisting with it. Thus, for Rottensteiner, any new developments are not like blossoms appearing on a tree, but like false eyelashes gummed on to a corpse that has been disinterred for that purpose. Le Guin sees modern fantasy as a form undergoing development: 'folktale, fairy tale and myth' were its ancestors, dealing 'with archetypes, not with characters' (LN, p. 96), whereas Tolkien's Lord of the Rings produces 'a sign and portent' in the character of Frodo Baggins, who is

something new to fantasy: a vulnerable, limited, rather unpredictable hero, who finally fails at his own quest - fails at the very end of it, and has to have it accomplished for him by his mortal enemy, Gollum, who is, however, his kinsman, his brother, in fact himself... (LN, p. 97)

Rottensteiner never mentions Le Guin's idea that character has evolved in fantasy - unless an oblique reference is intended in his enigmatic pronouncement that, in Le Guin's novels, 'often her concern with myth (which is perhaps more appropriate for fantasy) gets in the way of the characterization' (FR, p. 87).

Fantasy and ideology

Rottensteiner makes the accusation that Le Guin 'loves above all J. R. R. Tolkien' (FR, p. 88). This is worth a closer examination than Rottensteiner gives it, however, since it raises the question of Le Guin's and Tolkien's relative ideologies.

Le Guin says of Tolkien, 'Like all great artists he escapes ideology' (LN, p. 164); whereas my own opinion is that he escapes only allegory - not ideology. John Fekete has written of Le Guin's

implicit assumption that the union of conscious and unconscious will yield the archetype as pure object or form, as non-ideological manifestation... But... there is a mediating material translation process whereby any unconscious elements are consciously retrieved and appropriated, with the effect that any recovery of these elements is ideological in historically and culturally specific ways. Le Guin's own opus... embeds specific ideological currents.⁵¹

Some conservative writers refuse to acknowledge having an ideology (only radical writers could have anything so horrid); but Le Guin is not one of them. Admitting to ideology, she writes:

If people must call names, I cheerfully accept Lenin's anathemata as suitable: I am a petty bourgeois anarchist, and an internal emigrée. O.K.?⁵²

However, she is obviously opposed to the Procrustean use of ideology, where experience is not simply tortured to make it exactly fit the ideological bed, but is first flung into a super-sorter where appropriate bits are correctly ordered, while ones that could never be twisted or hammered into shape are discarded before the bedroom door of consciousness gets opened. For Le Guin,

An ideology is valuable only insofar as it is used to intensify clarity and honesty of thought and feeling. (LN, p. 132)

Fantasy-writers would be widely seen as failing this criterion; although they seldom take an energetic Procrustean way with ideology, they thoughtlessly take up, instead, the dungeon-bred authoritarian

hierarchies that other (and far more ancient) torturers have unobtrusively put in their way. But Le Guin is not among those failures. She perceives 'a cosmos that is not a simple, fixed hierarchy, but an immensely complex process in time' (LN, p. 198); the universe of her Earthsea trilogy, as Robert Scholes observes, is 'a dynamic balanced system, not subject to the capricious miracles of any deity, but only to the natural laws of its own working'; thus, 'no one... has ever made magic seem to function so much like science as Ursula Le Guin'.⁵³ As 'an inconsistent Taoist', Le Guin apparently shares the Taoist view that

The true laws - ethical and aesthetic, as surely as scientific - are not imposed from above by any authority, but exist in things and are to be found - discovered. (LN, p. 39)

Indeed, a belief in the existence of such laws seems essential to Le Guin's ideal of anarchy; how else could one assume (LN, p. 137) 'the interdependence of order and honesty'?

Tolkien is another matter; in finding him very readable, I exemplify George Orwell's opinion that

enjoyment can overwhelm disapproval, even though one clearly recognizes that one is enjoying something inimical. Swift, whose world-view is so peculiarly unacceptable, but who is nevertheless an extremely popular writer, is a good instance of this.⁵⁴

In particular, there seems to me nothing to choose between the spirit of Tolkien's battles and the battles described in the alternative Adolf Hitler's Lord of the Swastika (otherwise known as Norman Spinrad's The Iron Dream). Take, for example, Tolkien's (imperfectly visualised?) description:

And then all the host of Rohan burst into song, and they sang as they slew for the joy of battle was on them, and the sound of their singing was fair and terrible and came even to the City.⁵⁵

One notices a contrast, moreover, with Le Guin's villains - who never smell distinctively funny, and are not described as sneakily slinking where a hero would be slipping skilfully by. One also reads without surprise C. S. Lewis's report that Tolkien thought 'all literature is written for the amusement of men between thirty and forty'; and that Tolkien (like Lewis) values most highly 'things native and natural to the male'.⁵⁶ The only female hobbit I remember in Tolkien's books (apart from the rosy little breeder waiting for Sam) is a grasping old harridan that the heroes leave their washing-up behind for - and ha ha, serve her right, too! (T. H. White's The Age of Scandal reveals, incidentally, that washing-up was a sore point with dons at Cambridge, as well as at Oxford.) Tolkien points out in an introduction, however, that all the hobbits except the ones he writes about have large families; while Eowyn - the only non-hobbit female who glides beyond being highly untouchably beautiful - is finally converted to true doctrine:

I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders; nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren.⁵⁷

These are all ideological indicators, and Le Guin is aware of some of them at least - 'one begins to have mad visions of founding a Hobbit Socialist Party' (LN, p. 163), she admits. Thus, when she writes

that Tolkien 'escapes ideology', I take it that she means his ideology is not the Procrustean kind that walls a writer away from every sympathy of those who disagree with him. As a 'psychic journey', despite its ideology, The Lord of the Rings has a force and poetry completely lacking in Lord of the Swastika.

'Her concern with myth... gets in the way of the characterization'

In dealing with characterisation itself, Rottensteiner mentions with approval Patrick Parrinder's 'The Alien Encounter: Or, Mrs Brown and Mrs Le Guin'. When Parrinder's and Rottensteiner's articles are taken together, however, they notably misrepresent Virginia Woolf, whose 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', according to Parrinder, sets forth a 'doctrine... restated in an SF context by Ursula K. Le Guin under the title "Science Fiction and Mrs Brown"' (PP, p. 49).⁵⁸ Parrinder writes that Virginia Woolf's

Mrs Brown... was an ordinary lddy sitting in a railway carriage going from Richmond to Waterloo. Her reality and her ordinariness constituted the novelist's essential subject-matter, the one thing that he or she must never desert. (PP, p. 49)

(Similarly, Rottensteiner writes (FR, p. 87) of Le Guin's 'stressing of common human beings'.) In perceiving Mrs Brown as 'ordinary' - which can be translated as 'average' - Parrinder appears to be at one with Lord Reggie, in Robert Hichen's The Green Carnation:

He presumed that Lady Locke was an average woman, simply because he considered all women exceedingly and distinctively average.⁵⁹

Moreover, in referring to 'the idea of rounded characterization championed by Virginia Woolf' (PP, p. 56), Parrinder seemingly ascribes to Woolf exactly the kind of characterisation she was arguing against - writers who create, as she once said, 'large oil paintings of fabulous fleshy monsters complete from top to toe'.⁶⁰ One such writer was Arnold Bennett - the 'Mr Bennett' who, in Woolf's view, failed to do justice to 'Mrs Brown'. Neither Woolf nor Bennett was disputing that character-creation is essential to novel-writing: in Bennett's account:

I do... remember an article of hers in which she asserted that I and my kind could not create character. This was in answer to an article of mine in which I said that the sound drawing of character was the foundation of good fiction, and in which incidentally I gave an opinion that Mrs Woolf and her kind could not create character.⁶¹

For Woolf, the conventional rounded characters created by Bennett seemed inappropriate to the times:

The human soul, it seems to me, orientates itself afresh every now and then. It is doing so now. No one can see it whole, therefore. The best of us catch a glimpse of a nose, a shoulder, something turning away, always in movement.⁶²

Doubtless, Parrinder creates a false impression inadvertently, his intention being to distinguish writers who emphasise character from writers who emphasise plot; thus, if Woolf and Henry James are placed in the first category, Bennett and H. G. Wells will belong, relatively speaking, in the second. But it was not 'plot' which the writers themselves perceived as separating them; it was an emphasis on what Wells called the 'frame' or the 'scene':

The Novel in English was produced in an atmosphere of security for the entertainment of secure people who liked to feel established and safe for good. Its standards were established within that apparently permanent frame and the criticism of it began to be irritated and perplexed when, through a new instability, the splintering frame began to get into the picture.⁶³

Woolf's perception is that the works of Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy leave one with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In order to complete them it seems necessary to do something - to join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque.⁶⁴

As Leon Edel and Gordon Ray observe, the debate involves two different ways of life:

the way of the writer like Wells or Bernard Shaw who subordinates his art to his social message, and the way of the dedicated artist like James or Proust for whom art is the only valid means of encompassing and preserving human experience.⁶⁵

In this view, again, Bennett's place will be with Wells, while Woolf belongs with James.

Meanwhile, for both Woolf and Le Guin, the essence of Mrs Brown is not 'ordinariness' (neither of them describes her as ordinary): Mrs Brown represents the elusive quality in other human beings that fascinates - even enslaves - the novelist. As Woolf writes, 'She sat in her corner opposite, very clean, very small, rather queer, and suffering intensely';⁶⁶ and Woolf (having witnessed Mrs Brown's decidedly odd conversation with a fellow passenger) was thus lured into conjecture after conjecture about her - in the process bestowing such reality, both on Mrs Brown and on herself as witness, that the reader is likely to become excited, and to wish to shout out all the possibilities that Woolf doesn't seem to see (besides damning her impertinence in making any conjectures at all). The encounter is, in short, so intensely realistic that most people will be convinced that Woolf had invented the entire incident.

Both Woolf and Le Guin make it clear that they mean by 'Mrs Brown' not a particular old woman, but the human mystery that eternally captivates the novelist. Woolf mentions 'Ulysses, Queen Victoria, Mr Prufrock - to give Mrs Brown some of the names she has made famous lately';⁶⁷ while Le Guin writes that, among other exploits, Mrs Brown 'has found her way to Australia, where her name is Voss, or Laura' (LN, p. 92). Woolf argues that, when you think of any novel that impresses you as 'great', then you think of

some character who has seemed to you so real (I do not by that mean so lifelike) that it has the power to make you think not merely of it itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes - of religion, of love, of war, of peace, of family life, of balls in country towns, of sunsets, moonrises, the immortality of the soul.⁶⁸

But Woolf also points out that, if you are a novelist, your version of character will differ, not only with your individual temperament, but 'according to the age and country in which you happen to be born'.⁶⁹ In her own time, Woolf felt that a good deal of 'smashing and crashing' was needed, to free 'character' (and 'life itself') from the stultifying conventions that Mr Bennett and his like had imprisoned it in; while, in our own time, Le Guin argues against herself, and

(posing the 'postnovel' view) asks us:

what is science fiction at its best but just such a 'new tool' as Mrs Woolf avowedly sought for fifty years ago... an infinitely expandable metaphor, exactly suited to our expanding universe, a broken mirror, broken into numberless fragments, any one of which is capable of reflecting, for a moment, the left eye and the nose of the reader, and also the farthest stars shining in the depths of the remotest galaxy? (LN, p. 106)

For both Woolf and Le Guin, however, the smashing is a preparing of the way, and not the journey's end. Le Guin has written that

an improbable and unmanageable world is going to produce an improbable and hypothetical art. At this point, realism is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding or portraying the incredible realities of our existence. (LN, p. 47)

Thus, neither Woolf nor Le Guin is advocating, as Rottensteiner suggests, an approach 'more appropriate for the 19th than the 20th century' (FR, p. 87); but both believe that, in Le Guin's words,

If Mrs Brown is dead, you can take your galaxies and roll them up into a ball and throw them in the trashcan, for all I care. What good are all the objects in the universe, if there is no subject? (LN, p. 106)

Parrinder's view of human awareness seems consistent with Le Guin's when he writes: 'it is not possible for man to imagine what is utterly alien to him; the utterly alien would also be the meaningless' (PP, p. 48), and also: 'aliens in literature must always be constructed on some principle of analogy or contrast with the human world' (PP, p. 52). When discussing Stanislaw Lem's Solaris and The Invincible, however, Le Guin writes that

The dazzlingly rich, inventive, and complex metaphors of these novels serve to express, or symbolize, or illuminate the mind and emotions of late twentieth-century man (LN, p. 108)

whereas Parrinder writes, on the same subject:

Lem's novels do not go beyond the limitations of the human viewpoint, and are thus the eloquent statements of an impasse. (PP, p. 55)

In spite of his earlier remarks, Parrinder seems to believe that somehow it is possible to surmount the limitations of the human viewpoint - perhaps by using 'modernist narrative techniques' (PP, p. 55) - and to go beyond the impasse, and create 'an alien... with a language of her own' who will be characterised more 'fully' than 'the autonomous human beings of liberal individualism' (PP, p. 56). Rottensteiner may think (FR, p. 87) that this is 'much more sensible - and more realistic' than Le Guin's viewpoint; but fiction-writers would think exactly the reverse - considering not only Le Guin's remarks on Lem (as opposed to Parrinder's remarks), but also Lem's His Master's Voice, with its bewildering range of ways in which a truly alien language might be thought to manifest itself. Fiction-writers, like conjurers, know that it is fatal to be duped themselves by the illusions they are producing for their public.

Rottensteiner also claims that Le Guin's ideal appears to be a 'kind of psychological or psychologizing novel' (FR, p. 87) - ignoring Le Guin's complaint that 'the modern "psychological" novel is...

usually... not a portrait of a person, but a case study' (LN, p. 108). (Woolf, too, writes that 'the psychological novelist' oppresses us: 'We long for some more impersonal relationship. We long for ideas, for dreams, for imagination, for poetry.')⁷⁰

'The alien encounter'

The Left Hand of Darkness is a useful test of whether Le Guin can present aliens - or whether Rottensteiner and Parrinder are justified. So much has been written by others about this novel that (apart from mentioning that I find no longueurs in it), I shall confine myself to two points that I have not seen discussed by anybody else.

The first is that sexual coercion obviously exists on Winter, despite the fact that in different kemmerings any individual sometimes assumes male and sometimes female sexual characteristics, and (according to the female Investigator, Ong Tot Oppong) 'coitus can be performed only by mutual invitation and consent' (LHD, p. 69). Events show that the invitation need not be mutual, and 'consent' may occur against the conscious will. As Ong Tot Oppong says, in the first phase of kemmer, 'the sexual impulse is tremendously strong... controlling the entire personality, subjecting all other drives to its imperative' (LHD, p. 67). A person who has resolved to 'abstain' is still vulnerable to the influence of touch; if you and another are in kemmer, and touch one another's hands repeatedly, one of you will be stimulated out of androgyny and into either male or female sexual characteristics, whereupon the other responds with a transformation to the opposite sex. Once this has happened, 'sexual drive and capacity are at maximum', and will continue so for two to five days. The resultant vulnerability is well demonstrated, on both sides, when Gaum (of the Orogeyn secret police) attempts to seduce Estraven, who is just entering kemmer at the time and (as a member of the Handdara religion) does not take kemmer-reduction drugs. Estraven's notes describe the encounter:

he turned up last night in full kemmer, hormone-induced no doubt, ready to seduce me... He cooed and muttered and held on to my hands. He was going very rapidly into full phase as a woman. Gaum is very beautiful in kemmer, and he counted on his beauty and his sexual insistence... He forgot that detestation is as good as any drug. I got free of his pawing, which of course was having some effect on me, and left him, suggesting that he try the public kemmerhouse next door. At that he looked at me with pitiable hatred: for he was, however false his purpose, truly in kemmer and deeply aroused. (LHD, pp. 108-9)

The invitation here was not mutual; yet, in spite of Estraven's detesting Gaum and being a person of exceptional willpower, the touching of hands (Estraven admits) 'was having some effect on me'. With just a little more effect (and perhaps a locked door), even the unwilling Estraven could become as helplessly desirous as Gaum, swept away willy-nilly in the culminant phase of kemmer.

A complement of the Estraven-Gaum encounter occurs in the Foretelling group of the Handdara, where one of the nine members must be a Pervert, and another must be an adept of the Handdara discipline, vowed to celibacy, and just entering kemmer at the time of the Foretelling. Three to four per cent of Winter's population are Perverts, in whom there is 'excessive prolongation of the kemmer period, with permanent imbalance toward the male or the female' (LHD, p. 49). The Pervert of the Foretelling that Genly Ai witnesses

is permanently male, so that his touch will stimulate a normal person in kemmer to take on female characteristics. Genly watches

the kemmerer, whose increasingly active sexuality would be further roused and finally stimulated into full, female sexual capacity by the insistent, exaggerated maleness of the Pervert. The Pervert kept talking softly, leaning towards the kemmerer, who answered little and seemed to recoil... The Pervert laid his hand quickly and softly on the kemmerer's hand. The kemmerer avoided the touch hastily, with fear or disgust, and looked across at Faxe as if for help. Faxe did not move. The kemmerer kept his place, and kept still when the Pervert touched him again. (LHD, p. 50)

At the end of the Foretelling session, the kemmerer is 'breathing in gasps, still trembling' (LHD, p. 51). On Earth, there is an old saying (quoted in George Eliot's Romola, for example) that love and a cough cannot be hidden; yet, by Winter's standards (as Estraven reflects) our love must be 'a strange lowgrade sort of desire' (LHD, p. 158): a person in kemmer is revealed unequivocally as sexual and desirous - no pretence is possible; rejection is always loss of face (unless the rejector offers the excuse of some prior vow). Desire and frustration cannot be hidden, either in Gaum or in the celibate Foreteller; and both suffer their indignity in the female sexual state.

Female sexuality will also be produced in any kemmerer who is drawn to Genly Ai's maleness. He reports how a fellow-prisoner kept touching his hand - 'as if to be sure he had my attention' - and then, in a sudden shaft of sunlight, was revealed as

a girl, a filthy, pretty, stupid, weary girl, looking up into my face as she talked, smiling timidly, looking for solace... The one time any one of them asked anything of me, and I couldn't give it. (LHD, p. 118)

At night, in a small tent on the Gobrin Ice, Estraven has to explain 'stiffly and simply' to Genly that, having entered kemmer, 'I must not touch you' (LHD, p. 167). As Victoria Myers has said, Genly

has had to relinquish his concept of Estraven as an aggressive male like himself and with similar needs to prove his maleness. More than that, his aloneness with Estraven... makes Genly see Estraven... as the whole counterpart to his fragmented self. Though Le Guin has them reject sexual intercourse, she does not have them reject the desire: Genly can see Estraven as a potential lover and himself as beloved.⁷¹

Nevertheless, what Genly calls 'the more competitive elements of my masculine self-respect' (LHD, p. 149) would certainly be a problem if he and Estraven had become lovers; he would obviously be unable to match the intensity or stamina of Estraven's sexual desire. Moreover, the interaction between kemmerers and Genly would strike us very differently if Genly were a female, whose prospective partners took on male characteristics. To reflect on this is to understand clearly how culture-bound our expectations of male and female behaviour are - how improbable it is that the people of Winter would share them (although, despite genetic manipulation, they share with us a common Hainish ancestry) - and thus we see the force of Estraven's reflections on Genly: 'His differences from us are profound. They are not superficial' (LHD, p. 107).

It is probably that Genly, deceived by the superficial, continues at

times, to misinterpret Estraven, completely unaware that he is doing so. This connects with my second and last point - that I find it impossible to settle for one uncomplicated explanation of the different way Estraven and Genly hear one another's mindspeech. Only Genly's thoughts upon this are available; Estraven was asked to be secret, and so 'never said or wrote anything concerning our silent conversations' (LHD, p. 166).

In speaking of the past, the name 'Estraven' - which is a landname - becomes insufficient: Genly Ai's friend is called Therem Harth rem ir Estraven, Therem being the most intimate of these names. Therem's elder sibling, Arek, has been dead fourteen years - and, before dying, wrote to Therem a letter quoting Tormer's Lay: in part,

Two are one, life and death, lying
Together like lovers in kemmer. (LHD, p. 159)

The two had a child, who lives at the family home from which Therem has been exiled. Incest between siblings is permitted on Winter; 'siblings are not however allowed to vow kemmering, nor keep kemmering after the birth of a child to one of the pair' (LHD, p. 68). Thus, Therem says once (LHD, p. 57), 'The only true vow of faithfulness I ever swore was not spoken, nor could it be spoken'. As Martin Slickman has observed, 'Genly Ai is the structuring consciousness of the book', responsible for 'the alternation and interpenetration of fact and myth, the literal and the figurative'.⁷² One of the myths or legends he chooses is 'The Place Inside the Blizzard', in which two siblings have illegally vowed kemmering, and are commanded to break the vow:

On hearing this command one of the two, the one who bore the child, despaired and would hear no comfort or counsel, and procuring poison, committed suicide. Then the people of the Hearth rose up against the other brother and drove him out of Hearth and Domain, laying the shame of the suicide upon him. (LHD, pp. 22-3)

As N. B. Hayles has written,

We know that Arek and Estraven have had a child; we know that they had, in defiance of Gethenian custom, vowed kemmering to each other; we feel that Arek, like the brother in the legend, had committed suicide and so been responsible for Estraven's exile from his Domain.⁷³

Therem feels further guilt for having subsequently taken a second kemmering, despite having grown up in Kerm Land where the 'vow of faithfulness is not to be broken, not to be replaced' (LHD, p. 90). Therem reflects, concerning this kemmering, that 'Ashe's love had always forced me to act against my heart' (LHD, p. 56), while Genly perceives Ashe as 'one of those who are damned to love once' (LHD, p. 77) - being wholly committed to Therem, the sire of their two children.

When asked whether one can tell lies in mindspeech, Genly has answered, 'Not intentionally' (LHD, p. 53); he also says that mindspeech activates 'the speech centers of the brain' (LHD, p. 173). For Therem, Genly's mindspeech is heard, not in Genly's voice, but in the voice of the dead Arek; for Genly, Therem's mindspeech retains even the mispronunciation common to Therem's language-group: 'I suddenly heard him stammer in my inward hearing - "Genry -"

Even mindspeaking he never could say "I" properly' (LHD, p. 171). Is it the sender's or the receiver's feelings that determine what voice is heard? Whenever Genly mindspeaks, he feels that something in Therem winces away 'as if I touched a wound' (LHD, p. 172). The most explicit reaction we have from Therem is:

If you can speak inside my skull with a dead man's voice then you can call me by my name! Would he have called me 'Harth'? Oh, I see why there's no lying in this mindspeech. It is a terrible thing... (LHD, p. 170)

Exactly what Therem 'sees' can never be known; is it a revelation that Genly feels the same love for Therem that Arek did (in which case the feelings of the sender determine the voice); or is it the revelation that Therem's own heart has proved unfaithful to Arek - adding to the bitterness that Ashe already arouses, about 'myself and my own life, which lay behind me like a broken promise'? If this is so, the receiver's brain is reproducing the voice which truly represents the receiver's feelings about the sender - thus, the mispronunciation Genly hears would indicate that he sees Therem always as an alien (a foreigner); while what Therem hears would indicate full acceptance of Genly as a fellow human being. Genly assumes that he and Therem both feel that a sexual relationship between them could only prove estranging; he also assumes that they both feel that there is not just friendship but love between them. Yet Genly knows himself to be 'locked in my virility' (LHD, p. 145); his conception of love may therefore be, for Therem, a wounding one. When in kemmer, Therem reports how Genly says:

'In a sense, women are more alien to me than you are. With you I share one sex, anyhow...' He looked away and laughed, rueful and uneasy. My own feelings were complex, and we let the matter drop. (LHD, p. 160)

The difference in the way Genly and Therem hear mindspeech indicates to me that one of them is more convinced than the other that they have alien natures; yet I cannot decide whether that person is sender or receiver; or even whether seeing the other as alien represents a fuller acceptance of the other's reality. Thus, Therem is completely real, yet ultimately enigmatic to me - an alien whose shared Hainish ancestry is a common ground on which the boundaries of impenetrable shadow (including shadows belonging to this world, and hardly noticed until now) define themselves clearly in the other world's light.

'Full-blown Villain...'

And at this stage I grow weary of returning to the Mephistopheles-Rottensteiner; I decline to occupy the many further pages that could be filled by disputing with him, point by point. Instead, I sketch a few gestures - such as the remark that, whereas Rottensteiner credits the sf readership at large with 'a fundamental misunderstanding of characterization' (FR, p. 88), his own remarks on Le Guin suggest that, if there is indeed a single correct understanding of characterisation, Rottensteiner himself has not attained it. Or I mention that several discriminating people (Le Guin among them) would dispute Rottensteiner's claim that no sf novels 'would make the grade as novels of character' (FR, p. 87). Or I rebuke his suggestion that sf novelists should back away from the 'hopeless fight' involved in 'getting into the ring with Mr Tolstoy' (FR, p. 87); for this purpose, I quote Le Guin:

When you undertake to make a work of art - a novel or a clay pot - you're not competing with anybody, except yourself and God. Can I do it better this time? (LN, p. 22)

and perhaps I quote Flannery O'Connor as well:

It's always wrong of course to say that you can't do this or you can't do that in fiction. You can do anything you can get away with, but nobody has ever gotten away with much.⁷⁴

Then I mention that probably the hardest thing for a writer to get away with is presenting 'inner lands' without 'descriptions of purely physical things, of external landscapes, and of physical feats' (FR, p. 89). To Rottensteiner's complaints about this physicality, I oppose Le Guin's observation that 'sensory cues ((are)) extremely important in imaginative writing' (LN, p. 83); and I allow Gerald Manley Hopkins to demonstrate innerness of landscape:

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there.⁷⁵

Gesturing now towards Rottensteiner's image of a Le Guin who believes that, although dragons are 'not mere escapism', they inhabit a world 'far from everyday life and its personal and political conflicts' (FR, p. 88) - I point out that this is not noticeably accurate; I quote Le Guin's observation that the great fantasies 'are profoundly meaningful and usable - practical - in terms of ethics; of insight; of growth' (LN, p. 52): this I do to demonstrate Le Guin's view that fantasy worlds are directly relevant to our dealing with everyday conflicts. Next, I remark that the escapism of reading is always temporary, and that the relevance of what we bring back from it does not depend on whether a book is fantasy or realism - little human insight is derived from escape into a 'realist' world where a lucky shopgirl gets married by a handsome millionaire. Then I mention Le Guin's discussion of whether an escape is 'from the phony' (for example, 'to an intenser reality where joy, tragedy and morality exist') or whether it is 'into the phony' - 'into a nice simple cozy place where heroes don't have to pay taxes... where human suffering is something that can be cured - like scurvy' (LN, pp. 196-7). After that I mention Le Guin's view that, at the other extreme, 'novels of despair', too, are 'most often escapist, in that they provide a substitute for action, a draining-off of tension' (LN, p. 211). By combining these gestures, I curtsy briefly to all the thought and definition Le Guin is offering - which Rottensteiner ignores.

A similar gesture goes to Rottensteiner's suggestion that modern fantasy is popular because of 'its appeal to common symbols, perhaps directly influencing the subconscious - i.e. its appeal to the mass mind', and that this is the opposite of 'individuation' (FR, p. 88). Le Guin writes (with entrancing charity) that 'Jung's terminology is notoriously difficult, as he kept changing meanings the way a growing tree changes leaves' (LN, p. 52); she interprets Jung's 'collective consciousness' as a 'kind of lowest common denominator of all the little egos added together, the mass mind' - a domain of 'received beliefs' and 'empty forms' (LN, p. 53) - whereas Rottensteiner's 'mass mind' seems to belong rather to 'the area of Submyth', which Le Guin defines as having 'the vitality of the collective unconscious, but nothing else, no ethical, aesthetic, or intellectual value' (LN, p. 67). Both of these regions belong, in Le Guin's view, to 'popcult'

and 'the popcultist cashing in'. An artist attempts what Rottensteiner calls 'individuation' - connecting the conscious and the unconscious; Le Guin warns us that

If the only tool he uses is the intellect, he will produce only lifeless copies or parodies of the archetypes that live in his own deeper mind and in the great works of art and mythology. If he abandons intellect, he's likely to submerge his own personality and talent in a stew of mindless submyths, themselves coarse, feeble parodies of their archetypal origins. (LN, p. 68)

And individuation will be rare, because 'there are never very many artists around' (LN, p. 71). Thus, once again, Rottensteiner is not disagreeing with Le Guin; he is only completely ignoring what she has said, while muddling all types of fantasy together as one. Even his observation that 'any stumbling around in a fantasy world becomes a spiritual quest' (FR, p. 89) is only a clumsier version of Le Guin's 'Most of my stories are excuses for a journey. (We shall henceforth respectfully refer to this as the Quest Theme.)' (LN, p. 137.)

A last gesture is directed to Rottensteiner's proof that Americans are not afraid of dragons - in which (without fatiguing his readers by accurately stating it) he ridicules Le Guin's account of

something that goes very deep in the American character: a moral disapproval of fantasy, a disapproval so intense, and often so aggressive, that I cannot help but see it as arising, fundamentally, from fear. (LN, p. 29)

Le Guin also speaks of

a deep puritanical distrust of fantasy, which comes out often among people truly and seriously concerned about the ethical education of children. (LN, p. 59)

Some of these people have been librarians, refusing to stock fantasies because 'we don't feel that escapism is good for children' (LN, p. 29) or 'we do not allow children to read escapist literature' (LN, 217). Fifteen years ago, in Australia, I myself was listening to two trainee teachers; their only resemblance to Mrs Brown was their being in a railway compartment, and they were solemnly assuring one another how very injurious it was for children to be allowed to read anything but realism - apparently these two attended different colleges, and were competitively boastful of getting only the most up-to-date and orthodox instruction. Despite Rottensteiner's contempt for the notion of fantasy getting 'suppressed', the influence of teachers and librarians is not negligible. Rottensteiner's 'disliked by librarians and similar unimaginative people' (FR, p. 89) is enigmatic, however: perhaps he is jibing at Le Guin for supposing librarians unimaginative; perhaps he is mocking the notion that anyone would pay heed to librarians. He rejects Le Guin's suspicion that Americans and perhaps 'almost all very highly technological peoples are more or less antifantasy'; his counter-argument is Tolkien's great commercial success. Tolkien has had a great commercial success in Australia, too - yet any Australian's social circle would be astonishingly limited if more than a very small minority of it either liked Tolkien's books or cared to read other fantasy. Moreover, Le Guin specifies that she is thinking of 'the man in the street - the hardworking, over-thirty American male - the men who run this country' (LN, p. 30). Thus, far from disproving Le Guin's account of the American fear of dragons, Rottensteiner has not even properly engaged with it. Ought I,

then, to have underlined the flaw in Rottensteiner's argument by pointing out that Boy George's commercial success is no sign that a national majority either approves of or is deeply interested in him? And ought I to gesture aside a little, and recommend to the attention of Greek-speaking people Rottensteiner's reference (FR, p. 90) to 'the dead languages of Greek and Latin'?

I ought not; because, with all these weighty themes so lightly tossed away, good humour returns; I remember Le Guin's observation that

People in novels, like those in daily life, tend to be all more or less stupid, meddling, incompetent and greedy, doing evil without exactly intending to; among them the full-blown Villain seems improbable (just as he does in daily life). (LN, p. 136)

Perhaps, then, I have wronged Rottensteiner in casting him as a Mephistopheles; perhaps he is only a rash enthusiast, so carried away by the iniquities of 'popcultist' modern fantasy that he has no leisure for the distracting, finicky business of paying attention to what he is reviewing. Perhaps I have even been too much influenced by Christopher Priest's reference to 'the sort of cerebral thuggery that Rottensteiner goes in for'?⁷⁶ Armed with both Rottensteiner's review and my own observations on it, the reader may decide.

NOTES

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Yvonne Rousseau, December 1984

MUSELY

is a column devoted, as the name implies, to muses other than science fiction. Perhaps one day 'Musely' will take over this magazine all together. This issue's contributor is

Greg Egan

whose first novel, An Unusual Angle, was published recently by Norstrilia Press. He has stories in three recent anthologies, Dreamworks, Urban Fantasies, and Strange Attractors, a novel that Rigby accepted but has not yet published, and another novel, The Flight of Sirius, scheduled to appear in 1986. As you can see from the following, Greg is interested in strange music. (Yes, I know anything recorded after 1975 is strange to me...)

Laurie Anderson

Laurie Anderson is a performance artist from New York. She speaks in her work more often than she sings, and her ability to control her speaking voice precisely is her most impressive skill. She does not use the histrionic simulation of extreme emotional states; her voice is almost always calm, level, quiet, sometimes faintly amused, sometimes mildly puzzled. Her effects are achieved by making exquisite fine adjustments in the timing and intonation of every syllable. Her judgment is always faultless; for example, in 'Blue Lagoon' every sentence is made languorous by the insertion of long pauses in unnatural places (you can just imagine the narrator on the verge of succumbing to the soporific blue sky), pauses which are milliseconds short of becoming frustrating.

Her two albums so far are Big Science (Songs from United States I-IV) and Mister Heartbreak. (She has also made a record with William Burroughs and another performance artist, called You're the Man I Want to Spend My Money With.) United States I-IV was a one-woman show she did in London. It ran for eight hours (split over two nights) and involved complex audiovisual presentations as well as Anderson speaking, singing, and playing a multitude of instruments.

Anderson almost never uses the traditional structure of rhyming lines with repeated stress patterns (which would sound pretty silly with the words spoken rather than sung); instead she uses music with a very simple rhythm and makes no attempt to match her words to the beat. This allows her to use completely natural sentence structures. However, the music is still far more than a background to a monologue; the usual simple relationship of every syllable (or every third or fourth or fifth) falling on a beat is replaced by a far more complex relationship, exhibited over much longer periods of time. Unlike, say, John Cooper Clarke, she never sounds like she's reciting a piece in a room which just happens to contain some musicians playing; since she writes, and largely performs, the music, it is always supporting her spoken words to maximum effect.

Anderson also uses electronic voice manipulation to achieve unusual results. This ranges from slight distortions and bandwidth

reductions through to recording a note sung by Rhoabe Snow on a synclavier and using its harmonic properties to generate an entire musical scale. The basic rhythm track of 'O Superman' consists of Anderson's voice, slightly modified by electronics, repeating the same sound over and over: 'Huh huh huh huh huh huh...' Although this is obviously done with a tape loop or some digital equivalent (no singer could possibly keep that up with absolute regularity for eight minutes), the effect on the listener is still quite eerie: after a while you stop thinking of it as a voice; it becomes just a noise in the background, but when the song is coming to a close and the last music fades out, there it is, still going like clockwork, a recognisable human voice singing: 'Huh huh huh huh huh huh'.

What are the songs about? Technology. Dreams. Love. The myth of Eden. A plane crash. Tautology:

I met this guy - and he looked like he might have been a
hat check clerk at an ice rink
Which, in fact, he turned out to be. And I said:
Oh boy! Right again.

Let X = X. You know, it could be you.
It's a sky-blue sky. Satellites are out tonight.
Let X = X.

And the end of the world:

And I said: OK. Who is this really? And the voice said:
This is the hand, the hand that takes.
This is the hand, the hand that takes.
This is the hand, the hand that takes.
Here come the planes.
They're American planes. Made in America.
Smoking or non-smoking?
And the voice said:
Neither snow nor rain
Nor gloom of night
Shall stay these couriers
From the swift completion
Of their appointed rounds.

Apart from the imaginative use of electronic synthesis and treatment of sound, Anderson uses a vast range of exotic percussion instruments, mostly played by David Van Tieghem, to add interesting components to the music. Tracks on Mister Heartbreak include sounds from bamboo, plywood, wooden bowls and blocks, a 'double bell from the Cameroons', plus a long list of devices whose names mean nothing to me: iya, ikonkolo, shekere, gato. The gradual build-up of sound at the beginning of 'Sharkey's Day', with a mixture of synthesisers and unconventional acoustic instruments, evokes dawn just as surely as any crude imitations of birdsong or mounting traffic rumble, and with far more emotional impact: this day is special. 'Sharkey's Day' is a dense rainforest of chirping, tinkling, buzzing, and strumming, a wild, euphoric hymn to fertility and variety:

You know? They're growing mechanical trees.
They grow to their full height.
And then they chop themselves down.

Sharkey says: All of life comes from some strange lagoon.
It rises up, it bucks up to its full height
from a boggy swamp on a foggy night.
It creeps into your house. It's life! It's life!

The music on Big Science tends to be more 'mechanical' and less rich,
and the lyrics more like natural speech and less like poetry. That's
not a complaint: this combination has its own distinct advantage,
as in 'From the Air':

Good evening. This is your Captain.
We are about to attempt a crash landing.
Please extinguish all cigarettes.
Place your tray tables in their upright,
locked position.
Your Captain says: Put your hands on your knees.
Your Captain says: Put your head in your hands.
Captain says: Put your hands on your head.
Put your hands on your hips.
Heh heh.

Anderson's mood ranges from the darkly humorous helplessness of 'From
the Air' and 'O Superman' to the almost naively joyful 'Sharkey's
Day', but her control over the lyrics is as sure as her control over
their enunciation. 'Sharkey's Day' refuses to take its own exuberance
completely seriously:

Hey! Look out! Bugs are crawling up my legs!
You know? I'd rather see this on TV. Tones it down.

Every sound, every syllable is perfectly placed; every image is
original, evocative, effective. It is equally delightful to choose
to be conscious of this craftsmanship or to suppress awareness of
the skills behind each song and simply drown in the strange visions.

Laurie Anderson is a consummate story-teller, well on the way to
becoming a mythmaker. Her songs are haunting; they echo deep down,
touching on very basic fears and longings. From 'O Superman':

'Cause when love is gone, there's always justice
And when justice is gone, there's always force
And when force is gone, there's always Mom. Hi Mom!

From 'Langue d'Amour':

The snake told her things about the world.
He told her about the time there was a big typhoon
on the island and all the sharks came out of the water.
Yes.
They came out of the water and they walked right
into your house with their big white teeth.

And, also from 'Langue d'Amour':

And this is not a story my people tell.
It is something I know myself.
And when I do my job, I am thinking about these things.
Because when I do my job, that is what I think about.

Quoted lyrics from:

Big Science: 'Let X = X'; 'O Superman'; 'From the Air'
Mister Heartbreak: 'Sharkey's Day'; 'Langue d'Amour'.

HUNTERS AND COLLECTORS

The songs of Melbourne-based rock group Hunters and Collectors are, these days, concerned with common Australian subjects, most often pubs, trucks, and outback towns. Sounds dull? Banal? Crass? Incredibly, they're not. They are original, imaginative, eloquent, ironic, and, best of all, steeped in ambivalence. Pubs, trucks, and outback towns, but nothing could be further from the Slim Dusty inanities those terms bring to mind than lines like these:

And my town, it is a teacher
All trucks and beers and memories
Spread out on the road
And my town is a leader of children
To where caution is a 'Long Wide Load'

A few years ago, the band's lyrics were far more surrealistic, far less obviously connected with specific aspects of daily experience. In those days there were also many more musicians (often too many to fit on stage together), and bizarre collections of percussive objects which contributed a multitude of odd little noises to a dense, layered sound, sliced through now and then by plangent blasts from the brass section, known as the Horns of Contempt. Their live performances contained large improvised components, with complex, hypnotic rhythms often repeated over and over for several minutes, and lyrics like these made the dream-like mood complete:

Souvent pour j'amuser les hommes d'equipage
And it's like talking to a stranger
You tasted mustard when she painted
Your face and it was like
Talking to a stranger
Oh Miss Jesus tell me where are
Your black eyes - your baby was
Talking to a stranger

The band is a lot smaller now, and no longer performs the old songs; it would be physically impossible. The words and music are no longer as hallucinatory, the songs are shorter, the instruments are more conventional. However, the dream moods of the past still flavour their current work. Their music remains unlike anyone else's, their lyrics are among the most evocative to be heard in this country, and every subject they touch is imbued with a poignancy, a bittersweet amalgam of sadness, nostalgia, regret, and joy that comes from the realisation that, like it or not, these are the things our lives are made of. Much of this effect comes from the skills of lead vocalist Mark Seymour, but even in cold print the words are powerfully moving:

And every Monday morning
She spreads her arms across the table
She spreads a mess of living
At my feet
But I never could swallow a sinner's pride
And the food she makes me eat

Melancholy, yes, but always tinged with irony. The proportions change from song to song.

This song is dedicated to
The sacred beaches of this great nation
Where fifty thousand naked men and women
Prime their bodies with intensive care barrier cream
And contemplate the liquid universe...

Here comes the great sun-struck question
See it go twisting, twisting

And sometimes there's an echo of the old surrealism:

Our friend the Judas sheep
He's dressed up like a compost heap
Our friend the Judas sheep
To the top, top, top of the heap
Our friend the Judas sheep
Today, companion - tomorrow, fresh meat!

The creative effort evident in these lyrics is pretty rare in rock music; most songs use a few dozen cliches which have been recycled endlessly; the rhymes, the images, the subjects, virtually the entire vocabulary is drawn from a limited set that has had little added to it since the Beatles, the Doors, and Pink Floyd. Of course, Hunters and Collectors are not the only Australian band to go beyond spitting out permutations from this two- or three-page rock thesaurus, but their original images seem to me to be the most striking.

And that rusty old woman's giving birth in the gutter
I went down upon my knees when the little tacker talked
And Mount Nameless was listening, listening

Pubs, trucks, and outback towns: are they for or against? Do they worship or despise them? Glorify or mock them? Are they hedonistic yobbos or disdainful intellectuals?

The answer is: neither. Ambivalence (good old healthy ambivalence) is always present. Reality is embraced in all its strangeness. These lines aren't 'for' or 'against' drinking, they're just about it:

When my overcoat is hung
And I'm too far gone to see
And the last drink's bell is rung
You can carry me
Carry me
Push me through the door
Shovel me up when I'm sinking to
This tear stained floor

(Continued on Page 68)

George Turner's In the Heart or in the Head (Norstrilia Press) was nominated for Best Non-Fiction Book in this year's Hugo Awards. He has stories in each of the two new anthologies of original Australian sf stories ('The Fittest' in Urban Fantasies and 'On the Nursery Floor' in Strange Attractors). He continues to review for the Melbourne Age and for many Australian fanzines, and he is working on a new novel. A slightly different version of this essay appeared in Thyme 45.

A HUGO FOR 'NEUROMANCER'? :
AWARDS, WINNERS, AND VALUES

by George Turner

Discussed:

Neuromancer

by William Gibson

(Gollancz; 1984;
251 pp.; £8.95)

I don't try to stay abreast of the latest science fiction, preferring to watch for the signs which say I had better read this or that in order to keep up with party conversation and Nova Mob references. William Gibson's Neuromancer, having taken the Ditmar in Adelaide and the Hugo in Melbourne, is loaded with signs. (Besides, Merv Binns gave me a copy.)

We know, of course, that sf awards are the result of popularity polls - and sometimes, it is whispered, of factional in-fighting - and have no literary significance, but does not simple popularity have its own significance? This book may be forgotten by next year, but it means something this year to a large number of people (if only that it is the best of a dreary bunch, just ahead of 'No Award' - an outcome desirable once in a while), so it may pay to ask, What?

Having now read Neuromancer, I think I know why it took the Ditmar, Nebula, and the Hugo, though I have read none of the other finalist novels. (On the strength of various reviews and accounts I don't see why I should; there are better things in life, which is short enough.) It won convincingly because it has all the attributes of success, the elements that rivet, entertain, and bamboozle - until you think back over them with cooler blood and unglazed eyes.

*

The raison d'être, gimmick, McGuffin, or whatever that makes the story possible is the ability of some computer jockeys, in an unspecified but not too distant future, to actually see programs as shapes, colours, and artefacts, via electrodes clamped to the head, enabling study of them as gestalts. This is illustrated excellently in the novel by the presence of a 'virus' - a program designed to penetrate and pirate another. A biological virus operates by locating a point on a cell wall where chemical affinities will allow it to lock on and then penetrate the cell, after which it takes over and directs the cell's operation. In Gibson's computers a virus program duplicates these moves, seeking recognition points in the program to be pirated, locking on and absorbing it. In several scenes this action is watched by protagonist Case, making a nice innovation in imagery and

venue. (The watcher, seeing the shape of a program but not its content, can design a virus to explore and penetrate.)

So far, so good; original and attention-catching.

Next comes the illegal program, the AI, the Artificial Intelligence. It is worth noting that in the present state of argument about the possibility of creating an AI, several computer scientists have pointed out that very strict controls should be incorporated in a structure which might well be capable of reorganising its capacities in unpredictable and possibly dangerous forms - which is why AIs in Gibson's tomorrow world are illegal. One of them certainly has dangerous capacities, including the ability to manipulate not only other computers but any mechanical artefact linked to a power source; it can also produce, as visible programs, simulacra of any person whose 'information' has been recorded, including the dead. The possibilities of real-world confusion are fully exploited in the plot.

(Have these simulacra any reality? Though visible only on a screen or to a 'seeing' jockey, but complete in their simulation, how 'real' are they? The AI (God?) could have them reproduce if it wished. The question is hinted but not developed.)

Given these conceptions, the novel could go, broadly, in two directions: it could present a thoughtful exposition of the possibilities and implications of artificial intelligence, or it could use AI as a gimmick for a thriller.

Gibson settled for the gimmick. Neuromancer would be a simple goodies-and-baddies thriller if there were any goodies, but there are only the rotten and the less rotten; even the hero, Case, is a drug-addicted killer. Gibson has assembled a grisly cast of characters (for want of a suitable word) who operate on drugs and emotional triggers; there are no subtleties in this lot. So one's interest has to be focused on the outcome of the computer possibilities, but there isn't any that matters. Gibson seems to have thought that his puppets were people and that one could care what happened to them. In most novels one would, but these name-tags are there only to shove the plot along.

What Gibson's future world is like is hard to tell because the reader never gets out of its murder-haunted, drug-ridden gutters - until the last section, set on a pleasure satellite, which amounts only to a filthy-rich, murder-haunted, drug-ridden gutter.

The plot hardly matters; it is the old faithful about piercing to the core of a mystery to find a more dangerous complication behind it, and then getting the right people out by the skins of their teeth. The climax is, in fact, a mite clumsy, but almost rescued by a neat little visual twist in the final paragraphs.

*

So what makes all this a popular success? The philosophical and extrapolative possibilities are ignored; there are no characters to identify with or find memorable, the settings are dreary and listless, and only the goings-on in the bowels of the computers seem fresh and stimulating. Even the assorted mysteries have the same soulless solutions that Van Vogt thought up back in the 1940s. More accurately, they have no solutions, only running revelations which stop at a convenient point - the ninety-thousand-word mark. They stop right where the real story should begin: Now that.

the AI has got what it wanted, what now? Would the AI be a goodie or a baddie, and would the thing have any conception of such terms except as descriptive of non-logical moralities? That is where the theme really begins to tick.

So where lies the attraction? Certainly not in the prose, full of those loaded copouts that mean the writer can't be bothered visualising properly, like 'kaleidoscopic angles', 'the blue flash of orgasm', 'beyond ego, beyond personality, beyond awareness, he moved', giving an impression of verbal drive but in fact having no meaning. Call them 'surreal' if you like, but I call them attempts to gloss over what the writer did not know how to handle.

Against all this are the surefire selling values of the pop literature of the moment, the three great teenage concerns of our sociological day - the computer scene, the hard drug scene, and the sickening violence scene. All in one package, they can hardly miss a public. There is also plenty of sex, latent and consummated, with no hint of involvement or enjoyment - what you might call the hard sex scene. The women are killers, lesbian or harlot-sexy and cold-blooded, even in sex; the males are, with one exception, not quite so sordid. This may say something about authorial chauvinism but is more likely to be a product of the fascination of the contemporary thriller with woman as tough-guy-sexpot-substitute-male. In any case, all the characters are mere points, having position but no size.

These unattractive elements are the hallmarks of the late twentieth-century thriller, bearable only because the writer's lack of artistry reduces them to strings of words without conviction; they fail to horrify, and in presenting violence the author in fact hides it behind a yawn of acknowledgement that it is all in play. This is dangerous; we should think seriously about it. Fascination with violence specifically designed to lull reaction is a virus with easy entry, one whose effect is to deaden the response to reality. A touch of the reality might cure many a thoughtless devotee.

It seems, then, that Neuromancer gets by on a single bright idea dressed up in cliché. Enough for an award or three.

Yet there is something more. Very early in the reading I was visited by a feeling of deja vu, not in the sense of plagiarism, but in recognition of the style and method - the relentless push, the rough and urgent dialogue, the swift change of scene, the spare description, the ambient harshness.

What I recognised was, of course, a pale shadow of the style and method of the Alfred Bester of The Demolished Man and The Stars My Destination. Gibson has one slight advantage over Bester: he is much more careful to preserve the internal consistency of his tale. But he hasn't Bester's unerring choice of the single word to do the work of a sentence or his ability to pile one monstrous shock on another. And his computer jockey, Case, is no stupendous Gully Foyle; he is not even a hapless, blundering Ben Reich.

But I did not need to hold my breath when waiting for Hugo night.

- George Turner,
original version June 1985,
this version August 1985

Damien Broderick's most recent book is Strange Attractors (Hale & Iremonger), an anthology of new sf by Australian authors.

PERSISTENCE

LONGER THAN A SEASON

by Damien Broderick

Discussed:

HELLICONIA WINTER

by Brian W. Aldiss

(Jonathan Cape; 1985;
285 pp.; £8.95/\$A 19.95)

...At the far end of the smoke-filled room was a guy leaning over a typewriter as big as an upright piano. He just sprawled there, taking no notice of anyone, tapping out a few sentences on the keys. And ((a)) man in ((a)) sharp suit said, 'What you turn out that fantasy stuff for? Play something happy, something familiar.'

And the guy looked up... and kind of smiled... 'I believe in what I do. This is where I sing the science fiction blues. This is my kind of music. I work in an under-privileged, under-valued medium, sure, and even within that medium my style offends a whole lot of people...'

And the man in the sharp suit said, 'People want to be cheered up. They want to hear about real things.'

'One or the other you can have. Not both. See, my stories are about human woes, non-communication, disappointment, endurance, acceptance, love.'

So wrote Brian Aldiss in a barbed Author's Note prefacing the short story collection Last Orders eight years ago. Does he really see himself tinkling the obonies, running off bitter-sweet arpeggios of fantasy to the uncaring ears of a noisy, drunken crowd who are waiting for the Bomb to drop?

To judge from his major work of intervening years, the enormous 'Helliconia' trilogy (some 430,000 words by my estimate), Aldiss is no stranger to paradox. - for the three books team with invention and undisguised creative generosity, driven (one might think) by a profound pessimism.

In our own remote future, after the near death of the Earth, an evolved humanity muses that for us today 'aggression and killing had been an escape from pain: in the end, the planet had been murdered by its own sons.'

That bone-deep gloom is ostensibly relieved in the latest, final volume by mystic apprehensions. But you'd be forgiven for supposing

that Aldiss is reaching for hope like a street-wise Pandora who really knows better than to look for comfort at the bottom of a bag of bad news.

Two great metaphors govern temperate-zone human life, at mutual odds. One is the annual round, the endless rise and fall of the sun in the sky, the mercury in the thermometer. The other is a linear measure, the individual's passage from conception to death and dissolution. How we see and weigh the world's fate and our moral implication in it depends, perhaps, on which of these images stings most deeply into our hearts.

Aldiss has raised a brave and complex structure upon this dichotomy. Helliconia is an imaginary world a thousand light years from Earth, spinning about a sun dimmer than ours which for eight million years has followed a vast ellipse around an intruding distant hot giant which has snatched its moon out of its sky, a catastrophe which seems to have spurred humanoid life into consciousness (a notion with interesting Jungian undertones). Every 1825 lesser years, these epicycles fetch Helliconia from glacial centuries of winter through a season of spectacular spring metamorphosis to a cruel summer basting under two suns high in the same sky.

Nor is Aldiss content with doubling the number of suns. His world is inhabited by two major conscious species, one humanoid, the other distinctly not. These 'phagors' or 'ancipitals' are creatures suited to a glacial world, the world which was Helliconia before the hot sun gave the upstart mammals a chance at equality.

These two species pursue an ancient cycle of renewal and forgetfulness. One important theme of the trilogy is the human search for a scientific social order robust enough to carry formal knowledge through the scourges of high summer and dread winter, to wrench cyclic time into linear progress.

An authentically disturbing feature of the invented phagors is the nature of their consciousness. They do not think; apprehensions move like curdled milk in their 'pala harneys', a haunting phrase which captures for us something of Julian Jaynes's poetic vision of pre-modern 'bicameral' humanity.

Jaynes's ponderously titled The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind was a scandalous success in 1976, proposing that, as recently as the singing of the Iliad, human minds were literally split, the wisdom of the race introjected as 'gods' who audibly spoke their commands and temptations. 'The thumos, which later comes to mean something like emotional soul ((is)) like an organ... Diomedes says... that Achilles will fight "when the thumos in his chest tells him to and a god rouses him".' But even a raging ocean has thumos.

'A word of somewhat similar use is phren, which is always localized anatomically in the midriff, or sensations in the midriff, and is usually used in the plural.' Aldiss catches this shivery hypothesis exactly and amplifies it; his ancient phagors 'in tether', sinking ever more profoundly into moribund semi-life, gain a condition half way between household god-totem and embodied collective unconscious.

What's more, Helliconia rejoices in an abundance of well-thought-out beasts, birds, semi-sentients, cultures, languages, climates, religions, political systems, not to mention verifiable afterlives:

not merely the tether of the phagors, but a similar state for the humanoids, sinking under the earth as gossies and fessies.

As if all this is not enough, it's observed from orbit by the Avernus crew, who transmit detailed real-life soap operas of Helliconian life back to Earth before falling prey in turn to corruption, boredom, and savagery. And on Earth, in its turn, great changes are taking place: Aldiss reveals these in reverse, showing us first the peaceful and highly evolved people of the eighth millennium, only to track remorselessly backwards to the holocaust and nuclear winter which all but exterminates linear society on Earth even as the seasonal societies of Helliconia grind through their own pitiful and exultant trajectories.

Helliconia Winter follows the Tolstoyan wanderings of young Luterin Shokerandit, citizen of Sibornal (a northern land strongly reminiscent of eighteenth-century Russia) and son of a man even more powerful than Luterin appreciates. Scarred by a 'fatal innocence', an inability to face evil which makes him both saint and sinner, convenient victim of a politics he loathes, Luterin ends an outcast, screaming useless, exhilarated defiance at the sunken sun of winter.

As with the previous volumes, Helliconia Spring and Helliconia Summer, I found Aldiss's writing qua writing less pleasing than usual. For all that, much is genuinely powerful and beautiful, particularly his evocation of an iced landscape stretching from north Tropic to polar circle.

In one vividly realised and quite terrifying sequence, poor Luterin escapes his tormentors by entering a cell inside a gigantic rotating stone zodiac which completes its own cycle only once in ten years. Luterin's loathing and desire for his snails-pace-shifting cell is no less convincing than Oriana Fallaci's recent account of the imprisonment of Alexis Panagoulis, the Greek patriot imprisoned and destroyed by the Colonels and his own anarchic soul.

The mythic shape of the tale - of a culpable innocent at once fleeing and seeking the father he loves/hates, and his quest's oedipal resolution - carries Winter to success on both metaphors of change, linear and cyclic.

Reviewing the previous volume, I suggested that Aldiss's fundamental theme was 'that chastising enantiodromia', a force in mind and brute matter alike which ceaselessly changes each thing to its opposite. One of the agreeable features of science fiction as a medium is that the man playing his typewriter in the smoke-filled room will give you an answer. In a letter to The Metaphysical Review, Aldiss disagreed with me. If one can say a book is 'about' anything, he declared, then Helliconia was 'about' 'our fever to possess one another: the happiness it brings, the misery'.

Well, perhaps, though I doubt that an artist need create such a prodigal apparatus to express so domestic a vision. Now Aldiss has added - rather opportunistically, one might think - a somewhat lumbering mystic side to his parable.

Alas, what I applauded as Aldiss's wicked sarcasm in portraying the dead in pauk as first bitter and complaining and later saccharine in their summer forgiveness is now offered for our metaphysical hearts' ease:

Dreadful though the phagors are, they are not estranged from the

(Continued on Page 68)

Michael J. Tolley is Head of the Department of English, University of Adelaide, and a frequent contributor to TMR, Science Fiction, and other magazines. He is also an able and witty speaker, which makes it a pity that overseas travel prevented him from attending the recent 43rd World SF Convention (Aussiecon II) held in Melbourne.

SILVERBERG'S NEW LINE

by Michael J. Tolley

Discussed:

The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party

by Robert Silverberg

(Arbor House; 1984; 284 pp.
Gollancz - ISBN 0-575-03544-7; 1985;
284 pp.; 8 pounds 95.)

THE MAJIPOOR TRILOGY

by Robert Silverberg:

Lord Valentine's Castle

(Gollancz; 1980.
Pan; 1981; 506 pp.; \$A. 6.95.)

Majipoor Chronicles

(Gollancz; 1982; 314 pp.;
ISBN 0-575-031533-0; £8.95.)

Valentine Pontifex

(Gollancz; 1983; 347 pp.;
ISBN 0-575-03444-0; £9.95.)

I

In a short introduction to the sixteen recently published stories in The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party, the author talks about a hiatus in his publication of short stories which extended from 1973 to early 1980. Bova and Sheckley, editors of Omni, persuaded him, with the shekels they could command, to bother once again with this demanding form which had previously earned him about \$2.50 an hour. Soon, Silverberg was selling to Playboy, to Twilight Zone Magazine, and to other magazines and editors of book collections. The lode was again being mined.

The first of these new stories, 'Our Lady of the Sauropods', concerns the survival of a new Eve in a reconstituted antediluvian paradise, drawing us pleasantly along an unsuspected branch of knowledge until we snatch the barb at its tip. Although the horrific future it premises could not plausibly be plotted in detail (one of the means of separating short stories from novels in sf), this is a pleasant frissonific work.

It is appropriate to the appearance of this new group of stories in the early 'eighties that several should belong to the horror genre, the three Twilight Zone stories, 'How They Pass the Time in Pelpel', 'Not Our Brother', and 'A Thousand Paces Along the Via Dolorosa', being indeed straight Gothic. These caveats to American tourists, who might greedily blunder beyond their depth, relate back to the novella 'Born With the Dead' (1971) as well as to 'The Soul Painter and the Shapeshifter', one of the 'Majipoor Chronicles', first published in Omni. Reading this kind of story (and some of the time-travel stories as well as, in this collection, 'The Trouble with Sempoanga', a poisoned paradise story), the non-American reader is inclined to

suppose that they are heavily satirical of the American character. None of these travellers can resist temptations to fornicate, steal, drink, take drugs, and generally interfere with local conditions, working on the arrogant blind assumption that their personal, immediate, obsessive, irrational needs dictate the laws that govern the universe. Perhaps Silverberg and his American readers identify with such protagonists, which might intensify the emotional quality of their response; I merely record the observation that instead of reading simple horror stories wherein the normal confronts the uncanny, I find myself further removed, reading about obnoxious aliens (the Americans) encountering strange yet somehow more natural forces, ones that are obedient to a law. On reflection, I cannot doubt Silverberg's satirical intent, but perhaps he would do better to universalise his characters and refine their temptations.

The story I enjoyed best in this collection, 'Gianni', also concerns meddlers who fail to circumvent the universal laws, but is touched with broader and more felicitous humour than is usual with Silverberg. It concerns the resurrection, in the twenty-first century, of Pergolesi, whose untimely death in 1736 in his twenty-seventh year robbed the world of many brilliant compositions (as that genius himself would be the first to acknowledge). It first appeared in Playboy, so has very likely not been encountered by my readers, who should find it a charming foil to Amadeus.

Other time-travel stories, 'The Far Side of the Bell-Shaped Curve', 'Needle in a Timestack', and 'The Man Who Floated in Time', hark back to one of Silverberg's most amusing novels, Up the Line (1969); perhaps it is because I had in reading them a sense of deja vu that I was not much pleased by any.

'Jennifer's Lover' neatly brings someone to the present from the future: it was well placed in Penthouse and exemplifies Silverberg's admirable ability to suit a variety of lucrative publishing outlets. Although 'At the Conglomeroid Cocktail Party', for instance, is a real stinker about the impossible loves of future people who can change their physical forms with the same competitive zeal as they used to refashion their clothes, one can easily see why it was bought by Playboy.

Of the other stories, I enjoyed 'The Regulars', a slight but pleasing fantasy about a pub out of time; 'The Changeling', a not-amnesia story; and 'The Palace at Midnight', an urbane tale of diplomacy in the postnuclear city-states of California. 'The Pope of the Chimps' is more thoughtful, as it were reversing the famous analogy in King Lear: 'as God is to us, so we are to the chimps'. It's a satire on meddling Americans once again, this time encountering theological problems when laboratory-educated chimpanzees accidentally imbibe a dangerous notion about the desirability of death. Through its implicit attack on simple-minded religionists, it could be linked to 'Thomas the Proclaimer' (1972) or, joining this with satire on experimental scientists, to Recalled to Life (1958) and 'Our Lady of the Sauropods'.

II

Silverberg's third period of writing began in 1980 with his much-heralded and expensively pre-funded book, Lord Valentine's Castle, which ended a four-year retirement from sf, after he had abandoned the genre in professed disillusionment. This book, which had a mixed reception, was a breakaway from his previous group of serious

sf novels, such as Nightwings (1969), Dying Inside (1972), and Shadrach in the Furnace (1976), being clearly an attempt to establish himself as a popular writer in competition with such other world-sculptors as McCaffrey, Herbert, and Farmer. She had dragons, he has seadragons; he had Face Dancers, Bob has Shapeshifters; he had a Tier World, our hero has to climb a tiered island. If you get the impression that Lord Valentine's Castle is just a little derivative, you are probably right, but this does not spoil the book, and there is no reason why McCaffrey-lovers in particular should not enjoy it. By comparison with Dune, however, it is bland, and it lacks Farmer's audacity of conception. I have to admit that, although I found this first book in the Majipoor trilogy easy to read, I also found it tedious. However, Majipoor Chronicles and Valentine Pontifex are so much more interesting than Lord Valentine's Castle that they almost seem to justify that book's faults as a narrative, and the trilogy as a whole provides an unusual phenomenon, a series which gets better as it goes along.

Some sort of improvisation was probably at work here: Silverberg gave no indication, as far as I recall, that he was planning a larger series when his first book came out (it had appeared earlier 'in somewhat different form' in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction). Several of the 'Majipoor Chronicles' also appeared in magazines before being gathered in book form and may at first have been ways of using up stray suggestions generated by the large, rich world of Majipoor. Lord Valentine's Castle has, however, a plodding quality absent from the two later books, and it may simply be that Silverberg had to work through the first book in order to get himself sufficiently stimulated, following his lay-off, to produce more thought-provoking fiction.

The trouble with Lord Valentine's Castle, considered as a narrative, may soon be stated: we know from a very early stage in the book what the ending will be, and we also know just what has to be done in order to get there: the hero starts at A and has to get to Z, stopping at each letter between. We can follow his route across a huge continent, Zimroel, from west to east, by means of a map; then we know he has to cross a sea, in the middle of which is an island where he is bound to be delayed, before he can reach the continent of Alhanroel, where his castle is conveniently situated in the eastern parts at the top of a mountain ten miles high. Valentine's is all too obviously a sub-Odysean epic quest with an episodic structure, and he has no overwhelming reason to hurry along, so that we lose even the element of suspense which a race against time usually provides in such narratives - at least until the final assault on the Castle. Silverberg seems almost scrupulously to avoid obvious ways of making such a long trek interesting: he keeps his focus strictly on the hero, avoiding multiple perspective, so that the highly remarkable companions who travel with him remain underdeveloped; even when the travellers are separated by accidents along the route, they are quickly pulled together again, so the interest is not divided, the suspense not doubled (as it is so magnificently in The Lord of the Rings following Boromir's death). The traitor-in-the-midst motif, almost indispensable in such narratives, is employed in the most perfunctory manner, a spy being quickly exposed in the early part of the journey and turned immediately into a loyal companion. This is the more surprising, in that Valentine's enemies include members of an aboriginal alien race, known as Shapeshifters, who of course are masters of disguise. When Valentine's band encounters these

apparently dangerous savages in the course of their quest, they evoke rather less menace than the cannibal tribes in the Tarzan books, and are more easily evaded.

What, then, is happening in the first book of the trilogy? When we look back on it from the further side of Valentine Pontifex, we can see it as a gigantic exposition, deliberately underplayed. All is rather too easy in Volume One, so that the enormous difficulties of Volume Three will be thrown into higher relief. It seems to me not unfair to dismiss Valentine's early difficulties as too easy, despite the constant danger of his travels and the repeated challenges he must overcome. It is hard, for instance, to be convinced by the ease with which he escapes from almost certain death when swallowed by a giant seadragon, despite our awareness that Holy Writ records the legend of a similar survivor. Furthermore, Valentine has special powers, both physical and telepathic, denied even to most heroes. Admittedly, he does not gain all his powers at once, and it is important to appreciate that his quest is as much one of self-discovery as of advancement in objective power (there is an obvious quibble in the book's title: 'Will the real Lord Valentine rise up?'); nevertheless, this is not one of the anguished heroes of our days who has difficulties in coming to terms with his powers - worlds away from Thomas Covenant, fortunately! The relative easiness of Valentine's quest, however, draws attention to one of its basic functions: it is a means of treating us to a grand tour of the more habitable parts of Majipoor, while they are still to be seen at their best.

Majipoor is an unusually well-favoured planet. In reviewing Lord Valentine's Castle for The New York Times Book Review (3 August 1980), Jack Sullivan complains about the superlatives Silverberg uses to describe it: 'everything is "magical" or "awesome" or "brilliant" or "incandescent".' Finding that so many wonders cancel each other out, he turns Silverberg's own words against him. Valentine at one stage had passed 'an unending flow of nearly indistinguishable places'; Sullivan comments:

After more than 400 pages, they become even more 'unending' and 'indistinguishable' than Mr. Silverberg thinks they do. At the end, 'Lord Valentine's Castle' seems more like an overlong resume than a series of fantastic adventures.

Sullivan puts negatively what can be expressed positively: this book is indeed a long geographical survey and, for the extended purposes of the whole trilogy, the superlatives and even the length have the important function of introducing an extremely wealthy and rather smug world that is already threatened with disaster. Nevertheless, one might fairly complain that Silverberg could have provided a somewhat livelier - and briefer - narrative, had he been working in top gear.

Majipoor Chronicles, which amplifies the geographical and, more particularly, the historical background to Valentine's story, revives our flagging interest by presenting us, in a series of short stories, with the shifting viewpoints of which we have been starved and by developing a new leading character, Hissune. We first met Hissune when he was a young picaro helping Valentine to negotiate one of the tedious obstacles on his journey, the Pontifex's Labyrinth (perhaps Silverberg's equivalent to the Hades of Homer or the underworld of Virgil): Valentine then marked him as a possible future Coronal. The Majipoor Chronicles are ten memory-readings from the House of Records in the Labyrinth, surreptitiously sampled by the young

Hissune, which forms the key part of his real secondary education. The stories are varied and vigorous; they bring Majipoor alive for us in a way that Lord Valentine's Castle had failed to do. Collectively and individually, they have the effect of refreshing us before we plunge into the doom-laden world of Valentine Pontifex; their brevity and variety are all the more refreshing because of the longueurs of the antecedent volume and yet (despite the detachable nature of some of the tales), they depend for much of their interest on our previous knowledge of a world we are now ready to explore in greater depth.

Valentine Pontifex chronicles a fanatical Shapeshifter insurrection which erupts while Valentine is preoccupied with difficult personal and political problems. In classic style, Silverberg begins by suggesting that the enemy's strength is overwhelming, the hero tired and fatally ill-prepared. The nature of the action is complex and urgent, with the fate of a whole planet at stake. Hissune's fortunes now command as much attention as Valentine's and Silverberg switches his attention to several other characters, including Shapeshifter leaders and minor victims of the disasters unleashed by the enemy, greatly extending our sympathetic range. The manner in which the issues will be resolved remains for a long time uncertain, and entirely new factors are brought into play. These issues are frequently made recognisably close to ones that confront us in our own world, and they are presented in a disturbing way, without easy answers. Some of the problems are racial: the dispossessed Shapeshifters are uncomfortably like the aborigines on most of our own continents; some are ecological: are individual human lives worth less than those of rare animal species? The religious problem of the mass hysteria of millennarians (an old one in Silverberg: vide Recalled to Life) is again addressed; the socio-medical dilemma of euthenasia versus indefinite prolongation of life is movingly presented through the predicament of the barely human Pontifex, hovering between death and life in his hermetic capsule.

The Majipoor series should be read in the order of publication; on completion, if my experience is any guide, it will seem unusually satisfying. No addition seems necessary; one has dined richly and well and is now replete. McCaffrey, Donaldson, Farmer, Herbert - and especially Silverberg, please note!

- Michael J. Tolley,
April 1985

Jenny Blackford is one-half of Ebony Books (publishers of Damien Broderick's Transmitters, and Urban Fantasies, a collection of new Australian sf, edited by David King and Russell Blackford), and works with computers, writes, and dabbles in many other activities.

STEP LIGHTLY
THROUGH THE
EXPOSITORY LUMPS

by Jenny Blackford

Discussed:

THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR

by Jean M. Auel

(Hodder and Stoughton; 1981;
587 pp.; \$A 7.95)

The Clan of the Cave Bear is one of that breed of books which opens with several pages of glowing commendations from earlier reviewers. This in itself normally betokens disaster; but worse, here, while imagination and research are praised, no such mention is made of the work's literary qualities. I ought to have known from this

what to expect. Unfortunately, my hypothetical misgivings would have been right. The book is indeed well researched and imaginative - perhaps too imaginative. I will return to that. But first, a sample from the beginning of the book:

The girl trembled in wide-eyed horror as the foul-breathed gaping maw swallowed everything that had given meaning and security to the five short years of her life.

'Mother! Motherrrr!' she cried as comprehension overwhelmed her.
(p. 8)

This turgid, cliché-ridden style is enriched with very frequent expository lumps, like the following:

The Clan could not conceive a future any different from the past, could not devise innovative alternatives for tomorrow. All their knowledge, everything they did was a repetition of something that had been done before. Even storing food for seasonal changes was the result of past experiences.
(p. 41)

That quotation is an excerpt from two-and-a-half pages of exposition, broken by only a single paragraph of action.

This exposition itself often embodies some rather peculiar science:

All those primitive people, with almost no frontal lobes and speech limited by undeveloped vocal organs, but with huge brains - larger than those of any race of men then living or future generations unborn - were unique. They were the culmination of

a branch of mankind whose brain had developed in the back of their heads, in the occipital and parietal that controls ((sic)) vision and bodily sensations and store ((sic)) memory. (p. 40)

Worse, Ms Auel sets up a badly built straw man of male chauvinism, to be knocked down easily by the young female hero:

'It makes no difference if he is cruel or not, Ayla. He can be as cruel as he wants, it's his right, he's a man. He can beat you any time he wants, as hard as he wants.' (p. 212)

The plot is made up of old, familiar building blocks, and set in the Palaeolithic past. Brave child Ayla, only survivor of her Cro-magnon tribe after an earthquake, survives a week alone in the wilderness and is picked up by a Neanderthal tribe (the eponymous Clan). With difficulty she proves herself, and is adopted by the Clan. Coincidentally, this clan is the top-ranked Neanderthal tribe, run by the wisest leader, Brun, the best mog-ur or medicine man, Creb, and the best medicine woman, Iza. (Brun, Creb, and Iza are siblings, so perhaps their top ranking, and their Clan's, are to be explained by hereditary intelligence. This is not hinted at.) The wise Iza and Creb struggle to keep Ayla part of the incredibly conservative Clan, despite her natural Cro-magnon high spirits. The rest of the Clan, and all other Neanderthals, see Ayla's energy, independence, desire to hunt, and so on as unnatural (particularly in a woman), and therefore evil. Brun's revolting son, Broud, destined to be the next leader despite his bad temper, detests and victimises Ayla throughout the long book, and eventually succeeds in driving her from the Clan.

Ayla's victimisation by Broud includes multiple rapes, which result in a half-breed child: you guessed it, homo sapiens. During the book, various members of the Clan come to understand where babies come from (when will someone write a Stone Age story in which this doesn't happen?), as well as the fact that the Neanderthals are doomed, and that homo sapiens will supplant them.

Ayla reminds me of the all-American all-rounder. She has a major head start on the Clan people by being a go-ahead (American-style) Cro-magnon, not a tired (European) Neanderthal, but she is also appallingly indomitable and resourceful. She is better than members of the Clan at everything she tries. For example, as a woman she may not hunt, but after practising secretly with the sling she becomes the most proficient hunter in the Clan; and she is the only person quick thinking and quick acting enough to save three lives in her time with the Clan - one from drowning, one from animal attack, and one from shock.

The speculative aspects of the novel are rather dubious. The book incorporates an overwhelming amount of usually quite interesting detail about Neanderthal daily life. We even have the obligatory mammoth hunt. My own expertise in ancient life really begins with Homer and the Vedic hymns, much closer to the historical era, so I don't want to argue in detail against most of Ms Auel's reconstruction. However, I am quite sure there is no verification of the detail of many of the reconstructions.

As well as some perfectly acceptable extrapolations from archaeological evidence about food and its preparation, tools and weapons and their making, and herbal medicine, detailed assertions about Neanderthal

society are ~~included in the book~~. Specifically, Auel asserts that the society is fixed in a highly sexist structure, with women totally subservient to men, and that Neanderthals had both detailed racial memory and limited telepathic powers.

I found both these ideas jarring as I read the book. I have some literary objections to the way in which both were used in the novel's structure, and I will treat these later, but also there was something in the presentation of the ideas that hindered the reader's belief. I have no doubt that both assertions could have been used to good effect by a better novelist. William Golding, in his magnificent The Inheritors, uses the idea of Neanderthal mental powers subtly and well.

There are at least two major problems with the presentation of the ideas in The Clan of the Cave Bear.

One problem is that the book is presented in a terribly factual manner. It reminds me of such 'factions' as The Right Stuff. One could be reading a slightly jazzed-up textbook, with dissertations about terrain, animal and vegetable life, diet, medicine, and so on. When one suddenly comes across something known to be a wild theory, one is jarred as if by finding an error in a textbook.

The other problem is that one does suddenly come upon these wild theories: they are presented in expository lumps, rather than being shown to us subtly (as in The Inheritors) through the experiences of the characters.

What literary use has Ms Auel made of her fixed, sexist society, or of her racial memory and telepathy? Too little.

The author has made life too easy for herself by creating a fantasy sexist society. The straw man is too easy to knock down; watching the destruction is tedious. All right-thinking people must take Ayla's side in the contest; the other side is so clearly wrong. Not even the most beastly of modern Western males thinks it right to beat women indiscriminately to keep them in line, expects them to be available instantly for him to 'relieve his needs', insists that women walk meekly (never run!) and keep silence unless invited to speak - all of this with a penalty of expulsion from the tribe, and therefore death.

In this environment, it is all too easy for Ayla to offend with actions we as readers must find perfectly natural (walking with a spring in her step, for example, or crying out when raped). We must then find her punishment abhorrent, and the society unjust. There is no debate.

If Ms Auel wanted to attack sexism convincingly, sexism needed to be given a better case. There is no intellectual rigour; there is, really, no interest.

The other major unprovable aspect of the society, the strange mental powers of the Neanderthals, is also badly handled, but in a different way. The people have race memory and some telepathy. It should be interesting. Instead, the idea is treated tediously:

But only in the tremendous brain of the scarred, malformed cripple was the gift fully developed. Creb, gentle shy Creb, whose massive brain caused his deformity had, as Mog-ur, learned to use the power of that brain to fuse the separate entities seated around him into one mind, and direct it. He could take them to any part of their racial heritage... From the depths of

their minds they found the undeveloped brains of creatures in the sea floating in that warm, saline environment. They survived the pain of their first breath of air and became amphibians sharing both elements... (p. 40)

Leaving aside the rather hackneyed device of the cripple with great powers (surely the handicapped must find this sort of thing offensive?), I will state only that almost nothing is made of this amazing but really useless facility. The only use of this telepathy and group regression seems to be as a television substitute. As for plot value: through regression, Creb decides that Ayla is really not Clan (while everyone else in the Clan decided this long ago from her appearance) and finally rejects her. Telepathic group regression is a wasted idea.

Neanderthal racial memory, as opposed to Neanderthal telepathic regression, has some redeeming features. The theory here is that they rely totally on racial memory. The Neanderthals have filled their brains completely with ancient memories; innovation is no longer possible; thought at all is very difficult. They will die out from the inability to change. Ayla as Cro-magnon can conceptualise and innovate. But this part of the theory, too, is delivered to us in expository lumps (see, for example, the second quotation in this review). We are merely told about it. We do not weep for the strange doom of the Neanderthals.

I noted at the beginning of this review that the writing style of The Clan of the Cave Bear is turgid. The writing could by no stretch of the imagination be called a delight to read. It is pedestrian, but clotted, inflated, and full of clichés:

The young man's final lunge brought him directly in front of the powerful man of magic as the dull thudding rhythm and the excited staccato counterpoint ended with a flourish. (p. 106)

Ms Auel seldom shows when she can talk; even when she professes to show, it is a wooden business:

She recalled the monstrous lion with a shudder, visualising the sharp claw raking her leg. She remembered struggling to the stream, thirst overcoming her fear and the pain in her leg, but she remembered nothing before. Her mind had blocked out all memory of her ordeal wandering alone, hungry and afraid, the terrifying earthquake, and the loved ones she had lost. (p. 45)

As in this quotation, viewpoint often wavers violently between subjective impression and authorial voice; I found this disconcerting.

Read The Clan of the Cave Bear if you want a detailed explanation of Neanderthal food preparation, or if The Women's Room left you panting for more examples of male injustice to women. Don't expect a literary event.

- Jenny Blackford
March 1985

(MUSELY: Continued from Page 50)

More than anything else, Hunters and Collectors reflect what it is like to live in Australia. No nationalistic fervour, no crude ockerism, no strident politics; just fragments of everyday existence treated with a mixture of love, hate, and wonder that they deserve.

Quoted lyrics are from:

The Jaws of Life: 'Little Chalkie', 'Hayley's Doorstep', 'The Way to Go Out', 'Carry Me'

Hunters and Collectors: 'Talking to a Stranger'

The Fireman's Curse: 'Egg Heart', 'Judas Sheep'

(all: White Label records)

- Greg Egan
April 1985

(PERSISTENCE LONGER THAN A SEASON: Continued from Page 58)

Original Beholder, the Helliconian Gaia figure. So they are not tormented by the spirits about them... How happy... if they could have comfort from their gossies in the midst of all their other troubles.

So Gaia (the ecological totality of life on Earth), recovered from nuclear holocaust, uses human empathy to awaken her equivalent tutelary deity on Helliconia. It's nearly as dreary as Doris Lessing's astoundingly banal SOWF (Substance of We Feeling) in the Canopus sequence. Ho bloody hum.

Despite this belated note of redemptive uplift, though, the 'Helliconia' trilogy's completion reveals a major work which certainly will persist for rather longer than a season.

- Damien Broderick
October 1985

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS-- Continued from Page 6)

ELAINE COCHRANE

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Thank you for handing me TMRs 1, 2, and 3. I very much enjoyed John Brosnan's letter in TMR 3. You deserved every word of it - particularly as you insist on labelling 'naturopath' a fully qualified medical practitioner who has made a special study of the role of nutrition in disease aetiology.

Can't say I got much out of Russell Blackford's article in the same issue: I didn't get past the first page. It reads rather as if he has a large vocabulary and a new book of deconstructionist syntax. Perhaps my editing is of the old-fashioned type. I have always believed that the more complex the idea, the greater the necessity for clear, simple, and concise expression. (4 June 1985)

The only other letter-writer who disagreed with Russell Blackford or his writing method was, curiously enough:

GEORGE TURNER

Flat 4, 296 Inkerman St., East St Kilda, Victoria 3183

Russell Blackford writes (in TMR 3): 'Turner precludes any theory that the function of literature, or even a function of literature, is precisely to externalise dreams and nightmares, a psychological function rather than the overtly social one which is continually put forward.'

A closer reading of the text complained of (chapter 14 of In the Heart or in the Head) will show that I preclude nothing, but suggest that a huge area of social usefulness for science fiction is being neglected. On page 226 I wrote: 'Commercialized science fiction could and would carry on mass production, and a more aesthetic science fiction would continue to play with metaphysics and philosophy...' Blackford's preoccupations and orientations would continue to be served while a strong reality-based viewpoint was introduced to give them something more than purely intellectual status; the modes should, ideally, reinforce each other.

I see consideration of the immediate future as useful in down-to-earth terms and consideration of a 'far' future (meaning one so distant that the author can safely ignore all the underpinnings of history, psychology, and anthropology) useful on little more than a discussion basis. That the latter can 'force us', as Blackford claims, 'to think radically', is doubtful. To induce radical thought the author must put forward a radical conception, and that, given the standard of science fictional dreaming, is likely to remain a rarity. Even Delany's excited concepts of limitless sexual freedoms and simplicities, divorced from anthropological and psychological good sense (cultures do, after all, take transient ethical and moral stances to protect their existence, abandoning them as circumstances change) do not represent radical thinking so much as expressions of personal obsession.

Delany, however, is recording what seems important to him; most others are merely extruding fantasy hooks to catch the dollar. One has to suppose that Heinlein expects to be taken seriously,

and Herbert has stated that his 'Dune' sequence contains a political philosophy (i), but where else among the far futurists is work that offers more than entertainment without the reader-frightening problems of radicalism?

On the issue of ignoring nuclear war possibilities as a 'simple brazen cop-out', I make no apologies. The major reason for setting stories in a future so distant that present-day considerations no longer apply is simply to avoid the complications of reality, nuclear or any other. If this were done with the purpose of creating a microcosm which could be examined clinically (The Dispossessed, getting the effect by distance in space rather than time, is a fine, almost a solitary example) or for any other genuinely intellectual or literary purpose, I would point no finger, but in fact the purpose is usually no more than to duck the necessity of thought. 'Freeing the imagination', as they cry interminably, is an admirable purpose. But where, in the genre, are the flights of the freed spirit?

For those you must turn to Lanark, and Peace, Just Relations and The Plains, Cards of Identity and Mickelsson's Ghosts and Earthly Powers. And five of those are set in the here and now!

(7 June 1985)

GENE WOLFE

PO Box 69, Barrington, Illinois 60010, USA.

I'm now able to comment a bit on the Turner material in your May issue (TMR 3) - Merv Binns was kind enough to give me a copy of In the Heart or in the Head, and I read it on the five flights needed to get us home. Perhaps I should add that I was also able to talk to George Turner himself for half an hour or so in Merv's shop, and though that wasn't nearly as long as I would have liked, it provided a bit of additional input.

Fundamentally I agree with Russell Blackford, while acknowledging that Turner may be right and Blackford (and I) wrong.

It seems to me Turner has made two linked erroneous assumptions. First, that the threat of all-out nuclear war is grave and immediate. Second, that it is difficult to envision any way of preventing such a war. Given these assumptions, Turner is right. Far-future stories are a copout. If can be divided into responsible and irresponsible.

I part company with him because I don't believe the United States is on the point of attacking the USSR. Nor do I believe that the USSR is on the point of attacking the United States. Neither country would be a world power after even a mild nuclear war (if one may speak of such a thing, a war in which only fifty or a hundred million would die), and as long as that is true, neither country will willingly fight that sort of war. On the other hand, neither will surrender its nuclear weapons, for obvious reasons.

And it is easy to think of half a dozen ways to prevent such a war - ways that would be employed by both states if they thought such a war were imminent. To prove this second point, I plan to write a story I will call 'The Peace Spy'. If anyone sees fit to

publish it, I will have won. But Turner will have won as well, because it will be the sort of sf he has called for in his book.

It's a very good book, by the way. If George had only been a little less concerned with protecting old friends and old enemies, it might have been a great book. I hope he will reconsider his reticence in a sequel, telling us those stories he passed over in a couple of sentences, even if their principal characters must be supplied with fictitious names.

It was good to see you again. I wish we had seen more of you.
(3 September 1985)

I should explain that we had a long-arranged dinner date between Rosemary, Gene, Elaine, and I when the Wolfes reached Melbourne. But they could not get here until just before the Convention, had to leave on the last day, and were fully occupied each night. Oh well; that teaches me to make plans for a Worldcon. If we had ever been able to sit down for a proper conversation, we might have discussed this matter of far-future sf. I might have said that the odds seem very much against a future for the human race. In Australia we do get the feeling that Reagan would like to find an excuse for a bang-up fight with the Russians. And if he's not that stupid, it's all too easy for a nuclear war to start accidentally. I can't see how the danger of nuclear war can recede until, at the very least, the super-fast delivery and control systems are dismantled.

But maybe that has nothing to do with the matter of far-future sf. Take it that the human race survives anyway, whatever one's real fears, and make a few guesses about the possibilities. That raises the real point of conflict between Turner/me and Blackford: the fight between realistic-fiction-set-in-the-future and wide-screen-baroque-fantastic-space-yarns. 'The Book of the New Sun' would seem to fit into the former (except the worrying matter, for me, of Severian's seemingly magical powers of regeneration); but, like the unknown questioner during the 'Wolfe Question and Answer' panel at Aussiecon, I also worry that 'New Sun' is one of many sf futures that have retreated from democratic, egalitarian possibilities. Democracy is worth considering, even if only for the purposes of satire.

But if I had said all that around the dinner table, I might have put you to sleep, anyway... Thanks again for your presence at Aussiecon, Gene and Rosemary, and maybe we'll have that dinner some year in some out-of-the-way relaxacon in deepest Illinois.

Some readers might not yet have read In the Heart or in the Head. This situation can be remedied by sending \$A16.95 or equivalent to Norstrilia Press, PO Box 1091, Carlton, Vic. 3053, Australia. In return you'll receive George's Hugo-nominated book by surface mail. Add \$A5 if you want it sent airmail.

ANDREW WEINER

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I haven't read Turner's book, but if Russell Blackford is quoting him correctly, I would lean towards his side of the argument on far-future sf. I remember a Robert Silverberg quote on H. G. Wells, to the effect that 'anyone can discourse on the proper relationship between labour and capital, but only Wells could

show us that crab on the beach at the end of time'. (This is from my all-too-fallible memory, but I think that was the general sense.) This struck me at the time, and still does, as quite wrong: the great thing about Wells was that he showed us both. If you go for the crabs at the end of time and forget the rest, what you end up with is Edgar Rice Burroughs, or his modern-day equivalents. And that is precisely what I find wrong with latter-day Silverberg (see, for example, the gorgeous but curiously flat 'Byzantium Endures' in a recent issue of Asimov's, a likely best novella for the Nebula and Hugo), despite the fact that he's such a skilful writer.

On the other hand, Blackford is a lucid and interesting critic, and I hope you will be publishing more of his work.

TMR is turning into a more relaxed version of SFC, with all the essential features but without the compulsion to cover the whole sf field. The lists are as fascinating and bizarre as ever, but who is William Goyen?

The Oxford Companion to American Literature (fifth edition, 1983, pp. 292-3) describes Goyen as a Texas-born author whose novels include The House of Breath (1950) and In a Farther Country (1955), and who wrote lots of short stories and four plays. He died last year. I began reading him only because one of the blokes behind the counter at Whole Earth Books, Melbourne, pointed him out as a great American writer.

Two more reactions to Russell Blackford's article:

DOUG BARBOUR

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...I especially found Blackford's piece engaging. Not wanting to repeat the arguments he made so well, I will only add that I find the kinds of entrances to radical thinking that he speaks of in not only Delany's extraordinarily transformed interstellar culture(s) in Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand but also in the two latest 'Dune' books, in which I find Herbert, an admittedly limited writer in some ways, proffering a philosophical vision of a universe in continual flux, a vision I find provocative and affecting. I have a feeling that Blackford actually likes Delany - and among you guys that seems an aberration - and I was pleased to see that he'd been reading Delany's criticism, which I find among the most interesting in sf (especially his new book of essays, Starboard Wine). I agree with Blackford's premises but, in the light of your correspondents' disgust with contemporary science fiction and fantasy, I would add that I still enjoy a lot of ordinary sf & f - not as much as I enjoy Marquez, say, but enjoy nevertheless. I would probably agree with Tom Disch, whose work I have always found entertaining in the most various senses of the term, that Marion Zimmer Bradley lacks a(t least his kind of) sense of humour, but I found The Mists of Avalon interesting as an attempt to take on a mythography that has sunk its masculinist claws deep into the western psyche. And I would prefer not to have to choose between them, for though I would finally take Disch over Bradley, I still enjoy having them both around.

(24 June 1985)

Quite a few Melbourne TMR readers like Delany's stuff, but they tend to go all gushy when talking about his work. One of the few recent good pieces of writing about Delany is Russell's discussion of Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand, which he read first to a meeting of the Nova Mob, and which is scheduled to appear as an article in Van Ikin's magazine, Science Fiction.

CY CHAUVIN

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Russell Blackford's discussion of In the Heart or in the Head is quite interesting, particularly his point about 'enabling forms' that 'facilitate frames of reference for treating particular subjects in ways that go beyond the ordinary conventions of fiction'. It's always helpful to better understand what sf can do, and how it works - maybe this will make good sf easier to write. I haven't read George Turner's book, so I don't know exactly what he means (and I'm sure he can defend himself far better than I can). However, there has been a suggestion by a number of writers and critics, particularly Blish, Benford, and Watson, that sf should have significance beyond that of literature, and that a certain scientific and extrapolative rigour is necessary for this to happen. This is much easier to obtain in 'near future' sf. Benford, in particular, has pointed out that it is the combination of many likely near-future events - overpopulation, pollution, longer life - which is not really examined in sf (the common ploy being to take one trend or invention and extrapolate only its effects). The real problem is, of course, as always: this kind of fiction requires a lot more thinking and a lot less writing. I don't think that all sf must be this way: but this is where the cutting edge of the literature really lies: in fiction that explores the potential of humanity.

You'll just have to buy In the Heart or in the Head, Cy, as George says much as you're saying. He puts his preaching into practice, too. 'The Fittest', his story from a new Australian anthology, Urban Fantasies, is a particularly well-developed piece of near-future extrapolation.

I have to comment on the 'parafiction' discussion started in TMR 1, mainly in defence of John Crowley's Little, Big. If Christopher Priest's The Affirmation is parafiction, so is the Crowley book. It certainly wasn't marketed as sf when first released as a trade paperback in the USA. The award it won was also given by a jury, and not as a vote of popularity, like the Hugo or even the Nebula. I realise that many readers could not finish the novel, and I found myself pausing after about 70 pages: but I finished the book, and now it is one of the novels I love most, and I've re-read it twice since my first reading, and expect to read it again. The book is really fantasy rather than sf, and owes as much to the American 'fabulators' like John Barth, Tom Robbins, etc., as it does to sf.

I must admit that I haven't read any recent sf novels that I've thoroughly enjoyed except The Anubis Gates, by Tim Powers, which is a time-travel novel. I did not expect to like it, and only read it because I was on a panel about new writers, and it wasn't the sort of book I usually read: I liked it despite myself. See Paul Kincaid's review in Vector 124/125: he describes my opinion exactly.

(1 July 1985)

George Turner didn't like The Anubis Gates at all, so he gave me his copy. But other readers mention it as a good read.

I'll go back to Little, Big, of course, if only because of my 1985 experience with Gene Wolfe's 'The Book of the New Sun'. The Shadow of the Torturer made little impression on me when I read it first some years ago; on my second reading this year, I seemed to understand it for the first time. Little, Big might have the same delayed impact when I return to it.

This 'parafiction'/'ain't-current-sf-bad debate goes ever on:

RUSSELL BLACKFORD

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I've been enjoying all this guff about people abandoning science fiction or, in Joseph Nicholas's case, fiction generally. For myself, while sf is something I've always loved and still enjoy reading and discussing, I've never taken it all that seriously. I wonder whether the problem with all these disillusioned fans is that they believed in sf too much.

In the bad old days when I was teaching English at Monash University and developing the academic stigma that still haunts me, one of the worst things that could be said about a fellow academic was 'He (or she) doesn't believe in literature'; having long abandoned the evangelical faith of my youth, I was not very interested in having something to believe in - life is better lived without such crutches - so, while I've always found literature to be fun, stimulating, sometimes challenging, sometimes illuminating, I've never had any sort of faith in it. If I don't enjoy a book I won't voluntarily read it; if I do enjoy a book, I need no excuse for reading it.

Sf is something I've enjoyed since I was a whippersnapper, largely because of that sense of possibility in it which I tried to highlight in my article in TMR 3. As long as I'm enjoying the books, I don't really care that they don't embody the kind of traditional literary values supposedly to be found in a Henry James or Jane Austen. It strikes me that sf books can be more or less effective, successful, satisfying, meaningful, or significant by their own rules, and this should be enough for us to be appropriately discriminating and intelligent about the genre; I don't see how anyone can dismiss the genre as a whole without applying inappropriate rules to it - in which case (yes!) sf is not for you and you should be reading other stuff.

I've never read that much sf, I should add, which might be why I don't get too serious about what I expect from it. I seldom have time to read more than one or two books a week. When I was at University, I managed about five books a week, but only one of those would be sf: after all, I had to keep up with poetry, philosophy, politics, theology, mainstream fiction, drama, and on and on. These days, when I'm not immersed in High Court judgments and the like, I read more sf than anything else, but there's no way I'd manage even fifty books of sf a year. This means I read a lot of old stuff, a certain amount of new stuff, and mostly books that are on my mental reading list for one reason or another. If the quality of the material coming out in a particular year seems low, I'm unlikely to notice, because I

won't catch up on most of it until a couple of years later, or more. I read The Snow Queen, for example, only last year, and I thought it had all sorts of weaknesses, but I still enjoyed it and found that it raised some interesting thoughts in my mind about the origin of good and evil. So why should I get too cross about its weaknesses?

Joseph is right not to be too excited about fiction: there are more important things to worry about - like the nuclear arms race, starvation in the Third World, the rampant conservative backlash in our own society, the dehumanising structures of work that are still with us from last century..

As for 'parafiction': having written a PhD thesis largely on this kind of writing, I'm not getting all that excited about it. Some of my all-time favourite books would fit into this category: Barth's The Sot-Weed Factor and Giles Goat-Boy, Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five, even Broderick's Transmitters. Incidentally, it still seems to me useful to talk about 'metafiction': fiction that gains effects from revealing and playing with its own fictiveness. It also seems that, while all this is related to sf in some ways, it has roots far older than sf, notably, in ancient times, in Menippean satire, and in more recent times, Sterne's Tristram Shandy. Once the devices of metafiction became fashionable, it was inevitable that they would often be used at a fairly low level of literary ambition and thought. Accordingly, we now have writers like Tom Robbins and John Calvin Batchelor getting jaded sf fans all excited with a few tricks used sentimentally, and sometimes more cheaply than sf writers use theirs. In particular, I've been astounded at the rave reviews for that enjoyable but ultimately sloppy-minded piece of sub-Pynchon, The Further Adventures of Halley's Comet. Come on, team! You don't have to be taken in by this stuff. (9 June 1985)

Unable to resist such a challenge, I clambered up to 'B' for Batchelor, a bit past my arm's reach on our floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, and took down The Further Adventures of Halley's Comet. Then along came Aussiecon, and the need to re-read all of Gene Wolfe's work, and later the need to read Urban Fantasies, Strange Attractors, and Contrary Modes, so Batchelor is still unread and undefended.

And what do you mean: believe in sf? It sounds a bit like such immortal parental words as 'Do you mean you believe in all that sf stuff?' Well no, mum; if I did, they'd have to lock me up. I hate to re-re-repeat myself, but will anyway. All I really wanted out of science fiction was a 'good read'. The top authors gave me this, in books originally published before the early 1960s, and again in books published during the late 1960s and early 1970s (but a new lot of authors). Today's most successful authors seem to be those who write prose fit only for navigation by steam-shovel. If we find, every now and again, writers who give the same kind of playful/speculative enjoyment as sf writers once gave, I'll read them, even if 'sf' does not appear on the covers of their books. And I'll stay aware of people like Disch and Sladek, who still write entertainingly, although nobody gives them Hugos and Nebulas for their trouble.

But why re-re-repeat myself? The following correspondent says it all much better:

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

1 Ortygia House, 6 Lower Rd., Harrow, Middlesex HA2 ODA, England

Many thanks for The Metaphysical Review, which if it isn't SF Commentary is as near as damn it the same old thing we used to know and love so much. Welcome back. Good to see everyone whingeing away about why they no longer read science fiction. I think you have it right about the genre, you know: ambitious writers and discriminating readers have been edged out of the science fiction genre, abandoning the old place to the vested interests of those who either write low or read low.

I've written and said enough in recent years about my own disillusion with all this, so I'll spare you more. But after TMR came yesterday morning I was thinking how it all boils down to a matter of argument. One of the qualities of science fiction I used to find refreshing was that it was a kind of fiction that relies to some extent on argument. It was fought for, fought over, reasoned about, and analysed. But what the argument came down to was an essentially defensive statement: 'It's better than you think.' And it was based on a negative. Prejudice against science fiction has always been as strong as the much smaller passionate support from within, and because writers and readers are articulate they have made their case articulately. The argument was directed against a presumed adversary: the larger, uncaring, unilluminated outside world, which was traditionally perceived to scorn or ignore science fiction.

The problem for me these days is threefold.

Firstly, it's a difficult argument to make. There has been almost no responsible or informed criticism of science fiction from outside... so the presumed adversary is largely imaginary. The truth is that the majority of people who fail to appreciate the joys of science fiction don't really care: there's more indifference than ignorance or scorn. They are not, you know, all that interested in hearing the dire litany of Gernsback begat Campbell and Campbell begat Heinlein, and all that stuff.

Secondly, the argument has been deployed without visible effect for well over half a century, and I expect the next fifty years of impassioned advocacy will be just as fruitless. (Don't be misled by the current phenomenon of science fiction bestsellers or box office successes: that's just a fad.)

Thirdly, and for me most crucially, I believe the argument is not only falsely based but false in itself. The argument in favour of science fiction is all very well in theory until you produce examples to support that theory. When you take a long hard look at individual science fiction works, including (and perhaps especially) the accepted 'classics', there's very little that holds up in actuality. The consensus wisdom about the worth of science fiction is the product of adolescent reading habits. No one goes back and checks! Look again with adult eyes: Bester is a meretricious hack, much of Dick's work is hasty and scrappy, Heinlein is revered for books he wrote forty years ago, Asimov is trite and abstracted from any human concern... and since I'm not interested in just kicking the elderly and the dead, let me add that Ballard is often repetitive, Moorcock writes in funny voices, Disch mucks around with walking toasters, Delany is a

pretentious bore, Benford is a conscientious dullard, Le Guin is presumed to be beyond rational criticism, Niven couldn't write his way out of a damp paper bag, etc., etc. The argument doesn't hold because the intellect is unsupported by the evidence available.

There is, however, much life remaining in the imaginative metaphor, which is why people like you and me and many of your correspondents will go on finding a semblance of what we used to admire in science fiction out there in the despised 'mainstream'. It has always been there... but now it's only the dearth of genuine imaginative writing in contemporary science fiction that makes it seem like there's movement afoot. And all this is why I generally shuffle my feet and look evasive when I'm called a science fiction writer: it's not embarrassment about the company (in spite of what I rudely say about colleagues to people like you who know the argument), it's not even a negative regard for the surrounding works (ditto)... it's simply that no one will let it go at that. The fifty years of argument have established only that there is an argument, and in accounting for your own work you are usually obliged to account for the argument. I can no longer muster the enthusiasm. Sorry, chaps.

PS: John Alderson shot a cat?

(19 June 1985)

That's what he said in his letter, although I didn't talk to him about it at Aussiecon. Seems a very unfannish thing to do - but, with five cats underfoot at our place, sometimes even I feel like doing the same.

BRIAN EARL BROWN

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Your assertion that you mostly like books that are 'well written' is a little treacherous. Other times when people have used this phrase, a lot of other things creep in to determine what is 'well written'. Are the characters politically correct, for example? How well written can a book be if the author treats all female characters like bimbos? Or makes all men creeps? How well written can a book be if its characters are immoral or amoral? Can an Ayn Rand ever be well written to a socialist?

I don't think anyone has ever liked a book that she or he didn't consider well written. The phrase is a tautology: I like what I like. And who likes a book that doesn't conform to her or his beliefs - moral, political, and sexual? So to say one likes books that are well written is to say nothing at all.

(17 June 1985)

I suspect that the whole body of thought on aesthetics is designed to refute you, Brian, but since I don't have my Jim-Dandy Pocket Guide to Aesthetics around the house, I'll just have to fake it. You're right on one point: often in casual reviews, I've used the term 'well written' to mean 'books that I like'. But in my old days of writing serious and ferocious criticism, I meant by 'well written' those elements in the style of an author that could be judged by criteria beyond the personal predilections of the reader. Not that you can ever achieve this distance between you and either 'you the reader' or 'the book', but it can be fun to try. To answer one question specifically:

yes, Ayn Rand could be considered 'well written' to a socialist if she had refrained from hitting people over the head with her sermons. To me, one of the unwritten rules of good fiction is that you embody your message (if you're unsubtle enough to want to 'deliver messages') in the characters, story-line, and especially in the metaphors and turns of language that you use. As I remember Atlas Shrugged in particular, some passages of vituperation are lively and well written in themselves and, as such, could be entertaining even to a socialist. Surely the mark of an astute reader is the ability to enjoy a wide range of books, especially books that don't conform to currently held beliefs. Why should you always want to read books that tell you what you already know or believe? The enjoyment of reading is to see what's going on in the other person's head, even if you're sure it's a most peculiar head. Take two examples, Evelyn Waugh and Georgette Heyer. Both were right-wing snobs, whose political views would seem to prevent me reading their works. But Waugh had one of the finest wits in literature, plus a wonderful ability to write clever plots, invent vivid caricatures (rather than characters), and a willingness to be unsentimental, even about characters whose views he favoured. As for Georgette Heyer... some people would say the same about her, but I wouldn't; at least, not after reading the Hodge biography and reading some of the extracts from her novels quoted in the biography.

RICH BROWN

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I was interested in your exchange about Georgette Heyer with Patrick McGuire in TMR 3, but wonder what point you were trying to make when you said, 'Surely Heyer's Regency has little to do with the actual barbarity of life in that time?' I grant you that she generally romanticised the period and was not of the call-a-potato-a-dirty-potato school of writers; her best works were comedies of manners, after all. But I also think she showed more of the 'actual barbarity' of the period than did, say, Jane Austen, to whom Heyer is most often compared.

Austen, of course, actually lived in the period; while she was writing satirically, she was also writing about what she 'knew' - yet the society she lived in either effectively insulated her from most of the real 'barbarities' of her time or, at the very least, kept her from writing about them, since she was a female and therefore not 'allowed' to acknowledge she knew about them, even if she did.

But Heyer was writing from an historical perspective and at a time when a woman could at least acknowledge some of them. Although, as I say, she romanticised the period - she certainly gave more attention than was really necessary to just when the waltz was introduced to Polite Society (the Upper 2000 or ton) - her heroines often went off the beaten track to come face to face with the Real World. Most often they were running away from the society they knew with the vague notion of becoming governesses or mantua makers - either because they thought they weren't 'good enough' for the heroes or because their parents were trying to force them into an unwanted marriage - and while it's true they seldom suffered more than rudeness as a result, that was usually because the heroes hove on the scene to save them before they could suffer A Fate As Bad As Death. (In The Devil's Cub, the

heroine is only able to save herself from being raped by the 'hero' - whose only excuse is that he doesn't realise she's a Lady of Quality - by shooting him.)

Heyer's male protagonists (with a few notable and even delightful exceptions) tend to be rakish when they are not actual rakes, and to the extent that she depicts many of them as having faults which we can recognise but of which they would be blissfully unaware, I think she does so realistically. A Civil Contract is arguably her best novel - I don't think it her most enjoyable - in that it rather realistically depicts a 'marriage of convenience' between a member of the ton and the daughter of a merchant; all is eventually resolved with a 'happy ending', but not before the main characters confront a number of the period's grim realities.

I suspect all this could easily be irrelevant to the point you were intent on making; but since Heyer's focus was, for the most part, on the concerns of the upper classes of the period, I wonder to what extent she can be legitimately faulted for not placing more emphasis on ills that were, again for the most part, clearly outside her area of focus? Surely the 'actual barbarity' of the period was suffered by the lower classes, and it's seldom that even a peripheral character in her books is any 'lower' on the social scale than servant or middle class.

Which is the main reason why I can't get interested in Heyer's historical novels,.. nothing but my social prejudice, no doubt.

I'm inclined to grant you that her portrayal of the former may have been relatively unrealistic - I believe servants generally had more serious concerns than whether or not their 'master' might wear a wrinkled cravat and thus 'disgrace' them - but even here there's plenty of room to quibble. How many people in our society are just as devoted to the company that employs them - and would it be 'unrealistic' for writers a hundred years from now to depict them in that way?

I don't think I totally agree with McGuire - but acknowledge that this may simply be because he was generalising. He lumps Heyer's 'historical' novels outside the Regency period with her mysteries, but in my opinion the former are merely (as a general rule) dull while the latter are dreadful. And These Old Shades, which is set in the Georgian period and is the prequel to The Devil's Cub, is my second favourite Heyer book (my favourite is Cotillion), for all that it's a bit of a melodrama and that the plot turns on a somewhat offensive notion ('blood will tell').

Dorothy Dunnett is another woman writer who has turned her hand to writing only so-so mysteries, but I cannot too highly recommend her historical series - Game of Kings, Queen's Play, The Disorderly Knights, Pawn in Frankincense, and Checkmate. She's not only considerably more literate than Heyer and extremely subtle (I was devastated by how many cliches of the genre she managed to slip by me simply because she came at them from a refreshingly new angle), but the power and scope of her series puts even Tolkien to shame.

I wonder how many Australian fans have read Alexei Panshin's 'Anthony Villiers' series - Star Well, Masque World, and The

Thurb Revolution? They're difficult enough to find now, even here in the States, since they were published by Ace in the late 1960s and I don't believe they were ever reprinted. Alex admits they were inspired by Heyer, and I liked them somewhat better than the books of her best Regency imitator (Clare Darcey) for all that the series was never completed. I've asked him a couple of times why that was, and his answer has been that Times Changed even as he was writing them, and what he had found easy to do at the close of the '60s became increasingly difficult as we moved into the '70s. A pity - since they were visualised as a nine-novel series, one must put up with a number of loose ends that will now never be tied. I suspect Alex intended Villiers to marry the female main character of Star Well, for all that she's a young chit and begrudgingly going off to 'finishing school' at the end of the book; that the Troggs 'let' humankind 'win' the war against them out of kindness (they don't really care, one way or the other, and since it seemed to be so important to us, why not?); that Villiers is perhaps in line for the galactic throne (which would explain why people seem to be 'after' him) - but I'll never really know (short of actually asking Alex, which seems somehow akin to cheating). But I think any sf fan who likes Heyer would probably enjoy their humour and charm, despite all this. (26 June 1985)

I bought the Villiers novels when they appeared in the late 1960s, but I still haven't read them. George Turner reviewed one of them favourably in SF Commentary 1 (still available in SF Commentary Reprint Edition: First Year 1969, need I remind you).

DAVID J. LAKE

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Gloom! Gloom! Everyone's dying or giving up reading sf. Maybe it's part of the same process.

I think that as I get older (and therefore nearer to the crematorium) I lose interest in what may or may not happen to the human race because of technological fixes or nuclear wars. Whatever happens in the short run, in the long run death is certain, both for every one of us, and for the species, because of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. And for every other possibly existing species in the dying universe. Nothing lasts.

And therefore all the little questions don't matter. It doesn't matter if there is life in the oceans of Europa, or benevolent aliens lurking in some far galaxy. The only exciting questions are not scientific ones, but metaphysical ones - and therefore I think the title of your (ex?) sf magazine is a significant straw in the wind. ((brg: Nope. It just sounds better than the other titles I thought of.))

Frankly, what interests me is God. God, I would say, doesn't exist. Which is a good thing, because whatever exists is bound to die. Even protons decay in 10-to-the-zillionth years. But even when the universe has whimpered out of existence, God (who doesn't suffer from the drawback of existing) will still be going strong. And she may well give birth to other universes, filled with other poor saps like us.

Meanwhile, I am terribly interested in all the methods of living better for as long as I am condemned to exist. I am interested

in science only as far as science may provide clues to what God has been up to. And in sf only so far as it dabbles in such questions. I don't mind if it dabbles frivolously; in fact, frivolity is often the best strategy. I love Vonnegut and Douglas Adams. What should such creatures as us do with pomposity, with pretentiousness? (I tried Doris Lessing's 'Canopus' series and got stuck in the first volume. Bad case of p. & p.; and the dreadful old rubbish of Good and Evil races/planets. Our faults, dear Bruce, lie not in our stars beaming bad vibes at us, but in our selves - our inescapable aggressive primate natures.)

I don't read sf these days either - unless someone specially twists my mental arm. Fact is, I hardly read any new fiction. I find non-fiction much more thrilling; especially biology, psychology, philosophy. The last sf novel that really grabbed me was Riddley Walker. I'm reading that now for the fourth time, and I'm still spellbound. But then, it's all about my favourite subject - God.

I have also stopped writing fiction myself. At least, I think so. The only subject I would like to fictionalise is an impossible one - the next human race, the race that has conquered the problem of Evil, the race that knows. It's an impossible subject, because the author can't fictionally create a race that transcends his own condition. Well, there have been many attempts, but they are all really failures - interesting failures (like Childhood's End) but failures nevertheless.

Speaking of Arthur Clarke, have you noticed how he rubbishes religion (as in The Fountains of Paradise), yet invariably pops up with his own para-religion? His benevolent aliens, as at the end of Fountains, 2001, and 2010, are all thinly disguised gods.

And now for something totally different (or is it?). Diane Fox (TMR 3, p. 35) should be told that the theory of Freudians on flying dreams - that they are sexual - is total rubbish. Diane herself is right: they are basically about coping in 'every aspect' of your life. I have had lots of them (I even put one of them into my novel The Ring of Truth, giving it to my hero), and I know what they are about. They are not about getting it up, but about getting above the world, becoming free like a god. (See Ann Faraday's books, The Dream Game and Dream Power.) In my dreams, I fly by sheer mental power, and the higher I get, the more superior I feel to the poor earthbound other mortals; and I know that if I lose my self-confidence, I'm going to fall. (I haven't been flying very high lately...)

Keeping a dream diary can be fun; but I can't be bothered to write down every dream. (There are other things to do in life.) Still, I write down the more striking ones, and use them sometimes in my fiction. Once I dreamt I was driving in a car over the surface of the Moon, on a highway composed of luminous pale blue styrofoam. The shining blue road made a dramatic contrast with the grey lunar rocks on either side. The dream ended when I was doing a U-turn on a bridge over (presumably) a lunar rille. Freudians get stuffed; I think the content of that is basically religious, the Bridge being a good old symbol for the entrance to an Other World. Anyhow, I've used that dream in

my soon-to-appear fantasy novel, The Changelings of Chaan (Hyland House, September 1985).

Sometimes dreams can give you information about a serious medical condition, which may be known to your unconscious but not to the old left-brain. Thus, last year in February I kept dreaming, night after night, about death. Finally, I had a dream of seeing my own body lying on a bed in what might have been a hospital room. The very next evening, I got the news that I had a cancer in the wall of my stomach.

The dreams didn't actually help to alert me on that occasion - I had to get pain before I went for tests. If there's a next time, I think I'll pay more attention! As it happens, the medics cut me up p.i.d.q., and the cancer proved to be 'only' a lymphoma; and I seem to have made a complete getaway. No chemo-, no radio-, only regular check-ups. But still, for about a week I thought I'd had it. Dr Johnson was right, it does concentrate your mind wonderfully. Which is perhaps why I am so interested now in the ultimate questions.

All the best for now. Keep up the good Metaphysical work.

(6 June 1985)

I'm not sure how to react to your letter, David, since it seems that the early sections were all leading up to the last two paragraphs. It's hardly enough to wish you continued good health; but I'll do so anyway. My other thought was: what if it happened to me? What in life would remain important, and what would suddenly seem unimportant? So many of one's actions depend on a belief in a continuing life that it's hard to work out what you would feel if that perspective disappeared. Maybe I would just publish a large number of fat fanzines very fast, and put the whole debt on Bankcard. But that's what I was aiming to do during the next few months, anyway.

My own fundamentalist Christian background pursues me too closely for me to worry too much about a personal God. I'm more interested in the Total Pattern, if there is one. Can some basic sense of pattern in human affairs save us from nuclear annihilation? Not much comfort in the evidence based on current human behaviour. It seems more like a continuous miracle that any of us is left alive in 1985. I keep remembering Yvonne's words about The Lathe of Heaven (in her article in this issue): maybe somebody is keeping us alive by the power of effective dreams.

Everything stays interesting. I felt this particularly during the 1985 World Convention, especially as I haven't enjoyed conventions for some time. What's life all about? Those specific succulent seconds when you can break the boredom of routine mundanity, and suddenly experience something exciting and new. Serendipity combined with transcendence. The really pleasant surprise. That's the feeling I get from my favourite fiction writers, even those in sf, and especially from absurdist writers such as those you mention, David. I keep writing down my dreams because often my badly written accounts remind me of remarkable scenes which otherwise would not have been part of my experience. I've still never had a flying dream.

BETTY DE GABRIELE

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I have experienced quite a few flying dreams, most frequently as a child. I haven't had a dream off the ground in almost two years now, and I have heard that the frequency of these dreams drops off as we get older - something to do with losing the carefree attitude of childhood. Some people believe it is actually 'astral projection', although I don't believe this. (If it's true, however, I've had a great bird's-eye view of both Melbourne and Sydney and accidentally scared some poor cows out in some back paddock!) I regret the passing of this dreaming experience, if it truly has passed, as the feeling of exhilaration given by these dreams still remains with me.

Thank you for TMR, and if you accept artwork in exchange for a copy or two, I will be willing to contribute. (1 September 1985)

Yes, I'd like artwork, especially cover artwork. So would most other fanzine editors in Australia, as our fan artists tend to become professionals, and too busy to continue contributing to fanzines.

Back to dreams later, or in some other fanzine. Meanwhile, here are two correspondents who might almost have been writing to each other, rather than to TMR:

BRIAN W. ALDISS

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As ever, TMR is full of interest. You have never turned out a bad fanzine yet. But the general condemnation of sf by the literati puzzles me. We are the people who once stood up for it and sang its praises; why do we find no good in it now? Is it a kind of snobbery - now the stuff is so popular, so readily available, we don't want it? Is it that we are getting too old for a youthful mode? Or is it that sf has, by some objective standard, declined? I won't pursue this question, beyond saying that I have written to Van Ikin rather strongly on this subject; most of his contributors pour thin piss on sf - yet he still sails under the sf banner, like a pirate. I am determined to revise and update Billion Year Spree in an attempt to solve this vexing riddle of modern worth. (19 June 1985)

FRED JAMESON

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I'm very glad you're doing a new magazine, as yours were always among the very few I really like to read. I also understand the discouragement that seems to have moved you from sf to other, more general literary perspectives, as I've gone through this experience myself. Oddly, however, I found myself emerging from this discouragement at the moment you were entering it; and even more oddly, it was, among other things, Aldiss's 'Helliconia' series which persuaded me that - after the wave of schlock series and of fantasy novels - sf was coming back with new force, the very forms changed and renewed through that period of seeming deterioration. In other words, I don't think Aldiss's effort would have been possible until after this wave of fantasy had prepared and shaped readers for some more ambitious use of these longer forms of historical vision. I quite disagree with

Broderick, however, as I found volume I (Helliconia Spring) the most interesting, and II (Helliconia Summer) more of a let-down (have not seen the third volume yet). But surely this is a tremendous recoup for Aldiss too (whose recent work I have been less enthusiastic about). What I would have dared to say to Brian in a fan letter I meditated, but did not write, was that above all I admired the intelligence of this series - its marvellous narrative inventiveness being taken for granted - but here on top of it is a literature for grown-ups and a very intelligent man asking mature questions about the span of history and a range of landscapes and experiences normally furnished us in the mode of adolescent fantasy. It is a renewal of history in a new way; and I've reread the first volume several times with pleasure and admiration.

But this isn't the only sign of renewal in sf; the new Delanys are also to my mind quite wonderful (and mature/intelligent) and a real comeback for him as well.

Finally a pitch for two more favourites. Why do people not talk more about the wonderful novels of Suzy McKee Charnas (a double series, and a horror/sf book of great elegance, The Vampire Tapestry)? And do you know the work of my friend Kim Stanley Robinson, whose first and second novels have appeared very close to each other: The Wild Shore and Icehenge? Both are exciting and new, especially (for me) the second one, which is apparently poorly distributed and which people will have less of a chance to see.

(30 May 1985)

My own distaste for current sf is felt most strongly when standing in front of one of those packed shelves of sf at Space Age Books and realising that the only readable books - with very few exceptions - are reprints of books published ten years ago or more. At the same time I feel disappointed by most of the new books by most of my old favourites, including, I must admit, Helliconia Spring. I felt that in those books all sorts of propositions about human behaviour were being presented 'straight' instead of ironically or metaphorically, as they would have been in Aldiss books of a decade or two earlier. I've always depended on Aldiss as one of the few writers to laugh at himself and his characters, but this time he seemed to be taking it all rather ponderously. But maybe I'm wrong. I found out I was wrong about Wolfe's 'The Book of the New Sun' by tackling it twice, so I will certainly get back to the 'Helliconia' books.

Charnas? I liked the novella of 'The Vampire Tapestry', but have not read the novel version or anything much else by her. I've liked Kim Stanley Robinson's short fiction since it first appeared, and I think 'The Disguise' just about the best American sf short story of the 1970s. But The Wild Shore was at least 200 pages too long; it was one of those novels that convinced me I was no longer a reader of straight-down-the-middle American future fiction. But I bought Icehenge, and yes, it looks quite interesting.

MARIE MACLEAN

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About the wake you're currently holding for the death of science fiction... My enthusiasm has just been revived by Joanna Russ's Extra (Ordinary) People. To be honest, I came to it with some

trepidation because, in spite of being (almost) a card-carrying feminist, I found her previous books (apart from that marvellous thing about the Morlock) too didactic and too ideological. However, this is really interesting, subtle, and challenging, especially 'The Mystery of the Young Gentleman'.

Tell Patrick McGuire that there are people around who enjoy both Heyer's Frederica and Delany's Dhalgren, people like me. Both happen to be really well written.

Thanks for selling me Murnane's Landscape with Landscape. Being a TMR type, I still have a sneaking preference for The Plains, but Murnane is a great writer, whatever he does. However, in all that marvellous play of Chinese boxes and mirrors reflecting mirrors, I still give the palm to 'The Battle of Acosta Nu'. That section is pure genius, scary genius, which leaves us all wondering about 'inner space', which is surely why we're all friends, because we do.

A personal note: At the end of two years of gastric trouble, four doctors, and umpteen tests, a friend's suggestion that I give up coffee cured the problems overnight! (11 July 1985)

Which is the right point to mention (as I did briefly in TMR 4) that Elaine discovered that safflower oil is the main trigger of her hives. There may be a few other things as well, but staying off various types of oil product has helped her greatly.

BUCK COULSON

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This is hand-printed because I had a coronary on 27 June and the doctor says typing is too strenuous; I have to wait two more weeks. Since one of the nurses said my recovery 'was touch and go for a while there', I'm scared enough to follow orders. I spent two weeks in hospital, but I'm home now, mostly catching up on my reading. Which brings me to your comment on my loc in TMR 3. Gee, Bruce, all you have to do is subscribe to Amazing Stories and you'll get my book reviews.

Amazing Stories has not been distributed in Australia for at least a couple of years, maybe longer. Minotaur Books had the latest issues the other day, so they must have airmail-imported them.

My father cured my hives on the advice of a doctor. I was twelve or thirteen, mowing the yard on a hot day, and I broke out, as I frequently did. The doctor gave me some medicine and, as we were leaving the office he told Dad, 'Make him finish the yard.' Dad did, and I never had hives again. Other allergies, yes - but not hives. I'm not sure this is applicable to Elaine, however. Bruce, your bit about 'known allergy-inducing foods' is bullshit. Anything can induce allergy - it depends on the individual. People can be - and some are - allergic to wheat germ or yoghurt as well as to the foods you mention. A rapid change in temperature will give me asthma. And so on.

Of course you're right. But there do seem to be some foods that are more likely than others to induce allergic reactions, and they are the ones tested first.

Sf books that I've liked from the last couple of years: three by Tim Powers, The Drawing of the Dark, The Anubis Gates (his best), and Dinner at Deviant's Palace (his latest); Hilbert Schenck - anything except Steam Bird (I liked A Rose for Armageddon and At the Eye of the Ocean); The Postman, by David Brin, for sf-adventure; same for Clay's Ark, by Octavia Butler; The Book of Kells, by MacAvoy (and I definitely disliked her Damiano trilogy); Native Tongue, by Suzette Haden Elgin. And one shorter work, 'In the Sumerian Marshes', by Gerald Pearce, in the September 1984 Amazing. Only time I've written a fan letter to the author of a magazine story.

Of course, now that I have a lot of time I'm reading other things: The March of Folly, by Barbara Tuchman; Duty Honor Empire, by John Lord, a biography of the British Col. Meinertzhagen; Narrative of an Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam - a story of jungle warfare in the 1770s told by a participant. Next in line are The Great Cat Massacre, The Olmecs, and Upfield's House of Cain.

I have yet to finish a book by Rudy Rucker, but I may try one more before giving up. Or I may not. (24 July 1985)

It's a bit too late to say 'Get well' but I'll say it anyway. I hope your ~~recovery has gone~~ well, aided by all that reading. I'll have to try some of those sf books, if only to make sure that I haven't missed out on something special.

RALPH ASHBROOK

303 Tregaron Rd., Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania 19004, USA.

One aspect of the shift from science fiction to metaphysics is what's happening 'out there'. The world at large seems to have grown in its capacity to address issues that only pioneers were playing with from the 1930s to the 1950s. For example, The Lincoln Hunters has just been turned into an enormously popular film with Tucker getting a hand from Heinlein.

Now the preceding sentence is either a metaphor or a damned lie. The name of the film is Back to the Future. It borrows extensively (and I believe unwittingly) from Tucker, with a teeny idea from Heinlein. What impresses me is that the sense-of-wonder-if-you-will that I felt when reading The Lincoln Hunters is being felt by millions now whose parents would have, at best, frowned. I can't for the time being (and Tucker should certainly be comfortable with time-beings) be bothered with justice to one artist; I've got this whole planet on the verge of not only eating but maybe swallowing major transformational ideas.

We're talking quantum evolutionary shift here. Where's my typewriter? There's a science fiction story here somewhere. What? Turn on the tv? My story is on Laverne and Shirley? And it's a rerun? Ah, that's why we switched to metaphysics. - to remain on the leading edge.

If you can help it, don't read anything about Back to the Future, including the above. Just see it. (11 July 1985)

I will... but haven't yet. I wonder if Tucker thinks he's responsible for Back to the Future? If he does, will he sue?

SKEL

25 Bowland Close, Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 5NW, England

Swelp me, but the first passage of Lem's that Lucy quoted - from His Master's Voice - reminded me in tone of nothing so much as a passage out of the pulps. You know the sort, where a potted history is given to explain how things got to be the way they are. Such passages were also full of comparatives about size. Things were big. I don't mean just your average huge 'big', I mean Galaxy-spanning, Infinity-mangling, Deca-gigawatt big. I mean BIG. Unlike E. E. Smith, Lem doesn't measure his 'bigness' in millions of spaceships, or thousands of galaxies, or whathaveyou. Lem's bigness is in dollars. Hundreds of billions of them. Thousands of billions of them. 'Seven trillion dollars' even. Let's see Boskone stand against those sort of figures, eh? Not a chance. I suppose we should be thankful for small mercies, namely that Lem is a man of his time, obsessed with dollars. What is to be the wave of the future? Hopefully it will not wash in the direction of Marty Cantor! I don't think I could stand Mega-grossness. The universe isn't yet ready for the Billion-bogey Bomb, the Zillion-zit Phaser.

And then, after me saying that Lem's piece put me in mind of the pulps, Lucy went on to say that 'Other parts of His Master's Voice are more anachronistic...'

I gave up right there. I know when I'm licked.

As apparently do you.

Now come on, Bruce, are you a fan, or aren't you? How much time do you spend reading fanzines, writing articles, reviews, and what have you? I wouldn't mind betting that it's pretty much on a par with the time you spend reading other things, or watching films. So why this glaring omission in your lists? Where is your list of 1984's ten best fanzines? Where is the summation of the twenty best fan articles? Are you ashamed of being a fan? I am tempted to suggest that you are possibly more likely to include a list of the ten best craps you've taken during the year than mention anything pre-eminently fannish ('July third, the morning after a curry - Dynamite! A moving experience.') Of course, you obviously haven't yet grasped the insidious advantages of such a listing (I am, of course, talking about the fanac, you fool, not the craps). Because you haven't been taking notes, you don't have to worry about catching up from the year zero. This is a tremendous boon for an anally retentive neatness fanatic like you. You can just bonk right in from January of next year. Get with it, Gillespie! The Fanac Police are watching you!

And of course, speaking of fanac, you had to go and turn the screw. Come to think of it, why does 'turning the screw' have such a bad connotation? Let's face it, if it weren't for turning the screw, untold thousands of screwdriver manufacturers would be cast upon the dole, their children left to starve. I think I detect the evial machinations of the Amalgamated Hammer Workers Union behind this (or AWHU for short, which is what you usually say after you hit your thumb with one of their hammers). But back to your turning of the screw. You did it right there with the comment that you were particularly chuffed to 'get back on

the mailing list of Small Friendly Dog'. And here's me having just kicked it into touch. Sleeping dogs are going to have to lay as they will for a while... hence this LoC. I am not going to relinquish my place on the TMR mailing list without a fight. Oh, and in parting... Fucking stuffed you in the First Test, didn't we!
(20 June 1985)

First Test? What's that?

At Aussiecon II, the members of one of the panels were grumbling about the dreadful state of fanzines today. (You guessed it. Joseph Nicholas and Ted White were two of the people on that panel.) I asked, realising the moment I did so that I was insulting several 1985 Hugo nominees in the audience, 'Can anybody on the panel think of a better fanzine during the last 12 to 18 months than Rataplan?' Nobody could - until Marc Ortlieb suggested Small Friendly Dog. Others agreed. So you'd better revive it, Skel.

So why don't I do a Top Ten of Fanzines? Because I haven't kept the right sorts of lists. Because I still don't receive a lot of the well-reviewed fanzines, especially from Britain. Because fanzines are not objects you place in competition with each other. I don't make up lists of the Top Ten Letters Received From Friends. I feel much the same way about fanzines; they are personal communications, not consumer products. Some fanzines are too impersonal for me to like much; they would be bottom of any list. But top of any list? I can't make decisions like that. Off the top of my head, I can name SFD, Trap Door, Rataplan, and Stefantasy. The entertaining newszines - Ansible, Notional, Thyme, and File 770 - provide the liveliest reading these days. People forget that Science Fiction is a fanzine, and a good one. So is Foundation - although nobody among its editors would admit the fact. Probably it's the only current magazine that reminds me of the best of the old SF Commentaries. The only Yandro I've seen in years was very enjoyable. Instant Gratification and Mainstream. And if I go on any longer I'll insult the people I've left out. Which is the real reason, probably, I don't do a Fanzine Top 10.

I'm more interested in the fanzines I haven't seen lately: new issues of Warhoon (I'm told it's out, but hasn't reached me), egoscan (but that finally arrived a few days ago), Gambit, Mota, Wing Window, and even Chunder!, Philosophical Gas, and Tippon. Start publishing, you lot.

The only other comment I've had on Lucy's Lem article was from:

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER
Wien, Austria

I enjoyed the reviews of Lem; but your reviewer is wrong: what's in Imaginary Magnitude is all there is of Golem XIV.

(20 June 1985)

DAVE PIPER

7 Cranley Drive, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 6BZ, England

On dreams... well, I'll tell you, I had a b-a-d'un a couple of years ago. We were on holiday in Portugal the year before last. Very hot, specially at nights... very warm and we didn't sleep all that well. I'd drifted off this particular night and... and

I was at home, had my arms round Sara, was looking over me shoulder at a huge, multi-coloured, half-circle (that famous photo of the first H-bomb, you know the one I mean?), and saying to Sara, 'Oh jeezus, those bastards have really gone and done it. We've gotta find Mum and Clare.' And I woke up in a cold sweat. It was a really vivid, nightmarish dream. The first time, that I can recall, I've ever dreamt about The Bomb... I have no idea what triggered it off but I don't want it again. I tellya!

On books and stuff... well, I read considerably less sf now than I used to... me favourite books in the last year or so include very few modern sf, although I've been buying old magazines for some considerable time now so, I guess, sf is still my main reading matter. My favourite books include items like Feather's Encyclopædia of Jazz, Humphrey Lyttelton's 'Best of Jazz' series, and Collier's Making of Jazz... which gives a slight hint of my current preoccupation. In the 'fifties, specially the early 'fifties when I was in my early teens, my great interest was traditional jazz, which then developed into an interest in modern jazz but, after me Army stint, my interest waned and, basically, lay dormant for over twenty years. I even sold all my records. For about the past year or so I've been buying all those records that, when they first came out, I couldn't afford. Stacks of Clifford Brown, Bechet (especially the ones on Blue Note), Armstrong Hot Five et al, Parker, Count Basie, MJQ, and all like that. I think, basically, my interest was rekindled by the lack of (IMHO) any interesting, new, rock stuff and... natch!... the fact that John B. doesn't seem to be doin' anything these days. He probably can't due to extreme age and, probably, being bombed out all the time!

It's a little offputting, to tell you the truth; when I go up to me favourite sf shop on a Saturday I often call off at HMV in Oxford Street and buy a record. I find meself with a mid-fifties hard-bop record on me lap, reading an early-fifties F&SF or late-'forties ASF. Talk about living in the past! It's probably all down to me increasing old age and a desire to return to a time when I was a virile, dashing, handsome, clean-shaven, gold-like... snotbag!

Everybody's well 'ere; well... I say that, but we went to a friend's twenty-fifth wedding anniversary party last night, and Sara, whose fifteenth birthday it was as well yesterday, got just a little half cut. Well, not to put too fine a point to it, she got smashed and she's been like a wet week today, to say the least. She'll learn. I'd sooner she learned in my company than not, anyway. Clare's still keen on nursing... she had an interview at Guys (very famous teaching hospital) on Thursday and to everyone's surprised delight, has had an offer of a place. It depends on the results of her A Level studies, but it's still pretty great to get the offer... they have about 9000 applications a year and take circa 200. The chicks are gonna flee the nest, and Cath and I have mixed feelings. Well, to put it mildly, we hate the idea... just be ol' Darby and Joan left 'ere then... couple of old farts. (16 June 1985)

I must be doing something right with this magazine, to get a full-scale letter of comment from Dave Piper. This reminding me of ancient history is offputting to me as well. The last time I saw the Pipers, in early

1974, Sara was three or four, and Clare was (I think) five or six. I don't think I would recognise them now, and they wouldn't recognise me. (At Aussiecon, Gene Wolfe didn't recognise me, and he hadn't seen me for twelve years either.)

My New Year's resolution: to be aggressively nostalgic. Of course the old sf was better than that of the 1980s. And even I, who started listening to jazz only a few years ago, found out quickly that not much great jazz happened after 1930. (I still don't like 'fifties bop, but I like some of the jazz/rock fusion from the early 1970s.) Rock seems to have died during the 1980s (says he, who still spends a fortune on rock records).

I've had several dreams in which I've been very much alive after the Bomb has been dropped. Dust and fallout may fill the air, and the Final War has definitely begun, but I'm still sitting there, observing it all, scared silly.

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS

27 Borough Rd., Kingston on Thames, Surrey KT2 6BD, England.

(21 June 1985:)

I've given up going after jobs, being met by the stonewall: 'How old are you?' But there is light on the horizon. I've two cheques owing, one from a US anthology which is reprinting one of my sf stories from Ted Carnell's New Writings; and a new children's horror story which will be appearing in an Armada paperback, Nightmares 3. A picture story editor has asked to see the first quarter of a script, so I may get something there. And in two to three weeks time I shall be starting part-time work at home, as a tutor for a correspondence school, in writing (marking students' assignments). That, at least, will bring in a small regular income.

(5 August 1985:)

I recently filled up a claim form to get the old age pension; yes, you have to claim. (In my innocence I thought it was automatic when you reached sixty-five.) Then the queries start... Will I continue writing? How much do I expect to make? ('Not much!') Then I'm asked to sign a form requesting me to (a) limit my income, or (b) limit my hours of work to twelve. Can you imagine a writer working twelve hours a week by the clock and then stopping? This is bureaucracy gone mad.

Usually I view fanzines with interest; TMR 4 with enthusiasm. Without doubt, the best thing you've ever put out. Don Ashby is brilliant, Chris Johnston's illustrations are brilliant, the whole thing is brilliant. This issue is going to be a classic! Don Ashby's piece really is what fan writing should be about, and done better than any other piece I've read, anywhere, anytime. Thank you, Bruce, for reviving my faith in fandom.

I had not, incidentally, heard of The Magic Pudding before; though I have read something else by Norman Lindsay so long ago the title eludes me.

Recommended reading: The Anubi's Gates, by Tim Powers; Damballah, by John Edgar Wideman, stories of an American Negro family over several generations; and Le Carre's The Little Drummer Girl.

Glad to hear Elaine's okay now. Hope you are too, and all the cats. I'm fit and well and hope to start thriving soon.

I've always admired you greatly, Syd, for soldiering on, writing full-time when you can, taking jobs in between writing stints. I hope that your old age pension gives you real freedom at last.

And I hope your comments kick Don Ashby into regular fan writing - and maybe persuade Chris to send me some more artwork.

ANDREW WEINER
(again)

You might be interested in a recent short story of mine, 'Klein's Machine', which was in the April 1985 Asimov's. The story is about, among other things, an sf fan... or what I imagined an sf fan to be like, based only on my reading of fanzines like SF Commentary, back in the mid-1970s when I first tried to write the story. Originally it was about a fan who had the delusion that he travelled to the far future. It was in fact Robert Silverberg, in his capacity as editor of the New Dimensions anthology series, who pointed out to me that this was Not Science Fiction. When I finally got around to rewriting the story, I made the question of whether or not Klein does travel in time a little more ambiguous.

Asimov's, by the way, is a vastly improved magazine in recent years, and I don't say this only because they've started buying my stories. It's become the most consistently interesting of the US magazines - of course it's losing readers as a result, but then, so is Analog. In some ways, in fact, I like it better than Interzone, which gets bogged down quite a lot in obscurantism and 1960s New Wave nostalgia. But Interzone does seem to be finally developing some new voices of its own. Malcolm Edwards could be one of them, if he would only write some more. Whenever I see a terrific debut story like 'After-Images', I think of T. L. Sherrard, the guy who wrote 'E for Effort' and then just stopped. Well, I guess he did finally write a few other things, but nothing anyone really noticed. It must be a terrible burden to start at the top (not a problem of mine, obviously). Sherrard died recently, by the way. (19 June 1985)

At Aussiecon, Malcolm Edwards's official line was that he was quitting writing fiction while he was ahead.

Now that I've stopped buying them, maybe the humble little sf magazines are undergoing a renaissance. Or have done so, and I didn't notice.

We seem to have ended this column without too many deaths or disasters (except T. L. Sherrard's death, and very recently, those of Jack Gaughan, Theodore Sturgeon, and Italo Calvino). I should pay more attention to births and marriages, but that would mean copying out large slabs from issues of Thyme. At Aussiecon, I finally met Madeleine, recent daughter of Irene Pagram and Lee Harding. And I'm sure there are plenty more fan babies on the way... and all the last crop will be teany-boppers before the next Worldcon (Perth in '94) is held in Australia. I'll be 47 years old then. Oh.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

VARIOUS FANZINE EDITORS who were kind enough to add me to their trade list since last time; more, please, especially some of the well-reviewed British fanzines that I haven't seen yet; ROBERT MAPSON, the only correspondent to suggest that 'TMR requires more interior decorations. I would like to suggest pictures of naked ladies doing things with gerbils' - and who lists favourite fantasists as 'Lewis, Macdonald, Ende, Garner, Poe, Dante, Milne, Mishima, Dick, et al... only one of these is to be found on the publisher's sf shelf'; LEE HARDING, who wrote: 'Is the fanzine world really ready for the selective nose-picking of Bruce Gillespie?'; probably not, Lee, but they got it anyway; LEIGH EDMONDS, who has stopped reading fiction, except for large books about Australian history (that's one way of interpreting your letter, Leigh); 'LAN' LASKOWSKI, whose computer wiped most of a fanzine stored on diskette, and whose favourite recent reading includes 'Stick by Ellmore Leonard, World's End by Joan Vinge, Courtship Rite by Donald Kingsbury, The Tomorrow Testament by Barry Longyear, Emergence by David Palmer, The Branch by Mike Resnick, and Land of Laughs by Jonathan Carroll'; GIAN PAOLO COSSATO, to whom I must apologise for having committed his letter (TMR 3) to stencil before receiving his second letter; quite a few people sent best wishes, including Franz Rottensteiner, who mentioned that he was present when you and Agnes met; PAUL ANDERSON, who has kept me up to date on news from Adelaide, but who couldn't attend Aussiecon as he and Brenda are expecting their first child; IAN PENHALL, with some interesting yarns about his line of work, and who liked Dickson's 'Lost Dorsai' series and some of the recent 'Dune' books by Herbert; STEVE GREEN, whose 'Best Of' lists keep changing, but currently (on 19 June, when he wrote the letter) include Tom Robbins's Jitterbug Perfume and Rob Holdstock's Mythago Wood; JOSEPH NICHOLAS, who thoroughly disapproves of long letters of comment in fanzines, but sent me a three-pager anyway (the most interesting of the lot) and wouldn't let me print a word of it; you really know how to break a fanzine editor's heart, Joseph; PATRICK MCGUIRE, who writes truly in saying 'I have the distinct impression that contemporary publishers like faits accomplis (or whatever the plural is; I just checked two dictionaries to no avail), and want above all to get the thing locked up in galley or even page proofs before giving an author a chance to raise an objection'; and who asked about the 'AH' and 'BH' at the end of my phone numbers ('AH' = 'At Home' or 'After Hours'; 'BH' = 'Business Hours'); BEN INDICK, who, 'as your friendly neighbourhood druggist (chemist?)', offered some good advice to Elaine about her hives, but spoiled it all by saying to me, 'Of course she may be allergic to you, and that leaves her a choice...'; MICHAEL HAILSTONE, who points out correctly that even Oxford style is inconsistent; but the aim of adopting Oxford style universally would be to make publishers' styles consistently inconsistent; TOM WHALEN, who sent me copies of two books by Robert Walser, as well as an article about Walser which might appear in this issue; and is yet another correspondent to recommend 'John Sladek's Tik-Tok ((which)) is as good as they say, a wonderful romp'; ANDY SAWYER, who envies me for attending a Neil Young concert, but I envy him for having the chance to attend a Richard Thompson concert; RICHARD FAULDER, whose long and interesting letter covered a range of points; including: 'If it's any consolation, I didn't read you as making the point that John Brosnan seems to think you did. As you pointed out, you tried something and it worked after you had tried other things which hadn't worked. This isn't a

blanket endorsement of naturopathy'; certainly not, especially as the same medical practice that helped me failed to help Elaine, who solved her own problem through trial-and-error testing; DIANE FOX, most of whose letter I'll use in a special issue of either TMR or my FAPA magazine; JOAN GASKELL, whose favourite books read in 1984 were (with an asterisk beside the best-of-the-best): The History Man by Malcolm Bradbury, The Snow Queen by Joan Vinge, *Meridian by Alice Walker, The Human Factor by Graham Greene, How Far Can You Go by David Lodge, *Doctor Mirabilis by James Blish, Christian at the Crossroads by Karl Rahner, Original Sins by Lisa Alther, Daughters of the Dreaming by Diane Bell, Dutch Shea Jr. by John Gregory Dunne, Father-Daughter Rape by Elizabeth Ward, Bodily Harm by Margaret Atwood, Praxis by Fay Weldon, Malafrena by Ursula Le Guin, Growing Up the Country by P. Toyne and D. Vachon, *Sticks that Kill by Trevor Shearston, Constance by Lawrence Durrell, My Antonia by Willa Cather, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime by Josephine Flood, *Matilda, My Darling by Nigel Krauth, and In God's Name by David Yallop; DON BOYD, who is beginning a 35-to-40-page Australian comic with a strong sf emphasis; those interested should write to him at PO Box 19, Spit Junction, NSW 2088; KEN OZANNE, who, when he finally caught up with TMR 2 after seven months overseas, wrote: 'I can't believe in a Gillespie that isn't drinking coffee. You used to drink even more coffee than I do and perhaps even more than our fellow member of coffeeholics anonymous, Jack Chalkert'; and all I could tell Ken at Aussiecon was that I had backslid completely - now drank as much coffee as ever - can't keep away from it; ERIC LINDSAY, who would like Don Ashby to return to fan writing, and who appreciated one particular comment in the 'Magic Pudding Club' issue: 'I always thought Robin Johnson's concept of a floor as a filing system was a truly marvellous idea... One day I'll work out the indexing system as well'; DAVID LAKE (again), warning about the planet-wide epidemic possibilities of AIDS; to which Elaine replied that there are only two known ways of spreading the disease - by sexual penetration or by intravenous injection - so quite a few of us should be safe for a while yet; JIM HAMILTON who, as long-time organiser of the Victorian Fellowship of Australian Writers, must have seen all literary types, but who was still taken aback by a real-live fanzine; all was forgiven because Elaine and I are owned by five cats; MARC ORTLIEB, who did a great job of keeping us up to date on the short story contest (see elsewhere in this issue), although he was supposed to be running a million other aspects of Aussiecon at the same time; and...

and...

...several people whose letters I've received in the last three weeks. I want to use quite a few of their letters in the next issue, so I'll just mention that they are ALEXANDER NEDELKOVICH; ANNIS SHERHERD; SPAN; LELAND SAPIRO; TONY PEACEY; BERND FISCHER; PIP MADDERN; PHILIP BIRD; MAE STRELKOV; JEANNE MEALY; and LOIS ARNOTT.

Enough, enough. A reminder that if you really don't think you can send anything to me that would keep you on the mailing list, you are allowed to subscribe: \$20 for 5, or \$5 a single issue. Rates will rise in the new year. But I'd rather receive mungy letters than dry, crackly money - unless you feel like sending both. See yuz...

Last stencil typed: 6 October 1985.

