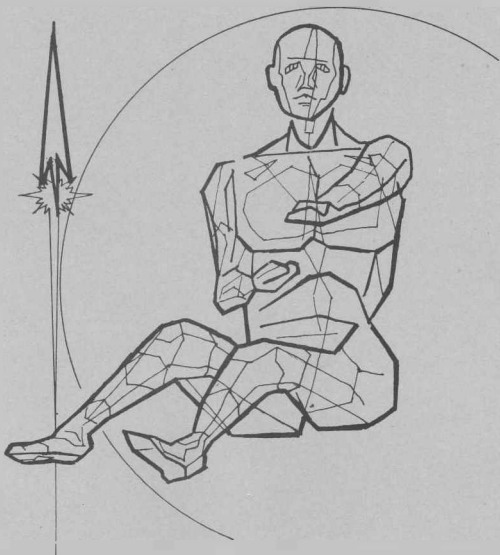


VECTOR

SCIENCE
FICTION
REVIEW

N° 57



JOHN HENRI HOLMBERG on
URSULA K. LE GUIN'S
THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

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APOLOGIA PRO VITA...

Perfection, as the philosopher had it in James Stephens' delightful fantasy The Crock of Gold, is finality; finality is death; nothing is perfect. In the case of VECTUR this appears to have had a ring of awful truth. Having finally achieved the distinction of getting into print, and having appeared to be on the very brink of producing that one definitive perfect issue, printing problems and loss of communication in the chain of command brought us to our knees. Our apologies to all our faithful readers.

For this issue our lead item is John-Henri Holmberg's article on the award-winning Ursula LeGuin novel The Left Hand of Darkness. This novel continues to arouse controversy, and the critiques seem to be as varied in attitude as the critics. But even to casual reading it is apparent that Miss LeGuin's world of Gethen owes certain features to Scandinavia, so that this view from Stockholm should be of particular interest. In our next issue a major article on the stories of Cordwainer Smith is planned, so keep your fingers crossed.

In the meantime, I would like to comment on another book, a book which seems to have been quoted recently on every occasion on which people have spoken of the high class of science fiction being written outside science fiction...

ART, JANNED ART

Having been accused (by Tony Sudbery, in SPECULATION 26, among others) of a certain lack of literary perspective (in thinking P. G. Dick greater than Heinlein

- that's what rankles!), the book that I have chosen for this term, class, is Vladimir Nabokov's latest - Ada (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969). Nobody, I trust, is going to suggest that Nabokov is illiterate, unworthy of our examination.

But Ada does, I feel, raise certain questions about the relationship between our genre and the world outside.

It has been apparent at least since such stories as "Lance" (Nabokov's Dogon, Penguin, 1950) that Nabokov occasionally uses science fiction techniques, even if he has a (perhaps justifiable) contempt of what he calls "physics-fiction". Ada is - among other things - a science fiction novel.

You might have missed that in the advertising.

But what else are you going to call a novel which, set in a North America inhabited by a pre-revolution Russian Aristocracy, has trans-Atlantic airlines and a Channel tunnel before 1900, and in which electricity in its various manifestations has been banned before the story opens, circa 1860?

Being Nabokov, this parallel world is never explained. It simply is. We get glimpses of our own world - Terra - as the fragmented dream of Heaven in deranged minds. But for the most part Nabokov takes delight in confusing parallels - making Techehoff write The Four Sisters with its characters dreaming of the high life in the capital - Moscow, Id. Or,

using Vinland as an esoteric variant of America, he will gull you into thinking that it was the Vikings all along, so casually turning it that you might miss the reference that the discoverer of the continent was, after all, named Vinlander. Ada abounds in this sort of wordplay.

It abounds in most of the things that Nabokov delights in. It is an intellectual entertainment of the level of Fast Fire, a curious obsessional love story like Lolita, as multi-level as The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, as fantastic as Invitation to a Beheading. It is even a Russian emigré novel like The Gift. It contains butterflies and the Russia of his childhood, and the America of his maturity. It carries on extensive guerrilla warfare against Freud. While it is always dangerous to read too much of an author into his work, I suspect that there is a very great deal of Nabokov in Ada. And on this level, I think that Ada is Nabokov's most successful novel to date.

But in this case what are we to make of the fact that "Ada", besides being the name of the heroine, is also used to mean hell? And is it mere mischief that bring in the suggestion that this world is Demonia?

To answer that, I think one must look at the reason Nabokov chose to use a fantasy setting for his novel. Towards the end I asked myself which of novel this one reminded me of. And the answer - Philip Dick's The Man In The High Castle. Somewhere, at the very roots of both, is a question about the nature of reality.

hLL, MCF MIAJH

Nabokov has had a tendency in all his books to suggest that reality is a fragmentary thing, evanescent at the best of times. He will play games with his art, but if you get too serious he will

remind you that this is, after all, only a fragment of his imagination. In the end it will not matter very much.

Ada and The Man In The High Castle are both about "hell" - and the "hell" in both cases is revealed to be one of unreality (almost a theological definition), but in Dick's novel it is an external one which the characters endure and in which they maintain their souls at least. In Nabokov's case the external circumstances are more pleasant, but the hell is an internal one - ultimately of emptiness - and one wonders whether the characters have any souls of their own at all, or whether they are just pretty painted patterns like butterflies.

Philip Dick, on the other hand, seems to me much more concerned that reality is something that we can meddle with so easily - particularly in The Penultimate Truth and The Three Stigmata of Valer Eldritch. This, and his ultimate optimism that we are able, somehow, to survive, seem to me to give Dick an edge over the other in content.

"But even considering, I mean it's a sort of bad beginning, we're not doing too bad. So I personally have faith that even in this lousy situation we're faced with we can make it. You get me?"

(The Three Stigmata of Valer Eldritch)

Don't get me wrong. I know a lot of people think that Dick never had that much content. Even I do not think he succeeds all the time. Nabokov is incomparably the better artist - for artistry there are probably not more than two or three writers here and now to touch him (curiously, in my list, those two or three have all written sf at one time or another, outside the field). But I am not sure that in the last analysis that artistry is not hollow.

Not that content need necessarily mean commitment, The world isn't that simple. I feel, however, that that content is important, and that of in its better moments has tried to recognise it, even if its record most of the time has been one of failure.

- Bob Parkinson

"BEST OF SF" EXHIBITION

SPECULATION II

Following last year's successful Speculation conference, and his recent success with Eastercon 22, Peter Weston is again organising a Speculation conference in Birmingham on Saturday, 12th June, 1971. James Blish, John Brunner and Philip Strick will be star turns.

In addition there will be a con-current exhibition of the "Best of SF", a selection of books and material presented by the National Book League and the Science Fiction Foundation.

The conference will be held at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, and tickets are available from the Secretary, BMI, Margaret Street, Birmingham 2, at £1.25, which includes full lunch.

Exhibition opens at the Albemarle Street premises of the National Book League, May 17th for two weeks, after which it will go to the Birmingham and Midlands Institute for the Speculation II Conference. It is planned to take the exhibition later to Strathclyde University and to Oxford, and possibly elsewhere. Organisers are Ken Bulmer and George Hay, sponsored by the Science Fiction Foundation.



DARKNESS: COLD AND LOVE

John-Henri Holmberg

There are many ways to approach a novel and to understand it. You can read it as a story, cut off from reality and from everyday life. You can try to interpret it allegorically, trying to find the common traits which exist both in our own time and in the imagined world of the book. You can read it as pure myth, as a creation of the imagination where certain elements, certain ideas or emotions have some sort of timelessness and truth.

It might be said that a novel which can be read in more ways than one and which does not lose any of its appeal in the process is a more worthwhile, more complex and rewarding novel than one which can be appreciated only from a set point of view.

In this way, it might be argued that such science fiction is superior to other forms of entertainment fiction. Science fiction does possess a strongly mythical element; it can be read as adventure romance, but also as a commentary on the things we believe to be important, such as faith in ideas, a longing for the unknown and a quest towards a higher level of understanding. Of course, in the same way it could be argued that the wild west novel and film have created a comparable mythos, giving the wild west epoch a sharply stylized, epic form.

At any rate, one of the most powerful

science fiction novels I have read was published in 1969 by Ace in the United States, and by MacDonald in Britain. It is The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula Kroeber LeGuin: it is a book full of myth, allegory and poetry, and in several ways it is unique in science fiction.

The novel has an epic width which I find strangely effective; it is convincing, overwhelming and surprisingly moving. Together with Miss LeGuin's three earlier sf novels (Socannon's World, Planet of Exile and City of Illusions), The Left Hand of Darkness forms part of a complex, growing and multifaceted picture of a very distant future. Each novel presents a new central character, a new milieu, but the background remains the same and grows continuously more sharply detailed and believable. The Left Hand of Darkness is set against a backdrop of infinite space and a wealth of worlds bound loosely together within a trade federation. The few glimpses given of this background are fascinating and well executed, but the focus is always kept to the two central characters, Genly Ai, the first man to try to convince the monarchs of the almost unknown world Gethen to join the federation of worlds, and Therse Estraven, a nobleman of Gethen.

There are parts of this book which should be studied carefully by other sf authors. One such part is the skillful

insertion of the background information into a story which never falters, never lets off while the reader is informed of things necessary to an understanding of what is happening. Another aspect of the novel is the part played by love and friendship. An important factor in the society Miss LeGuin creates is the sexual; the people on Gethen are neither men nor women; they are androgynes, sexless for most of their lives and with the ability to adapt either male or female characteristics during the short fertile periods.

This theme Ursula LeGuin treats convincingly, humanly and unsensationally, something which very few other sf writers have been able to do. The few others who have even tried writing about love have done so either by describing it in a round-about way which has often been so ambiguous as to become ridiculous, or in a "modern" way seemingly designed to show off the writer's daring by an ample shower of four-letter words. The sexual theme of The Left Hand of Darkness is as self-evident and important as any other aspect of the people in the story, and Miss LeGuin treats it in the same way as any other part of her book: simply, lucidly, compassionately. In this way she stands forth as a substantially more mature writer than most others within the sf field.

Furthermore, The Left Hand of Darkness is something very rare in sf: an almost pure character novel. Two humans: Genly Ai, the emissary, and Theram Estraven, the Gethenian nobleman, are continuously the centre of the novel and their thoughts, their dreams and different personalities are what matters in this book, not the experiences they have. The world of Gethen, which is also called Hither, is perfect to the smallest detail: it becomes so real, so convincing that it must be regarded as one of the most impressive feats of creation within sf - aside from Frank Herbert's Dune and

Hal Clement's Mission of Gravity I can remember no other sf novels so minutely, consistently and logically depicting an imaginary world and society. But in contrast especially to Mission of Gravity, the carefully worked out culture making up the scene for the actions of the main characters is not the important thing in The Left Hand of Darkness; it is only a projection, and its real depth is disclosed only in the ways in which it affects the people who make this story.

The protagonist of Ursula LeGuin's novel is Genly Ai, an emissary of the interstellar federation called the Ekumen. His mission is to contact again the people who long before the decline of the Earth empire many thousand years earlier had been sent to colonise Winter. The novel traces Ai's visit to the monarchy of Karhide, ruled by the mad king Argaven. One of the most influential of the king's advisors is Theram Earth renn ir Estraven, the other central character of the book. Estraven has tried to win the regent's favour for Ai, but fails as he is outmaneuvered in a political coup and has to leave the country. In time, Genly Ai follows him to the bordering dictatorship of Orgoreyn, there to try to convince those in power to join the Ekumen. But again Ai and Estraven fail, and now they return to Karhide across the Gobrin, an enormous inland glacier which they cross on foot during a painful journey which is the climax of the novel. On the ice, they are forced closer to each other: Genly Ai has to understand his own distrust of Estraven, has to understand the strangeness and the stranger, and in the same way Estraven's attitudes towards Ai are subject to great strain. Their two cultures, backgrounds and personalities meet and must be adjusted to each other or be destroyed in the ice and the darkness.

They reach Karhide, but Theram Estraven is killed by frontier guards

since he has been disowned by the king. This time, Genly Ai's mission is successful, Karhide decides to join the Ekumen, but the novel doesn't end with Genly Ai's triumph but with his visit to Estraven's one parent and child:

"You crossed the Gobraio lee together, 'Searve demanded, 'you and he?'"

"We did."

"I should like to hear that tale, my Lord Envoy," said old Ewans, very calm. But the boy, Therem's son, said stammering, 'Will you tell us how he died? - Will you tell us about the other worlds out among the stars - the other kinds of men, the other lives?'"

So the book ends, but not the story of Genly Ai nor that of the Ekumen he serves. The story of Therem Estraven is completed, and perhaps he is the real hero of the novel: the thin, aristocratic stranger from another world and a strange culture who becomes Genly Ai's friend through that cold and dark journey. Although the book is told by Ai, and although he is the formal protagonist, Therem Harth remains Estraven dominates the story. He is the power behind Ai, the man who forces those who make decisions to listen to the words of the envoy.

Shifgrethor is one of the most important of those conventions which govern life in Karhide. Ursula LeGuin demonstrates how shifgrethor works, how it subtly introduces disbelief and wariness between Genly Ai and those who try to help him, but she never gives a literal translation of the term. Perhaps because none is possible; shifgrethor means many things, and among them are such concepts as consideration, integrity, respect, delicacy, all formalized and ritualized to the point where personal relations become a dance with predetermined tours of subtle hints, halfmouthed warnings and counsels, unspoken suggestions. To directly tell someone how to act would be to hurt his shifgrethor;

to ask someone what he means would be to hurt his. In this way misunderstanding and suspicion is created.

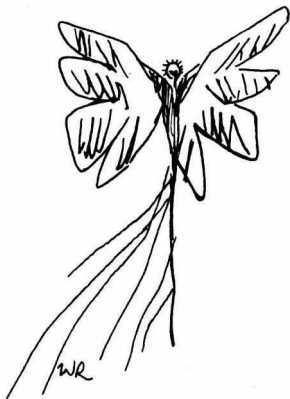
In this way also the events resulting in Genly Ai's being taken to the Pulefan Farms, a "voluntary work camp" among many in Urganoy, come about. Estraven has convinced some of the thirty-three Commensals of Urganoy to help Ai convince the Commensal assembly that they should seek membership in the Ekumen. But those intending to help Ai at last find themselves forced to disown him, and they leave him to his enemies, who send him to Pulefan. Estraven tries to warn him, but his respect for Ai's shifgrethor makes his warnings meaningless allusions; instead, he is forced to help Ai escape from the camp. It is at this point that Ai's distrust of Estraven reaches its peak, in the end to be turned into friendship and love.

In the first chapter of the book we are introduced to Estraven. Genly Ai is present at the ceremonial opening of a new bridge, and in his capacity as adviser to the king, Estraven is also present:

"Wiping sweat from his dark forehead the man - ~~and~~ I must say, having said he and his - the man answers, 'Very-long-ago a keystone was always set in with a mortar of ground bones mixed with blood. Human bones, human blood. Without the bloodband the arch would fall, you see. We use the blood of animals, these days.'

"So he often speaks, Frank yet cautious, ironic, as if always aware that I see and judge as an alien: a singular awareness in one of so isolate a race and so high a rank. He is one of the most powerful men in the country; I am not sure of the proper historical

convincing atmosphere of the places and the world she writes about.



"Even when he was very ill and weak, the first days after our escape, he hid his face from me when he wept. Reasons personal, racial, social, sexual - how can I guess why Ai must not weep? Yet his name is a cry of pain. For that I first sought him out in Ehrenrang, a long time ago it seems now; hearing talk of 'an Alien' I asked his name, and heard for answer a cry of pain from a human throat across the night. Now he sleeps. His arms tremble and twitch, muscular fatigue. The world around us, ice and rock, ash and snow, fire and dark, trembles and twitches and mutters. Looking out a minute ago I saw the glow of the volcano as a dull red bloom on the belly of vast clouds overhanging the darkness."

equivalent to his position, vizier or prime minister or councillor; the Karhidish word for it means the King's Ear. He is lord of a Domain and lord of the Kingdom, a mover of great events. His name is Thoren Harth rem ir Estraven."

Thoren Estraven writes in his notebook during the endless, inhuman journey across the Gobrin glacier where he and Ai find humanity in each other; or rather, where Ai finds warmth and pain even within Estraven, the cold and abstruse androgyne who "left his face in shadow; a dark face always shadowed". What Ursula LeGuin wishes to express in her book might be a very simple thing, such as this: what binds men together is important, while that which separates them - be it physical or psychic - is immaterial.

Parenthetically, the style in this and the previous quotation is typical of Ursula LeGuin's novel. Her prose is controlled, measured, but at the same time suggestive, melodious and often poetical. The poetic quality is attained by the slow, smooth modulation, an almost imperceptible turn to the unexpected word, the exactly right phrase giving an overtone of lyrical manyfoldness. The best word I know to describe Miss LeGuin's style is the misused and almost undefinable "beautiful." She writes beautifully, captivatingly, with great conviction and great talent, and her words create a compressed, entrancing mood and a clear,

What finally forces Ai to surmount his suspiciousness towards Estraven is neither his help nor his strength, neither Estraven's feat to rescue Ai from the Pulefen Farm nor his courage to travel with Ai on a journey doomed already from the start

towards Karhide where Estraven is proscribed, but his weakness. Even Estraven is vulnerable, in a painful and human way.

Kemmer is the name given to the short, sexually active period which the people on Gethen enter with regular intervals. When two persons both close to their kemmering cycle meet and decide to spend the cycle together, they decide between themselves which one of them shall be male; if one of them has gone further into his kemmer than the other and already has taken on the characteristics of one sex, the other fits himself to him.

On the Gobrin ice Estraven and Ai experience this tension, this painful phase of intense sexual tension which accompanies kemmer.

"It seemed to me, and I think to him, that it was from that sexual tension between us, admitted now and understood, but not assuaged, that the great and sudden assurance of friendship between us rose: a friendship so much needed by us both in our exile, and already so well proved in the days and nights of our bitter journey, that it might as well be called, now as later, love. But it was from the difference between us, not from the affinities and likenesses, but from the difference, that that love came; and it was itself the bridge, across what divided us. For us to meet sexually would be for us to meet once more as aliens. We had touched, in the only way we could touch. We left it at that. I do not know if we were right."

When Estraven has mastered the limited form of telepathy which Ai is able to teach him, the last barriers between them fall. Not completely, for no human being is ever able to stand naked and alone to someone else, but as far as it is

at all possible to give of oneself to any other, they do so, and their understanding is enriched by their complete loneliness and aloneness.

But Estraven's love for Genly Ai is deeper than usual; it becomes his love for the only people he has ever loved, his brother Arak who is long dead, and his kemmering, Foreth ram ir Ceboth, and to their child, the young Sorve. This identification of Ai with Arak is something which is brought about by the first "words" Ai speaks to Estraven in the "silent language"; as their thoughts meet, Estraven experiences Ai's voice as that of his brother.

The title of the novel Ursula LeGuin has taken from a poem which she lets Estraven render in the book:

"light is the left hand of
darkness
And darkness the right hand of light.
Two are one, life and death, lying
Together like lovers in kemmer,
Like hands joined together,
Like the end and the way."

Those lines are part of the literature created by the many handdara, those initiated to the Handdara. Handdara is the closest thing to a religion, a philosophy or an ethic Ursula LeGuin depicts in her novel.

Handdara is a religion without institutions, without priests, hierarchy, without any articles of faith or rituals; it is manifest only in the Fastnesses scattered across Karhide, places where people are welcome for a day or a lifetime, where they are given a new view of existence, a feeling of the oneness and communion of life and existence.

As most highborn Karhidians, Estraven has studied the Handdara, and perhaps part of his immediate knowledge of Genly Ai's

humanness and loneliness stems from his ability to see the affinity in all life.

The only ritual in the Handdara is that accompanying its prophets, people who by nearing themselves to the oneness which is the heart of all also can prophesy part of the future. Genly Ai has put a question to the seers of the Handdara, who let their thoughts and emotions flow together, forming a powerful net of sensitivity stretching through time and space:

"Hours and seconds passed, the moonlight shone on the wrong wall, there was no moonlight only darkness, and in the centre of all darkness Faxa: the Weaver; a woman, a woman dressed in light. The light was silver, the silver was armor, an armored woman with a sword. The light burned sudden and intolerable, the light along her limbs, the fire, and she screamed aloud in terror and pain. 'Yes, yes, yes!'"

So the question of whether in five years Gethen will be one of the worlds in the Ekumen is answered. But the road to the realization of this answer is still long and filled with difficulties; Estraven and Ai must still set out on their journey across the glacier. It is meaningless to ask how the future will be, since even if the knowledge is given the acts that make the answer possible must still be carried out.

In this way Winter is created in the novel: it becomes a world of loneliness and ice, of strangers who are still human, of darkness, inscrutability and love. The background is ready, and the envoy Genly Ai and the androgyne Teroun Harth see if Estraven can begin their journey across the Gobrin glacier:

"Ahead of us, cleared and

revealed by the same vast sweep of the land, lay twisted valleys, hundreds of feet below, full of ice and boulders. Across those valleys a great wall stood, a wall of ice, and raising our eyes up and still up to the rim of the wall we saw the ice itself, the Gobrin Glacier, blinding and horizonless to the utmost north, a white, a white the eyes could not look on...

"We stowed the wheels, uncapped the sledge-runners, put on our skis, and took off - down, north, onward, into that silent vastness of fire and ice that said in enormous letters of black and white DEATH, DEATH written right across a continent. The sledge pulled like a feather, and we laughed with joy."

The Left Hand of Darkness is a novel equally of light and dark. Genly Ai and Estraven find their friendship, but only when the alienness between them has brought them to the brink of a catastrophe. It lives only in the threat from the furious glacier, and it dies with Estraven as they reach their destination; and perhaps this is necessary within the framework of the novel, because the important thing isn't love or friendship or humanity, but the knowledge that these attributes can exist, that they haven't disappeared in the cold and the chasm. Neither does it matter what happens to Ai or Estraven once they finished their journey they have reached their understanding under the stars above the Gobrin Ice, and what is done to them afterwards is immaterial. "It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters, in the end."

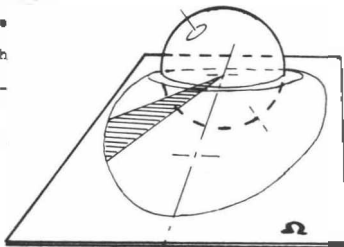
And they finish their journey and reach the border of Keshida, and the banned Estraven who has twice given his country and his career for Genly Ai now

gives his life for him as he is discovered by the guards in the home country he no longer has the right to live in:

"He was dying when I got to him, sprawled and twisted away from his skis that stuck up out of the snow, his chest half shot away. I took his head in my arms and spoke to him, but he never answered me; only in a way did he answer my love for him, crying out through the silent wreck and tumult of his mind as consciousness lapsed, in the unspoken tongue, once, clearly, 'Araki!' Then no more. I held him, crouching there in the snow, while he died. They let me do that. Then they made me get up, and took me off one way and him another, I going to prison and he into the dark."

So their journey across the Goblin glacier ends. Perhaps death is inevitable, because the love that has grown between Jenly Ai, the envoy from the stars, and Theran Estraven, the earthbound androgyns, must remain impossible, unfulfilled. The chasm between two ways of life, two cultures, two humans of different races becomes so great and can be bridged only when it has grown to be the chasm between living and dead. The cold and dark of Winter which is that of the human soul is released in love, but only during the second preceding the last cold, the eternal dark.

- John-Henri Meisberg



SF IN THE CLASSROOM

John Crompton

Eight years ago I happened to open the collection of short stories prescribed for a fourteen year old class in a grammar school, where I taught English, as luck would have it, at a science fiction story. As luck would have it further, my reading of the story to the class took exactly the thirty-five minutes of the lesson: by the time the bell went the class was leaning across the desks in anguished concentration of an intensity I had not achieved via Jane Austen or Katherine Mansfield.

The story was The Ruin by Arthur Porges, a neat fable about a prospector in North America being pursued by a machine left behind at the time of the dinosaurs by an alien visit collecting specimens of earthly life. The man employs every ingenious trick he can devise to destroy or escape the ruin; but it catches him in the end - and then releases him because the three day pursuit has lowered his weight below the limit the ruin is programmed to select.

Now I had myself a passion for sf (fired at the age of fifteen by A. E. vanVogt's The Voyage of the Space Beagle), so I had hopes of making converts of my class and followed up the ruin with a series of sf works at discreet intervals. I tried The City and the Stars, A. C. Clarke, one of my favourites - and it was not a success. I tried Childhood's End a year later on the same boys and girls, with no luck. Henry Kuttner's Fury fared no

better. Instead I was asked to order in John Wyndham, and, against my principles, I obliged. The Day of the Triffids went down very well, The Kraken Wakes not so well, much to my disappointment because I think it a better book. The Midwich Cuckoos was much more enthusiastically received.

Meanwhile I was trying the stuff out on other classes, of course, and discovered to my surprise that the twelve and thirteen year olds chimed with the opinions of the fourteen and fifteen year olds. The War of the Worlds and The Time Machine were as popular as Wyndham, while the material I thought was most stimulating and up-to-date, culled from the pages of NEW WORLDS and ASTOUNDING evoked only polite interest.

At this point I moved to an all-girls school, and started again with my rather undirected attempts to proselytise and research what sf was acceptable. The girls, from twelve to sixteen, unerringly chose (guess what) Wyndham and Wells; and responded very well to Ray Bradbury, Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, Sturgeon were nowhere. The Silver Locusts and The Seeds of Time were sure-fire lesson lesson material any day of the week.

I was, at the time, too new to teaching still, and too close to what I was trying to do, to draw the conclusions I shall shortly relate, even when the new book in "General Studies" in the sixth form

gave me the chance to try to sell sf to seventeen and eighteen year olds for an hour and a half a week. These older girls were ready for Pohl and Kornbluth, Sturgeon, Brian Aldiss (inhouse was a success) and even Blish and Ballard. The fact was that some still hankered after Wells and Wyndham - and I gratified them as best I could, hiding, I hope, my condescending feeling that they ought to have put away childish things. The more mature young women avidly discussed The Space Merchants and The Sirens of Titan.

Being also a strong advocate of "creative writing" as part of the English course, I had long since tried to induce the composition of sf stories from all my classes. This had proven very disappointing. The few who avoided the "after-the-bomb" format used the "invasion by BEH" cliché, and those who did seem to be giving the stuff a new twist usually turned out to have obtained a copy of The Magazine of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION that I had not seen. In other words what I received as homework was usually Wells and Wyndham and Bradbury rehashed. Well, one should not expect too much - and the stories themselves were often fifteen pages long and had had much time and loving care bestowed on them. Which was gratifying. The girls always provided a handsome hero who defeated the BEHs by a marvelous mixture of intellect and physique; and the boys always provided a rugged hero who defeated them by quick thinking and judo. At fifteen the girls introduced Romance, i.e. themselves, and at sixteen the boys introduced sex, i.e. wish fulfillment, and revealed thereby a disturbing acquaintance of the works of Hank Jansen.

Nowadays I work in a teachers' training college, where my English colleagues despise sf for not being concerned with the examination and portrayal of every last nuance of its characters' slightest emotions; and my science colleagues

despise it for not being proper science. And the students, all over eighteen, will either confess to a now dead interest or state a total and indifferent ignorance. Just a few, all men, will eagerly discuss with me, over the coffee, their reactions to Cat's Cradle or Slaughterhouse Five or whichever book I have recently ordered into the library. This select group consists entirely of arts and P.E. students and its members will buttonhole each other and me on sight, eyes agleam with fanatical conviction, ready to talk for hours. Catch 22, Swift, Kessel and Cabell are devoured with the same fervour as Vonnegut.

I believe that this limited experience of mine, of young people's reaction to sf, has certain implications for parents and teachers - and the future readership of the field. Children enjoy fantasy and imaginative works, so long as they can be related to the children's own experience. Wells and Wyndham start with a world near enough to the familiar; and the transition to a situation, local or global, in which the usual becomes the incredible is gradual, logical and easy to follow. Philosophy is beyond the thirteen or fourteen year old, so he rejects the writer, such as Clarke, whose situations require a too radical suspension of disbelief and the imposition of too disturbing new ways of viewing a universe they are not yet familiar with in its conventional forms.

By seventeen or eighteen, adolescents are ready for fiction that demands the leap from the mundane, now familiar enough, world into space, to Procyon, Titan and the future. Those still not prepared for the ultimate "Let's pretend" (let's pretend that the world is not as we think we know it) stay with the more cautious bending of the rules.

I should have realized this simple matter of progression long since - and not tried to hurry my charges into the adult

world too fast. Every teacher and college lecturer knows that the material presented to children must be only a little beyond their current stage of development; and that some children will not progress further than some particular point(s) peculiar to themselves. It is not surprising that Clarke was too much for the younger teenagers.

Then why did they accept The Time Machine, which seems to me to be much more complex and demanding than John Wyndham's?



There are several answers to this; the simplest being, perhaps, that my own enthusiasm and admiration for this story picked the pupils up and carried them along, in the way that sufficient commitment from the teacher often does. But a more likely reason is that despite the strangeness of the world of the Eloi and Morlocks, we see everything through the eyes of an essentially human Time Traveller and our identification with him carries us into the future via the reassurance of his contemporary personality. There is even a touch of sentiment, in his semi-paternal affection for the young Eloi woman, to remind us of the love that makes us human.

All right, I am implying some gradation of quality, of difficulty, in sf works. Well, I think there is such a gradation and that evaluating sf in terms of its suitability for children of

particular ages can, indeed, tell us a good deal about the material itself.

I do not believe that anyone can successfully demonstrate that John Wyndham's books have the depth and scope of Clarke, Kohl and Kornbluth, Vonnegut, P. K. Dick, Cordwainer Smith (to name a few). And Wells and Verne, for all that they pioneered sf writing, cannot compete with the best of the later men in the field when it comes to sheer power to move the intellect via the imagination.

Children unerringly opt for the good yarn, the exciting story, which does not demand the resources of the mature mind to appreciate philosophical speculations which only an adult can tackle and take pleasure in tackling. Thus, if they pick Wyndham in preference to Vonnegut, it tells us something that our critical faculties should have already told us.

Myths and fairy tales for the five to tens, then, and capitalize the delight these can inspire by moving a step or two into sf and no more. Cater to the taste for stories which do not go too far beyond the familiar and ultimately some young people will make it to the most demanding, and most rewarding, writers.

Above all, I find it most reassuring that thirteen to fifteen year olds had, in my six years of working with them, two especial favourites in sf books: The Seeds of Time, and The Silver Locusts. They liked them because the emphasis in both, whatever the setting, is firmly on human values and a compassionate presentation of human feelings and behaviour.

This instinctive appreciation of the essential quality of literature is the basis of proper understanding of, and discrimination among, that body of writings we call science fiction.

- John Brandon

BOOKS



ZANZIBAR REVISITED

THE JAWED ORBIT

by John Brunner

(Sidgwick & Jackson, £1.75)

Not infrequently we have seen attempts to portray the near future both in science fiction and in other media. *Jawed Orbit* looks at the USA during the early twenty-first century. It is an extrapolation which bites with a frightening reality.

The plot background includes the likely technical developments in computing and communication science, rather suprisingly ignoring probable biological/genetic advances. At the same time, the sociological pattern has shown a marked deterioration, with increasing insanity, insecurity and general failure of people to fit into the age of a complex machine civilization. Black Power has achieved considerable success and powerful black enclaves are an important factor in American life. The current obsession with owning guns has been intensified with the Gottschalk organization encouraging unrest and selling weapons to both black and white populations.

Brunner superbly shows the impact of the period in his character development. The short crisp chapters

contribute well to a grasp of the brittle inter-relationships which appear and become steadily more complex.

Matthew Flamen is a 3D television columnist, presenting expose programmes, and whose wife is confined to a fortress-like mental hospital. Another inmate is Harry Madison, a negro, who possesses an abnormal talent for altering electronic circuitry. The hospital is headed by Dr. Mogshack, who himself exhibits odd behaviour.

Whilst in a consultative trance at the hospital, Lyla Clay, a girl oracle, produces a series of cryptic messages which may hold the solution to the whole situation, and then the trance ends in near disaster. Then amidst New York riots, the various characters are drawn together into the climax.

Xavier Conroy, a sociologist and one of the few balanced people in the story who perceives reality, appears in the role of father figure/chairman to this final assembly of characters, but the key to the whole plot is held by Madison, and there are some strange revelations in the last pages.

If we could snatch a Victorian to the present day and allow him to read a newspaper, he would be baffled by such words as disc jockey, skinned or

hippie. The Jazzed Orbit quite logically introduces a new vocabulary of its own; examples - knees, kneebunks, and spool-pigeon. In the early stages of the book the reader is faced with sifting the meaning from the context, but it is an intriguing puzzle which I enjoyed.

In my view, this is an important book for Bruner, since it re-emphasizes his capabilities and craft skill in weaving together complex situations of people and backgrounds.

- Roy Mortimore

A PRIVATE COSMOS
by Philip José Farmer
(Sphere, 25p)

Envisage a tower shaped world of many levels separated by monolithic cliffs, on top of each cliff another world and another cliff. Each level is different: A Garden of Eden, Atlantean, Amerind - and on the top in the palace of the planet's ruler, the Lord. As a bonus, in the green skies hangs a moon made to resemble Burroughs' (ER, not William) Marsmoon.

This and other worlds were created by the Lords, immortal, powerful beings who make their own private universes and people them with men and beasts captured from their own habitat or synthesized in their biolabs. Transdimensional "gates" connect the universes and points within them. The Lords may be god-like in power but are the reverse in morality: vicious, arrogant, suspicious, they spend much of their time plotting against one another.

They use techniques they do not understand; they are scavengers, not innovators. In this third book in the series* we find out why. All the Lord scientists were killed in a disastrous war with their own creations, the Bellers, beings who can destroy the brain of another and transfer their own

personalities into the blank created. A few surviving Bellers now invade the tower world.

This book seems marginally less successful than the first two largely because the protagonist, Kickaha, an ex-earthman, is - to me - a less sympathetic character than the hero of the first two, Wolff, the Lord who lived on Earth and learnt human emotions.

It would be worth reading this book for the concepts alone. My advice is to read them all, straight through from The Maker of Universes, and the end provides a hook on which at least one more book must surely be hung.

- Brian A. Rolls.

* The series currently consists of -

The Maker of Universes
The Gates of Creation
A Private Cosmos
Behind The walls of Terra

The first three have been published in the UK by Sphere. The end of the last indicates that Farmer has a sequel in mind, if not in hand - Ed.

THE HEAVEN MAKERS
by Frank Herbert
(New English Library, 30p)

The Heaven Makers originally saw publication during 1968 as a two-part serial in Amazing. The Chem are a technologically highly-advanced race of empathic humanoid creatures who have attained virtual immortality. They employ their command of physical and psychological science to herd and manipulate the intelligent inhabitants of a plurality of worlds, including the Earth, for the purpose of providing

entertainment to stave off the constant
necessity of every immortal being - boredom.

The gleanings and dissemination of this material is left in the hands of powerful entrepreneurs such as the immensely successful Fraffin, whose hunting ground is the Earth. However, Fraffin's operations have attracted the attention of the Primacy, the supreme authority among the Chem, who suspect him of criminal malpractice and dispatch an undercover agent to investigate.

It is not until chapter four that we are introduced to the novel's chief human protagonist, Dr. Androcles Thurlow, a young American psychologist who has recently suffered a serious eye injury, forcing him to wear spectacles with specially polarized lenses. Thurlow later turns out to be an immune, able, with the aid of his doctored glasses, to pierce the Chem invisibility shield and watch a Chem camera crew film the arrest of a wife-murderer who is also the father of Thurlow's former girlfriend, now Mrs. Ruth Hudson.

The plot moves forward from here at a steady, if at times somewhat pedestrian, pace, and is shored up and enlivened by the author's adroit interpolation of background material concerning the Chem, surely one of the more fascinating alien races to appear in recent SF. Not a classic, The Heaven Makers is nevertheless a solidly constructed of thriller in the Frank Herbert tradition and well worth reading.

- Graham Andrews.

VORNAN-19
by Robert Silverberg
(Sidgwick & Jackson, £1.90)

In order to depict a future society,
it has been a common device from Brave New World to Stranger in a Strange Land to use

the reactions of a character alienated from it by time or space. Robert Silverberg offers an entertaining variation on the theme. The world is our own in 1999, a recognizable descendant of 1970: nothing very catastrophic has happened, but neither has utopia set in. Into all this drops (literally) the outsider, the man from 2999, Vornan-19.

He is an enigma. Is he genuine or a brilliant poseur? Asked about the survival of religious, political or economic institutions he ingeniously - or maliciously - says his world knows nothing of them. He refuses details, is uninterested in proving his genuineness and careless of his impact on individuals or society. The events following Vornan-19's appearance are related with dry cynicism by Leo Garfield, a disillusioned middle-aged high energy physicist, conscious that his best work is behind him.

Professionally written and highly readable. Some scenes are memorable, some hilarious; the riots of the Apocalypticists, who claim that the world will end in 2000 and urge total hedonism; the trip to the Stock Exchange with its meaningless activity; the visit to the automated brothel. Deeper meanings? Perhaps that everyone carries the seeds of his own destruction - all that Vornan-19 or anyone else can do is expose them.

A reasonable sprinkling of sex also - when I started reading if I was never sure that the scientist knew what to do with the girl he got on the last page, but Garfield is positively caprine.

- Brian A. Rollis.

ECHO ROUND HIS BONES

by Thomas M. Disch
(Panther, 25p)

Many of writers fall into one or the other of two main categories. There are those who incline to "hard" science (typified by writers who first made their mark in the 40's), and those who are more concerned to write "literature". The category into which a writer falls obviously has something to do with his education, but it probably has more to do with temperament. Coleridge said that everyone was born either an Aristotelian or a Platonist.

Disch is clearly a Platonist. He is obviously one of that small group of writers whose work one would offer to a conventionally educated detractor of the genre.

In Echo Round His Bones it is almost as if Disch had gone out of his way to show his contempt for the Aristotelians. We hear "nervous cracklings and humming sounds vaguely suggestive of electricity, or, at least, of Science." The donnee of the novel is the invention of a matter transmitter by an elderly scientist who has a young and beautiful wife (yes!). This ancient fictional device produces, as a side effect, ghostly duplicates of the bodies and materials transmitted by its aid, and the plot turns upon the attempts of characters in this "secondary" world to prevent a holocaust in the "primary" world.

Very well. Let us accept that the Aristotelians will be offended by the absence of "hard" science of an extrapolatory kind. What about the Platonic delights of a more literary nature?

And here is an even greater shock. On the second page we are told "This captain, who will be the hero of our history..." On the third page we are asked "Does this mean that our hero is on

the stupid side?" We are back with Thackeray (whose best-known novel was being read by the poor man in Descending), and as we turn the pages we expect to be button-holed and addressed as the "gentle reader."

Some of this fooling around is interesting, simply because it is a writer of Disch's status who is acting the fool.



There is the curiously non-committal and ambiguous description of character, and blatant intervention by the author to justify a character's reaction. Some of the ideas are intriguing, although they are not developed in detail - characters in the "secondary" world are figures of alienation and existentialist angst, and they see the architecture and conventions of the "primary" world as they "really" are. I liked the invention of the personalized novel, in which the hero/heroine has the same name as the reader.

My advice is to read first the brilliant novels (The Genocides and Camp Concentration) and the wonderful short stories (collected in Under Compulsion). Then you can read Echo Round His Bones as a jeu d'esprit. If you take this Disch first you might be put off the main course.

- Mark Adlard

THE CITY DWELLERS

by Charles Platt

(Sidgwick & Jackson, £1.25)

A primary tendency of it has been an extrapolation of today's problems into the framework of a hypothetical future. From an intellectual point of view it has always been necessary to expose by every available means the character of the facade we call our cultural environment and to force its recognition at all costs.

The trouble with projecting into the future is the curious fact that what may seem "important" now fails to have the same impact in fifty or one hundred years time.

The opening section of The City Dwellers is particularly pertinent when paralleled with the following quotation, dated about 1805 -

"Having seen it performed by a select party of foreigners we could not help reflecting how uneasy an English mother would be to see her daughter so familiarly treated, and still more to witness the obliging manner in which the freedom is returned by the females."

This indignation was levelled at the German dance of "modern invention" called the waltz.

The first theme of Platt's quartet concerns the problems of success and pressures of living for a 21st Century pop-star. Here "pop" is an extension of the current "scene". The creations Groy, Owen and Cathy are of today. Platt has virtually taken that blushing maiden from 1805 and projected her into 1970. The corrupting influence of the degrading waltz becomes ludicrous.

Platt's theme that the City is killing man, mentally and physically, is very valid today. But the attempt to produce a 21st

century culture from our problems doesn't quite come off.

The quality of writing varies widely from the "best" of Womans Own to passages which will move the understanding reader beyond what is often expected from SF. An uneven, uneasy work, but still recommended.

- David H. Wood

THE SHORES OF DEATH

by Michael Moorcock

(Sphere, 25p)

The copyright of this novel indicates that it was written four years ago; I wonder if Moorcock would have written it in this "deliberately formal style" today.

The plot of The Shores of Death (originally The Twilight Man) tells of the distant future when the Earth has stopped rotating; one side is now permanently in darkness. Over three hundred years have elapsed since the catastrophe that stilled the Earth and during that time a perfect society has evolved in the world of day. However, those who have survived now learn that due to a certain radiation the entire human race is sterile. Faced with racial death the individual can do one of two things; face the prospect of extinction resolutely while attempting to creatively determine the future, or lapse into some anaesthetizing routine. Clovis Marca, child of incest from the twilight zone, chooses the former and embarks on a search for the immortal genius, Orlando Sharvis.

The theme of this book is perhaps best explained by Michael Moorcock in his Introduction:

"Primarily, the story is about fear and its results. The symbolism

in it is not obscure and may even be a bit too obvious for some. The fear, in this case, is the fear of death and the despair that comes with it. Essentially the novel is still romantic and extravagant, but I now think the view it takes is psychologically realistic in the description of the perfect society and how it can decline rapidly once its 'freedom from fear' is removed.

"The manner of Adolf Hitler's rise to power in a Germany designed as a perfect democracy was not my model, though I now see that there are parallels in the novel. I am preaching no moral in the story. I am not saying that what happens to the various characters is a good thing or a bad thing; I'm simply trying to show that, in my experience, this is what would happen to them and their society when faced with the knowledge of inescapable racial death. The story divides into two halves, the first half dealing with the general effect, the second dealing with the particular effect."

Although I certainly enjoyed reading Moorcock's views of the perfect society in decline I am not convinced that it is psychologically realistic. In this novel Moorcock envisages a historical optimism which, to me, is crude determinism. The opinion is expressed that truth and good become that which is merely useful for survival; every event is part of a logically inevitable sequence which is indifferent to personality. Objective psychology cannot tell us the whole truth about man who is the subjective sources of all that he does and is. The notion of simple and inevitable laws governing human existence seems inappropriate. However, I thought that Michael Moorcock utilizes the character of the scientist Orlando Sharvis superbly to fulfil the idealistic concept that science is full of contradiction and that although it may be practically useful it is not the medium to show the true nature of things.

- Kevin O'Malley

NIGHT WALK

by Bob Shaw

(New English Library, 25p)

With four books off the presses and regular appearances in the magazine, Bob Shaw might well be described as a classic example of the "local boy makes good".

Earth ships have spread across space, traversing the blind regions of nul-space by "portals" which have fixed co-ordinates to lead them to the planets beyond. But Earth is bursting at the seams, and searching for new planets. Just as eager is the now-independent Earth colony of Sam Luther. And the prize that both seek, the co-ordinates for a portal behind which lies an empty Earth-type planet, is in the hands of the Sam Luther government.

But also in the mind of Earth agent Sam Tallon; and when his eyes are destroyed by one of his Sam Lutheran pursuers and he is sent to a prison camp, he realizes that he had to get back to Earth with the information that could save it. The "how" makes for a fast, exciting read as Tallon makes his "blind" trek across Sam Luther, his enemies pursuing, his aid a pair of electronic sight-aids which lock onto the vision of other people and beings he comes across, so that he sees through their eyes...

Strictly in the basic mould of sf adventure, this would while away a train journey very enjoyably. But if you are looking for deep, significant reading this isn't it.

- Roger Addington

SEVEN STEPS TO THE SUN
By Fred and Geoffrey Hoyle
(Heinemann, £1.50)

A writer - Mike Jerome - has an idea for an sf television series; and suddenly it starts happening to him. He jumps ten-year leaps into the future, finding himself in ever stranger situations after each temporal dislocation. Each scenario reveals a progressively-disintegrating world and, as one inhabitant complains, the mistake can be traced back to the '60s - Jerome's "present" - and the failure of the governments of the time to do anything about the population explosion.

I read the Hoyles' novels without expecting too much, and I am always more than happy. While many of writers - new wave and otherwise - are busily trying to convince themselves that they can write, the Hoyle family is calmly turning out good entertainment with a sound scientific basis. Fred's physics is, of course, unchallengeable, and Geoffrey's writing is unspetacular. Good fun, without too much strain on the senses.

- Michael Kenward

TO OPEN THE SKY
By Robert Silverberg
(Sphere, 30p)

Silverberg is one of those competent writers who turn out a consistent, unending stream of enjoyable fiction. Credible plots, attention to characterization, and a facile style combine to produce a good read by most people's standards.

In To Open The Sky we are shown the curiosities of 21st century Earth by the simple but effective device of following a Martian on a conducted tour. (Mars has been terraformed, Venus is habitable by

modified humans.)

The old religions have lost their grip. An eclectic, synthetic creed has dispensed with the mysticism of former religions and replaced it with a scientific mysticism. The Vorsters worship at altars which glow with cobalt-60, and they chant the Electromagnetic Litany - "Blessed be X-rays, sacred to Roentgen..." etc. Venus is in the hands of the Harmonists, a breakaway creed which derives much of its prestige from the para-normal powers of "espers". The Vorsters and the Harmonists are finally reconciled and combine their complimentary talents to launch men to the stars.

- Mark Adlard

BEST SF STORIES FROM NEW WORLDS 6
Ed. by Michael Moorcock
(Panther, 25p)

This sixth collection from New Worlds (and Science Fantasy) of 1966-69 is not up to the standard of 4 and 5, but it is still worth reading. But to call it a science fiction collection is really to call the stories something that many of them are not.

Gravity by Harvey Jacobs, to take an example, is a very good story of a man making love to an astronaut's wife while they watch her husband on TV. It is not sf and I do not think the author ever regarded it as such.

Categorizing can even diminish a piece. Langdon Jones' The Eye of the Lens is possibly the best thing in the book and it simply defies categories. Its obsessional detail builds up an almost sculptural effect which reminds me of Mervyn Peake. But as a story it is what it is and no more.

Here, also, do you place Jerry

Cornelius? This collection contains a splendid short piece by Michael Moorcock placing Jerry in the Orient, but that is not quite my meaning.

There are, it is true, four thoroughly traditional sf stories, all readable. One which seems to me to have been unjustly neglected since its first appearance in 1966 is A Man Must Die by John Clute, a powerful tale of a long starship voyage and the effect on the one man who is awake. Hilary Bailey's In Reason's Ear seems to me to have been overtaken by events, and the fact that events have not happened this way, while leaving a powerful and moving story, tend to weaken the impact.

- Vic Hallett

BSFA LIBRARY

The BSFA has an extensive library which members can borrow from for a nominal charge. Library address: Miss E. Nash, 25 Rungmore Road, Mossley Hill, Liverpool L18 4LW.

NOVACON 1

Vernon Brown and the Aston University SF group are planning a 2-day sf convention at the Imperial Hotel, Birmingham, over the weekend of 13th/14th November, 1971. 50p will secure registration and progress reports from the chairman, Vernon Brown, Room 623, University of Aston, Birmingham.

BSFA MAGAZINE LIBRARY

The BSFA maintains a library of US and UK science fiction magazines from which members can borrow for a nominal charge. Library address: J. Bowman, Ballinoe, Ardgay, Ross-shire, Scotland.

NEW WORLDS RESURGENT

For the avant garde, a special "subscriber's issue" of the old New Worlds announced that the magazine is to appear in paperback format as New Worlds Quarterly beginning in June 1971, published by Sphere in the UK, and by Berkley in the USA.

BSFA LIBRARY

SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION

In association with the Department of Applied Philosophy at the North East London Polytechnic, there is now a Science Fiction Foundation. Aims of the Foundation include collecting together bibliographic material, original manuscripts and author's personal papers, and making this material available to writers, students and academics.

It is expected that the existence of the Science Fiction Foundation will generate a variety of activities - exhibitions, seminars, visiting lectures and research projects - all of which will cut across interdisciplinary boundaries within the Polytechnic.

