Foundation 10

# FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

# 10

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the review of science fiction

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Editorial Board:

Editor – **Peter Nicholls**

Associate Editor (Features) – **Ian Watson**

Associate Editor (Forum) – **Christopher Priest**


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Number 10, June 1976

# editorial

## *Peter Nicholls*

*This is the largest single issue of* Foundation *yet – eight pages longer, if I have done my preliminary sums right, than* Foundation *6, which held the previous record. Even then, as we went to press I had to cut twenty pages out – we just can't afford 150 page issues. Our apologies especially to Professor Leland Fetzer, whose lively article on Kuprin, an early Russian Wellsian novelist, will definitely appear in the next issue. Apologies also to six of our regular reviewers, whose reviews have been held over.*

*This issue is much bigger than it looks. Our devotion to the currently fashionable precept that "small is beautiful" has led us finally to go down from 11pt to 9pt type for everything except the Features Section. (Paper costs had something to do with it. I admit.) We hope that none of our readers go blind, but at least as you head towards the optician, you can comfort yourself with the thought that you're getting more for your money.*

*There is a new, separate section to the journal, "Foundation Forum", edited and introduced by Christopher Priest. We would like to hear your response to this innovation. Ian Watson has taken over Features. I remain overall and technical editor: I am also directly responsible for the Letters and Review sections.*

*Some people think that our reviews are getting too long. Readers are invited to give their opinion on this question, too. I intend to hold adverse reviews of not-very-important books down to no more than 750 words in future. We receive (and usually cut down) quite a number of extended hatchet jobs from reviewers who have lost their temper sufficiently to need several thousand words before cooling off to room temperature. They must be fun to write, but it's tedious to read too many of them. Reviewers, please note. Our policy remains unchanged in one respect: we will continue to publish long reviews (circa 2,000 – 3,000 words) which examine an author's latest work in the context of his earlier books, or go on from a specific book to examine an important general question. Many of our reviews, that is, are closer to feature articles than critical notices, partly because many of the books in question have been out for several months by the time* Foundation *appears. Hence, the emphasis is quite different from that, say, of a newspaper, which necessarily assumes its readers to be completely ignorant of the books reviewed.*

*We welcome a number of new reviewers this issue: Hilary Bailey, the present editor of* New Worlds*; Jane Mackay, a graduate librarian with a special interest in sf; Helen Nicholls, a lecturer in English (no nepotism involved – she is not the editor's wife, only his sister); and Pauline Jones, the sf illustrator. The intention was not especially to redress the balance of the sexes, though that is a pleasant side effect. We also welcome as reviewers Douglas Barbour, Angus Taylor, and John Radford, all of whom will already be known to* Foundation *readers by their feature articles (two of them have features in this issue), Tom Hutchinson, author, sf critic for* The Times *and film critic for the* Sunday Telegraph, *and Colin Lester (Research Assistant and new Secretary of the Science Fiction Foundation, graduate in English from Keele and the University of Liverpool).*

*Some items of news: catalogues of the SFF Research library are now available in four parts (a) BSFA Library Catalogue (acquisitions up to 1970 – 69 pages) for £0.60 (b) National Book League 1973 SF Book Exhibition Catalogue, with full annotations (79 pages) for £0.60 (c) SFF Library Catalogue, listing books additional to those listed in (a) and (b) (acquired between 1970 and February '75, 92 pages) for £0.75 (d) SFF Supplementary Catalogue (acquisitions March '75 to January '76, 33 pages) for £0.35. The prices do* not *include postage. Within two years, our catalogues will be integrated, and continually updated through a computer system. Photo copies of the catalogue print-out will be available.*

*As advertised in* Foundation *9, the Science Fiction Foundation is sponsoring an annual award in science fiction criticism, to be known as the James Blish Award. We have decided, to give the judges more time, to make the first award (cash plus an inscribed plaque) at the Annual Easter Convention next year, 1977. Anyone who has published serious sf criticism, whether in books or magazines or news-*

*papers during the period January 1974 to October 1976, is eligible. Nominations to be sent to Peter Nicholls, please. Judges for the first award will be myself, Ursula Le Guin, Robert Louit, Philip Strick and Ian Watson.*

*The Council of the SFF varies slightly from year to year. The current Council Membership (our present letterhead paper is out of date) is Patron: Arthur C. Clarke; Polytechnic membership: Mr. Charles Barren, Dr. George Brosan, Mr. E.R. Cook, Mr. Leon Crickmore, Mr. R. Duff, Mr. Colin Lester and Dr. John Radford; professional sf membership: Ms. Ursula Le Guin, and Messrs. Ken Bulmer, George Hay, Christopher Priest, Philip Strick and Ian Watson. The fourteenth place on the Council has been vacant since the death of James Blish. The Council meets once every three months.*

*In the "Letters" section of this issue, J.G. Ballard comments on the disastrous effect he sees the grey armies of the academics as having on science fiction. This subject has been much discussed in the past, notably in the pages of the* SFWA Bulletin, *and in a recent heated controversy in* Riverside Quarterly, *Vol 6, No 3. I speak as an academic myself, but after several years of keeping my own counsel on this subject. I will briefly say where I stand (I speak for myself, not for the SFF): ideally, informed and intelligent criticism of science fiction, as with that of any fiction will help and interest the reader. But to put it bluntly, standards in our field in reality are low. I have read critical articles on sf by at least 120 different hands in the last few years, mainly by academics, or by other writers who adopt an academic mode of criticism; of these critics, I doubt if more than twenty have added to our knowledge or understanding of the field, and been interesting to read. Many of them have been shamefully poor. Too many third-raters, with no real love or understanding of their subject, are jumping onto what now seems to be an academic bandwagon, and in their fumblings, bringing both science fiction and academia into disrepute. A question – how well have we managed to steer clear of this danger ourselves?*

*The question is not simply rhetorical; nor is it easy to answer, since criteria of what is good and bad in criticism vary so much. Several letters in this issue bear directly on this question, some of them in less than flattering terms. Controversy is one thing though, and flat tedium is another. Do people read a journal like this out of a sense of duty, or because they enjoy it? We'd really like to hear your views - not just the reassuring ones either. This is a small circulation magazine which can only survive (except as a magazine equivalent of the "undead" of the horror films, chalk-faced and stiff-limbed) while it serves a genuine need. Is* Foundation *doing a service for literature, or are we (God forbid) the storm troops of what J.G. Ballard calls the new "lumpen-intelligentsia"?*

February 26, 1976

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# feature section

*edited by Ian Watson*

*By the ripe age of 28, Brian Stableford has already established a considerable fan following for his many space adventures in the* Hooded Swan *and* Dies Irae *series, as well as a solid reputation as a critic of sf. Currently he is working on a major study of sf from a viewpoint deriving from the sociology of literature. Although we have featured several reviews by Mr. Stableford, this is his first appearance in* Foundation *as social historian of sf – and those who imagine that Hugo Gernsback first married the words* science *and* fiction *in 1926 may be in for a surprise; though the fact that a Mr. William Wilson anticipated Gernsback by 75 years is, as Mr. Stableford comments, less significant than what this mid-Victorian gentleman thought that such a literature was, should be, and why. In the near future we hope to feature an assessment by Brian Stableford of the sf of the controversial Barry Malzberg, whilst Mr. Malzberg himself reportedly red-shifts furiously out of the field.*

# william wilson's prospectus for science fiction: 1851

*Brian M. Stableford*

> We hope it will not be long before we may have other works of Science-Fiction, as we believe such works likely to fulfil a good purpose, and create an interest, where, unhappily, science alone might fail.

This paragraph contains the first reference to Science-Fiction, so far as I am aware, in literary history. The words are those of William Wilson, in *A Little Earnest Book Upon a Great Old Subject,* which was pub-

lished in 1851. The "great old subject" of the title is Poetry, and the book consists of Wilson's reflections on that subject, compiled during his summer holiday in 1850.

For the most part, Wilson's thoughts on poets and poetry in general are commonplace and stereotyped. A devout Christian, he considers poetry to be divinely inspired and the highest endeavour of civilized man. There are in the book, however, two chapters which deal with "the Poetry of Science", and in these chapters Wilson breaks original ground, incidentally providing a prospectus for a new literary *genre*. Seventy-five years were to pass before science fiction was described and labelled a second time by Hugo Gernsback, and it is most interesting to compare Wilson's idea about what science fiction ought to be with the fiction that Gernsback promoted.

"The Poetry of Science," says Wilson:

> is beginning to attract a considerable increase of attention, and it is most just that it should be so; for the Natural and Mechanical Sciences are alike loaded with rich and wonderful Poetry: Poetry which only requires the clear eyes of the Poet's calm and lofty soul to be perceived and appreciated, and then to be translated palpably by him to the general mind, through the instrumentality of his divine art.
>
> All known Sciences contain within themselves Worlds of exquisite Poetry, and the more the general mind becomes familiarized with the ever-varying interest and fascinations connected with their study, the more rapid will become the diffusion and the rise of Science.
>
> Those Sciences which appear to us to be most attractive to the imagination, and to present the widest and best revealed fields of investigation, and to contain – even to a surface-inspection of their wonders, their beauties and their combinations – the most Poetry, are the studies of the Philosophical Naturalist, the Botanist, the Geologist, the Astronomer, and the Chemist. The Study and extraction of Poetry from these sciences is like reading mighty books of Life, Beauty and Divinity. But we can only obtain in the end, even if we spend a life in abstract Scientific studies 'a cloud-reflection of the vast Unseen'.
>
> With what an advance of interest over that of ordinary men must the Man of Science wander in the Fields and the Woods, and traverse over mountains, seas and deserts. The Trees and the Flowers have tongues for him, and the Rivers and the Streams have a History. He knows that the smallest insect, as well as the mightiest animal, has a direct parentage. He knows where the Zoophytes merge into one another: he knows not only the form and colour of a Flower, but the combinations that produce its symmetry and lovely hue: and he knows the laws by which the white sunbeam is thrown back from its surface in coloured rays. He knows, O wondrous fact! 'that the dew-drop which glistens on the Flower, that the tear which trembles on the eyelid, holds *locked in its transparent cells* an amount of electric fire equal to that which is discharged during a storm from a thunder-cloud.' Here is Poetry! He knows that *minute insects* have built whole islands of coral reefs up into light from the low deep bed of the vast ocean. Here is Poetry! He knows that neither Matter nor Mind ever die; and that if the fixed laws of Attraction and Repulsion were for one instant disturbed, the whole physical Creation would fall back that moment into Chaos, and that the ponderous Globe itself would then and there evanish.

We must overlook here certain errors as regards Wilson's understanding of the scientific knowledge of 1851, and we must look beyond the purple prose at the ideas which he is trying to convey. It is clear that what Wilson is talking about here is a "sense of wonder". It is not quite the same sense of wonder which the science fiction fan talks about, being wonder inspired by knowledge rather than imaginative possibilities, but it has a good deal in common with it. The quotation within the quotation is attributed by Wilson to "Hunt's *Poetry of Science*" – a title which I have been unable to trace – which he seems to have read at some point in the summer holiday during which he was recording his thoughts. This sense of wonder has been awakened in Wilson by the revelation that scientific knowledge may permit a man to see the world through different eyes: eyes informed of the true complexity of the natural world. It has been revealed to him that there is detail in the world about us which is inaccessible to our senses, that singular events may have a deeper significance in terms of the scientific principles which lie behind them.

It was apparently not Hunt's *Poetry of Science* alone which brought this home to him, for he goes on to make the following observation:

> Fiction has lately been chosen as a means of familiarizing science in one single case only, but with great success. It is by the celebrated dramatic Poet, R.H. Horne[1], and is entitled 'The Poor Artist; or, Seven Eye-sights and one object.'

This is followed by the sentence which I quoted at the beginning of the essay. Critics and literary historians have offered many candidates for the dubious distinction of being the first work of science fiction, but *The Poor Artist* is conspicuous by its absence from their lists of the *genre's* seminal works. (It is, perhaps, a little remarkable that Wilson should identify this as the "single case only" of fiction presenting a scientific perspective, but it is possible that he was not conversant with the work of Poe, who had died the previous year, and highly probable that he had not come across Mrs. Griffith's *Three Hundred Years Hence* – which he might not, in any case, have considered "lately" enough.) However, though *The Poor Artist*, like Wilson's commentary

1. Richard Henry Horne, who preferred to sign himself R. Hengist Horne, is perhaps best known for his collection of literary criticism *A New Spirit of the Age*, published twenty years after Hazlitt's original. He lived an active life, fighting in the Mexican War against Spain and serving as commissioner for the crown lands in Australia for many years. He wrote criticism, satire and epic poetry, and employed a good many pseudonyms (he wrote a history of duelling as "Lucius O'Trigger"). *The Poor Artist* was reprinted in 1871, with some new speculative material added, but nevertheless seems to have escaped the notice of the sf bibliographers. His only other work of imaginative fiction was *Sithron the Star-Stricken.*

on it, has been overlooked by the new critics of sf, it is not without interest. Here is Wilson's description of it:

> The story of 'The Poor Artist' is in itself – although only used as a garb in which to make 'the revelations of a reasoning imagination' appear the more attractive – full of earnest and speculative interest. The story of a high, simple, true spirit, struggling with unalterable will and determination towards an ennobling purpose, is pleasingly told.
>
> He does good work who leads us thus seductively, along the pleasant road of fiction, to such thought-inducing glimpses of the 'Poetry of Science' as we find here. The different aspects in which any one given object may and must appear to each differently formed insect and animal vision is the cause of the six sketches taken by the Poor Artist from descriptions given to him by a Bee, an Ant, a Spider, a Perch, a Robin, and a Cat. On investigating the object itself, he finds that the whole six have seen on the grass a shining golden sovereign, covered with bright dew-drops, and that his six strange pictures, all entirely different, of this single object, have been caused by the *different sights* of each of the little narrators. This little book, however, does not stop here; many thought-digressions spring from the contemplation of creation's unrevealed wonders.

*The Poor Artist* is a story of revelation, and there is no coincidence at all in the fact that it deals with the same revelation which had already seized Wilson's imagination thanks to Hunt's *Poetry of Science.* Here, again, we have the innocent sense of wonder at the knowledge that what our eyes tell us is neither the whole truth nor the only truth. This description of *The Poor Artist* puts one very much in mind of J.B.S. Haldane's essay "Possible Worlds", in which Haldane attempts to describe the world-view of the barnacle, and concludes with the oft-quoted remark that "the world is not only queerer than we imagine but queerer than we *can* imagine".

It is worth noting also how similar to Gernsback Wilson sounds in his account of this story. Gernsback, in his editorial to the first *Amazing Stories,* spoke of science fiction as "charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision", and this was very much how he saw it – to him, the story was just a vehicle for the speculation: "only used as a garb in which to make 'the revelations of reasoning imagination' more attractive". It is clear that the science fiction which Wilson is trying to describe is the same science fiction which Gernsback was to define in the 1920s, not the science fiction of later, more sophisticated definitions. Wilson goes on to say:

> Campbell[2] says that 'Fiction in Poetry is not the reverse of truth, but her soft and enchanting resemblance'. Now this applies especially to Science-Fiction, *in which the revealed truths of Science may be given, interwoven with a pleasing story* which may itself be poetical and *true* – thus circulating a

2. The reference is to the Scottish Poet Thomas Campbell, author of *The Pleasures of Hope* and *The Battle of the Baltic.*

knowledge of the Poetry of Science, clothed in a garb of the Poetry of Life.

The italics here are mine (except for the word 'true'), and they emphasize a phrase that may just as well have been written by Gernsback. Indeed, Gernsback – again in his editorial to the first issue of *Amazing* – spoke of Poe and Verne in almost exactly this way; he referred to "amazing romances, cleverly interwoven with a scientific thread".

It is significant that Wilson, having made these points about the potential of science fiction, should himself be drawn into the realms of scientific speculation. Perhaps it is almost inevitable that having discovered a sense of wonder in the perspectives of science, one should then be carried away by it. It is certainly a natural step, for as Wilson notes of *The Poor Artist,* "this little book does not stop here; many thought-digressions spring from the contemplation of creation's unrevealed wonders".

The first of his speculations concerns animal languages and the injustice of the phrase "dumb animals". Not only does he suggest that the audible noises made by familiar animals may communicate information, but he also argues for the possibility that apparently-voiceless animals may communicate using sounds outside the range of human hearing.

We know that when we gaze at some beautiful ruin, the space between our eye and the object is full of numerous tribes of living insects. We know that the very air which we breathe, and the water which we drink, both are also full of life. Is it not, then, as reasonable to suppose, that if life which we cannot see exists everywhere around us, so languages which we cannot hear, and which if we could hear, we could not of course understand, are spoken around us, by animals and insects which we consider to lack the power of sound.

Lest this argument appear rather too reckless to his readers, Wilson then proceeds to marvel – again, exactly as Gernsback was to marvel seventy-five years later – at the great achievements already to be credited to modern science.

The modern discoveries and applications of Science throw deeply into the shade the old romances and fanciful legends of our boyhood. The Arabian Nights' Entertainments – The Child's Fairy Tales – Oberon and Titania – The Child's Own Book – all are robbed of their old wonder by the many marvels of modern science. The Magnetic Needle – which has grown into the almost Omnipresent Electric Telegraph – has more magic about its *reality,* than the wildest creations of child-fiction and legend have in their *ideality.* The Fairies never fancied anything more wonderful than holding conversations thousands of miles apart, and they only effected such things in Story; yet such conversations are now every-day commonplaces. It really does not seem out of the way to look forward to the day – and that day not far distant – when the Mother Country may thus hold hourly communication with her various gigantic Colonial Infants in each hemisphere of the Globe.

The Electric Telegraph, when calmly thought of – and when we consider that the full powers of Electricity are not yet developed – is certainly the most wonderful of the modern applications of the discoveries of Science; because – as we have observed before – it almost realises in the mind Omnipresence! Truly, to the thoughtful mind, the days of Miracles are not over.

We will only make passing mention of frequent ascents in great Nassau Balloons, filled with 90,000 feet of gas, and travelling many miles above the Earth's surface across the Channel in the night, and landing in the morning somewhere in the far South of France.

We will only make passing mention of the entire banishment of night, as it were, from our great cities – by means of the soon-to-be-used Electric light – which, at a given hour, or even moment, will suddenly illuminate whole towns with a brightness almost equal to the light of day.

We will bestow but a glancing word upon Britannia Tubular Bridges – monster trains conveying thousands of passengers at the rate of sixty miles per hour – and the joining of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. We are sure, however, of one fact; that not many generations ago, to *talk* of such noble achievements would have resulted in confinement for life as a lunatic, and to have been successful in one or other would have been deemed a miracle. Many things that science has rendered common often approach sublimity.

The Amputation of Limbs without pain, the abstraction and replacement of eyes without the knowledge of the owner, are no longer things of even common surprise.

This was written twelve years before Jules Verne published the first of his *Voyages Extraordinaires* – and thirty-seven years before Edison actually perfected the electric light bulb which Wilson foresaw illuminating cities by night at the flick of a switch. It is significant that priority of place in this catalogue of wonders is given to the telegraph – a breakthrough in communications – for it was, of course, the invention and development of its successor, radio, which so inspired and involved Gernsback. It is the use of Science in facilitating *communication* which is of paramount importance to Wilson: in the communication of perspectives which allow people to see the world in a different light. The telegraph destroyed distance in making communication easier, but Wilson also looked to Science to overcome failure to communicate of a different kind. He looked to the human sciences to allow people to gain a better understanding of one another, and perhaps it is forgivable that his enthusiasm carries him away in this respect (as, in fact, similar enthusiasm carried away other speculative thinkers in more recent times) and makes him a champion of a plausible pseudo-science. In Wilson's case, it is Phrenology, but it is quite clear from his expectations of Phrenology – his motives for embracing it – that his is the same enthusiasm which led men with similar minds to embrace Dianetics and General Semantics. He writes:

What power over his fellow men is possessed by him who understands it,

> and how often in his passage through life may it not save him from imposition, miscalculation of impulse, and the many pangs of false friendship, and deceived love, and the bitter sorrows that thickly spring from misreposed confidence . . . The Statesman, and especially the Diplomatist, would often find that such a science, well used, might be turned to the vast advantage of whole Nations and Races . . . Thus the Poetry of Phrenology rests in its great power of good; for it may be made, if justly used by a true man, a Peacemaker, a Guide, and a Consolation.

L. Ron Hubbard, science fiction writer turned prophet, claimed no more (and no less) for his own custom-designed science/religion.

The fact that it was William Wilson, and not Hugo Gernsback, who invented the idea of science fiction is little more than a footnote for the historians intent on making a publishing category into a literary corpus with its own self-contained historicity. But there is something much more important to be learned from the pages of *A Little Earnest Book Upon a Great Old Subject* than the mere fact of Wilson's priority, and that is the manner in which the idea originated – the reason why the idea came to him and interested him. The "poetry of Science", the business of scientific speculation, and the notion of science fiction as an intellectual and artistic discipline, are all bound up with the realization (perhaps easy enough today, but not so easy in the intellectual climate of 1850) that the world we see is only a very small fraction of the world that *is*, and that in getting to know more about the world that is we may learn a great deal more about the world we see, and about ourselves. This is the revelation that common sense is often misleading, and that what is obvious is not necessarily true.

William Wilson's prospectus for science fiction was ignored, and has been forgotten. In 1851, it was ahead of its time. But the intellectual discovery made by Wilson and dramatised by Horne was to be made again and again over the next seventy-five years, in many areas of scientific thought. James Clerk Maxwell discovered that the light we see is only a tiny fraction of a vast electromagnetic spectrum. Bohr and Einstein revealed that the world of the atom is a world of mathematical abstractions where common sense concepts do not hold good. Hubble and Shapley discovered the vastness of the universe beyond the limits of visibility. William Wilson's revelation was confirmed in no uncertain terms by science. Perhaps it would not be too bold to argue that the re-emergence of Wilson's prospectus, in virtually identical form, during the early years of the twentieth century, was historically inevitable.

All quotes from Wilson are taken from *A Little Earnest Book Upon a Great Old Subject*, London: Darton & Co. 1851, pp.131-149. I am indebted to John Eggeling, who first directed my attention to the existence of the book, and to the Scottish National Lending Library, who made a copy available to me.

*It was particularly saintly of Bob Shaw to send the piece below to zero-pence-per-word* Foundation *at precisely the time when he had just given up his job as publicity officer in the ship-building industry to write full time, with the aim of clocking up three books a year. (Writers out there, please note! Our Profession series depends on such good deeds as this in the midst of schedules and wolves howling at the door . . .)*

*Last year, British Mensa came up with the bright idea that it was the duty of sf writers of the Western World to bring the Future into being by writing stories containing ideas for our scientists and technologists to put into practice – one sf writer being allocated to each British University and Research Establishment (locked in the basement of Grimbledon Down?) with a Ministry of SF co-ordinating the project. This may not exactly be what sf is all about. As James Blish pointed out in an essay in George Hay's* The Disappearing Future, *"Future Recall", sf actually has a rather slim record for specific predictions (as opposed to general expansion of our consciousness of the Future). Yet to Bob Shaw certainly belongs the credit for one of the few authentic sf 'inventions': Slow Glass. Strange, that none of our industrialists have yet tried to bring Slow Glass into being . . . Or perhaps this is fortunate for Mr. Shaw, who remains untethered and at large, to write the books he pleases – about future* people, *and* situations.

# the profession of science fiction: xi: escape to infinity

*Bob Shaw*

A friend who has been in the science fiction writing business for many years, and who occasionally makes wise pronouncements about the profession, recently said something like, "It all started as a bit of a joke, then it gradually took over my life".

The remark didn't have much impact at the time. Our first pints of the day had just been placed on the pub table and at moments like that one is concerned with plumbing malty depths rather than scaling mental heights, but it hit me 48 hours later, the way the first null-A

book was supposed to. The sentence has since acquired even more significance because – not long before sitting down to pen these words – I resigned from a secure, cushy, well-paid job to try living solely on what income can be obtained through writing science fiction. This is quite a big step for a man with the usual family responsibilities, but it seems gargantuan from the viewpoint I had when I sold the first story a couple of decades ago, or even the first novel eight years ago.

The phrase "a bit of a joke" is one of the multi-layered gemstones of British language and usage which persuades me that English can be mastered only by the native-born. In addition to its overt message that something is not to be taken too seriously, it conveys all the nuances of amused contempt that the archetypal Briton feels for a venture which wouldn't even have been put forward for serious consideration had the people concerned with it not been questionable in some way. That's how I always used the phrase – so how did I progress from regarding science fiction as a bit of a joke to the point of full commitment?

First of all, there was the pressing need to escape from the dullness of life in suburban Belfast in the late 1930s. I was an active and gregarious youngster, good at sports, and was reasonably content with life when the weather was fine; but when it rained and we were driven indoors to our separate homes, which happened quite often, the greyness used to clamp down and it was imperative to make a getaway by reading. My parents were non-literary to an extent which is difficult to appreciate in these days of plentiful paperbacks – there wasn't one book indigenous to the house – and they were somewhat baffled by the fact that I was an early and voracious reader who, from the age of seven, had been going through a steady one book a day from the local library. My father, in particular, regarded reading as an unhealthy pastime, dangerous to the eyes, and some of my earliest memories are of squatting under the bedclothes until the small hours, scanning books by the light of a bicycle lamp and praying he wouldn't hear the pages turning.

I read anything I could get hold of, but always had a strong preference for science fiction – a taste which had been nurtured by the fantastic serials which usually ran in the boys' weekly papers like *Wizard* and *Hotspur*. Science fiction was always a passion with me because of its message that the good times were a-coming, even if I wouldn't live to see them; that somewhere just around a wrinkle in the space-time continuum there were worlds of colour and glamour and excitement; that there were other horizons on which, in place of shipyard gantries, there gleamed the geometries of alien cities.

Nobody told me about H.G. Wells – at school we were stuck with "The Cloister and the Hearth" – and the only relevant books I found in the library were *The Starmaker* and one of Burrough's Martian series. I loved the former; quickly identified the latter as fantasy and rejected it because it held no genuine promise for the future. Strange how, from a sampling of only two books, my tastes re science fiction and fantasy were formed for life.

The discovery of *Astounding,* when I was about 11, converted me from a lover of science fiction into a rabid fanatic. The first thing I ever read in it was one of van Vogt's stories in the Mixed Men series, with its haughty Grand Captain Gloria Laurr and her vast warship from Imperial Earth hunting down a long-lost race of androids in the Magellanic Clouds. Looking back on the experience, I could almost make a case for governmental control of the exposure of vintage van Vogt to developing minds. The effect on me was much more devastating than LSD and much longer lasting – indeed, as far as I can determine, it was indelible. The boys' paper science fiction had been intriguing, but not wholly satisfying, whereas in the van Vogt stories there was a soul-glutting blend of new concepts, politics, sex, and adventure. His palette was sombre-hued, the brush strokes were broad, and the overall impression was one of sophisticated brooding maturity which I found totally irresistible.

It is no exaggeration to say that the reading of that first story changed the entire course of my life. For a start, my education suffered badly on account of the fact that I thought of nothing but science fiction and cared for nothing but science fiction during the years when I should have been working up to university entrance. It rarely occurred to me to pay any attention to the teachers at high school, the only occasions on which I tuned in to them being when they employed a new word such as vector or co-ordinate, which sounded as though I could use it in the sf stories I scribbled in my notebooks at the back of the classroom. My father was bitterly disappointed when I, anxious to avoid the embarrassment of a complete flop, quit school shortly before the matriculation examinations and got a job as an apprentice draughtsman.

Even then, I didn't improve much, doing the minimum amount of work and the maximum amount of science fiction reading. All the other apprentices were working hard at night classes and I was persuaded to attend them too – but at the age of 19 I encountered sf fandom and promptly quit night school so that I would have my evenings free for working on fanzines. I was utterly without worldly ambition because I *knew* that all that was needed for a rich full life was

a few shillings a week with which to buy sf magazines and beer.

The character sketched above doesn't sound like one who, as mentioned earlier, would regard the professional writing of science fiction as "a bit of a joke". The explanation for the discrepancy lies in mild schizophrenia. My family were Methodist, and part of the creed was that you worked hard in a steady job, saved what money you could, and never ever put yourself in a position where you might have to face the ultimate shame of accepting dole money. This outlook is basic to the Ulster Scot's way of life, and it is well nigh impossible to spend one's formative years in that mental climate without being influenced by it. One side of my nature was fervently convinced that devotion to science fiction was the path to happiness; the other side was keenly aware of my father's disappointment and shared his conviction that a life of industrious respectability in a recognised safe job was no more than the family's due.

The idea of becoming a full-time sf author, if it ever flicked across my mind in those days, could not have even been broached to my parents. My mother had been pleased to get me safely into a drawing office, and somehow she instinctively recognised a threat to this achievement in the scribblings I kept on doing in jotters. She occasionally tore them up into small pieces, all the while assuring me that I had no literary ability and would never be able to sell a word. My father came from farming stock (by the time he was 30 he had had one German bullet and two IRA bullets in him) and referred to science fiction as "that black magic stuff". When I sold my first story, and showed him the cheque for it, he went around telling everybody I had "won" some money. In Ireland there is a custom that when you win money you give a token amount – a luck penny – to your nearest and dearest so that fortune will smile on you again. My father hung around for hours waiting for a luck penny from that first cheque, was genuinely hurt when it wasn't forthcoming, and never really understood that I had been taking part in the straightforward commercial operation of making and selling a product.

So much for early influences. Currently, I regard science fiction as escapist, but in a positive sense. The conventional way of taking time off from the pressures of existence is to narrow one's field, to retreat inwards to the miniature and more controllable world of the model railway, the garden, the budgerigar in its cage. Equivalents in literature are the western and the mystery novel – especially the country house whodunnit – in which the boundaries of the observed universe are drawn in tight, like chintz curtains, and the actions are performed by a cast of simplified characters.

Science fiction escapism is different because it is an escape *to* reality.

The world image presented by mundane "realists" is one in which the invariants are things like mortgages, the TUC, engine wear, national insurance contributions, prostate troubles, Sunday, unemployment figures, newspapers, cemeteries, Harpic, ambition, season tickets, raincoats, Russia, suet, gas meters, greenfly, and so on. What the science fiction buff understands is that all these things are merely local phenomena of a very temporary nature, and that to get them in their proper perspective it is only necessary to step back a few thousand light years. That is where the excitement lay in my discovery of science fiction – and what a relief it was to learn that its verities so greatly transcended the paltry reality which so much engaged the attention of others.

It's all a matter of viewpoint, of course. A person who is reading the minutes of a trade union conference probably feels that he is in closer contact with reality than another who is reading – to choose a very basic example – a story about a spaceship getting into difficulties and being forced to land on an unfamiliar world. And yet he is concerning himself with a transient local phenomenon, while the sf reader is projecting himself into a general class of situation which must have occurred many times in countless galaxies throughout the universe. To put it another way: reportage is arithmetic; fiction is algebra.

It has been said that I'm content to work within the traditional themes of science fiction, and I'm prepared to accept that statement – with a rider to the effect that I go to considerable pains to introduce real people in the situations. Real people (it isn't entirely necessary for them to be human beings) give a story significance. The universe is marvellous only if there's somebody there to do the marvelling, but in science fiction it is important to strike the right balance between characterisation and exposition. In a story which has a strong idea the human interest stuff can get in the way of what the reader may legitimately regard as the main work in hand. This is why I try to express character in terms of action, and it has something to do with why I write a type of story which Harry Harrison has described as "plot supported".

The question of plotting is one on which I have strong opinions because it is so close to the central arena of the creative process. The incorporation of a strong story line in a book seems to be regarded by many good writers as a vote of no confidence in the quality of the writing. When Harry Harrison used the term "plot supported" (in *Hell's Cartographers*) he was referring to books he had written in a career phase he was happy to leave behind. And when a mainstream

"okay" writer produces a book in which the plot element has grown strong, and there is even a likelihood of the reader feeling some suspense about the final outcome, it is quite common for him to tell the ending of the story in the first chapter. He is saying: *Let's get the distractions out of the way so that you can concentrate on the actual writing, the message, the insight into human nature, etc.*

This is a perfectly valid stance for some writers – the best liquors are never sold in novelty bottles – but it is a risky one in some ways. When the idea for a story is born (I'm writing purely about my own experience here) it is a thing which often can be expressed in one short sentence. Sometimes it may only be a mood, an attitude, a relationship perceived – in which case it can't even be framed as a sentence. The only difference between this sampling from my consciousness and any other is that the writer's instincts and experience recognise it as having potential. The problem then is one of deciding how to develop and realize this potential.

In my case – I emphasise again that this is just one man's workshop practice, and make no apology for the engineering similes – the best method is to devise a plot which is like a machine which will hold the idea-diamond in a claw under a spotlight and turn it this way and that. The machine has to be intelligent, of course, so that it can (a) select all the good facets and make sure they are given due prominence, and (b) identify all the flaws and do its best to ensure that they become lost in the dazzle and fireworks.

The trouble is that I find such machines extremely difficult to build. My most successful short story ever was "Light of Other Days", which has been anthologised about 20 times and has made as much money as some people get for an entire novel. It took about four hours to write – but I carried the idea, the notion of "slow glass", around in my head for over two years. During that time I conceived plot after plot, most of which would have resulted in saleable stories, but which I rejected because they were machines which did not come up to the specification I had in mind. Against the four hours of actual writing time, there were perhaps a hundred scattered hours of inventing, assessing and rejecting unworthy instruments.

That's what plotting means to me. It's hard work, and if I were writing for no consideration other than money I might do less of it because the hidden investment in time cuts down the effective earnings per hour. At this point I can echo the advice given to new writers by Sprague de Camp. He said that when he investigated why unsuccessful tyros were failing he discovered they were putting far too little time into plotting. I would add to that by saying there's no point in making

up just any old plot, throwing in action sequence after action sequence simply to keep things going – you've got to aim to build that unique custom-made machine which will hold your idea-diamond in a firm grip and, like the typing head in an IBM golf ball machine, turn it to every precise angle you desire so that its fire will burn brightest.

Perhaps paradoxically, I find that the successful construction of a plot does not create an incentive to write carelessly. In the past I have tried a few slightly plotted pieces but, not commanding sufficient pure literary resources, never succeeded in bringing them off. There's nothing more depressing than reaching a spot in a story where everything begins to sag and knowing there's no way to hoist it back up to acceptability. It's no good proclaiming that you'll save the day by writing better at those places, because if you haven't been doing your best all along the piece is doomed anyway. On the other hand, the comfort of knowing that everything is tight and sure and solidly made is stimulating and keeps the mind at a high pitch. Another major consideration is that this approach to plotting necessitates intense examination of the story idea and can make you more aware of its ramifications, sometimes to the point where fertile new areas are discovered and opened up.

Summing up, the novels and short stories I've published so far probably reflect my belief that the universe in general is a fascinating place, even if 20th Century Earth can be a bit of a bore at times. I never use my science fiction to make comments on the present day scene, partly because better commentators are already doing that, partly because I'm not interested in using science fiction in that way. The general aim of my work is – if I may be permitted a bit of imagery – to wrench open a door in the grey circumscribing world of the here-and-now and show the technicolour infinities beyond it, which is what science fiction did for me. Incidentally, I regard that as a lofty aim.

The sort of stories I particularly enjoy reading, the sort Henry Kuttner did so well, are those which begin in a normal-seeming present and then, very gradually, steer you across an unseen line into strange dimensions. I enjoy writing stories like that, too, because they half-convince me that the wrinkles in the continuum, which I mentioned earlier, are close at hand, that maybe we won't have to wait Stapledonian aeons until doorknobs open blue eyes and blink at us, or time-travellers step out of glowing circles into our living rooms, or stars shine beneath the last step of the cellar stairs.

*John Brunner, as all of our readers must know, is a science fiction novelist. His most recently published work is* Shockwave Rider. *We are happy to welcome him here in his less familiar role as critic. Pynchon's* Gravity's Rainbow, *the subject of his discussion, was first published in the U.K. in hardback and paperback by Jonathan Cape in 1973. It is currently available in paperback from Picador (1975, £1.50).*

# coming events: an assessment of thomas pynchon's "gravity's rainbow"

*John Brunner*

The theme of Pynchon's enormous novel is salvation, in a specifically twentieth-century sense of that word: one which renders it almost interchangeable with *purpose.* If there is a reason for our existence, if we can even convince ourselves that there may be such a reason though it is beyond our human power to comprehend, then we are saved.

It has been said that the Vietnam war was "the most rational war in history" – the first to be conducted in accordance with computerised analyses of probable outcomes, the first where an attempt was made to straitjacket the individual participants into the Procrustean framework of such approximations as machines can cope with. It has also been said (perhaps apocryphally, for I quote the programme-note by Raymond Fletcher, MP, for Joan Littlewood's *Oh What a Lovely War!*) that when fed data relating to the outbreak of World War I half a century earlier a computer rejected them out of hand on the grounds that they were too preposterous to be true.

Exactly between those lay World War II, the background which in distorted form serves Pynchon for *Gravity's Rainbow.* It seems like an apt halfway house. On one level the author is hymning the irrational (*sc.* supra-rational?) element in warfare, purposive action endlessly aborted, countless projects withered in the bud, lives not only of people but of peoples expended to no discoverable effect. (Among the most powerful passages of the book: a catalogue of European and West Asian ethnic groups so totally uprooted by the war that all of them without exception had to desert their "homelands".)

Yet simultaneously he is seeking, on behalf of his characters, something with which to warrant, to justify, to *excuse* this planetary outbreak of delirium.

Because it echoes his own irresoluble dilemma, he frequently invokes the predestinarian paradox of the Preterite: that cruellest of the doctrines invented by a cruel religion, which states that for most of mankind salvation not only is not possible but has never been possible, since it was decreed otherwise at the Creation.

The Preterite are those who have been "passed over". Is that all of us?

Rephrased into Pynchon's more contemporary terms, the problem is expressed in terms of the hope, without which our lives are pointless, that on some universal scale grander than what we can perceive directly there may be a pattern endowed with symmetry, the beauty of necessity, and . . . Here one is at a loss for a word that sufficiently conveys *in parvo* what it took Pynchon 760 sprawling pages even to set parameters for. In default of alternatives: make it *will.*

The chaotic, discontinuous, randomised, fragmented setting of a world at war suggests that any such voluntaristic process (of which we may partake by scraps and snippets when we exercise, or imagine we exercise, conscious choice) is prey to obstruction, frustration, possibly defeat. Here is a modern analogy of that theological principle which in the view of the medieval schoolmen made acute depression *(accidia)* the outward manifestation of the sin against the Holy Ghost. The greatest imaginable act of blasphemy was to doubt that the world had been created for a purpose good in the eyes of God.

Yet we are frighteningly aware that clinging at all costs to a purposeful pattern of events, tidy incorporation of every least occurrence into one overriding schema, is symptomatic of an advanced form of mental

illness. Is our hypothesis that on some "higher" plane a "real plan" for the universe exists no more than a disguised version of the paranoid's ego-centred world-system? This is a question to make for sleepless nights.

Here is admittedly as fundamental a theme as a novelist of our or any day can well adopt. How does Thomas Pynchon set about its explication into fictional terms?

Dominating his novel is the V-2, or A-4 rocket, presented as an ultimate phallic symbol: that object detached which unites, the locus of intersection between the creative brilliance of the human mind and the blind hate-filled destructiveness of which we are also capable. The V-2 which landed on a crowded London cinema was the V-2 *par excellence,* blending the world of make-believe with the harshest possible reality. To such an extent (if we are to believe Mr Pynchon) did *Vergeltungswaffen Zwei* come to distort the Nazis' power of reason, at the end of the war SS men were assigned to dig potatoes, not for food but to ferment into alcohol so that one more and yet one more rocket could be launched.

Pynchon seizes on the fact that V-2's victims could only hear the rocket coming after it had wreaked its damage. From this nucleus he elaborates a complex and incontestably science-fictional retrospective parallel world in which attempts are being made to bombard *Festung Europa* with psychic images of retribution and disaster. This succeeds so well that words (manipulated symbols) take on concrete substance: above all, the *Schwarzkommando*, the "Black Command" which in reality has as much to do with Africans as does the Black Watch, emerges into the world of the novel as a Negro tribe in Nazi Germany descended from survivors of the massacre of the Hereros, in the process of acquiring a V-2 of their own.

Among the discoveries made by the psychical warfare group: a young officer, a great philanderer, keeps on the wall of his office a map of London decorated with stars to mark his conquests, each with a girl's name appended. Are they real or imaginary? It's impossible to tell. Each lived, if she did live, where a V-2 was later to land. One man, through the unconscious process of orgasm (often nicknamed "the little death"), is sensing the impending rockets even though they outstrip the very sound they make.

This penetration of the curtain of the future, this reversibility of events, is at the core of Pynchon's argument.

But here already we begin to sense a weakness which will undermine the validity of the book.

Presented as a unique and remarkable attribute of V-2, the arrival of a missile ahead of its own sound is in fact common to all shells and even bullets. During World War I a shell from one of the so-called Paris Guns landed on a church crowded with worshippers at Sunday morning mass, an image infinitely more pregnant with significance – I would submit – in the context of a quest for purpose and salvation than the demolition of a cinema (except inasmuch as the latter exemplifies a one-generation shift in our preferred patterns of escapism).

As though aware of the specious nature of certain elements in the substructure of his novel, Mr Pynchon, from a stylistic standpoint, must be described as combining eclecticism with bombasticism: the quickness of the typewriter is intended to deceive the eye. One is reminded now of John Barth at his most lexicophilic, now of William Burroughs at his most disjointed; here of Henry Miller, for egoism, and there of Thomas Wolfe, for self-indulgence. Indeed, so extensive a gamut of American traditions is here touched on, from the factual-expository mode (Melville) to the precious-introverted mode (one is obliged to say Brautigan, but I was more reminded of Paul Gallico), that one suspects those critics who hailed *Gravity's Rainbow* as the greatest of modern novels were not so much praising Pynchon as complimenting themselves and one another on being able to spot all the various influences.

And this makes Mr Pynchon into his own worst enemy. His undiscriminating approach prevents the novel from having either a central focus or even a linear spine. For a book which ostensibly reflects an extremely vivid and sharply-defined metaphor, the course of a missile which at its launch is the fruit of clear, unemotional, reasoned calculation, and at its descent creates a havoc of blood and débris, this is a fatal shortcoming.

Hare after ingenious hare is started . . . and scarcely one is chased to a kill. (For instance, the entire *Schwarzkommando* element of the narrative exists solely so that two half-brothers shall meet by chance and fail to recognize one another.) And image after dazzling image is deployed . . . and left hanging in mid-air. (Not even at the apogee where the rocket achieves maximum altitude and turns to rejoin the Earth,

but at a seemingly arbitrary location, as though the author lost interest. Conceivably, forgot.)

The regular reader of sf, coming to the opening section of *Gravity's Rainbow*, would certainly be struck by Mr Pynchon's employment of a technique greatly akin to that used by Michael Moorcock in his "Jerry Cornelius" stories (and by other writers, as disparate as Borges and Deighton): a piling-on of details elaborately catalogued, observed as though in a state of acute fatigue or while tripping out on certain drugs, combining to induce in the reader a respectful acceptance of the verisimilitude of the fiction.

But the scene is set in what purports to be the London of 1944, and it embodies all the cardboard conviction of a World War I flying-station as portrayed in *Hell's Angels* or *G-8 and his Battle Aces.*

This remark in no way contradicts the previous statement that Pynchon has created a retrospective parallel world; it is intended to emphasise that the price paid for creating it was the sacrifice of the potential impact of countless real-world images later to be invoked, up to and including the V-2 itself.

By displaying a truly surprising contempt for the recorded reality of wartime Britain, the author deprives himself of the solidity those images would *a priori* be expected to lend to his fictions. (This, alas, is all too common a failing among American writers; one thinks of Vance Bourjaily pivoting a "set scene" on an Englishman demanding over and over, like a machine, apple sauce for dessert . . . heedless of the fact that the English-English for that dish is stewed apples.)

Beginning this novel, one is prepared to accept as a forgivable extravagance the notion of officers being billeted in a house where a former occupant left a thriving banana-tree growing on layers of pig-manure; there is a fine tradition of English eccentrics on which to found such topsoil even in Chelsea. But then to encounter two of the officers beating "red rubber hot-water bags full of ice cubes, the idea being to pulverise the ice for ( . . .) banana frappés" – no, no, no! Any ice cubes small enough to enter by the hole in the end of a British hot-water bottle would already be quite small enough for the purpose stated.

And it grows worse. It is not the real wartime Britain which is the target of those V-2's whereon the effect of *Gravity's Rainbow* must depend; it is a never-never land to which the author brought preconceptions he did not wish to have tarnished by mere fact. It is a land

where lovers have "what Hollywood likes to call a 'cute meet' " – she on a bicycle, he driving a "vintage Jaguar". (At the outbreak of war, when production of private cars stopped for the duration, the oldest possible Jaguar was aged four years.) They have rendezvous "In the stay-away zone, under the barrage balloons south of London. The town, evacuated in '40, is still 'regulated' – still on the Ministry's list. Roger and Jessica occupy the place illegally" . . . and so on.

Moreover it is a land where V-2's distribute themselves "about London just as Poisson's equation in the textbooks predicts."

But they didn't.

Having so thoroughly researched the firing procedure for V-2's as to be able to inform us that the distinction between a good and an indifferent launch-officer depended on being able to time precisely, during a four-second "window", the switching-on of the main propellant, Mr Pynchon should also have researched the arrival end and let his readers know that the distribution of V-2's around London was not random, but on the contrary *was dictated by the British.* By convincing the Germans, through their espionage agents in Britain all of whom had been "doubled" without exception, that the rockets were overshooting, British Intelligence persuaded the enemy scientists to doubt the accuracy of their own calculations. They thus succeeded in having the range shortened little by little until virtually all of the late V-2's fell far too far to the east.

An objection to that sort of objection to this sort of novel: Mr Pynchon did not set out to write a historically accurate version of events, but only to use those events as the foundation for a fiction.

Granted; it has already been said that his is a parallel-world story, tangent at best to our actual past.

Furthermore he did not attempt to disguise his intentions; witness his use of names such as Scorpia Mossmoon, Tantivy Mucker-Maffick and (best among a poor bunch) the Japanese, Ensign Morituri, not to mention his unashamed imitation of that catastrophe-comedy school of cinema which traces its ancestry in roughly equal parts to circus clowning and the *opéra bouffe.*

Granted again. But – !

But this is not in any sense a *Catch-22,* or a *M-A-S-H.* In order to excuse what Mr Pynchon has done (or rather, what he has failed to do), one must maintain that his purpose was to extend the scope of the dictum,

"History is bunk!", by applying it not only to his background material and his characters, but also to what most obviously presents itself as his central theme: the question of meaning in the universe, if any.

And were his intention to have been a cursory dismissal of that question – whether as unanswerable or as already answered in the negative – it would not have taken seven hundred and sixty pages to spell out.

One is obliged to seek another explanation.

Accordingly, one turns to those elements in the novel which are most strikingly successful. Among these what stands out in relief – one could say *high* relief and be guilty of a justifiable pun – is the way in which the author captures the disorganized, hyper-accelerated, hallucinatory quality of life during World War II. Looking back, it seems incredible that such a plethora of event was packed into six short years. Mr Pynchon ingeniously analogizes this by re-introducing half-forgotten characters, a hundred pages later, in new situations so utterly disconnected from the last time we met them that it's taken for granted a myriad unpredictable things must have happened in the interim.

Moreover the whole book is in historic present, a device that is almost always irritating, but in respect of which a case can be made out here on the grounds that during the war time was telescoped and experience occurred in a continuing "now", a moment with neither past nor future: no past, because there was no chance to recriminate about it; no future, because it was impossible to foresee what plans were going to be obliterated by decisions on the unknown (enemy) side.

Unfortunately the suspicion obtrudes itself that the author wished to imply the possibility of departing from this continual "now" in either direction . . . and this proved to be as much out of the question as the return of the chicken to the egg, or the V-2 to the launch-pad.

In order to equip at least some of his characters with the hope of defining a purpose, Mr Pynchon invokes the image of the orgasm: in itself, a defensible choice. It is that to which we, human beings and allegedly civilised, feel impelled by irrational internal inclinations as we are now and then to warfare and destruction or the simple effect of losing our tempers (which can be irreversibly damaging, of course), but in respect of which we have a ready-made excuse: naturally it can dominate us because it is on the act of reproduction that the survival of the species has always hinged, and the species must take precedence.

No such ready-made justification offers itself, however, in connection with other irrational impulses. Literally in the case of Captain Blicero who achieves history's greatest actualisation of a masturbation fantasy, and to a marked degree in the case of Enzian of the *Schwarzkommando,* Tchitcherine who once saw the ineffable Kirghiz Light, and those other characters who are driven through this landscape of wartime desolation, the parallel is offered . . . but as it were diffidently. The impression given to the reader is that not even Mr Pynchon himself accepts the truth of the equation he propounds, between the act of self-commital to the "little death" of mating and the setting in train of events that may destroy oneself as well as the target. One concludes by suspecting that it has no solution, not even in irrationals. Those inventions which seem at the outset most promising (for instance, the secret ink for spies which can only be developed by a substance present in semen and messages in which must therefore be accompanied by material suitable to provoke a reflex ejaculation on the part of the addressee) are neglected and lead nowhere despite their rich potential for comic extravaganzas. They are displaced – and it is the book's and the reader's loss that this is so – by strained, quasi-realistic, but far less convincing gimmicks like Imipolex, "the world's only erectile plastic", and Byron the light-bulb on which the international lamp-cartel Phoebus keeps constant tabs because it alone among millions left the factory in perfect working order and will therefore shine for ever.

If the impression has been conveyed that *Gravity's Rainbow* is a real curate's egg of a book, that is as near to an evaluation as can be achieved in this narrow a compass. Were it to live up to the peaks of Mr Pynchon's luxuriant invention, were it to match at all points the immensity of its underlying theme, it would indeed be what rash reviewers in America have termed it: a masterpiece.

It seems, alas, that Mr Pynchon set out to attain two goals both of which were monumentally difficult, and wound up somewhere partway to both and halfway between them. Reading the ending, one feels it was chosen owing to exhaustion and not because it constituted a resolution of the argument. One cannot in all honesty predict that Slothrop and Squalidozzi and Säure Bummer will take their places in the history of American literature alongside Captain Ahab, or Gatsby, or even Lanny Budd.

*Dr. John Radford is Head of the Department of Psychology at North East London Polytechnic, and Dean of the Faculty of Human Sciences. He has for a long time been interested in the inter-relationships between science fiction and psychology, and is the author of other papers on the subject. As I write these notes, Dr. Radford has just been invited on to the Council of the Science Fiction Foundation. The Council of the SFF is equally divided between science fiction professionals and academics from the Polytechnic, and it is pleasing that the academic side of the Council looks like gaining extra strength. (It isn't easy as academics in the U.S.A. might have found, to locate seven teachers from the one institution all both well-informed and enthusiastic about science fiction, and ready to devote some of their working time to it.)*

# science fiction as myth

## *John Radford*

There is considerable current interest in the study of myth. This is probably connected on the one hand with the revival of the occult, and on the other with a new respect for the value of cultures other than our own. I wish to suggest that we might direct our attention to some of our own myths, particularly those to be found in the branch of literature known loosely as science fiction.

The structuralist school of anthropology has made familiar the notion of myth as message. Myth is thought of as a message sent from some source – presumably ancestral – to new members of society. The burden of the message is an attempted answer to the fundamental question, what is human? Myths as found in their natural state are characterized by a small number of themes with multiple repetition and variation. This is the "noise" of the message. The structural analyst, it is held, can perceive beneath the surface the elements of a pattern, which is that of our way of thinking about ourselves.

Science fiction (sf) certainly shares the characteristic of variation on a small number of themes. It is easy to list perhaps a dozen themes such that the probability of any story taken at random being a variation on one of them is very high. It might be suggested that sf is commonly more fragmentary than myth as recorded by anthropologists. It resembles, rather, the elements of myths seen in fairy stories or the paintings on Greek vases.

There is a *prima facie* case for sf as myth. But if myth is concerned with messages about our own nature, what are these today? Obviously our most explicit messages are those of the psychological sciences, for these are by definition concerned with our own behaviour. It is no accident, therefore, that sf often concerns itself with the findings of psychology and psychoanalysis. The work of J.G. Ballard is particularly notable, but there is an abundance of such motifs as the control of behaviour by drugs, surgery, or social pressure (cf. *1984*); subliminal stimulation; conditioning; creative thinking; computer simulation and artificial intelligence; repression and abreaction; childhood traumata; the omnipotence of thought; archetypes, etc., etc. Now it can be argued – and is argued over, endlessly, by psychologists – that a basic issue unsolved by the behavioural sciences is the choice of an appropriate model. Is man a sort of chemical compound, as the associationists thought? Is he a reflex machine, or a computer? Perhaps the most popular model has been the deterministic closed energy system of psycho-analysis. This, more explicitly than some, has been held to be universally applicable. But all raise the basic question, what is it to be human?

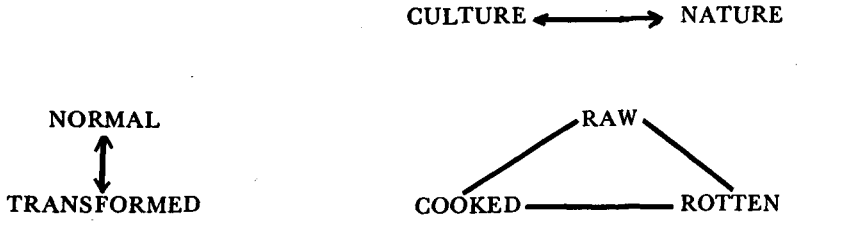
It may be said, that all fiction deals with the question in some sense. But sf is a special case. First, sf deliberately manipulates reality. Whereas classical fiction seeks to imitate reality, to produce a convincing simulacrum, sf gives us something that is explicitly other than what exists. It is not just that sf worlds are imaginary: it is that they are purposely constructed as alternative realities. Indeed the theme of multiple possible realities is often the actual theme of the story. Secondly the sf writer adopts a different standpoint to that of other fiction writers; a standpoint independent of time. This has two aspects: he writes about the future as if it were the past – " . . . in the year 2001, such and such happened." This contrasts with the classical writer, who adopts the position of a chronicler of imaginary events in which he might have taken part. The standpoint of Dickens or Tolstoy is the standpoint of Xenophon. But also, sf feels free to manipulate time, either by time travel or by some new view of time such as Priestley adopted in his "Time" plays. The extreme case of the conventional approach of course is the classical "unity of time"; at the other end of the scale, to the extent that a writer manipulates time itself (not just his order of relating, as by flashbacks) he may be said to adopt an sf standpoint.

From such a standpoint, then, sf interprets some of the views of human nature proposed by psychological scientists. Indeed one such view has become a cliché: the "monster" popularly supposed to be typical of sf. Monsters clearly are closely related, either explicitly or by implication, to the primary process – "unconscious" – thinking

described by Freud. Working and re-working the theme is characteristic of myth. Pierre Maranda says:

> . . . the life of myths consists in reorganising traditional components in the face of new circumstances or, correlatively, in reorganising new, imported components in the light of tradition. (*Mythology*, p.8.)

But it is possible also to suggest at least the beginnings of a deeper analysis, along structuralist lines, of sf themes. "Monster" is in fact a rather loose concept, despised by sf writers, who are much happier with two other sorts of non-human being: aliens and robots. The relationship between these and humans is one of the most interesting of sf themes. It reminds us at once of the famous "culinary triangle" of Lévi-Strauss:




After Leach, 1970

*Fig. 1*

We can propose an analogous triangle for man, alien and robot:

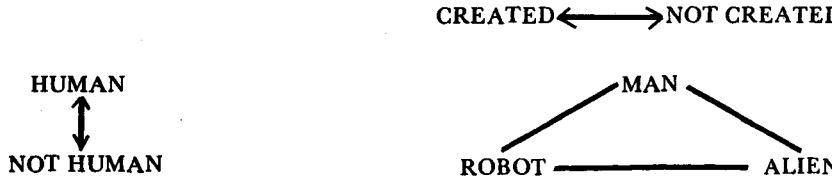



*Fig. 2*

The human is contrasted on the one hand with the alien, analogous to nature; on the other with the robot, analogous to culture. Aliens are unknown, to be feared, generally to be destroyed: is this not what we are doing to nature? Robots are our creation, supposedly programmed to do our bidding: yet (right from the days of Rossum's Universal Robots) they threaten to become our masters. Is this not what we fear from technology? Computers and motor cars are the most obvious examples, but

more subtle ones are found in psychological technology such as intelligence testing.

What do we think distinguishes humans from aliens and robots? What do we think makes us human? This is an empirical question. Maranda reports 80% agreement in our culture on the likely relationships between the well known mythic figures of man, woman, and snake. An interesting experiment is to fill in the most likely relationships in the following:

| | Receiver | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emitter | HUMAN | ALIEN | ROBOT |
| HUMAN | X | | |
| ALIEN | | X | |
| ROBOT | | | X |

*Fig. 3*

Preliminary results suggest that this produces considerable uniformity of responses. (Readers may like to try it out, and even send me the results.)

By such means it might be possible to integrate the subject-matter of sf into a system of relations and correlates such as Lévi-Strauss considers basic to the logic of myth (raw-cooked/fresh-putrid: culture nature: profane/sacred etc.). To the psychologist, such systems are at once reminiscent of the *neogenetic* principles of Charles Spearman. The principles themselves are not much talked of now, though they are embodied in every intelligence test item of the form: A is to B as C is to ? Spearman, however, thought that in them must lie "an exhaustive determination of the entire cosmos, not only in so far as this can be known, but even to the extent that it can be thought of at all." (*The Nature of Intelligence,* p. 101.)

But let us glance at another aspect of the sf writer as myth-transmitter. Mircea Eliade has brought out many features of the near-universal myth of the Fall: the origin of some present society following the cataclysmic collapse of a primordial state of bliss. Sf writers deal frequently with such a cataclysm, only they generally place it in the future. Sf formulates the possibility of what might be, rather than an explanation of what is. And it is correspondingly free to postulate all variations on the direction of change: better, worse, or static. Now as Eliade points out, there is a close connection between the transmission of myth and the role of shaman. Shamans, often through ecstatic trance states, simulate the

supposed features of the pre-Fall condition: they can speak with the animals, they fly through the air, they manipulate nature, they speak with the gods. All familiar events in sf (compare, among many, the works of Olaf Stapledon and Arthur Clarke). It would be rash to claim that sf writers enter upon ecstatic states: but they certainly manifest the flow of novel ideas, and bizarre imagery, that psychology associates with primary process thinking. Few trance states are likely to produce stranger products than the stories of Cordwainer Smith. Similarly, the shaman characteristically stands outside time, at least outside our conventional sequential time: and this too, we have seen, is typical of sf. Sf's exploration of time is analogous to the "timeless" society of myth, the poetic thinking described by Robert Graves (in *The White Goddess*), Freud's "unconscious" and Ulric Neisser's "multiple processing".

Now of course sf writers are aware of what they are doing. They do not, one supposes, believe in the reality of their worlds. But what of their readers? This too is a matter for empirical study. I guess that one common view might be "sf is not true, of course – but yet – who knows?" And there is besides, a body of writers – such as Von Däniken, Holiday, Michell, Lethbridge – who quite clearly and explicitly hold that "sf" events such as space travel, alien visitors, and so on, have occurred and are occurring.

Thus one can push the analogy of sf and myth too far. Indeed, if we think of sf writing as a form of art, then Lévi-Strauss tells us that the latter is "half-way" between myth or magic (he seems to equate the two) and science. This suggests a further triad, which also may bring out some relationships:

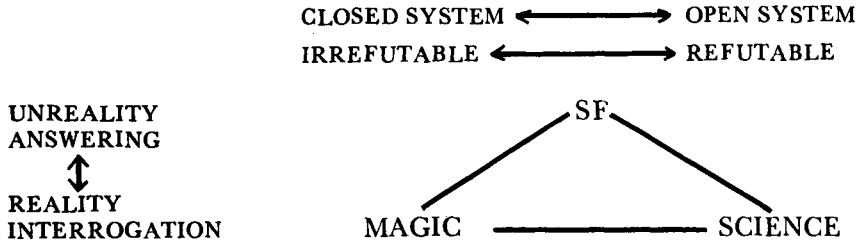



Fig. 4

Magic (the Western occult tradition, at least) supposes a closed orderly system; the system of science is open. Science attempts to establish refutable hypotheses about reality. Magic tries to manipulate reality by the use of irrefutable hypotheses. Sf explores the imaginable effects of hypotheses that are also irrefutable. Magic and science involve the

interrogation of reality; sf concentrates on supplying answers to questions that have yet to be asked. That is why it does not produce advances in science: in psychological jargon, it is divergent but not creative. Roland Barthes points to the popular conception of science as searching for some one key to understanding (his example is cartoons of Einstein always accompanied by the magical formula $E = Mc^2$). Actually, this is the occult approach: the search for the tetragrammaton. Science deals with a multiplicity of partial answers; and sf thus has a true grasp of science, while dealing with unreality.

Now let us not pretend that we are doing some real anthropology here. The analogy between our triads and those of Lévi-Strauss can be easily broken down. There is no transition equivalent to those of raw-cooked and fresh-putrid, to make an elementary point. But it is interesting that several writers (e.g. Ray Bradbury) have explored the theme of a man changing into a robot, or vice versa; and also that of the difficulty of knowing which is which (the problem that Turing's test is supposed to answer). Similar themes can be found with respect to aliens.

Again, doubtless most sf writers, and fans, would hold that their preferred art is for amusement only. But artists are not always best placed to see the implication of their own work. Sf does certainly embody some important issues, which in other circumstances might be readily accepted as myth. Many societies have sought to define their own humanity by contrast with the non-human. As the world becomes homogeneous, we have to postulate artificial outgroups for this purpose. As it becomes overcrowded, we have to face the problems of interference with others and of conscious manipulation of ourselves: problems already well explored in sf. At the present time we generally accept a culture based on science, though the dichotomy between this and magic is becoming apparent once more (it has been seen before in the sixth century B.C., in the first centuries of the Christian era, and again at the Renaissance). Sf perhaps gives us some help in exploring this dichotomy more productively than before. It does, at least, warn us against dogmatic certainty. To quote Lévi-Strauss:

> "Every civilization tends to overestimate the objective orientations of its thought and this tendency is never absent."

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*Angus Taylor's previous appearance in* Foundation *was in no. 4, and his subject was then the sf of Philip K. Dick. Author, subsequently, of one of the first two books on Dick (the other being reviewed by Mr. Taylor later in this issue),* Philip K. Dick and The Umbrella of Light, *(in the SF Author Series published by T-K Graphics of Baltimore), Mr. Taylor here contributes a stimulating comparison of the philosophies of Philip Dick and Ursula Le Guin: two writers who arrive at a similar political position from seemingly opposite directions. Angus Taylor is a Canadian, presently undertaking an M.Sc. in History and Social Studies of Science at the University of Sussex.*

# the politics of space, time and entropy

## *Angus Taylor*

> . . . the increase of entropy is due to two quite different kinds of effect; on the one hand, a striving toward simplicity, which will promote orderliness and the lowering of the level of order, and, on the other hand, disorderly destruction. Both lead to tension reduction. The two phenomena manifest themselves more clearly the less they are modified by the countertendency, namely, the anabolic establishment of a structural theme, which introduces and maintains tension.
>
> — Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy and Art*

In a 1971 preface to *The Golden Notebook* Doris Lessing suggested that the way to overcome

> the unease at writing about 'petty personal problems' was to recognize that nothing is personal, in the sense that it is uniquely one's own . . . The way to deal with the problem of 'subjectivity', that shocking business of being preoccupied with the tiny individual who is at the same time caught up in such an explosion of terrible and marvellous possibilities, is to see him as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience . . . into something much larger . . .

Lessing here was referring to the problem that confronts the (concerned) writer of "mainstream" fiction. The writer of science fiction, however, confronts the converse problem: how to impart to vast events, to convulsions in space and time, to upheavals in the social order, a credible sense of the personal and the subjective? For, as

individuals cannot in truth be divorced from the society they inhabit, so a society cannot in truth be divorced from the individuals who compose it. "Mainstream fiction" and "science fiction" are simply labels for the opposite ends of a continuous spectrum of strategies for portraying human relations. One end focuses upon the unique individual, the other upon the larger social grouping. But each ignores the other at its peril.

If the way for the mainstream writer to climb from the quagmire of the "merely personal" is to see the individual as a microcosm of societal happenings, then the way for the sf writer to personalize the impersonal is to see society as a *macrocosm* of individual concerns. "The dialectic of history is launched from a multiplicity of individual praxes."[1] Too few sf writers have recognized this elementary fact – a failing that helps explain the dreariness and sameness of much of the field.

Two writers who deny neither history nor the individual are Ursula K. Le Guin and Philip K. Dick. Their fiction is noteworthy for being founded on distinctive, and mutually distinct, views of the natural universe and man's place in it. In *The Dispossessed* Le Guin manages to explore the sociology of her "ambiguous utopia" without losing sight of its human foundations. The life of Anarres is the lives of its people; the politics of the whole are *internalized* by the novel's protagonists, and *reinvented* in their relations. Through them Le Guin confronts and interweaves the themes of anarchy, revolution, and individual responsibility. The novel is at this point the most elaborate piece in her remarkable "future history" series, and formulates in an unusually explicit way her model of man-in-the-universe. And while Dick's numerous novels and other stories are superficially unrelated to each other, they proceed almost uniformly from a particular vision of the human condition. Dick's model must be pieced together laboriously, bit by bit, like the fossil skeleton of some fabulous undreamed beast; but the skeleton, once reconstructed, is the whole that lends meaning to each of its parts. What is clear from an examination of the works of these two authors is that in each case socio-political processes are seen as reflecting particular environmental constraints.

Both Le Guin and Dick can be said to be concerned in their fiction with the universal play between the forces of entropy on one hand and those supporting the establishment and elaboration of structure on the other. However, their approaches are notably different. According to

1. David Caute, introduction to Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (London: Methuen, 1970), p.xii.

Le Guin, there is a basic tendency in the natural universe toward order; for Dick, the basic tendency of the natural universe is toward chaos. Entropy in Le Guin's terms is not so much the dissolution of all order, as the reduction of the level of order to less complex states of balance. *Ordered complexity* is a key concept in her model. Nature is seen as an integrated whole, consisting of a hierarchy of systems exhibiting isomorphic features: witness Odo's analogy between the body and the community in *The Dispossessed.*

For Le Guin there is a reciprocal relation between human cultures and the landscapes they inhabit. In "The Word for World is Forest" the native Athsheans inhabit an environment of complex and various form: "No way was clear, no light unbroken, in the forest. Into wind, water, sunlight, starlight, there always entered leaf and branch, bole and root, the shadowy, the complex . . . Revelation was lacking. There was no seeing everything at once: no certainty." (ch.2) Cultural variation reflects this fact: "They were not all one people on the Forty Lands of the world. There were more languages than lands, and each with a different dialect for every town that spoke it; there were infinite ramifications of manners, morals, customs, crafts; physical types differed on each of the five Great Lands." (ch.2) And yet, "Within the Lodges the Dreamers spoke an old tongue, and this varied little from land to land." (ch.2) The Athshean word for "dream" is also the word for "root"; the dream is the root, and the root of complexity is unity. In *The Dispossessed* the fundamental unity of Sequency and Simultaneity is seen by the physicist Shevek in this way: "It was simplicity: and contained in it all complexity, all promise. It was revelation. It was the way clear, the way home, the light." (ch.9) Yet this unity is described as predicated on a lack of certainty.

For Dick, by contrast, a lack of certainty is inherent in a fundamentally chaotic nature. Human culture is something built over a dangerous abyss, and humans are constantly in peril of falling through the floors of their constructed realities, as, for example, does Jason Taverner of *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said.* This famous, affluent television personality awakes one morning to discover that no one else remembers who he is, that he has no legal status in society, and must live by his wits from moment to moment. *Now Wait for Last Year* features the drug JJ-180, which alters the user's perception of time, breaking down its continuity and thereby undermining the meaning of the present moment. It is only the human mind and hand which impose coherence and relatedness on the external world: "Here, where she lived, Kathy had established potent spirits of the past, trapped within the concoctions of other periods: a lamp from early New England, a chest of drawers

that was authentic bird's-eye maple, a Hepplewhite cabinet . . . "(ch.5) The drug reifies the user's environment by destroying this capacity for non-alienated perception:

> The objects had lost their heritage of the familiar; by degrees they became cold, remote, and – hostile. Into the vacuum left by the decline in her relatedness to them the things surrounding her achieved their original isolation from the taming forces which normally emanated from the human mind; they became raw, abrupt, with jagged edges capable of cutting, gashing, inflicting fatal wounds. (ch.6)

Compare this "original isolation" of the external world with Shevek's thoughts on the woman Takver:

> There are souls, he thought, whose umbilicus has never been cut. They never got weaned from the universe. They do not understand death as an enemy; they look forward to rotting and turning into humus. It was strange to see Takver take a leaf into her hand, or even a rock. She became an extension of it, it of her. (ch.6)

That such an extension is possible betokens a radically different natural world from that postulated by Dick, for whom the only human extensions are *created* ones, whether social or technological.

At one point, Shevek quotes one of his society's dictums as follows: "The more that is organized, the more central the organism: centrality here implying the field of real function." (ch.8) The utopian anarchists of the moon Anarres here attempt to carry their understanding of the physical universe into the political realm. When a physicist in a capitalist state on Urras tries to explain the planet's power politics by claiming that "The politician and the physicist both deal with things as they are, with real forces, the basic laws of the world," Shevek retorts: "You put your petty miserable 'laws' to protect wealth, your 'forces' of guns and bombs, in the same sentence with the law of entropy and the force of gravity? I had thought better of your mind, Demaere!" (ch.7) The basic laws of the world can be arbitrary in politics no more than they are in physics. Useful human action must be grounded in recognition of man's place in nature's organizational hierarchy; the necessity of following this Way (*Tao*) is emphasized throughout Le Guin's works – never more so than in *The Lathe of Heaven.* Society must be regarded as an organism; the "body politic" is a natural system, and alienation arises from the attempt to impose unnatural forms on nature.

In the future history series Terrans destroy the original ecology of Earth, making a wasteland of their planet. It is said of Terran colonizers in "The Word for World is Forest": "They have left their roots behind them, perhaps, in this other forest from which they came, this forest with no trees." (ch.2) Terrans are "uprooted" from nature. The

Athshean Selver declares:

> If the yumens are men they are men unfit or untaught to dream and to act as men. Therefore they go about in torment killing and destroying, driven by the gods within, whom they will not set free but try to uproot and deny. If they are men they are evil men, having denied their own gods, afraid to see their own faces in the dark. (ch.2)

On the other hand, it is said of the Athsheans:

> They're a static, stable, uniform society. They have no history. Perfectly integrated, and wholly unprogressive. You might say that like the forest they live in, they've attained a climax state. But I don't mean to imply that they're incapable of adaptation. (ch.3)

Shevek's theoretical physics results in his formation of a "General Temporal Theory", which leads to the development of a machine called the "ansible". The ansible, which permits instantaneous communication over interstellar distances, in turn makes possible a community of worlds, for it eliminates the informational error inherent in the lag of light-speed messages. Similarly, telepathy, the direct contact of mind with mind, is a union coincident with truth: one literally cannot lie when one "mindspeaks". It is the eventual coming of aliens who can lie with their minds which sunders the League of All Worlds. And those who conquer through the Lie, we discover in *City of Illusions*, are also those who cut themselves off from the natural world and from those who inhabit it:

> Though there were said to be so many of the Lords, yet on Earth they kept only this one city, held apart, as Earth itself was held apart from the other worlds that once had formed the League. Es Toch was self-contained, self-nourished, rootless; all its brilliance and transience of lights and machines and faces, its multiplicity of strangers, its luxurious complexity was built across a chasm in the ground, a hollow place. It was the Place of the Lie. Yet it was wonderful, like a carved jewel fallen in the vast wilderness of the Earth: wonderful, timeless, alien. (ch.8)

How characteristic of Le Guin is this equation of artifice and alienation, of the rootless city with the Place of the Lie! And how unlike Dick, for whom the "artificial" gathering together of beings is a necessary precondition of the authentic life, for whom, in fact, a dichotomy between the artificial and the authentic conceived in terms of the human response to nature does not exist. With the entropic tendencies of the universe perceived in terms of chaos and anomie, the question of the artificial versus the authentic response arises only within the framework of human relations. To this end Dick employs his particular metaphor of the android: not simply the externally oppressed creature

common to most sf authors, but the being who is internally alienated, whose artificial nature manifests itself in his inability to relate humanely to other persons. For Dick the android is the human being who is becoming more like a machine; the robot is the machine that is becoming more like a human being.

Communication, the medium of politics at the international or interpersonal level, is for Le Guin a function of man's relation to the natural environment; for Dick, a function of the relations among men. The real aliens of *Now Wait for Last Year* are also masters of illusion, masquerading as human. But their alienness lies not in their biology or their ecology but in their lack of empathy and compassion. The Prime Minister of the 'Starmen induces a sense of anomie in those he confronts:

> Facing Freneksy, they became as they were born: isolated and individual, unsupported by the institutions which they were supposed to represent . . . facing Minister Freneksy, the naked, hapless, lonely man reemerged – and was required to stand up to the Minister in this unhappy infinitude. The normal *relativeness* of existence, lived with others in a fluctuating state of more or less adequate security, had vanished. (ch.9)

Politics in such a world is conducted at a highly personal and subjective level. Gino Molinari, UN Secretary and leader of Earth, is in effect stripped of his role in such a situation and thrown back entirely upon his internal resources. His solution to the desperate confrontation with Freneksy is to suffer acute illness in empathy with his fellow human beings and to "produce himself" existentially: a feat he accomplishes in a most literal manner by successively pulling new and healthy versions of himself from parallel time-streams. *"His whole psychology, his point of orientation, is to dabble with death and yet somehow surmount it."* (ch.12)

Similarly, Eric Sweetscent, the doctor sent to cure Molinari's illnesses, must instead face a crisis of his own, for he has been addicted to JJ-180 by his wife, Kathy. Thus the breakdown of his marriage, which destroys the secure foundations of his life, is reflected by the effect of the drug, which casts him adrift in time. With his objective continuum destroyed, he must save himself in the subjectivity of alternative time-streams. While gaining the antidote to JJ-180 he, like Molinari, literally rescues himself from the grip of the 'Starmen. The antidote to JJ-180 represents the power to survive existentially; by being able to see beyond the structures of everyday social life and yet remain in control of one's being, the individual can face up to the forces of chaos and alienation: " . . . by having unhindered use of JJ-180, without the possibility of addiction, of neural deterioration, *he can't be controlled by them.* This

is why, on a deep, psychosomatic basis, Molinari can defy Minister Freneksy. He is not entirely helpless." (ch.11) But the man who has seen chaos cannot return to everyday life, as Sweetscent discovers: "Nothing within him remained untouched; it had all been disfigured and even the antidote had not stopped this. As long as he lived he would never regain the purity of the original organism." (ch.11) For Dick, the social order is maintained only with difficulty; the "natural" tendency is entropic regression to the alienated state of isolation and meaninglessness. Man is "condemned to be free" – to use Sartre's phrase – and must therefore constantly produce his own reality.

If the literary models of these two authors subsume different aspects of the concept of entropy, the respective concepts of growth or structure which they oppose to entropy contain much in common. Le Guin's concept of organic structure presupposes a particular kind of "natural" relation among creatures in the natural world: it is the "mutual aid" thesis of the Russian "Anarchist Prince", Peter Kropotkin, which permeates *The Dispossessed.* And the number of times the words "mutual aid" (or variations, such as "mutuality") appear in the text makes it clear Le Guin is quite conscious of her sources and intents. Indeed, when Shevek is told that "The law of evolution is that the strongest survives!", we find him replying in the same terms that Kropotkin employed to answer T.H. Huxley and the other narrow interpreters of Darwin: "Yes, and the strongest, in the existence of any social species, are those who are most social. In human terms, most ethical." (ch.7)

The fascist conception of the "ethical state" was predicated on the belief that the laws governing human life were the same as those governing the life of other species, and were to be found in the natural, not in the historical world. Nazi philosophy raised nature to the level of divinity, and reduced the human world to a sub-system of nature. But the denial of any claim that man could transcend nature did not presuppose mutual aid among nature's creatures, but rather an eternal struggle for existence of each against all others. This social-Darwinist reductionism meant that society was conceived of as a natural organism, but one that demanded hierarchy and inequality. Science merely enabled man to read these harsh laws of nature, not rise above them. Consequently, a world in which this conception of life has triumphed – that of *The Man in the High Castle* – is the perfect foil for Dick's vision of the authentic, humanly-invented community. The return of Nietzsche's "splendid blond beast" to the jungle becomes the nightmare of "Prehistoric man in a sterile white lab coat . . . " (ch.1): the negation of history through technology. "It horrified him, this thought:

the ancient gigantic cannibal, near-man flourishing now, ruling the world once more. We spent a million years escaping him, Frink thought, and now he's back. And not merely as the adversary . . . but as the master." (ch.1)

*The Dispossessed* tackles the problem of individual freedom and responsibility within the natural context:

> The singing of the front of the march, far away up the street, and of the endless crowds coming on behind, was put out of phase by the distance the sound must travel, so that the melody seemed always to be lagging and catching up with itself, like a canon, and all the parts of the song were being sung at one time, in the same moment, though each singer sang the tune as a line from beginning to end." (ch.9)

As in physics, so in politics: the General Temporal Theory is an attempt to reconcile Sequency and Simultaneity; likewise, the individual must be a part in a whole, not a cog in a machine.

> The duty of the individual is to accept *no* rule, to be the initiator of his own acts, to be responsible. Only if he does so will the society live, and change, and adapt, and survive. We are not subjects of a State founded upon law, but members of a society founded upon revolution. (ch.12)

If the struggle of "each against all" receives more than a few raps from Le Guin, so too does the notion that "expert" is better than "red". Politics must take command: "It's not efficient, but what else is to be done?" asks Shevek. (ch.5) (In this respect the novel – subtitled "An Ambiguous Utopia" in the original U.S. edition – might almost as well be described "an unambiguous cultural revolution": with Sabul standing in for Liu Shao-chi perhaps! What is remarkable here is that Le Guin should have any real-life model to borrow from even granting that her "state" is rather more "withered" than China's. No longer are all the world's large-scale utopian experiments situated in the realm of fantasy.)

The great danger for any revolution is the growth of bureaucracy and the reification of the social structure, so that:

> the social conscience completely dominates the individual conscience, instead of striking a balance with it. We don't cooperate – we *obey* . . . We have created crime, just as the propertarians did. We force a man outside the sphere of our approval, and then condemn him for it. We've made laws, laws of conventional behaviour, built walls all around ourselves, and we can't see them, because they're part of our thinking." (ch.10)

This is the manifestation of entropy in Le Guin's terms – the reduction of tension through the lessening of the possibilities that should inhere in a complex society. "Favoritism, elitism, leader-worship, they

crept back and cropped out everywhere," thinks Odo in the short story "The Day Before the Revolution". Society must be in a state of continuous internal revolution, for it is only individual self-responsibility that will maximize complex potential.

"True journey is return" – a catchphrase of Odo's that figures both in the theme and structure of *The Dispossessed* – refers to the fact that there is no safety in the past: its promise can only be fulfilled by taking the Way that lies ahead. Since freedom is always in the process of becoming ossified, it is only by abandoning reified social structure that one can hope to make the *revolutionary* return to the original animate vision. Starting with a world-view based on the concept of natural order, Le Guin formulates a philosophy of action not far removed from the existential position:

> We know that there is no help for us but from one another, that no hand will save us if we do not reach out our hand. And the hand that you reach out is empty, as mine is. You have nothing. You possess nothing. You own nothing. You are free. All you have is what you are, and what you give.(ch.9)

The basically existential justification of action in *The Dispossessed* finds expression not only in the repeated reference to "empty hands" and the insistence upon individual responsibility, but, more interestingly, in the concept of fidelity:

> A promise is a direction taken, a self-limitation of choice. As Odo pointed out, if no direction is taken, if one goes nowhere, no change will occur. One's freedom to choose and to change will be unused, exactly as if one were in jail, a jail of one's own building, a maze in which no one way is better than any other." (ch.8)

This is the hard lesson that must be learned by Mathieu Delarue in Sartre's *Roads to Freedom* trilogy. Odo makes the point explicit: *"What is an anarchist? One who, choosing, accepts the responsibility of choice."* ("The Day Before the Revolution")

On the other hand, when Molinari tells Sweetscent not to wait for last year to come back, that "you've got only one tiny life and that lies ahead of you, not sideways or back" (ch.13), he is simply expressing Dick's fundamental approach. Dick begins with the existential position and then proceeds to formulate a concept of (potential) universal order. Dick's ideal of universal harmony is implied through its juxtaposition with incomplete or deteriorating forms of social or technological integration. *The Man in the High Castle* and *Ubik* are structurally similar in that each sets two mirrored entropic worlds against an ideal third. In the former novel the secondary fictional world – that of Abendsen's parallel-world novel – represents the ideal, while the primary fictional

world reflects the entropic tendencies of our own (continuously suggested) world. In *Ubik,* however, one of the two fictional worlds (that in which Runciter is supposedly alive) also represents our own world, though in an imagined future form, while the ideal world is suggested through the mysterious substance Ubik, which combats the regression of organized forms to earlier types. Ubik thus represents negentropy, and points to a world of Platonic form, beyond time; but it is significant that despite its obvious divine quality, the substance is said to have been invented by Ella Runciter and other threatened half-lifers, "working together a long, long time. And there still isn't very much of it available, as yet" (ch.16). Dick's ideal, organized universe is a human construct, a product of history.

Le Guin and Dick seem to approach from opposite directions a somewhat similar position: both contend that a reified social structure is a mystification, and both affirm that a proper stance must be one of individual initiative coupled with community solidarity – this latter represented in *Now Wait for Last Year* not only by Molinari's illnesses but by Sweetscent's decision at the end not to forsake his hopelessly ill wife. But Dick's view of man's relationship with his environment is less Taoist and more dialectical than Le Guin's.[2] That human and non-human structures come to reflect each other is for Dick not a moral imperative dictated by natural law, but an inevitable consequence of mutual adaptation. Technology is therefore seen as the potential instrument of reconciliation between man and the universe; the infusion of the environment with technological animation is a step away from alienation.

This is not to say that the effects of technology are always seen by Dick as beneficial, but simply that technology, as an extension of human hand and mind, reinforces the reciprocal relationship of human and non-human. The potential for the reciprocal movement of these spheres toward disintegration and death is exemplified by *Dr. Bloodmoney, or How We Got Along After the Bomb,* and by *The Man in the High Castle,* in which it is said of the Nazi rulers:

> It is their sense of space and time. They see through the here, the now, into the vast black deep beyond, the unchanging. And that is fatal to life. Because eventually there will be no life; there was once only the dust particles in

2. Without going into the question of what Dick sees as a correct form of political action, it is still possible to contend that his conception of man's relation to nature closely resembles that of Marx. In particular, Dick agrees that the human essence is not to be confused with the individual's biological nature, but is *socially* produced through man's interaction with nature. See, for example, Istvan Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin Press, 1970).

> space, the hot hydrogen gases, nothing more, and it will come again. This is an interval, *ein Augenblick*. The cosmic process is hurrying on, crushing life back into the granite and methane; the wheel turns for all life. It is all temporary. And these – these madmen – respond to the granite, the dust, the longing of the inanimate; they want to aid *Natur.*" (ch.3)

Conversely, in such a universe it is only human initiative that can begin the process of animating and "taming" nature.

For Le Guin, the proper use of technology permits the establishment of complex societal forms *within* the context of natural ecology. The people of Anarres "knew that their anarchism was the product of a very high civilization, of a complex diversified culture, of a stable economy and a highly industrialized technology that could maintain high production and rapid transportation of goods. However vast the distances separating settlements, they held to the ideal of complex organicism." (ch.4) Neither Le Guin nor Dick is guilty of reducing society to the political dictates of a brute nature. What ultimately differentiates their perspectives, however, is precisely the question of the nature of nature; and here Le Guin is the optimist – not through any claim that nature eases the actual human struggle toward a more harmonious world, but in the assertion that it provides in its structure objective demonstration of such a world's possibility. For Le Guin there is no necessary conflict between nature and history.

What both writers agree on is the necessity to "unbuild" the walls that separate people from their freedom. This is Shevek's mission in *The Dispossessed*, and it is his understanding of the physical and social worlds which leads him to this political action. Just as Mr. Tagomi, though faced with a more difficult environment in *The Man in the High Castle*, rejects the idea that it is beyond his power to act meaningfully, and refuses to turn Frank Frink over to Nazi authorities. The course of history and the actions of individuals are inextricably bound. What Le Guin and Dick demand is that what is produced should not be a "multiplicity of strangers" but a *community* of *human* beings.

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# letters

## *Edited by Peter Nicholls*

Dear Peter Nicholls, 18th December, 1975

It was a pleasure to see from *Foundation* 9 that you have ceased sniping at George Hay, the man who founded the whole enterprise and hence to whom you

owe your job. Your gaze turns instead towards Moorcock, Ballard, and me, in a half-hearted demotion job in which, among other insults, you call *Probability A* a *joke*, and Barefoot *dishonest*. May I say why this is irresponsible?

We are told that the central problem of your article is 'Where does the author stand?' This question is posed with particular reference to the three of us, but never gets answered, perhaps because you vacillate between attempting to put down *New Worlds* and making moral judgements on writing like *Crash* and *Probability A*, not intended for *New Worlds*. Those moral judgements ring hollow; the nature of the age is such that there is no universal acceptance of such guidelines – one of the disturbing perceptions on which the late Jerry Cornelius founded his life style.

Jerry was an amphibian of life-style; to embody that aspect of the Sixties in him is part of Moorcock's achievement. In failing to allow such perceptions throughout your piece, you have to fall back not on morality but on a moralising tone which is immediately revealed as broken-backed. For instance, your remark on Ballard's *Crash*, 'That was my aesthetic reaction. My human reaction was to grin to myself.' Too self-conscious to stand as any sort of objective criterion. The whole article lacks *judgement*. You are, after all, talking about a period when the spadework for much of the present-day success of British sf was carried out, when a native ambience was created (more of Mike's doing, to my view) and when a wider reading audience was reached – Charles Platt and Diane Lambert selling *New Worlds* on the street corner! – what dedication! – but you remain blind to all that.

Instead, you categorise your three principle stalking horses as nihilists, adding chattily, "I don't like nihilism, you see." Any self-respecting fanzine would throw out an article which was as subjective as, went no deeper than, that.

A general impression is conveyed that you dislike *New Worlds* and its nihilist writers over the period you attempt to discuss – which could be '64-'74 as claimed in the title of the article, although when you refer to the period when the Arts Council 'softly clucked' over the magazine (did it really?) you are in fact talking only of '67-'71. When you say 'I wouldn't like to see it die', you are praising your own big heart rather than the magazine.

Among all the vagueness in dating, phrasing, and defining, some items emerge clearly. You side with Donald Wollheim in the matter of *New Worlds*. Fine, then we understand your position, somewhere to the right of philistinism; and you presumably agree with Wollheim's dictum, which you quote, that sf is 'a battle for the future'. The rowdy mob who invaded Mike's *New Worlds* agreed on very little, but they accepted that a version of the future had arrived and they preferred to investigate it rather than look much further ahead. You may or may not think that is a suitable state of mind, but it is not nihilism. There was great excitement in discovering that particular mad present.

After Wollheim, you bring up what some readers may consider bigger guns, Dr. Johnson and W.B. Yeats, to say in effect that 'our writing was void of fondness and our lamentation of sorrow', after which you scuttle for cover ('I hope you all recognise that I have chosen to discuss three writers I very much admire . . .'). Remember that if Johnson was talking about John Donne, he was mistaken; one of the things we admire about Donne today is precisely his passion, both in fondness and sorrow. Discerning readers may later feel the same about Moorcock, Ballard, and me – as, I believe, many of them did when we were first published.

You nowhere define nihilism; presumably you mean a belief in nothing, extreme

scepticism. Donne celebrated the fact that 'the New Philosophy calls all in doubt', and a similar impulse shaped the prevailing mood of the second half of the sixties. If there was unison, it was in reflecting the schizophrenic world of Vietnam, Oxfam, Twiggy, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Beatles, LBJ, Che, the Space Race, and trendy figures like Gagarin, McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller; plus James Bondery, acid, GNP, Swinging London, That Was the Week that Was, and the theories of Durkheim, Marcuse, and Laing, with, if you like, Timothy Leary, Wilson-and-Brown, and Marx. Scepticism seemed a proper response in dealing with all this – and it is as mistaken to try to deal with *New Worlds* in isolation as it would be *Amazing Stories, Private Eye,* or *The Strand*; magazines reflect their times. Hence my rather inelegant attempt to set the scene in one sentence. Your only approach to perspective is to talk about your bloody boil ('the location of which I refuse to reveal', coyly, as if you thought we cared).

This lack of elementary care for the period leads you into error, or at least unwarranted assumption. I'll have to speak for myself; Mike and Ballard are well able to put their own case; but let me just mention the anthology, *The Best of New Worlds,* from which you quote only to demolish.

Introductions are where the editor makes out the best case he can; they are often different kettles of fish from the actual book. When Mike wrote his intro in 1965, he was still groping for the line of argument he was to employ with such success. Magazines are only viable with strong editorial presence, with an element of didacticism for sinews. I'll bet that any money his modest anthology made went, not into Mike's pocket, but into *New Worlds.* Mike believed in *New Worlds* and sweated blood for it. It doesn't make sense to come along years later and talk about nihilism. We fervently believed in what we were writing. Can you have fervent belief and nihilism coexisting? Do you honestly regard Ballard as non-committed?

You find Mike's remark about British writers being less earnest than American writers a surprising claim. The great thing about Mike's best novels is that they do not have the earnestness he was complaining about. I feel that you try to make us say by implication things we never said. You explain away my admiration for Pam Zoline's "Heat Death of the Universe" as being 'less for its intrinsic qualities as (sic) for its summing up of the NW zeitgeist'. This is not so. You have read my article on Zoline's story in which I say precisely *why* I admire it (see *The Mirror of Infinity*); and I condemn an item in it because that was 'a fashionable stylistic trick in NW'.

In condemning nihilism, the most amateur critic would have defined why he disliked it, over and above the flabby 'I don't like it, you see', – one more camouflaged plea for optimism as the official sf credo. We require in addition a perception that nihilism may be a writer's honestly felt response to his particular *Umwelt*; he is not then required to fake another response to pander to critics. You have filled *Foundation* recently with much high-flown tosh from Delany, presumably with approval. How do you endure the nihilism of *Dhalgren?*

To more central matters. You elect to discuss three of my novels, *Probability A, Barefoot,* and *An Age,* in relation to NW. The choice is more arbitrary than may appear. *Probability A* was written before your period, in 1962, almost concurrently with *Greybeard,* and before *The Saliva Tree* and *The Dark Light Years,* while *An Age* was written after *The Hand-Reared Boy.* (Mike did not like *An Age,* and ran extracts only.) Your selection is intended to fit a shaky thesis – so shaky that you leap from your three choices to chivvy *Eighty-Minute Hour* and my enigmas, all

products of the seventies. But what is meant by the phrase that these last 'emphasize baroque surfaces in a way I find injurious to both meaning and feeling'? The implication is that a sort of Gernsbackian utilitarian prose is more to be desired. I love the baroque; I see it like the Gothic as an eternal aspect of us; and *Eighty-Minute Hour,* whatever its faults, is not baroque just on the *surface.* The whole bloody structure is about as baroque as *Gormenghast,* its mortar a half-hidden chain of human relationships. Nor would anyone in their right mind claim that the enigmas are devoid of feeling; they're a stew of fever, pain, and hope, whatever their other shortcomings. Take the recent "Three Coins in Engimatic Fountains", in which an insect destroys a star – you cannot really pretend that is just some sort of word exercise.

But your thesis is that Ballard, Moorcock and I stand in an uncertain relationship to our writing. I would not have thought so. You might argue that my occasional assuming of the baroque is an example of that uncertainty. I call it liberty and a felt response to the age we live in. Oddly enough, my thoughts about that are quoted by Richard Cowper in his feline review of *Hell's Cartographers*: we are at the end of the post-Renaissance period. As such, we inherit all styles. One style is as much "natural" or "felt" as another. Because we are approaching transition, there is no one unique style, no one predominant ethos above another, as there is no universally accepted moral standard. A writer can capture for his readers a reflection of the time by crying "Look here upon this picture, and on this!" – by holding not one but many mirrors up to what was once called nature. We may passionately believe that what we can offer best in life is that humble thing, our "art". Art may seem a poor system to place faith in, but I happen not to believe in organised religion (religious feeling is another matter) or Marxism or Flying Saucers or the ability of more technology to save us from the last lot. Nature I loved, and next to nature, art . . . To call this 'a voluntary abdication of all beliefs' is a bit of tub-thumping, which probably sounded better at a convention than on paper. Then to call belief in art an 'aesthetic distancing device' is another thump.

Well, Come in Aesthetic Distancing Device Number One! *Probability A.* I still love that novel, so don't expect a dispassionate discussion, and damn your miserably inadequate approach to it. 'I am simply unable to attend', indeed! What a critical distancing device! Those watchers in the out-buildings waiting, if not for Godot, for Mrs. Mary – they have possibly lost free will, but they still live marginally, still long for something, in a way like terminal characters in a Beckett play. Perhaps you have the same contempt for Beckett. They may be voyeurs, as you say, but there is always a hope in voyeurism, the faint wish for warmth, the seeking for salvation in others. My characters in *Probability A* are much to be pitied; I kept my own pity from the narrative, cunningly thinking by so doing to encourage the reader's. I did not expect (and have never received) as crude a response as yours: 'I find myself yearning for some brisk hand action beneath a dirty raincoat!. What a descent into abuse, as well as self-abuse!

Although you have more to say about *Barefoot,* the more is not more convincing. It's a matter of taste whether anyone *likes Barefoot* or *Probability A,* although the fact that reprints are occasionally called for suggests that some people do. But you cannot make my attitude to the goings-on a matter of taste. To say that rape, death, etc. are witnessed as neutral events may be true; the same goes for *Clockwork Orange.* But that is part of the writer's design and not an attribute of uncertainty; Wells was vexed because reviewers complained that Griffiths, the invisible man, was not treated sympathetically; Wells did not feel sympathetically towards him. I do

not feel sympathetically towards Charteris (I am fascinated by him, but that was part of the deal). Charteris is a cold-hearted bastard, if I must spell it out. He lets one of his disciples drown without turning a hair; he is responsible for Marta's suicide; he is an absolute shit to Angeline. Careful study – or the normal study a writer, even an sf writer has come to expect from a critic – would show that Angeline is almost as important as Charteris in the scheme of things. The whole book began to move in my mind when I first saw that broken STELLA ART sign glowing in the surrealist Belgian dark; from then on, I wanted a broken woman in the novel. In the event, Angeline does not break. She survives better than Charteris; when he is a burnt-out case, still playing sly and 'wanting it both ways', she remains constant, but has little patience with him. Time extends, has its revenges. In your expression, Charteris is seen 'more and more in long shot'.

To claim *Barefoot* is 'an autobiography with a dishonest ending' is not true; and such claims should be argued, not stated. My argument is that it is not autobiography, and the ending is thoroughly in accord with Angeline's and Charteris's characters, and with his espousal of Ouspenski.

Again, I must spell it out, although I thought it clear enough. My belief is and was that Ouspenski is an old rogue, just the sort of crank that a hippie philosophy might seize on (in real life, they seized on Jubal Harshaw instead, but so it goes). To use Ouspenski in the book was an inspiration. It is beside the point to say that my 'flirtation' with Ouspenski is 'from the mind and not the gut'; you fall into the old trap of identifying author with chief character. As for the freak-outs being too literary, well, they took in many true acid-heads.

In the same way, the novel is about anarchy; but why claim that I therefore espouse it? Don't I make it look nasty enough? Isn't burning down Brussels sufficient? – We weren't in the EEC then. The acid-heads go for anarchy, but beneath the gong-tormented see-through surface are the horrors projected by Nick Boreas and Herr Laundrei. The jibe that I 'persist' in calling western civilization Wesciv ignores the fact that I hoped thereby to give a reader the idea that our civilization has shrunk under barefoot anarchy to a mere administrative department, like UNICEF, for instance.

A certain nihilistic jocularity in your piece ('This is a tip to future investors') suggests that what cuts deep to the writer can be treated as a horse race by any boil-ridden commentator who comes along. Maybe it isn't worth the hours spent nailing your misrepresentations. But among my passionate beliefs are two which hold that *Probability A* is not a joke, as you call it, and that a handful of ill-chosen jokes is not criticism.

*Brian Aldiss*

Southmoor,
Oxfordshire

Dear Peter Nicholls,

December, 1975

Thanks for *Foundation*, which, I'm afraid, I found oddly depressing, as, indeed, I find most publications which come out of the sf world. It was refreshing to read Richard Cowper, however, and his review of *Hell's Cartographers* had a whole

some air about it which seemed lacking in the rest of the magazine. Like Mr. Cowper, I read very little sf before I began writing it and never had much time for the genre, as such. I think I became interested in American sf through reading Alfred Bester, just as I became interested in American thrillers through reading Hammett and Chandler (I've never found any I can enjoy, though I keep looking, just as I never found anything to match *The Stars My Destination* or *The Demolished Man*).

It's only lately that I've come to realise that my general disappointment with the sf genre is based on the fact that I've never come across another writer as satisfying to me as Bester. I think the simplest answer to a much-asked question about why I took the policy I did in editing *New Worlds* is that I never enjoyed sf *as a genre.* My early, semi-conscious, attempts to get well away from it led me to try putting a different label (speculative fiction, imaginative fiction) on the work I favoured (Disch, Aldiss, Ballard, etc.). As my interest waned completely and it became impossible for me to distinguish between one sf story and another, I eventually gave up editing *New Worlds*, largely because it dawned on me that I was no longer publishing anything which could be remotely described as sf and that I was therefore deceiving a public which, after all, had a right to expect sf in *New Worlds.* Because I have so little in common with sf buffs I stopped attending conventions and the like years ago, and I turn down every offer to talk on sf because I've nothing to talk about – I can't read it – I don't like it. I would go further – I'm *afraid* of the 'sf field'.

It's hard to describe the effect which reading about myself in sf publications has on me. I'm judged in a context that is all but meaningless to me, my work is seen in relation to writers with whom I feel nothing at all in common, most of whom are merely names to me and whose work I am incapable of reading – as a result I wind up becoming disturbed and distressed. Is it possible that an ordinary reading public might have seen John Brunner as a 'British A. Bertram Chandler' (the phrase is meaningless to *me*!) if he had not written *Stand on Zanzibar*? And should I find it significant that I am in danger of facing 'a similar fate'? My readers – most of whom have no knowledge of sf 'fandom' – seem to approach my different kinds of books pretty largely in those books' own terms. (Those books, I should have thought, were often noteable for their sentimentality rather than their nihilism. I use neither word in a pejorative sense.) Ballard and Aldiss suffer, as I do, the greatest critical hostility from the sf buffs who seem to regard them as renegades. My own non-sf books are sent to sf buffs by literary editors and these reviewers then proceed to attack me for not writing sf. I'm treated far more charitably (if not always favourably) by reviewers of general fiction.

I don't say that standards are any better or that critics are any more intelligent or perceptive outside the sf field, but I'm not so confused by people who judge my work, for good or ill, in relation to other fiction rather than science fiction.

Much of the work you describe as nihilistic is to do with a search for values, a search for identity – and, with all due respect to you and *Foundation* – I find that my tenuous hold on my identity is threatened by the sf world. I suspect that Ballard (who, like me, has no nostalgia for American pulp magazines) feels this, too, and I sympathise with those people, less arrogant than myself, who succumb to a sense of fellowship and social obligation by allowing themselves to be drawn into a world which, even more than most literary worlds, is actively destructive to a writer's imagination and individuality.

It might be worth, in all humility, my taking the time to try to explain why, in

recent years, I've kept away from the sf scene. I've no wish to offend the people who make up sf fandom – they are certainly not deliberately malevolent (on the contrary) – but I didn't back out of the GoH spot at last year's convention because I was insane but because sanity and a sense of self-preservation returned in time and I knew I could not attend except as a hypocrite (I had no wish, obviously, to offend a lot of pleasant people whose guest I would be, but I also didn't want to be dishonest with them or myself).

Forgive me, then, for not responding very objectively to your article (I know it was seriously considered and its points were valid, but it phased me – it threatened my ability to work, to avoid self-consciousness. To be fair, perhaps all criticism does this and a writer should refuse to pander to his ego by giving attention to anything written about himself). I suppose that, in relation to a lot of noteably mediocre writers, Aldiss, Ballard and myself must stand out, but frankly I'd much rather be judged as a minor writer in the – um – 'general fiction field' than as a major writer in a genre for which I feel, by and large, active distaste.

*Renegade* Ladbroke Grove

*(Editor's Note: We assume 'Renegade' is Michael Moorcock.)*

*The following two letters, one complete, and the other an excerpt, are printed in reverse chronological order at Mr. Ballard's request, since the more recent letter was deliberately written to preface the material of the earlier one.*

Dear Peter Nicholls 16th January, 1976

Excellent though your article on *New Worlds* was, full of interesting points, to some extent you've printed a strangely negative picture of *New Worlds* in the mid-60's – the details are accurate, but the atmospheric tones, the "moral" blacks and whites, have all been reversed. Reading about Moorcock, Aldiss and myself was a little like stepping onto the set of *Last Year in Marienbad* and catching a glimpse in a mirror of a trio of decorticated zombies. Was it like that at the time? In those heady days ten years ago in Mike Moorcock's office I remember noticing a number of quiet characters sitting around, no doubt taking it all down in cinemascope, and perhaps I should have cassetted the whole thing – any time now, I can see, a tide of reminiscence is going to drown out any accurate memory of what we were all trying to do.

From the standpoint of our present, *genuinely* entropic mid-70's it's difficult to remember just what the mid-60's were really like. Not just Carnaby Street, Pop, Psychedelia, IT and the youth explosion, but also the JFK assassination and Vietnam, and, in a way just as disquieting, the proliferation of all kinds of sinister developments in the communications landscape – the sort of thing William Burroughs was trying to expose in his attacks on *Time* magazine and the takeover attempts on the human psyche being made then by various scientific media and information conglomerates – when you talk about the *New Worlds* crew being "cool" what you really mean is that they were keeping their heads.

*Crash* was started in 1971 and isn't typical of what *New Worlds* was printing in the late 60's, but *The Atrocity Exhibition* certainly is. May I say now that the sections of the book that Mike Moorcock published did not come sliding down a well-greased chute – Mike was a great editor and spent a vast amount of his time and energy sitting on the other end of a sofa or a telephone line listening to me going on and on about my obsession of the day, arguing with me, shouting me down, pouring the Scotch – and he did this for a dozen or more other writers. If there is a disservice in your article to *New Worlds* it is that I'm sure Mike Moorcock would *not* have published anything as coldly pornocentric as you imply *Jerry Cornelius,* Brian's *Barefoot in the Head* and *The Atrocity Exhibition* to have been. Without exaggeration, I can say that the atmosphere of 87A Ladbroke Grove was highly moralistic, unlike the laissez-faire, comic-book, catch-all approach of *New World's* American counterparts.

What Mike and his writers were trying to do was to find a set of keys that would spring the locks bolted across large areas of our lives by the apparent new "freedoms" multiplying around us in the late 60's. Most of us, being sf writers, deliberately chose a method more or less totally neglected by the science fiction of the previous 30 years – irony. This might even have involved giving the impression that one was never happier than when "surrounded by the detritus of destruction, the crashed car, the dully gleaming carbine over the shoulder, the empty syringe lying on the toilet floor." (*Crash,* I would like to think, is an example of a kind of terminal irony, where not even the writer knows where he stands – quite a difficult trick to manage, incidentally – some of your readers might try it.)

For all these comments, I nonetheless was in sympathy with a great deal of what you said in your article, and which at least takes an original line, unlike so much criticism of sf – a minor growth industry (it always annoys me, or used to, to think that the reviewers of one of my books made more collectively than I did for writing the damned thing) – which tries to annexe sf into the larger body of general fiction, parading, like a troupe of over-trained recruits, all the clichés and tiresome formulas of American and British Academic criticism, which were evolved to discuss a totally different poetry and fiction.

*Jim Ballard*

Shepperton,
Middlesex

Dear Peter Nicholls

11th December 1975

. . . Incidentally, it's not the barbarians who are at the gates of the city now, but the pseudo-intellectuals. I'm thinking particularly of Delany's piece, and the article by the Canadian about him – absolutely beyond parody – I feel sorry for Delany, a sweet guy, when he wakes up in five years time and realizes what he's been doing – or maybe he never will – in which case there'll be nothing left but to run for the hills. I have a nightmare vision of the street clogged with sf thesis-writers jawing away about Chomsky and Lévi-Strauss and Wittgenstein – the first *lumpen-intelligentsia* seems to be making its appearance in sf criticism. Don't think I'm knocking intelligent writing about sf – like your own excellent piece on N.W. But some of those Americans . . . In the New York Review of Books there used to be an ad listing the lecture or thesis titles of some college sf course – "Lévi-Strauss and the concepts of structuralism in the novels of Harry Harrison". Amazing stuff.

(Whenever anyone uses the phrase "in the novels of . . ." reach for your editorial revolver.) It seems to me that the main job of editors like yourself is not to protect us from the bad sf writers but the legion of sf critics.

*Jim Ballard*

Shepperton,
Middlesex.

Dear Mr. Nicholls,

20th October, 1975

. . . You will be diverted to know that an indexing journal, probably operating by computer, has classed my article "Enter The Apes" (a study of the *Planet of the Apes* films in *New Society*, June 12, 1975) under "Apes-Zoology"! The result has been that various scientists, behaviourists and zoologists ALL OVER THE WORLD have promptly written off for reprints. I have had postcards from a number of U.S. universities, the Yerkes Regional Primate Centre, the Washington Primate Field Station, the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute (Defense Nuclear Agency) in Maryland, and the Primate Information Centre in the U.S.S.R. among many others. What sets the crown on the story is that the computer rejected my own name as author because I am unknown to it, and threw up instead the name of the eminent Professor Kemball of Edinburgh university, who has since been driven mad by all these postcards arriving from his colleagues around the world. What upsets me is the corollary, that there *may* be specialists in the cinema or sf in the States who don't know about my article because it has not been indexed under the correct heading.

*Jessica Kemball-Cook*

London SE4

Dear Mr. Nicholls,

24th July, 1975

First, I am surprised that you published Chapman's article on sf in the 1950's in *Foundation* 7/8: it really is a very poor piece of work. His "major question" is really no question at all. He asks us to accept as a paradox that in an age of insecurity people read a literature which is fundamentally escapist – taking one very directly from the here and now which seems so threatening. That the direction of the flight of fancy is so often into the future seems to me to be of quite minor importance. He also implicitly asks us to accept that the sf-reading population was typical of the population as a whole – or at least of that part of it which was influenced by Billy Graham and Barry Goldwater. Plausibly, these were quite different subsets of the American population, with age being a major factor distinguishing them.

When I first read this article I noted in the margin a number of *non sequiturs*, dubious quotations taken out of context and indications that the author was damned well going to prove his point whatever the odds. Is Miller's *Canticle* as

small a work as he implies? Has Chapman *read Foundation* (Asimov's)? Doesn't he realise that the long pink worm which is Heinlein has been writing about rugged individualism for 35 years and the works which his 1950's cross-section produced have much more to do with the man than with the age?

I thought of doing a detailed critique of the piece but had the uncomfortable feeling that taking an undergraduate paper as a target was a bit like shooting fish in a barrel. Still, if you want more articles and letters on the subject and are prepared to consider one which would use a destructive critique of Chapman's effort at least as its framework then I am prepared to put my finer feelings aside. (Perhaps I may mention the great difficulty which I see, if you do publish more articles on this subject, of keeping the proper balance between the sf of the 1950's and the analysis of the background against which it was written. The 1950's were not homogenous and there were many more influences at work than those of Graham, Goldwater, McCarthy and the bomb: I think you may have difficulty, in the space available to you, in getting the background into focus. *Foundation* is, after all, a magazine about sf and not a journal of sociology.)

Second, I thought that the title of your review of *Inverted World* was witty (and wittier than my own suggestion of 'Chip with everything' as a sub-title for these two volumes of *Foundation*) but after that I found myself parting company with you. Like you, though, I am waiting to see if Chris Priest can write a good, solid novel. *Fugue for a Darkening Island* was a slim work, and *Indoctrinaire* and *Inverted World* are both pieces at whose core is a short story which has been published separately: sometimes the joins show. Still, I don't like to clash with you on your own (literary) territory so I'm happy for an excuse to defer judgement till his next book appears. But I will take issue with you on your assertion that the inverted world has been "worked out in the most plausible mathematical and physical detail". Where, pray, does the sun rise? It sets in that world's north-east and I reckon it *ought* to rise in the south-west, but what can "rise" over that infinite disc at the equator? Doesn't Priest himself implicitly admit the imperfections of the physical model in his acknowledgement to (I think) Virginia Kidd at the end of the book?

I suppose there's no hope of persuading you to stop printing verse?

*John Feather* London N21

Dear Mr. Nicholls, 2nd August, 1975

I was shocked to see the news of James Blish's death. To me he was one of the paladins of sf. His great achievement was the combination of intense imagination, fine plot-sculpture, and a fearless and craftsmanly actualization in cool and technical detail of even the most impossible or outré conceptions, down to werewolves, demons, mystical experience, towns tacking around the cosmos, micro-miniaturized human clones, or a space-ship landing on an electron. I believe his greatest *short* story may be "A Work of Art", the Richard Strauss tale, for its profound and precise psychological truth. *A Case of Conscience*, "Common Time", and perhaps "The Oath", also tower among the highest peaks.

*David I. Masson* Leeds

Dear Peter Nicholls, 17th December, 1975

. . . My regards to Tom Shippey for his very pleasant and simpatico review of *334*. It seemed rather exclusively interested in the political side of the book, but *as* a political reading it seemed pretty accurate, for which all poor misread writers must be grateful, yes?

*Tom Disch* New York

Dear Mr. Nicholls, 22nd January, 1976

I enjoyed no. 9; I especially liked your piece on the 'New Worlds' syndrome, although I confess to a feeling of disappointment that the feat of dragon-slaying you emerged victorious from at the I.C.A. was due to a boil on the wherever. I shall never read a hatchet-job criticism again without a touch of suspicion, unless it's covered by a medical certificate.

It's always good to see some good honest hysterical controversy in the pages of a critical magazine. I thought both the original review of *The Chalk Giants* and Keith Roberts's response to it were interesting, especially relating to my own reading of the book, which resulted in a similar response to that of your reviewer. He was obviously disturbed by the book – so was I. He protected himself with frivolity, which in places I did think was offensive . . .

. . . Why shouldn't the resurrection-myth stay with us? I'm reminded of what Alan Garner said at the I.C.A. about the inner core of myth remaining the same though the form changes. I think the various stories of *The Chalk Giants* were attempts at showing the reverberation of myth through the ages. I eventually came to the conclusion, which I see differs both from the review and Mr. Roberts's own explanation, that the dreams of Potts – the stories – were his own *subjective* future-visions, and as such couched essentially in terms of the past as he understands it, or could understand it; hence the 'cap-and-bells' type of seeming anachronism your reviewer took exception to. As such, maybe the ambiguity "future-racial memory" wasn't so inaccurate after all.

. . . The question raised by certain ambiguities in the time-structure of *The Chalk Giants* provides a handy target for the conflicting emotions raised by the power and violence of the book. It happened with your reviewer and it happened with me. It's obviously stirred up a lot of emotion. I don't know yet whether it's a good book; I can't say I enjoyed it but I'm sure Mr. Roberts didn't mean it to be fully digested at one sitting. I intend to read more of Mr. Roberts's work.

*Andrew Sawyer* London E12

# foundation forum

## *edited by Christopher Priest*

*What place does science fiction occupy in the world of general literature? How does it relate to advances in science? Is it philosophically naive? What critical standards should be applied when considering it? How should science fiction be interpreted, if at all? Is it, indeed, worthy of separate and serious consideration, or should it be thought of simply as a pop-cult phenomenon?*

*With certain notable exceptions,* Foundation *publishes essays and studies dealing in specifics: which is to say, reviews of published books, criticism of certain authors and their work, autobiographies of sf writers, and so on. We intend that* Foundation Forum *should become a regular and notable exception to this, because what we are concerned with here is, in a phrase, the theory and practice of science fiction. The questions put forward above (some of which are more important than others!) outline the sort of area in which we will be working, but as the* Forum *is planned to run for several more issues at least, the shape it takes will be dictated by its contributions.*

Foundation Forum *is so named, because it is open to all. Many of the contributions will be directly commissioned from both new and regular* Foundation *writers, but we may also carry short reprints from other journals (if they have a bearing on the debate) and contributions from readers. In this issue we publish the first two articles, both written especially for the* Forum. *The first is by Ian Watson and myself: a polemical dialogue, ostensibly debating the relative merits of Content and Form (but also opening several other cans of worms). The second is by David I. Masson, a regular contributor to* Foundation, *who calls for what might be described as the imaginative imperative of science fiction.*

*Letters or articles specifically intended for* Foundation Forum *should be marked as such on the envelope.*

Christopher Priest

# part i: science fiction: form versus content

## *Christopher Priest and Ian Watson*

PRIEST. "When all is said and done, sf writers are not different *in kind* from other writers." Thus Richard Cowper, reviewing *Hell's Cartographers* in *Foundation* 9, and making a point not frequently made. There is an assumption in science fiction circles, and it is found in all areas of science fiction activity from readers to critics

to writers, that sf is inherently different from other "kinds" of literature, and that although one can differentiate between good and bad science fiction, any qualitative judgement must be made strictly within the sf context. This assumption leads not only to arbitrary and parochial critical standards, it encourages the mentality of the literary ghetto and gives a misleading importance to the work of authors who, when judged in a wider context, have much in common with Mickey Spillane, John Creasey or J.T. Edson.

Is there not a case to be made out, though, for the belief that sf *is* different in kind, because of its content? After all, we are often told about the speculative nature of science fiction, the fact that it stimulates the imagination, that it deals with possibilities or probabilities. The idea is everything, and so long as it has not been explored before by other writers, then the work is intrinsically interesting, however inadequately it might be written.

If this case is to have any force, then we must be very clear as to what we mean by "idea".

My contention is that the form science fiction takes (in other words, its literary conduct) is more interesting than its apparent content, and that one is generally mistaken for the other.

When we speak of the science fiction "idea" we are really talking about two different things at once. There is the science fiction *notion*, and the science fiction *idea*.

The *notion* is generally an artifice: an extrapolation, an inversion, an imaginary alien planet, a new technology.

The *idea* is something which at first sight seems less important or specific, because it is concerned with what the author makes of his chosen theme: a social comment to be made, an idiocy to be satirized, a trait of humanity to be examined, manners to be parodied, tragedies to be mourned.

Science fiction notions are the apparent subject-matter; science fiction ideas are the actual subject-matter.

(An illustration of this point can be found in Frederik Pohl's "The Midas Plague". In this we are introduced to a society where what we understand of wealth has been inverted. The very poor are those people who have huge mansions, dozens of cars, robotic servants, large bankrolls. The very rich are those who live in hovels, are permanently in the red at the bank, and drive a 20-year old car (or, the ultimate status-symbol, no car at all). Social and economic niceties are similarly reversed: in a supermarket the customer *gives* trading stamps, and in a bar one says, to be polite, "Have this one on you". The *notion* of the story is to create the reverse-economy society; the *idea* is to illustrate and satirize the lunacies of our own consumer-oriented society.)

The test of good science fiction is, or should be, an examination of the idea rather than the notion. Since this necessarily involves such nebulous areas as the author's tone of voice, his point of view, his choice of language, and so forth, what this means in effect is that his style or form is actually more relevant than what at first glance seems to be his content. However, for fifty years (i.e. since the creation of the first specialist sf pulp-magazine in 1926) the notions of science fiction have been proselytized at the expense of the ideas by influential editors like John W. Campbell Jr., and by many critics and commentators. Science fiction – or fantastic literature, as it should more properly be called – is the misdirected literature of our time. The reason it survives artistically, as opposed to commercially, is because a minority of good writers continue to be attracted to it because of the literary

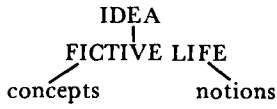
possibilities it presents. There is its justification, and it is in spite of all the genre trappings.

WATSON. Literature graphs the experiences and activities of people. It does this – in epics, tragedies, novels or whatever – by presenting mimic or 'fictive' life. For me, the 'idea' of a book is the total pattern of correspondences, links, mutual reflections between the fictive life and the thoughts behind the story.

(Fictive life must mimic life well enough to pass as convincing – like a fly passing for a wasp – but it is always a stylization. No matter how psychologically profound the work is. No matter how vivid the sense of life is. At the other extreme, you can mimic life too carelessly, and no one believes it.)

Let's distinguish between 'ideas' and 'idea'. Otherwise one is tempted to ask: what is the idea of this book? You cannot answer that simply. The idea is more complex than 'satire on such-and-such', 'parody of manners' or whatever. You would have to plot a graph with axes for Events, Locations, Characters, Time Sequence, Science Ideas, Ideological Bias, showing how all these balance and interrelate. For me, this is the 'idea' in the author's consciousness, or at least in his subconscious. This is what the reader receives, via the fictive life, as his idea of the book.

Actually, I would prefer to call satire, parody of manners and so on, 'notions' – as opposed to scientific 'concepts'.




For me, the 'idea' of the book is much more than a 'notion'. The idea is the whole bundle of relationships between the elements of the book: the concepts (scientific), the motives and notions of the author (ideology) and the fictive life which mediates these (narrative).

In sf, the concepts and the notions should have equal weighting – whereas in mainstream Literature the notions are almost all there is, feeding in to the fictive life.

Of course, 'ideas' in the sense of dreaming up bits of equipment or solving scientific puzzles are subordinate to the 'Idea'. (Sf can only mimic the solving of scientific puzzles – just as it mimics future equipment.) Yet, having said this, sf should uniquely change (and I think it has changed) the span of consciousness of people. If classic Literature comments on Society and makes Man more aware of psychological motives, sf has the added ingredient that it modifies (albeit a little) people's concept of the Nature of Man in the context of the Total Universe, Space and Time – because it is a literature that brings scientific ideas (in the broadest sense) to fictive life. It possesses an axis which classic Literature doesn't: the concepts axis. It is this axis that makes sf what it is. To overweight the notions axis by insisting on classic literary values is to betray sf – though equally to overweight the concepts axis turns the fictive life to cardboard.

I see Literature (and the rest of Culture) as part of an evolutionary process. It only has meaning within this biological and social context. Sf is unique in taking as its conscious subject matter this 'Total Universe' within which classic mainstream Literature is largely subconscious. This factor makes sf a more 'naked' literature.

In a sense, sf is a literature that is trying to put itself out of business; rather than referring back to itself. Sf mustn't simply hope to perform sparkling cadenzas on the theme-repertoire handed down by Classics, ancient and modern – patting itself on the back that it thus voices eternal verities and joins up with the Grand Tradition of Literature (with a few extrapolations and inversions that give it its own personality). Sf must reach out further than mainstream Literature – sf must think harder. Inevitably, it will have more 'content' – in the sense of theoretical discussions of What-Is-Going-On. The process of acquiring knowledge and organizing it will be more naked in sf, and *should be* (yet not in textbook gobbet style). Sf is a didactic literature: but in place of moral precepts (which the author may have subordinately as notions) we have the charting of the Unknown, presented as learning process to the reader (rather than the sophistication of the Known, as in too much mainstream Literature). Sf should try to generate some new thoughts, not permutate old ones. (And this is a hard task. For how can one think What-Is-Unthought? How can one really write about Aliens or Future Man? Well, sf can try to mimic the experience of these, and the better the mimicry the more convincing – and the more enlarging of our span of thought.)

That this optimistic programme bears little relationship to much of what is actually being written/churned out/manufactured by publishers, is merely regrettable, not a disproof. To say that 'fantastic literature' justifies itself because of the *'literary* possibilities' it presents is merely to invite the parasitism of the bankrupt-in-imagination and welcome condescending pastiche from without, or out-of-date literary experimentalism within.

**PRIEST.** The vocabulary of this exchange is already becoming extended: I'll settle for *idea* and *notion.* while you're bringing in *concept* too. I'm with you for much of the way, but if *concept* equals "scientific content" then what we're both talking about is the science fiction *notion.*

A title which vividly illustrates my argument is Larry Niven's prizewinning novel *Ringworld.* One can make several serious adverse criticisms of the book by examining its writing and characterization, say, and the qualities of its plotting were best summed up, I think, in Peter Nicholls's long review in *Foundation* 2. But the one thing that has never been said of *Ringworld,* as far as I know, is that it is not science fiction at all!

At the heart of *Ringworld* is the construction by fiction of the central artifact: the ringworld itself. This is a startling notion, and within certain limits it is brilliantly conceived. However, a brilliant notion does not by itself create a novel, nor even a science fiction *idea.* (Many scientific papers contain speculative notions – including Dyson's original theoretical paper about the construction of solar spheres – but we would not describe these as science fiction.) The difference between a notion in abstract and a science fiction novel is that the literature has to deal with the notion in some way so as to make a valid literary statement with it ("the total pattern . . . between the fictive life and the thoughts behind the story", as you say).

The trouble with *Ringworld* is that the pattern of literary statement is virtually nonexistent. What *is* said is hardly worth saying at all – by my reading, the universe-shaking "idea" in *Ringworld* is that man's spirit of curiosity and adventure is irrepressible – and in any event doesn't need an artifice the size of a ringworld to say it.

What we're left with is an extended piece of fictional prose (not a novel at all, I think) which describes a rather daunting artifact. The book remains interesting, *but not as a science fiction novel.*

On the other hand, the sort of science fiction I think actually works very well – where in the first place there is an interesting or startling notion, used to express in the second place an idea which is itself intrinsically science fictional – exists for the most part in well-written work. In other words, the apparent content is enhanced by the form, not, as in the case of *Ringworld,* diminished by it. I would put the work of authors like Disch, Le Guin, Aldiss and Ballard in the "well-written" bracket; not for the usual reasons of competent or stylish prose, or credible characterization, but because such writers seem to be involved with the science fiction novel as an art-form, and are dealing in much more sophisticated ideas than are suggested by the narrative or plot.

I think, for instance, that Bob Shaw's *Orbitsville* is a much better science fiction novel than *Ringworld,* although both books deal with the same kind of notion. Where Niven is content to build his world, then get his characters to enter it (and not much more), Shaw has thought through the *consequences* of such an artifact. The idea, and I use the word advisedly, of *Orbitsville* acting as a sort of cosmic sponge to soak up and disperse the outward drives of super-technological civilizations seems to me much more inherently science fictional than the artifact itself. But this idea depends, of course, on the plausibility of the various notions themselves, and Shaw rightly spends most of his apparent energy on making credible the people, the society, the starships and the Orbitsville construction itself. One should not mistake the trappings for the true book.

To ascend from the particular to the general, I'd like to return to one or two things you've said.

You speak of the "mimic" or "fictive" essence of a novel, especially with regard to its narrative.

It's often seemed to me that an element that is at once a great strength and a tremendous weakness of science fiction is the almost universal use of a nautralistic, linear or representational prose. A strength, because science fiction depends for much of its effect on the disparity between the reassuring – the reader's (and the writer's?) identification with a hold on a recognizable reality – and the disconcerting, in the shape of bizarre events or exotic surroundings. A weakness, because the major bulk of science fiction is written in a style derived from, although admittedly more polished than, the pulp magazines. On the whole, science fiction has not advanced stylistically, in the way that some areas of the modern general novel have. The trouble with saying this, of course, is that it sounds as if one wishes to embrace the "out-of-date literary experimentalism" that you refer to, meaning, presumably, the fracturing of form countenanced in sf during the 1960s. Actually, I'm a traditionalist, and I like the well-made novel or story, but it's always seemed to me that if there was ever a kind of literature where style could be adapted to meet the demands of content, then it is science fiction.

But there I'm falling into a trap I think you're already squatting in. You speak of "classic literature" and "sf" as if they're two different languages.

The creation of "scientifiction", then "science fiction" and then "sf" was a commercial, popularizing move, taken by the first American pulps. Before then, science fiction as we now know it was a part, and indeed a most respectable part, of the main stream of fictional literature. Gernsback is of course ultimately responsible for this vulgarization, but it was Campbell who made the deficiency into a seeming virtue, by treating fantastic literature as if it had to bear no relation to general fiction. (The average sf reader today still equates "mainstream" with detective-stories, romances or Westerns.) Campbell's concentration on "concepts", engineering solutions to human problems, and narrative and plot-values against actual

literary content took a whole generation of writers to a point so far inside the ghetto that they could no longer see the outside world.

**WATSON.** I'll stick with my jargon. It strikes me as more multi-valued. 'Concept' is not only 'scientific content' but also *how* the author is assembling and manipulating his content conceptually. 'Notion' is more than just the author's 'idea' in your sense (i.e. conscious decision to satirise, to celebrate, to mourn); it is also his entire ideological programming, which he may know little of indeed. It is his class alignment; his location in a particular society at a particular stage in the historical process – namely, for us, in the decadence of Western Capitalism allied to a scientific and technological climax. The sf writer, dealing with planetary themes and taking the Universe as his province, is not thereby dissected out from his own place and time (so that he can pursue aesthetic goals with a light heart). He must be more open to his world, more subject to stresses from the 'gravitational pulls' of conflicting interests and political, economic, social contradictions which affect the world, than his mainstream confreres, who can insulate themselves within dubious social microcosms supposedly reflecting the universal. The sf writer – like the astronaut who enters a very large Black Hole – is already, along with his whole society, within an 'Event Horizon' with regard to the future of Man as we know him and Culture as we know it (our cherished literary values included). The only way through is to *not* graze on familiar pastures en route, enjoying old familiar tastes with our well-honed sense of literary Taste, but to prepare for the mental eruption through the point of collapse of What-We-Know into What-we-do-not-yet-know. By this latter, I do not mean merely the political or economic future, but the conceptual future too.

I return to my point that we are part of an evolutionary and historical process. There is no thousand-year warranty on our styles, world views, genres. And as for emotional values, were not Compassion and Empathy – those beloveds of the 'Unchanging Human Heart' brigade – very recent acquisitions? Who except for Casanova felt much qualm when Damiens was torn to pieces by horses in a Paris square circa 1740 after a morning of tearing by hot pincers? The Fashionable thronged the balconies in their finery, drinking champagne. The Unfashionable munched buns down below and gawped as at a fair. Who except Casanova expressed the mildest empathy with the victim (or imagined that one should, or could) – harbinger thus of Romanticism, in the midst of which movement the Novel burgeoned? But for Romanticism, would the novel as we know it – with its empathetic identifications with another's heart and readings of these from the inside – have flourished? Is not this sort of novel becoming irrelevant as the torturers move back on to the stage after the brief honeymoon of History with Empathy; as bourgeois individualism (another mainstay of the Novel) erodes; as the world shifts in many other radical ways; and as statements must once more be made in literature?

Another prime ingredient of The Novel is unity of tone, linear representational unity. This is yet another recent 18th Century invention! We misread Chaucer – great story-teller – abominably, if we believe that narrative voice and characterization are intended as anything but variables, dependent on (moral) *content*. In fact character and style have generally been determined by content. Didactic precedes Aesthetic. To claim that age-old literary values are with you in your argument is false; for you can only call to witness the last 200 years, during which Empathy has been allied to Style.

When I speak of 'total pattern', I am not simply talking about 'valid literary statements'. I am talking about meaningful (that is to say: enlarging, modifying) mental events: events in the history of ideas, of Man's thinking as reflected in the individual's experience of specific works. I'm talking about learning-experiences, not simply about playing the literary game. There's nothing sacrosanct about the Novel; nothing sacrosanct about 'Literature' per se, which makes it self-validating.

Indeed I *do* draw a distinction between classic literature – let us define this as the classic literary values based on the last 200 years of novel writing in the West, for this is what you're really talking about – and sf. You're right to underline the pulp-inspired schism. Yet what has actually happened in the genetics of literature – if one may speak in a biological sense? From a large population (the Novel) this segment has split off and progressively isolated itself. In the process let us admit that inbreeding occurs, producing various aberrations and limitations. Yet out of this has also come a strong and viable strain, a new species, aligned mentally along the concepts axis. The truth is that the Mainstream is flowing around in a gigantic loop, as on Riverworld, whilst sf has actually restored the content-directedness of Literature, from before the time when 'Literature' was sanctified as a thing-in-itself, separate from Society. Now that this new breed is being admired a little, let it not troop back to try and breed itself out of existence again! The emergence of sf may indeed have been, historically, a commercial and economic move. So was the Slave Trade. Does that mean that Blacks of the Americas belong back in Africa? Gernsback and Campbell performed (inadvertently?) a sterling historical service. It would be invidious to compare '2-cents-a-word' with labour on the plantations; yet the ghetto allusion holds good – and now that this ghetto has become sophisticated, as well as transparent to the outside, is that any reason to deny the uniqueness thus bred: at the very moment when it gathers strength and is the literature of necessity for our time?

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**PRIEST.** Yes . . . but a ghetto is a ghetto, however big or sophisticated it becomes.

Your analogy of the slave-trade is remarkably effective, to the point where I suspect if I extend it (which I'm tempted to do), it will turn against me.

However, the inheritance of the slave-trade is *not* a problem of whether or not to repatriate every American Black to Africa (and, by the analogy chosen by you, I'm not suggesting that science fiction should be concentrating on middle-class social satires after the style of Jane Austen), but the political implications of Black Power today. In the way that the true American political struggle has only just begun, so it is that the main body of literature will one day have to come to terms with the fact that a certain kind of writing – that which I prefer to call fantastic literature, and that which publishers peddle as "science fiction" – will have an ultimate revolutionary effect on fiction as a whole. Political revolution in *America, a propos* the Blacks, will come as a result of cynicism and the corruption of the establishment (e.g. Watergate), and of power: Black economic, social, and perhaps guerrilla, power. Equally, literary revolution *à propos* fantastic literature, will come as a result of the stagnation of the main stream (for *exactly* the reasons you describe) and the emergence of a radical alternative. Perhaps on this we do not disagree fundamentally.

But this by its very essence denies something you say, *viz*: "there is nothing sacrosanct about the Novel". Pardon me, but yes, there is. The Novel (why does the capital letter seem to denigrate it?), the novel is sacrosanct because it is art, and

art is sacrosanct.

I don't believe that science fiction is the "literature of necessity for our time", as you put it; I do believe, though, that art is the necessary activity for our time, because it is the necessary activity for all times.

If the novel is accepted as part of art, and science fiction is accepted as a part of the novel, then it becomes "necessary". In which case one judges it not as a radical activity *per se*, but as one aspect of a radical movement.

Didactic precedes Aesthetic? Neither precedes the other, but aesthetics, rendered sufficiently high, can trounce didactics any time!

I've departed somewhat from your metaphor, but I'll happily return to it.

The transitional stage between the slave-trade of Gernsback and the radical evolution I foresee has been the building of the ghetto. Gernsback transported fantastic literature to the new world of the pulps; Campbell put up the barbed-wire fence and built the look-out towers. Science fiction, for the most part, is still trapped within. Here's Peter Nicholls on the subject of the ghetto: ". . . here we find the loyalty, the pride, the suspicion, the boastfulness, the fighting reflexes – even, occasionally, the secret language – that are traditionally associated with the ghetto". ("Mr. Wollheim and the Apotheosis of Fandom", *Xanthopsia* 2, 1972.) Nicholls is actually talking about science fiction fandom, but it applies with equal force to the conservative attitude adopted on a wide scale within science fiction: the fear, basically, that literary types will muck it up.

Nor is it only the readers who express the fear. Many science fiction writers not only mistake the confines of the ghetto for the wide open spaces, but actually appear to relish the imprisonment.

Here are three quotes that have come my way in the last few months alone, and all apparently written with the concerned frown of serious devotion to sf:

> Mainstream literature is merely gossip about people you don't know. (David Gerrold, Introduction: *Science Fiction Emphasis 1*, 1974.)

[Or as Brian Aldiss said when he saw it, "Take that, Dostoevsky, you bastard!"]

> Science fiction needed a discipline and set of techniques that had never been required before, if it were to present totally alien cultures, histories and worlds without long, obtrusive explanations that halted the flow of the story. Evolving such techniques was a slow and painful effort, as can be seen by reading most of the very early stories of the field. Try to imagine *Dune* or a Le Guin novel as it might have been written in 1930! Personally, I don't think such stories could have been written without later techniques. (Lester del Rey, *Analog*, September, 1975.)

[Thank Heavens that pushy young chaps like Joyce, Lawrence and Steinbeck never tried their hands at scientific tion!!]

> It (*The Skylark of Space*) became the first great 'classic' of American science fiction, and it was the forerunner of native American magazine science fiction, which ever since has dominated world literature in that field. (Isaac Asimov, Introduction: *Before the Golden Age*, 1974.)

[A bit better, this one, because at least "magazine" and "American" are used as qualifying adjectives, and "classic" is justifiably given inverted commas. But I believe the "dominance" of American magazine science fiction is only over the pulp magazines and their successors. I do not believe that Huxley, Stapledon, Orwell, etc., were "dominated" by E.E. Smith.]

Enough illustrations. (The theory I'd *really* like to reprint – but cannot, be-

cause of its length – is James Gunn's introduction to *Some Dreams are Nightmares*, Scribners, 1974. It starts with a witty observation of Randall Jarrell's ("A novel is a prose narrative of some length that has something wrong with it") . . . and in the context of Gunn's piece that follows one has to believe that Gunn interprets it *literally and seriously*. Gunn is defending the fact that most of his "novels" are really "novelettes" joined together, and are thus better than real novels. The whole piece should be read in its entirety; there's a man creating ghettos within a ghetto!)

The point of all this is concerned with the future of fantastic literature. I accept your remark that science fiction is directed by content; it would be crass to deny that the content is relevant to science fiction's success. But sf will not march on into a golden future, in the way you believe, so long as a majority of its practitioners (and, it has to be said, a considerable number of its critics) are drawing on the *genre* itself for inspiration.

This inbreeding is manifested in many ways.

Most critical works that discuss science fiction deal with the literature in an historical or chronological way. In other words, one begins with Lucian (or Homer, or Wells, or *Beowulf*, or Shelley, or Gernsback, depending on one's own theory) and slogs valiantly forward until one reaches Ballard (or Le Guin, or Niven, or Dick, or whomever). The critical perspective is therefore one of progression-towards-perfection. The trouble with this is that it assumes too many critical falsehoods, such as the most frequent assumption that it was "OK" for 99% of science fiction to be sub-literate in the '20s and '30s, because writers hadn't learnt how to write in those days. (Cf. Lester del Rey, just quoted.)

The inbreeding is manifested in what I see as a parochial and quite unhealthy preoccupation with science fiction's past; one hears continually of "Golden Ages", as if the publication of Heinlein's first story was an event of historical importance roughly equalling the founding of Pennsylvania.

Any science fiction novel or short story that has been out of print for more than 20 years is automatically labelled "classic". (Perhaps one should look to the Catholic Church here for guidance on the rules of canonization.)

Worst of all, by paying too much lip-service to the self-imposed restrictions of the ghetto, a large number of contemporary science fiction writers are stultifying the literature; furthermore, the audience seems to want this. (I found it depressing that a book as intrinsically unimaginative as *Rendezvous with Rama* could be written by an essentially romantic and intelligent writer like Arthur C. Clarke; the fact that it swept the board of science fiction literary awards in its year was simply unbelievable.)

Obsessions with the standard imagery of science fiction – galactic "empires", the triumph of technology, *laissez-faire* chauvinism, and so on – simply produce clichéd work, because the *notions* are secondhand. No amount of clever writing will repair this, and the struggle between Content and Form will be an abandoned match. (Poul Anderson, as one example, is an author who is generally associated with the middle ground of science fiction writing, and to my mind it is in much of his work that we see this illustrated. Anderson is a conscientious and careful writer, and his books are full of evident attempts to avoid the cliché; because his stories, though, deal with standard situations – developments from established science fiction modes – all he achieves is the expression of a cliché in a different manner . . . a new kind of cliché, if you like.)

All of which sounds as if I am conceding ground to you; perhaps I am. But one thing holds fast: if you cannot accept the novel as a form of holy endeavour, then

we will never meet halfway. Science fiction is an aspect of the novel; unique, granted, for its content, but nevertheless subject to the same criteria as all novels. Science fiction is the halfway house: the place where literature and speculative notions meet. The critical ethos that should therefore be applied to science fiction is this: how well is the speculative notion treated as an idea by the literature?

I had the first word in this exchange; the last word is yours.

WATSON. Well, metaphors *are* notoriously double-edged beasts! One may equally well point out, I'm sure, that the last thing that Black Power wants (after repatriation) is wholesale cultural assimilation. Having painfully established an identity and a voice, why should Blacks then wish to "grey" themselves? Admittedly Black Power 'Separatism' is the best way, politically and economically, to contain the Blacks (q.v. Martin Oppenheimer, *Urban Guerrilla*) from the point of view of WASP society. But I think we must distinguish between the political and cultural revolution of the Blacks. Whilst infiltrating and subverting the power-base of the previously oppressive régime, cultural identity must still be preserved; otherwise, as with so many revolutions, the revolution is contained and assimilated, then *plus ca change plus c'est le même chose.* Sf must avoid cultural assimilation within a bankrupt tradition, whilst simultaneously infiltrating the power-base of this tradition, e.g. media pundits who sneer at sf whilst adulating the giant dwarfs of contemporary letters (for instance, currently, Anthony Powell. All this fuss about 'Britain's Proust' – paradoxically in the wake of the Lord Lucan scandal – when Powell is simply writing about similar social parasites.)

I believe that sf can infiltrate and revolutionize well enough without dragging round the millstone labelled 'Art' (with denigratory capital A). Frankly I cannot buy this jargon of Art as holy and sacrosanct – and the word 'buy' is exactly right. Art plays a social role; and the social role defines the character of Art and how it is thought of – not vice versa. We might like to pretend that a particular period in history 'exists' today principally by virtue of a few outstanding artists, Geniuses. The present-day Chinese know better – they know that Art exists by virtue of Society. What we view as fine 'Art' (*ante diem*) at Lascaux and the other prehistoric caves was not 'Art' for the makers. It is aesthetically pleasing, yes – as any supremely well done activity should be, from a well-thrown pot to a judo throw; and the individuals who painted these figures may even have been (within the parameters of neolithic life) the village eccentrics; yet for sure they were operating within a social ritual context. Now, at the time the Novel burgeoned, so did the bourgeois individualism of the propertied classes. Free enterprise capitalism goes hand in hand with Individuality. Concepts of Genius, the Artist, and Free Aesthetic Activity ("Art") follow on, perversely, thus . . . Painting was already secular; it no longer celebrated Religious Rite or collective political events of the State, but increasingly the possessions and lives of those who paid for and patronized painting. Containing and curtailing revolution is what the ruling class generally did; the Romantic Revolution was contained by making Possession, Ownership, apply not merely to things, but – in the Novel – to the uniqueness of one's boiling emotions, and the eternal value of these as touchstones of prized Individualism and Personality. Via the Novel, one possessed vicariously other people's emotions. One bought 'Truth' – and named it 'Art'. Revolutionary upsurge of feelings and the sense of freedom were laundered in this transaction, to bring in profit without taxation: to enjoy the bolstering of Free Enterprise, without permitting Freedom. Henceforth Artists

could live on their own, pleased with their own aesthetic singularity, within a society that simultaneously ostracized them *and* purchased their 'Individuality' to inject a boost of Truth and Emotional Validity into its own being. The hoodwinked Artist chased his Muse and Art. Pursuit of the Muse is a very different activity in the 19th Century from when Milton invoked his Muse in a context of Epic Convention and Socio-Religious Divine Conviction; or when Vergil genuflected to his Muse, as patrician court poet, exactly like Augustus sacrificing to Capitiline Jupiter. Consider Defoe's novels. How many things and objects are listed in *Robinson Crusoe;* what an inventory of possessions. The novel increasingly becomes a draper's catalogue of lifestyles, of emotional insights, of individualities – which are thus possessed, owned, appropriated: a 'theft of person' hitherto unique, and intimately connected with the rise of Capitalism. The ultimate treachery was to persuade the Artist that the more individual and Muse-hunting he was, the better off he was spiritually, and likewise his Art.

Don't be fooled by the entrenched interests of a moribund culture, flourishing the cachet of 'Art' like a life peerage!

Now, I hardly suggest that sf is marching on into a golden future, do I, when I say that sf is a literature that seeks to abolish itself, by going beyond into the unknown? By 'literature of necessity' too, I mean that sf is the species that is necessary at this stage in the historical, cultural and social process – a process of radical change in the direction of a higher evolutionary state of society and human consciousness, mediated by our Science and Technology. One day let us hope that sf will be as obsolete as a stone axe – because it has fulfilled its role, and there are other, finer tools; but let us fashion that axe as well as we can, in the meantime!

('Take that, Rimbaud, you bastard!' – for throwing up your promising career as poet and Muse-pursuer and traipsing off to Ethiopia to explore other dimensions of experience than Art . . .)

I'm afraid that one cannot put a line round 'Art' and imply that it is uniquely holy or necessary *per se*: more so than Science – or other activities of the human mind. To do this, is to fall into the trap set by Capitalism for the revolutionary artists: upon whom it perversely feeds, thereby proving its own health and its worth as a locale for Art.

Life is a 'form of holy endeavour'. Consciousness is. Thought is. But to take one tool that helps us think – and that's what the Novel is, and what sf is – and say that the tool itself is holy and must endure, is mystification; and has nothing to do with really revolutionary alternatives and radical changes.

I would agree, by and large, with Lester del Rey that new techniques and new sense organs had to be – *and were* – evolved; and would point to Joyce, not as an experimenter, so much as an inspired, if inadvertent, terminator, who both (a) performs a *reductio ad absurdem* of the vast catalogue of appropriated objects and emotions that is the Novel, and (b) performs a *reductio ad absurdem* (terminating eventually in the collapse of Language, or its transfiguration) of 'Style' itself, thus undermining the genre-unity that the Novel depends on.

If sf is a half-way house between Literature and Speculative Notions, let me rephrase your final remark, and demand instead: How well does 'Literature' serve the speculative concept? For it is the concepts that matter: the processes of thought, slowly enlarging and opening up the Unknown of Knowledge concerning Man-in-the-Universe; and this is what Art should serve – as Myth has served it: the evolutionary process of articulation of the Universe we are in.

Yet one must not do the thing inelegantly. The horse runs best when it runs most beautifully, most stylishly.

# forum part ii: the light of imagination

## *David I. Masson*

High claims were made in the Form-versus-Content debate. Christopher Priest believed that art is holy and Ian Watson believed science fiction has a mission to guide us through into the political, economic and conceptual Unknown – both views with which I have a great deal of sympathy. Sf is certainly no trivial, specialized, parochial, evanescent trend. Sf is a Giant – with its head in the clouds, its bottom on the ground, and its feet in a cesspool. Its nose is pointing to the future but its eyes are mostly squinting down to its navel.

Small wonder, then, if new readers react like those blind men who encountered an elephant for the first time, each taking a part for the whole. One person may take sf for a sphere, another for a hyperboloid (acknowledgments to *Inverted World*). Now without wanting the genre regimented in any way, I should like to see it lower its head a bit, look about it more, lift up its feet and wash them. I do not propose to take up the elaborate Slave-Trade/Black-Power metaphor of Watson/Priest, a newest *nouvelles impressions d'Afrique* "embedded" in their text, but here's a new offering, for what it is worth: sf is the radiation-producing *Leidenfrost* phenomenon (interactive buffer-zone) between the matter-universe of literature and the antimatter-universe of speculation. (*Leidenfrost*, loosely so named from the cold-drop-on-hot-plate phenomenon.) I offer this imitation pearl without necessarily subscribing to it.

For me, sf worth discussion is a branch of literature, and literature is an art. Art is as sacred or unsacred as science – or religion. Any of these three, taking a millenial view, may be (like sport and other pursuits, which are not sacred) either in abeyance, a private pursuit, an independent movement, or shackled to the state (or community); starved of funds or choked with them; superficial or profound; but (while it exists) there will always, rightly, be persons for whom one of these is all important.

I agree wholeheartedly with Ian Watson that there is no thousand-year warranty on our styles, world-views, genres or even moral values. That does not mean, of course, that we should abandon these forthwith and welcome torture, enslavement, or the enthusiasms of the antheap. When I hear or read such expressions as "class alignment", "radical alternative", "revolutionary upsurge", "infiltrating and subverting the power-base", "entrenched interests of a moribund culture", "art plays a social role", or the idea put forward that art is a mode of possession and appropriation (John Berger?), I am reminded, ever so faintly, of all those who would like to change us to fit their own preconceptions, from the politicians to the suitcase bomber; and of everything from analyses by academics to the brand of Final Solution practised by the Khmer Rouge. Lucretius's *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* ("Such a mass of wickedness has Religion managed to prompt") was true

up to Voltaire's day; not long thereafter it was "O Liberté! O Liberté! que de crimes on commet en ton nom!" (Mme. Roland, 1793); today we see the revolutionary process, or the logic of socialism, being used to justify everything and anything, including the gagging of free discussion such as this. So let us give the dynamite of doctrinaire idealisms a wide berth and ask, first, simply: (1) is harm done by Man to Man (and Nature) on the increase? (2) if so, should sf welcome this or oppose it? (3) should sf promote current shibboleths, or question them? (4) can this silly, self congratulatory, possibly insane, over-proliferating species, ultimately survive without some kind of absolute, and deceiving, government? and (5) if not, does it deserve to survive? The answers to (2) and (3) are obvious, provided we consider sf as potentially a moral and enlightening pursuit (that is, as literature rather than propaganda or mere entertainment). As for numbers (4) and (5), these most terrible questions, in a fictionally distorted form, were faced by Kornbluth in "The Marching Morons"; and he faced them with all the resources of his black and powerful imagination. Disch has turned question (4) into equally black speculative fantasy in "Thesis on Social Forms". Ursula Le Guin has sidestepped (4) and (5) by sending a *Mayflower*-load of anarchist-commun(al)ist enthusiasts to a harsh new world, and this has enabled her to work out just what stuntings, deprivations, repressions, tyrannies and catchwords they would have evolved after a few generations, along with their new freedoms and honesties and their cooperative virtues.

Art may not be holy, but neither is Ian Watson's "historical, cultural and social process" divine. It is bigger than all of us, but blind and amoral. It belongs in the realm of statistics. It carries no guarantee of his "higher evolutionary state" at all. It is changed, marginally, by what we do, but never in the ways we intend. Watson seems to hope sf will be an instrument for pushing us over into the next stage. I doubt if it can do much more than reflect our hopes, doubts and fears on the thresh-threshold, and occasionally warn. Like all literature it can lead or mislead: "Tout est bien ou tout est mauvais suivant l'usage qu'on en fait" (Berlioz). It is no more and no less didactic than other varieties of literature: just more versatile, less bound to reality.

One of the dearest myths of sf is the single-handed saviour of the globe (or the Galaxy), of this species (or all intelligent species). (The reader identifies with the saviour rather than "worshipping" him.) It is of course an absurd myth, but answers to an obvious human craving in readers and possibly in writers. In fact, the real heroes of this world are usually crucified or burnt, and their teachings, if any, corrupted; the false heroes, long remembered in song and legend, have led their followers into cruelty and destruction; the true benefactors of mankind are mostly unsung and forgotten.

Many of the tales that say "What if?" and even of those that say "What when?" are only fascinating romances which go back, not so much to the gothic novel, as to the fantastic epic-romance of the Renaissance. Take Herbert's *Dune*, a brilliantly inventive super-transfiguration of the *Seven-Pillars-of-Wisdom* situation, set in a context of "scientifically" magic weapons of more-than-old-Celtic efficacy, magic mental powers including tele-detoxificatory chemistry (in which I refuse to believe), more-than-old-Germanic treacheries, more-than-Renaissance palace intrigues, some ordeals, and heroic hand-to-hand combats in the best tradition; with well worked out geographical, economic and ecological problems and tribal codes: but just how seriously can we take this highly-coloured fever-heat epic as literature *or* speculation? Or take Delany's *Babel-17*, with its ingenious if rather flighty suppositions about the effects of a novel language, its well-imagined different

social milieux and their conventions, its humorous observations of the emancipated "Customs" man, its well-controlled presentations of the "discorporate" and their functioning: what is it but a galactic mystery-thriller (of genius, granted) with the usual "romantic" trappings? Of course, we may have left those "galactic empire" days behind; but are we really any wiser now about the future and its possibilities? Sf liberates thoughts; but does it liberate critically or just as an indulgence? The authors of *Non-Stop* and of *The Man in the High Castle* were not out to educate us: they were expressing an inner vision of, or at least an ingenious new look at, the world. The author of *The Drowned World* was embodying in symbolic form an even more interior vision of "inner space". This does not make these works any less important. Sf sets thoughts free; but does it set free for a purpose or as a "pure" activity of what we might still call "the spirit"?

Whatever its functions, I agree that sf must exercise them with style (as I would call it); also with internal consistency and "fictive" conviction. "Style" is not mere "elegance" in the popular sense: it is the best words in the best order for the exact meaning that one wishes to convey, the exact effect that one wishes to make. Different modes of presentation are appropriate to different bits of the sf elephant or giant, different distortions of reality, different extravagances of style (as Christopher Priest suggests), different kinds of sincerity and insincerity.

Take style for the moment. One often sees the complaint that words have become a debased currency. They are certainly misprized and misused, and the result is a muddying, fogging and blunting of thought. (E.g., current misuse of "disinterested' and "refute" reflects and encourages the march of egoism and the supplanting of reasoning by outcry: details on request!) It is time this anti-literate, anti-intelligent trend was reversed. Where better to begin than in sf, which, whatever its functions, we hope can be something of an advance guard of popular thought? (But fairly, please! Orwell with Newspeak demonstrated too well how a vocabulary and its meanings, accepted or imposed, can produce a crippling Thought-Control.)

Someone may say that if the historical process is undirectable it is no use trying to reverse a linguistic trend which forms part of it. I think that would be a counsel of despair. Language is always changing under the pressure of larger-scale statistical forces. But if we deepen a little channel here, and remove an obstruction there, the current of language, if not the vast flood of history, may be turned a little (though never just how we would wish). It is at any rate our duty to attempt precision *and* imaginative creation, and not to surrender to what Hobbes and Pope called Dullness and we may call obtuseness and lack of imagination; to do so would be a *trahison des clercs*, a betrayal of the intellect, just as much as its misuse for doctrinaire propaganda.

Someone else may say I am making very heavy weather of a form of light literature (shudder, readers!). But whether sf is education or art, if we want the public and critics to take it seriously we must take its presentation seriously; and if we are really falling towards or through an "event horizon" (and it certainly feels like it) we can rise to the occasion by sharpening our standards!

Right at the beginning of his second paragraph Watson has neatly sketched the relationship between fictional "truth" and reality: the extent to which the former must always be stylized. Early in his second section he uses "notion" (not in Priest's sense) for the total outlook, conscious and unconscious, of the writer; this clearly must include a writer's hierarchy of values, unspoken assumptions, etc. My preferred shorthand term for this would be "Outlook". But it has also been said (in French) that *style* is the man himself (apologies to Women's Lib for all these

masculinities); this is just as true in poetry, music, the plastic and graphic arts, etc. *Both* Outlook and style are personal, and Outlook is to style what physique, biochemistry and physiology are to expression, gait, gestures, mannerisms and voice. Of course we can still criticize style, like mannerisms, gestures and tone, which ought to fit purpose and situation. And for narrative, also, to "convince", the writer must establish, or follow, conventions to suit what he has to tell. Even in sf he cannot present flagrant impossibilities without some acceptable trick to achieve them; and he had better think hard about what is, and what is not, too improbable. If his central thesis is impossible, his peripheral apparatus must be convincing and in tune. He must cut out false notes and off-key pranks, whether due to fatigue or natural exuberance. But above all, he should say to himself, "What would it *really* be like, in gross and in detail?"

This is where imagination comes in, and where we need much, much more of it. A few writers, among them Kornbluth, Disch, and Ursula Le Guin, seem to exhibit in many of their writings an altogether higher order of imagination than that of most sf writers. (Of these three, the first two especially in their short stories, the last in her novels.) I do not mean, of course, that these works are more fantastic: indeed they usually convey a powerful sense of truth. For true imagination is concerned with "truth", not with fantasy. (Disch's is perhaps a rather metaphysical truth.) Kornbluth's rhetoric presented a heightened reality in order to make some particular point about society, deeply pessimistic and expressed in terms of betrayal and poetic justice. It is perhaps too early to sum up the other two, but Disch's nightmare visions seem to project, despite his sympathy, an inner distrust or horror of the universe and the human condition, which goes beyond Kafka. In Le Guin on the other hand we see a deep moral and emotional involvement with people combined with an exploration of philosophies and intellectual analysis. She seems to have fought her way past Taoism to a carefully worked out thesis about the effect of societies upon individuals and their development, the effect on the nonconformist, and the role of the uniquely seminal personality (what Auden called "The physician, bridegroom and incendiary"). She well understands the power of malice, envy, intrigue, bigotry and conformism, enemies of promise, as well as the more generous impulses.

I would place next below this level some kinds of mythopoeic imagination in, for instance, *Cat's Cradle, The Drowned World,* "Common Time", or Silverberg's "Born with the Dead". They are usually much more restricted in field, they are freer from the constraints of either reality or consistency, their authors seem less identified with their subject, and can be glimpsed at work, as it were. Further down come the various levels of more literal imagination in most sf.

**Dimensions and categories**

A few (restricted to past novels) may help. There is the individual/world axis from *Who?* to *Stand on Zanzibar* (some galactics extend even further). There is the introvert/extrovert axis, from (say) *The Drowned World* to *Make Room! Make Room!* There is the personalities/figures axis, possibly from *The Man in the High Castle* to (in novel-size) *Monkey Planet.* There is the realism/anti-realism axis from Wyndham (or perhaps the folksier Americans) to *Report on Probability A.* And, quite a different dimension, there is the reality/unreality axis, say from *The Left Hand of Darkness* to *The End of Eternity.* Then there are the sub-genres: farcical comedies like *The Technicolor Time Machine;* satires like *Monkey Planet,* satirical fables like *Cat's Cradle,* fables like *The Lathe of Heaven,* fable-quests like *Non-Stop,*

simple quests like *Hothouse,* epics like *Dune,* task-thrillers like *Babel-17* or *The Black Cloud,* horror-thrillers like *The Possessors;* moral case-histories from *Sirius* to *Flowers for Algernon;* propagandist fantasies like *Out of the Silent Planet,* moral fantasies ranging from *Rogue Moon* to *Counter-Clock World,* salvationist fantasies like *More than Human* or *The End of Eternity;* salvationist stories in depth like *The Left Hand of Darkness* or *A Case of Conscience;* a variety of more or less moral futures and crisis-studies from *Nordenholt's Million* ("J.J. Connington", 1923!) through *The Day of the Triffids* to *Earthworks* or *The World in Winter;* quasi-doctrinaire dystopias like *Brave New World* or *Limbo '90,* and pessimist chronicles like *A Canticle for Leibowitz;* and many more, especially if we take in the short stories. Perhaps a great future is opening up for the alternative-history, used for farce, satire, speculation and fable; one of the finest sf short stories ever written was H. Beam Piper's "He Walked Around the Horses". No doubt the next few decades will throw up more types, if paper supplies and printing last.

**Varieties of treatment**

It's worth considering the different choices of imaginative writing in a couple of examples. Harry Harrison's "An Alien Agony" (1962) and Barry Malzberg's "The Falcon and the Falconeer" (1969; why the double-e?) ostensibly have the same plot-nucleus: "dumb" aliens adopt a human being as their Christ. Harrison's is a crucifixion story, Malzberg's a Christmas one, of course. Harrison tells his story straight. Malzberg makes his out of half a dozen diverse reports, and says almost everything by implication; but the reader's hair rises at the back of his neck. Harrison's moral is, evangelism taken too literally may bring evil to the sinless (more succinctly, salvation is damnation). Malzberg's moral, if I understand it (perhaps I don't) is: there are more things in Heaven and Earth . . . ; also: Man has no business in space. Both authors imaginatively warn against intercultural contagion; but Harrison restates a real human problem about that old *Tantum religio . . . ,* while Malzberg gives us the creeps about powers at large in the universe. (But has he slipped up here and there? The psychologist Stock refers to "death, disappearance and madness": madness, yes; but at the time, who died, who disappeared? I don't recall anyone. In Cullings's last words the sentence about getting crocked at the Inn is a false note; it doesn't sound like Cullings at his crisis, but like the author improving his clues.)

"The Proposal" by L. Sprague de Camp (1952) and Asimov's "The Ugly Little Boy" (1958) have also something in common at their cores: spinster welcomes chance of love in a totally strange environment. "The Proposal" concerns a very alien alien; Asimov's tale concerns a time-snatched Neanderthaler. "The Proposal" is an extended joke nine-tenths of which is taken up with the politely inexorable wooing of an unwilling and nubile American girl by a monster; "The Ugly Little Boy" is a sympathetic study of a maternal virgin in charge of the primitive. I would say Sprague de Camp's tale has a clever fantasy sending up conventions; Asimov's an ingenious imagination enlarging a basically familiar situation. Of course de Camp's joke needs no deep imagination or sincerity.

**The basis of truth**

I offer the following twenty very modest general propositions. If they are true, sf can only flout them selectively and for special purposes, including farce, fun, satire, or to make a frame for a universally compelling vision or fable; and it must be seen to be flouting them or be guilty of misleading the public, the blind leading

the blind. However, they could themselves provide opportunities for the exercise of real imagination. Here they are.

1. Before A.D. 2100 English, American and Strine will be about as far apart as Swedish, Norwegian and Danish are today.
2. By about 2200, 50% of English would be incomprehensible to us today, mainly because of new concepts, allusions and tabus.
3. A.D.-2500 English would be totally meaningless to us because of its sound-changes.
4. Mankind's broader preoccupations and shibboleths will be completely different from today's by A.D. 2300 or earlier, depending on its development.
5. This does not mean that society will have any of the various monomanias or one-feature characteristics attributed to it by different stories; such notions are handy for satire, fable or fantasy, but no more.
6. Between the years 2000 and 2300, the accelerating curve of scientific knowledge, technology, and resource-exploitation will have flattened out or collapsed.
7. By the year 2000, if Man is to survive, the problems of population, of world starvation, of nuclear proliferation, of the exhaustion of resources, and of waste recycling must be solved – if they can be.
8. Mankind will never manage to construct a material super-civilization or an Admass-nightmare.
9. On the other hand it, or parts of it, may well create and maintain an ant super-state, possibly run on public spirit and social manipulation and control, as in China.
10. The individual will tend to become more, not less, powerless everywhere.
11. Most human beings come to accept any situation, however horrible, provided it does not contrast too nakedly with their immediate memories, their realizable hopes, or what they can see of other lives around them; their constitutions, of course, may be complicatedly weakened.
12. And it now seems that "authority" can induce ordinary human beings to commit atrocities without qualms.
13. Popular revolts tend to occur when a repressive régime relaxes its repression.
14. Violence is a far stronger drug than doing good "in minute particulars" (Blake), and hatred has always "promised/An immediate dividend" (Auden); thus more chaos, harm and cruelty than any benefit come from revolutions.
15. In human institutions, cultivations and material fabrications, destruction is always easier than construction, rigidity than flexibility.
16. *General* space-travel will always be too costly in funds and energy.
17. If there are intelligent aliens Out There, their thought-processes (product of their evolution) are likely to be absolutely strange, as also their attitudes, values, associations and sensory backgrounds.
18. Their life-cycle may be stranger than on Blish's Lithia.
19. If they communicate by sound, it may well be by something other than the "mouth" (as in the case of terran insects, etc.); or if by "mouth", their phonetics and phonology may be very different from human systems (as with other terran vertebrates), for their "mouths" may be differently shaped, lack tongue, teeth, etc.; and their auditory range may differ totally from ours.
20. The planet/animal distinction may there be non-existent.

All this (17-20) is probable even for carbon-based life under Earth-like con-

ditions. (The idea of those caterpillarious mandibles pronouncing, on cryogenic super-gravity Mesklin, names like "Dondragmer" and "Charles", is a bit comic for any non-juvenile reader; not to mention their G.A. Henty psychology.)

**Possibles/impossibles, probables/improbables**

I once met a would-be author who was determined to propel a space-ship across the universe on water. Not heavy water, even. Just water, plus some instantly corrosive chemicals. Not radioactive, apparently. We all nod from time to time, of course. But a few old examples big and small need pointing out as awful warnings, mostly of the results of bringing to bear too little imagination.

In *Counter-Clock World* (1967) Philip K. Dick grasps the tremendous nettle of an Earth where time has started (in 1986, twelve years ago) running backwards; but appears to have skated over the absurdities to produce a grim little tragedy of struggle lit by quotations from the Fathers, with an After-Life gospel partly defeated by violent plotters and counter-plotters, and a last ambiguous hint of imminent general resurrection. Under the Hobart effect the dead, rescued from graves, are rehabilitated by Vitaria, grow young, enter the womb and ultimately divide into ovum and sperm during parental sexual union. Digestion is reversed, the exgurgitated victuals being returned to containers and eventually taken to the stores; cigarettes, blown, re-form from stubs; whiskers are glued on; clothes, put on soiled, are discarded clean. There are snappy linguistic follow-ups, e.g. "food" is a four-letter word. The Library calls in copies of books and MSS and eradicates them in sequence. (Memory is ambiguous.)

What Dick failed to cope with (who shall blame him?) was the paradox that the laws of physics remain the same, bullets leave guns instead of entering them, persons are killed by weapon and poison, sounds strike the ear instead of converging on the source, lamps radiate. With the paradox go some muddles. Sebastian is given a drug to make time stand still for a while, yet it merely slows time for him like Wells's New Accelerator. Lotta says the Hobart effect "tests out weak" on Mars, but he unnecessarily thinks this means he will age once more there. Is the effect actually confined to Earth? [But reversed time/entropy means an anti-matter region, no? Implications for what preceded the Big Bang . . . ] With advances impossible in what would be A.D. 1998 without the effect, Mars and Venus are already settled, there are vidphones, aerial "cars", and complex humanoid robots; since it's really 1974, why hasn't a lot of scientific knowledge been expunged too? More loose ends: did stores pay for goods returned? did employees pay employers with the proceeds? were raw materials paid for by those returning them to the earth? And could society have gone successfully into reverse in under twelve years?

Michael Frayn, in *A Very Private Life* (1968), very carefully written, develops a lode first worked by E.M. Forster: that of the capsuled life where all experience is by telecommunication and drugs. The demonstration, in 1968, was too late: world resources cannot afford such super-organization. Maybe we hadn't got the conservationist message at that date, but time has had a quick revenge on all such utopias and dystopias. (Nothing, by the way, is so out-of-date as yesterday's bald, fallible, didacticism: it is Literature that survives.)

Less important are those lapses which seem to overtake the author who lets his fancy or his ingenuity get the better of him. There are many examples, but I will pick three works by two authors. In *Dune,* the naming of religions is too joky for the context. Mahayana Christianity, Zensunni, Orange Catholic, Buddhislamic and so on carry no real conviction, however much fusion of ideas may have gone on.

Jasmium and stravidium, in one of the appendices, seem to be illegitimately invented elements (sf writers are always inventing elements, which is rather like inventing several *whole* numbers between 2 and 3). Many useful improbabilities come out of Ecaz (Alpha Centauri B IV), but *fogwood*, which can be shaped *in situ* by the power of thought, is a real clanger: is the author cocking a snook at us? In *Non-Stop*, Aldiss's hypnotic rat-directed rabbits are just a bit too much. So is his robot fly in *Report on Probability A:* not so much improbable as right out of tune.

**Style, presentation and structure**

Since one can have a structure of styles, etc., we can't in practice discuss these aspects separately. I will start with what seem to me faults. There are some "primitive" styles which may derive from the pulp magazines, but could owe something to Damon Runyon, and something to the Hemingway manner, a heroic-simple affectation worthy of parody but not of serious imitation. There used to be a special sort of third-rate self-inspection in sf which was presented always in terms of of "you" did this, "you" knew that, which left me cold. Rather better was the presentation of way-out experiences by means of short, sometimes verbless phrases, often in italics; giving a "plonking" effect like a piano arrangement of an orchestral piece. Here it is difficult to prescribe a suitable improvement, but more imagination about the experience and more conventionality in the narrative style might have paid off. (Kornbluth's "The Mindworm" and "Friend to Man" have italic inserts hinting at something which is going to come clear in the end, but this is quite a different ploy, essential to give the full thrust of the final "catastrophe" with economy.) A special variety of the pianistic mode is the plonk *andante maestoso;* Theodore Sturgeon fell back on this near the end of *More than Human* (1953) for the big moment when the omnipotent "Gestalt"-controlling Baddy is about to be shamed into turning Goody by mind-drinking some pretty plodding thoughts about Morality versus Ethics. The variegated nastinesses and respites of the story's development (some told in first-person) are more or less convincing; this conversion, the recruitment of the hero as Conscience, and the coda about age-old guardian-angelizing super-Gestalten welcoming the new multi-person graduate, are not. The moral would seem to be that writers shouldn't fudge their endings, should spend more time on them, and, for happy endings, either rubricate these in full details *or* end skilfully on a note of mere hope (as in *The Dispossessed*). Above all, they should not unroll 99% misery followed by 1% splendour, which turns a plot into cheap entertainment for the masochistic reader.

One would like to imagine how *More than Human* might have been written by 'John Wyndham" or even by Olaf Stapledon. The first would have been rather cosier the second more of a treatise. The Stapledon manner is unlikely to recur in sf. *Sirius* (1944) is "Robert's" careful chronicle of a dog with a brain of human pitch. The first meeting of Plaxy's lover Robert with Sirius makes a good shock opening. One could imagine, however, the unpleasantly liberated version that would be written today, and its less kindly style.

On the whole I'm against stylistically weird *beginnings*, which bore and puzzle rather than shock. A beginning written in an ordinary style slides smoothly under the skin without encountering resistance. It's the matter that should surprise here, not the manner. And of course, it's often best to start by attracting ordinary human interest or curiosity.

Some sf stories have the narrator starting sane but ending crazy, disembodied, or whatever, and it is then clear that he was so all along. This is not the character

speaking, but the author duping the reader. It is annoyingly insincere. Now and then it is more skilfully stage-managed, for instance in Avram Davidson's "Dagon".

Rex Warner's *The Wild Goose Chase* (1937), marginal but no more so than some sf of today, is a magnificent example of how not to write. With echoes ranging from Homer to Kafka, it is a hotchpotch of quest, thriller, satire, fantasy and allegory, with some telling sequences (e.g. the murderous football match, not so much an Ur-Rollerball as a fantasy of absolute injustice) but impossible, insanely disjunct psychology in the midst of pseudo-realism. I have always felt Robert Sheckley's *Journey beyond Tomorrow* (1962) suffered from a touch of similar dislocation; the bones of the author's heavy irony and indignation keep piercing the narrative, the presence of Rousseau, Satan and others is absurd, and the multiple encapsulations of Sheckley's message, while they may have been defensively necessary in 1962, don't better his attempt, which is more like Bernard Shaw's *Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God* than sf.

Michael Frayn, as a writer venturing once or twice only into the sf domain, was able to permit himself the device, which wouldn't do for repeated use, of putting most of his future tale *A Very Private Life* into the present tense. The effect, an odd one, is something between a stream-of-consciousness piece and a film script. Worth considering by authors for some special timeless effect.

There's still a future for the exchange-of-letters mode as in "The Prisoner" (Christopher Anvil, 1956) or "On Handling the Data" (Hirschfield and Mateyko, 1959). The young researcher in the second piece, by the way, Jonathan Wells, signs his final, careerist volte-face letter "J. Wellington Wells". This is an oblique reference to W.S. Gilbert's "My name is John Wellington Wells/I'm a dealer in magic and spells". Such little winks may be justified in a comic satire on research; not so the reference to "Adrienne Leverkuhn" in a more serious story like *Camp Concentration:* this ill-considered allusion to the disease-embracing protagonist Adrian Leverkuhn of Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* is incongruous, the author signalling over the characters' heads.

The official-report or journal-extract presentation, and the dramatic-text presentation, are still essential for some stories. Szilard relied partly on them, and Le Guin uses the learned-journal mode in her piece on "therolinguistics".

Middle Ballard with its "terminal", its cold tones, its invocations of vast spaces and times, and its charlatanic scientific explanations, is a marvellous device for projecting the Ballardian dream, but poison to the imitator except for parody.

The Vonnegut mode, developed from *Cat's Cradle* onwards, with short chapters and inconsequential newspaper headings (which suit the journalist there) and in later books odd little drawings, might be occasionally followed? What we might now call the Zanzibar mode, developed by John Brunner first in *Stand on Zanzibar* out of Dos Passos, etc., is highly individual. It chimes with the brash, teeming world there. It would be fatal to imitate it, but several writers have found courage, perhaps from it, to present slices of legend, newscasts and so forth to cross-illuminate the specimens on their slides, and we have all been the gainers: take the myths and sagas inserted in *The Left Hand of Darkness,* for example.

The chapter-alternation between two persons in *Left Hand* and of worlds (and past/present) in *The Dispossessed,* is effective. In the second case it is really the only way the story could have been pulled together into a satisfying whole. The alternation is in line with the time theories in the book, and slowly completes our understanding of Shevek's development, while the space journey there and back rounds off beginning and end. Its presentation of Anarres and half a lifetime is masterly;

in Shevek's limited experience of Urras (A-Io) there is a touch of patchwork stereotype, perhaps, but the fictional reality is still pretty high (Thu, a "state capitalist" nation in Watson's review, is, from Chifoilisk's last conversation, state "communist").

**Languages, their life-cycles, idioms, terms**

I shall go into some small details here, because in presenting matters of language, carelessness over a single word, or letter, can spoil a whole book. But first, as they say, the matter of time-scales.

In *The Weapon Shops of Isher* (superb title!) someone of today steps into the year 4784, and finds himself being addressed in slightly old-fashioned English. In Simak's *Time and Again* the hero, around A.D. 8000, opens a letter written by his ancestor of the same surname Sutton in A.D. 1987 in Wisconsin, and without any training reads it right off. Soon he (and others from even further in the future) visit the years 1977-87 and, masquerading as contemporaries, talk to the ancestor and other people without turning a hair or putting in so much as half an hour of study beforehand. Imagine digging up and reading a pictographic tablet inscribed by *your* ancestor (of the same surname???) in Sumeria around 4000 B.C., and then visiting with him and chatting him up in ancient Sumerian (it has to be Sumeria; no one else seems to have got around to inventing writing so early, and cuneiform wasn't evolved till 3400 B.C.)! People are always popping over into the past or future and both understanding and fooling the inhabitants without difficulty. We would have a job in Dr. Johnson's day, let alone further back. By A.D. 4784 English will have long ceased to exist, whether it has been transmogrified or simply died out. (Glosso-archaeologists might study our records if any survive.) Aldiss and others have realized this and indicated that future Man was really speaking Galactic or something. Even so, they've generally overlooked the imaginative possibilites of the vast multitude of dialects and languages that could develop across the universe despite international words and a *lingua franca* or two. (Kornbluth had a gambol with this in "That Share of Glory"; even he forgot or ignored the fact that a planet does not normally speak one language all over.)

As to petty anachronisms, what about all those galactic Dukes (another Renaissance legacy)? Writers should have the wit to coin more original titles. (Asimov's Arch-Administrators, however, sound hollow.)

In Frayn's *A Very Private Life*, though the languages are good, the guerrillas speak slang French. This strikes the right note but is impossible so far ahead. In *The Lord of the Rings* Old English is used to bring the tongue of the Rohirrim into correct relationship with the Common Speech (and Old Norse figures likewise), while an appendix rectifies the transpositions. In *Dune*, in the far future, the Arabic must *be* Arabic, the special French terms (with altered meaning) must be French, the bad Latin ones be bad Latin. Does it work? In this fairy-tale epic, perhaps. In reality all would have vanished from normal speech by the time so many planets had been colonized.

About the bad Latin: when Frank Herbert has "Panoplia Propheticus", "Salusa Secundus", "Dictum Familia", and "Canto and Respondu" one does not know whether he is representing future corruptions or is simply making mistakes. And has the great female training school of the Bene Gesserit taken its name from some (Papal?) dictum "she shall have done well" (apologies to Men's Lib)? When he invents "Faufreleuches" for a caste system, has he misread *fanfreluche* (bauble), coined *fau(sse)-freluche* (sham tuft), or is he simply grabbing blindly? How dare the Atreides assume that ancient Greek patronymic of ill luck? Why is a planet

cynically called Bela Tegeuse (i.e. Betelgeuse scrambled)? (It's all very well being playful, but not in an epic.) One recognises an Arabic base in most Arakeen words, and such as *erg* and *souk* are genuine, but one feels a bit uncertain, for instance, about "kull wahad" ("I am profoundly stirred"), since *kull* means "all" and *wahad* means "one". *Are* the Fremen of actual Arab descent?

Again, in *Babel-17* the pirate space-ship Jebel Tarik is said to mean "Jebel's mountain", Jebel being its captain, while as for *tarik*, "That's *mountain* in Old Moorish". But *jebel* is the Arabic for "mountain", and Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* says Gibraltar is a corruption of *Gebel-al-Tarik*, the hill of Tarik, the Saracen leader who beat Roderick the Gothic king of Spain in 711 and built a castle on the Rock. If Delany was teasing us he teased us too well. Brass can't pronounce a *p* because "the mouth, distended through cosmetisurgically implanted fangs, could not deal with a plosive labial unless it was voiced"; how could voicing [to *b*] make all the difference? And if *p* was all he couldn't say, why didn't he use *b*, *f* or *wh* instead? More imagination about oral impediments was needed. Then, how do you say "Çiribie"? A *c*-cedilla before *i* means nothing outside Turkish, where the cedilla distinguishes *tsh* from *dj*; and any "alien" *c* pronounced *s* should be spelt *s*. The extravagances of the language "Babel-17" itself can be swallowed as vital to the story. More spelling: in Malzberg's "The Falcon and the Falconeer" a Rigellian native is named as XCBNMJY; was it the official clerk that cynically ran his fingers over certain keys?

If one is not going to be accurate, at least one should be consistent. The "dialect" of San Lorenzo in *Cat's Cradle*, possibly meant for a creolized English, is absurd; but it's not inconsistent with the zany manifestations of Bokononism and doesn't jar too much, perhaps.

*The Left Hand of Darkness* is a good example of how really to deal with language. The author presents without fuss, quite casually, the necessary bits of a very convincing Karhidish, whose rough articulations contrast pretty effectively with the "sinuous" Orgota. In *The Dispossessed* Le Guin's treatment of languages (mostly refracted through English) is at once sound and imaginative. Her anarchist population of Anarres, as fits their "frontier" life and lack of almost all attachments, possessions and amenities, speak an artificial language Pravic; have their single names, harsh disyllables, chosen by computer; use a naked, direct diction almost free of tabus; avoid using "my", etc.; say "share" or "use" instead of "have"; and use pejoratives like "egoizing" (personal assertion), "archist" and "propertarian" (especially for Urras); and most of their place-names have the simplicity of the pioneers'. In contrast the ultra-capitalist nation of A-Io, whose élite live in luxury with inferiority for women but perhaps Jungian femininity and "chivalry" in the male psyche, speak Iotic, with a Hawaiian richness of vowels, honorifics, patronymics, etc.; while the capital's proletariat speak a rough, one-tense, conjunction-poor "Niotic". Any serious story about other times, places or alternative worlds should be steeped in the "conceptual idiom", by which I mean all the ways in which language reflects a community's thought.

**Properties and images**

Ballard in his middle period was very much a man of property, in the sense of stage property: sand, concrete blocks, dead machines, advertisement hoardings, laboratory tanks, tides, forests, constellations, and in the human inventory fey women and withdrawn men. There is a lot of atmospheric power in such recurrent objects, though they end by inviting parody. Too much of the same again should

be avoided, and most writers do avoid or vary it. In a sense the stage props include the whole imaginary history and cosmology of a story or series, so that Blish's would include the Dirac beep, the spindizzies and all; Le Guin's would have the Hainish origin of mankind, and the ansibles. But I am trying to focus attention on the use of "properties" as unifying motifs.

This brings us to the imagery. Le Guin has one "prop"/image common to both *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed:* the prison which is all too real, though not mentioned in society. In *Left Hand* she uses the metaphorical shadow/*shifgrethor* motif and also begins and ends with the keystone of the arch. In *The Dispossessed* she uses several more many times, such as the wall (as a barrier); and with great effect. Recurrent images like these, musical themes as it were, unify a book and give it authority, besides conveying a certain obsessiveness and drive in the character who feels them. It is possible for a self-indulgent writer to wallow in this kind of thing, to thrust raw symbols stinking under the nose of the reader. But a writer who feels he can bring vision and insight to "real" situations and "real" characters should never neglect the power and relevance of images.

Except when it is mere entertainment or propaganda, sf is a variety of art, and should strive for more honesty, precision, vision and imagination.

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# review section

*edited by Peter Nicholls*

## the prizewinners

**Shipwreck**
by Charles Logan *(Gollancz, 1975, 192pp, £3.00, ISBN 0 575 01983 2)*
**Catchworld**
by Chris Boyce *(Gollancz, 1975, 256pp, £3.75, ISBN 0 575 02008 3)*

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

*Shipwreck* and *Catchworld* are joint winners of a *Sunday Times*/Gollancz competition. Competition winners are always interesting books to read, not necessarily because one expects books of exceptional quality but because one has a vague feeling that competition winners ought to be somehow archetypal. (In many competitions it is much more important for aspirants to be archetypal than attractive, the "Miss World" competition being the cardinal example.) In actual fact, both these books are very good indeed, and when one considers that there have been at

least two other first sf novels of startling quality in the recent past (Salman Rushdie's *Grimus* and Ian Watson's *The Embedding*) it seems that while contemporary American sf is only marking time British sf is getting set for a renaissance. Let us, however, set aside this excellence, for the moment, and consider these books as possible archetypes. Are they, as one might expect from award-winners of this kind, books which are about all the things that we expect sf books to be about in this day and age?

It is, of course, mildly confusing that there are two of them. They are – not unnaturally – very dissimilar (if they were similar it would have been easy to prefer one above the other). Nevertheless, I think they are – each in its fashion – archetypal. They contain the same basic concerns, although their approach and development are very different.

It might be argued science fiction has three major categories of ideative investigation: the speculative exploration of the man/machine confrontation, the man/alien confrontation and the man/environment confrontation. In both *Shipwreck* and *Catchworld* we are involved with all three, in a similar fashion. In both books there is a computer-operated spaceship which forms the private environment of the leading character(s). In each book the greater universe beyond the private environment is essentially inimical to human life, but contains enigmatic aliens with whom it may be possible (and possibly desirable) to communicate. In both books, in fact, we travel the same intellectual territory, but in two different directions.

*Shipwreck* is a story of determined simplicity whose speculative paraphernalia is basically passive. In stark contrast, the imaginative apparatus of *Catchworld* is extravagantly active, not to say aggressive.

The plot of *Shipwreck* is basically *Robinson Crusoe*. Tansis, its protagonist, is the sole survivor of a disaster which leaves him a castaway on an alien world. He is forced not merely to find a way to survive, but to construct for himself a prospectus for a solitary life which will lend some point to his survival.

Crusoe was himself an archetype: the archetype of the Enlightenment model of man. He was man the self-helper, man the master of his environment, man the capitalist. Long before Max Weber demonstrated the ideological kinship between the economic assumptions of capitalism and the ethical assumptions of Protestantism. Crusoe was the perfect product of their synthesis. He set out with supreme self-confidence to build himself a home and gather possessions about himself. When he found another human on the island the desire for companionship was obviously subservient to the economic demand for service. Friday was there to be exploited rather than to be loved.

It is clear that Tansis is a character constructed to a different set of specifications. He is not the master of his environment, but a stranger within it. (This is an important distinction, not simply a logical consequence of the fact that *Shipwreck* takes place in space while Crusoe remained on Earth. That Crusoe was a fantasy is clear when one remembers what actually happened to Alexander Selkirk.)

Tansis also approaches his situation with a different set of intellectual priorities. He is not man the capitalist so much as man the scientist. He sets out to explore as much to find out what his new world is like as to discover what use he can make of its components. He has his self-doubts, wondering even while he attempts to glean and codify information about the world what meaning such information may have, but he is by no means as pragmatic as Crusoe.

Tansis has his Friday, but the Friday role is neatly divided. The servant-role is

filled by the computer which administrates his landing-craft. (Since Crusoe's time we have replaced household slaves with aspects of the house itself: energetic machines. "A house," said le Corbusier, "is a machine for living in". And that is exactly what Tansis' landing-craft is.) The companion-role is filled by the aquatic aliens who inhabit the world.

Two things must be noted here: first, the rebellion of the machine, and second, the ease with which the companion-role, separated from the question of exploitation, is filled. The first real crisis Tansis faces is a battle with the programming of his computer. He has to force it, by tough logical persuasion, to adapt itself to his new circumstances and the changed priorities which apply to them. Once that crisis is past, the focal point of the story moves to his struggle to make contact with the aliens. This he achieves only in the most primitive fashion – there can be no real communication or relationship between him and them, and yet it is enough. Simply being together is all that matters. (Which raises, obliquely, the question of what human communication is actually *for*: companionship, or exploitation?)

Tansis is clearly a winner. He outsmarts his computer and gets all the satisfaction possible out of his contact with the aliens. The alien environment, naturally enough, kills him in the end – but that was never in doubt. Mortality is part of the human condition, and we must do what we can within its limitations.

Or must we? Not, it seems, if we accept the set of assumptions that go into *Catchworld.*

In *Catchworld* the characters are playing by a different set of rules. They are the crew of an armed starship on its way to Altair in order to destroy that star and all its planets, in reprisal for alien attacks upon Earth. There is a space battle *en route,* and when they get to Altair they find that the situation is not quite what they had been led to believe, and that they have been delivered into a trap set by alien intelligences of unknowable nature and incalculable power.

The characters in *Catchworld* face the same problems Tansis did, but in a different context. The machine intelligence of the spaceship rebels as did Tansis' computer, but there is no question of tough logical persuasion here. The machine intelligence sucks the characters into itself, discarding their bodies and retaining only their minds, but that's not the end of the matter. The characters go on to become something entirely different, and to transcend the whole problem of man/machine confrontation by creating new categories rendering the old meaningless. Exactly the same thing happens with respect to the man/alien confrontation: head-on collision with extravagantly exciting results culminating in a final transcendence of the whole set of categories. In the end, as van Vogt fans know already, the whole question of man/environment relationships also becomes redundant. Following the collapse of man and machine into the same concept-space, and the collapse of man and alien into the same concept-space, comes the collapse of man and universe into the same concept-space, in an orgy of solipsistic triumph. *Catchworld* deals in the same cavalier manner with every question: the mind of the reader is invited to encompass the whole of existence with his/her imagination. Only the psychological environment matters – the real one was abandoned the moment the book was opened.

I do not mean all this to be a derogatory criticism of *Catchworld.* It is a wonderful adventure among ideas, beautifully written. And *Shipwreck,* for all that it tries to work metaphorically within the conditions that pertain to real life, is no less a fantasy.

The two books are complementary. In *Shipwreck* there's no escape from destiny

and we have to salvage what we can *as* we can. In *Catchworld* destiny itself can't escape – we will defy it and become its master. We can do it, too, inside our heads, in the universe of the mind.

And this is why these stories are archetypal.

As we live out lives in the grip of twentieth-century reality, retreating further and further into our private lives, sustained by our machines for living in and finding out that other people are really quite alien and not necessary to our lives save in some peculiar abstract sense, what kind of myths are we *likely* to build? Myths to dramatise our situation, and myths to show us how to cope with it – what else?

I congratulate the judges of the competition wholeheartedly on their having achieved such a remarkably appropriate result.

# you wouldn't like oregon

**Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH**
by Robert C. O'Brien *(Puffin, 1975, 197pp, £0.30, ISBN 0 1403 0725 7, first published Gollancz, 1972)*

**Z for Zachariah**
by Robert C. O'Brien *(Gollancz, 1975, 192pp, £1.75, ISBN 0 575 01890 9)*

## reviewed by Ursula K. Le Guin

There is generally someone in the room who announces that he "can't stand books with talking animals in them"? And I always wonder why he sounds so pleased with himself, as if some high virtue were hidden in his lamentable prejudice. Anyhow, this person may go elsewhere to pretend that he is not a talking animal, and need not read *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH.*

Mrs. Frisby is a mouse. The other characters in the book are mice, rats, an owl, humans, a shrew, etc. NIMH, though it is never spelled out in the book, is the (American) National Institute of Mental Health.

Now rats are much used in laboratories, for experiments on intelligence among other things; and extremely intelligent rats might escape from the laboratory as a group . . . In other words, the book is science fiction, in that a coherent and ingenious explanation is given for the rats' behaviour: their brains and longevity have been artificially, genetically, enhanced. However, the wild, unenhanced animals, though illiterate, talk as well as the rats do, and are inclined to an unusual degree of interspecies cooperation; so that everybody in the book, owls, mice and humans, ends up seeming pretty much the same sort – as in *The Wind in the Willows,* or *Watership Down.* This combination of traditional deep fantasy with the explanatory science-fictional element is a difficult one to pull off. But it seems not to worry most child readers. The sane child is probably at the far end of the spectrum from our friend to whom all beasts are dumb; to the child, we are all beasts together, and the distinction that bothers me is a quibble. In any case, Mr. O'Brien's rats are ratty, but not so ratty as Mr. Adams's rabbits are rabbity, because their civilisation is not indigenous and based upon native biology, but new and artificially engendered. They are, in fact, a new species; and their practical and ethical problems are therefore urgent and intense.

Their solutions to the practical problems are delightful to read about – why are the themes of escape from prison, and survival in a new and hostile environment, such sure-fire ones? The main ethical problem is also a solid and satisfying one. The escaped (and hunted) rats of NIMH decide that, being immensely more intelligent and long lived than other rats, they have no right to live as other rats do, by stealing from human beings. They should live as human beings do – or should do. They must set up a truly independent colony, not stealing grain from the farmer's bins but growing their own, not plugging in to the farmhouse electric main but, if they want powered machinery, developing their own power sources. They must, say their leaders, avoid parasitism, and go it alone. But some of them, more opportunistic, feel that this is foolish idealism, and resist the leaders' plan. The problem posed, then, is that of the responsibility of freedom. It provides a solid moral core to the eventful story. The book is not satire, nor allegory; it is a straightforward narrative directly and soberly told; but it is about something. Therefore it never degenerates into whimsy. Nor does it rant off into preaching. The problem is embodied, not argued; and it is not finally solved. Indeed the ending, though satisfying, is left so open to further developments that one can only long for the sequel we can never have.

The "recommended age level" of *Mrs. Frisby* would be, I suppose, about eight up. I read it to my son when he was nine, and he has since read it for himself twice. He said last year that it was the best book, except maybe for Russell Hoban's *The Mouse and His Child.* I offer you this opinion straight from the mouse's mouth.

I become increasingly convinced that the Novel, incapable of respectability, sick of being told in French that it's dead, and unwilling to face one more Symbol-Hunter armed with footnotes that expand upon contact with the body, is quietly retreating into places where the literati would not dream of looking for it; and that one of these places is the Juvenile, or Young Adult, shelf. But I don't want to say much about this phenomenon. Similarly, inhabitants of my state of Oregon don't like to talk much about the place to outsiders. Oh, it rains a lot, we say, hoping thus to stave off the human deluge. So I hope the inevitable critical realization of the artistic vitality and originality of the "Children's" novel in the last decade or two will hold off a little longer. The wilderness is so green and quiet! But there's no use skulking in the underbrush; and Mr. O'Brien's *Z for Zachariah* being both a Juvenile and Science Fiction, surely no respectable litcrit will take much notice of it anyhow.

After the War. The earth is dead. In a Pennsylvania valley protected by a meteorological freak from blast and fallout, sixteen-year-old Ann lives on her family's farm. The family went off to look for survivors elsewhere, and did not come back. Ann has been alone, and coping pretty well, for a year. Enter Mr. Loomis, a polymer chemist, wearing a radiation-proof suit – the only one of its kind, developed in his laboratory just before the bombs fell. Is he friend or enemy, last chance or final calamity? The story is told in Ann Burden's diary.

This situation involves a reduction to such elemental, mythic terms, that perhaps a more mythic tone is called for, a style that could bear the weight of a plot which is, after all, Genesis told backwards. Ann's earnest, kindly naivete is adequate to the theme only in its simplicity. We get the Apocalypse recounted by a nice kid; the Apocalypse is inevitably diminished. This said, I have no further criticism. Reading, I protested inwardly against Ann's passiveness in certain situations, her slowness to take the offensive, her childlike, self-sacrificial fairness – but my protest was

mistaken. Mr. O'Brien was drawing a picture, not just of an intelligent, sturdy farm-girl, but of a woman who may be, and knows she may be, the last woman left alive on earth. That she's a farm-girl is no mere convenience of plot. By the end, and by contrast with the single male character, she has attained true and appropriate mythic stature. She is Persephone, and Demeter-who-may-be; the corn goddess; the virgin and the fruitful one. Her behaviour is right. She does what she must do. So the note of hope – the last sentence is "I am hopeful" – which might seem ironic or cheaply cynical, rings true and tragic. It is the man, with all his knowledge and plans, who has no hope. He acts from despair. He kills. And so at last the young corn goddess, the life-nurturer, steals life from him and walks away.

Where the author makes this archetypal aspect of his heroine clearest, and thereby gains a resonance of poetry befitting his grand theme, is in the very quietly handled, recurring mention of Ann's dreams. She dreams of gathering cress with her mother in the old days, and, waking, realises that that is how she can get some green stuff before the vegetable garden comes ripe; there are other times when a dream guides her; and it is guided by a dream that she walks away at last. There is nothing else, of course, to guide her. – Except her enemy's last words to her . . . For the author, even when dealing with so stark a subject, did not oversimplify the human tangle of good and evil; motives remain mixed, complex. Mr. O'Brien's was a complex mind, and a humane one.

# hop aboard kids, we're going to 1984

**Wild Jack** by John Christopher *(Hamish Hamilton, 1974, pp141, £1.75, SBN 241 89070 5)*/ **The Grey King** by Susan Cooper *(Chatto & Windus, 1975, illus. by Michael Heslop. pp208, £2.95, ISBN 0 7011 5071 8)*/ **The Far Side of Evil** by Sylvia Engdahl *(Gollancz, 1975, pp292, £3.00, originally published U.S.A. 1971, ISBN 0 575 02024 5)*/ **Rebecca's World** by Terry Nation *(G. Whizzard Publications in association with André Deutsch, 1975, illus. by Larry Learmonth, pp114, £2.75, ISBN 0 903387 06 9)*/ **F. 67** by Fay Sampson *(Hamish Hamilton, 1975, pp141, £2.00, SBN 241 89236 8)*/ **Noah's Castle** by John Rowe Townsend *(Oxford University Press, 1975, pp180, £3.25, ISBN 0 19 271381 7)*/ **No Man's Land** by Simon Watson *(Gollancz, 1975, pp190, £2.50, ISBN 0 575 01954 9)*

## reviewed by Peter Nicholls

Here are seven recent books for children: a random sampling, compiled by scanning publishers' lists, and requesting review copies of books which seemed from the description to be science fiction. (Two other books, acquired the same way, are reviewed by Ursula Le Guin in this same issue of *Foundation.*) Is a sample of seven books big enough to allow any confident generalization about the current state of science fiction for children? Well, the conclusions may only be tentative, but they are hideously suggestive, as H.P. Lovecraft might have said, and I'll stand by them until somebody comes up with a definitive survey.

A few interesting facts to begin with:

Of the five publishers, only one (Gollancz) publishes science fiction for adults also. This suggests the possibility that the publishers' readers who bought the books

may know more about children's fiction than they do about science fiction. However, since the Gollancz titles are not more obviously assured or sophisticated than the others, this might be irrelevant. (Writers might take note, though, that the market in children's sf is probably wider than that in sf for adults.)

None of the books have the words "science fiction" printed anywhere on the dust jacket. This may be because publishers for children have too much sense to proliferate the sf ghetto mentality, with its consequent stereotyping of plot and style, which labelling brings about. Conversely, (I study the whole phenomenon with a jaundiced eye), it may be that "children's literature" is itself such an enclosed ghetto, that any other genre labelling within that ghetto would seem a *reductio ad absurdem.*

Five of the books are based on archetypal, middle-of-the-road, science fiction themes. A sixth (*Rebecca's World,* which is for younger children) takes a science fiction theme (the visit to a strange planet) but treats it wholly as fantasy. The seventh book (*The Grey King*) is wholly fantasy, with no science fiction elements at all.

A number of critics (though not nearly enough) have been aware for years that some of the most exciting and forceful new writing has been sneaking past practically unnoticed, because it is labelled as children's fiction. Alan Garner, C.S. Lewis, Richard Adams, and Ursula Le Guin have broken the walls of the kiddy-lit ghetto, and their works for children are widely read by adults, but I doubt if the same could be said of such distinguished writers as William Mayne, Peter Dickinson, Phillipa Pearce, John Gordon, Robert O'Brien (see Ursula Le Guin's review in this issue), Penelope Lively or Susan Cooper (see below) – and this is nothing like an exhaustive list.

Reading these seven books, I now realize that the wild-eyed, Ancient Mariner manner with which I've been claiming, for years past, that children's sf is very good indeed, is quite misplaced. What I should have said is that children's *fantasy* is very good indeed. Of the children's writers named above as among the finest, all write fantasy, but only two (Robert O'Brien and Peter Dickinson) can be claimed as science fiction writers, (in their books for children, that is) and they only marginally.

So I find, in the sample now before me, that the two outstanding books are fantasies. (By a happy coincidence, they are the only two to be illustrated, both superbly). Susan Cooper may be a half-remembered name among science fiction readers. Her sf novel *Mandrake* (a melodramatic dystopia of the Evil-Creeping-Bureaucracy-Heading Towards-Totalitarianism variety) was published in 1964. Later on, she turned to children's fiction, and now she is well known for her fantasy sequence "The Dark is Rising", of which *The Grey King* is the fourth part.

Most of the fantasy elements she uses are thoroughly familiar: the child involved in a quest for various objects of mythic import, the Lords of Darkness, the Old Ones (servants of The Light), the sleeping knights and so on. But she knows their potency, and uses them well, always giving sufficient ballast of landscape and character, rendered in well-observed and realistic terms, to keep the wonder and menace from floating away into some abstract allegory of good and evil.

Nor are good and evil seen by her as a simple dichotomy. As her writing deepens (and it is strongest in the second of the series, *The Dark is Rising,* and the most recent, *The Grey King*) she begins to treat with moral ambiguity, showing an adventurousness and confidence unusual in children's literature. Perhaps she has learned something from Alan Garner, though this book is in no sense an imitation.

*The Grey King* has a hero, the boy, Will, who is also in some sense a Lord – not

totally unlike the Time Lords of *Dr. Who.* The knowing child (the hidden adult peering through his eyes) is a difficult theme to treat well, but one that will appeal to most parents, who at various times must have felt that sense of an alien and weighty intelligence momentarily flickering behind the innocent blue eyes of their offspring. *The Grey King* features not one but *two* ambiguous children, the other being a sly albino, whose parentage may be either brutal or ethereal, and whose behaviour (is he a were-fox, a killer, or a sapling of Light?) keeps the reader guessing and half afraid. This is a fine story, likely, I suspect, to have a special appeal for lonely children trying to make sense of their separateness. But it faces too much pain, and even death, to have the simple charge of "wish-fulfillment" levelled at it. Adult fantasy readers should be delighted to have another good series to live through. The book is illustrated by Michael Heslop.

*Rebecca's World* is also by a name well-known in science fiction circles, Terry Nation, creator and writer of *Dr. Who,* and more recently, *Survivors,* another sf television series. *Rebecca's World* is a full-blooded fable which combines daredevil romance and extreme scepticism in proportions which I have proved to my own satisfaction work extremely well with the age group 8 to 10. It is no surprise to children of that age to meet with a Superman who is fat, balding and frightened, or with an evil industrialist who, in the spirited illustrations, looks exactly like Liberace. Kids these days have learned to expect the worst. The book is really very good, being a sort of compound of *Alice in Wonderland, Monty Python* and Jack Vance's *Big Planet.* Of course it has no *real* science, but it has some jolly ecology (there are these trees that keep the ghosts away, but they're cut down by wicked developers . . .). The illustrations, by Larry Learmonth, many of them full page and in colour (this is a large format book) hark back to the great days of Rackham and Dulac in their colour and line, but Escher is an influence too, and the pictures don't seem in the least old-fashioned. The book is published by a small new company whose fortunes may depend on its success. They deserve congratulations for their enterprise.

The interest *Rebecca's World* shows in government mismanagement on the one hand, and a docile, frightened population on the other, leads us straight into the five sf books. The two fantasies are by way of being a pleasant prologue to the bad news to come.

Here it is. I am in a position to say that children's sf is where adult sf was, back in the fifties, with the ghost of George Orwell hovering threateningly above it.

The four English sf books are each set in a near future where something very nasty has happened. In *Noah's Castle* unemployment combined with racing inflation is leading to starvation and rioting. In *F. 67* (shades of *Doomwatch*) a plastic-eating virus has run amuck, releasing poisonous gases, and rendering the U.K. (and most of the Western world) uninhabitable. (The Third World is pretty well untouched – there can't have been much wind that year.) In *Wild Jack,* life in the cities is comfortable but regimented, and nonconformists are imprisoned. Outside the cities, hairy outlaws maintain traditions of freedom. In *No Man's Land,* technology goes hand in hand with a tower-block-council-house ethos, the villages are depopulated, and noncomformist schoolboys who criticize the system are brainwashed.

The pattern continues in Sylvia Engdahl's *The Far Side of Evil,* written on the other side of the Atlantic. Ms. Engdahl envisages a planet dominated by a totalitarian state which tortures political prisoners. (O'Brien's *Z for Zachariah,* reviewed elsewhere, also fits the pattern, with its H Bomb catastrophe leaving only two survivors – though it is a very much better written book than any of those I'm considering here.)

One hopes that our child readers are resilient. Reading that lot in one week might send the mind of the jolliest optimist reeling towards madness and despair. "Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,/Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?" asked Dr. Johnson, and it seems at first glance that our children's sf writers would chorus a mordant "Yeah! Yeah!" to that one.

In the red corner, then, sits the Vanity of Human Wishes, gnashing its gum shield, a superheavyweight, hairy paws dangling almost to the floor. And in the white corner, only a flyweight, but full of spirit, ready to shuffle backward round the ring, dance like a butterfly, sting like a bee, is Stoic Virtue, chanting (in its piping soprano) the battle cry of Freedom. Even before the first blow is struck, before the bell is rung, the audience might well be shouting "Fix! Fix!". And by God, it turns out they're right. You've guessed it. The fresh-faced kid with the thirty kilo deficit, has won after only 150 pages. It's OK, children. You needn't despair after all. Goliath lies stunned, and David, his voice not broken yet, takes a cheeky bow.

"Fix! Fix!" I cry. Not one, but all five of my sample authors have entered a conspiracy. They've put a horseshoe in David's glove, injected him with ephedrine, and just to make sure, put nembutal in Goliath's mouth wash.

The details differ from book to book, of course. Sylvia Engdahl is by a long way the preachiest, and her heroine, the disguised agent of an interstellar Federation who is present in a nasty dictatorship strictly as an observer, no interference allowed, goes through a series of solemn and tremulous crises of conscience whose upshot is both morally and intellectually impeccable, but sadly, dead predictable the whole way. It's all rather pedestrian, and depressing not so much in its theme, as in its bullet-biting dedication, and its high ratio of rather stumbling and often redundant intellectual analysis to action. She always tells us what the action *means*, in case (careless children) we get it wrong in working it out for ourselves. On the other hand, her fight-fixing is minimal (and the character who does the fixing dies in the process). Like Orwell in *1984*, she doesn't see individual heroism as having much to do with historical process, and the ending is downbeat. I would recommend fourteen year old readers, after finishing the book, to have a reviving scotch and water before going to sleep.

*F. 67* is for younger children, I would guess. The protagonists seem to be younger than ten. It's really quite a jolly read, if a silly one. The sf disaster material is all given on page one, and then the book becomes an adventure about refugee children from England, in a black African State, attempting to rejoin their parents, who have been shipped to the neighbouring republic. Fay Sampson is good on the African landscape, and quite clear-sighted about the black nations, neither romanticising nor short-changing them. The actual disaster she describes would quite certainly have consequences very much more terrible than those she envisages, however, but since we never get a decent look at Goliath in this one, David's victory seems not too implausible.

John Christopher, in *Wild Jack*, has written a children's version of a thoroughly traditional adult sf theme. Aldiss used it in *Non-Stop*, Clarke in *The City and the Stars* and there are countless other examples: it is the conformists (city) versus the individualists (country). A recent version was John Boorman's film, *Zardoz*. I frankly doubt whether conformity can be established with quite the effortless ease that many such writers appear to imagine, though they can readily point to the examples of Nazi Germany and Franco's Spain. In my view, too, the city/country dichotomy though appealing, is rather fatuously romantic. Revolt usually springs up where the pressures are worst, i.e. the cities themselves. (Hence the other form of the myth, where the ruling class live in country villas, and the cities are festering,

as in Dick's *Penultimate Truth* and Adlard's TCity books. This version of the story is surely closer to what we see happening about us.) Anyway, Christopher's city boy survives (with a great deal of authorial assistance) to make a new start with the Outlanders. The story is told with Christopher's usual vivid and easy flow, but it's appallingly predictable.

*No Man's Land* is a likeable book, but its author, Simon Watson, is the most obvious weighter of the scales in the whole bunch. How did a boy like the hero emerge at all? If everyone else is so docile and happy, why not him? Frankly, I think the chances of any government in England of persuading the working classes to be cheerful by putting them in tower blocks is minimal. The sociology of the whole story is sadly out of date.

All these books, in fact, irresistibly remind the reader of the dystopias of the 1950s. They predicate disasters which could only be expected by those who take a remarkably patronising view of the dimness of their fellow men, and while I'm no longer so idealistic as to expect the state to wither away, rendered redundant by our mutual help and growth towards maturity, I'm not so cynical as most of the writers I'm discussing; Big Brother might be watching us, but a lot of us are keeping a pretty sharp eye on Him, too. I find it hard to reconcile the optimism of most of these stories so far as the plot is concerned (David letting Goliath have it in the eye, almost literally in the case of *No Man's Land*) with the pessimism of the sociology.

*Noah's Castle* is the best of the five books. John Rowe Townsend goes out of his way, in a brief introduction, to explain that the future he writes about is *not* a prediction, but merely an imagined possibility. In fact, it is by far the likeliest of all the imagined possibilities. The book deals with family tension, the son of a food hoarder (on quite a grand scale) finally getting the courage to abandon his father, when he can no longer bear the misery and poverty around him, contrasted with his own creature comforts. The imagined society is always plausible, except perhaps in the cynicism and corruptness of the central government. However, the government is very much in the background, and life in this provincial town, crippled by inflation, has a solid political reality to it. Mr. Townsend is well-meaning throughout, and one likes him for his clarity of vision, and his recognition of the real difficulties involved in moral decisions. As near-future sf it is fine, and he is the least offender in the David versus Goliath fix, perhaps because he is the least pessimistic about human decency, and recognizes Goliath's vulnerabilities. The execution is careful and literate, but lacks bravura or surprise; the tale is sometimes a little grey in its understatement and well-planned symmetry, but that can be said to some extent of all these five books.

Come on chaps! You don't have to be subdued and responsible all the time, when you write science fiction. The fantasy crew is pulling ahead! Strike back while there's still time! What about a bit more interstellar exploration? What about some fun? Fight free of the haggard grasp of the *zeitgeist*! What's happened to your sensawunna?

(The critic, never satisfied, kicks aside his Ballard and Le Guin, and stalks off muttering towards the telly, where, he seems to remember, *Star Trek* is having its seventeenth reprise . . .)

# vintage models: some mechanical defects

**Imperial Earth**
by Arthur C. Clarke *(Gollancz, 1975, 287pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 575 02011 3)*

**Extro**
by Alfred Bester *(Eyre Methuen, 1975, 218pp, £2.25, ISBN 0 413 34460 6)*

## reviewed by Hilary Bailey

Here are two much-anticipated books by two old masters of sf – *Imperial Earth* by Arthur C. Clarke and *Extro* by Alfred Bester. Because the books have much in common they must be treated, in part, together, but the reader should be cautioned that Clarke and Bester, in spite of being writers in the same sf-adventure genre and in spite of a background of having written for the same markets, in the same tradition and under the same influences, are still poles apart in spirit and that, therefore, even if this review gives impression that these books are the same in kind and quality, the actual reading experience will be very different in each case. So, with all disclaimers made and warnings posted, away with the smell of the schoolroom – and to work.

*Imperial Earth* has the subtitle "A Fantasy of Love and Discord" but, disregarding the fancy titling, the book is seemingly written in the sf-adventure tradition and so is a kind of thriller. At any rate there is no strong evidence to the contrary, as a glance at the plot will show. The story centres round Duncan Makenzie, youngest member of the Makenzie family which founded, and now rules, the moon Titan. Duncan Makenzie is a clone of his father, who was a clone of the still living patriarch, Malcolm Makenzie. The Helmers, clan-enemies of the Makenzies, also live on Titan. The Helmers are bad guys, although evidence of their badness is sparse, but at one time, many years back, Duncan's contemporary, Karl Helmer, got the visiting earth-girl Calindy, in whom Duncan was interested. So, as the action of the novel begins (a quarter of the way through the book) the time has come for Duncan to return to earth, clone, and come back to Titan with the new heir to the dynasty. Once on earth (just under half way through the book) there is a small difficulty when the doctor Duncan selects won't do the cloning, and a plot by Karl Helmer, in which Calindy is involved, which is foiled by Duncan. At the same time Duncan finally sleeps with Calindy, but drops her afterwards. A further plot by Karl is detected, although by that time Karl is dead.

It may not be a sound or fair practice for reviewers to reveal the plots of novels, but it is only by doing it in this case that the full lethargy, lameness and lack of tension of *Imperial Earth* can be indicated. It arouses indignation, for we all know that Arthur C. Clarke, at least in books like *City and the Stars* and *Earthlight* has not done this to us before, so we ask, why do it now? On the simplest of levels he must know, better than we do, that a novel which asks us to be interested in the action, the actual events taking place in the book, will be less than gripping if it begins with 76 pages of back history - including two baffling chapters where Duncan talks to his granny, who does not appear again until the last page of the book – continues with three chapters describing Duncan's uneventful journey to earth, including a long chat with the Scots engineer on subjects such as Scots en-

gineers, Rudyard Kipling and the like, and actually starts to get into the action around page 116. Setting a book up like this is like fighting with one hand tied behind your back. The long build-up, in any case, is unconvincing. To believe in subsequent events we have, during the long preamble, to be made to believe in the love and discord of the title. For example, in the rottenness of the Helmers. But we begin to wonder if their rottenness does not lie only in their challenge to the Makenzies (family motto: *"What was good for the Makenzies was indeed good for Titan"*). And that, for those of us not sharing the author's love and admiration for the Makenzie family, for the anarchists booing from the back, is not good enough. And we need to believe that the early love Duncan had for Calindy has not dwindled to the memory of a youthful smart, and that, in part, pique at being worsted by another man.

By the time Duncan reaches earth, however, the reader is really waiting for the action to start – but it never really does. Karl's best plan, for example, would be to stop Duncan from getting cloned, which would, of course, put a stop to the Makenzie dynasty. So did he get at the doctor who refuses to clone Duncan? No – the doctor just didn't want to do it. Is Duncan madly in love with Calindy? No – the relationship is a tepid one. He doesn't much like her, she doesn't much like him, she doesn't want the overthrow of the Makenzies, or the Helmers, or to be Queen of Titan. At every point in *Imperial Earth* we have the sense of action and suspense sacrificed. Until we begin to invent wildly. Will Duncan get back and find that his clone is really Karl's? Will Karl Helmer take over the universe? (but he can't because he's dead already). Will Duncan ever feel threatened, be threatened, ever adopt the tone of anything but a pompous man reasoning with an overcharging plumber? The answers are no, no and no, and I suspect that all this not only looks deliberate, but is deliberate. At every turn, where the possibility of action arises, the author turns away from it and Duncan Makenzie, rich, a dictator and, above all, immortal, is kept safe from anything which might crack his composure or give him cause for the alarm, despondency and trouble which real flesh is heir to. As he says, during his final confrontation with Karl, right on top of a high platform, from which Karl finally falls and dies, "I was saying that I'm merely trying to avoid any unpleasantness that will embarrass Earth and Titan. There's nothing personal in this and I wish that someone else was doing it, believe me." Well, in *Imperial Earth* any unpleasantness is well and truly avoided, also embarrassment. There is certainly nothing personal in it, we wish to God there were, and as to wishing someone else was doing it, perhaps, as we never did in *Childhood's End*, that was what we thought Clarke was thinking all along.

Still, for all of us in search of thrills, from the mad surfers of the New Wave to the oldest worshipper, whose collection of 1940s pulps leaves no room for a bicycle, let alone a car, in his asbestos-lined garage, Alfred Bester, inventive, tightrope-walking Bester, has always been the man. And here he is again, death-defying and almost as dangerous, back again with *Extro*. Like Clarke, Bester treats of immortality, and if Clarke is leaving replicas behind, then Bester isn't planning to go at all. His central character is in fact a Moleman, molecular man, one of a group who have attained immortality by surviving extremity and catastrophe. The plot, to summarise briefly and perhaps inaccurately, concerns the arrival on earth of a spaceship which left containing three spacemen and returns containing three Somethings, and an immortal, friend and brother-in-law of the hero, who becomes a tool of the computer, Extro, dedicated to overthrowing man on behalf of the machines. If the structure looks as if it might turn out to be ricketty, then that impression is right. Unlike

Clarke, Bester doesn't actually dismantle the bomb before putting it into position, thus ensuring a good night's sleep for all concerned, but there is a feeling that the timer might be out or, occasionally, the target wrongly chosen. There are other snags, too, and if my approach to the novel seems mechanistic it is only because I wish to point out, as strongly as possible, that a book, and in particular an adventure book, has certain simple lines which authors normally follow – for good reasons. Books have, like stage dragons, a skeleton underneath the paper maché, and if the skeleton is warped, the illusion is lost. So, take Edward Curzon, the main protagonist of the novel. We are dubious from the first – Edward Curzon, what kind of a name is that for an Alfred Bester hero, we ask ourselves? Studying the syllables we see; Edward Curzon = Alfred Bester, poshed up. Edward Curzon, the name of a character only Ouida could love. Reverting to a less keyhole type of criticism we find that Curzon is (a) immortal, (b) has a beautiful, devoted Indian bride, (c) sound investments and (d) well-disposed, powerful friends. The Greek invests for him, Houdini helps him escape from captivity. Moral advice, when needed, is supplied by Jesus Christ. You could say that Edward Curzon is hard to identify with and in a novel where everything hinges round the activities of one main figure it is as well to have that person susceptible to the human condition. From who-dunnit? – the butler – to does-he know-he-dunnit? – Oedipus – and on to will-he-do-it? – Hamlet – fiction has gone along on this basis for thousands of years. With few threats to his life, his fortune or his affections, Curzon is a hero hard to place in a work of fiction. And when the moral dilemma comes it is that Curzon may be obliged to rub out his brother-in-law. And I speak in all seriousness, but without wishing to go into all the intricacies of family structure, when I say that the possibility of killing a close male relative of a recently married wife's strikes nearer to wish fulfilment than it does to dilemma. Even then Curzon has to undergo a transformation in order to be able to do the deed, although up to that point he has seemed hip enough to do anything, and we realise suddenly that Curzon is a good man, a man so good that he needs magic to be able to perform a dirty but necessary act, that we had no real knowledge of his being, of who he is, in any general sense. And then we realise that the real hero of the book is the murder-victim, Sequoya, a natural Besterman, strong, resourceful, noble and made evil by events. But unfortunately Sequoya cannot function in the novel because he is always acted upon – Curzon makes him immortal and the machine takes him over. Small wonder that in spite of Bester's inventiveness, wit and sympathy, the reader feels the lack of guidance throughout *Extro*, for it is a flawed book, and flawed in very recognizable ways – by a plot adopted conscientiously but without enthusiasm, by the author's lack of feeling for his hero, by bits of wish-fulfilment, indifference in the guise of cool, and general staggering about the stage bumping into the scenery.

I do not relish complaining about the work of two skilled writers like Clarke and Bester, and hope that I have not given the impression that the reader will not enjoy the books. But I feel that both writers have in some ways spared themselves the pain of writing and so deprived the readers of the pleasure of reading. As any writer knows, when his hero (with whom he is likely to identify strongly) is hanging by his fingernails from a cliff with two sharks underneath snapping at his toes, his, the writer's, one desire is to introduce a friend in a speedboat with a rifle, a helicopter, or even to have the hero drop off the cliff, hit his head on a rock and go to his death with no pain. But the writer knows by instinct that he has to make that man claw his way along with bloody fingernails, pecked at by seabirds with the sweat pouring into his eyes, until he gets his foot on the ledge a little further along and

manages to climb the cliff. And even then the Chinese torturers must be waiting for him at the top. In other words, the hero must be vulnerable and we must wonder what's going to happen to him next. That's entertainment. That's why writers, who have to stay on that cliff with the hero, don't also have to get up early in the morning and go out to work. It is possibly this fundamental unwillingness to imperil the central characters in the books, and all the troubles which stem from that unwillingness which makes both of them less satisfying than they should have been.

# thick workers?

**Multiface**
by Mark Adlard *(Sidgwick & Jackson, 1975, 184pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 283 98249 7)*

## reviewed by Jane Mackay

North East England in the twenty second century is dominated by the Stahlex Corporation, which produces, by totally automated processes, an all purpose material rendering all other industry redundant. Citizens, no longer required as workers, are locked away in the beeblocks of Tcity; superintelligent Executives, free to enjoy the unspoiled countryside, work a one hour day adjusting the social clockwork. Plenty of material here, and this is the third book Adlard has made from it, *Interface* and *Volteface* coming before. Not so much a trilogy, more a set of variations on a theme, the new book picking out aspects which haven't yet been covered, with perhaps a sense that a map of the wood is more interesting than the local ecology.

*Interface* ends in the full flood of a bloody insurrection: there has been conspiracy among dissident elements, the artistic impulse has flared up again out of the ashes, people call for freedom, though with more enthusiasm than theory. This is fine – Tcity is a prime candidate for social unrest – but Adlard doesn't want to destroy the social system he's created; it's got too much life in it, we haven't seen how the complex machinery carries on, with its multiplicity of tiny parts; he cries, "Hold it there!" and everything stops for the camera. Society becomes something you can put your fingers on, point out the details, label them exhaustively, a state, not a process.

*Volteface* never lets on just how the Executives managed to put down the revolt, without leaving so much as a dent on the social fabric. The central idea, a brilliantly satirical picture of the reintroduction of twentieth century work habits, is presented, not as an attempt to keep the Citizens down, but to get them off their backsides and away from the telly. *Multiface* moves further away from social interaction. The action revolves around the individual's need for a sense of significance in his life, and centres on the Buddhist concept of stillness and detachment. The result, intentional or otherwise, is a right-wing view of society, together with moral ambivalence. You can accept, or if you have any sense reject, rightist propaganda like Heinlein's for what it is; there's no doubt about what he's pushing. With *Multiface* there's a queasy sense that we readers are also being offered a dose of the opium of the people.

Dick's *Penultimate Truth* is a useful comparison; there are many points of similarity, particularly the idea that the élite have taken over the open countryside, while persuading the incarcerated masses that it's nasty Out There. There isn't much to

choose between Aidan beeblock and Tom Mix tank, as far as overcrowding, synthetic food and stale air are concerned, but the victims react differently. The Yancemen take massive precautions against the discovery of the big lie, including an elaborate indoctrination programme and the complete falsification of history. Revolt is expected, plans are made accordingly, and tankers do manage to reach the surface. They compare notes, argue, scheme, and want out.

Adlard's Citizens are incapable of thinking beyond the demands of their own stomachs and genitalia; they have individual hangups, feelings of dissatisfaction, but don't talk about them to others in the same predicament – intercourse is predominantly (hetero)sexual. Needs which go beyond the immediate pacifiers of food, drugs, sex, can be catered for by arousing the old capitalist drive to do better than the next man. Hence the Work Project. Unfortunately, it can only be the management and clerical side of industry which is resurrected, as there's no need for productive workers; this must limit the numbers involved, but perhaps we can assume that all dissidents will be management material. Citizens appear to need no intellectual justification for their situation, but then no confrontation ever comes about – what is their reaction to the Executives? Do they even know they exist?

I could believe that a majority might be terrorized, drugged, indoctrinated or genetically engineered into mindless conformity, but I would like to have been told how it was done. The explanation in the Tcity novels is given in terms of the nature of the ruling class, not the Citizens.

The Executives (easily identifiable by their literal swelled heads) are the product of genetic engineering, which has raised their IQ's to such an extent that they are incapable of making a wrong decision. They are set apart by the fact that they know about the Cultural Tradition, can quote foreign languages, and know which wine should go with the cheese. These abilities are presented as signs of intelligence. *Interface* questions the IQ concept to a certain extent; *Volteface* blooms into a riot of satire on the vulgarities of the nouveau riche, which is effective in itself, but implicitly accepts the standards of the Executives, the haute bourgeoisie, who have an innate knowledge of good table manners.

In *Multiface* all these questions of class and intelligence are smoothed over or kept beneath the surface, which is why it is the most consistent of the three books, more of a finished product. I am happier with the rawness of *Interface*, even with *Volteface*'s vicious wit. The theme of the third novel is overtly democratic – all men, Citizens and Executives, are searching, on their various levels, for a pattern in existence. Idols for the simple, abstractions for the thinker. But in every case, whether the vision is found in Zen or doorknobs, it's a private vision, the aim a state of mind, through which the inequity, ugliness, and boredom of living will dissolve into nothingness. The conclusion states this explicitly. One of the Executives (more liable to irrational emotions, because female), expresses doubts about the lives led by the Citizens. Her husband "gently but firmly" disabuses her of these illusions: "Men have different faces. There are no two alike . . . even Buddhas only point the way." God made them high or lowly, and ordered their estate.

To which someone is bound to reply: this is too crude, you don't have to accept the verdict of one of the characters. Well, I'm not saying Mr. Adlard necessarily believes this watered down philosophy – I hope he doesn't. But if we are left to draw our own conclusions, we can't help but notice the bias in the way the case is presented.

Two opposed worlds are offered. One is a Gerald Scarfe caricature of urban

life, a Stahlex Gormenghast, cleaned and deodorized by machine, but still lousy with humans, smearing their excrement of sadism and violence across the pages. There's revulsion in the writing, and quite right, too; also a devilish, misanthropic delight in the horror story type of denouement. As a distorting mirror of society, this would be fine; it is less easy to accept that it reflects only the lower orders, while the Executive image is barely tarnished. The Yahoos kick and scratch at each other in their holes, while the 22nd century Houyhnhnms are as rational and civilised as their eighteenth century counterparts.

The Executives have the monopoly on explanations of the historical forces that produced Tcity, and if these are to be taken at face value, why not the justifications as well? After all, this is a "supremely intelligent, educated and rational élite". I can't see that the Executives show much evidence of superior brain power, but it is obvious that the Citizens are thick as two planks, thicker than you or me or the average steelworker, Irish jokes to the contrary. If intellectual activity is the monopoly of a class, then we are forced to accept its view of society as the correct one. The idea that Executives are created by genetic medicine and brain surgery serves to conceal the fact that the "average" IQ has been placed around the moron level, with no equivalent medical assistance.

There are several massive assumptions – the scientific validity of the IQ concept, the primacy of self-interest in human nature, oh yes and the other old favourite, the eternal inferiority of women (every redblooded male sf writer's fantasy of truly professional, certificated whores, flickering their knickers like beacons in a morass of unskilled nymphomaniacs and neurotic virgins).

A projected future society always implies a line on human nature and people as social animals. In science fiction you can't just say, "Most people are thick, most women aren't people", you have to prove it, out of the fabric of your created world, which is one of the things that makes science fiction more interesting than most other strands of the modern novel. I'm sure the above propositions can't be proved, if you're honest about the process of history, but you certainly can't get away with ducking the problems.

# superficial pleasures

**To Live Again**
by Robert Silverberg *(Sidgwick and Jackson, 1975, 231pp, £3.25, ISBN 0 283 981296)*

## reviewed by Tom Hutchinson

Robert Silverberg wrote *To Live Again*, as he told us in *Hell's Cartographers*, just after he had taken the pot off the boil and was preparing brews of a different intellectual calibre, potions that would have nothing to do with "all that zap-zap space-opera".

It seems to have been one of the first of his books to emerge from the womb-cleft created by all that ecstatically-confessed earthquake shifting going on in his mental terrain. It is good enough to make one wish it had been better; as an eruption to mark a particular point in his creative life it is an occasion but not a celebration.

In a time at the end of its tether the rich and powerful can buy the personae of the dead – though why they should want to is never made quite clear – and tycoons Mark Kaufmann and John Roditis are fighting, by fair means and foul, to wrest the mental imprint of the recently-dead Paul Kaufmann, Mark's uncle, away from the soul bank. Paul was a buccaneering monetary dictator of hyper-Getty proportions, so one can understand why he is in such demand.

The plot convolutes through a maze of scenes involving, not only this struggle for power beyond the grave, but also integrating Mark's daughter, Risa, who is eager for a soul-mating as well as the physical coupling she (and the author) seem to enjoy so much. Oh, and there's also Mark's mistress, Elena, around, displaying much lust and "tawny thighs": a "Playboy" centre-fold writ large if ever I read one.

The commercial mutation of the Buddhist principle of reincarnation is skilfully conveyed, but never properly explored, so that the correct rôle of death as a goal, and not a by-passed dream that money can defy, is never given the charge of paradoxical poetry that it requires.

Interior worlds are not here for Mr. Silverberg, but he is marvellously hallucinatory when dealing with surface action: a Phoney Island where test-tube freaks may be killed for fun; the way a host-human can shuffle his cards of separate identity to deal himself the better pleasure; the way duality becomes a duel of wills when the persona overwhelms its owner and "goes dybbuk".

The high comedy of the climax when there are two Paul Kaufmanns around is mounted to with glee, but no narrative tension, possibly because Mr. Silverberg has been dissipating it proving that science fiction can deal convincingly with sex. Science fiction can; in this book *he* can't. "Bell-like breasts" resound with only a tinny titillation in this sort of context and all the sweat from all that rutting tends to rust the glittery best of what is depicted here: the apparatus and technology of this world.

There are enough imaginative sparks to fret the darkness of the decadence but not enough to start a conflagration. Where one is really saddened by the book is the abdication of any viewpoint about what has been conjured; no sense of a moral judgment which is very much needed to raise the idea above the level of gimmickry. His distancing becomes irritating, but there may of course be a reason for that revealed by that time of his life: insecurity?

# son of towering inferno

**The Stochastic Man**
by Robert Silverberg *(Harper & Row, 1975, 229pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 06 013868 8)*

## reviewed by Pauline Jones

To place the action of a novel in a near future needs a deal of lateral thoroughness and ingenuity if the resulting fiction is to work at a truly speculative level. Sf which extrapolates to a convincing near future must encompass the absorptions and realities of the present – (in one respect, an uncontrollable one, sf must always do so). *The Stochastic Man* does not sell out too far to ersatz glamour, beguiling gadgetry or wholly incredible scenarios. The idea is carefully pursued in cool, white, elegant prose although the ending is blander than one would have preferred.

What is noticeably left out is the rest of the world. What is left in is dialectical/speculative material upon the nature of time, the paradoxes of second sight (and an unsatisfactory evaluation of this gift at the close); the wheeling and dealing and friable loyalties of the Great Society; the sinister tendencies of megalomania and charisma in a democracy . . . none of these redeem the simple absence of even a hint at a larger global scenario. It is as if America is the world. But to extrapolate, from the self-contradictory and fraught present-day America which is in the throes of re-appraising its global role and looks keenly to the presidency for at least a compromise with conscience in foreign policy, to a near future which leaves out even a sketch of the larger world or any mention of the influence of the extra-territorial upon internal politics, surely makes it difficult for the reader to suspend disbelief.

It is difficult to accept the book on its own terms. This is an "if" book, not a "will" book. The "if" is not explained.

The "if" is Carvajal, a man born with prescience, exact copious visions of what is to pass before his death and hence a knowledge of his own death. There his gift stops. Now, accepting that – we never really have the sort of close analytic reasoning which would settle the reader's doubts. One stirs under the paradoxes. There are no compensating factors which could render such an analysis superfluous. It's OK to think that our common conceptual grounds about time are partial or confused. It's another thing to feel that the author himself is theorising and groping for explanation.

Early in the book, the hero's wife Sundara, a Sanskrit vamp with an existential eye to Nirvana, enters the plot, not merely as a foil to her husband's besottment with Quinn, the villain, the President rising, but as a protagonist of a non-causal phenomenology. The book ends on a totally deterministic note, but not through debate and character development with and of this protagonist of the alternative.

Free will versus determinism is a knotty old problem in European Philosophy, insoluble except pragmatically, i.e. don't worry about it, you'll never know anyway. However, this teaser is always worth a go and is surely a good theme for the speculative writer. One needn't expect a solution to the problem: that would spoil everything. One could gain much from a novel which made a creative re-examination of the *problem* – see *War and Peace.* In the present instance the opportunity is passed up. Sundara drifts away. In fact the hero divorces her because he has been told he will. What sort of argument is that?

Nichols, the hero, the narrator, is a gifted analyst of statistical data; he sees trends. He runs his own consultancy until he sells his soul to Quinn, the man born to be King. Quinn is elected Mayor of New York and proceeds to gather his sidekicks. Nichols becomes obsessed with Quinn's success, aspires to the power behind the throne, to be the *eminence grise.* He sees Quinn's election as an end in itself and justifies his monomania by thinking of the good Quinn could do for America! But Quinn is a hollow man. Nichols is devoted to him, not to his programme for he has none. Is it likely that Nichols, a latterday John Dean, a rabid Neo-Nixonite would in his declining years found an institute for the perfection of human consciousness? Is it likely that such a gullible man, so lacking in judgement as to become infatuated with the Quinns of this world (whom many would love like a pain in the arse) could sustain such altruistic determination? Hero worship and sanity don't mix. Of course Quinn shows his true colours and Nichols, disillusioned, disappears up an esoteric spout to become his own god. Unfortunately he is shown to be a fool.

Another problem about Nichols is just how does he acquire the gift of vision?

There is a mass of stuffing about time and parallel/reverse universes. Unfortunately, however, this key development in the hero is never explained. Carvajal merely tells him it will come. And it does. And how. But why? One would be prepared to sacrifice all the theorising for an account of Carvajal's teaching methods, or at least of how Nichols breaks through. Also, so absorbing is the internal monologue that the other characters don't get much of a look in; they remain pretty flat.

One is led to ask whether, in such a near future, the nuclear family will have so irrevocably broken down in the U.S.A., or at least New York? Or is group sex and legal dope the reserve of the upper middle classes? What happened to children and the population explosion? The Russkies? The Third World? The Space Race? None of these are vital to the book but one cannot help speculating.

The book ends with a loaded choice. If you had perfect knowledge of your future would that make you "accept every turn of the script gladly and without regret. There will be no surprises; therefore there will be no pain. We will live in beauty, knowing that we are aspects of the one great Plan."? Personally I would blow my brains out. Or could I? Or what?

This is a mythic book about a mythopoeic country. It concerns frightened, well-off Americans trying to find ease of conscience, integrity and purpose in the failing society that supports and produces them, longing for the Day of Wrath and dropping out on mysticism just before time. It does not contain a programme, only a miracle.

What sort of choice is it between: "Man knows at last that he is alone in the indifferent immensity of the universe whence he has emerged by chance" and Einstein's! "God does not throw dice."?

Thus what sort of sense is it to be invited to endorse with the hero, the second proposition? These are simply not all the possibilities. In a book which is about forms of freedom and ways to freedom, but which comes up with determinism as an answer . . . perhaps it is the least lame conclusion.

# the pseudo-life of sf

**Unfamiliar Territory**
by Robert Silverberg *(Victor Gollancz, 1975, pp212, £2.50, ISBN 0 575 01919 0)*

## reviewed by David I. Masson

These thirteen stories were individually first published in 1971-3, before the energy crisis, though "ecology" and the threats of mankind to its planet had already had an airing. This review is written when terrorism, the spectre of world famine, inflation, Middle East tensions and possible petrol rationing are in people's minds. By the time it comes out the world may have changed. It can be the fate of writers and publishers today to be caught up by the acceleration of events; also, by their own changes of mind. I used to find optimism unconvincing, corny and dull, and the tragic or destructive in literature more significant. But I have

come round to appreciate the positive, and hopeful (so long as they are not facile); to remember Ursula Le Guin's (I hope) immortal words, "Light is the left hand of darkness" (Estraven recalling Tormer's Lay); and to believe there is a glimmer of hope for a way through the unutterable muddle that this idiotic species has made of its world.

The destructive in writing (critical or escapist) is an unofficial acknowledgement that the world around one, though full of wrong and folly, is stable. As general instability is recognized the sane man (whether he wishes to criticize or to escape) seeks positive values. Bob Silverberg has here one story that reflects this point, in which he sets an entertainment-vogue for previewing incompatible varieties of eschatological doom, against a neglect of real threats of multiple world disasters. But he may be unlucky, in this volume, in having his coven of inventions, extravaganzas and satirical extrapolations met together in a time of relative flux and dismay. For, as often with sf, they are all destructive (or at best negative) except perhaps for three (nos. 2, 8 and 12) focused on individuals, and two even of these are anything but life-enhancing. Everything tends to reduce, one feels, to the "ou-boom" of the Marabar caves. Most of the stories are funny, sour, and/or desperate.

Silverberg's characters are not persons so much as figures, painted perhaps by Edward Burra or drawn by Georg Grosz – or is it merely by Steinberg and Feiffer? The story usually depends on their rabid pursuit of sensation or money, or else on their passive acquiescence. Almost every piece lights up brilliantly one of those little enclosed bubbles of pseudo-life in which sf delights, little air-tight transparent plastic cells harbouring one, two or three ideas which interact vibratingly in their confined space. This is not true of the ironic poems of despair (as they may be called), nos. 3 and 13.

Two stories create something quite new: nos. 2 and 12. No. 12, "In Entropy's Jaws", is a genuine, if rather hollow, piece of mythopoeia. The best story of the whole bunch is the frivolous No. 2, "Now + n, Now – n", a bijou artefact with a high and attractive gloss, a real delight.

On p.109 someone says "I think my favorite [sic] . . . is the Angel of Lust". There's certainly a lot of it about, in gross detail, though in tune with each story concerned and usually to raise a laugh or a retch rather than any more substantial thing: the obsessive, frantic sexuality of a core-less culture.

The general themes and modes of attack, sometimes combined, are worth looking into. Three stories, nos. 3, 10 and 13, deal with global Doom, chiefly from pollution and violence (I don't think the exhaustion of planetary resources comes in). Two stories deal with irreversible loss and gain (through sex). Nos. 1, 7 and 9 work by showing stock res-

ponses in a bizarre setting: an unsubtle satirical device, and its targets don't stand out crystal clear. Two stories have the protagonist as misfit (the *Rhinoceros* syndrome; once with a couple of extra twists). Two are about literally cashing in on the future. Four stories bring in time-jumps, voluntary or involuntary, and some of these are in versions that strike me as novel and as fun; of these time stories, two show the terrible effects of meddling with the laws of the universe. Three tales utilize *Doppelgaengerei.* Four are concerned with pretence and illusion. Two are combination-extrapolations (one of transplants and conscripts, the other of group sex, telemetry and jetsetism). Four give the reader that good old shock by the end, yet two just tail off, while three exhibit circularity. Despite Silverberg's professional touch with words, several stories ramble, the author circling wearily round the point; in no. 3 the narrator gives up after some false starts and turns into a contemporary feebly warning us: perhaps even throwing up the sponge has its place?

"Many Mansions" is a puzzle. Did any of it happen, and if so, which version? or did they all split off into multiple alternatives? or is it all in their imaginations? In "Good News from the Vatican" the point is nearly lost underfoot; institutionalized religion is a hollow sham, is that it? Granted, but the first sentence almost pre-empts the rest. "Push No More" restates an ancient theme by hitching it very ingeniously onto poltergeistery and PK.

A favourite device in the volume, familiar nowadays, is the interpolated "document"; a pseudo-collage from an antibiotics table, diet table, Chinese legend, Roget's Thesaurus or what have you.

*(Editor's Note: The above review is set in a larger type because it was held over from the previous issue. In future, small being beautiful (and cheaper) all reviews will be in 9pt. rather than 11pt. type.)*

## one ironist, one romancer

**Born With The Dead**
by Robert Silverberg *(Gollancz, 1975, 267pp, £2.75, ISBN 0 575 01966 2)*

**Hiero's Journey**
by Sterling E. Lanier *(Sidgwick & Jackson, 1975, 348pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 283 98156 3)*

## reviewed by Tom Shippey

What is a miracle? According to George McWhirter Fotheringay, the sceptic hero of Wells's "The Man who Could Work Miracles", it is "something contrariwise to the course of nature done by power of Will". Readers of that story will remember that

all went fairly well for Fotheringay till the moment when (egged on by a clergyman with vague memories of Joshua) he decided to stop the earth's rotation – but without having made any stipulation for the "trifling movables" (like people, houses, and the sea) upon its surface. As a result, everyone was instantaneously thrown forward at speeds of up to 1000 mph. and all life in the world was (temporarily) destroyed.

Wells no doubt thought that part of the point of his story was to indicate the scientific naiveté of Biblical miracles, but he reckoned without Howard Fast, Velikovsky – and Robert Silverberg. For the second of the three novellas in *Born with the Dead*, "Thomas the Proclaimer", opens with the Sign of the sun standing still in heaven for twenty-four hours, in response to the prayer-programme of an evangelist from Reno. It's not possible, says the Wellsian, it's just a relic of pre-scientific fantasy! But Silverberg knows this just as well as Wells. His story is, in essence, about faith. Miracles challenge the faith of the sceptic; and these days we are all sceptics, as a result of the last three centuries of history. So, in Silverberg's story, the university professors form a League of Discerners, to try and interpret the Sign; the Catholic Church waits for a ruling from Rome; and the Archbishop of York agrees with the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria that alien extraterrestrials must have done it, finding that "less implausible" than something simply supernatural. Signs, in short, don't mean anything any more. Miracles have no theory to support them.

Silverberg's ironies in the end outgo Wells's. Thomas the Proclaimer turns out to have nothing to proclaim. He should have been called the Doubter, like his namesake. But at the end, as the vengeful crowd swarms over him, he calls on his betrayer – and the man's name is Saul. In his death, therefore, Thomas parallels Christ and Stephen Protomartyr. Maybe there was something in his Sign after all; but whatever it was, it wasn't enough, and it can't be any more.

Both the other novellas in the collection also deal with people trying to come to terms with what seems impossible: death by voluntary suicide in "Going", scientific resurrection in "Born with the Dead". The title-story rests rather heavily on semantic trickery: after all, if the dead are resurrected, they're alive. And if dodoes, quaggas, and aurochses are bred back into the world, they can't be called extinct any more. But Silverberg likes the thought of people who have been dead shooting animals who have also (in a sense) been dead, and visiting "dead" archaeological sites, and so on, so that we get several dramatic but not quite logical scenes. The pay-off is the story's rich coldness, as the reader is drawn into the dead men's passionless obsessions; just as, in "Going", we follow the composer-hero's increasingly gloomy estimate, not of science or society, but of his own music – a progress oddly like Jerom Busch/Richard Strauss's in the James Blish story, "A Work of Art".

The sub-title of the collection is "three science-fiction novellas about the spirit of man". "Spirit" seems no more than another bit of word-play, but it's true that Silverberg (in proper science-fiction style) is writing about what knowledge does to belief: a strong theme, closely realised, and not as alien from traditional sf as it looks.

Messrs. Sidgwick and Jackson, by contrast, coyly avoid mentioning science fiction, as far as possible, on their cover for *Hiero's Journey*. It is a "romance of the future", a "fantasy chronicle", with an "anti-technology message". Actually, it's a radiation-mutations-after-the-Death story, just like *The Chrysalids*, or *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, or Poul Anderson's *Vault of the Ages*, and what this genre thrives on is a good supply of mutated monsters, whose origins should be (like the

place-names) just about recognisable. Lanier provides these unflaggingly: morses and telepathic bears on the good side, Hairy Howlers, snappers, frog-things, Man-Rats, Gliths, and giant worms playing for the Unclean. Some of the individual episodes of the quest are models of their kind, like the fight with the Dweller in the Mist, or the intervention of Brother Aldo the Elevener. But the story suffers as a whole from the (fairly standard) motif which allows the hero to develop unprecedented telepathic powers. By the end his mind-shields and mind-bolts show signs of making it all too easy, something to be countered only by piling horror on horror, so that the final three-cornered fight with the Unclean adepts and the sentient slime-mould in the bowels of an ancient computer does sound (in full as well as in paraphrase) a bit like a comic-book.

The ending leaves room for a sequel in which revived Science will no doubt take on ancient Sorcery, and when it appears I shall buy it – but not for its message, anti-technology or otherwise, just for more of the "lethal mutations" or Leemutes.

# irish joke

**Irish Rose**
by Patrick Wyatt *(Michael Joseph, 1975, 213pp, £3.75, ISBN 0 7181 1299 7)*

## reviewed by Bob Shaw

"Wave of Annoyance" is a term which has an allegorical ring to it, but the phenomenon it describes is one of the hard facts of everyday life for the person who reads sf. When you start to read a piece of science fiction you know you are launching yourself on a precarious imaginative flight, as delicately and dangerously balanced as a 1903 flying machine. Sustaining you are things like the desire to have a good read and your years of practice at suspending disbelief; working against you, trying to upset your frail craft, are other things like the knowledge that most sf stories are based on pseudo-science and could never happen anyway, and the fact that there is usually so little money in writing sf that authors can be tempted to write carelessly. When you have written some of the stuff yourself, and been involved in the battle to keep these imaginative gliders airborne and stable, you tend to become morbidly aware of the mechanics of the struggle. For this reason, perhaps, authors may be unsuitable to play the role of critic.

When I'm reading a piece of science fiction and encounter something I think shouldn't have been there I experience one of the afore-mentioned Waves of Annoyance and tend to go into a nosedive. (It is oddly coincidental that the relevant acronym, WOA, is the word which to a horseman means "Stop", but let's not mix our metaphors.) Usually, one really good WOA is enough to make me put a book aside for ever. For example, one novel I tried recently began with a spaceship moving so quickly it was going to cross our galaxy in a matter of hours and there was a reference, straight out of *Thrilling Air Stories*, to the pilot's satisfaction at how well it was responding to the joystick! I didn't get beyond that point.

The reason for the above preamble is that I am fretting about the possibility of giving an unfair review of Patrick Wyatt's novel, *Irish Rose*. Two other reviews I've seen were favourable, yet to me this story of a future primitive society in England

was unbelievable and unsatisfactory in a number of ways. The background is that nearly all the white women in the world have died because of an unforeseen side-effect of the contraceptive pill. This led to the Pill Wars in which sex-starved white men raided all the other races for their females, in the process virtually destroying civilisation everywhere in the world – which seems a bit harsh to me. I mean, surely they could have come to *some* arrangement. The main exception was Ireland, where the pill was always banned, and which continued to flourish in insular comfort. These events led to a quick blending of the races and to an England where coffee-coloured survivors have set up a system of primitive city-states in places like Basingstoke (known as Basing) and Reading.

Their religion blames the "Second Fall" on women, so now women are kept merely as breeding animals, herded in barns and allowed no form of education. All menial or domestic tasks are carried out by eunuchs, known as yunes, and hard work such as soldiering is performed by whole men, known as entires. A woman reaching breeding age is called a nube, a word apparently derived from nubile, and afterwards she is known as a breeder.

Throughout the book these labels are bandied about at a ferocious pace, sometime all occurring in a single sentence, creating that sensation of being rhythmically sandbagged on the nape of the neck. In the set-up described, coupling with a nube is an obscene necessity and true romantic love only occurs between entires and yunes. He's got me doing it now! (Using all the labels, that is – not falling for eunuchs.) The heroine of the story is a girl called Rosamund, who is kept separate from the other nubes because she is a fair-skinned blonde, and who is in an ambivalent situation because the Irish are white, the Irish are admired, the words "white" and "Irish" are synonymous with "beautiful", and therefore although Rosamund is a mere nube she is also regarded as beautiful, and looking at her causes strange stirrings in entires' loins. To complicate things even further, from her private room she was able to overhear the young yunes being tutored and thus has learned to read and this is a blasphemy because everybody knows that nubes and breeders are dim animals incapable of thought.

I don't know how all this sounds to you, but I was butting through WOAs almost from the book's first page. The story is told from the viewpoint of Geoff, a crippled yune, who does much scuttling about on stone staircases and peering into the inevitable Great Hall where the fearsome Lord holds sway in front of a huge open fireplace. This is probably just a personal foible of mine, but the first mention of standard-issue Gormenghast trappings such as Great Halls and winding stone stairs never fails to bring on a conviction that TV programmes like *Gardener's World* or *Stars on Sunday* are worth watching after all.

Another WOA was caused by inconsistencies arising from Mr. Wyatt's insistence that entires despise nubes and reserve their finer feelings of love for yunes. Under those circumstances it would be totally illogical for a yune who wanted to attract an entire to emulate a woman in any way. Most of them don't, as far as we are told, but the yunes that Mr. Wyatt personally dislikes as characters tend to behave like Kenneth Williams caricatures. The following is a sample:

> 'You shouldn't talk about nasty, sinful things in that shameless way,' Fickle Fred would chide her. 'You make my flesh creep, that's a fact. D'you think I could borrow that nice green shawl of yours, deary, just for this evening? I've got a date with Big Ben, and he's always so difficult to please.'

Other annoyances are more trivial and perhaps of a technical nature which

would concern a writer more than a reader. At one point a character is frightened and shows his state of mind by stammering a word. This is fair enough, but the word Mr. Wyatt chooses for him to stammer is "Who", and it comes out: "W. . . W. . . Who?" I read that days ago and I'm still going around saying, "Doubleyou . . . Doubleyou . . . *Who?*" A book shouldn't have that effect on a reader. And how, I kept wondering, did places like America and Singapore and Kuala Lumpur manage to retain their pre-Fall spelling, while Europe became Yurrup?

On the credit side, there is a fair amount of action in *Irish Rose*, and I like action. The awful secret that Rosamund, a female, can read gets out; she and Geoff are hunted quite a bit, than they find refuge in Oxford which is still a seat of learning. In fact, near the end of the book, we discover that in Oxford they have begun to make progress with telepathy and levitation. Unfortunately, they don't seem to have much practical use for these talents, remaining content to do a little modest floating towards the chapel ceiling while praying. That part was strongly reminiscent of Zenna Henderson's stories about The People, and reinforced my conviction – acquired about one quarter the way through the book – that Patrick Wyatt is the pen name of a woman.

The dust jacket blurb says the book was written under a pseudonym by someone who has written many children's books. In a convention talk I once made a joke about Enid Blyton trying to write a torrid sex novel and, unable to shake off her past, producing a book called "The Toytown Brothel". I get a feeling that something similar has happened with *Irish Rose*. The book's basic idea, although preposterous, could have been handled in an "adult" way, but the style – even where homosexual encounters are described – remains obstinately in the mould of a Girls' Own Bumper Fun Book. For example:

> Fred . . . inveigled his current sweetheart, a big young sergeant, up into the comfortable privacy and they took off most of their clothes and had fine kiss-and-cuddle sessions on the floor.

And even at the age of ten I would have raised an eyebrow at an author who, while describing Geoff trotting along beside his Lord, had written the following line:

Stomp. Stomp. Stomp. Clop-loppetty-clop.

Finally, the ending of the book embodies a miscalculation by the author. Rosamund, who is portrayed all along as a petulant brat, has become an important figure, a symbol of the fact that women are equal to men. The head man at Oxford asks her to stay there and be a symbol, but an Irish Lord wants her to go with him and be his wife:

> He dropped on his knees before her. 'Sweet Rosamund,' he said. 'Rose of my world, Queen of all men's desire. Come with me. Come to your lover and make both of our hearts happy. Forget all other things and cleave to me!'

Rosamund says she needs time to think the proposition over, and the story ends a few paragraphs later, supposedly leaving us tantalised and tortured by never learning her decision, perhaps even begging for a sequel. Here's the way it goes:

> The people are all waiting there, down in the Court, for her to tell them. Shawn is tight-lipped. The knuckles of his hands are white.

Justice can cloak his fears in older majesty.

Rosamund is on her knees in the Cathedral. She is praying to God the Father, God the Mother, God the Son and God the Universal. Perhaps she's floating with the other girls above the altar, her sweet face lost in multicoloured glory as she prays.

She will get her answer. Then we shall know her decision. The bell has stopped tolling.

I must go down and join the other in the Court.

*I* must go down and join the others in the boozer. *Stomp. Stomp. Stomp. Clop-loppetty-clop.*

# fancy going to the vats?

**Hellstrom's Hive**
by Frank Herbert *(Bantam, 1974, 312pp, £0.50, ISBN 553 08276 150; also NEL, 1974, 278pp, £2.95, ISBN 4500 2137 8)*

## reviewed by Ian Watson

*Hellstrom's Hive* is a variation on two related themes common to Frank Herbert's work. These are: What will Man make of himself, biologically, socially and mentally? To what extent will Man manipulate himself? And by converse: to what extent is Man *being* manipulated, by power élites and by other political and psychological forces seemingly beyond the individual's control? To put it another way: to what extent are we human beings capable of enlarging the conceptual frameworks that delimit us; and to what extent are we dolls and puppets? What are the political and mental systems that limit us? And what sort of alien humanity lies beyond these limits? Herbert is inspired by a vision of Togetherness; but this is twofold. There is the togetherness of getting in touch with one's own biological and mental processes, internally. Externally, there is a utopian, social togetherness.

This. then, is Frank Herbert's "programme". He explores the ramifications of Manipulator versus Manipulated and Awareness versus Puppetry in book after book – books which oscillate rather wildly in quality. The dolls are sometimes put through their paces on the end of all too visible strings. A revolutionary vision is incongruously stuck on to potboiler-type thrillers, like a set of postage stamps from miraculous lands commemorating authentic saviours, saints and statesmen pasted on to postcards of identikit scenery conveying conventional banal greetings. Ingenious clues are marshalled – to be thrown away resolving problems in the mechanical, trivial spirit of a crossword puzzle. Yet whenever the philosophical, political messages and the characters, events and landscapes that image these do really cohere and achieve togetherness (instead of running an ungainly three-legged dash towards "The End") Herbert's work functions as a set of powerful signposts towards the future of Man, towards the "alien" being who awaits us, whether we quit our planet or stay upon it.

In *Dune,* Herbert glosses space travel as a quasi-religious phenomenon. Space opens out our limited frameworks into open-ended ones. Space carries us beyond the accepted limits. In his essay prefacing the Elwood anthology *Tomorrow's Alternatives,* Herbert suggests that for some people sf is more akin to religion than

to escapist entertainment. Yet Herbert criticises here. People who think in terms of such either/or dichotomies – of vision *versus* entertainment – hamstring our powers of thought. Now, in the *Dune* sense, Herbert is clearly a religious man. He possesses the awe, the sense of *noumen*, at the Beyond. This drives him to try to overcome limiting frameworks. Paradoxically, though, Herbert is also a writer caught up in the limiting framework of a particular kind of adventure story. He frequently yokes together the heterogeneous modes of entertainment and revelation by violence, in such a way that they *seem* heterogeneous and contradictory. His books are by turns thrillers, and metaphysical speculation; by turns profound social and psychological analysis, and manuals in scoutcraft. The contradiction runs deep in many Frank Herbert novels.

The conflict between the Agent and the Acted-Upon, and the parallel problem of whether an evolutionary process which will eventually make us aliens to our present selves is a benign or a horrifying force, link up with the dichotomy between Herbert as Wise Man and Herbert as Puppeteer of action-packed plots; and out of this comes the tension characteristic in Herbert's own plots, between "Good Agents" and "Bad Agents" who bitterly oppose one another whilst simultaneously uncovering some "alien" intrusion upon human nature. In a very real sense, the continual struggle of Agents within Herbert's books reflects the struggle between revelation and entertainment, between insight on the one hand, and *genre* vulgarity on the other. Herbert's various Agents constantly find themselves confronted by the Strangeness of the universe, and by the Aliens within ourselves. The battles of the Agents go on in parallel with the more important mental struggle with alien *noumen*. In effect, frequently a battle of the books with themselves takes place. The books become signposts of how far sf can stretch beyond conventional thought limits, and how constrained sf is by its own self-set limits.

In *Whipping Star*, cosmic mystery is explored by vulgar, brash "anti-agents" (who nevertheless represent the Good, the Only Hope for the Galaxy). These agents belong to a Bureau of Sabotage whose function is to throw spanners into the works of a multiplanet society which otherwise would become a frenetic tyranny of good intentions instantly, compulsively and malignantly realized.

In *The Eyes of Heisenberg*, agents of the Ruling Immortals are chipped away at by an Underground whose members possess a semi-mystical cachet of super-power common in Herbert's books: flickering high-speed hand signals which at once transcend human speech (our programmed linguistic "limitations") and also function as highly efficient espionage tools. These hand signals occur in *Dune* – and play a significant role in *Hellstrom's Hive*. They are at once an image of mysterious power, and concealment – handily combining revelation and espionage-adventure.

*The Godmakers* is built on a stock cliché of collapse of human civilization during "Rim Wars". Lost human colonies are being recontacted. One set of Agents performs this task with naive enthusiasm, like the do-gooders of *Whipping Star*. Their opponents (amongst whom is the book's hero) are the Devil's Advocates, perpetually on the look-out for those small betraying details, those "negative signs" of something wrong, which, like the hand signals, form another central image in Herbert's books, linking authentic mystery with the thriller mode. The opening of *Hellstrom's Hive* is again much occupied with just such negative signs. Out of this conflict of agents, of orders from higher authority and countermanding of orders, evolves amazingly a God Force. A God is created out of human actions, and transcends humanity, becomes inconceivable, yet actual. In this book, psychic "science" is responsible for this fearful transcendence. In *Destination: Void* it was cybernetics. In *The Eyes of*

*Heisenberg* a "god-force" also intervenes – here, at the very beginning of the book. It is a counter-response to Man's molecular engineering, to Man's genetic surgical intrusions into the geometries of Nature. It is seen as "heisenbergian" – as change brought about by Man's inspection of Nature; which takes the form of an apparently random and irrational intrusion of new and stronger structuring in the human pre-embryo. A "conscious" restructuring occurs. Intention is apparent. Yet it must seem to be irrational and random too; for this intrusion of "god-force" betokens the workings of a higher order system in Nature which we are not yet equipped to comprehend. These workings appear irrational or magical. We can only comprehend the workings of such a higher order system of organization if we are absorbed into it. But, for our familiar human "selves", who would no longer be independent units, this would be the thing we most fear. It would be the death of Self. About such a form of Togetherness, there is an inherent ambivalence.

Time and again in Herbert's books, the problem of Order – the problem of Levels of Order within the system of the Cosmos – is paralleled by the conflict of orders in the espionage area; and this conflict between good and bad Agencies reflects in turn the tension between revelation and adventure. Meanwhile, out of the battling human milieu, is generated – incomprehensibly, yet actually – a god-force.

Philip Dick too generates ambiguous divinities out of Man (in the form of the substance Ubik, in the form of the Intercessor in *A Maze of Death*). Dick's books twist around themselves Escher-style, to betoken the paradox of "God" arising out of Man, of a higher order system issuing from a lower order one. Herbert's books battle it out in binary conflict. Herbert takes over *genre* clichés lock, stock and barrel, whereas Dick guys them. Herbert dissects and analyses clues (not forgetting negative clues), precisely where Dick shows up all clues as the false leads they are. Dick's own "negative clues" take the form of the totally irrelevant chapter titles in *A Maze of Death*, or the confusing, hilarious ads for Ubik. Herbert stares through the electron microscope and, faced by Heisenbergian events (as a higher order system impinges on the observations of a lower) sets off in full cry with warring teams of secret agents. Yet Herbert too achieves *noumen*, insight, even despite the books themselves and the conventions they observe – just as Dick achieves this by guying those conventions.

*The Santaroga Barrier* is one of Herbert's finest novels precisely because the paradox of a higher order knowledge is best presented and resolved within it. The terror – and bliss – of submergence, of loss of identity in the process of achieving a higher order identity, is authentically conveyed – as well as the paradox that understanding, togetherness, might operate malevolently from the individual's point of view: it might seem like a Palmer Eldritch species of higher order, where one's "Self" is simply consumed.

*Hellstrom's Hive* is fully as successful as *The Santaroga Barrier* in articulating the paradox of individual versus higher order. The higher order existence in this case seems totally malign. It is a hive intelligence of insect humans; a pit of Hell as opposed to the Happy Valley of Santaroga. (Both books commence with an agent, a valley, a camper van, with negative signs.) It is a successful and important book because the balance between agents and "Higher Agency" is exactly right; because the metaphor for the transhuman is so strong, however grotesque.

The answer to the question, "Fancy going to the Vats?" is a fervent, sacramental "Yes", if you happen to be a denizen of the 50,000 strong human hive hidden under an Oregon farmstead. The vats (another of Herbert's favourite images; genetic engineering takes place in "vats" of another sort in *The Eyes of Heisenberg*) are the

recycling system into which human flesh returns, to be processed into food; they are a principal way by which emotional, biological identity is maintained in the hive – other ways including selective breeding and far more sophisticated hormonal and pheremonal science than exists "Outside". The vats seem almost like a guying of Herbert's sentiment that "we must get the biological material back into the living cycle. I see it as a warm feeling towards the living . . . " (from an interview in *Friends*, 23, February 2, 1971) – a sell-out of this sentiment to sensationalism. Yet it is not so.

The answer would be "Yes" – if you could speak. However, most of the nude hive workers bustling about their tasks possess vocal speech no more. Speech is being phased out, and replaced by sign language – the flickering fingers of the bee-dance. Is this even plausible? Certainly bee language has evolved *away* from sound, in the direction of motion (see Esch in *Scientific American*, April, 1967). Yet it seems to be an undisputed fact of *human* evolution, that it was acquisition of speech and the supplanting of gesture by speech, that marked the threshold of intelligence, in a word, of humanity. The notion that human beings can be deprogrammed of human language appears absurd – particularly since the hive deliberately eschews molecular engineering methods in favour of "natural" biological methods. This seems wilfully to forget what we already are, biologically, evolutionarily. It is like trying to turn into dolphins by jumping into the sea and thinking hard about it. And yet . . . as we understand more about the sheer range of human communications going on around and about words (gesture, body language, scent signals) and as we understand more about the functioning of sign languages, from the syntax of chimpanzees to the semiotics of deaf-and-dumb talk, and how these tie in to the innate speech programme and into other social codings midway between nature and nurture, who knows? We might find that we are severely constraining ourselves, hobbling ourselves all along.

Again, the idea of going shopping for "good genes" for the Hive, hey presto, with a hypo of hormones that will produce up to 35 orgasms verges on the comic-orgiastic, a la Philip Farmer – if it weren't treated quite so solemnly.

When the vital Vat question is mooted to Fancy Kalotermi (one of the front-agents for the Hive, with a naughty taste for Outside breakfasts; her name is an acronym for "the breeding batch *F*ractionated *A*ctinomycin *N*ucleotide *C*omplex *Y* series") her prime reaction is: surely she's still of some breeding use to the Hive? Fancy seems to get threatened with this fate roughly every thirty pages or so – interspersed with such morale-boosting slogans as "Into the vats old, out of the vats new" and other items of social philosophy of the Hive, which one may be tempted to think not only repetitious and simplistic, but grossly implausible; a reaction one might also have to the idea that insect "humanity" can achieve a group-identity such that the individual Fancy's "fancy-free" behaviour (for which she is threatened with the vats) becomes a working out, through one "bit" of biological data in the Hive Mind, of the problem of how to protect itself.

One might take umbrage at the style itself, oscillating as it does between the slick and the portentous.

Yet the whole *coheres*. The whole becomes a most powerful and chilling metaphor for the alien future of Man – which sf is so seldom willing to envisage, however willing it may be to invoke extraterrestials of all shapes and sizes. The Hive, malign in its very estrangement from us, signals the strangeness of our own possible future – in metaphor, not in prophecy or advocacy. Albeit with *genre* feet of clay, *Hellstrom's Hive* explores something that sf should be trying to explore, and ex-

plores it powerfully: Man in the Unknown, Alien Man that lies beyond Man.

*Hellstrom's Hive* will probably be unpopular; ignored with embarrassment both by the social utopians of sf (to whom all praise, for introducing some political consciousness and responsibility into this unpolitical and even antipolitical *genre*) as well as by the literary stylists of sf (for this book abolishes literature, art, humanity and it must be said that the style reflects this abolition, founded as the book is upon a basic contradiction common to so many Frank Herbert novels). Yet I think that this would be a mistake. For the book is more than it seems; just as the Hive becomes more than its components.

# they all look alike to me

**Solution Three**
by Naomi Mitchison *(Dobson, 1975, 160pp, £2.95, ISBN 0 234 77335 9)*

## reviewed by Helen Nicholls

> Jussie was saying to Ric: "I have the same feeling sometimes. I suppose it's just that I find the Professorials difficult to understand."
>
> "You mean their hetero-sexuality?" Ric said it bravely, for it was really rather an unpleasant word.
>
> Jussie nodded. "You see, it means – oh dear, not so much the men, perhaps, but a woman actually admiring, touching, being touched by – so disordered!"
>
> "It happened in history," said Ric soberly, "and not so far back either, before Solution Three, the great step in human knowledge and control." But why be so pompous! "You must have read about it."
>
> "I hate reading about it – these dreadful external sex organs!" said Jussie, and then, "Oh Ric, I do apologise, I never think of you as a male, but I suppose you're bound to have them."
>
> "I know, I know," said Ric soothingly, "but there are bits of you that flop, Jussie, if you don't mind my saying so."

In its context this cosy yet irritable conversation is unusually spirited, for the speakers are Councillors in the post-Aggression world. The Council regulates the population by enacting a series of Solutions. Consequently, everyone has sufficient living space. There are no grand passions – heterosexual love is taboo, open homosexuality is the common pleasure, and "caring" is more important than lust. Most humans are willingly obsolescent (except for the eccentric Professorials, who are friendly critics of the régime, and the backward peoples in places like Outer Mongolia, who do not know any better). Humanity is making way for a new generation of clones, the future leaders of the world. Leadership is to be entrusted to clones because they are all built in the image of He and She, who saved humanity after the Aggression and emerged as Adam and Eve prototypes, reversing the old story by falling from the corruption of the old world into the innocence of the new.

So, rather ingeniously, the gods are preserved incarnate, by cloning. It is a good idea for a novel, and the clones are certainly "good types". However, they are no more real than the future-lit faces of young pioneers on Chinese posters, or than the smile at the door when a Mormon salesman knocks. I cannot help wondering how their originals, He and She, grappled so successfully with the complex aggressions of earlier times, and am reminded of Pyle, Greene's "Quiet American".

The book does not have much plot. Instead, it is a slice of future life in a society on the verge of change. The clones have created a problem simply by being, like some pedigree racehorses, too excellent. The human plight in the book is paralleled by the food problem – superproductive crops have been bred but they have lost some of their old hardihood and are vulnerable to unforeseen viruses. If the society is to survive, new blood is needed. At heart, Naomi Mitchison is optimistic, and she closes the book with the suggestion that her society is flexible enough to rescue itself. She implies that the fittest of one era cannot necessarily cope with the problems of the next, and that there are no Final Solutions.

Many of the background details in *Solution Three* are reminiscent of *Brave New World,* although Naomi Mitchison's world is more temperate and rose-coloured than Huxley's. That they share similar concerns may not be coincidental, as they were close friends, exchanging letters about liberty and private property. Naomi Mitchison is the daughter of the eminent scientist, J.S. Haldane, and she has said that when she was a young girl Huxley often visited the house. He did not kiss her, but "He threw open a whole world to me . . . He knew an amazing amount about all the arts and took them seriously in a way that was tremendously encouraging to me in our somewhat anti-art Oxford home". While she learnt literature from Aldous, he was picking up science from her father. (See *Aldous Huxley Vol I* by Sybil Bedford, Chatto and Windus.)

Huxley, in his Foreword to *Brave New World,* describes the social engineering, "the deep, personal revolution in human minds and bodies", necessary to make people love their servitude. He says that the preconditions are: (1) a greatly improved technique of suggestion; (2) a fully developed science of human differences; (3) a substitute for alcohol and other narcotics; (4) "a foolproof system of eugenics, designed to standardise the human product and so to facilitate the task of the managers". Naomi Mitchison, in her book, concentrates particularly on the first and last. But she does not have Huxley's bitter humour and, although she describes the idea of the book as "horrid" in her dedication, she is surprisingly goodhearted. She recognises the dangers of breeding out too many genes in the pursuit of human perfection, but the Council members, the managers of social policy whom Huxley so distrusted, are tolerant and well-intentioned souls. Her objections to the society she creates are ambiguous. Sometimes she hints that the problems of her society could be straightened out by a few scientific adjustments. She does not often question the political assumptions of such a eugenically oriented world.

Unlike Huxley, she neglects the political issue by confining her characters to the élite Council members, administrators, and clones. Some deep social tensions are reported at second-hand by her characters, in "There's trouble at t'mill" fashion, but she never directly describes these conflicts. Although there is much amiable discussion of problems between Council members, this is as unsatisfactory as describing English life solely by reporting chitchat between Tory and Labour members drinking at the Parliamentary Bar.

Certain other curious aspects of her society are never fully explored. For instance, the clones are said to solve the "identity crisis", presumably the stress of alienation created, before the Aggression, by urban overpopulation. How could clones solve an identity problem, unless they had no identity, being brainless cells in the social organism? My idea of hell is to be surrounded by peers and siblings made in my image. I would fall to my knees and worship them in a narcissistic frenzy, or punch in their faces self-destructively, but cannot imagine being "just good friends" with

them.

Naomi Mitchison is likeable because she warmly considers the sexual possibilities of her society. Most science fiction writers, especially men, neglect this area, while the relationship between the hero and heroine (if she exists at all) tends to be as tired as a frozen chicken. However, I am not entirely convinced by the sexual behaviour described in *Solution Three.* One of the characters says:

> When that age-old sexual aggression changed to non-aggressive love of man for man and woman for woman, overt aggression dropped in the same curve as the still dropping popu-curve.

The notion that homosexual love is somehow cooler than its heterosexual equivalent is too Platonic for me to grasp. Why discriminate between hetero and homo? Why should one relationship be strewn with pitfalls of passion while the other is pure and controlled? In fact, the characters begin to recognise the falseness of this distinction for themselves, but their strange belief has nevertheless been instrumental in shaping their society.

Further, Naomi Mitchison tells us that love in her society is non-aggressive, so implying that romantic passion does not exist there. Given that romantic love is a modern phenomenon, not an innate human tendency, unpossessive love is no doubt possible. Romantic love has been variously described, but seems to be a rough-and-ready mingling of sexual appetite, desire for affection, and enjoyment of conquest, while it thrives on obstacles, and illusions of the ideal mate. The last few elements have apparently been abolished in Naomi Mitchison's welfare state. People are generous and co-operative, private property and, presumably, the profit motive have been wiped out, and so it is theoretically tenable that the urge to conquer in love is diminished, and that the acceptance of sexual freedom (within homosexual limits) inhibits the obsessions of unconsummated passion. However, Ms. Mitchison does not really test the unpossessive nature of her characters' liaisons. They love or have affairs, and some then go away or die, leaving their partners to grieve, but she reports no cases of infidelity, so we never really know whether jealousy, surely one of the most consuming forms of aggression, exists.

Naomi Mitchison has drafted a blue-print of her society, but she has not quite realised it. There is not much characterisation and action. The dialogue, which is abundant, tends to be bland or cloying. She provides too much explanatory material, and each explanation raises more questions. There is a wealth of detail, but it is sometimes disorderly and confusing:

> Elissa responded with a quick hand between Jussie's legs, but just as a greeting. Really, she had hoped that Mutumba would notice her, but Mutumba was talking to Stig and Andrei and only smiled briefly and in an un-lit-up way at Elissa who was, all the same, one of the brightest of the younger Councillors and had produced some exceedingly good ideas while business was on.

It is rather unfair to pick on one section like this, but such passages are common, and I found myself counting the characters on my fingers in order to remember who was what. But to be fair, Mitchison has created large artistic problems for herself. How do you characterise identical clones? How do you dramatise a society where passion is anathema?

# will harrison defeat the technocrats?

**The Machine in Shaft Ten, and Other Stories**
by M. John Harrison *(Panther, 1975, 174pp, £0.50, ISBN 586 04191 5)*

## reviewed by Angus Taylor

"To speak is to act; anything which one names is already no longer quite the same; it has lost its innocence." In a sentence Sartre describes the commitment of every writer – a commitment that may be conscious or unwitting. This commitment is always made relative to the historical moment, and implies a belief about the position of the writer's society in time. To maintain that the writer can in some fashion transcend time and offer a view of mankind from a universal perspective is merely naive, though such an assertion is not out of keeping with the mood of the present. Today the rejection of any positive belief in the future is positively fashionable in western societies.

After the Second World War the United States emerged as the world's richest and most powerful nation. With the successful reconstruction of Western European economies, it appeared that the capitalist states had overcome the crises of depression and war. Now, led by the U.S., and with Keynesian techniques of government intervention at hand to stabilize economic growth, the way seemed clear for unlimited material development. The old political arguments about the best way to organize society seemed to many to have been resolved. The motor of progress had been constructed and installed in the vehicle of state; the only job left for the mechanics of government was keeping the thing oiled and in good running order – "fine tuning" the economy, and so on.

This is the context in which the "end of ideology" school of thought emerged in political science – and which remains particularly noticeable today in a strain of American social forecasting that includes such men as Daniel Bell, Emmanuel Mesthene, and Buckminster Fuller (not to mention Arthur C. Clarke in Britain). The end of ideology implies an end to passion and transforming visions and their replacement by pragmatism and piecemeal solutions; by freezing history it offers an apology for the rise of a technical meritocracy within the old socio-economic framework (see, for example, Bell's recent work, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*).

Now, while this technocratic perspective has been rampant in science fiction, at least from the advent of Gernsback to the passing of Campbell, it came under considerable attack in the 1960s, a time of great political unrest in society at large. The attack of this sf avant-garde, lumped generally – though not always with acquiescence – under the "New Wave" label, has rejected the assumptions of the old sf. Yet in one important respect it has failed to fulfil its promise, for it has for the most part not been able to offer a corrective for the essentially static, extra-temporal bias of the technocracy. Its answer has been to oppose this with a human-oriented literature, but one that exists outside the historical moment. Ballard's catastrophe novels are of the essence here, excising themselves from history through the convenient intervention of a nature bent on reclaiming its own from the

machinery of human society.

"We have no meaning – and thus, thankfully, no more illusions – left to lose." The final line from the title story, "The Machine in Shaft Ten", sets the tone for this collection by M. John Harrison. Like various other of the field's younger writers, Harrison seems to have abandoned any pretence at an objective assessment of the world in favour of a radical subjectivity centred on the alienated individual. It is this perspective that I find of questionable merit. Let it be said to begin with that Harrison displays talent, and his refusal to employ the formula thinking of the old sf must be counted an advance. But is it enough to stop at this point, leaving the technocratic opposition in possession of the rest of the field?

Harrison still seems in the process of finding his own mode as a writer – an idea suggested by the several approaches seen in these stories. "The Lamia and Lord Cromis" – a carefully wrought (possibly overwrought) sword-and-sorcery fantasy – shows us that Harrison can have a nice way with language. Tracking the monster gives our heroes time to polish their memories and brood over their impending fates:

> And as the ritualistic syllables rolled, Cromis found himself sinking into a reverie of death and spoliation, haunted by grey, translucent images of the dead merchant in his desecrated chamber, of telescopes and strange astrologies.

Though I'm not quite sure what "grey, translucent images" are, it seems there's a poet trying to break loose here; unfortunately this is followed almost immediately by sentences like:

> Deep in the Marsh, the path wound tortuously between umber-iron bogs, albescent quicksands of aluminium and magnesium oxides, and sumps of cuprous blue or permanganate mauve fed by slow gelid streams and fringed by silver reeds.

This sounds less like a poet and more like a mad chemist. Meanwhile, we are told, "bold green and ultramarine" dragonflies prey on "whining ephemera and fluttering moths of april blue and chevrolet cerise." (A "Chevrolet Cerise", you will no doubt recall, is what Buddy Holly was presented with by adoring fans after "Peggy Sue" made it to Number One – Or was it a blue Cuprous?) The trick in this kind of story, apparently, is to try to create atmosphere by never employing a common word where a more obscure synonym can be found. This applies especially to colours, which should be used as often as possible for descriptive purposes, but without actually repeating oneself. Indeed, this particular story may be an example of intelligent parody, but this raises the question: at what point of imitation may a send-up become a form of flattery? What audience does the writer intend to reach?

Then again, in "Running Down", the longest in the collection, we meet the good old English drawing-room tale, descended no doubt from H.G. Wells via John Wyndham, and appropriated in his own distinctive way by Ballard. You know, those stories where events, no matter how improbable, are always recounted in a frightfully sensible manner; characters all call each other by their last names, and go around at crucial moments saying things like "For God's sake, Billingsworth!" Though, when used for less serious purposes, this style can be worked to lovely effect, as in the title story:

> Although I was later to become intimately involved with Professor Nicholas Bruton and the final, fatal events at the base of Shaft Ten, I was prevented by a series of personal disasters from taking much interest in the original announcement of his curious discovery at the centre of the earth. A copy of *National Geographic* containing the profes-

sor's immaculate geological proof of the presence of an "emotion converter" buried at the core of our planet lay unread on my desk for a month . . .

As for the collection as a whole, the dominant impression is less of tongue-in-cheek than of striving-for-effect. The reader is struck by (in addition to an excess of words beginning with "ecto-") an excess of crippled or mutated beings, ruined cities at the end of time, and so on – all those pretty, fragile, enervated fantasies of a new *fin de siècle* mood (a bit ahead of schedule perhaps), the intellectual and literary equivalents of the death-and-destruction extravaganzas now regaling the common folk in the cinemas. Mark Geston did this whole thing much better in *Out of the Mouth of the Dragon*, giving it an edge of hardness and pain that lifted it above the merely decadent. Harrison's stories are filled with people who have lost a sense of direction in their lives; we are even given a seabird "in search of something it probably can't even define to itself". The complexity of life is overwhelming: "Every action presents myriad side-effects, which are unpredictable. I cannot make a decision for fear of its unnoticed, incalculable results." No doubt this is why death or hallucination seems preferable.

As a critic, Harrison has bemoaned sf's becoming "a literature of comfort", yet his answer to the rugged comfort of the space operas seems to be a comfortable world-weariness, a kind of smug pessimism. As he says of one of his characters: "He was strangely unmoved by the knowledge that he had exchanged one neurosis for another, a frenetic maelstrom for a degenerate stasis."

It is a truism that science fiction is in a sense synonymous with change, that it has evolved in concert with the rapid changes in the social order initiated with the Industrial Revolution. This is inherent in the functional orientation of the literature – its concern with sociological as contrasted with more strictly individualistic processes its assumption of the mutability of the individual's social context. And yet in its formal manifestation, science fiction's non-mimetic approach, its other-wordly guise, can become the temptation, or the excuse, for an a-historical perspective. The future, like the past, becomes the realm of "once upon a time". Far from being the mirror of the possibilities of the present, the work of science fiction retreats into mere negation. Thus even the writer who rejects the easy assumptions dictated by the dominant culture may, by rejecting the historical time of which that culture forms a part, lose his ability to criticize those assumptions in a meaningful way. In so doing the writer becomes "a rebel, not a revolutionary".

This is the danger – the trap that science fiction lays. But it can be avoided; entrapment is not inherent in the structure of the medium. It is encouraging to catch a glimpse in his final story, "Coming from Behind", of a tougher, more upbeat Harrison, who has junked the excess verbal baggage and opted for a little hard-nosed optimism. Language here is used with more restraint, and when he refrains from trying to dazzle his readers, those carefully planted, specially polished phrases begin to shine through. "The master berates his lazy craftsmen if they are slothful at the wheel. In the autumn field, new smoke rises" announce the Nastic overlords, and in the bleak context of work camps, wrecked transport vehicles and guerrilla warfare the words leap out in their strangeness, casting new light on their surroundings. In this story the necessary negation of our world is completed by a reconstruction: the author addresses himself to the possibilities of the present, not to an eternal "once upon a time". Too little of recent sf even attempts to do this, though happily we have some notable exceptions, such as Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and Watson's *The Embedding*. Many persons, I suspect, would reject the polemical tone of *The Dispossessed*. But then this is a question that has to be faced

by writers and critics: what is the responsibility of the sf writer at this moment in history? To quote Sartre again, "It is not a matter of choosing one's age but of choosing oneself within it."

# NW keeps on trucking

**New Worlds 9**
edited by Hilary Bailey *(Corgi, 1975, 219pp, £0.50, ISBN 0 552 10022 6)*

## reviewed by Colin Lester

Not having tried them before, *New Worlds* has shuttled over to Corgi for no. 9 of its present series in the paperback book format, and has taken its typo troubles along. Particularly annoying are the eccentrically-placed commas, which are so ubiquitous that at one point I wondered if it was editorial policy to stimulate our alertness through irritation.

The magazine continues, however, to present some very good writing, concerned both with future societies and with the deeps and twists of the human mind. In this issue the two critical pieces are placed at the end, so that one doesn't get tricked into starting either of them as a story: easy to do with *NW* criticism. There's no poetry, a sad lack; no editorial or notes on contributors, either. If Ms. Bailey doesn't want to say anything to us herself that's fair enough, but a note on any writer who hasn't appeared previously in *NW* would be useful.

Keith Roberts's "Ministry of Children" uses as background a near-future extrapolation of some social and educational trends, notably increasing size and anarchy in comprehensive-type schools. His writing is so good that the exaggeration of these trends is barely perceptible. The treatment of Properjohn's character is, however, noticeably light where it needs to be weighty. It is never easy to depict a character believably both in high office and among family and friends, though we might learn from nineteenth-century writers like Trollope. Properjohn is a convincing man but not a convincing Minister. His character, and the political sub-plot of which he is part, need to be expanded, given more weight and background, if we are to believe in them.

In the foreground, Roberts gives s subtle and sympathetic study of a young girl maturing from pastoral romanticism to acceptance of risk, violence, and manipulation. The suspense is well controlled and the ending ambiguous but satisfying. Altogether a delightful read, as one would expect from Mr. Roberts.

The second story, the longest of the eight fiction pieces, is another Moorcock "Tale of the Dancers at the End of Time", called "Ancient Shadows". It plays out a dialogue between the major and minor hemispheres of the brain. His female protagonist comes from a Puritanical, superrational totalitarianism into the epitome of luxury and freedom. The conflict between the world encapsulated in her well-developed sense of duty, and the temptations of affluence, centres on her son. The problems of and for this type of psyche are treated with remarkable respect by the author, given his clear preference in the opening scene.

There is an obvious applicability of the story's dialectic to some of our own social situations, and in particular to relationships between generations, and between dif-

ferent cultural systems. The underlying appeal is for tolerance and understanding. But Moorcock is at least as interested in colourful writing. His control of varying tones (including a well-made passage of authorial interjection) shows a competence not always evident in his work.

The short piece by Joanna Russ, "Daddy's Girl", is a half-personal, half-archetypal, but always intimate study of a woman's place in modern family and social relationships. It is rendered as an impressionistic sub-conscious progression through male-dominated adolescence, from one sort of female (relative) freedom to another. The style is difficult to penetrate, and the attitudes towards domination are sometimes ambiguous. but this is apt and doubtless intentional. The ending is certainly decisive and pertinent. This story is neither sf nor fantasy, but that's of no consequence.

John Sladek's "The Hammer of Evil" is fashioned into sf by the inclusion of invading Acamarians. No-one actually *says* they're extra-terrestrials, though they're damned sinister . . . but again, it doesn't matter whether they're e.ts. or not. Much more important to the story is Magritte, and the logical and ethical paradox-mongers who apparently save the world from invasion – the narrator's world, that is. And since the story is a surrealistic collage, that may be all there is. It's an entertaining story, but ultimately unsatisfying, for it doesn't stimulate the curiosity, nor direct the imagination any particular way.

Brian Aldiss presents three one-act plays collectively entitled "Patagonia's Delicious Filling Station". They form something of a satire on civilized attitudes and created environments, with some hilarious word-play and strong absurdist tendencies. They read like a Günther Grass play, but wouldn't act so well (probably they're not intended to). The well-caught characters, and certain phrases and themes, pop in and out of the scenes as though the trilogy were strewn with shards of mirror. An entertaining, lightweight piece of dialogue rather than drama.

The remaining fiction contains a Charles Partington thriller flawed by turning into fantasy at the end, and an elegant parody by Matthew Paris, in which the author succumbs to the parody just as his protagonist gets caught by what he's investigating.

M. John Harrison's lively and enthusiastic critical piece, "Sweet Analytics", ends as it should start. Through most of the article he argues with scant coherence against the new myths undermining society: "logic has ceded its place to cheap fantasy and cheaper superstition . . . science fiction has replaced science fact, and thus become its own subject matter." Certainly here reason has ceded its place to sparkle, and insight is replaced by vague and easy attribution: " 'conservationism' . . . is in fact Conservatism in a new guise." Harrison attaches an inflated importance to the new fantasies. In the last, sane, paragraph he admits that their followers are a minority, yet avers that their myths are "suddenly gaining currency as a means of managing the real world". To take his heated arguments seriously we need to be shown that this is true, but it is only an assumption in the article before that last paragraph. There, he states his case carefully and reasonably. Had it opened and given its tone to the article, it might have stimulated the reaction it calls for: "we ought at least to give some thought to the misuse of fantasy."

The first page of John Clute's article/review "Trope Exposure" is enough to generate chaos in anyone semantically south of Buckminster Fuller. Self-indulgent, whimsical, full of clumped and clotted prose, it only becomes marginally comprehensible half-way down p.217 – which is a good place to begin finding out about the 1954 film *Them*. For Clute is perceptive, clever, informed, and stylistically-inimitable. Would that he were only three of those.

Much of the above comment is pedantic. *New Worlds* is still a forum for much of the best speculative writing now being done in English, and the encouragement given by Ms. Bailey to contemporary writers deserves the thanks of critics, readers, and publishers alike. There is encouragement for illustrators, too. In *NW9* the two illustrations by Judith Clute are splendid; the ones by Keith Roberts and Richard Glyn Jones are fine; Jim Cawthorn's three are slightly disappointing. The Corgi cover is nowhere credited, though it is most striking and must have been a good sales stimulus. The tendency to omit credits for cover artists is widespread, and must be deplored.

# illustration, art, or cosmic kitsch?

**Science Fiction Art**
compiled and introduced by Brian Aldiss *(New English Library, 1975, paperback, pp128, £2.95, SBN 450 02772 4)*
**Fantastic Science-Fiction Art**
edited with an introduction by Lester Del Rey *(Ballantine Books, New York, 1975, paperback, ppxiv, 40 plates, $5.95, SBN 345 24731 0 595)*
**The Fantastic Art of Frank Frazetta**
introduction by Betty Ballantine *(Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1975, hardcover, ppx, 40 plates, $10.00, SBN 0 684 14416 6)*
**One Hundred Years of Science Fiction Illustration**
by Anthony Frewin *(Jupiter Books, 1974, hardcover, pp128, £3.95, SBN 0 904041 042)*
**The Science Fiction Book: An Illustrated History**
by Franz Rottensteiner *(Thames & Hudson, 1975, paperback, pp160, £2.50, ISBN 0 500 27060 0)*
**2,000 A.D.: Illustration From The Golden Age of Science Fiction Pulps**
by Jacques Sadoul *(Souvenir, 1975, hardcover, pp176, £4.50, no ISBN number given)*

## reviewed by Peter Nicholls

The coffee table science fiction book had to arrive, and here it is – a platoon of them. All these six books (considering how much art books often cost these days) are generously priced, and offer ample value for money. The Aldiss compilation, *Science Fiction Art,* is a definite Best Buy in terms of square inches of picture: there are 128 pages in large format (14¾ x 10 3/8 inches) for only £2.95. It is also a Best Buy when judged by more exacting standards, but more of that later.

First, I'll tell a relevant anecdote. In 1974 I contracted with Thames and Hudson to edit a book to be called *Science Fiction and Art,* to be released in conjunction with a major exhibition of sf art to be held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts as part of their Science Fiction Festival, in January 1975. However, this exhibition would have cost around £20,000 to put together, and after a year of frustrating haggling, the Arts Council (which was suffering from a cutback in Government funds) decided in 1974 not to let the I.C.A. have even half that amount – a great pity. Thames & Hudson took fright at this cancellation and in spite of the sizeable advance already made to the I.C.A., decided to drop the project.

(They did consider going ahead anyway, but on the basis of six completed chapters [by myself, Sir Roland Penrose, Brian Aldiss, Roger Cardinal, Ted Polhemus and Peter Cook] they felt that I had insufficiently exercised any editorial co-ordination, and that each chapter seemed to be going off in a different direction. They were right, of course, although I don't believe they ever understood what a heterogeneous thing science fiction is, let alone sf art, which is even less suceptible to neat categorizing.)

My never-finished and never-published book did not assume that the sf magazine illustrations were the beginning and end of the story. Two thirds of the book looked both sideways and backwards, at contemporary art influenced by sf themes, and at some artists of the past who seemed to me to be part of the same continuum to which sf magazine art belongs. I justified these latter inclusions as follows: (excerpt from Introduction):

> Looking at the settings of sf films and the illustrations to the pulp magazines, one could recognize recurrent themes whose history in the world of visual art was both ancient and continuing. Here one caught reflections (maybe accidental or unconscious) of a Grunewald, there of a Bosch; here of a Fuseli or a Victor Hugo, there of a Dali or a Magritte; here of a John Martin and there of a Piranesi; here of a Da Vinci and there of a Buckminster Fuller . . . There was an obvious danger. Once we began admitting the great names of the past (or, come to that, such great names of the present as Picasso or Dali) it might easily seem that we were involved in a piece of shameless Empire building – and a shoddy, jerry-built Empire at that . . . But if we co-opted Bosch or Grunewald into a tradition of art which can (with hindsight) be seen as science fictional in its emphasis, we would not be rewriting history – simply adding to it. Bosch was a religious painter whose subjects were sin, virtue, judgment and apocalypse. I didn't want to deny that. But equally, he was fascinated by technology, by the creation of other worlds and by physical metamorphosis – in short, by many of the themes which we now recognize quite happily as science fictional . . . Science fiction itself incorporates a great many themes which in terms of the history of literature are each individually older than science fiction itself is usually said to be. And these, I discovered, are identical with many of the traditional themes of visual art – precisely those themes that give the work of Bosch or Dali, Piranesi or Max Ernst, its haunting familiarity to me – a kind of retrospective dèjá vu."

I go into this detail to declare my interest (not for purpose of self-advertisement), and also to state as strongly as possible why I find each of the six books considered here to be somewhat incomplete, though only in the subjective sense that none of the compilers has produced the book that would most have interested me. To restrict the *idea* of sf art to the magazines – even including films, as Rottensteiner does – is, by implication, to deprive it of all but a very immediate context.

Even in narrow genre terms, these books are incomplete, though perhaps necessarily so. For example, the magazine illustrations of the 30s and 40s make more sense if seen along with other magazine illustrations of the period, as the pop artists of the 50s – I'm thinking of, say, Hamilton's and Paolozzi's collages, some of them now to be seen in the Tate – always did see them. Bergey's cover dollies (or later, Frazetta's) are not *sui generis*. Their precise charm is that they typify so exactly the fantasies of their period. On the other hand, one could hardly expect Lester Del Rey to incorporate items from *Ladies Home Journal* or *Screen Gems* for purposes of contrast. But my point remains, that science fiction art is not, any more than science fiction itself, an enclosed and self-defining genre.

And so to the books themselves. The most publicized, and most disappointing, is Rottensteiner's *Science Fiction Book*. I still don't understand why Rottensteiner wrote it, or Thames and Hudson published it. In the latter case, the attraction was presumably the visual material, but this is randomly organized, almost totally dis-

connected from the text (there's no evidence that Rottensteiner himself is really interested in the visual side of things), and shows no visible principle of selection. Insofar as the text has a coherent argument, it is about literature and not art, and the pictures are a mere decorative irrelevance, taking up the valuable space that Rottensteiner so patently needed for the proper organization of his material, which is scrappy and far too brief as it stands. The book design is elegant, and the colour printing seems truer (where the same picture appears in several of the books) than most of the competition, despite the fact that the paper is not nearly as fine, say, as that used in the Frazetta book, or Del Rey's compilation. But the pictures (which occupy 4/5ths of the book) are chosen, in almost every case, merely because they illustrate a story mentioned in the text. Few of them are discussed *as* pictures.

There are various methods of organization that can be used in such a picture book. Aldiss, for example, groups pictures by themes, and also by artist; Sadoul uses themes also; Lester Del Rey uses a chronological system. Each of these methods allows the reader to consider the development of sf iconography as an art form. The Rottensteiner method, grouping magazine pictures and film stills according to the author being illustrated, has no intellectual justification at all.

Some of his other techniques have no justification either. Although the book has a copious and useful bibliography, it does not acknowledge the copyright ownership of any of the pictures. Sometimes, of course, this is impossible to trace, as Aldiss remarks in the graceful and fair-minded acknowledgement to his book. However, it can not have been very difficult for Rottensteiner to locate the copyright holder of, for example, the art work appearing in *New Worlds* of the last eight years. I understand that no permissions were asked, in these cases at least. Mal Dean's widow was not contacted about the use of her late husband's work. Richard Glyn Jones did not know his illustration ( a very fine one) was to be used until he picked up a copy of the book in a shop. Does the contempt which Mr. Rottensteiner so regularly shows for the writers of science fiction extend also to the artists, that he regards them (apparently) as devoid of legal rights? (Thames and Hudson rectified the situation after protests were made -- the fault was probably not theirs anyway -- but only after the book had been on sale for several weeks.)

The paradox of this book is that although a preference is clearly stated in the introduction for rigorous critical standards in the judging of science fiction, the book book itself evinces no intellectual rigour at all. The procedure is, in fact, intellectually contemptible. The text wavers between the feeble recapitulation of plot and theme, and unsubstantiated dogmatic assertions as to quality, with *no* attempt, no matter how primitive, to justify any of the judgments by reference to his source material.

The book calls itself a history. This is quite untrue -- the material is completely fragmented, and organized neither according to chronology nor thematic continuity. There is no sustained argument at all. Also, perhaps to justify his contempt for the genre, Mr. Rottensteiner continually chooses its worst rather than its best examples, very often from fantasy and horror rather than science fiction proper. There are several pages for Merritt, Lovecraft, Gernsback, Doc Smith, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and John W. Campbell, but only a few lines for Dick, Le Guin, Blish, Aldiss, and Ballard. Some of his judgments *could* probably be justified -- I have never supposed Mr. Rottensteiner to be a fool -- but they *are* not, not even in his introduction, which is the best part of the book.

Mr. Rottensteiner has not exactly kept a low profile over the past few years. He has launched many a Teutonic attack on the low standards of science fiction,

and especially the low standards of critical discussion of science fiction. I've often enjoyed these, and occasionally been angered by them. But with this book he's lost much of his credibility, as many reviews in sf publications have cheerfully pointed out. When the caster of the first stone turns out to be even more sinful than the rest of us, it is not surprising that the spectacle of his face quite covered with egg should appeal to the risibility of the target class.

The case made out in Mr. Rottensteiner's introduction is, briefly and in a simplified form, that most science fiction is aesthetically inferior, but that it has considerable impact for "extraliterary" reasons. My own belief is that this won't do – it implies a crude distinction between form and content that doesn't really exist. The way a writer says a thing *is part of what he's saying.*

Mr. Rottensteiner's own aesthetic judgments certainly don't jibe with mine which is to say, more objectively, that his accusations of aesthetic inferiority (or occasionally of superiority) are not self-evident. I would agree when he says that there is "a prevalent taste for bad poetry" in sf (though as ever, no example is given). I find it all the more amazing then, that he later refers to "the consummate artistry" of Ray Bradbury. (Most of Dick, by contrast, he sees as of "inferior quality".) The brief chapter entitled "Why there is no sex in science fiction" (a misnomer, since it shows quite clearly that there *is* sex – but immature sex) almost makes some interesting points, but he doesn't think them through – as the single exception from this Jeremiad of Philip Jose Farmer (whom he sees as OK) suggests. In passing, he makes precisely the wrong judgment about Harlan Ellison, about whom, God knows, it isn't too difficult to make snide remarks. But to call Ellison "devoid of spontaneity"? Harlan may have faults, but I shouldn't have thought too much careful thinking before he spoke was one of them.

Jacques Sadoul's book, *2,000 A.D.*, has my nomination for second place among these books, just behind the Aldiss compilation. The text is naive, and does not even attempt critical distinctions except of the simplest kind – indeed, so far as the literature is concerned (as opposed to the art), Sadoul's taste is downright primitive, inclining towards "Hawk Carse" by Harry Bates (*Astounding*, 1931). The pictures, however, are splendidly chosen: grotesque, inventive, archetypal pulp at its best.

Most of the illustrations are in black and white; Sadoul has concentrated less on the covers and more on interior illustration than the other anthologists do. The British edition is not reproduced so well as the French edition of 1973. The colours lack saturation, and the contrast is lower in the black and white pictures, but the quality is still quite good. The range of magazines scanned seems to have been enormous, considerably greater than that of Del Rey, Frewin and Rottensteiner, and slightly greater even than that of Aldiss. The illustrations are organized according to such themes as "Cities of the Future", "Bestiary of Outer Space", and "Women of the Cosmos". This book is the best buy for anybody primarily interested in sf iconography as such, and not so interested in analysing the styles of individual illustrators. Sadoul's book, being the first, must necessarily have been a useful guide for those compilers coming after him. I would regard it (along with the Aldiss) as being one of the only two essential reference books of the six here reviewed.

Anthony Frewin's *One Hundred Years of Science Fiction Illustration* is more generous than most of these books with textual comment, enlivened with a ridiculous number of what could charitably be called typos, but look suspiciously like spelling mistakes. He writes with plenty of liveliness, and continuously makes a sprightly attempt to evaluate the pictures he gives us and put them in a context.

That is, he is a more intellectually adventurous spirit than, say, Del Rey or Sadoul. But his commentary is often silly, his grammar bad, and he has the habit of jazzing things up with a noisy rhythm section of mixed metaphor. In fact, he writes rather like an ad-man; there is no weight or depth to the text. In the context of many second-rate illustrations, reproduced in what looks like a slightly blurry litho, his comment that "Doré lacks conviction" as a fantasy artist is strange indeed. Doré is quite the most distinguished of all his selected artists.

The first three chapters begin a long time before the pulps, with Grandville and Robida getting a great deal of space. I can't enthuse very much about either of these illustrators, especially in the context of the really splendid engravings that were being produced for other fantasy books of the second half of the nineteenth century. Grandville's silly animals have more in common with Munchhausen than sf, but Robida, of course, is quite authentically a product of a technological age, and did for illustration very much what Verne did for literature.

The later chapters are mainly organized according to particular magazines, one on *Amazing*, one on *Astounding*, and one on the various popular mechanical magazines. Since the style of pulp illustration did not, in the thirties, vary widely from magazine to magazine, the result is a series of chapters all very much the same in content. Nonetheless, there are many mind-boggling pictures, and it was adventurous and stimulating of Frewin to begin his story in 1844 rather than the more conventional 1926.

By contrast, Lester Del Rey's *Fantastic Science-Fiction Art* is a slim volume indeed, containing a mere 40 plates. But they are in colour, on glossy paper, and the book is most attractive to handle. The introduction is low-key and informative, but very general. It would have been nice to see *much* more comment on the pictures. Del Rey restricts his selection to cover art only, with a massive emphasis on Frank R. Paul's work. These things are subjective, but I found quite a few of the pictures rather drab, not as colourful as in the other collections. (Incidentally, Del Rey attributes the famous rocket-ship Noah's Ark cover of *Startling Stories* Nov. 1949 to Earle Bergey, where Frewin and Aldiss opt for Howard V. Brown.) The emphasis is on thirties covers, with only the last six plates for the period 1950 to today. All the anthologists seem to concur with Del Rey in the largely unargued and unspoken assumption that the great days of sf art were the 30s and 40s. I'm not convinced that they were right. Part of the problem is that in the fifties, the emphasis began to shift away from the magazines, and onto paperback books. How much of this sense of things declining is nostalgia for sheer kitsch, and how much derives from a more objective aesthetic judgment? Aldiss opens the question without resolving it in the introduction to his book, referring to the "insipid good taste" of cover art from the fifties onward, and to a general "stagnation".

Nonetheless, in *Science Fiction Art*, Aldiss is more generous with post-fifties art work than any of the other anthologists (though Rottensteiner has a go, too). If all these anthologists *are* right, in supposing that the decadence has set in, how to explain it? None of them really tries. It's a paradox, if true, because there's no doubt that standards of commercial art in other spheres have seldom if ever been higher than today, at least on record sleeves, posters and book covers, and in magazine advertisements. Is sf really such a poor relation?

It's true that fantasy art in the 1970s has been much affected by a conscious (sometimes self-conscious) harking back to Art Nouveau, to book illustrators like Beardsley, Dulac, Rackham and Greenaway. This sort of style has not yet moved far into the rigidly conservative world of sf illustration *per se*, but it could be

argued that sf illustration still cleaves to a different kind of nostalgia just as intense (and not as decorative) as the current fad in other spheres for Art Nouveau and Art Deco. Frank R. Paul rules, OK? *New Worlds* magazine did make a valiant attempt to smash the ghetto walls in picture as well as word; it is sad that Aldiss gives only one example of its post-Carnell art, though that is the unforgettable Mal Dean cover to No.191, Cornelius, a grotesque colossus with a death-mask face, chewing a bone, bestriding the world.

The Aldiss book has by far the most interesting text, even though it is comparatively brief, and the pictures give evidence of a more catholic and discriminating taste than any of the other compilers. Aldiss is more aware of why these absurd pulp illustrations work so well, and occasionally analyses the "how" of it as well. Hovering in the background is the sense that he is aware of other traditions, of where all this stuff fits into the larger history of art, literature, and indeed, of human development. I'd like to have seen this background material more prominent, but at least the text is informed with a general sense of confidence and a great deal of vigour, and the reader is quite ready to accept Aldiss as an authoritative guide, whereas, with Sadoul or Frewin, the text too often stumbles helplessly about, and we feel the guides to be like new mini-cab drivers hoping for the best, with the road map only half digested in their minds.

Half of the Aldiss book is organized according to artist, and half according to theme, with a useful appendix on *all* the sf magazines, with a cover illustration from each. Both kinds of researcher, the biographical and the iconographical, will find this arrangement useful. The book should be a standard reference, especially for those who haven't the money or inclination to build up a pulp magazine library for themselves.

As a coda, we come to the very elegantly produced Scribner's book, *The Fantastic Art of Frank Frazetta.* Betty Ballantine's introduction is over-heated advertising copy rather than analysis. The Frazetta woman, for instance, is "a sorceress, a child, a woman; she is erotic, she is improbable and lovely, and very much alive". What Ms.Ballantine doesn't say, though in my view it explains part of Frazetta's inflated reputation, especially among "heroic fantasy" fans, is that Frazetta's woman is also a sado-masochist's fantasy come true. We see her half-naked, menaced by leopards, swamp-demons and wolves (boobs visibly heaving, thighs tense), or with a scaly serpent gripped in the cleft of an invitingly jutting pair of buttocks, or straddling a sabre-tooth tiger, or pursued by cave men. The reviewer doesn't know whether to turn pale or blush.

References to Frazetta in the fan press invariably stress his mastery of anatomy: simply not true. He specialises in rippling muscles, but his bodies are often deformed, and seen in inadequate perspective. They are wish-fulfilment figures which crudely suggest enormous strength or eroticism while, in actual fact, being like no human body is or should be.

The 42 colour plates are interesting though. There's enough material here for the cynical reader to analyse how Frazetta has won his reputation – the foreshortened perspective trick, the triangular composition trick, the brilliant foreground colours in heavy contrast with the background wash trick, the single harsh light source from behind the viewer's shoulder trick, and so on. It's all vigorous and amusing, shrewdly done, appealing to the most notorious teenage fantasies; commercial art, with the emphasis on the "commercial". It sells books. The animals are good.

This collection does not usually mention the source of the pictures, incidentally,

which is a little hard on the illustrated authors. Bob Shaw, reading the book over my shoulder, moaned "that's *my* spider" when I came to plate 10, and sure enough, there was a faithful rendition of a scene from *Night Walk*. I looked up the relevant passage, and found that Shaw had, in effect, given full instructions to the artist, right down to the ring of milky ichor. He said that seeing the picture there, his own invention quite uncredited, made him feel burgled. I can see why.

# technology's champagne

*(Editor's note: we do not usually print two reviews of the same book, but the uncommissioned review below arrived unexpectedly in nice time to complement my own note above on Brian Aldiss's* Science Fiction Art, *expanding points I only touched on.)*

## Angus Taylor

While employed at Toronto's *Spaced-Out Library*, which houses one of the largest collections of sf material to be found anywhere, I had occasion to catalogue the library's stock of magazines, and was dismayed to find many of the older pulps literally crumbling away beneath my hands. It was not the stories contained in these magazines for which I feared, but rather the magazines themselves, and in particular the cover and interior illustrations. Here was a whole world of dreams given visible form, a source of endless fascination and of historical significance, apparently doomed to disappear before many more years passed.

Happily, a small but significant portion of this artwork has been given a new lease of life by Brian Aldiss through the medium of a handsome, large-format, soft cover book from New English Library. *Science Fiction Art* contains an introduction and commentary by Aldiss on artists from Frank R. Paul to Ed Emshwiller; as distinct from recent books by Franz Rottensteiner and Anthony Frewin, it concentrates almost entirely on magazine illustration since 1926. Thirty artists are featured separately, and there are also sequences denoting principal themes, such as "Interplanetary Pets" (girls, that is) and "Delightful Doomsdays". Aldiss also adds a few pages from the old sf comic strips.

Aldiss is aware that what we have here is not simply a gallery of strange creatures, space cruisers, and starry-eyed inhabitants of glass-and-metal cities. What we have here, in addition, is a record of the impact of technological change on the popular mind: that is, not simply the future seen through the past, but also the past seen through the future. It is this latter aspect that constitutes the chief academic value of this book — for while there is precious little of futurological interest left in these old pictures (if indeed there ever was much), they provide us with a veritable goldmine of information on the hopes, fears, and obsessions of previous decades.

A few objections can be raised about *Science Fiction Art:* some, mere quibbles; others, perhaps, more important. I feel, for example, that Aldiss' selection of material does justice neither to Virgil Finlay nor to Hannes Bok. In particular, Aldiss should be given a severe reprimand for not including Bok's wonderful *F&SF* wraparound cover illustration for Zelazny's "A Rose for Ecclesiastes". And the Ed Emshwiller presented here is not sufficiently the Emshwiller I know: the artist of clean, almost geometrical precision. It would have been nice to see included the

delightful robots with which Emsh illustrated "Comic Inferno", a *Galaxy* story by one Brian W. Aldiss.

Reproduction of illustrations, both colour and black-and-white, is generally excellent. though there are occasional lapses of judgement: Frank Kelly Freas' superb *Astounding* cover painting showing a soulful robot holding in its palm a wounded man suffers from a loss of definition as the result of being enlarged. Various illustrations show cracks and tears – the inevitable damage of the years. However, there is really no excuse for using a damaged copy of a September 1962 *Analog;* copies of magazines from this period are still in relatively plentiful supply, for those who know where to look.

These qualifications borne in mind, however, *Science Fiction Art* is to be highly recommended. Both Aldiss and the book's publishers deserve high marks for undertaking this project, and for carrying it out so well. Of course, any selection of this type must necessarily limit not only the number of artists included, but the number of illustrations for each artist. I, myself, would be perfectly happy to see an entire book devoted to those artists like Robert Gibson Jones and Earle Bergey whose work graced the covers of *Startling Stories, Amazing Stories,* and *Fantastic Adventures* in the early 1950s – artists who, as Aldiss says, made "champagne of the myth of technological progress", and worked "in the stardusty void where astronomy. aspiration and Hollywood meet".

Well, we can't have everything at once. This book, however, is a good start – a museum of sf art that's well worth the price of admission.

# alienists meet the alien

**Introductory Psychology Through Science Fiction**
Edited by Harvey A. Katz, Patricia Warrick, and Martin Harry Greenberg *(Rand McNally, 1974, viii + 510pp, £3.85, ISBN 0 528 62001 6)*

## reviewed by John Radford

Psychology through Science Fiction. In this journal it is hardly necessary to explain the second half of the equation. But it may be as well to say that Psychology is most usually regarded as the science of behaviour and experience. In the nineteenth century it was just experience, and then for a long time it was just behaviour. But now it's both. For the record, psychiatry is the branch of medicine dealing with mental illness; and psychoanalysis is the psychiatric technique invented by Sigmound Freud; and members of all three persuasions get cross if you muddle them up. Quite right: I do.

Anyhow, Psychology is a very popular thing for students to study just now. In the United States, where this book comes from, it is thought more college students take at least one course in it than any other single subject. Science fiction is also fairly widespread, and this book puts the two together. After all, both deal with people. As a matter of fact there are similar couplings of sf with history, anthropology, sociology and I don't know what all. The general plan of this particular book is to explain, first of all, what Psychology is about. Then it is suggested how it relates to sf. The most general point seems to be that sf, through its interest in non-human beings, new worlds and the like, helps us to stand back and take a new

look at ourselves. More specifically, sf actually deals with many psychological phenomena such as drugs, conditioning, subliminal perception, hallucinations, creativity, etc. It also has an active interest in new scientific developments. It often raises ethical questions. And it encourages an active, questioning approach in the reader, useful in studying anything, particularly Psychology.

The body of the book comprises seven sections: psychobiology; the learning process; sensation and perception; social processes; developmental processes; personality; abnormal processes and therapy. Each includes a short run-down of what Psychology has to say and three or four sf stories each with an introduction picking out the psychological message. It would have been easy here to destroy the point of the story. In fact the editors have rather neatly avoided this, and the introductions and stories hang together well. On the whole, the sf is a good deal better than the Psychology. The latter is sound introductory stuff, not wrong but not inspired. The stories, all re-prints, range from the competent to the brilliant. Some, such as "Flowers for Algernon", have appeared many times. This doesn't matter too much here, on the assumption that most readers will not be sf fans. Even those who are, should find a good deal new.

The avowed intention, though, is to introduce students to Psychology, through science fiction. The simplest way to consider this – and this underlies some of the editorial introduction – is that sf sugars the scientific pill. This might be so, and no great harm in it. The more vexing question is how do Psychology and sf actually relate to each other. While not gainsaying the editors' points, there is a good deal more to it.

First of all the notion of a scientific Psychology is not simple. In the psychological sciences, the practitioners are part of their own subject-matter. Apart from the numerous technical problems this raises, logically it seems to rule out the possibility of a completely objective scientific account; for the scientist's subjective feelings must be part of what he is trying to be objective about, by definition. He can't leave them at home when he goes to the laboratory, as a physicist might at least try to do. And it seems to rule out any final or complete account of behaviour. For every explanation produced is itself an *explicandum*, a new piece of behaviour to be explained; and so on for ever.

I suppose that many scientists of all kinds have had at the back, or front, of their minds a sort of assumption that one day science will be complete. We shall know all that there is to know. Those who have thought about it at all have soon become disenchanted with this, and usually adopted Karl Popper's version: roughly, that while we can never be certain of reaching final truth, we can get *nearer* to a true account of reality. This we do by putting forward our best guesses – hypotheses – and holding onto them until they are disproved. Unfortunately this also runs into some nasty snags, one of which is that if there is no way of knowing when you reach the end, there is also no way of knowing when you are nearer. Given that a hypothesis is disproved, how to choose a new one from an infinite number of alternatives?

It is really no longer clear what science is. And thus it is not clear what science is, after all. William Atheling Jr. (James Blish) said that it is what we are pointing at when we say "that is Science Fiction". Theodore Sturgeon said that a good sf story " – is a story built around human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content". Now I suppose most people would point at Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, say, as sf, and not at *Lord of the Rings*. Indeed Atheling says of the former:

"The book is science fiction, as the opening sentence establishes firmly: 'Once upon a time there was a Martian named Valentine Michael Smith' ".

It is very hard to see where the science is in supposing there to be inhabitants of Mars; and Smith's superhuman powers are given no vestige of scientific justification, any more than Tolkien's out-and-out magic. Where the difference lies, I suggest tentatively, is that whereas Tolkien says that such-and-such happened, even though both he and we know this was not so (and we could, in principle, check this e.g. by archaeological evidence); what sf says is that such-and-such *might* happen (or have happened) – and these things are of an order that in principle cannot be checked. An infinity of possibilities is of the essence of sf.

But where do these possibilities come from? Clearly, from human minds. And if science is faced with the puzzle of infinite possibilities, *a fortiori* this is true of psychological science. As Psychology and sf face each other, the effect is of two opposing mirrors. Reality is lost in an ever-receding vista of reflections.

How to get out of the mirror-room is at present baffling. This book does not attempt to tell us, indeed it doesn't really venture inside. But it does nudge the door ajar. So to conclude: good stories, reasonable Psychology and, to change the metaphor, a chance of scientific vertigo along the way. I recommend it.

# critics dream of electric dick

**Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd**
edited by Bruce Gillespie *(Norstrilia Press, Melbourne, 1975, 106pp, $A3.50, ISBN 0 909106 00 2)*

## reviewed by Angus Taylor

This selection of pieces on Philip K. Dick, culled from the pages of the Australian fanzine *SF Commentary,* comes to us as the first offering from Norstrilia Press, founded by Bruce Gillespie and Carey Handfield. Containing in addition a short introduction by Roger Zelazny and a useful bibliography of Dick's works by Fred Patten, *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* presents a valuable and provocative handbook of comment and analysis by Gillespie, George Turner, Stanislaw Lem, and Dick himself. However, in view of the subject under scrutiny, it is perhaps only to be expected that we are given a collection of material varied in terms of length, approach, and quality. There is probably no other writer of science fiction whose work elicits such a wide range of reaction from readers, and who poses so opaque a subject for critics.

In George Turner we see an example of the intelligent reader who ferrets all sorts of surface details but is unable to penetrate into the heart of things. In Turner's case the problem seems to be his hang-ups with the "logical" consequences of various stage props, such as the reversal of time in *Counter-Clock World,* the effects of the drug JJ-180 in *Now Wait for Last Year,* and the half-life world of *Ubik.* His conclusion: "The plotting is neat but cannot override the paradoxes. The metaphor fails because it cannot stand against the weight of reality as we know it." The point is, does Turner really understand what the metaphors used by Dick *are*? The "weight of reality" for Turner seems to be something other than it is for Dick. The *heart* of things Turner glimpses only in passing: *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* is, "believe it or not . . . a novel about love." Apparently he is not

aware that *all* Dick's novels are about love. Or, as Dick has said, about "love and grief". Towards this central concern point all Dick's metaphors and devices: androids, schizophrenia, half-life, aliens, parallel worlds, entropy, talking machinery, determined little dark-haired girls. Turner can spot the lack of "realistic" background in Dick's stories, but cannot go very far by way of explanation: "If his puppets move in a vacuum, at least we are not distracted by irrelevancies. Dick unfolds a formula for a particular aspect of reality or unreality, the aspect he wishes to discuss". True enough, but what specific aspects does he wish to discuss? And, more relevant to his use of *manufactured, socially-based* environments, how is "reality" constructed and destroyed in Dick's scheme? To these questions Turner is unable to provide any satisfactory answers.

From Stanislaw Lem we get a fascinating appraisal of the general state of sf, and a perceptive look at the way Dick manages to employ all the stock "trashy" clichés of the genre while gloriously transcending them. Unfortunately, however, while Lem properly appreciates the metaphysical aspects of the struggle of Dick's characters against entropy – "a battle not only for their lives, but also to save the basic categories of existence" – he, too, fails to grasp the real importance for Dick of social interaction, and the extent to which this shapes his metaphysical pyrotechnics. Thus Lem ends by bludgeoning Dick over the head, with regard to *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, in retaliation for a crime that exists only in Lem's imagination. (He has simply failed to understand Dick's metaphor of the android.)

More fun to read are the long meditations of Bruce Gillespie. Gillespie doesn't attack a literary problem head-on, but prefers to ramble around the perimeter, trying out different perspectives, nibbling away at the thing, and then working his way in obliquely towards the centre. In this way the reader is given a guided tour of Gillespie's mind at work, as he struggles with the giant puzzle before him, trying to make sense of it all, trying to discover a coherent underlying structure. And to his credit, although he is one of Philip Dick's most ardent admirers and tireless boosters, Gillespie doesn't pull any punches when dealing with what he sees as shortcomings. Thus he doesn't hesitate to pronounce that "The first 40 pages of *The Zap Gun* are unreadable" and goes on to say that "there are pages of indecipherable and indigestible jargon . . . Sentences lie torn in half and bleeding at their syntactical joints." Yet Gillespie is prepared to defend the value of this novel, something he is not prepared to do with respect to *Counter-Clock World*, for example.

One of the interesting things about Dick's critics – even those distinctly sympathetic to him – is their inability to agree on which stories are good and which bad; what one praises as a masterpiece of the science fiction field will be casually dismissed as trivial by the next. No doubt this phenomenon can be at least partly explained by the different qualities being sought by each: what's precious metal to one is fool's gold to another. Bruce Gillespie has a particular Geiger counter for the nuances of language, a fact which makes him appreciative of Dick's unique brand of wit. On one level, at least, it seems safe to say that no one is likely to succeed as a critic of this author who fails to appreciate such lines as the following, which Gillespie quotes:

> Instant Ubik has all the fresh flavor of just-brewed drip coffee. Your husband will say, Christ, Sally, I used to think your coffee was only so-so. But now, wow! Safe when taken as directed.

For the student of Dick, however, the most valuable pieces in this book are the contributions of Dick himself: two letters and the text of "The Android and the

Human", a speech delivered in Vancouver in 1972. In these two short letters Dick shows that he is well aware of the themes underlying his work, and gives us a concise statement of his view of the construction and destruction of reality as a function of social organization in an unorganized universe. "Reality" here is something quite specific – susceptible of definition and investigation. There is the entropic reality of the physical universe, and there is the negentropic reality of the social universe. But above all it is the ability and responsibility of the individual human being that Dick affirms – reality as a human creation, as distinct from the common experience of reified reality. As he says in the Vancouver speech:

> I have never had too high a regard for what is generally called "reality". Reality, to me, is not so much something that you perceive, but something you make. You create it more rapidly than it creates you. Man is the reality God created out of dust; God is the reality man creates continually out of his own passions, his own determination. "Good", for example – that is not a quality or even a force in the world or above the world, but what you do with the bits and pieces of meaningless, puzzling, disappointing, even cruel and crushing fragments all around us that seem to be pieces left over, discarded, from another world entirely that did, maybe, make sense.

This other world is Dick's ideal, organized, humanly-constructed realm of the spirit – of God, not transcendent, external, or above the world, but immanent the full expression of the human potential. It is on this level that Dick the political-scientist/sociologist merges with Dick the religious prophet, for if we recognize in his work the concept of immanent divinity, then the religious and the political dimensions need not conflict. When humanity is God, then politics is religion. The struggle for ideal social relations is the struggle of mankind toward its Godhood. By penetrating the mystifications of various anti-human political orders, humanity can hope to organize the relations among its parts in an ideal, liberating manner, and thus manifest its divine, truly *human* nature.

# blurred physiognomy?

**Faces of the Future: The Lessons of Science Fiction**
by Brian Ash *(Elek/Pemberton, 1975, 213pp, £3.95, ISBN 0 236 31004 6)*

## reviewed by Douglas Barbour

*Faces of the Future* is one of those books which refuse easy classification; unhappily, it does not fully satisfy any particular readership, because it is too busy attempting to appeal to all of them. It is not a critical work, yet it discusses any number of sf works in a somewhat critical fashion. It is not another history of the genre, yet it attempts, in its first few chapters, to show the genre's precedents, its beginnings with *Frankenstein*, also Brian Aldiss's choice – and its slow maturation. It is not simply an attempt to popularize the genre, yet it fails to do much else, and often trivializes the works it attempts to discuss in any depth.

Nevertheless, this is not a completely bad book. Its overriding purpose is stated in the subtitle, "The Lessons of Science Fiction", and it is obvious Mr. Ash feels compelled to present these lessons to those members of the general public who do not reach much, if any, science fiction. It appears that he unconditionally accepts

Arthur C. Clarke's 1962 dictum that "only readers or writers of science fiction were really competent to discuss the possibilities of the future", and wishes to increase the number of people capable of such discussion by bringing them – neatly packaged – some of sf's better known ideas.

*Faces of the Future* can be seen, then, as an attempt both to present a popular version of critical work done by a number of more strictly academic studies (of which Mr. Ash lists only a few of those he used in his Bibliography) and to use sf's ideas in a *Future Shock* manner to inform his readers of the many changes the future holds for all mankind. This would be fine, if it didn't lead him to jump about so much from topic to topic and story to story, thus presenting a jumbled map of the genre.

In separate chapters he discusses such topics as "The Long Shadow of Wells", "Criticism of Progress", "The Failure of Utopia", "Deus ex Machina", "Beyond Humanity", "The Destruction of Time", "The Teacher and the Taught" (about encounters with extraterrestrials), and "Mythology is One" (about the religious dimension in sf). His discussions of books or stories I know invariably prove inadequate, telling me nothing I haven't already figured out for myself. When he deals with books or stories I do not know, all I learn is the idea behind it or the plot-twist upon which it is built. Moreover, I have caught him out a few times where his description of what a story is about simply fails to come to grips with the complexity of the material: his comment that positronic robots *never* fully come awake, therefore never become fully living beings, is beside the point, I think; and his statement that "Samuel R. Delany has conjured in *The Einstein Intersection* (1967) the collision in the far future of *an alien galaxy* with the Milky Way" surely misses it.

"The main purpose of this study", writes Ash, "has been to examine the social implications, whether intended or accidental, of those science fiction stories which can be deemed of serious content – and to draw what lessons we will . . . If it has not been entirely a comforting experience, that is a good enough reflection on the nature of the material under study." This is, I suppose, reason enough to write and publish such a book. My complaint is that the lessons have not been drawn with the clarity and complexity the best stories insist upon, nor has the nature of the material under study been explored with sufficient subtlety or understanding. I am left wondering, then, who can it serve?

*Faces of the Future* is, just possibly, a book to give to an intelligent *non-reader* of science fiction, in the hope that it will at some point excite his or her interest in some examples of the genre. To the informed and intelligent fan or student of sf, it has nothing to offer.

# books received

*A listing in this column does not necessarily preclude a full review in a later issue.*

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