Foundation 13

FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

13

IN THIS ISSUE

Special James Blish Section:
William Atheling Jr proposes a new definition of sf
Brian Aldiss and Brian Stableford assess Blish's career
Also:
Christopher Priest on being a "young" writer
Brian Aldiss, Richard Cowper and Thomas M. Disch on creativity
Letters from James Gunn, Thomas M. Disch and others
Book reviews by Bailey, Barron, Cleaver, Clute, Hay, Hutchinson, Jones, McKinney, Myers, Pringle, Shippey, Sladek, Stableford, Taylor and Watson
Of Books by Bainbridge, Dick, Fisk, Haldeman, Harrison, Hodder-Williams, Komatsu, Lanier, Moorcock, Nicholls, Panshin, Pohl, Shaw, Silverberg, Stapledon, Suvin, Vonnegut, Watson and others

FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

13

contents

Number 13, May 1978

PETER NICHOLLS	4	Editorial
		Features:
WILLIAM ATHELING JR	6	Probapossible Prolegomena to Ideareal History
BRIAN M. STABLEFORD	12	The Science Fiction of James Blish
BRIAN W. ALDISS	43	James Blish: The Mathematics of Behaviour
CHRISTOPHER PRIEST	51	The Profession of Science Fiction: XIII: Overture and Beginners

Letters:

JAMES GUNN 56 On the aesthetic fallacy

THOMAS M. DISCH 58 On dealing with rude correspondents

JAMES W. BITTNER 60 On Zamyatin and Huxley

ALAN MYERS 60 On Russian sf bibliography

RICHARD McKINNEY 61 On Roger Zelazny and Clifford Simak

MYKOLA RUDENKO and OLES' BERDNYK 63 On Soviet persecution of sf writers

Foundation Forum:

BRIAN W. ALDISS RICHARD COWPER and THOMAS M. DISCH 65 Problems of Creativeness

Reviews:

JOHN CLUTE 73 *The Jonah Kit* and *The Martian Inca* by Ian Watson

IAN WATSON 76 *SF in Dimension* by Alexei and Cory Panshin and *Farewell to Yesterday's Tomorrow* by Alexei Panshin

HILARY BAILEY 78 *The Year's Best Science Fiction No.9* ed. Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison, *Best Science Fiction of the Year 5* ed. Terry Carr, *Andromeda 1* ed. Peter Weston and *Travelling Towards Epsilon* ed. Maxim Jakubowski

BRIAN M. STABLEFORD 83 *The Adventures of Una Persson and Catherine Cornelius in the Twentieth Century* by Michael Moorcock

TOM SHIPPEY 84 *Hotel De Dream* by Emma Tennant and *Deus Irae* by Philip K. Dick and Roger Zelazny

BRIAN M. STABLEFORD 87 *A Scanner Darkly* by Philip K. Dick

TOM HUTCHINSON 89 *The Early Pohl* by Frederik Pohl

JOHN SLADEK 90 *Man Plus* by Frederik Pohl

BRIAN M. STABLEFORD	91	*Mindbridge* by Joe Haldeman
DAVID PRINGLE	93	*A Wreath of Stars* and *Cosmic Kaleidoscope* by Bob Shaw
ANGUS M. TAYLOR	95	*The Feast of St Dionysus* by Robert Silverberg
BRIAN M. STABLEFORD	98	*Slapstick* by Kurt Vonnegut
PAMELA CLEAVER	99	*Time Trap* by Nicholas Fisk, *Time at the Top* by Edward Ormondroyd, *Time Junction* by Helen Solomon and *Time Explorers, Inc.* by E.W. Hildick
JOHN CLUTE	101	*Japan Sinks* by Sakyo Komatsu
BRIAN M. STABLEFORD	102	*The Best From the Rest of the World* ed. Donald A. Wollheim
JOHN SLADEK	103	*The Peculiar Exploits of Brigadier Ffellowes* by Sterling E. Lanier
GEORGE HAY	104	*The Spaceflight Revolution* by William Sims Bainbridge
PAULINE JONES	106	*The Prayer Machine* by Christopher Hodder-Williams
ALAN MYERS	109	*Russian Science Fiction 1956-1974: A Bibliography* by Darko Suvin
RICHARD McKINNEY	111	*The Lifeship* by Harry Harrison and Gordon R. Dickson
BRIAN M. STABLEFORD	114	*Nebula Maker* by Olaf Stapledon
DAVID PRINGLE	115	*Time of the Fourth Horseman* by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro
BRIAN M. STABLEFORD	116	*Sociology Through Science Fiction* and *Social Problems Through Science Fiction* ed. John W. Milstead, Martin Harry Greenberg, Joseph D. Olander and Patricia Warrick
NEIL BARRON	119	*Science Fiction at Large* ed. Peter Nicholls

editorial

Peter Nicholls

This is my last Foundation. *I shall miss writing these editorials, with their by-now traditional, lame excuses for the irregularity of our appearances. Along with my colleagues Ian Watson, Colin Lester and David Pringle, I am responsible for the contents of this issue; the new editor (elected on January 12th, 1978) is Malcolm Edwards, and it is he who will be seeing it through the presses.*

I feel a little like a mother abandoning a baby on a doorstep, and may now go off to drink gin in a fit of maudlin repentance. There can be no more solid and efficient doorstep, however, than the new Foundation *committee, which also includes David Pringle, one of the finest of our regular contributors. I am sure they will give the child a good home.*

The story is simple. I left the Science Fiction Foundation, having given notice in September 1977 and officially terminated my contract on December 31st, neither wholly voluntarily nor wholly involuntarily. The polytechnic, where the SFF makes its home, showed no sign for many months of replacing either my Research Assistant or my secretary (both of whom left in February 1977). When the new academic year began in September, I was still expected by my employers to carry out the duties of three people – duties which include the editing of this journal – alone. In order to put moral pressure on the polytechnic to make good their promise of six months previously and hire new staff, I resigned. It was my intention to withdraw the resignation if the polytechnic acted, but in the event the taste of freedom was so exhilarating that even when the polytechnic promised, again, the authorisation of new staff, I let my resignation stand. The new Research Fellow, David Pringle, and the new Administrator, Malcolm Edwards, were engaged in December, and took up their duties at the end of January. Both of them were, at the same time, elected to the editorial committee of the journal, Mr Edwards as editor. I had been asked if I wished to continue in that capacity, but decided it was best to make a clean break.

I wish here to apologize to anybody who suffered from the inactivity of the SFF between August, 1977 and February, 1978. Such suffering would most probably have taken the form of letters unanswered, or journal subscriptions unprocessed. I make no excuses at all. I deliberately left the journal unproduced (even though final copy was nearly all in by July), and all but the most essential correspondence unanswered, for two reasons. The first was to put the utmost possible pressure on my employers to act swiftly and efficiently in finding new staff for the SFF; such pressure, I reasoned, would be increased by the consequent public complaints. This was a genuine motive, arising from a forceful conviction (which stops

just this side of being passionate) that the SFF is important; that we had the potentiality to act as an on-the-whole intelligent and balanced agency in a neglected area of literary studies. I believed that it would be a tragedy if the SFF were allowed to die, or, more probably, to putter along unevenly on two cylinders when it needed six.

My second motive was by no means so disinterested. By cutting my average working hours a week on behalf of the SFF from 60/70 down to around 25 – I still managed to organize a successful season of sf cinema at the National Film Theatre in London, and continue all my teaching – I freed myself for the job of editing The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction. *This is a freelance job, on which I make a small but real profit, but it is not disingenuous to claim that the work when published towards the end of 1978 will prove to be of some importance to the SFF and any other organization interested in the educational use of sf. So much for my uneasy blend of confession and self-justification.*

The political manoeuvre was successful. I apologize to all our readers; I used you as pawns in a routine establishment squabble. But the results are better than I could have hoped. David Pringle and Malcolm Edwards are two of the best-informed and most balanced sf experts in this country. Mr Edwards was for some years the much-praised editor of Vector, *the journal of the British Science Fiction Association. Mr Pringle was co-editor of the useful book* J.G. Ballard: The First Twenty Years. *Both have been associated with* Foundation *for several years. It now seems probable that we have a new broom sufficiently sturdy to sweep cleaner than the old broom ever managed. I believe that from now on subscribers to* Foundation *will be amazed at the regularity with which the journal comes through their letter-boxes, three times a year, at four-monthly intervals. I could never manage that.*

I managed something, though. Foundation, *during my association with it, has quadrupled its circulation, and come to be recognized in the UK and abroad as one of the livelier, more eccentric platforms for sf criticism. I am proud of it, and proud of this valedictory issue. I do apologize, however, to our contributors, some of whom have waited an unconscionable time to see their words in print.*

Many people have helped me in the production of Foundation *since I took it over in 1973. Special thanks are due to Christopher Priest and Ian Watson. Thanks are due to the readers, too; you have always managed to repair temporary deficiencies in our morale by the friendliness of your letters, and by a continuing loyalty to what we have tried to do which has resulted in subscriptions climbing ever upward despite irregularities in publication. There have been amazingly few cancellations.*

The first eight issues of Foundation *will be published, complete in a bound format with an introduction by myself, by Gregg Press in the summer of this year. We hope that all our institutional subscribers, many of whom have requested unobtainable back issues, take note. Readers might also note that the series of lectures the SFF sponsored in 1975, already published in hardcover as* Science Fiction at Large, *is now available in paperback from Fontana books as* Explorations of the Marvellous.

The Science Fiction Foundation has been effectively moribund for twelve months. There is every hope now that it will become more alive than ever before.

In Foundation 9, *in expressing our deep regret over the death of James Blish, we hoped that it would be possible in a future issue to print a proper assessment of his work, as well as the critical article which he was working on for us at the time of his death. Now, two years later, the majority of the Feature Section is given over to such an assessment, by Brian Aldiss and Brian Stableford.*

But Jim Blish himself, in his William Atheling Jr. persona, will have the first word. Long ago, in Foundation 4, *Peter Nicholls expressed a wish that William Atheling Jr. would produce some overview of the whole sf landscape. Rising to the bait at the time when we were first mooting* Foundation Forum, *Jim sent in a contribution taking a Spenglerian overview that is about as 'distanced' as can be imagined, aiming to set a (perfectly serious) cat loose among the sf pigeons. Illness prevented the expansion of some of the historical references, and a long editorial note has been inserted after due consultation of Spengler and some hefty encyclopaedias.*

probapossible prolegomena to ideareal history

William Atheling Jr

In this essay (which means "trial") I propose to do five things: (1) Define science fiction; (2) Show why it arose when it did; (3) Explain why it is becoming steadily more popular; (4) Demonstrate that just as it has thus far produced no towering literary masterworks, so no such work can be expected of it in the future, and (5) Place it as a familiar phenomenon in world history.

Nothing so much gratifies the critical temper as criticising other critics, regardless of the subject-matter they are all ostensibly examining.[1] To put my readers at their ease, then, I shall begin in this enjoyable mode.

ARCHAIC ZELOTYPIA AND THE ODIUM TELEOLOGICUM

As others have noted, both historians and creators of science fiction are often unusually eager to claim for it respectable ancestors, working backwards through Voltaire, Swift and Cyrano de Bergerac to Lucian of Samosata. Most recently, Peter Nicholls has carried this process probably as far as it can be made to go, by including in science fiction's family tree the epic of Gilgamesh, which seems to have been

composed a considerable time before the Sumerians discovered that they could produce serviceable laundry lists by biting spoiled bricks. It should be noted, however, that Mr Nicholls' ongoing critical history is a sophisticated one, so that his examples are not primarily ancestor worship or fake genealogy; among other things, he is instead out to show certain traits and states of mind findable throughout literary history which, put together like puzzle pieces, unite to form works we call science fiction. (If there is any real objection to his approach, it is that we most successfully define things by their centres, not their edges, in Dr Jack Cohen's telling formulation.) The formidable Prof. Darko Suvin, the only formalist critic of science fiction known to me, is not an ancestor hunter either; but his definition of science fiction as "the literature of cognitive estrangement" eliminates family trees by permitting the inclusion of more ancestors than all the others put together (including some not intended as fiction at all), like an international convention of everybody named Smith – Smythes, Psmiths, Blacksmiths and Blacks also welcome.

The critics in apparent opposition are equally numerous and cover as wide a spectrum. Among these we may safely pass by the group exemplified by Judith Merril, to whose members science fiction is simply the Now Thing and Where It's At. The central, general tenet of this school is that science fiction was impossible before, and coincided with, the advent and rise of science and technology. The position is attractive and has the merit of relatively hard edges; at the very least, it does not throw into despair the prospective student who cannot read medieval Latin or Linear B. Like its converse, it has its megalomaniac extremes: for instance, I subscribe to it; and the late John W. Campbell maintained that science fiction *is* the mainstream, of which all other kinds of fiction are only backwaters. A more reasonable representative is Heinlein's claim that science fiction is more difficult to write than contemporary or historical fiction, and superior to them both. I disagree with every word of this, but I can see no possible argument with his immediately preceding point that no fiction, written in a technology-dominated era, which ignores technology can claim to be realistic. Kingsley Amis, throwing out of court any form of cultural aggrandisement, and admitting – as so few critics do – that a major function of science fiction is entertainment, sees it as an exclusively Twentieth Century form of social satire (though with the unavoidable and richly earned inclusion of H.G. Wells). This is perhaps *too* narrow, leaving out other *kinds* of science fiction, e.g. as thought-experiment, as early warning system, as generator of paradigms, and so on. Brian Aldiss's history casts its net far wider, but also holds that science fiction cannot sensibly be said to have existed before science; his earliest allowed starter is Mary Shelley, a consistent choice and admirably founded and defended.[2]

But these two schools, despite their apparently fundamental opposition, are simply two sides of the same balloon; take the best of the first school (Nicholls), turn him inside out, and you have the best of the second (Aldiss); topologically they remain identical. (In some of the lesser possible pairs you will have to let quite a bit of gas out first.) There is an important sense in which Gilgamesh, Grendel & co. indeed do belong in any history or theory of science fiction – though it is not a sense either advocated or rejected yet by either side. If I can establish this detail, the five theses in my opening paragraph will follow almost automatically.

PANOPTICAL PURVIEW OF POLITICAL PROGRESS AND THE FUTURE PRESENTATION OF THE PAST

Somewhere around ninety per cent of the central thesis of this essay – which I haven't stated yet – is not mine at all; I stole it from Oswald Spengler. This is something more than the usual acknowledgement of a debt, for the fact itself is a supporting datum for the thesis.

However, it also requires some definitions, since for the sake of brevity I shall use a few Spenglerian terms. Because these words are also in common use, considerable confusion would result without prior notice of the special senses Spengler attaches to them; hence I place a glossary here instead of in the usual place.

Culture: This word has no anthropological meaning in Spengler's hands (as, for instance, we might refer to the Navajo culture, the culture of the Trobriand Islands, etc.). Spengler's cultures span many centuries and many countries; for example, his Classical culture extends from pre-Homeric times to the fall of Rome. In this view, only Chinese, Indian and Egyptian histories lasted long enough to develop into independent cultures with definite geographical boundaries.

Civilization: There are essentially only two kinds of historical philosophy, the linear (or progressive) and the cyclical.[3] Marxism and Christianity are familiar linear theories; both believe that events are marching (or zigzagging) toward some goal. The cyclical theorist believes that history repeats itself. (Toynbee tried to believe both at once, resulting in eight volumes of minutely documented bewilderment.) Spengler's theory is cyclical, on an enormous scale. For him, civilization is but one of the phases every culture must go through unless disrupted by outside forces – and not one of its best phases, either. Since we are now living in the garbage dump of just this phase of his Western culture, I shall have more to say about this later.

Contemporary: In the ordinary sense, I am contemporary with everyone who lived through a majority of the same years I did. Spengler means nothing so trivial. In his sense, one man is contemporary with another if each plays a similar rôle in the corresponding phases of their cultures. For example, Sargon (Babylonian), Justinian I (Classical) and Charles V (Western) are eternal contemporaries – "late springtime" figures whose careers are similar because they had to be; the choice for each was either to play this rôle at this time, or be nobody. Hence the fact that I am alive during most of the same decades as Richard M. Nixon is meaningless; his true contemporaries are Lui-ti[4] and Caligula. My own, necessarily, are some Hellene one of whose lost 140 plays placed last in the Games in a bad year, and a sub-priest trying to make sense of the chaos Amenhotep IV's experiment in monotheism made of Egyptian religion.

I have drawn these examples of contemporaneity to illustrate as well another striking principle of Spenglerian history, which is that it is cyclical only at the intercultural level; history does *not* repeat itself on any smaller stage, let alone moment by moment in fine detail as in Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence".[5] Hence it would be futile to seek parallels between, say, King Arthur and Napoleon, though some can be forced; both were Westerners in sharply different phases of that culture.

It follows from this that Spenglarian history, since it is not rigidly determinis-

tic, allows for considerable exercise of individual free will, within the rôle as appropriate to the cultural phase or season. In 1975 we live late in that era of civilization he calls Caesarism. In such a period he would not counsel a poet to try to become an army officer or courtier instead; but he might well say, "Now it is too late to attempt writing a secondary epic; in Milton the West has already had its Vergil." The incompletion and overall structural failure of Pound's *Los Cantares* would have been predictable to him from the outset.[6] On a broader scale, most of Spengler's predictions for the Twentieth Century after 1921 have come to pass, and in the order in which he predicted them, a good test of any theory. He did fail to foresee that they would happen so fast; but he set the date for the utter collapse of the West at around 2200, which is just about as much time left as the Club of Rome gives us, and for the same reason – insanely runaway technology.

GNOSIS OF PRECREATE DETERMINATION

It now remains to place science fiction within this scheme. This requires a further short discussion of the nature of our own times in general.

Spengler's view of history is organic rather than causal, and so is his imagery; as previously implied, he compares the four major periods of each culture with the four seasons. The onset of civilization is the beginning of autumn. At this point, the culture has lost its growth-drive, and its lifestyle is codified – most particularly in architecture, with the building of great cities or cosmopoloi which both express the culture's highest spirit and drain it away from the countryside. Here, too, law is codified and history is written (*all* history is urban history); and the arts enter upon a period of attempted conformity to older, "standard" models, like the Eighteenth Century in Europe, when it became increasingly difficult to tell one composer or playwright from another.[7] In the West, civilization began to set in about the time of Napoleon.

Civilization may last for centuries and be extremely eventful; Imperial Rome is a prime example. At first, too, great creative works remain possible; I have mentioned Vergil, and in the West we have had Milton, Goethe, Joyce, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Einstein. (Spengler would unabashedly add himself to such a list, I think justifiably.) But autumn ends, and a civilization becomes a culture gone frozen in its brains and heart, and its finale is anything but grand. We are now far into what the Chinese called the period of contending states, and the collapse of Caesarism.

In such a period, politics becomes an arena of competing generals and plutocrats, under a dummy ruler chosen for low intelligence and complete moral plasticity, who amuses himself and keeps the masses distracted from their troubles with bread, circuses and brushfire wars. (This is the time of all times when a culture should unite – and the time when such a thing has become impossible.) Technology flourishes (the late Romans were first-class engineers) but science disintegrates into a welter of competing, grandiosely trivial hypotheses which supersede each other almost weekly and veer more and more markedly toward the occult. Among the masses there arises a "second religiousness" in which nobody actually believes;[8] an attempt is made to buttress this by syncretism, the wrenching out of context of religious *forms* from other cultures, such as the Indian, without the faintest hope

of knowing what they mean. This process, too, leads inevitably toward a revival of the occult, and here science and religion overlap, to the benefit of neither. Economic inequity, instability and wretchedness become endemic on a hitherto unprecedented scale; the highest buildings ever erected by the Classical culture were the tenements of the Imperial Roman slums, crammed to bursting point with freed and runaway slaves, bankrupts, and deposed petty kings and other political refugees. The group name we give all this, being linearists by nature,[9] is Progress.

Given all this, it is easy to deduce the state of the arts: a period of confused individual experimentation, in which traditions and even schools have ceased to exist, having been replaced by ephemeral fads. Hence the sole aim of all this experimentation is originality – a complete chimera, since the climate for the Great Idea is (in the West) fifty years dead; nor will nostalgia, simply an accompanying symptom, bring it back. This is not just winter now; it is the Fimbulwinter, the deep freeze which is the death of a culture.

We can now define science fiction; and against this background, see why it arose when it did, why it is becoming more popular, and why we can expect no masterpieces from it, *quod erat demonstrandum est,* in the simple act of definition.

AGNOSIS OF POSTCREATE DETERMINISM

Science fiction is the internal (intracultural) literary form taken by syncretism in the West. It adopts as its subject matter that occult area where a science in decay (elaborately decorated with technology) overlaps the second religiousness – hence, incidentally, its automatic receptivity from its emergence to such notions as time travel, ESP, dianetics, Dean Drives, faster-than-light travel, reincarnation and parallel universes. (I know of no other definition which accounts for our insistence that stories about such non-ideas be filed under the label.) It is fully contemporary with Meng-tse (372-289 BC), the Indian Nagarjun (150 AD), the Egyptian New Empire after Amenhotep IV, Byzantium in the time of Psellus (1017-78 AD), and the Magian Abbassid period[10] – we have lots of company, if it's ancestors we're looking for.

It is not a Utopian prospect – Utopia being, anyhow, only a pure example of linearism in a cyclical world – but neither need it be an occasion for despair. I repeat, we have free will within our rôle and era, as long as we know what it is and *when* we are. Even without any background, or belief, in Spengler, many of us have already sensed this. When a candidate for the presidency of the Science Fiction Writers of America made "fighting drug abuse" part of his platform, most of us felt almost instinctively that he was making a fool of himself; and Harlan Ellison's call to turn science fiction into a "literature of the streets" met with dead silence. Nor has there been noticeable response to the challenges of Philip José Farmer, Michel Butor, George Hay or British Mensa to turn science fiction into fact (and the Stalinist-oriented Futurians who published exactly this challenge thirty-five years ago gathered no following, either). It was this situation which led me to say six years ago that if an artist insists on carrying placards, they should all be blank.

The last words must be Spengler's:

". . . our direction, willed and obligatory at once, is set for us within narrow limits, and

on any other terms life is not worth the living. We have not the freedom to reach to this or to that, but the freedom to do the necessary or to do nothing. And a task that historic necessity has set *will* be accomplished with the individual or against him.

"Ducunt Fata volentem, nolentem trahunt." (The Fates lead the willing, they drag the unwilling.)

Notes

1. V. Nabokov *vs.* Wilson, superficially about Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin.*
2. In this summary I have made everybody sound as solemn as owls, but many of these critics are witty writers; see particularly Aldiss, Amis, de Camp and Nicholls.
3. I omit the accidental or meanwhile-back-at-the-corral accounts of most school and popular histories; since they see no pattern to events, they cannot be said to have a philosophy.
4. "Ti" is an honorific meaning, roughly, "the august"; and the first Chinese emperor to so style himself was, by no coincidence, contemporary in the Spenglerian sense with Caesar Augustus.
5. Nevertheless, Nietzsche was one of Spengler's two chief influences, the other being Goethe. He acknowledges them both at the outset and refers to them frequently thereafter.
6. There is a grimly interesting real example of this in Spengler's own lifetime. Hitler was contemporary with Wu-ti (119-124 AD) and Trajan, but utterly failed to sense the spirit of the time — though some of his councillors did, most notably Hjalamar Schacht. At the beginnings of the Nazi movement, Spengler in his only public lecture told the cream of the Hitlerjugend that they were doing the (historically) right thing at the right time, but that their leader had it all balled up and that it would end in disaster for the entire West. The leader of a national movement, he said with grisly humour, ought to be a hero, not an heroic tenor. In 1933 he expanded the speech into a 160-page book, *The Hour of Decision.* The Nazis banned the book three months after its publication (as well as forbidding all mention of his name in the press — luckily he was too famous to shoot), but by that time it had already sold 150,000 copies.
7. A charming work called the Jena Symphony was long attributed to early Beethoven because one of the orchestral parts had his name on it, though some musicologists suspected Haydn. It turned out to be by somebody no one had ever heard of.
8. *V.* the Eisenhower religiosity: "Everyone should go to the church of his or her own choice, I don't care which it is."
9. The characteristic spirit of the West, which Spengler calls Faustian, is inherently linear.
10. (*Editor's note*) Meng-tse, the only Chinese philosopher besides Confucius to have his name latinized — as Mencius — emphasized the ruler's duty to the people, advocated social welfare, and amplified the Confucian concept of 'magnanimity'. Nagarjuna, philosopher-monk and convert to Mahāyanā (Greater Vehicle) Buddhism, founded the 'Middle Path' school whose clarification of the concept of 'emptiness' (śūnyatā) is seen as a peak of intellectual and spiritual achievement in Indian thought; and wrote several critical analyses on views of the nature of reality, the means of knowledge and the origin of existence. Amenhotep IV (better known as Akhenaton; his wife was Nefertiti) reigned from 1379-1362 BC and besides advocating new intellectual and artistic freedom of expression, was the first monotheist known to history. Abandoning the old gods of Egypt for a single god of love and switching capitals from Thebes to his new city, Akhetaton, his neglect of practical politics prevented his reforms from surviving. Michael Psellus, philosopher and politician, headed the philosophy faculty at the new imperial university in Byzantium, initiating the renewal of classical scholarship by reversing the Aristotelian predominance in favour of Platonic thought and advocating a fusion of Platonic and Chrsitian doctrine, thereby prefiguring the Italian Renaissance. The Abbassids were the second great dynasty of the Muslim Empire of the Caliphate (750-1258 AD), the Magian period being the mystical decadence of this. The *individuals* here aren't themselves villains of the piece; rather, it is the piece in which, and against which, they were historically forced to participate which is properly 'villainous' — as the following (abridged) quotation from Spengler indicates: "Contemporary with the 'positivist' Meng-tse there suddenly began a powerful movement towards alchemy, astrology, and occultism. It has long been a favourite topic of dispute whether this was something new or a recrudescence of old Chinese myth-feeling — but a glance at Hellenism supplies the answer. This syncretism appears 'simultaneously' in the Classical, in Indian and China, and in popular Islam. It starts always on rationalist doctrines — the Stoa, Lao-tse, Buddha — and carries these through with peasant and springtime and exotic motives of every conceivable sort

> . . . The salvation-doctrine of Mahayana found its first great herald in the poet-scholar Asvagosha (c.50 BC) and its fulfilment proper in Nagarjuna. But side by side with such teaching, the whole mass of proto-Indian mythology came back into circulation . . . We have the same spectacle in the Egyptian New Empire, where Amen of Thebes formed the centre of a vast syncretism, and again in the Arabian world of the Abbassids, where the folk-religion, with its images of Purgatory, Hell, Last Judgement, the heavenly Kaaba, Logos-Mohammed, fairies, saints and spooks drove pristine Islam entirely into the background. There are still in such times a few high intellects like Nero's tutor Seneca and his antitype Psellus the philosopher, royal tutor and politician of Byzantium's Caesarism-phase . . . like the Pharoah Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton), whose deeply significant experiment was treated as heresy and brought to naught by the powerful Amen-priesthood . . ." Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (tr. C.F. Atkinson, London, Allen & Unwin, 1971) Vol.2, pp.312-313.

Addendum: I wrote this in hospital with no reference books to hand but the second volume of *The Decline of the West.* I now find that Spengler's 1924 speech was not his only public appearance; he also delivered a lecture in Hamburg in 1929. The substance of the second speech, however, was exactly the same as that of the first. – WAjr.

---

the science fiction of james blish

Brian M. Stableford

> "In my opinion – in my profoundly *religious* opinion, I might add – it is the duty of the conscientious science fiction writer not to falsify what he believes to be known fact. It is an even more important function for him to suggest new paradigms, by suggesting to the reader, over and over again, that X, Y and Z are not impossible." – James Blish, in a talk entitled "The Science in Science Fiction"[1]

When John W. Campbell Jr. took over *Astounding Stories* in the late thirties he brought to science fiction a new manifesto – a new declaration of its nature and aims. Hugo Gernsback, who had initiated the category in the pulp magazines, had seen sf as partly a medium of prophecy, partly a medium of education. It was to look forward – in both senses of the phrase – to the benevolent future made possible by technology, advertise its wonders, and stimulate young minds in order to prepare them for participation in an Age of Power-Freedom. While history, by degrees, invalidated Gernsback's attitudes Campbell revised the prospectus, attempting to make science fiction more akin to science itself. He asked that the inventions

of his writers should be treated as hypotheses, and that stories shoud be concerned with the logical tracking of the consequences of such innovations in terms of their effects upon individuals and society.

Campbell quickly assembled a "stable" of writers to provide him with the kind of fiction he thought sf ought to be. Because he inherited command of a publishing enterprise in a *genre* that was already twelve years old recruitment was not so difficult for him as it had been for the editorial pioneers – there were many would-be writers among the committed readers. He "discovered" Robert A. Heinlein, Lester del Rey, Isaac Asimov, L. Sprague de Camp, A.E. van Vogt, and Eric Frank Russell, and "took over" Clifford D. Simak, Jack Williamson and Edward E. Smith – all of whom were to make their most significant contribution to sf under Campbell's aegis.

Campbell's rivals were ineffective in providing any alternative ideology, operating according to standard pulp policies and presenting formularised adventure fiction which employed the imaginative apparatus of science fiction in place of the revolving stage of conventional melodrama. Campbell was allowed to shape modern science fiction because he was the only man who possessed both the power and the inclination to become a creative force within the *genre.* Campbell's stable may be regarded as the first generation of sf writers who had some measure of common cause.

Under different historical circumstances recruitment of writers through the forties might have been smooth and steady, but there was a break in history precipitated by the second world war, when many writers found their attention deflected and even would-be writers not involved with the war found a shrinking market which had little room to accommodate them. The result of this was that in the years after the war a second generation of writers emerged with apparent suddenness. Many of them, including Frederik Pohl, Cyril M. Kornbluth, Damon Knight, Alfred Bester and James Blish, had appeared in the pulps before the war, but none had made any real impression. It was in the immediate post-war period that this group re-emerged to join other writers just beginning their careers: Arthur C. Clarke, Jack Vance, Poul Anderson and – slightly later – Philip José Farmer and Robert Sheckley.

One of the principal reasons that this "new wave" of writers came to seem distinct from the "first generation" was the rapid series of changes which overtook the magazine medium in the post-war decade. New titles appeared in profusion and existing titles were transformed as a boom followed the war years and the pulps foundered, to be replaced by the digest magazines. Only *Astounding* held its course, having become a digest some years earlier. But Campbell was no longer the only shaping force effective in the medium. New magazines – notably *Galaxy* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* – adopted positive policies and quickly acquired personalities of their own, while some of the older titles – especially *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* – were placed under new management, and became for a brief but vital period much more interested in the quality of the material they presented.

The result of this change in the market situation was that virtually all of the new writers published important early work (including, in almost every case, their first novels) outside *Astounding,* free from the idiosyncrasies that haunted Campbell's policies. Different kinds of demands were made upon authors, and the authors them-

selves often adopted more complex and more ambitious aims in their work. Vociferous critics – most notably Damon Knight and James Blish – asked their fellow writers to aspire to a higher level of literary craftsmanship, and did their best to set an example. There was both a widening of the interests of sf writers and – perhaps more important – something of a loss of faith in the kind of answers favoured in Campbell's realm to the kinds of problems posed by common hypotheses in sf. Even *Astounding*'s fiction changed significantly in the post-war decade, as the notion that the appropriate answer to any technological problem was another technological innovation wilted and faded in the shadow of Hiroshima. But *Astounding* remained associated with and beholden to its own past, and the new approaches inevitably became associated with the publications which knew no other.

With so many diverse markets opening up the role of individual writers as important innovatory forces increased relative to that of individual editors. There were no longer such narrow bottlenecks in the businesss of getting into print. And the writers were not slow to take up this opportunity.

It is against this background that the career of James Blish, and his achievement in making a significant contribution to the evolution of science fiction, must be set. These circumstances allowed him the opportunity to experiment and to use science fiction in ways that it had not been previously used. And he brought to the writing of science fiction a new attitude, which coupled imaginative boldness with a rigorous discipline of thought and method. His best work shows an ambition which goes far beyond Campbell's manifesto; his hypotheses belonged to a different intellectual cosmos, and his handling of the hypotheses was more careful and more complex. In addition, he was intolerant to a far higher degree of sloppy thinking and sloppy writing.

In the detailed consideration of Blish's work that follows I have made no attempt to be absolutely exhaustive, confining my extensive commentaries to the stories which seem to me most interesting and most fruitful. I have not attempted to use a rigid chronological framework, as I feel that it is more sensible to divide the work up into various categories, which are – though artificial – both convenient and useful. (A chronological account of Blish's career would, in any case, become hopelessly convoluted owing to his extensive re-use of material.)

1. **Foundation Stones** Blish was born in 1921 and began reading sf in 1931. His first published stories appeared in 1940, and in a period of some three years he contributed about a dozen stories to minor pulp magainzes: *Super Science Stories, Cosmic Stories, Future* etc. In 1942, however, he was drafted. As a college graduate in biochemistry he was employed by the army as a medical technician, and upon release he resumed his education, beginning a post-graduate course in zoology. He quickly came to the conclusion, though, that a career in science would not suit him, and he began writing again.

His approach to this second phase of his literary activity was markedly different – he no longer saw writing as a hobby but as a potential career, and he set about cultivating professional methods and attitudes. He went to work for a literary agency, commenting on stories submitted for appraisal and learning about the nature of the market from the vantage-point of the bridge between writers and

editors. For some years he shared an apartment with Robert A.W. Lowndes, and the two wrote some science fiction in collaboration – the novelette "Chaos Co-ordinated", which was published in *Astounding* in 1946, and the material that was later to be organised into *The Duplicated Man* – but this was for interest's sake rather than a commercial enterprise. The bulk of his output during 1946-48 consisted of detective stories, sports stories and westerns. A handful of sf stories appeared in 1948 and 1949 – some in collaboration with Damon Knight – but these represented a minority of his published work. He now took a job editing trade journals, however, and once again his priorities changed, so that from 1950 onwards almost all his fiction belonged to the *genre* in which he had a special interest. He used his new editing job to provide a background for "Let the Finder Beware" (*Thrilling Wonder Stories* 1949) – a transitional story in which a genuine interest in the speculative content of the story is injected into the mechanical pulp adventure-routine. This story was later to become the basis of the novel *Jack of Eagles.*

The most interesting of the stories which Blish wrote during the hobbyist period of the early forties was one which did not see print until ten years later – the novelette "There Shall Be No Darkness", which appeared in *Thrilling Wonder Stories* a couple of issues after "Let the Finder Beware". Blish (habitually critical of those of his works which did not measure up to his standards of rigorous scientific fidelity or quality of prose) once referred to the story as "a schoolboy pastiche of *Dracula*",[2] but it has certain features which foreshadow strategies which were to become typical of his *modus operandi.*

The mechanics of the plot of "There Shall Be No Darkness" are crude in several respects – not least in the establishment of the basic situation, which is an English country-house party where the anti-social and slightly drunk Paul Foote becomes convinced (rather incredibly) that the suave foreigner playing the piano is a werewolf. He quickly discovers that his suspicions are justified, and because another member of the party is an expert on lycanthropy he acquires the means to offer the whole company convincing evidence of the fact.

In a classical fantasy or a modern horror story this could only be the prelude to a long crescendo of predatory suspense and evolving terror, with the affective qualities of the story dictating both pace and development. But that is not the way that Blish and his characters handle the situation. What is remarkable in the story is its rationality – not only the determined attempt to make the hypothesis plausible by the recruitment of a "scientific explanation" for lycanthropy, but also the logical manner in which the protagonist and his allies proceed with the task of destroying the menace. A corollary to both these aspects of the story's rationality is provided in the melodramatic (but eminently satisfactory) conclusion, where the werewolf's view of himself and his circumstances is extrapolated and displayed.

The method by which Blish constructs a rationalised account of lycanthropy (all the properties ascribed to the werewolf by legend are shown as effects or side-effects of a hormone secreted by a hyperpineal gland which allows liquid protoplasm to reconstruct its containing structures) is fairly straightforward – the science of biology is invoked in order to provide a jargon of apology rather than as a spring-

board for the imaginative exploration of possibility. It must be pointed out, though, that both the rigorousness and the competence of Blish's supportive argument are unusual, not only in the context of the science fiction of 1940, when the story was written, or even of 1950, when it was published, but in general. Jack Williamson's *Darker Than You Think*, published shortly after Blish wrote his story, attempts a similar rationalisation, but in a much shallower manner, invoking a rather vague hereditary process which pays no heed to Mendelian genetics. The slightness of this alternative (and more usual) jargon of apology does not detract from the novel's power as a literary work, but sets its methodology apart from that of the Blish story. In the great majority of sf stories – today as in 1940 – the establishment of the basic hypothesis is little more than a ritual process, the priority being given (for very good reasons) to reasoning *forward* from the notion to its consequences. In Blish's fiction a much stronger priority is given to *backward* reasoning, in search of firmer foundations for hypotheses: greater justification in the service of a higher degree of real-isation. It is to a large extent this greater degree of thoughtfulness, this more analytical approach, which gives the science fiction of James Blish its unique qualities.

Other hallmarks of Blish's work can also be seen – albeit in embryonic form – in "There Shall Be No Darkness". One is the ability of the characters to adapt to the situation into which they are precipitated. There is an orderliness in their reactions which is unusual – and in this context rather unconvincing. They are not so committed to their unbelief in werewolves that they find it impossible to change their minds without a desperate struggle. When confronted with the unthinkable they quickly reassess their world-view in order to make it thinkable, and then act positively and effectively. The "delay factor" which operates between revelation and acceptance in most literature of this kind (and which is undoubtedly realistic) is much reduced in "There Shall Be No Darkness", so that it appears almost vestigial. (In *Darker Than You Think* the delay factor is the focal point of the process of development of the story.) Blish's characters, here and throughout his work (whether they be sane men, men with severe psychological difficulties, or even children) always find it possible and necessary to bring rationality to bear on the situations (however strange or apocalyptic) which confront them. This extreme commitment to the scientific method is one of the principal shaping forces in Blish's literary philosophy. That he was conscious of it, and prepared, like any honest scientist, to doubt the wisdom of such a commitment, is evident in the nature of his best works.

One corollary of this commitment – and one which sets Blish somewhat apart from the Campbellian tradition in sf which developed through the forties – is a tendency to pin the hope that solutions to problems may be found on the method itself rather than on its further potential products. Thus it is characteristic of Blish's work that problems are *not* solved by innovations which cancel them out, but by the recruitment of material already to hand and its rational deployment. This, too, is evident in *There Shall Be No Darkness*. The problem is solved within its own parameters: the characters do not retreat to their laboratory in order to turn out a miraculous substance which acts specifically upon the hyperpineal hormone, thus cancelling one hypothesis with another in pointless circularity. (Such circularity was very common – indeed, standard practice – in science fiction before the war,

and we have certainly not seen the last of it yet.)

The method applied in "There Shall Be No Darkness" is also evident in "Let the Finder Beware", but in this story it is clearly subservient to another set of priorities – the priorities which Blish had learned during his spell with the Scott Meredith agency as appropriate to the construction and marketing of pulp fiction. Its hero is shunted rapidly from one dramatic encounter to another, hardly pausing to draw breath while the clichés mass around him: the conventional romantic interest, the comic-book gangsters and the secret organisations of supermen.

A very distinct shift in priorities is, however, evident in the transformation of "Let the Finder Beware" into the novel *Jack of Eagles* (1952). Here Blish's real interests are indulged (indulged rather too freely for some editors – some editions of the novel are heavily abridged, including the *Galaxy Novels* version and the first British edition put out by the publishers of the Carnell *New Worlds* in imitation of the *Galaxy Novels* series). In the full version Blish provides an elaborate commentary on the so-called psi-powers, going to great lengths to provide a logical supportive apparatus for the hypothetical invocation of such powers. As in "There Shall Be No Darkness" what is remarkable in the novel is not merely the painstaking support offered to the central idea by the author, but also the rational, strategically-controlled manner in which the hero, having discovered that he posses unusual powers, goes about trying to understand and come to terms with them. He goes in search of advice to all the possible sources which occur to him: to a medium (who turns out to be a charlatan), to the Fortean Society, to the parapsychological research unit at the university, and to the Society for Psychical Research. Slowly, as he gleans information piece by piece, his understanding of his powers increases, and through his understanding he gradually gains mastery over them. When events finally run their course and the plot ensnares him he is ready and able to act constructively.

The novel remains very much a creature of two worlds, as the clichés remain to provide the melodrama which makes the investigative procedure marketable as pulp fiction. The girl Marla serves no purpose within the plot, and is there only because pulp adventure fiction must have some romantic interest. The intrusion of the FBI and gangsters is logical enough in view of the hero's attempts to use his talent in manipulating the stock exchange and the *parimutuel*, but the actions which both these groups have to undertake in order to move the plot along are bizarre and illogical. The ultimate revelation that both the Forteans and the Psychical Research Society are organisations of psi masterminds is necessary according to the formulae of pulp fiction but lamentably unconvincing by comparison with the rational development of the hypothesis relative to the central character. It would, I think, be wrong simply to dismiss these aspects of the novel as "faults". They are introduced consciously and deliberately, for a purpose. Any critical study of Blish's work which ignores the fact that these elements were the means to an end is deliberately myopic.

There is one scene in *Jack of Eagles* which dramatises the crucial difference between Blish's work and that of the many contemporary writers who contributed to the "psi boom" in sf during the post-war decade. This is the climax, where the

hero "ascends" a "sigma-sequence" of alternate probability worlds (which become, in this scheme, a logical corollary of the existence of precognitive talent). This passage is reminiscent in many ways of events in novels by A.E. van Vogt, but one thing is different, and that is that Danny Caidin's evolution into control over his super-powers has been achieved and directed by the attainment of knowledge and the winning of understanding. There is nothing mystical or accidental about it. In van Vogt's work particularly, but also in the work of many other writers, miracles happen, either at the discretion of chance or in the service of some vague, unrevealed plan. In Blish's work this is always unacceptable. If events are dictated by some arbitrary scheme, then the scheme must be real, and it must be perceptible. It is always possible, in the literary cosmos to which Blish's fiction belongs, to gain knowledge *and to apply it.*

Given the Campbellian manifesto for science fiction and the various similar declarations of the *genre*'s nature and aims, one might expect this attitude and approach to be common, but it is not. There is, in fact, a considerable body of work in the field which embodies a myth almost precisely contrary in outlook: the notion that out of confusion and in response to any threat new resources (technological or personal) may arise serendipitously. This is a myth of reassurance much simpler in kind and structure than its particular variant in Blish's work — much easier to accept blindly, and much less demanding intellectually.

Blish worked much more closely to the formulae of pulp adventure fiction in the novel which he wrote before extending "Let the Finder Beware", which was initially called "Sword of Xota" (1951) and later retitled *The Warriors of Day.* This book belongs to a recognisable subspecies of pulp sf which had become popular during the forties. Its recipe runs as follows: an ordinary man is transported by a convenient literary device into a strange world, where he is no longer ordinary. The other world is like our own, but generally less advanced technologically and more advanced in terms of magical mind powers. The hero has an important, often quasi-messianic destiny to fill, but does not understand what he has to do or how. While bewildered he is harassed by various enemies and shuttled back and forth amid the apparatus of the plot. Eventually, though, in a climax involving transcendental manipulation of awesome forces, he takes control and settles the issue.*

Blish's version of the plot is routine — indeed, the consistency with which the novel follows the recipe is remarkable. This kind of plot came quite naturally to Merritt, Kuttner, Hamilton and others who used it copiously, but it is by no means the kind of work natural to Blish. His employment of it is surely the result of careful conscious control following up clinical analysis. In a sense, one might almost say that this work represents a kind of counterfeiting.

Blish was a determined experimenter, and this shows not only in the manner in which he adopted new perspectives to examine imaginative notions, but also in his

---

*Though it crops up in all the sf magazines this formula is primarily associated with *Startling Stories,* whose novels used it consistently for many years. Its principal exponent there was Henry Kuttner, whose contributions to the subspecies include *Mask of Circe, The Portal in the Picture, Lands of the Earthquake* and *The Dark World.* The last-named clearly shows the origin of the formula in imitation of A. Merritt.

whole approach to the business of writing. It may seem strange that a man with his high aesthetic standards should have set out to master the techniques of pulp writing so carefully. But this was where Blish's market lay, and it is typical of the man that he was not prepared to approach the problem of using in it a fashion that was either haphazard or intuitive.

The pulps dealt almost exclusively in restorative fantasies – dream-worlds whose function was to afford the reader temporary escape from reality, and the imaginary gratification of various wishes. Most of the men who write for the pulps were assisted by their own psychological proclivities – their creation of such fantasies was honest and sincere. Blish's main interest in science fiction, though, was not as a medium for fantasies of reassurance and wish-fulfilment. He was, in fact, somewhat intolerant of such purposes in his critical writings. But he was not only prepared to compromise with reader demand, he was also prepared to take an active interest in writing many different kinds of story, aiming at different modes of achievement. Perhaps he never liked pulp fiction, but he did try hard to understand it and experiment with it. That he was still interested enough to do this much later in his career is evidenced by his rewriting of the *Star Trek* scripts into prose collections.

Blish's assembled works give the impression that he *never* found writing easy – and this applies to writing at any level. His prose is always *constructed* – often carefully so, sometimes with a high degree of artistry, but nevertheless artificial. He was not blessed with any innate elegance in the way his prose formed itself, and such grace as appears in his writing had to be put there, by design and hard work. Perhaps he had no real talent for descriptive work or rhetoric at all. But there are advantages in having to work hard at conscious construction, and one of them is the cultivation of a delicate awareness of the logic of the construction. This awareness was one of the factors which made Blish a critic of some considerable expertise, and it also helped him to construct, in his best work, stories whose ideas were very carefully balanced and whose structure was inordinately precise.

In his poorer work, therefore, Blish's presentation is often lifeless and mechanical – he wrote many stories which could not rise above triviality because there was nothing in them but the careful and conscious ritual of revelation (and this applies right through his career, even to some stories published in the late sixties and early seventies). But the cause that underlies this failing, however, also underlies many of the virtues in his work: the elaborate supportive structures which add weight to his central ideas, the extreme meticulousness with which he develops the psychology of his characters and guides their intellectual pilgrimages.

Introducing "Surface Tension" in the collection *The Best SF Stories of James Blish*, the author wrote:

> "To my considerable bafflement, this is the most popular story I have ever written . . . I set out to do no more than write about what it might really be like to live in the microcosm, where such forces as surface tension are all-important and such forces as gravity negligible; but somewhere along the line I seem to have touched a nerve more mythological than molecular. I wish I knew how, for if I did, I'd do it again."[3]

It seems that the success of the story – which *is* one of his best – was accidental

relative to the conscious creative processes important to the writing of it. This observation constitutes something of a challenge to the analytical critic, who is called upon not merely to explain the story's appeal, but also to account for the fact that the author was unable to do so.

The "solution" to the second part of the problem is, I think, fairly simple. When Blish came to analyse the story to look for something that might account for its outstanding success, he must have looked long and hard at what he had put into it – the careful construction work, the planning of the plot, even the style of the writing. These represent his conscious contribution. A detailed analysis on this basis, far from exposing the story's strength, would have served to make the author even more aware of certain shortcomings.

"Surface Tension" was Blish's second attempt at depicting life in the microcosm, the first – "Sunken Universe" – having been published in 1942 under the pseudonym Arthur Merlyn. The earlier story (later amalgamated with "Surface Tension" in *The Seedling Stars*) is a pure adventure story about microscopic humanoids driving predatory rotifers out of their "castles", so beginning a long battle to become the masters of their environment and the lords of their tiny creation. There is nothing in the story about the different balance of forces pertaining to underwater life on a small scale, and it has one or two rather naive literary strategies – naming the other microscopic creatures by shortening the Latin names of familiar protozoans, for instance (*Paramecium* becomes Para, *Didinium* Didin etc.). "Surface Tension" is a sequel which returns to the *milieu* for more detailed and serious consideration of the implications of the notion, and which therefore inherits the frailties of the original – not only the naiveties of the writing, but also the unsupportability of the initial hypothesis. The notion of a metazoan creature as complex as a man existing in parallel with similarly-sized single-cell creatures is conceptually hopeless, as is the notion that protozoan creatures (the Paras) could be capable of hive-intelligence and telepathic communication.

All this, to a writer as dedicated to supportive logic as Blish, must have constituted a powerful argument against the story's real value. He can only have been dissatisfied with his weak attempt to "justify" the initial hypothesis by the introduction of the stranded genetic engineers (though once the story had become popular he was prepared to experiment further, first writing the identically-structured story "The Thing in the Attic", then extending and elaborating the idea of the genetic engineers themselves and working out one or two additional consequences of the notion in "A Time to Survive" and "Watershed").

What Blish would have overlooked in this analysis, however – and had to overlook, given his attitudes to and methods of writing – was what Raymond Williams calls "the structure of feeling" within the story: its "mythical" significance. Blish is not the only writer to fail to account for the tremendous popularity of a particular story, another example in sf being Isaac Asimov's declared mystification regarding the fact that "Nightfall" tends to emerge from polls as the most popular sf story ever written. Asimov, too, is a careful writer – a literary engineer – and his story has a great deal in common with "Surface Tension". It is a different version of the same myth, and the myth is one which is certainly central to science fiction,

and perhaps central also to science itself, or to our perception of the history of science.

In both stories we have a group of inquiring minds, opposed – as is usual – by cautionary conservatism, issues of faith, and mundane dangers, who are on the threshold of discovering that there lies beyond the horizon of their perception and imagination a vastly greater and more wonderful cosmos. The dramatic revelation in "Nightfall" when the stars shine through is perhaps an unparalleled piece of melodrama, which affords that story its primary status in reader opinion despite its logical weakness. In "Surface Tension" we have instead the epic journey of the tiny wooden "spacecraft", which is literally carried through the barrier of the "sky" and crosses the expanse of rock between pools to discover another cosmos. (It should, I think, be noted that both stories succeed because they stay within the world-view of the characters and share their moment of revelation. The copy-cat exercise, "The Thing in the Attic", fails because of the introduction of the human genetic engineers, introducing a new perspective to the reader and trivialising the first part of the story, which must maintain its epic quality if the myth is to retain its power.)

The crucial line of "Surface Tension", which links the mythic quality of the story (which is, to a large extent, the mythic quality of sf itself) with the particular analytical concerns of Blish's work, is found in the dying speech of the Para who has earlier tried to deny the humans their heritage by disposing of the enigmatic "message plates" left by the creators of the microscopic race:

> "This organism dies now. It dies in confidence of knowledge, as an intelligent creature dies. Man has taught us this. There is nothing that knowledge . . . cannot do. With it, men . . . have crossed . . . have crossed space . . ."[4]

One of the humans expresses vague doubts as to whether they have *really* crossed space, and the reader knows that they have not, in the sense that their creators once did. But on their own terms, against the physical restraint of surface tension, they have burst through their intellectual and imaginative horizons, moving out of a closed universe into an infinite one. And the tool that has made it possible is *knowledge*, and the imagination to apply it.

Many sf writers have employed this myth without this last, important qualification – or have applied the qualification falsely, by misrepresenting knowledge as some kind of innate transcendental power. (This is central to the work of van Vogt *et al.*, and also to the sf subspecies of which *The Warriors of Day* is an example.) Other writers – Asimov is one – have found the myth, including the qualification, to be adequate and sufficient. Asimov has never gone beyond it or questioned it (despite the fact that it is in "Nightfall", not "Surface Tension" that the revelation makes people go mad). Blish, however, *did* go on to extend this mythology, to investigate and question its corollaries. Others of his generation, and many who came subsequently to science fiction, did likewise, but Blish was a pioneer, and one who took his investigations further, along one particular line of enquiry, than anyone else. This is why Blish deserves special consideration in the historical study of science fiction. There is, I think, a clear and logical thematic link between the manifestation of sf's most important myth in "Surface Tension" and the quote from Eliot which

Blish was later to choose in order to identify the group of his most important works: "*After* such knowledge, what forgiveness?"

2. Cities in Flight The first of the stories which ultimately became collated into the *Cities in Flight* tetralogy was published in 1950. The last appeared in 1962. The series is primarily associated with *Astounding/Analog*, although one section of *Earthman, Come Home* ("Sargasso of Lost Cities") appeared in *Two Complete Science-Adventure Books* and *The Triumph of Time* did not appear in the magazines at all.

Mapping the future was an enterprise that several of Campbell's authors indulged in. Heinlein expressed an intention early in his career to present through the medium of all stories published under his own name a coherent and self-consistent history of the future, and though the intention was soon abandoned he added a volume to the series as recently as 1973 (*Time Enough for Love*) in an attempt to round out the enterprise. Heinlein apparently had no logical or philosophical basis to provide a frame or any kind of ratification for his historical plan, but he did have certain basic convictions – that history tends to repeat itself, and that exceptional individuals provide the motor of historical change. He also, apparently, believed that the logic of Darwinian natural selection was appropriate to the evolution of societies and cultural values. Outside of the influence of these rules of thumb, Heinlein's historical creation was largely intuitive.

Some years later, Isaac Asimov cleverly applied the rather naive method of constructing a future history by analogy with the past, tracking the decline and fall of a Galactic Empire and co-opting Gibbon's analytical perspectives by reversing them in time as Hari Seldon's predictive "psychohistory". The basic assumption here is that history repeats itself by virtue of a semi-deterministic process, but that exceptional individuals *may* contrive to direct its course within these predestined cycles, and even to divert it from them.

A third writer, contemporary with Blish, who attempted to plot a future history, was Poul Anderson, but Anderson actually built his history out of the raw material of his assembled stories rather than laying down a specific plan and writing stories to fit it. (Though he later employed a rather more formalised plan in a series of stories initially published in *Astounding* under the name Winston P. Sanders and later collected under his own name as *Tales of the Flying Mountains*.) Like his predecessors, Anderson too was prepared to accept that history was a cyclic process, but he placed considerable emphasis on economic determinism, and thus actually had some scientific basis for his historical schemes (it was, of course, a capitalist theory of economic determinism, not Marx's theory of dialectical materialism).

It is typical of Blish that he should take infinitely greater pains, in constructing his own history of the future, to provide himself with a coherent philosophical basis for his plan. He, too, adopted the notion that history is cyclic, but adopted perspectives that would allow him to describe and characterise the cycles much more exactly than was possible in the type of scheme that Asimov or Anderson had drawn up. It was not enough, for Blish, to *assume* that history would repeat itself – there had to be a *rationale* governing the repetition. What is more, having discovered and utilised such a rationale, Blish then went on to encapsulate the whole of history – to "complete" it in a manner that his predecessors could not

and would not have attempted.

When "Okie" and "Bindlestiff" appeared in 1950 Blish presumably had no intention of writing a history of man, but as the series grew so did the project, and the philosophy of history which Blish adopted – derived from Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* – was gradually built into it. The crucial intrusion is in the rewriting of "Bridge" and "At Death's End" into *They Shall Have Stars,* at which point a great deal of Spenglerian theory was introduced.

Blish's use of Spenglerian philosophy is discussed in the essay by R. D. Mullen, "The Earthmanist Culture: *Cities in Flight* as Spenglerian history", which forms the afterword of the Avon volume which collects together all four novels. Mullen finds fault here and there with Blish's elaboration of Spengler (in particular, with the notion of "cultural morphology", which Blish invents but credits to Spengler) but his overall consideration of the tetralogy as an exercise in "applied Spenglerianism" is a useful clarification of the scheme underlying the work. It should be noted, though, that while this is an interesting and legitimate piece of criticism, it does tend to misrepresent the books slightly. Blish is not really attempting to "apply" Spengler, developing his premises rigorously to predict the future course of history, but employing his theory as a supportive logic to aid in the development of hypotheses that are his own, working towards artistic ends that are also his own. He is neither drawing up "scenarios" for possible futures nor making model cultures, but rather conducting an essay in myth creation. The concluding volume of the tetralogy (though not the last written), *The Triumph of Time,* is an *aesthetic* necessity, and is not an extrapolation from Spengler (as Mullen points out).

The development of the series from the early novelettes to the climax of *The Triumph of Time* (the last episode to be written, *A Life for the Stars,* is a fill-in exercise) illustrates two main trends in Blish's writing during the fifties. The first trend is one concerning his experiments in thought – the manner in which he handles his ideas. The other concerns his experiments in the writing of fiction.

The basic hypothesis on which the series rests is, of course, the antigravity device: the "spindizzy". The establishment of the hypothesis in the story is characteristically bold: if you have antigravity, why move spaceships? You can move whole cities, or even whole worlds. The way in which the flying cities are used in the early stories, however, derives directly from the assumptions of pulp adventure fiction. The four novelettes which make up *Earthman, Come Home* are pure space opera, dealing in colourful action, with the cavalier introduction of innovations to meet the various problems posed. There is a sophistication in Blish's space opera that was never evident in E.E. Smith, or even in Asimov, but it is not different in kind from *Skylark of Valeron* or *Foundation and Empire.*

The next step in the project, however – the provision of a supportive logic for the flying cities – was not only something that Blish felt necessary, but something which he went about in a thoroughly characteristic way that removed the exercise from the domain of space opera altogether. What was needed, historically, to support the future of the star cities, was a pair of scientific developments, both of which had to be made in the relatively near future: the development of the spindizzy, and the discovery of the anti-agathic drugs which permitted its exploitation. In offering accounts of the origins of these two factors, Blish was not content to

offer simple tales of intuitive inspiration on the part of exceptional men – the geniuses Heinlein and Asimov found so convenient in arranging historical pivots. They knew as well as Blish did how scientific discoveries were actually made, but were content to simplify and pretend. Blish was not. He undertook to give an account of the kind of research programmes that might actually generate such discoveries – and his design of the bridge-building experiment on Jupiter is yet another example of his boldness in establishing his hypotheses within his stories. But he went even further than that, in "Bridge" and "At Death's End", by placing the experiments themselves into particular human contexts – in the first case using a psychological context, in the second a political one. Later, in expanding the stories into the novel version, he added yet another stage in this process of contextual embedding by fitting them into a gross historical scheme.

This elaborate layering of the ideative structure supporting *Cities in Flight* is not wholly successful – *They Shall Have Stars* is an impressive, even an admirable book, but it is also rather uncomfortable to read, and badly unbalanced by the inflation of its sections. The ambitiousness of the undertaking, however, brought something new into science fiction – an awareness of the *real* potential of the kind of thinking promoted by the Campbellian manifesto.

The Triumph of Time, which sealed the unity of the whole pattern, is neither space opera nor rigorous "hard" sf, but something else again. If *They Shall Have Stars* is the archetypal example of Blish's backtracking in support of his hypotheses, the *Triumph of Time* is surely characteristic of the way in which he could carry them forward to their ultimate, apocalyptic conclusions.*

Both the ways in which ideas are handled and the method of presentation of the story change dramatically in this third volume. Although there is a half-hearted attempt to introduce conflict and action in the struggle between Amalfi's city and the representatives of the new Galactic Empire to win a crucial position in the final crisis, *The Triumph of Time* is primarily a conversation-piece. Most of its ideas *remain* ideas, existing in the heads of the characters and not made manifest in the apparatus of the story. There is no attempt to construct the story as a pulp melodrama. Indeed, the tone of the story is so relaxed and detached that it becomes almost ironic.

The addition of *A Life for the Stars* to the series represents little more than an afterthought. It adds only slightly to the solidity of the work as a whole. As a novel in itself, though, it is not simply a supplement to *Cities in Flight* but a work belonging to another category of Blish's experiments – his juvenile novels, and I will mention it again in dealing with that category. Effectively, the *Cities in Flight* series became a totality with *The Triumph of Time,* and with the writing of the epitaph for the human race in its concluding paragraphs: *"We did not have the time to learn everything that we wanted to know."*[5] This was, I think, a wholly suitable ending to Blish's first major endeavour in science fiction.

---

*It should be noted that the development of the "After Such Knowledge" novels follows the same pattern; that is to say, the "middle" volume was written first, the "introductory" volume second, and the extension to apocalyptic conclusion third.

3. Experiments in Thought Thomas Kuhn has described the historical progress of scientific thought, in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* as a series of "paradigms" – exemplary modes of thought which arise gradually but which, once they have achieved dominance, are extremely difficult to topple or replace. These paradigms represent whole ways of thought – great complexes of coherently organised data which give form to the conceptual universes of their proponents. They perform such a useful function in lending such form to scientific conceptions of the world that they are not abandoned when anomalies creep in or contrary data are discovered, but are jealously preserved until a whole new paradigm – a complete new set of ordering principles – is available to take their place.

Thus, when Blish suggested in the talk which I quoted at the head of this article that "it is an . . . important function for (the sf writer) to suggest new paradigms", he was saying rather more than simply that sf should persistently represent the impossible as possible, thus perhaps helping it to *become* possible. He was implying that the sf writer should seek whole new perspectives, new modes of approach to the interface between the possible and the impossible. This seems to be asking a great deal, but the demand is not that the sf writer should actually find or build new paradigms – simply that he should *suggest* their inevitability. In a way, Blish was asking that sf should persistently *remind* readers that the contexts in which we presently see problems are not the contexts to which problems will always "belong" – that there are and will be other ways of looking at the world than the ones we take for granted now.

This *is,* I think, an important function for the science fiction writer. It is also one which very few writers have ventured to fulfil. Pulp formularisation is not only an easy way to write – it also represents an easy way to think. It has its own inbuilt paradigms pertaining to the mechanics of romance, of success, and of the questions of good and evil. The world of popular fiction of all kinds is paradigmatically ritualised, and its standards militate strongly against the suggestion of new paradigms, whether they be scientific, social, political or moral. Because of the fact that science fiction has always been a category of popular fiction in the publishing world, the serious writer identifying himself with the *genre* has always been caught in a kind of double-bind, facing two opposing sets of priorities. The inevitable result is that even the best of *genre* sf is to some extent bastardised.

This is as true of James Blish's work as it is of the work of any of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, it seems to me important that we should separate out from the bulk of his work those stories which are primarily experiments in thought rather than experiments in the writing of adventure fiction. Any such categorisation is to some extent artificial, and I certainly do not mean to imply that stories picked out according to this criterion are necessarily more meritorious, from a literary standpoint, than those which are not. Indeed, in the work of almost any other writer, one would expect to find only a slight correlation, or even a negative one. In the case of Blish, however, I believe that there is quite a marked tendency for his best-written works to be the ones in which he attempts to suggest new paradigms. The explanation for this is quite simple: he was always a writer who had to work hard, and he worked hardest and most effectively when he was most interested and involved in what he was doing. This is not true of many writers,

who write most gracefully and most attractively when they are most relaxed and secure in their endeavour.

"Beanstalk" (1953) is one of the earliest sf stories to deal in any depth with the moral and social questions arising out of the possibility of altering the human form by genetic engineering. That such power would eventually become available had been anticipated in the twenties following Muller's experiments inducing mutations in *Drosophila,* and the notion had been popularised then by J.B.S. Haldane in *Daedalus; or, Science and the Future.* However, though writers outside the field had used the idea (Huxley in *Brave New World,* Stapledon in *Last and First Men*) sf writers had been a good deal more circumspect.

Blish attacked the issue in a direct and straightforward manner. The engineering envisaged in the story is induced polyploidy, and its primary effect is giantism. (Mutational polyploidy in plants is not uncommon, and usually results in enlargement.) At first it appears that total polyploidy is involved, but it transpires that the situation is more complex, involving the selective doubling of specific chromosomes. This development is important, in that it leaves open possibilities for a reconciliation between normal humans and "tetraploids" which Blish could not find elsewhere.

The central concern of the book is similar to that of the latter part of Wells' *Food of the Gods* – the attitude of fear and hostility which the ordinary humans adopt toward their giant cousins. The plot framework of the story is pure pulp melodrama, but there is an attempt at sophistication in the way that Blish constructs the attitudes of his central characters – to themselves, to one another, and to the world at large. As is commonplace in sf of the period, Blish's sympathies are very much with the underprivileged supermen – the outsiders in society. The expansion of the novelette into the novel *Titan's Daughter* (1961) added little new depth to it, but did make the story somewhat less cramped.

There is little in "Beanstalk" that was new in 1953. Haldane's essay, published thirty years earlier, is a bolder, more extravagant, more thought-provoking work. But the importation of the ideas it contains into post-war science fiction was important. We now have to face, in the real world, the issues posed by the existence of techniques in genetic engineering. Historically speaking, "Beanstalk" was not ahead of its time but barely abreast of it. Science fiction may pride itself on its anticipatory potential, but that pride is entirely false. Its record in anticipating real social concerns is, to say the least, miserable. We can count on one hand the number of stories published before 1945 which anticipate the real social problems connected with the discovery of nuclear power, and despite the fact that Malthus died long before science fiction was born the population problem remained unconsidered in fiction until it became a serious concern in reality. The introduction of real social concerns into science fiction did not happen until the post-war period, and the work of importing them was vital to the aspirations of science fiction to become a viable medium for experiments in thought. For this reason, "Beanstalk" is an important work.

In "Beep" (1954) Blish approached a question altogether different in character. "Beanstalk" fell comfortably within the Campbellian prospectus, attempting to

measure the social consequences of technological innovation, but "Beep" took Blish into a new area, to confront the philosophical question of free will *versus* determinism. The theme of the story is simple, and was already familiar in sf as an elaboration of the man-who-finds-tomorrow's-newspaper plot. The archetypal version of the science fictional handling of the theme is probably Lewis Padgett's "Line to Tomorrow" (1945). Blish's story is different only in attitude.

The question of free will *versus* determinism had always been implicit in stories concerning characters who contrive, one way or another, to get information relating to the future. Usually, however, the notion had been used in sf as the basis for elaborate but neat plotting. Determinism usually triumphed, but only because that made for schemes that were aesthetically more elegant, usually involving the climactic sealing of closed loops in time, or the clever manipulating of circumstance to assure that foreknowledge is justified despite the efforts of the characters. Blish was perhaps the first SF writer to realise that within what had already become something of an sf cliché there was a serious and meaningful question.

As in "Beanstalk", the plot of the story is formularistic, losing in plausibility what it gains in suspense. There is, indeed, no more than a suggestion within it that something important lies within the concept of recovering "Dirac messages" which have not yet been sent – but the suggestion *is* there, and its presence is significant. When the characters decide that the future they have foreseen must be validated by their own conscious strategies they are, perhaps, avoiding the issue rather than attempting to test it, but they know what they are doing, and they choose their actions for good reasons.

Like "Beanstalk", "Beep" was subsequently expanded into a novel – albeit a very short one – called *The Quincunx of Time*. This was done, however, when Blish was in the grip of the cancer which ultimately killed him, and it is understandable that the expansion constituted little more than trivial inflation of the prose.

One of Blish's most notable literary experiments – and one which he seems to have regarded as one of his most successful – was the short story "A Work of Art" (1956). As with "Beep", the central notion of the story – the "resurrection" of a creative artist from the past – was already familiar, by courtesy of Bradbury's rather sickly "Forever and the Earth" and Asimov's jocular "The Immortal Bard" (and, indeed, the formula again dates back much further – to Hugh Kingsmill's *Return of William Shakespeare*) but once again Blish was not content simply to replay it, but set out to use it in order to expose some of the serious issues implicit within the hypothesis.

The story of the "reborn" Richard Strauss, his relationship with the strange world in which he finds himself, and his attempt to take up his career and his creativity where he left them at his death, is both sensitive and thoughtful. The pulp formulae which Blish considered necessary to support "Beanstalk" and "Beep" are not in evidence. The theme develops itself, without even paying lip service to melodrama. This was something Blish had not done before, even in "A Case of Conscience", which had appeared three years previously. Strauss's realisation, at the

end of the story, that his new symphony is a recapitulation with no genuine creative inspiration, and that the wild applause of the audience is not for him but for his creators – the scientists who have brought the mind of a composer to life in the brain of an idiot – is a perfect climax. The juxtaposition of the two revelations not only represents an extremely subtle insight on the part of the author, but also throws the whole question into a new perspective. This is genuine imaginative innovation – something rare not only in science fiction, but in literature in general. So many of sf's supposed innovations – ideative as well as manifest – are merely symbolic transfigurations of the familiar (often the ultra-familiar and the banal) that "A Work of Art" is a truly exceptional story. It is significant that – like "Beanstalk" and "A Case of Conscience" – the story could not find a home in any of the major magazines. This illustrates both the resistance of the market to innovation and the important role which the smaller, commercially non-viable magazines (which existed mainly because of the determined efforts of various members of the sf community) played during this period.

The determination to probe a little deeper into the implications of notions which had become standard in science fiction is present to some degree in almost all Blish's science fiction. It was not always successful, and sometimes produced results which are grotesque. Contrivance is all-too-obvious in "Tomb Tapper" (1956) and in the attempt to write a psychological drama around the short story "The Weakness of Rvog" (written in collaboration with Damon Knight) to convert it to the novel *VOR* (1958). In both stories Blish attempted to use his wartime experience to import realism into the background of the stories, and together with the rather bizarre "contemporary novel" *Fallen Star* (1957) they represent a conscientious attempt at verisimilitude in using present-day settings for sf themes. All three fail, largely because their treatment of the contemporary scene is unconvincing. This is something that Blish had in common with a great many of his contemporaries – while plausible in wholly hypothetical constructions, designing the environments of the future or of other worlds, his writing about things he actually knew about was strained and weak. This is evidence, I think, of a certain dislocation – even antipathy – between the author and his real world. This is not unusual in writers generally – the principal reason for living in the imagination is that one cannot feel at home in the social world – but it is often particularly pronounced in science fiction writers. They are the writers who are driven to explore the farther reaches of the imagination, and they are also the writers who pretend that their fantasies incorporate a realism of their own.

This dislocation from the real world is often expressed in science fiction as disenchantment, resentment, or even disgust. All three of these stories employing realistic backgrounds based on autobiographical experience are antisocial and slightly bitter in tone, and "Tomb Tapper" ends in a note of violent rejection. Such moments of horrific vision crop up elsewhere, sometimes in rather surprising places. In the badly-constructed and thoroughly undistinguished novel *The Duplicated Man* (1953, written in collaboration with Robert Lowndes), for instance, we find the following observation:

'*Do* you actually believe that we would need to run the Earth at its present peak of tech-

nology, if our only concern were to keep the people well-clothed, housed, fed, healthy and so on? Nonsense! We passed *that* peak around 1910. Medicine, agriculture, education – none of them require a technology as advanced and as energy-expensive as the one we maintain. Even after adding an increment for basic research, you would still have a peak only about half as high as our actual one. There is just one excuse, and one only, for this practice of keeping the technology cranked up against the ceiling, and forcing it higher every year. You know what it it as well as I do.'

'Warfare,' said Danton.[6]

This notion – that we live in a world created by and for war – is very much a part of the post-war consciousness that dominated sf in the fifties.

In *The Best SF Stories of James Blish* the author paired "Tomb Tapper" with "The Oath" (1960) – a much more successful story which neatly juxtaposes the doubts suffered by two doctors brought together in the wreckage of an atomic holocaust. Though it ends on a positive note, this story too partakes of a certain bitter disenchantment, which over-rides standardised attitudes to re-open the question of the meaning and value of the Hippocratic Oath in a world like ours.

In a story published the following year, "A Dusk of Idols", the anguish implicit in the earlier stories explodes, as the horrific vision extends to encompass all creation. The story is not among the best-written or most elegantly-constructed of Blish's works, but it is nevertheless a significant work. Again, the protagonist is a doctor, who takes as his mission the bringing of sanitation and medical science to a world where a rigid religious caste system applies constraints which continually doom whole classes of the less-privileged members of society to extinction through disease. His efforts are resented and he undertakes a nightmare journey along a great river: a sewer carrying the carrion of civilization along with their totems into the bowels of the world. This experience becomes a revelation, convincing the protagonist that this is the principle on which life itself operates: the survival of the fittest and the condemnation of the weak.

The viewpoint implicit in this story is that of the alienated intellectual, whose perspectives and passions are not channelled in commonplace ways. This has resulted in the occasional, but quite mistaken, accusation that Blish is a cold and emotionless writer. The truth is that the agony suffered by so many of his characters has sources which many readers simply do not recognise. It is, almost invariably, a pain which arises out of insight and intelligence, according to the Biblical dictum that "with much wisdom cometh much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow". If, as has often been suggested, our concept of evil arises out of our own experience of pain, then it is by no means surprising that a writer like Blish should, in finding a theme to test his creative energies and abilities most fully, have settled upon the confrontation between religious faith and secular knowledge, and the evil perhaps implicit in commitment to the latter.

4. Experiments in Adventure While Blish was wholly aware of the potential which science fiction as a *genre* offered for experiments in thought, this was not the sole cause – or even the main cause – of his interest in it. He became a science fiction writer because he was interested in the art, the craft, and the business of writing. Many of his experiments were not experiments in thought, but experiments in the writing of stories – to see what kind of stories could be written,

and how. Many of his pure adventure stories are trivial; some that are enjoyable are merely routine. Some of them, however, are interesting for various reasons individual to them, and I should like to comment on those which are, in my judgement, noteworthy. I see no virtue in making a descriptive catalogue of all Blish's adventure stories, and have made no attempt to do so. Some readers will undoubtedly consider that there are errors of omission here.

"Common Time" (1953) has become one of the best-known of Blish's short stories, partly because of the quasi-Freudian analysis of its content offered by Damon Knight in chapter 26 of his *In Search of Wonder*. That the story belongs to the category of experiments in adventure is made clear by Blish's comments in *The Best SF Stories of James Blish:*

> "Sometimes a story will turn so sharply away from the way a writer thought it was going to go as to make it seem almost as independent as a dream. That happened in Part Three of this story: I had planned to confront my hero with something as unearthly as I could possibly manage, but I did not know what it would be until it began to appear on the page."[7]

This was, of course, written after Knight's analysis, and Blish was to a considerable extent sympathetic towards the exercise.

The story's protagonist, Garrard, undergoes extreme subjective time-distortions while *en route* to Alpha Centauri in an experimental faster-than-light vessel. He experiences "the pinnacle of macro-time" and "pseudo-death", and finally awakes to commune with a being or beings using a synthetic meta-language, much of the exchange being concerned with the subject of love. Knight concludes that this experience is symbolic of the "lifetime" of a sperm, told in reverse. The mystical encounter with the alien(s) (which, as Knight points out, is a common *motif* in post-war sf) is said to be a representation of nostalgia for "the everlasting summer of childhood", though how this is connected with the sperm symbology is not altogether clear. The evidence on which Knight builds these claims is a series of what he calls "puns" – points in the narrative in which words and phrases are used which may be taken as ambiguous references equating sex and death. Knight implies that Blish's unconscious is working hard to produce these puns, though he does not say why.

In point of fact, Blish's unconscious does not have to work hard to produce such ambiguities, and would probably have to work a great deal harder to avoid them. For a number of reasons people inevitably talk (and think) about sex and love *via* series of metaphors, and many of the same metaphors are commonly applied to mordant states. It is impossible to describe the events which take place aboard the spaceship without invoking terms subject to ambiguous interpretation (and this is true of virtually any experience in a science fiction story which must be "created" – we can only use the words we already have).

Knight reinforces his suggestion by a little speculative etymology with respect to the metalanguage used by the alien(s). The descriptive term applied to it/them ("the clinesteron beademungen") is interpreted to mean "blessed are they who snore in bed", from the Greek *klino* (bed) and *sterto* (snore) and a Germanisation

of the Latin verb "to bless". This is relegated to a footnote because it obviously doesn't add much weight to the general argument, but it prompted Blish to add some support to the theory by interpreting the reference to the Alpha Centauri binary as "the twin radioceles" as a derivation from the medical term "varicocele" (a testicular tumour). This kind of intuitive etymology is, however, always amenable to strategic distortion, and is certainly not dependable.*

It seems to me more reasonable to take "Common Time" at face value, as a straightforward representation of a man undergoing an experience which temporarily allows him to transcend ordinary human limitations – this is not too far removed from the mythical pattern central to *The Warriors of Day*, and is linked to that in "Surface Tension". It is, I think, genuinely suggesting new paradigms rather than symbolically re-presenting old ones.

"Testament of Andros" (1953) is a different kind of experiment, and not a science fiction story at all. It is an attempt to track various stages in psychological breakdown as a series of different personality-structures relating themselves to a single common delusory symbol. The symbol itself is derived from the sf vocabulary of symbols, and the story itself is little more than a literary representation of a theoretical model in psychology, but it is a story *about* fantasy rather than a fantasy in itself.

It is an interesting story, but it has dated rather badly in that we no longer expect psychological processes to be so neat and so well-trimmed. No such order is habitually brought to the compilation of the narratives of ordinary everyday lives, let alone to the fragmentation of personalities. Blish always seems to have had a good deal of faith in the competence of analytical thought to bring total and relatively simple order even to the theories of the human sciences. This is not uncommon in committed rationalists, but is a relic of the heyday of positivst self-confidence, which was over before Blish was born. In this respect he was perhaps a little old-fashioned. The same commitment to orderliness in the characterisation of abnormal psychological states is evident in "Bridge" and *VOR*.

The capitulation to the need to make his stories commercial in a market dominated by the precepts of pulp fiction, so evident in Blish's early stories, continued to affect his work. One of its results seems to have been a consistent failure on the author's part to follow through from confident beginnings to satisfactory conclusions. Many of Blish's adventure stories seem to have no middle – just lengthy introductions and brief ritual resolutions. *Fallen Star*, for instance, is tightly and confidently written in the early stages, which deal with the preparations for the expedition to the North Pole. But once the expedition actually gets under way, what should have been the meat of the book becomes rather skeletal, and Blish

---

*We could, for instance, derive "radiocele" direct from the Latin *radius* (ray) and the Greek *kele* (tumour) and get "ray-tumour" – an odd but not inappropriate description of a star. Similarly, it takes no more corruption to read –esteron as deriving from the Greek *aster* rather than *sterto*, which makes "clinesteron" into "star-bed". "Beademungen" is more difficult, but there is a Scottish word *beadsman*, meaning "one bound or endowed to pray for others", which is at least as applicable to the situation as a disguised Latin blessing.

seems to be in something of a hurry to reach the climax and the conclusion. *And All The Stars A Stage* (1960) also begins with a certain efficiency and attention to detail while the author prepares the disaster which sends a small group of spaceships into interstellar space in search of a new home-world. Once past the introductory phase, though, the story becomes first episodic, and later quite cursory as the author seems to lose interest in his characters.

The most bizarre of Blish's literary experiments is *The Night Shapes* (1962) – an attempt to write a jungle fantasy not only set in the past but presented as if it had been written in the past. Though it deals with prehistoric survivors in a lost valley it seems to me more reminiscent of *Sanders of the River* than of Haggard or Burroughs. Dating the story is not easy – there are internal references to an important, "recently published" book on geology by "Lyly" (presumably Lyell's *Principles*, which appeared in 1830) but other evidence suggests a much later date. I am not familiar with either of the works which Blish did for *Jungle Stories* in 1948-49 ("Serpent's Fetish" and "The Snake-Headed Sceptre", the latter published under the name V.K. Emden) and do not know whether the novel owes anything to either of these stories, or perhaps to a third novelette of similar antiquity, but it certainly seems to have begun as a novelette – its climax comes just after halfway – and then been extended by tacking on a weak pseudo-sequel. But perhaps this, too, is the result of a simple inability to stay the distance.

In view of this consistent failure to sustain his effort through novel length it is understandable that the more successful commercial works produced by Blish are shorter. The novella "Get Out of My Sky" (1957) is a straightforward story of conflict between sister worlds, one of which has developed the physical sciences to a high level while the other has given priority to the human sciences and parapsychology. The model of the psi-powers contained within the story is unusual, and presumably reflects Blish's real interest in the story. Again, it is really no more than a long introduction to the central notion, with no middle and only the ghost of an end, but the author here resists the temptation to stagger on and pad out the narrative to book length.

Curiously enough, in view of the above comments, there is one short story in this middle part of Blish's career which is so lavishly spiced with ideas that one feels that it might have been more comfortable as a novel, or at least a novella. This is "Nor Iron Bars" (1957), which succeeds in spite of its blatant artificiality by virtue of its ideative flourishes. It includes a visit to a subatomic "solar system" which, if not altogether faithful to the post-Dirac model of the atom, at least shows a place where the existential situation is much less like our own than that portrayed in the stories which made Ray Cummings famous.

At a later stage in Blish's career his work in this vein became less forced and easier to read, although he never became effective at book-length. *A Torrent of Faces* (1967), written in collaboration with Norman L. Knight, is a series of loosely-connected episodes set in an overpopulated world ruled by a corporate state. The plot is fed by a series of disasters, the point being made that in a world so crowded all troubles are major ones. The same point later became the prospectus for a set of thematically-linked novelettes, *Three For Tomorrow* (1969), to which Blish

contributed the eco-doom story "We All Die Naked".

One interesting experiment from this period is the short story "How Beautiful With Banners" (1966), in which Blish tried consciously to build into a story the kind of symbolism which Damon Knight had "discovered" in "Common Time". The story is neat and effective, and represents a wholly typical response on the part of the author. Another ambitious experiment undertaken to fill a commission ("How Beautiful With Banners" was commissioned by Damon Knight for *Orbit 1*) was "A Hero's Life" (1966), later expanded into "A Style in Treason", which attempts to show a system in which treason is a species of diplomacy. The story is grotesque and unconvincing, but provides a good example of a thorough determination to find new angles on old problems.

The last of Blish's experiments in adventure, and in some ways the best, is *Midsummer Century,* a short novel first published in the special issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* devoted to Blish in 1972. The introduction quotes Blish's description of it as a "pure adventure story, which one doesn't see often in these over-earnest days".[8] And it is, in fact, pure adventure – perhaps the most relaxed piece of work that Blish had ever produced. Typically, it features not a physical odyssey of some muscular hero in search of violent thrills but the adventure of a disembodied consciousness in a distant future, first associated with a complex artificial mind which functions as an oracle, then with a man, and finally with a computer. The situation described is one of imminent war between the remnants of the human race and the birds, who have evolved a better command of "juganity" – a generalised mental power. The hero engineers the defeat of the birds and a new rebirth of the human race. As usual, the book is short, and its climax of action – the war between men and birds – is truncated into a couple of pages, but Blish seems for once to be content with these limitations. This "pure adventure story", perhaps more than any other single piece, emphasizes the extent to which Blish was himself an adventurer among ideas, and that his imaginative odysseys were essentially odysseys of the intellect.

5. Juveniles Within the space of a single decade Blish wrote six novels primarily intended for juvenile readers: *The Star Dwellers* (1961), *A Life for the Stars* (1962), *Mission to the Heart Stars* (1965), *Welcome to Mars* (serialised in 1966 as *The Hour Before Earthrise,* published in book form in 1968), *The Vanished Jet* (1968) and *Spock Must Die!* (1970). Although these books belong to the later phase of his career they constitute what is undoubtedly the weakest sector of his whole output.

Juvenile science fiction became a significant market in the USA during the fifties, and following Heinlein's success in writing it many of the leading writers in the field tried their hand, with varying degrees of success. Asimov, Clarke, Silverberg and Poul Anderson all did excellent work for younger readers. Juvenile sf tended to be more openly didactic, and much more obviously moralistic, than work done for adult readers. Assuming, as it had to, a certain level of scientific education and an intelligent interest in historical possiblities, serious juvenile sf was aimed at a teenage audience rather more seriously inclined than the target of other *genres* of children's fiction. Its heroes tended to be sober and burdened by a wisdom beyond their years, often alienated by their intelligence. Key themes in juvenile sf were therefore the

adoption of mature responsibilities by young people in a technological age and how to live with being different. Heinlein was an expert at combining these two themes.

The Star Dwellers clearly belongs to the tradition of the Heinlein juveniles, dealing with the adventures of a space cadet with educational attainments well beyond his years, whose existential isolation is adequately compensated by the opportunity to govern the course of world-changing events. He negotiates an agreement with energy-beings referred to rather unsubtly as "angels" – aliens who personify all that is good and noble. The book is primarily remarkable for its ruthlessly patronising tone – its theories of educational force-feeding and enforced celibacy for the aspiring young are rigidly uncompromising, and are coupled with a hymn of hate against popular culture and the contemporary youth which embraces it. The oversimplification of the images of man and alien is grotesque. Though these things are not uncommon in juvenile sf it is rare to find such blatant message-peddling. There seems to me to be little enough room for sympathy between Blish and his prospective audience – his appeal to adolescent egomania is nowhere near as subtle and seductive as Heinlein's.

A Life for the Stars follows the Heinlein pattern more closely, and with a good deal more success. Using the background of the *Cities in Flight* future history it follows the career of a young man from his beginnings as a refugee from the oppressive reality of near-future Earth to his achievement of responsibility as an important citizen of a spindizzy-equipped city.

Unfortunately, *Mission to the Heart Stars* reverts to the heavy-handed treatment of *The Star Dwellers*, to which it is a sequel. The cadet hero discovers the price of political stability in the absolute dictatorship of the Heart Stars federation, and wins the angels over to the human philosophy of dynamic social evolution. Again, this is not an unfamiliar message, but here it is prepared for juvenile consumption with painstaking unsubtlety. In his introductions to both *The Star Dwellers* and *Mission to the Heart Stars* Blish emphasizes the didactic merits of his work, supplying arguments in support of his hypotheses which would, in adult work, have been built into the narrative. Here, I think, is one of the reasons for the failure of most of Blish's work for younger readers – the material which he was prompted to leave out of his normal discourse simply did not leave enough behind. All his writing strengths and virtues tend to lie in the intellectual sophistications of his work.

Welcome to Mars abandons moralistic propaganda and settles into a conventional hypothetical exercise – the attempt to imagine what conditions on Mars might be like, in the light of more recent and more reasonable scientific speculations than those of Percival Lowell. Here, Blish is much closer to the kind of juvenile sf written by Asimov or Clarke than that of Heinlein. Other Blish stories had been loosely linked together by references to one Haertel, discoverer of a species of antigravity, and in *Welcome to Mars* we learn that Haertel was a teenager who made his discovery in a spare room above the garage and promptly built himself a spaceship out of an old packing case in order to fly to Mars. Recklessly indifferent to the fail-safe principle he finds himself marooned there, and is rapidly joined by his girl-friend, who duplicates his experiment with the aid of his notes, which she brings along with her so that no one else can follow. All this is far-fetched, but is acceptable enough as the mechanism by which the situation – a Martian robinsonade – is set up. More

difficult to forgive, though, is the way in which Blish cheats on his initial prospectus by introducing a miraculous lichen which adapts the hero and heroine to life in an environment where survival is logically impossible. There is a good deal of excitement in the story, and it has panache, but one can detect the old failing of running right out of steam once the introductory phase is over. The conclusion, in which a Martian noble savage leads the protagonists to a dead city, where a recording of the last of the ancient Martians bequeaths them the planet's heritage, is painfully clichéd.

The Vanished Jet is Blish's poorest book – a trivial exercise which never quite decides where it is going and whose action wallows sadly in its uncertainty. A boy searching for a hi-jacked sub-orbital jet carrying his parents goes to Lithuania and Saudi-Arabia, and eventually finds and saves it. There is not enough of a terribly lame plot to turn the travelogue into a novel.

Spock Must Die! represents Blish's original contribution to the mythology of *Star Trek*. He completed eleven volumes of script-adaptations, and this contribution was slotted in between the third and fourth. It is a combination of space opera and whimsy, quite typical of the *Star Trek* mythos, though somewhat more lavish with the special effects than the programme-budget would have allowed in a TV script. It is glib, and is even filled with sub-climaxes to bracket imaginary commercial breaks – a literary experiment conducted purely for the fun of it (though there is a little idiosyncratic self-indulgence in the way that *Finnegans Wake* intrudes into the plot). It seems less self-conscious than the other juveniles, though whether this reflects the situation of financial security into which the *Star Trek* books were bringing the author must remain a matter of conjecture.

The juveniles, looked at as a group, show up rather starkly all Blish's limitations as a writer, but rarely allow his virtues to peep through. His interests were intellectual; his best writing concerned itself with the sophisticated development of elaborate, many-faceted arguments. When his imaginative explorations were confined and his ideas simplified his artistry became almost negligible. Despite his conscientious efforts Blish was never an able writer of pulp fiction. His mind was not geared to it. It is not as a popular writer, easily plucking the standardised emotional strings (one of which is the so-called "sense of wonder") of a standardised audience that he will be remembered, and it is not by standards appropriate to the consideration of popular *genre* fiction that his work may be meaningfully assessed.

Blish was, above all else, a *methodical* writer, at his best when he was most meticulous. His major work is concerned with the exploration of abstruse philosophical questions by the literary development of hypotheses. The questions themselves are esoteric, and perhaps the books are esoteric too, although that was not the author's intention when he wrote them.

6. After Such Knowledge We live in an age when rationality, as a means to understanding and confronting the world, is possible. We accept this – whether we approve of it or not – so confidently that it is difficult for us to realise the significance of the fact, and of the inordinately complex historical process which made it a fact. For almost the whole of his history, man's concept of the natural world has been dominated by his concept of the *supernatural* world: the concept which he invented and described in order that the perceived world could become comprehensible, and

in order that his attitudes towards his environment and his actions might be organised.

There are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge which we invent and knowledge which we discover. The first kind is obtained intuitively, often attributed to "divine revelation". The second kind is obtained by systematic observation and by the testing of notions experimentally. The attempt to promote the second kind of knowledge at the expense of the first has been made at various times in the history of various cultures, with varying degrees and kinds of success. In Europe we recall the attempt made by the Greek philosophers, culminating in the work of Aristotle, and we recall the long struggle which followed the reintroduction of Aristotelian thought into a Europe dominated by Christian dogma. It seems evident today that this long struggle was a war of ideas of epic quality. Outstanding among its heroes were Galileo and Darwin, and its most significant battles were fought over the heliocentric theory of the universe and the theory of evolution by natural selection. Scientific knowledge carried the day in each case . . . and in consequence, rationalism is today a viable philosophy, unsupported and unsupplemented by the older kind of knowledge. It is *possible* – but it is also rare.

That the total victory of scientific knowledge over religious faith was a desirable end was claimed by the positivist philosophers of the nineteenth century, and is still claimed by their intellectual descendants today. There are others who are just as certain that such a total victory would be an utter disaster. In the vast middle-ground between the two poles there are considerable variations in the matters of compromise and doubt.

In the beginnings of the more recent struggle, which we may trace back to the twelfth century, the Christian Church – whose particular species of invented knowledge was then dominant in Europe – did not accept that there could be, in fact, two kinds of knowledge. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance scientific inquiry was permitted because it was taken for granted that its findings could only confirm and support the dogmatic faith of the Church. That was its only virtue. The moment that scientific knowledge began to be seen as something distinct from knowledge generated by "divine inspiration" – before it actually began to challenge or contradict it – it became a heresy in itself. Like all other threats to the established order, it was seen to be intrinsically evil.

This historical background is the basis of the conflict featured by the trilogy which constitutes James Blish's major contribution to modern literature. All three parts (the third consists of two volumes, but to call the group a tetralogy would be misleading) focus on the opposition – in each case built into a hypothetical situation – of a particular body of invented knowledge (a version of the Christian mythos) and the process of scientific inquiry. It should be emphasized that the confrontation is *not* between invented knowledge and discovered knowledge *per se*, but between invented knowledge and the *pursuit* of discovered knowledge. It is the *process* that is possibly evil, and the status of its products is merely a corollary to this question.

In this conflict there is no such thing as neutral ground. Objectivity is itself a commitment to one side. The only possible standpoint for the author to adopt in order to consider the question is not a position of neutrality but a position of doubt. This point, too, requires emphasis. The question is an essentially subjective one, and only has meaning in the forms which it can take in the minds of various characters.

Thus, Blish made the following observations in the introduction to the first volume to be published (*A Case of Conscience*, 1958):

> The author . . . is an agnostic with no position at all in these matters. It was my intention to write about a man, not a body of doctrine.[9]

The second novel, too, is about a man – it is, in fact, a biographical novel, *Doctor Mirabilis* (1964). It takes the question back to its historical origins, and presents an analysis of the intellectual history of Roger Bacon, a man whose written works make the issue manifest in no uncertain terms. Only in the third novel, which comprises *Black Easter* (1968) and *The Day After Judgement* (1970), does the confrontation become literal in the events of the story, extracting the question from its authentic context to display its logical consequences. This is, of course, typical of the way that Blish worked: first, the delineation of the hypothesis, followed by rigorous and detailed examination of its logical consequences. Typically, it is the second phase – the introductory work of *Doctor Mirabilis* – which represents Blish at his very best, and constitutes his masterpiece.

There is already extant a commentary on the *After Such Knowledge* novels by Bob Rickard, which originally appeared in *Speculation* and was revised for Cy Chauvin's critical anthology *A Multitude of Visions.* Rickard reads into the novels, in the order that they were written, a reflection of Blish's own spiritual progress, presuming that they constitute a symbolic transfiguration of the author's inner struggle to come to terms with his own existential situation. His summary of his thesis runs as follows:

> "It has been my thesis that these novels in the order written parallel Blish's own rite of passage; that not only the four books but the four principals chronicle Blish's own struggle to reconcile his scientific interests (magic/science) as his animus, with his arcane subconscious psychic needs (religious/faith, etc.) as the anima; and that each book represents a distinct phase. From the almost panic stricken agony of doubt and futility of *A Case of Conscience* emerges in time a stricter control. Roger Bacon seems in retrospect an ideal and logical study in sustained belief arising more out of the idea of dedication than intellectual justification. I believe Blish's agnosticism was formed in the period of writing *Doctor Mirabilis.* Bacon's own immediate predecessors, Duns Scotus and William of Occam, were the twin sources of the division between theological and philosophical debates – that nothing could be proved by *reasoning* about the existence of God or the Act of Creation – and in Blish's portrait of Bacon we can see a mirror of the rationalisation going on in Blish's own mind. He uses all the powers of intellect to *separate* the issues of scientific and theological truths – for in the separating he can come to understand each more clearly. The doubts are still there, but buried beneath layers of self-control – and a new belief that by *study* (i.e. scientific approach) he can come to terms with his earlier weakness. A lapse of time again before *Black Easter* comes on the scene, and we can see immediately that the Baconian process of dedication has paid off. The tentative agnosticism has matured into a bold detachment. Blish can now face, nay, toy with, more shocking heresies. *Black Easter* ends with Nietzsche's shout: 'God is dead!', and one feels that Blish has sprung it on his characters out of a bizarre sense of humour to see how they would react, testing his new courage by proxy. Indeed, the whole book is what Goethe called a 'profoundly serious jest' – and the scene in which the Church's representative's crucifix turns to dust as the priest tries to banish the demon is not only high gothic horror but shows to all the world that Blish can now laugh at the shadows that once plagued him so. *Black Easter* is his literary exorcism of his own demons.
>
> "This bring us to the place of *The Day After Judgement* in his scheme of things. Though written as a sequel to *Black Easter,* it was intended to be free-standing – it was, nevertheless, necessary to preface it with a synopsis of *Black Easter* since it virtually picks up at the very next sentence. My own view is that the two together are more complete, being as it were the two halves of a manic-depressive cycle. Beyond that *The Day After Judgement* is *so* dif-

ferent in style and tone – the exorcism, it seems, worked, and for the first time we see Blish's talent for heroic and romantic writing (so ably demonstrated outside this set) fused with his 'serious' intentions. He now embraces the mythic (as per Jung, *et al*) elements in his work and actually begins to wield them deliberately, not to fight them with intellect."[10]

This thesis is not without a certain glamour, but I disagree with it as an interpretation of the works.

In discussing the nature of the novels Rickard makes an important error. He criticises Blish for the adoption of the particular set of Christian dogmas adopted in the stories. "There seems," he notes, "no place in (Blish's) scheme of things for the religions of the rest of the world. This is a great curiosity, and I suppose just goes to show the extent to which the chauvinism and arrogance of the Western world permeates every level, scholarship notwithstanding."[11]

This is missing the point. It assumes that Blish is writing, albeit speculatively, about the "real world". It assumes that Blish has chosen the particular set of Christian dogmas he employs because it represents *the* divine revelation. Rickard assumes, in fact, that Blish is writing about the confrontation and juxtaposition of two versions of *the* truth. This is not so. In order to support his hypothesis that the battles fought out by the protagonists of the novels represent battles fought in the author's own mind, Rickard is forced to ignore or reject the statement made by Blish in the introduction to *A Case of Conscience* regarding the nature of the exercise. I do not feel that he is entitled to do this unless he can offer a convincing case to support the allegation that the statement is a misrepresentation. In fact, the set of Christian dogmas used by Blish are not there to embody a truth that the author, or his characters, were struggling to reject. They are there as what they are – a particular brand of invented knowledge which happens to be uniquely historically pertinent to both the writer and his assumed audience. (There is, indeed, a particular historical pertinence to the post-war decade, following the revelation of the atom bomb, when the novelette which form the first part of *A Case of Conscience* was written. In his own comments on "A Case of Conscience" – novelette version – and other contemporary stories with "religious themes" Blish referred to a post-bomb wave of "chiliastic panic"[12] which might account for the resurfacing of many images and ideas associated with Christian Millenariansim in American science fiction.) Rickard's accusation of narrow-mindedness is, of course, connected with his conviction that Blish's real beliefs were involved – and, indeed, at issue – in the writing of the works. He is castigating Blish not so much for producing a narrowly-focused story as for not looking far enough afield for things he might have believed in instead of turning to atheism. I do not accept that it is necessary – or even reasonable – to suppose that Blish's real beliefs were on trial in the writing of the trilogy, and I think that we should accept his own declaration of agnosticism. In the great range of his other works Blish considered many hypotheses purely as imaginative exercises, and *After Such Knowledge* is not necessarily an exception simply because it represents his finest and most important work.

Rickard is, however, right in some of his pertinent observations. He points out that the central narrative technique applied in the novelette version of "A Case of Conscience" – the "elaborate four-way argument" which Blish stated to be "unique in my experience"[13] – is central also to *Black Easter* and *The Day After Judgement*,

and, in fact, constitutes a categorisation of possible viewpoints which focuses the issue at stake in each case most effectively. It is this recognition that a two-dimensional (good *v.* evil) approach to the question would be inadequate because of its circularity, that allows Blish to mount an investigation in the first place. Although the viewpoints are not incarnate as characters in *Doctor Mirabilis* the multidimensional contemplation of the issue is – and this is responsible for some tortuous internal arguments conducted by Bacon (including one quoted by Rickard as an example of incoherence). In the third part of the trilogy the viewpoints achieve much more integrity and self-containment, but Theron Ware remains essentially the hub of events and the focal point of the author's interest.*

Speaking of the novelette version of "A Case of Conscience" in the essay "Cathedrals in Space" (in *The Issue at Hand*), Blish pointed out that there is nothing very original about using a hypothetical question to test the substance and competence of revealed knowledge. The question of the plurality of worlds had been tackled by theologians long before Galileo and Giordano Bruno lent the issue pertinence. The potential of science fiction in providing an imaginative *milieu* for the dramatisation of the conflict had also been recognised earlier, albeit outside the publishing category. The main difference, however, between Blish's treatment and that of C.S. Lewis in *Out of the Silent Planet* is that Lewis was committed to faith, and his version of the conflict was necessarily two-dimensional. Blish, committed to doubt, was permitted to introduce other facets of the issue.

The problem is posed in a moderately simple form. The planet Lithia has no body of doctrine comparable to the Christian mythos. Its inhabitants recognise no creator and no Fall from Grace. But they live according to a code of ethics identical to that prescribed by Christianity, and deviance is unknown. Lithia thus offers "proof" that goodness can exist without God. Ruiz-Sanchez concludes that it can only be a creation of the devil: a temptation and a trap. This conclusion he reaches by the application of rigorous logic to premises based in his religious faith, but the conclusion itself contains a heresy – the attribution of creativity to the devil. Lithia is a logical trap, and for Ruiz-Sanchez there is no way out.

In extending the novelette to book length Blish simply continued the story. He complained that he was held by contract to a 75,000 word limit, and advanced this as an apology for the fact that "there is just too much material there to escape an effect of breathlessness as the novel draws to a close"[14]. In fact, this excuse is weak – firstly because a substantial fraction of the available 75,000 words remains unused, and secondly, because the mode of approach to the subject matter of the second part is dogged by prevarication. The story is that of Egtverchi, the Lithian "feral child" raised by humans, and of Ruiz-Sanchez's discovery of a course of action which may not solve, but might at least settle his dilemma. There are, however, some strange shifts of viewpoint – it is difficult to argue that the intrusion of the caterer Aristide and his problems in running a party helps the development of the plot, and the com-

*Rickard claims that Theron Ware is partly based on Aleister Crowley, on the basis that his name is derived from Crowley's pseudonym, "The Master Therion", but this is surely wrong. It seems more likely that the name is derived ironically from Harold Frederic's novel about the loss of religious faith, *The Damnation of Theron Ware.*

mentary of Egtverchi's mobilisation of social delinquency into a kind of revolution lacks intimacy. I think that Blish's uneasiness in working at length is evident here, even though he was adding only 30,000 words after an interval of five years. But the novelette was a *tour de force* – and *was* complete in itself – and it must have been very difficult indeed to pick up the threads again. The story has its strong points as well as its weaknesses – the account of the development of the young Egtverchi is excellent, and the ambiguity of the conclusion is a perfect expression of the essential agnosticism of the exercise.

Doctor Mirabilis is, individually, the best of all Blish's works. It is uncharacteristically long, and its strength is sustained throughout its length – no mean achievement for a man who so often had difficulty organising fifty thousand words. The book underwent one complete rewrite, and Blish seems to have been afforded here the assistance – probably most valuable as moral support – that he needed to sustain him in a major effort which (as he must have known) was never likely to repay his investment financially.

In *The Issue at Hand* he comments:

> "(Faber & Faber) sent me both . . . readers' reports. Never in my entire publishing history have I ever seen anything even remotely like those reports. They were analyses in depth, done with knowledge and care, in detail and at considerable length . . . Both reports were enormously valuable to me, and to the novel; and thereafter, Faber assigned as my particular editor on this project an absolutely searing fireball . . . who in effect sat down across the ocean with me and went through the book practically line by line to get it into what we both agreed ought to have been its shape in the first place. No editor I have ever worked with over here, with one shining exception, has shown so much initial understanding of what it was that I had set out to do, plus so enormous a technical grasp of why I hadn't succeeded in doing it."[15]

Encouraged by this interest, Blish put enough work into the novel to make the best use of his abilities – abilities which, elsewhere, had all too often been compromised by commercial priorities. *Doctor Mirabilis* is not a science fiction novel, but nor is it a commonplace historical novel, in that the focus of its attention is neither the events it deals with nor the characters, but a set of *ideas* – the concept of a coherent, organised science which emerged (prematurely, in historical terms) in the mind of Roger Bacon, who was thus cast into the confusion of an allegiance to two species of truth.

Blish's meticulous attention to detail and his careful stylistic contrivance were ideally suited to the re-creation of a distant historical period – not only its environment and its habits, but also its intellectual climate and ways of thought. His literary method was designed for the writing of science fiction, the creation of imaginary worlds, and it brought to the business of historical world-invention an attitude and technique rather different from the tradition of historical fiction (which has always been an essentially romantic tradition). The technique was perfectly adapted to the work, and the greater context which fits *Doctor Mirabilis* into the *After Such Knowledge* trilogy was the proper context for the study. Roger Bacon's actions did not divert the flow of eventful history, nor did his efforts accomplish a great deal in altering the scientific thinking of his time, but his predicament raised issues of philosophical importance in both the thirteenth century and the present day.

The story is, of course, a tragedy. A hypothetical Roger Bacon, functioning in an imaginary universe, might have achieved something significant in terms of his aspirations. History records, however, that the real one did not. That fact, and its necessary consequences within the novel, removed Blish from a temptation which might otherwise have threatened the novel – the temptation to make it more commercial by using some of the devices he had learned in earlier days. Fidelity to history made certain that *Doctor Mirabilis* would be a wholly honest work. It is worth noting, I think, that this determined fidelity to history is a reflection of Blish's firmly held conviction that science fiction owes as much fidelity to reality as an author can attain. It is not quite the same fidelity to the minutiae of the environment – the scrupulous avoidance of anachronism – that is expressed in the work of historical novelists, whose conscientiousness has a different source.

The novel formed by *Black Easter* and *The Day After Judgement* is imaginatively bolder than either of its predecessors, and far harder to swallow. The apparatus of the mythos becomes visible as the demons are released from the mind of the characters to rape the helpless world and raise the City of Dis in Death Valley, and this is difficult to take. Demons in the mind are much more credible than demons at large. There are no holds barred here, and the conflict that was so delicate and finely-balanced in the earlier novels threatens to become a mere brawl. But Blish is never slapdash, and he remains in control throughout, and even manufactures a suitable post-apocalyptic conclusion – not an easy feat.

Rickard construes these two stories as loud and eloquent testimony to Blish's confirmation of his own atheism – a deliberate mockery following the relief of the final banishment of the phantasms of faith. But with *Doctor Mirabilis* complete there would have been little point in continuing to show the problem in balance. To go forward, the balance has to topple, and some kind of resolution must be reached – one of the available logical conclusions. And this, surely, is the most logical of all: if man's quest for secular knowledge *is* evil, then the fruits of the quest can be nothing but damnation – the human world delivered into the hands of demons. This is the climax of *Black Easter*, and is in a way the whole story. The plot is, of course, but a lengthy introduction – a carefully-built supportive logic delineating the terms of such deliverance.

The Day After Judgement bears the same relationship to *Black Easter* as part two of *A Case of Conscience* bears to the initial novelette. It recovers the climactic realisation and develops it. Like part two of the earlier work it seems to lack direction because it is not nearly so well focussed as its introductory section.

Both novels are weakened by the occasional intrusion of absurd levity. Blish complained so often about science-fictional in-jokes and incestuous cross-references that it is difficult to understand his inclusion of the passage which lists the white magicians as a series of miniature caricatures of sf writers[16] (including the Atheling *persona* under which guise he had complained about the tendency). Blish had borrowed the names of sf writers before (even in *Doctor Mirabilis*) but had not indulged in this kind of comedy. Some of the characterisations in *The Day After Judgement* also lean toward the caricatures – especially the militarist who identifies one of the princes of Hell as "the insidious Dr Fu Manchu". Such flippancy can

only undermine the exercise, and it is difficult to be sure whether it signifies a new attitude to the central issue (as Rickard argues) or whether it is strategic – perhaps a form of apology for parading the apparatus of the supernatural imagination upon the science-fictional stage. Whatever the reasons, these are flaws in the scheme, though the whole survives. Perhaps the momentary irreverence is necessary to the assumed standpoint of agnosticism – C.S. Lewis was prone to argue that not taking the devil seriously enough was the first step on the way to damnation, and it seems highly probable that Blish would have argued exactly the opposit.

7. Conclusion

> "I am trying to discuss the kind of book from which the reader emerges with the feeling, 'I never thought about it that way before'; the kind of book with which the author has not only parted the reader from his cash and an hour of his time, but also has in some small fraction enlarged his thinking and thereby changed his life. For this kind of operation an exploding star is not a proper tool; at best it is only a backdrop.
>
> "Isn't that, in fact, what we all felt about science fiction when we first encountered it? It's still a young field, and most of us encountered it as youngsters. It was a wonderful feeling, that sense that interplanetary space was not only there to be looked at, it was there to be travelled in . . . We felt bigger thereby, because what we were reading made our world seem bigger. But both we and the field are not children any longer, and we have reached the stage where our physical horizons can't be extended much more without bursting the bubble of the physical universe itself. The ethical, the moral, the philosophical horizons remain, and those are infinite. It is there, I believe, that the realm of good science fiction must lie . . . The real world is not different from what we have inside our skulls; in fact, all we know about the real world is what we have inside our skulls . . . The real insides are what make fiction, and if it is not about that it is just gadgetry and talk. This is where good fiction has always made its land and home, and I think that now either we must invade it, or else become just another brackish little backwater of literature, as deservedly forgotten as the mannerisms of Euphues." – James Blish, *The Issue at Hand*[17]

This is the invasion that James Blish and others of his generation attempted to head. He was one of the first writers of genre sf to realise that "all we know about the real world is what we have inside our skulls" and to follow that realisation through by using sf to begin talking about the real world in terms of what we have – and what, in different circumstances, we might have – inside our skulls. The tools at his disposal were limited, as are the tools available to any creative writer. He lacked what one or two of his contemporaries possessed – an easy grace of self-expression, the ability to write prose with natural elegance. He compensated for this lack with a determination to accomplish by hard work what did not come naturally, and he could add to this determination talents which were his own: great precision of thought, delicacy of construction, and an imaginative ambition which no other science fiction writer of the post-war generation has yet matched.

References

(All quotes are from Blish except nos. 10 and 11.)

1. "The Science in Science Fiction", *Vector* 69 (1975), p.10 (reprinted from *Quicksilver* 2 – April 1971).
2. "The Critical Literature", *SF Horizons* 2 (Winter 1965), p.43.
3. *The Best SF Stories of James Blish,* Faber & Faber, 1965, p.72.
4. "Surface Tension" in *ibid.,* p.117.
5. *Cities in Flight,* Avon, 1970, p.596.

6. *The Duplicated Man,* Airmont, 1964, p.68.
7. *The Best SF Stories of James Blish,* p.143.
8. *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* April 1972, p.5
9. *A Case of Conscience,* Faber & Faber, 1959, p.7.
10. Bob Rickard, "After Such Knowledge: James Blish's Tetralogy" in *A Multitude of Visions* edited by Cy Chauvin, TK Graphics, 1975, pp.32-33.
11. *Ibid.,* p.27.
12. "Cathedrals in Space" in *The Issue at Hand,* Advent, 1964, p.55.
13. *Ibid.,* p.51.
14. Afterword to *ibid.,* p.59.
15. *The Issue at Hand,* p.119.
16. *Black Easter,* Doubleday, 1968, pp.127-8.
17. *The Issue at Hand,* pp.128-129.

Acknowledgements This article was written while my own collection of books was in storage, and I am greatly indebted to all the people who lent me reference copies of James Blish's works: Chris Fowler, Gordon Heath, Dave Langford, Bill Russell and the Science Fiction Foundation library.

james blish: the mathematics of behaviour

Brian W. Aldiss

Blish as science fiction writer fits into no convenient category. He is of what we term the Campbell generation, yet his work produced during that period bears only a superficial resemblance to the work of his contemporaries. His Okie series (*Cities in Flight*) has plainly been forged on the terrible Campbellian anvil, yet the spirit the series communicates is something much more hard-headed than anything of Heinlein's, more intellectual than anything of Asimov's, and has little in common with the two writers he admired most, Kuttner and Kornbluth, eschewing the romantic and satiric modes which are the main characteristics respectively of those two writers.

I regard the stack of his books on my desk and wonder deeply about them. All those thousands of pages contain countless male-oriented worlds, full of serious concerns and odd knowledge. They are, in many ways, quintessential science fiction, the sort of thing a youngster would ideally bone up on before tackling Stapledon.

So why do we not accept Blish as centrally a science fiction writer?

The answer, as far as I can arrive at it, is that Blish experienced some deep perception of the basis, the effects, the periodicity, and the locations of knowledge which his fellows did not share. Campbell's authors were technology writers in the main (though obviously there is more than that to be said of most of them, and perhaps less than that to be said about Sturgeon or Simak or some others). If one examines the writings of Campbell himself, for example, one sees that they are choked with technological exposition and with twentieth century science of the sort which led Arthur Clarke – in many ways another Campbell writer – to remark that the science of the future will be indistinguishable from magic.

The main topic of the *Astounding* in which Blish's earlier and most popular stories were published can be summed up in that striking phrase of Winston Churchill's: "The Stone Age may return on the gleaming wings of science". The life and energy generated in *Astounding* were the result of writers feeling intensely ambivalent towards the implications of this dictum. They feared the Metal God they worshipped. Time and again, their stories are about experiments which, like von Braun, aim for the stars but hit London. In the most popular of all the inspirations of that age, Asimov's *Foundation*, the culture which Hari Seldon must preserve has nothing to do with the arts and humanities: it means merely an extrapolated twentieth-century technology which can encase Trantor in metal, opposed by a barbarism that rides in spaceships.

Blish's conception of culture and of science is more profound. He perceived how every culture is dominated by a few major ideas and how these ideas become gradually outmoded, thus dooming the culture concerned. He appreciated, for instance, the seminal value of the pre-Classical culture in Greece, and dismissed out of hand Campbell's assertion that "Homer was a barbarian". Ideas induced from other sources could, on the other hand, regenerate older cultures. Thinking of this sort, though always more complex than summaries can suggest, informs his one biography, *Doctor Mirabilis*, the story of the 'miraculous doctor' Roger Bacon. It also explains why Blish was determined to yoke four totally distinct books (*A Case of Conscience, Black Easter, The Day After Judgement*, and *Mirabilis*) together as a ponderous tetralogy ponderously entitled *After Such Knowledge*. I used to kid Blish about that arrangement, but I am slowly getting the message. His obsession with the true scientific nature of cultures is dramatised in rather primitive terms in *The Seedling Stars*. There an Adapted Man is not so much a man as an Idea from Earth, inserted into an alien environment to regenerate it.

The adjective 'primitive' is used here because the grand experiment of seeding stars takes little account of the feelings of the living beings forced to participate in the experiment, despite the moralising about the venture which goes on. (Is one happier as a guest in a house where one is not murdered or in a house where the hosts repeatedly state that their morality restrains them from murdering one?) Blish was interested in morality as a consciousness-structure, while singularly lacking conventional moral tone. What concerned him was connecting together incompatible structures; he had come to believe, through Oswald Spengler, that there were no eternal verities, not even in the mathematics which is the basis of culture; hence his preoccupation with eschatology.

There is a passage in the Chapter on 'The Meaning of Number' in Spengler's *Decline of the West* which assists our understanding of the flow of Blish's thought:

> "The modern mathematic, though 'true' only for the Western spirit, is undeniably a masterwork of that spirit; and yet to Plato it would have seemed a ridiculous and painful aberration from the path leading to the 'true' – to wit, the Classical – mathematic. And so with ourselves. Plainly, we have almost no notion of the multitude of great ideas belonging to other Cultures that we have suffered to lapse because *our* thought with its limitations has not permitted us to assimilate them, or (which comes to the same thing) has led us to reject them as false, superfluous, and nonsensical."

My belief is that our culture, sensing that the numbers on the Renaissance hourglass are running out, is now trying belatedly to derive notations from other cultures, previously ignored. Hence such manifestations as Tao Physics, and possibly sf itself. Blish, struggling for so many years of his maturity with a killing disease, would be particularly susceptible to such responses.

Blish was attracted to Spengler because Spengler 'thought big'. Throughout the main corpus of Blish's writing, we find two ideas dominant, riding along in the medium of a third. The two ideas – preoccupations is a better word – are that some culture or phase of culture is coming to an end (generally with a beginning implied in that end) and that fresh ideas transfigure culture. Both these ride along on concepts of number. What excites him is not the individual – how could it do, given those preoccupations – but the alembic of mathematics.

This is why his books end with extraordinary cryptic sentences, the like of which never was on land or sea.

"Earth isn't a place. It's an idea."

God is dead.

"And so, by winning all, all have I lost."

Creation began.

Then he, too, was gone, and the world was ready to begin.

This last is the final line of one of Blish's less appreciated novels, *A Torrent of Faces*, written with Norman L. Knight. It concerns – so the author tells us – a utopia of over-population. Blish is the only man not to regard this as a contradiction in terms. The numbers had an appeal for him. He says, "Our future world requires one hundred thousand cities with an average population of ten million people each. This means that there would have to be seven such cities in an area as small as Puerto Rico, about twelve to sixteen miles apart, if the cities are spread evenly all over the world in a checkerboard pattern." This culture survives only because a large portion of mankind now lives under the oceans.

A Torrent of Faces is a cascade of figures. Every conversation seems to flow with them. As Kim and Jothen fly towards the mountain range of Chicago, she tells him, "Somewhere inside is the headquarters of the Civic Medical Services. I was born there. Every day approximately fifteen thousand babies are born there. The nine outlying regional centres produce about the same number daily . . . " And so on. It is all rather like the scene at the end of *A Clash of Cymbals*, where, heading for the collapse of the universe at the metagalactic centre of the universe, Hazelton borrows Amalfi's slide-rule to do a few setting-up exercises. This is not just a George O. Smith ploy to baffle us with prestidigitation; the power of numbers is a real

thing for Blish. In *A Clash of Cymbals*, it creates a new universe. Amalfi, the hero of the Okie saga, becomes the godhead, the very substance of the new universe. Never was life everlasting achieved on such a scale.

This apocalyptic idea of one state of being leading to another is, of course, crucial to a number of Blish's novels and stories; with it goes one system of thought leading to another. Poor scientific Roger Bacon, arriving at Westminster, occupies a room foul with marsh gas from the sewer below; when he ignites it and blows himself up, he believes it to have been a visitation by the devil.

Blish's work as a whole is remarkable for the visitations it numbers from both devils and angels. Not only did he see them as convenient shorthand for an alien system of thought intruding itself on the cartesian universe, he seems to have had a markedly individual belief in Good and Evil, a Blish version of the Fall which is presented in its purest state in *A Case of Conscience*.

We have to remember that that ponderous title, *After Such Knowledge*, is a quotation from T.S. Eliot: "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" Nobody ever gets forgiven in Blish's worlds; the math is against it. Even the Devil has to suffer by taking up the burdens of God.

Not that Blish actually believes or asks us to believe in devils. But that he likes to hold the proposition open, if only as one of "the multitude of great ideas belonging to other cultures" (devils being far from a Christian prerogative), is indicated by his quotation from C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* in *Black Easter*:

> There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive or unhealthy interest in them.

When devils materialise in Death Valley (in *The Day After Judgement*), US military intelligence protects the troops from this dreadful knowledge by use of typical military double-talk:

> Enemy troops are equipped with individual body armour. In accordance with ancient Oriental custom, this armour has been designed and decorated in various grotesque shapes, in the hope of frightening the opposition. It is expected that the American soldier will simply laugh at this primitive device.

Close to home, devils appear. Farther away from Earth, apparitions are more celestial. Blish shares the belief common to many American sf writers of his generation that to remain on Earth invites stagnation (as if the Chinese show any signs of stagnation by remaining in China).

Lithia, only forty light-years away from Earth, may or may not be the province of the devil. But in the centre of the galaxy, in the light, in the Heart Stars, there we find angels. "Inside that vast dust cloud called the Greater Coal Sack, the Angels orbited and danced in their thousands, creatures older than the planets, older than the suns, many of them as old as the universe itself." (From *Mission to the Heart Stars*.)

What, we may well wonder, was Blish doing, if not seeking idly to entertain us? Are we to regard this sort of fancy as a fatuous blemish, or perhaps an extended version of John Donne's lovely paradox

> At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow
> Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise
> From death

(a sonnet later pillaged by another science fiction writer)? My guess is that, while Blish liked turning our ideas upside down, he also longed for some sort of acceptance, in which standard religion could take its place beside a rigorous science. He saw a contradiction between the two systems and wished to bridge it. One of Blish's most memorable stories is called "Bridge" (1952); it dramatises the journey of a man across an ice bridge on Jupiter: the meeting of two incompatible systems, since the man is not on Jupiter in actuality but in illusion. (Incidentally, Blish was too fond of truth to enjoy illusion; so he rarely springs surprises on us, as do so many science fiction writers. Perhaps he mistrusted Eddington's remark that reality is "a child which cannot survive without its nurse illusion".) His stories take their dynamism from oppositions between order and chaos.

Such antitheses – let us say between loving and judging – were also an integral part of James Blish's life; but let us see how interestingly they work out in two of his most famous stories, "Common Time" and "Beep".

In "Common Time", Garrard is the pilot of an experimental interstellar vessel, capable of accelerating to near-light velocities. He finds himself undergoing extreme time-dilation.

> During a single day of ship-time, Garrard could get in more thinking than any philosopher on Earth could have managed during an entire lifetime. Garrard could, if he disciplined himself sufficiently, devote his mind for a century to running down the consequences of a single thought, down to the last detail, and still have millennia left to go on to the next thought. What panoplies of pure reason could he not have assembled by the time 6,000 years had gone by? With sufficient concentration, he might come up with a solution to the Problem of Evil between breakfast and dinner of a single ship's day, and in a ship's month might put his finger on the First Cause!

Both Blish and I relished the writings of Sir Thomas Browne, physician of Norwich, and this passage carries reminders of Browne ("Julius Scaliger, who in a sleepless fit of the gout could make two hundred verses in a night, would have but five plain words upon his tomb . . . "). The passage from "Common Time" gains vigour from the antitheses employed. It is the mark of a genuine writer that, in the fibres of one characteristic sentence, he delivers a minute image of his whole thought, much as physicists once believed the whole solar system was modelled in the atom.

Garrard proceeds, without being aware of the paradox, from dreaming of "panoplies of pure reason" to solving the Problem of Evil, as if Evil could be resolved by Reason; the two questions are presented as not opposed but complementary. "Common Time" was published in 1953, in the same year as first publication of *A Case of Conscience.* In *A Case of Conscience,* also, Evil seems curiously to be something only discernible by tortuous reason; how fortunate that Ruiz-Sanchez combines the function of scientist and priest; how strange that the Lithians mate as they do.

Chtexa, a Lithian with whom Ruiz-Sanchez talks, explains that he is living alone because no female has chosen him to fecundate her eggs that season. The priest

asks, "And how is the choice determined? Is it by emotion, or by reason alone?"

"The two are in the long run the same," replies Chtexa.

If emotion and reason are the same "in the long run", then so it seems are religion and science. "Clouds and clouds" of angels follow the Ariadne back to Earth, riding the same Standing Wave as the ship (but the Standing Wave was in a field which "selectively rejected the universe"). In that same novel, *The Star Dwellers,* the children have a tiny transistorised transceiver of which young Sylvia says, "Dad uses it to talk to Lucifer." Why not? The characters in *Black Easter* listen to Armageddon taking place over Radio Luxembourg. Why not, if there are wholly new ideas of number yet to be revealed?

To me – and to many readers – these formulae are passing strange. Therein lies their attraction; they force us to recall the intimate connection between mathematics and reality. Under his Campbell-shaped umbrella, James Blish was pursuing his own interests, and one of the main targets of that interest was integrating a universe Milton accepted with one that Dirac envisioned, in equating the esoteric problem of evil with the recondite spin of the electron. This is not a problem one meets with continually in science fiction (not even in the scientific romances of theology written by C.S. Lewis, whom Blish admired), yet many scientifically-minded people have confronted it.

As Blake saw eternity in an hour, so the great Mary Somerville, translator of Laplace, saw a proof of the unity of the Deity in Differential Calculus. The American Edward Everett declared, a bit more gushingly, "In the pure mathematics we contemplate absolute truths which existed in the divine mind before the morning stars sang together." Perhaps Leslie A. White came nearer to Blish's position – and to Spengler's – when he remarked that "Mathematics is a form of behaviour".

So could belief in a Dirac transmitter, like absolute trust in God, free us from sin? Such seems to be Blish's odd position in that justly renowned story, "Beep", published the year after *Case of Conscience* and "Common Time".

Here with a vengeance we have a culture coming to an end and a fresh idea transforming culture, wrapped up in numerology. Moreover, the peculiar structure of the story is designed to exhibit these transformations to best effect. (Let me add that I refer to the original novella, not the slightly revised version published under the Browneian title, *The Quincunx of Time.*)

One of the pleasing ingenuities of "Beep" lies curled up within its title, like a Samual Palmer chestnut tree alert within the confines of a conker, so exactly does it parallel the effect of the story, which unpacks a forest of implications from its meaningless seed of noise. Here, in fact, is "Common Time" Garrard's dream come true: the "panoplies of pure reason" can be unravelled in less than "a single day of ship-time". This feat results in a universe of rigid causal laws: the banishment of Chaos, the imposition of an order more rigorous than anything we could achieve today.

"Beep" contains one central image, which, being a numerological incantation, banishes all devils:

> "I've heard the commander of a worldline cruiser," says one of the characters, "travelling from 8873 to 8704 along the world-line of the planet Hathshepa, which circles a star on the rim of NGC 4725, calling for help across eleven million light years – but what kind of help he was calling for, or will be calling for, is beyond my comprehension."

Another facet which unfolds from "Beep" is that it is about one of the central problems of a galactic civilisation, how to overcome those immensely long lines of communication. Blish's Dirac transmitter provides the remarkably effective answer. It proves to be, in effect, a machine which abolishes the Problem of Evil, root and branch. Heisenberg-Born-Dirac wield more stick than the Holy Trinity. The story demonstrates what paradoxically good effects the machine generates – including having one of the characters married almost forcibly to a transvestite lady of mixed ancestry (which marriage he enjoys).

When writing this strange story, Blish posits that with free will removed from human affairs there would be no sin (the opposite assumptions if I have my theology correct, which is doubtful, to the assumptions in *A Case of Conscience* and, par example, *A Clockwork Orange*). His deductions about determinism are interesting; he depicts human consciousness as 'just along for the ride' or as 'helpless'. Events rule all. I once wrote a story entitled "Not for an Age", in which consciousness is similarly carried along helplessly, just for the ride, unable to interpose in events. It remains my idea of hell. Yet in "Beep", Blish manages to make it sound almost utopian. The world of "Beep" is a remarkably happy one; as one of the characters remarks, "The news is always good."

To make the connection between instant communication and freedom from sin is bold – yet we equate non-communication (secrecy) with wickedness. Blish bodies it forth in the tender care taken by the Service to see that lovers always meet as planned, so as to maintain future events in their predestinate grooves. Never before did Secret Service so closely resemble Marriage Bureau.

Which is remarkable. Most sf writers, slaves to my 'Hubris clobbered by Nemesis' rule, use the idea of instant communication as something to be seized upon and perverted to further aims of conquest. In "Beep", further peace is what it brings. Is Blish trying to equate instant communication with perfect communion? How else explain why his all-powerful Service is incorruptible? The Event Police have become veritable Angels on Earth.

Science fiction stories leave strange vapour trails in the atmosphere of our minds. I find myself wondering at the way in which Blish has planted two people in disguise – one in the inner, one in the outer story. They assume their disguises for devious purposes, yet neither meets with even so much as disapproval when they are discovered.

Perhaps deception carries no penalties in a utopia. The deceit is maintained for benevolent ends (though theologians, not least Ruiz-Sanchez, would look askance at that). But, in this utopia, deceit cannot be feared, since there is no aggression. If you remove reasons for aggression, will aggression vanish? Does the wish to throw stones disappear on a perfectly sandy beach? Useless to ask such questions about the world of "Beep", since the Dirac transmitter makes cause and effect inoperative by rendering the whole universe totally open to scrutiny. After such knowledge, there is no room for Judgement Day.

If you grant that "Beep" is of a utopian disposition, then you have to grant that it is a rare sort of story indeed, even among Blish's cabinet of curiosities. I know of no other galactic empire which could be remotely regarded as utopian; in general, the sewers of these glittering Trantors are clogged with the dismembered bodies of the oppressed. Yet, given angelic guidance, even Trantor could

be made to blossom.

In his wisdom, James Blish did a lot of strange things. Now that he has gone, we mourn more than a friend. He was still a thinker, a maker, until the day of his death. Unlike so many science fiction writers – wretched slaves to editors and formulae – he did not grow less interesting as he grew older, as he engaged in a daily fight with death. One of the themes that "Common Time", "Beep", and *A Case of Conscience* have in common is immortality: immortality of thought, immortality of material things, immortality of evil. When the city of Dis makes its dreadful apparition in the seared lands of America which Blish had by then left, we feel it as an eruption of a dreadful cancer largely forgotten, yet ever-living. (But good old Death brings queasiness to the guts of generations weaned on Supermen and Grey Lensmen and the ever-unliving Spock.)

And in the volumes of the Cities in Flight series, along with the spindizzies go the anti-death drugs that confer extreme longevity on all. In those years, Blish had little enough care to use the idea as more than a plot-device. But the evil days would come, and what was merely thought would be entirely felt.

Like his Mayor Amalfi, James Blish has made the perilous crossing into another state of being. He is "by this time no Puny among the mighty Nations of the Dead; for tho' he left this World not many Days past, yet every Hour you know largely addeth unto that dark Society; and considering the incessant Mortality of Mankind, you cannot conceive that there dieth in the whole Earth so few as a thousand an Hour."

The James Blish Award

The first James Blish Award for Excellence in Science Fiction Criticism was presented at the annual British Science Fiction Convention on 10th April 1977. The award was sponsored by the Science Fiction Foundation, with financial support from Corgi Books, Coronet Books, Eyre Methuen Ltd, Faber & Faber Ltd, Victor Gollancz Ltd, Granada Books, Quartet Books and Sphere Books, and consisted of an inscribed metal plaque together with a cheque for £40. The judging panel, chaired by Peter Nicholls, comprised Philip Strick and Ian Watson from the UK, Ursula Le Guin from the USA and Robert Louit from France.

The award was for criticism published during 1974-76, and was to be made to the critic rather than the work: that is, the whole body of work published by a critic over the period of eligibility was taken into account. It was decided that no work by members of the judging panel could be considered; neither could criticism published in *Foundation.* The closest contenders were James Gunn – for his history of sf, *Alternate Worlds,* and for his fascinating study of Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore in *Voices For the Future,* edited by Tom Clareson – and Brian Stableford, for his reviews and articles in *Vector, Amazing Science Fiction, Algol* and elsewhere. Stableford is a genuinely original critic, whose thoughts on the conceptual history of sf and the ways in which its various ideational threads interweave are expressed in scholarly, lucid prose and demonstrate a strong sense of true conceptual grasp.

The first winner of the James Blish Award, however, was Brian W. Aldiss, primarily for his wonderfully vivid and succinct introduction to Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip* (which also appeared in *Science Fiction Studies*), though mention should also be made of his *Science Fiction Art* (more pictures than criticism, but what criticism there was threw new light on to this complicated subject). Mr Aldiss was present to accept the Award, and made a characteristically witty acceptance speech.

The second James Blish Award, covering criticism published during 1977-78, will be presented at the World Science Fiction Convention in Brighton in August 1979. Readers of *Foundation* are encouraged to nominate works for this Award, by writing to the Administrator, Malcolm Edwards.

Christopher Priest's fifth novel, A Dream of Wessex, *appeared last Autumn, but in view of what follows it might be a shade disingenuous (albeit perfectly true) to introduce him as one of the best of the younger sf writers in the English-speaking world. In fact, with devilish cunning, he has made it practically impossible to introduce him, by posing some very pointed and honest questions about the nature of reputation in the sf field and what professionalism actually means . . . .*

---

the profession of science fiction: xiii: overture and beginners

Christopher Priest

I am 33 years old as I write this article, although by the time it sees print the calendar clock will have ticked at least once more. If I were a sportsman (as I once intended to be), I would be nearing retirement age, and if the sport were swimming or gymnastics I would be a decade past retirement. If I were in industry (as I once had to be), I would probably be a middle-management executive, already keeping my back turned towards the wall whenever I saw pushy young graduates coming

up behind me. If I were a rock star (as I once wanted to be – I am the same age as Mick Jagger and Paul McCartney), I would be an elder statesman. Instead, I am a writer, and at the beginning of my career. I shall go on being a "young" writer until I am at least forty.

(To put this into a sort of perspective: I am the same age as H.G. Wells, when he was writing *Love and Mr Lewisham*, and older than when he wrote *The War of the Worlds, The Time Machine, The Island of Dr Moreau*, and many others. I am twelve years older than Mary Shelley, when she wrote *Frankenstein*. I am the same age as Brian Aldiss, when *Non-Stop* was published.)

The science fiction world, with which I closely identify, and with which I am closely identified, has a large number of "young" writers, and many of them are Turks, in the colloquial sense. It seems to me that a great weakness of the science fiction industry (for that is what it is) is the way in which writers without any real track-record are encouraged to think of themselves as important or influential figures. I can think of several burgeoning talents which have been effectively nipped in the bud by too much early praise, or who have developed into self-conscious and pretentious writers because they were not told, at an opportune moment, that there is a difference between promise and delivery. It worries me that I have been invited to write an autobiographical piece for *Foundation*; it worries me more that I am writing it.

Well, I'll spare you a lot of autobiography; my life is of interest only to me. Young men shouldn't write autobiographies unless they are Robert Graves, and although I am the same age as he was when he wrote *Goodbye to All That*, my external life is short on action and colour, and the internal life is carefully husbanded raw material. I'd prefer to concentrate on the "profession" of science fiction – or, as is more the case, the profession of writing – and combine it with fragments of autobiography, where those will explain.

For instance: when I left school in 1959 I went to work in an accountant's office, wherein I was eventually articled to the senior partner for a period of five years. I stayed in accountancy, in fact, for a total of nine years, and it is probably true to say that that august profession has never known a more unwilling, bored, lazy or unsuccessful student. It seems remarkable, in retrospect, that I stuck it for so long; if I had been *only* an accountant for all that time, I should certainly have gone mad. However, for the last six of those years I was reading science fiction and was peripherally involved with fandom, and for the last five of those years I was writing. (I gave up accountancy for good in 1968, when I became a full-time writer.)

The benefits of that long sojourn are few, but they do exist. Some of the benefits are minor – for example, even to this day I can add up a page-long column of figures in a few seconds – but one of them is, for me, of major importance.

Accountancy is a profession, and accountants are professionals. An accountant will not do something unless he is able to do it, and prepared to do it, and then he does it. When he charges a fee for his work it is charged according to the hours he has put in and the expertise he has employed. He maintains a correctness of demeanour, and a confidentiality about his clients and his intelligence of them. He works to a code of practice that is unspoken and unbreachable. He addresses his

creditors as "Mr" and his debtors as "Esq".

Now, I'm not suggesting that the professionalism that is right for an accountant is right for an author, nor even that I have brought that brand of professionalism to my own writing . . . but after many years exposure to it, some of it must have rubbed off on me. Certainly, I learnt the real meaning of the word from accountants, and have grown to recognize and admire examples of it in many different fields. The abstract notion of "professionalism" is for me a state of mind, not a state of affairs.

I don't believe that selling written work to a commercial publisher makes one into a "pro", and equally, I don't believe that someone who writes in his spare time is necessarily less of a professional than a full-time writer. In my own case, I knew my attitude to writing was a professional one well before I wrote my first published story, and certainly some years before I gave up my job. I knew also, in 1968, that becoming a full-time writer was a permanent step; the thought that I might one day have to go back to a job simply never occurred to me . . . I felt able to do it, I was prepared to do it, and I did it.

Professionalism embraces all aspects of the writing activity. It means that one should never write at less than one's best. That one should take an interest in the business side of one's work, and see that both sides of a publisher's contract are abided by. That one acts correctly, and abides by a code of practice. In these matters, and others, I have failed in the past, and will probably do so again, but an awareness of them constitutes a principle that influences every moment of my writing career.

The man is the life, and the life is the work, and where one fails is in personal weakness. This is something that greatly interests me.

Every writer, every *whole* writer, has three distinct modes of existence. The first is his private life, which, to one degree or another, produces the internal and external experience that becomes the subject-matter of his work. In his "private" existence, the writer will spend much time thinking or talking about his work – what he plans to write, what he is writing, and what he has written – and he may brag or he may be modest, but he will see his work in ideal terms.

A writer also has a "public" existence. This is in the form of his published work, or when he is reviewed in newspapers and magazines, or when he gives a talk, or is interviewed, or when he writes an autobiographical piece for *Foundation*. In this manifestation he either adopts, or has ascribed to him, a public view of his work. A reviewer will hail his latest book as a classic, or damn it as incompetent hackwork; when answering an interviewer's questions, the writer gives his replies in the terms of how his writing appears now that it is finished. Even when he speaks of the process, he chooses his words carefully; the work has been worked, the achievement has been achieved. Again, the writer may be a braggart, or he may not, but he will see his work in terms of completion.

No writer worth his salt ever mistakes either of these for the true state of being a writer, although both occupy a large proportion of his threescore years and ten. The third existence is the "real" one, and it is one about which I, at least, am almost inarticulate.

It is that period of time when one is actually writing. Without wishing to mystify

something that I've seen many other writers make light of, I am genuinely baffled by the act of writing. It's a kind of fusion of the private and public existence, but it is not that at all. It's a process of the unconscious, even though one consciously employs experience and craft and skill. It's a period of isolation, solitude and introspection, but it is not lonely. It is a process which requires great concentration and energy, and which, like masturbation, comes entirely from oneself and drains the energy, but which, unlike masturbation, raises the desire for more. It is a period in which success and failure coexist quite naturally, in which joy and despair go hand in hand. It is a process of expression and communication, and it is inexpressible and incommunicable.

When I have finished writing a piece of work, quite apart from the fact that I'm not entirely sure where it came from, I have a feeling of satisfaction that is dangerously close to smugness . . . but this is balanced by a feeling of intense relief, as if one has driven in an old car from Cornwall to the north of Scotland, and broken down repeatedly all the way, but got there in the end anyway.

Returning for a moment to the nature of "professionalism": I feel at my most professional – in other words, that I am most capable of pursuing my work in a correct manner – when I am most confident about my work.

But I, and presumably other writers too, bolster that confidence artificially when the confidence does not arise from the work itself. (We talk to our friends, as opposed to our foes; we listen to praise instead of to criticism; we write autobiographical pieces for *Foundation.*) Here, precisely here, is the writer's greatest potential for failure, and it is at such times that he becomes less than wholly professional.

There is, though, another kind of failure, and it is not to be discounted.

I do not see myself as a successful writer; I scrape by. I feel I must constantly improve . . . because there's nowhere else to go. I described just now a feeling of relief when I have finished writing something; it has been the inevitable concomitant of everything I have ever written. It is the relief of having found something marginally worth writing about; the relief of having stayed with it to the end, and not abandoning it. If anyone ever says he likes something I've written, I feel relief that he has missed the weak bits, not delight that he is praising something else.

I find myself duplicating the sentiments of a far better writer than myself, Graham Greene. When I first read the following passage (from his autobiography, *A Sort of Life*) it had a profound effect on me, because he had put his finger on *exactly* the right place:

> For a writer success is always temporary, success is only a delayed failure. And it is incomplete. A writer's ambition is not satisfied like the business man's by a comfortable income, though he sometimes boasts of it like a *nouveau riche.* 'The reception of my *New Magdalene* was prodigious. I was forced to appear half way through the piece, as well as at the end. The acting took everyone by surprise, and the second night's enthusiasm quite equalled the first. We have really hit the mark. Ferrari translates it for Italy, Regnier has two theatres ready for me in Paris, and Lambe of Vienna has accepted it for his theatre.' Where is *The New Magdalene* now, and how many remember the name of its author?

I have not, so far, had much to say about science fiction, because it is of secondary interest to me. I dislike science fiction, and many of its peripheral activities.

Most of the writing that is published in the genre seems trivial, badly written and depressing. (As for the peripheral activities, it seems from what one hears that many *New Magdalenes* are being written.)

What I like is the work of individual authors, some of whom – many of whom, in fact – are published in the science fiction category. If this is a fine distinction lost on some, so be it.

Yet the fact remains that what I write *is* unmistakably "science fiction", and it would be disingenuous to pretend (as some writers of a similarly independent bent have pretended about their own work) that it has no connexion with the rest of the field. This is something that causes me a lot of self-examination, because I am a writer first and a science fiction writer second, and I cannot evade it. I *know* that the first time someone in a bookshop or library picks up a Christopher Priest book they are doing so because they are hoping it will be "as good as" something by Isaac Asimov, or John Wyndham, or Ursula Le Guin . . . and I am very glad to have that reader. You cannot get away from the fact that there are a lot of people who are science fiction readers . . . who pick up a book *because* it is sf (or labelled as such). What one hopes is that when the book is put down, the reader not only picks up another, but picks it up *because* it is by Christopher Priest. I have no ambition to be "as good as" or "better than" any of those writers I named, nor of any other, but to extend the reader's taste to make room for me too. No writer can survive creatively if he thinks of himself as being a contributor to a genre; what one must always work towards is being accepted for one's own individual merit as a writer. In other words, one is looking for the right readership who will read you for the right reasons.

The fact remains that working within the science fiction field can be a dispiriting experience. One sees scientific puzzle-solving and donnish twee masquerading as literature (and being hailed as such), impotence-fear masquerading as storytelling, purple prose masquerading as style, hacks masquerading as writers. One sees a positive embarrassment of prize-giving. One sees critical writing which compares you with Philip José Farmer and Michael Moorcock. One hears diminutive talents with a knack for self-publicity and nothing else making more noise than a roomful of Nobel Prize winners. One has pert young women from radio-stations reading your new novel, and asking you if you believe in flying saucers.

I write science fiction because . . . I don't really know why.

I cannot write unless I have an idea, a real idea, and those ideas that appeal to me come out speculative in nature. Also, it was the reading of science fiction at an impressionable age that first revealed the possibilities of the novel form. I have been a voracious reader of books since the age of seven, but until I was eighteen almost everything I read was non-fiction. Then I discovered sf, and read every example of it I could lay my hands on. When interest began to wane after a few years, I mixed my reading, with science fiction fairly low in priority. Perhaps the most satisfying novel I can think of reading is a well written, deeply imagined and profoundly felt science fiction novel . . . but one of those comes along about once a decade. I've given up the fruitless search, and now read only those books which, for whatever reason, I have to, or enough to keep up with what the colleagues I most admire are doing at the moment.

For those who take an interest in such matters: I'm *not* an only child, I didn't have a miserable or lonely childhood, and I have an uncle who used to jump over barrels on a motorcycle. (One of my great-uncles dropped bombs on German submarines during the First World War, and a grandfather – whom I closely resemble, according to some – owned a toyshop at the seaside; under different management, Priest Bros. is still in business.) I write on an electric typewriter, I type my own manuscripts, and work very slowly. *The Space Machine* took fourteen months of close, concentrated work; *Fugue for a Darkening Island* was written in nine months, *A Dream of Wessex* in six. In a typical working day I will spend approximately one or two hours actually at the typewriter, and ten to twelve hours drinking coffee, watching TV, walking *very slowly* down the road to post a letter, or otherwise wasting time. I write approximately one novel every eighteen months, and one or two short stories a year. I am very happy in my job, and am seeking neither raise nor promotion.

I can never re-read my work with any pleasure, and as a matter of rule I always regret any non-fiction from the moment it appears in print. By the time you read this, I will disclaim every word of it. Having reached the end of it I am more convinced than I was at the outset that this is an interim report, and that "young" writers should curb their lips. I look forward to writing the second instalment of this when I am "old".

---

letters

Dear Peter Nicholls, 11th July 1977

What has moved me to write is an occasional lapse into what I will call, for lack of a better term, the esthetic fallacy. It expresses itself in statements such as: 1) one motivation for writing is superior to another; and 2) one kind of writing is superior to another; but, oddly enough, 3) all writing is basically the same; and 4) form and content are indivisible. These form the basis for esthetic judgments that seem to me to be based on half-truths (or half-untruths) and are no more than half-tenable. And, as conventional wisdom, they go as untested in journals as the uncritical admiration of fans goes untested in fanzines.

Let's take them one at a time, with examples. In his review of *Hell's Cartographers*, Richard Cowper deplores the author's continual emphasis on markets and money. He reminds us that "literary excellence bears very little relation to the amount of money a work earns for an author". Well, it was true that a proper concern for markets and money were the facts of life for science fiction authors in the U.S. between, say, 1935 and 1965, for reasons that I try to describe in my history,

Alternate Worlds; but we ought also to look at the other side of Cowper's coin, that a disregard for money and markets bears little relation to literary excellence, and that works of literary excellence have been produced by mercenary authors as well as by esthetes. One might point, randomly, to Shakespeare, Dickens, Bennett, Wells, O. Henry, Hammett, Chandler, Shaw, and no doubt hundreds of others since the advent of the money society. Before that, I have no doubt, the currying of favor with patrons, or the concern for the vote of the judges in the competition at Athens, did not automatically discredit the artist's work. It is a romantic notion that the artist should be above commercialism.

In Cowper's review and in Christopher Priest's review of Ben Bova's *Notes to a Science Fiction Writer,* we get the statement that one kind of writing is superior to another: that is, that a concern for markets and requirements and conventions leads automatically to inferior fiction. An element of truth may make it only more dangerous; though an *exclusive* concern for somebody else's formula is self-defeating, concentrating *exclusively* on one's own literary requirements is equally self-defeating. From my own experience of teaching fiction writing, I would say that the first problem is to free beginning writers from the notion that writing is self-expression; the second is to develop the skills that come with the realization that writing is communication and will be read by someone not privy to anything in the writer's head. The third problem is to get them published, for without publication few writers have the courage to continue. To be published, one must, of course, contribute some elements of uniqueness, but it helps, it helps, to know who you're writing for and how to manage his or her emotional involvement. With the encouragement of publication a writer can develop; any writer with ability will not remain long at hackwork, and no amount of talk about the holy nature of art will change the hacks.

In Cowper's and Priest's reviews we find the comments that science fiction (and its writers) is no different *in kind* than other kinds of literature (and their writers). Of course there are many ways in which science fiction is similar to other kinds of literature, but there are many significant ways in which it is different. Priest would restrict science fiction to fantastic metaphors, and other fiction to mundane metaphors, under the apparent assumption (here I guess) that since fiction cannot represent reality it must be a figurative comparison. Well, I'm a great metaphor man myself and perhaps there is an insight here, but I think there is much fiction that *tries* (successfully or not) to represent reality, and that science fiction obtains certain unique effects by considering the fantastic material realistically. Priest may be making his own preference into a definition. Even more, to find similarities between literatures may be useful, but to deny differences is to confuse issues. The critics of science fiction seem to feel that to claim difference for sf leads to "arbitrary and parochial critical standards", but to claim no difference may be an attempt to focus attention on what the critic likes or feels qualified to judge. If accepted, the notion that sf is no different would eliminate the need for a magazine such as *Foundation.* But sf *is* different: we recognize a basic difference as readers, and criticism is an attempt to explore the nature of that difference. Where reader reaction and criticism run into difficulties is in reaction to new works that lack generic identification. Genres evolve through fiction that works against conventions, but sometimes fiction falls outside genres and to force them into genres may do violence to both.

Finally, let me get to a bit of conventional wisdom that you are fond of repeating: "form and content are indivisible". Again, this is a partial truth. As you say, how one says something affects what is said [and what one says affects how one says it], but "indivisibility" implies that we are never able to detect thought behind inade-

quate expression or the absence of validity behind impeccable expression. Ideally we want valid and original content expressed in exact and perfect form, but this is an imperfect world. We exist as communicating creatures only by discerning more than expression should permit, and our tragedy is that we can never communicate our true and complete thoughts. And so we divide form and content all the time. "That's a good idea," we say, "but written poorly." Or: "that's great writing, but I don't have the faintest notion what the author is trying to say." The most ridiculous concepts can be written with grace and style, and ideas shattering in their originality can be nearly illiterate when expressed. An important fact about science fiction is that its content has surpassed the ability of its authors to shape it and express it, and if we can't talk about the difference we can't discuss with any honesty the evolution of science fiction. Of course we *want* sf to be written more skilfully, but we shouldn't confuse our tastes with standards of quality. I am reminded of a statement made a few years ago to an SFWA gathering by Leslie Fiedler: for too long critics have tried to tell readers why they should like what they don't like; what they should be doing is discovering why people like what they like.

James Gunn Lawrence, Kansas

Dear Peter Nicholls,

Herewith, unprompted, I offer for publication in *Foundation*, a correspondence comprising a letter by one B.S. addressed to me, and forwarded by Virginia Kidd, and my reply to Fr. S., which I would not have wasted time upon, except in the hope of making it an object lesson to others in her position, many of whom will have occasion to read it in *Foundation*. The manners of students and even older academics in approaching writers for free help are always astonishing to me, and by taking the time to write the ideal reply to such a letter as Fraulein S's I thought I might make a small contribution to reforming the more naive forms of rudeness. The writers in your audience will also, I venture, find amusement if not instruction in this brief exchange.

Thomas M. Disch London

Dear Mr Disch, *25th February 1977*

The Literary Agency Linder AG in Zurich has kindly given me the address of your agency in Milford.

I am a student at Heidelberg university and at the moment I am writing my thesis which is a translation critique of your book Camp Concentration.

I have already been in contact with the German translator, Mrs Gertrud Baruch, who answered my questions concerning the translation of your book.

I naturally want my thesis to be as informative and complete as possible and therefore I would be very grateful if you could answer some questions.

Due to difficulties in obtaining your address I am unfortunately pressed for time and would be grateful if you could answer my letter as soon as possible.

1. *Do you know of any material or books having been written about your book,* Camp Concentration. *If so, what are they and where have they been published?*

2. *What do you consider to be your principal aim behind this book?*
3. *What is your opinion of the "New Wave" in sf?*
4. Camp Concentration *has been considered as an attack against the Vietnamese War; do you believe that interpretation to be valid?*
5. *What inspired the use of the "Faust" theme in your book?*
6. *To which circle of readers do you think your book appeals?*
7. *What should the translator treat the most carefully?*

I have found Camp Concentration *a fascinating book for my thesis and look forward to your reply.*

Yours gratefully,
B.S.

Dear B.S., *6th March 1977*

As Virginia Kidd observed in her letter to you, your questions are not such as to encourage a reply. While I am intrigued by your thesis, and would be interested in a critique of Frau Baruch's translation, none of your questions to me bear upon that particular problem, except, nebulously, the seventh. They are, indeed, precisely calculated to provoke silence as their aptest reply, but as they are representative of a particular kind of time-wasting, fuzzy-headed questionnaire, I have decided to answer your letter in some public forum, on the chance that others in your position may be forestalled from a similar display of presumption and bad manners.

As to the bad manners first, the nearest you come to saying please in your your whole letter is to say that "you would be grateful" if I answered your letter "as soon as possible". You say you're pressed for time and make no inquiry at all into my situation. All you say of Camp Concentration *is that it is "a fascinating book for your thesis", and not a word as to the drift of that thesis, though any author might be presumed to be interested in a critique of the translation of one of his novels. In a word, you are thoughtless, in the sense of being insensitive to others.*

To judge by your questions, you're also thoughtless in a more literal sense. It is natural enough to ask for bibliographic help, so I shall pass over the first question, but how am I to answer something so witlessly unfocused as "What is the principal aim behind this book?" That is like trying to start a conversation by asking someone why they are alive. A book may be presumed to have manifested its aims sufficiently that any such questions can only be understood either as an insult to the writer (whose incompetence has left the matter still in doubt) or a confession of intellectual vacuity on the part of the person asking the question. In either case, one's instinct is not to answer.

I have no opinion of the "New Wave" in sf, since I don't believe that that was ever a meaningful classification. If you mean to ask – do I feel solidarity with all writers who have ever been lumped together under that heading – certainly I do not.

Your fourth question at least has the merit, unique in your letter, of being specific. It is also, to me, dumbfounding. Can there be any doubt where the book's sympathies lie on the question of the war in Viet Nam? It is not, evidently, an attack on the war itself. If it were, it would be needlessly oblique.

Then: "What inspired the use of the 'Faust' theme in your book?" The "Faust" theme itself, my dear – what else? Would you ask Tolstoi what inspires him to write about war? This is just another evidence of pussyfooting and thoughtlessness. You have gathered that "Faust" has some bearing on the book, and suppose that by

pressing that buttom I may yield something for you to quote.

"To which circle of readers do you think your book appeals?" That assumes, doesn't it, that it appeal is necessarily limited to a few? No doubt that's so, but it is scarcely for me to draw the circle.

"What should the translator treat the most carefully?" Another absurd piece of button-pushing. Surely, given your thesis, you must have some *notion of the options open to a translator that he must choose among. You might, in that case, have listed them. But you're obviously too lazy.*

In conclusion let me express my hope that your thesis finds the success that it deserves.

Best regards,
Thomas M. Disch

Dear Mr Nicholls, 5th July 1977

The balance between stuffy academic writing and sloppy fan writing is hard to achieve, but I think you are doing a fine job, going to neither extreme. I personally appreciate criticism like Angus Taylor's, which I guess you could call Marxist, but I prefer to read his remarks as coming from one with a "firm grasp on the obvious" as an old teacher of mine once said. I would subscribe to *Foundation* if I knew I would be assured of reading Taylor – that's reason enough. Stableford and Shippey have fine essays in 11/12 too.

May I make one remark? In your introduction to Fetzer's piece on Kuprin, you mention Zamyatin's influence of Huxley. This is assumed all too often, and is even argued by some on flimsy evidence. But I ran across this recently: "It has been wrongly assumed by critics that Zamjatin's novel *We* influenced Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* . . . In his letter of October 25, 1962 to the present writer, Huxley himself writes: 'Oddly enough I never heard of Zamiatin's book until 3 or 4 years ago . . . *Men Like Gods* annoyed me to the point of planning a parody, but when I started writing I found the idea of a negative utopia so interesting that I forgot about Wells and launched into B.N.W.'" (Christopher Collins, *Evgenij Zamjatin: An Interpretive Study* [Mouton: The Hague, 1973], p.41n). This is a minor point, but a significant one in that it bears on practical and theoretical issues like genre theory, influences, parody, satire, etc., etc.

James W. Bittner Wisconsin

Dear Mr Nicholls,

I'd appreciate a mention of a monumental work of my own – a bound copy of my *Bibliography of Russian Science Fantasy 1917-1966* is now on the shelves of the Library of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, Senate House, Malet Street, where anyone may consult it. It is a complete list of all works in the genre, all annotated as to content, with some remarks as to style and treatment where I felt this appropriate. There are one or two gaps, I may say, in the work as it stands, but I am adding a section at the end to fill all these in. All the entries

come complete with notes on where the given work was reviewed etc. For the serious student this is a mine of information and performs the important task of separating what's worthwhile and what isn't. It's a hefty tome of course and is a complete labour of love. If you feel your readership would be interested in this, please tell them to go along. There's also a list by me of all articles (critical) on sf in Russia. This is also in the library.

Alan Myers London

Dear Peter Nicholls, 17th September 1977

I just can't agree with (all of) Richard Cowper's comments on Zelazny. While it is probably true that Zelazny was indeed praised both too often and too loudly at the beginning of his writing career, it is far from certain that everything he's written since "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" has been downhill. In fact, he has produced several important works since that time. Cowper, for example, calls *The Dream Master* "something of a disappointment". (*F 11/12*, p.143) "It was all right," Cowper continues, "but it left no lasting impression upon me, and, to be candid, I can remember very little about it today." Now, surely, *The Dream Master* is one of the major modern sf novels. Other critics than myself agree with this opinion. Ormond Seavey, in the introduction to the Gregg Press edition of *The Dream Master*, states that the novel "remains one of [Zelazny's] most impressive works, perhaps his best." And Ursula Le Guin, in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, calls the novella version of the story ("He Who Shapes", Nebula winner, 1965) "one of the finest science fiction stories I know". I think it would not be too difficult to find others who agree with these sentiments. Likewise, it is just too simplistic to dismiss Zelazny's Hugo-winning *Lord of Light* as Cowper does, "reflecting that whichever way he was going it was not a path I was particularly interested in following". (*F 11/12*, p.143) I do agree with Cowper's general argument, that Zelazny has earned the right to be judged by the highest standards, and that he has not always attained these. It is just that I do not believe that Cowper has proven his thesis that Zelazny has not produced any important or memorable (an important criteria for Cowper) works in the last few years. Both *Today We Choose Faces* and *Doorways in the Sand* are far more interesting novels than Cowper will allow. (I assume that Zelazny's excellent recent "Home is the Hangman" had not been read by Cowper at the time he wrote his essay.)

Actually, I am afraid that my major criticism with Cowper's article is not so much with his conclusions, as with his lack of justification for those conclusions. What the essay amounts to is little more than an emotional plea, something like, "I don't like the recent work of Roger Zelazny because I don't find it memorable". This is not really critical argumentation. Why couldn't the man have taken a little more time and space and presented some more detailed reasons for *why* Zelazny's later works are so bad?

But, then again, isn't that one of the major elements of Cowper's own fiction: an emotional stance, shored up by eliciting sympathy from the reader rather than by convincing him, the reader, of the intellectual correctness of the argument. This is a strategy that can at times produce some notably effective literary art (e.g. some of the best of Cowper's own work, or, to take an entirely different example, several of the short stories of Harlan Ellison). However, when such a method is chosen for literary criticism in 1976/77, then it needs a very special

explanation and justification. Please note that I did not say that such a method was invalid, only that it must be clarified and defended in a way that Cowper did not do in *Foundation 11/12*.

I found David Pringle's article on Clifford Simak's sf especially interesting, as I read at almost the exact same time Thomas Clareson's essay on that same author in the first of the *Voices for the Future* books which Clareson has edited for Bowling Green University Popular Press. I do not have time to go into all the ramifications of these two articles here in this letter, but there should be a good deal to learn from a detailed comparison of the two. Clareson and Pringle have already found a point of disagreement in Simak's very first story, "The World of the Red Sun". Says Pringle, "This story . . . gives no hint of the Simak of the later decades." (*F 11/12*, p.16). While Clareson believes that "there is already – however unconsciously – something of at least one theme which was to shape Simak's mature work." (Thomas D. Clareson, "Clifford D. Simak: The Inhabited Universe" in Clareson, ed., *Voices for the Future*, Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976, p.64).

More important, clearly, is the critical opinion these two critics give of Simak's work as a whole. Pringle has this view of Simak's sf:

> His fame and popularity rest on no great innovations in the art of sf – indeed, they rest on no particularly outstanding individual works. Despite the three major awards he has received, there are no "masterpieces" in the Simak oeuvre. There is simply a body of good work, and a certain amount of competent hackwork. [. . .] Simak is scarcely an intellectual writer at all, despite the respect for things of the intellect expressed by characters in his stories. (*F 11/12*, p.17)

Yet Clareson claims,

> Once Simak had written *City* [. . .] American science fiction could never again be what it had been in the magazines of the 1930s and 1940s. [. . .] Clifford Simak did more, perhaps, than any of his contemporaries to free science fiction from its established patterns and to create credible, imaginary worlds better able to sustain metaphors of the condition of man. (Clareson, p.75)

Both authors, however, agree on the importance of the moral elements in Simak's sf. "[Simak's] seriousness is moral rather than cerebral" (Pringle, p.17) and, "As few other writers before him, he gave the genre a moral stance." (Clareson, p.75)

I see that I am getting involved in polemics again. Suffice it to say that Pringle and Clareson approach Simak from different directions and they reach different conclusions. Both have valuable things to say about Simak's work, but I tend to believe that in terms of choice of method and in concrete results, Clareson has the more valid and defensible view. It seems that Pringle has held himself too much on the surface of his material, he has neglected to dig deep enough, while Clareson has rooted out several truly valid themes which run through most of Simak's sf. Clareson has come much closer to understanding what Simak was really saying, and he has also done a better job of placing the works he examines in a chronologically revealing setting. If you will excuse such an analogy, Pringle has (generally) held himself to the symptoms while Clareson has sought the underlying causes.

Pringle singles out such obviously recurring metaphors/symbols as the House, Servants, Aliens, etc., without trying to fathom what these manifestations represent. Pringle's attempted analysis of Aliens ends with the conclusion that "The function of the aliens in Simak is to enlarge man's capacity for neighbourliness – the boons, like Old Mose's crystal ball, are just rewards for being good neighbours." (Pringle, p.23). This only hints at Simak's major concern with what Clareson has termed the "community of life": "Simak attempts to enunciate a vision which sees all sentient

creatures, however diverse their forms, as equal parts of a single community which is itself the purpose and meaning of the galaxy." (Clareson, p.75). The only time Pringle takes up this major theme for comment is when he calls Simak a "barnyard Olaf Stapledon, preaching the doctrine of universal unity". (Pringle, p.20).

I must stop now. I've already said more than enough. But both Pringle and Clareson are good places to start for the needed critical evaluation of Clifford D. Simak as a modern science fiction writer.

Richard L. McKinney Sweden

Dear Fellow Writers,

We would not wish to bother you with the affairs of distant colleagues; however, our troubles today could well become your troubles *tomorrow* if the literary world community does not demonstrate strong solidarity.

By now, you have probably heard about the long years of repression of the well-known publicists and authors I. Svitlychny, V. Moroz, Y. Sverstiuk, V. Stus, V. Chornovil, S. Karavan'sky, and of many other Ukrainians and representatives of other socialist republics.

Presently, the activities of government security organs have entered a new phase: special attention is paid to combating science fiction, works of fantasy that develop the somnolent consciousness, and those that prompt evolutionary or revolutionary changes. Thus, for example, all books by Oles' Berdnyk (approximately 30 titles) were secretly removed from all libraries and burned in accordance with a special "circular". (In what way does this differ from Hitler's actions of 1933?) Berdnyk himself was excluded from the Writers' Union five years ago, and placed in cruel and miserable living conditions.

They did the same with the poet and science fiction writer, Mykola Rudenko. For many years he had troubled the leading organs of Ukraine and the USSR with suggestions that they examine and consider a series of scientifically based forecasts in areas such as economics and sociology. Criticism of him was not lacking (except for literary criticism). He was expelled from the Party, from the Writers' Union, and became terrorised in all manner of ways.

More than once, our living quarters were subjected to searches by members of the KGB (three times in O. Berdnyk's apartment and twice in M. Rudenko's). Literary archives were almost completely plundered: taken were scores of note-books with plans for new works, unfinished stories and science fiction novels, tens of thousands of lines of Rudenko's poetry now impossible to recreate, and also, a philosophical work entitled "Gnosis and the Present". The works, "Holy Ukraine", "An Alternative Evolution", and many more were confiscated from O. Berdnyk.

It is impossible to work creatively expecting cruel and brutal guests any day (or more precisely, night). You, Fellow-Writers, have surely never even dreamed of such a situation where, in a socialist country, ignorant gendarmes burrow with their dirty paws through the manuscripts of writers and poets; where, upon these poets' dreams of a World of Unity, Humaneness, and Brotherhood, fall ominous shadows of a merciless present.

Do not consider these facts to be incidental. The situation of science fiction writers is tremendously sad throughout our multicultured nation. For instance, immediately after the death of the celebrated Russian writer I. Efremov, guests

from the KGB paid a visit to his widow, conducted a ruthless search, seized many valuable manuscripts. For a long time afterwards, his name was taboo and subscriptions for a six-volume edition of his works were cancelled. Following complaints by other science fiction writers, a three-volume edition was permitted, but his major works, "Time of the Bull", "Spare the Razor", and "Thais of Athens" were deleted from the edition. Many works by the well-known science fiction writers, the brothers Strugatsky are banned, and foreign science fiction is rarely published. The future has become a frightening prospect to the organs of security – in it they sense a threat to their totalitarian rule.

Ah, yes! It is impossible to keep the fire of the mind and heart in the paper labyrinths of vetoes and persecution for long. Prison walls and even death will not check the flight of flaming thought.

Brother-writers! Raise a cry of protest against the medieval persecution of literary men. The era of space travel demands free contacts, free thought, the fusion of all creative efforts, to build a unified World of Joy and Love!

We await your words of support. The situation is fearsome!

Mykola Rudenko
Oles' Berdnyk Kiev

Corrigenda Foundation 11/12

We would like to correct two unfortunate setting errors which mangled the sense of parts of David Pringle's article "Aliens for Neighbours: a Reassessment of Clifford D. Simak" in the last issue of *Foundation*.

p.17, lines 30-32. The sentence which reads "Just as Heinlein's is the emotionalism of early childhood, so Simak's is the emotionalism – call it sentimentalism if you like – of old age" should read "Just as Heinlein's is the emotionalism of the initiation ceremony and Bradbury's is the emotionalism of early childhood, so Simak's is the emotionalism – call it sentimentalism if you like – of old age."

p.28, final sentence. The phrase "mutually respecting old and and wise aliens" should read "mutually respecting old men and wise aliens".

foundation forum

This Forum arose from a conversation with Brian W. Aldiss during one of the intervals between the five Illuminatus! *plays during their first day-long run at the Liverpool School of Language, Music, Dream and Pun. What Mr Aldiss had to say about artistic awareness struck a chord, and, on looking at notes I had taken during sf evening classes at the Stanhope Institute, it seemed to me that there was ground for debate on the matter between Mr Aldiss on the one hand and Thomas M. Disch and Richard Cowper on the other. The reader will see below that my interpretations of the attitudes of Disch and Cowper were very largely mistaken. The divergence of views is less than anticipated, but what these three authors do have to say about the creative process is illuminating, in what it shows us about their own work and in the consensus it suggests about artistic creation in general. We welcome contributions from readers either to this new discussion, or to those discussions already begun in the two previous Forums.*

problems of creativeness

Brian W. Aldiss, Richard Cowper and Thomas M. Disch

1. Lester to Aldiss If I have it aright you were propounding the view at Liverpool that a good deal of conscious control of his writing is important to a serious author. Recently I've heard Tom Disch and Richard Cowper both saying virtually the opposite – namely that they don't care to think too much about their writing, either while they're at it or else afterwards, since they feel that a close consideration of their own techniques would make them too self-conscious to write at all. I wonder if this is an especially "science-fictional" (or perhaps "popular-genre") approach, a result of the ghetto-specialism that's been so vicious in effect elsewhere.

2. Aldiss to Lester What you have to say about Disch and Cowper claiming to prefer not to think too much about their writing is all very astonishing. As far as I can remember anything at all I said during that incredible weekend up in Liverpuddle,

I was talking rather less about consciousness with respect to one's writing than with respect to one's self. But this also fits in with what you say about ghetto-specialisation and popular genres; because I believe that one does not really start to matter as a writer without having brought a great deal of one's self into the area of awareness. Perhaps the reverse way of saying this is that creative people seem more aware of their motives and feelings – and underlying reasons for same – than do the uncreative.

Many uncreative people write. Many uncreative people write sf of a sort; it is perfectly easy to turn out twelve titles in the New! Daring! Original! series, *Cor of the Planet Shagbag* if one does not think what one is doing and just lets all the old Burroughs or Haggards pour through one's gut. The state here is trancelike; awareness is its enemy.

Disch and Cowper are not this sort of writer. I'd have said that both suffer from self-consciousness. I can hardly believe they are sincere in claiming not to want to think about their writing. That is not my way. My way to write is to build a sandwich. Odds and ends of ideas, characters, phrases, themes are marshalled on the table of my consciousness and a sort of *critical* process takes place until, come a certain juxtaposing of elements, my *creative* imagination takes fire. Then is the only anxious time, when *critical* and *creative* sides jostle, deciding what might work in a novel (story) and what would not. The discomfort of that chaos propels me eventually to the typewriter. There I go through the *creative* process: the mind is open, great winds sweep through it – superstitiously, I never read a word or page once it is done, until all is done. As *creativity* subsides, I work through on a second draft, using *critical* faculties to repair what havoc I can. This process may be repeated (*The Malacia Tapestry* had four drafts, and some passages many more). Finally, there is a cold *critical* look at the whole thing when the manuscript comes back from the typist. But this separation of critical and creative is for convenience only: when the processes are in action, they don't feel separate.

Some bits of writing are different. My "enigmas" begin without the critical preliminaries: I just hurl myself into writing without thought, as in a dream. The result is a certain stimulating inconsequence: good for short lengths, useless for long, where the time element enters.

3. Lester to Cowper I seem to remember your saying at the Stanhope class that you didn't like thinking too closely about your books, in case the intellectual process got in the way of your writing. I'm not sure if you were referring to the argument that a writer too conscious of his style would produce nothing but empty polished prose; or the one which says that if a writer concentrates on the underlying ideas in his story he'll end up with a clotted style.

4. Cowper to Lester I would certainly hesitate to pontificate about writing – even my own! I'm frequently astonished when erudite or psychologically orientated critics discover in my own work symbolism and thematic subtleties I had no idea were there. If I am a "stylist" – and so many people have told me I am that I've finally come to believe it – then it's in spite of and not because of myself. I try to tell the story I've chosen to tell as *clearly* as I possibly can, believing, with

Coleridge, that a man's style should be as transparent as a sheet of clear glass through which the reader observes free of obscurity. I tend to *think* in metaphors which accounts for the profusion of them in my novels. A poet *manqué* no doubt.

5. Lester to Disch I seem to remember your saying that a writer can't be too conscious of what he's writing – can't be too aware of the underlying ideas that he s exploring while he's writing – or he'll put himself off; or perhaps you were talking about style, an artist being too conscious of his style to produce anything but empty polished prose.

6. Disch to Lester My first reaction to your account of what I said was to take total exception to it. "A writer can't be too conscious of what he's writing . . . " I assume you use "can't" in the sense of "shouldn't". If it has the force, instead, of "it is not possible" then a partial case might be made. For if a writer is aware of his "underlying" ideas, can they be said to be underlying? For my own part, I like to leave some evidence on the face of the text of my own sense of what the text is about, not so much to forestall criticism as to smooth the path for an ideal reader, who will know, from such glimmers of intent, that he has taken one's true meaning. Further, there is a sense in which art may be considered progressive, and that is in the way that the latent content of art becomes, in the hands of a later generation of artists, its manifest content; which is a paraphrase, on a cultural level, of Freud's formulation that the ego is always at work extending the boundaries of consciousness at the expense of the lower depths. Thus, Cubism may be seen as a "manifest" account of what is latent in Cezanne, or Poussin, for that matter. Beethoven is constantly discovering huge philosophic meanings in materials that aren t much more than folk melodies – meanings he had the genius to perceive in the raw materials, and the craft to communicate as a composer.

However: the greater the gap between manifest and latent (i.e. the larger the generative idea of a work of art) the more corollaries there will be to be worked out, and it is these workings-out that are the main business of the artist. This is why great artists are also liable to be prolific: largeness of conception leads logically to amplitude of execution. In order to be prolific the artist learns – his art, whatever it is. Painters train for years to make mind, eye, and hand a single integrated circuit, which may seem, to someone who lacks that training, "instinctive". It isn't; the painter *thinks* in the language of his art. Composers *think* in music. Writers are no otherwise, but because their medium is language the nature of their artistry is obscured. For language is precisely what we all have in common.

A good writer, writing well, compresses immense meanings into few words, but (as the inadequacy of that common metaphor suggests) he loses some as well. For it isn't just squeezing more and more "meanings" into a limited space. A single metaphor of monumental scale has a way of generating and emitting meanings larger and more various than the artist could be held responsible for – at least, in a court of justice.

7. Lester to Aldiss Disch . . . seemed to claim at the Stanhope class that the iconography at the end of *The Genocides* was just a set of pretty pictures with no more

meaning than that. What I'd criticise in him (as in Dick and maybe Spinrad and sometimes Simak) is a lack of proper resolution to the ideas present in the books, a failure to work them through to leave a clear message (or clearly a lack of message) or an ambiguity; and from what Disch says this is perhaps because the ideas aren't consciously a part of the book for the writer. Disch is a fine writer, and I'm convinced is stylistically aware; but perhaps not so much ideationally.

8. Aldiss to Lester Writers aren't to be trusted in what they say about their writing; I take what both Tom Disch and Richard Cowper say with a grain of salt. Equally, I take what *I* said with a grain of the same. And this has nothing to do with honesty and much to do with inability. We aren't too sure what we are doing when we actually do it because a different level of attention is engaged. It's like the daydream interrupted by a loud noise – you know it was a good daydream but you can't remember what you were daydreaming about; and *thinking* merely makes it further lost because the daydream was a sort of associative imagery functioning at a lower level of consciousness than active thought. The workings of the mind aren't all of a piece.

Another example that comes close to our partial oblivion of intent can be seen in the case of vision. You focus on things at the focal point; everything is clear there. But the rest of vision also has its uses. Movement registers most acutely on the very margins of vision. Presumably this could be explained as a bit of survival technique left over from our hunt-and-be-hunted days. The imaginative faculty has similar survival properties – it enables us to grasp things previously on the perimeter.

Let me remind you of Shelley's fine phrase: "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know." I believe that a lot of my time at my desk is spent in imagining what I know, in making my own life experience credible to myself. Even as I write that sentence, I can see in it a fragmentary image of what my first novel, *Non-Stop*, was all about: people who were engaged in making their own life experience credible to themselves. Colin, I'm staggered! I am writing this piece slowly, sunning myself, drinking coffee, and wishing I was back with the novel I am writing. Yet here is an example materialising before our eyes of an idea generated in conversation (epistolatory conversation). I thought I had comprehended what Shelley was saying, but this time the rays of his light shine a little further into the cavern. We must reinforce the associative powers of mind; what other way have we of dealing with civilisations which grow increasingly complex, increasingly clogged with objects, images, and knowledge?

Perhaps I understand my own fiction better in the glow of Shelley's lantern. Colin Charteris, in *Barefoot in the Head*, torn between Jugoslavia and Britain, the two "ends" of Europe, is torn between the ultimate fame of Saviour-hood and the ultimate obscurity of acid-tripping; only when he can imaginatively see what he knows he has been doing is he able to decide on a course of action. That image of *balance* is central to my fictional intentions; but I am by no means always aware of it in the delight of having found some new thing in which I can develop my old intentions – my interest centres on the new thing, since lower and more habitual layers of thought can take care of the old thing. I must give you an example – I hate abstract discussion.

Jonathan Cape have just taken a novella of mine, called *Enemies of the System.* The two conscious axes of the story's orbit are: 1) my long-sustained ambition to write of a utopia ever since I perceived that dystopias like, say, John Brunner's, far from having an apotropaic effect, actually tend to bring about the conditions they so gloatingly describe, just as armaments races tend to escalate confrontation conditions; and 2) my wish to recapture something of the awful repressiveness of life in a Communist country, as reflected in Margaret's and my visit to Poland last year; Solzhenitsyn has had his effect on me, and I wanted to stand up and be counted, even if only as a place in decimals.

These two axes, as I've called them, are new. Well, fairly new. It's true that, during the years of marshalling forces before I got down to writing the final version of *The Malacia Tapestry,* I hoped to create Malacia as a little utopia; typically, as I got closer to it, I saw the slums ever more clearly. Typical of the way my mind works. Anyhow, let's say that the axes to *Enemies of the System* are fairly new and sharp-edged.

But on reading the completed novella through, I'm impressed by how much whole areas of the background resemble the territory of *Non-Stop* and *Hothouse* and *The Dark Light Years,* my early novels. There are downfallen humans, creatures distorted by evolution, and barbarous scenery; beings, in other words, living humbly in ruins of former greatness like the latter-day Romans who built their rude huts among and from the ruins of Imperial Rome in the engravings of Piranesi (a simile which gains its full effect if you have read – or written – *The Shape of Further Things*).

In *Enemies of the System,* this scenario of downfall lies in the background. In the foreground are arrogant creatures who think they own the universe. I realise that this scenario of downfall is very much my "thing" and may account for that all-too-easy jibe of pessimism which is sometimes levelled at me. What I see is not the downfall so much as the fact that despite the fall the beings involved survive, and with some honour. *Greybeard,* etc.

Richard Cowper is a bit defensive, as we all must be, about critics reading too much into what we write. Yes, yes. But, by Christ, how often they read too *little.* Behind what I've been saying about imagining what we know and living in the ruins of Rome, I see great ideas that help form our age; the rise of stable totalitarian regimes, the change in sexual mores engendered by the Pill, the decline of Britain's imperial days, the decline of Britain, and the clash between religion and science (which may seem to some like old nineteenth-century hat but which was rampant in my life and which still engenders some smoke and flame elsewhere). These ideas are imprinted in me; I don't go around dreaming up a new novel to embody them; rather the reverse – I try to escape from them by new routes. But I'm still driving the same old car.

Such imprinted ideas are unavoidable. They are the house if not the furniture of anyone's mind. I noted what Tom Disch said about the latent material of one generation becoming manifest in the next. I'm largely in agreement with him. But I can agree because in my head is roughly the same sort of imprinted idea or model as is in his head – a model of the layered brain roughly as described by Freud (whom Disch mentions in the context), or maybe Freud as watered down by Jung. On

creativity, Freud is impossible to take, and one needs a dose of Jung's more positive collective unconscious to help out. Now it may be that all our theories, our models of the brain, are totally wrong, as off-track as were the alchemists when they sought to transmute lead into gold (or whatever the hell they did do, for I'm never sure). We become dominated by *idées fixes*, and quite possibly our models of consciousness are just plain mistaken; Ornstein's work, for instance, emphasising hemispheric division of brain function, appears to contradict Freud's horizontal division of brain function; maybe both are wrong. The latent/manifest phenomenon could be merely a trick of the light. What is a moving object on the periphery of one generation's vision becomes the focus of attention in the next.

Similarly, what occupies a writer's attention in one decade may have to move over to the margins in the next. We know there's no God; maybe there's no Freud. Perhaps part of our job as writers should be to create our own mind-models and offer them to the world; or perhaps that is in part what we are doing and – one more time – we are not fully aware of it. Obviously, this bring us towards a new conscious function for science fiction, but I'd hate to get into that.

9. Disch to Lester It's hard, once again, to answer your letter without being drawn into endless vortices of theory. Each time I encounter one of your paraphrases of something I've said I appreciate why courts of law do not allow hearsay in evidence.

First, to do what I should know better than to attempt – to "defend" one of my own texts. The "pictures" at the end of *The Genocides* are certainly not just tinsel I happened to hang on the end of the book. They are sopping with meaning, but most of that meaning is inherited; is inherent in their iconography. What is an icon but a picture whose meaning, like its format, is fixed? They are allusions, quickly sketched in, and of immense associative range. I can claim no credit for that: they are archetypes. As they are presented in the epilogue, they are meant to act somewhat as if slides of Bellini and Raphael were to be projected onto the rubble of a lost civilisation. They are meant to be ironic, valedictory, and, in their particulars, relevant to the "story". But they don't offer, even as allegory, a "proper resolution to the ideas present in the book"; a phrase so loaded with pitfalls and possibilities for setting ourselves, again, at cross-purposes, that I can think of nothing to say but "Whoa!" Because I'm sure if we let ourselves get into that we'd soon discover how little we agree as to *what* the ideas of any given text are, or *how* they arrive there, much less how they are set into conflict with other ideas and that conflict resolved.

Briefly, I would suggest that ideas are an epiphenomenon of words; of "style", if you will. A book's ideas aren't detachable from its text. If they were, one could simply write a good synopsis and dispense with the bother of novel-writing. Some writers (and, it would seem, most readers) take the view that novels are in fact vehicles in which a certain cargo of ideas are transported into consciousness via an essentially innocent (fun, entertaining) story. Believing this, they will try to write books on this model, books with "ideas" hanging like framed pictures on the walls of the plot. Readers reading such novels will move from picture to picture, as in a gallery, skimming over the intervening "hack-writing". I suspect that in fact the material thus skimmed is more important to the "meaning" of the work than

either the hasty writer or his readers would care to admit, but to show *how* one would have to examine a given text with the same microscopic attention that Barthes gives to Balzac's *Sarrazine* in *S/Z*.

People who insist on an opposition between a febrile entity called "literature" and their own dynamic "ideas" (as Ian Watson does so strenuously and often) simply haven't bothered examining the writing process at the molecular level. Nor is there any reason they should. One can cook good meals and yet believe the universe to be compounded of earth, air, fire and water. One might, however, take exception to a chemistry textbook based on this belief – or to "literary" criticism that belabours such tired issues as style *vs.* content.

But is there any point arguing the merits of the periodic table with proponents of the four elements theory? People who adopt the simpler model do so for their own convenience or from a peculiar need it were unkind to examine. So long as we're all free to attend the restaurants of our choice, what does it matter? *Chacun à son goût,* and *bon appetit!*

10. Cowper to Lester Somewhere along the line I seem to have made one of those sweeping conversational generalisations to which I was ever prone and I now make haste to qualify it. To the extent that I am *fascinated* by the mysterious craft of writing and have been for over thirty-five years, I am one of the most conscious of writers. Very little of that prose of mine which is allowed to escape into print has not been pruned, polished and put through an almost interminable series of revisions. If the finished product *reads* as though it had been dashed off between two stiff gin-and-tonics that's all right by me, for I have always agreed with Sheridan that "Easy writing's vile hard reading". As in just about every other art I can think of, true ease of expression in writing comes only after prolonged effort and constant practice. We have first to learn – and then forget that we have ever learned – to make economy second nature. Having done that we can break the rules to our heart's content.

Where I think I was picked up by you that evening at the Stanhope Institute was in trying to describe the *first* of the two distinct processes that go into the writing of my novels (these processes appear to correspond so closely to Brian's own that reading his second letter was uncannily like listening to myself talking). The first draft is the vital one. It is written for myself alone. Brian calls this stage (rightly) the "creative process". This is the element in any book I write which (as you paraphrase me) I "don't care to think too much about". Here the unconscious themes are allowed to bubble close to the surface and are skimmed off into the plot-mould ready for shaping and polishing once they have cooled. This creative process is intensely private. It has to be. It is self-therapy. Over it I erect a large warning notice: PRIVATE PROPERTY. It is this initial stage of my writing that I do not care to examine under the microscope and I suspect that my motives may well correspond with Brian's when he speaks of "Consciousness with respect to one's self".

But that is only half the story. The rest is concerned with that shaping/refining process which will surely be familiar to all those taking part in this discussion. Somewhere between the first stage and the second emerges that mysterious element

we recognise as "style". Now I am far from certain exactly what style is – and that is not for want of reading what many wise men have had to say on the subject. It appears to be a quality easier to recognise than to define. I prefer to regard it as the expression of the writer's own personality, be it flamboyant, idiosyncratic, cantankerous, or whatever – and I can think of writers whose styles would fit each of those categories, especially the last! My own predilection is for clarity, but with it goes a sort of conversational "tone of voice" which enables people to say, "Oh, I'd recognise a story of yours anywhere." I'm not sure whether this is a good thing or just a fact of life; anyway it's too late to do much about it now. The other ingredient is what, for want of a better word, I must call the poetry. I could talk about this for hours but a lot of people would be bored stiff. Sufficient to say that cadence and metaphor are for me the soul of the novelist's art, and if my own prose ornithopter ever attains lift-off it is to the wingbeats of its own imagery.

Finally, if I'm reading you right, you extended my defence of wilful self-ignorance to include the ideas enshrined in the work. If you had said *fundamental themes* I would have had to concur. There are indeed certain themes ("betrayal" to mention but one) which I return to again and again. I was not even aware that I was doing this until someone else pointed it out to me, which might well prove something! But the "theme" in that sense is no more than the tidal pull whose psychological origins I am sufficiently aware of not to wish to examine too closely – I merely ride with the current. The *ideas* are something else again – notions one follows up curiously and hyper-consciously to see where they will lead, using one's own imagination to flesh out the cold bones disinterred from the graveyards of *Nature* and the *New Scientist*. Sf allows me to do this – to explore the territory of *What if . . . ?* The rest – moral values, mysticism, magic – creep in because they are a part of my own psychological make-up, and here it may well be – as the wise old Frenchman said – that *"Le style est l'homme même"*,

POSTSCRIPT

Aldiss to Lester We don't say much about science fiction. You picked three rather snobby writers for that! Heinlein and Ballard, the heavenly twins, both declare that sf is the Literatoor of the Twentieth Century, and other chaps tend to back them up – Ian Watson, a few issues of *Foundation* ago, was saying something absurdly derogatory about the novels of Anthony Powell in comparison with sf which corresponded to something someone said about one page of a rotten sf novel being worth a whole set of Proust.

This sort of myopia brought an inevitable reaction, and has caused some sf writers to despise, or appear to despise, the medium they use. I feel it in myself. The new critical anthology edited by Reginald Bretnor makes me wish to dissociate myself strongly from many of the philistine views expressed there. And so on, and so on. The division between these two sides is marked, and helps form the uneasy profile of modern science fiction.

So I care little for my contribution to your discussion – except that I began with a warning on that subject. As it happens, I have just been doing an article on the writing of James Blish (see elsewhere in this issue – Ed.) before reading your proofs – an article for Ian Watson, whose fiction I prefer to some of his opinions

(Ballard takes me the same way, so Watson is in good company). I was much happier doing the Blish piece, because there was something objective. Disch, Cowper, and I, jolly chaps though we are, have merely been subjective.

It really is impossibly hard to say how ideas and characters swarm in and arrange themselves on the page. If anyone is interested in the modes of creation, I suggest they consult a volume by a friend of mine, Anthony Storr: *The Dynamics of Creation,* now in Pelican. It's a book which contains a good strong dose of the hard stuff.

---

reviews

messages undelivered

The Jonah Kit
by Ian Watson (*Gollancz, 1975, 221pp, £2.60, ISBN 0 575 01938 7; Scribner's, 1976, 221pp, $6.95, ISBN 0 684 14600 2; Panther, 1977, 192pp, £0.60, ISBN 0 586 04385 3*)
The Martian Inca
by Ian Watson (*Gollancz, 1977, 207pp, £3.95, ISBN 0 575 02218 3; Scribner's, 1977, 207pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 684 15172 3*)

reviewed by John Clute

That this cursory look at Ian Watson's last two novels presents some doubts about the nature of his accomplishments as a writer of fiction may seem unduly querulous in view of the cognitive vigour both books display so convincingly, at least in the schematic matrices that claim to generate their narrative content. But it's precisely the relation of this cognitive ligature to the narratives it purports – in both books – to coordinate that is under question. Both novels present themselves as dovetailing narrations whose coming together claims to climax and justify the arguments that drive them, and in this sense *The Jonah Kit* and *The Martian Inca* share a more than brotherly affinity, succeed or fail in the same manner. As strategies the novels are nearly identical.

As messages too, perhaps.

The Jonah Kit is the less satisfactory book. As usual there are two main stories. In Mexico, one of Watson's monstrously aggressive male overachievers (this one's a Nobel Prize winner) has discovered via his radiotelescope that the universe we live in is a nugatory God-deserted echo of the real universe which, immediately after the Big Bang, self-transcended the space-time we inhabit and observe, leaving us as a kind of ghost-effect. This discovery is milked for its publicity value by the Nobel

laureate Hammond, and causes wide panic (Watson has an attractive, though somewhat loony sense of what it takes to activate a mob, his crowd scenes generally being fired by consuming metaphysical anguish). In Japan, meanwhile, a young Russian boy with a mathematical model of an astronaut's mind imprinted on his own is picked up as a defector from a Siberian project whose later stages involve the similar imprinting of the model of a human mind upon that of an immature whale, which is let loose to serve as a spy and benthic warden. We are given a whale's-eye view of how to live as a cetacean with ghost hands and other signs of prehensile deracination. It soon turns out that whales, when they come together into a "Star" comprising seven members, make up a kind of super-computer (in human terms) and (in cetacean terms) a reality-moulding bead-song of "thought" rendered in glyphs cut into their waxy melons. The stage is set for the distressing denouement. Hammond's discovery has badly shaken the Free World's episteme, drawing anguished motorcycle gangs to Mexico to try to rape his compliant wife, and the Russians, for realpolitik reasons I couldn't quite fathom, offer to plug his equations into a whale Star to see if they pan out. Perhaps (as the book argues) man, by seeing reality in one way, has contrived a coercive bead-song of the universe; perhaps the whales will see God's desertion differently. However, when the Star computes Hammond's theory, it reacts by passing a message to all toothed cetaceans that causes them to commit suicide by beaching themselves, either because they cannot submit to being echoes of the beginning of the universe, or because their sudden awareness of man's nature has caused them to go that deeply sour on the future of the planet. But we are not given the answer. The novel closes diminuendo with some of the depressing characters who have carried the tale deeply failing (not for the first time) to understand one another.

In *The Martian Inca* the two main narrative strands are linked more plausibly, though ultimately with the same diminendo effect. En route back from Mars, an unnamed Russian spaceprobe crashes into the high Andes, infecting Bolivian Indian villagers with a kind of spore that first mummifies them, then mentally restructures those who survive into beings capable of stringing and restringing the bead-song that comprises human thought/perception in such a way as to gain a working perspective on control of the matrices through and by which humans are bound into generating their species-specific vision of the world. At about the same time, an American spacecraft is on its way to Mars, with three morose astronauts aboard whom I could not separate from one another, despite their complex life-histories, all of which (to me) had a mutually interchangeable self-disqualifying ring to them. In Bolivia, a restrung Indian announces himself as an Inca born again and foments a rebellion, which the American government assists, so as to keep tabs on the spore from Mars. Eventually the astronauts are told of the danger, and only two of them are permitted to land, the third setting up reflective devices designed to change Mars' climate. One of the landed astronauts is duly sporulated and awakens transfigured, bead-songed into comprehension of how limited human thought makes the world up, our world. At the same time the climate begins to change ahead of schedule, storms destroy the landing module, and spores in the Martian soil begin to turn into the indigenous Martian lifeform, the agglutinative sporular Grex. The humans die, the Grex agglutinate, the rebellion fails on Earth, the born-again Incans meet their doom, the perspective of the bead-song dies aborning, diminuendo; various characters fail to understand one another (not for the first time).

Beneath the surface structure, then, both novels are constructed as deeply similar exemplifications of two shared central ideas (which I've further assimilated in

synopsis): 1) that a bindingly partial, species-specific framework of thought/perception generates the reality of and comprises *homo sapiens*; and 2) that this species-specificity has its obverse, the possibility that a less deracinated, less prehension-bound, less technos-irradiated species (this is sf after all) may *consciously* generate a fuller, more pliant, wiser reality to inhabit and to evolve within. These ideas (*The Embedding* shares them) Watson presents with a rigorous and enlightening enthusiasm, but it is just here, with presentation (in the form of sf fictions), that the trouble begins, for though he obviously intends his novels as irradiated demonstrations of these central concepts, as written both books work to disqualify the ideas they embody and the vigour with which they are argued.

Some of the disqualifications are as it were incidental. Some have been mentioned elsewhere: comic stylistic tics are pervasive, like never having anyone merely *say* anything, insisting instead on lame elaborations of simple verbs, as in: '"Fuck off!" she swore, facelessly.' More seriously, all of Watson's protagonists tend to share certain binding self-disqualifications, deep sexual traumas, considerable misogyny, anomic relations to the important jobs they hold down, enviousness of all men more capable than they are (and because characters like Paul Hammond are viewed only through that kind of perspective, as he is never given protagony, the books give imprimatur to their main protagonists' constant disqualifications of all energy, all kinetic drive, all achievement). And the world in which these characters move comes to the reader as deeply corroded, fundamentally slummy, high in entropy, at the end of its tether. It is a view of the world (to keep things straight) that I find personally as compelling as any other. The trouble with its expression in these novels, through anomic back-biting protagonists, lies not in the problematic area of truth value but in the lack of any compelling structural irony to play these constant disqualifications off against the dynamic tenor of the ideas they seem to claim to embody.

The plots of both novels under review, once they begin to dovetail, emphatically confirm this general sense of entropic disqualification, as both novels close on distressing diminuendi, and the ideas that have presumably generated the storylines, once activated within them, collapse in the dying falls and corrosive cynicisms of Watson's observed verisimilitudinous world. The cetaceans kill themselves (a pretty blatant cop-out on the author's part); the Bolivian Indians end up worse off than they began; the astronauts die on Mars; God knows what will happen to the Grex. All of which has the consistency of argument, perhaps, an argument about the fate of cognitive kinesis in a dying squandered world – but it's an unpresented argument, and that's the crux of the problem with *The Jonah Kit* and *The Martian Inca*. At the heart of both books lies an incongruence between cognition and its embodiment in action, but this incongruence is *never part of the argument.*

The messages are the same. But they are not delivered.

goodbye to all that; good morning sunshine!

SF in Dimension
by Alexei & Cory Panshin (*Advent, 1976, 342pp, $10, ISBN 0 911682 21 X)*
Farewell to Yesterday's Tomorrow
by Alexei Panshin (*Berkley, 1976, 212pp, $1.25, SBN 425 03211 6)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

Sf and human evolution: the growth of the individual, the unfolding of the butterfly from the caterpillar, and the remaking of Man – it's surely a bold spirit who links the two these days now that sf has "grown up". It all sounds a bit like poor Claude Degler's manifesto for a Cosmic Circle, revamped for the Aquarian Age. ("Man is evolving towards a higher form of life," trumpeted the provincial Degler. "A new figure is climbing upon the stage. Homo Cosmen, the Cosmic Men, will appear. We believe that we are mutations of that species . . . ") Yet there's an old saying that fools' gold only exists because there is real gold somewhere . . . And the Panshins are no fools.

Sf and true adulthood? Let's not forget Tom Disch's suggestion that sf is really a children's literature – and crucial aspects of adult experience are boring to children, thus sf cannot encompass them.

Glancing at a recent Year's Best anthology – Terry Carr's, covering 1975, with its proudly defensive introduction about "our strange and wonderful field" – how many of the tales are really child-oriented! Both yarns by the up-and-coming John Varley; Lisa Tuttle & George Martin's story of adolescence "The Storms of Windhaven" – Hugo & Nebula runner-up and Locus Poll winner; P.J. Plauger's "Child of All Ages" – Nebula & Hugo runner-up, about the permanent (wise) child; not to mention Harlan Ellison's cloacal "Croatoan" – Locus Poll winner, Hugo runner-up, which commences with a foetus and ends with the great staring eyes of the subterranean wonder-children, on the statement, "I am the only adult here."

Yet perhaps this preoccupation is because of something other than mere compensatory infatuation with an adult power-world currently beyond one's reach, something more than 'mere' power-fantasizing. Perhaps childhood (and its end; or transcend, to coin a word) is such a strong sf feature because the literature has roots – sunk, as roots are, through a lot of mud – in a vein of true gold; and that vein is one of growth, personal and social evolution, transcendence, a transformation of consciousness which one can only articulate as yet intuitively, fumblingly, fragmentarily. This is the Panshins' polemical view, and *Sf in Dimension* – a collection of essays-cum-book reviews from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,* and essays from *Fantastic, Extrapolation, The Alien Critic* and elsewhere, with a couple of summary annotated checklists of writers and their works, and one exemplary 'growth parable' – is best seen, and works best as a coherent volume, as a discursive propagandist philosophy of sf.

Since the Panshins see sf as a literature which doesn't even properly exist yet – the Elizabethan Theatre before even Marlowe came along, with Zelazny and Delany as the Thomas Kyds of the piece – they constantly judge the genre not (invoking Sturgeon's Law) by the best that has been written in it, versus the rest (so there are

no encomiums upon, say, Le Guin; *The Left Hand of Darkness* is graded as well above average for our year of grace 1590, but ultimately a flat failure) but rather by the standard of what hasn't yet been written: by those mythical novels which one constantly reaches for, which will actually live up to their blurbs, and continue to live up to them in retrospect. Lo, the playbills are written – but where is Will? And this proleptic standard is actually a fine, inspiring thing. The strong suit of this book is its urgent, but never dumbly optimistic, sense of what might be possible, what imaginative span sf might be able to encompass in the future; and the critical method matches the message of what sf is at heart about – intuitions of growth.

So, working from partial evidence – the sf actually in existence at the moment, which moment being "well before science fiction's hour" – it isn't surprising that the book should, in form, be a patchwork; though its occasional origin does occasionally grate. "If the last item is over-priced, *From Elfland to Poughkeepsie* . . . is a rip-off . . . Its thesis is that the diction of fantasy stories should be appropriate. Agreed. But why $3 for a thirty-page pamphlet, and $5 for an autographed copy? Seemingly that is what the publishers feel the traffic will bear. Be warned." Fair enough in a review, but really obsolete when part of a "chapter" of a book.

The bibliographies, too, while unexceptionable as items originally aimed at students to give an initial overview, seem far too clipped in this larger context, irrelevant to the likely readership of this volume, unless said readership like making lists of all-time Greats, in which case they're missing the book's message. (While descriptively acute, they do have inaccuracies: Olaf Stapledon was never a "British professor of philosophy..; he *lectured,* extramurally, to Workers' Educational groups, among others, on industrial history, psychology and literature as much as philosophy – the implication is too effete and rarified for Stapledon.)

But the spontaneity of the pieces, and their constantly committed standpoint, more than makes up for this fault; and a collection of disparate reviews, essays and telegraphic notes fuses to become a powerful, revelant statement on sf.

As in all polemics, positions do tend to get exaggerated . . . The Panshins are actually quite right that the mimetic novel is past its menopause – but I'd hardly say it's true that *Gulliver's Travels* (adduced to point up the decline in vision from a previous era when the 'world beyond the hill' still held sway, *en route* for the bourgeois enlightenment) only survives by its "continuing presence in children's libraries". Yet *Sf in Dimension* thrives as much by its pungent outspokenness, as by its urgent moral demand that sf should transcend itself, in the direction not of world-weary sophistication but of the miraculous, a hitching of our conceptual wagons to the stars.

Sf creates worlds and universes; and what does it do with them? jibes Franz Rottensteiner at Philip Farmer. Plays billiards with them. Uses them as a shooting gallery. Kick(aha)s them around. How nice to see an essay – by Russell Letson – in a recent issue of *Extrapolation* (May 1977) emphasizing that the flesh and the spilt blood in Farmer's books represents an honest recognition of the nightside of Humanity, without which there can be no Godlike dawn. As to sheer "playing around" with universes, what do children do but play with toys? *And learn.* And sf is a learning-toy. Arthur Clarke epitomizes the situation well at the end of the novel version of *2001,* with its striking image of the Star-Child floating before the glittering toy of planet Earth. ". . . he was not quite sure what to do next. But he would think of something." Sf, too, will – the Panshins hope – think of something yet; and it's a grand hope. Let it be.

Sf in Dimension is outspoken; one of its most singular throw-away lines must surely be this: "I think the science fiction short story is an irrelevance that deserves

to disappear . . . " – an assertion backed up a little way along by the explanation that much short fiction that does seem worthy has later proved to be part of a series or an integral piece of a longer work. (Though worthy in what way? Prizeworthy. I feel there is too much doting on Hugos and Nebulas as touchstones of virtue in the volume, and its bibliographies. Should the forward-looking Panshins so readily subcribe to what are, largely, conservative clique judgements?)

Having made this assertion, it's a shade ironic that the Panshin's most recent fictional offering to hand is *Farewell to Yesterday's Tomorrow* – a collection of *short* sf and fantasy pieces, plus one drum-beating essay which gives the book its title (also included in *Sf in dimension*). The stories range from several offshoots of the *Rite of Passage* society, through a number of tiny, pungent "teaching fables", a hardish-core How We Explored Neptune story with a Neil Armstrongish baseball punchline, an intriguing fiction/fact tale about how a story gets to be written (where the longer, mimetic biography part does rather outweigh in impact the non-mimetic story part) and a few surreal allegories, to a superbly imaginative discovery tale, "Lady Sunshine and the Magoon of Beatus". Like *Sf in Dimension*, however, *Farewell to Yesterday's Tomorrow* coheres emotionally to produce a greater whole than the sum of its parts. It is essentially a book of stimulus, of trial. The fiction/fact tale, "How Can We Sink When We Can Fly?", ends with Panshin's exhortation: "Endings of stories come easy. It is the beginnings, when anything is still possible, that come hard. *Start now.*"

Optimism is in short supply; it's good to have some around.

some corner of a funny field

The Year's Best Science Fiction No.9
edited by Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison *(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976, 206pp, £3.95, ISBN 0 297 77261 9; Orbit, 1976, 206pp, £0.65, ISBN 0 8600 7894 9)*
The Best Science Fiction of the Year 5
edited by Terry Carr *(Ballantine, 1976, 367pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 345 25064 8 195; Gollancz, 1976, 296pp, £4.50, ISBN 0 575 02136 5)*
Andromeda 1
edited by Peter Weston *(Orbit, 1976, 206pp, £0.65, ISBN 0 8600 7891 4)*
Travelling Towards Epsilon: An Anthology of French SF
edited by Maxim Jakubowski, translated Jakubowski and Beth Blish *(NEL, hardcover, 1977, 288pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 45003068 7)*

reviewed by Hilary Bailey

Science fiction anthologies are odd things because they so often contain stories by writers who, to the outside eye, have no connection with each other but who, the insider knows, really "belong to the field". They are relatives, so to speak, with nothing in common but what it says on their birth certificates. This "science fiction field" presents a fine problem for the critic, who often has to believe in its purely metaphysical existence and make judgments accordingly. The literal-minded, such as I, may be bewildered by having to make continual mental reference to this mysterious stretch of land, property no doubt of some worried farmer with many sons,

some good and some bad, which is continually "abandoned", "entered", "developed", "neglected", "joined" and, all too often, "betrayed" by the writers working in it. Some of these boys will spend their lives in the field, ploughing, sowing, reaping and digging out stones in winter, while others erect psychedelic domes or strip-clubs on it, try to let it out as a caravan site or sell it off for high-rise development. At any rate, this field must be a real tourist attraction in summer, as the visitors go over Gormenghast in the corner or tour the cellars of the Castle of Otranto at 50p a head, take a tour of the rocket range under the guidance of Patrick Moore or just lie peacefully on their backs watching the pterodactyls and UFOs weaving over their heads. Even in winter there will be something to see as vans with *Royal Society of Literature* painted on their sides bump up over the track to the gate, disgorging on arrival such notables as Doris Lessing, Angus Wilson or Kingsley Amis, who may take the much trodden path through the gate and go in, walk about a bit, take notes and leave with their wellies covered in mud. Going the other way are the authors leaving the field, jeered at by those still inside enjoying the many amenities, and obliged, in order to get out, to push through a large crowd of critics and academics, all hanging round the gate, surveying the field and telling the ghosts of Swift and Poe and Shakespeare, who are patrolling in the lane beyond, that they should be in the field, haunting. Meanwhile, our desperate farmer, something like an anthologist, is trying to get the good sons who stayed in, the bad sons who are trying to leave and various ghosts, Hell's Angels and general disruptive elements, all together round the farmhouse table in order to point out their duties, appeal to them to sink their differences and, mentioning that blood is, after all, thicker than water, to insist that they hang together, get their fingers out and, as it were, put down some fertiliser to keep the field's yield up.

This "field", perhaps one of the most mind-boggling conceptions sf has ever come up with, is as unignorable as the Post Office Tower, simply because editors, anthologists, critics and writers refer to it all the time, always defining it as what they want it to mean at that moment.

It crops up again in the introduction to Harry Harrison's and Brian Aldiss's *The Year's Best SF 9* where, in the introduction, Harry Harrison tells the readers that sf, in terms of college courses, films and general public interest, is booming. Probably in terms of recording rights, T-shirts and bumper stickers, too. But Harry, who commendably does not mention the word "field" does not explain either how "all of this eager attention can only have a salutary effect on the fiction produced" (his words) and I could not see that *The Years Best SF 9* showed astounding advances on *The Years Best SF 8, 7, 6* or *5*. The best story, I thought, was M. John Harrison's "Settling The World". This author's command of the right word, the right intonation and phrasing, his jokes, felicities and ironies, embedded in the narrative to surprise and please, never fail to impress. By the best writer, in terms of sheer style and inventiveness, who science fiction possesses, this story of God made manifest on the motorway is not what you might call a complete success simply because the idea was not powerful enough in Harrison's mind. The characters, story and central metaphor never melt together into that whole statement which, when it comes off, is the great justification for science fiction's existence. There is no way that the sinister dark night on the motorway will mesh in with the presence of the brilliant but notional Estrades "lounging back in his slatted chair with a bottle of mineral water and a long thin cigar" nor either with the ambiguous Oxlade, narrator of the tale.

Nevertheless, patchy as it is, it is the best, most thought-out and intelligent story in the book, which also includes Algis Budrys's "A Scraping At The Bones", a tale

of a tough 'tec solving a murder in a future society. This is so crammed with rote-writing and sf-ing-up (the art of describing routines like making a cup of tea or spittin in terms of technologically-advanced future society) that the eye faints as it travels on; "Once on the train he punched his destination on the coder in the armrest. When the straps went around him he thought of Dorrie." There is the usual story by a woman sf writer about a child – I speak as an offender of the worst kind, but if we're coming out of the closet we might as well come out of the nursery as well. There is also "A Dead Singer" by Michael Moorcock, a story about Jimi Hendrix, which has less reverberations now than it had in 1880, when the waltz was king – sorry, in the '20s, when jazz was k– sorry again. Well, Moorcock fans will not be too upset by this confusion. What I meant to say, of course, was that the story was written in the early '70s, when heavy rock was king. It is a loosely written piece centring around the dead Hendrix and his time and places and from the moment the first heavy rock cassette goes down into the stereo, as the rattling sound of the uppers and downers hits the air, we realise we are in fact back with that lovable old townsman, Michael Moorcock, on one of his nature rambles through the Grove – Ladbroke Grove, that is. It often works, but this time there is too heavy a reliance on the totem items – Mercedes campers, snorts of coke, paranoia and the like – as well as on the name of Hendrix himself. This dates, when the items themselves lose their talismanic significance, just as badly as the posher apparatus of a James Bond novel. The ending lines show Moorcock, a man of true feeling if ever there was one, at his Little Nell-like worst:

> She wiped the clammy sweat from her face. She must be freaking out. She hoped when she got back to the basement that there really wouldn't really be a dead guy there. She didn't need it.

You always woz a sentimental little bugger, Jer. And nah look wots 'appened to yer.

It would be unfair to end without talking about Richard Cowper's "The Custodians", a story beginning, in absolutely traditional style, "Although the monastery of Hautaire has dominated the Ix valley for more than twelve hundred years, compared with the Jurassic limestone to which it clings, it might have been erected yesterday . . . " and unfolds its tale with calm strength until the end, "And later a wind got up and blew from the north." Cowper writes very well, and feels what he writes and keeps his head while writing. Praise is due to anyone who can do that.

Another collection, also from 1975, is Terry Carr's *The Best Science Fiction of the Year 5*. The introduction strikes the same defensive note:

> Science fiction is so popular lately that it's become a peculiar exercise in pseudo-nostalgia to remember the days when this field was scorned as a lowly form of children's fiction, unworthy of attention by people who had passed beyond the need to move their lips while reading . . . Today science fiction is taught in hundreds of universities . . . Seldom does a science fiction writer or reader meet with the once-familiar lift of a sophisticate's eyebrow . . .

This well known statement about sf, very reminiscent of the old advertisement for someone's home-study method of learning the piano, "They laughed when I sat down at the piano but when I began to play – " with adjoining picture of an impressed crowd in the parlour all staring in awe and amazement at the student, never fails to make me reel about, since those who know anything about science fiction know it consists of books of many kinds and qualities and those who know anything

about life know that this sophisticate exists purely in the paranoid imaginations of people who write about science fiction. It's really time we all pulled ourselves together, looked at sf as it really is, as motley and disparate a collection of books and writers as ever marched together under one banner, stopped pretending to be brilliant but under-appreciated and persecuted by the cruel world outside, which will sometimes praise us but then, suddenly and for no reason, turn and rend, after the manner of all wicked tyrants, and abandoned the whole nonsense. Like the notion of "the field" this whole self-centred and self-pitying scenario seems to me to be one of the most brilliant fictionalisations science fiction produces.

The trouble is that Terry Carr is probably the best judge and selector of science fiction stories there is and the contents of this anthology are a hundred per cent better than the introduction would give the reader to believe. There is Cordwainer Smith's "Down To A Sunless Sea", which was completed by his widow, and even if Smith's tales have so often been thin and unbelievable, the sheer pleasantness of his writing, and its echoing back to the thinking and writing of the '90s, always refresh the reader. Gene Wolfe's "The Hero As Werwolf", a story of people literally living on each other, is tightly told and powerful. I got a sense of Harlan Ellison from the story and, behind it, another kind of talent, too – the account by the old man of how he and his family had lived through deteriorating times and his acceptance of a new and savage way of life was simple, natural and real.

We come to Harlan Ellison himself, whose story "Croatoan" opens in characteristic style – "'Stop it! Goddammit, just *stop* it . . . I said stop . . . ' And I had to hit her." – and goes on to be a powerful tale about a man who has, literally, to face the results of years of careless sex, careless love and equally careless abortion. Because Ellison has the nerve to be direct and to make direct statements and because he doesn't flinch at treating the most childish terror (something lives in the sewers and comes up and bites you when you're sitting on the lavatory) alongside the most grown-up (someone conceived your child and you don't want it) and because he sees his scenes clearly and describes them to you exactly – an art not stressed in schools of fine writing, but indispensible all the same – his story works. He also has a heart as big as a bucket, a clear sense of right and wrong – also not stressed at fine-writing schools – and at his best, will see, hear, feel and reveal, never tell lies and never hold back. And he is never lazy. Like many good writers his virtues are the virtues of a child – directness, energy, intense hatred of and fascination with cruelty, a sense of what is right and just and an instant recognition of where things don't come up to standard and, of course, passion. Adult compromise doesn't figure in Ellison's world, any more than it did in that of Dickens. Of course he should learn to pace and orchestrate his work better, writing quietly where he needs to. Of course he must stop things from happening in his stories *all* the time, but if he doesn't he'll still be worth ten of nearly any other sf writer. And if he does slow down and increase his range – well, the results may be really remarkable.

But I think my private favourite from the whole collection was John Varley's "In the Bowl", certainly the best conventional sf story I've read for a long time:

> If only the damn thing had gone on the blink before I left Venusberg. You know Venusberg: town of steamy swamps and sleazy hotels where you can get mugged as you walk down the public streets, lose a fortune at the gaming tables, buy any pleasure in the known universe, hunt the prehistoric monsters that wallow in the fetid marshes that are just a swamp-buggy ride out of town.

Stories being written like that now are often just pastiches, or very weak. Varley has come up with a good one. He has done the essential, which is to take his alien

landscape and alien circumstances (in this case a prospector hunting for the strange exploding jewels which can be got, whole and sound, in the alien desert, if you know how to do it) and turned the whole thing, landscape and circumstances, into a metaphor which reflects something about the human beings involved in the story, so that the plot and the people and their setting somehow blend together and make sense, one part being like the everyday world, and the other like a dream which, although different, still seems to have a bearing on our everyday lives. There is the man, in Varley's story, there the precocious girl who wants to get off the planet, there is the desert and there the biggest jewel of all, growing and ready to explode – very nice.

Mind you, although this is a good collection I wondered why the standard of writing only ranges, at the good end, from the merely workmanlike to, at the bad end, that "fine writing" often found in science fiction, which is generally a kind of vague, sub-poetic prose, leaning heavily on using words connected with the romantic poets to produce a heavy feeling of melancholy respect in the reader. "Thus, soaring, soaring, soaring, Jo Endicott became part of the dark and infinite boundlessness of space" (my own work) is the sort of thing we all recognise and blame Bradbury for. But, quibbles aside, Terry Carr has once again proved that there's life in the field and our thanks are due to him for it.

Peter Weston's first anthology, *Andromeda,* has a modest introduction, lacking the afflatus, cheerleading and paranoia which seem to be conventional in this area. The contents of the anthology, although they are fair enough, have a somewhat limited and defeated air. There are three stories about finding a lost love through space and time, and three is too many, out of ten stories. This idea tends to produce a corresponding wistfulness and sag in the writing, brought on by contemplation of the subject matter, loss of love, and perhaps of loss of Empire, world trade and the value of the pound. None of the stories are terrible, but with all this British near-nineteenth century prose about it, it was a nasty shock to be hit at the very end by an Ellison not at his best – "The alien slug was waiting . . . There was a long moment of terrible sucking sounds . . . " – and the name of the game, ultimately, appeared to be what has been so aptly called Warm Indifference.

Weston's problem may well have been that of a new editor, feeling tentative and needing big names to launch a new series, and perhaps not helped by being unable to compete with the rates of pay offered to writers in the USA. At any rate *Andromeda* is a respectable start and once he gets up enough confidence to back his private judgment of the material he is offered and accumulates enough goodwill to be sent material he and the writer both know he cannot pay for at the proper rate, but which is given generously so that he can publish it, then *Andromeda* may come into its own.

Finally, there is *Travelling Towards Epsilon,* a very interesting anthology of science fiction stories from France, collected and edited by Maxim Jakubowski. The introduction, which stresses the history and origins of science fiction in France, is a good and thorough bit of work. Certainly after reading the collection one feels that the persecution-mania suffered by the sf fraternity in the English-speaking branch of the genre would be more justified in the French, who have good, practical reasons for feeling overlooked and neglected since so little of their work is made accessible by translation to the rest of us. Fortunately Maxim Jakubowski has come in to correct the balance a little. In contrast, incidentally, to our own British dreams of lost love, a dominant theme in this anthology is that of the alien lover, with his, her,

and often his/her disconcerting changes of shape. Some national difference here, I feel, and one best not dwelt on. To mention just a few stories: Philippe Curval's "It's Only Pinball" is well worth reading. It is an odd and oblique tale of love and power both won by superiority at playing pinball. Maxim Jakubowski's own story "Summer in the Death Zone" benefits enormously from being told, not as fiction, in a special fiction-voice, but by the author himself, in his own voice, as autobiography, and I thought all the notions and preoccupations had force. "The Bubbles" by Julia Verlanger is a well-felt and truthful story. My own favourite piece is "Wings in the Night" by Nathalie Henneberg. This tale, the simplest Gothic story imaginable, concerns a young girl who goes to a grim castle in Poland, home of a doomed race, and finds, gradually, that there is a terrifying connection between herself and the family who own it. Nathalie Henneberg's landscape, narrative and characters all interact and balance each other. The control is masterly, the flow of the tale is always right. The author has the sense to use light and darkness and innocence and guilt in contrast (something which Lovecraft never managed) so that darkness and guilt look all the blacker. In a varied collection, this story is the best.

In some ways it has been difficult to pick up the general tone of this anthology. Science fiction written in French is very different from science fiction in English. It is never shy, and does not minimise the feelings and moods of the characters, whereas in sf in English these are often adjuncts to the plot. It deals less in landscape, the narrative is often less than strong, the "ideas" so beloved of sf buffs are often non-existent and frequently not all that original. Instead there seems to be a concern with colour and movement, with situations, rather than rapid plot, event and revelations. There is less sense of a struggle to bash mechanically on to the end of a narrative, although this does not mean that the stories are not tightly written (I speak having only read the stories in translation). Perhaps there is less pressure on French writers to keep on churning their work out for money, because there is less money about to be got. Perhaps Maxim Jakubowski's selection has been a very cunning one. Whatever the reasons, this collection has very much its own flavour. There is a great deal here that is worth reading, and quite a lot worth learning from.

the famous five go time-hopping

The Adventures of Una Persson and Catherine Cornelius in the Twentieth Century
by Michael Moorcock *(Quartet, 1976, 216pp, £3.95, ISBN 0 7043 2121 1)*

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

There is a curious syndrome which often overtakes the work of prolific writers (and also those who are a little obsessive). As their canon grows vastly the units into which their work is packaged lose their individuality and become fragments of a whole cloth: a self-consistent alien artificial cosmos which (it often seems) becomes quite real to its creator. Frank Richards built such a literary cosmos, and so did Enid Blyton. Modern sf/fantasy writers who have done so include H.P. Lovecraft (who got there by being obsessive rather than prolific) and Philip José Farmer. Farmer is a cardinal example – his series never end, his characters overflow from book to book, and the artificial cosmos grows and becomes complex by the co-

opting of other imaginary worlds beloved by Farmer the reader, and their mythic archetypes.

Michael Moorcock is clearly a victim of the same syndrome. His characters – particularly the ubiquitous Jerry Cornelius – have taken on lives and archetypal characteristics of their own in an alternate universe (or series of connected parallel universes) created and sustained by the Moorcockian universe which becomes more recognizable and idiosyncratic with every extending fragment. Where Farmer co-opts other fictional characters Moorcock absorbs elements from his experience of the "real" world – Ladbroke Grove, Hawkwind, the *zeitgeist* of the sixties – which become fantasized by adoption. Moorcock's strategy makes his work more "relevant", but it is possible that Farmer's is the more rational, in that it always permits a clear distinction between the experience of the fiction and the experience of the world. Moorcock's fantasies are more powerful and more adaptable, and have the potential to engulf experience of the real world. It is possible that Moorcock's career may go the same way as that of Lovecraft or Frank Richards, becoming ever-more narrowly directed. His works in their profusion already put me strangely in mind of a semi-pornographic, angst-ridden Enid Blyton.

Moorcock is an able writer, but this may not count for much in protecting him from the insidious advance of the syndrome. There are moments of verbal elegance and irony in the present offering, though it does not have the arch cleverness of the Cornelius tetralogy proper. Its heroines follow different time-hopping courses through the pattern of the twentieth century (as seen from the imaginative standpoint of the sixties), Catherine Cornelius dealing in sexual romance while Una Persson involves herself in class warfare. Each of their parallel tracks offers testimony to gradual decay and desolation. The further they go the darker are the visions encapsulated in their experiences, the more extreme the metaphors of dereliction. Their stories form a crescendo of disillusionment.

This is not a book of its time but a book of its mythos – a mythos which, paradoxically, becomes less and less of its time as it loses its more fantastic aspects. Moorcock has already attracted a kind of adulation similar to that which Lovecraft inspires (posthumously) and has already become (as all victims of the syndrome must) *sui generis*. But is there anything left for him to do save plagiarize himself endlessly?

malice in slumberland

Hotel De Dream
by Emma Tennant *(Gollancz, 1976, 190pp, £3.95, ISBN 0 575 02128 4)*
Deus Irae
by Philip K. Dick and Roger Zelazny *(Doubleday, 1976, 182pp, $5.95, ISBN 0 385 04527 1; Gollancz, 1977, 182pp, £3.75, ISBN 0 575 02307 4)*

reviewed by Tom Shippey

Dreams are visions of the future; they are information for the mind-computer being processed; they are products of the unconscious. Or, they are psychic shit, and this is the theory that Ms Tennant offers. The atmosphere of her repulsive Westringham Hotel is dominated by the array of antique jars and vases in the basement into which

Cridge, the dogsbody, is in the habit of defecating and which he empties only on Thursdays. But the novel starts on a Wednesday, and writhes nastily along till the end and 'the cleaner air of a Thursday morning'. Its premise is that in this hotel the dreams of the failed and ugly inhabitants can somehow get out of the mind, interact with each other, and even start uneasily to work on the outside world. So the spinster Miss Scranton's enormous nude Amazonian beach-women come bursting into the neat boring cardboard City where Mr Poynter rules as pocket-Hitler; Miss Briggs, who takes over in her dream from the abdicating Queen, finds herself knighting the hotel landlord, object of the proprietress's hopeless fantasies of protection and gentility. In the end, the feeble apocalypse of a suburban revolutionary provides a kind of mental evacuation for all the characters, and in it disappear Johnny and Melinda, the creatures of the lady-novelist who plays an increasingly dominant role in the lives of all the others.

Personal fantasy worlds are of course fairly familiar in sf, for instance in Philip K. Dick's *Eye in the Sky* or John Brunner's *Telepathist* or Ursula Le Guin's *Lathe of Heaven*, but *Hotel de Dream* hardly fits their pattern. Solipsist worlds in sf tend to be violently exciting in their unreality, first from their own vividness and second from the effort of trying to work out the worlds' "logic" – you'll remember how prayer really works under (Tetragrammaton). But *Hotel de Dream* often evokes a deliberate thinness and boredom. Mrs Houghton, for a start, seems to have written a real heart-sinker of a novel, all about two radical, observant, politically aware, middle-class individuals, mediated by a Henry James consciousness – the quotations from it show exactly why the characters keep running away, hoping to get into a 'Doc' Smith story, I suspect, or maybe *Death of Grass*. They provide a comic commentary on the functions of the contemporary novel. Cridge, too, offers samples of his own prose-style as he tries to break out of fetid dependence and kill his bosses by fictionalising them to death:

> He lowered the dagger to her breast. This was white, and exposed in a chemise. He was about to stab. The owl hooted thrice. The fox went for the seventh time around the moat. The door opened and the maid Routledge came in with tea . . .

Genteel nothingness plus the occasional blast of melodrama, just like E.M. Forster you might think; but in its context it gives a suddenly exact image of the character's desperate aspirations towards being a creator instead of (in two senses) a retainer.

Yes, but are you interested enough in the characters to *care*? That's the thought that underlies this novel, as it does the dreams/novels encapsulated inside it, and it's pretty clear the author has got you covered whichever way you go. If you *are* interested, that's fine, but if you're not you've got to face the question of why people read novels about the lives of ordinary bourgeois like themselves, instead of getting on with living their own; so the novel becomes a critique of novels. Dedicated sf readers evade this dilemma, of course, by pointing out that they never *do* read novels about characters just like themselves, and indeed admire authors often spectacularly sluggish about developing individuality, personality, etc., being more occupied with frames than pictures – not what is the dream, but why do people have to dream, what happens if they get stopped, and fascinating non-individual questions like that. As a result, I expect hard-core fans will ignore *Hotel de Dream* as mere fiction, but this would be a pity. It's a book with a nice turn of malice; and it's directed against targets we can all learn to hate, like Utopians and contemporary novelists and people who are bigger than we are – a bit like the Niven and Pournelle *Inferno*, but not so

stern and moral.

Deus Irae, by contrast, is a book with a strong and unexpected streak of *piety.* It begins in a world devastated by ter-weps (terror-weapons) like the gob (great objectless bomb), in which the human race is mostly dead or deformed, and where the survivors have gone over to worshipping the man who pressed the button, as representative of the God of Wrath who really runs the universe; Christians are a discouraged sect with nothing much in their favour. In this miserable circumstance the limbless artist Tibor McMasters is sent out to find the destroyer Carleton Lufteufel, to make his picture and strengthen the faith. But in a series of ironies he kills Lufteufel's avatar Schuld, and without realising the truth bases his picture on a stray tramp called 'poor Tom', Tom Gleason. The symbolic suggestions of all this are pretty open. Luf-teufel = love-devil, Schuld = guilt, but both devil and guilt are replaced by glee-son, a eucatastrophic figure (to use Tolkien's word) and moreover a representative of the underprivileged like the disguised Edgar in *King Lear.* To rub the point in, Dick and Zelazny stage an "Ecce Homo" tableau and a scene reminiscent of Christ's appearance on the road to Emmaus, both of which show the occlusions rolling back, giving sense to the feeble-minded and hope to the persecuted: "out of evil comes good", reflects the Christian pastor, turning from his memories of Job to the *felix culpa* of the Fall of Man. So all ends (fairly) happily and Judgement Day (as in several other sf stories) is less than final.

But the consolation seems a bit cheap, the mythology, after all, only made up. Further, quite a lot of the book reads like self-plagiarism from Dick. There's the very heavy use of German names and poems and bits of dialogue, into which he has retreated before (Karp und Sohnen Werke in *The Simulacra,* and so on); it has no particular justification here, being just a private hobby for some of the characters. Terweps were tried out in *The Zap Gun,* and the fuss over the names of God recalls the much better scenes of *Eye in the Sky.* Admittedly the inconsequentiality of the conversations still provides that mixture of paranoid menace and unassuming rationality which is perhaps the most distinctive feature of Dick's style: "That's manure," says McMasters's rescuer to a bug he finds trundling something along the road. "What do you expect to find a dung-beetle pushing along the road?" it snaps rhetorically. "Sour lemon balls?" So dung bettles still push dung even if they've developed intelligence and human size; I suppose it could be reasonable. However, the sheer flood of invention Dick is capable of appears here to have dried up. It's significant that instead of the memory-stretching number of characters that Dick has woven together in other books, this one has only about three main blocks of people, all of them known to each other at the start. The story is a quest through territory, not (as is more usual with Dick) an image of a whole society of people all existing together and not going anywhere at all.

Of course you have to allow for the presence of Roger Zelazny, though this seems much fainter. There are some good animal-scenes which recall *This Immortal* Zelazny rather than *Electric Sheep* Dick, and some children too. One of the best side-characters is Alice, the feeble-minded girl whom Lufteufel adopts and tries clumsily to protect, and then later to save. But perhaps this sense of compassion, admirable though it is, also works against the effect of the book as a whole. Nobody quite gets broken down, driven to insanity, sent down into the tomb-world in the way that we might have expected or that the callousness of the style might have encouraged. Nobody has his personality shredded away, as in Dick's normal personal nightmare. Maybe the trouble is that the mythical references are too prominent, telegraphing all the time that everything is going to be OK in the end – we don't

have depressing myths any more, now that even the Ragnarok ones have dried up. But more likely the trouble with this book is that it has Philip K. Dick and Roger Zelazny on the cover. You can't help picking it up and expecting to find a blend of the best of both authors' totally distinctive characteristics; so it gets judged against a perfect standard that no doubt couldn't exist. Just the same it is a bit of a disappointment. As soon as you come across the world 'fal't' on page 2 you recognise a slightly tired attempt to make 'fall-out' seem a fact of life. By the end of ten pages of *This Immortal* we were grappling with kallikanzaroi, strigefleurs, and spiderbats, and loving every minute of it.

flow my tears, the author said

A Scanner Darkly
by Philip K. Dick *(Doubleday, 1977, 220pp, $6.95, ISBN 0 385 01613 1)*

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

> "I felt that what *All Quiet on the Western Front* was to war – that anybody that read it would never pick up a rifle as long as they lived – that anybody who ever read *A Scanner Darkly* would never drop dope as long as they lived . . . It broke my heart to write it, it broke my heart to read it . . . Every time I read it I cry." – Philip K. Dick, in an interview *Science Fiction Review* 19

It will not be immediately obvious to the casual reader why *A Scanner Darkly* makes Philip Dick cry every time he reads it. It is not particularly harrowing, and does not inspire sufficient sympathy for any of its characters to make it an emotional experience. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, Martian Time-Slip,* and even *We Can Build You* are more moving than *A Scanner Darkly.* This is the book that makes Dick cry – and which he believes to be his masterpiece – because it is a novel of renunciation, one which buries a whole phase of his career. In crying, he is mourning his past, and the real people of whom the characters in the book are mere echoes.

In most of the novels Dick has written there co-exist two modes of experience, one "real" and one "irreal". The manner in which the world as perceived by his characters actually varies from the real world is changeable: in *Eye in the Sky* an accident casts the characters into a series of "alternate worlds" based on the distorted world-views of the neurotics among them; in *The Cosmic Puppets* an illusion is cast over a small town by alien forces as it becomes the arena of their conflict; in *Time Out of Joint* an illusory enclave is manufactured for the central character so that he can predict events in the real world in the conviction that he is doing a newspaper puzzle. In these early novels, the last of which appeared in 1959, the problem posed for the characters is how to recover reality – they set out to find it with almost desperate determination. As soon as they become aware that they are living in an illusion they want to be rid of it, and the scheme of each book is an obstacle course which they must run in order to reach their goal: reality. It is noticeable, however, that in the last novel, in contrast to the earlier two, reality becomes ominous and hostile, and the question of whether it is *worth* recovering becomes pertinent. This question heralded a complete change of emphasis.

From the publication of *The Man in the High Castle* in 1962 there was a con-

siderable change in Dick's two-level stories. Not only did illusion come to dominate reality almost totally, but the essential goal was lost. The obstacle course remained to provide a scheme for the characters' actions, but it was no longer possessed of direction. In the novels of the sixties reality no longer provides the framework for the bewildering and confusing experiences the characters undergo, but becomes instead an elusive state lost within a framework in which the distinction between real and irreal is no longer irrelevant. Those novels which set out as if aiming for the recovery and re-establishment of reality over illusion – *The Penultimate Truth*, *Martian Time-Slip* and *Now Wait For Last Year* – fail in their resolve and are side-tracked. In other novels such an end is never in sight, and the characters wander aimlessly deeper and deeper into incoherent experience, their best hope, apparently, a reconciliation with the state of estrangement rather than escape from it. At the end of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *We Can Build You* even the hope of reconciliation is missing. Bizarre pseudo-realities become vicious traps in *Counter-Clock World*, *Ubik* and *A Maze of Death*, with no possible hope of recall or adjustment.

Two of these novels – *Now Wait for Last Year* and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* – use drugs as the instrument of induced irreality. Both novels are (insofar as they may be said to pass any judgment at all) anti-drugs, although the latter recognises a constructive role played by the drug Can-D in allowing the colonists on Mars to forsake their desolate lives for the leisurely dreamworld of Perky Pat. Dick's third drug nôvel, *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said,* ends on a note of optimism which seems anomalous, but which is not, in any case, concerned with any judgment upon the drug, which puts the hero through an experience of an extremely disturbing nature (though he is not the one who takes it).

The point which this extravagant list-making is intended to make is that *A Scanner Darkly* contains nothing so startlingly new in its anti-drugs stance, nor in the fact that it represents the web of irreality as inescapable once entanglement is begun. In this novel, however, the inescapability of that entanglement is no longer a by-product of the fact that the aim of recovering reality has been lost. *A Scanner Darkly* does not lack direction, but moves instead with the sure pace of a polemical exercise. The events which confound the main character, Bob Arctor – addict and undercover narcotics agent – as he descends into the grip of illusion, keeping watch on himself the while, no longer constitute a kind of obstacle course but become instead the strands of the web indefatigably engulfing him. The events are the same events that beset Dick's main characters in a dozen previous books, but in the past his dealings with them were always marked by a profound fascination – an involvement which, though he appears to have recognised its morbidity, he showed little intention of breaking. In *A Scanner Darkly* he contemplates the same events with new eyes, convinced of their lethal nature and frightened of the fascination which he discards, page by page, as he cries his way through this story.

There is little in this book which qualifies it as science fiction. The drug to which Arctor is addicted is invented, and so is the device which allows him to fulfil his role as a police spy without disclosing his identity, but there is no intrusion of the fantastic for the purposes of decoration, and certainly not for the purpose of rendering the irreal experiences in any way alluring or intriguing. The book is dominated by metaphors of decay and destruction. It carries an afterword in which the author emphasizes that the implications of the book are to be taken seriously – Dick's personal involvement with the drug scene seems to have ended the day he realised how many of his acquaintances were dead or hopelessly insane.

This is not a particularly good book. It lacks many of the qualities which made Dick's earlier work unique, precisely because he is renouncing his interest in those

qualities. It will disappoint many of his fans. But Dick has never been solely dependent upon the fascinations that he has now laid to rest. He has other interests and considerable abilities as a writer. He will not have to start again from scratch. But it remains to be seen whether he can change direction completely. It is still possible that he will suffer something of a relapse. One day he might read this book and, instead of crying, find its choked possibilites once again intriguing.

ingrowing toenails

The Early Pohl
by Frederik Pohl *(Doubleday, 1976, 183pp, $5.95, ISBN 0 385 11014 6)*

reviewed by Tom Hutchinson

Every picture tells a story and here the cover is the giveaway for the contents. What we see is a portrait of the author as a young pencil, the point of the implement sticking out, where the neck should be, from a blazered, flannelled body, complete with those black and white shoes that Gatsby probably gave to Fitzgerald in the hope that he wouldn't publish and thus damn Gatz. And the reason for that picture? Well, the pencil looks like a pole and the pole suggests Pohl. As Glenda Slag might say: "Geddit?"

It's a suggestion that holds the tone of the book in one clearly defined image and, while acknowledging Mr Pohl as one of sf's masters, it is not a tone that is all that compulsive to me, although it seems a very American attitude. Very funny or very fanny; underneath the archness is something struggling not to come out into the light.

For what we have here, in reality, are one poem and eight short stories from the author's origins, but interrupted and braced out by reminiscences very much in the style of *The Early Asimov:* autobiographical recollections of Mr Pohl's love affair with science fiction as an excuse for the display of the literary offpsring of such impregnation. Mr Pohl wrote some of the tales under the name of James MacCreigh and all were published between 1940 and 1944 when it seems that there were people around who called themselves The Futurians, as there were other fan societies when he was a high school student. Dr Asimov was, of course, among that lot, as he has made clear himself, and there is some coy banter from Mr Pohl about our Isaac.

The stories are brisk and efficient and not altogether unmemorable, although you could detect little of the greatness of the writer who was to go on to write *The Space Merchants* with Kornbluth. Let us forget them and the poem. Let us, instead, consider the recollections interspersing those stories:

> In the winter of 1933 when I was just turned thirteen, I discovered three new truths. The first truth was that the world was in a hell of a mess. The second was that I really was not going to spend my life being a chemical engineer . . . the third was that in my conversion to science fiction as a way of life I was not alone.

And so on and so on, the mood of which I think does a disservice to science fiction (perhaps when you're as eminent as Mr Pohl you're allowed to do that, I don't know). For this is the fan, sf-writing-commune bit, the inherent knowledge that *we* as science fictioneers really want to be alone in our own literary ghetto,

while the mainstream rushes past out there still unaware of us. And do you know something? We like our isolation, that cosiness which garrulity like Mr Pohl's communicates. Ingrowing toenails are what should be.

The genre has come a long way from that attitude, surely? Not when you read the present Mr Pohl's dissertations on his past, even though he has undoubtedly helped us to come all that long way.

Writers on writing are fine when they are saying something specific about their craft, but not, as here, merely chatting on in a kind of mutual admiration society about themselves: "I'm not a particularly modest person, you know. It seems to me that I have enough in the way of awards and money and celebrity to temper the agonies of adolescent ambition." Well, bully for you, Fred; good of you to say so.

If all this sounds bilious it is because I respect Mr Pohl so much that it disappoints me that he, too, should allow himself to be locked in the trap that says we have to hug ourselves to ourselves and not try to make what we love throw out its arms to the rest of literature, to understand it all in the wider context: we've nothing to be ashamed of. This "dear-reader" confidentiality shows us going round and round in ever-decreasing circles until, finally, we disappear up our own self-regard.

In the meantime I note that I've been sent Mr Pohl's new book *Man Plus* to review for another publication. I *know* that can't be bad: there's no pencil on the cover. I bet the manuscript was even typed, just like a real novel.

a-plus for pohl

Man Plus
by Frederik Pohl *(Random House, 1976, 215pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 394 48676 5; Gollancz, 1976, 215pp, £3.75, ISBN 0 575 02206 X)*

reviewed by John Sladek

We might expect a Frederik Pohl novel to be solid, competent, thoroughly readable sf, well-plotted and brilliantly dramatized. *Man Plus* is all of these, and it is also horrifyingly believable, a dark mirror held up to today's world.

The plot sounds simple: Earth supports a population of eight billion. It also supports more wars, famines, plagues, riots, pollution and general misery than we ever thought possible – but according to delphic computer predictions, the human species is about to reach a critical point. The three big powers have for some time been exploring the solar system, but finding all its other planets uninhabitable. Now NASA elects to colonize Mars, despite high radiation, barren soil, unbearable temperatures and a lack of air and water. The easiest way around these problems is to create a new race of men independent of them. NASA builds a cyborg, Man Plus.

In former days, cyborg stories had a way of concentrating on all the gee-whiz results of linking up a human brain with powerful mechanical muscles, ultraviolet eyes, etc. (see *Six Trillion Dollar Man, Woman, Dog* and no doubt dozens of future spin offs). How the cyborg is made was usually glossed over in a paragraph.

In this novel making the monster occupies the centre of the stage. Astronaut Roger Torraway begins as a good-looking, intelligent, popular young man with a more or less happy marriage, more money than he needs, and of course a fascinat-

ing job. The adaptation to Man Plus requires the removal of his lungs and limbs, the draining of his blood, the flaying of his skin, blinding, deafening and even castration. He suffers every kind of pain and trauma, every physical indignity to become this:

> He did not look human at all. His eyes were glowing, red-faceted globes. His nostrils flared in flesh folds, like the snout of a star-nosed mole. His skin was artificial; its color was normal heavy sun tan, but its texture was that of a rhinoceros's hide. Nothing that could be seen about him was of the appearance he had been born with.

Add huge bat-ears (to pick up sound in the thin Martian atmosphere) and giant bat wings (really solar panels, to power his auxiliary equipment) and the visual change is virtually complete. Inside are no lungs, no heart, no stomach or colon – everything has been by-passed or replaced or eliminated, including the sensory parts of his brain. The author is relentless in working through every pain-wracked step, showing Torraway coping with the loss of his looks, his manhood, his sense of reality and finally perhaps his earthly nature. In a way, his humiliation is a kind of triumph.

But what about the surgical engineers who make Man Plus? What about the military and political people urging the project on? Aren't they becoming monsters, too, examples of Man Minus? Pohl is not the kind of author to overlook that possibility, and indeed uses it as a second, underlying theme. The coldness of the Man Plus Project is the coldness of official paranoia, and it shows up at the very beginning of the novel. Torraway, still human, is to meet the President. First, he is frisked:

> They were being unusually thorough. His armpits were investigated. His belt was loosened and the cleft of his buttocks probed. His testicles were palpated. Everything in his pockets came out; the handkerchief at his breast was shaken open and swiftly refolded, neater than before. His belt buckle and watchband were studied through a loupe.

Later, of course, he will be stripped even of his testicles and buttocks for NASA and the President. But the novel does not allow NASA or the President to remain faceless monsters – like Man Plus, they are frail and human when stripped of their official faces. They are, after all, moved by impersonal forces such as popularity polls, political forecasts, projections of the world's energy resources, forces beyond which there is no appeal – or is there? The stripping-away of false faces goes on throughout the novel, up to its eerie and unsettling last line. *Man Plus* is probably Frederik Pohl's best novel so far, and surely one of the most exciting, brilliantly conceived and capably-written sf novels of the past decade.

the great mindbridge disaster

Mindbridge
by Joe Haldeman *(Macdonald & Jane's 1977, 186pp, £3.95, ISBN 0 354 04144 4)*

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

Joe Haldeman won the 1976 Nebula and Hugo awards for his first novel, *The Forever War.* Outside of that novel he had published very little – his first sf story

appeared in 1969 and he published only a handful more before the chunks of *The Forever War* first appeared. *Mindbridge* is a sharp reminder of the fact that winning major awards with a first novel is not a guarantee of immunity against the mistakes of inexperience.

Like *The Forever War, Mindbridge* deals with contact with aliens – contact made extremely difficult by circumstances, involving a misunderstanding that might precipitate war. In *Mindbridge*, however, we find an aid to communication which might just avert a "forever war" fought across light-years of space and centuries of time if it can be used. Other ingredients are similar: a description of the organisation of an interstellar army (this time a *corps* of explorers coping with an inconvenient means of travel), a detailed commentary on the psychology of the hero (but not of any other characters), and an indelicate spice of sex. What makes *Mindbridge* a very different kettle of fish is the way that the ingredients are treated, for this concoction has been put together according to a rather more exotic recipe.

Haldeman is honest enough to credit his influences. John Brunner and John Dos Passos (the latter, alas, rendered by the English typesetter *Doss* Passos) are acknowledged in the dedication. This reflects to some extent the incestuousness of the sf community – we have an author borrowing a technique at second-hand (much as the Lovecraft freaks may imitate HPL's imitations of Dunsany). The Dos Passos mosaic technique was borrowed by Brunner in the first place because Brunner found it invaluable for his purpose – which was to describe and characterise a future society in all its manifold ways. The problem of constructing a social background in sf has always been a thorny one, because there is so much more to be invented and the task of spelling it all out is a Herculean one. Few authors have ever made the attempt – Brunner's was successful largely because of his enterprise in co-opting a method of presentation which allowed him to build up a mosaic image of a whole society with relatively little verbalisation. Haldeman obviously found the method interesting and inspiring, but what he has failed to do is recognise its value in application. He has picked it up as a mere gimmick – a kind of literary prestidigitation. He has no elaborate and complex background to present, but merely a straightforward story to tell, and it does not benefit from being chopped up and mixed with photostats of reports, bits of scientific papers complete with graphs etc. There are much more elegant ways of presenting the kind of data which Haldeman has to present, but he has chosen instead one that is singularly inappropriate.

Mindbridge was never going to be a great novel. Its ideas are not followed through, and it suffers from the fact that it has only one character (plus a lot of shadows). By chopping it up and shuffling the pieces Haldeman has managed to conceal some of this weakness – but at what cost! The story becomes grotesque in presentation, a gimmick-ridden mes.

Coming as it does so soon after a big success, *Mindbridge* might take a lot of stick from disappointed readers. But its faults are not really heinous ones. They are errors of judgment, and it is probable that Haldeman will not repeat them – he surely has the sense to realise that even a Nebula and a Hugo have not made him an instant writer, and that he still has work to do in shaping his abilities.

sure shaw

A Wreath of Stars
by Bob Shaw *(Gollancz, 1976, 189pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 575 02134 9; Doubleday, 1977, 185pp, $5.95, ISBN 0 385 12463 5)*
Cosmic Kaleidoscope
by Bob Shaw *(Gollancz, 1976, 188pp, £3.75, ISBN 0 575 02209 4; Pan, 1978, 174pp, £0.70, ISBN 0 330 25294 1)*

reviewed by David Pringle

Bob Shaw is a reliable writer who always produces works which are readable and entertaining. Inevitably, such a statement sounds like damnation with faint praise. 'Reliable', 'readable' and 'entertaining' are safe, middle-of-the-road adjectives for a reviewer to use when he has enjoyed a book but does not believe it to be particularly outstanding. But how am I to express my very high regard for Bob Shaw's writing without using such terms? For Shaw is the quintessential craftsman of science fiction, an author whose reliability, readability and ability to entertain strike me as more and more astonishing with each new book. Equipped with what seems to be a rather humdrum set of virtues, he has come closer to producing a 'high art' of sf than any other 'intelligent entertainer' the field can boast. One of the important, if obvious, points to make about Shaw is that he takes his stand at the exact centre of the genre. He believes in science fiction, and he wishes to excel as an sf writer, no more. Unlike many of the most talented writers of today, he does not attempt to explode definitions, to leap barriers or to strain towards the outer limits. If, for the moment, we accept science fiction as a closed and conventional genre, rather like the detective story, then it is fair to claim that Bob Shaw is the finest sf writer currently at work (although I have qualified this statement with some care, again, I do not intend it as faint praise but as a genuine tribute). To whom should we compare him? Poul Anderson? Larry Niven? He seems to me to be much superior to both these authors. How much better *Tau Zero* and *Ringworld* would have been if Shaw had written them!

In the seven novels he published between 1967 and 1975, he explored a set of standard themes and sf situations. He produced a time-travel story *(The Two-Timers)*, a space-war story *(The Palace of Eternity)*, tales of pursuit *(Night Walk* and *Ground Zero Man)*, a marvellous-invention story *(Other Days, Other Eyes)*, an immortality story *(One Million Tomorrows)* and a tale of men encountering a vast alien artifact *(Orbitsville)*. All were handled with considerable skill and most were intelligent treatments of a subject-matter which had already been well worked over by other sf writers. Although he has not as yet given us a fully-fledged disaster novel in the John Wyndham mode, it is beginning to look as though Shaw has worked his way through most of the conventional sf scenarios. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that his latest book, *A Wreath of Stars*, is based on the most unusual idea we have yet encountered in a Shaw novel. It opens conventionally enough, with the approach of a mysterious interstellar object towards the earth and the consequent fears of a collision (shades of H.G. Wells's "The Star" and a hundred other stories since) but it soon veers into the unexpected when the precise nature of the cosmic visitor and the curious effect it has on the earth become ap-

parent. The object is, in fact, an anti-neutrino planet, and it can only be seen when the observer is wearing 'Amplite' spectacles (another of those vision-enhancing devices that Bob Shaw is so fond of in his stories). Instead of colliding with the earth, it passes nearby and since it consists entirely of anti-neutrinos it has no immediately-discernible effects on our world. However, the wearers of Amplite lenses soon begin to see some very strange things . . .

The scientific content of *A Wreath of Stars* is rather far-fetched but Shaw has the sleight-of-hand to make it seem plausible. Moreover, his people are as real, as amusing and convincing, as ever. The central character is Gilbert Snook, "the human neutrino". Unlike most of Shaw's heroes to date, he is unmarried and lacking in close friendships. A selfish, disengaged but competent sort of man, he is a good counterweight to the novel's other principal male character, Doctor Boyce Ambrose. The latter is a flashy scientist, a rather shallow seeker of public approval, who visits Snook in Africa in the hope that, with Snook's help, he will be able to pin down the meaning of the strange phenomena caused by the passage of the anti-neutrino planet. Despite their obvious failings, this pair of misfits engage the reader's sympathy, and long before the end of the novel one is wondering, with real concern, "will Snook get the girl?" and "will Ambrose pull of his scientific coup?". The girl in this case is Prudence Devonald, a cool beauty who works as a snooper for UNESCO. These three characters form an interesting triangle, but Shaw does not allow the development of their relationship to get in the way of the central concern of the plot – namely, the discovery of what is happening in the anti-neutrino universe. He throws in a couple of well-drawn villains, President Ogilvie of the Republic of Barandi and his military right-hand man, Colonel Freeborn, to complete the cast of principal characters (some of the action is of the near-future political thriller type).

The idea, the scientific content and the characterization are all more than adequate, then, but I think it is Shaw's style, its felicities and asides, which make this novel a success. Not that there is anything showy or obtrusive about the style, for it is best described as quiet and solid, but it is admirably *sure* in tone. Authorial tone is extremely important in sf, a genre where so many of the other conventional qualities of prose fiction can be uncertain (if we don't trust the implied author, we don't trust the tale, in short). Shaw's authorial presence is slightly reminiscent of that of the early J.G. Ballard – less complex and introspective, certainly, but similar in its emphases, its balancing of fictional foreground and background, its sly contricks and its wry worldliness. Here is an example of the tone I am trying to describe, an incident plucked from an earlier Shaw novel, *One Million Tomorrows:*

> Sensing he was being stared at, Carewe turned his head. The baby on the woman's lap had pushed the folds of its wrap aside and brilliance from the aircraft's ports illuminated the pink, doll-like face. Two ocean-blue eyes – wise, yet imprisoned in permanent psychosis by an infantile inability to distinguish between ego and the outside world – gazed humorously at Carewe. He shrank away instinctively as the baby reached towards him with a dimpled hand. Suddenly aware of his reaction, the woman pressed the baby to her breast. Her eyes fastened on Carewe's, momentarily challenging, then slid away to contemplate the private horizons of a universe to which all men were strangers. (Pan Books, 1973, pp.57-58)

I trust that those with an ear will be able to detect the similarity to Ballard. *A Wreath of Stars* is written in the same sure style as Shaw's earlier novels (it is not an easy style to quote effective examples from, which is why I chose an older passage which happened to have stuck in my memory). Shaw is capable of an occasional lapse into cliché, but on the whole he maintains his individual authorial persona with admirable consistency – a consistency which inspires the reader's confidence in that persona.

As a result, *A Wreath of Stars* is a most enjoyable reading experience. As Brian Aldiss said in his brief but amusing review of this novel in *The Guardian*, "it wouldn't put me down". The ending of the book is a little loose, however – a bitter-sweet denouement which leaves room for a possible sequel. If Bob Shaw *should* decide to write a sequel detailing the further adventures of Gilbert Snook in the anti-neutrino world, I for one shall read it with alacrity.

Meanwhile, we have his new collection of short stories, *Cosmic Kaleidoscope*, which contains a previously-unpublished novelette, "Skirmish on a Summer Morning", as well as eight shorter tales most of which are of recent vintage. Shaw's short stories, with the notable exception of his early masterpiece, "Light of Other Days", are usually humorous, unlike his novels (the novels are witty or wry, but not actually comic). Several of the stories included here are out-and-out farces – for example, "Unreasonable Facsimile", that unlikely tale which involves a fibreglass replica of Mount Everest and which offers an explanation of the mystery of the Abominable Snowman; or "Waltz of the Bodysnatchers" which is about suicide, murder and mind-swapping machinations in a decadent future. More substantially, there is the delightful comedy of "A Full Member of the Club", which is perhaps the best example of a Bob Shavian tall story, offering as it does ludicrous explanations for such everyday observations as the fact that coffee never tastes as good as it smells, and that rich people like to buy up rare works of art.

One of the funniest stories is "The Giaconda Caper", which involves an inefficient "private psi" and his discovery that Leonardo da Vinci was in fact a pornographer. Less successful is "An Uncomic Book Horror Story", a black comedy about an adolescent and an alien monster. Less successful still is "The Silent Partners", an old story (it first appeared in *Nebula* in 1959) which has presumably been added to the book as a makeweight. "The Brink" and "A Little Night Flying" are more serious stories, and both are good. The latter is a dramatic account of an airborne policeman in an overcrowded world of the future.

Finally, there is "Skirmish on a Summer Morning", which is not only the longest story in the book but which will probably be judged by most readers as the best. It is, surprisingly, a Western, with elements of time-travel and inter-temporal warfare added. It is also a very simple story, about a lonely man, a woman on the run, the birth of a baby. What makes it successful is that reliable authorial tone: Shaw handles his cowboys every bit as well as he does his spacemen. All in all, *Cosmic Kaleidoscope* is a lightweight collection (virtually none of the stories make any pretence at significance) yet it is a book which I am confident the majority of sf readers will find very entertaining.

the path with heart?

The Feast of St Dionysus
by Robert Silverberg *(Gollancz, 1976, 255pp, £3.80, ISBN 0 575 02193 4)*

reviewed by Angus M. Taylor

Robert Silverberg may have slowed down in recent years, but the books keep coming. *The Feast of St Dionysus* is a collection of five stories, and seems to confirm

the direction of a number of Silverberg's recent works: an existential commitment to experience as the be-all and end-all of life. As one of his characters says, "I believe in searching as a way of life. Not searching *for*, just searching." To be more precise, and perhaps more fair, it should be said that this searching is not conceived of as an empty task; Silverberg's characters are *en route* to a kind of divine revelation, a joyful communion with the forces of the universe. Silverberg quotes Carlos Castaneda's shaman, Don Juan, on the necessity of following the "path with heart" in life: "Both paths lead nowhere; but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey; as long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life." Silverberg seems to subscribe unreservedly to this philosophy.

I suppose I value Robert Silverberg's stories for two main reasons. To begin with, they are for the most part immensely readable. Though hardly a poet, Silverberg has honed his writing skills to the point where his stories seem to flow effortlessly along. If you're looking for something to entertain you on your next train journey, you can't go wrong if you pick up anything this author has written in the last decade. This may seem like damning with faint praise, but it's not meant to be. Silverberg is one of sf's best story-tellers – an achievement for which he should be given due credit. In addition, I take Silverberg to be a peculiarly *honest* sort of writer. One gets the distinct impression that he is concerned to *communicate* with his audience, and that the passion that infuses his stories is not merely dictated by the art of writing.

In "The Feast of St Dionysus" an astronaut, depressed and mentally exhausted after returning from a Mars expedition that claimed the lives of his two fellow crew-members, seeks salvation in the "divine madnesses" of a Californian religious cult. The cult's leader explains to our astronaut that "we see no virtue in self-denial, since that is the contradiction of love". As in so many of Silverberg's stories, the search for communion is pursued with the help of sex and drugs – the drug in this particular case being wine, in quantities probably sufficient to float California off the map – or at least irrigate the Mojave Desert.

The protagonist of "Schwartz Between the Galaxies" bemoans the cultural homogeneity of twenty-first-century Earth, the lack of roots, the plastic sameness of everything, and dreams of the joyful communion of the diverse races of the galaxy. At one point he recounts the advice of a friend:

> Reshape your life, Tom; you can't reshape the world. I said, But how? And she said, Look inward, find the primitive in yourself, see what made you what you are, what made today's culture what it is, see how these alien streams have flowed together. Nothing's been lost here, only merged. Which made me think. Which gave me a new way of looking at things. Which sent me on an inward quest.

Silverberg's protagonists are alienated; intuiting the impossibility of reshaping the world, they prefer the inward quest for meaning and authentic identity. Here, on this alternative path, the world appears much more malleable. All things become possible. It's as if Silverberg's bright new universe has no skeleton – only a pliable, shifting exterior. It's a bit like a great lump of jelly: all sweet and wobbly and ready to melt away when you taste it. Interesting to look at, but not very nutritious. Even sex has this unreal quality to it: "The bed has fresh linens on it, cool, inviting . . . Their clothes drop away." Good old Silverberg. Every fuck a zipless one.

The inward quest goes hand-in-hand with a skeleton-less view of history. In "Trips" we are informed that

> New universes split off at each instant of decision . . . If repressing a sneeze generates an alternative continuum, what, then, are the consequences of the truly major acts, the assassinations and inseminations, the conversions, the renunciations? . . . No Industrial Revolution, is that it? The steam-engine man – what is his name, Savery, Newcomen, Watt? – smothered in his cradle? No mines, no factories, no assembly lines, no dark Satanic mills. That must be it.

This is a remarkably naive conception of cause-and-effect. The "truly major acts" listed here are all of a highly personal and individual nature – assassinations included. Where all this leads is uncertain. At one point in "Trips" the protagonist stumbles upon an alternative universe where naked youngsters lie beside "soaring fountains spewing turquoise-and-scarlet foam", lovers stroll along dangling grapes before each other's lips, and the dense moist grass emits "gentle thrumming melodies". Though declaring himself pleased with this hedonistic utopia, he is not long in departing from this ridiculous, improbable, and no doubt unendurably boring world. Perhaps it is a realization by the author of the contradiction between his conceptual ideal of a zipless, unconstrained freedom and its rather hollow manifestation that leads him to the self-indulgent argument that "The journey, not the arrival, matters. Always." Silverberg's position seems to be rather like that of the man in search of faith who, unable to convince himself of the existence of God, decides to dedicate his life to preaching the virtues of atheism. Only in this case, the matter is rather more the other way around: unable to discover a meaning in the historical world, Silverberg's characters opt for the ecstasies of communion with the divine.

"In the House of Double Minds" tells of children who are being groomed to become oracles after having the hemispheres of their brains separated. The idea is that the intuitive, mystical Right half will thus be enabled to develop free of the tyrannical dominance of the analytical, rational Left half. However, this is the weakest story in the collection – not because of its idea, but because it reads like a half-finished first draft the author pulled out of a drawer when some publisher made a hasty last-minute request for material. The book's final story, "This is the Road", a not-very-good allegory of Life in the Wobbly Universe, exhorts us to live for the moment and accept what comes to us.

Silverberg is undoubtedly one of the leading writers in the field today. His general level of technical competence is beyond question. And his passionate plea to celebrate life is refreshing. But his approach remains disappointly one-sided. Life may be a cabaret, old chum, but what about those Storm Troopers out there in the audience? They aren't likely to join in the dance; they may have other plans in mind. Silverberg offers us the hippie sensibility of the late 1960s, polished to a high gloss. The question for consideration is: Are there only two paths, leading nowhere? Or is there perhaps, in an alternative universe with a little more internal coherence, *another* path with heart?

counterfeit vonnegut

Slapstick; or, Lonesome No More!
by Kurt Vonnegut *(Cape, 1976, 243pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 224 01342 4)*

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

In Arthur Koestler's *Act of Creation* there is an anecdote about an art dealer who bought a canvas signed "Picasso" and took it to the artist to check on its authenticity. Picasso declared it to be a fake. A year later, the art dealer took the painter another canvas, and Picasso again declared it fake. The dealer objected that this was surely the painting on which the artist had been working on the last occasion they had met. Picasso shrugged, and said: "I often paint fakes."

In the introduction to *Slapstick* Kurt Vonnegut talks about the death of his sister, and how he travelled to her funeral in the company of his brother Bernard. "While my big brother meditated about clouds," he says, "the mind *I* was given daydreamed the story in this book. It is about desolated cities and spiritual cannibalism and incest and loneliness and lovelessness and death, and so on. It depicts myself and my beautiful sister as monsters, and so on." He also says: "It is about what life *feels* like to me."

Chronologically speaking, Vonnegut is 54. If you are as old as you feel, though, he is probably much older.

Vonnegut's literary career reached its climactic point in *Slaughterhouse-5*, which was not his best book but was certainly the one he had been working towards. The earlier novels exist in order to build a world-view and an existential context in which the firestorming of Dresden could take place. In the real world, it just happened, but fiction is organised experience, and things can't just happen – they have to be part of a scheme. Vonnegut's novels consist of the development and elaboration of that scheme. The early novels were ironic, sad, compassionate and sentimental. Vonnegut has grown out of all those things in growing older ("older" as in "as old as you feel", not in terms of chronology).

Slapstick is a fake Vonnegut novel, like Philip José Farmer's *Venus on the Half-Shell.* It matters not in the least that Vonnegut owned the hand that pushed the pen in this case. If Picasso could paint fakes, Vonnegut can write them, and this is definitely counterfeit.

Slapstick contains things that are clearly imitative of Vonnegut-like ideas. It has an idiot religion, the Church of Jesus Christ the Kidnapped. It has a political scheme for combating loneliness by giving everyone a new middle name and number which makes them legal kin to countless other people scattered at random across the United States. It has a brother and sister who share a single mind which only functions while they are together, and who are therefore permanently separated by those who control them. It is continually interrupted by a verbal shrug of the shoulders: "Hi ho". But all this is mere shadow-play. The irony has become simple bitterness, the sadness sarcasm, the compassion hollow laughter and the sentiment mockery. All the meaning has drained out of it.

Vonnegut says this is what life feels like to him, and he ought to know. But he didn't always feel the way he feels now. Now he is passive, but once he experienced his feelings actively. He compares this book to a Laurel-and-Hardy movie, and that seems fair enough – it's a book written by a spectator, who is slumped in a chair

while life happens on a screen, noisy and colourful but flat, observed through a faint haze of cigarette smoke. In *Slaughterhouse-5*, you will remember, he was in there *with* his characters – not the focal point of the action, but a participant nevertheless. Things have changed.

Slapstick is not badly-written. It is not boring. It is not devoid of ideas. But it's not a good book despite all that, because it's a fake.

the little brothers are watching you!

Time Trap
by Nicholas Fisk *(Gollancz, 1976, 128pp, £2.95, ISBN 0 575 02195 0)*
Time at the Top
by Edward Ormondroyd *(Heinemann, 1976, 135pp, £2.90, ISBN 0 434 95570 1; first published by Parnassus Press, 1963)*
Time Junction
by Helen Solomon *(Good Reading, 1976, 80pp, £2.35, ISBN 0 904223 13 2)*
Time Explorers, Inc.
by E.W. Hildick *(Doubleday, 1976, 223pp, $5.95, ISBN 0 385 09987 8)*

reviewed by Pamela Cleaver

The time slip (involuntary travel in time brought about by magic, a talisman or by being the right person in the right place) is one of the staple devices of children's fantasy books. Time travel (deliberately travelling in time by means of a machine, drug or other scientific device) is a staple of sf both for children and adults. The author's purpose, whether slipping by chance or travelling deliberately is usually to explore the past and extol or deplore it by comparison with the present or to show the future, extrapolated from present trends as an Awful Warning, *pace* H.G. Wells in *The Time Machine* or a Good Thing, *pace* E. Nesbit's Fabian Utopia in *The Story of the Amulet.*

There are certain problems inherent in putting people from the present into the past if the book is to retain the internal logic without which any fantasy collapses like a house of cards. There is the paradox of meeting yourself which is usually avoided by writers like the plague (except in cases like Heinlein's "All You Zombies" where he deliberately courts it); there is the question of the flexibility or inflexibility of time – can you change what has already happened? Opinions are sharply divided on this. Poul Anderson's theory ("Time Patrol", 1955) is that the continuum is like a tough mesh of rubber bands – if distorted slightly it snaps back into place. Kill one animal and another ancestory supplies the genes you thought you had eliminated. Ray Bradbury ("A Sound of Thunder", 1952) takes the opposite view: kill one mouse and you annihilate a billion possible mice and break an ecological chain which results in one of the only dozen cavemen on earth dying of starvation and thus you destroy a whole possible nation of men.

Another problem in time travel and time slip is the vocabulary shift. In that part of the past covered by written history we know how people spoke but when we come to the future, we can only extrapolate and guess – and as David I. Masson pointed out (*Foundation* 10), by 2200 50% of English spoken would be incompre-

hensible to us. So a writer making up future slang has to be careful if he is to get the right feel to his language. Nicholas Fisk has set *Time Trap* about a hundred years ahead but he has unwisely used a teenage narrator whose slang is very similar to today's. "Fantass" for instance is the teenage superlative based on the already obsolete fantastic (the teenagers I know are all into "amazing" while the sub-teens use "brilliant"). When his time travellers Dano and Uncle Lipton go forward a decade and come up against a gang of rowdies led by a girl incongruously called Pink Fairy, her slang sounds highly unlikely – "Well, that's all rightypighty then! We'll bid you farewellipoos. And goodbyeseiwise. We'll be on our merry waysi-paisie." Fisk may have chosen this cosy type of chat to make a chilling contrast to her callous cruelty, but it won't do.

In Fisk's dreary world of 2079 people live in Homebody units, stave off boredom by watching Viddy screens and drinking TrueT and Coffymost in Bevvy Lounges (weren't we here in *1984*?). The time travellers are punished by aversion therapyy called Tranking (anyone seen my *Clockwork Orange*?). In the future, Pink Fairy's gang beat people up and kill them by smearing them in their skimmers (did you say *Death Race 2000*?) and the moral is – you must make the best you can of your own time (ah! "Hobson's Choice"). The best section is when Dano and uncle Lipton visit the 1940s, but even that is distorted through rose-coloured nostaliga.

The two time-slip stories, one American *(Time at the Top)* and one English *(Time Junction)* are good examples of the genre. In *Time at the Top,* Susan Shaw does a good turn for an old lady who mutters while thanking her, "I'll give you three, no more." Susan, being well versed in fairy stories, expects the three to be wishes but finds that they are trips to the past. The elevator in her apartment block takes her to the house that stood on the site a hundred years before. She also finds that she (or some other *deus ex machina*) has been wished for by Victoria, the girl living there, to help prevent her mother marrying an odious suitor. Susan does this by her acting skill; she also tells them of a modern news item about a coin hoard unearthed that week by workmen and helps Victoria find it in the 19th century. Returning to the present she finds the news item has been erased from the newspaper and she solves the problem of a suitor for Victoria's mama by taking her own widower father back on her third and last trip to the nineteenth century where they stay. (Dano wanted to stay in the 1940s but Mr Fisk, being a non-changer of the past, couldn't let him.)

Ormondroyd brings himself into the story as an author living in Susan's apartment block and rounds it off by finding an old photograph of the house and notices Susan and Mr Shaw are part of the 1889 family group. Mr Ormondroyd's purpose in time-slipping – apart from making an engaging story – seems to be to prove how much nicer life was a hundred years ago.

Time Junction is about Tim, a boy visiting his grandparents who live beside an old, disused branch line of the Southern railway. He time-slips by taking a severe tumble while out walking and finds himself in the time of the railway navvies who are constructing the line. Time-slip here is used to present a small section of the past through modern eyes; it is well-researched and interestingly presented. Tim is protected from the rough world of the navvies by a strange, time-wise character called Stick-the-one and slips home safely when the action gets really menacing.

Time Explorers Inc. like *Time Trap* is a first person narrative. Mr Hildick is an English writer who writes separate books for the American market, of which this is one. I am not competent to judge the finer points of his American slang but it certainly feels right. Buzz, the narrator, finds he has a gift for interpreting dreams and Danny, his classmate, provides the dreams. There is some simplified psychology

here and some gobbledegook based on Dunne's theory of time. The book lulls you into a false sense of security (and boredom) – well, it does go on rather about all those dreams – until suddenly there is a twist ending. Their interpretations have been quite wrong; all the dreams have been leading up to one warning and investigating it culminates in Danny's death. I suppose Mr Hildick is saying that it is dangerous to tamper with the unknown, but the book is not convincing and the ending is bleak.

Each week I take a group of eleven and twelve year olds for Science Fiction Studies and to a man, their favourite kind of sf is time travel and they love time-slip stories too, they can't get enough of them. But in their criticism they are very strict and exacting about consistency and inner logic so let the writers beware – the little brothers are watching you!

everything including the kitchen sinks

Japan Sinks
by Sakyo Komatsu, translated by Michael Gallagher *(Harper & Row, 1976, 184pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 06 012449 0)*

reviewed by John Clute

When the Johns Wyndham and Christopher undertake to wipe out English civilization they generally tend to leave a Shire somewhere in the hills for a small band of brothers under the skin to survive in, and because as readers we are directed to identify with this brave little band, the climactic destruction of the twentieth century always seem to be a condign purging, with the heart of England (where we reside while reading) somehow intact, no matter how dead the grass. What is being purged is precisely what prevents us (in life) from lighting out ourselves. What Wyndham and Christopher, and some of their followers, write is therefore a kind of pastoral, hence the cosiness of megadeath in their novels. And what so distinguishes Sakyo Komatsu's *Japan Sinks* from these generic predecessors is the absence of any Shire at all, the lack of any pastoral comfort to the disaster it envisions.

Translations from the Japanese are notoriously difficult to accomplish, but Michael Gallagher's of this book does seem to make terribly heavy weather of the job, so much so that one is led to reconstruct the feel of Komatsu's narrative strategies by guesswork and analogies. Reading through the lines with the knowledge that Komatsu is a skilled professional writer and that the book has sold millions of copies in Japan, one comes to the assumption that the original text reads with something of the deftness and transparency of style to content of the best "documentary" disaster novels in our own language, the idiom of *Fail-Safe* or *The Longest Day*, for instance, or what Harry Harrison goes some way to achieving in *Skyfall*. With this understood, we begin to penetrate a remarkably cogent and well-constructed anti-pastoral, a moving elegy for the loss of Japan.

The map at the beginning is helpful. It shows the various islands making up Japan as they perch fragilely against the Japan Trench, the world's deepest, a plate tectonic node point in real life, where the Pacific and the local continental plates grind together, causing the earthquakes and volcanic activity Japan has always been a vic-

tim of. It is the simple premise of the novel that a slight shift in the patterns of force and convection balancing the two plates against one another causes the whole archipelago to gradually shift some miles to the east and a mile or two down, so that the Trench swallows Japan down like curd. The story begins with a small island at the edge of the Trench sinking overnight, causing some interest and alarm, and bringing the main characters of the book to the site to investigate it; Onodera the deepsea submarine pilot and Tadokoro the geologist appear throughout the book, Onodera responding emotionally to the gradual revelations Tadokoro is forced by the mounting evidence to make, for he soon suspects more than a local phenomenon, and uses his influence to get the government to fund continued research. Soon earthquakes and volcanoes begin mounting in severity and Tadokoro reveals his conclusions – that Japan is sinking into the Trench – to the government, which begins to take international covert action to place the Japanese people at the mercy of the world; q ..ly enough it is forced to announce publicly that Japan is sinking. A complex evacuation is begun, and most Japanese will survive in exile, Shireless. They are spread over the wide world. The novel closes on two of the characters disappearing on a train into the black Siberian night.

It's an exciting enough story, though at times a little disconcerting in its lurches (insensitively translated) from one venue to another, but gradually one begins to realize that the real subject of the book is not the fate of its individual characters, who fade abruptly out of sight in any case, but that of Japan herself. At the heart of the book is a sustained elegy for the total, exorbitant revocation without appeal of the island and of its culture. There is no escape from the book's images of fragility and cessation, images not generally found in Western sf, and certainly never with the conviction *Japan Sinks* conveys, its sense of bared trauma. There is a terrifying *submissiveness* in the text – which is after all a willed fiction – to the dreadful and irrevocable punishment the beloved islands are receiving. Though most Japanese manage to escape to the mainland, in this novel the whole world somehow refuses Japan, and there is a strong (though only hinted at) conviction in the last pages of narrative that a civilization has died; there is no sense of a germ of continuance (though a sequel is planned); clenched deep in the signs of an exorbitant refusal, the book closes in images of ice and trauma, very movingly, very Japanese.

When the book closes, Japan never was.

second best from the rest

The Best From the Rest of the World
edited by Donald A. Wollheim *(Doubleday, 1976, 267pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 385 04550 6)*

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

This book is subtitled "European Science Fiction", which may or may not be indicative of what the average American thinks the rest of the world comprises. Its problems, however, do not seem to have been diminished by this geographical conservatism.

Despite his reputation, Donald Wollheim, as one-time editor for Ace and – more

recently – as publisher of DAW Books, has always been ready to take risks and experiment with a fraction of his output. It should be remembered that he bought a good deal of early work by such writers as Philip Dick, Harlan Ellison, Samuel Delany and Barry Malzberg, none of whom can be labelled conservative writers. In the last few years he has become the first paperback publisher to give consistent exposure to the work of European writers, and though the quality of such translations has been somewhat variable (ranging from the appalling Pierre Barbet to the Strugatsky brothers) the endeavour itself is a wholly laudable one. Here he offers a collection of shorter pieces, including many of the writers he has featured regularly in DAW Books – Barbet, Gerard Klein, Herbert Franke and Sam Lundwall – and several previously unknown in the Anglo-American market.

I have no idea how many languages Don Wollheim reads, or the extent of his familiarity with the sf published in France, Germany, Italy, Sweden etc., but it is surely relevant to inquire how the selection was carried out. If these stories really are the best from the rest of the world (*alias* Europe) then sf outside the Anglo-American market is very sick indeed. If, on the other hand, they are simply stories which came readily to hand in translation, all that is wrong is a simple case of misrepresentation which, in view of the extent to which the word "best" has been recently devalued by over-use, is unlikely to mislead many people.

The best story here is Gerard Klein's "Party Line", which suffers only from a slight touch of déjà vû, in that it is a neat reworking of a familiar theme. There are redeeming features, too, in Wolfgang Jeschke's long story "The King and the Doll-maker", which clumsily telegraphs its ending, but which embodies a good time-paradox plot. Domingo Santos' "Round and Round and Round Again" is a pleasant, if trivial satire on parking problems in big cities. The one familiar story, Nathalie-Charles Henneberg's "Ysolde" (which appeared in *International SF* in 1968) is also readable. The remaining ten stories could surely never have been accepted for publication in a major sf magazine. Even allowing for crudities of translation and an understandable wish to have as many countries as possible represented it is difficult to account for the presence of a story like Jon Bing's "A Whiter Shade of Pale", based on the moronic premise that people in an arctic environment where everything is white find dark or coloured objects invisible. Wollheim's intentions are undoubtedly honourable, but he is in desperate need of better advice from his European contacts.

hail ffellowes well met

The Peculiar Exploits of Brigadier Ffellowes
by Sterling E. Lanier *(Sidgwick & Jackson, 1977, 159pp, £3.95, ISBN 0 283 98372 8)*

reviewed by John Sladek

To say that these stories are written to a formula is not to disparage them. The formula is old and honourable, and amazingly effective still, as Mr Lanier ably demonstrates.

On a rainy evening, a few chaps are talking quietly by the fire in the club library, when a stray word or a trivial incident suddenly reminds X of one of his most uncanny adventures. The adventure takes place in some remote region, and about

20 years or more in the past. As Arthur C. Clarke's introduction explains, the story "should take place in some unusual but vividly described locale . . . should be incapable of disproof – despite frequent attempts by its auditors – and . . . should cast grave doubts on the commonly accepted view of the universe."

The formula has of course been used by Mr Clarke himself, in *Tales from the White Hart*, as he says, and earlier by Lord Dunsany, in whose fables X was Mr Jorkens. Chesterton used it still earlier in *The Club of Queer Trades* and *Tales from the Long Bow*, and Max Beerbohm had already made fun of it in "A.V. Laider", so the formula was old before our century.

In these television days the formula has been tried at least once ("The Club of the Damned") without success, for what must be obvious reasons: what's so fascinating about a *tale* is that someone is telling it – there's a chance, just a chance, that it really happened. We may contrast the TV failure with Kingsley Amis's unexpected radio success a year or so ago, when he told the plot of *The Green Man* as a personal anecdote, and, I believe, had listeners writing in about it.

Sterling Lanier's tales evoke nostalgia for the radio days, I must admit, and his X, Brigadier Donald Ffellowes, has just the right touch of unreality, even in his pretentious name. Ffellowes has apparently been in all branches of Her Majesty's forces, from the RAF to MI5, but none of his stories are military. He's been everywhere on earth and of course speaks Basque, Greek, Swedish, etc., so is properly equipped for adventures. As it happens, every time he goes to an out-of-the way place, he has an encounter with something strange and unpleasant. Has he ever told you why he can't eat crab? Or of a Gaelic fox hunt of a rather peculiar, frightening nature? Then there was that terrible thing in Africa that kept eating cattle and men, but even that wasn't as nasty as the thing in the sea off Scandinavia which seemed to have – well, a kind of telepathic power of reaching into your mind and – but it's better to let Ffellowes tell you about it. He is, after all, a superb storyteller.

theories of rocketry

The Spaceflight Revolution: A Sociological Study
by William Sims Bainbridge *(John Wiley, 1976, 294pp, £13.00/$21.00, ISBN 0 471 043060 0)*

reviewed by George Hay

This book will have at least three separate readerships. First, sociologists – for it would seem that we have here the first serious and documented study of the relationship between science fiction and spaceflight. I suppose I should hedge my bets and say "the first English study", but, given the range of material covered here, I would really be astonished to learn that a better book awaits translation from any other tongue.

Then, the historians. Of course, the history of spaceflight does not lack documentation – and indeed, Mr Bainbridge draws heavily upon this – but to date the presentation of this history has leaned heavily upon the hardware side. If such presentations are looked at in terms of the heart/mind or art/life dichotomies, it can

be seen the "realists" have got their innings in first, which perhaps makes it easier to have some sympathy for the anti-technology latter-day Luddites, and to understand how far and how fast the balance has swung against science. In view of the importance of this issue, the balanced attitude of this book is particularly valuable, backed as it is by an impressive array of facts and tabular analyses. In Table 2.2, for example, the author tabulates background details of fourteen pioneers of spaceflight, from Clarke to Von Braun. Under "education" we have three "interrupted", two "irregular", one "dropout" and one "autodidact": under "science fiction an influence?" we have six "yesses" and one "possibly". Such figures by no means show any preponderance of superiority for the wild and solitary dreamer – Clarke has his B.Sc. and Von Braun his doctorate, please note. In fact, I should say right away that anyone planning to spend £13 in order to be able to "prove" that spaceflight was the offspring of sf would do better to save his money. I quote:

> Although science fiction may not contribute valuable inventions to the Spaceflight Movement, it may serve to mobilize public support to pay for space progress. On the face of it, this hypothesis looks like an obvious truth, but in fact there is room for doubt. Some professional aerospace men fear that science fiction may work against actual space development in the long run by giving the general public such distorted images of what is possible that real successes will not be appreciated. . . . For two years after Harry Warner's 1971 call for a campaign of fannish activism in support of spaceflight, I read many fanzines, including the comprehensive newsletter LOCUS, and detected absolutely no consequences of his plea.

It is not that Mr Bainbridge is any enemy of the genre. Clearly not. Nor does he lack discernment, scholarship, balance or thoroughness. The sad fact is that, the more these talents are deployed, the more they show up the fact, noted elsewhere by Disch and others, that for the majority of fans, sf is only a compensatory activity. I say *only* – the display of such activity can hardly be held as a reproach in the kind of world we inhabit, and which of us does not manifest it? It is, to say it again, that *only* that the author shows up so devastatingly, for anyone studying the detailed accounts and figures given of the various cult areas must surely realise that here at last is the proof of what one had so long suspected – that the one way to guarantee the arousal of the active hostility of a high percentage of sf 'followers' is to suggest that they – or indeed, anyone – ought to do something about the ideas they are reading about.

The historian, now, will be able to discuss these issues at last with chapter, verse and references to hand across the whole area, so that he won't have to go to one shelf – or indeed, library – to check, Atheling, William, Jr. (James Blish), *The Issue at Hand*, and another for Goddard, Robert H., *Autobiography*. And not before time . . . .

And the sf reader? Well, if he possesses a stiff upper lip, he stands to learn a great deal about the sociology of his own subject. "Something of the cultural style of fandom can be seen in the highly mechanical methods by which most of the (fannish) words were originally created . . . only six of the 53 words represent special imagery or colourful usage . . . almost all the words were produced mechanically. A metaphor is hard to find in the entire list. . . There are very few words about space, science, or indeed about sf literature." There are equally illuminating accounts of the Cosmic Circle, the Slan Shack and similar mountain peaks in fan history, balanced, let it be said, by very useful historical sketches of the American and British Interplanetary Societies, with detailed descriptions of their inter-relations with early rocketry developments.

A large part of the book deals with the history of the Nazi pre-war and wartime

investment in military rockets and attendant terror-weaponry. And here I must execute a smart about-face. For, if this book dismisses the wilder vapourings of the fans, it is only to emphasize in contrast the way, as incredible as it is undeniable, in which men like Von Braun bamboozled, first Hitler and then the Americans, into putting enormous resources at the disposal of what it is not going too far to describe as an 'sf fan activity': to wit, the entire space programme, from the days of the V-weapons onwards. This has to be read to be believed: alternately ghoulishly horrific and screamingly funny, it could have come straight out of a Vonnegut novel. In fact, of course, all this was part of what *generated* the Vonnegut novels . . . In the end, as I read it at least, this book shows that, while all that generalised sf did for spaceflight was to prepare the public for it to some degree, the influence of certain specific fans was supremely decisive. The City Engineer of wartime Magdeburg believed in the hollow-earth theory – remember that one? Who else but an sf fan could have persuaded him, in the middle of a major war, to invest in a plan for building a rocket intended to go 8,000 miles straight up and prove the correctness of the *Holtweltlehre* by smashing again into the earth at the antipodes without ever swerving from a straight course?

cant's theory of space and time

The Prayer Machine
by Christopher Hodder-Williams *(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976, 205pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 297 77045 4)*

reviewed by Pauline Jones

In this book the schizophrenic hero, Neil Prentice, passes into a *1984* future with the help of a drug called TNA. His route lies through a black hole. His mission is to save humanity from this future and its concomitant horrors of plastic cancer and premature ageing. In the course of the narrative, marketable preoccupations such as pollution, laser power, nuclear power run riot; drug treatments and genetic engineering help to confect the plot. All this is larded with schizophrenia and metaphysics.

Prentice has evolved a theory to justify his retreat from accepted realities:

> Interschizoid thinking is the process of working back from an imaginary point in the future and then reconciling the sequence of events so that they fit the present day. (p.94)

However, if one can imagine one point in the future one can imagine a myriad. So why not start with fact rather than imagination? But Mr Hodder-Williams' extrapolations into the future can only be possible *and* monstrous with considerable extrapolations in the present, a present which is thus somewhat without credence.

While Prentice is in the future trying to save us from all our yesterdays, he is zonked out on a table, in the present, sometimes talking backwards and having the odd wet dream.

Introducing a book review in this way might be construed as a gratuitous reduction of subtleties and imaginativeness as if when asked, "What is *Götterdämmerung*

all about?", I were to reply, "It's about a young lady who rides into a bonfire."

But this book fails to convince at the conceptual or explicatory levels. With the closest attention I was unable to conform its extrapolations to my experience of the present, nor its theories or speculations to either their premises (commonly received or not) or any logic by which one might build upon them. The book is sheer juxtapositional fantasy.

Aside from all that, the author attempts to convey his arcana from the mouths of his characters. The resulting surfeit of dialogue is so artificial that it subverts all chance of dramatic credibility; I confess myself flummoxed.

A black hole, even if the existence of such an object in fact corresponds to the inferences about it, cannot be truly understood or predicted in its properties. Certainly, if a person could be in two eras at once, that is, in the present and the future, and retain a physical identity in both, it seems unlikely that a black hole could be anything more than a cul-de-sac as an apparatus to effect this duplication. Even the messianic megalomania of a Neil Prentice cannot alter this. It is hard to accept that schizophrenia, with or without black holes, is the passport to such a conjuring trick, and without an account of some biochemical verisimilitude it is difficult to credit that a drug is going to let a loony loose on the future.

Unfortunately for the nonplussed reader, the dialogues and characterisations offer little easement. They are both false.

> "Ann Marie, I'm going to kiss you. Now."
> "I tilt my face?"
> "And your hair falls . . . just so. And, young woman, this is not a deal."
> "You do not understand yourself, Neil."
> "What do you mean?" — But he didn't give her a chance to answer. Their bodies were straining against each other, and his hand strayed to her breasts, and her calves ached, and her buttocks crimped together, and she broke away abruptly, and she said, "Now you will hate me, because we go back to Norton with your penis in agony?"
> "Yes."
> "Then one day you beat me for it, when I grow up."
> "I'm not sure you ever will."
> "You do hate me."
> "No. I see what you thought your duty was. You're the carrot. To stop me going too far into the PONEM." (p.69)

(PONEM = Point of Neutral Effective Mass.) Great stuff — great balls of fire — great bore.

> Narbiton penetrated more deeply into the dead forest. The stench was appalling; but he slithered onto the marshy ground and, grabbing a beam-fono off the back seat of the mag, directed it with shaking hands toward the most toxic area on the far side. He could hear only faint squeaking noises and of course he knew what that meant — a contaminated rabbit was in the last throes of plasticization.
> Under any other circumstances this would have made him think again; and had he possessed elementary technical knowledge of inter-mesh technology he would have recognized that throbbing in the frontal lobe of his brain as escalating decision-failure. He was the victim of compulsion and didn't know it. (p.133)

With writing like this, who needs sf? Anyone for extended metaphors?

> Oscar said, "But can't the horse be gentle?"
> "It is always gentle — that's why he doesn't throw you. And when he's raced from one end of the moor to the other, and you are both panting, he stops in a hay-field and you relax on the grass . . . the horse nuzzling you affectionately in the warm sun. You are safe; and the grass is moist and alive . . . like your pants are now. I'm not the Post Office Tower, I'm a confused person capable of adoring you. And I can feel my metaphor is right. But

you're never at the mercy of anyone you wish to love."

"Why?"

"Because, as with the horse, the position is one of trust. By consent, I play boss, at the end of the race across the moor. You feign obedience and in that sense you allow yourself to be my plaything . . . I can do what I like, as long as you like it. Is that a better script?"

"Almost perfect." (p.153)

Come back Hank Janson. All is as it was, but with intellectual salad-dressing.

One has an unworthy suspicion that it's still a man's world in this book, or perhaps a peevish jehad in the name of the well-hung God of Progesterone, fought out in the sadistic hurly-burly of a denuded and boring, male-created future. That particular dehumanised and "blasted heath" quality which the hero, wielding a blazing penis, seeks to arrest for the sake of us love-freaks in the present, is the only sort of scenario which permits the hero a masculinity which seems worth having. That determined endowment is sadomasochistic, cunt-struck and castration-fearful. Accordingly, the ladies are all good and beautiful, but end up with the wrong end of the stick. Luckily the hero escapes, having saved the universe which at times he locates inside of himself in a familiar schizophrenic manner. A big man for a big job.

The Prayer Machine is preponderantly a depressing platform for an insecure male ego. Women do not blush (= a bit excited/overawed) at copious emissions of semen. They're either quietly pleased or somewhat bored, according to the situation. The dishonesty and afflatus of this book is more dismaying at this sexual level than at any other, and that's *very* dismaying.

But it's sf! What's all this about sex?

a. Whatever else, it's a book;

b. It is presumably directed at a human audience;

c. As such, it purports to enlighten or at least entertain.

If science fiction draws a predominantly masculine readership, then more fool science fiction. After all, it is worth considering the possibility of royalties from half the population. The point is not that this book has been written by a man, but that it has been written to indulge men – presumptuously so. Really, a man doesn't need a cosmic mission to pull the birds, and doesn't have to be all that clever to protect himself from them. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written a long time ago now. *The Prayer Machine* is a cynical Gothic exploitation of it. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the hero has varicose veins, and he's not only credible but lovable.

But if the underlying sensibility is one of pompous phallic glorification, the landscapes and downbeats owe something to the New Wave, depurified somewhat by the unscientific bungling of superannuated hard-core posturings about time-travel. Uncharacteristic again, insofar as jumping on the New Wave bandwagon is concerned, is the sexual achievement. Certainly there are blasted inward and outward landscapes, sludge and Francis Bacon focused by neurotic obsession, but the "half in love with easeful death" quality, the delicious desuetude and crystallised forms of failure are absent. The sex is too studdish to convince the reader of the integrity of the vision. It would be impossible for this narrative to discard its Siegfried ethos and admit a midget, a coward, a "Parsifal" (or even a woman!). Its terms of reference, so far as universality is a concern of character-development, are too sperm-bound and if the reader has ever entertained a conception of heroic personality, the book in an underlying sense falls to pieces. This is because it is a set of *ad hoc* contingencies and fashions only unified at the phenomenal level by a strenuous action.

To fuse a diversity of elements out of creative necessity and thence adduce a novel synthesis, is admirable. To bring mysticism, pseudo-science and totalitarian fantasies together in a book whose sensibility in interpersonal attitudes retains at

base the sexist originality of *Scouting for Boys,* with none of the wry piquancy of implied perversion, is a recipe for indigestion. An attempt to anatomise the present or metaphorise current dilemma is a stiff commission. The author did not pause to consider that we, the readers, might have thought twice about the mind/body problem and, accordingly, not share his sensationalist indulgence towards irrational psychisms and conceptual pot-pourris. He might at least have allowed a discussion of these materials, and thus permitted them to discredit themselves.

The novel lacks the presence of an author view; it lacks honesty. Its rhetorical emphases cover a squirming confusion. Hence it succeeds as neither idea nor poem. Hence it is free to accrete as much or as little as the author wishes. Hence it invokes a schizophrenic hero who comforts women in their despair at a depersonalised universe which schizophrenic men have created.

It seems to me that a writer such as J.G. Ballard is not future-orientated. His truth is poetic. His landscapes and conditions are expressions of the inward landscapes and conditions implicit in the present. From this viewpoint he is a rather deadpan symbolist and his integrity and hilarity devolve from a driving consistency of vision. *The Prayer Machine* is humourless and unironic, like all uneasy impostures.

A case in point that exemplifies the vapid outwardness of this book: the stripped-down future and totalitarian computer-meshed hell of the party's régime produces an architecture characterised by the inverted pyramid, which Prentice decides he must ask about. Why an inverted pyramid? All tyrannies, given half a chance, are amusingly pompous in their architecture. Have a look at Moscow, or the Nuremberg arenas. Why should future totalitarianism hit upon this inverted pyramid form, which is not only uncharacteristic of such states but is also ergonomically ludicrous and completely unexplained? This anomaly jumps out at the reader. It is a wash of local colour that sinks on drying. It is gratuitous scene-setting. What life or chance would the hero have outside of a mental and ecological Antarctica? None. He is a surrogate of obsessions and shortcomings.

We can only be grateful to him who saves us from an apocalypse *if* we can perceive for ourselves that it is coming. This book is a set-up, spurious and brittle. It is written not to summate and transcend the fears within the present, but to titillate the inadequacies of present men, and damn the future.

after the thaw: a russian torrent of sf

Russian Science Fiction 1956-1974: A Bibliography
by Darko Suvin *(Dragon Press, 1976, 73pp, $10.00)*

reviewed by Alan Myers

Professor Suvin's latest bibliography, handsomely bound and printed, covers the twenty year period which interests him most of all in the history of Russian sf. The majority of readers with anything other than an antiquarian interest in the subject would agree with him. The years after Stalin's death witnessed a thawing of the icy grip of official control imposed some twenty years earlier. Statistics are most revealing; of the 1600 or so new Russian titles put out since 1917, about a thousand have appeared since 1958. It is also significant that the "breakthrough" novel of the

time, I.Yefremov's *Andromeda* (1959) was the first communist utopia published in Russia since Ya. Larri's *Happy Land* in 1930. Russian sf during the Stalin decades had been an arid wilderness. Writers like V. Nemtsov and V. Okhotnikov had resolutely clung to earth-bound themes very much on the near side of the "borders of the possible" – new types of farm machinery, new road laying machines, new energy source investigation and so on. Space fiction did not exist. Notoriously, Nemtsov had barely got his young heroes off the ground in a space lab the year before the first sputnik went up.

The new generation of writers produced earnest polemics claiming the right to speculate as far as the wings of imagination would carry them. They defended themselves energetically against charges of escapism and frivolity and eventually gained the day. The fruits of their victory were not slow to appear. Themes hitherto forbidden territory were treated for the first time; cybernetics, that science without a name, robots, encounters with credible aliens, even hostile aliens (ideologically delicate ground) and later, time travel and ESP. Yefremov himself gave support to his young colleagues, both in critical articles and, by example, in *Andromeda,* where we find, for the first time, the concept of null – or hyper-space among other "daring speculations". The popular science magainze, *Knowledge is Power* had, in the whole of 1953, published only one sf story. In 1961 no fewer than 19 were printed, including two by Ray Bradbury and an extract from Lem's *Solaris.* The number of translations from mainstream Anglo-American sf, followed later by Japanese, French and Italian work, swelled to a flood.

The liberating effects of the "thaw" were felt, of course, across the entire Russian literary scene, but the solid gains made by sf in 1958-63, have largely been held, whereas mainstream literature has had to abandon a good many forward positions in the face of official policy reappraisals. Professor Suvin gives us in Part One of his bibliography a straightforward transliterated checklist of Russian sf books published 1956-74. It shows the old guard of Nemtsov and Okhotnikov ceasing to publish by 1959; the then younger generation of A. Dneprov, G. Al'tov, V. Zhuravlyova and V. Savchenko are all still publishing in their seventies, after some 15 years. The prolific recent crop of writers like D. Bilenkin, V. Bakhnov and K. Bulychov are all prominent. The most talented of all, the Strugatsky brothers, after a whole series of excellent novels in the sixties, have two mutely melancholy entries in 1972, published in Frankfurt/Main – neither *Gadkie lebedi (Ugly swans)* nor *Ulitka na sklone (The Snail on the Slope),* the latter surely a masterwork of Russian sf (to put it no higher), could be published as books in the USSR.

Professor Suvin's decision to include only books in his list means not only the exclusion of all stories printed only in magazines – no great loss probably – but also the burial of first-rate material under the anonymity of a book or anthology title. I have in mind Savchenko's "Second Expedition", describing for the first time since the twenties a head-on clash between men and implacably hostile alien lifeforms. The story is included in *Chernye Zvezdy* (1960). O. Larionova's fine tale "The Kilimanjaro Leopard", about a group of young people who learn of their death-rate, is concealed behind the anthology title *N.F.* V. Mikhailov's impressive time-travel story, "Deep Minus", is anonymous behind *Fantastika* (1966). In a list which is not annotated in any way, S. Snegov's splendid space-opera, *Liudi kak bogi (Men like Gods)* of 1971, a tale with a galaxy-wide sweep unique in modern Russian sf passes unnoticed in the crowd. The first anthologies ever devoted to sf began coming out in the early sixties and duly take their place here, being listed rather solemnly year by year, right down the page, with no indication as to contents. Professor Suvin has elected to exclude all mixed collections of adventure/sf and sticks

to his decision to the point of denying entry to the very first of them all, the pioneering *Iskatel' (Seeker).* An exception might have been made here, I feel.

Professor Suvin is always mindful of students and people approaching Russian sf for the first time. He provides an excellent list of recommended authors, to which my only addition would be Yu. Tupitsyn, admittedly a novice.

In Part Two we are given a most comprehensive listing of Russian sf in translation (French and English). This is self-evidently invaluable for the prospective reader, comprising as it does, "all known book translations of 20th century authors".

The author's article published in *Extrapolation* (May 1970), entitled "Significant Themes in Soviet Criticism of Science Fiction in 1965", showed the masterful grasp he has of the material in Part Three of the present bibliography – a select list of major contributions to Russian sf criticism since 1956. Cogent annotations accompany each entry from the 1958/9 debate on the right to unfettered imaginative license to the final note – appropriately Suvin's own article, on the writers whose cause he has so trenchantly and perceptively championed – the Strugatskys. It was, after all, with their work that most critical controversy throughout this period was directly or indirectly concerned. The elegant and sophisticated work of R. Nudel'man receives its due; the last faint blast of the old guard (Nemtsov 1966) is noted and the overall trend towards increasingly sophisticated analysis is made very clear. A quotation from the annotation to Yu. Smelkov's book in 1974 will show this as well as the crisp and comprehensive style of the Professor's annotations throughout.

> Copious analyses of Anglophone sf and Lem, also of the theme of responsibility in the Strugatskys, of Bulychov's 'ludic' sf, of Nikitin, Savchenko, Ivanova, and of the negative examples of Kazantsev and Greshnov. Sophisticated discussions of a number of aspects – e.g. the development of protagonists from schematic onlookers through participants to personalities or the use of playful philosophical satire and paradoxical didacticism alongside utopia and warning – make this an excellent brief survey.

The bibliography concludes with an extremely useful appendix of pre-1956 critical works (not annotated), which rounds off a book full of interest for the general sf reader and a valuable tool for the student.

too many cooks

The Lifeship
by Harry Harrison and Gordon R. Dickson *(Harper & Row, 1976, 181pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 06 011764 8)*

reviewed by Richard McKinney

Both Harry Harrison and Gordon Dickson are experienced, competent science fiction writers. Each has produced memorable sf. As examples I might name Harrison's justly famous *Make Room! Make Room!,* his highly readable *Deathworld* or his latest novel, *Skyfall;* while from Dickson we have the epic Childe series, and such diverse but noteworthy shorter pieces as "Computers Don't Argue" and "Dolphin's Way".

Why, then, is *The Lifeship* such a dismal failure?

Because a failure it is: the style is melodramatic and overdone while simultaneously being boring; the characters are either not developed at all or are clichés; the plot is unbelievable and insufficiently supported by internal logic; and far too many of the story's extrapolations and speculations collapse when examined closely.

The novel is set in the far future. Men have reached the stars, at last; not through their own ingenuity, but as passengers on board the ships of an extraterrestrial race called the Albenareth. According to Albenareth religious/philosophical beliefs, the highest goal of a spacefaring Albenareth is an honourable death in space. Furthermore, the Earth itself has adopted a new social structure as a result of such factors as population pressure, energy limitations, etc. There are the rulers, the Adelborn, sworn and trained from early childhood to duty to the "plan" which is to save the race; and the arbites, who are the planet's workers, from manual labourer to computer technician, and who are virtual slaves to the Adelborn.

The book's hero, Giles *Steel* Ashad (the italics are the authors'), is Adelborn. On a flight to one of the Colony Worlds an explosion wrecks the Albenareth ship upon which he is travelling. Giles, two aliens, and a group of arbites (these latter provide a convenient – for the authors, at any rate – and exemplary cross-section of arbite society) escape in the lifeship of the book's title. The majority of the rest of the novel then tells of the perils of survival aboard the lifeship. This section reads all too much like all those other survivors-in-a-lifeboat-face-catastrophe-and-reveal-their-strengths-and-weaknesses story. It is an old tale, better told elsewhere.

What does hold at least some of the reader's interest is the unfolding of background data: the situation on Earth, the elaboration of the hows and whys of the present social structure; the story of the revolutionary group calling itself Black Thursday, and dedicated to the overthrow of the prevailing power structure; the details of the lifeship itself, with its mysterious ib vine, providing breathable air, food, and drink for human and alien alike. The actions of the passengers themselves, with some exception for Giles and Rayumung (the Albenareth Captain), are either too predictable or else uninteresting. Various events of this portion of the book appear to have been stuffed in mainly for "dramatic" effect. They have little real justification in terms of either story or characterization. Why, for example, all the rigamarole with extravehicular repairs?

The plot gets even more confused (not genuinely complex, which I could appreciate) after the ship finally reaches a safe planetfall. We learn that all the human survivors, except Giles himself, are part of a revolutionary plot by the secret police to take over Earth's government. Giles – with help from Rayumung – finally manages to save the day, of course. The novel ends on a note of closer cooperation between Albenareth and Human.

Despite numerous complaints about style, characterization etc. I am afraid that my biggest gripe about *The Lifeship* is that so much of its basic underpinning is not only weak – it is non-existent! Take the social order on Earth. The authors admit that it is a patently unnatural, contrived system. Perhaps it is acceptable to say that such a system could remain in power once created. But the explanation as to how it came about in the first place:

> There wasn't any choice. Everybody realized that. It was time to stop developing civilization – all the wild growth in population and invention – for as long as it was necessary to get the race on a working basis . . . (p.27)

"Everybody" (all ages, both sexes, all political, religious, moral persuasions) simply "realized" the problem and its solution: the setting up of the Adelborn-

arbite culture. No. I do not believe it. You do not change human nature or human organization across the entire planet just like that. The novel's basic premise concerning human social structure is impossible; at the very least it needs much more internal justification or explanation than Harrison and Dickson give us.

Further, look at the illogicalities connected with the Albenareth. The aliens appear to be basically indifferent to mankind. Humans are of a lower order. They are allowed to travel on Albenareth spaceships because of a trade agreement which is to the mutual benefit of both races. Likewise, there are apparently a significant number of Adelborn who believe that the aliens should be of little concern to humanity. Men seem to understand very little about Albenareth psychology and sociology.

The Adelborn-arbite system has been in existence on earth for a period of 200 years. Contact with the aliens occurred at approximately the same time as the Earth adopted this societal form. This means a *maximum* total time for human-Albenareth relations of just under two centuries. During this time Earthmen have spread out among the stars to numerous Colony Worlds – almost always aboard extraterrestrial ships. The Albenareth have received "manufactured goods" in payment for this transport. There must be scores – if not hundreds – of these Colony Worlds, settled, producing, and trading with both the Earth and other human planets. Remarkable achievement for a world of a rigidly structured society where the specific policy of the government is to slow down innovation and development! Where do all the colonists come from, if the Earth has a stable, controlled population? How many people would it take to colonize a world? Several worlds? How much time would it take to make such a planet so self-sufficient that it would be capable of interplanetary commerce?

Or look at the lifeship itself. Obviously it was designed by Albenareth for Albenareth with no consideration whatsoever for eventual human passengers. Nonetheless, the miraculous ib vine appears to serve human needs as well as those of the aliens. (Admittedly, it tastes bad, but nutritionally it functions sufficiently well.) What are the chances of such a parallel evolution that the food requirements of both races should be so near? Especially with the physiological differences between the two races which the authors specifically describe.

I could go on, but I think the idea is clear. The book's logical background has too many loopholes. Were the novel written humorously, or as satire, then it wouldn't matter so much. But Harrison and Dickson play it straight: they want us to believe in their future, and I'm afraid I can not do so. It is too shabbily constructed. Perhaps this is because the work originated at a round-table conference with the late John W. Campbell rather than in the desire of either author to tell a story or depict a particular future? I do not know. There *are* some fascinating ideas embedded in *The Lifeship's* pages, if only they had been developed with a bit more care and thought.

embryonic star maker

Nebula Maker
by Olaf Stapledon *(Bran's Head Books, 1976, 126pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 905220 06 4)*

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

This is the first part of a projected novel, more-or-less complete in itself. It is a difficult work to appraise, in that one must start with the knowledge that it was ultimately rejected by its author, who began afresh and wrote one of the most impressive works in the literature of the scientific imagination: *Star Maker*. *Nebula Maker* is, in a way, the ghost of *Star Maker* as it might have been.

Opposite the title page of this book is a photocopy of the contents page from Stapledon's first draft of *Star Maker*. The original scheme was to begin, as does the final version, with the narrator walking on a hill before being seized by a cosmic vision. In the original plan, however, the vision was to snatch the narrator directly to the beginning of time, to witness the moment of creation and then to study three phases in the development of the universe: first, the life of the great nebulae; second, the life of the stars; and third, the career of the "vermin" (life as we know it). Having seen the three "wakings" of life run their course, the visionary was to have confronted God, and discovered that what he had seen was but one of a whole series of creations carried out by God-the-experimenter. Then he was to be returned to Earth. *Nebula Maker* covers the entirety of the first phase, but having completed it, Stapledon abandoned it, and used a very different plan.

Star Maker, instead of beginning at the beginning of time and proceeding chronologically, begins with the vision of the Other Earth, then proceeds to an array of "worlds innumerable", setting all this into the context of the "community of worlds". This, in turn, is set into a greater context ("Stars and Vermin"), and this into a greater one still ("The Beginning and the End" – including a collapsed version of *Nebula Maker*). *Star Maker*, therefore, adopts a radically different, but no less systematic, procedure than was originally proposed, beginning with the almost-familiar and steadily expanding the context in which it is set – not a linear sequence of stages but an expanding set of concentric circles.

In the original programme the climax – the confrontation with the creator – would have been a kind of postscript, independent of the linear chronological sequence. In the actual novel it becomes the context of contexts – a *genuine* climax – and the end (the return to Earth) is not simply an exit but an *infolding*: a return to the point of origin of the vision and to the very centre of the whole scheme, which is thus illuminated by the whole experience.

There can be no question that Stapledon's decision was right, and that the actual scheme of *Star Maker* is far more appropriate than that first planned. But this does not mean that *Nebula Maker*, assessed independently, is a work fit only for the waste-basket. As a beginning to *Star Maker*, it was wrong, but in itself it is a strong work of considerable quality. The history of the living nebulae as they evolve through sociality to war, and eventually to a partial redemption by a nebular Christ, is a deliberately naive allegory – a commentary on human history and the processes of evolution (natural and sociopolitical) effective within it. In the 1930s it would probably have seemed too naive, and perhaps that is why Stapledon did not attempt to publish it then. Although naivete as a stratagem was winning acceptability in the

visual arts at that time, it was not until much more recently that it has become an acceptable mannerism in literature. Even today, despite the success of Vonnegut and Brautigan, it remains suspect, but *Nebula Maker* is likely to receive a more kindly and understanding reception today than it could have in 1937. Thus, this is not only an interesting work, offering valuable insight into the embryology of *Star Maker,* but a work of merit in its own right and one which seems to belong to the contemporary scene. Bran's Head Books deserve congratulation not only for their enterprise, but also for their sense of timing.

the pox in apocalypse

Time of the Fourth Horseman
by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro *(Doubleday, 1976, 183pp, $5.95, ISBN 0 385 11076 6; Ace, 1977, 250pp, $1.50, ISBN 0 441 81180 9)*

reviewed by David Pringle

Time of the Fourth Horseman has a nice title. It's curious how the mythic power of the Bible still pervades contemporary literature, and how even as "atheistic" a genre. as sf frequently takes chunks of Biblical story as its basic building-blocks: a good recent example was Vonda N. McIntyre's Hugo-winning tale "Of Mist, and Grass and Sand", with its all-too-wise heroine and her snakes – a feminist version of the Garden of Eden story, complete with an Adam who fails to fall into knowledge and maturity and exile. Chelsea Quinn Yarbro has taken her title from the other end of the Bible, but despite the resonance which this bestows, the novel is not a far-flung exercise in fantastic apocalypse. Rather, it is a would-be realistic, near-future scenario for disaster, a grim catalogue of inhumanities and stupidites (which places it, as Frank M. Robinson obligingly tells us on the back of the dustjacket, in that "new genre of novels, commonly mislabelled disaster novels, that depict the terrifying problems – and their equally terrifying solutions – that face mankind in the very near future" – i.e. alongside such books as Scortia and Robinson's *The Glass Inferno* or *The Prometheus Crisis*). It is a story of pestilence, with some echoes of Herod's slaughter of the first-born.

The heroine, Natalie Lebbreau, is a junior doctor in a large city hospital. Inured to dealing day and night with battered children and accident victims, she is horrified to discover that some of her young patients are suffering from the old, now extinct, diseases: polio, diphtheria, meningitis. She is even more horrified at the callousness of the hospital's officials and senior doctors, at the refusal of her colleagues to believe what is happening. Within days, she discovers that thousands of the city's children are dying from diseases that they have all, apparently, been inoculated against. Her husband, who happens to be one of the hospital's top medical research workers, proves to be the most callous of all her colleagues. The author gives her major plot-twist away very early in the novel, so it will do no harm if I explain it here. Natalie's husband has been working on a mysterious "project", and it soon transpires that the epidemic is the deliberate result of that project. The idea is to decimate the over-large population of the city by means of a controlled plague. With clandestine government backing, the doctors have been injecting children with fake

serum in the hope that nature will once more dictate a high death-rate. Their project works much too well . . . .

The remainder of the novel is taken up with the struggle of the good doctors against the bad, with the attempts of Natalie and her friends to set up an emergency plague-treatment centre, and with the depiction of the city's swift collapse. This is a very serious and admonitory novel, rather reminiscent in its grimness and its greyness of John Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up.* It is written in short, swift, dialogue-laden scenes, it builds from horror to horror, and it drives home its message with some force. However, in the urgency of her theme, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro has overlooked some of the values of good fiction. Natalie Lebbreau is portrayed with some sensitivity, but her husband comes over more as a comic-book monster (and his sticky end smacks too much of a dream vengeance). The other characters, and there are dozens of them, tend to get lost in all the flurry and flap of white coats. A sort of inverted nurse-and-doctor romance this novel may be, but unfortunately it seems to have retained some of the sentimentality and the cardboard of that genre. As the "good" doctors succumb one by one to various diseases (and beatings-up by crazed teenagers) the narrative pauses every now and again to jerk a tear, but it is hard for the reader to be moved when he is desperately trying to remember which character is which.

Towards the end, the novel becomes almost absurd in its piling on of the agony: the flesh is frail indeed. One of the sympathetic characters cuts his foot on some broken glass, another breaks his hand while thumping a table to stress a point in an argument. All this, with fire and pestilence too . . . Nevertheless, *Time of the Fourth Horseman* is a vivid piece of nightmare, and it is commendable in that it makes an important point. What I liked best about the book is the way in which Chelsea Quinn Yarbro counterpoints her deliberately-fostered plague of the future with the child abuse and torture which actually occurs to an ever-greater extent in our cities today. As a humane protest against child-molestation, and as a warning of what population pressures may do to our sense of values, her novel deserves some praise.

sociological fallacies

Sociology Through Science Fiction
edited by John W. Milstead, Martin Harry Greenberg, Joseph D. Olander and Patricia Warrick *(St James's Press, n.d., 412pp, £3.25, no ISBN: first published by St Martin's Press, 1974)*
Social Problems Through Science Fiction
edited by Martin Harry Greenberg, John W. Milstead, Joseph D. Olander and Patricia Warrick *(St James's Press, n.d., 365pp, £3.25, no ISBN: first published by St Martin's Press, 1975)*

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

There is a kinship between the problems of the theoretical sociologist and those facing a science fiction writer whose intention is to extrapolate from observations of present-day society to design the hypothetical society of the future. Similarly, the writer who approaches the more complex problem of creating from scratch an

alien society must – however intuitively – employ sociological assumptions.

The science of sociology has not produced many "laws" which may be perceived to govern social behaviour and the evolution of societies. Nor has it managed to provide many clear, precise and analytical descriptions of particular societies or their institutions, couched in terms which are generally applicable. This is not, as some people have suggested, because sociology is "still in its infancy" as a science, but because the methodological problems in defining and employing sociological knowledge are probably insuperable. In any science there is an "uncertainty principle" – limits set as to the kind of knowledge we can have and the extent to which such knowledge may be tested – and in the study of society that uncertainty is implicitly very great. Sociology is, by its very nature, a frustrated science.

While the professional sociologist can occupy himself by the intensive contemplation of his frustration, the science fiction writer has to get on with the job. If there are no revealed sociological rules and principles to guide him in his work, then he must invent them. He may take refuge in making the future a mere analogue of the past (the Galactic Empire *et al*) but even the process of drawing analogies tends to involve the writer in theories of history and covert sociological assumptions – as witness Asimov's invention of "psychohistory" and Blish's use of Spenglerian philosophy and "cultural morphology".

Sf writers are almost invariably inept intuitive sociologists (so are most sociologists) but the important thing is that the nature of their endeavour forces them to make imaginative leaps and hypothetical ventures where sociologists are confined by caution. There are many science fiction stories which may be regarded as sociological thought-experiments, submitted to a sort of intuitive "testing procedure" in terms of their plausibility (or lack of it). The criterion of plausibility is unscientific, but that does not make the thought-experiments implicitly uninteresting. Sociologists have to put up with the uncertainty anyhow – one might as well try to work as imaginatively and constructively within its limitations as is possible.

I have written this preface in order to make one thing crystal clear, and that is that there are very good reasons why sociologists might be interested in science fiction. I would go so far as to contend, in fact, that science fiction is of special interest to sociologists, and of considerable potential value, in that theirs is the science most confounded by problems of method, and which thus stands to gain most from the creative use of the imagination. In all likelihood, we are never going to have a science of sociology much advanced (according to Popper's criteria of scientific confidence) beyond the one we have at present. If the science is to grow, it must grow imaginatively, in directions other than those indicated by the criterion of hypothetical falsifiability. Science fiction, I firmly believe, can help.

The two books here presented for review can*not*. They are bad books, and it is vital that we should understand *why* they are bad, because we must not read into their failure the conclusion that science fiction has nothing to offer the student of sociology.

What the editors of these anthologies have attempted to do is to use sf stories in order to illustrate various areas of sociological thought and concern. The motive is clear – it is an attempt to make sociology more attractive to apathetic and uninterested students. This is, in my view, bad policy. If we are to write sociology to serve the whims of the uninterested and the apathetic, what kind of science are we going to end up with?

Sociology Through Science Fiction has a series of introductions which say, basically: *this* is what sociology is all about, *these* are the questions which interest sociologists – here are some science fiction stories which are about the same things

and interested in the same questions. The problem is that the stories are not about the same things, and are interested in very different questions. The kinship between the problems of the sociologists and those of the seriously-intentioned science fiction writer is a kinship of creative method. The one thing it does *not* mean is that the purposes and endeavours of the science fiction writer are those of the sociologist.

In the first section, *The Study of Society*, we find an introduction which speaks about the moral dilemma of the participant observer, and we are offered as illustration the story "Lost Newton" by Stanley Schmidt. The story is typical *Analog* fare, about super-civilized humans on a primitive planet interfering while trying to pretend that their aim is not to interfere. To represent the characters as "participant observers" engaged in "sociological research" is misleading, but a fairly trivial sin. The main point to be made is that the one thing the story is *not* concerned with is the moral dilemma of the social scientist – it is concerned with the evaluation of interfering and the role of individual genius in social and scientific progress. It is also a lousy story, but that, too, is somewhat beside the point in this kind of exercise.

The aim of using science fiction stories as illustrations in mapping the field of sociological interest has many pitfalls. The principal one is simply that science fiction stories are not written as illustrations of areas of sociological interest (not even for *Analog*) and any potential they have is an accidental by-product of the real creative process involved. Of the stories in this book I reckon that only four actually function as illustrations of the study-areas or pertinent questions concerned. They are Christopher Anvil's "Positive Feedback", Gerald Jonas's "The Shaker Revival", Walter M. Miller's "A Canticle for Leibowitz" (with the rider that this is a purely hypothetical role for the Church within society – not one it actually has adopted historically) and Brian Aldiss's "Total Environment". A further few are borderline cases. There are, however, thirteen which do not in any way dramatise the issues that they are supposed to dramatise. "Pigeon City", by Jesse Miller, is supposed to say something about race, but is in fact merely a representative of one of sf's oldest cliches – the one about the guy who rebels against oppressive circumstances and is told as he waits for punishment that he has passed the initiative test and can now become one of the oppressors. In this instance the rebels are black – but then, so are the oppressors and the poor saps left behind. How does this illustrate "social differentiation by race", as it is supposed to do? And does Ray Bradbury's "The Pedestrian" really inform us what a political institution is? Can John Rankine's "Two's Company" possibly bring the sociological study of the family into sharper focus? The answers are: *no, no* and *no*.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing about the selection of illustrative stories is the apparent inability of the editors to know a joke when they see one. There are half a dozen joke-stories here – Chad Oliver's "Of Course", Arthur Porges' "Guilty as Charged", two by Lafferty, one by Evelyn E. Smith and one by Christopher Anvil. In each case the jokes are presented as if they made some cogent point. They don't. That's not what jokes are for.

Social Problems Through Science Fiction is slightly better, in that a larger number of the stories are in some way adequate to the task ahead of them. But again there are idiocies: can the editors really believe that Robert Sheckley's black comedy "The People Trap" and Philip José Farmer's ironic *bizarrerie* "The Sliced-Crosswise Only-on-Tuesday World" will help the student of sociology get the problems of overpopulation into perspective? Has Herb Lehrman's farce "The Revolt of the Potato-Picker" much to teach us about the process of automation? Is William Sabrot's boring sceptic-victim-of-superstition story "Night of the Leopard" even remotely connected with the sociology of religion? *No, no* and *no* again.

One thing which does strike me as a little strange is that the editors have overlooked some of the good science fiction stories which actually *do* provide excellent illustrations of important questions in sociology. I can only wonder, helplessly, why Poul Anderson is represented by yet another of those rebel-awaiting-punishment-is-welcomed-into-the-élite stories when stories like "The Helping Hand" and "The Problem of Pain" actually do pose significant questions, on the one hand about cultural pollution, and on the other about the relationship between social behaviour and religious faith.

All these criticisms are, I think, relevant, but they should not cloud the basic issue. Even within their declared intentions the editors have done a poor job, but in my view the most vital point which is to be made is that their declared intentions are wrong. This approach – the attempt to make science fiction illustrate and dramatize sociology, the whole notion of teaching sociology *through* fiction, is a loser. It is exactly the reverse of the most interesting and most useful approach, which would be to say: Here is a story set in a hypothetical society, asking questions which have clear meaning within this hypothetical social situation, making assumptions about the kind of effects social systems and practices have upon attitudes, relationships and behaviour – what kind of a commentary can we, as sociologists, provide on these assumptions and the way these questions are answered?

The sociologist *must* let the literary text stand as it is, as a literary text. He must bring to bear his own perspectives, his own analytical procedures, accepting the story as an imaginative construction with its own aims and motives while allowing questions interesting to him to arise from it. He must *not* try to pretend that a story is something which it blatantly is not, to make what he *knows* is a false assumption. There is interesting sociological data to be found in science fiction – but that is *not* the same thing as saying that science fiction stories *are* sociological data. These two books misrepresent and misuse science fiction, and this must be discouraged, even though sociological interest in science fiction is by no means misplaced.

nicholls plugged

Science Fiction at Large
edited by Peter Nicholls *(Gollancz, 1976, 224pp, £5.95, ISBN 0 575 02178 0; Harper & Row, 1977, 224pp, $8.95, ISBN 0 06 013198 5)*

reviewed by Neil Barron

These are 11 lectures delivered in London in the winter of 1975 "about the interface between science fiction and reality", as the sub-title reads. The audience was not limited to fans but rather what Nicholls calls the general sf readership "who rightly or wrongly would rather die than attend a science fiction convention". Sf was to be linked to other areas of human activity, such as history, science or character. Seven of the talks are by sf writers, the others by people whose expertise might shed new light on the field.

Le Guin makes the most effective case for the novel of character I've seen, although she is certainly not the first to do so. She asks us to use a simple question to evaluate a novel: can you remember the central character's name? Science fiction

has implicitly rejected the story of character for that of idea, and the field is the worse for it. "Science fiction has mostly settled for a pseudo-objective listing of marvels and wonders and horrors which illuminate nothing beyond themselves and are without real moral resonance. The invention is superb, but self-enclosed and sterile. And the more eccentric and childish side of science fiction fandom, the defensive, fanatic in-groups, both feed upon and nourish this kind of triviality, which is harmless in itself, but which degrades taste, by keeping publishers' standards, and readers' and critics' expectations, very low." (page 32) She deserved the ovation she received for this lecture, which should be read by all sf readers.

Edward de Bono talks about the ways we pattern our experience into systems, which can become rigid mind sets and prevent us from seeing alternatives. Insight and humour are two ways of breaking away from a rigid, logical-deductive system. De Bono argues for lateral thinking to free us of these mind sets, a system which is provocative rather than descriptive or analytical. "Similarly, science fiction creates a provocative hypothesis which allows us to look at things in a new way – for our enjoyment or even insight." This reminded me of the comment by a 1937 Nobel Prize winner, Albert Szent-Gyorgyi: "Discovery consists in seeing what everybody else has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought."

John Taylor is a mathematics professor with an interest in science and sf. "I consider science fiction to be the art of making a scientific 'if' interesting, a scientific 'if' being a postulate or a proposition of scientific form." That's a somewhat narrow definition which excludes many of the more significant modern works. He usefully explores the innate conservatism of scientific theory, sharply distinguishing between the constraints imposed by perceived reality on the scientist and the freedom afforded the writer. Using black holes as an example, he suggests that science is stranger than fiction and that sf "is not relevant to fundamental research", although it helps to accustom us to change.

John Brunner castigates the pseudoscience all too often associated with sf, taking on Velikovsky, von Daniken and similar prophets who preach to the gullible. He cites two works which explore this area more fully, Martin Gardner's *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (1957) and Christopher Evans' *Cults of Unreason* (1974). Charles Fair's *The New Nonsense* (1974) might well have been mentioned. He unconvincingly eulogizes sf as "*par excellence* the literature of the open mind".

Nicholls says Harry Harrison's speech was "as much a happening as a lecture" and what appears in print is less flamboyant. Harrison discusses the alternate world motif, using his own novel, *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!*, as the focus of the lecture, which I found of little interest. Alvin Toffler of *Future Shock* fame discussed themes in his books, but copyright restrictions limited his printed remarks to two pages. In today's turbulent world, "science fiction has a special role to play in enhancing our abilities to adapt . . . By dealing with possibilities not ordinarily considered – alternative worlds, alternate visions – it widens our repertoire of possible responses to change."

Alan Garner, best known for his children's fantasies such as *Elidor* (1965), recounts in personal and fascinating detail how closely his personal life and his writings are intertwined. Nicholls titles the lecture "Inner Time". I would call it "Writing as Catharsis". As Garner says, "Perhaps the artist's job is to act as cartographer for all navigators, and I simply plot the maps of inner stars."

Thomas Disch has great fun laying into the sleazy aspects of sf, of which there are many. He argues that most sf is children's literature whose readers commonly began reading it at about 13 years old. Being children's literature, it has certain severe limitations. It is intellectually undemanding, rarely admitting irony, aesthetic

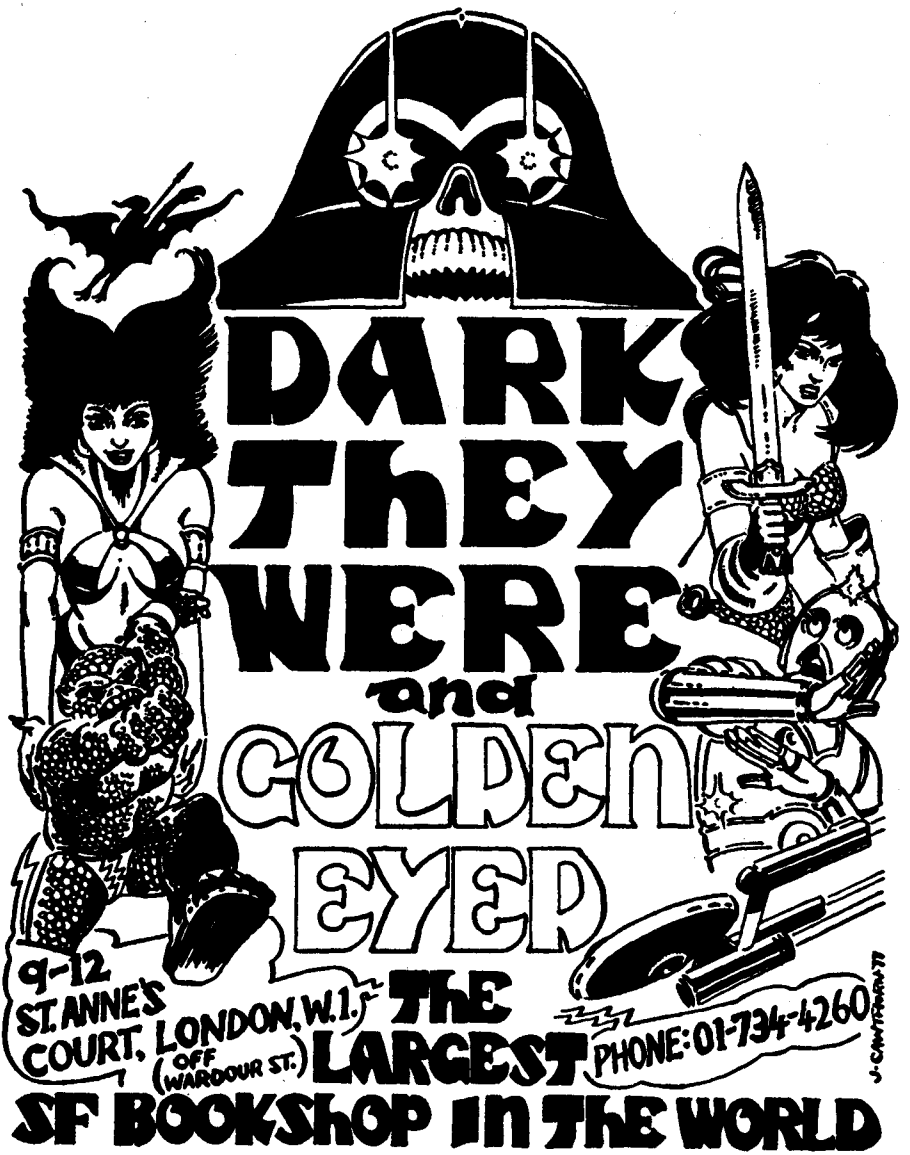
novelty or recognizing the complexities of the larger society. It is too often emotionally stultifying, often ignoring whole areas of human experience, such as love, sex and politics. And it is morally shallow, rarely recognizing the tragic dimension of human experience. Disch analyzes the nature of the sf audience and how this shapes and limits the creative writer's efforts. The lower class origin of many sf readers is reflected in the suspicion and resentment implicit in the stories and in the advertisements promising upward mobility through technical or other training. He thinks both sf's weaknesses and strengths are intrinsic. "Sf deals with the largest themes and most powerful emotional materials – but in ways that are often irresponsible and trivializing. Altogether too many of us, even the true giants like Philip Dick, are willing to trust our powers of improvisation untempered by powers of retrospect and analysis."

Nicholls's own lecture is somewhat similar to Disch's in general content. Various species of critics are skewered, from trendy Bandwagon Riders to the resolutely mis- or uninformed. Because this criticism was so muddled, a ghetto mentality developed, in which people like Wollheim or Moskowitz could create a cosy self-congratulatory pantheon. Amis and Aldiss take their lumps (as well as deserved praise), and Nicholls includes himself as a Smart Aleck, addicted to an élitist view. If the critics are irritants at worst, the monsters from within the field are more damaging. Many are identified in the other lectures. Nicholls adds the Sentimental Stylist, such as Bradbury and Sturgeon, who have been over-praised by people lacking any real knowledge of the wider world of literature. His catalogue of deficiencies is both acerbic and just.

Robert Sheckley substituted for Philip Dick. Sheckley describes himself as a fantasist exploring a fragmented reality. His gentle self-mockery gives his piece and enjoyable quality.

Philip Dick's illness prevented his attending, but his lecture is printed here. Anyone familiar with Dick's fiction will find his comments helpful in understanding his ideas. His discussion of modern brain research and his interpretation of the roles of the brain hemispheres are interesting if speculative. Dick's metaphysics and ontology struck me as very close to the pseudoscience which Brunner deplores. Nicholls says the advance bookings for the Dick lecture were the heaviest he received, which may tell us something.

Many collections of essays dealing with sf have appeared in recent years, often reprinted from other sources. These are all original pieces and their overall quality is very high, especially those lectures by Le Guin, Garner, Disch and Nicholls. Strongly recommended for all sf readers and for all but the smallest libraries.


DARK THEY WERE
and
GOLDEN EYED
9-12 ST. ANNE'S COURT, LONDON, W.1. (OFF WARDOUR ST.)
THE LARGEST
PHONE: 01-734-4260
SF BOOKSHOP IN THE WORLD
J. CAWTHORN '77

All editorial and subscription correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, "Foundation", The Science Fiction Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS, U.K.

Subscription rates (three numbers):

United Kingdom and Europe	*£3.00*
USA and Canada (surface mail)	*$7.50*
USA and Canada (air mail)	*$12.00*
Other countries (surface mail)	*£3.20*
Australia and New Zealand (air mail)	*£7.50*

Please enquire about airmail rates to other countries

We are not able to accept subscriptions for more than three issues (one year) in advance. Copies of 7/8 (double issue) are available at £1.40 each, of 9 and 10 at £1.10 each and of 11/12 (double issue) at £2.00 each. All other issues are out of print. Cheques, postal and money orders should be crossed and made payable to the Science Fiction Foundation. Subscribers sending dollar cheques should add 50c to cover bank charges.

This journal was typeset and printed by the Russell Press Ltd, Nottingham. It is published three times a year — in January, May and September — by the North East London Polytechnic on behalf of the Science Fiction Foundation.

ISSN 0306-4964