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FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

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In our last issue we published David Pringle's overview of Brian Stableford's novels. Now, not for the first time (e.g. "The Fourfold Symbolism of J.G. Ballard" in Foundation 4*) he turns his attention to the fiction of J.G. Ballard. This essay will form a chapter of a long monograph on Ballard to be published by the Borgo Press. We are indebted to Mr Robert Reginald of the Borgo Press for permission to publish it here.*

The Lamia, the Jester and the King: J. G. Ballard's Characters

David Pringle

J.G. Ballard generally uses a third-person narrative mode (*Crash* is the major exception, his only novel to be told in the first person). Yet, as critics and reviewers have remarked often enough, the central characters of his stories are all very alike and might as well be regarded as aspects of Ballard himself. His protagonists are always male, usually in early middle age, invariably middle-class professionals of one sort or another. A Ballard story with a female lead character, or even with a working class protagonist, is almost unimaginable. He occasionally uses a juvenile lead, boys of 17 or 18 as in "The Concentration City", "The Impossible Man" and "The Ultimate City", although young children are almost entirely absent from his stories. He has never featured an elderly protagonist – the age of 50 is about the upper limit. His heroes, of course, are always white Anglo-Saxons. Their professional backgrounds tend to be severely limited too. The overwhelming majority are doctors, with architects and research scientists of one type or another forming most of the remainder. *Crash*, again, is somewhat exceptional, because its protagonist is a TV film producer (although we never see him at work). There have been a few artists, teachers, librarians and pilots, as well as one or two protagonists of indeterminate occupation.

Almost all have conventional two-syllable English names: Maitland, Sanders, Ransom, Tallis, Powers, Traven, Travis, Glanville, Crispin, Franklin, Freeman, Conrad, Gifford, Pelham – Kerans is just about the most unusual. There have been a few lapses into one syllable – Neill, Laing, Quaine – and occasionally he has risked three, as in Halliday, Halloway and Connolly. (Any name with a double 'l' in it appeals to Ballard.) These men are referred to constantly by their sur-

names; likewise, the male characters always address each other by their surnames (or by the title "Doctor . . . "). Usually, it is only when a female character addresses the protagonist that we discover his christian name, and then it almost always turns out to be Charles or Robert. The central character of *Crash* is called "James Ballard", an ironical piece of honesty on the author's part. For there can be little doubt that all of these characters *are*, in a sense, James Ballard. They all represent essentially the same point of view: that of an intelligent man of the world, wry and introspective, slightly perverse and eternally suspicious of his own motives. The typical Ballardian hero is fond of inspecting himself in a mirror or photograph; he generally has a distaste for his own body, although he rarely has any gross physical defects. On the contrary, he is usually well-muscled, a big man, tending to leanness rather than fat. Women find him attractive (Ballard's heroes never have any hang-ups at all in that respect; at one point in *The Drought* Dr Ransom remarks to himself, "however isolated a man might be, women at least remained his companions, but an isolated woman was isolated absolutely").

Most of this is extraordinarily conventional. On the face of it, it sounds as though Ballard's protagonists are indeed "heroes". Apart from one or two masochistic kinks they could come straight out of the British thriller and adventure story tradition, slightly decadent avatars of Bulldog Drummond and James Bond. But that, of course, is only on the surface. There is far more of Graham Greene in Ballard's characters than there is of Ian Fleming. Ballard's heroes may be worldly-wise, but they are scarcely men of action (although there is usually a certain amount of "action" required of them: dodging bullets, driving cars, piloting aircraft, or simply being able to endure hostile environments). They are usually haunted by a sense of failure (often the failure of a marriage, or of a career) and are driven by obsessions. Frequently, they are semi-recluses, choosing to strand themselves in some bizarre terrain which reflects their states of mind. Thus Bridgman, the failed architect in "The Cage of Sand" (1962), picks out a meagre existence in the sand-inundated hotels of an abandoned Florida beach. His main activity is dodging the "wardens" who are trying to prevent the spread of a virus indigenous to the area. In *Concrete Island* Maitland proves himself remarkably resilient in overcoming his injuries (Ballard's characters rarely seem to feel pain, as though they are entirely detached from their bodies) yet he cannot summon the strength of will to escape from the island and return to a "normal" life. In short, Ballard's heroes constitute a typical Ballardian paradox: they are strong men, chiefly notable for their weaknesses.

These protagonists generally have a sense of humour, but the jokes are almost always on themselves. It is precisely this dimension of irony which redeems them from the surface clichés of their conception. Such elements of the thriller tradition as persist in Ballard's fiction are usually guyed in some way – undercut by irony. For example, Kerans in *The Drowned World* performs a manly feat when he descends in a diving suit and enters the submerged planetarium. The dangers are real; the act takes courage. Yet there is more than a suggestion of self-indulgence about the whole business, and Kerans's motives are highly suspect. The text is littered with references to the womb, and implications of infantile regression. As for the thriller reader's expectations, they are nicely sent up at

one point when Kerans reports over the intercom that he is in the planetarium manager's office and Strangman says to him: "Good man. See if you can find the safe. It should be behind the picture frame directly over the desk." Of course, nothing could be further from Kerans's mind; he is too busy communing with "the grey sweet mother of us all". There is really only one novel by Ballard in which the "action" elements can be taken at face value (or, for that matter, in which what the characters *say* can be taken at face value) and that is *The Wind from Nowhere*, a negligible work in almost every respect. For all the limitations of their conception and characterization, we must accept Ballard's leading men as convenient areas of awareness. The things they *see*, the landscapes through which they move, bear the main weight of significance.

And those landscapes feature other people. The other characters in Ballard's stories are usually vividly portrayed, and yet they have an air of unreality about them. The descriptions are normally brief, limited to clothing, accoutrements and facial expressions. It does not take us long to realize that these other characters conform to set types, and that these types form a consistent pattern throughout Ballard's fiction. They are, to a certain degree, emblematic – perhaps even figments of the protagonist's imagination (if landscape is a state of mind in Ballard's writing, then this rule must extend to the figures that people the landscape). In short, they can be regarded as symbols – symbolic in much the same sense as the deserts and swamps, concrete causeways and jewelled forests which form such important elements in so many of the stories.

There are certain dangers in using people as symbolic counters: the writer who does this may be accused of reducing human beings to ciphers; he may be accused of perpetuating stereotypes, of missing the importance of all the particularities which make each person unique. These sorts of accusations have in fact been levelled at Ballard, with some justification. Yet Ballard's detractors rarely take note of his compensating strengths. Sometimes the negative criticisms of Ballard are the result of sheer misunderstanding. One quality which critics and reviewers often overlook is his sense of *irony*: the Ballardian wit which redeems so much. Others, of course, misunderstand his intentions. It is important to realize that Ballard is a symbolic fantasist. He achieves his effects through the intelligent manipulation of symbols, properties, landscapes. To attempt to judge him by the conventional yardsticks of the social novel (or even of the would-be "realistic" science fiction novel) is to do him an injustice. By and large (there are exceptions to this rule), Ballard does not write a fiction of social *interaction*: he is not primarily concerned with the ways in which people change each other – which could be said to be the essential subject matter of the traditional novel. Rather, he is concerned with the individual's relationship with his own mind and impulses; with the relationship between the solitary awareness and various environments and technologies; ultimately, with the relationship between humanity and time, the fact of death, the "phenomenology of the universe".

One critic (Duncan Fallowell, reviewing *Low-Flying Aircraft* in *Books and Bookmen*) has accused Ballard of being sexist, and it is not hard to see why. As I have already pointed out, all of his protagonists are male (there is one partial exception, in a recent short story called "Having a Wonderful Time", 1978,

which I shall come to later). Not only that, but the female characters who surround Ballard's heroes are frequently bitches of the first, second or third order. If we look at two of his earliest short stories, "Passport to Eternity" (written in 1955, although not published until 1962) and "Escapement" (1956), we find sensitive, harassed husbands and bitchy or stupid wives. Margot Gorrell in "Passport to Eternity" is obsessed with the social cachet to be gained from an exotic holiday. Although Gorrell employs Trantino, an olive-complexioned "playboy", to keep his wife happy, she nags him and nags him on the subject of an expensive vacation. He is reduced to using a sound control device in order to escape from her voice: "Absently, Clifford said: 'Of course, dear,' his fingers racing over the volume control . . . Her shout sank to an angry squeak. She stepped over to him, her dress blazing like a dragon, jabbering at him noiselessly, the sounds sucked away through the vents over her head and pumped out across the echoing rooftops of the midnight city." Helen, the wife of the hero of "Escapement", is scarcely a harridan of this type, but she is depicted as stupid and unperceptive, sitting sewing in front of the TV while her husband is unwittingly caught up in a time-loop. Of course, these are very early and minor tales. Both are thoroughly within the mould of conventional 1950s short stories, and both are intended to be semi-humorous. But it is surprising how little Ballard has changed over the years in his depiction of husband-wife relationships. The heroes of "The Overloaded Man" (1961), "The Reptile Enclosure" (1963), "The Subliminal Man" (1963), *The Drought* and *Crash* all have bitch-wives. In "The Subliminal Man", his wife's nagging and her mindless acceptance of the insane values of their society are just as wearing on Dr Franklin as the subliminal signs themselves. In other cases, such as "Now Wakes the Sea" (1963) and "The Gioconda of the Twilight Noon" (1964), the heroes just do not feel up to communicating with their wives: it is obvious that the poor women simply cannot be expected to understand or appreciate what is going on. Indeed, these men often seem very relieved to escape into their inner space. Towards the end of *Concrete Island* Maitland acknowledges to himself "his need to be freed from his past, from his childhood, his wife and friends, with all their affections and demands, and to rove for ever within the empty city of his own mind".

The "death of affect" – the growth of a ruthlessly emotionless and guiltless form of individualism – is one of the great themes of Ballard's fiction. It could be argued that his female characters are stupid or vindictive precisely to the degree that Ballard wishes to make this point – and his men are by no means blameless either. The characters in *Crash* treat each other like erotic dolls or masturbatory devices; the women are little more than mannequins, a fact which the narrator confirms when he describes his wife "lying in bed beside me . . . as inert and emotionless as a sexual exercise doll fitted with a neoprene vagina". Perhaps the most terrifying example of this particular vision in Ballard's work is to be found in the recent short story "The Intensive Care Unit" (1977). It is set in a future where people only meet by television, and the hero is happily married with two children. He and his wife have never met in the flesh, and all their sexual acts consist of masturbation accompanied by screen images of each other. Their children are conceived by artificial insemination. Eventually, they

decide to do an unprecedented thing and have a family get-together. This union results in them literally tearing each other to pieces. The death of affect, the separation of man and woman, can go no further. It seems to be one of Ballard's procedures as a writer to pursue unsentimentally every odd strain in his own character. This is a type of ruthless honesty which leads to a genuine insight into contemporary moral predicaments.

There are other types of women in Ballard's fiction apart from these irritating or affectless workaday wives. The commonest type is, of course, the siren or *belle dame sans merci* – those remote, beautiful and almost unattainable women who haunt Vermilion Sands and others of Ballard's more magical landscapes. Again, this is a type which first emerges in one of the earliest stories: "Prima Belladonna" (1956). Jane Ciracylides is mysterious, golden-skinned and has "insects for eyes". As one of the characters over-states, she is "poetic, emergent, something straight out of the primal apocalyptic sea. She's probably divine." She is also dangerous. She cheats at i-Go (a form of "decelerated chess"), and she has an alarming power over the musical plants which the hero tends. Like "Passport to Eternity", "Prima Belladonna" is basically a humorous story (there is much play on the slack-jawed reactions that Jane elicits from the males of Vermilion Sands), but Ballard has gone on recreating Jane Ciracylides in story after story, most of which have been written on a more serious and sombre level than the first piece. She reappears as Aurora Day in "Studio 5, the Stars" (1961), as Lunora Goalen in "The Singing Statues" (1962), as Emerelda Garland in "The Screen Game" (1963) and as Leonora Chanel in "The Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D" (1967). There is more than a touch of her in the character of Beatrice Dahl in *The Drowned World* – lounging by her swimming pool, immaculately made up, reading a forty-year old copy of *Vogue* amidst all the heat and stench of the reptile-infested swamps. These impossibly beautiful and elegant women are reminiscent of Jungian Anima figures, and, like the siren or *la belle dame*, they have their distinctly menacing aspects.

This becomes very clear in a tale such as "The Day of Forever" (1966). From the balcony of his deserted hotel, the reclusive hero watches his "beautiful neighbour, Gabrielle Szabo, walk through the evening, her silk robe stirring the fine sand into cerise clouds". She has white hair and perpetually wears dark glasses, and at one point Halliday thinks of her quite explicitly as "the dark lamia of all his dreams". In the end, she attempts to lure him to his death and he discovers that she is in fact blind. The lamia, the beautiful temptress, Keats's snake-woman or Coleridge's "nightmare life-in-death . . . who thicks men's blood with cold", is, at bottom, the essential female figure in Ballard's fiction. In a sense, all his women are aspects of the lamia. She shows her most positive face in the characters of Jane Ciracylides or Beatrice Dahl, and her most negative in such personae as the deranged Miranda in *The Drought*, the skeleton-woman who clutches at the hero of "Now Wakes the Sea", or the bloody matriarchy which rules the apartment block at the end of *High-Rise*. In *The Crystal World* she appears in two aspects as the blithe independent Louise Peret (the daytime girl) and as the cold sickly Suzanne Clair (the night-time woman). "Her white hair and utter lack of pity reminded him of the spectre that appeared at all times of extreme exhaustion – the yellow-locked, leprous-skinned lamia who had pursued

the Ancient Mariner", thinks Ransom in *The Drought* after an encounter with Miranda Lomax.

Miranda – the name is, of course, heavily ironic, given all its Shakespearean associations of innocence and virginity. Many of the people in *The Drought* are perverted versions of characters from *The Tempest* – Lomax as Prospero, Quilter as Caliban, Philip Jordan as Ariel. Other Mirandas appear throughout Ballard's stories – Jane Sheppard in *Concrete Island*, Miranda Buckmaster in "The Ultimate City" (1976). The latter comes closest to being a "true" Miranda: she is young, apparently innocent, associated with flowers and life. If anything, the parallels with *The Tempest* in "The Ultimate City" are a little too explicit. At one point, Miranda even says "sometimes I feel like the daughter of some great magician". But even this avatar of Miranda is not quite as innocent as she at first appears to be. Towards the end of the story, she attempts to lure the hero into a bower of poison flowers (admittedly, she has been provoked by his tearing up of her flower-beds). This most girlish of Ballard's heroines turns out to be a potential murderess. Like almost all Ballard's female characters, she represents a *threat* to the hero, even if she is an object of desire on the surface. Ballard's men are threatened by their women in various ways, sometimes obliquely, sometimes directly. In "Mr F. is Mr F." (1961), perhaps Ballard's most extreme parable on marital relations, Freeman is actually absorbed into his wife's womb and becomes a foetus again. At one point in *High-Rise* Dr Laing says to himself: "careful, Laing, or some stockbroker's wife will un-man you as expertly as she destones a pair of avocados". Fear of the mother, fear of castration: these themes are treated jokingly in the two examples just given, yet they are implicit throughout Ballard's fiction. In another effective flash of humour, this time from *Crash*, Ballard's protagonist refers to the nurses who tend him in hospital as "these starched women (who) in all their roles reminded me of those who attended my childhood, commissionaires guarding my orifices".

One cannot help suspecting that in recent years Ballard has become uneasy about his own portrayals of women. The females in *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise* are depicted with greater care and sympathy than the women in most of the earlier works. Jane Sheppard in *Concrete Island* is the nearest thing to a "well-rounded" female character in all his novels, although even she has many of the qualities of the lamia. But Ballard's most effective apologia to date, his closest approach to a "women's lib" story, is "The Smile" (1976). In this piece he parodies his own earlier treatment of female characters. It is about a man who finds a beautiful woman on sale in a junk shop. He buys her, and installs her in his house as his "wife". The fact that she is no longer alive, but merely stuffed, makes her all the more attractive to him. She is the perfect complaisant consort, eternally good-humoured, obliging and decorative. Eventually, she destroys him, but for once the reader feels little sympathy for the male lead: he deserves what he gets. This story succeeds, through sheer grotesque exaggeration, in confounding all our expectations. "Having a Wonderful Time" (1978) represents a slide back into the old Ballardian pattern, however. Although this is the first of Ballard's stories to have a female narrator, the woman turns out to be a traditional dumb wife. The story is written in the form of a series of postcards from

a holiday resort: the writer and her husband find themselves trapped on a permanent vacation along with thousands of other people. It would appear that they have become the first inmates of a luxury concentration camp, an institution which has been set up by various European governments in order to rid themselves of an unemployable population. The woman does not realize what is going on, though – only her husband does, and she chooses not to believe him. Eventually he attempts to escape and is drowned; his wife blithely carries on with her amateur dramatics and seaside flirtations. In other words, the husband, whom we barely see, is the real "hero" of the story.

When asked in a 1975 interview why he had never written a work that portrayed a sympathetic male/female relationship, Ballard replied: "The protagonists of most of my fiction feel tremendously isolated, and that seems to exclude the possibility of a warm fruitful relationship with anybody, let alone anyone as potentially close as a woman". This hardly constitutes an explanation or a justification: it is simply the truth. Kerans in *The Drowned World* has an affair with Beatrice Dahl, but he abandons her in order to go on his odyssey to the south. There is no farewell scene: Beatrice merely waves to him from a distance. In *The Drought*, Ransom and his wife are living apart. They become reconciled, but then he leaves her on the seashore in order to pursue his own compulsions into the parched interior of the continent. A love affair with Catherine Austen, which the reader has been led to expect, just never happens. In *The Crystal World*, Dr Sanders leads an active sexual life, yet in the end he spurns the opportunity of "a warm fruitful relationship" with Louise Peret and seeks a private peace in the crystalline forest. The narrator of *Crash* has an extremely active sexual life and a marriage which thrives on infidelity. Although he and his wife stay together, and are even "loyal" to each other in a perverse way, their relationship is anything but warm and fruitful. We can only conclude that Ballard is simply not interested in the subject of love between a man and a woman: it is irrelevant to the true concerns of his fiction.

What about Ballard's portrayal of other social relations? Specifically, in what ways does he depict class differences? As I have already stated, all his protagonists are white middle class professionals. They frequently have a "colonial" manner – which is not surprising when we remember that Ballard lived for the first fifteen years of his life in the Far East, and when we consider his debt to such writers as Conrad and Graham Greene. For the lower classes in Ballard's fiction are often depicted as "natives" – a different breed altogether from the hero and his woman. I am not suggesting that there is any deliberately racist element in Ballard's view of society, merely that he has frequently used the convention – an appropriate one, considering his own background – of placing middle class anglo-saxon characters in a context of darker skins. It is a convention to be found in many of Somerset Maugham's short stories – "The Outstation", for example – and I have little doubt that Maugham's stories formed a part of Ballard's adolescent reading matter. In *The Drowned World*, the lower orders are represented by Strangman's negro thugs, and in particular by Big Caesar, who is described as "a huge hunchbacked Negro in a pair of green cotton shorts. A giant grotesque parody of a human being, now and then he took off his eye-patch to bellow

abuse . . . " (why he has to remove his eye-patch in order to bellow is not explained). In *The Crystal World*, the lower classes are represented by the natives of Port Matarre and by the mine-owner Thorensen's bully-boys, particularly "the Mulatto", a character very similar to Big Caesar. In "A Question of Re-entry" and "The Delta at Sunset" there is a kindred use of Indian characters. The most sympathetically-portrayed blacks in Ballard's fiction are the aged Mr Jordon in *The Drought* (although he plays a very minor role) and Oldsmobile in "The Ultimate City" (who, for once, is an Ariel figure rather than a Caliban).

A "grotesque parody of a human being" is a description which fits many other lower-class characters in Ballard's fiction apart from Big Caesar. There is Quilter in *The Drought*, the idiot son of an old Gypsy woman; Proctor in *Concrete Island*, a one-time circus acrobat who has lost most of his mental (and physical) faculties; Quimby in "Storm-bird, Storm-dreamer" (1966), a young club-footed moron; Petit Manuel in "The Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D", described as "a small hunchback with a child's overlit eyes"; and so on. Like the negro characters, these men are usually portrayed as brutish and instinctual; they arise dripping from the Id, endless avatars of Caliban. Other versions of this character-type include Seagrave, the stunt-driver in *Crash;* Stillman, the ex-convict in "The Ultimate City"; Tom Juranda, the juvenile delinquent in "Deep End" (1961); the unnamed chauffeurs in "Studio 5, the Stars" and "The Day of Forever"; Mayer, the mining engineer in "The Waiting Grounds" (1959); Bridges, the tomb robber in "The Time-Tombs" (1963); etc. For the most part, these characters are members of the lumpen proletariat. They are coarse, prone to violence, uncommunicative, and frequently represent a threat to the protagonists of the stories in which they appear. In *Concrete Island* Dr Maitland eventually subdues Proctor by urinating on him; he then uses Proctor as a beast of burden, sitting on his shoulders in order to move around the island without straining his injured leg. Usually, however, Ballard's protagonists simply try to avoid these Caliban figures; they are too dangerous to meddle with. In *The Drowned World*, Kerans receives a beating at the hands of Big Caesar and his comrades; in *The Drought* Ransom is very nearly killed by Quilter. These Calibans almost always die: thus, Proctor is dashed against a concrete overpass by a crane; Seagrave kills himself in a car crash; Stillman in "The Ultimate City" is burned to death in a blazing multi-storey car park; Big Caesar and the Mulatto are killed by the protagonists themselves. Quilter is the only major exception: he survives at the end of *The Drought*, although he has been "tamed" to a degree. His later role almost becomes that of a court jester: "Quilter sat on the crest of the dune, occasionally patting his furs . . . At one point (he) reached up to the swan's neck, dangling in front of his right eye, and pulled off the head-dress. Beneath it his scalp was bald, and the thick red hair sprang from the margins of a huge tonsure . . . With a brief gesture to them he strode off on his stilts across the sand, the furs and dressing-gown lifting behind him like tattered wings."

So Ballard's treatment of lower class characters and "natives" is no more objective or realistic than his treatment of women. They end up as equally symbolic figures, figments from the depths of the protagonist's imagination, projections of

desires and fears. Just as all Ballard's women are aspects of the lamia, so almost all of his working class men are aspects of Caliban or the jester. There is a partial exception in the character of Magnon in "The Sound-Sweep" (1960). Magnon, a mute, is actually the protagonist of this story, despite the fact that his social status is little more than that of a garbage collector. He is a sound-sweep, one of "an outcast group of illiterates . . . and social cripples" whose task is to rid the city of unwanted traces of noise. Using a "sonovac" and aided by his phenomenal sense of hearing, he sweeps buildings clear of sonic waste. However, Magnon, like Oldsmobile in "The Ultimate City", is more Ariel than Caliban, a man of undoubted sensitivity and talents, a sprite rather than a monster. These Ariel figures appear from time to time in Ballard's stories (e.g. Philip Jordan in *The Drought*) but they are far less common than the Calibans. Portrayals of working class people en masse are equally uncommon. There are the fishermen in *The Drought*, a dour crew who at one point attempt to capture Dr Ransom, and there are soldiers in *The Drowned World* and in such short stories as "The Killing Ground" (1969), but for the most part the lower classes as organized groups do not appear in Ballard's fiction.

There are, however, two short stories which can be read as parables of the relationship of the individual to a mass movement. In "The Garden of Time" (1962) Count Axel (the only case, incidentally, of Ballard using an aristocrat as hero) is threatened by the vast horde of humanity which is approaching his Palladian villa. He manages to fend them off by temporarily reversing the flow of time, but eventually his home is overrun and all his beautiful possessions are destroyed. Axel and his wife represent a leisured high culture, but the ragged army is described as "a vast throng of people . . . pressing forward in a disorganized tide. Some laboured under heavy loads suspended from crude yokes around their necks, others struggled with cumbersome wooden carts, their hands wrenching at the wheel spokes, a few trudged on alone, but all moved on at the same pace . . . " In short, "The Garden of Time" can be read as a class nightmare, or a dream-like attempt to mitigate the social cataclysm of history. The later story "A Place and a Time to Die" (1969) presents a more ironic view of a similar situation. Mannock, an ex-police chief, and two other men, one a right-wing fanatic and the other a would-be revolutionary, are the last people remaining in a small Mid-Western town. An enormous mixed army of soldiers and civilians (presumably Chinese) is approaching them on the other side of the river. Obviously some great invasion has taken place, and Mannock and his colleagues represent the last resistance. However, there is nothing they can do, and as the foreign army sweeps past them they are amazed to find themselves totally ignored; the enemy does not even bother to disarm them. "They're not interested in us!" Mannock shouts. "They're not interested at all!" The nightmare of being overrun has turned into the nightmare of being ignored.

So much for the relations of Ballard's protagonists to the lower orders. What are their attitudes to the upper classes, particularly the rich and powerful? In Ballard's stories there is almost always a male character who serves as a counterbalance to the Caliban figure, a character who is in some way "above" the hero, either through having higher social status or commanding greater power and wealth.

These characters are usually intelligent, loquacious and very eccentric. One again, they are frequently portrayed as a threat to the hero: in conventional terms, they are the "villains" of Ballard's novels and stories. The archetype is the character of Strangman in *The Drowned World*: "His handsome saturnine face regarding them with a mixture of suspicion and amused contempt, Strangman lounged back under the cool awning . . . He had changed into a crisp white suit, the silk-like surface of which reflected the gilt plate of his high-backed Renaissance throne . . . " In fact he may be no more than a well-educated pirate, but Strangman has the manner and the accoutrements of a king. He commands an army of men and beasts, and almost every other character in the novel is at the mercy of his whims. Strangman not only threatens Kerans physically, but, more seriously, he is an obstacle in the way to Kerans's psychic fulfilment. Strangman, with a malign intelligence, mocks Kerans's obsessions and makes a joke of all the more subtle processes which are going on. Ballard seems to find such characters useful, since they allow him to inject a larger dimension of irony, and even humour, into his stories.

Other characters who are analogous to Strangman include Richard Foster Lomax in *The Drought*, Vaughan in *Crash* and Buckmaster in "The Ultimate City". Both Lomax and Buckmaster (the latter, incidentally, is an architect, and his name is obviously intended as a parody of Buckminster Fuller's) are likened to Prospero, and both have their Caliban-like servants. These regal madmen are invariably associated with the lower-than-life Caliban figures, kings with their jesters. In *Crash* Vaughan encourages Seagrave to perform outrageous acts, which include disguising himself as Elizabeth Taylor and deliberately crashing his car. In *The Crystal World* there is no obvious "king" figure, although Ventress (an architect again) performs most of the functions of this character, such as keeping up an ironic running commentary on Dr Sanders's motives. In *Concrete Island*, the "king" is entirely missing, although it could be argued that Maitland takes on many of the aspects of this role himself, especially when he callously subdues the tramp Proctor and forces the latter to carry him on his shoulders. In Ballard's short stories the Prospero figures include Kaldren in "The Voices of Time" (a more benign version than most); Mallory in "The Day of Forever"; Traxel in "The Time-Tombs"; Nolan in "The Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D"; and others. At first glance, *High-Rise* is exceptional among Ballard's novels because it appears to contain three central characters instead of one. There is Dr Laing, the detached observer, Richard Wilder, the aggressive TV producer, and Anthony Royal, the eccentric architect. All three functions as centres of awareness, and each is given approximately a third of the book. It soon becomes clear, however, that these three are in fact the familiar Ballardian characters in a new, and more intimate, guise. Laing is the hero, the man with whom the book begins and ends, the one who survives. He is the equivalent of Kerans or Sanders in Ballard's earlier novels – the sardonic observer with a weakness for giving in to his more obscure impulses. Wilder and Royal (their very names are a give-away!) turn out to be the jester and the king, a Caliban and a perverted Prospero, like Big Caesar and Strangman, Quilter and Lomax, Seagrave and Vaughan.

Like the Caliban figures, these dominating characters usually die. At the end of *High-Rise* we see Wilder, daubed with blood and lipstick, become the sacrificial victim of a sort of grisly matriarchy, while Royal, with a bullet through his chest,

presides over a swimming-pool full of corpses. In *The Drowned World* Strangman is killed when Kerans re-floods the lagoon which Strangman's men have drained. In *The Drought* Lomax dies by falling down a mine-shaft after all the other characters have turned against him. And in *Crash*, of course, Vaughan kills himself in a deliberate car-smash. Why should Ballard be so fond of killing off all his important male characters apart from the protagonists themselves? As Ballard has stated, his fiction is essentially about the isolated consciousness. The only character that *matters*, in the last analysis, is the protagonist. As we have seen, most of the other characters, be they male or female, are perceived as threats to the central character. They menace his integrity and self-sufficiency in one way or another. If we accept that the characters are all symbolic, then a tentative reading of the "meaning" of the patterns they form might go as follows: to borrow from Freudian terminology, the Caliban figures stand for the Id, while the Prospero figures stand for the Ego. Characters like Big Caesar, Quilter and Proctor represent the purely instinctual drives of the unconscious. On the other hand, characters like Strangman and Lomax represent all the vanities of the conscious ego. Either of these types, given an entirely free rein, is a threat to the self, or the total personality. Ballard's protagonists seek a state of grace, or integration with the universe; they wish to find themselves and to create a whole. To borrow from Jungian terminology, they are in search of individuation. If any one part of the mind dominates the rest, it upsets the balance of the whole. Hence, Id and Ego have to be disciplined by the self (the protagonist).

In Jung's terms, Ballard's women are all aspects of the Anima, the archetypal image of the female which every man is supposed to carry in his unconscious. The Anima may also pose a threat to the self, and so we get that spurning of the love of women which is so characteristic of Ballard's heroes (or, in earthier terms, we see the flight from the mother and the castrating wife). There are other types of symbolic character in Ballard's fiction apart from the three major ones dealt with above. For example, there is the figure that could be viewed as analogous to the Super-Ego. I am thinking in particular of Colonel Riggs in *The Drowned World* and the Reverend Johnstone in *The Drought.* Both are figures of fun, to a degree, but both are representatives of traditional social authorities, and the protagonists' attitudes to them are by no means entirely mocking. Colonel Riggs, with his swagger-stick and his use of terms like "punka-wallah" and "chow", is an amusing parody, but at the same time we sense that the author is not unsympathetic towards him. After Riggs's departure, Beatrice Dahl remarks, "he was insufferable. All that stiff upper lip stuff and dressing for dinner in the jungle – a total lack of adaptability". Kerans merely says quietly: "Riggs was all right. He'll probably get by." In fact, it is Riggs who saves both Kerans and Beatrice from Strangman later in the novel. Akin to such Super-Ego figures, but invested with innate wisdom rather than institutional authority, are the Old Men who crop up from time to time. Like the Jungian archetype of the wise ancient, these characters are invariably benign and are depicted with a considerable amount of sympathy (they are also, from the author's point of view, very useful characters for conveying information to the reader). I refer to such figures as Dr Bodkin in *The Drowned World*; Dr Matthews in "The Impossible Man"; Whitby in "The Voices of Time"; the Old Man in "The Time-Tombs"; Professor Cameron in "The Venus Hunters"; Tallis in "The Waiting Grounds"; Dr Yasuda, the

dead Japanese whom Traven imagines is talking to him in "The Terminal Beach"; Granger in "Deep End"; perhaps even Dr Nathan in *The Atrocity Exhibition* (although he is not depicted as old). This type of character seems to be entirely lacking in Ballard's more recent fiction, and that is perhaps an indication of the degree to which he has progressively stripped his work of sentiment and reassurance.

In recent novels Ballard has also made larger concessions to social realism. That is to say, in *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise* he is trying to become more of a *novelist*, in the accepted sense. I have already remarked on the comparatively rounded characterization of Jane Sheppard in *Concrete Island*, and on the attempts to get "inside" the characters of Wilder and Royal by using them as points of view throughout much of *High-Rise*. Ballard's success as a novelist of manners is very limited, though. Other than clichés and social pleasantries, his characters seem to have little to say to each other: the best passages are still the introspective ones. In *High Rise*, a novel with a comparatively large cast of characters, Ballard has the irritating habit of continually labelling everyone by profession. Thus, a minor character is typically introduced as "the cost-accountant from the 27th floor", or "the airline pilot from the 6th floor", or whatever. Undoubtedly, this is intended partly as a joke, a series of ironic contrasts with the grotesque behaviour of the characters in the novel, but all the same the effect is to make Ballard's faceless people even more faceless. Nevertheless, there are some successful moments of social comedy in *High-Rise* – for instance the exchange between Dr Laing and his neighbour, the dentist. The latter has been complaining to Laing about the moral degeneracy of the people who live on the lower floors of the building. Laing demurs, but the dentist takes his arm and delivers the clincher: "He smiled reassuringly, flashing a mouth like a miniature cathedral of polished ivory. 'Believe me, Laing. I see their teeth.'"

On the whole, Ballard's strengths are not those of a realistic social novelist. To reiterate, he is a symbolic fantasist, and his characters are usually personifications of psychological urges rather than "real people". As I have tried to show, Ballard's abilities are very limited in scope when it comes to the depiction of people and of social relationships. He is incapable of dealing "fairly" with women, or even with men who are not middle class. Instead, he repeatedly recreats the lamia, the jester and the king. His work is best appreciated as a symbolic whole, and his characters are best seen as figures in an inner landscape.

The very title of the following article may seem paradoxical to those who think of modern fantasy in terms of the noble brows, lofty ideals and deadly earnestness of Tolkien and his cohorts. But as Michael Moorcock shows, wit and humour are intrinsic to much of the best fantasy. Mr Moorcock would like it made clear that this essay forms part of a longer work (a study of epic fantasy entitled Heroic Dreams*) and that references which may seem fleeting or obscure here are not so in the context of the whole book.*

Wit and Humour in Fantasy

Michael Moorcock

> Farther, I remember marking the flowers in the frame of carved oak, and casting my eye on the pistols which hang beneath, being the fire-arms with which, in the eventful year of 1746, my uncle meant to have espoused the cause of Prince Charles Edward; for, indeed, so little did he esteem personal safety, in comparison of steady high-church principle, that he waited but the news of the Adventurer's reaching London to hasten to join his standard.
>
> Scott, Introduction *Peverile of the Peak*, 1820

Scott's wit redeemed his work and makes it possible for us to enjoy it today in spite of its long windedness, its unlikely plots, its unfashionable sentiment. His humorous characters relieve the sober heart-searchings of his main characters. Scott, inheriting the style of the great 18th century novelists, could hardly fail to supply that wit, though he spread it as thinly as he spread the rest of his talents.

Fantastic fiction is happily very rich in comedy, from Thomas Love Peacock to Mervyn Peake. Comedy demands paradox – the juxtaposition of disparate images and elements – just as fantasy does. The square peg was never more delightful than when trying to fit itself into the round hole of a de Camp and Pratt fantasy. Comedy – like fantasy – is often at its best when making the greatest possible exaggerations – whereas tragedy usually becomes bathetic when it exaggerates. Obviously there is a vast difference between, say, Lewis Carroll and Richard Garnett but the thing that all writers of comedy have in common is a fascination with grotesque and unlikely juxtapositions of images, characters and events. The core of most humour, from Hal Roach to Nabokov. Somehow, too, the attraction to wholehearted mythological subject matter is often coupled to a comic talent as in the work of Mark Twain and James Branch Cabell. With *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Twain

produced one of the greatest classics of its kind, which has influenced more than one generation of fantasy writers. What gives Twain's romance a power which its imitators have in the main lacked is the undercurrent of pathos and tragedy running through the whole story. It is a substantial and enduring book because, although it is funny, it does not deny the facts and implications of its subject matter. The death of England's chivalry before The Boss's electric fences and gatlings is all the more poignant for the comedy which precedes the scene.

Jokes are not Comedy and stories which contain jokes are not comic stories. The art of ironic comedy is the highest art of all in fiction and drama but it is by no means the most popular art. James Branch Cabell's success with *Jurgen* (1919) was based on the public's mistaken idea that the book was filthy. It introduced enough people to Cabell's work, however, to give him a reasonably large audience through his life-time. His work today is rarely reprinted, as Peacock's is rarely reprinted, partly because it is an acquired taste (like Meredith's novels) and no publisher is prepared to publish enough of his work to let anyone acquire that taste. A vicious circle. Here is an example of Cabell:

> Thus it was that, upon the back of the elderly and quite tame dragon, Miramon returned to his earlier pursuits and to the practice of what he – in his striking way of putting things, – described as art for art's sake. The episode of Manuel had been, in the lower field of merely utilitarian art, amusing enough. That stupid, tall, quiet posturer, when he set out to redeem Poictesme, had needed just the mere bit of elementary magic which Miramon had performed for him, to establish Manuel among the great ones of the earth. Miramon had, in consequence, sent a few obsolete gods to drive the Northmen out of Poictesme, while Manuel waited upon the sands north of Manneville and diverted his leisure by contemplatively spitting into the sea. Thereafter Manuel had held the land to the admiration of everybody but more particularly of Miramon, – who did not at all agree with Anavalt of Fomor in his estimation of Dom Manuel's mental gifts.
>
> – *The Silver Stallion* (1926)

It seems always to have been true that the more grandiose, the more portentous, the less concise, the less truthful, the more humourless a writer is, the more successful he is; at least in immediate terms.

I think my own dislike of J.R.R. Tolkien lies primarily in the fact that in all those hundreds of pages, full of high ideals, sinister evil and noble deeds, there is scarcely a hint of irony anywhere. Its tone is one of relentless nursery room sobriety – "Once upon a time," began nanny gravely, for the telling of stories was a series matter, "there were a lot of furry little people who lived happily in the most beautiful, gentlest countryside you could possibly imagine, and then one day they learned that Wicked Outsiders were threatening this peace . . . "

There are, of course, some whimsical jokes in Tolkien, some "universal ironies", but these only serve to exaggerate the paucity of genuine imaginative invention. The jokes are not there to point to the truth, but to reject it. The collapse down the centuries of the great myths into nursery tales is mirrored in recent fiction. We have gone from hobbits, to seagulls, to rabbits and a whole host of other assorted talking vermin in a few short years and reached the ridiculous stage where there is often more substance to the children's books of writers like Garner, Garfield, Aiken and Cooper than there is in those fantasies apparently produced for adults! That such nostalgic pre-pubescent yearnings should exist in England is bad enough,

but that they should have spread throughout the world is positively terrifying. To find them flourishing in the land of Twain, Mencken and Damon Runyon is deeply distressing. But one should not be naive. America has her own brand of such stuff and much of it is to be found in modern science fiction.

There is a specific method employed by the bad writer to avoid the implications of his subject matter, to reduce the tensions, to minimise the importance of themes which he might in pretending to write a serious book, inadvertently touch upon. This is the joke which specifically indicates to the reader that the story is not really 'true'. I'm reminded of my favourite line from Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* where the daughter of the family, undergoing painful and primitive child-birth, pauses in her efforts to speak to her father. "Sorry about the sound-effects, daddy," she remarks.

The laboured irony, as it were, of the pulp hero or heroine, this deadly levity in the face of genuine experience, which serves not to point up the dramatic effect of the narrative, but to reduce it – and to make the experience described comfortingly 'unreal' – is the trick of the truly escapist author who pretends to be writing about fundamental truths and is in fact telling fundamental lies. An author of this kind cannot bear to confront reality for a second and will find any means of ignoring facts. Such wounded souls would be joking about the weather in Florida while they burned in Hell . . .

The great gaudy war-horses of heroic fantasy may look very fine in their silks, their cloth-of-gold, their silver, their iron, their richly decorated leather; they may roll their eyes and flare their nostrils and their huge hooves may dance proudly, but they are inclined to shy at the first whistle of shot, to whinny in terror at the sight of blood, and return to the safety of their high-fenced field to make somewhat nervous jokes about the real issues not being decided in the mud and filth of the battle – but on some higher, cosmic plane.

What genuine humour can do, as in the work of Tolkien's contemporary, Mervyn Peake, is to emphasise the implications of its subject matter, to humanise its heroes, clarify its issues and intensify its narrative. Humour is intrinsic to the *Gormenghast* trilogy (1945-59). Sonorous though much of the writing is, it is constantly saved from bathos by its wit, its shifts into dark comedy; melodramatic though many of the scenes can be, they are off-set by visual ironies, by comic juxtaposition, by sardonic descriptions, as with the Bright Carvers and their annual offerings. The injustices existing in Peake's world are injustices familiar to us all – cynicism, unfeeling self-involvement on the part of the powerful; confusion and fear on the part of the weak; unthinking brutality and inequalities, frustration and misery – yet these things are never harped upon; more often than not they are laughed at – while the author bides his time.

There are genuine comic grotesques in Peake – the Prunesquallors, the Teachers, Swelter, Barquentine, the sisters Cora and Clarice – the Earl and the Countess of Groan themselves. Even the central character of the first two novels, the infamous Steerpike, is made to behave somewhat ridiculously on occasions – and, when he takes his revenge on innocence – on those at whom we have laughed in earlier chapters – their plight is all the harder to endure: the pathos and misery of their situation is amplified and we see their fate in an altogether changed light. This is

what the genuine comic writer can do, time after time. He can make us laugh only to pause with shock at the recognition of what we are actually laughing at: misery, despair, loneliness, humiliation, the fact of death.

Here is a short passage from the under-rated third volume, *Titus Alone* (1959) where Titus has been arrested and is being tried for vagrancy:

> The Magistrate leaned forward on his elbows and rested his long, bony chin upon the knuckles of his interlocked fingers.
>
> 'This is the fourth time that I have had you before me at the bar, and as far as I can judge, the whole thing has been a waste of time to the Court and nothing but a nuisance to myself. Your answers, when they have been forthcoming, have been either idiotic, nebulous, or fantastic. This cannot be allowed to go on. Your youth is no excuse. Do you like stamps?'
>
> 'Stamps, your Worship?'
>
> 'Do you collect them?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> 'A pity. I have a rare collection rotting daily. Now listen to me. You have already spent a week in prison – but it is not your vagrancy that troubles me. That is straightforward, though culpable. It is that you are rootless and obtuse. It seems you have some knowledge hidden from us. Your ways are curious, your terms are meaningless. I will ask you once again. What is this Gormenghast? What does it mean?'
>
> Titus turned his face to the Bench. If ever there was a man to be trusted, his Worship was that man.
>
> Ancient, wrinkled, like a tortoise, but with eyes as candid as grey glass.
>
> But Titus made no answer, only brushing his forehead with the sleeve of his coat.
>
> 'Have you heard his Worship's question?' said a voice at his side. It was Mr Drugg.
>
> 'I do not know,' said Titus, 'what is meant by such a question. You might just as well ask me what is this hand of mine? What does it mean?' And he raised it in the air with the fingers spread out like a starfish. 'Or what is this leg?' And he stood on one foot in the box and shook the other as though it were loose. 'Forgive me, your Worship, I cannot understand.'
>
> 'It is a *place*, your Worship,' said the Clerk of the Court. 'The prisoner has insisted that it is a *place*.'
>
> 'Yes, yes,' said the Magistrate. 'But where is it? Is it north, south, east, or west, young man? Help *me* to help *you*. I take it you do not want to spend the rest of your life sleeping on the roofs of foreign towns. What is it boy? What is the matter with you?'
>
> A ray of light slid through a high window of the Courtroom and hit the back of Mr Drugg's short neck as though it were revealing something of mystical significance. Mr Drugg drew back his head and the light moved forward and settled on his ear. Titus watched it as he spoke.
>
> 'I would tell you, if I could, sir,' he said. 'I only know that I have lost my way. It is not that I want to return to my home – I do not; it is that even if I wished to do so I could not. It is not that I have travelled very far; it is that I have lost my bearings, sir.'
>
> 'Did you run away, young man?'
>
> 'I rode away,' said Titus.
>
> 'From . . . Gormenghast?'
>
> 'Yes, your Worship.'
>
> 'Leaving your mother . . . ?'
>
> 'Yes.'
>
> 'And your father . . . ?'
>
> 'No, not my father . . . '
>
> 'Ah . . . is he dead, my boy?'
>
> 'Yes, your Worship. He was eaten by owls.'
>
> The Magistrate raised an eyebrow and began to write upon a piece of paper.

Of all modern fantasists Mervyn Peake was probably the most successful at combining the comic with the epic to produce a trilogy which can be read and re-read for its insights into our own lives, showing our hopes and fears in a light which is often outrageously funny. The trilogy ranks with Meredith's *The Amazing Marriage* (1896) for the skill with which epic, comic, tragic and moral elements are blended together. It stands above all other works of its type; the *Gormenghast* trilogy is the

apotheosis of that romantic form which had its crude beginnings with *The Castle of Otranto*, in which the vast, rambling, semi-ruined castle is a symbol of the mind itself.

"The optimist proclaims that we live in the best of all possible worlds," says Cabell, "and the pessimist fears that this is so."

The optimist and the pessimist constantly war within the writer of fiction as he gives shape to his chosen subject matter. But it should be the subject matter, not the author's wishes, which ultimately speaks for itself. If the author forces the material one way or another to achieve a happy or an unhappy ending and thus denies the implications of what he has written he is betraying both the reader and himself.

While I admire the work of James Branch Cabell I find his ironies too relentless. He cheats in order to show everything as an example of mere human folly. In contrast to Twain, he uses his talents almost always to avoid pain, though he uses them very cleverly. Nothing is important, says Cabell, therefore nothing hurts. One becomes weary, after a while, of dismissive aphorisms. Like Vonnegut, he seems primarily concerned with showing how ridiculous all human activity can be; how pointless is human sorrow; how silly is human ambition; how pathetic is human concern and sentiment. It is anxiety-quelling of a sort which pretends to realism. It tells us that nothing is really worth suffering for to the extent that people are prepared to suffer; and that we debase ourselves by means of our self-deceits, our ridiculous vanities. But in the end this view is as untrue to our experience of life as that of the ponderous writer who insists that all issues are Large Issues, and that all Quests are in the end Fulfilled, if He Who Makes The Journey is Noble and Virtuous and given to inappropriate sentimentality. Cabell's kind of fiction may well act as a fine antidote to Tolkien's, but neither is very satisfying to the demanding reader in the long run. The impulse to write dismissive ironies often emerges in reaction to an overdose of portentous and meretricious sobriety; but one, though pleasanter to read and considerably more palatable to digest, is finally no more enduring than the other.

Melodrama and irony work very well together; the best fantasies contain both elements, which maintain tonal equilibrium – but a work of fantasy must, like all good fiction, be something more than aesthetically pleasing – though we should be grateful for the little that is merely that. It should have at its source some fundamental concern for human beings, some ambition to show, by means of image, metaphor, elements of allegory, what human life is actually about. As with listening to the music of Mozart, of Ives or Schoenberg, we wish to be entertained, to escape the immediate pressures of the world – but we also wish, when we read, to be informed, to try to understand how we may deal with these problems and how we may respond positively, without cynicism, to the injustices and frustrations which constantly hamper the needs of the spirit.

The messianic fervour amongst the more outlandish supporters of Heinlein or Tolkien shows, well enough, that the reader expects more than simple entertainment from his fantastic fictions. I doubt if there are many imaginative writers who have not had at least one letter – possibly hundreds – from readers who believe that a work of fiction has changed their lives, helped them through a difficult time, caused them to re-assess themselves and their society, and so on. To be a victim of one's

own messianism is terrible – to become the victim of someone else's is even worse. By introducing an element of comedy into his work a writer can maintain perspective for himself and his readers. Wit is the best enemy of perverted or fanatical romanticism.

Comedy and fantasy are close companions. If fantasy is real life exaggerated, more colourful and, perhaps, simpler – if the extremes of life are represented by giants and fairies, dragons and heroes – then the vicissitudes of life are represented in comedy by a pratfall or a custard pie, an embarrassing misunderstanding, and the losing of one's trousers at a formal function. To off-set the grandiose, the pompous elements in fantasy, the writer like Fritz Leiber will introduce comedy to 'humanise' the characters and make the reader much more concerned in their fate than they might otherwise be. The degree of irony one employs can often determine the degree of sentiment one uses and if one does want to touch on matters about which one feels deeply, then it is often better to use a comic context. One feels no less seriously about something, but one is able to face the implications with a steadier eye. Even in heroic fantasy garb it is possible to canter towards the guns and not shy away from the first or even the second cannonade.

Horace Walpole said that life was a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel. Since it is fair to guess that the majority of us both think and feel it is fair to expect fiction which appeals to both our thoughts and our emotions. When fantasy attempts to understand the real world tragic subject matter and comic style can often be the best combination. Byron says in *Don Juan*: "And if I laugh at any mortal thing/ 'Tis that I May not weep."

But a writer must entertain before he has any right to try instruction (even if his only attempt is to instruct the reader's sensibility). A writer has a natural reticence to shout at the same volume the same slogans as those people, quite as miserable and angry as himself, whose protests at such barbarism as modern war takes a more direct and political form. An artist cannot be much of a politician, unless it is during his time off.

If one *is* primarily concerned with telling a moral tale in the exaggerated form called 'fantasy' then comedy can have a humanising influence on what might otherwise be merely a portentous or over-distanced epic narrative. It also enables an author to cope with an idea on more than one level. If he is working a form where the ironic tone seems largely unsuitable he can supply a balance by having a character whose function can be to offer an ironic commentary on the protestations and ambitions of the hero. Thus in Leiber Fafhrd is fundamentally gloomy, while the Mouser is fundamentally optimistic. No matter how serious the drama, humour may help humanise the character and, on a simple level, the use of humour is the secret of the success of most of the popular film-thrillers, from *The Maltese Falcon* to *Jaws, The Wind and the Lion,* to *The Man Who Would Be King.* One thing that can be said for *Star Wars* (dreadful though the script is) is that it may well have banished the tone of Awful Seriousness which seemed to overtake even fairly good directors when faced with the prospect of doing quite an ordinary or minor science fiction subject.

To try to distinguish between different forms of humour here would be as silly as trying to define different kinds of fantasy and science fiction. It ranges from the wit of Meredith to the comedy of Dickens.

From Homer onwards the world's epics and fables have given us comic characters, including, of course, the original Conan, the buffoon, companion of Finn and the Red Branch heroes, yet there are surprisingly few such characters in the vast numbers of recent heroic fantasies claiming the mythological romance as their particular heritage. The comic strips offer a wider selection of humour, particularly in the *Star Reach* group of comics and the *Howard the Duck* series.

That comedy and fantasy may combine to delightful effect (as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) was shown by *Unknown* where writers like de Camp and Pratt, Anthony Boucher, Fritz Leiber, Henry Kuttner and many others came into their own. It is probably not a coincidence that the best writers have almost all shown themselves capable of producing marvellous comic stories. A strong sense of comedy or irony in a genre writer ensures that his chosen genre, at least in his hands, never becomes stale and over-formalised. Chandler and Hammett introduced sophisticated humour into the thriller without for a moment destroying the dramatic power of their work and gave the detective story a lease of life it retains to this day, as well as improving the overall level of aspiration of writers.

It seems to me that if fantasy fiction is to avoid the stultification that has befallen commercial science fiction it would do well to recall its strong bonds with comedy.

"To love Comedy," says Meredith, in his great essay *On The Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*, "you must know the real world, and know them, though you may still hope for good." To keep a form vital you must draw your inspiration not from other books in that form but from life itself, from experience, from knowledge of men and women, and, where fantasy fiction is concerned, from an enthusiasm for the epic, the myth, the noble metaphor which speaks to us on a hundred levels. And to make such things speak to their fellows in as many voices as possible, writers must employ comedy to remind their readers that no matter how intense the images, how grand the themes, how awe-inspiring the terrors, one is still writing about reality.

Letters

Dear Mr Edwards, 17th December 1978

For the record, I should like to make a couple of minor corrections in Brian M. Stableford's excellent essay, "The Science Fiction of James Blish", in your 13th issue.

On page 15 of that issue, Mr Stableford states: "For some years he shared an apartment with Robert A.W. Lowndes, and the two wrote some science fiction in collaboration . . . ".

The latter part of the quotation is correct, but not the first part. Jim and I took an apartment in April 1945; he moved out at the end of August to take an apartment across the hall from Virginia Kidd Emden (later Virginia Blish). That apartment, however, was but a few blocks away from my now-solitary dwellings, and the three of us remained close until the end of 1947, when the Blishes (having married in 1946) took a house in Staten Island.

In the same sentence, Mr Stableford also refers to ". . . the material that was later to be organized into *The Duplicated Man* . . . ". That is not 100% incorrect, but, at the very best, misleading. *The Duplicated Man* was completed, and submitted to John Campbell *via* Frederik Pohl (then Jim's agent) early in 1947. It was shorter than book-length – between 45,000 and 50,000 words as I recall – and when both Campbell and *Startling Stories* rejected it, there was no other market. In 1952, another science fiction title was added to my chain of pulp magazines: *Dynamic Science Fiction*. By then, James Blish was a "name" writer; I persuaded my publisher to let me run what I described as a "book-length" novel by Jim and myself (using a pseudonym for myself because there was a strict rule against an editor running his own stories under his own name at Columbia Publications). Jim and I then got out the dusty manuscript and reworked it, making what we believed to be improvements in the very first version, and extending it to about 55,000 words. There was, however, not a single change in plot or structure. We just took the opportunity to do somewhat more with what we already had.

After reading Mr Stableford's note that the structure of *The Duplicated Man* is bad, and that it's entirely an insignificant story, I took down my copy of the Avalon/Airmont edition (which varies only slightly from the magazine edition) and re-read it. Well, I'm vain enough to feel that some people might yet read it with enjoyment, but not critics; and I agree with your critic's comments. The story was written, partly, as a take-off on various A.E. Van Vogt serials which we had been reading in *Astounding* for several years; so the structure *had* to be bad. It didn't just happen; Jim and I worked it out (our exaggerations of Van Vogt structure) with great care, trying to out-Van Vogt Van Vogt and still wind up without loose ends all over the carpet (which was usually the case with a VV epic). I don't know whether we really succeeded – I'm still too close to the story to see as well as a competent critic can see thedifference between what we had in mind and what is actually there on the page. And, of course, under those conditions, any "significance" would be not only accidental but closer to miraculous. Jim was just beginning to become the author he became in later years; *TDM* was actually his first attempt at novel length. Had the idea behind the story occurred to me years later, and Jim had been taken with it as he was in 1947, we would have done it in a much different way; whether it would have been better remains unanswerable, but I think there would have been a sporting chance. Certainly we wouldn't have done it as a burlesque thriller.

It seems to me that the question of "significance" in any science fiction of our times is a snare. We find much significance in many works of fiction which have endured and are still being read after centuries. Much of H.G. Wells is still both popular and significant; but what critics writing about his stories in 1909, for example, could have predicted which ones would remain significant to readers of 1979? "Significance" is not something which a critic invents; it is something which he or she finds there – in such a way that any other reasonably intelligent reader can also find it there on the page. It has been there all the time. But Wells didn't sit down to write stories which would be found significant 50 or more years later, any more than Shakespeare set out to write plays which would still be hits more

than 300 years later. And what is considered significant in one milieu, within the same language of literature, may not be so in a generation or two – and vice versa. Yet, the honest and capable critic *must* consider the matter; otherwise, he or she is just a reviewer.

Excellent also was Brian Aldiss's very different assessment of Blish's work. I trust that you at *Foundation* are proud of the James Blish issue, for you certainly have earned the right to be so. Finally, let me say that what makes these two essays excellent for me is not only the insight, close reading, and sympathy that went into them but, no less important, that in reading what they say about James Blish, I recognize Jim; and in the writing about his stories, I recognize the stories. So much criticism consists of so-called insights into and analysis of stories which just could not be the ones the reader has read – the "critic" must have gotten a private edition somewhere else.

Robert A.W. Lowndes *Hoboken, New Jersey*

Dear Malcolm Edwards, 17th February 1979

Perhaps I could add a footnote to K.V. Bailey's fine article on Olaf Stapledon in *Foundation* 15. Bailey notes the correspondence between Stapledon's "absolute spirit", and Blake's vision of Jerusalem and the Divine Father. There is also a correspondence here with Hegel's "absolute spirit". I quote R.G. Collingwood, who said that for Hegel, "the importance of man in the world lies precisely in the fact that he is the vehicle of mind, the form in which God's being or rather becoming develops itself into its crowning phase as the being or becoming of spirit. This resembles pantheism in that the process of the world is conceived as identical with the process of God's self-creative life; but it differs from pantheism in that God in Himself, as the pure creative concept, is prior to the material world and transcends it as its cause." Collingwood pointed out that there was a contradiction between the mechanical view of matter held by the physics of Hegel's time, and his concept of nature evolving life and mind out of itself, by inner necessity. In contrast to the modern evolutionary view of (temporal) development, Hegel's transition from lower to higher forms of being is essentially a *logical* process. Yet in *Philosophy and Living* Stapledon indicated he was sympathetic to Hegel's purpose. "Hegel does his best to do justice both to the temporal and the eternal. Of course he fails to give a coherent account of them. But who has succeeded? He also remarked: "As Hegel had no sense of the astronomical magnitudes of time and space, human history bulked much more largely in his philosophy than seems plausible to us." Stapledon found Hegel's dialectical method too tidy; there is too much confusion and chance in the physical world for its nature to be deduced from an abstract principle – it can only be known through observation. Hegel's dialectic also fails to do justice to the influence of the material world in shaping man. Like Hegel, Stapledon saw a principle of development working itself out in the universe – but painfully and uncertainly. The metaphysics of *Star Maker* is in a sense a "corrected" version of Hegel, yet the difficulty of reconciling the concept of the Absolute and the concept of Development remains. In this regard Stapledon recognized the conflict between his two ideals of personality-in-community ("the moral protest, which seeks to alter the universe") and the ecstatic acceptance of the universe as it is – a conflict that is the source of his tragic vision. Ultimately, the point of view of the Star Maker must triumph over the moral protest.

The novel's concern with facing the possibility of "the ultimate darkness" also seems not wholly unrelated to the time at which it was written: the eve of the Second World War.

Angus Taylor *Amsterdam*

Dear Malcolm Edwards, 6th December 1978

Thanks for sending me *Foundation* 14. I found John Clute's review of *Our Lady of Darkness* very interesting, very acute and perceptive in some ways, and certainly well and clearly written. But I never did intend to write a novel of the dark night of the soul. Making it an occult thriller was no marketing decision but my own original one – it started as a short Jamesian horror story and just grew. (However, I suppose critic and author can argue on and on about the latter's *real* [or "real"] intentions.) The article on Essex House was also very well done – fascinating!

Fritz Leiber *San Francisco*

Ryszard Dubanski is a graduate student at the University of British Columbia specialising in non-realistic modes of literature; he is working on a book-length study of modern fantasy.

The Last Man Theme in Modern Fantasy and SF

Ryszard Dubanski

Modern fantasy begins with the sudden appearance of a curious figure on the imaginative horizon of the nineteenth century. The Last Man makes his debut in Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville's *Le dernier homme* (1805) and the anonymous English novel *The Last Man, or Omegarus and Syderia* (1806), "a romance of futurity" which describes a cataclysmic earthquake resulting from man's disobedience of the laws of God and Nature.[1] Within this context, the Last Man makes his solitary way across a devastated landscape. His outline is clear, but his features are blurred for he is an ambiguous figure. In a strange double role, he stands as a guardian of some sacred truth and as a symbol of menace who knows that life is no more than vain words and absolute futility, and that it was human folly that invoked the final catastrophe. Pursued by a great guilt and a restless despair, he is by instinct a wanderer. As the sole inhabitant of a world of decay and desolation and death, he yearns for an end to his pointless existence. Yet while he longs for oblivion, his eyes stray heavenward for some sign of redemption, some ray of hope.

A great swelling dis-ease begins to manifest itself in European society at the turn of the century, in various different ways. Thomas Campbell asks the astronomer Sir William Herschel whether or not the Solar System is stable, and Sir William replies: "No, for the asteroids are fragments of an exploded planet, and that may have been the beginning of the end."[2] So Campbell's much admired "Last Man" (1823) is the sole survivor of universal war, famine, and disease, who looks up

> Saying, We are Twins in death, proud Sun!
> Thy face is cold, thy game is run,
> 'Tis Mercy bids thee go:
> For thou ten thousand thousand years
> Hast seen the tide of human tears
> That shall no longer flow.[3]

In contrast, there is Thomas Hood's humorous "Last Man" (1826). He is a hangman,

who, having just executed the second-from-last-man, laments that there is "not another man alive/ In the world to pull my legs!"[4] In the same year Mary Shelley publishes her long and very tedious *The Last Man* in three volumes. Here, the strategy of a plague which destroys civilization provides a distancing device through which she can colour her own tragic history. Lionel Verney's "reckless loneliness" echoes Mary's own solitude.

Meanwhile, variations of the theme continue; and, as Elizabeth Nitchie details, the Last Man became something of a fad:

> In 1823 Beddoes was working on a play with the same title as Mary's novel. And many Last Men were to follow: beside Hood's burlesque, there were poems by E.J. Ousley and Edward Wallace, a sketch in *Blackwood's*, and a play by George Dibdin Pitt, which the playbill of 1842 evidently thought would be helped by the statement (completely unjustified) that it was "partly founded on Mrs. Shelley's thrilling novel."[5]

Nor is the Last Man confined to literature alone. The fashionable painters of the day complement the gloomy discourse with a series of appropriate images. That very popular master of disaster paintings, John Martin, does at least two Last Man pictures; and his other titles speak for themselves, including *The Fall of Babylon* (1819), *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* (1822), and *The Fall of Nineveh* (1829).[6] Other artists like Turner, Francis Danby, George Miller, and Delacroix contribute their own distinct treatments of "sublime" catastrophes and disasters.

This veritable deluge of Last Men demonstrates how a potent archetype enters the world. In literature the motif provides a narrative strategy which dramatizes a growing sense of isolation, estrangement, and despair: "Earth," exclaims Raymond in Mary Shelley s novel, "is to me a tomb, the firmament a vault, shrouding mere corruption."[7] In painting the Last Man is

> the perennial outsider, the tourist scale-figure employed by topographers to measure up against the wonders of the world, the time traveller who sees events of past and future all imprisoned in an everlasting present.[8]

Either way, he is the outcast, the alienated individual, kin to Galt's Wandering Jew, Mary's "Monster", Byron's proud exile, Sowacki's lonely hero, and so on. In short, he is the expression of a new and painful self-awareness wherein the operative words are "by oneself", "single", "alone". The dilemma of the individual being submerged in an increasingly mechanized and uncertain world and facing a seemingly indifferent universe gave birth to the theme of the disinherited mind, which has been with us ever since. Following the philosophers who formulated a subjective approach to reality, the writers explored the idea of the mind as the controller and perhaps creator of reality. Some, like Blake, could celebrate a Promethean victory won on their own terms. But there was a darker side to the debate, and its spirit is evident everywhere in varying degrees of emphasis – from Keats's "palely loitering" knight, to Wordsworth's Myth of the Solitary, to the Last Man. These are the symptoms of the beginnings of a complex existential agony, the first nuances of our all too familiar fragmented modern consciousness.

As the most explicit expression of this new spirit, the Last Man points in several

fantastic directions at once. Most significantly, he illuminates the very nature of modern fantasy. What is at the heart of the matter is that as man became increasingly conscious of his unconscious mind, fantasy became the most appropriate vehicle for exploring that previously uncharted territory. At its most challenging, fantasy outlines spiritual quests in the realm of inner space. It describes a descent through the layered depths of the psyche to some fundamental core of being, and thereby serves an integrative function. Yet such a voyage of discovery into this unknown realm can be dangerous for it submerges the voyager into the irrational, which has its own kind of order wherein reason does not apply. Fantasy loosens one's grip on the rational surface of the everyday world; it undermines and subverts a commonsense view of things, and therefore it disturbs and disorients. And those who embark on such a journey are essentially alone, drastically cut off from all that is known and familiar. They are, truly, Last Men. We need only think of all the disembodied points of view and isolated narrators in modern fantasy and sf – from George MacDonald to Kafka to J.G. Ballard to Robert Silverberg – to realize the insular nature of this intuitive process and the perils it involves.

Of course the theme of isolated or trapped consciousness is central to the mainstream of modern literature, from Dickens to Heller. But it is the essence of fantasy and sf. Consider, for instance, the kind of distorted Neo-Platonic mysticism found in David Lindsay and, to a lesser extent, Olaf Stapledon. All such visionary fiction, oriented to some transcendental reality that lies utterly beyond this one, is based on the assumption that we do not belong *here*, that we are aliens in search of our *real* home. And echoes of this sense of estrangement and loneliness occur throughout the range of modern fantasy and sf. In *Solaris*, to pick an unlikely example, Kelvin dreams: "I am the prisoner of an alien matter and my body is clothed in a dead, formless substance – or rather I have no body, I *am* that alien matter," and his "grief" becomes "a mountain visible in the dazzling light of another world".[9] The specific meanings may be different, but the message remains the same: we are all "last men", beings tragically cut off from meaningfully experiencing the surrounding universe by the structures of our minds and bodies. We are all "strangers in a strange land" embarked on a metaphysical detective-quest, searching in vain for the magic key that will unlock the prison of the senses and let our *real* inner selves free.

On a more concrete level, the Last Man is obviously a response to the pressures and anxieties of the Modern Age – to a plethora of bloody political revolutions, to the uncertain directions of a new science and technology, to growing industrialization and urbanization; in short, to rapid and uncontrolled change. In this context his story forms the backbone of what became sf. The rich potential of this narrative strategy is framed at the end of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*:

> Yet, will not this world be re-peopled, and the children of a saved pair of lovers, in some to me unknown and unattainable seclusion, wandering to these prodigious relics of the antepestilential race, seek to learn how beings so wondrous in their achievements, with imaginations infinite, and powers godlike, had departed from their home to an unknown country?[10]

It is a familiar scenario indeed. Critics like Scholes, Rabkin, and Aldiss hail *Frankenstein* (1816) as the origin of the species because of its emphasis on science

and the dual nature of man. But it seems David Ketterer is closer to the truth when he claims that the Apocalypse is *the* myth of sf – at least that is what all those countless stories of the end of man and civilization and of global disaster, whether realized or averted at the last moment, suggest.[11] And in this scheme the Last Man functions as a witness, a kind of Greek chorus providing a suitable commentary on the grand finale rather than a vision of personal isolation. Sometimes the scale is temporal, as in M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* (1901) or Stanisaw Lem's *The Futurological Congress* (1974). Or it may be cosmic, as in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930). Invariably the final catastrophe is invoked by human folly, some cosmic accident, or by some abstract scientific principle (like the Second Law of Thermodynamics) and leads to an abyss of chaos and non-meaning or to a glorious new order on the horizon of the future. That final "darkness" Wells's Time Traveller experiences in "The Further Vision" is the ultimate horror – something monstrous and meaningless and an affront to reason, a bottomless abyss wherein mind, consciousness, and humanity have no place or relevance. On the other hand, the moment we learn that the hero of Shiel's simple-minded tale is named Adam, we know what to expect. He will find his "Eve"; and they will re-populate the globe and live happily-ever-after. These are the extremes. But of course the whole thing can simply turn out to be a bad joke, as in Conan Doyle's *The Poison Belt* (1913) when everyone wakes to the realization that the poison was not lethal after all. The possibilities are endless.

However, there is another side to the Last Man debate. The nineteenth century also bears the distinction of being especially active in the genre of utopian fantasy because it was an age ruled by theories of progress: technological, scientific, evolutionary. But like Plato's ideal commonwealth and countless others which are based on order rather than freedom, all these "brave new worlds" seem to be designed for bureaucrats and not for people. Whether stridently socialist, like Etienne Cabet's *Journey to Icaria* (1840), or militantly capitalist, like Edward Bellamy's very influential *Looking Backward* (1888), they all tend to portray robot-like societies in which nothing is allowed to interfere with uniformity or to deny the authority of the system, and hence human concerns are forgotten.

We in the twentieth century no longer believe in progress and the perfectibility of man; or perhaps I should say that we desperately do not want to believe in them. For we have seen only too clearly the results of too much conditioning, too much tampering with the environment, too many horrible "ideal" states. Indeed, "utopia" has become a dirty word. Despite such notable exceptions as Huxley's *Island* (1962), Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1969), and Le Guin's "ambiguous" utopia, *The Dispossessed* (1974), that once noble dream has worked itself out. The final word belongs to Orwell. When in *1984* O'Brien says to Winston, "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever,"[12] we realize that this would be the inevitable result of choosing happiness over freedom.

Yet we cannot deny utopian thought a place on the map of modern consciousness because it expresses another basic human aspiration: the hope of a better world where an individual might be happy, living in harmony with his fellows. And in terms of the Last Man question there is one particular utopian thread that deserves some attention. That is, nineteenth century ideas of progress have given rise to the notion

that the next important step in man's evolution will be spiritual. One of the underpinnings of Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1870) is that man will evolve intellectually. Similarly, in *News from Nowhere* (1890) Morris takes it for granted that a significant heightening of consciousness will occur throughout society once people are no longer driven to brutal overwork by their greedy capitalist bosses. From such speculations it is but a short step indeed to Stapledon's visions, Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953) and of course his *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Sturgeon's *More than Human* (1953), and so on. In answer to the Last Man's essential isolation and estrangement is posed the possibility of a new species, the product of group or shared consciousness. Add to this development the nuances of our rising ecological awareness and the scientifically supported conviction that we are not alone in the universe after all, and we have the source of much of contemporary sf/fantasy's vague, half-baked mysticisms. A peripheral example is Le Guin, who opposes the need for creating a fully integrated human being to the idea of Cosmic Harmony or Balance with great clarity.

It seems, then, that the Last Man provides a valuable perspective for approaching modern fantasy and sf. Put in the simplest terms, his story traces the evolution of a consciousness divided against itself, the development of an awareness of the unlimited potentialities and possibilities of experience inherent in the modern world, whether creative and healing or destructive. In him are expressed all the dualities. Alone and drastically separated from anything that might interfere with his metaphysical quest, he remains suspended in some agaonized middle-region between transcendence and chaos, faith and skepticism, yes and no, a very human and familiar figure.

Notes

1. References to these novels and to other Last Man poems, plays, and tales are scattered throughout historical summaries of sf and various biographies and studies of Mary Shelley, Thomas Beddoes, Thomas Hood, etc.
2. Thomas Campbell, *Poems* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1904), "Introduction", xxxviii. It seems but a short step from here to *The Time Machine.*
3. *Ibid.*, p.111.
4. *Selected Poems of Thomas Hood*, edited and introduced by John Chubbe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) p.141.
5. Elizabeth Nitchie, *Mary Shelley* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953) p.152.
6. William Feaver, *The Art of John Martin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Feaver provides a chronology, and, although it is not his focus, a good indication of the intellectual climate that gave birth to the Last Man. Brian Aldiss also points out the connection between Martin's art and the literature of the day, in *Billion Year Spree* (London: Corgi Books, 1973), p.122.
7. Mary Shelley, *The Last Man* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p.135.
8. Feaver, p.186.
9. Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris* (New York: Walker & Co., 1970), pp.179-80.
10. Mary Shelley, p.339.
11. In *New Worlds for Old* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974) Ketterer focuses on sf as a means toward an epistemological or philosphical apocalypse, and hence his position is much more complex than a reference can indicate.
12. George Orwell, *1984* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p.215.

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Aldiss, Brian. *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction.* London: Corgi Books, 1973.

Ketterer, David. *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature.* New York: Anchor Books, 1974.

In Foundation 13 *we published a long overview of the work of James Blish by Brian Stableford; this has since been expanded and will appear as a monograph from Borgo Press (while the book that Brian Stableford took over from Blish on his death has been delivered to Doubleday* – The Stigmata of Evil: A History of Witchcraft*). Here now is an overview of Mack Reynolds, a writer of considerable popularity who has had little attention paid to him by critics of the* genre. *From his domicile in Mexico, Mack Reynolds contributes an afterword to the essay.*

The Utopian Dream Revisited: Socioeconomic Speculation in the SF of Mack Reynolds

Brian Stableford

Isaac Asimov once expressed the opinion that science fiction changed during the 1940s, when a period in which its dominant concern was technological invention gave way to a period in which its dominant concern became the social effects of technological progress. There was, according to this argument, no radical change in content, but simply a trend towards "sociological" extrapolation. This observation is not altogether false, in that it recognizes the new editorial requirements introduced by John W. Campbell into the corner of the pulp magazine market occupied by sf magazines, but it nevertheless fails to draw attention to the fact that Hugo Gernsback originally considered scientifiction to be an implicitly Utopian species of literature one of whose main functions was to herald a new technological Golden Age. What really happened in the forties – primarily in *Astounding Science Fiction* – was that writers began to cast a rather more critical eye upon the implications of technological advance, and lost their naive and optimistic faith in the

Gernsbackian "Age of Power Freedom". There is, therefore, a sense in which even pulp science fiction has always been "sociological" – which is to say, interested in the future prospects of human societies. At the same time, however, science fiction writers have been almost unanimously scornful of sociology itself – and the other social sciences also – apparently considering them to be inferior to the natural sciences and hardly deserving to be used as bases for extrapolative thought. No writer can produce an image of future society without speculating about its politics and economics, yet there are very few genre writers who have ever felt the need to refer to political or economic science before embarking upon such speculation. In some cases this refusal has proved pernicious, in that we still come across images of future society based on such stupid and obsolete assumptions as those of crude social Darwinism; in other cases it has simply resulted in the unthinking translocation of present-day political and economic systems into the future (even into the far-flung futures of galactic civilizations). It is, perhaps, a sad comment that the only conscious attempt in genre sf to use a *theory* of history to construct a future history for mankind is James Blish's *Cities in Flight* tetralogy, which borrows not from social science but from the metaphysical philosophy of history concocted by Oswald Spengler.

The reasons for this reluctance to use sociological theory are various. Partly, it is a simple failure of imagination. Partly, it reflects a genuinely unsatisfactory situation in modern sociology as regards theories of social change. Partly, however, it is due to the fact that science fiction as a popular genre is American in origin and inspiration, and American social philosophy has always been allergic to discussion of theories of social change because it is difficult to begin such discussion without taking into account the most influential theory of social change, which is that of Karl Marx. Marxist social theory and Marxist political rhetoric (though there is no *necessary* logical connection between them) are so closely associated and interwoven that hostility to the latter inevitably engenders hostility to the former, and this hostility tends also to stifle discussion of subsequent contributions to the theory of social change which, even if they are opposed to Marxist thought, nevertheless have to take it into account. The political climate in America, which has conditioned this allergic response during the last half-century, is largely responsible for the awkward predicament of American sociology as well as the failure of American science fiction to pay any real attention to the possible contribution of social science to the art of speculative extrapolation.

One might imagine that the situation in Eastern Europe would be very different, in that the governmental systems of those countries openly espouse Marxist theories of society. Unfortunately, this is not the case, for here too the attitude to the political rhetoric of Marxism dominates and determines attitudes to the theory of social change. The "official" position of such governments is that social change has, in accordance with Marxist theory (though this claim is highly dubious), been brought to its appropriate conclusion, and that there is therefore no further scope for speculation about the changes which might overtake society in the future. Soviet sf, therefore, presents a consistent tone of optimistic self-congraulation while being utterly devoid of any serious socioeconomic speculation. The simple fact is that no political system is inclined to tolerate the thought of its own mortality,

and that socioeconomic speculation in fiction or non-fiction is always likely to be construed as being subversive. In the West, such speculation is far from being completely stifled, but diplomacy makes much of it rather weak, and stimulates much activity in the realm of apologetics. In science fiction, which is a mass market genre, diplomacy usually rules despite a persistent tendency to parodic iconoclasm. The fifties produced a great number of stories which commented, at least metaphorically, on issues of contemporary political concern, and this trend has continued to the present day, but what is involved is generally the expression of opinion on particular matters (civil rights, the space programme, etc.) rather than attempts to analyse fundamental issues concerned with socioeconomic change. The number of stories which deal with post-capitalist society (however this is envisaged) is really very small, and few of those that do exist refer explicitly to any assumptions about mechanisms of social change.

There is, however, one American writer who has in recent years made it his special mission to speculate about the social and economic situations of the near future and their possible patterns of development. This is Mack Reynolds, whose family background appears to have given him a thorough familiarity with Marxist thought (both political rhetoric and social theory), and also with a healthy scepticism regarding all manner of political and economic presuppositions. Reynolds is not a writer who has attracted attention on account of the aesthetic merits of his prose, nor is it likely that he ever will, but his unique situation within contemporary American science fiction nevertheless makes him an interesting writer, and one who raises numerous issues worth examination and discussion. In particular, his novel *Looking Backward from the Year 2000* (1973) and the "sequels" which followed it, provide a fascinating exercise in socioeconomic speculation: a genuine thought-experiment in utopian engineering. It is worth noting that this is the only significant utopian novel to be produced in the genre during the last forty years which does not tie its utopian pretensions to some recommendation of "technological retreat".

The "testament" that closes Damon Knight's commentary on genre sf *In Search of Wonder* bequeaths to Mark Reynolds, among others, an English grammar. James Blish (writing as William Atheling, Jr.) observed that "[Reynolds] is trying to sell us important ideas clothed in the style of *Doc Savage* and *The Shadow* – in short, below the level of competent pulp magazine performance. This I think is a shame, but it could be remedied, and let no man say positively that Reynolds is incapable of so doing." Both these criticisms were merited at the time, and it cannot really be said that the tendencies referred to have been completely cured, but I believe that Blish was right to claim that the ideas which Reynolds has tried to sell us *are* important ones, in that they are imaginative stimuli of a kind which is far too rare in contemporary sf. The packaging of these ideas habitually ranges from the insipid to the excruciating, but in spite of this I think that it is worth taking a considered look at the way in which Reynolds has developed his socioeconomic speculations throughout his years as a professional sf writer.

Mack Reynolds was born in 1917, but did not embark upon his writing career until the late forties. His first sales to the sf magazines were made during 1949-50 and

while the post-war magazine boom continued he sold stories regularly. He collaborated occasionally with Fredric Brown and once with Theodore Cogswell, and like these writers he concentrated mainly on light-hearted and humorous pieces. In 1951 he published an amusing and enjoyable novel called *The Case of the Little Green Men*, in which a failed private eye is hired by science fiction fans as part of an elaborate hoax and becomes involved in a series of murders apparently committed by a superhuman agency.

Reynolds introduced himself to the readers of *Imagination* in 1952 in one of that magazine's "author profiles", and revealed that he had ambitions above and beyond what he had previously attempted to do in the genre: "What am I doing now? Writing a serious science fiction work which should take at least two years to complete. No wars of the future, no ray guns, extra-terrestrials, nor even time machines. It's going to be called *Tomorrow*." If this project was ever completed it evidently failed to find a market, and eight years were to pass before Reynolds was again to attempt serious speculations about the near future. In 1960, though, his career entered a new and prolific phase as he began selling regularly to *Astounding*, which was at that time in the process of becoming *Analog* and cultivating a new image. In May of that year he published "Revolution", which carried a preface making a new declaration of intent:

> "For some forty years critics of the USSR have been desiring, predicting, not to mention praying for, its collapse. For twenty of these years the author of this story has vaguely wondered what would replace the collapsed Soviet system. A return to Czarism? Oh, come now! Capitalism as we know it today in the advanced Western countries? It would seem difficult after almost half a century of State ownership and control of the means of production, distribution, communications, education, science. Then what? The question became increasingly interesting following recent visits not only to Moscow and Leningrad but also to various other capital cities of the Soviet complex. A controversial subject? Indeed it is. You can't get much more controversial than this in the world today. But this is science fiction, and here we go."[1]

In the story an American agent is sent to Russia to give financial aid to a revolutionary underground, but becomes gradually anxious about what might happen *after* the revolution. When he learns that the revolutionaries plan to clear away the totalitarian state in order to set up a communist system owing much more fidelity to the ideas of Marx and Engels he begins to wonder whether it might not be better to sell out his allies to the KGB.

A much more ambitious examination of the merits of the economic systems of America and Russia was "Adaptation", a short novel published in the August 1960 *Analog*. Here the crew of a starship is split by an ideological dispute regarding the best way to accelerate the historical and technological development of two "lost colonies" in the Rigel system. To put their claims to the test the two factions take a world each and embark upon a project to civilize them in the shortest possible time. One group, favouring a Stalinist programme of military conquest and accelerated industrialization planned by a centralized bureaucratic state, adopt the planet whose most advanced civilization is comparable to that of the Incas before the advent of Pizarro. The other, favouring a *laissez faire* programme in which technological innovations are to be distributed to merchants and entrepreneurs, adopts the planet whose most advanced culture is reminiscent of Renaissance Italy. (This

arrangement seems hardly equitable, but is of course convenient, in that post-Renaissance Europe was the birthplace of capitalism, and all revolutions so far accomplished in the name of communism have taken place – contrary to the Marxian theory of history – in more-or-less primitive countries whose economic systems have been of the types Marx categorised as Feudal and Asiatic.)

The story tells of the gradual involvement of the two teams in empire-building, and the transformation of the experiment into twin quests for personal power. As the bitter rivalry between the two factions threatens to break into all-out war between the two worlds the situation is saved by the fact that the natives of both worlds, resenting their manipulation by the Earthmen, form an alliance to dispossess their masters of all their power. *Their* verdict on the great experiment is that whatever the best route of progress might be, and whatever the ideal economic system, there just *has* to be something better than the processes through which their worlds have been forced.

"Adaptation" is one of Reynolds's best works, and would have profited immensely from expansion into a more carefully analytical novel. It had, however, to find a home in a paperback market which was hardly renowned for its promotion of such projects, and in fact the longer version of the story – *The Rival Rigelians*, 1967 – is simply inflated to novel length by the addition of some padding. It remains, of course, a straightforwardly iconoclastic work, attempting nothing more than a mocking indictment of two opposing ideologies which, in Reynolds's view, were pretty much as bad as one another. He ventures no suggestion as to what a better system might look like, but there is one significant point made in the climax. The crew of the starship, of course, come from an Earth much advanced beyond our own, and the political programmes for technological and economic development they have been testing are taken from their rather distant past. One of the crew members volunteers to explain to the native leaders the nature of Earth's *present* economic system. They decline, apparently having little confidence in the likelihood of its being any better. This was Reynolds's conviction, too, about the imminent future of America and Russia – he thought that things might very well get worse instead of (or at least before) getting better. Much of his work during the sixties employs the premise that both Western capitalism and Eastern state socialism might follow a similar pattern of stultification.

In two other stories published in 1960, however, Reynolds deliberately espoused the "heretical" hypothesis that in the near future the Soviet system might work well enough to enable the East to outstrip the West. In "Combat" (*Analog*, October 1960) an alien starship lands in Russia because that nation has "the largest government and the most advanced on Earth", and the alien ambassador criticizes an American agent because his parent nation has adopted a strategy of attempting to retard Russian progress rather than trying to step up its own rate of progress to stay ahead. The premise is taken to absurd extremes in "Russkies Go Home!" (*F&SF*, November 1960; expanded as *Tomorrow Might Be Different*, 1975) in which the Russian planned economy is booming to the extent that the Russians are dumping cheap goods throughout the West in order to obtain sufficient foreign currency to supply the needs of her tourists (who have replaced American tourists as the archetypes of arrogance and vulgarity). The hero plans to save the West by inventing a new

ascetic religion which will put an end to tourism and conspicuous consumption if only it can be exported to the East. The Russians see through the plan quickly enough, but instead of opposing it they accept it greedily, because the first waves of Chinese tourists are already flocking to the fatherland of the revolution . . .

This particular premise was never intended seriously, and Reynolds quickly abandoned it. "Freedom" (*Analog*, February 1961) seems much more serious in intent, suggesting that Russia's satellite countries might become gradually more liberal. A KGB agent sent to identify the origin of the subversive movements finds that they are not the product of anti-party conspirators but the result of a spontaneous mass demand for freedom of speech. In the story, the agent himself becomes a subversive and learns to see the KGB as an oppressive and undesirable force. The fate of Dubcek's regime in Czechoslovakia seven years later testifies to the fact that the story was a little on the optimistic side.

In Reynolds's next *Analog* novella, "Ultima Thule" (March 1961; reprinted as part of *Planetary Agent*, 1965), he again abandoned the near future of Earth in order to use one of the conventional backgrounds of post-war sf as a medium for a curious socioeconomic parable. The story hinges on the notion that the galaxy has been colonized after the fashion of Eric Frank Russell's *The Great Explosion*, with small social groups dissatisfied with conditions on Earth having blasted off to found their particular utopias or to preserve their particular traditions. All conceivable political and economic systems are represented, their idiosyncrasies protected by the "United Planets Charter", which pledges that no one will attempt to interfere with anyone else's socioeconomic affairs. The United Planets organization, however, has a mysterious department called Section G, whose secret function is the subversion of the Charter. In the story, a new recruit to the department is assigned the task of tracking down "Tommy Paine", a mercurial mastermind who has been provoking revolutions throughout the galaxy. He finds out, eventually, that this is merely the *nom de guerre* used by the department to conceal its own activities.

The story has two interesting features. Firstly, its dialogue mostly consists of a series of challenges directed by a Section G operative at the hero's preconceptions of the differential merits of various socioeconomic systems. His innocent liberalism is attacked and mocked as being essentially ethnocentric. Secondly, Section G is not fomenting revolutions in the name of any particular social policy – their revolutionary movements are as diverse as the regimes they overthrow – but simply in the name of *progress*. Implicit in the story is the view that any socioeconomic system is "good" if it is promoting technological progress, and bad if it is not. Tyranny is bad only because (or if) the oppressive apparatus of the state works to suppress creativity on the part of the intelligentsia. In "Ultima Thule" this view is rationalized by the fact that Section G has evidence that there is other intelligent life in the universe, technologically advanced far beyond the present ambitions of mankind, with which mankind might eventually have to compete. When the hero asks the head of Section G how he decides whether changes are for the better he is told:

> "It's sometimes difficult to decide, but we aim for changes that will mean an increased scientific progress, a more advanced industrial technology, more and better education,

the opening of opportunity for every member of the culture to exert himself to the full of his abilities. The last is particularly important. Too many cultures, even those that think of themselves as particularly advanced, suppress the individual by one means or another."

This is very much Reynolds's own credo. It forms the basis of his indictment of various images of near-future America and it is the basic premise of his utopian design in *Looking Backward from the Year 2000*. In "Ultima Thule" there is an immediate and practical motive for placing such a high priority on technological progress, but the aliens are really no more than a plausible excuse – a justificatory rationalization. In other stories this value-premise is simply axiomatic, or becomes entangled with Reynolds's notion of the "purpose of human existence". The premise is, of course, hardly new – it stretches back way beyond the technocratic propaganda of Gernsback to Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* – but it cannot be said to have played an important part in the tradition of political philosophy since Plato and Aristotle. Where it *has* played an important part is in the covert socio-political assumptions built into modern science fiction, and in making it available for detailed examination Reynolds is to some extent providing a commentary on certain assumptions taken for granted by many of his contemporaries.

"Ultima Thule" ultimately became the source of a series of short stories and novels using the same background, and two other stories published in 1961 mark major points of departure in Reynolds's work. In "Farmer" (*Galaxy*, June 1961) he began to contemplate the future of the underdeveloped countries of North Africa and the role to be played by the superpowers in "aiding" their development. In "Status Quo" (*Analog*, August 1961; expanded as *Day After Tomorrow*, 1976) he made his first significant attempt to deal straightforwardly with the possible near future of the USA. Neither story is impressive, the first being an account of the interaction of various political priorities involved in a project to reforest the Sahara and an attempt to sabotage the programme, while the second presents an America obsessed by the twin notions of status and fashionability, where non-conformists (including the intelligentsia) are being slowly stifled. Both, however, set up the scenery for more interesting work.

"Farmer" was quickly followed by two short novels dealing with the future of North Africa, both of which ran as serials in *Analog: Black Man's Burden* (December 1961-January 1962) and *Border, Breed Nor Birth* (July-August 1962). It was not until ten years later that the two finally appeared in book form as halves of an Ace double, in 1972.

Black Man's Burden is built around a conference where the field-workers of various organizations and projects involved in providing "foreign aid" meet to discuss their prospects. Their declared purposes are various, but they share certain common aims which the more realistic among them are willing to state openly: the subversion of social institutions, the destruction of ways of life, the recruitment of labour for building, and the procurement of children for education. In order to help the tribesmen in all these ways the various groups are being forced to use subtle confidence tricks to cheat them out of their traditional patterns of culture. The purpose of the conference is to discuss the informal co-ordination of

projects which, for political reasons, are insufficiently co-ordinated at the planning level.

Most of the agencies involved in these schemes use American negroes as their field-workers, because this is the only way that the various strategies they employ can be made to work, the tribesmen being extremely suspicious of white men. This, however, creates an awkward conflict of loyalties for many of the field-workers, who are totally dedicated to their work (and to the idea of progress) while finding much to despise in the cynical machinations of their white superiors, who are using African aid as an instrument of exploitation and as a diplomatic weapon in their "cold war".

The conference in *Black Man's Burden* reveals that an imaginary charismatic prophet, El Hassan, invented by one of the groups as an instrument of propaganda, has been taken up by some of the others, so that his name has been spread far and wide as that of a great reformer. After the conference, the group who invented him are recalled to base and given a new mission: to locate El Hassan and to figure out exactly where he stands. All the would-be manipulators want to find this new influential figure in order to co-opt him as a pawn. The heroes refuse to accept the new commission, deciding that it is time a new force entered the diplomatic field of play – one whose direct commitment is to the cause of African progress without being anyone's pawn. One of their number becomes El Hassan, and sets out to liberate North Africa. *Border, Breed Nor Birth* continues the story with an account of the first steps in this ambitious programme, ending with the first great battle (against the Arab Legion).

The two stories are remarkable on several counts. Their subject matter was entirely new to the sf of the day (and there has been no significant attempt to develop it since). Some of its premises seemed particularly apt – the notion of the role played by American negroes in political dealings with Africa, for instance. (In the stories, the Communist bloc are handicapped because they have so very few black agents, but they do use Cuban troops – a minor point of prophetic success.) The plot of each novel revolves around the infiltration of El Hassan's cadre by agents commissioned to destroy it. In each case the agent is black, and in the second case much is accomplished by the defection of the agent to the cause. This pattern is repeated yet again in a third volume added to the series much later – *The Best Ye Breed* (1978) – and is also widely featured in Reynolds's other work dealing with subversive movements in Russia and America. *Black Man's Burden* and *Border, Breed Nor Birth* figure among Reynolds's most convincing work largely because it is easy to see exactly what the heroes are fighting *for*. Their political objectives are clear, because we know exactly what will constitute *progress* within the framework of the story, and what cultural forces act in opposition to it. The strength of Reynolds's commitment is easy to see, not only because of his recurrent use of the heroic turncoat as a key character, but also in his ready identification of the evils against which his characters must fight. These are the three major orthodoxies: the Eastern and Western versions of political orthodoxy and the Moslem version of religious orthodoxy.

The first two novels in this series suffered the disadvantage of not appearing in book form until they were out of date. *The Best Ye Breed*, which takes up the

narrative at precisely the point at which it was abandoned sixteen years previously, seems to be a pointless exercise, perhaps motivated by the fact that it re-uses a 1973 story "The Cold War – Continued" and thus represents one of the exercises in story-inflation of which Reynolds is so fond. There is also a fourth story in the series, "Black Sheep Astray", which Reynolds did for the John W. Campbell memorial anthology *Astounding* (1973), which deals with the ultimate fate of the successful El Hassan in the more distant future. It is neat enough in execution, but loses its pertinence and some of its strength because the political goals implicit in it are no longer so clear or so instantly acceptable.

As "Farmer" heralded the coming of a series of stories about the forces opposing progress in near-future Africa, so "Status Quo" adumbrated a series about the forces opposing progress in near-future America. This began with "Mercenary" (*Analog*, April 1962; expanded as *Mercenary From Tomorrow*, 1968). The situation envisaged here is much more bizarre than anything in Reynolds's straightforward stories about Russia or Africa, being more a caricature than a reasonable extrapolation. In order to indict trends in American society it was necessary for the author to make the image of American society held up for criticism clearly distinct from the America his readers knew and loved, though the extent to which this stratagem was conscious is dubious.

In "Mercenary" America's population is distributed into nine officially-recognized social classes, ranging from Upper-Upper to Lower-Lower through all the possible permutations of the designations Upper, Middle and Lower. People inherit their status at birth, and with it their "occupational category". Most such categories have now become redundant because automation has taken over practically all manufacturing processes, and this means that for most people the possibility of status-promotion is negligible. The economic system of the future America is "People's Capitalism", and its major features are the protection of inherited wealth (which sanctifies and sustains the status-hierarchy) and the provision of social security for all citizens through the issue to everyone of shares in "Common Basic Stock". This Common Basic Stock originated when the government began taxing major corporations by appropriating some of their stock rather than cash from their profits. The dividends on these shares then became the source of all welfare payments, so that the fortunes of every citizen became linked to the success of the country's major industries. This kind of system appears in virtually all of Reynolds's stories about near-future America, sometimes called "Guaranteed Annual Income" or "Negative Income Tax", and in his view constitutes a rationalization of the system which effectively exists at the present time. The logic of the situation is amply exposed in "Mercenary": because the great majority of people are unemployed, having been made redundant by technology, they are all dependent upon the income they get as a result of being small-time capitalists, and thus have everything to lose, in the short term, if anything should interfere with the smooth running of the system. The prospect of a revolution therefore seems remote – and yet the system holds back progress by sustaining a social hierarchy in which positions of importance are determined by the inheritance of wealth.

In the world of "Mercenary" there are two occupational categories in which it is potentially possible for Lower class individuals to win promotion: Category Religion and Category Military. The latter offers faster mobility at much higher risk, and also recruits constantly from other occupational categories. Wars are no longer fought in this particular future, the campaign for international disarmament having been so successful that all weapons invented later than the year 1900 are banned. However, the Category Military thrives because the entertainment-hungry American masses love watching small-scale battles on TV, and to supply this demand the curious practice has emerged of settling industrial disputes in trial by combat. (The disputes are, of course, between rival companies, not between companies and their workforces.) These "fracases" are bloody, and common soldiers suffer a high mortality rate, but promotion is relatively swift where genuine ability is there to be recognised.

The hero of "Mercenary" is Joe Mauser, determined to become the first man to win promotion into the Upper classes in many years. As the story starts he is already a man of great competence, but his career has begun to stagnate because his ability and heroism have not caught the eye of the public. He is "adopted" by a TV cameraman who sets out to make him a star, and decides to take a big risk by signing on with the underdogs in a particular dispute, intending to win the battle against all the odds by a daring innovation whose legitimacy under the disarmament treaty is dubious. He wins the battle but loses his own private war, firstly because his employer dies and the son who inherits the company has transferred his own fortune into the shares of the rival company in anticipation of defeat, and secondly because his innovation is declared illegal. This second fact is not made known until the sequel to "Mercenary", *Frigid Fracas* (*Analog*, March-April 1963; published in book form the same year as *The Earth War*), which continues Mauser's story.

Robbed of his opportunity to reach the top, Mauser is transformed in the second story into a revolutionary. He is sent to the Soviet bloc – now dominated by Hungary – to contact the underground forces working against the Communist system with a view to co-ordinating operations. The intention is to prepare for the overthrowing not only of the respective governmental systems but also the rigid pattern of international relations which helps to sustain them: the "frigid fracas" (cold war). Mauser learns that Eastern Europe is in every much the same situation as the West, with the revolution having led to a status-hierarchy (the inner structure of the party) just as rigid and stultifying as that which has overtaken People's capitalism. Colonel Kossuth, the mouthpiece of the underground contacted by Mauser, offers the following synoptic "history" of the Soviet bloc:

> "Stalin, in particular, but others too, both before and following him, were ruthless in their determination to achieve industrialization and raise the Sov-world to the level of the most advanced countries . . . To accomplish these things, the Party had to, and did, become a strong, ruthless, even merciless organization, with all power safely – from its viewpoint, of course – in its hands. And, in spite of all handicaps and setbacks, eventually succeeded in the task it had set itself . . . But then comes the rub. Have you ever heard, Major Mauser, of a ruling class, caste, clique, call it what you will, which stepped down from power freely and willingly, handing over the reins to some other element? . . . A ruling caste, like a socio-economic system itself, when taken as a whole, instinctively perpetuates its life, as though a living organism. It cannot understand, will not admit, that it is ever time to die."[3]

In Reynolds's view, it is inevitable that the centralised State Bureaucracy of the communist countries will become a self-perpetuating, rigidly-stratified elite. The same, he suggests, may well be true of America. The conclusion of the Mauser/Kossuth debate and of the novel in which it appears is contained in Mauser's report back to his superiors:

> "I don't know why it didn't occur to any of us that the problems of the West-world and those of the Sov-world at long last have become similar, almost identical. Both, following different paths, have achieved the affluent society, so called. But in doing it, both managed to inflict upon themselves a caste system that perpetuated itself eventually to the detriment of progress. In the past, revolutions used to be accomplished by the masses, pushed beyond the point of endurance. A starving lower class, trying to change the rules of society so as to realize a better life. But now, in neither West nor in the Sov-world are there any starving. The majority of Lowers and Proletarians are well clothed, fed and housed, and bemused by fracases and trank pills, or their equivalent over there . . .
>
> "The best elements in both countries have finally realized that changes must be made. These elements, the more capable, more competent, more intelligent, already are *running* each country though they are not necessarily Uppers or Party members."[4]

This message is repeated almost verbatim in the third novel in this series, *Sweet Dreams, Sweet Princes* (*Analog*, October-December 1964; in book form as *Time Gladiator*, 1966), which has a very similar theme focusing on a different hero. The scenario here is even more exaggerated, with the assumption that the masses are to be kept happy with the revival in America of gladiatorial games. All Reynolds's series deteriorate as they grow, and *Time Gladiator* is no exception, adding nothing new to the basic idea in terms of further extrapolation of the more interesting premise.

A very similar message to that contained in *Frigid Fracas* is featured in a novella which appeared at about the same time – "Speakeasy" (*F&SF*, January 1963; expanded as *The Cosmic Eye*, 1969). This is, however, a hopelessly unconvincing story built around its punning title. In a conformist America of the future free speech is driven underground, into "dens of vice" set up so that amateur intellectuals can get high on political argument. The hero of the story is an out-and-out revolutionary who plans a lone career of terrorism, but finds out eventually that some of the political elite are already trying to figure out how to take the reins of power away from their oppressive governmental apparatus.

Reynolds's next novel after *Sweet Dreams, Sweet Princes* was *Of Godlike Power* (*Worlds of Tomorrow*, June-September 1965; in book form, 1966), in which he continued to pay attention to the matter of circuses to keep the masses entertained. The setting of this novel is the immediate future, and it features the confrontation between the status-conscious host of a radio programme, Ed Wonder, and a lay preacher named Ezekiel Josh Tubber. Wonder manages to get Tubber on to his chat show, intending to hold him up to ridicule, and provokes him to extreme anger. The trouble is that Tubber's curses really work. He has already cursed "the vainglory of women" and thereby destroyed the cosmetics industry and the fashion world, and now he curses radio and TV, destroying virtually all of the entertainment industry (the remainder of the popular media are taken care of in a series of afterthoughts).

In this novel it is not easy to see exactly where Reynolds stands. The "hero", Ed Wonder, is an unsympathetic embodiment of the value-system already satirized

in "Status Quo", but Tubber's extremism takes him far beyond the bounds of reason. As in much previous work, it is easy to see what the author is attacking, but not at all easy to see anything constructive beyond his iconoclasm. Tubber's cult runs a community called Elysium in the tradition of the utopian experiments of Robert Owen and Josiah Warren, where the philosophy of consumerism has been cast out as wasteful and soul-destroying, but Reynolds – though he clearly admires the community – can hardly be said to be recommending its way of life. The only point which he really has to make here is a critical one, summed up by Tubber before he falls victim to the mob whose circuses he has taken away:

> "Our best brains are utilized contriving . . . nonsense and then selling it. On top of that, we are using up our resources to the point that already we are a have-not nation. We must import our raw materials. Our mountains of iron, our seas of oil, our once seemingly endless natural resources have been flushed down the sewers of this throwaway economy. On top of it all, what do you suppose this sort of thing is doing, ultimately, to the intellects of our people? How can a people maintain their collective dignity, integrity and sense of fitness if they can be so easily coerced into desires for nonsense things, status symbols, nothing things, largely *because the next door neighbour has one*, or some third rate cinema performer does?"[5]

To all of this Ed Wonder's objection is quite simple. This, he argues, is what people *want*. There is simply no demand for the simple life as lived in Elysium. Tubber replies:

> "That's what people are *taught* to want. We must reverse ourselves. We have solved the problems of production of abundance, now man should settle down and take stock of himself, work out his path to his destiny, his Elysium. The overwhelming majority of our scientists are working either on methods of destruction, or the creation of new products which our people do not either need or want. Instead, they should be working upon the curing of man's ills, delving into the secrets of the All-Mother, plumbing the ocean's depths, reaching out to the stars."[6]

Wonder's view is, however, the more realistic. This is *not* what people want, whether or not they want or have been taught to want what they have instead. *Of Godlike Power* ends with all the curses withdrawn and Tubber running for political office. The opinion polls are suggesting that he will actually win, but at this point the novel breaks off, having strayed beyond the bounds of credibility.

Up to this point in time (mid-1965) Reynolds had enjoyed no conspicuous success as an sf writer. He had sold a considerable amount of wordage to *Analog* but had published only one sf book (*The Earth War*). In 1965 there followed *Planetary Agent X*, containing "Ultima Thule" and another novelette which was intended for *Analog* but never actually appeared there. In the next three years, however, he published ten further paperbacks, and this change in his fortunes seems to have been associated with a change in policy. From *Space Pioneer* (*Analog*, September-November 1965; in book form 1966) his priorities seemed to become much more rigidly commercial. His novels had always been peppered with spies and duels, but these had usually been secondary to the main focus of interest within his stories. Now plot moved very much into the foreground of his stories, and socioeconomic speculation was

largely abandoned. He continued to use elements of his older scenarios – in particular, the United Planets background – but only for the sake of convenience.

Most of the fiction that Reynolds produced between late 1965 and the middle of 1969 is positively awful, the most striking example being the United Planets series, which got steadily sillier as it progressed through *Beehive* (*Analog*, December 1965-January 1966; in book form as *Dawnman Planet*, 1967), *Amazon Planet* (*Analog*, December 1966-February 1967; in book form 1975), "Fiesta Brava" (*Analog*, September 1967; in book form combined with two short stories as *Section G; United Planets*, 1976) and *Code Duello* (in book form only 1968).

In 1969, however, the flood dried up completely. Reynolds published no science fiction at all in 1971 or 1972, and only one short story in 1970. For ten years he had been the most prolific contributor to *Analog*, but after publication of *The Five-Way Secret Agent* (April-May 1969; in book form 1975) he disappeared from its pages for eight years, reappearing only in 1977 with *Of Future Fears* (October-December). Why this happened only Reynolds can say, but it is probably not unconnected with the fact that in 1970 his principal paperback publisher, Ace, was taken over, and for a while virtually suspended operations. When Ace's production got fully under way again in 1975 they released fourteen Reynolds novels in three years, and one is inclined to presume that this log jam had built up much earlier. This can hardly have been the only reason for Reynolds's sudden disenchantment with sf, but it may well have been a contributory factor. It is, however, undoubtedly significant that the first new work which Reynolds produced in 1973, when his science fiction began once again to appear in some quantity, was *Looking Backward from the Year 2000*. This suggests that there was, indeed, genuine disenchantment involved in his temporary resignation from the field, and that he returned with his more serious intentions renewed and revitalised.

Few of the stories which first appeared between mid-1965 and 1969 are worth more than a passing mention in the context of the present article. A series published under the pseudonym "Guy McCord" in *Analog* and reprinted under Reynolds's own name as *The Space Barbarians* in 1969 is an interesting "lost colony" thriller in which a barbaric culture modelled jointly on the tribes of the Scottish Highlands and the North American Indians fights against the attempts of other-worlders to exploit and civilize them. In the first part ("Coup", *Analog*, November 1967) the author's sympathies are well and truly aligned with the barbarians, but when he added the other two parts (both appearing for the first time in 1969) he was more concerned with helping his hero adjust to the inevitability and ultimate desirability of progress. Similar signs of a return to serious intent are found in the other two novels published in the magazines in 1969: *The Five-Way Secret Agent* and *The Towns Must Roll* (*If*, July-September; expanded as *Rolltown*, 1976). Both these novels helped to bridge the gap in Reynolds's career by introducing characters who reappeared in later novels.

The Five-Way Secret Agent features Rex Bader, an underdog in the affluent society of future America. The caricature status-hierarchy of "Mercenary" is no longer in evidence here, and much emphasis is given to the role played by computers in the running of the society (a theme introduced into Reynolds's work in the spectacularly bad *Computer War*, serialised in *Analog* in June-July 1967 and reprinted as

a book the same year, and developed rather more thoughtfully in *The Computer Conspiracy*, serialised in *If* in November-December 1968). Bader, like most of the population, is living on Negative Income Tax while studying hard in the hope of getting a job in space, and meanwhile offering his services to any takers as a private detective. As there is no work whatsoever for private detectives he is somewhat surprised to find himself hired simultaneously by several different agencies. He is commissioned by a client to contact various individuals in Eastern Europe with a view to initiating a network of multinational corporations which will eventually take over the world. The Mafia, the Inter-American Bureau of Investigation and a mysterious subversive organization called the Technocrats all hire him to betray this original trust, and he decides to complicate matters further by planning to play a hand in the affair himself. The story is ludicrously implausible, but it is important within the developing context of Reynolds's work because it is, in a sense, a scenario-update of the future America envisaged in "Mercenary". Its message is in some ways similar to that of *Frigid Fracas*, but there is a new note of optimism in connection with the revised background. The spokesman for the emergent era who explains to Bader exactly which way the world is going repeats much of what Colonel Kossuth told Joe Mauser, but adds his own prospectus for a better future. The old political elites are simply fading away because they are redundant, and the *real* power is now vested in the intelligentsia who are actually running things, and it is in the interests of East and West that they should combine forces:

> "Obviously, the cosmocorps are the future. International borderlines are no longer valid . . . It will not be an overnight affair, but we must begin and the sooner the better. Urge Mr Roget to push the internationalization of communications bill through your Congress. If and when it passes, whether or not the Party would like it so, there will have to be an International congress to discuss the matter . . . When and if the governments of both the West and the Soviet Complex have agreed, a new type of cosmocorps will have to be set up, possibly in Switzerland. Very well, Mr Bader, that cosmocorps will be our point of contact with our fellows in the West. There we will lay our plans for future ventures."[7]

The "cosmocorps" referred to are, of course, the successors to the multinational corporations of today. It was in these institutions – and the fact that as productive endeavours they have to be run by intelligent people promoted on merit (Meritocrats) – that Reynolds saw in 1969 a possible way out of the impasse which he had discovered in "Mercenary" in 1962.

In *The Towns Must Roll* Reynolds addressed himself in a more optimistic frame of mind to the awkward conclusion of *Of Godlike Power*, imagining a near-future America in which the millions made redundant by mechanization and living on Negative Income Tax can institute their own "mini-utopias" by gathering together into communes and whole towns full of mobile homes which can migrate in search of new inspiration. The novel concerns the misadventures of one particular mobile town as it travels south through Mexico, awakening the envy and resentment of the local populace. Reynolds was later to expand the theme to cover a wider range of possible lifestyles in the novel *Commune 2000* (1974). Though not wholeheartedly utopian this notion of a "patchwork" society serving all possible idiosyncrasies was taken up by another writer determined to use sf as a medium for exploring utopian possibilities, Ray Nelson, in the rather weak-kneed novel *If*

Beggars Could Ride.

Both *The Five-Way Secret Agent* and *The Towns Must Roll* may be regarded as in some sense setting the scene for *Looking Backward from the Year 2000*, in that they explore some of the ideas later to be used therein. The optimism which infuses them was clearly the motive force which led Reynolds to attempt the challenging project of designing a high-technology utopia. Before going on to discuss the book, however, it is worth noting the one short story which Reynolds published in 1970, "Utopian", which was written for Harry Harrison's anthology *The Year 2000*, and which later became the starting point of one of the "sequels" to *Looking Backward, After Utopia* (1977). This sounds a cautionary note, in that it concerns a revolutionary of today brought forward in time into a utopia of abundance by dissenters who feel that society is stagnating because life is too easy. This raises, in advance of *Looking Backward from the Year 2000* and its sequel *Equality in the Year 2000* (1977), the *next* question: after we achieve utopia, what do we do then?

Looking Backward from the Year 2000 takes its title from Edward Bellamy's classic utopian novel of 1888. It retains the same basic plot-structure and gives the same names to its central characters. The political philosophy which informs the two books is basically similar – identical assumptions are made concerning the principles of social justice embodied in the economic system, and concerning the distribution of wealth.

The main features of the society depicted in Bellamy's novel are as follows:

1. All incomes are equal, and this is not conditional on employment. People work because they want to, and are free to choose their jobs. Less pleasant occupations are made more attractive by shortening the number of hours to be worked, and manipulations of this sort are carried out according to the principle of regulation by supply and demand, so that no occupation becomes undersubscribed or oversubscribed. Where there are still too many volunteers the most able candidates are selected. Promotion within occupations is strictly meritocratic.

2. The lack of economic incentives is compensated by competition for honour and prestige. Effort is rewarded by praise and lack of it discouraged by disapproval.

3. The system of government is democratic, but the nature of its political institutions is left rather vague. The government has, however, "merged" its functions and its bureaucratic operations with those of the larger corporations, so that virtually all public services and manufacturing industries have effectively been nationalized.

4. All problems of deviance have disappeared because all the economic motives for crime have been removed.

All of these features are retained by Reynolds in his utopian design. The most obvious differences between his version of the year 2000 and Bellamy's are the very different level of technology and unemployment. (The two do, of course, go hand in hand.) Though Bellamy looked to the industrial revolution to provide the means of production necessary to facilitate the reorganization of society on socialist lines, he had little to say about new sources of power or more sophisticated machines. He

is essentially an economy of *moderation* rather than an economy of abundance. Reynolds's is very much the latter – power is available on an unlimited scale thanks to nuclear fusion, and there is no resource crisis because unlimited power means unlimited opportunity to recycle everything that we use and to extract metals from the earth and the sea. Thus, where Bellamy considered that there would still be sufficient labour-intensive industry and bureaucracy to absorb a large work-force, Reynolds foresees virtually all work being automated and bureaucratic functions beind handled by computers, thus leaving a large majority of the citizens permanently and irredeemably unemployed. This creates a major problem of incentive – Bellamy's supposition that honour and prestige can supply an adequate substitute for economic incentive is weak in any case, and it becomes dangerously weak if there is nothing that most of the people can be honoured *for*. Thus, Reynolds is compelled to introduce a further factor into his vision of the future, which is the notion that all ambitions but currently unemployed people spend most of their time in the pursuit of knowledge and educational qualifications in the hope of getting employment or at least obtaining some prestige in their chosen academic field. Education is completely computerized, so that this kind of endeavour involves little more than constant confrontation with a computer terminal.

There is much in Reynolds's image of the year 2000 which reflects the interests and speculations of contemporary social philosophers, and in choosing the particular framework which he does he emphasizes the extent to which modern "futurology" is, indeed, recapitulative of nineteenth-century utopian speculation. Thus, *Looking Backward from the Year 2000* echoes Herman Kahn, Anthony Wiener and Herbert Marcuse in its development of the idea of an economy of abundance, Daniel Bell, Alain Touraine, Jurgen Habermas and J.K. Galbraith in its preoccupation with the production of knowledge and the function of knowledge as a crucial social resource. Though Reynolds, like Bellamy, leaves his notion of the merging of political and economic structures rather vague one of his main sources of inspiration is clearly Galbraith's *The New Industrial State*. Both Reynolds's *Looking Backward* and its sequel are peppered with quotes from contemporary social philosophers and journalistic speculators.

There is, of course, much in Reynolds's novel which stands in stark contrast to various American sociopolitical ideologies, most particularly his insistence on the demolition of economic incentives. Economic exchange in this future America is arranged on what is virtually a barter system, the exchange rates pertinent to various products being assessed according to the labour theory of value. (The merits of the labour theory had been discussed previously by Reynolds in – of all places – *Amazon Planet*, where he was careful to point out that its originator was not Karl Marx but Benjamin Franklin.) If there is one idea in *Looking Backward to the Year 2000* which seems certain to offend most of the book's readers it is the notion of equal incomes for *everyone*, regardless of position or productivity. When the hero of the book, who was a wealthy palyboy before being put into suspended animation in the early seventies, hears that most of the population is unemployed but nevertheless drawing the same salary as everyone else he immediately suggests that they are parasites. His hosts, however, justify their society's adherence to the principle of "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need" as

follows:

> "None of them are parasites, Jule. And neither are you. Today – forgive me for lecturing – today, in a computerized, automated factory which produces, say, shoes, two or three men on a shift may supervise the production of a hundred thousand pairs of shoes a day. But it is not just the three men who are producing those shoes. It is the whole human race down through the centuries. If they were working alone, without the whole race backing them, it is doubtful if they could produce more than a pair or two of shoes apiece, per day. But they have inherited the efforts of a hundred thousand generations of their ancestors. A million years ago an early man discovered how to use fire. Another devised the first crude stone tool. Many generations later, animals were domesticated, agriculture stumbled upon, the wheel invented, the use of metals begun. Mans' background of knowledge increased and increased and soon every generation was contributing. This legacy of invention and development doesn't belong to one man nor to any group of men. It belongs to the whole race. As a result of it, we have finally reached the point where a fraction of our people can produce an abundance for all."[8]

This is the central tenet of Reynolds's political philosophy, here expressed for the first time in terms of a positive prospectus rather than a covertly-held position used as a standpoint for the criticism of dystopian regimes. Its basic claim is quite simple: progress, from the moment it first began, has been the work of the whole human race; it is essentially a collective endeavour. Its benefits, therefore, should accrue to us all, equally and without discrimination on the grounds of whether we are occupied in productive labour, or even the production of more progress. On this model, all of history consists of the efforts of individual men, social groups and whole nations to seize for their own particular advantage what is really the common property of the race. This is not a view likely to have won the immediate approval of sympathizers with the American Libertarian movement – or, for that matter, from John W. Campbell, who once enthused about a series of openly didactic stories by Raymond F. Jones which suggested that Isaac Newton should have been able to patent the law of gravity, and that modern theoreticians who make equally important discoveries should keep their knowledge secret until they are allowed to patent them. (Isaac Newton himself, of course, was ready to admit that he had seen further than other men "by standing on the shoulders of giants" and had a craving for recognition which might have allowed him to fit in rather well in Reynolds's prestige-incentive society.)

There are, of course, several objections which can be raised with respect to the credibility of the societies designed by Bellamy and Reynolds, and perhaps the main weakness of Reynolds's book is the fact that in following its model so closely it fails to immunize itself against some fairly obvious criticisms. Bellamy's case rests upon numerous assumptions, of which three are especially weak. These are the assumption that social approval and censure (whether formal or informal) can adequately substitute for economic incentives; the assumption that equal incomes for everyone will actually operate to cancel out envy and greed to the extent that there is no widespread social dissatisfaction or crime; and the assumption that the people who occupy positions of power will not use their power corruptly. These three assumptions are, of course, interlinked and eventually they can be traced back to the fundamental assumption that the evils which exist in our society are the result of flaws in social structure and organization rather than flaws in "human nature". Bellamy's view of man is thus markedly akin to that of Marx, who saw

human consciousness determined by social conditions, and considered that in the appropriate social circumstances men would be happy, sociable, generous and good. This contrasts starkly, of course, with other notions of human nature – for example, that assumed by another of the fathers of modern sociology, Emile Durkheim, who saw human nature as fundamentally a collection of insatiable desires which must be held firmly in check by powerful socially-imposed constraints. Whereas Marx saw contemporary social constraints as sources of "alienation" without which men could be free, Durkheim saw moral norms as essential to mental well-being, and argued that where they became weak men suffered from "anomie".

Reynolds, in following Bellamy, clearly retains a basic commitment to the Marxian model of human nature, but it is interesting that throughout his work he seems to find great difficulty in believing it. It is his inability to accept this particular item of faith which, more than anything else, was responsible for his retreat from the utopian image of the year 2000 in work published in 1977 and 1978. Even in *Looking Backward from the Year 2000* and *Equality in the Year 2000* (which also takes its title from Bellamy) there is a curious prevarication in this respect. The first book has an ironically unhappy ending when the hero realizes that there is no place in the new world for him because he cannot hope to get a job or to catch up the thirty-year gap in his education. In the sequel, this situation is resolved because Reynolds borrows from a novel which he wrote in the interim, *Ability Quotient* (1976), a technique for enhancing the power of the brain to enable it to absorb and take command of new knowledge at a vastly increased rate. However, in the second novel the hero meets up with a whole "underground movement" of dissatisfied individuals who wish to overthrow the meritocratic utopia. The movement's plans are thwarted, but the very admission that such people *could* exist is a dangerous one which calls into question the assumptions upon which the society's utopian claims rest.

In *Perchance to Dream* (1977) and *After Utopia* the doubts haunting Reynolds's image of the perfect world crystallise out into a line of thought which leads inexorably to the collapse of the image. These novels were not the first in which Reynolds had extended his speculations about possible societies of the year 2000 to incorporate doubts about its utopian potential, but they are the most damning. *Commune 2000* deals in a cursory manner with the possibility of political corruption on the part of the people who are in positions of real power (the people who run the computers), but is basically an optimistic work, while *The Towers of Utopia* (1975) examines some of the day-to-day problems which might arise in running the gigantic skyscraper-towns which play such an important part in the world of *Looking Backward*, never losing the conviction that such problems could be coped with adequately. *Perchance to Dream*, however, introduces a much more ominous note into the discussion. It is a curious story featuring a new invention, the "intuitive computer", which is basically a machine for synthesizing experiences. These experiences can be reconstructions of actual historical events or pure fantasies, and the machine thus offers both the perfect means of historical "research" and the perfect vehicle for indulgence in "escapist" hallucinations. The hero of the novel spends alternate chapters using the machine to reconstruct the life of the Roman

Horatius, whose fame was reinforced by the best-remembered of Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, while the rest of the narrative is concerned with the ridiculously inefficient attempts of various interested parties to steal it from him. The Roman sequences form a story that is one of Reynolds's best works, showing none of the faults of dialogue-construction and lifestyle-depiction which mar his near-future stories, and the novel obtained a couple of Nebula recommendations on the strength of it, but the book is really little more than a preface to *After Utopia.*

The hero of *After Utopia* is a dedicated member of a revolutionary organization whose nature is unspecified but whose political ideology is generally anarchistic. He is in some mysterious manner "hypnotized" into stealing the movement's funds and putting himself into suspended animation so that he wakes up in the middle of the 21st century. His hosts are themselves aspiring revolutionaries who have brought him out of his own time in order to advise them as to how to overthrow their society, which is the world of *Looking Backward* half a century on and already decaying. The reason for the decay is that the lack of incentives provided for the vast majority of the people has resulted in the rapid spread of the intuitive computers, functioning as "dream machines". The entire population of the world seems to be on the brink of forsaking real existence altogether in favour of the infinite reaches of synthetic experience which the machines can provide.

The idea that a high-technology society might fall prey to this kind of fate is, of course, hardly new. In fact, it has been one of the perennial nightmares of twentieth century science fiction. The notion of men whose needs are entirely supplied by machines becoming useless lotus-eaters forms the central argument of many indictments of pseudo-utopian futures, from Forster's "The Machine Stops" through Breuer's *Paradise and Iron* and "Don A. Stuart's" "Twilight" to Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day*. A premise virtually identical to that used by Reynolds in *After Utopia* was employed by Fletcher Pratt and Laurence Manning in "The City of the Living Dead" in Gernsback's *Science Wonder Stories* in 1930.

The charges laid against such models of society as are presented by these stories assume that given the opportunity men will retreat from real life in pursuit of pure pleasure, stagnating psychologically and taking society into the grip of total decadence. The reason, of course, that we find the prospect so horrible is that we find it so plausible: we can easily imagine ourselves falling prey to such temptation and feel that we would find it irresistible even while our intellects rebelled against it. However, if the Marxian image of man were really viable this fear would be chimerical, for it would only be alienated men who needed or wished for this ultimate opiate. In a "true" communist society these dream machines would be used purposively, as a source of intellectual stimulus and as an art-form. *After Utopia*, unlike *Looking Backward from the Year 2000*, assumes the Durkheimian image of man whose insatiable desires will inevitably lead to self-destruction if not checked by external constraints.

The "solution" discovered by the hero of *After Utopia* is as commonplace (at least within the mythology of science fiction) as the problem. Section G of the United Planets Organization rationalized their commitment to progress by reference to a prospective alien enemy, and *After Utopia* shares with another Reynolds novel published a few months later (*Space Visitor* 1977) the assumption

that if such an enemy does not exist it is necessary to invent one. The logic of the solution is simple enough: nothing assures social solidarity and commitment to purposive endeavour better than a state of war, or a state of high anxiety aroused by the prospect of war. There are, however, other sides to the question, one of which is featured (albeit in a rather blurred fashion) in another recent Reynolds novel, *Galactic Medal of Honour* (1976; expanded from a 1960 novelette). This novel points out that preparedness for war may eventually create conflict where none need exist, and also that the commitment to production and self-sacrifice engendered by the threat will lead to the mass-production of things that ordinary men neither want nor need, thus wasting resources without any real gain in the quality of life.

What this confusion of viewpoints serves to emphasize is the circularity of the argument first set forth in "Ultima Thule" to the effect that progress is necessary in order that we might compete with possible enemies we might one day meet. In *After Utopia* and *Space Visitor* this becomes an obvious self-deception, for the alien enemy is here invented solely in order to establish a commitment to collective endeavour in the name of progress. In the final analysis, the commitment to progress is the one fundamental value-judgment that Reynolds makes, and all of his socio-economic speculation seems once again to revolve around the argument which he put forward as the "moral" of "Ultima Thule" – that in the end just about any sociopolitical system can be justified if it encourages progress. Reynolds's one real doubt about his utopian vision as sketched out in *Looking Backward* and *Equality* is not that it might not arrive (he never claims more for it than that it is a possibility that *might* be realized if we work at it) but that it might lose its progressive impetus. When we realize this, we can see that *Looking Backward from the Year 2000* is, despite its politically controversial nature, a less subversive work than it might at first appear, for its frank espousal of the political ideology of egalitarian socialism is really a secondary issue. The book's first and foremost loyalty is to the mythology of progress, and it is this aspect of it which invites more detailed discussion in relation to sociological theories of social change.

One of the most striking weaknesses of both Bellamy's and Reynolds's utopian novels is their vagueness in drawing a historical connection between future and present. In both cases the heroes ask in open amazement how on earth all this can have come about, and they are told with a shrug of the shoulders that it just happened, and that once it *had* happened it seemed so natural. Bellamy adds to this some oblique comments on processes of social evolution, but without specifying how these processes are governed.

Clearly, neither writer employs the Marxist theory of social change, which saw the process of history in the development of class-conflicts which could only be resolved by revolution and the metamorphosis of the economic system. On the other hand, neither writer assumes that social change is an altogether arbitrary process because both accept that some kind of progressive and teleological element is built into it. It is not obvious, however, how either writer interprets the word "progress". The advancement of knowledge and technology is a part of it, but

not the whole, for both also consider that there is some kind of *liberation* involved – that men once oppressed by circumstance and by one another are being made free. Knowledge and technology, providing resources for the control of the environment, are a major part of this process of liberation, but not all – a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of it. What, then, is the remainder?

The idea of progress was a product of the Enlightenment, emerging first and most powerfully in pre-Revolutionary France. We find it occupying a central position in the social philosophy of all French writers of the period. Turgot, Condorcet, Saint-Simon and Comte form a tradition of thought extending from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth, the central tenet of which was expressed by Condorcet in *The Progress of the Human Mind* (1974):

> "Nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties . . . the perfectibility of man is truly infinite; and . . . the progress of this perfectibility, from now on independent of any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us."

It was this notion which informed the earliest of the futuristic utopias (Mercier's *L'An 2440*, published in 1772, is the most famous). It was the same motion that impelled Hugo Gernsback to found *Amazing Stories* as a vehicle for a utopian "scientifiction" which would remind America of the perfectibility of man armed with the mechanical arts, and to feature such stories as Otfrid von Hanstein's *Electropolis* (1930) and Lilith Lorraine's "Into the 28th Century" (1930). By this time, however, the notion was already losing some of its glitter and its credibility, and the next twenty years were to see the decline and fall of the mythology of utopian progress and the perfectibility of man. Bertrand Russell was among the first to put the case for the opposition when he wrote in 1924:

> "Science has not given men more self-control, more kindliness, or more power of discounting their passions in deciding upon a course of action. It has given communities more power to indulge their collective passions, but, by making society more organic, it has diminished the part played by private passions. Men's collective passions are mainly evil; far the strongest of them are hatred and rivalry directed towards other groups. Therefore at present all that gives men power to indulge their collective passions is bad. That is why science threatens to cause the destruction of our civilization."

Here, what is taken for granted is the opposite of what was assumed by Condorcet and his allies: here it is the *im*perfectibility of man that is stoutly and confidently declared, and on that basis the value of technological advancement is challenged. It is here argued that the power provided by the growth of knowledge (which includes the power to manipulate the minds of men as well as the power to manipulate the environment) will necessarily be misused.

The predicament of Reynolds – the only contemporary science fiction writer to have made a serious attempt to design a utopian society – becomes clear when we realise the extent to which his acceptance of the imperfectibility of man prejudices his utopian optimism. We find it almost impossible to believe that the world of his *Looking Backward* could ever come about – and even he finds it almost impossible to believe that its pretensions could be sustained – because we can no longer accept what the Marquis de Condorcet took for granted.

What Reynolds must find, therefore, to add to the advancement of knowledge in order to make up his particular idea of progress is some substitute for the myth of the perfectibility of man. This is what he does not seem to have, for when his characters are actually forced back to defining what they mean by progress, or what they consider to be the purpose of human endeavour, no such substitute features in their replies. Thus, for instance, the would-be American revolutionary in the short story "The Throwaway Age" (*Worlds of Tomorrow* Winter 1967) can only reply, when asked about his ultimate aims:

> "I guess the ultimate goal, Paul, man's ultimate goal, is total understanding of the cosmos."[9]

It is not particularly surprising to find this statement of purpose being put forward by a science fiction writer, in that it can be said to be the implicit goal of all scientific endeavour, but it is not easy to see how it can be expected to stand alone as the focal point of *political* philosophy, without the addition of extra value-judgments about the constituency of the "good life" and hence about the way societies ought to be organized. There *is* some kind of additional commitment in Reynolds's philosophy of progress, because there has to be in order to render his speculations intelligible, but it remains both covert and uncertain. He cannot spell it out, it seems, because he is himself unsure of what it amounts to. It is this deficiency that represents the real failure of *Looking Backward from the Year 2000* and its sequel, and not the fact that it fails to convince as an image of our future. The failure is perhaps even more obvious in the recent novel where Reynolds describes the new American "revolution" which clears away the dead wood of the old system and opens the door to Utopian reorganization, *Trample an Empire Down* (1978). The revolutionaries here start a new political party largely because they are bored, and evolve a crazy patchwork of programmes and strategies, recruiting members by the techniques of pyramid selling. Their success takes them entirely by surprise, and is played by the author mainly for laughs. The novel seems slightly surreal – a satirical theatre of the absurd. One is inclined to wonder whether Reynolds realized that the satire reflects far more on his own more serious work than on contemporary American society.

This examination of socioeconomic speculations in the work of Mack Reynolds has served to illuminate the problems which face all contemporary science fiction writers who deal in image of the near future. *Looking Backward from the Year 2000* may be the last desperate flourish of a kind of utopian image that was once central to the mythology of *genre* sf, or it may be the first of a new wave of utopian designs, but either way it serves to illustrate both the major cause for the decline of technological utopianism and the major difficulty which has to be overcome by would-be designers of the Ideal State in the context of today's intellectual climate. The abandoned myth of the perfectibility of man, and its replacement by the assumption of the essential corruptness of human nature, is fatal to the very idea of utopian, and *any* vision of the future which purports to hold out hope for a better life has perforce to tie itself to some prescription for the redemption of

human nature from that corruptness. Many contemporary sf writers have made prolific use of the mythology of the superman, of various mythologies of rebirth and of ecological mysticism in this fashion, but close scrutiny of all of these strategies reveals nothing more than a clever jargon of apology: an ahistorical (and frequently transcendental) salvation mythology with no roots in actual possibility. Reynolds, for all his faults as a writer, is at least trying to confront historical problems without the aid of a pocketful of gaudy miracles of psychic readjustment. He is still writing "social science fiction" rather than quasi-religious fantasy. Perhaps his accomplishments (or lack of them) serve only to demonstrate that authentic science fiction which attempts to deal realistically with the problems of the near future is dying out because writers are finding it impossible to make visions of the future tolerable without the magical invocation of new myth-fantasies.

Following the hiatus in his work in the early seventies Reynolds is once again establishing himself as a prolific writer. The vast number of paperbacks which have appeared in the last three years have cleared up the backlog which presumably had accumulated at Ace during that publisher's period of inactivity, and they have also cleared up Reynolds's own backlog in that virtually everything he ever wrote which could be inflated or fixed-up into a book has now appeared. His future work is going to have to start from scratch, and the fact that he will be forced to abandon his perpetual self-cannibalism may well result in the emergence of new trends within his work. Admittedly, there is not much sign of this in *Of Future Fears* and *Trample an Empire Down*, both of which use familiar materials, the former using a cast of characters who are equally familiar (apparently the author is unworried by the fact that one of them was killed off in *Satellite City* in 1975).

Curiously, for such a prolific author, Reynolds rarely gives the impression of being at ease in his work. He writes in a manner which makes for very easy reading (he once topped a popularity poll run by the *Galaxy* group of magazines despite the fact that those magazines were only his secondary market) but one frequently suspects that his casualness masks a certain discontent. Certainly, there is an imbalance in his work between the interesting ideas and the extremely crude plotting, and one suspects that this imbalance is the result of a compromise which he feels obliged to make in order to be sure that the work will be marketable. For reasons already pointed out, there is little scope in a mass-market genre like science fiction for the kind of socioeconomic speculations which are Reynolds's real interest, and in order to indulge himself in such imaginative adventures he has probably found it necessary simultaneously to pander to the demand for routine melodrama which controls the lower strata of the sf market. He is not the first writer to have made such a compromise, and he will certainly not be the last. When he puts sufficient effort into his work he *is* capable of writing well, and he has interesting ideas to write about, but whether he will ever find it worthwhile as a professional sf writer to expend such effort is another matter. I, for one, though, will look forward to reading his future work in the expectation of finding something of interest, even if I must occasionally plough through books like *Space Pioneer* and *Code Duello* while searching for it.

The quotations from Reynolds's fiction are taken from the following texts:

1. "Revolution", *Analog*, May 1960, p.68.
2. *Planetary Agent X*, Ace, 1965, p.83.
3. *The Earth War*, Four Square, 1963, p.130-131.
4. *Ibid.*, p.139-140.
5. *Of Godlike Power*, Belmont, 1966, p.154.
6. *Ibid.*, p.154.
7. *The Five-Way Secret Agent*, Ace, 1975, p.114.
8. *Looking Backward from the Year 2000*, Ace, 1973, p.78.
9. "The Throwaway Age", *Worlds of Tomorrow*, Winter 1967, p.158.

Afterword
Mack Reynolds

Mr Stableford has been kind enough to forward to me a copy of his article *The Utopian Dream Revisited* suggesting that I might possibly wish to comment. To do so in detail would result in another article as lengthy as his own. However, I would like to make one point.

I am a professional story teller with no other source of income and hence, to make my living, must sometimes resort to pot boilers and humor novels. To my distress, Mr Stableford evidently did not realize that humor was intended in some of them.

But beyond the financial aspects I have attempted to direct my fiction along certain paths. However, contrary to a belief Mr Stableford seems to have arrived at, I have not intended to point out a path to Utopia. I subscribe to a statement once made by Eugene V. Debs, the early American socialist, who told his would-be followers, "Even if I could, I would not lead you into the Promised Land. For if I could lead you into it, someone else could lead you out again."

I am of the opinion that the world is going through an unprecedented period of revolution. It applies to almost every facet of our existence. A scientific revolution, a revolution in the relationship between the sexes and even the generations, a revolution in mores, in medicine, in our confrontation with nature, including the population explosion, pollution and depletion of resources. And, of course, in current political economy.

As Mr Stableford so well pointed out in the beginning of his article, Americans, in particular, do not seem to realize that socioeconomic change is possible. It simply doesn't seem to occur to them that anything except class divided society and private ownership of the means of production, complete with the profit motive, is possible, ever. Our sf writers – Poul Anderson and Isaac Asimov are good examples – will put a story a thousand years into a future in which all of the sciences have flowered wonderfully. But what is the socioeconomic system? Often they don't even have capitalism, they've gone back to feudalism!

The task I have set myself, then, is not to point out a definite future, my own idea of Utopia and the path to it, but to try and instill in my readers the understanding that a different society is possible and even desirable. I deal with the views of a dozen different types of "socialism" (the word has become so elastic as to be all but meaningless), communism, syndicalism, Technocracy (there is a movement by that name in the USA), meritocracy, anarchism, and so on. Sometimes I deal with them sympathetically, sometimes the opposite, sometimes even in humor (as in "Russkies Go Home!"). I feel that, even in humor, you can awaken in the mind of a reader the realization that social change is possible and possibly desirable, and set him to considering the alternatives.

And eventually, if enough of us set our minds to a better society, a more rational world, we will achieve one.

Reviews

1985
by Anthony Burgess *(Hutchinson, 1978, 240pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 09 136080 3)*

reviewed by Christopher Priest

Anthony Burgess's new book is in two parts. The first is a long essay on George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The second is a short novel in which the intention is (to quote Mr Burgess): "to contrive an alternative picture – using (Orwell's) own fictional technique – of the condition to which the seventies seem to be moving and which may well subsist in a real 1984 – or, to avoid plagiarism, 1985." The book closes with a note on "Worker's English" (which is roughly comparable to the Appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, explaining "Newspeak"), and an Epilogue, which takes the form of an imaginary interview.

So it is that Anthony Burgess returns, albeit somewhat uneasily, to a kind of fiction that his readership will recognize as being a not unimportant area of interest to him. In short, socio-linguistic speculative fiction . . . or what publishers usually call science fiction. To Burgess's apparent discomfiture, the novel he seems likely to be remembered for (and that partly because of Kubrick's film) is *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). Burgess refers to the earlier novel in this book: "It is not, in my view, a very good novel – too didactic, to linguistically exhibitionist." Some prefer another novel published in the same year, *The Wanting Seed*; perhaps Burgess does too, although he does not mention it here. Because of these two early novels, and now because of *1985*, Burgess has become one of those novelists whose work is sometimes claimed for science fiction, in an attempt to dignify the whole genre. Burgess himself would not see that his work has much in common with science fiction – in recent journalism he has revealed an irascible contempt for the genre – but he could console himself with the knowledge that he is at least in decent company; other writers so appropriated to science fiction

include Aldous Huxley, William Golding, Adrian Mitchell, Doris Lessing, C.S. Lewis . . . and, of course, George Orwell.

Whatever the author's intention, *1985* is predicated on a metaphysic that amounts to an analysis of and an exercise in science fiction.

The better part of the book is the essay. Burgess's reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is close and intelligent, and he makes a number of revealing points. His central perception is not, in fact, particularly original, although by devoting half a book to the idea he apparently thinks it is: he comes to the conclusion that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not intended to be an *actual prediction* of what might happen within the next thirty-six years (from Orwell's time), but is instead a metaphorical description of London and Britain in the immediate post-war years.

Well, Burgess probably arrives at this conclusion spontaneously, but it is very much the sort of critical idea that has been put forward for many years about science fiction as a whole. In other words, Burgess has discovered, through Orwell's novel, what the better examples of science fiction can be.

A new insight it might not be, but as a critical exercise it has never been done better, nor has it been so persuasively and lucidly illustrated.

There is a fascinating description, for instance, of the differences between Ingsoc (the political creed of Orwell's 1984 society) and English Socialism of the Bevan/Attlee/Morrison variety – whose Labour government came to power immediately after World War II. Similarly interesting is his concurrence with Orwell's linguistic ideas; much chilling contemporary illustration here of how Newspeak has crept into our language. He is also good on smaller details. He suggests where Orwell found the idea of Big Brother (a thuggish individual promoting a correspondence college). Room 101 (where the "worst thing in the world" happens) is Room 101 in Broadcasting House, from where Orwell broadcast propaganda to India during the war. Burgess is informative about Hate Week, Victory cigarettes, cheap gin and the smell of boiled cabbage, all of which have correlatives in the real world of the late 1940s. More description, first-hand, of the social background to Orwell's book: the feeling of many Britons of having been cheated after the war, when rationing was worse than ever it had been during the Blitz, when it sometimes seemed that international tension was being maintained with the purpose of keeping the civilian population subdued and the conscript army in uniform, when Stalin's Russia – wartime ally – suddenly became the new enemy. All this is indirectly described in Orwell's novel, and Burgess illuminates it. Like all good criticism, it reminds you of why you admire the original, and makes you want to re-read it with the new insights you have gained.

However, Mr Burgess then moves on to *1985*, and all is not well.

Firstly, and oddly, there is a basic inconsistency between what he has said of Orwell (and, indirectly, of science fiction in general) and what he states are his aims for the story. Having argued, plausibly, that Orwell was dealing with the present day by use of a futuristic metaphor, Burgess then sets out actually to *predict* a 1984 or 1985 ("the condition . . . which may well subsist in a real 1984", etc.).

Burgess's attitude to science fiction might be of interest here. In the summer of 1978 he contributed a long column of reviews to *The Observer*. "Why is most science fiction so damned dull?" he wrote. "There are various possible answers. You practise the genre if you have fancy but no imagination." He goes on to suggest that bizarrerie matters more than character and dialogue, that there is

an evasion of real issues, that content counts more than form.

He may well be right in many cases, but he doesn't really account for the dullness he sees. What he might have considered is that speculative writers become dullards when they abandon metaphor for the sake of prophecy; he should try some of H.G. Wells's later novels. He should re-examine his own new novel. It's not that *1985* is dull in the sense of being boring, but it does have a lacklustre quality to it. Anthony Burgess, who is a gifted and admired novelist, has not often been dull in this way before.

His vision (his "cacotopia", as he dubs it) is of a Britain become Tucland, financed and dominated by Arab oil-money, undermined and constantly threatened by concerted trades-union action, and where recalcitrant intellectuals are first put out to work in cake-factories, and later, if still obstinately individualistic, sent for rehabilitation to TUC indoctrination centres.

Comparisons with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are tacitly invited. The protagonist is Bev Jones (cf. Orwell's Winston Smith; Bev believes his name is derived from Bevan, Bevin or Beveridge), a former intellectual who turns strike-breaker when his wife dies in a hospital fire during a fireman's strike. He descends through society, eventually meeting up with the book's comparable O'Brien figure: a Mr Pettigrew, chairman of the TUC Presidium, who, far from being busily engaged in what one would imagine was the more pressing business of organizing strikes, appears to spend his time rehabilitating the likes of Bev Jones; never mind. In the rehabilitation centre Bev is educated in the ways of the true unionist, learning not only to speak Worker's English but also to eat such traditional prole fare as cod and chips, and spotted dick.

Where Orwell changed meanings and names to satirical or polemical purpose, Burgess opts for fun with words. Orwell characterized the BBC as the Ministry of Truth (where history was re-written); Burgess sees the hotels of London becoming "Al-Dorchester, Al-Klaridges, Al-Browns, various Al-Hiltons and Al-Idayinns" (think about the last one, but not for too long). Feminists who dislike the universal use of the male pronoun as standing for personkind will welcome the introduction of "heesh" (he/she), "Zer" (his/her) amd "mer" (him/her); everyone else will see them as word-play.

And there's "Worker's English", Burgess's pallid answer to Newspeak. It compares with Newspeak, but only in its awfulness rather than in its ability to change understanding. Newspeak was a genuinely prophetic invention; Worker's English comes across as an educated middle-class author's impatience with demotic English. Burgess offers us several examples of WE, including this oddity: "Don't get working on any of that supercodology when I'm around, mate, or you'll get a bunch of fives in the fag-hole". It doesn't have quite the same sinister resonance, somehow, as "crimethink" or "bellyfeel".

More crucially, there is the difference that exists between Anthony Burgess and George Orwell, and one becomes aware of it simply because Burgess invites us to consider it.

In the early part of the book, Burgess has this to say about Orwell:

> he was born on the fringe of the ruling class, he went to Eton, he spoke with a patrician accent. When he called on his fellow middle-class intellectuals to take a step downward and embrace the culture of miners and factory workers, he said: 'You have nothing to lose but your aitches'. But those were just what he could not lose. He had at heart the cause of working-class justice, but he couldn't really accept the workers as real people. They were animals – noble and powerful, like Boxer the horse in *Animal Farm*, but essentially of a different substance from himself . . . He pitied the workers, or animals. He also feared

them. There was a strong element of nostalgia in him – for the working-class life he couldn't have. (pp.32-33)

All this is true enough, but it's not the whole story. Orwell was not specifically a campaigner for working-class justice; of all 20th Century political journalists he was, and remains, the pre-eminent all-round humanitarian. In spite of what Burgess says, he did not pretend to an identification with the working-classes, but he did recognize that a substantial majority of the British population of his day was ill-housed, ill-nourished, under-educated and over-worked. Orwell paid as much attention to the social and economic pressures that produced these conditions as he did to those suffering from them. And, unlike Burgess, he did not presume to a knowledge of the working-class, except by what he observed. Take food, for instance: Burgess has the modern prole tucking with gusto into his cod and chips. He would have been closer to the mark with take-away doner kebab and pitta.

This sort of error of perception (like the WE reference to "a bunch of fives in the fag-hole") gives the novel a curiously dated air. In the latter part of the novel, for another example, much is made of the building of a mosque in the centre of London. There are union protests about scab-labour, and street-riots, etc. But does Mr Burgess not *know* that a huge modern mosque was peacefully built and opened in Regents Park last year? We meet droog-like "kumina" gangs (resentful yobbo education-freaks, who sing *Gaudeamus igitur, juvenes dum sumus* as they beat you up and set fire to your hair), and a scholarly gang of small-time thieves who pinch sardine-cans from supermarkets, but where are the football hooligans, the National Front, the Anti-Nazi League? Do we believe that these will have vanished from the streets during the next six years? What of the IRA? Is Northern Ireland a dead political duck by 1985? Oil-money going to the Arabs? Maybe . . . but what are the Scots and Shetlanders saying about it? What do the Eurocrats in Brussels have to say about Tucland? Why doesn't Bev Jones appeal to the European Court?

The actual difference between himself and George Orwell that Burgess invites us to see is, in fact, one that he would not care to admit. What it amounts to is that George Orwell knew England and the English, and Mr Burgess used to but now does not.

In 1944, Orwell wrote an essay called "The English People". It is in no sense a hymn to the working-class, but a sober and factual description of English life and society as he saw it. The essay can be read today and seen as an accurate modern portrait without any sort of allowance for its period; the same will almost certainly be true in 1984 or 1985. Anthony Burgess's novel, written in 1978, is already a period-piece and by 1985 will be merely risible. Orwell, for all his patrician accent, lived and worked in England, and, in his own way, loved the English. *1985* is, candidly, the sort of novel one suspects would be written by a tax-exile who reads right-wing British newspapers in his Monte Carlo home.

Alicia II
by Robert Thurston *(Berkley Putnam, 1978, 419pp., $10.95, ISBN 0 399 12219 2)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

My advance copy of *Alicia II* came complete with two pages of blurb from G.P. Putnam's Sons, Madison Avenue, including quotations from people I've never heard

of making critical claims I can't agree with. Not provocative, not well-crafted, not breathtaking, not lifelike, certainly not graceful: the opposites of all these, if anything. But I find it difficult to say what it is, except that it's a very uneven book which gains confidence as it goes on, so that Thurston ultimately achieves a very satisfying conclusion by way of many disappointments.

Premise and plot are very simple: surgeons can transplant the personality of one man into the body of a younger one, with absolutely no effect on the mind transferred except a vague rejuvenation. The immortality of the old is bought at the expense of the young. The person who continues is called a retread; the other, deemed worthy to die and supply him with a new body, is called a reject. This improbable vindication of mind-body dualism, instead of being banned at once, is institutionalized by the otherwise bland and inoffensive world government. Everyone is tested, and rejects told how long they will be allowed to live before the retreading industry can claim them.

Vossilyev Geraghty, after a boring life of pointless scientific research, arrives in his new body to seek fun and sex. But the body has been cunningly sabotaged by its previous wearer. In a huff, Voss signs up as troubleshooter on the frontiers of space and so becomes a minor celebrity. Back on Earth his girlfriend Alicia and his old chum Ben, both retreads, are secret members of the reject revolutionary party. Ben can arrange the operation to restore Voss to full virility, but only if Voss undertakes a sabotage mission of his own. In an underground cavern half the size of Manhattan slumber the preserved "souls" of the most distinguished retreads, waiting for reincarnation. Has Voss the conviction or the nerve to sneak in and destroy them all?

Alicia II opens with a striking image. Voss is struggling to master the workings of his new body: on the beach of a derelict resort he stumbles along after the nimble, flighty little girl who has befriended him. The reborn old man is also a newly-dead young man – echoes of *Death in Venice*, echoes of *Frankenstein* (the film). But the book doesn't continue at that advanced level. It slumps, depressingly. Thurston isn t a visual writer at all, though he stirs himself once or twice to try; nor is he adept at realising the society he's invented. I wanted to believe in the characters, but their dialogue has such a familiar, phoney, scripted feel to it. They suggest the past rather than the future. Their world has been sliced up with a two-edged blade of immortality and compulsory euthanasia, but, though they talk about it a lot, they clearly haven't been conditioned by it. They seem to natter in a vacuum; or when Thurston tries to put them in a building or a landscape, it's with the sort of uneasy description that makes you wish he hadn't bothered.

> We disembarked from the bus in front of a wide-based pyramidal building. Wavelike undulations appeared to go up its sides. At the peak of many of these undulations was a window . . .
>
> We were going, Pierre explained, to America, a rooftop club in the nightmare building. We passed through doors whose borders also had a wavelike shape and into a conventional lobby that was dominated by an enormous holomural depicting early American history.

Thurston's not an inner space writer either. The psychology of one mind that holds both life and death, age and rebirth, and obliterates the cellular remains of another identity, is incalculable, an ideal task for the talents of a Ballard or a Malzberg. Surface unrealities (stock characters, unlikely dialogue) would indicate the distinction of a new *kind* of reality, a synthesis of imaginative elements. Thurston, on the other hand, sees no ambiguities and few psychological problems

peculiar to his new man. Reality is firmly unchanged.

In fact, the purpose of the story seems to be to affirm this, that retreading has not changed the human condition. It has permitted injustice and inequality to rule the world, but the men wielding and suffering them are the same as men today. The same philosophical and moral questions apply, and the same answers. Surprising as this proposition is, all the evidence of *Alicia II* supports it; given that, Thurston's concern is with the moral attitudes of his characters, and especially the shaping of Voss's. Here he can be infinitely subtle, taking great pains to shade the black into the white. While knowing perfectly well which side he has put his readers on, he does not simplify Voss into a hero of good against the mad doctors of evil. His feelings and motives for accepting the mission are as mixed and inconstant as those that drove him into outer space. As a protected member of the elite, he needs to acquire more understanding, more information about his society before he can judge, but no amount of understanding and information can equip him sufficiently: the final commitment is his alone, and he makes it less out of principled conviction than recognition that it seems inevitable.

All this Thurston does skilfully. The very inconstancy of Voss's moral awareness seems to indicate high sensitivity and therefore accuracy in his author. *Alicia II* contains an existential problem set up with remarkable delicacy and care. What drags and disappoints is the rest of the novel, the context of that problem, which is very crude in design. There are passages of really plodding writing; there are incidents that splinter off from the plot and never get the reconnection apparently intended for them; there are the tremendous historical lectures heaped on Voss by other characters for our benefit; there are those characters themselves: Ben Blounte, cynical, gruff, wise old doc with a heart of gold; Stacy, stolid, taciturn, loyal sidekick, a good man in a fight; Gorman Triplett, embittered, homosexual assassin, living entirely on grudge and vicious thoughts. When they meet the air is thick with cliches. And yet there is also Alicia: elusively, effortlessly real, a character full of the spontaneity and complexity Thurston has denied the others. Alicia constantly and Voss increasingly stand out from the story, two human beings trapped in a comicbook. If only Thurston seemed to make use of the contradiction, or even appreciate it. *Alicia II* seems as if he intended to write a twentieth-century novel of character insight and moral subtlety which was also a rattling sci-fi adventure yarn – E.M. Forster with one hand and Robert Heinlein with the other. Unfortunately he hasn't realised that in such hybrids it's easier to write good psychological novel than good science fiction. Pay insufficient attention to the sf and it will dissolve into a handful of formal conventions, all conviction fled. But if you can read the first four parts without being put off, you're sure to relish the end.

Somerset Dreams and other Fictions
by Kate Wilhelm *(Harper & Row, 1978, 174pp, $8.95, ISBN 0 06 14649 4)*

reviewed by John Clute

This is the fourth or fifth volume of "fictions" from Kate Wilhelm, whose first novel was all about a Blob with bulimia, but who has never shown herself very comfortable with generic conceits – sf *pur* always seemed to make her come all

over chatty, nor has she entirely lost a tendency to gossip over the hedge even in the best stories of *Somerset Dreams*, only one of which, "The Hounds", deals other than metaphorically with sf material. Generally speaking, *Somerset Dreams* – a collection of stories all published within the last decade – is as mainstream an effort as one could expect of an alert short story writer of the 1970s: That is, some of the stories included are fabulations, some engage a little uneasily with sf or gothic or fantasy or naturalistic moves, and most of them are identifiable under two or three rubrics at the same time. At the heart of Ms Wilhelm's best work in this volume and in the earlier *The Infinity Box* (1975), a half-lit glinting miscegenation transforms the native loquacity of her storytelling voice into an unsettling, disingenuous, highly artful fabrication, or lie. Though some of the charm and horror of her stories lies in the sense that somehow she is *trying* to believe in the shape of Elsie the Genre-Cow and the whole verisimilitudinous sunlit world her sometimes slightly "feminine" magaziney prose constantly hints at evoking, at the heart of her best work, ghosting and irradiating the suburban Weltschmerz, lies a mutagenic humid darkness. Unlike, say, Ursula K. Le Guin, who also writes fables, Ms Wilhelm does not teach us about the dark; she trips us into it. And once we are there, it seems the shape of things.

Of course she's sometimes terribly sloppy, and always has been; there has always been a feeling about her prose that she finds it much too easy to write, some of her early work, like *Let the Fire Fall* (1969), astonishingly published the same year as the title story of the book under review, being consistently slipshod in a peculiarly (and infuriatingly) *airy* fashion. It is like skating on thin ice. It is like praying for the ice to break.

But when the ice does break, the easiness of effect (the lie that this is a friendly gossip we're having) is a sort of whistling in the cellar, though precisely what that cellar – that mythopoeic damp – actually represents cannot of course be defined very closely. In a sense, if there is an evolution in the Western art of storytelling, it lies in an accumulation of knowledge of what cannot be said. In "Somerset Dreams" an anaesthesiologist returns to her home town, which is dying, and finds (through some concurrent dream research she assists in) that she is herself beginning to dream dreams punitively illustrative of her death-wish compulsion to remain among the scenes of her childhood, and that these dreams are fundamentally identical to those of the other researchers, which turns the screw suddenly, and the story turns out to concern itself with the nature of passage; it becomes a series of questions about the real internal shape of the lives of members of our species. It is a story about the consequences of refusal to pass on: You are no longer a person: The paradise the anaesthesiologist dreams of entering is barred to her unless she becomes entirely still, and no longer human. Similarly, "Planet Story" sets another research team on to an Eden-like planet which begins to drive them crazy, right out of their skulls, right out of their species. It soon becomes obvious that *homo sapiens* has adapted out of Eden. Our exile is the soil that shapes us, and we would go mad in green pastures. We have passed on. In "The Hounds", the women protagonist (most of Wilhelm's protagonists are women) allows her husband to shape her life, which he does with an ample decency, he is not the villain of the piece. She is. He loses his Cape Kennedy job and moves, with her compliance, to a small farm in Kentucky, where she has no ostensible reason to rebel. He is happy, their children are happy, the life is clean, clement, downright pastoral. Two hounds trail her home. Death is a dream. They are as lithe and silvery and soft as death. They follow her everywhere. She begins to dream of hunting with them. They chase the great stag. Each time she dreams she comes closer to killing the stag herself. Is this right? Men

(her husband is the stag) and women must eat, and procreate, and make their gardens grow and pass through time. What right has she to kill her husband because he is merely human? She shoots the dogs. The dreams do not come again. She seems to be prepared, as the story ends, to begin living out her mortal span, in this world; it's nobody else's fault she's mortal.

These are the best of them. Some of the other tales remain too edgy and talkative (they talk a mile a minute) to allow us in. And when we do feel we have gotten inside, there is always the uneasy feeling that our paraphrastic attempts (as above) to make sense of that which cannot finally be said are ultimately a sort of philistinism. Certainly Ms Wilhelm says a great deal less about the meaning of her "fictions" than I find myself presuming to do. And sometimes she's a bit coy about the unnamable, about resting silent. At her best, though, she evokes a sustained complex melancholy horror, fitting to a late culture, and for readers whose greatest aesthetic pleasure is perhaps hearing someone say it cannot be said about something they had always been told something could be said.

In the Hall of the Martian Kings
by John Varley *(Sidgwick & Jackson, 1978, 316pp, $5.50, ISBN 0 283 98504 6; Futura, 1978, 316pp, £1.10, ISBN 0 7088 8036 3; apa The Persistence of Vision, The Dial Press/James Wade, 1979, 316pp, $9.95, ISBN 0 8037 6866 A)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

In *Foundation 14* I warmly praised John Varley's first novel, *The Ophiuchi Hotline*. Now comes Varley's first story collection, and here there is much to praise again, but there are also some naughty questions to be asked, though not with the intent of wounding.

From the plethora of simultaneous editions listed above, the book is obviously well promoted (as part of the "outstanding Quantum science fiction programme"); and part of the promotion is an unnecessary introduction by Algis Budrys – doubly unnecessary since it squirms under the realization of its own irrelevance, and since it cannot ask those naughty questions which might actually help the author (other than financially). Following this is another irrelevant page, showing that Sidgwick have been slightly lazy when printing from the American plates, for though they have changed the book's name on the title page from *The Persistence of Vision* (the US title) to *In the Hall of the Martian Kings* they've forgotten to do so inside. Why the change of title? Presumably a less abstract-sounding wraparound for the pragmatic Brits; or, to put it another way, our 16 year olds are going to prefer the Barsoomian to the philosophoculist.

Sixteen year olds . . . yes. One sure thing about most of the ten stories collected here is that they are, at heart, juvenile yarns dressed up as the toughly sophisticated. Juvenile, in the *feel* of the characters (once one strips away the obligatory veneer of postadolescence). Juvenile, in the ultimate sense of comfort and security.

Since we did away with all naughty germs, any hobbyist can saw a skull open without even washing his hands, for a spot of neural surgery; because, you see, dirt is *clean* now. Even if you get murdered, 'you' will live again within a few months, courtesy of memory recording and cloning. If your expedition gets wrecked on Mars, marvellous programmed plastic whirligigs will pop out of the sand to spin

you a haven, feed and succour you. The Justice Computer will up and tip you the wink, jamming an elevator so that the law catches up with you too late, 'cause yours is a *good* crime. If a black hole buggers up your space station way out beyond Pluto, your girlfriend (far away, sealed with a holographic kiss) will cobble together a flying chair to save you for bathtub sex in time, before you stifle in your spacesuit. Though what did you eat, all that time? I didn't notice you getting hungry or thirsty or crapping. Jus afloatin' in the void. This is the sort of thing the juvenile overlooks. So that in the end, as your brave, bright doll zooms in for a cuddle, the story evaporates. "The Black Hole Passes" is the name of this yarn; and pass it does – nobody feels any pain, though they have writhed about in the agonies of unconsummation. (In "Air Raid", notably, people do feel pain – is that why Varley published it under the pseudonym Herb Boehm?)

Varley does tend to forget things like the food and the bowels, selectively (though he remembers them when it suits his purpose, as in "In the Hall of the Martian Kings"). His lunar Disneylands, for instance: real-life Serengeti and so on – Varley notices gravity when he needs to notice it, but when we're in the mind of a lioness leaping on prey, or watching a stampede of buffalo, the effects of lunar gravity disappear. Reverting to the matter of clean dirt, *can* one recreate hundreds of square miles of pseudo-African ecology without any noxious beasties? A balanced ecology, where *all* is benign? Where no wound festers. Somehow I doubt it, but Varley is looking the other way. There's persistence of vision, yes indeed – but there's selective inattention too.

Yet there is real inventive power here too: people symbiosing with space-going vegetables among the Rings of Saturn, and much much else, carried off successfully, persuasively (which is the point about real invention, rather than just space-going symbiotic vegetables per se). And there's emotion – Varley does indeed pluck the heart strings when his Martian relief expedition turns up to find the bodies, and find instead: a wrap-around plastic paradise. Skimming a few inches away from schmaltziness (the Martian kiddies are even looking forward to their first bubblegum), the story succeeds. And the final tale, the eponymous (at least in America) "Persistence of Vision", about a deaf-blind community's 'para-speech', will certainly win this year's Nebula Award, and damn well deserve it: tragic, thoughtful, transcendent, heart-wracking, with – for once – a sense of *mature* inadequacy tormenting the hero. Even so, it shares much of the narrative tone of the rest, which is essentially B feature, since Varley is no stylist at all. And even so again, the stories do *work*. So Varley is a bit of an alchemist, for he seems to prove that lead can indeed turn into gold – the banal into the sublime; the only trouble is, it's always threatening to turn back again, and doing so.

And somehow this doesn't quite matter as much as it should.

SS-GB
by Len Deighton *(Jonathan Cape, 1978, 350pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 224 01606 7)*

reviewed by Anthony Wolk

I doubt if many readers of Len Deighton's *SS-GB* will think of it as science fiction. It is one of many books currently focusing on World War II, though, of course, it is quasi-history since it is set in an England of late 1941 under a German occupation.

As such *SS-GB* is an Alternative Universe (AU) novel, but not as distant from our version of reality as Beryl Bainbridge's *Young Adolf* or Norman Spinrad's *The Iron Dream*, both of which entirely remove Hitler from post-WWI Germany. But before proceeding, let's glance at a discussion of the AU genre in Kinglsey Amis's *The Alteration*. Several young boys are worrying about what constitutes the gentre of "CW". Various categories emerge:

> CW, or Counterfeit World, a class of tale set more or less at the present date, but portraying the result of some momentous change in historical fact, was classified as a form of TR [Time Romance, sometimes called IF, Invention Fiction, but never Science Fiction — "science" having the same pejorative associations as "disgusting"] . . . if on no firmer grounds than that writers of the one sometimes ventured into the other.

Their argument results from a furtive reading of Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, which in my universe is a What-if-Germany-won-WWII AU novel, though in *The Alteration* Dick's novel is rather warped by the special conditions which pertain to Amis's universe. Conditions which include Henry VII's son Arthur fathering a Prince Stephen on Catherine of Aragon and being victorious in the War of the English Succession against Henry the Abominable, with the support of one of the Three Northern Popes, Germanian I (formerly Martin Luther).

Continuing the regression, in my copy of *The Man in the High Castle* there is a discussion of what genre *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* (a What-if-Germany-lost-WWII novel) falls into:

Paul Kasoura: "Interesting form of fiction possibly within genre of science fiction."

Betty Kasoura (disagreeing): "No science in it. Not set in future. Science Fiction deals with future, in particular future where science has advanced over now. Book fits neither premise."

Paul Kasoura: "But it deals with alternate present. Many well-known science fiction novels of that sort."

Changes can be considerable in AU. Keith Roberts' *Pavane* (a What-if-Queen-Elizabeth-I-had-been-assassinated novel) becomes *Galliard* in Amis's other twentieth century.

Deighton's *SS-GB* clearly is AU or CW, but if the notion of momentous change in historical fact is significant, it falls short of what is customary in the genre. *SS-GB* is set in November 1941, some nine months after England's surrender. Initially the plot seems like that of an ordinary detective novel, with Superintendent Douglas Archer of Scotland Yard investigating the Chapter I murder. But as events unfold, the reader, though not Archer, focuses more and more on the vital question of who will acquire Britain's atomic research, Germany or the US. Deighton describes a political situation where members of the Resistance take advantage of the internecine struggle between the Abwehr and the SS, hoping to secure the escape of King George VI from the Tower in exchange for atomic secrets. But the ultimate end is to draw the United States from its neutral stance.

We identify throughout with the upstanding Superintendent Archer, naively willing to make an ultimate sacrifice of his own life to preserve the King's, and we find offensive the cooly political Colonel George Mayhew, who according to Archer is "playing God", "writing the future history books", "making sure that the King died in battle alongside his American allies". Yet Mayhew's icy machinations are responsible at the end for the credible assessment of Standartenführer Huth that "the Americans will make the bomb . . . and win the war that will begin the moment they are ready". The reader can breath a sigh of relief; in spite of the

accumulated ironies, England will soon be out from under the German fist.

It is precisely here that generic questions arise. *SS-GB* may be AU, but we can be pretty sure that by 1979 the variation produced by Germany winning the Battle of Britain (Deighton doesn't actually specify what led to the German victory) will be rendered benign. Briefly, for one leaden moment, there was a nasty blip on time's oscilloscope, but all's well that ends well. It was intriguing to tour retrospectively a German-occupied London, but our present is secure. The premise of Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" that one less palaeozoic butterfly is significant, remains unexamined. What might be called the sf temperament is lacking in *SS-GB*. About as close to sf as Deighton gets is to allow the question to creep in, "I was wondering in there, whether we'd be just as bad as they are . . . If we'd won the war and were occupying Germany."

Given what Len Deighton was doing (instead of what he didn't do), what is my response? I found myself fairly avid to read each succeeding chapter. I was hooked on poor Superintendent Archer and was sorry to see him so unsuspectingly used at the end. He seems to have known least of all what was happening – but then I knew little more. What Deighton does especially well is to work out what it was like living in German-occupied London in late 1941. I found myself following the events in my A-Z street atlas, fascinated with the what-if variations (like those of Orwell on Trafalgar Square). That I needed the denouement of chapter 40 to find out what had really been going on didn't crush my imagination. I am well aware that I am no Kissinger when it comes to *real politik*.

There are, however, some faults of style. It is especially with the American journalist Barbara Barga, who supplies the romantic interest for Archer, that Deighton sinks into the purple abyss. "She smiled in that relaxed way that marks the very rich and the very beautiful"; "Barbara Barga was not a very good dancer but she was light on her feet and happy, and ready to fall in love". And though she intends no more than a brief affair in this "war-torn land", she finds herself "beginning to like this gentlemanly English cop in ways over which she had no control". Somewhat more troublesome is Deighton's handling of point of view. He does stay with Archer primarily and the reader shares his limitations as is necessary. But there are lapses that intrude, such as a jump forward to a time Archer is not yet aware of: "Douglas never did forget that journey at reckless speeds . . . ". The implication of this revelation rules out certain resolutions. Other slips, for instance into Barbara Barga's perspective, reassure us, when legitimately we should doubt her intentions. On occasion we even slip into Mayhew's point of view, a tantalizing glimpse into a character whose knowledge far surpasses Archer's. I think my identification with Archer diminishes with each such slip.

Nothing rides on *SS-GB* being labelled sf by any given reader. But *SS-GB* is significantly different even from the accustomed sub-genre of alternative World War II novels and stories (compare Dick's *Man in the High Castle*, Hilary Bailey's "The Fall of French Steiner", Keith Roberts' "Weihnachtsabend", Fritz Leiber's "Catch that Zeppelin!" or their pre-war ancestor Murray Constantine's *Swastika Night*). Germany doesn't win WWII in *SS-GB*, it only occupies England for a while. In Philip K. Dick's "Adjustment Team" the thesis, like Bradbury's, is that it is the trivialities like the chance barking of a dog whereby "a chain of events will be set in motion", "the circle will widen". But Deighton's novel exemplifies the notion: for want of a nail, a war was won. That minimizing of the ripple is not a matter of good or bad, but it does prove disappointing for the sf reader.

Miracle Visitors
by Ian Watson *(Gollancz, 1978, 239pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 575 02474 7)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

One of my pet hates is books about UFOs. As a sociologist I am interested in the fact that people have delusions concerning extraterrestrial visitations, and in the reasons which people may have for making preposterous claims (whether sincerely or not), but I consider the substance of such delusions and claims to be fit matter for analysis rather than foundation stones for speculative literature. Any sf novel which, even as a passing comment, seeks additional "plausibility" by pointing out that its hypotheses can be extended to "explain" such things as UFO sightings normally has an abrasive effect on my nerves. *Miracle Visitors* is, however, an outstanding exception. It not only did not alienate my attention but actually captivated it, for the originality and imaginative boldness of its hypotheses simply swept away all such petty sensitivities. It is, I think, Ian Watson's best book – and to say that a book is better than *The Embedding* is to praise it very highly.

Watson does not, of course, take up any traditional lame-brained hypothesis about UFOs being spaceships from another world. His subject matter is UFO-*experiences*, and while he is prepared to hypothesize that the experiences are real this is by no means the same thing as assuming that they are as simple and straightforward as everyday experiences of sight and touch. The hero of the novel is a psychologist, John Deacon, researching "altered states of consciousness", who becomes involved with UFO-experiences when one of his subjects, Michael Peacocke, recalls such an experience (of which he has no conscious memory) under hypnosis. He comes to believe that such experiences are, in fact, a manifestation of an altered state of consciousness whose essential nature is that it temporarily invades but strategically eludes the normal state of consciousness, the UFO-experiences being its tantalising intrusions. These experiences defy rationality, as it were, *deliberately*, for that is their principal function: to represent and embody modes of understanding that lie beyond our immediate grasp. They are ideative carrots dangled before the noses of cognitive donkeys, inviting and drawing them on toward new imaginative horizons. Deacon and his subject are drawn further into the web of the UFO-mythos by new experiences, and by encounters with a group of Eastern mystics (who already, it seems, possess some of the intellectual equipment necessary for dealing with such mysteries) and with an American UFO-hunter named Shriver, who has dedicated his life to the task of finding proof to redeem the reality of his own UFO-experiences. In the climax of the book Deacon, Peacocke and Shriver are caught up in a particularly spectacular and characteristically irrational UFO-experience, which includes a flight to the dark side of the moon in a Ford Thunderbird. When the adventure abandons them again (leaving, of course, no significant evidential traces) the three try to cope with what has happened according to three different strategies, and it is the contrast between these three strategies which provides the heart of the book: Peacocke rejects the experience to retreat into the world of common sense, Shriver continues to pursue his mistaken quest for proof (which can, by definition, never be forthcoming because it is based on the futile hope of assimilating UFO-experiences to everyday experience), and Deacon abandons his own links with the everyday world in order to pursue the enigmatic mysticism of

the Sufis.

Miracle Visitors is fiction, and we are not required to discuss the question of whether UFO-experiences "really" function as they do in the book. What *does* invite comment, however, is the viewpoint which Watson has several times put forward that *science fiction* can (and perhaps should) function in a way that is analogous to the function of UFO-experiences supposed here, in suggesting the possibility of modes of thought, forms of life and ways of understanding that presently wait outside the prison of our ideas. Whether this prospectus for sf can be justified is still an open question, but what is certain is that *Miracle Visitors* represents an admirable attempt on Watson's part to practise what he preaches. This is a challenging book, a deliberately tantalizing book, and an enormously entertaining book for those who like to embark upon odysseys among ideas. The glorious fantasy of riding the Thunderbird to the far side of the moon is an image as striking in its way as the beautiful notion of cobwebs stretching between Earth and moon in Aldiss's *Hothouse*, and likewise needs no apology for its infidelity to contemporary views on scientific possibility, for the very nature of the event as specified here demands that it must defy rationality. This stirring passage, in particular, will serve as a handle to maintain the novel and its hotline to the ineffable within the memory for a long time.

The Feelies
by Mick Farren *(Michael Dempsey – Big O, 1978, 158pp, £2.95, ISBN 0 905664 124)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Big O Publishing have addressed *The Feelies* up big, yellow, green and red to make it look like a big, special book. A glance at the typeface and those sumptuous, expansive margins reveals that it's actually just another thin paperback blown up large enough to distract attention from its equally bloated price-tag. We've had the literature of exhaustion – now for the literature of inflation. Presumably this is down to Michael Dempsey rather than Mick Farren: Farren, ex-editor of *IT* and *Nasty Tales*, critic of the streets and rock-n-roll rebel extraordinary, would never want to rip off his public with fat margins and overweight paper. Would he? No. Not unless the seventies have really killed the sixties.

It's a very seventies, very cynical book. The inhabitants of Farren's future city pop pills, do depressing jobs, then go home to their tiny apartments and switch channels all evening. The ultimate ideal is a lifetime in the feelies: drugged and plugged in to sensory imput devices which supply the programmed fantasy-life of your choice. Vacationers and day-trippers can indulge in digest versions. The experience combines the virtues of bad tv and sadistic pornography, and is very, very expensive. Security guards sweep the dustless floors of the vaults, gazing along silent avenues of motionless dreamers in plastic coffins, wondering whether to envy them or not. For the ordinary man or woman, the only hope of entering the catatonic paradise is to win the tv contest *Wildest Dreams*, which offers the chance to run naked through riot-horses or drown in soundproof booths while completing meaningless coloured puzzles or answering questions on Charles Manson. Behind lurid glamour both telly and feelie industries are sordid and corrupt. Follow Wanda-Jean in her thrilling climb from shop counter and singles bar to the *Wildest Dreams*

finals and the dizzy heights of stardom. Will she sleep with the M.C. and win her lifetime of sensuous suspended animation, or blow the big question and plunge back down to anonymity and oblivion?

To answer that, I suppose, would give away the plot, but that wouldn't matter much. Once you've caught the tone of Farren's book, the rest is entirely predictable. *The Feelies* has all the inconsequential banality of soap opera, and deliberately so: this is a new kind of sf disaster, the World where Nothing Happened. The characters are economically and politically exploited, but Farren is more concerned with them as slaves of the unreality machine, robbed of everything and compelled to multiply electronic and chemical connections in pursuit of a fuzzy Nirvana lost in transit. Nothing is delivered; everything degenerates. There are no answers, and Farren is even too dispirited to spell out the questions all over again.

If this is damning *The Feelies*, it's not really meant to. Farren's writing is workable, no more, but he structures the story well, making something quite readable out of material that seems to offer no narrative tension at all. Like all his books, this one is best read fast, but lacks his usual zap. Zap would be out of place. The fantasy of *The Texts of Festival* contributes to the hippy-cowboy-rock star myth while projecting images of its decay. To write *The Feelies* as an imaginative, exciting book would be to obstruct the cynicism needed for its objective of total disillusionment. A smarter author might have worked up the ambiguities, encouraging us to share the characters' illusions before jerking them out from under us, or given us more details of their cheapened circumstances, as Thomas Disch did in *334*. But *334* is a good novel, and Farren isn't interested in producing a good novel, only in blocking in a cartoon of despair. The illustrations corroborate it: a faceless brute, hero of a feelie-dream, or teenage muggers in a basement car park, figures half-obscured in shadow and grime. Chris Welch, the artist, is another veteran of *Nasty Tales*, one of the best cartoonists from the English "underground".

The Feelies, it seems, has nothing much to offer, but that's not just fashionable vacancy. My defence, the only defence, of it is that it's a pretty good description of an indefensible world. We are becoming over-familiar with the shades of slow annihilation, and make no response to warnings any more. Farren doesn't expect or even try for one. The point of his book is that it *is* all obvious and familiar, and that is quite a frightening thing.

Journey
by Marta Randall *(Pocket Books, 1978, 324pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 671 81207 6)*

reviewed by Cherry Wilder

Journey comes to us with a double label: it is a science fiction novel and a Family Saga. While not quite the multi-generation Family Saga that Mother regarded as a good read, it is a solid story of a pioneering family on a distant planet. The Kennerins are aristocrats from a refeudalised Terra of the far future who own the planet Aerie under the sun Eagle. Jason Kennerin has turned to pioneering because his marriage to Mish, the beautiful oriental refugee, is unacceptable to the high-toned folks back home.

In spite of their clannishness the handsome, yellow-skinned, blue-eyed Kennerins of Aerie are lonely individualists. There is plenty of family tension and there are

any amount of skeletons in the Kennerin cupboard, which, after all, is a good part of what Family Sagas are all about.

The opening scenes are striking: twelve years after settlement Jason rescues a party of more than two hundred refugees from NewHome, a planet in a neighbouring system stricken with political troubles when its primary threatens to go nova. This is a traumatic experience not only for the poor newcomers but for Mish and their children Quilla, Jes and Hart. An important part of the book is the integration of these refugees and the way in which the small outpost called Haven begins to grow into a city. The landscape of *Journey* is mainly domestic; we recall the fields afound the homestead, the little town dotted with kites and windmills.

The native inhabitants of Aerie are the Kasirene, a race of six-limbed intelligent marsupials. They are calm, gentle, elusive; their treatment by the Kennerins and other humans parallels the treatment of native races by tolerant pioneers. The Kasirene are not hunted down or mistreated, on the contrary they are encouraged to work on human projects, though sometimes regarded as shiftless. The offspring of the "Kassies" are known as pups and there is a system of nurturing and swapping of pups that humans find odd; adult female and male Kasirene both have pouches and produce milk. The young Kasirene sit around in the schoolyard talking together and taking lunches from their pouches. The Kasirene go walkabout, have their own village, loom about cheerfully at human festivals; closer ties are developing between the Kasirene and the younger generation of humans. The language Kasiri is widely used by the humans for place names, times and dates. This familiar and easy-going racism is set down without irony; there is no point in treating the Kasirene as human because, heck, they aren't; and neither were the Redskins, the Abos, the N-----s, the Fuzzy-Wuzzies or the Gooks.

The characterisation is careful, even painstaking; besides the striding father-figure of Jason and the sweet, vigorous sexiness of Mish, a wife for all seasons, there is the study of Quilla, homely, strong-minded, practical. Meya, the youngest child, conceived on page seven, grows up pretty, downright, with a touch of Kannerin discontent. Jes, the elder son, has an adventure all to himself aboard various spacecraft. This episode, supposed to indicate the gulf between an imaginary world of space superheroes and the bumpy reality of space travel, is not successful. The mechanics of the thing are well done but any equation reading kid-outwits-space-baddies troubles our belief.

This nagging lack of conviction carries over into a more important thread in the book, the story of Hart, the younger son, a very black sheep indeed. Hart, at seven, is spoiled and aggressive; he resents the incoming refugees bitterly, sets fire to one of their houses and is blackmailed by Gren, a nasty refugee biologist. When he is seventeen a major scandal is hushed up by the Kennerins and Hart, biologist and psychopath, is packed off to University on another planet.

On his return ten years later an even more gothic episode follows. Hart is a surgeon-biologist of great skill who treats Jason, crippled by an accident at the spacefield. His latest evil companion, a decrepitating millionaire, brings about a climax of violence and misunderstanding culminating in Jason's death. Hart takes off again, this time a wronged man trying to save the family honour. Finally, while Hart is exercising his eugenic skills in a society full of evil companions on Gregory 4, he is moved to save the life of his own child ... in fact a child cloned from his own body; he learns to love and to love himself. This is deuced neat and proper foundation has been laid; the author has written herself out of a hole.

These bravura sequences are well-written and convincing, suggesting an imagin-

ation of darker power, almost too dark for a book that is generally as wholesome as the Whole Earth Catalogue. But the lack of conviction remains in the early stages: children do not blackmail easily; Hart at seventeen is too much of a monster.

Marta Randall argues that planetary colonists must be "generalists" not specialists, "able to fix machinery, repair electrical problems, service the generator, farm, weave", and the people of Aerie have an air of rough competence. The comings and goings over vast distances as well as the everyday business of the settlement are woven into the pattern of family life. The varied sex-life of the Kennerins is handled with warmth and understanding; they could be said to be unlucky in love. A particular strength of the book is the range of "character parts": Hoku, the Doctor; Hetch, the spacer; Laur, the proud old nurse; Mim, the servant, who brings poignancy to the death of Jason with a memory of her arrival from NewHome as a refugee years ago.

Journey is a long book but not overlong and its pace is well judged so that at the end we feel we have come a certain number of years, just far enough. The shifts in tone, the balance between domesticity and adventure may not be to everyone's taste. This is the author's own blend of simplicity, intrigue and skilfully extrapolated technology; it adds up to a good read.

Dreamsnake
by Vonda McIntyre *(Gollancz, 1978, 313pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 575 02480 1; Houghton Mifflin, 1978, 313pp, $8.95, ISBN 0 395 26470 7)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

Vonda McIntyre's Nebula-winning novelette "Of Mist and Grass and Sand" here becomes the opening sequence of a long, episodic novel which follows the healer Snake in her attempt to redeem the tragedy that resulted in the loss of one of the serpents essential to her vocation. Two of her companions, the diamondback rattlesnake Sand and the albino cobra Mist, are genetically modified so that their metabolism will produce anti-sera to combat disease, which is then injected *via* their fangs. The "dreamsnake" Grass, however, has a different function, being used not to cure but to ease the pain of death – it is essentially her "anaesthetic" – and when it is killed by fearful villagers Snake is faced with the prospect of being unable to help people whose injuries are irremediable and who must die in agony. The dreamsnakes are extraterrestrial in origin, and Snake's mentors cannot breed from the specimens they have, so that the loss is apparently irreparable. There is, however, a possibility that Snake might obtain a new dreamsnake from the inhabitants of Center, a city which has contact with the star-worlds but which bars its gates to the ordinary people of Earth.

The novel follows Snake through a series of encounters linked by the frail hope that she might gain access to Center and help from its inhabitants. She attends a woman named Jesse, self-exiled from Center, who dies after a fall in which her back is broken but commissions Snake to carry word of her death to Center. Snake sets off for the city, followed and twice attacked by a madman, and also tracked more distantly by one of the villagers who was present when the dreamsnake was killed and who wants to find some way of making reparation. Snake stays for a while in a mountain village, tending its headman through a bad sickness, and there

rescues a disfigured girl named Melissa from her cruel master, adopting her as a "daughter". They go to Center but find no help there. When they leave the madman attacks again, this time revealing his madness to be the result of his addiction to the bite of the dreamsnake. He guides Snake to the place where he became so addicted, where an albino named North holds a whole flock of followers in thrall by the same means. Snake finds not only a new supply of dreamsnakes but the secret of breeding them, but first must escape North if she is to make us of her discovery.

Dreamsnake has little in the way of a plot – the initial novelette gained its power from the fact that the dreamsnake was supposedly irreplaceable, and so it is hard to believe that Snake's trip to Center has any real chance of success and just as hard to accept the monumental coincidence that drops the madman in her lap and leads her to a dreamsnake cornucopia. However, it is not upon its plot that the novel relies for its effectiveness – it is primarily a novel of experience whose series of encounters add up to a morality play in which the principle is propounded that suffering is good for the soul if borne nobly and fatal if it leads to self-pity or self-loathing. This is not exactly an original claim, nor is it one that requires the imaginative décor of science fiction for its elaboration. I, personally, have never found it to be a particularly plausible claim, but it is one that seems to have a lot of literary mileage in it and there is no doubting the artistry in the way that Vonda McIntyre puts it over. *Dreamsnake* is a thoroughly readable book, written clearly and neatly and with a good deal of thought and sincerity. Vonda McIntyre is not a prolific writer – in the eight years since her first story appeared in *Venture* she has produced two novels, two novellas and a handful of shorter pieces – and presumably does not find writing easy. *Dreamsnake* gives the impression of having been put together with the utmost care, and is a work that commands some respect. It is handicapped by the fact that it extends from a piece so utterly complete in itself, and this is likely to reduce its impact somewhat, but it is nevertheless absorbing.

The Avatar
by Poul Anderson *(Berkley Putnam, 1978, 380pp, $10.95, ISBN 0 399 12228 1)*

reviewed by Andrew Kaveney

There is a set of ideas quite common among more commercially oriented sf authors which has produced hackwork from hacks, entertainments perfect of their kind from authors of minor gifts, and, from authors of real talent, as often as not slack potboilers full of lazy writing and pasteboard characters. These ideas might be summarised as a belief in intellectual and technical slickness and viscerally exciting, well-paced storytelling as replacements for, rather than adjuncts to, sensitivity to language and three-dimensional characterisation. This belief is dressed up with Amis's idea that in sf the idea is hero and dignified with the claim that since all art is basically in competition with the breweries for the public's loose change, elevated ideas about the artist's role and responsibility are a presumptuous intellectual fad.

In the recent novels of Poul Anderson these views have lead to a number of bad habits and technical shortcuts. To send your characters careering around the Universe for a hundred pages may provide entertainment but it is several hundred years since it passed for satisfactory plotting. Anderson has also become content with a sort of

stock-company characterisation – cheer the hero, hiss the bureaucrat – in which complex differences of nationality or species are indicated by different varieties of broken English. A further deterioration has been caused by the singleminded preaching of a bizarre and inconsistent set of political views – a "libertarian" horror of governments and an idealisation of feudalism that owes a lot to the rancher-hands relationship in old Westerns; Anderson's singleminded preparedness to be boring almost indicates that he is aware of the essential shoddiness of his thought.

For there is more to him than this. There is a poetic fascination with words and sensations that can at times turn into a routine appeal to each sense in turn or into the cutesty-pie whimsy of *A Midsummer Tempest* but informs a routine tale like "We have Fed our Sea" with tragic grandeur. His silly political solutions, and the narcissistically unscrupulous way that his heroes defend them, go along with a capacity to convey movingly the importance of social obligation and of freedom, though the latter tends to be seen exclusively in terms of the wild emptiness of forests, mountains and deep space. It is not enough to dismiss Anderson unread; he is terribly flawed by overproduction but his real gifts often shine through.

The Avatar is one of his most serious-minded books and clearly an attempt to write something of permanent value. It returns to themes, characters and situations from earlier work in a way that might be cynically described as autoplagiarim but which can be seen more judiciously as an attempt to do justice to material thrown away in earlier work. A mysterious elder race has given mankind a pathway through space and time to a virgin planet, but exploration of other pathways is prevented by the knowledge that explorers would just get lost. Aliens pass through and are followed home; the returning expedition is imprisoned on its return by a conspiracy opposed to space travel. Dan Brodersen, our hero, friend to some of the crew, lover of one of them, and dedicated defender of free enterprise, rescues them and, cornered, plunges through the elder race's network of pathways, playing it like a fruit machine and arriving at exotic location after exotic location, until he meets the elder race and discovers the secret of the Universe. Armed with this he returns to Earth and exposes his political enemies. This plot goes along with the complications of his relationships with his Penelope of a wife, his mistress Caitlin and his ex-mistress Joelle.

Caitlin, a poetess, turns out to be the Avatar of the title, a human recording device bred by the elder race to Experience the Human Condition and Celebrate this; she is Irish and so talks like a refugee from a touring company of *Brigadoon*. Joelle, on the other hand, is one of the two reasonably developed characters in the book – a middle-aged lady in mental symbiosis with a computer who has difficulty relating to people. One of the villains, a megalomaniac socialist politician, is allowed to make rather more of a case for himself than is Anderson's wont, though ultimately he is the usual elitist strawman. The John Wayne part, Broderson, is a worthy and wordy bore; usually Anderson's heroes sleep around for fun, he does it out of a duty to Experience and Relate. Anderson has been living in California too long.

What almost save the book from its trite plot and thin characterisation are its occasional flashes of poetry – not the fey little prose odes in which the elder race's recording devices explain to them what it's like to be a tree or a crow, but the descriptions of Broderson's points of call. Anderson aspires a bit overtly to be the Wordworth of the quasars but he does succeed in evoking wonder at the natural universe, and one page of his descriptive hymns to primal nebulae do more for the space race than three hundred of lectures on how welfare payments are bad for you. What is ultimately depressing about Anderson is that his dedication to propaganda

has blunted the tools with which he might have made the same points more effectively if more ambiguously, and has diminished him as a writer. *The Avatar* is a mess which reflects the decline of a talent; passages of humanity and shining vision silted up with cliché and pomposity.

New Writings in SF 30
edited by Kenneth Bulmer *(Corgi, 1977, 203pp, 95p, ISBN 0 552 10835 9)*
Orbit 20
edited by Damon Knight *(Harper and Row, 1978, 248pp, $9.95, ISBN 0 06 012429 6)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

New Writings 30 is in many ways the more *interesting* of these two volumes. None of the stories, with one exception, is less than competent, but very few are anything more. *NW* has occasionally dabbled on the fringes of experimental writing, often with refreshing results. Here, unfortunately, experiment has evaporated away, leaving a residue of mere whimsy. And Kenneth Bulmer has managed to fluff one of the most basic editorial jobs, by putting the stories in an unflattering order.

The collection starts well, with Keith Roberts's "The Shack at Great Cross Halt", a gritty and vivid caricature of a Britain reduced by economic monomania to a complex of motorways, a mere link in a global juggernaut-lorry network. There are echoes of Ballard in this landscape of tarmac, concrete and rusting cafés, but informed with a wry pastoralism of a different stamp. The end of the story, with revolutionaries in heavily-armed juggernauts dynamiting the M-ways, and sweeping down on London, is both highly conventional, and strangely convincing. And this account leaves out the human centre of the story, a witty and compassionate tale of degradation and recovery. The next piece is well chosen, if only for contrast: a desultory and forgettable reworking of Saberhagen's "Berserker" stories, with regulation issue "human interest". Brian Aldiss's "The Game with the Big, Heavy Ball" is a phenomenology story: a real world and subjective world, how can you tell which is which? One might be pardoned for feeling that Philip Dick has said nearly as much about this idea as can reasonably be said, but then a lot of science fiction depends on creative reworkings of ideas in themselves conventional and familiar. And, as it happens, Aldiss's story is one of the best in the book, a small miracle of concision and intelligence; a world elaborately and intimately detailed in under twenty pages, and a verbal fabric of exhilarating flexibility and sprkle. The sheer quantity of material in this story – landscapes, characters, witticisms, quotations, styles – is remarkable enough: the fact that everything is kept under the strictest discipline, and formed, without apparent effort, into a coherent whole, is a triumph. Next comes E.C. Tubb's "Read me this Riddle". A phenomonology story: real world and subjective world, how can you tell which is which? How nice. Not so good this one, despite the comfortable archaism of the opening, which depicts castaways on a desert planet whiling away the time around the fire with salty (or sideritic?) yarns. Then Chris Morgan's "My Sister Margarite". A phenomonology story . . . The point is not so much that Bulmer has chosen three stories on much the same theme for a collection of only eight stories, though that was imprudent enough. But placing them all together has an inevitable deadening effect. One tends to skim through "My Sister Margarite" without taking much in; which is a shame, since the story, although slight, has a very good joke

at the heart of it.

At last we return to firm ontological ground with Marie Jakober's "Notes from the Android Underground", though here again the real/fake dichotomy arises, albeit in different forms. This is a very slight production, especially when the inevitable comparison with *Tower of Glass* is made. Silverberg provided a convincing rationale for his "android underground" – the androids are manufactured deliberately as a cheap industrial workforce, and therefore inherit an honourable tradition of grievance. We *feel* for their struggle. Ms Jakober's androids, also fighting for "equal rights", are apparently being manufactured purely to do so, which is a circle not so much vicious as silly. There follows Ian Watson's "The Roentgen Refugees", the best thing in the collection; a sad, wise, remorseless evocation of the aftermath of planetary disaster in one particular country, South Africa. Both in the nature of the disaster – a nearby supernova – and in the use of a deeply religious protagonist who is trying to make sense of it all, this story has obvious affinities with Clarke's "The Star". It succeeds even more completely. The characterization is deft and precise, the details of action and landscape immensely telling. There is no hysteria: Watson's control is perfect.

Having reached such heights, it is a shame that the collection finishes with its only real failure, Ritchie Smith's "Amsterdam". This story's only claim to be sf is the fact that its male lead is an astronaut who has been to Mars. The plot, smothered in prose of glutinous vulgarity, is strictly Mills and Boon: shy, introverted, emotionally immature spaceman Michael meets wise, cultured, vivacious woman-of-the-world Francoise (she *had* to be French), who introduces him to the high life, or at least to a facsimile of same built up from *Vogue*, upmarket advertising copy, Aldous Huxley's snobbier moments and *Europe on $10 a Day*.

Generalize we must: the *Orbit* volume is at once more craftsmanly and less exciting a collection. The writing is never less than good, and is often very good – the sort of book you'd give to someone (if such people still exist) who dismisses all science fiction as illiterate or sloppily-written. Damon Knight has altogether too good an ear for prose to accept any of the banalities which managed to sneak into *NW 30*. And of course there are the usual extra "departments", so much more interesting and adaptable than the traditional editor's foreword. But too much of the material, considered generically and thematically, falls into two neat groups: stories which are not really sf at all, in the Wellsian sense of fantasy legitimized by "ingenious use of scientific patter"; and stories on traditional sf themes, using traditional sf plots and conventions, rendered fresh, if at all, solely by the fineness of the writing, and not by any act of imaginative recreation and reappraisal.

The book opens and closes on the latter note, with novellas by two *Orbit* regulars; Kate Wilhelm's "Moongate" and Gene Wolfe's "Seven American Nights". The first is a variation (and not much of a variation) on an old paranoid theme. A solitary wanderer encounters something Not Of This Earth, and has to convince her friends and the authorities that she has not been hallucinating. The story stands, finally, not by its sf elements, but by the remarkable vividness and thoroughness with which it evokes the scenery of the Oregon Desert, where the action occurs. Light effects, the shapes and textures of the land, its barrenness and its hyponotic beauty emerge precisely from the quiet prose. The finale, a pocket apocalypse of spectacular lights and surreal landscapes, comes as rather a distraction. The Wolfe story is cast as the diary of a visitor from a prosperous future Iran to be a ruined post-Silent Spring America, a wasteland of derelict buildings and mutations. A lot of mileage is wrung out of two particular effects: the Ozymandias Syndrome,

whereby we are treated to descriptions of the White House in ruins, the Capitol in ruins, the Washington Monument in ruins *et al.*; and inversion, whereby the attitudes of the well-off, civilized Iranian to the people of America are made a parodic reflection of the commonplace reactions of an intelligent Western tourist of today to Baghdad or Delhi. Nevertheless, the story works, partly because of the cunning use of various sources of suspense, and partly because of Wolfe's unusually tight grasp of the form: he never for a moment forgets that the story is meant to be a diary, and, as a result, it reads much more like a diary than is often the case, complete with cross-references, mentions of deleted paragraphs (which do not appear), occasional confusions of the time scheme, and so on. The last two pages are an inexplicable and disappointing lapse into Lovecraftism: "If hallucinations now begin, I will know that what I saw by the light of the blazing arrack was in truth a thing with which I have lain . . . "

Of the various fantasies, probably the best is Pamela Sargent's "The Novella Race", a sustained play on the idea of conflating the professional writer and the professional athlete. It's full of in-jokes, predictably (how many disguised sf writers can *you* spot?), but the entire piece is so unblinkingly straight-faced and unembarrassed that it seems humourless to carp.

There are honourable exceptions to the above categories, but not many. The best is Terrence L. Brown's "The Synergy Sculpture", perversely one of the least stylishly written stories in the book, and one of the freshest and wittiest. A new technological gimmick, some engaging satire on suburbia, a slyly perceptive parable about love and bad temper – all this and science fiction too!

It's a good collection. The range of subjects and styles is wide. But there are limitations: Knight's preference for a particular sort of fine writing, and his evident affection for humorous pieces (four of the eight stories are comic, though the tone ranges from farce to sarcasm) guarantee an entertaining read – "something keen", as he would say. But they tend also to give the book an overall feel of dilettante wittiness and well-bred gentility. Much is excluded. Much, of course, is included as well; but I, for one, found myself at times hoping for something *really* disturbing just over the page.

Starhiker
by Jack Dann *(Harper and Row, 1977, 164pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 06 010958 0)*

reviewed by Lee Montgomerie

Bo, a wandering minstrel on a post-technological Earth dominated by benign but inscrutable aliens, stows away on an interstellar freighter, kills an alien, escapes on a lifeboat to another planet, meets a girl and her telepathic insect-animal pet, is refused citizenship of her floating city (just as well: it is carried into the sky by the convection of the sun-warmed air within it, and how such a device could support the weight of a rigid structure, let alone a population, is beyond me), escapes with her on another ship, narrowly misses a black hole, lands on the truly sentient Node World, and miraculously transports himself back home.

However, as the blurb states, this is no adventure story. Action is replaced by fuzzy tricks involving nebulous mental powers; ideas by a dreary series of turgid lectures, couched in a "dream-language" on which the author exercises his total lack of descriptive ability.

Between pages 82 and 87, for instance, Bo:

> ". . . felt that the insect-animal was pushing dreams at him . . . walked as if in a dream . . . felt as if the insect-animal was throwing dreams at him . . . followed the logic of dreams . . . pushed away the dreams . . . was trapped again in the insect-animal's dreams . . . felt as if the insect-animal's dreams had swallowed his past . . . realised he was caught in the insect-animal's dreams . . . thought "That's the logic of dreams" . . . felt trapped in the insect-animal's dream-images . . . and felt fear break into his cold, alien dreams"

(Incidentally, the subject of this particular set of snares and bombardments [the same phrases recur incessantly throughout the book] was inspired by [and is credited to] David I. Masson's review of Watson's "The Embedding" in *Foundation 5*.) "How about (say) a being which conceives condition and transitions where we conceive *things*?", asks Masson, "Can a language be constructed without concrete nouns and pronouns? What sort of self-identity would such a being be aware of?" Dann is not loth to re-use Masson's words:

> "He saw only conditions and transitions – there were no 'things' . . . There were no ideas built with concrete nouns and pronoun."

And not only is the insect-animal's self-identity one familiar to all us concrete thinkers by the name of "solipsism"; but the creature is unable to express it without resorting to two pronouns and that inconceivable noun "thing":

> "The only thing you can see is yourself"

Excluding synonyms, the word "dream" occurs 202 times in the 161 pages of narrative. Bo is barely ever conscious. It would be reasonable to assume that the combined effects of ultra-culture-shock and super-jet-lag would be more likely to render the unseasoned interstellar traveller comatose than suited-up and raring to go, but Dann is not postulating this. His hero's apparent case of narcolepsy is a cheap device allowing Dann to pad the shapeless narrative with huge and rough-hewn chunks of Arthur C. Clarke, Buckminster Fuller, John Taylor and others.

Cybernetics, quantum mechanics, cosmology and Zen. Not much of the intellectual stuff reached this reader at least. The hypnotic thump of like phrase on like phrase and the interminable murmuring of the word "dream" soon had me drifting to worlds more exotic than any on which the dozy Bo ever pillowed his sleepy head.

Prisoners of Power
by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky *(Gollancz, 1978, 286pp, £5.50, ISBN 0 575 02545 X)*

reviewed by Kevin Smith

The pity about this book, for a reviewer, is that it starts with an introduction by Theodore Sturgeon, in which he makes the easy points a critic would like to make, and indeed would have to make. Thus, Sturgeon says that the lead character – Maxim – changes in the course of the story, which is an essential of good literature, and I can but agree and repeat it. Sturgeon says that the authors do not adhere to the "recommended" convention of the single viewpoint, and I nod and write it down. Sturgeon says some other things, too, but they relate more to the authors than to the

book and I don't agree with them quite so much, in any case.

The civilization in which Maxim, a very naive and trusting young Earthman, finds himself is a militaristic nation, at war with its northern neighbour despite having had its southern borders turned into a radioactive wasteland by a nuclear war only some thirty years earlier. The majority of the population worships its leaders – the All-Powerful Creators – but there is also a minority called the "degens" (degenerates) which does not, and is persecuted by the leaders and the majority.

Maxim cannot understand the fanaticism of the people he meets.

> "Schooled since childhood to show self-restraint, to question, and to dislike high-sounding phrases, he had to control his irritation with his comrades." (p.73)

When he meets his first degens he is horrified to discover that they are not the inhuman monsters he was told of, but quite ordinary people. Their only difference is that they periodically collapse in agony for no apparent reason. The parallels with the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis are obvious. To make the point absolutely clear, Hitler and Auschwitz are brought in as comparisons in Maxim's attempts to understand it.

This is his first great shock, and his first step away from naivety. He quits society and joins a degen terrorist group, whose aim is to destroy the towers that cover the country. The towers, Maxim learns, transmit a radiation that causes the degens' periodic agonies. Maxim is unaffected by it and helps them in a successful but costly attack on a tower. The knowledge about the towers is the second shock to him. He decides that the rulers who use such cruel devices as the radiation towers must be toppled, and the only way is to destroy the Centre. But before he can do anything he is captured and sent to a prison in the South.

During his imprisonment his resolve is hardened when he discovers the radiation doesn't only affect the degens. Under its influence the majority become incapable of making rational judgements, and it is constantly being broadcast. The degens' agonies only come about when the radiation is intensified; otherwise they are unaffected, and thus dangerous to the leaders.

Maxim decides to act and escapes into the wastelands. There he spends a considerable time trying to find help. In a number of encounters with the mutant tribes all he discovers is that there is no help outside the nation. This is the weakest section of the book. Ideas are thrown in which seem significant at the time, but which are never developed and thus do not merit the time spent on them. The only happening of note is a meeting with a mutant wise man, called the Wizard (and even he, despite his mental powers, plays no further part in the story):

> "Yes," continued the Wizard, "I know what is driving you. The impatience of a troubled conscience! Your conscience has been spoiled by constant attention; it groans at the slightest discomfort, and your reason bows before it respectfully instead of scolding it and putting it in its proper place . . . You must keep your reason pure."
>
> "I can't agree with you," said Maxim coldly. "Conscience, driven by its own pain, sets the task; reason carries it out. Conscience sets ideals; reason searches for the path to fulfillment. That, precisely, is reason's function: to find that path." (p.201)

This is a pivotal point in the book. Maxim now has the maturity to see that there is, in fact, a conflict between reason and conscience, and that he needs to decide between them. The Maxim of chapter 1 wouldn't have understood that at all.

There is a brief chapter in which Maxim participates in a full scale battle. This advances the plot not at all, but dramatically shows the controlled men carelessly

throwing away their own lives for the greater glory of their country and their leaders. If the point about the horrors of total control needed reinforcing, this does it with a vengeance.

Finally Maxim destroys the Centre, freeing the population. However, his shocks are not over. The chief villain of the piece, Strannick, turns out to be an agent of the Galactic Security Council, trying to save the planet. Maxim has just destroyed five years' work, and the planet is still as socially and economically derelict as ever. But Maxim has made his decision and his maturity is now such that he can offer to help in the rebuilding of the world, with a proviso:

> "I'm damned sure about one thing: I'll never permit another Centre to be built as long as I live. Even with the best of intentions." (p.286)

The naive youngster has developed enough to have an answer to the age-old problem of ends justifying means, and the story is over.

As well as the main theme of Maxim's development, and the straightforward attack on Fascism, there are a couple of minor themes that the authors have used before in *Hard to be a God*. One of them is the idea of history going astray, as shown in a description of the nation:

> "... a nation that had no idea that it was not a free people, and that ... had swerved from the course of history." (p.175)

It is evident that the "course of history" referred to is the Marxist one, and that the swerving force is Fascism, as it was in *Hard to be a God*.

The other idea is of the single alien – Maxim in *Prisoners of Power*, Rumata in *Hard to be a God* – with the capability of acting to change the society. The difference between the two is that Rumata acts in full knowledge and maturity, whereas Maxim does not achieve that maturity until he has acted, the difference between god and man.

On a technical level, the book takes the form of a detection thriller. Maxim has to fight for his life whilst working out what is going on. The revelations come only as Maxim discovers them, so that the reader is in the same state of ignorance as the lead character – and in greater suspense because he is always waiting for the next twist (knowing how many pages there are to go) whereas Maxim is satisfied by what he has just found out.

The pace is fast, and to maintain it the authors use two main techniques. One is the use of multiple viewpoints, which has not been supplanted in Russian novels as it has in English language ones. This enables the authors to convey essential information in fewer words than they could otherwise. But they control their usage so that the reader is never ahead of Maxim in any significant way, and never for long even then.

The other device for keeping up the pace, with which I have less sympathy, is the use of reports. The plot progresses in jumps, leaving the intervening times unexplained for a while. The gaps are then filled in with literary "remembering" (the pluperfect tense) or with an actual written report being read by a high official – with related viewpoint shift, of course. The density of information conveyed in these reports leads to two or three indigestible lumps in the text. Sturgeon waxes lyrical about this clever and subtle technique in his introduction, but I can't agree. It is an easy way out when essential information has to be given to the reader, and there is nearly always a better way of doing it.

The revelation that Strannick is an Earthman at the end of the novel comes as too much of a surprise. It is not hinted at earlier on, and is obviously there only for its effect on Maxim. This happens on a number of other occasions also; the plot does not hang together completely, but this does not matter. It is only a vehicle for the story of Maxim the person.

Prisoners of Power is a flawed novel – the loose ends, the reported action technique, the rabbit-out-of-a-hat nature of the ending – but it has more to say than a clutch of Hugo winners, and for that alone it would be worth reading. That it is an enjoyable book also is a bonus.

Space War Blues
by Richard A. Lupoff *(Dell, 1978, 315pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 440 16292 0)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

"Audacious . . . Extravagant . . . " bleeps Harlan Ellison on the front of the Dell edition, while Sturgeon yells "A tour-de-force!" from the back; then, just to make sure we're in a properly receptive frame of mind before being allowed to approach the text itself, there are twenty-five pages of Introduction and Preface, in which Ellison and Dick Lupoff's agent squabble over who recognised him first, and Lupoff stands between looking embarrassed and a little bored, murmuring, "In all honesty, I don't feel a hell of a lot of emotional involvement with a book that was created in 1967."

Nor do I; nor will anyone else, I suspect. I'm not anxious to attack *Space War Blues*, because it's not an especially bad book. It's simply a redundant book: Now – Eleven Years Behind Its Time – Comes . . . you'll begin to see what I mean when you know it was originally called "With the Bentfin Boomer Boys on Little Old New Alabama".

I'm sure it would have been much more interesting had it found a publisher in '67, when its topics were fresh and topical. It protests against racism, and against the charades of politics; it has cyborgs, lots of spare-part surgery, and hermaphrodites with their very own pronouns. It shows a keen respect for Delany and Zelazny and Spinrad and Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head*. It's naive and ambitious and in 1978 very tedious indeed. The supposition is simply that other planets have been colonised by Earth's national and political factions and minority groups, one to a planet, so that the Bentfin Boomer Boys from N'Alabama, instead of fighting green men from Betelgeuse, are fighting black men from N'Haiti. Within that, Lupoff manages to find a lot of different things to mention, but mentioning is all he ever does with them. Sub-plots proliferate, but few survive. His book has no sense of timing and is leaking energy badly by the end. This is the classic failure of sacrificing imagination to awe: nothing is realised, nothing substantiated, nothing developed or followed through.

Space War Blues is proof that "experimental" writing has as much to do with error as trial. Lupoff's style rarely engages the senses and consistently disappoints the intellect. By "unusual technique" Ellison presumably means that Lupoff can be both fulsome –

> A native of the vacuum realm, the membrane ship danced and trembled in port like an unbroken stallion forced to accept the unwelcome restraint of a bridle and bit.

> *Makarata* was like a beast alive, yearning for the feel of the starwinds in her sails, the friction of sparse-ranging hydrogen atoms bounding from her flanks as she drove the channels from blazing sun to sun.

and tiresome –

> Noozes: wargozwell enemyfallzback blacasualtizriez papadocs lozing gloriwhite spacefleet neet treet.
>
> Y Bi Noozes? Headlines allasame allagame allafine allatime. Win win win. So: Why no fixem sidewalkcracks, streetlights, build some houses, kill some lowzes, and some schools? Afterwarz uvcorz.

By the time you've got through that, you're wondering why you bothered: that's the danger of this vision.

I don't know what Lupoff's doing now, but I'm sure he's looking forward to the day *Space War Blues* is softly remaindered away and forgotten. He probably does very much better now; I hope so. I hope he also realises (though these things are sadly outside an author's control) that exclamatory blurbs from Sturgeon and Ellison have become bad juju, which cautious readers shun as fearfully as comparisons to Tolkien. "Audacious . . . Extravagant . . . It will raise one hell of a noise." That was me yawning, Harlan.

What Happened to Emily Goode After the Great Exhibition
by Raylyn Moore *(Starblaze, 1978, 188pp, $4.95, ISBN 0 915442 51 5)*

reviewed by Ashley Rock

Not Hyde Park in 1851, but Philadelphia in 1876, where Mrs Goode, a war widow, normally living quietly in her house in New York, attending lectures and other edifying events and doing voluntary work for those less fortunate than herself, was spending a few days. She had taken crab and then a horsecar to the New York depot, where for the reasonable price of two dollars and sixty-five cents she had boarded the train of cars which rattled, thundered, wailed and spewed smoke and cinders to reach the Main Building in Philadelphia. Wrought in the best modern architectural pattern, using glass and iron, it extended for nearly one-third of a mile along the Concourse. The masterpiece of the Machinery Hall was the Great Double Corliss Engine, milestone of America's hundred-year march of achievement, and harbinger of incredible progress to come. And while she was looking past the giddily spinning flywheels to the immense twin pistons, the supports for which loomed against the trussed roof like the folded wings of an enormous bird hunched broodingly on a sombre mountain peak, some inbuilt magnetic force of the Corliss Engine thrust Emily into the Philly of 1973. And Emily, with a reticule containing an obsolete cheque book, decorative but unacceptable banknotes, gold coins that render the owner liable to prosecution if offered as currency, is soon embroiled in a series of episodes verging on the picaresque, involving the police, drugs, lesbians and a fate worse than death. And while, like Candide, she is facing the perils of a world for which she is ill-prepared, let us ask a few questions, allowing the great big saw to come nearer and nearer to our heroine.

Is the book really science fiction? Aroint thee, peasants and pedants – this question is not to be asked. Is it a convincing contrast between Victorian virtues

and the degradation of modern America? Well, hardly. Emily, instructed by her father and Miss Lawley's Female Academy, knew more of public matters than most young ladies of her class. An ardent newspaper reader, she was aware of some of the scandals of her day, although her only personal tragedy was the death of her young husband in battle. Yet her acquaintance with the seaminess of her world was blinkered by protective gentility. I express my own view here; this is not a point made by the author, who is more concerned, in her gentle, satiric fashion, with crime and vulgarity in the 1970s.

Is this an example of evaluating our world by seeing it through the eyes of an alien? Since the eyes are not very alien, why not choose a girl from a convent or Polynesia? Time is an unnecessary artifice for achieving the "new" angle, as Huxley showed in 1932 when he brought his "Savage" to re-evaluate the *Brave New World*. Reconsidering his device fifteen years later, he decided that he had allowed his "Savage" to speak too rationally. The abnormality of innocence is not qualified to pronounce on the insanity of the over-organised. Raylyn Moore has no wish to be a Huxley, and indeed most of the story is characterised by an agreeable levity of touch, but she occasionally overburdens the narrative by giving Emily a critical role similar to that of the "Savage" and allowing the sententious to intrude.

Thus Emily tells a psychiatrist:

> "I shall never really become accustomed to a world where food has lost its flavour . . . everything is covered with smoke that never blows away, it is too often impossible to tell men from women and boys from girls, and where wars are fought without reasons and without honour."
>
> "Never even got used to it myself," he grunted finally, "and I was born here."

The implication that the nineteenth century was a fairer, purer time is rather silly. If the young Emily Mender had given Miss Lawley the slip she would have found a harsher world a few streets away than the one lurking a century ahead, a level of poverty and brutal repression soon to inspire Jack London's *Iron Heel*. Or had she later continued in her train of cars further south than Philadelphia, as she vaguely knew, she would have visited the sad land of carpetbaggers, vengeance and anarchy. The narrative, as I shall explain later, is unusually pleasant but it is lightweight. The opinions of Emily permeate the novel, and are part of its special quality; as objective judgments – if they are so intended, as sometimes they seem to be – they are as convincing as the time-transference powers of the Corliss Engine. This point is emphasised because much sf is concerned with criticism of the present age by extrapolation, or alien observation, and this book does not deserve a serious place in that genre.

Why, then, do I find myself liking it very much? To answer this I return to the apparently rhetorical question about the convent or Polynesia. First, whether what we learn of modern times is of value or not, it is the return to Emily's past – in both senses – that is vivid and fascinating. Emily, because of her unusually advanced education, her conversations with her father and sister – accompanied by solemn warnings against appearing a blue-stocking outside the family circle – her vicarious involvement in the Civil War, was an unusually well-informed young woman of her day. There is no hint, surprisingly in someone of Emily's strength of character, of any element of rebellion against paternal domination as was being displayed by her contemporaries Samuel Butler and Edmund Gosse, nor, as has been said, of personal curiosity about the hardships of New Yorkers of a different class – either element would have made the novel less saccharine.

However if we accept her happy genteel environment the time-transfer approach

is successful, at least in reverse in the implied journey back to Emily's starting point. We are shown a vivid panorama, ranging from her own ambivalence at the prospect of a second marriage, through details of dress, travel and newspaper scandal, to fascination at the new mechanical wonders, with reservations about their practicability. There are references to the kidnapped little Charley Ross, Victoria Woodhull the Presidential Candidate, and the whirlwind courtship that began when Emily was knitting warm garments for the Sanitary Commission in Washington Square. These scraps of information arise mainly from Emily's soliloquies or discussions with the self-made scholar, her elderly admirer Mr Bemmy, and are scattered throughout the narrative so skilfully that the reader does not at first realise that the more interesting journey is not into the present but into a glowing nostalgic past. I would have enjoyed Raylyn Moore's tale more if the proportions devoted to the twentieth and nineteenth centuries had been reversed.

The second admirable feature of the novel is the use of careful flowing sentences throughout the book, the precise but not florid vocabulary that papa and Miss Lawley had instilled into the young Emily. Since I have quoted most of the first paragraph of this review from the book, it is not necessary to illustrate the style further. There is a difficulty with the slurred speech of Emily's twentieth century associates, which is rendered phonetically. This makes for contrast, but breaks the consistency. Perhaps, like Ivy Compton-Burnett, Raylyn Moore could have ignored class and made the newsvendor or taxi driver as articulate and grammatical as Emily, or merely used indirect speech. It is always difficult to decide whether a consistent pattern or the impact of an exaggerated contrast serves the author's purpose better.

It is only just to pay tribute to Polly and Kelly Freas, the editors and illustrators, who have used what I am told is scraperboard technique and Melior bodyface to produce a book unusually pleasant to look at.

Blind Voices
by Tom Reamy *(Berkley Putnam, 1978, 254pp, $8.95, ISBN 399 12240 0)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

This is Tom Reamy's first and last novel, for Reamy died of a heart attack at the early age of 42 in the Autumn of 1977. So a reviewer is faced with a potentially embarrassing task. Joyfully, there is nothing to worry about. One need not merely review this book; one can celebrate it – for it is *fine*. It is about magic (or what seems to be magic, but turns out to be paranormal abilities) and the book itself is magic.

To a sleepy Kansas town (of the 1920s, says the blurb, but a 1929 Packard is bowling along in chapter 6, so maybe we are shading into the 1930s) comes Haverstock's Travelling Curiosus and Wondershow, run by a parapsychic Frankenstein without any of the scruples of the original manipulator, who deliberately makes his miracles tawdry for camouflage. The prose and dialogue evoking early 1930s Kansas is impeccable: smells, colours, tastes, sounds, tone of voice, the texture of daily life in the sticks in the Depression. (At least I imagine it is impeccable; if it wasn't that way, well, that's how it ought to have been!)

It is a book of awakenings: both mental and sexual – of the young people drawn to the show, who suspect the mystery beneath the phoney razzamatazz; of Angel

the wonder boy awakening to love, and speech, and control of his talents which he hasn't been allowed to understand by the scheming, sadistic Haverstock. It is a novel of real horror too, as well as of dusty somnolent quiet: the escape of Tiny Tim, genetically tailored 12 inch "son" of Haverstock, from the murdering father, from black widow spiders, from alley cats, particularly is a nightmare. It is a tale of the triumph of innocence over evil; yet evil holds so many cards that there is nothing fore-ordained about the outcome.

Perhaps because some of the chapters are distinctly short, I've seen hints that this may not represent Reamy's final draft; if that's so, Reamy was an incredible draughtsman. Finally, Berkley Putnam have done a beautiful novel proud with a really lovely cover painting (by Plourde).

Yes, here is a book to celebrate. The review copy comes equipped with advance encomiums by Ellison, Bishop, Budrys *et al* – and they're all nothing less than the plain truth.

Cassandra Rising
edited by Alice Laurance *(Doubleday, 1978, 207pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 385 12857 6)*

reviewed by Pauline Jones

This is an anthology of stories by women. Although the science fiction element in some of them is token, or even absent, this volume, if its title is to be taken as an indication of some nascent female literary burgeoning, is in the main a somewhat slender contribution to any genre at all.

Cassandra was the slightly batty daughter of King Priam. She stood on the ramparts of windy Ilium toward the end of matters, and said that things would turn out badly. Apt title. Does it come from the wisdom of foresight or the bathos of hindsight? Each story is introduced by Ringmistress Alice Laurance with a chatty curriculum vitae, literary and/or domestic – for instance, we learn that one authoress is an inspired maker of filmstrips, another has thirty-four cats, and another has seventy-two houseplants. *Dashing away with the electric typewriter she stole my heart away.* All this protective self-congratulation is not only off-putting to read but surely irrelevant. Literature stands or falls on its inherent quality as an art-form which explores and redeems the human condition, and the present volume need not therefore even point out that its authors are female, unless of course the book is put forward as a piece of documentary material pertinent to an understanding of women. Insofar as most of the material is concerned, one hopes that the critical reader will remember that to understand all is to forgive all.

There are nineteen stories, four of which fit slap-bang into the ghost story category, and none of these takes an original slant at that. In "The Way Back" (Raylyn Moore) a woman returns, after dying in hospital, to haunt her family invisibly and harmlessly. They live in a large house in the country, stocked with antiques that include a Gobelin tapestry. No one seems to have much to do or much to worry about, least of all the ghost, whose great anticipated consolation is looking out at the moonlight from the tower.

In "Schlossie" (Alice Laurance), the first-person narrator concludes (wrongly) that her just-buried sister was in fact a reincarnation of Adolf Hitler, on the somewhat slender premise that she was always interested in Hitler, in spite of the fact that she

was Jewish and lazy, and once at a tender age seemed to call a sandcastle *ein schloss*.

In "Lady in Waiting" (Anne McCaffrey), a newly widowed wife moves into an old house in the country. There is a chest in the tower which, after an amount of sniffing and yearning, promises to contain the remains of her embalmed husband, who has just been knocked off in a pub-bombing. But the good lady keeps a stiff upper lip if nothing else, and goes on making jam. In "Impact" (Steve Barnes), a rather immature girl driving a Mustang crashes in the rush to patch things up with her boyfriend (good Ballardesque injury-details here). But whilst believing she hasn't *actually* died, suddenly does so, which understandably enough brings the story to a full stop.

There are two stories which can only be called fantasies. "There Was a Garden" (Zenna Henderson) is a piece of eschatological, anthropomorphic allegory, in which the geosphere and biosphere and the parts thereof decide that they were better off being polluted and exploited by man, than left to their own devices and lonely anarchy. Freed slaves are often re-exploited on the same basis. In "Last One In is a Rotten Egg" (Grania Davis), ejaculating spermatazoa are characterized as Darwinian kiddies chasing after the Duke of Edinburgh's Outward Bound Award. However, there is a slight piquancy in the contrast (or should I say the vas deferens?) drawn between the wanky news-breaking telephone conversation between husband and wife, and the tooth-and-claw behaviour of their bourgeois germ-plasm. It might be as well to mention, at the end of this somewhat drippy catalogue, "Selena" (Beverly Goldberg). A pubescent danseuse is junked up to take part in some interstellar terpsichorean Olympics. This she wins swanningly, but dies. Oh well, nothing is perfect. Fortunately, this story, which is slush, is very short.

The remaining stories can, for various reasons, be construed as science fiction. It will have been noticed that five out of the six stories so far mentioned have death central to their narrative import. Nine of the remainder go the same way, and so it is hardly surprising if the volume as a whole is somewhat humourless. That is to say that the authors are very sincere.

Six of the remaining stories exhibit a fairly strong political preoccupation with implied liberal sympathies: in "Night-Rise" (Katherine MacLean), the most complete and powerful in this group, an alcoholic reporter stumbles across a Second Coming sect closely related in practice and outlook to the 18th and 19th century Thugs of India. These were devotees of a Christ-figure (Krishna) who saved the weak from the uninheritable earth by translation into eternal death rather than eternal life. The sect in the story has its altars up dark alleys, and does not proselytize, just waits. Since the story is written in the first person, and the narrator falls victim, it would have been more elegant and logical in the third person. However.

In "SQ" (Ursula Le Guin), mad psychometrist Dr Speakie sorts out the world into one vast looneybin through the application of his infallible Insanity Test. Not surprisingly he goes west himself, and we end up with his secretary and a caretaker governing the world, dull people well suited to this kind of work. For Le Guin's hand this story was disappointingly trite.

"Fliration Walk" (Kay Rogers) follows the unlikely but well-exploited pattern where a member of an élite spearhead commando kills a beautiful dissident, is then conscience-stricken, and joins the underground. Any chance of verisimilitude in this sequence of events is wholly undermined by the victim of the murder being beatiful, vulnerable and having fled to a beguiling pleasure world from a régime which is presented as transparently corrupt and unappealing.

"Nightfire" (Sydney J. van Scyoc) has the New World engaged in a bizarre conflict between continental unificationists and nationalist patriots. Like so many

American narratives of near-future apocalypse, the rest of the world seems not to exist in this odd scenario. On the ground, devastation and conflict are evident, but hovering at 60,000 feet (by means not described) are vast antheaps of non-combatants. The heroine gets these colonies lowered, and opposing governments are paralysed. This is a simple anti-war fantasy based on the fallacy that 20th century war machines could care tuppence about anyone, let alone those with a negative cost efficiency.

"Uraguyen and I" (Miriam Allen deFord and Juanita Coulson) is more subtle and accomplished. An egomaniac dictator riddled with cancer is finally reduced to searching for a brain which duplicates his own personality. The twist in the tail of this story is not so important as the analysis, which cannot be restated often enough, of how post-revolutionary idealism moves into tyranny, and rarely out of it, on the path to socialist reconstruction. Unfortunately, no one with the necessary fanatical vested interest is likely to write an sf novel which gets us out of that trough.

Last in this group of stories with a political bent is "Escape to the Suburbs" (Rachel Cosgrove Payes). Instead of New York being (as one so often wishes it would be) completely dispersed and dismantled, it is simply quarantined and abandoned to its ethnic proletariat. Hard tack is dropped by helicopter into the Soylent Green depths. Quick-to-cut soul brothers try to escape in a way that King Kong couldn't, that is by hang gliders. This story is spare, refreshing and vivid.

The remaining stories have a psychological/biological flavour, apart, that is, from "Space/Time Arabesque" (Chelsea Quinn Yarbro) and "The Slow and Gentle Progress of Trainee Bell-Ringers" (Barbara Paul). The former is inconsequential and stale, and the latter is a somewhat thin re-examination of a time paradox in which every-girl's-dream-history-student Angie gets to be Elizabeth I (could anyone explain the title to me, or is it as whimsical as the story?).

In "Troll Road" (Joan Bernott), an ill-favoured hick is made personable by star-travellers. The advances of a would-be sweetheart founder on the rock of "you didn't like me when I was ugly, how come you like me now?". Depends what you're after.

In "Motherbeast" (Kathleen Sky), there is a strident but strong examination of a daughter's repressed desire for her father. An "alien" mother comes to inhabit her own daughter's foetus as the mother's body dies in childbirth. This child takes mother's place with father, and the jealous daughter, who has been relegated to a corner of her own brain by mother, slangs it out with her until things are resolved by a repetition of the cycle.

"Alien Sensation" (Josephine Saxton) has mankind preserved recumbent, enervated and hallucinated by species-preserving aliens. Mankind degenerates and nothing appeals, until a bright alien psychologist comes up with the idea of simulated charring. The subject of the experiment dies in ecstasy, mop in hand.

Lastly, there is "The Vanillamint Tapestry" (Jacqueline Lichtenberg), which is the longest and best thing in the book. The story is written with authority and confidence, and its treatment and vision are heartenningly full. Symbiosis, detection and ethnical perplexity run through the narrative against the background of a planet described with the éclat, strangeness and resonance of Jack Vance. Although a satisfactory and accomplished story, it fails to save this volume from being a dog's breakfast.

Had the book consisted of stories as good as "The Vanillamint Tapestry", it would have rivetted the attention and would not have required a prestigious introduction by André Norton. A volume which requires gift-wrapping and a *pro vita*

sua is not bound to impress or benefit any platform, WASP feminist or otherwise. The many stories which fail in this anthology are condemned by one sin of commission: they are written out of the conviction that one's sexuality is interesting, and driven by a deluded belief in its inevitable martyrdom. Menstrual pains are real enough, but bloody boring.

The Alchemical Marriage of Alistair Crompton
by Robert Sheckley *(Michael Joseph, 1978, 191pp, £4.50, ISBN 0 7181 1695 X)*

reviewed by Mike Dickinson

Twenty years ago – in December 1958 to be exact – *Galaxy* magazine contained a novella called "Join Now" by Finn O'Donnevan (a pen-name used by Sheckley because there was an episode of one of his novels in the same issue). It featured a central character, Alistair Crompton, who had the task of finding and reintegrating with various other people – the sensual Edgar Loomis, the violent Don Stack and the mystic Barton Finch – who were not in fact separate human beings but slivers of Crompton's personality. These fractional beings inhabited artificial "Durier" bodies which, though perfect counterfeits of flesh and bone, had a sufficiently limited life to add urgency to Crompton's strange quest. This is the plot and these are the characters which, together with several pages of direct transcription, form the basis of *The Alchemical Marriage of Alistair Crompton.*

Plot has never been the strongest point of a Sheckley novel. The early short stories which brought him to public notice almost invariably used a single idea with a startling twist at the end. This dependence on the O. Henry model gave Sheckley few resources with which to tackle novels. So the best of his novels – e.g. *The Journey of Joenes* (1962) and *Mindswap* (1966) – used the Odyssey format. In his more recent longer works, *Dimension of Miracles* (1968) and *Options* (1975), this basic structure has tended to break down, leaving a group of vaguely related stories in the case of the former book and total stagnation in the latter work. In *Alistair Crompton* the plot dynamic is sufficient to keep at least half the story moving at a good pace. The original magazine story was clever in its central idea but rather primitive in style, whereas the novel is a polished and extremely funny piece of work.

The quality of the humour, in fact, is the most notable difference between the earlier and later versions of the story. In the original the humour is comparatively rare and crude; in the novel it is continual and effective. Crompton's former semi-serious quest becomes, in the expanded version, an ordeal of farcical blundering. Some of the humour – e.g. the pidgin Chinese-sepaking robot whose circuits have been subsumed by old Fu Manchu movies – is reminiscent of Ron Goulart, but the locales (particularly the eponymous planet of the Aaians) provide Sheckley with a far richer soil for his imagination than Goulart has ever discovered. Because of their immortality Aaians need a constant supply of fresh experience, hence their attempt to attract tourists by such devices as the eternal orgy at the Pleasure Gardens of Rui. Sheckley seizes the opportunity for hilarious asides on the sexual farce, e.g.: "nearby, seven muns were trying to engage in sexual psillicosis by parentian closure – rather pathetically, since they lacked the all-important badminton equipment".

There is a detached appreciation of absurdity in this novel which is typical of

Sheckley's matured talent. The wry passages of social description are crucial to the success of the book. Crompton's quest is expanded from the original (and rather dull) Mars and Venus to the planets Aaia and Ygga, widely separate but each given enough exotic background to be interesting. However, the ludicrous invention and witty asides fail, at times, to mitigate the fundamental implausibility of the novel's central device. We, and Alistair Crompton, know that there is no possibility of a successful meld even should all four minds consent. The walls have set around the characters' personalities and there is no common ground even though each is in his own way totally inadequate to stand as an individual. The ending, which is believably irresolute, merely confirms this.

Reading the second half of the novel one also begins to wonder why Sheckley has left so much of the original magazine story intact. The search formula is not in itself very interesting, and one reads a master of the form such as Jack Vance for the background details, the descriptions of communities accidentally stumbled upon. Sheckley plays with such details but cannot be said to develop them. The weak original, relatively unbolstered by the modern Sheckley, limps. As I stated earlier, plotting has never been Sheckley's strong point, and, looking at this novel with its borrowed skeleton, together with the mostly invertebrate recent short stories, I cannot help but wonder whether the ability to plot has failed him entirely in recent years. His plots were always relatively trite but they served their turn – cannibalization of his own work may signal an inability to produce even triteness. I hope that Sheckley will prove me wrong, for his gifts are unique and irreplaceable. But perhaps this is a pessimistic and mean assessment of a book which is, for all its faults, one of the wittiest yet produced within the sf genre.

The Crew of the Mekong
by E. Voiskunsky and I. Lukodyanov *(Moscow: Mir Publishers, 1974, 422pp)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

In the years before translations of Soviet sf became sufficiently fashionable to interest British and American publishers a certain amount of Russian sf was published in English by the Foreign Languages Publishing House, and later by Mir Publishers, both of Moscow. The books so translated were not easy to come by, and remain rather scarce, but among them are numerous items of interest. Mir, who produced the volume under review, produced six sf books in English between 1967 and 1975, including the first novel by the Strugatsky brothers to be translated, *Far Rainbow*. *The Crew of the Mekong* appears to be the only one of the six volumes still in print, but in the last few years Mir have published several sf books in Spanish and German, and might do more English translations in the future, especially if some encouragement is forthcoming from English-speaking readers.

An unusually high proportion of Russian sf novels seem to be written in collaboration. Apart from the Strugatsky brothers and the authors of the present volume Mir have also featured the work of the Abramovs (*Horsemen from Nowhere*, 1969 and *Journey Across Three Worlds*, 1973). *The Crew of the Mekong* is the first novel by Voiskunsky – an ex-naval officer and journalist – and Lukodyanov, a design engineer. Their second novel, *The Black Pillar*, appeared in the Mir collection *The Molecular Cafe* (1968) and they have written at least three sf books since.

The Crew of the Mekong is principally concerned with the exploits of a group of engineers associated with a project to build an oil pipeline across the Caspian Sea. The man in charge of the project, Boris Privalov, is attracted by the notion of increasing the surface tension of the oil artificially so that it can be transported without any need of a pipe. His assistants, Nikolai Potapkin and Yura Kostyukov (the owners of the sailing-ship *Mekong*) become involved in experiments attempting to increase the surface tension of various liquids by electrical stimulation. In the meantime, another scientist working on a project to raise the level of the Caspian in order to improve conditions for shipping, Nikolai Opratin, becomes involved with an attempt to solve the mystery of a knife whose blade can penetrate solid matter without interfering with its structure. The two projects, and the people involved with them, become gradually entangled. The origin and the history of the knife are eventually revealed, while the experiments begin to produce results. A strong contrast is drawn between the motivation of Opratin – obsessive and self-seeking – and that of Privalov's team, where common-sense rules, everyone is more amiable, and everyone is socially-responsible. In the climax of the book, Opratin's research suffers disaster even as his attempts to master the secrets of interpenetrability come to fruition. Potapkin and Kostyukov, with the aid of many others, eventually reap the rewards of the breakthrough. Oil begins to flow across the Caspian, without the need for a pipe, and the level of the sea is, indeed, raised.

As with all books in translation – especially from a language whose conventions are so different from our own – *The Crew of the Mekong* occasionally reads awkwardly, especially in its dialogue. Its rather convoluted plot is told with frequent flashbacks (some to the eighteenth century, when the knife was made and fell into the hands of a Russian officer, survivor of an ill-fated diplomatic mission to the Khan of Khiva). For this reason, it takes a little getting into. It is, however, a fascinating book with some unusual ideas. It is "hard" science fiction of the purest type, approaching its mysteries with the experimental attitudes of engineers, and it belongs to a species which is nowadays relatively uncommon in Anglo-American sf. It is, though, by no means old-fashioned in terms of the scientific background which forms its basis, and is a book well worth searching for – as, indeed, are the other Mir volumes.

The Night of Kadar
by Garry Kilworth *(Faber and Faber, 1978, 193pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 571 11202 1)*

reviewed by Anthony Wolk

In Garry Kilworth's *The Night of Kadar* we see the first stages of a Terran presence on an alien planet. It is a theme that has me reading and rereading *Dune, Planet of Exile, Stolen Faces*, and in a slightly different mode, *Islandia*. Like Michael Bishop's *Stolen Faces, The Night of Kadar* presents more than one culture alien to the occidental reader, for Kilworth's voyagers arrive inculcated with an Arabic culture, though somewhat generalized to suit an off-Terran Islam. Thousands of years from its launching, their spaceship approaches what it discerns as a habitable planet and accordingly unfreezes its 2000 embryos which then develop at a much accelerated pace. Soon nurture is added to nature and teaching machines simulate infancy, youth,

adolescence . . . to the age of 30. To judge from fascinating glimpses of the two primary characters Othman and Silendi (husband and wife), the simulation is remarkably complete, though the characters retain the dual awareness of the spaceship and of Terra.

But something has gone awry – the programmed instruction is interrupted by something alien. Half of the contingency arrive fully developed but uninformed about the rationale for their mission; the second half are blank, uninstructed, moronic. A great deal of casting about results. A reader familiar with Lem's *The Invincible* will ask what kind of mission was intended here: there are engineers, architects, weapons specialists, pilots, doctors, but no astronomers, biologists, and no planetologists. Hmmn. And with the computer fouled up, answers are hard to come by.

The starship has landed on a small island and engineer Othman assumes the role of leader whether intended or not, devoting their energies to building a causeway across the "vast sea of bubbling silt" which surrounds them, to the distant mainland. There is the suggestion of an ecological theme, along the lines of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The World for World Is Forest*:

> Felling the trees then began in earnest and the forest became a bedlam of cries and shrieking timber as machines cut down hardwood giants and dragged them toward the shore of the quicksand . . .

The autochthones, empathic but alien, do little to hinder this energetic destruction (called "Stickmen", I imagine them like Philip K. Dick's Bleekmen in *Martian Time-Slip*) – when the time comes, they simply go another way, but not before "touching" the morons into an empathic awareness. Thereafter, the morons go the way of the aliens. The bridge is emblematic of the first half of the novel. It is an abortive construction, devastating to the island and futile in itself – for seasonal change, mysteriously unanticipated, renders it unnecessary (the planetary year is roughly 10 STY). Whatever harmony there is results from Othman's focal energies to get off the island, and not from any inner or cultural homogeneity.

In fact there is a primary division in the group that surfaces early. Silendi, an architect, would turn their encampment into a capital, but Othman represents a different drive, that of the Bedu, of the nomad "with the blood of the curious traveller in his veins". And for much of the book this division persists, whether to wander or to settle. Othman's mistake had been in trying to divine their purpose from their programmed occupations, from their animals and equipment. Soon after they achieve the mainland, he realizes his mistaken orientation:

> He stared up at the skies, at the stars. But instead of giving thanks to Allah for his people's deliverance, he softly cursed those who had sent them. Whatever had gone wrong out there in space, whatever had happened to blank their minds, should have been guarded against. All eventualities should have been covered – protection should have been available. Then he realized what he was expecting of them and he knew he was wrong.

In the latter half of the book there is a welcome adaptation of the scattered wills of what "could have been a group of city people" into a tribe, "with each member knowing his or her daily tasks and where they fitted into the structure of the tribe, both socially and officially". And with adaptation come some answers, to why they left Terra, and to explain the coincidence of Terran flora like qat, or tea. And to account for the discovery of a barbaric and primitive but undeniably human settlement.

If there is a weakness to the novel, it is there in the first chapter when the "alien presence" interrupts the intelligence units and thereafter when it keeps a watchful eye on the quasi-colonists, for instance on their journey from the island:

> The visitor came as a heaving oval of light peppered by black windseeds, which swirled in and out of its shape. It stopped, some metres from the entourage, and, pulsing slowly as if breathing heavily after a run, seemed to contemplate the awestruck humans with some interest. Then, without warning, it flashed skywards.

Othman and the reader (who has the added advantage of having read the first chapter) know this is something more than a will-o'-the-wisp. It is deliberate in its interference when the tribe does choose to settle and build walls, dispersing them with plagues of smoke, wind, rain, and hail. Clearly the central concern of the novel is the tribe's evolution of a culture of their own choice, a culture that is more than a reaction to the Terran intent; but their adaptation into a harmonious tribe is disappointingly unheroic when the fact is they had no other choice. They achieve the freedom of a zoo.

In Kilworth's first novel, *In Solitary*, it is precisely this quality of choice that leads the young Terran Cave to abandon his native planet and species, to leave with the defeated aliens – "We would rather take our chances with the Soal. Kill us or take us! But do not leave us behind alive." The alternative would have been a restricted life on a reservation, supervised by the liberators from the Terran colony on Mars.

My enjoyment of *The Night of Kadar* (and enjoy it I did) depended on my ignoring the Manipulators, the anti-*deus ex machina*. For the present I will hope for a sequel. That failing, the night of Kadar and its attendant revelation will have to suffice.

Cinnabar
by Edward Bryant *(Fontana, 1978, 176pp, £0.75, ISBN 0 00 615146 9)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Edward Bryant is one of the generation of writers that sprang up just after the New Wave struck. The new radicals, loudly scornful of audience expectations and almost paranoid in evading conventionality, seemed for a while to polarise opinions on the writing of sf. At one end were those who stood fast by the moderate stylistic precepts of "the tradition", and at the other those who were eager to ransack the entire range of verbal possibilities to meet the demands of spiralling imagination. Whatever else the New Wave achieved, it ensured that its immediate successors would be acutely sensitive to their position as writers, and reminded those (on both shores) who preferred to consider sf a remote island kingdom that it is actually just another region of the mainland of fiction.

Hence the writers' workshops, and hence Ed Bryant. He is a very conscious writer, minutely aware that words are a medium which can yield a vast range of shapes and textures to skilful hands. He writes a considered, highly developed prose, which can delay the narrative sense and detonate its various devices at different times and with unexpected effects. His stories are written to require re-reading, on which a word or phrase that seemed casual or odd the first time through will suddenly click into place. It is a workshop prose – no flashes of brilliance, no deep, inexplicable reverberations, but the sensation that each line has been turned by

hand, each word selected and inserted with care.

I remark on this by way of stressing the peculiar quality of *Cinnabar*. Cinnabar, Bryant's ideal city of the imagination, is a fabrication of pure willed romance, where technology is harnessed to dream and the citizens play in a spirit of genteel enlightenment. Only Tourmaline Hayes, the sex-star, stops one visitor from calling it Utopia.

> "Cinnabar? It's no Utopia. There are more options here than you've had before. That's all. There's diversity on an asymptotic curve that never quite touches total breakdown."

So, like all synthetic paradises of romance, Cinnabar contains its own fascinating dooms: immortal inhabitants for whom love is "a transient cultural concept", in and out of vogue, whose couplings cannot survive unless they ritualise the hatred that centuries of familiarity breed, who go to have their brains periodically sponged of the unbearable stain of memory.

We are in the region of the autumn stars, exactly between Moorcock's "Dancers at the End of Time" and Ballard's *Vermilion Sands* (which Bryant acknowledges), but Cinnabar is not diminished by their proximity. While lacking the delicacy and humour of Moorcock and the compulsive glamour of Ballard, Bryant manages to interpose an authentic, original creation, more mercurial and elusive than either. He lays bare some of the personal elements that went into the construction of the city, and makes it clear from the start that the romance, the dream, is his own.

This is why I stressed the virtuosity of Bryant's craft before mentioning his subject matter. *Cinnabar* may appear to be a piece of stylish self-indulgence, a whimsical flit through the hinterlands of the authorial fancy; but it is scarcely that, and much more. Bryant's skill is to objectify what he writes and grant it a serene independence. The origin of each story may be in private fantasy, but it immediately opens out. As Tourmaline suspects, Cinnabar is the only city in the world, the City at the Centre of Time. "Infinite diversity, an opportunity for the exercise of endless alternatives," Bryant claims, and almost succeeds. Unlike Vermilion Sands, Cinnabar is not enclosed, not a dead-end. Despite recurrent characters, the stories do not melt into one another: one works as a parable, another as a mystery; there is a fairytale and a horror story and some remarkably straight science fiction, about time travel and artificial creatures. Cinnabar is somewhere (over the rainbow), but the somewhere shifts, and its citizens are intermittently occupied with trying to track it down. We become involved with them, even in their most tranquil and self-absorbed phases, because Bryant's techniques demand imaginative concentration, and because their self-created desires and despairs recall our own.

The Ennead
by Jan Mark *(Kestrel, 1978, 252pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 7226 5477 4)*
Star Lord
by Louise Lawrence *(Harper & Row, 1978, 170pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 06 023776 7)*
The Castle of Dark
by Tanith Lee *(Macmillan, 1978, 180pp, £3.95, ISBN 0 333 24792 2)*

reviewed by Pamela Cleaver

One of the questions that comes up for discussion regularly at children's book con-

ferences and in journals devoted to children's literature is "what makes a book a children's book?" and its corollary, "are the books currently published in the children's lists sometimes beyond their intended readers?" I do not propose to go into all the answers given, but I want to draw attention to the problem, for in the case of genre fiction, the dividing line is even narrower; if you are a devotee of historical novels, science fiction or fantasy, all is grist to your mill regardless of where the publishers put it in their lists. Among children's books in these genres the interested adult will find many books that appeal to him, and child-fans of the genres will swallow whole books that many adults would say are too old for them.

I firmly believe that books (except those intended for the very youngest readers) are for people who read and are interested in the subject matter regardless of their age and I think it is a great pity that in libraries there is a special children's section where some really good books that deserve adult attention languish unread by those who would enjoy them. I far prefer libraries that put everything for eleven year olds upwards on the general shelves but classify the books under subject matter. In that case the first book under review would be in the sf section and would get the many readers it deserves. As an English master at a prep school said to me when I asked him if he intended putting *The Ennead* in the library, "Yes, once in a while a very intelligent thirteen year old will read it, but it won't go out very often. I shall buy it though because it will be so rewarding for those who can cope with it."

Jan Mark has already written two highly acclaimed children's books, one of which, *Thunder and Lightnings*, won the Carnegie Medal. Both these books were about misfit children trying to find themselves and their place in the real world of here and now. *The Ennead* carries on her theme but is a much more ambitious book. It is about a misfit boy with the same objective but the setting is a system of nine planets far from our solar system and the time is the future. The Ennead is peopled, where it is inhabited, by refugees from polluted, over-crowded Earth who, having learned nothing from their experiences, turn Euterpe (the third planet) into a dog-eat-dog hell and so over-exploit the moon Orpheus that all the colonists die except for one child, our hero Isaac. He is taken to live on Erato, the mining planet, a hot, dusty, bleak world where life is rigidly controlled and the worst crime is unemployment.

When Isaac is fifteen, he must have a job or be deported to Euterpe. He lives with Theodore, the son of the man who rescued him and adopted him. By low cunning, Isaac creates a job for himself as Theodore's steward and soon learns how to extract money from his fellow servants by graft and corruption. Artists are highly suspect on Erato but when Isaac sees the chance to have a sculptor brought from Euterpe (ordered from a catalogue, delivery time two years) to carve a monument for Theodore's garden, he schemes and manipulates to secure her passage because he needs someone who will look up to him and be grateful to him. However when the sculptor Eleanor arrives, she shatters all his dreams by being tough, independent and rebellious as well as ungrateful. Trying to get her to conform to Erato's ways gets Isaac into difficulties and getting her out of trouble takes most of his hard-earned cash.

Isaac has never given or received love and kindness but he likes and respects Moshe, the gardener on the next estate and his protective feelings for Eleanor are gradually awaking affection in him. When he sees the friendship blossoming between Eleanor and Moshe, he is jealous and when they fall in love and are indicted for fornication, Isaac is the last person to realise what has been going on but he faces truth and reality and grows up. He discovers then that he is (as the

reader has suspected) Theodore's half-brother and therefore half-owner of a large portion of Erato and could be rich but he rejects all this in order to help Eleanor who is to be deported or hunted down and killed although he knows that neither of them has any chance of escaping the consequences of their actions. But, as the book ends, for a few precious moments, Isaac is free and master of his own fate and is content.

The evocation of the sterile landscape of Erato is masterly and the exploration of character against this background makes compelling reading. The horrors of the cold compulsory religious observances and the political implications of the system depicted are only too believable. It is a story that stays in the mind long after it has been laid down.

Louise Lawrence's *Star Lord* is a very different kind of book. It takes place on a legend-haunted Welsh mountainside where a family – Grandad who has always been there, Mom (she ought to be Mam as this is Wales) who has come back from the city after a failed marriage and her two teen-age children Rhys and Gwyneth – are living like a posed tableau. Suddenly an alien craft crashes on the mountainside with its star lord survivor and sets the tableau in motion. Trying to save Erlich the star lord, the family pits itself against the government, the soldiers and the police and finally against the power of the mountain itself. All this changes them; Grandad's life is claimed by the mountain while Erlich and the boy Rhys escape from this world. Blod, the dog, spends the rest of her life on the mountainside (like Greyfriars Bobby) waiting for Rhys to return. Mom and Gwyneth live out their dull lives and die of old age, and when Rhys returns, like Rip Van Winkle, he thinks one night only has passed. Although the brooding power of the mountain is well evoked, the plot is romantic and trashy and the writing flowery: the sf elements do not blend well with the legend and fantasy.

Tanith Lee is a writer whose forte is the evocation of place and atmosphere. I like the books she writes which appear in the children's lists better than her big, block-busting adult fantasies like *The Storm Lord*. For instance, *The Winter Players* was a gem of myth-creation. When writing to the length required for books for children she seems to concentrate and distil her mythology, magic and atmosphere and her writing has more sharpness and authority.

The Castle of Dark is about Lilune, a beautiful, accursed creature who can only go out at night and even then needs a moon-shade to protect her skin. She is kept prisoner in the castle by two old crones. Bored and frustrated, she concentrates her mind and sends out a summons which is heard by Lir, a talented harper who has been taught by a wandering enchanter to construct a magical harp from some very curious components.

Lir rescues Lilune from the castle but finds he has taken on much more than he has bargained for. Lilune has no knowledge of the way of the world and she is happier when constrained, she needs darkness and imprisonment to contain the evil which she calls up involuntarily. She becomes the pet and the bane of a Duke who rescues her from drowning while she is parted from Lir, but Lir again has to rescue her from the Duke's castle when she is accused of witchcraft. At last Lir realises that it is not Lilune who is evil but the castle from which she came and in a strange lyrical sequence full of symbols, he banishes the evil with the power of his harp music and rescues Lilune from danger for the third and last time. He breaks the spell completely and Lilune can at last live in the light of common day. This is a strange and beautiful story that will appeal to fantasy lovers of all ages, but like the first book, many adult readers will miss it because it will hide its light on the children's shelves in library and bookshop.

The Shining
by Stephen King *(Signet, 1978, 448pp, $2.50, ISBN 0 451 07872 1)*

reviewed by Anthony Wolk

The Shining combines two elements generically: it draws on science fiction's parapsychology and from the horror genre, the malevolent hotel. The particular malevolent hotel in *The Shining* is the Overlook, northwest of Denver and Boulder, Colorado. Northwest by 40 miles even of Sidewinder. It is a resort hotel built 1907-09 and is accessible only from late spring to early autumn. Otherwise it is snowbound. And so, it requires a winter caretaker.

Enter Jack Torrance of the violent temper, erstwhile playwright (with a story in *Esquire* entitled "Concerning Black Holes"!), who attains his position as a last ditch effort to hold himself, his art, and his family of three together. Which includes his son Danny, age five, by virtue of whose presence the novel might be called science fiction. Danny has the "knack", otherwise known as "shining". Just what its limits are is a fair question. Danny is telepathic – he calls this facility his "understandings". He can get the literal thought and also "undercurrents" more difficult to interpret, as well as "feelings" (which makes him a passive empath). He also has precognitive visions from "thinking very hard", though they can be fallible. And he seems to have some parachronological gift; through him the Overlook is able to make "all time . . . one". He may even be telekinetic.

The Shining is, I imagine, an ordinary example of its kind, borrowing some aspects of science fiction but couching them so that the work remains a horror story. Bookstores know to shelve these books separately from the Heinlein and Asimov. They go with the ghost books, the occult. Arthur Herzog's *The Swarm* and *Heat* are two recent examples, each taking a plausible assumption (an attack of killer bees and the greenhouse effect), not for a Ballardian consideration of what sort of society might evolve under this new circumstance, but to make it the basal material of a nightmare. I suspect it's no accident that *The Exorcist, Audrey Rose, The Swarm,* and *The Shining* all become films, while the science fiction we're used to reading resists translation into the visual mode. (The filming of *The Shining*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, has been postponed indefinitely after the January fire at the studio in Elstree which totally destroyed the set with just three shots left to take.)

Back to the novel. At its heart (chapter 4 – an early heart) is Danny's precognitive vision of a *redrum* (he sees the word in a mirror), complete with redrum instrument (a roque mallet – cf. croquet), a "blue rug with a riot of twisting black shapes woven into its pile", the dripping hand of the dead lady from Room 217, a locked trapdoor, and a monster whose refrain in a "voice of a madman, made the more terrible by its familiarity" is "Come on and take your medicine! Take it like a man!". Scary stuff for Dan, even for the reader at this point. And the references to rogue elevators, slashing roque mallets, to the masked ball, to an animated topiary (hedge rabbits, dogs, and lions), and to redrum would go on being scary if the story were to get on with it and accept at some humane point that suspense is now sufficiently built. But the book has 58 chapters, only one of which serves as denouement. So for 50-odd chapters the pressure builds. When the climax comes in the penultimate chapter there is little psychic energy left – it's pretty well drained away.

King himself says something about the generic roots of his novel by prefacing it with a short quote from Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death", which then becomes another element in his chorus of horrific references:

The Red Death held sway over all!
Unmask! Unmask!

But of course there is a vital difference between Poe and Stephen King. Poe intended his stories to be read at a single sitting (which may explain the success of the films).

It could be argued that the novel is a veiled psychological study of Jack Torrance, whose relationship with his violent father suggests Jack's own swings of love and wrath toward Danny (he broke Danny's arm not long before). But even that strand dissolves in favour of the accumulation of effect. The novel is self-celebrated in its blurbs for its "relentless heightening of horror" and not for the sensitive portrayal of an artist under stress. The periodic last sentences of chapters are a good instance of this heavy-handed emphasis:

> Let's get inside.
> And they did, closing the door firmly behind them against the relentless whine of the wind. (ch.13)
>
> Then Wendy closed the basement door behind them, closing it into darkness. (ch.18)
>
> And sometime after midnight, he [Danny] slept too and then only the wind was awake, prying at the hotel and hooting in its gables under the bright gimlet gaze of the stars. (ch.21)
>
> Inside its [the hotel's] shell the three of them went about their early evening routine, like microbes trapped in the intestine of a monster. (ch.24)
>
> Time passed. And he was just beginning to relax, just beginning to realize that the door must be unlocked and he could go, when the years-damp, bloated, fish-smelling hands closed softly around his throat and he was turned implacably around to stare into that dead and purple face. (ch.25)

Actually I'm curious about King's writing – could he write something outside or beyond the formula? I did find the relationship between Jack and Wendy Torrance interesting. It's pretty clear, however, that King's interest in psionics is limited to its value as a gimmick to hang a horror story around. As science fiction, *The Shining* is marginal, and I'm satisfied to see it shelved with those *other* books in the stores.

Encyclopedia of Science Fiction
consultant editor Robert Holdstock *(Octopus, 1978, 224pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 7064 075(0756 3)*
International Science Fiction Yearbook 1979
edited by Colin Lester *(Pierrot, 1978, 394pp, £2.95, ISBN 0 905310 16 0)*

reviewed by John Clute

Even more than the American, the English sf field. because it is so wee, tends to incest, and though details of all the couplings and squabbles we seem to engage in have little interest out of the breeding pond, it should perhaps be noted that Malcolm Edwards, the editor of *Foundation*, has contributed to one of the disasters I am about to review, that Colin Lester has been connected with the Science Fiction Foundation, and that I am Associate Editor of a forthcoming book, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, whose General Editor, Peter Nicholls, once edited *Foundation*; and also that the two Contributing Editors to this Encyclopedia are Malcolm Edwards and Brian Stableford who writes for everyone except Colin Lester. This information is not fascinating. Two points can be derived from it,

however. The first is the obvious declaration of possible bias on my part, which mother-wit forfend. The second point is maybe a little less clear-cut. It is this. Much -- too much -- of the contributions, or essays, or entries, placed in these various journals and edited books reads like different stages of draft of the same original material. The result is a kind of cliquish staleness of effect, a staleness the more evident the less editing has been done, with the result that Holdstock's *Encyclopedia*, which has no real editor at all, is the worst offender, and Lester's, which seems to have been edited by Franz Kafka, is less stale than incomprehensible. Wrong. It's stale too.

OK. In his review of Brian Ash's *The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* in *Foundation 15*, Malcolm Edwards makes a few elementary points about the kind of book he was reviewing then and which I am forced to review now. The title should have some discernible relation to the content of the book, he said. nor should the book under review turn out to be unusable, which means that, after it has sat on his shelves for a few months, the potential reviewer of one of these books should have voluntarily used the thing at least *once*.

Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, which is chock full of dumb pictures from the files of the publisher or NEL or somewhere, is neither visual, nor an encyclopedia, nor is it umpired. Holdstock, who provides an introduction and helps compile the scatty Catalog (sp) section, is listed as Consultant Editor, and it is quite clear, unless he's blind. that he had nothing to do with proofing the copy as it came in, much less editing it in the first place. As most of these publishers' cons tend to be, this soi-disant *Encyclopedia* is nothing more than a collection of essays, written on assignment by a variety of widely separated authors none of whom has more than a few clues as to the make-up of the book as a whole, so that they tend to repeat information that already appears once or twice elsewhere in the volume, but who's to know, Holdstock is miles away, none of the contributors meet except in pubs, and the people at Octopus think reading is somewhere on the road to Bristol.

Some of the essays are perfectly adequate, though riddled with their various authors' various eccentricities. Brian Stableford's brief assessment of provenance through the centuries, particularly the nineteenth, gives a competent historical matrix out of which he can persuasively argue the genre as we know it grew. But he tends to be careless with dates, has George Griffith writing a book five years after his death, and so forth; nor does Mr Stableford fail to mention J.D. Beresford, shyly but insistently, rather as one imagines W.S. Gilbert bringing up his damned lozenge again. Maybe Max Beerbohm drew the scene. Douglas Hill deals with "Major Themes" in an immense spineless ramble that beggars description while inviting sleep. Other than not stopping, and getting all sorts of dates wrong (one priceless error: a reference to "the Russian writer Yevgeny Zamyatin, author of *My* 1920 and *We* 1925": the second book being the English translation of the first), Mr Hill seems to specialize in the hypnagogy of the mixed metaphor, as in:

> And, like the utopias, science fiction at its best has always kept its social and moral awarenesses close at hand when it looked through its windows on the future (though it has always been more aware of its responsibilities as a form of entertainment than ever was the heavy-footed and didactic utopia). While the glass in those windows allows glimpses of tomorrow, that glass also reflects an image of the today in which writer and reader live.

That seems to have been written by a grown man who makes his living off it. Perhaps he thought there would be some copy-editing at Octopus. Perhaps he thought that was an excuse. *But we only live once.*

Michael Ashley's rehash of information about the pulps and so forth is perfectly

adequate and probably exactly what he was asked to do; Alan Frank's "Screen Trips" is opinionated but without nous, makes eccentric arguments against movies like *Doctor Strangelove*, excoriating its brilliant coda while praising the fatuous cliché from a dozen bad sf stories that closes off *Planet of the Apes*, and ends by referring to *Dr Who* as "resolutely lowbrow and underwritten", which is so exactly the reverse of the case about the Doctor, whether one is arguing for or against him, that one feels once again that an editor would have forced a little rigour out of the author; Harry Harrison's "Machine as Hero" strangely resembles his *Mechanismo*, and mentions one Harry Harrison and his works at least six count them times; in "Alien Encounter", Chris Morgan takes *alien* as being synonymous with *strange man*, and so manages to say almost nothing while repeating everyone else's references; and it goes on. The two pieces of any substance are Christopher Priest's on the New Wave and Malcolm Edwards's conspectus of the current writing scene; both essays are genuine arguments, and both belong in a book of essays, not here. The book as a whole, then, does not add up. It is a congeries. It is not an encyclopedia. It is not usable.

Colin Lester's *Science Fiction Yearbook* doesn't pretend to be an encyclopedia but does pretend to be contemporary, which it is not. At the back of the book there is an addendum which attempts to update information to about March 1978, but Mr Lester's publishers, who seem to be thicker even than Mr Holdstock's, seem to have published only a fraction of this updating, only six of the book's 29 sections being treated. In any case, much of the information in this incomprehensible book, so far as it is possible to extract information from it, deals with 1977, not 1978, and certainly not the 1979 of the title. Although most of the fault for the uselessness of this handbook must lie with Mr Lester, or K as I'll be referring to him from now on, Pierrot Publishing must come in for a good deal of blame. The truncation of K's addendum could perhaps have been a simple stupid mistake on the part of simple stupid editors; but the disastrous proofing of the book (there is an extraordinary number of misspelled words) must be laid at Pierrot's door as well as at K's; and most importantly the lay-out of the book itself must have been fundamentally the responsibility of the publisher. K's classification system may have been nearly lunatic (indeed it is nearly lunatic), but it's not his fault that the book is so set up as to make cross-referencing almost impossible. There are 29 sections, each intricately subdivided (even though the subdivisions have much less to do with content than they do with the function of registering the *exact point* during the compilation of the handbook at which Lester received a particular piece of information), 29 sections, but no running heads. You have to leaf through the book to find the section. Each time. And when you've found the section, your work has just begun, because the book is set in a heavy intolerant blinding sanserif, a face in which the letter 'l' and the Roman numeral 'I' are identical. This in a volume in which, thanks to K, there are a lot of Is and a lot of ls. It is simply impossible to know which is which. Context helps, but only rarely.

So K is lumbered from the word go, not that he needs any help "Every entry code," he says, "starts with the number of the Section in the listing of which the entry appears. Following the number a series of letters, or occasionally decimal numbers and letters. The order in which entries are arranged is as follows:

"33.1Aa comes before 33Aa, comes before 33AaA, comes before 33Aaa, comes before 33AaB, comes before 33Aab . . . " and so forth and so forth, though that's just the beginning; by the end of the explanation ("on the rare occasion where an insertion has been between, for instance, 33AbA and 33Aba, a further small letter has been added [33AbAa]") you are ready to drop the thought that Colin Lester

is K and proceed to the one that he's actually the Ancient Mariner who stoppeth all thought.

But this is avoiding the issue, which is the content of the book, however many fathoms down. It's difficult really to say, but it strikes one that beneath the surface lunacies created by Pierrot and the Mariner, lies a direr deeper shambles. It's difficult to tell, but there seems to be a remarkable looseness of ascription and of marshalling of data absolutely central (as Dr Steiner might put it) to the sense of vertigo the reader gets trying to extract a coherent picture from the thing, a looseness having nothing to do (though obviously emanating from the same pixillated head) with the Talmudic numerology up there on the surface. No one section seems to present its data in the same terms as any other section. Whether or not vital data are included seems a matter of whim, or happenstance. And everything is couched in a style that where it is not merely illiterate, combines ingroup facetiousness with the worst sort of ressentient academese, like minutes of the film society down at the Poly. It is a style which permeates the entire book, and vitiates any usableness individual entries might have had for stray spelunkers. It is the style of the amateur. It is the style of the bully. Accept me, it begs, fixing one of three; like me, like me. I don't.

The Space Odysseys of Arthur C. Clarke
by George Edgar Slusser *(Borgo Press, 1978, 64pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 89370 212 9)*
Aldiss Unbound: the science fiction of Brian W. Aldiss
by Richard Mathews *(Borgo Press, 1977, 64pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 89370 213 7)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

George Watson, in an otherwise unexceptionable manual on the noble art of thesis writing, wrote something to the effect that dullness in a literary thesis, while not a positive gain, is not necessarily a disadvantage either. This seems to me to contradict one of the basic imperatives behind all good writing. Anyone writing to be read, even by the sort of captive audience that a textbook commands, has a duty to avoid dullness insofar as he or she can. These two booklets differ in many respects, but they are as one in their almost unrelieved avoidance of the vivid, the provocative, and the memorable. Good criticism stimulates interest where before there was none. Messrs Slusser and Mathews reverse the process.

Their styles, on close examination, prove to be quite different – Mathews chatty and discursive, Slusser much more the professional literary critic, very much aware of the importance of what he is saying – but both are rendered almost impenetrable for long stretches by the usual stylistic atrocities of American neo-scholasticism. Commentary takes place at such a high level of abstraction and generalization, especially in Slusser's case, that the mind scrabbles vainly for some sort of experiential fingerhold, and slides off. The inevitable jargon, words worn bare of almost any significance by repeated use, is wheeled out again – "affirmation", "tension", "dichotomy", "transcendence", "parameter", and the rest. Polysyllables proliferate. The concise is abandoned in favour of a wordiness taken sometimes to the extreme of tautology – "a form of symbolic writing . . . in which characters and incidents seem to take on the quality of symbols" (Mathews). The usual names are dropped in a ritual showing of credentials which now and again degenerates into merest subcritical gibber: "The microcosm mirrors the macrocosm, following Blakean Roman-

ticism with an edge of insanity and a touch of 18th century classicism (irony, satire, and wit) . . . " (Mathews).

Both critics have obvious difficulties in keeping a sense of proportion between text and commentary. Slusser's analyses of *Islands in the Sky* and *The Sands of Mars* are of a subtlety and elaboration more commonly found in close readings of Donne or Marvell. Complex and ambiguous structures of correspondence and cross-reference are flung up, subterranean puns are unearthed, classical analogies laid out in full. It is a breathtaking performance. But, after all, the texts concerned are a pair of very ephemeral and undistinguished novels. Slusser concedes time and again that they "seem" purely conventional, derivative, journeyman work, pulp exercises and so on. Most critics would omit the "seem". But he has a case to prove. His book is much more concerned with a specific thesis than is the Mathews volume. The latter is a Readers' Guide affair; a short biography of Aldiss tacked on to a chronological tour of his work, with attention paid to the continuity of several themes and characteristics. *Space Odysseys*, however, is an extended examination of a single motif or narrative pattern in Clarke's writing; the "Odyssean" pattern of the "journey out" which is simultaneously a homecoming.

The sort of critical writing which concentrates on one theme can be, at its best, the most interesting and valuable. But there are dangers inherent in the method. There is the temptation to press slight examples into the service of weighty assertions, as when Mathews describes the conventional reactionary rhetoric of Bourgoyne in *The Primal Urge* ("It is a descent into savagery. Soon we shall be issued with rings to go through our noses!") as a foreshadowing of the "notion that time is really flowing backwards", more fully developed in *Cryptozoic!*. More seriously, the critic can come to falsify the text in the interests of his argument: Slusser insists that Wells's Time Machine is shaped like an armchair, in order to point a contrast with the domestic solidity of the dinner guests' chairs – in fact, as far as one can judge, the Machine resembles a bicycle more than anything. And his description of the final resolution of *Childhood's End*, "men become Overmind, ceasing to feel; Overlords learn to feel, and become men", is simply wrong. Moreover, by the end of *Space Odysseys*, the pattern of expedition and return has been found so often, in so many different aspects of so many books, by so many different processes of analysis, that, as in the case of Sir Thomas Browne's quincunxes, the evidence ceases to convince by virtue of its very abundance. The same pattern could be found *anywhere* if one were prepared to employ as much energy and ingenuity as this critic.

The positive virtue of Slusser's book is confined to incidental comments – he isolates well the curious quality of passivity which informs *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and he has some interesting things to say about *The Time Machine* and *Rendezvous with Rama*. But the general impression is of a surplus of acuity and learning being brought to bear on the material to hand, and dissipating itself in rhetoric and curious ideational doodles. Mathews's book is more consistently useful, though sketchier and uneven. The tone veers from chummy punning to very solemn scholastic analysis and back to Coles Notes type fill (we are given a dictionary definition of "putative" in brackets, and Shelley is further identified as "the nineteenth century poet" for fear we should mistake him), but he is often good at following the theme of time through Aldiss's books, and offers an interesting analysis of the portrayal of science in *Frankenstein Unbound*. But a bit more *life* in the writing would make such a difference.

The Jewel-Hinged Jaw
by Samuel R. Delany *(Dragon Press, 1977, 326pp, $12.95; Berkley Windhover, 1978, 303pp, $4.95, ISBN 0 425 03851 1)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

"In a sense," says Samuel Delany, "this is the most subjective of books on science fiction – by someone who spends much of his subjective energies analysing the sf phenomenon." It is a collection of fourteen essays, including reflections on particular sf books, particular authors and on sf in general, plus some invaluable pieces of advice to literary critics (especially critics of sf). Delany reveals that he learned to read with difficulty, and still reads slowly, and for this reason demands that what he reads repays the effort in one way or another. He asks that there should be sufficient food for thought packed into what he reads to enable it to stand up to slow and contemplative reading. Needless to say, there is much sf which does not live up to this expectation, and it is perhaps the highest compliment paid to the genre in recent times that he finds a good deal (more than we might immediately suspect) which does.

Delany is the most self-conscious of readers and the most self-conscious of writers. He does nothing without trying to analyse what he is doing, and what will be the results of his doing it. This inevitably leads him to ask questions about why he is doing what he does, and why it is worth doing. He is compulsive in this, and perhaps obsessive – it is something that he *needs* to do. We, his readers, should all be grateful for that compulsive need, for it makes him one of the most sincere and intellectually demanding critics who has ever focused his attention for more than a passing moment on science fiction and the art of science fiction writing. (It is also part of what makes him such a good science fiction writer.)

What Delany says in these essays is often "difficult" in the sense that it requires the kind of reading which Delany himself goes in for. They are the result of careful and detailed analysis and require careful and detailed analysis to yield up their insights. This is not to say that what he writes is always correct, for we are all fallible, but to emphasize that it is always careful and never superficial. I think that it was Bertrand Russell who defined a pedant as "someone who cares about whether what he is saying is true", and in this sense, Delany is a pedant. What he says is always worth taking seriously. I wish there were many more essayists of whom one could say the same.

The essays in this book which I most admire are those in section III, on "writing sf". "Thickening the Plot" is the only essay I have ever seen which really tries to grasp what goes on in the creative process, and which thus shows clearly that the way we talk about (and perhaps imagine) the creative process misrepresents it fundamentally. "On Pure Story-Telling" cuts right to the heart of the essential difference between story-telling through the medium of speech and through the medium of the written word. These analyses are valuable in themselves, but are redoubled in value in becoming the foundation-stones of his exercises in criticism – not only the specific comments on books and writers in section IV but also the essays in critical theory in section II, especially the superb "About 5,750 Words", which I have read several times and which seems to me to be the best essay ever written about the essential *nature* of sf as linguistic discourse. "Shadows" – the long set of notes submitted to *Foundation* for the "Profession of Science Fiction" series – also repays re-reading. In these notes Delany veers from personal reminiscence to commentary, aphorism to methodical attempts to resolve abstract

philosophical puzzles. Some readers have found it so bizarre that a science fiction writer notionally commenting on his profession should find it reasonable to pursue philosophical problems that they have found the whole piece quite mind-boggling, but in fact it is not so bizarre when one remembers what kind of reader/writer/thinker Delany is. It all *does* relate, in his view, and the fact that it *can* is a testament to a powerful (if perhaps quirky) imagination.

In the essay "To Read *The Dispossessed*", published here for the first time, Delany shows a mode of critical thought which arises directly from his slow and demanding way of reading. It dismantles sentences and paragraphs virtually word by word, examining the very gaps between them for implication. In his book *The American Shore* he develops this method still further, analysing a short story by Thomas Disch semantic unit by semantic unit, displaying all the resonances of the text and taking these revelations as examples to display the functioning of the text *as science fiction*, with all the implications of that phrase.

Delany's writing is dense, heavily impregnated with meaning (not "meaning" but simply meaning). It is not as difficult as it seems, simply because it is not in the least careless. One can attack it, if one has the heart, in the full confidence that it *does* have something to say, and something worth saying. Time invested in reading Delany is always well invested.

The Dream Quest of H.P. Lovecraft
by Darrell Schweitzer *(Borgo Press, 1978, 63pp, $2.45, ISBN 0 89370 217 X)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

This slender volume relates how an American critic happened upon certain shunned and wholly abhorrent Books; how he opened them, and what he found therein . . . Why is it that so many people who choose to write about Lovecraft are drawn to imitate his style? Could it be that he brings out the parodist in everyone? Although this book sets out to demonstrate Lovecraft's importance and his strengths as a writer, most of Schweitzer's useful remarks point the other way. He pins down his author's failings – his almost complete inability to get the proportions of a narrative right, his persistent failure adequately to visualize his horrors, his reliance on the terminal HORRIFIC REVELATION!!!, and so on – with an unerring eye. And he coins at least one really valuable critical term, viz. "adjectival gibber", a happy phrase which perfectly characterizes HPL's mature style. But the compensating virtues, where are they? In fact, they are more frequently asserted than demonstrated, more frequently assumed than asserted. Schweitzer seems to spend the first half of his book dismissing Lovecraft's early work as juvenilia, not as good as what was to come, and the second half conceding that Lovecraft's later work was a falling-off, not as good as what had gone before.

Schweitzer can't seem to settle on one approach to his subject. He hedges uncertainly between dignified academicism and psychological analysis. The former cannot fail to appear pompous and absurd, as the full battery of critical technique is brought to bear on a fabric manifestly too frail to take the strain. Whole paragraphs are wasted debating whether such-and-such a beastie belongs in the Cthulhu Mythos or was smuggled in later by Derleth. Stories come to be "major" or "important" for the most trivial reasons: "The Hound" is important because it contains the first mention of "the abhorred Necronomicon", and so on. Nothing

is ever said as to why the Necronomicon is itself important, beyond being a Lovecraft trademark and in-joke.

The latter approach, which is, to judge by Colin Wilson's analysis of Lovecraft, potentially the more interesting option, is let slide continually into anecdote and casual conjecture. Lovecraft's effectiveness, such as it is, derives principally from a recurring clash between two dissimilar ways of writing: on the one hand, that fondness for quasi-scholarship – fictitious but meticulously detailed histories, biographies, reports and documents – which so badly unbalances many of his stories; on the other, "adjectival gibber", a use of language and imagery which is nothing more nor less than a sustained, pathological gesture of revulsion from life – a gesture of which his racism, his violent nostalgia, his lack of interest in sexuality, were all part and parcel. Of this little is said.

Science Fiction Literatur in den USA: Vorstudien fur eine materialistische Paraliteraturwissenschaft
by Horst Schröder *(Focus Verlag, 1978, 519pp, DM 31.00, ISBN 3 920352 98 X)*

reviewed by Colin Lester

Science fiction writers and critics sometimes complain that the traditional mainstream approach to criticism is in some measure insufficient for assessing works in their particular branch of writing, since different criteria apply there. This cry has often seemed to be more of an emotional reaction to the neglect or rejection of their genre on literary or other grounds by the establishment critics, than a rational attempt to reach some basis on which sf, with propriety and benefit, might become the subject of intelligent, searching, and constructive criticism. No doubt this is one reason why the body of existing sf criticism does not yet include a large proportion of academically-respectable work (that is, cogently argued from acceptable premises). Another reason must be the well-known desire of a substantial (though perhaps diminishing) section of the British and American sf community for the genre and its commentators to remain popular and emotive rather than serious and rational.

Such people may find it difficult to decide on an appropriate reaction to a form of scholarship like the study of Paraliterature which, at least in the case of some practitioners, takes the view that much popular literature is written in reaction to a hermetic literary aestheticism. The introduction to this form of study in the book under consideration here should at least interest them however, and ought to recommend itself to all others in the sf community too.

Even those who (like me) do not read German fluently will find interest and useful information in the tables, quotations, appendices, and bibliographies, though they may prefer to wait for an English-language translation before purchasing the book (none is yet in progress, though Herr Schröder is enthusiastic and would be pleased to hear from potential publishers).

The book originated in a 1975 dissertation for the Department of Philology at the JW Goethe University in Frankfurt, an origin noticeable in its scholarly form, liberally sprinkled with footnotes and quotations (many from secondary sources, many in English). Where I have understood the argument it appears logical and reasonable; but I can do little more than give an indication of its import, in the following description of the book's structure.

It is divided into three parts: the first a Theoretical Preliminary Enquiry, the second an Examination of the Nature of sf as Goods, and the third a series of Examinations of the Ideology of sf. Though the book is clearly a socio-political study, its interest in the nature, crafting and structure of sf transcends the limitations of that approach.

The first part starts with an introduction to the theory of paraliterature, discussing various views, particularly those of Jean Tortel. This is followed by a note on ideology, and a discussion of ideological criticism and literature, including manipulation of readers, distortions, neglect of the aesthetic, literary politics, and constraints on ideological criticism. Chapter IV relates paraliterature to other forms of popular literature study whose names may be familiar to readers of German bibliographies: Schmutz- & Schundliteratur (pornographic and trash literature), Trivialliteratur, Imperialistische Massenliteratur, and Rollenliteratur (a consumer's-eye approach). The last chapter of this part sums up the relationship between ideology and literature.

The second part, taking an economic approach, opens with a chapter on the varieties of sf, examining them by volume of production, and dealing with a number of familiar sub-genres such as space opera, alternative history, extrapolation, inner space etc, and including sword-and-sorcery, fantasy sf, and horror sf. The third part of this chapter deals with fandom ("constructive hobbyism", a fine name for a fanzine if ever I heard one) and communication. A second chapter, on Product Improvement, looks at literary study and sf, and at criticism from within the field itself.

The chapter following is concerned with Commodity Development, setting the Myth of Literary History against The Commercial Reality. Chapter IV of this second part deals with the Sociology of Goods, treating separately the sales and market development of and incomes from the magazine and book businesses, and looking at the structure of publishing, and at the influences on it of both readers and authors. Chapter V relates the ideology of a book to the production of it as goods, dealing with various production conditions and with the relationship between ideology and standard of articulateness.

The third part is introduced by a reference to the fallacy of believing that a book can be wholly unpolitical and value-free in contrast to books produced in some other society. It then goes on to deal with varieties of ideology in, for instance, occultism and pseudo-science, which Schröder discerns as characterising the reactionary forces of sf, devoid of social and political awareness. The chapter also includes a section on John W. Campbell and another on the usages of scientific rhetoric. Chapter II of this part deals with The Myths of Capitalism, considering several specific authors and/or works – Cordwainer Smith, Philip Dick, Anderson's *Tau Zero*, Silverberg's *Downward to the Earth*, Delany's *Nova* – each supposed to exemplify a particular myth of American society. A last section considers the confining habits engendered by the historical-verification myth.

The third chapter in this part deals with sexual politics, and will clearly be of interest to feminists and "people's rights" readers. Starting with a section on the mutability of norms, it goes on to consider two in particular, the standard or "trained" man and woman, and later looks at "trained" relationships and the exceptions – a hint here that this is not simply an anti-American treatise. A further examination considers the Dread of Woman (the "Weininger-Syndrome"), while another discusses the "sexual revolution" in sf (Schröder's quotes). A last section is simply entitled 'Great Britain'.

Chapter IV of this section, the last of the book, is entitled Misplaced Truths,

and consists of four sections each divided into a consideration of a subject followed by a discussion of some aspect or concomitant of it: The Born Elite (and racial struggle), Freedom from Society (and anti-communism), Conservative Criticism of Capitalism and Fascism (and McCarthyism), and Hostile Resistence to Organizations and Religion (and Vietnam).

A final, fifth chapter is called simply "Alternatives?".

Appendices, Bibliographies and Indexes occupy 80 pages, and would be a useful addition to any library. Much of the data is from familiar sources such as *Stella Nova*, but it has been collated and tabulated for easy reference, and supplemented by material from book-jackets, fanzines etc. Anyone doubting the scholarly approach of the author should glance at the painstaking notes to these appendices. One might consider some small parts of the procedure to be slightly suspect, but the methodological explanations allow one to make corrections.

Appendices include statistics on the book market and on authors (including sections on British authors, and details of background, success etc), the Vietnam War manifestos and their signatories, and the by-now-obligatory lists of prizewinning novelists. The Bibliography is sectionalised and includes *inter-alia* British-style anthologies, and comics fanzines. The Index is in three parts: name, title, and key-word, the latter being particularly useful for cross-referencing.

Whether or not one agrees with the paraliterary approach to sf, or with the temper of this author's approach, there would seem to be much to be gained from reading the book. It surely deserves an English-language edition; which I hope will be rather better bound than this German soft-cover.

Reviews in Brief

Weeping May Tarry
by Raymond F. Jones and Lester del Rey *(Pinnacle, 1978, 180pp, $1.75, ISBN 0 423 40215 5)*

A rumour's been going around that Los Angeles-based Pinnacle Books has been publishing sf titles originally contracted for by the lamentable religious entrepreneur Roger Elwood, whose Laser Books fiasco we were lucky to see the last of a year or so ago; good luck for us maybe, but what about the poor authors who wrote babytalk for Roger and lied about sex and turds and such and pretended to be born-again Christians, all for the sake of an honest buck? Makes the heart sick, doesn't it, to think of all that pabulum gone to waste. So if the rumour's true then, quite a few hacks should be grateful to Pinnacle Books for caring so much for them and so little for us. *Weeping May Tarry* is a dreadful little book, told in a repetitive creepy monotone, with no references to sex or turds and such, and mongers one of the least plausible Christian messages I've ever been cozened into reading. These aliens have lived in peace for thousands of years, under the hegemony of a priesthood which demands obeisance to the Keelong, but as the story opens it's clear that the Alcorans have begun to backslide, and why not, the Keelong is a nothing God (or whatever), and obeisance has become a sham. High Priest Toreg (on board a survey ship looking for reasons for the destruction of a great swathe of planets across the galaxy) determines to fight against this backsliding, but before he is able to do more than deeply alienate the crew the ship's Commander decides

to visit a planet out of the path of the destruction (which is the last we hear of the ostensible reason for the journey); but this planet too is bereft of all life. On landing, and on being sabotaged by dissidents into having to remain, Toreg and the Commander discover one building left in the part of Earth (right) they've landed on. It's a church. There's a Bible, which their computers start translating. There's also a Christ on a Cross. Toreg thinks the Bible is nonsense and the Christ obscene. Though on the evidence of the book he's certainly right, the crew is immediately converted by the Bible, and he himself, after trying to destroy the Cross, is converted by the carved eyes of the Christ. This is what the Keelong has been lacking! The sabotage is repaired. The ship is ready to carry Christ to the stars. "He looked to the cross. Was there such peace and hope to be found by everyone in that strange, agonizing figure and its mystical book?" On such questions as this, Laser Books foundered, I say unto you.

— **John Clute**

The Masters of Solitude
by Marvin Kaye and Parke Godwin *(Doubleday, 1978, 398pp, $10, ISBN 0 385 12480 5)*

This is an inordinately tedious mulling-over of long-familiar fantasies, which makes use of a convenient sf scenario without in any way inviting description as sf. We have the standardised post-holocaust landscape where the bulk of mankind has reverted to barbarism, though at least one city, surviving intact, has cut itself off completely from the rest of the world in order to pursue lofty intellectual quests in high-technology privacy. One of the barbaric cultures is drawn indirectly from the pseudoscholarly fantasies of Margaret Murray regarding the imaginary witch-cult which supposedly thrived alongside Christianity before being hounded to extinction in the seventeenth century. The magic powers are there, as is the life-enhancing fertility-religion which is *de rigeur* for all the noble savages of contemporary fantasy. The ignoble savages against whom they are struggling are mostly mercenary soldiers hired by excessively puritanical Christians. My personal feeling is that silly attempts to reinterpret the past are the worst possible bases for speculative fiction about the future, but they do have the advantage of the psychological appeal that brought them into being in the first place. For that reason this project, despite its absurdity (ably exhibited by its pretensions to Philosophical Significance) may well be enjoyed by devoted fans of vacuous pseudoscience.

— **Brian Stableford**

Through the Eye of a Needle
by Hal Clement *(Del Rey, 1978, 195pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 345 2580 9)*

A juvenile. A sequel to *Needle*. But worse than *Needle*. Worse than blunt. Hal Clement is just fine when he sets a problem-solving protagonist whose personality is the sum of the problems he solves the task of solving problems on a problem-sized planet, I mean a planet-sized problem, where science is God, though even God can yawn; but when he has poor thick Bob Kinnaird returning a few years after the close of *Needle* to that cozy South Pacific island home of his, which has no problems, or none which he is bright enough to solve, then we are in trouble, and so is the novel. Bob's symbiont, the Hunter, who remains as dull and grey and orderly as ever, a sort of Holy Ghost of the Filing Cabinet, is beginning to have

a bad effect on Bob's biological makeup, so Bob and the Hunter have decided to trace down evidence of the arrival of other more expert members of the Hunter's species, who will have followed him to Earth to check on the planet's status. Near the island there are two sunken spaceships from the previous novel; there should be some sign there of later arrivals. Symbiosis tends to cause obesity. On the island is an obese boy who sabotages everybody's efforts to find the spaceships. Could the fat boy be harbouring the Bad Symbiont we all thought had been killed in *Needle*? Is there any *other* reason for the fat boy to make a bad short story run on for 192 pages? No. No. I think there's a *problem* here. Anyway, the spaceships are finally discovered after a lot of effort, including *swimming underwater*, but it all signifies precisely nothing, because after the search (and the books) are almost done with, the Hunters figures it out that his expert fellows, rather than spending their time underwater quizzing Davy Jones, will actually be in the town library reading up on Earth, and believe it or not there they are, there was no story at all, which is the only problem the book provides. And the aliens must have decided that Earth was no place for the likes of them, because the whole dim ramble is supposed to have taken place in 1954, and look at us, look at us now, look at what we have to read for instance.

— John Clute

An Exercise for Madmen
by Barbara Paul *(Berkley, 1978, $1.50, 168pp, SBN 425 03809 2)*

Pythia, planet of exiled scientists conducting their experiments a safe distance from Earth, is the scene for humankind's first contact with an evasive alien adventurer: tall, golden, god-like Zalmox; his 200-year mission to sow the universe with seeds, the fruits whereof are sweet, succulent and a sure cure for schizophrenia. As they ripen, the sweet-talking exterrestrial persuades the boffins to abandon their clinical, clockwork routine for relaxed and irresponsible revelries; and it is Jennie Geiss, the alienated only "normal" person in a hierarchy of scientists, technicians, experimental humans and animals, who defies the boss, tastes the fruit, sheds the last of her inhibitions and leads the colony to near-ruin in a prolonged orgy of sex, booze, vandalism and purple prose.

Barbara Paul has evidently enjoyed writing this book, parading through it an assortment of clones, chimeras and freaks (a swaggering web-footed swimming champ, a knockabout double act of ex-Siamese twins, and a cyborg whose loudspeakers shriek with the arch witticisms of a Noel Coward protagonist), studding it with puns and pastisches, stripping in the script of a short (immorality) play, decking it with gaudy dialogue (most of the dramatis personae seem to exist only to provide orifices for the orgy and throwaway lines for the endless snappy cocktail-party repartee) and bowing out in a gush of poetic alphabet soup.

Alas, the author has assiduously polished her prose without dusting from the implausible and ungainly plot the cobwebs of millennia, and I really do mean millennia. A writer as keen as Ms Paul is to exhibit her literary erudition should know better than to turn her tale on the destruction of a harmonious community by a woman who, against the orders of the Administrative Head, eats the fruit foisted upon her by a silver-tongued stranger. Once again, it is the woman who gets the blame and has to make the atonement. And while no serpent makes a personal appearance in these pages, it is perhaps significant that the priestess Pythia, also known as Pythoness, got her name from the great snake found on the premises of

her oracle at Delphi, and that the meaning of the root word is "rot".

— Lee Montgomerie

Star Rigger's Way
by Jeffrey A. Carver *(Dell, 1978, 237pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 440 17619 0)*

A juvenile with fellatio in good taste. It is a lyric interlude in slow motion at a holiday resort. The rest of the book sticks to business in *space*. Riggers pilot spaceships by driving them through a dream-like analogue of normal space, controlling this analogue through their capacity to create dream imagery consonant with the nature *of* the analogue at any one point in the space-time matrix doubletalk whatsit, which is fine. Gev Carlyle is a young rigger whose former crew, after giving him the boot for immaturity, have themselves split up. Young Gev rigs obsessively through the galaxy in search of his old pals, including the girl Janofer who has silver hair, or it's very blonde. He's rescued an alien rigger from an alien ship, just after his own new ship has had an accident which has killed everyone but him, and Gev and the alien, Cephean by name, Cordwainer Smith his papa, *quest* for Gev's old crew together, and eventually find them, after a close call with some huge semi-transparent alien spacedwellers who indifferently (like telephonists) connect Gev with his old friends, who all arrange to meet, and do, and her hair isn't really that colour after all, and he and Cephean have to save everybody from a *bad trip*, and in this way Gev has sort of grown up. He may go back to the girl who found him tasty. There are some subtleties. Gev is an idiot, and the author seems to know it, for instance. And the space-time analogue matrix gradually begins to make good kinetic sense. But as Gev and Cephean rig off into the sunset, there is an acrid, heady, sort of *fertile* smell in the air. It is the smell of sequels.

— John Clute

The Best Short Stories of J.G. Ballard
by J.G. Ballard *(Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978, 302pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 03 045661 4)*

This fine selection of 19 stories differs considerably from the British volume *The Best of J.G. Ballard* published by Futura in 1977. Stories included here which were *not* in the Futura selection are "Deep End", "End Game", "The Drowned Giant", "The Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D", "The Assassination of Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race", "The Atrocity Exhibition", "Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy" and "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan". But there are, of course, a large number of overlaps – including such accepted Ballard classics as "The Voices of Time", "Billennium", "The Subliminal Man" and "The Terminal Beach". Needless to say, this is a superlatively good collection (but, if asked, I could compile yet another *Best of Ballard*, almost as good, which would contain no overlaps with the previous two volumes). Ballard must rank as one of the most outstanding short story writers of the present day, in or out of the sf field. As a bonus, this new American volume contains an appreciative introduction by Anthony Burgess, in which he says that "The Drowned Giant" and "The Garden of Time" are "two of the most beautiful stories of the world canon of short fiction . . . The rhythms of poignancy which animate both stories are masterly: Ballard is a *moving* writer." I agree.

— David Pringle

The Inklings
by Humphrey Carpenter *(Allen & Unwin, 1978, 287pp, £6.50, ISBN 0 04 809011 5)*

Carpenter has followed his workmanlike and useful biography of Tolkien with an equally useful, if somewhat scrappy, account of the circle which centred on Tolkien and, more importantly, on C.S. Lewis. The Inklings, as the circle became known, was a combination of drinking club, literary discussion group, mutual admiration society and academic caucus. Their meetings in Lewis's rooms and various Oxford pubs heard early drafts of *Perelandra, Lord of the Rings* and Charles Williams's *All Hallows Eve*, attempted to fix the elections for the Professorship of poetry and succeeded in organizing the blocking for some years of attempts to reform the Oxford English syllabus. As well as writers of fantasy, Tolkien and Lewis were gifted scholars, political and aesthetic reactionaries, committed Christians and deeply emotionally scarred by the experience of the trenches. It is not surprising that their circle should be rather in the same mould, and that the creation of fantasy was a comparatively minor preoccupation. Indeed, some members of the group disliked Tolkien's work in progress to the extent of demanding a power of veto over it. Others revered it for what it was not – that is, in any way influenced by contemporary life, thought or literature – rather than for what it was: the finest flowering of the Georgians.

The book gives a useful biographical account of Lewis and Williams while avoiding the usual note of hagiography. Carpenter makes Lewis more credible and less likeable than he appears in R.L. Green's biography – deeply insensitive to even his closest friends and with a limited aesthetic response which explains why he was a great literary historian rather than a great critic. Carpenter does a good job of explaining the charismatic hold exercised by Charles Williams on this circle as on more important contemporaries like T.S. Eliot.

Generally a weakness of Carpenter's account is that he separates the fantasies of Lewis and Tolkien from the academic work which took up much of their time and interacted in important ways with their literary creations. He scotches the idea that there was much in the way of mutual influence as opposed to encouragement going on in the Lewis circle. What perhaps he fails to perceive is the extent to which a romantic Georgian ideal of friendship permeates Lewis's and Tolkien's fantasies as an objective correlative for the Just Society and the Heavenly City.

– **Andrew Kaveney**

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Mike Dickinson is a school teacher in Leeds. He used to co-edit the fanzine *Bar Trek* (with Lee Montgomerie) and is now co-editor of *Sirius* (with Alan Dorey).

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