FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

17

IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

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FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

Editor: Malcolm Edwards
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Number 17, September 1979

Editorial

This issue is being published, with an optimistically-boosted print run, to coincide with the 37th World Science Fiction Convention in Brighton. It may seem inappropriate to some of our readers for a journal which purports to be scholarly to attempt to promote itself through what is primarily an event for sf fans, but we see no contradiction. Foundation *– perhaps in contrast with its American counterparts – has always prided itself on having an active and interested readership, who actually study the entire contents of each issue. This, of course, is a reflection of the editorial policy, which has always been directed towards a model reader with an intelligent all-round critical interest in sf and imaginative literature, rather than towards the specialized tastes and needs of professional academics. (This is not to assert any kind of moral superiority over journals of the latter sort, but rather to articulate the difference which in our view makes* Foundation *unique among sf critical journals.)*

Our problem – and it is the perennial problem faced by specialized magazines of any description – is to reach the audience which we perceive to exist. We hope that Seacon '79 – which promises to be more truly international than the usual American "world" sf convention – will provide us with an opportunity to reach a larger section of this hypothetical audience. If this issue of Foundation *represents your first encounter with the journal, may we welcome you – and hope that you will stay with us in the future.*

Our regular readers will be accustomed to frequent – and generally gloomy – reports on our financial strictures. In fact, during the last year Foundation *advanced to the point of needing no cash subsidy from North East London Polytechnic for the first time in its seven years of existence. But with printing costs rising sharply this year (and with further increases in prospect in the winter), the time has come when we must once again raise our prices.*

In fact, the previous increase was in February 1977, so that by the time the new subscription rates come into force – on 1st January 1980 – the price will have been held steady for virtually three years. Few British publications or products could claim as much in these inflationary times. But if we are not to lose money heavily in 1980 the subscription rates must now rise by, on average, one third, so that the new standard rate for individuals will be £4.00 ($10.00) for one year (three issues); for institutions the new yearly rate will be £7.50 ($15.00). The full range of revised prices will be included with subscribers' expiry notices. With the continuing prospect of inflation we still cannot accept subscriptions for more than one year (three issues) in advance. We hope that subscribers will not find these increases excessive, and will feel that the quality of the journal justifies the extra cost.

We are often asked for copies of the first six issues of Foundation, *all of which have been out of print for a considerable time (and the first two of which, in particular, had a tiny circulation). The Gregg Press edition of* Foundation *1-8 does, of course, make these available, but the price ($35.00) deters many individuals. We are therefore contemplating a reprint of those first six issues. However, before embarking upon this considerable capital outlay it is important for us to be able to gauge the demand, and we would therefore ask those of our readers interested in obtaining any or all of these issues to write and let us know their requirements. Such letters will not constitute binding orders – unless you so specify – and we do not want you to send money at this stage; however, we do urge you to reply. If the response is insufficient the idea will be dropped. The cost will be in the region of £1.75 per issue. If the level of interest justifies the reprints they will proceed in batches during 1980.*

Malcolm Edwards

In the special British issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction *last April Brian Aldiss, surveying the current verdant landscape of British sf, remarked on how many writers have found recently that they can support themselves as full-time writers within the genre – some of them making as much as £50,000 per annum. (We are still interested in identifying some of these people who make £50,000 per annum! No doubt the Inland Revenue are too.) The fact remains that it* has *become possible in recent years for a fair few writers in the British Isles to live – as opposed to merely existing – by the typewriter; and it is notable, in all three autobiographical pieces in this issue, by Fritz Leiber, Philip Dick and here David Compton, how much the capricious Financial Angel has harried, taunted and shaped not only the writers themselves but also* what they write, *dictating the format for their dreams. This does not prove that market factors are the overriding influence upon what* kind *of sf is written (since people often write as they must, and would anyway) but they can play a major role in whether the books get written at all, or whether other books entirely may be written. The concrete existence of an sf text – particular words on paper, which the author cares deeply about, and which will be analysed as such – masks this fundamental economic indeterminacy as to the origin of the text. The picture is rosier today than it has ever been (if we disregard the Ayatollah, the emptying oil wells etcetera), with the result that we* have *the following essay by David Compton at all, in which the author of one of the finest sf novels of recent years,* The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe *(USA title:* The Unsleeping Eye*), explains the ups and downs of inspiration – and of that economic indeterminacy which, fortunately for us, is allowing Mr Compton once more to be a science fiction writer.*

The Profession of Science Fiction: XVI: By Chance out of Conviction

D.G. Compton

It would be nice to be able to say that the writing of sf was my profession. Sadly it wouldn't be quite true. Vocation, yes – profession, no. For I'm one of those timorous creatures, a spare-time writer. Most writers are these days, of course, usually as a matter of simply economic necessity. But in my case there's a second controlling factor: sheer lack of ideas.

Already, in my spare time, I put together two books a year, only one of which, if I'm lucky, will be sf. If I'm lucky enough, that is, to have come up with a usable idea in that particular twelvemonth. It's clear, therefore, that I wouldn't be able to

increase my sf output, no matter what. Hence the vocation rather than the profession.

Only one idea per year may sound like a pretty poor showing. And so it is. Most self-respecting writers – especially the short story people who flaunt their fertility with almost indecent confidence – can hardly wait to be done with one idea before another is clamouring for their attention. Or that's how it seems to me. And I envy them. For the fact has to be faced that (as a writer at least) I'm as near barren as dammit.

By way of some small mitigation though, it might be wise to explain what I mean by an "idea". Certainly I demand an awful lot of one. Principally I ask that as a result of it the book should more or less write itself. Everything should slip into place: the basic sfish notion; its usefulness as a symbol of something bigger; the interesting story to go with it; the interesting people to inhabit that story; and, most important of all, the significance of whatever theme the idea suggests as something I genuinely want to write about, something about which I believe I have things genuinely worth saying. And all this in at the most two or three blinding flashes . . .

So perhaps it's not surprising that it doesn't happen all that often. In fact, that it happens at all is a flaming miracle.

I'm not suggesting, please, that other writers finally demand less of their ideas. But they're willing, and able, to niggle away at them, turning them over, trying them this way and that, pushing them into shape. Whereas I need to have all that done for me. Or done, presumably, *by* me, but on some subconscious and blessedly undemanding level.

Mind you, it took me a long time to suspect even the existence of this other level. All my life, ever since some repellant poem about snowdrops when I was nine, greatly admired by my doting grandmother, I had known that I would be a writer. School magazines, with their easy acclaim, reinforced that ambition. As did the orgasmic delirium of actually having a play one had written produced as part of the end-of-term show. Self-criticism might never have been invented. Fame, to coin a phrase, was the spur.

A writer, then – no doubt of that. But a writer of what? Well, plays, of course – partly on account of that end-of-term show, partly on account of an actress mother, partly because poems about snowdrops had been discovered to be distinctly un-chic, but mostly for the obvious reason that plays were shorter than books, and therefore easier to write. I was an idle little turd, even then.

Admittedly a novel did get started during National Service, but it never progressed beyond the statutory first three chapters. As I recall, it was all about a conscientious objector with what I now look back on as a most unnatural affection for his cat. A conscientious objector on account of my detestation of what National Service was doing to me, and a cat on account of my backwardness at that time with women. The novel faded out when I was transferred to a psychiatric hospital on Southampton Waters, where the possibility of making a radio-controlled model boat as part of my Occupational Therapy seemed far more attractive.

I was still a playwright, though. And to prove it I composed a send-up of Dick Barton to be broadcast over the hospital tannoy. As if Dick Barton could be sent up any further than he was already. The play was never broadcast, I'm glad to say, but we had a lot of presumably therapeutic fun rehearsing it.

After National Service the real world suddenly loomed. University had already been ruled out – if I was to be a playwright, so my reasoning went, then the sooner I got down to the actual business of writing plays the better. My mother however (being a proper cow) had little confidence in my ability to earn my living as a playwright. With the most cursory of nods in the direction of my ultimate ambition, she shang-hied me into a job as Assistant Stage Manager in a provincial rep. Friends in high places, e.g. Leatherhead, helped.

So I went to Leatherhead. And I loved it: the pose of it all, the smell of size and grease-paint familiar from my childhood, the world-within-a-world, the glory, the whole fantasy-feeding shebang. Plus the fact that I was after all preparing myself in the best way possible for future playwright-hood. I even began to see plays in a new way, from the point of view of the stage staff. I decided that scene one of my next play would end with ten bottles of beer being opened on stage, the entire cast then having to hurry off for a complete costume change before scene two. Assistant Stage Managers were thirsty folk.

The mechanisms of plays, therefore: none of the matter. I don't remember thinking that they needed any.

My theatre career was short, however, for I soon fell insanely in love with the wife of the stage director, and she with me. Exit one ASM, hurriedly. And, such was the nature of our shared insanity, the maturing of a small insurance policy at the time of my twenty-first birthday convinced us both that now was the moment for me to fulfill all my delayed playwriting ambitions.

In retrospect once again, I imagine that the real attraction of that scheme was the romantic cottage in a Cornish fishing village (courtesy of the previously mentioned doting grandmother) that naturally came with it.

Cornwall was nice. My wife, though, quickly not quite so much so. And the children, one of hers and very shortly one of ours, cried all the time and were perfectly horrible. (I was horrible myself, too.) But worst of all was the lovely attic, with a view of the harbour, in which I was to do my writing.

Up there I was daily brought face to face – I did go up daily, for the first few months – with the realisation that there was more to writing plays than putting nice words on a page, or even arranging for beer bottles to be opened at opportune moments. There was also more to it than neatly turned plots. I was quite good at neatly turned plots – but there was still all that space between the exposition and the denouement to be filled in somehow. In short, one had to have something to write *about*. And further, one had to have something one *wanted* to write about.

I was twenty-one. I had precious little of the first, and none whatsoever of the second.

So I packed it in. My first truly wise act in twenty-one years.

Ten years later, when I returned to writing, I was more or less in the same condition. But at least by then I had written two radio plays and one short story, and sold all three. And anyway, life at that time was so utterly bloody that a return to writing could hardly make things worse.

We'd lasted eighteen months in Cornwall, first on my insurance policy, then on making lampshades and raffia bags to sell to the holiday-makers – those were the days before tourists had been invented. And our family was on the brink of being

increased to three. It's sad the way people still breed, even when they don't really like each other. *Don't like each other* . . . hardly a sufficient description of the mutual hacking that went on between my poor wife and me. Still, it was, in the long term, educational.

We went to London. I got an office job, and we lived on a houseboat. Next boat but three lived a playwright called John Osborne, whom I didn't resent because he was both unsuccessful and even poorer than we. I'm glad to say he moved away before the opening night of *Look Back In Anger*, otherwise I might have crept out at dead of night and vengefully scuppered his mouldering hulk under him.

I worked in the bedding department of Heals furniture store, where I learned that the best mattresses were filled with the curled manes of white Argentinian horses, and that eiderdown came from the arctic nests of the eider duck, one small handful per nest. She'd tweaked every wisp from her own bosom, poor thing, so it was hardly surprising there wasn't more. I learned also that Dodie Smith, of *Dear Octopus* fame, had worked at Heals before me, so I was in good company.

Later I managed a small furniture factory making hi-fi cabinets in Mortlake – by which I mean assembled the cabinets, polished them, delivered them, and dealt with the subsequent complaints. In short, I *was* the factory.

And so on. Jobs, nervous breakdowns, moves, more jobs . . . Until finally we landed up in Devon, pregnant again, and working as a door-to-door salesman. It was a confused time, and I wasn't always sure which of us was which. Except that it was then that the worm, of which we were the opposing ends, turned.

Clearly I was unfitted to the world of commerce. Equally clearly she was unfitted to be the wife of someone working in a world to which *he* was unfitted. Ergo, change the world. False reasoning, of course, but that's life all over.

So we sold our cottage, rented another, and I set up as a playwright on the balance. At last, a playwright. Again, a playwright? Full circle – even to the cottage which, if not in a romantic Cornish fishing village, was in the next best thing, a romantic Devon muddy field? No, I really do believe there was a difference. I was a hundred years older.

Not that the difference, as far as my writing was concerned, was immediately apparent. Though I did in truth have a few more things to write about, and wanted to write about them, nobody seemed in the least inclined to pay out good money for the results. The radio plays – radio now because I had become more realistic about my chances of a West End stage production – flowed abstrusely from my pen, dropped into the deep dark well of the BBC, and were spat out again at painfully long intervals. Once I was summoned to London – Peter Sellers might be interested in one of my scripts – they'd be in touch. We lived on that hope, dogging the postman, for nearly a year.

Funds ran out. National Assistance supervened, and occasional work on Bideford quay. Perhaps I wasn't, after all, destined to be a playwright. Perhaps I wasn't destined to be a writer, of whatever sort.

I turned to crime. The old joke is that it doesn't pay. Well, it didn't – or at least, only a hundred pounds a book – but even that was better than the poke in the eye with a wet stick that I'd got so used to. And those books did show me that the greater length need be no serious deterrent. One simply began at the beginning and

after a while one reached the end. Still, crime novels (those neatly turned out plots again, but with the space between exposion and denouement now quite decently filled) seemed hardly a fulfilment of my writerly destiny, and anyway, at a hundred pounds a time the wolf was still unpleasantly audible on the doorstep.

It was then that German radio discovered me. And my backlog of BBC rejects. And suddenly I ate. We all ate. Not lavishly, but well enough for my crime novel publisher and me to part, with no great expressions of regret on either side. I even sold a couple of TV plays – they were never transmitted, of course, but they were comfortingly paid for.

This, then, was the moment, with things suddenly trickling my way, when I had an idea for a book. Within my own rather special terms of reference, a genuine idea. I'd had ideas of radio plays, admittedly, but little ones, radio play-sized ones. This latest idea was book-sized. It wasn't crime. It wasn't anything. It was just that miraculous thing, an idea: characters, story, theme, the whole glorious kit of parts.

My wife said it was horrible, so I wrote it down. No – that's cheap. Mostly I respected her literary judgement. But I'd have written down this particular idea, whatever she'd said. It interested me. I believed in it.

Which is how, at long last and over my wife's protesting body (if you see what I mean) I became an sf writer.

I called the book *The Quality of Mercy*, and sent it off to Hodder and Stoughton. They accepted it. They even paid me two hundred and fifty pounds for it. And they asked me if I'd mind if they marketed it as sf. I told them I wouldn't – for two hundred and fifty pounds they could market it as fish and chips if they felt so inclined . . . Not that I'd any clear idea what sf was. There were gaudy magazines, weren't there, with rockets and girls in brass bras in their covers. But there was H.G. Wells also, who was really quite respectable. And anyway, my book had an identity of its own, quite apart from either, so I certainly wasn't going to get hung up over a label.

Around that time, also, a worrying thing happened: my supply of radio play-sized ideas dried up. I had a job by then as a part-time postman (4.30 to 9 in the morning) and another as a bank guard two days a week but even these two together hardly produced a living wage. So Hodders' two-fifty soon went, and I was broke again.

Hodder were most understanding. They offered to pay me thirty pounds a month for three years, by way of advance royalties, in exchange for three more sf novels. Was I interested? I did a quick sum. Thirty pounds a month represented three hundred and sixty pounds a year – and all for just one book. I was interested. And besides, I had to do something with my time, now that I was no longer writing all those radio plays.

The only trouble was, my current idea for a book was all about man's need for a rigid framework, all about the stringent circumstances under which I judged him to be happiest. Now, I had no notion that Utopias were part of sf's common currency. But I *did* know that sf was often concerned with outer space. So I placed my ideal society on Mars. Nothing to it. I was in business again: characters, story, theme, the whole glorious kit of parts.

Two more sf novels followed. It seemed, in fact, that my subconscious idea

machine had only to be pointed in the right direction, the my-impression-of-sf direction, and out popped the right sort of thing – though strictly on a one a year basis. Plus, as it happened, one totally non-sf idea that refused to be ignored, and produced *The Palace*, which Hodder published more or less as an act of loyalty. So that, what with this and the fact that they had taken me on as a reader as well by now, I was kept fairly busy.

Three years, three sf books, and then my contract ran out. But I wasn't worried. I was well into yet another sf novel, and surely Hodder would be interested. It turned out that they would – none of the last three had earned its three-sixty advance, so by rights I owed them another for nothing. They got it. It broke my bank, but I saw their point.

It didn't, actually, break my bank quite as much as it might have done, for a year or so earlier I'd written a short story, and Terry Carr had picked it up for Ace in America, and had written asking me if I'd done any books. So I met Don Wollheim in London, and handed him a sizable bundle. All of which Ace put out at suitable intervals. Three thousand dollars each. I bought myself a car.

It was 1968, and my marriage of inconvenience had just passed its seventeenth birthday. Enough of a bad thing by any standards, so we quit.

Predictably, though, with two homes to maintain now, the post office job, the bank guard job and my writing were no longer sufficient. I'm sorry to go on about money so, but life's like that. Well, my life was. Still, miracles do happen and, with the help of a recommendation from Hodder, the *Reader's Digest* offered me an editorial position. Not that I knew anything about the *Reader's Digest* – I'd led a very sheltered life. But I knew nothing about sf either, and that hadn't deterred me. So I returned to London, took up my duties in the Condensed Books department of *RD*, found myself the most marvellous wife any man could wish for, and kept up with my writing at weekends. I enjoyed London. I enjoyed my work at *RD*. I enjoyed my wife. I enjoyed my writing. The sun shone.

Except that in England Hodder were growing tired of losing money on me, while in America Don Wollheim had left Ace and set up his own firm, and taken me with him, and then also grown tired of the loss I represented. "You may not sell many books," he told me, "but the very best people will go to your funeral." I bet that's what he told all his authors. But it was a poor consolation when he subsequently rejected two of my books in a row.

By then in England too my writing was having a bad time. I'd been lucky enough to interest John Bush of Gollancz in *The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe*, but my next two (Don's two) had found no favour with him at all. In the face of such informed and unanimous dismissal my own belief that I was writing as well as ever, if not better, was clearly a delusion. Eight years of writing sf, eight books, and no progress. Scarcely any of these books, in fact, had even earned its advance. A blank wall, therefore. I was forty-five years old. I was happily married. I could live on my *Digest* salary. Time to call it a day. Everybody knew prophets weren't honoured in their own lands. Nor in other people's lands either, if my experience was anything to go by.

Not that I was a prophet. I wrote about today, only very thinly disguised as tomorrow.

Be that as it may, obviously I was wasting both my own time and other people's. So I moved out. But I was still temperamentally a writer, and hopeful, and greedy, so I turned to something else: romantic historical novels. About today again, I suppose, only very thinly disguised as yesterday.

Four years passed. Time for a keen young German agent to take me on, and succeed with my back list, thus reinforcing my gratitude to the German-speaking peoples, already profound from the radio play years. Time also for a small digression . . .

There is, in Southern California, a dedicated sf fan, and equally dedicated sf bibliographer, called Robert Reginald. Back in 1968 he had written to me, requesting information for his current bibliography. I wrote back. It emerged that he admired my work. The correspondence flourished, and has done ever since. For many years, in fact, Rob has been my best – if, admittedly, for most of that time my only – American friend.

Recently (which brings me to the point of this digression) he has entered the field of specialist sf publishing with his own imprint, Borgo Press. And a couple of years ago he approached me in my retirement: putting his loyalty to the ultimate test, he would himself publish one of those books of mine that nobody else would touch. Greater love hath no man.

My tale is nearly told. Picture, if you will, the mildly successful Condensed Books editor, the mildly successful romantic historical novelist, gazing gratefully at his Borgo Press contract and wistfully wishing that the rest of the publishing world were so kind. Take that same middle-aged gent down to Milford-on-Sea as the flattered guest of an sf writers' workshop there. Introduce him further at a boozy party to the dazzling Judy Blish and engage the two of them in conversation on the hackneyed subject of literary agents. "They aren't necessary," says he. "If a book is good, it sells. If it isn't, it doesn't." "Balls," says Judy Blish. "Oh, but surely – " says he. "Do you mind if I give your address to a friend of mine?" says she, whipping out an empty fag packet to write on.

The party ends, the gent thinks little more of it. Ladies like Judy Blish are dear kind souls. But the backs of empty fag packets are the most forgettable things in the world.

I did Judy scant justice, of course. She remembered her empty fag packet. And she also managed to decipher what she'd written on it. The result of which is that I now have the indomitable Virginia Kidd of that other Milford far across the sea as my American agent, who has recommended me to A.P. Watt in England, and I am, incredibly, back in business as an sf writer.

It's early days, of course. But nice things are already happening. First of all, Virginia's enthusiasm so fired me that I wrote an sf short story, closely followed by a whole new novel, and she sold them both. And the remaining hitherto unloved one. And reprints of others. While in England the new book, aided by A.P. Watt, has got me very happily back on the Gollancz list . . . Which seems to prove that I was totally wrong: it's the agent who has to be good, not the books. Or perhaps, ideally, a bit of both.

There's even a film on the way, with my beloved Katherine Mortenhoe played by my equally beloved Romy Schneider.

So there it is. I always wanted to be a writer and now, fingers crossed, I am one. I only work part-time at the *Reader's Digest*. And I plan to go on writing two books a year for as long as anybody will buy them: one romantic historical because it's fun, and one sf because it's both fun and a way of exploring the truth – about people, and about science's part in shaping them.

If I've stuck with what folk have been kind enough to call sf ('kind enough' because the label makes possible a large and informed readership for stuff that otherwise would probably sink without trace) it's principally because I'm afraid of admitting to commitment, a person who welcomes sf's distancing mechanisms. After all, it's far safer to dare to care about one's characters when the world one places them in isn't quite 'real'.

Admittedly the future worlds I choose are always closely tied to my own muddled understanding of the present world about me. But that's because in general terms I don't much like it, and developing it a few years on is as good as way as any of finding out why. And perhaps even seeing how it may be changed.

In response to our request for something for our Seacon Special issue, Mr Leiber – capping his exemplary rapidity in sending us his "Profession" piece for issue 11/12 many weeks earlier than we expected it – has sent us not one, but two essays – which we have naughtily run together as one, since the first essay explains the exigencies that prevented the book which the second essay was to have been part of, from ever coming to term. Accompanying Fritz Leiber's two essays was his "personalzine" for 1978 in which he reveals that another book of essays is on the way, reflecting his daily preoccupations through ten or so meditations on time ("My Japanese Clock"), rooftop astronomy, moods, our capacity for self-illusion, "San Francisco's Highrises", "Living Alone".

Travails of the Fantasy Novel: A Project Unborn

Fritz Leiber

I. THE PROJECT THAT HAUNTED ME FOR 15 YEARS

In January 1964 I signed an agreement with the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University to deliver to them by the end of the year a work entitled *The Fantasy Novel: Speculative Fiction* for the series "Crosscurrents/Modern Critiques", edited by Harry Thornton Moore, Professor of English there, whom I'd known as a fellow student at the University of Chicago thirty years earlier. The glamour of

academic publication was the chief lure leading me to take this step. Science fiction still hadn't much reputation in the colleges then. I'd be able to praise and illuminate some of my favourite books, strike a blow for an underrated genre, I thought, and at least accomplish something in line with my bachelor's degree, Phi Beta Kappa key, and lurking scholarly ambitions. A pleasant, even marginally (ahem!) noble prospect.

I do remember being a bit dubious about making that twelve-month's deadline. It seemed pushing things a bit for a scholarly volume. But I'd received no advance royalties – they'd only come when I'd completed and delivered a satisfactory manuscript – so I wouldn't have cash money on my conscience. And I recalled how Harry Moore himself had spent twenty years doing the book on D.H. Lawrence that had got him his doctor's degree and won him considerable reputation as a scholar. Somehow that circumstance seemed to me to justify in advance any possible delays of my own.

On the surface my situation was good, even tranquil, and my writing career was going well. Just the previous summer I'd completed a long science-fiction novel, *The Wanderer*, and was waiting for Ballantine to publish it. The same went for a short Fafhrd-Mouser novel, *The Lords of Quarmall*, incorporating material written by my old friend Harry Fischer some 25 years or so earlier; the magazine *Fantastic* would issue that one soon.

I was 53 years old and in good health. I was putting a goodly fraction of my income away in a fund intended to finance a trip to England, my wife's homeland. Jonquil and I were the sole occupants (with three cats) of a spacious hillside house that looked down across a romantically overgrown and neglected garden upon the serene, tile-roofed, old Mission city of Santa Barbara, founded in 1782, and the Pacific Ocean beyond with the great, lonely islands of Santa Cruze, Santa Rosa, and San Miguel looming up misty and blue some thirty miles out and making the intermittent far side of the Santa Barbara Channel. An ideal situation for a writer, you'd say.

But under the surface the weather of my life wasn't so good. If not storms, there were deep rufflings, devious undercurrents. I'd taken fully three years to write *The Wanderer*, devoting at least half my working time to it over that period, and for this I'd received only a trifle more than standard advance royalties – it would be years before it earned me anything more, if ever; and I hadn't been able to sell it as a magazine serial, the only chance for immediate extra money. Contrariwise, *The Lords of Quarmall* was making only magazine money – it would be five years before the Fafhrd and Mouser stories got into paperback books, and then only because I expanded one into a picaresque novel (*The Swords of Lankhmar*, grown from the novella "Scylla's Daughter").

Another thing: my wife and I didn't own or even rent the idyllic house and forsaken garden we occupied. We were only looking after it (and the three cats) for its owner, Stephen Schulteis, and his wife (science-fiction enthusiasts both), while they went around the world as librarians of the *University of the Seven Seas*, an experiment in marine and globe-trotting education, California style. This was a most welcome and deeply appreciated economy for us and also a profoundly needful change from Los Angeles, the sprawling city or supersuburb 90 miles southward which we both loathed, but it underlined the shaky state of my finances. When in

1956 I'd given up my 12-year Chicago job as associate editor of the magazine *Science Digest* to take up full-time freelancing, I'd sold the house those twelve years of work had bought and used the money to supplement my relatively small income from fiction writing. Now we'd used up all of that "house money" and needed rather acutely to expand my income from fiction.

This brings up another circumstance about the bad or gusty weather underlying my situation: *The Fantasy Novel* wasn't the only new book I'd contracted to do that year.

I'd finished *The Wanderer* the previous summer, as I've said, rather unhappy at the small amount of money I was earning for three years' effort. I didn't see *The Wanderer*, as I'm able to do now, as a long-term capital investment. No, at the time I was feeling quite resentful, even angry – and at the whole science-fiction and paperback market as well, back in those days when only Ace and Ballantine could be said to specialize in publishing such material and able to offer only relatively small advance royalties for it.

At the same time I was inclined to set myself higher and more difficult standards for the science-fiction novel. *The Wanderer* had given me a taste of writing a book with a "whole-earth" setting (yes, and it had taken three years to do; more than once I'd been on the point of abandoning the wide focus and shortening the book drastically). Also, I'd just read Mack Reynolds's *Analog* serial, *Black Man's Burden*, and several of his other fictions and been mightily impressed by his internationalist political expertise – it seemed to me then that any modern-setting science-fiction novel that didn't do equally well in that area didn't amount to much.

So, in this dubious mood of resentment and over-ambition, I'd whacked out in the fall of 1963 the outline of a novel involving the United States, Russia, Red China, and some very mysterious humanoid aliens living secretly in Siberia. I recall that the Russians had electrically launched passenger rockets hurtling daily between Leningrad and Vladivostok and that atomic tests in Tibet were an issue. The aliens powered their rockets with gigantic lasers and there were some speed-of-light paradoxes involved, also photonic booms analogous to the sonic ones – a faulty landing by one of their ships had been misinterpreted by earthlings as the great Tunguska meteor strike of 1908. Sometimes the aliens hid their spaceship in Lake Baikal, accounting for its mysterious changes in level – that must have been a vasty mother-ship indeed! dwarfing even the one in "Close Encounters of the Third Kind". And one of the aliens was a glamorous witchy redhead who passed herself off as the daughter of a British engineer self-exiled in Siberia and who somehow found her way into a treason trial.

I've discovered, incidentally, that there are two sorts of "whole-earth" modern-setting science-fiction novel: firstly, the ones in which there are scenes set in different countries to show the worldwide effects of some phenomenon or in order to view it from different vantage points. Generally the main characters are unimportant people who don't understand much of the general picture, and the story is told from their limited viewpoints. This is the easier "whole-world" novel to write (though none are really easy), requiring little research beyond phrasebooks, practical handbooks, atlases, and *National Geographic* articles.

And then there are the "whole-earth" novels that deal with nations and issues and

that tend to star leaders – presidents, premiers, kings, commissars, industrial magnates, and great scientists. For this the writer must know his politics, sociology, economics, and history, or at any rate be able to talk as convincingly as an ace correspondent – he must put on a good performance as author omniscient. This I've always found very hard to do. No matter how well I've prepared, I feel like a fake. But some authors are very good at it. They seem to enjoy speaking as experts and authorities – and sometimes they are.

At any rate, I'd whacked out my outline of *The Red-Headed Nightmare*. As that title suggests, it was a somewhat flamboyant outline, rather like a movie treatment. It was an outline written to impress publishers rather than help the author build – discover! – his story.

And then, instead of setting this outline aside and waiting for it to proliferate in my subconscious until it was a solid story, I sent it off to my agent, the tough-minded, forceful, cool Bob Mills. (My previous agent had been the amiable, sympathetic and very helpful Harry Altshuler – back in 1958 when I'd been waiting for my house money he advanced me $400 out of my hypothetical future earnings, but in 1963 he'd had to cut down his clientele because of changing circumstances in his life.)

And then, almost before I'd had time to draw breath, Bob Mills reported that Bantam would pay me $3,000 if I'd contract with them to do the novel – two or three times as big an advance as I'd ever received previously.

I had some last-minute qualms but of course I signed. Having all that money in hand gave me a wonderful feeling of security at first – for one thing, it was what made it possible for me to start the somewhat visionary England fund. I began to read up on meteors, lasers, and Russia – and to think rather uneasily about reading up on China.

Meanwhile, the fiction I was actually writing in Santa Barbara looked toward the past and not the future. The novelette *The Black Gondolier*, a rather nightmarish Lovecraftian story, though not using his Cthulhu monsters: it was set in Venice, California, a decaying resort city of canals and porticos aping those of Venice, Italy, and grotesquely spotted with oil wells – and now swallowed up in Los Angeles. *When the Change-Winds Blow*, a melancholy short story reflecting a growing interest in cathedrals and churches, the dramatic monologues of Browning, and my memories of the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Chapel. *Midnight in the Mirror World*, a rather morbid and moody tale of how a lonely romantic man who lived only for music, astronomy, and chess was slowly but inexorably drawn toward suicide. Both the last stories were about lost loves.

But the "whole-earth" novel outline wasn't growing properly. No new incidents sprang to my mind each day to fill in the gaps and make the story more real. And instead of getting more and more enmeshed in the action and developing strong feelings, the characters seemed to float in the void, unmotivated and blasé observers. While the more I read about Russia, the more it was borne in on me how little I knew about that land. I was getting anything but the feeling of being an expert.

In the long run this experience did teach me something about a writer's research for stories set in foreign lands and other periods. If you already have your plot pretty well worked out, you can quickly and easily read up the local colour you

need – language, coinage, customs, foods, transportation, layout of cities, things like that. The subconscious mind is hardly involved at all. It can be done in days, yes, hours. You're just looking for details. But if you're hoping to absorb large masses of information swiftly and then have a story, or an important part of one, spring to mind from that churning mass of half-assimilating stuff, you're in for a big disappointment – at least, if your mind works anything like mine. There is no quick way of digesting such material – the subconscious juices have to work at it for a long while.

I should at this point end the suspense by saying that I never did write *The Red-Headed Nightmare* – the plot would never jell – and that the unearned advance was on my conscience for a long, long time. I tried to pay it back in several ways. Years later I offered Bantam my novel *A Specter is Haunting Texas* in lieu of *Nightmare*, but they turned it down. A little later, in the perverse fashion of publishers, they bought it at a higher price from Walker, the hard-back publishers, but that wasn't the same thing to my touchy conscience. Now the statute of limitations has wiped out my debt to Bantam, but left me with a deep aversion to taking money in advance for anything.

But at the time in Santa Barbara, I was just becoming seriously worried about being able to complete *Nightmare* within the year allotted for it, so that when *The Fantasy Novel* contract came along – and no money attached to trouble my conscience – I signed it the more eagerly not only because of my hunger for scholarly renown, but also because I thought it would take my mind in part off my other writing-worry. I somehow persuaded myself for a while that two writing problems would be easier to solve than one – and in the same limited period of time, though I tried not to think about that last aspect.

And now that I was committed to *The Fantasy Novel* (which I sometimes thought of as *The Modern Fantasy Novel*), I took stock of my qualifications for writing it – the resources I could bring to the task – and found that they really didn't amount to very much.

At the University of Chicago I'd majored in psychology with a minor in physiology; toward the end I'd had a growing interest in philosophy. Just a few courses in English and none in literary research or library science.

During my twelve years at *Science Digest* I'd done quite a number of book reviews for *The Chicago Tribune*, but those had been chiefly of non-fiction, especially books about the sea and about flying saucers (there had been a rash of those in the 1950s).

The sole substantial piece of critical writing I'd done, in fact, had been an analysis of H.P. Lovecraft's style, story-structure, and intentions for the Derleth-edited Arkham volume of Lovecraft memorabilia called *Something About Cats*, where my article had appeared as "A Literary Copernicus".

About the only things I had going for me, it seemed, were that I had written saleable science fiction, supernatural horror, sword and sorcery, and miscellaneous fantasy myself and that I had read and re-read, was enthusiastic about and comfortable with, respected and loved – and at odd moments thought a lot about, I thought – the score or so of novels I intended to focus on. ("Mustn't spread it too thin," I told myself.)

As far as I can recall, my earliest list went just about like this: *The War of the Worlds*, by H.G. Wells; *Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley; *Last and First Men*, by Olaf Stapledon; *Double Star*, by Robert Heinlein; *War with the Newts*, by Karel Capek; *More Than Human*, by Theodore Sturgeon; *The Dragon in the Sea* (*Under Pressure* in *Astounding*), by Frank Herbert; *Mission of Gravity*, by Hal Clement; *A Case of Conscience*, by James Blish; *Bring the Jubilee*, by Ward Moore; *Watch the Northwind Rise* (*Seven Days in New Crete* in England), by Robert Graves; *Cat's Cradle*, by Kurt Vonnegut; *The Child Buyer*, by John Hersey; *Alraune*, by Hans Heinz Ewers; *Jurgen*, by James Branch Cabell; *To Walk the Night*, by William Sloane; *Steppenwolf*, by Herman Hesse; *The Once and Future King*, by T.H. White; *Titus Groan*, by Mervyn Peake; *The Worm Ouroboros*, by E.R. Eddison; *The People of the Black Circle*, by Robert E. Howard; and *The Shadow Out of Time*, by H.P. Lovecraft.

I knew I admired all these books. But just *how* had I been reading and re-reading them? And how had I been thinking about them?

Well, most of them were the sort of books I read to put myself to sleep at night, get myself into a secure and satisfied mood, something akin to companioning with friends or with a lover – even akin to nibbling a favourite food or sipping at a drink. (The nearest to exceptions to this generalization would have been *A Case of Conscience, Cat's Cradle, The Child Buyer, Jurgen, Steppenwolf,* and *Titus Groan* – I hadn't re-read those six all that often.) The lot weren't supposed to be the twenty or whatever best books, of course, a nervous and adjudging daytime selection, but simply a good and commendable, representative lot – books I'd feel comfortable and competent discussing. None of them was what you'd call worthy but difficult, with uncongenial, crabbed, and harsh aspects. No, each was a world of fantasy I loved to enter and that I felt at home in – Vendhya, Witchland, the Venus of the Flying Men, the cabins of the *Bree*, the *Thomas Paine*, the *Fenian Ram*. And much of my reading of these books had been done on the edge of sleep, close to the dream realm, with darkness at the window and the night winds blowing – hardly the state of mind to induce analysis, taking apart exploratorily, merciless examination – in short, criticism, if those were the sorts of things criticism was going to mean to me.

So what *were* the sort of things I wanted to say, to write, about these books in my fully-awake daytime or morning mind state? At least I believed I knew some of the things I *didn't* want to write.

I didn't want to write outlines, resumes, or any sort of retellings of the stories themselves. That seemed little more than a matter of repetition and selective copying, like writing cribs for students or casual readers who hadn't time or didn't really want to go to the books themselves, who wanted the show of knowledge with the least possible work getting it. I knew that in reviewing mystery stories the sin of sins was to reveal the solution, name the criminal, or tell much more that the intriguing beginnings of the plot. Of course, book reviews weren't critiques – to put it most simply, the first were for readers who hadn't read the book, the second for ones who had. Naturally there'd have to be some resumé-ing, to jog the memories of those who read the books some time ago and as a helpful courtesy to those who had not yet read some of the books discussed, but it ought to be kept to a minimum.

Also, I didn't want to do long biographics or biographical sketches of the authors of the novel. That seemed something more appropriately placed elsewhere than in the 60,000 word book I planned on writing. Moreover, in many cases the material was not easily available. There were Sam Moskowitz's *Explorers of the Infinite* and some of the chapters of his *Seekers of Tomorrow*, while so far as criticism was concerned, I'd read Damon Knight's *In Search of Wonder* and William Atheling, Jr.'s *The Issue at Hand.*

And then there was the matter of pointing out the influence of writers on each other and also the way they'd been shaped by writers outside the modern fantasy field.

I believe I was just about sophisticated enough at that time to know that this was a fascinating, but very tricky topic. I knew it was fatally easy to discern an influence and figure out its vector from the dates — and then discover that both parties were being influenced from a third source I hadn't known about. One could get into a sterile search for "firsts", or mistake simultaneous invention for influence. Best not get caught up in too much of that.

On the other hand, I did know something I *did* want to write about the books. I wanted to steer the new reader into each book helpfully. If there were anything apt to put him off from a book, I wanted to explain that away in advance, and if there were any prior information he ought to have, I wanted to give it to him. For instance, as early as 1940 it was clear that history was taking a different course from the one fancied for it in the 1920s by Olaf Stapledon in *Last and First Men.* He had Italy invading France, but swiftly crushed; next, a brief bombing war between England and France, achieving vast destruction with chemical explosives, while Germany tries to play the part of peacemaker. This "failure" in details caused one American publisher after World War II to issue the book without its opening chapters, beginning it only when a kind of atomic explosive had been discovered and America and China were squaring away for the last of the first big conflicts. (Such an over-reaction makes me think of authors who have rewritten already published stories to make them conform to new scientific discoveries and technological innovations; the usual result is that the story becomes overloaded with technical detail and generally "double plotted" as in Heinlein's rewriting of "Blow-Ups Happen".) But if we read those "mistaken" chapters of *Last and First Men* patiently without losing our cool, we find that Stapledon was well aware of most of the trends of his day and their explosive possibilities, but that looking forward from the 1920s he conceived them as resulting in several wars spread over a period of several hundred years — such a treatment would also enable him to develop his material in a more orderly way. I thought it would be helpful to point this out to the reader in advance. (In fact, the opening of *Last and First Men* can now be read as an alternate world story, one of the commonest ploys of time travel.)

I also wanted to tell something about the use made of science in each book, distinguish between original extrapolations and assumptions that have become common in most science fiction.

But above all, I wanted to investigate what each fantasy said about life, the human condition, the author's life, and about the world he lived in.

Such was, in brief, the way I intended to write *The Fantasy Novel.* Alas for

intentions! – I did not finish it in 1964. Nor in 1965. It remains incomplete today. Yet over those 15 years it has remained half alive, one of the "living dead", like a vampire or zombie, to haunt and trouble me. (This article, in fact, is one more attempt to lay the ghost.)

From time to time I've altered the list of novels, taking away some and adding others: Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (I'd dropped the "modern" qualification then); *The Duchess of Malfi*, by John Webster (I'd let in drama, but that Jacobean drama is a true parent of Gothic fiction); Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries* and Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* (admitting filmscripts also, for which I found good reason); *Messiah*, by Gore Vidal; *Childhood's End*, by Arthur Clarke, or else his *Rendezvous with Rama*; Arthur Machen's *The Three Imposters*.

Beginning in March 1968 I took on the job of occasionally (and from 1973 to 1978 regularly) writing the "Fantasy Books" column for the magazine *Fantastic*, largely with the idea of getting some helpful practice in critical writing. In the course of this I managed to write some material on Heinlein, Blish, Howard, Lovecraft, Bergman, and two or three others that would have been useful for my book, but mostly I discovered the difference between book reviewing (at least mine) and criticism.

And I wrote a few articles for several small publications. The most complete was one on Graves's *Watch the Northwind Rise* for *Riverside Quarterly*. There were various pieces on Ewers, T.H. White, Cabell, and Howard which I did for *Amra*. Finally there was the short chapter about Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* which forms the second part of this article.

Have I laid my ghost? I'm not sure. But at least I've tried to throw some light upon the phantom.

II THE GULLIVER CHAPTER

I first read *Gulliver's Travels* in an expurgated edition. I was delighted by the tiny people of Lilliput (my favourite page in the comics section of the Sunday newspaper was the Teeny-Weenies, a small town of little people no bigger than mice), fascinated yet somewhat frightened by the giants of Brobdingnag (Gulliver's loneliness is more like a child's there), confused and bored by the visionary scientists of Lagado (*old* people, all of them, they seemed to me, schoolteacher types) and their king's monstrous floating island, horrified by the senile immortals of Luggnagg, and saddened and bothered by the noble Houyhnhnms and disgusting Yahoos.

Later, in high school (though not in class), I got to the unexpurgated edition and was additionally titillated by the Brobdingnagian passages where the Queen's ladies strip Gulliver and themselves naked, especially when "the handsomest of these Maids of Honour, a pleasant frolicsome girl of sixteen, would sometimes set me astride upon one of her nipples, with many other tricks, wherein the reader will excuse me for not being over particular". Such thoroughgoing explorations of the sexual areas of the female body (what that "many other tricks" doesn't imply!)

sounded very appropriate and attractive to me and I wasn't put off, as Swift at least in part intended I should be, by their moles broad as trenchers, hairs thick as pack threads, corns big enough for Gulliver to make a silver-set drinking cup of one of them, or even by their stinks.

Still later I have begun to wonder at a little and even suspect Gulliver's terrible fright (supposedly the greatest in his life) when he is jumped while skinnydipping ("I immediately stripped myself stark naked and went down softly into the stream") by "a young female Yahoo" whose "countenance did not make an appearance altogether so hideous as the rest of the kind; for, I think, she could not be above eleven years old". Frolicsome sixteen full of tricks and fair sloe-haired eleven "inflamed with desire" and come running sound to me as if the dour and defensive Dean at those points in writing had been secretly tickled in spite of himself and all his intent to disgust us. At least, he knew what would interest his Yahoo audience!

Later, also, I came to realize that *Gulliver's Travels* is simply the first major science-fiction novel in the English language. The first and second voyages brilliantly fulfil the basic requirement of one type of such novels: detailed exploration of the consequences of a single change in one condition of our lives (*dimension* in this case) while maintaining the other conditions unaltered. The Lilliputians are a touch less than six inches high, the Brobdingnagians tower about seventy feet tall (linear dimensions have been respectively reduced and increased by a factor of twelve) and Swift sticks very singlemindedly to his programme of exploring from the viewpoint of Gulliver the consequences of these changes in the greatest possible detail – and it is precisely this that to my mind accounts for the great charm of the book and most of its memorable images: the exploration of Gulliver's pockets in Lilliput and listing of their contents (silver coins almost too heavy to lift, his watch a great mysterious engine clacketty-clacking like a watermill, his pistol a vast hollow pillar of iron), also his wonderfully fitted travelling closet in Brobdingnag that his dear nurse, the girl giantess Glumdalclitch, carried in her lap (life in a doll's house)!

The book was universally popular when first published, anathema to such nineteenth-century moralizers and defenders of purity as Thackeray, Macauley, and Sir Walter Scott. Dr Samuel Johnson, one of the earliest of *Gulliver*'s detractors, missed the point when he said, "When once you have thought of the big men and the little men, it is very easy to do all the rest". The point is that that "very easy" rest is precisely what other writers of those times would not have done, or been able to do. Their language dealt in generalities, not in particulars. They would have treated the big and little men as cardboard figures, used them for a single comparison, and never thought of examining them in detail as if they were real. (To do certain sorts of fantasy the courtesy and honour of examining them as if they were real – to put them to that test – is the essence of science fiction.)

But Swift gloried in particulars and vivid detail of the most excruciating sort. Consider these from his *Directions to Servants*: "There are several ways of putting out candles, and you ought to be instructed in them all: You may run the candle end against the wainscot, which puts the snuff out immediately; you may lay it on the floor, and tread the snuff out with your foot; you may hold it upside down, until it is choked with its own grease; or cram it into the socket of the candlestick; you may whirl it round in your hand till it goes out; when you go to bed,

after you have made water, you may dip the candle-end into the chamber-pot; you may spit on your finger and thumb, and pinch the snuff until it goes out. The cook may run the candle's nose into the meal tub, or the groom into a vessel of oats, or a lock of hay, or a heap of litter; the housemaid may put out her candle by running it against a looking glass, which nothing cleans so well as candle-snuff." He missed the housemaid extinguishing its flame with a casually well-aimed thin jet of milk expressed from a lactating breast (an image for which I am indebted to Heinrich Kley, the diabolically brilliant German pen-and-ink artist). With the exception of a few others like Defoe, it is not until the Romantic Period that such everyday detail returns to English fictions. Keats's enchanting blend of fantasy and the minutiae of real life immediately comes to mind; one recalls also his treatment of the titantic figures in *Hyperion*.

Once or twice Swift cheated on the crucial matter of dimension in the first two books, as when he had a troop of twenty-four Lilliputian cavalrymen parade two feet above the ground on Gulliver's pocket handkerchief stretched tight to sticks set firmly in the earth. But even here we must take into account that it was a very large pocket handkerchief, two and a half feet square, and figuring a Lilliputian horse to take up a ground space of eight by four inches, we see that the troop of twenty-four could readily have stood in close order for review on it, though certainly not have engaged in the exercises and skirmishes he describes. But these are no more than the changes of size of the figure of King Kong in the original movie, which are managed so skilfully that they do not spoil the film's illusion. Similarly, Swift brings off his handkerchief trick. In the excitement of the parade, the cavalrymen smoothly shrink from six to about one inch in height and their horses proportionately, they divide into troops and charge each other, send their blunt arrows winging, and then resume their larger size in time for Gulliver to lift them carefully down one at a time. At the end a particularly mettlesome stallion puts a hoof through the handkerchief, straining his shoulder and throwing his rider, who fortunately is not hurt, but the accident is sufficient to make Gulliver terminate the exhibition. Perfect!

A more serious objection to Swift's handling of dimension by modern science-fictional standards is that he overlooks the consequences of the Square-Cube Law and the atomic structure of matter. The former makes the Brobdingnagian giants impossible, while the latter calls into question the superior sensory acuity and also the intelligence equal to human of the Lilliputians.

By the Square-Cube Law, a man twelve times higher than normal would weigh, not twelve, but 1728 times as much. If built to human proportions, his bones and muscles would simply not be thick enough to support, let alone move, his weight. Standing erect, the seventy-footer's legs would break — for their cross section, measure of their strength would only have increased by a factor of 144. He would have had to be built more on the pattern of an elephant, at the very least, to be possible at all. (H.G. Wells makes his giant children in *The Food of the Gods* considerably smaller yet more sturdily shaped than Brobdingnagians, while Olaf Stapledon does an even better job with his Second Men in *Last and First Men*, making their legs truly elephantine.

On the other hand, the Square-Cube Law would in a way work to the advantage

of the Lilliputians. A man one-twelfth the height of a normal would weigh only 1/728th as much – a fraction of a pound. A horse likewise. Which would among other things have made the handkerchief trick more plausible, though it would have given the Lilliputians enormous appetites. A mammal that size eats about the equivalent of its body weight in a day simply to maintain the necessary temperature for life, since its small body chills very fast. A modern Gulliver would note and wonder at this.

No, what cooks the Lilliputians as plausible beings is atomic structure. Their sensory equipment would be built of the same size molecules as Gulliver's, hence couldn't be more acute, however attractive the notion of smaller people having finer eyesight and keener time-sense. The point here is that you can't build an accurate scale model of a complex structure using the same size bricks as in the big original. Their nervous systems would be built of the same size molecules too, and so their brains would not have had nerve cells enough for language ability and like human functioning. For that an animal the size of a large dog seems the minimum possibility.

Of course we might assume that the Lilliputians were built of smaller atoms than Gulliver, but this would involve making *two* changes in the conditions of our lives: not only gross dimensions but the size of the building blocks as well, requiring that there be two general species of atoms in the same world – and it is precisely such multiple assumptions that this sort of science fiction avoids; it has its own Occam's Razor and its own elegances.

More to the point, Swift would never have made such an assumption because a knowledge of the atomic structure of matter was a good one hundred and fifty years in his future. In his day atomic theory was still no more than a metaphyiscal speculation of the classical philosophers Democritus and Lucretius – Swift could very well think of matter and its forms as being unendingly divisible, no building blocks at all. While even the consequences of the Square-Cube Law were not widely nor well understood. In fact, the scientists of Swift's time were largely gentlemen-speculators themselves, builders of systems that were of no immediate practical use. It would be a half-century before Benjamin Franklin's work with static electricity, as Isaac Asimov has pointed out, would demonstrate how speculation by a gentleman scientist could lead to an invention (by that same gentleman scientist!) of demonstrable benefit to mankind – the lightning rod. And it is these gentlemen scientists, members of the Royal Society, founded only 64 years before the publication of *Gulliver*, who become the targets of Swift's satire in his third voyage – to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubdubdrib, Luggnagg, and Japan.

There is nothing uncommon about a science-fiction novel attacking science and scientists (or at least technology) in varying degrees. One thinks of the writings of Ray Bradbury and C.S. Lewis and Aldous Huxley and of the many novels picturing earth-life destroyed by an atomic war or by the pollution and overpopulation attendant on the proliferation of technology.

At the same time, there is nothing uncommon about such a novel turning to science for its gimmicks. The flying island of Laputa is kept aloft by magnetism, a force first systematically described by Gilbert in 1600, and which in Swift's day

still figured as something new and mysterious that could be invoked by the fantasy writer to explain almost anything, much as electricity figured towards the end of the last century or radium during the earlier years of this one. (Radium dissolved sailing-ships and their crews in *The Mystery* by Stewart Edward White and Samuel Hopkins Adams and powered rifles that sent explosive cartridges a hundred miles in Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars books; in its first flush a new discovery seems magical, at least to laymen, and capable of doing anything.)

Again treating his fantasy as if it were real, Swift is not satisfied with merely invoking the mystery-word "magnetism". He describes the lodestone magnet eighteen feet long and nine feet thick, shaped like a weaver's shuttle, that rests on gimbals in a cave in Laputa's adamantine foundation and how it is turned to govern the movements of the flying island. Such exact details are always wonderfully impressive. He is also meticulously realistic about the matter of language (always a problem for writers about unknown countries and foreign planets), and we see Gulliver writing down English and Laputan words in parallel columns and drilling for long hours.

The flying island is the residence of the king and is the means whereby he maintains his tyranny over the larger ocean-set island of Balnibarbi below, cutting off sunlight from rebellious cities and threatening to descend and crush them. This compelling concept has of course been imitated in later science fiction. I most recently saw it in the science-fiction film *Zardoz*, where the floating island speaks with a bull-horn voice from the sky and helps maintain the rule of an elite of immortals over a race of ape-men.

But all this about Laputa is just the scene setting. Now we discover that both Laputa and Balnibarbi constitute a dystopia or comic inferno of gentlemen scientists put in control of things and given free rein. In their enthusiasm for mathematics they scorn the simple horizontals and verticals of common sense and folk architecture, and have their houses built at strange angles, insuring that they will fall down shortly. While they scheme ways to recover food from dung and plough land by burying acorns and having hogs root them up, the nation is hungry and would starve were it not for a few despised old-fashioned gentlemen who insist on farming their lands in the old way. While in their passion for music the Laputan speculators have their food served to them shaped in the forms of fiddles and flutes, oboes and harps. And being forever lost in speculation, they are endlessly absent-minded, so that they have to have special servants to remind them when they are to listen and when to speak while their wives deceive them continually with strangers.

Gulliver finally visits the Laputan Academy and the parodies get hotter, for Swift simply "set down before his readers experiments actually performed by members of the Royal Society, more preposterous to the layman than anything imagination could invent and more devastating in their satire", as Marjorie Hope Nicholson points out in her book *Science and Imagination* (Archon Books, 1976). Naturally, Swift picks his examples for their comic possibilities and then loads them to maximize their ridiculousness. He reads in Robert Boyle's *Experiments and Observations upon Colour* about a blind man who could distinguish between different coloured pigments by touch or smell and from this gets a Laputan speculator who is training blind men to mix colours for painters, a job they keep botching. Having blind men sort colours, what could be sillier? – even if an occasional blind man could some-

times manage it. Or visiting Gresham College, Swift sees a collection of petrified objects and jumps ahead to a Laputan project for petrifying the hoofs of living horses in order to save on horse shoes. Or reading of experiments designed to show how water on freezing can burst metal tubes, he imagines a Laputan project to extract gunpowder from ice. Obviously with each experiment or observation Swift asks, "But what's the use of it?" – and if there is no immediate practical one, decides it's fair game for parody.

Swift also pictures the Laputans as living in fear of astronomical catastrophes, such as the earth falling into the sun, or the sun becoming obscured by the ashes of its burning. The former may have been suggested by Newton pointing out that a comet passing close to the sun at perihelion might be slowed by the latter's atmosphere to the point where it fell (much as an earth satellite in an orbit too close to earth), while the latter may have derived from a theory current then that sunspots were clouds of thick smoke from volcanoes there.

Gulliver next visits Glubbdubdrib, the Island of Sorcerers. There he is able to do a little time-travelling, for the chief sorcery practiced is the raising of the dead, and so Gulliver is able to call up Aristotle and get back to his criticism of the gentlemen scientists, in particular Newton. The Greek philosopher predicted on this occasion that Newton's theory of attraction (gravitation) would be exploded and said "that new systems of nature were but new fashions, which would vary in every age; and even those who pretended to demonstrate them from mathematical principles would flourish but a short period of time, and be out of vogue when that was determined". Here we see clearly that Swift simply did not trust experiment or observation (or mathematics) to prove anything and believed that all scientific systems were alike moonshine until they produced benefits for humanity. Very much the same position taken by some contemporary critics, say, of space research. He simply did not see the use of pure science.

Well, then, what had Swift to offer in its place? If making systems was foolishness, what was the proper occupation for the human mind? We find the answer to that question in Gulliver's fourth voyage, to the country of the Houyhnhnms, those noble talking horses. "Their grand maxim is, to cultivate *Reason*, and to be wholly governed by it. Neither is *Reason* among them a point problematical as with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of a question; but strikes you with immediate conviction; as it must needs do when it is not mingled, obscured, or discoloured by passion and interest."

I don't suppose this sweeping, yet somehow empty-sounding and suspiciously ideal answer should much surprise us. After all, the Eighteenth Century was the Age of Reason, and it was natural that that faculty should take on the wisdom and all-knowingness of the God it effectively replaced. At any rate, Swift clung to a belief that there was nothing really puzzling or obscure about nature or the world and that all questions and answers became simple when divorced from considerations of greed and vanity.

So the Houyhnhnms had no need for books – oral tradition and an oral literature sufficed. This was fortunate because Swift realized the difficulty horses would have in manipulating tools and his science-fictional fashion had carefully thought his way through it: "The Houyhnhnms use the hollow part between the pastern and

the hoof of their fore-feet as we do our hand." So they are able to hold flint axes and hammers, milk cows, and even (this really strains our credulity) thread needles. Yet, Swift's science-fictional imagination does not get out of hand here. He does not say the Houyhnhnms manufacture needles. Instead, Gulliver loans a needle and thread to the white mare who performs the demonstration for him with the unfamiliar object.

In general, reason supported traditional and dispassionate ways of doing things. For instance, the young colts and fillies were brought up by the state because even parental fondness was a vice. (Also, they were given the same education with no sexist distinctions – surely a feminist element in Swift's outlook.) "Fondness" was Swift's word for what I would think of as three quarters of love (the lust that was a preoccupation of the Yahoos) and what seems to have been Swift's sex life parallels this: an older gentleman happy to be tireless instructor (fillies must be given the same education as colts) and counsellor to a young lady or girl, and she happy to be so taught and advised. We must imagine, I guess, the special joys and gratifications of this relationship, the little affectionate attentions and civilities they could pay each other without feeling they were becoming fond or, of course, in any conscious sense lustful. There were Stella and Vanessa and even in his last years the young ladies kept coming, including a Miss Kelly who was attending him and hung on his words as he hobbled about on his last walks until she was forced to her bed by consumption.

One striking thing about the Houyhnhnms: each horsy couple limited their offspring to two. This sounds like and was a brilliant anticipation of population control. Indeed, Gulliver says of it, "This caution is necessary to prevent the country from being overburdened with numbers." But then we learn that the servant-class Houyhnhnms were not so limited – they might have as many children as three of each sex, six in all per couple. Yes, servants were a part of the traditional world and so reason had to support class distinction. Swift arbitrarily (as far as I know) decided that bay, dapple-grey and black horses were aristocrats and masters; while white, sorrel, and iron-gray horses were servants. There simply had to be some way of telling masters and servants apart. (And presumably servants wore out sooner than masters, hence their greater license to reproduce.)

Swift really knew that pure, unsullied Reason was not enough to explain all the workings of the human mind. As he says in "A Digression Concerning Madness" in *A Tale of a Tub*, "Human understanding, seated in the brain, must be troubled and overspread by vapours, ascending from the lower faculties to water the invention and render it fruitful." This sounds like and was an anticipation of the importance of the unconscious and the irrational in the workings of mind. As he says in the same place, "Fumes issuing from a jakes will furnish as comely and useful a vapour as incense from an altar." Yet at the same time Swift could never see this influence from below – the influence on mind of the sexual, digestive and excretory functions – except as a stain or sullying of Reason, and so was all his life tormented by his insight. I am reminded here of another writer of fantasy and a sort of science fiction – and a great admirer of the Age of Reason – Howard P. Lovecraft, writing in a letter to Reinhardt Kleiner, "I have opposed eroticism for several reasons, (a) because of the acknowledged repulsiveness of direct erotic

manifestations, as felt by all races and cultures and expressed in reticence to a greater or lesser degree, etc." Poor Swift and poor Lovecraft! — the former projecting the disgusts arising from his inhibitions on the Yahoos, the latter directing them at the foreigners he felt were contaminating New England. At least the latter came to realize: "Much as a delicate mind may grow nauseated at the bestiality of mankind, that same mind cannot deny what it discovers to exist — and surely romance is no more crude than the analogous phenomenon of hunger. All, then, that we must ask, is a more refined and artistic treatment of the erotic motive."

Feb.16, 1979: The above was written somewhat experimentally in 1976 in my efforts to strike a general tone. I have lost my notes for it and beg the reader's pardon and ask for his indulgence for the absence of footnotes and references. The *Gulliver's Travels* I quoted was the Penguin edition of 1967 as reprinted in 1971. Quotes from Lovecraft letters can be elusive, as the five-volume Arkham edition omits repetitive matter in individual letters and so a writer with access to an original letter may quote material from it that cannot always be verified from the Arkham excerpts, though it can generally be paralleled from other letters.

The following essay by Brian Aldiss was delivered, in slightly different form, as a speech in Los Angeles this February. Admirers of The Malacia Tapestry *— his alternate Balkan Renaissance world, legislated to be unchanging yet poised on the brink of change; a world where men are descended from the warm-blooded dinosaurs — will be glad to learn that it was in fact the first novel of a trilogy, whose second volume* The Igara Testament *is well under way.*

The Hand in the Jar: Metaphor in Wells and Huxley

Brian W. Aldiss

Arthur Koestler sees at least part of the act of creation as "bisociation", a term he coined to mean "the perceiving of a situation or idea in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference".* Jokes are bisociative. An Army officer tries to persuade a courtesan to spend the night with him. She refuses, saying, "I've given my heart to another". The officer says, "I wasn't aiming so high". *High*

*Arthur Koestler: *The Act of Creation*, 1964.

operates on both spiritual and physical levels.

Much science fiction functions by means of bisociation. One example must stand for many – the striking first sentence of Arthur Clarke's story "The Star": "It is three thousand light years from the Vatican." Religious and the scientific frames of reference intersect. We may compare this line with the ending of another Clarke story, one of the most famous in the literature, "Nine Billion Names of God", where the same intersection is made: "Overhead without any fuss the stars were going out."

This bisociation gives us a powerful sense of doors opening on strange rooms, of perspectives sharpening, of our area of cognisance widening. Connect, only connect!

Those of us who love sf regard it as being nearer to the creative act, to the imagination which is the hearth of all thought, than ordinary literature. Perhaps this is because the concept of science fiction is itself a work of bisociation. I have never seen anything to complain of in that label "science fiction"; the bi-focal term points to the dramatic intersection of two apparently incompatible matrices. Science works from particular instances towards a synthesis of general application, whereas fiction tends to do the reverse, and crystallise particular instances from general principles the sin of a Dr Moreau, the triumph of a Dr Obispo.

We can see that originally the mere idea of men travelling through the heavens, whether by migrating geese or balloon or rocketship, was a thrilling intersection of incompatible frames of reference, for man belonged on Earth, and the Heavens belonged to God. The wonder of that intersection has now become almost completely eroded for us in the West; God is deposed every day and hardware rules in the heavens. We need to find other intersections, which are not far to seek.

Much science fiction is a celebration of the deposition of God, with a consequent coronation of Man in his place. Not, some may think, a fortunate dynastic substitution – Man shows no sign as yet of being any more reliable than God was.

H.G. Wells's science fiction and indeed his whole career is a celebration of the deposition of God. Wells is such a protean creature that this celebration takes many forms. It manifests itself as a love of order, and particularly world order, as manifest in *A Modern Utopia* (1905) – what a self-conscious title that is! – or in Wells's last work of fiction, the drafting of the United Nations declaration. We can see now that a world order is not a desirable thing. "Order" itself has become charged with more than one meaning: a system of classification or a rule of decorum – and a suggestion of organised power. Wells saw order symbolised as less dogshit on the pavements.

> It will certainly be the botanist who will notice the comparative absence of animals about us.
>
> He will put it in the form of a temperate objection to the Utopian planet.
>
> He is a professed lover of dogs and there are none. We have seen no horses and only one or two mules on the day of our arrival, and there seems not a cat in the world . . .
>
> I try to explain that a phase in the world's development is inevitable when a systematic world-wide attempt will be made to destroy for ever a great number of contagious and infectious diseases, and that this will involve, for a time at any rate, a stringent suppression of the free movement of familiar animals. Utopian houses, streets, and drains will be planned and built to make rats, mice and suchlike house parasites impossible; the race of cats and dogs – providing as it does living fastnesses to which such diseases as plague, influenza, catarrhs and the like, can retreat to sally forth again – must pass for a time out of freedom.
>
> My botanist friend fails altogether to grasp what the disappearance of disease means.
>
> (*A Modern Utopia*, Ch.7)

Wells wanted to tidy the world up for the good of its inhabitants. Braver than

most world-tidiers, he saw that this meant killing off pets and was not afraid of saying so. There are big dog pounds where Wells's Samurai rule, and we have to take it on trust that the occasion rifle shot means no more than the death of an animal.

The problems expounded in Wells's utopia are still with us, and there is still dog shit on our pavements. Equally, there are still people – some well-meaning, some decidedly not – who wish to reorganise our lives.

The subject matter of Wells's debate was taken up by writers who followed him, among them Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, both of whom admired Wells. Orwell pointed out that a world order would be neither Christian, nor democratic, nor white.

Wells saw clearly the waste of human life caused by economic conditions, the moral dogshit, if you like. But he was not as blind to the destructive force of conformity as some commentators have argued; that we can see from the remarkable chapter in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) about the Natural History of the Selenites. On the Moon, physiological pressure is exerted to equip each Selenite for its role in society. There are dwarfed Selenites for fine work, and so on. Bedford reports, "Quite recently, I came upon a number of young Selenites, confined in jars from which only the forelimbs protruded, who were being compressed to become machine-minders of a special sort . . . That wretched-looking hand sticking out of its jar seemed to appeal to lost possibilities; it haunts me still . . . "

I believe that Wells uses that hand not only as an emblem of the future, where individuals must conform to the needs of the state, but as an emblem of the mutilation of the common man of Wells's own day by the *laissez faire* state.

As I commented in *Billion Year Spree*, the end of Wells's *Island of Dr Moreau* may have directed Orwell towards *Animal Farm*. Equally, the Selenites may have moved Aldous Huxley in the direction of *Brave New World*.

The hand in the jar is a powerful example of bisociation, one that has power to live. What was shocking to its first readers about *First Men in the Moon* – the space trip, for instance – may no longer be shocking to us.

But the book still has power over us; the elixir of art has not evaporated from it, because it still contains such images as the hand in the jar. That image in particular represents two systems we like to think of as mutually exclusive. Jars are for keeping preserves or foodstuffs in; human flesh is not a foodstuff and should not be jar-shaped.

This is only one image in a crowded novel, a molecule of a greater whole; but it is consistent with the whole, echoing a similar intersection of incompatibles enshrined in the title of the work. Men and Moons don't mix – or certainly didn't in 1901 – any more than flesh and jars. Here the microcosmic idea is extended on a macrocosmic scale, and reinforced, rammed home, by the adjective, "First". You think men on moons is a paradox with respect to the old order? Wells seems to ask us. You've seen nothing; the old order is over, for these men are but the first representatives of a radically different way of life.

Early in Wells's career, he was capable of this superb binding of the imagination, of making everything whole, and of expressing meaning by metaphor, rather than by the preaching he was forced to resort to later in life, when his power to conjure

gave away to a desire to lecture. Can you express meaning by metaphor? Metaphor is ambiguous; that is its strength. It enables a writer to escape from his own time and circumstance, and transcend possibly even the meaning he wished to establish. "Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back wherein he casts Alms for oblivion"; the voice is Shakespeare's, our master of metaphor. Ulysses doesn't say to Achilles "Reputations are forgotten as time passes"; it might have made his meaning clearer, but, had such clarity been pursued throughout Shakespeare's plays, we should no longer read them.

It is not a writer's duty to make things clear, any more than it is his duty to obfuscate. Most sf writers of the Heinlein-Asimov generation have felt it important to elucidate. But when this principle is applied to sf, we run the danger of turning the universe into a diagram, and so diminishing it. That diminution may seem to make things simpler; but simplicity is not a quality that anyone yet would apply either to the universe or one's personal experience. So much remains mysterious.

Wells seems gradually to have abandoned his art in favour of trying to make things clearer. After about 1905, when he published *Kipps* and *A Modern Utopia*, the old power diminishes. Only in his autobiography, and then only in the first of the two volumes, do we feel his old power to seize the whole subject and snatch at its beating heart.

Wishing to make matters clear, Wells had to abandon metaphor. Perhaps it would be truer to say that metaphor abandoned him. Where once he had flown over whole cities, he was forced to walk along the street.

Aldous Huxley understood well the necessity for metaphor and its uses in inducing what Keostler was later to term bisociation. He says in one of his late essays, "This bringing together of disparate and apparently often irrelevant or even mutually hostile objects of knowledge or experience, and fusing them together in a single whole, is extremely important in all considerations of artists."* His approach to the future is through metaphor, perhaps the distancing metaphor of a film script in *Ape and Essence*, and it lends him divinatory powers. Isaiah Berlin said of Huxley that he possessed "that special sensibility to the contours of the future which impersonal artists sometimes possess; he stood on the edge of, and peered beyond, the present frontiers of our self-knowledge".

Every writer becomes aware that his limitations are his strength. Both Wells and Huxley had one thing in common. Both laboured under a sense which, if expressed in words, had to find expression in metaphor; it belonged to a level of their being to which scientific expression has no access.

In Wells, his sense of horror found embodiment in his first novel, *The Time Machine*. The subterranean Morlocks are perhaps what he is envisaging when he speaks in *Anticipations* of "the swarming inferiority of the Abyss". He had a fear of the dark labouring mass, the perpetual undertow of civilization, and I'm not so sure that the fear did not spur on his thoughts for a world utopia, where even the lower elements would be kept in order. Wells dreaded the anthill, that conscienceless society found in nature, which we have taken as a symbol of much that we dread in ourselves — Leviathan without a head.

*"Art", in *The Human Situation*, 1977.

Huxley's first reputation, achieved in the twenties, was as a bright young novelist, a wit who showed a fascination and disgust with human sexuality. But Huxley developed, as Wells essentially did not. Huxley's disgust came to be more a disgust with the discrepancy between spirituality and sexuality or, a later refinement, between aspiration and achievement. You recall the cruel joke at the end of *After Many a Summer*, when the price of immortality is shown to be humanity itself.

This Huxleyan obsession, if I may use that rather clinical word, mellowed to a feeling for the dichotomy between utopia and actuality. The discrepancy was embodied in a poem of Fulke Greville's, which Huxley was fond of quoting all his life*:

> Oh, wearisome condition of Humanity!
> Born under one law, to another bound:
> Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity,
> Created sick, commanded to be sound:
> What meaneth Nature by these diverse Laws?
> Passion and Reason, self division cause.

To escape this intolerable division, Huxley turned to the perennial philosophy, and then to mescalin. He wanted to see more, to see beyond our present frontiers, as Berlin puts it. His sight had always been a mystery. He was almost blind, and yet – Isherwood asked the question, among others, "How much did he actually see and how much did he *cognise*?" We should remember that the precision of Huxley's prose, perhaps more remarkable in essays than novels, was acquired by his having to read Braille – a way of appreciating the English language equivalent to swimming from Los Angeles to Hong Kong in order to get an idea of the size of the Pacific.

Plato never could visualise a state which did not rely on muscle-power. Huxley's utopias always require chemicals, either to dull or enhance the human spirit. *Brave New World* embodies the dichotomy Huxley experienced: the alternatives are a regimented and hedonistic utopia or a primitive life where art could exist, the Reason and Passion of Greville's poem.

The time came when Aldous Huxley was to dislike his remarkable novel for this very reason. Perhaps his personality was undergoing one of those mysterious changes of gear we experience now and again when he wrote a preface to an edition of *Brave New World* in 1946; he speaks then of "the most serious defect" in the story as the fact that "the Savage is offered only two alternatives, an insane life in Utopia, or the life of a primitive in an Indian village".

We will return to that remark. H.G. Wells preached against hedonism, although he was a bit of a hedonist himself. His Samurai in *A Modern Utopia* observe "an austere rule of living" – it's the first thing we hear about them. And they wear uniform, which we now find ominous, having a dislike even of armbands.

Huxley, in his final novel, *Island*, comes out in favour of hedonism. Of course it is a gentle hedonism; Huxley was a gentle person. Although we can see the similarity of Wells and Huxley as writers of utopias, they made, I believe, life-decisions which were diametrically opposed. Wells opted for Ego, Huxley for Self.

Incidentally, I believe that Iran has recently been caught in a similar dilemma of choice, the Shah representing a highly technological Ego, the Ayatollah Khomeini

representing a backward-looking religious Self. Iran's conflict mirrors a torment working elsewhere; for in our present stage of development, the extremes are as extreme as anything in *Brave New World*: tanks and missiles – or public stoning of adulterers.

Let me give you a quotation from Huxley's *Doors of Perception* 1954, in which he speaks of what sounds like a mescalin vision but is not:

> I remember what an old friend, dead these many years, told me about his mad wife. One day in the early stage of the disease, when she still had her lucid intervals, he had gone to the hospital to talk to her about their children. She had listened for a while then cut him short. How could he bear to waste his time on a couple of absent children, when all that really mattered, here and now, was the unspeakable beauty of the patterns he made, in this brown tweed jacket, every time he moved his arms?

It sounds as if the poor mad woman is in an LSD state. But it is merely selfishness, the triumph of Self.

Huxley is not the only philosopher of this century to point to the alarming discrepancy between what – to use a shorthand invented by Arnold Toynbee – we can call the Head and the Heart. Shelley spoke of it at the beginning of last century, and of the need to get these two components of the human psyche to dwell in harmony. The Self had many indulgent centuries when it appeared in the ascendant, manifesting itself as religious persecution and denial of progress. Now the Ego, represented by the powers of technology, appears in the ascendant. Neither Self nor Ego – or Conscious and Unconscious, if you prefer those terms – can flourish alone. Each needs equal expression. If we are to be whole, we must allow equal expression to each.

These terms are possibly nebulous. Yet they may correspond to actual geographical locations in our brains. It may be that the outgoing Ego resides in the neocortex, the cerebrum, and the in-dwelling Self in the cerebellum.*

Isaiah Berlin is a witness to Huxley's intense preoccupation with this question of balance in his later years. "He (Huxley) would speak – at least in public – of nothing but the need for the re-integration of what both science and life had divided too sharply: the restoration of human contact with non-human nature, the needs for antidotes to the lop-sided development of human beings."

This is a complex subject; I will not go deeper into it. I wish merely to make the point that Wells's killing off of our familiar animals, the dogs and cats which have accompanied *homo sapiens* from the beginnings of his journeyings, represents a wish to kill off the Self, in favour of a logical, rational, Ego-dominated system. Whereas the basic scheme of *Brave New World*, Huxley's contrasting of technological utopia with savage life, which he at one time tried to deny, is in fact a representation in dramatic terms, terms of metaphor, of the opposed Ego and the Self.

With this understanding, we can perceive that Huxley's last utopia, *Island*, is a brave attempt to draw up that peace treaty between the Head and the Heart for which we are seeking. Ultimately, Huxley will prove a wiser prophet than Wells.

*See for instance the interesting discussion of this possibility in Stan Gooch's *The Paranormal*, 1976.

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The Times Themselves Talk Nonsense: Language in 'Barefoot in the Head'

Colin Greenland

A recurrent image in Brian Aldiss's *Report on Probability A* (1968) is the circle of vision, taken from the telescope through which S spies on Mrs Mary from the coach-house. Inside the circle everything is focused, but outside it everything is obscured, and what it encloses is only a part, indecipherable except in terms of the whole. Through his telescope S sees the empty milk bottle on the doorstep; later he looks again and lo, the full milk bottle – but he misses entirely the milkman and the process by which the first has intelligibly become the second.

> At the same time a dead leaf whisked through the circle of vision, over the step, and was gone into the darkness that always surrounded the circle of vision.
>
> – *Report on Probability A*, Faber, 1968, pp.67-68.

This sentence is repeated in *Barefoot in the Head* (1969), where it is followed by a qualification:

> But none of the watchers any longer cared for the old movements.
>
> – *Barefoot in the Head*, Faber, 1969, p.244.

There has been much analysis of the "youth revolution" of the sixties, and more argument over it. One of the most fascinating and chilling aspects of it was the belief, everywhere expressed, that the young were breaking completely with the preceding generation, and in fact with the whole of history. For the principles on which the world was to be reconstructed (whether pragmatic, ideological, or mystical) the past could be no guide. The preachings of Timothy Leary, the music of David Bowie, the uproar of Jerry Rubin, were all addressed to a new star-blessed race, children who would be of a different order to their parents, and would break the old conventional

limits (the circle of vision) with their expanded minds. It is obvious why they welcomed psychedelic drugs into their arsenal; it is also obvious why science fiction had a new relevance for their cause, with its eschewal of past and present and its imaginative delineation of alternative futures, new worlds. They remembered Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End* and John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos*, in which the chains of DNA that bind each generation to its ancestors are broken, and the children are the aliens.

This revaluation was, however, mostly on the side of the readers, at least in England. Even the most radical and ambitious sf writers, centred around Moorcock's *New Worlds*, saw danger and delusion in the new utopianism, and their fiction of the period, while often parading the breakdown of history, is rarely sanguine about the futures then being dreamed up in the communes of Notting Hill. Throughout the later sixties, while the generation gap was actually opening, Brian Aldiss was writing his story of the dislocation, using the extremism that sf allows to lend clarity to some very muddled issues. He invites the hippies into an intoxicating future of their very own: Europe after the Acid Head War. The Arabs have bombed the industrial West with psychedelic chemicals. The War lasts only a few hours but the hallucinogenic fallout lingers to permeate food and water and turn on the entire population. There is no invasion, no further news from Kuwait; presumably the Arabs have achieved their objective in knocking out the control centre of modern civilization. The abrupt finality of the bombardment demonstrates that the principal effect of disasters, so prevalent in science fiction, is the disruption of past from present.

> Like the man said, there had been a war, a dislocation. (p.40)

"The Serpent of Kundalini", *Barefoot*'s second chapter, emphasizes the irrelevance of the past. To live in England now, Charteris must discard his previous notions of the country, romantic images "culled from dozens of Saint books" (p.40), while the English bourgeoisie must abandon the cultural conservatism by which they have excluded time, their radios perpetually tuned to Glenn Miller, the sunsets arrested in the wrought iron of their gates. "The waiting man" at his Pear Tree Palace, with his absent daughter an eternally distant erotic possibility, is neighbour to Mr Mary and his tantalising wife in their inert estate.

> "Believe me, the old world has gone, but its shell remains in place. One day soon, there will come a breath of wind, a new messiah, the shell will crumple, and the kids will run streaming, screaming, barefoot in the head, through lush new imaginary meadows. What a time to be young!" (p.46)

This promise, the gospel of pastoral optimism brought from Haight-Ashbury to London in the mid-sixties, receives a rather doubtful materialization. In 1969 the Woodstock festival declared itself a nation, with the promise, which it fulfilled, of "three days of peace and love and music". At the end of the same year the Rolling Stones played – attempted to play – at Altamont. A man with a gun was stabbed to death by a Hell's Angel, mere feet from the stage. At the third Isle of Wight festival, next year, mobs assaulted the fences and occupied a hill they called Desolation Row. So, in *Barefoot*, the crusade of barefoot kids becomes a rambling motorcade, and for their lush new meadows they have only the grey highways and grim decaying cities. Instead of their Brussels festival, premiere of the film version

of Charteris's "resurrection", there is a manic mass-hallucination, no film, while cholera-stricken fans are crushed in the crowd; instead of the new messiah, only a second-hand Saint.

But it is not only that the present is disconnected from the past, and from past projections of the future. Everything is disconnected, the present divided against itself.

> He hoped his new-found mental state would enable him to see the future with increasing clarity; but, when he made the effort, as if, it might be, his eyesight misted over at any attempt to read small print, the endeavour seemed bafflingly self-defeating: the small print of the future bled and ran . . . until, trying to grapple with the muddled images, he finally even lost the *direction* in which his mind was trying to peer (p.38)

The dislocation is absolute. History, even the history of the Acid Head War itself, can be no guide to what will happen now. Charteris lays claim to total personal freedom, beyond the faded existentialism he picked up in France.

> "The times themselves, I mean, talk nonsense — but the sort of nonsense that makes us simultaneously very sceptical about the old rules of sanity."
>
> "There were no rules for that sort of thing. There never were. You make them up as you go." (p.43)

Aldiss's task in writing *Barefoot in the Head* was an immensely complex one. He had to create Charteris, this character who makes himself up as he goes, pushing out towards an illusion of random spontaneity while maintaining a coherence of character that would stay credible to the reader. He had to evoke not only a post-catastrophic landscape, but an entire reality in ruins, deprived of definitions into subjective and objective since the psychedelic devastation of all epistemological systems. At the same time he had to reproduce the peculiar gestalt-glimpses afforded by LSD, which seem to reveal the ineffable, inexpressible arrangement of the cosmos, the infinite interlocking gears of the universe. In the midst of the craziness is an apprehension of meaning and *sense*; synchronicity obtrudes, whether beautifully or dreadfully.

So, by means of a prose that had to be orderly enough to permit pursuit of conventional conceptions of character and plot, Aldiss attempted to depict a deranged mentality — not one, but a complete continent's — that had already done away with structures of identity and sequence in favour of a vision of teeming chaos; and, in turn, the chaos had to be of an apocalyptic, revelatory kind, previewing a new order. The first chapter, "Just Passing Through", introduces us to the levels. Charteris's experience of the decaying town of Metz becomes gradually more distorted and dreamlike, shot with personal paranoias and disruptions in the perception of time; but, passing through the dislocation, Charteris reaches a new understanding and fumbles at a Taoist appreciation of cosmic unity. These revelations of his will not be altogether acceptable to us. Sometimes they entice as a fresh alternative to the bourgeois death-in-life of the waiting man; sometimes they appal and disgust as a dereliction of the essential estate of humanity. They shift, coalescing and collapsing like the perfections of a kaleidoscope, and like the language into which Aldiss translates them.

Aldiss had not read *Finnegans Wake* and did not borrow his new language directly from it, but Joyce was there, as he is at the back of all contemporary

experiments with prose; and Joyce's task was a parallel too. The suggestive confusion of dreams is fairly comparable to the experience of LSD, and Joyce, rehearsing his wake for the death of the novel, while enabling that one novel to contain and reflect more than any ever had done before, prefigured Aldiss's story of the death of social man and the promise of liberated possibilities.

Aldiss's perennial fondness for wordplay helped him construct a language which, by destroying the apparently linear flow of traditional English grammar and syntax, would release a deluge of meanings, allusions, implications, and images. The old movements of prose were too restricting, so Charteris and his disciples reach beyond, trying to embrace all the verbal possibilities they can find. Imitating them, Aldiss was able to narrate the basic story of their adventures while working into and over it evocations of the extra dimensions of their overstimulated senses, capturing both the clarity of insight and the wild colours of illusion. The crusaders want it both ways, so double meanings combine instead of cancelling; metaphors are given actuality by the insistence with which they are spelt out. Gurdjieff used the illustration of a pack of playing cards to denote the dozens of momentary "selves" which we parcel into one apparently continuous ego. Since arriving in England Charteris has had hallucinations of these old selves peeling away from him as two-dimensional cut-outs, collapsing or taking the alternative route where he had made some decision. We had been told that

> his own quicksilver life proved there were decks full of alternatives. (p.16)

Now the metaphor "decks" and the submerged metaphor in "discard" fuse with the shapes in his hallucinations.

> He knew that he was the last trump of his former formal self to ascend from the dealings at Dover by the London lane and the other caught cards of his pack truly at discard trapped in old whists and wists. (p.69)

This is clever, but not just clever. It is not an intellectual game, an allegorical conceit, but the description of Charteris's peculiar experience in its own terms — in the way that he experiences it. His hallucinations are not arbitrary vanities but bizarre dramatizations of the contents of his psyche. These fictions are facts of his life, which the author reproduces.

Aldiss blends languages in other ways, both more and less complicated. Perhaps recalling that William Burroughs devised his "fold-in" technique by ignoring the dividing lines between columns of newsprint, he gives us Jan Koninkrijk, a traffic supervisor, reading his paper.

> From Loughborough in the heart of England's stormy industrial midlands may emerge new movement for washing at least ten times brighter smiled Mr Voon and eventually embrace all of war-torn Europe says our London correspondent . . . [Charteris's] first crusade motorcade through Europe is refrigerators at Ostend at four p.m. today and leaves tomorrow for what one commentator describes as several hundred incinerators automobiles pouring down here past Aalter at full speed, I'm bound to have more than one crash to deal with; better ring area squads now. (p.131)

The news story, erratically produced by tripped-out journalists and printers; other material on the same page; Koninkrijk's reaction. The frames of reference are warped and broken and overlap.

Nowhere is this more so than in dialogue, for the characters all have multiple personalities and multiple levels of awareness to articulate. The most banal exchanges become the most complex – the classic three-way sexual argument at the beginning of "Auto-Ancestral Fracture", for example, which drowns in a welter of nautical references, or this, from a speech of Charteris's which he begins, "I'm a mongrel, aren't I?"

> "Happiness is a yesterday phase. Say, think, 'tension-release', maintain a sliding scale, and so you do away with sorrow. Get me, you just have a relief from tension, and that's all you need. Nothing so time-consuming as happiness. Nothing personal. If you have sorrow, you are forced to seek its opposite, and vice versa, so you should try to abolish both. Wake, don't live automatic, I'll get it clear. Time . . . I must speak to people, address them. You have some gift I need. Come round with me, Angelina? Take me on, share my sack." (p.101)

The new messiah is a mongrel and barks like one. Aldiss skilfully pieces the characteristic languages of lover, salesman, philosopher, ad-man, teacher and preacher into a patchwork whole. Eclectic and irreverent, like their master Gurdjieff, the hippies take what appeals to them from every zone of human activity and then wear it all together.

Language, whether considered as a single human faculty or a mass of these specialized instruments, is a civilized structure, one of the things the psychedelic bombs have laid waste. So the language of *Barefoot in the Head*, as well as bending and stretching beyond traditional limits, must also cope with its own collapse. The book must be a record of the disintegration of language in the face of the transcendental apprehensions that seize Charteris momentarily and vanish as he is rushed, by drug or by car, into another, entirely unconnected moment. The understandings that inform his teachings break and dissipate even as he receives them:

> Precognition is a function of two forces he told himself and already wished that he might record it in case the thought drifted from him on the aerosolar light. Precognition. Two forces: mind of course and also time: the barriers go down and somewhere a white-thighed woman waits for me – (p.68)

Words are obliterated by visions, experience defeats articulation. Charteris finds himself taken back to a pre-verbal world of omens, pictorial imaginations, unprocessed perceptions, music:

> Can't argue it but one day with a tuned tongue I will my light is in this darkness as his face splashes flame so the sweet animal lark of my brain will be cauterise a flamingot of golden flumiance. (p.59)

The anagrams, pictograms and crossword patterns at the end of "Drake-Man Route" turn words into things on a trivial level.

Aldiss's manuscripts show him continually replacing statement with image.* A passage from "Multi-Value Motorway", which became chapter four of *Barefoot*, originally read:

> He heard Angeline screaming to her husband to stop. She seemed not to have been affected by the PCA Bomb, the Psycho-Chemical Aerosols that had sprayed most of Europe, including Britain, in the Acid Head War. But it was difficult to tell; the effects were so intricate.

*In this respect *Barefoot* is the mirror-opposite of *Probability A*, which substitutes measurements and statistics for the images and evocations in which novelists have usually dealt.

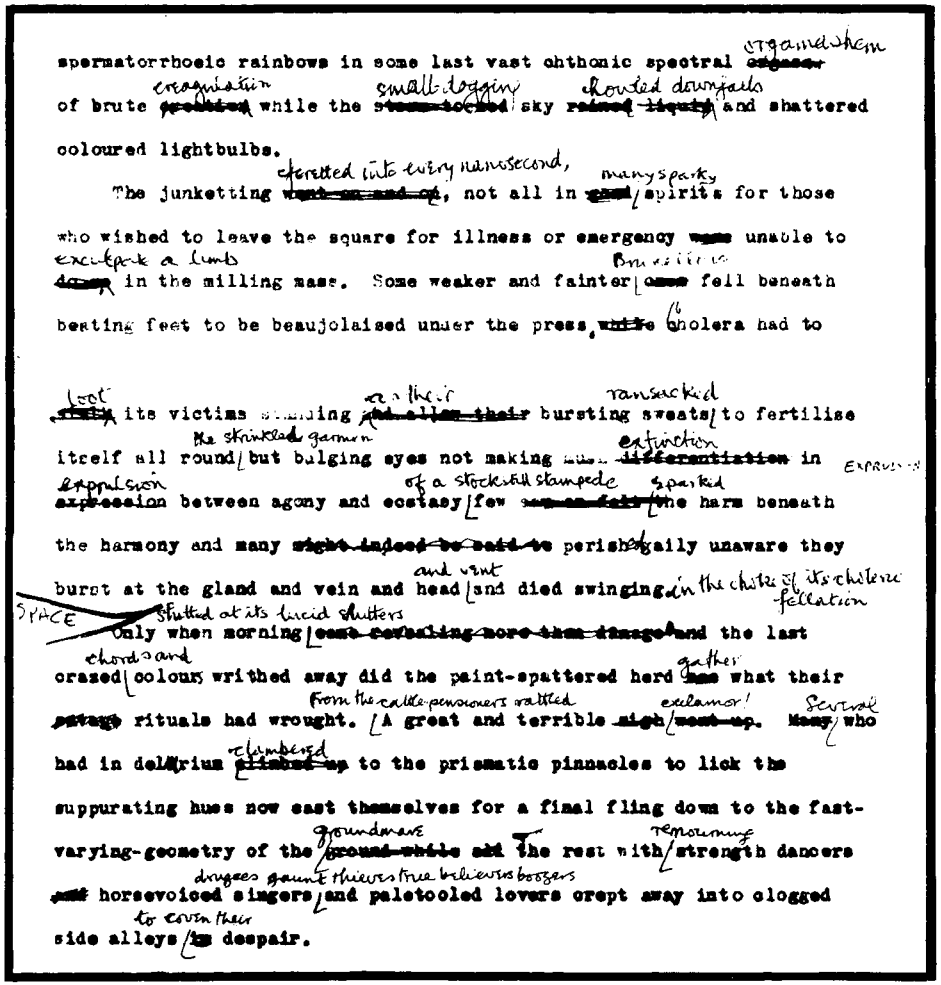
This is the revision eventually published:

> He heard Angeline screaming to her husband to stop. She seemed not to have been affected by the PCA Bombs, carrying her own neutrality through the brief nothing hours of the Acid Head War. But it was difficult to tell; bells rang even when classrooms looked empty or birds startled from cover. (p.87)

Language is the principal medium of civilized communication, the mode by which the individual attempts negotiations with other individuals and the world outside himself. But the havoc of the PCA Bombs has destroyed the conventional assumptions on which the negotiations are based.

> World and mind two or
> One? Funny how the simplest
> Question blows your mind! (p.271)

This haiku points (if such a place is conceivable) to the heart of the novel, the epicentre of the dislocation. To question the relation of subject to object, and whether they are not in fact the same thing, is to refute history and make nonsense of language. The structure of *Barefoot in the Head* is a deranged quest; Charteris and Angeline finally stumble upon their goal by chance, having spent the entire book travelling at speed in the wrong direction. The answer proves to be primitive and pastoral, consisting in an affirmation of the community of man and nature in the rooted, interwoven generations of the "multibrood", the "eternal recurrents and



eddies of beening and borning" (p.257). In this way Aldiss ventures his own repair of the dislocation, redeeming history and joining the present back onto the past, as he had previously done at the end of *Greybeard* (1964). Communication is reinstated, both verbal and non-verbal, as Angeline understands Charteris intuitively when he forgets what he meant to tell her. The times will talk sense again, for a time.

Transcript of a Working Draft of "Auto-Ancestral Fracture" marked "Early Typescript" (from the papers of Brian Aldiss loaned by the author to the Bodleian Library, Oxford)

[p.45] . . . spermatorrhoeic rainbows in some last vast chthonic spectral ~~orgasm~~ \ orgamashem / of brute ~~creation~~ \ creogulation / while the ~~storm tossed~~ \ small-dogging / sky ~~rained liquid~~ \ howled downfalls / and shattered coloured lightbulbs.

The junketting ~~went on and on~~ \ feretted into every nanosecond, / , not all in ~~good~~ \ many sparky / spirits who wished to leave the square for illness or emergency ~~were~~ unable to ~~do so~~ \ exculpate a limb / in the milling mass. Some weaker and fainter \ Bruxellois / ~~ones~~ fell beneath beating feet to be beaujolaised under the press [while c del.] . Cholera had to

[p.46] ~~stalk~~ \ loot / its victims standing \ as their / ~~and allow their~~ bursting sweats \ ransacked / to fertilise itself all round \ the strinkled garmen / but bulging eyes not making mush ~~differentiation~~ \ extinction / in ~~expression~~ \ exprulsion / between agony and ecstasy \ of a stockstill stampede / few ~~saw or felt~~ \ sparked / the harm beneath the harmony and many ~~might indeed be said to~~ perish \ ed / gaily unaware they burst at the gland and vein and head \ and vent / and died swinging \ in the choke of its choleric fellation. /

Only when morning \ slutted at its lucid shutters / ~~came revealing more than damage and~~ the last crazed \ chords and / colour\s/ writhed away did the paint-spattered herd ~~see~~ \ gather / what their ~~savage~~ rituals had wrought. \ From the cattle-pensioners rattled / A great and terrible ~~sigh~~ \exlamor!/ ~~went up. Many~~ \ Several / who had in del [i del., u subst.] rium \ clambered / ~~climbed up~~ to the prismatic pinnacles to lick the suppurating hues now cast themselves for a final fling down to the fast-varying-geometry of the \groundmare./ ~~ground while all t~~\T/he rest with \ remourning / strength dancers and horsevoiced singers \ drugees gaunt thieves true believers boozers / and paletooled lovers crept away into clogged side alleys \ to coven their / ~~in~~ despair.

A later ts, probably the final draft, differs in three places:

"feretted" (probably; 1. 5) has been read as "eferetted", which survives into print;

"few" (1. 16) is omitted, never to be replaced, which spoils the sense;

"groundmare" (probably; 1. 30) has been read as "groundwave", which also survives into print.

Faber's proof-reader removed the second "t" from "junketting" (1.5)

Notation

Interlinear alterations, added to the ts by hand, are distinguished between oblique strokes: \ /

All critical marks appear in square brackets: [ ]

del.: deleted

subst.: substituted

Other marks are Aldiss's own.

A general impression of Aldiss's method

The original draft (i.e. the ts as it must have appeared before Aldiss began his rewriting) already shows loose syntax and a tendency to meandering descriptions, including association by alliteration. Its vocabulary is thickened by the inclusion of obvious puns, etc.

e.g. "beaujolaised under the press" (1. 10)
"mush" for "much" (1. 15)
"horsevoiced" (1. 31)
"a final fling" (1. 29)

In rewriting single words are elaborated:

e.g. "creation" to "creogulation" (1. 2)
"expression" to "exprulsion" (1. 15)

Familiar words are replaced by terms from the slang of the new age:

e.g. "good spirits" by "sparky spirits" (1. 6)
"stalk" by "loot" (1. 12)

New formations are added:

e.g. "remourning" strength (1. 30)
"to coven their" despair (1. 33)

Prosaic mannerisms are condensed, rephrased, or deleted:

e.g. "went on and on" to "feretted into every nanosecond" (l. 5-6)
"might indeed be said to perish" to "perished" (l. 18)

Characteristically bizarre and fanciful expressions are extended:
e.g. "drugees gaunt thieves true believers boozers" added (l. 31-32)

It has long been the ambition of Foundation*'s editors to include an article by Philip K. Dick in these pages. The opportunity presented itself when one of the editors read the typescript of Dick's introduction to a forthcoming short story collection (*The Golden Man, *to be published by Berkley Books in 1980). With very minor alterations it seemed an ideal addition to our "Profession of Science Fiction" series, and thus it appears below, with special thanks to Philip Dick and Russell Galen (of Scott Meredith Literary Agency) for giving permission to publish the essay at very short notice. What to say about Philip Dick, author of a clutch on novels as remarkable as their titles:* The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, Ubik, The Man in the High Castle, Now Wait for Last Year, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? *and many more? His opus remains a largely neglected area of sf scholarship, though we hope partially to rectify that in our next issue with the first study of his short fiction, by Anthony Wolk of Portland State University. Meanwhile, we are pleased and proud to present the following warm, witty and wise memoir.*

The Profession of Science Fiction: XVII: The Lucky Dog Pet Store

Philip K. Dick

When I look at my stories, written over three decades, I think of the Lucky Dog Pet Store. There's a good reason for that. It has to do with an aspect of not just my life but of the lives of most freelance writers. It's called poverty.

I laugh about it now, and even feel a little nostalgia, because in many ways those were the happiest goddam days of my life, especially back in the early fifties when my writing career began. But we were poor; in fact we — my wife Kleo and I — were *poor* poor. We didn't enjoy it a bit. Poverty does not build good character. That is a myth. But it does make you into a good bookkeeper; you count accurately and you count money, little money, again and again. Before you leave the house to grocery shop you know exactly what you can spend, and you know exactly what you are

going to buy, because if you screw up you will not eat the next day and maybe not the day after that.

So anyhow there I am at the Lucky Dog Pet Store on San Pablo Avenue, in Berkeley, California in the fifties, buying a pound of ground horsemeat. The reason why I'm a freelance writer and living in poverty is (and I'm admitting this for the first time) that I am terrified of Authority Figures like bosses and cops and teachers; I want to be a freelance writer so I can be my own boss. It makes sense. I had quit my job managing a record department at a music store; all night every night I was writing short stories, both sf and mainstream . . . and selling the sf. I don t really enjoy the taste or texture of horsemeat; it's too sweet . . . but I also do enjoy not having to be behind a counter at exactly nin a.m., wearing a suit and tie and saying, "Yes ma'am, can I help you?" and so forth . . . I enjoyed being thrown out of the University of California at Berkeley because I would take ROTC – boy, an Authority Figure in a uniform is *the* Authority Figure! – and all of a sudden, as I hand over the 35¢ to the Lucky Dog Pet Store man, I find myself once more facing my personal nemesis. Out of the blue, I am once again confronted by an Authority Figure. There is no escape from your nemesis; I had forgotten that.

The man says, "You're buying this horsemeat and you are eating it yourselves."

He now stands nine feet tall and weighs three hundred pounds. He is glaring down at me. I am, in my mind, five years old again, and I have spilled glue on the floor in kindergarten.

"Yes sir," I admit. I want to tell him, Look: I stay up all night writing sf stories and I'm real poor but I know things will get better, and I have a wife I love, and a cat named Magnificat, and a little old house I'm buying at the rate of $25 a month payments which is all I can afford – but this man is interested in only one aspect of my desperate (but hopeful) life. I know what he is going to tell me. I have always known. The horsemeat they sell at the Lucky Dog Pet Store is only for animal consumption. But Kleo and I are eating it ourselves, and now we are before the judge; the Great Assize has come; I am caught in another Wrong Act.

I half expect the man to say, "You have a bad attitude."

That was my problem then and it's my problem now: I have a bad attitude. In a nutshell, I fear authority but at the same time I resent it – the authority *and* my own fear – so I rebel. And writing sf is a way to rebel. I rebelled against ROTC at U.C. Berkeley and got expelled; in fact told never to come back. I walked off my job at the record store one day and never came back. Later on I was to oppose the Vietnam War and get my files blown open and my papers gone through and stolen, as was written about in *Rolling Stone*. Everything I do is generated by my bad attitude, from riding the bus to fighting for my country. I even have a bad attitude toward publishers; I am always behind in meeting deadlines (I'm behind in this one, for instance).

Yet – sf is a rebellious art form and it needs writers and readers with bad attitudes – an attitude of, "Why?" Or, "How come?" Or, "Who says?". This gets sublimated into such themes as appear in my writing as, "Is the universe real?" Or, "Are we all really human or are some of us just reflex machines?" I have a lot of anger in me. I always have had. Last week my doctor told me that my blood pressure is elevated again and there now seems to be a cardiac complication. I got

mad. Death makes me mad. Human and animal suffering makes me mad; whenever one of my cats dies I curse God and I mean it; I feel fury at him. I'd like to get him here where I could interrogate him, tell him that I think the world is screwed up, that man didn't sin and fall but was pushed – which is bad enough – but was then sold the lie that he is basically sinful, which I know he is not.

I have known all kinds of people (I'm turning fifty in a month and I'm angry about that; I've lived a long time) and those were by and large good people. I model the characters in my novels and stories on them. Now and again one of these people dies, and that makes me mad – really mad, as mad as I can get. "You took my cat," I want to say to God, "and then you took my girlfriend. What are you doing? Listen to me; listen! It's wrong what you're doing."

Basically, I am not serene. I grew up in Berkeley and inherited from it the social consciousness which spread out over this country in the sixties and got rid of Nixon and ended the Vietnam War, plus a lot of other good things, the whole civil rights movement. Everyone in Berkeley gets mad at the drop of a hat. I used to get mad at the FBI agents who dropped by to visit with me week after week (Mr George Smith and Mr George Scruggs of the Red Squad), and I got mad at friends of mine who were members of the Communist Party; I got thrown out of the only meeting of the CP-USA I ever attended because I leaped to my feet and vigorously (i.e. angrily) argued against what they were saying.

That was in the early fifties and now here we are in the very late seventies and I am still mad. Right now I am furious because of my best friend, a girl named Doris, 24 years old. She has cancer. I am in love with someone who could die any time, and it makes fury against God and the world race through me, elevating my blood pressure and stepping up my heart beat. And so I write. I want to write about people I love, and put them into a fictional world spun out of my own mind, not the world we actually have, because the world we actually have does not meet my standards. Okay, so I should revise my standards, I'm out of step. I should yield to reality. I have never yielded to reality. That's what sf is all about. If you wish to yield to reality, go read Philip Roth; read the New York literary establishment mainstream best selling writers. But you are reading sf and I am writing it for you. I want to show you, in my writing, what I love (my friends) and what I savagely hate (what happens to them).

I have watched Doris suffer unspeakably, undergo torment in her fight against cancer to a degree that I cannot believe. One time I ran out of the apartment and up to a friend's place, literally ran. My doctor had told me that Doris wouldn't live much longer and I should say goodbye to her and tell her it was because she was dying. I tried to and couldn't and then I panicked and ran. At my friend's house we sat around and listened to weird records (I'm into weird music in general, both in classical and in rock; it's a comfort). He is a writer, too, a young sf writer named K.W. Jeter – a good one. We just sat there and then I said aloud, really just pondering aloud, "The worst part of it is I'm beginning to lose my sense of humour about cancer." Then I realized what I'd said, and he realized, and we both collapsed into laughter.

So I do get to laugh. Our situation, the human situation, is in the final analysis neither grim nor meaningful but funny. What else can you call it? The wisest people

are the clowns, like Harpo Marx, who would not speak. If I could have anything I want I would like God to listen to what Harpo was not saying, and understand why Harp would not talk. Remember, Harpo *could* talk. He just wouldn't. Maybe there was nothing to say; everything has been said. Or maybe, had he spoken, he would have pointed out something too terrible, something we should not be aware of. I don't know. Maybe you can tell me.

Writing is a lonely way of life. You shut yourself up in your study and work and work. For instance, I have had the same agent for 27 years and I've never met him because he is in New York and I'm in California. (I saw him once on TV, on the Tom Snyder Tomorrow Show, and my agent is one mean dude. He really plays hardball, which is what an agent is supposed to do.) I've met many other sf writers and become close friends with a number of them. For instance, I've known Harlan Ellison since 1954. Harlan hates my guts. When we were at the Metz Second Annual SF Festival last year, in France, see, Harlan tore into me; we were in the bar at the hotel, and all kinds of people, mostly French, were standing around. Harlan shredded me. It was fine; I loved it. It was sort of like a bad acid trip; you just have to kick back and enjoy; there is no alternative.

But I love that little bastard. He is a person who really exists. Likewise Van Vogt and Ted Sturgeon and Roger Zelazny and, most of all, Norman Spinrad and Tom Disch, my two main men in all the world. The loneliness of the writing per se is offset by the fraternity of writers. Last year a dream of mine of almost forty years was realized: I met Robert Heinlein. It was his writing, and A.E. Van Vogt's, which got me interested in sf, and I consider Heinlein my spiritual father, even though our political ideologies are totally at variance. Several years ago, when I was ill, Heinlein offered his help, anything he could do, and we had never met; he would phone me to cheer me up and see how I was doing. He wanted to buy me an electric typewriter, God bless him — one of the few true gentlemen in this world. I don't agree with any ideas he puts forth in his writing, but that is neither here nor there. One time when I owed the IRS a lot of money and couldn't raise it, Heinlein loaned the money to me. I think a great deal of him and his wife; I dedicated a book to them in appreciation. Robert Heinlein is a fine-looking man, very impressive and very military in stance; you can tell he has a military background, even to the haircut. He knows I'm a flipped-out freak and still he helped me and my wife when we were in trouble. That is the best in humanity, there; that is who and what I love.

My friend Doris who has cancer used to be Norman Spinrad's girlfriend. Norman and I have been close for years; we've done a lot of insane things together. Norman and I both get hysterical and start raving. Norman has the worst temper of any living mortal. He knows it. Beethoven was the same way. I now have no temper at all, which is probably why my blood pressure is so high; I can't get any of my anger out of my system. I don't really know — in the final analysis — who I'm mad at. I really envy Norman his ability to get it out of his system. He is an excellent writer and an excellent friend. This is what I get from being an sf writer: not fame and fortune, but good friends. That's what makes it worth it to me. Wives come and girlfriends come and go; we sf writers stay together until we literally die . . . which I may do at any time (probably to my own secret relief). Meanwhile I am writing this article, rereading stories that span a thirty year period of writing, thinking back,

remembering the Lucky Dog Pet Store, my days in Berkeley, my political involvement and how The Man got on my ass because of it . . . I still have a residual fear in me, but I do believe that the reign of police intrigue and terror is over in this country (for a time, anyhow). I now sleep okay. But there was a time when I sat up all night in fear, waiting for the knock on the door. I was finally asked to "come downtown," as they call it, and for hours the police interrogated me. I was even called in by OSI (Airforce Intelligence) and questioned by them; it had to do with terrorist activities in Marin County – not terrorist activities by the authorities this time, but by black ex-cons from San Quentin. It turned out that the house behind mine was owned by a group of them. The police thought we were in league; they kept showing me photos of black guys and asking did I know them? At that point I wouldn't have been able to answer. That was a really scary day for little Phil.

So if you thought writers live a bookish, cloistered life you are wrong, at least in my case. I was even in the street for a couple of years: the dope scene. Parts of that scene were funny and wonderful and other parts were hideous. I wrote about it in *A Scanner Darkly*, so I won't write about it here. The one good thing about my being in the street was that the people didn't know I was a well-known sf writer, or if they did they didn't care. They just wanted to know what I had that they could rip off and sell. At the end of the two years everything I owned was gone – literally, including my house. I flew to Canada as Guest of Honour at the Vancouver SF Convention, lectured at the University of B.C., and decided to stay there. The hell with the dope scene. I had temporarily stopped writing; it was a bad time for me. I had fallen in love with several unscrupulous street girls . . . I drove an old Pontiac convertible modified with a four-barrel carb and wide tyres, and no brakes, and we were always in trouble, always facing problems we couldn't handle. It wasn't until I left Canada and flew down here to Orange County that I got my head together and back to writing. I met a very straight girl and married her, and we had a little baby we called Christopher. He is now five. They left me a couple of years ago. Well, as Vonnegut says, so it goes. What else can you say? It's like the whole of reality: you either laugh or – I guess fold and die.

One thing I've found that I can do that I really enjoy is rereading my own writing, earlier stories and novels especially. It induces mental time travel, the same way certain songs you hear on the radio do (for instance, when I hear Don McLean sing *Vincent* I at once see a girl named Linda wearing a mini skirt and driving her yellow Camaro; we're on our way to an expensive restaurant and I am worrying if I'll be able to pay the bill and Linda is talking about how she is in love with an older sf writer and I imagine – oh vain folly! – that she means me, but it turns out she means Norman Spinrad who I introduced her to); the whole thing returns, an eerie feeling which I'm sure you've experienced. People have told me that everything about me, every facet of my life, psyche, experiences, dreams and fears, are laid out explicitly in my writing, that from the corpus of my work I can be absolutely and precisely inferred. This is true. So when I read my writing I take a trip through my own head and life, only it is my earlier head and my earlier life. I abreact, as the psychiatrists say. There's the dope theme. There's the philosophical theme, especially the vast epistemological doubts that began when I was briefly attending U.C. Berkeley. Friends who are dead are in my stories and novels. Names of streets!

I even put my agent's address in one, as a character's address (Harlan once put his own phone number in a story, which he was to regret later). And of course, in my writing, there is the constant theme of music, love of, preoccupation with, music. Music is the single thread making my life into a coherency.

You see, had I not become a writer I'd be somewhere in the music industry now, almost certainly the record industry. I remember back in the mid sixties when I first heard Linda Ronstadt; she was a guest on Glen Campbell's TV show, and no one had ever heard of her. I went nuts listening to her and looking at her. I had been a buyer in retail records and it had been my job to spot new talent that was hot property, and, seeing and hearing Ronstadt, I knew I was hearing one of the great people in the business; I could see down the pipe of time into the future. Later, when she'd recorded a few records, none of them hits, all of which I faithfully bought, I calculated to the exact *month* when she'd make it big. I even wrote Capitol Records and told them; I said, the next record Ronstadt cuts will be the beginning of a career unparalleled in the record industry. Her next record was "Heart Like a Wheel". Capitol didn t answer my letter, but what the hell; I was right, and happy to be right. But, see, that's what I'd be into now, had I not gone into writing sf. My fantasy number which I run in my head is, I discover Linda Ronstadt, and am remembered as the scout for Capitol who signed her. I would have wanted that on my gravestone:

HE DISCOVERED LINDA RONSTADT
AND SIGNED HER UP!

My friends are caustically and disdainfully amused by my fantasy life about discovering Ronstadt and Grace Slick and Streisand and so forth. I have a good stereo system (at least my cartridge and speakers are good) and I own a huge record collection, and every night from eleven p.m. to five a.m. I write while wearing my Stax electrostatic top-of-the-line headphones. It's my job and my vice mixed together. You can't hope for better than that: having your job and your sin comingled. There I am, writing away, and into my ears is pouring Bonnie Koloc and no one can hear it but me. The joker is, though, that there's no one but me here anyhow, all the wives and girlfriends having long since left. That's another of the ills of writing; because it is such a solitary occupation, and requires such long-term concentrated attention, it tends to drive your wife or girlfriend away, anyhow whoever you're living with. It's probably the most painful price the writer pays. All I have to keep my company are two cats. Like my doper friends (ex doper friends, since most of them are dead now) my cats don't know I'm a well-known writer, and, as with my doper friends, I prefer it that way.

When I was in France I had the interesting experience of being famous. I am the best-liked sf writer there, best of all in the entire whole complete world (I tell you that for what it's worth). I was Guest of Honour, at the Metz Festival which I mentioned, and I delivered a speech which, typically, made no sense whatever. Even the French couldn't understand it, despite a translation. Something goes haywire in my brain when I write speeches; I think I imagine I'm a reincarnation of Zoroaster bringing news of God. So I try to make as few speeches as possible. Call me up, offer

me a lot of money to deliver a speech, and I'll give a tacky pretext to get out of doing it; I'll say anything palpably a lie. But it was fantastic (in the sense of not real) to be in France and see all my books in expensive beautiful editions instead of little paperbacks with what Spinrad calls "peeled eyeball" covers. Owners of bookstores came to shake my hand. The Metz City Council had a dinner and a reception for us writers. Harlan was there, as I mentioned; so was Roger Zelazny and John Brunner and Harry Harrison and Robert Sheckley. I had never met Sheckley before; he is a gentle man. Brunner, like me, has gotten stout. We all had endless meals together; Brunner made sure everyone knew he spoke French. Harry Harrison sang the Fascist national anthem in Italian in a loud voice, which showed what he thought of prestige (Harry is the iconoclast of the known universe). Editors and publishers skulked everywhere, as well as the media. I got interviewed from eight in the morning until three-thirty the next morning, and, as always, I said things which will come back to haunt me. It was the best week of my life. I think that there at Metz I was really happy for the first time — not because I was famous but because there was so much excitement in those people. The French get wildly excited about ordering from a menu; it's like the old political discussions we used to have back in Berkeley, only it's simply food involved. Which street to walk up involves ten French people gesticulating and yelling, and then running off in different directions. The French, like me and Spinrad, see the most improbable possibility in every situation, which is certainly why I am popular there. Take a number of possibilities, and the French and I will select the wildest. So I had come home at last. I could get hysterical among people acculturated to hysteria, people never able to make decisions or execute actions because of the drama in the very process of choosing. That's me: paralyzed by imagination. For me a flat tyre on my car is (a) The End of the World; and (b) An Indication of Monsters (although I forget why).

This is why I love sf. I love to read it; I love to write it. The sf writer sees not just possibilities but *wild* possibilities. It's not just "What if —". It's "My God; what if —". In frenzy and hysteria. The Martians are always coming. Mr Spock is the only one calm. This is why Spock has become a cult god to us; he calms our normal hysteria. He balances the proclivity of sf people to imagine the impossible.

KIRK (frantically): Spock, the *Enterprise* is about to blow up!
SPOCK (calmly): Negative, Captain; it's merely a faulty fuse.

Spock is always right, even when he's wrong. It's the tone of voice, the supernatural reasonability; this is not a man like us; this is a god. God talks this way; everyone of us senses it instinctively. That's why they have Leonard Nimoy narrating pseudo-science TV programmes. Nimoy can make anything sound plausible. They can be in search of a lost button or the elephants' graveyard, and Nimoy will calm our doubts and fears. I would like him as a psychotherapist; I would rush in frantically, filled with my usual hysterical fears, and he would banish them.

PHIL (hysterically): Leonard, the sky is falling!
NIMOY (calmly): Negative, Phil; it's merely a faulty fuse.

And I'd feel okay and my blood pressure would drop and I could resume work on the novel I'm three years behind on vis-à-vis my deadline.

In reading my stories, you should bear in mind that most were written when sf was so looked down upon that it virtually was not there, in the eyes of all America. This was not funny, the derision felt towards sf writers. It made our lives wretched. Even in Berkeley – or especially in Berkeley – people would say, "But are you writing anything serious?" We made no money; few publishers published sf (Ace Books was the only regular book publisher of sf); and really cruel abuse was inflicted on us. To select sf writing as a career was an act of self-destruction; in fact, most *writers*, let alone other people, could not even conceive of someone considering it. The only non-sf writer who ever treated me with courtesy was Herbert Gold, who I met at a literary party in San Francisco. He autographed a file card to me this way: "To a colleague, Philip K. Dick." I kept the card until the ink faded and was gone, and I still feel grateful to him for his charity. (Yes, that was what it was, then, to treat an sf writer with courtesy.) To get hold of a copy of my first published novel, *Solar Lottery*, I had to special order it from the City Lights Bookshop in San Francisco which specialized in the outré. So in my head I have to collate the experience in 1977 of the mayor of Metz shaking hands with me at an official city function, and the ordeal of the fifties when Kleo and I lived on ninety dollars a month, when we could not even pay the fine on an overdue library book and when I wanted to read a magazine I had to go to the library because I could not afford to buy it, when we were literally living on dog food. But I think you should know this – specifically, in case you are, say, in your twenties and rather poor and perhaps becoming filled with despair, whether you are a sf writer or not, whatever you want to make of your life. There can be a lot of fear, and often it is a justified fear. People do starve in America. My financial ordeal did not end in the fifties; as late as the mid seventies I still could not pay my rent, nor afford to take Christopher to the doctor, nor own a car, nor have a phone. In the month that Christopher and his mother left me I earned nine dollars, and that was just three years ago. Only the kindness of my agent, Scott Meredith, in loaning me money when I was broke got me through. In 1971 I actually had to beg friends for food. Now look; I don't want sympathy; what I am trying to do is tell you that your crisis, your ordeal, assuming you have one, is not something that is going to be endless, and I want you to know that you will probably survive it through your courage and wits and sheer drive to live. I have seen uneducated street girls survive horrors that beggar description. I have seen the faces of men whose brains had been burned out by drugs, men who still could think enough to be able to realize what had happened to them; I watched their clumsy attempts to weather that which cannot be weathered. As in Heine's poem "Atlas", this line: "I carry that which can't be carried." And the next line is, "And in my body my heart would like to break!" But this is not the sole constituent of life, and it is not the sole theme in fiction, mine or anyone else's, except perhaps for the nihilist French existentialists. Kabir, the sixteenth century Sufi poet, wrote, "If you have not lived through something, it is not true." So live through it; I mean, go all the way to the end. Only then can it be understood, not along the way.

If I had to come forth with an analysis of the anger that lies inside me, which expresses itself in so many sublimations, I would guess that probably what arouses my indignation is seeing the meaningless. That which is disorder, the force of

entropy – there is no redemptive value of something that can't be understood, as far as I am concerned. My writing, in toto, is an attempt on my part to take my life and everything I've seen and done, and fashion it into a work which makes sense. I'm not sure I've been successful. First, I cannot falsify what I have seen. I see disorder and sorrow, and so I have to write about it; but I've seen bravery and humour, and so I put that in, too. But what does it all add up to? What is the vast overview which is going to impart sense into the entirety?

What helps for me – if help comes at all – is to find the mustard seed of the funny at the core of the horrible and futile. I've been researching ponderous and solemn theological matters for five years now, for my novel-in-progress, and much of the Wisdom of the World has passed from the printed page and into my brain, there to be processed and secreted in the form of more words: words in, words out, and a brain in the middle wearily trying to determine the meaning of it all. Anyhow, the other night I started on the article on Indian Philosophy in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, an eight-volume learned reference set which I esteem. The time was four a.m.; I was exhausted – I have been working endlessly like this on this novel, doing this kind of research. And there, at the heart of this solemn article, was this:

> "The Buddhist idealists used various arguments to show that perception does not yield knowledge of external objects distinct from the percipient . . . The external world supposedly consists of a number of different objects, but they can be known as different only because there are different sorts of experiences 'of' them. Yet if the experiences are thus distinguishable, there is no need to hold the superfluous hypothesis of external objects . . . "

In other words, by applying Ockham's razor to the basic epistemological question of, "What is reality?" the Buddhist idealists reach the conclusion that belief in an external world is a "superfluous hypothesis"; i.e. it violates the Principle of Parsimony – which is the principle underlying all Western science. Thus the external world is abolished, and we can go about more important business – whatever that might be.

That night I went to bed laughing. I laughed for an hour. I am still laughing. Push philosophy and theology to their ultimate (and Buddhist idealism probably is the ultimate of both) and what do you wind up with? Nothing. Nothing exists (they also proved that the self doesn't exist, either). As I said earlier, there is only one way out: seeing it all as ultimately funny. Kabir, who I quoted, saw dancing and joy and love as ways out, too; and he wrote about the sound of "the anklets on the feet of an insect as it walks". I would like to hear that sound; perhaps if I could my anger and fear, and my high blood pressure, would go away.

Philip K. Dick, Santa Ann, California.
November 1978

Barrington J. ("Barry") Bayley is a Borges of sf, unravelling whole alternative ontologies in the compass of short stories or longer metaphysical space operas – the most recent of which is Star Winds *from DAW, which merely assumes that alchemy is valid after all and that actual sailing ships can ply the etheric winds between the planets and the stars. Bayley writes a witty, technicolour eccentric experimental philosophy in each new tale – endorsing beautifully the original location of the Science Fiction Foundation within the Department of Applied Philosophy here at North East London Polytechnic. A thoroughly Bayleyesque concept is the following, that our "real" lives only last quite a short time – say ten or fifteen minutes . . .*

Science, Religion and the Science Fiction Idea, Or, Where Would We Be Without Hitler?

Barrington J. Bayley

Long ago, when engaged upon the compulsive activity of the child science fiction addict of those times, namely scouring newsagents, libraries and secondhand bookstalls for anything remotely resembling science fiction, I once came across a number of bulky volumes by the Victorian authoress Marie Corelli. I bought a few of these on the strength of their titles, which resounded excitingly with such phrases as *A Romance of Two Worlds* and *The Sorrows of Satan.*

As far as I can recall I succeeded in reading only one of them, and this was a comparatively short novel called *The Mighty Atom.* How Marie Corelli is regarded today I have no idea. I doubt that many sf readers have read *The Mighty Atom.* But if, at some date when the phenomenon of science fiction is over, its definitive history is written, this book should find a place in it.

Its theme is the clash between science and religion, a live issue when it was written though not, perhaps, today. What makes it memorable is the way the clash is resolved. The story describes the life of a young boy, ten to twelve years old, I should think, who is the son of one of those formidable 19th century atheists. The boy's education is strictly supervised and the scientific outlook of the time is instilled in him by carefully selected tutors. Religion is ignorance and superstition, the province of the peasants and villagers whose instinctive lives the boy sometimes compares enviously with his own. In the sphere of cosmology a version of the big

bang theory is explained to him: the universe and its works resulted from the explosion of a single stupendous primordial atom, the Mighty Atom of the title.

Contrast was a favourite device of Victorian writers. The other side of the dichotomy is represented by the boy's mother, and it is perhaps to Marie Corelli's credit that I was able to side with reason, not feeling. Emotional, full of religion, a weak and helpless woman, she is desperately miserable in her marriage to a man who derides everything she feels, and is forbidden to exert any influence on her son, who she scarcely even sees. But a boy loves his mother, and therein lie the sinews of conflict in the novel.

Of the incidents that fill out the story I can remember almost nothing, only that the boy falls in love with the local gravedigger's daughter, a girl even younger than himself, and this provides a climactic event in that he comes upon this simple but honest rustic digging his own daughter's grave (the choice of gravedigger being an all too glaring case of calculation on Corelli's part). But at any rate he grows increasingly unhappy, unable to deny the reality of his feelings (which we are tacitly invited to suppose descend from his mother) or to know how to reconcile them with the obstinately mechanistic universe which is the only one he has been allowed to admit is real. The sense of his increasing mental isolation is really quite appalling. His mother either dies or is sent away, and in the end he hangs himself, using the silk cord of a dressing gown she once gave him.

Before putting the noose around his neck he decides upon an act which might be seen as the defeat of his father's influence, but which really is a means of giving expression to his thoughts and feelings. He decides to pray. The trouble is, he has never been taught to pray, and he has been told nothing of a supreme being to whom one would pray. The greatest thing he has ever been told about is the Mighty Atom. And so, as best he can, he explains himself to the Mighty Atom.

Possibly this story drips with sentimentality which has dripped out of my memory in the interval, but the mood it evokes in my memory is powerful and moving – a mood which has been more recently evoked, in fact, by the finale of Ullmann's extraordinary opera *The Emperor of Atlantis*, written in a concentration camp.

Mood apart, what, one might ask, has this plaintive ending to do with science fiction? First of all, it destroys in one blow the suppositions of both religion and science, using those words in their narrow, popular Western sense. It destroys religion's claim to supernatural knowledge, and it also destroys the idea that science is somehow everything that religion is not.

Most of all, it takes both science and religion straight back to their common, ancient source, and that source is, of course, our good old friend the "sense of wonder". This word "wonder" has a double meaning in our language. On the intellectual level it is the beginning of all enquiry. On the emotional level it denotes the sense of awe that the presence of the natural universe, an entity vaster and more powerful than the beholder, might evoke.

Early civilisations were not as differentiated as ours is. The scientist and the priest were the same person; we would not recognise him in either capacity. That the two are now separate and antagonistic (to the extent that, after joining battle for some time, they have drawn demarcation lines and agreed to leave one another alone) is a modern development, which historians of the far future may well view

as the rivalry between one religion and another. There seems to me little mystery about the content of most religious doctrines; they read at first sight like improvised responses to the questions I will quote from the mouth of an intelligent four year-old: "How far does the sky (i.e. space) go? Where did human beings come from, when the world was different from what it is now and there were no other human beings to 'born' them? What was it like before there was any world, even any sky?" And, again and again, "How was the world made?"

When one goes more deeply into religious doctrine it does become somewhat more impressive, and shows traces (in the West, at any rate) of a system of natural philosophy that seems to have been worked out in the Middle Eastern civilisations of three or four thousand years ago. The transition from natural philosophy to worshipping religion is not recorded in the case of Western culture, but one more recent example elsewhere is: the Taoist philosophy of China also turned, in time, into a full-blown church, with gods, temples, shrines, priests, ceremonies and all the rest of the junk that apparently is indispensable to some aspect of the human psyche.

But that is a digression; I am not trying to show that religions are examples of degenerated science. Neither are they some kind of mental aberration that the world is one day going to dispense with. On the contrary, religions pass all the tests of survivability – they proliferate, reproduce and evolve. They have an existence in their own right, and they are very successful in what they set out to do. This, I probably do not need to add, is not concerned with affairs in heaven; if there is a supreme god, I doubt that he has ever heard of the Pope. The actual role of religions is a practical, down to earth one in historical terms, and the ones that actually call themselves religions – the organised, formal religions or churches – are only some of the religions that exist.

Anyone who has personal contact with the younger, more vital sects (I have talked at length with Mormon missionaries, for instance) might be impressed by their decided and often very effective attitude to life and the manner in which it should be lived. The "cosmic background" appears to serve as the numinous power source for a set of roles, attitudes and procedures, a formation of forces that can achieve practical results. New nations are raised out of the wilderness, great works are performed, a people wrests back, by sheer determination and ruthlessness, a homeland it occupied two thousand years ago.

In short, the human mind is not neutral. It is like a compass needle that has to align itself in some fashion with the world around it, and this alignment, the setting of a course, is the function performed by religions. This explains why religion is found in all cultures, and why its outward expression is so remarkably uniform.

The older religions coast along by sheer inertia and social conditioning. What one might call the "living religions" have another component to them, however, and this is conversion by personal experience. This is regarded as indispensable if the sect is to maintain its numinous quality. My Mormon friends, for instance, offered me a procedure which they said was sure to bring it about (I didn't follow it, and they don't visit me any more). Once again we are back to our sense of wonder, a personal experience that impinges directly on the consciousness. The momentariness of this experience provides another clue as to why religions are so powerful, so

surprisingly "cosmic" in their content, and why they so easily ossify.

One of my pet ideas is that life is very short, much shorter than is measured on the calendar. My own life, I estimate, will have turned out to be five to ten minutes long, maybe as much as twenty if I'm fortunate.

It's not easy to say exactly what this time consists of, except that it's made up of those occasions when we are "serious with ourselves". In such moments reality takes on an earnestness that is remembered, but not experienced, at other times. These are the formative moments of our lives. Influences are implanted, directions are set, and a feeling of certainty attained. The regular run of our lives, on the other hand, is rather like the centuries-long coasting of the major religions. We apply ourselves to this or that endeavour, follow our tendencies, but on the whole there is an habitual, ritualised character to it all.

So pay close attention, because, at great cost to my privacy, I'm going to tell you what I've never told anyone before: an early minute out of my five-minute life.

In fact it's one of the commonest of stories in the science fiction cult, for judging by various autobiographical notes the majority of people reading this will have experienced something like it. It occurred round about the age of six, but was preceded by my being carried home one starry night on my father's shoulders. I looked up at the sky, and asked my parents what the moon and stars were. Such are the stolid qualities of the English working class that they were unable to tell me, and showed no sign of having entertained the question themselves. My mother, with an eye to advantage noted in mothers, suggested that I should hurry up and learn to read properly, and then I could find out for myself.

After that, to my possibly faulty recollection, I learned very quickly to read well. At any rate my mother proved to be a help, for she found in *Picture Post*, a popular illustrated magazine of the time, an article on the moon. One evening I was left alone in a neighbour's house, while they both went to the pictures, with the article to keep me happy.

I can still remember the scene: the tiny living room, where I had never been before, of a wartime emergency house. And me, kneeling on the floor, the magazine spread out before me on the settee. The article explained that the moon was another world, like the Earth only somewhat smaller, but a dead world on which there was no life, no movement, no water, and no air. The article was accompanied by artist's impressions of the moon as it was envisaged in those years, with rearing craggy cliffs, a sense of motionless desolation, and so on.

I was absolutely stunned. What struck me with particular force, I remember, was to contemplate a world, not just with no water, *but with no air*. I could imagine the endless landscapes of this world, the cliffs, craters, gullies and plains, all existing in the same silent airlessness, a world with its own nature separate and different from Earth's nature. *A world other than our world.*

Shortly afterwards I began to see Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers serials at the Saturday cinema. Those rocket-ships were indescribably thrilling, especially the way they used to circle round, spitting sparks and emitting buzz-saw noises, before setting down an alien terrain. I immediately questioned my father on the subject of rocket-driven spaceships for travelling to the other worlds that by now I knew exis-

ted far off in space. There were no such things, he told me. They were only a fiction; none had been built.

My plaintive cries of "But why not?" eventually annoyed him. I just couldn't understand it. I knew that the prime instrument of space travel – the rocket engine – was already established. The war had just ended, and during it the enemy had directed thousands of V-2s against us. My father himself had told me that these vehicles climbed above the greater part of the atmosphere and impacted with a speed of three thousand miles per hour. (Indeed I knew that a great deal had come out of the war, such as three types of city-destroying super-bomb: the atom bomb, the atom*ic* bomb, and the automatic bomb, their potencies increasing, I presumed, with the length of the name. This sort of ultralogical thinking still plagues me.) Obviously a bit more work on the basic machinery was all that was needed. It was beyond my belief that with the goal of interplanetary travel in sight, everything had not been done to achieve it. I did not know, then, that religious ideas often have to work in an indirect fashion.

During his *kampfjähre* Adolf Hitler was heard to say that when he came to power he would encourage the development of space flight. It was one of those promises of his that he kept without really meaning to. (But to grasp the idea of space travel at all marks out Hitler as unusually imaginative among political leaders.) What on Earth can have persuaded the Nazis to devote immense resources to the development and mass production of a space vehicle with no defensive role and minimal effectiveness, when a modest outlay on guided ground-to-air and airborne missiles (which only the Germans had done any work on) could have regained them air supremacy, at the same time as releasing to the Eastern front all the personnel and artillery that went into a gigantic anti-aircraft effort. One stands bemused at such a crass error of judgment (though the ensuing prolongation of the war would presumably have saved German cities for the atom bomb).

A madman in authority; murderous tyrants paranoically suspicious of their neighbours; a lecherous president seeking national prestige by upstaging aforementioned murderous tyrants – such men as these issued the orders to build space vehicles, and most of them, until informed by "advisers", probably had no more comprehension of the moon and planets than did my dear old Mum and Dad.

These men were not, of course, the motive force behind the projects; they, like the political events of which they were a part, were merely enabling incidents. The development of space travel is a prime example of how an idea can grow and take advantage of circumstances. To the members of the German Rocket Society, who had been plugging dutifully away at their little projectiles for years in pursuit of their vision, the vainglorious Nazi armageddon must have seemed like a miraculous stroke of luck, so much so that in the closing months of the war Wernher von Braun was summoned to Gestapo headquarters in Berlin and accused of working for spaceflight rather than for German victory. It was an accusation that was well-founded. The goal of space exploration was what had brought Peenemunde into existence, and the engineers there had already drawn up plans for a larger step-rocket, designated A-10, to try to make it into space proper. (The excuse for working on this scheme was that it could be used to bombard New York.)

To come to the point I have been perambulating around in the preceding pages, it will not come as a surprise to hear me say that science fiction is a religion. "Religion" is a rather poor word because of its connotations, but pending a better, perhaps more sociological one, it will have to do. To make the point stick, I will order one or two observations.

a. Sf writers and avid fans often speak of a "revelatory experience" following which they became hopelessly addicted to science fiction literature (see Brian Stableford's *Notes Towards a Sociology of Science Fiction* in *Foundation* 15. Stableford speaks of a "perspective shift" which describes one aspect of this experience fairly well). Conversion through a revelatory experience is what distinguishes "living religion" from religion that merely persists through social continuity.

b. Have you noticed that the world is divided into people who "understand" what science fiction is and those who don't? One can usually tell the difference within a few minutes, and to those who don't it's quite futile to say anything. Someone may even tell you eagerly that he reads science fiction, muttering something about Arthur Clarke and Isaac Asimov, but you'll see clearly that he doesn't know what he's talking about, that he's blind to the light, and that most of the time he reads Zane Grey or something similar. He might even use the horrendous term "sci-fi" and so identify himself as an arrant heathen! With those who are "in the fold", however, there is an instant understanding that is independent of personal type.

c. The science fiction addict feels an inner certainty that the set of concepts through which he perceives the world, and which he enjoys through the science fiction medium, is basically how the world really *is*. This certainty amounts to religious conviction, so incomprehensible to those who don't share it.

The division at (b) appears to have little to do with intelligence, perceptiveness or imaginative capacity. The majority of mankind, and therefore the majority of intelligent, perceptive and imaginative people, are science fiction blind in the sense I am describing, while some of the most gawky and dimwitted have "seen the light".

To refer to science fiction as a religion might be thought by some to disparage it, but it is not my intention to do so because I am using the term in a broad sense, and I see religions as instruments of historical evolution. Any ideology or world view to which numbers of people subscribe is a religion on this understanding. The notion that religion somehow emanates from or deals with God is a peculiarly Western misconception; in the East it is recognised as dealing with man, and one major religion, that of the Jains (which started out at the same time as Buddhism) is officialy atheist.

I have seen in the pages of *Foundation* some argument as to whether science fiction is a literature of ideas or not. It is not. It is the literature of An Idea, a big idea from which any others proceed. This idea is the Master Idea of our age. It is scarcely possible to state it exactly, but those reading this are able to cognise it and appreciate it: a revelatory idea, the idea of the cosmos as revealed by science. Above all, it entails an expansion of awareness, into the depths of celestial space, and into

future time in which technology fulfils itself. How many science fiction stories *don't* take place in the future?

For all of this century the Idea has been gaining strength. Its images have been promulgated and become ever more ubiquitous. The science fiction genre has probably played more part than anything else in this process. And steadily the images have been turning into reality (the Russkies, poor buggers, cut off from the pulp magazines all these years, have to make their spaceships look like something out of Jules Verne). Those who are seized by the Idea or some part of it, such as those who laboured first at Peenemunde and then at Cape Canaveral, under the patronage of Hitler and Kennedy, are adherents of the religion of the age. The rest, as I said above, don't quite understand what's going on. They belong to past ages, past religions.

And so there we have it: we are the elect, the chosen. We have raised our eyes to the heavens and beheld wonders. With the eye of our mental vision we have espied worlds without end in the infinite void. We have the gift of prophecy: we apprehend future time beyond our span. Just the same, we in the science fiction field are members of the congregation, not priests. Few of us know very much about science or engineering; but we love it, we worship it. And apart from the inspiring content we (still) occasionally find in the literature, it definitely has a therapeutic effect. It would have been a different story with Marie Corelli's poor young boy, if he had found a few copies of *Astounding Stories* lying around, wouldn't it?

Yet lately something disconcerting is happening. The images and thoughts we have for so long prized have become common property. The world we live in is already a science fiction world in comparison with society as it was when the genre began early in the century. There's nobody now who doesn't know what the moon is. Catholic friends no longer sententiously tell us that being interested in space travel is a sin and the Pope has forbidden it.

A film was released recently in which the first manned Mars expedition goes wrong and can't take off, so for political reasons the whole think is faked for the benefit of the world television audience, and the pictures of astronauts purportedly on Mars are really being enacted in an American desert. The film is quite a good symbol of what happens when a living cult, bound by a common secret, turns into an established social religion: the Great Science Cosmos vulgarised. Every genuine religious idea is a product of the creative mind, and has an inspirational quality while it remains secret. When it is thrown open, when it is spoken on every tongue, a reverse alchemy takes place and pure gold turns to common brass. The gates have fallen, the holy of holies has been violated, and the rude barbarian, sword in hand, stares gape-mouthed at what he cannot understand.

Because social discourse is catching up with our genre, the genre itself is leaking at the edges. There are those who are heretics and defilers, who vulgarise and trivialise our holy scripture by mixing it with other kinds of literature, dealing perhaps with "real believable human beings" (the sort I try to avoid in real life and who are ten times more boring when found in print), and then there are the real traitors, the Judases who cash in on popular fashions with some mawkish ecological anti-technological back-to-nature garbage (to hell with all this grass and trees; get some engineering in here, I say). But this religion also has its fundamentalists,

who will not or cannot compromise, and for whom the vision stays pure and bright. And of which, of course, I am one.

Long associated with New Worlds *as both contributor and editor, Charles Platt remains closely involved with its new, somewhat anarchic incarnation. Platt now divids his time between London and New York, writing novels and profiles of sf writers (the latter to be published in book form by Berkley/Putnam). His most recent sf novel is* Twilight of the City, *reviewed elsewhere in this issue.*

C. M. Kornbluth: A Study Of His Work and Interview With His Widow

Charles Platt

C.M. Kornbluth was born in 1923, became a full-time freelance author in 1951, and died of a heart attack in 1958. Within his short life he became, I think, one of the very finest of all science fiction writers. It is sad that so little attention is paid today to the formidable strength of his work, which seems never to have received proper critical examination.

The Best of C.M. Kornbluth (Ballantine, 1976, edited by Frederik Pohl) summarizes the bare details of the man's life and includes his most important stories. Pohl has been instrumental in keeping Kornbluth in print; at the same time, he has overshadowed him. Most people now think of Kornbluth as Pohl's collaborator, or even his assistant, rather than as an author in his own right. Kingsley Amis is largely to blame, carelessly and foolishly asserting, without any real evidence, that Kornbluth's "part in *The Space Merchants* was roughly to provide the more violent action while Pohl filled in the social background and the satire". (*New Maps of Hell*, 1960) You only have to read Kornbluth's own short stories (which Amis evidently didn't — he doesn't refer to them and probably couldn't obtain them in England at that time) to appreciate the man's individual presence and power. My own opinion is that Kornbluth's best short fiction has endured more successfully than the best of Pohl's from the same period.

One of Kornbluth's early stories (first published in 1941) was "The Rocket of 1955". Only 500 words long, it embodies most of the themes and attitudes that were to recur later. The story is notable for its wit, its irony, its cynical sophistication . . . and the fact that few readers seem to understand it. At a college course that I used to teach, most of the reasonably-intelligent students made no sense of

it at all. Thus, long before the "new wave", Kornbluth was writing fiction that was supposedly incomprehensible because of its density and oblique narrative style.

The story is a reaction against dishonest romanticising of space travel. Other science fiction writers were wallowing in the adventure and glory of it all; Kornbluth, aged 18, already saw it differently. The events are narrated by a con-man who starts his own space programme to get rich by fraud; he uses blackmail to get the assistance of "that old, bushy-haired Viennese, worshipped incontinently by the mob" (meaning Einstein, presumably, though who else would have treated him so irreverently?), and uses a radio broadcast to publicize his bold plan to "plant the red-white-and-blue banner in the soil of Mars!".

Contributions flood in from business, government, patriotic citizens, and scams like "Rocket Contribution Week in the nation's public schools". The rocket is built, but it's made of tinplate, fuelled by hydrogen, and as soon as it takes off it explodes. While newsmen chronicle the "tragedy" the narrator counts his seven million dollars ... until "Einstein" confesses his role in the con and our narrator and his accomplice are hanged by a vigilante committee, headed, inevitably, by "a man who had lost fifty cents in our rocket".

So here, within about 500 words, we have the following ideas and attributes, which were to recur in Kornbluth's later work:

- Cynicism about the supposed national glory of a space programme, 15 years before America had even the beginnings of such a programme.
- A sharp understanding of greed and deception as bedrock social forces, regarding which other science fiction writers were remarkably naive.
- A choice of brevity over length.
- Few concessions to the reading audience. Narration by demonstration, rather than by explanation.
- By no means a happy ending.
- A clear grasp of the power of modern media to sell an idea.
- An elitist disdain for the public as sheep, easily led, easily conned.

This last element is the most troubling recurrent theme in Kornbluth's work. Frequently he expresses compassion for the average guy, or for bums and derelicts on skid row, regardless of intelligence or social status; he seems, in fact, to have relished meeting such "real" people. Seen *en masse*, however, humanity does not look so good; Kornbluth snobbishly despises the mob; he clearly places himself above them.

This is most unpleasantly clear in his famous "The Marching Morons" (1951). A man from the present wakes up in a future where the ignorant masses have outbred the intelligentsia and have engulfed the world as a result. A helpless intelligent minority, descended from educated men and women who used birth control to limit their families, tries to keep the world running, with diminishing success. It takes a "final solution" to get rid of the dumb proletariat for good, and, again, the space programme that serves the purpose is a cruel con trick, this time blatantly modelled on Hitler's ovens. The reader naturally identifies with the elite minority who have been trying so nobly to cope with the moronic masses mind-

lessly breeding and despoiling the world. Like most of Kornbluth's work, "The Marching Morons" is a nasty warning, depicting a repellent social situation derived partly from paranoid fantasy, and partly from everyday cliché (we all know what a drag it is, dealing with them dumb assholes, right? Right!). It is written in anger, in a reformist spirit; the danger is that it is too easily taken as a recipe for fascism (so let's get rid of them morons once and for all!). Of course the real message is not so simplistic. In the story, the inventor of the final solution is a racist bigot who ultimately is included in the solution himself; Kornbluth, a Jew, is not advocating genocide. And yet . . . it is surely a story of *us* and *them*, and some of its potency derives from the author's own *stylistic* snobbery – where, for instance, he uses specific detail to create a future reality in the most effective manner, but becomes so enamoured of his own knowledge of trivia (about pottery glazes, for instance) that the story hesitates on the edge of becoming mired in self-indulgence.

Kornbluth's aversion to the masses recurs in many other stories. Metaphorically, it is noticeable in "The Remorseful" (1953), a minor story depicting an alien intelligence that exists as a hive-mind, a vast insect swarm whose individual units of life are expendable. The story is in effect a parable against socialism. As the alien spaceship lands on Earth: "Five thousand insects . . . heaved on fifteen thousand wires to open the port and let down the landing ramp. While they heaved a few hundred felt the pangs of death on them. They communicated the minute all-they-knew to blank-minded standby youngsters, died, and were eaten. Other hundreds stopped heaving briefly, gave birth, and resumed heaving."

As with other alien-invasion-of-America stories in the early 1950s, it is not far-fetched to see the aliens representing the forces of communism. Inevitably, the mindless forces are vanquished by the superior power of individuals with free will.

But Kornbluth is just as disgusted by mindlessness at home as he is by *en masse* mindlessness abroad. In a weird, obscure, almost incomprehensibly oblique story, "The Last Man in the Bar" (1957), we find: "Them and their neatly packaged problems, them and their neatly packaged [TV] shows with beginning middle and end. The rite of the low-budget shot-in-Europe spy series, the rite of pugilism, the rite of the dog walk after dinner and the beer at the bar with cocelebrant worshippers at the high altar of Nothing." And a couple of pages further on: "To his left they were settling down; it was the hour of confidences, and man to man they told the secret of their success: 'In the needle trade, I'm in the needle trade, I don't sell anybody a crooked needle, my father told me that. Albert, he said to me, don't never sell nobody nothing but a straight needle. And today I have four shops.'"

Kornbluth's facility for creating moronic dialogue with morbid accuracy is displayed again in his classic "The Little Black Bag" (1950). Here, once more, society has degenerated into a majority of nerds unknowingly governed by a benevolent minority of supermen. In an impatient moment, one of the supermen offhandedly tells one of the nerds how to build a time machine:

> "So he gives me these here tube numbers and says, 'Series circuit. Now stop bothering me. Build your time machine, sit down at it and turn on the switch. That's all I ask, Dr Gillis

— that's all I ask."

"Say," marvelled a brittle and lovely blond guest, "you remember real good, don't you, doc?" She gave him a melting smile.

"Heck," said Gillis modestly, "I always remember good. It's what you call an inherent facility. And besides I told it quick to my secretary, so she wrote it down. I don't read so good, but I sure remember good, all right. Now, where was I?"

Everybody thought hard, and there were various suggestions:

"Something about bottles, doc?"

"You was starting a fight. You said 'time somebody was travelling'."

"Yeah — you called somebody a swish. Who did you call a swish?"

"Not swish — *switch*."

Dr Gillis's noble brow grooved with thought, and he declared: "Switch is right. It was about time travel. What we call travel through time. So I took the tube numbers he gave me and I put them into the circuit builder; I set it for 'series' and there it is — my time-travelling machine. It travels things through time real good."

Gillis then demonstrates, by dumping a doctor's bag into the box. The bag disappears back into the past — our own time. But it isn't just an ordinary doctor's bag; it is designed by supermen to be safe in the hands of nerds, and it can cure anything. It falls into the hands of a disbarred MD turned wino bum, and the story from here on is a classic moral fable about power, greed, and hopeless idealism. Aided by a sharp-eyed, street-wise young woman from a ghetto background, the ex-MD cleans himself up and uses the doctor's bag from the future to build a successful new practice. He's the only quack in town whose cures actually work. Alas, his accomplice is also his nemesis. When he talks of nobly donating the wonderful black bag to a medical society for the good of mankind, she sees a million dollars slipping through her fingers, and kills him. As in so many Kornbluth stories, good does not triumph over evil. At the same time, ultimately, evil defeats itself; no one wins; there are only losers, in a world which is a victim of its own lack of values.

Several other stories illustrate this point. "The Goodly Creatures" (1952) describes a morally and artistically corrupt advertising man, forced to face his shoddy retreat from idealism when he foolishly hires a dreamy would-be poet as a copywriter. "With These Hands" (1951) shows a similar concern with moral and (rather romanticized) artistic values; it describes the Last Artist in a world where Europe has been atom-bombed, "culture" is consequently dead, and in America synthetic art has displaced the real thing. Rejected on all sides, the Last Artist makes a suicidal odyssey into the bombed wasteland to see "Milles' Orpheus Fountain". There, he dies of radioactive poisoning.

Kornbluth's relentlessly harsh and often cynical view of humanity is partly to blame, I think, for his lack of popularity. In many of his stories the world is a vicious, tragic place, and there is no relief from it. People use each other soullessly (as in "The Mindworm" [1950], the saga of a contemporary vampire who feeds off human anguish), or, more often, people are used by government and business. In "The Altar at Midnight" (1952) the tragedy of a young astronaut whose work in space is killing him is compounded when we learn that his bar-room buddy, the narrator of the story, drinking himself to death, is the inventor of the drive that has made space-travel possible. It's a classic fable of the inventor whose genius is appropriated for commercial ends, and the worker whose welfare is sacrificed in the cause of getting rich quick.

Morbid and depressing, of course, but very accurate. As things have turned out,

astronauts were not lured into space by vast sums of money inducing them to sacrifice their health and life expectancy. And yet in a sense they were used just as cruelly and impersonally as the hero of "The Altar at Midnight". It makes little difference that the lure was glory rather than wealth, and the damage was psychological rather than physiological. Kornbluth's specific predictive visions may not have come true, but his perception of human nature and its failings will always be true, regardless of how many readers would prefer not to be faced with it quite so mercilessly.

Kornbluth's novels tend to be more upbeat and entertaining, though his widow Mary feels this was not entirely his own choice (see the interview that follows). *The Syndic* (1953) is pure fun: a utopia run by the mafia, with a classic guy-gets-gal happy ending. *Not This August* (1955) (retitled *Christmas Eve* in the UK) is tougher – a vivid depiction of how the Russians could have invaded America – but again the ending is optimistic (the Red Menace is defeated by the efforts of a free individual), albeit with qualifications (the arms race will continue and we must all Watch Out).

Alas, the novels are disastrously badly structured, and impatiently written; Kornbluth's short stories will remain his most enduring work.

In 1973, while I was a consulting editor for Avon Books in New York, it was my plan to have Avon publish a collection of C.M. Kornbluth's short stories, in the "rediscovery" series which was already scheduled to include *The Syndic*. I wanted to preface the collection with an appreciation of Kornbluth's work, and it seemed worthwhile to talk to the writer's widow in an effort to clarify some of the background information.

Mary Kornbluth lives in the Adirondacks, a vast forested area a considerable distance north of New York City. She does not have a phone and is erratic about replying to letters Consequently it was difficult to make contact. Eventually, however, I did talk to her for an hour one evening when she was able to settle comfortably, and undisturbed, in a local phone booth at her nearest village.

Alas, the transcript of this interview was never used, because I resigned from my Avon job and they didn't want to publish a collection of Kornbluth stories anyway. I made attempts to place the collection elsewhere, without success; and then Pohl's *The Best of C.M. Kornbluth* appeared, using many of the stories that I had planned to include. So I dropped the project, and my interview with Mary Kornbluth has not appeared anywhere until now.

One of the aspects of Kornbluth's work that fascinates me is its numerous apparent contradictions: respect for democracy and freedom, side by side with simplistic authoritarian answers to ethical problems; xenophobia toward Russians, Germans, Japanese, and extraterrestrials, side by side with a sincere belief in human values and racial equality; patriotic faith in America, coupled with disgust at its lack of idealism. I chose this as a starting point in my conversation with Mary Kornbluth in 1973:

CP: There seems to be an ambivalence in Cyril Kornbluth's feeling toward America. On the one hand, patriotism; on the other, disgust.

MK: Yes. But I think that Cyril in discussing this with me once pointed out that criticism and patriotism are necessarily part of the same thing. Cyril and I spent a lot of time in the 1930s when we were both teenagers, hoping for this brave new world, so to speak, that was supposed to come up out of the depression, which was a very creative time in America – despite all the disasters there was also a lot of creativity. Cyril and his writings began to evolve in that period. Subsequently, we were both somewhat disillusioned. For instance, we were both intensely pro-union, and it's very disillusioning to see what happened to the unions. They were supposed to make life better for the common man, but they became quite corrupt.

CP: What would you say his politics were?

MK: The thing he discussed most often was Jeffersonian democracy.

CP: In today's terms could you call him a liberal or a conservative?

MK: Cyril was not a liberal, because of his intense interest in semantics. It's impossible to be a liberal and a semanticist. On the other hand, "conservative" is too simple a label. He examined each issue separately, critically.

CP: Was he dissatisfied with the actual workings of capitalism, because of the failings of the individual people involved?

MK: Yes, he was. His general feeling about capitalism was that it may not be the most ideal system imaginable, but it was the best game going. But he was extremely ethical and high-principled, and he not only believed in his principles but acted on them, so naturally he felt that capitalism could be improved.

CP: What was his outlook on social change? Was he optimistic about the future?

MK: He definitely didn't feel that a past with bad teeth, slavery, child labour, and all the rest of it, was good. But he did not feel we were headed toward anything better. I remember for instance the day they admitted to building obsolescence into cars. Cyril walked into the kitchen where I was diapering one baby or another and said, will you look at this? Out of the whole paper he'd picked out a little one-inch paragraph, and at the time I didn't pay too much attention but in a few minutes I got involved because he had a facility for getting you involved . . . the point is that our junkyards, our international oil purchases, our shipments of ore from Africa, along with the destruction taking place in our woodlands, are all aspects of what he foresaw and described at that time. He saw it all, as soon as they announced obsolescence in American society. He said, *Americans don't like to keep things*, and I remember feeling somewhat insulted at the time, myself. But he saw it all, horribly accurately.

CP: Could you tell me a bit about his childhood and home background?

MK: His father was a second-generation Jew, and ran a small tailor shop. He seems to have been an authoritarian man. Cyril always believed that father knew best. He [Cyril] had a very precocious childhood, learned to read when he was about three, graduated from high school when he was thirteen, won a scholarship to City College

when he was fourteen, and got thrown out for leading a student strike. He started to write when he was about seven. He was writing whole issues of magazines by the time he was 16.

CP: I understand he went back to college twice.

MK: That's right. Both times, he dropped out. He couldn't see the point to it. I was thoroughly disillusioned with education myself, and so was he. Platitudes bored him inexpressibly and he heard a lot of them at college. He was a semanticist in an age when no one else had heard of it. He understood language as no one else I've ever known understood it. His earliest training was as a poet, I mean when he was seven, eight, nine, in junior high school. We used to write poems to each other, and I would look for the most difficult form I could find, and finally I would get it into shape with great labour, much burning of midnight oil, and give it to him, and then of course he would cap it with something even more complicated.

CP: Did he ever complain of editorial constraints in his fiction?

MK: I don't know whether you're aware of how much editorial interference he had. Science fiction wasn't exactly the most rewarding field to work in, in editorial terms. They generally wanted a certain type of ending. Cyril did his best work when he could devise the whole thing himself, and was not subject to any editorial restraints. That's why the short stories I think are better; not because the novels couldn't have been better but because there were things about them that had been influenced by other people. I don't want to draw any personalities into this . . . but if he'd been left to himself he might have devised other endings. He didn't believe in happy endings you know.

CP: There's a morbid element to some of his work. "The Mindworm" . . .

MK: When he wrote that story he was attending the University of Chicago. There was a housing shortage and we were stuck back at the stockyards in a fantastic old neighbourhood. There were ancient Polish people there, whom he described in "The Mindworm". When the story was written I believe it was written pretty accurately about what would have happened, and what a real, modern vampire would be like.

CP: When I first read it, the evil in that story bothered me a great deal.

MK: Yes. At that time I was a little more innocent than I am now, and I pointed out to him that life doesn't have to be like that. But his point was that it *is* like that. Now that I've been involved with a couple of conservation battles [Mrs Kornbluth has been opposing the construction of an interstate highway through unspoiled land] all I can say is that I have to agree, now, he was right. He said that the people who do the destroying are like that [like The Mindworm] and now that I've seen some of them and talked to them myself, I have to say that they really do enjoy destroying, and the more beautiful a thing is, the greater their enjoyment is.

CP: So he did not in any sense contrive that story. He was writing from the heart.

MK: Yes he was.

We welcome the return of Darko Suvin, rival editor of Science-Fiction Studies *and multilingual* éminence grise *of the international theoretics of the sf genre, to our pages, with this comprehensive survey of the work of the fraternal leaders of contemporary Russian sf – the brothers Strugatsky – which will appear as an introduction to their novel* Snail on the Slope *due from Bantam Books early in 1980. (One day, when we have worked out how to get a letter through to the Strugatskys, we hope to prevail on them for a "profession" piece.) Professor Suvin's latest book is* Metamorphoses of Science Fiction, *from Yale University Press – "On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre" – published this Spring. His latest in English, at any rate. Doubtless other books have also appeared this year in French, German, Serbo-Croat . . .*

The Strugatskys and their 'Snail on the Slope'

Darko Suvin

1. The Development of the Strugatskys' Fiction

The Strugatsky brothers, who write together, are on the whole the best and most significant Soviet sf writers who began publishing after the breakthrough of Yefremov's *Andromeda* in 1957-58.[1] Arkady, born 1925, is a specialist in Japanese and English languages who worked in the Institute for Technical Information and later in the State Publishing House in Moscow; Boris, born 1933, was a computer mathematician at the Pulkovo astronomical observatory near Leningrad, but he seems lately to have abandoned work in natural sciences for writing. A number of their works have by now been translated into German, English and other languages, but little context has been provided for placing such works which come from various phases of their development.[2] In order to supply such a context, I shall begin by listing their book-length publications; a full list of their works and of the available translations into English, French and German can be found (within the limits imposed by the publication date) in my bibliography and the articles mentioned in footnotes 1 and 2. The order followed is: *Russian title* (literal translation or title of English translation). Place: Publisher, year of first publication in book form (unless otherwise indicated). The list is my best guess at the chronological order of actual composition, which in a few cases departs from the order of publication. M stands for Moscow; NY for New York City.

1. **Strana bagrovykh tuch** *(The Country of Crimson Clouds).* M: Detgiz, 1959.
2. **Shest' spichek** *(Six Matches).* M: Detgiz, 1960.
3. **Put' na Amal'teiiu** *(Destination: Amaltheia).* M: Mol. gvardiia, 1960.

4. **Vozvrashchenie. (Polden'. 22-i vek)** *(The Homecoming: Noon, 22nd Century).* M: Detgiz, 1962. Revised ed. expanded to 20 stories as **Polden', XXII vek (Vozvrashchenie)** *(Noon: 22nd Century)* M: Detskaia lit., 1967.
5. **Stazhery** *(The Apprentices).* M: Mol. gvardiia, 1962.
6. **Popytka k begstvu** *(An Attempted Escape),* in anthology *Fantastika. 1962 god,* M: Mol. gvardiia, 1962. Reprinted together with no.9.
7. **Dalekaia Raduga** *(Far Rainbow),* in anthology *Novaia signal'naia.* M: Znanie, 1963. Reprinted together with no.8.
8. **Trudno byt' bogom** *(Hard To Be a God),* in their **Dalekaia Raduga.** M: Mol. gvardiia, 1964.
9. **Khishchnye veshchi veka** *(Predatory Things of Our Times).* M: Mol. gvardiia, 1965.
10. **Ponedel'nik nachinaetsia v subbotu** *(Monday Begins on Saturday).* M: Detskaia lit., 1965.
11. **Ulitka na sklone** *(The Snail on the Slope)* – see further in the text. "Kandid" part published in anthology *Èllinskii sekret.* Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1966; "Pepper" part published in magazine *Baikal,* Nos.1 and 2 (1968). Book published in Estonian SSR in 1972, the "Pepper" part alone was published in *Ulitka na sklone – Skazka o troike.* Frankfurt/Main: Possev, 1972, an unauthorized ed.
12. **Vtoroe nashestvie marsian** *(The Second Martian Invasion),* in their **Stazhery – Vtoroe nashestvie marsian.** M: Mol. gvardiia, 1968.
13. **Gadkie lebedi** *(Ugly Swans).* Frankfurt/Main: Possev, 1972, an unauthorized ed. (no publication in the USSR).
14. **Skazka o troike** *(Tale of the Troika),* magazine *Angara* Nos. 4 and 5 (1968).
15. **Obitaemyi ostrov** *(Prisoners of Power).* M: Detskaia lit , 1971.
16. **Otel' "U pogibshego al pinista"** *(Hotel "To the Lost Climber"),* magazine *Iunost',* Nos. 9, 10 and 11 (1970).
17. **Malysh** *(The Kid),* in anthology *Talisman.* Leningrad: Detskaia lit., 1973, reprinted in their **Polden . . . – Malysh.** Leningrad: Detskaia lit., 1976.
18. **Piknik na obochine** *(Roadside Picnic),* magazine *Avrora* Nos. 7, 8, 9 and 10 (1972).
19. **Paren' iz preispodnei** *(The Guy From Hell),* in anthology *Nezrimyi most'.* Leningrad: Detskaia lit., 1976.
20. **Za milliard let do kontsa sveta** *(Definitely Maybe),* magazine *Znanie-sila* Nos. 9, 10, 11 and 12 (1976) and 1 (1977).

The first cycle or phase of the Strugatskys is the interplanetary trilogy *The Country of Crimson Clouds, Destination: Amaltheia* and *The Apprentices* with the same group of protagonists, and the cognate short stories collected in *Six Matches, Destination: Amaltheia* and *Noon: 22nd Century*, all published 1959 to 1962. Except for a few early stories this phase constitutes a "future history" system formally similar to the model of a number of American sf writers, e.g. Heinlein and Asimov. It is a not quite systematic series of novels and stories with interlocking characters and locations progressing from the end of the twentieth to the twenty-second century, realistically conveying life on a predominantly communist

(classless) Earth and human relations in explorations on and between the planets of the Solar system and some nearer stars. Yefremov's monolithic leaders and huge exploits were here supplanted by young explorers and scientists finding romance in their everyday pioneering tasks. Retaining the utopian sense of absolute ethical involvement and personal honour, even the Strugatskys' early protagonists – at times moody or vain, tired or capricious – were much more lifelike than the usual cardboard or marble figures in most Soviet sf. Together with the vividly depicted and variegated surroundings, the sure touch for detail and the adventure-packed action leading to some ethical choice, this immediately brought the young authors to the forefront of Soviet sf. But from good juvenile-adventure sf they quickly passed to a richer form in which the adventure level serves as vehicle for socio-philosophical exploration and understanding.

This first Strugatsky cycle is still fairly idyllic. Except for the occasional egotistic and capitalist survivals, conflicts take place – as they formulated it – "between the good and the better", that is, within absolute and generally accepted ethics. Thus the only fundamental conflict left is the epic adventure of man faced with and conquering nature as a "collective Robinson" (Kagarlitsky). Yet at the end of the cycle – in *The Apprentices* and some stories such as "Wanderers and Travellers", "The Puzzle of the Hind Foot", and "The Rendez-Vous" – an element of open-ended doubt and of darkness enters into these somewhat aseptically bright horizons. Some protagonists die or retire, and some "come home" from cosmic jaunts to Earth and its problems. Though the future is still envisaged as a golden arrested moment of "noon", historical time with its puzzles, pain, and potentialities of regress begins to seep in as shadows of postmeridian experience lengthen. This adventure model is interlarded with quotations from neo-romantic poets such as R.L. Stevenson and Bagritsky. In the second phase, an adult exploration of a more complex and painful world concentrates, as one of its novels has it, on the "predatory things of our times" – a title appropriately enough taken from Russia's major poetic exploration of relationships in such a world by Voznesensky's *dza.*

The dialectics of innocence and experience, of utopian ethics and historical obstacles on the way to their enthronement provide henceforth the main tension and pathos of the Strugatskys' opus. In their second phase, consisting of the novels or long stories *An Attempted Escape, Far Rainbow, Hard to be a God* and *Predatory Things of Our Times* – all published 1962 to 1965 – they went about finding the proper form for such dialectics. The black horizon of a history where slavery and high technology go together appears in *An Attempted Escape*, though only as an exception (a backward planet) within the utopian universe of the first phase. In this work the Strugatskys are still defensive about their new tack. Even stylistically, it is halfway between the careful realism of the extrapolative-utopian cycle and a new parable form, so that it reads as a first sketch for *Hard To Be a God.* The protagonist – an escapee from Nazi concentration camps – and the paradoxical society are even less motivated than Mark Twain's Yankee in Camelot. Nonetheless, this story introduces the first full-fledged conflict of utopian innocence and twentieth-century experience using the highly effective device of a protagonist caught in a blind alley of history.

The first two masterpieces of the Strugatskys are the long story *Far Rainbow* and the novel *Hard To Be a God.* In both of them extrapolation gives way to a clearly focused parable. In both, utopian ethics are put to the test of anti-utopian darkness, of an inhuman and apparently irresistible wave of destruction. On the small planet Far Rainbow this is presented as a physical black Wave destroying the whole joyous community of experimenting creators. Almost all remaining heroes of the first cycle die here; only the children (and the mysterious deathless man-robot Kamill, personifying perhaps a Cassandra-like lonely and powerless Reason) are saved to carry on the unquenchable human hope and thirst for knowledge. The elemental force let loose by the cheerful seekers and destroying them from behind is valid as a story in its own right, and also a clear parable for the price of historical knowledge and progress.

The conflict of militant philistinism, stupidity, and socio-psychological entropy with the utopian idea of the Commune is faced without "cosmic" disguises, directly within history — and therefore with richer and subtler consequences — in *Hard To Be a God* by way of a very successful domestication of the Scott/Dumas-type historical novel. The hero is one of a handful of emissaries from classless Earth's Institute of Experimental History on a feudal planet. He is perfectly disguised as a native nobleman, under strict instructions to observe without interfering, and trained to adapt himself to the existing way of life — a mixture of a medieval Europe and Japan — in all details, from language to hygiene, except in his views. However, the Institute's futurological Basic Theory of Feudalism, which projects a slow linear progress for the planet, turns out to be wrong. The opposition between ethics and history explodes when the protagonist is faced with a regress into organized obscurantism, leading to death and destruction for all poets, scientists, doctors, and other bearers of human values and intelligence in the Arkanar kingdom, and culminating in the slaying of his girl-friend. As in *Far Rainbow*, the problem of meeting an unforseen, calamitous twist of history is posed, rendered believable (here by vividly recreating the customs, legends, and ways of life in Arkanar, as well as the psychology of the troubled hero), and then left realistically open-ended.

Hard To Be a God amounts to an "educational novel" where the reader is the hero, learning together with the protagonist the nature of painful conflict between utopian human values — always the fixed Pole Star for the Strugatskys — and the terrible empirical pressures of mass egotism, slavery to petty passions, and conformism. Under such pressures the great majority of the people turn to religious fanaticism, mass murder or apathy. The resulting situation is reminiscent of the worst traits of Stalinism (a "doctors' plot", stage-managed confessions, recasting of history to exalt the present ruler) and Nazism (storm troopers and pogroms, the Night of Long Knives). The spirit of the revolt — as in the rebel leader Arata — is undying, but it has to deal with omnipresent historical inertia. Outside interference cannot liberate a people without introducing a new benevolent dictatorship: the Earthling "gods" are both ethically obliged and historically powerless to act. The true enemy is within each man: Slavery and Reason, narrow-minded class psychology and the axiological reality of a classless future, are still fighting it out, in a variant of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor confrontation. The Strugatskys' mature opus retains the utopian abhorrence of "the terrible ghosts of the past" and belief in the neces-

sity of a humanized future, but it is also intensely aware of the defeats humanity has suffered since the heyday of utopianism in the early 1920s. Thus, from this time on their work takes its place with the insights of the best sf – from Wells and London, to Dick, Disch and Le Guin – into the dangers of social devolution: it is a warning without pat answers, a bearing of witness, and "an angry pamphlet against tyranny, violence, indifference, against the philistinism which gives rise to dictatorships" (as the Soviet critic Revich aptly said). Even further, it is a significant rendering of tragic utopian activism, akin in many ways to the ethico-historiosophical visions of the best Hemingway and of poets like Brecht (the protagonist's dilemma in this novel is not too dissimilar to that in *The Measures Taken*), Okudzhava, or Voznesensky. It is no wonder this novel has become the most popular sf work in the USSR.

Predatory Things of Our Times returns to the anticipatory universe of the first cycle, with which it shares the protagonist, a Soviet cosmonaut turned UN Secret Service agent. His task is to flush out an evil new influence in the Country of the Fools, a wealthy, demilitarized capitalist state in a world dominated by socialism; this turns out to be addictive stimulation of pleasure centres, born of social demoralization and feeding into it. The story is a half-hearted try at a more precise Earthly localization of the concern with historical blind alleys, but its focus is blurred. The Country of the Fools is midway between an updated USA of Hemingway, Raymond Chandler, or gangster movies, and a folktale-like Never-never Land. Though vigorous and swift-paced, it is neither sufficiently concrete for precise sociopolitical criticism – as some Soviet critics were quick to point out – nor sufficiently generalized for a parabolic model of a mass welfare state. *Hard To Be a God*, with its clear and historically vivid yet sufficiently enstranged localization, and its fusion of medieval and twenty to twenty-first century, public and private concerns (evident even in the epigraphs from Abelard and Hemingway), thus remains the supreme model of the Strugatskys' exemplary work until 1965.

Since explicit criticism of situations nearer home than its "thousand years and thousand parsecs from Earth" would have (among other sociological consequences) meant abandoning the sf genre and their readers, the Strugatskys opted for the second possible way – a folktale-like parable form with increasingly satirical overtones. As contrasted with their work so far, their third phase, consisting of the looser and more grotesque long tales *Monday Begins on Saturday, The Snail on the Slope, The Second Martian Invasion, Ugly Swans* and *Tale of the Troika* is marked by growing precision and width of reference of a single model and characterized by a variety of probings and formal manoeuvrings – and reading publics, from the juvenile to the most sophisticated intellectual one.

A sign of formal mastery, joined to a certain sociological bewilderment, can be seen in the changing Strugatsky protagonist. By this phase he has turned into the privileged point of view. As a rule he is, like Voltaire's *Candide*, a naive glance at the increasingly estranged and disharmonious world, but burdened by the additional twentieth-century problem of how to make sense of the events in a mass society with monopolized information channels. This makes for anxiety, as in *The Snail on the Slope*, or activist response, as in *Prisoners of Power*, or a fusion of both, as in

The Tale of the Troika. In *The Second Martian Invasion*, however, the protagonist, ignorant as Candide, is also happy in his conformist ignorance. This Martian invasion does not need to use Wellsian heat-rays and gases to poison a nation, merely local traitors, economic corruption, and misinformation. As befits the one-dimensional age, the calamity is muted, and thus more convincing and horrible. The whole story is a *tour de force* of identifying petty bourgeois language and horizons, the almost unnoticeable nuances which lead down the slope of quislingism. It is "a grotesque which does not reside in the style but in the point of view" (Britikov). Stylistically, it is on a par with *Hard To Be a God* and the Kandid part of *The Snail on the Slope* as the Strugatskys' most homogeneous achievement.

If *The Second Martian Invasion* was in the vein of Voltaire or Swift, the anxiety of the two protagonists in *The Snail on the Slope* (one of them named Kandid) is rather Kafkaesque. The visionary universe of this novel, reduced to a fantastic swampy forest, will be discussed at greater length in the second part of this article.

Perhaps a central place in the Strugatskys' third phase is due to the "Privalov cycle" – the novels *Monday Begins on Saturday* and *The Tale of the Troika*. In an updated folktale garb, they embody the underlying atmosphere of this phase – a total invasion of human relationships by a lack of linear logic and sense. Modern sciences and modern social relationships, in their strangeness for and alienation from the uninitiated majority, are equivalent to white and black magic. Conversely, the forms of the magical folktale can be taken as forerunners of, and freely mixed with, contemporary "quantum alchemy". Indeed, the old characters – a penny-pinching Baba Yaga, a sclerotic Talking Cat, a parochial Pike Who Grants Three Desires – are small fry, good only for some mild fun, incidental critique, and atmosphere-setting in comparison to the estranged horrors of scientific charlatanism and bureaucratic power. *Monday Begins on Saturday* deals primarily with the use and charlatanic abuse of science. This is sketched in the career of Ianus Nevstruev, director of the Scientific Institute for Magic which studies the problems of human happiness and in whose folktale-lands both books take place: Nevstruev has split into S-Ianus the scientist, and A-Ianus the administrator who lives backward in time. But charlatanism is personified in Amvroz Ambruazovich Vybegallo, a semi-literate careerist planning the creation of a happy Universal Consumer, who talks in a mixture of bad French and demagogic bureaucratese. His homunculus, the Model of Full Contentedness, has to be destroyed just short of consuming the whole universe. The novel ranges from such a Goya-esque vision of A Dream of Reason Giving Birth to Monsters to an affectionate return to the roots of Russian and other folk tales (the Institute is located with great felicity in the legendary Russian North). The loose picaresque form – the "ideational adventures" of the candid protagonist – can be used for hitting out at anything that fits the authors' bill. Thus one section, in which Privalov tests out a machine for travelling through "ideal times", is a spoof of sf from the utopias and *The Time Machine*, through technological anticipations and Soviet cosmic sf (with considerable self-parody), to western sf behind an "Iron Wall" dividing the Universe of Humanistic Imagination from the Universe of Fearing the Future where violent warfare with robots, aliens, viruses, etc., reigns supreme.

The Tale of the Troika is blacker, concentrating on a bureaucratic triumvirate – originally a commission for checking the plumbing system – that has usurped power

in a country of unexplained social and natural phenomena, which it proceeds to "rationalize" by misusing or explaining them away. Their scientific consultant is Professor Vybegallo, and their main power is the Great Round Seal. A brilliantly detailed picture emerges of their prejudices, militaristic mannerisms, and internecine infighting – in short, of a despotic approach turning "scientifico-administrative". Its semi-literate jargon and fossilized pseudo-democratic slogans, its totally incompetent quid-pro-quos and malapropisms are portrayed with a wildly hilarious black humour, which makes this the funniest work of sf I know. It is unfortunate that it has so far not appeared in book form in the USSR, for – as the episode of the Alien most clearly shows – this critique of a degenerated power-situation is applicable to all of present-day mankind, psychologically unprepared for contact with an utopian future. In fact, I know of no more sympathetic insight into the true necessities that bring about the elite power than the Troika chairman's speech (under the influence of an apparatus which induces the surfacing of innermost motives) at the Alien's trial. Though somewhat uneven, this is perhaps the weightiest experiment of the Strugatskys.

The works first published after 1968 – *Prisoners of Power et.seq.* in my opening list – will not be discussed here, in order to concentrate on *The Snail on the Slope.* At any rate, they seem to constitute a further phase – alienated and sombre, yet cast in a mould of juvenile heroics, in their increasingly tense and increasingly heterogeneous opus.

2. The Snail on the Slope

All the foregoing can serve as the context for the somewhat puzzling *Snail on the Slope*. It is not my intention in this article to explore all the puzzles with which this text abounds, in the best sf tradition – let that be left to the reader of the book (to be published in 1980 by Bantam Books) as a part of his pleasure. Furthermore, I think some of these puzzles are deliberately ambiguous and cannot be "deciphered" in any univocal or simplistic way. I simply want to indicate a possible first approach.

The novel is divided into two stories, those of Pepper and Kandid.[3] Their plots appear to be only very loosely connected, but the compositional interlocking (chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 9 and 10 deal with Pepper, and 2, 4, 7, 8 and 11 with Kandid) express in fact a deeper interplay of their fortunes and attitudes. Pepper and Kandid have many similarities: both are intellectuals, tolerated or even condescendingly liked, yet thrown as outsiders into nightmarish power situations beyond their control; for both, thinking – i.e. an understanding of what is happening in light of their humanistic ethical and historiosophical principles – is not "a pastime, it's a duty" (ch.1). In fact, in a Russian idiom beautifully fashioned by the Strugatskys on the model of "homesickness", they are both sick for understanding, they have the "yearning for understanding" or "know-sickness" (ch.6). Thus, the world view of both Kandid and Pepper can be called "emotional materialism" (ch.3): as scientists they are materialists, but the painful informational opacity of their environments has caused them to fall back on personally felt ethics in lieu of a dialectical overview. Thus, besides understanding, they both yearn for a minimum of humanist decency: "just people would do for a start – clean, shaved, considerate, hospitable.

No high-flown ideas necessary, no blazing talents." (ch.9).

Yet, as we gradually find out during the novel, Pepper and Kandid have equally significant dissimilarities. Not only is Kandid directly faced with the central novelty and strange experience of this text, the Forest, while Pepper faces it indirectly, through the Forest Study and Exploitation Authority (or Directorate); but, more importantly, their reactions too – during much of the novel largely identical – eventually diverge so radically that they result in diametrically opposed behaviour. In relation to the other human characters as well as to the overriding and unmanageable presences of the Forest and the Directorate, Pepper and Kandid finally come to stand for the two horns of the dilemma facing modern intellectuals (as the text sees it): *accommodation* or *refusal*. In relation to other people – perhaps, as opposed to the solitary intellectual protagonists, one could just as well say in relation to *the* people – Pepper has almost from the very beginning a much stronger gut revulsion, which subsumes sex under human animalism (at the end he regrets that he cannot have driver Acey castrated). Ironically, Pepper is the one who finally succumbs to the seduction of the self-perpetuating power-structure, symbolized by the Tannhäuser-Venus inkpot, in spite of the lugubrious warning in fluorescent colours of No Exit" (ch.5). Conversely, Kandid – though equally, if not more, helpless and intellectually isolated – lives among his more primitive villagers as a strange and eccentric member of their community, at the outset condescended to as "Dummy", but at the end reverenced as the slightly mad "holy fool" and unparalleled disposer of the "deadlings". Though his marriage to Nava (who is frequently called "a girl" in the sense of a rather young person) is possibly only symbolical, and though it does not last, even such an ambiguous marriage and name are precise symbols for Kandid's precarious partaking in the village community. And for all its rural inertia – so beautifully rendered by the Strugatskys' language in the Kandid part with its archaic folk images and idioms, infuriatingly repetitive and monotonous as the life whose flavour it conveys – there is to my mind a clear sense of the moral superiority of this primitive folk community over the egotistic urbanized conformism of the Directorate employees. That may *explain* Pepper's revulsion, but in a book so fraught with ethnical judgments it does not *justify* it. In fact, it is a logical stage on the way to Pepper's Fall Into Power, ironically marked by his eradication of the Eradicators supervised by the chief eradicator. Kandid's irritation and even fury at the "dozey . . . vegetable way of life" (ch.9) in the Village is paralleled by his adaptation to the heavy and sometimes oppressive but also astonishingly fertile vegetable imagery; Pepper's revulsion from the Directorate apparatus carries a subtle implication of a hysterical splitting of its members into animals on the one hand and machines on the other. In fact, I'd read the "machine episode" of chapter 9 as a parable on intellectuals streamlined or reified into serving the military-industrial complex: frustrated by it, destroyed when they attempt to evade from it, they are internally subverted by it into scientific or aesthetic acquiescence ("Winnie the Pooh" and the Gardener), militarist aggressiveness (the Tank), hysteria (the Doll), etc. If something like this reading is acceptable, this seemingly gratuitous episode would fit well into the Pepper story. Kandid, on the contrary, after being ejected from his helicopter is faced only with biocybernetic, if you wish "organic", novelties, not with inorganic machines. The

matriarchal or Amazon civilization of the Maidens (another almost untranslatable Russian term, literally something like Women Companions or She-Friends) with its Swampings and Harrowings is, of course, no less ruthless than the patriarchal Exploitation Authority, but Kandid's fellow-yokels have for all their bumbling preserved more human dignity than the Directorate's employees, they sin against the "yearning for knowledge" rather than against other people. And even that sin is overwhelmingly conveyed as being in large part due to the dearth of information and the almost physiological impossibility of generalizing on the part of a social group bereft of history and art (indeed even of a myth of origin) and subject to unknown destructive forces. No such excuses prevail for the Authority employees, at least as much sinning as sinned against: no Anger-Martyrs amongst them. Though oppressed by the power, they share in it; the villagers don't.

However, what of the two huge and stifling collective entities, the Forest and the Directorate? The Directorate is a simpler case: a Kafka-like bureaucracy whose facelessness is horrible because it is composed of Everyman, so to speak – it works in, through, and by means of its victims such as Pepper; it is a "vector [with] its base in the depths of time" (ch.10), aptly symbolized by Acey's tattoos: "What destroys us", and "Ever onward". It is "capable of any extreme" – faith, disbelief, neglect – only not of understanding (ch.1); thus, it is the moral antipode of the intellectual protagonists. It exists only because of the Forest, but also only for its eradication and exploitation; furthermore, it is failing dismally to deal not only with the Forest but even with the relatively powerless villagers ("Native Population"). Besides the ineffective bio-station, breeding ground of careers, pettiness, "salary and bonuses" rather than of understanding, the Directorate impinges on the Forest only through the new "luxurious four-hole latrine" (ch.10), a drastically clear image. Its Kafkaesque murk – most of the Pepper story happens in total or semi-obscurity – is joined in the Director's anterooms by Carrollian nonsense, while the "decoding" of the telephone speech rejoins the savager Swiftian satire at Tribnia. The Philistine pseudo-utopia of affluence and leisure – reminding one of the feeblest Wells or other optimistic forecasting, not excluding Philistine pseudo-Marxists: ". . . stadia, swimming-pools, aerial parks, crystal bars and cafes. Stairways to the sky! Slender, swaying women with dark supple skin! [. . .] Cars, gliders, airships . . . Debates, hypnopaedia, stereo-cinema . . . " (ch.5) – only deepens the gloom. It is rendered practically impenetrable when Alevtina's thesis of the historical continuity of bureaucratic authority is confirmed by the evidently sincere inability of Pepper to find what Wells would have called a democratic "social receiver" for the Directorate: "Criticise and laugh . . . Yes, they would criticise. They'd do it at length with warmth and ecstasy since they'd been ordered to do it [. . .] and in between they'd hurry to the latrine overhanging the precipice . . . " (ch.10).

The Forest is much more complex, in fact the most multiplex symbol in the novel. As in a story by Le Guin, it is the word for this world. Pepper is too remote from it, and sees far too little; Kandid is too near to it, and sees far too much; such an absence as well as such an overload of information turn the Forest into a blur, a black-and-white cerebral one for Pepper and a technicolour one, replete with noises and smells, for Kandid. But even the latter, after three years of living within

it, can penetrate no further than skin-deep into the *meaning* of its half-glimpsed "unpleasant secrets and terrible puzzles", into the lilac fog of its alien abundance: if Pepper's glance is blocked by the Authority, Kandid's is by the strangeness of the Forest iself, which he does not see for its phenomena.

This unresolved opacity makes it impossible, as I suggested earlier, to "decode" the Forest as standing allegorically for any one particular entity. Yet clearly, to the protagonists it matters supremely: it is Pepper's romantic dream, and Kandid's realistic existence; Pepper yearns desperately to get into it, Kandid to get out of it. Neither will succeed; but for both the Forest will remain the central fascination of their existences, a tormenting love/hate (it will only dim for Pepper when he becomes absorbed in the Directorate and follows up his nausea at the alien Forest with the assumption of a bureaucratic responsibility for it which – as his eradication decision gives us to understand – will not lead to significant change). The mysterious Forest stands thus for an encompassing strange truth and value (for intellectuals they are the same) surrounding the modern thinking man. Sociologically, it might stand for society; anthropologically, for the people; politically, for the state; but finally, I think that no such subdivisions will account for its multiplicity and ambiguity, although at various points in the text they might be applicable to a certain degree. Finally, subsuming all such partial explanations, the Strugatskys' Forest seems to be, almost ontologically life in general, the viscous duration and existence for which Russian has the expressive term "byt". Nonetheless, it remains true that the forces in the Forest are also in some ways similar to the menacing "mysticism" (ch.1) of the Exploitation Authority (even the speech modes of the power-wielders are not too dissimilar). The impressive *newness* of the Forest is finally inhuman; whatever it might have started out like in the past, it is now a parthenogenetic "higher" species. The authors' final word is given through Kandid's mouth: "What has their progress to do with me, it's not my progress and I call it progress only because there's no other suitable word . . . " (ch.11).

It would be disingenuous here not to mention that the black comedy of this novel, and in particular the grotesque satire of the Directorate, have led a few critics to label it simply as anti-utopian critique of Soviet society. If my argument so far is accepted, that is a reductionist oversimplification. Instead of further discussion, I will quote the Soviet critic Lebedev:

> V. Aleksandrov writes in *Pravda Buriatii* [a local Siberian newspaper, DS] that "this work, called an sf story, is nothing but a lampoon against our reality [. . .]". What is this premise based upon, which characteristic traits allow Aleksandrov to identify the fantastic reality of the Strugatskys with the reality he designates? Here they are: "The fantastic society shown by A. and B. Strugatsky in the story *Snail on the Slope*", writes Aleksandrov, "is a conglomerate of people living in chaos and disorder, engaged in senseless and useless work, carrying out stupid laws and directives. Fear, suspicion, toadyism, and bureaucracy reign there." – Well now! A truly fantastic aberration: it seems such phenomena and signs are the "typical" aspects allowing to treat sf with such elements as a kind of "copy" of our reality? Comrade Aleksandrov seems to have nice ideas about the society around him, it must be confessed . . .

And Lebedev concludes: "The affirmation of dreams about the beautiful future, of the romantic impulse forward and higher, finds its necessary complement in the demystification of tendencies which pretend to the historical correctness and the romantic aureole, but are in fact incompatible with the ideal of scientific com-

munism".[4] No doubt, individual readers will wish to conclude for themselves, according to their politics, which countries possess bureaucracies, chaos, and stupid laws. I would personally think this is, unfortunately, not the privilege of any particular country or society. The inertia of monstrous power-structures, the need for intellectuals and indeed all people to choose between identifying with them or opting out and opposing them, is a problem of our whole globe and historical epoch. It is therefore regrettable that in the USSR this novel has been published as a whole only in Estonian, and it is hoped that the relevance the English-language reader may well find in it will argue against the Aleksandrovs or similar critics and publishers. For, properly speaking, the Forest is not a political but an ethical and cognitive symbol. As the authors themselves have written: "The Forest is to be taken as a symbol of the unknown and alien, a symbol of necessity simplified, of all that is at present hidden from mankind because of our incomplete scientific, philosophical and sociological knowledge".

All this does not mean, of course, that one could not have legitimate doubts, queries or outright disagreements with the novel. The ethics of the Strugatskys' heroes are – as usual – to my mind unexceptionable, utopian socialist ethics. But their protest against the loss of harmony between ends and means, while rightly postulating that unethical politics are self-defeating, does not leave much room at all for intelligent, i.e. ethical, politics. Is not "drilling the principles of fortification into a future builder of sun cities" (ch.3) no doubt always unpleasant but perhaps sometimes unavoidable? Say, when faced with the world symbolized by the contents of the Director's safe in ch.10 – a pistol, a "twisted general's epaulette and an iron cross with oak leaves"? Probably in that case the classical revolutionary and Russian question "what is to be done?" cannot be solved by pure ethics. The Strugatskys themselves penned what amounts to a credo at the same time as writing this novel. It speaks of sf as "the literature dealing with the ethics and responsibility of the scientists [. . .] with what those, in whose hands lies the realization of the highest achievements of human knowledge, feel and how do they relate to their work [. . .]. Each scientist has to be a revolutionary humanist, otherwise the inertia of history will shunt him into the ranks of irresponsible scoundrels leading the world to its destruction".[5] From their own point of view, Kandid's final opposition between head and heart – between utopian socialist ethics and realistic cognition of world and history – may in that case not be a useful answer.

On the contrary, Kandid's final realization that it is necessary to look both at the Authority and the Forest "from the side" is right on. For this is the classical look of sf as well as of all scientific estrangement – the wide-eyed "it ain't necessarily so" look which is the beginning of all wisdom – a wisdom desperately needed in our world of somewhat different Authorities and Forests. The numerous uses of such a look make of this sombre but unbowed, difficult but rewarding novel one of the most interesting creations of the Strugatsky brothers, and of modern sf. Any disagreements that one might have with this or that aspect of their vision is more than compensated for by the humour and relevance of the novel as a whole. It is a legitimate continuation of the Gogol and Shchedrin vein of Russian literature, and of the great Soviet tradition of Ilf-Petrov or Olesha, at the borders of sf and satire

as in Mayakovsky's late plays. Fusing this tradition with the stimulus of Swift, Kafka, Lem, and English fantastic literature such as Lewis Carroll, the Strugatskys offer the reader a brilliant work of word-art – a mimicry of bureaucratese and academese, of philistine and fanatic jargon, irony and parody, colloquialisms and neologisms. Thus, *The Snail on the Slope* is polemic at the deepest literary level, making untenable what they called the "fiery banalities" of the genre.

Footnotes

1. For this breakthrough and the whole previous tradition of Russian sf see chapter 11 in my *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven & London: Yale U.P., 1979), as well as the appendix about Russian sf before 1956 in my book *Russian Science Fiction 1956-1974: A Bibliography* (Elizabethtown, NY: Dragon Press, 1976).
2. Except for book reviews, I think that the English reader can so far use only my two articles in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*: "Criticism of the Strugatskii Brothers' Work", No.2 (Summer 1972), and "The Literary Opus of the Strugatskii Brothers", No.3 (Fall 1974), the first of which lists ca.100 critical items, and the second of which has – with the kind permission of the editor, Dr Charles Schlacks, Jr. – been adapted for a part of this article.
3. My analysis of the novel is indebted to discussions with the excellent translator, Mr Alan G. Myers, which is here gratefully acknowledged, though its merits or demerits can only be mine. I am also grateful to Dr Roger De Garis for help with bibliographic data.
4. For full data in the critical debate around the Strugatskys including Lebedev's article see my 1972 article and 1976 bibliography adduced in notes 1 and 2.
5. Review of Gansovsky, see my bibliography from note 1, p.44.

Reviews

The Fountains of Paradise
by Arthur C. Clarke *(Gollancz, 1979, 255pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 575 02520 4)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

"Gigantic is Beautiful" run the last words of the Afterword to this book which Arthur Clarke considers his finest, and final novel. The main theme of the book – the building of a thirty-six thousand kilometer tower to link a geostationary space station with the ground – is gigantic enough, though even this is to be dwarfed in the book's epilogue by its natural successor: a vertical city-*cum*-elevator rising to a space city encircling the whole globe; and the gigantic scheme is counterpointed by another earlier attempt at scaling "Heaven" by Kalidasa, king of early Taprobane (Ceylon, shifted south), from close by the ruins of whose enterprise the space elevator will soar.

Kalidasa's project was erased by a rival king because it was considered to be a challenge to the Gods; and macro-engineer Vannevar Morgan's space elevator is stymied initially by the Buddhist monks who occupy the relevant real estate. However, their opposition entirely evaporates when a cloud of butterflies is blown up

their hill, fulfilling an ancient prophecy of doom – just as religion in general is knocked sideways by the advent of the alien robot probe Starglider which flits through the solar system, reducing Thomas Aquinas to a list of fallacies, demolishing the concept of God with Occam's razor, and indicating that religious behaviour is only exhibited by mammals who nurture their young (God is Big Daddy or Mummy). Moral: let superstitious twaddle be swept away, then the real universe is ours.

Thus in the end the Gods are challenged – and there aren't any. We are them. The myth of the Tower of Babel is inverted: it was actually theological babble and suchlike communications breakdown that put paid to that lovely concept. Here, *per contra*, communication with Starglider wipes out theological babble forever, while perfected technological communication systems – of data banks, information processing, and transport technology – raise the tower into space so that we may take our rightful place in the real heavens and evolve to a higher cultural stage.

So the book is spectacular in scope, and Clarke loves incidental spectacles too. He delights in *son-et-lumière* shows, in evocations and recreations of past technology. Just so, in *Imperial Earth*, did he parade the refloated Titanic.

By contrast with *Imperial Earth*, however, here everything is beautifully integrated and counterpointed. The past ambitions of Kalidasa balance off poetically and relevantly the present ambitions of Morgan. A spectacular disaster that overtook the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in the 1940s holds the key to how to oscillate a Mars space elevator clear of orbiting Phobos (providing a marvellous spectacle at the same time). Whereas the evocations of the Titanic and such in *Imperial Earth* were disjointed frivolities – merely tableaux – here the corresponding evocations are witty and organic.

Clarke has also solved, by fascinating snippets from future history, the problem of how our sorry divided world might haul itself together into a harmonious high technology community – something sadly lacking in the earlier book, where there was no sense of feasible continuity between now and then. The transition is honourably handled here, woven throughout the text. Other transitions surprise and please the reader too: for example the sly shift in the first chapter from one bearer of the name Venerable Mahanayake Thero to his successor two thousand years later, annoyed by the sonic boom from a re-entering space shuttle. (This is as unexpected yet exactly right as the transition from the bit of bone that the hominid tosses in the air, to the space station, in the film of *2001*.) Even Clarke's incidental jokes – where he has been on patchy ground in the past – work here. *Mandala Press, Moscow*: what a delightful conceit from the home of materialism, especially given the double irony that religion is now at last apparently obsolete!

Which brings us to the second point about the book, which actually makes it so fascinating and satisfying. Here at last are united in a synthesis the two major themes of Clarke's career in sf: the championship of technology, and the theme of evolutionary transcendence – the kind of apotheosis of man into a higher order of being that notably occurs in *Childhood's End* and at the end of *2001*.

In both of those earlier works there is an apparent rift and contradiction between the two. The technology of the Overlords may be far beyond ours, but what we will mutate into – the mind-cloud – utterly supercedes technology. Likewise, in *2001*, spaceships and computers and such are mere toys, to be flicked aside in face of the Star-Child.

By the end of *The Fountains of Paradise*, an "Overlord" has come too – in the form of one of the builders of Starglider: a Master of the Swarms who can conjugate his body (or rather *Itselves* body) into any form – and It is surrounded by human children, showing off their new mastery of mind over matter. Yet these are still

human children, telling jokes, japing, engaged in playful ambiguities rooted deep in human culture. Instead of rising in a transfigured mind-cloud up into the cosmos, the human race has streamed physically up the space elevator, off an ice age Earth, into the ring city and beyond, to Mars and Mercury and Venus. This final section of the book is entitled "Ascension", yet it isn't the apotheosis of the Star-Child. It is a purely physical ascension, within our normal plane of experience – give or take a considerable bit of "magical" biocontrol. What was once a quasi-religious strain – within the category of transcendence – is now relocated and redefined as mythic thinking, which carries on because it represents the achievement of a balance between reason and the creative irrational. So we have the alien emissary struggling to conceive this human invention of Negative Information; and it is something which in this future epoch of success and understanding still belongs to people, motivating them to "poetically" correct choices. As a consequence, people do not attempt to fight back the encroaching ice-sheets (which they could successfully have done) but yield instead to the long winter in harmony with Nature (*per contra* Morgan's view of Nature as an honourable *adversary*). In the ultimate engineer's world of exactly predictable movements, true wisdom lies not in opposition but in flowing with the rhythms; and so Clarke at last achieves the integration towards which the two main themes in his work have been straining. The strain is over – the strain which subjects Morgan to a heart attack, which his successors will be able to cope with through the mind-matter harmony of their symbiotes.

Of course, there is still the puzzle of who the "mysterious Hunters of the Dawn, who left their marks upon so many worlds, so inexplicably close to the beginning itself" might be. We are left suitably haunted: a big mystery remains. And there is still the earlier hint outstanding that now we have got rid of religions, perhaps we can start to think seriously about the concept of God. (Is this swept aside by the aliens' discovery of the origin of the universe, or isn't it?) For human beings, however, and for Clarke himself, the engineering side of life and the mysterious side have finally fused together, integrating and harmonising what seemed to be contrary strains in his fiction. Should Arthur Clarke write no more novels after this one, he has wound up his novelistic career with a Shakespearean touch: just as *The Tempest* was Shakespeare's summation, so is *The Fountains of Paradise* Arthur Clarke's.

I will leave to others to remark on the flavour of a mutual admiration society that pervades areas of the book, and on the fact that Morgan – being a workaholic – is saved from having any character problems, sex life, etc. etc. Clarke knows what he is good at; and here he is very good at it.

Vertigo
by Bob Shaw *(Gollancz, 1978, 160pp, £4.50, ISBN 0 575 02559 X)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

When John W. Campbell wrote the prospectus for the kind of science fiction which he wanted to promote in the pages of *Astounding Science Fiction* he suggested that the work of the sf writer should consist of adopting imaginary innovations as hypotheses and then attempting to infer in a logical manner how these innovations would affect the society into which they were born. It is not often realised how difficult this task is – the transformations which social institutions undergo in consequence of technological innovations are often subtle and by no means immediately

obvious to the people whose behaviour is regulated by those institutions. Because it is by no means easy for us to understand how our own lives have been affected by particular innovations (and *are* being affected thereby) in terms of straightforward chains of cause-and-effect it is very difficult for us to work out hypothetical examples in any real detail. It was easy enough for the writers of proto-science fiction to imagine airships, television sets and atom bombs, but it was not at all easy for them to predict what implications these discoveries would have for the behaviour of individuals and patterns of social change. This cannot really be held against them, as we ourselves quickly get into difficulties when we try to assess exactly what effects these innovations *have had*, and what contribution they have made to modern ways of thinking. Writing science fiction according to the Campbellian prospectus requires an imaginative competence that few writers possess.

The writer who succeeds in living up to the demands of this prospectus is likely to find further difficulties which arise in consequence of his achievement. When the task is performed well much of the work that goes into it becomes almost invisible. All the changes which the author makes in the fabric of his extrapolated society come to seem – as, of course, they must – entirely natural. The true science fiction novel, in these terms, is a novel which seems so realistic and coherent that it hardly *seems* to be imaginative at all. Nevertheless, such a novel – on the rare occasions that it turns up – represents an imaginative *tour de force*. *Vertigo* is such a novel.

Vertigo is a sequel to a short story called "A Little Night Flying", and is set in a society of the near future which has been transformed by the invention of an anti-gravity harness which gives human beings the power of flight. The invention is subject to a series of limitations which prevent more spectacular applications, so that its primary function is to give individuals the freedom of the air – it will not lift starships. The lapse of time between the initial sketch and the novel gave the author every opportunity to think about the possible consequences of his hypothesis and to work them through quite thoroughly. There is not an element of the background out of place, and in its representation of the psychological and sociological effects of the invention the novel is utterly convincing – a product of the finest imaginative craftsmanship.

The narrative deals with the problems faced by Robert Hasson, a policeman grounded by a serious accident, who has lost his nerve as well as his good health. Sent to Canada to recuperate, he becomes embroiled in a tense situation involving a crusade undertaken by a local businessman against a gang of delinquent flyers, which eventually flares up into violence. Hasson first has to fight his way back to health and regain his competence to deal with the fraught social relationships which he establishes with his hosts and their neighbours. Gradually, he is forced to take a hand in attempting to control the burgeoning vendetta, and has to take a leading role in repairing the damage when things get out of hand. The climax of the story takes place in a burning hotel four hundred metres above ground-level. Here he must conquer his anxieties in no uncertain terms, and must recover the freedom which he has lost.

Because the plot is concerned with the actions of ordinary people involved with small-scale problems it seems as natural as the background against which it is set, encouraging the illusion that the novel is on the borderline of science fiction. But this *is* an illusion, because everything in the book – including the psychology which motivates the characters to act as they do – is in some way dependent upon the single technological innovation which is the novel's basic hypothesis. Those who expact science fiction novels to launch forth from modest hypotheses into vast panoramas of infinite possibility may find the book a little restrained, but this should not prevent their appreciating its artistry and revelling in the occasional

lyrical passages which describe in compelling fashion the experience of flying as high as it is possible to go into the darkening sky, in fulfilment of an ancient dream.

Science fiction readers complain bitterly – and justifiably – about the attitude of one or two bigoted literary critics who have used the curious argument that if a book is good it therefore cannot be science fiction, which is by definition artless. While rejecting this argument, it may still be advisable to note that there *is* some sf whose appeal depends upon its artlessness, and also that when sf of the extrapolative variety really *is* good, then it acquires a gloss of naturalism which does indeed make it seem (*seem* being the operative word) rather unlike the bulk of sf. *Vertigo* is, essentially, a modest novel, and modesty is not very common in science fiction, but this must not lead us to mistaking it for lack of ambition. *Vertigo* is ambitious, and fulfils its ambitions very well. It is a fine novel, and it is science fiction through and through.

Make us Happy
by Arthur Herzog *(Thomas Crowell, 1978, 247pp, $8.95, ISBN 0 690 01460 0)*

reviewed by John Clute

You're watching a shoddily-made film and there is a kind of depression that comes over you which is not merely the depression of seeing dreck after having paid for it but something rather more interesting perhaps, a depression that comes from realizing just how very difficult it is going to be to understand just *why* this movie is so very bad. A weariness of spirit comes over you at the thought of articulating the badness of the sets with their Tesco lighting so that "nightclubs" look like Neasden godslots, at delineating the deep irrational poverty of the storyline, at mentioning the conflicting acting styles, and so forth, and so on, and so on. Words begin to fail. But there is one thing interesting about this depression, because it does tell you something about the nature of some kinds of badness, because some badness is like evil in some views of the world: It is a lack; it is an absence of good. Which is why *you* have to do the film's work for it; to get at what's bad, you have to supply cognitions of what might be good, that is, *real*. You have to do the film's work for it. Because a film makes multifarious demands on various senses and apprehensions of reality, this task of creation is (for me) most readily apprehensible as a rendering of the action of movie-going. But of course the same job is demanded of the reader by a bad book, one for instance as bad as Arthur *(The Swarm)* Herzog's sophomoric, jokey, interminable hambone of a dystopian jape, *Make Us Happy*, all about an America a thousand or so years hence, long after computers have had their day of Ascension and have taken over from humans, making the world they rule as uniform, bland, lifeless and manipulable as possible, natch. It is a bad book. It is an absence of good. It is unreal.

And it would be doing the author's job for him to try to make articulate the generic assumptions shaping *Make Us Happy*, though a brief attempt does follow. It is not a *novel* as such, nor a *romance*, nor any variety of fiction whose sense of givenness of the world, or verisimilitude, runs from the rooted thingness of the one to the shrill kinetic lubricity of thingness of the other. At its level of competence, *Make Us Happy*'s fiction-like attributes are intentionally made transparent to the arguments about the world – however buffoon-like they may be – which its author wishes to present; *Make Us Happy* then, and very obviously, is a utopian

fiction. It is a dystopia, a very bad one. Because Herzog has failed to provide himself with any kind of Visitor to his automated, kinky urban America, however, he has been forced to plot his joke-analysis of how America came this cropper through the investigations into the past of his main protagonist, Bil, so that much of the book is taken up with Bil's answering of questions about the world – questions no one in the dystopia would realistically be expected to be able to phrase, nor Bil to answer by recourse to libraries of heavily censored books. A topos of the verisimilitudinous sf romance – hero quests for and discovers secret of world he lives in – has been imposed upon a structure – the discussion utopia – which cannot sustain it, nor was ever intended to. We are told by the shape of the book not to succumb to action topoi, but at the same time are forced to read a text whose surface is only comprehensible in precisely those terms. The result is an insuperable tediousness.

Bil and Alce and Ralp Nadir Nth and Dian, the four protagonists, are therefore the arrow of discourse and its target both, and it doesn't wash. Bil is the last Communist Capitalist (or Comcap), and Ralp Nadir Nth the last Environmental Liberal (or Enlib), and their arguments about who betrayed who to let the computers in provide much of the "action" of the discussions which fill the narrative up. The explanations Bil dredges up comprise a series of low sarcasms, and are obviously intended to demonstrate the notional character of the world described. After humans have come close to self-destruction, computers have been asked to take over and to make us happy. They do this by a series of joke reductions in human choice and variety – genetic engineering has reduced humans to a few types; because of sex discrimination, women are now larger than men; as human aspirations caused so much trouble, everyone is now expected to adhere to self-deprecating maxims about human endeavour and so forth; as divorce had become such a problem, marriage has been made illegal, and so forth. All swearwords are disenfranchised except the computer-devised *fusb*, which Herzog must repeat three hundred times in the course of the book. Bil thinks of himself as a revolutionary, persuades the others to co-conspire, they are all sent to a Floating Island as punishment, escape, find the hole where the computers live; Bil discovers the computers' secret: They had conspired with Ralp Nadir Prime to take over humankind; Ralp Nadir Prime, in his search for personal immortality, had wedded himself to them, and his personality remains at the bottom of the computer pit, complaining and still not properly immortal: He is a sort of golem, for whom Bil refuses to pull a convenient lever to make him fully animate. "Make us human," the computer-cum-Ralp Nadir Prime cries as Bil and his pals go back to the surface to start democracy off again, and so forth.

So ultimately, after you wade through interminable gabfests (Herzog is a worse writer than W.H. Mallock by far), after obediently abandoning the pleasures of fiction for the thin air of the discussion group, you're presented with a sour sarcastic incompetent nada nada by the text, and find you have learned nothing about the human condition, nor have you been told a story. And even the task of finding out you'd been cheated was all yours. You did all the work.

The Chain of Chance
by Stanislaw Lem *(Secker and Warburg, 1978, 179pp, £4.50, ISBN 0 436 24418 7)*

reviewed by Lee Montgomerie

To call a book *The Chain of Chance* (however much more appeal it may have than

the original Polish title of *Cattarrh*) is to fail to convince the reader that anything but the most damnable series of coincidences could have caused the bizarre and mysterious deaths of eleven middle-aged, balding, allergic, arthritic, single foreigners holidaying in Naples. Is this novel, then, a specimen of that most disappointing breed of mystery story: the whodunit where the final answer is "nobody"? Does it just manage to slip in under the net of sf because the ageing, balding, hayfeverish, rheumatic, unattached, expatriate protagonist is an ex-astronaut, the story is set in a little-changed near future, and its resolution is much concerned with pharmacology and probability theory? Or is it a fictionalised dissertation on the nature of coincidence: theories about which have lately become a cunning weapon, aimed by Jung, primed by Kammerer and fired wildly in all directions by Koestler, of those who would encourage our belief that there is more to us than chemistry and physics; that the outsiders that occasionally come in against enormous odds are steeds bearing messages of even more massive import: the co-operation of inanimate objects with the subconscious mind, the overlooked possession of paranormal powers, the signs of purpose behind the random workings of evolution to produce the supremely vain animal: the one that believes that the immense and marvellous universe was created for its own benefit?

Such thoughts do not even enter the superlatively rational mind of Lem's ex-astronaut-by-chance-turned-detective as he follows his hypersensitive nose across Europe in search of the keys to the mystery, suffering terrorist bomb outrages, hallucinatory horrors and irritating authority figures with an undifferentiated stolid calm. Lem's thesis of coincidence is far less sensational, but one with real implications for the modern world: a world in which the random accretion of incidents has reached the intensity of a saturation bombardment, and it is couched in acutely precise and lucid prose, a quantum leap away not only from the wheedlings and blarings of the proponents of coincidence as the eternal, all-purpose tangential proof of the crackpot theory, but from the antics and semantics of Lem's own recent cosmic comedies. *The Chain of Chance* is set not in the runaway universe on which Tichy, Klapacius and Trurl work their endless, gratuitous chronological and cosmological arrangement, but in an inner spacetime so undistorted that the clocks keep perfect time with ours, and so quiet that one can hear every tick. Details proliferate, the crossword-puzzle plot unriddles marvellously to a solution so comprehensive that it even accounts for the existence of the book, and through it all streams the nose and consciousness of an irresistibly engaging narrator; but Lem is a craftsman who performs so dazzlingly in the gushing headwaters of the sf genre that it is inevitably a disappointment that he has chosen this time to man his craft in the placid reaches adjoining the Mainstream.

Web
by John Wyndham *(Michael Joseph, 1979, 187pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 7181 1797 2)*

reviewed by Ashley Rock

This book is an event of some importance in the world of sf. It has appeared ten years after Wyndham's death, a previously unpublished novel written at the end of the decade in which his most celebrated works were produced. We are told that the delay is due to the fact that *Web* was still under revision at the time of the author's death. I shall hazard a guess or two at the sections which seem weak

enough to have been of concern to Wyndham, largely to push them out of the way and allow me to comment on the major part of the novel which I find most impressive – the work of a master craftsman who can write a deceptively simple story that slowly builds up a sense of menace, and who theorises variedly, through the speculations of a lady biologist, about the dangerous behaviour of a horde of spiders while skilfully tantalising us by refusing to commit himself to a definitive explanation.

A small island called Tanakuatua lies temptingly in a remote area of the Pacific. Its inhabitants have had some contact with the British, largely formal but not overtly unfriendly, until they are removed, with a few exceptions, when an atom bomb is due to be exploded in the sea, with the potential danger of fall-out dust. The handful who choose to stay are led by Nokiki, the head medicine-man. He believes that to abandon a haven sacred to the most powerful of the gods is blasphemy; he is painted with the red spider, the totem of his clan, dons the full ceremonial ornaments of his office, casts a terrible tabu on the island and kills himself on the altar, after which his four companions sail away. When the islanders are permitted to return they refuse to do so because of the curse and so, although aerial photographs show what appears to be an inexplicable heavy mist over much of the forest, the island appears fertile and uninhabited, and is bought by a millionaire who equips a Project to found a New Utopia, largely to bring himself eternal fame.

When the pioneers have laboured to set up their base they gradually become aware that the "mist" is in reality a thick maze of webs, and that the forest is the stronghold of myriads of spiders, which combine to acquire food. They are not monsters in the "pulp horror" sense; dissection shows that there is no physical variation from a known order that is mildly poisonous, but their corporate behaviour becomes terrifying. The resolution of the contest is for the reader to discover.

I referred earlier to a few weaknesses in *Web*. My view conflicts with the *Guardian* critic, who describes the book as "the perfect apocalyptic fable" of man's failure to restructure himself, considers Lord Foxfield "wise" and talks of the spiders as "deciding to move on". My own interpretation is that Wyndham's constant preoccupation is with the knife-edge nature of man's supremacy in nature and how easily it can be imperilled by freakish change in other life forms or competition with aliens. Camilla, the expedition's biologist, is the sage, not the financier, and she scorns the talk of "men like gods" and says, "Man, with his capacities, is as much the product of nature as were the dinosaurs with theirs. He is an instrument of natural processes." If this is the true theme the first chapter is somewhat ponderous and curiously old-fashioned, dealing at some length with the ambition and confused idealism of Lord Foxfield and the organisation of the Project, only partially redeemed by a touch of dry humour. Equally the final chapter, a tidying exercise, is expendable in comparison with the brilliantly abrupt conclusion to a similar situation in *Lord of the Flies*. The two main characters would have gained a dimension if the sexual implications of enforced intimacy had been mentioned, if only negatively in terms of the detumescent effect of a sinister state of siege. And there are too many premonitory chapter endings of the "little did they reck what doom lay ahead" order.

Whether my speculations about the parts of the book still under revision after seven years are valid or not, the episodes on Tanakuatua are a *tour de force*. The spiders do not loom like the triffids, there is no alien strangeness as in *The Kraken Wakes* or *The Midwich Cuckoos*, and the fact that there is no visible anatomical change is the more disturbing. The description is simple, limpid prose. Of the first hunting pack on the beach we are told, "The brown patch was irregular in shape, looking as if it had been spilt there. It was sliding slowly across the beach in our direction. It suggested something seen under a low-powered microscope, an enor-

mous amoeba flowing across the sand." The final full siege runs, "They crowded in a stirring, shimmering line along the outer edge of the belt we kept sprayed. When one went close the stirring ceased. They stood as closely as pebbles on a beach, and as motionless. To the eye alone they were inert enough to be dead. It was something more than the eye which gave the feeling of the spring coiled tight, the spark withheld, immobility at high tension."

A special quality of *Web* lies in the area of speculation, which Wyndham implicitly leaves to the reader for resolution. Was the change in the nature of the spiders due to atomic fall-out, Nokiki's curse, or was it an evolutionary adaptation to circumstances of high fecundity, few enemies and shortage of food? Is there an empathy, however slight, between the islanders of the spider clan and their "Little Sisters" to whom they return to afford help? Life on the island is ultimately destroyed, apparently by a volcanic eruption but more probably by a fusion bomb; yet millions of baby spiders have been blown across the sea, enmeshed in columns of web carried by thermals. The vast majority will drown, but will sufficient numbers reach a destination which they can turn into a base for survival and ultimate attack? Is the transition of behavioural pattern from a solitary nature to hunting in packs classifiable as intelligence? These spiders cross a ravine by allowing threads to wave in the breeze until one finds anchorage on the other side. A spider crosses, adding a strand, to be followed by the others, each contributing to the silken bridge. The biologist thinks that this technique may lead to the building of fishing nets, equates it with the "corporate sensitivity" of ants, acknowledges it to be "a very significant and successful evolutionary development", but is reluctant to call it "mind", and would have given short shrift to the critic's concept of the spiders as "deciding to move on", which implies reasoning even before the change.

The subtle blending of idealism and uncertainty personified by the narrator and careful analysis with a refusal to make unverified assumptions coming from the trained mind of Camilla, makes the arachnid change uncomfortably convincing. The pedestrian nature of the first and closing chapters, as well as lack of development in characterisation, mar the book; but if the episode on the island falls short of being a masterpiece, it is only by the breadth of a silken thread.

Anticipations
edited by Christopher Priest *(Faber, 1978, 214pp, £4.60, ISBN 0 571 11207 2; Scribner's, 1978, 214pp, $8.95, ISBN 0 684 15634 2)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Christopher Priest (now sf's oldest young anthologist?) totes a very mixed bag, assembled, he says, as a collection of writers rather than stories. Certainly the stories have practically nothing in common. The title, I presume, only means that publishers still believe sf is all about the future. In order of appearance, then:

Ian Watson risks a time-travel story and pulls it off with his customary assurance. I don't think anyone should attempt a time-story unless he's going to acknowledge all the obvious paradoxes and find some way of coping with each. Watson unfolds every implication with an astuteness to rival Borges, managing to be both preposterous and utterly convincing. He even tells us, at last, where time machines must draw their power from. A fine story, whether you take it primarily for its Carrollian joke value, its labyrinthine logicality, or its unanswerable statements on the limits

of human understanding.

Robert Sheckley's fantasy whisks us right back to the fifties, or some time when crude things like this actually wowed the readers of *F&SF*. It equally resembles those little moral tales of the supernatural that Marvel Comics once used to fill spare pages at the back of the issue, suitably captioned: "Eddie bought the *binoculars* to spy on the *girls* across the *street* – but the things they showed him were just *impossible* – or *were* they?" Ho hum.

Bob Shaw contributes a parable about a neo-Attenborough documenting Life off Earth, with film of alien beasts devouring each other. "When you point your camera at any creature you make it special," says the naturalist's girlfriend. "You enlist the sympathy of millions of viewers." For once Shaw's camera fails to click; his characters refuse to come to life, and his plot holds scant interest. In fact, its contrivances only fudge the delicacy of the ethical issues he's trying to engage. Complete with a preaching super-saviour from another world, it's surprisingly pious, and surprisingly poorly written.

Christopher Priest's own story, "The Negation", relates an encounter between a young conscript and his heroine, a middle-aged novelist on a residency in his remote and snowbound border town. Contained in the story is the observation that a writer's discussion of his own work can interfere with the reader's direct experience of it: perhaps this is what happens to "The Negation", so that it works only in theory. Dik's life as a regimented nobody patrolling a freezing wall is well described, but he can extend that life by applying his reading of Moylita Kaine's novel, compounded with her own explanation of it. Though we hear much about it and even get a synopsis, nothing compensates for the fact that we can't read that novel, so Dik's experience remains too detached for us to appreciate its significance, and the dreamlike conclusion merely makes it vaguer. It could be intentional, but I think the story's proposition is Communication, not Incommunicability, and it's only half there.

Harry Harrison bangs in a chirpy piece of nonsense about a future world where impoverished nations send spies to Ireland to discover the secret of her new power source. In lighter mood Harrison has always had more than a kiss of the blarney himself: it's impossible to criticise at all.

Thomas M. Disch's "Mutability" will undoubtedly be even better in the novel he extracted it from. Subtle, oblique, but never annoyingly so, he has the ability to keep the sf background stuff – 2097 and widespread immortality – *in* the background and portray people for whom it is the ordinary, the everyday. This doesn't acknowledge half of his virtues, among which is the skill of trimming prose to perfection, writing neither more nor less than he needs to. In this respect his story stands out from most of the others here.

J.G. Ballard offers no surprises. "This curious threesome – the aircraft salesman, the provincial film critic in his late forties, and the young wife ten years his junior, a moderately successful painter of miniatures – sat in this well-appointed villa beside a long-forgotten battleground as if unsure what had brought them here" – apparently, the desire to finish off World War II, still boiling on some secret level of David Ogden's mind. It's an old familiar Ballard scene, the wife and lover watching from a distance while the protagonist gallops grinning down the twilit corridors of deep psychosis. As such, it's a little dull for the Ballard habitué: obsession with too few variations seems to be the danger. Always a writer of the moment, Ballard has exchanged the moody glamour and cosmic whisperings of his sixties fiction for a sparse, grim, seventies monochrome version.

Brian W. Aldiss's "A Chinese Perspective" is less anarchic than most of his Zodiacal Planet stories. He returns to the image of the Prediction Machine for

another wistful look at the odds on determinism and randomness in human behaviour. The plot development depends on two things that perhaps will not bear the weight of believing: one, that Edward Maine would still identify himself so completely with the Western mentality after spending most of his life on another planet; the other, that Tao, "Mandarin etiquette", and a large body of Chinese tradition will be flourishing several centuries hence – indeed, that China will "get by without mechanization". That this looks especially implausible now is not just a quibble of history; it makes Aldiss's China rather more of a fairyland than it should. Some of these landscapes already feel a little dated. These weaknesses in the dialectic disappear, however, in an abundance of decorative detail, which Aldiss has been producing more and more of late. As a perspective, then, on two contrasting and complementary states of the human soul, it comes clear and looks good.

As anthologies go this is fair enough: though too many of the contributors seem to be writing under par, its great variety gives the impression of having read a volume rather larger than its actual size, and of skimming the breadth of present sf in doing it.

Cirque
by Terry Carr *(Fawcett, 1978, 223pp, $1.75, ISBN 0 449 23556 4; Dobson, 1979, 187pp, £4.25, ISBN 0 234 72111 1)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

Considering the incredible fuss that is routinely made about the "long awaited first novel" by x, y and z, this first novel by veteran anthologist (*and* short story writer) Terry Carr has slipped by like a ship in the night. True, it came third in the Nebula poll for best novel but one could reasonably expect this, given Carr's prominence in the sf field and the routine nomination patterns. Yet who has actually *said* very much about the book? We all chorus *"Gateway!"* (in a manner of speaking), but who whispers *"Cirque"*?

I have a theory about this. It is that *Cirque* is actually a perfect book – a work of perfect craftsmanship – and that it's very difficult to review a perfect book. One just tends to read it, relish it, absorb it. Then pass on.

On autumnal Earth, to the beautiful city of Cirque whose inhabitants are all linked by a holistic monitor who broadcasts whatever citizen's experiences and visions are intuited to be germane to the lives of all, to a city whose beauty is juxtaposed with the "abyss" into which the River Fundament drains and where all sins are believed to be dumped, comes a "foreigner", a millipede from Aldebaran, to witness an epochal event which it alone (with its time perception) knows will certainly happen on that very same day: the eruption of evil-become-flesh from the abyss and its transfiguration which will transform old Cirque into a place of pilgrimage for all millipedes . . .

Gradually the lives of the holopath monitor, and fat Nikki who has taken a personality-schism pill, and her fire-sculptor lover, and the fire priestess, a teacher and one of his pupils who is practising her negatives today, the lady Captain of the Guard and her lover, and the millipede circle around each other like coloured ribbons round a maypole, tightening into a kaleidoscopic whole. For *Cirque* is a circle that comes around full turn back to its opening scene, one day later – and a masque. It is a dance of characters about a central point that brings them all together within classically observed unities of time and space (with the holopathic monitor providing

"unity of manner"), resolving and revivifying their lives. And this central point is the metaphysical enigma of what life means, approached through a questioning of time and causation, good and evil – yet handled, as in a masque, with such vivid tableaux as the fire service, the shooting of the rapids of the River Fundament, the "entry into Jerusalem gate" of the alien millipede, the descent into the abyss.

The whole is so well balanced and modulated that the book becomes a holistic thing itself; so that perhaps criticism has shied away, and the book is simply experienced by the reader. Can a book succeed so perfectly that people don't notice it?

Wyst: Alastor 1716
by Jack Vance *(DAW, 1978, 222pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 87997 413 3)*

reviewed by Pauline Jones

This volume is the third in the Alastor series. The Alastor Cluster of stars sheds light on thirty thousand worlds. All are swayed by one man: the Connatic. He is an elusive, muttered against, but seemingly benevolent autocrat, with immense powers of direction and redress at his command.

> At your first move I will touch two buttons.
> The first will destroy you through robot sensors, the second will call down the Whelm.

The Whelm is the might of the Connatic, used sparingly, when he is compelled to gunboat diplomacy. Vance evinces this force by hints and rumours until it finally appears at the climax of the plot.

In Alastor Cluster things are well, by and large. Within this order, individual lives are as passionate and turbulent as may be. Vance seems to value authority more as a sanction than a presence. In his worlds, the individual does best to seek his own path, settle his own accounts, and, he seems to warn, experience is but wastefully confused with injustice. It isn't that people are not perfectible, but that all opinions are worth some respect; nothing is absolute. There is an inevitability of gradualness, but Vance's figures of authority exhibit (up to a point) a permissive inscrutability in their judgments and valuations, reminiscent of 19th century Liberalism. The best government keeps out of the way. Yet within and from beyond this there is a hidden order.

In all of Vance's work one senses this order working through events, and hidden forces which do not monitor to judge, but rather to evolve. Institutions, actions, opinions are their almost blind instruments. There appears to be an endorsement of a sort of wagon train decency, but apart from that, Vance seems to spread his palms up at the mystery. This is well, since, having no axe to grind but rather interests to follow, he is only partly hampered by scruples irrelevant to his talents.

These talents seem to have evolved and Vance's application of them has moved from sorcery, through space adventure, to works of some socio-anthropological intricacy. In these, as is the case with the current Alastor Series, the development and aspirations of youth are counterpointed with an examination of an unusual or opaque and complex society.

Art and artifice, of some variety, has often been a recurrent strand in Vance's output and frequently his youthful heroes have something of creative remark about them. In the present book, a restless young man with painterly leanings, sets out from his rurally quiescent home world to the Planet of Wyst and its great conur-

bation of Arrabus, where millions live a life of semi-idleness and idle diversion. Obsolescent machines and systems are maintained on a rota of duty which demands from everyone a few hours "drudge" per week. There is no natural food, only dreary synthetics and a whole subculture of gourmandising and bootlegging. Contractors from the ruined and witch-rumoured lands beyond the city build their own petty empires on the exorbitant fees they charge the lazy and de-skilled utopians for essential but onerous services. Arrabus approaches the centenary of its foundation and at the same time drifts toward socio-economic crisis. The Connatic is invited to the festivities. He and these are the focus of a murderous but ingenious conspiracy into which stumbles the water-colourist hero.

I have the impression, looking at other works of Vance, that he is sometimes wearied of the need to end books well or at least to end with as much panache as he unfolds them. Although at times this has made him a somewhat drop-ended maker of novels, it has not seriously detracted from his good points which rest in the expression of atmosphere and landscape, in irony with dialogue. The effect is essentially meditative, for all that the books may comprise fast-moving actions. In the present volume however, he has managed to keep the plot working too.

In his books of "youthful tribulation" the hidden order has manifested itself at the narrative level as a shadowy or charismatic helper/mentor who takes a hand when the hero has been tried to desperation. In the present work this figure has his epiphany at a critical moment in the guise of a plenipotentiary of the Connatic. One then knows not only that all will be okay, but how. The great sanction is to be invoked. The light yoke will come down heavily on the malefactors who subvert the acceptable limits. Yet here again there is no moralizing. A justice is imposed in the spirit of sympathetic magic and for the sake of example. A basic stricture is that the community is not destroyed. Things are taken in hand with patience and economy to reify a status quo which, in Vance's view, is the prerequisite of gradualness and which conserves diversity and its potential.

It appears then that justice is no end, but is a striking instrument of encouragement. There are no final forms or standards, however sturdily authoritarian are the views expressed by protagonists. It is a *laissez-faire* cosmos but with an inbuilt mechanism of come-uppance; it is, in fact, aesthetic rather than moral; and yet cynicism is somehow avoided. Perhaps this is because his worlds are depicted with an appreciative wryness which, in his best passages, is almost devoid of special pleading and underlaid with optimism.

Such *laissez-faire* and life positivity is unfashionable. It does not engender pained analysis or the searching of entrails, but it requires and generates narrative. An aesthetic viewpoint tends to place the responsibility for characters fairly upon their own shoulders. Life goes on, not in spite of tragedies, but because of everything. If there is nothing to be *done* there is nothing to be mourned or maundered over beyond its effects on contiguous events. This optimistic relativism leads to a lot of the humour in Vance, a humour that is very broad but much in words and turns of phrase. While he places a whole gamut of verbiage, from mysticism to scatology, in the mouths of his characters, he often commands a multiple dramatic irony. His situations are far from the dignity or rotundity of the language of description and dialogue in which they inhere. The most squalid is humourized in rounded sentences. Rarely can the self-interest of characters have been made so patent with such affection. There is sometimes a whiff of Restoration comedy or the balanced astringency of the Augustans. Beyond this ironic play lies a landscape of strangeness and beauty which, like a laughing echo, further reduces the self-importance of characters and satirizes their self-insistence. This ironic play sometimes has the effect of binding complex narrative into images of mouthing, gesturing figures, preposterous yet

memorable, with an envelope of strange light. Vance's perspectives are often adjusted to a surreal otherness, but his worlds are overlaid with a romantic excitement about distance. From this duality of sensibility in character and setting, stock figures and landscapes are redeemed by the very shortcomings of their familiarity. It is a picaresque yet introverted world, an odd meditation, in which the onlooker is deprived of a focus, like a chinese landscape painting.

The present volume has these qualities to advantage. It has also a less fertile contradiction which betrays an uneasiness on Vance's part, encumbering his chances as a novelist. He appears to find it impossible to carry his sophisticated, ironical vision into his treatment of the tender affections. When women occur in the narrative, as incident or sinister protagonist, all is well.

> The girl picked up her handbag. "Off to bed for me, I'm too tired even to copulate." "I know those days . . . well, I suppose I'd better be earning my gruff."

However, when true love rears its blushing head, the hero emerges as ardent or bashful and the heroine conventionally, if modestly charming. Hearts beat high and interludes are stock romance, even if consummated. Now all this would be less puzzling, but of greater disgrace, if it arose from some conviction of Vance's about what sells. For what might be called stock romance actually takes place both in and out of books, and no harm done. With Vance it often assumes a sort of sub-Daphnis-and-Chloe naivety and charm. Even so, once he departs from his ironies, Vance is not quite clear as to how he should or does feel about things. And even if he were sure, the two sensibilities set one's teeth on edge, like a man wearing jeans and a bowler hat. His irony is too rich for his "romance" to appear authentic. This incongruity is patent and flawing. If the irony were merely in the mouths of characters, one might search elsewhere for the key to Vance's position. But it is faintly dyed into the whole fabric of the narrative and must originate in the outlook of the author. Time and again he is capable of far more than mish-mash, the manifestation of which not only denatures his aesthetic/comic cosmos, but renders his treatment of character conservatively decent at just those testing points where his robustness might transcend blueberry pie. Perhaps Jack Vance is too proper for his talents.

Profundis
by Richard Cowper *(Gollancz, 1979, 171pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 575 02600 6)*

reviewed by D. West

Humour is not something generally associated with sf. Perhaps this is part of the self-defensiveness implicit in a ghetto mentality. Science fiction is supposed to be *serious*, and its supporters are inclined to bristle when anyone laughs. Satire is accepted (and even approved as providing the genre with recognisable literary credentials) and parody from within the field is also tolerated, in much the same way that Jews are allowed to make anti-semitic jokes. But the broader sort of humour – that disrespectful jesting which operates upon nothing more specific and important than the ridiculous gap between humanity's hopes and its actual success-rate – is much less commonly seen.

Profundis is a comic novel of sorts – but Richard Cowper does not seem to have been able to decide *which* sort. There are elements of satire, of irony, of parody and of plain old knockabout farce, but the overall impression is not so much of versatility as of a failure to settle on any clear plan. The result is a novel

which is mildly entertaining but also more than mildly irritating, since at the end of it the reader is likely to wish the author had not skimmed so many surfaces but had rather plumbed some particular area of the deep with all of his skill and attention.

The *Profundis* of the title is a vast nuclear submarine which cruises the oceans submerged, waiting for the day when post-holocaust radiation levels subside enough to make the surface inhabitable again. Horatio Prood, maddest of a long line of mad captains, decides he is God and with the help of Proteus, the ship's sentient computer, resolves to re-enact the sacrifice of his Beloved Son . . . Tom Jones, Mammal (Aquatic) Communicator Grade 3, happens to fit the part, and as a result is precipitated into a series of unlikely adventures which take him the length and breadth of the small world of the ship, bring out his latent psi powers, and ultimately provide everyone with a somewhat different destiny.

There are openings here for satire on authority, on religion, on militarism, on the good old sf cliches of the closed-system world, the omnicompetent computer and the lone hero who discovers Strange Talents and saves the universe . . . But though the scenery is set up often enough, the actors are given no real lines to deliver. The parallel with the New Testament remains simply a parallel, with little more to it than the obvious and superficial ironies and amusements of spotting the equivalent characters in the transplanted plot.

The deliberate adaptation of an old and familiar story is a somewhat cynical device which has been used by many writers, both sf and mainstream. Zelazny and Delany plunder classical mythology, and more people than one cares to count rip off large chunks of such as Homer, Dante, and more modern masters. The trick is simple: flatter the reader. Let him pick up the carefully planted allusions and he will feel pleased with his own discernment and therefore generally in charity with the author. (The critics will be even happier – without stretching their brains too far they are given easy openings for fine displays of erudition.)

Of course, use of this mechanism can be legitimate on occasions. The recast version may uncover new ironies and insights in its contrasts with the original, and there are always straightforward dramatic possibilities in the shock of giving an old story a new twist. Unfortunately, the comic and ironic possibilities in the *Profundis* version of the New Testament strike the reader more as missed opportunities than as visible achievements. The author *could* have made considerable use of such material, but to assume on that account that he *has* done so would be to take the wish for the deed.

There are other, less readily identifiable echoes. The ferocious Sergeant Major Goff dimly calls to mind Deathwish Drang of Harry Harrison's *Bill, the Galactic Hero* – though perhaps he is simply the latest sf version of a stock joke figure: the bellowing, bristling, but basically harmless N.C.O. Bob Shaw's *Who Goes Here?* had earlier provided a neat burlesque of Harrison's Drang, himself a satire on Heinlein's crazy Starship Trooper original, so perhaps this makes Cowper's Goff a parody of a parody of a parody of a parody.

Another stock joke figure is the dotty commander, Horatio Prood. Known to his intimates as "Bunjie" he is a deranged upper-class twit straight out of P.G. Wodehouse or A.G. Macdonell. Cowper is known as a writer who is resolutely English, but here he seems to be not so much honouring tradition as digging it up for the purposes of a little necrophilia. In his dealings with minor characters he also comes very close to resurrecting the comfortable old notion (dear to the hearts of *Punch* readers for a century or more) that workers and the uneducated are innately funny. (Just for full measure there is also a character who talks pidgin Irish, an embarrassment sf readers are normally spared, except in Poul Anderson's epics of

ethnic mispronunciation). However, the author is saved from accusations of partiality by the fact that *all* his characters are either simpletons or buffoons. No class favouritism *here*.

The element of the picaresque and the naming of his chief character suggests that the author had in mind at least a distant gesture towards the work of Henry Fielding. However, Cowper's Tom Jones in no way resembles Fielding's lusty original. He is much closer to the Tom Pinch of Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* – that gutless pietistic prig so many readers must have longed to fetch a swift kick.

The choice is certainly deliberate – on the second page Tom abjectly acknowledges himself "a grovelling, snivelling, snotty-nosed coward" – and it is surely the book's most serious mistake.

Profundis is essentially the old story of the innocent who goes out into the wicked world and wins through to good fortune, having been protected by his purity while his enemies are confounded by their own base worldliness. The difference between Cowper's *Profundis* and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (a better example and a closer relation than *Tom Jones*) is that whereas the hero of the latter, though an innocent, shows spirit and a certain amount of good sense, Cowper's protagonist is given very little wit and shown as almost completely wet. His triumph comes only be default – the opposition is even less effectual. To those who argue that Tom's general spineless idiocy and the other characters' undistinguished foolishness are simpy up-to-date realism it must be pointed out that such "realism" is, in practical terms, misplaced. Casting an anti-hero in the lead role of a morality play is bound to lead to considerable difficulties of resolution, and the defeat of villains who are less than properly villainous (whether they are efficient or otherwise) is not a triumph likely to raise much interest or enthusiasm among the audience. In *Profundis* the characters and the form are constantly at odds with each other.

To say that this is a disappointing novel is perhaps to judge it by too severe a standard – scolding the author for failing to reach a mark at which he never aimed. All the same, it is difficult to avoid a sense of regret that so many juicy chances have been let slip so casually.

Perhaps *Profundis* is the victim of its author's own kindliness. It is a genial, airy book – too goodtempered and light for passion, or even any very strong disrespect. But humour – like beauty – is always a little painful in its results. Somewhere, someone gets hurt. Doubtless the characters of *Profundis* all lived happily ever after. The trouble is, the readers are not likely to care about it one way or the other.

A Little Knowledge
by Michael Bishop *(Berkley, 1978, 209pp, $1.50, ISBN 0 425 03671 5)*
Catacomb Years
by Michael Bishop *(Berkley/Putnam, 1979, 384pp, $10.95, ISBN 0 399 12255 9)*

reviewed by Andrew Kaveney

There is something incongruous about a serious-minded and highly-regarded young writer like Michael Bishop producing (in this novel and set of tales about spirituality and repression in the domed Atlanta, Georgia, of 2034 to 2074) a body of work which can be packaged by the publishers as a Future History. The sf series has, after all, been sniped at for some time now by responsible critics as an inherently unhealthy and inartistic form. Thus Joanna Russ tells us that the series lacks that sense of its

own completion intrinsic in its originating impulse which is a characteristic of art: "art ends (its final satisfaction) while escape – never quite satisfying enough – is condemned to tread over and over the same barren ground" (*F&SF*, Feb. 1979). The fierce anti-commercial integrity of this point of view implies all series are the pot-boilers that most of them undoubtedly are. But Ursula Le Guin and before her Cordwainer Smith have begun the rehabilitation of the Future History as a vehicle for discussion of humane ideas. For an earnest writer like Bishop, deeply concerned with fine moral discriminations and spiritual and political values, such a series is an obvious way to set up a continuing dialogue without having to paint a new backdrop each time.

At their best the stories are reinforced by the links between them. Our understanding of Julian Cawthorn, hero of *A Little Knowledge* and major participant in "Death Rehearsals", and of the values he represents is enhanced by our knowledge, from earlier stories, of his mother and grandmother. Such links can become merely worthy attempts at scoring points, however: the links between the outraged teenager Newlyn Yates in "The Mirrors in Dante's Hell" and the mature defector of "Allegiances" are purely contingent but they are placed as if crucially defining something that is wrong with Atlanta. There are points in most of the stories where Bishop's preoccupations begin to slip into timeworn grooves – the standard postures about the persecution of the nonconforming individual – but that has more to do with the writer that he is than with the specific of his using a series as a vehicle. The seriousness of the work as a whole is marred by the way it has been dressed up with an apparatus of chronologies and interludes which laboriously cross and dot the details of this future; the points that Bishop is trying to make are not assisted by the fitting of arbitrary dates to them.

The scenario for these tales is fairly simple and conventional. The major cities of a collapsing America retreat from the world and from each other under vast self-sufficient domes. Atlanta sinks further and further into individual neurosis and state repression, both typified by stodgy puritanism and vicious hostility towards social and scientific innovation. Finally, this inherently unstable society is disrupted by the impact of the world it has tried to ignore, by immortality research and by star travel. The better stories tend to cluster round this final crisis. "The Samurai and the Willows", in some ways the best, typifies earlier stresses without the necessary melodrama of the final resolutions. Instead of public action, it shows two modes of private revolt against Atlanta – one the literary neo-bushido of Fowler, typified by his bonsai willows and only effective when it becomes suicide, the other the brash street culture of his flatmate Georgia Cawthorn and the corps of messengers to which she belongs. This gimcrack nonconformity is ultimately destroyed by the state; Bishop only tells us about Georgia's murder, he does not try to show it. This raises an important point: Bishop is fairly reticent about the racial politics of Atlanta while making it clear that the majority of his rebels are black.

When disruption comes to Atlanta in the crisp and effective novel *A Little Knowledge* it is through a public act of spirituality. An alien visitor to the city acknowledges Christ as his personal saviour and asks to be received into the State Church. It is at this point in the cycle that Bishop starts to give Atlanta its due. The heroine of *A Little Knowledge* and secondary protagonist of "Death Rehearsals", Margot Eastwin, is a deacon in the State Church and accepts wholehartedly the professed values of Atlanta, even to the point of complicity in its repressive aspects. But she is portrayed sympathetically – in some ways, more sympathetically than Julian, a nonconformist but a trimmer. If the heavily-wrought quality of Bishop's work is anything to go by, the author finds it easier to empathize with priggish worth than with the morally lazy and frivolous. In "At the Dixy Apple with the Shoofly Pie Kid", he adopts the mask of Julian to write a story that Julian is

shown in *A Little Knowledge* as writing. The result is oddly stilted and discordant.

Bishop confounds our expectations at the climax of *A Little Knowledge* by forcing us to re-examine our complacent agnostic reactions to the religious consciousness shared by so many of the characters. Bishop Asbury Holman, the rawhide-clad ex-police sniper who accepts the conversion of the aliens in much the same way that he gives Christian burial to his favourite polo pony, is absurd, but he is as much a holy fool as he is the conventional corrupt revivalist cleric of sf. Ortho-urbanism may be a false religion, but we are made to contemplate the possibility that it shares insights with a true one. Julian is made to believe that one of the Cygnostikoi is the reincarnation of his irreverent grandmother and that the universe is one in which spirituality represents an aspect of reality. It is Margot who rejects their vision as irrelevant even if true. This is an ambitious topic for a novel as short as *A Little Knowledge* to tackle, but it is made to stick, if at the expense of some more than usually clotted prose.

In these books Bishop tackles demanding material with some success, but the disjointed and foggy prose in which he does it often stands in his way. He is too determinedly literary and will hold up a powerful scene for a conceit. He lacks much of the practical good sense that a writer so ambitious needs. What saves him from his own dogged worthiness, what makes his spiritual interests sympathetic and convincing, is the way in which he embodies them in a real concern for human individuals. In a piece in *Foundation* 14 he criticized the Panshins' demands for spiritual elevation at all costs, and declared himself, like Ursula Le Guin, more concerned with portraying "Mrs Brown". By their deep concern with character, both he and Le Guin succeed in making their political and moral concerns relevant to their readers. By making history something that happens to people we care about, they make their use of the sf series something more than a sterile heartless game.

Twilight of the City
by Charles Platt *(Berkley, 1978, 215pp, $1.75, ISBN 0 425 03832 7)*

reviewed by Lee Montgomerie

Platt's *The City Dwellers*, published in 1970, details in four disconnected novelettes the surrender of an unnamed metropolis to successive stages of entropy. It is written with a nervous, greedy fascination with the plastic texture, neon illumination, discordant beat and social sparkle of city life; a life in which substitutes transcend realities, for in *The City Dwellers*, it is universal impotence and consequent failure to breed which kills the city; industries failing as the population drops. The smart set are unable to keep up with their own overstimulating lifestyle, trendy ex-urbanites on a back-to-nature trip woefully mismanage a farm, peripatetic squatters scavenge the carcass of a stillborn housing estate, and the devolved, decaying and all but depopulated city finally meets its death at the hands of a theorist turned terrorist.

Twilight of the City seeks to unite these four novelettes into a single tale with minimal changes of plot by using the same characters throughout, and by doing so has had to condense the action into a few years, too few for the mechanism of population run-down used in the earlier book to be credible. Instead, the city dwellers find that the super-rich and the capitalist state have heedlessly plundered the future, squandered the proceeds and fled. The characters that emerge as Platt's hero and heroine are, in a small way, survivors; escaping the rapidly-collapsing city

before the peace-keeping forces can establish an event horizon around it, scraping a living on the land and from the food counters of deserted hypermarkets, re-establishing a quantum fluctuation of order in a near-Mediaeval rustic commune, and finally returning to hunt down and expunge the last few cells of the urban cancer in the decaying corpse of the metropolis.

Like the various protagonists of *The City Dwellers, Twilight*'s Michael and Lisa (he from the posturing, rhinestone-studded "suicide rock" scene; she fleeing the desperations of unemployment in the ghetto) are not a particularly likeable pair. The excess verbiage that makes *Twilight* half as long again as *Dwellers* is entirely devoted to their endless vanities, profanities, squabbles and callous courtship rituals of come-on and put-down, rendered in nauseating detail and without apparent irony. Indeed, the author seems actively to endorse their cruelty, crudity, cantankourousness and conceit as appropriate behaviour for the glittering, up-tempo social whirl of a society fast rotating into chaos.

Between them, *Dwellers* and *Twilight* offer no hope for the future. Unchecked growth is a fireball reducing resources to worthless ash; if growth ceases, the universe, no longer wound up by the mechanism of expansion, begins to run down. Entropy rules, and Platt's cities are wombs and tombs of gloom and doom whichever way the cosmos oscillates; but when the lights wink out and the beat goes off, one shares with Platt a greater admiration for the enduring bleak beauties of bare concrete than for the arrogant vermin with which he has populated it.

Beloved Son
by George Turner *(Faber, 1978, 375pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 571 11152 1; Sphere, 1979, 375pp, £1.25, ISBN 0 7221 8642 8)*

reviewed by Couze Venn

Beloved Son is George Turner's first venture into sf, and it is a commendably serious effort. The issues it addresses are the kinds of social arrangements and ideologies which would ensure, at a minimum, the survival of humanity in a peaceful, ordered, relatively happy world. This sounds ominously like a *roman à thèse*; the temptation, therefore, is to ask whether the author has got it right and to take him to task for his ideas rather than the way they function in the novel.

The context is familiar enough, since it has been the location of a good many sf stories: it is that of the post-Doomsday world. Many novels have dealt with the event itself and its sequel (*The Drought, Earth Abides*, etc, etc) and thus attempt to imagine what it would be like to live through that hellish experience. Other novels have depicted humanity trying to come to terms with an impossibly over-populated world, with super-pollution, or with unexpected calamities (*Make Room! Make Room!, The Sheep Look Up*, etc, etc).

Beloved Son assumes the inevitability of catastrophe as a premise. Turner does not recount the world's death spasms in detail but is happy simply to provide enough information so that we may follow the tale. He opts for a combination of the likely ills – that is, an explosive mixture of overpopulation, resource depletion, ecological damage and nuclear and biological warfare. The Five Days (as these events are referred to) climax a road already embarked upon. However, the destruction is selective and limited, partly because Turner believes the world does not quite wish to annihilate itself and partly because it simply runs out of steam. The world is left,

after this clearing of the decks of complicating details, with parts of several major powers: the United States, Russia, China, Europe (minus Great Britain) and Australia (Mr Turner is an Australian). There are also some nice reversals of political colours: the US, for example, turns communist.

The author explicitly rejects ideas of a return to feudalism, to "savagery", so typical of all those tales of marginal survival on the debris of the old civilization. Instead, the survivors smartly build a new improved technology – after all, we are told, the knowledge is *there*, in books (Popper lives, OK) – and a political system based on a worldwide "benevolent" security force advised by a few wise men from the old world. Everything seems fine until a crew of forgotten astronauts return home. These men, and the Commander in particular, are the instruments which enable Turner to question the society that has emerged, to tear out its submerged secrets, and in the process to rebuild it – though whether for better or for worse is a moot point.

In the course of this we discover the existence of human clones, "fathered" by the Commander before he left, and of a biological engineering complex buried in a nuclear shelter. In secret, the latter has been taking over the controls of society – through amazingly expert kids, mind-bending drugs and an efficient computer-aided police force. These elements set in motion a series of imaginative and interesting events which allow Turner to say a good deal about biological engineering, the ills of unchecked technology (that old thesis again), the basically redeemable character of youth (all they need is a mature guiding hand. . .) and Human Nature, which seems to be his forte.

The starmen are witnesses from the pre-Doomsday generation who have come to pass judgment on this ordered, heavily-policed and apparently peaceful world. They gradually emerge as the other face, the submerged side, of the new humanity: violent, selfish and fearful. Turner's thesis is that these are the deep-rooted features of what he calls human nature. Wilful modifications (e.g. through genetic engineering) cannot alter the facts; they can only amplify or suppress some of these features, often unpredictably. The conclusion is inevitable: Turner stage-manages a grand finale which has Security, the police and a secularized Christianity harnessing the enthusiasm of the young for the greater good of humanity.

The overall impression is one of unreality. The fact that the only activities and institutions described are those of the military in various guises amply confirms this. We fail to find out how the community really lives: its daily routines, its industries, how it grows its food, all the details which might help us understand it. In addition, I found some of the assumptions of the book very irritating – e.g. the assumed neutrality and autonomy of science and technology today, the mind-bending techniques, the belief that the world could be reconstructed from chaos in one generation, the remarks about youth and "human nature", and the absence of women (except in the role of the unfortunate instruments of some historical destiny). The ending is ambiguous. One is left wondering whether the astronaut-psychiatrist from the spaceship is really a symbol of the old era and has no place in the emerging society, or whether he is the (suppressed) conscience of the survivors and has to be cast off, literally, into space. One would like to think, at the end of *Beloved Son*, that this society fathered by the Police and Security to the tune of a revised Sermon on the Mount is an index of the next dark age to come. But given what the author says in between one cannot be sure.

I must say, though, that I found *Beloved Son* well-written, sometimes provocative, tense, tightly controlled and in some ways quite down to earth. These attributes make it a welcome relief from the deluge of unlikely escapist fantasy which passes for science fiction. But, for the reasons that I have stated, I found the story uncon-

vincing and lacking in the understanding (of politics, economics, scientific activity) and depth that might have made it a radically new contribution to the literature.

Blackpool Vanishes
by Richard Francis *(Faber, 1979, 191pp, £4.50, ISBN 0 571 11258 7)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

When Stone first saw the flying saucers from the Promenade, he assumed, as spotters usually do, that they were large and fairly high up, well above the famous Tower. Only then did he realize that they were in fact very tiny, just over an inch across and flying three feet above his head. Not that anyone else noticed them, of course; and even when Stone pointed them out to his employer he was merely told, somewhat brusquely, that they must be midges. Of course, if anyone had believed Stone at the time, he might never have written a poem about the event, or others on subsequent sightings every few years or so. And if he hadn't written the poems, and sent copies to the Foreign Office, James Aldridge of the Alien Beings Section would not have had the vital clue to the sudden disappearance, in the summer of 1976, of the entire town of Blackpool. But now that Aldridge is one of the most important men in the country, no one can reach him. He is under arrest, suspected of the savage murder of Barnet, his head of department. Meanwhile, the only other man to know the secret of the Stone Report, the mysterious Marcroft, is lying dead in the reading room of his London club – killed by a telephone call . . .

If all that seems a little old-fashioned, that's exactly the flavour of Richard Francis's curious first novel. Its populous cast have names like Tom Standish, Bill Caudle, and Miss Nym; when impelled to travel they board railway trains and find themselves in places called Boddington, spelled out in pansies on the station flowerbed, where the ticket collector wears a pocket watch. In a state of mild-mannered confusion ("'Good God', responded Wentworth, but left it at that") they wander through the plot, eddying helplessly round and round the bubble of nothing that once was Blackpool. Imagine the minor characters of mid-century English fiction given a novel all to themselves.

Blackpool Vanishes is a thoroughly English book; one might almost expect Michael Moorcock to enjoy parts of it. In one way I suppose it's in the tradition of the disaster novel – what Brian Aldiss has called the "cosy catastrophe". But, unlike Wyndham, Francis does not share the Englishman's illusions about himself, and if he writes gently he also writes acutely and mollifies nothing. This is backwater England: the fact is, nobody really takes much notice of the catastrophe. As they vanish, Blackpool's residents come over all queer for a bit; then, shaking their heads, turn back to their unfinished points. Later, when it's all over, they shuffle home to watch it on *Nationwide*. Aldridge, suddenly the man in the picture, finds that his daughter Bunty doesn't quite appreciate what's happening. "No doubt," he reflects, "she was like the rest of the general public in that respect"; and indeed she is. Stone was in his local when the first dimensional rupture was felt. "The effect had been so definite and distinct that the others had been forced to remark on it for once, although of course it drained out of their attention very rapidly through the holes provided for it."

Francis is very clear about holes. He portrays people as hollow men, characterizing them by their inadequacies: Aldridge, too lower-second to rise in the F.O.;

Pulse, apologising continually for an unintentional affair with his secretary; the Watts, whose marriage and dog have grown decrepit along with them. In a poem Stone calls the saucers "small holes/In the continuum" and later guesses, correctly, that the aliens have miniaturized Blackpool, sucked it through a tiny hole in the force-bubble, and hidden it in a hole in the ground.

Even our hero, Tom Standish, is a man of holes, a hero by default. Nothing to do with Blackpool or the Foreign Office, he approaches the disaster area to gratify a flutter of curiosity and stave off a habitual boredom. His only virtues are a vague sort of pragmatism and a wish not to get too caught up in everyone else's eddies: uninspired, but a likeable sort of chap. So are they all, all likeable sorts of chap.

So is Richard Francis, on this showing. And with all this English lukewarmth, it's difficult to emphasize how very cool and incisive he can be. What is even more difficult is to believe that he's a lecturer in American Literature with two years research at Harvard behind him. I've no idea who'll buy this book, but I hope someone will.

Stellar 4: Science Fiction Stories
edited by Judy-Lynn del Rey *(Del Rey, 1978, 230pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 345 27302 8)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

Strictly addict-fodder, this. Six indispensable fixes for those weaned on the sort of science fiction whose every story began with Captain Macho and his faithful assistant Schitz striding coolly into Galactic Security Central to be briefed on their next mission against the awful Drogons.

To be scrupulously fair, such a dismissal is a bit hard on the first story in the collection, a James Tiptree Jr piece called "We Who Stole The 'Dream'". This, although unexciting by external standards, stands out like a beacon amid *Stellar*'s waste of blockhead heroics in that it is actually *about* something. The story is reasonably well-worn: a slave race on a planet of the Terran Empire contrive to steal a spaceship and escape in it to that region of space, outside the Empire, where others of their race still live free and unmolested. The brutality of life under the Terran regime is feelingly evoked, and the ironic, if predictable, twist in the story's tail finds the refugees learning that their autonomous fellows are in the process of constructing an empire almost indistinguishable from the Terran. The setting of the story is routine: the Terrans are standard issue for anti-colonial or feminist sf, a crowd of brutal drunks who spend most of their time forcing their sexual attentions on any life-form with a remotely serviceable orifice; the aliens are gentle and furry, devout followers of the Le Guinian Tao, and talk a lot about oneness, harmony and so on. Such a simplistic dualism increases the clarity of the metaphor, but impoverishes its resonances. The story could have been considerably richer and more true if it had contained any evidence that the slave race had it in them all along to become in their turn enslavers. Instead, the enslaved and their imperialistic co-racials are only seen as separate camps. The transition from one to the other seems purely a function of environment: enslaved, they are gentle and good; free, they are like the Terrans, and the twain seem not to meet. This conclusion smacks strongly of environmental determinism. In which case, why waste emotive resources vilifying the Terrans, who must be as much the creatures of their environment as are the aliens, and as such blameless?

This story is told with sensitivity and a certain amount of compassion. The second piece, Stephen R. Donaldson's "Animal Lover", is narrated in a kind of mock-Spillane idiom which perfectly captures the monotony and crudity of the original while missing its wit and energy. Sample:

> I had to stop those animals.
> With just an M-16? Fat chance!
> But I had to try. I was a Special Agent, wasn't I? This was my job.

This kind of high-level interior monologue makes up about one third of the story, the rest being pieced out with gun-battles, explosions, and tight-lipped displays of expertise by Our Hero. "Flesh and blood", he remarks at one point, summoning years of experience to the bar, "can't stand up against laser cannon, no matter what kind of genes it has". The plot, for anyone who is still interested, concerns the efforts of a CIA cyborg to prevent a mad scientist from conquering the world with artificially mutated animals.

The next offering is "Snake Eyes", by Alan Dean Foster, which is outstandingly bad, even by comparison with the foregoing. The tale is of the "precocious adolescent with magical pet" type, and the plot is one of the half-dozen standards that every writer of Westerns keeps in a file marked Last Resort. A crusty but comical old prospector has an endless supply of cracker-barrel aphorisms, and maintains a heart-warming dialogue with his brainless but lovable pack-animal. Our Hero, every mixed-up adolescent's ideal self-image, rescues the old man from death in the desert, and finds himself as a result a 50-50 partner in a gold mine. But first he and Lassie have to help the old-timer fight off a gang of claim jumpers, who are led by a beautiful villainess. The lesser crooks are killed, the villainess duped into escaping with a bag of Fools' Gold, and everyone lives happily etc. This nonsense is retailed without wit or distinction.

Ben Bova's "The Last Decision" inevitably comes as a welcome relief, but it is not a particularly good story, if only because he appears to have been in some doubt as to his real aim. The story begins as run-of-the-mill space opera, with Sol about to explode, and the Emperor of the Hundred Worlds calling a conclave of scientists to advise him on how the star is to be saved. But as the story proceeds, it begins to develop ambitions of being an autumnal tone poem about the declining years of a once great monarch. The bones of a sentimental love-interest are introduced but left bare, and the plot even lurches in Von Daniken's direction at one point. At times Bova evokes dim echoes of the kind of "dying fall" mood which Aldiss is so good at, but the overall effect is of indecision and a crucial looseness of focus.

There are two more stories in the collection, a facetious short and an interplanetary James Bond. Why bother? Where did I leave my *Kemlo and the Star Men*?

The Violet Apple
by David Lindsay *(Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978, 252pp, £5.50, ISBN 0 283 98442 2)*

reviewed by D. West

David Lindsay's best-known work, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, was first published in 1920. The book was a complete failure both commercially and critically and was not reprinted until after Lindsay's death in 1945. Several other novels published

in Lindsay's lifetime met with a similar lack of success. *The Violet Apple* was written (and rewritten) in the period 1924-26 and is published in Britain now for the first time.

These details appear in J.B. Pick's brief but excellent introduction. As a longtime admirer of Lindsay's work Mr Pick makes high claims for the present volume, referring to its "wild boldness" and declaring that it "has a beauty which does not depend upon the words themselves but upon its very essence; it takes root in the mind . . . What you hold in your hands is a strange and sober work of art."

The reader's initial reaction is scepticism. The opening chapters of *The Violet Apple* suggest "a strange and sober work of art" only if one accepts intention for execution. As with some low-budget film version of *Frankenstein*, the germ of the original idea can almost be recognised, but a good deal has to be taken on trust or the message will inevitably be drowned out by the dull thudding of leadfilled boots. Lindsay's prose is laboured, his portrayal of character generally clumsy, his physical descriptions mere listings, and his development of plot and narrative creakingly awkward. All the same, anyone who has ever read *A Voyage to Arcturus* and seen it as something more than a rather odd piece of planetary picaresque — Jack Vance crossed with William Blake — may be prepared to allow the justice of at least some of Mr Pick's claims.

A Voyage to Arcturus is one of the few twentieth century examples of a genuinely visionary work of literature. There is nothing quite like it. Its uniqueness separates it from the company of those books which are readily praised because readily placeable in context. As a result it tends to be pushed into the category of freaks and sports and classified as an early example of the fantastical scientific romance — technologically unsophisticated science fiction. E.H. Visiak observed that the book was "superficially considered, the sort of extravaganza that might have been written by Jules Verne if he had possessed the faculty of inventing psychological dramas instead of scientific, or mechanical, novelties." There is, indeed, a certain temptation to consider Lindsay as some sort of early science fiction writer — a primitive Philip K. Dick, perhaps — who might have contributed more to the field had chance put the influences and opportunity before him. However, as Visiak's "superficially" implies, this is to mistake the surface for the substance. Lindsay was not interested in contriving a Tale of Wonder for its own sake. The journey to the Arcturan planet of Tormance was simply a device to free his narrative from the constraints of earthbound "reality". The form of *A Voyage to Arcturus* was undoubtedly dictated by the fact that no container less fantastic could hold the materials. The form of *The Violet Apple* was doubtless urged upon him by a different sort of necessity: the need to secure the audience the first book had so patently failed to attract.

The Violet Apple begins as a perfectly ordinary novel about the mildly entangled love affairs of two engaged couples, Anthony and Grace and Jim and Haidee. The style is awkward rather than unconventional — perhaps a little old fashioned even for the period of fifty years ago. All the indications are that here is just one more piece of what might be called Traditional Suburban Home Counties fiction — the novel as comfortable middle-class gossip mixed with a dash of moralising. The characters may at times behave badly according to society's laws — thus providing the reader with an agreeable frisson of scandal — but it is taken for granted that they will never question the essential importance of those laws and all their own doings. Very likely the publishers of fifty years ago found Lindsay's novel more and more puzzling and unsettling as they read further. It is one thing to break the rules, but to dismiss the whole rule book as irrelevant is to go beyond boldness or bad taste into total incomprehensibility.

Lindsay attempts what Arthur Machen had tried earlier (most notably in *A Fragment of Life*): to show something of the numinous and supranormal sphere of existence which lies unseen – but sometimes glimpsed – at the back of the banalities of everyday existence.

It is noteworthy that for Lindsay this vision of another world was not a kind of fairy-tale fantasising – what lay beyond was not golden prettiness but something austere, grim and terrifying. Indeed, Lindsay undoubtedly felt that it was the "real" world of getting and spending, of social ritual and small practical concerns, which represented the true escapism, the true avoidance of life's essential nature. Unfortunately, this belief rather handicaps his attempt to contrast the two modes of existence. The visionary passages have vividness and impact, but Lindsay gives the impression of having to struggle to see everyday existence at all – his descriptions seem based more on a conscientious sifting of secondhand reports than on direct experience and empathy. The paradoxical result is that those passages which deal with "real" life are by far the least convincing. (The same effect is seen in *A Voyage to Arcturus*, where the laborious early chapters – before the flight to Tormance – must deter many readers.)

Lindsay's writing in *The Violet Apple* is no worse than anywhere else, but unfortunately it is the work of a plain and transparently honest man. A more artful writer might have managed to conceal the basic lack of sympathy with worldly affairs. Lindsay's attitude is not so much one of rejection as of incomprehension. He has been so dazed by what he has seen beyond life that it is only with the greatest effort and struggle that he can bring himself to take everyday details with any seriousness. This remoteness is not an affectation – the poor man doesn't really know what to do about it and can scarcely help himself.

Perhaps *The Violet Apple* will seem somewhat less extraordinary to readers of the present day. After all, when Anthony and Haidee eat the fruit of their own particular Tree of Knowledge (the Violet Apple of the title), experience total illumination, and reject convention and their intended marriage partners, is not this simply an earlier version of the transcendental drug-trip and "dropping out"?

Well, not exactly. In fact, the muddled mysticism of the drug culture would probably strike Lindsay as simply an extension of the theosophist mumbo-jumbo common in his own times – just one more blanket-veil of self-delusion. Lindsay was a metaphysician, certainly, but his aim was always an absolute and painfully hard *clarity* rather than any self-indulgent wallowings in vague and splendid visions of the ineffable. For Lindsay, the snares of the Devil were not merely the World and the Flesh but also the subtler desceptions of self-serving and self-centred aestheticism and ascetism – elements of which were seen as present in almost all systems of religious belief. Thus "mysticism" is almost a term of contempt in Lindsay's vocabulary – a description of the kind of soft-brained, rose-tinted, imprecise thinking characteristic of those who take their religion as they take their wine: to satisfy the niceties of taste and to provide a pleasant glow.

Lindsay's life and career as a writer were tragic – the tragedy of one whose performance never matched his vision and whose message went largely unregarded. *The Violet Apple* represents what must have been a prodigious and heroic effort to break through the wall of silence and make his audience understand. Failure must have been bitter indeed. This is probably his best book after *A Voyage to Arcturus*. In the two combined he fires off his whole magazine – but scarcely a single hit was acknowledged in his own lifetime. On a purely literary level the book must still be counted far from perfect, but as a psychological (and partly autobiographical) sequel to *A Voyage to Arcturus* is offers some fascinating insights into the mind and character of a strange and unique writer.

Underkill
by James White *(Corgi, 1979, 176pp, £0.95, ISBN 0 552 10996 7)*

reviewed by Ashley Rock

My young grandson is into bottles; James White is into stress. His many and varied themes include disasters at the sea bottom or in space, nuclear war and sickness of aliens. Despite this wide ranger there is a plot that often recurse: an unexpected situation arises involving danger and extreme tension; this ultimately is resolved by an ingenuity guided by medical wisdom or inspiration. In his new book we glimpse the same elements, but the disaster is too great for the remedy; the author has gone for broke. He postulates a world in the near future which fulfils the direst prophecies of Paul Ehrlich; it is over-populated, short of energy, polluted; people are stratified into work categories but resentful and violent; food and transport are painfully scarce; in sum it is the ecologists' nightmare. The bottles are empty; medical expertise drains into the sand.

The central characters are on the staff of an extremely well-run and caring hospital, but can only patch up the casualties that a decaying world has thrown their way – the victims of road-traffic accidents, drug overdose, and frustration leading to violence, sabotage and shooting. Inevitably, despite their devotion and resources, the medical team seldom heal entirely and sometimes merely turn a damaged life into a pointless and degraded vegetable existence. The sickness lies in society; local medication can only alleviate the symptoms of the few; major surgery is required to cure the sickness of the planet.

The cold statement of the problem, the ruthless logic with which it is argued through, and the appalling dimensions of the solution are the strength of the book. White implies that even if humans had the capacity their feelings would not permit the only true answer – mass destruction, with the exception of "chosen centres of learning, science and culture" – and so an alien race is involved to engineer this and they exert pressure on two members of the hospital staff to participate in the ultimate solution.

So much for the plot, clearly not designed for the queasy. The book has power but also some serious weaknesses. First the situation is so frequent an sf theme that there is a feeling of deja vu, although the ruthlessness of the conclusion is novel. Moreover the premise has been challenged since the publication of *The Population Bomb* in 1968 insofar as statistics show that a numbers explosion in technologically advanced countries is now less likely, however horrifying the prospect may be elsewhere. The plot might have been more convincing had it been confined, say, to South America or India in the next century. This is a complacent suggestion from someone living in southern England. White, who has experienced the violence and hatreds of Belfast, is likely to feel otherwise. He makes his decent, brutally-wounded old man, Hesketh, say: "Some of the most liberal people supported them [the criminals and nutcases], and . . . people who broke the law, who stole or wrecked property or killed other people, demanded as a right more help than was given to any law-abiding person." In the context of the author's home this remark is acceptable; as a generality there is a whiff of sulphur, a touch of the Heinleins.

The human characters lack depth. Hospital staff, patients and the police officers who figure prominently are uncomplicatedly admirable; the rest of the population are covered unsympathetically by the blanket description given by Hesketh. The

aliens are a rather boring lot, from the clones who superimpose upon their mission an internal feud like warring Mafia gangs, to the deus in machina, who brooks no "emotional" argument. There is no discussion of how the surviving élite of the "already chosen centres" has been selected, nor what an alien means by "culture" on this planet. Since the Trennechoran is a "philosophical giant" prepared to answer unemotional questions, it would have been interesting to learn whether his planned physical devastation would strive to exempt Palladio or Picasso, Kiyonaga or Kandinsky, the Tate Gallery or the Taj Mahal, or none of these. The point is not frivolous. White implies that the "surgery" is horrifying in terms of human life, but irrefutably necessary. Of course this is the dominant issue, but is it not important to probe into the question of what else would be lost, especially as this is the decision of a race who for twenty thousand years have used "public debate to settle . . . philosophical arguments"? Wisdom may be ruthless but it is also discriminating, and the proposal to destroy violently the elements of civilisation likely to have terrestrial significance only, without discussion with humans – there is no suggestion that the clones are enlightened in this field – deprives the book of an interesting area of speculation. There are to be ten million planetary survivors. Would the Trennechorvan permit Oxford to survive (only as far as Magdalen Bridge, of course) or would he prefer the Other Place? After the annihilation of the rest of the country, the alien believes, "learning, science and culture" will flourish; "hopefully they will remain meek." White's medical listeners are shattered by the number of deaths proposed. The practicality of the solution is not questioned, nor the pompous silliness of the philosophical giant.

Problems of this kind abound. The Trennechoran intention is ultimately benevolent. Once the cancerous growths of overcrowding, racial hatred and the warped nature of terran culture are exercised, the two planets will co-operate in healing other worlds where a similar malignancy is to be found. Yet, although nuclear bombardment, earthquakes and vast seas of fire are part of the surgical process, we are astonishingly told: "Nothing of your past greatness will be destroyed." How the survivors are to feed themselves, communicate or avoid a reversion to barbarism is not discussed; perhaps it is to be assumed that men will be dependents of their destroyers, without explanation of how the psychological damage of this dependence will leave no scar. The reader may be impressed by the drastic nature of the "remedy", even half-prepared to accept the logic of the argument, but he is bound to feel let down by the lack of interest by the author in implications other than in terms of life itself.

Perhaps White's forte lies in the vivid depiction of incident rather than in the complete novel. Thus *Dark Inferno* portrays the conditions of Pod Three, in which two violent men and an attractive woman escape from a doomed spaceship in a plastic prison, suffering heat, lack of food, lust and hatred until the men fight for survival and the woman. The episode, only known to the others because the pod radio broadcasts the increasingly vicious snarling of the men, is a gripping piece of writing, a powerful example of stress.

Similar in *Underkill* there is a minor incident when the doctor and his wife, theoretically on a rest-day on horseback, are surrounded helplessly in the centre of a roundabout by a multitude of cyclists, each unable to break out of the solid moving mass, each pedalling desperately, each fearful of arriving late at work and so forfeiting the privilege of living away from the factory instead of in a thousand-bed dormitory adjacent to it. Inevitably there are collisions. "Responsible citizens began tearing into each other with fists, teeth or fingernails. Some of them were battering at each other with their bicycles, using the machines like great, awkward, ludicrous clubs." This was an everyday incident; the police who quietened it with

gas grenades had already dealt with four such that morning. This vignette is painfully evocative of my forty-year-old experience of endlessly circling Trafalgar Square on the inside lane in an Austin Seven. White offers another vivid glimpse of stress.

Underkill is a brief, highly compressed novel. It is not cosy reading and has flaws, but pursues a serious topic with relentless logic to a very bitter end.

The Very Slow Time Machine and other stories
by Ian Watson *(Gollancz, 1979, 189pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 575 02582 4)*

reviewed by Lee Montgomerie

To reach the future in a Very Slow Time Machine is as ageing and protracted as living through the intervening years; but those years are spent crawling backwards into the past in suffocating isolation, gathering impetus for a smallish leap forward. In the title piece, the occupant of the eponymous artifact first appears in a wretched and demented state, cramped in his insanitary quarters and incapable of communication, and progresses, as backwards into his past and our future crawls he, to the beatific composure, brimming with hope and holding up explanatory placards, of the start of his heroic voyage.

To read these short stories, first published between 1973 and 1978, in chronological order rather than the arbitrary sequence in which they are presented in this collection, is somewhat to echo this retrogressive degeneration. Watson never actually reaches any high spots; but he has certainly crept a short way out of the squalid imprisoning pit.

One begins one's trip through the book condemned to failure in a stifling, claustrophobic world; confined by Fuller domes and forcefields, filthy with pollution, frequently incapable of communication and a participant in such psychotic rituals as exsanguination, disembowelment and roasting alive. One ends hovering with dazzling clarity of vision at the interfaces of mathematical abstractions (the event horizon of a singularity, the sinusoidal cliff of Thom's catastrophe diagram), tormented by prickly philosophical problems and thorny personal relationships; still doomed and damned but no longer prey to the instant and bloodthirsty Nemesis visited on the protagonists of "Thy Blood Like Milk" and "Sitting on a Starwood Stool". In these two stories, causality is a simple closed loop: frustration leads to foul deeds, foul deeds to retribution and retribution to impotent, unbearable and grossly humiliating frustration. In the later stories there is just frustration, and the plot lines, instead of being tied into a neat, if brutal, hangman's knot, fray off into a plethora of alternate possibilities, all of them dismal. From kitchen tables, hospital beds, physics laboratories, lost spaceships and ruined planets, Watson's characters agonise as their certainties of having a soul, a saviour, hope of redemption; of knowing what time it is and whether or not they are dreaming, slip beyond their grasp.

Watson's universe, either the old closed one or the modern version whose sieve-like space-time admits a multitude of alternatives, is a pessimist's paradise: one where God, if ever he existed, has abandoned us on a barren, radiation-seared Earth, imprisoned himself in a backward-running time machine or slipped down a black hole. The soul is a formless, slimy blob that can be inadvertantly expectorated to provide a centrepiece for uneasy dinner-party chit-chat, and Humanity, threatened by every fate from total annihilation to obsolescence, is a treacherous, blundering species,

emotionally clumsy with one another and too out of touch with our alien brethren to gain anything but guilt and humiliation from contact with them.

It is a tribute to the author that this sour brew is less of a depressant than a stimulant; so richly does it bubble with Watson's own heady mixture of myth, metaphysic, straight science and blatant cultist hocus-pocus, and so delicately is it flavoured with authentic cultural background details, from the ancient Aztecs to the future Japanese (especially the future Japanese with their symbolic kamikaze space-shots into city parks, fads for ultimately disposable living works of art, computerised brothels and Zen mafiosi). Asides like "they hadn't jumped into a tachyon mode at all, but had 'moebiused' themselves through wormholes in the space-time fabric" (a chapter-filler in anybody else's book) and scenarios like that of "Immune Dreams" – an intoxicating cocktail of neurosurgery, sleep research, catastrophe theory, genetic programming, cancer phobia, uncomfortable relationships and images of gliders soaring above archetypal landscapes – hit one squarely in the intellectual pleasure centres.

This exhilarating wealth of images and ideas holds the fascination at the expense of the plots which tend to peter out into shabby and frustrating inconclusions; though it seems unfair to blame the author for what appears to be an attempt to apply extreme realism to even the most preposterous of constructs. Watson pictures the future as a shabby and frustrating (and all too probable) place, and one that even a Very Slow Time Machine will reach very much too soon.

The Checklist of Science-Fiction and Supernatural Fiction
by E.F. Bleiler *(Firebell Books, P.O. Box 804, Glen Rock, New Jersey, 07452, 1978, xxii + 266pp, $20.00, no ISBN)*
Tale of the Future from the Beginning to the Present Day (third edition): an annotated Bibliography
by I.F. Clarke *(The Library Association, 1978, xvii + 357pp, £6.50 [£5.20 to LA members], ISBN 0 85365 550 2)*
British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1975: an annotated Bibliography
by Lyman Tower Sargent *(G.K. Hall, 1979, xxiii + 324pp, $28.00, ISBN 0 8161 8243 4)*

reviewed by John Eggeling

There appear to be two basic approaches to the compilation of a bibliography of early sf or any of its sub-genres. The first, and the most frequently encountered, is that established in pre-war fanzines such as *Fantasy Magazine* where booknotes and checklists derived from the inspection of personal collections were regularly published. This approach had a major endorsement in 1948 with the publication of *The Checklist of Fantastic Literature* and has been used many times since. The other approach, now on the increase, is that of the academic researcher whose time is spent more in the library than in bookshops. Both methodologies have their advantages and their shortcomings.

The former approach requires a thorough background knowledge, derived from the literature about sf, and a personal examination of countless volumes of fiction, the measure of success being dependent upon an awareness of publisher's and author's preferences (and of contemporary literary trends), intuition, and good luck. The use of general purpose bibliographic aids is normally restricted to such

works as the British Museum's *Catalogue of Printed Books, The National Union Catalogue, The English Catalogue of Books,* and *The American Catalogue of Books**, primarily for dating purposes and the determination of first editions. Some reference may be made to certain author bibliographies. The academic approach is somewhat similar in its requirements of extensive background knowledge and a persual of book listings for possibly pertinent titles but has a wider recourse to general purpose aids. Since it covers all the general bibliographies one may need, T. Besterman's four volume *A World Bibliography of Bibliographies* may be regarded as a cornerstone to this approach. In some cases the researcher may be in active contact with book dealers and may make use of their catalogues to locate additional titles.

The advantages of the one over the other are that the collector/researcher may well come across relevant works issued by publishers who failed to submit the statutory copies to the British Museum and other deposit libraries (or may discover such elusive volumes as David Lindsay's *The Witch* which appeared as proof copies but not as actual books), while the diligent researcher can locate in *BMC* and *EC* (or in book reviews) X.Y.Z.'s *The Vril Staff* and other rare books which are seldom to be found on the shelves of bookdealers.

As for their more negative aspects, the collector is apparently unaware that sf is but a sub-genre of literature in general (and therefore any general work on fiction will most likely contain something of relevance to sf), while the academic seems to presume that the basic research has already been undertaken. Thus one can browse for an hour or so through *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature* to discover otherwise unrecorded 19th century interplanetary fiction (or the existence of an 1890 magazine which devoted an issue exclusively to sf and utopist thought) or peruse book reviews in *The Athenaeum, The Acadmy, The Times Literary Supplement* and similar periodicals and extract remarkably long lists of "unknown" books.

My own interests in such approaches are based on a selfish belief that such "unknown" titles are more easily, and more cheaply, attained once I (alone) know about their existence, and so I am always interested in learning new approaches to research and adding to my knowledge of sf. It was therefore with some anticipation that I awaited the three works now in front of me.

Unfortunately, like virtually every other bibliography I have seen, none of these three works gives much indication as to how their title listings were derived, either as an indication of their comprehensiveness or for the benefit of future researchers, though each does make in one way or another the traditional statement (or exoneration?) that bibliographies are never complete.

Since I have a considerable affection for the original edition my anticipations were highest for Everett F. Bleiler's *The Checklist of Science-Fiction and Supernatural Fiction* which was advertised as being a thorough revision and enlargement of *The Checklist of Fantastic Literature*, with annotations (its compiler states that about 600 titles erroneously included in the original have been dropped, a further 1,150 titles have been added, the cut off date now being 1948, and each entry has been researched to ensure a listing of the first edition). Though its larger size, more fitted for the bookshelf than a collector's pocket, is in keeping with its presumed scholarship, hopes that this would be a definitive work are dashed by what Bleiler has to say in his introduction and afterword.

Whereas the introduction to the original related how T.E. Dikty and Melvin Korshak, the publisher of the first edition, had accumulated the entries for that checklist from the contents listings of the major collections of the day *and then*

*Hereinafter referred to as *BMC, NUC, EC* and *AC* respectively.

solicited Bleiler's aid as editor and researcher, all we get from the present edition, apart from a poor attempt at definition, is a blast of condemnation at T.E. Dikty for re-issuing the first edition in 1972, together with such coments as ". . . (which) was reprinted without my knowledge or consent", "I . . . decided to revise the book completely to prevent further such incidents", and "Could I have spent my time to better advantage? Certainly." His own reply is definitely the answer anyone else would give, for in his afterword Bleiler makes known the full extent of his indignation by his statement that though he is aware of the several bibliographies on aspects of sf which have appeared in recent years he considers it *unethical* to "raid" them for information (which brings to mind the apocryphal story of the bibliographer who put false information into his work to protect his copyright).

Since no attempt has been made to make his researches (published here under an anagrammatic imprint) exhaustive, how has he obtained those additional 1,500 titles? Certainly not by an examination of the output of the more prolific authors, for the eleven entries under William Le Queux represents only about half of the eligible books by him. Similarly there are titles overlooked for Cutcliffe Hyne *(The Adventures of an Engineer, The Foundered Galleon)*, H.G. Wells *(The Door in the Wall)*, George Griffith *(A Woman Against the World, Captain Ishmael, The Stolen Submarine)*, Jules Verne *(The Chase of the Golden Meteor, For the Flag)* and no entry whatsoever for John Creasey. Neither has use been made of book reviews, for an examination of early issues of *The Times Literary Supplement* shows that Martin Potter's *The Sea Surrenders*, Iota's *The Fire Seeker*, E.M. Sanderson's *Souls and Stones*, Justin McCarthy's *Calling the Tune* and numerous other relevant titles have not been included.

Presumably we are dealing with a work in the old fan tradition, the titles coming either from his own collection or from those suggestions sent in to him after the publication of the first edition, a possibility hinted at in the afterword. Given that assumption one can only look to the attempt at definition and the rigorousness of bibliographic procedure to determine the extent of scholarship shown.

With regard to the former, only a very hazy and inconsistent picture emerges, the introduction focusing mainly on the problems of definition while an examination of the titles deleted from the original edition shows that a high proportion of relevant titles have mistakenly been excluded, among them *The Wolf Bride* by Aino Kallas, *The Bloomsbury Wonder* by Thomas Burke, *Freak Museum* by R.R. Ryan, and Walter Owen's horrifying allegorical fantasy *The Cross of Carl*. The two Alice titles by Lewis Carroll have similarly been excluded, presumably through Bleiler's restriction that only juveniles in the lost race and interplanetary genres are included, but John K. Bang's *Alice in Blunderland* is retained with only an annotation declaring it to be a parody as a justification for inclusion. On another point of definition, which excludes all serial items, Bleiler has given entries to *Varney the Vampire* and other works published in penny parts but has omitted the similarly-issued *Cosmos*, a round-robin sf novel by eighteen authors which was given away in as many parts to readers of *Fantasy Magazine*.

Bleiler's notes on bibliographic procedures indicate a possibly high degree of accuracy, for he points out that the first editions of an author did not necessarily appear in that author's country of origin, quite correctly citing titles by H. Rider Haggard and James Fenimore Cooper as examples. Since he also states that he considers *BMC* and *NUC* to be authoritative one would then expect each entry to have been checked in both, but such is obviously not the case.

Looking at the titles appearing in Bleiler under the name of the British authoress Eliza Haywood one finds an entry for *The Unfortunate Princess* (1741), which is listed in *BMC*, but no mention of *The Adventures of Eovoai, Princess of Ijaveo* (1736)

which is clearly listed in *NUC* as being the same work (Bleiler thus shows a level of trust in the British Library's book-buying department which is not extended to his fellow bibliographers). Similarly, in the case of the American author Ray Cummings, Bleiler lists the 1923 New York edition of *The Girl in the Golden Atom*, the earliest copy listed in NUC, but overlooks the 1922 London edition listed in BMC (idiosyncratically, Bleiler lists the Canadian reprint of *Brigands of the Moon* which appeared under the false attribution of John Campbell).

With regard to the simultaneous, or near simultaneous, publication of a book in Britain and America, Bleiler makes the facile assumption of placing the first edition in the author's home country while pointing out that it is generally "nonsensical" to do otherwise (which tells us nothing of how to decide in the case of foreign authors). Thus the entry for Australian author Ambrose Pratt tells us that the first edition of *The Living Mummy* was published in London when an examination of that edition shows it to be an importation of the American sheets with a cancel title-page.

Investigating further one discovers under Jack London the erroneous assumption that the first edition of *The Jacket* (aka *The Star Rover*) appeared in America, which evidently proves that no recourse has been made to such definitive works as Jacob Blanck's *Bibliography of American Literature*. More importantly, under the entries for this author he shows a complete lack of awareness as to what exactly may be lodged in a deposit library, for Bleiler there tells us that the first editions of *Before Adam*, *The Iron Heel*, and *The Scarlet Plague* appeared respectively in 1906, 1907, and 1912. An inspection of Blanck shows these to be the dates of the copyrighting issues (which may have been magazine tearsheets, plot outlines, or whatever) the true first editions having appeared in 1907, 1908, and 1915. That this may be intentional on Bleiler's part is belied by the non-appearance of similar items under Kipling while only one of several such items appears in the W.H. Hodgson entries.

One attribute of *NUC* that is quite useful is the listing of the contents of most early collections and anthologies; Bleiler appears to have made no use of this, however. Under Mrs Oliphant *NUC* clearly shows the 1889 American edition of *Stories of the Seen and Unseen* to have slightly different contents than the 1902 British edition but Bleiler makes no mention of this. A full search of the *NUC* entries for this authoress shows that two of the stories from that collection had earlier appeared as *Two Stories of the Seen and Unseen* while another, *Old Lady Mary* had in 1884 been published on its own. No mention is made in Bleiler of these two titles. Under the same authoress Bleiler manages to make two other errors for he cites her novel *The Beleaguered City* as being only thirty pages long and incorrectly entitles *A Little Pilgrim in the Unseen* as *The Little Pilgrim* (a similar error occurs in the entry for Mrs Belloc Lowndes where *From the Vasty Deep* is given as *From out the Vasty Deep* — nor is there mention of this work's first appearance as a Christmas supplement to *The Illustrated London News*).

The most irritating thing about this bibliography is that in spite of everything it is still very useful; like London Transport (which is only slightly more reliable) I use it daily.

Though there are a high proportion of errors and omissions there are many very rare and otherwise unrecorded titles listed here, and since many of these had only the one edition in the one country the information on these can be assumed to be correct. For his annotations Bleiler has used a coded form of description based on a classification of some seventy sub-genres of sf and supernatural fiction. Though these are often banal, indicating only "a self-explanatory title" or "fantastic elements", or "lost race", and point only to the main genre

in which the work falls, they are very useful for forming the basis of an index to time travel stories, vampire fiction, or what you will.

For such purposes Prof. I.F. Clarke should find this work of some use when he begins to update and revise the present edition of *Tale of the Future from the Beginning to the Present Day*, for Bleiler does list several titles overlooked by Clarke. However this latter work is superior in several ways to Bleiler's check-list even though it is open to some of the same criticism.

Clarke's third edition of *Tale of the Future*, to use its short title, updates the second edition by six years, bringing the cut-off date to 1976. At a rough estimate some 300 titles not in the second edition are added to this one and the total number of entries is brought to around 3,900 by the inclusion of some 1,200 or so titles published in the period 1971 to 1976 (this boom in sf publishing is underlined by the fact that on a page by page cost the third proves cheaper than the second edition, presumably indicative of a higher print run rather than an error on the part of the Library Association).

Entries are listed chronologically with an alphabetical listing of authors under each year, by which certain trends may be inferred. Bibliographic exactitude is attained by the bracketing off of certain dates, indicating that though a work appeared in that year it was not dated such. First edition information is generally sound and is enhanced by an indication of prior American publication. First edition collectors can therefore find in it a useful adjunct to Tuck's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy* since it is easy to determine which works of recent years had their first edition published in Britain (Clarke's scope is entirely restricted to British published works).

Annotations are verbal and show greater richness and depth than Bleiler's, though on occasion undue haste can be discerned (R.A. Kennedy's marvellously eccentric *The Triuneverse* which ends with Mars reduced to the size of a pea and the Earth part of the Alpha Centauri system is given a synopsis based on events occurring in the opening paragraph).

Any attempt at determining how the early titles have been gleaned will be doomed to frustration, for by now several hands must have been involved in that area, and any overview of that period may now have been biased by the inclusion in this edition of some forty or more pre-1914 utopian, or near utopian, futuristic titles submitted by Lyman Tower Sargent in the course of his researches (see below). An examination of *The Times Literary Supplement* does show that no recourse has been made to such periodicals, for many obviously relevant titles such as E.J. Rath's *The Sixth Speed* (1910), R. Halifax's *The House of Horror* (1911) and Shaw Darren's *Il Magnifico – A Fantasy of England Under Prohibition* (1933) have not been included. Similarly, in spite of Prof. Clarke's introductory anecdote about the reading of volumes of *BMC* while travelling to work, it is still possible to examine particular volumes and discover such inviting titles as the two Dexter Dayle novels, *The Purple Threat* and *The Towers of Terror* (both c.1934) which on inspection prove to merit entries.

An inspection of more recent titles shows similar, but more surprising, omissions. there being no entries for either C.M. Kornbluth's *Thirteen O'Clock and other Zero Hours* or Emma Tennant's *The Last of the Country House Murders* (the omission of two Heinlein titles *Orphans of the Sky* and *Time for the Stars* are presumably a clerical error since they did appear in the second edition), while further examination shows that none of the eligible Olympia Press titles of the early 1970s, among them Ray Kainen's *Satyr Trek* and Genghis Cohen's *The Erotic Spectacles*, nor any of the eighteen or more titles in the mid-1950s series *The Tit-Bits Science Fiction Library* are included.

In part this may be due to an over-reliance on such fan-produced bibliographies as Gerald Bishop's yearly listing of sf titles published in Britain, for many of the blind spots in those particular lists are carried over here, but it is also due, I feel, to an academic thrust that is directed more towards an analysis of the genre than towards a complete bibliography of that genre's individual members. This is brought home when one turns towards Clarke's discussion of definition where his sole criterion is that "the story should be located in a time – months, years, centuries, or millennia ahead – that follows after the date of publication", parallel worlds, alternate histories, lost world and similar genres being considered only if they are set in the future (borderline thrillers are only included if the events described are of such import that they would have become a part of recorded history if they had occurred). Clarke states that, although grudgingly admitted to his list, *Our Man in Havana* is a borderline case, even though Greene specifically located it in the near future, because it has nothing futuristic whatsoever about its plot, and then follows that a page later with the citation of *Star Wars*, along with certain other popular sf films, as being indicative of the current interest in the tale of the future, even though that film is specifically located in the distant past by the opening sequence. This definitional error is perpetuated by the appearance of Armstrong and Graeme's *When the Bells Rang* and Moorcock's *Elric* series, which are both set in alternate pasts.

If it were I who was writing about borderline cases I would have mentioned Seaforth's *We Band of Brothers*, a future war novel written before September 1939 but not published until after that date, which the publishers packaged as an alternate past history. I would also have mentioned "return to pre-war tranquility" novels set in an unchanged post-war period but published during war time (an example of this genre is I.A.R. Wylie's *The Shining Heights*, published in 1917) and I would certainly have mentioned that species of early nineteenth century novel, of which John Hannah's *Critica Novazealandica Futura* (W.P. Grant, Cambridge, 1837) is an extreme example, that were set contemporary with their publication but which were written as though by some future historian, futuristic elements only appearing as brief notes about the subsequent abrogation of some Parliamentary law or perhaps on the later demise of some notable politician. Perhaps if I were feeling particularly argumentative I would mention the women's emancipation novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which the heroine's character and bearing was a projection of the personality the writer hoped to attain after equality was achieved.

However none of these points are debated, nor are any examples of these works to be located in the listing. More relevant to Clarke's bibliography but equally sparse in their appearance are the early works of John Creasey and the novels of G. Davidson and others who wrote cheap thrillers for the lending library market of the 1930s; nor are any of the score or more futuristic novels in the late 1930s Piccadilly paperback series (or of any similar series) included. Since it was only in such publications that British authors could compete with and imitate the American pulp magazines, then flooding Britain at 3d. a copy, this virtually unexplored territory could well yield numerous and quite diverse additional titles.

My own feelings are that any analysis of the tale of the future based on Professor Clarke's work is in danger of having about as much relevance as an analysis of poverty in Great Britain would have if it were based on questionnaires returned by a sample population drawn at random from the telephone directory. (This problem is compounded by the fact that Clarke makes no consideration of serial publications nor of juvenile fiction, two areas in which innovations sometimes occurred.) Simply taken as a bibliography, however, *Tale of the Future* is one of the best and most reliable works currently available.

Problems of definition are the main reason for the appearance of Lyman Tower Sargent's *British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1975, An Annotated Bibliography*, and in his pursuit of a definition Sargent is following the classic model for scientific research. From his introduction on the problems of definition, in which an examination of the best attempts to date results in the establishment of a discriminatory device for deciding what, and what not, to include, and from his article in *Extrapolation* (19: 16-26), December 1977, his purpose is plain. To achieve a definition of utopia you must first establish a reasonably acceptable definition and use that to determine each of those works which can be classified as a utopia. Analysis of the characteristics in common will then lead to refinement of the initial definition and a slightly altered bibliography. The process is then repeated until a definition as near to perfection as possible is attained . . . but then someone might discover an unknown utopian work which does not fit the definition and the process must start again. With this eventuality in mind Sargent has put considerable time and effort into his research, and has made a thorough examination of the literature pertaining to utopianism. In conjunction with his bibliography of utopian literature, which contains some 1,600 or more titles, Sargent has provided a secondary bibliography some 120 pages in length which lists some 3,500 books, articles, and unpublished dissertations. Towards such a listing Sargent appears to have used as wide a range of aids as possible, ranging from the *Library of Congress Catalog, Books: Subjects* through *Dissertations in English and American Literature* and *Comprehensive Dissertation Index* to *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature, Social Sciences and Humanities Index*, and *Internationale Bibliographie Der Zeitschriftenliteratur*, with many others along the way.

From a quick and very small sampling of several of these works his research appears to be very thorough. Since most of these works have entries arranged under subject matter the most likely manner by which an article, book, or dissertation of relevance may have been overlooked is by its entry under some associated heading, such as *Charles Darwin*, *Urban Planning* or *Eugene Zamiatin*, rather than that of *Utopia*.

Having achieved that listing then one can make an initial checklist of all the works described therein as being utopian, adding to that list by various means alluded to before, and then examining each work individually to see if it fits the initial definition.

Since my own interest in utopia is minimal, my reading of such being mainly confined to those works in which utopia is merely a backdrop (or at best novels about alienation where utopia, usually dystopian in nature, is but one aspect of a fragmenting personality), I hesitate to mention any particular omissions. I would however like to suggest that an examination of H.M. Green's *A History of Australian Literature*, a work evidently overlooked by most sf researchers, may yield one or two relevant titles (e.g. John Boyle O'Reilly's *Moondyne*).

A look at the bibliography proper shows it to be highly accurate, only the identification of James Fenimore Cooper's two novels, listed here as having their first editions published in America, and the wrong identification of H. Van Laun's *The Gates of Afree, A.D. 1928* as being London published, when it was actually Edinburgh, being the errors noted by myself so far.

The only trouble is that the result of his skill, like that of a tailor, is suited only to a particular person, for each and every annotation is written with the utopian researcher in mind. Thus most of the Philip K. Dick entries are described as "authoritarian dystopia" while other annotations may just say – "dystopia of violence", "socialist eutopia" or whatever. True, the annotations get more detailed

for 16th and 17th century items but as far as research into sf goes this work is only secondary in importance to those of Bleiler and Clarke – an interesting paradox if nothing else.

Reviews in Brief

Vector Analysis
by Jack C. Haldeman II *(Berkley Putnam, 1978, 196pp, $8.95, ISBN 0 399 12267 2)*

According to a recent issue of *Locus*, the flood which destroyed most of the stock in Berkley-Putnam's New Jersey warehouse hit *Vector Analysis* particularly badly, though initial shipments to bookshops had already gone out. It may, therefore, be a difficult book to find, and if it were to become a classic of science fiction my review copy, as an unusually rare first edition, might escalate in value in a spectacular manner. Alas, I cannot imagine future generations being particularly desperate to collect it. It is, in fact, rather a dull book.

The title is a slightly esoteric pun, the subject matter of the story having nothing to do with higher mathematics, but being concerned instead with a mysterious disease which sweeps through a satellite research-station, posing the problem of identifying the vector which is carrying the infection. The space plague story, as we all know by now, is an inordinately convenient plot, in that the plague can be made to do almost anything with the aid of a little imaginative jargon, avoiding all normal precautionary measures and treatments, while remaining subject to an immediate *coup de grace* at the convenience of the author. Joe Haldeman's elder brother is well-read in science, and handles the operation neatly enough insofar as jargon is concerned, but he lacks the story-telling ability to give the narrative the necessary punch. There are too many characters, not very well-drawn, and there are too many sub-plots that amount to nothing (including the old stand-by about the wicked politician who is an Enemy of Progress because he wants to advance his own career by arousing the ire of the public against the space stations). The print used in the book is very large, giving the impression that an inadequate story has been made to look weighty by devious strategies, and it comes as no surprise to learn from the small print that the meat of the book appeared as an *Analog* short story in 1977.

– **Brian Stableford**

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