FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

18

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FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

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Gene Wolfe has established an enviable reputation during the last decade as one of the best writers ever to choose to work within the sf form. He has only so far published one major sf book, the extraordinary Fifth Head of Cerberus *(1972), whose select group of devotees (including the editor of this journal) would be disinclined to quarrel with Peter Nicholls's statement – in Magill's* Survey of Science Fiction Literature *– that "there is a strong case for arguing that this is the greatest science fiction work of the 1970s". More Wolfe books are due to appear in 1980: a long-overdue short-story collection,* The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories, *and the first volume of a fantasy tetralogy,* Book of the New Sun. *Mr Wolfe's contribution to this series is characteristically oblique; indeed, for much of its length it does not appear to be about science fiction at all. But read on . . .*

The Profession of Science Fiction: XVIII

Gene Wolfe

To begin, it is no profession. If the truth were known, there are only two real professions: law and medicine. In a profession (I am told) one sits in one's offices behind a brass plate, waiting for someone to insult one with money. Sherlock Holmes, perhaps, began as a professional, but even he soon found he had to go out into the streets and work, though he advertised himself as the world's one and only consulting detective. I have been most of the other things that are sometimes said – mostly by their practitioners – to be professions. I have been a soldier ("the profession of arms"). I have been a teacher and an engineer and a journalist. All these are jobs.

Being a science fictionist is not even that; it is an affliction, like being a horse player or a bag lady. One weeps when no one else so much as wipes away the furtive tear, and one laughs when no one else smiles, and in the end it affects the brain.

I sold my first sf story to Frederik Pohl, who was then editor of a now-defunct magazine called *Worlds of If.* Mr Pohl was also the editor of *Galaxy,* but I, knowing nothing about the science fiction "world," did not know that. I sent *Galaxy* a story I called "The Mountains are Mice", and when *Galaxy* sent it back with a form of rejection, I doggedly mailed it out again – to *Worlds of If.*

On that submission I got a check and a letter, and the letter said something like "I'm glad you let me see this again. I feel the rewrite has improved it quite a bit."

If I had been an honest man, I would have sent back the check, but as it was I took it to the bank (it was fairly small and needed somebody to go along with it) and came home glorying, and I have had a soft spot in my heart for Fred Pohl ever

since. He changed the title to "Mountains Like Mice", and I wrote him to say that I understood they enjoyed them fried but could take them or leave them alone boiled, but I retained that soft spot. He never bought another word from me; I still retained the soft spot.

Now, however, I am forced to tell the truth: I have a soft spot in my heart for Fred, but Fred has a soft spot in his head. That worries me, because Fred is a science fiction writer and I am a science fiction writer, and we have enjoyed remarkably similar careers except that Fred has been successful and has a great many friends. (No doubt *you* knew about Fred's soft spot as soon as you read that bit about "Mountains Like Mice"; I am not quite so sharp.)

I wasn't really aware of Fred's weakness until I got to the middle of his remarkably readable autobiography *The Way The Future Was.* Somewhere around the center of the book Fred says that he knows just how oppressed minorities feel because he was in the US Army. Then he details his military experiences: quartered in a Miami Beach hotel while he was being trained as a weatherman; sent to Oklahoma, where he palled around with Jack Williamson; sent to Italy to serve in what must have been the original *Catch-22* outfit; marrying a WAC and being given a honeymoon in Paris by the Army, during which Fred and his bride ate at a mess supposedly reserved for generals.

Right, Fred. Tow that barge. Tote that bale.

Frederik Pohl is obviously sick, and I believe I know what it was that made him sick, and so do you. It was science fiction. Sooner or later (mostly later) one discovers that everything one's parents told one is true. (Theodore Sturgeon made a fine short story out of that.) When I was a child, my parents let me know that reading sf and fantasy would destroy my mind, and I wish I had found out they were wrong.

Fred does, of course, know how it feels to be a member of an oppressed minority, and in fact he may very well know how it feels to be a member of any number of oppressed minorities that do not exist. (He probably does not know how it feels to be a black or a Jew, but that is another matter.) Because he has this knowledge, he subconsciously attributes it to the Army.

No doubt all eight of you reading this are waiting with breathless interest for me to get on to my favourite subject. But before I drop poor Fred, I want to talk – however briefly – about the following quote from a later chapter of *The Way The Future Was.* The author is talking about the type of stories Harlan Ellison sought for *Dangerous Visions.*

"It is an article of faith with some writers that such stories exist, kept from an eager audience by the poltroon editors. It is an article of faith with *me* that this is hogwash. Some editors do hesitate to publish off-track stories, but if the story is any good, some other editor, sooner or later, will snap it up."

Now half a minute's reflection will show almost anyone – certainly anyone one tenth as intelligent as Frederik Pohl – that the last sentence is arrant nonsense. It is a restatement of a bit of boilerplate that editors and publishers have used for at least fifty years, and Fred (for reasons I hope eventually to demonstrate) has absorbed it without examination. What does *sooner or later* mean in that last sentence? Within a year? Certainly not. Within a decade? I could pretty readily

quote cases to show that even a decade is too short a time. Within fifty years, then. Fifty years is a large limbo; it will hold a lot of stories.

It will not, however, preserve them in dry ice. "Ball of Fat" is outdated now by a century, yet because we know something of conditions in France during the Franco-Prussian war it has not gone rancid. But what about a *good* science fiction story written in 1930 and laid in the then-fifty-years-off world of 1980? For that matter, what about such a story laid in 2000? Suppose this story was written as well as Sherwood Anderson himself could have written it – in 1930 – and it predicted such things as computers, flame throwers, hand-held calculators, atomic bombs, the rise of the Arab states, and the civil rights movement. What would be chance of its being published if it were not published before, say, the year 1940?

But forget all that. For a story to be published, it must be marketed. If a hundred writers write a hundred good-but-off-track stories, and all these stories are rejected forty times, isn't it at least possible that *some* of those writers will have lost faith in them by that time? (Forty rejections might easily take ten years; the manuscript would have to be retyped *at least* three times to have any chance at all.)

A typical publisher or editor would say, of course, that *Dangerous Visions* itself proved him correct; after all, the stories printed in *Dangerous Visions were* printed – in *Dangerous Visions.*

Once upon a time three men were walking beside a river when they saw a beautiful woman drowning. The first man cast his eyes toward heaven, folded his hands, and said, "Lord, I know you would never permit this lovely creature to perish."

"Amen, brother." said the second man.

The third man leaped into the river and after nearly drowning himself, pulled out the woman. Whereupon, naturally, the first and second men said, "I told you so."

But does anyone seriously suppose that *Dangerous Visions* got *all* the off-track stories that were in existence at that time? Harlan almost immediately put together *Again, Dangerous Visions* containing as many more. And he has since assembled a third book (many of us call it *Dangerous Revisions*) rumored to be larger than the first and second books combined.

I am not saying all this to glorify Harlan Ellison; he needs no help from me in that. I merely wish to show that the idea that all good writing finds a publisher eventually is absurd – or to be a little more precise, meaningless.

Now I would like to change the subject from writing to crime. Please bear with me. I am going to tell you how crime statistics – and at least some criminals – are created. Every word, every detail, no matter how fantastic it may sound, is true to the best of my knowledge.

It was the afternoon of our wedding anniversary, and I had taken the day off. When the telephone rang, we were about to drive to a shopper center for lunch. My wife answered it. I heard her say "Hello, where are you?" and knew she was talking to one of our children. Soon her voice changed; she was talking to an adult, and she sounded frightened. When she hung up she said, "Matthew threatened some other boys with a knife. The police have him." As we were getting into the

car to go to the police station, she added, "I'll bet it was those boys from the theater."

Matt is our youngest, a quiet boy of twelve whose chief passion is fishing. About four months earlier, he had broken a neighbor's friendship light with a slingshot – accidentally, he said. That was the most serious disciplinary problem we had ever had with him.

The previous night we had let Matt go to the movies with a schoolmate. My wife said that when she had driven to the theater to get him, he had been surrounded by four or five shouting boys. When he was in the car she had asked if they were his friends, and he had told her they were "mad" at him. He and his schoolmate had been sitting near the front of the theater, and these boys, several rows behind, had thrown mints at them. (We live, it would seem, in an age so rich that children willingly use candies for missiles.) Matt's schoolmate had called them "a bad name", and the boys had waited outside the theater.

Over an intercom in the police station, my wife and I could hear the arresting officer telling a woman clerk to give him some warning when we arrived, while she tried to explain that we were already there. Apparently her microphone was defective or she did not know how to use it; eventually he got the message and began to do whatever it was he felt he had to before talking to us – perhaps settle with his partner what they would tell us.

A few minutes later he came out to greet us and lead us to a conference room. He was young and good looking, and might easily have served as the model policeman on some public affairs broadcast. As it happened, I had met him once before – he was the son of a deceased co-worker. Matt was nowhere in sight.

"Apparently, your son pulled a switchblade knife on some other boys," the arresting officer told us. I said I found that hard to believe. "That's what the boys say, and he admits it. He's never been in trouble before, has he?"

My wife recounted the friendship light episode, which the arresting officer seemed to shrug aside, and asked if the boys involved were the ones from the theater. He said they were (we later discovered that only one of the boys from the theater had been in the group that had found Matt the next day, but he had been the leader, three years older than any of the others), and seemed somewhat surprised to find we were aware of the incident. "Your son appears to have threatened these boys with his knife in the theater last night as well."

My wife said that when she had driven to the theater to pick Matt up she had seen no knife – only Matt surrounded by larger and older boys.

"Well, they say he did."

My wife named several neighborhood boys who she felt might dislike Matt and asked if any of them were involved.

"No, these boys are all from _____ ." The arresting officer named a town about ten miles from the one we live in.

We thought at first that we had misunderstood him. When he repeated what he had said before, we asked what these boys were doing in our town.

"They said they were going to the high school – one of them has a brother in our school. Do you have any idea where your son could have got the knife?"

We did not. I mentioned what the arresting officer, as a policeman, must surely

have known: that switchblades had been outlawed in the US for many years.

"They said it had a pushbutton, but it might just have been the kind of knife that locks open. Do you have any such knife around the house?"

My wife said, "Could it have been your brown-handled knife?" and I explained that the knife she was referring to was a pruning knife I used in the garden. This knife has a hooked blade about three and a half inches long and a brass spring that must be pushed aside to close the blade.

"Your son's knife appears to have been more like a hunting knife," the arresting officer said. "Where is your knife now?"

I told him that as far as I knew it was in my dresser drawer at home. From this time forward his attitude toward me changed radically. I owned a dangerous knife, and was thus a potential criminal. I had left this knife where it might have fallen into Matt's hands. It did not occur to me at the time to point out that our kitchen, like every other kitchen, contains half a dozen knives more suitable for use as weapons.

"Does your knife have a chromed or highly polished blade?"

I shook my head. I have used that knife to cut roses and dig out dandelions for years. I told the arresting officer that if he would only let me see the knife, I would tell him at once if it was mine.

"We don't have it," he said. "They threw it away."

"*They* threw it away?"

"They had taken it from him. The funny thing is that he was the one who called us." (This was also untrue – a clerk in a store where Matt had taken refuge had actually made the call – but the arresting officer seemed to believe what he said, and because we had taught Matt that the police would help him, we believe it too.) "Maybe we ought to have him in now."

The arresting officer's partner led Matt in. His face was tear-stained, but he was no longer crying. He told us he had been dismissed from school and had been walking to a friend's house to play. Four boys, led by one of the boys who had pushed him around outside the theater, had come up behind him on bicycles. Two of these boys were eleven, one, a younger brother of the leader, was ten. The leader was fourteen, but the arresting officer's partner insisted he was no larger physically than Matt. At twelve, Matt is smaller than many of his classmates; the leader must have been quite diminutive for his age, if this were true.

They had struck Matt and kicked him. He had run from them – across a busy Federal highway and eventually into an apartment complex. There he had entered one of the buildings and pounded on the door of one of the apartments. No one had come, and the four boys had driven him out of the building again. In the parking lot, Matt had taken out his pocket knife and tried to hold off his attackers.

The arresting officer interrupted, his voice as humorless as the slam of a cell door. "That is aggravated assault."

Matt said he had found the knife in the street in front of our house about two weeks before. I am not certain this is true. Such knives are for sale in many stores for a dollar or two, Matt sometimes earns money by cutting grass or raking leaves for the neighbors, and it is possible that at this point he was afraid to

admit he had bought the knife. He had not told my wife or me about it, although he had shown it to his older brother.

I asked him how the other boys had taken it from him.

"They said if I would let them see it, they would stop beating me up. Only they took it and beat me up some more."

They had chased him several blocks farther until he took refuge in a skiing store, halfway across town from the point where he had initially been attacked. A clerk had called the police to drive away the gang of four boys waiting outside, Matt had told the policeman that they had taken his knife, and he had been arrested. The arresting officer's partner had stopped the four boys, then released them. He said he had searched them – there on the street – for the knife, and that they had said they had thrown it away. He had searched the area where they had told him they had thrown it, but he had been unable to find it.

"In my day," the arresting officer said, "in yours too, I'm sure," (it seemed to be an attempt to return to the old friendly footing that had prevailed before I admitted to owning a pruning knife) "we knew how to defend ourselves without knives."

My wife said we would try to enroll Matt in a boxing or karate class. Then came the most incredible part of the entire interview. I find it difficult to write because I feel know it will not be believed, but it is true. The arresting officer solemnly warned us that if we enrolled Matt in such a class, the police might choose to consider his hands dangerous weapons.

In the end Matt was released. We were told that the police have "started a card" on him, and that he is classified as a potentially violent juvenile. In the eyes of the law, he is a criminal guilty of aggravated assault. Aggravated assault, it seems, is the legal term for a tearful little boy futilely attempting to hold a gang at bay with a pocket knife.

All this may seem to have nothing to do with the Affliction of Science Fiction, but I am convinced that it does. There are two principal forms of human thought; if I were even a little bit Chinese I would call them *The Path of the Beast* and *The Road of the Angel,* or something of the kind. The first consists of reacting to simply cues, the second of reasoning from more or less consciously formulated premises. Most people do the former; science fiction, the strumpet step-daugher of the hard sciences, tends to teach us to do the latter.

I felt persecuted, bullied, by the policeman, who was reacting to the word *knife* (the actual knife itself had done nothing, and he had never even seen it) as mindlessly as my trash compactor does to the touch of a button. Fred Pohl, doubtless, found the Army reacting to cues of various kinds in the same wholly automatic fashion, and thus was moved to resent it, though it had furnished him with a glorious, years-long adventure.

But although the Path of the Beast and the Road of the Angel are wholly separate, the neurons of each human brain trace both; mention "off-track" stories to Fred, and you evolve the programmed, unthought response.

Once one has followed the Road of the Angel even a little way, however, a great many things become obvious. It is obvious, for example, that we should devise

some planet-wide substitute for war, and that it would be to everyone's advantage to do so. It is obvious that society should repress those who act aggressively, and not those who attempt to defend themselves from that aggression. Yet people who have understood these things, and the hundred more like them that could be rattled off, must continue to live where they are. They are by definition maladjusted, just as a pig who had somehow understood that the end of pigness was porkness, and wept or tried to climb out of the sty, could truthfully be said to be maladjusted.

That, of course, is not real "mind rot"; but real decay of the intelligence is not only possible but common. The person who takes the Road of the Angel soon perceives that he is on the road and not yet at his destination, which he will perhaps reach only after death; and that the road winds through a looking-glass land where reason is murdered by words and he is ill adapted to survive. Having lost the instincts of the beasts he seeks to substitute for them a contrived and habitual lunacy, and becomes, like little Alice, a bewildered pawn. He is afflicted. I am so afflicted, as my parents warned me I would be. Matt will no doubt soon be so afflicted if he is not already. Fred is so afflicted, and so, I think, are you.

Rudy Rucker is an American mathematician currently at the University of Heidelberg, where he is teaching a course in the Philosophy of Mathematics. He is author of Geometry, Relativity and the Fourth Dimension *(Dover 1977). His first sf novel* Spacetime Donuts *was serialised in* Unearth *and a second novel* White Light *is forthcoming from Ace Books. The following fascinating account of the dimensional speculations and scientific romances of Charles Hinton is a somewhat altered version of Mr Rucker's introduction to an anthology of Hinton's writings forthcoming in Summer 1980 from Dover in the USA and Constable in the UK.*

Life in the Fourth Dimension: C.H. Hinton and his Scientific Romances

Rudy Rucker

Charles Howard Hinton was a professional mathematician. He took the Master's degree at Oxford, taught at Princeton, and published pure mathematics related to work of Morley, Hamilton and Cayley. But for Hinton formal mathematics was never an end in itself.

Hinton's touchstone was, rather, direct and intuitive knowledge of four-dimensional space. The bulk of his writings are aimed at developing in the reader the power to think about 4-D space; and the rest of his work focused on using a knowledge of higher space to solve various problems in physics and metaphysics.

Hinton was born in London in 1853, the first son in his family. He was schooled at Rugby, and matriculated at Oxford in 1871. From a letter written to him by his father in 1869, we learn that already as a schoolboy, Hinton evidenced an interest in "studying geometry as an exercise of direct perception".

After two years at Oxford, he was granted a three-year term as Exhibitor of Balliol College in the University. On the strength of this honour, Hinton obtained a post as Assistant Master at the Cheltenham Ladies' College in 1875. He continued his studies at Oxford, some 50 miles distant from Cheltenham, receiving his B.A. in 1877. In 1880, he left Cheltenham to teach at the Uppingham School, where he remained until he received his M.A. from Oxford in 1886. It is during the decade 1877-1887 that Hinton found his life's work.

Of this period he writes in *A New Era of Thought* (1888) that, "I found myself in respect to knowledge like a man who is in the midst of plenty and yet who cannot find anything to eat. All around me were the evidences of knowledge – the arts, the sciences, interesting talk, useful inventions – and yet I myself was profited

nothing at all; for somehow, amidst all the activity, I was left alone, I could get nothing which I could know".

Desperate for some absolute and definite knowledge, Hinton hit upon the plan of memorizing a cubic yard of one-inch cubes. That is, he took a 36 x 36 x 36 block of little cubes, assigned a two-word Latin name (e.g. Collis Nebula) to each of the 46,656 cubes, and learned to use this network as a sort of "solid paper". Thus, when Hinton wished to visualize some solid structure, he would do so by adjusting its size so that it fitted into his cubic yard. Then he could describe the structure by listing the names of the occupied cells. Hinton maintains that he thereby obtained a sort of direct and sensuous appreciation of space.

Given that Hinton's father had been known for his exceptional memory, and that there is a system which reduces the brute facts to be memorized to 216, this learning of a yard block of one-inch cubes is not inconceivable. But now Hinton went on to memorize the positions of the little cubes for each of the 24 possible orientations which the block might have relative to the observer (six choices for the bottom face times four choices for the front face).

His reasons for doing this are described in his essay "Casting Out the Self" (1884). If cube A is *next to* Cube B, this is an absolute fact. But to say that cube A is *above* or *behind* cube B is simply to say something about the relation of the self to the arrangement of cubes. It was in order to eliminate such "self-elements" that Hinton learned the block of cubes in each of its 24 possible orientations.

This casting out of self-elements led to an interesting question: Is the difference between an arrangement of cubes, and the mirror image of this arrangement, absolute or relative? Hinton brooded over Kant's remark (in section 13 of the *Prolegomena*) that the apparently irreconcilable differences between a right hand and a left hand is somehow the result of a limited space intuition. And one would image that Hinton also heard of A.F. Mobius's 1827 discovery that any 3-D object can be turned into its mirror-image by a rotation through 4-D space.

Hinton now became interested in the fourth dimension. He used his "solid paper" to construct for himself the various cubical cross-sections of the hypercube or tesseract (a word which Hinton may have coined himself). He assigned a different colour to each of the tesseract's 81 parts (1 tesseract + 8 cubes + 24 faces + 32 edges + 16 vertices). By working with these cross-sections he was able to visualize the reality of the fact that if a tesseract is pushed through our space, turned over, and pushed back through, then the first cubical cross-section seen the first time through will be the mirror image of the first seen the second time through.

As his understanding of the fourth dimension grew, Hinton set to writing about it. His first published essay, "What is the Fourth Dimension?", appeared in 1880 in the *Dublin University Magazine*, was reprinted in the *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine* of September 1883, and finally was published as a pamphlet with the subtitle "Ghosts Explained", by Swann Sonnenschein & Co. in 1884. In the period 1884-1886, Swann Sonnenschein published in London nine different pamphlets by Hinton which were then collected in the two-volume set *Scientific Romances*.

Swann Sonnenschein was to be the first publisher for all of Hinton's books. Around 1910, Allen & Unwin obtained the rights to the books, which they kept in

print for a number of years. In one of his introductions, Hinton acknowledges his debt to, "the publisher of this volume, Mr Sonnenschein, to whose unique appreciation of the line of thought of this, as of my former essays, their publication is owing".

Three of the "scientific romances" are what we would now call science-fiction stories. The first of these is "The Persian King", subtitled "The Mystery of Pleasure and Pain". This is about a king who keeps a valley running by absorbing a small amount of pain from everyone, so that there is enough differential between pleasure and pain for activity to exist. The story is somewhat atypical for Hinton, and was written primarily to dramatize one of his father's pet ideas.

The father, James Hinton, was an aural surgeon who was best known for a little book, *The Mystery of Pain,* which sets forth the Panglossian thesis that, "All that which we feel as painful is really *giving* – something that our fellows are better for, even though we cannot trace it". Charles added his own touch by dramatizing this in terms of infinite series.

The second of the fictional scientific romances is a novella called "Stella". This is a first-person description of the narrator's love affair with a girl who has been made invisible by her guardian. The guardian has provided the girl with an elixir which makes her index of refraction equal to that of air. It seems possible that "Stella" provided some of the inspiration for H.G. Well's *The Invisible Man.*

However, unlike the invisible man, Stella chooses to be invisible for the highest of motives. Hinton held a very strong conviction that the key to right living is openness and altruism. As Stella says, "Being is being for others". The reason Stella chooses to remain invisible is so that she will not fall into a self-serving concern with her own appearance!

The most interesting of the fictional scientific romances is "An Unfinished Communication" (1885). This weird, modernistic story describes the experiences of a young man who seeks out the services of an "Unlearner". He manages to forget more and more of the rubbish clogging his mind. He falls in love with a fisherman's daughter, but then drowns while walking on a quicksand beach. As he is drowing he becomes aware of two-dimensional time. The idea is that a life can be viewed as a fixed object in 4-D spacetime. As some higher, second time lapses, an entire life can gradually evolve into a different one. The drowning hero is suddenly able to watch his life evolving into one where things work out properly.

The *Scientific Romances* collection also contains a couple of essays on life in a 2-D world. The purpose of these essays is to describe the fourth dimension by analogy. The fourth dimension is to us, as the third dimension would be to Flatlanders. Hinton was, of course, familiar with Edwin Abbott's 1884 *Flatland,* but he was interested in working out the physics of Flatland in much more detail.

Soon after Hinton received his Master's degree from Oxford in 1886, he left his post at Uppingham School to teach for several years in the Japanese government middle schools. He left his first full-length book, *A New Era of Thought* (1888), in manuscript form with his friends Alicia Boole and John Falk. They used his manuscript, essentially unrevised, for Part I of *A New Era of Thought*; and for Part II they themselves wrote up a detailed description of the exercises with coloured cubes which Hinton had used to see the tesseract.

The most interesting notion in Part I is Hinton's "phonograph record" view of the aether. He believed that just as Flatlanders could be viewed as flat shapes sliding on a tabletop, we were actually sliding along on a solid block of 4-D aether. We have a slight 4-D hyperthickness, and our passage leaves scratches on the aether. To some extent our activities are preordained by the scratches or grooves which we slide over. But every so often things return to their starting position, and it is possible to alter the configuration of the guiding grooves by exerting suitable pressure. So here we have an eternal return idea combined with the two-dimensional time idea that our life as a whole can change.

Hinton is probably best known for the coloured cube exercises in Part II of *A New Era of Thought.* One is to construct a sect of 12 cubes, colouring the faces, edges and corners all manner of different colours. (81 different colours are prescribed, some of them rather unusual. The modern reader is amused to note that the line going into the fourth dimension is to be coloured "Stone".) The way in which all the cubes fit together is really explained rather well, if one has the will to endure not only 81 colours, but also the 81 Latin names Hinton assigns.

Judging from the quotes which Sonnenschein & Co reprinted on the endpapers of Hinton's books, both the *Scientific Romances* and *A New Era of Thought* were favourably received. Of the *Romance* "What is the Fourth Dimension?" the *Pall Mall Gazette* wrote, "It is a short treatise of admirable clearness. Mr Hinton brings us panting, but delighted, to at least a momentary faith in the Fourth Dimension, and upon the eye there opens a vista of interesting problems. It exhibits a boldness of speculation and a power of conceiving and expressing even the inconceivable, which rouses one's faculties like a tonic". The *Literary World* praised *A New Era of Thought* in equally athletic terms: "A theoretical and practical treatise on the Fourth Dimension. The book is a powerful mental gymnastic; the style is as clear as it can be. The author is in grim earnest, and promises a complete system of four-dimensional thought – Mechanical, Scientific and Aesthetic".

Exactly how long Hinton stayed in Japan is unclear, but in the Fall of 1893 he started a stint as Instructor in the Mathematics Department of Princeton University. There were only three other members of the department teaching at that time, and Hinton seems to have been at the bottom of the pecking order. He taught only Freshmen and Sophomore level courses, and he was fired after four years. In a piece called "The Oxford Spirit" which he wrote in 1902, Hinton expressed some bitterness at his treatment by the American educational system:

> In America a new phenomenon has arisen – the business man in control of the halls of learning. The college president runs his university as if it were a great factory. He makes a number of provisional appointments – instructors. The instructors know that during term time they must work to the full extent of their energy in instruction, and occupy their vacations in prosecuting their subject if they are to retain their positions.

It cannot really be said that Hinton followed this formula while teaching at Princeton. He was friendly with his students and became very interested in baseball . . . so much so that he invented a sort of baseball gun. As he wrote in his article, "A Mechanical Pitcher", in *Harper's Weekly*, 1897, "The project of constructing a

mechanical pitcher was suggested to me by considerations all who are intested in baseball will appreciate. I had remarked the frequent occurrence of 'sore arm', as also that it was only in the matches themselves that many a batter had experience of really first class pitching". So, after a period of experimentation, he developed a gun which, when charged with gunpowder, would shoot a baseball at the requisite 40 to 70 miles per hour. The speed was regulated by varying the size of an adjustable breech; and, most importantly, any desired curve or drop ball could be shot by adjusting two rubber-coated steel fingers attached to the muzzle of the gun. The Princeton nine worked out with this mechanical pitcher for several years. Eventually it was abandoned because of the fear it inspired in the batters.

There is a curious story connected with Hinton's discovery of the baseball gun. I quote from his obituary in the *New York Sun,* May 5, 1907. "Although on account of his enthusiasm for metageometry he was never a great success as an instructor in his college positions, he made many friends, and in Princeton endeared himself to the students by one of the most successful practical jokes ever perpetrated there. This was just after his perfection of the baseball gun. He invited the faculty and students to a lecture, at which he demonstrated the machine and described its scientific theory. While he was upon the platform the lecture was interrupted by the arrival of a special delivery postman who walked down the aisle and called to the professor. As he had been the victim of many practical jokes and 'horsed' by the students according to the Princeton custom the audience prepared for some absurd diversion. After protesting against the interruption, but not being able to send away the messenger, Prof Hinton begged permission to look at a letter important enough to demand consideration at such a time. He read aloud, and had turned two pages, reading an account of a baseball game in the year 1950, before the students discovered that the joke was upon them." Presumably this science-fictional baseball game included the use of Hinton's pitching gun. Indeed, in his article on the baseball gun mentioned above, Hinton indicated he expected the use of it to become commonplace. There is something magical in this story of the professor of higher space receiving a message from the future.

After leaving Princeton, Hinton took a position as Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota. He continued using his baseball gun there, and he also gave a number of extracurricular talks and lectures. One was entitled, "Double Personality – Who Am I?"

In 1900 he resigned from the University of Minnesota to take a position at the Naval Observatory in Washington, D.C. The famous astronomer, Simon Newcomb, had recently retired from his post there. In view of the fact that Newcomb wrote a paper on 4-D rotations, it seems likely that he helped Hinton obtain his position at the Naval Observatory. Shortly after moving to Washington, Hinton read a paper entitled "The Recognition of the Fourth Dimension" before the Philosophical Society there. This paper represents electric charge as a sort of double rotation in a 4-D aether.

Hinton's best-known book, *The Fourth Dimension,* was published in 1904. The chapters are largely independent from each other, and one has the impression that they were written at various times over the 16 years since *A New Era of Thought.* The tone of this book is much more subdued that in earlier works. Hinton remarks

that his earlier systems of naming regions of space "turned out, after giving them a fair trial, to be intolerable". He is no longer absolutely sure that he can teach everyone to see the reality of the fourth dimension and says, "I do not like to speak positively, for I might occasion a loss of time on the part of others, if, as may very well be, I am mistaken".

Nevertheless, Hinton does continue to try to teach the reader to see 4-D space. He had a theory that the smallest particles of our brains are in fact four-dimensional . . . so that it really *should* be possible to form perfect 4-D mental images. *The Fourth Dimension* contains a greatly streamlined version of the tesseract models. There was a set of 27 cardboard squares; a set of 81 one-inch monochrome cubes of various colours; and a set of 12 multi-coloured "catalogue cubes".

When the book came out, one could buy a set with the 81 little cubes for 16 shillings. It would be interesting to know how many of these sets were actually sold. Appended to the essay "Hypercubes" in Martin Gardner's *Mathematical Carnival,* there is a spooky letter from a former user of Hinton's cubes who calls them "completely mind-destroying".

Despite this remark, I went ahead and built myself a set of 81 Hinton cubes. There are 81 because they represent a hypercube 3 units long per side . . . and $3^4 = 81$. One works with them by setting up three cubes, each 3 units per side, in various ways. It was interesting . . . but I think that anyone who came of age in the Sixties will feel the need for more drastic means of mind destruction!

After spending several years at the Naval Observatory, Hinton took the civil service test for a position in the Patent Office, having studied only one night. He qualified as an examiner for chemical patents, and he remained at this post until his sudden death at the age of 54 on April 30, 1907.

Dramatically enough, Hinton suffered cerebral aemorrhage and died on the spot while leaving the annual banquet of the Washington, D.C., Society of Philanthropic Inquiry. He was a prominent member of the Society and had wound up the evening by complying with the toastmaster's request for a toast to female philosophers. His death is described in an article bluntly headlined "Scientist Drops Dead", in the *Washington Post* of May 1, 1907.

At the time of his death, Hinton's last book, *An Episode of Flatland: or How a Plane Folk Discovered the Third Dimension,* was in press. We can fittingly regard this mature and mellow novel as Hinton's last testament. Any preconceptions of Hinton as some sort of narrow-minded crank are dispelled by the gentle self-irony of the book, which features two characters modelled on Hinton himself.

An Episode of Flatland returns to Hinton's notion that the aether is a solid body which is next to us in the direction of the fourth dimension, and that our bodies actually have a slight 4-D thickness. The soul is taken to be a very small 4-D entity which directs the 3-D motions of the body . . . just as the captain of a ship is a small 3-D entity which directs the 2-D motions of the ship.

The problem facing the characters in *Episode* is that the disk (cf. planet) on which they live is about to crash into another such disk . . . killing everyone. The old three-dimensional scientist comes up with a notion for saving their planet. At a specified time each day everyone on one half of the disk is to go to church and imagine himself to be floating upwards.

When one prays, or meditates on floating, one's tiny little tooth of a 3-D soul actually digs into the aether and pulls up. The combined effect of this is enough to pull the Flatlanders' world into a new course, and they are served. There's a war and a pair of star-crossed lovers, too.

The main idea is a captivating one, providing a nice scientific basis for levitation stories. One levitates by grasping the underlying 4-D aether with one's mind. If one could only build 4-D pitons, one could climb up through empty space by driving little posts into the aether!

Unfortunately, Hinton's notion of a solid *space-like* aether *next to* us is not too tenable. Instead, in relativity, we have a *spacetime* aether all *around* us. The characteristic thing about the modern aether is that it does not allow itself to be thought of as a definite spacelike object. Although multi-dimensional spaces are used routinely in physics we seem no closer than ever to that "exhilarating moment when an investigator comes upon phenomena which show that external nature cannot be explained except by the assumption of a four-dimensional space", which Hinton awaited. The problem is that the higher-dimensionalities of physics (e.g. those involved in curved spacetime) can be thought of as mere mathematical formalisms . . . although it is usually *easier* to go ahead and visualize in terms of higher-dimensional space. (See my *Geometry, Relativity and the Fourth Dimension*, 1977.)

In the end it seems that the best place to look for higher-dimensional space is, as Hinton so often said, in the mind. We still have no idea of how to axiomatize the logical space in which our minds move about, but there is every reason to believe that this space is higher-dimensional. It has been my personal experience that Hinton's claim that the mind can move in 4-D space is true, although I cannot say that I find the experience of turning the world into its own mirror image a pleasant one.

We are only at the threshold of a non-reductive theory of consciousness; and any final higher-space expression of higher consciousness is something which is no closer now than it was in Hinton's time. Indeed, it would be folly to expect that everything can be explained along any given lines – the world exists both before and after our attempts to understand it. Hinton eloquently continues this line of thought in "Many Dimensions" (1888):

> If we want to pass on and on till magnitude and dimensions disappear, is it not done for us already? That reality, where magnitudes and dimensions are not, is simple and about us. For passing thus on and on we lose ourselves, but find the clue again in the apprehension of the simplest acts of human goodness, in the most rudimentary recognition of another human soul wherein is neither magnitude nor dimension, and yet all is real.

Anthony Wolk is Professor of English at Portland State University. He recently spent a year on sabbatical in London, dividing his time between research in linguistics and reading his way (as far as possible) through the complete works of Philip K. Dick. Part of the fruits of the latter research are presented here: the first attempt we are aware of to explore the extensive terrain of Dick's short stories.

The Sunstruck Forest: A Guide to the Short Fiction of Philip K. Dick

Anthony Wolk

How do dreams begin? Like Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener, I prefer to ignore that question. But how a novel or story begins is much easier to deal with. Philip K. Dick's story "Roog" (1953), his first sale, begins when it is "early morning, and the sun had not really come up yet. . . . and from all around the sounds of people geting up echoed through the morning air."[1] Water gets poured into the coffeepot; Alf Cardossi asks his wife if she's brought in the paper.

Though relatively few of Dick's stories (and novels) actually begin with the morning of a new day, it is still, I think, a quintessential beginning for Dick – as if both reader and character are ripped or translated from what I once heard a child call the safe, cozy world of sleep into a world of tension, anxiety, dread:

> A merry little surge of electricity piped by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside his bed awakened Rick Deckard. Surprised – it always surprised him to find himself awake without prior notice – he rose from the bed, stood up in his multi-colored pajamas, and stretched. Now, in her bed, his wife Iran opened her grey, unmerry eyes, blinked, then groaned and shut her eyes again. (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, 1968)

> At four fifteen in the afternoon, T.S.T., Garson Poole work up in his hospital bed, knew that he lay in a hospital bed in a three-bed ward and realized in addition two things: that he no longer had a right hand and that he felt no pain. ("The Electric Ant", 1969)

> He awoke – and wanted Mars. The valleys, he thought. What would it be like to trudge among them? Great and greater yet: the dream grew as he became fully conscious, the dream and the yearning. . . .
>
> "Are you getting up or not?" his wife Kirsten asked drowsily, with her usual hint of fierce crossness. "If you are, push the hot coffee button on the darn stove." ("We Can Remember It for You Wholesale", 1966)

As Dick says in "Man, Android and Machine", his ontology, or realm of Being, has both reader and character "slumber in dreams as they wait for the voice which

will awaken them".[2] In "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale an awakening proceeds step by step through the story. Douglas Quail (an apt name for the character accidentally flushed and now in full flight) unmasks the shadowy appearances layer by layer. The Mars that he comes awake wanting is a metaphor for another metaphor, of spring: "we are waiting for spring to come. . . . Spring means thermal return, the abolition of the process of entropy . . . the period of slumbering is a period of gestation together with our fellows which will culminate in an entirely different form of life than we have ever known before" ("Man, Android and Machine"). And spring in turn is the human, the non-machine element of our selves – a "way of being in the world". Elsewhere Dick speaks of "no authors and no readers but a great many characters in search of a plot" and metaphorically of "a huge umbrella that lets in light and shuts out the darkness at the same instant. When the characters die, the novel ends. And the book falls back into dust."[3]

In his "Afterthoughts" to *The Best of Philip K. Dick* Dick describes writing his stories as "attempts at reception – at listening to voices from another place, very far off, sounds quite faint but important". He writes that these voices or sounds "only come late at night, when the background din and gabble of our world have faded out". Dick writes whimsically of this "reception" – "I clocked it once and reception is best between 3.00am and 4.45am". Whatever it was when the earlier stories were written, I don't think that Dick now regards this inspiration as whimsy. The reader should look at "Man, Android and Machine", where Dick admits deriving "much of the material for my writing from dreams", dreams which move beyond the "ego-oriented left-hemisphere brains" and share in the "collective noöspheric Mind which comprises all our right brains". Dick is still tentative about whether his dreams "indicate that a telepathic communication was in progress somewhere within my head". But, he admits, "much of the dream material seemed beyond my personal ability to have created".

Having read John Livingston Lowes on Coleridge's inspiration for "The Road to Xanadu", I'd say that Dick should credit his creative genius considerably more. But, I have also read Dante's *Comedia*, and in my own schizoid way I don't challenge the reality of Dante's vision. Nor do I keep my maps of Earthsea and Middle Earth very many leagues away from my Oxford Historical Atlas. I can now presume to say something about Dick's stories. As of 1978, 106 short stories and novellas! Presently, in the five collections of stories, the reader has comfortable access to 49 of Philip K. Dick's stories. Until other collections are published few readers nowadays will get beyond this incomplete corpus.

The figures on Dick's output are startling. His first published story, "Beyond Lies the Wub", appeared in *Planet Stories* in July, 1952. By the end of 1955, 73 stories had been published (including *Dr. Futurity* under the title "Time Pawn"). Thereafter Dick's production of short stories slowed down considerably: 5 stories in 1956, 2 in 1957, 1 in 1958, 4 in 1959, and then none until 1963. From then on his short stories are occasional except for 1967 when 7 were published. I think a convincing case can be made from the 24 novels since 1960 (from *The Man in the High Castle* onward) that Dick's fiction has demonstrated a consistent approach and ontology. But to talk about consistency in and with the earlier canon would

require a great deal of qualification. For instance, whereas all the novels demonstrate survival, no matter how rotten affairs may be in the future, there are stories that show the opposite, early stories like "Second Variety" (1953), where machines become self-programming and design weapons that kill the last human on earth and then head for Moon Base. It is meagre comfort at the end of the story that "They were already beginning to design weapons to use against each other." Well, at least the machines won't survive long![4] But then it may not entirely be a matter of early or late in the canon – differences could be generic. Even a late story like "The Electric Ant" (1969), which deals with Dick's vital theme of *What is Real?*, ends with the whole cosmos winking out of existing and all matter disintegrating:

> Trembling, she [Sarah Benton] walked back to the inert roby, stood by it, not knowing what to do. Through her legs the carpet showed, and then the carpet became dim, and she saw, through it, further layers of disintegrating matter beyond.
>
> Maybe if I can fuse the tape-ends back together, she thought. But she did not know how. And already Poole had become vague.
>
> The wind of early morning blew about her. She did not feel it; she had begun, now, to cease to feel.
>
> The winds blew on.

In his brief note on this story Dick writes, "The ending of this story has always frightened me . . . [Dick's ellipsis] the image of the rushing wind, the sound of emptiness. As if the character hears the final fate of the world itself." Beneath the veil is nothingness, pure entropy. In his discussion of actuality in "Man, Android and Machine", Dick comments on *Ubik*, where "time has been nullified". And with "the deaths of the characters, we the readers and they the personae see the world as it is without the veil of Maya, without the obscuring mists of lineal time". It is Time, "binding together all phenomena and maintaining all life, which by its *activity* hides the ontological reality beneath its flow". But Sarah Benton doesn't *die* at the end of "The Electric Ant"; she ceases to exist. There is no killing. And it is nothingness that Poole's reality tape is veiling. Dick is not presenting us with a mystery, like Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*, where the basal material of the ocean, of Rheya, disappears under extreme magnification. To judge from what Dick goes on to say in "Man, Android and Machine", he would not endorse the ending of "The Electric Ant": "If you feel that chaos is closing in, that when the dream fades out, nothing will be left, or, worse, something dreadful will confront you – well, this is why the concept of the Day of Wrath persists . . . But I think that the visage revealed will be a smiling one, since spring usually beams down on creatures rather than blasting them with desiccating heat."

At the end of the essay Dick quotes from *Revelation* 22:16: "I am the root and scion of David, the bright morning star"; and the Pindar,

> Of all the trees that are
> He hath his flock, and feedeth root by root,
> The Joy-god Dionysos, the pure star
> That shines amid the gathering of the fruit.

Dick notes that both passages entail the alpha and omega, the root and the star: "I am from the chthonic world up, and the starry heaven downwards." In concord

with this positive view is the medieval German poem cited by Dick in both *Ubik* and *Deus Irae:*

> Ich sih die liehte heide
> in gruner varwe stan.
> Dar sūln wir alle gehen,
> die sumerzit enphahen.
>
> I see the sunstruck forest,
> In green it stands complete.
> There soon we all are going,
> The summertime to meet.

Perhaps the contrast then is of fear and belief, not early and late. The longer works express the belief and the stories sometimes give in to the far.

Like the presence of the chthonic, another measure of the *belief* has to do with Dick's protagonists. In her short article on Dick in *The New Republic,* Ursula K. Le Guin celebrates the subtle quality of heroism in Mr Tagomi, who is the foundation of whatever hope we have.[5] Dick voices this himself: "To me the great joy in writing a book is showing some small person, some ordinary person doing something in a moment of great valor, for which he would get nothing and which would be unsung in the real world."[6] Shadrach Jones in "King of the Elves" (1953) is a paticularly clear instance of the unlikely hero, chosen by the dying King of the Elves as his successor:

> He trusted you . . . You brought him inside your house, out of the rain. He knew that you expected nothing for it, that there was nothing you wanted. He had known few who gave and asked nothing back.

And it doesn't detract from the heroism that the heroic moment may have comic overtones, the Japanese official fanning his Colt 45 in true gunslinger fashion or Shadrach Jones remarking, "It's a hard thing for a man of my age to change. To stop selling gasoline and suddenly be a king."

I think, though, it could be said that the margin of victory is becoming narrower in Dick's later work. In "A Little Something for Us Tempunauts" (1974), a loop story, Addison Doug's tendency toward cyclothymia (a pronounced *déjà vu*) produces the loop. His psychotic refusal "to let go of the past" yields an equivocal "gift to them, the people, his country. He had bestowed upon the world a wonderful burden. The dreadful and weary miracle of eternal life." The irony inherent in Dick oxymoronic "wonderful burden" marks this as a story, ultimately, of failure. In *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) it takes the full perspective of the novel to realize the true heroism of Bob Arctor. At the end he is stripped of his name, his identity; he is Bruce, whose speech now is only echolaliac. But he has discovered where *Mors ontologica* is grown, the drug which is the death of the spirit:

> Stooping down, Bruce picked one of the stubbled blue plants, then placed it in his right shoe, slipping it down out of sight. A present for my friends, he thought, and looked forward inside his mind, where no one could see, to Thanksgiving.[7]

His act marks the beginning of the end for an inhumane society, extreme in its

lying, its manipulation, its repression.

Dick himself suggests a shifting perspective from early to late. In his prefatory note to *A Handful of Darkness* (1955) he writes of "small men, apparently mediocre, suddenly presented with a situation which is patently impossible." (I shall refer to such stories as Minor Man stories.) But, he adds, these stories "are no flights into soap-bubble fancy; these stories deal with a hard, ruthless world, a world of frequent defeat. Recognize it? But the possibility of victory exists . . . [Dick's ellipsis] sometimes it is the enemy who is ground up in the gleaming machinery, or carried off by the flood."[8] In his "Afterthoughts" to *The Best of Philip K. Dick,* published 22 years later, Dick says, "The majority of these stories were written when my life was simpler and made sense. I could tell the difference between the real world and the world I wrote about." He could write a story like "Roog" (1953) where garbage men are aliens, garbage cans "offering urns", and dogs are the "guardians" (later, garbage becomes a primary symbol of entropic waste). Or one with a premise that the alien's mask is crab grass – "My earlier stories had such premises. Later, when my personal life became complicated and full of unfortunate convolutions, worries about crab grass got lost somewhere." I think, though, the contrast here is largely between his early short stories and the later novels – yet stories like "The Little Movement" (1952) or "Colony" (1953) do seem uncomplicated – morally uncomplicated – after reading "Faith of Our Fathers" (1967) or "A Little Something for Us Tempunauts" (1974).[9]

Still there is a remarkable persistence to Dick's stories, from first to last. Those few that don't seem to have the particular Philip K. Dick stamp, like "The Builder" (1953-54) or "The Cookie Lady" (1953) or "The Indefatigable Frog" (1953), on second thought are not exceptions. "The Builder" with its Noah analogue is after all a Minor Man story; "The Cookie Lady" ends with young Bubber translated into "Something grey, something grey and dry . . . blowing up against the porch, carried by the wind. . . . A bundle of weeds, weeds and rags blown by the wind", an entropic essence from what Dick later calls the "tomb world" (the name "Bubber" itself goes with Dick's later vocabulary of entropy: "gubble", "gabble", "gubbish", "kipple"). "The Indefatigable Frog", which plays with Zeno's paradox and relativity, doesn't at first trigger any associations in my critic's mind, but then its wry situational humor and limited point of view as Professor Grote shrinks microscopically would do justice to Palmer Eldritch's "Chew-Z":

> In the half light he leaped from stone to stone. He was running across an endless plain of rocks and boulders, jumping like a goat, from crag to crag. 'Or like a frog,' he said. He jumped on, stopping once in a while for breath. How long would it be? He looked at the size of the great blocks of ore piled up around him. Suddenly a terror rushed through him.

Only when I declare that the fundamental Dick story presents a pattern of hope, of choice, of survival, only then are exceptions discovered. In "Paycheck" (1953) a computer mechanic becomes a time traveller and leaves an obscure message to his past self that initiatives a series of events that leads inexorably to one conclusion. When Jennings is tempted to doubt the trail, he reasons, "But surely *he* had known what he was doing. *He* had already seen all this. Like God, it had already happened for *him.* Predetermined. *He* could not err." True, it does occur to Jennings that

maybe the future is variable – the chain is sustained, there is no variation. In Dick's early novels *The World Jones Made* (1956) and *Dr Futurity* (1960; based on "Time Pawn", 1954) there is a similar certitude about the future. At the conclusion of *Dr Futurity*, Nathan Parsons asks Loris if he will return to this future Earth:

> "Will I ever be back here," he asked her bluntly.
> With composure, she said, "I won't tell you."
> "But you know."
> "Yes," she said.
> "Why won't you tell me?"
> "I don't want to rob you of the power of choosing for yourself. If I tell you, it will seem determined. Out of your hands . . ."
> "Do you believe that choice actually exists? That it's not an illusion?"
> She said, "I believe it's authentic."
> He let it go at that.

Later Dick didn't "let it go at that". For a precog like Barney Mayerson in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964) or for Eric Sweetscent in *Now Wait for Last Year* (1966), who actually visits the future via the drug JJ-108, there are variables, there is an element of choice.

> Where will we be next year? he [Norbert Weiss] asked himself. No way to know . . . [Dick's ellipsis] except for the precogs among the Unusuals, and they saw many futures at one time, like – he had heard – rows of boxes. (*Our Friends from Frolix 8*, 1970)

Again, it is the earlier certainty for Edna Berthelson in "Captive Market" (1955) with her "odd ability" to "look 'ahead'"; she has the power to view the range of possible futures and then choose the "correct" one that best suits her "business and profit" mind. She gets to choose, unlike the few survivors of the next war who are desperately trying to begin again on Venus. It's a story where greed extinguishes hope, choice, and the opportunity for survival.

So "Captive Market" and "A Little Something for Us Tempunauts" are exceptional, though not just because Dick denies free choice. The author has opted for the *other* resolution, away from optimism and toward pessimism. (I said earlier that the novels always always proceed toward hope, however slim; I'd like to quality that somewhat: in *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* [1974] and *Deus Irae* [1976, with Roger Zelazny] the protagonists slip down the drain, but only in the Epilogues. Which, I tell myself, were added in an authorial fit of mood.)

There is a different kind of observation pertinent to the relationship of Dick's shorter and longer fiction: many of his novels derive specifically from his short stories. For instance:

"Shell Game" (1954) and *Clans of the Alphane Moon* (1964)
"Novelty Act" (1964) and *The Simulacra* (1964)
"The Days of Perky Pat" (1963) and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964)
"Stand-by" (1963) and *The Crack in Space* (1966)[10]
"Your Appointment Will be Yesterday" (1966) and *Counter-Clock World* (1967)
"The Little Black Box" (1964) and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)
"What the Dead Men Say" (1964) and *Ubik* (1969).

Even as early a story as "The Defenders" (1953) is an explicit source for *The Penultimate Truth* (1964), complete with Leadies, the big lie of a fake on-going surface war, the underground weapons factories, and the great masses living their sub-surface multi-level existence. Unlike *The Penultimate Truth*, however, "The Defenders" is a *good machines* story, where the surface robots wisely sustain the hoax until humans are "ready to learn the truth". Humans must continue to be restricted: "The working out of daily problems of existence will teach you [Russian and American] how to get along in the same world. It will not be easy, but it will be done."

The élitism theme so prominent in *The Penultimate Truth* is to a degree present in the story. Initially Don Taylor takes comfort in being "an integral part of the war program, not just another factory worker lugging a cart of scrap, but a technician, one of those who designed and planned the nerve-trunk of the war". But questions about events on the surface and his wife's cynicism lead him beyond his limited vision:

> He had not realized how resentful she was. Were they all like that? How about the workers toiling in the factories, day and night, endlessly? The pale, stooped men and women, plodding back and forth to work, blinking in the colorless light, eating synthetics –

The short story has no brilliant contrast between the toiling workers and anyone above ground. That must wait for the novel, which opposes chthonic comradely workers below ground with the vast demesnes solitarily peopled by sterile Yancemen whose agencies perpetrate the big lie for Stanton Brose, who in turn is the ultimately selfish leader, monopolizing the scant collection of artiforgs (artificial organs). In "The Defenders" the robots – the leadies – are morally responsible, waiting patiently for men to become equally reasonable; in the novel the machines are destructive (apparently they haven't learned the three Asimovian laws of robotics), though the primary antagonists are not the machines but men.[11]

The links between the stories and the novels vary enormously. Sometimes it's only a character's name or the name of a weapon or a vehicle (rexeroid is as common as Portland cement). Or, at the other extreme, in *Deus Irae* whole sections of early short stories are woven in episodically nearly word for word:

"Say," one said. "You're a human being."

"That's right," Trent said.

"My name's Jackson." The youth extended his thin blue horny hand and Trent shook it awkardly. The hand was fragile under his lead-lined glove. Its owner added, "My friend here is Earl Potter."

Trent shook hands with Potter. "Greetings," Potter said. His rough lips twitched. "Can we have a look at your rig?"

"My rig?" Trent countered.

"Your gun and equipment. What's that on your belt? And that tank?"

("Planet for Transients", 1953).

"Say," one of them said. "You're a human being."

"That's right," Tibor said.

"My name's Jackson." The youth extended his thin blue horny hand and Tibor shook it awkwardly with his front right extensor. "My friend here is Earl Potter."

Tibor shook hands with Potter. "Greetings, ' Potter said. His scaly rough lips twitched. "Can we have a look at your rig, that cart you're tied into? We've never seen anything quite like it."

(Deus Irae)

Deus Irae is a unique case in this regard. Not published until 1976, it was begun much earlier; just how the collaboration worked with Roger Zelazny or how the novel was eventually completed, I can't say.[12] In all other instances I'm aware of, there is a genuine metamorphosis that incorporates the story into the novel. But fascinating as it is to recognize sources for Dick's novels in his stories, I must admit that this pursuit is a separate topic, or a separable one, involved more with the question of how an author generates his material than with a critical description of the end product.

Having meandered through the corpus of Dick's short fiction, I'd like to intensify my focus and describe his value system, his ontology, as revealed in the short stories. Generally, Dick explores the broad themes of Survival, Orientation, Wrath/Empathy, the Android/Human, Illusion/Reality, the Entropic/Chthonic. To do so he systematically opposes élitism, greed, weaponry, machines, games, drugs, masks with choice, responsibility, caring, gardens, music, etc.

Before citing exemplary stories, I'll expand briefly on the interweaving of these polarities, limiting myself to quite general and nearly detached observations and quotes:

– survival is the end, the ultimate intent;
– to survive requires an orientation toward what is real, to what is present, to what is essentially human;
– such survival involves responsible and deliberate choice, and by so choosing, we stamp ourselves as human, as individuals of worth, as something more than mere machine;
– "The quality of kindness, to me, distinguishes us from rocks and sticks and metal [i.e., the machine], and will forever, whatever shape we take, wherever we go, whatever we become" ("Afterthoughts", *The Best of Philip K. Dick*) – kindness, help, empathy, caritas are synonymous;
– "A human being without the proper empathy or feeling is the same as an android built so as to lack it, either by design or mistake" ("Man, Android and Machine");
– the absence of the humane impulse is the hallmark of the machine, of the weapons mania, or of élitism, which at its worst is founded on raw economic greed;
– inevitably, it is the "ordinary people . . . suddenly presented with a situation which is patently impossible" who overturn the machine, who avert fate, who thwart the delusion of the game, all for no reward ("Preface", *A Handful of Darkness*);
– "life can be expressed in terms of thermal units", "Spring means thermal return, the abolition of the process of entropy" ("Man, Android and Machine");
– it is a chthonic "voice which each bulb and seed and root in the ground, our ground, in our wintertime, hears. It hears: 'Wake up! Sleepers awake!'" ("Man, Android and Machine");
– "I feel the death of wearing out on endless upward stairs, while someone

cruel, or anyhow wearing a cruel mask, watches and offers no aid – the machine, lacking empathy, watching as mere spectator . . ." ("Man, Android and Machine");
– "we are alienated, not from the sky . . . but are alienated from the *earth*, the chthonic soil from which life, *our* life, sprang long ago" (*Vertex*, 11, 4, 99);
– "We must be careful . . . of confusing a mask, any mask, with the reality beneath" ("Man, Android and Machine").

In this last section I want to discuss Dick's stories in some detail by looking at three of his particular concerns: orientation, empathy, and reality. Inevitably, the discussion will range from one story to another.

1. **Orientation** In Dick's post-cataclysmic worlds (with few exceptions his societies look back to World War III or a variation thereon), individuals and groups and societies can look backward to recapturing the good old days of pre-war technology or forward to adapting to new conditions. "The Days of Perky Pat" (1963), "Planet for Transients" (1953), "Psi-Man Heal My Child!" (1955), "Pay for the Printer" (1956), all have this concern centrally. In "Pay for the Printer" Biltongs from another solar system have been sustaining the devastated society by "printing" or duplicating items as various as a '57 Buick or a fifth of Lord Calvert. But lately their work is "puddinged" – they are growing old. Dawes, a "survivor from Chicago" after it collapsed, visits the decaying community, bringing with him a new word:

> "The word isn't print – the word is *build*. We're building tools, making things." He pulled out the crude wooden cup and laid it down on the ash. "Printing means merely copying. I can't explain to you what building is; you'll have to try it yourself to find out. Building and printing are two totally different things."

A Steuben cup represents the "way it was": "Some day it'll be that way again . . . [Dick's ellipsis] but we're going up the right way – the hard way – step by step, until we get back up there."

In a story like "Stand-by" (1963), orientation, though not central, is still a prominent topic. The President of the United States is the "homeostatic problem-solving structure Unicephalon 40-D", whose "rational disinterested rule" is dedicated to "the preservation of all that's worthy in our tradition" (the word "preserve", as in "The Preserving Machine" [1953], is a good clue about orientation). Though the story largely explores the machine-versus-human motif – whether humanity can be responsible to choose for itself – we also see the danger of a static society. The hobbies of the stand-by presidents, who merely back up the computer, symbolize this regressive orientation. Gus Schatz had prints "tacked on the walls: a 1963 Volvo S-122, a 1957 Peugeot 403 and other antique classics of a bygone age . . . He could tell you any fact there is about those old pre-turbine cars – any useless bit of car knowledge." His predecessor "collected rubber bands, made a huge ball, big as a house, by the time he died". When Maximilian Fischer becomes a genuine president, with the computer temporarily disabled, we welcome his oafish

zest: "I'm not going to be winding no ball of string . . . Or making model boats, nuthin like that." Under the wise, rational government of the machine, all significant choice had disappeared. When the computer later repairs itself, it cancels out what decisions the humans have made and orders Jim Briskin, Dick's news-clown protagonist, to "cease and desist" and to "show just cause why he should be free to pursue any further political activity. In the public interest we instruct him to become politically silent." Briskin then sounds the credo of humanity:

> He could not really become politically silent; he could not do what the problem-solver said. It simply was not biologically possible for him; sooner or later he would begin to talk again, for better or worse.

Unicephalon 40-D's policies are no less counter to what is biologically human than the artificially-controlled generation of the dominant government in *Dr Futurity* or its racist opposite, the "savage, relentless schemes of [Nixina], a dried-up little old lady, who imagined herself as the protagonist of an ancient race reborn."[13]

"The Days of Perky Pat" (1963) portrays the moment when the orientation shifts from fantasizing about the past with Barbie-like dolls and games to – comically – more mature dolls and more realistic staging. The point is more vitally made by the children of the flukers (who survived the war by flukes of fate), who are a next generation which goes beyond mere survival to adaptation:

> His father murmured, "These Oaklanders; their game, their particular doll, it taught them something. Connie [Companion] had to grow and it forced them all to grow along with her. Our flukers never learned about that, not from Perky Pat. I wonder if they ever will. She'd have to grow up the way Connie did. Connie must have been like Perky Pat, once. A long time ago."
>
> Not interested in what his father was saying – who really cared about dolls and games with dolls? – Timothy scampered ahead, peering to see what lay before them, the opportunities and possibilities . . .
>
> "I can't wait," he yelled back at his father . . .

This sublimation of energy into ritualized games is another Dickian motif, fully explored in *The Game-Players of Titan, The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch,* and *Galactic Pot-Healer,* as well as *Solar Lottery*, Dick's first novel. It's not all that different from making giant balls out of rubber bands. An orientation away from the present, from responsibility, from reality.

"Exhibit Piece" (1954) thematically is a complicated story: George Miller, a government antiquarian two hundred years from now, discovers a time portal in his Twentieth Century Museum exhibit. Rather than be a "minor bureaucrat in a vast machine", he chooses the "freedom" of the past – only to discover that the Twentieth Century is on the verge of total world destruction via the cobalt bomb (don't ask how his present survived from that past). Miller had been doubly warned about his irreal fantasy (that it turns out not to be fantasy doesn't alter the case). Controller Fleming says, "Beware . . . Come up out of your tapes and face reality . . . Idolize the past, if you want. But remember – it's gone and buried. Times change. Society progresses." And his psychiatrist Dr Grunberg warns Miller about the other possible explanation – an "escape fantasy" – that he *really is* the "middle-class businessman" from the late 1900s rather than the antiquarian with the History Agency:

> "It would be nice," Grunberg said blandly, "to live in a world of tomorrow. With robots and rocket ships to do all the work. You could just sit back and take it easy. No worries, no cares. No frustrations."

Note Grunberg's association of rocket ships with the future: this coordination of the spatial and the temporal is frequent in Dick – later the term "ethereal" is applied to the Grunberg analysis.[14] "Exhibit Piece" is one of the *other* stories, of the Minor Man who goes astray, who evades responsibility. A possible variant on the story would have Miller be the agent whose presence averts the nuclear war and so makes the future possible.

2. **Empathy** An orientation is not only temporal. Other continua could be plotted along axes of entropy/chthonic life, machine/human, or wrath/empathy, perhaps even mask/reality. In Dick's first published story, "Beyond Lies the Wub" (1952), Captain Franco (surely not a name chosen accidentally) kills the alien Wub, "a sensible being like yourselves". The Wub, given to philosophical discussion rather than being eaten, interprets the Odysseus myth allegorically: "Odysseus wanders as an individual aware of himself as such. This is the idea of separation, of separation from family and country. The process of individuation." The time of "separation is a temporary period, a brief journey of the soul". The wanderer's return "to land and race" signifies a higher stage achieved, not technologically or in terms of physical evolution, but culturally in an anthropological sense. A movement from the ego concern of the *eigenwelt* to an awareness of the *mitwelt*, the shared world.[15] As Captain Franco is about to shoot the Wub, it begins to tell him "a parable that your Savior related". I presume the parable would have pointed to this higher stage, to caritas, to caring. Clearly, Captain Franco is what Dick later labels the android mentality, "someone who does not care about the fate which is fellow living creatures fall victim to" ("Man, Android and Machine").[16]

"Human Is" (1955) plays with the word "humane". Jill Herrick's husband is described quite otherwise:

> Lester worked on unperturbed. His work. His research. Day after day. Lester was getting ahead; there was no doubt of that. His lean body was bent like a coiled spring over the tape scanner, cold gray eyes taking in the information feverishly, analyzing, appraising, his conceptual faculties operating like well-greased machinery.

(Like many Dickian characters, Lester earns his living in weapons research: "he works out new poisons for the Military".) When Lester goes on business to Rexor IV, what returns is a Rexorian, or at least Rexorian innards, with the "original psychic contents . . . removed". But pseudo-Lester is most unlike the "cold and ruthless", "inhuman" Lester. And when the new Lester says, "Perhaps I can help you prepare – that is, can I do anything to help?" he establishes himself as a model Dickian entity. As Charley Boyer tells Nick Appleton[17] in *Our Friends from Frolix 8* (1970),

> The measure of a man is not his intelligence . . . The measure of a man is this: how swiftly can he react to another person's need? And how much of himself can he give? In giving that is true giving, nothing comes back . . .

Or, as Dick says in his "Afterthought" to "Human Is", "It's not what you look like, or what planet you were born on. It's how kind you are". When the new Lester describes the awfulness of Rexor IV as "Dry and dead. Ancient. Squeezed to a pulp by wind and sun. A dreadful place" and the Terra as "moist and full of life", he is describing the change in himself – a movement from the tomb to the chthonic, from entropy to life. No wonder he's disoriented when Jill suggests that he go ahead with his work on toxins: "'Toxins!' Lester showed confusion. 'Well, for heaven's sake! Toxins. Devil take it!'"

In "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" it's an ultimate benefit that derives from an emphatic personality. Douglas Quail's deeply rooted fantasy (which turns out to be true) has him averting an alien invasion,

> not by destroying them. Instead, you show them kindness and mercy, even though by telepathy – their mode of communication – you know why they have come. They have never seen such humane traits exhibited by any sentient organism . . .

A story that illustrates the aspect opposite to empathy is "Nanny" (1955). Dick's Nannies are not the flesh-and-blood variety but are robots so essential now that children cannot imagine a world "before Nannies lived". But something has gone awry, and Nannies sneak away from their small charges at night, bursting with excitement to engage other Nannies in the "wild frenzy of battle", "performing the wrathful, ultimate task for which each had been designed". They are not, however, self-programming machines like those in "Second Variety" or "Autofac", but owe their genesis to the "competition". And the customer doesn't "have a choice. It's nobody's fault, sir. Don't blame us; don't blame Allied Domestic". The economic mentality is like that of Leo Bohlen in *Martian Time-Slip*, out to make a "killing".

Dick incorporates an anti-chthonic bent into these wrathful Nannies. The children's perception of a day in the park is most un-Nanny:

> It was a lovely day, with the sun shining down hotly and the grass and flowers blowing in the wind. The two children strolled along the gravel path, breathing the warm-scented air, taking deep breaths and holding the presence of roses and hydrangeas and orange blossoms inside them as long as possible. They passed through a swaying grove of dark, rich cedars. The ground was soft with mould underfoot, the velvet, moist fur of a living world beneath their feet.

Whereas, for Nanny on the edge of battle,

> The night air was thin and cold. And full of smells, all the strange, tingling smells of the night, when spring has begun to change into summer, when the ground is still moist and the hot July sun has not had a chance to kill all the little growing things.

3. **Reality** I will be fairly brief here. In earlier stories the question *What is Real?* is a physical question. In "Second Variety" (1953) Major Hendricks must decide which people are in fact people and not robots. It is difficult because the imitation is so exact, not because of a fundamental problem of perception, Plato-wise.* And in

*Solace, gentle Reader, I'll never approach Dick's "tinwoodman-wise".

"Colony" (1953) the animation of physical objects results from the aliens' malign imitations and not from the colonists' astigmatic vision. "Adjustment Team" (1954) hints at Dick's later perception of reality as psychological, though it turns out that the explanation for the apparent tampering with reality is divine – the "Old Man", seen in a room whose edges disappear into the shadows. But before Ed Fletcher discovers the "explanation", it occurs to him that he has "had some sort of protective psychotic fit. Retreat from reality". Later, in stories like "Precious Artifact" (1964) or "The Electric Ant" (1969) or in novels like *The Game-Players of Titan*, *The Three Stigmata of Plamer Eldritch*, or *Ubik* there won't be an easy explanation. Still Fletcher's experience in "Adjustment Team" is very like later ones:

> I saw the fabric of reality split open. I saw – *behind.* Underneath I saw what was really there. And I don't want to go back. I don't want to see dust people again. Ever.

"Faith of Our Fathers" (1967) is in some ways a lot like "Adjustment Team", but instead of a benevolent "Old Man" intervening to avert humans bringing the holocaust upon themselves, Comrade Chien, a "young career man on his way up", sees the Absolute Benefactor of the People in various guises. Initially, irritated that he doesn't have permission to turn off the Leader's speech on TV, Chien inhales what he thinks is snuff – "There was no known ordinance, however, preventing him from taking snuff while he watched the Leader". But then,

> The face dwindled away, disappeared . . . He faced an emptiness, a vacuum . . . and then, by degrees, an image once more formed and established itself. It was not the Leader. Not the Absolute Benefactor of the People, in point of fact not a human figure at all.
>
> He faced a dead mechanical construct, made of solid state circuits, of swiveling pseudopodia, lenses and a squawk-box . . .

Chien asks himself whether this is reality or hallucination and decides the latter. He soon learns it wasn't snuff but stelazine, an anti-hallucinogenic and that what he had seen was the Clanker (others see other apparitions: the Gulper, the Bird, etc, 12 groups in all). Tanya Leee asks him to join their "gathering": "We want to know what it *really* is" and "who or what is leading us?" It is then arranged for him to meet the Leader in person, "face to face as he actually is". But Chien hears from a loyal Party member that the Leader is in fact a "Cauc", named Thomas Fletcher, and that the TV image is "subjected to a variegated assortment of skilful refinements. For ideological purposes". This variation on reality is not psychological, but political – the Big Lie. But Chien is resisting any questions – "Curiosity was, especially in Party activities, often a terminal state careerwise".

Invited to a dinner at the Benefactor's Yangtze River Ranch, Chien now finds himself at double purposes: to advance his career and to "decipher His Greatness as a fraud". Having again taken the stelazine, what he sees is neither flesh nor metal – it is a shape that is there and is not:

> It was terrible; it blasted him with its awfulness. As it moved it drained the life from each person in turn . . . It hated . . . If this is a hallucination . . . it is the worst I have ever had; if it is not, then it is evil reality . . .

He recognizes it as God, "searching for the flowers of life to eat them . . . you engineer life and then guzzle it". The description of this anti-chthonic, entropic essence goes on. It is a reification of the tomb world, the Form Destroyer, and it tells Chien, "Don't question what I'm doing". Like Jim Briskin in "Stand-by" facing Unicephalon 40-D, Chien refuses: "He hit it as hard as he could".

The next day, with Tanya, he despairs. "We can't win . . . I'm not in this; I just wanted to do my job at the Ministry and forget it." But he asks her to spend the night.

Earlier Chien had been given the final lines from Dryden's "A Song for St. Cecelia's Day":

> So when the last and dreadful hour
> This crumbling pageant shall devour,
> This trumpet shall be heard on high,
> The dead shall live, the living die,
> And Music shall untune the sky.

The Benefactor has glossed this mystery of the dead living and of live dying as "I kill what lives; I save what has died"; and Tanya says "that if there is a God He has very little interest in human affairs . . . He doesn't seem to care . . ." Contrasting this bleak and non-empathic reality, Chien calls an hallucination merciful: "I wish I had it; I want mine back". And then they make love, an act "outside of time":

> It's boundless, like an ocean. It's the way we were in Cambrian times, before we migrated up onto the land; it's the ancient primary waters. This is the only time we get to go back . . .

The resolution forces Chien to throw over illusion, to accept responsibility. He has the willingness of a Joe Fernwright in *Galactic Pot-Healer* to risk being the self, to risk failure.

"Faith of Our Fathers" might be called a story of psychic winter, of an uncaring and indifferent Cosmos. Dick's own reading of the story is one of absolute pessimism, that it was "in some eerie way involved" with the time when "the roof fell in on me years later". He sees it offending everyone – "Communism, drugs, sex, God". But I see the story as heroic, certainly not an *other* story of despair. Tanya appears, "smelling of spring rain, smelling of sweetness and agitation, beautiful in the way she smelled, and looked . . ." She has that quality which Dick calls the "Qumran personality" in his discussion of a new novel *To Scare The Dead*: "pitted against the City of Iron, be it Rome or Washington, DC; he is a god of springtime, of new life, of small and helpless creatures" ("Man, Android and Machine").

Usually, Dick embodies this quality in his female characters, like Tanya, or Juliana Frink (in *The Man in the High Castle*), or the Pied Piperish girl in "Piper in the Woods" (1953), "lovely, very lovely, with long dark hair that wound around her shoulders and arms . . . slim, very slender, with a supple grace". Or 13-year-old Mary Meade in *The Cosmic Puppets* (1957), whose "breasts were still small, not developed at all", who was "slim and lithe, very much like a youth" (but not in her unmasked persona as Armaiti, the daughter of Ormazd, "the essence

of generation. The bursting power of woman". Charley Boyer in *Our Friends from Frolix 8* epitomizes it. Nick Appleton calls her "the tail of a fox and a field of wheat. And the light of the sun". Quoting Yeats, Appleton calls her the "hapless faun":

> there is a grave where daffodil and lily wave, and I would please the hapless faun, buried under the sleepy ground, with mirthful songs before the dawn.

Amos Ild's promise after her death that she will hear the song is the reassurance of spring, analogous with the arrival of "our friends", the Frolixians – whose appearance, put simply, means "help".

Having by now mentioned 43 stories and 23 novels, and having divorced character, theme, and motif from the stories and novels sufficiently to induce situational schizophrenia in the dear and hopefully still gentle reader, I will call a halt to my critical excursion. I hope the reader will now address herself or himself to, what is after all the point of my essay, reading Philip K. Dick.

Notes

1. I cannot claim textual authority for my citations from Dick's fiction. For those stories which have been republished in collected editions, I have sometimes used the American edition, sometimes the British, but I have not gone back to the initial magazine appearance. Accordingly, I do not supply page references. The five collections of Dick's short stories are *The Best of Philip K. Dick,* with "Afterthoughts by the Author" (Del Rey/Ballantine, 1977); *The Book of Philip K. Dick* (DAW, 1973 – British edition, *The Turning Wheel and Other Stories* [Coronet, 1977]); *A Handful of Darkness* (Gregg Press, 1978 – a reprint of the 1955 edition); *The Preserving Machine and Other Stories* (Ace, 1969); and *The Variable Man and Other Stories* (Ace, 1957). These include 49 different works, about half of Dick's short stories. A sixth collection, *The Golden Man,* with 14 stories, is scheduled for early 1980 publication by Berkley. Thanks to Malcolm Edwards and David Pringle at the Science Fiction Foundation in London I have been able to expand my reading to stories either uncollected or anthologized in editions now largely inaccessible, though there are still some 30 stories I have not seen. Peter Nicholls has also been generous in allowing me access to his Dick library. For bibliographical listings I have relied on *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd,* ed. Bruce Gillespie (1975) and on *Index to Science Fiction Anthologies and Collections,* compiled by William Contento (G.K. Hall, 1978).
2. In *Science Fiction at Large,* ed. Peter Nicholls (Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1976).
3. From Dick's 1972 Vancouver Speech, "The Android and the Human", reprinted in *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* (see note 1). This passage provides the title for Angus Taylor in his useful study *Philip K. Dick and the Umbrella of Light* (T.K. Graphics, 1975).
4. "Jon's World" (1954) in some ways is a continuation of "Second Variety"; we learn by expository discussion that the Lunar colony was ready for the humanoid machines and that Terran society was eventually reconstituted. "Jon's World" is the story of the attempt to return to the past for the plans of the now lost Schonerman artificial brain. But the accidental death of Schonerman and the destruction of his plans result in a new continuum where the war described in "Second Variety" is cancelled out, yielding to an agrarian and philosophical society. An outlandish instance of Dick's picking up on older material is "Waterspider" (1964) with the premise that sf writers are precogs and their stories will be considered scientific articles, for instance, "The Defenders" (1953) and "The Variable Man" (1953).

5. 30th October, 1976.
6. *Vertex,* February, 1974, p.37.
7. Frequently the last word, especially in the novels, is a clear signal of hope; beside "Thanksgiving", instances are "loved", "Earth", "life", "beginning", "patient", and "God".
8. Dick's comment suggests a specific story, "The Trouble with Bubbles" (1953) — "bubbles" are "Sub-atomic worlds, in controlled containers. We start life going on a sub-atomic world, feed it problems to make it evolve . . . It's certainly a creative pastime". All this because we "couldn't leave Terra". Meanwhile, Terran society stagnates.
9. I should point out that Dick still writes the occasional "early" story later: "Not by Its Cover" (1968) and "The War with the Fnools" (1969) are both humorously uncomplicated and unfraught morally.
10. First section published as "Cantata 140" (1964); the "jiffi-scuttler" which allows access to the crack in space is first invented in "Prominent Author" (1954), a Minor Man story *without* a vengeance.
11. A second story that contributes directly to *The Penultimate Truth* is "The Mold of Yancy" (1955), where Dick describes an agency that fabricates John Edward Yancy, a persona of the "dullest, most mediocre man you could dream up". Like the teaching machines in *Martian Time-Slip,* Yancy promotes intellectual obedience and makes possible a "carefully controlled totalitarian state" — controlled by trading syndicates. It's Peter Taverner (cf. *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*), a Terran policeman, with the cooperation of a Callistote, who reverses the programming from "Good solid lulling views" and the "ready answer" to original views that take "real effort to work out".
12. Dick's other collaborative novel, *The Ganymede Takeover* (1967), writeen with Ray Nelson, does not draw on the short stories as *Deus Irae* does.
13. "What'll We Do with Ragland Park?" (1963) is a direct sequel to "Stand-by" — they were published in successive issues of *Amazing.* "Ragland Park" ends as though there might be a continuation, but there are no further stories. The two stories are completely separable, however, despite the presence of Jim Briskin and Max Fischer in both. The question of how the stories lead to the novels becomes more and more tempting.
14. See Richard Hnatt's description of Dr Willy Denkmal's Evolution Therapy in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* and the three levels of existence: the tomb world, the ethereal world, and the "middle level of the human".
15. See Richard Kongrosian's analysis in *The Simulacra.*
16. Martian Wub-fur is a fashionable item in Dick's world; we discover its full potential in "Not by Its Cover" (1968). There Wub hide is used for binding books — why? "If torn or scratched the hide repairs itself. It grows over the months, a more and more lush pile . . ." A drawback, perhaps, is that it somehow manages to edit its text according to Wub philosophy — for instance, it converts references to mortality in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* to immortality, to "unstopping bliss". To a collection of Freud's papers it adds, "Physician, Heal Thyself", and it deletes all of Tom Paine's *The Age of Reason.*
17. Another index to Dickian protagonists is their chthonic names, usually associated with gardening: in addition to Nick Appleton, there is Pete Garden, Joe Fernwright, a variety of characters named Hawthorne, etc.

Note

In our last issue (no.17) we published Professor Darko Suvin's article "The Strugatskys and their *Snail on the Slope*". In the prefatory note we mentioned that the article was to appear as the introduction to the forthcoming Bantam Books edition of *Snail on the Slope,* but regrettably omitted to say that it is also to be included in the British edition of the novel, published by Victor Gollancz Ltd. Our apologies to Gollancz and to Professor Suvin for this oversight.

Oxford-based Colin Greenland contributed an analysis of the language of Brian Aldiss's Barefoot in the Head *to our previous issue. Here, following in the footsteps of Tom Disch with his "Closer Look at Close Encounters" in* Foundation *15, he turns his attention to a more brain-scrambled blockbuster.*

Martial Lore: Thoughts on 'Battlestar Galactica'

Colin Greenland

In his recent "Closer Look at 'Close Encounters'" (*Foundation* 15) Thomas M. Disch proposed that what that film and *Star Wars* required of the critic was not so much assessment as interpretation. While there was a strong flavour of tongue and cheek about the "subtexts" he exposed, Disch's facetiousness was no more than the films invited; and the point remains. John Clute and Michael Moorcock have said similar things about minor books of sf and fantasy. A critic's offer to "decode" a work is often a malicious parody of his function, which he resorts to when the work and other people's responses to it have made him sick and cynical. Even so, it may be that the only proper use for minor art is to be broken up for sociological scrap, and the Marxist-Freudian wreckers certainly know how to take care of that. Nevertheless, the semiology of sf is a special case. Two-sevenths of the sf boom of the last fifteen years is due to authors waking up to all the unconscious metaphors and putting them to use; but at least another four-sevenths is down to popular obsession with the shapes and surfaces of sf cliches. That is why there are films like *Star Wars*, and why they are such a hit; but it is, as Disch says, largely unanalysed. How much it needs analysing is proved by *Battlestar Galactica,* third and most degenerate of the biggies, first of the rash of imitations that now inflames the distant galaxies like acne. I believe it flopped in America; I hope so, otherwise the epidemic is still spreading.

I saw and enjoyed *Star Wars,* so help me, in complete innocence. It was obviously making no claims to originality or imagination; it had all the paraphernalia and no plot; it was a simple fantasy, fleshed out with millions of dollars. I relished it with a feeling of Brian Aldiss's "pleased recognition". This was the apotheosis of screen pulp, in direct line from *Flash Gordon* through *Thunderbirds,* untouched by human brain. It wasn't even camp. It was a fairy story: black cloaks against white, with a farmboy and a kindly wizard and a princess to be won. All fairy stories are violent. The only sombre reflection this one provoked was that for modern kids the emphasis has to be on the violence. The fairies have to kill each other in ever-increasing numbers with ever more

monstrous machinery.

In *Close Encounters* Spielberg sidestepped genres and courted originality by inverting many of the conventions on the way. He juggled the structure of the story and put the humour and the suspense in unexpected places – a trick he learned from *Duel.* Rather than putting anything over on the literal-minded, he was selling them a fairly innocuous whimsy that Clarke and von Daniken had warmed them to: nice UFO. That the little pink men are really broken images of God, as Disch says, merely puts us deeper into fairy story.

Battlestar Galactica, derived from both, is sf twice removed, so thin you can see through it. It's a typical heartless imitation that misses the essence of the original. When he went to see *Star Wars* Colla spent more time watching the takings than watching the screen. He saw violence and machines. He went off and made a war movie – nothing more, nothing less. In *Star Wars* the politics were fairly vague: miscellaneous rebel hordes against the Empire. In *Galactica* we're clearly on the other side. Whatever the ostensible political map, our wise-cracking bright-eyed WASP hero-boys are definitely fighting for America; and the old-fashioned new world at that. This is an old war movie: The Greet Berets Go To Mars. It's all there, from the wet-eared rookie panting for his first patrol to the grave, fatherly general, the only man who really understands what's going on. Politicians are all weak and inept, traitors and self-seekers who party while the people starve. Foreigners are probably collaborators; peace is a trap; keep your hand on your gun. Thank God for our boys, the two white ones with their outrageous machismo, Starbuck and Apollo (my *goodness*), and the black one (what was his name again?) not written out until they do their really daring number, pausing only to flex hearts of gold and initiate Boxey into the true way of manhood. "I wish *he* could be my daddy", lisps Boxey. Of course he wants to be a fighter pilot. Of course he has a big shaggy dog. Of course his mommy the war widow is a pushover. The Empire may be in ruins but its self-congratulatory myths were never finer. There go the wagons, out where they've always been, on the eternal frontier: the chosen people rolling along to the great Promised Land in the sky.

In the sixties there was Vietnam, and *Catch-22,* and *M.A.S.H.,* and it became difficult to make old jubilant hate-filled patriotic war movies. At the same time *Soldier Blue, A Man Called Horse* and *Little Big Man* were making it impossible to slaughter cinema redskins without a twinge of guilt. For screen sf, there was only *Star Trek,* which largely suppressed its latent imperialism with a blanket of liberal guff. But the sixties are over, and so are the seventies, near as damn it, and the need for a cinema of righteous destruction survives. Oppressed minorities get itchy: make your own. Make them purely evil, and make them inhuman, so that everybody can enjoy setting them up and blasting hell out of them. Throughout I was reminded of the new slot machine games in which you fire "lasers" at a video blip, but also of the snarling figures painted on army training targets. Bayonetting dummies is a harmless enough liberation, but has the effect of building up moral muscles, giving you confidence in following a doctrine through into aggressive action.

The difference from *Star Wars* is merely in degree, so perhaps *Galactica* is only

fairytale, as the Aryan myths Hitler pressed into service were only fairytale. It's the ease with which this particular mean and hostile myth can be remobilised after fifteen years' rust, neglect and heavy damage, put in a cheap and shoddy vehicle and sent trundling off through the stars, that makes me anxious.

Daniel Walther is a journalist with an important French provincial newspaper. Now in his late thirties, he has produced a considerable stylistic range of sf, from sword and sorcery through hard-core to experimental and poetic – a versatility that has won him the sobriquet of the "French Harlan Ellison". His works to date include the short novel Mais l'espace . . . Mais le temps (What about space? What about time?) *which blends technology and magic;* Requiem pour Demain (Requiem for Tomorrow), *a virtuoso avant-garde collection; and the manifesto anthology of French new wave authors* Les Soleils Noirs d'Arcadie (Blacks Suns of Acradia). *Our thanks go to Monsieur Walther for writing especially for* Foundation *the following essay on the latest developments in French sf – a* terra *that is happily becoming less* incognita *to Anglo-Saxon readers – and, for translating it, to Maxim Jakubowski – now a veritable power in the land as head of the newly-formed Virgin Books, and the main bridgehead of French sf in Anglosaxonia.*

Political SF in France, or, The Long Night of the Fools

Daniel Walther

1. The Egg of Christopher Columbus

France is a Cartesian country. This isn't an original statement, but most assuredly it is a necessary one – necessary because we French authors are obliged, whether we enjoy it or not, to think within very specific categories to the detriment of any genuine freedom of the imagination. Before I begin this short survey of political speculative literature, I should like to recall an anecdote of the late Jacques Papy, one of our best specialists in Anglo-Saxon fantasy literature. In the introduction to an anthology of British and American terror stories, Jacques Papy relates the following quite characteristic misadventure:

> It would appear that all Frenchmen are more or less Cartesian from the moment of birth, and what a pity this is! Not content with lacking "an epic mind", we also lack a mind for magic. We demand logic and verisimilitude before all else, otherwise we lose our grip and toss the book away, protesting "How silly this all is!" How significant in this respect is the attitude of 11 to 12 year old pupils – be they dunces or top of the form specimens – when confronted with the improbabilities of *Peter Pan* or the extravagances of *Alice in Wonderland.* I am broken-hearted to report that when asked for an opinion, they will all

exclaim with one voice, "But, Sir, it's stupid!" Even our fairy tales, sadly stamped with the so-called "spirit of the Great Century", are always quite exact and seem to be trying to keep the imagination on a tight rein.

My own cultural upbringing was strongly marked by the German Romantics and by my infatuation with Anglo-Saxon literature, so that I cannot but agree (alas!) with dear Jacques Papy. For the model Frenchman, the imagination is none other than "the madwoman around the house": she is a hybrid creature, with no powers of utterance, and is no more trustworthy than counterfeit money. If fantasy, begetter of science fiction or at any rate of a large proportion of the literature which today goes under the name of sf, is a lively tradition in Anglo-Saxon countries, it's certainly not the case in our own dear France: here, fantasy scribbers are on the margins of mainstream literature and their works are looked upon with a curiosity tainted with forbearance or even contempt.

The great tidal wave which shook up the intellectuals during the pseudo-revolution of 1968 briefly tossed up the dream of putting the imagination in power. Unfortunately ensuing events proved once again that the imagination was condemned to remain in the latrines of French literary history. The big cyclone which should have shaken, in a healthy frenzy, the sorry bourgeois habits of traditional France was finally no more than an icy breeze which choked itself out gently in the wind of history. After May we could have expected a fantastic spring, a magnificent flowering which would have drowned with red and fiery petals the old puffed-up fools who in Paris dominated contemporary literature. We could have hoped for funeral pyres where wonderful iconoclasts would come to burn the sentences of the old Torquemadas, opening the way for a healthy and fair political culture worthy of the name.

Alas, we all know what happened.

But, many are those who think that French political-fiction was a logical consequence of May 68, the unanimous scream of an inspired youth howling out its disapproval, willing to change the world, to establish new and better societies.

We shall see further on what happened.

Others say that political sf is nothing; that it is like the aberrations of ecologists who understand nothing about anything and think they can change the world without having grasped any of the searching questions of history – thus political sf has just been another form of impoverishment of the language, instead of a step foward towards maturity for French science fiction.

But first, before I go into more details, I would like to say that it's rather foolish to pretend that science fiction – or, as Pierre Versins puts it, conjectural fiction – has only been political since the Bernard Blancs, the Dominique Douays, the Jean-Pierre Andrevons and the Yves Fremions all decided that it was so. But the French, may I remind you, like to see things all nicely in a row, well labelled. Science Fiction, a literature of ideas, has always crossed paths with politics. It's just that nobody in the old days ever had the gall to say: "I am a writer of political science fiction!"

Such a naive outburst would have made many of us laugh. But if ridicule could once kill in France, nowadays it thrives and no longer murders anyone.

2. A Visceral Literature

In 1968, completely by coincidence, somewhere in Germany I wrote a short sf story called *Flinquez-moi tout ça!* ("Shoot it all up!"). The story was written white-hot in just one day . . . In a somewhat unorthodox vain, I detailed in a few pages a rather bloody episode from a future war. My coarse, realistic terminology, not far removed from naturalistic literature, wasn't particularly original but in the greyness of the French output of those days it had the effect of a bombshell. Abused by some, acclaimed by others, this story provoked visceral, epidermal, even hysterical reactions. *Flinquez-moi tout ça!* has since been translated into Roumanian and German but has lost a lot of its impact. When I read one of my stories again (which I seldom do!), I sometimes wonder why it was successful, of if not, why it failed. As far as *Flinquez-moi tout ça!* is concerned, the answer is simple: the story, written in February 1968, preceded the big libertarian outpourings of May – that famous month of May 1968 which has become a symbol in France. Slightly over ten years later, the young and the "still young" can be divided into two categories: those who were present in May 1968 (in Paris of course, because outside Paris – as we all know – there is no France!) and those who were not. Those present in May 68 often brag like veteran soldiers, and the less they participated in the events the more they are liable to talk. As for those who were not around, they might as well die of shame!

As for me, I was born in 1940 and was 28 in May 1968. I was completing my studies in Germany and I witnessed May 68 from afar. Without quite believing it all. I have never encountered the great men of 68, except for Cohn-Bendit from a distance when he came to speak at Sarrebruck University and, more recently, Jean Edern-Hallier, with whom I spent a most amusing evening on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of May 1968 (!). Which is why I think of May 68 as the prototype of an aborted revolution, a movement which harboured for some time the dreams of many before giving way to a new form of conventionalism, a typical sort of lukewarm French protest, which leads nowhere and certainly not towards a radical transformation of society.

To quote a recently deceased scientist of ours: I am very optimistic as regards the future of pessimism. For me, the whole thing's well under way: everything in France will follow the downhill course.

But I digress; back to the subject. Out of the explosions of 1968 emerged a small aggressive crowd calling themselves anarchists or leftists or what-have-you, apparently ready to take on the whole world.

I must confess that I also threw myself into the fray, though I do consider myself more as a romantic intellectual lagging behind the times, quite out of synch with all the little movements which have come about of late in French science fiction. In order to showcase the lively voices of young (and less young) sf I compiled, not without some problems, an anthology which I called *Les Soleils noirs d'Arcadie* (The Black Suns of Arcadia). Here, fourteen authors indulged all their fantasies. For a brief time, I thought of myself as a little French Harlan Ellison, but there are no miracles in France and the book, badly distributed, created a stir but did not sell.

The above considerations haven't been outlined to put my own name to the fore

or to underline, with or without discretion, the somewhat meteoric role I played in the introduction of a certain political "philosophy" into French science fiction literature. If a brief fit of pride allowed me to think I had become a sort of "leader of the pack", I soon had to climb down a peg; other wolves were snarling at the gate, ready to invade the stage – prophetic young wolves with sharpened teeth, not unlike the cannibals in our childhood stories. Gaunt and hungry, they proclaimed that the time had come to park the spaceships in the cloakroom and leave all the distant planets to the war veterans and other crypto-fascists. According to the jargon of the New Young Wave, a crypto-fascist is a conservative gentleman who cannot understand that the days of reaction are over. Unfortunately, they were not inventing anything: lacking the necessary education, they were simply following in the footsteps of all the anti-utopianists suspicious of Change, but this they did not know. George Orwell, Walter Jens, Hermann Kasack had, after the war, tackled with much talent and power similar themes to those which were to become the bread and jam of the young French political wave. Not forgetting J.G. Ballard, who encouraged the exploration of inner space to the detriment of the great space journeys.

Before examining some important or characteristic books of French political science fiction, I must emphasize here that this article is far from exhaustive and that an in-depth study of French political sf is still to be written. All I wish to do here is blaze a trail, toss a few pebbles against the shutters of time and demonstate that at a particular moment there were tremors in France which might well have given birth to a new and fruitful onslaught of the marvellous. If the branches bore no fruit and the mountain finally gave birth to a mouse, that's no reason scornfully to ignore what has been a necessary transitional phase in the evolution of speculative literature in France.

3. A Knack for Manifestoes

In a book which stands as a self-proclaimed manifesto for the new political science fiction, Bernard Blanc tries to define what he really expects of the new genre but does not succeed in doing so. The upshot is a more or less logical sequence of inflammatory remarks, outlines and visceral eruptions. His book is entitled *Pourquoi J'ai Tué Jules Verne* (Why I Killed Jules Verne). It is here that we find a magnificent sentence which characterizes the author's naivety. I really must quote it here, so typical it is of the lack of humour of the new French science fiction: "Having disposed of [killed] Jules [Verne] – because it was his fault that science fiction nearly remained a literature for the mentally-retarded – I suddenly had a doubt."

Once again, without our young wolf realizing it in the least, here comes the Cartesian cavalry to the rescue. A guilty party is required. That is the logic of things. Why not Jules Verne, who symbolises the scientific rigidity of "bad" French sf? What an easy solution. It sticks around for all 360 pages of Bernard Blanc's book, pervasive and tenacious, with all the devilish inflexibility of elementary Stalinism. It's an exemplary philosophy: the goodies are on one side, the baddies are on the other, so much the worse for subtleties – and the whole thing is sustained by slogans such as: Those who are not with us are against us, or, We shall win because we are the strongest.

It is necessary to read this book to understand the extent to which French political sf has been led astray by the most deplorable and commercial cliches (oh yes, oh yes indeed, left-wing ideology sells much better than you imagine and, very soon, so will the now almost-fashionable "new right"!). It is in this particular book that Blanc has stumbled across a (not uninteresting) notion for putting over the new French political science fiction: he allows representative members of the movement to speak for themselves. The method, a blend of anthology and interview (the author answering questions and illustrating his points with more or less relevant stories) at least makes the reading of the book easy and captivating. Because, despite what I have said earlier, *Pourquoi J'ai Tué Jules Verne* is an enthralling book. Which is what makes its biting judgements even more dangerous. The authors interviewed therein are Jean-Pierre Andrevon, Philippe Curval (whose presence here must surely be a mistake, Curval being a classical author – which coming from me must be taken as a compliment, even if I don't always share his opinions!), Jean-Pierre Hubert, Dominique Douay (two of the best authors recently produced by French sf), René Durand (one of the only writers of the French political sf movement who is a genuine gut subversive – and full of talent too), Christian Vila (from whom we expected a lot, but who has gone the way of all flesh), Michel Jeury, to whom we shall return shortly, and a few others (including yours sincerely whom you have already heard too much about!).

Alas, despite the desire to smash up everything and annoy the bourgeoisie (an attitude which is rather old hat in a world which nothing shocks), despite the threats and the rage, the thunderous proclamations and the devastating puns, the book contributed nothing new to French sf. In fact, Blanc was just rushing through open doors and all his arguments were soon absorbed and capitalised on by the bourgeoisie he hates so much, on account of the trump card of that same bourgeoisie: cash. Or rather, this happened through the commercialisation of every single protest element, beginning with the protesters and angry folk themselves who soon settled down with slippers on – even if the said slippers bear the iridescent colours of anarchy. End of parenthesis.

I feel that the great weakness of French political sf is self-evident: *French sf leads nowhere because it isn't truly subversive.*

I know this statement will have a lot of my own friends reacting strongly (apart from a few exceptions who will prove the rule, like Jean-Pierre Hubert, for example). Obviously, they think they are very dangerous to the Establishment and firmly believe they will be summarily purged when the "new right" comes to power, martyrs to the cause!

To be subversive is to be different.

To be subversive is to accept nothing without distrust, not even your own shadow!

But this is no lesson in subversion in ten easy instalments. Cartesian even in revolt, the Frenchman, young or old, organises groups, chapels, coteries. He creates (or tries to create) schools, small sects of political thought. There arises the strange myth of the "leader", this whole phenomenon which must be quite unknown to the British writer.

Fortunately, Bernard Blanc was not content with one book, and from being an

occasional pamphleteer he became a literary editor – thnks to Rolf Kesselring, a Swiss publisher who has since moved to Paris. This enabled him to publish some of the more interesting novels of the young French sf.

Mort à l'Etouffée (Death by Asphyxiation) by Jean-Pierre Hubert, a difficult and rigorous book, reveals a strong writing personality always tightly in control. Seldom has the malevolent role of power been so cleverly analysed, with such convincing depth and strength.

La Terre Etait Ici (Earth Was Here) by Maxime Benoit-Jeannin is a ruthless story, chaotic in parts, where a veneer of cynicism poorly conceals the author's anxiety when confronted by a future very similar to our present times, like a monstrous twin of sorts. It is often an irritating book, but one which I find difficult to ignore.

Desert! by Pierre Marlson introduces us to a world where all is falsified, where violence and arbitrariness reign – a world described by Marlson in a coarse and often convoluted style. Marlson is a writer who has long been ignored by more traditional publishers and has really been launched by Bernard Blanc. It's with work of this type that one must recognize the usefulness of this young tiger, not in his "sermons", most of which appear to be the result of bad digestion.

Finally, it's in the Kesselring/Blanc series that *Le Sommeil du Chien (The Sleep of the Dog)* appeared, a very curious novel by Pierre Pelot, the most prolific of all French sf writers. In this feverish book, Pelot selflessly combines autobiography (the main character being a writer isolated in a physical and mental "landscape" very similar to the one where the author lives in "reality"), with modern forms of fantasy and political sf.

It is also worth pointing out that Rolf Kesselring is soon to publish (in early 1980) a novel by Maxim Jakubowski, translated into French by the author himself, a novel overlooked by both British and other French publishers for reasons which elude me. *The Phosphorus War* is an erotico-political novel, full of fury and bizarre poetry, a sado-masochistic confession, replete with old-fashioned romanticism, which should at least reach here the readers it truly deserves.*

"Political" publishing is not, of course, only done by Keselring, but his is obviously the most militant house, the one to which future academic studies will point as having promoted the launch of the "movement".

Anthologies, or rather "collectives" (this being the expression they have preferred to use!) in the "Ici et Maintenant" ("Here and Now") series of Kesselring's, are almost not worth writing about; they are uneven and full of short-sighted philosophy. Even the collection put together by Michael Jeury, *Planete Socialiste (Socialist Planet)*, is far from convincing. The back-cover blurb sums it all up: "It's been in the air for a long time! Shouldn't we now at last arrive at socialism? With science fiction, it would already be here. Eleven French writers tell you all about the time after the revolution: life is easy, we speak with the flowers and vegetables and smoke joints. Or, if you would rather have it this way: gun in hand, we keep an eye on the frontiers to see if anybody

*I would dispute DW's view of political connotations in my novel quite strongly! May I point out that this novel, although published by Kesselring is appearing in a new series *not* edited by B. Blanc. (M.J.)

is coming".

And most of the stories in the collection illustrate the above premises. This was, of course, the time when France still, naively, believed in the chances of the Left. Alas! Poor France! You don't get good political literature just by being well-meaning. Michel Jeury, who was once a member of the Communist Party, should have known! Fortunately, Jeury has also written books where he has been more convincing. When he reveals the sly dealings of the huge industrial empires *(Le Temps Incertain – Uncertain time)*, or when, at last rid of the influence of Philip K. Dick, he gleefully attacks all the dangerous and hysterical mythology surrounding UFOs, cults, perverted esoterisms and points an accusing finger at the true dangers that lie behind the myth *(Poney-Dragon)*.

Dominique Douay, of all French writers, is certainly the one who has had the closest look at the "horrors" of contemporary politics. Even if his writing is somewhat cold, he has achieved some interesting novels. His first collection is made up of a short novel surrounded by some of his better short stories and is a bitter reflection on the times *(Cinq Solutions Pour en Finir – Five Solutions to End it All)*. Social criticism here is both fair and intelligent, even if in some stories excessive demonstration does lead him into dangerous paths. This is, for example, the trouble with "Venceremos", an isolated story published in *Univers 01*, a powerful and evocative yarn spoilt by a somewhat science fiction-like thematic which impairs its balance.

Finally, the themes of French political sf are few, often used indiscriminately and too frequently; it is therefore nice to be able to welcome a more modest enterprise, whose aims have been more apposite.

Together and with the collaboration of French sf writers, Bernard Stephan and Raymond Milési have unassumingly put together a series of collections reflecting upon sf and power, combining intelligent – if sometimes rather dry and didactic stories – with analytical articles.

The first three volumes of the series are: *Mass Communication Media, Education* and *Consumption*. The fourth is to be devoted to *The Organisation of (vital) Space*. Material by Guiot, Milési, Stephan, Pelot, Jeury, Hubert, Vila, Walther, Boireau, Planchat and others can be found in these volumes, which vary between 80 and 150 pages.

4. The Price of Liberty

If young French sf has tried to hoist the black flag into the winds of history, if it has gaily trodden on all sorts of taboos, if it has proclaimed total liberty, valiantly fought on the side of ecology, screamed its anger at the doors of nuclear power stations, and smoked funny cigarettes in the corridors of loneliness, if it has shouted its hatred of the capitalist system and bitten the bourgeoisie in the gut, if it believed for a few short years that victory was possible, if it neglected form and wholesaled the content, if it dismissed traditional culture in four easy lessons and attempted to give a name to the child of its anger at the same time by continually protesting, it also lost all of its power and forgot the basics: namely that a writer is a lone person, who cannot write imprisoned in what are now called "collectives" or "reflection groups". I am aware that even with the best will in the

world, it is not possible to "marginalise" within groups, hordes or "collectives", because the very dynamics of groups, hordes and "collectives" operate against the individual. Which is why – and I state this most strongly – there will never be a French literary movement of "political science fiction". But if out of all the ferment emerge some authors of talent, I feel the whole dubious game will have been worthwhile after all. I do not share the opinion of Jean-Pierre Andrevon regarding the work already produced by the young writers of French political sf, when in one of his anthologies he says that stories illustrating a certain vein of political sf "have their feet solidly stuck in the mud". In fact, it is present political history which is stuck in the mud. However, I do share his views when he declares that the stories in question are only stages on the way to the future. They are a port of call between "two uncertain worlds", that of the past and that of the future . . .

I think that if Bernard Blanc and several others had not existed, it would have been necessary to invent them. They have played the role of the catalyst in chemistry. They have tried to set fire to the keg, and if the fuse takes a long time burning, that's no reason for those who sneer at their mistakes and fits of hysteria from within the 'in' literary salons to hang out the flags.

As I have said, and must now repeat to end this very partial reflection on French political sf, we Frenchmen whether we like it or not are obliged to think within categories. We are reduced to a form of individualism sanctioned by republican morality. We are the do-it-yourself men of the revolution.

For, if I regard with a more than critical eye the efforts of French political sf to steer clear of the literary ruts which a "militant" bourgeoisie has turned into a royal road, I also rebut with my dying breath those who ape the specious arguments of the new right in Frence by trying to reduce the whole experiment to a collection of childish tracts and puerile messages bound to spoil the fun of the hail-fellow-well-met types.

I agree with Maxime Benoit-Jeannin when he says:

> The imagination isn't neutral. An alienated imagination cannot render reality. It is the man of the right whose imagination is alienated – whether or not he is a writer, whether he is a Stalinist or a social-democrat. Here and now, yonder and now, or elsewhere and tomorrow, he is the one who defends existing social conditions and propagates eternal values, taboos, prejudices, illusions, lies born of oppression; which in literary terms reflects itself in the creation of stereotypes.

Many will criticize this article of mine for its great number of obscurities, contradictions and repetitions, but I feel that this is very much due to the fact that science fiction is as much a literature of moods as of ideas, of images as of extrapolations, of truths as of lies, and it is in fact this very richness in paradoxes of all kinds which has made me love and hate it for more than twenty years now, because of and in spite of all its avatars.

5. What they think

Maybe it's a professional idiosyncrasy, but I've a weak spot for interviews. Anyway, as I mentioned earlier on, Bernard Blanc had the same idea when he interrogated his writer friends. I asked some of mine (along with Bernard Blanc, who did not

answer!) to give me their opinion on French political sf and their own way of looking at *political* writing in general.

Here are some *excerpts* from letters by Jean-Pierre Andrevon, Dominique Douay, Jean-Pierre Hubert, Michel Jeury and Maxime Benoit-Jeannin. Oddly enough, most of the answers are somewhat evasive. Fatigue is a social phenomenon too.

Michel Jeury, *born 1934* the author of some of the most memorable works in French sf: *Le Temps Incertain (Uncertain Time), Le Territoire Humain (The Human Territory),* and many short stories. He has published all over the place and has spread himself around in projects unworthy of the best of his talent.

We all know it: everything is political. Therefore, nothing is truly political. Politics is everywhere – even in sf – therefore nowhere, especially not in political sf!

Does this mean it isn't a genuine problem?

Sf is like a kitten playing with balls of wool and it's Granny's sons who take the blame. But the kitten isn't innocent. Sf is a *wicked* kitten: now that's a definition I've been looking for a century or two. When it retracts its claws, it's planning some snide slash; when the claws emerge, it's just for a joke (and it's usually quite funny). Anyway, they're just little claws, only able to tear up soft toilet tissue.

When I was young, workers and peasants wiped their arses with newspaper. In an alternate world, today's politicised sf would never dare tear up a single sheet of *Paris-Soir* or the *Petite Gironde*! I'm just saying any old thing? Why stint me? Everything's political – and sf is everywhere nowadays. I can say anything that comes into my head without being irrelevant; actually that's the wicked kitten's method.

So what about politics? It's all over too: in a corner of the john, just behind the toilet paper holder for the backsides of the bourgeoisie. The wicked kitten is standing on top of the door to watch the cosmos-loo from the viewpoint of Sirius. He's very interested in toilet paper. He's well aware that the two biggest tigers of the 20th Century, Marxism and Freudianism, were both made of the same delicate material; and he's discovered with feline glee that he could sharpen his claws on these two routed mastodons. All great fun. Of course he's just that little bit afraid. Although the bodies of the paper tigers are torn and empty, the mask still remains: scary. And, after all, aren't they such huge beasts whereas he, the kitten, is a wicked beastie but he's an insignificant one.

Jean-Pierre Andrevon, *born 1937* the author of many novels, collections of short stories and the *Retour à la Terre (Back to Earth)* series of anthologies. His best two books are the novel *Le Desert du Monde (Desert of the World),* and his collection *Paysages de Mort (Landscapes of Death),* both published by Denoël.

In the 1960s, and even more so throughout these 1970s we're reaching the tail end of, "young" writers came to notice that their elders' books were in fact quite full of politics (albeit unknowingly or at any rate pretending not to know it was so), so they reacted with other forms of politics: pacifism, the recognition of the *other,* the denunciation of technology, etc. . . . Bravo! But, of course, we writers were not inventing anything new, we were only reflecting the growing ideology of counter-culture, the hippy movement, ecology, May 1968 and all that . . . The problem, and this is particularly so in France, is that we have not been capable of mastering our new material. We've forgotten much too soon that literature is, first of all, the telling of stories. We knew better, putting the message before the massage, as someone said, and we soon bored the pants off everyone. At the same time, to do the modern thing and be with it we (that's "young French sf", 25, 30 year olds) aggravated certain themes like violence, drugs and sex, but this was only our petit-bourgeois fantasies coming to the surface. In our stories there was a flood of fucking, but we kept on living as couples and heterosexuals; we rode high with fantastic hallucinogens but in real life we were lucky if we'd even smoked a couple of joints and coughed a lot; we moved crowds down as if were were marines, but on the street we made off sharpish if we saw a cop half a mile away. You've got to be practical!

Jean-Pierre Hubert, *born 1941.* In my own view, Jean-Pierre Hubert is unlike anybody else. But I'm far from objective. He's one of my best friends. He has published two books: *Planets à 3 Temps (Three-Time Planet)* and *Mort à l'Etouffée (Death by Asphyxiation).* The second one is a masterpiece. His third novel, *Scenes de Guerre Civile (Scenes from a Civil War),* is appearing soon.

I think it's becoming more and more difficult nowadays to separate the life of an sf writer from his work, which is "committed" out of sheer necessity – like a flesh and blood finger dragged into a mincing machine. The 1979 writer is a fragile machine churning out ideas and moods, the last link in a commercial chain where the public's taste (invisible and intangible) seems predictable and malleable. This proletarian of the word, not even paid monthly, let alone unionised, subject to instant dismissal, tossed by the variable moods of editors (themselves pitiful slave traders with a semblance of power subject to the need for commercial success), is therefore the ideal echo chamber for a stampede of fears, inhibitions, neurasthenia, early morning anxieties and other jokes that seem to be nicely stamped with the future.

In fact, I don't really know what the future holds for this so-called political sf which a kind of pressurized emptiness has forced to spurt up from the familiar soil. No doubt we're living in a particular time-zone fit for the birth of utopias – when no ideal seems to match up to the dream of better times. Despite its veneer of denunciation, this political sf has always seemed quite optimistic to me, probably because it underlines what is generally hidden and is, as a consequence, quite fragile, sensitive to time. I think it may last the life of a nova visible on particularly starry nights . . .

Dominique Douay, *born 1944.* A talented author, in complete control of his writing skills, even if he does sometimes appear to lack personality. In my view, one of the only French authors really capable of tackling a political subject in an intelligent manner. Author of six books, including *Strates (Layers)* and *Cinq Solutions Pour en Finir (Five Solutions to End it All),* both published by Denoël.

The writing of sf has changed. The time when we could write escapist stories without bothering about the ideas they conveyed is over. So there's a temptation to shorten the distance even further to deliver a message without any frills, a message directly connected with our day-to-day world, and this, in my view, is the main originality of the stories published by French authors between 1975 and 1978.

At this point in time, one observation: a mistake seems to have been made regarding the word "political". Following the dominant interpretation (as carried by the media) most authors have only tackled the politics of the politicians. Which, I feel, explains the tone of rejection – a very healthy one however! – which marks *inter alia* a collection like *Planete Socialiste (Socialist Planet)* where most of the stories stick tight to a reality where, in the first analysis: *Socialism* equals (French) *Socialist Party* equals *Union of the Left,* joyfully forgetting that socialism also comprises all the Utopian socialists (Proudhon, Farrier, etc. . . .)

One can distinguish an emergent pattern in the stories published since: French sf seems characterized by a will to enter the political fray, and this phenomenon will last. Where opinions do differ is on the subject of the mediations to be established.

Maxime Benoit-Jeannin, *born 1946.* One of the more marginal authors in French political sf. Has mostly published poetry. Good poetry. Literary jack-of-all-trades, he has explored all the different borderlines of creation. His first novel, *La Terre Etait Ici (Earth Was Here)* is one of the few truly subversive works in French sf.

The enemies of political sf pretend that they are equating it with an ideological literature, with a kind of propaganda. The silliest criticism made to writers of political sf is to say that they are writing tracts. In reality, our enemies are suffering from acute myopia. They should know that ideology reflects reality and brings an end to contradictions. On the contrary, political sf unmasks ideology, insofar as its ambition is to decipher daily reality and

transpose it into the realm of the imagination. A transposition does not signify a transfiguration or a simplification. In our case, it means a restitution of the complexity of a life where everything happens to be political. The pessimism some detect in political sf is only a recognition of the fact that everything is political in science.

Letters

Dear Malcolm Edwards, 21st July 1979

I found Michael Moorcock's essay "Wit and Humour in Fantasy" (*Foundation* 16) both stimulating and puzzling: stimulating because of its adroitness in casting a critical beam over such an assemblage of humorists and fantasists, illuminating them in the lights of comparison and contrast; puzzling in that, while his main message was clear enough – that good fantasy is a way of looking at the "real world", and that, since it has so much in common (grotesque juxtaposition, paradox, etc) with humorous and ironic ways of doing this, the two, fantasy and comedy, make a rewarding blend – he at times seems unduly to rationalise, even to trivialise, the processes by which this blend may come into being.

On page 21, for example, he says, "The degree of irony one employs can often determine the degree of sentiment one uses and if one does not want to touch on matters about which one feels deeply, it is often better to use a comic context". Now Michael Moorcock is a creative writer, adept in wit and comedy – which are often shot through with powerfully serious intuitions. I certainly do not see him weighing out chemist-wise so much humour and so much irony to mix in with so much sentiment. What I think Mr Moorcock is doing here is to rationalise a process which springs basically from the interaction of an artist's personality and experience of life with his feeling for the medium – or genre – in which he works. The process is, of course, not undemanding of technique and, if analysed, the technique may correspond somewhat to what this quotation is describing; but to achieve success the process must surely be one in which technique and insight function in organic and complementary fashion.

This, in fact, Mr Moorcock acknowledges by implication elsewhere in his essay: "It [a work of fantasy] should have *at its source* [my italics] some fundamental concern for human beings, some ambition to show, by means of image, metaphor, elements of allegory, what human life is actually about". (p.22) It is on such a basis that, as he demonstrates, a fantasy seemingly as remote from the real world in its setting as *Gormenghast* undoubtedly succeeds. On the other hand, psychological regression and a loose and artifically structured narrative seem to go hand in hand in such a "failed" (in my view) fantasy as *Sylvie and Bruno,* which is well divorced from any mature perception of the common ground of human concern, however recognisable its Oxford setting may be.

I would suggest that Mr Moorcock has memorably symbolised this situation in his own *Gloriana.* In that novel the palace and its environs are at the focus of the fantasy world within which the tragedies and comedies of Albion take place. It is at half-remove from our known world as actualised in time and space, but the

psychological and dramatic resonances are clear and consistent. In the leagues of ducts beneath the palace and between its walls, and in its abandoned wildernesses, lies the area of "closed" fantasy, the universe of "time's ruins", where everything runs to morbidity, finishes in dead-ends. It is only where there is interface between it and the outer world that it can be dynamically involved; yet its doomed and pathetic denizen, Jephraim Tallow, says of this endless maze of Piranesi-like walkways and passages (and it is the authentic voice of the prisoner of "closed" fantasy):

> They're my home for the moment. Until I move on. But I've a poor understanding of the real world, which is why I prefer to be separated from it, as one is, of necessity, here. Though I'm fascinated by it, also. This is the ideal habitat for a fellow of my persuasion.

It is, however, an irony of *Gloriana* that return to innocence and pastoral only occurs after the two worlds have merged in a nightmarish confusion, in which sexual tension – used throughout in sustained metaphor – is at last resolved. It is a witty and strangely moving dialectic.

Mr Moorcock decisively dismisses the trappings of fantasy where these are merely cosmetic, or where, in hiding vacuity, they suggest that the real issues are being decided "on some higher cosmic plane". Fair enough: but there are works of the imagination, far from vacuous or escapist, which do suggest something of the kind – Hardy's *The Dynasts,* for one. There is undoubtedly an element of escapism in Lewis Carroll's fantasies; but in *Through the Looking Glass,* a work of high genius, the chess-moves and their associated problems, with – even through – their very entertaining escapist mechanisms, serve actually to sharpen one's sensitivity to what may or may not be real. Martin Gardner in *The Annotated Alice* quotes Bertrand Russell as saying (of the dialogue between Alice and Tweedledum and Tweedledee over the body of the dreaming Red King):

> A very interesting discussion from a philosophical point of view, but if it were not put humorously, we should find it too painful.

As it is, taken in conjunction with the final checkmate and its aftermath, the conversation is unnerving enough. In the same book (p.209) Martin Gardner also surveys briefly the literature of the chess game as an analogue of action in "the real world" (or "real worlds") – from Wells to James Branch Cabell. Referring to the possibility of a hierarchically recessive determinism, he quotes Mother Sereda in *Jurgen*: "And there is merriment overhead, but it is very far away." Fantasy, I suspect, is not in these cases evading real issues so much as hinting at their metaphysical complexity.

A matter on which I also only partly agree with Mr Moorcock is his generalised insistence that a joke indicating that the story is not really "true" is the hallmark of the bad or purely escapist writer of fantasy. In a crude sense, in the vein in which he elaborates his contention, this may be so. In the hands of an orginal and inventive writer, however, the counterpointing of fiction against fact, or indeed of fiction against fiction, particularly if on a sustained scale, can give scope for sophisticated fantasy and irony. One could perhaps call it the Sherlock Holmes syndrome. An example is Philip José Farmer's *The Other Log of Phileas Fogg.* Here the reader knows, and knows that the author knows, that Verne wrote fiction; therefore he knows throughout that he is a willing accomplice in the creation of a kind of literary joke. He is offered, and agrees to accept, what is known to be a fiction as a factual basis for the "true" story. Then the "cosmic

war" is poured into the pedantic terrestrial and human moulds of Verne's narrative. The total effect can be both comic and chilling.

In this light let us look again at Moorcock's *Gloriana,* a novel of fantasy which, in fact, uses an analogous technique. There *is* a true history of Doctor Dee, of Rudolf of Bohemia, of the Aztec Empire – and, as the reader is well aware, this is not it. Our enjoyment of *Gloriana* to some extent lies in this awareness, and in our knowledge that it is a fiction conceived differently from the historical novels of Scott, Harrison Ainsworth et al., works which imaginatively propose, and ask you to believe, that this is what it was "really" like,

Gloriana engages our belief or disbelief on a multiplicity of levels: it is a pastiche of the picaresque novel; it explores major mythological themes; it draws, in slightly parodic vein, on a number of classic fictional sources, Malory, Spenser, and Rabelais among them. The basis of reality on which the narrative rests is left deliberately vague. But even if, in an infinity of universes, all of *Gloriana* may be supposed to have happened, in one of an infinity of Londons, our sharpest pleasure lies in experiencing the transposing, by way of "the Matter of Britain", of a world created somewhat in the Byzantine key into the key of Elizabethan England, of the superimposition of an imagined pagan, stable, imperial regime on to an oddly distorted "real world" simulacrum of that great era in which the tensions of Reformation and Renaissance began to pull into shape the nascent modern state. That an emerging and disruptive dynamism is resolved back into an eternal and idyllic stability is the unexpected but inevitable final irony; and this is given a last equivocal twist when we read, as Prince Arthur and Queen Gloriana set out on their Progress, the last sentence of the book (with its telling echo of Prospero's speech in Act IV of *The Tempest,* following the betrothal and the disappearance of the Spirits of the Masque):

> And behind them will be the palace, its glinting domes and roofs rising and falling like a glamorous tide; its towers and minarets lifting like the hulls of sunken ships.

We realise, what we have known all along, that in our reading of the story we have been in a realm "glamorous", in the old sense of the word, enchanted; but our keen psychological experience is by no means dimmed by this awareness of having been lured to live out a literary Albion's "insubstantial pageant". It is a legerdemain in which we find ourselves perfectly in collusion with the author.

A variation of method, often practised by writers of fantasy, in establishing a commonly accepted fictional ground between authors and audience, is the use of a framework created in a different imaginative vein from the fantasies which it frames. One can trace its descent from *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* through to *Master Humphrey's Clock* and beyond. A twentieth century example is Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man.* The first story in that volume, its embodiment having been determined by the Prologue, is the black, black comedy of *The Veldt.* At its end the little parenticides, as the vultures drop down, prepare to entertain the consultant psychologist to a cosy cup of tea. The turning body of the Illustrated Man then opens up a space through which falls an image of the broken rocket, introducing the first paragraph of *Kaleidoscope.* This shifts the mood, provides a universe, a continuum, for a succession of fantasies, and, although the technique is not suitable, it defines a convention which projects its singularly theatrical spell through the volume.

In fact the body of the Illustrated Man is a kind of theatre in which performers endlessly perform. As Bradbury put it:

There in the moonlight, with the tiny tinkling thoughts and the distant sea voices, each little drama was enacted.

The Illustrated Man (like the Red King) seems to sleep. One is reminded again of Prospero's account of the Spirits of the Masque, and of Puck's final speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Maybe it is in the theatre that these twists of perspective – making the audience establish lines of demarcation, and at the same time seek questioning links between fantasy and reality – can be most effectively deployed. The stage and auditorium provide a corporeal framework for the twinkling forth and apprehension, the manifestation and repetition, of the artist's dramatic vision.

In such a view, Shakespeare's "wooden O" becomes his "Illustrated Man"; the Court at Whitehall that of Jonson, Beaumont, and the seventeenth century masquers; and the Savoy Theatre that of a notable creator of fantasy, William Schwenck Gilbert. Gilbert's succession of proscenium-framed, brilliantly coloured fantasies – the resurrected ancestors of *Ruddigore,* the winged ascent of the peers in *Iolanthe,* the myth of the misplaced heir in *The Gondoliers,* and that of the "disguised god" in *The Mikado* and *His Excellency* – may, with their puns, their forced absurdities, and contrived plots, at first glance seem to belong to the in-turned immature world of "closed" fantasy; but, when viewed as variations in a series-long process of "using logic to deride living and life to deride logic" (Isaac Goldberg), it is apparent that the operattas do not so much attempt to escape from the "real world" as to involve the audience in turning it upside down and inside out, in being made aware of the extent to which the "real world" is reflected in fantasy and, reciprocally and paradoxically, how much make-belief motivates supposedly rational action. Audience complicity in these operas, early signalled by Major-General Stanley's in-joke that he could "whistle all the airs from that infernal nonsense *Pinafore*", and continued even to the present day in the "ritual" nature of each performance, is not simply a cult phenomenon: it is indicative of success in achieving the legitimate (and acquiesced in) theatrical illusion/reality ploy.

Finally, may I say that, while I agree with Michael Moorcock's view of Dickens as humorist, I would also rate him high as a writer of the kind of fantasy, rooted in realism, but given wings by humane and comic insights, that Mr Moorcock has defined and acclaimed. I would maintain this less on the basis of the fantasies, often sentimentally coloured, involving dreams and visions *(The Chimes, A Christmas Carol),* more with reference to those passages of fantasy and metaphor introduced into (yet integrated with) a predominantly realistic narrative: Mrs Varley's dissertation on and manipulation of her waxwork figures in *The Old Curiosity Shop,* and Millie Swidger's battles with the four elements in *The Haunted Man* – but here there is neither space nor time to elaborate; only to voice again appreciation of the expansions of understanding and enjoyment which Michael Moorcock's essay affords.

K. V. Bailey *High Beach, Essex*

Dear Malcolm Edwards, 30th July 1979

Michael Moorcock's well-written case for comedy and irony in fantasy makes a much-needed point. I wonder, though, why he restricts it to fantasy. Avoiding

the "stultification of commercial sf", as he terms it, demands also the same use of many tones, many voices, of drama drawn ultimately from life. (Was it Ballard who termed sf a literature not won from experience?)

This touches in turn on an implicit conflict between the UK view, as evident in *Foundation*, and a common US opinion. Colin Lester touches on this (in no.16) when he looks askance at assertions that sf must be read and criticised differently than mainstream literature. The early Bester works, to my mind, demand an approach which must be learned. But I can see some virtues in Mr Lester's position, too.

So to use scientific jargon, I suggest an intermediate model. What we mean by "general literature" can be described by a certain bandwidth, let us say, of literary approaches. Anything written outside that bandwidth is understood only fractionally, or at worst becomes utterly opaque. That is, the reader may "follow the story" in a crude sense, but the virtues don't shine through. "Progress" in literature means widening the bandwidth in such a way that the audience (or at least the professors) can follow. Of course, people differ in their bandwidths according to their exposure and receptivity. And taste leads many to read in only a small region of their bandwidth, though they understand perfectly well what's being transmitted on other wavelengths.

My point about sf is that it has a fairly wide bandwidth, which is widening as people develop new techniques to express new perceptions. But sf overlaps the general literature bandwidth only partially. Where the two bandwidths overlap we get, for example, what the mainstream regards as virtually non-sf classics – Orwell, Wells, Huxley etc – and the recent easily approachable big-book Heinleins, Herberts, Clarkes etc. These works don't require much in the way of new habits of reading. Delany and others point to the portions of the sf bandwidth that *do* demand a special set of responses, and tend to regard this as the essential core of sf. Of course, it can be amusing to take positions on which part of the bandwidth represents the dividing line between us 'n them. Also, hammering home the necessity for a different reading technique is a good idea so long as the critical fraternity thinks otherwise. But it seems to me there is a deeper question.

We need a theory which evaluates *when* the "sf reading sense" can be offset against "traditional literary virtues". There is nearly always a difficult aesthetic choice to be made about this. It's one of the most difficult problems in writing sf.

We need a recognisable standard for judging when the tradeoff between these two standards is legitimate. We need a way to decide when style, characterisation, etc. must give way to specifically science fictional purposes. This tension is the source of much of the difficulty in sf.

I admit such a call seems like a tall order. But I feel pursuing answers will in the end be more productive than arguments over the sanctity of our bandwidths.

Gregory Benford *Cambridge*

Dear Sir, 9th October 1979

"Cowper is known as a writer who is resolutely English" – thus D. West *en passant* while in the process of excoriating my novel *Profundis* in *Foundation* 17 – and I am moved to wonder just what he means by "resolutely" in that particular context.

That I am English cannot be denied, and certainly I would not wish to deny it, but "resolutely"? Firmly? Unhesitatingly? Unyieldingly? Unflinchingly steadfast in purpose? What have these to do with my being English? True, I write in English (it being my mother tongue) and abjure, wherever possible, that bland, pre-digested substitute for the real thing which is, I am told, *de rigueur* for English sf writers who hope to capture the trans-Atlantic market. I have even, on occasion, been known to use words of more than two syllables and to construct quite complex sentences in which to contain them; in short I am one of those writers who aims his prose at a target somewhat above the level of his readers' kneecaps.

But, that having been said, I still feel that I may well be missing the critical point which Mr West believed he was making, and a rapid check back through a file of press notices I have received over the past few years has uncovered the following qualifying adjectives all of which have, at one time or another, been tackled on to my nationality (viz): "very", "truly", "genuinely" and "undeniably". Now, without, I hope, being hypersensitive in the matter I feel bound to say that I detect a faintly pejorative note in these words – an appeal, as it were, to some pre-conception in the reader's mind which is enshrined in the very word "English" itself. At the best it is parochial; at the worst narrow-minded, chauvinistic, smug and self-satisfied. So let me take this opportunity to deny most strenuously that I am any of these things, though, of course, I could be mistaken.

Richard Cowper *Dittisham*

PS Might I also be allowed to point out that *Profundis* was/is a satire on the British Navy – a fact of some significance which seems to have escaped your reviewer.

Dear Sir, 26th September 1979

In reading *Foundation* 16 I was bothered when I came across an article containing such elementary errors of fact as are found in "The Last Man Theme in Modern Fantasy and SF" by Ryszard Dubanski. On page 26 he notes the first two last man novels, but I.F. Clarke has been pointing out for at least two editions that the English one is a translation of the French. I can't see how anyone writing on this theme can make that error.

On page 29 he calls Bellamy's Looking Backward "militantly capitalist" which is simply ridiculous. There is a description of Bellamy's society by Brian Stableford on page 45 of the same issue which, while having a few points that might be quibbled with, accurately points out that virtually the entire economy has been nationalized. This is hardly a "militantly capitalist" policy.

Lyman Tower Sargent *University of Missouri-St Louis*

Dear Sir, 9th July 1979

Readers wondering why *Foundation* is duller than it was may possibly have come to my conclusion: that the former editor did not allow Brian Stableford to

proliferate as you do. By all means cultivate your garden, but watch out for the common bindweed.

Stableford is often perceptive, his methods are scholarly, he makes his points with reasonable brevity, in reasonable English. The trouble is that he is so awfully patronising, so awfully solemn, he ruins his own case.

In Issue 16, he conceived the sound idea of writing about Mack Reynolds' work. Reynolds has been in business for a long while and is (therefore?) much neglected. But Stableford must begin with a prolegomenon about Western sociology failing to discuss Marxism and Soviet sf being barren of "any serious socio-economic speculation". With good reason in both cases, I'd have thought. That polemic is mingled with a contemptuous lambasting of authors for "simple failure of imagination" and of sf for being a "mass market genre", and so on – warning signs of a critic who feels himself superior to the medium on which he is delivering judgement. His argument is, basically, that Western writers no more dare to write of Communist futures for the world than Soviet writers dare predict capitalist futures for any world: in other words, *we're* no freer than *they* are.

I became rather tired of hearing this lie some while ago, not from Mr Stableford, who lives in a free country, but from chaps from the Warsaw Pact countries, who have to earn their right to move across frontiers by spouting such nonsense. As a result, I wrote *Enemies of the System,* in which I visualise a future solar-system-wide utopia of decided communist emphasis. In future, when some exportable savant from Bucharest or Leningrad, or even a fellow-traveller from Paris or London, gets to his feet and says, "Western writers never predict Communist futures", the answer is, "Yes, we did; now *you* try it". Feel free to mention *Enemies of the System.*

Unfortunately, my book on publication was thrown to none other than your ubiquitous Brian Stableford (issue 15), who began to attack on it in an underhand way by saying the volume was over-priced as compared with the version in *F&SF,* as if magazines are not always cheaper than hardcovers. He did not bother to note that the *F&SF* version was abridged; indeed, he claimed the magazine version was complete, from which we might just infer that he did not bother to read his review copy.

He was careful, as such people are, to camouflage his political objections to it. His is a dyspeptic review (and quite opposed to the judgements of Anthony Burgess, who can be dyspeptic to far better effect when he wishes); it concludes, if I may remind your readers, "Aldiss has always been a self-indulgent writer, but if this book is a sign of things to come then it seems that in matters of both scale and substance he is also becoming lazy". Why should this stroppy little man presume to guess about what I write in future? How dare he make such inferences when within the previous twelve-months I had published a collection of short stories *(Last Orders)* and a long novel *(Rude Awakening)*? Well, he dare because you let him. *Watch out for the common bindweed.*

I made no response at the time. Why bother? I bring up the point now because I have another long political novel appearing soon *(Life in the West),* which will no doubt provoke similar sniping, and also because I wish to draw attention to your critic's unwarrantedly patronising tone towards the authors he chooses to discuss.

Stableford has been luckier with James Blish and Mack Reynolds than with me. They didn't answer back. Blish is too dead, Reynolds is too nice.

In response to Stableford's sneering remark, "Reynolds is not a writer who has attracted attention on account of the aesthetic merits of his prose, nor is it likely he

ever will . . .", Mack modestly responds, "I am a professional story teller with no other source of income and hence, to make my living, must sometimes resort to pot boilers and humor novels". Spoken like a man. There's honour in survival.

Notice how Mack continues, with perfect good will: "To my distress, Mr Stableford evidently did not realise that humor was intended in some of them". He is not trying to belittle anyone, or anyone's abilities; the guy who should be distressed is the humourless, hubristic critic.

Brian W. Aldiss *Oxford*

Brian Stableford replies:

Dear Malcolm Edwards, 23rd November 1979

Thank you for letting me see Brian Aldiss' letter remarking on my alleged convolvuline tendencies, and for giving me the opportunity to clarify some of the points which seem to have confused him.

The introductory section of my essay on Mack Reynolds (which hardly deserves the high-flown title of prolegonemon) is making the point that Western writers rarely make use of any theories of social change save for pseudoscientific ones. Marx's dialectical theory of social change is defective, but it is a sincere attempt to understand processes of social change without recourse to metaphysical idealism, and deserves respect. Most subsequent theories which actually have anything much to contribute to the understanding of social change are corrective modifications of it (Weber's work in this vein, for instance). It is for this reason that Marxist analysis remains important in the consideration of processes of social change.

At no point in my essay do I allege that Western sf writers are no freer than those in the East. What I actually say is that "In the West, such speculation is far from being completely stifled, but diplomacy makes much of it rather weak". I go on to point out that Mack Reynolds is an honourable exception to this generalisation – his existence is adequate testimony to the degree of tolerance enjoyed by Western writers. Even if Western writers *were* as restricted as those in the East, however, it would not stop them writing about Communist futures – it would merely mean that such writing would present Communist futures as utterly horrible and desolate societies as derelict of human feeling and inspiration as an ant-hive. Most Western writing about Communist features has taken exactly this line: John Kendall's *Unborn Tomorrow,* Ayn Rand's *Anthem* and Brian Aldiss's *Enemies of the System* are excellent examples. Perhaps Mr Aldiss regards *Enemies of the System* as a fearless piece of sociopolitical speculation which could not have been published if we lived under a right-wing totalitarianism as powerful as the government of the USSR but it seems to me that they would be more likely to give him a medal for it than suppress it. The point is that satirical condemnation by means of such extreme parodies is too easy, *whatever* particular political philosophy is under attack. Socialist writers have had no difficulty in imagining and presenting brutal and dehumanising Capitalist systems of equal unattractiveness. *Reductio ad absurdum* is a powerful strategy in logic, but in political argument its victories are too cheap to be of much real interest, whichever side is using it. (It may also be worth pointing out that hive-like uniformity is also used as a horrifying image in a recent Soviet sf novel – Emtsev and Parnov's

World Soul; a work which, without being particularly startling in its originality, seems markedly more adventurous than *Enemies of the System.*)

I read my review copy of *Enemies of the System* diligently, before receiving my standing-order copy of the relevant issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction.* I apologise for my error in saying that the magazine version was complete – I meant to imply "all-in-one-issue" rather than "unabridged", and should have said so more clearly.

I agree that Anthony Burgess is a far more dyspeptic reviewer than I, but I am not sure that he has less political bias. Having read *1985* I find it unsurprising that he liked *Enemies of the System.* I remember reading his review, and was struck by the fact that he claimed that the novel could not be science fiction because it was good. In the light of this judgement it seems curious that Mr Aldiss should accuse me of being the "critic who feels himself superior to the medium on which he is delivering judgement". Could this be a case of mistaken identity?

It is, of course, noble of Mr Aldiss to spring to the defence of Mack Reynolds and my other "victims", and it would be churlish of anyone reading his letter even to suspect that the concern which he expresses on behalf of others is a cover-up for his own sense of injury. Let me say, therefore, that Mack Reynolds is a writer whose work I have enjoyed throughout the years I have been reading sf, and whom I admire. When I review books I occasionally find it necessary to say that I do not think highly of them, but my only motive for spontaneously writing articles on particular writers is to attempt to analyse and compliment the qualities which I admire in their work. I have never set out to "belittle" another writer, and I have never undertaken a critical article with the intention of hurting and humiliating another writer, as Mr Aldiss has done at least once, in his attack on Lan Wright in *SF Horizons 2.* I did, as Mr Aldiss points out, say that it seemed that he was becoming lazy in writing a book like *Enemies of the System.* By this I did not mean to comment on his overall productivity, but rather to express my disappointment that a writer with such an imaginative range should have relaxed into the production of such a hackneyed and lightweight book. Perhaps I was a little too harsh – it is, after all, longer and less crude than *Anthem* and the short novel in *1985.*

I leave it to the readers to decide whether this brief exchange lends weight to Mr Aldiss' contention that this critic feels himself to be "above" the medium, or whether it is rather a case of the writer feeling himself to be above criticism, but it may be pertinent to quote the (loosely paraphrased) words of a pseudo-Confucian graffitist who once advised that: "He who would become a sacred cow should first grow the hide".

Brian Stableford *Swansea*

Reviews

Engine Summer
by John Crowley *(Doubleday, 1979, 182pp, $7.95, ISBN 0-385-12381-2)*

reviewed by Thomas M. Disch

Among the traditional postulates of sf the best-loved, and most overused, may well be the regression of civilization into barbarism as a result of the Bomb. Indeed, the theme predates the splitting of the atom; in 1885 Richard Jefferies wrote *After London,* an account of Britain transformed into a Gothic folly. In modern sf the avatars are John Wyndham's *Rebirth* (in UK *The Chrysalids*) and Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz.* The seductions of the theme are manifold, not least the possibilities for set-decoration as the woodbine pulls down the sky-scrapers and every scrap-heap becomes a riddle book of misunderstood technologies. It allows the sf writer to revert to the idyllic imagery of Arcadia and put by the expository demands of the High Tech style. It provides a playground for daydreams of Brute Power, one that is more plausible (and intellectually respectable) than alien planets concocted for such suspect pastimes. Finally, it can offer, as in *Canticle,* laboratory conditions for testing (or confirming) historical theories: Is civilization cyclical? Is the feudal three-tiered stratification of lord (power), priest (knowledge), and serf (forced labour) the inevitable solution to Hobbesian anarchy – or is it a false paradigm and therefore part of the problem? Will we, as predators doomed to aggress, finally drop our bombs? Good, solid, unanswerable questions guaranteed to lend dignity to even the most trivial fiction.

In 1976 St. Martin's published Steve Wilson's *The Lost Traveller,* which was recently reprinted by Ace with the irresistible blurb "A Science Fiction Western and Motorcycle Quest Epic" and an even more irresistible endorsement from Norma Spinrad, who promises that this is "unquestionably the best, most mature, most honest, fairest and most wise piece of fiction ever written about the Hell's Angels" and, what's more, "true science fiction in the highest sense – alien sensibilities rendered with conviction in their own terms, thereby expanding the reader's sense of the humanly possible". I mention this novel so much after the fact of its publication for two reasons: to second Norman's recommendation and by way of contrasting the much greater merits of another post-holocaust fantasy, John Crowley's *Engine Summer,* a novel that manages to use the theme of post-atomic regression in so novel (and novelistic) a matter as to amount to a complete recension of that theme.

The Lost Traveller covers great tracts of familiar territory at high speed, moving from one familiar trope to the next with the quick editing, high colour, and careful moral equivocation that allow one's own barbaric id a vicarious romp through an entire Disneyworld of macho hijinks, as the hero, a Hell's Angel with prophetic powers, kills rival motorcyclists with gun, crossbow, and knife (his own father among them, as they discover too late; an affecting moment), is initiated into an

Indian tribe (a tip of the hat, here, to the ancient wisdom of Carlos Castaneda), rescues Professor Sangreal (White Science) from the evil clutches of East Coast totalitarians (Black Science), has exemplary sex with a barmaid who is a noble savage in disguise, and, with his buddy Milt, holds out against and defeats a small armada of villains. And even that isn't the topper. Revealing these elements of the story will not, I think, detract from any reader's pleasure in it, for Wilson's craft lays in deploying his archetypes in yes-of-course order, so that we know the moment a character enters exactly what role he must play. *The Lost Traveller* is predestined for Hollywood, and I hope Zelazny's slovenly and unpersuasive *Damnation Alley* hasn't spoiled its chance for the big screen. Meanwhile, all literate, would-be barbarians can enjoy this paperback.

To inventory the high points of *Engine Summer* similarly would be to perform an injustice to its future readers, for it's a novel full of genuine surprises, trapdoors that spring open under the feet of the mind at regular intervals all the way to the last chapter. Therefore, as much as possible I'll try to praise the book without betraying its secrets, though these, of course, are integral to its success sheerly as science fiction. Indeed, without a developed knack for the kind of decoding and riddle-guessing demanded by the more cerebral forms of sf, few readers are likely to get beyond the first two or three twists of the labyrinth. As Crowley explains, with customary indirection: "There is no way through Little Belaire to the outside except Path, and no one who wasn't born in Little Belaire, probably, could ever find his way to the centre. Path looks no different from what is not Path: it's drawn on your feet."

Though full of surprises, *Engine Summer* eschews drama. There's not a single villain, not a fight, scarcely a line of dialogue that isn't redolent of good will. Is it then a kind of love story? No: though the narrator forms a rather forlorn attachment to a girl (who resembles Dickens's Estella a little too closely), is rebuffed, pursues her, and achieves a bittersweet and fleeting rapprochement, this, the largest dramatic action of the book, constitutes at most a sub-plot. Passion requires nutrients not to be found in the soil of *Engine Summer*. The best the hero can hope for, and what he finally achieves is the stoic acceptance of an awareness almost congruent with despair.

What the book is poignantly, strenuously, and beautifully *about* is truth – how it is known and how spoken. The narrator is born into a society whose central value is introspection and plain-speaking, a kind of Quaker monastery populated by illiterate but exquisitely articulate aborigines, timid as rabbits, who support themselves by foraging for nuts and berries and dealing dope to other tribes who lack their horticultural resources. At an early age the narrator, Rush, forms the ambition of becoming a saint: that is, someone who in telling the story of his life evokes a universal truth, whose life, in its narrative form, is a paradigm for all human lives. *Engine Summer* is precisely the oral narative by which we are to judge if Rush (and/or Crowley) have attained this so-novelistic ideal of sainthood. What the book is also about, by inference, is the art of the novel, the art of this novel. One can't read far without being reminded of Crowley's presence behind his narrator's persona: a modest, melancholy, quiet-spoken young man who occasionally reveals, as though inadvertently, an unshakable conviction in his own genius. The book's epigraph is from Kafka, but even without that hint it is of Kafka one is constantly made to think. Not the expressionist, shrill trance-medium of "Metamorphosis" but the later, sedated Kafka who wrote such masterpieces of precision allegory as "Investigations of a Dog", the blandly lethal ironist, the master of dropped pins.

Most readers will have already leaped to the conclusion that I am urging them to

read that anomalous and always suspect hybrid, a poetic novel. I confess it, but would add that Crowley's "poetry" is not what is ordinarily accounted poetic prose, a rhetorical commodity reserved for moments of maximum claptrap, as when Steve Wilson's hero has spent the *de rigueur* weekend fasting on a mountaintop so as to get in tune with the eternal rhythms:

> The sun's warmth was a smile on him, but an Indian smile, after nothing for itself, inscrutable — a mystery which was echoed in the mauve and violet shadows beneath the trees, the shifting blackness in the seas of evergreens, the cobalt of the sky above like a single abrupt syllable, a clapped hand.

That is fustian, cut from a long bolt of the same Nebula-Award quality but sturdy enough to clothe a moment of naked ignorance. With the lighting right some readers may even mistake it for French gabardine; it's fustian, even so.

Crowley's "poetry" is of another ilk, descending from the scrubbed-bare, no-nonsense vein of modern mid-American poetry (represented by such poets as Williams, Creeley, Bly, and Simic), which has for its conservative aim the restoration of full emotional force to plain words grown slack with overuse. Such poetry, depending as it does on the running currents for its lustre, is not easily excerpted, but here, anyhow, is a passage from an early chapter in which Rush is explaining the totemic groupings of his people:

> Cords. Your cord is *you* more surely than your name or the face that looks out at you from mirrors, though both of those, face and name, belong to the cord you belong to. There are many cords in Little Belaire, nobody knows exactly how many because there is a dispute among the gossips about cords which some say aren't cords but only parts of other cords. You grow into being in your cord; the more you become yourself, the more you become the cord you are. Until — if you aren't ordinary — you reach a time when your own cord expands and begins to swallow up others, and you grow out of being in a single cord at all. I said Painted Red had been Water cord, and her name was Wind; now she was larger than that and she had no cord that could be named, though in her way of speaking, in the motions of her hands, the matter of her life, in small things, she was still Water.
>
> Water and Buckle and Leaf; Palm and Bones and Ice; St. Gene's tiny Thread cord, and Brink's cord if it exists. And the rest. And Whisper. And was it because of her secrets that I loved Once a Day, or because of Once a Day that I came to love secrets?

The way the narrator struggles with his subject, his hedges and qualifications, and his final surrender to the wisdom of tautology have an almost anthropological ring of truth. There is the pleasure, as well, of being inducted into a private language (as in *A Clockwork Orange*), which becomes more complex and interconnected with each page; a pleasure that is heightened by the chemical purity of the vocabulary. There are glints of mystery (one never hears of the problematic Brink's cord again), as well as many minor, and ingenious, solutions to etymological riddles along the way. Nor are all the riddles minor: one of the story's most inspired ironies concerns the naming of the tribe known as Dr Boot's List.

Engine Summer is exceptional in science fiction for being, first and foremost, a work of art. Its scale is small and the range of human possibility it encompasses is correspondingly narrow, but one doesn't fault Cezanne's "Card Players" for lacking *terribilità*. Within its carefully determined bounds *Engine Summer* succeeds at the first, and still the most difficult, task of art: it achieves formal beauty.

Stardance
by Spider and Jeanne Robinson (*Sidgwick and Jackson, 1979, 278pp, £5.95, ISBN 0 283 98525 9; Futura, 1979, 278pp, £1.10, ISBN 0 7088 8049 5)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

When you spend time with people so pleasant, a rosy future for all seems inevitable. There's Shara, for a start She's a dancer – or at least, she yearns to make it in the competitive world of Modern Dance, but her boobs are too big and her bottom's too big and she's altogether stuck in the wrong body. But she has a Dream, and integrity, and pride, and you have to love her for her sheer indomitable spirit. Finally, she creates single-handed the new art of zero-gee dancing, where her body is no limitation. She's good. In fact, she's the best dancer in human history. So when aliens arrive who communicate solely by dance, and threaten Mother Earth, Shara dances them right out of the Solar System with a dance expressing the sheer indomitable spirit and gutsiness and tragic courage of humanity, even though the effort kills her. And there's her friend Charlie – a crippled, embittered drunk, to be sure, but one hell of a nice guy, full of guts and dedication and a kooky sense of humour and sheer indomitable spirit. He's a video-man by profession, since a burglar's bullet ruined his dancing career, and he's the best viedo-man in the Solar System. He forms a partnership with Shara's sister Norrey to build up a zero-gee dance company which will develop Shara's art, ready for when the aliens return. The company attracts some more very nice people. There's Raoul, who's the best composer and musician and set-designer in the world. He's a runt, but he recovers a lot of self-respect in space – "In zero gee *nobody* is short" – and you have to admire him for sheer talent and likeableness and spirit. And there's Bill Cox, "the best strategic mind in space", a bluff old soldier with a heart of gold, tough as they come but still every kid's ideal father. And Harry Stein, the best engineer in the world and virtual inventor of all techniques of zero-gee construction. Harry is as strong as an ox, and taciturn, but soft underneath it all, quite a charmer really. And Tom, who's the best business mind in the System, but still one hell of a nice guy. And Linda, who's the kindest and most empathic person you've ever met, as well as a first rate dancer, and very sincere and courageous and loving. Not, of course, that there are no baddies at all. That would be sugar in honey sauce. There's Carrington, a crippled billionaire industrialist who helps Shara out of a financial tight spot in return for lashings of zero-gee sex, the pig, the unprincipled swine. And there's Silverman, a redneck US patriot who sees everything in terms of military advantage, hates Commies, talks like a Jules Verne Jew and may even be a repressed homosexual.

The plot is every bit as reassuring. One woman saves the whole world by being courageous and talented and indomitable. The two members of the company who initially really hate each other finally discover that it was only love seen from the wrong angle after all, and end up making the second-best marriage in the universe (Charlie and Norrey already have the first). Charlie and Norrey become trapped aboard a spacecraft with a long orbit and virtually no fuel and oxygen, so they soothe and forgive and love each other, and deliver a limp critique of life on an overcrowded, polluted Earth before being saved in the absolute nick by indomitable Bill Cox and his space commandos. When the company are required to go out to Titan to meet the returning aliens, Charlie tells the others that only he and Norrey need go, and that they should stay at home because it's a dangerous mission: he is shouted down – all for one and one for all, pack your comic books for Titan. When

they get there, the aliens turn out to be superior and benevolent, come to supervise the transition of the human race to its next evolutionary stage, which involves immortality, freedom to live naked in space without injury, and, as a special bonus, the formation of an empathic group mind without loss of individual ego. Shara is alive after all: she didn't burn up in Earth's atmosphere after her Stardance, but was rescued by the aliens and has lived happily in Saturn's rings until the rest of the goodies could make it out there to join here. Yes, Virginia, there *is* a Santa Claus.

One or two particular points. In their "Acknowledgements", the Robinsons credit John Varley and Frank Herbert with having pioneered "the concept on which the ending of this book depends", presumably referring to the symbiotic organism enabling humane to pursue naturism in space. Otherwise it is patent nonsense. The linked ideas of a superhuman paternalism and an evolutionary leap to a secularized state of grace are presented more economically and forcefully in *Childhood's End,* and before that in different ways in *Star Maker, Star Begotten, Men Like Gods (en passant)* and many other books. The ending of this book, as Brian Stableford pointed out in a recent number of *Foundation,* is a cliche of modern sf, possibly the commonest resolution in sf novels of the past twenty years, though rarely has the convention been presented in such a thoroughly droopy, glutinous and "inspirational" manner. My second objection relates more directly to the contrast between the book's hip, hardbitten surface style and its heart of mush. It is, nominally, a story about the rewards to be won through the overcoming of obstacles. Yet there are no real obstacles – Carrington, Silverman, the burglar who cripples Charlie, are ephemeral concessions to an older tradition of moral plain-dealing. The Robinsons are in the business of reassurance, so they ignore the possibility that life's obstacles may not always be conveniently surmounted after a ritual period of degradation or frustration. There are no real, persistent barriers here. It's a children's book of the worst sort – dishonest, a slurry of schmaltz. I'm told it's very popular. How could it fail to be? Everything is beautiful and nothing hurts.

Jem: the Making of a Utopia
by Frederik Pohl *(Gollancz, 1979, 300pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 575 02566 2)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Earth is divided into three economic alliances. The Food Bloc (America, Canada, Russia, Bulgaria, etc) farm and distribute the world's food. The People's Republics (China, Pakistan, the West Indies, etc) have the numbers and supply the workers. The Oil Bloc (Arabia, Britain, Venezuela, etc) control the pipelines. As a global organisation, you can see the logic, but suspect that it might prove unwieldy in practice and too simple to have arisen in the first place. But the triangular structure trims the balance of power right down. "Everyone knew that war was simply priced out of the market for any nation that wanted to survive". All they can do is haggle.

In this near future of depleted resources it comes as something of a shock to find that the FTL drive has been invented and perfected, and that every bloc can supply the hardware to put men in a distant star system at a few months' notice. (The principle, by the way, involves changing every particle of the projectile to tachyon state – the sort of thing that makes the Tardis go.) Jem, where everyone is heading,

is a hot, murky planet orbiting a small, unstable star. It has three highly intelligent species on it already, and can support human life. It's also rich in those good old natural resources. On your marks. Get set. Go.

Given all that, the rest of the plot follows. You can calculate what some of the issues, ironies, tensions and alarms are going to be. Pohl has calculated them all. *Jem* continues his Master's Series on the great subjects of modern sf. It's ostensibly an eco-novel: not a new *Dune,* but an expanded version of Aldiss's *Dark Light Years.* The comparison is revealing. Herbert's primary subject is World, but Aldiss's and Pohl's is Man. They offer the same picture of humanity as the most dangerous lifeform in the universe, given to acquiring power far in advance of understanding: reach now, grasp later. This criticism is Pohl's message, and its urgency in *Jem* tends to compress the possible breadth of the material. The book provides no image of Jem as an entire planet, not because it's too large to manage, but because it's been pre-shrunk. Jem is an issue, a deadly board-game, a series of military camps separated by rough terrain. Similarly, the strong human bias induces a crafty anthropomorphism in the characterisation of the alien races. Jem's "balloonists" are very like the utods, in fact. Though their culture is credibly complex and inhuman, their racial character, a sort of comic noble savagery and vulnerable cuddliness, is only too simple. Margie Menninger, the Food Bloc camp commander, tells her naturalist lover that he should have spent less time studying and wooing the peaceful balloonists and concentrated on their natural enemies, the air-sharks. "'What a killing machine! Shit, Danny, I can see why things are going badly here. You people picked the wrong allies. We ought to team up with the sharks!'" The parable is neat and functional: scientific mind vs. military mind. What the sentiment obscures is the ecological fact that the balloonists are predators too, feeding on the Jemman equivalent of grubs and insects that float through the air. That fact, with its consequent moral confusions, Herbert would have pointed up; Pohl needs to conceal it.

There's a parallel bias to his human characterisation. The races are very badly balanced, and don't show up in anything like the proportions or intermixtures that they ought. Representatives range in complexity and credibility from Colonel Menninger at the top to the funny Russian, Kappelyushnikov, and the grotesque Englishman, Chesley Pontrefact *(sic)* way down at the bottom. America dominates. This is, after all, the tale of how America nearly dominated the human and other races into extinction. Self-preoccupied, the novel is intensely self-critical, as all modern American literature is. Margie Menninger, setting up the colonial push, tells her Deputy Undersecretary daddy: "I want the United States to send enough muscle up there to make it fit to live in." Leapin' lizards! And she's winning, right up until the last moment, just when she's almost made Jem *un*fit for life of any kind. The American Nightmare almost comes true.

The fact that Margie Menninger is a woman looks interesting, but is actually no more significant than the fact that Margie Thatcher is a woman. Margie Menninger is all-American woman, a terrible superhuman titaness, the ultimate master race mistress, by West Point out of the US matriarchy.

It's in terms like these that Pohl has written *Jem,* as a racial, political and economic conflict, imposed upon an alien and rather fragile ecology. Heavy on particulars, short on stylistic beauties, it's a very efficient piece of traditional science fiction, even though it's by no means in love with technology, progress, or man's unconquerable mind. It is solid evidence for Pohl's mastery within the genre, and of how surely he is resisting the drift to complacency and repetition that is so easy for one of his seniority there. It will add weight to his recently

rebuilt reputation, even if it perhaps won't sweep the award table. As to "the Making of a Utopia", the book's subtitle: well, it's obviously ironic, though the last chapter, six generations on, does describe a more or less integrated Jemman society and applies utopian vocabulary to it. But those words are not without irony too. The administrators may not own or compel the labourers, but if the labourers don't "freely give" according to their abilities, they will certainly "freely starve". It's only a matter of time before such necessities cease to be necessary and dwindle into laws. Wisely, Pohl allows the reader to provide his own objections to the assertions of utopia, or, I suppose, to accept them if he wishes. Whether or not this prophetic appendix is a good thing is a pointless question if an obvious one. It certainly doesn't spoil the book as it is; it's a fine book.

An Infinite Summer
by Christopher Priest *(Faber and Faber, 1979, 208pp, £5.25, ISBN 0 571 11343 5)*

reviewed by John Clute

Here is the worst of Christopher Priest in *An Infinite Summer*, a collection of stories he claims are linked; it should lead us somewhere:

> That one day he would marry one of the two sisters had been an inevitability long acknowledged by both families, though precisely which of the two it would be had been occupying his thoughts for many weeks.
>
> There was much to choose between the two – or so Thomas himself considered – but if his choice had been free then his mind would have been at rest.

On first reading, the dejected propriety of a passage like that seems semantically straightforward enough, though terribly limp; it is only on a second go that coulisses and misdirections begin to undermine the security one has been tricked – to what end? – into feeling. At first it looks, simply enough, as though the protagonist is occupying his thoughts over choosing which of two sisters he will eventually marry, though clouds gather at the end of the quote. But this won't do. Apparently Thomas thinks there's a lot to choose between the two sisters, which is presumably a circumlocutory way of saying that he much prefers one of them – which means (despite the clear implied drift of the first sentence) that he can't be occupying his mind over the *choice*, because he has already made it. No indeed; as we read the second sentence for the second or third time, it becomes clear that the only thing Thomas can be occupying his mind with is precisely his *lack* of choice, which can only mean that he is being forced to "choose" the wrong girl. So what the two sentences actually say is something like this:

> That he would inevitably marry one of the two sisters had long been acknowledged by both families; between the two girls, his own choice was clear, but for weeks he had been brooding over the fact that he was being forced into selecting the one he did not want.

There. That seems simple enough. Like bleach, the new version eliminates misdirection stains and redundancies and some other stylistic clangers not gone into. But at the same time something has been lost, even from this worst passage out of the entire book, because the new version is only what it seems, syntax and semantics decently transparent one to the other, and Christopher Priest's original,

no matter how ineptly, works as a kind of ambuscade, as does all his work from *Inverted World* (1974) on; indeed, so far from being careless and hasty, the passage has all the blown lassitude of excessive rewriting. Something is being protected here. Like most British sf of any conviction, Christopher Priest's work relates voyeuristically to the genre from which it extracts its topoi, only to punish them for coming, and displays a voyeur's obsession with and obligation to but refusal of the broad noisy icons from across the waters: The Hearty Yankee catastrophes; the triumphant robinsonades; the classy aliens; the diatonic power-jigs of interstellar industry and Polesotechnic Leagues. Deeply refusing of all this community spirit, there is at the heart of Priest's work an austere evasive punitive solitude, and one of its protective colorations is a prose that apes decorum the way a voyeur apes the acts of intersubjectivity to which he cannot possibly consent. Decorum is a kind of paraphrase, and that which is indefinitely paraphrasable cannot be found out. Priest's language demonstrates its deceptive thaumaturgic availability by the ease with which it can be shed without loss of revelation; one has the strong sense that, like other metaphysical fiction writers, he would translate very well, especially into French, where a public linguistic decorum has from time immemorial masked the cold-eyed interior paramour, so we've been told.

In his introduction to *An Infinite Summer,* Priest indicates that the five stories it contains were "placed . . . in a deliberate order", the governing principle of which, characteristically, he does not reveal. Certainly they are intimately related. They share a pervading melancholy. We've already referred to the dissimulating dignity of their telling as a form of secrecy. In their narrative strategies, each story embodies an apparently conventional rhetoric of progressive (and rather sinister) revelation *that does not reveal* in the crunch, so that their rushed gnomic endings seem evasive, impoverishing, peremptory, secretive, almost sarcastic: but surely this is deliberate on Priest's part, this retraction of narrative from its implied task of exposing to the light the heart of the donnée. Where there are Yankee sf elements in these stories (like time travel in "An Infinite Summer" or a spaceship in "Palely Loitering"), they are handled gingerly, as it were in quotes, with an almost tangible dis-ease, like something phosphorescent in the night. Each story also inhabits a nostalgically framed venue, like Edwardian England in those tales just mentioned, or the otherwise pervading Dream Archipelago that louringly recasts the facsimile interior dream world escaped to in *A Dream of Wessex* – but the venues in this volume are described with such an impoverishing refusal of detail or complexity that they seem dreams not of escape but of incarceration, dreams in which you are being watched and cannot cover yourself from the eyes, for there is no rending the fabric of these worlds, no *Invitation to a Beheading* here. And in each of these stories the protagonist is the same protagonist, variously accoutered, a young (or youngish) sexually endangered solitary (whether or not bound to a family), filled with longing, a romantic in the paradigm Western sense that identifies passion with refusal; he is a prisoner. Indeed – leaving the anomalous and vengeful "Whores" to one side – if there is one single principle governing the order in which the stories of *An Infinite Summer* are printed, I think it must be that of progression into deepening forms of imprisonment, imprisonment which ultimately lays on the exhausted hero an icy closure, so that he can move neither mind nor body to escape the threat of being visible to the world as it narrows in, appallingly undifferentiated, like a nightmare just before the eye opens, as in the final images of the final tale, "The Watched", where the obsessed Yvann Ordier lies bound and stripped under the innumerable invisible eyes of the whole intolerably knowing world, which he cannot begin to understand, for he is a solipsist. And here lies Priest's concern with conundrums of perception, which is really a concern with

visibility. Like Fellini's *Casanova, An Infinite Summer* can be read as responding to a dark vision of Western man – seeing him as an obsessed voyeur/solipsist who peers through the keyhole at a bloodless facsimile world of quoted topoi, which *looks back,* as Medusa did, and turns you to stone. And all intersubjectivitity fails. You cannot get blood out of a stone.

Whether or not the collection is any good is another question. With reservations, I rather think it is. Two stories seemed to miss the mark: "Whores" is vivid enough, but oddly pious about its sexual guignolism, self-pitying under its modish deadpan surrealism; and "The Negation" eluded me utterly, perhaps because of its vibrant central figure, an admiringly realized woman novelist with whom the usual Priest protagonist cannot cope, nor can the story. But the rest of the volume fully embraces the tangled subcutaneous constellations of material with which Priest seems best equipped to deal, and from that embrace come tales both chilling and exemplary. Though Priest generally fails to write well enough to master his concerns, and sometimes seems to strive to obscure – maybe out of a kind of insecurity – that which he should wish to make formally cogent, these failures stem from ambition, not sloth. Because *An Infinite Summer* is nothing if not ambitious, and does attempt to grapple with the complexion of the world we live in. It bears a taste of the medusas.

Dagger of the Mind
by Bob Shaw *(Gollancz, 1979, 173pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 575 02612 X)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

What immediately strikes you about this novel is its prevailing modesty of tone. For a start, it belongs to the relatively small sub-set of sf stories set neither in the future nor on another world, but firmly in the here-and-now. And it is a here-and-now recognizably ordinary and recognizably British, as opposed to the nebulous mid-Atlantic territory common elsewhere. The book describes a world where people make jokes about the DHSS and have childish rows with girlfriends; the hero rides around on a bicycle, which is stolen halfway through the book – not impounded by the Thought Police or hidden by the World Conspiracy, just routinely stolen; when the heroine fails to keep a vital appointment in the States, it has nothing to do with last-minute car chases, but happens simply because of the usual fretting delays at Heathrow. And so on. I was reminded at times of Kingsley Amis. And along with the mundane setting of the action goes a dry reticence of narrative tone: the writing is witty in a rather English way, understated, literate, mildly pedantic, almost completely devoid of presumption and grandiose gestures.

All this is of course very canny, for the novel is a sort of horror story and the horrors are incalculably enhanced by the ordinariness of their context. There are rare moments of truly spectacular nastiness, as when John Redpath looks through the peephole of his flat and confronts a face which has been completely and scrupulously skinned, yet is still manifestly alive. In the main, such moments come off less well than the more frequent evocations of indefinable, edgy *wrongness.* At the high points of scarification Shaw tends to miscalculate effects and produce cliches:

> Redpath glanced back and saw that the wooden jamb was curving inwards with every blow. The three on the landing no longer sounded like human beings, and at least one of them was making strange, wet, sucking noises.
> *'Slughh, slugghh, slughhh.'*

But throughout much of the book he succeeds remarkably well in infusing superficially workaday situations with a sense of disguised malice and elusive corruption. The house 131 Raby Street becomes, in the course of the story, every bit as indefinably sinister, quite as amorphously "alive" as Catherine Deneuve's apartment in *Repulsion*; less overt yet much less forgettable than the typical haunted house of Gothic tradition.

I imagine Bob Shaw could well become tired of having reviewers insist that there is a regrettable disparity between the execution of his work and his choice of material. This has been said at least once before in *Foundation.* Alas, it's true again. Shaw too frequently offers an interesting inversion of one of the traditional failing of the sf genre. To wit, rather than marrying potentially fascinating or profound material with hack writing, derisory characterization and general lack of literary ability, he lavishes authorial skills of a high order on unremarkable plots and facile conceptions. *Dagger,* as the title suggests, begins as a telepathy story. Redpath, a human guinea-pig at a parapsychology research centre, begins to have inexplicable experiences: he sees gruesome visions, and finds his ability to distinguish between reality and illusion deteriorating. At first he blames the sensitizing drug the Institute is giving him. Things get worse. Under the impression that he has murdered his girlfriend, he takes refuge in the above-mentioned house in Raby Street, whose inhabitants live in odd, unconvincing life reminiscent of a parody of normal living concocted by a mind observant yet uncomprehending. The depiction of this factitious regime is by far the best thing in the book.

Inexplicable glimpses, unsettling repetitions of events, and the quirks of Redpath's epileptic synaesthesia combine to evolve an unrelenting menace just below the surface of normality: "Did you ever think of hell as a shabby old room with rexine armchairs and luncheon meat sandwiches . . .?" Intertwined with the collapse of Redpath's perceptions is the mystery of the source of his visions. He is repeatedly seeing *flayed* living things: birds "sandpapered to death", two skinned corpses in a bathtub, a peeled face at the door. A scrap of paper found in the house in Raby Street identifies the common factor as keratin, the characteristic protein constituent of epidermis, hair and feathers. Up until half way through the book, the science fictional content is as modest as the scene-setting: one assumes that some kind of psychic phenomenon is behind everything, and that the destruction of keratin is a side-effect. Now, psi powers are dull enough as the hinge of a story, but in the second half of the book we go lower still: the people in the house, horrible to relate, are the puppets of an alien intelligence which lives in the cellar. In the best fashion of the Good Old Days, this beastie is an alien criminal/dissident, being pursued by another of its kind who is perfectly ready to wipe out the whole world to be sure of getting its man. And only John Redpath stands between the Earth and certain destruction. Nostalgic, eh? The finale is a feast of pure heroic hokum, as Redpath descends into the cellar, armed with a Molotov cocktail, to burn out the puppet-master. To be a little fair to Shaw, he does suggest a concession of the hokum-ness of the whole thing, in that he makes Redpath a chronic cinéaste who habitually thinks in terms of Hollywood thrillers. To be fairer, the book is tremendously entertaining. This sort of story is by no means easy to tell, especially with its being so well-worn and all, and Shaw carries it off

triumphantly. There are a few loose ends – Redpath's being an epileptic seems gratuitous, since the story would have unfolded in the same way had he not been, and the piece of paper with the tip about keratin on it is never satisfactorily explained. But it's a shame that Shaw seems satisfied to operate so far within his apparent range. This sort of modesty is redundant.

What *did* happen to all that keratin? Well, it's a shame to have to say it, but: what, in the good old xenophobic sf of the pulps did aliens *usually* want people for?

Cautionary Tales
by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro *(Doubleday, 1978, 204pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 385 13145 2)*

reviewed by Andrew Kaveney

It is, I suppose, foolish to regret that a new writer is only good, only craftsmanlike, only sensitive, only imaginative; so many of the woodlice scurrying into the welcoming shelter of the sf and fantasy genres are so very far from being any of those things. Chelsea Quinn Yarbro has all the equipment of a very good writer, yet in none of her work that I have read so far – with the partial exception of *Hotel Transylvania* – is it brought quite into full play. There is a coolness to her work which is partly that of artistic restraint, of never causing in her audience one gasp or chuckle more than is necessary – but partly also that of a writer who believes it vulgar to take risks, who wishes to hold back from total commitment to the content of her work.

In the postscript to one of these stories, "The Generalissimo's Butterfly", Ms Yarbro says that she values "something I call consistency of vision – in other words, a story that does not deviate from its own rules". This seems to indicate an approach which demands total intellectual control of the story, a control which sets out the whole sequence of moves before the game begins. It is of course interesting that in "Allies" she is able to write a story in which at no point is the sex of any of the characters revealed without this being in any way important to the story – but it is almost more interesting that she should want to. The impulse may have derived from the ideological point involved, but it fairly quickly must have become a dispassionate delight in virtuoso technique. It is almost churlish to regret this so in a field where virtuoso technique is rare – but throughout this volume there are perpetual hints of even better stories which could have been more directly involving without spilling over into Ellisonian hysteria.

Yarbro tackles some fairly emotional themes in this volume – that much is certain – and offers a book of samples over pretty much the whole range of the sf and fantasy fields with the exception of the overtly experimentalist. Her stories feature strongly conceived and perceived protagonists – even when, and it is not always true, they are perceived only objectively. This externality is sometimes an advantage, of course; deeper empathy with the brutalised victim-heroine of "Dead in Irons" would render an already horrific story unbearable. Sometimes, too, the lack of emotional involvement makes it possible to write a *short* story around a character and situation – we could not hope to comprehend subjectively the teenage ghoulette of "Disturb not my Slumbering Fair" without the flippant story's reaching a length at which its plot would become unwieldly. She has the elegant ingenuity which redeems the work of some of the worst hacks in the field without

any of the clumsiness which drags their work almost back to the mire; "Dead in Irons" gives us the nuts and bolts of the vicious exploitation of crews and passengers in vast coldsleep immigrant freighters and makes it matter by portraying it as a struggle between incompetent good and mindless competent evil.

Two stories in particular stand out by their excellence. "Lammas Night" is a moving and effective period piece in which we are shown, and for once made by Ms Yarbro to feel with, a Cagliostro who could be the magician he pretends to be but only at the expense of what social standing he possesses – you cannot conjure demons if you are using a false name. It would be impertinent to assume allegory – but period detail and a knowledge of conjuring combine to present us with a portrait of a man who has chosen to do the second best thing, but at least to do it well. If an allegory of herself as a writer is intended here, it might also be assumed that Ms Yarbro has similar feelings about the final story in the collection, "The Fellini Beggar", in which an insensitive reporter interviews in the ruins of Rome the crippled star of Fellini's post-holocaust documentary. The reporter cannot value correctly the reward the dwarf received – the manuscript of *Turandot* and with it the icy certainty of exactly what ending Puccini intended for it; deformed talent earns and has granted to it a cold revelation of excellence. If it is art and artistry that Yarbro values most, that at least her stories celebrate amply. To combine that with a portrayal of warmer, less pure values is not beyond her; it is simply that much of the time she prefers not to.

The Wall of Years
by Andrew M. Stephenson *(Futura, 1979, 384pp, £1.25, ISBN 0 7088 8043 6)*

reviewed by Kevin Smith

The Wall of Years is in some ways a strange book. It definitely fits sf's "hard science" classification; it is set mainly in Saxon England; the plot consists of a mystery to be solved; and the underlying theme is the question of identity. When I say that the hard science is concerned with time travel and the mystery involves a villain who has hidden himself among the followers of Alfred the Great and is diligently changing history, the connexion between three of these aspects becomes apparent. But to connect them as glibly as I have just done is to imply an inadequacy of imagination on the part of the author, which is far from the truth.

The "science" of time travel is convincing, and includes travel not only forwards and backwards, but also sideways into parallel and very similar worlds. There is also a nasty little side-effect called "entropic reversion", in which the atoms of an object displaced in time return to their starting point – one by one, at random. This is first shown happening to a block of metal (which falls apart) and finally takes full and disgusting effect on a human being. The Saxon England in which the hero – Jerlan Nilssen – finds himself is described with detailed and painstaking accuracy. The objects and manners of Saxon life have a solid realism to them; kick them and you'd hurt your foot. Stephenson seems very much at home with Saxon history and the trappings of science both.

The plot is complex, as you'd expect in a time travel story. I won't go into it, partly because it would take too long, and partly because it would spoil the mystery element. There are the usual overlapping visits by the hero, which leave

him with some tricky explaining to his Saxon friends, but the complexity hangs together well enough, and the constructive use of time paradoxes by Nilssen is studiously avoided – giving the lie to the blurb on the back cover. To have had his novel described as "a dazzling saga of time's paradoxes" must have hurt Andrew Stephenson. No doubt the publishers thought it an economical way of suggesting both science and hairy warriors, albeit the wrong hairy warriors.

As a mystery story, the plot works less well. The villain is unmasked in the end, but the reader is left wondering what took Nilssen so long to find him out. It seems a curious obtuseness on the hero's part, especially after the amazing, almost superhuman perceptivity – bordering on telepathy – displayed by his companion and himself in the interpretation of raised eyebrows and half-frowns earlier in the book. The author is obviously not as much at ease with personal interactions and relationships as he is with the less personal history and science. This is fairly common among "hard" sf writers, and the dead giveaway is the uncanny manner in which their characters know so much about each other's thoughts and intentions from minor nuances and twitches. Never could quite believe in it, myself, and I don't in *The Wall of Years.* The main characters in it are also a bit flat and stilted.

There is still the fourth aspect of the novel – the underlying theme of individual identity. It is in there all right, but rather than being expounded by the story, it seems to obtrude upon it at intervals, being lost from sight the rest of the time. The hero is Jerlan Nilssen; he travels into the past in the guise of a Saracen, Ibrahim ibn-Haroun; and at the end he finds out that he is the body of Gwillem York Crewkerne, with the memories (all of them) of Jerlan Nilssen. This discovery has an effect on him.

> Gradually he experienced the onset of terror. *Am I real? Am I a whole person or a patchwork? If two in one, why not many more – my name is Legion, for I am many . . .*
> 'Where does that leave me?' he asked. 'Who am I, in the end?'

After much agonising he comes to the conclusion that "the names don't matter a jot" and settles on Nilssen. But for me the problem is a fake one; it is instantly and intuitively obvious that the names don't matter a jot. Peace of mind comes at once, and the metaphysical justification can follow in its own good time. The author fails to convince me of the reality of the problem to the hero, and thus the revelation of Nilssen's "real" name at the end seems an irrelevant distraction, an unnecessary and detrimental plot-twist.

Overall, the novel fails to sparkle. The writing is good, but it is solid rather than inspiring, and the characters are not fully alive. No matter how good the ideas (they are) or how careful and detailed the background (it is), if the characters don't live, a novel cannot fulfil its potential, and this is the case with *The Wall of Years.*

Macrolife
by George Zebrowski *(Harper & Row, 284pp, $12.95, ISBN 0-06-014792-X)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

Macrolife is a novelistic account of the future of mankind, making much of a notion primarily associated with Dandridge Cole, and which involves man forsaking

(in large measure) the surfaces of planets in favour of artificial space habitats, here called macroworlds. Initially, these habitats are obtained by hollowing out asteroids, but may then be continually remodelled and extended, multiplying by binary fission. Each of these space habitats contains a precisely balanced ecology, and is essentially a homoeostatic system of organisms (hence macrolife). In social terms, each one is a potential Utopia, wealthy enough to support all of its population in comfort and always ready to cope with emergent conflicts by division.

Inevitably, this project will recall to the minds of many sf readers James Blish's saga of *Cities in Flight,* most particularly in its final sequence, which – like *The Triumph of Time* – deals with the death of the universe and the possibility of its rebirth. Zebrowski's book, however, has a much grander scale than Blish's tetralogy – his macroworlds are bigger by far than Blish's spaceborne cities, and his time-scale extends as far beyond the year 4004 A.D. as the real history of the universe extends beyond Archbishop Ussher's estimate of its origin.

The main strength of *Cities in Flight* – and, alas, its main weakness – derived from its use of Spengler's philosophy of history as a framework to lend it form and shape. Spengler's theory of historical cycles gives the rise and fall of Blish's "Earth-manist culture" an aesthetically-satisfying completeness that could not be gained any other way. It also mires the exercise in metaphysical pseudoscience, and indulgence in pseudo-social-science is really no more tolerable in science fiction that indulgence in pseudo-physical-science. Zebrowski, to his credit, realises that no theory of history is relevant or necessary to his scheme, and that he should instead attempt to provide (or at least suggest) some kind of sociology of macrolife. Just as an sf writer dealing with hard science can only represent future knowledge by technology and not by theory, so he can only represent his future social science by its concomitant social philosophy, but this is one important step advanced from inventing a metaphysical "psychohistory"or adapting a theory of cycles. It represents, in fact, the grasping of a nettle that all but a few sf writers have too long been afraid to touch.

Macrolife's blurb is headed by a quote from Gregory Benford which compares Zebrowski's enterprise to Stapledon's *Last and First Men,* and in some ways the comparison is apt. Like Stapledon, Zebrowski is primarily involved with "an essay in myth creation", and *Macrolife* constitutes, in essence, a myth of the future: a vision of destiny, a secular "Book of Revelations". Zebrowski, however, is crippled by a disadvantage that Stapledon managed to avoid, in that he is working within the form of a novel (*Last and First Men,* as Stapledon states in the introduction, is *not* a novel). There is simply no way that vision of the kind which provides the heart and soul of this book can be presented through the medium of a novel, which is necessarily preoccupied with character and narrative. In order to pretend that it can, Zebrowski has to make his characters lecture one another continually with long monologues which are sixty per cent exposition and forty per cent purple prose. In one section the character under scrutiny has to read a book of commentary in order that we can read it over his shoulder. In the final section there is no alternative but to have the protagonist experience a revelatory dream. In the interstices between the key passages we are presented with the scattered jigsaw pieces of half a dozen mini-plots whose significance cannot help but fade into negligibility. The pity of it all is that none of this can be held against the author as an aesthetic error, because it is a reflection of necessity rather than choice: there is no other way that the vision presented here could have found a market save by adopting the sadly ineffective disguise of being a novel.

George Zebrowski is a very poor novelist. The timbre of his prose is entirely

unsuited to the novel form. He is not a poor writer, by any means, but he suffers perhaps more than any other contemporary sf writer from the fact that the science fiction market, at least where real money is concerned, is a market for novels. His ideas are far too big for novels, though they can sometimes fit well enough into short stories, where character and narrative can occasionally be neglected entirely. (It may seem paradoxical that short stories can contain ideas for which the novel form is too constricted, but it is clearly true – consider, for instance, the work of the most ideatively extravagant of modern writers, Calvino and Borges. Zebrowski's most satisfying piece to date is the brief "Heathen God", and all the most memorable visionary pieces in *genre* sf are short stories or codicils to episodic novels.)

In the afterword where he acknowledges his soruces Zebrowski cites an article by G. Harry Stine in which Stine complained that more innovative speculation was going on in contemporary non-fiction than contemporary science fiction. Zebrowski adds: "This is even more true today". It is – and this despite the boom that sf is enjoying. There is no better evidence of the reason for this state of affairs than *Macrolife* itself. Science fiction writers, in order to make a living, must write novels, and the novel is more narrow-minded than other literary forms in terms of the kind and range of speculation which it can tolerably contain. The essayist has a great deal more scope for visionary speculation – this can be verified quite simply by comparing the assembled works of any contemporary sf writer with those of Carl Sagan or Loren Eiseley. Essayists, too, have their limitations (or there would be no need for speculative fiction) – their difficulties are simply the other side of the same coin, for the basic problem is that there is such a deep divide between the categories of "fiction" and "non-fiction". We tend to forget how recently this distinction came to seem fundamentally important – it is one which makes little sense in confrontation with the most ambitious speculative works of the seventeenth century.

No modern writer has had much success with "fictional essays" (though "non-fiction novels" have had their impact). Stapledon had little success during his own lifetime, and the posthumous endorsement granted to *Last and First Men* and *Star-Maker* has not extended to *Darkness and the Light* or *Death into Life.* Wells's *Shape of Things to Come* never achieved the popularity of his scientific romances. Earlier classics of the species – Flammarion's *Lumen* and *La Fin du Monde,* Poe's *Eureka* and Rosny's *La Legende Sceptique* – are almost totally neglected. While this kind of literary endeavour remains unrecognised and unmarketable, there is no genuinely appropriate vehicle for the kind of ideas contained in *Macrolife,* and they will be condemned to exist as chimerical quasi-novels which literary critics will rightly spurn as pretenders.

I recommend this book heartily to all readers. It is a handsome book with interior illustrations by Rich Sternbach, and is a pleasing thing to have on the shelf. It is a book which contains some good ideas, and some good writing, and some excellent food for thought. It is, alas, an unnatural thing – a kind of literary mule – and thus far less satisfactory in itself than it might have been, but I would rather have one *Macrolife* than a dozen sickly novels of the species that currently dominates the America sf scene.

What future can there be, though, in the science fiction field for a writer like George Zebrowski?

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger *(Doubleday, 1978, 180pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 385 12722 7)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

The only other thing by Effinger I've read was part of *Nightmare Blue*, which he co-wrote with Gardner Dozois. A small part: it was so resolutely, mindlessly bad I couldn't read any more. I now suspect that must have been Dozois's contribution; whatever Effinger is, he's not incompetent.

I'm still not sure what he is. This collection of short stories is a bewildering mixture, which looks to me like the proceeds of one author directing himself precisely at the chequebooks of seven or eight different editors: Vonnegut's *Welcome to the Monkey House*, for example. I wish I had access to Effinger's novels, to see the same mind working at a longer stretch. That might resolve some of the inconsistencies. In that vacuum, therefore, these are my responses.

"New New York New Orleans" is a tale of topographic schizophrenia, in which the first city inexorably and inexplicably turns into the second. It's clever, in every way, with the sort of arch, wisecrack cleverness that can fall flat and hard or set your teeth on edge, but scores very highly when it hits:

> Something absolutely crazy occurs, and all he does is classify it as a *strange happening*. He'll simmer over one of those for weeks. A television person would know better. I'd let the "Six O'Clock News" people worry about it; then I'd find out what it meant after the professionals had done all the work.

"New New York" was probably my favourite story. There's nothing new about it, except that the wit is definitely seventies, not thirties: more intense, less sentimental. After reading it I had Effinger marked down as an over-achiever in the modern school of American sf over-achievers.

The next story is called "Contentment, Satisfaction, Cheer, Well-Being, Gladness, Joy, Comfort, and not Having to Get Up Early Any More" – which did nothing but reinforce that impression.

In fact, it's a sober little piece about a future world ruled by six high technocrats. Everyone else is located, labelled, and sanitized. One technocrat gradually pushes the others out, leaving just him and the Computer. Finally there's just the Computer. I haven't spoiled the story by telling you, because it's obvious all along. No surprises, no jokes, no cynicisms; just the classic parable as E.M. Forster or George Orwell might have done it, when simply expressing such an idea would have been radical enough. I was puzzled; and more so after the next, "Strange Ragged Saintliness", which is about the pluggies, who have electrodes implanted in their pleasure centres and are enslaved to the Man who keeps the special generator. The narrator's friend undertakes a personal mission to save the pluggies, wins, loses, is ostracized, gets ripped off, and all the things you might expect. In the end he decides "people first have to work out their own salvations" and devotes himself wholly to one of the fallen: Suzy, whom he loves. That's all. Nothing original, just the obvious development. It could even have been not sf, about heroin instead of Electrical Stimulation of the Brain. Except that E.S.B. permits no chemical alleviation, there's no difference.

"The Awesome Menace of the Polarizer" is an odd mixture. A young man discovers that his name has suddenly become nationally-famous, so that no one believes that he is who he says he is. Intercut with his story is a parody of a super-hero comic, exact and funny, complete with incredible cop-out ending – not that

difficult to do, though. The whole story is one of those exercises in the absurd that seem merely, comfortably absurd, and don't refer outside themselves. Delightful trivia. "Heartstop" is a long, tedious mystery of the supernatural, full of surreal elements but entirely devoid of suspense or fright because it rapidly becomes clear that the mystery is sheer mystification, there is no hope of explanation or satisfaction, and the author is making it up as he goes along. "Timmy Was Eight" is a short horror story, quite undistinguished.

I don't think I'm being unfair to Effinger, or that I missed anything important. When he's original, it's bewildering and obvious, as in "Live, from Berchtesgaden", in which a comatose *fraulein* in the period of World War I takes on the spirit of an American tourist to Germany in the present and rhapsodises in English over history, the *zeitgeist,* and the horrors of World War II. The invalid's family understand nothing of the delirious ramble and ignore her more and more. Eventually their desperate inhumanity to her becomes fantastic: perhaps they are only a dream in the lost mind of the tourist lady after all. Sf as Sylvia Plath would have written it: her rhetoric, her deep disturbance.

Now do you appreciate my confusion over Effinger? Of the other stories, two are sentimental satires, one on the military mind, one on the medical, with glances at the moral problem that ecstasy is anti-social and counter-productive. A third is an improbable glimpse of Lovecraftian ancient evil at work in the sleazy life of a poor immigrant pigeon-fancier. The fourth is a middle-aged man's memoir of the time in his childhood when his neighbourhood was visited by the local kids' favourite cartoon character, Wacky Mouse, who inspired them all to elevated intellectual discourse but got beaten up by the big boys and never came back.

I wasn't at all satisfied with *Dirty Tricks.* The banal stories are extremely banal, and make the strange ones seem altogether bizarre; which has the secondary effect of making the banal stories seem as if they must actually be very subtle. Is that the dirty trick? Perhaps I did miss something. I certainly intend to read anything else by Effinger that I find.

Titan
by John Varley *(Sidgwick & Jackson, 1979, £5.95, ISBN 0283 98511 9)*

reviewed by John Clute

Into the long poem he wrote after the Brighton World sf convention, which he calls "On Science Fiction", and which is a post-coital examination of the nature of the genre and of its readership based upon the initial premise that "We are all cripples", Tom Disch inserts an upliftingly heartless paraphrase of the dank inner message promulgated by John Varley's novella, "The Persistence of Vision" (1978), a story which has already become "famous" (as it might be put in Brighton) for readers of sf. In Disch's rendering, "The Persistence of Vision" has gained this notoriety primarily because of the acute accuracy with which it provides a model for the vicarious conquering of the universe by its emotionally crippled readership – a model (one might add) neatly brought up to date (or *dragonified*) by the psychobabble transcendentalism of its descriptions of the deaf and blind among its cast carrying on grokking and ultimately disappearing utterly (though off-stage) from the ken of all mundanes and other insensitives. It is as enticing an homage to adolescent dreams of revenge against normal children and cheerleaders and the

world they've destroyed with their corporate state (which is only children's gangsterism writ large) as anything Theodore Sturgeon ever dreamt of 30 years ago when he wrote his first Gestalt Club nurse romances and invented California for the fans. And if Theodore Sturgeon is indeed the soft underbelly of John Varley, just as Heinlein is his crust, then Disch is entirely justified in using "The Persistence of Vision" as a paradigm for the unhealthy wish-fulfilment relation between so much sf and its more damaged readers – who seem to take revenge fantasies as a form of cognition.

The case of Varley may be considerably less simple than that, though; Disch was writing a poem not an essay, and like all strong poets (and nowadays those who aspire to strength and have read Harold Bloom) tends to violate his grist. Despite the smug and sullen softness at its heart, even "The Persistence of Vision" does manage to cop out within a frame (almost a sub-text) of bracing disillusion, for the world transcended out of by the few remains, at the end of the story, bitterly constraining for the rest of us stuck at the end of a terrible century. And the air of insufferable savvy (sexual and otherwise) of the protagonists of *The Ophiuchi Hotline* (1977) must equally be read in terms of disenfranchisment – in this case mankind's literal exile from the planet of our birth, an exile (it can be inferred from the text) we merited. After all the coyness and the hectoring, Varley's best work seems to express itself as a series of fundamentally sober paradigms of adaptive response; the typical Varley protagonist does not save the world or become its secret slan king; he (or more usually she) *survives* the world's mutilation, which she can no more prevent than you can. It is because his fiction is about competent survival in the shit-house that Varley has become the model sf writer of his generation.

But what about *Titan*?

In a way it's unfair to review the book at all. Though published, and maybe even originally conceived, as a singleton, it is an astonishingly simpleminded book for Varley to have written, and indeed it does turn out that at the moment he is doing a sequel, the working title of which is *Wizard*, and though a title like that does rather ominously hint at a protagonist filled to the brim with savvy and exhaustive Arthur Murray demonstrations of just how exuberantly painless polymorphic troilism cubed in free fall can be if only you keep grinning, it is still the case that Varley's record to date would suggest that he's preparing some kind of salutary kick up *Titan's* backside, to wipe the grin off.

We begin with Cirocco Jones, tall tough female captain of a NASA spacecraft nearing Saturn and grimly gay Varley sexual *enjoyer*: "Bill's tongue had started at Cirocco's toes and was now exploring her left ear. She liked that. It had been a memorable journey. Cirocco had loved every centimeter of it; some of the stops along the way had been outrageous". Outrageous to whom, you might ask? God knows. None of the cast gives a shit, nor, in terms of the sexually emancipated world Varley claims they inhabit, should they. In any case, the sexual outrages come to a halt for a while when it's discovered that Saturn is suddenly boasting a twelfth moon, which turns out to be quite evidently artificial and almost immediately destroys the ship, shovelling the crew through birth-like *rites de passage* into its hollow insides, where the novel comes to life, as Varley is a dab hand at gigantism. The detailed kinetic intensity with which he visualizes the complex interior of Gaea – for this is the name of the Titan – almost saves the novel, and certainly compels one to read it through. Though patently and intricately constructed, Gaea turns out to be an enormously complex, ageing, female organism, rather atrabilious; her origin in the Mists of Time the sequels

may reveal but *Titan* does not. After Cirocco and her crew get together again, some of them radically metamorphosed by their rebirth into Gaea (metamorphoses similar to though more cogently realized than those found in parallel sequences of Jack Chalker's invertebrate Well Worlds books), the rest of the novel beads periphrasitically together on the string of the tough capitan's quest for the actual seat of Gaea's intelligence, so they can confab. There is a finely realized 300 kilometer climb in minuscule gravity from the rim of organism up to her hub; there are photogenic contacts with various local species created by Gaea; there is Cirocco's inchworm transition to a lesbian relationship as primo in limo amongst her polymorphic functions; and there is the discovery of the embodiment of Gaea herself in the shape of a fat formidable old lady whose *mise en scene* (which she creates) is comprised of clips from *2001* and other items she's monitored from Earth transmissions. The old lady tells Cirocco some of the problems of being a live moon over the hill, and Cirocco agrees to stay on board within her as a kind of troubleshooter, with godlike powers over other metamorphosers. So the tough captain has triumphed on all fronts. The novel ends with a grin and a boast.

And a taste in the mouth. It's all been too easy; competent survivors – if they're not to set their readers' teeth on edge – must accomplish their competent surviving within the iron penumbra of the odds against, which abide; but for Cirocco Jones – whose name must either be a parody of Heinlein at his most bullying, or a confession – the universe shifts to no darker calculus than a straight summing of the challenges she meets and overcomes, hence the thin merciless bonhomie of *Titan* as a representation of reality. True, sf worlds in general are rarely more than bonhomous stacked decks for the reality sharps we tend to identify with them when we are young, like Jommy Cross, or Donal Graeme, or Cirocco here, nor is the occasional bout of morose introspection in books like *Slan* or *Dorsai!* or *Titan* ever much more than sleight-of-hand. All the same, the trouble with *Titan* is that Varley has written it, and that he's capable of far denser and more exciting work than he's given us in this *romp*. So we await the sequel. So we hope to hear the iron penumbra of the world slap the grin off *Wizard's* face.

The Outcasts of Heaven Belt
by Joan D. Vinge *(Signet, 1978, 198pp, $1.75, ISBN 0-575-02481-X)*

A Voice Out Of Ramah
by Lee Killough *(Del Rey, 1979, 211pp. $1.75, ISBN 0-345-28021-0-)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

These novels are bracketed together here not so much because they are both written by women – no longer a remarkable circumstance anyway – as because they are both exercises in a current formula. Cherry Wilder commented in a recent number of *Foundation* on the emergence of one particular formula, that of the alien lover, in the science fiction of women writers. These books represent another such, an inverted relation of the old technological chauvinism of *Astounding's* hey-day, in which the traditional narrative vehicles are regeared to exalt rather different qualities: expertise, mastery and acquisition are replaced in the hierarchy by cooperation, kindness and moderation. In both of these novels, the essential story is the same. Each takes place on a lost Terran colony whose

inhabitants, through isolation and cultural introversion, have sunk into stagnation and injustice. In each, a starship arrives from an interdependent community of worlds to invite the lost colony to join: in *Outcasts,* the starship's commander is a resourceful, imposing woman, her only surviving crew a single aging male in poor health; in *Voice,* the ship's landing party comprises a resourceful, imposing woman and one man who swiftly sickens and dies. Each woman encounters a male colonial who turns out to be rather more intelligent, sensitive and responsible than his fellows; he demonstrates this by embracing the woman's values and becoming a traitor to his own society. This is, however, only treason from the colony's corrupt point of view: it actually constitutes some sort of redemption, as the woman's values, which are ecological, co-operative and communitarian, are wholly superior to those of the colony, which is riddled with selfishness, inequality, mistrust and the abuse of power. Through the conversion of its representative the colony is finally purged of its vices, and a purified social and psychological order is established. In both cases sentimentalism and moral earnestness predominate, nor is it always possible to distinguish one from the other.

Obviously such a summary is aimed at minimizing the differences between the novels in an effort to make clear their kinship. Justice demands some compensation. Superficially, at least, the novels employ very different conventions: *Outcasts* is a space adventure with roots in the Old School, complete with interplanetary dogfight, hijacking, last second ultimatums and stand-by-to-receive-boarders; *Voice* is a story about a geographical journey which is also a journey to niativity. In *Outcasts* the starship *Ranger* sets out from the relatively impoverished community of planets to which its home world, Morningside, belongs, to establish trade links with the asteriods of the Heaven Belt, a rumoured wonderland of high technology and unlimited resources. Unfortunately, upon their arrival in the Heaven system the *Ranger's* crew (swiftly decimated by a stray warhead) discover that the great days of the Belt are well over. A civil war has destroyed almost the entire colony. The survivors, barely surviving on the disintegrating remnants of pre-war technology, have become mean, selfish and desperate (they have even taken to omitting the final "g" of the present participle, a sure sympton of racial decline). The political landscape is familiar: the Belt is divided between two dwindling superpowers, the collectivist dystopia of the Grand Harmony and the Demarchy, a media-run plutocracy masquerading under slogans about "the rights of the individual". There is also a minuscule third power in the ex-capital of the asteroids, Lansing, a moribund world of imperial ruins and genetic collapse (surely a rather extreme picture of Britain?). The geographics of these societies are economically evoked – this is one of the book's great strengths, a fine visual sense combined with a good eye for the interesting detail – but all are alike in their plight, all sliding slowly to extinction, not so much through actual lack of resources as through a complete lack of mutual trust which prevents them from pooling what resources of equipment and knowledge they do retain. Ms Vinge's main triumph is the way in which she conveys the contrast between the utter hostility of the Belt's deep-space environment and the precarious footholds of warmth and atmosphere retained by the dying asteroid cultures: "space", here, is more than a pretty back-drop; it becomes at times a compelling metaphor for all the forces which threaten human life and happiness. Amidst this grim environment of vacuum, hard radiation and bitter cold, the squabbles of the Belter nations become infuriatingly petty and misguided, especially when it is revealed that Morningside's league of worlds grew out of the need to outface similarly uncompromising natural conditions. As in some of Philip Dick's novels, the void is a realization of all the intrinsic

hardships of existence which render human love and community imperative. A complex plot occupies the foreground, concerned with the various attempts of the Belt societies to capture the *Ranger* for their own political advantage. But Captain Betha eludes all snares, rehabilitates the Demarchy agent Abdhiamal and finally persuades the feuding states to shake hands and open relations with Morningside: the forces of communitarian idealism, high technology and correct pronunciation carry the day.

Voice concerns the planet Marah, to which comes the starship *Galactic Rose* in an attempt to sell the Marahns a nostalgically Van Vogitan matter-transmitter which will give them access to the great community of worlds. Of the original settlers of Marah (a band of "semi-fundamentalist neo-Anglicans"!), all but a few males died, victims of a male-selective disease left behind the deceased aboriginal Marahn race. So society there has grown up rigidly stratified: the female majority do all the work, the few men, who are all priests and deacons in the ruling Temples, govern, contemplate and propagate the race. So far, so dull. However, by the fourth generation, immunity to the disease has bred through the entire population. Therefore, either in order to preserve their privileged position or (as the orthodox version has it) to perpetuate the social model forced on the founding fathers by God, the upper echelons of the priestly class hit on a system of surreptitiously poisoning most of the planet's boys at puberty, and blaming their deaths on "the plague". This is one flaw in the story: even given that such a system could be instigated, it seems ridiculous to suppose that the secret, known to a high proportion of the adult males of each generation, could be kept a secret for six centuries. That is, however, what occurs, and Marahn society remains stable until the arrival of the starship emissary Alesdra arouses doubts and misgivings in the priest Jared. The centre of the book is Jared's overland journey to Marah's capital: after wrestling with his conscience, he decides to tell Alesdra the truth about the "plague" and enlist her help in ending the priestly conspiracy. This journey is principally a process of education: to avoid attracting attention he travels disguised as a woman, and thus comes to learn of the real injustices and antagonisms hidden beneath the placid social surface. By the end of the journey his determination to upset the traditional form of Marahn society, originally a purely personal impulse, has become based on a broader appreciation of the perversion of human relations which that form imposes: personal disgust has become informed social perspective. His revelations trigger a brief sexual war, in which Marah is recast in a new mould, closer kin to the communitarian and egalitarian ideals of Alesdra.

Two shared themes are of special importance: those of sexual role and of regeneration. Both novels present societies with strongly polarized sexual roles: to safeguard genetic material, all Belt women are confined forever in the interiors of the asteroids, away from hard radiation, in virtual purdah. Men, since sperms, unlike ova, can be stored, do all the travelling, trading and fighting, all the living; women are purely breeding stock. On Marah, the situation is virtually reversed, and the sexual theme looms larger, since much of the book is a description of Marahn society from within, a society 90% female. This is a fascinating idea, and at times well-handled. The portrayal of lesbianism is admirably unsensational; unfortunately when discussion turns to men, there is more than a hint of stridency. Granted that the tyranny of the Temples is on one hand a portrayal of the corruption of power in any circumstances, it is still a portrayal framed in terms of sexual antagonism, an antagonism which all too often finds expression as hen party misandry:

"Has lack of knowledge ever stopped a man from offering advice at any time on any subject whatsoever? After all, they're the Lord's appointed rulers of the universe: they'll tell you so."

This is every bit as clichéd and unhelpful as any MCP canard. The exploitation of "what women think of men" is further weakened by the absurd device of Jared's disguise. That a man raised in a pampered, idle élite with almost no knowledge of the ways of everyday life should be able to spend more than a week in the constant company of a group of hard-working cowgirls and pass for one of them is simply ridiculous: the imagination recoils in amused disbelief.

Regeneration involves liberalization of the sexual status quo, but extends to more thorough transformation of man and society. In both books societies rotten with greed, power-mongering, prejudice and inequality are confronted by an image of human community at its most ideal, whether that be a co-operative community of mutually-sustaining worlds after the fashion of Le Guin's Ekumen, or, on a less macrocosmic scale, the group marriages of Morningside and of Marah outside the Temples. The one pertains more to the political dimension of life, the other to the personal, but both are founded on the same principles: sharing, caring, reciprocal aid and reciprocal respect as alternatives to the selfishness and disaffection of the murdering priesthood or the dying asteroid states. There is a significant difference between the novels which means that, for me, *Voice* is in some senses the more satisfying of the two, despite the absurdities of its plot; in *Outcasts* redemption is external, something brought in on the *Ranger* along with the rest of the starship's technological miracles. There is an echo of the technological messianism of older sf here: gifts from the chariots of the gods. Abdhiamal has his regeneration forced upon him – he remains a prisoner aboard the *Ranger* while most of the decisions governing his future are made elsewhere. Jared, and his society, work for their regeneration: Alesdra provides only a catalytic spark. Jared must confront his knowledge, make his own decisions, and undergo physical danger to implement them. And Marah finds its alternative social model among its own people, among the largely female society of the group marriages, and undertakes its own reordering, rather than accepting an external scheme of perfection: indeed, in the end, Marsh rejects the starship's offer of macrocosmic community, or postpones acceptance, wishing to work out its own salvation first. There is less of the wish-fulfilment fantasy in *Voice*, a fuller recognition of the difficulty of remaking a life or a society.

Outcasts has its strengths: it is better simply as a story, better paced, more concretely visualized, more suspenseful. And Ms Vinge doesn't waste satire on targets too big to miss and therefore difficult to hit interestingly, as does Ms Killough in her tedious guying of institutional religion. *Voice* is less "readable"; but it is more ambitious, and even as a partial failure has moments of power. It is, as I have pointed out, less given to wish-fulfilment: it is characteristic that Betha is allowed to steer the *Ranger* away from Heaven in the end and head for home, while Alesdra, having originally landed on Marah by mistake ends up having to abide by her error and stay there, since she has become a carrier of the endemic plague. And the emotional texture of *Voice* is more convincing: Betha's interminable grief over her dead crew-family merely provides her with a wound to be healed, in the best sentimental tradition, by Abdhiamal; while *Voice*, initially rather stilted and formulaic, rises to something like real passion when Jared makes his revelations. These are not remarkable books: the bones of formula sermonizing are too often visible through the flesh, and the prevailing reminiscence of Le Guin only shows up the fudgings and longeurs more clearly: but both are literate, if rarely gripping. And the moral is at least attractive.

Hegira
by Greg Bear *(Dell, 1979, 240pp, $1.75, ISBN 0 440 13473 0)*

reviewed by Dave Langford

This house has a Jack Vance setting turned inside out. Vance loves to create a house-of-cards society (or several such), top-heavy with rococo ornament and with three coats of gilt on every lily visible; but Vance's science or pseudo-science tends to the sober and rational. Bear offers societies and ways of life which are solid and believable; the physical background, however, proves to be so thoroughly weird, complex and pointless that the author abandons all hope of explaining it unobtrusively. Instead, the penultimate chapter is a lecture . . . It's not that Bear becomes infatuated with the complexity of his own pseudo-science (cf. Colin Kapp's excesses in *The Chaos Weapon*); his aim is simply to stretch physics as we know it and create huge, unforgettable concepts. Only by the time he's finished, there's such a heap of knobbly concepts that one despairs of sorting them all out.

Some of the puzzles, then . . . The planet Hegira is big – diameter about 20 times Earth's – yet its surface gravity is only 1g! (Hell, we learnt that one at John W. Campbell's knee. The thing has to be hollow.) Instead of public libraries, Hegira has obelisks engraved with all knowledge, from kiddy primers at the base to Secrets of the Universe at the top. Snag: these obelisks are 1000 kilometres high and the atmosphere stops at 100km. Halfway through the book they begin to fall over, causing untold death and devastation. (It turns out that this is because those who run things would like people to have the advanced knowledge higher up the obelisks. Such kindness.) From Hegira one can see no stars, though there are strange lights in the sky (would you believe several million similar worlds?); during the book, however, the stars begin to appear sporadically and in patches. (The explanation of this has ramifications which fill many pages – that penultimate chapter, in fact.) There is a Wall at "the edge of the world", engraved with more knowledge; there are legends at what lies beyond; there are pilgrims who assail the wall when notified by a Sign – i.e. the conversion of their loved ones to statues. (This proves to be how those in charge lure people along for chapter-length orientation lectures. I haven't worked out why they don't just snatch them, but give me time.) Also thrown in are aliens, old and new universes, the obligatory Token Black Hole and a few oddities of Hegira's structure which seem to be there just for the hell of it.

Surprisingly, this ludicrous background makes for a pleasant read once it's accepted. It is of course inevitable that a band of people must trek across Hegira to take in its wonders, but at least they're interesting people. There's an ex-soldier on the run after twenty years of pillage, an orphan created and adopted by him, and a religious youngster who has been Signed as above. Plenty of room for good solid stereotyping here; however, their differences, inconsistencies and unexpected reactions are convincing as the three wander by land and sea, survive the aftermath of a falling obelisk (an impeccably researched earthquake and tsunami) and eventually approach the Wall and the answer to all questions. Unfortunately the storytelling is not enhanced by Bear's fondness for the dread wandering viewpoint; in some chapters it seems that we're looking through a different person's eyes with each new paragraph. I was left to wonder whether there is a deep, subtle reason for this constant switching of channels, or whether Bear simply doesn't care about the boring old single-viewpoint convention, or even whether he couldn't decide which chap was the *real* hero. Perhaps the last, since towards the end he

kills off the soldier and the orphan, leaving a classical single viewpoint to undergo enlightenment. (Should have realized the soldier had been handed the black spot: his name is Bar-Woten, "Bear-Killer", and what author could tolerate such a threat?)

The book's conclusion is not at all unsatisfying. The remaining character – who throughout the narrative has been shedding callowness and learning compromise – succeeds in his personal quest and returns with the beginnings of maturity (also with the consciousness that these are only the beginnings). Simultaneously, the world of Hegira moves into the final stage of its own journey – for yes, the name is appropriate and Hegira *is* going somewhere. So are its millions of sister worlds; perhaps each bears a suitable name, the whole being a vast travelling thesaurus. Or perhaps they're all called Hegira.

Ultimately, though, *Hegira* the book is not a real success. No amount of good writing can happily integrate the characters into a plot whose real hero is Hegira itself – a plot where all the mystery and wonder centres on the planet and not the people. Though better written, it doesn't even achieve the impact of *Ringworld*: I think the reason is that given in G.K. Chesterton's essay "On Detective Novels". Such stories, Chesterton said, should have a key secret – a dreadful truth which might be stated in a single revelatory cry: "The Archbishop is Bloody Bill!" Or in sf: "The world is a ring enclosing its sun!" Obviously this doesn't apply where the message is necessarily abstruse (here Ian Watson springs to mind, a nasty habit of his); but Hegira's complexity seems gratuitous. Already the labyrinthine cosmology is fading from this reviewer's memory, though other things remain: that falling obelisk and ifts aftershock, the trees casting off their leaves "like dogs shivering water". A less ambitious book from Bear could be a very fine one.

This edition is illustrated by Stephen Fabian, whose elaborate drawings have been converted by Dell into grainy grot. Again, less ambitious work might have had a better chance.

Twenty Houses of the Zodiac
edited by Maxim Jakubowski *(New English Library, 1979, 237pp, £1.25, ISBN 0 450 04333 9)*

reviewed by Lee Montgomerie

Good evening and welcome to the first international science fiction match. Mr Jakubowski claims to have picked a team from the limits of the globe to challenge the alleged supremacy of the English and American players in this field; but it's plain to see, when you disregard the Ireland and San Seriffe shirts sported by Bob Shaw and Adam Barnett-Foster respectively, that over a third of this book was written in England and over half of it in English. Other English and American contenders include Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, Michael Moorcock, Robert Sheckley and John Sladek. Pretty well the sort of line-up one might expect for a standard anthology, which might also include a piece from the Australian player, Cherry Wilder. And I wonder how the Rest of the World are going to match up to this lot? The only members of the foreign team I have come across before are the Polish supremo Stanislaw Lem and the left-footed Strugatsky brothers from Russia.

And the English speakers have won the toss and number one shirt Brian Aldiss kicks off with a story about a man who endures his problems with his wife, mother, sister, daughter and psychiatrist, and takes it all out on God. I don't know about

you, but this scenario reminds me of Graham Greene from the Serious Fiction team. But Brian's protagonist has got God right there in everybody's living room, making sanctimonious and sarcastic remarks from a tank, and he can really bully that Deity. *And what a goal!* And he makes it look so easy.

And the ball has gone to Ion Hobana, and – no! I don't believe it! – Ion is trying to do an H.G. Wells pastiche. Well, that might go down all right back home in Roumania, but it's making him look pretty silly in this company. Cherry Wilder has taken the ball and she is kicking it all over the field – and she is going so fast that I can't quite follow her: she is trying to establish a colony world complete with history, culture, shape-changing aliens manipulating things behind the scenes and a blind beggar boy who has turned down the job of Messiah – and she's not really left herself enough room to go for the goal – and it's offside! – but what an exciting player she could be if she had better control of the ball.

Here comes Gerd Maximovic of Germany, going for it with his left foot, and Gerd is tackling a really interesting and provocative satire about the worker/management power struggle in a factory transported through a timeslip to the Carboniferous and back. And – oh dear – did you see how lamely that last kick trailed off? It reminded me of the local high school team. But the story had so much impetus that it carried the ball into the net! And that's a great goal for the foreign side as Elizabeth Vonarburg of Canada comes in with a story about a little boy from a colony planet (incidentally, have you noticed the way the Colonial players persistently write about colony worlds) who fraternises with the alien swarm and disobeys his parents – and I didn't follow that ending at all! It suddenly rushed up and completely swamped the sense of the story! And from the action replay we can see that the chief clue to the ending was given in the title, and that was a dead giveaway. And that's *way* offside!

Robert Sheckley, the unpredictable American forward, takes up the play with a piece on the disorienting effects of teleportation. Robert has made some brilliant showings in the past, but tonight he seems rather tired . . . And he has completely misjudged it! It's far too short! And Philippe Curval from France gets the ball and is playing it safe with a straightforward piece about a society where sleep is forbidden for fear of nasty mind parasites. And yes – it's an easy goal from this neat but unspectacular player! The foreign team is beating the English speakers 2-1. And Adam Barnett-Foster in the San Seriffe shirt will really have to pull something out of the hat to equalise.

But what Adam has in fact pulled out is a squirming mass of silly in-jokes. And that is getting the crowd here pretty irritated. I must say that he does not show much consideration for the supposedly international audience by assuming a nationality created as an All Fool's Day joke by an English newspaper. And he has thrown in a character called Corny Jherek! And that is a foul in anybody's book! And the Strugatsky boys have taken the ball and are passing it between them with a tale about a man who habitually transgresses the laws of probability – and no, it's not a story, just an anecdote. No score.

But here comes English supremo J.G. Ballard, reverting to the style which served him so brilliantly in his Atrocity Exhibition match, with a piece about a mental patient of unknown parentage whose laevo-rotatory DNA threatens to disrupt the Universe, interpolated with the sinister insignia of an updated zodiac. There is no doubt that J.G. is going to reach the goal. And he has! And at half-time the score stands at 2-2.

Well, it's a pretty even match so far, though the English-speaking team has fielded only eight players to the opposition's eleven (the organiser of the event is playing for both England and France). I'm disappointed not to see more of the

American stars in this team but I assume Mr Jakubowski could not afford the transfer fees.

And as the whistle goes for the second half, Hugo Raes of Holland comes out on the pitch with an evocative description of the sex act within sight of Saturn. His characters have tappers, tremblers, lubbers, grabbers, repples, tummels, nickles, stickles, toots, towers, joins and thorns; so why does the female one also need tits and nipples? I can't see this one getting anywhere. And it doesn't. Shin'ichi Hoshi is representing the whole of Asia with a four-page story first published in 1958. It is sf because the heroine has an earhole instead of a keyhole, but a body-guard demanding a password would have served the story just as well. And the ball goes to midfield maestro Bob Shaw – and just look at this lightness and dexterity with which he tackles this complicated story about an unemployed nuclear physicist trapped in castle dungeons with homicidal mad "squientist" and pulchritudinous phantom! And it's a seemingly *effortless* goal from Bob Shaw!

According to the programme, Daniel Walther is "the French Harlan Ellison". I hope Harlan sues, because Daniel appears to be competing for the World Cup for incest, necrophilia and masturbation with this unreadable insult to Anna Kavan and Brian Aldiss; short on verbs, long on abstract nouns and peppered with meaning-less capitalisations ("The refuge, the anonymity of the WHITENESS, you would say . . ." is a typical "sentence", from a paragraph with the inset sub-heading "MENTAL LANDSCAPE AND COSMOGENY"). And Daniel has been sent off for persistently handling the ball. And it's John Sladek to take the penalty for the English speakers with a sardonic future law-and-order story – and just look at the marvellous potted history of the mechanical zombie that he has put into the mouth of his central character! He has coined the word "robotomised", which sums it up perfectly. And that brilliant header, from a man who is so good above the shoulders that he scarcely needs to use his feet at all, sends the ball sailing between the posts!

I don't know whether Teresa Ingles has taken any coaching from J.G. Ballard, but there's a touch of his "Garden of Time" about her "Alabaster Garden", though she is a much stricter adherent to the rule book than he is. Her protagonist has arrived in a curious frozen garden: an enigmatic landmark on an otherwise desolate Dyson shell. And she's left it hanging in the air – but I should say it was in the net! And the organiser comes onto the pitch for a short display of dribbling. He describes his people collection. Then Sam Lundwall of Sweden juggles for a while, describing some latter-day human lemmings hang-gliding off the edge of a flat Earth.

I must say these foreign players do seem to be extraordinarily reluctant to go for the goal. Mr Jakubowski began his opening speech with the observation that:

> The field of science fiction is possibly the only area of publishing today where anthologies still flourish.

Well, my theory is that the reason why other branches of the sport are afflicted by falling gates is that too many of their players just use the field for an exhibition of fancy footwork without actually attempting to score. Anyway, here comes Stanislaw Lem determined to equalise for the Rest of the World. He seems to be limping a bit, but he still outclasses most of the other players in this match with his story about a machine culture threatened by a crashed spaceship full of pulped astronauts. And yes – it's a goal! And can Michael Moorcock put the English speakers back on top with his tale about the Cossacks fighting World War III in Indo-China? Incidentally, this is a homage to Isaac Babel. A number of the players here tonight have been overtly emulating the heavyweights from the Serious Fiction game, and I don't know how well that will go down with the purists. And Michael

has banged it in as the final whistle blows! And the score at the end of this somewhat disappointing match, in which so many players seem to have been producing less than their best, is:

English Speakers 5 Rest of the World 4

And that result really comes as no surprise to the fans. US/UK SF rules OK. Sorry about that, Mr Jakubowski.

A World Between
by Norman Spinrad *(Pocket Books, 1979, 343pp, $2,25, ISBN 0 671 82876 2)*

reviewed by Charles Platt

Norman Spinrad's first new science fiction novel since 1972 describes a three-way political power struggle between male supremacists, radical feminists, and a sexually-equal system that they are attempting to subvert. The message is clearly contemporary; the novel is only science fiction insofar as it postulates a Utopian society of Earth colonists on an alien planet.

The planet, Pacifica, is an electronically democratic global village whose major industry is the production of TV programmes for the rest of the colonized galaxy. The Utopian system is delightfully American in flavour. Its government operates like a corporation: it competes with private industry, aims to run at a profit, and its "board of directors" and "chairman" can be ousted any time by a referendum to the citizen "shareholders" via the two-way media web that embraces every home. There is complete freedom of speech and, more importantly, freedom of access: every citizen is constitutionally entitled to unlimited use of local TV channels for any purpose.

We see no deprivation, no suffering, no poverty; it's the suntanned Californian dream – without smog. There is a flippant yet romantic sexual equality; men and women have equal opportunities generally, and the government itself is headed by a husband-and-wife team (she is the Chairman, he the Minister of Media, a position of almost equal power).

Enter the extremists: first, the disciples of Transcendental Science, a cult-type organization that possesses genuinely valuable secrets (drugs to arrest ageing, telekinesis, a better space drive) but shares these secrets only with converts who have submitted to orientation. It appeals to what Spinrad sees as male traits: abstract dreams of power, ambition, discovery, and destiny.

The movement is implicitly male-supremacist. It starts preaching its subtly sexist doctrine to the Pacificans, at which point the "Femocrats" arrive: ultra-radical feminists from a post-catastrophe Earth (they blame male aggression for having caused World War III). The Femocrat objective is to foment revolution, establish a matriarchy, kill off most men and keep the remainder locked up for breeding purposes only.

Pacifica's free-access law guarantees TV time to both deputations, so a media war ensues, largely narrated by Spinrad in the form of transcripts of political TV commercials. The sophisticated Pacifican electorate proves to be oddly malleable by grotesque propaganda whose polemic makes Hitler sound subtle by comparison. After a surfeit of political manoeuvrings and commercials, the Pacifican society reaches a crisis point of media-provoked male-female antagonism. At which point, inevitably, a final government-sponsored TV spot salvages Utopia by turning public opinion around within the last few hours.

The great unresolved debates surrounding sexual equality are never addressed intellectually in this novel. As in any media war, the issues are argued by reducing them to melodramatic images and the winner is the player who best manipulates the emotions of the audience.

Some of the characters are described in greater depth, notably the leader of the Transcendentalists and his scientist-wife. Here is a fair picture of an inflexibly domineering husband and a good-natured, loyal, but unhappy woman who is ultimately forced to rebel against her second-class role. Neither is a cliché; both are human and believable.

Not so the Femocrats, who are posturing caricatures embodying every reactionary male superstition about feminism. They are dowdy and butch; they spout dogma; they make gross lesbian advances to each other when not expounding on the vileness of men. Of course, they secretly crave the forbidden delights of hetero-sexuality. When the Femocrat leader is exposed to the dubious male charisma of an arrogant Pacifican cop, she soons discards her lifelong conviction that men are despicable and turns into a blushing schoolgirl. She coyly begs him to reveal his "long, throbbing piercer" (the book uses a strange amalgam of science-fictional sex jargon and 1950s euphemisms), whereupon the sight of the male organ over-whelms her with an instinctual need to . . . suck it.

Even if the author does not seriously believe in the penis-worship that grips some of his female characters, its recurrence at least shows he feels it is *plausible.* This alone devalues any serious points he has to make about human sexuality. An excerpt from this novel would fit right into *Playboy*; neither its preconceptions nor its message would conflict with editorial policy.

It is a long novel (about 100,000 words) and, despite all the political game-playing, there is no real action. The transcripts of imaginary commercials are integral to the plot but they have the awful inevitability of those *real* American commercials that never let you enjoy a late movie on TV for more than ten minutes at a stretch. They are lightened by outrageousness and wit, but Spinrad's technique of image-repetition (used to better effect in *Bug Jack Barron*) builds a tiresome sense of déjà-vu. Even descriptions of staged TV sequences involving dildoes, castration, SS uniforms, and mass rape tend to become predictable, the fourth time around.

In the sections of conventional narrative the style is terse, with pretensions of toughness overlaying a softer voice that really speaks of the need for people to be nice to each other. The whole book is covertly founded on assumptions of nice-ness: Pacifica's Utopia is a land of live-and-let-live devoid of violent imposition of will, and even the battle of ideologies is conducted with less unpleasantness than an average game of Monopoly. Unlike most extremist groups the Femocrats and Transcendental Scientists never think of imposing their ideas by force (though the latter organization obviously has the super-science to do so easily). A nice, gentlemanly agreement resolves political strife; nice, married love is the antidote to sexual antagonism.

In this and earlier novels Spinrad seems fixed on telling worldly tales of power and its abuses. But no matter how many machinations and manipulations he contrives, no matter how much scheming and deceit, there is always an element of worldliness that is missing. There is no pure *evil,* or real *dirt*; his macho heroes are basically kind-hearted; the villains seldom kill and never torture; even the sensuous women are not fundamentally *promiscuous.* There is a bedrock of decency that is never questioned, as if this were Ursula Le Guin trying to write Harold Robbins.

Such sensitivity toward gentler values would be a virtue in a different kind of

story. So long as Norman Spinrad avoids this different story and persists in hiding his sensitivity behind flippant macho dialogue in narratives of power and passion, there will always be a sneaking sense of implausibility.

A World Between feels as if it were not written by the real, whole author. It is more a product of a militant persona that he exhibits to the outside world. This doesn't stop the book from being sincere, provocative, and entertaining. But inevitably it robs it of authenticity and passion. The story has been built to meet a perceived need, rather than to fulfill a deep obsession. I think it will be controversial and successful (one senses that the author has already planned his talk-show appearances). But behind all the power-games and rhetoric the book's message is as simple and naive as anything that came out of San Francisco in the late 1960s. The real Norman Spinrad surely has more subtlety and more intellect to embody in a novel than this.

Aries I
edited by John Grant *(David & Charles, 1979, 191pp, £4.95, ISBN 0-7153-7777-9)*

reviewed by Ann Collier

John Grant's enthusiasm for the stories in *Aries I* is infectious. It infects me with a strong antagonism towards them. I find it difficult to respond to them on their own merits when the well-intentioned but mindless introductions arouse in me a generalised feeling of ill-will. His prefaces add nothing to the collection by way of providing factual information, of setting the mood or of commenting on criteria for inclusion in the anthology. Heavily padded with nice cosy comments devoid of any substance, they irritated me intensely.

However, several of the stories survive the editor's attempts to promote them. The collection covers a wide range of sf themes and styles but the quality is very uneven. Stories by Michael Scott Rohan, David Langford, Robert Holdstock and Terry Tapp are excellent. But there is also a lot of ballast. Generally, Grant has placed them in a mutually flattering order and only the arrangement of the last two stories seems ill-advised. The penultimate is "Timeslip" by Colin Wilson. It is long and convincingly presented as a factual account of a real incident. It develops into an exploration of the structure and potential powers of the brain and in particular into split-brain research. It ends not with a punch line but with a mystery and would have provided a thoughtful conclusion to the collection. But, it is followed by a very short, humorous story by Eve Devereus, "M.T. (and hence to be filled)" which pokes fun at the stock scene where a group of scientists gather expectantly around "the world's first matter transmitter". It's a slight story, at best only mildly entertaining and coming after Wilson's block-buster, it finishes the anthology on a hiccup.

The other two humorous stories come in the middle of the collection and are extremely funny. "The Insect Tapes" by Michael Scott Rohan is a zany monologue. The starting point for the story has been used a hundred times before: a computer on board a pioneering spaceship goes wrong. But Rohan's inventiveness lies in making this computer the technological equivalent of Noah's Ark and it is programmed to reproduce seventy of each species of insect in two sexes. The style is a chaotic, chatty variety of gibbering madness, and the story is a variation on "There was an old lady who swallowed a fly", for each "solution" creates

an even worse problem.

"Sex Pirates of the Blood Asteroid" by David Langford is a burlesque caricature of space opera. It is hilariously funny and boasts a superbutch hero, with far more brawn than brain who nonchalantly shaves with an (admittedly tiny) nuclear flame thrower, who is forever "drawing his potent blaster" whilst escaping from inevitable death. A totally hissable villain kidnaps the heroine whose role is to faint decorously and frequently. The hero is strangely reticent when it comes to sexual matters and is far more relaxed when dealing with the "Vomisa killer robots" who regrettably haven't quite mastered Asimov's first two laws but are very well-briefed on the third.

Far less successful is "The Edge of Time" by Bob Shaw and Malcolm Harris which telegraphs its punches from the beginning. A mysterious pilot lands his spaceship on a base in an apparently alien setting. It comes as no surprise when it emerges he has accidentally travelled from another time through the medium of "slow glass", a process described in lengthy, though to me, incoherent detail. It begins well on a humorous note with a smugly, self-satisfied father laughing at his son's naiveté only for the latter to be proved consistently right. Throughout, I wounder whether I'm meant to be taking this seriously but if it's a spoof, it doesn't quite work. It has none of the inventiveness of *Other Days, Other Eyes* and I found it boring and trite.

The third time-travel story in the collection, "The Agent" by Christopher Priest and David Redd, also makes use of a gadget to enable the hero to travel into the future, a particularly valuable asset since the hero is a spy at a time of international war. In contrast to the last story, the setting and background are economically but adequately sketched. Disobeying the time-honoured injunction not to meddle with what he doesn't understand, the hero starts to experiment, with the unfortunate result that the longer he spends in the future, the slower the elapse of time in the present. Very confusing for him and the reader as he sees himself coming back from places for which he hasn't yet set out. The whole thing is very stylish and the conclusion has the quality of a nightmare. What is unsatisfying, however, is that the detail of the story invites you to follow the time switches carefully but if you do, it doesn't make sense. He travels one month into the future to give the enemies of his country information about shipping movements but surely one month in the future they know this already – dare one say it's already history by then.

"The Marble of God's Cold Lips" by Garry Kilworth is a "how it feels to be a tiger" story. A dying man agrees to participate in an experiment in which his cells are transmuted into those of a tiger. It revolves around the contrast between the formerly sick and dependent man and the dominant and instinctive tiger. The story's strength lies in the descriptions of the tiger's sensory experiences, which vividly evoke the steaming jungle and its inhabitants, but the story is written in a style which is simplistic to the point of being offensive. Although this Superbeast no longer gets sand kicked in his face, life is still difficult for him even as a tiger. He chooses a mate who chastises him sharply when he makes mistakes – a nagging tigress? The ending is strange. Having read it several times, its meaning still eludes me.

"Prime Culture" by Steven Spruill is a conventional working of a conventional idea, Colonists land on a planet which appears to be paradise. It is inhabited by gentle creatures who roll playfully on the grass and do little else. But, the astronauts soon take to rolling playfully on the grass too. Easy to guess what's happened to them even if you haven't seen several episodes of *Star Trek* which dealt with the same idea – repeatedly. All very predictable. It had me cheering on the destroying viruses.

"Flies in Amber" by Robin Douglas is similar in its use of contrast to Kilworth's story but here the contrast is between the triviality and superficiality of the female character and the dignity and assumed wisdom of the ancient extraterrestial creature she keeps caged as a pet. It suggests the need to capture, domesticate and thus render harmless that which is alien and which threatens one's sense of superiority. The story takes a long and not very interesting time to say this and is set in a geographical and temporal limbo.

"And Englishmen" by Terry Tapp, on the other hand, makes every word count. In a subterranean society, all danger has been eliminated. People's lives are dominated by videogames which, like the TV walls in *Fahrenheit 451,* become a substitute for real experience and for relating to other people. Dire sanctions are attached to venturing outside the enclosure but the central character dares to do just that. Not until the last few lines do all the clues fall into place. It is intriguing, concise and satisfying.

"In the Valley of Statues" by Robert Holdstock is more elusive but equally as good. It has echoes of Ballard, particularly *Vermilion Sands,* in the descriptions of the pattern of light on a surreal landscape, a valley scattered with a thousand statues; in the sculptor's obsessive desire to fashion the immediate natural environment into shapes of his woman and of the intense and complex interrelationship of the characters. The writing is beautiful with elegant descriptions and sharp, bitter dialogue and the ambiguity about what is natural and what is mad-made cleverely explored.

In the introduction, Mr Grant says ominously that he has collected enough material for another two publishable collections. On the evidence of *Aries I,* he would do well to engage in a more ruthless pruning and perhaps produce one really good anthology.

Bander Snatch
by Kevin O'Donnell, Jr *(Bantam, 1979, 242pp, $1.95, ISBN 0-553-12620-2)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Kevin O'Donnell publishes his first novel in a career of short stories, and it turns out to fold into three. Book One tells how Bander Snatch, mobster king of a future ghetto, has his moll heisted by the feds. He comes running, but — uh-uh — it's a trap. It's him they're really after.

> Despite the room's aura of power consolidated, I was ready to bluster, but a glance at Dr Pajalli stopped me . . .
>
> He was 150 centimeters tall, wearing long brown hair spiked with streaks of gray. His eyes held me like a lepidopterist's pin. Ebony, they were hard and cold, and scoped the interior of my soul.
>
> His long, hairy fingers arched out from his palm like spider's legs . . . "The woman called Shana is my hostage". His voice complemented his eyes perfectly. "I hold her to ensure your cooperation. If you participate in certain tests, she will be released at their conclusion. If you refuse, she will be disposed of as I see fit".

There's too much of this stuff still around, old Man's Adventure pulp dressed as science fiction. Particularly irritating is the way its writers make you struggle through a thin but resilient veneer of futurity before getting into a story that — just as you knew all along — dates from the fifties. It's like the clingfilm round

a British Rail centenary sandwich. The hardware's easy – vidphones, plastiglass, and battery cars – but then there's the grotesque slang you have to translate, which is unnecessary without a properly new society to speak it, and usually badly constructed anyway. O'Donnell doesn't spare us. Gasheads, ho-coms, diggers. "Gangsters" are gangsters. To "cough" is to kill. "Crinkly" is money. "Leapfrogs" are police. "Guarpars" are guardian parents. But read on.

The reason they want Bander Snatch is because they think he has ESP, which he does, so they test and train him. Things get more interesting now, though it seems strange that O'Donnell could squeeze new life out of telepathy, a subject that's not exactly fashionable and must be as old as all this leapers'n'gangers rubbish. He doesn't offer a new angle as such, but he has a good line in subconscious imagery, the dreamscapes of the mental realm. This telepathy works most with primary emotions, sensations and auras. Snatch learns the patterns of other people's minds and how to mesh with them. The learning is hard, and, most important, it affects him. A little, not a lot. But enough to make me sit up and take a little more notice. Then they parcel him up and send him off to the planet Arkslsnagl for experience in the field. Why, I'm still not sure. It costs them a lot of money: apart from the flight, Snatch at one point says that they've equipped him with protective clothes the army can't even afford. It's major investment, considering they've abandoned him alone in a jungle full of telepathic predators and his chances are next to nil. The story takes another lurch in consistency. While O'Donnell is good enough at plotting the individual sections, with a formulaic kind of smoothness, the hinges between them are very flimsy indeed.

Book Two is the best. Snatch takes up with a rural community and has to try to learn to communicate with people who have no words, only "thoughtballs". Their society has a satisfying complexity, and O'Donnell even manages to work out some of what telepahtic morality might be. Nobody shields his mind, but nor is it an encounter group Utopia. Snatch learns to fight and play – his tutors send him to the children, who patronise him – and also finds out what mental disorders there are in a race of wide-open minds. I think even John W. Campbell might have found it all a bit advanced.

Book Three sees Snatch back on Earth to claim his million dollars, with the biggest case of jet lag ever. We're expected to believe that he doesn't realise how long his interstellar flight has actually taken him. Things have changed, there's been civil war for one thing, and gangland won't have him back. He's given a job (Why? Creaking hinges) as independent ombudsman to intervene in cases of complaint against federal agencies and the like. With his mental power he can tell who's honest and who's not, you see. And the government are going to give this job to a lifelong criminal from the ghetto whom they haven't seen for six years. And grant him authority to make moral discriminations that may be international in scope. And trust his own moral integrity. And he's going to accept it and use it honestly, turning into Mr Middle America overnight, secretary, authentic leather swivel chair, barbered lawn, waterbed and all. No, there isn't a catch). And yes, the book does just fall apart from here on. Snatch sees a sample few clients, comicbook characters like a sweaty con-man, a dignified old immigrant ex-nobleman, an angry grey-haired granny; settles an old score, and rescues his naked, tortured girlfriend from the couch of his arch-enemy. Macho gratification count: high. That is, if you're prepared to accept that the hero of Book Three is actually the same person as the hero of Books One and Two. This ruffian-to-riches bit is even older than the gangster gear it's dressed in, of course. It's pop Victorian: poverty, theft and street conscience in chapter one, virtue,

work and bourgeois rewards in chapter fourteen. But O'Donnell at least tries, and amongst all the corn achieves some moments of imaginative finesse now and then. I read most of it on a train and suggest you do too. Take your own sandwiches.

Blood and Burning
by Algis Budrys *(Berkley, 1978, 227pp, $1.75, ISBN 425 03861 0)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

This collection has all the hallmarks of a hasty follow-up to *Michaelmas,* rushed out in the hope of consolidating the success of the earlier book into some sort of Budrys revival. Its besetting aim is patchiness: stories range in date from 1954 to 1978, covering virtually the entire span of the writer's career; some of them are very considerable productions, while some are the merest fill, apparently included just to make the book respectably bulky; some are science fiction, some are fantasy, some are neither. Budrys's introduction makes a game try at imposing coherence on the contents, but on reading the collection falls to pieces – there is not, in the last analysis, enough that is really good in it to hold it together. Recurrent themes emerge, however. There is an interest, central to many of the stories, in the extreme nature of what people can be driven to do to other people, and to themselves, by the pressure of necessity or circumstance: cannibalism, cruelty, murder, dehumanization and genocide are a constant undertow, and Budrys's opening reminiscence of watching Hitler visit the city of his childhood points the endurance and importance of this theme. He insists that he does not write about "maniacs", merely ordinary people under pressure – this, in a literature haunted too long by black-and-white moral schemes and simplistic externalizations of evil, is an honourable and important perception. There is a persistent concern with isolation, loneliness and alienation, whether it be the heroic isolation of the saboteur-hero in "All for Love", the simple physical aloneness of the castaway in "Scream at Sea", or the subtle and frightening technological alienation of the actor Haverman in "The Nuptial Flight of Warbirds". Some of the better stories, notably those which concern themselves with broadcasting and the media, revisit that central science-fictional territory where the interaction of human life and technology is explored. Here the preoccupation of modern science fiction with themes of perception, knowledge and truth is given added point and resonance by the setting of such themes in the context of the media fantasy factory.

By and large, the weakest stories in the collection are those which are in no sense science fiction. "Scream at Sea" is an amiable little horror story without originality or point: the only survivor of a foundered ship finds himself alone on a raft in mid-Atlantic, faces the fact that he may not survive the ordeal, and dies of pneumonia. The progress of the disease is described in a clinical, understated way which leaves the reader feeling less than well, but the story itself is notional. "The Master of the Hounds" describes a crippled ex-Marine officer who has trained two Dobermann Pinschers as servants: he tyrannizes his neighbours, a young couple on vacation, until the man rebels and is torn to pieces for his trouble. The portrait of the officer in this story is economical and powerful, but again the story is woefully short of real substance. It remains only a shocker, albeit a competent one. "The Last Brunette" is an appalling sentimental *Playboy*

story about the amorous fixation of a travelling salesman.

The science fiction stories, even the poorer ones, are in a different class. "All for Love" is a moving account of obsession, fleshed out in traditionally gigantic props from the great age of space opera: a two-hundred-and-fifty-mile high spaceship, the entire population of the Earth engaged in digging great pits under the ship's landing struts, a cyborg military commander and a wholly absurd invisible weapons-carrier with a nuclear bomb on board. It is some sort of triumph for Budrys that in this instance one remembers the tiny human interest (a conventional love-triangle) almost as well as the vast machines. "Be Merry" is a quite, largely unremarkable account of a particular type of interspecies cannibalism which manages to transcend the more obvious effects through compassion and a fine, unsentimental refusal to clamour. But the real heart of the collection lies in the two stories from this decade, "A Scraping at the Bones" and "The Nuptial Flight of Warbirds". To these may be added 1961's "Wall of Crystal, Eye of Night", which is plainly an earlier relative and which, though badly disfigured by Cordwainer Smith rococo, retains something of the same texture and power. "Bones" is primarily a detective story about murder in a luxury apartment building, while "Warbirds" concerns a political and financial crisis in the broadcasting industry, but they clearly belong together, with each other and with *Michaelmas*. Both stories are sleek, eloquent and rhythmic, crammed with the technological jargon of the entertainment industry – holograms, computer tape editing, encoders, comsats, lasers – and tight with the bleak energy of the American urban experience; desperation, violence, drugs, technocracy, regimentation and the sleazy drama of high finance. Both may seem a little heartless in their sheer glossy perfection. But both are forceful and horrifying evocations of the air-conditioned nightmare, of the gradual inevitable erosion of the truly human by a world of data-banks, consumer industry, total automation, rigid allocations of time, space and resource. Of the eleven stories in the book only these three, with the possible addition of "Be Merry", are really of the best, but they are "social" science fiction at its finest: pithy, accurate and passionate.

Note: The British edition of *Blood and Burning* (Gollancz, 1979, 192pp, £5.50, ISBN 0 575 02513 1) omits two of the stories mentioned in this review – "Scream at Sea" and "The Last Brunette" – plus three others – DP.

Watchtower
by Elizabeth A. Lynn *(Berkley-Putnam, 1979, 251pp, $9.95, ISBN 0-399-12272-9)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

Elizabeth Lynn's first novel, *A Different Light,* was a typical example of a contemporary school of fantasy and sf notable for its suspension between models of sentimentality and angst. Other symptons of the school are a delight in exotic settings and a ponderously self-conscious concern with sexual politics. Key exponents of this brand of fiction are James Tiptree Jr., Vonda McIntyre, George R.R. Martin and John Varley. They have produced some enjoyable books between them, and their characteristic voice is pleasant enough in moderation, but it is a little too rich to be genuinely nutritious, and eventually begins to make you feel

sick. I fear that I was already feeling the effects of a surfeit before I began *Watchtower,* and my frail hope that it might strike out in a different direction was soon dashed. I read it through with distinct feelings of queasiness.

The recent fashion for fantasies set in imaginary barbaric milieux, combined with the thrust towards an affected and phoney "realism" characteristic of this school of writing, has produced some rather odd products which can best be described as fantasies with the fantastic element taken out. *Watchtower* is a cardinal example – an historical novel which avoids the constraints of actual history, and which can thus cheat blithely by juxtaposing cultures which could never actually have co-existed. Here we have a general social situation lifted straight out of the Dark Ages, set somewhere vaguely reminiscent of Northern Europe, but which also includes a Happy Valley setting whose eclectic ethos is suspiciously suggestive of something out of post-hippy California. The hero of the story starts out as a warrior on the losing side of a battle, forced to collaborate with the victors in order to preserve the life of his erstwhile prince. He and the prince are helped to escape by two enigmatic women who take them to Happy Valley, where he is Forced To Come To Terms With Himself. Then he and a few of his new friends set off to turn the tables on the villainous conquerors. It is, inevitably, the first volume of a trilogy.

Elizabeth Lynn is a good writer. Her prose is smooth and well-shaped. She does not, like certain other members of this school, write in a perpetual screech. If she ever finds a story worth writing she will be well worth reading. For the moment, she is only doing finger-exercises – rehearsing a stereotyped routine. She has not the flair of Tiptree, nor the imaginative fertility of Varley, and hence has nothing yet to make her stand out among others of her ilk, but it is probable that all she needs is time to work out her own way of doing things.

A Usual Lunacy
by D.G. Compton *(Borgo Press, 1978, 192pp, $3.85, ISBN 0 89370 225 0)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

This is a very literary book, and Compton obviously has a very literary attitude to his writing. I'm sure this is something of a distraction. The critic is invited to approach the book with all scholarly assumptions intact, and can muse enlightenedly about its operation and achievement on a technical level. The sf apologist, overwhelmed by the realisation that this is a Novel, instantly recognisable from the most conservative notion of what that means, is won over before he starts. The singularity of the work itself vanishes in the perspective of either observer. Compton's carpet has a pattern, surely, but the one is irresistibly tempted to discuss only the complexity of the warp and the weft, while the other is delighted that there's a pattern at all: neither of them knows what it is. Borgo Press have packaged *A Usual Lunacy* with a critical Afterword from George Edgar Slusser and a critical blurb from Scholes and Rabkin. The one is conscientious, well-meaning, A-level stuff; the other is simple-minded fannish idiocy. Both are annoying and I wish I could learn to stop reading all these artificial additives earnest publishers lace our fiction with these days. They ruin your taste-buds.

What do I mean by "literary"? Well, before investigating that, let's observe that there are two conditions that modify the plot of *A Usual Lunacy,* making it self-

evidently science fiction. First, it is set in a depressingly familiar near-future where Civilisation and its Discontents are fighting in the streets and the Discontents look like winning. Second, the most recent scientific advance is the discovery that the great majority of incidents of human sexual attraction are in fact the effects of a mutually reinfecting virus, which can be isolated and, with difficulty, counteracted. There is love, but it is rare. The rest are cases of Reciprocal Obsessive Fixation Syndrome. The whole course of social history takes a sudden swerve.

Or does it? Perhaps the point of Compton's book is that the discovery may make drastic alterations to medicine, literature, and the law, but that to most people the difference is negligible. Naming the virus (with plausible poverty of imagination) the "Love Bug", they marry, sleep or fight with their mutual infectees, or take the pills and hope it'll blow over soon. Intellectual journalist Giles Cranston is buffetted by blasts of lust and doubt when he falls for air hostess Tamsin McGillivray, but she takes him in her stride (so to speak), relishing the disease with every nerve cell and continuing to enjoy her more primitive relationship with her grim husband Jock.

It's this careful attention to the complexity of an issue that is specifically literary in Compton, as in Aldiss, or Disch. More tangibly, so is the way he arranges and presents that understanding. The whole story is narrated from the characters' heads, part internal monologue, but mostly just seen through their eyes. Compton is able to isolate their viewpoints effectively by securing them in the artificial separation of a courtroom, the climactic scene of the story, and relating everything by flashback and retrospective reference. His methods of characterisation, by careful insertion of slang and socially-bracketed speech habits, and by continual repetition of phrases, is verbally acute if generally uninspired. Personalities, their interaction, and their circumstances don't have to be built up with words in the way a wall is built up with bricks. They can be suggested and revealed *through* words, by manipulation and co-ordination of secondary elements, nuance and association, as light can be coloured and directed by arrangements of prism and lens. Exploitation of this understanding declares a literary mentality, is a literary device.

And over and above all this (the warp and the weft), the book resounds with literary symbolism. Tamsin, in her unregenerate proletarian warmth, does embody a force of nature, continuous, forgiving, and female, invulnerable in her innocence, as Slusser pronounces. On the other side, Giles represents middle-class hypocrisy, the meddling intellect, fragmented, anxious, male, and doomed. The narrative does plot neat graphs of their rises and falls, the interchange of their fortunes. Both are vivid, "rounded" characters, so efficiently done that it seems mean to fault them for never deviating from type, never giving us a moment's doubt or difficulty.

Yet it is the very orthodoxy of Compton's writing that makes me hesitate as to his achievement. He is a sensitive writer and makes the most of properties derived from both sf and the novel – derived, that is, from earlier forms of those two kinds when they ignored each other as they now no longer do. He aligns the two angles to give perspective to a very subtle version of "society" and "people": how they differ, what they do, what they can never do, what they cannot help doing. Certainly that's enough; but *I* can't help wishing the result were more challenging, more daring, less easy to assimilate and put by.

That's my problem, I suppose. *A Usual Lunacy* is also an offbeat spy thriller, with menacing fascists, an aeroplane hijack, medical drama, and *lots* of dirty bits. Enjoy it.

The Instrumentality of Mankind
by Cordwainer Smith *(Del Rey, 1979, 238pp, $1.95, ISBN 0 345 27716 3)*

reviewed by Andrew Kaveney

In one of the parodies included in *The Steam Driven Boy* John Sladek made, quite convincingly, the case for condemnation of Cordwainer Smith's work on stylistic grounds. Childlike simplicity of diction, over-reliance on nonce-words drawn from a wide selection of languages, far too many fragments of bad poetry, over-reliance on that trope which goes "That is what the legends say but this is the story of what actually occurred" – all of these charges Sladek makes wittily if not always economically. Smith was for a long time one of the favourite "intellectual" writers of American sf, praised inside the genre for a delicate poetic touch – and all too often such praise is strong evidence that a writer is guilty of combining fey whimsy with arrant pomposity.

It is possible to make a further case against Smith – or rather against Dr Paul Linebarger as he was really called. He was an expert on China and a committed Christian – and therefore a doughty fighter for the China lobby and for Chiang Kai-Shek. When he opposed involvement in Vietnam it seems to have been as a mistake rather than as a crime. On religious grounds, he favoured widespread opportunities for suffering for the good of the soul and as an aid to the evolution which as a disciple of Teilhard he saw as a function of the divine plan. As the title of the present volume indicates, he was obsessed in his stories with the Instrumentality, a corps of élite civil servants and magistrates who exercise vast and arbitrary power over the galaxy – and are fond of doing extravagantly nasty things to people and worlds for the grater good. A number of the stories deal sympathetically with the struggle for equality of the underpeople, mutated animals of human intelligence and appearance, but the terms in which he dedicated them to his Negro nanny indicates that even in this manifestation as a liberal he was still very much the aristocrat descending to good and faithful servants for the sake of their possession of that good old-time religion. Such ideological considerations would of course be irrelevant, were it not for the fact that they complement so neatly his stylistic aberrations.

And yet, and yet – the fact remains that Linebarger/Smith produced some exceptionally fine stories in which the more amiable sides of the man – his sense of duty, his love for cats – created mythic expressions of themselves of a very deep resonance and power. Many of the stories in the earlier Ballantine collection *The Best of Cordwainer Smith* transcend his limitations as a stylist and as a thinker simply because they are fine *stories* in which a crisp idea is embodied forcefully in an economic and dramatic plot. In, say, "The Game of Rat and Dragon" – which is rightly held to be one of the greatest of sf short stories – what can elsewhere be jejune and banal about his style is transmuted to the elegant simplicity of that tragic and comic last line: "Where would he ever find a woman who could compare with her?" The complexity of our perception of Underhill's feelings for his telepathic catcompanion is neatly expressed in the ambiguity of that sentence – where does the stress come, on "ever" or on "woman"?

Sadly, the excellence of that first volume and the scarcity of Smith's work means that *The Instrumentality of Mankind* is a poor introduction to his work and really only essential reading for people who are committed to his writing. There are good stories here – "Think Blue, Count Two" and the rather pretentious "Drunkboat" – but they are not at his finest level of achievement (though it is

almost worth owning a copy of the latter to remind oneself of how few sf writers could have had the idea of using garbled Rimbaud to describe hyperspace, or would have had the bad taste to carry the idea through). For those people who are obsessed with filling in the gaps in "Future History" cycles, there are a number of Smith's stories here which will fulfil that curious urge, though few of them are actually that good. The volume contains two examples of Smith's habit of never leaving a story alone until he was quite satisfied – the unpublished "The Colonel Came Back From Nothing At All" is to a large extend a first draft for some of the ideas in "Drunkboat", and the sentimental "Nancy" of the still minor but at least economical "The Good Friends" – and will for that reason alone be essential to serious students of his work. The collection contains a number of stories from outside his cycle, most of them overtly or covertly bashing superstitious atheism in the interests of enlightened blind faith – but he treated the whole theme more effectively in the eloquent, if Commie-bashing "No! No! Not Rogov!" which is also contained here. Del Rey books announce this as the last of their Smith publications and I would guess that they are right from the extent to which it has scraped the barrel; the serious student of his work who will want to buy it will presumably already be aware that there are odd other stories: "Himself in Anachron" in the *Last Dangerous Visions* and "Down to a Sunless Sea" in Terry Carr's *Best SF of the Year 5.*

The Last Days of the Edge of the World
by Brian Stableford *(Hutchinson, 1978, 174pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 09 133820 4)*
Misplaced Persons
by Lee Harding *(Harper & Row, 1979, 149pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 06 022216 6)*
Galactic Warlord
by Douglas Hill *(Gollancz, 1979, 127pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 575 02663 4)*

reviewed by Pamela Cleaver

Easily the most interesting of the books under review and the best written is Brian Stableford's first venture into children's fiction. It is pure fantasy, not sf. At the edge of the world are the magic lands which have been devastated some years before the story opens by battles between rival magicians and enchanters. Living there in a house called Moonmansion is Sirion Hilversun, an aging enchanter, and his daughter Helen. Hilversun was banished from the land of Caramorn many years earlier when the king swept his country clear of magic. But now Caramorn has fallen on evil days and the treasury is bankrupt, so Prime Minister Coronado suggests to the king that they arrange a marriage between Crown Price Damian and Helen, thus getting Hilversun back to Caramorn to save its fortunes by marriage.

Like Stableford's adult novels, this book is shaped by a quest: neither Helen nor Damian is keen on the idea of marriage, so Helen proposes that she should test her suitor by the traditional fairy-tale method of getting him to answer three questions, while agreeing to answer three herself in return. The questions involve the participants in tasks which have to be accomplished in danger and difficulty. Damian, however, is not very bright and not very brave so Coronado arranges that a young student Ewan, on leave from the University of Heliopolis to catalogue the royal library, shall undertake them for Damian. (Very traditional this too, a

penniless young man proving himself better than the prince.) Ewan and Helen each perform the first task alone and then join forces to deal with the remaining questions. It is not long before they realise that they are working through a spell which will wipe the magic lands clean of the scars left by the enchanters' wars.

One of the things which I demand of quest stories is that the main characters should be fallible and sometimes make mistakes which they rectify with difficulty, and that there should be a definite possibility of defeat. But Ewan and Helen never put a foot wrong and I thought they were bound to win through, because at one stage she says, "We could get ourselves killed", and Ewan replies, "Maybe, but this thing is *intended* to go through", which seemed to me to make the whole business too easy. But a few pages on I was glad to read, "'This thing still has ifs, you know. It's not automatic . . . it's not enough for you to go through the motions, you have to provide the rest as well'. 'And what's the rest?' asked Helen. 'Courage, fear, a little pain. Determination, effort – everything that goes into living. How can you succeed if there's no danger of failure?'" My sentiments exactly.

The denouement, when all six questions are answered, is a cataclysmic flood which washes the magic lands away, giving Caramorn a new coastline (which will revitalise trade etc.). Ewan and Helen are rescued by Hilversun and the king and everyone is all set to live happily ever after – but please note that nowadays, instead of girl and boy marrying, they go off hand in hand to the University of Heliopolis on government grants.

The book has much to say about survival in a crumbling, changing world and the story is exciting, well-described and well worked out. I have only one tiny quibble, although others may not be so fussy. In a world where there are magic lands, kings, princes and enchanters, where transport is by horse and illumination by lantern, one expects the clothes to be vaguely medieval. Although the author seldom tells us exactly how the characters are dressed, odd clues reinforce this picture. On page 9 the enchanter is wearing slippers with curled-up toes, on page 27 he is wearing a purple robe with stars round the cuffs and Helen's hair is full of hairpins. On page 56 Ewan is wearing a jerkin, so it comes as a shock when Helen's "dress" is described at last to find she is wearing a heavy jacket, denim jeans and sensible shoes – it quite spoiled the atmosphere.

Lee Harding's *Misplaced Persons* is a very different kettle of fish. It is the story of a boy who finds people are beginning to ignore him, that the world round him is becoming grey. His girl friend passes him in the street and looks straight through him, he cannot get served in a cafe and even worse, his parents do not see him or hear him or even lay him a place at table. Eventually he finds he has passed from the real world which he can still see but not feel and into a kind of limbo where he meets two other people with similar experiences. There are some objects which are misplaced in the real world and appear in limbo tangible to the misplaced persons and full of colour. The story is quite well told but really there is only enough material in it for a short story; the rest is padding. And the end is a cop-out – Graeme finds himself back in the real world again with a tape recording he made in limbo but no recollection of his time there. The idea is good sf and would, as I say, have made a good short story, but the characters are very flat and I did not find the book absorbing or the eerie experience the jacket promised. I could be wrong, though – the book won the 1978 Alan Marshall Award in Australia for the year's best manuscript of narrative fiction. I'm glad I didn't see the others.

Zap! Pow! Zowie! In *Galactic Warlord* Douglas Hill has written a marvellous cops-and-robbers-in-space: totally absorbing while you are reading it and totally forgotten the day after tomorrow. After getting a severe dose of radiation, Keill Randor, super-hero, is totally rebuilt by the Overseers (like the bionic man, only

better). He sets out to avenge an attack on his planet Moros and comes to grips with the evil, sinister Warlord, eventually beating him with the help of a telepathic alien called Glr who is female, giggles and sounds more like an insect than a person. When the Warlord is finally beaten with plenty of swash and buckle, Keill and Glr find themselves pledged to seek out and destroy a galaxy-threatening organisation called the Deathwing, which adventures we shall be able to read about in the next book in the series. All the characters talk as if they have come straight to space from the stage of a Victorian melodrama – you can almost see the villains twirling their moustaches as they gloat over having the hero in their power. But it is easy to mock this kind of book and I have no doubt that there are a lot of ten year olds who will lap up this adventure and clamour for more which is, after all, what the author intended.

The Grand Wheel
by Barrington Bayley *(Fontana, 1979, 160pp, £0.80, ISBN 0 00 614863 8)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Bayley dashes off one for the market: DAW Books, 1977, but who would have thought it? This book would have been old in 1957, and the Syndicate fantasy dates from a lot earlier. You remember – the green baize, the marked deck, the bourbon, the moll, the rival mob, the raid, and the evil but fascinating aura of the criminal mastermind entertaining himself in his paranoid backgroom. Period stuff, but all thoughlessly relegated hundreds of years hence so that period feel is lost in transit and Bayley misses his last chance of an appeal to imagination. *The Grand Wheel* is as void of atmosphere as a deserted asteroid.

For the first chapter, which contains one of the book's two jokes and its one idea, it looked as though Bayley was trying, at least a little. The empire of men throughout the universe is in the grip of two organisations. The Legitimacy, which runs it, consists of the politicians and the police and manifests what Burroughs calls "the control habit". The Grand Wheel, its opposition, is a secret criminal cartel of gambling fiends with hooded eyes, brains like computers, and the fevered urge to stake their grandmothers – heck, *other people's* grandmothers – on the flip of a card. Meanwhile the whole intergalactic caboodle is under threat of war from the Hadranics – *aliens* from *outer space!* Our hero is Cheyne Scarne, or rather ought to be, but a hero ought to be at least interesting. Cheyne Scarne, his stand-in, is a master gambler pressganged into spying for the Legitimacy, who aren't so legitimate after all (did you guess?) because they've hooked him on a drug only they can supply. Scarne is also a professor of randomatics, which is Bayley's one idea in the good old tradition of sf ideas; viz. below a certain number in the billions, numbers generated independently are not random but conform to runs and groups that can be analysed and predicted by the new randomatic calculus. "The mythical system once sought by cranks and eccentrics became, therefore, a scientific fact". Yes! Glimmer of interest! Mathematical nonsense, of course, but that wouldn't matter in a science fiction story, would it?

What does matter is that the idea is entirely undeveloped. The only function of randomatics in the plot is to provide for the fact that games have got much more complicated in this future, which we might have expected anyway. Muggers, the equivalent of one-armed bandits, operate by tracking the movement of sub-atomic

particles and the like, to push the variables down below the predictability threshold. Scarne's professorship doesn't give him any special advantages, or even any particularly different attitudes, to games or to life. Recalling Bayley stories like "Four-Colour Problem", "The Exploration of Space", and "Me and my Antronoscope", I'd expected something very much more cerebral, playing off philosophies on a chessboard of stars – the stochastic, the calculable; the anarchic, the controlled; Life is random, Life is determined – the sort of thing Charles Harness used to do. There's an interesting vision in chapter six, based on the Tarot picture of the Wheel of Furtune: the material world of chance and change is afloat on an infinite sea of "pure randomness", below the quantum level, "where no physical laws obtain". But apart from a few dizzy spells and a few inexplicable fits of righteous protest, the revelation doesn't seem to influence Scarne at all. The metaphysical version of the book is latent, somewhere here, but I expect Bayley didn't have the time or the urge to write it. Instead he gave DAW this listless spy story, leaden with explanation, dressed up as sf, with a plot you don't need a degree in randomatics to predict.

Metamorphoses of Science Fiction
by Darko Suvin *(Yale University Press, 1979, 317pp, £16.20 [£6.45, paper], ISBN 0 300 02250 6)*

reviewed by Anthony Wolk

Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* is a major work of sf criticism, published by a major American university press. In it, Suvin (a co-editor of *Science-Fiction Studies*) attempts the "theoretico-historical reflection" which he says must be the starting point for any serious examination of English-language sf of the last 50 years. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* is divided into two sections, Poetics and History. Suvin's epistemology may already be familiar to some readers from his numerous essays in various journals, including *SFS*, but *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* by drawing his essays together gives me a feeling of a sum greater than its parts. I recall having read what is basically Chapter 1 when it was published in *College English* in 1972 – rather I recall the difficulty I then had with Suvin's highly theoretical framework which seemed almost indifferent to actual works of sf. I still have trouble reading seven years later – his vocabulary and syntax can be challenging – but I now see how Suvin adds praxis to epistemology, exemplum to precept.

The opening chapters work through the "genological jungle", using the notions of estrangement and cognition: an *estranged fiction* uses "a different space/time location or central figure for the fable, unverifiable by common sense", as opposed to *naturalistic fiction* (p.18); in a *cognitive* view, phenomena are posited and then explored as problems ("why such a man in such a kind of world?"), unlike *myth* which claims once and for all to explain their essence. Suvin works through pastoral, folktale, fantasy, and then distinguishes the extrapolative and analogical models of sf. Specifically, Suvin is working to distinguish categories from subcategories. Utopian literature is "the sociopolitical subgenre of sf", the "sociopolitical variant of the radically different peoples and locations of sf" (p.95). And significant sf itself "is always also a certain type of imaginative historical tale" where the "epistemological, ideological, and narrative implications and correlatives

of the novum" [the "newness" – the imaginative leap from the empirical or naturalistic] comment on "the author's collective context" (p.84). That is, the "escape" is to a "better vantage point" for the author to comment on human relations. In the balance of the book, Suvin applies his poetics to an historical examination of More, Rabelais, Bacon, Campanella, Cyrano, Swift, Mary Shelley, Verne, Bellamy, Morris, Twain, Wells, Zamyatin, Capek, and others.

Suvin uses a qualifier like "significant" to describe sf "with cognition of tendencies in the social practice of human relationships", or "corrupt" for sf which operates "in semantic emptiness spiced with melodramatic sensationalism as a compensatory satisfaction, in a runaway feedback system with corrupt audience taste" (p.75). He labels a *novum* as "fake" unless it "participates in and partakes of what [Ernst] Bloch called the 'front-line of historical process' – which for him (and for me) as a Marxist means a process intimately concerned with strivings for a dealienation of men and their social life" (pp.81-82). This emphasis on historical responsibility works variously. For one, it immediately defines as limited any work which concludes statically, all ends nicely tied up, especially a utopian novel, as though an ideal of society has been achieved (Morris is thus preferable to Bellamy in this respect). There is no ideology that is an "end-product [which] history has been laboring for from the time of the first saber-toothed tigers and Mesopotamian city-states" (p.83). Science, societies, humanity, all are seen vitally as "open-ended". Sf is "significant and truly relevant" when it avoids "final solutions", whether utopian or dystopian. For another, it labels as "mystifying escapism" works which fail to explore "the rise of subversive social classes" and the alienation of technological production in capitalistic society (p.ix).

Suvin's comments on Verne's *The Mysterious Island* provide an instance of how his analytic method can be illuminating. In the novel Verne "presents the rise of a fraternal community fertilizing nature by applying scientific knowledge" (p.156). Set on an island, the novel recapitulates the history of the race with Cyrus Smith as "the saintsimonian ideal: an engineer, communicator, and organizer". His retinue represents a chain of being, including "at its demonic and angelic ends a repented criminal and the dying Nemo". From Smith's two watches (their crystals produce Promethean fire), a sliver of steel, and a grain of wheat, the community progresses from gathering and hunting to a civilization in possession of an electric telegraph line. But, Suvin points out, Verne's demonstration of man in harmony with nature has "problematic blind spots and ambiguities for a parable on history" (p.157). First, the colony is untroubled by aborigines so that it "progresses, in Vernean ease, as a cross between a holiday and a utopian colony". And hence there will be some questions about the "vague utopian colony in Iowa" that Smith *et al* intend to found after the island's volcanic eruption. Second, the novel represents human history without the presence of a lower class. And third, not one woman appears in the novel – "This history has no future". The community is held together by devotion to Cyrus Smith, and problems associated with nascent capitalism and a stratified social system will never arise (are you listening in Des Moines?).

I think Suvin's analysis of Verne here is fair – Verne has reduced his society elementally and clearly endorses its evolution. And so when an alert reader perceives "anti-cognitive impulses" in the novel, the estrangement is degraded, is merely "surface sensationalism"; there is no "fertile blend" of the cognitive approach with the "ludic pleasure of estrangement" (p.ix). I think Suvin is less fair in his brief mention of Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, arguing that Miller "crosses the divide into pseudomyth, that is, into fantasy" in the character of Mrs Grales at the resolution of the novel (p.27). What makes Mrs Grales fantastic?

Suvin says that Miller uses Christianity to shape this episode, not just for formal convenience, but as part of the authorial world view. Suvin uses the term "myth" to refer to the Christian ethic. But I would say that Miller didn't suddenly leap to this nether country, where Christian doctrine and its mystery structure the universe – he had been there all along. How else can the presence of Benjamin the Wandering Jew be explained? He is an objective proof of Christ's divinity – though no character in the novel has the benefit of spiritual certainty from the realization of what he is. But he's there for the reader. *Canticle* is a Christian novel, affirming the efficacy of the church invisible. "Myth" would presumably not be Miller's term for that aspect of the book. Note, though, that by endorsing and not just using myth formally, Miller is now on the wrong side of Suvin's divide – into noncognitive fantasy-land and out of sf. The problem for me is that I am asked to judge a work of literature by an ideology that may only partially apply or prove useful to understand and enjoy that work. As an extreme case, I prefer to read the Ulysses episode in Dante's *Inferno* in the context of Dante's ideology: Ulysses' voyage to Mt Purgatory represents an extreme example of worldly presumption, an exact analogue with stealing fruit from the tree of knowledge in Eden. Ulysses is justly punished as a bad counsellor. But Suvin describes it as "Ulysses' final heroic voyage toward the Paradise Terrestrial, on which he is drowned by a jealous God intent on preserving his monopoly over the right of passage" (p.93) – a folk legend that Dante rewrote for "religious purposes". I am not arguing that Marxist ideology is inferior to Christian ideology, but I think that Dante can only be understood according to an *other* ideology. Even to label this episode a "rewriting" may interfere with the *Comedia* as a visionary work of literature.

There is one last reading of Suvin's I want to question – and I do so apprehensively. It is of More *Utopia*, which Suvin reads as depicting for More sociopolitical perfection. I realize that the word "utopia" has that sense nowadays – that's not where my argument lies. I would accept that Hythlodaye perceived Utopia as politically perfect, but not More. And I grant that the Utopians, without the benefit of Christianity's spiritual enlightenment, manage better in many ways than most supposedly enlightened nations, including England. But, to be very brief, material aspects are not the sole basis for evaluation – or, to go on using Christian terminology, *worldly* aspects. To be better in some ways than a vicious people does not dissolve the mark of original sin from the Utopians. I agree it would be an improper *a priori* argument if I were to say that because More was a Christian, he would never present a people as better off without Christianity. But for all their orderly government, the Utopians specifically violate the three primary Christian virtues: their indifference to treaties demonstrates a lack of faith; their practice of euthanasia shows the failure of hope, and their callous treatment of mercenaries exemplifies a denial of charity. Irony is always hard to sort through, but I think the quiet Thomas More who is a character in *Utopia* and who has reservations about poor Hythlodaye is straight. My point again is that a sound reading and hence my own "ludic pleasure" in a particular work may well depend on an ideology which is not of Suvin's choosing, or mine. Enough!

If it isn't quite clear at this stage, I do find Suvin's poetics and history enormously valuable (not to mention the extensive bibliographies). When I agree with him, I scribble enthusiastically in the margins; and when I disagree, I do the same.

Conan's World and Robert E. Howard
by Darrell Schweitzer *(Borgo Press, 1979, 64pp, $2.45, ISBN 0-89370-223-4)*

reviewed by D. West

It may seem callous, but many people are likely to feel that the chief lasting interest of the works of writers such as Robert E. Howard and H.P. Lovecraft arises out the fact that the authors were so obviously off their heads. Darrell Schweitzer has already written about Lovecraft (Volume 12 in this series from Borgo Press) but sidestepped most opportunities to discuss his subject's mental foibles. Apart from a brief biographical introduction he now does the same for Howard. Perhaps it *is* a little hard to expect an admirer to dwell on the unhappy ghosts of homosexuality, sadism and racism that intermittently haunt Howard's work, but unfortunately there is little else worth lingering over. Howard's fiction is considerably less varied and interesting than Lovecraft's, and it is reasonable to claim that if you've read one Conan story you needn't bother with the rest – unless you just want more of the same.

As it happens, quite a lot of people *do* want more of the same, and so Conan the Barbarian has hacked his way (appropriately enough) through more than a dozen volumes. The original Conan stories were written in the 1930s and published in the pulp magazines, being carried on after Howard's suicide by other hands. In addition to these direct successors a number of writers have wheeled out very similar blood-and-guts musclebrained barbarian heros. However, the claim that Howard's work has had a great influence is not something which should be pressed too hard. Apart from the fact that the boom in fantasy is probably attributable much more to Tolkien, any influence from Howard has been entirely bad. The imitators of Conan the Cimmerian (a much simpler and easier model than *The Lord of the Rings*) have picked up the formula with all its shortcomings and vices, but they inevitably lack the authentic spark of hysterical vitality that sprang from the muddles and tensions of Howard's maladjusted personality. When the Conan stories live at all, it is because some of their unfortunate creator's delusions lend them a little murky fire. L. Sprague de Camp, Howard's principal posthumous collaborator, is unfortunately (from the reader's point of view) entirely too sane, well-adjusted and hardheaded to do more than provide competent but comparatively lifeless pastiches. Schweitzer acknowledges this fact, but never pursues it very far. Thus the essay as a whole suffers from being an attempt at a purely literary examination of an author who is mainly interesting as a psychological case-history. (Another possible – and neglected – approach would have been a consideration of *why* Howard's stories are so popular.) To put it bluntly: Howard was always a hack, almost always a bad writer, and very often damned dull as well. Judging by the amount of apologising and hedging Schweitzer does, he appears to be uneasily aware of all this himself. Since he cannot therefore honestly spend a great deal of time on the (non-existent) subtleties of Howard's prose he is forced to fall back on wanderings through plot summary, capsule reviews ("Some of these stories are very good, some no good at all") and the trivia of Cimmerian lore. Even this last is something of an exercise in apologetics, since the background of Conan's world is neither well thought-out nor consistent.

The final rating given to this booklet therefore depends largely on the degree of enthusiasm with which one views the subject matter. Converts to the Conan cause are unlikely, but those Howard enthusiasts who, like Tolkien's hobbits, enjoy books filled with things they already know, all set down fair and square, will doubtless give it the attention it deserves.

Science Fiction: A Critical Guide
edited by Patrick Parrinder *(Longmans, 1979, 238pp, £3.50 in pb, £7.50 in hardback, ISBN 0 582 48929 6 (pb) or 0 582 48928 8 (hardback))*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

This collection of essays attempts to give a rounded view of science fiction in both its literary and historical contexts. Part I has an introductory essay by Mark Hillegas on the prehistory of the *genre*, and essays on Verne and Wells by Marc Angenot and John Huntington. Part II is a brief examination of "two formative traditions", in which Raymond Williams relates sf to Utopian literature and Patrick Parrinder relates its history to the developing "scientific world-view". Part III deals with contemporary sf, featuring an analysis of the *genre's* reactions to the cold war by Tom Shippey; a study of religious imagery in sf by Tom Woodman; and a two-handed commentary on the vexed question of why sf is characteristically bad at characterisation. This section closes with three brief overviews of American sf, British sf and European sf.

As with any anthology, the contents are a little patchy. Hillegas's essay is cursory and over-familiar, while Angenot's suffers badly from a determination to fit Jules Verne's work into a framework of preconceptions which is blatantly ill-fitted to contain it. Also disappointing is the book's big name, Raymond Williams, who clearly has little to say about sf, for the very good reason that he finds it uninteresting. The best pieces are Shippey's study of the way in which sf reflected cold-war politics and Parrinder's study of the way in which it embodies certain attitudes associated with the scientific community. Parrinder also contributes usefully to the debate on characterisation, though his reply is to Ursula Le Guin's essay "Science Fiction and Mrs Brown" (in Peter Nicholls's *Science Fiction at Large*) rather than to the Scott Sanders piece with which it is juxtaposed. Parrinder's argument here is concerned with the characterisation of the alien being (which he calls, irreverently, "Ms Brown") and has the virtue of being witty enough to compensate for the dullness of some of the other contributions.

The one section of the book which is very poor is the last group of three essays. This is not entirely the fault of the writers, whose task is notoriously awkward, threatening to decay into mere cataloguing or flag-waving, but it is still something of a let-down. There is some interesting material in the book, but it hardly adds up to a "critical guide", and the general reader may find it a little too heavy for his taste.

The Book of Ellison
edited by Andrew Porter *(Algol Press, 1978, 192pp, $5.95, ISBN 0-916186-08-3)*

reviewed by K.G. Mathieson

Algol editor Andrew Porter has assembled in this volume a strangely mixed collection of pieces by and about Harlan Ellison. It is divided into three sections, the first consisting of four personal memoirs of Ellison by Lee Hoffman, Ted White, Robert Silverberg (the compliment is returned in the section by Ellison) and David Gerrold, attempting in Gerrold's words "not to honour Harlan Ellison the legend,

but Harlan Ellison the human being" while recognising that the two intertwine. Of the four, only Gerrold's appears here for the first time, the others being reprints from the March 1967 issue of *Algol*. The final essay in the opening section is the only one which addresses itself to Ellison's writing as such, an examination by writer/critic Joseph Patrouch of the development in Ellison's stories from their early "formula story" beginnings into a more idiosyncratic style, transcending the limitations of the genre in his best work. The essay suffers somewhat from excess of plot repetition rather than analysis, but comes as a welcome attempt to evaluate the work rather than pay tribute to the man. In addition to the pieces by Gerrold and Patrouch, the only other contribution which appears here for the first time is Leslie Kay Swigart's Bibliography of Ellison's non-fiction which closes the volume, giving a strangely dated cast to the largest section, a collection of articles by Ellison garnered from various sources and spanning over twenty years, from two early stories originally published in 1955 to the piece on Silverberg mentioned above lifted from the 1977 Worldcon programme.

Of the other pieces which make up this section, one is an autobiographical note from the 1973 Lunacon programme – surely, in a book which, after all, is hardly cheap, an updated piece could have been elicited from the subject, who is hardly known for reticence in speaking about himself – which traces his career up to that date, complete with announcement of the imminent publication of *The Last Dangerous Visions* in 1974!; this, more than any other contribution, lends a dated feel to the volume, and while it is certainly useful to have the better articles included here collected in accessible form, an outdated biographical note is only of marginal interest six years later. The others cover the Clarion Writers Workshop, a didactic piece explaining its success and asking for support, again from a Convention programme; two on the business of writing itself, on the practical dangers of being robbed by unscrupulous publishers ("Getting Stiffed") and on the genesis of "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes"; and two on the nature of science fiction, in which he argues a position familar to anyone who has followed the contemporary debate on the nature of science fiction, and Ellison's part in it, as stated, for instance, in the voluminous prefaces and introductions to the *Dangerous Visions* anthologies. Ellison here argues for a widening of the boundaries of the genre, or an escape from its restrictive precincts altogether, for "speculative fiction" over nuts and bolts engineering science fiction, for the "fractionalising of the genre" as the only way to ensure recognition for its most exciting talents (including, of course, himself). Both of these essays, "A Time for Daring" and "A Voice from the Styx", written in 1967 and 1968 respectively, are valuable documents in one of the central debates of the period, and we should compliment Andrew Porter on making them readily available; they form, together with Patrouch's essay and the article on the writing of "Maggie", the substance of the book. However, they add nothing new to that debate, nor does the volume as a whole ultimately provide any new understanding of Ellison the fiction writer; like many of his fellows, Ellison's output is infuriatingly inconsistent, but at his best he is a writer of considerable imaginative daring, and his contribution to the extension of the possibilities of the genre deserves a more rigorous investigation than it has so far received, here or elsewhere, but we must wait awhile yet for that. In the last analysis, Andrew Porter has not attempted to produce such a book, and accordingly should not be criticised for failing to do so; the book which he has produced and designed as "a salute to one of science fiction's greatest writers by those who know him best – his fellow writers" falls well short of establishing his claim to such a title, and remains for the most part (with the three or four honourable exceptions

singled out) of only passing interest to anyone concerned with the writing of science fiction rather than with its personalities.

The Clockwork Universes of Anthony Burgess
by Richard Mathews *(Borgo Press, 1978, 64pp, $2.45, ISBN 0-89370-227-7)*

reviewed by D. West

Judgements on any living author are notoriously difficult to make and assess, the subject having a vexatious tendency to produce new work and upset the carefully arranged critical applecart. Richard Mathews does not attempt to cover the whole of Burgess's considerable output, instead concentrating on ten novels, including *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed,* the two generally recognised as science-fictional. Unfortunately, he stops short of *1985.* It would have been interesting to see what so slavish an admirer made of a book which seems to have had no good effect on its author's literary reputation.

Large claims are made here for Burgess's talents and influence. It is said that he "may very well be the greatest living English novelist" and that he has "already permanently influenced the style and form of the modern English novel". These assertions may be received with a certain amount of scepticism, unless "the modern English novel" is taken to be a genre not much larger than science fiction itself. Burgess is a very literary writer, and Mathews is a very literary critic. The two exist here together in a comfortable symbiosis which is a useful illustration of the ways in which the Modern English Novelist and the Critic of the Modern English Novel keep each other in business. Burgess provides the Clever Bits (derived from the Clever Bits of other literary and philosophical chaps such as Virgil, Shakespeare, Pelagius, Aristotle and many more) and partner Mathews solemnly identifies them and counts off the score. This is the work-ethic of heavy-thesis-industry: the novel as a supply of raw material from which will be forged fantastic displays of critical virtuosity. Observers who do not share the abstract passion for literary and intellectual brand-names may conclude that the game is doubtless fun for the players but demands too much suppression of a sense of the ridiculous to appeal to others.

Many pages of dense argument fail to convince that Burgess is either an exceptional talent or any sort of innovator. The alphabet soup comes in a variety of dishes, certainly, but the ingredients seem to be to an old, old recipe. *The Clockwork Orange,* one of Burgess's better novels (and probably his best-known) is an interesting piece of work, but scarcely unique in approach or ideas as a dystopian vision. *The Wanting Seed* – a mixture of bilious Waugh, flatulent Chesterton, and Brian Aldiss in one of his less responsible moods – is based upon premises which are frankly silly. Many of the other novels are entertaining enough, though tending towards the precious, but even their agreeable qualities tend to sink down out of sight under the weight of Mathews's criticism.

Burgess's much-vaunted erudition is of no real significance in his work except as a literary device – the purveying of reader-flattering "inside" information. Ian Fleming did it, John Braine did it, and hordes of thriller writers, spy story writers and sf writers (to name only the most obvious) do it all the time. It scarcely matters whether the esoterica comes straight out of the author's head or is cribbed

from some other source: the effect is the same. Encyclopaedic learning means little in the face of the limitations imposed by the Manichaeism which is at the heart of Modern English Novel-writing: the dismal belief that there is nothing new under the sun, only the same old Dance to the Music of Time. In such a Clockwork Universe one writes clockwork novels – and clockwork criticism is the result. It's all been put together cleverly enough – the gears mesh precisely and every hour on the hour the expected number of chimes sound before the cycle starts again – but clock-watching is a pretty pointless occupation, and certainly rather boring.

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction
edited by Peter Nicholls; associate editor John Clute *(Granada, 1979, 672pp, £15.00, ISBN 0 246 11020 1)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

The standard approach to reviewing a volume like this is to start by spotting the mistakes, omissions and distortions; then you can usually wrap up by complaining that the publishers should be prosecuted under the Trade Descriptions Act for daring to call their product an "encyclopedia" – or even a "reader's guide". No such luck here! This reviewer was even driven, in initial panic, to the ridiculous expedient of begging the editor for a few scraps of error to dilute what must otherwise be a mere eulogy. The editor – noble soul – did provide a few; and I did eventually find a few myself. (The text, incidentally, is on computer tape so that a second edition can be corrected *and* updated – which could just mean that the Nicholls/Clute *Encylopedia* rules OK from now to eternity. As it should. As it most certainly should.)

Anyhow, warming one's hands over the few slender sticks of error . . .

Vonda McIntyre's first published story was "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand"? Preposterous! Everyone knows that her first story was . . . well, actually I don't know, but it certainly wasn't *that.*

Robert Silverberg was born in 1936? No way! Definitely the previous year.

Checklist of Themes. What, no separate entry on Space Stations? No entry on Beastmen? How can a book pretend to completeness . . .?

That's got the fire crackling.

Turn to one's own entry, now. Hmm. Hmm. Aha . . . "His most recent novel is *The Miracle Visitors*". No definite article in the title. Mind you, there might have been. I seem to recall making a conscious effort *not* to call this book "The Something Something".

Roaming about, to the entry upon WOMEN, I notice my name again. "Robot women are also featured . . . The same idea was used by Ian WATSON, in his *Orgasmachine*". No, it wasn't. The custom-built girls of that book are organic, bioengineered human beings. At least, they're meant to be, though the customers must have had a long time to wait, come to think of it. Accelerated growth, perhaps? Well, they were *meant* to be biological (with the odd prosthetic implant). Maybe this entry points up a fault in the author . . .

Passing to the entry on Jonathan Swift, commendable indeed is the balanced assessment of Swift's satire in Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*: the intelligent horses are *not* saints, but the objects of satire too – a subtlety that is sometimes overlooked even in mainstream literary criticism. However, up the creek is the state-

ment that the senile immortals, the Struldbruggs, inhabit Laputa or environs. They don't even inhabit Balnibarbi, the continent which the floating island dominates. They actually live in distant Lugnagg, far off across the ocean, as is made clear both by Gulliver's itinerary and by the original maps in the book. Tsk, tsk.

Descending at random to the entry on Marghanita Laski, one wonders why no mention is made of her TV play *The Offshore Island*, a NEAR FUTURE HOLOCAUST AND AFTER drama the first screening of which notoriously brought simultaneous protests from the US and USSR embassies. It concerns the Berlin-like partition of England by the Americans and Russians after a future war.

The entry on TIME TRAVEL concludes with the statement that "there have been few attempts to analyse the time-travel story" and cites an essay by Niven and one other reference. What about Stanislaw's Lem's acerbic dissection of this sub-genre, "The Time-Travel Story and Related Matters of SF Structuring" in *Science-Fiction Studies*, Spring 1974? Eh?

Regarding *Childhood's End*, in two places (on pp.256 and 418) it is said that we "remember" the Devil-like appearance of the Overlords because of a visit to Earth by them in the past. Not so. Surely the Devil image was imprinted in our collective psyche, in the novel, by a racial *precognition* of what was to come?

Likewise, the account of Fred Hoyle's *The Black Cloud* (on p.309) assets that the attempt of the cloud-intelligence to communicate with mankind injures several men since our brains are not big enough to absorb the new data. This is wrong on three counts. Firstly, the cloud doesn't attempt to communicate; it has no idea we're here till we communicate with it. Secondly, only two men – not several – are killed by the attempt to transfer "cloud-thought" into human consciousness. Finally, the whole point – and the irony – is *not* that the human brain is too small (the cloud is fairly certain to the contrary) but rather that the transfer is attempted with scientists who have fully (and erroneously) programmed minds; with a simple chap like Joe Stoddard it might well have worked because there would have been far less conflict with his preconceptions.

The entry on C.S. Lewis makes no mention of Lewis's *A Preface to Paradise Lost* which is *exactly* the blueprint for *Perelandra*. Lewis's Christian critique of Milton sets up all the equations which his planetary romance proceeds to repeat, one by one, and solve.

The entry on Tom Reamy claims a "common background" for *Blind Voices* and "San Diego Lightfoot Sue". I don't see how a Kansas town of the early 1930s and Los Angeles of the 1960s can be said to share a common background, even if a Kansas boy does come to the big city in "Lightfoot Sue".

Mention might have been made, in the entry on Jerry Sohl, of his Laser novel *I. Aleppo* (1976), a write-up of his story "I am Aleppo" in Elwood's *The New Mind* – one of the strongest of Sohl's books, towering about the general rubbish of the Laser line.

Nor is there any entry for Trevor Hoyle, whose "Q" series (two volumes of which appeared before the cut-off date) are at least rather ambitious and imaginative shots at PARALLEL WORLDS.

Nor of Michael Davidson, author of *The Karma Machine* (1975) – a highly ambitious if unnovelistic examination of UTOPIA.

Also, I personally think the assessment in the brief entry on Defontenay is rather misleading and dismissive. "Discovery of a box full of information about life on another star". (Eh? What? To quote Defontenay himself: "Star is a planetary mass . . . and its orbit occupies the intermediate position of the system, almost equi-distant between . . . the green sun and . . . the blue sun. Star, like these two suns, gravitates around Ruliel". Just because the author calls his planet "Star" doesn't

mean that he was referring to it as *a* star, *a* sun; he wasn't.) "Prose dry and awkward, ideas left naked and undramatized". Actually, *Star* is a singularly inventive book in literary terms, with long stretches of poetry – and even actual dramatization, in play form. Could the author of the entry be referring to the quality of the translation?

The entry on Kingsley Amis fails to mention his sf play, broadcast on the Third Programme by the BBC – when exactly, I do not recall (probably between 1956 and 1960) – which was something of a first (if one overlooks the superb dramatization of *A Voyage to Arcturus* on the same Third programme one Sunday in 1956) though not necessarily a successful one. The RADIO (UK) entry mentions neither of these.

The entry on Michael Bishop riskily prognosticates (by contrast with the wise refusal to do so elsewhere) and announces a forthcoming English edition of *And Strange at Ecbatan the Trees* (aka *Beneath the Shattered Moons*) projected "to contain added material". Not really. The UK edition simply binds up the novel *Trees/Moons* with the long novella "The White Otters of Childhood" – which does concern human relations with the evolved men, but on Earth, not far out in space, and some 9000 years earlier in time. The phrase "added material" is quite misleading.

No doubt there are other little things to pick upon here and there throughout the 672 close-packed pages. However, on the basis of this sample one will still only be picking nits; oversights, sometimes caused (as obviously in the cases of Swift, Hoyle and Clarke) by relying on memory of the books rather than on re-reading or speed-skimming them – but of course if the contributors had been expected to re-read every text they mention from cover to cover we could have waited till the year 2000 for the *Encyclopedia*, by which time the world would have been waist-deep in grotty pseudo-encyclopedias.

Let us make no mistake. This volume *is* a genuine encyclopedia – the first such. It is the *Britannica* of the sf field, and it is particularly *Britannica*-like in its magnificent essay-length theme entries ranging from Metaphysics to Mathematics, from Androids to Automation, from Linguistics to Lost Worlds. Noteworthy about the whole book is the co-ordination of the entries, a co-ordination which extends beyond cross-referencing to a certain co-ordination of tone of voice: *not* a homogenized neuterdom, but a lively, alert contributorial presence – without waffle or gossip, but with a sense of wit and style so that there is nothing dry or tired about entry the Nth. Praiseworthy too is the continual effort to assess, fairly but not tamely, as well as to describe. The illustrations, too, are notably relevant – information, not merely adornement.

Should prospective buyers blanch a little at the £15.00 price tag, let them realize that they are buying over 470 words per penny. Here is a handsomely designed, well produced hardback – at a paperback price.

Reviews in Brief

Against Time's Arrow: The High Crusade of Pul Anderson
by Sandra Miesel *(Borgo Press, 1978, 64pp, $2.45, ISBN 0 89370 224 2)*

Ms Miesel's study is an interesting example of a sort of criticism which is far from worthless but which can never really get to the point. She has taken a reasonably

large selection of Anderson's work and discussed each tale as a more or less effective embodiment of what she has already decided is his major theme – not one of his major themes, his single major theme – the struggle of human will against an entropy whose victory is foreknown. Considerations like Anderson's frequently pasteboard characterisation, his opinionated and tedious pronouncements on life and society, the self-destructive attempts at "fine writing", his occasional wit and frequent charm, his capacity for seeing the alien clearly and firmly and communicating that vision of strangeness and beauty – all these are alien to Ms Miesel except inasmuch as they illustrate her thesis, which is that Anderson has a thesis and she knows what it is. Of course, in order to make her point, which has considerable provisional validity, she has to ignore the contrary indications in his work as a whole and in the works she cites. To pick on one tiny but representative point: in *The Enemy Stars* it is not primarily to spare his surviving comrade the risk that Ryerson steps through a matter transmitter to his doom – it is in boyish excitement at the thought of reunion with his bride. Such points do not invalidate her thesis, but they indicate that in his best work Anderson is a little more aware of human ambiguity and complexity than Ms Miesel will give him credit for. In some of his works as cited here, chaos is a vicious tyranny; in others it is slightly fey anarchy; in yet others it is the blind iron laws of nature or history – in other works not cited here all of these things (perhaps the first only for critics of political persuasions other than Anderson's) are seen as positive values in acceptance of which human beings can achieve merit. In yet other books, not all of them insignificant, all these considerations are simply ignored. Anderson is not a very good writer and certainly not the writer he could have been – over-popularity, half-baked views on society and art, sheer vulgarity of perception have all taken their toll of his talent – but if Ms Miesel's was the last word to be said on him, his status would deserve to be considerably lower.

– Andrew Kaveney

Universe 9
edited by Terry Carr *(Doubleday, 1979, 182pp, $7.95, ISBN 0-385-13649-8)*

Universe continues to vie with *New Dimensions* as the premier showcase for sf in the shorter lengths, but this collection is not as impressive as some of its predecessors. It leads off with a futuristic murder mystery by Bob Shaw, which has a neat plot developed in the author's customary calm and careful manner. This contrasts strongly with the bulk of the American offerings which fill the remainder of the book, most of which follow the recent American trend of wallowing in emotional turmoil, obsessed with self-confrontation and the slough of self-fulfilment. Marta Randall's "The Captain and the Kid" is about the problems of growing old and becoming redundant, while Greg Bear's "The White Horse Child" is about the problems of growing up with an imagination. Paul Novitski's "Nuclear Fission" and John Varley's "Options" are about the problems of family life and sexual relations. All four, though, have a depressing sameness about their psychoanalytic fervour. They are thoroughly introspective stories which use sciencefictional devices (or pure fantasy devices in Bear's case) merely to exaggerate the difficulties of figuring out where the hell one is at in life. Why write about the difficult present when you can write about the bloody impossible future? The only trouble is that orgies of futuristic soul-searching have a rather false ring about them. The best story in the book is John Shirley's "Will the Chill", which has the same

concerns, but which is in some measure aware of its own bombastic absurdity, and plays it up for all it is worth, like a consummate ham playing Cyrano de Bergerac.

If contemporary American sf is to be believed, the face of the future underwent a dramatic change when self-analysis and est replaced Freud and the private couch as the fashionable expressions of the desire to expose and conquer imaginary neuroses. We can now, it seems, look forward with obsessive intensity to a marvellous future or interminable ego-masturbation and orgasmic discoveries of a sense of personal destiny. Personally, I do not find it an attractive prospect, but I am frequently told that I do not pay enough attention to the serious business of flaying my soul.

— **Brian Stableford**

The Pleasure Tube
by Robert Onopa *(Berkley, 1979, 212pp, $1.75, ISBN 425-03941-2)*

Future societies in older sf used occasionally to feature "Pleasure Palaces", technological-baroque Bowers of Bliss which were at once the defining cachets of a decadent culture and traps where Our Hero might stray from the American way or his girlfriend suffer unnamable outrages. Details, necessarily, were scarce — men and women were glimpsed holding hands in rooms full of glass flowers — but the sophisticates among the audience must have had a shrewd idea of what *really* went on in such places. Alas, it appears they were right. Rawley Voorst finds refuge from the official investigation following a starship accident in deep space by enrolling himself in the Pleasure Tube (motto "our service is pleasure/your pleasure our service") for a holiday much-needed after eight years on duty. Most of the book is devoted to the progress of this holiday: opportunity, one might hope, for some ingenious titillation, if nothing else. But no. There is a deal of pompous philosophizing about the nature of pleasure, including an epigraph from Plato, but the invoked sensibility is much closer to the *Sunday People* than to Huysmans. The Tube combines intermittent sex (mostly monogamous and missionary — Rawley even *falls in love* with his assigned "service") with good food, long showers, picnics in the country, sightseeing trips and, most incredible of all, hours and hours of television (or "videon", as Onopa chooses to call it). The man must have a sick mind. Support characters include Massimo, a stage Italian brimming with mellow Mediterranean wisdom ("How you say? If you dig the pit, you will fall into the pit.") and Eva Steiner, diminutive leather-clad sado-masochistic Lesbian machine-fetishist, who turns out to be villainess-in-chief, much to everyone's surprise. The square-jawed narrative, liberally laced with computerese and always in the present tense, grinds forward, the wild round of pleasure continues, until in the final chapter our patience is rewarded, Onopa loses interest in the Pleasure Tube, and the story finally gets off the ground. There is some business about time-loops, and what Brian Ash calls an "awareness of reality" situation. Everybody panics. History repeats itself. I began to get interested. Too late, too late.

— **Tom Hosty**

CDN SF & F: a bibliography of Canadian science fiction and fantasy compiled by John Robert Colombo, Michael Robinson, John Bell and Alexandre L. Amprimoz *(Hounslow Press, Toronto, 1979, 85pp, $4.95, no ISBN)*

This gnomically titled booklet lists some six hundred titles written by Canadians, or about Canada, including over 100 titles published in French. The majority of entries are annotated. Fiction is divided into seven sections, and there is also a section devoted to non-fiction. There is a good deal of interesting information, and – to an eye admittedly untutored in spotting things Canadian in sf – no obvious omissions.

That was the good news: now for the bad. Despite having four compilers, one of whom is a librarian and one an archivist, the bibliographic information in those entries with which I am familiar is so slapdash as to make me mistrust the whole. No indicate is given as to the sources used – evidently not the books themselves in some cases – but whatever they were, they clearly were not used with care. Multiplying examples would be tedious, but, for instance: one of Crawford Kilian's two novels is entered as by Kilian Crawford; publishing data for Coney's *The Ultimate Jungle* is utterly wrong (given as Gollancz 1978, rather than Millington 1979); for Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* the date of publication is variously given as 1969 (UK) and 1969 (US), instead of, in both cases, 1955 (and the wrong American publisher is given); the entries for A.E. Van Vogt are a hopeless mess, and moreover incomplete even by the limiting criteria given; Ben Barzman's single novel is given two entries, the compilers evidently having been fooled by it's having had three titles.

Equally serious, the criteria for inclusion are unclear, to say the least. Are the authors Canadian born, Canadian resident, or did they once pass through Canada on their way to somewhere else? Are the books included because they are set in Canada, irrespective of the author's nationality? There is a section, "Canadian Interest", devoted to books of this sort, but other examples seem to crop up at random elsewhere. Some of the reasons for inclusion can be divined from the other entries, or from personal knowledge, or from other reference books; for the rest, only the compilers know. It would have been better had they chosen to share the information.

Lastly, and almost unbelievably, the book does not have any overall index of authors or titles. Subdivided as it is, this makes it extremely difficult to use and together with its other faults means that – despite the useful information it undoubtedly must contain – it is likely to languish unused on most reference shelves.

– **Malcolm Edwards**

Notes on Reviewers

Dave Langford is editor of the fanzine *Twll Ddu* (nominated for a Hugo Award in 1979) and of the news-magazine *Ansible*. He is the author of a study of future weaponry, *War in 2080* (David & Charles, 1979), and of several sf short stories. He is a civil servant and lives in Reading.

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