Foundation 19

FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

19

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THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

Editor: Malcolm Edwards
Features Editor: Ian Watson
Reviews Editor: David Pringle

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Editorial

This is the last issue of Foundation *to appear under my editorship: I leave the Science Fiction Foundation on 30th April in order to pursue a freelance career (this being the traditional next step for Administrators of the SFF and editors of the journal), and am at the same time stepping down from the editorial committee. The composition of the new committee has not yet been officially confirmed, so it would be inappropriate for me to make any annoucement here; suffice it to say that Ian Watson and David Pringle will be carrying on, and that the new third mem-*

ber is someone whose presence, in my view, will certainly strengthen the editorial team. In any case, I am not indulging in false modesty when I say that I do not expect my departure to have any adverse effect on the content of Foundation: *Ian Watson and David Pringle do most of the work anyway: my main fuction has been to try to get the thing published regularly and on time. In this I had the advantage of a paid position one of whose duties was the technical editorship – the time-consuming and sometimes tedious minutias of copy-editing, proofing, pasting-up, corresponding with the printers, etc, etc. Even so, it has not always been possible to fulfill my noble intentions: it will not have escaped your notice that the last issue was a couple of monthe late, and it may be June rather than May before this one is loosed on to the world.*

I say this as a prelude to warning you that things may not be so easy in the immediate future. As a consequence of expenditure cuts forced upon North East London Polytechnic by government policy my post as Administrator of the Science Fiction Foundation will not be replaced, at least for the immediate future. Thus the tasks which I have hitherto performed sitting at my desk under the guise of working will now be divided among an editorial committee of busy people who will have to fit them into their limited spare time. It is still the intention to publish three issues a year, but do not expect metronomic precision (as if long-time Foundation *readers ever would!).*

A couple of final notes: We are sorry that a number of subscribers have received faulty copies of the last two issues (pages blank, pages from a third-world economies journal bound-in). It is obviously impossible for us to check each copy before sending it out, but we are always happy to supply replacements for faulty copies (the return of the defective copy is appreciated, but not essential). Secondly, the subscription rates for individuals and institutions were accidently transposed in the last issue (with luck they will be correct in theis issue): subscriptions for individuals are, naturally, lower than those for institutions, and run on a per-issue rather than per-annum basis. Lastly, a word of thanks for all of you who have made encouraging or approving noises about Foundation *during the last two-and-a-bit years. It has been an enjoyable period for me, and I now look forward to seeing how the journal develops in future.*

Malcolm Edwards

Ian Watson and family have recently completed a move from Oxford to the depths of the Northamptonshire countryside, where they are now among the few private individuals blessed with a postal address as long as the Science Fiction Foundation's. The translation to rural splendour does not seem to have diminished Mr Watson's awe-inspiring capacity for work: a new novel, The Garden of Delights, *is forthcoming shortly from Gollancz, to be followed by* Under Heaven's Bridge *(in collaboration with Michael Bishop). In the midst of this activity he still finds time to act as* Foundation's *Features Editor – and to contributr articles and reviews himself, of which the following study of the aforementioned Mr Bishop is the latest.*

A Rhetoric of Recognition: The Science Fiction of Michael Bishop

Ian Watson

Michael Bishop is both an exoticist and a moralist. He is sometimes guilty, in the first respect, of a certain over-writing – underlying exotic venue by exotic diction – though the two become more organically integrated as his work progresses; and in the second respect of what one might call an over-scrupulousness on the part of his characters and his perceived attitude to them: a high-mindedness which can verge on what Andrew Kaveney (reviewing Bishop in *Foundation* 17) has tagged as a sympathy with prigs. These, however, are merely the consequence of aspiration and conscience; and as more of Bishop's work has appeared – and as his reputation has growth – he has shown no signs of the second-best syndrome to which sf flesh is heir, but rather of a more coherent melding of exotic vision, ethics and style.

Paradoxically this is borne out by his two most recent books: *Transfigurations*, a novelization of his earlier bravura novella "Death and Designation Among the Asadi", a remarkably sustained, convincing transfiguration and resolution of the enigmatic original at a time when short fiction is routinely inflated to vacuous book length; and the rewrite of his first novel *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire* under the title *Eyes of Fire* – which isn't in the least the usual professional revision of a tyro work with mild amendments, but rather a whole new novel which might have been produced in a parallel universe by a Bishop who never wrote the original *Funeral* at all but who now envisions the whole story for the first time: it is a re-creation, not a revision. The intensity and intention of these two reworkings of earlier material mark Bishop out from his confrères.

The original *Funeral* (of 1975) tells of two brothers who have defected from the

claustrophobic domed Urban Nucleus of Atlanta (itself extensively explored in the later novel *A Little Knowledge* and the subsequent fix-up novel *Catacomb Years*). Elder brother Peter overshadows younger brother Gunnar – the viewpoint character – who is something of an innocent abroad. To win them a place of refuge out among the stars, Peter arranges with the government of Glaparcus to use Gunnar as front man on an embassy to planet Trope, of a neighbouring star, to persuade the Tropish government to let one thorn in its flesh – a religious kibbutz which practices revelation in opposition to the Tropish norm of rationality – be removed to Glaparcus where the kibbutzniks can grow food in the Tropics, inimical to native Glaparcans, to supply the pioneers of colder climes.

Naïveté, pride and deceit flaw the mission – which is tainted at root since the real intention is to compel the kibbutzniks to exploit much less savoury territory; and it is in that unwholesome territory that the two brothers (Gunnar now tempered by sad experience) will take on the redemptory custodianship of the savaged, cheated kibbutzniks. (This theme is taken up in Bishop's third novel *Stolen Faces* where another fallen human being is exiled to custody of another despised subgroup, and indeed a similar exile plays a role in his second novel *And Strange at Ecbatan the Trees* where evolved humans – the Neo-Men or Parfects – have isolated the remnants of old, flawed humanity on an austere world light years from Earth.)

The central equation of *Funeral* – beyond the question of deceit and self-discovery – is the opposition between the legislated rationality of the Tropish State and the mystic connectedness and "irrationality" of the kibbutz, a prime irony being that the Tropish Magistrate actually wears the heritage of the kibbutz around his neck. This heritage – the powdered eyes of the departed prophet, murderously obtained in a police action – is what has advanced the Magistrate to his present position whereby he can try to solve the problem of the kibbutz compassionately (for he has cast off his own Tropish heritage); yet its return to the kibbutz triggers a nemesis which wrecks the kibbutz and brings about his own death, with some of the cursed inevitability of a Greek drama.

This legislating of Reason will be taken up again in *Ecbatan*, under a different guise, where the Neo-Men have genetically engineered a split in unstable *Homo Sapiens* between a ruling class who possess some of the old feelings but who must maintain the status quo, and a majority whose lives are purged of irrationality and any high emotion. Likewise, the theme of "evolution" through the change-phases of Tropish life (which the kibbutzniks believe alienates all orthodox Tropemen from their souls) is picked up afresh in the second novel in the radical discontinuity between *Homo Sapiens* and the Neo-Men – a contrast explored in more detail in the *Ecbatan*-linked novella "The White Otters of Childhood", albeit located thousands of years earlier and light-years distant.

Thus do Bishop's themes constantly interweave and reflect one another. Bishop has been criticised for adopting the sf "cliché" of a Future History, complete with chronology and genealogy, to fix up the stories that fit into *Catacomb Years*, yet it was perhaps inevitable that he would do this when themes themselves are mutually supportive in this way. Nevertheless, familiar "clichés" do occur – as in *Funeral* with its Le Guinish excuse for the existence of humanoids on different

worlds, that perhaps we were all once seeded from a common world. However. clishés have their virtues; it's worth noting that in the rewrite Bishop shifted the "common ancestry" remark of *Funeral* into a much wider, more telling comment upon how all beings are imperfect reflections of the same common progenitor. Extending this still further, we all – in the terminology of *A Little Knowledge* – represent a particular *haecceitas* or "thisness" subtending from the Absolute. A progressive shift takes place from the generic theme of common ancestry to a metaphysical insight into what that theme can really be made to express – a bold leap which Bishop makes from the springboard of the genre conceit, but one which required that conceit in the first place. Thus is genre translated, but still from the genre *base.*

The name of planet Trope – literally "a metaphorical expression", "a figure of speech" – hints at Bishop's constant stylistic strategy, deployed in rather rococo vein in the first novel. The book uses a rich array of deliberate rhetorical devices: repetition ("Your thoughts are a separateness, ever a separateness"), oxymoron ("loyal traitors", "a detonation of silence"), hyperbole and so forth. Ironic parallels and inversions abound: Gunnar left Earth to escape premature burial in one of the Urban Nuclei (which themselves are echoed in the thirty cities of the Goerlif Legacy), so that now he sits in a tomb on Trope. In death, the Magistrate who shoots himself produces a "mouth" in his head. (Before, like all Tropemen, he absorbed nutrition through his hands.) The Pledgeson's death is "a very baroque, self-conscious spectacle" – as though to re-emphasize the exemplary nature of the drama of the book, which is also underpinned by allusions to both Glaparcan and human mythology (as well as being formally keynoted by four epigraphs). Coinages and neologisms abound, many of them striking, particularly the "cerebrating" of "encephalogoi" for the telepathic speech of the mouthless Tropemen. Proper names hint at symbolism: Gunnar, naturally, brings the gift of a gun. Place names such as "Mindlight" and "Edgegleam" remind one of the nomenclature of Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus,* while sundry other names seem like anagrams – just as the events themselves are anagrams of other events, a puzzle in search of a solution. Particular items – mouth, eye, fire – emerge and submerge in the narrative like musical themes. At the same time, this intense concern with the exemplary significance of each item and event leads to many telling physical descriptions; and from this springs, in particular, one of the permanent hallmarks of Bishop's fiction: his fascination, unique among sf writers with the eyes of his aliens as indicators of their alien souls, visible extensions of their inner selves.

Eyes of Fire, the 1980 rendition of *Funeral,* is more disciplined and tauter than the earlier work. One immediately notices that the plethora of epigraphs, which "protest too much", from Ardrey, Lorenz and others have been cut out, as also have the over-indicative chapter titles. But where another writer might simply have pruned excesses, Bishop hasn't merely reorchestrated the same source but has written an entirely different symphony based on the same themes; and on several new ones.

Names have altered (with a certain shift in what they echo away from a linguistic home-base that produces coinages such as Aerthu or Goerlif towards, say, Bantu: "Mwehanja", "the Mwezahbe Legacy"). Gunnar is Gunnar no longer but (Biblically)

Seth; nor does he bring a gun but a Glaparcan ritual killing dart which, with a host of similar darts, slew his own father on a much more fully realized and motivated Glaparcus. The novel has shifted register from first person to a more objective third person, and the sf cliché of escaping from Earth to alien sanctuary – a feat difficult to conceive, and unexplained – has become the rather more practical heisting of the Earth family's starcraft which belongs to the Ommundi Trade Company with the aim of forcing the humans to use it for the Tropish deal. The two brothers, knit together in *Funeral* simply by an elder-younger brother knot, are now bound much more stickily by a clone relationship and homosexual incest, which the climax resolves in a paradoxical alienating attunement through pain. (The custodianship finale of the old *Funeral* vanishes entirely, perhaps having been superseded by a deeper exploration of this area in the interim in *Stolen Faces*.) Hyperspace ("The Sublime") and the starcraft itself, piloted now by a triple-brain-hemisphere cyborg, are powerfully evoked, while events on Trope take less obvious courses: Brother Abel does *not* now make love to Lijadu (the old Bassern, who betrays him); the Magistrate doesn't commit suicide but instead defects; nor do the Tropemen any longer lack mouths (a rather wild conceit), though they still possess those exemplary paradoxes, organic crystal eyes. The contrast between the rational Tropish State and the irrationality of the kibbutz is now stressed sexually (as is the love-hate between the brothers); for like Le Guin's Winter people the Tropemen are now androgynous – a borrowing which Bishop acknowledges with his echo of Le Guin's "kemmer" in the "kemmai" of Trope – and the State opts for permanent rational masculinity while the mystics maintain permanent female bodies of feeling.

If *Eyes of Fire* is more controlled stylistically, it is far from being austere. Austerity is no part of Bishop's fictional strategy – this book too is an exotic. The point is that Bishop's rhetoric ideally functions not as bombast (mere fine writing, purple prose) but as a means of explicating a moral equation – the rhetor and the moralist being near allies – and now it does so more successfully, more intergratedly. If rhetoric is crystal (a geometry of words, an artifice, spectralizing simple light into bright colours) and ethics is organic (of life, of the flesh) then actually we have in the organic crystal eyes of fire of the Tropemen a displaced symbol for Bishop's own style of envisioning and solving.

Names of characters in the second novel *Ecbatan* are rather Jacobean (Ingram Marley, Robin Coigns) and some of the dialogue could well be from a Ford or Tourneur play ('"Then I love the lady for the dangers that she's passed," Gabriel Elk said . . .'). Even assassins can be heard "railing poetry like actors" – a distinctly Jacobean situation, but perfectly appropriate here since the novel itself concerns dramas, of a unique kind: the cybernetic rekindling of corpses by a scientist-artist to enact dramas before audiences of the genetically-repressed populace who may neither feel emotion nor even simulate it, till they are dead. One is conscious all the while, too, that the protagonists of the novel are very much that: "protagonists" at the same time as they are living, learning human beings.

The tragedy of the *Ecbatan* world is its "maskedness" – the suppression of a whole area of human behaviour conducive to violence. This also means that people cannot even weep, for those who weep can also rage; accordingly the corpses in Gabriel Elk's drama display more animation than the audience. Not everyone

belongs to this society, though. Wild folk – Vikings, reavers, – who have bred back to the original human barbarism pose a serious threat to the State and status quo; as, from the other side of the coin, does the fabled "sloak": a kind of quasi-living blanket beneath the sea which supposedly drags itself ashore, periodically erasing civilization, if Parfect spy-satellites spot signs of high, perverted technology. To repel the pirates the State must apply a little of this technology from out of the old knowledge; and it turns to scientist-tragedian Elk to build laser cannons. The barbarians are accordingly defeated, the sloak shudders premonitorily underwater, and the status quo is preserved – with Elk's son dead in a meaningless pursuit of the retreating barbarians, and the narrator (a rather Jacobean sub-bully in the service of the State) vowing to become a living actor so that one day the people may learn how to shed tears.

It is Elk's son who is responsible for the strange trees of the title: stone carvings – a petrified forest in the young man's room – which at first seem quite gratuitous and tangential to the main theme. Actually they are a central image – not so much part of the events as of the rhetorical syntax underlying the events – a reflection of, and protest at, the genetic stone garden of humanity. Perhaps too, at the same time, these ossified organic forms represent the son's unconscious protest at the re-animations of the dead which he had to slave away to control from beneath his father's theatre? We cannot quite be certain. The symbol is richer than what it signifies; like the planet of the first novel, these trees are a complex, enigmatic trope.

Noteworthy, too, is the fact that the reavers are oriental in appearance – with a yin-yang on their boats (their passion balancing the impassiveness of the mainland); and this rather links up with the bantu-izing of some names in *Eyes of Fire.* Pliny once said, "*ex Africa semper aliquid novi*", but now not only Africa but the whole Third World is an "alien" thought territory which invades all our lives on equal terms. The real future is going to be as much brown, yellow and black as white, not only chromatically but culturally (unless, of course, we follow the homogenization scenario of Silverberg's "Schwartz Between the Galaxies"!).

In *Ectbatan* Bishop remains the rhetorician still, though the tone of the book is elegiac. Faces are still, oxymoronically, "rigid with blandness" – while galleons burn and our morale sinks. Epigram is traded with epigram, in formal stichomythia. The resurrection of the dead is echoed ironically in the animation of the sloak. Repetition plays its role ("Waited. Just waited.") – and the shattered moons float contrastingly between Ongladred's strong rock and the weak stars. The coins of rational, quietist Ongladred are "mithras" (from the mystery God): a telling irony, and a characteristic one.

The third novel *Stolen Faces* concerns yet another banned community, suffering from gross impairment: of soul, and of body too. To a colony world of Aztec cultural affectations comes the disgraced Lucian Yeardance, put in charge of the local leper settlement for the victims of "muphormosy" – an embarrassing blemish on the surface of otherwise thriving Tezcatl, but out of sight and out of mind. Lucian is supposed simply to sit out his unspecified tour of duty, to re-habilitate himself for his impertinence to his lazy former starship captain. And soon he discovers that there is no such thing as the disease muphormosy any longer. The

lepers – these outcast wretched of the Earth – are simulating their own disfigurations, which is paradoxically the only way that they can hold their anti-community together. They are the world's spiritual scapegoats, who have turned their scapegoat condition inside out to become their revolting pride, embracing avidly – like the characters in Jean Genet's *The Screens* and *The Blacks* – self-contempt and abasement as their destiny, though unlike Genet's characters with no revolutionary aim in mind. In a sense one might say that theirs is a *purer,* more exemplary life of evil. Lucian's involvement with them drives him to his own King Lear-like abasement, a savage putting out of the eyes and a raving in the wilderness – which does have as its result the closure of the leprosarium, though this brings neither honour to Lucian nor advantage to the lepers, and the whole sorry episode is quietly forgotten after a while.

Stolen Faces, which is again about deceit, maskedness and discovery of self-truth, is a harsh, arctic tale by contrast with the previous novel where the terrain may be stark but there is a mannered elegance in the tone of vioce; it is a tale executed in an argot-ritualistic style. An interesting instance of jokey verbal pre-echo from the novel which will follow it – *A Little Knowledge* – occurs when the leprosarium staff are administering medical tests to their charges. (One's next novel is usually gathering on the horizon, and sometimes some of the rain spills over!) Besides more orthodox blood tests and skin scrapings we find "haecceitas-photon graphs", something which no ordinary orderly or physician ever could derive, but only a metaphysician – since this would be a technique for charting the muphormers' own insight into their ontological "thisness", their degree of "inscape" in the poet Hopkins's word.

Haecceitas "or thisness, the specialness of each individual attributable of God's creation as a means of understanding the whole" is invoked in *A Little Knowledge* in its strict theological sense by one of the seminarists of the Christian-revival city of Atlanta (a few miles north-east of Bishop's real life home base). This is a highly germane allusion on Bishop's part, since what he is very good at as a writer is the conveying of *haecceitas*; he has an extraordinarily fine sense of the "thisness" of existences, particularly alien or future existences which may be said to function as metaphors for the here and now but which at the same time establish themselves uniquely well as identities which are "other" in their own right.

Whence comes, as I've said, that notable attention to his aliens' eyes – and none more so than here, where the eyes of the aliens from 61 Cygni A (who are introduced into domed Atlanta as a kind of picklock for its deliberate seclusion) resemble hourglasses. They have evolved selective reception to the different light values of 61 Cygni A and 61 Cygni B – but more than this, one mode of their eyesight perceives the ordinary world, while the other mode perceives (or so it seems) the pleroma, a more profound transcendental reality.

The aliens from this nicely described (if unfactual) 61 Cygni system are a remarkable paradigm of alienness – with their binary eyes, their bodies which are a fusion of the organic and the inorganic (the robot in symbiosis with the animal), their voluntary death-comas, their dream-hypnotic effect upon human beings, and their seven-fold 'families' (each family member in turn being focus for worship). Their acceptance of the Christian revelation inside the religious hot-house of the domed

city is a shock which both sustains the Establishment – in the eyes of the eccentric gung-ho High Bishop of Atlanta – and at the same time suggests a universality at odds with the principle of cutting oneself off from the rest of the world, and universe. As the aliens shift from calling themselves plain "Cygnusians" to "Cygnostikoi" (Cygnusian gnostics), a stranger private revelation looms for the two central characters Julian and Margot. On their wedding night, one of the aliens – entrancing them, and persuading Julian though not Margot – announces that it is actually the reincarnation further up the hierarchic ladder of existence of the soul of Julian's dead grandmother, a realization which has lain dormant in its alien psyche during its alien life only to be triggered by the space journey back to Earth; and we learn that all beings reincarnate in this way, through a succession of real worlds in the galaxy, in a universal ascent towards the ultimate. Or rather, the alien does not *announce* this, as a bald statement. The revelation is conveyed – as perhaps it only could be while still retaining "thisness" instead of obtruding as a Big Statement – in a plantation patois of the same dead grandmother, a sustained passage of argot-metaphysics.

A Little Knowledge itself is encapsulated chronologically within the subsequent fix-up of novellas and new material *Catacomb Years*, which rationalizes the construction of the domed secular infernos of the North American Urban Federation, successor to the old USA – no mean feat, digging foundations for a metaphor right down to bedrock. This strange claustrophobic society of internal emigration – with its macho roller-skating messengers, the glissadors; the hive violence of its manic masked punk-spooks, the hoisterjacks; its experimental geriatric multi-marriages, the septigamoklans; its perennial contrast between the underprivileged and the élite; its religious politics (with the Krishna people and Moslems as the only permitted variants); its Savanarolas and Cromwells and plain ordinary folk yearning fearfully to glimpse the sky even if it means blowing a hole in the dome – is a tapestry of rational insanity, like other forms of insanity something entirely self-consistent yet at the same time out of kilter with the consensus world outside: a feature which critics have missed who claim it is simply implausible. It isn't implausible; it is simply insane, and rigidly self-defining within its aberration: an Aldiss *Non-Stop* or Clarke Diaspar constructed out of modern urban angst, decay, fear of pollution, salvatory macroarchitecture, future pop music, neo-encounter groups, revivalism, supermarkets and so forth; and perhaps, if Southerners felt – and still feel themselves – outside of the main power stream of American life, Jimmy Carter notwithstanding (elected on a spiritual supremacy ticket, and in the business of redemption as in Bishop's Atlanta) it does incarnate a deeply-felt but subconscious theme, one that is highly relevant, and one which on another plane – that of America's place in the world community at large – is germane too, as oil crises and international insults provoke a mood of techno-isolationism and self-salvation.

The tang of future slang – demotic rhetoric – constantly brings vividly alive what a lesser writer might have turned into admonitory reportage, while woven through the whole scheme are varieties of transcendence, from the droogish hoisterjacke who merely hitch lifts, through the state religion of Ortho-Urbanism which has thoughtful, morally alert if also brash devotees, via Bonsai, aesthetic religion in

a state of cramp, by way of medical immortality, to the enigmatic Cygnostikoi.

At last, as much lured by the bait of immortality research as moved by the suffocation of prisoners who have forgotten what it is to breath, the dome is breached – and, in a typical irony, people stare out at "the reborn night". The bright lights of Ortho-Urbanism yield to the greater mysteries of the Other, of the universe. The final breaching of the dome may be, first, a terrorist incident and, secondly, a political choice, of deconstruction; but principally it is a physical event – the ending of a psychotic episode in which all participate so that it seems quite normal, the first unbinding of the spars which sustain this aberrant but powerful dome, and scenario. To write of individual lunacy from within is relatively simple compared with the evoking of social madness internally with such sympathy and realism. Usually sf writers simplify the issue by isolating their chosen society in a broken-down generation ark or vast bomb shelter (with the rest of creation depopulated) – perhaps with an overliteral computer in control. (And perhaps the internal society can turn out literally to be internal: a computer simulation.) But real people are the protagonists in Bishop's Atlanta, located within a feasible wider world – which is at the same time relatively inconceivable to them.

Bishop works such a sea-change on the sf trope of an enclosed society that one doesn't at first recognize it as such with all its Future History resonances – which in fact are the means by which he transforms the "laboratory culture society" dear to sf hearts into something more authentic. The fact that some exemplary hero does not burst out and discover a wider "truth" (by reaching the control room, leading a revolution, undertaking a pilgrimage) but rather that there is continual give-and-take of a kind between inside and outside, and that the inside *isn't* dominated by misunderstood rituals but is occupied with living, believable behaviour is what distinguishes this story-cycle.

Formally, *Catacomb Years* is something else uniquely science-fictional – namely a "fix-up" of tales into a novel. Yet another genre tradition nowadays is what one might call the "build-up": the expansion of a much-admired story to full novel length, sometimes with rather vacuous results, merely predictable surprises. If the "fix-up" is a category which sometimes betrays its mosaic seams, the "build-up" is one which frequently betrays its balloon nature by too much air inside it and too thin a surface. Bishop's "build-up" of his justly admired novella "Death and Designation Among the Asadi" of 1973 into the 1979 novel *Transfigurations* is, however, the exception to this rule.

But first, a word about the body of Bishop's shorter fiction, amongst which the Asadi tale was an early *pièce de resistance* of alien anthropology . . .

Bishop's tales are as rhetorically crafty as his novels – and, rhetoric including parody as one of its devices, commentary rather breaks down at this point faced by one of two poker-faced short stories in Silverberg's *New Dimensions* 5, "The Contributors to *Plenum Four*", a delightful take-off of sf editorial-*cum*-critical hype. *Plenum Four* is an anthology of holovistic universes, whose practitioners vote each other (naturally) Apotheo Awards and Yahweh Awards at Galactic Cons, and the descriptions of their assorted masterpieces are couched in a familiar and seductive praise-jargon. The other tongue in cheek story there is "Rogue Tomato", about a man transmuted into a planet-sized tomato who brings the new Starchild annun-

ciation to Earth without the foggiest idea why; and that Bishop is rather good at parody and satire when he wishes is also demonstrated by a take-off of the variously hip and lordly reviewing styles of certain sf pundits in a piece in *Thrust* 13 entitled "Critics Night at the Sci-Fi Bistro". Bishop is a writer who uses to the full (and beyond) sf tropes and conventions – the Future History format, telepathy, psychokinesis, cyborgs, cloning, hyperdrives, the alien landscape – and indeed one of his neatest stories, "Blooded on Arachne" (in Silverberg and Elwood's *Epoch*), is avowedly a homage to the science-fictional tropes, "the goal" of the story, he wrote in the afterword, being "a sort of Technicolour entertainment with no slowdowns and a suitably imageful and cadenced style. The title – a deliberately garish one, redolent, I hope, of one of sf's "Golden Ages" and the old pulps . . ." Bishop *could* make a fine living writing parody of sf, supposedly knocking the grandiose inanities of the genre but in actual fact stealing sweets off the kiddies, reversing the wrappings, and selling them back to the kiddies at twice the price. Bishop plays it for real, instead, and in so doing he transfigures the genre tropes by force of conviction and intensity of utterance. Ultimately – and "Blooded on Arachne" is a good example – the striving is less for effect than for understanding, for a sort of salvation or transcendence.

The painful search for salvation – for recognition of what one's self might be, and become – is frequently characterized by bizarre mutations and transformations in his shorter fiction. Thus in "Collaborating" (in Harding's *Rooms of Paradise*) we encounter a two-headed man who regard(s) their body as "The Monster"; or in "The House of Compassionate Sharers" a man who has suffered a crushing accident and been rebuilt as a prosthetic machine, alien to himself and other fleshly life; or in "The White Otters of Childhood" a humankind which has failed to become sufficiently alien to its heritage, by contrast with the evolved Parfects. In "Effigies" one of the last men alive on Earth tries vainly to recreate our dying race, only to produce mocking vegetable simulacra; while in "Cathadonian Odyssey" the armless aliens of a simple paradise world stretch themselves to snapping point for the sake of a human castaway, producing an awe-ful, misconceived apotheosis, the telekinetic summoning of planet Earth into their sky. Bishop's art is that of the exotic parable, handled with an intensity of presence – of "thisness" – which renders the strange familiar to us without its losing its essential otherness. And for his characters, their lives too are alien lives, as strange to their actors as they are to us. These are tales of alienation – from one's fellows, one's feelings, one's world, one's body – and of the struggle to redeem those lives, a struggle often tragic, sometimes foolhardy or grotesque, occasionally a bittersweet success.

"Death and Designation" is a novella of multiple alienation, where a heart-rent anthropologist, mourning the passing of the Pygmies of the Ituri Rain Forest on Earth, projects his own dilemmas upon the voiceless, eye-signalling denizens of a forest on another world whose social structure – such as it is – seems motivated by formalized loathing for one another. Adopting the mask of invisibility of a beardless outcast, xenologist Chaney penetrates the Asadi stamping ground, becoming even more alienated from humanity and from himself in the midst of their self-alienation, till it is wholly uncertain whether he is discovering or hallucinating a mysterious pagoda full of "eyebooks" and the unendearing Asadi "elder" with his bat-like

familiar and cannibal routines. The self-consuming of the Asadi (both psychological and physiological) and the self-consuming of Chaney himself mirror each other so convincingly that it seems inevitable that he has projected himself into them and discovered only his own personal failure in this alien troupe who seem to impossible as a viable biosocial entity. (As an anti-community the Asadi are several degrees worse than the Muphormers of *Stolen Faces*.) Thus, with the disapperance of Chaney himself and the impossibility of "proof" (since no aerial survey can ever locate the huge pagoda which should stand out like a beacon in the forest) the novella presents itself – as Lem's *Solaris* does – as a perfect metaphor for the incomprehensibility of an alien life form, which cannot even be successfully tagged as "intelligent" or "non-intelligent", and which simply holds up a mirror to our own ill-recognized selves. The "solution" to the Asadi enigma is that there is no conceivable solution.

How, then, to arrive at one? How to recognize the unrecognizable? This is the task which Bishop sets himself in the novelization *Transfigurations*, written and fictionally located six years after the original novella – and without fudging any of the data provided by Egan Chaney

Sf writers are always setting themselves puzzles in their stories; seldom do they solve them so convincingly. To the same planet BoskVeld, now a burgeoning colony, some six years after Chaney's disapperance comes his daughter Elegy, determined to treat Chaney's fantastical reports as literally as Schliemann treated Homer. Accompanying her is the neo-baboon Kretzoi, genetically altered and IQ-enhanced, who will attempt actually to impersonate an Asadi and make the communication breakthrough. Which he does – traumatically for all concerned; and his breakthrough leads the human team to the actual physical pagoda – concealed by a light-polarizing technology of the early Asadi, who had come from another star system originally, beings dominated by bat-like familiars which constituted a hive-mind, beings whose eyes photosynthesized so that – each Asadi being a self-sufficient food factory – only obsessive rituals could bind them together in any kind of inverted society out in the wild. Genetic engineering plays a role in the solution, and the erratic behaviour of the alien sun, and the social history of the early Asadi at the point where the majority threw off the yoke of their huri familiars; while Chaney himself is found alive, cocooned in a state of suspension in interface with the huri mind in the vastnesses beneath the pagoda – a failed focus for the hopes of the mind-swarm. The fact that Chaney can have survived as this focus requires that human beings be almost compatible with the needs of the huris, a fact bound up with the intervention of starfaring Asadi long ago on Earth itself (not that they seeded us, this time, but that they tampered genetically from the best of motives). And thus there open deeply disturbing vistas of the past of this spent race, the Asadi, and of our own. The ambiguous exotica of the earlier fable are transfigured so that once again discovery of the alien mediates a self-discovery.

The central questions underlying Bishop's moral searches – whither, and whence evolution? what may be the common denominator between living beings in the universe, and what of their purpose, and personal purposes? and where are the discontinuities between, and within, beings? – are posed once more in an exotic and harrowing setting.

Norman Spinrad has the unique distinction of having his work critiqued not only by critics and reviewers, but by the British Parliament – the book in question being Bug Jack Barron, *then being serialized in* New Worlds *to the shock, horror and amaze of the nation. Undeterred by the politicians, Spinrad proceeded to write Adolf Hitler's best sf novel,* The Iron Dream *(winner of the French Prix Apollo), and has lately leapt into the sex wars with* A World Between. *Recently published too is* The Star-Spangled Future, *Spinrad's dream and nightmare of America; and this Spring sees the publication of* Songs From The Stars, *a novel every bit as passionate and committed as* Bug Jack Barron, *only this time concerned not with the triumph of the will, but of the spirit.*

The Profession of Science Fiction: XIX: Where I Get My Crazy Ideas

Norman Spinrad

Which, of course, is Idiot Question Numero Uno: "Hey, where do you get your crazy ideas?" Matched only, perhaps, by "What is your definition of science fiction?" Harlan Ellison has taken to answering "From an Idea Service in Schenectady, New York, dummy!" But people keep asking him for the address. When asked this question on a panel once, I held up the glass of beer before me and grinned moronically.

Nevertheless, this piece *will* be more or less of an attempt to answer this question seriously. After all, any series of "The Profession of Science Fiction" should make an attempt to say something about the wellspring mysterious core of any novel or story, to wit, the initial inspiration, for without it, the most skilled writer in the world will simply end up staring at a blank piece of paper for months on end, and any further discussion of "how to" will be moot indeed.

Now I'm not talking about hacko plot-by-the-numbers kits like Plot Skeletons or automatic writing tricks or there's this high-g planet with seventeen Earth-sized moons or hand-held plagiarism computers. I'm talking about the kind of "story idea" that causes you to rap out a short story obsessively or that can kick around in your head for years accumulating material around it before you even begin to spend half a year of your life in the universe of a novel. The real stuff, genuine creative inspiration.

How do you even know when you've got it? You can tell whether you did or not in hindsight, perusing the finished product, or observing the trail of paper leading to never completed works, and sometimes you can realize the awful halfway through

and be faced with the moral question of art versus fulfilling that contract. But knowing which of your moment-to-moment obsessions is the true heart of a story or novel – and indeed knowing whether its natural child is short story or novel – is maybe the highest and the deepest of the writing skills that can be taught or learned.

Failing to learn this is probably the cause of most writer's blocks, and regaining the clear vision of your own internal landscape is probably ultimately the only real cure for same. Imagination, synergetic thinking, sheer craziness, whatever the irreducible magic talent may be that allows a statistically tiny proportion of the gene pool to actually be able to write any kind of fiction at all, is a toss of the cosmic dice, not something that can be learned or taught. If you can or have been able to write fiction at all, however, all kinds of "story ideas" are going through your head all the time. When they are shit, and you know it, that's a writer's block. When you don't know it, you end up writing stuff that makes you and the critics wonder whether you may be blown out.

So first of all, you need a shit-detector. What is the difference between a viable idea and smoke-rings in the mind?

If you have to ask that question, you do not have a story idea. In essence, it's simple as that. If an idea doesn't grab you by the throat or start obsessing you for weeks, or roll around in your head for months gathering intellectual moss quite unlike a rolling stone, then you should wait for one that does. If you think you have to write it down so you won't forget it, then forget it.

The subconscious mind is a better processor of data into fiction than any notebook or cardfile or system you can concoct. If you wait for one of its creations to really grab you, you'll *know* when you've got an inspiration for something.

The zen of it is that the way to analyze the worth of your story ideas is to wait for a self-evidence grabber to swim by. You'll know it when you see it. If you don't, you haven't

You are then, of course, sometimes left sitting there like a frog on your lily pad waiting for months for a succulent mental dragonfly. But these uninspired periods can be part of their own solution, depending on what you do with the time.

Staring at a dry typewriter for weeks or months or centuries on end, will, of course, drive you crazy. Reaming out pages of desperate bibble for the pleasure of wadding them up and building a pile of rubbish on the floor is hardly any better.

One excellent solution to how to occupy yourself during the dry spells is to take vacations. Get out there in the world, travel, get loaded, have adventures, and forget about work until the spirit once more moves you. This is an appealing solution if you are independently wealthy, or believe starvation is good for the soul. That is, unless, the good times come to be seen as the blocked times.

Many of us, however, do not have this option. The rent must be paid, the belly must be fed, and to do this, one must make money. Distasteful but true. We have three options. We can go out and get a job. While my experience with this phenomenon is mercifully limited, it has not led me to believe that a nine to fiver is what a writer needs to get the creative juices flowing. Or we can grit our teeth and write formula potboilers out of whatever we can and feed the body at the expense of the soul.

Or write non-fiction.

What a weird term "non-fiction" is, upon reflection! It must have been invented by a fiction writer, because what it means is anything there is to write except this magic fabulation of new realities and actual people out of the thin air of our minds that we call fiction. As if fiction is the lion's share of the craft and art of all possible writings, and everything else is simply non-it.

Perhaps in a certain sense this is true. Fiction may be seen as the pinnacle of the writing profession in that it demands access to levels of the spirit by the conscious mind which are *not* necessary to the writing of that other stuff, and in that it creates its own subject matter out of the void. Whereas "non-fiction" is a step further down the ladder of absolute creation since it is always about something and does not create either people or events, a brand new synthetic reality.

Which is why there is so much more of it, and why it is so much easier to write than fiction. The fiction writer must seine his own mind for inspiration, a zen act that cannot be reduced entirely to conscious volitional control. But if you can write fiction, if you have the necessary command of description and language to write short stories, then writing non-fiction is merely a matter of scanning your environment for targets of opportunity. The material of fiction must come from your own head, but the material of non-fiction surrounds you.

Journalism in its most extended sense is the craft of reporting events in the external environment, pondering them aloud, and ideally reaching some philosophic position. In the practical world of publishing, this can mean anything from scientific treatises to jackoff material for low porn magazines, from criticism to sports writing, from political commentary to gourmandizing, endless possibilities to write about stuff you don't have to make up and earn some money doing it.

I've been writing non-fiction intermittently for about as long as I've been writing novels. I've been a film critic, a book reviewer, and a science writer. I've done political columns in a men's magazine and the Underground Press. I've interviewed Buckminster Fuller and done a piece about Chinese food. Whatever. At times I did it strictly for the money, at times I wasn't hardly getting any money and did it for kicks or free movies. At times I've written pieces because there were real things I wanted to talk about directly, and at times I just felt like being funny.

I guess I started writing non-fiction originally because I wasn't making enough money out of writing short stories or even my early novels, and it seemed like a quicker and more enjoyable way of solving economic crises than getting a job. And it always has seemed so much easier to write non-fiction on demand. If someone gave me an assignment to take his story idea and turn it into fiction, no way. But if someone points me to a subject and says maybe you'd find that interesting and I do, I have no trouble in writing about it.

In those days, when science fiction stories were selling for 3c a word on the average and $1500 was a respectable advance for a book, journalism was economically attractice because even the lowest men's magazines paid more than the science fiction mags, and a sale of an article to a top market could net you more than a whole book.

Now, of course, the situation is reversed, and there's no way I could make a living as a journalist without doing it full-time one step ahead of the bill collector,

and for the time I spend I can certainly make much more money writing fiction. Nevertheless, I continue to dabble in journalism in its varied forms, though there is no longer an economic necessity.

Because over the past few years I've come to realize that fiction arises not from more fiction, but from all that stuff that is non. Garbage in, garbage out. Nothing in, ultimately nothing out, sooner of later. You can't keep writing fiction that lives if you're not interested in anything else. What's more, sometimes it can be very rewarding to have your attention focused on something which you might not have thought you were interested in.

Examples of fiction that had its origins in something that journalism of one sort or another got me into are endless and recomplicated. A book review I was assigned, Wilhelm Reich's *The Psychopathology of Fascism,* came my way about the time I was writing *The Iron Dream,* and was certainly a significant influence. Film criticism got me into the process of movie-making as well as the milieu of the record industry through connection with rock critics, and a few years later, out comes *Passing Through The Flame.* A four-hour interview with Buckminster Fuller triggered all sorts of things that emerged in all sorts of places later. The Fuller interview led me into writing on scientific subjects which led to the metapolitics of energy which when combined with a piece I did on the L-5 proposal and a few other things germinated in the forthcoming *Songs From The Stars.* Some reviews I once did of some feminist books combined with the usual personal travails led to a piece in a men's magazine called "The Masculine Mystique" which led to another piece on the subject of sex and gender for a woman's magazine and later it all surfaced in *A World Between.*

In terms of your fiction, what is valuable about doing journalism is not so much what you write as what writing it gets you into. And what it gets you out of, namely your own head.

Writing is a solitary and solipsistic occupation anyway. You sit there alone your whole working day communing with the brilliance of your own prose. Fiction writing is even more solipsistic; there you are in a universe of your own creation playing god to your creatures. *Science* fiction writing is perhaps the purest form of solipsism — it doesn't have to have any connection with outside reality at all.

If you spend all your working hours either creating your own fictional realities or trying to, you can get pretty weird. If all your intellectual input is science fiction, if your only mental stretching exercise is creating it, and if god forbid you don't even read much of anything else, sooner or later, your fiction will cease relating to anything but itself, and you'll find yourself either running dry or crazy.

Worse still, writers tend to rub minds mostly with other writers and with editors, since those are the only people they tend to have working relations with. Science fiction writers have a whole world of fandom they can submerge themselves in during their non-working hours as well.

I have found that my intermittent non-fiction keeps me in the habit of being a student of sticking my nose into sometimes unlikely intellectual crannies sniffing for something that might be worth reporting. I guess I started doing it for money, and now I do it for fun. Although ultimately I know on another level that I can justify my dilettantish pursuits on the basis of supplying the richest possible data-

flow for the magic subconscious computer that germinates my fiction.

But the zen of it is, for me anyway, that I can't generate fiction ideas through organized research, the very thought of which fills me with schooltime memories of the horrors of homework. While I consider my fiction the main line of my concern, I never do any research for it beyond what is necessary to avoid factual or descriptive goofs. But that subconscious computer draws on all the stuff I've crammed into it in the pursuit of *other* goals and synthesizes it, transmutes it, and generates fictional creation from it.

And that's where I think I get my crazy ideas.

Of course if you don't believe me, you could always ask Harlan for that address in Schenectady . . .

A student of Japanese, formerly with the Asahi Evening News, *Tokyo, and now back at university at Ann Arbor, Michigan, David Lewis – who is also an sf writer and SFWA member – has contributed useful columns on the Japanese scene to* Locus. *Here he presents a lively survey of the history and state of mind of sf in Japan.*

Science Fiction in Japan

David Lewis

> Taking all the world for its stage, a strange and extraordinary tale of great adventure has appeared, and the hero of this tome: a gallant Japanese naval officer! Beneath his command are death-defying sailors; crocodiles sleep in the Indian Ocean, lions savage the crags of continents, pure youths prevail who brandish the pirate sword! There are ruddy-cheeked youths, riding in phantasmagorical craft, crossing a thousand leagues beneath the sea; there are dignified gentlemen, driving forward a singular iron car over the summits of ten thousand peaks. On silent, isolated isles are mysterious echoes, in strange lands beyond human ken flies the naval ensigh of Imperial Japan. Incredibly strange! Incredibly mysterious! And again, magnificent![1]

In November, 1900, Dentsu had yet to become the world's largest advertising company. It fell on lesser men to write the blurbs for a most remarkable book by a completely unknown young author. His name was Oshikawa Shunro, his book *The Undersea Warship (Kaitei Gunkan).* Released simultaneously by three Tokyo publishing houses, the first printing sold out almost overnight and started an immediate flood of imitations, many by Oshikawa himself.

It also earned Oshikawa the title of the "grandfather" of Japanese science fiction.

Seventy-eight years later science fiction was being taught at prestigious Tokyo Daigaku, Japan's foremost university. Science fiction novels regularly headed the Japanese bestseller lists, while more than half the stories proposed for the Japan Literary Association's annual collection of best short stories were written by sf

writers. The genre had begun to carve a niche for itself in Japan's literary world, almost seeming to justify the contention of leading critic and translator Itoh Norio that "science fiction is the most viable literary form in Japan today".

This state of affairs would no doubt have astonished Oshikawa. His success in Meiji Japan reflected not so much a Japanese predisposition to science fiction as a happy assessment of the market for a new breed of military adventure novels *(gunji boken shosetsu).* Japan in 1900 was chafing at Western restraints on its growing power. Three decades in single-minded pursuit of modernization had turned Japan into a budding imperialist, filled with still unrealizable pretensions. *Kaitei Gunkan* spoke to these frustrations with a childish bluntness that won it lasting fame.

A brilliant Japanese naval scientist, infuriated by the arrogance of the whites in Asian and despairing of a government too cowardly to stand up to the oppressors, builds a secret base in the Indian Ocean where he perfects an arsenal of super-weapons. Taking advantage of a gap in the convoluted plot, he sallies forth with his submersible warcraft, the Denkotei, and in a climactic night action blasts a powerful white pirate ship to smithereens.

Faceless at first, the enemies of Japan gradually took firmer shape in the many sequels Oshikawa cranked out after his initial success. Russians, Americans, French and English all succumbed to Denkotei's might. When the Russo-Japanese war broke out in 1905 it was promptly incorporated into the series. *Kaitei Gunkan* and its progeny proved a strident cry for Japanese expansion into south Asia.

If Oshikawa had stopped with this militant appeal, *Kaitei Gunkan* could be chalked up as another gratuitous wad of imperialist propaganda. Instead it became Japan's first foray into science fiction. With the Denkotei and other exotic war machines introduced in later volumes, Oshikawa excited his readers to the promise of the dawning technological age. The first edition contained forewords by three Japanese admirals testifying on behalf of Oshikawa's visionary technology. Clearly the machine was as important to the book's success as the cast of wooden characters. For all its juvenile militarism, *Kaitei Gunkan* played upon the "sense of wonder" that even today is cited by Japanese critics as one of the defining elements of science fiction.

Kaitei Gunkan has gone down as the first true science fiction novel in Japan but the roots of sf in Japanese literature go back much further.* Ishikawa Takashi, lecturer at Tokyo University and Japan's most widely recognized science fiction critic, has made a cursory review of Japanese literature back to the earliest written works, the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi,* pointing out their "speculative characteristics".[2] While he makes no pretence that these or other early tales are in themselves science fiction, he does raise interesting points about the genesis of the Japanese speculative vision. There is, for instance, Hiraga Gennai's 1763 novel, *Furyo Shido Kenden,* in which the hero receives a pair of wings and flies around the world, discovering a land of giants, a land of Lilliputians and others before returing to Edo, the present day Tokyo. The book is satirical, using the hero's adventures to

*Some historians prefer to credit the pre-Meiji (1857) *Seiseikaishinhen,* in which Japan invades and conquers England, with being the first. But Oshikawa clearly wins out in terms of lasting influence.

lampoon contemporary society, and followed *Gulliver's Travels* by only 37 years.

Despite the presence of such fantastic elements in writing throughout Japanese history, however, it is generally agreed that science fiction only established itself in Japan after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Yet once the doors to the West were opened, Japanese intellectuals (the only people prepared to read, much less translate, Western fiction) showed a strong interest in European and American visions of the future. The first Western novel to be translated following the restoration was a Dutch utopian tract. The works of Jules Verne appeared in translation with remarkable speed, along with books by Albert Robida and utopian novelists. Verne was second only to Shakespeare in popularity, and it is likely that Oshikawa read at least some of his works before penning *Kaitei Gunkan.* The same can also be said of Yano Ryukei, whose *Tale of the Floating Castle (Ujo Monogatari),* appearing in 1890, was the direct inspiration for the novel that eventually upstaged it by virtue of Oshikawa's flashier extrapolation.

The new ideas from the West triggered a wave of future utopia novels early into the Meiji period, beginning with *Japan's Future (Nihon no Mirai)* by Ushiyama Ryosuke. The late 1800s were marked by an intense interest in new philosophies and concepts from the West. Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and others were translated and widely read. It is not surprising that books of a similar nature should begin to be written by progressive Japanese intellectuals. No single work sums up this movement the way *Kaitei Gunkan* encapsulates military adventure science fiction, but the rush of utopian novels during the Meiji period testifies to the readiness of the new intelligentsia to consider alternatives to the world they lived in.

As industrialization progressed and Japanese self-confidence grew, the utopian movement began its transformation into the imperialist yearnings of the 1900s. Oshikawa's books are in a sense utopian (proving conclusively that one man's utopia may not appeal to another), and Denkotei's adventures were followed by many imitators. Most clung closely to Oshikawa's model. When he died at the early age of 38, the genre faltered. During his short life he had founded several magazines for young readers, and these kept the fires burning for a whilg longer. But they, too, were soon to be replaced as World War I discredited the militarists and opened new vistas of scientific and technological progress.

In between the demise of the *gunji boken shosetsu* and the rise of Japan's version of scientifiction, there is an absence of recognizably science fiction-oriented work. A number of prominent mainstream writers – Tanizaki Junichiro, Akutagawa Ryunosuke and Izumi Kyoka in particular – can be singled out for the fantastic elements in their fiction. The sf label is applied rather more loosely in Japan than in the West, and with this in mind Akutagawa's famous "Kappa" or even some of the stories of the neo-sensualist school *(shinkankaku-ha)* to which Nobel Prize-winner Kawabata Yasunari belonged can be seen as having contributed, albeit peripherally, to the growth of the genre.

Between the Wars

In the 1920s two magazines appeared that were to dominate the development of Japanese science fiction until World War II. These were *New Youth (Shinseinen)*

and *Science Pictorial (Kagaku Gaho)*, first published in 1920 and 1923 respectively. *Shinseinen* was a descendant of Oshikawa's *Adventure World (Boken Sekai)*, and started out with a strong colonialist flavor. Gradually it shifted toward mystery fiction, in that capacity also bringing science fiction under its wing. Until the post-war years science fiction in Japan was regarded as a variation on the mystery story, or *suiri shosetsu*, a category broad enough to encompass horror and some of the supernatural as well.

Comparisons with Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* are not inappropriate. Both magazines were in the market for technological stories; both had largely teenage audiences that were more interested in wireless sets than characterization. The science fiction historian Shimamoto Mitsuteru has suggested that when Kozakai Fukoku produced what have been called Japan's first pure science fiction stories for *Kagaku Gaho* in 1926 he had already been exposed to imported copies of *Amazing*, published earlier that same year.[3] In any case, Kozakai was himself an instructor in the medical department of Tohoku Imperial University. Unno Juza, the great pre-war sf writer who was to overshadow him, worked in a radio research laboratory. The age of science fiction with a capital 'S' came to Japan almost as quickly as it came to the United States.

Another development in publishing that was to spur the genre's development in Japan was also taking place about that time. Post-war recession led to the *enbon*, a cheaply printed pocket book that brought literature within reach of a mass audience for the first time. Edogawa Rampo, one of the best known of Japanese mystery and horror writers, later described the *enbon* boom as literary "dumping". Publishing houses frantically rushed out sets and collections of world literature. As the number of unpublished classics dwindled, more obscure books were rushed into print. *Metropolis* and other seminal Western sf works became widely available, as did reprints of Wells, Verne and the earliest of Japanese science fiction and fantasy authors. A vastly expanded readership was thus fed the latest literary developments of the West with remarkable speed. Capek's *R.U.R.* was staged at the Tsukiji Little Theatre, birthplace of modern Japanese drama, only four years after its original performance in Europe.

In light of this sudden influx, it is not too surprising that just as Meiji Japan had picked up on the political utopia novel, authors of the between-wars period kept abreast of moods in the West. Japan saw its own splurge of future war scenarios pitting its army and navy against various combinations of potential enemies.* A small core of "pulp writers" supplied the popular science and boys' magazines. Even serious writers experimented with the broadened horizons for speculation pointed to by Wells and company.

Most notable of this last category is probably *The Record of Nonsharan (Nonsharan no Kiroku)*, by the famous poet and occasional novelist Sato Haruo. Nonsharan is a nonsense word, but the 1928 story, while perhaps seeming like nonsense to many of Sato's peers, is virtually unique in the Japanese literature of the time.

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*Interestingly enough it is seeing a similar splurge today, usually with the Russians invading Hokkaido.

In a huge city of the future, the lower classes live underground while the rich occupy enormous buildings on the surface. The viewpoint character is one of the lowest of the low, living on one of the deepest levels and enjoying virtually none of the amenities distributed on the basis of social class. The story opens with the underground population being allowed to the surface for a few hours on a holiday. They climb up out of a deep shaft, clinging to a narrow walkway and occasionally slipping to their death. On the surface, garish advertising is smeared over the towering buildings. The hero eventually finds himself in a chamber where a scientist, fallen from grace with the upper classes, cares for social outcasts and lives off supplies pilfered from the complex life-support system of the city. In the end all are caught, the scientist being rendered into a human vegetable for use in scientific experiments.

Nonsharan probably does not deserve a place on the right hand of *Brave New World,* but it is clearly a work of a different order altogether from the antics of *Kaitei Gunkan.* Sato protested that he wrote it not as science fiction but as social satire, a statement that in itself indicates the story is closer in spirit to sf as we now consider it, or at least hope for it to be, than to the gee-whiz gimmickry that was passing for science fiction at the time. Despite the manifest flaws in execution, *Nonsharan,* written in an almost surrealistic style by an author of great literary power, is a unique work in the annals of Japanese science fiction.

In November 1927, the year before *Nonsharan* appeared, *Kagaku Gaho* announced a competition for "new science novels". The winners were published in the January 1928 issue, and while neither they nor their authors have played any significant role in the history of Japanese sf, one of the runners-up mentioned in the judges' commentary was to become synonymous with science fiction for the next 10 years.

Unno Juza's "Mysterious Shortwave Radio Station" finally appeared in one of *Kagaku's* sister publications later that year, but by then *Shinseinen* had already provided Unno with his first professional publication credit, "The Electric Bath Murder Affair".

Unno was then 30 years old, working at the Ministry of Communications' Electrical Research Centre. Introduced to the editor of *Shinseinen* by a mutual friend, he was invited to write a story for the magazine on the basis of the good impression he made and a short piece published in a laboratory newsletter.

Over the next decade Unno became Japan's best known science fiction writer. He wrote in three veins – humorous, mystery and what was for the time hard sf – as well as straight mystery and adventure fiction. While his work is hardly satisfying by current standards, he was an important influence. Author Hoshi Shinichi, cartoonist Tetsuka Osamu and editor Takumi Shibano, three of the leading figures in post-war science fiction, were all born in 1925. Most of the older Japanese sf writers read Unno at some time in their careers, while as recently as 1978 one Tokyo film critic was still citing Unno in an attempt to explain *Star Wars.*

The titles of Unno's mystery sf – "The Stolen Brain" *(Nusumareta Nozui),* "The Manmade Man Affair" *(Jinzo Ningen Jiken)* – give a pretty good picture of his work in that field. His humour usually turned on a comical mad scientist figure out of touch with the realities of the world. But in some of his harder science

fiction he reached commendable heights. "The Six o'clock Music Bath" *(Juhachiji no Ongakuyoku)* tackled conformity and totalitarianism with vigour. The proletariat, led by the brilliant scientist Kohaku and his robot army, seek to overthrow a dictatorship founded on the misuse of technology. In the end they are overwhelmed by the brainwashing "music bath".

Juhachiji no Ongakuyoku contained such surprising ideas as having one character obtain sex change surgery to escape his oppressive factory job. The whole story becomes more remarkable for having been written under the pall of growing Japanese militarism. Shortly after it was published, the Japanese army in Manchuria provoked open warfare with China. World War II had begun.

As the militarists consolidated their power in Tokyo, science fiction faded into jingoism. Not all of Unno's stories had been as bold as the "Music Bath" – some, such as "The Floating Aerodrome" *(Ukabu Hikoto)*, would have pleased Oshikawa – and with the outbreak of war he did not shirk from lending his writing talents to the war effort. This willing acquiescence was true of most Japanese writers, and became one of the great moral dilemmas of the intelligentsia after the war ended. Unno himself came close to suicide in the grim post-war years. He wrote nothing more of note, and died without seeing the resurgence of the genre he had helped to found.

The sf "Jimmu Boom"

Unno had predicted that science fiction would grow in two stages. The first, he said, would be "science dressed as literature". This was the category to which he himself belonged, the Gernsbackian scientification where the scientist and technician carried more weight than the writer. But at some point, he predicted, sf would reach the stage of "science fiction as writing", an event to be heralded by the appearance of superior science fiction authors. In Japan, that second stage dawned with the publication of *Uchujin* magazine, and would seem to have reached some form of fruition in the 1970s.

Edogawa Rampo in 1953 wrote a piece for *Geneijo* magazine describing an unusual visitor to his house.[4] The visitor, a young man named Yano Toru, was an avid reader of American science fiction magazines who claimed to have been invited to the United States by a science fiction fan club on the basis of letters he had written to the readers' columns of various publications. One fan, a Mr Forrest Ackerman, had offered to cover his expenses in the United States.

Yano wanted information about the state of science fiction in Japan lest he be called upon to make any speeches. Edogawa told him there was really not much to say. There had been a time before the war when it seemed to go over well in Japan, but now there were no magazines, few books, and certainly no fandom. Sf, he said, just didn't seem to make it in Japan.

Some quarters were putting it even more strongly than Edogawa. Sf, they said, was jinxed.

There seemed to be good reason for this opinion. The absence of sf in Japan was not for want of trying. A Japanese edition of *Amazing* brought out shortly after the war failed in seven issues. *Seiun*, the first Japanese science fiction

magazine, was launched in 1954 with words of encouragement from Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Judith Merril and others. It failed in one issue. Muromachi Publication Co's 1950 "SF Series" collapsed after two volumes. Gengensha's "Complete Collection of New Science Fiction" reached 20 volumes, and failed. Kodansha's "SF Series" only reached its sixth book, and the new Omega Club couldn't even get its fanzine out a third time. The belief gained ground that "sf publishing is bound to fail".

Yet the dismal record did not mean sf had no following in Japan. Yano Toru, today one of the most prolific authors and translators in Japan and perhaps the world, encountered his first pulps while working as a translator for the US Army occupation forces. Noda Masahiro, sf collector, historian and impresario, learned his love of pulp sf art from a used bookstore in Tokyo's Kanda publishing district. A select and devoted audience, fed by the castoffs of US servicemen, was scouring Tokyo for science fiction. Finally, in May 1957, the semi-prozine *Cosmic Dust (Uchujin)* was launched by Takumi Shibano and the Uchujin club.

Uchujin has since published close to 200 issues. The pace has slowed as Takumi shifts his efforts from the propagation and education of Japanese fandom to translation and his own writing, but its successful publication broke the jinx once and for all. In 1960 Hayakawa Publishing Co brought out *Hayakawa Fantasy* magazine, later retitled *SF Magazine*, still the leading magazine in the field. A host of fan publications appeared, followed by *Kiso Tengai*, another professional publication that went out of print only to return to life in 1976. The glossy *SF Fantasia* appeared in 1977, and 1979 saw the birth of *SF Hoseki*, the Japanese edition of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, and *SF Adventure*. A number of other fanzines have reached high levels of quality. *NW-SF*, a semi-prozine started by Yamano Koichi as an outlet for new wave writing, has been publishing since 1970.

This wealth of magazines suggests the massive science fiction readership that has emerged in Japan over the 1960s and 70s. The first major writers appeared with *Uchujin* (and publication in *Uchujin* is still one of the major stepping stones towards becoming a professional sf author). Today at least four are well-known through Japanese society, while a great many more are able to make a living exclusively from science fiction. It is hard to guess exactly the number of publishing authors now, especially after the high-growth era of the 70s, but there is a hard core of between 30 and 40 writers and translators, critics and experts, who support the science fiction superstructure in Japan. The translators in particular play a far more important role in Japanese science fiction than in the United States or England. Not only English language works, but Russian, French, German, Italian and other more esoteric books and short stories are well represented both in the magazines and in the lines of books put out by major sf publishers. It is indicative of the growth of Japanese sf, however, that foreign writers now follow the leading domestic authors in popularity polls.

Fan activity has also grown markedly over the past decade or so. There are some 100 fan publications, representing a wide spread of interests and ability. The first all-Japan convention was held in 1962. The 1978 convention, held at a mountain resort south of Tokyo, drew over 300 committed fans.

Also significant has been science fiction's success beyond the confines of the specialized audience. Sf stories appear on an equal footing with mainstream fiction in the mass-market magazines. Hoshi Shinichi and Komatsu Sakyo have both been awarded by the Mystery Writer's Guild. Hanmura Ryo was the first recipient of the Naoki Prize. Tsutsui Yasutaka has achieved widespread recognition with his many novels.

Beneath this constellation are a number of quite competent writers, almost all prodigiously prolific. With such a small cadre of authors supporting so many publishing ventures, it is not uncommon to find the same name appearing in every magazine on the stands in a given month, and with a book appearing as well. At the same time, it is undeniable that some writers are stretching themselves very thin. The quality versus quantity equation is being pushed to its limits.

A survey carried out on the twentieth anniversary of *Uchujin's* publication found the "typical" science fiction fan to be marginally younger than his American equivalent as depicted in similar *Locus* surveys. Nonetheless, the largest group still comes down to university students. Some 95 per cent of Uchujin club's 400 some-odd members are male, 50 per cent of them in school, almost all apolitical, atheist and middle class. The convergence with United States fandom is more than statistical. Certainly the course of Japanese fandom has been strongly influenced from the West ever since Yano's attendance at the eleventh Worldcon, but Japanese fans even *look* like American fans in clothing and deportment. This may be territory for the anthropologist as much as for the student of comparative literature.

The broader audience for science fiction is harder to pin down, but there is no questioning that its attitudes are rather different. One student said she would occasionally buy *SF Magazine* for easy reading that didn't make her think. In general, the awareness that the story being read comes from a body of writing labelled science fiction seems to be very low and, with the spread of sf into the mass marketplace, getting lower. The four million copies sold of Komatsu Sakyo's *Japan Sinks (Nihon Chinbotsu)** and Hanmura Ryo's extensive following would suggest this. Tsutsui Yasutaka, who has edited a series of "best of the year" anthologies, predicted in the 1975 edition the imminent collapse of sf as a distinct genre. Many of the stories chosen for the series appeared in mainstream magazines, rather than the speciality publications.

Meanwhile, major sf writers are spreading out into historical, mystery and straight fiction, while a number of mystery writers have done quite creditable science fiction. Itoh Norio was surprised during a visit to the United States to find how genre-bound American sf writers are. Reporting Harlan Ellison's announcement that he was leaving science fiction in order to get more equal consideration in the marketplace, Itoh observed that in Japan writers find it necessary to assert that they *are* science fiction authors.

Yet the crumbling of the walls around the sf ghetto has revealed only another set of barriers. This is the category of *taishu bungaku*, or "popular", perhaps even

*Available in abridged form from Tuttle Publishing Co – as *The Death of the Dragon* – and from Harper & Row.

"entertainment" literature. *Taishu bungaku* does not enjoy particularly high status in Japan. It is not considered very respectable, much less important. Acceptance of sf as serious literature is still slow in coming in Japan.

This is not to say that certain writers recognized in the world of letters, most conspicuously Abe Kobo, have not used science fiction techniques in their fiction. Abe's *Inter Ice Age 4 (Daiyon Kanpyoki)* is a compelling work investigating the moral implications of the relationship between the present and the future. Aside from the cavalier handling of technology, *Daiyon Kanpyoki* is a superior work, a serious attempt to investigate matters of profound concern. The science fiction elements have been picked to create a stage for metaphor. In this and other novels, Abe takes advantage of science fiction's potential for creating "controlled experiments" free from the givens of the real world that restrict the mainstream novelist's room for manoeuvre. But despite Abe's solid reputation, *Daiyon Kanpyoki* was first published in a non-literary magazine. The resistance to science fiction in Japan's world of letters remains formidable despite the advances noted at the beginning of this article.

Another major novelist who has written on the borderline of science fiction is Mishima Yukio. Mishima is sadly best known for his ritual suicide at a Japanese Self Defence Force base, but he was a strong writer and one not too greatly overrated. He also had a long-standing interest in UFOs. He was one of the first members of the first Japanese UFO watchers society *(Nihon Soratoby Enban Kenkyukai)* and this appears to have led to an interest in science fiction as well. On one occasion Mishima wrote to *Uchujin,* urging Japanese writers to break free of Western influence and realize the genre's potential as "the first literature capable of totally conquering modern humanism".[5] He was also on record as saying science fiction was the only approach by which Japanese literature could achieve intellectual success.[6]

Mishima's own science fiction novel, *Beautiful Planet (Utsukushii Hoshi),* is not considered one of his better works. A family comes to believe they are not human, but rather aliens entrusted with saving Earth, the beautiful planet of the title. They are opposed by a motley collection of characters who believe themselves to be aliens from Cygnus dispatched to destroy Earth. The novel is a good vehicle for Mishima to express his distaste with the "everyday life" of modern society, to which he hoped sf could prove an antidote.

It is doubtful whether Mishima's militant perception of the role of science fiction is shared by any of the writers working within the genre. Satire is common to much of Japanese science fiction, ranging from the stand-up comic short-shorts of Hoshi Shinichi which chide society in detail but have no serious qualms about its basic precepts to the black humor slapstick of Tsutsui Yasutaka, bleak stories that ultimately opt for disengagement. Hanmura Ryo's massive novels reinterpreting Japanese history from the inside out are often grim, but it seems more a state of mind based on acceptance, however unpleasant, of things as they are. Komatsu Sakyo, last of the big four, plays repeatedly with themes of annihilation, but does not have a political voice.

There is little kudos for human nature in post-war Japanese science fiction, and much pessimisim, even nihilism. But the criticism has no focus. There is little direct

consideration of modern society or its ills. It is not an activist literature.

One explanation for the apolitical nature of this bleak vision rests in the Second World War, a period many Japanese authors lived through. There are not a few short stories and novels that hark back to vivid memories of the Tokyo fire bombings. Japan lost the war and lost utterly. It is perhaps not surprising that even after the economic miracle of the 50s and 60s cheery optimism is hard to come by. Significantly, the most political voice in the field is Yamano Koichi of the post-war generation. Yamano's activism finds its roots in the student left, but ultimately it is a frustrated dissension that must content itself with individual solutions. The stories are bleak with a different hue as they reflect the betrayal of the student movement itself in a growth-oriented, materialistic Japan. Yamano's vision has remained a solitary one.

Indeed, the pervasive conservatism of this literature of the future is often surprising. Fukushima Masami, the man behind *SF Magazine*, whose constant efforts on behalf of the field earned him the title of "Mr SF", once debunked a fellow writer, asking how "anyone with an effeminate spirit like that can possibly write SF?" Women in Fukushima's future still arranged flowers, albeit electronically, and worried whether they were too old to find good husbands. Komatsu Sakyo, after carefully plotting out the demise of Japan in *Nihon Chinbotsu*, still has Taiwan in the United Nations and a non-communist South Vietnam. The handful of women writers are looked on with a certain condescension, and it is not at all surprising to have the women serving the men tea at sf fan club meetings. Things are changing, certainly, but science fiction is not at the cutting edge of Japanese society.

If so, what is science fiction in Japan, other than another form of entertainment literature that happens to use spaceships, or if not spaceships, the future, or if not the future, at least the unexpected? The boundaries of the field are so wide, and so permeable, that it is hard to find a more convincing definition of Japanese science fiction than stories (of almost any kind) written by an author who identifies himself as, or has been identified as, a science fiction writer either at present or sometime in the past, that leave the reader with something other than the common sense perceptions of everyday life. "Sense of wonder" is one of the operative terms for this last, but it can be achieved, apparently, just as easily in a story about a planet surrounded by black holes as in a story about hanging an elephant for murder (you use a cliff).

Thus at the working level there is tremendous variation in Japanese science fiction, from the straight forward 1950s solidity of Mayumura Taku and Toyata Aritsune to the pseudo-Hemingway of Tanaka Koji, he-man tales for the city dweller. There is the almost uniquely Japanese "dotabata sf", best translated as slapstick in the tradition of Japanese vaudeville, that was started by Tsutsui and has been inherited by Kanbe Musashi. There is Mitsuse Ryu, trying to forge a form of hard science lyricism in his future history, and Aramaki Yoshio, working a dense, literary fantasy. There are, in short, a great many very competent writers, working in almost every vein imaginable.

But while it is hard to say what Japanese science fiction is, it is somewhat easier to say some things it is not. It is not a literature of prophecy, nor is it a

literature of social criticism. It is not a literature with much more than a passing interest in science, and it is far more interested in what the Japanese are today than in what they might become. The Meiji era is long past, and sf is no longer a utopian literature.

Science fiction is not yet a particularly serious literature. Several Tokyo bookstores in 1978 had taken to placing the works of Kara Juro, a radical and occasionally visionary playwright, and Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, one of the most compelling spokesmen of the artistic left, on their science fiction racks, but in this the management showed more optimism than the field itself justified. Shibusawa has placed sf as the latest in a series of literary forms that supplement reality with the unreal. Science fiction, he asserts, only became possible when science changed from a source of security to an object of fear.[7] Mishima's ambitious pronouncements have already been noted. But at present neither the reading public nor the active writers harbour such grand designs.

Japanese science fiction today is still essentially content with entertaining the public mind. Sometimes it may chastise, but it sees no need for fundamental change. There are many competent writers and a number of excellent ones. There are a great many stories that deserve to be translated and read widely. But the field is still in need of a startling vision, and a determined conviction of its own.[8]

References

1. Reproduced in Yokota Junya's "Nihon SF Koten Koten", *SF Magazine,* September 1974. Yokota is a tireless excavator of Japan's science fiction past (and present). The long-running "Koten" series is a treasure trove.
2. Ishikawa Takashi's "Nihon SF-shi no Kokoromi" is a useful run through Japanese literature with an eye out for sf. It is reprinted, with much else of interest, in *SF no Jidai: Nihon SF no Taido to Tenbo,* published by Kiso Tengai-sha, 1977.
3. Shimamoto Mitsuteru's "Gaisetsu Nihon SF-shi" has appeared over a number of years in *Uchujin.* There are perhaps inevitable conflicts of opinion with other sf historians, but it is all interesting. The installment in *Uchujin* 172 (1973), is a good survey from the Meiji period to World War II.
4. Reprinted in the programme for Cosmicon '77, a convention celebrating the 20th anniversary of *Uchujin.*
5. The letter, "Ichi SF Fan no Wagamama na Kibo", is reprinted in *Mishima Yukio Zenshu,* v. 31, published by Shinchosha.
6. In the section on *Utsukushii Hoshi* in *Sekai no SF Bungaku Sokaisetu,* published by Jiyu Kokumin-sha, 1978. Essentially a book summarizing the plots of world sf classics, it is valuable for its summaries of major Japanese novels. There are also brief biographies of the authors.
7. From "Genso Bungaku ni Tsuite", *Shibusawa Tatsuhiko Shusei,* v. 7. published by Togensha. A rare appraisal by a scholar outside the field, but rather abstract.
8. Any attempt to summarize, much less criticize, a literary tradition with a hundred-year history, written in a totally foreign language, is presumptuous to say the least. I apologize in advance for any errors in my romanization of the notorious Japanese personal names, and for omitting many significant works and authors in such a short survey article.

Keith Roberts is justly admired as a writer of great artistry – as well as being an artist in his own right; so it is scarcely surprising that the presentation and 'feel' of his own works after metamorphosis into alien tongues is of great moment to him, as he explains below. Keith Roberts' latest book is the story collection Ladies From Hell.

Tongue-Twisting as a Sport

Keith Roberts

"Bless thee, Bottom; thou art translated . . .!"

The First Translation must be a significant event in the small, intricate life of any writer; unfortunately, I've forgotten what mine was. I'm surrounded by a mettlesome collection of them though. Many provide food for thought.

Here's a nice one to start with. *Tichá Hrůza,* proclaims the cover inscrutably. It's a Czech short story collection in which I share space with Bradbury, Daphne du Maurier and all sorts of worthy folk. The title page shows a trepanned Edwardian gentleman with a batlike object feeding off his brain. Nearly as nasty as a Monty Python graphic. "Boulter's Canaries" was the tale thus enshrined; the first story, actually, that I ever sold, though not the first to see print. Here it's become, perhaps predictably, *Boulterovi Kanáři.* It starts out splendidly. *Aleka Boultera znám už léta . . .* Well, you can't beat that for style can you?

It's an elegant little volume, replete with bookmark and silk headband; both something of a rarity these days. Its pages are tinted a delicate stinging-nettle green, which I heard they do in case students get eyestrain. I well remember Ted Carnell making this sale. He rang me up one evening in a state of barely-suppressed excitement – the only times I've actually heard heavy breathing have been from agents – and told me I'd earned great store of foreign currency. I wasn't over-impressed. Not to start with anyway. Though there was one pleasant little bonus. I was enabled to stroll into the office next morning and ask casually if anybody knew the current conversion rate for kopecks. I wouldn't normally have done such a thing, it honestly isn't my style; but they really were an unpleasant bunch of creeps.

When the cash came through it was my turn to whoop for breath. It resolved itself, even after fifteen per cent deduction for a foreign sale and a variety of stoppages at source, into the then-hefty sum of sixty quid. Since Boulter's technological pranks had made just £24.00 for First British Serial I felt well served out for cynicism; and incidentally started wondering whether Czechoslovakia really was a Workers' Paradise after all.

The story had an interesting little sequel. A year or so later I got talking to a chap in a Henley pub who said he had travelled extensively behind the Iron Curtain.

He claimed the Czech publishing industry, which is of course State controlled, has two scales of pay; one for native-born authors, the other to impress Western imperialists. I can't vouch for the truth of that but it would seem to figure. Crafty blighters, these politicians. Whatever the shade of armband.

The Czechs returned to the fray some time later and "Boulter" was bought once more, this time for dramatization by Radio Prague. That also paid handsomely; four times the going rate for British sf, or about half the minimum offer from any self-respecting women's mag.

"Boulter's Canaries" is a funny sort of story really, and it's had a funny sort of history. It's probably made more than anything else of equivalent length that I've ever done. In which I suppose there must be a moral. It seems to be the sort of thing editors, and therefore presumably fans, lap up; loads of luverly hard-core Facts to wallow about in. I remember the late Dennis Dobson, its first publisher, who I was told was also an amateur movie buff, gleefully searching my time-lapse calculations for errors. (And finding one, of course.) It's all a bit like the well-known Hardy mania. The thing seems to be not to assess the virtues, if any, of the great man's prose but to get that vast list of alternative place names thoroughly by heart. Never mind the quality, feel the width.

Speaking of the Iron Curtain, I sense the absence-presence of at least one weighty tome. *The Boat of Fate*, my one and only historical, was once offered for by a publisher in Warsaw. Payment was to be made in zlotys. I answered (and I have the carbon to prove it) that I didn't mind as long as they were free-range, I didn't want them in batteries because the wire netting makes their feet sore. I found out afterwards that they were coin of the realm and that since they're not allowed to be exported, a bank account had been opened for me over there. But since all subsequent enquiries have met with silence I've really no idea whether I'm a zloty millionaire or not. That in turn led to a highly curious thought. Do bank accounts in Communist countries pay interest? The answer, apparently, is that they do, else the system wouldn't work. Which left me wondering a trifle confusedly about the inevitability of Capitalism in any money-using society, and what all the bloody flag-waving is about anyway. It seems we're one day going to blow ourselves all to Kingdom Come for no detectable reason whatsoever. Except, of course, the sheer fun of the thing.

I wish it had been the Czechs who came up trumps. I only know of one good Pole, and he's not home because they made him Pope; but if it had been Czechoslovakia I'd have been off like a long dog. I'd find my way to Brno, that impossible town; to Kounovicá Street and the State Conservatoire of Music. I'd see the tintypes and the Ehrbar Grand, the little plain study where Janáček, the old lion, worked out his days. Perhaps I'd even make it to Hukvaldy, in the pine forests he loved so much, where he took Kamilla Stoesslová, one of the most beautiful women ever born and where he died of pneumonia after walking for hours in search of her young lost son.

Which I suppose shows my colours with a vengeance; and loses me another handful of fans. It's well known in sf circles that hard rock is the only music that exists. Well, tough luck. Rock *has* been known to make me cry; it happened the first time I heard the Fanshawe Paternoster. I'd be quite happy to break down

again, if I heard anything else as good; but I never have. All the rest just gives me a raging headache.

There's something about a story or book title that seems to rouse the most jaded publisher to a creative frenzy. I recall when my story "The Ministry of Children" first came out a very hard-working and conscientous editor wrote to suggest that since the main Baddie is nicknamed The Duke, a better title might be "Ed-Duke-ation". Which convinced me emotionally of what I'd previously learned by rote; that if you must make jokes, or puns, in sf they'd best be Teutonically broad. The other sort just plain ain't wanted.

Foreign publishers share this preoccupation to a high degree; and some of the results have been, to say the least, spectacular. I think *Pavane* has perhaps suffered more extensively than most; such a simple title, of course, is obviously ripe for improvement. *Dodendans met het Roomse Rijk* was the Dutch alternative; and if you think that's going some, just hold onto your hats. In German it became – and you'd better believe it – *Die Folgenschwere Ermordung Ihrer Majestät Königen Elisabeth I.* After which I suppose the only thing to do is tiptoe quietly away. Mark Twain does say somewhere that if you give a German scholar his head you won't see him again till he surfaces at the other side of the Atlantic with his verb in his mouth; but even so this is surely carrying a good thing a little too far.

The German tongue, I suspect, has been the Waterloo of abler linguists than I. I remember once planning a sendup of the vogue for British Nazi stories. In my version an Anglo-German alliance had produced a World Empire. (I thought of it after a fairly nasty run-in with some English public school louts on the Paddington-Henley train.) It finally surfaced as "Weihnachtabend", and is surely my most reprinted novella; so I sense another moral looming up. The joke is that most of the German phrases in it are a load of cobblers, or whatever the Teutonic equivalent might be. The translations I needed here and there for the odd bit of dialogue were supplied initially by a Swiss gentleman of my acquaintance (I use the word in its loosest possible sense) who volunteered for the task. I distrusted his efforts from the first. Aberrant though the tongue might be it didn't seem, even to my untutored ear, that "holy-night-evening" could conceivably be a proper translation for Christmas Eve. (Dear old Kornbluth was so much smarter; no pissing about at all.) Accordingly I sought the advice of a professional. When the good man had finished wiping his glasses he proclaimed the versions furnished quite the best of their kind he had ever seen. I thought whatever it was that had reduced a German translator to tears was well worth retaining; so *stet* was the order of the day. Unfortunately Messrs. Hutchinson's careful typesetters had other ideas. When the story finally came in for proofreading I saw the German sections had been partly, though not wholly, put right; so the thing as it stands is a fearsome mishmash for which all I can do is disclaim responsibility. I've been waiting ever since for somebody to write to me about the title, but it's never happened. Perhaps no-one out there Really Cares.

The only piece of German that I *know* is right, because I checked it out myself, is *Stille Nacht.* It's a beautiful, gentle, haunting carol and I wouldn't muck about with it for worlds. Strange how the very best poetry is always easy to read. Even in a foreign tongue. Not an umlaut in sight.

The newest giggle is that the collection in which "Weihnachtabend" appears has at

long last been sold to the Germans themselves. Der coals to Newcastle kommen are. I can scarcely wait to see what they do with those must-disputed passages. Translate them into "Schwarz Englischer" perhaps.

All my things have suffered more or less from Teutonic originality. There's one here, for instance, that calls itself *Der Neptun-Test.* It started life many years ago as *The Furies*; the "Neptune Test" itself, the rationalisation for reducing Wessex to rubble, is as I remember dealt with in about four lines. Anybody buying the book in the hope of nuclear revelations must have been sadly disappointed. What's the German for Trade Descriptions Act please, someone?

On second thoughts, no. Don't tell me . . .

The wheel came full circle with the Italian editor of *Pavane,* copies of which only came in this week. I see it's become *Pavana*; than which nothing, surely, could be more fair.

Italian really is tremendous fun. Though to start with advances can be a shade disappointing. Still after you realize that 200,000,000 lire = 2½p, that's all right.

Every Italian sentence, regardless of subject matter, looks as if it's been lifted straight from the nearest opera libretto. If opera didn't exist, the Italians would have had to invent it. Which of course is exactly what they did. Look at this bit:

'Milady,' disse riflettendo, 'questa è la guerra . . . ?
Lei si scrollò lan mano di dosso, respirando affanosamente. 'Volete andare?'
disse furiosa. 'O dovrò mandare qualcun altro . . .?'

It's the Lady Eleanor ordering the seneschal to rouse her tenants and liege-men in the costal villages after the treachery of her guest, the King's Champion. Quite strong stuff in the original I suppose; but it would sound so much better *sung.* And couldn't the critics have a ball with it?

"After the tenor's affecting *respirando* and the spirited *affanosamente* with which he is answered comes the duet *'Volete andare',* which forms the peak of this section of the work. In it, musical tensions we have sensed since *'Questa è la guerra'* finally begin to resolve . . ."

I think on the whole I'd rather read music critics than literary ones. They've brought wordwooze to such a degree of perfection these days that even the insults are barely detectable in the verbiage.

I tripped lightly over the great Dutch nation a little while ago. Let's trip lightly back. Here's one of my treasures, *Invasie van Giganten.* It, too, started life as *The Furies.* I'll choose a piece at random.

'Hallo, Bill,' klonk enn gesluierde stem. 'Ik wil wedden dat ik uit bed heb gebeld.'
Daar werd ik niets wijzer van. 'Eh . . . met wie spreek ik?'
'Met mij, sufferd. Met Jane . . .'

Now if there's one thing I'm prepared to bet about the Dutch it's that they don't have any sex problems. In fact I'll go further; it's a wonder how they've ever managed to survive as a nation. This is actually a rather tense little telephone conversation between Bill Sampson and his disturbingly attractive schoolgirl neighbour, in which she opens the batting by asking him huskily if she's got him out of bed. Now nobody, surely, could cherish the teeniest improper thought after having had to come out with a mouthful like, *Ik wil wedden dat ik je uit bed heb gebeld*;

while having to greet even the steamiest nymphet with, *Met wie spreek il?* would act on me at least like an overdose of bromide. One begins to see how those famous East India Company merchants managed to get so much done despite, undoubtedly, being surrounded by exotic distractions.

Nonetheless Dutch seems to me a most valuable and salutary tongue; so much so that I feel all sf writers should be compulsorily translated into it, and all fans made to read their favourite story in it at least once. What would happen, I ask you, to all those "Buzz words" by means of which the Sense of Wonder can be so effortlessly, or mindlessly, conjured up? You know the sort of thing. "Thundering" is great, "flame" and "fire" are always good for a whirl; "unknowable" and "unguessable" are useful despite their built-in tautology while "straining", with its vaguely erotic overtones, can be guaranteed to set the dullest pulse a-racing. But oh, in Dutch! "Poised on a thundering column of flame, the rocketship strained for the unknowable," would come out something like, "Het iss gon oop". A lost, undoubtedly, to our great Genre; but one, you know, that I almost feel I could live with.

One could go on indefinitely about the vagaries of foreign translation; even variations of punctuation can be intriguing. Here's good old *Las Furias* for instance; full, no doubt, of Spanish lisps and with the to my eye quaint custom of inverting a question mark at the *beginning* of a sentence as well as placing it right way up at the end. The effect is odd in the extreme; a sort of "Nudge nudge, wink wink, somebody's going to *ask* somebody something." The Portugese (*Vieram do Espaço, they* made the book) go at it in quite a different way. They, or at least *Livros do Brasil, Lisboa,* use our query system but replace inverted commas with thundering great dashes, so the whole thing looks like a copy brief that should have been written up but wasn't. While the Czechoslavakian I nentioned a while back is a language I'm sure I could never get used to. There seems to be something basically at fault with a communication system that needs to employ an accent over every other letter; it makes the lines of type look like so many rows of portholes, they'd be better off going back to Glagolitic. But I'll cut reflection short because I really want to get on to my Secret Vice, which I'm sure will one day send me blind; *reading my work in French!*

I suppose my relationship with the French language is a trifle one-sided. I've never really managed to get my tongue round it; I'm sure that to speak it at all well you need a heavy head cold at the very least. But there's nothing in this world more satisfying and elegant than French on the written page. *Anything* looks good in Gallic; luggage receipts, air fare restrictions, the lot. While as for sf stories; the grottiest become almost bearable, while a certain something is added to them all. If one knew exactly what it was there would be no need for a phrase like, *Je ne sais quoi.*

I've chosen two books from my "naughty shelf", both productions of the sadly-missed Editions Opta. The first is a double-decker containing both *The Furies* and *Pavane.* I remember the surprise I got on first opening it. The level of most sf artwork, quite frankly, is abysmal; for somebody who for his sins once spent four years working with real drawings, it's a recurring pain. And that, I'm afraid, isn't an opinion but a statement of incontrovertible fact. (There goes another bunch of supporters.) Here at last though is sound, uncluttered commercial illustration. Well-

drawn armoured vehicles do stern battle with horrid hymenoptera; the armies of Mediaeval fantasy swirl from the robes of a nicely-Gallicised Eleanor; Bill, Jane and Sek wander sadly from their stranded APC. And bless my soul, they've even got the Saracen right, to the hang and droop of her independently-suspended wheels! In between the plates of course are oodles of lovely Language. *Bonjour, Bill,* says Jane silkily. *Je parie que je vous ai tiré du lit,* which is much more to the mark. Even the carefully formal plural seems to develop a hint of bushy tail. *Furies* works a treat, though I have to admit *Pavane* needs a touch more concentration. I didn't fully realize at the time quite what a close-grained style I'd used, but the *traduction* reflects it faithfully. "Can I please 'ave zee English?" groaned an Anglo-French friend to whom I had thoughtfully given a copy. "Ze French eez so *difficile* . . . "

On one point only did my friends across the Channel go adrift; and that was probably my fault anyway. It's hard at times to decide where accuracy stops and pedantry sets in; but after all the research I'd done on my great steamers, the folk I'd talk to who'd driven and continue to drive them, I couldn't bring myself to use the invariable but inaccurate designation "traction engines". A "traction engine" was a smaller machine, say three or three and a half n.h.p., designed primarily for jobs about the farm. Those great beasts with their maroon livery and glinting barley-sugar brasswork, that still occasionally frighten the horses, are *road locomotives*; and that's where it all went wrong. As a matter of fact the definition also fooled the finest critic in the business, Algis Budrys; while he approved in general of my "locomotives" he added the curious rider that I'd avoided saying what their wheels were made of. I'd done no such thing; it had simply never crossed my mind that it was important. With steam fairs the growth industry they have become, I assumed everybody would know!

The French gave me a road of riveted steel plates; along it, horribly, chuffs something that looks like a refugee from a Sugarpuffs pack. Beside it a butterfly car gybes wildly, and I for one don't blame it. "I've heard of a *chemin de fer*," I wrote to the series editor, Michel Demuth, "but this is taking a joke too far . . ." But the rest of the production was so good that I was determined to be philosophical. *C'est brutale,* cried I, summoning all my Gallic wit, *mais ça marche* . . . The immortal words of M. Bouton to M. Le Comte de Dion when he one day made a motor car that had a gearbox but no clutch. Apposite, though I, and in *exquisite* taste; it should have been a gas. M. Demuth did not respond; and I later heard to my surprise and deep dismay that he'd been rather upset and thought I didn't like the book. So, no more bilingual gags for Roberts. One's own tongue can have a nasty habit of backfiring at times, let alone trying to juggle with two at once.

It speaks worlds for Michel's forbearance that not too long afterwards he bought me again; and gave me, quite simply, the most beautiful production of any of my works I ever hope to see. I have *Les Géants de Craie* beside me as I write. Years have elapsed; but I still open it with a little thrill of disbelief.

You know, words are very funny things. They're the only basic tool we have for getting on with each other and making sense of the world. They can sing and thunder, dance and cry; unlock Fairyland, and help win wars. Yet there are whole areas in which they just don't work. "Words fail me . . ." As a *cliché*, it's probably centuries old. But how often have you said it, or thought it? And how often has it

been *true*?

One of the regions where fools rush in but literacy fears to tread is sex. Get overt, and one of two things happens. Either prurience sets in, voyeurism, which kills the very effect you're trying to achieve; or the whole thing becomes hilarious. Which of course does even more damage. Yet *The Chalk Giants* is an erotic book. The only one, in fact, I've ever written. So how to proceed? The answer's a lemon. I can't, not beyond a certain well-defined point. The reader's own imagination must flesh out, colour. If he or she doesn't happen to possess such a thing – a phenomenon not entirely unknown, even, alas, among the ranks of sf enthusiasts – so much the worse for me. They'll get no "lift" from it, it will leave them "unfulfilled". Though in this respect I should perhaps echo the classic comment of Leslie Thomas, that I'm a novelist, not a bloody faith healer.

I'm not talking about superficial matters like censorship by the way. I'm concerned with *taste*. Let aesthetics enter the arena and the Whitehouses and Longfords recede into their proper perspective. Busy little people, without a doubt; but irrelevant.

All of which may seem a long way from questions of translation. But it isn't really.

Bonfiglioli always used to say that the word "illustration" should be pronounced with the stress on the second syllable, since its real meaning is to flood with light. Now see the infinite *tact* of the French. Mata, in full colour, climbs from her reedy pool She's the most *naked* "naked little girl" one can imagine. She still has the slight pot belly of childhood, her breasts are wholly unformed. Only her eyes are mature; old, wise and dead. On the end papers, Maggie cuddles Martine. The bodies curl and twine, make one shape; yet they are pathetically exposed, Marty's knees are drawn quite properly together; but still we see the "hoofprint of the doe", the cause of so much anguish. The composition is static yet tense. Rocks crowd a foreshore; and the immense horizon *curves*. The execution of the whole thing is breathtaking. They've matched me with a master; and he has finished my book for me, *shown* what I could not. A magic circle is complete.

Between the endplates, of course, is a private feast of text. *Sun over a low hill*, I called my first section. Not, perhaps, the most stirring of subtitles. But how about *Le soleil au-dessus d'une colline basse*? Makes it all come right, don't it? And try this for size:

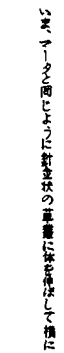
> *Je savais alors ce que je voulais. Quand Marty est arrivée. Mais je ne voulais pas l'admettre. Pas dès le début. C'était idiot. Quand on cesse d'être franc avec soi-même, c'est la qu'on se met à vieiller . . .*
>
> *Je me demande si elle savait. Dés le début? Tous les bobards sur i'intuition féminine. Des excuses pour têtes creuses . . .*

It's a tricky little section that has to do with what they call, for want of a better term, Lesbianism. (I had structural reasons for including it that had nothing to do with that prurience of which I complained so ardently, but I won't go into that here; this isn't an apologetic.) Maggie, the dropped-out schoolteacher turned folk singer, is musing about the pretty young barmaid she desired for so long, and who is now within her reach. Dodgy, potentially offensive material that needed kid gloves

in English. But the French seems to have taken it all in its stride. Or is that just another example of national bigotry? Can it merely be that we're less concerned about Gallic aberrations than British ones?

Like I said, I read French for pleasure. I think I could taste the difference between a good translation and a workaday one. But even if you can't catch all the nuances there are other ways of testing foreign copy. A good one is to check the quality and frequency of the footnotes; and these are a delight. Guy Fawkes Night, when *Fawkes et ses amis catholiques faillirent faire sauter le Parlement britannique,* gets a singularly loving mensh while a measurement *en pouces* acquires a scream-stick and a hasty metric conversion. Fair enough; else everybody'd think I was going on about a three inch wide woman. The Bloody Assize, Barrisal Guns; it's all covered. Including some things I'd never ever have thought of. *Les fenêtres anglaises,* says the ever-watchful 'N.D.T', *ne l'oublions pas, sont toute à guillotine . . .* Here we have *Matthieu XXV, 29*; here the *Elégie écrite dans un cimetière de campagne*; and here, surely, the final accolade. I see I've quoted Swinburne; *Un jardin abandonné* no less. But I don't *know* any Swinburne, I've *never* known any Swinburne. Except that line about the Pale Galilean; and I don't know where that comes *from*! A little pink about the gills, I hand these Princes among translators the ultimate bouquet.

There are moments in the best-regulated life when all language palls; Czech with its rows of portholes, Spanish with its upside-down wotthers, German with its — well, the various things that German has. French with its limpid elegance, even our own mighty double-rooted Tongue. But at such times I still have a final line of defence; and it's never failed me yet. It calms me, uplifts my spirit. It's sublime with the sublimity of perfection. Here, I know, I shall never find those unchecked literals that range from the Surreal to the obscene; those transposed lines; those unloved, unwanted commas, graceless as bugs, that rain so thick from poised and trembling Biros; those deletions, those improvements, those Bowdlerings with which editor after editor has "saved" my work. For all I can tell, the text may crawl with them; but the wonderful thing is, I shall never know. It's "The God House" in Japanese; and it starts thus.



The rest is blessèd peace.

Alan Myers is a schoolmaster now living in London, but who resided for some years in Moscow. He has translated Russian sf novels into English (the Strugatskys' Far Rainbow *and forthcoming* Snail on the Slope*), and compiled an extensive bibliography of Russian and Soviet sf to 1966. A copy of this work resides at the Science Fiction Foundation, together with Mr Myers' extensive collection of Russian science fiction.*

Some Developments in Soviet SF Since 1966

Alan Myers

The year 1966 can be seen as a dividing line in Soviet sf in a number of ways. In some areas, new ground was broken; in others, existing trends were intensified; in yet others, hitherto lively themes broke off or petered out.

New ground was taken over with the publication, in the 1966 Leningrad anthology *Ellinskiy Sekret,* of S. Snegov's *Men like Gods.* Parts two and three came out in 1968 and 1974. This immense novel is a space opera on a galactic scale, rather reminiscent of Asimov's Foundation trilogy. Nothing like it had appeared in Soviet sf since the 20s and Snegov's work is strikingly better written and ideologically much more convincing.

In the year 563 of the Communist Era, terrestrial "stellar ploughs" penetrate to the most distant systems of our galaxy. These vast spaceships can convert space into matter (the Tanev effect) and can thus attain velocities many times in excess of light. The galaxy is swarming with intelligent life of all kinds; semi-transparent beings on Altair; primitive winged creatures from the Hyades; beautiful shimmering Vegans. All of these are, in fact, at a lower stage of development then is man; likewise, all of them are at the mercy of a menace threatening them from the depths of the galaxy. This is the advance of the "destroyers" from Perseus. These fearful creatures, a symbiotic form of living and cybernetic being, have reached a high level of scientific progress and have embarked on a career of conquest and enslavement. As events progress, it seems that humanity is faced with a choice. It can either remain "above the battle" and concentrate on its own safety or it can defend the weaker life-forms in a battle to the death. The dilemma is well-argued. For the "humanity first" camp Romero, a historian, speaks as follows:

> Our knowledge of alient life-forms has proved that humanity is the highest form of intelligent life. Only now do I understand the full meaning of the criterion "all for the good of man and the race of men". An unexpected danger hangs over humanity. We must, today, think only of ourselves, only of ourselves! No sort of altruism is worth sacrificing the interests of mankind for!!

His opponent, Vera speaks thus:

> Man is the friend of all that is good and intelligent in the universe! Now we have come face to face with other worlds. Can we really pass by with indifference creatures who are perishing for lack of light, warmth, or food? Can our tongues really say: "you look after yourselves and we will do likewise – freeze to death if you can't think of a way out . . ." . . . we must become worthy of ourselves!

Apart from the main conflict situation, the novel attempts to differentiate characters and outline various other ethical conflicts seen as part of future society. But there is no detailed exposition of future technology; Snegov employs a broad brush and prefers to excite the imagination rather than employ a meticulous descriptive method. One intriguing set-piece, however, is the artificial planet, Ora; this planet, many light years from Earth, is equipped with a variety of environments suitable for the reception of the various galactic races. Similarly interesting is the vast computer complex "The Great Academic", one million cells of which are allotted to each Earth inhabitant as a kind of guardian angel. It is an ever-vigilant protector from danger and illness; rather ominously: "if it detects any signs of mental breakdown, then, as an integral part of the 'Great Academic', it sounds the alarm before all humanity"

Another life form encountered in the novel is "the Galactics". These are indifferent to good and evil alike. In their efforts to convert "the wonderful moment into a wonderful eternity" they have become a stagnant well-fed, complacent utopia. Snegov's heroes argue the case for dynamism: "Look at the world – how much broader and richer than your blueprints. It's all contradictions, full of all manner of things and you just string it out in a kind of line. It points in every direction, it's going off at every angle like an explosion and all you notice is the bit of it that happens to hit you in the chest."

In part three (1974) both the Destroyers and the Galactics have become the allies of mankind and a joint expedition is on the way to the galactic core to establish contact with the mysterious Ramirs. These latter make their presence known by a number of phenomena running counter to the natural order, including the hurling of entire stellar clusters out of the galactic centre. The Ramirs take hostile action against the expedition and lock the surviving ships in a Reverse Time Loop. Eli, the expedition's commander, continues to hope for contact, believing that high civilisation is incompatible with senseless cruelty. The Ramirs' purpose is seen to be the reversal of entropy and the expedition's fate is a mere fragment of the whole plan: nevertheless the expedition appeals to the Ramirs to recognise the right of biological intelligence to have a destiny in the universe. Eli declares:

> "My tiny brain is capable of forming 10^{60} connections – many more than the total number of material particles and waves in the universe. And every connection is a picture: phenomena, events, particles, waves, signals. Everything that can be formed in the universe will find its reflection in me, become an image duplicating the real object within me . . . I am the mirror of the world, think on this."

> Further: "We, that is life, are as yet a minuscule force within the universe, an insignificant field within thousands of other fields. But we are the only growing field, growing, not conserving. We have come into being at the edge of the galaxy and are moving towards the

centre. We are expanding fast and multiplying quickly. We have a different time scale – one of your seconds is equal to our millennia. We, life, are an explosion in inert matter! I say to you, we are the future of the universe."

Certainly nothing on this scale had ever appeared in the USSR before. It heralded a new freedom to expand and exult in the universe without the continual hedging and socio-political qualifications we find in a work like Efremov's *Andromeda* for example. Even though Snegov concedes there are forces in the galaxy greater than man, he does not adopt the pessimism of Stanislaw Lem (in such confrontations of man and the unknown as *Solaris, The Invincible* or *Eden*). Snegov, as it were, synthesis the optimism of Efremov and the pessimism of Len and transposes his conflicts to a higher level where they are resolved within a dynamic framework.

It should be noted here that the level-headed Soviet critics, E. Brandis and V. Dmitriyevsky, are at pains to disarm criticism of Snegov: "Sergei Snegov's epic-novel may strike some critics as merely a Soviet version of 'space opera'. Not everyone picks up its ironic undertones, which are in fact directed against the stereotyped devices of that very genre . . ." The critics go on to heap praise on the novel's fast-moving plot, endless invention, convincing human characters and the profundity of its philosophocial reasoning.

Another new theme, that of possession by aliens, appears in 1975 in A. Mirer's *Wanderer's Home.* It's quite clear that the anthropocentric views of Efremov, Martynov and other polemicists of the early 60s have now gone completely by the board:

[the tiny alien ship] contains several hundred crystals about the size of a heavy-calibre bullet. The big ships with the colonisers carry millions and they're the ships that will land on Earth. They've done it plenty of times – taken over alien planets without a shot. They just transplanted one of their own minds into each "savage" they came across. Three billion crystals have been prepared for Earth, enough for everybody . . .

It should be noted that the idea of hostile aliens is itself an idea which has had to fight hard for a place in the Soviet sf. The views of Efremov and others that the highest forms of life in the universe would certainly be humanoid and well disposed toward mankind have taken a long time to subvert. V. Savchenko had pioneered the idea of life-forms implacably hostile to mankind in his story "Second Expedition" (1960) but even the example of Lem's *The Invincible*, translated into Russian in 1964, failed to start a sub-genre within Soviet sf. Of course, as well as Efremov's ideas, the hostile alien was inevitably linked with the worst type of western sf with its galactic wars and alien invasions. Nevertheless, M. Pukhov in the anthology *Fantastika* (1967), wrote a story which owed much to Savchenko. Entitled "Hunting Expedition", it deals with a spaceship apparently manned by western spacemen, though no names are used; the ship is rounding up some alien creatures to take back to Earth, presumably for profit. The last chilling lines recall Savchenko's plot:

He did not know that he was not the leader but the led, not the master but the slave, not a Member of the Animal Preservation Society, but an animal to be preserved.

He did not know that there are intelligences equal to man's in ferocity and that the herd which he was leading towards Earth had become a swarm flying towards Earth.

Pukhov does not permit his readers the happy resolution which Savchenko had devised seven years earlier. These works of Snegov, Mirer and Pukhov imply the rejection of anthropomorphic theories; A. Valentinov in his story "Enchanted Planet", which appeared in *World Adventures* (1975), specifically denies that terrestrial physical laws hold good throughout the universe or that intelligent races must necessarily be benevolent:

> You have shown people what dangers await them in space. And . . . if there were any of them inclined to dismiss them, thinking that highly organised creatures were certain to find common ground, well you've helped them to grow up.

Another theme first encountered in isolation in the early 60s – the post-*Andromeda* period – was travel in hyper-space. Since 1966 this has become commonplace in Soviet sf, permitting the subject matter of sf to expand into areas formerly the preserve of western sf, i.e. space fiction as such. Interestingly, matter-transference, mentioned in the Strugatsky tale, *Far Rainbow* (1963), has never been developed.

Time-travel is still approached cautiously; wholesale tampering with the past in order to alter the present is, not surprisingly, taboo. The young writer A. Balabukha, in his story "Appendix" in *Fantastika* (1967), however, describes a time service operating in the future. Termed Mind Security, this service has operatives intervening in human history, pruning those who, by some freak, are geniuses born ahead of their time. In this story it is Evarist Galois who must die young. Taut and suspenseful, the tale is somewhat reminiscent of Poul Anderson's *Corridors of Time.*

V. Mikhailov in his excellent story "Deep Minus" (*Fantastika,* 1966) has his heroes working far back in time researching into, among other things, the extinction of the dinosaurs. The story of temporal disaster and rescue which then ensues is, to my mind, one of the best productions of Soviet sf in the 1960s. The real pioneer in this field is, however, Olga Larionova, whose story "The Kilimanjaro Leopard" came out in the collection *N.F. 3* (1965). Here an experiment goes wrong and a spaceship is displaced in time. It brings back, among other future data, the death rates of all people living on Earth. What difference this makes to a given group of people makes for a serious and absorbing narrative.
Despite these promising harbingers, time travel stories have remained rare.
K. Bulychov has a jokey tale in *Fantastika* (1969-70), "Fault on the Line", where a technician of 2056 gets his lines crossed and mixes up 1967 and 1667 with humorous results, but rather more typical is V. Mikhanovskiy in the *N.F. 12* anthology (1972). A scientist "sees" the future misuse of his discoveries and sets about preventing this. A novel which approaches time travel as a scientific problem is *Researches at the Time Institute* by A. Gromova and R. Nudelman (1973). This is a sober laboratory tale of time-displacement experiments. The authors feel it necessary to add an afterword quoting Lenin and asserting that the novel's theme does not contradict dialectical materialism. Another point of interest is that the novel includes two other sf writers among the characters – the Strugatsky brothers, thinly disguised as the brothers Struchkov!

There can also be found a number of stories which transport the hero in some

way back to the revolutionary past of the Soviet Union, a patriotic reminder of the "lest we forget" sort. On the other hand, the kind of novel in which the hero is transported into the utopian future (Martynov's novels and the Strugatskys *Noon: 22nd Century* for example) seem to have disappeared altogether.

M. Chudnova's remarkable "Lebensraum" (*Fantastika,* 1969-70) tells of a man whose life is circumscribed in space but not in time. He is able to travel at will in time, but the space he inhabits on the Earth gets smaller and smaller! The story concentrates on the "space" rather than the "time" theme however. In M. Pukhov's "Loss" (*Fantastika,* 1971) the main plot line concerns the catastrophic displacement of a spaceship in time and space but the emphasis of the narrative is elsewhere; we are introduced to an individual genius-investigator familar from 1920s sf (and indeed Sherlock Holmes), who is called in to solve the problem. This is a rarity in modern Soviet sf, since the individual eccentric genius has long been identified by Soviet critics as being typical of bourgeois western sf, and alien to the Soviet concept of the collective.

Even that most stable of sub-genres, the anti-western "pamphlet" undergoes some change after 1966. There are mentions of unemployment benefit, for example, and the old picture of a rat-race society bedevilled by unemployment gives way to something more up to date. More often than not, western society is shown as affluent, with a kind of state or 'cybernetic' socialism in operation. Welfare benefits keep the workers happy and insensible to their condition. Such societies are shown to be heartless, however, and lacking in all dynamism. Mind-swapping boredom is the general lot, with increasing spiritual desperation taking the place of the old material deprivations (see my review of the Strugatskys' *Final Circle of Paradise* in *Foundation* 14). S. Gansovskiy, in his "Milky Way" (*Fantastika,* 1974), also gives some good examples of "Western" problems: pollution, nuclear arms, and over-population. He adds, incidentally, that the Soviet Union has solved the latter but omits to say how.

Provincial publishing houses, however, are still turning out the sort of tale popularised by A. Belyaev in the 1920s and much imitated since. An example is *Invasion from the Past* by Kondratov and Sokolnikov published in Kuibyshev in 1968. The content is familiar stuff: flying saucer phenomena are observed over a Pacific Island. Have aliens landed? It turns out to be a plot by "nuclear adventurers". Russian sailors play a major part in uncovering the capitalist fraud. An attempt at updating is made in the introduction, which resumes the evidence for alien visits to Earth and flying saucer sightings.

A good deal more interesting is the development of the "ambivalent pamphlet", a form of dystopian literature which depicts a corrupt or tyrannical society but leaves it an open question as to exactly whose society it is, or will be. Some are clearly capitalist societies, but could they also be a comment on the future of Soviet society? Some are stated to be "fascist", but does this merely cover an attack closer home? The Khruschev period in the early 1960s spawned not only Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Left of Ivan Denisovitch* but also A. Sharov's brilliant anti-Stalinist satire "Pirrow Island" (*Fantastika,* 1965). A "dictator" also figures in V. Bakhnov's "When the Sun Went Out" (*Fantastika,* 1968). The hero, one Dino Dinami, displays many Stalinist characteristics, including

demands for instant unquestioning obedience and megalomania, but the critics affected to see in it a portrayal of a fascist dictator. Efremov's last work, the novel *The Hour of the Bull* (1970), contains a savage attack on a Stalinist dictator figure.

The Leningrad writer I. Varshavskiy had, prior to 1966, written some stories set in "Donomaga", a repressive society of machine slavery. He continued the series in 1967 with the story "Cockroaches". We see again the new stereotype of capitalism as an economic structure which produces material abundance but is spiritually sterile. A welfare state is in operation, but all creative work is reserved for the ruling élite (the lop-ears). Donomaga, it seems, is screened off from the communist world where, we are informed, "the living standard is no lower". In this spoon-fed society, Varshavskiy lets his anger show:

> "Inane, well-fed faces, empty eyes, total apathy towards everything" . . . "Automation and abundance. How many years have we bowed down to those two idols. Guzzle, guzzle."

Varshavskiy shows this as the Donomagan answer to class conflict. There are no cars in Donomoga. "In Donomaga it's a long time since anyone had anywhere to hurry to." His hero, Toni, explodes with anger when Loi, one of the élite, twits him about his childish pastimes: "And what else have you left us?"

The conclusion of the story comes when Loi stumbles in with the news that Max, a trained gorilla, has done in one week what Loi has been working on for five years. "Lets go and race cockroaches," says Toni.

"Cockroaches" is longer and more satisfying than Varshavskiy's normal output, but there is still too much bald assertion and too little plausible analysis. The satire is crude and over-explicit. There is, however, in my view no need to agonise over what country Donomaga is supposed to be. Varshavskiy from the early 60s onwards had tended to scepticism over the supposed beneficial results of scientific progress. His "Molecular Cafe" (1960) is a short paean in praise of "real" food. His "Terra Firma" (1964) is something unique in Soviet sf – a biological utopia. Returning spacemen find an idyllic pastoral society established on Earth, with adapted or trained flora and fauna carrying out all the usual functions of machinery. Surely it is not fanciful to see in the "ambivalent pamphlets" of Varshavskiy and others a genuine concern for what the *world* may come to, rather than one or another country, however many local references can be tracked down.

It is to the Strugatsky brothers finally that we must turn to see sf writers at the limits of the genre in the USSR. The recent spate of long-overdue translations has acquainted Western readers with much of their work, both of the early utopian period (*Noon: 22nd Century* and *Far Rainbow*) and of their middle-period (in particular *Hard to be a God*). 1966 was a watershed for them; in that year the first part of *The Snail on the Slope* appeared in the *Ellinskiy Sekret* anthology. This part is the self-contained story of Kandid, a biologist, whose helicopter is brought down deep inside the forest his bio-station had been

rather tentatively studying. The forest is a place of nightmare; not only are the flora and fauna appallingly dangerous, the whole place is full of puzzling phenomena, apparently not susceptible to rational explanation. The aboriginal inhabitants are cowed and helpless before the power structure at work within the forest. Their villages are wiped out from time to time, or ravaged by plagues of mushrooms or overrun with grass which affects their minds. Lacking any real information about what is happening, and lacking the props of religion and history, they have retreated into apathetic parochialism and a language of endless repetition and evasion. Kandid seems to have undergond some kind of brain operation at the hands of the villagers and has great difficult in coming to terms with his environment; at last he sets out to discover what hierarchy it is which controls the forest. The answers he finds are astonishing in themselves but present him with essentially the same dilemma which faced Anton in *Hard to be a God.* Should he accept the "historical necessity" which prevails in this place and throw in his lot with the hierarchy or should he defy the historical process and obstruct it as much as possible, whatever the consequences? It is possible to interpret this as a fundamental criticism of Marxist philosophy, the aborigines as symbolisng the Russian people, the masters of the forest as their oppressors and so on, but no one who has read the book with attention, in my view, would carry this as their abiding impression. The picture is altogether broader, though not necessarily more acceptable to hard-line Russian critics. I sense there an anguish about the whole human condition, an anguish even more poignant, if more puritanical, in the second part of the novel, published rather surreptitiously in the Siberian journal *Baikal* in 1968. This section of the novel (the chapters in both parts should be interleavedin the complete book) is altogether less exotic than the first, though oppressive enough in all conscience. Set in the Directorate overlooking the forest, it presents a Kafkaesque picture of secretiveness, incompetence, wasted effort and maniacal order-issuing. The Strugatskys' protagonist, Pepper, is lost in this atmosphere of unnerving arbitrariness and makes efforts to get away from the place. Thwarted at every turn, he tinds himself unwillingly floating upwards in the power-structure — in contrast with Kandid in the forest, who is meanwhile sinking to the bottom of the hierarchy there. Everywhere is felt the brooding presence of the forest, at one sinister and, to Pepper at least, fascinating; it embodies his ideals in a manner which is not really made clear to the reader. It remains a symbol of mystical potential, resisting Pepper's efforts to penetrate its secrets as effectively as it resists the Directorate's crass attempts to cover it in concrete and "eradicate" the native population.

This picture of a corrupt and philistine bureaucracy, however grotesque, was too much for the Soviet censorship and the second part has never appeared in book form; in fact neither part has since been published in the USSR.

This obsession with the blighting effects of the bureaucratic process on scientific activity was embodied in the figure of Vybegallo in *Monday begins on Saturday* (1965) and the same personage plays a major role in *The Tale of the Troika*, which came out in the magazine *Angara*, again in Siberia, in 1968. This has never achieved book status and has never since been republished.

Once again the debased jargon of bureaucracy is used to telling effect, but to my mind the novel is heavy going, especially for an English reader. My contention that these assaults by the Strugatskys on power-élites of whatever kind represent not so much attacks on a supposed Soviet actuality, as a despairing response to situations they see developing in the world as a whole, is supported by the episode with the alien in this novel. The debased hierarchy of the imaginary country of the Troika is quite unable to come to terms with the unknown, possibly wonderful future, here represented by an alien visitor.

The move of the Strugatskys after 1966, away from the heights of popularity and success they had attained with *Hard to be a God*, continued with the novel *Ugly Swans* unpublished in the USSR but due to come out in English by the time this article appears. Indeed, their period in the wilderness lasted till 1971, when the novel *The Inhabited Island* was published (translated into English as *Prisoners of Power*). This seems to be widely regarded as a rather simply-constructed adventure yarn, with the protagonist, Maxim, leading a successful revolt against yet another power-élite on a far planet. This time the élite is explicitly identified as "fascist", as was the hierarchy of *Hard to be a God*, but here again the content of the novel eludes precise definition. Compared with *The Snail on the Slope* the book certainly represents a simplification. The enemy is clearly identifiable, in the person of the "Unknown Fathers" ("All-Powerful Creators" in translation), rather than an atmosphere or set of corrupting attitudes as in *Snail*.

But in one way the book represents a further, and to date, a last step in the Strugatsky hero's mental evolution. In this book, Maxim is actually successful in overturning the power-structure and faces a different problem from that confronted by the helpless and desperate Kandid. This position is that of Pepper in a much-simplified form.

> Maxim realised that he was in a gigantic trap, that contact would be established only when he had literally turned inside out all the conventional ideas which had taken root over millennia.

The "Unknown Fathers", bolstered by the deft application of modern techniques of persuasion, had indeed been "extremely popular". Maxim, however, sets aside the angst-ridden pessimism of *Snail* and addresses the planet in confident tones:

> I've got only two alternatives: either yearn for the impossible and stand biting my nails uselessly, or make up my mind to live. Really live, the way I've always wanted to – loving my friends, achieving aims, struggling, winning, losing, getting a bloody nose, paying it back – all of that, only not standing and wringing my hands.

In *Roadside Picnic* (1972), the brothers' most significant work since their return, we find blighted ideals once more, as another Directorate overlooks the Zone of an alien visitation and attempts to come to terms with the unknown in a vulgarly materialistic manner (see my review in *Foundation* 14). This time only a miracle, in the form of a golden ball which grants all wishes, can

save the hero's disintegrating morale. I find this book powerfully affecting and the extraordinary ending both poignant and satisfying. The long road since *Noon: 22nd Century* has come to its bitter end. The ideal of the golden utopia is shattered because the search for the means to it involves compromise, and ultimately, corruption and sterility.

After 1966, finally, the translation field really began to blossom and shows every sign of continuing to do so. The Library of Contemporary Fantasy appeared in 25 volumes between 1965-73 and brought an enormous range of modern foreign sf before the Soviet reader. The series included a volume of Japanese sf by Kobo Abe, Scandinavian sf stories, major novels by Lem and Clarke, Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, Asimov's *The End of Eternity*, Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and a great number of stories by Sheckley, Bester, Simak and Vonnegut. 1972 saw the publication of a volume of Italian short stories, preceded by French (1967) and Japanese (1969). Theme anthologies also appeared, e.g. stories by non-fantasy writers (1968). This included Forster's "The Machine Stops". *Far Flight* (1972) was a collection of space tales, as had been *The Call of Space* (1969). *Space Hospital* (1972) was devoted to stories of alien life forms. The title story is taken from James White, and the book also includes Schmitz's "Grandpa". In 1969 the collection *The Muses in the Space Age* had the amusing idea of collecting only stories dealing with the arts. *The Sands of the Ages* (1970) contained time-travel stories. *A Feast of Demons* (1968) brought together sf stories by scientists, including Asimov, Wiener, Frisch and Hoyle. Humorous stories appeared in *June 31st* (1968). There were many others, too, one concerning the planets (1971) one on robots (1971) and so on.

Mention should also be made of the *Library of Adventure* (1965-70) which included in volume 16 Clarke's *A Fall of Moondust* and Asimov's *Caves of Steel* and *I Robot*.

Translations also appeared in anthologies of native work. For example the series sf carried Heinlein's "And He Built a Crooked House" and "If This Goes On" and Russell's 'Allamagoosa'. The adventure magazine *Seeker* also published Tenn's "Bernie the Faust", Dickson's "Computers don't Argue" and a shortened version of Theodore Thomas and Kate Wilhelm's *The Clone*.

This flood of translation has enabled foreign writers to build up a following in the USSR; though the only poll I have seen appeared in *Fantastika* of 1967. Readers may be interested in its findings. The most popular works are listed in order:

1. *Hard to be a God*, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky
2. *Monday begins on Saturday*, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky
3. *The Martian Chronicles*, Ray Bradbury
4. *Solaris*, Stanislaw Lem
5. *The Invincible*, Stanislaw Lem
6. *Far Rainbow*, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky
7. *Stories*, Robert Sheckley
8. *I, Robot*, Isaac Asimov
9. *Return from the Stars*, Stanislaw Lem

10. *An Age's Predators,* Arkady and Boris Strugatsky
11. *Andromeda,* Ivan Efremov.

It will be no surprise to learn that criticism of sf in general has improved out of all recognition. There have been interesting articles on the history of the genre in Russia, notably by R. Nudelman and B. Revich; a substantial work on the same lines was produced by A. Britikov in 1970. Yu. Kagarlitskiy and T. Chernysheva have written in most erudite fashion on questions of genre definition, myth-making and so on; on a lower, expository level, E. Brandis and V. Dmitriyevsky have continued their work of sober enlightenment. Copious translation has had the heartening additional effect of assisting Russian critics in arriving at a more balanced estimated than hitherto of western writers. The days of wholesale condemnation are gone and I look forward to the day when that sector of western sf so far untranslated — the "New Wave" writers, to use a broad term — will also reach the Soviet reading public, just as Soviet writers other than the Strugatskys are now reaching readers in the West.

The following article is one of a series of profiles assembled by Charles Platt for publication in book form later this year (by Berkley-Putnam in the USA and Savoy Books in Britain). Interviews are not normally Foundation's *meat and drink, but we found this one valuable for its insights into the character of one of the foremost modern writers of sf. After spending much of 1979 in Britain, Charles Platt is now living once again in New York, together with an array of rapidly-obsolescing computer gadgetry.*

An Interview with Thomas M. Disch

Charles Platt

New York, city of contrasts! Here we are on Fourteenth Street, walking past The New School Graduate Faculty, a clean modern building. Inside it today there is a fine museum exhibit of surreal landscape photography, but the drapes are permanently closed across the windows because, out here on the stained sidewalk, just the other side of the plate-glass, it's Filth City, peopled by the usual cast of winos, monte dealers, shopping-bag ladies festooned in rags and mumbling obscenities, addicts nodding out and falling off fire hydrants. Fourteenth Street, clientele from Puerto Rico, merchandise from Taiwan. And *what* merchandise! In

stores as garish and impermanent as sideshows at a cheap carnival, here are plastic dinner-plates and vases, plastic toys, plastic flowers and fruit, plastic statues of Jesus, plastic furniture, plastic trousers and jackets – all in Da-Glo colours, naturally. And outside the stores are dark dudes in pimp-hats and shades, peddling leather belts, pink and orange wigs, and afro-combs . . . itinerant vendors of kebabs cooked over flaming charcoal in aluminium handcarts . . . crazy old men selling giant balloons . . . hustlers of every description. And further, on through the perpetual fanfare of disco music and car horns, past the *Banco Populare,* here is Union Square, under the shadow of the Klein Sign. Klein's, a semi-respectable old department store, was driven out of business by the local traders and has lain empty for years, but its falling-apart facade still looms over the square, confirming the bankrupt status of the area. While in the square itself – over here, brother, here, my man, I got 'em, loose joints, angel dust, hash, coke, THC, smack, acid, speed, Valium, 'ludes, Seconal, Elavil!

Union Square wasn't always like this. Michael Moorcock once told me that it acquired its name by being the last major battlefield of the American Civil War. Foolishly, I believed him. In truth there are ties here with the American labour movement: many trades unions are still headquartered in the old, dignified buildings, outside of which stand old, dignified union men, in defensive lunch-hour cliques, glaring at the panhandlers and hustlers toting pint bottles of wine in paper bags and giant 20-watt ten-band Panasonic stereo portables blaring more disco! disco! disco!

Oddly enough we are looking for an address, here, of a writer who is known in the science-fiction field for his almost elitist, civilized sensibilities. He has moved into an ex-office building that has been converted from commercial to residential status. Union Square is on the edge of "Chelsea", which is supposed to be the new Soho, a zone where, theoretically, artists and writers are moving in and fixing up old buildings until, when renovations are complete, advertising execs and gallery owners will "discover" the area and turn it into a rich, fashionable part of town.

Theoretically, but *not yet.* In the meantime this turn-of-the-century, 16-storey, ex-office building is one of the brave pioneer outposts. We are admitted by a uniformed guard at the street entrance, and take the elevator to the 11th floor. Here we emerge into a corridor recently fabricated from unpainted sheets of plasterboard, now defaced with graffiti, but *high-class* graffiti, messages from the socially-enlightened tenants criticizing the owner of the building for his alleged failure to provide services ("Mr Ellis Sucks!" "Rent Strike Now!") and here, we have reached a steel door provisionally painted in grubby Latex White, the kind of paint that picks up every fingermark and can't be washed easily. There's no bell, so one has to thump the door panels, but this is the place, all right, this is where Thomas M. Disch lives.

Mr Disch opens the door. He is extremely tall, genial and urbane, very welcoming. He ushers us in, and here, inside, it really *is* civilized. A thick, new carpet and a new couch and drapes and a fine old mahogany rolltop desk – and a view over Union Square, which is so far below that the dope-dealers dwindle to insignificance. It's charming! So is Mr Disch, hospitably offering a wide variety of edible and drinkable refreshments. Not such an imaginative variety as is available from the natives in the square, but he offers them with considerably more graciousness and finesse.

New York, city of contrasts, also is city of high rents, so that even a relatively well-to-do quite-successful writer nearing forty has to resort to unlikely neighbourhoods to beat the accommodation problem. But the point is, Thomas Disch has travelled so widely and is so adept at living almost anywhere, he makes the outside environment seem immaterial. It is Disch's nature to make himself at home by sheer willpower, never ill-at-ease or out-of-place, regardless of circumstances. Perhaps it is his height, perhaps it is his implacable control and elegant manners; he always seems to be both part of the environment and at the same time distanced from it, managing it with casual competence.

Similarly, in his writing: he has travelled widely, through almost every genre and technique: poetry, science fiction, non-fiction, movie scripts, mysteries, historical romances. And in each field he has made himself at home, never ill-at-ease or out-of-place, writing with the same implacable control and elegant manners.

Take, for example, his ventures into the science fiction field. He has logged quite a few years in this literary ghetto. Yet he has always remained a visitor rather than an inmate, part of the environment and at the same time distanced from it, with his own ironic perspective. This has not always gone down too well with the ghetto-dwellers themselves – the long-term, permanent-resident science-fiction writers and fans. Some of them have been unhappy about an elegant aesthete like Disch "discovering" their neighbourhood and using the cheap accommodation for his own questionable ends.

Disch's first novel illustrates the point. Science fiction readers recognized it immediately as an aliens-invade-the-Earth story, in the tradition of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* and a thousand others. There was only one snag: in all the other novels of this type, Earth wins and the aliens are vanquished. In Disch's novel (cheerily titled *The Genocides*) Earth loses and the aliens kill everybody. It almost seemed as if Disch were deliberately making fun of the traditional ways in which stories had always been told in the science fiction field.

Naturally, he sees it differently. "To me, it was always aesthetically unsatisfying to see some giant juggernaut alien force finally take a quiet pratfall at the end of an alien-invasion novel. It seemed to me to be perfectly natural to say, let's be honest, the real interest in this kind of story is to see some devastating cataclysm *wipe mankind out.* There's a grandeur in that idea that all the other people threw away and trivialized. My point was simply to write a book where you don't spoil that beauty and pleasure at the end."

To the science fiction community, Disch's ideas about "beauty and pleasure" seemed a bit depressing, and they accused him, and have continued to accuse him, of being a pessimistic author. He responds:

"What sort of *criticism* is it to say that a writer is pessimistic? One can name any number of admirable writers who indeed were pessimistic and whose writing one cherishes. It's mindless to offer that as a criticism. Usually all it means is that I am stating a moral position that is uncongenial to the person reading the story. It means that I have a view of existence which raises serious questions that they're not prepared to discuss; such as the fact that man is mortal, or that love dies. I think the very fact that my imagination goes a greater distance than they're prepared to travel suggests that the limited view of life is on their part rather than on mine."

Comments like this lead, in turn, to other criticisms – for instance, that Disch is setting himself up as an intellectual.

"Oh, but I've always taken it for granted that I'm an intellectual," he replies ingenuously. "I don't think of it as being a matter of setting myself up.

"My purpose in writing is never to establish myself as a member of a club. I don't feel hostile to my audience, indeed I'm fond of it, but to write other than what delights *me* would be to condescend to my audience, and I think that would be reprehensible. I think any writer who reins in his muse for the sake of some supposed lack of intelligence or sophistication on the part of his readers is . . . well, that's deplorable behaviour."

So Disch has consistently written at a level which pleases himself, and has consistently been misunderstood by science fiction readers as a result. His novel *334*, a gloomy vision of America in the future, was if anything less well-received by such readers than *The Genocides*, and was condemned as being even more depressing – even nihilistic.

"Well, nihilism is a pejorative that people throw out by way of dismissing an outlook," he replies. "It was one of Agnew's words. Agnew loved it because it means that someone believes in nothing and, of course, we *know* we don't approve of people like *that*. But it also throws up the problem of what do *you* believe in. God? Is he a living god? Have you seen him? Do you talk to him? If someone calls me a nihilist I want the transcripts of his conversations with Jesus, till I'm convinced that we're not brothers under the skin."

And about the book *334* itself:

"I think what distressed some people is that it presents a world in which the macroproblems of life, such as death and taxes, are considered to be unsolvable, and the welfare system is *not* seen as some totalitarian monster that must call forth a revolt of the oppressed masses. The radical solution shouldn't be easier to achieve in fiction than in real life. Almost all science fiction presents worlds in which social reform can be accomplished by the hero of the tale in some symbolic act of rebellion, but that's not what the world is like, so there's no reason the future should be like that."

Is this an argument that all fiction should be relentlessly tied to present-day realities?

"I'm not saying that every writer has to be a realist, but in terms of the ethical sensibility brought to bear in a work of imagination, there has to be some complex moral understanding of the world. In the art that I like, I require irony, for instance, or simply some sense that the writer isn't telling egregious lies about the lives we lead."

I reply that it isn't necessarily a bad thing if readers look for some simplification of the eternal problems of real life, or at least a little escape from them now and again.

"People who want that are certainly supplied with it often enough. Of course there's no reason that artistry can't be brought to bear upon such morally simplistic material, but it remains morally simplistic, and to me it will always be a lesser pleasure than the same artistry brought to bear on morally complex material. The escapist reader wants a book that ends with a triumph of the hero and not with an

ambiguous accommodation; I suppose I'm inclinded to think that you can't have it that way. I don't know people who have moral triumphs in their lives. I just know people who lead more, or less, good lives.

"A literature that doesn't try to mirror these realities of human existence, as honestly and as thoroughly and as passionately as it can, is being smaller than life. Who needs it?"

Tom Disch was born in Iowa in 1940 and grew up in Minnesota, first in Minneapolis-St. Paul ("Always my growing-up image of the big city") and then in a variety of small towns. "I went to a two-room country school for half of fourth grade . . . finished fourth grade in the next town we moved to in Fairmount, Minnesota, which is in the corn belt . . ."

At the age of nine he had already started writing: "I filled up nickel tablets with science fiction plots derived from one of Isaac Asimov's robot mystery stories. If we could find those nickel tablets I'm certain that the resemblance would be astonishing. But I think *my* stories were livelier even then." He laughs happily.

"I remember a moment in tenth grade in high school, talking to my English teacher – I was always the pet of my English teachers and made them my confidantes – and I envisioned two alternatives. One of them would have kept me in the twin cities on the paths of righteousness and duty (I can't remember what that would have been, exactly), the other was to come to New York and be an Artist.

"My first job after high school, after taking some kind of test at the state employment centre, was with US Steel as a trainee structural steel draftsman. I stuck it out through that summer till I'd saved enough money to come to New York. Then in New York I got the lowest type of clerical jobs.

"I wanted to get into Cooper Union, to the architectural school. My idea was to be Frank Lloyd Wright. Cooper Union did accept me. Even though the tuition was free, I still had to work as well, and in the end I just collapsed from overwork and possibly from lack of real ambition to be an architect. Architects have to study a lot of dull things for a very long time and I probably wasn't up to it."

Disch returned to university later, but: "The only purpose I had in mind, then, for any degree I might have acquired, would have been to become an academic, and I though it would be better to be a writer, so as soon as I sold my first story I dropped out of college."

Supposedly, a major factor that influences people to read a lot of science fiction, and then write it, is a sense of childhood alienation. I ask Disch if he had that experience. He is sceptical:

"*All* young people are prone to feel alienated, because that's their situation in life. Very often they haven't found a career, don't have a social circle they feel is theirs, and they feel sorry for themselves, accordingly. Certainly it is something real that happens to you, but with luck you work your way out of it and soon your social calendar will be filled and you won't complain about alienation any more. You'll get married. Very few married men with children complain about alienation."

Disch himself seems unusually gregarious, for a writer, and many of his projects have been written in collaboration with various other authors. His first collaborator was John Sladek. "We started writing together in New York in the summer of 1965,

just short japes at first, and then two novels. One was a gothic which is best forgotten. The other was *Black Alice.*" (A contemporary mystery/suspense novel.)

"My experience of collaborating with other writers is just mutual delight. One person has a good idea and the other says, that's great, and then what-if . . . It builds. Writing in collaboration with a person whose work you admire, miraculously sections of the book are done for you. It's like having dreamed that you wrote something, it eliminates all the real work of writing.

"I've planned other collaborations. I've worked with composers on a small musical and an opera, and I just like the process of it. I would like to write for movies. Other writers complain about the horrors of dealing with directors, but if it's a director one admires I would think that it would be exciting, and if it's not a director you admire then you shouldn't be doing it. It would be difficult to share my own most earnest novels; but for comic writing, for instance, I should think it would be so much more exciting to write for "Saturday Night Live" than just to write humorous pieces for magazines, however great your inspiration."

The range of people with whom Disch has worked reflects the range of different forms of writing that he is interested in. "Part of my notion of a proper ambition is that one should excel at a wide range of tasks. I want to write opera libretti; I want to write every kind of novel and story; I've written a lot of poetry and I will continue to do so. I foresee a pattern of alternating between science fiction novels, and novels of historical or contemporary-realistic character."

I ask if he isn't worried that this will give him too diffuse an image in the minds of publishers, who are generally happier if a writer can be given a single genre-label.

"Publishers do feel more comfortable with you if you are, in a sense, at their mercy. They prefer you to be limited as a writer. If you're a science fiction writer who begins to write a kind of science fiction that isn't to the taste of a publisher whom you've been working with, they will in effect say, stick to what you know best, go back and write the kind of book that has made you successful. If you are a genre writer then genre editors can dictate to you the terms of the genre. In the long term they're asking for the death of the imagination, and a dreary sameness of invention, plots, and characters is the result."

Since Disch has managed to avoid being typecast in this way, I ask him which matters more to him — success and recognition in the science fiction field, or outside of it.

"I would suppose that *any* science fiction writer would rather be successful in the big world than in the small world. The rewards are greater. Not simply financially, but the rewards of public acclaim. If the approval of your peers means anything, then the approval of more of your peers must mean more. And not all of the palates that you want to tickle, the critics you hope to please, are within the science fiction field. In fact the big judgement seat is outside of it."

I ask if Disch's best-known novel, *Camp Concentration,* was an attempt to achieve recognition outside of the science fiction field.

"*Camp Concentration* was a science fiction novel, and I think it was probably not strong enough to stand on its own outside the genre. Not as a work of literature. It might have been marketed as a middle-brow suspense novel — some science fiction is smuggled out to the real world in that disguise — but I think the audience

outside of science fiction is even more resentful of intellectual showing-off, while within science fiction there's been a kind of tradition of it. Witness something like Bester's *The Demolished Man,* which was in its day proclaimed to be pyrotechnical. Pyrotechnics are part of the science fiction aesthetic, and that's what *Camp Concentration* was aiming at.

"In America the novel didn't receive very much attention and it became the focus of resentment for some of the fuddy-duddy elements in science fiction to carp about. I never had enough success with the book to make me seem a threat and I'm not much of a self-promoter, so the book just vanished in the way that some books do. And that's not entirely a bad thing. The kind of success that generates a lot of attention can be unsettling to the ego, and the people who have that kind of success are often encouraged to repeat it. It would have been a very bad thing if I had bowed to pressure to write another book like *Camp Concentration,* which was the expectation, to a degree, even in myself. For a while I wanted to write things that were even more full of anguish, and even more serious."

Camp Concentration is, as Disch says, very serious and full of anguish. It is the diary of a character who is locked up and given a drug to heighten his intelligence; an unfortunate side-effect of the drug is that it induces death within a matter of months. The book thus presented a double challenge to Disch: he had to write a diary of a man who knows he is going to die, and he had to write the diary of a man whose intelligence is steadily increasing to superhuman levels. In a way it was a self-indulgence – a conscious piece of self-analysis – in that Disch himself is aware of his intelligence to the extent that it is something of a fetish.

While he was working on *Camp Concentration,* he confided to Michael Moorcock, (as Moorcock tells it), "I'm writing a book about what everyone wants the most."

To which Moorcock replied: "Really? Is it about elephants?"

"Elephants? No, it's about becoming more intelligent."

"Oh," said Moorcock, "what I've always wanted most is to be an elephant."

Talking to Tom Disch, I recount this anecdote, if only to check on its accuracy. Disch laughs and comments, "Well, I guess Mike Moorcock and I have both realized our secret dreams."

Foundation Forum

Originally the following was going to be a companion essay to Ian Watson's piece on Michael Bishop on this issue. However, having read the latter, Mr Bishop suspected that readers might suspect that something was going on . . . This loss is the gain of Foundation Forum – now newly resurrected for some searching thoughts on the Great Debate, begun in Foundation 10. *Michael Bishop's latest books are* Transfigurations *(see John Clute's review elsewhere in this issue) and* Eyes of Fire; *and newly completed is* Under Heaven's Bridge, *the first transatlantic novel collaboration, in partnership – coincidentally – with Ian Watson.*

Believers and Heretics: An Episcopal Bull

(which last word may be defined as the reader likes)

Michael Bishop

Welcome to the Church Schismatic.

Anyone who has followed *Foundation* closely for the last several issues (issues 13 through 17, say) has read a great deal about iconography, evangelism, transcendence, revelation, holy scripture, faith, skepticism, heresy, and belief. An outsider stumbling upon this review for the first time might easily suppose it a tract on the order of the Iranian mullahs' admonitory tabloid *Death to Infidels* or the Jehovah Witnesses' ardent foolscap quarto *The Watchtower* (not to be confused with Elizabeth A. Lynn's fantasy novel of similar title). That the focus of all this quasi-theological inquisition and quibbling has been science fiction, *Foundation's* ostensible hobby-horse, goes only a small way toward exorcising the demons of religiosity and doubt amok in these pages. *Selah.*

My name is Michael (from the Hebrew *Mikael*, "who is like God") Bishop (from the Greek *episkopos*, "one who watches"), in spite of which I have heedlessly allowed zealots to append my name to their lists of unbelievers. Only God and Barrington J. Bayley, I imagine, know Christopher Priest's precise status. No matter. Once more into the fray, the cloak of my excommunicate episcopacy flapping bravely behind! Don Quixote, be it known, is alive and well in Pine Mountain, Georgia, and he has again put on his crusader's shirt backwards . . .

In an article entitled "The Crudities of Science Fiction" in *Arena* 7, Ian Watson wrote, "Sf is founded upon the exploration of ideas, rather than stylistics. It is a community of ideas; in its sum, it composes what one might call an 'idea-myth', the idea-myth of man in the universe." This pronouncement – and others like it, either in the same article or elsewhere – occasioned some anguished, indignant, or simply scoffing ripostes from several writers with whom I ordinarily find myself in intuitive sympathy.

Thomas M. Disch, for instance, devoted a succinct and scrupulously temperate essay ("Ideas: A Popular Misconception" in *Foundation* 14) to detailing what he perceives as the flaws in this view of science fiction. Indeed, Disch indicts Watson's arguments as "wrong-headed, self-serving, and dishonest". (The essay becomes more temperate as it goes along.) After accurately identifying the central preoccupation of Watson's fiction as "transcendence", Disch notes that this is a religious concern. One likely consequence of establishing transcendence as a novel's theme, he then implies, is the elevation of the literary text – in the author's mind, if nowhere else – to a kind of self-substantiating gospel. Those who reject the ideological content of this gospel are not merely sceptics but heretics; their want of faith automatically excommunicates them from the True Religion to which the gospel/novel testifies. Disch concludes by suggesting that Watson and sf writers in general are not so much hierophants in the Church of Ideas as guildspeople in the Workshop of Poetry, where the language of Faith is no longer literal but metaphorical.

Interestingly (to me, at any rate), immediately preceding Disch's article in the same issue of *Foundation* is a piece entitled "Evangels of Hope" by Michael Bishop. Its entire thrust is that Alexei and Cory Panshin – in their uncompromisingly hopeful collection of reviews and essays, *SF in Dimension* – have erred in attributing to sf the *purpose* of generating psychologically integrative visions that will permit us to grow into a new and more effective awareness of the world and ourselves. I go to great lengths to refute the evangelical import of the Panshins' book, especially to the extent that their message strikes me as prescriptive and hence artistically limiting. My reaction to the Panshins' thesis is similar, I believe, to Disch's reaction to the prescriptive (by implication if not by decree) definition of sf contained in Watson's "The Crudities of Science Fiction". Rather than putting Poetry forward as either the salvation or the aim of contemporary sf, however, I opt for an emphasis on character revelation – a concern that, tellingly, Disch's commitment to Poetry may well subsume.

In *Foundation* 13 Watson had himself reviewed *SF in Dimension*. Although he had minor quibbles with one or two of the Panshins' arguments (arguments inessential to their unifying thesis), he identified as the book's principal virtue the very quality that I had come to see as its most dangerous folly. Wrote Watson, "The strong suit of this book is its urgent, but never dumbly optimistic, sense of what might be possible, what imaginative span sf might be able to encompass in the future; and the critical method matches the message of what sf is at heart about – intuitions of growth." I had better say here that my objection to the Panshins' emphasis on transcendence as a theme of great import to science fiction – indeed, as an extraliterary *goal* of the genre – has nothing, or very little, to do with my (tenuous) personal commitment to the political, cultural, or evolutionary status

quo of humanity, but everything to do with my fear of the censorship implicit in any prescriptive approach to art.

Meanwhile, in a hiccoughing, indirect fashion, the debate has unobtrusively bumped along.

For instance, Barrington J. Bayley joined the fray in *Foundation* 17 on the side of the hierophants, if not the angels, with an article wherein Adolf Hitler is incidentally canonized as a patron saint (emphasis on *patron* rather than *saint*) of the Science Fiction Idea. Tongue sometimes in cheek, sometimes tight against his palate, Bayley manages to declare that sf is not a literature of ideas (an assertion initially appearing to set him at odds with Watson) but of "an Idea", *viz.*, "the idea of the cosmos as revealed by science" (a clarification pretty much in tune with Watson's "the idea-myth of man in the universe"). Bayley confesses that this idea does not succumb to any absolute definition, but contends that True Believers "cognise" it effortlessly. Further, they regard its embodiment in *genuine* sf as the most basic and fulfilling manifestation of their religion. Sad to say, however, the True Faith is under attack. As a result of the wholesale appropriation of sf images by popular discourse (films, television, comic books, advertising, politicians), Bayley now sees "heretics and defilers" popping up all around – even as he, to his austere joy, remains an uncompromising fundamentalist. I find the details of Bayley's youthful conversion both poignant and vivid; I understand his dismay as the tide of commercialism and superficial commitment begins lapping at the pillars of the Faith; I applaud his steadfastness.

But I do not care for or accept his argument that attention to characters is incommensurate with the Undiluted Vision. I would repent if I could, but sackcloth scratches and ashes make me sneeze. And kneeling in the snow is altogether out of the question. As for tithing as a road to reinstatement, please contact my agent.

Watson and Bayley, by most outward signs, appear to be coreligionists: ones for whom, as Disch observes, "the generic term 'science fiction' is sacrosanct". Bayley, after all, defines religions as "instruments of historical evolution", while Watson along with the Panshins places a premium on sf's putative ability to further our species's pursuit of new modes of perception and intellection. The easy conflation of these points of view merely sanctifies the rock – whether "ideas" or "an Idea" – on which they have established their Church. Bayley's orthodox monotheism comfortably assimilates Watson's pluralistic celebration of the notion of transcendence. Certainly, on purely doctrinal grounds, they have more in common with each other than either of them apparently has with the secular-minded commandant of *Camp Concentration.* The irony and irreverence of Disch necessarily disqualify him from receiving communion in the same high transept as True Believers.

Or do they? How far astray have the strictures of metaphor and the ethereality of doctrine led us from what is at heart our concern? Our concern, of course, is not solely "intuitions of growth" but an ecumenical desire for Quality. Further, I would like to assert – even if it invites incredulity or derision – that disagreements about what comprises or manifests Quality (a term I have shamelessly filched from Robert Pirsig) fall away in open-minded contemplation of whatever possesses it. Differences in taste or inclination will undoubtedly continue to flourish, but Quality persists in

spite of them. Objectivity is not a myth. How do I know? Well, uh, I . . . I take it on faith.

Maybe an example would help. Ian Watson's *Miracle Visitors* is a stylish avatar of its own ideal form despite its being chockful of Ideas; similarly, Thomas Disch's *334* is an ideationally exciting incarnation of *its* Platonic template despite its author's cunning exploitation of "Stylistics". (Of course, the word *despite* in both of the preceding clauses is an anomaly and a deceit.) One novel may be more nearly perfect than the other, as measured against its own ideal form rather than its existing opposite number, but both are undeniably science fiction – even by Bayley's inabsolute definition (given a *little* freedom of construction). Although either or both might well give a furiously cognising True Believer pause, each is an exemplar of Quality and therefore an ornament to its field.

Doctrinal disputes between Poetry and Ideas are nifty means to hone the intellect, but if either position were to win the day utterly, the loser would be literature, the medium (or agency) of their simultaneous expression. Goodbye, *Miracle Visitors,* or goodbye, *334*; take your pick. Fortunately, no such spurious choice in fact presents itself, as Watson and Disch themselves well know.

For the white-robed zealots and would-be ayatollahs among us, however, let me here point out that science fiction, although not coextensive with literature, occasionally contrives to creep under its aegis. Philosophies of exclusion frequently work to diminish or impoverish. For which reason, I reiterate, if either Poetry or Ideas were *really* capable of winning this impossible combat, science fiction would be the loser. *We* would be the loser. As Disch himself has convincingly argued, Watson's "idea-myth" (no less than Bayley's "the idea of the cosmos as revealed by science") is dependent on and probably even encompassed by Poetry. Still, the secularization of science fiction – as I have already hinted – need not entail the complete abandonment of another sort of faith, that implicit in the creative process underlying sf.

Because I have frequently found myself drawn toward the altar of the Church Schismatic, let me try to focus in on the problem of belief. Of late, my impetus to go forward and witness on behalf of Watson's idea-myth derives less from the intrinsic cogency of his critical arguments than from the considerable power of his short stories and novels. At the same time, I weigh the merit of much of what I read – both in and out of the field – against the exacting standards of Disch's best work, which is always meticulously crafted and heavily character-oriented. Although it therefore disturbs me that many of Watson's characters *nod, smile, sneer,* or *frown* their dialogue, I am also keenly aware that his most compelling novels and stories demonstrate his abiding thesis about the nature of sf *by expertly employing* some of the very literary techniques – "playful, provisional, undogmatic" – that Disch cites as the handmaidens of Poetry. "The Rooms of Paradise" is a brilliant Borgesian melding of poetry and speculation, rationally grounded in the terrain of the irrational.

In other words, Watson, the self-proclaimed Idea Man, is in practice an Artist – whose canon is an elaborate but secondary sort of special pleading for his view of sf. Of course, the same can be said in reverse of Disch. In fact, Disch acknowledges that

the principal difference between their doctrinal stances may be that he stresses the *process* of myth-making whereas Watson stresses the *substance* of the resultant myth. However, writes Disch, "the shift of emphasis has large repercussions, for it means that Watson wants to *believe* his Ideas, while I am content to entertain mine" [Disch's italics].

Several possible responses suggest themselves.

First, Watson generally speaks of the necessity of exploring ideas, not of believing in them. Neither in practice nor in theory does he enthrone ideas as objects of Immutable Truthfulness, thereby entitled to worship and unquestioning belief. His stories and novels, to appropriate a term that Ursula Le Guin has used to characterize *The Left Hand of Darkness*, are "thought-experiments". Their purpose, like that of many so-called mimetic fictions, is to describe reality. Accurate description is contingent, however, and varies as conditions vary. (The description of psychological reality requires different approaches than does the rendering of physical detail, for instance.) Hence, the multiplicity of ideas involving transcendence that Watson has factored into so much of his thought-experimental fiction. Further, transcendence usually crops up in his work as a desirable possibility rather than as inevitability or a given. It would be foolish – or maybe reprehensibly disingenuous – to accuse him of blindly championing the innate *truth-value* of the ideas he has chosen to explore.

Let me briefly digress by pointing out that the attempt to establish art – whether lyric poetry or science fiction or anything else – as a stand-in religion has roots as gnarled and tenacious as an impacted tooth's. In *Literature against Itself* (The University of Chicago Press, 1979), the American academician and critic Gerald Graff quotes José Ortega y Gasset to the effect that in the nineteenth century "the downfall of religion and the inevitable relativism of science" (the latter, incidentally, being a conspicuous concern of *Miracle Visitors* and a basic assumption of *334*) lifted art to the status of a surrogate faith. "But," writes Graff, "the downfall of religion and the relativism of science were developments which could not help undermining the moral and epistemological foundations of art." From what source does the creative imagination take its authority, if we intend to drape it in the vestments of faith? Science, says Bayley in "Science, Religion, and the Science Fiction Idea". Watson, more sagely, hedges.

His hedge is a legitimate one, leading me to a second response to Disch's critique of his, Watson's, position. Although it may be possible to regard the latter's definition of sf as "wrong-headed" or "self-serving" (it incontestably tends to derive from and bolster the kinds of stories and novels he writes), Disch's use of "dishonest" to complete his pejorative catalogue bewilders me, even if he wants it to mean "self-delusive". Nor do I believe that I am contemplating a nit by zooming in on a word that Disch may have chosen principally for its emotional force. (Not to mention three witches, three wishes, three tasks . . .)

Watson, after all, consistently demonstrates an earnest faith in the ability of sf to voice, give currency to, and perhaps even foster an omnium-gatherum of cobweb-dislodging alternative statements about the nature of reality and our place in the cosmos – in his fiction as well as in his idiosyncratic position papers. From *The Embedding* to *God's World* he has been obsessively single-minded in his quest to discover and dramatize unorthodox, and powerful, metaphors of transcendence.

The extraliterary function of these metaphors, apart from their frequent capacity to startle and delight, is to strip the soul of its *a priori* provincialism and to reopen the eyes of the mind.

In hip terminology, to expand consciousness.

In an older and more vulnerable word, to educate.

Viewed as a purpose of sf or of any other reputed art form, this is a brave concern – even if many science fiction writers have either subjugated it to the not unworthy desire to entertain or trivialised it by purveying shallow historical reconstructions, technophlic claptrap, or others of those ever-popular Dumb Ideas that Disch so deplores. (Watson calls these corruptions of Bayley's Science Fiction Idea or his own idea-myth the genre's most dogged "crudities".) No matter. Even if it provokes or unleashes our scepticism, Watson's faith in sf's ability to suggest new approaches to learning and living warrants a respectful look. It assumes – as does Thomas M. Disch, if his fiction to date is a reliable guide – that the propositional content of literature (i.e., its theme or message) has a significance to the real world apart from its purely aesthetic function in the work of art itself.

Which observation brings us back to the question of belief.

Watson assuredly does not genuflect numbly before the ideas, even that of transcendence, that go glimmering through the pages of his remarkable oeuvre. Just as assuredly, however, he does believe in the *efficacy* of the exploration of ideas to transform – for the better – those who are exposed to the process. In addition, he appears to see science fiction as the definitive context for this exploration. Here it is necessary to nod again in the Panshins' direction, for they were among the first to articulate this same faith, even to prophesying for their as yet unborn messianic sf an eventually ameliorative effect on the world at large. Brave concerns, brave beliefs. Intellectual and emotional passion inform them, but surely no shortcoming so crass as dishonesty.

Before continuing, I want to stress that I am *not* one of those who view sf as the sole or even the potentially most efficacious context for the test-flying of consciousness-expanding ideas. Nevertheless, I wholeheartedly sympathize with Watson's belief in the ability of the propositional content of art (sf necessarily included) to reinforce or alter the paradigms of human reality by affecting people as individuals. Much post-modern writing, you see, operates from the premise that literary constructs – like the world itself – do not *mean* but simply *exist.* Consider, if you will, Archibald MacLeish's famous poetical assertion "A poem should not mean/But be", or the root idea sustaining Susan Sontag's influential treatise *Against Interpretation.* Nowadays anyone naive enough to espouse the social utility of literature – aside from its handiness in teaching children to read, so that they can distinguish among the labels of consumer goods when they grow up, or the use of remaindered paperbacks as landfill under our expressways and shopping malls – risks incurring the scorn of those who know that subject matter and theme are merely *pretexts* for the aesthetic changes that the writer wishes to ring during the making of the self-reflexive artifact. But for a few opinionated cranks, some groggy throwbacks to the romantic era, and a host of unsavory cultural radicals (about whom, more in a moment), no one in the intellectual community *really* believes anymore in the pertinence of literature. This, at any rate, is the picture that Gerald Graff paints.

The writers and readers of science fiction, however, *do believe* in its pertinence – even if Ejler Jakobsson was subjected to a chorus of raspberries for putting that word on the spine of *Galaxy* magazine back in the early seventies, and even if the mainstream literati and some of our own might squint at our credentials as, uh, intellectuals. Well, they have their reasons. Still, we do believe. Applaud if you want to rescue Tinkerbell . . .

Others who believe, according to Graff, are those cultural radicals who seek to "explode the bourgeois myth of a stable reality independent of human fantasy". For these politically motivated artists and critics, in fact, anti-realism is a means of either commenting on or subverting the existing social order (which is always presupposed to be repressive). Exactly how anti-realism accomplishes this latter end is not always clear, but the goal itself has correspondences with the consciousness-expanding concerns of Watson and the Panshins, whose arguments *do* attempt to explain the mechanics of sf's potential efficacy as a world-changer and whose politics are rather more evangelical than Marxist.

In *Literature against Itself* Graff makes passing reference to the "radical credentials" of science fiction and fantasy, about which – beyond a familiarity with fabulists like Borges, Barth, and Pynchon – he appears to know or care very little. He quotes both David Ketterer and Darko Suvin at secondhand, from an article in which another writer has quoted them, and he echoes without comment Robert Scholes's argument that science fiction "can regenerate a criticism of present life . . . through the construction of models of the future". Paradoxically, if not altogether nonsensically, Scholes sees these models as unburdened by "the problem of correspondence or noncorrespondence with some present actuality or some previously experienced past". At this phrasing I scratch my head, although I do have an inkling of what Scholes is trying to get at. Graff is no further help because he drops sf and fantasy as examples of cultural radicalism and goes on to talk about modern experimental poetry.

In 1968, however, Samuel R. Delany provided a succinct reply to the view that science fiction illustrates "our whole society's divorce from the real". In his essay "About 5,750 Words" he wrote, "anyone who reads or writes s-f seriously knows that its particular excellence is [that] . . . in all the brouhaha clinging about these unreal worlds, chords are sounded in total sympathy with the real". In fact, it might be possible to formulate a (tentative) definition of sf embodying open recognition of this idea: *the mimesis of an imaginary reality resonating in sympathy with or in opposition to the real.* The degree and the direction of the resonance account for the astonishing variety of works whose authors have either claimed or repudiated on their behalf our union label. Indeed, so broad is this definition that it might also serve to characterize literature in general (or sculpture, or drama, or music, or . . .?) – a point in its favour to my way of thinking, but undoubtedly a mark of its utter worthlessness to True Believers. So be it. At least it serves to establish a lifeline (however thin or frayed) to the real, and to bring all self-professed practitioners of sf under the roof of the same fellowship hall if not beneath the vault of the same incense-befogged cathedral.

Now, if we want to fight, we should organize our schisms around the recognition of Quality rather than the identification and subsequent denial of heresy. We should

also take note of the fact that most of us believe in the efficacy of what we write to affect our common reality – somehow, some way, no matter how small. Even those among us who say, "I'm nothing but an entertainer and damned proud of it – stuff your myths and metaphors!" so often postulate fantasy worlds in which Good and Evil battle each other to a resounding or an ambiguous victory, or even to a standstill, that our texts conspire to belie the innocence of import that we attribute to them. On the other hand, not even the most artistically and/or politically committed in our ranks would ever confess a *desire* to bore. Our belief in the power of science fiction to affect the world by dismantling our preconceptions and then reordering our priorities unites us all. Willy-nilly. We are devotees of art, but not solely for its own sake.

The following, by way of both coda and further illustration:

Ian Watson's *Miracle Visitors* – which Brian Stableford and I consider his best book – exploits for its dramatic and thematic impact the "tension between scientific rationality and mystery". (The phrase is from an article by Watson entitled "Some Sufist Insights into the Nature of Inexplicable Events" that appeared in a recent SFWA *Bulletin*.) During the research and writing of this novel the author penned the following note to himself: "If one writes a novel on the (true) scientific premise that science cannot explain everything – and that it would be unscientific to *believe* that it could . . . is this a science fiction novel?" [my italics]. Watson answered himself in the affirmative, then went on to incorporate Sufist approaches to "indefinability" into the exhilaratingly complex unravelling of his story. In addition to being aesthetically successful, this strategy is pitched in part to increasing our understanding by broadening our conceptual horizons.

Thomas M. Disch's *334* – which after several readings remains for me a book as entertaining as *Gulliver's Travels,* nearly as significant and consistently more moving – exploits for its dramatic and thematic impact the tension between an often dismaying present and a tomorrow that seems all too probable. As M. John Harrison accurately observes in his introduction to the Gregg Press hardcover, *334* "is a novel about *us* and our precarious relationship with the real, narrated as a series of collisions between what the world is and what we would like it to be, between the kind of life we have now and the kind of life it may lead to" [Harrison's italics]. In addition to being intellectually rigorous, this strategy is pitched in part to increasing our understanding by generating compassion.

In the sense that I have tried to indicate, then, Watson and Disch are fellow believers.

Ian Watson writes:

Michael Bishop correctly remarks *en passant* about a certain penchant in my books for what James Blish first christened – and thus exposed to ridicule for ever more – 'said-bookisms'. Characters don't just 'say'; they 'leer', they 'spit'. But may not said-bookisms be a much-maligned breed, an endangered species even, now that these verb keenings, these demotic 'rosy-fingered dawns' of our day, have fallen into extreme disfavour? I have a dream; that one day I will conclude a story of alien sexual inversion, with utter plausibility, with the following: '"I love you," she ejaculated.'

Reviews

On Wings of Song
by Thomas M. Disch *(Gollancz, 1979, 315pp, £5.95, ISBN 0 575 02547 6)*

reviewed by John Clute

To end with, it is an intensely substantial novel of irony. To begin with, Thomas M. Disch's *On Wings of Song* reads like a Bildungsroman with amnesia, so shocking are the caesurae that untimely rip its telling of the dubious life of Daniel Weinreb into three parts, so untimely indeed is the ultimate trifurcated parlance of the book. It is all very shocking. It must certainly be intended to be.

Part One: At the end of the century, in the horrifying semi-independent state of Iowa, which is governed by corrupt philistine repressive Fundamentalists who call themselves Undergoders, Daniel Weinreb, the son of a failed dentist, grows up longing to fly and to become a fairy. Flying – it is the main sf element in the novel – is done like this: Hook yourself up to the necessary apparatus – the Grundig 1300 Amphion *Fluchtpunktapparat* being the best obtainable – and begin to sing; the quality of your performance does not matter, but if you are capable of combining words and music "in perfect equipoise", so that both hemispheres of your brain *know* one another in an instant of transcending, chaste rightness, then at that instant you will fly; although your body remains comatose on the apparatus, something like and possibly consubstantial with the soul (hence all Undergoders' loathing of the operation) will soar invisibly into space, and you will dance there in a state of ecstacy, you will be a fairy, as those who are flying are described in the text. You need never return from your "astral body" to the flesh. Eventually you will rise above this Earth and dance to the music of the spheres, to which you have become attuned, perhaps forever. But of course flying is illegal in Iowa, and in any case Daniel's hopes of learning to fly are put into abrupt cold storage when he is sent to prison at the age of fourteen for the crime of selling an illegal out-of-state newspaper, one that advertises flying apparatuses. In his terrifying year at the Spirit Lake prison farm, he acquires some worldly wisdom, learns more about flying from fellow inmates, begins to grow up. He does not abandon his ultimate goal. Just before his term is up, the Supreme Court declares his crime no longer a crime, and he is released, in the first significantly punitive irony through which Disch gives warning to the reader that what seems to have begun as a mimetic depiction of the growth of a soul, as in the traditional Bildungsroman, may turn out to be something rather crueller and less reposeful: judgment from above on the fitness for combat of a soul's carapace. But still, at this point, the parlance of the novel retains its moral coterminousness with the protagonist, as though there were still hope.

Part Two: Suddenly we are in a thinner, generically-hyped world, that of young Boadicea Whiting, father-fixated daughter of Grandison Whiting, who is fabulously rich, as sophisticated as Machiavelli tried to teach and who lives in a splendid castle in the middle of his enormous farm in the middle of Iowa, in whose politics he is a cynical *eminence grise*. Boadicea returns home and goes back to school and becomes attracted to ex-con Daniel, whom she introduces to her family. Grandison likes his

subornable spunk, and more or less arranges that Daniel marry his daughter. It looks like Daniel has been co-opted, and after he has expressed to Grandison his truculent acquiescence to becoming a tame heir, it looks as though life will begin to run smoothly for him. Bride and groom fly to New York on their honeymoon and secretly book into a flying centre, where they both plug into machines. Daniel sings earnestly but without the final come – he is, after all, ultimately subornable, a performer of behaviour, a fatally self-knowing trimmer. But Boadicea flies, and fails to return to her body, so they miss the next leg of their flight, which is duly bombed. So far as his past's concerned, Daniel is now dead, and that's the end of *this* co-optation of his attempts to become an artist.

Part Three: And suddenly Daniel is thirty. A decade of personality formation, compromise and failure has passed. He is still in New York. His sexual behaviour is now exclusively homosexual – though as a kind of guerdon of the book's refusal to the didactic impulse native to the Bildungsroman the word homosexual is never mentioned, nor is Daniel's sexual orientation given any register whatsoever in the text. He continues to maintain Boadicea's legally dead body. He goes by the name of Ben Bosola, in fear of discovery by the Whiting clan. Though not very well nor very sincerely, he continues to sing. The storyline is complex and narrated in considerable detail: He becomes the fancy boy of a famed castrato, who eventually teaches him to sing well enough to become professional. With a musical about Honey Honeybunny and her brother Bunny Honeybunny, two adorable rabbits, he becomes famous overnight, but even with his new income the financial strain of maintaining Boadicea is telling seriously on him. In case she happens to be flying in the neighbourhood, he often converses with her immobile body, and finally tells her that unless she returns he will have to shut it down – an action which will not, however, affect her while she remains a fairy. But she returns. For much of the previous decade or so, she'd been caught in an ingenious fairy-trap kept by her father – whom she had of course flown straight to – because he liked his privacy; but the machine has been wrecked in a riot, and she has recently been able to dance to the music of the spheres. There is no justice in art. Boadicea remains with Daniel long enough to sing again, and leaves for good. Her body dies and its ashes scattered over her father's estate. Locked to the world, Daniel continues to trim and to perform.

There is a short epilogue. In his new fame, Daniel returns to Iowa to give a Honeybunny concert, a programme which involves his being linked up to an apparatus through which he can fake flying. It is a perfectly genuine apparatus, however. He gives the concert. It is time for him to "fly". He seems to turn the faking switch. An Undergoder shoots him dead. The text is composed ambiguously enough to allow us to choose whether or not to believe that, at the moment of death, Daniel Weinreb, hick from Iowa, heir presumptive to a Rube Goldberg empire, street-wise pander to fashionable tastes in music and sex – all of which characteristics fail singularly and deliberately to add up to the mimetic portrait of a soul – that Daniel Weinreb has soared finally above his circumstances into song. Unfortunately, as the text presents it, this final ambivalence between generic trope and deflating irony is a cheat on the reader. Just after Daniel's fingers *touch* the switch that simulates flying, and just before his brains are blown out, there is a single paragraph, one highlighted sentence: "The dials of the apparatus showed that Daniel was in flight." But within the narrative world of the novel, there can be no doubt whether or not Daniel flew, as he either did or did not activate (rather than merely touch) the switch, and this knowledge is available to at least some characters in the text. Bah, humbug.

But that's the only serious flaw in the novel's constant play with the structural incompossibilities of nescience and omniscience that inform so much of its shape, and explain the violent disruptions in continuity that this long speedy skate of synopsis was meant to emphasize. Too bad it happens on the last page. At the heart of the book's strength lies its refusal – which goes wrong only on that one occasion – to advance reality claims for any one version of telling with which it engages; it is this refusal which defines it as a significantly Modernist assay at and uprooting of the material of art. *On Wings of Song* is an epistemology of the art act. Everything depends on that: The melancholy gravitas, the pellucid cognitiveness of Disch's high mature voice; the delicious savvy archness of the contrast between the ironical fitting of Daniel into binding social milieux and the genric *gullibility* of the way characters like Grandison Whiting are presented, with his TV movie Realpolitiking and the giant fake red beard he wears so as to project the face of command of his desire upon a manipulable world; the deranging interventions of structure: All derive their sustaining impact and "insightfulness" from this underlying examination of the dance of omniscience in the land of nada.

That is what the book is. What it is *about* is also, of course, the nature of art. Who can fly? Who can make art? What is flying (what's art)? And because Disch is a conscious artist – no active sf writer is more conscious than he is of the aesthetics of the job – there is, hidden within the book's quicksand pyrotechnics, and recognizable in the hilarious roman à clef elements that occasionally show our backs above the element, a quite audible confessional tone. It is not the biography of Daniel, nor the autobiography of Disch, that is being confessed, but, through the wit of its Modernist sleights-of-hand, a thankfully disingenuous conflation of both, irradiated by the accomplishment of art which is the book. One could paraphrase *On Wings of Song* as a triumphant spoof of the confessional of failure self-transcended, through flight.

Shikasta
by Doris Lessing *(Cape, 1979, 365pp, £5.95, ISBN 0 224 01767 5)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Science fiction, formerly the despised illegitimate son in the family of literature, has been able to tell truths his respectable siblings have had to ignore; always indispensable, sf is the most original branch of literature now, with most to contribute. The terms are those of Doris Lessing's preface to *Shikasta,* the novel which marks her full adoption of the bastard she first acknowledged ten years ago. Her readers have seen her venture into the future *(The Four-Gated City)* and inner space *(Briefing for a Descent into Hell, Memoirs of a Survivor).* Now she completes the process by also taking in the distant past, through myth, and intergalactic space.

Shikasta is Earth, which proves to be a possession of three galactic Empires: Canopus, Sirius, and Puttiora. Canopus, sternly benevolent, is the principal power, responsible for our development and support since the first appearance of life here. Sirius, in alliance with Canopus, uses our world mainly as a testing ground for various biological experiments. Puttiora, in any case a discreditable outfit, has been perverted by its evil planet Shammat, whose inhabitants feed on destruction

and pain. Due to an unfortunate astrological misalignment the benign radiations of Canopus have been jammed for thousands of years, giving Shammat the chance to do its worst with us, or almost. Canopus has not given up the struggle, though there is some division over its Shikastan policy. This book, together with three to follow, comes from the archives of Canopus and is a selection of documents "for the use of first-year students" by Johor, one of the most eminent Canopean colonial emissaries. Johor first came here in the earliest days, before the Fall, and then again about 1970 to prepare for the Third World War and the education of a few survivors. This time Johor came not by spaceship but by incarnation, to be George Sherban. He has included a journal written by his sister Rachel, a normal Shikastan. The perspective of the novel thus switches between the personal, with the story of one survivor and her odd brother, and the cosmic, with excerpts from Canopean history books dealing with the lives and deaths of planets.

"Looking from the outside at this planet it was as if at a totally crazed species." The history of Shikasta is "a long slow atrophy" from the severe, pallid glories of original Paradise through decay and into self-destructive madness as humanity, occluded from the radiations that maintain Canopean rule, grows more and more confused and polluted by its own blunders and Shammatian malice. But Lessing believes in madness as a possible theraputic process, a personal, primal revolution against the disease of Western civilisation. The authentic possibilities of the human mind are deeper, higher, more mysterious than social orthodoxy allows: madness is the eruption consequent upon their repression. The voices heard by a schizophrenic may be those of Canopeans, in his genes or in outer space. His hallucinations may be the visions of the prophets. Canopus is, effectively, God.

God is a very popular subject for sf these days. Lessing's primary cosmological and ethical source is the Old Testament, though she blends in stuff from Blake, Gilgamesh, Celtic and Arabic traditions; and of course von Daniken, since in her view the more eccentric and undisciplined a metaphysical speculation, the more likely it is to be a distorted glimpse of truth. There is "an overmind, an Ur-mind, or unconscious, or what you will, and . . . this accounts for a great many improbabilities and 'coincidences'." Her embrace of literary bastards and lunatics does not lead her to imaginative extremes and psychedelic revelations of the Robert Anton Wilson kind, however. Her unorthodoxy is strictly traditional and traditionally strict; her picture of Paradise, lost to be regained, would make a Puritan quake for joy. Harmony and ritual observance dominated there. Personality was unheard of: Canopeans regard belief in individuality as "the very essence of the Degenerative Disease". Humans and giants built geometric cities of stone together, walked the ley lines in mute, doe-eyed placidity and lived to appalling ages in perfect peace. Now Shikasta to Canopean senses is a galactic anomally, glaring in its colour scheme, raucous in its sounds.

I found Lessing's reliance on scripture enhanced the credibility of her story, in that the Master Plan is proved to be one which has been suspected and foretold in history as I know it, but lowered its appeal considerably. Offered this Paradise I remain resolutely unregenerate, which may mark me as a typically corrupt Shikastan of the last days, but does nothing for my enjoyment of Lessing's novel. Similarly, her adoption of science fiction proves a bit of a disappointment. She refers to Stapledon; the sf she writes combines his approach with that of C.S. Lewis ("Shikasta" means stricken; the planet was formerly called "Rohanda", meaning fruitful). The result is numbingly bleak, vastly deterministic, and rings with a moral note pitched high and *sostenuto* till your teeth begin to ache. As an alien race the Canopeans hardly seem substantial. They evince none of the ancestral

depth such imperialists would surely feel. *Shikasta* does not show us Earth through the minds of another culture but through a mind firmly grounded in our own. The attitude throughout is a kind of mystical conservatism which transcends obliviously the ostensible divisions between the documents, divisions of time, source, purpose, even authorship. Lessing is not good at pretending to be different writers. Encyclopaedia entries and extracts from histories continually lapse into the first person; at least one is evidently by Johor, which is in any case implausible but certainly spoils the point of the formal pretence. On and on goes the voice, Lessing's soft, moist lament, reciting in its characteristic awkward syntax homilies on the waywardness of mankind, for two-thirds of the book. The last third, containing Rachel Sherban's journal and some letters of the period, is better, more convincing and less abstract. But the book as a whole shows none of the organization that textbooks do – which does not make it a credible alien textbook: an alien textbook should show alien principles of organization, especially if the aliens are totalitarian imperialists. *Shikasta* is the sort of book whose flaws interrupt your concentration, making you wish it had been revised more thoroughly. It is insufficiently edited, both by Johor and by Doris Lessing.

How it will fare as Modern Literature I couldn't say. It will surely publicize awareness of the usefulness of sf as something more than a generic pastime; it has already been over-estimated by critics (under-estimated by Bernard Levin) who cannot spot its faults as sf. It would be interesting to know what sf Lessing has read She demonstrates the breadth of possibilities that constitute it, but fails to meet their requirements. She has said, "I think perhaps *Shikasta* doesn't quite come off." Perhaps the next volumes will. In the meanwhile, for visions of wholeness and moral endeavour in the field of galactic diversity, I prefer Ursula Le Guin – and her prose is better too.

The Visitors
by Clifford D. Simak *(Del Rey, 1980, 282pp, $9.95, ISBN 0 345 28441 0)*

reviewed by David Pringle

Four years ago I wrote an essay on the work of Clifford Simak which was published in these pages in 1977. On that occasion I concluded by saying "there is every possibility that we will see more good fiction from Simak, and that it will be good not because it is different or contains new ideas, but because it returns to the familiar themes that have inspired him in the past". If I may be excused for saying so, I believe that my prediction has been borne out by such entertaining novels as *A Heritage of Stars* (1977), *Mastodonia* (1978) and now *The Visitors*. They are far from being major sf novels – viewed in *genre* terms they are even trivial – but in *auteur* terms they are solidly interesting and demonstrate that Simik continues to be himself: a likeable, if minor, moralist of trad American sf. To put it simply, if you have enjoyed Simak in the past you will find these recent novels worth reading.

The Visitors is an old man's novel (Simak was 75 in August 1979), but very proficiently done. It is full of dialogue, ranging from the rural gossip at which Simak has always excelled, through the brisk jargon of a busy newspaper office in which he is equally at home, to the bureaucratese of Washington conferences. There are even echoes of speech patterns which are normally quite alien to the world of Simak's fiction:

"Hey, man, you hear about them cars?"
"What cars?"
"Them cars the visitors are about to give us."
"There ain't nobody going to give us cars."
"It says so in the paper."
"Not us, man. Maybe some honkeys will get some cars. We won't get no cars. All we'll get is screwed."

The visitors in question are huge oblong boxes which plonk themselves down in inconvenient locations throughout the United States. Black as midnight and indestructible, they are curiously warm to the touch and are evidently living creatures. They eat trees, and occasionally houses and cars. Proper communication is never established with them, though one man, a forestry student, receives some telepathic messages and becomes convinced that the visitors "are" trees, or, at any rate, plant-like organisms. The visitors are not hostile, though they cause much confusion. Eventually, they begin to pay their way in human society by "budding" and producing wonderful gifts. Hence the reference to free cars in the above scrap of dialogue.

The novel has structural faults. It begins well, with an amusing piece of dialogue between a small-town newspaper editor and his local barber, interrupted by the arrival of the first visitor, but the narrative slows to a crawl in the middle third of the book. The many scenes set in Washington become increasingly tedious and unconvincing. The President and his aides sit around discussing what to do about the visitors and the public upheaval they have caused (throw nukes at them? cover up the whole issue?) but they come up with absolutely no ideas. It is as though Simak is trying to make a post-Watergate social melodrama out of his midwestern fable, exposing the fumblings of folks in high places. But he hasn't really got the equipment to deal with such material; he is always at his best when he writes whereof he knows. The ending of the book is rushed: it finishes just as it begins to get really interesting. Loose ends dangle – for example, one of the visitors dies and is dissected; there is some speculation as to why it has died, but we are never given an answer (nor, for that matter, are we told *how* the thing is dissected).

But the tale has its rewards. Long-time readers of Simak will be reminded of such novels as *Ring Around the Sun* (1953) and *They Walked Like Men* (1962), in which aliens or mutants disrupt the economic order of the USA, causing factories to be closed and people to be thrown out of work. *The Visitors* restates the favourite Simakian fantasy of beneficent aliens bearing boons, and exacts the familiar dream-vengeance on industrial capitalism, with one important difference: the ending of this novel, though hurried, does not duck the political and economic issues by veering off into a never-never world (a pristine parallel earth in the case of *Ring Around the Sun*) or a miraculous restoration of the status quo (through the magical properties of skunk odour in *They Walked Like Men*). *The Visitors*, for all its qualities of Tall Story and fable (so typical of Simak), suggests that a better order of things can actually be achieved, here and now, by human beings.

The Jesus Incident
by Frank Herbert and Bill Ransom *(Gollancz, 1979, 405pp, £5.95, ISBN 0 575 02685 5)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

Numerous contemporary sf writers maintain a strong interest in metaphysical issues, though it seems almost paradoxical that they should. The questions of metaphysics are, by definition, those which lie beyond the scope of empirical enquiry, and it seems rather perverse that a *genre* named science fiction should contain so much work which is intensely fascinated by that which is *not* science. The method adopted by science fiction writers in pursuit of metaphysical themes is, however, a curiously cunning one which seeks to shift the boundary between science and non-science rather in the fashion of Yossarian moving the bomb-line and thus obtaining a temporary alteration of perceived reality. What sf writers characteristically do in tackling these themes is to establish a context in which metaphysical questions are carefully reified. God may not exist but he *can* be invented; miracles may by definition defy the natural order, but it is not too difficult to imagine ordinary events which nevertheless have to be *perceived* as miracles by those caught up in them.

The Jesus Incident uses hypothetical material from an earlier Herbert novel, *Destination: Void,* to "replay" the challenge posed to men by God through the medium of His emissary. Raja Flattery, the unwilling messiah, is literally reincarnated by the artificial intelligence inhabiting an interstellar ship. The intelligence long ago came to the conclusion that it is God, and has spent much time trying to force its human passengers and crew to discover an appropriate style of "worShip". Earth, apparently, has been destroyed, and the humans attempting to colonize the world of Pandora from the ship may be the last of their kind – especially as the ship intends to destroy them all if they cannot come up with the answer to its little problem. Flattery is given a tight deadline, considering that the present leaders of the community have become atheists and are far more likely to murder him than listen to him.

The methods used by the humans attempting to tame Pandora leave much to be desired in moral terms. Pandora's native life-forms are deadly, and the human invaders are trying to cope by being equally deadly in their transactions with the world, and utterly ruthless in their manipulations of one another. The odds against a successful resolution to the whole mess seem to be very high, but regular sf readers will not be surprised to learn that there may just be a way. They will be even less surprised to learn that Pandora's life system is dominated by a hive-intelligence, which is benign although threatened by the colonists with destruction. There is also a ship's poet, despised by the colony's masters but beloved by his diety . . .

If cliches like these set your teeth on edge, it might be as well not to finish the book, for there you will find out just what *is* the appropriate way to worShip.

There is, of course, one flaw in the strategy by which science fiction co-opts metaphysical questions: turning gods literally into machines opens up infinite possibilities for literary *deus exmachina.* The situation can be set up for any old platitude (or, alternatively, any weird idiosyncrasy – oh for a touch of idiosyncrasy in *The Jesus Incident*!) to provide the answer. For this reason, making metaphysical issues concrete often renders them puerile. If the trick is to succeed then it can only do so by taking good advantage of the moment's hesitation induced by the

shift of context, and the materials used in *The Jesus Incident* are so depressingly familiar – thanks to countless Shaggy God stories – that there is simply no room for Herbert and Ransom to operate.

God's World
by Ian Watson *(Gollancz, 1979, 254pp, £5.95, ISBN 0 575 02683 9)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

It starts with free-fall sex (like the bits they didn't show in *Barbarella*), which is as good a way of hooking your reader as any, I suppose. After that material satisfactions (so to speak) are a bit scarce, but don't despair, there s gripping action a-plenty for fans of theology and ancient philosophy as Watson vindicates notion after unfashionable notion. Essence precedes existence: Socrates was right! Pow! Dreams and prayers are communications with a higher plane! Zap! Technological progress is historically healthy! Blam! God exists! So does Satan, but call him Iblis, because the truest and most enlightened religion is – Islam! Wow!

What has happened is that the whole of mankind (below lat. 44° N.) has been visited by apparitions of its various messiahs, prophets, angels and holy men, inviting a delegation to God's World, a planet in Eridanus, where eternal life in celestial bliss is free to all who will die to be born again. The alien missionaries provide a motor which will power a spaceship as long as its crew fuel it with good, positive thoughts (hence the copulation), and our team finally pops out of hyperspace to land on an idyllic pastoral world where lovers live in eternal communion and dreams come true. But God's World is threatened by a horde of giant black insects, and when some of the crew are captured it becomes clear that all is not as heavenly as it seems . . .

Watson is on his usual themes, explaining how our perceptions determine the reality we subscribe to, and reaching eagerly but uncertainly for the key that unlocks the matrix. In *God's World* transcendence of mind and matter is readily but dangerously handy. The hidden choice is: immortality or death? The exposition proceeds on many levels, material, mental, and spiritual planes, states of dream, illusion, and memory. A perfect cosmological economy is placed together. Being overflows from a higher mode to a lower, to be recycled through death. Satan – Iblis – the Veil Being – has interposed Himself and is filtering the system, tempting catastrophe. But these revelations at one level are not necessarily transferred to another, and there is some urgency, since our heroes are riding to their destiny, on the mundane plane, unaware. This makes for more suspense and rather more plot than other Watson novels have, which is a good thing. At one point Amy Dove, the narrator, is fighting a battle in a dream, a dream within another dream, in which she's fighting the same battle on the other side, while her waking self trots on innocent of any conflict.

There's more than a dash of Clarke in the doomed yearning for transcendence; perhaps even a deliberate reference to *Childhood's End* in the mute giant insects who look like demons but turn out to be God's unpaid guardians. But there's less in the way of characterization than even Clarke has provided, despite one of Watson's usual large multi-racial casts. Among all this transcendence and telepathy there's little feel for the original limits that set the shapes of human identity. Nowhere,

despite the first person narration, is there an allowance for the value of this adventure as experience rather than as idea. Character definition is functional and melodramatic, from the mad id-figure Jacobik to the paternal superego, Captain Kamasarin. Each has a perfunctory personality; they all have much the same artificial, chortling voice in which they speculate faultlessly, never missing a word.

> "Love, it sickens me to say, has been used to kill. The little death became the big death."
> "Thanatos and Eros hand in hand," nods Natalya.
> "What real proof have you got?" blusters Trimble . . .

and so on. John Clute once complained here about this nodding and blustering; they also clamour, observe, snap, sniff, and point anything, rather than say it. This stylization, like any other, is not a sin. What's wrong is that it jars with the rest of the narration. The verbs give crashing emphases which the comparative anonymity of the characters and the uniformity of their diction don't invite and won't sustain. It also encourages absurdities ("'*Ja*, it's true,' confirms Heinz"), while the speech itself withers from lack of attention: a Moslem planetologist tells everyone, "There's a closed loop situation." If Watson put the characterization in the speech instead of the stage directions reviewers would gladly stop snapping, sniffing and pointing themselves.

It's not as trivial an objection as it appears. Speech is a vital character index, especially in a first-person narrative, and the attenuated version Watson provides is effectively no better than the spittings, gruntings and grinnings of Doc Smith characters, highly-educated though it may be. *God s World* is, evidently, a morality play is hyperfrive. Human beings are primarily functions, points scored by the devils until the angels win them back. Adding the power of space opera to that conflict produces something very like a comicbook, with simplified supermen, omnipotent engines, flashes of primary colour, and a general sense of insubstantiality. This is high quality, old-fashioned sf, compelling as intellectual adventure but imaginately remote, abstract, emotionally unpersuasive.

The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories
by Angela Carter *(Gollancz, 1979, 157pp, £4.95, ISBN 0 575 02584 0)*
Transfigurations
by Michael Bishop *(Berkley/Putnam, 1979, 362pp, $10.95, ISBN 0 224 012379 2)*

reviewed by John Clute

Some truisms. That as humans our defining discontent and only recourse is to stiffen out of childhood and to become civilized and to age into the rut of our terminal repressions seems a basic enough assumption in these latter days, and may well be true, and if the conventional mimetic novel were the only fictional meaning system we had to go by in our attempts at dowsing solaces out of this desert of selfhood and mortality, an icy plate tectonic of discontent would be the end of our story, as we perceived it. We would "live" within the prison of the feigned faces we uttered through, and eventually would die there, and in our occasional "escapes", to Tahiti or Jerry Pournelle, we would be no more than tourists, stinking of recidivism: Ex-cons. But of course the conventional realistic novel and its co-opted romance sidekicks is – like Valium – more a symptom than

a description of the world we, as stiffened Westerners, find ourselves paying through our noses to inhabit. Created – and marketed – in the century when that world began to hypertrophy, the century of the Englightenment, the mimetic novel, like the great porridge of Umwelt it represents, stakes a claim of ownership over its readers' perceptions of objective and subjunctive, light and dark, good and evil, real and unreal; like technology, like a helipad in Viet-nam, it stockades us within a cruel binary. But of course beyond the encampment chimes the Ghost Dance of the unfathomable Other, there and within us like a nausea, alien and uterine. To be dis-eased, seasonless, *under pressure:* This may be only the historical nuance of a species-defining discontent, but it is certainly the case that the conventional novel, in its attempts to seal that pressure in with Great Tradition Pew Wax, has increasingly come to seem a dangerously deracinated and compromised parlance, so that in 1980 the Tradition has become a sort of locker-room joke. And this is even more clearly the case with the romance escape routes provided by most sf and fantasy, which rarely accomplish much more than a temporary domestication of the Other. They are forms of repressive toleration. Is there no hope?

Falteringly, the books under review provide some sense of relief, in that neither of them attempts to promulgate a repressive clarity. There is something subversive about both of them. If to be human is to be cemented in dis-ease, then at the heart of our imprisoning incompletion must lie – we should insist, out of faith in the Ghost Dance – dreams of metamorphosis, of texts whose contents represent a constant pressure of radical engendering speech against the iron mask of the Boys' Own world of Faust up there, like magma. These texts, from Ovid to *The Golden Ass, Frankenstein* to *Jekyll and Hyde,* Carroll to Kafka, in fable or poem, romance or picaresque, will tend to dominate no genre, nor to define any, with the probable exception of Trickster tales. A book containing within its components radical acts of metamorphosis – or simply a book about shape-changing, which is by no means necessarily the same thing – may also be competent or lousy. The most radical of impulses can be expressed through the mouth of a dolt, or a cad, or even Jack L. Chalker, whose terrible fecundity may merit all the negative responses his books have so far received, but at the heart of whose donnée however cynically manipulated it may be, lies a genuine (and probably sadistic) urge to explore our human "shape" by putting it through coercive distortions: Metamorphosis as pornography.

The cellar chill of Angela Carter's fables in *The Bloody Chamber* may well strike the reader as queerly pornotopic, too. The language in which she tells her fables of metamorphosis – most of them recast versions of traditional material – certainly reminds one, in its ornately distancing and bejewelled poise, of the icier sorts of French intellectual porn, where monstrous (but fey) experimentations in the Ultimate take place under the sign of the Idea, and the contents of the text comprise a kind of slumming. She does give off the same flushed manipulative knowingness as writers like Georges Bataille, for instance, and in this she speaks with the voice of the prison warder rationalizing a menu of educational torture for his/her inmates. But I think I would argue that this prison smell represents that which at base her fables are trying to escape from: It is the smell of the world the metamorphic urge subverts.

Crudely, the fables of *The Bloody Chamber* are a set of explorations of female sexual identity; her protagonists, who are usually women at the verge of coercive immersion in adult sexual roles, undergo *rites de passage* that at the mimetic level could be described as initiations into marriage and adulthood, but which are actually rendered as fundamental metamorphoses. In the best of these stories, "The Tiger's Bride", published here for the first time, the female protagonist is

lost at cards by her father, and bundled off to the castle of the winner, who intends to wed her. At the initial, mimetic level, he is an Italian nobleman; but at the level at which metamorphic language couches and engenders the basic reality of the transaction, he is an animal shape in the form of a tiger. Because her sexual initiation – to be successful – must be transformative, and because it must perform transactions in the language of the labile beast that underlies and fuels our mimetic carapaces, she must turn into his language. She must become the tiger's bride. The prison walls of self, and of the castle in which she has been immured, must become her den. She resists fiercely – after all, it is the fate of most of us never to touch home base. Until the last paragraph we do not know whether or not she will remain forever frozen, but the last paragraph reads:

> And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur.

The Bloody Chamber is fabulation, not sf, and is therefore liberated from the cognitive trammels or apron strings that generally tie sf to the frozen parlance of realism, however palely aped. For most sf – *pace* Mr Delany – merely apes the complex multiplex voice of "mundane" literature, and its apparent freedom (say to have three suns in the sky) is merely a kind of repressive toleration, as I claimed earlier. Generally, for an sf work even to approach the engendering lubricity of a metamorphic tongue, there must be an alien, preferably an alien culture, to catalyze visions of the Other in the mirror; alien cultures are subversive . . . This metamorphic urge will not typically be found nakedly shaping the language of the text, as in Carter's fabulations, but will serve as one pole (or ground) of an ostensibly mimetic realm of discourse, as a subject of study and confrontation: Metamorphosis as anthropology. This may seem safe, and in the days of John W. Campbell it almost always was safe. All the same, in this way an sf novel can bear within its realistic daylight parlance – as does Michael Bishop's *Transfigurations* – the terms of a savage assault upon the suppositions of the world-view which that parlance registers, for it is basic to the world-view we here have grown up uttering and living out that the world described in the trustworthy reliable voice of a real novel is a world described accurately: In other words, the world is transparent to certain techniques of explication. This assumption governs the way most sf goes about the business of knowing.

Transfigurations seems at first to obey these assumptions. Written in a po-faced, even-tempered, humourless first-person singular, the novel seems to set itself up to be read as a typical strait-laced reporting of introspective mimesis, during the assimilation of which we learn from the protagonist what he learns of himself, seeing a few sights along the way, and close off in desert daylight. Fortunately, this is a reading which very quickly falls apart. Both the shape and the content of *Transfigurations* violently confront the reasonable establishment voice of its telling with a surly insidious alien Otherness. At the formal heart of the novel – like poison – lies a 1973 novella, "Death and Designation Among the Asadi", which is presented in *Transfigurations* as an actual text written several years before by Egan Chaney, a cultural xenologist now presumed dead, and edited for publication some time before the narrator begins his own story, which is ostensibly a narrative of his attempts at elucidating Chaney's work. Ultimately, however, there is no way he (or *Transfigurations*) can assimilate the radical threat of "Death and Designation Among the Asadi". It is not amenable to paraphrase. It is poisonous.

(NB. Taking an earlier text of less than book length as a formal challenge to be

confronted by the full book surrounding it is a decidedly clever way of dealing with an abiding sf marketing problem, a problem usually slighted by sf writers to the cost of those of us who end up having to read their jumped-up stories, their interminable chronicles, their gormless picaresques, their hot-air expansions. Most sf novels have square wheels.)

On BoskVeld, a planet of the Denebolan system, human colonists have discovered a native race living in the deep jungle, the primate-like Asadi, who seem to have declined from a civilized state into barely sentient savagery. Although they are primate-like, they are at the same time radically alien, both in physiology – they get much of their energy from the sun by a process rather like photosynthesis – and in behaviour. They are like parodies of humans, but at the same time their complexly ritualized lives are nauseatingly deranged by human standards. Egan Chaney has made a field trip into their jungle – itself so disorienting that he calls it the Synesthesia Wild – to investigate Asadi behaviour, and it is his report, "Death and Designation Among the Asadi", assembled and published after his permanent return to the jungle by his colleague Thomas Benedict (who narrates *Transfigurations*), which comprises the indigestible alien presence at the heart of the shape of the book; the content of the report is as well indigestible for the characters whose lives are shaped by Chaney's disappearance, and who become obsessed by their attempts to make sense of that disappearance and of the Asadi who must have caused it. Benedict (and Chaney's daughter Elegy Cather) are trying to make sense of "Death and Designation", which itself is a statement that no ultimate sense can be made; in the terms of this review, they are trying to domesticate the Asadi to the parlance of the mimetic novel.

And indeed *Transfigurations* is a fever of explanation. Hypothesis builds on hypothesis as Benedict and Elegy add more and more data to the original observations, and much of the resulting construction is beautifully crafted, almost hallucinatory it is so plausible. But of course these explanations are never enough – and the intellectual tact by which Bishop makes them almost *but not quite* fit the data they are meant to make transparent is perhaps the strongest part of this extremely dense and carefully thought-through novel. Eventually, Benedict and Elegy find Egan Chaney, who in his attempts at comprehension and assimilation has undergone a strange involuntary failed metamorphosis at the hands of the huri, bat-like parasites deeply and intricately involved in Asadi life; the explanation of their melancholy and coercive sovereignty over Asadi consciousness through thousands of years of cultural decay represents perhaps the fiercest thrust of hypothesis in the entire book – and we long to be convinced, we all have a stake in domesticating the Other. But it won't wash. Egan Chaney – physically and mentally transmogrified – is as far as the novel can go, and it's not far enough. He understands no more than we do. He can ape but he cannot speak the language of metamorphosis, and stands, at novel's close, as a sign of the prison-house.

I think that is what Bishop intended in this stunning book.

Shadow of Earth
by Phyllis Eisenstein *(Dell, 1979, 329pp, $2.25, ISBN 0 440 18032 5)*

reviewed by Dave Langford

Sf, the genre that launched a thousand Armadas, is at it again with yet another

parallel world where the Invincible Armada lives up to its name, smashing England and Protestantism and scientific method at a stroke; once again Holy Mother Church is unopposed in her inquisitions and stiflings of enquiry, and once again the terminus is a 20th Century of mediaeval gloom, replete with lice and squalor, "the black-powder siege cannon its ultimate weapon". This course of events has been worn so smooth that I think Phyllis Eisenstein could have spared us the blow-by-blow account (pages 29-35) of how it got that way . . . there's ample information in the rest of the book, while the details of *why* the Armada triumphed in this world are quite irrelevant to the story.

When she has put away her apparatus, Eisenstein gets down to telling a good story our own Earth and the alternative exist simultaneously, so to speak, once Celia, the heroine, is thoroughly cut off from the former and thrown into the latter, the author hardly puts a foot wrong. It is the surrounding apparatus of the plot which keeps creaking and producing nagging doubts . . . not least of which is an irreverent speculation as to whether the book has to be sf at all. One could fudge up a recognizable version of the central story which takes place in, say, the chaos of South American banana republics, even to the detail of everyone's speaking Spanish. But let's take it from the beginning.

Celia and lover Larry are students (who met because she gives Spanish lessons while he for some reasons wishes to learn). She stumbles on his secret: He has been researching force fields, virtually alone; using smuggled university equipment he has constructed a portal to the alternate Earth, again alone (a whole clutch of possible sub-plots being disposed of by the flat statement that that Earth is the only one he can reach); with only the resources of a graduate student, he sets up a thriving gun-running trade . . . Now wait a moment. How does any impoverished student acquire unlimited quantities of Lee Enfield rifles? Why doesn't he sell something easier to get? "There's nothing else they need so desperately," he explains, avoiding the point. Nineteen pages later, when Celia has stepped into the other world and duly been enslaved, her captors strip her and talk about how her costly clothing (jeans, blouse, underwear) will sell for a whole lot more than she will. I believe that, but I can't believe in those rifles. Their function, of course, has nothing to do with Larry's economics; they are there to provoke lots of exciting upheaval, war and sudden death in the feudal alternate America. In fact this does rather little for the story.

Celia's story is a simple one: she undergoes a fate worse than death. Though an intelligent and resourceful modern woman, she can do little but resist passively as the feudal machinery puts her firmly in her place – a woman's place in a society where women, if not peasants and drudges, are expected to do nothing but breed and occupy their tiny minds with sewing. A charming, romantic young man called Río purchases her from the original captors; she is growing fond of him when he sells her to a bigwig, the Marqués, who has been seeking a blonde woman to perpetuate his rare, blonde-haired line. (The cover shows the anomalously pale don as dark and the dark young slaver as fair; those cover artists who aren't colour-blind tend to be illiterate.) This is regarded as a fine opportunity for Celia; after 20 years or so of sewing and producing children in the Marqués's home, she can become a matriarch and boss people around!

There's nothing chicken-hearted about this book; nor is anything wrapped in a haze of erotic fantasy (cf. Jane Gaskell's works, where the heroine's reaction to a gang-bang by the Golden Horde would be, roughly, to say "Oh, you *naughty* men" whilst arranging her hair more provocatively). Celia is not saved by a last-minute cavalry charge from the Marqués's attentions; not having her pills, she

becomes pregnant; there is something highly convincing in the quiet, tough way she hangs on to sanity. Suicide seems an interesting option, but she keeps control of herself. Worse is to come. The only way to get home is *via* a device of Larry's, captured along with him when the Marqués gets curious about the source of guns; the gadget is part of a belt (time machines and probability shifters are always built into people's belts) now worn by a soldier as spoils of war. How do you get a soldier to take his belt off without arousing his suspicions? Celia, umpteen months pregnant, grits her teeth and gets down to it. A tough lady.

Larry dies in the Marqués's torture chamber, babbling nonsense about alternate worlds which no-one will believe. Celia has her unwanted baby – another harrowing passage – and eventually escapes in the aftershock of a minor war, in the company of Río. The tables are turned back on Earth, of course; Río plays straight man in the old fantasy game of Showing The Primitive Person The Wonders Of The 20th Century, while there's a strong wash of realism from Celia's parents' reaction to her return, after a year's "amnesia", with a young man who speaks only Spanish . . . Presently Río decides he'd rather go home.

> "Coward!" she shouted. "Is this the man who roamed the forests of San Felipe alone? Coward!"
> . . . "I am a coward," he said. "And so are you."
> "I? In what way am I a coward?"
> "You would not stay in San Felipe."

Full circle: Celia's treatment of Río on her home ground precisely echoes everyone's treatment of her in the other world, even though she should know better – hammering home the truth that she too is less than perfect, while her oppressors acted only according to the moral laws of their appalling society. Some melodrama there may be, but romantic haziness is not allowed to creep into this solidly readable book. With such well-worn and unpromising material, it's quite an achievement.

Visions and Venturers
by Theodore Sturgeon *(Gollancz, 1979, 300pp, £5.50, ISBN 0 575 02679 9)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

I should imagine that this is a collection for Sturgeon completists only. The material assembled is all old; mostly from the late 40s and early 50s, with isolated offerings as remote as 1942 and as recent as 1965. More to the point, none of it is by any means Sturgeon's best work, and there is a certain irony in Gollancz having dredged up James Blish's old tribute ("the finest conscious artist science fiction has yet had") to decorate the dust jacket of what is plainly an anthology of gleanings. Presumably we have Sturgeon's often-lamented low rate of production to thank for this negligible stopgap. Whatever the reason, the result is a book in which it is really rather difficult to remain interested: read in chronological order, the stories throw a peripheral light on the development of genre science fiction over a quarter of a century, and undoubtedly illuminate Sturgeon's growing confidence and expertise throughout this part of his career. But such are traditionally the consolations of second rate work.

To descend to cases. The oldest story, "The Hag Seleen", comes from *Unknown Worlds*, and constitutes a perfect demonstration of what makes the supernatural horror story contemptible. The plot, a formulaic bit of nonsense about Cajun voodoo, serves as a vehicle to a dreary freight of implausible narrative contrivance, easy sentimentalizing (already clearly visible as Sturgeon's besetting sin), and some memorably awful "lyrical" writing: "Patty was my daughter and Anjy's . . . Figuratively she had originated in some hot corner of hell and had left there with such incredible violence that she had taken half of heaven with her along her trajectory and brought it with her." In other words, the child is a precocious tomboy – who, needless to relate, finally saves her parents from the eponymous villainess by a combination of shrewd, instinctive anthropological insight, Marine Commando guts and a loveable lisp. Still, these were early days.

By 1949, as two stories demonstrate, much of the purpleness had been purged out of his prose, though it lingers on in places (as it was to do even in *More Than Human*). The narrative voice remains hearty and colloquial, and relations between the generations and the sexes are still presented entirely in terms of sentimental cliché. We are, without doubt, still in the world of the pulps – *Weird Tales* in these instances. The stories are as poor as the strenuously "kooky" titles ("The Martian and the Moron", "One Foot and the Grave") suggest, but the latter is interesting as the earliest unmistakably "Sturgeonish" story in the volume. The characteristics are recognizable on all levels, from the "suspended" opening paragrah (*in medias res*, with as many characters and plot devices as possible crowded in before the reader can make instant sense of them) to the central theme of human isolation, loneliness and jealousy. Regrettably, what *homo gestalt* does for mankind *More Than Human* is done in "One Foot" by the archangel Kamael, who has been imprisoned underground for millennia but is finally freed to help the human race towards fellowship and mutual love, away from fear and sectarianism. It's a pretty notion, but the machinery of the story, already sagging before the climax, crumbles completely under such a weighty denouement: the effect is is of a fusion of Lovecraft and Milton, which strives for grandeur and achieves silliness.

Essentially the same story turns up again two years later as "The Traveling Crag". The machinery has been rebuilt to please *Fantastic Adventures'* preferences, and the objective correlative is different. Instead of a buried archangel, we have a buried alien machine which neutralizes fear and makes people love one another. They also, by a stroke of alien benevolence, become great writers into the bargain – Sturgeon's harping on how "moving" and "exquisite" their stories are has the unfortunate side effect of directing one's attention to the shoddiness of *his* story. The *deus ex machina* is still numbingly dominant, and the story survives only as a fragment of vapid libertarian daydreaming.

Come 1953, and two stories. "Talent" is a brief anecdote about a miracle-working child hoist by his own petard, and is a little enlivened by a dash of the cruelty which is the other face of Sturgeon's sentimentality. The writing, too, is a good deal better than what has gone before, principally because here the writer has discarded the first person narrator with his endless wisecracks, soft-boiled cynicism, uncomfortable bonhomie and nervous striving for effect. The result is a prose less hectic and more assured, though still over-ripe in patches. The story, short as it is, suffers from the predominance of the child Precious, an aptly-named and intolerable brat, no more lovable for being one of this author's generic types. The other 1953 story, "The Touch of Your Hand", is just the sort of thing Brian Aldiss might have adduced to illustrate his generalizations about *Galaxy* in *Billion Year Spree*: markedly anti-Campbell in ideological tone, a lengthy denunciation of high-technology living, of

specialization and the fragmentation of culture which it brings, of the Hero Principle, of *Astounding*'s Victorian ideals of material progress, and so on. The militaristic conqueror and technocrat turns out to be, in the terms of his culture, both a cripple and a child, and his perversion is the result purely of loneliness, as in a Sturgeon story it is likely to be. Unfortunately, the story is overlong and marred by a languid lyricism which reminds me strongly of Arthur Clarke's less successful pieces from the same period. Any sting which the story might have had as a parable is negated by the dreamy prettiness of the telling.

The most recent story, "The Nail and the Oracle", gives small sign of improvement. It is told in the brisk, hearty, forced-witty voice of "TheTraveling Craig" rather than the remote, pretty tones of "The Touch of Your Hand"; it is freely peppered with interjections like "The old son of a gun!" and "Nope!"; and, given its origin in 1965, it is therefore considerably more anachronistic and less interesting than earlier stories in the book. Generically, it's an Asimovian computer puzzle with a typically flip ending, little more than a mediocre joke told at ridiculous length. Even technically it's poor – the insertion of paragraphs-full of circumstantial information halfway through in order to set the scene for a point which is not even central to the story suggests clumsy planning or even improvisation.

All told, the contents of this collection are history rather than literature. The satisfactions they offer are nostalgic, academic, polemic, biographical – almost anything except the native satisfactions of good writing. The necessity for such a compilation is hard to see.

The Stars are the Styx
by Theodore Sturgeon *(Dell, 1979, 382pp, $2.25, ISBN 0 440 18006 6)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

"One is conditioned to be austere and objective," writes Theodore Sturgeon. "Well, I say the hell with it. Most of what I write is written by the simple process of opening a vein and dripping it (all too slowly) into the typewriter." This collection of ten stories gives a good opportunity to follow that bloody trail over eleven years and judge the "simple process" at length. It's a remarkably straight track – a slight shift up and down again in the elevation of the prose, a swing some degrees to the left in the politics – but that may be an effect of the editing. The element of care remains steady, and the concern is with mankind. "My research has always been people," he says.

The stories certainly bear this out. People are primary: he researches quirks, not quarks. Some of his humans are timeless, others contemporary; few show convincing signs of being future people. He deals with qualities and habits of mind, especially in interaction; he is impassioned, alert to the pulses. The heartiness also shows up as a certain wilful sentimentality, often at odds with probability and observation. He declares his faith in "ultimate justice" and measures out the poetic sort in every story, so that all things end well or promise to. Man may be fallen, but he can hope for perfection, especially if there are co-operative aliens on hand.

Sturgeon's research has led him to discover more about the peculiarities of the psyche and the intricate mechanics of mind than most of his contemporaries and many of his successors in sf. Again and again he pins some trait. Two brothers meet after years:

> They hit each other, cursed, called each other the filthiest possible names. It would not be easy to explain this to an extra-terrestial; it isn't necessarily a human thing to do. It's a cultural thing. It means, I want to touch you, it means I love you; but they were men and brothers, so they hit each other's arms and shoulders and swore despicable oaths and insults.

Or this early morning observation from an extra-terrestial newcomer:

> There was a hoarse shout from inside, a violent floundering, and then Chandler Behringer appeared. He was tousled and frightened. His panic, she noted, had been sufficient to drive him outdoors without his shirt, but not without his trousers.

Much of the psychoanalysis has a sexual element, which gives the sense of reading something "advanced"; but though his characters buzz so many recognizable and indeed illuminating signals, few attain the roundness of full identity. Partly this is because Sturgeon sees the limitations of mankind and concludes, in the popular way, that we are incomplete or even damaged. He uses the alien viewpoint to dramatize it, and other sf properties as metaphors for it: we are a young race, or else a degenerate one, or one blighted by virus and mutation. His optimistic assessment of our chances relies, here as elsewhere, on the possibilities of synergetic combinations of people, or parts of people. "Rule of Three" shows alien missionaries infiltrating humans and pressing them into healthy trios instead of weak couples. "The Other Man" suggests a posthypnotic therapy with which the components of an unbalanced mind might be shuffled back into a nicer one. The wisdom of Sturgeon's love admits that there would be a loss of tone, of spirit and romance in the cured man: there's the passion with the research, so I wouldn't quarrel with it. The awkward thing is that Sturgeon believed in the therapy he proposed, and still does, twenty-three years later.

Every one of these stories posits some perfect harmony, social or psychological integration, or even the Tao, not metaphysical but potential, even latent. A shove should do it, and a little attention will show us where to push. One revelation will be sufficient:

> It was as if a curtain had been lifted from their minds for the first time in their lives . . . He knew instinctively that what he now felt was a new norm, and that it was humanity's birthright.

And Sturgeon agrees with him.

When a character and his author "know instinctively" things that contradict a reader's experience, how can the reader give full credit? Sometimes, in "Granny Won't Knit" for instance, the imaginative inadequacy of the proposed utopia betrays the crudity of the original analysis. This is most obvious where premises of Sturgeon's design have been outdated – the hippie commune and the power of the atom may be answers in some cases, but have provided whole new problems in more. The better stories are open-ended ones, "The Claustrophile", "Dazed", and "The Education of Drusilla Strange", where Sturgeon juggles his exempla instead of holding them reverently aloft. The sf writer, like the special effects man in "Occam's Scalpel", offers models which may suggest analyses of problems and even solutions to them. Do they distort, partially or allegorically, in order to demonstrate, or is their symbolism actually much closer than that? When Sturgeon trusts his heart to answer that question, I don't. When he admits ambiguities, as in the magnificent "Drusilla Strange", I admire, and understand the powerful influence acknowledged by writers such as Aldiss and Delany. Read *The Stars are the Styx*. Consider "Drusilla Strange", with the vision that Luellen provides at the end: is it 50s sexism,

or deep, timeless realism? Whatever your disposition, the story allows the alternative: that I can trust. If you need something more concrete, look at the alien's first sight of bubble-gum: *that* is great science fiction!

Note Some of the points contained in this review emerged in discussion with Nick Pratt, to whom I am thus indebted.

Juniper Time
by Kate Wilhelm *(Harper & Row, 1979, 280pp, $10.95, ISBN 0 06 014657 5)*

reviewed by Ann Collier

The Western United States is devastated by drought. Society is disintegrating under the strain of the migration eastward, the consequent overcrowding and food shortages, and the general economic depression. The heroine, Jean Brighton, unable any longer to endure these privations, goes westwards to her grandparents' home in Oregon where, living for a while with the Indians, she learns to achieve a difficult balance, how to adapt the environment to meet her needs and how to adapt herself to survive on what is available. Strengthened by this practical and psychological training she returns to city life to take a major role in the regeneration of the country's economy, albeit by a gigantic hoax. Initially welcomed as a saviour, she later falls under suspicion and goes once more into a kind of exile.

From this plot synopsis, it is evident how easily *Juniper Time* could have descended by way of cliché and home-spun philosophy to mawkish sentimentality. Certainly, few of the elements of this plot are novel to Kate Wilhelm's work. She has written previously of a female protagonist, of outstanding achievement in her profession, who faces moral choices of far-reaching significance for society as well as herself. We have seen before nostalgia for the security of childhood giving way under acute stress to a painful process of maturity, which process seems to be reflected in the turmoil of the surrounding society. In response, people search for a perfect solution, a panacea, be it literally an end to all pain as in *The Clewiston Test*, the possibilities offered by cloning as in *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, or here, the desperate hope that a mysterious cylinder found in space announces the arrival of aliens who will be able to solve all earth's problems.

But, though the elements in *Juniper Time* may not be new, they are here blended and synthesized to produce a far richer, more complex and satisfying work than previously. Plot and sub-plot, characterization, setting, style and structure form an intricate and inter-related network. Indeed, it seems inaccurate to speak of a sub-plot, so closely related is this to the main events of the story. Rather, the outline of the plot given above is the centre of several concentric circles which spread out from the story of an individual to encompass the fate of the Indians and of the society at large. One of the major themes is precisely whether an individual can and should, disregarding the social, economic and climatic conditions, choose his own lifestyle while the world falls into chaos around him. Cluny, the male protagonist and Jean's childhood friend, tries to do just this and succeeds in the early part of the novel. Protected initially by his father's wealth and prestige, he escapes the worst horrors of the approaching disasters. Later, following a career in space research as an astrophysicist, he works on the orbiting space station to which his father and Jean's

devoted their lives. This is presented clearly as an escape from the problems on earth.

> At those times, he yearned to be back on Alpha, away from the noise, the smells, the press of strange bodies and their hungers and needs. From Alpha, the world was calm, serene, beautiful (p.268).

He develops what the author calls a "functional blindness" and although he shows signs of gaining some vision throughout the book, this is very limited.

Jean also searches for an escape route but only after full exposure to the suffering and humiliation which surrounds her. Refusing to continue her research as a linguist when the work becomes classified by the government, she loses income and accommodation and in desperation goes to a Newtown, hastily erected for mass communal living. Only the bare essentials of life are catered for, however, and there is no privacy, no safety, no individuality. This is an immensely powerful image of despair, helplessness, apathy and violence. It is harrowing because of its credibility (every picture I've ever seen of countries devastated by physical disaster, war or political turmoil, feeds my response to it) and because of the simple, forceful and unrelenting style of the writing, also reduced to its bare essentials. The rape scene which ends this section is a metaphor for the total degradation of those who flock to the Newtowns, seeking survival at whatever cost. Similarly, the Indians have sacrificed much of their cultural heritage for the guarantee of a secure life on the reservations. When that guarantee can no longer be met, they are faced with the choice either of total surrender and life in a Newtown, or slowly and painstakingly relearning the ways of their ancestors and surviving on little. Much of this section of the book deals with the impact of white domination on the Indians who "came to doubt the value of everything of (their) own" (p.239). Their solution cannot be Jean's, however, and what she learns from them is the importance of facing one's hidden fears which otherwise serve to paralyze and terrify. Again, this is reflected on a national as well as a personal level and is represented by the metaphor of the drought.

> But the drought was here long before the rains stopped . . . when the real drought came, it was almost welcomed as something we could all point to and say, There's the reason (p.271).

The fear is a reluctance to live in the present, a desire to hold on to the security of childhood. The opening pages of the book are a description of incidents from Jean's childhood, fondly remembered, her parents' love, her grandparents' indulgence, a safe, warm, familiar world. After being raped, Jean takes her chance on survival and returns to her grandparents' home. In contrast to the bleakness and uniformity of the Newtown, the family home is portrayed in great detail by references to the colours, textures, smells and shapes in the house. But childhood is gone and cannot be recaptured. Jean's strength when she leaves Oregon for the East derives from having accepted and integrated all her experiences, good and bad, and is thus set free to face the future and to take control of her life again. Previously, she had felt destined to live in a certain way and out of fear tried desperately but impotently to avoid her fate. Now, she assumes control not only of her own life but adopts a course of action which affects the society as a whole. But this is no facile exhortation to find one's real self and go forth into the evil world clad in the armour of truth. Increased prosperity and hope for the future are inspired by an enormous con-trick which Jean perpetrates, albeit for the common good. "You can change the world with words," her father says in the opening chapter and the question of

whether the words need be true is left open. In a sense, Jean is practising the lessons learnt in the West; always hitherto a passive victim, she now becomes a manipulator on a grand scale. Like the junipers of the title which survive in the harshest, most desolate environment, she pretends and tricks but she survives. The conclusion provides no easy answers, neither salvation nor damnation for the heroine or the society, but the tone is cautiously optimistic. The aliens may not be coming to cure all earth's ills but men by their determination and imagination have taken an impossible step forward.

Kate Wilhelm describes with equal ease the appalling brutality of life in a New-town and the harsh, magnificent Oregon desert and mountains. The structure of the book, although complex, is not bewildering but emphasizes one of the book's themes: the central characters' shared childhood experiences are described until the point at which their lives diverge. We then follow each separately until the mysterious cylinder, as if by fate, draws them together again. But when on the final page, they go into exile together it is by choice and not by necessity. Although the scope of the novel is panoramic, the central characters are drawn with great insight and in absorbing detail. Whether it be classified as "mainstream" or science fiction, *Juniper Time* is a beautiful and accomplished novel.

Woman on the Edge of Time
by Marge Piercy *(Women's Press, 1979, 381pp, £1.95, ISBN 0 7043 3837 8)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Case: Consuelo Camacho Ramos, Mexican-American, thirty-seven, widowed, deserted by her second husband, taken into psychiatric care after assaulting their six-year-old daughter in a fit of depression under the influence of barbituates and alcohol. Released into the harsh mercy of Welfare, Connie lives on alone in her grim apartment, all her opportunities gone. Into her dreams comes Luciente, lithe, graceful, ambiguous visitor from another age. Soon Luciente is appearing in the street, in the apartment; is Connie finally succumbing by hallucination to psychosis? Before she can decide her niece Dolores arrives seeking sanctuary from her pimp Geraldo, enraged because she is pregnant. When he bursts in and menaces Dolly, Connie hits him in the face with a half-gallon wine jar. She next wakes, battered and bruised, back in the psychiatric hospital.

In what solitude she has there she summons Luciente, feeling the mysterious presence at her shoulder. Luciente is a time-traveller, a "sender" on an investigative jaunt from the future. Connie has a talent not yet recognised: she is a "catcher", the receptive mind needed to enable Luciente to project back in time. Together they journey into the world of 2137, to Mattapoisett, Luciente's home village. There Connie finds a human society that has learned from the mistakes of history. Though computers and automated factories are essential to their culture, they practise an agrarian communalism, serene but tough, finely tuned to the ecology of their environment. In her visits Connie explores and is welcomed by the villagers; she learns how they live and witnesses them coping with birth, education and death, art, agriculture, celebration, sex and psychotherapy. Much is familiar from the schools of softer technology of our time, but there are surprises too: bottle babies turn out to be a good idea; Mattapoisett and kindred communities are continually

at war, against the machine-cultures in the east. Meanwhile back in 1976 Connie is experiencing the violent injustice of the politics of insanity, as the victim of an omnipotent institution that defines her thoughts as delusions and her behaviour as dangerous. She is being prepared for the insertion into her brain of an experimental regulator, by means of which she can be kept docile and obedient. Her independence effectively destroyed, she will be given her freedom again. Freedom without power: the catcher caught.

Woman on the Edge of Time is polemic in the Utopian tradition. Mattapoisett is Utopia. New York, its psychiatric institutions, are Hell. But if Piercy has written a tract, she has also written a novel, and written it well. There is anger in it, but the dominant tone is clean reason, bitter as well as sweet. Her powers of characterization pull the participants up and away from allegory; there are no Keseyan caricatures in the hospitals. Connie is a compelling personality, like one of D.G. Compton's characters: strong, damaged, difficult to like. The village of Mattapoisett inevitably recalls Le Guin's Anarres, but it is not ambiguous. The ineradicable human failings that jeopardise that colony hardly taint Mattapoisett, whose people behave impeccably. That should be a flaw in the novel's credibility, but somehow – it must be obvious by now that I admire this book a great deal – it seems instead to give the community an uncompromising assurance. No doubt Piercy has provoked objectors as Le Guin has. The doctrine of Mattapoisett is as open to political criticism as Odonianism, or any other. I am not interested in the politics of the debate these books automatically open; I note that any uncertainty I feel comes from the ease with which Piercy's Utopians keep their technology down, their machines enslaved. As in *News from Nowhere,* the grinding of great engines is necessary for the re-establishment of pastoral. The soundproofing is a bit too perfect. I don't believe that the relationship between human and tool could ever be stable . . . but between now and 2137 will come even vaster technological errors than any we have made so far, according to Luciente, and if there should then be some humans who really can learn from past mistakes and actually agree on their lessons, perhaps a number of small communities could exist, for a while, in growth not stasis, constantly embattled by external threat . . .?

Luciente insists to Connie that time is vulnerable. Without the proper uprisings and revolts, private and public, now and later, the blessed village will not come into existence. On some of her last time-trips Connie experiences anomalies that seem to prove the theory. After her own costly rebellion it is by no means certain that the future is safe. This is what justifies the absolute goodness of Mattapoisett: its elusiveness. Piercy makes it apparent that Connie's guided tour is no delusion, but it is a vision, a vision of all that's right displayed to a sane but damaged woman in a madhouse, in the midst of all that's wrong. From Mattapoisett it is certainly possible in eternity to get back to the Age of Greed and Waste, but it is by no means certain that time and humanity will be strong enough to make the opposite journey, through hisory. That is up to Connie, and to us. Piercy lets her villagers lecture and preach as Utopians always do to their visitors, but she shows how difficult, dangerous and vital it is to try to apply what they say.

Woman on the Edge of Time deserves all the readers it can get. Marge Piercy has joined the self-educated clarity of feminism to the visionary scope of science fiction. Her single theme is survival. Her book is powerfully, unfashionably sane, half of which comes from looking at insanity, and discovering what it's all about.

The Merman's Children
by Poul Anderson *(Berkley/Putnam, 1979, 319pp, $11.95, ISBN 0 399 12375 X)*

reviewed by Roz Kaveney

Poul Anderson used the heroic fantasy fruitfully very early in his career; *The Broken Sword* is an effective vehicle for what has always been one of his major themes – and has recently come to be a dominant one – the depiction less of the dissolution and collapse of a moral and social order than of its slow decay and the growth among its inhabitants of the knowledge that the process of destruction is well-established and inexorable. At a date when *The Lord of the Rings* was still being published Anderson independtly and skilfully adapted material from the sagas, the eddas and mediaeval romances to the requirements of the commercial market; the result is crudely effective. Austerely decadent elves change a human child for an elf-troll hybrid; the inevitable feud between these two becomes significant in the elf-troll wars, and the elf-reared hero's inadvertant incent produces a son, who will, it is darkly foreboded, make things a good deal worse. Christianity and Odim loom from the wings. Some stylistic clumsinesses – not necessarily improved by the novel's 1971 restoration – apart, this is still by far his most original and significant contribution to heroic fantasy. *Three Hearts and Three Lions* is fluent enough but is essentially a reworking of a standard de Camp and Pratt plot; *Operation Chaos* is a similar exercise performed on Heinlein's "Magic, Inc"; *A Midsummer Tempest* is a regrettable and whimsical piece of Stockbroker Tudor. Except for a few short stories Anderson's contribution to fantasy reached fruition and completion almost as it started.

His new fantasy, *The Merman's Children*, does not change this situation, despite its attempt to return to the destruction of the world of legend and the rise of the more boring Christian world. The result of some years' labour – sections appeared in Lin Carter's *Flashing Swords* anthologies – it is a look at the later histories of the participants of the legend which Matthew Arnold englished as "The Forsaken Merman". Cheerfully soul-less merfolk live pastoral idylls at the bottom of the fjord until exorcised by a more than usually intolerant priest. The halfhuman children of their king rob Atlantis for funds for a sister who wishes to become a nun and for their quest for their father. In Greenland they mediate between the dying Viking settlements and ecologically conscious Esquimaux. In Yugoslavia their father and his people have accepted the inevitability of Christianity and have been given souls upon baptism; the heroine similarly sells out to God and a handsome fisherboy while, unregenerate, the hero goes off to America with an amalgam of his other two non-incestuous loves, a whore and a rusalka vilja lorelei. Anderson has thought long and hard about the middle ages and the orthodox theological position of the nonhuman denizens of legend; he has pored copiously over history and myth. But to what avail?

His faults in the past have been many but have rarely included the simply tedious. *The Merman's Children* is too *willed*, too much a book that he thought he ought to write, and the result is too little endowed with the guts and power that usually redeem his work. He has seen the necessity of exploring fictionally one of the answers to the entropy to which all his imagined universes seem to be tending, and has accordingly set out to portray, in cold blood, acceptance of the will of God – while keeping his hero free of holy water for the sake of the easily offended pagan susceptibilities of a portion of his audience. A part of the trouble is that at no point in this book is religion rendered emotionally appealing or even

regrettably authoritative; as always when at his weakest Anderson leaves too much for us to take for granted. For all that it is a return to a favourite theme seen in a potentially interesting and charming light, *The Merman's Children* is simply lacking in the passion that sometimes saves Anderson from his horribly polished commercial skill. When describing Elfhill or the hearts of stars Anderson is involved with his material and stretches himself; when, as here, he describes places he has or reasonably might have visited he descends to the level of supporting-feature travelogue: "The coast of Dalmatia rises steeply. A bare league inland Shibenik town stands high on a hill above the river Krka and sees mountain peaks in the east." A similar thinness of imaginative power characterizes the jolly sexual encounters – this is the sort of thing that gives free and equal partnership a bad name. Potentially the most interesting section of the book, the episode which deals with the decay and assimilation of the West Greenland settlements is one of the most sketcht; the supernatural nature of the merfolk renders them immune to the cold without which any imagined Greenland is going to lack much of its bite. For the elect protagonists of Anderson's work the world has become increasingly safe – disasters and damnations rain around them but their integrity and emotional deadness wraps them as an unbreachable shield. His work has become a game of conflict in which his pieces are perpetually mended and reboxed in some Valhalla of cliché at the end. *The Broken Sword* explored a universe in which the worst could not only happen but be felt to happen; in *The Merman's Children* neither damnation nor baptism is ultimately a serious choice. Where the author's imagination is ultimately so unengaged there is little chance that the work will be worth much attention.

The Unlimited Dream Company
by J.G. Ballard *(Cape, 1979, £4.95, ISBN 0 224 01742 X)*

reviewed by John Clute

In the flat eerie epiphanies of *The Unlimited Dream Company*, which is a posthumous fantasy, J.G. Ballard has written perhaps his most traditional novel yet. There are numerous tales of adventure set in some kind of afterlife – from legends of life with the gods in Valhalla and elsewhere down to their modern secular equivalents in *A House-Boat on the Styx* and its sequels by John Kendrick Bangs, and the Riverworld novels of Philip José Farmer. The initial binding characteristic of books like these is that their protagonists proceed from the assumption – whether tacit or worked out–that they are indeed dead, that they have passed on to another plane, and that the destiny they must work out in this afterworld is an expanded furtherance of their previous lives, so that novels like *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* and its sequels tend to work as wish-fulfilment picaresques. What I'd like to designate the posthumous fantasy, though a better term may well be forthcoming, much more closely resembles stories like Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", or Conrad Aiken's "Mr Arcularis", stories where men at the literal point of death escape into an imagined alternative to that death, only gradually to realize that this dream world is fading out, generally to the tune of some insistent horrifying rhythm, perhaps that of the failing heart. In the posthumous fantasy, death has of course already occurred, though the protagonist is at first unaware of this, and the limbo in which he tries to continue his life tends to emit an aura of

imminent epiphany, of a puzzle that must be solved. The protagonist will be driven to its solution. Typically a metamorphic intertwining of plot and landscale, this puzzle will tend ultimately to cash out as a rendering of the shape of the protagonist's life: Representative narrative images of a soul's entelechy. Some better-known examples of posthumous fantasy would be the initial portions of Wyndham Lewis's *The Childermass* (1928), Charles Williams' *All Hallows' Eve* (1945), Claude Chabrol's superb film, *Alice, or the Last Fugue* (1976); a savage narrowing of the idiom probably substrates stories like Thomas M. Disch's "Descending" (1964). *The Unlimited Dream Company* is an almost orthodox contribution to the genre.

It is told in the first person by its protagonist, Blake, whose name seems rather coyly to point to the visionary nature of his story. Obsessed by visions of flight, he steals a small airplane from Heathrow and crashes it into the Thames at Shepperton, a small subfusc suburb of London south of the airport. As the plane sinks into the water, he has an intense tapestry-like vision* of the Shepperton shore, from which several human beings gaze upon him, and then he drowns. He awakes on the bank, surrounded by the frieze on the walls of his vision; they remain central to his consciousness for the remainder of his tenure in Shepperton, a simulacrum of the world itself, and which he cannot leave, despite several attempts at reaching the Motorway. Shepperton, and the frieze of observers, remain as intimate to him, until he admits his death, as Pincher Martin's tooth – William Golding's 1956 novel can be read as either a pre-posthumous fantasy or as a full-fledged one. Soon Blake comes to the realization that he must transform the lives of his new friends, that he has become their engendering principle or godhead. He wishes to make love to all men and women and children. He passes naked through Shepperton at dawn, making the town fruitful with his semen, so that dense tropical vegetation springs up everywhere with hosannas. There are birds everywhere. Eventually he teaches all the residents of Shepperton – none of whom are able to leave the town any more than he is – to fly. Three childrens– part of the original frieze of witnesses – dig a grave in which they inter fragments of the drowned plane, along with bits of clothing. Blake returns obsessively to the grave. He undergoes epiphanies of water, earth and air. He longs for an epiphany of fire. He ingests the people of Shepperton into his body and frees them into the welkin, transfigured. The walls of his self are grandiloquent, paranoid, edgy with self-devouring imperious lust. The people of Shepperton are set free. Away they fly like birds. He comes to realize that he is dead, and that he will soon be resuscitated in a pantheistic orgasm of the entire organic and inorganic world. The book closes before his posthumous caesarism turns to dust.

The novel's main innovation lies in the stridency of its protagonist's coming to terms with the shape of the meaning of his life, and because Blake is so inveterately himself in his unremitting efforts to save the world by ingesting it, there is a peculiarly *ungrateful* restiveness to the book as a whole. Because the epiphanies are so thoroughly owned by Blake, there is a final failure of liquidity of texture, of donation, of solace. The book has no religion. But it contributes to its genre, a solipsist variation on the basic theme of transcendence. It works: In Blake's terms.

* It should be noted that both this vision, and the cover illusration which replicates it, constitute a clear (and rather moving) homage to the painter Stanley Spencer and to the apocalyptic prelapsarian paradise farther ups the Thames at Coo kham he returned to constantly in his works.

The Dead Zone
by Stephen King *(Viking Press, 1979, 426pp, $11.95, ISBN 0 670 26077 0)*

reviewed by Anthony Wolk

The Dead Zone represents another excursion into sf for Stephen King. The novel explores the awful talent for precognition possessed by Johnny Smith. The talent has a neurological explanation. As a child Johnny is knocked on the head in a skating accident and regains consciousness with an occasional gift for predicting the future. The explanation goes: "A part of John Smith's brain has been damaged beyond repair . . . He calls this his 'dead zone', and there, apparently, a number of trace memories were stored . . . Balancing this off, another tiny part of John Smith's brain appears to have *awakened*. A section of the cerebrum within the parietal lobe. This is one of the deeply grooved sections of the 'forward' or 'thinking' brain. The electrical responses from this section of Smith's brain are way out of line from what they should be." The neurologist explains that John's "flashes" are preceded by touching of some sort, and associates the parietal lobe with the sense of touch.

The problem isn't the explanation; it's the way Johnny's precognition operates, both physically and morally. Why should he foresee only disasters: a battery exploding, an apartment or a roadhouse fire, a fall off a ladder? Nor is his talent simply precognition. Sometimes he touches a picture of a long-lost mother and knows where she is. He also knows where a lost wedding ring is. He can both sniff out a rapist-murderer and foresee a fascistic president and nuclear war. But he never foresees anything involving his own destiny. Yet it's not a wholly deterministic system. Some of these futures, or perhaps all, can be averted. The presidential candidate can be sidetracked or Chuck Chatsworth can be persuaded to skip his graduation party at Cathy's roadside inn and hence not be among the victims of the fire.

The title of the novel refers to a limitation on his talent, which is variously described as a "fouled circuit" or a "faulty relay ' where the "signals don't conduct". It's clearly not a zone of the dead like Bill Keller glimpses in Philip K. Dick's *Dr Bloodmoney* or the half-lifers sense in *Ubik*. The Tibetan *Book of the Dead* has nothing to do with King's "dead zone". But, surprisingly, Johnny does become aware of a "hallway" while in his four-and-a-half year coma following an auto accident. It's called a "hallway in time", as well as "a weird conduit between the land of the living and that of the dead". I wish King had developed this other sense of "dead zone". As the novel stands, it's as though it's entitled *The Fouled Relay*.

A more serious problem than how King limits Johnny Smith's psychic talent is the connection between morality and precognition. Johnny's mother, a flying saucer and doomsday nut, voices the moral link: "You'll know the voice when it comes. It'll tell you what to do . . . And when it does, Johnny . . . *do your duty*". Even this message, though, is fuzzy. Was it a misuse of his gift to win money at the wheel of fortune? Hence the auto accident and the coma? "Found money brings bad luck", his mother says. It's a psychic-Newtonian law: "that feeling of bad luck coming to balance off the good." So, with his gift there comes the price unless it's in the line of duty. Someone – and probably it's the someone "up there" – has a nice system all worked out, and Johnny is its instrument.

There are also structural problems with the novel. It has two strands to the plot: one having to do with a string of rape-murders in Johnny's home state of Maine, and the other with the uncouth, dishonest, violent, unscrupulous, fascist Greg Stillson whose nascent political ambitions carry him to Congress in 1976 from the

neighbouring state of New Hampshire. It's from his touch that Johnny forsees a presidency and the holocaust, though the vision is limited by the dead zone. Like a Chaucerian tale, the two plots need to resolve together. As it is, the murderer is discovered a bit more than halfway along, and then Stillson, who has been foreshadowed briefly a few times on his way to power, comes to centre stage. But the novel is in its own dead zone after the initial resolution, and is episodic thereafter. The reader is hard pressed to crank interest back into the story. King surely is aware of the problem, hence his efforts at foreshadowing. Partly, it may be the necessity for bestsellers to be blockbusters. King has to stretch for his 150,000 words, and character building, anticipation of doom, and refrain won't go far enough.

Apart from the structural failure and the inconsistency of Johnny's gift, the novel is readable. It has local colour, some interesting characters, a fair enough prose style. But it seems trivial. The sex murderer is the way he is because his mother caught him playing with himself at the age of 7; Greg Stillson had a domineering father and a too-forgiving mother. That nuclear war hangs in the balance is the overworked opposite. It's all very easy. Johnny's touch will never yield anything mundane: your house is on fire, the piano is playing with itself, the world is coming to an end. Even the character of Johnny Smith suffers as the novel grinds along – from a nice guy he evolves into a distasteful man with an obsession:

> Johnny felt the familiar coldness come over him, the trance feeling. The sensation that nothing mattered except to *know*. He even smiled a little, but it wasn't his smile.

Perhaps the burden is too great. Finding Lisa Schumann's high school ring was simpler. Now God or destiny "seems to be reaching out with its steady and unarguable hand to put the scales back in balance again . . . And I believe that when I finish what I have to finish, the scales will come completely back into balance again."

After reading *The Shining*, I had hopes that King might escape the formula of the horror novel with borrowings from sf. But I'd say that King is still writing strictly for the market. And Johnny Smith's recommendation as a teacher that non-readers should begin with "high-impact materials such as fantasy, science fiction, Westerns, and boy-meets-car juveniles" gives a fair notion of how King must envision that market.

Greencomber
by Peter Tate *(Doubleday, 1979, 182pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 385 13637 4)*

reviewed by Cherry Wilder

The beachcomber hero of this strange pastoral fantasy leaves the beaches of southern England and moves inland to "comb the green". He feels threatened by a team of men with metal detectors who follow him about; their leader, Manning, claims that the beachcomber is their talisman. Greencomber, as he now calls himself, wanders the countryside noting changes and tendencies. This sounds promising and timely; the story is set in the near future. Our hopes are defeated, however, by a vague style and a persistent unwillingness to spell anything out. The author's imagination

swerves between things that are nasty and things that are childish.

Greencomber comes to the Red Castle, a fairytale folly rebuilt in the nineteenth century; it contains "two perfectly sane children and a beautiful woman so scarred intracranially by many losses that she had withdrawn from the touch-logic of her faculties". These persons are all kept in solitary confinement; the child Satin appears to be a "test-tube" baby reared in very curious circumstances; the six-year-old boy Ben has had his brain enhanced to receive a peculiar ecological message. To suggest that such children would be perfectly sane and to have them behave like nice normal kiddies is an imaginative feat.

The man who controls these persons is Wolf Hochbaum, the remaining member of a team of wicked "chromosome-engineers" who worked in Stockholm until Sweden suffered a fall of soot. He is "an experimenter in the tradition of Auschwitz", "a pathological vandal". He is raising the two children to survive and dominate in the doomsday crisis he believes will soon arrive. The children are dosed, variously, with Lithium to keep Ben amenable to suggestion and rubidium to heighten Satin's initiative. Voices speak to them from the walls, food enters through a hatch, Ben is taught by Sleepfeed. They also learn by listening to Singer, the lovely red-haired woman. "What Hochbaum had done to Singer was nobody's business but in fairness to him he had stopped short of frontal lobotomy and in fairness to her she had been glad of the oblivion he offered". Now she is programmed to sing and utter ecological pronouncements which echo eerily over the surrounding countryside.

Greencomber encounters an oddly familiar bunch of rustics who pay no attention to the Voice. He approaches the castle, speaks to the children through their windows, observes Singer, tackles Hochbaum . . . drawing his axe . . . and brings them all out. The tone of the story is extraordinary; these sorts of cruelties and deprivations cannot be treated as fairytale. The children and Singer are incredible and so is Hochbaum who dwindles into a minor villain.

Greencomber chugs on in a camper van with his ready-made family from the New Forest to the coast and back again. Episodes involving the same nebulous pack of baddies include a village where the leaves mysteriously fall in a night and an outbreak of virulent erosion in which houses fall from cliffs. Domestic episodes and the gormless courtship of Greencomber and Singer alternate with mystification and scenery. The relentless, elliptical short paragraph style is made more irritating by the use of capitals for emphasis throughout, in place of italics. ("The trouble comes from INLAND and the cause is PEOPLE.")

When the story moves back to the purlieus of the New Forest it becomes more interesting and suggests that the author may have done better with an historical-pastoral or time-slipping tale. Manning kidnaps Singer and the children and Greencomber is led during his search for them to the fateful glade where William Rufus was shot to death in 1100 AD. The incidents leading up to the King's death long ago are examined. Was this murder instigated by the Church, by Prince Henry? Did Walter Tyrrel who fled to sanctuary fire the fatal arrow either by accident or design? Was this a pagan ritual murder? Greencomber's own ritual murder seems certain; his chief pursuer is revealed as a wizard, whose circle hunt "good men", using Singer as bait. There is a good melodramatic climax, complete with a menacing power saw.

Greencomber survives, of course, and the author casts about for another horrid thing for his hero to handle. He comes with unerring lack of taste, as you might say to the problem of the New Forest ponies. These charming creatures are rounded up and sold occasionally; it is given out as common knowledge, which a little girl

passes on to Satin, that certain Belgian buyers of pregnant ponies intend to serve unborn foal as a table delicacy. At the biggest restaurant in Liege, no less. Other ethnic dietary smears occur to the reviewer . . . the one about Auslanders in Germany capturing cats for the pot, which also turned up in Australia directed at different ethnic groups.

While the author is building up one myth he is exploding another: what has become of the English as a nation of animal lovers? The 21st century must have marked the end of an epoch. Where is the spirit shown by the members of the Royal Society who insulted Amundsen when they proposed three cheers for the dogs he ate on the way to the South Pole? Greencomber frees the ponies in question and gets rapped over the knuckles by the Verderers Court of the New Forest . . . or a version of the court got up for his benefit . . . because the owner of the ponies has lost money. In spite of all the talk about reality (or REALITY) the only clear message here is that the author uses queer sensational material. At any rate, by this time Greencomber's family start plotting against him too . . . in order to persuade him back to beachcombing. The whole daft caper ends peacefully; we hope Greencomber never breaks loose. Perhaps he would start town-combing through Whitechapel, in search of Jack the Ripper . . .

Morlock Night
by K.W. Jeter *(DAW, 1979, 156pp, £1.10, ISBN 0 87997 468 0)*

reviewed by Dave Langford

Sf authors are often tempted to graft their work onto that of celebrated dead writers who are not in a position to complain. The result can be worthwhile (e.g. Christopher Priest's *The Space Machine*), but generally we're treated to horrors like *The Wind Whales of Ishmael* – an ill-fitting sequel to *Moby Dick* wherein Philip José Farmer displays his inability to write like Melville – or, for that matter, like anybody but Philip José Farmer.

Morlock Night, planted firmly in Wells territory and following on from *The Time Machine*, manages to avoid the worst pitfalls. No Wells characters are recycled and ebased, or ar there cameo appearances from Sherlock Holmes and Dr Jekyll. The hero and narrator, Hocker, is the "quiet, shy man" who never spoke during the Time Traveller's recital; his story follows neatly enough from Wells's premises. It turns out that the Time Traveller met an inferior class of Morlock, mere proles; behind the scenes are some horridly clever ones who, after dealing with the Traveller on his second visit, proceed to master the time machine and invade the London of 1892. (The machine will in fact only operate to link 1892 and that distant future, owing to Edmund Crispin's "Hook, Line and Sinker Effect" – so called because the reader has to swallow it.) Bored by their monotonous diet of stewed Eloi, these super-Morlocks fancy some *haute cuisine* cannibalism. In a few decades the world is a nasty mess, as Hocker is allowed to experience proleptically; the growing disturbance of the Scheme of Things will lead to final blackout unless prevented at its source in 1892 . . .

So far this is a scenario for an action-adventure like countless others; but Jeter has a few good cards to play. Hocker's 19th century narrative style is well handled – I suspect DAW must take the blame for such interesting Victorianisms as "gotten",

"inside of" and "a long ways" (on the other hand, an Englishwoman of "a generation hence" comes out with "I just kind of figured . . ."). The vision of a Morlock-devastated world is suitably horrifying. Best of all is the lore of the London sewers (where else would Morlocks set up shop), thick with fascinating details lifted from Mayhew's *London Labour and London Poor* – giving a feel of authenticity unattainable by the more traditional auctorial study of Wells, Doyle and the rest.

(Incidentally, the woman mentioned above is the main – virtually the only – female character, and like most female characters these days she is tough, competent, quick on the uptake, etc, etc. Such is the impact of Raised Consciousness on the sf field; the tough, competent woman is becoming as much of a cliché as her ancestress, the heroine whose soft curvaceous body was matched by a mind of similar texture. Tafe, the woman in question, operates very nicely in her own milieu – the Morlock-shattered future England; for the rest of the book Jester can think of little to do with her, and she fades out of sight for whole chapters. Or so it seems.)

Unfortunately Jeter's eagerness to make this the most mindbogglingly imaginative novel ever leads him into ghastly excesses. Hold on tight! The gentleman responsible for alerting Hocker to the peril is none other than Merlinus Ambrosius. Only by re-assembling Excalibur and unearthing the current incarnation of Arthur can the Morlocks can be defeated. (And who could the incarnation of Arthur possibly be? You may well ask.) Meanwhile, and for no apparent reason, it turns out that the remoter portions of the sewers – where the foot of civil engineer has presumably never trod – connect with the pan-European subway system established by the bygone people of Atlantis. Good grief.

All this improbable material is actually assembled more dextrously than one would suspect from the mere list, but I couldn't force myself to believe it. Yet . . . the predictable ending does somehow avoid utter corniness; though amply flawed, *Morlock Night* isn't bad as an entertaining romp. Better to fail through excess than aridity any day.

New Arrivals, Old Encounters
by Brian Aldiss *(Cape, 1979, 224pp, £4.50, ISBN 0 224 01681 4)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

This collection of stories clusters tight around a central theory that, elegantly and simply, redeems matter, asserts the omnipresence of God, and shows that the human mind is an integral component of the cosmos. It may even be true; certainly most Eastern thinkers would accept it. It functions as a metaphorical departure point for an examination of man in the context of infinity. It is also, for anyone still investing in them, a Science Fiction Idea of the first water.

Aldiss has always been fascinated with the ethics of consciousness and the role of the mind. He once said, "The general view expressed in all my writing is . . . that living things are okay – marvellous, in fact, when you consider the ghastly situation, the space/time growth/decay structure, in which they are placed." Here he triangulates man's systematic attempts to explore and manipulate that structure, securing art, religion and science in co-operation. Two stories feature technological and astronautic priesthoods, while in a third a United Earth prepares to switch on the Ultimate Machine, which will obviously bring one into being. Armed with its most

sophisticated extensions (half the stories feature electronic oracles or authoritarian computers), the human mind may yet miss its cue or overplay its part. Set in the cosmic scheme to balance the brute determinism of matter, the brain may become disenchanted with the perpetual kaleidoscope of days and ways. Like any receiving apparatus it acts only by damping out the majority of incoming signals; developed too well it may mute the whole song of creation. "Consciousness might be even more basic to the universe than hydrogen", but the consciousness of God may still not be enough to save from a lonely death the man who has just proved His existence. God may even be indifferent.

There are the politics of consciousness to consider too. Reprinted here from *Comic Inferno* are "Amen and Out" and "The Soft Predicament". The first is the one about the immortal who invents portable gods and the beatnik who's too tripped out to take notice of them. The second concerns the problems of programming a machine with the irrational computations of our dreams. Aldiss represents his familiar diagram of the brain divided into upper and lower halves: the rational, analytical conscious and the dreaming, syncretic unconscious. When we learn in "Non-Isotropic" that the brain of the genius Cellini has "abolished the untidiness of normal human dreams" we know it's a bad sign; likewise with the insomniac electronic brain in "Song of the Silencer". "New Arrivals, Old Encounters", the title story, is a disappointment. A mawkish little homily, it reads more like earliest Bradbury than latest Aldiss, but contributes a telling image of an integrated alien mind devastated by the ravening collective unconscious of some Terran colonists. Hereabouts is also "One Blink of the Moon", relating an awesome, emblematic hallucination on a silent hill, like the beginning of another *Star Maker.*

This much of *New Arrivals* is quite weighty enough, but there are two extras, jokes of different kinds. "The Impossible Puppet Show" is frivolity from Aldiss the Absurdist, stariing Aldous Huxley, half-a-dozen anteaters, and the Eighth Army. "A Spot of Konfrontation" is a Euro-satire; a "Displaced Tourist" has trouble with the natives (and his wife). Everyone talks a multi-lingual jargon called SpEEC: "'Mine passport is komandeert! Die Politzei mussa be on mine numbero'." *New Arrivals* is a worthy collection, rich in fine images and cerebral meat, though rather short of those sudden shafts of eloquence that usually illuminate his prose. It comes in a nasty and most unworthy jacket. Paperback publishers please note.

The Resurrectionist
by Gary K. Wolf *(Doubleday, 1979, 181pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 385 13141 0)*

reviewed by Jon Turney

Personal transportation by some form of matter transmitter is one of the great infantile wish-fulfillments of sf hardware – and none the worse for that. However, authors who intend to deploy such a device should be aware that there are certain grave risks associated with this technology. There have been disturbing rumours of clients passing through the Bridge system and emerging somehow *changed.* Reports have been filed of real, embodied human beings stepping through the transportal entrance, only to rematerialize as cardboard cutout figures, lacking motives for their actions, speaking only in cliche and thinking hardly at all. Sadly, a scrutiny of the characters in *The Resurrectionist* suggests that these early misgivings were

fully justified.

These unfortunates, purged of any interesting human qualities, must be defined by their external appearance, and especially their personal accessories. Thus we meet Galina Rosmanov, ballerina (tailored wool suit, cashmere sweater, unborn-calf-skin coat, Gucci handbag), Lindstrom, scientist (doeskin jacket, tapered chambray shirt), Michelle Warren, corporate executive (Saks Fifth Avenue coat, pigskin attache case). If this were a Philip Dick novel, we might give the author the benefit of the doubt and assume we were being invited to guess which characters would be revealed as mere simulacra; if it were written by Ballard, we might take it as a comment on reification. Alas, in this case the protagonists are represented in this way because Wolf has nothing else to say about them.

In fact, this is a very old fashioned sf novel, the kind where the wonders of technology and the pace of the plot are intended to blind the reader to the paucity of the characterization and lack of conviction in the descriptive writing. The real resurrectionist here is Wolf. It is easy to suppose this type of book to be dead and buried when we read the latest by Shaw or Silverberg. But see! It crawls from its lightly covered grave and totters a few feeble steps more.

The book's antique quality derives not so much from the storyline as the execution. The plot itself is serviceable enough, relating the efforts of hard-nosed troubleshooter Saul Lukas to free Galina Rosmanov, who is caught up in the wires. Suffice to say that he succeeds, after coping with a bewildering succession of political intrigues, kidnappings, assaults, druggings, poisonings and dangerous new inventions. Since we have a transporter system these occur in a variety of widely scattered locations but this scarcely matters as Wolf conveys no sense of place. The woman Lukas eventually frees is not at all what he anticipated, for she has become superhuman. She does not have much opportunity to exercise her new-found powers, however, before Wolf contrives her departure by means of a trick ending which points towards a more complex sequel. This is all fine and good, but somehow we reach the end with a feeling of profound dissatisfaction. This is partly due to the good old fashioned xenophobia and sexism which permeate the narrative, but more important is the sense of *deja vu* which overcomes the reader whenever Wolf's descriptive powers are taxed beyond their limits. A journey inside the trans-portal wires, for example, starts out promisingly but then degenerates into vintage Gernsbackian gobbledegook.

> When the beam finally petered out, he hooked into the Q channel and rode it to a point just beyond its attenuator. There he collided with a stationary phase shift. In order to pass, he had to remove four klystrons and adjust the timing. He travelled onward without encountering another barrier until he reached a converter-wired PIN diode, which he had to goose open with his field inverter . . .

This, taken in conjunction with scenes such as the one in which Lukas opens a safe, to find within

> a spiral notebook filled with technical equations, an amber plastic vial with a white safety cap and a cork stoppered clear glass bottle half-full of chalky white powder

makes this book at times seem dangerously close to parody. But this would imply a degree of self-consciousness in the writing which is not in evidence elsewhere.

All in all, this is a station-bookstall novel, the kind which would just about pass muster if skimmed through on a high speed train, preferably with at least half an eye on the passing scenery. Under any other circumstances all but the least demanding

of readers would surely find it an insult to the intelligence. It has no redeeming features that I can discern. It is the sort of book which gave science fiction a bad name, and which perpetuates that name today.

Fool's Gold
by David Hutchinson *(Abelard, 1979, 160pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 200 72622 6)*

reviewed by Ann Collier

Although *Fools' Gold* is littered with science fiction paraphernalia, its treatment of subjects owes little to the sf genre. The stories seem much more influenced by thrillers and adventure tales with the emphasis very firmly on action, excitement and suspense. Whilst a sustained attempt is made to create a political and historical context which runs throughout many of the stories, there is an awkwardness about this. Near the beginning of the story, we are given a regulation dose of background information interposed clumsily in the narrative. Having got that out of the way, the author can then get down to the plot, which seems to interest him a great deal more. His energies are divided, resulting in his achieving little success. However, since the author is aged 18, and this is only his second published collection, it is not surprising he is still establishing where his literary interests lie.

The eight stories feature time-travel, intrigue on an individual and interplanetary level, matter transmitters (which in true sf tradition are always breaking down), hyper-drive spaceships and an unprepossessing but resourceful alien race, the Toads. They noticeably do not feature altruism or female characters. Heroes are invariably reluctant and are only induced to participate in the adventure by being blackmailed, well paid or both. Relationships between characters are roughly and minimally drawn, belonging to the buddy-buddy variety, familiar from Westerns and American TV police series. The dialogue is often so appalling as to make one wince. Many of the stories fail, I feel, because they attempt too much and can't be sustained. Already beginning to peter out in the middle, the endings, which are meant to offer a twist-in-the-tail, are anti-climatic and disappointing.

The three stories which seem to me the best are successful either because they are set in a context with which David Hutchinson appears familiar or because they concentrate solely on one idea, developing it carefully and never losing sight of the conclusion. "The Atom Bomb That Wouldn't Stand Still" is a three page story in which Hutchinson experiments with two narrative threads which only cross at the end. It deals very simply with a life-form from another planet squatting in an orbiting bomb and subsequently hitching a ride to earth on it. It ends effectively before the consequences, although certain, are described. "The Day After The End Of The World" is again short and simple: it tells of a writer on an isolated farm in Scotland meeting an alien invader. Unlike the interplanetary stories, the scene is convincingly sketched with a landscape description setting the mood. The humorous conversation between the writer and his unexpected guest is much better than most of the dialogue in the book, as indeed is the conclusion. This story is unpretentious and concise. "Knife Edge" is the one example in the collection of the context forming an integral part of the story rather than being merely a flatly painted and evidently artificial backdrop. It deals with a Jack-the-Ripper murderer who makes good his escape from the scene of the crime by using a

ubiquitous "gate" which transmits matter simultaneously. Hutchinson begins to explore the effect that "gates" could have on a society; international borders become extinct, car thieves become redundant, murder becomes easy. "A man could leave a party, jump a thousand miles away, kill and be back in the time it took it go to to the toilet." Although ostensibly the setting is another planet, its inhabitants sound and look like Americans. The suspense is well maintained and the ending, for once, deliberately and effectively an anti-climax.

These three apart, however, I was never quite sure what the stories were about and found little interest in them. On the evidence of *Fools' Gold,* Hutchinson's talents lie not in the evocation of a bizarre world, its inhabitants and history, but rather in exploring in a mundane and familiar context, the possibilities for the strange and surreal.

Split Second
by Garry Kilworth *(Faber, 1979, 191pp, £6.95, ISBN 0571 11388 5)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

The Wiederhaus Repeater produces hologram images of prehistoric beings, reconstructed from fragmentary light-wave patterns given off by fossils. When rich amateur archaeologist Paul Levan uses one to put illusory flesh on dry bones he has dug up in Cyprus, his teenage son Richard accidentally shorts the Repeater field. His body lies mindless in hospital, but Richard wakes up inside the head of Esk, a Cro-Magnon boy. Their identities have bonded across time. The fossil skeleton indicates that Esk died young. What will happen to Richard?

Curiously, the lad seems scarcely upset by his plight. He takes the experience as an educational outling, a sort of palaeontological field trip. (Are there really kids like that still around, clean, resilient psyches just thirsting for data and insrtuctions? I thought they all died out with the *B.O.P.*) In any case, Richard and Esk quickly adapt to the bizarre mutility; Richard contributes some sophistication to the partnership, winning a brief boost of tribal status for his host. "Meanwhile" Paul, with his mistress Loraine, is struggling to get the best medical treatment for his son, whose condition nobody can even diagnose. When Lorraine's ex-husband Alan turns up, in trouble with the Mafia, and tries to use Richard to sniff out sites of prehistoric treasure, the story takes on another dimension, of a modern thriller.

The prehistoric scene is well done, strong in both fecund glory and premoral vileness. Life is rich and rank. Kilworth characterizes his Cro-Magnons, and also introduces them to a natural enemy, nomadic Neanderthal remnants. The breadth of this temporal baseline, one end with the Neanderthals and the other with Levan and the future archaeologists, permits Kilworth to mark quite neatly the limits of the Cro-Magnons' survival. They live in perpetual crisis, squeezed down by history and the sabre-tooth. Their position is authentically precarious, recalling Golding's *The Inheritors.* By the end this book too is about technology and irreversible steps in the ascent of Man. Esk is an animal, a superior one. When a young panther attacks him he bites it and runs away. The edge of his superiority balances on his wits. Modern man, by contrast, is a weak, inferior animal, holding the food chain at arm's length by his devices, penicillin and the automatic rifle.

It's disappointing that Kilworth didn't choose (or manage) to dramatize that

contrast, having indicated it. The whole novel would benefit greatly from a more symmetrical organization: Richard against Esk, Paul against Granla the Shaman, the Wiederhaus Repeater against the bow and arrow. Organization is not Kilworth's strong point. I have no objection to the dramatic dislocations of sequence he favours, but they expose inadequate articulation in the plot. He allows himself too many improbable developments for the sake of a scene or, worse, a discussion; too many causeless effects, too many motiveless actions. His correct and rather old-fashioned prose style makes his recurrent grammatical slips and occasional splash of purple much more awkward and uncomfortable than they might be. *Split Second,* his third novel, is not an improvement on *In Solitary*, his first, which shared these faults but was altogether more original. *Split Second* remains an unremarkable book, dotted with many unusual insights, side-glances and speculations, but not enough to irradiate the whole. But I would recommend it at once to any enterprising fifteen-year-old.

The Earth Again Redeemed
by Martin Green *(Sphere, 1979, 359pp, £1.50, ISBN 0 7221 4006 1)*

reviewed by Jon Turney

What would be the shape of a world in which technological development had been arrested three hundred years ago; in which neither the scientific nor industrial revolutions took place, and human control over the forces of nature reposed with the wheelwright and the smith? This is the main premise of Martin Green's novel. It is not, however, an exercise in mere whimsy or wishful thinking, but an interesting attempt at what might be called anthropological fiction, which hinges on a deftly executed inversion of sf conventions – extrapolating from an absence of technology rather than an excess of it.

The device employed in the construction of this world, the turning point between the other reality and ours, is a Divine revelation bestowed on a Portuguese nun in Africa in 1665. This makes her suddenly aware of the inevitable consequences of her contemporaries' Promethean aspirations, and she accordingly bids them desist from their collective folly. This they do, obligingly renouncing not only the pursuit of knowledge, but also slavery and imperialism. On this rather flimsy pretext, we are led to believe that the Baconian project was smothered at birth. I will pass over the theory of history which would have the flourishing mercantile capitalist culture of 17th century Britain bowing down before such an untimely ecclesiastical injuction, and assume that the power of the church was irresistible. (The real Dona Beatriz, we are told in a foreword, failed to persuade the religious authorities and was burnt as a heretic.)

Appropriately, then, the world Green portrays is dominated by religion, by spiritual rites and observances, sacred taboos and holy wars. The story is set in Sao Salvador, capital of the Kongo, in 1984, and concerns the developing relationship between the newly arrived English ambassador and his wife, and the impressive figure of Aquin, christian Archbishop and Nsaka ne Vunda of the Bakongo. Their world is in crisis; the countries of Europe lie at the mercy of the better-armed Muslim forces, whose countries have lately set about researches in natural philosophy

on their own account. Aquin, too is under threat, from the armies of Islam, and from a resurgence of tribal religion in his nominally Christian country. The English couple have been sent to Aquin, as Keeper of the Revelation, to seek a temporary lifting of the injunction on new technology to save Christendom from certain defeat at the hands of the infidel.

The decision is complicated by the relations between this world and our own, for this is, as the cover proclaims, an epic novel of alternative realities. The inhabitants of the redeemed world are aware that they have parted company with a separately developing reality, and are occasionally vouchsafed visions of the conditions of life which obtain there (or, rather, here). Their aversion to technique is sustained by their conviction that the other world is doomed and in this they are, of course, justified. The sole representative of "our" world is a sardonic cyborg, once a university lecturer, living on a bombed-out, post holocaust campus. The details of the history of this world up to 1984 are sketched in rather perfunctorily, perhaps because the end is never in doubt, for this is one of those novels in which the coming self-destruction of our society is taken for granted. We are, in fact, the collective bearers of an Awful Warning, to point up Aquin's dilemma; will he turn to technology for salvation, and thus set his world down the same path?

This is elaborated through Aquin's attempts to establish contact with the other world, first to seek counsel and later, having decided that he must have new weapons, to solicit information which will enable them to be built. In his final confrontation with the cyborg, his request is refused, because "Whatever you have to go through, it would be better than *this, I know*". Thus the book ends, though the implication is that it is already too late, as the fateful decision to seek new knowledge has been taken.

There is a great volume of writing here, 360 odd pages, to set up such a trite conclusion, but the main achievement of the book, and I suspect its chief interest for the author, lies in the body of the text, in the elaboration of the christian culture in Africa. This is not, perhaps, as impressive or seemingly effortless a feat of world-creation as the works of Le Guin or Frank Herbert. The details of the Kongo culture are in fact based on actual studies, and the author relies on the African situation for the feeling that these characters really do live in a different world. I found myself wanting to know more of the state of European culture, but this is mentioned only incidentally. Similarly, America has been handed back to the Indians, and Asia appears not to exist. Nevertheless, the gradual unfolding of the uneasy marriage between the Kongo culture and Christianity, and their joint development up to 1984, are vividly portrayed, even though the wealth of ethnographic detail overwhelms the narrative in places. The pattern of life thus revealed, through the actions of a number of finely drawn characters, their affections, antagonisms and shifting allegiances, is complex and contradictory enough to feel authentic. Green succeeds in conveying something of the reciprocal influence between ways of feeling and ways of doing, the way in which modes of thought and modes of production are mutually constitutive. Unfortunately, he seems uncertain what to do with the world he has so painstakingly built up and the elements of humour introduced in the description of the cyborg's post-nuclear daily life, though appealing in themselves, tend to subvert the dramatic intentions of the main story. In large part, the plot boils down to a reworking of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, albeit with the role of the church reversed and the time-stream split. Despite Green's success in imagining his culture, and his impressive powers of characterisation, his ambitious book, in my reading anyway, fails to add to Miller's earlier epic at the level of ideas. Surely we can now pass beyond the old dichotomy

of technology or no technology? Is anyone, I wonder, prepared to make the intellectual effort to conceive a world with a plausibly different *selection* of technologies (and this needn't apply only to the past – future technology in sf is really very conventional), for this is the process we so urgently need to understand.

Xeno
by D.F. Jones *(Sidgwick and Jackson, 1979, 267pp, £5.95, ISBN 0 283 98529)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

One of the miserable facts about science fiction is that it comprises a symbolic and imagistic vocabulary of considerable flexibility and resonance, a vocabulary which is uniquely of the modern era in its associations and derivations and therefore uniquely suitable both for responsible exploration of the characteristic dilemmas of the age and for contemporary restatements of timeless issues, yet which is persistently made a vehicle for the most vapid and infantile imaginings. Harlan Ellison once wrote, of some of his early stories, that he liked them because "they say something more than The Mutants Is Coming". That, surely, is the ideal. This book falls rather short. The plot is quickly summarized (*too* quickly for 267pp of text, one feels) as follows. All of those aircraft that keep vanishing into thin air (*you* remember) have in fact been snatched away to an alien planet by an unknown race for an unguessable purpose. When that purpose has been served, they are put back more or less where they came from, give or take a thousand miles or forty years. Unfortunately when the aeroplanes begin to turn up again, apparently none the worse for their ordeal, it transpires that they have picked up parasites (dubbed Xenos by our biologists) native to the other world. Because the unknown aliens are, it is assumed, much bigger than we are, they are probably unaware of the Xenos, who are no more bothersome to them than microscopic parasites are to us. The Xenos adopt human beings as surrogate hosts – they drink our blood and lay eggs in our flesh. Because of the size difference, these activities are fatal to us. Human civilization collapses. The miserable survivors end up in enclaves in Alaska worshipping the alien parasites as messengers of a puritanical God.

So, one is tempted to ask, what? *Xeno* is that not-unfamilar sf object, a "living" fossil – an antique BEM story recast in a glossy 70s TV-thriller format. All the action takes place around conference tables, in aircraft control-towers, in biology labs, in beleaguered and dramatic hospitals – it's *talky*. Characters thump tables to express bafflement, pass out to express shock, go tight-lipped to indicate undauntedness. Footnotes for the less able reader are included in the text – a conference of Air Intelligence boffins needs to be told that a missing Ilyushin IL-14P is a "real oldie", and when an Air Force colonel is told something rather untoward, he needs time "to fully absorb this incredible news", as Jones solemnly puts it. Between the novelized-screenplay bouts of talk and the heavy-handed pieces of reader direction, the plot slows down fatally. The book *plods*, and that is the one unforgivable sin for a thriller. Jones does his best to hurry things along by stereotyping his characters to the point of dummydon – the capable, dedicated doctor with his emotional young assistant, the crusty military heavy feared yet

respected by all for his scrupulous professionalism, the "nice, old-fashioned girl" heroine, and so on. In this book, inevitably, a Russian agent is "a short thickset man in a bulky overcoat", and the only Russian woman we meet is mannish, dumpy and badly-dressed, but with a touch of Slavic wilderness in her soul. Of course. This dumping of the passengers does gain the book a few precious mph, but it never really looks like achieving airspeed.

Further to compound the felony, Jones has cobbled a couple of "themes", one political and one theological, on to a narrative which has nothing, intrinsically, to do with them, presumably in an attempt to redeem the story from complete insignificance. The theological theme is purest nonsense — to wit, several characters labour under the delusion that the existence of a superior alien race is the same thing as the existence of God. Hence the arrival of Xeno poses ideological problems for the officially atheist USSR, and various staunch Party members find the depths of their Slavic souls troubled by a confusion that any amateur philosopher or theologican could straighten out in half a minute. The author is surely being either a little perverse or a little dishonest in allowing the velleity of a theme to loom so large in the book — it is one thing for the degenerate, superstitious survivors of the Xeno attack to make the mistake of identifying the extraterrestial with the divine, entirely another for well-trained, self-possessed and intelligent men of science and culture to do the same thing. It would appear, though, that the major function of the theological theme is, after all, to provide the author with another means of embarrassing the Russians. The second preoccupation of the book is a persistent but rather ineffectual barracking at the Soviet political system. Fair game, certainly, but the real trouble with Jones's critique is that it exists on the intellectual level of a *Sun* editorial. The Russians, he repeatedly insists, are blinkered, inefficient, hypocritical and — worst of all — atheistic. And they dress badly. What price a literature of cognitive estrangement? By all means let us have sf that takes cognizance of political realities — but this sort of cliche-mongering helps no-one. Least of all D.F. Jones. *Xeno* remains stubbornly negligible.

Side-Effect
by Ramond Hawkey *(Jonathan Cape, 1979, 256pp, £4.95, ISBN 0-224-01653-9)*

reviewed by Ann Collier

Side-Effect shouldn't be good. The highly organized kidnapping of people to obtain organs for use in transplant surgery; interwoven strands of detective and political thriller; an all-action raid on a Bahamian island carried out by military planes flying into the eye of a hurricane; a Dr Moreau figure to whom cloning is merely one of many available medical techniques; and implicated in all this, the President of the United States. Too florid, too implausible. And yet, against all odds, what convinces me in *Side-Effect* that the world is less mundane than it appears, is not Hawkey's enumeration in the Postscript of the events which are transforming his fiction into fact but the quality of that fiction; the carefully worked out details of the plot; the consistent if alarming motivations of the characters; the gradual opening out of the story from a modest, domestic beginning, through a crescendo of increasingly

exciting events, to a drama on an international stage. Towards the climax, I was ready for anything, from imagining what hideous creatures lurked in the shadows of the shattered laboratory to accepting without a qualm the American President considering the premeditated murder of innocent civilians. And, underlying and unifying all the diverse elements, the same bitter sense of irony: in *Side-Effect* appearances are deceptive; nothing is as bad as it appears to be; the reality is unequivocally nastier.

The book concerns the activities of a Dr Snaith who not only can perform difficult organ transplants but can guarantee these against tissue rejection. His patients are the rich and the powerful and his surgery is on a remote island in the Bahamas. His support team works in secrecy and displays standards of efficiency and resourcefulness of which even the Mafia would be proud. They kidnap Clair Tennant from her London flat because her tissue type is compatible with that of Frank Mancini, the head of an American business empire who badly needs a heart transplant. Her boyfriend, Michael Fitzpatrick, sets out to look for her only to be captured also but, when the President sanctions a military assault on the island where they are held, all looks set for a happy ending. Although the Rangers rescue the couple and arrest Dr Snaith, discovering en route a veritable Dr Moreau freak show, the drama is far from over. Well-intentioned actions often produce unintentional results – side effects. The last pages describe a final, splendid irony, fantastic but all too plausible and much, much too good to be disclosed here. Suffice it to say that before Watergate, we would scarcely have believed it.

In Hawkey's world, unmitigated paranoia is the best aid to personal survival. Mistrust everyone, for they are never what they seem. Clinics are places where murder has become a precise science. Potential donors are killed in meticulously rigged "accidents" and sufficient damage is done to ensure a legally certifiable death without injury to the particular organ needed for transport. The recipients are not left to chance because money buys priority on organ waiting lists. As Mancini says, "You get what you pay for" and a heart is a commodity like any other. Medicine is big business. This treatment of the medical world is very reminiscent of the recent film *Coma,* where beneath the veneer of normality all manner of unethical and illegal deeds are planned and executed.

Even those who escape the surgeon's scalpel are not safe, for there are still the politicians to contend with and they, more so than doctors, can damage your health. Their motives are always ulterior and their morality infinitely flexible. Hawkey prefaces the second half of his book with a quotation from Wolfgang Friedmann – "Ultimately, all law dissolves into administrative discretion." His politicians posture and perform and his irony is used to great effect to illustrate the gap between the acting and the reality. But even the characters favourably depicted have difficulty in knowing how to respond to a world where appearances are deceptive and which insists on imitating the cinema. Several scenes are conventional elements in thrillers: the chase in a crowded public place, the arrest of a member of Snaith's team who is promptly "wasted" by colleagues afraid that she will betray them, the parachutists dropping on the island, all very James Bond. But these scenes are well written and the pace of the narrative quickens as crisis succeeds crisis. Planes survive flying upside down through hurricanes (and in the Bermuda Triangle, no less!) to face not merely landing on an abbreviated, impromptu airstrip but a descent through thousands of panic-struck birds, sheltering from the hurricane. Again, this ought to be just too highly spiced to digest but somehow Hawkey gets away with it to deliver the *coup de grace,* the nauseating scene in the laboratory where the little that is described

serves only to trigger the imagination to create its own worse horrors.

Raymond Hawkey's first novel, *Wild Card*, dealt with similar themes. It featured an earlier President also furtively toying with the lives of innocent civilians (in this case, a substantial proportion of the inhabitants of Los Angeles) in a devious attempt to unite a nation torn apart by economic depression and civil strife. That novel has an even more ingenious central idea and shows greater subtlety in its characterisation: fewer pyrotechnics than *Side-Effect* but more food for thought. Characters in *Side-Effect* are divided rather too glibly into the good/evil, weak/powerful. Mancini in particular is a stereotype and were he to bump into Jonathan Smith (from *I Will Fear No Evil*) in Snaith's clinic, he would find more than a little in common with him. He is described as "a man who . . . seemed surrounded by a forcefield of malevolent energy . . . a man's man, tough and uncompromising". Yes, I think we get the point!

The "side-effect" of the title is that technology is advancing so rapidly that we are unable to learn how to cope with the changes it brings, nor can we afford to reap its benefits. The President's response to this dilemma is to pretend that it's not really happening but Hawkey warns the reader against similarly burying his head in the sand. In a very vivid scene, he describes a man in an aquarium falling into an enclosure in which, unknown to him, are sharks. Seeing himself to be the centre of attention and oblivious of the danger, he smiles and waves; reassured, the crowd assume that it must all be part of the show and that he is demonstrating a shark repellent – until, to their horrified amazement, the sharks tear him apart. The reader of *Side-Effect* perhaps makes the same assumption (mistakenly according to Hawkey) that the danger is simulated. But whether or now Hawkey's novel proves to be prophetic, it is likely to be remembered for its ingenuity and excitement and for its chilling implications.

Worlds Out of Words
by Douglas Barbour *(Bran's Head, 1979, 171pp, £4.50, ISBN 0 905220 13 7)*
Tales of Neveryon
by Samuel R. Delany *(Bantam, 1979, 264pp, $2.25, ISBN 0 553 12333 5)*

reviewed by K.G. Mathieson

In *Worlds Out of Words*, Douglas Barbour has written a useful and intelligent introduction to the science fiction of Samuel R. Delany, a study which complements the earlier essay by George Slusser in the Borgo Press Milford series, and which goes some way to filling the gap in solid criticism of this writer. I consider Delany to be among the three or four most important writers currently working in sf; somewhat surprisingly, there has been comparatively little critical attention paid to his work so far. Mr Barbour's book comes as a welcome addition, both to the critic and to the wider general readership at which the book seems clearly aimed – readers such as those subscribers to this journal who are not themselves academics. Indeed, at times Barbour seems almost apologetic in invoking the work of literary critics as reference points for his own conclusions, although he does so usefully throughout. Given Delany's own orientation toward structuralist criticism, and Barbour's recognition of this fact in his introduction, the reader may well expect to encounter more reference to structuralism than he does (Foucault is discussed in relation to

Triton), but I suspect Mr Barbour may have chosen an alternative approach to avoid duplication with that of Slusser.

Barbour sees Delany as being one of a group of writers in the 1960s interested in consciously "extending the boundaries of the genre far beyond what earlier writers dreamed was possible, making sf an increasingly complex and profoundly entertaining form of literature" and attempts to analyze some of the ways in which Delany's fictions achieve these aims. The book breaks into two sections, the opening four chapters, which formed part of his thesis (a section of which was published in different form in *Foundation* 7/8), being concerned with the novels up to *Nova* in 1968, with subsequent chapters on *Dhalgren* and *Triton*, ending up with a brief and necessarily provisional conclusion.

The study of the earlier novels is framed under four headings: a thematic analysis of the recurring (and changing) Quest pattern in his fiction, a useful chapter which, like much of this first part of the book, suffers from an excess of plot recounting which soon becomes tiresome to the reader acquainted with the novels – presumably anyone interested enough to read this work will be so acquainted; a highly useful chapter in which he has done much invaluable spade-work on the cultural, literary and mythological allusions which permeate the novels, a task for which subsequent researchers, including myself, will fervently thank him; an examination of Delany's methods of creating possible future cultures, an art which Delany has successfully cultivated from the very outset, and which Barbour correctly sees as being at the centre of the science-fictional enterprise; and a chapter devoted to a necessarily cursory examination of style and structure – a division which sits uncomfortably in the light of Delany's own strictures that style and content are not divisible. Barbour recognises the importance of language ("*Empire Star* is one of those novels which demonstrate that a writer moves his readers mainly by organizing his words properly"), but the nature of an introductory work of this kind combines with his selection of method to limit the amount of attention he can pay to Delany's language; it will be the work of subsequent writers on Delany to build on this introduction.

Chapter Five, an exploratory study of *Dhalgren*, is the best thing in the book; it avoids some of the pitfalls of the opening section by immediately rejecting plot as a useful source of insight, and by combining the discussion of style and content more thoroughly than in earlier chapters; what follows is a lucid and intelligent probing into the labyrinthine complexities of Delany's massive work, approached in the spirit of a tentative exploration, which throws up a number of suggestive leads to how the work may be read and comprehended; he brings out both what is different in *Dhalgren* and in what way it relates to the earlier fictions. Barbour's most lucid and articulate criticism seems to me to centre on this book and *Empire Star*, where plot recapitulation does not intrude itself as overtly as elsewhere; the chapter on *Triton* which follows, while again often perceptive, suffers somewhat from this temptation. The conclusion is necessarily open-ended, given that Delany will be productive for many years to come, but Barbour rightly claims that "Delany's novels since *Empire Star* have expanded our understanding of sf's capacity for experimentation. Exemplary self-conscious fictions, the styles of which are anything but self-effacing, they challenge conventional estimates of what science fiction is." On the whole, Mr Barbour has written a serious and intelligent introduction to Delany's work, and his book will become the essential starting point for anyone interested in Delany's fiction.

A final quibble. While, in the absence of much interest as yet from the major presses, we are clearly to be grateful for the small band of enterprising publishers

who are issuing this kind of critical book, nonetheless the reader is surely entitled to expect a product of considerably better quality than provided in this case (especially since the book is hardly cheap). The book is full of typographical errors (including a missing footnote, note 9 to Chapter Five) which a normal degree of proofreading should obviate, and it also rather shoddily printed, some pages being near illegible. It is neither a good advertisement for Bran's Head itself, nor for the prestige of sf criticism in general, and it is hoped that future titles in an otherwise admirable series will be more carefully produced.

In *Tales of Nevèrÿon,* many of the threads which Barbour has unravelled are again woven into the fabric of the narrative, with a craft and assurance which confirm the growing maturity of its author. Delany's prose throughout the five interlinked episodes which make up the narrative demonstrates a greater sureness of control than in previous work: the rhetorical flourishes which punctuate his previous novels have given way to a measured understatement, an apparent simplicity which reads so easily that it disguises the painstaking skill with which each word has been carefully weighed and chosen: Delany is increasingly emerging as an accomplished and polished stylist, completely in control of his language. If *Dhalgren* was reminiscent of the word-spinning of Thomas Pynchon, *Tales* moves closer to the apparent simplicity and ease of Vonnegut.

Tales consists of five separate episodes; the first three, the "Tales" of Gorgik, Old Venn and Small Sarg, introduce the main protagonists in the work, while the last two bring them eventually together; the novel finishes, as did *Triton,* with some further "remarks toward the Modular Calculus". For the first time, Delany has gone back in time to create his fictional world, calling upon some of the conventions of heroic fantasy and sword-and-sorcery as the setting for his own distinctive treatment; the novel is on one level a criticism of the assumptions which inform that kind of writing, just as earlier novels have similarly both re-moulded and criticized other conventional sf staples. There are echoes of other Delany works (and the by now familiar sprinkling of literary and mythological allusions) in *Tales,* but the connection is tenuous, suggestive, a lateral linkage rather than an attempt to build a vertical, chronological superstructure in the manner of Le Guin's Hainish novels: each book asserts both its independence and its fictiveness before acknowledging its connections within his canon. *Tales,* then, is a work outside objective time and space, an invented world defined by and existing within its own fictive space, while nonetheless clearly mirroring the genesis of our own society.

The society which Delany creates within this fictional world is a pre-industrial one in which a wide range of possibilities is beginning to be narrowed and rigidified; the various lifestyles in the book suggest the possibilities we have largely lost in our own society, foreshadowed in the changes hinted at as the result of the beginnings of a money economy described here. The society is examined in the context of a series of relationships, some of which are familiar from his other work; master-slave, teacher-pupil, aristocrat-subject, man-woman, man-boy, woman-girl, and so on. This meshing network of personal relations becomes the fabric in which the patterns of his invented world emerge, the oppositions and ambiguities serving to define rather than divide our understanding of it. As always, Delany is fascinated by the power of language not simply to define but to create: part of this embryonic society is just learning the power of words to exert control over those about whom they are used, and by extension over reality itself. Delany remains acutely conscious of the importance of his own control over the reader through language – the only medium, as William Gass reminds us, over which a writer is master – the frequent epigraphs and occasional authorial "directions" within the text testify to the continuing self-

conscious nature of his work.

Behind the book clearly lies the shadow of Lévi-Strauss, and the influence of structuralist thought in general, an intellectual mode which Delany has consistently championed. But to recognize the influence of these theories on his writing is not to suggest that here is yet another novel written as though its primary aim was to be discussed in seminars and explicated in learned journals. Delany has always been a superb teller of stories, and has consistently used the raw material of science fictional adventure as a basis on which to construct his distinctive and sophisticated narrative worlds, which perhaps goes some way to explaining his popularity both with those literary critics who have "discovered" sf and with the readers who buy his novels in vast numbers. Delany has, like Vonnegut, bridged the gap which exists between these poles, and *Tales* exhibits many of the features which have in the past effected this transition. The central narrative thread evolves around an examination of the nature of slavery, the ambiguities inherent in possession, which results in the final tale in Gorgik and Small Sarg, held in a strange, mutually accepted master-slave relationship with each other, fighting and suffering in order to free the sometimes unwilling slaves of the aristocratic landowners – as always in Delany, nothing is certain: there is only ambiguity, opposition, and continual change. The liberated dragon which may symbolize the end of the aristocrats' reign as slaveholders is equally uncertain:

> "So", said Raven, "once again tonight we are presented with a mysterious sign and no way to know whether it completes a pattern or destroys one."

There is, indeed, no way to know in a world which denies certainty, and which is constantly in a state of change; answers are necessarily and always provisional and incomplete:

> But almost as if presenting the image of some ironic answer, the wings flapped against a sudden, high, unfelt breeze, and the beast, here shorn of all fables, rose and rose – for a while – under the night.

These open endings have become characteristic of Delany's style because they are central to his understanding of the world and its processes.

It is impossible to do justice in a review to a novel of the complexity and richness of *Tales*; it constitutes another landmark in a fascinating career, and the reviewer can do no better than refer the reader, with the highest of recommendations, to the book itself – although I suspect that there may be readers beguiled by the gaudy cover and sensational blurb who will not find quite what they anticipate within.

Ursula K. Le Guin: Voyager to Inner Lands and to Outer Space
edited by Joe De Bolt *(Kennikat Press, 1979, 221pp, $15.00, ISBN 0 8046 9229 7)*

reviewed by Anthony Wolk

This is a collection of specially commissioned articles on Ursula K. Le Guin. I assume it is aimed at the library market and is not the sort of thing the ordinary or even enthusiastic reader of sf will ever possess or most likely see. It aims for a limited but sufficient market. I'll comment briefly.

It begins with a short introduction by Barry N. Malzberg who characterizes Le Guin as a writer in vogue now but likely to be esteemed less as time goes by, and he thinks her career "to be taking her out of science fiction entirely". Next is a short biographical essay by Joe De Bolt, drawn from various published sources, but not from direct interviews with the author (though Le Guin did read the article for factual accuracy). There is some danger that quotes culled from materials several years back may be irrelevant by 1979 – I say that as someone whose wife has interviewed Le Guin almost too often. A useful essay in the collection, especially from an academic perspective, is James W. Bittner's survey of Le Guin criticism, which in its 19 pages provides a coherent and integrated discussion of a considerable corpus. Reading the survey, it becomes clear that early criticism of, for example, *The Left Hand of Darkness* was too quick to find fault. It's as though by knowing that Le Guin is good, it's easier then to recognize her excellence. Or, perhaps it's inevitable that early criticism generates a clearer view by clueing the later critic where not to focus. And it is evidence to me from Bittner's survey (and from the 7 articles in the collection) that the single most neglected problem for Le Guin critics is to integrate *The Lathe of Heaven* into her other works.

The 7 critical articles are:

- Karen Sinclair, "Solitary Being: The Hero as Anthropologist"
- Peter T. Koper, "Science and Fiction in the Fiction of Ursula Le Guin"
- Rollin A. Lasseter, "Four Letters about Le Guin"
- John R. Pfeiffer, "'But Dragons Have Keen Ears': On Hearing 'Earthsea' with Recollection of *Beowulf*"
- Francis J. Molson, "The Earthsea Triology: Ethical Fantasy for Children"
- Elizabeth Cummins Cogell, "Taoist Configurations: *The Dispossessed*"
- Larry L. Tifft & Dennis C. Sullivan, "Possessed Sociology and Le Guin's Dispossessed: From Exile to Anarchism"

Sinclair provides sound readings of *The Left Hand of Darkness, The Dispossessed,* and *The Word for World is Forest* in her discussion of Le Guin's anthropologist-outsider narrators whose "convictions become strengthened by their ordeals". Koper's article is an instance of the critic bringing so much furniture into a room that there is no space to move about. Le Guin provides him the opportunity to tune up his Aristotle and Kenneth Burke. There are three essays on the Earthsea Trilogy, and of these Molson's is least useful, beating the drum of "ethical fantasy" and forcing Ged to march in step. Pfeiffer's compares Earthsea stylistically to *Beowulf,* and while they share a number of qualities, so, I suspect, do many others of Le Guin's works (*The Left Hand of Darkness,* for instance). Pfeiffer's discussion of the importance of language, however, I do find stimulating. Lassater discusses each Earthsea novel in turn, especially for its allegorical value. And while I might agree generally, I am uneasy with moving too quickly from Le Guin's invented universe to a veiled representation of ours (I don't mean to sound anti-critical here). Cogell's essay is extremely valuable, providing in her discussion of Taoism a structure for the Le Guin universes – she writes about *The Dispossessed,* but it's easy to make transfers. Cogell corresponded with Le Guin in composing the article and thus avoids the glaring errors about Taoism which cropped up in the special issue of *Science-Fiction Studies* on Le Guin. Tifft's and Sullivan's essay closes the collection by using *The Dispossessed* as a text for a tedious sermon on the virtues of anarchic sociology.

Pushed as I am, I will say that the book ought to have a place in your local library, largely on the strength of the Bittner survey, Sinclair, and Cogell – and if Cogell were easily accessible, I'd let the rest go.

A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction
by Baird Searles, Martin Last, Beth Meacham and Michael Franklin *(Avon, 1979, 266pp. $2.95, ISBN 0 380 46128 5)*

reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

As one would expect from its title, *A Reader's Guide To Science Fiction* is not a work of scholarship, but is – to quote from the editors' introduction – aimed at "those just trying to find their way around the vast amount of literature", meaning, essentially, those new to the genre. Most of the book is taken up with some two-hundred-plus author-entries providing a concise but informative (if in many cases bibliographically incomplete) guide to their work and thematic concerns (which leads me to believe that it might have been better titled *A Reader's Guide To SF Authors*). Each entry is appended by a comment suggesting other authors with similar interests, not with a view to plotting influences of linkages but to answering the questions supposedly asked by newcomers to the genre (not for nothing is the author-entry section titled "If You Like Heinlein, Will You Love Van Vogt?") and inspired by the questions asked of the editors by those who frequent their sf bookshop in New York. They may well be better placed than most to make such comments – they can be expected to know what their customers want, after all – but they are nevertheless very two-edged ones: on the one hand encouraging the reader to investigate the literature further ("without the time and expense of the trial and error method") by pointing out authors he might otherwise overlook, while on the other restricting his field of choice to the type of fiction he's already reading and thus denying him the opportunity of discovering someone new. Apart from which, some of these comments make little sense: admirers of Aldiss, for example, are encouraged to try T.J. Bass, which is almost to say that those who like poets might also like vets. Another is the advice given to fans of Bob Shaw's work to try that of Philip K. Dick; offhand, I can think of no two authors so completely dissimilar in style and preoccupations.

In restricting themselves solely to sf, the editors have omitted almost everything pertaining to the largely overlapping genre of fantasy, including even Tolkien (despite the somewhat paradoxical inclusion of H.P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith on the rather tenuous grounds that one sometimes wrote about aliens and the other about Earth's distant future), and also certain "borderline" authors of interest like Barth, Borges and Pynchon; although, curiously, they never actually attempt to define what they mean by the term "sf" until the 22-page brief history of the genre that forms one of the book's appendices, where they spend a page or so wallowing in semantics before awareness of the futility of such a task causes them to abandon the effort altogether. Then, too, they include a number of now-unread authors of the pulp era – such as Stanton A. Coblentz, Ralph Milne Farley and Neil R. Jones – who are recommended to those with "the right tolerance for yesterday's literature" or at least "some historical perspective" – yet how can the new readers at whom this book is aimed by expected to have any such perspective? On a more nitpicking level, Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* is described as "a *tour-de-force* extrapolation of what the military of the future will be like", which is grossly misleading; Herbert's *Under Pressure* is said to be a retitling of *The Dragon In The Sea* whereas the opposite is the case; Ged, the main protagonist of LeGuin's *Earthsea* trilogy (mentioned only in an aside – see above, my comment about the exclusion of fantasy generally), is stupidly misprinted as "God" (the number of typographical errors with which the book is littered is dismaying); Leiber's *Conjure*

Wife is mentioned as having been filmed under the title of A. Merritt's *Burn, Witch!* when the correct title for both the movie and Merritt's novel is *Burn, Witch, Burn!* . . . Although these mistakes are no more than a minor irritant to the already knowledgeable reader, newcomers will know no different, and one can but hope that a second edition will allow correction of them.

As a bonus, there are various appendices devoted to listing all the Hugo and Nebula Award-winners up to and including 1978 (acceptable as a measure of quality in such a *Guide* if only because of its avowedly populist slant – and the editors hint that they're not) and the "best" 50 sf books ever written (which, like all such subjective lists, varies wildly from the sublime to the ridiculous), plus the aforementioned brief history of the genre, whose title, "The Spawn of Frankenstein" (derived without acknowledgement from Aldiss's *Billion Year Spree,* mentioned nowhere in the entire *Guide*) betrays a surprisingly British bias and which, far from claiming Hugo Gernsback as the All-Powerful All-Father whom none can ever depose, points out that he was important only to American magazine sf, and then hints obliquely that his influence upon that was ultimately very damaging. (Throughout the editors seem to have reserved their highest praise for contemporary British rather than, as one might chauvinistically expect, contemporary American authors; that heaped upon M. John Harrison, for instance, is particularly effusive.)

Only time, of course, can prove the worth and usefulness of this *Guide,* but it is at least – and despite all my previous cavils – noticeably more accurate and comprehensive than Brian Ash's hopelessly botched *Who's Who In SF.* On those grounds alone, I venture that novice readers of sf will find it of no little interest.

A Clash of Symbols: The Triumph of James Blish
by Brian Stableford *(Borgo Press, 1979, 64pp, $2.95, ISBN 0 89370 234 X)*

reviewed by Anthony Wolk

Brian Stableford's book – an expanded and "substantially" different version of the essay in *Foundation* 13 – is an excellent introduction to James Blish's work. The book's arrangement is not chronological but thematic, though the initial sections do place Blish among other sf writers of the 40s and early 50s, especially those not in Campbell's stable, specifically the Futurians. Stableford beings with analysis of seminal stories like "There Shall Be No Darkness" and elucidates their "hallmarks", such as Blish's rational attitude of mind, the orderliness of characters' reactions to the unexpected, and the prominence of the scientific method. After the introductory analyses, Stableford moves on to biological stories like "Surface Tension" which illustrate Blish's notion of pantropy (as distinct from "terraforming"); next to *Cities in Flight*; then a category called "Experiments in Thought", which includes comment on stories like "Beep" and "A Work of Art", stories which re-examine fairly traditional sf ideas. In this discussion Stableford not only deals sensitively with the fiction, but also places "A Work of Art" in the context of other "reborn artist" stories, and then suggests how it was different from conventional pulp material – a kind of analysis that gives a rich sense of what sf was like in its golden age and its transitional years afterward (I must add that Peter Nicholls's *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia* is doing much the same for me as I roam from entry to entry – there is a claim, by the way, in its entry for Stableford that he may have

"a more detailed knowledge of the history of sf than any other critic at work today", a claim I'll not dispute). Next come "Experiments in Adventure" – a highly selective section dealing with works like "Common Time" and *Fallen Star*; then the juveniles, especially the *Star Trek* books. Lastly, *After Such Knowledge,* the trilogy on which Blish's reputation will no doubt be founded.

Stableford's weaving through Blish's corpus is artful and even critically generative. It reawakened my interest in Blish to the extent of raiding used bookstores and rummaging in my basement among my scattered collection of old sf magazines. Having gotten in this deep, I have compared the Borgo version with Stableford's earlier *Foundation* article; and, like enjoying both Clarke's *The City and the Stars* and its earlier version *Against the Fall of Night,* I find the earlier work, though much shorter, still different enough to be useful.

A critic can always quibble, even with the best work. I don't understand the title, beyond the pun on the retitling of *A Triumph of Time* as *A Clash of Cymbals.* And Stableford may be right to comment that Blish's works give the impression that writing was never easy for him, that his "prose is always *constructed* – often carefully so, sometimes with a high degree of artistry, but nevertheless artificial" (p.14), but I fail to pick up on that in my reading of Blish. A generalization about such an important matter deserves some support. I also wish the volume came with a more detailed bibliography. Stableford is not responsible here, rather the format that goes with the Milford Series. I'm not asking for a comprehensive bibliography at this stage, but at least a list of short stories and novellas to go with the listing of books (I would have liked as well to have the editors' names where relevant for collections).

One last point: I'm still left with the puzzle about the order of the four books in the *After Such Knowledge* trilogy. Stableford (like Nicholls in his encyclopedia entry) has them in order of publication: *A Case of Conscience, Dr Mirabilis,* and *Black Easter/The Day After Judgment* (so does Bob Rickard, as cited by Stableford in the earlier *Foundation* version). But Brian Aldiss's essay on Blish in the special Blish issue of *Foundation* puts *Dr Mirabilis* last when he mentions the trilogy in passing. And to keep things complicated, Robert A.W. Lowndes (an early friend and later collaborator), in his introductory essay "Science Fiction the Hard Way" to *The Best of James Blish* (Ballantine, 1979), specifically talks about the trilogy as not yet in "final form", with *Dr Mirabilis* as its "first novel" and *Case of Conscience* last. I wonder if another order isn't preferable. Clearly *Black Easter* and *The Day After Judgment* come last, but why not have *Dr Mirabilis* be first? This is the order given in the 1968 Dell edition of *Black Easter* (though it says the trilogy is completed with the publication of *Black Easter*). An obvious virtue to this sequence is the raw chronology. But, additionally, it is easier to read the trilogy then as antithetical to C.S. Lewis's trilogy, especially in the comparison of Lithia and Perelandra (*Black Easter* is "In Memoriam" for C.S. Lewis, an ambiguous dedication in a book that also has God among the dead).

Reviews in Brief

A Wizard in Bedlam
by Christopher Stasheff *(Doubleday, 1979, 187pp, $7.95, ISBN 0 385 14497 0)*

Without craftmanship and at least some measure of artistry, nothing will avail a writer for long. Sheer innocence and brio made Stasheff's first novel *The Warlock in Spite of Himself* something of a treat when it appeared in 1969; it was an interesting attempt to deal with the material of fairytale and space opera in a rational humanist social-democratic way and was bound to be a refreshing treat simply by contrast. The ludicrously overcomplex plot of the book and its sequel *King Kobold*, and the writing which teetered uneasily between the childlike and the infantile and was inappositely spiced with rather twee bawdy – somehow all of this communicated a likeable, worthy, doggy auctorial persona trying to endear himself to friends and the likeminded by doing his party piece. It wasn't enough, but for a time it would do . . . Now, after eight years of silence, an older sourer Stasheff returns with a darker variant of much the same material. Here the pseudo-feudal regime to be overthrown is consciously and brutally repressive and the workers and peasants are descended from clones of twelve individuals and thus are all somewhat alike. The mechanics of revolution in a society of total genetic conformity are well thought out – but if Mr Stasheff wanted to write about that the place was in an article or short tale. As a novel this third book is an inept bore with a plot assembled from a packet mix; the innocence is gone, the charm has outstayed its welcome and the good intentions remain simply intentions, unfulfilled and incapable of fulfilment.

– Andrew Kaveney

Earthchild
by Doris Piserchia *(Dobson, 1979, 204pp, £4.25, ISBN 0-234-72309-X)*

The heroine of *Earthchild* is Reee (two syllables), the last human inhabitant of Earth. Her principal co-inhabitants are Indigo, an oceanic mass of protoplasm which is gradually absorbing all living matter on the surface, and Emeroo, a rather more retiring but no less versatile entity. Indigo is blue and (apparently) bad; Emeroo is green and (apparently) not so bad. Emeroo protects Reee and occasionally saves her from death, while Indigo keeps making imitation humans – "blue boys" – to tempt and haunt her. Reee's only other friend is Belios, a gigantic predatory flying-creature, but she has plenty of other enemies, including the Martian humans who are trying to destroy Indigo and reclaim Earth.

As with all Doris Piserchia's novels, the plot of *Earthchild* is little more than a paranoid rhapsody. Reee is threatened, persecuted and imperilled, kidnapped, imprisoned and tortured in a more-or-less arbitrary series of adventures. Nobody seems to have any real *reason* for being nasty to her, but everyone is always out to make sure that she suffers. At the end of the story she is delivered from this situation by the amazingly simple device of the author's stating more-or-less point blank that it has stopped and that everything from now on will be okay. At no stage does Piserchia feel it incumbent upon her to make any kind of sense. *Earthchild* begs to be read as some kind of fable or allegory simply because if read

literally it is irrational and silly, but the problem of how to decode it in order to reveal its "true" significance is not an easy one to solve. It seems to be a candidate for dream-analysis rather than any kind of rational examination, and is heartily recommended to all Freudians.

— **Brian Stableford**

Legion
by Charles L. Grant *(Berkley, 1979, 213pp, $1.75, ISBN 0 425 04108 5)*

Legion is the tenth item in a vast future history whose component stories (ten not yet written) take two pages to list. After toiling so long on this saga, Charles L. Grant seems to have lost patience with readers so repulsive as not to have studied his earlier works: *Legion,* for neophytes like myself, is somewhat bewildering. The setting is North America (subtly contracted to 'Noram') centuries hence, depopulated to an improbable degree by something called the PlagueWind. (This features in numerous oaths — just as World War II survivors notoriously swear "V-2 take it!" or "By the gas-chambers!") Other sf props include *Alpha,* apparently a starship Out There somewhere, which is mentioned a couple of times as something everybody knows about (except the reader) and assorted androids which are mechanical yet just sufficiently organic to be affected by Plague, which cleverly turns them into berserk killers. Of central importance to the book and the saga is the Parric family, who can be distinguished (a) by a blond streak in their hair and (b) by the fact that people look to them for leadership (reason not given — like *Alpha,* this is doubtless explained in an earlier book). Since the hero — one Mathew Parric — spends his time in a haze of bewilderment rivalling my own, it's difficult to take seriously the intricate subterfuges of a master-villain whose plans for Noram domination require dozy Mathew as an essential partner/figurehead. Much wandering and wondering ensues; all ends confusedly in a prolonged fight whose excitement sends the author's prose (not for the first time) into brain-rotting staccato . . .

> He reached down and freed his knife. Almost jumped as he sought desperately for a way to use it.
> Wanted to weep.
> Wanted to scream as Shem climbed to the bow . . .

Wanted to stop reading.

— **Dave Langford**

Night Child
by Scott Baker *(Berkley/Putnam, 1979, 273pp, $10.95, ISBN 0 399 12377 6)*

With Scott Baker's second novel it becomes clear that his interests lie heavily in the use of sf as a vehicle for transcendental aspirations (as recommended by the Panshins in *SF in Dimension*) and that he suffers, so far, from a belief likely to be inspired by that recipe — that if your end is to portray the redemption of the

universe and all that surrounds it, this will justify pulling much of your plot and locale from the standard catalogue of wish-fulfilment and melodrama. His first novel, *Symbiote's Crown,* showed a youth crippled mentally and physically by his mother's ill-advised macrobioticism and reared by a more than usually wicked and avaricious uncle, who finds happiness and fulfilment in translation to another dimension and union with the hive mind of the Forest. In *Night Child* his hero is reared in the standard religious orphanage, officially to join the priesthood of the standand unpleasant cult and actually as food for the more or less standard psychic vampires. He turns out to be a mislaid vampire himself and after a quantity of pastel coloured Mucha-plus-Dulac phantasmagoria, and a certain amount of padding concerning his relationship with a lady vampire who has got stuck in his body and his best friend from the orphanage, he succeeds in leading towards a better-adjusted mode of existence the vampires, the alien vampires from who they derive and, ultimately, the whole of animate and inanimate creation. It seems a little presumptuous to say that the result of all this is a modestly competent little entertainment in the style of the early 70s, but that is what it is – middling Zelazny without any jokes, Anthony without the heterodoxies of expression, high-grade Laumer without the brio and sexism. Such big conceptual guns should not be brought to bear without being matched with equal profundity in the locale and cast; a book which involves by implication such a colossal scale should leave one awestricken rather than pleasantly passing one's time. Still, it reveals Scott Baker as a writer of real if limited gifts and promise; he will do better when he starts to match his vast intentions with a little more hard work and originality.

– Roz Kaveney

The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy
by Douglas Adams *(Pan, 1979, 159pp, £0.80, ISBN 0 330 25864 8)*

I tried hard to enjoy this book. I really did. After all, the radio series on which it is based earned a considerable cult following, and even managed to come second in this year's voting for the Best Dramatic Performance Hugo Award. And the book is so obviously eager to please, in a rather doggy way – full of characters with names so carefully designed to be funny, bits of space-lore so considerately fabricated to amuse, nudgings and winkings and funny faces so laboriously assembled to entertain, that I feel a terrible old killjoy having to confess that I didn't laugh once. Perhaps the antiquity of the whole conception is at the root of the trouble: the book is an ill-advised crossing of BBC Radio's peculiarly time-warped idea of humour with a kind of narrative even more outmoded; to wit, good old head-banging Doc Smith space opera. Earth is demolished by the Vogons to make way for a "hyperspatial express route", and the last earthling, a cypher whose role consists entirely of the expression of bafflement and bewildered outrage, is rescued by some other cyphers and taken off to have an adventure in the Horsehead Nebula. Some nostalgic revelations are wheeled out as if in affectionate salute to Gernsback and Campbell – Earth was built by an alien planet factory, not naturally formed, and humans were never the true masters of Earth, whatever they may have been deluded into believing. There is an alternative dimension, a supercomputer engaged in figuring out the ultimate point of existence, a manic-depressive robot, a galactic criminal with two heads who steals the fastest starship in the universe, a

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