FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

20

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Number 20, October 1980

Editorial

The decade of the 1970s is behind us at last. This is scarcely to be regretted, for most people seem to agree that it was a dull, if not dismal decade, reminiscent of the 1950s or even the 1930s. (Do decades alternate, or rather, does the "spirit" of successive decades alternate, by some strange metaphysical means?) The concept of The Decade, of "the 1970s" or "the 1980s", is of course a calendar-generated fiction, yet, like so many other fictions, it seems to influence people's expectations. The packaging of the recent past into decades certainly influences our collective historical sense. "The 30s" and "the 60s" are both phrases with a potent folk meaning, and the meanings are constantly evoked by newspaper leader-writers and pundits – not to mention politicians. We are sometimes told that we are all heading "back to the 30s" (by which is usually meant a period of high unemployment and grevious inequality) but unfortunately we are rarely informed that we are heading "back to the 60s" (by which one might mean a period of fun, rebelliousness and experimentation). The latter, surely, is more devoutly to be wished, and if decades do indeed alternate in spirit then perhaps we can expect something of the 60s to be reborn in the 80s. A little optimism and good cheer, even of the rather frenetic variety which flourished in the 1960s, would be most welcome – as would a dash of idealism, which is what this editorial is all about.

For if the 1970s can be summed up in one word that word must surely be "reaction". If it was a decade of political reaction, culminating in the recent, ludicrously frozen, pseudo-1950s postures of international relations: this dreadful period of decade lag which we are all forced to endure before the *real* 1980s begin (when history appears to repeat itself it always does so as comedy – black comedy). It was also a decade of aesthetic reaction, or, to put a more flattering word on it, of nostalgia. Versions of pastoral, and of the past, were all around us – in TV advertisements for brown bread (filmed, incidentally, by the man who went on to direct *Alien*); in films such as *Paper Moon*, *The Great Gatsby* and *Grease*; in TV series such as "Upstairs, Downstairs" and "Happy Days"; and in popular fiction of every variety, including science fiction. Fantasy and escapism of the most gooey kinds – Tolkien, sword-and-sorcery, Dungeons and Dragons, *Star Wars*, *Superman*, *Watership Down*, the cult of fey illustrators, the obsession with dragons and beasties – became the most recognizable stigma of the sf subculture. And it was, among other things, a great age of reprints. While it was pleasing to see Raymond Chandler's private-eye thrillers of the 40s advertised on railway-station hoardings (in 1979! – thus proving that good popular fiction lives on, however ignored by the high critics of its day), it was galling to see new sf being squeezed off the bookstalls on those same railway-stations by endless reprints of E.E. "Doc" Smith and Robert E. Howard (not to mention early Heinlein, Williamson and Asimov). We tried to keep the past alive during the 1970s, but too often we succeeded only in galvanzing corpses. Time moves on, change happens, but in the 70s we denied the current reality of history by worshipping its past ephemera.

The 1970s was the decade in which science fiction (as a discrete, self-conscious

genre) really began to feel (and to show) its age. The "Modern" sf writers, most of whom began their careers between the late 1930s and the early 1950s, constituted an aging generation. Some died (the decade saw the deaths of Murray Leinster, James Blish, Edmond Hamilton, Eric Frank Russell, Leigh Brackett, John W. Campbell, Daniel Galouye and many others); others fell silent; a few maintained high productivity, and a number made "comebacks" (e.g. Arthur C. Clarke and Frederik Pohl). The writers who began their careers in the late 50s and early 60s, the so-called "New Wave", grew into middle age, some of them abandoning sf and (apparently) their ideals. One symptom of the genre's age is its self-congratulatory mood of recent years. But the rapprochement between New Wave and "trad" sf which took place in the early 70s stood revealed by the end of the decade as a species of con-trick. Rather than the best of both worlds, a smug mediocrity prevailed. Certainly, there were new writers aplenty during the 1970s, but many of them gained too easy an acceptance precisely because they were aping the manners of their elders. In America, mini-Heinleins and mini-Sturgeons abounded – not to mention mini-Le Guins. One of the great disappointments of the decade was that if failed to produce any major new writers comparable with the very best of the 1960s generation (a dangerous statement, and one which I hope will be confounded by a few of the newer voices).

A sure sign of decadence and hardening arteries is the obsession with Awards. In the 70s, the Hugo and Nebula Awards systems became thoroughly entrenched, mere extensions of the publishing inudstry's razamatazz. Several new awards were instituted, with the effect of bolstering the whole system of hype. Older writers were honoured and feted merely because they had been around a long time; the pretensions of newer writers became absurdly inflated. There were too many *ceremonies* in the 1970s, too many publishers' parties, too many advertisements of shoddy goods. When the creative joices cease flowing, alcohol and flattery take over.

As does comment, scholarship, bibliography and idolatrous chat. Over 90% of the total body of "secondary literature" pertaining to science fiction was published in the 1970s. Histories, encyclopaedias, critical monographs, biographies, collections of essays, checklists, festschriften, de luxe editions and fans' scrapbooks were published in profusion. Some of this was useful spadework, a little of it was actually good critcism, but the vast bulk was made up of never-to-be-reprinted ephemera. Somewhere in their lurked several "scholarly journals" devoted to science fiction criticism – the most notable being the North American *SF Studies*, founded in 1973, and the present magazine, *Foundation*. To tell the truth, only *SF Studies* has a genuine claim to the label "scholarly". Good luck to it.

Foundation, under the editorship of Peter Nicholls (1973-1977) and Malcolm Edwards (1978-1980) has been the least "academic" of those journals published by educational institutions. It has prided itself on being open to all comers and to all approaches. A very high proportion of contributors to *Foundation* over the past eight years have been creative writers, ranging from John Brunner and James Blish in the earliest issues to Harlan Ellison, Brian Aldiss and R.A. Lafferty in the current issue. Many other contributors have been non-academics – intelligent

laymen, "fans", call them what you will. The new editorial team, consisting of Ian Watson, John Clute and myself, is entirely non-academic (although it is true that a couple of us have held academic posts in the past). We receive no pay for editing *Foundation*, and no obvious career benefits. In short, we are in it for love – which is perhaps as it should be.

At its worst, *Foundation* has been a ragbag, at its best it has been productively eclectic. To some extent it has drifted with the times, and its occasional dullness has mirrored the dullness of its decade. But whatever the actual failings of the magazine, the editors of *Foundation* have always been agreed on one thing: that criticism *matters*. To comment on and to criticize the stories one has read is a normal human response. Even if all literary journals were to be banned tomorrow, criticism would continue – if only in conversation. Given that criticism happens and goes on happening, it is the role of a journal such as *Foundation* to find the best of that criticism and deliver it to a wider public. Criticism matters because fiction matters: in the end, both matter because human thoughts, dreams and fears (and our collective *awareness* of those thoughts, dreams and fears) are the stuff on which our social life is built. Criticism, like the fiction which is its raison d'etre, should be written with style, force and wit; it should be moving, funny, entertaining, profound; it should contain original ideas, metaphors and symbols – in short, it too should be "creative". Of course, nine-tenths of published criticism does not live up to such an ideal description, but then (as an sf author once remarked) nor does nine-tenths of fiction, or nine-tenths of anything.

So *Foundation* has been, and will continue to be, a magazine which aspires to "creative criticism". Although it is a child of the backward-looking 70s, it hopes to be reborn with the new decade of the 80s. The editors do not have a "programme", but believe in the desirability of a generally iconoclastic and idealistic approach to sf criticism. One element of that approach should be political awareness – we live in a complicated and dangerous world, and it is no longer possible for sf writers and critics to be politically innocent. *Foundation* does not adhere to a specifically Marxist view of reality, as certain other journals do, but we are by no means anti-Marxist either – we wish to be critically eclectic, or eclectically critical. Above all, we want to be on the side of the creative sf writer, though that does not entail offering comfort to shoddy, lazy and complacent writers. We recognize no sharp distinction between "art" and "entertainment" – sf has been both simultaneously and can be both again – and although we believe in literary values we are not on the side of Literature in an Establishment sense. Good writing almost always has a subversive function, and although sf can be of value to teachers and college lecturers experience has taught us in the past few years that there is always an uneasy gap between what is academically assimilable and what is best in current writing. Good science fiction is not written directly for the classroom, even if eventually it finds its way there (there's usually a 15 to 20-year time lag). *Foundation* is more concerned with what people read "under the desk", with what people turn to for the urgency of revelation and the delight of discovery. Sf has always been something of a messianic genre.

Foundation subscribes to no sharply-delimited definition of what science fiction is – although we do feel that we know it when we see it. One significant characteristic of sf, to this Editor at least, is that messianic quality alluded to above. It is a dangerous quality, in that it probably leads to simplistic claptrap more often than it leads to genuine insight. In his essay on "Conceptual Breakthrough" in *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* (1979) Peter Nicholls hints at the sort of ambivalent promise I am talking about: "Sf is pre-eminently the literature of the intellectually dissatisfied, the discontented, those who need to feel there must be more to life than this, and therein lies its maturity, which by a paradox can be seen as a perpetual adolescent yearning." At its best sf is well suited to deal with the world of now, and – however badly – to process the "stuff" of today and tomorrow. Ideally, it is the least backward-looking of fictional forms. The genre trappings of sf can be used, at the very least, to provide a metaphorical and appropriate picture of the present. In a rapidly-changing world it is simply not good enough for writers to view the present through the lens of the past. Such arguments should be familiar to all those who remember the "New Wave" controversy of the 1960s. They have by no means lost their force. Because the 1970s was a low-pressure entropic decade compared to the 60s it became very difficult for sf writers to fulfil the ambitions of 10 or 15 years ago. In the 70s we seemed to live through the experience so accurately foreseen by Philip K Dick in his novel *Ubik* (1969): we were plunged into a world in which everything appeared to regress to earlier forms. Time was running backwards.

With the turning of the decade, I believe that this mental climate is about to change. Sf, if it is to become anything more than despairing escapist fantasy, should forge new ideals and a new aesthetic for the 1980s. (Those ideals, dimly perceived as yet, are best described in 1960s terms for the moment, but this is not to say that they will turn out to be identical with the ideals of the 60s). The time is certainly ripe, and I should like to see *Foundation* as an open platform for writers and critics who are prepared to meet this challenge. Of course, one cannot *will* a change in the moral and intellectual climate of which sf is just a small part, but there are reasons to believe that such a change will come about in the next two or three years as a result of general cultural momentum. Even as the sf writers of the late 1970s were turning more and more to the past – the literal past, or sf's own mythical past, or the surrogate past of pastoral fantasy – the future was with us in our daily lives more urgently than ever before; the rate of change appeared to be speeding up again. We desperately need interpreters, we need (in the widest sense) *poets* to portray for us the inner reality of that future which is pregnant in the present.

Why? What are the external changes I'm talking about? They are legion, and many of them are well known, if poorly understood. Let us bear in mind that we're not only entering a fin de siécle period; we're already living through fin de millenium. In the next 20 years I predict (I *predict*) that predictions, prophecies, futurology and apocalyptic thought are going to boom as never before. What we have seen so far, what we heard since the times of Turgot and Sebastian Mercier, Saint-Simon and Jules Verne (to name four Frenchmen), is as nothing compared to what is to come. Bearing in mind the welter of possibilities and

viewpoints from which they have been extracted, here are a few major factors which are shaping the present and the future:

1) The political and economic rise of the non-Western world – Japan, China, the new industrial nations of Asia, the Islamic and oil-producing countries (Iran!), the Indian sub-continent and parts of Africa and South America too. In short, the change from Western Civilization to World Civilization. (An aspect of this is the massive change taking place in the USA – away from the North-East, the Atlantic and Europe, towards the South and West, the Caribbean and the Pacific.) In relative terms, Europe and European influence are going into decline – even China is showing signs of modifying its "European" ideology of Marxism.

2) The demographic transition. The Malthusian fears of the 60s and early 70s may have been exaggerated, but there is little doubt that world population, when it stabilizes, is going to be at least twice as high as it is at present. And most of the new population will of course be non-"Western". The world can produce enough food to feel all these people but distributing it will be no easy matter. Localized wars, famines, coup d'états and revolutions are likely to become even more common over the next two decades.

3) Massive armaments and nuclear proliferation. The most alarming factor is the erosion of the distinction between nuclear and "conventional" weapons. There is also the possibility of a whole new generation of space weapons, lasers in orbit, etc. Before the end of the 80s it may no longer be possible to talk about "conventional weapons". Even non-nuclear war will (on a large scale) become unthinkable.

4) Space manufacture and spin-offs. It's likely that in the 80s and 90s space will become "fashionable" again – especially after the US Shuttle is in service. Apart from space weapons, space manufacture of goods and materials could become an important factor before the end of the century. Even without O'Neill habitats and factories in orbit, the planet as a whole will depend on space technology to a vastly greater degree. Earth resources satellites will locate the mineral deposits of Asia, Africa and the Americas. Communications satellites will carry enormously increased loads of information.

5) The communications explosion. Not only satellites but cable TV, VCRs, microcomputers, etc., will increase the availability of information (and its *cheapness*). The home will become a library and a fun palace. Ceefax, Prestel and so on are just the beginning – in France the government is *giving* a free viewdata terminal to every telephone subscriber. Already there are signs that ordinary people can learn more easily or confide more fully in computers – thus teachers, doctors, counsellors, etc,. etc., will be replaced or augmented by computers. There are considerable implications for decentralization of power – CB radio is a great device for anarchists. As computers become everyday objects they will become demystified: home computer hobbyists are already a common breed.

6) Microprocessors and automation. The application of microelectronics to production is already booming. The drift of workers from primary production to secondary and tertiary occupations is likely to become a flood. Soon, industrialized nations will need no more factory workers than farm workers. "Structural"

unemployment becomes inevitable but could take many different forms – early retirement, shorter hours, more holidays, etc. Hence the "problem" of leisure, discussed in the 60s, will at last become a pressing reality. There will be a boom in leisure industries – and there will be a reaction in the forms of more do-it-yourself, more back-to-the-land and self-sufficiency movements. There will be immense difficulties in this transition: inequalities aggravated by unemployment, Luddite riots, etc.

7) The biological time-bomb. The possibilities here are very familiar to sf readers, but nonetheless becoming all the more urgent in reality. Genetic manipulation, intelligence and memory enhancement, link-ups between people and machines, intelligent animals, clones, etc., etc., all serve to bring about a situation in which the human body and mind will become more amorphous, more pliable. Biological techniques will also be used in production of materials and fuels.

One could go on endlessly, plucking such "trends" from the newspapers, Sunday supplements and popular science books. Put them all together, add at least as many other factors, and you have an explosive mixture – a mixture of fact and fancy which is rapidly becoming our "real world", like it or not. Sf is important because it has the potential to deal with that world – indeed, it has already dealt with it to some extent. But the need for intelligent sf becomes more pressing, not less, as the century wears on. I am not suggesting that sf writers should deal didactically, or even explicitly, with the issues raised above; rather that they should be busy providing us with objective correlatives for what it feels like to inhabit such a world. To reverse Karl Marx, the task of sf writers is not to change the world but to help us understand it. The world is changing, is *being* changed, in any case: it is the insides of our heads which require a revolution now.

Foundation can play a small but important part in helping such a revitalized sf come into existence. The editorial team is searching for new talent, new contributors. If you wish to participate in our collective endeavour, please do so. Letters of comment are greatly appreciated, and we hope to publish many more of them. We also welcome submissions of articles and sample reviews. We intend to build on the good work done by Peter Nicholls and Malcolm Edwards, so there are unlikely to be abrupt changes in the make-up of *Foundation* in the next few issues. Our motto is simply *Make it Better!* We intend to be alive to the cultural changes which the 80s will bring, and to be responsive, flexible and open in our approach. Who knows, we may all be going places. But we need our readers' assistance. Please help.

David Pringle
June 1980

As well as being an excellent writer Brian Aldiss is a wonderful public speaker – as all those who attended Seacon '79, the World Science Fiction Convention held in Brighton, can attest. The following is a slightly shortened version of his Guest of Honour speech on that occasion.

Up Against the Universe

Brian Aldiss

For me, a personal statement would have to reveal my strong beliefs about the universe at large; so let me have a stab at outlining the case of Aldiss against the universe. I love sf, and I like it black, the way some people like their coffee. Science fiction is at its best, in my view, when it is in disagreement, when it's upsetting someone's cosily established point of view; not when it's simply uttering platitudes or feeding us popcorn. The whole point of science fiction, as of science, is to question.

In short, for me, Science Fiction is the Heretical Party. That's what I always believed, and I still believe that we understand the world differently from those who don't know the distinction between fission and fusion, and think that parthenogenesis is a pop group that performs in Athens. Nowadays, however, I sometimes find myself in an Heretical Party of one. You see, I have come to doubt whether there is life anywhere else in the universe.

Back in the sixties, I put together an anthology of fact and fiction entitled *Farewell, Fantastic Venus!* I did some reading in the Bodleian concerning imaginary beings, and was astonished at the perennial human capacity to populate empty space with myriads of non-existent creatures. It isn't Nature that abhors a vacuum – it's us. Every age has conjured up dictionaries of mythology full of hosts of impossible populations: hobgoblins, unicorns, missing links, sirens, giants, and so forth – from the angel with the flaming sword who stood at the gate of Eden looking rather like Arthur C. Clarke in a dirty bathrobe to all those dragons of Anne McCaffrey's. (I'm not sure whether Anne actually believes in her dragons, but I'm sure her bank manager does.)

For countless ages, such beasties, gods, devils, sundry spirits, have held mankind in thrall and ruled his beliefs and occasions. I repeat they are imaginary. Each fresh generation arises, wipes away the old mythology, and begins the task of creating a fresh one. The old bogeyman changeth, giving place to the new.

After wrestling with the problem for many years, I have found I believe in none of them. And why should this generation's imaginings be different? I believe that all these entities merely comprise a creaking floorboard between the cellars of the old brain and the attics of the new. The new brain of *homo sapiens,* the cerebrum, has to make what sense it can out of the noises and images it catches from the old brain, the cerebellum, the mid brain, and so on.

I'm not saying that these mythical entities aren't fascinating, or even that people shouldn't write about them. I'm saying that they have no objective existence. They are one part of the brain explaining another part to itself. Heaven and Hell may be real enough; but they exist as paradigms within our skulls.

The old brain, innocent of language, *sans* words or figleaves, remembers still the days of running and fruit-gathering, and the nights of rutting and the full moon, in those timeless days, those days of the Great Time, before death, parenthood, and the Kleenex tissue were discovered. It has to make what sense it can out of the noises from the floor above, the cerebrum in its crowded sky. Only in dreams can it converse with the new tenants, and then only by sign language. The new brain is becoming skilled at understanding sign language, but it still has a long way to go. They sniff each other, like ape and dog.

One of the most important tasks facing mankind is to achieve reconciliation between these two inheritances, between the supremely ancient and the superbly modern, within us. Science fiction assists in that task, or can do when it is mature enough to confront squarely the confusion that still informs man, rather than pretending that he is really a superman in the wrong size of jockstrap. I believe that sf itself is a token of that division in our minds, for we at once hope and fear for the results of technology; the new brain hopes, the old brain fears; together they write sf, which accomplishes both simultaneously.

So does some older fiction. The legendary tale of Cinderella, for example, which is acted out in Pantomime every Christmas. Cinderella embodies a parable of the frail little underbrain (as it sees itself), the cerebellum, regarded as ugly and unfit for decent society by those placed above it. But at night the underbrain is free from slavery. Along comes the prince, with a key which represents the delightful truth about the underbrain, just as Prince Charming represents perhaps an enlightened mixture of intelligence allied to feeling. So the little underbrain is restored to its rightful position. It becomes the equal – well, almost – of the Prince. And you'll observe that in most versions of the story, Cinderella takes no revenge on her ugly sisters – the twin hemispheres of the cerebrum? – for they too are graciously invited to join in the wedding feast and the general happiness.

Cinderella is a work of the unifying imagination, explaining ourselves to ourselves, in the manner of the best science fiction. One of our delights in science fiction is in inventing hordes of imaginary creatures – aliens – with which to populate the universe. If we remember that they are symbols of the Real, not aspects of the Real, then what they do, their function in the plot, and the story in which they are embroiled, will stand a chance of having some lasting significance. We are splendidly prodigal with our alien life-forms. But that's a tribute to the green bay tree of the human imagination. Most of them have absolutely no scientific basis, although we may like to think otherwise. We know the mind's populated; we have no such data about the universe. There may be nothing out there, friends, not even a branch of MacDonald's.

Let me put it this way. You've seen the superb shots of Jupiter and her moons filmed by Voyager on her recent fly-by of the big planet. Fantastic, weren't they? Beautiful almost beyond credence. But I had to ask myself: there was Io; where was that big sort of beacon thing that Murray Leinster told us was there, sticking

out into space? There was Ganymede; where were those vicious creatures the size of whales with huge leathery wings and beaks like claymores that Eando Binder used to tell us about? There was Callisto; my god, I thought I knew Callisto like the back of my hand – where was Callisto City, for god's sake, with that low bar where the deep-system spacers used to drink, brawling every night and coshing the barman over whichever of his heads was the nearest? Gone, nothing there. All imagination. In reality, the whole place is barren, dead, desolate. Not even a tuft of intelligent lichen raising a glass of *glotschtxz* to itself.

This may sound perverse, but I hope the universe is empty. To hell with *glotschtxz*; we can always drink Vimto. The human game is so interesting and varied. We need no other. We can play the game to our own rules. We just have to amend the rules slightly, make them a little fairer, and everything will be fine.

I like the idea of a whole empty galaxy. That feeling is admittedly more emotional than intellectual. I'm in love with the minimal. I respond always to the marginal case, as I did to the poor trapped people in *Non-Stop, Hothouse* and *Probability A.*

My grandfather used to breed pigeons. The walls of his study and bedroom were covered with framed certificates of merit. He bred strange pigeons, all glorious with white plumage like Antarctic macaws; pigeons with big crests, pigeons with big breasts, pigeons with long tails, pigeons with spats, pigeons that were pigeon-chested. Grandfather died while I was still in my pram – though I got out for the funeral, of course – but my uncles used to maintain his long pigeon-houses, which stood in the quiet old garden in Peterborough. The pigeon-houses took up half the garden. It was pretty damp and dark down there, in the shade of the Fletton brick walls.

I loved walking through the deserted pigeon-houses. They were filled with hundreds of white-painted nesting boxes, all numbered, all silent and untenanted now that grandfather was dead. You had to keep pushing chicken-wire doors open before you, going on and on, hearing the flimsy doors clatter closed behind you. The place smelt of feathers. And right in the very end chamber, one old pigeon lived on, sole survivor from my grandfather's time. He was an ordinary pigeon, without any evolutionary adornment, and his name was Willie. Willie would sit in your cupped hands. Willie was always reasonably glad to see you, although he was not a particularly effusive bird. My uncles felt sorry for Willie, living all alone, but I thought he was lucky and had a rich life. There's honour in survival. Willie had the world to himself.

Like Willie, a novelist needs solitude, silence, exile. Like the rest of us, he also needs company, and the occasional grand beano as provided here at Brighton. Human beings are a restless species, forever on the move. Have you ever seen a film in which one character did not say to another character, at some point or other, "Try and get some rest"?

It's not in our nature to rest. We are a new species, maybe a new thing in the universe, forever at the mercy of our endocrine glands, forever going off to war or playing guitars or molesting young ladies from Harrow. We're creeping with activity. Give us a few million years and an empty galaxy, and see what we become then.

How can we "get some rest"? We live in the middle of a vast explosion. We are

ourselves products, side-effects, of that explosion; elements of that explosion are built into our constitution. Take a look at Ian Watson, and you'll see what I mean. The unfolding of generation after generation of living things is an expression in flesh of that primal Big Bang, the force of which is as yet by no means exhausted.

I hate to tell you this, but one generation succeedeth another, and even some of us science fiction writers are getting a bit long in the tooth.

I want to tell you a story about time. It's also a story about how a writer's mind works. It's impossible to be a serious writer and not come to close terms with time; but last year I became involved with it in a remarkable way.

At the end of World War II, I found myself as a young soldier in Sumatra. There I lived for a year, for most of the time in the capital city, Medan, which I have described in my novel, *A Rude Awakening.* I lived in a pleasant colonial-style house which had served as a Japanese brothel and, before that, as a billet for minor Dutch civil servants. I was happy there. I loved the tropics. I loved the sun blazing forth every day. Back in England, I never dreamed that I could ever return to Sumatra; however, thirty years later, I found the opportunity to go back. That was last year, when I was on my way to Australia. So I found myself in Medan once more. My house had been on the edge of town; curiosity prompted me to seek it out again. I enlisted the help of a friendly guide of the Batak tribe, and we caught a taxi. I had also bought a map, no mean feat in itself.

Thirty years. I was still in pretty good nick, but Medan had changed for the worse. All round me, the Third World was reeling under the impact of the population explosion. Not that the locals saw it that way. Everything had changed. They'd had a revolution; the Dutch had gone, Sumatra had become part of the Republic of Indonesia. All the streets and buildings had been re-named. There were many more streets. Whole kampongs had disappeared under concrete, and complex one-way systems had been constructed.

Eventually, we got the taxi to an area I thought I recognised, though we had come at it from what in my day was an impossible direction. "It's near here," I said.

Trees had come down and fences had gone up. My guide, Michael, and the taxi man both started worrying on my account. On one corner, I saw a house standing back from the road which could have been mine. When I got out and looked at it, Michael went over and knocked at the door. Some Indonesians emerged; they chanced to belong to Michael's tribe, so everyone was jolly, and I was ushered in. There was a good chance that it was my old billet, but I saw now that this wasn't going to be so easy.

The parents and their brothers and sisters were about thirty years old; between them they had a lot of children who stood, smiling and courteous, as I sat down in their kitchen and drank some coffee with them. They knew nothing of Dutch rule, never mind British or Japanese. Had this been my house?

I wasn't sure. I had lived upstairs. It certainly looked like my house, but I used to enter through a door on the other side of the house.

Would I like to look upstairs? They could easily get Grandad out of bed.

As we went upstairs, I thought, No, you're mad, Aldiss — the staircase went up the other way round, or else you actually have forgotten.

"That was my room," I said, pointing to a closed door on the landing. Best put a bold face on it.

They opened up. Grandad and I exchanged greetings, and I walked round the room. A curious creepy feeling stole over me, compounded of amazement, delight, and the dregs of time. Yes, by a miracle it was my room, still in the world of things that are. I gazed from the window; the view was broadly the same, the same lovely tropical trees, though more houses crowded in. I turned to my hosts, beaming, thanking them all, saying how pleased I felt to come back.

But. As we were leaving the room, I thought, there used to be a balcony. There's no balcony. This can't be your room . . .

Still, the tropics are the tropics. Balconies fall off sometimes.

We went outside, Michael photographed us all, and we took the glad news back to the waiting taxi driver. Fond waves all round . . .

To this day, I don't know whether I got back to my old house or not. Some days I think I did, some days I think I didn't. But I'm content with that uncertainty. The uncertainty seems to me rich and enriching, the very stuff of which life is made. I have no wish ever to reduce life to a diagram. It was J.M.W. Turner with his apparent lack of form who understood Reality, not his rivals, secure in the Academy, plastering on their regulation bitumen. Nor for that matter was it ever possible for me to be sure one way or the other whether I had revisited my old house. Proust says that we can never return to the street beloved by us in childhood, because one is seeking a lost time as well as a lost place. That's the way it is: final but ambiguous; ambiguous but final.

Time passes. This year I celebrate twenty-one years of independence and the lion's life of the writer. I began writing science fiction long before we let in the general public. You must all be as aware as I am of the extraordinary mystique of sf, of the fanatical loyalties it generates and the hopes it engenders. You know that this Brighton convention is one peak in a Himalaya of faith in – well, not exactly in sf itself, but in a sort of Platonic ideal of sf enshrined in some far Shangri-La, some Arisia of the soul.

In my twenty-one years of the lion's life, science fiction has changed, as the world itself has changed. Science fiction binds together many conflicting strands of thought – that's what gives it its energy. The old idle daydreams of limitless power and galactic domination go on, but the world itself has moved into a period when political power is more difficult to make operative, and fuel power has become expensive and relatively scarce.

Power, and the knowledge that has created that power, lie at the basis of Western culture; the West itself faces a crisis. That crisis will doubtless be resolved in an unsatisfactory way, as most crises have been. Time has a way of by-passing crises and embedding them in history.

I said I like my sf black. I also prefer it when it talks in evolutionary rather than power-fantasy terms. In my new book of essays, *This World And Nearer Ones*, I argue that one of the prime functions of science fiction since H.G. Wells's day is to assist us in coming to terms with the manifold implications of the evolutionary theory, and the attendant gloomy theories formulated last century.

Whenever we invent new planetary races with different attributes from ours,

living on different planets at different stages of evolution, as for instance Fred Pohl recently did in *Jem,* we are constructing models built on the dynamic principles formulated by Lyell, Malthus, Kelvin, Darwin and others.

The findings of those great men tipped us sprawling like a bag of fish into a wide-open universe, a universe of speculation rather than certainty. It was as though everyone had suddenly been given a new pair of eyes. Everything was different, the same but strangely altered, like the room Alice found herself in when she climbed through the looking-glass.

Evolution is the most wonderful tool we have for understanding the cunning relationships, the hidden orders, the amazing prodigalities, of our world. System has replaced random; but it is a system of such magnificent complexity that we can spend a lifetime, as Darwin did, coming to terms with it.

The revelations of evolution have such impact that they are felt deep down in the psyche. You know that Charles Darwin suffered a long hypochondriacal illness, remaining almost isolated for years in the little village of Downe. As you travel by British Rail from London to Brighton, you pass Downe to the west. I have no doubt that Darwin's illness was caused in part by the profound shock he experienced in coming to terms with a philosophy which so completely overturned the opinions and landscapes of his fathers.

In *Billion Year Spree.* I remarked on how frequently sf authors dwell on scenes of solitude and desolation. The fact is, there's not a great deal of comfort or cosiness in the theory of evolution. It confronts us with a wheel of genetic material, a struggling arc of bodies in flight through space and time, a fountain of metabolism in a flickering light. The mechanism is natural selection through sexual reproduction. Have you ever thought how rare is the act of reproduction for most creatures on the globe? That brief but crucial spurt of sexual pleasure comes to only one mammal in five, one bird in fifty, one fish in thousands, one insect in millions. Most are gobbled up before reaching puberty.

Scenes of solitude and desolation attracted Darwin just as they do science fiction writers. After his five years' voyage on the *Beagle* he looked back on what most impressed him, and recalled the desolate plains of Patagonia.

Darwin says, "These plains are pronounced by all wretched and useless. They can be described only by negative characters: without habitations, without water, without trees, without mountains, they support merely a few dwarf plants. Why then — and the case is not peculiar to myself — have these arid wastes taken so firm a hold on my memory? . . . It must be partly owing to the free scope given to the imagination . . . The plains of Patagonia are boundless . . . They bear the stamp of having lasted as they are now for ages, and there appears no limit to their duration through future time . . . Who would not look at these last boundaries to man's knowledge with deep but ill-defined sensations?"

Travel does alter our minds. I hope that those of you find yourselves in dear old England for the first time will be affected by what you experience. You will observe, for instance, that British sf is alive and well as never before, a forest in its own right and not, as it used to be, someone else's plantation. Notice the chief reason Charles Darwin produces for continuing to haunt the plains of Patagonia in his mind. They gave free scope to his imagination. This is the justification for science fiction — if it

needs justification: it allows scope for the imagination. The Oxford philosopher, Mary Warnock, in her book on the imagination, says, "The cultivation of the imagination should be the chief aim of education, and yet it is that in which our present systems of education most conspicuously fail." Students of course supplement this deficiency by reading the works of Robert Sheckley. As you can tell by the shape of their heads.

Imagination is a flower that withers easily. We all know of people with dead imaginations. They constitute what we in science fiction call the mundane world. I don't know how this vital faculty comes to be so frail, but so it is. To classify objects, to distinguish between true and false, to be the first to perceive that the correspondences between skeletons of apes and men argue a family relationship – such perceptions require imagination. It needed imagination to create the theory of evolution – just as imagination went into the divine theories of creation which evolution has largely superseded.

To many people – and especially to sf cover artists – sf means large machines. Fine. But large machines get in the way of Nature, and Nature is the largest possible machine, encompassing all others. You must put up with my coolness to large machines as I put up with your madness. It takes all kinds to make a world; and it certainly takes all kinds to make all kinds of worlds.

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Moving Towards Chaos: Aldiss's Hothouse

Brian Griffin

In *Hothouse* Brian Aldiss presents us with problems of categorization. *Hothouse* is sf – and more. However, to keep chaos at bay, let us begin by treating it simply as sf. This is, after all, a novel which can be compared and contrasted with other novels in the sf *genre* – with, for example, Ian Watson's *The Embedding* (1973). Such a treatment should certainly provide important clues as to the way sf developed during that watershed-decade of 1962-73.

Hothouse and *The Embedding* are both concerned with the possibility of understanding and transcending Nature, or the physical universe; both novels, therefore, are centrally concerned with the nature of the human brain. Watson supposes that the brain is literally an "embedding", a part of the cosmos endowed with an embedded language wherewith man – or some men, anyway – can understand the cosmos in all its modes. Watson's Xemahoa Indians are content with their embedded language; but the white men who discover their secret are not so content. Whence this embedding? And why? Can man lift himself by his own bootstraps and transcend the cosmos in which he and his brain are embedded? The aliens who arrive on Earth from a far-distant part of the Galaxy are obsessed with the same questions – and consumed with despair at their inability to grasp "Other-Reality". On the whole, Ian Watson himself tends to be *for* transcendence in any shape or form, and to see any failure in trascendence in tragic terms. "This-Reality", in which we are embedded, as in a womb, becomes our tomb unless we can get out. And the clue to our escape must lie in the very nature of Language, that brain-embedded paradigm . . .

Part of Aldiss shares Ian Watson's desire to understand, to transcend the natural world; but Aldiss is also half in love with the physical world, with the sheer manic proliferation of Nature.

> Obeying an inalienable law, things grew, growing riotous and strange in their impulse for growth.
>
> The heat, the light, the humidity – these were constant and had remained constant for . . . but nobody knew how long. Nobody cared any more for the big questions that begin 'How long . . .?' or 'Why . . .?' It was a place for growth, for vegetables. It was like a hothouse.[1]

But then, Aldiss is not writing about abstractions here: he had been a soldier in the Far East, and the reality of Nature must have hit him right in the solar plexus during those years. Certainly this opening paragraph of *Hothouse* is strongly reminiscent of the descriptions of an omnipotent, loved/hated Nature in *A Rude Awakening* (1978), in which Aldiss came out into the open and described his experiences much more directly.

> You could tell blindfold that Medan was just one degree off the equator. The air suppurated like primaeval broth. A million monstrous little things unknown in England expressed their beings in sound so urgently that it was hard to know what was air, what noise. I stood there, swaying slightly, and flipped my fag-end away into the night. Its parabola was cut short in mid-air. Something had gobbled it up before it fell.[2]

A trappersnapper, perhaps? A wiltmilt? A tigerfly? A greenguts? To Aldiss's mind, the fantastic vegetative life of *Hothouse* can't have been as essentially fantastic as all that. He had *felt* them, all of them, out there in the jungle, at the dead end of the British Empire and well into the middle of the Decline of the West.

But Aldiss also saw beauty in the tropics – a beauty which man violates at his peril. In *A Rude Awakening*, that beauty comes through in the scene preceding the killing of the crocodiles by the hunting party, which precipitates their deaths in turn, as if in reprisal. (pp.118, et seq)

> Sweet is the lore that Nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things: –
> We murder to dissect.[3]

Wordsworth in the tropics may seem incongruous, as Aldous Huxley would have pointed out; but there *is* a Wordsworthian dread of the numinous side of Nature evinced in *Hothouse (A Rude Awakening* being mainly concerned with other things). It is seen especially in the episode which brings Gren and Yattmur to a mysterious island surmounted by a dark cliff – an image that recurs significantly in the short story called "A Kind of Artistry", which was also first published in 1962, (the year of *Hothouse's* hardback publication), and in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,* where *Hothouse* first saw the light of day. But more of that later. In *Hothouse,* the Dark Cliff is a kind of receiving/transmitting station for the green forces of Nature, that mindless and omnipotent Power.

> Yattmur looked up towards the towering cliff again. Gathering cloud scudding across the sky made that great wall look as if it were toppling.
>
> Yattmur fell on her face and covered her eyes. 'The mighty cliffs are crashing down on us!' she cried, pulling Gren down with her.
>
> He looked up at once. The illusion caught him too: that grand and high tower was coming grandly down on top of them![4]

This is probably a half-conscious allusion to the famous passage in Wordsworth's *Prelude,* in which young William steals a boat by night and has a nasty experience in the middle of the silent lake:

> a huge peak, black and huge,
> As if with voluntary power instinct
> Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
> And growing still in stature the grim shape
> Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
> For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
> And measured motion like a living thing,
> Strode after me.[5]

Romanticism and a concern with the external world of Nature constitute the rich soil in which sf eventually grew and came to fruition. Insofar as *Hothouse* expresses these things, Aldiss is writing pure, classic sf within the central tradition, sf that draws its special flavour from Aldiss's identification with the Romantic Poets. (Wordsworth's great sonnet, "The world is too much with us", crops up significantly in *An Age,* 1967; while Shelley and Byron nearly steal the whole show in *Frankenstein Unbound,* 1973.) Behind the usual ambivalence, there is a certain innocence of attitude in *Hothouse,* an unquestioning acceptance of the external world of Nature as a primary reality, which is lacking in Ian Watson's *The Embedding,* written a decade later. In Aldiss, a childlike enthusiasm coexists with an adult sophistication (an essential attribute of the romantic imagination); in Watson, there is little of the childlike to be found. For good or ill, sf seems to have outgrown such childish things: even in Bob Shaw's *Orbitsville* (and Shaw is the nearest thing we have, these days, to the classic tradition), the realm of Nature turns out to be an inconceivably vast booby-trap for the human race. "Transcendence or Bust" – that seems to be our motto now.

Part of Aldiss, however, wants no truck with transcendence. This part of him is responsible for the two sexually-oriented novels – *The Primal Urge* and *The Male Response* – that appeared in 1961. Faced with a Girl and a Robot with Flowers,[6] this part of Aldiss will always choose the Girl and the Flowers, while regarding the Robot with due suspicion. As in the story called "Comic Inferno" (1963) – not to

mention the even funnier "Working in the Spaceship Yards" (1969) – the Robot means dehumanised abstraction, a deadly transcendence of Nature, among other things. Robots *observe;* they cannot instinctively *be.* They are also an externalisation of something Aldiss feels, and suspects, in himself: the Cartesian split between Mind and Nature.

There is a corresponding externalisation of this side of Aldiss (and of ourselves) in *Hothouse:* the conscious morel fungus, the primal brain-stuff, which is trying to reassert its former dominance of Nature in the last age of a dying Earth – a situation which is, metaphorically at least, by no means irrelevant to the situation we actually find ourselves in as the 20th Century draws to a close. What price Intellect, when, according to Heidegger, the real issue must now be decided between Being and Nothingness?

Yet the morel obviously fascinates Aldiss. It represents pure cerebration, abstraction, the pride of systematised thought, the fascination of the everlasting conceptual chessgame. In a word, it represents Intellect – Intellect as it has paradoxically come to be understood during the last three centuries: something essentially alienated from, and even opposed to, the "Outside" realm of Nature, or what Descartes called "extension". (The corollary of this, of course, was that Man was trapped "Inside" his own brain: *I think, therefore I am* being the only remaining certainty.)

Even this is an oversimplification; for at the root of the problem is a basic confusion about what these terms "Inside" and "Outside" mean to post-Cartesian man. As the artist Kokoschka wrote at the end of the last war, "A fallacy is blurring the clear distinction between what is in and what is out of the mind".[7] Substitute *paradox* for *fallacy,* and you have the prevailing state of affairs in the fiction of Brian Aldiss; so that, in *Hothouse,* Intellect can be seen as existing "Outside" the realm of Nature. Intellect transcends the warm, "Inside" womb of Nature, in which man, being a mere recapitulation of all other forms of life, is now doomed to go into reverse and devolve back to nothing in order that the process might begin all over again. (Aldiss was to re-state this theme, in a more sophisticated form, in *An Age,* 1967).

At this point, some people might argue that I'm in danger of taking a mere sf writer too seriously; yet in *Hothouse,* Aldiss is dealing with the central theme of Joyce's *Ulysses,* no less. In the penultimate section of *Ulysses,* Joyce – exploring the endless cyclic processes of Nature with all the love/hate of an intellectual aesthete – puts these thoughts into the mind of Leopold Bloom: "From inexistence to existence he came to many and was as one received: existence with existence he was with any as any with any: from existence to nonexistence gone he would be by all as none perceived."[8] And, later, "He smiled . . . to reflect that each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas he is always the last term of a preceding series even if the first term of a succeeding one, each imagining himself to be the first, last, only and alone, whereas he is neither first nor last not only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity."[9]

Compare Joyce with this speech from Aldiss's morel fungus: "At the beginning of this sun system's time, all forms of life were blurred together and by perishing supplied other forms. They arrived on Earth from space . . . in Cambrian times.

Then the forms evolved into animal, vegetable, reptile, insect – all varieties and species . . ., many of them now gone . . . (Now) Nature is devolving. Again the forms are blurring! They never ceased to be inter-dependent . . . and now they merge together once more . . . Galactic fluxes will carry the spores of life to another and a new system, just as they once brought it here."[10] The only difference between Aldiss and Joyce, in this respect, is that Aldiss doesn't have to work hard at making his characters universal: the sf scenario does all that for him. But does that, in itself, make him an inferior artist? It's worth noting that the most memorable passages in the penultimate section of *Ulysses*, in which Bloom contemplates the night sky, are science fictional in spirit.

To complete the parallel, the morel fungus is to *Hothouse* what Stephen Dedalus is to *Ulysses*. Like Dedalus, the morel persists in asking *"What am I?"*[11], in being highly differentiated. And like Dedalus (that maker of labyrinths), the morel (that selfinvolved, convoluted brain-stuff) is ambivalent and sinister in aspect. Like Dedalus, it fights for the continuation of life (its own) – yet, like him, it suffers from selfconsciousness, from "Agenbite of Inwit". Or, rather, visits that blight upon its human hosts.

Intellect and Nature, Inside and Outside, Order and Chaos – Aldiss is torn between these opposites. In *Hothouse*, this self-division is unresolved: in the end, as with *Hothouse*, "everthing falls apart", and one senses a kind of maniacal zest on the part of Aldiss which contrasts strongly with the grim earnestness of Ian Watson's *The Embedding*. But then, Watson wants to transcend the opposites via science, or linguistics; whereas Aldiss, one feels, is simply following the opposites to their chaotic but logical conclusion in his search for something beyond chaos and logic, *yin* and *yang*. In this, he resembles neither the scientistic Watson nor the aesthetic Joyce: he travels alone, and we are glad to travel with him – even into the wildest regions. He is like the mad mariner in Matthew Arnold's "A Summer Night":

> Still bent to make some port he knows not where,
> Still standing for some false, impossible shore.[12]

Only Aldiss feels that there *is* a shoreline somewhere; and he's a lot more cheerful than Arnold, who preferred to remain sane but sad.

To summarize: you can, up to a point, trace the lineage of *Hothouse* from Wells (see *The Island of Dr Moreau*, in which the remorseless Doctor represents Reason, while his mutated beasts are an analogue of humanity), through Olaf Stapledon (it's likely that the idea of the morel fungus grew from the episode of "the Great Brains" in *Last and First Men)*, and then trace a line from *Hothouse* right on to Ian Watson's *The Embedding*, and the current sf scene.

But only up to a point. I've already invoked the name of Joyce; and it's true that *Hothouse* becomes even more interesting when placed in a wider literary context.

Hothouse begins as pure sf with a strong admixture of fantasy (the novel began its life as a series of stories in *Fantasy and Science Fiction*).[13] A group of humans fight for survival in a hothouse world given over to cannibalistic vegetables, and the Sun is about to go nova –. Apart from the introduction of the morel fungus, this seems at first to be the essence of the plot; but as it progresses – and particularly

beyond the point at which Gren and Yattmur (accompanied by the morel) reach the island of the stalker-walker plants with its buried "heckler" bird – the whole story begins to take on new proportions. Gren begins to play Caliban to the morel's ague-threatening Prospero: "Since it is impossible for you to be my partner," says the morel, "you must suffer being my slave". (p.133) Then, like *Frankenstein Unbound*, *Hothouse* becomes a long journey into regions of night, icebergs and inhuman monsters.

The idea of a dark mysterious voyage has obviously fascinated Aldiss from the start, as is witnessed by *Non-Stop* (and by his next major novel, *Greybeard*, 1964). But *Hothouse* is the first of his sf novels to break the bounds of sf, so that the criteria of that genre are not enough to describe it. Aldiss was adventuring in search of an audience – his own audience, not just the sf fans, for all that he was greatly indebted to them; Aldiss was looking for his own literary identity, just as Gren, in *Hothouse*, is looking for himself. Having learnt some valuable lessons from Ted Carnell, Aldiss was moving on.

I've already mentioned Prospero. Shakespeare's book-drowning magus haunts the minds of most serious writers from time to time, and it's highly unlikely that the bookish Aldiss is an exception. The Prospero Syndrome, by itself, would not make *Hothouse* exceptional; but as the novel proceeds, associations of a much more distinctive, non-Shakespearean nature rise up from the depths. In fact, as they move ever onwards into the dark hemisphere of a dying Earth, the symbiotic duo of Gren-plus-morel assume a likeness to Ibsen's Peer Gynt. Like Peer, they are driven ever onwards into themsleves by vague and grandiose ambitions; while Yattmur, Gren's mate, takes on a likeness to Solvieg – a faithful, archetypal Woman to the last, patiently enduring the errant fancies of Gren/morel. As in *Peer Gynt*, the whole story begins in a realm of natural, primal innocence – Yattmur's realm, Solvieg's realm; an innocence which is destroyed by Gren/morel.

> Yattmur looked up at him, suddenly struck with pity at the change that had recently possessed him.
>
> 'You say so little, and you look so ill, my love. We have come so far together, you and I, with only each other to love, yet now it is as if you were gone from me. From my heart flows only love for you, from my lips only kindness. But love and kindness are lost things on you now, O Gren, O my Gren!'
>
> The girl stayed helplessly where she was, while clouds piled up overhead. Presently it began to rain, the rain turning to snow. Laren cried, and was given a breast to suck.
>
> Slowly the girl's thoughts grew outwards . . . Vague pictures hung in the air about her, pictures that despite their lack of logic were her way of reasoning. Her safe days in the tribe of herders was represented by a tiny red flower that could also, with just the tiniest shift of emphasis, be her, as her safe days had been her: she had not seen herself as a phenomenon distinct from the phenomena about her . . .[14]

Here Yattmur not only reminds us of Solvieg, but brings us back to Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Molly Bloom's famous stream-of-consciousness soliloquy in the final section. (". . . and all the queer little streets and pink and blue and yellow houses and the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a Flower of the mountain yes . . ." etc.) The "tiny red flower" image in *Hothouse* could be an unconscious echo on Aldiss's part, of course – in which case, his subconscious served him well; because *Hothouse* fits within this wider literary context, as well as being good sf. Like Solveig and Molly Bloom,

Aldiss's Yattmur *is* Nature, our Mother and Mistress, from whom we emerge, to whom we return in endless cycles. Like Peer Gynt and Stephen Dedalus, Gren-plus-morel will not accept simple, natural realities; they must invent their own realities, they must explore themselves. These literary interconnections are by no means abitrary: the young Joyce was deeply influenced by Ibsen, just as Aldiss – on the strength of *Barefoot in the Head* (1969) alone – has been deeply influenced by Joyce. It is a large part of Aldiss's strength that he carries on two traditions – the relatively new tradition of sf, and the much older tradition of Western Literature. At his best, Aldiss can persuade you that both traditions belong to a seamless Whole, and that Continuity reigns after all.

Here is the morel fungus, laughing and boasting inside Gren's head – indulging in delusions of grandeur, very much in ther manner of Peer Gynt, and flaunting its precious Intellect, very much in the manner of Stephen Dedalus:

> 'The drama may not yet be finished! I am a sturdier strain than those of my bygone ancestors; I can tolerate high radiation. So can your kind. Now is the historic moment for us to begin another symbiosis as great and profitable as the one which tempered those tarsiers until they rode among the stars! Again the clocks of intelligence begin to chime. The clocks have hands again . . . Hear the clocks chime! They chime for us, children!'[15]

"Oh, oh! I can hear them!" moans Gren, who does not share the morel's enthusiasm, and with good reason. For once this break with Nature has been made – once Serial Time arrives with the onset of conscious perception, and proceeds to distort man's perception of primary reality, just as it does in Aldiss's *An Age* (1967) – then nighmare ensues.

For Peer Gynt, the nightmare is incarnated in his Troll Bridge; to Stephen Dedalus comes the hideous vision of his dead, accusing mother. Gren-plus-morel, appropriately enough, are visited by the much more science fictional horror of the Black Mouth – the White Goddess seen as gigantic Black Widow Spider; Nature seen, from the terrified viewpoint of alienated Intellect, as something monstrous, ever-hungry, and all-devouring.

"*What have I done?*" wails the morel (p.92), aware that it has *created* the Black Mouth by the mere fact of its own existence – just as Peer Gynt creates his Troll Bridge, and much else besides. "As your hut was built," the troll tells Peer, "mine rose at its side".[16] So is it with Gren-plus-morel and the Black Mouth.

In the land of Eternal Night, beyond the terminator of the dying planet (which by this time has ceased rotating on its axis), Aldiss's wolf-men – or "sharp-furs" – are reminiscent of Ibsen's trolls; while the tummy-belly men who accompany Gren and Yattmur could easily have come from the pantomine-like Act Three of Peer Gynt. Aldiss's magnificently *outré* creation, the Sodal Ye – a monstrous man-mounted Fish proclaiming the End of the World as the Sun finally goes nova – is a figure worthy of the last Act of *Peer Gynt*, in which the dying Peer and the failing human experiment become identified amid scenes of deepening, dreamlike confusion. Ibsen's Button-Moulder arrives to melt Peer down and make him into buttons; while Aldiss's Social Ye prefigures a similar melting-down of all life into its oceanic origins . . .

This brings us to the morel's closing speech, which is spoken through the mouth of the Sodal Ye, and which has already been quoted in relation to comparable

passages from *Ulysses*. The Joyce connection can be explored a little further here: for the idea expressed in the morel's speech, and the notion of a giant fish being guided by a human brain, was dealt with more fully by Aldiss in a short story of this period called "Shards" (1962). The title of the story refers to shards of human brain, experimentally embedded in two giant tunnies. These fish/men persist in a vain attempt at ratiocination, but only succeed in achieving a flow of Joycean free association ("The heights whereby the determination of our sign may be civilised are seven in number. The subjugation of the body. The resurrection of the sky-scraper. The perpetuation of the speeches. The annihilation of the species . . ." etc.) Aldiss is not just using a Joycean gimmick; the connection goes deeper than that. One can't help remembering that Joyce was only prevented by death from writing a final inchoate epic about the Sea; and that Joyce's final thought on the fate of civilisation was that "we are going downhill very fast". Aldiss's thoughts, of course, are never final; but he has always had a delectation for that he calls, in *Billion Year Spree*, the "decent despair" of so much British sf.[17]

These literary parallels hold good right to the end of *Hothouse*. Peer Gynt returns to Solveig; Leopold Bloom, "the childman weary, the manchild in the womb", returns to Molly; Gren returns to Yattmur. All return to the Great Womb of Nature – though the story has by no means ended. The Button-Moulder warns Peer that there are more "crossroads" ahead; Stephen Dedalus still trails his "intellectual imagination" through the streets of Dublin; the morel fungus still pursues its grandiose dreams through the vast silences of space.

The reader, of course, has no moral obligation to size up *Hothouse* in relation to Ibsen, or Joyce, or anyone. In any case, he will be far too busy taking in the sheer exuberance of Aldiss's invention, and the intense poetic reality of his vision of Nature in all her awesome vastness and fecundity. If C.S. Lewis's *Perelandra* is a classic description of "unfallen" Nature, then *Hothouse* is a correspondingly classic description of the "fallen" Nature we are more familiar with.

> Time stopped. The world turned green . . . The rain behind him turned green. Everything: green and immobile.
>
> And shrinking. To dwindle. To shrivel and contract. To become a drop of rain forever falling down the lungs of the heavens. Or to be a grain of sand marking an eternal tumble through hourglasses of endless time . . . Finally to reach the infinite immensity of being nothing . . . the infinite richness of non-existence . . . and thus of becoming God . . .
>
> . . . of summoning up a billion worlds to rattle along the green links of every second . . . of flying through uncreated stacks of green matter that waited in a vast ante-chamber of being for its hour or eon of use . . .
>
> For he *was* flying wasn't he? . . . And if it was flight, then it was happening in this impossible green universe of delight, in some element other than air and in some flux apart from time. And they were flying in light, emitting light.
>
> And they were not alone.
>
> Everything was with them. Life had replaced time, that was it; death had gone, for the clocks here would tick off fertilities only . . .[18]

Aldiss can likewise match the sheer invention of C.S. Lewis's fantastically-elongated sorns – one of whom carries Ransom over the tops of Malacandra – with the stalker-walker plants which carry Yattmur and Gren-plus-morel across the terminator into the nightlands of a dying Earth. The nightlands themselves are perhaps the descriptive high-point of the novel – but throughout *Hothouse* Aldiss's descriptive powers are fully assured, as if he were glad to shrug off the confining

hardware of *Non-Stop*, with its occasional awkwardness and built-in obsolescence.

A first reading of *Hothouse* reveals all this, and it is enough for the reader. Later on, however, the Critic arrives and starts wondering, in his irritating way, just what kind of unity is achieved within the novel.

Beginning life as it did, as a series of short stories for *Fantasy and Science Fiction* in 1961, *Hothouse* is inevitably far more diffuse than *Non-Stop*.[19] Yet, in this case, diffuseness is highly appropriate; because if the real "hero" of *Non-Stop* is the Story itself, leading Roy Complain ever onward towards his vision of the Big Something, in *Hothouse* the situation is far otherwise. In *Hothouse*, the Story is largely determined by the morel fungus and its delusions of inhuman grandeur. The Story *is* the morel, the morel *is* the Story; so that the Story is, with the usual ambivalent qualifications, the villain of the piece. It follows that, insofar as Aldiss is more concerned with his human characters than with the ambitions of the morel, the plot will inevitably tend towards the diffuse. In fact, the balance between Order and Anarchy in this novel is distinctly unsteady. They are the two poles between which Aldiss is forever suspended – but the pull of Anarchy here threatens to topple him. But in the end, all the strands of the story are drawn, or forced together; just enough, anyway to satisfy an elemental need in the reader.[20]

The Critic's charge of undue diffuseness can therefore be gladly waived. Yet there *is* a certain lack of control, of discipline, in *Hothouse*, and it is all bound up with Aldiss's uncertainty about his audience – about *who*, precisely, he is writing for.[21] The mixture of sf adventure, fantasy and symbolic drama is very risky at times (which, of course, is one of its attractions as far as the unblinkered reader is concerned). From the point of view of your staunch sf fan, Aldiss broke the rules right from the start with his brilliant notion of imaging the senility of our dying solar system by means of the "traversers" – spider-like vegetables who weave their webs between Earth and Moon. When *Hothouse* first appeared, even an eminently intelligent man like James Blish found these vegetable astronautics hard to take: they flew in the face of sacred Scientific Facthood, which Blish took very seriously indeed. Actually, even he had to accept the traversers in the end: they are irresistable, like the absurd artificial heckler-bird on the island of the stalker-walkers, or the magnificently impossible Sodal Ye. (The very name of Aldiss's Great Fish seems to proclaim "Sod all the lot of ye, I'll do what I like!".) Invention is piled upon invention, in a superabundance of childlike enthusiasm, unrestrained at times by adult sophistication. (I'm now thinking of the cannon-trees in Nomansland, which mine potassium nitrate with their roots in order to bombard the attacking seaweeds!) By working like this, Aldiss obviously risked alienating both hard-core sf fans and your average consumer of Deep Symbolic Drama – who would probably sniff at the whole science fictional context anyway.

The immediate point is not so much that Aldiss has a self-indulgent streak, as that he has always been working very much on his own – not in the sf ghetto (there is a togetherness in the ghetto), but on the frontier between sf and the traditions of Western Literature. Once you realise just how isolated he was – and to some extent still is – in the literary universe, his wildest and most arbitrary gestures become understandable. This wildness doesn't spoil *Hothouse* – if anything, it adds to the fun; but it is a precursor of even wilder things to come.

To balk at the wildness of *Hothouse* is just a tiny bit like complaining of the extravagances in Shakespeare; but it is permissable, at this point, to follow up the implications of this wildness. It was (and is) symptomatic of Aldiss's continuing unsureness about his audience. It concerns *us*, as well as him, at a deep level.

This unsureness about his audience indicates, in fact, the Janus-like situation of Brian Aldiss. He straddles the gap between the "Golden Age" of Gernsbackian sf, so often invoked by dyed-in-the-wool fans, and a putative future generation of readers and writers for whom the whole distinction between "mainstream" and "sf" literature will have become meaningless – the putative generation discussed by Aldiss, Amis and C.S. Lewis in a conversation which took place in Lewis's rooms at Oxford in 1962, which was recorded on tape by Aldiss, and which was first published under the title "The Establishment must die and rot . . ." in the Aldiss/Harrison publication *SF Horizons* (No.1, Spring 1964).[22] This was not just another "sercon" conversation between three sf freaks: it was a sign of the times – like the very first light of dawn. This impression is supported by the fact that in 1963, over at Cambridge, Louis MacNeice's Clark Lectures – delivered from the viewpoint of a so-called "mainstream" poet, and published posthumously in 1965 as *Varieties of Parable* – pointed in the same direction. The living writers actually dealt with by MacNeice in these 1963 Clark Lectures were Beckett, Pinter and Golding: "mainstream" writers all. But MacNeice was basically presenting a case for more contemporary forms of "parabolic" writing, as opposed to naturalism and "Movement" poetry: writing which would allow public access to the imaginative realm. The public was starved of images; what it needed was an art-form which would explore dream imagery, and thereby express the otherwise inexpressible – in the manner of *Peer Gynt*.

Ironically, MacNeice deigned to make only a passing reference to sf – he noted the public response to *The Day of The Triffids*, which he saw as being "parabolic" in spirit. If only he had known that, over at Oxford, Brian Aldiss was already delivering the indiluted goods under the deceptive sf label! Not only that: he was delivering the goods to an increasingly large audience.

Something was happening. Aldiss represented one half of this Something, while we, his readers, represented the other half. Since then, over the years, Aldiss and ourselves have been exploring this otherwise-inexpressible Something; sometimes progressing, sometimes stumbling, sometimes nearing chaos, but never giving up.

What *is* happening in *Hothouse*, at the imaginative level? The out-of-control "dizzies" of *Non-Stop* have become the devolved humans of Earth's latter end – man in the state of relative dispersion and "seriality" prior to all tribal "pledges", to use the terminology of R.D. Laing's *Reason and Violence*. The humans in *Hothouse* do live in groups; but these groups are not irrevocably welded together by any Laingian "pledge", so that they fall apart relatively easily. Gren, at any rate, exiles himself from his group with little difficulty and reverts to natural "seriality" – reverts almost doubly, in fact, back towards total unity with Nature, in the episode of the "Mirage" on the receiving/transmitting island. Like Roy Complain in *Non-Stop*, Gren can sense something above and beyond the Group: something from which he is divorced, first by the Group, and ultimately by the

morel fungus which, together with the Group, is all that remains of the fully-inorganic, non-dialectical Past of civilised society.

Unlike Roy Complain, however, Gren ultimately see that *his* Big Something lies not in Transcendence, but in total devolution and union with the spirit of Nature. Whereas there is, throughout *Non-Stop*, a growing sense of Order (however undermined by Aldissian ambivalence), *Hothouse* veers sharply towards Chaos. In *Non-Stop*, the Starship represented the convolutions of Society and of the Neocortex, and was presented, on the whole, as a basically Good Idea gone wrong. But in *Hothouse*, Society and the Neocortex are represented by the repressive, parasitic, alienating, terrorising force of the morel fungus. Typically, Aldiss lets the morel have its say and does not pronounce judgement upon it; but the spirit of *Hothouse* is all against Order, and all for the Chaotic, undifferentiated life of Nature. The Aldissian seesaw is in full swing, with Aldiss sitting on both ends . . . How long can he keep going? Will the seesaw crack down the middle? Seventeen years later, we are still reading on.

In the final analysis, of course, *Hothouse* is another search for the connection between Inside and Outside. Gren is trapped inside the labyrinthine dreams of the parasitic morel fungus, the primal brain stuff which grows over him like a cancer, and which is alienating him even from his own body.

> Complete chaos had overtaken his impressions of the external world . . . He saw a wall of tiny cells, sticky like a honeycomb, growing all about him . . . Now the wall of cells loomed above his head, closing in. Only one gap in it remained. Staring through it, he saw tiny figures miles distant. One was Yattmur, down on her knees, gesticulating, crying because he could not get to her . . . And another – that writhing creature! he recognised as himself, shut out from his own citadel.[23]

This passage also shows how, in *Hothouse*, the very distinction between Inside and Outside is becoming blurred: Is Gren *inside* (the morel) or *outside* (his own body)? *A paradox is blurring the clear distinction between what is in and what is out of the mind,* as Kokoschka nearly said . . . Within the structure of the morel – like Laingian Man within the structure of Society – Gren is no longer himself. Or can it be that Gren-within-the-morel is the *true* Gren? Aldiss, of course supplies no answer: he is too busy identifying with Gren. His own life, at this time, was in a state of chaos: his determination to write had destroyed his first marriage and deprived him of his children. He must have wondered where the *true* Aldiss lay: in the Robot, or with the Girl and the Flowers; inside the morel fungus of his intellectual imagination, or elsewhere with Yattmur.[24]

In *Hothouse*, Aldiss is obviously yearning for some pre-*Non-Stop* mode of being in which Body *is* Soul, and vice-versa, thereby putting an end to the whole Inside/Outside problem. When Gren and Poyly are taken over by the morel in Nomansland – their "dangerous Eden" – they "drop their souls". Their "souls" are the crude little wooden figures they carry round with them, and with which they identify. From the moment they "drop their souls", they are no longer themselves: a cleavage has occurred between Soul and Body, between the Observing Self and the Observed Universe, between Inside and Outside. In *Non-Stop*, Aldiss was being lured on towards a reconciliation of Inside and Outside at some higher level (the Big Something); but in the final pages of *Hothouse*, in which Gren rejects the grandiose

visions of the morel and returns with Yattmur to life in the Forest, Aldiss is leaning towards mortalism – the belief that Body and Soul *are* one to start with. Milton leant the same way in his depiction of Adam and Eve. (For we are not involved with Aldiss's private life here, but with something much larger.)

In the end, of course, Ambivalence rules. If Gren return to the Forest with Yattmur, it is also true that symbiosis with the morel has made him more self-reliant – more, in fact, of a *self.* As for the morel, it journeys on into new realms, having achieved symbiosis with one of the astronautical traversers. Using the traverser, the morel can reach new worlds, discover new truths – just as Brian Aldiss, sf writer, can continue his own dark, non-stop journey by using the tools of his trade. This part of Aldiss is (or was) far removed from the Girl with the Flowers, those symbols of the primal reality of Nature. He has more in common with Walt Whitman, the agnostic adventurer in spiritual realms. With Whitman, he can say:

> Reckless O Soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
> Sail forth, steer for the deep waters only,
> For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
> And we will risk the ship, ourselves, and all.[25]

Aldiss could never resist that long, dark and delightful journey of the disembodied Soul – even if the other part of him, the part still wedded to the primal world of Nature, still sneered with D.H. Lawrence: *"Post-mortem effects . . .!"*

Notes

1. *Hothouse;* Sphere Books, 1977; p.7.
2. *A Rude Awakening;* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978; p.12. The assumption that *A Rude Awakening* is implicit in *Hothouse,* is supported in a recently published essay by Aldiss, in *This World and Nearer Ones:* "Returning to England from Sumatra all those years ago, I nursed the determination to set down what I had experienced. That determination shaped the novelist in me, although much time and many abandoned manuscript drafts lay between my return home and what was eventually published as *A Rude Awakening."* ("A Swim in Sumatra", p.250)
3. "The Tables Turned", by William Wordsworth; v.6.
4. *Hothouse,* pp.115-6.
5. Bk.1, lines 378-85.
6. See his essay, "Looking Forward to 2001", in *This World and Nearer Ones* (p.186) – originally, and appropriately, a humorous speech to Oxford Union. "Despite history," Aldiss says, "private life goes on. The Hundred Years' War is nothing beside the girl next door." Wars are powered by the Logos; Aldiss the humourist chooses Eros every time.
7. Quoted in *Moving into Aquarius* by Michael Tippett; Paladin, 1974, p.130.
8. *Ulysses;* The Bodley Head, 1960; pp. 778-9.
9. *Ibid.,* p.863.
10. *Hothouse,* p.204.
11. *Ibid.,* p.204.
12. Lines 69-70.
13. The first *Hothouse* story appeared in the February 1961 number of F & SF (New York Edition); and in the June number of the British Reprint Edition.
14. *Hothouse,* pp.159-60
15. *Ibid.,* p.91.
16. Act III Scene 3.
17. Or, alternatively, "cosy catastrophe". But in *Science Fiction as Science Fiction* (Bran's Head, 1978), Aldiss qualifies this by likening *too many* doom-laden sf novels to bubo-like symptoms of future plagues. The diagnosis can itself become a symptom. In Aldiss, there is always an attempt to redress the balance – the most extreme example, perhaps, occurring in *Frankenstein Unbound,* where the oppressive darkness of the concluding

pages is offset by the brilliance of Byron and Shelley, and the love of Joe Bodenland for Mary.

18. *Hothouse,* p.122.
19. Aldiss submitted the serialised version of *Hothouse* to little or no change while preparing the final novel; in this way, he was very much in a position analogous to that of popular authors in the nineteenth century – like Hardy, or Dickens. By 1968, however – when *Barefoot in the Head* first materialised as a series of stories in *New Worlds* – things had changed a lot, for better or worse. Very much the conscious Artist by now, Aldiss felt free to mould and remould his material as and when he liked: the editors, and the public, now had to follow *his* lead.
20. No doubt the morel fungus – like the romen in "Comic Inferno" (1963) and the Robot in "Girl and Robot with Flowers" (1965) – externalizes something in Aldiss, and in the nature of sf so far; something Aldiss pinpoints in *Billion Year Spree* when he quotes the Goncourt Brothers' prophecy of a coming "clear-sighted, sickly literature. No more poetry, but analytic fantasy. Something monomaniacal. Things playing a more important part than people; love giving way to deductions and other sources of ideas, style, subject and interest; the basis of the novel transferred from the heart to the head, from the passion to the idea, from the drama to the denouement." (pp.45-6) Note, though, that in most of this passage, the Goncourts could also be describing the mature work of James Joyce. In any case, this battle between Heart and Head – another of Aldiss's polarities – is by no means a merely literary issue, if Julian Jaynes is to be taken seriously in his *Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind.* It's something we're all very much concerned with, as the modern world rushes headlong towards ultimate fusion or fission.
21. "*Non-Stop* would be better if I had been more sure of my audience . . ." (Brian Aldis, in a letter to David Wingrove, 1978.) A microcosmic sign of this uncertainty is Aldiss's stylistic *tic,* which might be called Roget's Disease: a slight tendency to use a long or impressive-looking word when a short, plain one would have done better. Things have improved, however, since the time he had recourse to the word *proslambanomenos* to describe the humming of the Control Room in *Non-Stop!*
22. "One of my pet theories," says Amis, in the course of the conversation, "is that serious writers as yet unborn will soon regard science fiction as a natural way of writing." This conversation was also published – as "Unreal Estates" – in *Encounter,* vol XXIV (March 1965), and in *Of Other Worlds,* Essays and Stories by C.S. Lewis, ed. Walter Hooper (Bles, 1966).
23. *Hothouse,* p.162.
24. Aldiss's divided nature at this time comes over in this quotation from *The Shape of Further Things* (Corgi, 1974, p.134): "That was in 1960. In those days, I was obsessed with my separation from my children, Clive and Wendy; Mike (Moorcock) was prepared to listen, and we traded troubles. We also discussed *Greybeard,* which grew partly out of my longing for the children and partly out of a splendid literary image Mike had of people travelling down a river."
25. Whitman, "A Passage to India"; Canto 9, 11. 26-9

As Michael Moorcock has pointed out (see his introduction to Ellison's Paingod *and* I have No Mouth and I Must Scream, *Gregg Press, 1979 – also published in* New Worlds *215) Harlan Ellison is the greatest* performer *in contemporary American sf. Here is another powerful performance from Mr Ellison, one which we are delighted to publish as the 20th essay in our series "The Profession of SF". This piece will appear as the introduction to a forthcoming collection of stories,* Shatterday *(Houghton-Mifflin), and we are grateful to Mr Ellison and his publishers for permission to give it prior publication here.*

The Profession of Science Fiction, 20: Mortal Dreads

Harlan Ellison

With a touch of quiet pride the Author states that he has watched the Johnny Carson Show only once in his life. (The single blot on an otherwise exemplary record occurred when I was pressed one night into sitting through consummate dreariness to reach the moment when Robert Blake, a friend of many years even though he's an actor, was to sit and talk to Orson Welles, one of my heroes despite his hawking of inferior commercial wines. It was a moment I wish had been denied me. Bob, a good and decent and talented man, clever, witty and articulate, driven mad perhaps by the fame and cheap notoriety of having become a television cult hero for several seasons, proceeded to insult Mr Welles in a manner I suppose he thought was bright badinage. It was a maleficent spectacle in overwhelming bad taste, culminating in Bob's passing a remark about Mr Welles's girth.

(Welles sat silently for a moment as the audience – and I – winced in disbelief and horror. Then he said, very softly, very softly, "My weight is correctable only with enormous difficulty at my age, but I live with it comfortably; as opposed to your bad manners.")

There should be benign deities who would send ravens to pluck out one's eyes so such sights could be avoided.

I did not need to see my friend make an ass of himself. And I sat there thinking, for a wonder, is *this* what a vast segment of the American viewing public truly accepts as "the rebirth of conversation"? This endless babble and confluence of self-serving "celebrities" who warm studio sets with the indispensable intelligence that they'll be doing *Pal Joey* at the Country Squire Dinner Theatre in Lubbock, Texas from June 12th to 18th?

And I could not contain my sorrow that my friend had been driven mad by

television, to sit there having been gulled into thinking he was having a "conversation" before so many millions of moon-white eyes in darkened bedrooms. But this time I will not inveigh against the Monster Video; that was the fulmination that served to introduce my previous collection of stories.

No, this time I would speak of conversation; of speaking to the true and universal darkness that fills so much of our soul. Of mortal dreads and the value of such terrors as I present here.

I do a considerable number of college lectures every year. It helps pay the freight so I don't have to write television ever again. From my lips to the ear of God . . . or whoever's in charge. And frequently I will say something about the human condition that seems perfectly rational and proper to me, because I know we all share the same thoughts. Invariably, some feep in the audience will attempt to pillory me with the stunning accusation, "You only said that to shock!"

My response is always the same:

"You bet your ass, slushface. Of course I said it to shock you (or *wrote* it to shock you). I don't know how *you* perceive my mission as a writer, but for me it is not a responsibility to reaffirm your concretized myths and provincial prejudices. It is not my job to lull you with a false sense of the rightness of the universe. This wonderful and terrible occupation of recreating the world in a different way, each time fresh and strange, is an act of revolutionary guerrilla warfare. I stir up the soup. I inconvenience you. I make your nose run and your eyes water. I spend my life and miles of visceral material in a glorious and painful series of midnight raids against complacency. It is my lot to wake with anger every morning, to lie down at night even angrier. All in pursuit of one truth that lies at the core of every jot of fiction ever written: we are all in the same skin . . . but for the time it takes to read these stories I merely have the mouth. You see before you a child who never grew up, who does not know it's socially unacceptable to ask, 'Who farted?'"

Thus I try to codify in noble terms the obsession with Art and the inability of the writer to stop writing, to get along with others, to view the world without rancor as a gem, at once pure and perfect. But that's flapdoodle, of course. I write because I write. I can do no other.

It is the love of conversation.

I am anti-entropy. My work is foursquare for chaos. I spend my life personally, and my work professionally, keeping that soup boiling. Gadfly is what they call you when you are no longer dangerous, when the right magazines publish your work and you don't have to seek out obscure publications as homes for the really mean stuff, when they ask you to come and discuss matters of import with "celebrities" on the Johnny Carson Show. I much prefer troublemaker, malcontent, pain in the ass, desperado. As I've said elsewhere, I see myself as a combination of Jiminy Cricket and Zorro. *Thus* do I ennoble myself in the times when all the simple jobs I've forsworn rush back on me as chances-lost, and I'm left with only the work and something Irwin Shaw said: "Since I am not particularly devout, my chances for salvation lie in a place sometime in the future on a library shelf."

Why is he telling me all this?

He's telling you all this because you thought you were getting off a hot one when you accused him of merely writing to shock.

That's my job. To stir the soup, to bite your thigh, to get you angry so you keep the conversation going. Don't invite me to parties for pleasant chat. I want to hear the sound of your soul. Then I can translate it into the mortal dreads we all share and fire them back at you transmogrified, reshaped as amusing or frightening fables.

Look, it's like this: I was in Utah doing some work for the Equal Rights Amendment late last year, and I said some things like this during a radio interview. So the interviewer, who was a very bright guy, pushed at it a little. He asked me to explicate some of these "mortal dreads" that we all share, that I thought I was illuminating by writing such weird and troubling stories. I thought about it a moment, and then in a fit of confession that passes for honesty I told him about writing the title story of this book, "Shatterday."

"I was sitting in a hotel room in New York in the middle of a January snowstorm in 1975," I said. "I had to have the story finished by 7:00 that night so I could present it at a reading uptown at 7:30, allowing myself time to get a cab and find the auditorium . . . and I was writing furiously, hardly thinking about how the story was creating itself –"

The interviewer looked at me oddly.

"It was *creating itself?*"

"Yeah," I said. "I was just the machine that was putting it on paper. That story came out of secret places in my head and ran at the paper without regard for my breaking back or the deadline. It created itself. Well, I finished it barely in time, got downstairs, shoved an old lady out of the way to grab her cab in the snow, and just got uptown in time for the reading. I didn't even have time to read it.

"So when I was in the middle of the lecture, reading the section where the lead character is having the argument with his alter ego about his mother, I realized for the first time that I wanted *my* mother to die."

The interviewer looked uncomfortable.

"No, wait, listen," I said hurriedly, "I didn't mean that I wanted her to *die*, just to be gone. See, my mother was quite old at that time, she'd been extremely ill off-and-on for years, and in that eerie way we have of exchanging places with our parents when they grow old, I'd become the parent and she'd become the child; and *I* was responsible for *her.* I supported her, and tried to keep her comfortable down in Miami Beach where she was living, and that gave me pleasure, to play at being a real grownup son, and like that. But she was just a shadow. She hadn't been happy in a long time, she was just marking out her days, and I wanted to be free of that constant realization that *she was out there.* I loved her, she was a nice woman. I didn't have any rancor or meanness in me . . . I just had to admit that I wanted her gone."

The interviewer looked *really* uncomfortable now.

"Well, oh boy, that was some helluva thing to have to admit to myself. 'You slimy sonofabitch,' I thought, and I was still reading aloud to the audience that had no tiniest idea what monstrous and hellish thoughts were tearing me up. 'You evil, ungrateful, selfish prick! How the hell could you even *consider* something as awful as that? She never did anything to you, she raised you, put up with your craziness and always had faith in you when everyone else said you'd wind up in some penal colony or the chipmunk factory! You sleazy, vomitous crud, how can you even

think of her being dead?' And it was terrible, just terrible. I thought I was scum unfit to walk with decent human beings, to harbor these secret feelings about a perfectly innocent old woman. And I remembered what Eric Hoffer once wrote: 'What monstrosities would walk the streets were some people's faces as unfinished as their minds.'

"But there it was, in the story. I'd written it and had to confront it and learn to live with it." It was like the line out of another story in this book, "All the Lies That Are My Life" where I mention the ugliness of simply being human. But I hadn't thought of that line then. And the interviewer didn't quite know what to say to me. What the hell can you say to some dude sitting there copping to wanting his mother to pass away?

Well, it was one of those call-in radio shows, and we started taking calls from Salt Lake citizens who were pissed-off at an "outsider" coming in to tell them that Utah's not ratifying the ERA was a sinful and mischievous act. And then, suddenly, there was a woman on the line, coming over the headphones to me in that soundproof booth, with tears in her voice, saying to me, "Thank-you. Thank you for telling that about your mother. My mother was dying of cancer and I had *the same thoughts* and I hated myself for it. I thought I was the only person in the world who ever thought such an awful thing, and I couldn't bear it. Thank you. Oh, thank you."

And I thought of that heartrending scene in Jack Gelber's play "The Connection" where the old Salvation Army sister who has been turned into a medical junkie by inept doctors says to this aprtment full of stone righteous street hypes, "You are not alone. You are not alone."

I damned near started to cry myself. I wanted to hug that nameless woman out there in Salt Lake City somewhere, hug her and say *you are not alone.*

That's why I tell you all this.

You are not alone. We are all the same, all in this fragile skin, suffering the ugliness of simply being human, all prey to the same mortal dreads.

When I lecture I try to say this, to say most of the fears you invent – atomic war, multinational conspiracies, assassination paranoias, fear of ethnic types, flying saucers from Mars – those are all bullshit. I inveigh against illogical beliefs and say that the mortal dreads are the ones that drive you to crazy beliefs in Scientology, est, the power of dope, hatred of elitism and intellectual pursuits, astrology, messiahs like Sun Myung Moon or Jim Jones, fundamentalist religions. I try to tell you that fear is okay if you understand that what you fear is the same for *everyone.*

Not the bogus oogie-boogie scares of Dan O'Bannon and Ridley Scott's *Alien,* slavering creatures in the darkness that want to pierce your flesh with scorpion stinger tails and ripping jaws, but the fear of Gregor Samsa waking to discover he isn't who he was when he went to bed; the fear of Pip in the graveyard; the fear of Huck finding his dead father on the abandoned houseboat. The fears we are all heir to simply because we are tiny creatures in a universe that is neither benign nor malign . . . it is simply enormous and unaware of us save as part of the chain of life.

And all we have to stand between us and the irrational crazy chicken-running-around-squawking terror that those mortal dreads lay on us is wisdom and courage.

That is why I tell you all this, and why I write to shock you and anger you and

scare you. To tell you with love and care that you are not alone.

These stories are about the mortal dreads.

Each one is a little different from all the others because, to fall back on words of Irwin Shaw again, ". . . in a novel or a play you must be a whole man. In a collection of stories you can be all the men or fragments of men, worthy and unworthy, who in different seasons abound in you. It is a luxury not to be scorned."

And so, with the serious warning that you not try to pick out the pieces of the Author that went into the writing of each of these little cautionary tales, I give you another year or two of my life's work, all of which say, with love and care, and the intent to anger, shock and scare you . . .

Honest to god — or whoever's in charge — you are not alone.

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Exiles and Envoys: the SF of Ursula K. Le Guin

Kathleen L. Spencer

There are nearly as many ways to describe the central theme of Ursula Le Guin's sf as there are critics of her work: "wholeness and duality . . ., the awareness that balance must be sought where light and dark meet and mix";[2] "the paradox of communication: (that) in order to communicate, it is necessary to recognize differences and to move toward an understanding of these differences";[3] "the movement of the hero toward oneness with other human creatures";[4] "the loneliness of the self, the impossibility of understanding the self except through its relationship with the other, and the human need to establish that relationship through reaching out to the other in love."[5] However their formulations differ, nearly all critics agree that Le Guin is fundamentally concerned

with the essential human duality of self and other, and with the profound sense of isolation and separation that is such a troubling part of the modern condition.

But Le Guin's novels are not so much about isolation as they are about communication growing out of isolation. Again and again in her fiction, we watch the crisis of encounter between alien cultures, and again and again we see the slow start of communication and understanding because of the actions of one or two people who are able to bridge the gap. These pivotal figures – envoys and exiles, bridge-builders and translators – all have one characteristic in common: they encounter the alien culture as isolated individuals, separated from their own cultures by physical distance, by circumstance, or by temperament. Genly Ai in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is a Terran alone on the planet Gethen, far from home, friends, and familiar ways; his one real Gethenian friend turns out to be Estraven – the traitor, the exile, rejected by his own people because his vision runs too far ahead of theirs. Jakob Agat, the Alterran leader in *Planet of Exile*, sets himself apart from his own people when he falls in love with and marries a Tevaran girl – Rolery, the Summer-born, a woman isolated among her people by her out-of-season birth, twenty years out of phase with her natural mates. In *The Word for World is Forest*, Lyubov the hilfer is scorned by his fellow Terrans as a "creechie lover" for treating Athsheans like humans rather than furry green monkies; Selver, his friend, is separated from the rest of his people by the terrible and powerful dreams which make him a god. And Falk in *City of Illusions* is separated from not one but two cultures – from that of his home world on Werel by the memory-blanking of the Shing, as well as the vast time differential of space travel; and from his adopted culture on Terra, at first by his physical difference from the people who take him in, and later and more completely by his restored memories as Ramarren. He is in himself a bridge between the cultures of Werel and Terra, part of both and different from both. The same is true of Shevek in *The Dispossessed:* he can serve as a link between Urras and Anarres because he shares something with both; yet, because of that very ability to share, he can never belong wholly to either. Despite his love of and loyalty to Anarres, he is not only envoy but exile, neither purely an Odonian nor purely a physicist, permanently between.

However, the isolation that Le Guin's central characters experience is of a special kind: they are isolated without being alienated. The alienated man, as Marx explains the term, experiences life passively, as one to whom things happen; further, he is cut off from his own essential nature and therefore from other men, for he cannot confront others if he cannot confront himself.[6] The alienated man sits, fearful and angry, in a tiny cage of his own construction, staring at his hands in his lap and waiting helplessly for what will happen next. None of Le Guin's central characters match this description. They do not see themselves as objects, or as powerless victims shoved around by monstrous impersonal forces over which they have no control (even when there is some truth to that view, as for George Orr in *The Lathe of Heaven* or Belle and Simon in "The New Atlantis"). They may choose to refrain from action like the Handdarata, but they are never merely passive in the deathlike unintentional way of the alienated. Though they may find themselves among strangers or rejected by their own people, they do not give up – they still strive to reach out, to make some kind of meaningful contact with someone. Even

Osden, the bitter empath of "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow", who seems more alienated than any of her other major characters, succeeds in communicating with the sentient World 4470. And far from being alienated from themselves, though some characters know themselves better or are stronger than others, they all ultimately act out of a profound sense of their own beings.

Social anthropology has a term for this special kind of isolation, and a theory of social patterns which explains how these people function in society and why they are vital in the process of change. Anthropologist Victor Turner, a student of ritual processes and symbolic behaviour in human culture, describes people in this non-aliented form of isolation as *liminal* (from the Latin *limen*, threshold), a term he borrows and modifies from the work of Arnold van Gennep on rites of passage. An understanding of what Turner means by liminality and how it functions in society will bring a new clarity and coherence to the pattern in Le Guin's fiction of the solitary hero reaching out to the alien.

Turner conceives of social structure as a process, not static and permanent like an organization chart, but dynamic and temporal, a dialectic over time between what he calls *structure* and *anti-structure* (or *communitas*). As Turner explains, "Implicitly, or explicitly, in societies at all level of complexity, a contrast is posited between the notion of society as a differentiated, segmented system of structural positions... and society as a homogenous, undifferentiated *whole*." The first of these notions is structure, the second communitas. In structure,

> the units are statuses and roles, not concrete human individuals. The individual is segmentalized into roles which he plays... The second model, communitas, often appears culturally in the guise of an Edenic, paradisiacal, utopian, or millenial state of affairs, to the attainment of which religious or political action, personal or collective, should be directed. Society is pictured as a communitas of free and equal comrades – of total persons. "Societas" or "society" ... is a process involving both social structure and communitas, separately and united in varying proportion.[7]

By structure, Turner does not mean the kind of negative concepts associated with the word during the social protests of the 60's and early 70's – structure as another word for The System, narrow, inflexible, dehumanizing. Structure, as Turner uses the term, is the modality of human interaction responsible for stability, continuity, predictability, the preservation and transmission of tradition and knowledge. It is the blueprint or skeleton of society which indicates how each of the parts relates to other parts and to the whole. Structure is what differentiates the role of the hand from that of the eye or knee, the role of the factory worker from that of the teacher or police officer, and explains how each part contributes to the proper functioning of the whole. Communitas, complementarily, is the modality of universal brotherhood and spiritual renewal, the affirmation of the connectedness of all human beings, of the familial bond of the species. Equally important, it is also the modality of change, innovation, modification of "the way we have always done things" to meet new circumstances – society's protection from dysfunctional rigidity in a changing world. In order to be viable, a culture must provide for expressions of both modalities: the two together make up a whole.

This intimate relationship between structure and communitas, tradition and change, analysis and integration, does not however, mean that representatives of the different modalities necessarily understand each other or the relationship. In

fact, the opposite is often true. Structure is, after all, the norm, for it is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the society. Since structure is inherently a conservative modality – that is its function, to conserve – it is no surprise that those people who are satisfied members of the structure also tend to be conservative and suspicious of change. But facilitating change is one of the important functions of communitas, and to call for change is to criticize the status quo, implicitly. Thus, says Turner, "from the standpoint of structural man, he who is in communitas is an exile or a stranger, someone who, by his very existence, calls into question the whole normative order" (p. 268) – in other words, the enemy of the structure. Equally, those in communitas can easily perceive the structural man as the enemy of necessary change, resisting out of stupidity or selfishness. Remember the bitterness and ferocity of the conflict between the American middle class ("structural men") and the anti-war youth movement (a classic example of communitas), the one insisting on the necessity of a change, the other resisting change and the changers doggedly – structure and communitas passionately rejecting not only the opinions of the other modality but the society's very need for the other modality. But in the end, very slowly, the change occurred, became integrated into the structure itself, following the archetypal pattern of change.

So: recognizing that structure is the norm but that communitas is essential for the growth and survival of a culture, what produces this magical yeast of social in innovation and renewal? Turner identifies three conditions as intimately associated with communitas: liminality, outsiderhood, and lowermost status. Liminality is a term Turner borrows from van Gennep's cross-cultural study of rites of passage, which identifies three phases of such rites; separation, margin (or *limen*, threshold), and reaggregation. During the liminal period, "the state of the ritual subject . . . becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (p. 231). The ritual subject is no longer what he was – a child, for instance, in the initiation into adulthood – but not yet what he will become at the conclusion of the ritual – a man. He is *between*, statusless, outside the social structure, if only temporarily. It is a dangerous condition, liminality. "In this gap between ordered worlds, almost anything can happen. In this interim of 'liminality', the possibility exists of standing aside not only from one's social position but from all social positions and of *formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements*" (p. 13-14, emphasis added). Turner comments, "It is the analysis of culture into factors and their free recombination in any and every possible pattern, no matter how weird, that is most characteristic of liminality" (p. 255). No wonder, then, that the liminal condition in traditional rituals is hedged around with taboos and restrictions: society needs protection from the power of the sacred anti-structure, from the ability of the liminary to take apart and reshuffle the elements of the culture.

But Turner, though he begins with van Gennep's definition of liminality, does not end with it. Arguing that there is a strong "affinity between the middle in sacred time (the *limen*) and the outside in sacred space," Turner extends the concept of liminality beyond its original application in rites of passage and includes in it the notions of "outsiderhood" and "lowermost status" so that the term now means "any condition outside, or on the peripheries of, everyday life" (p. 52-3).

This concept includes, of course, the temporary set-apartness of ritual liminality, but it also now applies to people who are set apart more permanently, for whenever there is a social structure – a clearly defined set of statuses and roles and relationships – there will also be people who for one reason or another do not fit comfortably in it. Some fall outside the structure altogether – transients, for instance, or the insane. Some people are outside the structure in another way: priests, for example, are set aside from the normal activities of the larger society by the very nature of their role. Since their concern is not with the material world but with the spiritual one, they are uninvolved in most of the structure-determined activities of the culture*. Other such outsiders would include, in various cultures, "shamans, diviners, mediums, . . . those in monastic seclusion, hippies, hoboes, and gypsies" (p. 233).

In addition to the outsiders, there are people who fall between the cracks of the structure, their positions ambigious and imperfectly described by any one social role. Turner calls them structurally "marginal," those

> who are simultaneously members . . . of two or more groups whose social definitions are distinct from, and often opposed to, one another . . . These would include migrant foreigners, second-generation Americans, persons of mixed ethnic origin, parvenus (upwardly mobile marginals), the déclassés (downwardly mobile marginals), migrants from country to city, and women in a changed, nontraditional role. (p. 233).

Marginal people, that is, have two or more conflicting identities and sets of rules governing social behaviour, a fact which makes fitting comfortably into either structure very difficult. Consider the child of a mother who is Italian-American Catholic and a father descended from Russian Jews: to which of these two very different groups does the child belong? Partial participation in several such groups makes it impossible to identify wholly with any one of them.

There is one more category of people strongly linked with liminality by virtue of their position in the social matrix: the structurally inferior, those of the lowest caste, who in religion and art "have often been assigned the symbolic function of representing humanity, without status qualifications or characteristics. Here the lowest represents the human total, the extreme case most fittingly portrays the whole" (p. 234).

People in all these categories – the outsiders, the marginals, the lowermost – because they are "outside, or on the peripheries of, everyday life," are, by Turner's definition, liminal. But this kind of liminality is different from the ritual liminality van Gennep described. For these individuals, unlike the ritual liminary, the condition is not necessarily temporary: it may be indefinite, or even permanent. Nor is it necessarily a group experience; it is often a solitary one – isolation rather than renewal. And yet these misfits and outcasts are vital to their cultures, because they, even more than the ritual liminary, are the potential sources of growth and change. They share the power of all liminaries to stand outside the system and formulate alternative arrangements, to fit new phenomena into established systems

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* As a member of a hierarchy, each priest is also a participant in his own structural set (the Church), but from the perspective of the larger society, all priests are by definition structural outsiders.

of knowledge, to modify the structure as no one within the structure can do. These are the figures Le Guin puts at the fulcrum in each of her works, at the balance point where the weight turns. They are the people who make resolution and reaggravation possible. More important, they are the ones who make communication possible. Through all her variations of plot and character, this one constant emerges: liminality is the essential precondition for communication between self and other. When characters fail, wholly or in part, to achieve that kind of communication, they fail because the liminal quality is absent or insufficient or one-sided*. When characters succeed, they succeed because, whatever their differences, they come to share the liminal condition enough to reach out and touch the alien other.

One of the most explicit expositions of this theme in Le Guin's work is to be found in "Nine Lives," a story about the difficulties of encountering the alien, the stranger. Pugh and Martin, who have been alone on a hostile planet for six months, are to be joined by a team of miners. They look forward to the reinforcements with eagerness, but also with some trepidation.

> It is hard to meet a stranger. Even the greatest extravert meeting even the meekest stranger knows a certain dread, though he may not know he knows it. Will he make a fool of me, wreck my image of myself invade me destroy me change me? Will he be different from me? Yes, that he will. There's the terrible thing: the strangeness of the stranger.[8]

If it is so frightening to meet a stranger who presumably has the same fears and vulnerabilities as oneself, meeting someone who lacks them is overpowering. The mining team turns out to be a ten-clone, Jon Chow, a physically superb genius multiplied by ten. The clones' relationship to each other is utterly intimate and yet taken for granted, since they have never been without it; it fills all their needs, physical, intellectual, emotional, even sexual. As a unit they are completely self-sufficient. Though the clones are unfailingly polite to Pugh and Martin, they are not really interested in them. As Pugh thinks to himself, "Why should they have sympathy? That's one of the things you give because you need it back."

Then nine of the ten clones are killed in a mining accident, and the sole survivor, Kaph, finds himself alone for the first time in his life, cut off from the automatic intimacy which had shielded him from the fear of – and the need for – the stranger. He is at first so completely unresponsive Martin is sure that he has gone crazy, and that Kaph hates them for not being his brothers, but Pugh disagrees.

> Maybe. But I think he's alone. He doesn't see us or hear us, that's the truth. He never had to see anyone else before. He never was alone before. He had himself to see, talk with, live with, nine other selves all his life. He doesn't know how you go it alone. He must learn. Give him time. (p. 123).

Kaph, with Pugh's help, does begin to learn, until at the end of the story he is able to see that Pugh and Martin love each other, proof that it is possible to love

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* "The New atlantis" is an exception to this. We are given strong hints throughout the story that some kind of ghostly and dreamlike communication is already occuring, especially in the powerful shared vision of sunlight on the white towers of Atlantis; but Belle (presumably) drowns before the Atlanteans finally emerge, leaving behind only her journal to speak for her. So in this case at least, full communication is prevented by circumstance rather then insufficient liminality.

someone who is not oneself. More important, Kaph is finally able to see "the thing he had never seen before: saw him: Owen Pugh, the other, the stranger who held out his hand in the dark" (p. 131).

In a more complex form, the same situation exists in *The Left Hand of Darkness*[9]. Genly Ai, of course, is obviously liminial in one sense: as First Mobile of the Ekumen to Gethen, he has left his family long dead behind him, has left all others of his own kind to venture alone into a society unlike any other human society in the known universe. But he also still has a recognizable role in a coherent structure, even though on Gethen that structure exists primarily in his own head. He has been, in fact, *sent*, and he is following a set of guidelines, a pattern of behaviour laid down and followed by others in similar situations. And he could, if great need arose, use the ansible to call down assistance. He is not totally alone; and he is highly conscious of his status, even if that status is doubted by the Gethenians. Perhaps it is this tremendous connection with structure which blinds Ai at first to Estraven's liminality. Though as Prime Minister Estraven is a part of the power structure in Karhide, he also has a unique breadth of vision. Alone of his people, Estraven has the courage and the imagination to believe in what Ai, in a fit of self-alienation, calls his "preposterous" story, to respond to Ai's message and his mission. But Ai, still secure in his structure, misreads the enigmatic Karhider and fails to perceive his profound set-apartness. Once Estraven falls from power and becomes Estraven the Traitor, Estraven the exile in Orgoreyn, he becomes even more obviously liminal – displaced, despised, outcast, "the spectre at the feast," "a banished man living off his wits in a foreign land" (p. 122). Even Genly Ai is beginning to notice that there is something unusual about Estraven, but he does not yet understand or trust the Karhider, for in Orgoreyn Ai feels more firmly connected than ever to his status as Envoy, and closer to success than he had ever felt in Karhide. This blindness lasts until Ai finds himself a captive in the darkness on the way to an unknown place. Only when he is totally cut off from his structural function, from the security of his mental structure, past all hope of contacting his friends – only then does Ai become unconditionally liminal. His position is strikingly similar to Turner's description of the experience of the ritual initiand, who "is structurally if not physically invisible in terms of his culture's standard definitions and classifications. He has been divested of the outward attributes of structural position, set aside from the main arenas of social life in a seclusion lodge or camp, and reduced to an equality with his fellow intiands regardless of their pre-ritual status" (Turner, p. 231-2). This is precisely Ai's situation, naked, freezing, starving, huddled in the dark with a group of people whom he does not know, hidden from sight in the back of a truck on his way to a prison farm. Significantly, though the conditions for an experience of communitas are present in that grim truck, it does not occur.

> Kindness there was, and endurance, but in silence, always in silence. Jammed together in the sour darkness of our shared mortality, we bumped one another continually, jolted together, fell over one another, breathed our breaths mingling, laid the heat of our bodies together as a fire is laid – but remained strangers. (p. 170).

This absence of communitas becomes a compelling indictment of the Orgota system for it indicates that the system acts to alienate men from each other rather

than to unify them. As Ai remarks,

> It was the second time I had been locked in the dark with the uncomplaining, unhopeful people of Orgoreyn. I knew now the sign I had been given, my first night in this country. I had ignored that black cellar and gone looking for the substance of Orgoreyn above ground, in daylight. No wonder nothing had seemed real. (p. 167-8).

Nothing, that is, but the prison, which, unlike all the other buildings in Mishnory, "is exactly what it looks like and is called. It is a jail. It is not a front for something else, not a facade, not a pseudonym. It is real, the real thing, the thing behind the words" (p. 166). Thus at Pulefen Farm, the only kind of real thing in Orgoreyn, Ai finds himself totally liminal – out of touch with his friends, stateless, invisible, divested of the outward attributes of his structural position as alien and as envoy of the Ekumen; and he is dying. When he encounters Estraven agains, following Estraven's successful rescue of him from the farm, he must do for the first time without any of those vestiges of structure and status which stood between them before, and with no strength to support barriers of fear and distrust. On the ice, Ai and Estraven are at last equal, and equally liminal, the alien envoy and the exiled traitor, journeying together across the ice into understanding, into love. The journey itself is liminal also: like the place within the Blizzard, the Gobrin Ice is "temporarily liminal and spatially marginal," a place of "no-place and no-time" that resists classification, in which "the major classifications and categories of the culture emerge within the integuments of myth, symbol, and ritual" (Turner, p. 258-9). In this episode at last the central images of the book converge: Tormer's Lay, the source of the title; the yin-yang symbol; the place where there are no shadows. The symbolic core of the novel is here, in these totally liminal surroundings at the top of the world. During the journey Estraven and Ai come finally to know each other, to know deeply and fully. "Gnosis, 'deep knowledge,' is highly characteristic of liminality," says Turner. "Men 'know' less or more as a function of the quality of their relationship with other men" (p. 258). In this liminal state, Ai comes to know Estraven, but more, he comes to understand the wisdom of the Ekumen in sending a solitary individual as the First Mobile to a planet. He had originally believed that his solitariness was for the sake of the Gethenians, so that they could not possibly feel threatened by him, a lone individual – "not an invasion but a mere messenger-boy" (p. 259). And that is at least partly true, perhaps. But there is more to it than that, Ai realizes. As he tells Estraven,

> Alone, I cannot change your world. But I can be changed by it. Alone, I must listen, as well as speak. Alone, the relationship I finally make, if I make one, is not impersonal and not only political: it is individual, it is personal, it is both more and less than political. Not We and They; not I and It; but I and Thou. (p. 259).

Thus for Genly Ali, as for John Kaph Chow, leaving structure behind is what makes possible true communication between self and other.

While in "Nine Lives" and *The Left Hand of Darkness* Le Guin focuses on communication between individuals, in *The Eye of the Heron*[10] she changes her scope a little to examine the relationship of two groups, the two interdependent but separated human communities on the planet Victoria. That the society of Victoria City, based on the cultural pattern of Latin America, represents structure while the society of Shantih (or Shanty-Town) represents communitas is made clear by the

images Le Guin chooses for the groups.

The dominant concern of the City is the idea of prison, a fact whose explanation seems partly pragmatic and partly psychological. Pragmatically, the constant possibility of imprisonment can be used by the Bosses to keep the lower orders under control; but more importantly, in psychological terms throwing someone in jail can help a man forget that, Victoria being in origin a penal colony, his ancestors were criminals. Even more strongly, the Bosses proudly describe themselves, as often as possible, as "free men," but their tone has more of bravado in it than conviction. Somehow, for the Bosses no less than the other inhabitants, the City seems to be a combination of fortress and prison, locking out the terrifying sea of empty wilderness around them, but also locking them inside. "It was to keep out . . . their fear that the roofs and walls of the City had been raised, it was fear that had drawn the streets so straight, and made the doors so narrow" (p.196). But the physical walls are only part of it: the men of the City have built other, less visible walls around themselves. As Vera tells Luz.

> You're not inside the walls with [your father] ! He doesn't protect you — you protect him. When the wind blows, it doesn't blow on him, but on the roof and walls of this city that his fathers built as a fortress against the unknown, a protection. And you're part of that city, part of his roofs and walls, his house, Casa Falco. So is his title, Senhor, Councillor, Boss. So are all his servants and his guards, all the men and women he can give orders to. They're all part of his house, the walls to keep the wind off him. (p. 137).

Luz herself is obsessed with the idea of rooms, small square, enclosed places. Her room is the only place in which she has any freedom at all, but it is "close, dirty: a prison cell" (p. 104). Since the men run everything in Victoria City, "there was no room left for the women, no City for the women. Nowhere, nowhere, but in their own rooms, alone" (p. 107). But even that freedom, limited as it is, is precarious and uncertain. "All life had to show her was a locked door and behind the locked door, no room" (p. 108). Her images of freedom are scarcely less enclosed. The garden at the heart of Casa Falco seems to her "like an inner room of the house, shut in, protected. But a room with the roof taken off. A room into which rain fell" (p. 137) — that is, an open place. To Luz, walking in the rain in this inner garden seems as close to freedom as she will ever get.

In marked contrast to these linear, enclosed, constricted images of the City, the dominant metaphor in Shantih is the circle, the center. This is appropriate, because Shantih, the home of the People of the Peace, is an example of what Turner calls "normative communitas," the social order which results when a group experiencing spontaneous communitas organizes itself into an ongoing community which tries to preserve the orginal sense of brotherhood and fellowship in its religious and ethical codes and the statutes which guide its daily function.[11] Unlike the sterile static image of the City, the metaphor for Shantih is dynamic and living, the ringtree of Victoria, which begins life as a single seedling that produces "one single seed on a high central branch." While the branches wither, the seed grows, until one day it explodes, showering hundreds of seedlets in a perfect circle around the central stem. "Ten years later, and for a century or two after that, from twenty to sixty copper-leaved trees stood in a perfect ring about the long-vanished central stem. Branch and root, they stood apart, yet touching, forty ringtrees, one tree-ring" (p.118) —

like the people of Shantih, four thousand individuals standing in a circle of communitas, separate, yet touching.

In contrast to the huge square capitol in the City, "the biggest building in the world," the meeting hall of Shantih is mostly in the open, in the center of an old circle of ringtrees. Here the people of Shantih gather to discuss community affairs, to find the sense of the meeting, "to find and keep the center, the strength of the group. A center there was, and [Lev felt himself] in it – was the center, himself, with . . . all the others." "It was as if he were not Lev alone, but Lev times a thousand – himself, but himself immensely increased, enlarged, a boundless self mingled with all the other selves, set free, as no man alone could ever be free" (p. 160). In contrast to the City, "the walls [of Shantih] were not visible but were very strong: companionship, cooperation, love; the close human circle" (p. 196). So endemic is the circle to Shantih thinking that they even apply it to their enemies, conceiving of the City men as "caught in [a] circle of violence" (p. 124). Between these two groups, the square and the circle, the prison and the tree-ring, conflict is almost inevitable, and resolution (short of total defeat of one side or the other) likely to be limited at best. What resolution there is in the story is generated through the actions of Luz Marina, who is the one person able to understand both groups and to interpret the situation and its possibilities accurately, because she alone is liminal in both the City and the Town.

As Lev says to her, "You never were like the other City girls, you didn't fit, you didn't belong. You belong here" (p. 159). But he is only partly right, and he knows it.

> For despite his insistence that she was one of them, she was not; she was . . . not like any woman he knew. She was different, alien to him . . . There was a silence in her, a silence that drew him, drew him aside, toward a different center. (p. 162).
>
> There was a strength in her that was not drawn from love or trust or community, did not rise from any source that should give strength, any source he recognized. He feared that strength, and craved it. (p. 164).

The dramatic climax of the story – the confrontation between Herman Macmilan's homemade army and the People of the Peace – arrives and passes, leaving Lev dead in its wake, Lev and seventeen other Townspeople as well as eight men of the city (including Macmilan himself, killed by Luz's father). Luz's father is under house arrest for murder and Luz is very much alone, "a traitor to the City and a stranger in the Town." Oh, the Townsfolk are her friends, "Vera, Southwind, Andre, all the other, all the gentle people, but they're not [her] people. Only Lev, only Lev was, and he couldn't stay, he wouldn't wait, he had to go climb his mountain, and put off life till later" (p. 190).

But because of her very isolation, she becomes a vital figure in the destiny of Shantih. Lev's dream of a new settlement for the People of the Peace where they could be free from the domination and exploitation of the Bosses takes root in Luz and a few others in the Town; but, bound by their own conventions and assumptions, the others – especially Andre – cannot make the break with what they see as the community, by which they mean both Victoria City and Shantih. It is Luz, the outsider, who shows them a door in the wall they have built around themselves. When Andre objects that leaving surreptitiously would be running away, Luz

responds angrily,

> Running away! . . . You talk about choice and freedom —The world, the whole world is there for you to live in and be free, and that would be running away! From what? To what? Maybe we can't be free, maybe people always take themselves with themselves, but at least you can try. What was your Long March for? What makes you think it ever ended? (p. 192).

So for a small group of Shanty-Towners, including Luz, the Long March continues into the trackless wilderness to the south, where at last, just before snowfall, they find a lovely little valley, sheltered, well-provided with food and water; and Luz suggests to Andre that they turn their temporary stop into a permanent one. But Andre is suddenly doubtful.

> "They say when you're lost, really lost, you always go in a circle," he said. "You come back to where you started from. Only you don't always recognize it."
> "This isn't the City," Luz said. "Nor the Town."
> "No. Not yet."
> "Not ever," she said . . . "This is a new place, Andre. A beginning place."
> "God willing."
> "I don't know what God wants." She put out her free hand and scratched up a little of the damp, half-frozen earth, and squeezed it in her palm. "That's God," she said, opening her hand on the half-molded sphere of black dirt. "That's me. And you. And the others. And the mountains. We're all . . . it's all one circle." (p. 206-7, last ellipsis Le Guin's).

Luz at last has found her place, has come into the circle. Now that her liminality, with her ability to see new possibilities and break old patterns, is no longer needed, she is free to become a member of the community. Because of her, the little group has moved not in a circle back to the same old place, but in a spiral, to a new place, a new beginning. Even without Lev to lead her, she has found her own way into the center, from liminality to communitas, from communitas into the structure of the new community.

Liminality leading to communitas is the common theme of all these works, as it is of a preponderance of Le Guin's writing. Though the focus and emphasis may shift from work to work, the essential message remains the same: shared loneliness and mutual vulnerability — the fundamental human condition, if we can only admit it — is the only ground in which communication, friendship, love can flourish. Social anthropology can help us understand intellectually why this is so; Le Guin's fiction, sane, wise, and profoundly mature, helps our hearts to understand and accept it.

This paper is dedicated, with love and gratitude, to my husband, Denis McGucken. Two years ago he handed me a copy of Turner's *The Ritual Process*, saying, "here — you might find this interesting"; and now, like Dr. Frankenstein, he has to live with the results of his handiwork.

Notes

1. I am deeply indebted to James Bittner for his encouragement, advice and support, for his probing questions and bibliographical generosity, and for his acceptance of an earlier version of this paper for the Le Guin Panel at the 1979 Popular Culture Association Convention.
2. Douglas Barbour, "Wholeness and Balance in the Hainish Novels of Ursula K. Le Guin," *Science-Fiction Studies*, 1 (1974), 167, 172.

3. Donald F. Theall, "The Art of Social-Science Fiction: The Ambiguous Utopian Dialects of Ursula K. Le Guin," *Science Fiction Studies*, 2 (1975), 263-4.
4. Rafail Nudelman, "An Approach to the Structure of Le Guin's SF," trans. Alan G. Myers, *Science-Fiction Studies*, 2 (1975), 215.
5. Thomas J. Remington, "A Touch of Difference, a Touch of Love: Theme in Three Stories by Ursula K. Le Guin," *Extrapolation*, 18 (Dec. 1976), 28.
6. Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York, 1961), 43-58.
7. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY, 1974), 237-8.
8. Ursula K. Le Guin, "Nine Lives," in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (New York, 1975), 107.
9. – *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York, 1976). This edition includes a preface by Le Guin; older editions lacking the preface have a different pagination.
10. – *The Eye of the Heron*, in *Millennial Women*, ed. Virginia Kidd (New York, 1978).
11. Turner, p. 169. Monastic orders are a good example of this. Given that Turner derives much of his data on communitas from pilgrimages, both historical and modern, the Long March at the root of Shantih's philosophical and political structure takes on added significance.

Not too long ago a series of poems appeared in Riverside Quarterly *under the title "No Stone Unthrown combined with Son of No Stone Unthrown by R.A. Lafferty" in which, beneath, the deftly concealing initials of numerous science-fictioneers (after all, it might be a different UKLG), was presented a sort of Dr Seuss survey of the sf bestiary. Prevailed upon by us at the Brighton Worldcon to write a "Profession" piece, Mr Lafferty brooded (not long, but more like a while) and decided that there were cogent reasons why he could not make a Great Statement on the subject. All characters in the following are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental . . .*

The Profession of Science Fiction, 21: True Believers

R.A. Lafferty

1. Prose Statement

As to Science Fiction, I am not a "True Believer". As to Fantasy I am no more than ten per cent "True Believer". I respect only "True Believers" in the real things, in the eschatologies, in the ultimates, in the basics. I do not respect the "True Believers" in toys; and the "True Believers" in toys hate me completely, when they really know what I am. Though more than half of mankind does believe in the

ultimates and basics, surely less than five per cent of the Science Fiction people have any belief at all in what is real. Science Fiction is, for ninety-five per cent of the people who indulge in it, a surrogate "True Belief", a "True Belief" in things from which the truth has been carefully removed.

All Science Fiction is comic. Five per cent if it is consciously comic and ninety-five per cent of it is unconsciously comic. But to laugh at the often very funny ninety-five per cent of it is to be put into mortal peril. The "True Believers" would kill us if they could, and perhaps they can.

Most Science Fiction takes itself seriously, which is grotesque. Intensity is a characteristic of this inexcusable seriousness. But intensity for the sake of intensity is on par with loudness for the sake of loudness, ugliness for the sake of ugliness, pomposity for the sake of pomposity, phoniness for the sake of phoniness, hatred for the sake of hatred, tedium for the sake of tedium. It's true that rancid seriousness, intensity, loudness, ugliness, pomposity, phoniness, hatred and tedium are all presently red-hot items in the market place. But they should not be.

2. Verse Statement

Critique Authentic for a start,
To know the betters from the worses.
Pour out, my Many-Chambered Heart,
Definitive and trenchant verses!

(The dozens of the most extreme of the 'Waxwork Horrors' are omitted ere we start. Now proceed, briskly, briskly!)

Brian Aldiss

With pleasant mien he does abhor
All trace of commoners or peasants.
He hasn't an iota more,
But Oh! he's got a lot of presence!

Thomas M. Disch

He's not my manner nor my mood:
Too swish for toffs, too dull for wenches.
He's not the best, nor even good,
But Oh! he is the most pretentious!

John Varley

The Emperor of 'Trendy Gloze',
A saltless meal, a tepid toddy,
Not only does he wear no clothes
He doesn't even have a body.

Spider Robinson

He cannot write nor yet apprize.
He ladles with a rusty ladle.
He's neither talented nor wise.
But spider-bites are seldom fadle.

Wilson Bob Tucker

He enters his eleventh youthe,
He's sometimes wry and sometimes grumpy,
He leads the chorus boys in 'smoooothe'.
That stuff is really kind of bumpy.

Roger Zelazny

A shelf of novels in a row
So like there is no best nor worst one.
He did the 'proto' long ago,
And cloned the others from that first one.

Ben Bova

He's on the verge for years anon
With prospects bright. "Varoom!" sounds Bova.
The verge is worn and almost gone.
Oh will or won't the guy go nova?

Stanislaw Lem

He has the trumpets' sound and scree,
He has the praise of mouthers mealy.
For international amity
I wish that he were better, really.

Joe Haldeman

Amid his boscage is a smile,
He's broody, quippy, even clever.
He went to war a little while
And writes of it forever ever.

Alan Dean Foster

He scripts for Trekkies awful much,
And rakes the green and gracious booty.
He lacks the tone, he lacks the touch.
He mostly makes it on his beauty.

Jerry E. Pournelle

He's doctorated to the gills.
And erudite, and tall, and tubby,
And elegant, and full of skills
(His alter-ego's kind of grubby).

John Brunner

A princely sort of raconteur,
An off-the-cuffer, genial japer.
His words are sparkling literacheur,
Except the ones he puts on paper.

J.G. Ballard

A beach without an ocean yet,
A cartless horse, a plotless prating,
A dogless tail, guitarless fret.
Oh why, Oh why's he fascinating?

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro

A brat, a fake, an urchin wit,
She baits a lure for fish to rise to.
I love her yet a little bit,
But don't know why the other guys do.

Alfred Bester

He's old as I'm, his sun is set,
His star is burst, his man's demolished.
So why's he grin so happy yet?
And how so puckish and so polished?

Time for a three-liner here:

"Alfie Bester jokes are way over Alfie Bester's head."
"How could Alfie Bester jokes be over Alfie Bester's head?"
"He's got a low head."

Gene Wolfe

He owns nine acres of magic ground.
The things he grows are effervescive.
He's quite the best of those around.
(Those guys around aren't too impressive).

Arthur C. Clarke

A lonely member of the clan.
In science fiction bunds (deplore them!)
The first, and *only* gentleman.
(There's not a lot of market for them).

Alas, we have not had a major piece of criticism by Brian Stableford in our pages since issue 16 – a lapse of four whole issues. Fortunately we can repair this omission in the current issue (with apologies to the many fans of Mr Stableford's critical writing) with the following account of the SF of a neglected British author.

The Future Between the Wars: the Speculative Fiction of John Gloag

Brian Stableford

The first world war brought to an end a particular phase in the history of British speculative fiction. The economic pressures resulting from the war effort destroyed some of the popular magazines in which speculative fiction had previously flourished. The war was also responsible for considerable changes in attitudes to the future, which make the speculative fiction of the period between the wars distinct in its characteristic tone and its dominant concerns.

The decade of the Great War saw a marked change in the population of writers who were significant contributors to British speculative fiction. George Griffith died some years before the war began, and his last futuristic novel was published posthumously in 1911. William Hope Hodgson was killed in action. John Beresford and M.P. Shiel both abandoned speculative fiction for a considerable period in the twenties and thirties, though both returned to it briefly at the end of their careers. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's interest in spiritualism reduced his literary output and carried him into less fertile imaginative territory. The pre-eminent figure in the history of British sf, H.G. Wells, virtually abandoned the kind of scientific romance which had helped make him famous, and his post-war speculative fiction consists mainly of fictionalized essays.

To compensate for this draining of resources, a new generation of writers emerged, most notable among them Olaf Stapledon and S. Fowler Wright. Excellent speculative fiction was written by many writers less specialised than these two in their output, including Aldous Huxley and George Bernard Shaw. Writers less well-known who made a significant contribution to the *genre* include Muriel Jaeger, E.C. Large and John Gloag. The decline of *The Strand* and similar magazines meant that, in contrast to the pre-war writers, these writers wrote little short fiction and their novels were not serialised before book publication. Their books had less chance of

finding a wide audience, and with the exception of Huxley's *Brave New World* few of their works achieved any sudden success in their native land. Stapledon had to wait many years for his true status as a writer to be acknowledged, and some of his contemporaries still have not received the credit they deserve. John Gloag is one of them.

John Gloag was born in 1896. His first novel, published in 1932, was *Tomorrow's Yesterday*; this was followed in 1933 by *The New Pleasure* and in 1934 by *Winter's Youth*. His literary output during the thirties was very diverse, including numerous non-fiction works and contemporary novels. Two of his later novels are purely speculative – *Manna* (1940) and *99%* (1944) – and two others contain some speculative material: *Sacred Edifice* (1937) and *Slow* (1954). His short fiction, which includes a good deal of material written for broadcasting, includes a few sf stories. His other work includes numerous books on architecture, design and furniture, and also works on social history. He is still active as a writer, and his most recent works of fiction are historical novels set in Roman Britain; they include *Caesar of the Narrow Seas* (1969), *The Eagles Depart* (1973) and *Artorius Rex* (1977). He is currently working on a fourth novel in this series.

Mr Gloag has been kind enough to answer some questions regarding the speculative novels which he wrote in the thirties, and to provide me with some background information about his life. He is, so far as I know, the only British writer of speculative fiction active between the wars who is still alive to comment on the attitudes implicit in his fiction, and if there were no other reason he would warrant investigation on that score alone. He is, however, one of the better writers of the period, and his speculative novels remain eminently readable today despite the fact that the futures represented therein have dated. They are not much discussed in American reference books dealing with the history of speculative fiction, but this is because they have been overlooked – they will, in fact, amply reward consideration both in terms of their historical significance as exemplars of the imaginative climate of their day, and in terms of their entertainment value.

I am greatly indebted to Mr Gloag for allowing me to consult him and ask his opinion about the impressions I have gained from reading his books, but the responsibility for any errors or distortions in the following essay is entirely mine.

The most dramatic effect which the first world war had upon the characteristic attitudes expressed in futuristic fiction was, of course, upon the attitude to war itself. From 1871, when George Chesney published his account of "The Battle of Dorking" in order to alert the British public to the threat posed by German militarism, until 1914, when the war actually began, the most prolific species of futuristic fiction produced in Britain was the future war story. For the most part, these stories delighted in the contemplation of coming conflict – there is a persistent tendency in them to revel in the excitement of war and to look forward with chauvinistic enthusiasm to the day when Britain might demonstrate to the rest of the world the true extent of her moral and military supremacy.

The man whole novels in this vein may be regarded as archetypal is William le Queux, author of *The Invasion of 1910*, whose serialisation in the *Daily Mail* during 1906 was turned into a mammoth publicity stunt by the paper's proprietor, Alfred

Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe). Mnay popular writers contributed to the species, including Louis tracy (*The Final War*, 1896), Max Pemberton (*Pro Patria*, 1901) and Edgar Wallace (*Private Selby*, 1912), while two writers who built their earlier reputations on works in this vein were George Griffith (*The Angel of the Revolution*, 1893) and M.P. Shiel (*The Yellow Danger*, 1899). Though many of these writers – most notably Griffith and Shiel – foresaw bloodshed on a colossal scale as a result of advances in military technology, they tended to contemplate the prospect with relish. A more cautious approach is evident in Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) and Cutliffe Hyne's *Empire of the World* (1910), but there were few others whose main concern was the possibility of avoiding war rather than indulging in it. Even H.G. Wells, who not only realised that the scale of destruction featured in the next war might be far greater than in any previous conflict, but also appreciated the tragic implications of that fact, was ambivalent in his attitude because of his conviction that the present social order must be torn down if it was to be replaced by a better one. Both *The War in the Air* (1908) and *The World Set Free* (1914) provide eloquent testimony to this ambivalence.

Once the Great War had ended, however, this optimism was lost. Trench warfare in France drained the credibility from notions of the magnificence and glorious excitement of war, and implanted a horror and disgust that grew as the truth filtered through the web of propaganda which temporarily confirmed it. The disillusionment suffered first by the fighting men and later by the British public is elegantly expressed by R.C. Sherriff's successful play *Journey's End*, which opened in 1929. Wells' hope that the tragedy might be ameliorated by the reordering of international relations and progress toward a World State quickly evaporated. His optimistic essay on the proposals for the formation of a League of Nations, *In the Fourth Year; Anticipations of a World Peace* (1918) was followed not long after by *The Salvaging of Civilisation*, which declares that "unless the ever more violent and disastrous incidence of war can be averted, unless some common controls can be imposed on the headlong waste of man's limited inheritance of coal, oil and moral energy that is now going on, the history of humanity must presently culminate in some sort of disaster, repeating and exaggerating the disaster of the great war, producing chaotic social conditions, and going on thereafter in a degenerative process towards extinction."

This attitude, as might be expected, is widely represented in the futuristic fiction of the twenties. *The People of the Ruins* (1920) by Edward Shanks has its protagonist delivered into the next century *via* suspended animation, and there he finds civilisation in collapse and England reverted to barbarism. The knowledge he posseses might be extremely valuable in this world that has lost its history and its intellectual heritage, but his host is only interested in his knowledge of artillery, and he has no option but to take part in yet another conflict whose result is further degeneration. Similar images recur frequently, in such works as Cicely Hamilton's *Theodore Savage* (1922; reprinted as *Lest Ye Die*); P.A. Graham's *The Collapse of Homo Sapiens* (1923); Shaw Desmond's *Ragnarok* (1926) and John Collier's *Tom's a-Cold* (1933; known in the US as *Full Circle*). To the horror of war itself was added a sense of the *vulnerability* of civilisation.

John Gloag was one of the few important writers of speculative fiction who was

on active service during the Great War, and he comments on his experiences as follows:

> "I served in the Welsh Guards during the latter part of the 1914-18 War, and was in France (as a subaltern) on the Western Front with the first battalion of my regiment and took part in the big push that smashed into the Hindenburg Line in August 1918, when I collected some lungfulls of poison gas (our own chiefly, for we were far ahead of our barrage in the attack when I was knocked out), and was invalided home. It's necessary to tell you all this, as what I experienced in the army and on active service had a profound effect upon my imagination, and to some extent coloured my fiction when I wrote short stories and novels after the Great War. (Engraved on one of the routine medals I collected, suspended from what was known as "the Victory ribbon", are the words: The Great War for Civilisation. That's a laugh, in view of the sort of civilisation we've had ever since!)"

Gloag directed a good deal of serious thought to the question of the vulnerability of modern society to the effects of disaster. One of his earliest published works was the essay *Artifex; or the Future of Craftsmanship* (1926), which was published as part of the influential series of speculative pamphlets known as the *Today & Tomorrow* series (1924-30). He introduces his subject as follows:

> "Many writers have brought their critical and imaginative gifts to picturing the condition of civilisation in the future, fifty, a hundred, or two hundred years hence. Some of these studies in futurity have been presented as fiction, and if we glance at the most pessimistic forecasts we realize with something of a shock how absolutely dependent we are for our present security and comfort upon the skill, individual and co-ordinated, of craftsmen, the people who actually make things or assist in the production of scores of our everyday articles – pots and pans, needles, thimbles, shoes, glass, tobacco-pipes, and a thousand and one objects we accept without much thought concerning the way they were made." (pp. 7-8).

He goes on to summarise the theme of *People of the Ruins* and *Theodore Savage* (he also quotes from *The War in the Air* and mentions Jack London's story of a depopulated world, "The Scarlet Plague") and adds the judgment that:

> "The books referred to are not just stories to be dismissed as such after a few shudders by way of tribute to the authors' ability in creating an atmosphere of horror. They should be recognized as thoughtful comments on very real and highly unpleasant possibilities." (p.11).

He goes on from there to attempt to analyse and answer the question of whether modern society could, indeed, suffer such a reverse as to find itself without the necessary resources of efficient craftsmanship. The main body of the essay is concerned with examining the relationship between modern manufacturing methods and the skill of cratsmen, and the effect of mass production upon the potential for artistry in design. The conclusion is careful and optimistic, but the introduction offers eloquent testimony to an undercurrent of anxiety. It is not surprising that when he began to turn his hand to the writing of fiction Gloag chose to produce a futuristic fantasy echoing those which had earlier stimulated his imagination, though by no means simply replicating their images.

Tomorrow's Yesterday is, first and foremost, a novel which arises out of a particular climate of thought, and reflects a view of the world appropriate to it. It is worth noting, though, that it is also a work which belongs to an authentic literary tradition. It is easy to overlook the fact that a coherant tradition of speculative fiction quite independent of the one which grew up in America around the science fiction magazines existed in parallel in Britain. There is a series of one another's activities and aware, too, of some degree of common inspiration and

common cause. As well as the writers cited, Gloag read S. Fowler Wright and remember the futuristic fiction of Kipling and Huxley. He names Olaf Stapledon as "a valued friend . . . with whom I used to have stimulating discussions about imaginary worlds". The close connection which existed in Britain between speculative fiction and speculative non-fiction is emphasised by his involvement with the "Today & Tomorrow" series (other "Today & Tomorrow" essayists who also wrote futuristic fiction include Andre Maurois, Robert Graves, Muriel Jaeger, A.M. Low, H.F. Heard, Bertrand Russell and J.B.S. Haldane) and by his enthusiastic recommendation of Haldane's *Possible Worlds.*

Tomorrow's Yesterday was originally conceived as a film script, and the script itself occupies a little over half its text, bracketed by several chapters of narrative. In the book, the film becomes a production put on by the mysterious New Century Theatre. The story reflects most of the author's interests of the day – at this time he was building up his own advertising agency as well as writing – and is primarily concerned with the advertising campaign which heralds the opening of the new theatre (an architectural marvel) and with the critical reception of the production.

The film (in three-dimensional colour projection!) concerns the observations made by two humanoid creatures trying to analyse and understand the historical fate of the species which they have replaced: *Homo sapiens.* The opening scenes present a satirical account of the role of the sexual impulse in human affairs, and of its exploitation by advertising; the later ones describe the advent of a destructive war and the subsequent gradual reversion of humankind to savagery. In the last stages of decadence, savage humans worship the wheel – a symbol of almost-forgotten greatness which has become the object of human sacrifices intended to placate the gods and stave off disaster. It transpires that all is not quite lost, for the observers (who have evolved from cats) bring out of the past a human sociologist and explain to him that he is the first of the many. They tell him that:

> "As our kind developed their brains they conquered fear and lust, for the first scientists soon learned to mechanize the reproductive processes, so that in half a million years sex was altogether silenced, leaving us a freedom men had never known. We concentrated on the conquest of every problem that science discovered, and we are still only in the beginning of Knowledge, even though we have colonies in the stars and have ranged back in time and found, what some of our early biologists suspected, that there had been a strange experiment in civilization before ours – the experiment of man. This experiment will serve us and our world, for, as we told you, we shall draw from that past of man the great minds that rose above their kind and tried to teach and make things that would endure. Of these, you are the first, and we chanced upon you in our first visits to the world you knew. You will help us to bring back all the wasted wisdom of man to the life of the world, and great men shall live again." (p.143).

The sociologist, however, suspects that the great men, embittered by what they will learn of the fate of their race, might prefer oblivion to the prospect of re-creation by courtesy of another race. This question is left open, to be further dramatised by the response of the public to the spectacle placed before it. The film itself is satirical, but the surrounding material is doubly so – the audience is beyond the reach of the message which the film is trying to get across, resentful letters appear in the papers following an almost-unanimously hostile response from the critics. There seems to be no future for the New Century Theatre, and no sooner

has it announced the title of its next production, *War Gods Wake*, than it is forced to close because of a state of national emergency . . .

The principal reason why *Tomorrow's Yesterday* stands out among contemporary speculative novels is its tone. Though it is in some respects a recognisably Wellsian work (Wells had produced his own "book of a film", *The King Who Was a King*, in 1929) its ironic quality is very much Gloag's own. Sharp satire was one of the few things that Wells was not very good at, and his most heavily sarcastic works – *Boon* and *The Camford Visitation* are the best examples – are rather ponderous and unsubtle. *Tomorrow's Yesterday* contrives to be scathing while retaining the finesse and lightness of touch essential to successful satire.

In fact, this satirical approach was something rarely seen in British speculative fiction, especially in connection with so serious a theme. Wells advanced the view that the best way to write scientific romance was to import single innovative hypotheses into narratives which were otherwise carefully realistic – only thus, he supposed, could the new ideas possibly be taken seriously. The growing familiarity of futuristic scenarios permitted some relaxation of this rule, but even so *Tomorrow's Yesterday* stands out as a boldly innovative work. It is similar in several ways to the satires and black comedies that began to appear in American sf of the fifties, principally in *Galaxy*. The only contemporary speculative work which is as sharp in its ironic treatment of serious matters is *The Spacious Adventures of the Man in the Street* (1928) by the Irish satirist Eimar O'Duffy, which is much less focussed and contains a good deal of pure comedy. There are several Utopian satires of the period, but nothing that deals with anything as deadly serious as the threat of apocalyptic war. It is not until we look at the last twenty years, when science fiction writers began the prolific production of mocking tales of the self-destruction of civilization *via* overpopulation and pollution, that we can find a more accurate parallel.

Gloag's second novel, *The New Pleasure*, shows the same ironic finesse and delicacy of touch as *Tomorrow's Yesterday*, but to rather different purpose. Its theme is not the destruction of civilization, but its salvation – or, rather, the salvation of humankind from the more awful aspects of civilization. The agent of this change is as different as can be from the wars which Wells used to smash up the old world order in *The War in the Air* and *The World Set Free*; but it is very different too from the miraculous alternatives which Wells produced in *In the Days of the Comet* and *The Autocracy of Mr Parham*, which are based in a rather curious theory of moral chemistry. Gloag's agent of change is ingenious and imaginatively appealing in comparison.

The story begins with the invention of a drug codenamed Gamma-8 and subsequently marketed under the name "Voe". It is the imaginative counterpart of a local anaesthetic – a restricted stimulant which selectively affects the sense of smell, at the same time producing a pleasurable, euphoric sensation. The plot of the novel follows the fight to market the drug against the opposition of various vested interests (principally the tobacco industry), and the effect which the ultimate habituation of the British public to its use has upon their way of life.

It transpires that tobacco is only one of the obnoxious things which has been

tolerated in the human environment only because men have hitherto existed in a state of olfactory anaesthesia. Petrol fumes are equally intolerable, and so are most cosmetics and lack of personal hygiene. A new age of discretion dawns as men become capable of realizing to the full which aspects of modern life, in a literal *and* metaphorical sense, stink. Their awakened noses lead them to a new promised land, leading to much greater discrimination even in sexual relationships, promoting an entirely natural eugenic selection that reduces the population greatly. As the inventor of Voe, Adrian Frankby (canonised by future generations as St. Adrian) travels up the Thames in the closing chapters, he reflects that the new England he has been instrumental in creating, would resemble the picture painted by William Morris in *News from Nowhere* were it not for the fact that the architecture of *this* new world is so much more magnificent.

The New Pleasure provides one of the most stylish and charming prospectuses for social salvation ever written. Its satirical tone is much more gentle than that of *Tomorrow's Yesterday*, and the work has a flavour which is quite unique. Like *Tomorrow's Yesterday*, it finds a faint resonance in recent American science fiction, but whereas recent apocalyptic fantasies frequently recapitulate the mocking irony of Gloag's first novel, recent stories of tactical retreat from the uglier aspects of technology are usually deadly serious, lightened only by a curious quasi-religious "ecological mysticism". There is a sense in which *The New Pleasure* is still ahead of the time which can produce such novels as Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, for it includes within the scope of its irony exactly such lyrical celebrations of the re-establishment of harmony with nature. The final chapter of the book describes the unveiling of a statue of St. Adrian which is to encapsulate the spirit of the salvation which he brought to mankind:

> "It was a naked figure. The right hand was raised to the nose, with the forefinger and thumb touching the nostrils as though conveying a pinch of Voe. The left hand was stretched aloft with the index finger pointing to the sky, for the sculptor had resisted the inspiration of the cartoon-symbolist school, which would have compelled him to put in the figure's right hand a sword with a bowler hat impaled thereon, thus relegating to the left hand the vital Voe-taking gesture." (p.303).

Beneath the charm and humour, however, there reamins a serious note of disenchantment with the quality of contemporary civilization and culture. This reaction against certain contemporary trends and fashions mingles in Gloag's work with the intimations of cultural mortality which constantly invade it. It is striking that what all of his central characters have in common is an urge to *withdraw* into a secure private enclave where they can be safe and comfortable — a feeling which seems to sit uneasily alongside the strong sense of duty and concern for their fellow men which they also share. When they are called upon to do their bit, they do so wholeheartedly (though sometimes pessimistically), but they always look forward to the time when they can retire from the fray in order to follow their private and idiosyncratic concerns. This is true of Adrian Frankby in *The New Pleasure*, more so of Lord Privilege in *Winter's Youth*, and even more so of Jacob Drune in *Sacred Edifice*. This correlates with a sense of disconnection from the world's affairs which seems evident in the world-view of several notable writers of speculative fiction (John Beresford and S. Fowler Wright provides the most striking examples

among Gloag's contemporaries). The central characters of Gloag's later novels become steadily more disenchanted with the world in which they find themselves, particularly as its fashions are exemplified by the ambitions and attitudes of the younger characters who provide them with dramatic counterpoints. *99%* is a novel positively saturated by disenchantment.

The roots of this disenchantment clearly orgininate in the disullusionment of the Great War, but its growth was nourished by other historical trends. When *The New Pleasure* was written, this steady growth had hardly begun – the disenchantment of the novel reflects nothing more than the evaporation of the myth of material progress toward a technological Utopia. In the year that it was published, however, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, and the rise of Nazism began to provide further cause for alarm. The spectre of Hitler – the ghost of horrors yet to cone – lurks in the background of all Gloag's subsequent speculative novels, and appears to have driven away the spirit of innocent amusement that makes *The New Pleasure* so seductive.

Winter's Youth extends arguments contained in the first two novels, and adds more. It is basically a poltical satire set in the 1960s, and there are some aspects of it that faintly echo the humorous political fantasies of Hilaire Belloc. The theme connecting the elements of the plot is the determination of the Second National Government to hold on to power and popularity by whatever means become available. After a disastrous public relations exercise connected with the promotion of a supposed new gospel which turns out to be a fake, the cabinet elect to take credit for sponsoring a rejuvenation process discovered by one Dr Nordelf. This move turns out to be mistaken, leading to extreme discontent among the young and the founding of a new opposition party, the Social Revivalists, which stands a far better chance of taking power than the old opposition party, the Communist-Fascists. The rejuvenated cabinet hang on desperately, but their excessive self-interest and advancing senility eventually lead the nation into a series of calamities culminating in the three days war, in which four million people die.

The observer who provides the commentary on this sequence of events is Lord Privilege, a descendent of Captain Marryat's Peter Simple and the one clear-sighted man in the ill-fated cabinet, where he serves as foreign secretary. His mission in life is to preserve Europe from the horror of war – a horror which has increased considerably since the invention of "radiant inflammatol" – a weapon powerful enough to obliterate whole cities. There being no defence against radiant inflammatol, it has become a kind of ultimate deterrent, with no nation daring to provoke its use, but Lord Privilege knows that in spite of this he is trying to preserve a situation whihch must, in the long run, deteriorate. His sense of detachment from the complex pattern of events is greatly enhanced by his acceptance of the fact that things are, in the final analysis, outside his control. He is perhaps the most interesting character in any of Gloag's novels, for his fatalism is unusually complicated, tempered by compassion for others, a strong sense of irony, and a gentle undercurrent of hedonism.

Winter's Youth is a more sober novel than its predecessors: its ironies are deliberately understated. The way in which the Nordelf process becomes part of

everyday life is unmelodramatic, and so is the process of a concomitant plot by the British Medical Association to use its gifts for a little covert eugenic selection. One of the side-effects of the process is to inculcate in its beneficiaries a rather perverted interest in sadism and debauchery, but this too is domesticated into more-or-less harmless ritual. Even the war is passed over in an interlude between chapters, and the reader learns about it as it is filtered into the stream of Lord Privilege's memories, denuded of its terrible significance. The climax of the story is anything but apocalyptic, dealing with the quiet passing away of the one man who preferred to let nature take its course and refused to submit to the indignity of the Nordelf process. The casual acceptance of events such as these as part and parcel of the everyday affairs of twentieth-century man has a greater impact than impassioned rhetoric could have. The occasional moments of vitriolic cynicism are all the more powerful because of this setting.

One of the key judgments passed by Lord Privilege is contained in the comments which he makes regarding one of the "fevered orgies" conducted by his Nordelfised colleagues, where the author observes that:

> "Lord Privilege knew enough about history and humanity to understand that religious teaching always rotted down into ritual; for the mob demanded ritual: truth was too bleak for the common mind; it pulled away the layers of belief that, piled up like eiderdowns on a bed, kept thought comfortably drowsy. He knew that most mid-twentieth century Europeans had lost their religious convictions without losing their taste for ritual. Only intelligent men could bear the isolation and spiritual responsibility of scepticism. Orthodox religions had become spiritually unrefreshing symbols of social standing, except in Germany, where the new paganism was fiercely alive; but in the Christian countries of Europe and America the revival of strange cults, secret societies with private rituals of their own, and of magic, witchcraft and witch covens, was a symptom of the unacknowledged and largely unrecognized loss of connection between the life of the body and the needs of the soul." (p.188-9).

This diagnosis of our contemporary predicament sounds quite familiar to our ears, perhaps becuase we have seen so many more of the symptoms which Gloag anticipated. (It should be remembered that the passage quoted was written nearly twenty years before Gerald Gardner popularized "witch covens" as a modish form of lifestyle fantasy). The characterization of Lord Privilege's detachment as "the isolation and spiritual responsibility of scepticism" is particularly interesting, for it is exactly Gloag's charge against his contemporaries that they were all-too-often lacking in spiritual repsonsibility, ever-ready to seize upon new dogmas and to be betrayed by them.

When Privilege observes the deterioration of his country's affairs under the Nordelfised cabinet, this is the observation which he makes:

> "If this type of preliminary decay, this mental enervation, was affecting the ruling classes in other countries some peculiar things might occur. Was the world really coming under the direction of minds that were half in ruins? Even if it was, his habitual scepticism inclined him to doubt whether mankind's affairs would be conducted very differently. A mad tyrant like Caligula or Nero was often only the equivalent of a government of elected professional politicians. International malignancy and injustice could be directly attributed to a tyrant; he was a convenient figurehead for a nation's wrongs; but only stupidity or well-meaning incompetence could be directly attributed to a political party when misery and injustice endured under its power." (pp.269-70).

This is the political predicament which is corollary to the spiritual predicament indicated by Privilege in the earlier passage: on the one hand waits the evil of

tyranny, on the other the treachery of stupidity; and the attempts to steer a course between them is bedevilled by many difficulties. The attractiveness of political substitutes for religion – Militarism, Fascism and Marxism, in particular – is represented in Gloag's books as a crucial, and potentially fatal, failure of scepticism and renunciation of spiritual responsibility. In this regard too the author's rhetoric still seems forceful to the reader of today.

Winter's Youth can be seen as a kind of summing up of the attitudes and arguments evident in Gloag's early speculative fiction. Though his literary output continued to be prolific, he wrote no more futuristic fantasies for a while. His next novels were the thrillers *Sweet Racket* and *Ripe for Development*. It was in this period that he became extensively involved with broadcasting, and he wrote many short stories for the radio. (He also appeared frequently on the Brains Trust and other discussion programmes, where his flair for ironic rhetoric must have served him very well.) Because of the influence of the radio medium on his work, all of his short stories are brief and economical, and they are constructed so as to favour some kind of surprise revelation in the last line; they are designed to be *told* rather then to be read. Some are science fiction, but these were among the ones which were *not* broadcast, according to the indications given in the contents pages of his first collection, *It Makes a Nice Change* (1938).

"Pendulum", first published in the *London Mercury*, is an account of a vision experienced by a man injured in a car crash. Detached from his body, his consciousness begins to swing back and forth through time, to observe London in the distant past and far future, time and time again until some kind of "temporal friction" slows him down and brings him to rest inside his body once more. The point of the story is that as he swings in both "directions" he sees similar changes overtaking the city – no matter whether he is travelling forward or back in time he still sees the city slowly vanishing into forest and men degenerating into savages.

The same theme recurs in "The Stilt", a Wellsian vignette in which the protagonist, visiting a friend who is a scientist, is offered an opportunity to use a machine which can look through time. He elects to look back at England in the fifth century, when the Dark Ages were closing in upon a land from which the guiding hand of Roman Empire had been recently withdrawn. What he sees he interprets in this light, and is horrified to learn afterwards that owing to a fault in the apparatus he has actually been looking into the future, at the England of the late twenty-first century.

Both of these stories are necessarily cursory in their treatment of this notion of historical cyclicity, but more depth was given to it when Gloag used it a third time, in the novel *Sacred Edifice*. Though this is primarily a contemporary novel, an added significance is lent to its events by the bracketing of the main narrative with scenes set in the distant past and far future – which prove, of course, to be strikingly similar.

The plot of the novel conerns the rebuilding of a storm-damaged Gothic cathedral, with the aid of a generous gift from an American millionaire. The architect who wins the commission to rebuild it is determined in some way to recapitulate the endeavour of the original builders, who attempted to incarnate in its

architecture the spirit of their religion. Rather than simply restoring it he wants to build a sacred edifice adequate to the twentieth century: one which will perform a parallel socio-psychological function for the modern men and women who will worship in it. This feat he eventually accomplishes.

This is an unusual theme for a novel, and only a man with Gloag's unusual combination of interests and abilities could have planned and executed it. (He reports that "it was conceived as a complete story during a visit to the fragment of the abbey church at Malmesbury when my wife and I were wandering about the west country in our car in the summer of 1936. Within hours, I seem to recollect, the tale of the great church of Brell – my imagined sacred edifice – was unfolded, peopled with characters, though of course the chief character is the great building itself.")

The main narrative is fascinating in itself, and the interaction of the characters is handled delicately and effectively, but the depth of vision added by the extended temporal perspective provides a whole new dimension. The story of the rebuilding and regeneration of the cathedral has its immediate historical context – that of the depression and the threat to world peace posed by Nazi Germany – but this context too takes its place in an immensely wider perspective provided by the vision of Kara, a stone-age priest who selects the site ultimately to be occupied by the church as the place where his own sacred edifice (a stone circle) properly belongs. His vision forsees the building and rebuilding of the Gothic cathedral, but also reveals the fate of the architect's dream, which proves (inevitably) to be as frail in substance and as transient in meaning as its predecessor:

> "Kara could see the gaunt ruins of the cathedral; the medieval stonework of the nave and chancel still faithfully upholding the roof; but from the wreck of the central tower and transepts, rusty steel girders emerged like blood-stained bones from powdering concrete. The city on the hillside had almost disappeared. Dimpled mounds covered with coarse grass entombed its houses. On the crest of the downs a few huts were grouped behind earthern ramparts, and on the site where Kara had marked out the first temple, a circle of well-grown oaks surrounded a crude shrine, a cruciform roofless structure built from ragged pieces of concrete and large stones.
>
> "Men still worshipped although half their lives were spent in secret lairs hiding from roving brigand bands. They lived in a lawless land of fear and magic, perplexed by legends of peace and order and plenty that their fathers, and grandfathers and great-grandfathers had handed down from some unimaginable golden age. In due time they would build again, and give praise to God with their skill. The work of building would drink up the love and understanding of a thousand lives until some sacred edifice should again challenge the sky with towers and resist the south-west wind that freshens the land men once called England." (pp.286-7).

Sacred Edifice is very different from the two short stories "Pendulum" and "The Slit" in that the character who experiences the vision connecting past and future is situated outside the plot. His visions have been "tapped" by one of the deans of the cathedral, who has written a history of the site which his successor considers overly imaginative, but they do not otherwise intrude. The perspective which the author adds *Via* Kara's visions is a remote one – a "God's eye view" not altogether dissimilar to that frequently employed by Olaf Stapledon in his own attempts to place modern man in a much greater context.

The agent of destruction which reduces England (and presumably civilization as a whole) to ruins in these stories is, of course, war, and by the time that *Sacred*

Edifice was written that war was looming on the horizon. The contemporary narrative ends with the mobilization of the European nations. The imminence of war seems to have been the primary force generating the persistent recurrence within Gloag's work of the kind of image described above. In one of his letters he states quite bluntly:

> "My preoccupation with the future during the 1930s was generated (if you can generate a preoccupation) by the mounting horror of what was then the present, with a certifiable lunatic in charge of the most aggressive military nation in Europe."

As history turned out, Gloag's next futuristic novel was overtaken by events while it was in press. *Manna* was written in 1939, and the proofs were passed mere weeks before Hitler invaded Poland. By the time the book was published, in 1940 Europe was at war, as the novel's climax predicted. It is the story of a conspiracy mounted by a group of influential men brought together after having been featured in a book of biographies written by a retired journalist. The journalist is the narrator of the book, though he only becomes invloved in the conspiracy when he tries to find the cause of his book's suppression by its subjects.

One of the conspirators has developed a new kind of mushroom which will grow almost anywhere, and which provides all the nourishment that men need. Once releases into the environment it can spread of its own accord, and if properly managed can banish forever the danger of hunger and the possibility of starvation. There are, however, two problems which need to be faced before mankind can be given this new manna. The first problem is to assure that society can readjust itself to circumstances in which the foremost of the Malthusian checks on population growth has been removed. The second, and more complex, problem is that the fungus has a side-effect not unlike that of the drug featured in *The New Pleasure* – it promotes tranquillity. One of the men in charge of the project suggests to the narrator that introducing manna to the contemporary scene would be "like introducing alcohol to a community of clean-living Polynesians". Such a gift, it is argued, might lead to the end of progress and the loss of initiative, and the last thing the conspirators want is to turn mankind into a race of lotus-eaters.

The narrator sees in manna tremendous potential for good, but in the course of the plot he becames gradually disenchanted with most of the men whose biographies he had assembled under the title *Possible Rulers*. The implication is that if even *they* have feet of clay, what of the rest? Indeed, the reaction of most of the people who find out about manna is a hostile one. The narrator's son is a Marxist, and argues that science can never solve the problems of mankind, and that the amelioration of conflict between social classes by the introduction of a new opium into social affairs would be a catastrophe in its own right. The Narrator cannot agree, but is made anxious by doubts that eventually crystallize as Europe lurches into war. With Hitler to be defeated, the possible effects of manna on the fighting forces become an ironic threat. The world's reception of this great gift is finally summed up by the Prime Minister in a broadcast to the nation:

> "But there are more threats to the welfare of this nation, and indeed to the well-being of mankind, than those arising from political differences with our neighbours. Nature sometimes takes it upon herself to test the frailty of her creatures, and sometimes the test takes the form of a plague; sometimes it takes the form of a gift; an embarrassing gift. We have

known occasions in the past when the bountiful hands of Nature have, by furnishing an indiscriminate plenty, nearly overset the delicately balanced economic machine of modern civilization. I should not conceal from you the fact that we are facing a very grave crisis, far greater than those political and international crises which have disfigured the history of this century.

"We are facing Nature, when Nature is in a mischievous mood. We have all heard of a growth, of a new plant, that has surged over this country like a tidal wave. That plant has been impiously likened to the manna that fell from heaven upon the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. But . . . this is no gift from God; this so-called manna is a temptation of the devil . . .

"The Government . . . must take steps against this plague, for plague it is. It is sapping the fine character of our people. It is as pernicious as opium. It is rotting that independence of outlook, destroying that individual integrity, and debilitating that reverence for immemorial institutions without which no country, and certainly no great empire, can long endure . . . This growth – this so-called food, this manna – must be destroyed, uprooted, burned out, seared from the surface of our fair land. The eating of manna will become an offence under the Law. Only be recognizing the evil that it may create and maintain can we have the courage to preserve our economic system and our great civilization." (pp.276-8).

Here the story ends – as, in fact, it must. The kind of novel of the future which Gloag had been writing was rendered impotent by the onset of actual conflict. The catastrophe had arrived, and the attempt to plan for a better future was short-circuited and reduced to a final terse comment, the last section of the book, which simply reads:

"Manna awaits the world. Will men have the wisdom and courage to use it?" (p.280).

It was a question that could not be asked again until peace was renewed. Indeed, it could not be asked again until people were once again *confident* of peace. John Gloag, as least, put aside this question and others like it for all time; after 1945 he wrote no more futuristic fantasies at all.

Gloag wrote one more speculative novel during the war: *99%*. Though it is not a futuristic work it recapitulates the theme of "Pendulum", "The Slit" and *Sacred Edifice*. The story follows the course of an experiment in which a number of individuals are "sent back in time" while they are asleep and dreaming, in order to re-live some moment of extreme significance experienced by one of their ancestors and transmitted through the generations by some kind of genetic memory. The several sub-plots of the story, as might be expected, focus on the various effects which the visions have on the lives of the protagonists. Each one finds himself rudely jolted out of his complacency, inspired to take a new and more dynamic approach to his affairs.

In the early chapters, the story appears to be more straightforward than in fact it is. A false trail laid by the author suggests that each participant in the experiment will burst through the imaginative bounds that confine him, and with the aid of whatever vital insight he has achieved will constructively remake his own life, possibly to the benefit of the world at large. The idea is attractive enough, and represents a moral sometimes advanced by similar stories – that if we could only break out of the confines of our mental prisons the revelation of the way of the world that would ensue could only be beneficial. However, Gloag's story is more subtle and rather more pessimistic than that, for although his characters readily seize upon this belief, all of them are betrayed by it in some measure. The world,

unfortunately, proves to be singularly intractable in the face of their new fervour.

The most cruel of these exemplary narratives is that of the M.P. Carnaby Riggs, whose dream takes him back to experience the flight of a small boy from Carthage before its destruction by the Romans. The boy's father is a rich merchant, who produces a flow of cynical rhetoric regarding the virtues of opportunism and the politics of expediency. The merchant is optimistic, believing that when the present political troubles have blown over the world he knows will be restored to him. His lack of imagination is conclusively demonstrated when he is taken by slavers who murder him, appropriate all his goods, and take the boy to be sold.

Riggs cannot help but see the present in this long-lost past, and is appalled by this newly-revealed consistency in human affairs. He abandons his political career in favour of a messianic enthusiasm for Utopian regeneration, which takes him to Russia in search of the possibility of a new and better world. Alas, the reality of Russia cannot measure up to his inspiration, and conditions in the new world drive both himself and his wife to an early grave.

The judgments passed upon the other characters are less harsh, but even the man who actually learns most from his experience, and seems to have found some essential core of truth, can only react to his lesson by turning away from his life of more-or-less idle luxury to take up an ascetic and eremitic existence. (This eventuality is one which Schopenhauer would have approved of wholeheartedly, but it is much more appropriate than genuinely convincing).

This particular experience allows Sir Stephen Trobell, a marine engineer with an exceptionally snobbish wife, temporarily to share the consciousness of a stone-age cave-dweller – a priest and visionary, like Kara of *Sacred Edifice*. By this means he is witness to a religious ritual in which the savages dance themselves to exhaustion, and which climaxes as follows:

> "The women danced longer than the men of the tribe, but for two hours after the last woman had sunk down to earth in utter exhaustion, the priests continued whirling about the blackened ashes of their fire. Then, one by one, they dropped down, unconscious, until Af was left alone, spinning away from his body, away from the world as he knew it, leaving behind the tribes and the caves and the hunting grounds; leaving the kindly, sheltering spirit of the tribe, and adventuring alone, to gain the knowledge of things as they are.
>
> "Of his own physical collapse, he knew nothing; for he was drawn away from his body, and his own mind merged into something far greater than the mind of a tribal priest. He saw it moving brightly towards light and glittering shapes, and returning, darkened, shrunken and scattered. It was like a luminous cloud; occasionally particles of it were detached, grew promisingly and vividly, and then broke up into innumerable fresh particles that sometimes expanded and flourished, but more often faded and blackened.
>
> "He saw *through* the cloud, to an earth, green with vegetation, grey with water, belted and banded with golden deserts, and studded with white-tipped mountains. Everywhere on that varied stage pictures were forming and re-forming. Tribes came out of caves and roamed the forests, and then gave up hunting, and settled down to grow their food. Like an enormous panorama, he saw the spread of human life through the world. He observed the invention of building and the control of shelter changing the ways and thoughts of men, and from huts and hovels, came houses, palaces, great monuments, cities, roads, machines, and a world full of movement. And everywhere, men became strangers to each other, and the luminous cloud of the world mind was attentuated, until only a few wisps of its filmy radiance survived. Men built and destroyed, generation after generation, until at last they built only for destruction, and whole tribes and continents gave their lives and dedicated their arts, to the making of machines that would burn and tear down what they had inherited from the past." (pp.166-7).

And then, of course, the pattern is reversed, and mankind reverts to savagery and the worship of the wheel. New hunters emerge in order to re-establish the superiority of men over wild beasts, and new tribes form and expand until:

> "The mind of mankind begins to glow once more, to coalesce, and through the iridescent mist a picture formed, of a figure with a white-painted face and mutilated hands, lying naked and unconscious across the ashes of a little fire, while rain beat down, and a concourse of people stood, silent and expectant." (p.168).

Af cannot tell his people about his vision, because he has not the words to convey its meaning. Trobell finds himself no better placed than the stone-age priest, and he finds no alternative but to retreat into quietism – an extreme form of the withdrawal that all Gloag's heroes find ultimately convenient.

The conclusion of *99%* is not so very different from the conclusion of *Tomorrow's Yesterday*, save for the addition of a little Stapledonian mysticism and the fact that mankind lives to rise again rather than being replaced by another species. The tone of the later book, however, is markedly different. The sharp satire is gone, replaced with a more ruthless and less amiable iconoclasm. The enormity of fate's cruelty is increased beyond the measure suggested in *Sacred Edifice*. Nevertheless, it is not a wholly pessimistic book, and the characters fortunate enough not to have shared Trobell's vision contrive to continue their lives with stout enough hearts. The book is bleak and bitter in what its vision suggests: that civilization is ephemeral; that enlightenment will not save us despite the fact that it is not illusory; that the spirit of man is valiant in adversity but cannot liberate itself from the frailty of the flesh. However, the author clearly recognizes the imperatives of the proximate reality as well as the inhumanity of infinity and eternity, and he recognizes that there are virtues as well as faults in its staunch resistance to the transforming power of the imagination.

There is no futuristic element in any of the fiction which Gloag went on to publish after the end of the second world war. *Tomorrow's Yesterday* was reprinted in 1946 in an omnibus along with ten short stories from *It Makes a Nice Change* and ten previously uncollected stories. One of the new stories – "Petrified" – is science fiction, but is merely a vignette dealing with an unfortunate side-effect of a drug whose effects are similar to that described in Wells' "The New Accelerator". Later, this notion was reversed in the contemporary thriller *Slow* (1954), in which an Englishman visiting France is caught up in a complicated web of intrigue as assorted spies compete to win control of a drug which slows down the metabolism. Gloag's last collection of short stories, *Take One a Week* (1950 – an omnibus absorbing both the previous collections and adding new material) also has a couple of borderline science fiction stories, but they are conventional stories of thought-transmission. By 1945, it seems, the creative impulse that had led him to write his major speculative works had been transformed, and from then on his energies were directed into other avenues. This is perhaps not surprising when one recalls that the advent of the atom bomb led to an outpouring of futuristic fantasies anxious about the possibility of a new war that might destroy civilization. There was no need for Gloag to participate; for him, it was all in the past. He had realised and dramatised the importance to the relevant trends fifteen years earlier, and to the man

who had imagined radiant inflammatol in 1934 the atom bomb came as no particular surprise.

In 1946, with the war over, Gloag seems to have felt rather more cheerful than when he wrote *99%*. The preface which he wrote for *First One and Twenty*, the ominbus which included *Tomorrow's Yesterday*, defends the writing of stories for pure entertainment, and describes speculative fiction as an essentially playful endeavour. He quotes with approval a letter written to him by Olaf Stapledon, which says:

> "All this modish playing about with time and space, which you and I have so indulged in, is of course symptomatic of our period. It opens up new worlds for the writer of fantastic fiction, or at any rate gives him a new and exciting game to play. The rules of the game are imposed on him by the new attitude to time and space, but he can go beyond the accepted conditions as much as he likes so long as he does not actually or flagrantly violate them, and so become implausible or even positively incredible." (p.vii).

Gloag adds his own comment, to this effect:

> "The writers of the popular scientific fantasy fiction have created a golden age of their own, projected into the not too distant future, where everything is streamlined, mechanised and appallingly tidy; where atomic energy has been safely harnessed, and life is organised by an aristocracy of technicians. This literature, with its own conventions and jargon, is a manifestation of the scientific romantic movement of which Jules Verne and H.G. Wells are the great progenitors. It responds to contemporary influences, and since the beginning of the second world war has seldom featured the catastrophic theme. This theme may not be so popular in the future when so many of us have had first hand experience of large scale catastrophe." (p.vii).

Further on, he seems almost to be repenting of his own novels of ideas when he says that:

> "Between the wars political, economic and sociological themes were tried and found wanting in entertainment value. Still, there may well be a healthy creative reaction against the violence and solemnity of the last thirty years." (p.viii).

Certainly, the fiction which Gloag produced in the years after the war is designed to entertain, and his novels of that period are not novels of ideas in the sense that his speculative novels certainly are. He defends the same point of view today, and minimizes the role played by ideas in his fiction, noting in one of his letters that:

> "Your analysis of the characters in *Manna* suggests that you are reading far more into that tale than there is in it, if I may put it so very bluntly. I'm not conscious of trying to make my puppets convey anything in particular. Some wit, writing about H.G. Wells took some liberties with Holy Writ, and said that Wells 'had sold his birthright for a spot of message,' for he unashamedly wrote propaganda novels, which often seriously marred his great powers as a teller of tales. Apart from a desire to prod my readers and to bring them to the brink of 'the dark river of thought' (another quotation from Wells, by the way), I was always intent on telling the story, as it had first come into my mind, and the sermon element was never considered at all. But remember, those semi-scientific romances written in the late thirties and early forties, were written when my life, and the lives of most people in this county, was shadowed by fear: the fear of war, air-raids, and (for a brief space) invasion."

It would, of course, be wrong to treat any of the novels described herein as propaganda, but it must be noted that Wells wrote various novels of ideas before he "sold his birthright for a spot of message", and the fact that his early scientific romances were written as popular thrillers does not in the least affect the fact that they contain some very serious (and sometimes deeply pessimistic) reflections on

the place of man in nature and the future prospects of our civilization. Novels written to entertain may still be worth taking seriously as exemplifications of a particular view of the world, and the fact that a novel is entertaining should not mean – and very rarely does – that it is a mere literary confection, forgotten as soon as it is consumed.

It is always easy for a literary critic to confuse the intentional and the incidental, or at least to fail to discriminate well enough between different kinds of intention; but that which was unintended, or intended differently from the way it is interpreted, may nevertheless be interesting and revealing. I would not wish to mislead anyone into thinking that the novels of John Gloag are unduly ponderous by concentrating too hard on what they reveal about the outlook of the author. They are a joy to read, but they do indeed bring their readers to the brink of the dark river of thought, and compel them to look over it.

The work of John Gloag exemplifies both the deep gulf that lay between British and American speculative fiction between the wars, and the manner in which that breach was healed in the post-war period.

In America, the *genre* acquired a label, which created a common cause simply by establishung a category-heading. Many of the American writers who made significant contributions to the *genre* between 1918 and 1945 wrote for the science fiction magazines, aware of other work that was appearing there. The fiction which these writers produced was predominantly optimistic about technological progress and confident about the future of American society. Future wars occur regularly in American science fiction of this period, but very few stories show any great anxiety about the possible effects of such wars. (It is significant that in the novel which features the bleakest scenes of devastation, L. Ron Hubbard's *Final Blackout*, it is Europe that is destroyed – America recovers and consolidates her position as the most highly-developed nation on Earth).

British speculative ficition of this period deos not, of course, consist entirely of images of future devastation, but there is in virtually all of it an undercurrent of anxiety. The first world war left a far greater impact on the consciousness of Britons than on the Americians whose territory was never seriously threatened. The prospect of a second European war was far more frightful in the British imagination than in the American. The depression of the thirties had surprisingly little effect on the temper of American futuristic fiction (expect, perhaps, to aid the proliferation of pulp science fiction by sustaining a heavy demand for escapist fantasies in a cheap format). throughout the thirties, therefore, speculative fiction in America remained overwhelmingly committed to the myth of the inevitability of material progress, while British writers already felt that they had adequate reason to be suspicious of it. America inherited that suspicion after the second world war, and that is why it is possible to find a curious kinship between the images prevalent in British speculative fiction between the wars and American science fiction of the post-war decades.

The work of John Gloag testifies to this kinship by virtue of his ambivalent cynicism, his occasional sharp satire, and his anxious contemplation of the possibility of the catastrophic reversal of the pattern of social evolution. In view of this

fact, it is curious that he has not attracted more attention from America scholars interested in the development of speculative fiction – perhaps because (as with so many British writers) his works were never widely available in the USA and could not call attention to themselves. They would repay such attention for they are doubly revealing. They are, on the one hand, typical of a particular perception of the affairs of modern man that was generated by the historical circumstances of the period; and they are also the work of an ingenious and skillful writer – a genuine craftsman in prose – whose appeal has not been diminished by the dating of his visions of the future.

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Letters

Dear Sir, 17th April 1980

Two reviews in recent *Foundations* make similar dismissals of H.P. Lovecraft: John Sladek in No.15 on *The Necronomicon*, and Tom Hosty in No.16 on *The Dream Quest of H.P. Lovecraft*. Both refer to his extreme racism as a sufficient reason for ignoring him. They point out that central to his work was, as Hosty puts it:

> a use of language and imagery which is nothing more or less than a sustained, pathological gesture of revulsion from life — a gesture of which his racism, his violent nostalgia, his lack of any interest in sexuality, were all part and parcel. (*Foundation* No.16, p.102).

But these features of HPL's work are only reasons for totally ignoring him if we accept the assumption that to be interesting or important an author must be likeable or his views agreeable. If we do not accept this, then it is just these obnoxious features of his thought which make him worthy of study. I can think of no other sf/fantasy writer whose life and emotions can be so straightforwardly mapped onto his work. Consider these features of his life and its products:

1. There is a close relation between his personal puritanism and some of his images of mutational promiscurity and organic chaos. An especially good example is the appearance of Wibur Whately, child of human and demon-monster, without his trousers: an eye in each hip, a tail and tentacles tipped with bloodsucking mouths. (In "The Dunwich Horror").

2. The expression of HPL's racism in the creations of the threatening Others of the Cthulhu Mythos. What qualified a group to be the object of his hate was that it appeared to him as a threat to his New England traditions and gentility. This roused him to a frenzy of Pythonesque absurdity. In a couple of letters written during his stay in New York in 1925 he describes foreigners in terms which clearly echo his descriptions of extra-terrestrial beings, even to the extent of the "impious . . . abnormal non-Euclidean" geometry which he so often ascribed to his aliens:

> indescribable scum pulling one into holes in the wall where flamboyant monstrosities ululate their impossibility . . . craziness in cloth hanging in futuristic attitudes.
> . . . once a Syrian had the room next to mine and played eldritch and whining monotones on a strange bagpipe which made me dream ghoulish and indescribable things of crypts (quoted in *Lovecraft: A Bibliography*, L. Sprague de Camp, New English Library, 1976, p.233 and 234).

As against this "mess of stewing mongrel flesh" (ibid p.169), he opposed the ideal of the hardy Teuton warrior, which in his less self-analytical moments he imagined himself to be. But at some level he must have carried the memory that his mother described him to neighbours as of such loathsome ugliness that (so she said) he could not bear to walk out on the streets (ibid p.27).

3. In the light of the frequency with which he locates his horrors undersea and their tendency to be non-mammalian, it is curious that he suffered from the condition called poikilothermism, in which the body is unable to make the usual adjustments to keep its temperature constant in relation to its surroundings. In other words, he was deficient in the faculty which is one of the defining characteristics of mammals. He also felt a loathing for the sea and for seafood.

4. The mode of HPL's writing shifted from fantasy to sf, and within this the evaluation of his aliens altered. In the earlier work they are quasi-demonic and implacably hostile to humanity; in the later they are natural, are biologically and culturally alien, but are not antagonistic to humanity as such. The narrator in "At the Mountains of Madness" remarks that "radiates, vegetables, monstrosities, star spawn – whatever they had been, they were men!" (pp.102-3 of the 1968 Panther collection with this title). There is nothing like this in the earlier works; it expresses a very different feeling. This change was paralleled in HPL's own life by a move from the attitude that other peoples were inferior and despicable to a belief that they were alien and should not be mixed with, but were of equal value and importance.

Of course, in practice the political consequences of these two attitudes are often indistinguishable. But for Lovecraft, burdened with the crushing and restrictive insanity of his upbringing, it was a huge step to take.

5. It is not unusual for a belief in racism and ultra-conservatism to go along with a yearning for crank cosmologies, "ancient knowledge" and general mysticism. It is therefore interesting that HPL, with his puritanism, xenophobia, hero-worship and fixated attachment to his home territory would have none of this. His first published writing was an attack on astrology, soon followed by a criticism of Percival Lowell's theory that the Martian *canali* were the products of intelligent beings. He later worked on an abortive project with Houdini to write a book exposing fake mediums. He had no sympathy for Atlanteansim, Charles Fort or any other form of para-science.

De Camp finds it paradoxical tht HPL should reject all pseudo-science of this type yet should have fallen totally for the 'pseudo-scientific Aryanist cult" (op cit, p.250). But the paradox only exists if we accept that racism was external to science in the way that the former group were; if it held that "scientific" racism did actually have strong roots in official science then the paradox disappears.

Lovecraft's horror of the strange was so complete and his objectification of it in his fiction so obsessive that it would have been impossible for him to contemplate the existence of the metaphysically alien in the real world. De Camp comments in the context of HPL's racism, that:

> The fusion of two patently different groups seemed to him a violation of the laws of nature, and to him a violation of natural law was the ultimate horror. (ibid, p.252).

In this lay the roots of both his racism and his scientism, and behind this was his deep need for a wholly known, secure and static world – the strength of this feeling for him is perhaps most vividly shown in the ending of "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath". His way of dealing with the the tensions he felt in his world was to locate them in the wholly fantastic. In this he makes an interesting contrast with the less thoroughgoing conservative whose response to social strangeness is to "balance" it by postualting the existence of metaphysical strangeness in the actual world.

It is not my concern here to defend Lovecraft as "literature", as a "good writer", only to point out that we can regard him as a syndrome in which are sharply focused several of the currents of cultural pathology which are usually encountered in fuzzier, more mediated expressions.

David Murray *London*

Dear Malcolm Edwards 5th May 1980

I found Charles Platt's review of *A World Between* eerily disturbing; while he speaks of the novel as being "built to meet a perceived need rather than to fulfil a deep obsession," his whole review, for the author of the book, anyway, is an object lesson in why *A World Between was* such a deeply-felt book for me while I wrote it.

Platt's review, like several others along the same line I've seen, seems based on several social and political assumptions of his own which he doesn't even seem aware of. He's swallowed a whole bunch of invidious programming and he writes as if his own ideological mind-set is axiomatic truth. Should this species of mind-set *become* a common unexamined social axiom, what passes for western civilization will indeed be in deep shit.

He finds worldliness missing from the novel because "there is no pure evil," because my "macho heroes" are basically kind-hearted, because my villains "seldom kill", because there is a "bedrock of decency", and because I portray a future universe over a thousand years from now in which opposing ideological forces never think of imposing their ideas by force. This, Platt finds an implausible picture of the possible future.

Meaning, no doubt, that the eternal human verities as Platt sees them are black-hearted sadistic villainy, murder, and war, graven into the genes of the race for all time.

Not that the above, is not a legitimate set of assumptions for portraying the human future, but it is horrifying indeed to meet the assumption that they are the *only* "realistic" parameters of future human destiny.

A World Between is meant to be a utopian novel, not *Bug Jack Barron* or *The Iron Dream*. It is basicially a democratic, libertarian, parliamentary, electoral, referendal utopia, and the fact that this seems to lack some kind of credibility as a positive possible future political structure says something perfectly ghastly about the basic spirit of western civilization. Intellectual belief and human faith in true democratic principles *is* eroding in the United States, Britain, and much of Europe, to the point, where in a curious way, one stands open to snickers at one's naivete for daring to entertain the possibility that consensual democracy may have a future.

At the same time, Platt seems to have also swallowed whole the prevailing feminist ideology which presumes to equate itself with "humanism" and proceeds to attempt to inflict *its* male role model definition on men, in Platt's case apparently quite successfully.

Platt assumes that such "macho" virtues as my male characters display are incompatible with "gentler values" and that I am therefore "hiding (my) sensitivity behind flippant macho dialogue . . ." creating a "sneaking sense of implausibility".

In other words, that authors, characters, men, who manipulate power, display manly virtues, and are passionate in strife and love cannot also lay credible claim to sensitivity and "gentler values".

Why?

Because it violates the extreme feminist stereotype of the male chauvinist pig? Because in order to be accepted as an ideologically correct post-revolutionary lover, one must eschew any ideals and virtues enformed by "machismo?"

This then, is what *A World Between* is about, at least as I intended it: democracy, programming, and yes, love.

From *A World Between*, p.290:

"Beyond any momentary issue, beyond any bug-brained ideology . . . in the end, reason sanity, love, compromise, the spirit of our democracy – these must be preserved, and these shall prevail.

. . . "Femocrats and Transcendental Scientists alike will say that my people believe this because they are stupid. I believe it too."

Norman Spinrad *New York*

Dear Sir, 9th May 1980

Regarding Tom Hosty's review of my collection, *Blood & Burning*, in *Foundation* 18:

I'd like a second opinion on whether the human protagonist in "Scream at Sea" is "alone", whether "The Master of the Hounds" in fact contains "a young couple on vacation", or "The Last Brunette" a "travelling salesman". Similarly, I'd appreciate someone's taking a look in "All for Love" for a "saboteur", and whether "the entire population of Earth" is literally engaged in "digging great pits" under the alien vessel.

I'm dismayed to find that I have written "A Scraping at the Bones" in such a way that it's possible to say that it's "about murder in a luxury apartment", when my intention was to have it be about a policeman realizing he will soon commit uxorcide for reasons that will gain him no sympathy with the public. A similar embarrassment comes over me with regard to "The Nuptial Flight of Warbirds"; I have always thought that while it does *contain* a "political and financial crisis" as a story event to which considerable wordage is devoted, what the story "concerns" is the power of media to obliterate objective content from life.

By my count, too, there is only one fantasy in the collection. I don't write many; "The Last Brunette" was one of only two done during my professional career as of the publication date of the US *Blood & Burning* reviewed by Mr Hosty. It would help me if I could have a list of any others found in the collection.

Algis Budrys *Evanston, Illinois*

Dear Malcolm Edwards, 29th May 1980

I notice my name taken in vain in several places in *Foundation* 18. Response may not, in fact, be essential; but the sparking occurred, so perhaps my synapses know more than my good sense.

But first, I must say that the piece by Gene Wolf is absolutely stunning. Its brevity notwithstanding, it is so pluperfectly Wolfeian, capturing the essence of Gene that we who have known and marvelled at him for years have always perceived, that I commend you for your good sense in preserving it in "The Profession of Science Fiction" series despite its apparent deviation from what one usually gets in these memoirs. Wolfe, for my money – and I am hardly alone in praising him wildly – bids fair to being the outstanding fantasist of the coming decade. His mind is as advanced and disparate from all other sf/fantasy writers as the mass of us are different from ordinary, well-adjusted humans. He is a writer's writer, and his new novel, *The Shadow of the Torturer*, first volume of an ambitious tetralogy, is so astonishing that many of us feel it will be *the* important writing in the genre for

some time to come, as seminal in its way as *More Than Human*, *The Demolished Man* and the writings of Sheckley or Pangborn were in theirs.

I was also delighted to see Gene take Fred Pohl to task for his persistent comment that there was nothing – during the historical period of the emergence of "the new wave" – that was too dangerous to be published in the sf magazines. Those of us who railed against the restrictions of the field at that time knew otherwise; it was not mere chance that Knight, Merril, Moorcock and myself all provided outlets for tough writing at that time. Gene's remarks are pointed, dead accurate, and historically important.

On page 37 I am horrified to encounter the information that Daniel Walther has won "the sobriquet of the 'French Harlan Ellison" for his versatility. I am horrified, because I have always understood with core certainty that comparisons like this are invidious. In this case even more than usual. Daniel is a remarkable writer, and I find linkage with him, however tenuous, quite an honor. Were my ability to read French better, I suspect I would place him high on the list of the most creative writers working *anywhere* today. As it is, my exposure to his writings has been limited to the few pieces translated into English, and to an extraordinary piece titled "The 100 Million Horses of Planet Dada" which I brought – with great joy – for *The Last Dangerous Visions*. (It will be published therein, around Christmas of 1981, in French and English translation, side-by-side). But despite having been denied the pleasures of gulping down *all* of the Walther stories, I am sufficiently impressed to find the need to call him "like" anyone (especially me) most egregious. It is enough that he is the "French Daniel Walther", and I hope in future *Foundation* will resist falling back on this kind of easy categorization. Nothing stunts the freedom of a writer to explore his/her talent like comparisons to other writers. It causes the writer purposely to avoid paths that might later branch off into uncharted territory, merely because is was noted *en passant* and with offhanded jingoism that what s/he was doing resembled something done by an earlier writer.

This horror is reinforced for me by mention of my name in connection with Chelsea Quinn Yarbo's book *Cautionary Tales* (reviewed by Andrew Kaveney). On the American paperback edition of one of Quinn's books – it may even have been this one – she was referred to as "a female Harlan Ellison". God! How insulting and demeaning and stupid! I have written her several times to apologize for the remark, even though I had absolutely nothing to do with it (the product of some pimplebrain in the blurb-writing dungeons of American publishers, I presume) and would go a long way out of my way to flense the moronic remark from the Mind of Humanity. But the invidious comparison is once again reinforced by Kaveney, who makes references to "Ellisonian hysteria".

Charming. He manages to slay both of us with the same stone.

I have no idea what "Ellisonian hysteria" is, nor do I really feel I ought to bother advising Mr Kaveney that I have *never* written a story while in a state of hysteria. All I know is is that I think it's a shitty remark: superficial, thick as a brick and impertinent. Admitting that on occasion I am all these things too does not lessen my sadness or feeling of having been kicked when I wasn't looking. It almost gets me hysterical, almost leads me to want to write a more plodding, concretized prose. More, that is, like that of Mr Kaveney.

As for K.G. Mathieson's review of *The Book of Ellison*, I cannot but agree wholeheartedly with everything said. I don't think I'm being hypocritical by saying I really cringe at the sight of the thing. I've said this to Andy Porter on

a number of occasions and, while I'll not go into the twisted machinations that led to the appearance of the book, it will not undercut candor to repeat my assertion that I was only minimally involved in its birth. For the longest time I thought it was going to help raise money for *Algol*. That it has become a soft-and hardcover book that sold extremely well and made me a nice piece of change only embarrasses me more. People are actually buying the book, and I try to pretned that it never happened. Mathieson is dead accurate: it's a Frankenstein monster of a publication, cobbled up from disparate parts that smell too much of Potter's Field.

Harlan Ellison *Sherman Oaks, California*

Dear Malcolm Edwards, 2nd June 1980

Brian Aldiss strikes an answering spark in his accusation (issue 18) that *Foundation* is duller than it was; his irritation loads Brian Stableford with more blame than he deserves (though, as we shall see, he deserves some) but with a finger firmly on the "Reviews" section Aldiss is putting pressure on the right spot.

The rest of the magazine is often pleasurable (Wolfe and Rucker in 18) and sometimes trivial (Greenland in the same issue) but in general solid. Where the reviews begin, solidarity ends. My attention was caught by Stableford's review of *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* in issue 16. It was the standard, worshipful Delany review, pointing out that a Delany work must be read word by word, pondered and ultimately comprehended only by the sweat of the intellectual brow. In return for this effort the reader will get – what? Stableford did not say. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* is dissected, we were told, but to what end? Was Delany's view penetrating or superficial, hostile or appreciative or merely the grinding of his personal semantic axe? And would one know more of Le Guin and *The Dispossessed* after reading it? Stableford did not tell us these things – these things that matter.

I quote: "'On pure Story-Telling' cuts right to the heart of the essential difference between story-telling through the medium speech and through the medium of the written word." Great! It might even be more interesting if Stableford told us what "story-telling" means in the Delany lexicon (Delany being Delany, it might very well not be what you and I mean) and whether the "difference" is critical or merely technical and what, briefly, the "difference" is. To say, in effect: "Here is this excellent essay", is neither reviewing nor criticism; it is only questionable subjective information, opinion without backing. A further quotation: "One can attack it . . . in the full confidence that it *does* have something to say, and something worth saying." Who says so? Stableford says so. On what ground? He doesn't say. Such starry-eyed staff is for fanzines.

In years of querying Delany-worshippers I have never met one capable of quoting chapter and verse to say, "This matters, this is fine work", and then explain precisely why. Like Stableford they say, "It's marvellous", and float transcendentally off.

A question: Why did not the Reviews editor observe the inadequacy of the review and ask Stableford to offer some justification, based on *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, of his stance? Writers, like labourers and short-order cooks, will get away with what you let them get away with – and will do what you want of them if you push them with plain words. David Pringle can't be blamed for what his contributors write but he can be blamed for accepting a contribution with nothing to say, and

the big names have no more right to license than the rawest fan – if anything, less. One may wonder, for instance, why John Clute is permitted to unleash so much gobbledygook in the guise of English? So – on to his review of *An Infinite Summer* (issue 18).

I rarely bother with Clute's pseudo-academic version of English as it is never spoken and, praise God, not too often written, but when he takes another to task for lack of precision it is time to examine him in his semantic habitat. Quickly we arrive at this little beauty (p.63):

> Like most British sf of any conviction, Christopher Priest's work relates voyeuristically to the genre from which it extracts its topoi, only to punish them for coming, and displays a voyeur's obsession with and obligation to but refusal of the broad noisy icons from across the waters: the Hearty Yankee catastrophes; the triumphant robinsonades; the classy aliens; the diatonic power-jigs of interstellar industry and Polesotechnic Leagues.

The first 21 words – to "topoi" – are unexceptionable, but at "only to punish them for coming" the eye pauses while the mind recalls that the "topoi" didn't come but were "extracted". Are they being punished, perhaps, for existing? Or is one to observe the sexual hint of "voyeuristically" and conclude that Clute is making an obscure joke about "coming"? My conclusion is that if interpretation is my duty, clarity is his. He follows with "obsession with and obligation to but refusal of", which is not only a clumsy piling of references back to "voyeur" but allows the reader to wonder if he means that Priest has both acknowledged and rejected his sources. A neat rick, if ineed performed.

Next: "the broad, noisy icons . . ." "Noisy"? Perhaps icons are no longer what I thought them to be. And, while adjectives are in focus, "diatonic power-jigs of interstellar industry" offers several not very practical possibilities. "Jigs" coupled with "industry" makes tangential but not very useful sense, so one is left with "jigs" as "diatonic" dance tunes. Sense? Without information on the melodic and harmonic structure of the tunes it tells us exactly nothing about industry or Polesotechnic Leagues. It is a little orphan adjective, sufficiently specialised to be noticeable, but in fact lost in a crowd of irrelevant nouns.

If Priest's not-so-difficult little sentence can give rise to a full page of rumination, what wordage might be mined from the Clute sample here quoted? A better question: Why did David Pringle not send it back to Clute for clarification? Has Clute been getting away with it for so many years, now, that no one bothers any longer to notice whether or not it makes sense? Clute's self-conscious prose is neither elegant nor accurate, merely tangled.

Further reading of the review shows Clute, after some two thousand words of Priest-bashing, allowing with insufferable condescension that this may be a worthwhile collection on the ground that it "does attempt to grapple with the complexion of the world we live in." "Complexion"? Ah, well . . . He appears to generally approve the book but has written, instead of a review, a generalized essay on Priest patronising enough to alienate readers in droves. Is he capable of a straight statement in unambigious English? Yes! In issue 16 he had three brief reviews which told clearly what one needed to know in order to avoid the books like plague carriers. Why, then, erode the reputation of better work with an empty pyrotechnic display? And why does *Foundation* put up with it? Let editors edit!

A few pages further on Kevin Smith, reviewing *The Wall Of Years*, assures us "It definitely fits sf's 'hard science' classificiation", then reveals that the "hard science" concerns time travel, "not only forwards and backwards, but sideways and into parallel and very similar worlds". One wonders what he thinks "hard science"

is or what descriptive term he would find for Clement's *Mission Of Gravity* or Clarke's *A Fall Of Moondust*. Even if David Pringle were one of those pestilential sciencefictionists who make a noisy virtue of "knowing no science" (which I don't believe) he should have noticed a howler so blatant as to destroy the credibility of the rest of the reviewer's remarks – particularly where, at the end, he calls the writing "good" in the middle of a statement as to where it fails. Or did he mean only that the syntax is correct throughout? I suppose even that counts for something these days.

One could go on indefinitely with lesser gripes – Stableford (again!) for instances, using the "fact" that Stapledon claimed that *Last And First Men* is not a novel to support a doubtful argument about the form of *Macrolife*, when Stapledon, who knew better, claimed nothing of the sort, in his "Introduction" or anywhere else – but this would quickly descend to nit picking.

Many of the reviews, notably those by Disch, Hosty and Greenland, have life in them. Others are cold porridge, and the reason may lie in that requirement once stated to me – balanced reviewing. Too many *Foundation* reviewers bend over backwards in terror of unfairness, ferreting in corners of plot and conception for plus points to balance the dreadful minuses of imitation and general dreariness, until a novel of no importance is discussed far beyond its significance or value and a potboiler gets the same attention as a major work. Elevated beyond their worth of notice in issue 18 might be mentioned *Dagger Of The Mind, The Wall Of Years, Hegira, Bander Snatch, The Grand Wheel* and – dare I whisper heresy? – *Jem*. There is much to be said for dismissing the third rate with a kick in the arse rather than a pallid attempt at rescue. In fact, Tom Hosty's dismissal of *Stardance* (justfiably lengthy because of the misguided adulation given the book) was the happiest item in the issue. And there was nothing balanced about *that* review, which was all the better for cheerful and accurate mayhem.

Why not encourage your reviewers to kick up their critical heels a little? You might in turn lead to some *real* criticism of some of the sf godlets who are (like Delany?) assumed to be beyond censure because few care to face the outraged contempt which descends on the iconoclast. (As a practising iconoclast of long standing I know whereof I speak). And then *Foundation* would actually be doing something for science fiction instead of floating with the current, publishing pleasant essays and bland reviews which encourage the belief that sf grows daily sweeter and prettier, when in fact so much is foolish, muddled, misunderstood and outright commerical.

I realize that such a letter as this should be confined to a single subject, but may I take issue with Pamela Cleaver's review of *Misplaced Persons*? (This concerns matters the editors could in no sense have been aware of).

To begin at the end, Cleaver remarks that as *Misplaced Persons* was a competition winner, she's glad she didn't see the other manuscripts. As one of the judges who selected the book (under its correct and more meaningful title of *Displaced Person*) as winner, I can assure her that bad as most of them were (dear God, how bad!) I too am glad she wasn't involved because she would certainly have missed it altogether. Pamela Cleaver, alas, has the doubtful eminence of being the only person I know of – and certainly the only published reviewer – who managed to read the book without noticing what it is about. She reviewed it as a pointless experience of a few people who fade in and out of reality for no apparent reason. In fact, the book is in the tradition of myth-creation and is an extended metaphor for teenage alienation. We three happy judges realized this without prompting and

thanked our stars for an intelligent entry.

Seen in this perspective, her comment that "there is only enough material in it for a short story; the rest is padding" is inadequate. The "padding" is a detailed and (so the teenagers tell me) pretty acurate realization of the inner turmoil of alienation and, seen in psychological terns, the "cop-out" ending reflects reasonably well the unsatisfactory recollection of attitudes fading from memory and experience. The teenagers are giving it the thumbs-up sign here in no small way – 5,000 hard-cover copies in eight months is popularity in our small population – and in matters pertaining to their own special realities they are apt to be more clear-eyed than their elders.

By the time this letter reaches you the news will be public that *Displaced Person* has won the national award as the best Australian juvenile novel of 1979, which at least backs the opinion of the Allan Marshall judges.

For those who know that Lee Harding and I have been aquainted for many years, and even live in the same street: the manuscripts were submitted for judgment without the writers' names.

I write this more to correct an unfair impression than to blame Pamela Cleaver; we have all missed the point at times. I, for instance, missed the point of *Enemies Of The System* and wrote a review I would disown if only I could. I confess I love the book little better for having Bruce Gillespie set my vision straight; I writhe at having been *insensitively* wrong. Which brings us back to Brian Aldiss, which is where I came in. . .

May you flourish on more controversy and less approval.

George Turner — *Balaclava, Victoria*

Reviews

Windows
by D.G. Compton *(Berkley/Putnam, 1979, 255pp, $10.95)*

reviewed by Tom Hosty

Windows is a novel about a man's struggle to come to terms with disablement. The plot is essentially as follows. Rod, a television reporter, has blinded himself in an access of disgust and shame at the peeping, prying nature of his work. This act frees him from the clutches of the television corporation, which has been gradually dehumanizing him over a period of years in the interests of making him a better reporter, and it allows him to return to his estranged wife for a second try at making their marriage work. But there are also, inevitably, severe difficulties: a powerful, ambitious, even ruthless public figure must learn how to live as a blind, dependent, unemployable private citizen. Much of the novel is concerned with the gradual regeneration of Rod's marriage and the equally gradual revival of his will to live. From initial despair, cynicism and impotence he passes through a succession of emotional phases – a suicide attempt, stoicism, hysterical cheerfulness – each less stable and less rewarding for himself, his wife and child than the preceding one. His career is complicated by his once more becoming a public figure, albeit in a new sense: his self-blinding has been seen by many as a political act; less a private expiation than a symbolic protest against the media and the consumerist mentality they serve and foster. Radical students and hippies adopt him as a guru; right-wing pressure groups label him a dangerous subversive. There are obscene phone calls, sniper attacks, crowds gather round his home and fighting breaks out in the streets. Nevertheless, it is out of this unwelcome renewal of his public role that salvation eventually emerges: a rest-cure holiday in Italy turns into a terrorist kidnapping, and it is only in the effort to protect his family from the consequences of his own notoriety that Rod can at last discard self-pity and rediscover the possibility of meaningful action and a meaningful life.

A number of points emerge from such a summary. First of all (given *Foundation's* particular interest), the book is not science fiction. Putnam's appear a little self-conscious in this matter: they insist on Compton's reputation as "a premier science fiction writer" on the publicity handout, but change this to "speculative fiction writer" on the dustjacket. The novel is described as "futuristic", whatever that might mean. It is a sequel to a science fiction novel, *The Unsleeping Eye*, and therefore, presumably, science fiction? Not really – the science-fictional element in the earlier novel, Rod's TV-camera eyes and the issues of privacy, publicity and the admass mentality which they embody, are missing. The book is set in Compton's usual version of the near future, which is a straight exaggeration of today's headlines, with escalating street-violence and terrorism, motoring a thing of the past, Italy no longer a nation-state but a straggle of bandit-baronies, marriage a renewable five-year contract, and so on. None of this background really impinges on the intensely private and largely internal drama of the main characters, and the book could easily have been set in the present.

Not that any of this constitutes a criticism. It is, after all, quite possible for a book to be good without being science fiction. Which brings one to a consideration of how good *Windows* actually is, judged as a novel. There is a lot to be said for it, at least on technical grounds. The prose is fluent and versatile, and there is an interesting use of dual viewpoint, the story advancing alternately in Rod's first person narration and a third person narrative focussed on his wife; this device, besides allowing the interplay of "objective" and "subjective" estimates of events and permitting a more complex account of certain crucial moments, also mercifully gives Rod's story a visual dimension. Where the book fails to satisfy is in the terrible stock quality of the story itself. The detail is often excellent: the moments of friction between individuals: Tracey's continual veering between sympathy for and determination to reject her husband; most of all, the moment-by-moment movements of Rod's mind between hope and despair, pride and self-loathing, posturing arrogance and pathetic weakness; all are delicately grasped and unsensationally set down. It is the larger framework that fails to convince adequately. The whole movement is too predictable: the long slide from decisive action into cynicism and self-hatred, the sudden arrival of crisis and the rehabilitation of the crippled hero in the face of the need for action. It is consoling. It may even be true. But the story has been told often and better.

When it becomes evident in the later chapters that Rod is being compared with his expatriate friend-turned-kidnapper Marcus, Rod's physical blindness against Marcus' disillusioned refusal to see anything good in mankind, Rod's temporary self-hatred, which he transcends when his loved ones are in danger, against Marcus' final surrender to cynicism and self-loathing, the weight of *significance* begins to pile up. One thinks of allegorical diptychs, or Shakespeare. The echoes are unfortunate. Rod's blindness ceases to be entirely a physical crippling to which he must accommodate himself, and assumes symbolic undertones. We remember the great traditional blinded heroes. Marcus spends his free time making sculptures, all of which are in fact based on the forms of windows. Rod, faced with the corruptions and nastiness of a consumerist society in which even human misery becomes another marketable product, puts out his own two "windows" but retains his moral sense: Marcus sells out to the forces of corruption, becomes a cynical gun-runner, and consoles himself for his loss of moral vision with mock windows through which nothing can be seen. Worse and worse. The final effect is unsteady – the book wobbles between symbolic allegory and psychological portraiture, without ever settling into either mode. On the whole, the second option would probably have been more rewarding. Certainly it is from the psychological detail that the book draws most of its strength.

Ascendencies
by D.G. Compton *(Gollancz, 1980, 208pp, £5.95)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

A bit of a change for Compton: usually concerned with projecting current trends into nearly probable futures, this time he jumps the gap into complete improbability and, because it's incalculable, into mystery too. As usual we're only a few years ahead, in 1986, but since 1983 "a dust-like . . . non-toxic fissionable material, foreign to the earth's composition" has been snowing down thickly out of thin air over large

random areas of the globe every month or so. Free fuel from outer space, neither animal, vegetable, nor mineral. The Central Generating Authority pays for any that falls on private property, and what you can't be bothered to shovel up will do your roses a treat. It's called, equally improbably, Moondrift.

Factor one, and the economy is thriving, business booming, leisure time expanding. Factor two is uncomfortably symmetrical to factor one, and may or may not be connected in a grim quid pro quo. People keep vanishing, *into* thin air, again at random, always to the sound of heavenly choirs and the smell of synthetic essence of roses. The special effects, apparently hallucinatory, seize large areas for four or five minutes at a time.

.The Church and other Insurance Companies immediately declare that Disappearance, however celestial it seems, is not death. Richard Wallingford is a Claims Verification Inspector checking that anyone demanding payment of a life policy actually has a body to show and that the body is the insured one. Mr Wallingford calls upon Mrs Trenchard whose obnoxious husband has apparently broken his neck. A hundred thousand pounds is the figure. There are complications.

As ever, Compton is examining people, what they do to each other, what they say, and especially what they think. *Ascendancies* is a not-love story. The tension is astonishing. It's not a gripping book, but one that demands concentration: you have to grip it. It took hard thought and probably hard work to write, that much is obvious. The drama is concentrated, on Mr Wallingford and Mrs Trenchard, two utterly different characters. The vital, selfish, aggressive insurance salesman, and the calculating, rich, frightened widow. They draw together and swing apart, touching unexpectedly, missing by miles or by an inch. Secondary characters slot in like cogs. The whole movement is dynamic but enclosed, like a piece of clockwork.

Compton's language is concentrated and interlocking too, increasing its tendency to repetition and allusion.

> It was dusk now, and the street lamp outside the house cast four precise oblongs of light on the living room carpet. She sat down tidily on her folded-up leges on the white hide sofa, and stared at the oblongs. If there had been a few more of them she could have played noughts-and-crosses. But not on her own. You always won if you played noughts-and-crosses on your own.

He lingers over words, probing them for every last nuance. That was Mrs Trenchard, who is stifled and bored, but ennui is not the privilege of the rich and sensitive. This is Mr Wallingford, trailing a blackmailer:

> She was almost dancing now as she went happily down the street. Not that he blamed her. He'd be dancing too, if he'd just picked up a buckshee two thousand . . .
>
> Except that he wasn't. And he'd picked up forty – the cheque was at home in the pocket of his Italian suit. And he wasn't dancing. But then, he never had. Not like that. Not that he could remember.

It would be easy to justify this chronic dullness as characterization. These people are demoralised, not yet adjusted to a life which is both plentiful and uncertain, a three-day working week and a plunge in life expentancy. But I suspect that the boredom is in the author too, and not entirely under his control. Compton flirts with the banal. When it works the banal is transformed, stands out in high relief. Very often it doesn't, and the flatness is appalling. I imagine Compton depresses himself hypnotically as he writes. He loves to go on like this, reproducing a character's internal monologue, or turning his words and phrases back on him.

His uneducated characters, like Mr Wallingford, use brief, choice clichés: "It's quicker in the long run. Gets things over with. Know what I mean?'" Educated ones, like Mrs Trenchard, use terse, gnomic allusions, manipulating subtle innuendo if only to themselves: "Anyway, *why* didn't she want to go abroad? Because the Saturday vegetables were really her limit, and even the country was straining things?" Sometimes it's pure Pinter, or even more like Eliot, his proles and neurasthenics.

All of which is to take *Ascendancies* as Compton presents it, as a tight, vivid psychological investigation, mundane fiction, against an improbable futuristic backdrop. Far be it from me to whistle up the old red herring, but – is it necessarily science fiction? I haven't checked very detail, but I believe the story could be seamlessly transferred to, say, 1966. The legal peculiarities of 1986 really don't provde unparallelled conditions. I'm not raising an objection. The herring *is* a red one because we now know better. But it does leave the fainter question of why Compton bothered with Moondrift and Disappearances at all. They contribute a certain moral and symbolic shade to the story, but a rather pastel one; and there were plenty of alternative sources of paranoia even in 1966. Whatever the answer, Compton has toned up his style and judged the balance nicely.

Does Anyone Else Have Something Further to Add?
by R.A. Lafferty *(Dobson, 1979, 273pp, £5.25)*

reviewed by Dave Langford

Somewhere on the outskirts of the sf City, rather far from the ten-a-penny blast pads, power plants and computer installations, R.A. Lafferty operates a strange little pub. Good booze is served, tall tales are told and (to steal a phrase from this book), they take the sky off early in the morning so you can get as high as you want all day long. Life is fine, but death doesn't bother anyone; when immortality becomes available Lafferty folk merely nod and remark that it's not such a bad idea. Visitors to this pixilated zone may detect echoes of Chesterton or Hemingway, but Lafferty's style and syntax are very much his own. Visitors may complain "This is not reasonable", or "Such events could never occur": these spoilsports are blandly ignored.

Lafferty deals in odd people and odd events, with deep naiveté and at the same time deep cynicism. "About a Secret Crocodile", the first of these sixteen "stories about secret places and mean men" (these categories being distinguished by typeface) is an excellent example. It opens by describing a handful of secret societies . . .

> There is a secret society of seven men that controls the finances of the world. This is known to everyone but the details are not known. There are some who believe that it would be better if one of those seven men were a financier.

In a page and a half of similar squibs there are more such naive, or cynical, little jokes: not so many as to conceal Lafferty's conviction that this is an entirely reasonable way to view the world. Last comes the society called Crocodile, which controls the attitudes and dispositions of the world by its dissemination of subtle catchwords and phrases. This is stated; it is a fact; you take it or leave it. Is Lafferty tickling us with a feather or a razor? Oddness piles on oddness as the Secret Crocodile finds itself thwarted by three ordinary (almost) folk whose

comtempt can wither the most potent slogan or catchword. Presently the servants of the Crocodile – blandly presented as harassed admen – track down and disable the three.

> . . . The Purposive Accident was very well programmed. There was no great amount of blood poured out. No persons were killed except several uninvolved bystanders. The secret three were left alive and ambulant and scathed only at their points of strength.

And that is that. "The trouble is over with." The world runs smoothly once more; deadpan to the last, Lafferty leaves us this as a happy ending. Except that almost as an afterthought, he tosses in one more paragraph:

> In our opening catalog we forgot one group. There is another secret society in the world composed of the good guys and good gals. It has no name that we have ever heard except just the Good Guys and Good Gals. At the moment this society controls nothing at all in the world. It stirs a little, though. It may collide, someday, even with the Secret Crocodile itself.

How does he get away with it? (The wide-eyed rhetorical question is a favourite Lafferty trick, by the way.) This is the flavour of the man; and it is strangely addictive. With its oddness, perversity and whimsicality it is also easy to dislike should one choose. Michael Frayn put his finger on or near it when discussing J.B. "Beachcomber" Morton:

> I think one would know Mr Morton was a Catholic from reading him, even without any direct reference. There is an echo in his work of that tone of voice, hard to describe yet curiously distinctive, which sounds through a great many of the English Catholic writers. Perhaps it is a certain intellectual perverseness. I find it can become irritating, particularly when it takes the form, as it does, not in Morton, but in Chesterton and Graham Greene, of a galloping obsession with paradox.

Certainly Lafferty enjoys paradox, like and quotes Chesterton, and is a Catholic, without being a Catholic apologist in the no-holds-barred manner of GKC. Those who dislike him on these grounds alone are undoubtedly minions of the Secret Crocodile. His squinty viewpoint is unique: it can twist obliqueness into incomprehensibility, though happily not in this collection. The lesser stories here seem to fail through not being weird enough.

Perhaps half of them are topnotch Lafferty. Besides the Crocodile tale, the best – meaning my personal favourites – are "Nor Limestone Islands", sending up the "I wouldn't believe it even if I saw it" attitude with the aid of a flying island and a thirty-million-ton pink limestone pagoda; "Boomer Flats", affirming our less likely links with the Abominable Snowman; "In the Garden", with the most crooked and booby-trapped Eden setting ever met with; "Groaning Hinges of the World". which explains how whole countries of people can be exchanged for identical-looking monsters when the world's hinges turn beneath them . . .

> As to the Germanies, those hinges in the Carnic Alps and in the Wangeroog are of badly rusted iron. Nobody can tell when they turned last, but should they turn now (the shape they are in) it would make a groaning heard around the world . . . Is there any report of such a thing happening in our own days or those of our forefathers?

Each story goes down smoothly once the mental focus has adjusted to Lafferty's deranged universe; each contains sharp little points both buried and blatantly exposed, like the fanged snake customarily served in one's beer in Boomer Flats. The Lafferty world offers allegorical comments on the real one but is most definitely not part of it – an exception, "Seven Story Dream"

from a detective magazine, fails to cast the usual spell simply because it's set in 'reality', and is the least successful story here. Others – "Pig in a Pokey", "The Wierdest World" – though undeniably Lafferty, are earlier pieces which to the detriment resemble ordinary sf.

This is not the best of all Lafferty collections (*Nine Hundred Grandmothers* is better), but it's very welcome. This profoundly dotty (and dottily profound) author deserves more attention in the UK – especially from those most pernicious limbs of the Secret Crocodile, the paperback publishers.

Timescape
by Gregory Benford *(Simon and Schuster, 1980, $13.95; Gollancz, 1980, 416pp, £6.50)*

reviewed by David N. Samuelson

Is it really appropriate for science fiction to be about science? Ever since Hugo Gernsback, someone's been arguing over whether the first word in "science fiction" is anything but an honorific, or – in Alexei and Cory Panshin's book – a curse. Gregory Benford has been known to straddle that line himself, declaring himself a "hard science fiction" writer, a member of a class of which there are no members, since fantasy is essential, requiring fancy footwork to cover over the questions science cannot (yet) answer.

But being a practising physicist and a conscientious artist, concerned with the knowledge won from experience, Benford has tried at times to make science central to his fiction, almost to the point of excluding the fantasy altogether. Only a careful reading reveals that "White Creatures" (*New Dimensions* 5) actually has a future setting, and changes outside the obsessions of its central character. The forthcoming "Exposures" is almost entirely limited to the speculative hypotheses of its narrator's internal monologue.

Benford has relied on hard science in previous novels too. But they were all space opera, to a greater or lesser extent, involved with planetary exploration *(Jupiter Project)*, communication with aliens (*In the Ocean of Night*, *If the Stars are Gods)*, even interspecies warfare (*The Stars in Shroud*, nee *Deeper than the Darkness).* All take place far enough away to make the science almost a curiosity, fantastic data from alien sources which barely impinges on the here and now.

At moments, a character might stop and reflect, taking time out from other adventures to actually do some science, observing, hypothesizing, testing, before he had a result worth announcing. For some readers, this slowed up the action, as in for example *In the Ocean of Night.* But in *Timescape* this *is* the action, in so far as it departs from living in the real world with all of its demands and distractions.

The science fiction of *Timescape* is, loosely speaking, time travel, complete with paradoxes, both potential and actual. Technically, it's time *communication,* by means of a technique that's dramatically plausible but theoretically impossible. Scientists in Cambridge, England (1998) try to bombard indium antinomide in La Jolla, California (1963), with tachyons, theoretical particles that can only travel faster than light, hence backwards in time, directed in space to where Earth was at the target time. Success is urgent, since life, or at least civilization, is

threatened by a biochemical reaction that might be reversible before it gets started, i.e. "if only we knew then what we know now".

Doesn't sound promising? Sounds like an interminable lecture? like one of a dozen past novels of ecotastrophe? or a story in which a nameless technician discovers a strange message, precipitating a successful rescue by some equivalent of the US Cavalry coming over the rise? It's nothing of the kind; any of those kinds.

What Benford has done to spotlight this action is to write a full-fledged novel about people who live, who make love, who fight for their identity and survival, in the context of doing for a living an intellectually obsessing activity known as science, with all of the attendant politics of the scientific community, past and future.

The people of 1998 are, understandably, on the edge of desperation, Cambridge is beset by shortages – of food, electricity, raw materials, law and order – but the academic middle class is surviving, in a civilized, barely flappable way. Signs of the times include squatters occupying deserted homes, the new King playing down his coronation ceremony, John Renfrew accompanying his son on a father-son mercury-scavenging hunt through the city sewers.

The most serious threat, a new cloud-borne life form resulting from ocean pollution, is officially known to very few beyond the Emergency Council, whose efforts to fight on all fronts both the causes and effects of the past's profligacy seem doomed. But that Renfrew's tachyon experiment is worth supporting is agreed by Council member Ian Peterson and visiting American physicist Gregory Markham, who seek help from British, American and Continental sources. Crossing paths in the laboratory and elsewhere, they are not all-consumed by the experiment; they also live their own lives and make their own plans, some of which come to nought.

The situation in La Jolla, thirty-six years earlier, seems contrasting in the extreme. America has just entered the Sixties (the book's action starts in 1962, making 1980 a midpoint between its two presents), ebulliently optimistic. Nowhere is it more so than at the La Jolla campus of the University of California (now UC San Diego), madly recruiting science faculty, with Nobel prizewinners seemingly around every corner.

Heady with this atmosphere, Gordon Bernstein is an Assistant Professor of Physics, dependent on the good graces of senior faculty not only for tenure and promotion, but also for research grant support and approval. A recent arrival from New York, Gordon is also taken with the hedonism and eccentricity of Southern California, most blatantly embodied by his live-in girl friend, but he is not completely emancipated from his ethnic and geographic roots.

Bernstein is the reluctant recipient of Renfrew's inexplicable and garbled message, for which he must fight for acceptance and interpretation, against the weight of the scientific establishment and the publicized wrong-guesses of well-meaning colleagues and competitors. Against the background of rising cultural malaise (American "advisors" are in Vietnam, Goldwater conservatism is rising, the counterculture is just getting off the ground), Gordon risks his future for the sake of a puzzle that won't go away, and that turns out to involve the risk of everybody's future.

All of this is treated with loving, sensuous detail, much of it taken from life. A physics professor at UC Irvine, Benford is familiar with both Cambridge, where he has taught and studied, and La Jolla, where he was a graduate student at the time

of the novel. Numerous real-life scientists make cameo appearances, including Benford and his brother (under another name), and a headline-hunting send-up of Carl Sagan.

The imaginary details are also in place, however, from Berstein's confrontations with his mother and family over living with a *shiksa*, to Peterson's fulfilling long-laid plans to survive the catastrophe on his family's country estate. But central to the book is the recurrent experience of *doing science*, in the laboratory, in the classroom, in the colloquium, in the board room, and especially in the mind.

Science is not a swashbuckling adventure, but an intellectual activity, and one in which a single flash of revelation may lead to endless philosophical repercussions and even mystical overtones, but seldom before a thousand obstacles, rebuffs, distractions, wrong turnings, and after-the-fact reservations. For all of its vaunted teamwork, science is also an essentially solitary activity, like life; in *Timescape* the "community of scholars" continually threatens to turn into a school of sharks, just as the traditionally sought-after "love of a good woman" can be transformed into a model of miscommunication.

The result is a thoroughly engrossing novel, about interesting and real-seeming people, in an intellectually and emotionally charged setting, or pair of settings. At the least, it's the best science fiction novel since *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, but there really is no precedent for *Timescape* in science fiction. The closest competition outside science fiction, the novels of C.P. Snow, are no match for Benford in vision or style. If Simon and Schuster and Gollancz are at all successful in marketing it as general fiction, it should be the next big book about which people will say "This can't be science fiction . . . it's good."

Cosmic Encounter
by A.E. van Vogt *(Doubleday, 1980, 209pp, $8.95)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

This book is set in 1704 A.D. – but then, it has to be, because the first thing that happens in it is that time collapses, and 1704 A.D. is all that is left of it. The people who are/were actually alive at that time feel no particular ill-effects except that the more sensitive among them become aware of ghostly memories of personal futures which are quickly being falsified as events take a new course. The reason events are taking a new course is that various oddments from the far future have been thrown back into 1704 by the collapse of time. One is a 25th century battleship manned by robots who were/will be (in their own time) at war with men. One is a small Transit-Craft from a more distant future. One is a 23rd century New Yorker named Abdul Jones. None of these refugees is aware of what has happened or why, but they quickly figure out certain aspects of their predicament, and slowly arrive at the conclusion that a key figure in the new situation is one Nathan Fletcher, a disinherited English aristocrat and one-time friend of Queen Anne, presently captain of a pirate ship. When we first meet him he is engaged in committing a particularly brutal murder, having been commissioned to do so by the victim's nearest and dearest, but we gather that he is really not such a bad sort after all. (In fact, as the novel progresses, the author makes more and more oblique comments about morality, and we are led to believe that this has something to do with the meaning of it all.) The plot is – as usual in a van Vogt novel –

utterly nonsensical. The characters act without rhyme or reason, although we are perpetually assured that they are following the dictates of some obscure logic. The things that happen *to* the characters also happen without rhyme or reason, and the particular gimmick of *Cosmic Encounter* is that every now and again time collapses again, wiping out a few chapters save for the ghostly memories that preserve continuity of information if not of action. For some odd reason, time keeps collapsing back to different moments, but that's time-collapse for you – you never can tell when you're up to.

Serious students of van Vogt will be unsurprised to learn (and I am surely giving no secrets away by saying it) that Nathan Fletcher is slowly transmogrified into a superperson, and that the *deus ex machina* at the end unscrambles everything simply by stating baldly that everything is unscrambled. ("Everthing", of course, refers not merely to disinherited aristocrats, unwitting time-travellers, murder-victims not *quite* brought back to life and the fact that the universe has collapsed, but also to the entire future history of the human race, which is purged of what Van Vogt terms "infantile destructiveness" and becomes "responsible".)

One has to admire van Vogt. He doesn't write very well, but whereas common mortals with this affliction try to cope with it in the ordinary, tedious way (i.e. by trying to write better) van Vogt goes to extraordinary lengths to turn his incompetence into an advantage. He has difficulty in saying what he means – well then, obscurity will become the hallmark of his prose, and he will cultivate it assiduously. He cannot characterise properly – well then, let the motivations of his characters be relentlessly absurd, let their illogicality at least be blessed with the compulsion of obsession. He loves to throw into his plots any and every idea that occurs to him during the time of writing, whether it fits or not and despite the fact that it prohibits him ever making a sensible resolution of the plot and its contents – well then, forget fitting things together and to hell with sensible resolutions; make disorder the rule and go in for magical formulae whose mere recitation will be said (no proof need be given) to have made everything satisfactory. Tell the readers *that* while staring them straight in the eye, and tell them that your climactic miracle, as well as resolving your irresolvable plot, has also resolved all the problems of mankind, and maybe a few of God's as well, and even though they will *know* that you are telling the most blatant lies imaginable, they will have to respect you for it. Who else has ever told them such breathtakingly appalling lies?

It isn't Literature, but in its own sweet way, it's magnificent.

The Berkley Showcase, Vol.1
edited by Victoria Schochet and John Silbersack *(Berkley, 1980, 280pp. $1.95)*

reviewed by Roz Kaveney

This undistinguished production is intended to show "the vast range of what is deep, incandescent and exciting in the new Science Fiction". Very disappointingly, particularly given the generally high quality of Berkley's list and the acuteness that its editors have shown in contracting young authors, what the collection actually shows is a fairly comprehensive range of what is shallow, foggily written, tawdry, boring and modish in a contemporary science fiction that has all the faults of the old with a whole new set of vices tacked on. Most of these eight young

writers have yet to make their mark: Elizabeth Lynn has elsewhere shown that she can do sufficiently better than this that should be ashamed of herself for "The Gods of Reorth", while Orson Scott Card has made what is not so much a mark as a sort of unsightly stain. The overwhelming features of these stories are a leaden portentousness and a gross sentimentality which tries to cut its own sickliness with touches of unpleasant toughmindedness – usually manifested in loving depiction of physical or mental brutalization.

The locus classicus for all of these is "Sergeant Pepper" by Karl Hansen, an unpleasant anecdote about Vietnam dressed up with messy acrylic space-opera trappings and a very sub-Hemingway terseness of tone. And splitting of sentences. Into sense units . . . The eponymous villainess, an aristocrat sentenced to the army medical corps for killing her husband, works off her homicidal tendencies by drugging, with her hypodermic fingernails, one combat soldier after another into heroism and death. The enemy of this unsavoury army are mutant colonists of a partially terraformed Titan who are known as elves; one of their favourite booby-traps involves exploding mutant koala bears; there is little indication that this story is *meant* to be funny. But why not let Mr Hansen and his narrator speak for themselves:

> Maybe they mourned their dead – the ones we'd killed that day. Maybe that's why they wailed so. It didn't matter.
>
> I was only interested in gambling and in playing the game.
>
> No matter how much psionic influence I tried to exert on my poker crystal I couldn't transmute the queen to the jack of diamonds . . . "Never draw to an inside straight" was the only advice my old man ever gave me before he died. Sometimes I wish I'd listened.

What is objectionable about this is not simply that the tone is unmodified contemporary Tough Guy dotted with raisins of futurology. It is, I suppose, quite conceivable that the convict soldiers of a caste-ridden world state, soldiers surgically modified, psionically trained and coked to the gills, might talk in a style which could usefully and convincingly be represented in such a way. It is not so self-evidently the case that a writer can merely opt to do it as an easy course and leave it at that. It needs work . . . Mr Hansen also has a taste for leaden exposition – more about those koalas:

> Their modifications were more than those required to adapt them to the surface of Titan. Sure, they had respiratory and digestive functions switched like all Titanians; they breathed their food and ate oxygen . . . Instead of storing free oxygen bound in brown adipose tissue, as did other Titanian creatures, airbears secreted it in distensible bladders that trailed from their backs.

What really makes that passage is the "Sure". Mr Hansen knows that he is boring the pants off us and feels the need to stick in a little folksiness. And then the need to explain unnecessarily what he meant about the respiratory and digestive functions in case we are really dim . . . But what did the koalas do about their eucalyptus? . . .

More about the long hard road of duty from Howard Waldrop in one of the comparatively least objectionable stories, the unpromisingly titled "Billy Big-Eyes". This tells of how one of the caste of the space pilots mutated to see all those useful spectra that get you around space without falling down black holes – and blind to boring old light – searches against orders for the betrothed who has rejected him and gone missing. Back in Mission Control various of his relatives discuss Billy's past, the history of their caste, stellar physics and other topics which just happen to come up. Waldrop has a gratingly neat last line, "Outside the music

of the spheres hurt his eyes", the leaden predictability of which typifies the story's stylistic and other longueurs. Like his associate, George R.R. Martin, Waldrop is so determined to break our hearts that he slips all too often into a sort of fine writing which attempts to justify paragraphs of stodge with one dubiously meaty image.

Yet more of the "stern daughter of the voice of God" in Elizabeth Lynn's tale of a longlived member of a corps of interstellar watchers. This heroine is anguished about the decision of her superiors that the simple pastoral folk among whom she dwells have got to be brutalized by their neighbours for the sake of the free market or something, but protesting slightly, retires to observe from her cave. When her wisewoman sweetheart is messily killed she loses her cool and inflicts nasty biological penalties on the enemy. Here too we have the last line dropping into place like a billiard ball at the end of a mediocre break; here too we the indiscriminate salting of the narrative with little nuggets of imagery; here too we have a relentless commitment to showing vice in all its gore and intensity even at the expense of showing virtue as idiotically ineffective. It has been said before in these pages – but Elizabeth Lynn will not fulfil her obvious promise until she finds something that she actually *wants* to write about. Though "The Gods of Reorth" is the best story in the book, this is not a recommendation.

"The Princess and the Bear" by the egregious and omnipresent Orson Scott Card is a pleasant enough little fable low on his usual unpleasing obsession with mutilation. This tale of a princess and her suitors is an odd blend of Eleanor Farjeon and Micky Spillane, which ends in a deathbed marriage and not a dry eye in the house. "Lance the Lizard" by Roland Antony Cross is an amiable bit of druggy whimsy without point or plot or, ultimately, interest; "Last Things" by John Kessel a vapidly deep piece about Men confronting death. Janet Morris has already achieved an odd sort of reputation for *High Couch of Silistria* and its S/M-clogged sequels and in "Raising the Green Lion" goes through a series of alchemical rigmaroles in a clotted prose that may be appropriate to her subject matter but defeats comprehension. "Stepfather Bank" by David Andreissen is an action-packed melodrama in which a subversive calypso singer overthrows the Universal Bank which runs the world and kills you for overdrawing. Written thirty years ago the story would have been admirable for its sense of adventure and naive charm. Written now it is merely cheap; martyrdom does not hurt and is merely a step to greater success; solutions as easy as this are just not satisfactory when presented in a cynically flip "take it or leave it" voice.

This book is not only unsatisfactory but actually rather distasteful because of a combination of commercialism with moral pretension. Artistic pretension has been left way behind. The work is adequate as writing for the most part and the witless facility which hides some of the faults of some of the writers some of the time is part and parcel of a shabby attitude to art and life which shows perpetually through. Life is easly, moral choice is easy, writing is easy: writing science fiction is easiest of all.

Eyes of Amber
by Joan D. Vinge *(Signet, 1979, 248pp, $1.95)*

reviewed by Ann Collier

> We are all on a one-way trip (to infinity) . . . The only choice we really have is to make the best of whatever options the choices we've made already have left to us.
> (Afterword to "View from a Height").

This quotation, though inelegantly written, highlights one of the collection's main themes, the agonizing process of making moral choices, sometimes of far-reaching significance, and of facing change and adaptation. The characters have complex but readily identifiable motives and emotions and their concerns are about ageing and loneliness, about ambition determining ethics, about the need to escape from the pressures of life. But whilst the actors are recognizably human, the sets are extravagantly and opulently alien. Exotic landscapes, inhabited by fully realized creatures, are presented in a variety of forms. The history and culture is sensitively and unobtrusively introduced into the story so as not to detract from the pace of the action and adventure. Superb descriptions of the brilliance, colour and dynamics of deep space are of crucial relevance to the story line but also important in their own right.

The themes of alien contact and alienation are also central to the collection. "Eyes of Amber" is the story of a linguist on earth communicating, through probes landed on Titan, with T'uupieh, a female inhabitant who, in the belief that the probe is a demon, appeases it, cherishes it and is fascinated by it. Because of this belief, the linguist has the opportunity to dissuade T'uupieh from killing her sister and brother-in-law, a baron who has seized her lands. Contemporary liberal horror at merely waiting for this deed to take place wrestles with a reluctance to interfere in the value system of another planet. This story opens like a fairy tale with a beggar woman in rags shuffling down a silent street. The presence of powerful robber barons and outlaw bands suggest a medieval atmosphere which contrasts to great effect with the advanced technology of the control room from which communication is directed.

In "To Bell the Cat", the alien contact is two-fold. The obvious aliens are the troglodytes whose survival in a natural nuclear reactor makes them a subject of study. Their communication is poetic and telepathic and not immediately understandable to the reader. But the more interesting alien is Piper Alvarian Jary, whose support for a dictator involved such monstrous crimes as to justify the punishment of being sentenced for life to serve as a guinea pig at a biomedical research unit. The power the researcher has over him is immense but, curiously, torturer and victim have an interdependent relationship. Both, it seems, are so alienated from the mainstream of humanity that they become as alien as the troglodytes.

Similarly in "View from a Height", the central character is also estranged from the human race but here it is by reasons of physical isolation. The narrator is a scientist making the one-way trip beyond the Solar System and finding that initial excitement at the possibilities it offers is overcome by memories of always feeling apart and isolated. Born with no natural immunity to disease, she has spent all her life in a plastic bubble, never knowing the comfort of another human touch. Beyond the point of no return for her, a cure is discovered on earth. Parts of this story are harrowing, especially as the story is written in the first person and

has a very direct and personal impact.

In "Media Man" the alienation is within the central character who has sacrificed integrity to get a job promoting the interests of company boss. News and company publicitv have become indistinguishable and he keeps his job by being totally obedient to the wishes of his boss until this means collusion in murder. Alienation from oneself is also dealt with in "The Crystal Ship". Human society on an alien planet becomes fragmented and divided and, finding a scapegoat in the native inhabitants, resorts to genocide. The human survivors take to drugging themselves to avoid "the unaccustomed burden of grief and reality" but the heroine comes to realise the emptiness and phoniness of the drug-induced "dreams" and sets out to discover by contact with the last survivor of human/alien parents how the situation arose. Outcasts and friendless, this couple find in telepathic communication a way of re-establishing contact with their real selves. The male/female relationship which is the medium for communication is also crucial in "Eyes of Amber" and in the final story, "Tin Soldier" whose central character ages more slowly than normal because of artificial limbs. As others grow old and see him apparently unchanged by the years, they come to treat him as an institution and not as a sentient male. His loneliness is partially dispelled by falling in love but his girlfriend belongs to a space crew and spends long periods away. This story deals, almost in passing, with role reversal since it is the women who are better physically adapted to space-travel and the men who provide temporary and casual sexual services. Joan Vinge manages with equal ease to convey the bawdy barrack-room conversation of the women, the excitement of the heroine, a poet, at the splendour of space and the sentimentality which makes this, in some ways, an old fashioned love story.

Fratricide, mass murder, brutality, lonliness and pain. There is much that is depressing in this collection but the overall tone is one of optimism and it is a reflection of Joan Vinge's skill that this does not seem facile. The "other", be it extraterrestial or human, can be reached by sensitive communication normally conducted within a relationship whose participants represent different cultures or attitudes, but this must be genuine communication, not the voyeurism proposed by the project director in "Eyes of Amber". Wanting to transmit to the world the massacre planned by T'uupieh, his justification is that it is "a demonstration of a unique, alien, socio-cultural condition". Compulsive viewing it would undoubtedly be but compulsive because of the vicarious participation of the viewers.

Joan Vinge's achievement in this collection is to communicate to the reader in a variety of styles and stories, all interesting, thought-provoking and skilfully written, the not entirely original thought that the alien exists as much within each individual and within society as it does beyond the confines of this planet.

Magic Time
by Kit Reed *(Berkley Putnam, 1980, 268pp, $10.95)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Happy Habitat is the Disneyland of the 1990s. Run by a squabbling family whose mother's name is Dearest and whose father is a cheap and not very intelligent suitcase, it specializes in silver roller-coasters and walking litter-bins shaped like pelicans. It also operates a series of fantasy environments where you can simulate

yourself. Or should that be stimulate? No. Of course, it's sinister. Guests who pay enough can enjoy naughtier games, like killing real people or even water-buffalo. And hardly anyone is aware that in a secluded area of the park is Golden Acres, where you can send the old folks, windfalls of the autumn of life, and *never have to visit them again!*

Evaline lives in Golden Acres, put out to grass by her guilty offspring. Undaunted, she has everything lifted that can be lifted and joins in the gay octogenarian whirl of silicon and speed. But her friends keep *disappearing . . .*

Lucia di Lammermoor Finley starts out as one of the undercover cops who are there to make sure none of the guests enjoys himself too much and to bop any reluctant extras in the secret sex and death scenes. She has a red mane and a black hood, but is not happy in her work, partly because of:

Kaa Naa Mahadevan, a diminutive Indian who has thrust his country into the industrial front line by telling everyone to burn cow dung. He dotes on Luce and is happy when she shoves him in the face.

So. Boone, Evaline, Luce, Kaa Naaji. An American reader complained to me recently that there's too much plot description in the average English fiction review. Fortunately, Linda, I can spare you the synopsis in this one, because *Magic Time* doesn't have a plot. (It doesn't have any characters either, but you have to allow the critic one fallacy or he'd never have anything to say.) The action consists entirely of these four escaping from inadequately guarded rooms and running for miles along corridors. Granny Evaline keeps up pretty well: it must be all those bennies and the restorative surgery. In any case the others all conduct long conversations as they run, which probably slows them down a bit. I remember at several points they take on armed guards and win, and at another they meet a Chinese carnival dragon whose deadly teeth they avoid by running *past* it, leaving it *unable to turn around* in that constricting corridor – nifty strategy, eh? I also seem to remember somebody being chased round in circles by a robot hamster, also with deadly teeth.

I hope I'm not giving you the wrong impression. This is all utterly serious. The air conditioning cannot whisk away the bitterness of the angst, the smell of corruption of Happy Habitat, into whose heart of darkness these joggers yearn to drive their stake. Three of them actually seek their own destruction in the attempt (ah, but Linda, I don't tell you which ones succeed!). Probably they are all consumed by despair at the wretchedness of the book they find themselves in, and frantic to find a way out. But here comes the delightfully bizarre twist (it says here): where is the boundary of Happy Habitat? Which is the illusion, which the reality?

I suppose there'll be a reader somewhere for whom *Magic Time* will seem original and imaginative. If anyone's interested, the formula is equal parts *Logan's Run* and *Westworld* with a spoonful each of McGoohan's *The Prisoner* and Aldiss's "Not for an Age". Neither shaken nor stirred. Philip Dick could have got the whole thing done in half the length and nobody would have minded at all, least of all me.

Jailbird
by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. *(Jonathan Cape, 1979, 246pp, £5.50)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

Breakfast of Champions and *Slapstick* each gave their separate testimony to the effect that Vonnegut, after *Slaughterhouse 5*, had written himself out. They implied that like may a man before him, Vonnegut had been forced into the semi-retirement of self-imitation. His *angst* had grown listless, his *weltschmerz* was soggy. *Jailbird*, however, shows that he was framed – or rather convicted because of a temporary lapse. His writing has regained its bite, its fierce pessimism, its deadpan passion, and its crusading fervour on behalf of the frail but indomitable hope that wanders fugitively through the cloud of troubles which haunt the Pandora's Box of human affairs.

The jailbird of the title is Walter F. Starbuck, who has just finished serving a two-year sentence imposed on him in connection with the Watergate scandal. Starbuck was not actually involved in Watergate, but his office in the White House had been used for the concealment of embarrassing material relating to the enquiry. How and why he got into the White House at all is explained as he puts together the pieces of his past during his first days of freedom. The chain of causality is a crazy sequence of coincidences, each one carefully nested in ordinary human motivations but no less absurd for that (rather the reverse in fact). The plot of the novel, as it moves forward at a snail's pace carrying the burden of Starbuck's past, is concerned with the way in which the net of coincidence enfolds him again, lovingly and triumphantly, to bring about dramatic changes in fortune not just for him but for all the people who grant him petty kindness and courtesies. These lavish rewards of virtue are, of course, temporary – for time and chance are in the final analysis morally neutral – but they are no less marvellous for that. The miracle is that any kind of moral victory at all can be salvaged from the morass of blind selfishness which is slowly engulfing the human world. Vonnegut seems to see the predicament of contemporary America in terms of a curious kind of moral entropy; the process of disintegration is relentless, and perhaps in the long run unconquerable, but with the aid of a little energy borrowed from elsewhere, individuals can make their stand at least in the short term. Where they fail to hold together what they have won, it is the result of a natural process – Vonnegut's paramount virtue is his extreme reluctance to *blame* anyone for the fact that the historical situation is constantly threatened with deterioration and perpetually throws up tragedies.

Vonnegut's account of the way the world works is not calculated to appeal to everyone. Despite his unfailing sympathy for the people he writes about, some readers find his literary cosmos a bleak place. It is, however, entirely in keeping with the world-view which the contemporary state of scientific knowledge asks us to accept: a world not only not supervised by God but not supervised by a Newtonian universe-machine either, subject in the final analysis as much to chance and coincidence as to law and determination. Vonnegut is far from being alone among modern writers in having realized this, and having appreciated to the full what an awful prospect it is, but he is one of the few who maintains that it is still possible for us to fight the good fight on such a battleground, and that the victories we may win there are not to be despised. Walter F. Starbuck, like Billy Pilgrim before him, is a hero for our

times, a man we should (and perhaps must) admire because he is not only fighting the good fight but fighting *our* fight, and providing a paradigm for a possible route to our philosophical salvation.

This is a book that can sit alongside *Mother Night* and *Cat's Cradle*, and we should all be grateful that Vonnegut can, after all, still write books that can do that. I hope he writes a lot more.

The House Between the Worlds
by Marion Zimmer Bradley *(Doubleday, 1980, 244pp, $10.00)*

reviewed by Roz Kaveney

There was a time – and by a time I mean a stage in the evolution of literary consciousness rather than a chronological date – there was a time when the commercial genre on the hinterland of sf which we can call science fantasy was more or less innocent; at various levels of accomplishment authors would tell an exciting tale, cribbing wildly from a fairly standard set of European myth cycles, and that was that. The innocence vanished so fast; increasingly the sight of a sword on a book cover prepares us for heavy handed allegorizing, occasionally on behalf of that good old born-again religion, more often these days on behalf of a limp and depoliticized feminism or of an apolcalyptic ecologism. Periodically too, though usually at a low level of skill, authors take on the form as a way of showing their dexterity with literary games. This new gallery-pleaser from the ever fertile Marion Zimmer Bradley tries, gallantly, to take on board all of these possibilities at once and ends up proving conclusively at least one piece of wisdom of the ages – that you cannot have your cake and eat it.

Like so many protagonists before him, Cam Fenton takes the mysterious drug *antaril* which is supposed to enhance his ESP and in fact transports his astral body to a threatened elfland. With the traditional mind-numbing slowness he realises that it is possible for him to become a solid world walker instead of a spectral 'tweenman, that the secret brotherhood of worldwalkers are jolly snooty about his state of 'tweenness (sorry!), that the elfworld is under threat from a space-opera mad dictator called Pentarn who is Fenton's double, and that the beautiful changeling Irielle is Fenton's own mislaid great grandaunt. Real life is not a bowl of cherries either as Fenton struggles to convince his friends on the ESP project including the beautiful, paranoid and misandric Sally, that he is not merely a drug-crazed loony and the world is in danger – Pentarn's goblin allies the Ironfolk can come here and eat people. When in Berkeley (which is where according to the dust wrapper Ms. Bradley has her "terrestrial home") the worldwalkers hang out in a mysterious printshop full of Arthur Rackhams and Dungeons-and-Dragons players, which turns into a launderette whenever Fention goes near it. The usual wanderings between various boring worlds, butchery of minor characters and long meaningful conversations over Chinese takeaway follow. Fenton eventually gets things right, saves the worlds and retires with Sally to be a worldwalker; the mystic brotherhood will teach him to sit around nobly refraining from anything so vulgar as action and to play a mean game of Dungeons and Dragons.

When we were young and very silly all this might just have done. The gushy greyness of the writing is more or less balanced by the pace of the rare scenes

in which the characters are allowed to act as if not actually retarded, and a certain visceral excitement occasionally struggles through the cliches. But this is not a juvenile – it is a supposedly adult book which conscientiously proposes adolescent solutions to adult problems. We are shown the problems which Fenton faces in the real world – and they are just about manifested to us as real in spite of the scented smell of soap opera which haunts them: his lack of career motivation, his diffidence with the defensive Sally. We are also shown, at a level of subtlety which might just have passed muster in a 1963 Ace Double, his growth into responsibility through intervention in a group of comicbook venues; he persuades a vast rockbeing to rid the worlds of the Ironfolk by absorbing them into itself and allows the few survivors to butcher Pentarn for betraying them. Solving these problems has shown him and Sally how to grow to a maturity commensurate with their years and they are ready for apotheosis. (Applause.) The *real* worldwalkers who now accept them are shown as recognizing that worldsaving and other forms of direct action are passé and indicative, like scientific method, of an immature cast of mind, as being a high point of humanity to which he can finally aspire, *and* as taking their social behaviour and general organizational style from the most mindlessly adulatory section of the audience for sf in general and for Ms Bradley's work in particular. At the heart of this feeble book is the staggering implication that people who like books like this are in possession of the ultimate secrets of the universe.

The trouble with genre as a game to be played for the sake of demonstrating literary skill without any concession to mature moral or political content is that it makes the game attractive to those who feel no responsibility either to commitment or to skill. Some of Ms Bradley's earlier work is very moderately distinguished in a dull way because of her efforts to import some sort of moral decency to the nonsense. The best of her Darkover books have an essential seriousness that makes plausible and even emotionally and sensuously valid her labyrinthine plots, idiot aristocrat protagonists and gloomy backdrops. Here, I fear, she may well have set out in all seriousness to examine the relationship between reality and fiction, between emotional problems and wish-fulfilment fantasies, to offer some valid answers while playing upon our expectations and providing an entertaining story: she has ended up, either through the inadequacy for the task of her literary equipment or simply because she is talking rot, producing a not especially competent and distressingly self-congratulatory piece of leaden whimsey.

Ladies from Hell
by Keith Roberts *(Gollancz, 1979,198pp, £5.95)*

reviewed by Dave Langford

In a world where the books of just about any *Analog* or *Omni* writer you care to name are launched amid fanfares fit to make the Second Coming a distinct anticlimax, it's strange that this latest collection by the marvellously gifted Keith Roberts should creep with such silky quietness onto the market. But then, Roberts doesn't write *Analog* or *Omni* stories, and thus waives his chance of awards: these five are from *New Writings, New Worlds Quarterly* and *F & SF*, together with one new piece, "Our Lady of Desperation". The book is essential reading and, in terms

of sheer writing power, the best Roberts collection yet; the man is a magician with a feel for myth and a feel for words:

> I sat and had another stare at Coventina. A shaft of sunlight was hitting the easel foot, bright as a horn note. She heard the war horns too, the trumpets of the Legions; it's in her eyes. And perhaps a soldier gave her his cloak; a great rough Tyrian cloak, that smelled of urine. She was already old when he named her, though . . .
> ("Our Lady of Desperation")

With the same skill, his writing can strike unerringly at our visceral fears:

> Pamela was washing her hands in a bowl of soapy water and broken glass, and didn't seem to understand; and Liz's voice had gone so that the harder she tried to shout to stop, the less sound came. The water had turned from pink to scarlet before she managed to speak; then it was only a whisper, but Pamela smiled and turned. "It's all right, bunny," she said. "It doesn't hurt a bit. Honest . . ." She held out dripping red paws, and Liz shrieked.
> ("The Ministry of Children")

And Liz's nightmare sets the tone for a singularly nasty and effective sf horror story, in which the control over emotion and character never fails.

. . . Or does it? The common voice which runs through these stories is ragged with the author's own emotion, and from time to time there comes the terrible suspicion that Roberts is losing control, that the emotion is wagging the intellect and the staff wielding Prospero – in short, that instead of writing for us all Roberts is slipping towards mere one-sided propaganda. When the magician writes in double harness with the propagandist, their collaboration can be shaky. Damon Knight once analyzed a Pohl & Kornbluth book, remarking on the excellence of this and that . . .

> and then when you are not looking the other man sits down at the typewriter, and you get an incredibly obtuse blurt like this –

This? Well, a favourite obsession of the other Roberts is the spectre of TUCland, so that in "The Shack at Great Cross Halt" the bulk of the story is a lovely and sensitive study of the talking back into humanity of a broken shanty-dwelling girl in a broken England . . . and when the baddies heave into view you get an incredibly obtuse blurt like their challenge:

> "Reach, by Huskanlon!"
> "Reach, by Mikalfot!"*

There's a good deal of related nonsense: the country is depopulated and most of those who don't live in squalid shanty towns are truckers on a vastly extended motorway network taking things from somewhere to somewhere else (fuel appears to be no problem – well well), and a union split means the truckers actually live on the road, "families with three-four, sometimes five-six kids, all livin' in a space about eight foot square . . ." Please understand that this is not being played for laughs. And yet the core of the story is so good . . .

"Our Lady of Desperation" is similarly flawed, with a demented background of taxes in excess of 100% for creative artists, who also suffer personal 'Overseers' from the Civil Service. The narrator's ebullience manages to make this more of a comic inferno than a serious fear, but the misplaced seriousness is there as well. Also

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* For the benefit of our American readers, Hugh Scanlon is a British trade union leader, recently retired; Michael Foot is a prominent Labour Party Politician; the TUC is the Trades Union Congress.

some unusually creaky plot machinery: the real story – a good one – is about artists and eroticism and, devastatingly, the syndrome of the man who has everthing and therefore wants even more (and failed to get it); to push this Adonis into the company of the ratty but sexy artist-narrator, Roberts introduces some gobbledegook about how being an Overseer is such a little-liked job that the Government were forced to make it a swift route to high office. In just such a manner are today's undersecretaries forced to serve their term on sewage farms.

"The Ministry of Children", where the target is violence in comprehensive schools, is more successful because we all have our memories of bad times at school, we all worry about plummeting educational standards; however much we may disagree with it, its sheer hyperbolic nastiness is legitmate warning in the old pattern of "if this goes on–". Background and plot do not fall apart, though there's a feeling of thin ice when attention shifts briefly from people to politics; it's a coherent whole, as is "Missa Privata", a short and memorable piece on the familiar themes of free speech, choice and sacrifice, which is made sf merely by setting it in (you guessed it) a communist Britain.

Things fall apart again in "The Big Fans", where the knocks at nuclear power and the vile unions seem almost gratuitous: this one is a heady stew of ley lines and some remarkable wind generators and what might well be time travel. (Special praise, by the way, to a writer who can pop in an unexpected appearance of King Arthur and get away with it, triumphantly.) Somebody less cynical than I might make much of the fact that this story, the only one of the five with anything resembling sf gadgetry, is the only one to have appeared in the US. There are some striking images and (as usual) fine writing here, and it succeeds in spite of the now tedious union-bashing.

Roberts, as I've said, is a magician of a writer. His vision floods the work with colour, contrasting sharply with the black-and-white efforts of lesser men. Colour TV, however, has one disadvantage compared with black-and-white: you must take more care with background details, you can't ignore the newsreader's red nose. It is precisely because Roberts has given us so much more than black-and-white writers that he must offer more still, and give those backgrounds the solidity and truth of his people and places. As it is . . . too often there is the feel of a middle-class Prospero diverting his wondrous, evocative talents into getting up a petition about flying pickets or the local comprehensive.

Hestia
by C.J. Cherryh *(DAW, 1979, 160pp, $1.95)*

reviewed by Ann Collier

Be it ever so alien, there's no place like home! Thus say the Hestians, descendants of settlers from earth, stubbornly refusing to leave a planet notable for its incessant rain, consequent mud and devastating floods. They determine to build a dam upriver which, in saving the lowlands, will submerge the territory of the native Hestians, strangely, in view of their stressed animality, called the People. But when did colonists and pioneers ever feel a qualm about such matters as genocide? Indeed, if they did, what would be the role of the hero, Sam Merritt, an engineer come from earth (albeit poorly supplied and tardy), who, as a result of capturing and befriending Sazhje, a female of the People, wonders whether the survival of

one species has inevitably to lead to the destruction of the other. Merritt's colleagues, having seen for themselves the magnitude of the task of saving Hestia, decide that it is impossible and take the next spaceship out, leaving Merritt to be pressganged into service, a reluctant hero who only gradually begins to identify with the plight of the Hestians.

Though we seem to have here the bones of a story dealing with the clash of two cultures and with the conflicting loyalties of the hero, *Hesita* does not pursue this line, and, indeed, I am confused about what line it does pursue. For an alien planet, Hestia is disconcertingly like home. Its sole town, the ironically named New Hope, is a collection of drab, unpainted, uniform buildings, slowly being surrounded by an irresistible sea of mud. It could be any of a thousand places on this planet where the struggle for physical survival invalidates any concept of civic pride or aestheticism. The human Hestians are not distinguishable from the folks back home on earth, whilst the native Hestians' alienness is merely physical. True, they are covered in down, have prognathic features, fangs and tails, but these are mere trifling details: they have a strong and ruthless sense of survival, they hold councils to decide on communal action and policy and, if Sazhje is a typical example, have a healthy and enthusiastic appreciation of sexuality. Burns' Station, the inland settlement where most of the action takes place, is close to a gorge, with steeply wooded mountains, torrential rivers – and yes, yet more rain. Not, in fact, totally dissimilar from earth locations.

But perhaps this is to miss the point completely. Perhaps *Hestia* is an unashamed red-blooded adventure story. The style is very much a narrative one, suited to the description of events, of which there are many, and lacking in metaphor and symbolism. The characters are given to action and reaction rather than reflection. Indeed, when the climax of the action, the destruction by a clan of People of the foundations of the dam, is reached, Cherryh seems not to know how to end the story and clumsily adds a coda, in which magically the People decide to allow the humans into their highlands in exchange for promises that no dam will be built. A fair and logical deal but not a realistic one when one considers the conspicuous lack of rationality which dominates the world's trouble spots. This volte-face by the People, whilst not persuading me, is consistent with a theme running throughout the book that Hestia can only be saved by the setting aside of differences in mutual co-operation.

The characters are credible enough, in the sense of being consistent, but they and several episodes in the book remind me of stock elements from other genres. The hero's trip up-river effectively isolates him from all that is familiar and takes him into the unknown on a voyage of self-discovery. The boat's captain is Amos, a man of few words but unstinting loyalty, courage and good sense, deeply attached to his patched and battered vessel. An inhabitant of Burn's Station is a typical Western saloon bully, provocative, loud-mouthed and crass, who repeatedly engineers the (only marginally) Hestian equivalent of the showdown, where the pianist and card players dive for cover. All we are shown of the lady of the house is that she feeds, with her home cooking naturally, and tends the wounds of the men who come home hungry and tired from braving danger. But if *Hestia* were to be flimed, undoubtedly the star part would be Sazhje's, fangs and tail notwithstanding. Her vivacity and vitality transcend the descriptions of her, which bring to mind *Playboy* centrefolds – long-limbed,

naked, purring and nestling but with an underlying aggression and volatility.

The history of Hestia is of initial optimism about the future giving way to a decline marked by apathy and lethargy, before ultimately a sense of hope is rekindled. My response to the book mirrored this pattern, the opening chapter being a model of economic and almost cinematic scene-setting, promising an engrossing and well-written novel. Unlike Hestia, however, I did not thereafter progress beyond apathy.

The Seed of Evil
by Barrington J. Bayley *(Allison & Busby, 1979, 175pp, £5.95)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

Allison and Busby are now well-advanced with their programme of bringing out the entire works of Barrington J. Bayley – a project which should earn them the undying gratitude of any true science fiction fan. This is the second collection of Bayley's short stories, and has been published along with two novels – *Empire of Two Worlds* and *Annihilation Factor*. These novels are not among his best, and nor are most of the stories in this collection, but even Bayley's lesser works are full of ideas and highly readable.

The Knights of the Limits will remain the archetypal Bayley collection at least until the author can find a new market for his idiosyncratic fantasies and thus be encouraged to produce some new work. Although this collection has four stories which have not previously seen the light of day, and one or two which first appeared in rather obscure places, it is basically a compendium of early works. The stories are entirely typical of Bayley's method, showing his inventive flair to good advantage, though they lack something of the dramatic *panache* which made the earlier collection a classic.

The collection opens with "Sporting with the Child", a marvellously gruesome story about the amusements of an alien race who are expert biological engineers, and closes with the equally melodramatic title story, which is a kind of sciencefictional version of *Melmoth the Wanderer.* Few of the stories in between are as substantial, though God is assassinated in "The God-Gun" and the force animating Eartly evolution is switiched off in 'The Infinite Searchlight". Several of the stories which Bayley sold to Ted Carnell in the guise of P.F. Woods are here, including a marvellous story of warped space inside the Earth, "The Radius Riders", but it is slightly disappointing to find that the new stories are really no better than these. However, there is one exceptionally fine story – the star of the collection – whose content belies its brevity. This is "Man in Transit", the autobiography of a man born of stateless parents aboard an aeroplane, who must spend his entire life being constantly deported from one country to another and back again. He dedicates his life to the development of a philosophy and a theology which suit his existential predicament – a simple but elegant piece of metaphorical reasoning.

A second-rate Bayley collection has as much to offer as most collections in this day and age, and this one should be sought out for that reason.

Mayflies
by Kevin O'Donnell Jr *(Berkley, 1979, 295pp, $1.95)*

reviewed by Dave Langford

Imagine if you will a vast generation-ship sent on a mission of colonization; a ship whose fifteen-year trip is unforeseeably prolonged to a thousand, its passengers living and dying (like, as it were, mayflies) through successive generations . . . "Good grief," you're asking, "who *hasn't* written this one?"

Wierdly, O'Donnell makes it work. The mainspring is the ship's computer, programmed to fail safe in every way – no nonsense about its breaking down and leaving the passengers to revert to barbarism. Rigid programming, of course, brings its own problems. For reasons not clearly stated (nor over-convincing in the light of microelectronic progress) the computer incorporates a human brain; there is a ghost in the machine, the traumatized proprietor of said tissue, who wakes up as the ship departs, threshes around mentally until he turns off the drive fourteen years and eleven months too soon, and spends much of the book coming to terms with (a) not having a body; (b) having a body after all, i.e. the ship; (c) an artificial alterego, "The Program", which in its fail-safe way can override him on every front but isn't flexible enough to cope with the problems of the extended trip. The three-way conflict between this impersonal Program, the impotent hero and the uncomprehending latter-generation colonists is interesting and well told.

Like a vastly less polished Michael Bishop, O'Donnell deploys hordes of vividly-realized people and somehow gets away with many a ream of unlikely future slang. (Rather than kill people you "term" them, this being a significant advance on O'Donnell's last book *Bander Snatch* in which you could only "cough" them: ugh.) There is a welcome terseness; important plot turns may whiz past almost too swiftly for comfort, but they are not dwelt upon and hammered home and restated in numerous ways for the benefit of a moronic audience. The trouble with terseness is that when incidents don't stretch too far, one must introduce more and more incidents. For the most part this works: there's plenty of well-handled aberrant behaviour among the colonists and moral strife in the computer/hero. But the temptation to introduce vast numbers of arbitrary events is too great, and *deus* after *deus ex machina* pops up. Earth develops FTL travel and zooms ahead of the colony ship; nasty aliens "rape" the ship; nice alien visits; nasty aliens return; some of this, however neatly tied in, is surely being inserted to make the book longer. True, the evil aliens' computer conveniently teaches Our Hero how to beat the program (Why? Oh, it just felt like it); but he was already making slow, convincing progress as the reluctant Program was forced to hand over partial control in sector after sector because of its inability to deal with unpredicted situations.

Mind-to-mind strife in computer space can be dull indeed, in a grey fog of power thrusts and impalpable thought screens. O'Donnell correctly realizes that a wired-up brain will see inputs as solid metaphors – though metaphors subject to reinterpretation. The undersea imagery in scenes like the death struggle between ego and Program is good, showing the teeth of the threats (electronic "virus" programs aimed to erase our hero's identity are seen as torpedoes which must be individually intercepted, etc) while keeping the dreamlike quality proper to a conflict with no moving parts. Less solemn metaphors also appear: the ship's takeoff mocks yet reinforces the wonder of spaceflight as our hero

awakens to an interpretation of his jet-propelled status . . . farting his way to the stars.

The trouble with an immortal hero/computer is that everyone else flits by too swiftly, however well handled in their brief moment on the stage. And the ending is pure wish-fulfilment, with *everybody* getting all they wish for. And the prose slithers into journalese when O'Donnell's concentration slips, or sometimes into bathos when he's trying especially hard. And there are scientific glitches: "radio waves on a frequency inaudible to humans", indeed! The book is still enjoyable, with an inventiveness, ambition and ability to write which rarely meet in one author these days. For all its rough edges, *Mayflies* is recommended to those who wondered what had happened to hard sf.

Far Future Calling
by Olaf Stapledon, edited by Sam Moskowitz *(Oswald Train: Publisher, P.O Box 1891, Philadelphia, Pa. 19105: 1980, 275pp, $12.00)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

Following his collection of the unreprinted fantasies of William Hope Hodgson, *Out of the Storm*, Sam Moskowitz has turned his attention to Olaf Stapledon. He has managed to unearth five short stories, an untransmitted radio play derived from *Last and First Men*, and a paper prepared for Stapledon's address to the British Interplanetary Society in 1948. As usual, he has added a biography of the author, and also a personal note concerning his attempt to meet Stapledon while the latter was in the United States in 1949, on tour with the Cultural and Scientific Conference for Peace. The book has illustrations by the ubiquitous Stephen Fabian.

One cannot help nursing an unkind suspicion that Olaf Stapledon might not have picked Sam Moskowitz as his "official" biographer had he been given the choice. Moskowitz is by no means the best man to comment on the life and thought of a philosopher, having no reputation for any great subtlety of thought on his own account. Having said that, however, it is as well to remember what a valuable man the indefatigable Sam actually is. He works hard on his various projects, doing a great deal of original research. He tries to ascertain the relevant facts, and is prepared to put himself to some trouble in order to do so. He is far more worthy of the title of "historian" than many men who can write more elegantly but are content to rely almost entirely on secondary sources. The pieces here assembled are minor Stapledon, to be sure, but they are of considerable interest nevertheless – if there had been no Sam Moskowitz, would anyone else have managed to gather them together and get them into print? Though Moskowitz's critical evaluations often make me wince, I have never known him to write an uninteresting article, and virtually all his projects have been well worth while, warts and all.

Two of the Stapledon stories collected here are experiments in alien viewpoints – attempts to imagine what the world might look and feel like to a tree or to a being whose sensory environment is exclusively auditory. These are sketches rather stories, taking their inspiration from the speculative essays of Haldane and Huxley. "A Modern Magician" is an ordinary story about the misuse of an extraordinary power, but the other two fantasies, though they are equally conventional, are vivid enough to rise above their limitations. "East is West" is an alternate

world story which tries to expose the limitations of ethnocentric thinking in politics and everyday life, while "Arms out of Hand" is a story of disintegrating personality in which a man finds different aspects of his character winning control of his right and left hands.

The play, "Far Future Calling", is a curiously Shavian piece, recalling key moments in *Back to Methuselah* as much as its parent work. One can appreciate that it might not have been a success if broadcast – it would have been rather difficult for listeners to get their bearings within it. The long essay, "Interplanetary Man" is an excellent piece of work providing a valuable insight into Stapledon's thinking about the problems of the future.

Moskowitz's introductory essay contains a good deal of valuable information, but has a curious coyness wherever it touches upon Stapledon's political beliefs. The same coyness is even more evident in the concluding piece about Moskowitz's attempt to meet Stapledon during his tour with the communist-inspired "Peace Conference". Sam always has trouble when he tries to reconcile his naive Americanism with his admiration for any author whose political views were markedly different, and his comments always begin to seem a little odd when he grapples with the ideas embraced by such writers as Stapledon (his comments on M.P. Shiel and S. Fowler Wright are equally odd, though their ideas were very different from Stapledon's.) It would be churlish, though, to hold this against him, and he deserves congratulations for putting this book together and getting it into print. All libraries should obtain a copy, and it is essential reading for anyone who has an interest in Stapledon.

The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five
by Doris Lessing *(Cape, 1980, 245pp, £5.95)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Marriages is the second in Lessing's series in progress, *Canopus in Argos: Archives.* Lessing has said that she turned to sf for its scope, among other things: *Marriages* extends the story not in time or space (which *Shikasta* seemed to have pretty well staked out), but into other dimensions. *Shikasta* showed us briefly into the "zones" parallel to Earth, as perceived by the Canopeans, whose concepts of matter and form are not altogether like our own. One zone is what we think of as the afterlife or limbo, another is the "otherworld" of our legends and fairytales. *Marriages* takes place in the three zones of its title (with a quick trip into the headier realm of Zone Two), on a descending range of vast plateaux. Each zone is more refined than the next: Zone Three is a pastoral gynarchic utopia ruled by Al Ith, the elected representative of a people who are all noble, clean, wise, and can talk to animals. Zone Four is the stereotype masculine counterpart, a marital state under the warlord bully Ben Ata.

There is no cultural exchange, until an Order comes down from the Providers (who, we can assume, are the Canopeans) that Ben Ata must marry Al Ith. She sulks, he swears, but an Order cannot be disobeyed.

Since the story is "narrated by the Chroniclers of Zone Three" this is an opportunity for Lessing to moan about how nasty and uncouth Zone Four is compared to the cosy sanity of Three, and she does, but not for long. As soon as Al Ith arrives in Four, she begins to change. Dismayed, she finds herself capable of feminine wiles, calculated submissiveness, and the unknown emotion, jealousy. Enlightenment is no protection. Are sex roles innate, or the first condition imposed on lapsarian humanity? Al Ith has certainly "fallen", to a lower place whose air does funny things to Third Zoners. Periodically summoned back and forth by the Providers' phantom drum, she feels less and less at home with her own people. But Ben Ata is changing too, away from the norms of Zone Four: he's going off the army life, but can't quite see his way to a cultural reformation.

The battle between women and men, however, is continuous. This is Lessing's subject, and she has not lost any of the accuracy she displayed in *The Golden Notebook*. Indeed, in the stylization of this fairytale world she is able to tell the old story more succinctly. Love and marriage are not a happy ending but a special kind of war. The sexes are foreigners. Personal resentments and cultural incompatibilities twist and turn, but biology goes straight through. How many ways there are for two people to misunderstand each other; but forced intimacy forces sex, which forces love. Lessing actually had me beginning to see how arranged marriages can work.

Marriages is fantasy, of course, rather than science fiction, and the more suited to Lessing's abilities. She has called sf a branch of sociology: *Shikasta* was presented as social anthropology, the findings of various colonial investigations, whereas *Marriages* is source material, living legend. The Choniclers, the authoritative lore-masters of Zone Three, are nicely self-critical, they narrate the book as the definitive version of a folktale. Lessing is much more successful at faking this sophisticated folk art than the scientific "case studies" of *Shikasta*. She puts in right details: the animal cults, the Zambian magic telephone tree (the original also of Blish's "Message Tree" in *Case of Conscience*, I presume). The story of Al Ith and Ben Ata is myth, of a highly artificial kind; the mode is oriental where *Shikasta's* was Judaeic, though the pattern is primarily the tale of Persephone, the Kore, doomed to rise and descend forever between Earth and the Underworld. Al Ith through the Looking-glass, perhaps. Lessing provides her with a bleak ascension at last: she's an idealist, after all, and needs to make a sort of synthesis between zones possible, if difficult. I was reminded very much of Hesse: the characters and landscapes have that plain, scrubbed quality, and there is a moral strictness about the whole thing. But there is an absence of explicit judgment – Zone Three has its limitations clearly indicated too – which, after the tedious jeremiad of *Shikasta*, is refreshing.

Capella's Golden Eyes
by Christopher Evans *(Faber, 1980, 220pp, £5.95)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

This is Christopher Evans' first novel, and a beautiful one it is indeed, from the title onwards. But don't be led astray by the beauty, or by the anticipations it evokes – for the book is about domination, although we only realize this gradually, as does the narrator David. This, even though we are shown it in the very first chapter with the incident of the swimming pool bully and the voice of authority behind the Manager's desk – which at the time only seems to add a frisson of excitement to the urban delights of David and his friends. It's a very cunning first chapter, since it sets out the main theme of the book, yet it is not the theme that we expect.

The planet Gaia has been colonized successfully from Earth, though it owes its success to the intervention and continuing assistance of enigmatic aliens, called the M'threnni for want of a better name. Nothing much is known about them or their motives except that their civilization is entirely superior to that of the human race. The tiny contingent of M'threnni live in complete isolation in a helical tower from which the human capital Helixport takes its name, accompanied by their human "Voices", an equally small number of human volunteers or abductees who never re-enter human society again.

And, of course, one expects that David (who actually encounters an alien at large, together with a dying Voice) will penetrate the mystery; or perhaps that his rural commune friend Annia, who is with him at the time and strangely affected by the encounter, will succeed. Wrong. Or, almost wrong.

Likewise one is subtly wrong, from the start, about the quality of Gaian life since in the case of Helixport with its Jack Vancean medly of artists, vendors, sailors, tinkers, rich folk, poor folk, the fact that there *are* poor folk and slums does matter, though we regard this as part of a tapestry to begin with. Until one per cent of the population dies in an epidemic.

David wins a scholarship from his commune, makes good, and we await his penetration of the alien mystery. And we await it. Meanwhile, "rebels" inveigh against the alien presence.

Due to a rebel bombing of the alien perimeter, David is actually taken into the M'threnni tower. "Ah, at last", we think. "Wonders lie ahead". But David is quite disoriented and learns almost nothing – except afterwards that the city authorities can be pretty ruthless.

The fact that, of his two close childhood friends, Annia has been taken as a Voice (to be repatterned cerebrally into an autistic alien, he surmises) and Jax has joined the rebels as a result, thrusts him into the rebel camp. And we await his rescue of Jax; but Jax has been brain-erased by the authorities. And we await the revolution – but it never takes place. Instead, the rebel leader and David and a disturbed woman of genius who has picked up gravity pulses from a faster-than-light ship that is on the way from Earth, retire to the antipodes. When they return, politics has shifted. There is a place on the governing council for the rebel leader, and social reform is in order. And the aliens are still in seclusion, still unknowable.

As the Earth ship draws closer, the M'threnni all suddenly leave, releasing their small band of catatonic Voices, amongst whom is Annia – whom David does *not* miraculously re-awaken from her trance, though there are indications that she will recover in time. The Earth ship sends a landing craft down into this flawed utopia,

which has newly reaffirmed its democracy – and politics has shifted on Earth too, while technological power has increased. Enigmatic, smile-and-be-a-villain Chinese managers are running the world, and intend to run the colony too. They have the clout to do it, whether the colony wishes it or not. One breed of alien domination has been exchanged for another. For David, at the end, it is a case of "il faut cultiver son jardin"; and wait.

This is a marvellously realistic novel, which dangles the carrots of alien encounter, exotic colony tapestry, and brave democratic revolution before the reader, delicately proving that the reader is a donkey, as we amble forward, hee-hawing for the wrong things. It is only in the end that we quite realize this; but it was there from the very first chapter of this beautifully crafted, reorienting book. Even Mr Lem might give it a nod of assent.

P.S. David rightly identifies the name of the Chinese starship, the *Ta Chaung*, as being one of the hexagrams of *The Book of Changes*; but he can't remember which. *Ta Chaung* is Vigorous Strength. "Advantage comes from being firm and correct". Enough said.

Editor's Note: The author of the novel reviewed above is *not* the Christopher Evans who wrote *The Mighty Micro* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). Faber's Christopher Evans is a young Welsh writer, and the title-page of *Capella's Golden Eyes* gives his byline as "C.D. Evans".

Mockingbird
by Walter Tevis *(Hodder & Stoughton, 1980, 247pp, £5.95)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

The Man who Fell to Earth was a masterpiece of understatement. Undemonstrative prose contained and even concealed all bitterness and rage as Tevis anatomized the politics of inhumanity. *Mockingbird* carries the same theme, but weakly, as if Tevis has succumbed to the weariness that overtook Thomas Jerome Newton. The tone is mild again, but underneath nothing grips, nothing bites.

In a future America all work and responsibility have been given to the robots, while the human race, supported by drugs and isolation techniques, cultivates apathy. Emotions and abilities atrophy; even the production and maintenance of automation is neglected. Literacy has been discouraged out of existence, but at NYU Prof. Paul Bentley has taught himself to read. Not recognizing or intending this skill for its subversive potential, he offers it to the Dean of Faculties, Bob Spofforth, who smiles and sends him to work in the silent movie archives. Spofforth, of course, is a senior robot, last of the Mark Nines, with brain patterns copied from a long-dead cybernetic engineer. Designed to be sexless and immortal, he is plagued by human dreams of desire and a hunger for death.

The plot now follows an sf formula, with little of the variation and inversion that distinguished *Man who Fell.* Bentley is only slightly misfitted in his placid totalitarian society, more by his doubts than his behaviour, until he meets a young woman less conformist and more blasé than himself. She begins to rouse his dormant conscience. He stops taking his pills and enters into an enclave of sexual and intellectual progressiveness with her, until they are interrupted by the law. In prison Bentley undergoes a tough social education, tutored by a kindly old lag with twinkling eyes and a pet cat; on the loose he exercises new muscles, hones his survival instinct, and communes with the frozen landscape. The next society he encounteres challenges him with a baptism of fire, which he passes; completing his education among them, he equips a stolen bus and sets off back to New York to search for his love Mary Lou.

There's nothing here that isn't familiar from a thousand and one sf adventures, or from more anxious social critiques like *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984.* The formula is a special case of the old heroic pattern: exile, strength through suffering, the trial, gathering of resources, triumphant homecoming. The waste land is refertilized by the questing knight, who deposes wounded old King Spofforth on his return. The sf version commonly concerns at initiation delayed by stultifying social forces; it takes an individualist to unearth an older moral scheme and defeat the death-culture, humanism against the robots.

Tevis teaches creative writing at Ohio. I'm sure he knows all about mythic structure. He ought to know that you can't afford to let the myth write the story for you, unless you don't want to do more than make a few general points. After Bentley finds his refuge in the wilderness with the neo-Puritan community, all tension drops out of the plot. Everything comes too easily to hand: the shopping mall in the giant fallout shelter, the friendly telepathic robot bus, the journey across four or five hundred miles of desolation. Once back in New York Bentley traces Mary Lou without any difficulty and their bodies and personalities re-engage without any adjustment. The clothes he has brought her all fit. The ending is unnecessarily perfect.

When you start thinking "If only life could be like that", it's a sign that what you're reading isn't about life at all, but about a dream or a wish, rewards and revenges distributed according to some ideal notion of fifth-act poetic justice. When the mythic pattern takes over and gets filled so automatically, it ceases to be myth and becomes ritual. In narrative terms that means the suspension and release, the withholding and satisfaction that characterize commercial fiction. This is part of what M. John Harrison meant by calling sf a literature of comfort: a familiar order is upset, then righted, with just enough interim let and hindrance to keep the reader reading. Tevis's message about man, machine and responsibility is truthful and honestly meant, but the manner of its delivery, starting with melancholy social comment and ending with wishful thinking, robs it of force.

The Way the Future Was: A Memoir
by Frederik Pohl *(Gollancz, 1979, 256pp, £6.95)*

reviewed by John Sladek

Most writers lead dull lives, I suppose (why else seek refuge in fiction?), but this is overdoing it. I find it hard to believe that Frederik Pohl or anyone else could have lived this life of consistent vapidity. Or why, having got through it, he should then want to tell us about it.

The answer is, I think, that Mr Pohl has simply edited out of his real life any memory which would not be of immediate interest to "fandom". That immediately rules out any discussion of his literary development – and almost anything else of any intrinsic interest. What is left, aside from an occasional political aside, has no more life to it than any day in his excellent story "The Tunnel under the World".

The interesting facts can be summarized in one paragraph: Mr Pohl was born in 1919, grew up in Depression New York (a sickly child who read a lot), began to read science fiction and to hang around with others who did the same. He tried the Young Communist League, became a pulp sf editor at the age of nineteen, married four times, served in the army, worked in advertising, became an editor of *Galaxy*, wrote, travelled, lectured.

These facts do not accumulate much flesh in the book, nor do any of the sketches of people remembered: "My father, he was a travelling man." And "my mother, a redheaded Irish girl two or three years older than he, worked as a secretary."

So much for antecedents; what about the four women with whom Mr Pohl shared most of the years of his past future, the mothers of his several children? This is more or less all we learn of them:

1. Doe (p.64) was "strikingly beautiful, and strikingly intelligent, too, in a sulky, humorous, deprecatory way that matched well with most of the people I admired."
2. Tina (p.107) was "a pretty, brown-haired recent divorcee from San Diego" who "wore her hair in coronet braids."
3. Judy (Judith Merril, p.140) "was not pretty" but "was a writer to be respected."
4. Carol (p.173) was "a tall, leggy, strikingly beautiful blonde."

(*Dames!* one is tempted to exclaim, *who can figure 'em?*)

Having thus dispensed with all of the people with whom he must have spent half

of his waking life, Frederik Pohl gets on with the — fan fodder, I guess it must be called: Explanations of what literary agents do, who publishers are, how book contracts operate, what it's like to go to science fiction conventions. SF celebrities are listed in loving detail, along with the names of hundreds of people who are or were fans, or friends of fans, or cousins of friends of fans. Picking a page at randon (p.42) will give some idea of the gossipy tone:

> . . . and we formed the Futurians . . . the Brooklyn SFL lasted barely a year . . . G.G. Clark did not much care for Donald and Johnny . . . Dave Kyle even started a chapter in Monticello, New York, of which the entire membership was pseudonyms of his own . . . The East New York SFL was the feifdom of a high-schooler named Harold W. Kirshenblit ('KB') who also had a big cellar his parents allowed him to use for meetings . . .

Well sure, okay, that's just the juvenile Pohl. But things have not improved much by page 84 (twice as far along):

> Just down the short hall from my own little office was Ken White, editor of ***Black Mask.*** Ken had inherited directly from Cap Shaw, who with Dashiell Hammett had shaped the modern detective story only a few years before. On the longer hallway, towards the 42nd Street side, was Janie Littell with her love pulps . . . in the other direction along the long hall were most of ther other editors: Alden H. Norton . . .

and five others are named, names now of interest only to pulp-publishing archeologists. They mean no more to me than the rest of the book; I can't think why Frederik Pohl wrote it, and I believe it to be unworthy of him.

Earth is the Alien Planet
by David Pringle *(Borgo Press, 1979, 63pp, $2.95)*

reviewed by John Brady

David Pringle's short monograph, sub-titled *J.G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare*, is a welcome appraisal, succinctly written and thoughtfully argued. It is divided into four sections, two of which have already appeared in the pages of *Foundation*. "The Fourfold Symbolism" (cf. Issue No.4) has been successfully expanded since it was reprinted in *J.G. Ballard: The First Twenty Years* (edited by James Goddard and David Pringle, Brans Head Books). It occupies just over a third of the monograph and is, quite simply, its kernel and *raison d'etre.*

Before I come to his critique, let me address a couple of caveats to his publisher, R. Reginald. Firstly there is no typographical distinction (apart from inverted commas) between the author's text and the numerous quotations cited. However, this unnecessary congestion *is* mitigated by the very readable typeface. Secondly, the blurb on the back states that " . . . Ballard began his career as a hack science fiction writer . . ." Recall that between the publication of "Prima Belladonna" in 1956 and "The Voices of Time" in 1960, Ballard had also penned "The Concentration City", "Manhole 69", "The Waiting Grounds" and "The Sound Sweep". Some hack writer!

Much of the "Introduction" is defensively pitched towards American readers who have misunderstood or reacted against Ballard's fiction. Indeed Pringle

concludes by listing five major accusations before retaliating. At the outset he brackets JGB with Bradbury and Vonnegut because "All three writers have used the conventions of science fiction to highly personal ends" (p.4). An arbitrary trio by whatever criteria. While it is true that "both Vonnegut and Ballard experienced modern war at first hand" (p.5) and both were POWs, this happened to Ballard over five crucial years: the formative period between the ages ten and fifteen. Overall, however, this section is a lucid account of Ballard's work from his first published story, "The Violent Noon" (1951) to "Zodiac 2000" and "Motel Architecture" (both 1978). One interesting digression, which could have been extended, concerns his "precursors" (i.e. the Borgesian notion that "every writer *creates* his own precursors.") A pity, then, that Pringle offers only one specific example from Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959): "Dark alternatives to the Paraclete whose coming he awaited, the birds seemed eager at times to descend in place of the dove." (p.7)

As I said earlier, the second section, "The Fourfold Symbolism", is by far the most substantial. Here is arresting analysis for the nonplussed reader that can also be recommended to the sf author, whether fledgeling or professional. Pringle consistently justifies his "belief that Ballard's use of symbolism has, on the whole, been more conscious, more intelligent, and more innovative than that of any other contemporary sf or fantasy writer . . ." (p.17)

Reviewing *The Crystal World* and a new collection of stories in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* (Aug 1966), Judith Merril outlined a methodological problem that looms even larger since *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash*:

> ". . . while most of what he has done in the last two years comes off satisfactorily (and occasionally brilliantly) under examination by the established rules of 'serious' literary criticism, those rules are themselves far short of satisfactory for examination of most of his work."

In "The Lamia, The Jester and The King", Pringle makes use of these rules and, not surprisingly, finds Ballard's characters wanting in depth and variety. It's an elaborate analysis that sidesteps the critical challenge just quoted, which Pringle acknowledges when he says:

> "Ballard does not write a fiction of social *interaction;* he is not primarily concerned with the ways in which people change each other – which could be said to be the essential subject matter of the traditional novel. Rather, he is concerned with the individual's relationship with his own mind and impulses; with the relationship between the solitary awareness and various environments and technologies; ultimately with the relationship between humanity and time, the fact of death, the 'phenomenology of the universe.'" (pp 39-40)

In other words, a poet's charter.

A propos, Ballard has always been the first to declare his debt to the Surrealists, sometimes embodying this in the fiction itself; e.g. Delvaux's *L'Echo* in "The Day of Forever" (1966). To expect a symbolic fantasy of such brevity to "work" simultaneously as social realism strikes me as paradoxical, like viewing Dali or Magritte with the artistic spectacles of Rembrandt or Holbein. It's doubly unfortunate that the Surrealist connection is only signposted and not explored. Obviously Pringle has a stronger case in the matter of characterization and the novels but he undermines it by striving to be all-inclusive (a strategy that came off better in "The Fourfold Symbolism"). Here, his negative conclusions are not worth all the analytic effort.

The last section deals with four of Ballard's seminal themes, grouped into balanced pairs: *Imprisonment* and *Flight, Time Must Have a Stop* and

Superannuation. As he did before, Pringle marshalls his evidence to confound the charges of pessimism and morbidity that have beenlevelled at Ballard. There's also a prescient insight which has been more than vindicated by *The Unlimited Dream Company:* "images of flight and transcendence have predominated over images of imprisonment and the halting of time in his recent work." (p.57) If advance reports are to be believed, *Hello America* (a forthcoming novel) will sustain the upbeat quality that Pringle reckons to be the hallmark of Ballard's third period.

But, endings and denouments are never the whole story so perhaps we should take more seriously Ballard's conviction (which Pringle shares) that his novels at least have always been about psychic fulfilment rather than doom or disaster. As Pringle says: "he deals with death as a fact of life: a human fact. His fiction represents a coming to terms with, rather than a revelling in or a flight from death." (Ibid.) This is one – though not the only – reason why Ballard's fiction will speak as eloquently to readers of the twenty-first century. In the meantime, I can only affirm the critical achievement of the present terminal beachcomber.

The Mighty Micro
by Chrisopher Evans *(Gollancz, 1979, 255pp, £5.50)*

reviewed by John Sladek

Subtitled "The Impact of the Computer Revolution", this popular treatment is for those who feel it's time they really found out more about these little chip-whatsists everyone keeps on about. The book is firmly low-tech, pausing at one point to explain binary numbers, at another to demonstrate the size of a billion. Low-tech readers will probably not mind occasional lapses such as "high" tolerances (meaning close ones) or "huge combinations", or Evans' rather Anglican history of computers, omitting a number of major figures outside Britain. Any serious history should include Claude Shannon, who first proved that logic can be modelled in electrical switching circuits, and Norbert Weiner, who coined the word *cybernetics* and roughed out many of the outlines of our thinking (high-tech and low-) about thinking machines.

This is in many ways a predictable book, but then so are most popular books on the subject. People writing about computers tend to believe in them, sometimes fanatically (the exception that comes to mind is J. Weizenbaum's *Computer Power and Human Reason),* so that readers seeking a more balanced view will have to make certain adjustments: For "inevitable" read "probable", for "universal" read "widespread" and so on. The words, "creative" and "original" are used in a question-begging mode in reference to two computer programs which he has not proved to be either creative or original.

These two examples call for a closer look, since they might seem to question all traditional views of creativity as a human attribute. First is the Haken-Appel proof of the Four Color Theorem: That four colors suffice to color any flat map so that no two adjoining regions have the same color. For over a century, the theorem, though empirically sound, defeated all attempts at a mathematical proof.

But the mathematical world was rocked when in 1977 the problem was handed over to a

> computer, which attacked it with a stupendous frontal assault, sifting through huge combinations of possibilities and eventually demonstrating, to every mathematician's satisfaction, that four colours would do the trick. Actually, though this is spectacular testimony to the computer's creative powers, it is not really the most cogent example . . .

The achievement was certainly big news, but not all mathematicians were satisfied with a proof requiring 1200 hours of time on a large, high-speed computer, producing work whose detail can hardly be checked. "The Haken-Appel proof of the four-color theorem," writes Martin Gardner in *Scientific American*, "is certainly unsatisfying, in that no one can call it simple, beautiful or elegant."

The creativity involved might be reasonably attributed to the men who came up with the idea, who wrote the elaborate program required. Evans makes no mention of Haken or Appel. Apparently the humans involved get no credit whatever; they merely hand things over to computers. Seems unlikely.

Evans goes on to his next example:

> A better, and much earlier, demonstration of computer originality came from a program which was set to generate some totally new proofs in Euclidean geometry.

This time the program seemed to produce something startling and new, certainly simple and elegant: a proof that the two base angles of an isoceles triangle are equal, using no construction lines. In essence, the proof amounts to considering the triangle and its mirror image as two triangles. Then, having proved the two congruent, it showed the two base angles to the congruent, i.e., equal.

> Quite apart from the fact that it had not before been known to Man, it (this proof) showed such originality that . . .

The fact is, this proof was known to the geometer Pappus (A.D. 300); this would not, however, diminish the achievement of a program that could make such a discovery independently. How independent was the program, though? How closely linked to the ideas of its creator, E. Gerlenter (once more not named by Evans)?

The computer scientist Douglas Hofstadter takes up the question in *Godel, Escher, Bach,* a mammoth study (and celebration) of minds and machines:

> In the particular case of Gerlenter and his geometry machine, while Gerlenter probably would not have rediscovered Pappus' proof, still the mechanisms which generated that proof were sufficiently close to the surface of the program that one hesitates to call the program a geometer in its own right. If it had kept on astonishing people by coming up with ingenious new proofs over and over again, each of which seemed to be based on a fresh spark of genius rather than on some standard method, *then* one would have no qualms about calling the program a geometer – but this did not happen.

If the best examples of computer creativity can easily be called into question by the very people who work with computers, then it is far from a fact. This is of course not to say that creative machines will not one day appear – arguments for their impossibility are as unconvincing as arguments for their reality.

The same goes for robots, and here Christopher Evans is on the side of traditionalists. Anthropomorphic, walking talking robots, he says, are just not in the cards (except as toys). In particular, when the Ultra-Intelligent Machine arrives to take its place as the new superior species on our planet, it will not look anything like a man.

> We can be confident that whatever form the UIMs assume, it is most unlikely to be anything that looks like a human being. To construct them in this way would be

pointless and wasteful.

Yes of course, but hasn't it always been pointless and wasteful to make gadgets that look and act like human beings? Yet we do so and have done so for perhaps 3500 years (since Amenhotep is said to have erected at Thebes a statue of Memnon which could speak, or at least groan, at the sight of the sun), pointlessly and wastefully. What was the point of making statues walk and talk, of making machines that could add and subtract – or translate languages or play chess – what persuaded Babbage to waste his life designing an analytical engine which could not be built? "Why? Because we *can*!" says someone in *The Stepford Wives,* and because we want to – no matter how wasteful or pointless (did anyone apply these adjectives to the Apollo missions? And did anyone listen?). The Mighty Micro is going to go on developing intelligence until its behaviour looks mighty human – and possibly until it looks mighty human itself. That, I think, is what we can and evidently want to do.

Reviews in Brief

Lagrange Five
by Mack Reynolds *(Bantam, 1979, 227pp, $1.95)*

Buried somewhere in this book is an essay – perhaps already written by some prophet of the L5 cult – on the socioeconomic impact on dull old Earth of flourishing, utopian space colonies close to independence. It's credible that Earthbound interests like oil nations would fight against being undersold by cheap beamed power from such colonies. What isn't credible is that part to which Reynolds gives less attention: dialogue, character, motivation, little things like that. Background data get an incredibly hamhanded presentation . . . e.g. there's "space Cafard", a dread claustrophobia which has little effect on astronauts in their roomy capsules but strikes with full force when you're cooped up in a few score cubic miles of space colony. This occupational hazard is introduced by wheeling on a disposable cardboard character who catches it and does not omit to recite all the synonyms ("I've got Island fever. I've got Wide Syndrome. I've got . . . space cafard . . ."); next page the doctor fears we will have forgotten, and mutters a resume ("Space cafard," he muttered. "So-called Island fever. Sometimes it's named 'Wide Syndrome' . . .") before passing the time by lecturing a nurse – who knows all about space cafard – on the interesting subject of space cafard. At last the actual hero comes aboard, and is swift to ask his lady mentor: "What's space cafard?" And she tells him. Everyone just loves to lecture everyone else. Indigestible knowledge is flung around like sacks of cement; we have speeches on the L5 economy (pp 38-42), space cafard again (48-9), food production and local hobbies (54-6), racial conflict (61-64), economics of building colonies (65), Utopian eugenics (69-73, 76-8), space cafard (81-2) . . . Subtly realized future slang consists of the word *wizard* (meaning "fine" or "OK") and the fearful oath *Holy Zen!* (in extreme cases *Holy Jumping Zen!*); the recurrence of these gave me agonizing bouts of space cafard.

The plot is flawed; everybody has to be so shortsighted as not to spot likely economic and other tensions produced by L5 colonies until several are built; since the issues have already been publicly debated, it's nonsensical to suggest such slow realization that physically independent colonies might wish legal independence, or that a beamed power system giving virtual monopoly of Earth's electricity supply might be used (surprise!) for blackmail. Far from becoming suddenly apparent at such a late date, factors like these are already playing their own small part to ensure the colonies will never be built at all.

— **Dave Langford**

Roadmarks
by Roger Zelazny *(Del Rey, 1979, 185pp, $8.95)*

An honourable contribution to the great tradition of science fiction confectionary, this: a book as sweet as champagne and substantial as bubbles. The Road in question leads through time, linking all historical epochs both actual and alternative into a complex superhighway network, complete with all the jargon of hard shoulders and exits. Certain talented individuals can travel this Road, running guns to historical wars, trading between eras after the fasion of Eternity, or simply searching for the land of Heart's Desire. One such is Red Dorakeen, picturesque trucker and part-time romantic, looking for the meaning of his life. Another is his son, looking for him. A third, the villainous Chadwick, complicates everybody's lives by declaring "black decade" on Red — a ritual whereby he is allowed ten free attempts on the life of his chosen target. These attempts are carried out through a team of assassins hand-picked from every historical era — a psychopathic cyborg, a Tibetan warrior-monk, a tyrannosaur, a killing-machine abandoned on Earth by visiting extraterrestrials, and so on. There is the usual display of time-paradox complications, re-complicated by a staccato and tortuous narrative line. The book virtually bulges with minor characters, including brief appearances by Jack the Ripper, Adolph Hitler, and the Marquis de Sade. Wonderful machines, exotic landscapes, bizarre encounters turn up on every other page at a pace which is finally rather dizzying. There are even dragons, supernatural overseers of the Road, which whom Red's final destiny is obscurely bound up. If there is next to no real *invention* here, there is astonishing astonishing dexterity. The whole gaudy, fascinating pageant is kept in vigorous motion with no appearance of effort, and Zelazny's fluent, streamlined prose accommodates itself to a wide range of effects with wit and economy. Yes, it would be nice if the book were *about* something, rather than just a sparkling cabaret; if the characters were in any sense *characters* rather than comfortable stereotypes, the action not merely an adroitly-conceived succession of thrills and spills. But it must have been fun to write — it's certainly great fun to read.

— **Tom Hosty**

Naming the Animals: A Haunting
by Ned Crawford *(Faber, 1980, 191pp, £5.50)*

"What future is there for a man who begins to question the validity of the world he inhabits and doubts its most fundamental values?" asks the blurb-writer, faced with the difficult job of making this boring book sound significant. He proceeds apace to the answer: "No future, probably, but that of outcast or madman." Nonsense – the poor fellow simply becomes an author of overwritten novels explaining pretentiously what a horrible future the world must have. It's not even difficult; all he has to do is take a comic book version of *Brave New World,* add a bit of Kafka's *Castle* (it doesn't matter if it doesn't fit – it's *symbolism,* and the days when symbols were meant to be symbols *of* something are a long time past) and a defiantly optimistic ending stolen from *Genesis* (who cares whether it makes sense or not? – the whole point of the book is that everything has ceased to make sense), and serve it up cold. I find it difficult to believe that any reader could be impressed by the idiotic posturing which the author employs in the fond hope that it will add significance to his lame plot and hackneyed scenarios, but Faber and Faber obviously believe that intellectuals can be bluffed just as easily as anyone else, if not more easily. They may be right.

– **Brian Stableford**

Clifford D. Simak: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography
by Muriel R. Becker *(G.K. Hall, 1980, xliii + 149pp, $18.00)*

This is an exhaustive author bibliography, fat, well-printed and sturdily bound. No doubt it will last forever. Ms Becker provides a more-or-less critical introduction, a brief interview with Clifford Simak, a short chronology of his life, and a listing of every last thing he has written, fiction and non-fiction. The longest section of the volume, "Critical and Bio-Bibliographical Studies", lists no less than 193 items about Simak – including the brief mentions which occur in, for example, Neil Barron's *Anatomy of Wonder.* Every item is annotated. By my count, only three of the 193 items amount to fully-fledged essays on the author – those by Sam Moskowitz (1962), Thomas Clareson (1976) and myself (1977). Despite the impression of a flourishing Simak Industry which Ms Becker's bibliography gives, not much has really been said about this author so far. But should anyone wish to say more he or she will find the present volume an essential reference work. It is one of the first of an endless series which G.K. Hall plan to produce under the general editorship of L.W. Currey and Marshall B. Tymn. Other writers already covered in this "Masters of Science Fiction and Fantasy" series include Jack Williamson and Andre Norton. Volumes on Heinlein, Asimov and anybody else you care to name are rumoured to be on their way.

– **David Pringle**

Editorial Postscript

As readers will have gathered, Malcolm Edwards is no longer Administrator of the SF Foundation. We wish him the best of luck in his new freelance career. Since 1st May 1980 the SFF has been without an Administrator. Letters and subscriptions are being handled by Mrs Joyce Day, the part-time secretary. Joyce is doing an excellent job, but correspondents should bear in mind that she works part-time in term-time only. Hence, there may be occasional delays in replying to letters and subscription queries.

Only one member of *Foundation's* editorial team (John Clute) lives in London, so the journal is for the most part being edited from a distance. This may also lead to slight delays. Please bear with us. We certainly intend to keep things going, however adverse the circumstances. There is a faint chance that a new Administrator may be appointed before the end of 1980, probably as a member of library staff rather than teaching staff. North East London Poly has been hit harder than any other polytechnic by the Government's "capping" of the Advanced Further Education financial pool. However, one bright piece of news for the SFF is that the Arts Council has kindly agreed to subsidize a science fiction writer-in-residence for one year. He or she should be in post by the time this issue of *Foundation* appears, and will undertake light teaching duties at NELP.

Meanwhile, the Foundation's library still exists (larger than ever!) and is still housed in the fine new building at the Barking Precinct of NELP. Visiting researchers can still be accommodated – by prior arrangement with Joyce Day, please, and not during vacation time.

Finally, I'm afraid we must announce another increase in subscription rates for the journal. There has been a more than 20% inflation rate in Britain during 1980; printing and paper costs have continued to rise, so the council of the SFF has decided to raise prices accordingly. From 1st January 1981, the standard rate for individual European subscribers will rise from £4 to £5. Overseas and institutional rates will be increased in approximately the same degree (details are being sent out with subscribers' renewal notices, and will be printed on the inside front cover of *Foundation* 21). We are sorry about this, but it is, as they say, due to circumstances beyond our control. We feel that *Foundation* is still good value for money, and we hope to make it ever more so.

D.P.

whole race in suspended animation on an apparently dead planet, a shoot-out with interstellar cops . . . The humour is predominantly sub-Harrison, with a definite infusion of sub-Sheckley, and, if I'm not mistaken, a little sub-Vonnegut too. It all creaks. Imagine the *I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again* team dramatizing Bertram Chandler. If you like the idea, buy the book.

— **Tom Hosty**

All correspondence about subscriptions, advertising and business matters should be sent to The SF Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, RM8 2AS, UK. Editorial correspondence only *should be addressed to David Pringle, 21 The Village Street, Leeds, LS4 2PR, UK.*

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

ISSN 0306-4964