FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

21

IN THIS ISSUE

Gregory Benford unravels his String of Days
Naomi Mitchison on the Deathless Ditties of sf
Christopher Priest lambasts Lester del Rey
K.V. Bailey on Dickens as a proto-sf writer
D. West against the Marching Morons
Colin Greenland on Peake's Titus Alone
Letters from Bailey, Clute, Greenland, Lowndes and others
Reviews by Bishop, Clute, Greenland, Kaveney, Samuelson, Stableford, Watson and others
of books by Octavia Butler, Nicholas Fisk, M. John Harrison, Ursula Le Guin, Stanislaw Lem, Frederik Pohl, Robert Silverberg, John Varley, Jack Williamson, Gene Wolfe and many others

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21

Contents

Number 21, February 1981

Editorial

Foundation is almost nine years old. Throughout that time it has been published by North East London Polytechnic, within which the Science Fiction Foundation nestles as a semi-autonomous body. The journal has undoubtedly brought credit to the Polytechnic. For many readers – in America, Japan and Australia as well as in Britain – North East London Polytechnic is known primarily because it publishes *Foundation*. NELP has been the only educational institution in Britain to recognize that science fiction is a field worthy of study. The SF Foundation's library, housed at NELP's Barking Precinct, is by far and away the finest publicly-available collection of sf and sf criticism in Britain, and it has been used by many researchers (some of them of high academic standing and public repute). We hope that all this will continue to be true, though the present economic climate casts a certain amount of gloom.

The financial prospect for polytechnics in England and Wales continues to grow worse. According to the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (30th January 1981), a Government White Paper due to be published in March foresees "a dramatic downward spiral of spending on higher education up to 1984 . . . The plans show that the Advanced Further Education pool, which in the current year was fixed at £375 million (November 1979 prices) will plummet to £282 million by 1983-84."

The Government has already announced a £12 million cut in the AFE pool for 1981-82; further reductions of £22 million for 1982-83 and £28 million for 1983-84 are forecast. These plans assume a 17 per cent fall in the number of lecturers employed in polytechnics and colleges of higher education – "probably through large-scale redundancies", according to the *THES*. Meanwhile student numbers are actually increasing – in 1980 they grew by 3 per cent over 1979.

Against this background, there is now little hope that NELP will be able to appoint a new Administrator for the SF Foundation – or a librarian, for that matter. (The SFF has been without an Administrator since 1st May 1980.) Currently, the SFF is staffed by a part-time secretary, Mrs Joyce Day (to whom all credit for her hard work in recent months), and a Writing Fellow, Colin Greenland (who is funded by the Arts Council for one year). Colin has kept alive some of the teaching work of the SFF, though his primary responsibility is to his own creative writing. (His critical writing has also added strength to the journal – see his article on Mervyn Peake and his half-dozen book reviews in this issue.)

The editorial team of *Foundation* continues to maintain a spirit of enthusiasm and optimism, despite the vicissitudes of the parent institution. We hope to make the journal livelier and more fruitfully controversial. As we stated in the last issue, letters of comment are greatly appreciated and we hope to publish many more of them – see the expanded "Letters" section in this issue. From the next issue, *Foundation* 22, onwards we hope to improve the appearance of the magazine, beginning with the introduction of justified right-hand margins (at long last!). We already have some good material in hand for future issues, including a long article on "Science Fiction in the 1970s" by Roz Kaveney; an essay by Dr Patrick Parminder on the sf of J.B.S. Haldane and Naomi Mitchison; a study of "Man-Made Catastrophies:: by Brian Stableford; a delightful "Profession" piece by Raymond Z. Gallun; and much else. Stay with us!

– David Pringle
January 1981

Gregory Benford is one of a relatively rare breed amongst sf writers: a practising scientist. He is also a superbly literate and humane writer, who not only gets his "hard" sf right, but also gets his people right, and does so with remarkable stylistic panache, making him a living refutation of C.P. Snow's regrets about the gulf between the Two Cultures. This is born out especially in his recent novel Timescape, *which is not only a thrilling sf story and a fine novel by any standard but is also a genuine portrayal of the actual business of science. Below, in fascinating diary format, he shows how the two strands in his life wind together to form their productive double helix.*

The Profession of Science Fiction, 22: a String of Days

Gregory Benford

Tuesday, May 6. Things move slowly with the novel. I decide this in the evening, as I read over the blue sheets which are the carbon copies of last weekend's work. My newest system for writing is to make one original on yellow paper, a carbon on blue, and then do hand corrections on the blue. Once I've rethought those, and finally amended the yellow original sheets, I take the carbon to the university and file it in a stack in the big metal cabinet in my office. Ever since Dell lost two copies of the *Find the Changeling* ms. and Gordon Eklund's wife threw a snit and burned the others, leaving only a partial rough carbon to be discovered 6 months later after we'd all given up, I've been cautious.

Wednesday, May 7. I go by the labs I'm running and check how the teaching assistants are handling the Franck-Hertz experiment. The students appear to be doing better this quarter than last. There's trouble with some of the circuitry but we fool around with it, guided more by intuition than anything else, and the rig begins to operate successfully. Ever since I changed the P5E lab course to require each student to work alone, building the experiment and taking the data and analyzing it himself, there has been more interest from them; so the teaching assistants say.

I write a thank you letter to Cliff Simak, for his kind note about *Timescape.* We'd had a good long talk at a convention a month ago, and discovered we have much the same feelings about some sf themes, and both consider ourselves country folk at heart. I was born in southern Alabama, across the bay from Mobile, and spent most of my first decade living in small towns, on farms, always near the sea.

I like rural surroundings and have managed to find a beach town, Laguna Beach, which combines some naturalness, proximity to a city (the greater southern California sprawl) and the chance to be near the ocean whenever I like, which is often. I consider myself a southern writer, with instincts developed there. My father fought in WWII and found the Army much to his liking, compared with teaching agriculture in small Alabama towns. We left Alabama in 1948, returning occasionally for long stays while my father trained or took assignments in distant places unsuitable for families. He was on Macarthur's general staff in the Korean war, and commanded an artillery batallion in Germany. We lived "on the economy" in Germany, but our three years in Japan were spent on a base. I saw a lot of Japan and liked it, though I've never been back. In Germany I became interested in sf fandom and started publishing a fanzine, *Void.* We returned to Dallas, Texas, in 1957, and I became caught up in science. My father retired after becoming Commandant of the US Army Artillery School in Oklahoma, and I got my Bachelor's degree at the University of Oklahoma in 1963, mostly because it was close to home. My father is similar to Eisenhower, a country type who is cleverer than many would at first suppose. I was acutely conscious myself of the prejudice against southerners, and in adolescence trained myself into a straight American accent. (I later found that this seemed to make me more aware of accents and speech mannerisms, and to this day I tend to lapse into an approximation of whatever accent those around me are speaking. After moving to California for graduate work in 1963 I gradually slid into a Californian mode of speech. Get me excited about something, though, and the southern vowels will leak out.)

The day's second mail delivery arrives. There are reprints of a paper I did with my now-graduated student, Bob Buschauer. Bob now teaches at Cal State Research Polytech at Pomona, a solid school, and he seems to enjoy it greatly. Our paper concerns the luminosity of pulsars, trying to set theoretical limits. *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* is a good journal to publish in: reasonably swift, attentive, neat, and read by a larger range of people than *Astrophysical Journal,* or *Ap J,* the American leading journal. Also, *Monthly Notices* doesn't have page charges. I've always felt rather like a vanity press writer when I pay charges, though of course in the sciences these things are looked upon differently.

Fall asleep reading Faulkner.

Thursday, May 8. This is the one day a week I definitely set aside to stay home and work. Usually I write; often, fiction. Something nudges at me, a TV presentation of "The Music School" by Updike seen last night, plus some research I've been doing on NGC 1097, and I go into my study to make notes. I begin work on a short story, "Plates", feeling that I'll try out a few paragraphs for feel and then get down to the ever-looming novel. I start out by hand, as usual. Doesn't come easily. I have started without looking up my notes made when the basic idea occurred to me, about seven years ago, but now I take out the notebook, tear out the pages and lie them beside my own recent scribblings. Most of my original plot, involving a graduate student, I can't use. The basic idea, though – discovery of an extragalactic phenomenon which casts light on events at the center of our own galazy – will work. I try a few more paragraphs, rummaging for the proper voice. Must be first person, yes. A certain distance, an assessing gaze, but an open man, inquisitive.

The atmosphere of Caltech, yes: and abruptly I see why I've started this story, this day – tomorrow I'll visit Caltech and something will surely click into place. I put away my notes and write a memo about university stuff and then go after the novel. Meet Mark at his bus stop, walk down with him to his music lesson. He discusses seriously what he wants for his birthday. I swing by the library while he is in his lesson, glance at the *Publisher's Weekly* (favourable on the new Wolfe, ho-hum on the Spinrad, expect commercial success for the Silverberg), check a local bookstore for what's new (not much) and read a short story on the beach. Walk home with Mark and play catch.

Watch *Norma Rae* on the movie channel in the evening, drink a bottle of Chardonnay.

Friday, May 9. This is colloquium day in the physics department, and I am one of the three colloquium chairmen this year. I arrive at my office to find a taped telephone series of increasingly anxious messages from a graduate student who works with our colloquium speaker. The speaker is sick and can't make it. I immediately confer with the other chairmen and we find a substitute among our own department members. Another crisis averted. I settle down and read the mail – a few reprints of papers on plasma physics, a membership bill from the American Physical Society, a fanzine and a letter from a reader of *In the Ocean of Night* – and then begin to think about a theoretical paper I have been writing on galactic jets. These are the huge gouts of relativistic electrons which are ejected from distant galaxies, which we see in the radio frequencies. What ejects them we don't know, and I have dealt only with the dynamics of the jets. I review my calculations and make a new note about ramifications. Then a quick lunch and I'm off, driving for an hour to Caltech. There I walk around a bit to renew my impressions of the long tiled hallways, and find Roger Blandford's office. We talk for an hour or so and then I look up Peter Goldreich. Peter and I have waged a battle against a French mathematical physicist over a particular relativistic radiation mechanism which may be relevant to pulsars and quasars. Goldreich proposed the mechanism years ago and I studied it, reproducing his results and adding some sophistication to the mathematics, later. The Frenchman has attempted to show that an even more sophisticated calculation shows that the mechanism fails. We have tried to duplicate his calculation and, surprise! – it turns out he is dead wrong: the mechanism remains, essentially as we proposed it. Goldreich and I are rather happy with this result, and we speculate on the motives of the Frenchman, whose handling of the whole affair has been rather rude. I leave shortly after 5 pm and drive to a large home in Pasadena, where I am expected for dinner. I am to give a talk on writing sf and the market in the 1980s to an annual Pasadena writers' meeting. The Japanese dinner is relaxing and the hostess takes me to the auditorium where about 100 people are milling around. I make a few notes while I am being introduced (I haven't planned anything beforehand) and then launch into a discussion of sf as a market, what a newcomer can expect, how to roll with the editorial punches, etc. I make a few jokes about being a writer and the talk as a whole goes over well. The crowd seems to want the real insiders' gossip and how-to elements, rather than abstract lit'ry discussion. I give it to them. After about an hour I ask for questions, and then sign a few books – a ceremony that always seems a bit strange to me –

and then I'm off, free. A few drinks at the hostess's house, and the long drive home. On the way I listen to a Vivaldi program and try to plot the next chunk in the novel.

Saturday, May 10. Letter from a Polish sf society, asking for bio and books. I make a few notes for novel purposes, reread notes from before, and skim the latest *Physics Today,* marking pieces of possible use for the Britannica summary I do at the end of the year. Then I chuck it all for the day and walk down to the center of Laguna with the family, looking in on the bookstores. Play with Alyson and Mark on the beach. In the afternoon Joan and I go to an opulent brunch, the annual meeting of the Laguna Beach Chamber Music Society. It is in the home of a rather rich man, the place dripping with 18th and 19th century Italian art and furniture. Wonderful food. Joan is made president of the society, and there is discussion of the concerts for next season. (One of the advantages of our location is that we can walk down the hill to hear some of the best chamber groups in the world.) I eat rather more than I should, as usual, hitting slightly above my 3500+ calories/day rate.

That evening Rick & Asenath Sternbach come by to show us the four black-and-whites Rick has done for a story of mine to appear in *Destinies.* Fine stuff. Rick is quiet, intense, and an exceptional talent, probably the best to emerge in sf in over a decade.

Sunday, May 11. Mother's Day. Presents for Jean, brunch out. Work in the garden. Call my mother to chat. Practice softball with Mark. Work on "Plates".

Monday, May 12. A proofed version of an astrophysics paper of mine comes in from *Ap J* for checking. Tedious work. I spend an hour with Keith Kato, my graduate student, discussing experiments he's doing. Keith is also an sf fan, and even attends conventions, subscribes to fanzines, etc. That he should wind up having a part-time sf writer as major professor is one of those coincidences a writer would never dare use. He works well and is making good progress. We discuss two papers we've been preparing for the plasma physics journals. I don't want to send them to the journal yet, because somethings nags at me about the theoretical explanation. I ask Keith to recheck all the data, and replot the points in a different way. Plasma seminar that afternoon.

Letter from John Douglas at Simon & Schuster, enclosing very favourable letters on *Timescape* from Anthony Burgess and Walter Miller, Jr. Wow. These are people I admire the hell out of, as we southerners say, and their approval is gratifying.

Tuesday, May 13. I conduct my usual discussion section for the introductory physics course. The students seem bright. In the afternoon I finish reading the *Ap J* proofs. This paper has two Italian co-authors; I really should get in touch with them about the changes I've made here and there, in the light of recent new radio astronomy maps, but there isn't time, so I go ahead.

Keith Kato brings by the replotted data. Some of it doesn't square with the way we've thought about the theory.

Make some notes about "Plates" in the evening.

My back therapy seems to be doing some good. I sleep fairly comfortably for the first time in a week.

Wednesday, May 14. I attend the Honours Lunch for outstanding graduate and undergraduate students in the School of Physical Sciences, one from each department. Our graduates are getting better and better. One of them asks me if I have a new novel coming out soon, and I manage to deflect conversation away to matters scientific fairly soon after answering the question. I realize I am getting fairly bored with describing the publishing biz to outsiders, especially since it's unbelievably irrational.

I figure out a new way to explain the Kato data. Work on that through the afternoon.

Call from Owen Davies at *Omni,* asking if I'll write some Astronomy columns for them. I agree. Deadline for the first is tight: June 1.

Thursday, May 15. Work on the short story, think about the novel. When I run out of writing steam I do some more calculations regarding the Kato data. This explanation looks much better than our earlier ideas. Some uncertainties in the calculation, though, make it difficult to reliably predict the power we should observe. Luckily, the data lies within a reasonable parameter range for the theory. For this you pay the price that the observed power in the 1 cm wavelength range doesn't help confirm the theory very well. Theories that can be adjusted to agree with just about anything aren't useful; in fact, since you can't make a prediction with them, they aren't even scientific in the strict sense. So we have to rely on the spectrum as a crucial test. Son of a gun, it seems to work out.

Goddam back is bothering me again.

Friday, May 16. Talk to Silverberg about stock market. I have a sense, developing strongly over the last year, that anyone who has family obligations must pay much attention to economics. The classical sound investments are drifting close to the rocks, and even the small clump of capital the Benfords have needs guidance. Silverberg takes a very traditional investment policy, never sells anything, doesn't fool with real estate, etc. To me this is madness, particularly in his tax bracket, but on the other hand, he is a reliable source of information on the more traditional stocks.

Faculty meeting at 11, about two new assistant professor appointments. Both gain approval. I remember how, when I attended my first such meeting in 1971, I had expected solemn and profound deliberations. Instead, there is a comfortable air and jokes are made. But the business is serious and the decisions are gradually arrived at, sampling the bulk of the opinions before any votes are taken. Both leading candidates for the positions gain approval. I'm glad of this; we can use a new plasma experimentalist, and this one looks good. I am running my own little experimental group, even though I'm a theorist, and I can use some help.

Letter from a fanzine editor, Dan Steffan, asking if I'll write a retrospective about the days when Ted White, Terry Carr and I edited a fanzine together, *Void.* What the hell; I decide to do it. Should be fun. I often write just because I like writing itself, pushing out the words. The fact that sometimes this is a way of not working on fiction, which is tough going, I try to ignore.

Saturday, May 17. Softball game of Mark's; they lose.

New *Publisher's Weekly* has a great positive review of *Timescape.* This makes me

feel definitely up the whole afternoon, until I remind myself that I can't let myself be tossed about by the winds of critical opinion. Burgess & Miller, sure, but not some faceless reviewer. It is easier to believe this than to practice it, though, as every author knows. Trouble is, I know that the sf audience as a whole is more interested in wish fulfillment fantasies than anything else, and that's not my vector. The question is whether I should seek a larger audidence, maybe outside sf, which has my interests. It is hard to ignore the flat fact that most of the sf crowd is a passing throng of adolescents, and probably always will be. The act of faith you hear from such high priests of the biz as Dave Hartwell is that there remains a literate, sensitive, long-term audience for what Zebrowski always calls "high sf". I seriously doubt this proposition, but I can't disprove it. Certainly the awards don't bear on the point; they're from a minute fraction of the readers. Oh well. I'm pretty sure a lot of the sf crowd will dislike *Timescape's* space devoted to characters and historical background. There is even a whole chapter about a doctoral exam; I *know* that won't play with a lot of them. I suspect the characters, middle-class types whose interests are cerebral, won't appeal to the large readership who apparently want something currently passing for hugely relevant, forward-thinking insight: sensitive far-future folk atop their heroic horses. Oh well. I made all the choices about the book long ago; only now, at some remove, can I begin to see how it blends into the field. It's this way with every book. I always have my own latter evaluation of my work, and by my lights the Graham Greene division into *entertainments* and *novels* is useful. In that sense only *In the Ocean of Night* and *Timescape* are my novels, with a possible reservation about *If the Stars are Gods.* The first two are my own favourites, so I don't know whether I'm identifying ambition with achievement or not. You never do, I guess. Such reflections are typical of the time a novel is about to come out, for me. There is, I think, a steady conflict between commercial values and personal ones, all warring inside the same person. I write some things for the sheer joy of production, to be a craftsman, to be a pro. Nothing wrong with that. (Then why do I sometimes feel a curious, undefined conflict?)

I go home and reread the Tom Disch essay in the Nocholls *SF at Large* volume. I wonder at times why he's still in the field. Why is Gene Wolfe? I'll have to ask them sometime.

Sunday, May 18. Self doubt squashed or maybe satiated, I write a long major scene in the novel, a scene I've been planning for weeks and have balked from writing so far.

Faculty brunch at the chairman's home; excellent. Interesting results from the neutrino folk.

Monday, May 19. Meeting at lunch to finish off details of setting up, at long last, a student-operated bookstore on campus. I've been working for this for three years and now a loan for $250,000 from the Regents has come through, so it looks like sho' 'nuff success. And I'll be glad as hell to be quit of the job.

Tuesday, May 20. Work on some radio astronomy data. In the evening I write the astronomy piece for *Omni,* taking as subject good ol' NGC 1097. There's a beautiful color print they can use.

Wednesday, May 21. Spend most of the day in the lab, peering at recalcitrant experiments. The quantity of sheer fiddling in experimental physics is numbing. That's why I decided to get out of it, after spending two years tracking down vacuum leaks and electrical faults in a nuclear spin resonance lab. It was a wise decision, for one of my nature. Now I'm back supervising exactly that sort of thing, but the pleasure is that I get to look at results, and can sidestep most of the grunt labor. Of course, there's dog work in theory, too. A lot.

Thursday, May 22. In one long session I finish "Plates", about 6500 words. Decide to call it "Exposures".

Friday, May 23. Lunch with one of the two novelists in the UCIrvine writing school. His pen name is Macdonald Harris and he was nominated for the National Book Award (for *The Balloonist*) some years back. He tells me horror stories about mainstream publishing. Tales of agents forgetting their clients, of neglect from well-thought-of houses, of incestuous ingroups. Sounds familiar. He lets drop that none of his books has ever earned out its hardback advance, despite several paperback sales. And his advances don't seem all that high, either. Sf does have its pluses.

Thesis exam for a doctoral student. He does reasonably well. Students have an odd notion – I remember it from my student days – that faculty love to cut them up on oral exams. In fact, a professor likes nothing better than to find a student who tells them something interesting in a clear way. It's far more delightful to be told something new than to merely sit in judgment.

I go for one more therapy session for my back, before my trip. It seems better. They're still allowing me only swimming as exercise. I have sustained enough injuries in the last three years to give one pause. Either I'm getting careless or the machine is giving out.

Letter from Malzberg. He is bitter, as usual, about the sf field. I wish he could overcome it and write some more, for he is a singular talent and it would be valuable to watch him develop.

More rewriting on "Exposures". Am I avoiding working on the novel? This is what it usually feels like if my subconscious is hanging back from doing something. Oh well; no point in forcing matters.

Saturday, May 24. Picnic on the beach with friends. Read a few scientific journals. More on "Exposures".

Sunday, May 25. More beach, more notes on the novel. I've got thick notebooks of them now, so detailed I wonder how I can mine it efficiently for material.

In early afternoon I get tired of pushing ideas around and resolve to quit, go for a walk, and then a notion comes into my head, a theme for a short story. I mull it over for two or three minutes and then, acting on impulse and no small amount of frustration with the novel, I find myself rolling clean paper into the typewriter and beginning without pause, writing the thing as fast as I can go. Malzberg often writes afterwords to his stories saying "written in 37 minutes on February 4, 1972" or the like, and I've always puzzled over how that could be, but now I find myself making it all up as my fingers move, and in 61 minutes – damn, I was trying for a perfect hour – I finish "Slices", the first story I've written in quite a while without any planning. In the mid-1970s I wrote by dictation and knocked out some of my best

stories ("White Creatures", "Doing Lennon") in a Sunday morning, going hell for leather. It has its rewards. "Slices" is a commercially viable story, I suppose, but its value to me is mostly in the steam I blew off by writing it.

See David & Marilee Samuelson in the evening; swimming and sf talk. He tells some funny stories about his class in essay writing. He speaks well of the new Gary Wolfe critical volume.

Monday, May 26, Memorial Day. As Laguna fills with tourists I flee, taking a two-step flight to Albuquerque. My government car isn't there to meet me, so I grab an Avis and drive north, stopping at Indian sites for the lovely view near the Rio Grande. This is a marvellous crystalline land, sharp and immediate even in the gathering dusty heat of early summer. I went this way often some years ago, when I was working with people at Los Alamos – which is visible on the distant etched plateau, still V'd with gullies of snow. I liked Santa Fe then and coming into it now, as arranged, I turn off and find George R.R. Martin's house. Lisa Tuttle is there, too. We talk, gossip, go to dinner. I tell them about a famous sf writer who maintains he must screw every day, and the difficulties of prearrangement this get him into. Railroad's office is a shrine to sf; I reflect on the fact that mine is a hodge-podge of books, never quite put in order. I like orderly offices but only occasionally get mine into shape. I wonder if anybody has ever tried classifying writers on a scale of neatness.

Tuesday, May 27. Wake up staring at Railroad's hardback collection. He makes breakfast and Lisa tells about life in Texas. I went to high school in Dallas and the details sound as though they haven't changed much. I am impressed with the level of economic difficulty she is willing to put up with to write. I wonder if I would do the same, all for the muse. No, I think, on the drive back to Albuquerque, I wouldn't. I made that decision, without really thinking it through clearly, back in Dallas. My sourly cynical fanzine writings of that time – which I've been reviewing lately for the I-remember-*Void* piece – bring back to me my hardheaded self of the late 50s and early 60s. My parents had persuaded me that life was tough, life was earnest, and I made the immediate deduction that joining the Sputnik sendup was a smart bet. And it was more fun that the notion of pounding a typewriter, too; life itself, whole, can easily beat a garret. I don't regret the decision.

Turn in the Avis, pick up the GSA car, drive south along the Rio Grande to Socorro. It's a wind-swept little town with a small technical college in it. I pass through and at 70 mph wind through 55 miles of steadily ascending mountain country. The specks of white ahead resolve into radio disks, all mutely peering at a spot in the sky, laid out in a Y-shaped pattern, each arm at least 14 kilometers long. The Very Large Array is the biggest radio interferometer ever built, placed 7000 feet up on the floor of an ancient lake bed. The altitude gets above most of the interfering water vapour in the atmosphere, and also isolates the site from commercial interference. (You can pick up a TV show from a thousand miles away, though, if you want.)

I drive across the site and go into the big main building, where Jack Burns greets me. He takes me on a walking tour of the facility. It's nearly finished, due to open, with a senator cutting the tape, October 1980. As we approach the radio dishes

loom up and up until, as we climb on the catwalk, I realize they are each as big as a two-storey house. The wind shrieks through the heavy mounts, at least thirty miles an hour. The control room is moving them into position to lock on vertical, because they can be unstable in winds like these. Vertical minimizes the cross section, but of course it shuts down the VLA, too. Climbing into the bowl of a stationary, moored disk, I manage to twist my back some, but I forget about it in the surprising heat of the sun-catching bowl. Here there is no wind. We talk for a while and then climb back down.

I spend the evening looking at fresh radio maps of extragalactic sources with extended jets – radio sorcery, indeed – and talking to the team which works on such matters. We eat out in a "nearby" (15 miles) town; okay Mexican food. I stay up to midnight, watching data come through that I'm interested in. It's displayed on a TV screen which can provide a number of different color contrasts. It is eerie to see a radio galaxy in blue and green, with red background.

Before falling asleep in the motel-like on-site room they've given me, I read the John Varley story in *New Voices III* that Railroad has given me. Pretty good.

Wednesday, May 28. Up early, breakfast at the cafeteria. The VLA is a national lab run by the Associated Universities, and thus is free of the officialdom air of other labs – notably, it's nothing like the earnest Lawrence Livermore Lab, where I did fusion plasma research for four years before joining the UCI Physics department. I spend the morning discussing results with the observers. It turns out my suggestion of mapping NGC 1097 in the radio was done only weeks before. Surprisingly, there is absolutely no sign of the jets which appear in the optical. This casts into grave doubt the model of ejected black holes; the jets were supposed to be their wakes. Well, I say, maybe some things are ejected from the center of NGC 1097, but it's mild stuff, perhaps a clumping of gravitationally bound stars. The idea doesn't seem very promising, but there must be some explanation, and the absence of a radio trace merely deepens the mystery.

After lunch I give the first of two talks on the theory I've been working on over the last year: stability of relativistic jets. It is well attended and seems to go over well. That evening we eat at a steak restaurant which uses local beef and for the first time in my life I cannot finish the steak; it must be 2½ lbs, easy.

I stay up late, watching maps come in from the computer processing. In one of the sources a small, jet-like spike appears. Interesting.

Before falling asleep I spend some time relaxing by trying to re-derive a mathematical result I got some months ago. It's fun and calms the mind. The trouble with doing it at the end of the day is that my metabolism is variable, and I lose my mental keenness at night. I find I can't reproduce the result.

The hell with it. I do exercises for my back and go to sleep.

Thursday, May 29. I awaken early and can't get back to sleep, so I try the problem of the night before. This time it comes easily. I also write down some notes on the novel which occurred to me as I was waking up; this nudging of the subconscious has become a standard work habit with me in these crowded days.

Same routine as yesterday. When the VLA people called me up and invited me out I had no idea it was so isolated. You could get fidgety out here; most people

take the bus to Socorro, 55 miles, but it's no metropolis. I think of myself as a country boy, but this isn't country, it's a giant pool table framed by mountains.

In early afternoon I review my seminar and, finishing early, I call up Dave Hartwell in New York. I sit watching the dishes tilt and talk about the advertising budget for *Timescape*. Turns out there isn't any. Also, a manoeuvre Norman Spinrad and I worked out, whereby the paperbacks come out early to capitalize on the hardback reviews, has been ok'd for Norman but not for me. *Sigh.* More strange bookbiz.

There are some damn good comments after my seminar. I make some notes to use in later research. This is the kind of science which can't be carried out by reading the journals. It makes up the bulk of how science is really done, and I've reflected often on how little the historian of science gets to glimpse this. (I won't even mention how little of it is in sf . . .) In the old days, to be sure, a scientist wrote letters to his peers, and they saved them. The correspondence was human and often garrulous. Now when a scientist gets an idea, he writes a letter and publishes it, formally, in a letter journal. A lot of the zest is lost.

Another Mexican restaurant tonight; excellent. After returning to the control room of the VLA, and waiting for new results on the screens, I punch into the FTS line and call Spinrad in NYC. He has a good overall vision of what's happening at Simon & Schuster, though the news still isn't pleasant. I call Charlie Brown, too, to see if he has any roundabout dope. He has, and altogether I begin to feel better about the advertising dustup. My agent has written a letter in protest to the S&S publisher, getting Dave into a bit of hot water, but the underlying fact is that Simon & Schuster is treating the whole sf line with monumental indifference, and the larger audience I and others had hoped to reach isn't going to be easily found.

Stay up late, talking and peering at the screens.

Friday, May 30. Up early, into my GSA car, stop in Socorro for breakfast, then on to Albuquerque. Call Suzy Charnas from the airport and chat about good ol' S&S and feminism in sf. My flight is late, I miss my connection in LA, and arrive in Orange County (at the newly named John Wayne Airport) just in time. I reach the Physics department colloquium, which I'm supposed to host this time, about halfway through a talk on Jupiter by a Caltech Voyager astronomer, Andy Ingersol. Good stuff. We talk at the wine and cheese afterward, and I get the latest scoop on the moons. Then some work with Keith Kato, pick up the mail, and home for a late supper and a few blissful moments spent simply standing under the olive tree and looking at the Pacific. Odd name; it's the least peaceful of all the oceans I know.

Saturday, May 31. Open my mail and find (a) a paper from *Physics of Fluids* to review; (b) two fanzines; (c) letter from *Future Life* about a personal opinion piece from me; (d) copies of the cover Ted White got Dan Steffan to draw for the new issue of *Void* we're planning; (e) galleys of a critical piece on aliens in sf I did for a volume to come from Southern Illinois Press, called *Bridges to SF* (I gave a talk at the first Eaton Conference on sf at UCRiverside, which was fun because I got to put in a lot of jokes; writing it up was work, but publishing the proceedings of the conference will probably help it establish itself, it says here.); (f) a paper from *Plasma Physics* to review; (g) "Exposures", rejected by Terry Carr. I had more or

less guessed he wouldn't like it, since it is an underplayed piece, but his comment that the style is "flat" mystifies me. Oh well; I'm going to do another draft, anyway, so I resolutely forget Terry's comments until I have worked through the new elements in my own mind. It is probably true that an attempt to portray the way a scientist confronts a problem (or, in critical hyperbole, The Unknown) will seem undramatic and maybe even falsely quiet to most readers. One must keep that in mind.

Sunday, June 1. Write a bit in the morning, trying to get the sense of a scene in the novel. I've started thinking of the book as a set of scenes to be attacked one at a time and stacked atop each other. One of the hardest things in writing, for me, is the realization that the reader goes through all your carefully wrought passages and plot-turns like the wind, gobbling them up, processing, living the drama at a pace that takes you months. So the reader inevitably sees a different book, has a different sense of the pace. How does a writer correct for that? I dunno, really. Rereading helps, but after a few readings of a pored-over text, I become blind to it and can't see it fresh for many months. This is one thing which forces my drawn-out style of writing novels.

I get off a note to Vicki Shochet at Berkley/Putnam, changing a word in the galleys of *Jupiter Project,* which appears in updated form this October; the latest notions about Ganymede, learned yesterday from Andy, make this necessary. Of course, next year the opinions will probably be different, but . . .

Monday, June 2. It's beginning to look as though the radiation processes in our current experiments are similar to those which occur in the Type III solar radio bursts. There are intense cascades of radio noise emitted when a volley of weakly relativistic electrons are ejected from the sun. The electrons pass through the near-solar plasma and excite plasma waves, which then lead to radiation. The complex way the plasma waves turn into bona fide electromagnetic radiation is a subject of decades-old discussion, with a lot of Russian theorists involved. The American theorists have proposed an interesting mechanism, with the Russians saying it was implicit in their earlier work anyway. (They seldom like ideas unless they thought of them first.) But our data is compatible with a certain modification of the recent theory, which means the mechanism may be widespread. This would be the first time a lab experiment has shed light on an astrophysical process of this kind. I resolve to write it up for *Physical Review Letters.*

One parenthetical point is that a particular aspect of turbulence theory is needed to complete the calculation of radiated power in our experiments, and I had resolved to do the calculation soon. But a few weeks before Dean Smith, at Colorado, called to say he'd found the mathematics worked out in a new paper in the Soviet literature. Dean speaks Russian and so is about a year ahead of the translation service. The calculation is quite specifically directed at the parameter range appropriate to our lab experiments. Question: why does it appear naked, without reference to any application? It seems unlikely someone would just up and do this problem without motivation. So why have no experiments similar to ours been mentioned in the Soviet literature?

A further implication is that charged particle weapons, passing through our

atmosphere, very probably emit radio waves. Coincidentally, I receive today a call from my twin brother, Jim, who is working on assessment of Soviet progress in charged particle devices. He listens to my story about the Soviet paper, and remarks that, indeed, it seems beams would emit radio waves, but no one in the US has considered this yet. We both wonder if the surfacing of this Russian paper is a tip of an iceberg.

This is about as close to defence-related work as I get. I put it out of my mind and spend the afternoon writing the *Phys Rev Letters* paper. One virtue of being a part-time writer is that you can pound out a scientific paper at what is, for a scientist, lightning speed. I finish the paper in 3 hours.

The evening's mail brings a critical paper on sf. I read it over quickly after dinner and after putting the kids to bed. Joan has a meeting connected with her work on art, so I read some Faulkner and mull over the vast span between High Lit and scruffy ol' scifi. In the eyes of many it is a true abyss. I remember that several people have remarked to me that I seemed influenced by, among others, Silverberg. In my frame, though, both Sberg and myself are influenced by modern literature itself, by the importing of different techniques. I've actually read only a fraction of Sberg's short stories and perhaps a quarter of his prominent novels. In the mid-70s it simply seemed he was an editor who was open to variant ways of telling a story, so I sent him some work. The ways of translating techniques from the "mainstream" into sf are many and varied, and seldom does direct imposition work; the subject matter is too different. Actually, how anybody could see Sberg themes or approaches in my work is a mystery to me.

But it does seem to me anyone with ambition in sf must try to learn from the experiments of his peers, because the going is tough here, and we are largely without a critical audience which can mirror our concerns. The critics are busy unearthing Wells and embalming Le Guin, so a practising writer gets no useful feedback. As the field becomes more mature (in something more than the sense that mature means old enough to go see durty movies) maybe this will improve. In part, development of sf among a certain fraction is held back by, to use Carol Carr's phase, agora-bibliophobia: fear of the literary marketplace. I wonder how strongly it acts on writers on the margin, of whom there are many. Thank God my limitations are my own, and not imposed from outside.

Tuesday, June 3. More work on the experiment. Take the figures down to get them spruced up for the PRL paper.

I write a quick page for the next Lilapa mailing. Lilapa is an amateur press association which essentially functions as a letter-substitute among the members, who are Bob Tucker, Bill Rotsler, Silverberg, Carr, Norm Clarke, Boyd Raeburn, Bob Shaw, Sid Coleman, Jim and Hilary Benford, Joan and me, Dick Ellington (and Pat), Steve and Grania Davis, the Busbies, Tom Perry, and Dean Grennell; oldtime fans and pros.

I leave the University early and meet my family in Bluebird Park, Laguna. It is Mark's 7th birthday and 12 of his friends are there, with Alyson, to eat cake and play softball. Running the game among 14 fierce players turns out to require more diplomacy than I'd anticipated, but we make it through without major disputes.

I can remember, wryly, being just as competitive as they were, at that age.

Home, put the still-excited kids to bed, and relax with a bottle of wine. I reread these diary pages. My intention has been to simply put it all down, not forcing the events to make some point – that's the job of fiction – but instead to see, in part for my own curiosity, how all the frayed details of the professorial life twine together. It is an unusual act, doing science and writing about it in fiction at the same time. Lately I've been trying to enlist the reader's responses to the devices of realism, in the cause of the fantastic. An odd enterprise. Reading through these days, I can't sum them up. They're just there. In a few years they'll be gone utterly, except for some scraps of memory, a few bits of fiction, cancelled checks and tax returns.

Joan comes into my office, where I've just typed this, and we go to bed.

Donald West, who has been an occasional book reviewer for Foundation, *is presently a mature student working towards a BA in Humanities at Bradford University. He has been well known as a fanzine writer for some ten years, and in 1979 gained a Hugo nomination as Best Fan Writer. He has had several short stories published, and works as a reader for a leading British publisher of sf. In this, his first article for* Foundation, *he casts a caustic eye on a famous story by Cyril Kornbluth.*

The Right Sort of People

D. West

C.M. Kornbluth's story "The Marching Morons" was first published in 1951. It has been reprinted many times. In 1973 it was included in the *Science Fiction Hall of Fame* anthology of "Greatest Science Fiction Novellas of All Time" chosen by the members of The Science Fiction Writers of America. Within the genre the story is generally regarded as a classic: one of those works which cannot be left out of any historical survey, and which even today can be put forward as an example of the kind of sf that is to be admired and emulated. Indeed, "The Marching Morons" is a very readable story. It is written with all Kornbluth's customary pace, dash and wit: a tight and fast-moving narrative that wastes scarcely a word and holds the reader's attention from beginning to end. However, such good, solid commercial readability is scarcely unique, and "The Marching Morons" has no unusual or outstanding features from a purely literary point of view. Yet for thirty years it has been widely admired, despite the fact that the science content is grossly inaccurate or completely implausible, the internal logic is faulty, the basic situation is impossible, the resolution is preposterous, and the overall outlook is indicative of a pathologically morbid

mental condition. Kornbluth's story certainly deserves a place in any history of sf – but only as one of the clearest possible examples of what can go wrong with the genre: of dark, miserable, fear-ridden fantasies of revenge and power masquerading as the triumph of scientific objectivity over emotion and the victory of reason and logic over irrationality.

"The Marching Morons" tells how the tomb of one Honest John Barlow, a real-estate salesman from late twentieth century America, is discovered in the far future. Thanks to an accident with a new anaesthetic Barlow has survived in a state of suspended animation and he is duly brought back to life – mainly in the hope that he might be of some use in solving "The Problem". Taken to a nearby city, Barlow marvels at the wonders of futuristic buildings, cars which apparently travel at 250 Kph, garish animated advertising and inter-urban rocket ships. However, he suspects he is being tricked in some way and he flees, only to be refound and given some franker explanations. The cars, the rocket ships and the rest are indeed fakes: toys to fool a population whose average IQ has declined to 45. A world of five billion is run by a high-intelligence group of only three million (for convenience referred to in this article as the Elite) and The Problem is how to find some way of reducing this vast population, since the Morons breed uncontrollably. The story's title comes from an analogy cited by Barlow: "If all the Chinese in the world were to line up four abreast, I think it was, and start marching past a given point, they'd never stop because of the babies that would be born and grow up before they passed the point". In other words, the Morons can't be sterilized fast enough. Barlow immediately conceives a solution, but being a sharp (and greedy) businessman he refuses to reveal his plan until he is assured of rewards up to and including World Dictatorship. His terms being accepted, he sets the Elite to work on a vast campaign to persuade the Morons to emigrate to Venus. The colonization of Venus is of course a complete fake, since there are no real spaceships capable of travelling further than the Moon, but by advertising, undercover propaganda and manipulation of political and national rivalries Barlow successfully instils the Morons with what he calls "the lemming urge". Cities are torn down for their steel and vast fleets of spaceships are built and take off for the promised land. Finally, when The Problem is solved, Barlow himself is paid off: put in a ship of his own and shot off into the graveyard of space . . . like all the others.

(There are casual mentions of Hitler's death camps, but exactly how the Morons are exterminated is not made explicit. Presumably they are simply dumped in space or on the Moon. Writing so soon after World War II and its mass atrocities Kornbluth probably felt that a hint was quite enough.)

The concentration camps of the Nazis are estimated to have claimed the lives of about six million people. That modern men could systematically and cold-bloodedly commit murder on such a scale was scarcely conceivable until the example was provided. Kornbluth's extrapolation pushes the millions up to billions – a quantum jump that strains credibility all over again. However, it is probably true that human nastiness knows no mathematical limits; atrocity on a grand scale is limited only by the logistics. In fact, Kornbluth scores his one hit here: in almost every other area his premises are frankly impossible.

Intelligence testing on a large scale was started by the military in World War I. The statistical picture of the distribution of intelligence throughout the population has varied scarcely at all from that day to the present. There is some dispute as to exactly what qualities are measured by intelligence tests – the standard joke being that intelligence tests measure the ability to do intelligence tests – but there is general agreement that the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) provides a useful indication of overall cognitive capacity. The mean IQ is set at 100 – the 50% below 100 being duller than average, the 50% above brighter than average. In the form of a graph the figures assume the bell shape so familiar to statisticians that is called the Normal Curve. At the extremes of high and low intelligence percentages are small, but grow steadily larger as they approach the mean. Approximate figures are as follows:

3.5%	less than IQ70
7.0%	IQ70-80
14.5%	IQ80-90
50.0%	IQ90-110
14.5%	IQ110-120
7.0%	IQ120-130
3.0%	IQ130-140
0.5%	more than IQ140

The distribution is very nearly symmetrical, bearing in mind that it is easier to measure precisely in the higher IQ range. There is in fact a higher percentage of very low IQs, due to the various metabolic disorders and purely environmental factors which can affect intelligence adversely. (There are many ways in which intelligence can be reduced, but so far as is known there is still no way in which the genetic inheritance can actually be improved.)

In line with this distribution a population of 5 billion (5,000,000,000) would include 25 million persons with an IQ over 140. Kornbluth's Elite of 3 million in fact represents about .006%, as against the standard .5%. However, if the bell-shaped curve is shoved well over to one side of the graph, bringing the peak of the mean to IQ45, then this figure (statistically insignificant) will probably be more or less correct. There remains the slight problem of 2,500,000,000 individuals with IQs less than 45 . . .

Kornbluth uses the term "moron" rather loosely. In medical terminology three degree of mental deficiency are usually recognized: *Morons* (IQ50-70) can learn useful tasks and adjust under supervision; *Imbeciles* (IQ25-50) can care for simple personal needs but must live in institutions; *Idiots* (IQ too low for measurement) are wholly incapable of looking after themselves. In Kornbluth's world the Morons are the comparatively bright ones; more than half the population would be Imbeciles or Idiots – persons who (if they were significantly mobile at all) would have considerable trouble tying their shoelace or crossing the street. This remains true even if the curve of distribution is assumed to be so severely squashed that the variation from the mean of IQ45 is only a few points either way. A large, complex, urban civilisation with a population of such uniformly low intelligence simply would not be viable. The problem of overpopulation would solve itself within a couple of generations. Persons of very low IQ are less likely to be capable of repro-

duction. The marginally brighter who managed (more or less by accident) to connect with each other would be largely incapable of rearing their children. At this level the infant mortality rate would be well over 50%. Sterilization would hardly be needed, since a long succession of miracles would be necessary for anyone to live long enough to reproduce. With only .006% of the population, each one of the Elite would be responsible for some 1600 Morons – a difficult enough assignment even with subjects who could manage basic self-preservation, and altogether impossible when *at least half* would virtually require full-time nursing. Delegation would be impossible; organization and responsibility require intelligence, and training *one* person of IQ45 to do even the simplest tasks would require considerable labour. The "Morons" Kornbluth presents in his story are something of a cheat – stupider than average, certainly, but by their behaviour on the top side of the IQ70-80 range. *They* would be capable (just about) of managing a simple life under direction, but the five billion with an average IQ of 45 is a complete absurdity.

How did things reach this sorry state, anyway? Looking through a newspaper (which must have had a rather small readership, not many persons of IQ45 being great readers) Barlow spots that racing form has sadly deteriorated since his own time. "Not a single horse running had even the slightest trace of class". In other words, the breed has definitely not improved. As one of the Elite puts it to him:

> "We need the rockets and trick speedometers and cities because, while you and your kind were being prudent and foresighted and not having children, the migrant workers, slum dwellers and tenant farmers were shiftlessly and shortsightedly having children – breeding, breeding. My God, how they bred! . . . Your intelligence was bred out. It is gone. Children that should have been born never were. The just-average, they'll-get-along majority took over the population."

The decline of the racehorse seems a somewhat illogical example to use here, since racehorses have always been bred selectively, with the best being the ones most favoured to reproduce. However, even if racing has suicided or been sabotaged for some strange reason the Elite has managed to use selective breeding for its own ends: ". . . the geneticists realised at last that nobody was going to pay any attention to what they said, so they abandoned words for deeds. Specifically, they formed and recruited for a closed corporation intended to maintain and improve the breed. We are their descendants . . ."

The real morons in Kornbluth's story seem to be these particular "geneticists". Kornbluth was writing well before several major advances in knowledge, but even so, heredity was not entirely a closed book in his time. His own mention of racehorse breeding should have given him some hint of the nonsense he was talking. A novice might think that if a fast stallion is mated with a staying mare the resulting foal will be able to travel long distances at high speeds. Breeders are not such optimists. They take a long look at the family trees on both sides, make abstruse calculations concerning recessive genes – and end by hoping that at least *some* of the desired characteristics will appear. Simply *maintaining* excellence is a fair success – let alone scoring an improvement. Likewise, human genetics is rather more than a simple matter of addition or subtraction. A tall man and a tall woman will have children who are tall – but not quite so tall as the parents. (Were it otherwise one could expect a race of giants by now, given the strong tendency for tall

women to marry tall men.) More to the point: the children of very intelligent parents will probably be rather less intelligent, and the children of very stupid parents will probably be rather less stupid. In other words, the rule is regression to the mean. Even with controlled breeding there is a tendency to move back to the average, and where there is *no* control the tendency is a certainty. To establish – and maintain – a *new* average requires either an enormous effort or an enormous disaster, and a large gene pool makes either of these a little unlikely. In fact, short of the assumption that possession of any IQ over 60 automatically conferred sterility there is no way that the huge shift in the distribution of intelligence postulated in Kornbluth's story could have come about. Kornbluth seems to view intelligence as a sort of Capital: in the deserving Elite it mounts up from generation to generation by genetic compound interest, while among the shiftless Morons it is speedily and recklessly dissipated away. Unfortunately for this notion Nature is more of a Communist, and in the long run intelligence (and other qualities) dodges from high to low through average and back again in a way that is truly impartial. "Good Breeding" is very largely a myth maintained by social and environmental sanctions.

Enough has been said by now to indicate that the "science" in this particular piece of science fiction is distinctly shaky. The situation is arbitrarily declared to exist – and therefore it exists, in defiance of all reason and knowledge. The author has a casual way with figures; neither statistics nor logistics seem to strike him as matters requiring too much attention. For instance, he is able to work out (when Barlow asks why the Morons are not left to kill themselves off) that "Five billion corpses mean about five hundred million tons of rotting flesh", but the very same five hundred million tons is subsequently packed into spaceships and shot off into space without any consideration of the (impossible) amounts of steel, fuel and sundries that would be required.

Still, while it is no doubt desirable for the science in sf to have at least a glancing connection with known realities it is not altogether and absolutely essential. Where the point of the story is not directly implicated, errors and improbabilities can be overlooked out of regard for merits elsewhere. However, the most glaring improbability of all is rather too obvious to be set aside: the inability of the super-intelligent Elite to come up with any answers to the Problem. As Barlow himself puts it: "You're the great brains and you can't think of any?"

The given reason is that "Poprob had exhausted every rational attempt and the new Poprob attacklines would have to be irrational or subrational. This creature from the past . . . would be a foundation of precious vicious self-interest." The real reason, of course, is that without the unsolved problem and Barlow's solution there would be no story. However, this raises the second question: why does it have to be *this* solution?

Without stretching the imagination too much one can think of several possibilities not too foreign to a man of Barlow's stamp. He could market a contraceptive candy bar of irresistible attractiveness. He could start a fashion for suntan lamps emitting enough hard radiation to sterilize the users. He could use his real-estate talents to sell prairie building lots and disperse the urban masses into the countryside, there to be encouraged to raise extra-fat hogs by feeding them with unwanted babies... And so on and so forth. In fact, given a different preoccupation,

this is a problem that would be settled out of hand. Kornbluth was writing before oral contraceptives, but the old sf standby of the miracle pill must have occurred to him. The conclusion has to be that the story was created for the sake of its solution: mass murder. The whole thing is a barely rational excuse for a particularly nasty piece of wish-fulfillment.

"The Marching Morons" is a fantasy of fear and revenge. The fear comes from an insecure sense of superiority which feels itself threatened by those who care nothing for its values. The revenge manifests itself as the sulky desire to strike back at those who (inadvertently or purposely) might infringe the privileges of selfishness. The Morons are an intolerable burden to be cast aside: "The actual truth is that millions of workers live in luxury on the sweat of a handful of aristocrats. I shall probably die before my time of overwork . . ." These are the descendants of the "migrant workers, slum-dwellers and tenant farmers" who so shiftlessly and inconsiderately bred and bred again while real-estate dealer Barlow remained childless and was ". . . a blind stupid ass to tolerate economic and social conditions which penalized childbearing by the prudent and foresighted".

Here is the true and authentic whine of Middle Class martyrdom, the voice which frets and moans over taxes and complains bitterly at the unfairness of a world which asks more from those who have than from those who have little. The poor and stupid are to be hated because, being poor and stupid, they lack the prudence and foresight of those who are richer and cleverer; they are to be feared because they are too numerous and might want too much, unreasonably and unaccountably failing to recognize that only those who are powerful and intelligent have the right to be selfish. These miserable creatures – all five billion of them – are scarcely human at all; only the Elite are "People – real people". (A phrase used twice.) The Morons are just five hundred million tons of meat: mumbling illiterates chewing candy bars and watching idiotic TV quiz shows, driving flash faked-up automobiles and visiting Moron psychiatrists. (The "Family Freud" – a neat little satirical vignette.) It is the "real people" who have the monopoly on art and science: Hawkins the potter, who has to listen in resigned disgust while the Moron store-buyer burbles on about the "est'etic" values of his wares, and Ryan-Ngana, who "between interruptions . . . was slowly constructing an n-dimensional geometry whose foundations and superstructure owed no debt whatsoever to intuition".

Smart boys, these – even if they couldn't quite solve the Problem without Barlow's "vicious self-interest". But that, of course, was strictly necessary: an intermediary was needed to distance the Great Brains from their dirty work. Not that they seem at all squeamish about it. One member of Barlow's team does commit suicide out of remorse, but the others manage to carry on bravely enough. Presumably once Barlow has been disposed of and everyone has given their hands a good wash they can cheerfully settle down to an idyllic future of aesthetic pleasures and intellectual joys, quite unencumbered by billions of tiresome Morons.

It could be argued that "The Marching Morons" is meant as irony. This is a rather dubious proposition, since it argues an extraordinary degree of disinguenuousness and cynicism on the part of the author. Still, speculation on the motives and intentions of authors is always difficult and dangerous, particularly when the work in question was written for commercial publication. Kornbluth's friends and

contemporaries speak of him as having a somewhat dark and saturnine temperament, given to cynicism and occasionally fond of playing the ogre. Certainly he seems to have been made unhappy both by what he saw in the world and in himself. He once described his novel *The Syndic* as "sick". "The Marching Morons" deserves some much harsher word – and Kornbluth may have thought so himself, if not at the time of writing them later. His story "The Meeting" (completed by Frederik Pohl) indicates that there was a good deal of ambivalence (at the last) in his attitudes.

But whatever the author's intentions, it seems fairly certain that "The Marching Morons" is not *read* as irony – nor, indeed, that it can be so read without making quite exceptional and unreasonable allowance. So while there may be some excuses to be made for the author, there is no excuse at all for the praise of the readers, the editors and the critics. For thirty years "The Marching Morons" has been Great sf, endlessly reprinted, whereas it should have been greeted with a yell of execration on its very appearance. The reason is discreditable and distasteful, but not too hard to find. Whether with conscious cynicism or purely by instinct Kornbluth has given expression to a whole series of the murky prejudices and atavistic impulses which lie beneath science fiction's facade of scientific sweet reason.

One of sf's great and enduring themes is what might be called *The Coming of the Other.* With fear or with hope the writers and readers look towards the day when mankind meets something outside itself – aliens or mutants, monsters or super-intelligences – which will bring either judgement and destruction or peace and redemption. Many sf properties are, in fact, little more than new scenery for the old eschatological visions of millenarian religion. The alien angels will land, or the mutant messiah will rise, and the world will be remade anew . . . The devil will come down in great wrath with his rayguns, or the psionic Anti-Christ will be born . . . The metaphors may even come to be taken as literal. There is now a whole sub-literature – purportedly factual – dealing with Godly visitations from space, and the Cargo Cults of the South Seas have their Western equivalents in the Contactees who await the return of their favourite flying saucer.

The Other in the form of mutant or alien-among-us sometimes owes less to religious feeling than to straightforward xenophobia. (The two are often difficult to separate. Sf has a great many echoes of folklore, with its tales of non-human races and beings, and many of these legends and superstitions probably owe something to half-guilty xenophobic memories of supplanted aboriginal peoples.) Even now, the struggles of the American Empire against the fiendish Orientals continue to chronicled against a background of distant planets. Where Kornbluth is unusual is that the xenophobia of his story is concerned not with *race* (as such) but with *intelligence.* His use of the metaphor of the Marching Chinese certainly contains an ironic reference to the old "Yellow Peril" but he is careful to separate himself from any hint of ordinary racism by the inclusion of Ryan-Ngana, a darkskinned member of the Elite who is spurned by Barlow with the classic line, "It's not that I'm prejudiced, you understand. Some of my best friends . . ." There are no ethnic divisions in Kornbluth's future: intelligence is all. However, the difference between the Elite and the Morons is not seen simply as a matter of degree; it is a fundamental difference of kind. In effect, the two are separate species.

Master Races – whether benevolent or tyrannical – are not exactly new either.

In some case they can be taken as expressions of racist fears or prejudices. Norman Spinrad's *The Iron Dream* provides the final word on this sub-genre, with its sf novel as written by Adolf Hitler. (There is some rather uncomfortable irony in the thought that, as with "The Marching Morons", a good many readers may have taken this completely straight, as just the sort of good gutsy stuff they instinctively enjoy.) Where intelligence (rather than any visible physical characteristics) is the distinguishing feature the stories are generally pure power fantasies: I may *look* ordinary but I'm really Clark Kent . . . Or, I *could* be Superman, only those guys at the top stole my costume . . .

It has been suggested by various commentators that sf readers tend to be those who have an idea of the value of education but not necessarily much success, either in the field of learning or the world beyond. Indeed, one could define certain sorts of power-fantasy sf as daydreams for the takers of correspondence courses. The marvellous future of technology is within sight, yet so frustratingly just out of reach . . . John W. Campbell Jr saw himself as a frustrated scientist, and this may have been one of the reasons why his editorship of *Astounding* was so successful: he shared the fantasies of his readership.

On its own, this kind of daydreaming is a fairly harmless compensatory device. The participant soothes and consoles himself with what is probably recognized as a fairy story: a modern version of the old tales in which the peasant's son gets the princess and the pot of gold, thus proving he is pretty smart after all. Where there is genuine paranoia or a real sense of inferiority the result is less healthy: an exacerbation of frustration rather than a relief. Sometimes the feeling of envy so produced leads to a kind of populist inversion: an anti-intellectual solution in which the Master Races's representatives are punished for the presumptuousness of being cleverer than ordinary men.

What *is* unusual, however, is the kind of Final Solution featured in "The Marching Morons". The normal issue is one of *dominance.* Is the world to be ruled by the Superbeings who have received the enlightenment of Science, or by the usual bunch of limited Normals? In effect, this is akin to the conflict between two political parties. What Kornbluth puts forward is a very much rougher Social Darwinism: a struggle to the death. The Morons only survive because the Elite cannot dispose of them, and the Elite only survive because the Morons are unaware of their existence.

> Tinny-Peete had no wish to be torn limb from limb; he knew very well that it would end that way if the population ever learned . . . that there was a small elite which considered itself head, shoulders, trunk and groin above the rest. The fact that this assumption was perfectly true and the fact that the elite was condemned by its superiority to a life of the most grinding toil would not be considered; the differences would.

This is the Class War pushed to extremes – and also stood on its head. The dictatorship of the proletariat has often enough envisaged the extermination of the upper classes, but this is the first time that the suggestion has been made that the *lower* classes should be wiped out. Traditionally, the upper classes have treated their inferiors badly – have starved, oppressed and ill-treated them – but they have never attempted to wipe them out completely. The reason is obvious enough: someone has to do the work. But sf has been quicker than the rest of the world in recognizing a coming fundamental change: the lower classes of the future are all

machines, and the human beings must find a new position.

Kornbluth may not have recognized the point he was making (and certainly he does not articulate it in so many words) but in effect he was saying that *the lower classes are no longer necessary.* In other words, there is no reason at all why class hatred should not go to its fullest extent . . .

This is an idea which would have been impossible in the 19th Century, and even until comparatively recently would not have been entertained seriously outside sf. But now – thirty years after Kornbluth's story – we are moving rapidly into an era of technological change so drastic in its effects that the brutal fable of "The Marching Morons" is likely to have an increasing appeal to certain minds.

The ameliorating feature of the pre-20th Century class system was the doctrine (in one form or another) of *noblesse oblige*: the acknowledgement that if the ruling classes possessed powers and privileges they also possessed certain responsibilities (however minimal) for the wellbeing of their inferiors. In part of course, this was simply enlightened self-interest – a dead slave being worth less than a live one – but there was also at least some genuine belief in moral obligation. The differences between master and servant might be unbridgeable and permament, but each depended on the other to at least some extent and therefore in justice (and common humanity) owed each other something.

Kornbluth's Elite believe that they do not need the Morons – believe, in fact, that they are exploited by them – and reject all obligations. With psychopathic selfishness they remove what they see as an encumberance by mass murder. (That Barlow himself gets killed off is simply the obligatory Hollywood-style moral ending. Bad guys may seem to prosper for a while, but they must be seen to come to justice. This conveniently fuzzes over the fact that the real villains manage to live happily ever after.)

Even as a metaphorical rendering of reality "The Marching Morons" is grotesquely distorted, but it does provide a very accurate evocation of a certain sort of class fear and hatred. A piece of straightforward class-distinction or racism would obviously be difficult to justify, but by taking intelligence (an objectively measurable quality) as his standard Kornbluth is able to cloak prejudice in a superficial veneer of rationality. In fact, any discrimination on grounds of IQ is inevitably going to involve class as well. In any society which is at all socially mobile class will follow intelligence: the clever rise while the less clever fall away. The greater the demands that are made on intelligence – as in a technological society – the more certain and swift this polarization becomes. Like fascism, the attraction of Kornbluth's story is the relief it offers from an abiding sense of social insecurity. It appeals to the lower middle classes of the intellect: those who are just far enough above the average to covet what they glimpse above and to fear and despise those below. The great terror of any elite is that *despite* its superiority it will somehow be dragged down to the level of the masses. Getting rid of the masses is one fantasy-solution. An aspiring elite is even less secure; it is faced with the appalling prospect that all its struggles may be for nothing. In the context of "The Marching Morons" a lack of intelligence becomes what is virtually a *moral* defect, just as poverty was once (and still is, in some quarters) regarded as being essentially sinful. This may not be very logical, but it is certainly conforting. The fact that it is the kind of comfort which Poor

Whites take from being white is not regarded at all. However, it is less comfortable to be continually reminded of both possible failure and possible obligation. One cannot exactly lose intelligence (and therefore social standing) in the same way as material possessions – but there is always the awful possibility that the original capital was very much overvalued. And it is galling to be surrounded by people who don't give a high IQ the respect and admiration it deserves . . . But maybe the high IQ (real or fantasized) isn't everything after all, and even if it is – what then of the duty owed to those in society who are endowed with less? Selfishness brings guilt – and guilt without repentance can only be assuaged by hatred.

Obviously there are considerable openings here for debate on the nature and extent of social obligations. It is sufficient to note that Kornbluth's story simply begs all the questions – it never rises out of its resentful fantasies of frustrated ambition. Fascism is really a kind of snobbery – and vice versa – and the members of the high-intelligence Elite are the ultimate fascist snobs: high IQ puts them up with the right sort of people, and that is that. They are beyond morality. They are also beyond rationality. "The Marching Morons" is not so much sf in the gutter as sf in the sewers, and those who have praised the story for so long would do well to consider on what basis their admiration rests.

Naomi Mitchison (nee Haldane) was born in 1897. Her father was the distinguished biologist J.S. Haldane, and her brother was the scientist and writer J.B.S. Haldane – author, among many other good things, of the brilliant speculative essay "The Last Judgment" (in his collection, Possible Worlds, *1927) which so inspired Olaf Stapledon and appalled C.S. Lewis. Mrs Mitchison became a highly-regarded novelist as long ago as 1923, with the publication of her first book,* The Conquered *(about Caesar's conquest of Gaul – told from the point of view of the Gauls). She created a whole new fictional genre: the Serious Modern Historical Novel, entirely unlike the militaristic and nationalistic tushery of 19th century historical romance. (Other writers who have followed in Naomi Mitchison's footsteps include Robert Graves, Marguerite Yourcenar, Alfred Duggan, Henry Treece, Mary Renault and Peter Green.) Her most important historical novel was* The Corn King and the Spring Queen *(1931). Since then Mrs Mitchison has written numerous works of fiction and non-fiction, including the sf novels* Memoirs of a Spacewoman *(1962) and* Solution Three *(1975). Her most recent book is* A Bridge to Africa *(1980), a collection of African tales and legends. She informs us that she has just completed a new sf novel.*

The Profession of Science Fiction, 23: Wonderful Deathless Ditties

Naomi Mitchison

We had more time in the thirties. Olaf Stapledon and I discussed everything from growing potatoes to world politics and back again, but mostly science fiction. His own work was mounting up, increasingly fascinating to the real scientists, especially the younger generation, including my brother J.B.S. Haldane who told me I must immediately read *Last and First Men.* I hadn't started writing sf yet, but I was thrilled with his. We met in the Cafe Royale, where one sat on plush benches and had a good three course lunch with coffee and I think a glass of wine for half a crown. It was full of highbrows but Olaf Stapledon didn't look like one. He was strong and stocky, with light brown hair cut short and very blue eyes; he often looked worried, perhaps because he was looking too far into the future or perhaps because he was onto a problem of which the scientific solution was not visible.

He was very conscious too of the social problems of the depression and understandably doubtful whether the political solutions suggested would have the

intended effect. All the time he went on reading solid science and listening to scientists, many of whom were glad to talk with him sensibly and intelligently. We swapped books and he wrote to me often in his small, exact, completely legible handwriting, the lines always going straight across the page. He went very deep and influenced many people, especially perhaps those who had fallen under the spell of D.H. Lawrence and his community mysticism as Aldous Huxley and I myself had done. He wrote to me as somebody who cares very much but keeps his head:

> "Don't you go the pace too much in everything you do? It's so tempting because it gives one the sense of being effective. But it's dangerous for people whose real function is to use their minds because it blots out all the more delicate reactions and makes for bad work . . . I suspect that you have come up against a most serious flaw in the modern spirit . . . it alone is not good enough to live by, it has to be supplemented by something else perennial . . . all this longing not to be separate is a weakness. You *must* be yourself as precisely as possible otherwise you're no good for community. You are different, 'special' and you must not funk the fact and try to bury yourself in the herd . . . Community means being intensely oneself and intensely aware of other bright individual selves and acting accordingly. It doesn't mean all howling in unison in a trance. That's what it is in fascism and the worst sort of Communism . . . as for books, it's ridiculous to say they're no good. The right ones are just about all that really matters these days. (But there one goes and writes a wrong one! But my next will be a right one and much bigger than me which is odd. But you see it's *making* me bigger.)"

Olaf Stapledon was a prophet but these are the words of a moralist. He knew that his writings were part of change and he was intent on making it a good change. He didn't want just to amuse people or gratify a publisher out for big sales. He was dead honest about his writing when it was not "scientific" in the sense of rational. He had just written *Waking World* which, he was afraid, "damned me in the eyes of the scientists. It's sad because I have usually a dog-like respect for them". But he defended himself: "I may have madly misdescribed what I feel but what I describe is at least as immediate as the warmth which I attribute to a fire. I don't believe I am warm; I just am warm. Similarly with the 'worship' experience. But interpretation of the experience is sure to be mostly false." If only more people could manage to separate the experience from its interpretation! It's too easy to run them together. Olaf comes back to it when he talks of the negative bad of the modern spirit: "What would have been called godlessness formerly but the word is no good today. It's what Spinoza had amongst others and it kept him straight and at peace always".

To be a moral being not because one is told to but because one wants to be: that's what some of the sf writers in those early days were after. That's how H.G. Wells was – another old friend but somehow we never talked about sf! Sometimes H.G. was so enchanted with the new material he had to play with that, as in so many of his short stories, what he gave us was sparkling, intelligent – above all new – entertainment. It wasn't until *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* that the social doctrine came in. Odd how, in spite of being technologically out of date, those stories are so deeply readable. I wish we were still allowed to believe in the Grand Lunar!

Story telling and morality have gone together since the beginnings of time. The story is more potent than the adjuration. It must have been so since the beginnings of what we think of as human life. What else kept them going? We can see the illustrations to the stories, no odder than many a book jacket, in the caves of

Lascaux. These stories told people how to behave, what magic to use. And also they fulfilled curiosity, that natural curiosity that exists in all sentient beings, though mostly about food and danger. When curiosity takes shape in a being with a big brain and clever hands that can twist and shape and alter and uncover, when he begins to look up at the stars and wonder, then the seeds of science are sown. And also the seeds of story telling.

Look at the Australian Dream Time; our own beginnings may have been like that. In one sense it is an enormous bundle of stories about exchanges between gods and animals and people, difficult for us to make sense of – which meant that the incoming white Australians gave up or attempted to substitute their own god-story. But in another sense Dream Time is a coherent moral universe where all who are called into it from the very beginnings have their proper place and are fulfilled. If people lose the sense of their Dream Time it collapses into mere stories. But there are those who still know themselves in what is in many ways a logical sf construct, more elaborate and full of difficulties than *Dune* or any of Ursula Le Guin's worlds, and containing the whole of life. The Australian skeletal and shadow illustrations help but do not explain to the outsider who does not know the stories. Doubtless our ancestors had equally complex worlds with their prohibitions, exchanges and encouragement, out of which were born the great world religions, rising enormously and then collapsing.

The centuries of reason came and the moral and prophetic stories no longer made sense. What magic would help? It was dead. The churches took over, but they were not entirely acceptable; they only had one story. Where was fantasy, where magic, where colour? Science was magic at first, then shook itself clear. Can one imagine the great nineteenth century scientists expressing themselves in terms of fiction? No. They were sufficiently occupied with the astonishing panoramas which were opening in front of them, and also the fight with the stupider theologians who saw themselves supplanted. But there was an outpouring of a whole new stock of scientific images and the poets at least with their airy navies grappling in the central blue had some idea of what was going to happen and drew some quite important morals.

Think now of William Morris who did more than any other single figure, including Karl Marx, to shape British left-wing politics. He was no scientist but he was a craftsman; he knew the detail of wood-working and printing, weaving and masonry, pottery. All this had developed out of scientific technology. All his stories have a continual moral and prophetic thesis. A tale of another world, as so many of his were, must have a hard core. Today's other worlds have a hard core of science. His hard core was that of a craftsman, and the two run together.

Some of the early twentieth century sf writers seem now to be out of date, but I wonder. Most of them took the trouble to write well, not so a hundred per cent of their later followers. But, after Stapledon there was something of a gap. The prophetic strain died out. A major war focuses people's minds on the immediate present rather than the future. The first thing was to survive. Olaf wrote to me in the darkest time: "I think the country is learning its lesson fairly rapidly and there may really be a chance of something better after the war if we are not wiped out". We forget now what a near thing it was. He wrote to me again after *Sirius* came out,

Methuen having turned the book down as obscene. In fact the published version had been cut rather hard; it would doubtless have passed now. He was worried about it, partly in case he had been – as the publishers said – wrong in writing it as he did, and yet equally aware that he had been right to do so.

There were two more books after that and then he died, suddenly, perhaps worn down by the hard physical work he had been doing during the war, getting food from a difficult piece of land, travelling uncomfortably, worrying. It was like part of oneself dying.

But gradually the prophets and teachers came back: first of all, I think, Clarke, and the major American writers. All of them had a moral outlook and this goes on with our good writers, more and more strongly. It is now only too obvious that we have made a nasty mess of our home planet, and there isn't much time for putting it right. One writer after another has expressed this forcibly. Few sf writers would catch themselves forseeing anything except an international world government, unless, like Wyndham, they are concentrating on a local disaster.

But should all this warning and teaching be in the form of fiction? The other possible packaging is in mathematical symbols. Oddly enough these are both an international language and a strictly minority one. Fred Hoyle could of course lay out the possibilities of any of his books in terms of strict anatomical observations and conclusions, but no, no, give us another story please!

So, who better to bring the disasters which we are making for ourselves forcibly home to voters and opinion-makers than committed sf writers? They have taken over so much both from the politicians and the churches just because they can and do express themselves more forcibly and perhaps because they can upset people and make them wonder what they're doing. That's their job and their success. Some do it because they have been struck by some particularly unpleasant examples of human intelligence gone wrong. I suspect this of Silverberg, probably Bradbury. Look in almost any anthology of sf writing; a quarter at least are parables, pehaps about man-made pollution or the terrifying possibilities of monopoly capitalism, perhaps about the growth of drug-taking or pleasure in violence. We are constantly being taken by the hand and made to face something we would much rather not be aware of – but it has to be done if action is to be taken.

Perhaps one of the inevitable failures is that it is almost impossibly hard to imagine what human beings will be like in the remote future, or what they, or other life forms, may be like in other worlds. Most of us avoid bug-eyed monsters, good fun as they are to invent, but we all like interplanetary contacts, though we begin to realize the immense difficulties. Then comes the technical difficulty of speech forms, something which also hits historical novelists. The mere fact that the characters in deeply other worlds or far into the future have to talk English makes them English – or American – or whatever other nationality the writer starts with. This reacts in the imagination of the reader but also that of the writer. We are bound to identify fully with some of the people we write about; we have to, for we are using them to speak through; but can they avoid having the kind of thoughts and reactions that we have? However much we are aware that they are different, have completely other work, love and community relationships, we still can't keep ourselves out. Sf writers try different dodges. One is to invent a social set-up

something like earlier ones in our own history. Hence the mock mediaevalism of some writers, including princesses and dragons. My own dodge in *Memoirs of a Space Woman* was never to allow actual speech to extra-terran life forms, but instead have the "I" in the story put into words what they are communicating. Yet this could be made into an interesting platform for moralizing!

It doesn't really make things very different if the characters are given exotic names, though it may well make a good story a bit harder to follow, especially if the pronunciation is ambiguous. Ursula Le Guin sometimes makes unnecessary difficulties for us, though I can appreciate why she does it. Tolkien got away with it – or didn't he?

But the main argument and moral must be inherent in the plot and in what feelings and thoughts it excites in the reader, who has to get used to the diction and appearance of the characters, whatever way this is worked out. Then comes the big question: is even a tiny percentage of readers influenced, perhaps in the direction of taking political action to curb powerful monopolies, even though these are not yet galactic? Or, more simply, what percentage has stopped throwing plastic bags or old tins into bushes or has decided never to use any product based on whale oil? Unfortunately these statistics don't exist. We have to be content to shove at the old zeitgeist not knowing if we are getting anywhere. But this is what happens to all prophets from Ezekiel on.

Yet is straight propaganda, the sock in the reader's lazy old ego, the best way to get things moving? Results are more likely from a story with a moral outlook but not too obvious a text and sermon. Let's get the reader musing and reconsidering, and then finding that old attitudes have shifted just a little. One method is to produce an acceptable alternative or future world not utterly remote, but something which the reader might feel he or she might be, or already was, working towards. A world of this kind is postulated in J.B.S. Haldane's *The Man With Two Memories.* The interest here is not so much in the plot as in the historical working out of how it came into existence.

Serious sf writers in other countries are doing the same kind of thing as the British and Americans. It is quite clear that this is so for at least a couple of the authors in the Penguin *Russian Science Fiction.* In fact it looks as though things could be pointed out, and social and moral attitudes expressed, which might not have been taken kindly in another literary form. We first heard of Stanislaw Lem from Poland, as the author of *Solaris,* which in turn became the most moving and beautiful sf film that has so far been produced – and packed with prophetic and complex morality. He is not the only good sf writer from the Debatable Land between East and West, and it would be surprising if there was nothing excellent coming out of Spanish-speaking South America.

When it comes to our prophetic ideas, we sf writers must remember the good guys, those who are deliberately trying to make the right choices, social and political. They need our help. It can be more than a little un-nerving to feel we are heading towards an inevitable dark age, a chaos in which it doesn't matter if Shakespeare, Donne or Blake, or Michael Angelo, Carl Milles and Pablo Picasso had never existed. This isn't so. It does matter and sf writers should not pretend that the human spirit is useless although, as in more than one book, we encounter higher intelligence and

although, as most of us are deeply aware, we humans are only in the dawn of our history. We have made terrible mistakes; we have had knowledge and lost it – I think of the increasing evidence for competent mathematicians and astronomers working in our own island between the Orkneys and Stonehenge long before the building of the pyramids. Perhaps much else has been lost, even earlier, and exchanged for – what? There are human gains not to be reckoned in terms of air travel, the amusement industry and contraceptives, but in the wakening of the spirit which Stapledon foresaw – but in 1939 with the shadow of World War II already over him. The reckoning must be remade over and over and the gains and losses made clear. This is one of our jobs and can only be done if we have a moral framework, fully believed in by ourselves, within which to make it.

Now let us be careful. A moral framework is not the same as a religious framework, though there is some overlap and many of us move from one to the other and back. But our moral framework as sf prophets and shakers must be rational, based on the human spirit but stretching reason and humanity beyond their present bounds. We must forsee, but without the aid or hope of miracles. It is the lapse from a humanist moral framework into a narrowly Christian one which makes the C.S. Lewis series, even *Perelandra* with its lovely opening chapter, unaccepable as prophetic sf. There must at least be some solid evidence of the possibility of what we describe or infer in our stories. Anything beyond is fantasy.

But here we are in something of a puzzlement and we do not always recognize it ourselves, even while we are writing. Harry Harrison put it very well in his diagram of the sf circle inside the fantasy circle, but which sometimes coalesces until there is nothing of the original circle left. Wind-steeds for instance, delightful as they are, must count as fantasy; in fact so must most of the fauna and flora with which we bedeck our alternative worlds. Almost any author other than the real hardliners like Asimov, Heinlein, Van Vogt and Clarke falls into F for Fantasy more or less, perhaps for a whole book. Sometimes Bradbury does it so continuously that we only get glimpses of the S behind the F. Or take an author of considerable literary talent and a violently lively inventiveness, Josephine Saxton. What she writes is fantasy but without benefit of kings of fairies; yet we feel somewhere at the back a hard scientific impulse and she must certainly class as an sf writer. There is yet another pitfall, rather an unfair one. Something which, when it was first published, was deemed scientifically possible, as well as imaginatively plausible, ceases to be so. All the fiction we pinned onto Mars has become increasingly unreal with every bit of evidence which comes back from the space probes. This is sad, as some of the Mars stories were so good!

Now there are certain assumptions which most sf writers make and which are perhaps a little shaky and need examining. One is the weapon category, the ever more efficient gun which can in its simplest form destroy space monsters, including ships pouring out of further galaxies, or even black holes, and more sophisticated versions which merely anaesthetize or immobilize. Counter-armour of course exists. Considering what a shockingly high percentage of today's technological ingenuity goes into the designing of new methods of destruction, this is probably legitimate.

Another assumption is in dealing with time in terms of light years and human years during space flight. We get round it by using words like hyperdrive, time-

blackout and so on. Only the mathematicians and astronomers among us really try to work it all out and they are not always totally convincing. But something of the sort must come about sooner or later.

Another general assumption which almost all sf writers make sooner or later is about Psi. It is assumed that "mind-speech" of some kind is a faculty which exists to some extent now among some individuals and is likely to be developed. I am myself inclined to think this is correct, partly from my own early experiences with Prof Gilbert Murray and with my brother, and partly from the experiences of other people, who, I believe, are intelligent and totally honest. It appears to be almost always a young person's ability, usually lost later on. But there is certainly considerable scientific scepticism about this, especially among the tough boys of the *New Scientist.* Our present methods of verbal communication, even with translating computers, which do make the oddest mistakes, are inadequate even in the world as it is. Words are made even less meaningful when used as a private language of science or economics. Linguistics is a delightful branch of science, but real communication is something else. I think it may not be long before something serious comes up in the Psi field, bringing with it very genuine moral problems.

But what about the really disintegrated sf? Is it prophetic? Does it have a shape, even in the writer's mind? Clearly for some people it is the picture of things to come. It may be marginally valid for a period of change which the rest of us only sense uneasily. We have certainly not forseen all the changes which are going to come. Does Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* count as sf? From time to time I recognize something happening which is in that book, not anything as simple as an incident, but a ripple of social behaviour out of the new morality or moral collapse — but can we be sure which is which, and, if collapse, can we see beyond?

This means that the moral basis on which we build our lives, which for writers is essentially what we write, is in a state of change, parallel with the changes in technology. A very unrestful state no doubt, but surely by now we know that God changes with Man? So we are on a permament edge. Now, this change in morality cannot be directly argued, mostly because we know what it was and to some extent what it is, but not what it will be, even when we try to glimpse it. But it is also because only a minority of the well-educated, themselves a minority, are interested in argument for its own sake. So this groping towards a view of change must be put some other way. How? That, surely, is where sf comes in. We can and must attempt to make a picture of the new morality, the kind of society which it might make at its best and with luck. Alternatively, the kind which it can make if it goes wrong.

How far forward can we hope to foresee? Classics like *Childhood's End* or the Stapledon books take us a very long way and there may be other turns on the journey which no prophetic vision has yet encountered. Indeed this is quite certainly so. We are far from possessing all the evidence necessary for accurate extrapolation. But our guesses are warnings. If things go along road X this may be the result: if along road Y that. What is our own stand-point? I think we must admit that a few human categories are valuable: courage, though not necessarily physical: kindness, that is to say empathy with the not-self in any life-form curiosity kept within a framework by courage and kindness. But how to rate that

difficult abstraction truthfulness, without which curiosity can hurt rather than help? How to rate aesthetic perception and creation? How to rate patience, or is it essential to kindness? Loyalty is a difficult one and honour can be twisted. There are also social virtues, including freedom which is scarcely a meaningful concept any longer, so much has it been used as a political stone to sling at our opponents. If we intend to be prophets and moralists we must make our own moral mixture and live by it ourselves.

And yet, yet, the main thing is the story, the inspired story, the serious sf of the prophets and movers who never know what effect they are having. They only know that reviews and sales mean little in the sense of our hopes, our shy and delicate hopes. Have we contrived to send out our antennae to meet with reciprocal thought of change? Have we been so well able to point the choices for mankind that some people, only so far a very few but they could swell to armies, have thought and done something which leads to a better future and which they would not have done but for the stories which we, the far-sighted, have written for them?

Kenneth Bailey, who used to work for the BBC, has recently retired to the Channel Islands. He contributed an article on Olaf Stapledon to Foundation *15. In this latest stimulating essay he takes a close look at the work of Charles Dickens – not a science fiction writer by any means but certainly a fantasist, and one whose writing has had a great influence on sf and fantasy.*

Spaceships, Little Nell and the Sinister Cardboard Man

A Study of Dickens as Fantasist and as a Perecursor of Science Fiction

K.V. Bailey

> I used to fancy as I sat by him of an evening, on a green slope, and saw him watch the kite high in the quiet air, that it lifted his mind out of its confusion, and bore it (such was my boyish thought) into the skies. *David Copperfield*

Most English-language literature of the 20th century owes something to the work of Charles Dickens, even where there appears to be no line of descent. Despite all

changes in critical fashion, it has remained a pervading influence in the progress of both the experimental and the naturalistic novel. My aim here is to trace in the works of Dickens certain insights into the nature of human experience, and into the direction in which he saw the world to be moving some one and a quarter centuries ago; and to relate his vivid and often symbolic expression of these insights to parallel concepts in the work of 20th century writers of fantasy and science fiction.

Dickens was many-faceted: editor, journalist, entrepreneur, actor, would-be magistrate. His most lasting achievements were the work of Dickens the novelist and story-writer. His literary output spanned the years between 1831, when news and people, for practical purposes, travelled no faster than horse or sail could take them, and 1870, when the telegraph, photography, the railway networks and ocean steamer lines were all part of everyday technology. Dickens wrote no science fiction, but he lived in an ambience which nurtured it. He was six years old when *Frankenstein* appeared; the date of publication of his last complete novel (*Our Mutual Friend*) was also that of Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864); and Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race* is dated 1871, one year after his death.

Fantasy, though not precisely so defined as a genre, was in the mid-century an established but very eclectic literary mode. Part-descended from the Gothic novel, part-energized by lively feelings for the "romantic" aspects of history and an aroused interest in folk-lore and the supernatural, it found such varied vehicles as Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), Thomas Barham's *Ingoldsby Legends,* Mark Twain's *A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur,* the novels of the elder William Gilbert, and the children's stories (shot through with metaphysical and psychological implications) of Charles Kingsley and Lewis Carroll. Dickens, whose writing career was contemporary with or overlapped all of these, wrote a good deal of fantasy, mostly in the *Christmas Books* and *Christmas Stories,* seeking through the creation of visions, dreams and pseudo-myths to explore themes related to identity, time, memory, destiny and free-will. Some of his best ventures into fantasy, however, occur not in his overtly fantastic fictions, but as conceits, flights of the imagination, in the more realistic contexts of his major novels. These "mini-fantasies", off-beat and grotesque ways of looking at people and events, were highly original; they are certainly prototypes of some more recent forms of fantasy, and occasionally, married to his insights into the potentials of 19th century technology, carry intimations of a future science fiction.

To illustrate these ideas I propose to look at three distinctive images, or sets of images. The first is the "Ark" complex; the second is a body of symbolic images, separate but sometimes interchangeable, which includes corpse, mechanical figure, dummy, tomb, prison; the third is the image/metaphor of the railway. Additionally there are thoughts on how certain trends in 20th century science fiction relate to Dicken's themes, and on some of the "timeless" images common to modern fantasies and to those of Dickens.

First, then, the "Ark" – now a well-accepted, almost stereotyped, science fiction convention, but having an interesting ancestry in which Dickens's variants figure significantly. Continually in his books we come across the image of a haven, riding above the earth, above the water, often in the air. The "Ark" is a secure vessel of escape from the deluge of earth-born emotional or material conflict which

threatens to swamp the foreground of life. In its most rudimentary form it is the Peggoty boat-house in *David Copperfield,* or Quilp's gipsy-style river-side hide-out (*The Old Curiosity Shop*), with its slung hammock and rusty ship's stove funnelled through the roof, a cabin which he shared with the rats – "fine secret stealthy fellows". In a more sophisticated form it becomes Tartar's ship-shape eyrie, high above Staple Inn, in *Edwin Drood.* Here, as John Carey has noted in this book *The Violent Effigy,* a dream-boat image of a tidy but sterile, almost air-borne craft is combined with that of a store of dormant but potentially fertile seed.

As well as separateness Dickens found, in certain classes of his "Ark", what he termed "melancholy". Prison, police-station, the Inns of Court, exemplified such tomb-like, self-contained, space-isolated dwellings. In *The Uncommercial Traveller* he wrote of an upper set of rooms in Lyon Inn:

> It is to be remarked of chambers in general, that they must have been built for chambers, to have the right kind of loneliness. You may make a great dwelling-house very lonely by isolating suites of rooms and calling these chambers, but you cannot make the true kind of loneliness.

In other words, these specialized retreats, whether decayed or ship-shape, have functional, in-built, world-excluding elements. They are usually high in the air, or associated with symbolic seas and tides. Even though they may be neat and purposeful, neatness and purpose are depicted as emerging from chaos, e.g. the original dereliction of Quilp's counting house, the squalid waste ground surrounding the Peggoty boat-home, or, on the grand scale, in *Little Dorrit,* the flooding of darkness through Alpine valleys above which rides the Saint Bernard monastery:

> Seen from these solitudes, and from the Pass of the Great Saint Bernard, which was one of them, the ascending Night came up the mountain like a rising water. When it at last came to the walls of the convent of the Great Saint Bernard, it was as if the weather-beaten structure were another Ark, and floated on the shadowy waves . . . Blackened skeleton arms of wood by the wayside pointed up to the convent, as if the ghosts of former travellers overwhelmed by the snow haunted the scene of their distress.

At the monastery, in the stable yard, is a grated mortuary stacked with frozen corpses – the mother with child at breast – seeming to be in a state of eternally suspended life. This is an image we shall return to; but note the resemblance to those myriad of dormant earth-born passengers in a thousand fictional space-Arks bound for Sirius, Vega, or points between.

To be concrete and specific, though, I am choosing one modern work of science fiction, which has an "Ark" motif, to run in harness with the Dickensian "dream-ship". In selecting Brian Aldiss's early novel *Non-Stop* I am not suggesting any derivation; only that both authors have the human predicament as theme, and that there are parallels of imagery.

Images of the Flood occur, in fact, time after time in Aldiss's work, right through from "There is a Tide" in *Space, Time and Nathaniel* to "The Expensive Delicate Ship" (*Nova 3*). The former story draws on the terror and genocidal symbolism of Genesis to punch home its "message", and echoes the same archetype as does Ruskin's "King of the Golden River" in its scenario; "The Expensive Delicate Ship" asks whether a "doppelganger ark" might have cradled an alternative planetary population of extinct and mythical beasts. Should it have been this gleaming phantom ship that survived the Flood, and not Noah's old wooden tub?

Aldiss's brilliant and very beautiful new wave sketch may seem far removed from the comparatively hard sf machinery of *Non-Stop*, but the "The Expensive Delicate Ship" and the directionless and derelict "Big Dog" of *Non-Stop* are first cousins. They are both overwhelmed by misfortune, but may, or may not, survive as refuges against a worse misfortune. In *Non-Stop*, the meaninglessly earth-orbiting "Big Dog" (so called on earth because it had been to a system in the constellation Little Dog) combines homeliness with decay, order with ruin. The exploration of its length by the protagonist Complain brings him to a section of the ship known as Forwards. The initial description of this introduces a series of interiors exhibiting contrasts similar to those we find in Dickens's "arks":

> Forwards was a region like none Roy Complain had seen before. The grandeur of Sternstairs, the cosy squalor of Quarters, the hideous wilderness of Deadways, even the spectacle of that macabre sea where the Giants had captured him – none had prepared him for the *differentness* of Forwards . . . Forwards was firmly established, its boundaries fixed and unchanging. It looked the result of order rather than accident.

As the history of "Big Dog" is bit by bit disclosed, its decline from the ordered discipline of its original mission is made more poignant by the discovery of the long-dead captain's log, revealing how plague had struck and had disintegrated its order during the homeward flight from New Earth, or Procyon V. The scenes of violence which mark the eventual dismantling of the ship are as horrific as the acts of riot accompanying the gutting of yet another of Dickens's "haven" symbols, the Maypole Inn in *Barnaby Rudge* – even to the slaughter of the caged birds. Yet even in this dismemberment of "Big Dog" we find, ark within ark, little enclaves exposed in which some kind of secure nest had been shaped out of dereliction – in the nightmare homes of the mutated intelligent rats, for example:

> Splitting open a boiler, two of Gregg's men revealed a crazy little maze of rat buildings, a rodent village. Different levels and flights of a bewildering complexity of design had been constructed inside the boiler from bones and rubble and cans and filth. There were tiny cages here containing starving creatures, mice, hamsters, rabbits, even a bird; there were moths living here, rising up in a storm; and there were rats, in nurseries and studs and armouries and slaughter houses.

Their haven is their tomb as the demolition proceeds. Then, after the ultimate revelation – that the Giants are an introduced human caretaking crew, that the ship has for many generations been circling earth, its mutated, dwarfed, metabolically speeded-up populations confined as subjects for study in a prison without purpose or direction – they, Complain, Vyann and their companions, still fear that they will again be locked away in this closed-environment tomb. In fact, the book ends in cataclysmic release in which Vyann senses that "It was as if everyone was about to be born". They will endure the stresses of planetary adaptation to be able to enter into that promised land revealed when the long-closed shutters were sprung back:

> Three quarters of a great sphere all round the four of them was turned in a twinkling into space. Through the hyaline tungsten, the universe breathed in at them: on one side of the ship the sun burned tall and strong; on the other Earth and moon were radiant globes.

We have moved from ship-ark to prison-tomb image and on to promise of release from the flood of the confining vacuum of space.

Turning now to Dickens (and moving on to our second group of symbols), we

can follow a not dissimilar transition, a pairing, merging and confusion of images. Recall that the obverse side of the fire-warmed sanctuary at the Saint Bernard convent was its mortuary of eternally frozen corpses. In one form or another – as corpses, as dummies, as dolls, as prisoners, such figures crop up endlessly. They in fact constitute what John Carey has defined as "violent effigies". Dickens's childhood memories, as recorded in "A Christmas Tree" (*Christmas Stories*), include many of them. The haunting Mask was one. It was meant to be "droll", but its still death-mask features, hiding the living wearer's face, were "intolerable". It is an example of what Peter Nicholls, writing on "Science fiction and the Mainstream" in *Foundation* 5 described as Dickens's preoccupation with "the less-than-human masquerading as the human". Another such one is the large cardboard man:

> . . . who used to be hung against the wall and pulled by a string; there was a sinister expression in that nose of his; and when he got his legs round his neck (which he very often did), he was ghastly and not a creature to be alone with.

Equally ambiguous was the Tumbler:

> Up yonder, among the green holly and red berries, is the Tumbler with his hands in his pockets, who wouldn't lie down, but whenever he was put upon the floor, persisted in rolling his fat body about, until he rolled himself still, and brought those lobster eyes of his to bear upon me – when I affected to laugh very much, but in my heart of hearts was extremely doubtful of him.

Such grotesques – human into puppet, puppet into human, life confused with death – appear in various guises in a variety of expected, and unexpected, fictional settings. One of Dickens's snug, though certainly dingy, retreats is Mr Venus's taxidermist shop in *Our Mutual Friend.* It is, as is Mr Tartar's ship-like eyrie, full of shelves, brackets, nooks and mysterious recesses. Silas Wegg comes there to investigate the welfare of his leg (always in Dickens an identity surrogate), bought by Mr Venus from a hospital porter. As he leaves the flare of a candle lights up the shop's (ship's) inhabitants (passengers): "the babies – Hindoo, African and British – the 'human various', the French gentleman, the green glass-eyed cats, the dogs, the ducks, and all the rest of the collection show for an instant as if paralytically animated". They constitute what Mr Venus calls "the whole panorama", and indeed they do represent a kind of Victorian global anthropological museum. If we look for the animated dead in a recent science fiction context, we shall find them in that galactic museum girdling the whole of the planet Norma, which carries it through space. Norma is described in another Aldiss story, "An Appearance of Life" (*Andromeda 1*). Here are collected the human accretions of millenia, and here are talking animated images of the dead powered by "the submolecular structure of the holocap cells"; a technology extrapolated from those of the holograph and the micro-computer replaces that of the taxidermist; and the visiting researcher, after his experiences with the compulsively talking heads, is made to conclude that the living are after all no more than programmed projections.

Dickens's "suspended dead" or "animated corpses" are not, however, all mummies. They take many forms, but they are usually to be found stacked away in, and disturbing the cosiness of, one or another of his "arks". Mrs Jarley's caravan (*Old Curiosity Shop*), for example, a compact, neatly fitted land-ship, is another of his dream-vessels. Nell sleeps in it and dreams of Mrs Jarley's crew and of Quilp who

"throughout her uneasy dream was somehow connected with the wax-work himself, or was wax-work himself, or was Mrs Jarley and wax-work too". And later, sleeping among the waxwork figures, this interchangeability of the nightmare dead (figures which by the removal of boots and the addition of a night-cap, can transform from William Pitt to William Cowper) overwhelms her imagination:

> . . . she tortured herself, she could not help it, with imagining a resemblance in some one or other of their death-like faces, to the dwarf, and this fancy would sometimes so gain on her that she would almost believe he had removed the figure and stood within the clothes. Then there were so many of them with their great glassy eyes – and, as they stood one behind another all about her bed, they looked so like living creatures, and yet so unlike in their grim stillness and silence, that she had a kind of terror of them for their own sakes, and would often lie watching their dusky figures until she was obliged to rise and light a candle, or go and sit at the open window and feel a companionship in the bright stars.

This is the world of the tomb, the prison, of alienation – with the hint of a way of escape. It is that enclosed recess of the imagination in which life and death, man and mummy, human and robot, the organic and the inorganic may seem to change places. Its mood is schizoid; its premiss a universe of mechanical conditioning. From such a world-view derive some of the dominant images in *Non-Stop* – for example that of space ship as tomb and prison, a concept most explicitly expressed in (and protested against in) the long section of the captain's log detailing the ravages of the Nine-day Ague, a disease which caused the living to be indistinguishable from the dead. The log concludes:

> I pray that there (on Earth) men's hearts have changed . . . grown less like the hard metals they have loved and served so long. Nothing but the full flowering of a technological age, such as the Twenty-fourth Century knew, could have launched this miraculous ship; yet the miracle is sterile, cruel. Only a technological age could condemn unborn generations to exist in it, as if men were mere protoplasm, without emotion or aspiration. At the beginning of the technological age – a fitting token to my mind – stands the memory of Belsen: what can we do but hope that this more protracted agony stands at its end.

It might have been equally fitting to say that at the beginning of the technological age stands the memory of Coketown. *Hard Times* is an early and classic statement of the dystopian theme which, in 20th century versions has been explored in works as various as Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes,* Capek's *RUR,* and, in different vein but with essentially the same nightmare at its core, Barry Malzberg's *Beyond Apollo.* The man in the command-module may be as alienated, as enslaved by a technological "system" as the sweated Victorian mill-hand. The theme is given didactic form in Lewis Mumford's comparison (in *The Pentagon of Power*) of a spaceship (and equally of their earth-bound office-block and factory equivalents) to a dehumanizing tomb or prison for regressed technological man, and of the equipped and encapsulated astronaut to an automaton or a foetus. That such comparisons are only in half-correspondence to reality, that what they represent may also be viewed as one stage in a dialectic proceeding towards the expansion and fulfilment of both individual and civilization, doesn't lessen their force as symbols of the humanistic counterstance. The shadow of the dead captain's anguish hangs over the whole history of *Non-Stop.* Towards its end Complain bursts out:

> So we're not human beings at all . . . That's what you're saying. All that we've suffered, hoped, done, loved . . . it's not been real. We're just funny little mechanical things, twitching in a frenzy, dolls motivated by chemicals . . .

There was in Dickens a pathological streak, manifested in his fascination with dungeons and tortures, mortuaries and cemeteries, disfigurements and artificial limbs, all of which entered into his tomb and prison imagery. Some of the inmates of these morbid worlds are characterized as frenetic automata; but, and this is what makes his ironies so marvellous and so powerfully memorable, his humour keeps his puppets human, redresses the balance: Wegg and his leg; Mr Gamp (deceased) and his wooden one – Sarah recalled its habit of steering him into public houses, "as weak as flesh, if not weaker"; the demonic Quilp; Marley (deceased) in whom the horrible, the grotesque and the humorously sympathetic enter into vigorous combination. As Scrooge puts his key into the front-door lock the knocker becomes Marley's face, the colour of a bad lobster in a dark cellar, eyes open and staring but motionless. Then, before the whole apparition becomes inorganic metal again, comes the sure Dickensian humanizing touch: "It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up on ghostly forehead". (*A Christmas Carol*)

In *The Chimes,* the ticket porter Toby Veck is the perfect little automaton – known as Trotty because his legs take him everywhere at a trot. There is a graphic description of Trotty blown about by the wind, "all aslant, and facing now in this direction, now in that", and of his cane struggling against being wrested from his hand, while his legs underwent "tremendous agitation". And here is Dickens's anatomy of him, articulations counterpointed with the chimes of the mechanical Bells which, high above his head, measure out the divisions of his day and life:

> . . . the functions of Toby's body, his digestive organs for example, did of their own cunning and by a great many operations of which he was altogether ignorant, and the knowledge of which would have astonished him very much, arrive at a certain end; and so his mental faculties, without his privity or concurrence, set all these wheels and springs in motion, with a thousand others, when they worked to bring about his liking for the Bells.

There is here, underlying the humanity and the grotesquerie, a macabre hint of mechanical men – the robot, or perhaps the android. These descriptions are steps toward the kind of concept developed in Robert Silverberg's *Tower of Glass,* when the tycoon's son visits an android factory:

> He saw young androids taking their first shambling steps and tumbling and laughing and getting to their feet and doing it better the second time. He visited a classroom where the subject being taught was bowel control. He watched slumbering betas undergoing personality imprints; a soul was being etched into each unformed mind.

One thinks again of Mumford's foetal astronauts, of the complementary relationships of HAL and the space travellers in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (particularly of the creation, conditioning and, later, of the disintegration of HAL). The physical imprisonment within a space craft in these instances is paralleled in *The Chimes* by the virtual imprisonment of Toby within the walls of the belfry – "a heavy sense of dread and loneliness fell instantly upon him, as he climbed into this airy nest of stone and metal".

The Chimes is a confused, moralistic, and structurally unsatisfactory work; but its central symbolism is interesting. Along one time-line Toby falls from the tower and is killed; along another time-line, that future appears to be illusory. The point of divergence is signalled by an image of escape – by music rising from the church,

bursting through the iron-bound doors and through the tower walls, to soar into the sky. This image of release from a rigidly mapped existence, symbolized by an enclosed cell and/or a determined life-line, is in such instances common to Dickens and to such works of science fiction as *Non-Stop* – where the Big Dog ship appears as both prison and analogue of an endlessly orbiting and directionless planet. In Silverberg's *Tower of Glass*, and indeed in Clarke's *Childhood's End*, we find again the metaphor of planet as tomb, prison – or chrysalis. In the former novel, escape is described in terms of high technology and megalomaniac fantasy; in the latter in terms of transcendence – release as phase in a cosmic dialectic. We have already looked at such an image of release in the Jarley waxworks/Little Nell episode from *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In Dickens there are many more. There is, for example, a grim fantasy in *The Uncommercial Traveller* where Dickens writes of the cemeteries he visited in the course of his perpetual night-walking through London:

> It was a solemn consideration what enormous hosts of dead belong to one old great city, and how, if they were raised while the living slept, there would not be space of a pin's point in all the streets and ways for the living to come out into. Not only that, but the vast armies of the dead would overflow the hills and valleys beyond the city, and would stretch away all round it, God knows how far.

The vision here has much in common with that of Eliot's *The Waste Land* (lines 60-76), which in its turn has explicit associations with Dante's *La Divina Commedia*. Eliot sees London as a hell and as a tomb, its eternal moment signalled by the dead sound on the final stroke of the church clock of St Mary Woolnoth travelling through the fog. In Eliot the first premonition of renewal, resurrection, or translation is an earthy one – last year's planted corpse, has it yet begun to sprout? For Dickens it comes in the passage immediately following that quoted, and is an aerial one – though, oddly enough, it also uses the image of the striking of a church clock bell, the vibration of which he senses and imagines to be spiralling in circles "opening out, for ever and ever afterwards, widening perhaps (as the philosopher has suggested) in eternal space". This is an echo of Trotty Veck's experience in the belfry; and there is yet another echo in *A Child's Dream of a Star*, a terribly sentimental (though symbolically significant) piece. There entry to the star is looked upon as escape from the tomb and release from the earth; again one thinks of the escape from Big Dog, and of release from the earth in *Childhood's End*. In these works moral and dramatic emphases differ as between mid-19th and mid-20th centuries, but the themes of time, mortality, and human purpose are held in common, and their authors use analogous symbols and imagery.

But Dickens's ultimate symbol of prison was – a prison; and above all the Marchelsea, traumatically woven into his boyhood memories. He in fact makes a quite deliberate metaphor of the prison as inorganic and dead, as against the "upper world", the universe of light and life. In one passage of *Little Dorrit* he compares the bars of the prison gates, shutting in the prison but gilded by the sun's rays, to the actual sun's rays slanting over the city roofs – "bars of the prison of this lower world". Elsewhere, in the same novel, the imprisoned Clenham:

> . . . had watched the miserable night out, listening to the fall of the rain on the yard pavement, thinking of its soft fall upon the country earth. A blurred circle of yellow haze had risen up in the sky in lieu of the sun, and he watched the patch it put upon the wall, like a bit of the prison's raggedness.

Dickens also uses smoke and fog as "shutting-in" symbols. They obscure and distort the light of the upper world. It is interesting to compare the above passage with an extract from the wonderful description of a November afternoon in London which opens *Bleak House*, an afternoon of "gas" (in Dickens = gas-light), atmospheric with a feeling of "limbo" and disorientation:

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollution of a great (and dirty) city . . . Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.
>
> Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time – as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

It compares also with Dickens's mythopoeically allusive portrait, in *Hard Times*, of dawn over the gas-illuminated factories of Coketown – "the ugly citadel, where nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in":

> The day grew strong, and showed itself outside, even against the flaming lights within. The lights were turned out, and the work went to. The rain fell and the Snake-serpents, submissive to the curse of all that tribe, trailed themselves upon the earth. In the waste-yard outside, the steam from the escape pipe, the litter of barrels and old iron, the shining heaps of coals and old iron, the ashes everywhere, were shrouded in a veil of mist and rain.

City, workhouse, mill, school, prison are all locales on which Dickens can concentrate his revolt against the ugliness and deading utilitarianism of his age. His dark industrialized landscapes from which the sun is excluded point directly to the world of the Morlocks in Wells's *Time Machine*, and on perhaps to the enclosed cities, the photophobic planet, of Asimov's *The Naked Sun*. It is arguable that there has been no comparable prose-poet of environmental pollution until the J.G. Ballard of *The Atrocity Exhibition*. At the same time Dickens was moved by the tremendous technological changes that were taking place, and which foreshadowed the world of which science fiction has become so distinctive a literature – a literature as ambivalent in its stance as were the writings of Dickens.

Dickens is too often thought of as a commemorator of the stage coach and of the "good old days". Actually he was antipathetic to the "good old days" and tended to be chauvinistic in respect of (when he was not angrily or ironically contemptuous of) the Victorian achievement. His experience of the already shrinking world of the mid-century produced speculative fancy, and was also used in the creation of symbols within his novels. The following dramatic example, taken from one of his travel sketches, shows sensitivity to the emerging "planetary" vista. Sailing on a Cunard liner from New York he is on deck at 2 am off the coast of Ireland watching the exchange of signal rockets to register the ship's arrival. Two rockets are fired from the "Russia":

> A sudden solitary light is pointed out to me in the black sky yonder. A change is expected in the light, but none takes place. "Give them two more rockets, Mr Vigilant". Two more and a blue light burns. All eyes watch the light again. At last a little toy sky rocket is flashed up from it; and even as that small streak in the darkness dies away, we are telegraphed to Queenstown, Liverpool and London and back again under the ocean to America.

It was, however, the railway that was the mightiest indication of a new world of changed distances, changed perspectives, changed spatial relationships. Air travel, the more immediate forerunner of space travel, was in practical terms only a matter of exhibition balloon voyages; but early in the 1850s Dickens wrote an essay for *Household Words* entitled "A Flight". He started his essay with a reference to hypothetical "Flying Machines", in the somewhat derisive strain that mainstream authors and journalists have often reserved for sf ideas, and said, in effect, that while winged journeys to Paris remained an unlikely possibility he would rely on the South-Eastern Railway to fly him there. But the essay is, in its staccato style and with its vivid, abrupt imagery, extraordinarily predictive not so much of 'plane as of rocket flight. In fact in *Our Mutual Friend* the roar and progress of a train are described as being those of "a great rocket"; but in "A Flight" he seems actually to capture something of a stage-by-stage ascent, even perhaps of a spatial disorientation:

> There is a dreamy pleasure in this flying. I wonder when it was and where it was that we exploded and blew into space . . . Bang. We have let another station off and fly away regardless. Everything is flying. The hop-gardens turn gracefully towards me, presenting regular avenues of hope, then whirl away . . . Bang. Bang. A double-barrelled station.

It is perhaps worth remembering that Verne's moon-directed ballistics were still over ten years in the future (1865). Dickens's essay was written at a time when, although some of his city imagery was as claustrophobic as ever, his understanding of the long-term significance of new communication networks was moving his imagination into an expansive phase; and this swing was a liberating one – he even saw cities as being "on the move" and accepted this as a symbol of the future.

Dombey and Son, written and published during the great construction boom of the 1840s, above all others is the novel in which the railway is a prime ingredient and symbol. It appears as destroyer and creator. It is the demon destroyer of John Carker when at dawn the engine "licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat"; and it is the destroyer of that segment of Camden Town which Dickens calls Staggs Gardens – yet also creator and originator of the scale and purpose of townscapes succeeding that tumbledown area:

> Where old rotten summer-houses once had stood, palaces now reared their heads and granite columns of gigantic girth opened a vista to the railway world beyond . . . To and from the heart of this great change, all day and night throbbing currents rushed and returned incessantly like its life's blood. Crowds of people and mountains of goods, departing and arriving scores upon scores of times in every twenty-four hours produced a fermentation in the place that was always in action. The very houses seemed to pack up and take trips.

This is in strong contrast to the "death image" of the railway – its ash, its black tunnel walls, which marked Dombey's journey. In that journey it is made to reflect a depressed subjective state; here it looks forward to a world of movement in which even industrial cities achieve a new and vital organicism. Dickens's image of "the very houses (seeming) to pack up and take trips" (he uses similar metaphors more than once) is a venture in imaginative play, an interpretation of the concept of mobility which points to a future of global communications, and almost points the way to certain science fiction images of movement and expansion created a century or so later – the busy trading between planets, Blish's spindizzy-propelled cities, Niven's *Ringworld*, and, as a matter of immediate technology, Spacelab, the Space Shuttle and their potential many-purposed descendants.

There is one lively passage in *Bleak House* in which Dickens lifts his railway imagery to cosmic level. It comes when Mrs Rouncewell and Mrs Bagnet are travelling by chaise along dark frozen roads southwards from Lincolnshire:

> Railroads shall soon traverse all this country, and with a rattle and a glare the engine and train shall shoot like a meteor over the wide night-landscape, turning the moon paler; but, as yet, such things are non-existent in these parts, though not wholly unexpected.

Their existence he goes on to say, in foreceful descriptive detail, will emerge from a chaos of earth upturning and reshaping on enormous scale – a passage which again shows how visually sensitive Dickens was to the transformation of terrain and landscape which the railway boom of the mid-century occasioned.

Some of the aspects of Dickens's writing which have been stressed in this essay may be less familiar than are his tragic, comic, pathetic or grotesque portrayals of men and women; but all of his figures perform against the background of landscapes which sometimes symbolically reflect, sometimes seem to be the maturing matrix of the dramas in which they engage.

Throughout *Our Mutual Friend,* for example, the dust heaps (earth) and the sea, the tides, above all the river (water) are focal elements in the unfolding of its tragedies and in the making of its unions. The mounds of the Golden Dustman have their own alchemy – riches from dust. Tides and the Thames are involved in several episodes of death – and of re-birth and return from death. The culminating marriages of Lizzie and Eugene Wrayburn, and of Bella and John Harmon, are signalled by different symbols: the shutters raised and the dawn sun blazing into the room where the injured Eugene lies; the earth circling its primary as the time for the birth of Bella's child approaches. The themes of resurrection and new birth are strong in this novel, as they are in many works of science fiction; and it is no arbitrary pairing that would see the opening of the sun-shutters in Eugene's darkened room paralleled by the "revelatory" scene (previously quoted) on Big Dog; or that would see the "sun-circling" passage heralding the birth of Bella's baby paralleled by passages in the "Recapitulation" chapter at the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey,* where "in an empty room, floating amid the fires of a double star twenty thousand light-years from Earth, a baby opened its eyes and began to cry".

Unlikely companions in literature or in philosophy as Charles Dickens and Arthur Clarke may appear to be, there are in fact closely congruent patterns in their work when they move into what one may call their "transcendental" keys. The relevance of *Childhood's End* has already been noted, and it is perhaps worth returning to. Both that novel and *2001* – and, indeed, *Non-Stop* – end in a kind of apotheosis. They could share with *The Old Curiosity Shop* the symbolism of what (plot tidying-up apart) is its culminating sentence: "In the Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations which defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to Heaven".

2001 is so ingenious an exploration of human history and destiny that it has lent itself to a number of interpretations. One of the most interesting of these is that offered by Mel McKee, writing in "Sight and Sound" (Autumn 1971). In his article he discerns resemblances between Arthur Clarke's imagery and that of C.S. Lewis in *Out of the Silent Planet.* The summoning of Ransom to Oyarsa and the pfifil-

triggi-constructed guest house in which he stays are compared with Bowman's metamorphosis and the Earth-like house which is its scene and base. Both houses are cradles of a translation of men who have passed through the symbolic elements: the one house stands by the ferry at the foot of the monolith and the eldila-lined grove leading to the crown of Oyarsa's island, and the presence of Oyarsa; the other is on the far side of the Star Gate. As Clarke wrote of Bowman, when he traverses the Star Gate:

> He was moving through a new order of creation, of which few men had ever dreamed. Beyond the realm of sea and land and air and space lay the realm of fire, which he alone had been privileged to glimpse.

Now this pattern of movement to apotheosis through an hierarchical sequence of elements is not only built into ancient alchemical and cabalistic systems of cosmology, but is reflected in a wide spectrum of literature, some consciously, much only peripherally or indirectly drawing on such sources. In Dickens its upsurge is based simply on his intuitive feeling for the archetypal profiles of human experience; but it emerges almost as surely as it does in *The Tempest* or *The Faerie Queene.* It is there, for instance, in the elemental framework of *Great Expectations,* as it stretches from the first chapter set in the dark flat wilderness of the estuarine marshes to the final chapter in which the first and last meetings of Pip and Estella complete a cycle, and which concludes with Pip's words:

> The evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.

It is there also in the context Dickens creates for another of his "anima" figures, Milly Swidger, or "Mrs William" of *The Haunted Man*; and here Dickens shows his virtuosity, using a cockney-humorous mise-en-scène. In William Swidger's account of his wife, the gentle, resourceful college servitor, he says that Milly is fully equal to live save when the elements take her off her balance: "She is not formed superior to *that*". Swidger details these occasions in terms of Earth, Air, Fire and Water, each Dickensianly localized within the London environment. She might, for example, be "taken off her balance" by air when she is (like Toby Veck) buffeted by the wind, or when she is, with uncomfortable results, persuaded on to the swings at Peckham Fair, and by water when her young nephew takes her for a trip on the river and rows her into one of the piers of Battersea Bridge. Swidger adds:

> But these are elements. Mrs William must be taken out of the elements for the strength of her character to come into play.

What are these elements? And in what sense can Milly operate outside and beyond them? *The Haunted Man* is a brilliant if confused book, overladen with symbolism and sentiment, but contains a good deal of autobiographical and self-revelatory writing. The introductory pages depict the elements, land, sea and air as constraining men, birds and animals, who, buffeted like puppets (the Trotty Veck syndrome again), pass into night, all helpless creatures of time and mutability. The laboratory of Dickens's Faust figure, Redlaw, is depicted in quasi-alchemical terms and is shown as existing in "vault-like" seclusion at the heart of the college building. This building is itself the prime environmental symbol. At the beginning of the story it is earthbound and deadened. In Dickens's description of it he is at his

very best as a poet of pollution and decay, using his "elemental" imagery to negative effect:

> . . . smoke-age-and-weather darkened, squeezed on every side by the overgrowing of the great city, and choked, like an old well, with stones and bricks; its small quadrangles lying down in very pits formed by the streets and buildings, which, in course of time, had been constructed above its heavy chimney stacks; its old trees, insulted by the neighbouring smoke, which deigned to droop so low when it was very feeble and the weather very moody; its grass-plots, struggling with the mildewed earth to be grass, or to win any show of compromise; its silent pavements, unaccustomed to the tread of feet, and even to the observation of eyes, except when a stray face looked down from the upper world, wondering what nook it was; its sun-dial in a little bricked-up corner, where no sun has straggled for a hundred years, but where, in compensation for the sun's neglect, the snow would lie for weeks when it lay nowhere else, and the black east wind would spin like a huge humming-top, when in all other places it was silent and still.

The psychological turning-point of the story comes in its final chapter in an incident (a little reminiscent of the "bless'd them unawares" passage of *The Ancient Mariner*) when Redlaw's revulsion at the "baby savage" gives way to compassion. This is a change in which the beneficent attraction of Milly for the savage instinct-bound boy is chiefly instrumental: Milly and he, for different reasons, being the only ones unaffected by the "regressive" spell. The boy is completely immersed in the "baser" elements; Redlaw, the alchemical-protagonist, had tried, unsuccessfully, to conquer time and the elements by denying them; Milly redeems the situation by transcending them. After the beginning of her redemption of the savage boy (Redlaw's alter-ego – Dickens describes him as "his dread companion", and Redlaw addresses him as "Shadow of myself"), the college is immediately described in its changed aspect. In this final chapter Dickens's elemental imagery becomes positive, and the element of light is transcendent and transforming. The description is now precisely polar to that quoted from the opening chapter:

> Soon, now, the distant line of the horizon brightened, the darkness faded, the sun rose red and glorious, and the chimney stacks and gables of the ancient building gleamed in the clear air, which turned the smoke and vapour of the city into a cloud of gold. The very sun-dial in his shady corner, where the wind used to spin with such un-windy constancy, shook off the finer particles of snow that had accumulated on his dull old face in the night, and looked out at the little white wreaths eddying round and round him. Doubtless some blind groping of the morning made its way down into the forgotten crypt so cold and earthy, where the Norman arches were half buried in the ground, and stirred the dull deep sap in the lazy vegetation hanging to the walls, and quickened the slow principle of life within the little world of wonderful and delicate creation which existed there, with some faint knowledge that the sun was up.

There are many layers and strands of symbolism in this intricately devised fantasy, and the strand that I have defined only carries part of the story; but it is a key part and I have quoted extensively the two "college" descriptions because they illustrate so well that movement in Dickens's fantasy writing that we might call a movement "from crypt to light". It is a movement frequently introduced, often with remarkable escalations and inversions – literally "escalated", for example, in the already-mentioned *Child's Dream of a Star*, which, for all its (in Dickens's time more acceptable) sentimentality and Highgate Cemetery monumentalism, has some startling visionary flashes, as in the angelic avenues of light: the long rows in which they stood could be the avenue of the eldila, and the final image, "my age is falling from me like a garment and I move towards the star as a child" strongly pre-echoes

the final chapters of *2001.*

And as for an "inversion" effect, there is a curious passage in *The Old Curiosity Shop* when Nell, wandering solitary, experiences the emotions of "sky, earth, air and rippling water, and the sound of distant bells"; then after gazing up "through immeasurable space" to the stars, "in their changeless and incorruptible existence", and seeing them "looking down so mildly from the wide world of air":

> She bent over the calm river, and saw them shining in the same majestic order as when the dove beheld them gleaming through the swollen waters upon the mountain tops far down below, and dead mankind a million fathoms deep.

Despite its hyperbole the passage is effective in combining elemental imagery with the Ark motif and in painting a symbolically complex picture of upper and lower worlds, the one reflected in the other, with the earth and mankind imprisoned or entombed beneath the flood – or that which is free held by that which is conditioned.

The narcissistic metaphor is of course not new; nor is the image of the flood as symbol. The point here is that Dickens uses them on the kind of planetary and cosmic scale which leads straight into the similarly-scaled symbolism of sf, whether it be Ballard's *The Drowned World,* Aldiss's "The Expensive Delicate Ship", the "apocalypse" of Moorcock's *The Final Programme,* or, most strikingly analogous in its combination of an image of dead mankind with one symbolizing a release into space, Clarke's *Childhood's End.*

To sum up: we have seen how certain archetypal images equally find expression in Dickens's work and in the work of the 20th century writers of science fiction and fantasy selected for comparison. It is not a case of derivation, but of the effect of a literary sea-surge or ground-swell, for that is what the achievement of Dickens was in relation to future fictional writing. In greater part it may also be a manifestation of Jean Charon's contention (in *L'Homme à sa Découverte*) that the art of the future may draw more on the "collective unconscious" than on that of the individual. We have also found in Dickens a number of thoughts and images which derive from the mid-19th century technological environment, being used symbolically, and also being used, if not exactly prophetically, then in a way that prefigures the future. He lived and wrote in that period between Jane Austen and the present time which C.S. Lewis held to be the most critical watershed in Western history – the period of the effective birth of the machine. There is in his work an early sounding of motifs which the literature of later technologies would develop, both in "hard" science fiction and, with some correspondence to Dickens's fables and metaphors, in mythopoeic science fiction and fantasy. He himself, within the greater body of his work contributing to the growth of the realistic novel, was also a fantasist; and, as this examination of aspects of his writing has sought to show, he trod and marked out, at times in pioneering vein, that narrow boundary which presently lies between some of the calmer seas of fantasy and some of the wilder shores of science fiction.

Colin Greenland is now the Arts Council-sponsored Writing Fellow at the Science Fiction Foundation – a post which he holds for one year from October 1980. He has completed a fantasy novel, as yet unpublished, and is now working on a second. He is already well known to readers of Foundation *on the basis of the interesting articles and book reviews which he has contributed in the past two years. The following piece, which examines a surprisingly neglected novel by a major writer, will appear in very different form in* The Mervyn Peake Review.

From Beowulf to Kafka: Mervyn Peake's "Titus Alone"

Colin Greenland

Mervyn Peake's achievement as a novelist is now generally recognized. Other critics have observed that in 1946, when *Titus Groan,* the first of the Titus books, was published, the generation that would appreciate them was hardly born. The qualities that made them odd for their time now ensure their popularity. There is still, as there always was, a Peake cult, but the taste is no longer exclusive; and even among readers who do not share it, Peake no longer suffers the reputation of being a mere English eccentric, a literary freak with the pathos of one of his own characters.

I discovered Peake when everyone else did, at the publication of the Penguin edition. In the course of ten years reading and discussing his work I have noticed an exceptional number of people who speak enthusiastically of the Titus books but soon admit they have not read all three. They have read *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast,* perhaps more than once, and started *Titus Alone* but never finished it. It's a reaction which seems to be peculiar to Peake. I haven't found it among admirers of other f and sf trilogies, Le Guin's or Tolkien's or Shea and Wilson's. Many English readers bought American editions of *The Sword and the Stallion* or *The Children of Dune* because they were not prepared to wait for English ones. Conversely, readers who gave up on Thomas Covenant after one or two volumes are not eager to call themselves Donaldson fans. There is a feeling that *Titus Alone* is less acceptable or plainly less good than *Titus Groan* or *Gormenghast.* A friend of mine who relished *Titus Groan* eventually returned my copy of *Titus Alone* declaring it unreadable. It is treated as a minor appendage to the major work, negligible in any assessment of the whole.

There are two qualifications that must be borne in mind. First, Peake's three books are only a trilogy because he died before he could write a fourth. No end to the series had been envisaged. "Trilogy" suggests a neatness of organization – beginning,

middle, end – which, as Maeve Gilmore has said, Peake never designed. Nor do the three give that impression of completeness. Each of them is open-ended; each last page contains an implicit – no, an explicit new beginning. The three books do not comprise a unit, though they have an essential continuity, a balanced structure, as I hope to demonstrate.

Second, we cannot forget that the meticulous craftsman who wrote *Titus Groan* was already under attack from his fatal disease when he wrote *Titus Alone.* Langdon Jones's 1970 edition of *Titus Alone* is the most faithful and coherent version possible from the manuscript and subsequent alterations by the author and his heavy-handed first editor; but it trembles, it wastes away, it almost falls apart. What sustains it is the very urgency of an author determined to express a vision despite the ravages of mental and physical decay.

With this in mind it is curious to read the preface to the new French translation, *Titus Errant.* André Dhôtel affirms the opinion that the book is "difficult", never saying so, but implying it by summarizing the story and insisting how logical it actually is.

> The sometimes patchy appearance of this last work has often been ascribed to the fact that it was written by a man in the first stages of Parkinson's disease. *Nothing could be further from the truth.*
>
> The shattering difference between one episode and another is proof of singular lucidity.

Dhôtel's claim is a strange one. *Titus Alone was* written by a man in the first stages of Parkinson's disease. It appears "patchy" because it is patchy; otherwise there would have been no need for Langdon Jones. Under the circumstances, both medical and editorial, it could hardly be "singularly lucid"; it isn't. Dhôtel almost suggests that the irregularities of *Titus Alone* are a deliberate stylistic technique, like the fragmentations of Ballard or Vonnegut. They aren't.

Nor are they disastrous. The book does not fall to pieces. There are gaps in the fabric: abrupt and obscure transitions, and scenes whose dramatic motivation is unclear. The overall shape of the story is quite intact. The gaps are passages we may not understand, or appreciate, or believe, because the writing falls short, but there is nothing we cannot follow, though we may be as confused as Titus himself. Peake's descriptive brilliance flickers and fades through the book, but he is always explicit about the moral significance of each incident, however incomplete it remains in the reader's imagination. So what is the problem?

For the reader of all three Titus books, it may be hard to accept less after so much, just as the wavering line and empty forms of Peake's last sketches are no substitute for the density and sinuous detail of his best drawings. But for all those readers who get no further than the first page of *Titus Alone,* a major stumbling-block seems to be Muzzlehatch's outrageous car.

The epoch of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* is of course undated, but as Anthony Burgess writes in his introduction,

> The doomed ritual lord, the emergent hero, the castle, the hall of retainers, the mountain, the lake, the twisted trees, the strange creatures, the violent knives, the dark and the foreboding belong (however qualified by tea, muffins, tobacco and sherry wine) to a prehistoric England. (*Titus Groan,* p.12.)

Titus could be a contemporary of Beowulf. Reading those first two volumes, we have

the sensation that there is a world beyond Gormenghast, where history is flowing on, isolating the castle, but to meet a motor-car is a shock. It signals Titus's emergence from the temporal backwater straight into the mainstream of modernity. To follow him we need to make an abrupt shift of focus, and of pace. Things will now be much closer to hand and move even faster.

Peake is emphatic about the discontinuity between the castle and the world. It is the very subject of the third volume, in which Titus struggles to adjust his memory to his experience. He hates his home and has abandoned it, but it is his past and so remains in his present. As birthplace and more especially as birthright, the earldom has made him what he is. His identity crisis is precipitated by the incompatibility of the two realms. "Were they coeval; were they simultaneous? These worlds; these realms – could they *both* be true? Were there no bridges?" (*Titus Alone* p.32). The people among whom he wanders quite justifiably doubt his history. "'Titus Groan, Seventy-Seventh Lord?'" queries the magistrate. "'That sort of title belongs to another age.'" (*TA* p.86.)

The skill of Peake's narration involves us in Titus's disturbance. Gormenghast, lavishly and minutely depicted in *Titus Groan*, with so much described and so much more suggested, looming in shadow, encloses the imagination like a Piranese dungeon. It tempts us to assent to the creed upheld by Gertrude and Sourdust, that there is nowhere else – in narrative terms, that this is the story of a separate, self-contained world, whose character is definite, however labyrinthine and compendious. But Peake's subject was not Gormenghast but Titus. He was not a Gothic writer, obsessed with his mausoleum; he was for life and youth and sunlight. The awful, fascinating grandeur of Gormenghast is presented to us on its last day, the day of the coming of Titus, and of Steerpike. Change and growth cannot be halted, time must run on. That is the whole moral of the three books. Away from the castle, Titus discovers the actual extent of the world. It is vast, so vast that Gormenghast is lost in it. "'My letters are returned. Address Unknown.'" (*TA* p.86.) Similarly Peake makes us realise the extent and significance of his work by abruptly throwing open the doors to space and time. We have already appreciated the satirical aspect of Gormenghast, how it mirrors our world, in little, within limits. In *Titus Alone* the fiction reaches out to merge with it, to envelop us. There may be no bridges from the city to the castle, but from the city to London and New York and Berlin, to Belsen and Hiroshima, the roads are clearly signposted. There are cars tearing along them.

The acceleration is marked in the style. *Titus Groan* takes five hundred pages to span two years; over half of them are concerned with one day. There are innumerable passages where Peake stops the action to describe and evaluate, or winds back to lead up again with another character from another direction. In *Gormenghast* the same number of pages covers ten years. As Titus wakes up from the trance of puberty and the hunt begins, the narrative gathers speed.

> Out of nowhere, suddenly, the first sight of the elusive Steerpike. Out of nowhere, suddenly, the news of Fuchsia's death. Out of nowhere, and suddenly, the uprush of his rebellion – the danger of it, the shock of it for all about him, the excitement of it, and the thrill of finding himself free of duplicity – a traitor if they liked, but a man who had torn away the brambles from his clothes, the ivy from his limbs, the bindweed from his brain. (*Gormenghast*, p.467.)

Peake's prose, elaborate and repetitive as ever, now resonates with urgency. In *Titus*

Alone events move inhumanly fast, flashing past before they can be grasped: fragments of landscape and disconnected incidents, glimpses from the windows as we are hustled up and down those nameless highways. Time jumps, disappears. Readers who resist this acceleration are making a very important mistake. What they want, in effect, is more Gormenghast, though Gormenghast is the place of stagnation and living death, of the triumph of history over freedom, of ritual over desire. They are using Peake as escapist fiction, an alternative to life, not a comment upon and extension of it. The crux of the transition to *Titus Alone,* and the key to its operation as fiction, is that Peake stops allowing us to believe that his fantasy is separate from our experience. It is no longer a world away.

Titus Alone prefigures many of the concerns and techniques of the contemporary novel, not least in its relentless uncertainty. When is Titus – in the past, the present, the future? Which is true, the castle or the city? Is the world defined by the scientists, who can see into the atom and across the globe, or by the refugees, the "displaced persons" under the river? It is not hard to see why Peake found such favour in *New Worlds* when the air resounded with the demolition of old idols and icons. Michael Moorcock, Langdon Jones and M. John Harrison all helped to champion him out of lingering obscurity. Like theirs, his fiction makes use of the conventions and tropes of popular fantasy to construct a world which is emphatically only a distortion of our own – and which insists that our own world may well be distorted already. Peake's imagination is robust, his descriptions dense and tactile with the particularity of his painter's eye. His characters, however much they would prefer to be aloof from nature and time, are grotesques in the satirical tradition. Moorcock has pointed out that Peake is in descent from Swift, Rabelais and Dickens, rather than the line of discreet and well-bred English fantasy from Malory through Tennyson to Tolkien. Peak made use of that tradition as of the Gothic, to inform his vision; *Titus Groan* is certainly his masterpiece, but it does not define the limits of his capability. For *Titus Alone* he made exactly the same use of science fiction. In the fifties silver skyscrapers, wingless aeroplanes, robot flying eyes and tireless android policemen were all commonplaces from the pulp era. Depicted on the screen in stories of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon and on the comic page with Dan Dare too, they had passed into a popular currency of images familiar even to people who never read science fiction, as William Burroughs and Eduardo Paolozzi have observed. In *Titus Alone* Peake employs them as Burroughs and Paolozzi do, or as Philip K. Dick does, as images of our increasing mechanization, of the usurpation of the senses by the media, of our elimination of the natural and necessary and reliance on the artificial and arbitrary. The Titus books are a classic example of the distinction so crucial to the *New Worlds* writers, between repetition of formula and exploitation of formula, between the *genre* fascination with the future and fiction about that fascination. The city of Titus's exile worships the future as devoutly as Gormenghast worships the past. Peake shows each as a kind of living death, a fatal distraction from the present. Himself a fervent romantic, he presents each as a corrupt romanticism.

Brian Aldiss, David Ketterer, and others have shown the historical and thematic connections between Gothicism and science fiction. The two characteristic mentalities are polarized in the Titus books, which tell the story of a young idealist struggling to find his position between them. *Titus Alone* bears the same attitude to science

fiction as *Titus Groan* does to the Gothic, the self-conscious and calculating attitude we have muffled under the blanket term "New Wave". This fiction is as open as *genre* fiction is closed. *Titus Groan* shows the cracking of the wall, through which the present starts to seep in. *Gormenghast* tells of the flood, devastating and cleansing. *Titus Alone* takes away the wall and leaves a world scoured of landmarks. Signs and boundaries flicker ambiguously. It is not long before space and time start to melt. Its frame of reference is open: open to interpretation, to interaction with the world in which we read it. This is a condition of modernist and post-modernist writing, which recognizes that Menard's *Quixote* is not the same as Cervantes' and exploits the relationship of reader to text. *Titus Alone* is no more difficult or remote than a daily paper. Its first readers were as familiar as we are with highways and prison camps, and the various factories whose raw material is human and whose principle product is death. Death-rays may have been pretty much the monopoly of the Mekon in 1959, but in 1980 *Scientific American* reported that they had reached Russia. The slaughter of Muzzlehatch's zoo by "some kind of ray" now seems as much matter for the headlines as for the pulps. Science fiction, as I have said elsewhere, is not prediction; but it continues to offer the best equipment for exploring Wilde's provocative maxim that Nature imitates Art.

Mervyn Peake was not in the business of prediction, or even of realism, however defined. He used the properties of science fiction, as William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, Angela Carter, or Doris Lessing have used them, to create a fictional space which is a distortion of our own, the distortions offering various strange reflections upon and insights into reality (however defined). The distorted landscape, the exile abroad in it, not so much on a quest as searching for the sense of his own wanderings – the pattern is central to the disrupted and alienated fiction we read and write today. In an essay I once described *Titus Alone* as "Kafkaesque": I didn't realise how close the comparison was until I reread *The Castle* recently. There are several intriguing correspondences. K's sudden, heedless, doomed love affair with Frieda is very like Titus's with Juno. The two alarming and indistinguishable "assistants", appointed to follow K around for reasons that are never made clear, are like another version of Titus's official, implacable pursuers. Other features also recall *The Trial,* most obviously the Honeycomb prison, "a world within a world" (*TA* p.72) whose moral and legal systems do not necessarily tally with those that operate outside, and the tenebrous courtroom with its maundering but menacing magistrate. Kafka's Castle is, in fact, quite unlike Peake's, being a small and unimpressive structure; and K, of course, is trying to get in while Titus is trying to get away, but both misfits display ambivalent emotions for their dominant edifices. The Landlady upbraids K:

> "You are not from the Castle, you are not from the village, you aren't anything. Or rather, unfortunately, you are something, a stranger, a man who isn't wanted and is in everybody's way, a man who's always causing trouble . . . a man whose intentions are obscure . . ."

Couldn't that just as well be Titus Groan, the Earl, the Abdicator? Later she assures K:

> "You can do what you like. Your actions may no doubt leave deep footprints in the snow out there in the courtyard, but they'll do nothing more."

"You will only tread a circle, Titus Groan." Can the individual ever be free without being lost? If he moves according to impulse, is he only going round in circles?

Titus Alone is a flawed work, perhaps best thought of as unfinished, or at least unrevised. As such, it can afford only partial satisfaction; but satisfaction is not easily obtained when those huge unanswerables are at issue. It might frustrate or disappoint a reader who requires a rigid logic of plot, like a route map at the back of the book, but it is hardly difficult to read. Such a reader is in any case ill-equipped to venture into an imagination like Peake's. The difficulty of *Titus Alone* is only that of accepting the full significance of the author's intentions. Forced to step out into the atrocious absurdity of the latter days, the escapist shares Titus's sudden feeling that, compared with this, Gormenghast was cosy.

Note. Page references are to *Titus Groan, Gormenghast* and *Titus Alone,* 2nd. ed., Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968-70; the Penguin edition has the same pagination.

Foundation Forum

The following is a polemical piece rather than a book review, which is why we have chosen to publish it under the "Forum" heading. Here Christopher Priest uses Lester del Rey's book The World of Science Fiction *as an example of what he sees as a prevalent philistine attitude to sf. Should any readers feel moved to join this discussion, we would be happy to publish their views in the next Forum section or in a future letter column of* Foundation.

"It" Came from Outer Space

Christopher Priest

The World of Science Fiction: 1926-1976
by Lester del Rey *(Del Rey Books, 1979, 416pp, $5.95)*

> I took Helen on a shopping trip to Hudson and she giggled and purred over the wisps of silk and glassheen that were the fashion, tried on endless hats, and conducted herself as any normal girl might. We went trout fishing for a day, where she proved to be as good a sport and as sensibly silent as a man. ("Helen O'Loy", 1938)

> Herr Dr Ernst Meyer nodded heavy agreement. "Ja, so. Und mit all dis matchinery, no vunder. It gives yet no goot place v'ere I can mit comfort vork, also in mine own laboradory. Und v'at haff ve here?"
>
> "That's Hermes – my mascot". Brugh picked up the little, hollow rubber figure of the god Hermes; Mercury, the Romans called him. ("The Smallest God", 1940)

A statement of personal position to begin with, not because I have to justify or defend my attitude to Lester del Rey's celebratory history of science fiction, but so that I can identify myself for his benefit and save him the chore of reading this essay.

I am Lester del Rey's professional adversary, the antagonist of his literary dreams. He will not need to read this because he already knows what I am going to say. I am identified (though not by name) within the text of his book. My mention is in the chapter called "Rebellion: The New Wave and Art". I am fairly described as one of the writers who (p.257) "developed taste under the influence of the New Wave", which influence is "still evident in much English critical writing on science fiction". I am also one of those writers who (p.258) "decided they were no mere craftsmen, but should be considered artists". Del Rey will therefore distrust everything I say on the subject of literature and science fiction, judging correctly that I am hostile to his views. Even if his mind is not closed against me, he will ascribe it all to a difference of "opinion", and he will think this because opinion is indeed the last refuge of the intellectual scoundrel. There are not even any careless slips in this in which I say something which might be construed to his favour: I am challenging his perspective, his impartiality, his accuracy, his writing ability, his ideas and attitudes, and even his spelling and vocabulary. There is nothing here for him. He would be much better advised to go and read an old copy of *Astounding*.

If del Rey will not care a hoot for what I think of his attitudes, why should I worry about what he has to say? The answer is that del Rey is a vocal and persistent spokesman for the consensus view of science fiction. His attitudes and his interpretation have momentum behind them, the tacit agreement of many of the most influential writers in the genre, virtually all the editors and publishers, and the vast majority of science fiction fans. Del Rey is therefore on sure ground, knowing that anyone who opposes him will be by definition either an outsider or an extremist. It would never occur to him that it might be the consensus he represents which is extremist, which happens to be my own sincerely held belief. This is not a debating point or a theoretical stance. The attitudes represented by del Rey's book are dangerous, and directly threaten the ultimate freedom of creative writers. My reasoning on this will emerge in due course.

First, the del Rey text. He has a story to tell, and to anyone who has read in and around the literature of science fiction it will be a familiar story. It is the one we are all told, the one which most of us tell, the one which like folklore is passed from one generation to the next. It concerns, of course, the year 1926 and Hugo Gernsback; 1938 and John W. Campbell; 1950 and Anthony Boucher and H.L. Gold, 1964 and Michael Moorcock. It treats of Golden Ages and New Waves, fandom and conventions, pulp magazines and digests, classic titles and sense of wonder. This sacred text, for so long passed by work of mouth, is now being written up so as to persuade outsiders of the good news of science fiction. Lester del Rey, like St Luke, is writing the gospel for non-Jews.

Unfortunately, because del Rey is not a saint, his story is full of assumptions and it is riddled with fallacies, both of his own making and arising from his conspicuous lack of literary perspective.

Del Rey assumes many things, but they are all subordinate to one: that science

fiction somehow *is*, that it is an identifiable quality, that it can be described and defined and set apart for examination. His book is full of constructions like "science fiction *is*", "science fiction *should be*", "the *purpose* of science fiction is", "science fiction *serves as*", and so forth. Thus, the identity of separate works and individual authors are subsumed into an all-embracing and homogeneous label to which characteristics are ascribed.

To make this major assumption, del Rey has to accept a major fallacy. This is one which although having an unarguable basis in material fact, is nevertheless fallacious on the level at which del Rey himself writes: the theoretical. Put simply, it was the creation of the genre magazines by Gernsback and his imitators. Del Rey is of the belief that the genre magazines were *in theory* a good thing. However, del Rey himself is a self-avowed product of the genre, so his view is from inside; his perspective is therefore limited. He sees all that existed before Gernsback and *Amazing Stories* as being chaotic and without form. Of this period he says:

> The many books could not establish science fiction fully; they were priced out of reach of most readers and they also tended to disappear into the mainstream. To develop, science fiction had to remove itself from the usual critics who viewed it from the perspective of that mainstream, and who judged its worth largely on its mainstream values. As part of that mainstream, it would never have had the freedom to make the choices it did – many of them quite possibly wrongly, but necessary for its development. (p.35.)

One never knows quite where to begin with writing like this. It is typical of the genre mind, for instance, to refer to everything that is not-science-fiction as "mainstream". Although science fiction has already been defined at ponderous length (pp.3-11), no definition is offered here for "mainstream". Judging from the rest, it can be taken to mean the other commercial genres – romances, sea-stories, Westerns, detective stories, and so on – plus a nebulous concept of general, non-genre fiction known variously as "straight" fiction, the "traditional" novel, "literary" works, and this would imply those difficult novels read at school plus modern works dealing with campus life. The science fiction commentator generally refers to the "mainstream" with either a contemptuous sneer, or else with empty genuflections to approved masters like Dickens, Fielding and Twain.

But returning to del Rey's remark, what he actually means is that the abstract quality of science fiction-ness ("it") was something unrecognized while it languished in the real world. Worse, "it" might be judged by stringent literary standards, and be found wanting. Del Rey compares (p.88) the creation of science fiction magazines to the building of a hothouse, one to which the delicate specimens could be transferred for careful tending, away from the acid rains of mainstream misunderstanding and the cold winds of criticism.

Speaking from his position well inside the hothouse, his roots firmly bedded in lime-free compost, his environment carefully controlled, del Rey can only see dimly through the protective panes of glass.

Because the hothouse *was* built, and the genre magazines do exist, let us step outside them for a moment and consider the situation before 1926 and Hugo Gernsback.

There were up to that time at least four renowned writers in the fantastic idiom: Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. All four had gained

prominence in the 19th century: Shelley in 1818, Poe in the 1840s, Verne in the 1860s, Wells in the 1890s. Their reputations were made in popular culture, and in the particular examples of Verne and Wells each had been lionized in his own country. In the case of Wells (the only one of these writers still alive in the 1920s), he was in his day possibly one of the most controversial and famous authors in the world, and had an immense international readership. Poe, Verne and Wells are *sui generis*: to most members of the reading public the very mention of their names is sufficient to summon up a generalized but accurate impression of their work. (A quality shared with writers of the ilk of, say, Ernest Hemingway, Georges Simenon, Franz Kafka, D.H. Lawrence, H. Rider Haggard, Jane Austen, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jack Kerouac.)

Now, of the writers who developed within the science fiction genre (i.e. post Gernsback), who can be said to be *sui generis*? Did the hothouse experiment succeed?

Del Rey's book is sprinkled with names, nearly all of which will be abundantly familiar to most habitual science fiction readers. The least known of these are the ones who are accorded a role in the "history" of science fiction (they wrote stories now considered to be classics, or they are associated with a particular period of change, or with an editor or a magazine). The major names are not only famous within the genre, but have identities outside; we can probably agree for a moment that the best-known writers of science fiction are Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke and Robert A. Heinlein. Although people inside the science fiction world can see individual traits in these writers' works, in the larger literary world this is not so. Their work is associated with the abstract "it" quality of science fiction . . . they are identified as *science fiction writers.*

This is emphatically not true of Poe, Verne and Wells. These are writers who did *more*; not just other "types" of work, but they have qualities above and outside of science fiction. In other words, Asimov and the others have never transcended the limitations of the genre, but have risen only as high as it is possible to go.

Del Rey does not see this fine distinction. He does not allow that people who have read widely in literature have a greater sense of perspective than he has. Nor does he see that while his hothouse was nurturing its specialized strains, at least two writers who had nothing whatsoever to do with "it", George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, were not only producing works of fantastic literature that have enduring qualities, but were becoming genuinely *sui generis* writers.

(Incidentally, del Rey on George Orwell is especially awful. Of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – not *1984*, as del Rey has the title – he says: "(it) cannot be misread as to intent". He then proceeds to do just that by adding: "This is an almost purely political dystopia, with little gadgetry added to what he had at the time of its writing. Of course, the trouble with Orwell's forecast was that most of it had already happened. At most, it was a simple exaggeration of techniques used previously". Thus the blinkered science fiction man grapples with one of the few genuinely prophetic – in the primary meaning of the word – novels of the 20th century.)

Furthermore, the underlying premise of chronological development is cock-eyed, as I have argued on more than one previous occasion.

The suggestion is that certain fiction can only be judged in the context of its immediate period, and that rational literary judgements must be suspended. Several famous science fiction stories are traditionally awarded this licence, and allowed an historical place (usually as a "classic") because of their happenstance of date. Stories like Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey", Asimov's "Nightfall" and Godwin's "The Cold Equations" are therefore mentioned in hushed, respectful tones of voice, and it is a reckless soul who suggests that they are less than accomplished. Even so, none of these stories can really sustain an open-minded modern reading. Anyone who doubts it should try it. All three stories are ineptly handled, the first with plonking humour, the second with crassly unbelievable characterization, the third with risible sentimentality. The point is that literature doesn't go off or deteriorate: the words we read now are the words that were written in their day. If a story seems clumsy now it is not that we the audience have changed, or that English usage and literary conventions have been transformed. Yet del Rey *is* making this special plea: that the art (he uses the word "technique") of fiction writing advances year by year, so that what now seems to us to be bad writing is in fact very good writing, and that the reason we cannot see this is because fashion and attitudes have changed us. This sort of argument strikes deep into the heart of literary appreciation, and says in effect that a modern audience is incapable of responding to Donne's poetry, Shakespeare's plays or Austen's satires.

The trouble with being inside a genre that has totally abandoned literary criteria is that any commentator from within has the same lack. Here is del Rey again, still worrying at the chronology of technique, this time in *Analog*, September 1975:

> Science fiction needed a discipline and set of techniques that had never been required before, if it were to present totally alien cultures, histories and worlds without long, obtrusive explanations that halted the flow of the story. Evolving such techniques was a slow and painful effort, as can be seen by reading most of the very early stories of the field. Try to imagine *Dune* or a Le Guin novel as it might have been written in 1930! Personally, I don't think such stories could have been written without later techniques.

The implication is that every science fiction writer needs to have read everything that has gone before, and learn by the mistakes of others. Quite apart from the fact that this is extremely unlikely, it doesn't make sense even in del Rey's narrow terms. He probably believes fervently that Frank Herbert and Ursula Le Guin are better writers than, say, Vargo Statten. But by the same argument, Vargo Statten is then a "better" writer than Robert A. Heinlein, who in turn is "better" than Captain S.P. Meek, who is "better" than H.G. Wells. It is patent nonsense.

And even within his narrowness, del Rey is not consistent. He characterizes the "development" of science fiction as a series of revolutions, out of each of which emerged a "better" or purer form of science fiction. He follows this theory through until he reaches the 1960s, when the "New Wave" revolution took place, but at this point the theory collapses. The kind of changes that took place then were not to his taste, so he dismisses them.

I have already written at length on the New Wave (in Octopus Books' *Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, 1978), and do not wish to repeat myself too much here. Although del Rey would categorize me within the New Wave (for the reasons given at the beginning of this), and if he were to read the whole of this essay would feel

himself vindicated in so doing, in fact I happen to be at odds with what remains of the New Wave movement; writers like Michael Moorcock and M. John Harrison dislike my own fiction and disagree with my views. I find this healthy and bracing. Even so, I insist that del Rey's interpretation of what happened in the 1960s is fallacious, and reveals in microcosm further insights into his mistaken understandings of the whole science fiction genre.

To del Rey, the New Wave was not an advancement of "it" but a temporary aberration, a short-lived break with orthodoxy. He says that the editors and writers were (p.250) "disenchanted with science", were (p.251) "*primarily* interested in writing as a thing in itself"; *New Worlds* (p.252) "seemed to be devoted to stories that were controversial, either by the breaking of the reputed magazine taboos or in treatment and style". And so on: concerned as ever with surfaces, del Rey is incapable of discerning what lay beneath.

As one who went through it all, as one who was "influenced" by it, I can say that the disenchantment was not with science but with science fiction; the writers of the '60s were *sceptical* of science, and *despised* the uncritical way established science fiction writers had dealt with it. The Tsars of science fiction who had to be overthrown were the middle-aged, middle-class writers grown fat and contented: the targets for the revolutionary fervour were Asimov, Anderson, Heinlein, Clarke and del Rey himself.

The interest in writing "as a thing in itself" was no more "primary" than the concern held by every serious and committed writer; "writerliness" by itself was never once advocated. Del Rey has not done his research: if he had bothered to read even a few of, say, Moorcock's editorials he would have discovered this for himself.

As for the purported controversial or unconventional nature of *New Worlds*, again del Rey has not bothered to check the source. In the first place, the majority of the issues put out under Moorcock's editorship were in an extremely conventional paperback format (perhaps for the same reasons as the Dadaists wore business suits). The large-size issues which followed were even more conventional in a commercial sense, in that they had the appearance of the majority of newsstand magazines. Inside, there were remarkably few tricks of a graphic or typographic nature, as del Rey implies there were. Even the choice of material was to a large extent conventional. Again, if del Rey had only looked he would have found fiction by such taboo-busting writers as Mack Reynolds, E.C. Tubb, Harry Harrison, Arthur C. Clarke, Joseph L. Green, plus a considerable amount of trad science fiction by writers less well known.

(The only genuine controversy – the publication of Norman Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron*; not *Bug Jack Baron*, as del Rey prints the title – was a storm in a teacup, willed on the magazine from outside. It was not "debated in Parliament", as del Rey has it: a right-wing MP put down a Question. Sophisticated watchers of politicians recognized it as just the sort of political football that gets kicked around when nothing much else is going on, yet the incident is clutched at by writers like del Rey in an attempt to make it seem like a rational judgement on the magazine's policy.)

But del Rey's attitude to the New Wave reveals his deeper misunderstandings.

The New Wave, if it was anything, was a state of mind, a revolutionary attitude, a questioning of "it". But also, because Moorcock's influence was actually constructive, it was an exploration of the ways in which the idiom might be enlarged, brought more in tune with the minds of the kind of people known to be reading it. The 1960s were a time of sweeping social change in the Western world, and complacent adventure stories set on uncontroversial worlds, with all the received and borrowed imaginings of genre fiction, were not then (and still are not) sufficiently stimulating to intelligent readers.

However, what happened to change this was that someone (del Rey suggests it was Judith Merril, but it is not important) came along and pinned the label "New Wave" on what was happening. The movement, and the feeling behind the movement, continued as before, but the effect of the label was to bring a wider consciousness, an identification of *type.*

Unfortunately, the type was generally understood to be fiction that was (i) obscure, (ii) downbeat or ambiguous, (iii) sexy, (iv) littered with four-letter words and (v) given to typographical trickery.

This is the sort of thing that happens when the cart is put before the horse, when effects are considered without wondering about the causes. So, given a new kind of "plot", the would-be trendies had a new market to sell to!

It is actually *this* which is correctly described as New Wave: a different *type* of story, written to order.

When del Rey decides, as he does on p.257, that the New Wave fervour died down, what he means is that this secondary type of New Wave story went out of fashion. The effects died away, but the cause continued and it continues today. There is a whole generation of writers, of whom I am one, who have no truck with the traditions of the past, who see "Nightfall" and "Helen O'Loy" and *Starship Troopers* and *Slan,* and many hundreds of similar works, as existing in a literary ambience quite separate from and irrelevant to their own. These writers are American and British, and they are all over the continent of Europe, and in the USSR, and in Australasia. On the whole they will be polite about the science fiction of the past, and many are familiar with "it" from reading it in their youth. But they do not pay continual homage to "it", and they feel affronted by commentators like del Rey who use the fallacies of the past as a goad or a stick to beat them for what is interpreted as a betrayal of "it".

Del Rey's contempt for contemporary science fiction is manifest. The catchment area for his book is the half century to 1976. I decided to use the index of the book to what del Rey had to say about a selected leading contemporary writer, one who was well established by 1976. I chose Thomas M. Disch, partly because del Rey does mention him (which is quite something, as I will come to shortly), but mostly because Disch's work is held in high regard by a large number of modern critics.

Disch rates five entries in the book. On p.233 he is mentioned as having his first published appearance in 1962. On p.248 *The Genocides* is described as "one of the first New Wave books by an American author". On p.255, after a brief synopsis of *The Genocides,* del Rey says: "in some ways, his work has been the most consistently cynical of all writers in this group". On p.256 Disch is mentioned parenthetically as being one of the few American authors who would admit to being of

the New Wave. On p.387 Disch's novel *Camp Concentration* is listed as recommended reading, from "The Age of Rebellion: 1962-1973".

Thus, the *only* comment passed on the work of this major author is the cheap (and inaccurate) slur that it is "consistently cynical". I hope that Mr Disch is in a temperate frame of mind should he ever come across this unpleasant statement.

(Other books recommended from "The Age of Rebellion" include: *Rendezvous with Rama* (Clarke), *Dune* (Herbert), *Dragonflight* (McCaffrey), *Witchworld* and *Victory on Janus* (Norton), *Little Fuzzy*, *Space Viking* and *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen* (Piper), *Way Station* (Simak) and *The Winds of Gath* (Tubb). A curious selection, which says a lot about del Rey's notion of "rebellion".)

Having seen what del Rey could do for the modern school, I decided to compare it with the attention given to one of the older writers. The criteria here were that the writer should be firmly associated with a given period of science fiction, preferably the so-called Golden Age, one who had published little else of note between then and now, yet one who was still active and opinionated in the present day. Because he fulfils these criteria, and because his name was on my mind, I chose Lester del Rey.

Lester del Rey is mentioned in the third person no less than 33 times, far too many to list every one. Only Isaac Asimov (36 entries), Robert A. Heinlein (47 entries) and John W. Campbell (79 entries) are mentioned more often. Del Rey's supremacy in the world of science fiction thus seems inevitable. However, whereas most people interested in science fiction could probably rattle off a list of Asimov and Heinlein titles, and have a working knowledge of Campbell's influence in the genre, I wonder how many people could easily name more del Rey works than the early novel *Nerves* and the much anthologized story "Helen O'Loy"?

Perhaps this seems gratuitous and selective, but del Rey draws attention to himself. Would a more objective observer of science fiction give Lester del Rey, writer, the same significance? Or would this observer give del Rey the same sort of passing mention he himself gives to writers like Vonda McIntyre, J.G. Ballard, Barry Malzberg, Brian Aldiss, Cordwainer Smith, Norman Spinrad, Samuel R. Delany, Keith Roberts and the aforementioned Thomas M. Disch?

And I wonder if this objective observer would include *three* del Rey titles in a list of recommended books that includes only *one* book by each of Olaf Stapledon, Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, Alfred Bester, Ray Bradbury, Ursula Le Guin, Thomas M. Disch, Anthony Burgess and John Brunner?

The author of this book is clearly not impartial, nor able to step back sufficiently far from his chosen genre to see it in even limited perspective. To judge from internal evidence, del Rey was a voracious and unselective reader of science fiction in the 1930s and 1940s, a casual reader during the 1950s, and appears to have lost interest in the early 1960s. His interest seems to have returned in the mid-1970s when del Rey started a long reviewing stint in *Analog*, and the Del Rey imprint was made a part of Ballantine Books (publishers of a great many of the titles here recommended).

This accounts, I think, for his prejudice against the New Wave, for his closed mind against modern writers and for the omission of a startling number of interesting and possibly important writers who came to prominence in the late '60s and '70s.

(Eg: Barrington Bayley, D.G. Compton, Richard Cowper, M. John Harrison, Robert Holdstock, Garry Kilworth, myself, Brian Stableford, Ian Watson and others in Britain; Greg Benford, Michael Bishop, Ed Bryant, Suzy McKee Charnas, John Crowley, Jack Dann, Charles L. Grant, George R.R. Martin, Marta Randall, Lisa Tuttle, John Varley, Joan Vinge, Gene Wolfe, Chelsea Quinn Yabro, George Zebrowski and *many* others in the US; not to mention the burgeoning activity in Australia, or in the foreign-language countries del Rey seems never to have heard of.) Overall, there is a sense of wandering attention, probably accounting for the unusual number of misprints and spelling errors in the text. Like many before him he has not bothered to check the etymology of "utopia", and he reports titles incorrectly as I have shown, and he thinks *Extrapolation* and *Science Fiction Studies* have been amalgamated into one super-academic magazine, and on one occasion he speaks of Olaf Stapleton, and the characters in *The Stars My Destination* are said to "jape" (it should be "jaunt") . . . and all this was noticed in spite of the fact that I have no eye for such details, and am not much interested in them. The book is written in the dead blandspeak that seems unique to science fiction experts, with a strictly functional use of the English language whose vocabulary is limited to a choice of the dullest and least evocative words, and the syntax is brain-crunching see what I mean?

In all, the book is a shoddy and disgraceful piece of work, incompletely conceived, ill written and lacking in even the narrow perspective the author presumes to himself.

But what is the alternative? It seems that if a history of science fiction has to be written then it must take some cognizance of the matters dealt with in such exhaustive detail by del Rey. Brian Aldiss, in *Billion Year Spree,* made a pretty good fist of it without losing perspective. But all the time I was reading del Rey's dreadful book I kept thinking that this tiresome chronological story about Gernsback and Campbell and the New Wave must be neither the whole story nor the end of it.

The time is coming when an entirely new approach to the understanding of the subject is necessary. It occurs to me that a clue as to why the consensus wisdom is just not good enough might lie in del Rey's narrative.

On the strength of his text, del Rey appears to be a conceited man with illusions about his role in the scheme of things. His narrative is braggadocio thinly disguised as "history"; I hope I have shown that it is no history. In the recent past del Rey has subscribed to two more narcissistic volumes: *The Early del Rey* and *The Best of Lester del Rey.* However, if we generously discount his frequent egocentric lapses, what we find is more revealing than mere conceit. It is clear he identifies very closely with the "story" of science fiction's development. He has invested a lot in science fiction as an idiom, and as a consequence his own validity as a writer is tied up with the success of the genre.

In *Foundation* 17, Barrington Bayley wrote compellingly of the transcendental, quasi-religious feeling that many people have reported surrounds their "conversion" to science fiction. I don't know whether the same is or could be true of today's generation of readers (science fiction imagery is a large part of our visual vocabulary, with everything from instant mashed potato to motor cars promoted with futuristic

motifs), but it is clearly so of the writers and fans of del Rey's generation. Accounts of it are faithfully described: the feeling of revelation when science fiction was first encountered, quickly followed by secretiveness and/or proselytizing zeal, or absorption into fandom, or aspirations to professionalism. This is not intended as a derogatory analysis, but a statement of something that approaches a truism in science fiction circles.

Perhaps del Rey's overriding mistake is to identify this personal sense of revelation too closely with science fiction's discovery of "itself".

An act of transference has taken place, and del Rey is trying to cope with it on the conscious and unconscious level. It must go something like this:

Science fiction became coherent by defining itself within specialist magazines. Since then it has been simultaneously secretive and missionary, both closing itself in with the arcana of jargon words and in-group references (del Rey's book contains the inevitable Glossary) *and* trying to make itself more accessible by forming alliances with, say, the space race and environmental issues and the feminist movement and the global media village. Recently, it has been prettily flattered by the courtship of the academic world, but in an effort to keep the faith with the ordinary reader has turned to explanatory encyclopaedias and self-regarding histories.

In short, for anyone (particularly, for any writer) to accept the inevitable and admit he is of the science fiction world, it becomes a matter of personal identity to accept the *status quo* and endorse the consensus wisdom. This is clearly what del Rey has done.

But what about a writer of a more independent state of mind?

Here lies the danger of the conservative consensus. The very idea of treating science fiction as an "it" is to accept homogeneity. I know at first hand, as a writer identified with science fiction, that there are continual pressures to produce work which fits into the commonality of the idiom. You hear dicta from publishers and editors (and even from successful writers) that the nature of both the idiom and its habitual readers expect obeisance to (del Rey, p.11) "the rules and requirements". They mean that there should be a scientific rationale, an emphasis on movement and event, a seeming consistency, an awareness that a substantial percentage of the audience is in its teens, a regard for a satisfactory ending, and so forth.

Why? Where do these rules and requirements come from? They are only a series of precedents, established nearly half a century ago during a so-called Golden Age that involved one doctrinaire editor and a handful of writers.

Any intelligent or ambitious writer of the contemporary world, who finds himself writing something best described as "science fiction", stands no chance of creative freedom or artistic fulfilment if he is constrained by such artificial and out-dated precedents. The novel of the fantastic is an exciting and stimulating form, still relatively unexplored by serious writers. But these people who issue "rules", who hark back to precedent, who lack a literary perspective, are without intending to going to ossify a literary form. Their attitudes run counter to their intentions.

The trouble with ignorance, according to Kingsley Amis, is that it defends itself to the death against knowledge.

It is true that many emerging or recent science fiction writers have a working acquaintance with the literature, that they might well have read Heinlein and

Asimov at an impressionable age, and indeed retain an affection for those writers' books. But anyone whose career is developing in the 1980s will have grown up in a world that is very diverse: there is, say, the freewheeling eclecticism of television, the mobility of cheap international travel, the availability of broad-based libraries, the cultural interfaces of racially integrating societies, the free fora of alternative presses and rock culture. Someone who could read science fiction to the exclusion of such potent stimuli would be dogged and singleminded indeed.

Times have irrevocably changed from the days of the Depression, when lonely introverts picked up pulp magazines from drugstore racks, and went on to become Isaac Asimov or Jack Williamson or Alfred Bester.

It is high time we put these falsehoods about science fiction behind us. Now we should move on, and go to the place where most of the audience is already living, and from where most of the stimulating new writers have sprung. Del Rey has likened science fiction to a hothouse: a building made of glass. We all know what people who live within a glasshouse must not do; let those who are without cast the first stone.

Letters

Dear Sir, September 1980

In his interesting review of Brian Stableford's *A Clash of Symbols: The Triumph of James Blish* (*Foundation* 19, pages 106/107) Anthony Wolk refers to my comments on Blish's trilogy as "not yet in 'final form'." I did, indeed use those two words, but I'm afraid that Mr Wolk has inferred somewhat more than I implied by them – or, at least, intended to imply.

My point was entirely a speculative one: namely, that if Jim Blish had lived longer, he *might* have been able to arrange for publication of the trilogy in a single volume, just as the four novels dealing with the futuristic "okies" were published in a single volume under the title *Cities in Flight.*

Had such an event occurred, he *might* have taken advantage of the situation and made some final adjustments, reworkings, or whatever. There are two editions of *Dr Mirabilis,* for example (the American version differs from the British version, though not in any substantial way – the story is the same in both versions). He might have selected one of the two as "final" and "definitive", or made a third "final" version which was not 100% the same as either of the earlier two. And he *might* have made changes in the first of the series, *A Case of Conscience.*

But let me repeat, that is nothing more than speculation on my part. We know that Jim did, at times, use the opportunity of later republication to revise earlier versions of his stories. I have no knowledge that he intended to do any further work on the three stories; that is why my comments cannot be more than speculation. As things stand, *Black Easter/The Day After Judgement* and *A Case of*

Conscience, are in their final form (and we need a single-volume edition of the two middle stories of the trilogy, which are really one that is damaged by being separated, as any given reader might not be able to find copies of both). The reader who has both the British and American editions of *Dr Mirabilis* will have to choose for himself which he prefers as the definitive version.

With respect to the *order* of the trilogy, the author has made a final statement. In his afterward to the hardcover edition of *The Day After Judgement* (Doubleday, 1971 – pages 165/166) Jim states that the first volume of the trilogy "is a historical novel called *Doctor Mirabilis*" and "the last, a science-fiction novel called *A Case of Conscience . . .*" and that the two books, *Black Easter* and *The Day After Judgment* "make up the second volume of a trilogy under the overall title of AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE". That doesn't leave us any room for questioning the order of the books in the trilogy, though each of us is free to prefer a different order and to think about the trilogy as in our preferred order.

Jim also notes in his afterword that he intended *The Day After Judgement* to be independent of *Black Easter,* but I remain unconvinced that he managed to effect that intention. Rereading both of them confirms my original opinion that the two books make one story, neither of them being complete or entirely intelligible without the other. That's why I wish we could have them together under one cover.

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

Dear Editor, September 1980

David Pringle in his review of *The Visitors* (*Foundation* 19) brings out very clearly three significant (and related) points about the work of Clifford D. Simak: his talent for developing variations on his own established themes; his ability to inflict what Mr Pringle describes as a "dream-like vengeance on industrial capitalism"; and the excellence of his treatment of people and settings with which he is familiar, as contrasted with the bathos and lack of plausibility which may creep in whenever he ranges wide and high.

This last tendency is a long-standing one in Simak's work. The Washington episodes in *The Visitors,* adversely criticized in the review, are for example, comparable to the unconvincing exchanges between the Secretary of State and "Galactic Central" in *Way Station* – a novel in which the folk-way tensions between Enoch, the "Rip van Winkle" way station keeper, and the "trashy" Fisher family of the Wisconsin backwoods are as authentic as the cosmic politics are unlikely.

It is certainly true, as your reviewer suggests, that Simak is prone to invoke a *deus ex machina* in the working-out of his novels; but when the solution is within his imaginative compass, that method is usually properly, neatly (and almost literally) applied. The original *deus ex machina* was the intervention of a god on the classical stage, introduced and powered by the pulleys and ropes of theatrical machinery. Simak is constantly seeing inorganic matter as a vehicle for superhuman or transcendent power; or alternatively seeing such power to be limited and directed "downward" through inorganic media.

These insights of Simak's often probe to a deeper psychological level than the plane of political or economic critical and satirical comment at which his novels are apparently operating. They usually involve aliens, robots, or artifacts functioning sometimes positively and creatively, sometimes negatively and destructively, most

usually ambivalently. One or two examples may illustrate this.

There is Roscoe, the telepathic robot of *Destiny Doll* (a novel which at points reads as though *The Wizard of Oz* and *Alice Through the Looking-glass* are simultaneously taking place in the universe of Olaf Stapledon). Roscoe's brain-case is rescued from a tribe of centaurs which has been using it as a ball in a polo game. The consequence, when it is reconnected to Roscoe, is a regression rather like the malfunction of Hal in *2001: A Space Odyssey*: compulsive rhyming alternates with poetic outbursts and verbal gibberish. Out of this breakdown into mechanical repetitiveness occasioned by the equally mechanical polo-ball battering, comes Roscoe's up-swing into a creative liberation, a new synthesis in which he is able to open up successive planes of reality and to free the atomically frozen ship.

Roscoe's earlier prototype is Richard Daniel, the robot protagonist of "All the Traps of Earth". David Pringle in his definitive essay on Simak in *Foundation* 11/12 sees Richard Daniel very much as a kind of roboticized Uncle Tom. While this identification is acute, and partly true, it is too simplistic. Simak's symbolism runs deeper, the "liberation" of Richard Daniel, and the emergence of new insights and diagnostic powers, are not primarily the result of any man/robot relationship, but of the exposure of the inorganic robot body, incorporating an intelligence, to the extremes of inter-stellar space and of "hyperspace", which "had taken him and twisted him and changed him, had moulded him anew, had made him into a different robot . . .", and had given him the ability to perceive diagramatically the patterns which underlie the structures of both organic and inorganic worlds.

In *Way Station* it is not a robot but an artifact which is the vehicle of power; but it needs the complement of a responsive organism to enable it, in something like symbiosis, to perform its liberating and redemptive work. The girl, Lucy Fisher, crippled by deaf-muteness, yet Wordsworthianly sensitive to the life-requirements of all creatures (Simak has a talent for chosing subliminally apt names), achieved rapport with the inorganic Talisman – a "Grail" object, "brother to the hoe, the wrench, the hammer", yet as far removed from them, in Simak's universe, as is the brain from Earth's first-formed organic molecules.

It is in such strangely conceived interplays between the organic and the inorganic that Simak has exercised peculiar imaginative skill. They underlie the whole structure of many of his novels; so that solutions dependent on them are integral to the novel and may not be so forced as David Pringle suggests. In his review of *The Visitors* he refers specifically and critically to the *deus ex machina* ending of *They Walked Like Men*, because he sees this denouement as "a miraculous restoration of the status quo (through the magical properties of skunk odour)". It is, I think, a mistake to dismiss this solution as arbitrary. Simak is, in fact, using consistent imagery and a consistent logic. The bowling balls (which is the form the aliens take) have throughout been symbols of an ambiguous nature. They appear at first to be organisms having deceptively inorganic form. Transformation then takes place with colour changes, striations appearing and splits occurring along a network of tiny lines. Finally the balls change into piles of money, and later into such objects as cars and dolls. As commodities these acquire legal status and begin a take-over. Men find themselves literally in the grip of, even part of, a machine. For example, a driver discovers that he can't take his hands from a car wheel; they seem to be stuck there; and then he sees that the wheel has grown extensions, embedding and incorporating his hands.

In that incident the car suddenly disappears in full flight, leaving him sailing through the air to hit the ground. In other words, the mechanistic/inorganic take-

over is accompanied by, and in part achieved by, illusion. When organic contact is resumed, as the human regains consciousness, he becomes aware of the feel of moss and damp leaves between his fingers, hears the wind blowing through the trees and smells the odour of wet vegetation. Alienation is, in this instance, associated with inorganic take-over; wholeness with organic unity. Machine dominance has brought with it the counterfeit and the illusory; its dissolution a fresh awareness of the essential nature of the organic.

As David Pringle has remarked, Simak's "distrust of machines runs very deep"; but Simak is also aware of the potentialities of the inorganic (hence his crystal planets and redemptive Talismans) and, conversely, of the machine-like deterministic processes operative in organisms. In his resolution of the plot of *They Walked Like Men,* therefore, he plays on the dual aspects of the bowling ball aliens: as organisms they can be made to behave mechanically; as bowling balls they can be made to behave like organisms. In that context the introduction of the olfactory sense is most appropriate. It is the one above all which may produce in an organism a compulsively mechanical response – such as that which causes the bowling balls in Pied Piper avalanches to roll into vast heaps in the mountain valleys. In the overpowering experience of smell, conveyed by diffusing molecules, the organic and inorganic elements operate to bring about a solution, with positive results for the humans, negative for the aliens. It is a solution, too, in which illusion plays its part – the very kind of illusion anticipated when:

> Into the street the Piper stept,
> Smiling first a little smile
> As if he knew what magic slept
> In his quiet pipe the while

The sights and sounds that lure the rats and the children disappear when the music stops, but, though illusory, they stir emotions, and through them action, to the required effect. Simak's magic is a bit like that – it is akin to the magic of R.G. Collingwood's definition (in his *Autobiography*): "Magical activity is a kind of dynamo supplying the mechanism of practical life with the emotional current that drives it".

Illusion, indeed, is a significant theme in Simak's work – oddly enough, save incidentally in his treatment of "The House" and its haunting, it does not figure in the 12-point analysis made by David Pringle in his *Foundation* 11/12 essay. Simak writes of tiers or levels of reality; but we are often left wondering whether he is not also indicating veils and masks of illusion – sometimes overtly as in the case of the "magic" artifact-created revenants of *Way Station*; sometimes more obliquely, as when we realize that the attained paradise, the Shangri-la, towards which the action of a novel has been pointing, is mind-dependent in its existence, and we are made to ask whether that moves it in the direction of deeper illusion or of stronger reality.

Simak deals much with the mind and comparatively little in space-ship hardware. In *Destiny Doll,* for example, the space-ship is to all intents turned to stone while the main action proceeds – action in which transit from planet to planet is through Lady of Shalott-like screens, or simply by stepping by willed effort across "strata" of the universe from one co-existent world to another. Ross's world of escape at the end of *Destiny Doll,* described as a "tapestry" world, has much the quality of the Willow-pattern village, even of Keats's Grecian Urn. Before the unreality fades and mobility takes over, boats, river, sky, trees, people and little dogs are "all elements of a set piece, woven centuries ago and untouched by time, the coloured threads put in place and kept in place for all eternity, frozen and at rest".

This garnering and storing of action and emotion, which, illusorily, may appear to be frozen, or, as in the story of "The Sitters", may hallucinatorily manifest itself as stolen children's laughter from the past, shows Simak at his most mystical – or magical. Again Simak's "magic" often operates by unusual faculties of the mind being triggered by the functioning of an artifact. He sees this "magic" as being in the realm of a meta-science rather than in that of the irrational. His own definition of magic in *Time is the Simplest Thing* is that it involves "the using of the mind and the extension of the mind instead of the using of the hands and the extension of hands". In that same novel the protagonist Blaine describes the machine that sends him to the stars as being, rather than a machine, a symbolic device that helps free his mind, or even gives it, as he says, "a kick in the right direction". In "The Sitters", as in *Ring Around the Sun,* it is an artifact (in each case a spinning top) which is the "releaser" of the power to move through interpenetrating planes of existence; much as in Eliot's *Four Quartets* it is the play of sunlight on a drained concrete garden pool that brings the "lotos" experience and fills the shrubbery with long-past children's voices. Note, however, that where in Simak illusion is encountered, it is illusion occurring in an objectively existent universe; mind is an essential mode of activity, but Simak's universe is not solipsistic – any more than is, of course, the universe of *Four Quartets.*

What Simak is trying to do in these "mystical" passages is to give fictional and poetic expression to his vision of a universe in which all may be conserved; in which our space/time-bound experience of phenomenal worlds is compounded both of illusions and of intimations and revelations of the real; and in which these experiences are themselves strands in an enduring and meaningful pattern. He is concerned to probe the contours of a universe the parameters of which embrace both mysticism and relativist physics – one in which might be encountered the time-engine of "The Birch Clump Cylinder", the over-grown computer planet of "Limiting Factor", or, more mystically, the Talisman of *Way Station,* that artifact through which the spiritual energies of a galaxy are tapped and which, under the guardianship of sensitives "is carried from star to star in a sort of eternal progression". This is a universe akin to that characterized by C.H. Reyner (in his *Universe of Relationships*) as approachable only through "a quality of thinking beyond the hypnotising influences of time, body, and multiplicity", the dimensions of restriction as Meister Eckhart once defined them.

It is with references to these aspects of Simak's writings that David Pringle has described him as "a barnyard Olaf Stapledon". The description is apt if by "barnyard" it is meant that Simak's imaginative flights have their earth-side base in his own Mid-Western small towns and farmlands (as certain of Olaf Stapledon's cosmic wanderings are rooted in a nostalgia for suburban security – and H.G. Wells's in a fond familiarity with the English home counties); but perhaps a little unfair if "barnyard" should imply, in a depreciatory sense, something negligible because homespun. The dusty-road-and-old-jalopy settings must not lead us into supposing that Simak's intuitions and his imagination are not authentically winged.

K. V. Bailey *Alderney, Channel Islands*

Postscript

Kenneth Bailey makes the following additional point about Clifford D. Simak, in reply to a letter from the editor of this journal:

Dear Mr Pringle October 1980

Your remarks about the appeal of Simak to people on this side of the Atlantic are interesting. It is surprising how – and this I have observed – American friends are able to hunt out a Dickensian London (even if Baker Street thwarts their Sherlock Holmes expectations). They prowl round the Inns of Court and the Isle of Dogs, and it all lives for them. There is a continuing appeal in the American version of pastoral for many Britishers whose early reading may have embraced Longfellow and Mark Twain and may have continued through Thoreau, Whitman and Robert Frost. Visiting last year small towns and villages as far west as Montana and Idaho, I, for one, managed to find it even now to be quite powerfully experienced; and I would guess that this kind of nostalgia, still with some credence on the ground, provides at least one strand in the Simak appeal over here.

Dear Editor, October 1980

Welcome, David Pringle, and all congratulations to you for taking the chair. It's as well you're in it for love, as the post brings neither pence nor praise. Standing up to address the dull rabble for the first time, on your own, it's the Agincourt that comes to hand most immediately. Stiffen the sinews! Summon up the blood! Forge new ideals and a new aesthetic for the 1980s! What will happen, though, is what happened when Moorcock and Ballard invited us to a revolution in the head, the last time this decade came around: gentlemen in England then abed yawned, turned off the alarm clock, and decided they could afford ten or twenty minutes more before they really had to get up.

Foundation has been a bit dull, now you come to mention it. Nothing to worry about, because it's still the best there is; nothing to feel complacent about either. I remember Angus Taylor in No.11/12 saying astutely,

> *Foundation*, . . . while masquerading as an academic journal, is actually closer in spirit to the spontaneity of the fanzines, though without sacrificing quality of content. (p.118.)

On that occasion he also proposed his own exhortation: "Get sf criticism out of the academic journals and back in the gutters, where it belongs". By "gutters" he meant "streets", not "drains", and it's certainly a cry I respond more to than "forge a new aesthetic". In part Pringle seems to feel it too: "Good science fiction", he says, "is not written directly for the classroom . . . *Foundation* is more concerned with what people read 'under the desk'." But there's some confusion, as sf also seems to supply the teacher with material "not to change the world but to help us understand it". So it's literature for a good cause once again. Here's Taylor claiming it for the proletariat and social change, while over there Watson's harnessing it to Man's unconquerable Mind. Pringle opts for the middle road, mildly proposing sf for a clearer tomorrow. Can this cockpit hold the vasty fields of France? I doubt it. Pardon, gentles all, but what we need here is a little negative thinking.

Science fiction is a minority taste. Since the sixties the minority has grown much bigger and its boundaries much vaguer: these are good things, but the fraction of the reading public that pays attention to science fiction is obviously still a small one. The number of those readers who actually think through the social and intellectual implications of sf is smaller still, and the number of those who allow themselves to be educated by any of it is a minority of a minority of a minority. So,

when Pringle asks sf "not to change the world but to help us understand it", the "us" can refer only to that receptive minimality, to an elite. No one else is listening.

I suspect that all idealism is elitist, but let's not go into that. Taylor remarks,

> Science fiction today is *on the whole* just what the unsympathetic critics have always claimed it to be: escapism . . . The responsible writer or critic should not rest content with this situation. (p.118.)

Admitting, uncomfortably, that *Foundation* people are a sort of elite, can we take the responsibility for spreading enlightenment?

Even if we all agree on what we're offering (and sf's multiplication of alternatives is a hotbed for dissent), the limited success of Moorcock's *New Worlds* indicates that we probably can't. What Moorcock managed to do was to make sf self-conscious, which it badly needed at the time, and which has since been very useful. The ideals and intentions he tried to graft on have not taken. Sf is still escapism, as Taylor complains and as Pringle shows by his description of the seventies, but this is not all due to the incorrect attitudes of writer and critic. The market is conditioned, by demand (what most readers choose, and what they decide to make of it), and by distribution (how businessmen appreciate that choice, and how they decide to manipulate it). Whether or not you infer a capitalist conspiracy to keep the masses distracted and unenlightened, the sheer bulk of the two monsters doesn't leave the hero much room to manoeuvre. That's why the bookstalls still groan under the Doc Smith reprints and *Star Wars* spin-offs, while the brightest are shuffled away to the remainder shelves: John Crowley, Gene Wolfe, and even Tom Disch are among the first that come to mind. Literary values in a popular form are possible, but only when the wind's in the right quarter, and they'll never take over – until the Inevitable Demise of Capitalism, I suppose.

Social change is one thing "we" pride ourselves on understanding, but "our" understanding is isolated from effectiveness – not by deliberate elitism, not any longer, but by equations of supply and demand. The public gets what the public wants what the public gets. Anyway, what *are* "we" offering? How clear is that future? Pringle predicts a boom in prediction, as the future comes to be "with us in our daily lives more urgently than ever before". The myth of a "future" approaching like a meteor, a tangible tomorrow which will actually arrive, has its own interest. It is one contemporary secular brand of millennarianism. Pringle says that futurology increases with the rate of social change; Stableford adds that it also becomes more despondent. Both these may be true, but it is certainly true that the pronouncements of Tofflers are not popularly used as a preparation for social change, whether they arrive dressed in science fiction or not. Prediction will *not* become more important in the eighties, even if there is more of it. It will merely continue to provide the same distractive, escapist function it provides today. *The News* demonstrates that we are destroying the planet and each other; then *Tomorrow's World* wheels on the new machinery whose various deities promise salvation. A boom in futurology will be one of the idiosyncrasies by which our age is characterized in future social histories. Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* discusses the way that millennarial cults have always existed to comment upon society, and always grow more vociferous as the rev counter clicks round towards a double zero. One of Kermode's most interesting remarks is that disconfirmation of predictions never dissuades the cultists. How many times have Jehovah's Witnesses doomed the world already?

In 1969 Samuel Delany wrote an article against that criticism of sf which is confined to utopian and dystopian principles. The Amis theory that sf dignifies

itself by the justice of its social comment quickly collapses into a clash of basic human temperaments, irreconcilable as the debate of town v. country fashionable in the eighteenth century: Asimov's Heaven would be Dick's Hell. This is especially true where technology is the bone of contention, as it traditionally is in sf. As Delany points out,

> Technology has always run in both constructive and destructive directions at once . . . Man's technical achievements, like his aesthetic ones, do not form a single line, but a web, in which numerous lines can be traced. Indeed, they sit in the same web. ("Critical Methods/ Speculative Fiction", *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw,* pp.123-24.)

The future is too nebulous and complex to predict accurately, though Delany maintains that sf has always had a minor predictive or even "incantatory" function, invoking cultural manifestations by repetition of names: "Television", he cites. "Rocketship. Waldo. Spacesuit". His plea is for more painstaking complexity of speculations, showing all sides of all things, and for more complex criticism. He doesn't attempt to state the relationship between these speculations and actual historical developments. I would say that it's negligible. You can count the correct guesses of sf writers – the submarine, the atomic pile, the female prime minister – on the fingers of one waldo. Even then, the oracles have not necessarily been sensitive to the cutting edges of their predictions. Remember Campbell hearing the news of Hiroshima and exclaiming gleefully, "Now they'll have to take us seriously!" Pringle's editorial is not innocent of gosh-wow prediction. His contribution to *Tomorrow's World* has all the streamlined ease and simplicity of Arthur Clarke, describing (and implicitly justifying) the technology according to its *design.* At the same time, as a true Ballardian, he reminds us that it's our psychological response to the stuff that's important. Ballard, of course, habitually goes further. The ostensible and intended purpose of the machine is quite irrelevant to its *effects,* which commonly appear to fulfil our worst desires, perhaps revealing the secret, unconscious programme we have put into it.

Darkness is the right hand of light. Chance and the unexpected are major factors in social change. No futurologist will ever eliminate them, as Aldiss says in his "destimeter" stories. We see the Delanian web from one side only, our own. Even a relentless objecter like Ballard can only keep inverting the naive perspective to bludgeon his meaning home. What history has to add to prophecy qualifies it absolutely, as Oedipus and Macbeth discovered. Arthur Clarke foresaw the communications satellite, George Orwell the telescreen; history puts them both together and gives us the GPO's Menwith Hill Station. The future (the present, any age) is characterized not by its systems but by its bugs. Clarke's futures are clean and 98% efficient because he can account only for the machines: look at his characterization. Machines are perfectly rational and systematic. Put them into the hands of messy, inadequate human beings and you get the bugs: the mistakes, breakdowns, loopholes, corruptions, that distinguish service from training, achievement from intention, actuality from blueprints. Ballard's rusting spaceships and Dick's disobedient servomats are extreme images of this effect, which increases as technology becomes more sophisticated and social communication more complex. Because it is an effect of incalculable forces no one can predict it. Unconscious industrial sabotage has been documented, but not forestalled. You can't count your bugs before they're hatched. When the motor car was invented the cardinal assumption was that it would bring about a social revolution because it would speed travel from town to town. Cautious predictors added that it might endanger life and limb, especially because hurtling alone at unnatural speeds in excess of thirty mph would

obviously crush the human form to jelly. Though travel has been accelerated, for everyone, with consequences far in excess of that first assumption, most of the ways in which the car affects society were completely unforeseeable: pollution, depletion of natural resources, distortion of the landscape, international and industrial strife, the provision of new equipment for atavistic, combative, predatorial, and fetishistic urges, and, if Ballard is to be only half believed, for major new psychopathologies. The ranks of sf writers represent the sort who wanted to drive the motor car and the sort who wanted to ban it, but altogether they are no further forward than that man walking in front with his red flag.

Sf is not able to clarify the future. Sf is not even about the future. *The Space Merchants* and *Stand on Zanzibar* tell far more about the world in 1953 and 1968 than they do about the futures towards which they notionally point. This becomes more apparent as time goes on and history calmly diverges from their horrific warnings. Predictions finally reveal their arbitrariness as they assume the quaintness of all obsolete artifacts. George Dangerfield wrote:

> Important writing, strange to say, rarely gives the exact flavour of its period; if it is successful it presents you with the soul of man, undated. Very minor literature, on the other hand, is the Baedeker of the soul, and will guide you through the curious relics, the tumbledown buildings, the flimsy palaces, the false pagodas, the distorted and fantastical and faery vistas which have cluttered the imagination of mankind at this or that brief period of its history.

Sf is not a special case. Important sf is important literature; minor sf is minor literature, crudities and all. Its rationalized dreams are not privileged peeks into the future. Among many others Freud established this one thing: dreams do not come true. They are true. They may even (as Jung had it) be especially true.

Whatever the need for sf, it is not demanded by any ideal, not even by the future, where ideals always shimmer, like mirages. It *is* demanded by our need to have an *image* of the future, but that is a factor of our present condition. What we ought to concentrate on is not an ideal but the present condition of writing, the exploration of imagination and the craft of expression, to accomplish as well as possible whatever we do, escapist fantasies or editorial manifestos.

Colin Greenland *Oxford*

Dear David Pringle October 1980

Foundation 19 received in good order, and the review by Dave Langford of Phyllis's *Shadow of Earth* much appreciated. It's not received nearly so penetrating a look here in the States. Of course one always prefers the rave reviews to the tepid notices . . . but Dave Langford's review is not an unqualified rave, so I think I can be more objective about his praise than if it were. I think I could explain, also, how the book constitutes legitimate sf, in the vein of *Connecticut Yankee*, though I'll grant it may not be highly original on that score, and the emphasis is not laid most heavily on the technological aspect. The matter of the Enfield rifles is rather a mistake on Dave's part; they are quite commonly available in this country, as sport weapons, and my gun-nut brother-in-law assures us there are at least a million lying in storage in warehouses around the country. True, they are not a compact commodity, but I think the logic of their value in the other world is unassailable. The climactic attack on the castle demonstrates their limitations, with respect to a source of ammunition, only after the source himself (Larry Myers) has been killed

by the greedy Quintero. But that in no wise compromises the seductiveness of them as trade goods, for trader and buyer alike, while Larry remains alive. The whole point, of course, of the failure of the raid on the castle is that no advanced technology exists in isolation; its continued function requires continued support. This makes Larry's gun-running even *more* attractive: he is the only source of usable ammunition. And he becomes the victim of his own greed and self-confidence.

I think Dave's real dissatisfactions with the book may have to do more with the fact the opening chapters are not so well-written as they might be — as they really *should* be. They are not so *real* as the rest, for that reason.

The only other objection to his review that could be voiced is the hyperbole of "sf, the genre that launched a thousand Armadas . . ." Perhaps I am ignorant, but I know of only two others, one being *Pavane* and the other Brunner's *Times Without Number* (only part of which deals with a victorious-Armada world). I guess Amis's *Alteration* is a similar sort of book, but in origin and detail much different. In any event, its publication did not make the selling of *Shadow* . . . any easier. The latter actually was initiated as a serious project just about the time *Pavane* came out. It languished for years as a complete ms. because of its cross-category nature, bouncing from editor to editor. And in fact we both would have preferred it be published as a non-genre work, much as Amis's book was. It would have been a much more exciting book, in many ways, had it come out in 1971 or 72 (when it was first completed) rather than 1979, whether as a genre book or otherwise. Now its feminist edge may seem rather commonplace; then it was more unusual, and even — in terms of typical middle-class values — a little shocking. I would like to believe it still has value in that way, for it is more double-edged than many such books. (The subjugation is not taking place, after all, in *our* world; but it has lesser reflections in our world. There is also the matter of Celia's rise from low estate to the very highest . . . always remaining a slave, never any less a chattel, a pawn in someone else's designs.)

The admiration Dave Langford expresses for its hard-nosed realism, its penetration of the falsifications of historical romance, is very much appreciated; this aspect has hardly been noticed in genre reviews over here. Nor have, I'm afraid, its implications for feminist rhetoric. On the whole, Langford's is the best and most balanced view of the book yet to appear. Many thanks should be given for reviewers who can appreciate a book for what it is rather than seeing only what it is not.

Alex Eisenstein *Chicago*

Dear David Pringle November 1980

Much of George Turner's diatonic animadversion on the quality of book reviewing in *Foundation* (see *F*20), with dire examples from Brian Stableford and myself and others, is strikingly usual of its sort, and generally comprises what I'd think of as fair comment, which doesn't mean I think Mr Turner is *right* (for I certainly do not think that), but that his comments are neither made ad hominem nor in contradiction of *fact.*

However, Mr Turner's negative response to my review of Christopher Priest's *An Infinite Summer* in *F*18, in its judgment that it was an exercise in "Priest-bashing", does call for some kind of response. Let me start with a sort of bald assertion: I did not intend to write, nor do I think I ended up writing by mistake, a

negative review of Priest's scarifying admirable difficult icy collection of stories; what I tried to present was a kind of grappling absorption with a series of texts that both intrigued and challenged me, texts I was taking very seriously indeed, as the Wrestler's Rhetoric of the review should have made obvious enough.

In trying to demonstrate something like the opposite, Mr Turner quotes a sizeable portion of the review in order to mock its bad English and other flaws, dismantling much of it in his subsequent commentary, but unfortunately failing to bite the bullet of paraphrase, i.e. refusing to engage in the elementary critical exercise (one whose tact is obvious) of making a guess as to what was intended to be said in a disputed passage, *then* raking the sinner over the coals for failing to realize that intention. As I am not, therefore, to benefit from the courtesy of knowing what Mr Turner thought I was failing to say, I'm reduced to a few fragmentary responses: that the sexual intention behind the use of the word "coming" was clear, and in the text is the only meaning suggested by the syntax; that simultaneous acknowledgement and refusal of sources may or may not be a trick Mr Turner finds comically inconceivable, but is certainly a very usual one, nor was Harold Bloom (see *The Anxiety of Influence*, 1973) by any means the first to notice *that* obvious dynamic and how it obtains in the creative act; that "broad, noisy icons" was precisely what I meant to say, and that if Mr Turner doesn't like synaesthesia or metaphorical play in general he should say so and not pretend to fail to understand their use; that "diatonic power-jigs of interstellar industry and Polesotechnic Leagues" may have been a clumsily jocular way of referring to the right-wing simplistics of some sf writers, but that it wasn't impossibly obscure, and I, at any rate, have always visualized Nicholas van Rijn celebrating each new entrepreneurial triumph with a cadential jig and gongorism routine; and that, finally, I did certainly mean to say "complexion of the world we live in", intending – quite possibly too obscurely – a personalization of the world-as-voyeur to which Priest's characters respond – as I said in the review – as voyeurs themselves. The language of voyeurism may be unpleasantly sexual, but it struck me as relevant to *An Infinite Summer*, and corresponds to some of my own feelings with regard to the old world, this ageing genre, and old age.

But I'm getting carried away from my main motive for responding. Though I doubt most readers will have read my review as fundamentally negative in tone – whether or not they think it was pretentious – I do have some reason for trying to make some kind of affirmation on the issue. George Turner may well be unaware of the long internecine warfare – on grounds I've never adequately worked out – between Christopher Priest and several of the writers associated in the past with *New Worlds* magazine, so that it's probably just my bad luck that his misreading of the intention of the review may lead some readers in the small sf world to the assumption that, as a writer also associated with *New Worlds*, I was continuing the feud, and without admitting it. I was not. The provenance of any relationship between Christopher Priest and myself is entirely different, and has not led, so far as I'm aware, to any bad feelings on either of our parts. Perhaps none of this needed to be said, but it *is* a small world here, and hints of incest can put a bad complexion on it.

John Clute *London*

Dear David November 1980

I stand accused (by Harlan Ellison in *Foundation* 20) not only of bad prose, but of lese-majeste and cowardly assault – heavy charges to be levelled on the strength of two words; amid the spluttering Mr Ellison raises points of critical practice and etiquette on which I would like to comment. Ellison has built a not unimpressive career and body of work on a style less often characterized by polished Gibbonian periods than by comicbook baroque expressionism. The interest of A.E. Van Vogt's work lies in his frenzied portrayal of conspiracies and the pursuit of power. Much of the work of Joanna Russ is an attack on male supremacy bracingly untrammeled by liberal fairness. To comment on what part of an author's political views or emotional and mental state remains private might indeed be impertinent, but when their work arrives on my desk it is no longer private and its predominant theme and tone lie in the public domain. Thus it is legitimate – as well as accurate and convenient – to use as part of my critical vocabulary terms such as "Russian misandry", "Van Vogtian paranoia" or "Ellisonian hysteria".

When a critic is engaged in reviewing new work, it is no part of her task to tend the fragile egos of the creative, but rather to make potential readers see what a book is like and how, if at all, it may be usefully, productively and entertainingly read. Used sparingly, apposite comparisons with, and the drawing of likenesses to, the work of other authors are a handy shorthand through which the feel of a writer's work can be commu nicated – albeit a lazy one which I try generally to avoid. It is also a part of a critic's responsibility to *attempt* to prod authors in directions she thinks they should take; very few careers are blighted by a review and Harlan Ellison is hardly John Keats. For the record, I would not and could not dismiss Ellison and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro with a phrase; but I could and did try to draw attention succinctly to complementary deficiencies in work alike only in its occasional excellence.

A brief comment too on John Clute's review of *Transfigurations* by Michael Bishop in *Foundation* 19: John Clute's reading, with its emphasis on the theme of productive metamorphosis as expressed in the title, literal details of the plot and Bishop's exemplary demonstration of expansion of a short text to a long one, is clearly correct but does not go far enough. Bishop makes effective and elegant use of a lost race, an ape companion, a hidden pyramid in whose cellars an Elder Race practices vile rites; haven't we been here before, often? Bishop takes on and (all groan here) transfigures much of the camp old tat that has festered on the fringes of the sf genres since the days of Haggard, Burroughs and Lovecraft. The lost race story started as part of a genuine interest in the origins of cultures and species as well as an apologia for imperial conquest and an expression of the racist view that that which is incomprehensible, alien and uncontrollable probably smells and is covered in slime. Further, the works of these writers are linked through a shared interest in the implications of the quest for knowledge of, and power over, less developed peoples with at least one other key work of the high Imperial phase of Western culture, a work which like *Transfigurations* achieves many of its effects by embodying in itself mutually contradictory texts. Bishop doesn't go so far as to make Chaney expire saying "The horror, the horror", but the dwelling place of the Asadi is clearly "one of the dark places of the earth" and I think that Conrad would have been honoured by this gloss on his work more than by that in *Apocalypse Now*. Nor are these references only a literary game but part of Bishop's argument about the nature of Western culture – a part to which, of course, I could not refer

were I to take seriously Ellison's demand that I treat the work of each author I discuss in a separate compartment.

Roz Kaveney *London*

Dear Mr Pringle: December 1980

R.A. LAFFERTY

"Tis Ray the Irish saint he is,
The holiest iv men;
The light iv Hiven's on his head,
He drives the divel's pen;
He deals wi' an even hand,
Wi' malace toward the thumb,
('Tis hard to write whin so much wrong
Wins glory fer some bum.)
I give him leave to damn me wi'
Lift-handed complimint;
If he'll but leave me half his fire,
I swear I'll be contint."

Gene Wolfe *Barrington, Illinois*

Reviews

Lord Valentine's Castle
by Robert Silverberg *(Harper & Row, 1980, 444pp, $12.50)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

Lord Valentine's Castle is really a gigantic juvenile. As such, nothing particularly abominable happens, and handsome, friendly, loving Valentine (deprived of his heritage and his memory by a mind-swap) is bound to win through to his true self – duly honed by experience en route – and to Castle Mount, from which the Coronal (who should be himself) rules over the vast, multi-species world of Majipoor.

It is a world as vast as the book itself. A world rather too large, despite its relative scarcity of metals, to have the gentle gravity it does? A book rather too long, despite the inventive panoply of Majipoor, to sustain the juvenile reader's interest? But ah, it is written for juveniles of all ages.

The blurb speaks of an "epic". And indeed Silverberg does make use of epic

techniques. The catalogue is one such: of former rulers, of towns and cities. These can go on for a long paragraph or two. Why should they ever end? They are pleasant to read.

Another epic technique, particularly used by Ovid who had studied rhetoric a bit too dilligently, is the self-debate – shall I? shan't I? if I do, if I don't? – which can go on endlessly and repeatedly when we all know perfectly well what the hero is going to do. Valentine debates with himself thus at length, or for variety with other characters who fulfil the same debating function.

Another feature which stretches out the book is *sheer* repetition. Now, in his earlier works, Silverberg had a neat trick of stately, telling repetition of a word or phrase, which worked very well indeed. But here the trick gets right out of hand.

"But the wagon was burning. The wagon was burning. The woods were full of Metamorphs, night was swiftly coming on, the rain was a torrent, and the wagon was burning." (Doesn't torrential rain tend to douse fires, by the way?) The old Silverberg would have omitted the whole final sentence.

And a few pages further on: "I'll set out onward, toward Ni-moya, towards Piliplok, toward the Isle of the Lady, onward, onward, onward, onward toward Castle Mount or whatever lies ahead of me. Onward. Onward. Onward." Well, it's one way to expand a book.

Other things get expanded too: multiplied by five or ten, for sensawonder. Cities have to stretch at least a hundred miles, and contain tens of millions of people. (But Majipoor is so big, they are all swallowed up in it.) Rivers are of inconceivable width. One headland at the gargantuan mouth of a 700 mile river, overlooking the ocean, is 'a chalk cliff a mile high and many miles wide'. A *chalk* cliff, a mile high? Battered by waves and tides? Come off it. The image is pretty, the geology unthought about.

When Valentine's ship is stove in by a suitably gargantuan marine dragon, Valentine is tossed into the sea. "Valentine felt himself flying; he soared gracefully, he dipped and bobbed, he plunged with elegance and skill toward the water". Apart from wondering how one can dip and bob while soaring on an uncontrolled trajectory – so that one asks oneself whether Silverberg is simply pouring in words without due consideration of what they mean – this elegant mishap exemplifies the blandness of much of the book, which is writ large in the dire warnings about how Valentine's betrayal will crumble the pillars of society, if left unchecked.

Now admittedly Silverberg does pull a venomous snake out of the hat at the very end with a surprise revelation of who is behind the treachery, and how the treachery *would* therefore subvert Majipoor fatally; and he also produces a fairly blighting special effect at this point – though since it is soon switched off, it only blights a few leaves. We *are* genuinely worried here, but on the whole – compared with the consequences of Lord Foul's Bane – what happens to the land of Majipoor is hardly very gruelling. And compared with the social "politics" (if that's the right word) of Good and Evil, Wholesomeness and Corruption, in Donaldson's harrowing trilogy, the political rationale here is, incredibly, that of the Divine Right of Kings. "Take but degree away, untune that string, and hark what discord follows . . ." Good enough for Shakespeare, good enough for a re-run?

Unlike Donaldson's more believable, constrained Deity, here "The Divine" lurks off-stage, abstractly granting that kingly right (accompanied by that old sidekick of Ovid, when you got into a tight spot: Destiny). And the root reason why the Divine Right of Kings is the right system is that it has kept Majipoor stable, productive and happy for the last 12,000 years or so. Thus sayeth the author,

Q.E.D. We can hardly argue with that, since he made the world to these specifications.

But I find it distinctly easier to believe in the pluriworld society of Jack Vance's Alastor Cluster with its presiding Connatic; and indeed there are very many Vancean cadences in this novel – though somehow Vance seems to have more quirky fun. Perhaps because Vance isn't pressing onward, onward, onward. Onward. (And pressing thus onward, despite the fact that the story is supposed to span two years, somehow it seems to take a much shorter time to travel such vast distances.)

Of course, there are good things in this great juvenile: Zen and the Art of Juggling; the Metamorphs; the assorted aliens; the palette-fulls of local colour; the "chilling" climax – but at heart the novel is an elegant, attenuated banality. Though Donaldson's trilogy is also too long, it is too long to much better purpose.

The Divine Right of Kings, good Lord! Oh well, good may come of it. Soon, the rebel colonies across the water will kneel at the foot of the British Crown once more, making frantic starburst signs, and all will be sweetness and light. And, for helping to bring this about, Sir Robert Silverberg definitely deserves a knighthood. It would be a shame if he only got a Hugo.

The Beginning Place
by Ursula K. Le Guin *(Harper & Row, 1980, 183pp, $8.85; as* **Threshold**, *Gollancz, 1980, 183pp, £5.50)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

In the woods beyond the waste fields is a kind of gateway, a threshold. Hugh Rogers literally stumbles across it one evening after running through the suburbs down the gravel road between the old farmhouses and their scrapyards, running "off the edge of the paved world" in the sort of panic that comes when you're twenty, twenty-one, big and slow and undecided, living with your mother and working at the checkout in Sam's Thrift-E-Mart. Across the threshold is the beginning place, an American Eden, with bushes and a creek, without concrete and litter, Walden Pond; it is outside reality, below the urban event horizon, so that time passes more slowly there. There are no people, but there are no birds or animals either, and it is always twilight on a summer evening with the stars almost coming out.

Irene Pannis also knows how to get to the beginning place. She has been going there for years, since she was thirteen, to escape her own ruined family and the dangerous slob of her mother's second marriage. She resents Hugh's arrival. To her this is not Eden but somewhere pagan or just beyond it; she knows the road to the mountains and the mountain town Tembreabrezi, where they have taught her their language and welcome her as a daughter.

Ursula Le Guin has written something very like an American Alan Garner. Her adolescents chance upon an otherworld at once ancient and timeless, and under an ancient curse; their coming is mysteriously expected and prepared for, and they have a quest set upon them whose fulfilment prejudices their success in the real world. As in *Elidor*, the real world is authentically grimy but somehow held in abeyance, flattened; while the dreamworld is ill-lit, incomplete, but real enough to kill you.

One of the most substantial and compelling things about this simple little

allegory is the way Le Guin develops her dreamworld, not altering its nature but revealing more of it in space and time. From somewhere Hugh and Irene and any of their readers would wish to go, it eventually becomes a cold and desolate place to get through and out of as quickly as possible. The rite of passage is living ritual: tough, frightening, a selection procedure. Le Guin tells its story as Garner does, without making up anything that can't be found in mythology. Nothing is new. Tembreabrezi is a village out of Medieval Europe, Orsinian, cosy but confined. Its people do not speak of anything beyond its borders; they studiously ignore where Irene comes from. The man who has been to the City is called Lord. When the curse falls it becomes physically impossible to leave Tembreabrezi. A zone of panic blocks the roads. The otherworld, first revealed as fields of innocence, adopts the tenuous, apple-cheeked hospitability of a fairytale shire, and then turns to something bleaker and more elemental, a waste land, with a legend of a wounded king. Hugh is given a sword and Irene sent to lead him, to climb a mountain and make an unspecified sacrifice to an unspecified enemy. As they set out the village seems a dim, grey place of stone walls and dust: almost the dry land from *The Farthest Shore.* Irene and Hugh leave their first, false loves, the Master and the Princess, at the bridge; reluctantly they have only each other — and themselves — to rely on.

Le Guin's new novel is rich, and deft, and humorous, and wise, and beautiful. These are terms more often seen in blurb than reviews, but they are no more than truth, and no more than is to be expected from her. By now it is difficult to imagine her offering anything less. Many of her recurrent images and themes are here, such as the insistence on coupled contraries:

> Death is love's sister, the sister with the shadowed face. (p.138.)

The beginning place itself fulfills a familiar complementary function for Hugh:

> It was there, and he could come back to it, the silence that gave words meaning, the center that gave the world a shape. (p.56.)

Hugh himself is one more in the line of Le Guin's empty-handed men, Ged and Shevek and Itale Sorde, heroes who would never recognize themselves as such. Dispossession is a necessary part of preparation for the task. If the balanced opposites are her Taoism, this is her Zen.

> I haven't got anything and I'm not anything. He stood there in the hall knowing this to be the truth . . . He turned away from his mother's door then, went back into the kitchen and his own room to get ready what he would need tomorrow morning. (p.107.)

There is, however, a change of style for *The Beginning Place,* a blurring of description by a drifting, appositional syntax, not everywhere, but especially where Le Guin is trying for an effect.

> He thought he would be awake all night, having slept at the creek place, but he slept sound in bed, only waking earlier and easier than ever, at four-thirty, before sunrise, in the other twilight, the first, the twilight of morning. By the time he got to the woods the sun had risen in bright, tremendous splendor of summer. He turned from that, going down into the evening land, tranquil and eager, ready to cross the water and explore, to learn this realm beyond reason and beyond question, his own place, his own country. (p.28.)

Too much of this (which is the opposite of Garner's terse, gnomic compression, dialogue like flung gravel) unfocuses the mind and cloys the palate. Le Guin doesn't indulge in too much of it, but comes sonorously close to self-parody.

> Meanwhile there was no fear, but only sleep, here rising from the sources deeper than dream, beyond the screen of word or touching hand, the mountain that is within the mountain, the

sea that is in the spring, here where no rain fell. (p.129.)

What does that mean, for example? From a lesser author it would be smokescreen mysticism to cover an awkward gap. Here it is only a lapse in a perfectly controlled and engrossing novel.

The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories
by Gene Wolfe *(Pocket Books, 1980, 410pp, $2.95)*

reviewed by Roz Kaveney

In a characteristically counsel-darkening exaggeration, Barry Malzberg has claimed (in his introduction to his collection *Out of Ganymede*) that it is science fiction which keeps alive the short story as a form in which quality and significance are possible in our time. A possibly more accurate formulation is that sf is a field in which it is what happens in a short story which gives that story its significance and in which that significance extends to things beyond the story itself. This is not the only recipe for quality in the form; it is however one recipe. This collection of Gene Wolfe's stories – containing most of his major work over the last decade or so and a reasonable selection of minor work as well – contains a number of tales which are largely unchallengeable as artifacts in which little could usefully, or other than destructively, be altered or rearranged. They are witty and wise and all those other standard complimentary adjectives; a part of their efficient craft is the way in which they convince the reader, at least for the duration of a reading of the story in question, that something eternally valid and sensible is being said through this specific instance, some great humane and innocent truth.

Wolfe is of course quite unscrupulous in the means he uses to produce this effect in his reader, using transparently simple devices to condition our sympathy from the beginning of a story. Our attention is clearly focused on a protagonist who is usually largely solitary save for our attention, and is in some way deeply innocent whether by virtue of being a child or by dint of foreignness, amnesia or mental incapacity, the standard Wolfe protagonist is getting a rough deal under which he bears up admirably. In all of this Wolfe falls in with and usually transcends the models of sf as wish-fulfilment literature for alienated male adolescents. His other major concession to the standard behaviour of science fiction writers is the way that all his characters talk in quotations, in phrases or sentences clearly designed to be memorable outside their immediate narrative context – but as is rarely the case with Heinlein or even with Sturgeon, when a Wolfe character says something intended to be wise or touching or witty, it usually is those things while remaining something that that character might actually say. Wolfe is both artist and craftsman in a way which puts the alleged craftsmanship of sf's anti-art brigade to shame.

To descend to cases; Wolfe has produced a lot of slight and quirky shorts, many of them for anthologies like *Orbit*, and this collection presents a number of pleasant but forgettable very short stories as well as his two short masterpieces. Of the minor pieces, "Cues" is a squib which makes efficient points about the price of developing a talent, but ends in a pun – intended to clinch the matter – which makes the story misfire as the meaningful statement it was possibly meant to be. "Three Fingers" is an exercise in paranoid dread which proves that with a few simple tricks – having your protagonist eternally watchful and surprisingly knowledgeable – you can

prepare the reader for a revelation about his antagonists which will be believed in dread, no matter how silly it is; in this particular instance it turns out to be the Disney Organization that the hero is running away from. "Feather Tigers" is an eco-Vietnam story in which aliens resurrect, unwisely, the fauna of Earth; "The Toy Theatre" is an exercise in the what-is-art, what-is-identity, which-is-the-mask-and-which-the-face mode, with an odd sexual twist at the end. Both of these stories are efficient, both are a little pseud; "The Toy Theatre" is memorable for a useful statement of Wolfe's methods:

> The Japanese puppet theatre. The operators stand in full view of the audience but the audience pretends not to see them.

In some ways the slightest but possibly still the best of these minor pieces is "La Befana", Wolfe's story of Christmas on a pauper colony with an unwelcome and xenophobic grandmother, an exercise in Little-Nellery which affected this reader more than anything since Edward Woodward reduced the Oxford Playhouse to liquid sobs with "Christmas Day in the Workhouse", a piece which "La Befana" somewhat resembles. Wolfe is always concerned with the effect of his story on the reader; these short pieces are his laboratory for trying new ways of achieving his designs on us and it is not wholly surprising that in some of them these designs are misjudged or mishandled.

Two of the short stories in this collection are precisely judged machines for putting the reader through a gruelling emotional experience and for making us *feel* that we are wiser and better for that experience. "The Hero as Werwolf" shows us the underside of Utopia, the left-over human beings who were judged unsuitable for inclusion in the programme of massive genetic improvement and who of necessity live on the hyper-intelligent but passive majority. Paul is competent but doomed; Wolfe knows his audience well enough not to try and make us empathize with a cannibal who actually gets away with it. This story also crystallizes a tendency which occurs from time to time in Wolfe's work – viz. a slight sentimentality about the small rural freeholdings doomed in an efficient but not necessarily just society. The father of Paul's retarded bride talks in terms – "There wasn't no more seed but what was saved . . . then one day just before Christmas these here machines started tearing up our fields" – which are paralleled in "The Eyeflash Miracles" by the self-justifications of Tib's murderous father – "Look what we been. Moving from place to place, working construction, working the land . . . Pretty soon now there won't be any call at all for people to do that. We've got to join them before it's too late", it is only fair that an author so adroit at manipulating sentiment should have an area in which he feels strongly enough to slip out of his usual fine verbal control into the American equivalent of Mummerset . . .

The title story is the definitive non-sf short story about the sf readership; it takes the observation that the Golden Age of Science Fiction is about twelve and turns it into a story about the agonies and pains from which adolescents escape into pulp literature. Or does it? Some critics have complained of the sorrows of young Tackman, his separated parents, the isolated big house, the drug addicted mother and her sexually equivocal companions, that all of this mechanism is impossibly melodramatic and phony, as of course it is, which is why the story is called "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories". Little Tackie's is one of those other stories; at the end of it the charmingly sinister Doctor Death rises from both death and the pages of a magazine and can say to him: "But if you start the book again we'll all be back . . . You're too young to realize it yet but it's the same with you".

Wolfe uses alienation of both the artistic and the literal kind in order to represent that which he is saying purely and clearly; he gets to have his cake and eat it, as he does also with his fine artistic sensibility and love of trash by including wonderfully dreadful fragments of pulp embedded in the main text.

Wolfe's fondness for genre is also the driving force behind the less interesting (comparatively) of the longer stories in this book. In "Tracking Song" an amnesiac, probably a marooned explorer, finds himself among the semihuman cannibalistic primitives of a snowbound land and sets off in pursuit of the "Great Sleigh" which abandoned him. Wolfe makes aphasia and amnesia reinvigorate the tired old quest with its cyborg monsters, touchingly loyal semi-human girl and lost city; they seem new and memorable because the narrator is seeing these things and coping with these concepts for the first time. "Alien Stones" is a gray competent piece about the totally alien and different human ways of looking at things; "Hour of Trust" is a dated and dotty political piece in which the hero sides with the big corporations against the revolt of the hippies through a mixture of self-interest, and romantic pseudo-existentialism. He comes to a predictably grisly and deserved end in a way which points up an odd contrast in Wolfe's work between a theoretical anti-sexism and a tendency to portray women as bringers of doom. This tendency has a major outbreak at the end of "Seven American Nights" spoiling with emotional extremism a moving tale of cultural relativism and similarly cerebral concepts. The tale – in which a young Persian a century hence visits a financially, agriculturally and genetically bankrupt America – deals with the dangers of knowledge. America has poisoned itself with preservatives because it thought it knew how to use them; Nadan is destroyed by his quest for understanding of what the old America was like. The denouement reverses the sexual roles in the story of Cupid and Psyche – often taken as an allegory of the soul's quest for divine love – so that Nadan sees in sudden light that his beloved Ellen is in some way revoltingly mutated (possibly he only thinks he sees this, under the influence of a drug which he may or may not have taken). This descent into melodrama obscures the real core of the story, agnosticism about the human capacity to understand the other, and is less effective than quiet scenes like that in which the crippled actor Barry quotes Fitzgerald's paraphrase of Omar Khayman to Nadan and the Persian has no idea what he is on about. Wolfe seems in this story keen on the idea that there are limits to what we can or should seek to know and that those limits are never closer than when we are making a real effort to know.

This mysticism and other types of confusion predominate in the patchily brilliant "Eyeflash Miracles" in which a blind child wanders through an over-mechanized and inhumanly bureaucratized America spreading sweetness, light, hallucination and healing. This story is deliberately and genuinely heartwarming, if often mawkish in incidentals when Wolfe simply tries too hard. A characteristically embarrassing if partially effective moment comes when little Tib is talking to his father, who has been sent by the Government to kill him as a threat to public order, about the genetic project through which his powers were discovered:

> "The brains and spinal cords of the boys and girls involved would be turned over to the biologists for examination."
>
> "Oh, I know this story", Little Tib said. "The three wise men come and warn Mary and Joseph and they take Baby Jesus to the Land of Egypt."
>
> "No, this isn't that story at all . . ."

A difficulty with this story for English readers is the heavy reliance of its imagery on the Oz books; Little Tib is not only Christ and Krishna but also Tip, protagonist

of some of the later of these. Appearances by Dorothy, the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman are at least partially comprehensible to an audience which knows the MGM film but Wolfe should have foreseen the possibility that the story would have its effect spoiled for audiences, of which this critic is an example, for whom the final transformation of Tib's Negro sidekick Nitty into the Shaggy Man has no childhood reference. This miscalculation diminishes the story, though not sufficiently to deny it considerable power; Tib is far more convincingly a small child than most of the infant Messiahs with which sf has been plagued, and the implied society through which he joyously moves is, with economy, made utterly loathsome.

Probably the least successful of the stories in this volume, though one of the more ambitious, is "The Doctor of Death Island" which has, unlike "The Death of Doctor Island", the air of having been written to fit its title, and is, in spite of certain felicities, rather diffuse and perfunctory. Alvard, inventor of a type of talking book, has got life for pushing his partner out of a window, has been cryogenically preserved until a cure for his cancer could be found, and wakes into a society which will give him immortality but not freedom. It has been decided that murderers must be kept imprisoned forever, when a dangerous criminal on the streets might cost someone all of eternity. Alvard, with a few traditional twists of an improvised screwdriver, sets in motion an adaptation of his invention which will punish society for stealing his invention and force it to set him free to deal with it. He has not allowed – or perhaps he has – for the complexities of his emotional life and the hallucinations of the doctor who froze him. Wolfe is just playing games with stock themes here and for once the game means little beyond its own movements. In spite of boosting as an example of the moral superiority of the hick ("Farm people don't steal . . . but they'll kill you if they get mad enough") Alvard is one of Wolfe's least sympathetic protagonists and both author and reader are in consequence fatally uninvolved with his fate.

An unbearably deep involvement is on the other hand the artistic effect of "The Death of Doctor Island". Inasmuch as the title is a play on its predecessor, the title story, it is a cruel jest appropriate to the callous society implied in the story – here death is literal, irrevocable, and cruelly engineered. The title plays both on the destruction which at the climax the disturbed adolescent hero plots for his robot psychiatrist, and on the surcease which the machine is designed to provide for a majority of its clients in the interests of those whom society is more interested in curing. Part of the terror of the story comes from the way these psychiatric policies are made to seem rational and truly kind save at moments when we see them, as society avoids seeing them, in terms of abused dead flesh, and when it is revealed in passing how carelessly the bureaucracy decides its human priorities. If there is a weakness in the story is is that the conflict between Nicholas and the homicidal genius Ignacio is less interesting than the ultimate conflict with Doctor Island, less because of building to a climax than because Ignacio is imperfectly realized, consisting of a few mannerisms of speech and a few locally coloured confessions about boyhood in Brazil. The doomed Diana is a little thinly done as well; a charitable view would say that this is to make her fate less than intolerably painful, rather than because of Wolfe's difficulty with female characters. The story also rebukes a lot of the sf of the seven years since it was published by being set inside a big dumb complicated unlikely artefact which works both as metaphor for a cruel society and as a way of provoking a gasp of surprise from the reader.

Wolfe is not a prolific writer; this collection makes his work readily available and

makes clear that he is one of the names most to be reckoned with, for all my passing cavils, in the literate science fiction of today. His efficiency puts to shame sloppier writers; his humanity more cold-blooded ones; his usual rationality more muddleheaded ones. In his best work he utilizes or casts aside what faults he possesses, and so far has not begun to repeat himself in serious ways. This admirable collection could by itself almost justify the sf short story in its generation.

Their Immortal Hearts: Three Visions of Time
(West Coast Poetry Review, 1980, 168pp, $5)

reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is an original anthology of three novellas, presumably edited by Bruce McAllister, though nowhere on the book does it actually say so. It carries contributions by McAllister, Michael Bishop and Barry Malzberg, with McAllister's story taking up approximately half the text. The book is a quality paperback published by a small non-profit-making press, and may therefore be difficult to obtain, but it is well worth the effort of searching it out because it is one of the best books of its kind. (The publisher's address, for anyone wishing to inquire direct, is 1335 Dartmouth Drive, Reno, Nevada 89509. British readers may be fortunate enough to find copies in the import shops.)

Collections of novellas apparently do not sell well, though why this should be I cannot imagine – the novella is an ideal length for sf stories, allowing time to develop an exotic background while not requiring the complexity of plot and character-development necessary in novel-length; and a set of three novellas by different hands provides an excellent framework for offering differing perspectives on a given theme. *Their Immortal Hearts*, as the title suggests, is concerned with the idea of immortality, and the three stories are idiosyncratic in the best possible way, each one providing a neat encapsulation of the various authors' very different perspectives on possibility. Thus, we are offered three very good stories which gain something further from their juxtaposition. Not all theme anthologies of this kind come off, but this is definitely one of the successes.

Michael Bishop's "Cold War Orphans" is set in the past, and concerns the exploits of eccentric USAF pilots operating out of a secret base in Turkey in 1957-58, witnessed through the eyes of a boy receiving illicit letters from his father. The package of letters tells the strange story of John Scott Brown and his "adopted son", who set off to fly a U-2 to the moon, on a "one-way trip to glory". There is a sharp change of mood moving from this quaint testament to a typically passionate story by Barry Malzberg: "Le Croix (the Cross)" in which an alienated member of a rationalistic and technocratic future culture sets out to study religious experience first-hand, and finds in his trips through time his own particular kind of self-mortifying salvation. Like his other long stories, "A Galaxy Called Rome" and "Chorale", this is one of the author's very best works, and certainly ought to win the Nebula award for the best novella of 1980.

The title novelette by Bruce McAllister is in some ways a more conventional story than either of its predecessors, in that it deals directly and literally with the hypothetical question of what it might be like to be immortal, but it is nevertheless unusual in making use of illustrative material, mostly in the form of graphs, as an

integral part of its presentation. This is not mere gimmickry, because what the story actually has to suggest about the way that an immortal man (or, at least, a very long-lived man) might come to view his life depends on the reader's appreciation of the significance of the graphical material. It is a very good story, and provides the perfect anchor for the collection as a whole. (It was originally sold, apparently, to the ill-fated magazine *Cosmos*, and became the foundation-stone of this project when that publication folded.)

Whether the West Coast Poetry Review will follow this volume up with similar projects presumably depends on whether *Their Immortal Hearts* pays for itself. I hope that it does, because in a contracting market the endeavours of small presses and editors working for love become much more important in sustaining adventurous and somewhat non-commercial work. Science fiction has always enjoyed good fortune in the number of editors who have worked out of a passionate interest in the *genre*, and the success which they have had in getting material into print. There seems to be no immediate danger that this hobbyist element will die out, but that does not meant to say that any of them are expendable. I wish the West Coast Poetry Review every success with this and future ventures, and in the case of *Their Immortal Hearts* success is surely deserved.

"The Number of the Beast—"
by Robert A. Heinlein *(New English Library, 1980, 556pp, £6.95)*

reviewed by John Clute

> Winter and summer till old age began
> My circus animals were all on show,
> Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,
> Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.

Well, it passes, for some. For William Butler Yeats, in "The Circus Animals' Desertion", written when he was about as old as Robert A. Heinlein, the rhodomontade of the worlds he had created seemed to have passed beyond his present grasp, his burly salient of imagined warrior folk reduced to the raw point of the self stripped bare: "Now that my ladder's gone," the poem concludes famously, "I must lie down where all the ladders start,/In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart."

For others, it don't pass. Let us, for instance, open the gates of *"The Number of the Beast—"* and step into the boiler factory and see what Robert A. Heinlein does with the solipsism of ageing. The noise, as you may gather, is pretty terrific. Not one, not two, but *four* Heinlein protagonists dominate the foreground of this nearly enormous summa – sold for hundreds of thousands of smackeroos and a lien on the soul of a spider – and each of them, each logorrheic, opinionated, extremely superior man-and-woman-jack of them, is given stretches of point-of-view protagony to fill up with talk, argument, exclamations; and each of them, as the novel eventually makes clear, is Robert A. Heinlein, because the novel is ultimately about the nature of reality, the relation between different levels of creative deposition/sedimentation against the Void, and because the novel ultimately *declares* itself to be the stentorian, unflagging, magus-voice of its author. It might be asked, What novel isn't? It might also be asked, If you're going to belabour

solitude, whose flesh are you pounding but your own? Because there's a lot of bruising going on in this book, a lot of melancholia beneath the headachy unremitting clatter of its telling. And a lot of denial. Fuck off, William Butler Yeats, the book could be read as saying, because *I* contain multitudes.

Count 'em. There are the four protagonists, who comprise a tinker-genius scientist, a Burroughs-derived Seatonesque hero sort, and two women – both of whom are pregnant through most of the book – who start off as pliant gabby wet-dreams of male chauvinism, and who end up as a kind of homage to a polymorphic, rather attractive image of legitimate female agenthood. Through a gizmo which enables this quartet to examine and visit trillions of universes (the number of the Beast is Revelation's 666 read as 6 raised to the 6th raised to the 6th, which is the number of universes available, and an image of the delirious populousness of solitude), we are shown a number of alternative worlds on different levels of fictive reality: some of them original to this book, some encored from previous Heinlein novels, some taken (along with the authors themselves) from other writers' creations. Because it's all the same. Every reality is someone else's fiction. God is the ultimate author. Robert A. Heinlein is God. He is not alone. It is not a rag-and-bone shop that he's left with as the book ends; it's a science fiction convention. Literally. The foul rag-and-bone shop of the summa theologica of Robert A. Heinlein is a science fiction convention.

I suppose it's an appalling image. Strangely enough, though as a vision it lacked any of the structural diastole of tragedy's chastened sensate ending, I felt myself to be rather moved. Deafened maybe, but moved all the same. After being assaulted and wrong-footed all these years by his bullying didacticism, and by the delirious ease with which he stenciled onto the world outside his books those pulp ideograms of good and evil we tended to love in early Doc Smith but which had begun to seem radically inadequate round about the time Heinlein began to write, now (in early 1981) I found the adolescent refusal of this book to admit to loss and mortality and staleness and the world's mute intractability oddly forgiveable. Though there is certainly a lot to forgive: the noise, obviously; the retroactive decerebration of his previous novels, whose moments of real loss, real peripeteia, real contextuality, have all been prestidigitated out of sight and mind; the delirium; the patriotism of selfhood now that the country of his youth has gone astray forever; the delirium; the delirium.

And there is a final passing thought. Except in the closed world of American science fiction, where, in all of literature, and at the end of whose mind, could such a convention have been held? "*The Number of the Beast–*" represents an historic moment in the history of a freak genre, and the deconstructing nihilism at its heart may represent something too. Vale.

Wild Seed
by Octavia Butler *(Doubleday, 1980, 248pp, $10.00)*

reviewed by Michael Bishop

Writing in *Foundation* 14 about two of Butler's early novels, episodes in the Patternist series to which this latest book provides a lovely, self-contained overture, Brian Stableford declared, "Octavia Butler has the ability – and, more important, the

ambition to use that ability – to become one of the outstanding writers in the field". In *Foundation* 15, however, Cherry Wilder concluded a review of a new non-Patternist novel, *Survivor,* with this responsibly skeptical observation: "Octavia Butler understands the science fiction idiom but she has not found the right balance of theme, plot and background".

Wild Seed, my first go at a book by Butler, justifies Stableford's enthusiasm by successfully answering each of Wilder's objections.

This novel, one of the oddest love stories you are ever likely to read, treats effectively of the enduring human conflicts between duty and desire, conscience and expediency. It also touches on the tension between our innate longings for power, or for proximity to power, and the revlusion we inevitably feel at its abuse. My wording makes abstract what Butler cloaks in vivid raiment, for, as in nearly all successful fictions, her themes reveal themselves in terms of characters and their interactions.

Indeed, the most remarkable accomplishment of *Wild Seed* may be that Butler leads us to believe in the *humanity* of two terribly unlikely near-immortals, both Africans, both apparently figures from Igbo mythology.

The first, Doro, is an *ogbanje,* an evil spirit who has survived for thirty-seven hundred years by periodically discarding one borrowed human body for another, like a snake littering the landscape with ecdysial shells, each shed skin a corpse. The second, Anyanwu – or, as Doro the Nubian calls her, "Sun Woman" – is a somewhat less ancient near-immortal, an Onitsha healer who, at will, can become leopard, dolphin, eagle, werewolf, or a younger version of herself. She embodies the metaphorical "wild seed" of the title, a term Doro applies to promising bloodlines independent of the "seed villages" from which, for his own enigmatic ends, he is slowly, painstakingly, and often wastefully developing a stock of psi-talented people. That we should suspend our disbelief in Doro and Anyanwu – as I did, without qualm – testifies to Butler's steadily maturing skills as storyteller and psychologist.

The story itself is eerily fascinating, and well wrought. It begins in 1690 in what today is Nigeria, where Doro discovers Anyanwu and decides she would be a valuable addition to his rather satanic long-term eugenics programme. He carries her to the New World aboard a slaver called the *Silver Star.* In the seed village of Wheatley, New York, he forces her to marry his telekinetically gifted white son Isaac, a command that, in spite of her affection for the young man, she regards as a desecration of the love she bears for Doro himself. Isaac's tenderness and her own fear of death at last prompt her to submit to this indignity.

Dated 1741, the novel's second section recounts the failure of one of Anyanwu's daughters to achieve "transition" from a latent to a manifest psi state, the decline and death of Isaac, and Anyanwu's literal flight – she becomes a large bird, and later, far out at sea, a dolphin – from the tyrannical spell of Doro. The final section, set in rural Louisiana in 1841, where the healer has gathered about her a family of her own, chronicles Doro's rediscovery of Anyanwu and the stages by which she wins a Pyrrhic triumph over the *ogbanje.* After Doro has either directly or indirectly brought about the deaths of several of those close to her, she surrenders first to an indifference that Doro finds maddening and then to a kind of passive pity for one whose immortality is contingent upon these and other deaths.

A love story, then, but one in which love is annihilated by betrayal, threat, and active cruelty, only to reassert itself, tentatively, in Anyanwu's melancholy acceptance of Doro's inhuman nature.

Butler has confessed that her "ungentle, all-too-human Patternists" (whose society she explicitly reveals in *Mind of My Mind* and *Patternmaster*) owe a great deal to Zenna Henderson's "gentle, psionic aliens" in the People series. I am impressed, however, by the manner in which Butler has infused this familiar science fiction conceit with the fierce particularity of her own vision. She renews this conceit by refusing to apply the brakes of irony or coyness. The ironies of her story derive from the conflicts that are its substance; they are not lettered across the text – ONLY MAKE-BELIEVE – like the name of a country printed in widely spaced characters across a map busy with such minute organic essentials as towns, rivers, highways, and mountains. Butler further revives the credibility of the psi conceit by unfolding it against the richly allusive terrain of the past rather than the untilled *terra incognita* of the future. Rather than prediction or fantasy, *Wild Seed* reads like history or epic poetry. "This is how it was", Butler tells us, and because her voice has a steely ring, we – or I, at least – believe her.

A flaw? Well, I am disturbed that Butler sketches rather than paints her historical backdrops. She sets up little scene cards reading, in turn, "Africa", "deck of slave vessel", "Wheatley, New York", and "Louisiana plantation", but does not go out of her way to evoke these places with her prose. Even here, though, Butler makes her minimalist approach work in the same way a skilful playwright exploits the possibilities of a naked stage. In suggesting that she insert ten, twelve, or twenty neat descriptive passages to rectify a problem that she herself does not care to recognize, I am clearly at hazard. For many readers this "flaw" may seem a demonstration of narrative economy, and I, too, am willing to give Butler the benefit of the doubt.

Wild Seed, hard on the heels of last year's *Kindred,* suggests that Octavia Butler is now in firm command of her talent.

Beyond the Blue Event Horizon
by Frederik Pohl *(Gollancz, 1980, 327pp, £5.95)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

This is the sequel to *Gateway*, Pohl's triple-prizewinner, which left our hero Robinette Broadhead screaming on the couch, having become one of the richest people on Earth by being the only man ever to tumble into the gravity sink of a black hole and bring pictures back to prove it. The trauma, you remember, was because Broadhead had to kick his pals and his girlfriend down into the hole to propel himself out. Did he intend to push that button or didn't he? Only his computer knows for sure.

"Gateway" is the name given to a deserted car park orbiting in space, an asteroid honeycombed with tunnels and stocked with alien spacecraft. Having fuelled them up and laid in courses, the Heechee (the aliens; why "Heechee"? Pohl doesn't say) promptly abandoned them. Tricky chappie, your wog: inscrutable, cunning, but hellish useful. Among the few facts that do emerge about the Heechee is that their biochemistry is close to ours, and that they feed themselves by mining and recombining basic elements from meteors. And among the many threads that Pohl left himself in *Gateway* to be picked up later if he felt like it, was that one of those pre-programmed ships would eventually turn out to be a ferry to a Heechee food factory, and so the hotline to a solution to global starvation. *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon* is the story of that ship, its crew, the space castaway, the Old Ones,

the Dead Men, and one of the richest people on Earth, Robinette Broadhead, who owns almost everything else in the book.

The primary appeal of *Horizon* will be to readers who enjoyed *Gateway* and want to know what Bob Broadhead did next. As a self-contained novel it does stand up, but not so well, and certainly not as eminently as *Gateway*. The success of *Gateway* lay in Pohl's victory over the limitations of his subject: it depended, after all, on old magic (the inexplicable alien FTL drive) in a plot that reduces to "With one bound he was free". Pohl gave some substance to the business and social aspects of the exploitation of Gateway's resources, but, more importantly, he penetrated the very craziness of Broadhead as unfledged trainee, as rookie pilot, and as the hero-victim of his own guilty triumph. By intercutting Broadhead's history as a Gateway pioneer with his anguished reminiscences to his computerized analyst, saving the crisis, the hinge, for the very end of the book, Pohl enhanced both the suspense and the perspective of his story. One small slip for a man, a giant leap for mankind.

There is an attempt to revive the guilt theme in the sequel by supplying Broadhead with a happy marriage as well as undying love for Klara, who is still sinking slowly before the event horizon, but it amounts to very little. *Horizon* has none of the tight organization of *Gateway*; the neuroses of the crew who discover the Factory are nothing like so compulsive; narrative suspense keeps the plot dynamic, but it turns some very awkward corners and runs up a few dead ends. One minor character makes a sudden bid for supervillain status and rapidly becomes such an embarrassment that Pohl has to write him out at once. Other minor characters are computer simulations, infuriating as the cute robots that have become standard in pulp tv and movies. "Sigfrid von Shrink" was suitably faceless in *Gateway*; "Albert Einstein", the science programme of the same computer, appears as a full-blown hologram in a baggy sweater, puffing a pipe. Pohl rationalizes the kitsch as the sort of "personalization" idle rich subscribers might choose, but no amount of rationalization can ever deodorize rotten narration. "Albert" is a crude reinstatement of an obsolete stereotype from the days when sf writers claimed exemption from the exigencies of characterization: the lovable old prof who shuffles on with undigested slabs of lecture to put the science in the fiction. The lazy gimmick doesn't ruin the novel, but it's a shame to see Pohl slip back after re-establishing himself so powerfully with *Man Plus, Gateway* and *Jem*. The off-the-peg personalities in this thriller are adequate but not satisfying from a writer who has demonstrated a vital feeling for the clashing forces of human character.

Beyond the Blue Event Horizon contains good things, enough of them to make this quite a good book, had it been by a minor author. The disappointment is that they are the same good things that Pohl has offered before with more adroitness and intelligence, and that there are fewer of them. *Horizon* is unsatisfying because it is the sequel to a better book. *Gateway*, so full of question marks and unknown quantities, ends with a great resounding question – did he? didn't he? who pushed the button and why? It is the question of fear against desire, love against survival; Broadhead's past against his future; a public triumph against a personal tragedy. *Horizon* doesn't answer that question, or the question of the Heechee (though we actually see one in the last chapter); but it makes a good stab at polishing off most of the others. It delivers conclusions and resolutions, narrative satisfactions that seem less satisfying than the mysteries they solve. In the two black holes, the Heechee's burrow and Clara's grave, Pohl has left himself space for a third volume. I hope he doesn't get around to it.

Ringworld Engineers
by Larry Niven *(Gollancz, 1980, 354pp, £6.50)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is a book written to answer a particular – and to some extent peculiar – kind of reader response. It is, of course, a sequel to the award-winning *Ringworld*, and attempts to repair the original concept of the eponymous artefact by incorporating into its design various accessories necessary to its competence. Niven notes in his dedicatory preface that: "People have been reading *Ringworld*, and commenting on the assumptions, overt and hidden, and the mathematics and the ecology and the philosophical implications, precisely as if it were a proposed engineering project and they were being paid for the work". This kind of criticism is, for obvious reasons, unique to science fiction – and, indeed, to a particular subspecies of science fiction: the hardest of "hard" sf. It pays testament to the delight which scientists may take in dealing with hypothetical notions – a kind of exuberant intellectual play. Niven has been driven back to the Ringworld in order to patch up the holes and damaged logical seams which time has exposed in his earlier account of it, to secure it more comfortably within the rules of a sophisticated and rather esoteric game.

It is hardly surprising, in view of this, that the story gains its main impetus from the gradual release of answers to questions about how the ringworld remains stable, how soil erosion is remedied, and how its meteor-defence system works. One or two of the conclusions in the earlier book are retracted in order to recover the mystery of who built the ringworld and why, and suspense is added by a catastrophist flourish which threatens the edifice with imminent destruction, but in essence this is a book for the clannish cadre of ringworld enthusiasts who need no more than their fascination with imaginary engineering to keep their attention glued to the page. Given that, it is perhaps natural that the narrative vehicle which carries the reader along is not particularly fascinating on its own account.

Niven is a highly-competent player of the kind of game that is represented here. He is one of a bare handful of sf writers who can specify the technological conditions of a hypothetical situation so tightly that he can set convincing and challenging mystery stories within their framework – his recent novella *The Patchwork Girl* provides an excellent example. It is, however, one thing to enlist reader involvement in a human drama of murder on the moon, and quite another to persuade a reader to identify himself (or herself) with an attempt to shift a ring 190 million miles in diameter back to its proper place in the sky. Human (and alien) beings are reduced to such insignificance by this scale of events that they cannot imaginatively connect with the schematics of the problem. For this reason, *Ringworld Engineers* is a much more abstracted exercise in thinking than *The Patchwork Girl*, and for many readers it will be less interesting in consequence.

It would be unfair to criticise *Ringworld Engineers* for its inadequacy in meeting aims which it does not fulfil, no matter how esoteric its actual aims are, and there is no point in belabouring the issue of what the book has (or, rather, has not) to offer readers not passionately interested in whether the ringworld is equipped with stabilizing jets. However, it is surely worth observing that much of the appeal of *Ringworld* itself arose from the fact that the characters were moving in uncharted territory, with the unknown lurking behind every horizon. *Ringworld Engineers* starts with a tremendous handicap because it is a return to a partly-familiar land-

scape. The characters know too much about where they are and where they might look for answers to their questions, and much of what happens to them in the course of their journeying hither and yon seems to constitute merely a series of delays. This seriously undermines the dramatic tension of the story, and prevents Niven from covering up his weaknesses by exploiting his strengths, as he usually can and does. I fear, therefore, that the fate of this book may be to be regarded even by Niven's admirers simply as a footnote to *Ringworld* and a reminder of the ancient dictum that nothing is ever as exciting second time around.

Wizard
by John Varley *(Berkley/Putnam, 1980, 355pp, $12.95)*
The Barbie Murders
by John Varley *(Berkley, 1980, 260pp, $2.25)*

reviewed by John Clute

Two more volumes of fin de siecle hijinks from John Varley. A brief report, not because either of these books is exactly negligible, but because we seem to be very much in medias res with the sagas they are liquidly deploying further episodes of. *Wizard* follows *Titan* – and probably precedes a volume to be entitled *Demon*, if Varley's hints are to be believed, just as you used to believe Franklin W. Dixon – in the fleuval saga of Gaea, the animate hollow planet-sized wheel within which dwell numerous indigenes (created by Gaea herself for her own amusement), and some tourist humans, including Cirocco Jones, protagonist of the first novel, mostly absent drunkard in this one, despite being the official Wizard of the title. The second volume is a collection of stories, most of them set in the punished environment most extensively exploited in *The Ophiuchi Hotline*, Varley's first novel, and a much more satisfyingly complex rendering of human destiny than the Gaea lot: in *The Barbie Murders*, except for the remarkably overrated title story and a few other strays, Varley plays echoes and riffs on the Ophiuchi universe after his smooth, seamless, deceptively guileless fashion. It is a technique ideally designed to convey the colourable polymorphousness underlying all his work, both in its propagandizing content and its bright drawling Dynaflow style, married here as elsewhere. The basic premise of the Ophiuchi universe is harsh enough – Invaders have driven homo sapiens from Earth to make their way among the other planets of the system, generally in Moebius malls deep within Mars or Titan or wherever, or – suitably bioengineered – as freefloaters amongst the asteroids and beyond; in view of this harshness, and of the constant implied violence in the Varley universe, of the sudden patches of deep chill when the implications of the system occasionally bite, in view of all of this, it is a surprisingly *ambient* universe, and the stories of *The Barbie Murders* convey a kind of sustained irenic serenity.

The same for *Wizard*, except for the fact that 300 pages of ambient flow, however contortuplicated sexual relations between human tourist heroes and native centaurlike Titanides with dozens of orifices can become, is ambient flow up to here. *Wizard* is an exceedingly ambient flow of a book. Decades have passed since *Titan*. Cirocco has become jaded, alcoholic, only remotely and intermittently formidable. Taking her place to emcee the fleuve of action/vista are Gaby from the first volume, and a couple of slightly dejected humans on (in) Gaea to do something

she will accept as heroic: if they succeed, she will reward them by curing their epilepsy-like ailments. Their need to perform accords with Gaby's plan to circumnavigate Gaea sounding out the twelve subsidiary godlets (or ganglions of their main god) whose functions involve routine reality maintenance over the twelve sections making up the whole wheel. Like most circles, the story kind of repeats itself, or seems to: it is possible to get lost. Ultimately – at some point or other – Gaby seems to get killed at Gaea's whim, and Cirocco is stung into action. Right. Stung into action, Cirocco bustles back up to the hub with a revolver and shoots a simulacrum or two, all out of rage and grief and the general sense that Gaea is going potty. An incontinent planet is bad news for the bugs. We await the medicaments of volume three.

But we do this awaiting with a certain calm. Maybe as one does with someone like Scriabin, awaiting the end of the movement. Nothing incontinent, mind you. Just that Varley seems far more interested in process than dramatic structure (though "Good-Bye, Robinson Crusoe" superbly ideograms the rite of passage between childhood and manhood); and this interest, exemplified as it is in the flowing nature of his stories, the sexual polymorphosity of his characters, making them significantly hard to identify, leads to a momentum of eternal return. Climaxes in Varley are hard to come by. The hieratic becomes swamped in melancholy harmonies. Choate, inchoate, choate, his stories meld together in the mind's eye, into a fleuve from which these incondite half-figures in foam emerge, aping the dolphin.

The Travails of Jane Saint
by Josephine Saxton *(Virgin Books, 1980, 128pp, £1.95)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

Nine years have passed since the publication (in America) of Josephine Saxton's third novel, the excellent *Group Feast*. I think I am right in saying that not one of her early novels ever achieved publication in Britain despite the fact that many of the allusions in *Group Feast* and *Vector for Seven* would have made little sense to anyone not familiar with the culture of the north of England. If this were not unfortunate enough, the books lived under the handicap of being marketed as *genre* sf novels, though only the first of them – *The Hieros Gamos of Sam and An Smith* – actually invites classification as sf. It would, I think, have been a terrible tragedy if a novel as good as *Group Feast* had never been published at all, but one must surely regret the fact that it was aimed at a target audience very different from the one which might have appreciated it. In consequence of all this, there is surely cause for rejoicing in the fact that Josephine Saxton at last has managed to get a book into print in her native land, and I hope that it will be the first of many.

The Travails of Jane Saint is a feminist novel: a quest-fantasy whose heroine searches for her lost children and tries to change the world while imprisoned in a sensory deprivation tank awaiting brainwashing. We catch hardly a glimpse of the "real" world which treats her thus, though the implication is that it lies in our future, but see only the surreal dreamworld which takes its place in Jane Saint's hallucinating consciousness. Here there are monsters, but they are mostly friendly, as are the talking dogs and the alchemists. Even the man who claims to be her

husband doesn't seem to be too bad, though his helicopter pilot, Acrid von Sturmundrang, is definitely on the nasty side. The threat which hangs over the heroine saturates the dream-landscape in which she finds herself, but is never really incarnate there – which emphasizes, as it is meant to, the fact that its source is the "real" world outside the dreams.

Dream-fantasy is actually a very difficult narrative mode to work in, especially if the author has to bear Freud and Jung in mind without making many concessions to their masculine perspectives. It would have been easy for this story to become bogged down in didactic symbolism, and just as easy for it to dissolve into a chaotic mess of arbitrary happenings and careless impossibilities. Josephine Saxton, however, manages to steer the hazardous middle course, keeping the narrative light and witty, with some wonderfully quirky special effects and some fine throwaway lines, while never losing sight of her theme and purpose. This new novel has not the baroque intensity of *Group Feast*, but it has the same sharp and brilliant sense of irony, and is eminently readable. Whether the novel will please other feminists I cannot tell, and it is certainly not for me to say whether it should or should not, but I wish that more propaganda (for any and all causes) could be as deft and as appealing as this.

Tales of Pirx the Pilot
by Stanislaw Lem *(Secker & Warburg, 1980, 206pp, £5.95)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

Tales dates from the 1950s, and is certainly different at first glance from what American sf writers were producing back then. In *Other Worlds, Other Seas* Darko Suvin identifies Lem's favourite classic as *Don Quixote*, and a fair amount of tilting at windmills goes on in this collection of five stories, conducted by Pirx, the Tintin of the Space Service, who seems like a buffoon but who actually has depths of dogged rationality that pull him through (even though he's always capable of crying "Gosh!", fantasizing about eternal fame, or simply going off his head).

Two of the stories concern technical malfunctions of such a minor nature (though fatal consequences) that the revelation of the cause, after the whole mysterious build-up, seems to cast these tales in the role of shaggy astronaut stories; while the very first story hangs on a fly short-circuiting the works (and it's only a simulated mission, after all). The rescue of *The Albatross* in the fourth tale ends, after all the bangs, with less than a whimper; while Pirx's answer to the mystery of space ghosts in the final tale eschews even the faulty fuse scenario – Pirx simply orders the offending robot scrapped, and that's the end of it.

Then, too, the narrative is peculiar, becoming more so as the book progresses. Description and plot action is lavished on machines, instrument panels, spacesuits, blast-offs. But what is Pirx up to, contemplating stuffing a blanket into a spacesuit too large for him? What looney would land a lunar shuttle as carelessly? Who would hoist a whole moonliner on hydraulic winches, as a routine way of berthing it? Who would live through all the leaking radiation from overheating atomic piles? Not to mention: the cages of mice fulfilling the role of radiation monitors, as cages of canaries did for miners fearing gas? Or solar system weather reports of meteorite showers, and warnings of "high vacuum" ahead? Or people tucked up in rugs in

deck-chairs on a Mars-liner? Or taking on "ballast" before blasting off (with difficulty, since the ship is so old)? And the traffic controller ordering all ships to heave to immediately, on the Earth-Mars run?

Farce? Joie de vivre?

Did I say these are different from American sf of the 1950s or 1940s? Actually, Doc Smith would feel at home here (at times), Doc Smith who pioneered the uniquely inventive method of space communication in emergency, of firing morse code messages with a machine gun at the hull of another craft. Meanwhile, the great ship groans and the reactor leaks neutrons like a sieve. (The great ships in the *Tales* are the flip-side of the massive, vulnerable *Invincible* in Lem's novel of that name.)

But as to the hero . . . ah. More like Sancho Panza, really. And there are no enemies, except for the weather in space, or the emptiness and boredom, or the grottiness of old equipment, or oscillating malfunctions in super new equipment. And one can't call those things "enemies" – more like routine facts of life. There's no one "out there", apart from a bit of alien lichen, maybe. Nor ar Pirx's successes – for which he gets little credit – really the triumph of reason over the indifferent universe. Machines, too, are innocent, however much pathetic fallacy is poured into them. Machines are "accomplices" of our mad adventures, only in our own eyes: the moral that Pirx ends up with, which ties up neatly with the faults of human observation in the earlier shaggy astronaut fiascos. But man's adventures are indeed mad – round the twist – just as these *Tales* are mad too, in one way or another, with a rational madness.

And if they creak almightily, surely that's because we're meant to hear them creak and groan and develop hectic ennui, like recalcitrant (but innocent) machines.

Surely?

The Humanoid Touch
by Jack Williamson *(Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980, $10.95; "A Phantasia Book Society First Edition")*

reviewed by David N. Samuelson

Some science fiction approaches literature for mature readers, but this is not a case in point. Jack Williamson still writes potboilers, as he has since 1928, relatively unfazed by changes in the world and in sf, by a stint as an English professor and collaborations with the constantly improving, technically innovative, socially conscious Frederik Pohl, to whom this book is dedicated.

Williamson's *The Humanoids* (1949), recently reissued by Avon with its source novella, "With Folded Hands" (1947), and auctorial afterthoughts, introduced the world to the prospect of perfect, self-replicating robots programmed "to serve and obey and protect man from harm". Utopian enslavement seemed the only alternative to man's rampant aggression, approved by thought-controlled humans across the galaxy by the novel's end.

Keth Kyrone, seven years old at this sequel's start, grows into the chief protagonist of a typical Williamson "fight and flight" plot, finally to symbolize a third alternative: mystic oneness with nature, complete with parapsychological powers.

Keth's planet, Kai, circling one sun of a "runaway binary star", houses descendants of refugees from the humanoids in a rigid, militaristic, and mechanistic social

order of their own. Not content with one world, they are expanding a beachhead on their moon, Malili, by sterilizing – their arsenal includes neutron bombs – a Zone free of iron-eating "rockrust" and its biological analog, "bloodrot".

When the humanoids arrive in full force, Keth escapes via drug-aided teleportation beyond the Zone to join the mutated Leleyo, with his late-revealed "real father", Bosun Brong, a Leleyan half-breed. Already infatuated with a Leleyan *femme fatale*, Keth discovers the naked "primitives" live in symbiosis with the *feyo* tree, whose "blood" is a drug neutralizing the iron-eater. Thwarted by rockrust, the humanoids accept that the organic community lacks the aggression they are directed to control.

Like Asimov's "positronic" robots, Williamson's "rhodomagnetic" humanoids are creatures of word-magic covering up ignorance of how such machines could really work. Unlike Asimov, however, Williamson seems equally ignorant of how science, society, and human psychology work. In 1949, his basic premise was half-way daring, when technological affluence and the welfare state were yet to come. Today, like the implicit racism of sleek, black machines unctuously "Uncle Tom-ming" as they menace established order, it is dated and objectionable.

Lacking adequate exploitation of science, setting, social thinking and characterization, *The Humanoid Touch* does have virtually non-stop action, purple prose, two dream-girls and a mystical happy ending. Who says they don't write science fiction the way they used to?

The Dread Empire Series (A Shadow of All Night Falling, October's Baby and All Darkness Met)
by Glen Cook *(Berkley, 1979-80, 240, 248 and 323pp, $1.95 each)*

reviewed by Roz Kaveney

A growing body of work in sf and heroic fantasy concerns itself predominantly with the depiction of imaginary military engagements; most of them do this at a level typified at the bottom end of this market by Hugh Walker's "Wargamer's World" series, and are little more than scenarios for strategy and tactics games with a thin top dressing of fiction. Even such (very comparatively) superior works as Jerry Pournelle's two novels about the career of John Christian Falkenberg – *The Mercenary* and *West of Honor* – are unsatisfactory, dwelling as they do vastly more in the neat and rosy world of regimental histories than in terms of some more mature and realistic apprehension of the facts and techniques of combat. In his eloquent tract *The Face of Battle*, military historian John Keegan called for a sort of writing of battlepieces which would reflect awareness of the complexity of what actually happens on a battleground, of the massive variations of morale and quality of communications within a given army; this plea makes even more sense in the context of fictional treatment of battle than in the less immediate, and intellectual, discipline of military history. Accounts of warfare in sf and fantasy – even those which like the work of Joe Haldeman aspire to deglamorizing it – are for the major part written in a gushy prose which not only prettifies battle but leaves any sense of what is actually going on hopelessly vague. While there is much to be said in criticism of Glen Cook's ambitious trilogy of heroic fantasies, they form at the very least a valuable corrective to this tendency in their clear and matter-of-fact setpiece battle scenes.

Cook's subject matter – the attempt by subversion and overwhelming might of the sorcerous Empire of Shinsan to conquer the disunited kingdoms of the West – is one which gives him the opportunity to indulge in such scenes on an ever-increasing scale. In the first and largely expository book the Western Empire of Ilkazar collapses in a short flashback and so we get off fairly lightly with the siege of Ravenskrak, home of the moderately sorcerous and inordinately ambitious Storm Lords, by mercenaries in the pay of the magician Varthlokkur, rejected suitor of their sister Nepanthe; the siege does not last very long since the defending forces are for the most part in the besiegers' pay. The second volume, *October's Baby*, starts with a small skirmish between troops of the southern Prophet El MUrid and the household of Bragi Ragnarson, formerly leader of the Storm Lords' treacherous employees, moves through the campaigns of her mercenary force in the civil wars in the Ruritanian kingdom of Kavelin, and has as climax the battle of Baxendale in which Bragi defeats not only Kavelin rebels but the supposedly invincible troops of Shinsan, which has chosen this moment to reveal its Hidden Hand. In the third volume, a punitive raid by Bragi on Shinsan's tributaries leads to full-scale invasion of the West, an invasion planned for centuries and beaten as much by winter and plague as by military prowess.

The trilogy contains more than its fair share of set piece engagements and is surprisingly clear and unselfindulgent in its account, communicating the feel of a commander doing a job of work to the best of not unlimited abilities. Since as the trilogy eventually emerges it is largely an account of the rise of Bragi Ragnarson from smalltime venal mercenary to Marshall of the West, Cook must be accounted to have succeeded, by bringing these scenes off, in a large part of his artistic ends. Where the death of the golem commander of Shinsan, Badalamen, at the hands of a totally insignificant ensign, would have been in most such books only the ironic fulfilment of a prophecy, for Cook it serves as an apt example of the extent to which military events are out of the hands of even the most preternaturally competent of commanders.

Where the trilogy fails is in an uncertainty for much of its length as to whether our interest is supposed to centre on Bragi, his partnership with his wife Elana and his passion for Fiana, queen of Kavelin, or on the rather more complicated triangle involving Varthlokkur, immortal sorceror, destroyer of Ilkazar and Shinsan's dupe turned implacable enemy, Nepanthe for whose foreshadowed birth he has waited centuries, and Mocker, Bragi's intelligence aide, Nepanthe's husband and Varthlokkur's longlost son. The complications of the latter menage dominate the first book only to disappear largely from our ken at just the point where they become really interesting. There are compensations for this loss – Mocker talks in ungrammatical macaronics that make Anderson's van Rijn look an elegant stylist – but it leaves a suspicion that much of the time Cook improvised these books as he went along. The trilogy is dedicated to Fritz Leiber; the obvious homage embodied in the relationship between the dour but sentimental Northerner Bragi and the decadent southerner Mocker all too often gives rise to invidious comparisons. Mocker is merely a buffoon in a way that Leiber has never allowed the Mouser to become and which renders his eventual fate as a brainwashed tool of Shinsan gratifying rather than genuinely tragic. Uncertainty of tone is a hallmark also of Cook's style which is for the most part gray, convincing and workmanlike, but which makes occasional illadvised forays into the colloquial, the highflying archaic and the leadenly ornate.

All too many of the trilogy's personages are never given space to evolve into characters and this is particularly true of female characters – Nepanthe, Elana,

Fiana and Mist, deposed Empress of Shinsan and mistress of Nepanthe's brother. Cook is clearly capable of showing these four in the round but skimps the task in favour of lectures on politics, the trade routes across which Kavelin sits, and the interlocking pyramids of conspiracy which rule Shinsan behind its Emperors' backs. Cook's sorcerors are almost as convincingly technicians as his military men, yet at times their infinite abilities, vast age and colossal gullibility become implausible. It is necessary for Cook's ramshackle plot that people act like idiots while being the sort of people who would in no circumstances be idiots. The ultimate revelation of the series is that the entire plot has been orchestrated by the figure who stands behind the ultimate conspiratorial cell, a mysterious supermagician, the Star Rider, who regards himself as sentenced to set up vast spectacles of blood and intrigue for some extraterrestrial audience; this cosmic punchline cannot but throw into doubt the perspicacity of all these incredibly gifted magicians who have been swanning round the rest of the plot without ever getting a whiff of it.

If I had to characterize the flaws of this trilogy in a word that word would be carelessness; Cook constructs elaborate scenarios and sets them going without checking that the machinery actually works. He assumes that it is enough to tell us what a character is like and set them in motion of a characteristic kind. He lets stand shoddy passages when he knows that a good scene is waiting on the next page which will with luck obliterate our memory of his minor attacks of stylistic incompetence. At its best, this trilogy communicates the excitement of the author at writing it and an occasional mythopoeic grandeur; Cook portrays convincingly the world of military men as one in which the important thing is to minimize the areas in which things can go wrong; he makes a competent stab at a group of portraits of individuals who have historic roles to fulfil. But these merits are diminished by the frequent cackhandedness of thought and and craftmanship and a preparedness to give length to the minutia of history and politics, which would have been better devoted to deepening the portraits which lie at the emotional heart of the work. The trilogy is undeniably impressive but gives cause to doubt that Cook's longer works will in general fulfil the promise of his shorter fiction.

White Light
by Rudy Rucker *(Virgin, 1980, 128pp, £1.95)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Rudolf von B. Rucker, it says here, is the great-great-great-grandson of Hegel, a Doctor of Mathematical Logic, and lecturer at Oxford and Heidelburg. He has edited a collection of the writings of C.H. Hinton, on whom he also wrote for *Foundation* 18. Rucker has also been an underground cartoonist and knows a thing or two about drugs and rock and roll. All right, so he's the Noo Renaissance Man, but can he write science fiction?

Hinton's interest was the forth dimension, its nature and relation to the first three, and he spun some of his speculations into stories, including a sequel to Edwin Abbott's *Flatland.* Rucker now succeeds Hinton with the fantasy of an after-life in the fourth dimension. The genre is scientific romance, with the emphasis on science rather than technology, it is also dream fantasy, since the narrator is privileged to tour the afterlife without having to die first. Felix Rayman, a maths

research graduate stuck with a creaking marriage and a dull teaching job, spends much of his time asleep on the floor of his office. Through lucid dreaming he learns the rudiments of astral travel. One afternoon he leaves his body slumped in a cemetery and returns to find it gone. Jesus and the Devil appear and send him off on a mysterious mission to Cimön: they seem to know something they're not telling. Cimön is a kind of unspecific purgatory, both infinite and two-dimensional. Felix has to climb an infinite mountain, visit a Borgesian infinite library and write an infinite book for it, and stay in a hotel with an infinite number of rooms (where he has tea with Einstein), and so on.

Dream fantasy comes in two kinds. One consists of an attempt to reproduce in words as Dali did in paint the quality of dreaming. This is a feature of works by Anna Kavan and Emma Tennant, for example. The other kind uses the dream as a technical device. A writer requires a private, distanced narrative arena for some exercise of allegory or satire which involves metamorphoses, irrational transitions and inversions, a piece of free time and space bounded by mundane time and space, and calls it a dream. This is a very different kind from the mimetic. Its tradition goes back through Olaf Stapledon, Lewis Carroll, John Bunyan, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, to the earliest recorded English literature. *White Light* has passages of the first kind but is largely of the second, since Rucker's purpose is to deliver a loose bundle of notions in maths and metaphysics wrapped up in fiction. Indeed, it is a bit like Lewis Carroll, or rather like Carroll as the hippies knew him, missing the maths and the satirical caricatures, and rolling the witticism and perverse logic into a general goofball of stoned cosmic foolery: Carroll the tripmaster, Carroll the eater of both sides of the mushroom. Remember what the dormouse said. Right! Um – what did he say?

Carroll's textual divisions are precise, separate moves on the topological chessboard: one logical inversion, one crazed lucidity neatly expounded in each chapter. Rucker has the same episodic drift, slipping disquietingly from nightmare to farce to void, but not the same conclusiveness. He can multiply forever but he can't add up. *White Light* is packed with half-good things and unkept promises. What is Felix's mission, and why doesn't it matter that he doesn't properly complete it? What is the origin of the mysterious guide to Cimön he finds in the bookshop? What was the message of the Beast under the desk? What does happen to Kathy's spirit when she steals Felix's body?

The dream*like* parts of the story are powerful, authentic surrealism that shocks rather than titillating, as when Felix uses a teacup to scoop rotten flesh out of the back of a giant beetle. But the rest of those questions aren't enigmas, only dangling threads Rucker's imagination hasn't knitted together. Virgin Books hope that their first paperback will be the cult novel of the eighties, but I can tell them now they hope in vain. How famous is Hinton? In fact there are here the heterogeneous makings of a metaphysical adventure as odd and distinctive as Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,* or at least of a transmundane sequel to Peter Beagle's *A Fine and Private Place* (which Rucker has obviously read). He doesn't concentrate; nothing occupies his mind for long enough. What he's most interested in are the cute, sophomoric parables of infinity, Hilbert's Hotel, Cantor's Continua and the like. While he never makes them too complicated for the uneducated, their interest is really too limited to allure the general imagination; but I suppose his book will be a big chuckle if you're into number theory.

Golem 100
by Alfred Bester *(Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980, 383pp, £6.95)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

A group of ladies seeking an entertaining diversion from the tedium of everyday existence decide to summon the devil. Their ritual releases from their own collective subconscious a "golem" which embarks upon a spectacular career of sadistic violence. It is eventually identified and tracked down by an unlikely pair of investigators, at first harassed and later aided by a no-less-exotic officer of the law. The adventure culminates in a desperately overloaded climax.

The structure of the novel reflects its theme, as Bester deliberately unfetters his imagination and abandons all semblance of control to let his fancy run riot. That the result is damaging to his technique is only to be expected, but what is more surprising (though perhaps in retrospect it should not be) is the fact that even leaving all questions of technique aside this is a positively repellent book.

Bester has always been a melodramatic writer, keen to dazzle and shock his readers. He makes his claims on our attention mainly by the audacity with which he deploys his ideas and the flamboyant decoration of his characters and their environments. His two classic novels, *The Demolished Man* and *The Stars My Destination*, succeed because all this creative fervour is contained within a coherent framework: all its elements are made to interlock, if not to balance, and they draw tensile strengh from a tight and compelling narrative structure. *Golem 100*, by contrast, is never far from dissolving into incoherency – the bizarre elements never approach integration and the narrative structure simply explodes once the plot, like the golem, breaks free of the weak frame. *The Demolished Man* and *The Stars My Destination* borrowed their narrative structures from other works (*Crime and Punishment* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*) but Bester's third sf novel, *Extro*, went off the rails apparently because the author had to make it up as he went; rumour has it that *Golem 100* started out attempting to borrow the narrative frame of *Dracula*, but if that ever was the case it seems that Bester very soon lost the thread.

In retrospect, it is fairly obvious that Bester's imagination has always had sadistic tendencies. His characters always did a lot of suffering, tortured in dozens of ingenious ways both mentally and physically – some of his works are little more than exercises in imaginative cruelty ("Hell is Forever", for instance). It has never in the past seemed reasonable to condemn him for this, on the principle that there is no one without the relevant sin to case the first stone. In *Golem100*, though, the repressed impulses are not only allowed full rein, but the author invites the reader to join him in an orgy of self-indulgence which revels gluttonously in slaughter and sexual extravagance. I am not much given to deploring books on the grounds of obscenity, and I doubt whether fantasies of this kind have as much power to deprave and corrupt as their enemies would suggest, but I think it ought to be said that if *this* is what is lurking in Alfred Bester's *id* then it surely needs some powerful *superego* restraint to confine it. Bester would presumably defend himself – as, indeed, the narrative tries to justify itself – on the grounds that the impulses here indulged are no more and no less than the common property of all mankind, but even if this is true it is deplorable to revel lasciviously in the assertion of it. If we are really so nasty-minded as this story assumes in inviting us to identify with its enthusiasms, then we are all sick; if we are not, then all Bester is doing in telling us

that we are is revealing more about his own inclinations that we ever wanted to know or desired to believe.

This is a rank bad book in unbelievably bad taste, without any obvious trace of redeeming artistry, which may well do irreparable damage to the reputation of the author.

A Rag, a Bone and a Hank of Hair
by Nicholas Fisk *(Kestrel Books, 1980, 126pp, £3.95)*
Starstormers
by Nicholas Fisk *(Knight Books, 1980, 110pp, £0.85)*
Sunburst
by Nicholas Fisk *(Knight Books, 1980, 126pp, £0.85)*

reviewed by John Clute

Here are three books for the next generation (good luck, kids!) by Nicholas Fisk (1923-), who has been contributing to that market darker and darker tales for about two decades now. If he knows what he is doing, and he gives no hint of not being aware of the implications behind the quiet savagery of his children's books, then he is preparing his market, which will inherit the earth, for the pits. The leavings.

The title of the first novel, which is invertebrate, a tag too far, comprises its only wasted words. We are well into the future. Almost totally bereft of children, Britain has been transformed into a more or less standardized dystopian autoclave, overtly benign, secretly authoritarian, which is of course the long-held sf version of the nature of the Fatherhood of the state. Children are in general cherished and spoiled; Brin, the novel's protagonist, twelve years old, a particularly brilliant and valuable child, is seriously shocked when he is taken to confer with the Seniors of the Western Elect (i.e. the government) and is spoken to rudely. Just slightly, his universe is undermined; should this happen to a child, in a story for children? It is *proper* to lace the sarsaparilla? But the Seniors' rudeness seems to turn out to have been a *test*. Ah. Adults can be like that in a children's book, at the beginning, can't they. The Seniors then quiz Brin about a taboo subject, the Reborns, correctly rumoured to be artifically bred human stock, reconstituted from stray organic relics, some of them from long ago. Reborns are mainly dangerous in that they can be recreated without Sleepers – devices that for a long while have been implanted into human stock to ensure non-violent behaviour. The Seniors tell Brin that he's been selected to monitor a group of Reborns bred out of preSleeper organic soup, to see if they provide some sort of answer to the problem of human sterility, for the human race is quite obviously dying.

Most of the rest of the book takes place in a couple of rooms constructed to replicate the Reborns' proper historical setting – a 1940s London kitchen, at the time of the Blitz. At first Brin is reluctant and offended; the Reborns, two of them his age, seem appallingly physical and crude and *dumb*; soon, however, he comes to identify with them in their ignorance and to pity their condition, for they have been programmed to repeat the same day, again and again, under conditions varied by the experimeters, whose Sleepers don't seem to preclude the most profound cruelties, as long as they are abstract. Conditions in the kitchen get harsher and harsher. Gradually the Reborns themselves begin to sense something is wrong. On

the day kindly Cockney Mrs Mossop is due to be killed by a malfunctioning electrical socket, in order to test the flavour of the survivors' rage and grief and despair, Brin's imaginary uncle, Rick, created as part of his cover, turns up at the door, and the novel leaps into the transcendental, because Rick has come into "existence" through the Reborns' belief in him. Through his agency they leave the kitchen, stumble appalled and uncomprehending through a segment of the real world, full of Trouble Bubbles and pedalecs. Somehow, Brin gets them back to the kitchen. But it is too late. He works out the fact that he, too, is a Reborn, though of later stock, that he is homeless in the horrifying autoclave of the world, and that he, and his new family, will soon be destroyed by the Seniors. And indeed he is. They are all blown up. They are killed. In this world there is no place for intense love, camaraderie, chaos, sweat, tangible things. The future Brin lived in is where no child can live.

The novel closes with the chief scientist hearing ghost voices:

> 'Mrs Mossop?' said Tello. But the voices were gone. He sighed, turned over on his side and eventually fell into an uneasy sleep, filled with wild and impossible dreams, and voices calling.

This is all told so that a twelve-year old can read it, though he or she will probably know little more about a 1940s English kitchen than Brin does. The harsh obsessive detailing of the mise en scene may seem hallucinatorily vivid to the book's primary audience; adults will read Mr Fisk's anguished dry-ice nostalgia in a different light, though not an inconsistent one, for without any of the brainy potholing for symbols that – say – Lionel Davidson engages upon in *Under Plum Lake* unto mort, in *A Rag, a Bone and a Hank of Hair* Mr Fisk has constructed a genuinely multivalent text, a genuine mediation among several states of our human condition, during which, for chastening moments, we read as children in this age of ours, the enSleepered slag they are about to inherit.

For younger children, in *Starstormers* and *Sunburst*, which are the first two volumes of a space opera series planned at the moment to extend to about five instalments, Mr Fisk is scarcely less alarming in the way he goes about catching the attention of the next ones. Once again it is the future. "The Worst Thing on Earth", says one of the four young protagonists, all of whom have been effectively abandoned here, "is crumminess. Knowing you're stuck with a loser. Knowing that the whole planet is going down and down, everything falling apart, nothing working, everyone wanting to leave, all the best people already gone –" So they jimmy a Boss – i.e. a computer – to fabricate a spaceship for them out of a meteorite, escape Earth, ultimately find their ineffective but doting parents on a colony planet; in the second volume, the children continue their fight against the Octopus Emperor, whose domain is sentient dust, and eventually decide they must leave their parents again, to protect them. The sequels will tell us how they contrive to triumph against a universe whose enmity is insidious, whose figures of parenthood are helpless against the chill of things. Some of the astronomy is crappy in the second volume; but nothing else goes wrong at all. Though the series, being written for young children, allows its protagonists to thrive, however alone, darkness is sustained. They are children of darkness. Darkness: Mr Fisk is luminous with it.

The Old Gods Waken
by Manly Wade Wellman *(Doubleday, 1979, 186pp, $7.95)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

The Old Gods Waken is a novel-length addition to the series of stories collected in *Who Fears the Devil?*, featuring the wandering guitar-player John. The earlier volume is undoubtedly Wellman's best book, and probably his most popular, but the sequel is disappointing. For the benefit of those not familiar with the earlier book, John is a good-natured soul who uses silver strings on his guitar and pursues a career somewhat akin to that of the Lone Ranger, forever bumping into nice folks who need a hand to defend themselves against the forces of evil. Rather than fighting outlaws, however, he pits himself against the demons and sorcerors of Appalachian folklore. How convincing his exploits would be to anyone actually familiar with the region I cannot tell, but I found *Who Fears the Devil?* both interesting and likeable when I read it in the mid-sixties (the stories themselves date from 1951-58 in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*). I think the new volume is genuinely less impressive – perhaps only to be expected, in that Wellman was 74 at the time of its publication – but part of my disenchantment may be accountable in terms of the fact that I can no longer place the least credence in its mythological background, which owes more to Lovecraft and Lewis Spence than to authentic folklore. Despite the half-hearted attempt to write the book in a cute kind of dialect it is a thoroughgoing fake as an item of imaginative Americana.

The Old Gods Waken is about two sinister Englishmen who set out to raise demons on top of a mountain, much to the distress of those living further down the slopes. John, accompanied by an Indian medicine man named Reuben Manco, must fight his way to the summit while harried by various supernatural agents, in order to stop the wicked ritual and rescue two innocent victims. That's about as much plot as any of the original short stories had, but while they were spare and lean as if built for the telling, the present offering is padded out with chatter and melodramatic description and is anything but anecdotal. This process of inflation robs it of any merit it might have had as a swashbuckling tale of good against evil – John is by no means the kind of character who is well-adapted to the novel forms, and he should never have been charged with the task of trying to sustain himself through a narrative of this length.

A Storm of Wings
by M. John Harrison *(Sphere, 1980, 185pp, £1.35)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

> Viriconium, the Pastel City; a little cryptic, a little proud, a little mad. Its histories, as forgotten as his own, made of the air a sort of amber, an entrapment; the geometry of its avenues was a wry message from one survivor to another; and its present, like his own, was but an implication of its past – a dream, a prediction, a brief possibility to be endured.

M. John Harrison, meanest and most talented scion of Moorcock's *New Worlds*, finally makes good his perpetual grouse about the quality of everything else published as imaginative fiction today by turning in his finest work. Like Moorcock's, Harrison's fiction is idiosyncratic, immediately recognizable, perfectly

unclassifiable, and altogether remote from the original terms of the "New Wave", but Harrison (or his publisher) has been as sparing with it as Moorcock has been prolific with his. *A Storm of Wings* is the second in the Viriconium series, and makes its predecessor *The Pastel City* look terse by comparison. It is a metaphysical extravangaza, vivid, grotesque, and decadent; too corporeal to be Gothic, too cynical to be heroic; a Surrealist's baroque, written in machine oil on stained glass, but written in a flawless copperplate.

On a first reading the plot tends to lose itself in the convoluted labyrinth of the prose, but that hardly spoils the enjoyment; and the plot proves to be simple enough on a second. A bizarre sect, the Sign of the Locust, infects the mercantile classes of Viriconium. Blood is spilt to prove the unreality of the universe and even of the self. A madwoman comes from the north with an incomprehensible message and an impossible token: the rotting head of an insect, eighteen inches from eye to eye. In the north-west wasteland an inhuman city is struggling to erect itself. A desultory fellowship is formed: the lunatic, a zombie, an aristocratic cutthroat, a cybernetic alchemist, and a cheerfully vicious dwarf. The bloated ghost of an ancient aviator attempts to lead them. Some of these are survivors from *The Pastel City*, though it is eighty years since tegeus-Cromis overthrew Canna Moidart, and he himself is twenty years dead. No heroes. The expedition encounters an epileptic sealord fighting his last battle against an invisible enemy and negotiates a great maze of ash. No elves.

Since William Morris popular fantasists have been having great success with a sanitized feudal civilization, rinsing, like Tolkien, the dark out of the dark ages. Harrison, who has testified for the Orcs, romanticizes with equal success the corruption, grime, and disease. His Evening Culture, far in the future after the mad technocracies of the Afternoon, wallows gleefully in rust and watery sewage. "Viriconium, sump of time . . ." The jewels and old machines sparkle the brighter for their decrepit settings.

The denouement, in which we come upon the corpse of the aviator, Benedict Paucemanly (Harrison's names are not the least delicious of his imaginings), and learn *why* it is bloated, involves a deliquescing city, an invasion of giant insects from outer space, and a rocket-ship that fizzes and pops, all somehow invested with a melancholy and grandeur quite beyond probability. Harrison could go on like this all Evening, and all Night too, probably.

A Storm of Wings is carbuncled with literary allusions, to Eddison and Keats, and Langdon Jones and Ballard, and also, more surprisingly, to T.S. Eliot – early Eliot, of course, when he still had the fascination with seediness that he exorcized in *The Waste Land*. Here are murmured quotations from "Prufrock", "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", "Gerontion", and "The Hollow Men". Faces in the shadows resemble Eliot's too, sinister names on tenement stairs and in hotel corridors, Equipot, Madam 'L', Paulinus Rack, Lord Mooncarrot, Chorica nam Vell Ban. Equally they recall Mervyn Peake: "Ansel Verdigris the derelict poet, head like an antipodean cockatoo's", recites his verse: "My dear when the grass rolls in tubular billows . . ." Peake is the single most obvious influence (see Harrison's description of Viriconium besieged by the smell of cooked cabbage), well-absorbed, but Harrison can mix the sense of delight and horror inextricably and sustain the effect as Peake rarely could. Gormenghast was never like this, nor Malacia, nor Gloriana's Albion. But perhaps –

Perhaps somewhere down in here is Harrison revisiting his roots, as he did in *The Centauri Device*. In the pubs and cellars and crash pads of the 1960s society

and the universe seemed to be dissolving in potent brews, solipsism became almost a virtue and ontology was up for grabs. He remembers fondly the "handful of rogues and poseurs and failures watching midnight away" there while the crazed musicians were tuning up and the trippers gibbered; he writes of places called Methedrin and Mogadon; he wears the sentimental grin of Tomb the Dwarf as he finds himself in one of the nastier suburbs of the Pastel City. Harrison's scene is the grottiest and most glamorous of all.

The Steel, the Mist, and the Blazing Sun
by Christopher Anvil *(Ace, 1980, 282pp, $2.25)*

reviewed by Brian Stableford

The cover proudly proclaims this to be "An Analog Book", and of course it is. Christopher Anvil was one of the archetypal *Analog* writers during the last decade of John W. Campbell's life – a member of the stable which also included Mack Reynolds and Randall Garrett. Although a prolific writer of magazine stories, Anvil has had little success in book form, this being (I think) only his fifth book, and the second to be written for book publication rather than being derived from pre-existent magazine material. As with the great bulk of his fiction, the narrative derives its force from the development of a situation in which all the characters are making wrong assumptions whose wrongness they slowly penetrate. Again as with the great bulk of his work there are good guys (Americans) whose wrong assumptions arise from ignorance and for whom the gradual revelations form a pathway to glory, and there are bad guys (Russians) whose wrong assumptions arise from overconfidence and ideological limitations, and for whom the gradual revelations are uncomfortable proof of fallibility. Fate (personified by the author) has a message for both sides, and it is that the American way is best.

What appears to have happened as the novel begins is that West and East have ruined one another in a nuclear war so completely that the Americans cannot even remember who they are (and refer to themselves, piquantly, as the Wesdem O'Cracys). What they *do* remember, albeit dimly, is that the Russ are the enemy and that it is their sacred mission to liberate certain Russ colonies in Europe from the tyrant's oppressive hand. Having beaten the Russ on his own soil, the O'Cracy warlord Arakal is now taking his fleet to Europe, planning to land at Utah Beach to wage the holy war. The Russ have more guns, more men and more information, but they cannot contend with the spirit of the American soldiery or with the tortuous subtlety of their own secret masters, the sinister S-division. (We are told by Anvil that Arakal is a military genius, but nothing he does lends support to this claim. Perhaps this is not surprising when we ask ourselves what support American military history lends to his claims about the innate superiority and unconquerable spirit of the American fighting man.)

The book's message is duly delivered in the form of a Campbellian sermon – like the flag in the cover illo it has seen so much previous action that it is rather well-worn, but nevertheless flutters defiantly. Oh say can you see, *etc., etc.* . . .

The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction
by Ursula K. Le Guin (ed. Susan Wood, *Putnam, 1979, 270pp, $9.95; Berkley 1980, $4.95)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

> The springs of creation remain unsounded by the wisest psychology; and an artist is often the last person to say anything comprehensible about the process of creation.

Le Guin in 1978: hyperbole, but an appropriate caveat for this collection of her speeches, articles, and introductions. In fact we may well assume that, though she seems quite happy to discuss the subject of writing in (what she would call) depth, Le Guin would be sure to apply the dictum to herself and would never have assembled this volume of her own accord. The credit for *The Language of the Night* goes to Susan Wood; it may well be remembered as the best of her contributions to the criticism of sf. It is certainly a great gift for the completist; I don't know anything that ought to be in but isn't, and Wood's practice of picking pearls from articles excluded, for use as epigrams and as illustrations for her own introductions, is a very good compromise.

What she includes are Le Guin's introductions to *Rocannon's World, Planet of Exile, City of Illusions, The Word for World is Forest,* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, with a supplementary article reviewing the sexual themes of that book, "Is Gender Necessary?" Also in are the better-known speeches and articles: "Dreams Must Explain Themselves", about *Earthsea* and her experience of the irrational and unintended during writing; "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?", in which she maintains that fantasy is an indispensable ingredient in the diet of growing minds; "American SF and the Other", her polemic against sexism, nationalism, and other conservative habits; and "Science Fiction and Mrs Brown", her subsequent plea for a humanist sf. There are other articles on subjects including cosmology, censorship, style, and escapism; on Tolkien, Dick, and Tiptree; and a previously-unpublished convention address which assured the audience that fandom is a blessed and communal state conducive to personal and artistic development.

There are two criticisms to be made of editorial matters before I get to the substance of these writings. One is that I doubt the wisdom of arranging such mixed material thematically instead of chronologically, even if dates and sources are conscientiously stated (as they are here, some in two or three separate places). The thematic arrangement discards history in favour of tidiness and obscures growth and change in the writer's ideas, offering instead the impression of a static intellect, self-contained but somehow vague, oscillating in self-contradiction. Wood herself points out what seems to be a major revision between 1971 and 1974 in Le Guin's assessment of the literary status of sf; in this arrangement it would not have been apparent without her comment.

My second objection is to Jeff Levin's "Bibliographic Checklist" of Le Guin's works, included as an appendix; or perhaps only to its typography. I'm not a bibliographer; I tend to have a pragmatic approach to the format and layout of such things: some oeuvres suggest one scheme, some another. But surely a chronological listing followed by an alphabetical index would be more useful (and scarcely more effort) than this series of alphabetical lists; and surely a few gestures towards visual organization would make it easier to consult – elementary things, like distinguishing titles of short pieces by inverted commas, tabulating the reference numbers in a separate column, and leaving a line between one entry and the next – should we

not expect such consideration from G.P. Putnam's Sons? Perhaps it's Levin's way of protecting his achievement: the more confusing your bibliography, the less chance there is of lazy reviewers like me checking your references.

Meanwhile, who's checking Le Guin's references? Nobody, of course: it would seem somehow rude. She has done more than sufficient to establish her own joint position as White Goddess of Sf *and* as current No.1 Sf Writer for People Who Don't Read Sf. She's earned the right to say anything she likes about anything in view, and if that weren't enough her generosity and eloquence would carry the weight. The theses are piling up; *SF Studies* and *Extrapolation* have both dedicated special issues to her work; only the odd snarl from the Manchester School of Sf Criticism breaks the swelling turmult of acclaim. So it needn't matter that she doesn't make much of a job of sounding those springs of creation, while her utterances on the creative process, though far from incomprehensible, must seem quaint to any serious critic. Susan Wood speaks of Le Guin joining the tradition of sf writer-critics, cut she is in the line of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, not that of Damon Knight and Samuel R. Delany. Her aesthetic is stated in terms of truth and beauty; her method consists in purifying the imagination by honesty; her psychology is gospel Jung and woefully teleological: thus, one story is good because it employs the true mythic archetypes, another is bad because it employs shallow imitations of them. Thus, American businessmen reject fantasy fiction because they fear it is more true than their materialism. And son on. When asked by *Algol* for an article on her methods, Le Guin replies with disarming directness, "I didn't plan anything, I found it." "What we are," she proclaims,

> who we are, and where we are going, I do not know, nor do I believe anyone who says he knows, except, possibly, Beethoven, in the last movement of the last symphony.

The romanticism is rhetoric, of course, but these are her authorities, Beethoven and, more than once, Shelley. Her judgments of other writers are similarly wobbly, with Philip K. Dick as "our own homegrown Borges" and Tolkien as the first to achieve dignified human characters in modern fantasy.

I am making her sound foolish; the book does not, and I don't mean to. My only point is the expected one, that Le Guin's criticism is valuable only as self-description, and as diplomacy. She does not inflate critical nonsense to justify her own practices, as most writer-critics are tempted to; rather, she covers herself with an antique patchwork aestheticism and leaves the hard work of analysis to others. Her contribution to literary criticism and the psychology of aesthetics is about as advanced as Charles Lamb. This can hardly surprise anyone, least of all the serenely cheerful Le Guin; and as long as no one believes *The Washington Post* and tries to use this volume as an "introduction to science fiction", it can do no serious disservice to the literature.

The Lunar Effect: Biological Tides and Human Emotions
by Arnold L. Lieber *(Dell, 1980, 219pp, $2.25)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

"Feel like doing something strange? dangerous? Look at the Moon, it's probably full!" Feel homicidal? suicidal? unusually passive and suggestible? Look at the Moon. It's probably full. Feel restless? Can't sleep? Hair growing on palms and

face? Look at the Moon. *It's probably full.* Or new. Or at the first quarter. Or the last. Or a mere *two or three days away from* one or other of them. Superstition? Or *scientific fact?* What is this strange power that "the ancients" knew all about, that affects rainfall, sex, birth, death, automobile accidents and publishing sales? How does it extend its uncanny grip over the Bermuda Triangle? What is the mysterious "force" that drives perfectly normal doctors to write sensational "scientific" paperbacks? Why do these books cause perfectly normal reviewers to jump up and down with murderous grins on their faces? Look at the Moon. *It's probably grinning too.*

Arnold L. Lieber, M.D. has a case. No, not *is* a case; *has* a case. The Moon's gravity acts on the oceans, causing tides, and also on the land masses, contributing to earthquakes. It must also act on each creature here below, that's you and me, causing high and low tides in our precious bodily fluids, and interfering with electromagnetic sensitivities we have but do not identify. Most people cope with the tides without any problem, but anyone with any instability, temporary or permanent, may be triggered into violent storms of emotion. Fair enough, I say, which may already be too generous of me, but I look at it from the other side: it would be most unlikely that the Moon had no effect on us at all. Lieber insists most soberly that the effect he's talking about is a small one, but one which could be decisive in cases where balances are already precarious.

After that word of sanity, he goes completely off the rails. *Everything* shows "lunar periodicity", from epileptic seizures to sex ratios of newborn babies, from cockroach blood pressure to precipitation in colloid solutions. For a small effect it certainly gets around. That the opening times of oysters are not influenced by lab conditions, while the menstrual cycles of women are (artificial light standing in for moonlight) are both adduced as evidence. Of orthodox scientists who try to refute his findings Lieber says primly, "More often than one might expect, scientists design studies to support their own private opinions rather than to document objectively what is going on".

Quite. How do you measure lunar periodicity, for instance? Despite several warnings about statistics and their inability to express "the dynamic interaction between organism and environment", Lieber's method is entirely statistical and involves plotting incidents on graphs with lunar time scales.

> Violence directed against others showed a confirmed predilection for full moon, with somewhat lesser clustering around new moon. Fatal traffic accidents peaked between first quarter and full moon and again at last quarter. Psychiatric emergency-room visits peaked around first quarter and last quarter, with a significant decrease at new moon and full moon.

We can add to this:

> a heightened accident susceptibility . . . for people during the lunar phase similar to that in which they were born and for the lunar phase that is 180 degrees away from that in which they were born.

So (leaving aside the question of how these results could be called "confirmed") it appears that a peak (or, of course, a trough) is significant if it is at any of the four phases named, or at or opposite the birth-phase, which already gives up to six "significant" possibilities out of twenty-eight. For graphs which still don't fit, Lieber posits a possible two- or three-day time-lag between the lunar effect and the result observed (such as the fatal traffic accidents), which covers the rest of the month pretty thoroughly but leads him into absurdities like deducing a delay factor in his figures for "psychiatric emergency-room visits". Hospitals are as hard-pressed

as anyone now, I know, but surely not to the point of letting days go by before isolating an outburst of psychotic violence. A three-day queue for the *emergency* room?

"If an observer is looking for certain behaviors, he is more likely to find them. It is as simple as that." So if he finds them and they don't fit, it's someone else's fault. Measuring various kinds of violence for lunar periodicity, Lieber says,

> A significant correlation was found in every case with the exception of suicide. In spite of this exception, it appears likely that suicide has some intrinsic relation to moon phases because other destructive behavior shows a clear-cut lunar periodicity. The inaccurate suicide data are probably responsible for the negative results.

In other words, this experiment ought to have worked because some others did. If it had, it would have been evidence, but since it didn't, it's negligible. It is as simple as that.

Lieber's masterpiece is p.49, where he compares the number of homicides in Cuyahoga County, Ohio (1958-70) with Hamster Metabolic Activity (on a scale helpfully marked "units") in Evanston, Illinois (1964-65). Note the striking coincidence of peaks relative to the lunar synodic cycle. Well, two out of seven of them, anyway. Next full moon, homicidal hamsters. Don't say we didn't try to warn you.

Reviews in Brief

Dark is the Sun
by Philip José Farmer *(Del Rey, 1979, 405pp, $9.95)*

Philip José Farmer can do so much better than this. *Dark is the Sun* is like one of his minor entertainments of ten years ago (say, *The Stone God Awakens*) rewritten at three times the length and generating thrice the tedium. Yet again we have a quest story set in the distant future, a brawny hero pitted against an endless series of monsters. There are funny beasties with names like Sloosh and the Shemibob, and there are speeches which go like this: "Great God Phemropit, lord of the fiery falling star and of the great inland sea, god of the Narakannetishaw! Speak with your tongue of light!" There is no economy or grace here, and precious little imagination. Although this is a big book, it was probably written in a matter of weeks, and the haste shows. The narrative is headlong but monotonous. One "exciting" thing happens after another; there is scarcely any progression. There is no real description, despite the fact that the novel is supposed to evoke a rank, devolved world of 15 billion years hence, replete with exotic life forms. Farmer has always had difficulty in *finishing* a story, and after 30 books he still hasn't learned. This thin jerky comic-strip narrative just goes on and on until it stops.

— **David Pringle**

The Known and the Unknown: The Iconography of Science Fiction
by Gary K. Wolfe *(Kent State University Press, 1979, 250pp, $12.50)*

This is one of the most intelligent of recent general studies of sf. As Dr Wolfe states, it is "neither a history of sf nor an introductory survey", but "an attempt to explore how a few images familiar to any sf reader have developed into 'icons'." In seven solid chapters, Wolfe analyzes "Icons of Wonder"; "The Image of the Barrier"; and the Icons of "the Spaceship", "the City", "the Wasteland", "the Robot", and "the Monster". He makes copious references to particular works, with the emphasis very much on American sf of the 1940s to the 1960s. As the title suggests, his thesis is that genre sf is most typically about the meeting of the known and the unknown, and that these junctures of the familiar and the strange have become established as ever-recurring "icons". He points out how the iconography of written sf has spilled over into other media, even TV commercials, and he concludes that "this suggests there is something more to the genre than a group of interesting stories written by a limited group of writers over the years". As with other types of popular fiction, sf has its formulae, and these are based on "ideational structures". Wolfe acknowledges the work of John G. Cawelti (*Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, 1976) in analyzing the formulae of detective stories and Westerns, and attempts herein to do something of the sort for sf. Although one feels that particular authors are diminished by such an approach (while others are elevated beyond their importance), one must admit that, as with Cawelti's book, Wolfe's labours have opened a number of doors.

— **David Pringle**

Stellar 5: Science Fiction Stories
edited by Judy-Lynn del Rey *(Del Rey Books, 1980, 244pp, $1.95)*

Too many readers assume that fifties pulp sf, with its disfiguring symptoms of blockheadedness and leaden prose, is an extinct disease. Sad to relate, it is with us still. Writers of all ages still suffer from the crippling effects of plot fatigue and character blindness. We ask you to remember the insignificant, and give generously to the Del Rey Home for the Obsolete. For a donation of only $1.95 you can read about Frank and Old Shep, the old-timers who figure they're plumb goin' woodsy when they run into an alien prospector! Marvel at the parasites who secrete intelligence in furry aliens, at the cleverness of Jim Parker and the stern resolution of Captain Dial Senta. "He thought he could see a faint crease of worry on her brow, an indented V of concern above the prominent nose." Chortle over the unfortunate time-hopping philologist who gets caught in the consonantal shift! Or, for real excitement, join Major Carol Waverley of the USAF as she blasts the alien satellite that helped an evil President kill her father *right out of time itself!*

> "What?" she heard Pearson choke from a few feet in front of her. His tone wasn't really that of a question; he had simply plucked the word at random from the confusion boiling inside his head, and tossed it out to inject something into the void until anything more meaningful came together.

Quite.

Which leaves you where it left me, wondering whether the new Philip K. Dick

story "Chains of Air, Web of Aether", will actually make the collection worth the price. Well, no, it won't, but there's twice as much insight and understanding in his sixteen pages as the rest of the dunces can muster between them.

The del Reys: lest we forget.

— **Colin Greenland**

Torn Air
by David Hutchinson *(Abelard, 1980, 160pp, £4.25)*

Torn Air, incomprehensible violation of the familiar: Hutchinson's title stresses his primary concern, the juxtaposition of paranormal and commonplace. Certainly, despite one story of alien landing and three which involve matter-transmission "gates", the collection displays little interest in themes and expositions traditional to sf. Perhaps the author is becoming more aware of his strengths and weaknesses. He offers a range of naturalistic settings, a fine sense of the eerie and, commenting on the personal consequences of progress or the small totems in everyday lives, an unobtrusive irony. His protagonists are limited, loners or working colleagues (look elsewhere for human variety or intimacy), but he writes evocatively of things he knows: landscapes, dawns, solitary introspection, the half-ordered jumble of stored possessions. However, minutiae can also emphasize his greatest problem: where characters might brew their endless teas and coffees with revealing idiosyncrasy, they do so with monotonous similarity. This is a failure of sustained imaginative attention and such lapses lead as readily to slack clichés or even to flawed dénouements. Mysterious atmospheres are easier to create than to resolve and in his admirable shunning of extremes — rationalist or Lovecraftian — Hutchinson too often loses his ethereal vision and serves up bathos. But there is promising talent amidst his uneveness. A young and prolific writer, he needs to slow down, to consider more carefully his own processes of observation and realization. Given that, his fictive style will become more independent, his creation of the imaginary more consistent. Meanwhile, special applause for "The Visible Man" — cynical treatment of the gestalt concept was long overdue.

— **Nick Pratt**

The Restaurant at the End of the Universe
by Douglas Adams *(Pan, 1980, 187pp, £0.95)*

It would not have been unreasonable of Douglas Adams to have traded on the success of his earlier transcript of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and produced a similar type of novel in *Restaurant*. Happily, however, this is not the case. In *Restaurant* he has attempted to construct a novel which retains points of contact with the second radio series, but which largely comprises new material.

Adams' particular brand of "undergraduate" humour continues to dominate his style of writing and is generally used to good effect, if somewhat overplayed at times. The view of the universe he creates is more implicit than explicit and at first sight appears to exist without any overarching pattern or order. The universe is "bizarre and inexplicable". Chaos is not her ruler however; that role is given over to

a being who exists in a state of detachment. Adams' underlying view is perhaps expressed by Zaphod after interviewing the Ruler of the Universe: "I think the Universe is in pretty good hands, yeah?"

Various themes thrown up in the first book reappear, but tend to be used as red herrings, rather than as adding real substance to the novel. The theme of the Ultimate Answer/Question still fascinates, and surely could have been expanded to provide some type of "Quest" for Arthur and Ford. They remain tantalizingly unsolved, though not, I think, so that Adams can use them again in a further volume. Unlike some reviewers, I do not think that we are going to witness a long saga of Hitch-Hiker books, because in *Restaurant* he does attempt to provide a conclusion to the tale.

It seems to be a continuing trend among reviewers to condemn a book merely on the grounds that it is popular. The equation seems to be popular=inferior. It would be a pity if *Restaurant* was to be overlooked on those grounds.

– John Sherriff

Mirror Friend, Mirror Foe
by George Takei and Robert Asprin *(Playboy Press, 1979, 223pp, $1.95)*

Two corporations, both riddled with backstabbing and suspicion, share an entire planet. Both manufacture robots and are obsessed with mutual spying and sabotage: amoral free enterprise has never been healthier. Thus far *Mirror Friend, Mirror Foe* is little more than an extrapolation from Asprin's earlier *Cold Cash War*. Enter our hero Hosato: duellist, saboteur, member of the venerable and mysterious order of Ninjas, he is a mercenary circumscribed by a strict ethical code. Nevertheless, his efficiency makes some of Zelazny's boys seem rank amateurs. And what's this? Robots bypassing Asimov's first law, massacring humans (screams offstage) and threatening the known universe? Throwing aside his cover and his profit it's Hosato to the rescue! He makes some mistakes of course, stupid mistakes, but never mind, we know that slow wits and swift reflexes are destined to save the galaxy. Besides, his trusty familiars are there to help. Sasha is an ex-security chief, almost as professional a killer as Hosato. It takes an amputated arm (courtesy of a robot's blaster) to drive her into his comforting embrace. James, clumsy and gauche, has potential: with expert training he just might make the grade. Stolid Rick, although not Scottish, is an engineering genius. Demanding and sighing, gasping and snarling (Hosato even achieves this in sign language), they prove, after many a short, cliff-hanger chapter, that mechanical logic cannot match cunning and adaptability. The moral? Technology reflects its users' characteristics and human beings are varied and unpredictable – textual evidence notwithstanding. As for living happily ever after, well, no, there is a stepping-stone ending. Might some sequel feature a "corporate world" of publishing, where automated factories write fiche-novels? An ambivalent speculation: such fiction could seem fascinating if measured against the tawdy solecisms of Takei and Asprin.

– Nick Pratt

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