FOUNDATION

23

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

IN THIS ISSUE

M. John Harrison surveys the terrain
George Zebrowski on life and Macrolife
Richard Erlich on Pohl and Kornbluth
John Dean explores Science Fiction Cities
Peter Kuczka on SF in Hungary

Letters from Ballard, Brosnan, Hay, Moorcock and Tidmarsh

Reviews by Bishop, Brigg, Clute, Collier, Dickinson, Greenland, Kaveney, Ketterer, Langford, Moorcock, Stableford, Turner and Watson
of books by J.G. Ballard, Damien Broderick, Orson Scott Card, Gordon Dickson, Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, George R.R. Martin, Frederik Pohl, Christopher Priest, Bob Shaw and others

FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

Editor: David Pringle
Features Editor: Ian Watson
Reviews Editor: John Clute

Contents
Number 23, October 1981

Editorial

We have five Feature articles in this issue, all of them by writers who are new to *Foundation*. Particular thanks are due to Christopher Fowler and Jeffrey M. Elliot for bringing us the M. John Harrison and George Zebrowski material. We also welcome a new reviewer, Peter Brigg (who is a Canadian academic, currently working on a study of J.G. Ballard for the Starmont Readers' Guide series), and we welcome first reviews by three others who have previously contributed to our Features pages: Michael Moorcock, George Turner and David Ketterer.

Foundation is published by North East London Polytechnic, although none of the editorial team works there. As reported in my editorial before last, the Polytechnic has been hit hard by Government-dictated financial cuts. This means that the work of the Science Fiction Foundation (other than the journal) has been severely curtailed. There is now no Administrator (a post held by Peter Nicholls from 1972 until January 1978, and by Malcolm Edwards until May 1980). Responsibility for the Foundation's library, which contains well over 10,000 items, has been transferred to the NELP Library (Mr Ron Duff, a long-standing member of the SFF's Council, is Librarian). For helping maintain a number of the SFF's activities we owe special thanks to Charles Barren, who has served as (unpaid) Acting Administrator on a one-day-a-week basis throughout this year, and to Joyce Day, the part-time secretary.

Dr George Brosan, Director of North East London Polytechnic since its inception and himself a long-time sf enthusiast, is due to retire at the end of the year. He attended the July AGM of the SF Foundation and assured us that he wishes to hand over a viable organization to his successor. There is still no chance than an Administrator will be appointed in the foreseeable future, but the library will be maintained and the journal will continue. Dr John Radford, one of the Polytechnic's Assistant Directors, has been re-elected Chairman of the SFF's Council for the coming year.

Certainly the journal is in no imminent danger of folding, but to ensure its longer-term survival it would be most beneficial if we could boost the circulation. So we appeal to our readers throughout the world to please do what they can to help. If readers would recommend *Foundation* to their friends and colleagues; persuade local sf dealers or college bookshops to stock the journal; and advise libraries, both public and academic, to subscribe, we could achieve the desired result. The less financial underwriting we demand of NELP (and in fact we have asked for comparatively little recently) the more likely we are to weather the storms of the early 1980s. Free sample copies of a slightly defective run of *Foundation* 19 are available to anyone on request; and until the end of the year any three back-issues of the journal may be bought for the price of two. We are planning no increase in subscription rates for next January, so the prices given on the inside front cover of this issue should hold good for some time.

The next issue will feature a "Profession of Science Fiction" piece by J.G. Ballard—plus many other good things.

What is *Interzone*?

It is the provisional title of an exciting new British sf magazine to be launched next Spring. It will be edited and produced by a collective which includes two of the editors of

this journal (you could say that we feel it is time to practise what we preach). *Interzone* has no formal connection with the SFF, although a former Administrator of the Foundation happens to be another member of the collective.

Interzone is an idealistic venture and will bring no financial profit to its editors (it is intended that contributors will be well paid, however). The magazine is being undertaken for the good of British sf, and for the good of sf in general. We believe it is the right time, at the beginning of a very "interesting" decade, for a serious new sf magazine from this side of the Atlantic. We intend to publish imaginative fiction of high quality by both established writers and newcomers.

Interzone will be a quarterly, and the first issue should be out in February 1982. It is being funded in part by advance subscriptions (all those who subscribe before 31st December this year will receive a first-edition booklet of a long story by a very well-known author). We are now soliciting charter subscribers: the minimum rate is £5 for a year's issues, and you are invited to send your cheques or postal orders to *Interzone* at 28 Duckett Road, London N4 1BN, UK. (Overseas subscribers please pay by money order—we regret that cheques drawn on overseas banks and Eurocheques cannot be accepted.) We hope that many readers of *Foundation* will want to participate in the beginning of this stimulating venture. The *real* 1980s start here!

David Pringle
September 1981

The fact that M. John Harrison is a thoroughly unique writer who has done his level best to avoid being pigeon-holed has, of course, meant that he is also a writer who has been comparatively neglected by the sf establishment, which intones the litany of contemporary Greats and Classics—though, since his most recent novel A Storm of Wings, *there are signs that he is becoming a hot "literary property." A ruthlessly self-critical artist himself, he will certainly know how to evade the seductive corruptions of apotheosis. In the following trenchant and forthright interview, conducted in almost symbiotic rapport with Christopher Fowler, M. John Harrison scales the lonely crag of his own career and surveys both it and the ragged terrain of sf surrounding.*

The Last Rebel: An Interview with M. John Harrison

CHRISTOPHER FOWLER

The structure of this interview is a curious one. It consists of two parts, the first dating from January 1977, the second from December 1980. I should like to say something about the reasons for this, and the unique advantages that this structure provides. Firstly, the reasons. I started out, in January 1977, with the intention of interviewing M. John Harrison, a writer whose work I had admired for some time, the result to be printed in *Vector,* the critical journal of the British SF Association. At the time I was editor of the journal, and was planning a special issue on M. John Harrison. Due to the pressures of other editorial work, however, the tapes of the interview (over two hours) remained untranscribed, and the special issue failed to appear before I resigned as editor of *Vector* in November 1977, after a stint of almost 2½ years. Unfortunately for any chances of the interview appearing in a subsequent issue of the journal, the parting of the ways between the BSFA and myself was not very amicable. I was left with a profound distaste for science fiction fans and for the magazines which they produced. I removed myself from contact with almost everyone in the sf field (though not, fortunately, with Mike Harrison) until July 1980. When David Pringle asked me if I would like to update the interview for possible inclusion in *Foundation,* I found that the wounds had healed sufficiently for me to agree willingly. I contacted Mike Harrison and in December 1980 we put another two hours of material on tape. It has taken a further six months to transcribe this material, and to reduce the 28,000 words of unedited transcript—with the help of Mike Harrison—to the piece you see before you.

The disadvantage of all this has been the delay in getting into print what I (immodestly) believe to be some fascinating and revealing material. The advantage is that it is now possible, by comparing the two parts and the views expressed by M. John Harrison, especially about his own fiction, to see the way his ideas have developed over a four-year period. I hope that this will provide, both for the reader and for anyone writing reviews or articles about M. John Harrison, additional insights into his development as a writer.

Perhaps I should say no more than that I see a greater assurance and a new optimism in his attitude to his fiction. For the rest: read on.

— Christopher Fowler, July 1981

Part I: 4 January 1977

CJF: I'd like to start by asking why you first started writing. You lived the first 18 years of your life in Rugby, and then went to teacher training college. You studied there for only about six months, didn't you? At what point did you sell your first short story?

MJH: When I was about 19 or 20, in 1965. It was sold to *Science Fantasy,* and didn't subsequently appear until early 1966.

CJF: So, when you went to college, were you still uncertain about the direction of your life, or had you already determined to take up writing?

MJH: I didn't really determine to be a writer. College wasn't a step in a direction of any sort. It was a refuge, that's all: somewhere to go other than a metal-worker's bench in the local factory. It was an easier option than that. I was slightly conned, because you always are, that I would have plenty of holidays for writing in. It's the great amateur con. So I quickly left, and moved down to London.

CJF: And were you supporting yourself from that time by writing?

MJH: Goodness, no! I'm hardly self-supporting now. It took years, absolutely years.

CJF: How much of your time were you able to devote then to writing?

MJH: A fair bit. Not enough. When you've got a job it's never enough. When you haven't and you go professional, then there's always too much time, I find, being lazy. I had a job then as a clerk for a while, working for a Masonic charity institute. I spent most of my time writing stories on the backs of envelopes and not doing any work. I finally left after an argument about a picture which someone asked me to take to the picture-cleaners. I felt that it demeaned me, so I left. But I didn't become self-supporting until I joined *New Worlds* in 1968.

CJF: In fact you almost simultaneously had your first story published in *New Worlds,* "Baa Baa Blocksheep", then became Books Editor with issue 185. Had you any contact with *New Worlds* before that time, or with Michael Moorcock or any of the other people involved with the magazine?

MJH: I'd met people briefly at parties, and I knew Graham Hall very well. Graham at the time was quite closely involved. In fact, he edited two issues, I think. Also, James Sallis was heavily involved. In fact, it was James Sallis who suggested I become Books Editor. He dragged me round to Mike Moorcock's house one night at about three o'clock and said: "This chap should be Books Editor." So Mike said something like: "Oh, all right"—and I was.

CJF: How rapidly were you drawn into the *New Worlds* milieu?

MJH: Into the social milieu, very slowly, and it was never complete. I didn't actually enjoy the parties and the editorial meetings and so on. I never have enjoyed close contact with a lot of people all at once. Also, I didn't agree with, and I still don't agree with, a lot of the stuff we published in *New Worlds;* or a lot of the ideas that were then current, which I later modified, I hope; or ideas which later disappeared.

CJF: What elements of the *New Worlds* ethos did you feel unhappy with at that time?

MJH: I just thought a lot of it was rather crude, and still do. We suffered from a lack of the kind of material we wanted, and so were forced to publish material constantly that I,

and I think most of the other editors, considered to be below par. To return to the point of being absorbed into *New Worlds,* however. As I said, socially I don't ever feel I was completely absorbed. But the *New Worlds* idea, or my version of it, overtook me immediately. I became immediately, completely and totally committed to it, as I commit myself to anything that I take up in that way. If I didn't believe we were publishing the best material possible, it was because I believed that we couldn't get that material. It simply wasn't being produced. I still believe it's not being produced. But I believed then and I still believe that science fiction needs to be radically changed from the inside by people who will not compromise. That is how I saw *New Worlds:* as a tool, or an instrument, or a weapon of non-compromise. It was a vehicle, a place where stuff that did not compromise could be published. That's why I committed myself to it totally, and am still committed, to a concept of non-compromise with mediocrity.

CJF: It has been suggested that you are the archetypal product of *New Worlds,* that you have absorbed most strongly in your fiction the whole idea of entropy which seems to percolate right through *New Worlds.* Did you feel at the time that the idea of entropy was one of the vital elements of reform?

MJH: No. Entropy's a subject matter. I'm not even sure entropy's a good word for it. It was a word we seized on, which did a lot of good duty 10 years ago. I think these days we talk more about a moral fiction. Entropy is simply the result of a rather depressed outlook on the part of the author, particularly the English author. So I don't see that as central to reforming science fiction. Entropy was just a subject matter that became obsessive to a lot of writers in the *New Worlds* vein. Many of them didn't have any real contact with one another, and the idea seemed to fire separately in a lot of people at once, and in totally different ways. Jim Sallis's version of entropy was quite different from Pam Zoline's, for instance. If you look at them there are superficial similarities, but the way things are handled in a Sallis story are totally different from in one of mine, or one of Mike's, or one of Pam's. Also, a lot of the entropy idea came out of the character of the editor of *New Worlds.* We mustn't avoid the fact that Mike Moorcock has a character which is virtually manic-depressive: he's elated at one moment and very down the next. He shows this in his Cornelius stories. When you're down, you can perceive entropy pretty well! Too much concern has been given to a concept which was really a subject matter of Michael Moorcock's. We all dipped into it, because you do that when you get a good metaphor, and entropy is a damned good metaphor; there's no doubt about that. For the type of thing we do it is a good metaphor, so you dip in and help yourself from the bran-tub.

CJF: Do you think that the metaphor of entropy was also a reflection of the time you were living in, of the late sixties? Or was it to any extent a reflection of a despair with the genre as it was then?

MJH: I see what you're getting at; but for me, the answer is no on both points. I'm a depressed character. I see entropy all about me: moral, physical and emotional. Ever since I began writing I've been a depressive writer, a writer who appreciated entropy. You can't relate that to the apparent stasis and decay in the science fiction field, although certainly I was seeing it at the time. My attitude to sf then, and it still is, was one of pure horror. I'd had very little to do with it until I got on to *New Worlds,* and until the review books began to go through my hands as literary editor. I would get possibly 70 or 80 books a month, which I read before they were sent out to the reviewers. I prided myself on always having read the book that the reviewer reviewed, because I don't believe a literary editor's doing

his job unless he knows exactly what his reviewer's talking about. Otherwise he can't assess the material he gets back in. I was horrified. I was appalled, because it was so bad. It was a very quick transfer from being astonished to being appalled and finally to despair. It took about three months flat. Previous to that I'd read a few Ballards, a few Bradburys. I thought that was science fiction. It was good—it wasn't good *enough,* but it was quite good. It was as good as some of the real books I'd read. I needed an imaginative way of expressing myself, and this seemed to be it. To come across an Ace book, and to realise that the majority of the books published in science fiction were the Ace book type, and that Ballard and Bradbury were the froth on an enormously deep sea of rubbish (that's a nicely mixed metaphor!), caused me to despair very quickly. Also, I have to be honest, a lot of the people I met in sf—my opinion of them was extremely low. I could see quite well how they would enjoy reading Ace books. It appeared to me that they and Ace books were made for one another. This makes you very cynical as a young man, when you're full of ideals. You can switch very quickly from idealism to cynicism. In the climate of the sixties, the climate of *New Worlds,* it was very easy for me to slip into a deliberate and active cynicism, rather than a passive cynicism. That is how my style of *New Worlds* criticism developed: as a polemical, anarchistic, iconoclastic, deliberate refusal to accept almost anything that was put in front of it. And as a deliberate, tooled and scientific attempt to infuriate, insult and show contempt for most of the people who write science fiction, most of the people who publish it and most of the people who read it. It was at this point, in fact, that I began to diverge from most of the other *New Worlds* editors and writers, who still, even to this day, have a balanced attitude. Mike Moorcock has a balanced attitude. John Clute is a very balanced critic. My attitude to sf is not balanced in the way theirs is. I would even now refuse to admit that anything good comes out of the science fiction field, because I believe that it is good for the sf field to be told that and told it regularly. That way we might actually stimulate some sort of growth, self-examination and sense of responsibility.

CJF: To what extent was the fiction you were writing then a product of the limited amount of science fiction that you'd read, and to what extent was it a product of the real writers that you'd read before? Do you see any writers as having particularly influenced your fiction at that time?

MJH: Yes—numberless. At that point, I'd begun the schizoid process that any sf writer who starts simply as a writer has to go through, to be able to produce work that will on the one hand satisfy him and on the other satisfy what he conceives to be the science fiction reading public. So I'd already begun to write two types of work: the sort of story I'd submit to Ted Carnell would be quite different from the sort of story I'd submit to Michael Moorcock. At the time I was a beginning *New Worlds* writer, one of the new boys, the kind of thing I wrote was highly influenced by authors like Beckett, Pynchon, Flann O'Brien. I'd begun to move out my Ballard influence phase, but there's still some heavy influence by Ballard, obviously. I'd never deny that, just as I'd never deny that my first stories were so influenced by Ray Bradbury that you can't really tell the difference. The other side wasn't really influenced by anything. It was the only cynical fiction I wrote, the fiction I wrote for Ted Carnell. It was the only deliberate hack work I ever wrote.

CJF: Things like "Green Five Renegade" . . .

MJH: . . . And "The Macbeth Expiation". Because I'd realized even then that if you sent a story that you considered to be good to Ted Carnell he would turn it down, because

he wasn't very good at telling what good literature was. He *was* very good at telling what would sell to the public. So that was it: my output became stratified or schizoid, and it's remained so to this day. Most of the novels have been written to earn money, and most of the short stories are written, these days, simply for myself.

CJF: You've mentioned the influence of J.G. Ballard. That certainly seems to be very strong in *The Committed Men,* your first novel. In fact, the opening page has this incredible, almost Ballardian, beginning, about motorways striding across the landscape . . .

MJH: Not a very good pastiche, either! I was very pleased with it at the time, though, which you are at the age of 22.

CJF: So, you would say that all three of your novels to date have been written within a certain format which would be saleable?

MJH: Yes—with reservations. Firstly, that *The Committed Men* was a lot truer unto itself. It was to a certain extent something which I wanted to say. You can tell that it's a more honest book than the next two. It's less generic. It's not as well written, because it was a first novel. In fact, it's very poorly written, and very poorly conceived and structured. The structure is awful. But it was more honest than the next two, particularly the second, *The Pastel City,* which was a fairly dishonest sort of a book, since I don't even really approve of sword and sorcery.

CJF: To a certain extent, in your first three novels you explore three of the classic areas of science fiction . . .

MJH: That was deliberate, too.

CJF: . . . In *The Committed Men,* you're doing the British post-disaster novel, which you've said to me before is done at least once by every British writer of science fiction.

MJH: It's got to be. A lot of British writers do it. It's in our nature to see entropy. All English writers have to do a post-disaster. Even L.P. Hartley had done one. It's part of the national character.

CJF: Having done that, you went on to write, in *The Pastel City,* what has been described as a new wave sword and sorcery.

MJH: Once you see the second volume, *A Storm of Wings,* then you will *really* see a new wave sword and sorcery. Still, I see what you are talking about. The divorced wife in Chapter Two is hardly sword and sorcery material, for instance. I hope it was new wave. I see no reason why the tenets of the so-called new wave—or even the so-called "Kitchen Sink"—shouldn't be applied to melodramatic fiction. But the fact is that the tongue was securely anchored in the cheek: the intention of *The Pastel City* was to make money—which, incidentally, it did, compared to most of the rest of my work. This confirms me in my opinion of the people who read that sort of thing, the people who publish it and the people who write it. The only thing I can say in my own defence—in defence of my own attacks upon myself, not those that may be made by others—is that as a young man I had a strong feeling for the Tolkien-based, Moorcock-based type of fantasy. I enjoyed reading it and it was probably necessary for me to get it out of my system. *The Pastel City* was a means of doing that.

CJF: Was that the primary reason why you turned to writing a sword and sorcery rather than any other sub-section of the genre?

MJH: The primary reason was that sword and sorcery novels were at that time earning a lot more money than the other kinds of novels. The secondary reason was that I thought I could do it, because I liked Tolkien, or had liked him as a child. I fancied that I had a flair

for the type of prose that you have to use, which in fact *The Pastel City* fails to show; though I still quite fancy I have flair for it. That was the main reason: for the money. And that's the reason I'm writing a sequel: because it's still selling better.

CJF: Although you said your tongue was in your cheek, and you were writing primarily for commercial reasons, there are still some very fine passages in *The Pastel City*.

MJH: I don't know about that; but you can't write anything without getting involved in it. As Keith Roberts said somewhere: there's no such thing as the finger independently striking the typewriter keys; there's no such thing as pure hack work. You've got to be involved to do it. So, obviously there are bits of *The Pastel City* which I enjoyed writing, which made me laugh or made me feel I'd turned a phrase. You can't divorce yourself from the work and be a pure hack, or at least, I don't believe it's possible. I couldn't do it. But that's as close to hack work as I could ever get. I don't believe in it. I didn't believe in it when I started it. A lot of it is very thin because of that.

CJF: You say you don't like the American, Conan-the-Barbarian type of fantasy, yet *The Pastel City* is similar to that in that it has a hero who makes things happen, rather than a protagonist to whom things happen.

MJH: I don't think that's true. If you study *The Pastel City* you'll find that it is the exact opposite, he's a very passive sort of chap. He doesn't actually make things happen. He only makes a couple of decisions in the whole book: both of them result in something going wrong. In the end he just cops out completely. If he was in any way a dynamic character to start with, a character who forced the action, he ceases to be the moment he sees his best friend dead on the floor as a result of a "decision". I saw at that point that Cromis was a human being and that the only way I could finish the novel—I was writing it very quickly, because I had words with NEL about the deadline—was to have him cop out. A good thing, too. The fewer Conans there are around who have the strength to lead us, the better off we shall be.

CJF: Did writing *The Pastel City* completely exorcise the need in you to write something of that kind?

MJH: I've already said that.

CJF: What's your attitude to the mass of sword and sorcery novels which are being produced today?

MJH: They're rubbish.

CJF: Does that include all the Moorcock sword and sorceries?

MJH: It covers a lot of them. They're written too quickly. Though I think Elric has something. But Mike wrote too many of them, as has every single writer of that genre. Because they have to be produced very quickly, because they have to be all the same. There's a voracious appetite for that sort of escapism. Anybody who gets on the treadmill of having to produce novels like that, especially an author with familial responsibilities and the need for a heavy cashflow, can easily get trapped into doing that. He's got to produce exactly what the publisher and the public want. They're bound to get very thin, even if the original idea was good. Sword and sorcery could perhaps be made to work by conscientious writers with some time on their hands.

CJF: Do you think you're getting anywhere towards that with the sequel to *The Pastel City?*

MJH: I think I'm getting towards something. I don't quite know what it is. It's going to be a very curious book. You see, I've always been fascinated by cosmology and meta-

physics, and by "metaphysical" or "imagist" verse. I think that there are whole sections of Eliot from which you could people a sword and sorcery novel. I don't quite know what the effect and atmosphere would be, but it would be pretty odd. I'm trying to move somewhere towards that with *A Storm of Wings.*

CJF: To leave the subject of *The Pastel City* and sword and sorcery, can we move on to the third novel, *The Centauri Device.* It was four years between *The Pastel City* and this next novel. Having, in some people's eyes, done the new wave post-disaster novel, and the new wavish sword and sorcery novel, you then went on to assault the new wave space opera . . .

MJH: New wav*ish.*

CJF: Why at that point did you turn to space opera? Was the decision related in any way to the lengthy lapse between publication of *The Pastel City* and *The Centauri Device*?

MJH: No. The lapse was something else. It was a result of pure depression on my part. I've always found it hard to write, and the fact that *The Pastel City* was received so well and *The Committed Men* so much less well depressed me. The fact that a complex, unromantic story is still impossible to sell, and a simple, sentimental one will sell immediately, still appalls me. I was so gloomy that it took me a long time to write *The Centauri Device,* that's all. I sat and looked at a wall for a couple of years. Partly that was because I was depressed personally, and partly because by then I'd begun to realize that there wasn't any point in writing science fiction if you wanted to say anything, or if you wanted to be a good writer. It took me a long time to get over that. But there was no link between that and the subject matter of *The Centauri Device.* The decision to do a space opera came from my admiration of Bester's *Tiger! Tiger!* I'd always wanted to do a space opera. New wave, of course—what else?

CJF: David Pringle evinces Alfred Bester and Charles Harness as being primary elements of comparison.

MJH: Not so much Harness, because he's an awful writer. His prose is awful. There were also several other influences, among which I'd number William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon and R.L. Stevenson.

CJF: When you wrote *The Centauri Device,* were you writing it with as commercial and cynical an intent as when you wrote *The Pastel City?* Were you writing something which would sell, or were you to a greater extent trying to explore certain themes which you felt to be important?

MJH: A bit of both, which is what makes it less successful as a space opera. The idea, of course, was to try to write, once again, a piece of so-called dynamic fiction, in which the central character is the wish-fulfilment figure who drives the action along. He came out as passive as a stone. He was almost inert in fact. I decided on the "hippy" aspect of the book simply because I was involved with a band called Hawkwind at the time. Indeed, they make a guest appearance as the crew of one of the starships. And the operation of the starships, the views we get of the interiors of the starships when they're operating, are all based on Hawkwind light shows and sound shows. I was on the periphery of the Portobello Road drug subculture. That's how I decided the basic background. John Truck is one of the dispossessed. He's one of the people who strictly speaking will never make a mark, will always be kicked around or managed by the state, the Right, the Left, the Church, the pushers. That is, most of us, really. We have no decision-making power, which is why we read science fiction in which there are dynamic master characters.

CJF: One can certainly see there are titanic forces acting on John Truck, with the conflict between the Arab and Israeli elements, the two warring power factions. But there's a very interesting third force present in the form of the Interstellar Anarchists, and I find them quite fascinating.

MJH: Oh yes. I did.

CJF: It's quite apparent from facts such as Swinburne Sinclair-Pater dying with the final words of Aubrey Beardsley on his breath, and the names of the starships, and so on, that you were strongly influenced by the fin-de-siècle decadents. Was that a temporary interest on your part, or is it a continuing interest?

MJH: It's a continuing interest in the lives of painters and writers in that period between 1875 and 1920, when modern art and literature were being invented. I'm more interested in these people's lives than their work. I like the essentially romantic-sordid-tragic character of doomed poets and painters. I like to get the dirt on them.

CJF: There's a tremendous number of historical and literary references in the names of the starships, and, I believe also in the suite of rooms which the leader of the Anarchists occupies . . .

MJH: It's a private joke all the way through. There are an enormous number of references.

CJF: The starship names include things like *Les Fleurs du Mal,* which is the collection of poems by Baudelaire. Are all the names from titles of books or references to poems or that kind of thing?

MJH: *The New English Art Club, The Green Carnation, Driftwood of Decadence*—they're all direct references. The little French song that Pater's whore, or his model as we call her, sings—the French is wrong. The important thing is Pater's suite of rooms. The bowl of dried roses belong to the suite of rooms of Walter Pater, the critic. The apartment is mostly Pater's apartment. "On the walls were hung two pictures; one was the head of some wine god, unfathomable, sensually cruel"—that was the head of Bacchus, drawn by one of Pater's young men who became involved with Swinburne, a painter called Simeon Solomon. "The other, a rough sketch of a morose and stooping young man, thin, heavy-jawed, deep close-set eyes, dressed in the garments of a defunct high church order"—that is, in fact, a picture of Walter Pater by Simeon Solomon. He's dressed in high church robes because Pater was very religious early in his life—although he experienced an intense revulsion against religion later on. He once said: "Wouldn't it be marvellous to be ordained into the Church of England without believing a word of it."

CJF: The starship names . . .

MJH: Mostly I simply use those without any particular reference.

CJF: *The Atalanta in Calydon* . . .

MJH: That's a poem by Swinburne which Himation the Anarchist quotes from.

CJF: That's a reference to the wars that follow, isn't it? So—when you were bringing in this third force of Interstellar Anarchists, who are immensely attractive, you use all these elements from the fin-de-siècle decadents. What particularly about them attracts you so strongly?

MJH: Art for art's sake. They were a little bit naive because they were inventing it all. Nothing like that had ever happened before. The funny thing is that when people criticized them then, they used terms such as: "Which way up does it go?"—a common comment on modern painting in the *Daily Mirror,* which shows that cheap journalism is

150 years out of date—as if we needed to know. They were inventing art for art's sake. I believe in art for art's sake, especially when confronted with politics. Ideology's such a drag, it's so meaningless and it's so impractical. We're exorted these days to belong to one side or another, and to see everything in terms of the conflict between those two sides. You can't eat your breakfast these days without it being a political, ideological action. This is a con, a way of controlling large populations by frightening them. It's quite possible to see the world without being a capitalist or a communist. It's quite possible to open your eyes and look at things as a human being rather than as a political animal. It offends me to be told or to be persuaded to view life in a particular way. It offends me deeply. The fact is that the politicians of right or left have a vested interest in their own quarrel, because without it they couldn't keep us under their thumbs. Without it they wouldn't be able to make us take second best all the time, and live in a sort of grey drabness while they strut about wearing medals.

CJF: I think that point is well made in the novel. It's certainly quite apparent from *The Centauri Device* that you feel a revulsion with politics; and in the Interstellar Anarchist sections, the wanting to opt out is apparent. But in the writing of *The Centauri Device,* did you find any conflict between the wanting to opt out and the compassion that comes through for all the others, who aren't the UASR, the IWG, the losers, or the Centaurans, who may, just possibly, crawl out of their cracks after *The Centauri Device?*

MJH: What rather devalues the book is that there is a conflict between the central idea, which is of passive resistance, and the fact that, in the end, the only way that John Truck can resist is to resist actively and blow something up. It's a contradiction in terms, that he should ever, as a loser, be put in that position. Because losers don't—they die of hypothermia in bus shelters. They will never have the power. They will never have a spokesman, because by very definition a spokesman would have energy and he wouldn't be a loser. He would be a politician. That's the contradiction that really shakes *The Centauri Device* apart. Truck ends up as a politico. The moment he presses the button he's done something political: he ceases to be a loser. He becomes one of the winners. This is the whole point about belief in systems: you have to kill and maim and repress and indoctrinate to make them work. It's the trap of ideological solutions.

CJF: We don't actually see much of the Centaurans in the novel, do we, except in the character of Truck; and one gets glimpses of people. There's a very fine passage about drug addicts on page 114. I thought that was one of the best glimpses of the Centaurans, of the losers.

MJH: Yes—basically, the drug addict is the symbol of loserdom. He's the goods, the drug addict. We're all drug addicts of one kind or another. The drug addict is simply the most radical expression of what we all are—which is losers.

CJF: Which is why Truck says at the end: "When we hurt, you sell us something to ease the pain."

MJH: Yes. Ideology as opiate, as mass-manipulation technique, is what the novel really attacks. We're all drug addicts of one kind or another. We're all taking something to ease the pain. Ideologies are excuses invented by men who wish to be in positions of power; or worse, by people who actually believe in ideologies. I'd rather have corrupt politicians. At least you can understand their motives.

CJF: In *The Centauri Device,* one critic has suggested that there is a fundamental element of your work, which is the conflict between despair and the quest for purpose.

MJH: I quite agree with that.

CJF: You've said that there is a primary failure in the novel, in that Truck ultimately acts, and does something he would never do. To what extent might there be a deeper failure: the failure to really show the suffering and to demonstrate the compassion which you want to show?

MJH: Yes, there is. It's a space opera; it's not a proper novel. Like any form of fiction whose basis is to entertain and to earn money, it can't deal properly with the question of suffering. I could only get round that deeper failure by writing a proper novel. But if I wrote a proper novel nobody would buy it, because nobody wants to read about despair and misery. Even if I were to write it with a hopeful note, I'm afraid nobody in science fiction would want to read it, because they're a little unsubtle and they can't detect a hopeful note! Science fiction readers react very quickly to misery; it hurts them and they turn away, because they don't like to be made to feel miserable. So it is a failure on that level. That's a failure of 100% of sf.

CJF: I think you undervalue *The Centauri Device*. There are characters, like Truck's wife, who are real human characters with real emotions and real human suffering. There are moments, like the section about drug addicts, where the real compassion does come through, despite this vehicle which you feel is getting in the way.

MJH: Truck's wife is the only successful character in the book in that she acts exactly to type, and is acted upon exactly to type. There are billions of her in the world. We're all her, we're all Ruth Berenici. We all carry the scar on our face for everybody to see. The drug sequence is the way it is because there was an awful lot of anger impelling it. But let's get this clear: nothing I've said has anything to do with drug addicts. That isn't supposed to be a picture of drug addicts. I didn't want to say anything about addicts, or people who take drugs. All I'm interested in is the pusher-addict relationship. There's no comment in that book which has any relevance to the drug sub-culture. I was interested in the pusher-addict relationship; the metaphysics of it, not the proper mechanics of it.

CJF: Can we talk about the style of *The Centauri Device?*

MJH: Yes—we can get a lot of good influences in here.

CJF: The style has been praised highly by many critics. David Pringle has said that your two great strengths are your ability to depict violent action in convincing detail and your moody descriptions of landscapes of entropy. He also says you have "an ability to turn chaos into beauty". Do you think the style of the novel is a strength of it?

MJH: Yes. For a start, it moves along quite a bit faster than my normal stuff. The descriptions are *by* M. John Harrison, courtesy of M. John Harrison. The general stylistic ambience is courtesy of Thomas Pynchon and a couple of other American beat writers; Bob Dylan, too. The Interstellar Anarchist section was definitely courtesy of the fin-de-siècle, and there are contributions by T.S. Eliot, Lawrence Durrell and various other superstars in passing. All my stuff has a strong stylistic drive, because I'm interested in writing. I'm interested particularly in prose cadencing. I don't write so much to a grammar or a syntax as to a cadence. This stylistic interest separates me from the other *New Worlds* writers. It's been said many times by people on *New Worlds,* including myself, that style is not important; what is important is subject matter. What is important is drive and energy and originality of ideas. The new wave was *not* a stylistic revolution. But I love prose for its own sake. That is what makes me different from, say, Barry Bayley. Mike Moorcock has latterly become somewhat more interested in style, but the

new wave was not a stylistic revolution, except for me. Style has always been the most important thing for me: it has to be right.

CJF: Would you see Barry Bayley as essentially a metaphysician?

MJH: He's an ideas man. He's brilliant.

CJF: And do you think the other *New Worlds* writers are essentially ideas-oriented?

MJH: Most of them tend to have substance. Moorcock and Disch are moral writers. Ballard is a kind of crazy Van Vogt, all ideas. I would certainly like to say that I incline in Barry Bayley's direction, although I find him a bit cold and uninterested in people. He's the only person in Britain, or anywhere—other than Robert Silverberg—who truly understands what problems we would have in even *seeing* an alien being, let alone conversing with it. Barry understands alienness because he understands topology. Barry has metaphysics where the rest of us have morals. He's one of the most under-rated science fiction writers in Britain.

CJF: Having looked at *The Centauri Device,* and how that relates to your interest in writing about human suffering, and compassion, I'd like to come on to "Running Down". This seems to be generally regarded as the best thing you've yet done. Now, this story can easily be analysed as being about entropy again . . .

MJH: Which it isn't.

CJF: What were you writing about in "Running Down"?

MJH: Although entropy is its central metaphor, the story isn't "about" entropy. I don't think any new wave fiction ever was, or if it was, it was nothing to do with me. Certainly, the metaphor of running down is central. This is the point of a "gothic" story—the central image infects every single part of the action. Everything is perceived through one narrow window of imagery. But what the story is "about" is compassion. It's about our inability to feel compassion and the inability of those who demand compassion to understand that they need it. Lyall, the protagonist, is a composite of two or three people I actually know and for whom I find it difficult to feel compassion, because their very misery makes them unlikable: their failures and weaknesses suck down and damage everyone around them. You almost always fail to help such people, however hard you try. It's hard not to be repelled by them. It's hard to regard the overt evidence of misery, especially when it's misery connected to egocentricity, with anything other than disgust. "Running Down" doesn't provide any solution to this problem. I don't believe we should look for one. The world is the world: it constantly confronts us with our own and other people's misery and selfishness. That's what the story is "about", not entropy. Entropy is the science fictional metaphor which reflects and elucidates the subject-matter. We imagine that a man becomes so self-involved that he explodes a mountain by his sheer psychic emanation of misery. "Running Down" is a story in which sf has been used to amplify, enhance, echo. This is the only excuse there can be for science fiction. The story isn't about entropy, it's about people.

CJF: Right—we've scotched that one; despite the fact that it's what everybody's been saying.

MJH: That's because they're a bit short-sighted and because they're used to science fiction, you see.

CJF: There is, then, this definite progression in your work towards a literature of compassion. Where does the most recent short story, "Settling the World", come in that progression? Or is it an off-shoot, a return to this question of purpose?

MJH: It is a return to that exact thing. One of my characters says somewhere: "Things are, things happen". And he might as well go on to say: "And that is all you know and all you need to know". That's it: things are, things happen. We do not need a sense of purpose. We're conned by various ideologies into believing that we need to believe in something. "Settling the World" isn't an important story. I just liked the image of the big stag beetle.

CJF: There are a number of other stories in the collection *The Machine in Shaft Ten* which seem superficially to be fitting together, bringing in characters from *The Centauri Device,* or tegeus-Cromis from *The Pastel City,* set in some timeless period. Is there any conscious attempt through these pieces to link up all the things you've written thus far, in the same way that Michael Moorcock attempts to link up all the heroic fantasies into the one theme of the Eternal Champion? Or is it merely a coincidence of names?

MJH: It wasn't merely a coincidence of names. Sometimes I can't be bothered to invent a new name or even a new character when I write a short piece. And there are times when I become so obsessed by a particular name that I want to use it again. All those names would have been changed, if I could have been bothered, before the manuscript of *The Machine in Shaft Ten* went to the publishers, but it was done in a hurry and I couldn't be bothered. I thought to myself, though it's a little unfair: let the reader try to figure it out for himself. The more confused he becomes, the happier I will be. Since then I have seen that this may well have been an unconscious attempt on the part of somewhere in the back of my brain to prompt me into doing just what you suggested—which is to fit it all together. So, to complicate the issue further, the new novel will have hints that some world structure can be made out of this. But I shall leave it very much as a jigsaw puzzle, because *I don't want to do a Moorcock.* Especially the way he's done it. I love Ballard's way of having the character with the same name, but with one or two letters changed.

CJF: Traven, Travis . . .

MJH: Yes, that's beautiful, because it implies continuity without actually suggesting anything so crude as a temporal continuity. I've never been able to separate my sketchbooks from my actual paintings. They get all mixed up. I like it. I like an author who writes his stuff like that. I adored Cordwainer Smith because he was so confused and weird; his stuff had this constant feeling of being unfinished. Then I found out that he wasn't doing it deliberately, and I was disappointed, because I felt that here was an author who understood the beauty of incompleteness. A lot of my stories seem to start halfway through and finish halfway through. "Coming from Behind" starts after the major action and the major action continues after it, as if it's a chapter from a book. Many people have come to me and said: "Is it an excerpt from a book?" You did. Barry Bayley did. I wrote it that way because I love incompleteness. I love metaphysical fiction, schizoid fiction; fiction which hints at things. Avram Davidson is very good at that. Budrys is occasionally good at it. Borges is an absolute ace at it. I think one of the only satisfying things about science fiction, or of fantasy, as a form, is that you can get this peculiar sense of incompleteness. You can *suggest* a fantasy world; you can brush it in like a Japanese artist, with two strokes, then leave the reader to puzzle over the rest and to fill in the gaps. So I don't care if it has confused a lot of people—that's good. I think one should be a little confused by the fiction one reads. You should have to *do* something; you should have to work for it. Anyway, watch this space, because further ramifications will occur.

CJF: Ramifications which you obviously find artistically and creatively satisfying.
MJH: Yes, I enjoy it.
CJF: Even if they're not as *morally* satisfying as the literature of compassion?
MJH: No. This is the lighter stuff.
CJF: Can we move on to "The Incalling"? It seems to me to be much more in line with the progression from *The Centauri Device* through "Running Down", and is another step towards compassion. The main character, Clerk, is a character who is in enormous suffering and torment. He is introverted in his suffering, in the same way as Lyall in "Running Down". The whole story is framed in a much less generic way than any of the previous stories. It has elements of the ghost story, the gothic, the horror story, about it. And there's this unresolved question of whether something supernatural is going on or not. But you seem to be gradually abandoning the genre trappings. Is that something which is going to continue in your short fiction?
MJH: Yes. And by the time I'm an old man, in the novels as well. But I don't write novels very well, so there's no point in me setting out to write a mainstream novel now. It would be a failure. I only seem to be able to concentrate for two months before I fall apart, and that's just how long it takes me to write a dense 10,000 word short story. So, in the short stories I shall try to get out of genre fiction altogether, perhaps through the gothic, to the mainstream. On the way I may find a compromise that suits me, as I almost did in "Running Down". I may not want to leave science fiction when it comes down to it. You never know until you've tried. I suspect that in the end I shall find a rather rarefied compromise, in which there's just a hint of sci-fi, to keep it ticking over. Or, as in the case of "Running Down", sf used as a metaphor, not as the be-all and end-all. I don't want any more to write science fiction as the be-all and end-all of a story. What I would dearly love to do now would be to write a short novel at the level of compromise of "Running Down" or "The Incalling", which have just enough of the gothic or science fiction or fantasy in them to sustain them as interesting pieces of fiction, but which dealt with totally other concerns. I still believe in one of the basic *New Worlds* tenets, which is that today's mainstream fiction is immobile, nerveless, as well as being sloppy. It lacks dynamism, and generic fiction could provide that dynamism, either if the mainstream began to take some of its subject matter from the generic system; or if generic fiction got good enough to compete with mainstream fiction. Both would gain. It seems that our age has simply forgotten how to write whole books. We split them all into little genres, so anyone who wants to read action and adventure goes to the thriller, and the people who want to be a bit disturbed go to the gothic, and the chaps who want to read about the problems of middle class lady novelists go to the mainstream. In a Dickens novel, you got the lot. Social comment, solid action, a bit of a chill up the spine, morality, philosophy, compassion, a good story, a fair bit of decent writing—although not all that much from Dickens, of course. Why don't we write whole books any more? I should like to write a whole book, but I know I never will. That really would be way beyond me, and, I think, beyond most authors writing today.
CJF: So you're not despairing of your ability to write the kind of fiction you really want to write and still maintain those elements of the genre which provide the vitality you feel is needed?
MJH: Well, which provide what *I* need. Sometimes I despair of it—but then, a lot of the time I despair of being able to write particularly well anyway. I think "Running Down"

proves it can be done. I was very pleased to write that story because I thought to myself: My Gawd! I was right all the time—it can be done! The thing moves along, it's readable by quite a broad section of the audience, but it says things too. I don't despair that it can be done. It's just that I can do it once a year if I'm lucky, and I'd like to be able to do it all the time. I can't because it wouldn't pay enough. I made £50 on "Running Down". I'd like to have it on record that the first publication of "Running Down", which is my best story, and into which I put a great amount of work and a great deal of my life and a great deal of whatever talent I do have, earned me £50. And *that's* why I have to write rubbish. That's why most science fiction writers have to write rubbish. It's a pity that most of them don't realize—and admit—they're doing it. I know that *The Pastel City* is not the sort of thing I should be wasting my time over. But I can't afford to do it any other way. Nobody can. If I had a private income, I probably wouldn't even bother to publish anything. I'd just write it for my own satisfaction. I don't believe in "market forces" as a necessary discipline to shape the artist. Mike Moorcock and many other *New Worlds* authors believe that the market is necessary to stimulate the author to work at all, which is possibly true. They point to Balzac and Dickens. But both of them have fits of unbearable sloppiness, and if they'd written precisely 10% of what they churned out in search of money, they would have been better writers. The sf genre invites a young author into the trap of earning large amounts of money by overproducing: their stuff gets more and more threadbare, and they end up like John Brunner. I just don't believe in market forces as the mysterious thing which turns fiction vital and make it readable and zonky and so forth. That's an excuse invented by people who have no alternative and no honesty. And often, no talent. I'm not going to start writing a lot of bad books so that I can live well and maybe write a couple of good pieces when I have the time. What I do now is madly attempt one thing, become very miserable and zoom off to do the other: I write bad stuff to make money, and I become extremely depressed doing it, so I whip off and write something good, and get behind on the crap, and that makes me even more depressed. It's not a good solution, because it means I have to run up mountains a lot to retain any sanity at all. I can't afford to become an "amateur", which I would dearly prefer to do. That's what I'd do if I had a private income. If anybody out there has got one they want to give away, M. John'll take it.

CJF: Do you see anybody else in the science fiction field at the moment who is writing the kind of literature you feel ought to be written, or is at least getting close to it? Or would you despair of the whole lot at the moment?

MJH: My temptation would be to give the correct answer to this, as far as my own polemic is concerned and say: No, 100% of it is rubbish. But that wouldn't be quite truthful. Thomas M. Disch has done it: "The Asian Shore" is the best science fiction short story ever written, or best fantasy, whatever genre it is. It's a beautiful short story. It works. It does exactly what "Running Down" was supposed to do, but it does it so much better. The metaphor pervades the entire story. The image has as many arms as an octopus, and they're into everything: the dialogue, the characterization, everything. Some of Tom's other stuff, too: *334* is very close to transcending the genre. Keith Roberts does it in some of his short stories, particularly "Weinachtsabend", "The Grain Kings" and "Missa Privata", and one or two others that have been in *New Worlds*, which are astonishingly good. I find it hard to define what it is that I think fiction should be doing, except by pointing at certain examples. Mike Moorcock does it in his shorter "Dancers at

the End of Time" stories. They are close to it in a different way from "Running Down" or "The Asian Shore", in that they are much lighter. But they have an honest sort of amused compassion about them, and they're very well written. They're entertaining and funny and subtle and amusing. His compulsion to write them came out of something which had nothing to do with generic fiction. I think you'll find this was the case with *334* as well, and "The Asian Shore". Certainly it was the case with "Running Down". There was nothing further from my mind than generic science fiction when I wrote that. I think you'll find that it's probably true of most of Keith's work as well. Very few American writers, I believe, get anywhere near the kind of fiction I would like to see. Silverberg has it in the occasional short story, but his novels aren't too tight. They don't go so precisely to the heart of things as they should. They ramble, but the Americans are prone to that.

CJF: You don't rate Ursula Le Guin's fiction as having compassion?

MJH: It's too tainted with ideology to tell if it has real compassion, too generalized. This business of dealing with great generalized sweeps kills compassion. Genuine compassion only exists on a one-to-one basis, between author and character, or between one character and another. The moment you begin to start organizing the way the universe should run, or trying to describe how it runs, or what is wrong with us, with our society; the moment you've started talking in any sort of plural, in any sort of generality: then compassion goes out of the window. It's got to, or you couldn't do it. The moment you say: "Millions of people are starving in India. If only Arthur C. Clarke could invent something to stop them from starving"—you cease to have any compassion for those million starving people because you've called them "the million starving people". You try to think of a device, ideological or technological, which can cure the hunger and the misery of a million people. You've begun to think in mechanical terms, mechanistic terms. You've ceased to think of them as people, if you ever did in the first place. You can't have compassion on a grand scale; it's impossible.

CJF: Not even in the case of Dickens, whose literature had compassion on the individual level, and yet dealt with mass problems?

MJH: Oh yes, in *individual* cases every time. He didn't discuss the problem in general. He showed you examples of it. He didn't discuss the problems of blacking factories, he showed you an individual in a blacking factory. Whereas Heinlein or Arthur C. Clarke or Asimov would say, in a great sweep: "This problem of blacking factories, three million individuals slaving away in blacking factories . . ." "This problem of blacking factories" —it's so easy! Compassion goes out of the window when you start having great sweeps of ideation about things—"Let's solve the world's problems!" Science fiction is very prone to that. Heinlein and Anderson and Larry Niven have characters who say: "I am not interested in the microcosmic view. It is the great macrocosmic sweep that interests me. Go out and shoot 50 billion people." Because they are fascists. However, we all know that, and perhaps it is a hobby horse that we've been riding too often. Science fiction is very prone to generalistic solutions because of its beginnings with Wellsian utopian socialism. I think Ursula Le Guin and Joanna Russ do it particularly. There's a lot of ideological stuff going on there which is the death of humanity of any sort. You may hold your ideological views for the most humane of reasons, but the very fact that you hold them in an ideological framework dehumanizes them. This is important: it's the framework through which you view the world that matters.

CJF: Do you see anybody in the mainstream who is achieving the standards you are

looking for?

MJH: There's only one good novelist writing at the moment in Britain, and that's Angus Wilson. He achieves that and more—he almost writes complete novels. I don't read a lot of modern authors. The same applies to new sf writers. The only ones I've read recently have struck me as being worse than the generation before. That would include Michael G. Coney and Brian Stableford. Coney—there's quite a fuss being made about him, at least by his publishers. He's terrible. The American science fiction magazines and anthologies are filled with names I've never heard of. Most of that is sawdust. The only writer I can think of who is all right is Gene Wolfe, even if he is a bit anthropological. He seems to be a reasonable writer, which is all you can ask for in an American. Most of them are so bad that even a decent piece of prose is welcome.

CJF: Have you gone off science fiction because you are not forced to read so much of it because you're no longer literary editor of *New Worlds,* or are you no longer literary editor of *New Worlds* because you couldn't stand having to read it?

MJH: When I was still editing the literary part of *New Worlds,* I used to have this dream that I'd be able to stop one day, and that if I stopped and gave science fiction a rest for a few months that I would leap back into it revitalized. It didn't happen. In fact, I gave up sf long before I stopped being literary editor of *New Worlds,* and I don't miss it. Occasionally, I read a bit just to make myself angry. Every so often I go to the library and I take out three or four sf novels and I plough my way through them. It takes me a week and by the end of it I don't want to read any for another six months. Have you ever noticed that most of the science fiction in libraries is published by either Robert Hale, Dobson or Gollancz. Even some of the Gollancz stuff isn't of a particularly high quality. It's all absolute rubbish.

CJF: Hale churn out an awfully large amount of sf books.

MJH: And their pay is terrible. They exploit their writers as if it's still 1950. Dobson, of course, specialize in reprinting bad American science fiction that can't get reprinted anywhere else.

CJF: I think we're coming to the end of this section, unless there's something else you'd like to say about the early stuff?

MJH: I would disown most of it: "Green Five Renegade", "The Macbeth Expiation" and "Visions of Monad"; *The Pastel City*—but not the sequel. The sequel's going to be a lot better and it will sell correspondingly fewer books. Do you want to bet? Would you like to take a little bet?

CJF: No, I'd rather not.

MJH: That's it then. This interview has suffered from terminal entropy.

Part II: 14 December 1980

CJF: I'd like to start by discussing your latest published novel, and in fact your only published novel since we last talked, *A Storm of Wings.* To me, it comes across as a tremendous development in almost every way from its predecessor in the Viriconium Sequence, *The Pastel City.* One of the elements I'd like to discuss is the metaphysics in the book. In the earlier part of the interview you said that you felt that metaphysics was not particularly your strong point, yet in *A Storm of Wings* there are strong elements of metaphysics. There is this great clash of world views between the insects and the people of Viriconium. We see the effects of that both on the people, with the cult of the locust, and

on the insects, with them being unhinged by the impingement of the human's world view. Would you like to say something about that, and about the way you are using metaphysics? Maybe, something about the difference between the way you use it and the way Barry Bayley uses it, for example?

MJH: We ought to start by saying that one of the basic reasons there is such a difference between the two novels is that there is ten years between them, and obviously an awful lot of development has gone on between the two. That is, simple technical development; not to mention the fact that I'm ten years older. I don't think of the metaphysics as the primary purpose, or the primary subject matter of the novel, although on the surface it appears to be: it's what generates the plot, after all. The difference between Barry Bayley and me is that I'm not interested in the metaphysic itself. It's not the idea that fascinates me, but the use to which I can put it. Barry, like all classic science fiction writers, is interested in ideas for themselves. He makes a story which is a cradle for the idea. I'm more interested in the simple buzz that I get from it. In that way I'm more a *reader* of ideas. I'm receptive to paradoxes and mysteries, but I've no metaphysical training, and no interest in reading the medieval schoolmen. My interest in metaphysics stems from the need to have at the heart of everything I write some image, often a metaphysical one, which I can use as a metaphor for what the story is really about. The clash of *Umwelts* in *A Storm of Wings* reflects in a crude way the fact that none of us ever knows, or can ever understand, quite how anybody else in the world sits in his own skull and sees things. The cat, if asked would deny the universe of the housefly which he's caught in his mouth. They perceive the world in such totally different ways that they can never really say anything to one another. To an extent none of us can, because although we're all the same species, each of us still sits inside a very individual *Umwelt*. We can't communicate. That is part of the tragedy of being human and part of the desperate need we have for compassion for one another, and understanding. So that image isn't there because I was interested in the image itself, although the metaphysical problem really fascinates me, but it is there as a metaphor for bits of the human condition.

CJF: So you're using that as an exaggerated form of the gulf of isolation between every human being and every other human being, in that we all sit inside our own skulls. And the exaggeration is seen in the conflict between the two races, humans and insects, who are alien to one another.

MJH: Yes, but I wouldn't say it was a serious attempt to do that. I wasn't sitting down to write a novel to do that. It's simply that I can't write anything unless it has some relevance. Almost every other image in the book is about communication: the Reborn Men, unable to communicate either with one another or with human beings. Elmo Buffin, who somehow cannot manage to convey that he is at war with the insects. He never gets any help because he can't communicate. And the whole thing is chaotic as a result: it's a very chaotic book.

CJF: There's also the attempts by Paucemanly to communicate with people, yet he never gets further than saying "Gob".

MJH: Yes. He's unable to invent a language by which he can be understood. So he's desperately floating around in the air emitting gases and vomiting into his rubber mask. Algis Budrys called *A Storm of Wings* "a mad book with mad conclusions". I won't argue with that, in fact I'm pleased by it.

CJF: Another very significant development over the 10 years is the stylistic

development. The style of *A Storm of Wings* is incredibly dense, with very powerful images. Particularly the first 30 or 35 pages are incredibly stylistically dense. Would you like to comment at all on the style? What were you trying to achieve, and where did any of the influences come from? It reminded me of T.S. Eliot. In fact, it can be looked at as an exercise in style.

MJH: The visible difference between *The Pastel City* and *A Storm of Wings* in stylistic terms, represents 10 years of hard and deliberate attempts to be a better writer. One of the five or six most important things in writing is that you should have evolved a prose vehicle that will do what you want it to do. Having said that, *A Storm of Wings* probably represents the high point and the last instance of my deliberate stylistic development of myself as an imagist, which you rightly remark has its roots in T.S. Eliot and in T.S. Eliot's theories of imagism. I doubt that I will do it again, because I've come to the beginning of a new period of stylistic development. The whole point of imagism is that every sentence reflects what you are trying to say, through some image. But in *A Storm of Wings* I deliberately overdid it. I remember sitting there and thinking: "Right! This time we're going over the top". In the first 30 or 40 pages I certainly went over the top, to the extent that some of those sentences have to be read two or three times before many readers can make head or tail of them. I'm not saying that's a good thing or a bad thing. I enjoy doing it. To an extent, it's the reader's job to keep up with me, and if he can't then I'm really not interested in having him as a reader. It should be as much of a joy for him to work it out as it was for me to put it together. But I doubt that I'll do it again, because I've found other things I enjoy. I shall still be a person who embeds images in almost every sentence, but there are other ways of embedding them. Going back to the point about the first 30 or 40 pages of *A Storm of Wings:* the first section of everything I write is a bit slow. It's almost as if, during work on the first two or three paragraphs of a short story, or the first chapter or so of a novel, some part of me is desperately looking around for a simpler way of saying things.

CFJ: Do you think that the style, especially of the first section of *A Storm of Wings,* is partly a product of the way you actually work, painstakingly reworking and re-reworking each sentence? Somebody told me a story about James Joyce, while writing *Ulysses,* being met in a cafe at the end of the day, and being asked how much he had written that day. He said: "I wrote two sentences—but they are wonderful sentences."

MJH: I've never heard anything as fakey as that, frankly. He was an old faker, anyway. Yes, it is one of my habits. I work very hard at it; and I expect the reader to work very hard too. I don't see why he shouldn't do that. After all he's an intelligent chap and he's an educated chap, and he understands that a writer enjoys what he does. I like to get it right. I'm a perfectionist. At the time of writing I can't let a sentence go unless it's right, but six months later I can forget it completely and cross it out, and realize that I've failed. It would give me great mental pain to have a section of 200 words, even in draft form, that wasn't right at the time, but three months later I will willingly chuck it out of the window and forget it. It's a difficult way to be. A lot of my early stuff, by which I mean *The Centauri Device* and some of the short stories of the same period, became very stilted. I also began maybe 15 short stories in that period (it was two years) which I couldn't finish because they silted up. I was working too hard at it. I was too tense. So I had to re-educate myself to rely on instinct. For me that is the hardest thing in the world to do. It's really very difficult for me to leave anything and stop working at it. For the next 10 years, I

would hope to be trying to learn how to relax and operate on instinct and to write more fluidly. This does not mean more quickly. Writing quickly is a great advantage if you're a commercial writer: but who wants to do that!

CJF: Would it be fair to say that what you've been trying to do, and what you are now getting to, is an appropriate style for the material?

MJH: Yes—it's always a search for an appropriate style, because the style is the fiction. When you come down to it, you only have the words to say what you want to say. Obviously my subject matter is now changing and will certainly continue to change in the long, desperate gap between *A Storm of Wings* and whatever appears next. In fact, I've already found the method of writing that I've been looking for. Once you're ready to change your subject matter you're ready to change the style in which you write it. I've also felt recently that I've come into my own over the last five years, in the sense that *A Storm of Wings* is the first thing I've written that is wholly M. John Harrison. Previously I wrote a space opera, a disaster story, a sword and sorcery. I don't need to do that now. I have my own obsessions; they've come through clearly enough now for me to recognize them; and the style, and the images with which I will clothe them are coming readily to me.

CJF: You said that *A Storm of Wings* is the first novel you've written which is distinctively M. John Harrison. There are a number of elements of the novel which are distinctively M. John Harrison, too, which set it apart from other fantasy/sword and sorcery novels. One of those is the character of Paucemanly . . .

MJH: The 20-foot floating man!

CJF: Who is quite revolting and repulsive and at the same time a fascinating character. Would you like to say something about him, and other distinctive elements?

MJH: I love Benedict Paucemanly. He came to me in a flash. I suddenly thought: Why not try it? Why not have this absurd spectre floating about as a commentary on what is going on down below? What better guide for a bunch of madmen on a mad quest than a 20-foot floating loony who speaks in tongues? By the way, many of his quotes are from Dante, Ezra Pound, and other poets. Many of them are in languages which I made up on the spot, although most of them seem to have an Italian basis. I wish I could remember all the reasons for inventing him. Now I read him in the spirit that Algis Budrys must have. I look at him and think: How did I manage it? Why did I do it? I did it partly to give continuity with *The Pastel City,* because he is mentioned as one of the heroes in that book who has flown to the moon. I suddenly thought: What if he had a horrible time when he got there, the poor bastard? What if the universe turns out to be absolutely awful, for no reason? He's done nothing to deserve it, but he's trapped on the moon for a century, and when he returns he is in this appalling state. I can't explain him and I don't want to. He obviously has some unfortunate disease of the bowels. I enjoy him and I hope the reader enjoys him, just because he appears there, Plop! As to the other totally M. John Harrison elements, the strongest of those is in fact not a new one. It's the landscapes. Unfortunately, I think this is also the last time I'll be a landscape writer. I've always wanted to be a painter, but I've absolutely no talent for it at all, so ever since *The Committed Men* I've painted in words the landscapes that appalled me or that I loved. The landscapes of *The Pastel City* and *A Storm of Wings* are quite obviously the landscapes of upland Britain: the Peak District, the Derbyshire moors, the tops of the Lake District. The landscapes in *A Storm of Wings* in particular have references to the Derbyshire moors, because on top of hills like Kinder Scout the landscape really is rotting and falling to pieces. It's a genuine

desert, drying up and blowing away on the wind every summer. It has dreadful bogs in which you can sink without trace on a Sunday afternoon only nine miles from Sheffield. They are the landscapes that I now live in, and they obsess me. Hilary Bailey said of many of the landscapes in *A Storm of Wings* that though they were bleak and awful, one had this sneaking suspicion that the author would like to go on his holidays there. Hilary is very acute. I believe that fiction *should* have a very strong sense of place. That comes from Wordsworth and from H.E. Bates. I loved Wordsworth as a child. If you don't have a strong landscape in a piece of fiction, then you don't have a strong piece of fiction.

CJF: I've mentioned to you before that David Pringle picked out two elements of strength in your fiction: one was the landscapes. The other was the ability to write scenes of violent action in a very convincing way, which were present in *The Pastel City* and to some extent in *The Centauri Device.*

MJH: It's astonishing. I was really surprised when he gave specific mention to the violence, because at that time I honestly didn't think of myself as what you would call a violent writer. Not, anyway, in the sense that you'd call Peckinpah a violent film director. And so I went back to the stuff and I thought: Good God—he's right! I really do seem to harp on it. I would say that I don't think it's very realistic. I disagree with him there. I don't think it's very well done at all, especially in *The Pastel City.* While I believe very strongly that if you do violence you should do it properly, and although I'm an extremely energetic, frustrated and you might even say violent person; I have very little experience of it. I don't think it was very well done in *The Pastel City.* I think it's a bit better done in *A Storm of Wings.* It's more sordid. But I think the best piece of violence I ever did in the sense of realism was in "Running Down", where the two men are scrabbling around in their underpants in the dark. The only way they can remember how to fight is the way they fought at school: grabbing at one another and pushing—what kids do as violence, or what they used to do before they educated themselves at the Kung Fu movies. No, I was surprised. I'm not surprised now, because there is an underlying violence in me, a sort of underlying frustration, which tended to come out in the early stuff in actual physical fights between the characters. But I didn't want violence to be a central focus of my work at all. There is a very violent element in popular fiction, of course. You're supposed to have a fight every 800 words. I'm sure that Ted Carnell or A.E. Van Vogt has probably gone on record somewhere as saying that the perfect fictional structure is to have a fight every 800 words. I don't know. I'm a very active and turbulent person, and it's probably a bit of psychological overflow.

CJF: For me, in *A Storm of Wings,* particularly comparing it with *The Pastel City,* there is a decrease in the actual explicit scenes of violence. For me, a lot of the violent energy has gone into the images of the book, into descriptions of, for example, the poor people of the Low City scratching up stalks to keep themselves warm in winter. In that way it's gone into a feeling of anger about the suffering of those people. I was wondering how that tied in with the attempt to bring a real human compassion into it. To what extent do you feel that it is true that the violent energy has gone into the images more in this book?

MJH: Yes—I think that is entirely feasible. Again, though, it's not something I've thought about specifically. I think it has always been a human trait to be not simply compassionate, but to be violently compassionate. There is a just rage, and if you hate the circumstances that people find themselves in—I don't mean politically or socially, but

simply by virtue of the human condition—and if you rage constantly against the fact that the world is imperfect, and that people must suffer although you hate to see it, then that's bound to come out in your fiction. But really all that has happened to me is that I've managed to get away from physical confrontation as an expression of the inner violence of my characters. I think from now on I shall be more interested in actual human exchanges, rather than human exchanges symbolized in invented violence. Let's be honest, there's no point in inventing violence. It's not the real thing. It could also be that a lot of my own personal violence has been canalized. As I said, I'm very active, a very energetic sort of person physically, and I've now found ways of living an active, adventurous and dangerous life in reality: I don't need vicarious excitement any more, and if the reader does, he can go to Larry Niven.

CJF: One of the things that most struck me about the ending of *A Storm of Wings* is the way in which Viriconium, having endured this terrible winter in which, as you say, the fabric of the world has been literally ripped apart by the conflict between the two world views, the city is almost intact, untouched. The people are already fogetting about the terrible things that have happened. Also, at the beginning of the book, although it takes place in theory about 80 or 90 years after the events of *The Pastel City,* there is no sign of the tremendous damage that was wreaked on the city in that book. Viriconium has been reborn at the beginning of *A Storm of Wings,* and it seems to have been reborn again at the end. This leads on to a discussion of the way you now see Viriconium, so would you like to say something about that—about the way you see Viriconium as the Eternal City, eternally there, always the same, always different, existing throughout space and time.

MJH: Well, you just said it, really. When I came to do a sequel to *The Pastel City,* apart from the fact that I hate sequels, I found that I wasn't interested in the hermetic universe that had been created in *The Pastel City.* To the extent that I was still interested in sword and sorcery, I was interested in a slightly different way. So I simply sat down and began to write what I wanted to write in 1976, which was, of course, somewhat different from what I had wanted to write in 1970. And while I was doing it I suddenly realized that, firstly, I would have to have a rationale for doing this, in publishing terms: and secondly, the very search for that rationale could be interesting in itself. I was about to write about a situation in which the fabric of the world had become so old and thin that it couldn't support two different concepts of what it was. Given that so much time has passed and the fabric of reality has become so thin and old and stretched out, could it be that this one city has been in existence for billions of years in different forms, possibly with a different geography but the same name, or with a different name but the same geography? Could it be that at the end of time the only thing that matter and space in their horrible sort of tired and entropic form could do is to vaguely attempt to repeat or partially repeat one or two significant symbolic events? This is a lovely idea, with the professional advantage that it allows me to make Viriconium whatever I want it to be and yet still be subsumed under the general heading of the Viriconium Sequence. There are millions of Viriconiums, there have possibly been thousands of tegeus-Cromis's, thousands of Galen Hornwracks, all acting out three or four symbolic events. There have been different invasions. We know from reading *The Pastel City* that giant reptiles have invaded the Earth at some point; we know that a race of giant, intelligent sloths have once lived there; there could have been a thousand invasions. We know that the stars are out there and they're getting thin as well; everything is thin and stretched-out there too. The potential of this vision is appalling.

Then a final possibility occurred to me, as recently as this morning: that we are living in that time too; that Paris may very well be Viriconium, or Vienna may be. It could really be that the Eternal City *is* eternal. As far as I'm concerned it's a beautiful image. It's the whole, almost religious, idea of the City which is the World.

CJF: You say that this concept of the Viriconium Sequence allows you to write about whatever you are interested in at that particular moment. Can we come on to discuss the (unpublished) next stage in the Viriconium Sequence, which is the short story version of "In Viriconium". This again is a different Viriconium: there are new street names and new place names, but there are all kinds of things which give one clues as to what you are doing. There are the characters who recur with slightly different names in slightly different guises: the character of Elmo Buffin from *A Storm of Wings* recurs as Buffo in "In Viriconium". So, can we talk about this new story, and what you are trying to do with this new section of the Viriconium Sequence? Stylistically, there is a tremendous change from *A Storm of Wings*. It is much more sparingly written. The images are still there, but they are not so densely packed together. Also, although there is this background of the Entropy Plague which is sweeping over the city, it strikes me that the story is really about two human beings, Ashlyme and Audsley King; and it's about Audsley King and her art.

MJH: I believe very firmly that the story should come out of the character of the characters—what a professional writer, God help him, would call "plot dynamic". The energy that moves the story forward and the events that move it forward should come out of the characters. This is taken for granted in the real world, in real fiction. It's taken for granted that you write about people, and the things that happen in the story happen because the people are like that. Oddly enough, this has been taken for granted in the real world for two thousand years. It's only generic science fiction writers who have forgotten it—or never knew it. This is an attempt to move closer to that idea, and yet retain fantasy. "In Viriconium" is still a fantasy. It hasn't got a twenty-foot high floating man, but it has got the Barley Brothers, who are wonderful 20th century Birmingham, or Midlands, lads, who have somehow blundered into the middle of a sword and sorcery; or *almost* a sword and sorcery. It would have been sword and sorcery, if there had been any swords or sorcery in it, but I forgot those. It is really a story about an artist who has lost her relationship with her art, with her audience and with her life. It's a story about the kind of artist who first appeared in the 1860s, what you would call a modern artist, who's constantly having trouble with his audience, and who has lost respect for his audience. This is the sort of artist who, in my opinion, was the real driving force behind the so-called new wave, and *New Worlds*. The sort of artist who believes that *he* should decide what he produces, not the audience or the publisher. It's a bitter little story.

CJF: But not a story without humour. That's the big difference that strikes me between "In Viriconium" and *A Storm of Wings*. In this new story the whole tone is lighter and the humour is lighter, whereas in *A Storm of Wings* the humour is black to the nth degree.

MJH: I don't like humour that isn't "black", because humour that isn't "black" is really humour for its own sake, which is as bad as fantasy for its own sake. I like my humour to have something to say about the world. "In Viriconium" is lighter in tone. I used a lighter prose, mainly because what I want now is for the material to come through the prose; the events should be enough in themselves. I want to strip the prose down. I'm not saying this very well: the stuff should speak for itself, but unfortunately "In Viriconium" can't, because it isn't in print.

CJF: But hopefully that will be expanded into a novel for American publication?
MJH: It certainly *will* expand. If it doesn't expand, I won't eat!
CJF: Perhaps we can conclude this discussion of the Viriconium Sequence by asking the question: why, if you are trying to write about human beings for their own sake, do you still find it useful to stick within the kind of fantasy framework that you have in the Viriconium Sequence?
MJH: Because I don't seem to be able to stop doing it.
CJF: Are you saying that it still feels right?
MJH: Not exactly. Somehow I still need a *seed* of fantasy—like dropping a crystal into a solution to seed it—before the mainstream element of the story will gell. The reason I think I need that is that I need in all my stories a central image which can poke tentacles into every area of the story, and act as an analogue of my "meaning". In "Running Down" the entropy image goes into all parts of the story. Although I would dearly love to be able to simply see people and reproduce people, I still seem able only to see them through that lens of fantasy. I've removed many of the lenses that were in the way and I see my development as a writer, and everbody's development as a writer, as the removal of lenses which have distorted one's vision. In the last 10 years I've got rid of dozens of the damn things. The fantasy element of my stories is my last act of avoidance. The reader uses it to escape from his life. It could possibly be that I'm trying to avoid the implications of what I want to do. If you want to go out there and connect with the world, one-to-one, and be a real writer—then you've got to *do* it. I sometimes have the feeling that the little bit of fantasy I retain is actually necessary to me; that I'm crippled in the sense that I do, like any fan, need a little bit of fantasy in my life to be able to live it. That's appalling, but it's subject matter. As a realistic writer I can examine that. My latest short story, "Egnaro", explores the relationship of people to their fantasies.
CJF: What would you say to the suggestion that a fantasy or sf framework allows a writer tremendous scope for using very powerful images, as are present in *A Storm of Wings,* which you can use as metaphors for the human condition? Now, those powerful images are not present in the kind of fiction which relates directly to people in their real human condition today. Do you think that you would be losing something if you were to eliminate this last vestige of fantasy from your work? Or do you think that what you would lose in terms of those powerful images which you couldn't use any longer, you would immensely gain in clarity of vision?
MJH: That's why I'm going so cautiously—or I tell myself that's why I'm going so cautiously. The risk is that I would lose something, but I don't agree with you that a real fiction would necessarily strip those elements out, anyway. As an example, I give you *1984,* a fiction which is desperately about people and desperately realistic, but which has a very, very big "fantasy element". That is to say, it is set some forty years ahead of the time in which it is written. It's a piece of science fiction. You see, what I would call real fiction takes what it wants, in terms of techniques and subject matters. A writer who's a real writer does what he wants. And if he can make it stick—then he can make it stick. The mainstream is what you make it. J.G. Ballard is the mainstream, Borges is the mainstream, whether you like it or not. I hate the term "mainstream", by the way. What I mean to say is they are *real* writers. What I would say is that all generic fantasy stuff obscures what a writer wants to say rather than helps it. All I'm saying is that fantasy should be subjugated to writers—writers should not be subjugated to fantasy. I find it a

hateful imprisonment to be shackled by readers who only want fantasy. And to an extent I hate them for not being able to see that there are more important things to look at—like their own lives and other people's lives. I cannot help, honestly, but see it as a running away, a desperate sort of running away. I don't mean that in a socialist-realist sense, because I hate generalities. It's an individual running away from the individual facts of an individual life. What's the point? At the end of your life, if you've run away from your life, you've *had* no life. *New Worlds*—the new wave—was an attempt by science fiction writers to free themselves from their own audience. For a while it looked as if we might escape, and even take some of the audience with us. But the door's been shut since. The counter-revolution has taken place, and we're back in prison. I shouldn't say "we". I'm not. I never intend to be in prison again.

CJF: The stripping away of fantasy images or techniques, is even more apparent in your most recent short story to be published, in *New Terrors 2,* "The Ice Monkey". It's ostensibly a horror story, but the generic horror element has been stripped down to three references to the actual monkey. And yet, the story remains very horrible.

MJH: Yes!

CJF: This is an example of what you're talking about when you say "real fiction" as opposed to the fantasy of, say, the Viriconium Sequence. Would you like to say something about what you feel you are achieving in this stripped-down fiction? What is the "real fiction" which would be "Running Down", "The Incalling", "The Ice Monkey" and "Egnaro"—achieving that you can't achieve in the Viriconium Sequence?

MJH: The world is an extremely seedy place, in which people desperately try to avoid one another. That's what "The Ice Monkey" is about. It's about a climber who uses climbing as his fantasy, his escape. He has his ability, he has his way of removing himself from the hard facts of reality. Once again, I don't mean socialist-realist facts. I'm not interested in the Erin Pizzey style of facts of reality. I'm talking about the hell of being locked up in a human skull and being surrounded by other human skulls in which are locked these little nubs of existence.

CJF: "Running Down" and "The Ice Monkey" are about a few real people and the way they're trying to communicate with each other. Or to avoid reality, as in the case of Jones in "The Ice Monkey", who escapes into rock climbing to get away from his wife and child, and the miserable circumstances of his life.

MJH: You mentioned earlier that although that story only has three lines of generic horror, it is still horrifying. It is full of the compassionate revulsion that one feels for the sort of life being led by the characters in the sort of trap they find themselves in. It's interesting in that context that Phil Meadley said to me about that story: "But I quite *like* babies. I quite *like* untidy flats. How have you made them so *horrible* to me?" What I've stumbled on is the horror of the real things we find around us every day. The horror of our own situations: the stark horror of waking up every morning and finding yourself still to be yourself. Now *that's* what I'm trying to write about. It's an Expressionist horror. The Expressionists were among the first people ever to wake up in the morning and suddenly think: "Christ! How horrifying it is to be a human being. How horrifying it is to be trapped here without benefit of religion, without benefit of a structured Catholic world-view, or a structured Protestant world-view; and to find myself alone. To find myself a human being, a thing I can't define, trapped in a skull it never made." Munch and all the other Expressionists woke up trapped in a skull they'd never made and had to scream

because of it. That's what I'm writing about: the horror of being human. All this sounds grand and pompous. It's not meant to be. You, by interviewing me, are asking me to generalize—and I hate generalizations. "The Ice Monkey" is about some people I knew. That story, of about 5,000 words, has maybe five or six characters in it. Every single one of them I've met. Every single situation that happens in there has happened, most of them to me. I've been to a funeral like that. It was the funeral of a dear friend. Every single piece of observation in that story is real, and most of it has happened to me. I've dressed it up a little, tacked it on to a different scene, worked it; but it's still real. There is nothing in that story that is faked at all, and hopefully there is no attempt by me to fake it: to make it seem worse than it is, or better than it is, or to direct the reader's attention towards one character or another and say: "He was to blame." Nobody is to blame. In popular fiction there's always somebody to blame. In popular politics there's always somebody to blame. It's a human trait, but it's a crude, cheap and vulgar human trait. Nobody in "The Ice Monkey" or in "Running Down" is to blame. There's no villain. These are simply the things we do to one another. Generic science fiction or fantasy can never show this. I once said about fantasy that the only good fantasy was the act of dragging the reader into a maze without a map and leaving the bugger there. There is no map to your own life, to reality. You're lost in it.

CJF: Would it be fair to say that one of the things you're trying to do in your fiction is to wake people up and get them thinking?

MJH: Yes.

CJF: Whereas you feel that a lot of popular fiction just says to them: "Here's what you've got to do, here is the map"?

MJH: Popular fiction does a lot of things but one of the things that it definitely does is give cheap solutions. (As modern politics does. If you take Mrs Thatcher's medicine you're going to be all right; or Mr Benn's medicine; or Mr Brezhnev's medicine.) Popular fiction gives cheap solutions and cheap thrills. To the extent that I have a polemical purpose or a didactic purpose, I am trying to awaken people to their personal condition.

CJF: So, they then might say: "I won't read your books, I will read the books that allow me to escape."

MJH: Yes. We've expressed this in rather crude didactic and polemical terms. What a writer really does is show you his vision of the world. A bad writer modifies his view of the world to fit in with the view of the biggest audience. He's known as a hack, or an arse-licker, or a lackey. A real writer continues to say what he thinks about the world, continues to see the world through his own eyes until enough people are interested for him to start earning a living by doing it. George Orwell made it work. Collette, Isherwood and H.E. Bates made it work very, very well indeed. Graham Greene has made it work. They are simply writers. That's what I want to be: simply a writer. In generic terms you're either a professional or an amateur writer. In my terms you're not. You're only a writer or a hack. You're only a writer or nothing.

CJF: You're very much an individualist, aren't you? Do you think that to some extent you're the last real rebel left from the new wave period of the mid-sixties?

MHJ: As far as I can see we now have a bland middle-brow science fiction rather than a bland low-brow science fiction, which is what we had before the new wave. The new wave was a violent eruption of new techniques and subject matter and writers. Out of this, the bureaucrats, academics and carpet-baggers, who appear after any rebellion, have created,

by simplification, a new set of limitations. What's happened is that another establishment has been laid down, an establishment which is in no way flexible, and, more important, is in no way self-critical. An establishment which is as smug as a pig. Almost nothing that the new wave attempted to achieve has been achieved. All we've done is to graft on a second-class honours establishment. There's no energy about. More than anything, there's none of the sense that you got during the revolution of the imminent liberation of the audience and the writers and the fiction. But the whole point about innovators is that they move on. They are restless. When they do that, a vacuum is created. Into that vacuum comes your bureaucrat. They dig in. They rationalize. They make lists. These bureaucrats have formalized the new wave, and in doing so castrated it. They've defined what it is: it should be a sort of social fiction, it should be a fiction of ideas. Students should write essays about it. After your innovator moves out, your carpet-bagger and your bureaucrat move in, and they begin to set up a rigid hierarchy which in 10 years time has to be knocked down again. *Foundation* itself has a lot to answer for in this way. I see myself as the permanent knocker-down, and always have done. That's what an anarchist is there for. When I say I prefer *2000 AD* comic to Ursula Le Guin, that is perhaps a polemical over-statement, but I know what I mean.

CJF: Do you think that what science fiction could do with again is another jolt like it had in the sixties, and like rock music had in the middle seventies, with the upsurgence of a really angry and anarchic punk rock?

MJH: Yes. Given that it must, sadly, be a violent process. As I said to you last night, I sometimes dream that out there are young science fiction punks, who are going to come up with something which will make me reel back and realize that I've become an old man. I hope they hurry.

CJF: I think that is as good a note to end on as any.

Acknowledgements
I should like to thank the following people who provided help and encouragement with the preparation of this interview: Graham Cumming, Beryl Richards and Tish Milner, who assisted with part of the transcription; Howard and Jackie Green, for providing accommodation in Yorkshire; Nina Berry; and most of all, Mike and Diane Harrison for their friendship and hospitality.—*CJF.*

Richard Erlich is an associate professor in English at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Alone or in collaboration he has published a number of essays on sf and sf cinema, and with colleague Thom Dunn is co-editor of two essay collections by various critics for Greenwood Press: The Mechanical God: Machines in Science Fiction *and* Clockwork Worlds: Mechanized Environments in SF.

A Womb with a View: Domesticating the Fantastic in Pohl and Kornbluth's Gladiator-at-Law

RICHARD D. ERLICH

My title is worse – punnier – than you might think.[1] The wombs with views in *Gladiator-at-Law* are houses (Latin, *domus,* whence, ultimately, "domesticate") and, still worse, dome houses. These G.M.L. homes are a major plot element and a minor symbol in *Gladiator,* and I shall deal with them briefly below. First, though, I want to summarize *Gladiator* for you (it's often hard to get hold of) and demonstrate in more general ways how *Gladiator* uses elements of what we usually think of as the fantastic.[2]

I think, somewhat paradoxically, that this would be a useful exercise because *Gladiator* is not the sort of work one would teach in a course in fantasy. If it's in print, you might teach it as "near-in", extrapolative sf. More likely, you'd teach it in a course in relatively recent dystopian fiction. Because that's what *Gladiator* is, mostly: a short novel from 1955 that shows human characters in action in a rotten world. *Gladiator,* however, *uses* fantasy in interesting and interrelated ways. I shall discuss three of these ways.

* First, the world of this novel is extrapolated from our own, but extrapolated in such a way as to reduce several aspects of our culture to the grotesque.

* Second, this extrapolation moves *Gladiator* out of the low mimetic mode into satire, which Northrop Frye correctly labels, as an attitude, as "a combination of fantasy and morality." Moreover, satire, as a literary mode, has the surprising habit of moving up Frye's hierarchy of modes toward the heights of myth.

* Third, the plot of *Gladiator* is verisimilar – not at all because it is likely but because it displaces into its satiric world what Joseph Campbell has called "the monomyth of the Hero". I.e., we believe the story, while reading it, not because it shows a realistic triumph of realistic good guys in a realistically rendered world but because the good guys have the good sense to follow the ancient script for the regeneration of the wasteland, the salvation of a rotten world.

The rotten world of this novel is the USA, circa 2060, mostly the area around New York City, some time after the world has recovered from some sort of disaster.[3] The social structure of this future USA consists of the fantastically rich investment house of Green, Charlesworth, the secret *de facto* rulers of the world of the novel; very rich Titans of Industry, manuevering in corporate battles; rich professionals lucky enough to be important physicians or born into law firms doing corporation law; poorer professionals, such as police, politicians, engineers, and Charles Mundin, LL.B, the main protagonist; a small merchant class; a large class of contract workers, who live in G.M.L. houses as part of their contracts; and a large underclass of dispossessed and despised "non-people" who live in the slums surrounding the G.M.L. bubble-cities.

The people from the slums see themselves as slaves and live in a kind of hell. The contract workers are also slaves: any complaints or rocking the boat, and they find themselves out of their houses and in a slum. Even one of the very rich, the Titan Bliss Hubble, asserts that his life is also hellish: corruption and social sickness and misery permeate the society.

There is no threat of rebellion from the slum-dwellers. The younger ones work out their aggressions in gang warfare, and the rest are kept going by allotments and Field Days – bread and circuses – and, usually, by finding projects in art or petty commerce to keep them busy and let them think, possibly correctly (on occasion) with the artists, that they are leading meaningful lives. For most of the rest of the common folk, there's their contract labor, magnificent G.M.L. houses, and the delights of the weekly shows and special Field Days: the spectacular gladiatorial contests that help keep the underclass in line.

All the major elements of this world are similar to our world or carefully extrapolated from our world. Indeed, we get to overhear one of the characters speculate on the origins of Field Days, and we even get a little essay in which the Narrator explains the rise of the suburban slums, particularly Belly Rave, the slum dealt with directly in *Gladiator.* Ursula K. Le Guin, in the introduction to the 1976 Ace edition of *The Left Hand of Darkness,* has some instructive comments on extrapolation. In an "extrapolative" work, she says, the

> . . . writer is supposed to take a trend or phenomenon of the here-and-now, purify and intensify it for dramatic effect, and extend it into the future . . . A prediction is made. Method and results much resemble those of a scientist who feeds large doses of a purified and concentrated food additive to mice, in order to predict what may happen to people who eat it in small quantities for a long time. The outcome seems almost inevitably to be cancer. So does the outcome of extrapolation. Strictly extrapolative works of science fiction generally arrive about where the Club of Rome arrives: somewhere between the gradual extinction of human liberty and the total extinction of terrestrial life.
>
> Almost anything carried to its logical extreme becomes depressing, if not carcinogenic. (p. i, unnumbered)

Students of dystopias and satire will recognize the idea of carrying a premise to its logical extreme: it's what Yevgeny Zamyatin called *reductio ad finem.*[4] It's also the method of the logical technique of reduction to the absurd often combined with the satiric techniques of reduction to the animal and reduction to the grotesque – often achieved by literalizing clichés, slogans, or metaphors. Fairly pure examples of these techniques can be seen in the blinding of Gloucester in Shakespeare's *King Lear,* in Swift's "A Modest Proposal" and other writings. In any event, these techniques were well established when Pohl and Kornbluth pushed to their logical and extreme (hence, grotesque) ends such ideas, trends, and phenomena as the mechanism of the law, Social Darwinism and the

"battle" of big business, "gambling" on the stock market, and the violence of many sports, and sports fans. And so we accept, a bit too readily perhaps, *Gladiator's* reductions to the grotesque that yield the trial of the "twerp" before the automated "jury box" (ch. 1), the stratifications of society in America in 2060, the "Field Day" metaphors for big business, the pari-mutuel operation of the Stock Market (complete with slot machines and touts), and the gladiatorial contests of literal Field Days. The exaggerated extrapolations of *Gladiator* are exactly the sort of things we're used to in reading dystopian satires; more important, they are sufficiently appropriate and instructive a commentary on our own world that we forget that in themselves they are highly unlikely. They are rational (even moderate) comments on the evils of our world, but in themselves a bitter fantasy about an improbably corrupt future world.

The action of *Gladiator* is the comic one of the bringing down of this rotten world by a group of young or at least youngish people. At the end of the novel, the protagonists are in charge of the world and are going to make some changes. One couple among the good characters, Charles Mundin and Norma Lavin, are on their way to be married; and the other couple, Norvell and Virginia Bligh, are going to have a son.

The plot of *Gladiator* has, as part of the catastrophe, an exciting scene of physical action in which Don Lavin, Norma's younger brother, is rescued from death during the Field Day at Monmouth Stadium. And there are some other bits of violence in the three-month course of the story.[5] Still, most of the plot involves not physical battles but business battles, and the final blows against the antagonists are struck at the betting machines of the New York Stock Exchange.

Much of *Gladiator,* then, has to do with money, and this fact places *Gladiator* in the tradition of what Northrop Frye calls the "low mimetic";[6] more specifically, it's in the tradition of realistic, middleclass fiction going back to Defoe.[7] Obviously. The gods don't deal with economics, as Brecht asserts in *The Good Woman of Setzuan,* and no Knights-Errant "ever paid in any inn whatsoever" – as Don Quixote informs the inn-keeper just before his hasty exit.[8] Myths and Romances usually don't deal with money, nor do tragedies and epics in any serious way. Dragon hoards, assorted treasures, virtuous poverty, rewards, feudal titles and rents – these are acceptable in our loftier literatures; but larger-than-life heroes just don't ever have to worry about keeping up payments on office equipment or getting arrested for using a cancelled credit card. Nor do our loftier literatures usually deal with the political and personal implications of economic systems.

So *Gladiator* is in the tradition of the low mimetic novel, in the lower ranges of that tradition, the part that slips imperceptibly into satire.

It's something of a shock, then, when we finally get to meet Green, Charlesworth, the antagonists. Charles Mundin and Norma Lavin are invited (summoned, actually) to the Green, Charlesworth office, in the Empire State Building, amidst the rotting wreckage of Old New York. They ascend high into the building, are kept waiting for hours in an anteroom, and then enter a room, empty except for two large cabinets and a "man" sitting at a desk. The "man" tells them, "We despise you, Mr. Mundin. We are going to destroy you . . . You are Rocking the Boat, Mundin . . . Your are Our Enemy, Mundin." Mundin soon discovers that the "man" is a Western Electric Sleepless Receptionist (115 Volt A.C. Only). Then the two cabinets light up. "The contents of the cabinets were: Green and Charlesworth. Green, an incredibly, impossibly ancient dumpy-looking, hairless female. Charlesworth, an incredibly, impossibly ancient string-bean-looking,

hairless male." Green and Charlesworth, who have bugged Mundin's new offices, inform them that they do not approve of Norma Lavin's plan to retake G.M.L. Homes and release people from contract slavery:

> "Painted courtesan," observed the male voice. "She wants to free the slaves, she says. Talks about Mr Lincoln!"
> "We Fixed Mr Lincoln's Wagon, Mr Charlesworth," chortled the female voice.
> "We did, Mrs Green. And we will Fix Her Wagon too."
>
> (A bit later, Green and Charlesworth order Mundin and Lavin to leave. Mundin stops for a moment,) staring at the milky glass. Glass, he thought. Glass, and quivering, moving corpses inside, that a breath of air might –
> "Try it, Mundin," challenged the voice. "We wanted to see if you would try it."
> Mundin thought, and decided against it.
> "Too bad," said the voice of Charlesworth. "We hate you, Mundin. You said we were not God Almighty."
> "Atheist!" hissed the voice of Mrs Green. (ch. 21, pp. 142-45)

This line by Mrs Green ends their little colloquy and the chapter. Immediately following this, Mundin and Lavin are back at their offices, and we get a speech by Harry Ryan. Ryan is an old lawyer who is advising the Lavins; he is also a "yen pox" addict and is now "coked to the eyebrows." In his opium-inspired monolog, Ryan quotes H.G. Wells' (circa 1940) comment, "A frightful queerness is coming into life" and notes that "Green, Charlesworth must have been hitting their stride about then." He goes on to identify Green, Charlesworth with the *Struldbruggs* of *Gulliver's Travels* (Book 3, ch. 10; *G-a-L,* ch. 22 p. 145).

Norma Lavin goes on to give a fairly realistic explanation of Green, Charlesworth: "I suppose there's no reason a man can't live a long time, if he's got plenty of money to spend on medicine; and I suppose that a man who pays the doctors to keep him going, no matter what, has plenty of chance to line up money" – but the *Struldbrugg* identification and its implications remain (p. 146). Green, Charlesworth are over 200 years old, and they have fulfilled the fears that prompted the *Luggnuggians* of Gulliver to pass laws stripping the *Struldbruggs* of their wealth when they passed eighty years old.[9] This ancient couple has engrossed the wealth of the world.

All right, then, *Struldbruggs.* But what are *Struldbruggs* doing in a relatively realistic novel that seems to be in the low mimetic mode?

My question is rhetorical. Frye notes, as I said earlier, that low mimetic can slip easily into the satiric, and that's what has happened here. And I shall note, even more strongly than Frye does, that satires are never, ever really realistic.

I speak as one who has written satire, on occasion, and I will now digress briefly into a confession. We Satirists are wont to point out that other modes of literature aren't realistic. A satirical rogue, dealing with epics, will point out that one doesn't run into Homer's Hector as the leader of a real army; Shakespeare's Hector, yes – but not Homer's. A satirical rogue, dealing with tragedy, will point out that in the entire history of the theater no tragic hero has ever gone to the bathroom. A tragic heroine may murder her children or frame guards for a regicide, but no tragic heroine in the history of literature has ever plopped herself down, put her feet up, and scratched. And comedy – well, anyone who thinks that *all* those joyous brides and grooms lived happily ever after must have spent his life watching Doris Day movies. Myths and Romances, satirical rogues continue, are simply beneath contempt – they've received exactly what they deserve at the hands of Euripides, Cervantes, Mel Brooks, Monty Python, and *MAD.*

No, no, we say, real reality is to be found in satire. In satire we peel off the veneer and show you the sewer just beneath the surface, the corruption within the whitewashed sepulchre. The world is 99.44% *drek,* and only We Satirists have the courage to face facts. There may be a good man or honest woman or two in the world, but mostly it's just you and me, dear audience, and, frankly, I'm not too sure about you.

It's all flim-flam and hoax, satire; there's nothing realistic about it, and only convention, and some cynicism, allows readers to perceive, while experiencing the works, most satires as anything except fantastic.

Frye puts it nicely: "As the name of an attitude, satire is . . . a combination of fantasy and morality" – and Frye can note that the "morality" of satire isn't always very fastidious (*Anatomy,* p. 310; see also pp. 224-25 and 235).

So *Gladiator* slips into satire, and satire is part fantasy; more, satire has the interesting habit of moving toward the mythic.

The Struldbrugg episode, then, is quite decorous in *Gladiator.* We have learned earlier that Green, Charlesworth are "essentially money" (ch. 19, p. 130), and in the moral universe of *Gladiator* the love *and power* of money combine to be the root of all evils. Morality plus fantasy here yields the monstrous Struldbruggs, Green, Charlesworth: a symbol for the tyranny of wealth engrossed by the old. They are the ever-so-slightly displaced monster familiar to us from myths and legends and tales: "the tyrant-monster . . . the hoarder of the general benefit. He is the monster avid for the greedy rights of 'my and mine'"; he is "precisely the monster of the status quo: Holdfast, the keeper of the past . . . great and conspicuous in the seat of power . . ."[11] Or, as in this case, hidden behind his agents, holed up in his lair.

Now the Empire State Building may seem an odd sort of lair: dragons and ogres and such usually prefer to be underground. But we must recall that Green and Charlesworth see themselves as God Almighty, and, as money, *are* the false god of *Gladiator.*[12] It is appropriate, then, in mythic terms, that the hero (and heroine) ascend to them, in their Cosmic Mountain, so to speak, at the Navel of the World of *Gladiator.*

It's a parody, the Struldbrugg episode, a parody of the Hero's Ascent and Atonement with the Father/God.[13] The meeting with Green, Charlesworth is also our clue to decipher the complex modality-games that Pohl and Kornbluth play in *Gladiator.*

We have in *Gladiator* what looks like *low* low mimetic comedy: what looks like an essentially realistic story that gets in a little subversive satire. It's subversive and a satire and comic to be sure, but *Gladiator* also contains significant portions of the great monomyth of the Hero. Of course, all stories do that, if Frye and Joseph Campbell et al. are right – but in *Gladiator* there really isn't much displacement of the traditional patterns.[14] We can see this if we work backward and forward from the meeting with Green, Charlesworth.

Looking backward, we can see in *Gladiator* some familiar motifs from heroic fantasy, from the quest-romance. The world of the story is the Wasteland, and Mundin and Norvell Bligh, the two point-of-view characters, divide between them the role of the Hero in attempting to redeem it.[15]

Mundin gets his Call to Adventure when he meets Norma and Don Lavin. His motivations for answering the Call aren't totally heroic (he wants a big case, one that might get him out of criminal law into the immensely profitable corporate law); still, he is decent enough to answer what he perceives as "a cry for help" (ch. 3, p. 20). Bligh doesn't

get called, exactly; he gets pushed: he's exiled from the G.M.L. City of Monmouth to the horrors of Belly Rave, exiled to where he is considered by his society less than human. A bit later in the novel, a cop puts the matter bluntly: "People are one thing. Belly Ravers are something else. Are these people on the tax rolls? Do they have punch-card codes? Do they have employment-contract identification tatoos? No" (ch. 12, P. 65). As Campbell points out, however, there are two ways to view exile: "From the stand-point of the way of duty, anyone in exile from the community is a nothing. From the other point of view, however (from that of the individual), this exile is the first step of the quest" (Campbell, Epilogue, section 2, p. 385).

With Bligh's going to Belly Rave, we have the Descent of the Hero, his descent to an Underworld in which he can learn. So this exile is necessary; it is also good in itself, in allowing him greater freedom.

The G.M.L. cities look like good things; they were designed by Norma's and Don's father and his co-inventer to be good things. And, when our heroes have conquered, they will probably become good again. For now, though, at this stage of *Gladiator,* they are not good things; they are traps. As we find with much sf and dystopian literature, what first appears to be protective and nurturing containment turns out to be imprisonment. A womb with a view may be pleasant, but one must leave the womb if one is to go from fetus to infant and on into adulthood. In terms of archetypes, the Great Mother is always dual in her nature: she is both the Nurturing Mother and the Terrible Mother, the protecting womb and the bowels of Leviathan. Possibly her most dangerous role is the Terrible Mother in disguise as the Nurturing Mother: the prison tricked out as a sanctuary.

Monmouth City looks like a secularized City of God, with its pleasure domes and comforts – a Xanadu surrounded by hellish slums. But "The world's in jail," as Norma Lavin says, and Monmouth City is a secularized City of Dis (see *G-a-L,* ch. 22, pp. 147-48). It's a place where one is held in bondage by contracts enforced by a perverse capitalist law. The bubble-city is the womb-as-labyrinth; Belly Rave, at first, is hellish, but it is also the desert in which one may find the Straight Way, the Way the Hero must go.[16]

So Mundin answers his Call voluntarily; Bligh, because he has no choice. Bligh gets the Hero's Descent into the Underworld; Mundin goes on to find the woman. In Jungian terms, Mundin's next task is the Rescue of the Anima. Not from Belly Rave, however; Norma is soon kidnapped and held by the "Titan" who runs G.M.L. Mundin cunningly blackmails the Titan and rescues Norma Lavin, with the help of Bligh and Lana, the leader of a kids' gang.

Before this, however, Bligh needs help himself. He gets it from his wife and from Shep, a friendly giant of a man who performs the functions of friendly giants (ch. 11, pp. 60 f.). Shep aids Bligh and helps initiate him into the mysteries of life in Belly Rave. It's Shep who introduces Bligh to Lana and her gang of Wabbits and who explains to Bligh the nature of the hell of Belly Rave: no work, and in that sense – and that sense only – a "perpetual holiday" (ch. 13, p. 73).

Shep, then, is a Master of Initiation as well as a friendly giant, and Lana and her gang are, well, friendly animals. That's their function, anyway, and the cute little tykes, with their busted bottles, fulfil it nicely.

After the heroes have answered their Calls and have crossed the Threshold into Belly Rave and Adventure, after Mundin has rescued his future bride and Bligh has established

Belly Rave as home – and after the good characters have teamed up; after all this, the novel proceeds rather realistically until Mundin and Norma Lavin receive their summons from Green, Charlesworth.[17]

And this returns us, in good quest fashion, to what I've called the Struldbrugg episode.

We don't have to go very far if we work forward from this scene, since *Gladiator* moves rapidly from the confrontation with Green, Charlesworth to its catastrophe and resolution. When Mundin and Norma Lavin return with the news that Green, Charlesworth oppose them, the two older silent partners desert the project, leaving only Bliss Hubble with them, the youngest of the Titans helping them bankrupt and seize control of G.M.L. Homes. That leaves only Harry Ryan as an older person among the good characters. Then Green, Charlesworth "trigger" a deeply implanted order in Don Lavin, and Don goes off to the High Wire event in Field Day. The rest of the good characters go to rescue him, requiring that most of them enter the High Wire event as "Hecklers": surrogates for the audience, throwing gravel, and rocks, at him as he crosses a wire above a tank of piranha.

Our co-hero, Norvell Bligh, decides to sacrifice himself in place of Don: if Don falls, he will throw himself into the tank, drawing off the fish and giving the others time to save Don. With this decision, Bligh regains his hearing and becomes fully conscious of the horrors around him – the standard *anagnorisis* by the Hero: full recognition, usually followed by his sacrifice. Bligh doesn't get a chance to sacrifice himself, though. Shep, who had tried to seduce Mrs Bligh, atones for that – cancels his "inpounding (sic) debt worry" – and jumps in himself, taking the obnoxious Field Day M.C. with him (ch. 24, pp. 160-62; see also ch. 23, p. 154).

Bligh had decided to become a sacrificial substitute for Don Lavin; Shep substitutes himself for Bligh. This is the theme of the scapegoat, the *pharmakos,* and in *Gladiator* it is very literally rendered with a *sparagmos:* the tearing apart (and devouring) of the victim.[18]

Harry Ryan also dies in the attempt to rescue Don (from an injury in another event). This death has no big mythic reverberations, but it allows Mundin to meditate on the costs of their war against evil (ch. 25, p. 163), and it allows the new world at the end of the novel to be controlled totally by young people (see Frye, p. 164).

The final battle of the novel, again, takes place at the Stock Exchange and has only a little blood to it. It is a battle, however – or a hunt, to use another image in the novel (ch. 17, p. 111). It is also a gamble: the satiric presentation of the Stock Exchange as a pari-mutuel operation fits in with the motif of Heroic "hazarding." Mundin and his allies break G.M.L., and the rest of the market goes with that huge firm; then, quietly, Mundin et al. proceed to buy up most of their world. This is not a very impressive form for a Ragnarok, but Green and Charlesworth are pretty sleazy gods. Those who live by the dollar die by the dollar, though, and the struggle here is appropriately both petty (a matter of mere money) and titanic (over 14 billion dollars of mere money).

In the resolution of the plot, we see that the scene at the Stock Exchange was, indeed, a Twilight of the Gods. Back at Bligh's house in Belly Rave – the Return home in the quest – the good characters count their hard-gotten gains and conclude that they "own a bit of everything" in their world.

> "We'll need it," said Norma, nestled against Mundin's arm. "Those old monsters in their glass bottles . . . "[19]
>
> Mundin patted her hand. "I don't know," he said, after a moment. "They're as good as dead, you know. They didn't have anything to live for but power, and when we broke the

market we took that away from them. We . . ."

He stopped. The house shivered and sang. A white flash of light sprang up outside, turned orange and faded away.

"What's that?" demanded Norvie Bligh, a protective arm around his wife.

No one knew; and they all ran up to the battered second floor, where there was a window with glass – where there used to be a window with glass, they found. The glass was in shards across the floor.

Across the slaggy bay, luminous even in the evening light, where Old New York had stood and rotted – a mushroom-shaped cloud.

"Green, Charlesworth," mused Norvell. "I guess you weren't the only one who realized they were as good as dead, Charles."

They stood there for a long moment, watching the cloud drift out to sea, an insubstantial monument to the suicide of the Struldbruggs, but the only monument they would ever have . .

"We'd better get below," said Mundin. "We've got cleaning up to do." (ch. 26, pp. 170-71 – end of the novel)

The old, sterile couple, Green, Charlesworth, is dead. The tyrant-monster Holdfast is dead. The world is still capitalistic, and we get a hint earlier in the story that just a change in rulers might not make much difference – that this year's savior may be next year's tyrant.[20] Still, the young couples and their friends can at least clean up, and possibly rejuvenate, the wasteland.

Notes

1 This essay is an extension of my brief comments on *Gladiator-at-Law* in "Odysseus in Grey Flannel: The Heroic Journey in Two Dystopias by Pohl and Kornbluth," *Par Rapport,* 1 (Summer 1978), 126-31. (The other dystopia was *The Space Merchants.*)

2 Frederik Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth, *Gladiator-at-Law* (New York: Ballantine, 1955). In this paper all brief citations will be found in my text (esp., most citations after the first). In my citations I abbreviate *Gladiator-at-Law* as *G-a-L.*

3 Old New York has been bombed: *G-a-L*, ch. 19, p. 130. Note, though, that this post-apocalypse business is not mentioned elsewhere.

4 Mirra Ginsburg, trans., *We* (1920-21), intro. to Viking edn. (1972; rpt. NY: Bantam, 1972), p. xiii.

5 Pohl and Kornbluth may have originally intended their fictive time to cover one week: see ch. 4, p. 23. There are several minor inconsistencies in *G-a-L*, however (e.g., see n. 3, above), so it seems safest to just accept the time-scheme that is made fairly explicit later in the novel. The Narrator tells us that Mundin notes the change in Bligh in the "few weeks" between the start of the novel and the spraying of Coshocton (ch. 19, p. 128); Harry Coett gives the three month figure as the time between the G.M.L. stockholders' meeting we see and the next one (ch. 17, p. 111). We never see the second stockholders' meeting – another change in plan by Pohl and Kornbluth, I suspect – but the three-month figure feels about right for the action of the story.

6 *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1966), "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes," esp. pp. 33-34, 44-45; see also p. 49 for an excellent comment on science fiction as (usually) "a mode of romance with a strong inherent tendency to myth."

7 The tradition goes back earlier than Defoe in the drama: e.g., Thomas Dekker, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600) and Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603).

8 *Don Quixote,* Part I, Book III, ch. 3; alluded to in Frye, *Anatomy,* p. 223.

9 Ryan errs when he puts the age at 100: "As soon as they have completed the Term of Eighty Years, they are looked on as dead in Law . . . " ("A Voyage to Laputa, Etc.").

11 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 2nd edn. (1968 – no essential changes from the first edn. of 1949; Princeton/Bollingen paperback, 1972), Prologue, ch. 1, p. 15 and Part II, ch. iii, section 3, p. 337.

12 See in *G-a-L* ch. 22, p. 147; compare the god of Sales in Pohl's and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (1952).

13 Pohl and Kornbluth parody this and other aspects of the Heroic Journey in *Space Merchants*; see my "Odysseus in Grey Flannel," esp. pp. 128-29.

14 For Campbell's summary of the monomyth, see *Hero*, I. 4, pp. 245-46; for Frye's similar version, see *Anatomy*, p. 192.

15 See "Odysseus in Grey Flannel" for a brief discussion of point of view in *G-a-L*, esp. n. 7, p. 131.

16 See Frye, *Anatomy*, pp. 141-50, 166-70, 187-92, and 198-201.

17 One point is touched on too lightly for me to handle in my text, but I'll note here one interesting little mythic element in Bligh's entry into Belly Rave. At what Campbell calls "the entrance to the zone of magnified power" – Belly Rave for Bligh – there is a "threshold guardian" (*Hero*, I.i.4, p. 77). I think this is the function of the Resident Commissioner, the "dreary old hack" who handles the paper work for the Blighs' moving in to Belly Rave (*G-a-L*, ch. 11, p. 64).

18 See Frye, *Anatomy*, p. 148. The only work of literature (as conscious creation by a single author) that I can think of with as literal a *sparagmos* as that in *G-a-L* is the death of Pentheus in Euripides' *The Bacchae*. For devouring the victim of a *sparagmos*, see Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (1940, 1942; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1953), pp. 56-57. Note also the Fraction of the Communion wafer: "According to the mystical interpretation devised in the Middle Ages, this represents the Body of Christ being broken during His Passion . . . " – Henri Daniel-Rops, *This is The Mass*, trans. Alastair Guinan (1958; rpt. Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), p. 143.

19 Unspaced periods represents an "ellipsis" mark in original.

20 See *G-a-L*, ch. 15, p. 90. See also Campbell, *Hero*, II.iii. 5-6, esp. p. 353.

It seems that in Eastern Europe Peter Nicholls' Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction *is spoken of in somewhat ambivalent terms, mainly because all of "Eastern Europe" is compressed into one article slightly over a page long. While acknowledging that smaller nations tend to have sensitive inferiority complexes, Peter Kuczka—from whom comes the following short history of Hungarian sf—suggests that if in a Hungarian encyclopaedia for example Sweden, England, France and Luxembourg were all treated under the heading "Western Europe" "there would follow an immediate, unparalleled scandal . . ."*

Mr Kuczka is President of the SF Committee of the Hungarian Writers' Association, and of the Hungarian Journalists' Union. Born in 1923, he started as a poet, has a good number of volumes of poetry published, and has received a number of literary prizes. From 1956 to 1964 he had to work solely as a journalist and in artistic public relations. Since the mid Sixties he has been concerned extensively with sf, editing around 200 books and magazines. His magazine Galaktika *is described by Sam Lundwall as one of the three best sf magazines in the world. He has also written short stories, but his main interest is the theory of sf and mass culture, including comics, films and television. He has written a number of scripts for educational documentaries and feature films, sf included.*

In the following informative piece, Eastern Europe Strikes Back . . .

(Meanwhile, in China, we might mention that in Spring 1981 the Kwangtung SF Association was founded in Kwangchow with the aim of studying, commenting on, and writing sf. We hope that in a future issue of Foundation *we might be able to publish an sf viewpoint from China . . .)*

Science Fiction in Hungary

PÉTER KUCZKA

1

According to certain fantastic hypotheses the Hungarian language is a direct derivation of the Sumerian, and is related to the Quechuan and other Indian languages. In reality, however, Hungarian belongs to the Finno-Ugrian family of languages, and our linguistic relations are the Finns and the small Siberian populations like the Voguls, Ostyaks, Votyaks and Mordvinians.

The Hungarian language is very strange for foreigners. It has rich inflections, the vowels are connected according to a certain system, in the genitive case the possessive precedes the possessed, it is full of images, very rich in synonyms, each word is stressed in the first syllable. It can be used with great flexibility; any sort of poetic form can be rendered in Hungarian. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Victor Hugo, Poe can be translated into Hungarian in their original rhythm.

The Hungarian language is spoken by about 14 million people—10·5 within the borders of the country, the rest beyond.

All this can, perhaps, explain why Hungarian literature is not known abroad and why

translation is so rich, significant and valued in our country.

2

Our poetry is seven hundred years old. We have known for hundreds of years Plato's utopias, Lucian's fantasies, Aristophanes' anti-utopias; but the forerunners of science fiction came here relatively late.

In the late 18th century Holberg's novel, *Nicolai Klimi iter Subterraneum* was read here till the copies fell to pieces; people also read Voltaire's *Micromégas* and Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas: Prince of Abissinia.*

Only at the end of the 18th century, mainly influenced by the French Enlightenment, did original utopias, fantastic voyages, mystical and alchemist novels appear here. It is worthwhile mentioning here *Tariménes utazása* (The Voyage of Tariménes) by György Bessenyei and *A mostani adeptus* (The Adept of Our Days) by Sándor Bárótzi.

These writings appeared at the beginning of the 19th century, and they can be truly regarded as the immediate predecessors of science fiction. In this thriving period of our literature more and more works appeared in the science-fiction genre, on serious or satirical subjects. Imagination paints different pictures of the future. The influence of scientific education can be also felt. Our authors discover ideal societies or frightening, brave new worlds in the Moon, in the unknown parts of the Earth or under the Earth.

We can mention two outstanding works from this period.

The Hungarian heroes of *Utazás a Holdba* (1836) (Voyage to the Moon) by Ferenc Ney reach their destination by an airship. In this short novel, they find on the Moon a rationalistic society and lots of fantastic gadgets and inventions, among them sunlight transmitted by crystal tubes, vehicles driven by magnetic force and artificial rain.

Miklós Jósika's novel *Végnapok* (1847) (The Last Days) leads us into a very distant future and planet, with ideas sometimes surpassing the imagination of modern science-fiction authors—telepath earthlings, curious animals and monsters, submarines, airplanes, flexible glass, extraordinary landscapes—and in these strange surroundings he gives a description of etheric love between an earthling and an "alien".

The real father of Hungarian science fiction is, however, Mór Jókai. In his vast oeuvre at first we find only a couple of short stories, later some novels that represent fantasy and science fiction. We can say that it was Jókai's novels and stories that laid the foundations of Hungarian science fiction. Their diversity, the suspense of their plots, their scientific inspiration, social interest, humanitarian concerns and admirable language can fascinate even the modern reader. From among these works we can find the outstanding examples of *Oceánia,* a novel of Atlantis; the utopian Robinsonade of *Ahol a pénz nem isten* (Where Money is not a God); the bitter satire of *Egészen az északi pólusig* (As far as the North Pole); and the supereminent, three-volume work written in 1872, *A jövő század regénye* (The Novel of the Next Century). It is impossible to give a list of the "inventions" of the novel, ranging from hibernation to plastics, from electric aeroplanes to weather control.

Jókai's literary influence is almost immeasurable. The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries were full of his followers and imitators. Titusz Tóvölgyi, the ill-fated author who wrote his novel *Az új világ* (The New World) about the Communist society of the future, was a follower of Jókai, as was István Makay, who in his novel *Repülőgéppel a Holdba* (1889) (By Airplane to the Moon) dealt exclusively with scientific

and technological problems and foresaw the *real* landing on the Moon with a scientific accuracy putting Verne and Wells to shame.

In the meantime, almost simultaneously with the original publications, science-fiction works by Verne, Wells, Robida, Bellamy, Rosny ainé, Lasswitz, Zulawski, Jack London and others were translated into Hungarian; but the Hungarian authors themselves wrote many valuable works of sf in the fields of adventure, philosophy or satire in this period.

3

The second period of Hungarian science fiction is closely connected with the literary revival at the beginning of the 20th century, with the début of the authors of the new literary magazine *Nyugat* (The West).

Among them the most significant is the other classic Hungarian science fiction writer Frigyes Karinthy, a versatile author and profound thinker. Karinthy is the enthusiast and lover of common sense, reason, intellect. He confessed himself to be Swift's inheritor and a relation of H.G. Wells. He continued to narrate Gulliver's travels in two novels. The first one, *Utazás Faremidóba* (A Voyage to Faremid), preceding *R.U.R.* by Karel Capek, describes the conflict of the intelligent, speaking machines, (that is the "robots") and of people; in *Capillária* the author enlarges the contradictory relation of man and woman to fantastic measures. In *Ezerarcú lélek* he tells us about the adventures and ultimate failure of the unkillable man; in *Uj Odisszeia* (A New Odyssey) about the war of machines run wild and people fallen back into a state of primeval existence; while in *Mennyei riport* (A Report from Heaven) about a voyage to the next world. Karinthy very often turned to the future, protesting against the inhumanity of the present. In our literature it was Karinthy who became mostly interested in natural sciences; many of his "inventions" preceded those described later in world science fiction.

There is another "Gulliveriade" from this period, that by Sándor Szathmári, the novel entitled *Kazohinia*. This could not be published for years and came out only in the middle of the war, in consequence of a sleepy moment of censorship; even so it was published in a truncated version. This philosophical work examines the basic problems of human existence in fantastic surroundings, the dichotomy of reason and feeling remaining insoluble.

The menace of World War II, then in preparation, made Mihály Babits, one of the best and most educated poets of the epoch, write his novel *Elza pilóta, vagy a tökéletes társadalom* (Elza, the Pilot, or the Perfect Society) about eternal war, recruited women, life forced back into caves and about a scientist creating a miniature universe.

Naturally a number of other novels also appeared in this period, more or less with similar subjects as in the sf of most countries of the world—space adventures, wars, alien beings and curious technologies. These served, however, mainly the amusement of juvenile and adult readers.

4

The situation after the war created a different climate for Hungarian science fiction. We have come to know the works of Soviet science-fiction literature; we could also witness the cultural-political currents of the postwar period limiting imagination. From the grey mass of uninteresting writings only one book, *Az ibolyaszínü fény* (The Violet Light) by Péter Földes is worth mentioning for its good ideas and adventurous plot.

The great boom arrived at the end of the fifties. There were greater possibilities of

literary expression; we could read at last the significant authors of the West—Bradbury, Simak, Vonnegut, Wyndham, Carsac, Aldiss, Pohl, the new American, French, Italian, English, Swedish, German, Spanish and Japanese authors. We could discover the endless empire of science fiction and its great possibilities. That was the time we could get to know the theoretical writings accompanying science fiction, sf aesthetics, the existence of sf fandom, films and sf art.

In the Hungarian Writers' Union a Science Fiction Work Committee was formed for professional authors, film people, artists and musicians. It has organized discussions and conventions, has published its quarterly *SF Tájékoztató,* and is generally represented in international conventions and conferences.

Simultaneously with all this the sf readers' clubs were formed one by one, their activities and scope of interest being similar to those of Western fandom. The work of the publishers was also revived; new series and anthologies were started; among them the most important was the book series *Kozmosz Fantasztikus Könyvek* and the magazine *Galaktika.* At the present moment there are about 25-30 authors who regularly write science fiction, but for local reasons none of them do so exclusively.

It would be boring to enumerate names and titles for readers abroad; it seems to be better to show certain groups and/or currents.

There are three generations living and working together. Among the older writers is Jenő Szentiványi with his prehistoric novels and adventure stories; and there is Mária Szepes, who gained a wide readership with her psychologically motivated, slightly mystical novels.

After them comes the wide layer of the age group of 40-50 years, a good number of creative personalities and richly endowed talents seeking individual paths. Let us mention here Gyula Fekete's utopias of social criticism; Zoltán Csernai's mystic trilogy on "aliens", Péter Zsoldos's tensely-constructed space adventures and novels of catastrophe. There is Dezső Kemény, who mixes up science fiction with stories of crime and detection, and Gyula Hernádi, an author forever experimenting with forms and messages, who could be compared to the American Harlan Ellison, though Hernádi is much more modest as a man.

The members of the third generation have been brought up to take science fiction and the modern sciences for granted. They are inclined to despise the traditional forms and subjects of science fiction; they seek new ways and messages, they are cautious and suspicious, do not believe in the omnipotence of technology and science. They are full of satiric and ironic ideas and thoughts. They represent the "new wave" of Hungarian science fiction. Here we may mention Péter Szentmihályi Szabó, a highly talented and versatile author; István Kaszás, who has arrived from the field of physical sciences, and László L. Lőrincz, a young scholar of international renown in the field of mongolistics.

And then there are the 25-30 year olds streaming after them in growing numbers . . .

5

In my brief survey I have been unable to talk about Hungarian sf film, art and music, which have had their first, successful and promising results. I could not dwell on our critical life and debates either; the problems here are more or less the same ones as anywhere in the world.

In summary I wish to quote only a few data. The magazine *Galaktika* at first appeared

in a circulation of 20,000-25,000, while our latest issues have been published in 80,000-90,000 runs and basically it is the same with our books. The various sf publications are sold out within minutes and this shows that our readers' interest is always growing. This interest, and the many authors producing ever-newer works, make me feel secure in my optimism when talking of the future of Hungarian science fiction.

1979 saw the publication of George Zebrowski's Macrolife, *an epic novel about the future of life not on natural planets but within artificial, mobile, self-reproducing mini-worlds. Unlike much sf touted as "epic",* Macrolife *does not concern itself with space wars and other such interstellar high jinks, but is a deeply philosophical novel about that most exciting of themes: the future of intelligence in the universe, and beyond the end of the universe as we know it. Dr Jeffrey M. Elliot—to whom we owe the delightful "Profession" interview with Raymond Z. Gallun in our last issue—here just as revealingly interviews George Zebrowski. (About one third of the following appeared earlier in* Questar.*)*

Dr Elliot, who has been described as "the Boswell of modern America" for his many interviews, has a background in Political Science and Government studies. Besides his well-received Keys to Economic Understanding *(Kendall/Hunt) and* Political Ideals, Policy Dilemmas *(Education Development Center) he is author of numerous volumes of in-depth interviews with authors, both in and out of the science fiction field, from Borgo Press. Currently he is engaged in a continuing series of videotaped interviews with leading American figures, for Borgo Press. In addition, he is deeply involved in community affairs.*

The Profession of Science Fiction, 25: Perfecting Visions, Slaying Cynics

GEORGE ZEBROWSKI

(with JEFFREY M. ELLIOT)

I was born of Polish slaves after they were liberated by Allied troops in 1945. This was in Villach, Austria. My father joined the Allied armies and was transferred to Italy. My mother followed, illegally, smuggling me across the Alps. We finally settled in England, where I spent a year in the hospital (I had been a premature baby, a breech birth, and it was later found that my hips were dislocated; this was corrected by surgery, but I fell out

of bed and the work was ruined; it was not to be corrected, and then only partially, until 1959, in New York City).

I attended grade school in England. In 1951, we came to New York, settling in Manhattan; later I lived in the South Bronx, a year in Miami, and finally on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, where we settled after my mother's divorce. My brother and I attended DeWitt Clinton High School, where we were both Honor and Scholarship students, before going to college at the State University of New York at Binghamton-Harpur College, in 1964 and 1966 respectively. We both studied philosophy.

My memories of New York City are those of a vast, powerful city, where anything could be had. My mother, happily, had brought me to the center of the world. I still think of it as my home town, and I am very moved whenever I return to it (on writerly business these days, to see my publishers or my agent).

Growing up in Manhattan, on 345 East 9th Street (the building still stands, I believe), was not unlike the early life of David in Henry Roth's great novel *Call It Sleep*. I am amazed at how little things had changed from the turn of the century by the early 1950s. Tenements, drunks, horse-drawn ice deliveries for use in iceboxes (we got a refrigerator later), deep, dark cellars. Our building was populated by Poles who had been scattered by the war. There were economists and once-landed ladies of Polish nobility, as well as peasant and middle-class families. I went to the public school on the corner, where the other students laughed at my short pants and Oxford British accent (which I quickly lost for that of a New Yorker). After a few grades I was transferred to the nearby Catholic parochial school, where the nuns beat us and taught us the fear of God, a suspicion of sex and girls, and reverence for the male priests.

When my mother left my father in the middle '50s, my brother and I grew up without the usual fatherly restrictions; we loved our mother and felt very free, until our stepfather entered the picture. He was very nice, but became quite authoritarian after the wedding, thus causing bad feelings which have never quite disappeared.

The South Bronx was already beginning to fall apart in the late '50s. I remember the three years there as a constant temptation to run with the local gangs. Moving to Florida was a liberation. Warm, clean, and with a wonderful public library made of high white marble walls, it was a place out of Clarke's *Against The Fall of Night*. There I discovered science fiction—endless shelves of Gnome Press, Shasta, Fantasy Press, early Doubleday volumes, all quite priceless now, all long discarded by the library.

Returning from Florida to New York was like coming back from Paradise. I entered the hospital for a six-month stay in August of 1959, and recovered a year later, just in time to enter DeWitt Clinton High School without crutches. My most vivid memory of January 1960 is buying the issue of *Astounding* with Harrison's *Deathworld* on the cover, and reading Dick's *Time Out of Joint*.

DeWitt Clinton, in the early '60s, was a school of some 5,000 students; of these, a few hundred belonged to the scholarship and honor programs, having been selected for them in the first year. The programs were aimed at college preparation, and they were a bit of a rat race. There was a sense of tradition about the school; we were reminded that this was the high school of James Baldwin, Nathaniel West, Burt Lancaster, Richard Rodgers, Daniel Schoor, and others. I vividly remember reading Baldwin's sonnets in the literary magazine's back files.

Poe Cottage stood nearby. I often visited it to read Poe's poems in his own

handwriting; doing so sent chills up my spine. In my senior year, I remember reading Camus's *The Stranger* and Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy in the same week. The week after, I read a lot of Bertrand Russell.

I attended an early Lunacon (one room with a hundred people in it), where I met a few professional writers. I also went to the American Rocket Society's Exposition at the New York Coliseum, where I met Arthur C. Clarke, Willy Ley, Wernher von Braun, and got a tongue lashing from my stepfather for getting home late. He completely missed the importance of the event to me. I still correspond with Clarke, who has always shown a remarkable capacity to remain distant yet very close, in understanding the way the mind works, even my feelings, in the most subtle ways. He *knew* what it meant to me to be introduced to Ley and von Braun.

Towards the end of high school and throughout college, the battle in me continued as to whether I should be a writer or should teach philosophy and pursue an academic philosophical career. In college, I stole time from Nagel's *The Structure of Science* to read Disch's *The Genocides,* Ballard's *The Crystal World,* and a lot of Brunner. My best teacher in college was Robert Neidorf, a philosopher of science and science fiction reader, who restored my faith in great teachers. He was one of the few I met.

Everything came to a head in 1968, when I attended the first Clarion Workshop in Pennsylvania. Merril, Knight, Ellison, and Leiber had a decisive influence, more by example (writing could be real) than by the things they taught. By 1970, I was out of school and writing full time, mostly for the original anthologies, as well as for magazines. I taught a full credit course in science fiction in 1971 at SUNY/Binghamton. In 1972, my first novel was published, and my fourth published story was nominated for a Nebula; a little later *Macrolife* was given a contract. Foreign sales began to come in, as well as invitations to speak. Pamela Sargent and I found that together we could do quite well at writing. It was fun, exciting, and it meant something, which was more than could be said for the declining prospects in academe.

I spent five years editing the SFWA *Bulletin* on behalf of my fellow writers. My respect for some of them has grown, while for others it has declined badly, no matter how well I regard some of their work. It seems to me that many of them were vastly different people at other times. Failure and poor judgement lie in wait for even the best, sometimes side by side with spectacular success, both personal and professional.

My parents, who did not know what to make of my writing once, now feel proud; I'm glad that they were not able to muster any truly effective means of stopping me; the psychological criticism was not enough by itself. My brother works professionally in psychology, which reminds me of the Henry and William James combination. Very little in our backgrounds would have suggested a writer and a psychologist.

Ten years later, as I struggle through my third market bust (convinced still that they *do* come *and* go), I feel poised to do better work, despite the battering experience of free-lancing. My ambition is to get ahead enough to write novels completely on speculation, without a contract, and offer them complete, rather than in wretched chapter and outline form. The writing life has been modestly decent to me; my work is not overpraised, nor is it ignored. If I can maintain a certain balance, then my development will continue for a long time to come.

—George Zebrowski
(From Interview
with Jeffrey Elliot)

JE: According to your biographical sketch, you were born in Austria of Polish refugees who had been kidnapped as slave labor for the German Reich. Can you discuss your family's experience in Germany? How did it affect their lives? In what ways has it influenced you?

GZ: Imagine a girl and a boy in their early teens. Each is taken away from their parents and sent to a strange land, where no one speaks their language, and forced to work for nothing. My father was beaten severely, my mother abused. And yet, relatively speaking, their experience was not as bad as that of others; they came out alive, as did their parents. The effects on their lives are the kinds of things I have only recently come to understand clearly, although I was always faced with the facts in one way or another. For example, I could not grow up just having my normal parent-child problems; the war experience cast its shadow over everything, preventing my problems from just being my own. I had no right to have lesser problems; I had it good by comparison—therefore I couldn't always convince my parents that my problems were real. In a sense, they weren't real. This changed, but slowly. Frankly, I'm surprised at how well my mother turned away from the past and began to live for the present and future; my father, and my stepfather, did not do as well.

JE: As a child, you were taken across the Alps into Italy, then across France to England, where you grew up and began attending grade school. Do you have memories—vivid or otherwise—of this early period? What do you recall of those days?

GZ: My earliest memories are of the English countryside. I have no memory of my birthplace in Austria, or of my stay in Italy, but I'm told I was very happy in Italy, where my mother and I spent a lot of time at the beach. My feet were dipped in the Adriatic, so it must mean that I'm vulnerable everywhere except in the heels. Grade school in England was for me wearing a tweed short pants suit and writing on a hand-held black slate with chalk, and eating very tasty, dinner-type lunches. Even though I spent most of a year in an Oxford hospital, I remember England with an abiding affection.

JE: In 1951, you came to the United States as part of a displaced persons quota, and narrowly escaped forced repatriation, thanks to a special United Nations resolution. What were the circumstances surrounding this occurrence? How close were you to being ordered out of the country?

GZ: What happened is that various Eastern European countries, Poland and Russia included, wanted to regain those people whom the war had scattered, for political and economic reasons. There had been some forced repatriation in the early years after the war, and this created some tragedies, including the murder by Stalin of whole groups of people who had been sent back by the Allies. The United Nations resolution, in my case, gave the Poles in England a choice of where to go. They could choose to go to the United States, though the numbers were limited to a quota, or anywhere in the British Commonwealth. That a choice was offered was the result of the tragedies of forced repatriation which had come to the attention of the world. If the politics had been different—that is, if the West had seen fit to humor the Eastern bloc, then a forced repatriation resolution might have passed in the United Nations. What is sad about all this is that less prominent minorities were forcibly returned to Stalin, even while pleading that they would be killed (they were), while the Poles were treated humanely, probably because they had fought with the Allies in all the theaters of World War II.

JE: In one article, you wrote that you believed from an early age that you would

become a writer. When did you first come to that realization? What events or circumstances reinforced that belief?

GZ: I think it was in 1958 that I first made a conscious decision to write stories. I had read a lot of science fiction by then—mostly novels published by Fantasy Press, Doubleday, Gnome Press, Putnam, Arkham House—which pretty much covered the science fiction of the '30s, '40s, and early '50s. I had written stories for fun at least a year earlier, so the seeds were ready to bloom under the stimulus of heavy reading. I think I read about a thousand sf novels, science books, biographies, adventure stories, by 1960. But the most important thing about writing was that I had this undercurrent in my mind about it, that it was a way of getting at things that could not be approached otherwise. I had a special feeling about writing which was always there; I can't be more specific. When I sat down to write, I knew I was right. I got my first rejection slip from Campbell in 1960; others followed from Cele Goldsmith, Fred Pohl, etc. I sold my first story in 1969, although long before then I had seen print in amateur publications. I even published a very serious fanzine for three very expensive and ambitious issues. It was called *Epilogue,* and received much praise from people like Blish, Merril, Moorcock, and others. The list of contributors surprises me today.

JE: Given your many interests and talents, why did you decide to become a writer? What basic attraction did it hold?

GZ: Writing, whether it's fiction or non-fiction, is a way of life for me, a way of thinking, of clarifying, of taking stock. I don't fully know what I think about something until I've set my thoughts down in a note or essay. Fiction is a way of structuring experience, exploring character, whether it's the everyday experience or future possible experience, or just a purely fantastic experience. Writing gets at the undercurrent of novelty, change, of beauty in the universe.

JE: What might you do if you couldn't write anymore? Are there other careers that would interest you? Have you ever been close to changing careers?

GZ: Philosophy and Science are the other interests in my life, but even there I would have to write well to accomplish anything. I'm not cut off from being a philosopher; few academic philosophers deserve the name, though they try to make you feel they own philosophy, as do English Departments with Literature. I keep up with the Philosophy of Science; it's a reading kind of field—you think about things. Science I think I love for its beauty and example—the honesty before nature, the scruples of the work, but I like these aspects more than I would the actual work, so it's better that I write about it when I can, understand it where I can. There should be more people who are moved by the ideals and examples of science, and who understand its sociology and history, its importance to human aspirations and survival. Most workaday scientists rarely think about these things either.

JE: Unlike most American writers, your natal language is Polish, not English. Has it been difficult for you to master your adopted language, particularly its idioms and patois? How did you develop such proficiency?

GZ: I spoke *both* English and Polish fluently at age two. Polish I learned at home; English I learned from the nurses and doctors at an Oxford hospital. I don't remember a time when I did not think, read, and write both languages.

JE: One writer has compared you to the distinguished novelist, Joseph Conrad, whose natal language was also Polish, observing: "His phrasing resembles Conrad's in

many ways, a reflection perhaps of the semantic biases of his original tongue. His prose, like Conrad's, is alternately complex and leanly descriptive. His themes frequently reflect the intellectual heritage of Middle Europe." Is this an apt comparison? Was Conrad an important literary influence? In what ways are you both similar and dissimilar?

GZ: Yes, I think the comparison may fit a few things I've written, but the fact is that I've read very little Conrad. I suppose that I share with him a heavy streak of pessimism about human beings, but when I read about his disputes with Wells, I side with Wells. Conrad saw no chance for progress, only for individual moral victories, and these would never surpass the great examples we've already had in human history; we can only equal them. Conrad was serious about morals and entranced by the beauty of the universe in which we dance out our deadly game. Writing was a way of uncovering things, and that's what I like about him. Too much fiction, including science fiction, is merely the dramatization of clever conceits, not the search for the telling moment, the revelation of a truth, which is usually a relationship between people, and between people and things.

JE: Speaking of influences, which writers have had the most significant impact on you and your approach to writing?

GZ: I've always worried about such a question, because so many people have had an influence on me. I haven't weighed one against the other to see who comes out on top; I've been happy with just coming across them. Wells, of course; Stapledon; Heinlein; Clarke, very much; Bertrand Russell; and J. Robert Oppenheimer (primarily because his life was a dramatically meaningful collision of science and government, ethics, and the pursuit of knowledge.) American writers: Twain, Hawthorne, Lovecraft, Merritt, Wolfe. People like Jacob Bronowski and John McHale (who I was fortunate to know personally in the last decade of his life). Among the younger writers: I admire Gregory Benford, Glen Cook, Howard Waldrop, Ian Watson, and Michael Bishop.

JE: In terms of your writing, it has been said that your primary goal is "the idea wedded to human concern." If so, how is this reflected in your work? How does it take shape in your writing?

GZ: Science fiction must deal with the collision of the plausible fantastic with the real world; this means that the *possible* must meet the *real—real* people, *real* history, *real* social issues. The hardness of "hard science fiction" must extend to many areas; it does not. In my own work, I am just coming out of a decade of learning, where the given, dominant varieties of commercial science fiction have too much influenced me. All my work except for *Macrolife* and perhaps a few short stories, has failed to take a path independent of the narrow thinking and standard genre materials of commercial sf, however skilled or entertaining it might be. These same materials, and many new ones, can be used novelistically, in a *writerly* way which weds hard philosophical scientific thinking to metaphor and a keen sense of human character. Benford's *Timescape* is the best example from recent fiction. Genre addicts may not like this kind of work, which aims to provoke and move in a totally serious way. Having been a genre addict, I can confess that I like "junkiness" to be as it is; which is to say that genre science fiction is liked for itself. Those of us who look to other kinds of work are the victims, if you like, of development, which if it is not impeded will carry you to places far beyond those where you started. Read 10,000 comics and you'll demand, at least, better comics; read the same amount of sf and you'll reach a limit—you'll dream of a vastly more sophisticated science fiction; the same thing has happened in serious literature, which is why it can't be

comprehended by most readers. They don't have the development time in their heads.

JE: A science fiction critic, speaking of your work, wrote: "In all of his stories, he asks: 'Where are we going?' but more importantly he asks: 'Where have we been' and 'Where and *what* are we now . . . and why?' " Of these questions, which one most interests you? What makes it especially important?

GZ: You can't write about the hypothetical future without knowing the human past; you must know the present just to have a place to *stand;* and the conditional futures of your work must grow out of a collision of human personality, human desire and knowledge, with what is possible. All the tenses are part of a human being; what I am is a reflection of all that I know to have been, and much I don't know; so looking forward cannot be a totally independent thing.

JE: In one essay, you described science fiction writers (and artists) as "telepaths". What did you mean?

GZ: All writers of fiction must enter the minds of their characters, which means that they must be sensitive to the moods and feelings of others to a great degree. Writing fiction is a kind of science-fictional activity, since you find yourself looking "into" people in public places, guessing what they must be thinking or feeling on the basis of subtle clues in their dress, expression, manner, etc. Most sf writers don't do this. Their characters exist in a social vacuum; their futures have no immediate past, and *their* futures are even cloudier. There is no history, no sociology, no universe of intellectual achievement in science fiction, no awareness of "past culture", nor sense of a variegated "future culture".

JE: You're known as a writer with broad and varied intellectual interests. Do you read extensively in other genres? What disciplines most intrigue you? Who are your favorite fiction and non-fiction writers (outside the science fiction field)?

GZ: My interests range over all the sciences (I have attempted to have at least a few volumes in each science on my shelves, in increasing order of difficulty), philosophy and philosophy of science, history, and the humanities. I can't even begin to list the odd kinds of books that sometimes attract me. I find it very overwhelming and instructive to see what it takes in terms of say, literature, to gather a collection of books which can pretend to reflect basic literacy in the world's best fiction. It's a few hundred volumes, painstakingly gathered over the years. Now, what does it take for other fields? If being a good science fiction writer, or a writer of fiction, depends on being well educated, then I can see why most sf writers prefer to simply imitate other works of science fiction and hang the outside world. George R.R. Martin once sat across from me in my living room and, appalled at how much I studied, told me that you don't have to "do all that stuff" to write science fiction; you could just make it up, or steal it from other writers. And in a sense he was right (although he didn't mean it in that way); that's how most sf is written. Copies of copies of copies. But in each case, an original mind was at work; but where are *our* originals? Favorite fiction writers: Nabokov, Naipaul; non-fiction: Loren Eisley, Walter Sullivan, Louis Halle, C.P. Snow, Edmund Wilson. I really shouldn't use words like "favorite", or "best"; no one human angle can become that extreme for me. Who I appreciate depends on how my mental stream is flowing that week. Why should I put myself into corners like best and favorite?

JE: Asked to describe your approach to writing, you stated: "I would like readers to think of a story or book as something that they will perform in their minds, in the way that

a conductor brings a musical score to life, without simply expecting it to move them with no effort." What did you mean by that statement? How is this concern reflected in your fiction? What do you ask of a reader?

GZ: What I ask of a reader is that he or she not take the model of "light reading" as the only model for fiction, or films as a comparison for stories and novels. A developed reader—one who has progressed from simple to more complex reading—knows what I mean. This is not a matter of being able to read words, but to find pleasure and meaning in what some would call "difficult works". Genre wallows are not this kind of pleasure; it has nothing to do with elitism either, since *anyone* can develop taste and understanding. Why limit yourself? Enjoy as many things as you can reach out to. It's more than most people ever realize. Perhaps I'm wrong, and most people *want* simply to be hypnotized and controlled by the author, who will do everything for them in their heads, rather than think for themselves. Maybe it's fun to be dominated and led around?

JE: How would you describe your readership? Who buys a George Zebrowski novel? How do your readers differ from other science fiction readers?

GZ: Most of my readers to date have read me, I suspect, because I wrote science fiction, not because of *me*. There's a built-in sale guarantee in this genre. Any sf book will sell a minimum number of copies because it's science fiction. Some writers escape this as soon as a reader notices the name recurring on the cover. I noticed this with Heinlein, Clarke, Norton, and others when I was a boy. However, I do think there is a readership of what can be called "high science fiction". I would like to have letters from such caring readers, just to see how many there might be.

JE: What do you think is the most common misconception that people have of you, either having read your work or studied your career? Why do you think this view exists?

GZ: Every writer thinks that he is misunderstood; and he is, by some people, and not by others. I can't expect people to come and know me personally by the thousands; but I should expect them to read with some taste and care. They should expect it of themselves! There is a kind of contemporary boor, usually another writer near your own age, who always seeks to understand you through himself and all his failings, envy included; he just can't stand your success, or you looks, or that you have a pretty girlfriend, or that you failed to nominate his story for an award. One such writer I loaned money to when he lost his on the streets; I also gave him books, even a typewriter. Another is convinced that I'm part of the communist conspiracy because I stood up for Lem when the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) terminated his Honorary Membership. I have never met this writer. And yet another was so angered by the fact that prominent people liked *Macrolife* that he accused my publisher of falsifying the review quotes on the book jacket. Who is Zebrowski? Some foreign-sounding person from New York City—maybe he's from somewhere else? An outsider, because he defended Lem. The vagaries of opinion and impression have no limits. A climate of opinion and feeling about a writer cannot be controlled, it seems. Lem, for example, has great hopes for science fiction, and has not been harder on it than Knight, Bester, or Blish. Many writers bear him no ill will; but to many others he's a rude outsider. A couple of past SFWA presidents didn't even bother to deny that he was kicked out for rudeness, rather than on a technicality. They admitted this freely, saying that we should not suffer traitors in our midst! The sad thing is that "Lem Affair", as it is called, will not die away; it's a time bomb in SFWA, one that will tick louder and louder as his reputation makes his detractors look sillier and sillier year after

year. He's a great credit to science fiction, but we don't glory in it. This time bomb will explode, and it will get in the way of SFWA's good work in bettering the lot of writers. But what SFWA president will have the courage to push through a Grand Master Nebula for Lem? It would solve the problem without referring to the past injury. *And he deserves it, even if there had been no injury!*

Those of us who stood up for Lem are seen as troublemakers, and as hostile to science fiction in some way. Gardner Dozois told me, that I should worry about hurting my career if I stood up for Lem, thus unwittingly passing on the pressure to conform, to shut up. When I think of all those great names who lied about Lem, or who sat back silently and did nothing, I begin to glimpse the true meaning of thoughtlessness and prejudice; they did not need to be evil to do what was done, even though some were malicious. Loving science fiction as I do, I ache when I see favorite authors do such a thing. And these are the same people who spoke of poor, sad John Campbell, when he strayed from truth and goodness, of how they would give such-and-such to change his mind and bring him back to the fold. What I would give to change their minds! The one pernicious statement I have in mind was made by one of science fiction's giants, namely that Lem attacks our sf because he wants to gain favour with his own government, and this about one of the most unpolitical writers in all of Europe! A thoughtless falsehood, never defended, just stated with no evidence as Truth by one of science fiction's authoritative truth-sayers, who reveals himself to be, not the logical mind of his public image, but an emotional revenge-seeker (Lem had been hard on his work in the past). Lem has been hard on my work, too. I can disagree without making up lies about him. (Lem, incidentally, is not a communist, but he is often assumed to be one.)

JE: Fellow science fiction writer and friend, Thomas Scortia, wrote of you: "George is a sane and concerned human being. I have always found his relationship with friends remarkable. Unlike most Americans of my generation, he does not hide behind a wall of cynicism; he is not afraid to touch. More than this, he is not embarassed to say, 'I love.' " Can you discuss your attitude toward friendship? What attracts you to a person? Do you make friends easily? Do you keep them over time? What does it take to be your friend? What kind of friend are you?

GZ: I value friendship above family ties, which are involuntary. I have lots of acquaintances, but only a few friends; too many people call everyone they know a friend, as if having more is better. What does it take to be my friend? As long as we can both get *above* ourselves, our lives, our predicaments, and discuss, argue, without feelings being hurt, then the friendship continues; but if one of us gets hurt and complains, then the code is broken. What this means is that one party values approval and agreement above critical discussion, above disagreement, above friendship. They want to be agreed with, approved, justified, when this is not possible. And they can't stand the other's critical view; it's too damaging; it hits too close to home, maybe. True friends would disagree and be friends, however sadly, even if one was a Nazi. But maybe some issues are too great for any friendship, and this is where it must break down, should break down. Issues of livelihood, money, social position, require that we make moral choices which might make us *poorer*. Few people will let something like the truth make them poorer. Thus empires fall. I try to be the kind of friend who will say the unwelcome thing, and I have had my head cut off for it. The past is greater than most of us, and it has carried off at least two of my once idealistic friends; what I mean is that they have joined the bad guys of the world,

just to make a living, to survive. Beware, I say to them, of the poison within and the steamroller without.

JE: In this regard, most of us seem dissatisfied, to some extent, with the kind of person we are. Is this true of you? What kind of person would you like to be? How far away from this ideal are you?

GZ: I would like to be more knowledgeable than I am. The goal is far away. We would all like to be smart, lovable and loving, kind and understanding, etc. The trouble comes when we think that this is what we are doing, but we're really doing the opposite. Take all those films about persecuted geniuses like Pasteur, Zola, etc. *Everyone* in the audience likes to think that he understands. The film's gift of hindsight gives us perfect moral vision. But how many of our friends would have joined Hitler in the pressure-cooker of post-war Germany? How many of your friends would be reliable in combat, if it came to that? How many would turn you in to the Thought Police? Worse, how many would write a letter in support of your draft status, or to second an unpopular opinion? These questions of life are far from the world of science fiction; yet they belong to the concerns of serious literature. They are everything that means anything. Where is the science fiction that deals with them, say, in terms of future social systems? What is the future of the human heart and mind? I think it was Kornbluth who said that the most important concerns of a writer have to do with the symbolic material which expresses his relationship to his family and friends on the one hand, and to the raw, impinging universe on the other, with all its mystery and terror. One of the few writers who has stepped into Kornbluth's large shoes in this matter, Barry Malzberg, is one of the most vilified and hated authors in science fiction. My trouble is that I appreciate many different kinds of sf, including some of the trivial entertainments. I don't want it to be any *one* thing, ever; but I want it to show intelligence at every level, as say John Brunner shows remarkable intelligence in his most innocent space operas. To get back to your question: I want science fiction to be diverse and joined to reality on the deepest issues. The plausible-possible, that which is considered fantastic by the man in the street, should collide with human character and history. Most sf just provides the fantastic and leaves out the personal and social dynamics; it leaves out all that is literature.

JE: Since most readers won't have the opportunity to visit you or see your home, can you describe it for them? In what ways does it most reflect your personality? Would one see a lot of you—and what you value—in your surroundings?

GZ: Pamela Sargent and I share the floor over our apartment. Here there are two finished rooms (a third is unfinished and is used as a storeroom) which we have made into working offices, complete with desks, phone, file cabinets, and hundreds of feet of bookshelves. They hold our entire science fiction collection, the science library, philosophy, history, historical novels, mysteries, travel, art, etc. Each category has at least a thousand volumes. My office has two desks, one for typing, one for busy work. There are two typewriters. Our apartment consists of a living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, and back porch (enclosed), where we can look out at the hills which Fenimore Cooper used as the background to his Leatherstocking sagas. The living room and dining room are lined with shelves containing mostly contemporary and classic fiction. Another thousand volumes. What you see in these seven rooms is a hungry person—hungry to know, to eat up what other minds have to offer, to imagine what they were like, to feel what they felt. Looking into future possibilities is a part of this hunger. There's a lot of

music. My office and my living room are wired with speakers. I listen to and collect performances of what is called "classical music"—the term is wrongly applied to all serious music. Serious music, like serious literature, extends deeply into my emotional and intellectual life. One of the sadnesses of my life is that science fiction, a love of mine since childhood, so rarely reaches even the second best heights. Many of the sf books in my extensive collection are there because some small part of them is good, some nugget, a bit of an idea, but the overall work may be obviously hopeless, despite my enjoyment of it. I'm appalled at times how much junk I like, for these fragmented reasons.

JE: How do you deal with the isolation, the loneliness, the solitude which writing entails? Do you feel pressure to write? Does this ever result in writer's block? If so, how do you overcome it?

GZ: I write all the time. Notebooks sit everywhere, and I put down whole paragraphs and fragments, ideas, titles, sentences at all hours. I rarely have a so-called "block", though I do take a rest for a week at a time. The pressure to write is always there, since I believe in having work all the time as a hedge against booms and busts in the market; this means that my contracts stretch a couple of years ahead, at the least. Isolation and loneliness—I wish I could have it! The science fiction fan press is so blatantly commercialized now, that it's difficult to feel isolated. I feel that isolation gives you a chance to develop on your own, in an individual way. This is threatened whenever market pressures or reviews come into my working environment. I think sf is one of the few fields where the fans, the public, tries to control what the writers write—through reviews, letters, public abuse, and through editors who serve these tastes, having once been fans themselves. I think this is best shown by the state of the "Best of the Year" anthologies. They're all slavish to the Hugo and Nebula process, but the worst of them is Dutton's, and not because it fails to reprint decent stories, but because of the narrow runway on which they are exhibited. The editor, like most fan-oriented writers, is a total creature of his environment. Rigorous editorial judgment, of the kind once shown by Merril, Harrison and Aldiss, would choose a best of the year which would not follow the predictable judgments of the rest of the market. I should not be able to guess the contents of these collections so easily. Just open Merril's *Ninth Annual,* for example, and you'll see how wide-ranging was her mind. Science fiction, for her, did not exist in isolation.

JE: Can you describe a "typical" work day, if there is such a thing? How do you structure your time? What activities consume your energies?

GZ: Eight to five would be an extremely good day. For many weeks at a time I work in the evenings, until midnight; at other times, all night. Correspondence and normal office work eat up too much of my time. An honest day can be had from noon to five.

JE: You have many strong opinions about science fiction—what it is and isn't. For instance, when asked to assess the state of the art, you observed: "The goals of science fiction writers are poor, the expectations of editors poorer. Writing talent, and its infrequent demonstration at that, is lauded all by itself, too much and too soon, like the praise given the tailor who made well-cut suits, truly marvellous productions, out of burlap." Looking back, what were you trying to say about the genre and its practitioners? What examples come most readily to mind?

GZ: Science fiction is still a literature of promise. Few if any of its works belong to the first rank of literature. This should not be misunderstood; there are many fine works of fiction in the second and third ranks, in and outside science fiction. But sf is particu-

larly tragic, because it so obviously has potential and delivers so little. What is poorly understood by critics who say this, however, is that addicts are perfectly happy with the cooky-patterned, consensus materials of genre reading. The junk is what they want. The situation is complicated by the fact that the junk is often so well written nowadays.

JE: Asked about the current crop of sf writers, you opined: "The writers are not ambitious enough, too ready to practice science fiction at every level of quality except their best, yet ready to think of themselves as thinkers (which we are not) and pretenders to literary quality (which we sometimes achieve with little else)." What conditions within the field have created this situation? How widespread is the problem? In what ways do these writers fall wide of the mark? Are there some for whom this is not true?

GZ: Science fiction, like Hollywood, complains that it must follow the market for popular taste; but who created this situation? I think that many different tastes should be cultivated, even by the same person; and especially by an editor, who should help create taste, by giving readers the chance to develop along more than one direction. The market has become totally show-biz, with only a few writers—Lem, Le Guin, Benford, Wolfe, and a few others—managing to escape its taint, by receiving what looks like serious publication.

JE: Over the years, you've spoken out vociferously on the need to cultivate a new class of writers—individuals who are schooled in all major disciplines (e.g., art, music, philosophy, politics), as opposed to genre specialists. How would science fiction, written by non-genre specialists, be different from that which is currently being published? Are there signs that such individuals are being attracted to the genre?

GZ: The individuals who could change science fiction's ideals are a minority; what they do does not make for a complex trend, which is the only kind of trend that can change things. I think the whole role model image for writers of science fiction is a pretense; in fact, I don't like the image of the writer and artist that emerges from American life: woolly thinkers, machos, sloppy, drunk, poor, anti-intellectual, emotional rather than reason-oriented. Writers are poorly organized; they often are bums; no wonder publishers treat us as they wish; it's easy to keep us divided. What I would like to see is a scientifically-trained philosopher of science who writes like a poet. Why don't the Loren Eisley's of the world write sf? Why don't we have more thoroughgoing figures today, on the order of a Clarke, Lem, Heinlein, or Kuttner. Role models are always hard to create and live up to; today we're not even looking for them.

JE: As regards science fiction, how fierce is the battle between those writers who are idea-oriented and those of purely literary persuasion?

GZ: John Campbell said to me in 1970: "Those who can write can't think, and those who can think can't write." To be purely idea-oriented is useless to a writer; he's not a fiction writer, really, but to be purely literary, not to have ideas or interesting thoughts, is stupid. What I think a purely "literary writer", so-called, would say, is that his kind of ideas are differently treated. Pangborn will always be a better writer than Niven, say, despite the fact that Niven's ideas are more striking. Pangborn penetrates, while Niven presents. Pangborn should have had Niven's ideas, or Niven Pangborn's writing ability. I think it's an open question as to how much can be achieved if you set out, or consciously plan, to be a Niven-Pangborn combination. Most writers just do what they can, any way they can; they don't train and they don't try.

JE: Addressing this dichotomy, you remarked: "Ideals should not be foreign to the

artist or writer, even though the successful combination of concept and character in sf is agonizingly difficult, and the production of great work even more difficult." What makes this so difficult to achieve within the context of a science fiction story?

GZ: I think it can be done. Look at Benford's *Timescape,* or Lem's novels; but it takes deliberation, rewriting, the training and cultivation of multiple ideals. You must practice, said the piano teacher. Why should writing be different?

JE: Do you still share the view, expressed in 1971, that readers operating on a high level of intellect and involvement are noticably lacking in science fiction? If so, why do you think this is the case?

GZ: For lack of trying, for lack of editorial encouragement, for lack of publishing support.

JE: Of the sf field, you stated "Science fiction is often a game for the immature, a genre entertainment that is not curious about how people think and feel, because it lacks the authenticity of lived experience." Can you elaborate on this thought? How does it show itself in what is currently being published?

GZ: The great interest of science fiction lies in showing how real human beings, real milieux, may come into contact with the fantastic, with future possibility. This means that conceptual skill, cleverness with ideas is not enough. If we are to give sf the authenticity of "lived experience", we must introduce into science fiction the extreme dimension of character. I say "extreme" because that is the only dimension of authenticity that is possible in sf; everything else is hypothetical. Remember, ideas are held within human minds, not in the air; the stronger the human dimension, the stronger will be science fiction's claim to being serious literature. See how striking sf can be with ideas alone; imagine how overwhelming it could be with the skills of a Dostoevsky added.

JE: You were one of the first American writers to introduce science fiction readers to Stanislaw Lem, the popular author of *Solaris.* Moreover, you have written extensively about the man and his work. What are Lem's special talents as a writer? How would you assess his contribution to the sf field? What explains the mixed feelings which many readers have about him?

GZ: Lem is as good as he is because he takes the possibilities of sf seriously, not as a game to be played, but as a literature which can speak to the most far-reaching possibilities now open to humanity through science and technology. He sees a painfully real humanity poised before a sea of real possibilities and he expresses the collision between human nature and plausible possibilities in elegant, subtle works which have as their main literary component a personal reference which is at once philosophical and scientific in the most searching manner. His sense of language is equal to that of Camus or Joyce, his vision encompasses many possible outlooks. What he has tried not to produce are genre wallows; he is not against them, except when they are presented as being profound works of literature. As for the mixed feelings about him, we do not find this so much among science fiction book buyers, who have supported his work with enthusiasm, as among science fiction professionals who are too thin-skinned to take criticism with grace. They'll take criticism from people like Knight and Bester, but they will not suffer it from foreigners. The thing to remember about Lem is that he is not a foe of sf; he loves it as much as any fan, but he is appalled at science fiction's claims, especially when the reality falls so far short. I have never met Lem, and philosophically, I disagree with many of his views, but since when has it been necessary to subscribe to all of an author's views to like

his work?

JE: Several years ago, you played an active role in what has since come to be called the "Lem Affair", in which the author was expelled from Honorary Membership in the SFWA. Briefly, can you explain the basic issues in the controversy? What part did you play in the dispute? Has your involvement in any way affected your standing in the organization? What lessons should be learned from this incident?

GZ: Lem has been critical of science fiction, including his own. When this became known to certain members of SFWA, a technical reason was found to terminate his Honorary Membership (which I had recommended, and President Poul Anderson and the officers had approved). No such termination would have occurred except for Lem's published views becoming known to English-speaking authors. In other words, the legality of his Honorary Membership only became an issue when it became known that Lem was critical of Western science fiction (he's actually critical of all sf, including his own). The lesson for me was not so much a matter of Lem, but what it says about SFWA, that it should punish the heretic so clumsily, and then deny that it was so doing. One past president was more honest. He stated quite clearly that Lem was thrown out for bad table manners, and that this was a right and proper, very human thing to do. Other officers spoke of "hanging traitors", etc. The lesson to me, as Chris Priest so well put it, was that SFWA could be so admirable in the individual, yet so lynch mob-like in the collective. I blame the president of that time, who failed to take any public position, and who could easily have quashed the whole thing before it got out of hand. The whole affair, I'm afraid, will not go away; it will come back as soon as some national reporter gets wind of the fact that here was an American writers' organization behaving like the Soviet Writers' Union. All that can be done now is for a new president to repudiate the whole thing, even if it takes a referendum of the membership, and perhaps giving Lem a Grand Master Nebula, which he would deserve even if no wrong had ever been done to him. Such an award would not have to refer to the past injury, I repeat, since he deserves one anyway. He deserves a Nobel Prize, in fact, as many people in and outside science fiction have noted. Those of us who stood up for Lem within SFWA (Le Guin, Sargent, Benford, Dann, Berman, and others) have been vilified. Just a bunch of pinkos. An example of bad behaviour that is particularly pernicious occurred when a distinguished writer withdrew a story from the final Nebula ballot, not wanting to win an award in the year when Lem was so badly treated. The story was withdrawn after it had won, and the award was given to the next story, all very quietly, with no mention of the facts by SFWA.

JE: In the past, you've written extensively about sf and the visual media. In one piece, you argued that science fiction film is mainly a story of failure on many counts. As you view it, what are the major fronts on which most sf cinema fails?

GZ: It may be fine film, fine drama, but it's rarely great *science fiction* film. The two sets of demands are too much for filmmakers, primarily because they don't set out to meet them. Visual virtues dominate over storytelling and ideas.

JE: Speaking of such films, you remarked: "Ironically, the dream-made-real medium breaks newcomers of their dreams." What did you mean? Can you cite some current examples?

GZ: The economic system under which films are made tries to eliminate all risk; and with that elimination goes almost every chance to do science fiction cinema as it needs to be done. *Things to Come* and *2001* are just about the summit, and far from perfect.

JE: As a film critic, what are the salient criteria by which a science fiction film should be judged? What films most stand out as successes and failures as measured by these criteria?

GZ: Here is a medium which is supposed to be the ultimate expression of creative reality-making, of taking time, sight, and sound, and restructuring them to create the illusion of change and development, of time passing and lives lived, and what do we get? Special effects, as in *Black Hole* and *Alien,* and a total failure in scripting, acting, and thinking. A show like *Space: 1999* is the finest example of the triumph of visuals over *every other virtue;* everything fails except the surface appearance.

JE: As regards film, is there general cause for optimism? Does there exist a real possibility for good sf cinema?

GZ: Hope exists in the realm of "pure possibility"—namely, it is physically possible to make great science fiction film, but the possibility is of no help, unless you have people who know sf, can write scripts, direct, and produce the final result.

JE: How do you regard television as a major cultural influence? Has it been a force for good? In what ways has it affected the popularization of science fiction?

GZ: I believe that TV can do good things, in principle, just as a man can be healthy, in principle, if you don't feed him toxins; but TV keeps feeding us crap. Science fiction on TV is limited to "Twilight Zones" (often good), "The Outer Limits" (always good, often brilliant), one or two good "Star Treks", and not much else. The cutting edge of great sf is not TV; it's in print. This doesn't have to be the case completely, but it is.

JE: You've been extremely critical of many practices within the publishing industry. As you view it, what's wrong with most of the big publishing houses? What can be done to overcome this predicament? Is there any evidence of progress in this area?

GZ: We now have editors who can't edit, and they run the science fiction programs. The publishers have given them their positions because they are "acquainted" with sf, not because they are editors of fiction (certainly none of them is a major American fiction editor, in the sense of someone who works with an author line by line). Where are our Campbells and Bouchers? Recent editors have helped perpetuate a show-biz mentality in sf, and then they point to the commerical market as the reason they buy so much junk. Normally, I wouldn't complain about this sort of thing, but where are the quality science fiction publishing programs, where is the work treated as a serious form of American fiction? It it were even 10 percent of the market, I would be happy.

JE: Do you share the view, expressed by many, that sf is still considered the lowest rung on the publishing ladder? If so, what will it take to change this attitude?

GZ: Most serious fiction editors do not look upon science fiction as a place for serious writing. One Lem or Clarke, or Le Guin, does not change the overall picture. Until we have major American fiction editors actively supporting a new generation of honest writers who want to write sf, the situation will not change. Science fiction will continue to be just another form of print television. What is sad is that good writers get lost in this area of ink and paper.

JE: When you read a book—sf or otherwise—do you ever compare yourself, favourably or unfavourably, to those who wrote it?

GZ: I try to give myself up to the spell of intended effect of a book, while forgetting that I am a writer. Later, I may think of its technique or style.

JE: In rereading your work, are you generally pleased with what you've produced?

Are you usually satisfied with your own efforts?

GZ: Generally, I don't reread, except to find typos. The day I feel satisfied will be the day I stop learning and growing. Unfolding will be at an end. This doesn't stop me from liking a passage or two on occasion.

JE: How do you respond to criticism of your own work? What value do you attach to negative reviews? Do such reviews ever cause you to doubt your own talent?

GZ: My views have grown with experience. Emotionally, many writers believe the worst reviews and forget the fine ones, no matter how many fine ones there have been. Later, I learned that I couldn't believe either the good reviews or the bad; and that *someone* would always hate your book or story no matter how good it was, and that people with wide tastes appreciate many different kinds of things and are more likely to grasp your intentions in a work, seeing it for what it is, rather than attributing the result to your inability. What a critic considers my failures may be what I actually planned; it didn't just happen by mistake. Many critics are failed writers who make money from selling out their more successful colleagues; it's much easier to sell reviews if you're witty and clever than if you write seriously and with depth. I have learned, however, that in the end the reviews make no difference to sales (at least none that can be proven); they are for you and your editor, family, and friends. After ten years, I see that all my fiction is in print or about to come back into print in better editions (in one case going from *paperback to hardcover*), and the reviews have been nothing when compared to sales. Few readers buy a book for the review blurbs, and most don't read reviews at all. So while I may react emotionally on occasion, good *and* bad reviews leave you empty a week later. All of which leaves the question of genuine criticism in science fiction untouched, since it doesn't exist.

JE: As you know, two reviewers can read the same book and arrive at totally different conclusions. For example, of your new book, *Macrolife,* critic W. Warren Wagner wrote: "With the publication of *Macrolife,* George Zebrowski takes his place next to H.G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon, and Arthur C. Clarke as a novelist of ideas on a cosmic scale. It is one of the most intellectually adventurous science fiction novels of all time . . ." Yet, another reviewer, John Clute, said of the book: "Big, dense, dumb. And if George Zebrowski is as humorless as the prose he fills the marmoreal solitude of this book with, then he's not much of a smiler . . ." How can two critics—both reading the same book—arrive at such very different conclusions? Is this more a product of the reviewers or the book?

GZ: Clute wrongly demands values which he doesn't find in my book. Aside from his obvious abuse, he complains about my so-called plot, always the mark of an amateur who would have liked to have written the book for you. A bit of examination shows that the critique falls to pieces, leaving only the derision. For example, Clute complained that my characters were dull people; one was even a dolt. Thus, he noted my intention, but thought that I had made some kind of mistake. Possibly he expected science-fictional superheroes and not flawed, deluded, even doltish human beings. He also wanted a different plot, something zippy, probably. Before he was through, this poor excuse for a critic had accused me of loving General Eisenhower and desiring to live in a shopping mall. He seemed genuinely to hate the book, but all I could see was that he hated his own straw man of the book, not what I had written. The derision, wilful know-nothingness of his words, the complete lack of logic in his review (it is contradictory at its heart), leads me to conclude that science fiction reviewing is in a terrible state when it permits this kind of

sloppy mind to commit its words to print. The conclusion of the review, by the way, is a piece of slander (disproved, I'm happy to say, since publication) based on the reviewer's need to discredit the possibility that *anyone* could have thought the novel worthy. A good or bad review can be credited on the validity of its descriptions and arguments, according to some rules of fair play; and reviewers should be held accountable to some minimal standards; a bad reviewer should be able to ruin his reputation in the same way as a bad writer. Science fiction reviewers, I'm afraid, can't even learn good manners, much less apply any canons of rational discourse. They exist like vigilantes, above any law; they resemble, if anything, the old McCarthy blacklisters. But the ultimate dirty secret of reviewers is that they fear saying something good about a book, because it is much harder to justify, to say why a book is good, than to do a clever hatchet job. Constructive activity is always harder than destructive; ask any child who builds toy towns. And worst of all, reviewing is fashionable among young writers, many of whom have later confessed that they should not have reviewed books at that age, but it was a publishing "credit"; however poor a substitute it might have been for creative work, it was a way to get one's name around. But to get back to your question: Clute is probably not a dummy; so how can his reaction be so dumb? Is it the nature of my novel that has caused this split in opinions? I don't think so; stupidity is a much simpler explanation. I no longer wonder at how it is possible for intelligent critics and reviewers to be so stupid. If you start with insufficient values, then your intelligence, which is often the servant of our wilful convictions and sympathies, will work very hard to support them. You'll be brilliant in defending dumb ideas. Lawyers have always known this; they're obligated to do it. So, given all this, the smarter you are, the dumber you'll get in your pronouncements. I think they call it "wilful stupidity".

JE: During the course of your career, you've written a number of reviews. In this regard, would you agree with the oft-quoted observation that it is hard to write intelligently about good books, and even harder about the very best?

GZ: Critical writing illuminates, deepens our understanding of a work. A great book cannot be exhausted by multiple readings, and there are even works which are over the heads of most human beings. To write intelligently about the very best science fiction requires that you be a great reader. What does that mean? Read Adler's *How to Read a Book,* and you'll see how many *kinds* of reading there are, and how few readers ever get past the first stages of effort; yet everyone thinks they know all about it. Great reading is akin to playing the score of a symphony, taking the words and performing them, and *not* expecting the author to do it all for you as in television.

JE: In *Macrolife,* you employ a unique stylistic approach, stretching the novel format to new lengths. Can you discuss the structure of the book?

GZ: The structure of the book is not aimed at having a zippy plot, but at conveying the feeling of people who might be living in a very different future, not in the '70s or '80s. The sequence is aimed at conveying a vast sweep of time in personal terms, especially in the conflict of ideas which are held by differing people. I don't think I'm stretching the novel format more than say, *Moby Dick,* or *Doctor Faustus* by Mann; it's only in the science fiction world, where technique is backward, that the book seems strange. I'm reminded of Damon Knight's complaint about how dull *Messiah* by Gore Vidal was, even though he found the final effect unforgettable and profound; which only shows how unable pulpsters are of sitting still for something serious. The light reading model is not

the only one there is for novels. It fosters short attention spans.

JE: As regards *Macrolife,* Gerard O'Neill wrote: "This is the story of humanity's breakout to the era of space colonies, a book which addresses the deepest of questions: What is the human destiny?" Briefly, for those who haven't read it, what is the storyline of the book?

GZ: The story follows the development of self-reproducing space settlements in the next century; then we are shown how they have developed a thousand years from now; and in the last part of the novel we look *back* from the final moments of the universe to see how macrolife became the dominant form of interspecies civilization in the cosmos. All this we are shown through fairly ordinary people in part one, a throwback clone of a character from part one in part two, and the same character in part three, who has fallen back into a state of extreme individuality. The story moves from a party in part one, chapter one, to the collapse of all nature in part three. I'd like to clear up some misconceptions about the theme and politics of the book. *Macrolife* is a novel about a social system which has solved its grossest external problems, perfected the environment, but cannot perfect the nature of the creatures who must inhabit it—namely, intelligent beings, humans. And this is a society which has learned that it should not try to perfect the inner world, since it must, of necessity, proceed on the basis of imperfection. The achievement of moral goodness, the attainment of knowledge, in fact the pursuit of any virtue, must proceed on the basis of that virtue's lack, to whatever degree, in the pursuer. Thus the outlook of the novel is neither liberal, nor conservative; while it believes in the perfection of the outer realms, it denies, in principle, the possibility or the desirability of perfecting the inner world. Marx and Smith fall by the wayside. The central focus is on the incompleteness of society, life, and individual understanding. John Bulero, the protagonist of part two, is a social failure; he comes to accept the ideals of his society, but the undercurrent of tragedy, strain, of a final and permanent dissatisfaction, persists. It is not a happy book, nor an optimistic one. Things are as they are, and our understanding is incomplete. The heroic posture of macrolife serves to point this up . . . I'm afraid that politically, and ideationally, this book is too sophisticated for the science fiction audience, which lives by polarities and narrow criteria. Passages like the one where Blackfriar details the failings of his world; the fact that John is a failure; these things go past the casual reader's mind. The method of the book is meditative, and that is how it deserves to be read.

JE: With few exceptions, *Macrolife* has received exceptional acclaim—rave reviews from the biggest and best in the field. Indeed, several critics have hailed the book as a science fiction classic. As you view it, what makes *Macrolife* such a powerful work? Why does it evoke such strong reactions? Did you expect this kind of response?

GZ: I did not expect the book to become the darling of the fan community. It's not a cozy book about a cozy universe; it tries to see human beings existing in a radically different social system. But judge for yourself. Those who like the book are Arthur C. Clarke, Gregory Benford, Gerard O'Neill, Ian Watson, Michael Bishop, Brian Stableford, R. Bretnor, Thomas Scortia, Dean Ing, Quinn Yarbro, Cynthia Felice, Howard Waldrop, and many others; while those who abuse it are John Clute, Gardner Dozois, and Charles Brown. "A book is a mirror," the saying goes, "if an ass peers into it, you can't expect an apostle to peer out." The light reading model for the novel (print television) is unforgiving of story characters who have long dialogues, or thoughts; but

feelings and actions are fine. Throw in some visual images and whip the whole thing up into a frenzied souffle. This kind of thing has been called the "denatured novel" by some; others see it as an advance in narrative technique ("high-pressure narrative", they call it).

JE: Hypothetically, suppose *Macrolife* made you a million dollars. How would you spend it? What is your attitude toward money? How much value do you place on it?

GZ: I write for money so I can continue to write. Quote me a figure and I see all the *time* I can buy to write.

JE: In your Introduction to *Faster Than Light,* you wrote: "Dreamers grow up and grow sluggish, whether they be science fiction writers or scientists." Can this be said of you? If so, how?

GZ: The circulatory system has a couple of special valves, carotid valves; these grow tighter with age and fail to open as wide as they did in youth; the brain gets less oxygen and those moments of peak performance, insight, inspiration grow less frequent. We all have the experience of being at our best; we know when we're not, because we remember how we were. Some scientists claim that these valves can be trained to open wider even in advanced age. Experimental results show marked increases in performance. We all are growing more sluggish, unless something can be done. When you slow up the brain, you slow up its sense of possibility, its sense of reaching forward in time to accomplish something. I see it in writers who are my age. They don't take care of themselves, thinking that the brain is apart from physical limits. It's the only organ in the body which has little or no exercise directed at it— I don't mean intellectual exercise, but purely physical.

JE: In one review of *Macrolife,* a critic posed the question: "What future can there be in the science fiction field for a writer like George Zebrowski?" Given your experiences to date, how would you answer the question? How do you see your own future in the field?

GZ: I try not to think of a "field", although I once did. I'm a writer who happens to write science fiction. If print television takes over, then there is little future for American literature. But to date, I have little to complain about. *Macrolife* was published by Avon in mid-1980. Since then it's gotten a British, German, and Swedish edition. Out of some 50 notices, only six are bad. I sell every word I write, and I have lived from writing for ten years now, quite comfortably. My other stories and novels have appeared in more than half a dozen languages, and the number is growing. There are readers who understand me and those who don't; they're free to do so, and I'm free to have my opinion of them.

JE: During the course of your career, you've produced many highly-praised works. What explains your failure to receive wider attention in the science fiction community? Are there signs that this is changing?

GZ: I'm better known than I realize, actually. I have been nominated for awards. Lately, I was a special guest speaker at Urcon II, and the invitations keep coming. *Macrolife* has been praised by writers outside sf, notably by the novelist Robert Kroetsch, by Curtis Smith (the Stapledon scholar), by historian, futurist, and Wells scholar Warren Wagar; the *L-5 News* gave the book a fine review. Richard Geis, the editor of *Science Fiction Review,* tried hard to resist the book, but ended up praising it highly. All that is necessary for the book's continued survival has happened; the expectation is that it will do well in paperback. It's not the first time that a good book has not made a million dollars or been severely underestimated by critics and noted editors. Go look at some of the stupid reviews of *Childhood's End* by some of the blessed of the field.

JE: In the Introduction to your collection, *The Monadic Universe,* Thomas Scortia wrote of you: "The rate at which his talent is growing makes me impatient to see the product of his talent 20 years from now." In this regard, how would you assess your own development? In what areas have you made the greatest progress? Are there some which require further effort?

GZ: I am moving from being completely influenced by the vast body of science fiction to developing a critical view of how it might be done. Good sf is not like other science fiction; it is not cut from a cookie pattern, which is what we mean by genre writing. Good sf treats of the human (or that of any intelligence that can be imagined) reaction to the emergence of a variety of factors of a new kind. Novelties based on science and technology are inserted into the flow of socio-historical events, and the human reaction is observed in the author's mind, as a highly imperfect thought experiment. The human reaction part makes it literature, the novelty part makes it science fiction. My conviction is that this program must be carried out with a vengeance. It represents, I believe, the fulfillment of Campbell's vision of "hard science fiction", but in a way that will not be recognized by its current devotees, since it demands "hardness" across the board—in thinking, writing, a novelistic approach to character, etc. In terms of *a unified sense of values,* Campbell's true heirs are writers like Le Guin, Wolfe, Benford, Lem, Clarke, and others. They stand on his shoulders and see the greater vision (in which science fiction is great fiction *and* great science fiction), even when they don't admit to it. Improvement means making a set of values work together. The real question every sf writer must ultimately ask is this: Do I want to write in my own way, following my own vision, or do I want to manipulate the market, responding to the demands of critics and editors? Many writers give in. They give the market what it wants; others do their own work and just happen to be liked; still others are excellent and ignored. These last are often pointed to by older professionals and described as "not understanding the market". I'm tired of these Claggarts who have lost all ideals. They don't understand how anyone would *want* to have a critical, independent viewpoint on science fiction, especially if it means a loss of income and notice. They come to believe that there is "something" to bad taste; and worst of all they believe in the back of their minds that public taste cannot be improved, so you might as well dive in and swim around in it.

JE: When you're not writing, what do you do to relax? What are some of your non-writing interests? Is it easy for you to relax?

GZ: I watch movies, I play chess, I swim and play tennis (not at the same time), I bookhound fanatically, read book catalogs to wake up in the morning, I walk a lot, talk a lot (with those who know how to play the game only). Serious music is a passion, as are current events, history, and beautiful women (whose unsung variety is a joy).

JE: *New York* magazine recently asked a group of well known figures to discuss their "secret vices". What are yours?

GZ: I love *not* to drive a car, or take a plane; I love trains and walking, Cadbury chocolate bars, and to sleep, as well as keeping in touch with my friends by phone, at ruinous rates. I recommend this only for those who care.

JE: Finally, can you discuss some of the projects which you currently have on the drawing board? What plans do you have for the future? Do you envision any major new directions?

GZ: I've just finished a book for young readers, *Free Space* (Harper & Row);

Doubleday will be doing a trilogy of mine. I've edited *The Best of Thomas N. Scortia* (Doubleday); Ace will be doing a one volume of *The Omega Trilogy*. There are at least a dozen stories I want to write, and the *Macrolife* background has at least three books to go. These will not be sequels in any sense, but stories set in this future, in vastly differing times. Each novel will differ in technique from *Macrolife,* and from the other books. There are also some editorial projects I'm planning—an anthology on Cosmology and Science Fiction, one on Space Settlements and Science Fiction (with Gregory Benford), a complete Science Fiction and Fantasy of Wells (with Warren Wagar); a few contemporary stories, an historical novel, at least a dozen other sf novels, one or two fantasy novels. Eventually something on film.

Editorial Note: For readers interested in George Zebrowski's comments on John Clute, our Reviews Editor would refer them to the April 1980 issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction,* where the review in question appears. John Clute says: "Much of the column is taken up with the task of praising John Crowley's *Engine Summer.* Incidentally, I did not claim that Zebrowski loved Eisenhower; I claimed that Eisenhower would have loved Zebrowski."

A native of New England, and former executive editor of Sennet *(The University of London's student-faculty newspaper), John Dean is currently teaching at the University of Paris XIII. Author of a book on the Romance genre,* Restless Wanderers, *and a collection of fiction and poetry* (Foreign, *Handshake Press, Paris), he has published numerous critical articles on topics Homeric, Melvillean, English Renaissance and contemporary French, as well as on sf and fantasy. At present he is working on* Thomas M. Disch: A Reader's Guide *for Starmont House Press.*

The Science Fiction City

JOHN DEAN

> "Thrive, cities—bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient rivers,
> Expand . . . none else is more spiritual,
> Keep your places . . . none else is more lasting."
> —Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"

The presence of a city in a work of science fiction heightens the drama of living in the future. The condition of a major city in any advanced civilization is the clearest indication of the particular stage of that civilization. The city is the heart of the body politic; it is the nucleus of all social life and culture. In the literature of science fiction the city concentrates the imaginative ideal which gives form to the particular work of science fiction. Along with language and the craft of literature itself, "mind *takes form* in the city . . . the dome and the spire, the open avenue and the closed court, tell the story not merely of different physical accommodations, but of essentially different conceptions of man's destiny."[1]

The city plays an important part in a wide range of modern science fiction literature, from H.G. Wells' London of the year 2,100 in *The Sleeper Awakes* (1899; 1910) through Frank Herbert's gloomy city of Chu in *The Dosadi Experiment* (1977) and John Shirley's *City Come A-Walkin'* (1980). As the literature of science fiction continues to grow and develop the riches of the city remain an especially persistent and vital source of extrapolative envisionings. Yet critical cartographers have so far mapped this urban region in only the sketchiest of terms. Thus, my essay: an exploratory survey of the cities realized in Anglo-Saxon science fiction since mid-century. I will attempt to define the different kinds of cities, and the different meanings given to these cities, since that time.

To repeat: in sf cities are legion. Where do they begin: with Homer's urbane Phaecians in the *Odyssey,* with Plato's utopian *Republic,* or with Aristophanes' aerial city of Cloud-cuckooland in *The Birds*? And where do they end: amid the catastrophies of Bellona in Delany's controversial *Dhalgren* (1975), with J.G. Ballard's effervescent necropolises, or with John Shirley's beautifully verminous San Francisco? From the outset I make a self-serving disclaimer: that I will not, that I *cannot* refer to every city which has ever appeared in a work of sf. That is the point. The cities I write of in this article are exemplary. I've kept this piece short—hopefully concise—to draw a schematic outline of sf cities. The area has long been in need of a map. Having said this, let us enter the urban maze . . .

The city is first of all located in the presence of utopias and dystopias. The utopia and the city are distinguishable literary entities. Utopias are the sometimes-realized-dreams of different cultures, individuals, and ideologies which eventually pass away. The city remains. The city is the constant base upon which utopian attempts are founded. The city extends from blueprints to ruins. It is in the flesh and in the skeleton, the material realization and the intellectual abstraction of utopias. The city is the clay which a utopia shapes to its own ends; the clay which remains when the utopia has once again become nothing but an idea.

The majority of utopias in modern science fiction are actually dystopian. The rigid systemization which characterizes twentieth century utopias tends to stifle the very life forms which the systemization originally attempted to nourish. Order crushes the life out of disorderly mankind. The single most notable exception here is Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), in which utopian man—personified by Shevek, living in the city of Abbenay—manage to realize a high measure of individual creativity and social harmony. Otherwise, the utopian cities of science fiction "do not work very well or they work much too well for comfort."[2]

Possibly at the root of this utopian, dystopian distinction is the dichotomous tradition of the city itself in western literature: on the one hand, as the Hellenic city, and on the other as the Biblical, Hebraic city. The Hellenic vision sees man as being in perfect harmony with urban ways and rhythms, with the civic pressures, the economic concerns, even the darker temptations and threats which encroach upon man in the city. The Hellenic conception of the city is to see it not only as man's proper "home, where one is happiest and whither one is drawn, but also (as) a mighty being, lofty and divine . . . (The city) represents an image for the highest heroism and dedication . . . (It was) the real . . . religion" among the Greeks.[3] The Biblical, Hebraic vision sees man as degraded by the city. The Bible's first city, Enoch, was founded by Cain. The city opposes the ways of God and severely limits man's ability to perfect himself. The city generates the likes of Babel,

Sodom and Gomorrah, and Pontius Pilate's Jerusalem. Virtuous men such as Adam, Abel, Seth and Noah live out their righteous lives in pastoral surroundings.

Having established this background, we can now locate examples of this primary use of the city in science fiction as utopian or dystopian base structure in: H.G. Wells' neo-fascist, quasi-subterranean London in *The Sleeper Awakes* (1899; 1910); E.M. Forster's world-wide, womb-like beehive city in his nightmarish short story "The Machine Stops" (1909); Thea von Harbou's city of "reasoned, methodical hurry . . . the center of the world,"[4] Metropolis, in her novel version of Fritz Lang's film by the same name, *Metropolis* (novel: 1927, film: 1926); the technologically wonderous but spiritually corrosive city of London in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932); Terminus, the main city of Dr Hari Seldon's far-off planet of repose on the fringe of the galactic spiral, in Isaac Asimov's fatalistic *Foundation Trilogy* (1953); Diaspar, Arthur C. Clarke's seemingly eternal city of artists in *The City and The Stars* (1956); the claustral Urban Monad 116 in Robert Silverberg's *The World Inside* (1971); and the many degenerating cities of the future contained in Roger Elwood's anthology, *Future City* (1973).

Among these many versions of the city as utopian and dystopian base structure, Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis* is especially important as a trendsetting vision of the city in twentieth century science fiction. *Metropolis* beautifully synthesizes the modern nightmare of the dystopian megalopolis originally envisioned by Wells in *The Sleeper Awakes* and further developed by Forster in "The Machine Stops". Unfortunately, the present-day reader will find that Thea von Harbou's novelistic version—as opposed to her husband's cinematic version of *Metropolis*—has not aged very well. It is more interesting from the critical viewpoint than from the entertainment viewpoint. It is an ordeal to read. It is turgid, repetitive, and self-effacingly melodramatic. Yet mixed in with the artistic and emotional murkiness of her novel there is an extraordinary wealth of ideas about the city which helps to articulate much of what Fritz Lang pictured forth in *Metropolis*.

The city of *Metropolis* has a soul, an indwelling spirit; the city itself is practically an animistic being. When the city suffers industrial oppression "it was as though the houses were weeping—as though every stone in the wall were a sobbing mouth, set free from eternal dumbness . . . to mourn an everlasting agony."[5] Dominating the city of Metropolis are machines which are worshipped like deities on their thrones. Within this oppressive context the city is divided into two classes: the few, rich elite who rule and the many, underpaid proletarians who serve. The very skeletons of the working class support the foundations of Metropolis.

The city demands a revolution. For the only way to save the city, to save the state of humanity which is identical with the city, is to destroy it in order to begin anew. The main character, Freder Fredersen, declares a new city must be established in the place of Metropolis which rules on feminine principles of charity and creativity rather than masculine principles of hate, fear and physical domination, most of all a city whose ways are not *fixed* in a state of god-like sanctity. In a concluding speech which disclaims any specific politics, type of industry, or form of religion Freder Fredersen maintains: "for the inventive spirit of man there is no utopia . . . there is only a Not-yet . . . we must try to find the other ways."[6] The city remains, but the ways of the city change.

The next most wide-ranging use of the city in science fiction is the city as an advanced form of shelter. Usually this means shelter against a threatening world of atomic or post-atomic pollution, surrounding primitive tribes and primitive living conditions, or the

pressures of a disastrously over-populated world.

It is in this fashion that Alexei Panshin portrays the reasonable community of the approximately twenty-mile wide asteroid space ship in his Hugo award winning *Rite of Passage* (1968), a novel which is surprisingly juvenile both in conception and in execution to have been awarded such a high level of recognition. Much more impressively, Philip K. Dick presents the underground ant tank known as the Tom Mix as an advanced form of shelter in his pessimistic novel about social manipulation after the Third World War, *The Penultimate Truth* (1964). The different cities written about in Roger Elwood's short story anthology *Future City* (1973) tend towards the conception of a city as the best of all possible solutions in a deathly polluted world, as in T.F. Monteleone's "Chicago", Dean R. Koontz's "The Undercity", or Robert Siverberg's "Getting Across". This type of city can rapidly degenerate from a protective citadel into a totalitarian police state, as in Thomas N. Scortia's excellent "The Weariest River". Or the city can turn upon itself and become a maniacal no-man's-land of cannibalism and utterly senseless destruction, as in J.L. Hensley's predacious "In Dark Places" or Miriam Allen deFord's primitivistic "5,000,000 A.D."[7] In the end man polluted the heaven and the earth—but until the end the city remained his proper domain.

The two extreme poles of this second conception of the city as a place of shelter would be the enormous, trailer-like city found in Christopher Priest's thoughtful and mature *Inverted World* (1974) and the dome-covered New York City of 2,010 in John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968). Priest's nameless city is strangely negative and positive at the same time. As the character Helward relates in *Inverted World,* his city is a "fanatical society" because it "continued to struggle against the odds when all hope was lost . . . It was impossible for mankind to survive in this environment . . . and yet the city continued to do so."[8] In *Inverted World* the efforts of the city to survive are ambiguous but heroic. The population of the city becomes neurotically introverted over the years, yet at the same time the citizens maintain a healthy and creative interdependency. The binding city pattern proves to be as necessary to life as oxygen and water.

There is no such heroism or ambiguity about John Brunner's New York City in *Stand on Zanzibar*. New York, along with Tokyo, Delhi and Calcutta, are examples for Brunner of "swarming antheaps collapsing into ruins beneath the sledgehammer blows of riots, armed robbery and pure directionless vandalism."[9] Cities have nowhere to go but down. Cities are great, bandaged sores on a leprous, over-populated world. A similar conception would be the odious and grim city of Chu in Frank Herbert's vastly inferior, thoroughly bilious novel *The Dosadi Experiment* (1977). The earth itself in *Stand on Zanzibar* mirrors its cities. Earth has reached a stage which the social theorist Theodore VonLaue has called the "Great Confluence", when "all cultures and polities grate upon each other . . . each disproves the absolutes of the other; each challenges the other's cohesion at its very foundation . . . All cultures and polities . . . (are) joined . . . in a moral competition, in which . . . the very bases of man's social existence . . . are at stake."[10]

In the case of Dick, Brunner, and some of the cities depicted in *Future City* this second conception of cities shades over into a third conception of the city as thinly disguised satires of modern metropolitan life. Andrew J. Offutt's short story "Meanwhile, We Eliminate" in *Future City*—about a traffic jam on an American freeway which leads to a city riot in which nineteen persons are killed, seventy-three are injured, and three-point-two city blocks are burned to the ground—would be a good example of this satirical

version of the science fiction city, as would be Thomas Disch's novel *334* (1972). In *334* the city, the New York of 2025, has both a specific spiritual meaning and a geographical identity. It is a labyrinth of alienation, a mental, claustral labyrinth which consists of a special group of geographically defined people: over-sexed, over-ambitious, cynical, witty, make-a-buck, lose-a-buck New Yorkers. Both Offutt and Disch use science fictional elements as icing on their narrative cakes. What is primarily important in "Meanwhile, We Eliminate" and *334* is that the reader recognizes the authentic links between these hyper-imaginative depictions of city life and the actual exaggerations of day-to-day metropolitan existence.

A fourth conception of the city is as an ideal goal, a goal which is never totally realized. With this use of the city its main narrative purpose is to lead the wandering hero onward in search of a personal salvation or a societal reward which he will realize while in the process of questing. The city becomes for the wanderer a place of sacred, magnetic energy. And, in some cases, the actual arrival in the longed-for city is a depletive anti-climax.

Examples of this sort of city would be: the city of the machine which alternatively attracts and repulses Gilbert Gosseyn in A.E. van Vogt's adventurous *The World of Null-A* (1948); the city-like museum that concludes Jack Vance's early work *The Dying Earth* (1950); the city of archetypal heroes, Tanelorn, which appears and reappears in Michael Moorcock's *Elric of Melniboné* novels (1961-1968); Es Toch, the illusory city of the alien Shing, to which Agad Ramarran of Werel journies in Ursula K. Le Guin's *City of Illusions* (1967); or the "last outpost of mankind"[11] glimpsed by Joseph Bodenland at the conclusion to Brian Aldiss' *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973).

This type of city clearly represents a paradox: it is important to arrive there if the wanderer can, but getting there is equally important. Often, the journey is even more important than the arrival. As long as the city stays the quester's goal it neither destroys nor corrupts him—though he may well fear what it offers him. This type of city as an ideal goal is a potential Babylon, a temptress city, a false fulfilment but necessary stimulus for heroic achievement.

"My quest . . . was finished," says Joseph Bodenland at the end of *Frankenstein Unbound,* though "I hardly knew whether the sight of (those) enormous buildings . . . so close to celestial visions . . . filled me with comfort or foreboding."[12] Will the reality match the promise? It remains to be seen. Aldiss, for one, concludes on a discordant mixture of awe and scepticism. In a similar vein, when Michael Moorcock's wanderers achieve Tanelorn they settle down into a state of flaccid body and torpid mind. It is as if Tanelorn were a kind of Circe, a lover who causes simultaneous attraction and aversion, whose pleasures simultaneously reward and erode their heroic excellence.

The fifth and, I believe, the most subtle use of the city in sf is the city as a psychic metaphor for man. The character of a city, with all its twistings and turnings, its patterns of settlement and ways of coming to ruin, is used as a perfect mirror image for man's own nature. Clifford Simak's *City* (1952), James Blish's *Cities in Flight* quartet (1950-1962), Robert Silverberg's *The Man in the Maze* (1969) and John Shirley's *City Come-A-Walkin'* (1980), make extremely effective use of this type of city.

Simak's three thousand year chronicle of mankind portrays man as a microcosm of the city; simultaneously social and antisocial, ceaselessly innovative, alternately creative and destructive, and—worst of all—fundamentally disordered. Man oscillates between a condition of kindness, justice and charity (in character terms: John J. Webster, Richard

Grant, Bruce Webster, Jon Webster) and the instinct to kill and destroy (in character terms: the Chamber of Commerce membership, the mutant named Joe, Tyler Webster, Peter Webster). Mankind evolves down "the bow and arrow road"[13] with remarkable and fatalistic inevitability.

Simak parallels mankind's development in *City* with the theme of a brotherhood of beasts and a helpful confederation of robots (typified by Jenkins). The morally superior and orderly dogs which replace mankind regenerate the positive aspects of their previous, human masters. Gradually man and his city ways disappear from earth. And, for once, Simak doesn't opt out for the octogenerian pastoralism which he so loves, but removes most of mankind to an Edgar Allan Poe landscape of stinking fumes, purple mists and ammonia rains on the planet of Jupiter. Simak's vision of mankind through his use of the city is dark but not damning. There is no Swiftian sense of total misanthropy for a race of excrementious Yahoos in *City*.

The *Cities in Flight* quartet is especially concerned with the problems of communal living and the common good. Three parts of the quartet follow the deep space wanderings of New York City. But the physical lay-out of New York is barely described in the quartet's six hundred pages since the main area of urban meaning, the city as a physical organism, exists in its citizens. First among New York's citizens is the Flying Dutchman mayor, John Amalfi, fashioned after the colorful New York City mayor of the 'thirties and the 'forties, Fiorello LaGuardia.

Yet for Blish the city is not only the men who run it, but also the main machine which keeps the city in flight: the master computer known as the City Fathers, the mind over the citizens' matter. The City Fathers are cold, pet-like, and domineering at the same time. They order and carry out executions of citizens who threaten the city's welfare. They stick by Mayor Amalfi's side like a loyal retriever until the universe ends.

Cities in Flight concludes as Mayor Amalfi, by this point the quintessential New Yorker, is literally transformed into the primal matter of a new universe, for, as Blish writes, "That was unknowable. But the unknowable was what he wanted."[14] However, there is a politic behind this idea since, for Blish, it is a characteristically Western, and especially American aspiration—as opposed to a Soviet aspiration—to be drawn spacewards:

> Space flight had been a natural, if late, outcome of Western thought patterns, which had always been ambitious for the infinite. The Soviets, however, were opposed so bitterly to the very idea that they would not even allow their fiction writers to mention it. Where the West had soared from the rock of Earth like a sequoia, the Soviets spread like lichens over the planet.[15]

Therefore to be urban, in the best outerspace sense of the word for Blish, is to be American.

Robert Siverberg's *The Man In The Maze* is a science fiction refashioning of Sophocles' *Philoctetes,* the fifth century BC Greek play which relates the unsuccessful attempts by Odysseus and Achilleus' son Neoptolemus to entice the incurably ill Philoctetes to the battle of Troy where, with the aid of his magical, Heraclean bow, he will help secure the downfall of Troy. A city-sized labyrinth, which is the remnants of an alien civilization on the planet of "Lemnos", approximates Philoctetes' Sophoclean cave on the island of Lemnos. A sickness of spirit, really an uncontrollable telepathic ability to expose the innermost workings of heart, mind and soul, approximates Philoctetes' festering snake wound.

Muller, Silverberg's Philoctetes, is a man who is in perfect harmony with his surroundings, a man who flourishes only in "a time of testing,"[16] whose whole life has been dedicated to decoding alien symmetries—and appropriately has decided to end his life within the maze of the planet Lemnos. In *The Man In The Maze* the intricacy of man, personified by Muller, finds its perfect mirror image in a literal urban maze. For the maze of the planet Lemnos is as deadly, dark, alien and potentially unfathomable as man's own subconsciousness. Muller eventually travels away from his urban soulscape, but not until Silverberg establishes a vision of the city as a psyche of mortal tenaciousness and near-total despair in dynamic tension with a universe of divine conspiracies and awesome loneliness.

John Shirley's personification of San Francisco in *City Come A-Walkin'* (1980) ripples with all the over-heated vitality and renegade liveliness of Dr Frankenstein's monster. Two "metropolitan aborigines"[17], Stuart Cole and Catz Wailen, serve the will of City, "the sum total of the unconscious apprehension of every brain in the city" of San Francisco.[18] Shirley's urban personification communicates to his elect through radios and t.v. screens, with an ineluctable voice in the San Francisco air, or by taking the shape of a man who "moved like an icebreaker . . . the ideal bouncer . . . (with) a square face, pale and unblemished, but rough . . . five-seven, medium build . . . (but possessed of a) complacent formidability in the skyscraper uprightness of his stance . . . complete and unbreakable and cool-but-human and perfect as a movie hero."[19]

Shirley's City is pure modern American. It uses Stuart Cole and Catz Wailen to destroy a cancer of mafia, corrupt city government, and a hyper-computerized, insidiously anonymous corporation called "ITF" which is destroying San Francisco's special character. As City tells Cole: "The city's regularity arises from the walls created by competition, and it's the competition of free enterprise. This is a place of feverish metal flexing— *that* (i.e., mafia, corrupt city government, ITF) will be quiet, efficient and blasé . . . *there'll be no need for cities* . . . (there'll only be) *moronic* uniformity."[20]

San Francisco's attempt to purge itself is part of a concerted attempt by all of America's *fin de siècle* twentieth-century cities to sweep themselves clean of corruption. We get a look at one other city spirit: Sacramento, "a hooker . . . both alluring and defiant . . . full-bodied . . . a languid white hand tipped in mirror nails" hanging from an exposed breast.[21] But mainly Shirley is busy with the look and feel of San Francisco. And it feels mainly like a scummy, teeming, exciting, pressurized pit. Sexy and raw as hell. As anarchic, individualistic, and ultimately triumphant as its two servants: Stuart Cole and Catz Wailen.

City uses a male and female because in spirit San Francisco is fundamentally bi-sexual. On the one side Stuart Cole is reminiscent of an enraged, middle-aged, scarred, B-movie urban hero—who *you know* deep down has a heart of gold. Robert Mitchum, Ernest Borgnine, or Lino Ventura immediately spring to mind. Catz Wailen, like City, is a woman whose power is strongest at night. She is a rock singer energized by hate, love, wit, cynicism, idealism and *angst:* often all at once. With these three characters as *City Come A-Walkin"*s principle narrative instruments the novel moves onward, upward, and outward like a perfectly executed rock 'n' roll explosion. Shirley's city as psyche plays one very mean and beautiful city song.

Many urban symbols are left uncoded. What are we to make of the spaceship which travels for decades with enormous populations and life-support systems inside? When is a space ship, or is a space ship not, to be taken as a city? Are tight, mobile groups which belong to the same class and yet contain a wide degree of personal and experiential variation, such as Joe Haldeman's time-travelling warrior platoons in the humorous and acerbic anti-military novel *The Forever War* (1974), to be read as urban units? If so, are all human groupings urban units and are we then led back to the assumption that man *is* the city?

The economic character of the city presents a special problem. The city as a center of commerce and industry cuts across all these preceding definitions. For example, Dick's ant tanks in *The Penultimate Truth* are the production centers for the robotic "leadies"; Lang's and von Harbou's Metropolis is the world's commercial and industrial center; one of the very first details brought to the protagonist's attention in *The Sleeper Awakes*—and intensified throughout the novel—is his awareness of cold cash. But the commercial aspect of the city is not special to science fiction. This element is present whenever the city is exploited in literature, just as the elements of wild animals and growing plants are present in the literary exploitation of nature. Must the sf city be confined to the market place? Or can we not measure its meaning in non-monetary terms?

And what of the city without citizens, or when it is deserted because of an inevitable holocaust, as in Harlan Ellison's moving "Hindsight: 480 Seconds" in *Future City* when Haddon Brooks, a poet and the last man in the last city on Earth, reports the death of Earth? Do cities, as Ellison explicitly suggests, only live with people in them, or do they possess—with or without people—patterns which radiate meanings of their own, a geomancy or a persistent form of order which extends beyond human life? What does one make of Atlantis, Eldorado, Necropolis, Heliopolis, Diosi, Shangri-La, The Eternal City? Can cities, as Jungians have argued, possess "more than mere outward form" and "be exalted above the purely secular realm" into a realm of pure, spiritual beauty.[22] Certainly Michael Moorcock's city of Tanelorn and the idea of the city as the quester's goal would enter in here. Is, then, the city fundamentally a state of mind which men exalt, deprecate, or materialize as they will? Certainly one attribute is without the slightest ambiguity: the city itself is an especially persistent and vital dream in the envisionings of science fiction literature which promises to continue for some time to come.

Notes

1 Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, 1938), p.5.
The little criticism which exclusively focuses on the city includes: the entry on "Urbanisme" in *Encylopédie de L'Utopie Des Voyages Extraordinaires et de la Science Fiction,* ed. Pierre Versins (Lausanne: Editions L'Age d'Homme, 1972), pp. 910-912; selected material in Gary K. Wolfe's *The Known and the Unknown—The Iconography of Science Fiction* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1979); Robert Sheckley, *Futuropolis* (London: Big O Publishing Ltd., 1979); also useful: R. Williams, "Utopia and science fiction," in *Science Fiction—A Critical Guide,* ed. P. Parrinder (London: Longmans, 1979), pp. 52-66, and R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Granada Pub. Ltd., 1975), esp. Ch. 23, "The City & the Future," pp. 326-333; *Revue d'Esthetique* 1977/3-4, Paris, eds. M. Dufrenne & E. Souriau, "La ville n'est pas un lieu"; *Modern Fiction Studies,* vol. 24, No. 1, Spring 1978, "The Modern Novel and the City."

2 Robert Sheckley, *Futuropolis, op. cit.,* p.12.

3 Jacob Burckhardt, *History of Greek Culture* (New York: Ungar, 1963) pp. 14, 17, trans. P. Hilty of 1898-1902 orig. edn. *Griechische Kultur* (abr. edn. 1958).

4 Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis* (New York: Ace Books, 1963; rpt. orig. English trans. 1927, anon.), p. 48.

5 T. von Harbou, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

6 T. von Harbou, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

7 Roger Elwood, ed. *Future City* (New York: Trident Press, 1973; see also R. Clem, M.H. Greenbergs eds., *The City 2000 AD* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1976); Damon Knight, ed. *Cities of Wonder* (New York: Macfadden Bartell Co., 1967).

8 Christopher Priest, *Inverted World* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1974), p. 241.

9 John Brunner, *Stand on Zanzibar* (New York: Ballantine, 1969), p. 52.

10 Theodore H. Von Laue, *The Global City* (New York: Lippincott, 1969), p. 25.

11 Brian Aldiss, *Frankenstein Unbound* (London: Pan, 1975; orig. edn. 1973, J. Cape, 1973), p. 153.

12 B. Aldiss, *op. cit.*, pp. 156, 153.

13 Clifford Simak, *City* (New York: Ace Books, 1976; rpt. orig. edn., 1952, Gnome Press, Inc.), p. 211.

14 James Blish, *Cities in Flight* (New York: Avon, 1970; rpt. orig. edns. 1950-1962), p. 596.

15 J. Blish, *op. cit.*, p. 238, Vol. III, "Earthman Come Home".

16 Robert Silverberg, *The Man in the Maze* (London: Tandem Books, 1971; rpt. orig. edn. 1969, Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd.), p. 190. For more see my article in Comparative Literature Studies, Autumn 1980, "The Sick Hero Reborn: Two Versions of the Philoctetes Myth".

17 John Shirley, *City Come A-Walkin'* (New York: Dell Publ. Co., Inc., 1980), p. 60.

18 J. Shirley, *op. cit.*, P. 56.

19 J. Shirley, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12, 141.

20 J. Shirley, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

21 J. Shirley, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

22 C.G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1978); rpt. orig. edn. 1964, Aldus Books Ltd.,), p. 279, in part 4 "Symbolism in the Visual Arts", Aniela Jaffé.

Letters

Dear David, June 1981

Many thanks for inviting me to contribute to your "Profession of Science Fiction" series though I must admit you did take your time about it.

Enclosed is my piece which I modestly trust will prove interesting:

The Profession of Science Fiction: No.23896

Wake up experiencing usual existentialist panic. What am I doing here? Why am I here? Why is here? And, above all, why is here in bloody Harlesden, NW 10?

Grope for bottle of vodka beside bed and soon panic has dwindled to mere angst and feeling of grim foreboding. The shaking also stops.

Leap out of bed and begin usual exercise routine by lifting 105 pound weight above my head several times. But as usual routine is prematurely halted when she starts screaming.

Go and collect mail from hallway then retire to bathroom to read it and move bowels, the only two things I can do simultaneously.

Only two items of mail: final demand for subscription fees from EXIT who threaten not to supply me with cyanide pills when the Big C takes hold. Other item more interesting—the latest issue of *New Scientist,* a magazine that is invaluable to us science fiction writers as a source of ideas. But a quick browse through its pages reveals that there is little in this issue that will provide inspiration, unless I can make use of the article on how symbiotic algae and hydras share food. Yes, on further thought it might make a good 100,000 word novel. Could be a movie in there too . . .

Feeling more cheerful I roll up *New Scientist* and use it to push in wayward bunch of haemorrhoids the size of a cow's udder. The haemorrhoid situation is definitely getting out of control but I comfort myself with the knowledge that having piles is part of a writer's life. My talent may not be on a par with, say, Jerry Pournelle's but I bet I can match him pile for pile.

After breakfast, which consists of a quart of decoffeenated caffeine, I begin work. As soon as I have cleared up cat's vomit off my chair with the Woman's Page of the *Guardian* I sit down and switch on my Adler Neanderthal electric typewriter. Then I select a fresh page of white paper from the stack I keep beside the typewriter for such a purpose and insert it carefully into the machine. This done I sigh, get up and have a good stretch. The hard part is over.

Call my agent to find out how my novel *Skyship* is selling. She informs me that the book isn't doing too well but that the poster featuring the book's cover has sold out and the publishers are thinking of reprinting it. This is cheering news even though I don't get royalties on the sales of the poster. She also tells me that I have been invited to open a new remainder book shop in Harrow-on-the-Hill next week. I protest that my schedule is pretty full but of course I am greatly flattered. I never thought all those years ago when I used to spend my time gelding Aborigines on my father's sheep station in Australia that one day I would become a celebrity.

Return to the typewriter inflamed with zeal. Now to begin! But begin what? There are so many projects bubbling away on my back-burner, so to speak. Should I make a start on my proposed project for Virago Press: *Flatulence is a Feminist Issue?* Or should I persevere with my sequel to *Skyship, Son of Skyship,* which is all about a giant airship that achieves escape velocity, after springing a leak in its stern, and heads off for Alpha Centauri carrying an interesting cross-section of society? No, I'd better wait while Gerry Webb finishes working out the figures. I don't want to write anything that isn't technically feasible down to the smallest detail.

Stare up at the large portrait of Christopher Priest that I keep on the wall for inspiration. It was done when Chris had long hair (why he had it cut I'll never know—a thousand hearts were broken on that grim day) and there's a faraway, almost visionary look in his eyes that I find quite moving, on a profound level, whenever I look at it. I've always thought there was something fundamentally *religious* about Chris but I've never been able to put my finger on it. Perhaps it's his name—*Christ*opher *Priest*. It's certainly food for thought.

I know! I'll make a start on my big disaster novel, NOVA! This is going to be the

disaster novel to end all disaster novels . . . here goes now. Gosh, this is exciting . . .

NOVA *by John Brosnan*

Chapter One: ONE OF OUR NEUTRINOS IS MISSING!

Tanned and lantern-jawed Dr Lance Pierce, six time Nobel Prize winner and Olympic swimming champion, turned from the window swearing softly.

"What's up, doc?" asked his assistant, Margo, as her tawny breasts strained at the white fabric of her St Laurent lab coat.

He held out a small black box and shook it. It sounded empty. "A whole ten minutes I've been aiming this Acme Neutrino Collector at the sun and not a sausage! There's something funny going on at the core of the sun and I aim to get to the bottom of it . . ." He paused, looking at her with a puzzled expression. "There's something different about *you* today. Your eyes . . . didn't they used to be blue?"

She nodded shyly. "I forgot to wear my contact lenses today."

He looked at her as if seeing her for the first time. "God, but you're beautiful without your contact lenses," he murmured.

Suddenly the sun exploded . . .

Hmmm. The next 99,850 words are going to be a bit tricky. Will have to think about it. In the meantime perhaps I'd better concentrate on some other project.

What's the time? Good heavens, it's almost 11 am. Soon be opening time at my local, the Slug and Vomit. Perhaps I'll just nip out for a quick one then come back to work. Just one pint, no more . . .

Wake up experiencing usual existentialist panic . . .

John Brosnan *London*

From a postcard: July 1981

I was flattered by Roz Kaveney's attention in her excellent article on the 1970s (*Foundation* 22), but was surprised by her failure to note the work of M. John Harrison (particularly his short fiction). Also I'd argue that I've never "rejected earlier amoralism"—my books have reeked of morality for years! All I believe I did in *Condition of Muzak* was to emphasize what I'd been saying all along by means of ironic metaphor—which of course is what "Dancers at the End of Time" and other things are full of.

Thanks for an interesting issue.

Michael Moorcock *Ingleton*

From a letter: July 1981

. . . sometimes I think the whole of sf would benefit by an extended period of silence—excellent though *Foundation* is, there seems to be a vast discrepancy between the high-flown perorations from the mouths of the critics and what is actually being produced by the writers—but perhaps I'm just totally out of touch, and sf criticism, like literary criticism as a whole, has reached the point where it exists in its own self-sustaining and self-generating world—now and then the odd wet log in the form of an actual novel or short story is kicked into the white-hot blaze of the critical furnace and emits a few brief hisses soon drowned in the gabbling roar . . .

J.G. Ballard *Shepperton*

Dear David Pringle, July 1981

Roz Kaveney's otherwise impressive "tour of the universe", "Science Fiction in the 1970s: Some Dominant Themes and Personalities" (*Foundation* 22), neglects one of my favourite writers: Barry Malzberg.

I count seven of Malzberg's novels that "at an important level . . . function as comment, partly a moral comment, on stock sf attitudes and what those attitudes embody of the central beliefs of our culture."

Relatively primitive works are *Dwellers of the Deep* (first published 1970), *Gather in the Hall of the Planets* (1971) (both by "K.M. O'Donnell") and *The Day of the Burning* (1975): from a reading of which one—a reader of sf—can believe that the person approached by an extraterrestrial to decide the fate of the Earth *would* be a reader of sf (and, *because* a reader of such fiction, unable to decide, consequently responsible for the Earth's destruction).

A (relatively) sophisticated trio are *The Men Inside* (1973), *In the Enclosure* (1973) and *Galaxies* (1975). They contain clear statements of Malzberg's opinion of sf; treating it as (as for many it has become) a way of life: remarking upon its entrapment of both writers and readers.

> Here we all are: in the enclosure . . . Life is, perhaps, more self-contained than I would like it to be; on the other hand, we are a tribe (how much I have learned of us!) which has always been highly dependent upon an institutional framework and, for that reason, things are not as unpleasant here as we thought they would be. In fact, and despite the rigorously ordered existence, things go quite well: although there are occasional murmurs of restlessness and I suspect the few unadjusted among us still talk of the necessity of violent overthrow and escape. Or conquest. (*In the Enclosure,* p1).

Read in sequence, these three novels metaphorically parallel the course of Malzberg's own career: first, as a disciple of the Hulm institute (the genre termed sf), who chooses (though feels himself compelled) to return over and over to the corrupt, cancerous bodies of the weak and aged (sf "classics") and, by excising diseased tissue, to assure their survival; second, as an alien (a writer—albeit unsuccessful—from the mainstream) who'd come to Earth to peacefully share his knowledge with Earthlings and, for his pains, been imprisoned, tortured; and, third, as the pilot of the unique and magnificent ship, the *Skipstone,* in whose hold are carried the frozen bodies of five hundred and fifteen dead

men (members of the SFWA?), apparently trapped at the heart of a black galaxy, who nevertheless might, by gearing up the ship to tachyonic drive, leap, through some mysterious level of space, to safety (the town of Ridgefield Park, New Jersey?) or, otherwise, destroy the universe.

Perhaps the most powerful novel in this vein is *Herovit's World* (1973) (certainly it is the most widely-acclaimed), about which, in an earlier draft of this letter, I'd written: "it has a narrower significance, being a statement of the joys and sorrows of being a writer of sf." Yes; and no. Rather, it states openly what several of Malzberg's other works merely imply: that sf, as a form of literature, is trash, whose effect upon reality, despite the protestations of its practitioners and (more important, louder) of its commentators, is negligible. Jonathan Herovit has not written what he'd always promised he would write—a "great" novel (*the* Great American Novel, perhaps?): in his education, he has placed "Science" before "Fiction": his works conform to the pattern of earlier (better) works, hence are unsatisfactory. Malzberg shows sf to have been constructed rather than to have emerged from a writer's experience of life. His deployment of clichés—that a writer writes well only when drunk or that fans are adolescents (of every age) who loathe what they so avidly read—devastates (by satirizing) the genre. A book about Mack Miller, the Survey Team, once read may be discarded (indeed, once written . . .): it offers to Jonathan Herovit no protection from death.

> At the first alien intersection, Mack attacks and knocks unconscious with a blow a male alien; sprinting down the peculiar walkways of the planet, he manages to inflict injury upon several others. But by weight of numbers the pursuers, calling for aid from the alien reinforcements, wear him down, and at last Mack finds himself trapped in a pathway as they descend upon him. He feels his power rushing from him, the force of his rage now the only defense, and realizes with horror that he is too old for this. He should have been retired some time ago; he can no longer meet the physical requirements of the Survey. Nevertheless, he will fight onward, perish with his armour on, crying defiance to the aliens who spring upon him and make him give up progressively more of his position. Something must save him. It always has before. And if it does not he has the assurance that he has done his work well. (*Herovit's World:* pp 158-159)

Seven novels that, despite Malzberg's (mishandled: by him) "retirement" from the field, cannot be discounted.

Andrew Tidmarsh *Orton Goldhay, Peterborough*

Dear Sirs, July 1981

In the darkest days of World War II, in the town of Swindon—a place correctly designated by J.B. Priestley as the Valley of the Shadow of Death—I came upon the first British paperback edition of James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen*. The effect on me was incalculable, and my search thereafter for the rest of the Poictesme saga could well be headed "The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole". Imagine, then, my feelings on learning that a Mr Christopher Tookey, of Future Theatre, was about to produce, at London's Gate Theatre, *Ladies and Jurgen*, described as a comic fantasy, based on the works of Cabell.

Fantasy fiction of real quality is translated infrequently onto stage or screen, and, when it is, the result is generally a massacre alike of the author's intention and means. Imagine—I repeat—my feelings as Mr Tookey, on the other end of a phone line, explained that he had set the play within the framework of a situation wherein aliens were

endeavouring to understand earth culture on the sole evidence of Cabell's writings . . . Unspeakable thoughts about Brechtian distancing-effects surfaced like marsh gas bubbles on my mind. My fingers whitened on the phone as my lips struggled to frame some polite periphrasis for: "Have you mucked-up the speech-rythms, then?" Mr Tookey replied that he had not. And—to put an end to all this suspense—let me say at once that not only has he presented unaltered those incredible speeches; he has, further, managed to do something which, though not in itself impossible, I would have thought, in the current state of our culture, highly unlikely—he has, in one short play, presented, as nearly as may be imagined, the heart of James Branch Cabell's philosophy.

Forget about the matter of aliens, this turned out to be merely a device for presenting a Narrator. *Ladies and Jurgen*'s story, allowing for certain additions and minor alterations, is the story of the celestial and infernal travels of Jurgen the pawnbroker, as set out in the novel of that name. A brief passage from *Figures of Earth* has been introduced—the only point on which I would mildly remonstrate, since to my thinking the characters of Niafer and Guenevere, though similar, are by no means identical. And the passage where Jurgen interviews the God of his grandmother is enlarged a little freely. Some parts of the tale—inevitably—have been dropped altogether. But the core of the story is perfectly preserved, both as to means and ends. Now, recalling the length, verbal felicity, wit and emotional effect of the dialogue that this author puts into the mouths of his characters, I must say that I was stunned at the way the actors had here reproduced these effects. Credit, in particular, must go to Sue Holderness, doubling as Stultitia, Phyllis and others, and, above all, to Richard Williams as the Narrator and Brian Protheroe as Jurgen.

And here I come to the additions which I mentioned earlier. What Mr Tookey has most ingeniously done is to have the Narrator reveal himself, in his final interview with Jurgen, as none other than Koshchei, the Maker of All Things. At this point the director introduces passages from other Cabell works, such as *The High Place,* as well as the non-fictional *Strawers and Prayer-Books,* in such a way that Jurgen and Koshchei present between them those views of the author not overtly presented in *Jurgen.*

I understand that *Ladies and Jurgen* is to be re-presented in London later this year, and possibly later on in off-Broadway theatre. If you will bring to the forefront of your minds the active hostility of western theatre and the media in general alike to romanticism and to conceptual drama, the importance of this phenomenon can hardly be over-estimated. In the nature of things, few of those who read this notice will be able to attend these presentations. But you will have known that the thing was done: that in the midst of this barren desert the sweet waters of reason have surfaced, however briefly. And that is what counts . . .

George Hay *London*

Reviews

Hello America
by J.G. Ballard (*Cape, 1981, 224 pp, £6.50*)

reviewed by Michael Moorcock

> Just as machinery has embodied ideas of good, so the technology of destruction has also acquired a metaphysical character. The practical questions have thus become the ultimate questions as well. Annihilation is no longer a metaphor. Good and evil are real.
>
> —Saul Bellow, *Herzog*.

Hello America is probably the best sf we are ever going to get from J.G. Ballard and it is consequently inferior to his recent non-generic books such as *Crash* or *The Unlimited Dream Company*. The book is surprising because it has that same uneasy marriage of conventional sf elements and idiosyncratic vision which marred *The Wind from Nowhere*. In this case the book is far more readable and interesting, of course, but Ballard has come a long way since his first serial for Carnell's *New Worlds* and has so successfully developed his own techniques that the gulf in *Hello America* between personal and generic material is all the more evident. This is, I should say, considerably more enjoyable for me than any other imaginative fiction I've seen in the recent past. Even unsatisfactory Ballard is better than no Ballard. My enthusiasm for his work doesn't appear to wane, even when faced with a book as patchy as this one. I find him constantly stimulating and feel only the mildest disappointment when his energy or his inspiration appears to flag. I am more interested in his work, in other words, than I am in his individual stories.

Hello America seems a deliberate attempt at a generic book (though I don't know why Ballard chose to do it this way) and I find it less satisfying than his non-sf of the past ten years, even though he beats the great run of sf writers at their own game.

If the average sf writer takes the stuff of metaphor and tries to give it the appearance of reality, then authors like Ballard take the stuff of reality and expand it into metaphor. Interestingly, it seems that Ballard here has taken many of his individual metaphors and attempted to rationalize them. We are told that this is the 22nd century; we're told that the USA has been abandoned by its population in a kind of reverse migration to Europe (as a result of the oil running out) and we're told that the sub-continent now has radically altered climates because of desperate efforts at weather-control designed to feed an over-populated world. In a typical modern Ballard we would normally be offered none of this—the time would be the present, the landscapes would be transfigured representations of monumental psychic upheavals in the minds of characters unable to come to terms with the falsifications of experience demanded of those who would live in the modern urban or suburban environment. And we would read a clearly articulated and complex parable.

Hello America's rationalizations fail to convince: I suspect that the impatient Chapter 7, "The Crisis Years", which deals with the causes of the catastrophe in a little under six pages, is inserted almost contemptuously. This is the stuff of the run-of-the-mill sf writer with his faddish moralizing and unoriginal warnings. It is to Ballard's credit that he makes no moralistic use of the device. He wants to write about what America means to him.

All the members of a steamship expedition from depressed Socialist Europe to

abandoned America have differing private mythologies which they impose upon a surprisingly transformed USA and gradually, as we'd expect from Ballard, they attempt to make these fantasies a reality and will largely be thwarted, often suffering horribly for their ego-maniacal misuse of the human imagination. The central character, Wayne, a young stowaway, secretly hopes to restore this lost Empire to its former vitality, to rediscover the technological optimism which Europe and Russia have so thoroughly rejected as the evil which brought everyone to ruin. His companions dream of absorbing themselves in the wilderness, of becoming the next President of the deserted sub-continent, of indulging in the luxuries of an ancient consumer society. The substance of the book is in its examination of European impressions of America. Its writing is often tremendously fresh and full-strength Ballard. What is therefore surprising is the discovery of banalities which one would not expect to find outside a copy of *Galaxy* magazine in 1954. For instance, there are camel-riding barbarian tribes: Astronauts (from Florida), Bureaucrats (from Washington), Gays (from San Francisco), Divorcees (from Reno), Gangsters (from Chicago). These characters are named Pepsodent, GM, Heinz and so on. This is, at best, devalued currency, the kind of vocabulary which Ballard so brilliantly rejected with the publication of his very first story.

We have, then, a confection of familiar Ballardian deserts, rain-forests, drowned cities and crystalline aircraft, containing some indifferent sci-fi invention but which is, above all, a series of brilliant painter's images describing Ballard's classically surrealist vision of the American Dream in which the gigantic figures of John Wayne and Charles Manson bestraddle a jungle-bound Las Vegas where robot gunships shoot to ribbons giraffes and alligators populating the city streets and 46 presidents of the United States attempt an assault on a War Room which has at its centre a roulette wheel on which are marked the names of cities to be destroyed by cruise missiles buried in the mysterious jungles of Nevada and Arizona. I cannot bring myself to judge this book in terms of conventional sf, for all that a few of the elements have been inserted in it here and there. Conventional sf depends on its ability to make the fantastic seem real and Ballard is not even half-heartedly, I believe, trying to do that. To quarrel with the book's geography or the probability of its science or political events would be pointless. Like all Ballard's work it must be judged on the clarity and originality of its images, the power of its mood, the coherence of its form. This book does well on image, is a bit weak on mood (as in all Ballard's stories where action is substituted for metaphysical mystery) and is not very coherent in form. Like many good imaginative writers (at least from Stevenson onward) Ballard isn't particularly interested in conventional narrative: it tends to get in his way; as a result he's developed and invented techniques to cope with problems arising from his need to discard devices most less adventurous writers use to give shape to their work. There's plenty of "story" in a good Ballard, but little "plot". When he decides to do "plot" (as here) it's never wholly successful; there's a tendency for his idiosyncracies to clash with the convention he is imitating. His preferred means of narration include repetition of images, private associations, abstract or metaphysical ideas gradually taking form through the eyes of a passive central character, so his dynamics go askew when he attempts to use an active central character with specific goals and a specific narrative function. A typical (and attractive) Ballard character will act against ordinary common sense, against all familiar survival instincts, to achieve the realization of a desperate, profound and sometimes impossible dream, but if the plot is set up so that this character

also has to supply the main dynamic and resolution then Ballard has structural trouble. In *Hello America* Wayne is prepared to kill or betray his companions so that he may pursue his personal fantasy of restoring the old America, with its familiar iconography, to its former glory. But because he isn't the only one (most of the other characters have similar needs to redeem optimistic and glamorous images of 20th century USA) and because he has to "fail", the narrative tensions are consequently often lost. Wayne's dreams are shown by Ballard to be fantastic and spurious. Most of the others' dreams are similarly examined and found wanting. On this level the book is very satisfying.

The end of *Hello America* is rather surprisingly optimistic, even a trifle sentimental, with a lyrical requiem for a lost and unrecoverable America and intimations of a brave new dawn. It's a peculiar battle-ground of a book in which Ballard's undeniable originality wages war with sci-fi's conventionality and threatens to shake the whole thing to pieces. But when the dust settles we're left with the impression of the best images, some excellent prose, and we might remember that we have read a good, tight Ballard story. In this case I think we shall have done some of the selecting and concentrating ourselves.

Under the City of Angels
by Jerry Earl Brown (*Bantam, 1981, 291 pp, $1.95*)

Daystar and Shadow
by James B. Johnson (*Daw, 1981, 206 pp, $2.25*)

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Though we often need to pretend it might, literature does not progress. While the career of a particular writer or the history of a particular form may divide into periods of maturation, consummation and decline, those curves are not cumulative. Writers cannot "improve" on their predecessors any more than children can learn by their parents' mistakes. They have to take predecessors and contemporaries into account, however, if they want to establish an identity which will survive, in the marketplace as in the library. The peculiar condition of sf as a literary mode emergent from a publisher's category, involuted, self-reflexive, overfurnished with idioms, exaggerates the pressure and the necessity. Anyone who can put one phrase comfortably in front of another can fill the marketplace with books, by simple permutation of the available clichés. Anyone who has an urge towards the library must look sharp in a field where five or ten years suffice to turn an icon into a fossil. Progress is a snare and a delusion, but perpetual revolution is only very difficult. When a writer drags a commercial formula up into the light, exposes it, gives a definitive analysis of it, and tests it to destruction, critics (ideally) sit up and take notice, and hope that other writers will take notice too. If the others only continue in the old habits, following the formula naively, critics are disappointed even if booksellers are satisfied. History then isolates the dissenter as an eccentric, occasionally to be mourned as the only person honest or clever enough to say that the icon is only a fossil after all.

It is obviously cruel and safe for a critic to compare first novels with classics. However, these two books, published in the same month as *Hello America,* and also set in devastated Americas of the future, inevitably recall J.G. Ballard's early variations on the

catastrophe form and prompt some reflections on sf symbolism, and the state of the field. That the reference does Brown and Johnson little credit is a general rather than a particular point (otherwise it would not have been worth making).

In Brown's *Under the City of Angels* an almighty quake has dumped into the sea far more of California than even the seismologists can understand. Oil companies who were testing an underground field with nuclear probes are highly suspect; so is enemy sabotage. The answer lies buried in the sunken ruins of L.A. where Jack Kelso, a harsh, embittered and extremely capable scavanger, goes diving on an illegal salvage job for a mysterious and powerful woman, Judith DeFond. The Ballardian paradigm is *The Drowned World.* Johnson's *Daystar and Shadow* has the whole of America parched into desert by the Holocaust and infested with alien fireworms, which fry human beings on contact. Its hero Robin, called Daystar in his legends, is tall, tough, highly intelligent, telepathic, a water diviner, immune to fireworms, and can run at twenty m.p.h. almost indefinitely. If there were any tall buildings left he would almost certainly leap them at a single bound. Accompanied by his lover Sombra, who contracts one of the worst cases of female subordination I have seen for a while, he takes up the cause of people ostracized for autistic behaviour, subject of a pogrom by fanatics of the New Christian Church. The analogy with this book is Ballard's *The Drought,* if only because the two are polarized in their attitudes to determinism and freewill.

Both Kelso and Robin are men of violence, impetuously involved in chases and fights, moving restlessly from place to place. This is in contrast to Ballard's contemplative protagonists, who seem to do nothing but compromise themselves with the catastrophes that beset them. Ballard used to be blamed for the sheer inactivity of his first novels, and it would be perverse to claim that other writers ought to imitate it. However, what Ballard was doing was drawing attention to the self-destructive impulses of the human mind, to the fascination of disaster and its powerful appeal to the imagination. The immediate and obvious target of his message was the sf reader, delighted and comforted by vista after vista of planetary demolition, who turned to Ballard as to Shiel and Wyndham, not expecting to have the favoured formula analyzed and turned about. Ballard keeps his characters inert while minutely elaborating the geography and geometry of their obsessive relationships. The violence in his first three novels is latent, breaking out sporadically, a charge that binds character to landscape, landscape to character, until we hardly know whether the disaster is a figment of the imagination or the person is an epiphenomenon of the disaster: thus he makes his post-Surrealist case for the dark side of the mind. The symbolism is complex, ambiguous, but compact and integrated. Against this, Jerry Earl Brown does admit that diving to the sunken city is a metaphor for plumbing a troubled unconscious, but only just, only once or twice. The guilt and masochism of the disaster are located at a national level, in the polluting activities of corporations and governments, but Kelso, with his background in marine ecology, is not implicated in that and has to be given his own wounds, the death of his family, to nurse. Daystar, on the other hand, whose autistic infancy is a token of his mutant status—a true Ballardian notion, that—still has no symbolic relations with his environment at all. He acts like any lone G.I. hero, wiping away psychological handicaps like sweat from his brow, jubilant in the uncomplication of his powers and intentions, in which the desert is no vector. Desert to Johnson is an *absence* of landscape, symbolically null, merely an empty arena where people can fight in extemely uncomfortable conditions, occasionally pausing almost to

die of thirst.

Both Brown and Johnson do something that sf permits and encourages, which Ballard, significantly enough, has never needed to do. They bring in extraterrestrial aliens to symbolize the elements missing from the humans in their stories. Ballard, with his Freudian sense of the mental complex, gave the disconcerting illusion of having invented nothing except the global disasters themselves. Brown needs a source for the bizarre and obscure motivations of his heroine which is at once deadly dangerous, pathetic, and venial. (*Under the City of Angels,* incidentally, is prime material for a feminist critique of the woman-as-alien motif.) Unable to confront the vicious qualities of human character, Brown attributes them to social injustice (in Kelso's case) and alien interference (in DeFond's). Other people, or demons, are responsible; not us. This is a perfectly legitimate externalization in sf, and Brown achieves some tension in the effects of alien possession. His aliens are rigid and pale enough to suggest that they may indeed be allegorical, but he seems to want to believe in them, and to want us to as well, which is awkward. Johnson similarly ascribes the New Christians' genocide to alien mind-parasites, which gives Daystar and Sombra a few qualms as they pick off the last three hundred of the sect, cornered in a cave. Ultimately aliens, even their fireworm allies, have to be killed because they are alien and threaten the purity of the will. To kill them is a clean thing to do, a relief: they are injuns, gooks. That the gooks might be symptoms of a malaise in the master race itself never enters Daystar's head, telepathic or not—nor, apparently, Johnson's either.

So the formulas survive, and the unlimited dream company still turns them into science fiction. *Hello America* is not one of Ballard's most significant achievements, but by his ironic revival of the myth of America as Promised Land, where dreams walk tall and unafraid, he reveals the frame for these fantasies of devastation and free enterprise, of puritanism that turns into fascism while everyone's still applauding. He illustrates the two national desires, which are the same, in Brown's book and in Johnson's, different as they are: the yearning for the punishment of self-destruction, purgation by flood or fire; and the hunger for a hero, redeemed and redeeming, to come stepping across the Rockies like President Manson's holograms.

Brown is trying. Brown realizes something is wrong. His writing is loudly nervous, agonizing indefinitely through page after page of rhetorical questions.

> No! Her heart cried out for Kelso to be spared. But how, when he was essential to her mission? And if she served despots, wasn't the mission itself evil? Could she be sure of that? Even on Earth despotism had served good causes, hadn't it? What did "despotism" mean on a world light-years from Earth, ruled by beings perhaps eons older than humanity?
>
> How many light-years away? How many eons?
>
> Who?

Brown has something, a narrative satisfaction, an inner sense of formal accuracy, bundled up for the moment in prose three inches thick. Johnson is not trying, except to sell. *Daystar and Shadow* is conceived weakly and written inattentively. I prefer to think that there are new sf writers who do take Ballard into account, or who reject him to do something equally incisive, but that they are not lucky enough to attract the attention of publishers forced back into timid commercialism by economic recession. After the revolution, what sells best is the old lies.

The Affirmation
by Christopher Priest (*Faber, 1981, 213 pp, £6.25*)

reviewed by Ian Watson

Peter Sinclair takes refuge from a series of personal disasters in a borrowed country cottage, where he sets out to discover his true self by writing a fictional autobiography in which Peter Sinclair, winner of a lottery ticket entitling him to longevity treatment, is traversing the islands of the Dream Archipelago in an alternative world. And in this world he has written a fictional autobiography exploring his dilemmas of identity through the metaphor of an alternative world consisting of London, Sheffield, Greece . . .

But a by-product of longevity treatment is the erasing of one's memories—so that Sinclair is asked prior to treatment to write a true autobiography with which to re-programme him as a person, afterwards. So convinced is he that his fiction (about England) represents the truth, that he tenders this invention as the record of his true self.

Meanwhile, it is evident that the England-Sinclair only imagined that he was writing a book. Yet the book that you hold in your hands *is* the book that he wrote, but did not quite finish—or at least it is so to a certain extent.

Or is it? Actually, it *can't* be, because . . .

One is reminded of the Chinese philosopher who dreamed that he was a butterfly; but then, awakening, wondered whether he was not really a butterfly dreaming that it was a Chinese philosopher.

It would be fatuous to summarize the plot of *The Affirmation*—since a different sort of plot is taking place all the while: a plot to disorient the reader, very lucidly. One's safest—and most treacherous guide—is not the critic, but the text itself, with which Christopher Priest has taken great pains (as witness, even, the varying punctuation used to introduce speech of increasing degrees of reality—or unreality). And I'm reminded of the joke going round a while back, *à propos* the TV version of Le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor:* "It's perfectly easy to follow, so long as you've *learnt* the book."

Now, all this may sound simply like an author playing clever literary games; but no. The book grips the reader—and the more so, the more the "game" is played. It achieves a quality of the magical, out of the mundane; and this magic does not reside specifically in the fact that the Dream Archipelago is a more exotic and consequently preferable domain to London and Sheffield, but rather in the tension and the transitions between the two, in their simultaneous negating and affirming of each other. Relatively understated throughout, *The Affirmation* nevertheless builds up a powerful, even dizzying sense of momentum; and the fact that the book stops dead in mid-sentence is one of the most powerful effects in it—for at a word, or rather, and perhaps typically, in the absence of further words, we have to reassess everything. At a time when there are far too many sequels to books, *The Affirmation* is, economically, its own sequel.

This is a marvellously ingenious book, and to describe Peter Sinclair as someone who goes insane—as in one review I noticed—is by no means to do justice to the permutations upon reality and fantasy which the book sustains. Indeed, to speak in terms of reality versus fantasy, as though one situation is "true" and the other is "false" is far too crude. Each alternative subverts the other, while at the same time paradoxically intensifying it—by strengthening it as a created product, which is of a truer and more powerful status than the raw data of life. But of what is each a product? Of England-Sinclair's mind? Or Archipelago-Sinclair's mind? Or of the book itself? (But which book? The book that Sinclair writes in the alternative world? The book that he writes in England?—yet doesn't

write; nevertheless it exists. Or a product *of the book that writes him?*)

Superficially, there seem to be powerful links in theme with the author's previous novel *A Dream of Wessex,* in which a false reality is brought into being—by technological means—which then supersedes the mundane reality. But *The Affirmation* is no mere thematic "sequel" to the earlier book. It is a different book entirely from *A Dream of Wessex,* where we were quite certain which was the baseline reality, and which was the false (though preferable) reality. The technology of the electronic think-tank provided a (relatively) clear-cut frontier between the two. But now there is no simple technological frontier. The agent of reality-shift is the book itself—at the same time as, in beautiful balance, the book is itself a product of that shift.

God Emperor of Dune
by Frank Herbert (*Gollancz, 1981, 349 pp, £6.95*)

Direct Descent
by Frank Herbert (*Ace, 1980, 188 pp, $6.95*)

reviewed by Peter Brigg

Even to his admirers Frank Herbert's sf output seems marred by damaging commercial concerns, an eagerness for the "big buck" which sticks to the cover tag "by the author of *Dune*". Frank Herbert is a successful freelance journalist and has been well enough rewarded for *Dune* and other books that he is not hunting crusts of bread in trash cans so it is a sensible and charitable conclusion that he is at least partly a victim of the commercial greed of agents or publishers. This leads Herbert enthusiasts to a division of his works into "serious" and the rest, which latter category enthusiasts would like to bury as deeply in granite as nuclear wastes and for a longer interval. This unoriginal apologetic critical method (Homer "nods" if I recall my Civilization 101 professor correctly) is clearly justified by the contrast between Herbert's two most recent productions: *Direct Descent* and *God Emperor of Dune,* the former an expansion of a 1954 *Astounding* story, "Pack Rat Planet", and the latter volume IV of the *Dune* "trilogy".

Direct Descent is an Ace edition illustrated by Garcia. Its 188 pages include 69 drawings, 4 title and section division pages, and one blank face. The fact that the remaining 114 pages are set in very large type is the final giveaway that there ain't much here but what there is is aimed at a public which reads with its finger. I don't claim any expertise on sf art but Garcia, a competent draughtsman, has an imagination which disappoints even me. Goons in Roman battle helmets, bodies in jumpsuits and furs, blasters, and some very ordinary rocket planes (one with a pilot wearing a 1965 high altitude oxygen mask) contend for space with close ups of a hero drawn from a snapshot of Paul Newman, a heroine who looks like a blend of fifteen blonde American sitcom actresses, and one villain drawn from a Mickey Rooney snap. Write off 69 illustrated pages.

The plot idea is Earth as a galactic library planet, a green paradise on its postindustrial surface, honeycombed with tunnels to its core, sending out teams to collect data, and, for tension, a couple of serious run-ins with galactic dictators attempting to destroy its functions by misuse of the clause that makes the library unable to resist the commands of

"central administration". One wonders if Herbert hit on this idea before Buckminster Fuller modestly suggested that beautifully green England play library to the modern world after shucking its self-image as an industrial nation. Herbert uses the concept to touch the root of many of his later ideas: the struggle between knowledge and power, the desirable possibility of greening the Earth, and the inevitable solution from honourable, clever *individuals* whose logic beats muscle in the optimistic conclusion.

The idea may be possible, but the telling is a museum model of a 1954 magazine story, full of cruel baddies, cool goodies, and luscious cuties. It has the very crude story-line energy of all Herbert's fiction but completely lacks the complicating subtlety of his best work. The whole undertaking of producing this book is in the worst tradition of exploitive junk publishing and the best response to it is to crusade against anyone buying it. That is the only club-blow these commercial neolithics will ever feel.

God Emperor of Dune is the other side of the Herbert picture (thank the god(s)!). Of course it is an exploitive natural, continuing the highly successful *Dune* trilogy with the magic word in its very title. But Herbert, probably aware that *Dune Messiah* was widely held to be a dud sequel (perhaps redeemed in the completed trilogy) and undoubtedly concerned for the reputation of this major work, has written a very interesting fourth volume to carry the *Dune* tradition to its possible conclusion (sadly, the weed seeds of further sequels are present: to which one can only mutter, "Damn you Darth Vader, Hari Seldon and the Bobbsey twins!").

He begins with the leaping stroke of setting the book over 7000 years after *Children of Dune,* at a moment when historians have unearthed the personal memoirs of Leto II, whom *Children* left beginning to turn into a Sandworm. His memoirs are over 3000 years old themselves and are offered as one source among others, including The Stolen Journals (Leto II's) and various partly mythic scraps, for the reconstruction of the later period of his immensely long man-to-worm transformation. He is justifying himself (a touch of Nixon in this worm?) and explaining the Golden Path which he is bringing into existence for the future of mankind. Herbert's nose for a good suspenseful story-line fortunately intervenes in what could otherwise become a boring reconstruction. After a quick establishing of sources there is a spectacular suspense-chase chapter in which lies buried the key to the plot. The balance of the book is structured around two journeys which Leto II undertakes. Both are long slow accumulations of tension and mystery with "present" action interspersed with flashbacks, flashforwards and fragments of philosophy. He is a strange and menacing mancreature, at once oracular and practical, calculating and capable of emotion, inactive yet tense with potential merciless violence. He will stick in my mind with Asimov's Mule, Anderson's van Rijn and Le Guin's Ai as a luminous character, perfect within the demands of his context.

The regular casts of *Dune* are back: the Bene Gesserit, the Face Dancers, the Ixians, the Spacing Guild, the ghola of Duncan Idaho, but the balances have changed on an Arrakis renamed Rakis which is verdant and produces no spice. Leto II controls his galactic empire partly by doling out his hidden hoards to desperate Bene Gesserit Reverend Mothers and Guild navigators. The novel is *Dune* yet not *Dune,* using ancestral memories or Leto II's versions of the past to recall the earlier novels but moving on to new ideas and new events.

Herbert's ideas are probably considered suspect by many self-identified thinkers and the key word, hissed nastily over a small tumbler of malt, is probably "pretentious". I

don't agree. He has a lot of common sense in his thoughts about the powers of cannibalistic governments and bureaucracies, the function of the individual and the perspectives of planning, the interlocking of ecology-history and politics, and other real, hard issues. He shows me a concern with the world around him, a visceral, newsman's sense of the "possible" rather than the ideal and a broad base of general knowledge which he can draw from for striking illustrations and new juxtapositions. And he is able to turn his own ideas over, so that prescience and vast historical perspective, for example, can be seen as curses for Leto II as well as the most convenient tools of his power.

Herbert's presentation of ideas is certainly what prompts the charges of pretension. Those delphic chapter headings and readings from encyclopedias, histories, and philosophers (fictional ones), by now the established Herbert method, give a sense of thesis fiction: the chapter written to illustrate the gnomic utterance. Yet they are in tune with the story; bold, romantic, even melodramatic. Herbert is not writing Iris Murdoch's novels, and subtle, delicate, equivocatingly complex moral ideas and characters would have no more place in his style than God Emperor Leto II would have in the Civil Service drawing rooms of St. John's Wood. Herbert deserves to be seen as a centre-stream American sf writer in the best, big part of that tradition, gifted at building quite stunning fictions around ideas and casting the whole in energetic stories.

One example of this explicit style is the Fish Speakers, the private guard of women whom Leto II has assembled as his military force. Duncan Idaho is given command of them and questions why an army should not be male. Herbert offers some interesting arguments for female armies and embeds demonstrations in the plot. Are they original ideas? *No one is* but the combinations are fascinating. He suggests male armies derive their violent energy from displaced sexual drive and that they are held in a continuous adolescence by ritual, pseudo-parental command structures. They turn on the society that creates them if deprived of enemies, and rape, a predominently male act disruptive to civilization, is the classic expression of the male army. He contrasts this with the possibility of a fiercely loyal female force, bonded to a single leader (probably male and sexually idolized—in *GE of D* Leto II is not human but is a very sexy shape). Such women could, when mustered out as a reward for devoted service, mature psychologically very quickly by becoming mothers. Herbert wisely suggests that it is not the action of conquering but the effects of the military on the society after conflict which should be a key factor in the creation and management of armies. Woman the mother, the civilizer, the food gatherer, who will not seek war for pleasure or as a way of life but can be fiercely bound to sisterhood and ruthless in the short term, suits the needs better than man. These ideas are all explicit in the novel, effectively dramatized, and of course reflect vividly on the male military establishments of our time. They may, incidentally, explain the deep hostility of the military in Britain and the United States to absorbing women into their ranks in any serious numbers or in combat roles. If more officers considered the dubious pleasure of being on the receiving end of a woman's violent fury in terms of military potential they would spot new talent but they might not like the implications for the present military style of life. Herbert's methods open the way for examining such things with a fresh eye, and that is an asset in any writer.

God Emperor of Dune is a good, chewy read for any but the most jaded palates. It remains exciting, puzzling and echoing with fictional paradigms of the concepts it treats right up to the strange and exhilarating optimism of its ending.

The Spirit of Dorsai
by Gordon Dickson; illustrated by Fernando Fernandez (*Ace, 1979, 281 pp, $5.95*)

reviewed by Dave Langford

Here are two novelettes, "Amanda Morgan" and "Brothers", with no particular connexion beyond their place in Dickson's "Childe Cycle"—the Dorsai books to you and me. There's also a modicum of dispensable linking material, and much visual padding from Fernandez, which to my untrained eye looks very dispensable indeed . . . this "magnificently illustrated" edition is rather a mess.

Like Poul Anderson, Dickson started as a reasonably entertaining and unpretentious writer of popular sf: the earlier Dorsai books feature a happy succession of men who hold the universe in their hands for good or ill, all that stuff. Like Poul Anderson, Dickson now seems to be setting his sights a trifle higher, going for more moral ambiguity, more emotional weight, more Serious work; and like Poul Anderson—but even more so—he chooses to place these new strains on the same old jerrybuilt framework of his space operas, as though a colossal bronze mask of Tragedy were to be erected atop a pinball machine.

These stories are written into the interstices of already existing novels, which at once puts peculiar constraints on them. "Amanda Morgan" deals with events offstage in *Tactics of Mistake,* specifically the sequence wherein a gigantic military occupation of the world called Dorsai is reportedly defeated by resident juveniles and geriatrics—everyone else being away at the wars. The eponymous old lady who masterminds part of the retaliation is a reasonably well-drawn character (by Dickson, that is—not by Fernandez, who believes you draw old people by sketching palpably young ones and adding a few lines about the face). But there's a creaking of plot-machinery to adjust the story to certain immutable scenes—here offstage—from *Tactics of Mistake.* Naturally no new character can impinge on these; and since Amanda Morgan is a new character . . . More seriously, she spends much time worrying about the master plan, which, it turns out, cripples or kills not only the invaders but—to dispel suspicion—large numbers of indigents. Strong stuff. Unfortunately the dead hand of the pulp tradition causes Dickson to save the details of all this for a belated revelation, leaving us the spectacle of a heroine agonizing over we know not what—and thrusting offstage all the emotional turmoil surrounding the actual sacrificial decision. No amount of having the lady hold off entire armoured columns single-handed (I kid you not) can compensate for the nagging feeling that there's a much better story here than Dickson allowed himself to write.

"Brothers" deals similarly with a loose end in *Soldier, Ask Not:* Dorsai commander Kensie Graham is assassinated and brother Ian wreaks vengeance on killers. What's vaguely dissatisfying about this in the novels *Soldier, Ask Not* and *Dorsai!* is that the relationship between charismatic Kensie and brooding Ian is given a terrific build-up as something important—whereupon Kensie kicks the bucket offstage and Ian collapses into a mere cipher. So, the reader is inclined to ask, what? "Brothers" attempts to plug the emotional hole and convey Ian's vast suppressed grief, etc. Some not overly convincing tension mounts while the murderers can't be found, both tension and lack of conviction arising from Dorsai mercenaries who are in effect willing to annihilate a town-ful of innocent bystanders rather than let their commander's killers go unpunished.

Luckily the evil-doers are found; being a mighty Dorsai warrior, a stark naked Ian has no trouble in killing three blaster-wielding psychopaths in open combat with his bare hands; gee whiz. In case this superhuman outburst on his late brother's behalf is not enough, Ian then gets to show emotion in true strong-and-silent fashion by bending agonizedly over Kensie's coffin while those same hands grip and bend the coffin's (metal) edge so hard that the blood comes. Plonk. This sort of thing can be effective up to a point, but also somewhat—as it were—heavy-handed; constrained perhaps by the existing series, Dickson seems unable to add his desired emotional weight save by techniques of irremediable pulp.

The Spirit of Dorsai, then, is an odd hybrid which may well appeal to hardened Dorsai fans. New readers should begin elsewhere.

The Dreaming Dragons: A Time Opera
by Damien Broderick (*Norstrilia Press, 1980, 245 pp, $A12.95; Pocket Books, 1980, $US2.25; Penguin Australia, 1981, $A4.50*)

reviewed by George Turner

In a period of upsurge in Australian science fiction writing (some good, some promising, much merely distressing) and some attempts to develop a distinctively Australian treatment, one must confess a critical vested interest. There is a temptation when a novel as good as *The Dreaming Dragons* appears to toss critical caution aside and cry, "Local boy makes good!"

So—"Local boy makes good!" This said, it must be asked what manner of good Damien Broderick has made. Very well: High marks for originality, style, lively dialogue and some characterization beyond the normal call of science fictional duty, but sharp deductions for careless obscurities, debatable moral stances and an occasional aristocratic disregard for communication with other than the intellectual élite among his potential readers.

The story outline is familiar, but this is true of most fiction; it is the internal disposition that creates impact. An Aboriginal anthropologist (not so unlikely a person in modern Australia), accompanied by a mentally handicapped youngster, Mouse, is investigating an ancient tribal site when he stumbles on a non-Aboriginal artefact, a shining sphere, deep in a cave. Actually the thing is 600 kilometres distant, buried under the monstrous Ayers Rock; what he has found is a matter-transmitting portal. He steps through the artefact's automatic defences and is severely mauled by them, but the retarded Mouse is able to approach unharmed. The Ayers Rock site turns out to be a base where Americans and Russians (scientists and military personnel) are working together to discover the nature of the sphere, which has implications bigger than international suspicions. The sphere's defences make approach impossible to all but Mouse, who is co-opted as a channel of mental communication with the artefact and its makers.

It would be unfair to follow the plotting further but quite fair to reveal that it involves Aboriginal folklore (neatly used), the collective unconscious (Jung would *not* approve the Broderick variation), research methodology (of which more later), pacificism, militarism and religion (the triumvirate at the core of the novel's intention), sub-nuclear physics (and how ingeniously!) and the true origin of the human race. That sounds like a Van Vogtian

encounter of the worst kind but in fact the parts are so properly interdependent that almost one ignores the manipulative mind at work behind the print. The story-telling is smoothly British in style, the science superbly hard-core American, the setting and general attitudes as Australian as Ayers Rock itself; add Broderick's distinctive literary tone and the synthesis is unlike a novel by anyone else.

Since this is, basically, a novel about the necessity for deeper, more intimate forms of communication and the inter-racial and inter-personal understandings to be initiated thereby (why does no one ever question this highly doubtful proposition?) moral attitudes become central. Broderick is himself a passionate pacifist with contempt for the military mind and the bigotries of fundamentalist religion, and this contempt at times disturbs the aesthetic balance of the book. One must applaud his championing of the Aborigines, wherein he exaggerates nothing in his account of white treatment of them, from uncomprehending do-goodism at one pole to sheer inhumanity at the other, but he is on shakier ground in other stances. The general who reverts to basic old-time religion in the face of unacceptable facts abrades the reading consciousness on both dramatic and psychological grounds; though a surprising number of senior military men are, in this agnostic age, deeply religious, it is rarely in the fashion of terrified righteousness or traumatic refusal of the unknown. Science fiction writers generally could benefit the genre by ceasing to portray servicemen as either bellowing, macho heroes or cold-blooded dimwits operating reflexively to the command, "Kill!" but collapsing in disarray before the logic of pacifism. Some understanding of the subject might lend credibility to their stances.

This leads me to a sequence in the novel which shows Broderick at both his intellectual best and worst. The distraught scientists of Ayers Rock are driven to call in the aid of a group of Out of Body Experience investigators. An American general goes to meet them in the discussion chamber they call their Grope Pit and is there submitted to an exhibition of breathtakingly insulting intellectual snobbery, culminating in open insult. The OOBEs converse in a jargon-shorthand and treat the soldier's confusion with insolent derision making no effort at intelligibility until it suits them. If an argument for non-specialist resentment of specialist eggheads were required, Broderick supplies it here. It may be just possible that his intention was to display both élites as equally distasteful, but the impression given is of a self-consciously high-powered group treating the rabble with contempt.

One intention surely was to underline the non-routine nature of the OOBE methodology, but the most abstruse of experts commonly offers simplicity to a non-specialist audience. Specialists do and indeed must talk to each other in the language of their speciality, but total realism is rarely good literary art and here not only art but craftsmanship is at stake. The reader is hereby warned that he should, before tackling Chapter 4, have some understanding of the difference between the Classic and Romantic approaches to research, the major statement of Godel's Proof, what is meant by "broken-gauge unification" and/or huge reserves of good temper. The reader unfamiliar with these mysteries will be bogged in pages of incomprehensible dialogue while searching for an orientating clue. A clue is finally provided, *after* the discussion, which is of course at the wrong end. Even the absent-minded professor tends to announce what he is talking about before launching into extrapolated particle theory and the philosophy of research. (I knew the Classic and Romantic bits but had to stop to check up on Godel's Proof,

which turned out to be an excellent clue to the whole but did my tolerance no good at all. The novelist needs to hold his audience, not send it scuttling to the reference shelf.)

Fortunately this is the only major blemish in an otherwise entrancing novel. Rather than let complaint weight the scale too heavily I prefer to pass lightly over minor cavils, such as some reservations as to the practicability of some aspects of the anatomy of the dragons when they appear, because the overriding impression is of a sharp intellect at work and of a literary talent feeling towards maturity.

I can safely say, "Enjoy, enjoy," and mean it. And, since characterization was invoked near the beginning of this review, let me end by commending Aboriginal Alf Dean Djanyagirnji as a tenderly depicted, living person connecting science fiction to the real world.

The Cool War
by Frederik Pohl (*Gollancz, 1981, 282 pp, £5.95*)

reviewed by Brian Stableford

The Cool War, according to the Gollancz blurb, is "a return to the sharp social satire with which Frederik Pohl first made his name". This demonstrates, I suppose, that a label once acquired—however misleading—will stick forever more. Frederik Pohl never really was a satirist. He was witty and ironic, and was occasionally scathing in his parody of certain contemporary ideologies, but much of what is taken for satire in his early stories is nothing of the kind. To satirize something is to ridicule it by exaggeration. There is much exaggeration in Pohl's early work—the exaggeration of advertising methods in "The Tunnel Under the World" and of the consumer society in "The Midas Plague" are the best-known examples—but the purpose of presenting these absurd hypothetical societies is not to make the contemporary world look silly, but rather to make its tendencies seem disturbing. The absurdity of satire punctures pretensions, relieves tensions, appeals to aggressive resentments. Pohl's exaggerations achieve none of these ends, largely because his absurdities are a little too realistic—he is actually calling attention to contemporary social processes and bringing out their problematic features. What made him outstanding among the sf writers of the early fifties was precisely the fact that he had his finger on the pulse of social change. His black comedy overlay (as does most black comedy) a deep and clear-sighted pessimism; to dismiss his work as satire is to overlook or defuse its more baleful qualities.

In the new Pohl who has reasserted himself so strongly in the contemporary science fiction scene there has been little evidence of the grotesquerie that lightened the tone (though not the theme) of much of his early work for *Galaxy. Jem* is certainly heavy with pessimism and dark irony, but it is far from being black comedy. *Man Plus* and *Gateway* similarly had their hint of bitterness; both really belong to the Romantic side of science fiction, heavily involved with the myth of the conquest of space and participation in epoch-making adventures; the intrusion of a certain downbeat "realism" fits them more accurately to their time but does not transform their character. *The Cool War* represents the first attempt by the new Pohl to invigorate his writing with the touch of malicious levity that was once his hallmark—perhaps as a reaction against the ponderousness of *Jem.* Indeed, in its style and form—and even to a degree in its plot—*The Cool War* is

reminiscent of Pohl's first and almost-forgotten solo novel, *Slave Ship.*

The "cool war" of the title is an insidious affair in which the nations of the world are engaged in fierce economic competition of an underhand nature. As well as promoting their own industrial enterprises they are busy sabotaging one another's by spreading epidemics, initiating disasters and engineering breakdowns. The book's hero, "Horny" Hake—a small-town priest—is drafted into America's army of secret agents, where he becomes a very confused pawn driven hither and yon by the conflicting forces of his innate suggestibility, his awkward conscience, and miscellaneous threats and inducements offered by the different sides in the struggle. Why the powers-that-be are led to conscript an unreliable incompetent like Hake is never quite clear, but the implication is that the team functions with the same level of competence and efficiency as any other government agency. The plot of the book comprises a series of picaresque episodes during the course of which Hake slowly realizes what he has got himself into and decides what he must do about it.

The major problem with the story is that its theme and tone are awkward collaborators. The flippancy falls repeatedly flat because it seems discordant, ironically betrayed by the awful plausibility of the historical scenario. The cool war itself is easy to believe in (indeed, it is difficult *not* to believe in it) and most of the incidental details of sociopolitical happenstance which flesh out the picture are equally compelling. *This* image of the near future is not exaggerated enough even to begin to seem absurd, and to treat it as a joke, even in a black comedy, seems quite wrong. This problem is further compounded by the fact that the story has no logical resolution. It is perfectly plain that if things are as they are described, there is not a thing that Horny Hake or anyone else can do about it; the logic of the situation is compelling. For the sake of making a story out of his materials, with a climax to suit the tone, Pohl is forced to adopt one of the most hollow and unconvincing of contemporary clichés to serve as a *deus ex machina.* As a resounding finale, it strikes the falsest note of all.

The Cool War is the least of Pohl's recent works because it falls between two stools: he has tried to recapture the virtues of his early work while retaining the strength of his recent novels. He was bound to fall, because the best of both worlds turns out to be immiscible.

A Planet Called Treason
by Orson Scott Card (*Dell, 1980, 299 pp, $2.50*)

reviewed by Mike Dickinson

In many ways science fiction is a genre that foments anarchy. Possibly the most common plot, after the odyssey, deals with the destruction of a tyrannical regime. The more authoritarian writers tend, with the exception of a small band of mercenary acolytes, to head off into fantasy. Orson Scott Card recently opined in *SF Review* that the closer he comes to fantasy the more nearly he approaches Truth. In all ways but a dubious sf rationale *A Planet Called Treason* is fantasy, and thus forms a fair guide to what Card regards as Truth.

Generations ago a shipload of exiled geniuses crash-landed on Treason. Each ship member founded a dynasty (with what, Card only knows) and established a territory. One

of the feudal families is Mueller, which, using the inherent Mueller skills, has developed the ability to grow spare parts which are then lopped off (in a typical Card gambit) and sold to the Ambassadors for iron. Since there seems to be no other iron on Treason, and no other family has comparable services to offer, the Muellers are Top. All this material wealth is used to create the sort of unreconstructed feudal rule (complete with power-mad father and slaves so abased they are whipped whenever they witness nobles making clots of themselves) which is probably only known to the readers and writers of fantasy fiction.

The novel begins with the hero, Lanik Mueller, being dismissed as heir to the feudal holdings for the crime of growing breasts. But, lest this original opening should disgust us with suggestions of perversion, Card quickly clears up our doubts: instead of, as a dutiful son, merely sprouting limbs in gay profusion, Lanik has become a "radical regenerative" which means (inasmuch as it means anything) that he has gone too far (would it were for the last time).

Lanik fits in with this brutal society and at no time, even when it rejects him, does he (for this is a first-person narrative) think to criticize it. In return, his father, after hurting his breasts in public as a macho humiliation, confesses that he needs him for his intelligence: "Lanik, never in the three thousand years of Mueller has there been a mind like yours—a man truly fit to lead men" (p.20).

This is a curious remark considering that, in public, Lanik has just insulted his father and his own successor as heir, who in return have not merely not killed him but not condemned him to the horrid living fate of all others in his condition. However, constant repetition makes us sure that, despite blunders necessary for the plot, Card intends us to accept this as true. For several reasons it is essential that we do believe it, as without Lanik's being special, his father could not trust him for the mission, to spy on some newly-discovered iron owners, which sends Lanik out on his travels. Super-intelligence is also the necessary first ingredient for the superman which Card is trying to assemble. The second ingredient comes clear when we discover his invulnerability, as he takes mere minutes to recover from the slit throat his sneaky brother gives him. (Again, why his brother, even in the light of later information, should be dumb enough to think this would kill him, Card only knows.)

But his escape from the castle provides immediate refutation of the lad's superbrain. He hides from some soldiers in the hut of an old peasant woman who, before she is killed (action, always action!), gives him a piece of advice concerning the forest of Ku Kuei which, because of its evil reputation, is the only place that offers "safe" passage on his journey: "pay no heed to day and night" (p.32). Lanik then proceeds to walk until he keels over, merely because it is daylight.

The inhabitants of Nkumai, on whom he is to spy, are black and live in trees, giving hoi polloi lots of opportunities to gabble racialist mistrust, which Card thinks important enough to include. Lanik learns a great deal about the history of Treason from them, but can find nothing much good to say about them except that he likes their singing (not, fortunately, "Camptown Races"). He does, however, meet the *éminence grise* of the society, Murabao Mawa, or rather she meets him and outwits him every time, finally penetrating his female disguise by attempting to have sex with him.

Escaping again, Lanik embarks on what are plainly meant to be learning experiences. He meets the Schwartzes, descendants of a geologist, who not only cure his body of its rampant growths but make it unnecessary for him ever to eat again. How in a world of

physical laws he can become "like the chameleon that lives on air" and how, furthermore, geologists can do it, once again, Card only knows. The Schwartzes teach him to communicate with rocks and sand, and discover, surprise, surprise, that he is more talented than them at doing so. Now superman can whip the ground literally from under anyone's feet or even knock over fortresses by asking the earth to move (what fun Hemingway could have had!). They are, however, desert-dwelling mystic pacifists and Lanik seemingly imbibes their philosophy, and seemingly grows. However, it is not long before he is using his new power in childish tricks, or to kill people. For a superman he is not far removed from a weakling who can persuade the sand to kick into the bully's eyes.

His next call is on the Ku Kuei, founded by a philosopher, where he discovers a people who can move faster or slower relative to normal time. Hence the time distortions he had noticed earlier. Again he learns their skills and notices when back in ordinary society that several top leaders or powers-behind-the-throne are not what they seem, when viewed in the speed-time he is using to escape detection. In discussions with a Lord Barton, product of a line of historians, he discovers a conspiracy by several people from Anderson to use their shape-shifting powers to take control. (In case anyone is wondering what trade produces shape-shifting, Anderson was the pilot and hence a politician!) And the climax of the book comes when after this, and an unhappy day-trip to Anderson, Lanik decides to destroy Anderson.

So this is the conclusion that all the acquiring of skills and expanding the consciousness was leading towards: Genocide! Because of misbehaviour by less than a hundred of its number, more than a million inhabitants of the Anderson continent must go. Sure enough, Lanik persuades, by logic and eloquence, the highly moral Schwartzes (so it must be all right!) to help him. The continent is junked, with unfortunate effects on great numbers of non-Andersons, particularly those near coasts. Eggs and omelettes. The main part over with, Lanik accelerates into super-time and the usurpers are killed like fish in a barrel, though the odd one wriggles, just for fun. Finally, with little knee-jerks of remorse, Lanik moves off to retreat amongst the primitive shepherd Humpers, who worship him.

Whether the Andersons are allegorical Jews, Communists, or whatever, the fact remains that Card has forced his hero through all these growth exercises to produce a mentality that would win Hitler's unstinted approval. What is more, he has done it in a rather cheap way: make people praise the intelligence of your protagonist (and make everyone else a little dumber) and hope the reader believes it; have him morally approved of by a group of ascetic people who even care about rocks, and have him even, at one stage, judged morally acceptable by the earth, and the reader has to be convinced. There is no trace of irony in Mr Card; he genuinely seems to believe that powerful people have the right, nay duty, to make and enforce judgements of execution upon millions. That he has some gift of invention and description, despite the obvious influence of writers such as Cordwainer Smith, is evident. He can also pace a story very well and, when not lapsing into dubious slang, e.g. "bollixed", has a fair ear for dialogue. Faced with a book like this, however, I feel such comments are like praising the icing on a cake that tastes of stinking fish.

Nightflyers
by George R.R. Martin

True Names
by Vernor Vinge *(Dell Binary Star No. 5, 1980, $2.50)*

reviewed by Roz Kaveney

And here is, I suppose, the more or less acceptable face of the new populist sf, chock-a-block with somewhat transcended clichés, arrantly gooey sentimentality, gosh-wow mind-expanding (curiously safe) Ideas and an awful lot of sheer genre *Stuff* . . . The Binary Star series has been going long enough now for a clear picture to have emerged of its style; as might be deduced from the fact that the most adventurous story of the 10 is a 1945 Fritz Leiber, that style is, in however civilized a fashion, somewhat reactionary. While it is nice that there be an outlet for stories like the Vernor Vinge (which, while there are things to be said against it, is fighting at pretty much its right weight at 105 pages), there has to be a suspicion that the guiding motive of James Frenkel as editor is less that than a calculation that many readers of the genre are nostalgic for the good old days of Ace Doubles and full-length feature novels, before things went wrong. Nostalgia has a lot to do with the content of these stories and also, predictably, a lot to do with their form.

Nightflyers is fluent, fascinating and frustratingly unaccomplished, partly because of the length at which George Martin has chosen to work here. His first novel *Dying of the Light* accomplished with admirable efficiency many of the tasks he set it—if, as I have maintained here before, it is less than satisfactory, it is because of his sheer chutzpah in trying to combine a glossy doomladen space opera with simultaneous reruns of *Women in Love* and *Rob Roy.* Martin's talent is not for the original—it is for the illumination and emotional variation of others' material. Too often he tries to compensate for this essentially secondary status by packing in his material tight; he weakens his structures by an overconscientious attempt to give us value for money. Here he gives us the Flying Dutchman, Eloise and Abelard, Moby Dick, ultimate castrating mothers and Ten Little N-----s in a starship—too much in too little space and none of it quite works. The doomed love of the reluctantly reclusive crippled space captain Royd and the over- confident superwoman Melanctha is touching in its slow growth and convincingly tragic in its crowning non-consummation. The quest of the scholar d'Branin—why do space- opera characters always have glottal stops and apostrophes in their names?—for the *volcryn,* a vast being or beings that drifts slowly between the stars troubling the dreams of planet-bound telepaths, is a lot more interesting than most such quests and its eventual resolution is convincing as a puzzle solution and moving as an emotional image. Almost these two stories jell into a whole linked by common material of disastrous incompre- hension and endless yearning wandering. Where in *Dying of the Light,* Martin built a stage set of a world to surround his torrid plot with big chunks of pathetic-fallacy land- scape, here he surrounds his action with the pregnant emptiness of interstellar space. Where most of his school want to get us into space because it will be Good For us, Martin seems keen on it principally because high vacuum is an appropriate locale for the deeper apprehension of angst.

At a shorter, or more probably at a greater, length, the suspense plot might have

worked by itself; as it stands though it merely gets in the way. In Agatha Christie all characters are puppets because the puzzle is all that exists; inasmuch as the subsidiary figures here are puppets who exist to be gruesomely killed, their efficiency is diminished by the fact that they have to interact with characters who are not puppets and who in turn seem out of place in the puppets' bit of the story. Martin is too compassionately involved with his characters as people to be capable of making his potential corpses totally puppets; they are human enough that we are irritated at their failure to come fully to life before leaving it. The horrors are oddly perfunctory—or perhaps they only seem that way because, since *Nightflyers* was originally published in *Analog,* we have all seen a starship crew done in with far more style, panache and tomato ketchup in Ridley Scott's *Alien*. All this puzzle and blood weakens our concentration on the three portraits and one dream which almost redeem the failure of this tale.

True Names is less ambitious, less interesting and in its little way more accomplished. Vinge has been over-shadowed by his ex-wife and lost what of my good will he had gained with the Ruritanian antics of *Grimm's World* with the appalling sexist sub-de Camp *The Witling*—plain too-smart woman finds true love and happiness when lobotomized by aliens as fat as she is. It says something for *True Names* that it conquered the nasty taste that has been in the back of my mouth during the long years of his silence. This is the sort of good ol' story that serious critics of the genre are no longer supposed to enjoy—current trends are extrapolated into a fast-moving somewhat metaphysical adventure story dressed up with a lot of movie dialogue and some totally sexless Lerve. (The New Celibacy obtrudes itself quite heavily in both these stories). The whole thing is, if you are predisposed to use such language and actually think it means something, a product of the fancy rather than the imagination and quite unrespectable. But on its own trivial level the thing works.

Early next century society is so dependent on data-processing machines—increasingly operated via an EEG mind-machine interface—that it is peculiarly vulnerable to computer thieves and pranksters. The latter have found it convenient to conceptualize the flood of information they manipulate via an elaborate fantasy-game scenario, which also supplies them with entertainment and much-needed disguises. The hero Roger is identified by the government as the "warlock" Mr Slippery and blackmailed into helping with the identification and destruction of the mysterious and murderous Mailman who is out for real power. Roger acquires and renounces total power over the world; his friend "Eryinthia the Red Witch" turns out to be a dying old lady who transfers her consciousness into the world computer-net as a guard against future baddies. In such a transfer—we are told—lies the future immortality of the human race and Roger's hope of possessing his beloved . . . What is effective here is the pursuit of the Mailman through an ever-increasing level of complexity of machinery; Vinge manages the power fantasy part of the story effectively and the slightly leaden dying fall of the sentimental ending is efficient as a balance to it. The fantasy scenes are reasonably effective, though the presence in them of a computerised dragon persona called Alan—after Alan Turing—telegraphs for a quick gag the solution of the problem of the villain's identity in a way that displays a distressing lack of commitment to his story on Vinge's part.

These two stories have the wrong things in common to stand usefully in the same volume; both are at least partly problems and their solutions are too close to being the same; both have emotional subplots which come to rather similarly unsatisfactory

culminations. What we have here is a miscalculation on the part of the editor, I fear. Both stories offer much pleasure to the uncritical audience for which they were intended and much ammunition to those who think that no matter how serious an effort is made to use such material, the genre clichés will trip you every time. To an open and critical mind it all looks a bit too much like artistic laziness and skimped work in the Martin, and a profoundly limited talent in the Vinge. Neither story actually *insults* the reader. And off I go dissatisfied and grumbling, hoping that one day someone will produce a space opera I actually enjoy defending . . .

The Ceres Solution
by Bob Shaw (*Gollancz, 1981, 191 pp, £5.95*)

reviewed by John Clute

Sly fly tonguewhipper Young Martin Amis gets quoted to unusual effect on the yellow dustwrapper of this latest Bob Shaw novel from Gollancz, where he tells us that, "after Ballard himself, Bob Shaw is the nearest we've got to a home-grown Great," which God knows who could quarrel with, except maybe on the grounds that Ballard was born and raised in the Far East and Bob Shaw is Irish, except maybe that the idea of a "home-grown Great" implies a kind of prep-school score-keeping subtly but intensely inimical to the cultivation of home-grown Taste, and except that maybe Bob Shaw himself would feel a little *exposed* at being declared Second in a race he was probably unaware of committing the faux pas of entering, especially when what the blurb in all its tipster gaucheness ends up advertising is *The Ceres Solution*.

Which is not one of Bob Shaw's better novels. In the form in which it reaches us, it may well be his worst. Certainly it cannot be a novel whose present state of completion gives Shaw very much pleasure. At some point, somebody's nerve—maybe Shaw's, maybe an editor's—seems to have failed, because what we have in the 191 pages of this loony tale *must* be a savagely cut or reshuffled or maybe even scrambled rendering of an original manuscript.

The story is not simple. No way.

Themselves watched by almost immortal beings in italics at either end of the text who are on a post-kindergarten tour of the entire universe, the long-lived humans of the planet Mollan have for many thousands of years kept a watching brief on other planets originally colonized by them (perhaps) and still inhabited by human stock, in order to find out what makes civilization kick the bucket after yea thousands of years; apparently incapable of working it out—after thousands of years—that watching other human beings die out like vermin is in itself a singularly comprehensive definition of profound decadence, the Mollanians are still looking for the secret when the novel opens, on Earth, in the painfully defensive and incarcerated mind of young Denny Hargate, a victim of multiple peripheral neuritis duralloy-crutching his way up a New England hillside to rediscover the special feeling of "imminence" bestowed upon him whenever he goes to a secret sheltered glade in the woods there.

On this occasion he finds a beautiful lady in the glade who offends him by visibly noticing his infirmity and who, when he seems to be out of sight, makes ornate

mathematical gestures with her raised right hand and disappears. Years pass. We find out that the lady in question is an ugly Mollanian (as Shaw intends, their standards of beauty, central to their bland narrow culture, are comically Nordic) who has been cozened by the Mollanian Warden of Earth into undertaking observer duty. All humans (other than Terrans, whose huge Moon scrambles all third-order forces) are capable of teleportation and other such like, and travel between the stars through nodal points like the one Denny Hargate had stumbled upon. Grown-up, Denny um—but there's no point in continuing like this. Because of whatever catastrophe has jumbled this book up, Denny Hargate does not work, either as a character in his own right, nor as an emblem of the human condition. From this point in the plot, which has been achieved through frames and flashbacks and sand in the eyes, a confusion of protagonist-shifts, narrative dislocations, strange gear-changes in every sort of rhythm of tale-telling one can imagine all combine to bemuse and make seasick the reader the way bad Van Vogt does, but Shaw doesn't have the excuse of waking himself up every twelve and a half minutes to write twelve and a half words of dream imagery, with his eyes crossed, I mean there is nothing in the actual fragments of *The Ceres Solution* (we'll touch on Ceres in just a moment) that even hint at a Van Vogtian dream-metaphysic.

Shaw is as "sane" as the rest of us. It is only his book which blocks the inner ear and we topple yawing. And, as I've said, as it stands I don't think the book is his. I think what he probably intended to do was write a long rather intense narrative investigation of Denny Hargate as a working symbol of our human condition, which is nasty, brutish, Reagan-haunted, short and like a prison; and I think he probably intended, through the escapes science fiction gives us, to present Denny (and all Terrans) with release from crippledom into a full, nearly immortal (though not necessarily Nordic), secular adulthood pointing to the stars, o'erleaping our mortal frame with the destruction of the Moon which is our penitentiary wall.

But of course it doesn't come. All one can do is kind of follow the plot to the end. The Mollanian Warden of Earth is mad, and has artificially shortened our lifespans to make better fruitflies of us, so that his inhumanly long treatise on our inevitable self-destruction —*Analytical Notes on the Evolution of One Human Civilization*—will be all the more comprehensive. Mollanian dissidents on Earth persuade Denny's teleporting female friend to kind of help them in their project to *destroy the Moon* and thus liberate Terrans for good. Denny himself confronts the Warden on the Moon just before it is due to be terminated, and so badly freaks him out that he (the Warden) publicly confesses his sins of lifespan-shortening and general interference. Denny's own incarceration in the sly rather Martin-Amis-like sarcasms of a self-protective human psyche will be paroled by marriage to the female Mollanian, though he will die soon after, and is already too weak (he says) to fuck her. It's altogether too late for him, a fact which, in the novel I've been continuing to claim Shaw maybe wrote but backed away from or whatever, would have been very moving. Anyway, Terrans will conquer the stars. Makes ya glad yer *people*. Only one element of the plot needs final baring. How the rebel Mollanians destroy the Moon is by diverting the largest asteroid from orbit and crashing it into Her. This really big asteroid is of course Ceres.

New Dimensions 12
edited by Marta Randall and Robert Silverberg (*Timescape, 1981, 223 pp, $2.50*)

reviewed by Michael Bishop

In July, 1980, *New Dimensions 11* appeared in the United States from Pocket Books, whose fantasy and science fiction publications have since begun to cascade into the world emblazoned with an ugly, vertigo-inducing colophon taking its name from Gregory Benford's exemplary novel *Timescape*. In a foreword to *11*, after a run of five high-priced hardcover numbers from Harper & Row, Robert Silverberg wrote, "Effective with this issue, I have withdrawn from active control of *New Dimensions*, and, though my name remains on the title page in an *ex officio* capacity, the book you now hold is largely the work of Marta Randall." Well, in that book, the appearance of Suzy McKee Charnas's "Unicorn Tapestry," along with good work by newcomers Michael Swanwick, Pat Cadigan, and Alan Ryan, was heartening testimony to Randall's editorial competence.

Now, on *New Dimensions 12*, complete (blessedly) with a colophon about half the size of those that throbbed on Timescape's premier productions, Marta Randall gets top billing. The twelve stories that she has assembled bespeak her continuing commitment to her predecessor's literary standards without branding her a slavish devotee of his tastes. Indeed, my feeling is that *New Dimensions 11* and the issue currently under review constitute far more balanced and readable additions to the series than the last two volumes edited solely by Silverberg. The fact that you can pick them up for paperback prices also disposes me kindly toward them. The Harper & Row incarnations were undeniably sleek and handsome, but, as well as being expensive, they were often damnably hard to procure. Does a tree falling in a forest to make wood pulp for paper to be used in the production of pages that will never be read land with a clangorously reverberating or an eerily inaudible thud? The latter, I fear.

In this twelfth volume, Randall's first performance as the headliner, the feminist consciousness-raising effort of the last decade or so has scored what strikes me as a welcome and quietly unobtrusive triumph. Although only three contributors (Elizabeth A. Lynn, Vonda N. McIntyre, and Juleen Brantingham) are women, the point-of-view characters in most of these stories are female. (Significantly, I suppose, McIntyre's first person narrator is male, albeit a biologically engineered centaur, whereas those of Lynn and Brantingham never conclusively reveal their gender, probably because in neither instance is gender a matter of real thematic consequence.) Maude in Michael Swanwick's "Walden Three", Lydia in Gregory Benford's "Cadenza", Kelly in Gordon Eklund's "Pain and Glory", Pitspipple in Michael Ward's "Delta D and She", and Elinor in Tony Sarowitz's "A Manner of Speaking" comprise an interesting gallery of gutsy and/or anguished human beings. I do not find these several stories equally commendable, but I like nearly all of these distinctive point-of-view characters. It also pleases me to note that none of these women is a distaff version of some galaxy-hopping Captain Infallible or even a winsome sf projection of the Unsinkable Molly Brown. Their heroism, when and if it asserts itself, grows out of defining weaknesses as well as certain definitive strengths.

The most obvious case in point, and to my mind the best story in the book, is Eklund's, although I did not begin to like it very much until I was nearly two thirds of the way through it. Over the last decade Eklund has been a mystifyingly uneven writer, turning out

flawed or altogether misconceived novels along with an occasional stunning short story, as, for example, the sadly underacclaimed "Vermeer's Window" from Terry Carr's *Universe 8*. "Pain and Glory" redeems the out-at-the-elbow convention of the psionically gifted group or family by deftly bringing to life the several beleaguered members of the Cohen clan, as perceived and ultimately reassessed through the eyes of its youngest adept, sixteen-year-old Kelly. This story is moving, and wise, and restrained to the point of self-effacement.

It's stylistic opposite, and to my mind Randall's unhappiest selection for *ND 12*, is Peter Santiago C.'s "The Celebrants," an ambitious, bitterly flamboyant tale about Something Profound, I am not quite sure what. "Mist's cry was filled with more terror than was possible," writes Santiago C. near story's end, and I here succumb to the temptation to point out that "The Celebrants" is filled with more background, more disembodied emotionalism, and more self-consciously sensitive prose than is advisable at this length, particularly when the alien characters, physical descriptions aside, are virtually indistinguishable from the human. "The Celebrants" is simultaneously too short (to untangle the complicated threads of its fictional milieu) and too long (to sustain interest in what story there is). However, I hope to see C.—presumably not Wallace Steven's Comedian—back in this series with his mordant exuberance under tighter rein and his ambition augmented by a better-communicated feel for character.

To lump my diatribes against this volume's less successful stories into one more paragraph (or maybe two), let me mention here that Lynn's "The Woman in the Phone Booth", which Randall astutely introduces as "rather silly", is a finger exercise worthy of prominent display in a fanzine; that Ward's "Delta D and She", whose author's mind Randall charitably characterizes as "manic", fails to gird its episodic structure with any but a manic (i.e., nonexistent) discipline; and that Brantingham's "The Satyr's and Dryad's Cotillion", which Randall touts as "sensuous" and "complex", actually proves to be an arch little story of rococo vengeance, with insufficient wit to animate characters who are both conceited and vacuous.

"Elfleda" by Vonda McIntyre has occasional virtues, among them its careful, almost elegaic prose, but its concluding "tragedy" is telegraphed by this very tone. Further, I suspect McIntyre of contriving the unicorn-woman Elfleda's cruel capture, as well as the centaur-narrator's helpless predicament, precisely to saddle the reader with a classical *tristesse*. I am unable to submit to this painful cinching as willingly as the author would undoubtedly like. As for Wendy Rose's accompanying two-page illustration—well, it would have been gratuitous in a quarter of the space. Please, Marta Randall, no more of this ineptly Picassoid stuff.

Together with Eklund's "Pain and Glory", the remaining six stories earn their spots in *ND 12* and more than compensate for these duds and near-misses. Even the slightest of this admirable bunch—Jack Dann and Barry N. Malzberg's "Parables of Art" and Carter Scholz's "The Last Concert of Pierre Valdemar"—delight, primarily because the authors pepper their outlandish conceits with liberal quantities of black humor and infrared irony. Yea, verily, the contribution by Scholz is a miniature masterpiece, just like Pierre Valdemar's final high-flying fling at the Steinway. Even people with tin ears should enjoy it.

Although I am heartily sick of present-tense narration, Benford's "Cadenza" neatly outlines the rebellion of a dying woman against the tyranny of "chemsamplers" and

"medmons". Minor Benford, it succeeds in spite of its worn-out avant-gardism, and probably succeeds less well than Gardner Dozois's far bleaker "Machines of Loving Grace" from *Orbit 11,* which it quite uncannily resembles. Better, however, is Sarowitz's "A Manner of Speaking", sociological sf in which a peculiar sort of prostitution struggles to counter the disaffection of people whose culture has given rise to a thoroughgoing taboo against self-revelation. Like Lydia in the Benford story, Sarowitz's Elinor has a desperate need to escape the loneliness of mechanized relationships. She fails, but her failure illuminates the universality of this need.

In his novelette "Walden Three" Swanwick details an interesting future society that eventually owes it redemption to the public sacrifice of a scapegoat. This broad narrative pattern has a corollary in "The Feast of Saint Janis", Swanwick's contribution to the last number of *New Dimensions* and my first acquaintance with his work. The nits I wish to pick with "Walden Three" involve not this fascinating similarity, however, but a climactic "tragedy" that seems to have been engineered somewhat like that in the McIntyre story and a rather sententious epilogue of the sort that I have once or twice written myself. Nevertheless, the complexity of Swanwick's society, the clarity of his characterizations, and the ease with which his story unravels show him to be a writer to watch.

Finally, there is —are?—"Drode's Equations" by Richard Grant. This surprising piece shares resonances with some of the convolute *ficciones* of Borges, if you can imagine the Argentine's tales couched in a sunlit, altogether amiable Victorian style. Very little "action" occurs—a man studies a set of equations during a train trip and presently reaches a pair of destinations, one of them physical, the other metaphysical and evanescent—but the sense of imminent arrival into which Grant maneuvers the reader perfuses the entire story with suspense and significance. Our victories over time, even if they do not last long, are timeless.

New Dimensions 12 is a good collection, an auspicious beginning to the series' second decade.

Nebula Winners Fifteen
Edited by Frank Herbert (*Harper & Row, 1981, 223 pp, $12.95*)

reviewed by Ian Watson

Of course, *Nebula Winners Fifteen*—in common with earlier volumes in the series, which used to be called *Nebula Award Stories*—contains a number of runners-up as well, not to mention one or two essays. But I suppose, in these days of competitive hype, the old title seems a bit weak. The cry from the fair booth has to be: "Every page a winner!"

This year, Frank Herbert is the anchor man, and to get a slant in his demotic introduction he pretends cunningly that readers probably have no idea whatever about the prejudices of the author of *Dune;* so he kicks Social Security in the teeth a bit, noises it around that in sf us Yanks can cut the mustard, and puts the boot into Euro-Culture—represented by its dire Academies which pontificate on, and fossilize Art. Fortunately "politics" has been banished from SFWA at last. Vote-hustling is a thing of the past; the Nebula ballot is as clean as a whistle.

Well, no doubt it is, as regards the behaviour of the individual members. But Frank

Herbert has turned a blind eye to the commercial pressure hype, which led in this year in question to members of SFWA each receiving a free copy of the September 1979 issue of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine,* containing Barry Longyear's "Enemy Mine" with an explanatory letter about how good they thought it was. The story won; so here it is in *Nebula Winners Fifteen.* This isn't to say that it didn't deserve to win (more on this later); simply that its partisans made expensively damn sure that as many members as possible read it, and felt grateful for the chance. Not a dishonest tactic, simply an effective one. Yet, Frank Herbert assures us, "lobbying efforts have died off because they produced unwanted negative results." When is a lobbying effort not a lobbying effort? Come off it, Mr Herbert.

The other two pieces of non-fiction are by Vonda McIntyre and Ben Bova. Vonda McIntyre's essay is addressed to hopeful writers; so it assaults once more the Aunt Sally of "said-bookisms" and other vices, as have a dozen other essays elsewhere. This is an example of the *faute-de-mieux*-essayism: the author couldn't think of anything new to say. Next, she describes in detail verging on parody how to prepare a typescript, which must not be typed on black paper and should bear the author's name in demi-pica-elite 3½ inches to the right of the watermark (though some schools of thought hold that it should be 3½ inches to the left). This part of the essay isn't at all unlike the style-sheets sent out by *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine,* accompanying rejection slips, though those are more concisely thought out and graphically presented. Presumably this essay may encourage more schools to buy the volume as a teaching aid; but I would have preferred another piece of runner-up fiction.

Ben Bova makes some accurate points on the publishing biz, including a puff for *Omni* (and why not indeed?)—though one peculiar note is sounded, motivation-wise, when Mr Bova declares: "I want to reach the largest number of readers I can—and if this means writing stories in which the characters are more important than the gadgets, then fine, those are the stories I will write." Well, it's one reason for writing Litrachure, instead of Skiffy—but have you thought, Mr Bova, that all this sensitive characterization business at the expense of gadget-as-hero may well be part *of a new inner-directed rebellion against technology,* which will put the kibosh on enough money for hard-tech outer space research, eh?

And so to the stories, all neat and literate and duly moving. George R.R. Martin won with "Sandkings", Edward Bryant with "giANTS", and Barry Longyear with "Enemy Mine". Non-winners are Jack Dann's "Camps", Joanna Russ's "The Extraordinary Voyages of Amélie Bertrand" and Orson Scott Card's "Unaccompanied Sonata".

Of the non-winners, Russ's homage to Jules Verne is definitely a non-plastic story—a lovely (and nutty) idea, beautifully handled. Bravo! Card's story is a nicely plastic tale about a social set-up that withers under scrutiny. Scrutinize not. Jack Dann's is a nobly intentioned time-parallel about Nazism which is somehow too neat, too balanced.

Of the winners, *à propos* Vonda McIntyre's advice not to make something sound conveniently "sci-fi" by adding "-on" ("No character ever pulled a chairon to a tableon, but they came close"), and her advice against having characters "hiss" sentences with narry a sibilant in them, someone with a sense of humour has placed Barry Longyear's story next. It opens: "The Dracon's three-fingered hands flexed." It continues: *"Irkmaan!* the thing spat."

After some pages of initial low-forehead jet jockey Terran xenophobia this tale

becomes rather moving as the stranded human pilot and the stranded alien—who has a much higher forehead, and can recite his genealogy for 3½ hours—come to terms and make friends. All rather obvious stuff, but probably just as well to repeat it as the Crusade recommences in Central America. Though I do not understand the planet, with its constant vast tidal waves rolling over islands. (But maybe there's a big nearby moon that I didn't notice.) Nor do I understand quite why—even *causa pietatis*—the place is worth colonizing. (Oh well, Aeneas probably thought that about Italy.) Yet the story does move one; I read the last few pages two or three times, me heart throbbing, and then I realized why it moved me. Vonda McIntyre warns against relocating cowboy stories into outer space, with the characters and hardware renamed; and damn it, Longyear had been watching *Roots* just before he wrote the story—and I had the same lump in my throat at the time. Remember how a new Dad would hold the new-born up to the night sky? "And your grandaddy was Chicken George, and your great-great-grandaddy was Kunta Kinte, a Mandinka fighting man . . ." Lo and behold: ". . . and now Ty handed me Haesni. I nodded at the child. 'Your child will be called Gothig, and then . . .' I looked at the sky and felt the tears drying on my face. '. . . and then, Gothig's child will be called Shigan.' "

Bryant's "giANTS" is another balanced tale, about a scientist whose pregnant wife died long ago of anaphylactic shock when a nest of fire ants bit her up; in the now-world, army ants are out of control in South America, marching north on the rampage. Remembering, and haunted by the movie *THEM* (with its breach of the square-cube law), our scientist realizes that he can kill them by dosing them from the air with gigantism juice. Memories of his wife and unborn daughter are stirred by the dashing girl reporter. It's a very neat story with everything just right; but that's the trouble.

Finally, "Sandkings", I would say, deserved a Nebula. It has that edge of madness and surprise, and savagery—and morality which isn't too intrusive—and that bit of extra inventiveness, which makes all the difference. Like the other winners, it is the *sort* of story that tends to win—and therefore determines the shape of story that hopeful writers (and hopeful winners) feel it would be a good idea to write—aided and abetted in their ambitions by a showcase volume such as this, including its tips to young hopefuls. (*Pace* Mr Herbert, here is the Tacit Academy at work.) But, what the hell, it's a good tale.

Orbit 21
edited by Damon Knight (*Harper & Row, 1980, 240 pp, $12.95*)

reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is the final collection of the *Orbit* series, which begun in 1966, sparked off the boom in original anthologies. Originally published by Berkley Medallion in paperback, the series acquired a hardcover edition when Berkley was taken over by Putnam, and then switched to Harper & Row when poor sales cooled the initiating publisher's ardour. The Harper edition never found a paperback publisher to share the burden of costs, and the only surprising thing about the news of its demise is the fact that it was delayed so long. *Orbit*, thanks to the efforts of Damon Knight and the sympathy of the various in-house editors he had to work with, proved surprisingly resilient against the tyrranies of commercial common sense—it was always more of a labour of love than a profit-making venture; the same is true of the more prestigious imitation series which survive it—*New*

Dimensions and *Universe*—each of which has similarly survived changes in address.

Knight hangs up his editorial hat conscious of having set a good example, and can look back with some satisfaction at four award-winning stories and a host of nominees (though the former statistic looks marginally less impressive given Knight's confession in the introduction to the present volume that he rejected five award-winners). It is possible that there may have been more award-winners if the last eight volumes had not been restricted to hardcover publication—it is well-nigh impossible under such circumstances for stories to attain sufficient exposure to pick up Nebula or Hugo votes. Nevertheless, the fact that *Orbit's* award-winners were clustered in the early years of its career *does* reflect a significant loss of vitality; the best of the non-award-winning stories (including Harlan Ellison's "Shattered Like a Glass Goblin", Norman Spinrad's "The Big Flash" and Thomas M. Disch's "The Asian Shore") are also in the earlier volumes. This may not be Knight's fault: just as declining sales must have been largely attributable to the level of competition, so the best stories must have spread themselves much more thinly among the available outlets.

Three writers have been much more extensively-featured in *Orbit* than any others: in the first twenty volumes there were 19 stories by Kate Wilhelm, and 18 each by Gene Wolfe and R.A. Lafferty. Lafferty's *Orbit* stories do not represent a significant section of his output, but that is emphatically not true of the other two, whose *Orbit* stories represent the greater part of the cream of their production in the shorter lengths. How much these writers owe Knight on this account is not clear (he notes in his introduction to the present volume that it is unduly prideful for an editor to claim rights of discovery in respect of the authors he publishes) but it is certain that *Orbit* would have been very different without them, and it may be that their record might look different were it not for *Orbit*. Curiously, of these three mainstays of the series, only Lafferty is represented in volume 21, which is a fairly lousy collection, just about the worst of the lot. Like *Orbit* 13 (the last of the Berkley collections) it has presumably cleared out the last of the inventory, which seems to have accumulated its inevitable measure of scoria.

Knight always tried, in *Orbit,* to practice what he had preached in all his critical writings. As he puts it in the introduction to *Orbit 21:* "My thesis was that there was no inherent reason why science fiction could not meet ordinary literary standards, but that the pulp tradition of forty years had encouraged ideas at the expense of writing skill. It seemed to me that the only way to cure this was to set high standards at the beginning, even if it meant publishing a lot of fantasy and marginal material because most hard-core sf could not make the grade." With telling accuracy, though, he adds: "Later, cocky with success, I followed this trail too far." The problem with this approach, as *Orbit 21* clearly demonstrates, is that it has encouraged Knight, as an editor, to pay too much attention to simple linguistic competence. *Orbit 21* is full of stories which have few grammatical errors, and even elegance of expression, but which are depressing in their tediousness. As well as his editorial activities, of course, Knight has been heavily involved in running writers' workshops at Milford in Connecticut, and this seems to have sharpened his attention to the *theory* of story-construction to the point at which he may completely have lost his grip on the art of reading. How otherwise could he have bought such mediocrities as Richard Kearns' sickly and pretentious "Love, Death, Time and Katie" or Lelia Rose Foreman's unwittingly stupid *cri de coeur* "Hope"? Too many of the stories here—especially those by unknown writers like Eileen Roy, Raymond G. Embrak and Rhondi

Vilott—are quite deadly in their painstaking attempts to make statements about the human condition according to worn-out literary formulae. Even the longest and most readable story in the book, Kim Stanley Robinson's "On the North Pole of Pluto", which aspires to be a serious comment on the sociology of science in presenting a drama of theorists in conflict, undermines its own efforts first by having the theorists argue about a particularly silly enigma (who, and for what reason, constructed a kind of imitation Stonehenge on Pluto) and secondly by its dull insistence on returning again and again to its painfully-ponderous moral:

> Jones's bass chuckle, rumbling in the vacuum's silence. 'That's probably as it should be.' He put his arm around my shoulders, steered me around. We began walking back toward the landing vehicle, going back to the others, going back. Jones shook his head, spoke in a sort of singsong: 'We dream, we wake on a cold hillside, we pursue the dream again. In the beginning was the dream, and the work of disenchantment never ends.'

(On second thoughts, I take back what I said about the stories having few grammatical errors.)

Partly, *Orbit 21* suffers from troubles that afflict virtually all of American sf just now: it veers between sickly sentimentality and mawkish self-pity, between screeches of histrionic anguish and dreamy farewells to the mythological detritus of yesterday's ambitions, all without any realization of how stereotyped this has become. Partly, though, its faults are its own, the unfortunate residue of its own failed ambitions. *Orbit's* career ends, alas, not with a bang but a whimper; if there was enough energy left to make a bang, perhaps it wouldn't be ending.

A Spadeful of Spacetime
edited by Fred Saberhagen (*Ace, 1981, 214 pp, $2.25*)

reviewed by Ann Collier

Disbelieve Saberhagen. His introduction boldly states that he aimed ". . . to get, from some of the best science fiction writers alive, their own visions on the subject of probing the past without Mr Wells' all too convenient aid (the Time Machine)." The actual result? A collection of stories, mostly by well-known writers, all of which may have *something* to do with exploring the past or future, though with many this is purely incidental to a more central concern. Strong enough in atmosphere and mood, the anthology fails to live up to the vision so explicitly promised, and by no means represents the best that is available by living authors. It is no doubt naive still to have one's expectations raised by an editor's boasts but hope continues to triumph over experience.

This anthology's greyness is partly attributable to the inclusion of several stories with similar plot devices and mood. Four stories approach the past through the memories of the central characters, in particular memories of death and terminal illness. "Go Starless in the Night" by Roger Zelazny (which first appeared in *Destinies* in 1979), has an intriguing opening, a monologue in which the speaker suddenly becomes aware of his existence, an existence devoid of physical sensation other than speech and hearing. Zelazny skilfully manipulates the reader's emotions from initial confusion to relief and then quiet despair. Most memorable is the nightmare quality of this story, though respite is finally granted through a reliving of happy memories. Even this balm is denied to the

heroine of "The Child Who Cries For The Moon" by Connie Willis, whos memories come to us from beyond the grave. Born ugly into a society where beauty has become almost an obsession, the adolescent heroine recounts her final stay in hospital following numerous suicide attempts. The time-probing element is in the plot device, the treatment used by the sincere but inept psychiatrist, but the story is esentially a very personal, moving, and harrowing piece with a strong psychological flavour, written in a tone of unremmitting grim desperation.

Whilst the subject matter of "St. Amy's Child" by Orson Scott Card is equally depressing, the treatment of it is designed to chill the reader rather than move him to tears. Interwoven narrative threads present different perspectives on the killing of Amy's father by her mother. Although we are told this in a blunt dispassionate statement near the beginning, the author manages by repeatedly cutting from the present to the past to maintain a feeling of suspense. Well constructed and with excellent narrative pace, this story nonetheless suffers from an impression of hollowness and of insufficient exposition as a result of which characters behave inexplicably.

Next stop on Saberhagen's not quite magical misery tour, his own contribution, "Recessional". An initially parochial story of a panellist at an sf convention, it is taken over by a mood of increasingly urgent but unspecified panic. Wherever the hero goes, the body of a young bikini-clad girl is washed up on the nearest sea or lakeshore. As if in Dickian explanation of this phenomenon, the media thrust at him discussions of human consciousness affecting reality, but a more telling clue to the enigma lies in his feelings of guilt at his wife's death. Tautly written and suspenseful, this story achieves its effect with minimal exposition and creates a sense of an insanely imploding world.

This group of stories so taxes the reader's emotional stamina that one is disposed to welcome a more diffuse story about a communal sense of loss, "To Whom It May Concern" by Chad Oliver. His professional interest in anthropology is apparent in this lament, set in Kenya, for the disappearance of the culture of tribal societies. It is, therefore, a surprising lapse into chauvinism to choose the white, American anthropologist as the guardian of the physical symbol of the persistence and universality of such societies. The emotionally compensatory ending suggests Oliver used the piece for personal therapy, becoming oblivious to the slackness of the writing and the abandonment of intellectual satisfaction. Woolliness also mars "Strata" by Edward Bryant. Four friends return to a canyon famous for its rock formations, drawn back there by a sense of failure and disillusionment in contrast to their former confident hope. They meet the creature who is the spirit of the place and vague impressionistic descriptions give way to a splendidly climactic, surreal, technicolour confrontation. Despite the characters' rather obvious attempts to be enlightening, the meaning of all this remains unclear but the story is partially redeemed by the powerful evocation of a sinister, expectant atmosphere and, an incidental bonus, the skill with which Bryant captures the awkward tension of friends meeting after the passage of time.

Two stories explore the past through the scientific recreation of ancient man and his environment. The less interesting is "Forefather Figure" by Charles Sheffield which telegraphs its punches prior to delivering them bluntly and crudely. "Grain of Truth" by Charles Spano, Jr. is much more fun; fun is a rare commodity in this collection. Purporting to be a series of letters from a Nobel Prize-hungry scientist to his sister, the humour derives from the unimaginativeness of the scientist who observes, measures, and

notes but lacks the vision to make sense of the data. Totally preposterous, it is a joy to read, an oasis in this desert of gloom.

The only other stories in which can be detected any trace of humour herd together for safety at the end of the book. "Experimentum Crucis" by Rivka Jacobs benefits from a richly detailed, historical setting and an inspired sense of the human tendency toward the ridiculous, however dire the situation. "Bank and Shoal of Time" by R.A. Lafferty, in contrast, falls flat on its face. The humour in this self-conscious story of time experts gathering in a rambling Gothic house is weak beyond belief, with interminably boring dialogue. In choosing this as the last substantial item in the collection, Saberhagen must have been more influenced by the author's prestige than by the story's merits.

Short items complete the anthology. "Final Days" is a terse, six page story by David Langford, here in deadly serious vein. It is a powerful comment on the amoral vacuity of posturing politicians. Modestly designed, it works with a slickness which reinforces its theme. Shorter but more pretentious is "Forward" by Steve Rasnic Tem. The quotation from Teilhard de Chardin which prefaces it fails to enlighten the disconnected series of brief paragraphs apparently chronicling scenes from man's historical progress.

Serving as a unifying thread throughout the book are three poems by R.A. Frazier concerning a computerized regenerator's ability to reconstruct the past in an imaginative rather then merely deductive way. Lucid, disciplined and poignant, they have lovely imagery and are striking when read aloud. They suggest something of the infinite richness of visions of the past, a richness which this anthology, despite some memorable evocations of mood, leaves quite unexplored.

Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion
by Rosemary Jackson (*Methuen, "New Accents" series, 1981, x+211 pp, £2.95*)

reviewed by David Ketterer

"To construct plausible and moving 'other worlds,' " claims C.S. Lewis (in *Of Other Worlds*), "you must draw on the only real 'other world' we know, that of the spirit." From Rosemary Jackson's point of view, however, no formulation for the writing of fantasy, including the more worthwhile science fiction, could be more misguided. After all, we now know that the supernatural other worlds of Heaven, Hell and the like are thoroughly bogus. To the extent that modern works of fantasy concern themselves with such apparently transcendent, apparently other realms, they belong, with fairy tales and the bulk of science fiction, in the category of the "marvellous". In our age of disbelief, the most appropriate form of fantasy has moved on from any assumptions about the reality of the supernatural to an epistemological skepticism regarding the "reality" of the "natural" world.

The "interrogation of the 'nature' of the real" (p. 9), a presentation of the otherness of this world, not literal other worlds, is the proper programme for works of fantasy, and woe betide such backsliders as Lewis, Tolkien, Le Guin or Richard Adams who kid themselves with any kind of mystical breakthrough—in Jackson's materialist terms, a mistaken experience with "a zero point of entropy" (p. 77). Instead of subverting reality, such fantasists subvert fantasy's true ends. Indeed, many of the more popular and more familiar fantasists are given short shrift in Jackson's study precisely because they deviate

from that unremitting questioning which finds expression in the "fantastic," a mode of fantasy distinct from the "marvellous" and situated, in the scheme which Jackson adapts from the structuralist Tzetvan Todorov, between the "marvellous" and the "mimetic" (the "mimetic" being Jackson's substitution for Todorov's "uncanny", a term which Jackson rightfully supposes might more fittingly be applied to discussions of the psychoanalytical rather than the literary generic placing of fantasy).

Jackson is concerned, then, not with the entire history of fantasy or its total gamut, but with those post-Enlightenment forms of the mode ("genre", she convincingly argues, is too narrow a term to cover the variety of works which might be described as fantasies) that refuse to rest easy with the acceptance of ultimate realities. It is certainly reasonable to discern such a tradition of the fantastic beginning with the Gothic tales and novels of Anne Radcliffe, M.G. Lewis, Mary Shelley and Charles Maturin, proceeding through the "fantastic realism" of such as Dickens, Dostoevsky, James and Conrad, and the Victorian fantasies of Carroll (but not the more mystical—i.e., "death wish" invoked—"high" fantasy of Kingsley, Macdonald and Morris, and later Lewis and Tolkein), and culminating, for present purposes, with the fictions of Kafka, Peake and Pynchon. But as *my* tone of skepticism has perhaps indicated, it would appear that Jackson has unfairly privileged one aspect of fantasy at the expense of the other, or others.

There is a legitimate kind of fantasy, including science fiction, oriented towards "unity" or idealism and there is a legitimate kind of fantasy, also including science fiction, oriented towards the destruction of reality—and there is a third kind of fantasy and science fiction which might be regarded as escapist (to the extent that its surface at least signifies something akin to a nostalgic land of faerie) and which might properly belong to a category like Todorov's and Jackson's "marvellous". But from a theoretical point of view, idealist fantasy belongs not with escapist fantasy (to place them together is to confuse the "unreal" with the "unknown") but with destructive fantasy in some such middling category as Todorov's and Jackson's "fantastic" or, dare I say it, my own "apocalyptic" (see *New Worlds for Old*). After all, much of Jackson's terminology is consistent with the idea of the "apocalyptic"—the fantastic "breaks up a unified notion of 'the real' " (p. 97) to "reveal that which should remain hidden" (p. 98). Furthermore, there are, in fact, a number of respected modern and contemporary authors who have written fantasies of an idealist bent such as Hermann Hesse, Alan Garner, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Doris Lessing but, as one might expect, readers of Jackson's book will look in vain for any mention of them. Such fictions would presumably belong in the escapist category of the "marvellous" but to place them there is to immediately call into question Jackson's conceptual basis. As for that basis, it seems likely that her 1978 doctoral dissertation, "Dickens and the Gothic Tradition", which she lists in her valuable bibliography, determined the bias which this book seeks to rationalize.

It must be allowed, however, that Jackson's theoretical discussion of the kind of fantasy that she is interested in is one of the best available in English. I say "in English" because much of the best work in this field is doubly foreign being written in French and displaying the vocabulary of structuralism and deconstruction. Building on Todorov and other mainly Continental theoreticians, Jackson has cleverly and constructively synthesized a mass of material that English critics should know more about. Such an approach often leads to linguistically informed conclusions: "the basic trope of fantasy," we are

told, "is the oxymoron, a figure of speech which holds together contradictions and sustains them in an impossible unity" (p. 21) (we are not told that Milton, for one, makes use of this device precisely as a means of evoking a sense of transcendence); the unnameable "things" of horror fiction, the "other" of fantasy, and Carroll's nonsense terms are, interestingly, related to the lack of relation—the gap—between names and things, the signifier and the signified, "the disjunction . . . which is at the heart of the fantastic" (p. 69). Thematically considered, Jackson's species of fantasy is concerned with transgression (impulses towards incest, necrophilia, androgyny and the like) rather than transcendence, and the hollow earth scenario, common to certain fantasies, points to the vacancy at the heart of reality. Of particular importance, however, is the theme of metamorphosis together with that of dual and multiple selves which not only attack, or rather transgress upon, the mimetic imagination's cherished unity of character, but directly indicate that psychoanalytic dimension of the fantastic which represents Jackson's main addition to Todorov's formulation.

Todorov's structuralist theory explicitly rejects psychoanalytic theory and, less consistently, ideological issues. Jackson seizes upon Todorov's misappropriation of the psychoanalytic term, the "uncanny", and with the assistance of Freud, and more particularly Jacques Lacan's elaboration of Freud's theory of the uncanny in terms of the "mirror stage" of human development, seeks to understand the psychoanalytic functions of the fantastic, its subversive implication for commonly accepted, largely bourgeois, conceptions of reality and the tendency for society to value the mode of fantasy much less highly than the mode of mimesis. Albeit often overstated and a little too pat, all of this is argued with considerable force and has substantial explanatory power.

The second part of Jackson's book, which is given over to the interpretation of individual texts, tends towards the repetitive and the schematic. It is to be regretted, incidentally, that the typographical format of this volume, and presumably the useful 'New Accents" series of which it is a part, does not allow for any distinction between stories and novels (they both appear in italics, with one exception on p. 36). Critical wrangling, of course, depends upon distinctions made or not made. For example, one distinction which Jackson makes (p. 116) between Wells's science fiction (*The Time Machine, The War of the Worlds, Men like Gods* and *The Sleeper Wakes*) and his fantasies (*The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *The Invisible Man*) is certain to provoke considerable argument. And if that distinction does not hold, what again of the distinction between the marvellous and the fantastic? Nevertheless, here as elsewhere, Rosemary Jackson's crisply written study is marvellously, sorry, I mean fantastically suggestive.

Expanded Universe
by Robert A. Heinlein (*Ace, 1980, 582 pp, $8.95*)

reviewed by Dave Langford

This fat and well-produced collection is not so much the Best of Heinlein as the Rest of Heinlein—a mopping-up job on the oddments of a long career, with no new fictional material. If you simply want to read sf, there's relatively little here: his first story

"Lifeline"; the dated but still suspenseful "Blowups Happen", which ultimately argues that the only site for a nuclear reactor is in space (a view Heinlein no longer appears to hold); and the oft-cited "Solution Unsatisfactory", where he rightly pats himself on the back for seeing (in 1941) past the Ultimate Weapon myth to the fact that you can't classify physics and the resulting problem when both sides brandish ultimate weapons. Lesser sf includes short-shorts (one for a fanzine); a Scout-oriented juvenile, "Nothing Ever Happens on the Moon"; "On the Slopes of Vesuvius", which says you shouldn't live in New York etc. because of the forthcoming Russian nuclear sneak attack; and "Free Men", about an underground of diehard heroes in post-occupation America. Heinlein seems inordinately fond of this inconclusive piece, sf or not (he himself observes that it could be any occupied country, any time), and appears to relish the inflexible rules of he-who-is-not-with-us-is-against-us by which the harassed underground operates. Apparently this adumbration of *Farnham's Freehold* was written as far back as 1947 . . .

Thus the sf. There are four other fictional items (in brief: an adequate detective story, a hospital anecdote, a tale of politics which is all political know-how and no tale, and a vaguely icky piece about a young lady called Puddin' who formed the basis for the still ickier *Podkayne of Mars*). In all the rest, whether autobiographical snippets, expositions, predictions or—all too often—sermons, Heinlein speaks directly to the reader. This is the real meat of the book, and sure enough it's almost invariably interesting—one way or another. Let's whip through on a quick guided tour.

A perky introduction. "Either I or this soi-disant civilization will be extinct by 2000AD . . . But do not assume that *I* will be the one extinct." Seems that people who dislike Heinlein tend to drop dead of mysterious ills . . . P.28: it's disgusting that those nasty fans should dare to ask Heinlein to give away his valuable words for their fanzines . . . P.91: Three Mile Island was but a "harmless flap"—well, it's a slightly truer view than those of people who would have you believe the world was teetering on the brink of annihilation. Next page: "Honest work: a euphemism for underpaid bodily exertion, done standing up or on your knees, often in bad weather or other nasty circumstances, and frequently involving shovels, picks, hoes, assembly lines, tractors, and unsympathetic supervisors." Yes, Henlein can be so likeable . . . but a page later he's handing John W. Campbell an ultimatum to the effect that the first time JWC rejects Heinlein, "we're through." Next, three 1940s articles about the Nuclear Menace.

> There are only three real alternatives open to us: One, to form a truly sovereign superstate to police the globe; two, to prepare realistically for World War III, in which case dispersion, real and thorough dispersion, is utterly necessary, or, third, to sit here, fat, dumb and happy, wallowing in our luxuries, until the next Hitler annihilates us!
> ("The Last Days of the United States")

And they're still waiting . . . P.207: we learn that Heinlein wrote juvenile sf novels for Scribner's, annually since *Rocketship Galileo* (which book now makes him cringe all the way to the bank), until at last they bounced one. "I took it across the street . . . and won a Hugo with it." With an irritating coyness which crops up frequently (as when he gives a whole list of stories and won't say which one JWC rejected), Heinlein leaves you to count on your fingers, check the references and deduce that the "juvenile" in question was in fact *Starship Troopers*. Onward . . . "Pandora's Box" is a great wodge of 1950 predictions with 1965 afterthoughts and 1979 third thoughts, a good read even where it's most wrong. Heinlein's non-fiction works best when he's relaxed, speaking as himself, tossing in the odd first-person pronoun, and generally sounding like one of his

garrulously omniscient sages. (A later piece, "Paul Dirac, Antimatter, and You", combines a portentous third-person approach with the Heinlein apparatus of snappy rhetorical questions, short paragraphs and sentences ending in dashes, and grates continually.) Points which catch the eye are that the Communist world is apparently propped up only by the US, while the main reason the US should invest yet more massively in space is that if they don't the Japs will.

Onward . . . that famous plea against test-ban treaties, "Who are the Heirs of Patrick Henry?". Forget all hope of a "sovereign super-state to police the globe"—now it's "We want America made supremely strong", and while the reader is still punch-drunk the evilness of Communism is further proved by two pieces on the Heinleins' less-than-perfect Russian holiday. The minions of Intourist sound merely stupid, unimaginative and inefficient rather than satanically evil . . . but then, the Heinleins were there and I wasn't . . . P.446: gosh, he wrote *Glory Road* in 23 days. I might have known it . . . In "The Pragmatics of Patriotism" he lectures to US midshipmen on freelance writing, but doesn't print that bit—just the tract in which he encourages them to regret that they have but one life to give, etc. . . "Larger than Life" is a eulogy of Doc Smith, and critics who find any of Smith's novels less than perfect are properly put in their places—the cads. Then a plea for more space investment because spinoffs help the elderly and handicapped . . . and lastly 60-odd pages of "The Happy Days Ahead", with new new new predictions for the glorious future. This, as the major *new* piece in *Expanded Universe,* deserves a closer look.

It falls into two parts, a pessimistic and an optimistic scenario, which between them show how much easier it is to say what's wrong than to indicate any hope of a cure. The pessimistic view is largely a run-down on the present day, and one nods sadly and tiredly in agreement with plaints about the decline of education, the increase of inflation and of government deadwood, the upsurge of cultists, irrationalists, astrologers, creationists, you name it. Only the moans about a dwindling army, and the careful implication that no *informed* person could oppose nuclear power stations, fail somehow to stir my sympathies.

But the optimistic view, cagily told as fiction—oh gosh. All that's needed is the brain of Heinlein in the body of a black lady (cf. *I Will Fear No Evil*) who just happens to be President, and a few brisk orders soon sort the world out. Pollution? "That one has already been solved." Racism? "No more Black Americans. No more Japanese Americans . . . don't come back. Not as a splinter group. Come back as *Americans.*" R/A wastes? "One of those nonproblems that the antitechnology nuts delight in." The US budget is swiftly balanced by a return to the gold standard, and it's found that all those reactor accidents are merely because civilians run the things. "Admiral, why . . . never any trouble with your nuclear submarines?" QED.

Heinlein, in the ultimate analysis, doesn't sound like the savage militarist who so worries certain fans. His defence of *Sixth Column/The Day After Tomorrow* (the one where a few red-blooded American boys equipped with magic technology zap a vast occupation force of slant-eyed tyrants) as a potboiler written under the yoke of JWC is fair enough. His defence of *Starship Troopers'* peculiar franchise system (only veterans vote) involves an explanation that "veteran" merely means a retired civil servant . . . ho hum. He comes down strongly *against* conscription, volunteer armies having *esprit de corps* and thus being better. The Heinlein that finally emerges is not too far removed from

the bold pioneer, the unquenchable "free man" he so admires, who is unafraid to speak his mind, who vows never to "leave my quarters without being properly armed" (introduction), and is supremely competent in all the minutiae of survival. Since such a person does not exactly find the fullest scope for expression of his talents in today's America, it follows that Heinlein should have a soft spot for para-military organizations which still value the pioneering arts—I refer, of course, to the Boy Scouts. Looking closer still, is one wrong to imagine a certain gloating in so very many pieces wherein Heinlein sees the ruin of civilization-as-we-know-it—sees his favourite Survival Types coming into their own at last and muscling their dauntless way through the wilderness?

Now, it seems that Heinlein identifies with America itself as a Survival Type—as a pioneer nation scratching out its liberty in hostile surroundings (ie. the rest of us). Once he saw America as a global policeman—"Solution Unsatisfactory", again—and, now that ideal seems impossible, the country is visualized as a Free Man in the wilderness of wild communists, socialists, OPEC profiteers and so on. Perhaps it's just as well that America does not heed his sermons and—bar a few little CIA activities—is content to sit there "fat, dumb and happy". An America animated anew by the pioneering spirit would fit about as well in this crowded world as a revived and pioneering Britain, or Rome.

Expanded Universe, then, is less for the sf reader than the Heinlein student. Its author once reshaped the world of pulp sf with the greatest of ease; but, as shown in "The Happy Days Ahead", the instant pulp solution looks less convincing in the real world. Now, trying to alter this real world by preaching sterner virtues to a decadent America, Heinlein cuts a less impressive figure . . . never quite a bore, but perilously close to being a crank.

ROBERT SILVERBERG LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE

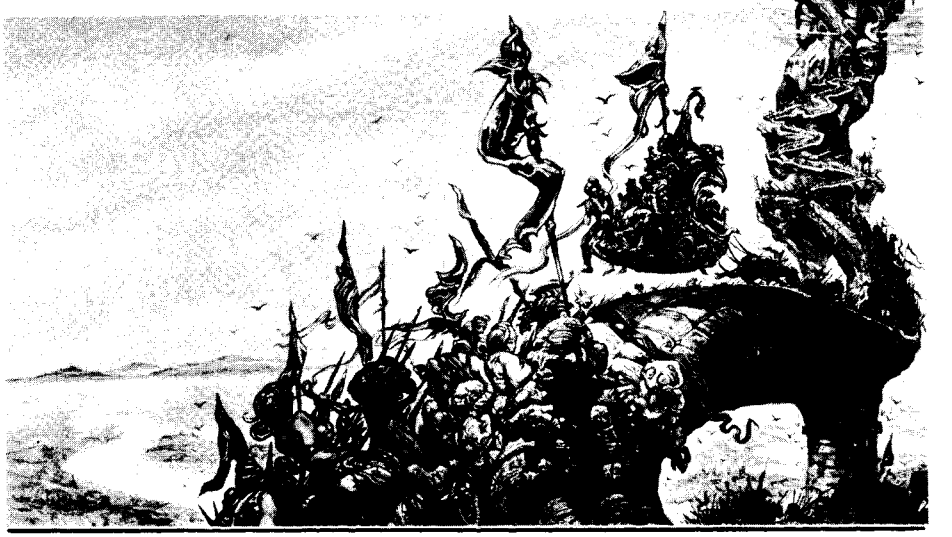
Silverberg said that he would never write again. Having retired in 1974 in his early forties after completing over 70 novels and 60 non-fiction books, he was reputed to have made a fortune from writing. In 1977, under pressure from Harlan Ellison, he tried to write a short story but couldn't get past the second sentence. But in April 1978, in his fabled garden one sunny afternoon, a brief idea for a book occurred to him. He scribbled the idea on the back of an envelope and got in touch with his American publishers, Harper & Row. After a frenetic publishers' auction, he had committed himself to write a special epic quite unlike anything he had produced before. Harpers gave him a six-figure advance. Forced amidst a great deal of publicity to complete the new book, he found that he couldn't even begin it. Then, on the afternoon of 31 October 1978, whilst once more he was pacing the fuchsia- and cacti-filled garden that had become his overwhelming passion, he found himself writing, almost automatically, on another scrap of paper, the first sentence of a novel, almost like Coleridge waking to the first lines of Kubla Khan.

And then, after walking all day through a golden haze of humid warmth that gathered about him like a fine white fleece, Valentine came to a great ridge of outcropping white stone overlooking the city of Pidruid. It was the provincial capital, sprawling and splendid, the biggest city he had come upon since – since? – the biggest in a long while of wandering, at any rate. There he halted, finding a seat at the edge of the soft, crumbling white ridge digging his booted feet into the flaking ragged stone, and sat there staring down at Pidruid, blinking as though he were newly out of sleep. . . .

Lord Valentine's Castle is now published as a Pan paperback, a vast epic fantasy saga of usurped power and reclaimed fate. It is 'Spectacularly readable . . . it bears comparison with Frank Herbert's *Dune*' *(The Times)*; 'A magnificent Behemoth of a fantasy . . . with all the narrative skills and imaginative brilliance that have made his recent science fiction so exceptional' *(Tribune)*. 'Silverberg's invention is prodigious . . . a near-encyclopaedia of unnatural wonders and weird ecosystems. Silverberg, like a competent juggler, maintains his rhythm and suspense to the end.' *(Times Literary Supplement)*.

Published 9 October 1981

Pan Books



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

Subscription rates:

Individuals (three numbers):

United Kingdom and Europe	*£5.00*
USA and Canada (surface mail)	*$12.00*
USA and Canada (air mail)	*$17.00*
Other countries (surface mail)	*£5.50*
Australia and New Zealand (air mail)	*£10.00*

Institutions (per calendar year):

United Kingdom and Europe	*£9.50*
USA and Canada (surface mail)	*$20.00*
USA and Canada (air mail)	*£25.00*
Other countries (surface mail)	*£10.00*
Australia and New Zealand (air mail)	*£14.50*

Please enquire about air mail rates to other countries.

We are unable to accept subscriptions for more than three issues or one year in advance. The following back issues are available at £2 each: 7/8 (double issue), 11/12 (double issue), 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22. Price includes postage. All other issues are out of print. Cheques, postal orders and money orders should be crossed and made payable to the Science Fiction Foundation. Subscribers sending dollar cheques please add $1 to cover bank charges.

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

ISSN 0306-4964