FOUNDATION

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THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

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FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

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Editorial

Regular readers of *Foundation* will know that we have devoted much space over the past year or so to considerations of the late Philip K. Dick's work. Now we are pleased to publicize the formation of a Philip K. Dick Society. It is being administered, in the opening stages, by the executor of Dick's literary estate, Paul Williams (among many other things, co-founder of Entwhistle Press, which in 1975 brought into print Dick's long-lost *Confessions of a Crap Artist).* The first newsletter of the society appeared in August 1983, together with a pamphlet which contains a previously unpublished letter by Dick written in 1960. Interested American readers may join the society by sending $5 to Paul Williams, Box 611, Glen Ellen, California 95442. British readers should send £3.50 (or £6 if they wish to receive newsletters by airmail) to UK agents Keith Bowden and Valerie Buckle, 47 Park Avenue, Barking, Essex IG11 8QU. Please make cheques or postal orders payable to the "PKD Society".

We think this society is well worth supporting for several reasons, the most important of which is that it will be instrumental in bringing to print many unpublished manuscripts by Philip K. Dick (see my Editorial in *Foundation* 25). In fact, the first newsletter informs us that *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike,* a Dick novel completed in 1960, has now found a publisher: "An agreement has been made between the estate of Philip K. Dick and Ziesing Brothers Books, a small publisher in Connecticut, for publication of a hardcover edition of this previously unpublished mainstream novel by Philip K. Dick. *The Man Whose Teeth* . . . was written after *Confessions of a Crap Artist.* PKDS members will be notified when the book is available for ordering." Paul Williams also tells us that the manuscript of another novel, not previously listed, is in the estate's possession. It is called *Humpty Dumpty in Oakland* and was probably written in 1963.

The PKDS pamphlet, "A Letter from Philip K. Dick, February 1 1960", proves that Dick was a writer of phenomenal energy. In it, he discusses several unpublished novels (including another "unlisted" title, *A Time for George Stavros*). At one point he states: "Gradually I've ceased science fiction writing and have been doing 'straight' stuff. Also, I revise, sometimes several years later. Under certain conditions, however, I can write very fast, even without notes. The Lippincott book was written in two weeks . . . But it took me years to work out the basic idea . . ." The Lippincott book referred to must be *Time Out*

of Joint, Dick's first US hardcover and one of the best of his early novels. As we all know, Dick returned to sf with a vengeance from 1962 onwards. One is moved by his plight, but one's feelings are mixed. If Dick's "mainstream" novels had not been rejected by the publishers of the time perhaps we would not have had all those sf works of the mid-1960s. On the other hand, it has become clear that the quality of Dick's unpublished non-sf is very high; a grave injustice was done. Should one be quietly grateful for the injustice—thankful that this writer was "forced" into producing sf? It's a conundrum.

A reminder that the next *Foundation,* which should be out in March, will be a special "1984" issue. It will be devoted to British sf as seen by foreigners, and already we have in hand good material by Gregory Benford, Péter Kuczka, Koichi Yamano and others. Don't miss it. In addition we have decided that a further "1984" issue will not come amiss next year, hence the following announcement by Features Editor Ian Watson:

More from the Ministry of Truth

And lo, in addition to our special issue on British sf as seen from abroad, which will be issue 30, we are planning a second special issue during 1984 on the theme of "sf and socialism".

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may well be the quintessentially dystopian novel of the century, but first and foremost Orwell was a positive and active socialist, and it is this essential backbone of his life and thought that we wish to honour in this second special issue, by examining the relevance of sf to socialism and vice versa.

So here is a call to our readers to kindly submit articles in this general area. We would be particularly interested in contributions from active socialists who are also readers of sf. Deadline: 1st April 1984.

Garry Kilworth is currently studying for a second degree at the University of London. Since his first story was published in 1974 he has established himself as one of the best of Britain's newer sf writers. In addition to several novels from Faber and Faber, and Penguin Books, he has recently had short stories published in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Extro, Interzone, *and elsewhere. "The Dissemblers", which appeared in the last-named, elicited from Canadian critic Peter Brigg the comment that "this story alone justifies the existence of a new magazine" (SFRA* Newsletter, *June 1983). We are delighted to be able to revive our "Profession of Science Fiction" series of occasional autobiographical pieces with the following from Mr Kilworth.*

The Profession of Science Fiction 31: Confessions of a Bradbury Eater

GARRY KILWORTH

This coming July I shall be 42, which may be the answer to life, the universe and everything—or it could be, as Dudley Moore said in the opening lines to *10,* a betrayal. Certainly it snuck up on me suddenly, just after my twenty-seventh birthday, and caught me with my pants down. I had intended to achieve one of two goals before my 42nd birthday: I wanted to be either rich or famous (or both) and I've been robbed.

I have several confessions to make. First of all, I failed the eleven plus, which is why I am doing a BA in English at an age when most men are falling over their feet to get to the armchair. Education began by correspondence course at the age of 22, completed at 33, with a degree in Business Studies. I also began writing science fiction seriously (which means with a view to publication) at the same time I completed my degree. Previous to that one or two half-hearted attempts had been hopefully winged to *New Worlds:* there are several letters from Mike Moorcock to prove their inadequacy. (Where *did* he find the time to encourage newcomers? Whilst editing a poetry magazine I didn't have time to write to my own mother). I've never quite managed to completely throw off that early dismal failure at primary school, which is probably why I'm still into Education. It's rather nice being a very mature student. Other students are always mistaking me for a tutor and sometimes call me "sir".

My childhood, mostly spent in Arabia since my father was in the Air Force, was somewhat Huckleberry Finnish. I played truant a lot which gave me time to read all those pulp magazines of the Golden Age. I was always an avid reader of fiction of any kind—torch under the sheets at midnight stuff—and later, following gosling-like in daddy's footprints, was sent to places like Gan Island where the only thing to do besides swim was read and write. (You might ask why a nice, passive, uneducated fifteen-year-old from a

poor family, with dominant parents, signs a legally-binding document committing himself to 18 years of service. You might ask, while you're reaching for the violin if you need to.) Also, the motives of the individual seldom coincide with those of the organisation. Potential pilots will join because it is the only way to learn to fly high-speed jet aircraft, not because they enjoy dropping napalm on Asiatic villages. The rude awakening comes later. I had a taste for travel which even now remains unsated and my personal contribution was encoding and decyphering messages in dark holes underground. In 1961 I joined the CND marchers which, incongruous as it may sound, was no uncommon thing among young servicemen in the early sixties, and resulted in a posting from Air Ministry London to a remote airfield in Norfolk.

My lust for travel and exotic lands was quenched by long periods in Singapore, the Maldive Islands, Kenya, Germany, Bahrain, Aden, Malta, Cyprus and Masirah in the Persian Gulf. If you're wondering why I bother to list them, it's because I loved them all and like a book collector refuse to omit any prestigious title. As I travelled I wrote, mostly poetry and sf, my "sensawonder" having been primed by Wells and Wyndham, Ron Goulart and Brian Aldiss. If I could have touched the hem of Brian's garment at the age of 20, I would have been fulfilled. (Or would have risen from the dead, or cured of leprosy, or *something*).

My father, an ordinary airman, came from farm labouring stock and my mother from a trawler fishing family. The dreamy kid they had spawned, who was forever bunking school and getting caught with a fishing line in his hand, was a bit of an enigma to them. When my first story appeared in the *Sunday Times*, my mother regarded me with a kind of suspicious awe, as if I'd done something faintly illicit. (Some of you will probably agree with her.)

That first story, "Let's go to Golgotha", the shared winner of the Gollancz/*Sunday Times* sf competition of 1974, was the biggest kick I ever got from writing. After that the hard work began, just at the point when I sincerely believed it was over. The world was my oyster. I have since come face to face with the addition to the cliche: one has to open an awful lot of oysters to find a pearl. I wrote something like six stories after "Golgotha" which failed to find a publisher. However, I had discovered there was an institution called "fandom" of which I had not previously been aware. One day, while drowning slowly in a quicksand of rejection slips, a letter arrived from a guy who signed himself Robert Holdstock. "I have one or two stories under my belt," he said modestly, "and so do you. I'm getting together an anthology called *Time in Hand* and I'd like to include something by you. No gratuitous sex or violence though," which just goes to show how perverse human nature is. I met Rob in London and a long and firm friendship developed. He introduced me to a workshop group called "Pieria" and contact with the sf writing world was firmly established.

My first Pierian story was "A Warrior Falls", which subsequently appeared in the appallingly unsuccessful Penguin Anthology *Pulsar Two*. It was not a good story and I almost threw up with nervous tension reading it out to a group of strangers but it did put some confidence back into my pen. One or two of the group actually liked a couple of phrases I'd used, though I was (and still am) accused of wandering prose. My philosophy on that aspect of writing has always been firm. I believe I am an intuitive writer and spontaneity I regard as a strength. This does not always result in a cohesive whole but it does have a certain freshness which appeals to certain readers. This doesn't mean I throw

craftsmanship by the board, but that, for my particular style of writing, overpolishing often destroys the original intention. I write longhand and each sentence is carefully considered before application and occasionally a little purple creeps in: if the voices in my head aren't too loud, it stays. Three drafts of a novel is my maximum and if the cuts haven't come by then, they never will.

In the early days (are they still with me?) my worst critics were within the sf field, though not as a complete body or I would have jumped from Westminster Bridge with a copy of *Dhalgren* tied round my neck. A particular comment, which always had me mystified, was that I did not develop this or that idea fully enough. My answer would have been, had I been *allowed* to answer, that the particular idea did not interest me enough to develop it beyond a certain point, otherwise I would have done so. A novel has a course to run and I go into enough backwaters as it is, without following a completely different river from the one on which I first began the journey. Paul Kincaid gave one of my novels a single syllable review. It was an anagram of the word "ride" and a minor feud began between that able critic and myself. We have since met and appraised each other with a more sympathetic eye but still retain the right to disagree as much in science fiction—not just my novels and his reviews, which time may prove to be as erid as we think they are.

The observations of critics, whom Fielding described rather unkindly as clerks usurping the judge's bench, do affect a new writer to the field, either serving to entrench certain ideas or to alter them. Sure, the whole business is subjective and at least critics do *read* the books (don't they?) and even adverse comment is public notice. They make one pause to consider exactly what one *is* trying to say. Even a favourable review might evoke a passionate response in the wrong direction. Another able reviewer once wrote that while I did not *appear* to be a sexist (note the vague inference that I had yet to prove my innocence), I did sometimes describe women *by* the size of their breasts. What? I reread the passages in the novels and found that I had indeed included in my description of two women, through the viewpoint of one of my male characters, a reference to the fact that their breasts were small, medium or large, as I had mentioned that they had angular jaws and/or Greek noses. I had also described one of the men as having wiry arms, balding head and small testicles. The personalities and intelligence of both sexes were also plumbed to the advantage and disadvantage of both, depending on the characters, but obviously I had entered a sacrosanct area. Let me state here and now that *I* believe in the equality of the sexes, whatever my protagonists might, in the ignorance of their times and situations, portray as their views on the subject. As a poor writer and thus a kept house-husband, I need to retain this belief in equality in order to overcome my inferiority complex, as I vacuum the home and make the beds before my female partner returns from a hard day at the office, to beat me at a game of Scrabble. Having successfully raised a daughter in the belief that she can compete with men in the world of engineering, and a son in the knowledge that it is not effeminate to want to be a chef, this kind of inferred criticism deeply wounds. I am aware that if one puts a baby amongst wolves, it will grow up to be a wolf in all but physical appearance. Environmental indoctrination is, after all, the main theme in my novel *In Solitary*. My best friends will tell you I am about as macho as a mixture of Woody Allen and Bambi.

The energy level I have as a writer is directly proportionate to my enthusiasm for the subject matter. Sf gives me a lot of drive because its imaginative scope excites me. During the first six years of writing (seriously) I held down a full-time job during the day,

commuting two hours each way to London from a remote corner of Essex. If I was writing a novel I would plan the evening's work on the journey to and from London, and commit those plans to paper in the hours from 8 to 12 at night. My first three novels, two thrillers and an sf book, failed to find a publisher. This can be pretty dispiriting when it takes nine months to complete a single novel. I am not trying to call on the violins again at this point —I'm just trying to say that it's all been worth it. That first published novel could have cancelled out five manuscripts collecting dust in the drawer. On rereading the rejects, of course, one gives a hearty sigh of relief that they never were published—all except one, which had a Jerry Cornelius character for its hero, but was a thriller and apparently he was not sympathetic enough for readers in that genre. Since I gave up my bread-and-butter job to write full time, I find I am producing less. There's some sort of equation here that escapes my unmathematical brain but it has something to do with the fact that when you squeeze an apple into a tomato skin you get a nice tight fit.

The approach to writing short stories is obviously completely different to that of a novel. I compose almost all the first draft of a short story in my head and on committing it to paper can maintain that high pitch of enthusiasm for the idea throughout. I like to write a short story from beginning to end without putting down my pen. Of course this is not always possible but I am usually more satisfied with the result when it is. Likewise my reception of a good novel can be compared to a long lovemaking session with a slow, shuddering climax; a short story to the ecstatic jolt of quick orgasm. (Is this gratuitous, Rob? I'm never sure.)

It is fashionable in some quarters to remark that no good sf has been written since 1960 (or 1940 or 1950) and in the literature world, opinions often masquerade as facts. I do not believe that "real" sf stopped at a precise time of day in May any more than I believe good art ceased with Raphael. There are just as many good sf stories now as there were when Kingsley Amis was young, and just as much trash reached the shelves then as it does now. The Spartans' attitude of "everything is perfect, let's stop progress" only reflects on those that employ such rigid and blinkered viewpoints. If examples of "good" stories since 1960 *are* required, then I'll quote some particular favourites, Wolfe's "The Death of Doctor Island", most of Tiptree's stories, and Holdstock's "Mythago Wood". We all feel nostalgic for the pre-'60 years in sf, me included, but for heavens' sakes let's not turn an emotion into a basis for a philosophy. (This dismal attitude towards current sf is particularly galling when it comes from the pen of those who do not write any publishable fiction themselves.) J.G. Ballard has stated that he believes sf to be the authentic literature of the 20th Century (not just the three decades following the war), and said in a television interview that there are some exciting stories and novels being written *right now*. He is right, of course. There is *always* some exciting literature being written *right now*.

It is inevitable that writers should be fashionable or unfashionable at certain points in their careers. Asimov, Heinlein and Bradbury have recently run the gauntlet of adverse criticism, in this country at least. Like many authors they do not produce their best in later years, though there are exceptions, (Frederik Pohl being one of them). I was raised on a diet of Bradbury stories which to me were as intoxicating as opium and I will never renounce them. Jack Finney too, I swallowed avidly, and believe him to be a much underrated writer. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is not his only work and was out of the run of his normal medium. His "Galesburg" stories evoked an atmosphere which went to my head faster than champagne. Enjoyment of a story, for me, does depend a great deal on its

atmosphere, which is one reason I like science fiction. A tale that is as dry and stale as a bar room at 8 o'clock in the morning does not arouse my enthusiasm, however original and clever the plot. Originality *is* important but its absence does not concern me if the plot is approached from a new angle and a definite mood is developed. Perhaps a little anecdote will serve to illustrate this. I was once standing at a bus stop next to a couple of West Indian youngsters who were discussing a pop concert they had been to. "Man," said one, "that music was real trash, y'know. Nuthin' new. All old, old, old." "What do you expect, man?" said his buddy, "they's only few basic notes to use." The first speaker waved his arms in the general direction of the street. "See those people. They all got two arms, legs an' a head, yet they's all *different*. That's the way the music should be." And the same holds true for sf stories. There *are* only a few basic plots: it's the way they're put together that counts. Investigation of an alien culture, whether invented or borrowed from this world, is as fascinating to me as the exploration of an aspect of physics is to others. I do not consider the 'science' in science fiction to be the predominant factor governing the quality of the work.

What I do consider important, or rather what is important to *me,* is that the "imagination" should be allowed unchecked flow. This may seem like a rather puerile statement but I find it worrying that critics within the sf field, as well as out of it, seem more concerned at drawing parallels with mainstream fiction, or wishing to regress to earlier decades, than looking for stories which develop the world of the imagination. Science fiction is a genre and it is expected that people who do not read it have no real grasp of the fundamental concepts that lie behind its works. One of those concepts is the exploration of the imagination, whether it is in the direction of inner or outer space. As soon as one begins to lay down restrictions and draw boundaries, the literary form becomes static and eventually stagnates. However, one does expect that *within* the genre, appreciation will be given to brave ventures at extending the boundaries of imagination, instead of complaining that themes have become too exotic, or that the stories in sf magazines are not as well written as those in mainstream anthologies. (Judged by whose standards?) In reaching for new worlds, there must be experimentation, and experiments, by definition attempt discovery without being confident of the results.

Thus we must expect to find ordinary mortals in sf magazines, as well as the occasional giant. The giants should be allowed to carry the lesser beings unless one wishes to abandon the search for fantastic creatures altogether. The mainstream produces well-written, unusual stories but it works within its own confines and these restrictions harness "imagination" in the widest sense of the word. Wordsworth (Oh God, the sod is into the Romantics at the moment) wrote many beautiful poems but because of the restrictions he placed upon himself he never produced a poem that plumbed the depths of imagination. Coleridge wrote many mediocre poems but he also produced the unrivalled "Khubla Khan". Surely we have enough *heart* to support our own literature and its adventurous spirit.

In mainstream fiction, authors and readers have in recent years begun moving towards a factual element as a basis for enjoyment of the work. They like the familiarity of real events interlocked with fictional drama. *The Day of the Jackal* and *The Eagle has Landed* are two examples in point. The books seem to vie for percentages of truth. "20 percent of this story is known fact". I would like, one day, to attempt to capture some of this readership, to have the courage, audacity and pretension to state that "90 percent of this

sf novel is true. It just hasn't happened yet." Prefacing the same novel I should also like to have the cheek to dedicate the work to earlier influences on my career as a reader. It would say something like, "To the lost gardens of Enid Blyton, Lucy Atwell, Beatrix Potter and the rest of the lads of the 32nd Parachute Regiment."

Generally famous in his day—only to fall into neglect—S. Fowler Wright (note those initials!) achieved a new kind of renown and personal impetus, briefly and in the evening of his life, through the rise of sf in the Fifties. Had Fowler Wright been born 20 years later, it's interesting to speculate what alternative paths this speculative writer might have trod. Yet undoubtedly then he would not, and could not, have been the author whose speculative works Brian Stableford analyzes intriguingly below. Foundation *is proud to present a major piece of scholarship, of considerable intrinsic fascination.*

Against the New Gods: The Speculative Fiction of S. Fowler Wright

BRIAN STABLEFORD

Sydney Fowler Wright was born in 1874. He was of the same generation as H.G. Wells, John Beresford and William Hope Hodgson, but while these contemporaries were making their names as writers of speculative fiction in the years before the Great War Fowler Wright[1] was working as an accountant in Birmingham. He did not begin publishing literary works until after the war, and his early efforts were all poetry. His first novel, written in 1920, failed to find a publisher and he ultimately published it himself in 1927. It was highly praised by British reviewers, became a best-seller in America, was filmed in Hollywood and launched its author upon a new career as a prolific writer of speculative fantasies, historical novels, crime stories and various idiosyncratic projects. At the height of his fame he was nominated by the *Daily Express* as one of the ten best brains in Britain, but his career proved to be meteoric. By the time of his death in 1965 he was so completely forgotten that not a single obituary appeared. *The Times,* in fact, continued to copy his name ritualistically from year to year in their list of birthdays, until one of his sons pointed out that he had been dead for several years.

Speculative fiction accounts for only a small fraction of Fowler Wright's total output. He published fifteen novels and a collection of short stories of this kind, although two of these were potboilers published under the name "Sydney Fowler", which he attached to

his many hastily-written crime stories. Scientific romance was by no means his first love, but among his published works his stories in that vein nevertheless occupy a special place. In the preface to *The Throne of Saturn,* which brings together almost all his speculative short stories, he makes the following observation:

> One who is a friend, a man of no mean literary judgment, and who has been kind to some things which I have written, recently surprised me not merely by saying he could not read a phantasy of which I was the author, but that he could not understand anyone writing such books if capable of other and (inferentially) better work.
>
> Was this judgment sound?
>
> Every work of imagination widens the frontiers of reality. It may have no objective reality, but precisely to that extent it adds to creation's sum. Men were; beyond that they built imaginations of things which were not. They may not have imagined facts; but it was a fact that they imagined things which had not been, and may never be.
>
> A foolish criticism of *Ivanhoe* (foolish alike whether correct or not) is that it represents a scene which has little historical basis. But it would be wiser to say that (being vivid as it is) the more it be a work of baseless imagination the more admirable it is.
>
> It is the contemporary habit to give first place to novels which portray men and events truly, observation rather than imagination being the inspiration. There is no need to depreciate such work, but they are only of the highest rank if it is better to crawl than to soar.
>
> To recognise this is not to assert that every fantastic tale is of high literary merit. It may be a sounder proposition that it is such in proportion to the verisimilitude which it attains. Beyond that, all serious works of imagination will contain a philosophy of life, and, the more they are without basis of mundane fact, the more clearly will that philosophy appear.
>
> For these and other reasons, having written works of imagination of many kinds, both in prose and verse, among which phantasy has not bulked prominently, I am disposed, without claiming any absolute value for such works, to place them relatively not last but first.
>
> (ToS p.vii)

Fowler Wright's affection for speculative fiction has several bases. He took delight, of course, in the exercise of imaginative power, and liked to startle his readers with bold new ideas. He also had, though, a "philosophy of life" and an interest in developing and communicating it. His wilder fantasies are both exploratory and expository; they helped him to examine the logical consequences of his beliefs, and helped him to publicize convictions which he held strongly. He was alarmed by the prospect of technological advancement, suspicious of science, antipathetic toward machinery and dismayed by certain trends in politics and popular mores. In speculative fiction he examined these trends and displayed other worlds from which they were absent. He aspired to show, in his own phrase, "where the new gods lead", and he laid down a determined challenge to the worshippers of these new gods. On balance, though, the exploratory appears to have outweighed the expository in motivating his work; his tone is usually cool and detached, and he rarely attempts to be persuasive in his fiction (though he was prepared to play the crusader in non-fiction tracts). He appears always to have been pessimistic about the possibility of persuading the people of England to adopt a different course, and content therefore to offer them visions of possible worlds without urgent exhortations to choose. He usually assumes that the choice is already made, that the new gods will triumph in the short term, but that in the fulness of time it will not matter.

Writers of speculative fiction are often idiosyncratic, but Fowler Wright stands out as a highly distinctive character even in such motley company. He was never the kind of writer who could capture the sympathy of large numbers of readers; at best he could aspire to fascinate them for a while by leading them in new imaginative directions. Every work of the imagination, as he says, widens the frontiers of reality, and Fowler Wright worked on frontiers rarely visited by other writers, and reported on strange vistas that no one else glimpsed. His favourite imaginative territories were not calculated to attract

millions of armchair tourists; there is nothing intoxicating or euphoric about their exoticism. For the most part, they are more closely akin to an arid wilderness than a land flowing with milk and honey. It is not surprising, therefore, that his work ultimately proved to be rather esoteric, but it is no less intriguing for that.

Historians of speculative fiction have not paid overmuch attention to Fowler Wright, who has suffered the neglect common to most of those who carried on the tradition of British scientific romance between the two world wars. Such comments as have been made reflect a common sense of puzzlement about his work; it is not easy, on superficial acquaintance with his work, to figure out what he is trying to do and why. There is—necessarily, as he pointed out— a philosophy of life to be found in his imaginative fictions, but it is not an easy one to describe accurately or to relate to. It would be worth making the effort, if only to solve the intellectual puzzle, but it is also worthwhile to analyze his work more carefully for two other reasons. On the one hand, there is food for thought in his works which can still offer an intellectual challenge to contemporary readers; on the other hand, Fowler Wright offers scope for an interesting case-study in the wider project of relating the content of imaginative fictions to the personalities and historical situations of their creators.

Fowler Wright attended King Edward's School in Birmingham but left at a relatively early age. Later in life he offered differing explanations for this, claiming at one time that he was needed at home, and at another that there was no point in staying because the school no longer had anything to teach him. Either way, he took responsibility for his own education from his early teens, and worked hard at it according to his own plan. He became a determinedly independent thinker, always inclined to mistrust the opinions of others and always ready to form his own judgments with scant regard for common opinion. Nor was he idle in his autodidactic endeavours: he taught himself Italian in order to translate Dante, French in order to translate Dumas, and his knowledge of English literature was prodigious.

He became an accountant, and made a considerable success of that career. He married young by the standards of his day, probably at 19 (*Who's Who* gives a slightly later date, but may be wrong.) He was very devoted to the girl he married, Nellie Ashbarry, and very protective of her feelings. She died in 1918, after bearing six children, and seems to have been in delicate health for some years before her death. Although the family had not much money to start with they prospered, and the surviving daughter of that first marriage, Esther, recalls that they lived in a large house with capacious grounds, where they kept very many animals (horses, a cow, dogs, pigeons, rabbits, geese and others). Fowler Wright was very fond of animals—and, indeed, passionately devoted to all things natural. He cultivated plants too, and tried hard to breed a green carnation, without success. He was a non-meat-eater—not quite a vegetarian, because he ate fish—and he loved walking and cycling in the country. His other modes of relaxation were typical of his background: he liked cricket, and was a capable chess player.

Fowler Wright came from a family of devout Baptists; his father was a lay preacher and one of his sisters became a missionary in Africa. Although he became a freethinker he retained many of the values associated with that religious heritage. He cultivated a particular kind of asceticism and moral scrupulousness. He did not smoke and was very moderate in his use of alcohol (G.K. Chesterton, apparently, was once deeply wounded

when he was only given water to drink when he came to lunch.) Although he abandoned the dogmatic apparatus of his father's brand of Christianity he retained certain tenets of moral belief and kept an attitude of mind associated with that species of Protestantism, overtly preoccupied with sharp moral boundaries and covertly preoccupied with the outward signs of grace.

(It should be noted here that many of the other British writers of scientific romance were also freethinking sons of devout fathers. George Griffith, M.P. Shiel, William Hope Hodgson and J.D. Beresford were all the sons of clergymen. The post-Darwinian generations were forced to accept a basic change in the substance of the Church's mythology, and to reformulate their attitudes to its network of beliefs. Much exploratory speculative fiction can be seen at least partly as an attempt to build an image of the cosmos to replace the one promoted by the Church, and a corollary attempt to re-characterize the moral dimension of human affairs.)

Fowler Wright did not teach his children to pray and would not allow them to read the Bible, which he considered unsuitable for the young, though necessary reading for any educated adult. Although he had little use for outworn dogmas he was certainly no atheist, and as with many converts from Christianity to the various forms of humanism he retained a strong interest in the historical dimension of the Old Testament, which provided substance for some of his literary works. He approved of the slogan "God is Love", but objected strongly to "Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild", which he considered ridiculously unrealistic. He tried to bring up his children with a profound respect for the truth, and with a wholehearted commitment to it.

He had a very strong commitment to individual freedom and responsibility, and disliked intensely what he saw as a progressive erosion of that freedom by legislation. He detested bureaucracy and the *modus operandi* of petty bureaucrats. His profound dislike of the police was mainly based on their increasing intrusion into matters which, he thought, should be none of their concern. He was a passionate believer in natural justice, and felt that the kind of justice promoted by contemporary English law and its agents was a crude perversion. When passing judgment on the behaviour and character of his fellow men he was scathing, but he did have a great deal of respect for the practical skills and knowledge of farmers and craftsmen.

Fowler Wright's love of nature had as its counterpart a determined antipathy toward technology in general and the motor car in particular. From the very first he saw motor cars as ugly and dangerous would-be despoilers of the land. He was appalled by the fact that people were killed by these foul machines simply in order to allow others to get from point A to point B more rapidly. Every new development in the industry intensified his anxiety and his hatred.

As with other writers of scientific romance—Beresford and Shiel, for example—he was prepared to turn the scepticism which had distanced him from his father's faith upon the scientific "faith" which aspired to replace it. He considered that what was "proved" today might easily be "disproved" tomorrow, and thought it stupid to replace the dogmas of religion with the dogmas of contemporary science. The *real* truth, he felt, must lie elsewhere, waiting to be explicated in such a fashion that it would show up clearly the deficiencies of traditional religion and contemporary science. This was, of course, a remarkably common belief of the period—few people, no matter how destructive their scepticism, doubted that there *was*, somewhere, a perfect and appropriate faith waiting to

be discovered and revealed. It was not simply the writers of scientific romance who went looking for it in odd places; religious fantasists like Chesterton and the brothers Powys were embarked upon a similar quest in different imaginative territories, and so were all the new cultists determinedly re-inventing all the old heresies.

Fowler Wright was by no means alone in the powerful self-confidence that by the exercise of his own rationality, unassisted by authority, he could find this one true faith. If anything, what distinguishes him from most of his contemporaries was the modesty with which he accepted his inability to convince others that what he had found was, in fact, the genuine article. Men like Shiel and John Cowper Powys might not be *confident* of being believed as they try to plant signposts on the way to a new revelation, but at least they are hopeful. Fowler Wright was never even that.

Although he thrived in the world of commerce Fowler Wright was not the kind of man to put his heart and soul into "business". Indeed, even while he made his way successfully through the commercial jungle he was sensitive to the plight of those who did not. He was sometimes called upon to act as receiver to failed businesses, and an investigator of failing ones. He was impatient with the network of regulations controlling his work and angry about its iniquities. Several of his later works of fiction contain scathing attacks on E.P.D.—the "excess profits duty" introduced during the Great War, which had a profound and inequitable effect on the fortunes of many small firms. It is significant that his one serious contemporary novel, *Seven Thousand In Israel* (1931) is a tragedy of financial ruination. He became a well-respected man in the business world—during the Great War he was sent to France by the War Office to discover why vital war equipment was not being produced quickly enough, and was nearly trapped in Paris when the city fell—but his real interests were outside the world of account books. He was passionately interested in arts and letters, particularly in poetry, not simply as a means of securing his own pleasure but as a propagandist committed to the extension of high culture to the newly-literate working classes.

In 1917 Fowler Wright became one of the founding fathers of the Empire Poetry League, whose function was to promote cultural endeavour throughout the English-speaking world. Other members recruited to the league were G.K. Chesterton, R. Crompton Rhodes, L.A.G. Strong, H.E. Bates, Humbert Wolfe and Bishop Barnes. The organization was philanthropically funded, and from the beginning Fowler Wright took a leading role in its affairs. He was the main architect of its projects, and was responsible for compiling and issuing numerous volumes of poetry under the aegis of the League and its own publishing imprint, the Merton Press. He edited the League's journal, *Poetry* (later *Poetry and the Play*). Inevitably, the League eventually collapsed as its funds dried up, but while it flourished it helped to turn Fowler Wright into a writer.

Fowler Wright's first published work was a volume of poetry entitled *Scenes from the Morte d'Arthur,* issued under the name Alan Seymour in 1919. This was part of the grand project which was to be the core of his life's work in the literary field: a rendering of the whole body of Arthurian legend in blank verse. He worked on this epic throughout his life, occasionally publishing small sections of it. It was complete in 1940 but the manuscript was destroyed during the Blitz and he had to set off again to reconstruct the work. The reconstruction was eventually completed, but the entire work was never published; it exists today as several volumes of manuscript and typescript, over a thousand pages in length, entitled *The Song of Arthur.*

Shortly after publication of *Scenes from the Morte d'Arthur* Fowler Wright wrote his first novel, *Deluge*. He began it in response to a provocative remark from one of his children, who challenged him to "write a book before breakfast". This he did, setting aside time in the early morning every day for several months. The book, however, did not sell.

Apparently, Fowler Wright had written a good deal of lyric poetry during the period of his first marriage (he married his second wife, Truda Hancock, in 1920) but relatively little of this was ever exposed to public view. J.E. Clare MacFarlane, in the address on S. Fowler Wright which he gave to the Institute of Jamaica in 1958, says that most of this lyric poetry was "buried" with his first wife, though this is, of course, meant figuratively. His second published volume, however, *Some Songs of Bilitis* (1921), probably recalls something of the spirit of the lost verse. (The original "Songs of Bilitis" were the work of the French poet Pierre Louÿs, Bilitis being an imaginary contemporary of Sappho.) Fowler Wright's *Songs of Bilitis* were reprinted in a more substantial volume, *The Song of Songs and Other Poems,* which was issued by the Merton Press in 1925. The title piece is a supposed "reconstruction" of a hypothetical original poem presumed to be the basis of the Biblical *Song of Solomon*. Fowler Wright claims in the introduction to the book that the poem in the Bible is clearly fragmentary and distorted, and has of necessity been recast in a different form. It was quite in character for him casually to adopt such a daring project.

By this time he had begun work on his translations from Dante. The *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* appeared in serial form in *Poetry and the Play,* though the *Paradiso* did not at this time see the light of day. He had also continued to work in prose, however, and another book which came from the Merton Press was *The Amphibians, a Romance of 500,000 Years Hence.* A small first edition was issued in 1925, but a much more substantial second edition followed a year later. In its own fashion, this novel was rather more ambitious even than *The Song of Songs*.

The Amphibians is set in a future so remote that man has disappeared from the Earth, to be replaced by other intelligent species, including the gentle telepathic Amphibians and the giant troglodytic Dwellers. A third, rather more primitive race is that of the loathsome Killers.

The novel's narrator—who is not named, though one of the other characters addresses him as "George"—is asked by a scientist to take part in an experiment. The scientist has a machine that will transmit objects into the future, and though he has successfully transmitted and recovered several inanimate objects his two previous experiments with human subjects have failed: the men have not returned, although one did re-appear briefly to gather some equipment before setting out again. The narrator, who needs money badly although we are not told why, goes after them in return for a fee which is paid to one Clara (possibly his fiancée). Readers of Fowler Wright will quickly notice that he is extremely parsimonious with the prefatory material which brackets the strange adventures of his characters, and is often infuriatingly uninformative about them.

The narrator finds himself on the edge of a great plain, near a great wall alongside which runs an opalescent pathway. There are caves in the wall, and tunnels leading into the depths of the world. Everything is apparently artificial, even the outlay of the giant plants on the plain. He is sheltering in a cave when he sees a humanoid creature,

apparently female, running along the path. His emergence from hiding is so startling that she stumbles from the pathway and is seized by an apparently-carnivorous plant. He destroys the plant but cannot save its victim, who communicates with him telepathically and plants in his mind a compulsion to carry through some unspecified mission.

The narrator is briefly captured by a giant yellow-skinned humanoid, but escapes. Hurt and fearful, he is eventually found by other creatures like the one killed by the plant. These approach in a column, "singing" with their thoughts, and recover from him a message implanted in his mind by their dead companion. This relates to one of their kind who has been imprisoned. These are the Amphibians, inhabitants of islets off the coast of the island continent where they are now standing. This continent is controlled by the Dwellers, from one of whom the narrator has recently escaped. The Dwellers have retired underground and have sealed off the boundaries of their territory against some unspecified menace, and have a treaty with the Amphibians. This treaty has now been breached by the Amphibians coming inland, and thanks to the narrator the breach can no longer be kept secret. The imprisoned Amphibian is being kept by the ferocious, mountain-dwelling Killers, who are saving her for one of their periodic carnivorous feasts; the troop has come to rescue her, and now the narrator is bound to join in with them. He is commissioned to plan the assault by which the release of the trapped Amphibian will be secured, being more able than they to carry out such aggressive intentions. In company with one Amphibian, he moves into and destroys the Killers' arsenal, and then by using "the Forbidden Thing" (fire) manages to accomplish the task which he has been set.

From the moment that the narrator meets the first Amphibian he is made to feel ugly and pitiable by comparison with "her" (the Amphibians are actually hermaphrodites, but Fowler Wright and the narrator prefer to use the feminine pronoun in referring to them). His subsequent dealings with them serve only to intensify these feelings of self-doubt. The Amphibians are beautiful, gentle and high-minded, and find the narrator almost intolerably loathsome. At first, they are too polite to be more than mildly critical, even when he tells them about the world from which he has come, but such is the intimacy which develops between him and his special companion that eventually he is able to penetrate this veil:

> And then—for one incautious instant—she let me see her mind, and I knew how she regarded me.
>
> I remember once, at a call of urgency, I volunteered to assist a shepherd who was ministering to some neglected sheep, which had been bitten by blow-flies. The grubs had hatched in the wounds, and had burrowed inward. The sores had festered, and some had become cavities several inches deep, laying bare bone and flesh, or going down to the vital organs themselves, and in them were a mass of grubs that burrowed and fed.
>
> Some of the sheep were dying, others might be saved if prompt attention were paid to the wounds.
>
> I still remember acutely the repulsion with which I touched and cleansed, and dressed them. Others might have felt it less, but from such things I am constitutionally averse.
>
> But the feeling was mild to the repulsion with which she regarded the foot on which her fingers rested. It was different in quality, because she had a mind which saw clearly what should be done, and a body that did not dream of rebellion; but it remained that she regarded the foot she touched as something more grotesque and repulsive than her familiar fishes, which swam in the clean flood, and that she felt as I might have done, had duty called me to minister to one of the Killers—to touch the worm-pink sliminess of the loathsome body while it waved its sucker in a whistling gratitude for my attentions. (WB pp.116-7)

Partly, of course, this repulsion is occasioned by the fact that the foot the Amphibian

is touching is injured, but the simile nevertheless remains: he is to her what one of the monstrous Killers is to himself. In a later passage, he tells her that life in his own world is by no means wild and free, as the life of the Amphibians is, but that the vast majority must toil in desperate conditions. This is her reaction:

> I think there are two ways of life which are good. There is the higher way, which is ours, in which all are united; and there is the lower way, of the shark or the shell-fish, of freedom and violence, which only greater violence can destroy, and which nothing can bring into slavery. But the vision which you give me is of a state which is lower than either of these, of blind servitudes and oppressions, to which you yield without willingness.
>
> The more you tell me, the more easily do I understand the sudden violences and crafts of your mind, and the disorders through which you think. But has there been none who has pointed out to you either the road of freedom or the road of concord? Are you content with a social state as uncontrolled as the bodies in which you live so briefly? Have you no law-makers whom you can reverence, and whom you can obey with serenity? (WB p.127)

This last remark, though, merely opens the way into one of Fowler Wright's, frequent commentaries on the dreadful state of law-making in the twentieth century, explaining how the mass-production of laws has got completely out of hand.

Given this, it is perhaps slightly surprising that the climactic scene of *The Amphibians* should actually be a trial, in which judgment must be passed on a group of bat-winged creatures resembling Doré's representations of Dante's devils. These creatures are specimens of a race which once held dominion over the Earth, and were preserved by the Dwellers for purposes of research until they were handed over to the Killers for disposal. When the narrator and his companion rescue the trapped Amphibian they must decide whether or not to release these creatures also, and therefore agree to hear again the evidence of their character which persuaded the Dwellers to condemn them to death. Their crime is that they have condemned to death one of their own kind for stealing food. The Dwellers have judged that any people who establish a society where it is possible for some to be without food while others have more than enough are irredeemably corrupt. The narrator eventually confirms this judgment.

After this strange digression the story comes abruptly to a halt, though not to an end. In a final scene the Dwellers and the Amphibians apparently reach a new agreement, but its import is not made clear and the last line of the book promises a new adventure for the two protagonists. A sequel was obviously planned, and it seems as if Fowler Wright intended *The Amphibians* at this stage to be the first part of a trilogy.

The Amphibians is a remarkable work in several ways. In a brief preface to the second edition Fowler Wright noted that some commentators had suggested that it was influenced by Wells' *The Time Machine* and that its social philosophy was borrowed from Butler's *Erewhon*. Actually, though, it is only the basic literary device that is borrowed from Wells (the debt is acknowledged in the text) and the resemblance between Butler's philosophy and Fowler Wright's is very superficial. The preface notes, in fact, that Fowler Wright had not read *Erewhon*. On all counts, *The Amphibians* is really a book of striking originality, which shows considerable influence only in the fact that some of its imagery derives from Dante's *Inferno*. In its discussion of what constitutes sin, and of the ethics of punishment, Fowler Wright and Dante are of course poles apart.

The book is so harsh in the judgment which it passes on human nature and society that it ranks as one of the most bitterly misanthropic of futuristic fantasies, but the adjective "misanthropic" does need to be qualified. It is not that the author detested his fellow men *en masse* or individually. Rather, his distaste arises from a clinically detached contemp-

lation of the human condition. He is quite calm in reporting that from an objective viewpoint one can find much in the human condition to deplore and much to pity. Other speculative fictions written between the wars are just as harsh in their judgments, but add a note of hysteria (as in Claude Houghton's *This Was Ivor Trent*) or a note of vituperation (as in Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John*); Fowler Wright was not given to such fierceness of feeling. It should be noted that it is quite a common strategy for imaginative writers to look at humankind through hypothetical alien eyes, and that they are rarely generous in reporting their findings. Few people, reflecting on their own physical and moral weaknesses, can resist entirely the temptations of contempt. It was not men who were free from sin who invented Hell; the fascination of the Inferno is partly due to its instrumental value in controlling our capacity for evil. Self-control often involves an element of self-blackmail.

The Amphibians is certainly a disturbing book, if one takes its allegations about the human condition seriously. It is alleged more than once in the text that there is a human soul which suffers by virtue of its imprisonment in such a vile body. As the second quotation above indicates, Fowler Wright sees man as a half-and-half creature, trapped between two ways of being which are represented in the text by the Amphibians and the Killers. The former enjoy a physical condition which is appropriate to their spiritual possibilities; the latter have no souls and are hence free to indulge the vicious appetites built into their physical being in a way that men (being capable of conscience) are not.

What is particularly harsh and unusual about this argument is that it posits an ideal state of being which men, by definition, can never reach. This is why the readers who detected a trace of Butlerian Utopianism are quite mistaken. Like Butler, Fowler Wright is against technology, and supports a more natural way of life, but the supernatural fellowship which the Amphibians have is not something that humans can acquire. Even if humans were fortunate enough to become telepathic (as they do, for instance, in Fowler Wright's last speculative novel, *Spiders' War*) they would still have certain tendencies toward evil built into their physical constitution.

The most important thing to note about the ideal state of being which the Amphibians enjoy is that it is an *internal* state of being. It does not depend at all upon their living in a placid, bountiful and comfortable environment. Their world resembles the Inferno far more than it does the Garden of Eden, but this works in their favour rather than against them. It is his insistence on this point rather than any other item in his philosophy of life that sets Fowler Wright apart from the other exponents of scientific romance. He is flatly opposed to the "utopia of comforts" to which Wells and the Fabians looked forward, and he is opposed also to the Arcadian images which have often been set up in opposition to them. Indeed, he proved in time to be willing to argue against Heaven itself. His reverence for nature was in no way based on the misapprehension (common among modern ecological mystics) that nature is harmonious. His notion of the ideal state of being is, in fact, based on the opposite presumption: that it is struggle and strife which are natural, and that the ideal state of being must be accomodated to that reality.

Given this, it is not surprising that Fowler Wright is pessimistic on behalf of the human race. He is pessimistic too on behalf of the technically-capable Dwellers and the idealized Amphibians—the text makes it clear that though the Amphibians and the Dwellers are quite conscious of the self-destructive tendencies of intelligence, they will probably not find a way to preserve their world. This was to become even clearer when he finally wrote

the sequel which he promised.

The Merton Press became defunct soon after the second edition of *The Amphibians* was issued, but the public response to the book was sufficient to encourage Fowler Wright that more ventures along the same lines might be in order. He therefore established a new publishing company, Fowler Wright Books Ltd., with the intention of issuing *Deluge,* his translation of the *Inferno,* and as many other works as might prove feasible. In 1927 *Deluge* appeared, and was greeted enthusiastically by the newspaper critics. In those days, reviews could still boost the sales of a book very considerably, and the reviewers threw all of their weight behind the book. Arnold Bennett, Edward Shanks and Gerald Gould were among its most ardent champions, but there was a general chorus of praise.

It is, of course, very rare for a privately-printed work to achieve any degree of success, but Fowler Wright was in an exceptionally favourable position. He was already widely-known and widely-respected in literary circles, and his work on behalf of the Empire Poetry League had built him a substantial balance of moral credit. Even people who were not personally known to him were quite ready to give a boost to his book. The reviewers to whom *Deluge* went out were not only prepared to take it seriously, but were prepared to be sympathetic to its ambitions and were glad to find in it virtues which they could applaud. The praise which they heaped upon it helped it to carry a reputation across the Atlantic, where the Cosmopolitan Book Corporation were encouraged to invest in it as a ready-made best-seller. Advertising made sure of its success, and Cosmopolitan later claimed to have sold 70,000 copies on the day of publication and 160,000 within a week. Film rights were quickly sold and Fowler Wright (who had relatives in California) gladly set off for Hollywood to assist in making the film. Within the space of a few months in 1928 Fowler Wright's life was transformed. He was a celebrity—a literary lion—and the way of opportunity was open before him.

It may seem to modern readers that *Deluge* is an unlikely best-seller. While it is true, though, that its phenomenal success was partly due to an accident of favourable circumstance, it *is* a striking work which brought an original viewpoint to the sub-*genre* of the catastrophe story. Disaster novels had flourished in Britain and the USA around the turn of the century, and American readers would already have been familiar with Jack London's "The Scarlet Plague" (1912) and George Allan England's *Darkness and Dawn* (1914), which between them encompass the Tragic and the Romantic threads of the disaster-story tradition. *Deluge,* by contrast, subsumed both the Tragic and the Romantic beneath a steely and rather brutal realism that was as compelling as it was uncomfortable. In this respect *Deluge* has much more in common with later catastrophe stories than with earlier ones; in 1928 Fowler Wright was emerging on to the literary scene just ahead of a new school of tough and unsentimental writers who would become noticeable in various sectors of the literary marketplace. The tone of the novel, therefore, really did strike a chord in tune with the imaginative movements of the day.

Deluge begins with a casual account of a series of earth tremors which profoundly alter the contours of the planet's surface, flooding much of the existing land and elevating new land from beneath the sea. Almost all of the civilized world is inundated, but as chance would have it a few areas of England are elevated to the point where the hilltops are still above water. The Cotswolds thus become a tiny chain of islands.

The storm that accompanies the tremors kills a great many people even in those areas

which remain above water, and those who survive find themselves uncomfortably born out of the womb of civilization:

> It was not only that they were physically ill-adapted for life on the earth's surface, but the minds of most of them were empty of the most elementary knowledge of their physical environment.
>
> Released in a day from the most elaborate system of mutual slavery that the world has known, they were unused to the exercise of mental initiative, or to independent action. They were accustomed to settle every issue of life, not by the application of any basic rules, or instinctive preferences, or by the exercise of reason, but under the blind guidance of their specialized fellow-men, or by assiduous imitation of the procedure of those around them. The great majority of them were engaged in repetition work which had not originated in their own minds, and made no call upon them for analysis, decision, or judgment.
>
> Their perceptions were blinded by physical deficiency. They were incapable of clear thought, or of decisive action.
>
> They were at a further disadvantage, which was not less serious because of a less obvious kind.
>
> They had been restrained from many evil (and some admirable) courses, not by experience of their probable consequences, nor by observation, nor tradition, but by laws which exacted utterly illogical penalties. When the fear of these penalties was removed, they reacted variously to instincts undisciplined except by a restraint which no longer operated.
>
> It had been a natural correlative of such conditions that where there had been no law to coerce them they (or at least many among them) had lacked the self-control needed for the dignity or even the decencies of physical existence, and had developed communally concealed habits which would have appalled the instincts of any cleanly beast. The bodies of many of them were rotten from the contagious horrors of the degradation in which they had lived, and the deluge did no more than hasten them to a swifter and more seemly end than they would otherwise have experienced. (D pp.5-6)

There is a reference later in this prologue to the Biblical parable of the flood, which men might have taken more seriously, but in spite of this reference Fowler Wright's deluge is no divine judgment on human wickedness; it is an accident of happenstance, which might result in a cleansing of the Earth and a rebirth of mankind, but which might just as easily not. As the quotation suggests, the narrative of the novel is a painstaking account of the adventures of people who mostly fail dismally to cope with the circumstances of disaster. As with many disaster stories there is a kind of social Darwinism underlying the assumptions which are implicit in the extrapolation of the basic premise, but in Fowler Wright's case this is complicated by his slightly eccentric views on medical science. He was of the opinion that healthy people did not need doctors, save perhaps on rare occasions where some treatment might be necessary for an accidental injury, and felt that people who lived an appropriate life would be sufficiently robust to resist the ravages of disease. Thus, in his view, the unfit who will perish even if the disaster leaves them alive are not unfit because of any faulty genetic heritage, but rather because civilized life has weakened them fatally.

Deluge is mainly the story of Martin Webster, who flees from his house with his wife Helen and their two small children when the storm destroys it. Helen is injured and he has to leave her with the children to seek help, but when the flood comes they are separated and neither can be sure that the other has survived. The third major character in the story is Claire Arlington, who finds a temporary refuge on an island with two men, but decides to seek her fortune elsewhere when they fall to casting lots for her. Eventually Claire and Martin meet, and begin to gather together the necessities of life, building a cache inside a railway tunnel while they live in a hut beside the track. They are discovered by a gang of men under the leadership of the brutal giant Bellamy, and must fight for their lives—a fight which climaxes with a bloody siege of the tunnel.

Meanwhile, Helen and her babies are taken in by Tom Aldworth, a decent man who is one of the leading figures in a struggling community. The community, in establishing some basic moral principles, has already had to expel two groups of dissidents: Bellamy's and a more organized troop led by Jerry Cooper. A war is brewing between Aldworth's community and Cooper's men, with Bellamy also a threat. In trying to remove the lesser threat first, Aldworth lifts the siege of the railway tunnel and frees Martin and Claire. They then take important roles in the community and play a vital part in repelling Cooper's first attack on their settlement. Martin finds himself on the horns of a dilemma, however, by virtue of the fact that he has now made oaths of loyalty and fidelity to two women, and seemingly must give one up (most of the fighting has been caused by a drastic shortage of women in the post-disaster world). In the end, though, he persuades the community to accept that the decision of the women must be binding, and they choose to share him. Helen's acceptance of Claire provides the closing lines of the story.

As with many other disaster stories *Deluge* combines a tense and violent account of a struggle for survival with a moral argument about human nature and the fragility of culturally-maintained behaviour-patterns. Fowler Wright is unique, however, in the extent to which he blames the undesirable aspects of human nature on civilization while insisting that what is genuinely natural in it is also good. His philosophy is closer to that of Rousseau than to any philosopher of his own era, though it is doubtful that there was much direct influence. The method by which he raised his own children may have been in accordance with some of the recommendations made in *Emile*, but this is likely to have been coincidence. Some striking resemblances can be found between passages in Fowler Wright and passages in the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, in connection with the "enslaving" aspects of civilization, but Fowler Wright shows little trace of Rousseau's Romanticism, nor of his preoccupation with inequality. The greatest similarity between them is that they are both, in essence, contract theorists when they come to examine the fundamental nature of social relationships. The emphasis which Fowler Wright puts on the contractual aspect of relationships is obvious in *Deluge*, both in his account of the community of survivors attempting to formulate new rules and in his consideration of Martin's dilemma.

It is important to the understanding of almost all of Fowler Wright's works to remember that his notion of sexual relationships is first and foremost that they constitute a contract between free individuals. His view of sexuality is in some ways an odd one, and he reacted strongly against the view of sexuality propounded by Freud. In *Deluge* he is careful to include a scathing description of one of the degenerate members of Bellamy's gang, which makes clear his opinion that the implication of man's possession of "animal instincts" is very different from what is commonly supposed:

> He was obsessed by a debased sexuality, such as is stimulated by the excitements and restraints of an unhealthy civilization, and which Freud appears to have supposed, very foolishly, to be the common curse of humanity.
>
> An urban population, knowing nothing of animals, has quaintly given the name of "animalism" to this lowest of human vices, but it has no affinity to the loyalty of a rat to his doe, or the tenderness of a wolf for his mate. It is, in fact, the vice which, among all the outrages by which humanity has defied the laws of its Creator to its own undoing, is most alien from anything existing among the wild creatures which men have left unmurdered, nor has it any approximate parallel among those that they have brought into servitude and association. (D p.168)

The ramifications of this argument through his works of fiction are complicated, but

several puzzling features of his novels can be explained by extrapolation of it.

The reference in the above quotation to the Creator and His laws is one of several to be found in *Deluge*, but none of these really reflects any orthodox religiosity. In fact he does not see civilized man's betrayal of his Creator as an opposition to the divine will, but rather as a reckless squandering of providence. The other references include a strident *cri de coeur* against the spoliation of the environment by industry and pollution (D pp. 333-4), and this shows clearly that the references are not to a personalized Creator but rather to the natural world which, by evolutionary process, was indeed the creator of mankind. It should be noted that Fowler Wright's horror at the squandering of nature's providence was coupled with an unbreakable faith in the bounteousness of that providence—hence his conviction that there could be no merit in the argument that births must be restricted in order to conserve resources.

Almost all commentaries on *Deluge* call special attention to the ending, where the hero "gets" both the girls. There are many ironic references to this, representing it by implication as the ultimate in selfish wish-fulfilment. The few unfavourable reviews which *Deluge* received tend to accuse the author of immorality on this account, and it is not unlikely that some of the book's champions were attracted by what seemed to be a note of daring unconventionality, or immoral self-indulgence.

In fact, of course, Fowler Wright was the last man in the world to encourage immoral self-indulgence, and the end of the book is really a triumphant recognition and acknowledgment of moral responsibility. Martin, believing that his first marriage has been dissolved by death, makes a new contract; when he discovers his mistake his only honourable course is to honour both contracts unless one of the two parties of the second part prefers release. That they do not testifies to their honourable qualities. It is surely no coincidence that *Deluge* was written near to the time of Fowler Wright's second marriage, following the premature death of his beloved first wife. If the ending of the story is self-indulgent at all it is surely in the matter of reassurance—an affirmation of the supposition that his first wife, had she been able to speak, would have welcomed his second just as Helen, in her final speech, welcomes Claire to Martin's family.

Before concluding discussion of *Deluge* it might be mentioned that the most curious response of all to the book came from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was nearing the end of his life at the time of publication. Doyle wrote to Fowler Wright saying that he had long had it in mind to write exactly such a story, and that the only means by which Fowler Wright could have got hold of the idea was that the spirits with whom Doyle was in frequent communication had transmitted it to him. Doyle did not appear to be unduly troubled by the idea that "his" plot was lost, but was very worried by the possibility that other people had access to "his" spirits. Fowler Wright, considering the letter to be fatuous nonsense, put it aside, but temptation proved too much for his son Gilbert, who quoted the letter in a satirical piece for the *Sunday Express*. Doyle was infuriated and threatened to sue for breach of copyright if Fowler Wright would not apologize. Fowler Wright declined, thinking that no fault was his, and the case went to court, where Doyle won damages. Doyle did, however, send Fowler Wright an inscribed copy of *Pheneas Speaks* (1927), in the hope of persuading the sceptic that the original letter had been perfectly sensible. Fowler Wright was later to include malicious sideswipes at Pheneas and his disciples in several works.

The success of *Deluge* opened a new world of opportunity to Fowler Wright. He must already have completed his third fantastic novel, because it appeared very quickly to catch the wave of publicity stirred up by *Deluge*. This was *The Island of Captain Sparrow*, and although it was by no means as well-received as *Deluge* it kept the momentum of his new career going. It was published by Gollancz and was eventually reprinted as an early Penguin book. In the same year—1928—Fowler Wright issued his translation of the *Inferno* under his own imprint. In 1929 Collins issued *The Amphibians* and its sequel, *The World Below*, in a single volume under the latter title, while Fowler Wright Ltd. issued two titles, one a handsome edition of *The Riding of Lancelot* (part of *The Song of Arthur*) and the other a pamphlet entitled *Police and Public*.

The latter project suggests that like H.G. Wells before him, Fowler Wright had ambitions to become a twentieth century sage as well as a speculative writer, whose opinions on social matters would be respected. Other titles which he optimistically announced for future publication were "The Problems of Motor Traffic"; "The Case Against Birth Control"; "The Safeguarding of Industries"; "The Ethics of Taxation"; "The Votes of Women"; and "The Channel Tunnel". He concluded this list with "etc, etc,", but in fact the financial viability of his private press was already under threat. He never got the chance to ride these various hobby-horses in public. *Police and Public* was contentious enough to be controversial, but soon slipped into oblivion like the pamphlets Conan Doyle was issuing on behalf of the spiritualist cause.

On the commercial side, the success of *Deluge* encouraged Fowler Wright to begin writing short stories for the popular magazines of the day. Naturally, his early tales were all fantastic in character. One of the most important, "The Choice: an Allegory of Blood and Tears", appeared in the upmarket women's magazine *Eve* in the issue for 3 April 1929. The magazine was later combined with another as *Eve and Britannia*, and Fowler Wright published another striking story there in the August issue: "P.N. 40—and Love". This latter story also appeared in the American *Red Book* magazine in the same year. *Weird Tales* also published two Fowler Wright stories in 1929: "The Rat" and "Automata". These and later stories were eventually to make up the contents of the important collection *The New Gods Lead* (1932).

There was a further proliferation of Fowler Wright's literary interests in 1930 and 1931. In the former year, along with his sequel to *Deluge, Dawn*, he published the first of his historical novels, *Elfwin*, and the first of his crime stories, *The King Against Anne Bickerton*—the latter under the Sydney Fowler pseudonym. In 1931 he published his novel of contemporary life *Seven Thousand in Israel* and the first of his prehistoric fantasies, *Dream*, as well as three more crime novels. There can be no doubt that Fowler Wright, who was already into his late fifties by this time, was a man of astonishing energy. Having become, somewhat unexpectedly, a writer of note, he thrust himself into his new career with great determination. His productivity certainly did not help his reputation, but he cared very little about that. He was undoubtedly pleased to have an audience to hear him, but he was determined to hold his own course in deciding what to offer them. He was prepared to pander to popular taste in mass-producing crime novels, but only to make sure that he could take risks with the commercial appeal of his other books. Given this, it is not surprising that his celebrity began to fade; he had no sooner burst spectacularly upon the literary scene than he became so familiar as to begin to attract a certain contempt. While he enjoyed his brief span as a luminary, though, he seized his

chance to scatter what light he could.

Fowler Wright claimed of both *The Amphibians* and *Deluge* that he was more interested in telling a tale than delivering a message, but was not entirely convincing in his claim. In *The Island of Captain Sparrow,* however, he is much more obviously at ease, making up his story without bothering to include too many didactic asides. The novel tells the story of Charlton Foyle, who escapes from a ship when his life is in danger to become a castaway on an unknown island. As is customary with Fowler Wright, we are told little about this hero, save that he has been travelling the world aimlessly, "avoiding the death to which a dozen doctors had doomed him, yet not gaining the health without which life is of dubious value". Despite this remark he seems fit enough as he undertakes his strenuous adventure on the island, and it is probable that his malaise is of a spiritual kind.

The island on which Foyle finds himself has several groups of inhabitants, the most important being the descendants of part of the crew of the pirate Andrew Sparrow, who were left to guard the island as his base when he set out on a last voyage from which he never returned. This gang is led by Sparrow's son Jacob, who is an old man by the time Foyle arrives. A more active force in the affairs of this strange group of degenerates is Jacob's bestial son Nichodemus ("Demers"). The pirates have made a treaty with the people who were already on the island when they arrived: a small relic of some ancient ante-Diluvian civilization (possibly Atlantis), which is based in the temple of Gîr. Unknown to the pirates, their arrival on the island has spelled the doom of this society, for they have imported diseases to which the Atlanteans have no resistance. By the time Foyle arrives on the island only a single priest and his immediate family remain in the temple, though the pirates do not know this.

The feral inhabitants of the island are most strange. They include a population of fierce giant birds, which are apparently under the control of the Atlanteans, and which must occasionally be placated by the pirates with gifts of food. There is also a population of non-sentient humanoids formed like the satyrs of Greek mythology, who are protected from the pirates under the terms of their treaty with the priests, save for periodic hunts when one may be killed.

Foyle finds in the caves which lead from the cliffs surrounding the island to its lush interior evidence that he is not the first castaway to reach the island in recent years, but the fate of these other visitors remains unclear until he finds one of them—a young girl—living naked, wild and free in the forest. She is a fugitive, keeping her existence secret from the pirates, who believe her dead. She and Foyle hold a long conversation in the darkness, and decide that they must escape together.

Their plan goes wrong when the girl, Marcelle, tries to steal some clothing and is captured by the pirates. Jacob Sparrow plans a wedding for his son, who is temporarily absent on the satyr-hunt, and Marcelle pretends to agree in order to avoid betraying Foyle. The ritual feast following the hunt is to be attended by the priest of Gîr, and this provides the dramatic climax of the book as Foyle comes to claim Marcelle and violence breaks out, with the great birds coming to the aid of the minority.

Curiously, this climax is described as though from the viewpoint of the priest, who is quite without emotion and - we are told - "remote as a god". There is a cool clinicality about the description which is very close to the tone of *The Amphibians.* In the end, Foyle and Marcelle flee across the island, pursued by Demers. They have with them the priest's child, the very last of his race. Foyle kills Demers but is badly wounded, and the

two take refuge in the empty temple. When they are ready to attempt to escape the island again they find that their plan has been pre-empted: the remaining pirates have taken Foyle's boat. They are the sole inheritors of the island, and Marcelle will bring Foyle into her way of life rather than *vice versa*. The implication is that this is the only truly happy ending that could have been devised.

The Island of Captain Sparrow is basically an escapist dream-fantasy—the story of a hard-won refuge from the world, which becomes for its inheritors a substitute Garden of Eden, at least insofar as it offers an opportunity for life to be lived naturally. The play with ambiguous characters, half-human and half-animal, relates *The Island of Captain Sparrow* to Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau,* but the underlying ideas are of course very different. Whereas Wells' Prendick is forced into a horrified retreat as the beast-men begin to revert to their animal nature, Fowler Wright expels from his island the degenerate humans whose "animality" is the residue of culture. The satyrs, though they are far from harmless, are allowed to remain because they are morally innocent, but Demers—who bears the stigmata of human satyriasis—is destroyed. Hence the argument initially set out in *Deluge* is amplified into a curiously enigmatic parable.

It is doubtful that Fowler Wright consciously set out to write such a parable—he would surely have made the story's "message" much more explicit had he actually had it in mind. Nevertheless, the implication of the dream-fantasy is not too difficult to follow. Buried beneath the surface of the adventure is the same tacit championship of nature against culture that re-appears consistently in Fowler Wright's work, at varying levels of explicitness.

At the end of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* Prendick is driven by his experiences to become a kind of priest of science, taking comfort in the peaceful contemplation of cosmology as though it were a kind of transcendence of his own bestial heritage—his fleshiness. Fowler Wright despised this kind of retreat into objective intellectualism. His hero is lured back into a state of nature by what is effectively a glamorous nature-spirit (Marcelle is called a dryad in the chapter which introduces her), to find fulfilment in freedom from the corrupting effects of civilization.

Marcelle was the prototype for a whole series of Fowler Wright heroines, though it might be argued that she is herself no more than a new version of the narrator's Amphibian companion in *The Amphibians.* She retains something of the character of Claire Arlington, being strong, capable and decisive, but she has another side to her as well as her merely human attributes. When she first speaks to Foyle she is invisible, though he has glimpsed her earlier. When she last speaks to him she is again invisible, leading him into the wilderness with a tempting, mocking voice. She is similar in many respects to Rima, the heroine of W.H. Hudson's *Green Mansions,* but her robustness makes her importantly different. Fowler Wright's characterization of nature is different from Hudson's in exactly the same way: Hudson is a determined Romantic, and perhaps the first prophet of modern ecological mysticism, but Fowler Wright knows well enough that the natural life is tough.

There is a sense in which *The Island of Captain Sparrow* is less pessimistic than many of the author's works, but it should be remembered that it is manifestly a dream-fantasy, and must not be reckoned too closely akin to *Deluge*, or even *The Amphibians.* Fowler Wright knew well enough that it was only in dreams that civilized men could throw off the shackles of culture and retreat into the bosom of nature; most of his heroes must do what

they can with much more severely restricted opportunities.

The Island of Captain Sparrow was followed by the sequels which Fowler Wright added to both his earlier scientific romances. Neither sequel can really be said to have lived up to expectations.

In *The World Below* the time traveller and his Amphibian companion go into the subterranean world of the Dwellers. The early chapters simply describe further stages in their phantasmagoric odyssey, each one featuring a strange and dangerous encounter. They soon emerge, however, into an enormous room where they find an artificial organism impressed with telepathic recordings: a "living book". The narrator, not without difficulty, contrives to read passages from this book, including some references to the two men he is looking for. One, it is ominously said, has been "scraped by the Vivisection Department" and the other "transferred to the Experimental Section". The companions also learn more about the new treaty made between the Amphibians and the Dwellers, relating to an impending war against the insectile "Antipodeans".

In seeking further information the narrator and the Amphibian discover a library of living books, and pass through corridors on whose walls are projected visual images. They learn something of the history of the Dwellers, and something of the progress of the war, but all of this is fragmentary and disjointed. When they are eventually discovered by the Dwellers the two protagonists are parted, and the narrator continues his search alone. By this time the story is being told in an almost perfunctory manner, in brief and terse chapters, as though the author simply wanted to be done with the book as quickly as possible. In a brief scene set in a laboratory the narrator sees the Dwellers tending their war-wounded, and learns that even in this Hellish underworld love continues to be an important and vital force in the lives of those who live there. The narratator is imprisoned, and encounters in his captivity the one of those he has come to seek who remains alive. Alas, the man is quite mad, and does not know his friend, though he is blissful in his insane innocence.

The Amphibians eventually persuade the Dwellers to release the narrator, and it is in the company of the "Seekers of Wisdom" that he lives out his year in the far future before returning to his own time. The Seekers of Wisdom are Dwellers, and are not so different from men as the Amphibians, but he still finds them contemptuous when he describes to them the world from which he has come. He has to concur in many of their judgments, as he tells them a story of which he is ashamed. He finally returns to his own world a changed man.

Incredibly, when the narrator is asked in the epilogue whether he would be prepared to undertake another journey to the world he has visited, he says that he might—but only if Clara would go with him. He thinks that she might (and if she is cut from the same cloth as other Fowler Wright heroines, indeed she might, astonishing as this may seem.)

It seems obvious that Fowler Wright had great difficulty in sustaining his creative energy through *The World Below,* and it is not at all surprising that what was first planned as a trilogy became a curtly concluded pair. Fowler Wright always made up his plots as he went along, and thus worked in continual hazard of running out of inspiration. Many of his books become unbalanced or shapeless as they change direction and lose impetus, and *The World Below* suffers more than most from this.

It is possible that the writing of this particular story had a kind of cathartic effect upon

its author, and that expression of the sentiments contained in its argument constituted a partial exorcism of its nightmarish perspectives. In that case, the vision itself might be reckoned a kind of purgatory. However, though Fowler Wright never returned to this particular imaginary world, he was to build many more that incorporate the same essential features, and if the loss of impetus of this novel was the result of a kind of catharsis, it was a purely temporary release.

Dawn is a much more substantial work than *The World Below,* and suffers no such decay into disjointedness. Nevertheless, Fowler Wright obviously found some difficulties in carrying forward the story told in his first novel ten years after he had written it down. In fact, he ended up by not carrying it forward very much. The first two-thirds of the story told in *Dawn* runs parallel to the events in *Deluge*, providing a more detailed history of the community which takes in Helen Webster, examining the stresses and strains which lead to the expulsion of Bellamy's gang and the defection of Jerry Cooper. Even when it moves beyond straightforward recapitulation it really does not move into new imaginative territory, but is largely content to deal with a second attempt by Cooper to take control.

The major elements in the plot that are new concern the influence upon the course of affairs in the post-disaster world of two men: Henry Butcher, a careful trader who cleverly corners the market in various highly desirable commodities by careful scavenging and artful bartering; and John Burman, a farmer who lives on an islet a little way from the large land-mass on which the community is based, and who is fiercely protective of his independence.

The importance of these two men is that they represent contrasting forces in human affairs. Martin, in deciding what kind of political system to adopt for his little empire, must find a way to control the anti-social enterprise of men like Butcher without doing anything to compromise the freedom of men like Burman. The problem is never set out quite so explicitly, but this is what it all comes down to.

Despite its relative substance and solidity *Dawn* adds rather less to *Deluge* than *The World Below* adds to *The Amphibians.* The questions opened up in the earlier novel are neither closed nor further elaborated, and the book seems lacking in any sense of dramatic urgency. Martin, once established as a leader, proves remarkably indecisive and enervated. He vacillates over the task of trying to save what he can of the knowledge of the old world by gathering a library of useful books—he begins the process of selecting a heritage by condemning to the fire the works of "a little group of the disciples of the hoary cult of the Witch of Endor", but we hear no more of this business of rationalization. Again, when the community faces a moral crisis because a woman dies as a result of an abortion, Martin's doubts about the correct way to handle the affair lead to his favouring what the author obviously considered to be a weak-kneed solution. Martin condemns the doctor responsible to exile, but another character exacts a harsher penalty. Something very similar happens in the climax, when Martin is disposed to treat the vanquished Cooper mercifully, but finds matters taken out of his hands by someone more decisive and less squeamish.

These episodes emphasize a certain ambivalence in Fowler Wright's writings which was to be seen even more clearly in his later novel *Power.* He had a great many ideas about what needed to be done if the world were to be set to rights, but he also had moral qualms about the actions which might need to be taken in order to accomplish the setting right. He was, of course, basically pessimistic about the prospect of saving the world, and *Dawn*

displays many of his reasons for that pessimism. It has much to say about the unpromising nature of human beings, even when those most perverted by civilization are weeded out. Less noticeably, though, it asks whether even a man of great intelligence and resolve could really devise a blueprint for Utopia, and whether—even had he such a blueprint—he could in all conscience force his prescription upon others.

Fowler Wright was a believer in freedom, and recognized well enough that freedom includes the freedom to be foolish, indolent, and wicked. He recognized too the need for a community to draw up some kind of social contract which would either limit or contain foolishness, indolence and wickedness. In the final analysis he had no confidence that people would freely and willingly enter into and honour such a contract, and thus had to conclude that some element of force would always be necessary if the well-being of a community were to be preserved. Martin's story is an account of his making this unhappy discovery, trying to cope with it as best he can, and finding only an uncertain compromise.

In one way, the conclusion of *Dawn* is happier than the end of *Deluge*. The forces menacing the community have been conclusively defeated: both Butcher and Cooper have been dealt with. In another way, though, *Dawn* ends much more desolately than its predecessor, with no note of personal triumph. The symbolic promise of a new day offered by the title is insidiously qualified in the last line by a deadly adjective. This is the substance of Martin's final meditation:

> He saw the futility of all endeavour. He might rule with an old wisdom, or a new foolishness, but he would die, and his will with him, and even that which he had sown in wisdom might be brought by others to a foolish flower . . .
>
> He remembered that terrible bureaucratic slavery which the waters covered, when every man had been compelled to walk the same road at the same pace as his neighbours; when he could not take pleasure, or work, for his own gain or his fellows' good, but at the licensed times; when he could not find a corner of England so remote that he could build a home to his own liking without the interference and restraint of others; when he could not teach his own child in his own way, but it must be raped from him to be patterned in the common mould . . .
>
> He became aware that the wind was colder, and that the night was falling around him. "*The night cometh, when no man can work.*" The words entered his mind as a warning, and as an unescapable doom. What use was there in thought and anxious effort in a world in which the night was always approaching?
>
> His influence might be good or evil, but it would pass like a shadow, like an impression in water. The water might give way very easily to the moving hand, but it would close as easily behind it, and what would be altered? And the hand was Life, the water Time. Was it not a wiser rule to accept the inevitable end, and not to exhaust its brevity with a useless effort? "*The night cometh, when no man can work.*"
>
> And then the thought came that these were the words of one who had the gift of putting the deepest wisdom into a simplicity of words, and that he had used them to a directly opposite argument.
>
> It was because of that approaching darkness that the labour should be neither delayed nor stinted. Taking no anxious thought for the morrow, the day's work must be done as best we may, because the darkness is so certain—and so near.
>
> The new order of life which he was striving to build with such partial success, with such inevitable errors, might disappear tomorrow, but what he did today would have become a fact unchangeable, the significance of which was beyond his seeing.
>
> The night moved round the earth. It followed daylight as men are followed by the over-taking feet of death, but there was no finality in its triumph.
>
> For behind it followed for ever the indifferent dawn. (*Dawn* pp.362-3)

The quotation within the quotation is, of course, from the Gospel according to St. John, but the spirit of Martin's response—indeed, of Fowler Wright's underlying philosophy of life—is closer to that of *Ecclesiastes,* the preacher of the Old Testament.

Although time will obliterate everything, and nothing can endure for long, it is nevertheless necessary to do what one can, and what is *right*. It is the *effort* which counts, not the circumstances or the end result. Neither desperate circumstances nor deep-seated pessimism about results can excuse the lack of that essential effort.

None of the works which he published in 1929 and 1930 won Fowler Wright the kind of praise which *Deluge* had attracted. His celebrity was still sufficient in 1931, however, for him to be recruited to the effort of promoting a book called *Red Ike* by J.M. Denwood (known in the USA as *Under the Brutchstone*). This appeared as a collaboration, though Fowler Wright merely edited the somewhat rough-hewn text and added an introduction. The publishers attempted to boost the book to best-seller status with heavy advertising, but their success was limited.

Fowler Wright's own fortunes were on the brink of decline, even though 1931 was his most productive year. Not one of his novels of that year was successful in commercial terms, although *The Hanging of Constance Hillier* is one of the best of his crime stories.

Another of the Sydney Fowler potboilers which Fowler Wright published in 1931 was *The Bell Street Murders,* one of his two crime stories to include a sciencefictional element.

The Bell Street Murders is the story of an inventor who devises a coating which, when applied to a screen, will allow the screen to record visual impressions from its surroundings. These impressions may be recalled by a watcher at any time if the watcher can summon up a mental image of the first scene of the sequence to act as a trigger. This highly unlikely device, inevitably, becomes the sole "witness" to the murder of the inventor, and those trying to figure out who killed him must discover the appropriate trigger signal to make the screen divulge its information. The story is not impressive, but Fowler Wright was obviously somewhat taken with the villain of the piece, because he later wrote two sequels featuring further adventures of the same adversary: *The Secret of the Screen* (1933) and *Who Murdered Reynard?* (1947). Neither of these has any speculative content. More importantly, *The Bell Street Murders* introduces in a very minor role a solicitor named Jellipot, who plays a rather larger part in *The Secret of the Screen* and went on from there to much higher things. He was to feature alongside the investigating police officer Inspector Combridge in many other novels, quickly establishing himself as the star performer. Mr Jellipot helped Fowler Wright to find a *via media* between his desire to write crime stories of a moderately realistic kind and his intense dislike of the police; the solicitor is permitted to provide the intelligence and acuity necessary to identify and outwit criminals, while the inspector's men do the legwork.

The two novels which Fowler Wright published under his full name in 1931 were certainly not calculated to win wide popularity. Both, on the surface at least, are remarkably arid and pessimistic. *Seven Thousand in Israel,* his only attempt at a serious contemporary novel, deals with various moral crises facing its protagonist John Oakley. Although Oakley has similar views to Fowler Wright on many issues, including birth control, he is no mere autobiographical shadow. After weathering various minor tribulations Oakley goes bankrupt (largely thanks to the invidious E.P.D.) and his ruination is painfully extended before he finally contracts pneumonia and dies. The story is relentlessly downbeat, curiously interrupted by occasional passages where the author talks directly to the reader about what he is doing, asking rhetorical questions about the pace of the story and wondering whether the various twists of the plot are sensible. This

awkward self-consciousness reveals most explicitly that Fowler Wright was very uneasy in the writing of this story; he seems in these passages to be almost conscience-stricken about the fact that the plot proceeds so bleakly and ends so nihilistically. Like Martin Webster at the end of *Dawn,* Fowler Wright seems here to be feeling guilty about his own tendency to despair, but finding it just as difficult to pull himself out of the slough of despond.

A similar tendency to despair is a key feature of the character of Marguerite Leinster, the heroine of *Dream; or, The Simian Maid.* She, however, responds to this fatalistic depression by seeking escape in dreams which are conjured up for her by a "magician"—a scientist who can send her consciousness through time to experience other lives. She has already visited Atlantis and Babylon, and now wishes to go even further back into a genuinely primitive era.

She is incarnated as a tree-dwelling furry primate. She is the only one of her own species who appears in the story, but there are other races co-existing with hers of whom we see rather more. There are the "cave-people", much more human in appearance, who have more elaborate tools and a more developed language than her kind. There are also the Ogpurs, a savage and degraded race. Despite the cultural advantages enjoyed by the cave-people the person Marguerite has become—who is called Rita—considers that her own kind are a "higher" species. The Ogpurs—a "mongrel race"—are considered the lowest of the low; they, the author suggests, must be the ancestors of modern men.

Marguerite is followed into her dream by two others, who have tracked her to the magician's lair. One is Stephen Cranleigh, who is ambitious to marry her. The other is Cranleigh's sister Elsie, who is worried about her brother. They become the cave-people Stele and Elsya, sent abroad from their own land in search of a mate for Stele. They are drawn into a strange collusion with Rita, eventually emerging with her into an isolated valley connected to the outer world by a dangerous cave-system. The king who rules this valley and its people lives a peculiar double life, being king also of a tribe outside the valley. His outer lands are menaced by creatures like giant rats which are swarming across the continent, and his subjects within the valley are fomenting rebellion. There are ominous matters of family politics to be settled before the fate of the three strangers can be settled, but Elsya is married to the king's son and Stele is torn between the king's daughter and Rita. In the end, Stele and Rita try to reach one another in the caves, but cannot, and die on opposite sides of a stone wall, able only to touch by means of a very narrow breach. This frustrating ending seems to be symbolic of something in the relationship of Stephen Cranleigh and Marguerite Leinster once they have returned to their own world. He is insistent that he will marry her but her final response to his demand, in the line which closes the book, is distinctly ambiguous as to her feelings and her intentions.

Dream is, of course, not to be construed as an attempt to represent actual conditions of prehistory deduced from palaeontological evidence. It does not belong to the tradition of Wells' "A Story of the Stone Age", Rosny's *La Guerre du Feu* or J.V. Jensen's *The Long Journey.* Nor is it a moral fantasy like J. Leslie Mitchell's *Three Go Back* and William Golding's *The Inheritors,* both of which use the supposed fatal confrontation between Neanderthal man and our Cro-Magnon ancestors to draw conclusions about the essential nature of modern man. *Dream* does carry certain moral implications of this kind, but they are subdued and incidental. The novel has much in common with *The Island of Captain Sparrow,* in that it is a dream-fantasy whose heroine is part human and part nature-spirit,

but is has ideative links also with *The World Below* in presenting an argument about the continuity of nature and the principles on which the natural world operates, regardless of the presence or absence of man. There is a kind of glorification of the struggle for existence—but again, not strictly in Darwinian terms.

In one way *Dream* is much more pessimistic than *The Island of Captain Sparrow*. Inside the dream, the protagonists all die. There is no haven for them there, not even in the valley isolated by cliffs and caves. It is to the real world that they must return in order to live their lives—and that will be difficult, for Marguerite at least, because in some very vital sense she is not and never can be at home there; she does not *belong*. Inevitably, Fowler Wright returned to the inconclusive ending of *Dream* to write a sequel, though circumstances forced the sequel to be represented in print in a different way, encouraging the author, late in life, to add a second and slightly different sequel instead.

All Fowler Wright's longer scientific romances from *The Amphibians* to *Dream* take the reader into worlds remote from our own, into circumstances which—one way or another—are much more primitive, where the laws of nature (as Fowler Wright saw them) hold much more obvious dominion. His shorter stories written in the same period, however, follow the opposite tack: they take the reader into worlds which are less primitive, where culture has overwhelmed nature and obliterated its rule. Although the same philosophy is clearly present, the imagery of the short stories is strikingly different from the imagery of the speculative novels.

Ten short stories are gathered together in the collection *The New Gods Lead* (1932). Seven of these are grouped together under the heading "Where the New Gods Lead" while three are simply headed "Also". Actually, it is not entirely clear why "Appeal" is included in the main sequence, as it is a trivial story which does not bear on the same issues as the rest, but the probability is that Fowler Wright considered that the seven stories might be seen as referring to a common future history, and "Appeal" is there simply because—unlike "The Rat", which is excluded—it does not contradict anything in the other six.

The best of the stories in this book constitute what is perhaps the most vitriolic vision of the future ever produced; they have an imaginative savagery of tone and content that is quite unparallelled. All of Fowler Wright's preoccupations and anxieties regarding the march of progress are subjected here to bitterly sarcastic extrapolation.

"Justice" concerns the effects of a law passed in 1966 to establish a scale of penalties for the killing of persons by careless motorists. In the interests of rationality the penalties depend on the age of the person killed, being greater according to the expectation of life of which the victims are deprived. By this time, the continued use of birth control has resulted in a population where very many people are old, and the fact that the law has been altered to make the killing of old people free of penalty had its inevitable consequence: in 1972 there is a massacre of the ancient and enfeebled, in which hundreds of thousands perish.

"This Night", set in the year 1980, is the story of an unorthodox courtship mounted by a technocratic scientist, which takes the form of emotionless blackmail. As it happens, he fails to have his evil way, but only because of an accident of fate. The shape of this developing future is indicated here:

> There had been a time, in the earlier part of the century, when the world had awakened to the fact that the advances in scientific knowledge threatened the destruction of the

> race—were even putting the power of that destruction into any ignorant or criminal hand which might be disposed to use it . . . The scientists had replied that the pursuit of knowledge could not by stayed, but that the remedy lay in restricting the circulation of that which would be dangerous in unworthy hands. Laws had been passed to this end, and in twenty years they had borne such fruit that the scientists had become a caste who were above the obligations of their fellows and beyond their laws. They had resurrected a forgotten tongue, which only the elect among them were allowed to learn, and in which their records were kept. No one had more than a vague conception of what their knowledge had become, or the power it gave them. So they ruled by a great fear. (ToS p.24)

"Brain" carries this fragmentary future history forward to 1990, a few months after the suppression of a rebellion when "the last traditions of barbarism had gone down". Now the technocracy is quite secure and one Professor Brisket is its President. He is planning to secure absolute power for himself, having discovered various substances which can either augment the intellectual power of the brain or instil a slave-like docility. Unfortunately, his plan misfires because over-hastiness in testing his brain stimulant leads him to overlook the fact that the augmentation of intelligence is followed by a corollary encouragement of altruism. Display of this altruism, of course, leads to his instant removal from authority—nothing could be more out of place in a technocracy.

The temporal sequence of the stories is then broken. "Appeal", set in the year 1950, is the story of a trial in which the crucial evidence is that of the murder victim, recalled by means of a spiritualist medium. "Proof" is the ironic story of the French Revolution of 1984, which leads to the setting up of a eugenic tribunal charged with sending the inefficient and the inadequate to the guillotine. The plot describes some subtle and absurd test-cases which are invoked in order to prove the wisdom of the revolution and to decide who should be its victims.

A great leap forward in time then takes the future history into the 93rd year of the Eugenic Era. "P.N. 40" tells the story of a rebellion by two lovestruck individuals against the laws of their orderly and rational society, where marriage and childbirth are strictly regulated. The eponymous heroine is a characteristic Fowler Wright invention, decisive and daring, and it is she who formulates the plan by which she and 48 V.C. can escape from oppressive order into a perilous chaos from which they might or might not be safely delivered.

The last of the "New Gods" sequence is "Automata", which is not so much a story as a philosophical commentary on man's use of machines, foreseeing the slow usurpation of all human activity and privilege by mechanical devices. The first section is an imaginary address delivered to a meeting of the British Association, and is straightforward exposition:

> The humility of science will hesitate to prophesy the detailed incidence of that which may be foreseen in its inevitable outline, but it may not be a too-rash guess that the industrial workman and the domestic servant will be the first to disappear from their places in the national life. Some few may remain for generations, even for centuries. But is it reasonable to suppose that the nation will continue altruistically to support the persons and families of industrial workers who are no longer needed? For themselves there may be some generous provision to avert the euthanasia which would be the evident economic expedient for the aged horse, or the dog of which a woman has grown tired, but would it be tolerable that we should allow the propagation of their useless children? (ToS p.116)

The remaining sections of the story observe the working out of this hypothesis. In the first, middle-aged matrons gather to drink tea and compare notes on their automatic children. The preferability of machines to men is already abundantly evident to them:

There is a difference between the greatest man and the simplest machine which can never be bridged, and our highest wisdom is to observe it with reverence and humility. It is not a difference in degree, but in kind. We act from confused and contradictory impulses, but they with the inevitability of universal law. In a word, we are human and they divine. (ToS p.120)

In the last scene, the last man in the world reviews his situation as he fails to complete the task assigned to him, and then goes quietly to his inevitable fate; to be scrapped:

He knew that he ought to move . . . he knew that the oiler would be here in a few minutes to caress and comfort the joints and bearings of his companions . . . Yet he sat still, wondering . . . The door opened, and an automaton entered. It was one of those which still bore a vague resemblance to humanity, the pattern of the first designers not having been entirely abandoned. It was thus that the human race might leave the impress of its passing flicker of life for a million years—perhaps for ever—as a mollusc may leave its fossil imprint in the enduring rock. (ToS p.125)

Although the other three stories in the collection are excluded from the main group, they are not dissimilar in spirit. "The Rat" is perhaps Fowler Wright's best short story, and has been widely reprinted. It concerns the discovery of a serum of immortality by an inconspicuous country doctor, who proves its efficacy by rejuvenating an aged rat and then falls to contemplating the effects of using it on his patients. He hesitates when he realizes that he must be prepared to immortalize the evil as well as the good, the mean as well as the generous. As he ponders further he finds that the long-term implications of his discovery are frightening. Life will be transformed once the balancing factor of death is banished from human affairs, and it will not be transformed for the better. Even when he considers his own particular case he realizes that there is only a limited sense in which he can restore his youth, and that the prospect of living for a thousand years has its horrific aspect as well as its attractive one. He resolves to bury his discovery, but learns to his cost that new things can be as difficult to destroy as they are to create.

In this story there is not the same sarcastic exaggeration as in the stories of the main sequence, nor does the author seem quite so certain of his own moral ground. Both these things work to the advantage of the story, and it is the most eloquent of them all.

The second of the three stories outside the main group, "Rule", is a rather frivolous political satire in which a government elected on a platform of reckless promises cements its position by manipulating popular culture. The idea is an interesting one, but it is not well worked-out in the story. The third and last of these stories is, however, a much more important and revealing one. It is a fable which gives the most explicit expression of Fowler Wright's basic philosophical position. In the book it is called simply "The Choice", but it will be remembered that the magazine version was subtitled "An Allegory of Blood and Tears".

A man and a woman who have suffered a great deal in their lives on Earth are reunited after death in Heaven, thanks to the mercy of God. They settle down to enjoy the rewards of virtue, but find life in Heaven to be pointless in its peacefulness—to be literally soul-destroying. They ask to return to a world fit for people to live in, and God sets squarely before them the prospect they will face:

Birth will be a darkness behind and death a darkness before you. You will forget all that you are or have been. You will endure the night of the womb, as your body grows from the current of another's blood, and her thoughts control you; knowing panic when she fears, and causeless joy when she pleasures. You will know the terror of birth when you are cast out with a body which is not yours, but has been made weak or strong by the passions of others. You will live through helpless years under the controls of those who may be foolish or brutal. You will be scourged by the customs of the tribe that breeds you, and enslaved by instincts that

you cannot kill, though your mind may hate them. You will know remorse and shame. You will desire things which you cannot reach, or you will find your gains to be worthless. You will know pain that is more dreadful than any sorrow, and sorrow that is more dreadful than any pain. You will do evil to others, and you will suffer evil continually. At the last, you will die miserably, facing the curtain of death without assurance of immortality. For if you go, you go blindly. (ToS p.166)

Even though they know that rebirth will part them, and that they may never meet again, the man and the woman elect to take their chances. The simple heroism of their decision gives the story a superficial appeal which actually undermines the moral message, because one has to think twice about it to realize what a remarkably harsh story it really is.

As with many modern fables featuring the Divine Person—those written by T.F. Powys are perhaps the closest analogues—"The Choice" emerges from a peculiar amalgam of scepticism and belief. It is neither the ironic play of the atheist (like Wells' "A Vision of Judgment") nor the respectful tampering with orthodoxy of a writer who still accepts, fundamentally, the God of the Churchmen (as, for instance, in *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis). In its way, it is more radical than either. Its basic contention is that Christians are wrong to try to balance the sufferings of this world against the rewards of Heaven. Heaven is no proper reward at all, and its presumed peaceful constancy might better be regarded as a kind of purgatory. It is in life, if at all, that we must seek and find what rewards there are to balance out the penalties of pain and misery extracted from human beings by their nature and circumstances. This is a species of Epicureanism, but of a remarkably bleak and pessimistic kind, which echoes once again the message of the preacher Ecclesiastes.

Those who find Fowler Wright a difficult writer to come to terms with may well find in "The Choice" the best key to his outlook and personality: a striking combination of an image of the world which is desolate and frightful with a determined refusal to accept despair as logical or necessary in consequence. Fowler Wright was perhaps as ready as any other writer of his generation to find not Jerusalem but Pandemonium a-building in England's green and pleasant land, but he was not ready to forsake Hell to claim a fake salvation. If Hell was come to Earth, no one had to like it, but it was man's job to live in it as best he might, and not to accept the softer spiritual options offered by the cowardly imagination.

It seems that Fowler Wright must have turned this argument upon his own predilection for escapist fantasies, because he never again provided an idyllic ending like the one he attached to *The Island of Captain Sparrow*. All his other dream-fantasies are stories of escape *from* Heaven rather than *to* it.

Fowler Wright's new imaginative novel for 1932 was *Beyond the Rim*, the first and by far the best of his lost race stories. It is the story of an expedition to the Antarctic undertaken partly to test the proposition that the world might, after all, be flat and partly in response to a strange tale told by one Captain Sparshott of his adventures during a previous expedition.

The group, led by soldier-of-fortune Franklin Arden and the heiress Eleanor D'Acre, eventually reach a warm valley dominated by an ancient volcano, isolated from the outside world and reachable (as usual) only *via* a complicated cave-system. (Freud might have had some comment to make on Fowler Wright's fascination with isolated mini-worlds which can be reached only *via* caves, but we know what Fowler Wright thought of

Freud.) In this valley live the descendants of the survivors of the pilgrim ship *Morning Star,* which left England hoping to reach the New World some three centuries before. Several Puritan families eke out a precarious living from the land. There are God's-Truths, Trustwells and Cloutsclads. They are led by the excellent Michael God's-Truth, but he is only one of a council of bigoted fools who contend that the strangers are demons who must be destroyed. The colony is periodically menaced by the rough-living descendants of cast-out heretics, who are known as Anabaptists, though no one can now remember what their actual heresy was, and the elders are still fearful of heresy. The newcomers win the support of Michael God's-Truth by testifying at the trial of his daughter Patience, who is deemed a heretic because she contends that the outer world may not have been destroyed. Arden and his companions testify that indeed it has not, but this offends the other members of the community. There is a climactic battle against the Anabaptists, and then Arden and Eleanor make a desperate bid to escape across the ice, pursued by men from the valley who will kill them rather than allow the outer world to know of their existence.

Beyond the Rim is a pure adventure story with no overtly didactic content, and as such is oddly effective. It is one of the most well-worked of all Fowler Wright's books, maintaining tension throughout and building to an excellent double climax. Eleanor D'Acre and Franklin Arden recapitulate yet again the peculiar relationship typical of so many Fowler Wright couples—he competent yet vacillating, distinctly lacking in some crucial element of resolve; she requiring masculine aid to compensate for physical deficiency yet possessed of greater strength of character and determination. There is a similar imbalance between the two minor characters in the expedition—Eleanor's cousin Bunford Weldon and secretary Gwen Collinson—which is so much to the former's disadvantage that Gwen finds a more suitable mate in Michael God's-Truth's son and elects to stay in the primitive haven under the volcano.

It was in Fowler Wright's next imaginative novel, however, that he presented his most careful and detailed examination of a relationship between a man and a woman, offering a much more carefully balanced situation for consideration. This novel was *Power,* published in 1933.

Power belongs to a class of stories which became common in the 1930s, in which lone inventors come upon discoveries so momentous as to offer an opportunity to blackmail the world. Examples include E. Charles Vivian's *Star Dust* (1925), C.S. Forester's *The Peacemaker* (1934), Francis Beeding's *The One Sane Man* (1934) and S. Andrew Wood's *I'll Blackmail the World* (1935). In each case a man whose identity is at first concealed demonstrates that he has the power to devastate the world and then begins to make his demands, which are often rather well-intentioned, usually including the abandonment of war. In such stories the protagonist's ambitions are almost always thwarted—Neil Bell's *The Lord of Life,* published in the same year as *Power,* is one of the very few in which the scientist goes ahead and destroys the world. The best story in this vein—Forester's—is both scathing and harrowing in its portrayal of a well-meaning but somewhat weak-spirited man who betrays himself to the mob in trying to save men from the implications of their own collective stupidity.

Fowler Wright, in setting out to write a novel of this kind was by no means the last in the field, but nevertheless seems to have been aware that he was working within a tradition. *Power* is not the only novel of the species in which the blackmailer achieves

temporary success, but it is the only one which deliberately sets out to examine, carefully and painstakingly, how he might tackle the practical project of achieving political reform even within one country.

The hero of *Power* is Stanley Maitland. He is not a scientist and is not personally responsible for the discovery of the devastating force with which he threatens the world—it comes into his possession when he murders the actual inventor to save the world from a less altruistic blackmailer than he. The book is basically his story, explaining how he proves to the people of England that he really does have the power to annihilate all life from the land, and how he is thus grudgingly granted the authority to use Parliament to exact such laws as he wishes for a period of one year. It is, however, also the story of his wife, Lady Crystal, who is shocked to the core by his betrayal of party loyalties in taking such unilateral action, and estranges herself from him, perhaps too rapidly, and with ultimately fatal consequences.

Power begins from the same ideological standpoint as *The New Gods Lead,* and the early dialogue between Maitland and the inventor Feltham explains his justification for trying to turn aside the current of history:

> I began to think, and look round, and what I saw was a great civilization drifting to destruction with no leaders at all. Of course, other civilizations have gone down before ours, though we don't always know how. I suppose they've been led into the abyss.
>
> But the curious thing about ours is that it's not being led at all. It's just stumbling on in a blind leaderless self-slavery, and if anyone interferes to lead or guide it, it just shakes him off its back in an impatient irritated way. *All the force comes from below.* I entered political circles and I found that no one dreams of governing in England today. They listen with their ears to the ground.
>
> If any governing's done at all, it's in Whitehall, not Westminster. And you get the anomaly there that the men who govern are all controlled by the same fear,—the fear of a blind force, a system to which they are slaves, and which no-one dreams of defying.
>
> Democracy's got the bit in its teeth, and it dashes on like a bolting horse, boasting of its own speed, and proud of the fact that no-one can rein it in now. It hasn't the faintest idea of where it's going, or why . . .
>
> We are looking at a civilisation without control, and without the freedom that control gives. We are a nation of slaves, and slaves to a tyrant that we cannot kill, being beyond our reach. Our new rulers are the aggregate folly and the aggregate weakness of mankind. Comfort and cowardice are the new gods. (*Power* pp.24-5)

Later in the same dialogue Maitland pins the blame for this lack of control on the march of science, which has become not merely the handmaiden but the actual focal point of this aggregate folly and aggregate weakness. At this stage Maitland seems to see clearly enough what has to be done, but when he actually takes up the reins of power it is a different story; he quickly becomes hesitant and decays slowly towards irresolution. He raises tariff barriers to protect British industry, then lowers some again when some firms begin profiteering. He exiles all supporters of birth control and abortion. For one reason or another, though, his plans then grind slowly to a halt.

Partly, it is clear, his hesitancy comes from a lack of support. Although a barrier already existed between himself and his wife (because of her reluctance to have children) her defection is deeply wounding, and although her sister Jehane, who acts as his secretary, is willing to offer the moral and emotional support that Crystal will not, both are compelled to honour the contract which he has with his wife. Partly, though, the hesitation is not really Maitland's at all, but the author's. Fowler Wright—as always, making up his plot as he went along—was drawn away from the business of political planning, apparently intimidated by the sheer magnitude of the imaginative task he had

set himself. Instead, he allowed *Power* to develop into a kind of thriller not unlike his crime stories. A group of cabinet rebels who have refused to stay on in Maitland's administration exploit Crystal's ambivalence to trick her into providing the means to lure Maitland from his safe refuge. He is kidnapped and removed to that clichéd imprisonment beloved of all writers of melodrama—a private lunatic asylum. There he is blackmailed in his turn as his captors try to take control of his deadly weapon for their own benefit.

The story eventually reaches the kind of climax that is typical of thrillers of the period, dramatic enough in its eventfulness but serving only to disguise the fact that the real issues raised by the book have been conveniently forgotten. Maitland is freed from his enemies, and may presumably still act as a political force even though his weapon is no longer effective, but what he will do with his influence we are not told.

Fowler Wright had set himself a task in *Power* that even he believed impossible. He did not think that any man really could turn aside the evil march of progress. The real implication of Maitland's speech quoted above is not that the world needs benevolent dictators, but rather that even benevolent dictators could do little to change things. The plot of the novel had to be turned aside, because there really was very little progress it could make in the direction it was initially pointed.

In the same year that *Power* appeared Fowler Wright published three other novels. One was his second historical novel, *Lord's Right in Languedoc,* a romance of knightly rivalries set in the time of the crusades. The others were Sydney Fowler novels—the lighthearted *Arresting Delia* and the first of the two sequels to *The Bell Street Murders, The Secret of the Screen.* All but the last of these had been written during the previous year.

Surviving among Fowler Wright's papers is a five-year diary covering the years 1933-37. At the beginning of this period Fowler Wright could still be reckoned a successful author; though his recent books had not sold as well as his early successes he was still managing to publish serious work. His *Life of Sir Walter Scott* had appeared in 1932 and other projects dear to his heart must still have seemed to him to be viable. During the five years covered by the diary, though, things changed considerably. He began to find it more and more difficult to publish his more ambitious work, and the pattern of his publications changed markedly, moving downmarket year by year. His crime stories continued to appear at the same pace, but his other works began to take on the forms of other kinds of popular thriller. He was still writing more ambitious books, but they were not appearing in print.

In the back of the diary, presumably begun when he began the diary itself, is a list headed "Books I intend to write if I live these five years 1933-37." The list is a long one and was extended at various times, though even the later titles are marked "1933 ideas"—the first ones were presumably ones he had in mind at the end of 1932.

The list is headed by *For God and Spain,* a historical novel about Cortez. This was to become Fowler Wright's second major project after *The Song of Arthur,* and he was to labour over it for many years. It was never to sell, and exists today in complete typescript, 1199 pages long. The second item on the list is a "novel on Mary Stuart", but this was never done; nor was the third item, whose nature is unclear from the one-word title. Of the next half-dozen items—all, apparently, intended as more commercial endeavours—three are sequels to earlier works. *The Secret of the Screen* is one; another—a "Sea Epic

of *Deluge*"—was never written. The third, initially written down as "Sequel to *Dream*" is marked "done 1934" and *"Vengeance of Gwa". Vengeance of Gwa* was actually published in 1934 under the pseudonym Anthony Wingrave, and is not as it stands a sequel to *Dream*. Given the evidence of the diary, however, it seems that it *is* actually a further adventure of Marguerite Leinster, from which the introduction and epilogue were removed—presumably because Harrap rejected it (their cheap edition of *Dream*, published in 1933, probably sold badly) and Thornton Butterworth, who took it, did not want to publish a sequel to a book issued by a rival.

Several other titles on the diary list did eventually materialize as books or stories, though some of them were long-delayed. Other titles marked "done 1933" are *David*, which was published in 1934, and *The Knights of Malta*, which did not appear until 1942 (as *The Siege of Malta)*. The former is a novel about the Biblical king—"restored", like *The Song of Songs* from the fragmentary account offered in the Old Testament—while the latter is a completion of a novel left unfinished by Sir Walter Scott. It seems, therefore, that for a while Fowler Wright turned almost exclusively to the writing and planning of historical romances. Another one that he started at this time is marked in the diary as "story about a witchfinder", but this ended up as a rather unsatisfactory novelette eventually published in 1946. Apart from the sequel to *Dream* Fowler Wright apparently planned only one speculative novel in 1933; this appears in the list as *The Splendid Curse*, although a subsequent note identifies it with the future-war trilogy which he wrote between 1935 and 1937. Interestingly, *The Screaming Lake* appears on the first list, though he did not get around to writing it until 1936. Although this was the second of his lost race stories to see print it seems to have been completed after *The Hidden Tribe*, which was written in 1935 although not published until 1938.

The list makes it appear that Fowler Wright was planning to ease up on crime stories—the only one actually listed apart from *The Secret of the Screen* is *Who Else But She?*, written and published in 1934—but it may simply be that he was not given to planning his potboilers so far in advance. Anyhow, his enthusiasm for crime fiction was reignited in 1935 when his crime story of that year, *Three Witnesses*, was filmed in Hollywood. That year—which also saw the newspaper serialization of the first of his future war novels—was the last year in which the promise of great commercial success briefly flared up again.

The fact that Fowler Wright's fortunes declined so markedly by 1937 is reflected in a decline in the quality of his published works, but this may not have been symptomatic of the waning of his creative powers, despite his age. The work into which he poured most of his energy during those years remains mostly unpublished. The books that got into print were mostly potboilers. Nevertheless, his fantasies, in particular, still contained material of interest in the context of this essay.

Vengeance of Gwa strongly resembles *Dream* in all important respects. As before, we find an independent, strong-willed heroine who enters into an uneasy alliance with savage folk not of her own kind, and eventually witnesses a destructive war for survival between that tribe and another, more rapacious species.

The heroine in this incarnation is Raina, who emerges into the savage world from a great city inhabited by a highly-civilized people resembling the Atlanteans of Captain Sparrow's island. This city is a sterile counter-Utopia akin to Heaven in "The Choice" and forerunner of the world to be described in much more detail in *The Adventure of Wyndham Smith:*

They had long conquered all the evils which plague mankind. They had no lack of delectable things. They had vanquished pain, and made death no more than a pleasant dream, that will come to those who begin to yawn for the night. The beatitudes would have had no meaning for them, who neither quarrelled nor mourned.

Once, in its tenth year, each child was exposed to heat and cold, to hunger and pain, on the outside of the walls, and he would not ask to feel them again, having had enough of the outer things. (VoG p.9)

Raina, accepting exile from the city because she cannot abide its sterility, comes to the coastal strip where the Baradi live, ruled over by their king Bwene. Their territory is limited and the tribe face a resource crisis, but they are hemmed in on one side by a more powerful humanoid tribe, the Ho-Tus, and on the other by a fearful horde of ape-men. The time is approaching when the tribe must fight one or the other, or perish. Bwene also has personal troubles, caused by the fact that his first wife, Bira, is both faithless and, apparently, incapable of bearing him a son. He has, in the past, taken a second wife (Gwa) but she disappeared mysteriously shortly after becoming pregnant. The implication is that Bira has murdered her, but there is no proof of this.

When Raina arrives in the Baradi territory Bwene begins to consider her as a possible new wife, thus placing her in great peril from Bira's jealousy. The plot concerns the working-out of this situation, against a background of bloody conflict as the tribe clashes first with the Ho-Tus and then with the ape-men. As in *Dream,* nature is painted very red in tooth and claw, and a grim realism dictates the actions and decisions of the tribesmen. In the end, Bwene's tribe is almost annihilated, but a few survive, though Bira is destroyed when proof of her crimes is revealed. Bwene's final demand that Raina should become his wife, and her hesitant response, recall the concluding scene in the epilogue of *Dream,* and suggest that Bwene is Stephen Cranleigh, still trying to marry Marguerite Leinster. (A comment in the introduction to *Spiders' War* supports this interpretation.)

Like *Dream, Vengeance of Gwa* owes nothing to our knowledge of prehistory. The author admits this freely, obliquely in a little prefatory quote attached to the text and more explicitly in a blurb which he wrote for a reissue of the book in 1946:

The book is a fantasy to the extent that it is set in a remote period of the Earth's history, and populates it with races of men, and some other creatures, which cannot be precisely identified with any of which remains or fossil impressions have been discovered. It is realism in that the conditions which it presents are logical and credible, and include nothing which may not quite probably have occurred in the immense period during which the human race has existed.

It postulates a fundamental morality which is independent of place or period, and it contains a philosophy of life, which is briefly that hazard is better than security, effort than success. (VoG dw)

The basic pattern of relationships is less tangled in *Vengeance of Gwa* than in *Dream.* It is basically a triangular situation involving Bwene, Bira and Raina. Triangular situations are, of course, common in Fowler Wright's work, though they differ markedly in kind: the present example is not at all like that containing Martin and Helen Webster and Claire Arlington, or that containing Stanley and Crystal Maitland and Jehane. There is, in fact, a curious "developmental sequence" to be seen in these triangles if they are placed in chronological order. In the first, the first wife is steadfastly loyal; in the second she is partially disloyal, but is retained without being required to make room for her ostensible rival; in the third she is wholly disloyal but discarded and replaced only with difficulty and after much tribulation. If one considers this sequence, the remarkable opening scenes of *Spider's War,* to be fully discussed in due course, can be seen to have a context.

Although the significance of the chain of triangles is something of a puzzle, one thing that might be noted right away is that they cannot reflect any change in Fowler Wright's attitude to his own wives. If *Deluge* probably does relate metaphorically to his own situation, *Vengeance of Gwa* certainly does not—what is being worked out in this exemplary chain is at a much deeper level of philosophical abstraction, having to do with the "fundamental morality" referred to in his description of the story. This point will be taken up again in connection with *Spiders' War.*

The one momentary flicker of Fowler Wright's fame as his career went into decline was partly the result of a visit to Hitler's Germany. As might be expected, given his fears about science and developing tyranny, the new Germany seemed to him to pose an ominous threat to the world. Its ideologies stood in sharp contrast to everything that he believed in. As his diary reveals, he had already contemplated writing a future war novel, and now this intention became focused—but instead of war being a "splendid curse" it became the promise of a new Armageddon.

Fowler Wright's trip had been commissioned by a newspaper, for whom he was to write a series of articles. These were, as might be expected, bitterly critical—so bitterly that he was asked at one point by the Foreign Office to be careful lest he prejudice delicate negotiations with Hitler. As well as the articles he began to produce a futuristic thriller which appeared in serial form in the *Daily Mail* as *1938.* (The newspaper had made productive use of future war fiction as a circulation-booster in its earliest days, when it serialized William le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910* in 1906.)

1938 was released in book form as *Prelude in Prague; a Story of the War of 1938,* and reprinted in America as *The War of 1938.* (It was also translated rapidly into several other languages.) It is remarkable for several reasons. It has a prophetic dimension in suggesting that Germany would manufacture an excuse to attack Czechoslovakia to regain part of her "traditional territories", and that this would be the prelude to much greater military ambitions. As with many other future war novels of the period, though, it transforms itself in its final chapters from a rather cliché-ridden thriller into a coldly effective horror-story which recognizes and displays the possible devastations of a new war.

The story begins with an account of Germany's strategy in building up diplomatic pressure on Czechoslovakia, leading to the creation of an excuse to launch her air-fleet against Prague. The actual story-line follows the exploits of two young Englishwomen visiting that city. One, Perdita Wyatt, is visiting her fiancé, a secretary at the British Legation; her companion, Caresse Langton, is the wife of a Foreign Office official. The plot in which they become involved is very conventional, involving secret documents planted on them by a desperate spy, the kidnapping of Perdita, and eventually their desperate attempts to escape from Prague when the bombers come. The other main character in the story is variously known as no. 973 (his identification code in the British Secret Service), Richard Steele and Adolph Zweiss. In this last guise he was once a German air ace in the Great War, but he now appears to be wholly loyal to Britain. His dual identity enables him to move through the convolutions of the plot with great ease.

Fowler Wright assumes in *Prelude in Prague* that the extent of German rearmament has been much greater than is widely known, and that they have large airfleets based in secret underground aerodromes. He also assumes that they have made considerable progress in chemical weaponry, though the new "freezing gas" only makes a peripheral

appearance in this first volume before becoming a key agent in the devastation of Britain in *Four Days War*, the second volume of the trilogy, published in 1936.

Prior to the Great War most future war stories had been jingoistic fantasies boasting about the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race and promoting a mythology of a war to end war. The actual experience of the Great War transformed the *genre*, leading to the production of many bloodcurdling tales of world-destruction by high-explosive and poison gas. In the 1920s these fictions seemed distinctly hypothetical in their extremism, but by the time Fowler Wright began to work in the tradition the possibility of a new war was beginning to seem much more real, making accounts of the next war more journalistic and more pessimistic in character. The end of *Prelude in Prague* presents a clinically horrific catalogue of atrocities, and is chillingly careless in the disposal of some of the leading characters. Only Perdita Wyatt and Steele/Zweiss make their way to relative safety. In the last chapter Germany delivers an ultimatum to Britain.

Four Days War takes up the story immediately, with the British rejection of the ultimatum and the consequent attacks of the German air fleets. Events in England are mostly seen from the viewpoint of Eustace Ashfield, a manufacturer of gas masks, and the girl he loves, aviatrix Imogen Lister. They see the horrors of widespread destruction wrought by explosives and chemical weapons. In the meantime, Perdita Wyatt has been escorted out of Prague by a German officer and has to be rescued from Nürnberg by Richard Steele, who has by now adopted a few other German identities to supplement his real one. He manages to get her back to a much-changed England before setting out to return to Germany as a one-man fifth column. By this time England is in a very poor state. Imogen Lister has been shot down and badly injured. Eustace Ashfield has been sent to work in a factory because there is no longer any room in the beleaguered community for capitalists. Chemical warfare has been supplemented by biological weaponry as foot-and-mouth disease is deliberately sown in an attempt to disrupt food supplies. America has joined in the war on England's side (so has Japan, though Russia and France have capitulated with German demands) but the Americans have decided that it is not worth trying to hold Europe. The war now comes to be seen as a kind of Holy War, with the Christian nations arrayed against the forces of a new paganism. Germany has a new military dictator, symbolically titled Prince von Teufel.

There is more auctorial commentary in *Four Days War* than either of the other volumes in the trilogy, including one chapter of exposition (chapter XIII, pp. 68-73) in which Fowler Wright delivers a scathing commentary on the sad state of contemporary England, morally decadent and quite unready for conflict. In a later expository passage Richard Steele lectures Perdita Wyatt on the many mistakes which England's leaders have made since the Great War, and wonders what the outcome might have been had things gone differently. She speaks up for love as an alternative to strife as a force in human affairs, but he is dismissive of the practicality of a society based on love, whether in its Christian version or any other. Here, briefly, there is a representation of war as the "splendid curse" of the original title as Steele attacks pacifism and argues that there is something in human nature which loves hazard, and rightly so. He concludes that the present war may "clean the world", but this shadowy optimism is rarely glimpsed again as the story proceeds. Fowler Wright remains conscious throughout that the civilization whose destruction he is describing is, in his view, rotten to the core, but the horror of his vision is so overwhelming that he cannot applaud the means of its abolition. *Four Days*

War does end with the kind of speculative summary which one often finds at the end of future war stories of the 1930s, with a series of grandiose questions about the shape of the future, but it is significant that *Meggido's Ridge*, which concludes the trilogy, does not.

In *Megiddo's Ridge* (1937) Richard Steele worms his way into the very highest councils of the new Germany, winning the trust of von Teufel. The Germans propose to exert pressure on their enemies by a mass movement of women from the occupied lands into Germany, where they will become slaves and breeding stock. (This seems to be regarded by Fowler Wright as a kind of ultimate horror, by which the Germans break all the rules of human conduct and place themselves beyond the moral pale.) Perdita Wyatt, working on scavenging detail with Eugene Ashfield in England, is captured by invading Germans and becomes part of this mass exportation, eventually being attached to the household of one Professor Sturm, inventor of a new chemical weapon. When an experiment goes wrong and destroys the family Perdita is charged with their murder and condemned to death, but Steele finds her and secures her release, sending her in a plane to pass on a vital message to the British. Although she manages to deliver the message she is killed, and Steele is executed by the Germans. In the meantime, the rival armies and air-fleets are massing for a crucial confrontation in North Africa; it seems that the decisive battle might actually be fought around the Biblical ridge of Armageddon. We are promised on the final page that von Teufel will soon die, killed by some innate physical deficiency, but that is the only hint we are given to console us regarding the probable outcome of the final battle. The conclusion is deliberately abrupt, and refuses to look forward even to ask questions about the possibility of deliverance.

Megiddo's Ridge is hardly Fowler Wright at his best. It is even less plausible than its extravagant predecessors, and lacks their very effective descriptive passages which detail the sufferings of ordinary people under the impact of high-technology war. It does, however, show him at his most relentless and perhaps his most nihilistic. By the time he wrote this section of the story he had passed through the phase of being horrified by the prospect he was describing, and had almost begun to take a frustrated delight in the business of tearing up the map of the modern world.

Alongside the future war trilogy Fowler Wright continued to publish crime stories, but his only other ventures of the period which were successful in finding a publisher were the two lost race stories issued by Robert Hale (the same publisher who produced the future war novels). Even these were not placed without difficulty—Hale first rejected *The Screaming Lake* on the grounds that it was too short, and Fowler Wright resentfully padded it out to the required length. It is obvious enough where the padding was added, for the early chapters are bloated and the later ones unreasonably terse.

The Screaming Lake combines many elements already familiar in Fowler Wright's work. The hero, venturing up the Amazon to a land from which many others have failed to return in search of the lost treasure of the Incas, meets a wild white girl held captive by an Indian tribe. Her story is much the same as that of Marcelle in *The Island of Captain Sparrow*, but her character is but a pale reflection of that model. Together they reach the refuge of the Inca and his few remaining subjects, and the girl is marked down to become the loathsome Inca's new bride. Naturally, they escape, and in an uncharacteristic bow to conventional cliché the girl turns out to be a titled heiress.

The Hidden Tribe, which Fowler Wright wrote before *The Screaming Lake*, is rather

more substantial but structurally similar. Here there is a subterranean city deep in the Libyan desert, which harbours a culture more technologically sophisticated than that of the desert nomads. It appears to be a fragment of the ancient Egyptian civilization, though its inhabitants worship Artemis. The hero and the girl who mistakenly follows him on his adventure become embroiled in a civil war in the city, and rescue another female captive. Although better-paced than *The Screaming Lake* the book self-consciously refuses to stray from the path of convention, and it is basically an exercise in pastiche.

To anyone following his published works as they appeared it must have seemed that Fowler Wright's creativity was almost burned out. It would not have been entirely surprising had this been the case—he was, after all, well into his sixties. His last imaginative novel of the 1930s was, however, by no means a pure potboiler. It is implausible in its basic premise and is not particularly well-shaped as a story, but it represents a significant return to the task of displaying where the new gods would lead.

According to the 1933-37 diary this project began as a short story, "Original Sin", which failed to sell when it was written in 1936 (it eventually appeared in *The Witchfinder* in 1946). It has clear ideative links with the stories in *The New Gods Lead*. Set in the year 2838 it takes the form of a manuscript produced by one XP4378882. This explains how the conquest of disease long ago led to the passing of laws regulating birth, and ultimately to the creation of a pain-free Utopia of comfort and ease like the one briefly mentioned in *Vengeance of Gwa*. Into this settled world has come a new ideology, the Doctrine of Futility, which advances from heresy to sacred writ as mankind passes judgment on its own pointlessness, deciding that mass suicide is an appropriate end for the race. The writer and his friend Stella plan to exempt themselves from the mass suicide to become a new Adam and Eve, and secure the last places on the line as the last few people take turns to give one another lethal injections. When the narrator has to execute the second-last woman he hesitates, seeing fear in her eyes, but Stella will have none of such prevarication and presses the needle home. This new original sin seems to the hero to be an unpromising beginning to the founding of a new world.

Thinking the idea too good to lose Fowler Wright set about expanding the theme of "Original Sin" to novel-length, producing *The Adventure of Wyndham Smith*, which was published in 1938. Smith is a medical student of our own day snatched into the future in order to take part in a bizarre and unconvincing experiment in "ego-transplantation". As a result of this the soul of the twentieth century man becomes lodged in the identity of Colpeck-4XP, who is thus subtly altered to become a potential rebel against the collective decision taken by the men of this far future to exterminate themselves.

With great difficulty, Smith/Colpeck makes a plan which will exempt him from the mass suicide along with a girl named Vinette, whose character has a fatal flaw (by the standards of this hyper-rational era). This time the mass-suicide is to be followed by mass-cremation, and there is a dramatic battle as the last few pass into the fiery chamber and Smith's plan is discovered. As in "Original Sin" there is a brief moment when it seems that a second woman might survive, but Vinette passes sentence of death upon her.

The two survivors then go out into the greater world, now left to the dominion of the giant agricultural machines which carry on despite the demise of their erstwhile masters. They are not yet safe because a precaution has been taken against the possibility of some individuals opting out of the suicide pact: there is a group of mechanical trackers and killers which has been programmed to search for them and hunt them down. In time,

these and all the other machines will rust into immobility but for a while they will have to be avoided at all costs.

Having taken the same kind of choice as other Fowler Wright characters before them, Smith and Vinette flee into the wilderness to build for themselves a new life in circumstances which are harsh and demanding. The future stretches before them, vast and uncertain, but the author provides a token climax by arranging a crucial confrontation between his hero and the killer automata, whose resolution is made to stand as a conclusion. As with other novels of this period, the ending does seem clipped, as though the author wanted to get it over with, having lost his imaginative impetus. The same criticism might be applied to the last of his historical novels, *Ordeal of Barata,* which was published the following year.

By the time the war began Fowler Wright's prolific phase had come to an end. No doubt the war itself had something to do with his slowing down, and one of his last projects mounted before it began, dealing with a contemporary *cause célèbre,* was suppressed because the war changed the circumstances of one of its protagonists, but there is a sense in which he had simply reached the end of his tether. Between 1940 and 1944 he still managed to publish six books, but one was the long-completed *Siege of Malta* and the other five were mediocre crime stories, two featuring Mr Jellipot and three comprising a trilogy about the exploits of an unlikely group called the Mildew Gang. In 1945 he published another Jellipot novel and returned briefly to speculative fiction with the Sydney Fowler novel *The Adventure of the Blue Room*[2]. This is by far the worst of his scientific romances, and perhaps the worst of all his published novels. As with the future war trilogy it proceeds from the premise that the transformation of war by scientific discovery will threaten Armageddon. It is set in 1990, eleven years after the third Great War, and deals with a threat to the balance of terror which is preventing further conflicts. The plot quickly deserts the arena of international intrigue to retreat into the house of a scientist, in whose rooms the fate of the world is very implausibly settled.

Fowler Wright's situation changed again, though, when he acquired a new job, editing *Books of Today,* a magazine published by the London booksellers Hatchards, mainly to promote their wares. Fowler Wright wrote articles for the magazine on a number of subjects, literary and political, and was eventually able to use the company behind the journal, Books of Today Ltd., to begin publishing his own works once again. Under this imprint he reprinted several volumes, including *The World Below, Vengeance of Gwa* (this time under his own name) and *Elfwin.* He issued a small pamphlet reprinting two short stories from *The New Gods Lead,* entitled *Justice and The Rat: Two Famous Stories* and later put together a new collection of more recent stories, *The Witchfinder.* This included only two speculative stories, "Original Sin" and the eccentric comedy "The Temperature of Gehenna Sue", about a showgirl turned literally frigid by a scientist commissioned to break her romance with a playboy.

This new adventure in self-promotion soon came to an end and Fowler Wright returned to other projects. One more crime story appeared in 1947, but his other publication of that year was a new translation of *Marguerite de Valois* by Alexandre Dumas. This was followed up by a "redaction" of Lord Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii,* removing some of the padding which that author had put into his famous novel in order to fit it into the three-decker format of its initial publication.

At this point in time Fowler Wright's career as a creative writer appeared to have run its course. He still had unpublished work on hand, but it seemed unlikely that he would publish anything else of consequence that was wholly new; he was by now well into his seventies. There was, however, one last development still to come in his chequered career.

Fowler Wright's brief period of fame in America was long gone, but he was not entirely forgotten there. *Deluge* had faded entirely from the memory of most of its tens of thousands of readers, but one particular group of its admirers had unusually long memories: the members of the science-fiction fan community, who had found in *Deluge, The Island of Captain Sparrow* and *The World Below* some of the few works published outside the specialist pulp magazines that were of interest to them. *The Island of Captain Sparrow* had already been reprinted in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* in 1946 and short stories by Wright had been reprinted in the *Avon Fantasy Reader* and in some of the pioneering hardcover anthologies of sf edited by Groff Conklin and August Derleth. *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* also reprinted *The Adventure of Wyndham Smith* in 1950. The really important development in the sf world during the post-war years was, however, the emergence of small specialty publishing houses operated by fans. These publishers were actively looking for classic material to bring back into print and two came to Fowler Wright. August Derleth's Arkham House issued *The Throne of Saturn,* a short story collection including the whole of *The New Gods Lead* plus the two futuristic fantasies from *The Witchfinder,* in 1949. In the same year Shasta brought out a new edition of *The World Below.* The Arkham House volume was reprinted by an English publisher and the two parts of *The World Below* were reissued again in 1951 as two "Galaxy Novels".

Fowler Wright cannot have made much money out of these reprints. The Shasta edition of *The World Below* sold more than 2,000 copies, but most of these were at generous levels of discount, and *The Throne of Saturn* remained in print for many years before the 3,000-copy Arkham edition was exhausted. However, this interest from America did help to reignite Fowler Wright's enthusiasm for speculative fiction, and he decided to try to become a science fiction writer. Forrest Ackerman became his American agent and he began grinding out stories aimed at the American sf market. Unfortunately, very little came of this late burst of effort, and only one new work actually reached print: *Spiders' War,* published in America in 1954.

It is not entirely certain that *Spiders' War* was actually written in the early 1950s. It might conceivably have been written much earlier, though there is one textual reference which dates it later than 1945. It certainly seems much better than Fowler Wright's other early 1950s sf stories, if the few fragments which remain of the latter are typical, but this may only mean that it was the first of them, and that it extracted the best from the new burst of creativity.[3]

Spiders' War is a sequel to *Dream,* and has a brief prologue in which the heroine in her contemporary incarnation—now Marguerite Cranleigh, having obviously married her persistent suitor—asks whether the magician can send her into the future rather than the past. He assures her that there is no difficulty, largely because there is no difference: past, present and future are "all one".

The opening chapters of the story proper have provoked much comment, though the book as a whole is usually treated dismissively. The heroine wakes into her dream to find herself tied up. She is now Gleda, and has been captured by one Lemno, who intends to kill her and butcher her body for its meat. After seeing Lemno's shrewish wife Destra,

however, Gleda suggests that he would do better to change his plans. Lemno, struck by the logic of her argument, kills Destra (without any apparent compunction) and frees Gleda to be his wife.

The shock-value of this episode is considerable, and when cited alongside the ending of *Deluge* it can be made to suggest—misleadingly—a certain amorality in the author's outlook. Undoubtedly the incident is meant to shock, but it is not an arbitrary piece of nastiness.

Lemno's tribe, like Bwene's, is caught in a desperate ecological squeeze. Its crops and livestock have been devastated by disease. Cannibalism has been reluctantly adopted as an alternative to starvation, but only as an emergency measure. The episode where Destra is murdered arises from a two-stage argument. Firstly, Fowler Wright suggests that if people are carnivorous anyhow, then they should be prepared to eat human meat if no other is available. Secondly, given that this is the case, they should be prepared to be realistic in selecting their prey. If no one in the community has conveniently died, then someone must be killed. Gleda is a member of another tribe, and hence fairer game than a member of the immediate community, but Lemno's second thoughts are logical enough given his particular circumstances. Destra is a bad wife, and Gleda promises to be a good one.

Fowler Wright presents this episode as an examplar of a moral code in action: a code which is neither squeamish nor hypocritical. It becomes the starting-point for a debate about laws, and how the behaviour of members of a society should properly be regulated. Lemno argues that if punishment for crimes is legitimate at all, then it should not be carried out impersonally. Rather, members of the community should take responsibility for their own decisions about just deserts. (It is worth noting here that Fowler Wright did not believe in corporal punishment for his children, but required them to design appropriate punishments for themselves when they did wrong.)

This argument about crime and punishment then extends to an argument about the nature of society; it becomes the cornerstone of a manifesto for an idiosyncratic anarchism. More than any other community in Fowler Wright's work Lemno's approaches a state which, if hardly ideal, is as satisfactory as a human society can be. It is, of course, a fantastic society—its political decisions are taken by telepathic plebiscite—but it is the closest Fowler Wright ever came to describing a way of life really fit for human beings. It is highly significant that Marguerite Cranleigh asks the magician whether she may carry into this future dream a memory of what she has been—thus, conscious comparisons can be made between this world and ours, further assisted by the fact that Lemno is a historian researching our time. It is equally significant that there is no epilogue; as far as we know the heroine never returns to the present. In Lemno she has found the one version of Stephen Cranleigh with whom she can be satisfied.

The beliefs of an author must not, of course, be carelessly deduced from the beliefs of his characters. One thing that is certain is that had Lemno been a mere projection of Fowler Wright, he would have been just as unable to bring himself to kill Destra as Martin Webster was unable to kill the abortionist in *Dawn*. Fowler Wright is not recommending, nor even endorsing, the course of action followed by his hero. He is dealing with a hypothetical case, trying to follow through the logical implications of a general philosophy of life. If this particular instance seems cruel, that is mainly because in Fowler Wright's philosophy nature has its cruel side, though it is not to be refused respect—even

reverence—on account of it. In the end, Lemno and Fowler Wright both argue, the cruelties of natural justice are less than, and preferable to, the purely human cruelties that are the products of our unnatural way of living.

The plot of *Spiders' War* follows the same formula as that of *Dream* and *Vengeance of Gwa*. Again, the tribe under pressure must fight for new land. Other, more powerful tribes dominate some neighbouring lands, and in order to make a bid for virgin territory it is necessary to cross a region which is the habitation of gigantic spiders created long before when a biological experiment went wrong.

Lemno leads a group of his people into the land of the spiders. Gleda is with him, and so also is Jalna, who is ambitious to displace her as Lemno's new wife. After a great deal of action, involving not only the spiders but also the rival tribe from which Gleda came, a new balance is attained. Peace is made between the tribes, though not without great difficulty, largely by virtue of the happenstance that Gleda was a princess in her own land. Jalna is bartered away in marriage to the king, Gleda's brother. The spiders are defeated by the collective efforts of the human tribes, and are all but exterminated. Typically, though, Fowler Wright refuses to allow the victory to be total, and makes sure that a vital cocoon of eggs survives. There can be no lasting peace, no certainty of survival—it would be unfortunate, in his view, if there were.

Spiders' War, though it has to be read in the context of Fowler Wright's work as a whole, perhaps offers a clearer version of his underlying philosophy than any other. It tells us quite explicitly that civilization is a historical and spiritual dead end, and that despite all the torments and brutalities of living within the system of nature, such a life is nevertheless to be preferred to the attempt to escape from the rule of nature into a technological cage.

This is, of course, not a message likely to appeal to many twentieth century readers (science fiction fans, perhaps, least of all) but one thing that can be said for it is that it faces the issue squarely, without the silly tissue of illusions that are used to sugar-coat the pill by other modern followers in the footsteps of Rousseau.

It is not simply a general philosophy of life that is at stake in *Spiders' War,* though, but also a more personal one. Marguerite Leinster Cranleigh here, apparently, achieves the personal fulfilment so enigmatically denied to her previously, and the last of Fowler Wright's hypothetical triangular relationships achieves an end as clear and definite (and, in its way, as shocking) as the first.

Although it is never actually stated in *Spiders' War* that Lemno is Stephen Cranleigh's *alter ego* just as Stele was, Marguerite has asked the magician whether she may find in this new dream, as she has before, "one whom I knew well". Her persistence in revisiting the magician is not so much a symptom of a desperate desire to escape *from* Cranleigh, but rather to transform him. She is perhaps more realistic than she seems in assuming that if he is to be genuinely transformed then the entire world which contains him will have to be transformed too. The right man for her is not one that can be found in the civilized world, but one too good for it, by virtue of being untainted *by* it. What she wants is the male equivalent of Charlton Foyle's Marcelle (who came, it will be remembered, along with her own dream-microcosm).

In Fowler Wright, therefore, the quest for the ideal personal relationship involves this determined retreat from the artificial to the natural. This is *not* because he is an advocate of natural sexual passion. Fowler Wright's reaction against Freud may have been as

violent as D.H. Lawrence's reaction (in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*) but it was a reaction in a very different direction. Passion, indeed, features hardly at all in Fowler Wright's work. The desire which his male heroes feel for his heroines, and *vice versa,* is never expressed in sexual terms, but in terms of protectiveness, desire for companionship, and emotional support. Relationships are always conducted on a pragmatic basis.

Reference to sexual desire is not particularly noticeable by its absence from Fowler Wright's work because there were still many writers of his time who exercised a severe self-censorship in the interests of "decency". His non-acknowledgement of sexual desire is, however, no mere hangover from the Victorian times in which he spent his formative years. Writers dedicated to Victorian decorum would never have written so many novels in which wild girls run naked through lush tropical jungles, nor any novels in which the heroes end up with two wives, or change wives by summary execution. Fowler Wright's attitude to sexual desire certainly does not arise from mere prudishness.

The real key to Fowler Wright's handling of personal relationships is not the relative dearth of passion, but rather the heavy emphasis on moral calculation which displaces it. He should be seen as the most ardent champion of the natural marriage contract—the most basic of all social contracts, backed (of course) not by law but by honour. For Fowler Wright, living with other people, in particular and in general, is essentially a matter of accepting a whole set of obligations and responsibilities which one is honour-bound to discharge. Enshrined within this set are the principles of natural justice which he contrasted so strongly with the perverted laws of civilized England. (It would also fit in with his view of things to suggest that his notion of man's relationship with nature can be seen, metaphorically, as a kind of contract.)

Fowler Wright had a clear idea of what the contract of marriage "naturally" involved. It is in working out the logical consequences of this contract that the various exemplary cases in his works become coherent with one another. Thus, Martin Webster becomes entitled to have two wives simultaneously, and so does Bwene, Bwene is also entitled to discard Bira when her perfidy stands revealed, just as Lemno is entitled to discard Destra. Crystal Maitland's behaviour comes to be seen as an example of someone moving into uneasy transgression of the true (as opposed to the legal) terms of her marriage contract, and thus being placed in a moral whirlpool from which she delivers herself only with difficulty.

All of this helps to explain why the opening chapters of *Spiders' War* are not merely an example of shocking sadism. It would be wrong, though, to regard the episode simply as an element in a hypothetical pattern. To some extent the episode *does* reflect an eccentric preoccupation which is noticeable in the brief fragments which survive from two of Fowler Wright's other science fiction novels of the early 1950s. Both *Martian Reception* and a fragment which probably comes from *Outbreak from Earth* (see note 3) dwell on the possibility of humans being used as food, notionally in support of the claim that humans can expect no moral consideration from the inhabitants of other planets. Again, the author is tacitly attacking the squeamishness and hypocrisy of humans who are prepared to eat meat but find the idea of slaughtering animals repulsive (he, it will be remembered, did *not* eat meat) but there seems to be more than the simple desire to make a point in this frequent repetition. Even in the most light-hearted and amiable of all his works, the unpublished *Inquisitive Angel,* much is made of the sheer delight experienced by the

heroine when she can change into a flea and *bite* somebody. Deeper than the complicated philosophy of life that underlies the puzzling surface of Fowler Wright's scientific romances, there really is a tiny spark of an authentic and determined misanthropy.

In the same year that Fowler Wright published *Spiders' War* two other books appeared. One was *With Cause Enough?,* the last of his crime novels and yet another tale of Mr Jellipot. It had probably been written some years earlier. The other was the long-delayed and much-revised translation of the *Purgatorio.* These were the last works to see the light of day; in the last ten years of his life he published nothing new, though he presumably kept up attempts to sell *For God and Spain* and his other completed works.

The last work which actually appeared in print was the brief short story "The Better Choice", which he did for Groff Conklin's anthology *Science Fiction Adventures in Mutation* (1955). A mere two pages long, it tells the story of a scientist who turns his wife into a cat for the purpose of experimentation, and loses her because she finds that life as a cat is so much more invigorating than life as the wife of a twentieth century scientist. The story is quite typical of its author.

It may be that just as "Original Sin" was the seed of *The Adventure of Wyndham Smith,* so "The Better Choice" was the seed of *Inquisitive Angel,* the only unpublished fantasy by Fowler Wright to have been preserved in almost-complete form. This tells the story of a visit to Earth by a young female angel, Elya, who can control her form and change into any animal at will. In the course of an easy-going and good-natured plot she encounters English etiquette, motor cars, politics and the law, and delivers predictable judgments on all of them, usually by mischievous interference with their course. As with most Fowler Wright heroines she is a free spirit, forthright and uninhibited; she appears for the first time stark naked in London's Oxford Street. *Inquisitive Angel* is not a particularly good novel, and most of the axes it grinds are familiar ones, but is has a light touch and liveliness not seen in the author's other fantasies (but glimpsed in one or two of his crime novels, including *Arresting Delia*). It was probably written in 1953 or 1954 and demonstrates that Fowler Wright retained something of his artistry even at the age of eighty.

Today Fowler Wright is condemned to the purgatory of literary obscurity. Arno Press reprinted *Deluge* and *Dawn* in a single volume in one of their series of library reprints, and Hyperion Books similarly reprinted *The World Below,* but these were small editions. Fowler Wright's son and literary executor, who operates Fowler Wright Books Ltd. as a wholesale distributor of religious books, recently collaborated with the Irish publisher G. Dalton to reprint paperback editions of *The World Below, Deluge* and *The Island of Captain Sparrow,* but these passed unnoticed because of the lack of facilities for appropriate distribution. Most of Fowler Wright's books—especially the later ones—are extremely rare and difficult to find in second-hand bookshops.

This slide into oblivion is not entirely surprising. It has happened to many speculative writers, partly because speculative fiction was not taken seriously as a literary form until very recently and partly because nothing dates quite as fast as images of the future. Nor is Fowler Wright a comfortable writer whose works invite re-reading for pleasant relaxation. He is a thinking man's writer, who challenges the reader's intellectual verities. In his own day Fowler Wright was often compared to Wells, and Edward Shanks nominated *Deluge* as one of "The Fifty Best Novels Since the War" in an article for *John*

o' London's Weekly in 1932, but Fowler Wright lacks the literary virtues of Wells and has not the grandiose imaginative sweep of Olaf Stapledon (whose *Last and First Men* was also on Shanks' list). Fowler Wright could be brilliant, but ony fitfully. *The World Below* is only half-finished and some of his later works are only half-started. Had he been able or willing to lavish the same care on his novels that he lavished on *The Song of Arthur* and his translations of Dante—had he even been prepared to invest a *little* more time in pre-planning and revising—he might have achieved much more. As things were, the critics and the public were right in concluding that the promise shown by *Deluge* was not fulfilled.

Nevertheless, Fowler Wright occupies an important place in the development of British scientific romance. He was the one person to speak out quite unequivocally against the "new gods": not just science and technology themselves, but the habit of mind which made science and technology attractive. Comfort and Cowardice, it will be recalled, are the names which he once gave to the new gods. In a tradition replete with frightening and pessimistic visions of the future Fowler Wright might almost claim to have been the one *true* alarmist. While others argued against the *misuse* of science, Fowler Wright attacked science itself as an evil. Sam Moskowitz, in the article on Fowler Wright which he first titled "The Devil's Disciple", is horrified by this particular kind of pessimism, considering that Fowler Wright is rejecting the real path to salvation, but Fowler Wright had no time at all for the kind of salvation that led to a well-ordered and comfortable Utopia, whether on Earth or in the Kingdom of Heaven. Moskowitz, in dubbing Fowler Wright a devil's disciple, takes the rejection of Heaven as an acceptance of Hell, but that is to misunderstand the system of theological metaphors upon which Fowler Wright draws: the Hell of eternal punishment has no place at all in his scheme; the choice, as in "The Choice", is between Heaven and *life,* not between Heaven and Hell. Heaven and Hell, for Fowler Wright, are both human products—products of the imagination or products of historical progress—and are not to be reckoned poles apart, but rather united in opposition to the state of nature.

On superficial acquaintance one could easily mistake Fowler Wright for a social Darwinist, glorifying the struggle for existence, but that would be wrong. He certainly is not a social Darwinist in the sense of one who attempts to explain social evolution with analogies borrowed from the theory of biological evolution—in *that* sense he is no kind of evolutionist at all. Nor is he concerned with the doctrine of the survival of the fittest, in any version. What he glorifies, in fact, is not the struggle *for* existence but the struggle *of* existence: the battle between individuals and the vicissitudes of circumstance. For him, this is largely a *moral* battle: a struggle to create and maintain a moral identity in the face of appalling odds. None of his characters really succeeds in this, and perhaps it is an impossible task, but his heroes and heroines always achieve *something* in this regard. Mostly, they win personal victories in the arena of marital relationships, but such small successes are certainly not to be despised in his way of thinking.

It is perhaps ironic that such an openly didactic writer should be so easy to misunderstand and misinterpret. Certainly, it requires fairly elaborate analysis to make clear exactly what Fowler Wright was about. This is not, however, simply because he failed to make himself clear, but rather because his imaginative forays are explorations rather than mere allegories. They are accounts of imaginative journeys which he undertook—in the best sense—*naively,* not knowing quite what to expect; they are not

tourist brochures rehearsing argumentative rituals for the *n*th time. Once the pattern of his ideas is revealed, though, it can be appreciated and admired even by those who could never share it, both for its uniqueness and for the way it fits in with the personality of the man, his moment, and his milieu.

NOTES

1. Fowler Wright is used in its entirety as a surname, like Bonar Law or Conan Doyle. This does not necessarily mean that Sydney Fowler Wright's books should be indexed under F rather than W, but in this article I shall call him "Fowler Wright" rather than simply "Wright".

2. Different sources give different dates for this book. The book itself is undated. Donald Tuck's *Encyclopedia* and other sources presumably copying from it give 1948; *Who Was Who* gives 1950. The latter is undoubtedly wrong, and contains other wrong dates as well. 1945, as given in the British Museum Catalogue and the Cumulative Book Index, is correct. Tuck is also incorrect in giving the date of the first edition of *The Amphibians* as 1924, and overlooks the privately-published first edition of *Deluge*.

3. It is not certain how many unpublished fantasy and science fiction novels Fowler Wright wrote. During the last few years of his life he lived with various members of his family for brief periods of time, carrying his typescripts with him in an old suitcase. Not unnaturally, most of the typescripts were mangled or lost, except for *For God and Spain* and *The Song of Arthur,* which were protected by cardboard covers. One fantasy novel survives almost intact; the title page is missing but Nigel Fowler Wright recalls that it was called *Inquisitive Angel.* There is a fragment consisting of pp.1-9 of a story called *Martian Reception,* and another consisting of pp.13-64 of a different story, also science fiction. Fowler Wright's entry in *Who Was Who* lists three phantom titles that were not published. One is *Under Ten,* which was not a novel; the others are *Professor Randall's Experiment* and *Outbreak From Earth.* The second title would appear to fit the second fragment of typescript. *Martian Reception* and *Outbreak from Earth* are included in a surviving note listing typescripts which Fowler Wright sent to Forry Ackerman. The list also includes *Space in Reverse,* which is presumably science fiction and may or may not be the same story as *Professor Randall's Experiment.* It is possible that copies of these and other stories may be languishing in Ackerman's legendary science-fiction museum, but Ackerman has not replied to my inquiries on this matter.

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I should also like to express my thanks to Chris Morgan, who rendered useful assistance in the course of my research.

—Brian Stableford

Gregory Feeley is about to undertake a critical biography of James Blish, with the major accent on the biographical. David Ketterer is also currently at work on a book-length study of Blish, which will be primarily critical, with a biographical first chapter. These two critical works-in-progress should serve Blish's memory excellently, and complement one another very well. Meanwhile, Mr Feeley looks at various items of bibliographic static which are disrupting the clear transmission of Blish's works.

Correcting the Record on Blish

GREGORY FEELEY

No writer in genre sf has created a body of work intractable to critical inquiry, yet what passes for criticism in the field remains less adept in approaching our modest talents than mainstream criticism has proven in grappling with the difficulties of real genius. James Blish produced in his best work a body of sf peculiarly fruitful to that study of underlying themes and literary allusion generally thought to distinguish criticism from book-reviewing, yet such studies of his work as exist—even ventures in bibliography and textual restoration, with which non-academic sf "scholars" are considered to be more competent —run rife with errors of fact, attribution, interpretation, to a degree not easily found elsewhere in sf or even out of it.

Restoring auctorial readings of doctored texts has always been difficult in science fiction, partly because years generally elapse between printings of most books (whose publishers anyway will resist restoring changes their own editors made, if for no other

reasons, than to obviate resetting type); and any cases more complicated than the simple meddling by a magazine editor of a text already scheduled for book publication have a way of persisting, sometimes for decades. With Blish, supplanting corrupt or discarded texts in print is particularly hard because 1) the author is dead; 2) revised or restored readings were often published on the opposite side of the Atlantic, or in editions more obscure than the originals; and 3) well-meaning or indifferent editors have at times chosen earlier (or later!), non-auctorial readings over those stipulated by the author, for reasons of personal preference or ignorance. However much Blish esteemed criticism, he would have surely more happily borne the stings of poorly considered or error-strewn commentary than the crippling liability of bad texts returning to print. With the Del Rey *The Best of James Blish* and the current Avon series of reprinted Blish titles attaining something like definitive status, they bid fair to perpetuate into posterity the bad texts each enshrines.

The selection of Robert A.W. Lowndes to compile and introduce the 1979 *The Best of James Blish* was a judicious one, for Lowndes had been a lifelong friend and sometime collaborator with and editor of Blish, and knows his work thoroughly. Lowndes moreover assembled a strong list for the anthology, which has the distinct value of including several of Blish's late, infrequently reprinted stories that another editor might have passed over to make room once more for "Okie" or "Bridge". However, Lowndes' decisions regarding which texts to print are in some cases based on shaky reasoning or plain error, and have resurrected one voided text Blish had doubly discarded, and which has since spread to other anthologies like a bacillus.

Of the 1950 "There Shall Be No Darkness", Lowndes notes that

> That story now exists in two forms, as Jim expanded and reworked it to fit into a volume called *Witches Three*, published by Twayne in 1952. Both tell the same story, but the difference is that the original version, which you will see here, is science fiction, while the Twayne version is fantasy. The science-fiction version gives the reader a scientific explanation of lycanthropy; there is not even a trace of the "supernatural" about it. In the expanded version, Jim goes into fantasy when he makes the leading female a witch, without any scientific explanation of witchcraft, although the nonsupernatural exposition of the werewolf remains.

Whatever reasons Lowndes may hold for automatically preferring a "science fiction" version of a story over a "fantasy" one bearing the author's imprimatur are not given, but he is in any event simply wrong in the distinction he draws. The 1952 version of "There Shall Be No Darkness"—which was the text everywhere thereafter reprinted in Blish's lifetime—is less an expansion (being only a few pages longer) than a revision, adding the element of "witchcraft" as a structurally beneficial counterpoint and enriching the story's complexity in other respects. Lowndes errs unaccountably in asserting that there is no "scientific explanation of witchcraft", as the story sets out plainly the proposal that what was historically called witchcraft is in fact a psychic ability inherent in some individuals—a rationale as adequate for science fiction as is Blish's endocrinological explanation of lycanthropy, even disregarding the fact that the characters in both versions pursue the implications of their discoveries in a rigorous and rational manner worthy of Roger Bacon's investigations in *Doctor Mirabilis*. Whatever point "There Shall Be No Darkness" occupies on a scale distinguishing sf from fantasy is identical for each version; the second one is merely the better. If Lowndes wishes to disregard Blish's eventual conviction that "There Shall Be No Darkness" is a weak story (Blish called it "a

schoolboy pastiche of *Dracula"* and dropped it from the paperback edition of *The Best Science Fiction Stories of James Blish*) and reprint it—as I believe he is justified in doing—he still has no sanction in returning to print a supplanted text that had not seen light since its appearance in *Thrilling Wonder Stories* in April 1950. Its recurrence since then in Carr and Wollheim's *A Treasury of Modern Fantasy* is clearly attributable to Lowndes: his edition is the only version of the story available in many years, since Blish's decision not to keep it in print. Lowndes has ill served Blish readers as much as Blish.

Another oddity of Lowndes' bibliography is his paragraph following the one quoted:

> There is a legend that Jim wrote the original version (of "There Shall Be No Darkness") in 1940 and did not sell it until 1950. No so; in an aside in one of the 1949 *Vanguard* publications, Jim notes that he's revising an old werewolf story known around here "as the 'Two-Bit Horla,'" and that he had written the very first version in 1942.

The assertion is reasonable enough (though one would like to see the entire quotation), but belief that "There Shall Be No Darkness" was written in 1940, whatever status it may have as a "legend", derives from Blish himself. In *More Issues At Hand* he writes that "my story, although published in 1950, had been written ten years earlier, about eight months before (Jack Williamson's *Darker Than You Think) (Unknown,* 1940) was published." His precision in so dating seems convincing; perhaps Blish was in 1949 already revising the text toward its 1952 Twayne version.

Elsewhere in his Introduction Lowndes gets muddled in his bibliography and decides to pass a bad text on to us, though this time without success. Commenting on Blish's most famous story, he writes:

> A prologue, explaining the experiment, appears in some reprints of "Surface Tension", but several readings have convinced me that it is not only unnecessary, but needlessly intrusive as an introduction to the story. The prologue is therefore omitted in the present edition.

Two versions of "Surface Tension" exist, one subsuming and succeeding the other. "Surface Tension" (1952) was a sequel to "Sunken Universe", and commenced with a Prologue that prefaced both stories. Book III of *The Seedling Stars* (1957), "Surface Tension", contains both stories and the Prologue in chronological order. No version, either the original (as reprinted in *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame*) or full-dress (as reprinted in *The Best Science Fiction Stories of James Blish)* has ever appeared without the Prologue, so the shearing Lowndes proposed would be unprecedented as well as unsanctioned, whatever he thinks he remembers. Fortunately Lowndes failed in fact to remove the Prologue, so his stated intentions can presently cause confusion at worst, though he may carry through in a later printing.

Lowndes' apparent carelessness in simply bundling together tearsheets for transmittal to Del Rey Books mars—though not textually—the ending to the last story printed, "A Style in Treason". It is followed by a late essay Blish published in *Foundation,* and Lowndes neglected to remove the editor's introduction which ran above the title, so the reader of Blish's moving closing lines to "A Style in Treason" continues at once into an italicized paragraph he can recognize only after several lines to be the preface to another piece, and inadvertently included at that.

The Avon editions of Blish's novels being issued during 1982-83 in handsome editions of uniform format offer the first US paperbacks of some of Blish's best works *(Doctor Mirabilis, The Day After Judgment);* and it is particularly painful to see bad texts published in a form that may go uncorrected for a decade. *Doctor Mirabilis,* which Blish

wrote envisaging a primarily American audience, contained small explanatory references to British localities that the novel's first, British publishers removed as unnecessary. For the eventual American edition, Blish restored these excisions, and additionally translated some of the copious Latin quotations the novel contained, which he had come to feel were excessive. The American edition (Dodd, Mead, 1971) is thus peculiarly suited to an American audience, better than the British is to a British or any other audience, as it contains revisions both absolute and targeted for its specific readership. Avon reprinted the British text.

The Frozen Year (Ballantine, 1957) was published in England later that year as *Fallen Star,* a title kept by Arrow for its paperback edition twenty years later. The changed title reflects the novel's sf element, which however did not please Blish, as the book's ambiguous status as sf or contemporary novel (depending on whether the fantastic claims of one character are true) he rightly regarded as a flaw rather than the enriching dimension attained for example in Silverberg's *The Book of Skulls.* The 1983 Avon edition, first American reprint of the novel, keeps the altered title—which may have been a conscious marketing decision, but more likely was followed out of ignorance, because the text from which Avon set type was probably Arrow's.

Similarly, Blish's juvenile novel *The Hour Before Earthrise (If,* 1966) was published the following year in New York and London as *Welcome to Mars!,* a title we know Blish did not choose (see his introduction to "No Jokes on Mars" in *Anywhen*). The 1978 Sphere reprint drops the fatuous exclamation mark but leaves the title intact, and Avon's 1983 edition does the same. In this case we can be certain that Avon acted out of ignorance, since *Welcome to Mars* is still a title immediately suggestive of Juvenile sf (itself no selling point; virtually all juvenile sf published in paper in the US is marketed as ordinary science fiction). And unlike *The Frozen Year, The Hour Before Earthrise* is a title immediately recognizable as sf, as well as a great aesthetic improvement. Too bad: too late.

Criticism of Blish has, with the exception of Brian M. Stableford's *A Clash of Symbols: The Triumph of James Blish,* been restricted to essays and reviews—some quite good, but not easily available. Stableford's slim volume was published by the Borgo Press in California as part of a line of uniformly 64-page long monographs with titles that pun puerilely on their subjects' better known titles (e.g. *The Bradbury Chronicles, The Delany Intersection).* Stableford is thus not responsible for his vapid title, occasionally cursory treatment or absence of an index. His study is in fact a useful introduction to Blish's work and plausibly identifies what is most likely to endure among his fiction, but is shot through with methodological flaws, generally poor writing (Stableford tends to use critical or literary terms such as "Machiavellian", "archetypal", "perspective", "scope", and "medium" carelessly and sometimes incorrectly) and a boldness to grapple with the intricacies of Blish's works that largely exists in inverse proportion to the works' formidability (he devotes to *Doctor Mirabilis* a single paragraph, entirely descriptive; and repeatedly cites "conceptual breakthrough", a theme others have identified as central to much of Blish's work, as though it were the conclusion sought in discussion of a story, rather than an entry to deeper consideration of it).

A Clash of Symbols contains several interesting pieces of information—such as Stableford's assertions that . . . *And All The Stars A Stage* was based on a (unpublished?) short story, or that "On the Walls of the Lodge" was originally intended to be a

novel—whose provenance one would like to know. However, a good number of such facts—as distinct from interpretations—have been assumed, not established, by Stableford, and many of them are wrong. Writing on the popularity of "Surface Tension", long a mystery to Blish, Stableford claims:

> In a fanzine piece Blish revealed that he wrote an identically-structured piece in an attempt to recapture the magic, but failed. (Though he did not give the title, the copycat exercise is obviously "The Thing in the Attic".)

Though one cannot demonstrate Stableford to be "obviously" wrong, the story in question is quite probably "Nor Iron Bars". Looking at the passage Stableford paraphrases we read:

> I made an exhaustive analysis of the story ("Surface Tension") from general structure right down to individual word choices, and then wrote another one which followed the analysis *exactly*, even including elements that I'd otherwise have tried to do better or even omit . . . This act of critical mimicry dropped dead on publication, and I've never again tried to consciously repeat a success, let alone that minutely.

It is unlikely Blish would describe as having "dropped dead on publication" a story he incorporated without revision into a successful novel, but never mind that. More central is the fact that "The Thing in the Attic" *in no way* resembles "Surface Tension" except in the most obvious implication of the premise it shares with all the Pantropy stories (Adapted Men may still have problems coping with the worlds for which they were tailored). Stableford's criticism of "The Thing in the Attic" as fiction, moreover, is a structural one, noting a feature of the story's denouement that "Surface Tension" does *not* share. Had Stableford quoted rather than paraphrased Blish (with his italicized *exactly*), the baselessness of his point would have been apparent.

"Nor Iron Bars" was first published, like "Surface Tension", in two parts: as "Detour to the Stars" and "Nor Iron Bars" in the December 1956 and November 1957 issues of *Infinity Science Fiction*. (The MIT Index and indicia to *Galactic Cluster* tell us as much, though where the story division lay must be asked of someone with access to that magazine's back files). The story concerns the test flight of an interstellar drive which, when activated, transports the ship not to Alpha Centauri but into an unfamiliar solar system that turns out to be the inside of a carbon atom. This leap into the unknown, involving as it does a confrontation with the sources of the protagonists' physical origins (analogous to the incomplete metal plate in "Surface Tension" that tells the Adapted Men whence they came) takes on a dimension that Blish, in his *Best SF Stories* introduction to "Surface Tension", described as "mythological". The strange scene where the protagonist leaves the ship to make a "landfall" on an electron may parallel the moment in "Surface Tension" when Lavon thrusts his upper body through the surface of his puddle universe, though the actions are dissimilar (the elements Blish set out to duplicate would not of course have included gross physical action, else the two stories would have recognizably kindred plots). What exactly Blish did in recreating "individual word choices" he does not explain, but verbal parallels exist in these two scenes, including the protagonist of "Nor Iron Bars"'s description of their new environment as a "universe" (he could have called it a "shrunken universe", though Stableford has already made it clear in his attack on Damon Knight's analysis of "Common Time" that he doesn't believe in subconscious puns); and narrative descriptions of the two new locales contain a noticeable echo by the new story of the old: "The surface tension was too strong"/"Its surface tension must be enormous".

Dissimilar elements between the two stories are apparent, such as the presence in "Nor Iron Bars" of a rather forced humor in the opening pages; and its closing scene, involving the gravely ill fiancée of a secondary character, has no structural affinity with "Surface Tension" that I can discern. Yet both stories dramatize an encounter between beleaguered humans and a hostile environment that proves to be a familiar one so altered in scale as almost to constitute the *inside* of reality; this resonance sounds more deeply than the trivial echo "The Thing in the Attic" affords (that of Adapted Men who are simply *smaller* than normal humans—Stableford sometimes shows himself to be depressingly literal-minded). Should further study—or the straightforward expedient of asking Virginia Kidd, then Blish's wife, or Frederik Pohl, then his agent—show another story to be Blish's replica (if it truly "dropped dead on publication", it may never even have been collected, as was "Nor Iron Bars"), the point about Stableford's sloppiness in thinking through remains.

Other errors born of insufficient research abound (quickly asserted; rebutted—perforce—at length). Stableford seems to feel that *The Quincunx of Time* was Blish's last novel (he accounts for its inadequacies by noting that during its composition Blish "was in the grip of the cancer which ultimately killed him"), which seems reasonable enough, for it was the last published, coming a year after *Midsummer Century* (1972). Yet the author's note to *Quincunx* is dated 1970, while that of *Midsummer Century* 1971 (both clearly written after completion of their respective novels). More: Blish's list of works in the introduction to his story in *Again, Dangerous Visions* lists *Beep* (i.e. *The Quincunx of Time*) as forthcoming but *Midsummer Century* not at all. And Blish's chronological list of sf novels among the front matter to the Doubleday edition of *Midsummer Century* lists the final three entries thus: *The Quincunx of Time, Midsummer Century, King Log* (in preparation). Unquestionably *The Quincunx of Time* was completed before *Midsummer Century;* one can hypothesize that its appearance more than a year later owed to initial difficulty finding a publisher, as it is both prohibitively short (28,000 words) and has been unanimously adjudged a weak work. In other words, in expanding the story "Beep" into the novella *The Quincunx of Time,* Blish was hobbled by no such handicap as would prevent his working up *Midsummer Century* (which Stableford likes) out of nothing. *Quincunx*'s shortcomings cannot be explained as Stableford seeks.

Another critical conclusion based on faulty bibliography: "'A Work of Art' is an exceptional work, and it is significant that it could not find a home in any of the major magazines." "A Work of Art" first appeared in *Science Fiction Stories* for July 1956, under the editorship of Robert Lowndes. Of Lowndes as editor, Blish had this to say:

> He squeezes money from the back of the book to pay higher rates for the front of it . . . (and) makes use (quite legitimately, let me add) of the fact that a number of well-known authors are close personal friends to commission stories from these people . . . The slightly higher rates for lead stories give him the assurance that he will see stories by known writers somewhere near the halfway point of the manuscripts' travels, rather than at the end . . . The commissions produce more uneven work, particularly since most of them are written around already-painted covers, but most of the surprises come from this category. (*The Issue at Hand,* pp.47-48)

Lowndes commissioned two earlier stories by Blish around magazine covers ("Common Time" and "Testament of Andros"), which Stableford should know, since he elsewhere quotes the books *(In Search of Wonder* and *The Issue At Hand)* in which this information appears. Whether or not "A Work of Art" was written around a cover, it

certainly did not come in among those manuscripts rejected by all other magazines. In other words, it is not "significant" that "A Work of Art" "could not find a home in any of the major magazines" because it is not true.

Blish was notorious for subjecting stories to further consideration and revision, usually to send them finally out as novels. Stableford traces the early versions of these novels—Blish was scrupulous in detailing a text's early history in the indicia of the copyright page—but fails in all cases to note where a short work was revised without being expanded to novel form. He does this with "There Shall Be No Darkness"—commenting that the story first appeared in *Thrilling Wonder Stories* in 1950, though he clearly did not consult that issue, as the only version he knows is the 1952 revision. "On the Walls of the Lodge", originally published as by James Blish and Virginia Blish in *Galaxy,* 1962, was cut by several thousand words, and the complete version has appeared only in Robert Siverberg's 1970 anthology *Dark Stars.* Stableford appears to be unfamiliar with this version. And in the textual history of "A Style in Treason", admittedly unusual even for Blish, Stableford errs despite a full accounting being given on the copyright page to *Anywhen.* Blish expanded his 1966 novelette "A Hero's Life" for publication as "A Style in Treason" in that 1970 Doubleday collection, but also published the early version, with the later title, prefaced with a new prologue (adapted from the added material of the revised version) in the May 1970 *Galaxy.* Why he did so is hard to conjecture, but he set the details out and Stableford misstates them. Such bibliographic minutiae are unimportant except that Stableford comments on a story whose definitive version he appears not to have read; had he done so he might have found the "inordinately complex process" of the story's central premise more "convincing".

Stableford comments on Blish's expansion of "A Case of Conscience" into novel form without, it appears, actually having examined the text of the 1953 story as originally published. Evidently unaware of the extent to which the novella was revised to form Part I of the 1958 novel ("When Blish expanded the short version of 'A Case of Conscience' to novel length he simply continued the story"), Stableford, who finds the second part of the novel inferior to the first, creates the impression that Blish made a poor job of constructing a novel out of his earlier story. In fact, some crucial elements to Part I were added only in the novel version, including all mention of Manichaean heresy and Father Ruiz-Sanchez' consequent agony. In assuming that all these features were present in the 1953 novella, Stableford maligns the effort Blish later made in refashioning his story as a novel. More strangely still, Stableford dismisses one reason Blish proffered for the novel's flaws (that he was held to a 75,000-word length limit) by noting that "a substantial fraction of the available 75,000 words remains unused." But it doesn't: the text and Appendix of *A Case of Conscience* comprise just under 75,000 words. Anyone taking Stableford's word on this easily verifiable point will conclude that Blish had been disingenuous in excusing himself.

Not all the errors in Stableford's essay lead to textual misinterpretation; most are just there, like gnats. Reprinting publishers took a casual attitude toward Blish's titles when they didn't simply change them, and the punctuational features of *Welcome to Mars!* and . . . *And All The Stars A Stage* were simply dropped by his paperback publishers, which Stableford oddly mimics by citing the titles correctly in his bibliography and truncatedly throughout his text, though he is consistent in misplacing the apostrophe in *Titans' Daughter,* something no American (or, I suspect, British) publisher did. Incorrect dates

are sprinkled throughout the text (and *Hell's Cartographers* gets a spare apostrophe), which doesn't matter greatly except to show that Stableford didn't read proof (he might believe that *The Day After Judgment* was published in 1972 but could hardly be lead by a mistake in his notes to think Blish was born in 1951).

In my own essay on *The Seedling Stars* in *Foundation* 24, I mention Blish's 1970 *Galaxy* novelette "Darkside Crossing" in terms of the movement toward isolation traced by his late fiction. Though the generalization remains tenable, readers who came to *Galaxy* a year before I did will know that "Darkside Crossing" was preceded by two 1969 stories dealing with the same events and character, and that the three stories were clearly portions of a novel in progress. A reading of "Our Binary Brothers" (February) and "The City That Was the World" (August) leave no doubt, moreover, that this was the novel entitled *King Log* which Blish left unfinished at his death. Characteristically, the three stories make up nothing so simple as the first three chapters of the projected novel: they do not run in sequence, and the third story in fact is a detailed expansion of material that is set out in a brief paragraph in the first story. Blish would surely have revised the stories for book publication, perhaps as thoroughly as he did those novelettes that eventually became *A Torrent of Faces*. It is especially interesting to note that the plot developments Blish established in those stories promise a work of greater scope and amplitude than any other book of his final phase; Judy Blish says that the novel was projected to comprise 180,000 words, or longer than Blish's last four novels combined.

Blish died leaving various loose ends to his work that his estate has not yet fully resolved: enough uncollected stories from his last years to fill another volume; uncollected critical writings; and at least two completed books—a last novel and his study of magic, posthumously completed by Mr Stableford—that await publishers. When these are settled, fuller critical assessments of Blish's achievement will be in order; this is the last chance to clear the record of errors and misprints, before they are caught in hard-covered print like insects in amber.

Reply to Gregory Feeley

ROBERT A.W. LOWNDES

Mr Feeley was kind enough to send me a copy of his article "Correcting the Record on Blish". When I called his attention to a few errors he said that you would be agreeable to publishing my response in the same issue.

One of the errors, he said, he will ask you to correct before publication; I shall note it here in the event that good intentions are not realized—something I am well acquainted with from my editorial experience: I cannot be charged with careless or sloppy proof-reading of my introduction to *The Best of James Blish*, or of typographical errors in the texts of the selections, because I never saw proofs. (I suspect that Mr Brian Stableford did not have any opportunity to make corrections in his Borgo book, either.)

Mr Feeley charges me with "returning to print a supplanted text that had not seen light since its appearance in *Thrilling Wonder Stories* . . ." (He gives the date as April 1950; that, however is the cover date on the magazine, which appeared in February 1950.) The charge is incorrect.

The original text was reprinted in the January 1969 issue of *Magazine of Horror* (Issue 25), which appeared circa November in 1968. I was the editor of the magazine, and earlier in 1968 I asked Jim if I might reprint "There Shall Be No Darkness" in *MOH,* at the small rates we could pay for reprints. I mentioned to him that I preferred the original version, but if he himself preferred the revised version, I would honour his preference. I felt, and still feel, that it is an excellent story in both versions. Jim's reply was that it was all right with him to run either of the two versions, and did not say whether he himself considered the revised version the better of the two.

In 1978, when I accepted Judy-Lynn Del Rey's invitation to put together a collection of Jim's best short material, I read or re-read every short story of Jim's that I could get my hands on. I also went through the entire mailings of the Vanguard Amateur Press Association to see if I could find anything there which would be of value for my introduction. Thus the "oddity" which Mr Feeley mentions. In reference to the "aside" I mention: there is no more to add.

At that point, I fell afoul of Murphy's Law of Research: "The source you're sure that you do not need to consult will prove to be crucial." I'd entirely forgotten that Jim had nailed down the date of his first draft of "Darkness" in *More Issues At Hand,* where he refutes the suggestion that his story had been "influenced" by Jack Williamson's novel, *Darker Than You Think.* That was impossible, Jim stated because he wrote his story before he ever saw the Williamson novel, which appeared in the December 1940 issue of *Unknown*—on sale in November 1940. Therefore the 1940 date has to be correct, and the Vanguard reference is either a typographical error or a slip of memory.

Mr Feeley suggests that what Jim might have been re-writing in 1949 was not that original 1940 draft, but the second revision, which was published in the book, *Witches Three,* in 1952. However, it's very unlikely that he would have been working on a new version *before* any version had been published—equally unlikely that he was capable of writing the 1950-published version in 1940. It is too far ahead of anything else he wrote at that time. The more likely answer is that he was turning an early draft into a finished story, with all the skill and understanding that he had achieved since 1940.

Why was there a revision of that 1950 version at all? Certainly not because Jim felt that he had done a poor or incomplete job on the *Thrilling Wonder Stories* version. At that time, Jim could not afford such speculative luxury, even if he felt he could improve the story. The only reason for his doing it then was that he received a good offer; by adding the "witchcraft" element, he'd get extra money and hard-cover publication as well in a book with two other writers he respected. Mr Feeley charges me with error in labelling that version "fantasy" and saying that there is no scientific explanation of witchcraft: ". . . the story sets out plainly the proposal that what was historically called witchcraft is in fact a psychic ability inherent in some individuals—a rationale as adequate for science fiction as is Blish's endocrinological explanation of lyncanthropy . . ." I cannot accept that phrase "as adequate"; "as" implies equality, and while the so-called "psychic sciences" might come under that definition of science, "a systematic body of knowledge" they are by no means "sciences" in the sense that endocrinology is a science. (That blurring of

meaning between real and pseudo science was one that James Blish opposed all his life.) Granted that such elements have proved to be adequate for good stories which we accept as science fiction on their own terms, it remains a distortion of everything that "science fiction" meant to James Blish to call them *as* adequate as genuine science.

So I cannot feel penitent either for selecting "There Shall Be No Darkness" for my collection or for preferring the 1950 version of it. I have no argument against anyone's preferring the 1952 version, but, as you've seen, considerable argument against the contention that it is the better of the two. (It was not only the fantasy element but what I still consider a needless multiplication of entities in the revision that determines my opinion. Had Jim expanded the story sufficiently to justify that multiplication, then I don't think I'd consider the multiplication needless—though I'd still insist that the result was science-directed fantasy, rather than straight science fiction.)

I see that I am charged with attempted literary crime, in relation to my original plans for reprinting "Surface Tension", in my collection. I call it "my collection", simply because everything that appears in it was my selection, although everything that I selected did not appear in it. But my part of it all ended when I delivered the package; I had no control of what would be done with it, and I do feel that some of Judy-Lynn Del Rey's decisions were wiser than my own. My only regret is that I did not see a set of proofs; had I had the opportunity, I'd have revised the relevant part of my introduction, and possibly have caught a few typographical errors, there and elsewhere, that got through to the published edition. (I had no part in the layout of the book at any time, although the book does follow my original order for the selections, except for "The Citadel of Thought", which I had suggested as part of the appendix. The essay would have been in the appendix, too. But I don't see that any real damage was done.) So I plead "nolo contendere" to the charge, and if anyone wants to convict me, let's remember that in many jurisdictions rooted in Anglo-Saxon law, the penalty for an attempted crime is one half that for the same crime accomplished. Perhaps exile halfway to Siberia would suffice.

The quotation from Blish himself about how I handled my science fiction magazines at Columbia Publications is an error in that Jim was mistaken about it. He was under the impression that I operated on month-to-month budgets for the magazines, as many other editors did. Such was not the case. We did have a sliding scale of word rates, and "name authors" received top rates. Also, I tried to get at least two stories from "name authors" for the covers each time, although I was not restricted to two. (Later on, the situation deteriorated; rates were cut, and hardly anyone except Isaac Asimov was paid more than the minimum. But Jim is speaking of the days when sales were good and payments were made upon acceptance most of the time.) The interesting thing about Jim's error is that I *would* have operated that way had I been on a rigid budget per issue; at a later time, when for different magazines I had to work within a budget, I *did* do it that way.

Letters

Dear *Foundation* August 1983

I found George Zebrowski's journals of great interest. I admire his determination to examine clearly all the relationships, implications and motivations in the writing and publication of science fiction. I agree with very much of what he has written. Any disagreements I have are more in the nature of widening his discussion or pointing out what I believe are wrong conclusions. The dates are from his journal.

July 15, 1979
In defence of editors and sf publishing. Up until the recent cutbacks, due to publishing troubles not just sf ones, I believe that there was too little editorial discrimination—not too much. Where did all that sf junk you complain about come from? Someone wrote it, someone bought it. When the field was booming anything barely literate that purported to be science fiction could be published. But in among the dross you could find Dick, Disch, Delany, Lafferty and others. If these were "mainstream" they would never have been published. If there has ever been an sf book of real literary worth, no matter how novel the material, that was refused publication before the present cutbacks I would like to hear about it. For all the protestations of Zebrowski, and others, I do not think these "ambitious, unfamiliar new works" exist or ever have existed.

Sept. 30, 1979
To add to this I quote James Blish who said, "Words, gentlemen, that's all we have. Just words."

Nov. 30, 1979
Let us not knock the fans and the fanzines too much. Many of us emerged from this murky pool. They are what they are and their tastes define them. They like a certain form of rubbish, they form cliques and exist by mutual backslapping. They give each other awards that represent popularity inside the clique, the Hugo and the Nebula. (The Nebula is even a more fannish award than the Hugo, less votes are needed to get it and it in no way represents any democratic polling. That good books do occasionally receive either award does not invalidate their basic in-group nature.) We must also abandon the conspiracy theory of editing and publishing. Perhaps some fans have "talked unknowing publishers into letting them run science fiction programs," though I doubt it and would like to hear names named. If this ploy had worked, the fan-editor would have been fired as soon as the first bad returns came in. Publishing is a dog-eat-dog business and the failures go instantly to the kennel wall. A successful editor is one whose taste matches that of a large section of the reading public. If the books he selects make money he keeps his job. If the line loses money he is canned. It is really just as simple as that.

And I am afraid that the last paragraph is mistaken. Taste was not debased when more money came into the field. Debased taste is always with us; there are more garbage men than college professors, so TV programmes are aimed at the garbage men. If crap sells there is always someone who will publish crap. And, really, have you ever met an author who was afraid to speak out?

Jan. 12, 1980
No, I can't accept a word of this. I cannot say that I have worked with every editor in the field, but at the very least I have either sold to or know personally almost every one in New York and London. There is only one professional pressure: make money. I will not deny that there are editors who come down hard on new writers, who twist a knife when they can, who talk about "their" books. But if "their" books lose money they are fired. They are not in a majority. No writer is forced to deal with an editor. If as you say "to write a serious, intelligent book, a writer must give up everything . . ." he will also have to give up an editor who stands in his way. There are plenty of publishers. Speaking personally, and being a slow writer, I have only written books that I have wanted to write. I have listened to editorial comment and if I have agreed and seriously believed a suggestion was correct I have made changes. If I disagreed I have withdrawn the book and gone elsewhere. And I am not talking about the clout I now enjoy by having a backlist of 32 novels, all in print. I am talking about novels one, two, three and four. Four I pulled back and sold elsewhere because I refused to make the changes asked. And that was a year's work laid on the line.

May 4, 1980
George, I beg of you, do not be ashamed of literature nor feel that sf is impossible at bottom. I know the feeling of despair when every book opened seems worse than the one before. Sf does not die "before the awesome authenticity of serious works." The corpus of sf contains authentic and serious work. It is just not doing too well at the present moment. But you cannot blame the readers for that, they can only buy what is available, nor are the editors to blame—they can only publish what is available. No, the culprit is the writer. Where is he? What is he writing? He is writing crap, that is what he is doing. Again I challenge you to produce for inspection that great unpublished sf classic kept from the audience by evil editors. Only the authors are to blame. The editors and readers are waiting expectantly.

Oct. 30, 1980
No argument.

June 13, 1981
The years have passed. Unlike most people Zebrowski is learning from experience. Editors and readers are now seen to be consumers: it is up to the authors to produce the quality product. But the authors do not live in isolation. They were/are readers. If they perceive of sf as being a simplistic, action-filled pulp medium they will write only that and the process will be self-fulfilling. How to change this? One way is to honour and draw attention to the few sf books of quality. This is what the John W. Campbell Memorial Award attempts to do. This award will benefit the discriminating reader by leading him to books of value he might have missed. More important, it will show the authors what is possible, that the only limitations are personally applied ones.

Sept. 5, 1981
Negative. This is specious argument, making an assumption then calling it a fact. "Show don't tell" is a valid fictional rule. Showing does not favor the visual sense alone therefore conclusions based on this statement are invalid. If an author "tells", then he is writing non-fiction. "Showing" is the art of fiction that involves the reader in the story, makes him a part of it and it a part of him. When the reader is deeply involved in a work of fiction

he can then be "told" any number of things. "Telling" too much makes for bad fiction. Huxley's *Island* contains much material of worth; it fails as fiction because it is too polemic.

Jan. 2, 1982
The suffering of authors is always necessary, because basically no one cares. *How* a book is written is of absolutely no importance to editor or reader. It is a hard world and the freelance author's lot the hardest of all if he wishes to be true to his work and not be a hack. The response of your editor in the dialogue here should go like this:

> Editor: "We have invested money in you—now it is time you fulfil the obligations in the contract you signed. If you need more time, work weekends, work evenings, borrow money, get your wife a job, stand up on you own legs and get on with it. Write. That is what you are being paid to do."

Feb. 5, 1982
The writer comes of age. Zebrowski has worked through all the arguments and reached the truth about science fiction. The only arguable point is the last. I doubt strongly if genre publishers and hostile critics are really holding sf back. They don't have to—we do that far better ourselves.

May 7, 1982
Same as the above. It has been most exciting to read these progressive reports from the frontline of Zebrowski's warring mind. I hope that my comments have been constructive, since that is their only intent.

Harry Harrison — *Co. Wicklow, Ireland*

Dear David, — September 1983

Professor Needham, in his fascinating anthropological perspective on Tarzan, says that "the only satisfactory record" of a feral child is that of the Wild Boy of Aveyron. This is certainly the most famous case, and Itard's own account is still of great interest, though a more modern version can also be recommended, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron* by Harlan Lane (Harvard University Press, 1977). There are other cases which offer some evidence, however: R.M. Zingg reviewed forty such cases as long ago as 1940 (American Journal of Psychology, 53, 487 – 517), and another review is by Roger Brown in *Words and Things* (Free Press, 1958). A more recent report is by Susan Curtiss: *Genie: A psycholinguistic study of a modern-day "wild child"* (Academic Press, 1977). The case of the "gazelle boy" described by Jean-Claude Armen (Bodley Head, 1971) is less well authenticated.

There are also some half-dozen reported attempts, of which two or three may be genuine, deliberately to bring up children in isolation in order to see if language will develop; without success, as far as is known. These are summarised by Campbell and Grieve (Royal investigations of the origin of language, *Historiographia Linguistica* 1982, IX: 1/2, 43-74).

Campbell and Grieve conclude of feral children "in no such case has the isolate shown signs of being able to communicate in a systematic way and . . . it is inconceivable that any should, except for the sort of communication system that might be established with an

animal caretaker".

This, of course, is exactly what Tarzan did with his "missing link" type foster tribe of great apes. So far as I know there is no case of reading and writing being acquired without a prior knowledge of the language; and this remains perhaps the least plausible of Tarzan's achievements.

John Radford — *Faculty of Science, NELP*

Dear Charles Barren — September 1983

Foundation 28 arrived yesterday with your query about the "original story" for *Forbidden Planet* by Irving Block and Allen Adler. The simple answer is this: Block and Adler were the writers who initiated the project, with a treatment (the "orig. story") first entitled "Fatal Planet". This was later turned into a series of screenplays by Cyril Hume, some versions of which are available through various dealers in film collectibles. However, the original treatment has not yet shown up on this market, to my knowledge. For background information on the film, from inception to completion, the best source is still Steve Rubin's cover story for *Cinefantastique* in the Spring '79 issue (vol. 8, no. 2 & 3), available from the publisher at P.O. Box 270, Oak Park, IL 60303, USA, for the spectacular price of $12 US. (recent back issues are $6 apiece, and this one was a double issue). Sixty-four of its ninety-six pages are devoted to the production of *FP*, and there is much discussion of editing deletions and script changes.

I have been curious myself for quite some time about the possible differences between the original concept and the final execution of the film, as suggested by the conceptual differences embedded in the novelization by "W.J. Stuart". I finally tracked down this elusive author, but too late to ask him any questions directly, inasmuch as he had died the year I was struggling to get his name and address from his publishers. An editor at Doubleday finally sent me his widow's current address, but she has never answered any of my letters.

Alex Eisenstein — *Chicago, Illinois*

Reviews

Staying Alive
by Norman Spinrad *(The Donning Company, 1983, 162 pp, $5.95)*

reviewed by Christopher Priest

Staying Alive is a collection of Norman Spinrad's essays from *Locus*. It is written from the point of view of his being a practising professional writer in touch with the volatile New

York publishing scene, and is aimed at his fellow writers, whatever their particular level of achievement. The book contains a considerable amount of professional advice, some of it sound.

For instance, Spinrad is emphatic that writers should never sign a book contract which does not include a reversion clause. This is probably the major reform that writers can expect in the next few years, and happens to be central to the new Minimum Terms Agreement currently being negotiated in Britain by the Writers' Guild. Spinrad should be heeded, and henceforth all writers, or their agents, should insist that their books be published for a fixed term. Spinrad is equally reliable in more general areas. He believes that writers should maximize their income whenever possible, on the principle that the more money a writer earns the less will be the need to undertake hackwork. Spinrad states, correctly, that hackwork does not pay, that in the long term the most money will be earned by the sincerest work. Spinrad also deals with awards and their relative value in a commercial market, and here too what he says is worth reading.

His single most perceptive observation concerns the way in which the New York literary establishment does not know what to make of science fiction, does not realize how deep is its penetration into the market, nor how worthy are some of its examples. If I read Spinrad correctly, what he says is that mass-market publishing is predicated on the presumed apathy and ignorance of the public, so that books have to be aggressively sold to an audience which has to be created each time for each title, either by heavy promotion and advertising of individual titles, or by creating purchasing habits with genre categories. Spinrad notes that the science fiction audience is in general a positive one, which discriminates between titles and authors, which habitually buys, reads and reacts to novels, which devotes a considerable percentage of its disposable income to the buying of books, and which in total makes up probably 15% of *all* mass-market paperback sales in the United States. I don't agree with Spinrad's paranoia about the literary establishment (which he capitalizes NYLE, as if it were a formally constituted organization like NASA, IBM or for that matter SFWA), but I believe he is right to attribute the perceived collective narcissism of the literary world to the arrogant and mistaken belief that critics are the only intelligent readers.

Now, although I endorse these five points, the rather awkward fact is that none of them is all that original. Almost any professional writer who is interested in the trade, and who is treated to a minimum of one publisher's lunch a year, would probably have come up with the same insights. But Spinrad isn't any old writer. Spinrad is the professional's professional; he is high-profile in the New York science fiction world, he has long been a nabob in SFWA, he is a self-avowed internationalist, he has written God knows how many books of one sort or another, and so on. Spinrad does not suffer fools gladly, and you don't mess with him; when he strides towards you, you step off the sidewalk, avert your eyes, and try not to hear the muttered obscenities in case they are directed at you. This confident behaviour comes from within, and develops from the belief that his moral base and his guiding principles are sound.

Unfortunately, the five pieces of golden sense occupy only about one per cent of the whole text. Spinrad's unique approach to professional authorship occupies the rest, and it is in this, and how it is revealed in this book, that I am primarily interested.

Expressed in the simplest terms, the function of a non-fiction book is to present an argument and persuade the reader of the writer's ideas. Indeed, Spinrad's declared aim is

to provide "pragmatic advice to science fiction writers", as well as a guide to survival in the modern publishing world. Most of this advice, understandably, concerns money and career. The text includes a draft of SFWA's "Model Paperback Contract", and an explanation of it. Discussing the technicalities of this document is not in the brief of this review, but there is an element of confrontation and aggression in the thinking behind this. Publishers have long sent out contracts in the form of a printed document, usually heavily weighted in their favour, which authors and agents are then at liberty to try to change to a more equitable wording. The SFWA Model Contract is the mirror-image, a second wrong attempting to make a right. It meets like with like, and is heavily weighted in the writer's favour. Spinrad is a noisy advocate of this shouting-match approach to contracts, and it is symptomatic of his general attitude.

One of the pleasures of reading non-fiction is the sense of encountering a marshalled argument, a feeling that you are being informed on some subject by being persuaded about its issues. Even a book like Spinrad's can have a general appeal, while being aimed at a specialist audience. People like to glimpse insights into what goes on behind the scenes. It's interesting, therefore, that although Spinrad clearly recognizes his primary audience of fellow writers, and addresses them throughout, the book has a continual sense of intellectual diffuseness.

The problem begins with the fact that Spinrad writes dreadful prose. His style is crude, barbaric and clumsy, and his syntax is full of anacolutha and solecisms. The book itself has many spelling mistakes and typos. The kindest possible thing I can say is that Spinrad is obviously one of those writers who needs ruthless copyediting by an experienced editor, and his publisher is one who should hire a new proofreader.

But why try to be kind? Spinrad clearly means what he says; he doesn't write like this by accident. All right then: he writes *awful* English, and he should be ashamed of himself. A typical Spinrad passage will invoke foreign words and phrases, mix them up with Jewish slang, tart itself up with high-sounding constructions, toss in an obscenity, make a ballsy declamation, mix a metaphor or two . . . and then call the reader an asshole.

On top of this, although he has a broad vocabulary, Spinrad interprets the meanings of words in the loosest way. If a word has two or three subsidiary meanings, he goes for the lowest every time. Also, he has favourite words, and uses them over and over again, in the obvious hope that if he repeats them enough times the sheer weight of unblushing usage will legitimize them.

Take "ouvre", a Spinrad coinage unknown to any dictionary. It's not a spelling mistake, because he uses it on several different occasions. Sometimes he thinks it is a French word, because he italicizes it. Writers are said by Spinrad to have a "total ouvre" or an "existing ouvre", compounding ignorance with pleonasm. He thinks "langinappe" means a bonus or a perquisite. I eventually worked it out that the word he was looking for was "lagniappe", a Creole word used in New Orleans for the pleasant tradition in which a customer is given slightly more goods than he expects. Spinrad thinks "seppuku" (ritual self-disembowelment, and another word for harakiri) is a synonym for the Western concept of suicide.

He consistently uses "parameter" (possibly his favourite word of all; it seems to occur more frequently than "the") in the loose sense of an abstract limiting factor: he says there are economic parameters, crossover parameters, standard sf parameters, genre parameters, physical parameters of reality, and so on. "Karma" and "karmic" (the sum of a

person's actions, a destiny) are consistently used in the vague sense of ambience or environment: the karma of the house, the current karma, the karma is sweet, no compunction in using this karma, a certain karmic debt, etc. "Maven" is another choice Spinrad word, one that was new to me. Research reveals that maven (or mavin, as the *Oxford American Dictionary* actually has it) is a Yiddish word meaning connoisseur or expert. But Spinrad apparently believes it has the same general meaning as, for example, "mandarin": the corporate mavens who failed to support a line, the cost-accountant mavens, the mavens of PEN, the critical mavens without awareness, a marketing maven's genre formula, the *Times* mavens, American literary mavens, and so on.

I'll spare you what he does with "dialectic".

The point is that none of these words is completely wrong. It's just that Spinrad has a tin ear for language and his usage of them is consistently sharp or flat of their best meanings. Other words would generally have been preferable, and by tiresome repetition he makes his writing style a continual affront to the reader's sensibilities. As the book proceeds you revise your opinions that Spinrad is an awful writer, and think of him as atrocious.

Nor did I choose the above words to make a few cheap shots. Spinrad is always tone-deaf to language, and in his polyglot dreadfulness he repeatedly abuses "kosher", "interface", "bottom line" and "sacred bottom line", "purview", "macroculture", "demographic", "schlock", "schlocko" and "schlockmeister", "discourse", *"sui generis"*, "corporate", "illusive", and many others.

His breezy solecisms are clearly committed out of the belief that he is combining the instincts of a professional writer with the vernacular of the street, the boardroom and the bar. In fact, the way he writes is extremely offensive: it is ugly on the eye and ear, and is often difficult to understand:

> While I have dabbled herein in areas not entirely related to economic survival as an sf writer, I have never advocated career courses of action which I knew to be antithetical to maximizing income. (p. 117)
>
> Having in the last exciting episode at last brought the illusive question of quality into our discussion of the dialectic between the science fiction writer and the commercial interface, it now behoves us to hold our noses and attempt to examine the effect of current corporate thinking in the sf industry upon the esthetic state of the art. (p. 67)
>
> A work of art (first "Quality", and now fucking *"Art!"*) on the other hand, has its own self-contained structure with a pleasing internal resolution, and at its highest form, the science fiction novel, is most often the tale of transformation in reality, character, or both—exactly that sublime thematic element excluded as *seppuku* from the successful series guide. (p. 65)
>
> And the entire Dell/Quantum sf program has been shitcanned after the usual annual putsch in higher circles, along with its major domo, Jim Frenkel. (p. 62)
>
> Aside from science fiction, there are a few other small areas of discourse which mainstream publishing, which is to say contemporary corporate committee conglomerate publishing, is keeping in cultural purdah. (pp. 142-3)

If it weren't for the fact that these examples are so turgidly written, so witless and lacking in irony, so otiose and *serious*, they would be funny. When you've read a measure of this bombast you cannot avoid a harsh but important question: when a writer proves so conclusively that he has not yet mastered English prose, does it not throw into doubt his competence in other areas of, er, discourse?

In other words, set aside the fact that Spinrad's English reads as if it has been translated from the Serbo-Croat by a committee of trade unionists. What is he saying?

I believe his perceptions are for the most part as clumsy as the words he describes them in. The *Locus* essays were written on the run, as it were, in hot reaction to developments in the trade. As journalism they therefore have contemporaneity as a condition. But this is a book assembled from past journalism (and Spinrad tacitly acknowledges this by having rearranged the order in which the pieces now appear), and the text has been checked and recast before press. While this, incidentally, pre-empts any claim that the shoddy writing was caused by haste, it also imparts permanence to what was once a passing thought.

The first essay is easily the best in the book: it was the first one to be written, and is a straightforward run-through of some basics. (It contains three of the five points with which I agree.) It is part of the section called *How To,* which concludes with the SFWA Model Contract and Spinrad's defence of it. Part Two, *Market Forces,* is where the "kosher" Spinrad appears.

Spinrad is revealed here as a follower, a secondary source. He writes with all the passion of a man who has developed his own ideas, but the reality is that his wisdom is received from whomever he had lunch with the day before.

Broadly speaking, Spinrad began these essays at a time which he frequently refers to as the "Boom" . . . in other words, at the end of the 1970s. As the book closes, the cold grip of the "Recession" has tightened around the neck of the sf world. Spinrad saw the Boom as a good thing, because science fiction writers started to make big money, and presumably because somebody informed him that the world recession (well under way in 1978-79) was not real. He repeats this myopic optimism several times in the book, most notably on p.45 (written in December 1979) where he actually says: "$35,000 is not an unreasonable advance for any book intended to be a properly done monthly lead". By p.133 (March 1982) the same reasoning, after someone told him the Recession had started, suggests that $15,000 might be nearer the mark.

It looks on the surface as if this is a professional writer facing up to and adjusting to the realities of the times, but if so then it only goes to show the relativity of such matters. Those writers amongst us for whom an American paperback sale, small or large, is just a distant memory will find even Spinrad's more conservative estimates to be, say, $15,000 too generous.

In a rare moment of introspection, Spinrad asks himself the following rhetorical question:

> But now, with hindsight's wisdom, I wonder if, like most of us, I wasn't missing an essential point: if the existence of a column such as this and the perceived need for it wasn't part of the wool that we were all pulling over our eyes.
>
> While we were mesmerized by spiraling advances and how best to secure them, sinister paradigm shifts and devolutions were going on within the literature of the genre itself; and this column, like most sf criticism, gossip, and bullshitting of the period, did little to center them in our collective consciousness. (p.114)

Although he's actually talking about the sneaky growth of fantasy, I interpret this to be an admission by Spinrad that he misunderstood what was going on. I suppose it is refreshing that he should recognize that he was mesmerized by money, etc., even though this particular essay was written in November 1981, and was nowhere near his final word.

The "Boom" at the end of the 1970s was led by publishers: it meant larger print-runs, more titles, a lot of reprints, bigger advances. It coincided with the first release of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind,* and it was said then by several leading science fiction writers (including Spinrad in his essays) that sf was at last reaching a much

wider audience. This was and is simply not true, as the subsequent slump has proved. Both boom and bust were the consequence of publisher activity: expansion and contraction in response to perceived market forces, not the sudden appearance of millions of new readers followed a few months later by their unexplained and unreported deaths. The fact that a few titles have more recently broken through to the bestseller charts is a separate phenomenon. Interestingly, the science fiction bestseller is Spinrad's current fascination, and the idea that fabulous fame and wealth are now within reach have produced a different kind of looniness. There is a very revealing moment in *Staying Alive* when Spinrad fantasizes in print (as surely he must fantasize in private) about what bestsellerdom will mean to him. It means, actually, making publishing executives call him *Mr* Spinrad!

Here is the dichotomy:

The apparent Boom at the end of the '70s was a very worrying time for any writer dispassionate enough to step back and view what was happening in perspective. Norman Spinrad, meanwhile, was beavering away at his pocket calculator and deciding his next novel was going to make him $35,000.

The present rash of science fiction bestsellers is setting up economic dynamics which mean the end of the science fiction category as a place where young, ambitious or difficult writers can build their own audience. Norman Spinrad, meanwhile, has power fantasies about making people call him Sir.

Staying Alive is a depressing book to read. It's abominably written, parochial in its views, limited in its experience, secondhand in its news, its opinions are received, and the worldview of the author is the limited and distorted one of a man accustomed to walking with his ear to the ground. I sincerely hope no young or impressionable writers will mistake this unskilled and tasteless display of macho colloquialism for good advice or professional wisdom, because if they do they will be seriously misled.

The Guide to Supernatural Fiction
by Everett F. Bleiler *(The Kent State University Press, 1983, 736 pp., $55)*
(distributor in England and Europe: Eurospan, Ltd, 3 Henrietta St., London)

reviewed by Donald M. Hassler

In his wonderful book on the style and substance of thought among the late Enlightenment, early Romantic thinkers entitled *What Coleridge Thought,* Owen Barfield describes a subtlety with categories and oppositions that few have been able to match since:

> . . . we could say of it what Coleridge says of the unity which is "the essence of all opposites": that "it is neither because it is the essence of both." . . . This is taken to illustrate a universal principle; namely, that the infinite is present, or involved, in the simplest relation between infinities. (p.191).

The least successful part of Everett F. Bleiler's monumental new contribution to the study of a genre that I would love to hear Coleridge's comments upon is his essay toward the end, "The Phenomenology of Contranatural Fiction", in which he offers his own labeling and mapping of this area of fantasy (pp.553-556). His problem is suggested in the wording of his title and then laboured out in the sentences and lists of the essay itself.

"Contranatural" fiction is concerned with ". . . a world view that is in direct opposition to that of materialism," he maintains. Not only is science no longer committed to a simple materialism, as Bleiler implies, but also science fiction and fantasy are approaching syntheses in thinking and polar gymnastics of thought (see Philip K. Dick, Rudy Rucker, Gene Wolfe for starters) that even Coleridge, I think, would approve. In other words, it is not just a question of what our investigations uncover that will determine our understandings of reality (and hence our literary categories) but also how we think about our methodologies. Bleiler's categories impose too many limits on our understanding; but his theoretical essay is not the center of his book for, in fact, the alphabetical arrangement by author that he finally decides upon can lead (Coleridgewise) toward many centers.

This work of Bleiler's (who is of course one of the venerable researchers and anthologists in all science fiction and fantasy going back legendlike to the days when Ted Dikty knew him as a young graduate student in Chicago) is truly admirable. He describes and summarizes 7,200 separate fictions (his count) in some 1,775 books dating from the late Enlightenment (he starts with 1800 but drops back to pick up *The Castle of Otranto,* 1765, and other key texts) to 1960, "a watershed year in publishing." As an aside, one might argue that the subtle intermixing of science fiction and fantasy that I evoked at the start of this review did not become manifestly mature till recently so that Bleiler's linear and dialectic logic may be more appropriate for his subject than I suggested. Nevertheless, the methodology of this reference (and entertaining) volume is impressive and worth further comment. Bleiler had to decide whether to include stories of faked supernaturalism, detective stories in which supernatural elements are rationalized in the end, and stories in which all the elements are presented as a dream. He decided to include dream stories, to include some "fakes", and not to include detective stories. Other researchers and compilers would make different choices. What is fascinating is the variety of fictions and the self-conscious attempt to classify. If Bleiler is the Linnaeus of supernatural fiction (Northrop Frye is our Aquinas of all fictions), when will we have an extended natural classification system for what remains?

Finally, Bleiler's methodology of insisting upon printing his own plot summary for each story rather than using what he calls "talk-arounds" (I see these in the Curtis Smith reference book reviewed here recently) or the work of other summarizers adds an awesome authority to his work that, again, reminds me of the labors in the field of the early naturalists—though Linnaeus would use descriptions of plants sent to him by other people. The analogy, of course, is between literature and the fecundity of nature itself. Bleiler's book is both infinitely useful (he suggests that some of the fictional groups are endangered species that only his volume will preserve a vestige of) and humbling. The steady accumulation of fictions, even since 1765 and only in the area of the supernatural, defies classification and description. That is why Bleiler's hard work and self-conscious decision making are more valuable than his simplifying theories. If Everett Bleiler began collecting his some 40,000 file cards when Ted Dikty said he did (he must have, or before), this volume is also the celebration of a life work that we can only hope, driven by love, will endure and lead to more work. Coleridge would have admired, if not the logic, such industry and such love of literature.

The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction by Colin Greenland *(Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, xii + 244 pp, £11.95)*

reviewed by Patrick Parrinder

The Entropy Exhibition, Colin Greenland tells us, is based on a D.Phil thesis submitted in 1980 to the University of Oxford. Wondering what sort of revisions the author had made in preparing it for book publication, I turned idly to the index and looked for the name of Kingsley Amis. There were two references to Amis as a "mainstream" friend to sf, and one to him as playing an incidental role in the history of *New Worlds.* Altogether missing, however, was any hint that Amis's views on the British New Wave might differ from those of Colin Greenland. Nobody would guess, from reading *The Entropy Exhibition,* that Amis's 1981 anthology *The Golden Age of Science Fiction* contained an introduction comprehensively damning the New Wave and all its works. And this omission seems characteristic of what I would describe as the benevolent liberalism of Greenland's approach. He is tolerant, fair-minded, sensible; a generous quoter; an illuminating practical critic—all of these things. What's more, he has discriminations to make and (as he frequently assures the reader) is not prepared to accept just any experimentalist tosh. His book has all the qualities required of a judicious defence of the New Wave but one. It does not engage with the enemy.

Compare, for example, Amis and Greenland on Pamela Zoline's famous (?) story from *New Worlds,* "The Heat-Death of the Universe". Amis dispatches the story briefly and brutally, leaving us in no doubt what he thinks. Greenland quotes from it two or three times—as an "entropy exhibition" it is necessarily one of his own central exhibits—and he compares Zoline's housewife with characters from Spinrad, Ballard, and the pop artist Richard Hamilton. He calls "Heat-Death" "one of the best things ever published in *New Worlds*". But he never says *why* he admires it; instead, he quotes Brian Aldiss. We would surely have had a more stimulating discussion of Zoline if Greenland had actually thought it necessary to argue his case.

The Entropy Exhibition offers a meticulous documentation of various aspects of New Wave writing, concentrating on stylistic experiment and on the themes of entropy, space (anti- and inner), and sex. The book itself is elegantly if sometimes too self-indulgently written. Three long central chapters constitute a most useful survey of the work of the Big Three—Aldiss, Ballard, and Moorcock—and their varying responsibility for the New Wave. Greenland argues that Moorcock in particular has been underestimated (though the self-contradictory public pronouncements he quotes suggest that this prolific writer is sometimes his own worst enemy). There is much else in this book which shows Greenland to be an intelligent and sophisticated observer of the science-fiction scene and its associated cultural phenomena. He has the right to a certain detachment (the 1960s had ended before he had reached his sixteenth birthday) but it is, nevertheless, far too soon to write of the New Wave in a spirit of dispassionate literary history. One can only wish that the author had risked more, and argued his own convictions more outspokenly.

The Future of Eternity
by Casey Fredericks *(Indiana University Press, 1982, 229 pp, no price given)*

reviewed by Andrew Joron

The tone of this book on Science fiction by Casey Fredericks, a young classical scholar, is one of overwhelming enthusiasm—for the idea of sf and also for the idea of myth, whose influence on sf the author purports to trace. Fredericks waxes most enthusiastic of all when dwelling on the limitless potentials of mind that are allegedly released whenever myth and sf come in contact. Fredericks' barely-concealed Jungian transcendentalism soon leaves behind any attempt at scholarly sobriety and rigor, and the reader is treated to a whirlwind ride through a miscellany of sf texts whose actual relation to myth remains—at least from a rationalistic point of view—problematic and unclear.

The main difficulty lies in the author's lack of a solid, working definition of myth, except in the vaguest sense of "any pre-modern system of thought." Fredericks is not entirely to blame for this vagueness. From Aristotle's condemnation of myth as "a tissue of wonders", to Lévi-Strauss' characterization of it as "a series of translations without an original", myth has always been recognized for its resistance to rational analysis and systemization.

Fredericks has preferred to operate empirically in his search for traces of myth in science fiction. An sf tale is considered "mythological" if it happens to resemble a well-known myth, or if any of its characters can be related to a mythic archetype. Fredericks' overview of mythological sf touches only lightly on the various competing theories of myth (such as functionalism, Cassirer's expressivism, etc.) although he is quick to borrow tidbits of insight from them, if they happen to suit the text in question.

He is much less reluctant to pin sf down within an analytical schema. Indeed, the "cognitive estrangement" theory of sf, which the author wholeheartedly adopts, fills the empty space in his book that should have been occupied by a theory of myth. Fredericks argues that the real value of ancient myths for the modern world arises from the way myths make familiar things strange and strange things familiar. They provide perceptual refreshment; in the author's phrase, myths are "wonderfully stimulating, refreshing, free, and life-enhancing" (page 175).

Early in the book Fredericks applies Darko Suvin's theory of sf mechanically and without reservations to myth: "A 'myth' may then be defined simply as a fiction whose entire narrative field is taken up with dislocation effects" (page 41). Thus, the author assumes as given the problem he has set out to investigate, i.e., "the strong, almost inevitable, affinity between myth and sf" (page 33). The result is a misguided tendency toward the valorization of myths as historical reservoirs of sf-type imagination.

The fact that myths also have the honor of being the first form of organized belief designed to serve the interest of powerful elites—in closing off questioning and providing illusory answers about the nature and origin of Society—receives scant attention from Fredericks. The author's highly idealistic approach vaporizes the thick layers of social history separating myth from sf. In his view, the two coexist on an equable basis in the transcendent realm of narrative form. Fredericks never bothers to situate myth and sf materially within the different historical moments that produced them. Since his immediate concern is always with sf texts, and never with mythology *per se*, it should have

been especially important for Fredericks to recognize that sf is ordinarily produced as a category of mass-market "entertainment" fiction—and that its formal conventions and content have been greatly shaped by commercial, as well as literary, influences.

Fredericks' examples of science fiction have apparently been chosen without primary regard for their literary merit, but instead for their degree of "openness" to mythological interpretation. Some exceedingly minor fabulations are discussed in detail, while rather few of the "classics" are represented.

Among Fredericks' easiest targets are a handful of "mythological" novels by Roger Zelazny, an author whose utilization of myth-figures, as Fredericks admits, is capricious in the extreme. But Fredericks' observations on these and other works (by Farmer, Anderson, Moorcock, etc.) are meandering and inconclusive, given that he stands in fundamental need of a method for differentiating myth from science fiction. Instead, both forms are homogenized and lost in a welter of rhetoric devoted to "intellectual freedom", which the two supposedly provide.

Fredericks is sometimes desperate in his eclecticism—wishing to count Boucher's "Quest for St Aquin" as an example of mythological sf, he classifies even the abstract metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas as "myth". Many other stories, innocent of any special mythological frame or substance, are included here—but arriving naked, they exit clothed in Grecian archetypes.

That a text may be explicated in a mythological fashion does not prove Fredericks' case for "strong affinity". Mainstream literature is also susceptible to such analysis. However, the crux of the affinity for Fredericks appears in his polarization of sf as "heroic" and modernist writing as "anti-heroic".

Most sf is cast in the mold of the adventure story, and it is evident that Fredericks is attracted to the standard image of the multi-talented, self-assertive protagonist. His chapter entitled "In Defense of Heroic Fantasy" is a paean to the soul-cleansing properties of escapism. According to Fredericks, the "best" tales of battling barbarians are "tonic for a late twentieth-century world already over-burdened by intellectual depression and consciousness of individual powerlessness" (page 120). While never honestly confronting the political implications of this view, Frederick also leaves out of his account the psychological—and gender-specific—appeal of "heroic fantasy" to the wish-dreams of male dominance. The degradation of women that is routinely depicted in this genre goes entirely unmentioned.

Throughout his analysis, stories by or about women have been consciously avoided by Fredericks. Although he names several novels by women that would have been relevant to his theme, he excuses himself from consideration of them because "understanding the 'sexual other' is something I still understand only intuitively and obscurely, so as a male critic I am unable to go beyond the male androgyny of writers like Farmer and Graves" (page 169).

Despite Fredericks' prefatory declaration—"I aim at being *intelligent and interesting*" (page xii, italics in original)—it is obvious that his achievement falls short in many respects. The book is a muddled mix of superficial generalities and ideological pleading. The real affinity between mythology and sf has yet to be systematically and incisively explored.

Keep Watching the Skies! : American Science Fiction Movies of the Fifties – Volume 1, 1950 – 1957
by Bill Warren *(McFarland & Co., Publishers, Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina, 28640, USA; 1982, xvi + 467 pp, $39.95)*

reviewed by John Dean

Bill Warren has a warm, deft, individual and unpretentious critical voice. You might hope to come across it in a surprise letter received one morning from that old, lost friend of yours whom you haven't heard from since Ex-President Eisenhower had one of his golf clubs stolen by bandleader Lawrence Welk or Christine Keeler received her twenty-one gun salute (Bang. Bang. Bang. Etcetera.). In other words: an intelligent, friendly, nostalgic book.

The stodgy heavies in the field of sf and fantasy criticism have given *Keep Watching The Skies!* a very hard time. It has been dismissed as a volume of exclusive interest to specialists in 1950s sf films, appealing but lighthearted, serviceable but little more. How wrong they are.

Keep Watching The Skies!, Volume 1 (Vol. 2 will include up through 1962—"trends don't watch calendars") charts 133 English and American sf movies year by year, film by film. There are about 120 illustrations in the book, all very well chosen to highlight a point about characters, setting, or special-effects. The prose is lucid, sincere, humorous, with technical aspects and unusual anecdotes added here and there to spice up the mixture.

Warren's insights are quickened by affection. As he says in his introduction: "Don't expect to find these films discussed from the point of view of the auteur theory, the genre theory, the seminological theory (what Florida Indians think of them). Just me." The personal touch is extremely important since he was one of the great popcorn-eating mass of Baby Boomers who grew up with these films.

The sf movies released for mass consumption in America during the early 1950s were designed for the whole family, with primarily adult appeal. By the mid-1950s these movies were aimed more at young people, to the exclusion of adults. The sf movies of the period became a ritual which young people used to inspect the adult world which lay about them and threatened to engulf them in time.

Fifties sf movies were a naïve art form. Kids thrilled to the rough-hewn struggles enacted up on the Saturday Cinema screen, but they rarely knew *why* they were thrilled. Nuclear radiation got almost every major sf film monster going in the period, but "this was not a form of nuclear paranoia, merely cheap and simple plotting." Yet, in the end, many of these films helped to fill out a seedbed for the social unrest and the invigorating, iconoclastic attitudes of the 1960s. At the time 1950s sf movies were taken as the evanescent trivia of popular entertainment; in retrospect Warren shows how this just ain't so.

On another level, *Keep Watching The Skies!* is also a very fair assessment of what is lasting and what is mediocre in these films. Outstanding here are his readings of what are generally agreed to be the most important films of the era, such as *Forbidden Planet* (based on *The Tempest,* don't forget), *War of the Worlds, Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (fascist shades of "Tail Gunner" Joe McCarthy), *It Came From Outer Space,* and *The Incredible Shrinking Man.*

Warren also has a discerning way with overlooked oddities like *Cat-Women of the Moon* ("With a title like that, it hardly seems necessary to go on, but if I didn't, I would feel as if I betrayed a great trust . . . (it's a) screwily charming film.") and *Attack of the Crab Monsters.* Typical of Warren's panache, he points out about *Crab Monsters:* "The idea of battling a giant crab directed by a mind that only moments before was a friend of yours is amusingly ghastly." Compare this remark to John Brosnan's numbing observation (in Nicholls' *SF Encyclopedia*) about *Crab Monsters:* "Even the most fanatical devotees . . . find it difficult to say a good word for the film."

Keep Watching The Skies! also pinpoints influences in 1950s sf films missed by other critics. Among these was the incredible impact of the reissue of *King Kong* in the summer of 1952 and the effect Ray Bradbury's writings had upon the genre. Bradbury originated the typical, cinematic sf 1950s hero—with John Putnam in *It Came From Outer Space*—as well as the eerie, wasteland desert setting which became prevalent in 1950s sf movies.

Throughout *Keep Watching The Skies!* Bill Warren refreshens and rediscovers an area of cultural history which too many authorities have been all too ready to dismiss. The man is an intellectual adventurer. His book is a delight.

Olaf Stapledon: A Man Divided
by Leslie A. Fiedler *(Oxford University Press, 1983, 236 pp, $19.95)*

reviewed by David Pringle

I read this book with considerable enjoyment. Fiedler is a lively, provocative critic, as anyone who knows his *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) or *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968) can attest. He has shown some passing interest in sf for over a decade now—most notably in 1975 when he edited, and wrote a 13-page introduction for, *In Dreams Awake: A Historical-Critical Anthology of Science Fiction* (Dell Books). The introduction to that anthology contained a number of errors—for instance his inclusion of Edmond Rostand in a list of proto-sf authors (obviously he was thinking of the fellow with the long nose) and his passing references to Lester Del Ray, Fritz Lieber and Frederic Pohl (all *sic*). However, solecisms like these irritated sf insiders rather less than the suspicion that Fiedler was being condescending when he appeared to praise sf for its "slapdash writing, sloppiness and vulgarity". The fact that the contemporary sf writer he seemed to find most congenial was the slapdash, sloppy and frequently vulgar Philip José Farmer did not do much to allay the fears of some of the more sensitive literary souls in the sf establishment. Were they being got at by a Big Name Critic from the mainstream? Did the man have the faintest idea what he was talking about?

Around the time of that anthology Fiedler published his own sf novel, *The Messengers Will Come No More,* which appears to have been execrated by the few people who saw it. I have not read it—there was no British edition, and to the best of my knowledge there has been no American paperback edition—nor have I read any of Fiedler's earlier fiction: *The Last Jew in America, Nude Croquet,* etc. So I have no opinions to pass on Fiedler's one foray into sf writing or on his general abilities as an author of fiction. That is all quite irrelevant. Even if his denigrators are correct, and the man cannot practise what he preaches, it nevertheless seems to me that his standing as a zestful, enhancing critic

remains completely unaffected. He has always been full of ideas, open to new things, and usually happily irreverent in his approach (which means that he will inevitably tread on a few toes), and I for one am glad that he has turned his attention to science fiction. Given his long-standing interest in "pop lit" and pornography—see his essay "Cross the Border—Close the Gap" (1969)—one might almost have expected a book on Philip José Farmer (I can see the title!: *Tarzan in the Flesh, or Swallowing it Whole* . . .) but instead he has surprised us by focusing on that rather fusty and well-nigh "respectable" figure, Olaf Stapledon.

Let there be no mistake: Fiedler has done his homework and he has evidently read or reread every last scrap of Stapledon's fiction, including the posthumous works. It is clear that he has also read a good deal of the non-fiction. This is a well-researched book—even, if one can go so far, a labour of love. In fact it is not so surprising that Fiedler should have lighted on Stapledon when you consider that both are men of the 1930s—Fiedler in the sense that he was young during that decade and has constantly harked back to it in his criticism; and Stapledon in the sense that the 30s were the years of his greatest success. Born in 1886, Stapledon was already 44 when *Last and First Men* (his first work of fiction) was published in 1930, but, as Fiedler claims, Stapledon was a slow developer and the 30s were to mark him as deeply as they did a somewhat younger generation of novelists and poets.

Perhaps the most important fact of Stapledon's life at that time was that he became a Communist sympathizer, though never actually a Party member, and he retained that sympathy until his death in 1950. Although he doesn't quite say so here one suspects that Fiedler too was a Communist of sorts in the late 1930s, and so he is able to understand the feelings that Stapledon (and many, many others) had for Stalinist Russia. The trouble with Stapledon, in Fiedler's eyes, is that he never recanted: he never became a 40s Trotskyist, nor did he live to become a 50s liberal or a 60s New Left radical. He stayed the same: a doubter, certainly, but with a constant if uneasy loyalty to the Soviet Union which was attested by his participation in various Communist-organized congresses in the late 1940s. Similarly, Stapledon's overall philosophy changed not at all, and indeed repetitiousness became one of the besetting faults of his fiction, as Fiedler quite justly points out. Moreover, for all its great virtues of imaginative insight and its expressed concern for humanity, there is a decidedly Stalinist tone to much of Stapledon's writing, with its depictions of dire struggles and great dyings as the human race strives ever onwards and upwards to the light.

Fiedler says of Stapledon:

> On the conscious level, he is the heir to socialist humanism: a believer in communal decision making as well as communal goods; but on the deeper psychic levels from which his fiction comes, he is a shameless elitist—in the suspect tradition of Nietzsche—convinced that the "more fully awakened" among us (and who is to decide who they are, except themselves?) have an obligation to lead, the rest of us to follow. Moreover, to the leaders everything is permitted (after all, God *is* dead!) . . . (p.117)

—and in that statement it seems to me he is correct, especially when one considers the implications of a novel such as *Odd John* (1935), in which the murdering superman hero is fawned upon by the ordinary (i.e. human) narrator. There was some very murky stuff in those "deeper psychic levels", including a marked sado-masochism and (Fiedler asserts) an obsession with incest. Leaving aside the latter contentious issue, it seems to me that the sado-masochistic element is very obviously present in Stapledon's fictions, manifest not

only in the great dyings already referred to, but in the constant association of "ecstacy" and pain. Fiedler quotes an astonishing passage from *Last Men in London* (1932)—incidentally, a novel which impressed me deeply at the age of 14—in which the young hero stabs a knife into the palm of his own hand *and twists it,* all the while gazing at the stars, in order to induce an ecstatic mystical state. This sort of thing is hardly unique to Stapledon but the persistence with which he returns to such motifs of physical torment is remarkable.

Please do not misunderstand: this is far from being a debunking book or, indeed, a "muck-raking" one. Fiedler appreciates Stapledon for his incomparable ability to open up vistas of space and time, for his ceaseless quest to find an apocalyptic mythology appropriate to a scientific 20th Century, and not least for his ability to move the reader to tears over the fate of intelligence in an icy universe. Fiedler confesses to having wept at the ending of *Sirius* (1944), as no doubt many of us have done. That novel of a super-intelligent dog and of his love for a human girl is a beautiful book, perhaps a great book, and I agree entirely with Fiedler when he describes it as:

> . . . by all odds the best of his fictions—with the possible exception of *Star Maker.* More coherent and elegantly structured than anything which preceded it or was to follow, it is also more archetypally resonant, more genuinely pathetic, more truly a product of deep psychic impulses for once blessedly out of the author's control. (pp 184-185)

The references to "deeper psychic levels" and "deep psychic impulses" in the above quotations will alert the reader to the fact that Fiedler is very much a psychological critic, one for whom Freud replaced Marx in the disillusionment which followed the 1930s. Stapledon would not have approved, and perhaps some contemporary sf readers will also have doubts about this approach. Rather than prejudging, though, one should ask the question: "does it *work*?" I believe it does: I come away from this book with an enriched understanding of Stapledon and his writings, and my faith in the value of criticism as applied to sf is refreshed.

The only quibbles I have are very minor ones, of precisely the sort that are usually aimed at Leslie Fiedler. He generalizes (how he generalizes!), as someone once said. He makes sweeping statements in an often engaging way, and sometimes they contain errors of fact. One example is his passing reference to Wilfred Owen as a "1920s" writer (p.32)—although even here one sees what Fiedler means: for all that he died in 1918, Owen became *fashionable* in the 20s. Another small example is his bibliographically inept reference to Edgar Rice Burroughs, whose Martian romances were in Stapledon's personal library: "Nor could he have read them as a boy, since *Dejah Thoris, Princess of Mars,* the first of the series, did not appear until 1911, when Stapledon was 25" (p.43). In fact the work in question first appeared as an American magazine serial in 1912, not 1911, when it was entitled "Under the Moons of Mars"; it appeared in book form, as *A Princess of Mars,* in 1917, and "Dejah Thoris" was never a part of the title. A minor point, which Fiedler does not pick up on, is that the first British edition of ERB's novel was in 1919 (when Stapledon would have been 33) and the publishing house was Methuen, Stapledon's own subsequent publisher. Conceivably, a Methuen editor gave Stapledon the ERB books? Or, just possibly, Stapledon submitted *Last and First Men* to Methuen in the knowledge that they had already published ERB and therefore might be more amenable than most to a "fantastic romance"?

But this is small beer, and the sort of thing that should have been corrected by a copy-

editor who knew his or her stuff—or for that matter by Robert Scholes, the General Editor of the series. In point of fact there are a number of irritating typographical errors in this volume, particularly towards the end, and several incorrect attributions of dates—for example Wells's *Food of the Gods* is cited as both "1904" (right) and "1909" (wrong)—all of which is surprising in a book from a publisher of such academic repute. Nevertheless Oxford University Press's "Science Fiction Writers" series is shaping up to be by far and away the best line of critical monographs on sf authors. They have already given us H. Bruce Franklin's stimulating *Robert A. Heinlein: America as Science Fiction* (1980), plus volumes on Wells and Asimov which I have not seen. We are promised future books on Ursula Le Guin and Arthur C. Clarke. If any of these are as good as Fiedler on Stapledon then we shall be privileged indeed. Perhaps Robert Scholes can prevail on Fiedler to give us another volume in the series—maybe even that book on Philip José Farmer?

Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy
edited by George E. Slusser, Eric S. Rabkin and Robert Scholes *(Southern Illinois University Press, 1983, xii + 209 pp, $19.95)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Thirteen at one table, critics all, Leslie Fiedler at the head with Eric Rabkin at his right hand and Bruce Franklin at his left, the table being that of the third J. Lloyd Eaton Conference, this commemorative menu being very much what was served there at the University of California, Riverside, with few editorial changes. Thirteen, traditionally unlucky, for a dinner party, for a symposium, even one with a title as abstract as *Coordinates*. The reader sits down warily, expecting the worst, a bun-fight, or a dog's dinner; but rises, after several breathers, positively gorged, and thinking, "What a feast!"

Fiedler, who declared his interest in sf long ago when it was trendy to do so, has stuck to it, keeping up with the stuff, *and* the criticism, *and the fanzines*. He knows what he's talking about when he delivers a powerful plea for a criticism that's congruent with the fiction as non-academic readers perceive it—stern dismissals for *Extrapolation* and *Science-Fiction Studies*—a plea, videlicet, for *Foundation*, hurrah! (on its good days). His test case is Van Vogt: come at him too literary and he's unspeakable; come at him too partisan and he's awful *but very important*. Get Van Vogt straight and you're on target, says Fiedler. Step forward, Mr Hay.

After that, two lightweights. Rabkin utters a theoretical rhapsody for evolution as amelioration, and fantasy as psychologically conducive to evolution. He never puts a foot on the ground, so how can you trip him up? Then Gerald Prince, who hasn't read much sf at all, says so, but has an honest bash at first steps in cognitive estrangement. Next, Mark Rose: sf is constructed upon an unresolvable tension between the materialist ideology of science and the romantic apprehension also known as sensawunda; and the proof is right here, in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. As a bell, Rose, and I bet Fiedler liked it too.

Joseph M. Lenz describes two sf classics, *Foundation* and *Dune*, as classical—that is, as epics each commemorating the inauguration of an empire. *Foundation's Edge* has since fuzzed up his neat conclusion, but that's scarcely Lenz's fault. Michelle Massé spells

out a character-study of Bron, anti-hero of *Triton*. Her prose is lumpy but her mind is clear. Her structuralist attitude is less exalted than Delany's own, less assertive, more demonstrative, more use. Bron adopts an autoplastic strategy—changing his own body—to avoid the problems of social integration. Gary K. Wolfe discusses autoplastic and alloplastic themes in sf—Heinlein's "Waldo" and Simak's "Desertion"—to show sf's preoccupation with fitting and misfitting: change me or change everything else? Ayn Rand, as we know, was all for alloplastics. The raw material of Earth yielded to the iron will of her capitalist Ubermenschen. Robert Hunt, amused, pokes around in her deathly "philosophy", pulls huge gobbets of pulp sf, still steaming, out of *Atlas Shrugged*. Now we can shrug too, but carefully.

George Guffey has a horror story to tell, of a bowdlerization of an sf classic that, impression by impression, like a virus, all but swallowed the authoritative edition. The irony: the book was *Fahrenheit 451*. Since the truth is out already, and the damage made good, it's odd that Guffey should think it needs detailing here, except as a caution. Odder then that he makes no mention of the same virus striking *The War of the Worlds* in the same year, 1977, not in Ballantine *but in OUP*, and in their "critical edition". David Y. Hughes told *that* horror story in *Science-Fiction Studies* No. 12. H. Bruce Franklin's horror story is of America in 1939, strangled by the totalitarian alliance of industry and government, under cover of science fiction. The camouflage in question was not *Astounding*, which he shows to have been operating a different, regressive, marginal mythology; no, early Campbell had nothing on the World's Fair, running that year as the "World of Tomorrow" and exhibiting all the chromium-plated utopian gaga you'd expect to find in the literature. Intriguing.

Disconcerting. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's duet is heavily orchestrated. They weigh into the dialectic of late nineteenth-century patriarchal anxiety and early twentieth-century feminist hope: the one in Rider Haggard's *She*, the other in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. Everything is in place, and the unflinching neo-Freudian ransack turns up some good stuff, not least the recurrent trio of male explorers, bewildered misogynists who suffer in the gynarchies, whoever writes them. But somehow the assumptions of these essays are not the assumptions of the others. They seem to have intruded from a different conference. Those three dumb men are not referred forward to Tiptree's "Houston, Houston", for instance. If only the challenge of feminist scholarship had actually engaged with male academia here, instead of trundling along like a parallel universe. But the sense of displacement increases with George Slusser's extraordinary finale to which all the foregoing are as pips in jam. Slusser collects Hume and Cocteau, Hoffman and Mishima, Kierkegaard and Kubrick, and takes us all for a long ride down the tube of a cosmic kaleidoscope called "Existential Fantasy". Texts are written on quicksilver, and mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show, but I for one would rather have had the paper he delivered at the conference, "Heinlein's Perpetual-Motion Fur Farm", even if it has seen print already.

Tarzan and Tradition: Classical Myth in Popular Literature
by Erling B. Holtsmark *(Greenwood Press, 1981, $22.50)*

reviewed by Robert Meadley

The jungle is Tarzan's. It is the luck of very few popular writers to capture entire a particular landscape. In the desert, for instance, the sheik of Ethel M. Dell wars constantly with P.C. Wren's legionnaires; though if the former looks like Valentino, the latter may resemble Abbot and Costello. A foggy London street; is it Sherlock Holmes who comes, or one of many lesser characters, Herbert Lom as the Phantom of the Opera perhaps, for in this world of image and imagination books merge indistinguishably into film, and the Paris of the novel becomes the London of the cinema. Though Holmes presides here, a pantheon of lesser beings haunt his gaslit shadow. But in a jungle glade, we await Tarzan. An awkward dilletante taste might insist on looking for Sanders of the River or the African Queen, but it is Tarzan we all expect. This is a potent reputation, and if the crown is cardboard and somewhat tinted with burlesque, it is still regal.

But there are aliens afoot in the jungle. They are not villains in the mould of Rokoff and Paulvitch, but I am not wholly sure they are not sinister. In manner they remind one more of Professor Archimedes Q. Porter. (The father of Jane! On your knees and howl, those who did not know.) A sample from *Tarzan of the Apes* will give the flavour:

> Professor Archimedes Q. Porter adjusted his spectacles.
> "Ah yes, indeed: yes, indeed—most remarkable, most remarkable!" said the professor; "but I can add nothing further to what I have already remarked in elucidation of this truly remarkable occurence," and the professor turned slowly in the direction of the jungle.
> "But, papa," cried the girl, "you haven't said anything about it yet."
> "Tut-tut, child; tut-tut," responded Professor Porter, in a kindly and indulgent tone. "Do not trouble your pretty head with such weighty and abstruse problems," and again he wandered off slowly in still another direction, his eyes bent on the ground at his feet, his hands clasped behind him beneath the flowing tails of his coat.
> "I reckon the daffy old bounder don't know no more'n we do about it," growled the rat-faced sailor.

The example I have before me, author of the first volume of a series called Contributions to the Study of Popular Culture, is Professor Erling B. Holtsmark, Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Iowa. His book is entitled *Tarzan and Tradition: Classical Myth in Popular Literature;* published by the Greenwood Press (from Robin Hood to Tarzan at a leap?) of Westport, Connecticut. He is solemn and means well. He refers to Burroughs' Venusian novels as Venerian, which should give you a quick likeness. Perhaps, like Professor Porter, someone has sold him a Spanish treasure map. He may not have been shipwrecked, but he is certainly lost in the jungle.

Professor Holtsmark's purpose is serious. He wishes to confer respectability on the author of Tarzan. "In no sense," he insists in his preface, "am I engaging in a form of intellectual slumming." I will happily suppose he believes this, but I am not sure that it's true. His argument is based entirely on the first six Tarzan novels; by far the best, though I cannot claim to have read all the subsequent ones. Now, while he could not reasonably have been expected to discuss all 24 titles, it might have been more honest, in view of the scorn with which he treats Tarzan's critics, to have chosen his sample from across the whole spectrum of performance, or at least alluded to the deterioration of style in the later novels. Professor Holtsmark, if not slumming, is like a missionary among fallen women

who only notices the young and pretty ones; he turns a blind eye to those showing signs of pox or who no longer bother to sweeten with peppermint the cheap gin on their breath.

Another somewhat dubious assertion, again in the professor's own words: "The classical tradition in which Burroughs had been so steeped in his younger years emerges with clarity." "Steeped" is a strong word where the evidence only suggests that Burroughs, like not a few other popular writers, had a little Latin knocked into him at school.

At the point where the professor makes this claim, his argument is that some names of animals in the Tarzan stories appear to be derived from Latin. About this he is sometimes plausible, if ponderous:

> The name of the hippopotamus, Duro, is suspiciously close to the Latin *durus,* 'harsh, rough, enduring', a not inappropriate appellation. The formation then is of a type commonly observed in the transition from Latin to modern Spanish, wherein the Latin *-us* appears as *-o* in Spanish. (For example, Latin *caballus* goes into Spanish *caballo,* Latin *manus* to Spanish *mano,* and so forth.)

and sometimes mystical, if not farcical: "It appears that the name for the boar, Horta, has been feminised from the masculine *hortus,* which is Latin for 'garden'."

The logic of this escapes me, and evidently escapes the professor, never loth to expand on the self-evident, for he leaves this extraordinary declaration without any further comment. A pity, since this is one of the few points in the book where I should have appreciated enlightenment. I have seen very few wild boar, and then only in captivity, but none of them has ever struck me as either feminine or even dimly related to gardens, although Horta the effeminate pig of a gardener sounds like a promising character for a comic novel.

I can only assume that the professor has been hypnotised by his own fantasy. He is certainly ruthless in overstating his case. A single remark by Burroughs (transplanted by Holtsmark from Irwin Porges' monumental *Edgar Rice Burroughs: The Man Who Created Tarzan)* that he had recently re-read Plutarch's *Lives,* becomes evidence of "Burroughs abiding interest in the classical world"; "mirrored", thus Burroughs' remark is introduced, "in the following citation of his *ipsissima verba*". "Abiding interest" is as strong as "steeped", and the evidence is as scanty. I have scoured Porges for any similar remarks by Burroughs, without finding one.

And here's a mistake that a professor, or even a conscientious student, should not make; he is discussing Burroughs' use of polarity, or the juxtaposition of opposites:

> Tarzan's father, John Clayton, receives his commission to go to Africa to untangle a diplomatic difficulty, and 'he was both elated and appalled' . . . The use of the polar expression here provides the springboard for viewing Clayton with a fullness that a less pleonastic phrasing might have rendered difficult.

Pleonastic, as I understand it, means exactly the opposite of polar. Wyld's *Universal Dictionary* (my personal totem) has "Pleonasm . . . Redundancy of style; use of superfluous words, esp. words expressing over again what has already been expressed in the sentence; e.g. he was struck on the head and received a blow on the skull; he is dumb and cannot speak." One could not have a less pleonastic phrase than the bald polar one which the professor quotes. But let it pass, let it pass.

So, *panga* in hand and trailing exhausted bearers, we labour on. It is the professor's argument that a methodology similar (we are not told how it differs) to that for classical

literature "lends itself to the study of Burroughs' novels precisely because they are conceived and to a large extent executed in a manner that speaks of a classical background and classical influences", and it is a principal plank of this argument that there are many parallels between the Tarzan novels, or at least those of the acceptable sample, and the epic literature of Greece and Rome. There is, for example, a continuous motif of analogy with the *Aeneid,* which may be summed up by the following:

> Indeed the language is reminiscent of Aeneas' famous start for the lower world.
> "Ibant obscuri sola nocte per umbram (Beneath the lonely night they started out dimly through the shadow . . .)" (*Aeneid* 6.268)
> And in Burroughs:
> "With the coming of night he set forth . . ." (5.22)

It seems to me, in my obscurity, that it is the situation that is similar and not the language, and I cannot believe that anyone who writes "He (or they) set out at night . . ." places themselves immediately in a tradition that derives directly from the *Aeneid.*

Again I am reminded of *Tarzan of the Apes:*

> When Professor Archimedes Q. Porter and his assistant, Samuel T. Philander, after much insistence on the part of the latter, finally turned their steps towards camp, they were as completely lost in the wild and tangled labyrinth of the matted jungle as two human beings well could be, though they did not know it.
>
> It was by the merest caprice of fortune that they headed towards the west coast of Africa, instead of towards Zanzibar on the opposite side of the Dark Continent.
>
> When in a short time they reached the beach, only to find no camp in sight, Philander was positive that they were north of their proper destination, while, as a matter of fact they were about two hundred yards south of it.
>
> It never occured to either of these impractical theorists to call aloud on the chance of attracting their friends' attention. Instead, with all the assurance that deductive reasoning from a wrong premise induces in one, Mr Samuel T. Philander grasped Professor Archimedes Q. Porter firmly by the arm and hurried the weakly protesting old gentleman off in the direction of Cape Town, fifteen hundred miles to the south.

Professor Holtsmark's fundamental error is that he desperately wants to place Burroughs in a tradition that is largely classical and wholly respectable. But Burroughs belongs to a tradition of popular literature, perfectly legitimate in its way, about whose origins it is possible, if improper, to demonstrate almost anything by selective use of evidence, since popular writers have always plundered widely under the continuous pressure to produce more copy. For instance, Professor Holtsmark wonders coyly whether there is a connection between an episode in John C. Cremony's *Life Among The Apaches* (published in 1868 and recently promoted to academic respectability) and an almost identical episode in *Jungle Tales Of Tarzan.* "Nor," says the professor, after conceding that Burroughs probably had read Cremony, "should one think that the connection, if it is genuine, is in any sense indicative of Burroughs' auctorial underhandedness. He borrows extensively from the past and adapts the material to his own ends, and the point in introducing this one parallel narrative is simply to underscore the eclectic origins of Tarzan." I can think of another instance of what the professor so delicately calls "parallel narrative": the plot of *The Mad King* is lifted wholesale from Anthony Hope's *Prisoner Of Zenda.* It is none the worse for that; I enjoyed *The Mad King,* it has an atmosphere of the one-act music hall melodrama, with very hissable villains and an utterly contemptible cad, which is enjoyable in itself, and for those who require more, is an interesting commentary on the ambiguities, such as they are, of the original. Yet somehow, since Anthony Hope has yet to acquire academic respectability

(but give it time, academia is now as greedily omnivorous as the pulps) I cannot imagine the professor defending this "borrowing" (it is a theft requiring either a pantechnicon or an army of porters) as smugly as that from the well-established Cremony. (Cremony seems well worth reading, by the way; he also figures in the footnotes to *Flashman and the Redskins*. His book, says Holtsmark, "is almost Herodotean in sweep and anecdotal particularly," but don't be put off; Herodotus also knew a good tale and told them succinctly.)

"Eclectic origins" is one way of describing the fact that popular literature exists, and always has done, in the same atmosphere of prequels and sequels, rip-offs, cover versions and bootlegs, as all other forms of popular entertainment. Burroughs did not spring full grown from Virgil's thigh, and to enshrine him in a niche with Virgil, Darwin and Cremony (all readable; popular literature has no monopoly of readability) is simply to misplace him.

Professor Holtsmark takes great pains to demonstrate the presence in the Tarzan stories of such 'classical' literary techniques as ring-composition, polarity, parallelism, chiasmus and synkrisis. (Don't be distressed; these are academic names for quite simple things.) Now, while ranging through Porges' huge biography of Burroughs, looking in vain for evidence of Burroughs' "abiding interest" in things classical, (motor cars, yes—things classical, no) I came across a letter from Burroughs to his current editor, Thomas Newell Metcalf of *All-Story* magazine, remarking on his lack of confidence in his grammar, to which Metcalf replied that "if Ed were to get a good rhetoric 'like Sherman Adam Hill's,' this might prove valuable." The term *rhetoric* has a very dated ring to it, we should now call it *style,* but remember Burroughs was born in 1875 and sold his first story in 1911; his style is essentially Edwardian, which may account for some of the "classical" influences. All this seemed worth a small experiment. So, lacking an Edwardian rhetoric, I took out the best catalogue I have of such things (a translation of Longinus *On The Sublime* in the Penguin *Classical Literary Criticism)*, picked a volume of Jack London stories at random from my collection and set to work. I found not only examples of items from the professor's list, but also varieties of that classically controversial flora, always a favourite of mine, the *polyptoton.* I am now ready, at the drop of a grant from the University of Iowa or the Catholic College of Medicine Hat, to produce a paper on Periclean influences on the language of the San Francisco waterfront *circa* the Gold Rush. ("Herodotus knew a good tale and told them succinctly" looks like a species of *polyptoton,* for those who wish to pursue the matter.)

What eludes Professor Holtsmark is that all these techniques are the commonplace of literary composition, some enjoying more favour at one time than another, and that popular writers are no more necessarily fools than authors with more serious intent are necessarily bores, or than professors necessarily know what they are talking about. I have no special animus against Professor Holtsmark. He just happens to be an example of his kind, and to have stumbled into the stake-lined pit of one who has "gone native." What makes it necessary to cut him up for the pot is that he is not alone. Academics are beginning to batten in hordes on all forms of popular culture, and where one was accustomed to see only the adventurers, the ivory hunters and slave traders, the missionaries are moving in. It may be inevitable that the innocent, grinning readers will end up wearing top hats and singing hymns at the direction of those who seek to impose varieties of an alien god, but perhaps we can promote one or two of these invaders to a

martyr's crown with an occasional spear thrust or poisoned arrow from the shadows, before the anthropologists arrive to restore us tidily in the image of ourselves.

Postscript

Another example, for those who may imagine I exaggerate, of the sloppy standards that are apparently acceptable when dealing with popular culture. While reading round the subject (anything I could find on Tarzaniana and the pulps generally) in order to put Professor Holtsmark in some sort of context, I came across *Publishers for Mass Entertainment in Nineteenth Century America,* ed. Madeleine B. Stern, G.K. Hall & Co., 1980. I grabbed at this—an authoritative bibliography of popular publishers was something I really needed—only to be frustrated immediately by a glaring omission. I first looked, naturally, for anything on Frank Munsey, publisher of *All-Story* magazine, which carried the first Burroughs stories, and *Argosy,* the boys' magazine which he transformed into the first of the pulps, creating the genre in which Burroughs was to flourish. But there was no entry under Munsey, and no mention of him either in the index or the introduction, though there is reference to the publishers' panic of 1893, the consequences of which are said to have inspired Munsey's invention of the pulps. (Curiously, for those who like coincidence, I notice from the Library of Congress data that Ms Stern was born in 1912, the year the first Burroughs story appeared in Munsey's *All-Story* magazine.) I wondered at first whether Munsey, whose operation seems to have been in the '90s and on into the twentieth century, had been omitted because he was felt to belong more in the twentieth century than the nineteenth, and was perhaps being saved for a subsequent volume—though even so one would have expected some mention of him. But I find A.L. Burt Company (1883 – 1937), virtually a year-to-year contemporary of Munsey, a reprint house, and of infinitely less significance, rates a six-page entry with full-page illustration. (A.L. Burt Company are mentioned as having published Tarzan reprints following the success of the films. As I could find no mention of them in Porges, I presume this was one of Burroughs' rare problem-free business arrangements.) So I can only imagine that Ms Stern has either overlooked Munsey or is not aware of him. Perhaps, for Ms. Stern, the pulps have yet to join the dime novel in the respectability of the chap-book and broadsheet. But in what purports to be a comprehensive bibliography of publishers for mass entertainment, and like most such works is not cheap, this omission deserves comment.

Incidentally, I noticed a sinister phenomenon in the acknowledgements to this book. Thanks are given to Madeleine B. Stern. A Madeleine B. Stern, as editor, is dispensing these thanks. A new novel of rescue occurs to me, *Tarzan and the Library of Clones.* In a lost valley beyond the Congo, a mad don is manufacturing identical students of popular culture. If there are two Madeleine B. Sterns, how many Professor Holtsmarks are there? They are in our midst. Let us flee to the jungle, or what is left of it after the herbicidal attentions of the clones of Horta, the effeminate pigs of gardeners.

No Enemy But Time
by Michael Bishop *(Timescape, 1982, 397pp, $3.50; Sphere Books, 1983, 397pp, £2.25)*

reviewed by John Dean

Time has come, the reviewer said, to scrutinize Michael Bishop's *No Enemy But Time.* For a year now it has been gathering laurels: the Nebula for Best Novel, the SF Research Association's endorsement that it "is not only highly recommended, but required reading for those who take science fiction seriously," and a chorus of hip hoorays ("awesome . . . major novel . . . true dramatic power . . . most inventive . . . unique . . . topnotch") from the likes of fellow novelists Benford, Bryant, Zelazny, Spinrad, Elizabeth A. Lynn and George R.R. Martin.

Let's look at it closely before it's covered with marble and surrounded by a fence. *No Enemy But Time* is about a black American, Joshua Kempa, who travels back two million years to the Pleistocene era, at a geographical place roughly equivalent to today's East Africa, Kenya, Lake Rudolph. The purpose of this "dropback" is to unriddle the enigma of human origins. Back there in the way-back-when Joshua Kempa joins a small tribe of hominids, eventually marries one, sires a child, stays the length of two years, and returns to the present (1987) with the child. He finds that our bipedal, primate ancestors were neither beast nor angel. They were a community of tough survivors, both gentle and brutal, humble and ambitious.

But *No Enemy But Time* is a fictive machine that runs with at least two different engines. It runs on the dual power of a first person narrative that relates Joshua's prehistoric adventures, and a third person narrative that relates Joshua's biography from birth in 1962 to rebirth in 1987 into the Pleistocene era. The two tales run parallel, chapter by chapter. And the book's final chapters try to interthread the two narratives into a uniform place and time.

It is enormously ambitious, filled with excellence, marred by profound fault lines.

Science fictionally *No Enemy But Time* succeeds in a number of ways. It works diligently, resourcefully in the scientific light of paleoanthropology. However, the time traveling is not done by strictly obeying the laws of physics. Joshua ("Yah delivers") is visionary. He is a chrononaut by virtue of oneiromancy. He dreams his way back two million years—with a little help from his friends and a lavish, American government expense account.

Some have said this method of time-travel is the book's weakness, that it is dubious science, puttering with silly gizmos. But this remark is foolish. For I think it is Bishop's intention to integrate the technological with the spiritual. His metaphor works. It is a metaphysical puzzle. For Joshua Kempa had always dreamed of the Pleistocene era, vividly and accurately. To finally get there means to finally get in touch with his deepest, innermost self. Time-travel drifts him "into the objectified territory of the . . . subconscious, a 'dreamland' that is no longer a dream but a palpable place." Kempa is "kemp": a warrior, a champion of dreams.

The multiplicity begats thematic plurality in this genesis tale of *No Enemy But Time.* The hero's quest is manifold. Joshua retrieves a treasure chest of knowledge about the "disadvantaged innocence of our Pleistocene ancestors." But Joshua is a marginal man, the disadvantaged, disenfranchised American black. He doesn't rightly belong anywhere:

"The invisible man, another country's native son, cut off from his roots in the primeval Kane'an." Yet this outsider finds he is perfectly, edenically at home in a hominid tribe which itself is tenuously at home in a prehistoric world.

What's more, Joshua began life as the bastard child of an illiterate Spanish whore. He was subsequently adopted and educated by an all-American Air Force family. He was part of a family to which he did not spiritually belong. His time-travel excursions were thus the dynamic, purposeful expressions of individual anxieties. The child, the adolescent, and finally the man had to dream himself to himself.

His personal, familial search is paternal and patrimonial. He is after the father he never had. He must continually change families and countries. It is a deep theme, as Thomas Wolfe wrote: "the deepest search in life . . . the thing that in one way or another was central to all living . . . man's search to find his father, not merely the father of his flesh, not merely the father of his youth, but the image of a strength and wisdom external to his need and superior to his hunger, to which the belief and power of his own life could be united." And Bishop handles this theme of the father exquisitely in *No Enemy But Time.*

However, having said all this, it is important to note that we ain't got no Great American Novel here. The book is excellent in bits and pieces. Elsewhere there is dullness and noticeable imperfection.

To start, I find that the subject of discovering man's origins demands more emotion, more romantic heroism that Bishop allows in *No Enemy But Time.* It is a curiously dispassionate work which is more often impartial than lyrical. The alternation between first and third person narrative is a checks and balances system. It keeps the point of view as factual as possible, forces the story to be "objective". As a novelist Bishop refuses to idealize reality. He focuses on ordinary people (complete with soiled underwear and clumsy condoms), likely sentiments, minute attention to the detail of a setting.

Perhaps this is a question of taste, for which there is no system, no proofs. Perhaps I was set for the groove of Rosny-Ainé's *Quest for Fire,* the spiritual *frission* you feel in the first "Primeval Night" section of *2001.* Either way, Bishop's primeval world felt excessively artificial, brainy, a product of the author's cool, elite intellectuality rather than blood, sweat and heartfelt gutsiness.

His realism was also awkward and agglutinative. The story would occasionally flounder in paragraphs of detailed information. Melville made this mistake in the tedious Beale and Scoresby chapters of *Moby Dick.* But he redeemed himself imperially. Bishop, for example, includes a list of "way of necessity in-the-field gear . . . a canteen (Army surplus, government issue); a Swiss Army pocketknife with a lanyard chain (L.L. Bean Inc., Freeport, Main); an Eddie Bauer combination stove and survival kit; a shaving bag with a Gillette Track II razor, a small can of Colgate shaving cream (lime scented)." Then he returns to the action. The effect is like looking at your watch in a movie theatre, reading an ingredients label instead of following a story.

Then comes my biggest, and last, complaint: Bishop's uneven tone, his garbled narrative voice. Don't get me wrong. The man has a fine command of prose. The speech, for example, of Joshua's foster mother Jeanette R. Monegal is as gutsy, precise, and eloquent as anything in modern literature. But it's a meadow amid brambles.

Bishop belittles his tribe of hominids with cutesy, pet names like Alfie, Roosevelt, Mister Pibb, Bonzo, Zippy, Miss Jane. Shades of ingenuous old Clifford D. Simak! Why

does Bishop engage in self-effacing silliness? Is he or is he not aware of the profundity of his theme? In the same vein, he indulges his taste for tall tales. There was one yarn about a rhinoceros that was pure Chinese water torture.

Overall, *No Enemy But Time* is a tonal gallimaufry, a medley of contradictory voices to the point where style overshadows story. Judging by his prologue, he sees his tale as a coherent, mixed-up slide show. He thinks that his shuffling of images will "convey nuances that linear sequence could not really communicate." Each new chapter will be "a revision and a gloss".

But echoes of Dustin Hoffman vie against Gulliver amid the yahoos. After a downbeat conclusion to Joshua's prehistoric adventures the ending comes on with a jazzy, whimsical chapter strongly reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut. Earlier in the book I heard lectures by Jane Goodall and Louis Leakey. At other moments I fell into folk songs, backwoods' tales, comic realism, and a long, strong dose of yee old American Holden Caulfield, Huck Finn novel of adolescent development.

Okay, you may ask, why not?

But, I reply, I plead, shouldn't they fit together?

Bishop has been praised as having "an imagination that knows no restraints". He could use some. Maybe he never blots a line. Would he had blotted a thousand.

The novel runs the risk of self-annihilation through excessive dissonance. Certainly narrative flow is impeded in *No Enemy But Time*. Damn it, the reader doesn't know where the story is going or where it wants to go or, ultimately, if the story is of *any* importance. Is the author lost? Is this an elaborate con job? I'm upset because *No Enemy But Time* is alternately so fine, so weak. I expected more. Michael Bishop, wherever you are, don't let that Nebula go to your head. This novel shows great promise.

Roderick, or The Education of a Young Machine and **Roderick at Random, or Further Education of a Young Machine**
by John Sladek *(Granada, 1980, 348 pp, £6.95; and: 1983, 317 pp, £1.95)*

reviewed by Cherry Wilder

To begin in the middle. The story of Roderick's creation is already passing into legend, among humans as among computers, and has been amply reviewed, but it is a pleasure to read the two books side by side. We can look forward to Roderick's adventures at the Danton Doggie Dinette, to his meeting with Ida, the prostitute with a heart of gold and a sexy mirror, to his pursuit by bumbling O'Smith, the bionic gunfighter, and to his friendship with Luke, the paranoid joiner of sects. We can also look back at the first book and see just how well the stories mesh. Minutes after the spring blizzard has ripped over the campus at ole Minnetonka there is Lee Fong explaining the Roderick Project to Prof. Rogers. (And why was he legging it around the campus after dark?) Luke Draeger, the ex-astronaut, turns up on page 21. Allbright, the poet, Lyle Danton Tate, who sculpts Roderick's ultimate head in his own image, horrible Mr Kratt (is his first name Auto or maybe Pluto?) . . . everyone turns up again.

Roderick is at his funniest and most moving as a baby intelligence trying to explain why a raven is like a writing-desk and as a little kid robot confounding mentor after mentor. He has two distinct sets of foster parents: Hank and Indica Dinks who fly apart and

become a Luddite and a Machines Libber respectively, and Ma and Pa, Mary and Paul Wood, two hack sf writers who faked their own suicides, switched roles, and gave their boy parental love plus pixilated ethnology and a new body.

The second book settles down a little; it begins in a less frenetic tone as Roderick becomes a lonely, grown-up innocent abroad. The team of gifted but unfortunate scientists who created him has been dispersed. Dan Sonnenschein and Mary Mendez are in hospitals for the insane, Lee Fong is repairman in a low gambling den in Taipin, Ben Franklin is the personal assistant of Mr Kratt, and Leo Bunsky is a wired-up brain in a tank at the Orinoco Institute. This congeries of pipe-smoking oldsters, of the reptilian glance and liver-spotted claw, have succeeded in neutralizing his creators but they can't catch Roderick. The chase continues and so does the debate on learning machines and the examination of the relation between human and automaton.

On this second theme the author is lively and observant. Human attitudes to their bodily images—dolls, statues—and to their mental images—computers, learning machines—are imbued with the passion and morbid fascination we reserve for sex and the gods. Sladek sends up Women's Lib, artfully missing the point here and there, so we must throw in the notion that there is a whiff of the Patriarchate in all this carry-on with the creation of dolls and puppets, Olimpia and Galatea. Men, so men appear to be saying, created everything; was this a genetic urge or a bad case of uterus envy?

John Sladek takes a long, informed, humane look at the development of learning and thinking machines and concludes that this development is possible, in fact it has arrived. The corollary is that robots or thinking machines should be treated kindly, sensibly and with respect. Unfortunately, as the books point out, hardly anybody is able to behave kindly or sensibly. Human beings are wonderfully gifted and capable of love but they are also stupid, bigotted, neurotic, cruel, driven by greed and at the mercy of a garish, shoddy, hustling, cult-ridden, drug-sodden society of their own making. Behind the impish mask of John Sladek, the humorist, there lurks the savage indignation of Jonathan Swift. We could infer that the satirist is also, like Swift, a moralist and a harsh one. The love and understanding he feels and causes us to feel for Roderick and for other simpler machines may be, in part, a deep distaste for human beings.

The interstices of both books are packed with robot lore, running gags, slices of life, paradoxes, palindromes and one-liners. John Sladek is beautifully, effortlessly funny, clever and meaningful. (If the word retains any meaning . . .) How about the story of Abraham and Isaac as a Flow Chart, in *Roderick,* or the mystery of the missing $60,000,000, in *Roderick at Random?* What whoops of joy would a computer buff utter over these books while your reviewer guffaws at the T.S. Eliot references? In a genre not devoid of brilliant all-rounders Sladek is shaping up as the most preposterous polymath of them all. Sf readers who often pay lip-service to a love of ideas, while stuffing themselves with space candy, can now experience a real ideas man in action.

For all his brilliance, however, he has some difficulty in getting off the merry-go-round and ending the second book. The relentless scurrying about of a great number of characters has too alienating an effect. Roderick himself is not quite the hero or even the anti-hero to catalyze all this material. A few of the final solutions are too facile . . . the defusing of the awful Orinocan oldies, for example. Personally I believe those pipe-smoking old bastards are still out to get us all and have a branch up the line in Heidelberg.

The climax, Roderick's personal protest against human violence, is fine but a shade

too slight; it slips past a little, as Father K. slipped past, joining the queue to the gas chambers at Auschwitz, as a young woman in Cologne is slipping past, on hunger strike for World Peace. So the chase ends with nobody much the wiser, with a round-up of mankind's poor, broken, half-made, half-mad simulacra at the wedding in the Church of Plastic Jesus and with a white epoxy sculpture entitled Man Confronting The Universe. What will happen next? What has happened next in the mind of John Sladek? Would it be too hopeful to move Roderick's spiritual children into space after this most artistic ending?

In Viriconium and **The Ice Monkey**
by M. John Harrison *(Gollancz, 1982, 126 pp, £6.95; and: 1983, 144 pp, £8.95)*

reviewed by Roz Kaveney

From the start of his career what has stood out about M. John Harrison has been a cold and clear anger—anger at the dolts who insist on simple literal-minded genre series, anger at the class myths of Tolkien, anger at the shoddiness that passes for art both in sf and in the literary world as a whole, anger at things for breaking and staying broken and people for dying, anger at anger itself as something that stands in the way, often as not, of some sort of solution. Much of the development of his prose has been the hardening of an instrument with which to express that intensity of feeling without breaching his sense of decorum; he is a writer who seems compelled to tear down in each new important work much of what he built in earlier ones.

> 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 . . . 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 our and realize that I've failed.
>
> (Interview with Chris Fowler, *Foundation* 23)

Harrison would like there to be solutions but is almost totally convinced that they are impossible; he has carped at ideological sf, both the technophiliac sf of Clarke or Niven, and the more sympathetic liberal sf of Le Guin or feminist sf of Russ, as offering mass solutions to an aggregate of individual problems and dehumanizing people thereby; Harrison is a professed anarchist but there is in his work an almost Tory distaste for the Nanny State—"They took his easel from him so that he would not have to be bothered carrying it." Besides, solutions tend to involve heroes and he views *those* as baboon colony stuff. So when his protagonists have become engaged with the worlds in which they live, it has tended to be against their will and in ways that suit ill with heroic traditions; Tegeus-Cromis opts out of the action of *The Pastel City* at a crucial point in the civil war, and both Galen Hornwrack and Captain Truck use political intervention as a way of satisfying their consciences and committing suicide at the same time. If you can't solve anything, you can at least dissociate yourself from it by smashing it and yourself.

The malaise that strikes Viriconium in *In Viriconium* is a subtler one of garbage blowing in the streets and people coughing a lot; occasional oblique references to Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the last section's overt quotation, as epigraph, from *From Ritual to Romance* prepare us for some more high-faluting kind of cure. Transformed by his

brother's casual murder, Gog Barley, about to revert to godhood, harangues Ashlyme as if the latter were a failed Parsifal: "If you had only asked yourselves what was the matter with the city all would have been well." But Harrison is not one to let Gods get away with that kind of evasion; the blood of the wounded or dead god Matey Barley, whom Ashlyme has stabbed in a fit of bourgeois pique and panic, drifts over the city like white flowers, reviving it. The city can be redeemed not by a plan, not by farcical attempts at moving Audsley King out of the plague zone, not by organizing brutal and totalitarian mechanisms of police and spies, but by a sudden act of honest anger.

In his review of the American edition of *In Viriconium* (retitled *The Floating Gods*) Algis Budrys usefully describes it as a split "cleanly from two predecessors to which it is not, in truth, a sequel anywhere near as much as it is a formally stated antithesis." Harrison has talked of Viriconium as a last city embodying memories of other cities and of itself at other times; this is a vaguer but also rather more poetic concept than Tanelorn or the multiverse which has enabled Moorcock to have Abbot and Costello meet the Eternal Champion so many times. Given how tenuous the links are in theory, it is surprising how strong they are in practice. The old man from whom Buffo and Ashlyme buy their disguises has a sign "Seller" outside his shop and is in some degree either cognate with the Cellur of the other Viriconium books or that mage in one of his moments of amnesia; the overt reappearance on the last page of the novel of a talking metal bird in his shop may indicate some more complex renewal than I have surmised. The same old place-names recur; the beggars have the deformities and bandages that were all the cultists of *A Storm of Wings* were ultimately left with for their trouble; the Grand Cairo describes the Barley brothers in terms which seem to make them at least cognate with the Reborn Men. The Grand Cairo himself is another of the sequence of Harrison's vicious dwarves, who bring much of the real violence to his books and so vigorously parody his tall mad doomed dandies in their self-obsession: Cairo says of himself "a streak of the sinister is mixed in him with many good qualities," but Ashlyme and the audience are not obliged by Harrison to concur. It seems unlikely that the Grand Cairo is in any sense meant to be literally the same individual as Tomb, but like him he inhabits a world of "intrigue and backstabbing and great flies in everything you eat". Harrison's habit of cross-reference links this novel with other work too; Audsley King's hope of a remission of her sickness from Fast Mam Etellia's readings seems to parallel the similar hopes of the protagonists of "The New Rays" and "The Incalling", while the decorations hung on screens by the Grand Cairo for the fortune teller's arrival in his tower include a monkey twisted from jute just like the one that occurs at the funeral feast in "The Ice Monkey". These may be literal references or may merely indicate that all of Harrison's fiction takes place in the same gloomy universe; it may be a mistake for a critic to look too closely and logically at the resonances and echoes in work which aspires so heavily to the poetic.

In the interview with Fowler, Harrison made clear his allegiance to the idea of Art for Art's Sake as an alternative ideology to politics. Even more than *The Centauri Device,* where the Interstellar Anarchists' habit of quoting the writers and artists of the 90s and naming their space ships after them had something of the air of an in-joke (an impression not lessened by the almost literal transcription at one point of a descriptive passage from Gaunt's *The Aesthetic Adventure),* this novel is riddled with references to, and the feel of, the 1890s in London and Paris. If some characters in the novel are cognate with characters from other work by Harrison, others are cognate with real people. Audsley King's

prolonged agony has about it more than a little of those of Aubrey Beardsley and his sister Mabel, while Ashlyme has about him something of Swinburne, something of Whistler, something of Will Rothenstein. The closest Harrison has ever come to real sentimentality is in the way he writes here about being a young artist: "We were all going to be famous then—Ignace Retz the woodblock illustrator . . . Kristodolous, Astrid Gerstl, 'La Divinette.' But my husband contracted a howling syphilis and hanged himself one stifling afternoon in the back parlour of a herbalist's shop. He was twenty-three years old and had saved no money!" All through the novel we are kept distanced from the characters' grief by art chat about how Ashlyme later used this theme or how Audsley King had painted that location; it is possible that part of what has redeemed the city at the end has been the burst of creativity in which before she dies—if she dies; there is some slight ambiguity—she recreates on canvas the country of her past. For Harrison, art is a serious matter, perhaps the only serious matter; there is more then mere irony in Audsley's cry "My father said 'Why draw this filth . . . If you abuse your talents you will lose them. They will be taken from you if you draw filth."

It needs hardly be said that all of Harrison's work is set in his very special private cosmos, a universe in which the very gods "invented donkey jackets, wellington boots and small plastic trays covered in congealed food". Yet the (mostly recent) stories included in *The Ice Monkey* are also set vividly in the real world and in actual knowable locations—the backstreet Camden of "The Incalling" and "The New Rays", the central Manchester of "Egnaro". Harrison seizes the essence of such places and makes them over to fit. As he writes, bits fall off buildings and things rust where they stand. Even the suburban utopia the Insect God has imposed on us all withers under his bracing scorn, and it is no surprise to learn that around that God, in "Settling the World", whatever the standard appearance He has imposed on reality, "the earth was cracked and bare, like mudsoil on some abandoned African plateau". Well of course, it would be . . .

That "abandoned" is an example of the only thing that could ever be imputed to Harrison as a serious fault: a slight tendency to go over the top. The misery always gets spread a little more than a conventional writer would spread it and sometimes this looks perilously like a sort of perverse self-indulgence. In "The Ice Monkey" for example not only is there someone mortally sick at Spider's funeral but next day the road outside the cemetery was "littered with satin ribbons and florist's cellophane which had blown off the graves during the night". Cancer occurs in three of these seven stories, and in two of them is the major impelling device of the plot. The obsession with dirty washing-up and unrinsed milk bottles is partly an apt symbol of entropy and partly a tic or trademark. The protagonist of "Running Down" in his strange capacity to make things fall apart round him is only echoing the standard literary manner of his creator.

Here, as in *In Viriconium,* there are no easy answers available. If magic exists it is something nasty and dangerous about which we are better off not knowing and not talking; there is something particularly admirable about the restraints and precision with which Harrison seems to indicate in "The Ice Monkey" that Spider's death (choked by a climbing rope) was the result of some practice, not necessarily malignant in intent, by his wife or her neighbour with the silver monkey he had given her. "The Incalling" may have started its life as a move in one of Harrison's literary vendettas but it is moving in the way it shows how the Strakes' seances make the last months of Clerk's death even more gross and muddled than they would otherwise have been. Science is not much help either; in

"The New Rays" Harrison actually gets away with a charge against his quack cancer doctor analogous to the one supposedly levelled at photographers by primitives viz. that his process takes bits away from you that are important. He is less sure about what is wrong with religion; the world the insect God has created in "Settling the World" may not be to one's taste and may be unfree but is opposed only by Estrades with "his Middle-European *angst* and his cheap linguistic philosophy"; but Harrison knows he is agin' it.

Perhaps the most impressive of these stories is "Egnaro" in which Harrison makes some effective editorial remarks about the habit of fantasy and in passing manages a fairly hefty sideswipe at Borges. (Would it make any difference if Harrison has never read "The Aleph" and "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"? Only Pierre Menard knows for sure.) Bookshop proprietor Lucas sells sf and pornography, "often wondering out loud why they confiscated the one and not the other . . . Comfort and dreams. It all rots the brain." Lucas, and later by infection his accountant, the narrator, are obsessed by the imaginary (?) country Egnaro whose name drifts into your ears from other people's conversations, whose manners one guesses from obscure hints in footnotes and misprinted poetry. Because so much of it has to be constructed for yourself from such hints the quest for Egnaro is both more admirable than the habit of reading Edgar Rice Burroughs and more destructive. Lucas eventually loses his shop and his private book collection. But he returns to a sort of rotten prosperity, selling fast food, replacing his leather briefcase with a plastic one, and indicates that he found Egnaro; it is implied that beyond the anguish of the quest is the corruption of the discovery. The narrator suggests that "The secret is meaningless before you know it and, judging by what has happened to Lucas, worthless when you do. If Egnaro is the substrate of mystery which underlies all daily life, then the reciprocal of this is also true, and it is the exact dead point of ordinariness which lies beneath every mystery." There is in Harrison both a profound commitment to the fantastic mode and a deep dread of what fantasy might make you, where it might lead you. It is the appalled fascination, this playing with damnation, that gives his work so much of its power, which justifies all his mannerisms and makes him, beyond the anger, serious.

Ancient Evenings
by Norman Mailer *(Little, Brown, 1983, 709 pp, $19.95; Macmillan, 1983, £9.95)*

reviewed by Gregory Feeley

Burdened (or propelled) by word of the book's eleven years in progress, its unprecedented subsidy, magnitude of effort, and frank enormity of ambition, the initial reception of *Ancient Evenings* has obscured consideration of that novel's real qualities to the degree that a publisher, however proud of the work at hand, could scarcely hope for. Treating the book as an exegesis, remarkable only in its exhaustiveness, of Mailer's abiding concerns scants the imaginative effort that has gone into this very long novel, which stands as less an historical recreation (whatever Mailer's researches) than a fantasy—one that explicitly assumes, among other things, the validity of the ancient Egyptian concept of the afterlife, if not of that entire cosmogony. Mailer's fiction has always hovered closer to fantasy than is generally recognized; his last original novel, *Why Are We in Vietnam?,* takes the form of a mental broadcast by Mailer's perhaps fancifully reminiscent

protagonist D.J., even as *Ancient Evenings* comprises the gradual lifetime recollections of a soul awakening in its crypt; and both novels are fraught with psychic vibrations, convictions of telepathy, and the perception of an animate universe. If *Ancient Evenings* gives indications to the reader sufficiently familiar with Mailer's work that the eventual trilogy which it inaugurates may well subsume the novel into pure sf (you read it here first), it is sufficient for the moment to note that the book, however plentiful its echoes of Mailer's notorious philosophical ruminations, is best approached simply as a text.

The ancient Egyptians believed each person to possess seven souls, and the disembodied first-person voice of *Ancient Evenings* is revealed, very engagingly, to be one of these souls, the Ka, of the twenty-year-old Menenhetet Two, violently dead by what means he cannot recall. The plot as given by most reviewers, the narration by Menenhetet's powerful great-grandfather of his long life and three previous lives through the hours of a late evening in the company of the Pharaoh, is merely one of Menenhetet's childhood memories, notwithstanding the fact that it takes up most of the book. The novel thus possesses a double framework—the young man's Ka recalling the older man relating his own long adventures—and if the elder Menenhetet's tale sometimes baldly limns Mailer's characteristic preoccupations, the subtler relationships existing between the novel's planes of narrative—between young Menenhetet's Ka and the once-living self of which it constitutes merely an aspect, and between the younger and elder Menenhetets (the one being perhaps an unsought and imperfect reincarnation of the other)—afford genuine pleasures to the reader willing to grant Mailer a healthy credit line of doubt benefits.

Many commentators have noted Mailer's 1959 promise (in *Advertisements for Myself)* to produce a long novel ("will it be a thousand pages?") that would set forth an orgiastic and outrageous vision of essential truths. *Ancient Evenings* (or more likely, the eventual trilogy) is indeed the lineal descendent of that abortive novel, fragments of which, in various versions, dot the subsequent several years of Mailer's bibliography. Like the "Prologue to a Long Novel" in *Advertisements,* it is narrated by a murder victim, speaking from a vantage of some worldly confusion but decided proximity to cosmic essences. Various scatological and algolagnial concerns are found to have metaphysical implications, a conceit that has been central to Mailer's work since the theophanic insight at the conclusion of *The Deer Park* (1955) that one might "Think of Sex as Time, and Time as the connection of new circuits", and which by the Prologue four years later had largely assumed its current form.

The dubious particulars of this conviction, of course, have been widely remarked, but less familiar is a 1962 story Mailer produced after abandoning his first (actually second) attempt at his "long novel", a piece entitled "The Last Night" written in the form of a film treatment. It is frankly science fiction, detailing the efforts of a polluted and dying Earth to send a generation ship to the stars, which effort is realized only by launching that ship on the winds of a purposefully exploded Sun. No other work of Mailer's in the twenty years since has adopted an sf idiom, but Mailer has announced that his trilogy, theme and overall title unspecified, shall continue with a novel set on a generation ship and conclude with a contemporary volume. Provocatively, the closing pages of *Ancient Evenings,* detailing the younger Menenhetet's setting forth on his perilous journey through the Land of the Dead, are filled with imagery that forcefully suggests a voyage through interstellar space. No critic outside the genre has noticed this, but it's there.

Also there is a gnosis, attributed to the elder Menenhetet but so informing the text—peculiarly concerned as it is with the recovery of knowledge and the acquisition of wisdom—as to command closer attention than is usually given a set of utterances in an historical novel. The exhaustive presentation of one character's convictions cannot be adduced here as evidence of formal clumsiness, for Menenhetet has been bid tell his lives' story and accumulated wisdom, with his possible ascension to the high office of Vizier understood to occasion the request. Yet the younger Menenhetet's (and everyone else's) ready accession to the truth of these beliefs—and the fact that the axioms underlying Menenhetet One's secret of reincarnation (open only to potent men) is in the novel's universe validated by the plain fact of Menenhetet's repeated reincarnation—suggests that Mailer wishes these notions, however embedded in the context of a culture alien to our own, to be pondered by the reader as more than the extravagant given of an uncanny novel.

On the final page, as Menenhetet Two sails toward his trials in the Land of the Dead, it comes to him that "purity and goodness were worth less to Osiris than strength". This credo, toward which the entirety of the novel tends, is echoed in *Advertisements for Myself* to the point of paraphrase half a dozen times, and can fairly be regarded, to use the term advisedly, as a test for fascism. Mussolini exalted power above any higher will to forgo its exercise (which he could not comprehend), and as early as *The Deer Park* Mailer had pondered the rub that the weak could embrace compassion to evade strife, and that to refrain from exerting power might cause its extent to be doubted, which at once becomes intolerable. Mailer has with *Ancient Evenings* finally found an original and appropriate form for the articulation of that ethic which all his books since *The Deer Park* have sought to advocate: a deeply realized conviction that spiritual growth resides in the hard winning of strength (or bravery, which appears to function for Mailer as a synonym). Awakening in his first panicky moments, the Ka of Menenhetet reflects upon his likely misspent life, and regrets "the lost dialogue that had never taken place between the bravest part of me and the rest. The coward had been the master". Seven hundred pages later, embarking upon his journey, the Ka movingly realizes:

> If I would never encounter the trials of the Duad, then a void would dwell in the last of my seven souls and spirits. My Ka would never encounter a true test of its courage. I might even live forever and never die a second time, but then there is no loneliness, I decided then, that is worse than being ignorant of the worth of your soul.

This is beautifully expressed, as is much else in this strange and, for the most part, compelling work. More could be said about the novel's intriguing parallels with Mailer's earlier (usually fragmentary) fiction, or the large risks that Mailer, who may be a great stylist, took in writing a book so far removed from the immediacy of experience that deeply informs his style (his brilliant metaphors, such as the observation that Manhattan politician Bella Abzug had a voice that could boil the fat off a cab driver's neck, are palpably material, and for the most part had to be conceived along new principles for this work). Dismissed in many quarters as risible, *Ancient Evenings* is manifestly something other than that, and shall not be quickly dissolved in the taxonomic gut of the American (or British) reviews industry.

Riddley Walker
by Russell Hoban *(Cape, 1980, 220 pp, £5.95; Picador/Pan, 1982, 214 pp, £1.95)*
Pilgermann
by Russell Hoban *(Cape, 1983, 240 pp, £7.95)*

reviewed by David Lake

People who don't like mysticism will not like Russell Hoban's latest novel *Pilgermann*—nor will they truly appreciate his previous and highly acclaimed *Riddley Walker*. For although on the surface *Riddley* is post-Bomb sf, and *Pilgermann* is a hybrid of fantasy and historical fiction, the underlying form of each book is *Bildungsroman*, and the essential achievement of each hero is to put himself at one with the One (God, Nature, or whatever else you prefer to call it). Both novels are confrontations between political violence and something like Taoist quietism.

Hoban is of course not essentially a science fiction writer, and none of his books has been marketed as sf. He first achieved fame as the author of a children's classic fantasy, *The Mouse and his Child* (1967), after which he consolidated his reputation with three more or less fantastic adult novels, *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz* (1973), *Kleinzeit* (1974), and *Turtle Diary* (1975)—all three set largely in London, where Hoban now lives. There is a strain of mysticism, fantasy and whimsy running through all of Hoban's work, and his latest novel *Pilgermann* is very much in line with all this. It is *Riddley Walker* which is apparently exceptional—certainly in genre, perhaps also in greatness. For it is a great book—if you can read it. Not everyone can. For this is how it begins:

> On my naming day when I come 12 I gone front spear and kilt a wyld boar he parbly ben the las wyld pig on the Bundel Downs any how there hadnt ben none for a long time befor him nor I aint looking to see none agen.

And so it goes on relentlessly, for over two hundred pages. Not very much happens in the first hundred and forty. We are introduced to the barbarous society of Inland, which is Kent about 2400 years After the Bomb, and to the main issue, which is: Shall Inland start "moving frontways" again, or should it continue to rely on "the first knowing", i.e. mystical intuition? Riddley, our hero-narrator, after some wavering plumps for intuition rather than (sic) "clevverness". Then in the last sixty or so pages, Progress arrives in the form of gunpowder, most of the political leaders get killed off (some actually blown up by the new Little Bomb), and Riddley converts a few others to his own Tao-like withdrawal from the power struggle. The outlook for Inland at the end remains highly dubious; but that doesn't really matter, for Riddley is now enlightened and is (hopefully) spreading enlightenment via the current literary medium of Inland, the travelling puppet show. Which looks like a symbolic message for our own time: in this age of the Big Bomb, the only Way for us literary types is to withdraw from the political struggle, put our own minds in order, and perhaps Write. Well, that's at least realistic: what else *can* we do? Riddley at least does not save the universe on the last page, as do far too many sf heroes.

In terms of plot, therefore, the novel is comparable to the first third of Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. There is even a prominent instance of misinterpreting a pre-Bomb icon, in this case a painting of the Legend of St Eustace at Canterbury Cathedral. But that's as far as the similarity goes. Where Miller is panoramic, Hoban is concentrated

on the one focus, the mind of young Riddley. And that, largely, is why we get Riddley's own voice, and his own Future English.

In giving us this Future English, Hoban has obviously taken a great risk. No other author has attempted to produce a whole sf novel in a language so greatly altered; and in comparison, Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* are easy reading. Normally, in first person novels set thousands of years ahead, a translation convention is used: not only do we get the text somehow whisked back to us across the aeons, but the same process transforms the language to Present English; often very elegant Present English, as in Genly Ai's narration in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. But Hoban will have none of that: he gives us the English of the Fifth Millennium, unfiltered by any convention. Or so he would have us believe: actually, I am sure that English after 2400 years of barbarism would be totally unintelligible; after all, the average reader today can barely understand Chaucer, back across 600 years of full literacy. But we must suspend such disbelief, to enjoy Riddley's language.

I have the best of evidence that Riddley's language *is* enjoyable, in spite of its difficulties: for I have taught the book in 1983 to a class of eighty Australian university students, and have sampled their reactions. Those varied enormously. One student wrote: "Terrible, may as well be in Chinese"; but others made such remarks as "Enjoyed it immensely", "excellent", "fun to decipher", and even, surprisingly, "easy to read". A large majority asked me to keep the book on my sf course, as a set text. So I shall.

"Fun to decipher". Yes, it is that: reading *Riddley* is like solving a gorgeous crossword puzzle, with clues of varying difficulty. Sometimes the solutions—word meanings and their etymologies—are highly rewarding. The language is catching like a pleasant infection, because Hoban has developed English in the ways that English likes to develop, especially through technical slang, conversion between word-classes, and onomatopoeia. I now wonder how I managed, in pre-*Riddley* days, to do without such useful expressions as *nexters* (followers), *arga warga* (violence, or a dog's snarl), *Trubba not* (pax), *doing the juicy* (having sex), or *toofy teef* . . . But there is a great deal more in the language than these little jokes. The serious reason why the language has to be Future English in Future spelling is that this allows Hoban to make more easily some very pregnant puns, fusions such as "Addom" (both *atom* and *Adam*), "hart" (both *hart* and *heart*), and "wud" (both *wood* and *would*). So in the (sic) "Eusa Story", the central myth of Inland, the Littl Shynin Man the Addom is caught by the scientist Eusa in the Hart of the Wud—and torn apart: which means fission both of the atomic nucleus and of the Adam, the Divine Humanity. Both the atom and our selves are split in the heart of our "would", our will to power. The characters in the novel are fissioned too, their heads being blown off and away from their hearts. In these fissions there is obviously a symbolic fusion, of matter and spirit—for *Riddley Walker* is essentially a poetic book, steeped in symbolism; it is utterly down to earth, and at the same time radically mystical. Its roots are in Taoism and Gnosticism, with a dash of the worship of the One Goddess:

> Shes that same I shows her moon self or she jus shows her old old nite and no moon. Shes that same I every thing and all of us come out of . . .

It is a miracle that Hoban can express all this in Riddley's rudely demotic language; it is almost like translating Wordsworth into Future Cockney.

I think, therefore, that *Riddley Walker* is a great book, perhaps a classic of fringe

science fiction; and with all its quoted myths and legends it is more comparable to *The Left Hand of Darkness* than to *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. It is perhaps slightly weak on the side of plot, and the characters, apart from Riddley himself and one beautiful black dog, tend to be uncertain figures—they move with mixed motivation toward what seems the predestined end, the discovery of the Little Bomb, never wholeheartedly for or against Progress, so that there are no very definite parties, no Goodies-and-Baddies, and the apparent villain of one part of the story becomes the hero's friend a little later, or vice versa. This does not make for easy identification on the reader's part; but it is like life. Or like some nightmares: for the politicians weave across Riddley's path like figures in a dream.

Much more dreamlike are the characters in Hoban's latest novel, *Pilgermann:* and this time, that goes for the hero too. For Pilgermann is literally a ghost writer: he has been killed before he begins to tell his story, and in his posthumous existence he can skip forward in time between his death in 1098 and our present, drawing importantly on cultural artifacts of the later Middle Ages. And even when he is alive, he keeps having to deal with the ghosts of those who have died earlier in the tale. This strange book is a sort of Jewish *Roots,* for the hero's experiences are obviously supposed to symbolize the experiences of Jewry in Europe down the centuries. In an eleventh-century German town, while the First Crusade is in preparation, the hero has a one-night stand with the symbolically named Christian woman Sophia—whereupon he is caught in a pogrom, and castrated by a pack of Christians. After that he has a vision of Christ, and sets out for Jerusalem. However, after various adventures he ends up instead in Antioch, first as the slave and later as the bosom friend of a mystically-minded Turk. And here between Turk and Jew they produce a masterpiece: the tiled paving of an open square, whose pattern expresses the Answer to Life, the Universe and Everything (as Douglas Adams would say). Unfortunately, this does not prevent the pavement being used as the site of two massacres; on the symbolic face of God, everyone is killed—including, at last, Pilgermann and his Turkish friend, when the Crusaders arrive.

The trouble with all this is, that one is inclined to say at the end, so what? We have here again a confrontation between mysticism and the violent way of the world—but this time the outcome is much less encouraging than in *Riddley Walker,* and the surface action of the story is much less interesting. Pilgermann's child by Sophia, the child of Jewry and Wisdom, may or may not survive the next massacre, when the Crusaders reach Jerusalem. But in any case, neither this child nor Sophia are real people. They are allegoric abstractions—and Pilgermann is not far from being one, either. The Turk, Bembel Rudzuk, is charming, and his explanation of how he came by his name is rather like a crazy Zen parable; but he and his pavement are not a very solid foundation for a 240-page novel. At least in *Riddley Walker* we had a vivid sense of the real life of Inland; here there is little feeling of concrete life or historical reality. But then, doubtless Hoban is not aiming at such reality. This is not really a historical novel, nor yet is it a full-blown fantasy. Perhaps we should call it a symbolic meditation, and leave it at that. We must not expect from Hoban another *Riddley Walker,* for he has already written that. He will doubtless go on now to do different things.

The Fishers of Darksea
by Roger Eldridge *(Gollancz, 1982, 241 pp, £7.95)*

reviewed by Judith Hanna

Like its hero, this novel limps along, awkward and failing to convince. In the end, No-Mirth triumphs, but the novel just peters out. What could have been perfectly okay slick entertainment, the sort of thing you expect in a randomly pulled-out library book, collapses into tedium, weighed down by unnecessary detail, agonizing introspection, and proliferation of adjectives. Clichés rain—"with a cry of horror", "eyes eloquent beyond the need for words", "they savoured their moment", "his eyes filmed with shame", "feeling the joy of its capture draining", "he knew with a dread certainty", "with painful slowness he clambered . . . every sinew straining", "A song of purest happiness filled No-Mirth's heart". Emote, emote, emote, as relentless as a soap-opera. So many waste words which should have been pruned, if not by the author then by his editor.

All that bad writing would be less frustrating if it were not cluttering up the bones of what ought to be a good story. For background, Eldridge draws upon such showpiece ideas of elementary anthropology as initiation rites, shamanism, folk tradition and beliefs, and a sketchy but nicely put together elementary form of social organization with not much resemblance to what little I know of actual Eskimo culture except what is dictated by adaptation to the same sub-arctic environment, all mixed in with a massive dose of hard-science radioactivity. The plot sticks close to the heroic "monomyth" of which legends are made, as expounded by Lord Raglan and Joseph Campbell: on a sub-arctic island our hero, No-Mirth, accompanied by Mirth, his "Other" (his "buddy" in the diving sense, his "mate" in the Australian sense) undertake their initiation test and succeed in killing a walrus; No-Mirth wanders off from the celebrations that welcome them to the elite status of "Fishers" to roam out in the open, across the rocky surface of the island, while a storm rages; he sees a vision of a giant "Fish" (which since this is sf, not legend, turns out to be a real nuclear submarine); cast out from his tribe by Nemu, the ventriloquist "curer", he kills his Other, then is taken aboard the submarine "Rorqual"; returning to his people from the Fish's belly, No-Mirth overpowers Nemu and is acclaimed an avatar of Glorkas the Water-Sorceror.

The character of No-Mirth is the focus of the novel and, as I said before, it suffers from unremitting too-close focus. It could almost be read as a psychological study of the classic "shaman" personality—a misfit who experiences schizophrenic episodes and hallucinations, interpreted as visions of the spirit world, and who masters his madness to become accepted as spiritual leader of his people. From that point of view, this could have been anthropological science fiction, and better than most that's been written in that vein. But, of course, No-Mirth's visions aren't hallucinations, nor are they spiritual revelations. We learn that No-Mirth and his hairless "grey-man" tribe are radioactive-adapted Eskimos whose sacred "Liferock" is uranium ore; the dreaded "nixies", supposedly spirits of the drowned dead, are in fact men dressed in protective silver suits from the perfectly ordinary submarine, which he had taken for a monster. That sort of von Daniken turnabout—all these superstitions can now be explained in terms of visitors from another, scientifically more advanced world—is not a revelation but a cliché.

The Rainbow Cadenza: A Novel in Logosata Form
by J. Neil Schulman *(Simon and Schuster, 1983, 303 pp, $15.95)*

reviewed by David N. Samuelson

Neil Schulman's first novel, *Alongside Night* (1979), predictably won praises from Poul Anderson, Jerry Pournelle, and Robert Anton Wilson of science fiction's official or unofficial Libertarian contingent. An adventure story witnessed by two adolescents, it recounted the way in which the corrupt contemporary society succumbed with very little bloodshed to a new Libertarian order, in a veritable wet dream for those of the right political persuasion. Recommended by Milton Friedman and F. Paul Wilson as well, it was greatly admired even by Anthony Burgess, whose dissatisfaction with the present order seems to have him grasping at straws.

Encouraged by this reception no doubt, Schulman pulled out all the stops in his second book, which is not being marketed as science fiction in the US, despite its future locale and extrapolative base. Though the author specifically disavows proselytizing this time, his Libertarianism is seldom far from the surface, as his characters sometimes engage in, but more often talk about art, politics, economics, religion, life-style variations and especially sex. An admirer of Heinlein ("the greatest science fiction writer of all time"), he seems more drawn to his idol's later period, during which almost everything has been sacrificed for the sake of philosophizing, often of an irresponsible and jejune sort. However, enough outré situations and incidents are thrown in to shock or offend just about anyone who takes the book at all seriously.

Schulman's 22nd-Century hardware includes flying suits, commonplace human clothing, independent space colonies (or "habitats"), and the centerpiece of his story, "lasegraphy". In both its classical and popular modes, it harks back to today's Laserium performances in which laser beams make patterns on ceilings and walls in time to music.

Social changes following the big war include drafting women for sexual duty (to channel male warlike aggression), justice administered on television by commercial courts, and the branding of criminals—including draft dodgers—as "Touchables" who may be and are hunted down, raped (male or female), and killed for sport. Human classes seem organized now by sexual orientation, politically divided into Libertarians and Chauvinists, and (female-dominated) witchcraft is the foremost religion in the "North American Union". Christians are persecuted and Jews, if one example will suffice, are "exiled" to the habitats, some of which come considerably closer to the Libertarian ideal than does the home planet.

As in Heinlein's *Podkayne of Mars,* the story centers on a know-all girl, Joan Seymour Darris, daughter of a wealthy family who is destined to become a world-class lasegrapher. Trained for some years on a habitat by her elderly teacher, and raised there in a Jewish household, she returns to Earth before her draft age in an attempt to "resurrect" her mother and leave again before she can be inducted into the Peace Corps ("Make Love Not War"). Joan's mother, Eleanor was killed by her "clone-daughter", Vera, albeit "accidentally"; Vera then took over Eleanor's home and husband, neglecting to have her mother's mind transferred into another clone.

Unwelcome to begin with, Joan is doubly troublesome when she tries to have the procedure done with herself as the surrogate. Now Chief Justice of Legos, Ltd., Vera sees

to it Joan is drafted early, thus giving Schulman a chance to combine Heinleinian militarism with talk about the social value of the sexual draft. Another ploy of Joan's, with the aid of her black, Christian, Reggae-like laser musician lover, is also foiled and, although Joan's life is spared, he is sent to the Ovens to be "Icarized" (or "icked"). Given numerous chances to do the right thing, Vera always fails, making her richly deserve an ironic fate when Joan is finally avenged.

Parts of the book are ingenious, but much is ingenuous. Lasegraphy in conception is believable as a future art form; in execution, it suffers, as was perhaps inevitable, from being reduced to prose that must be described as purple, no matter how many other shades are present. The lasegraphy model is also followed by the table of contents, which lists chapters not by title, but by electromagnetic wave-length, a bit of pretension which may be indebted to Heinlein's *Time Enough for Love* with its bugle-calls as chapter heads. Clever but hardly admirable are his ideas for preventing war and recognizing the economic biases of the law; indentured prostitutes and legalized murder might be more "attractive" if this were more clearly a "cautionary tale", in which they were explicitly disapproved.

For anyone past adolescence, however, his characters' philosophizing is not only long-winded, insistent and ubiquitous; it is also shallow, little interested in the effects of changes, except where they touch on the plot or on political attitudes he is supposedly not arguing for. His imagined future is not all that dense with detail beyond what the plot demands. Far from fully consistent or convincing, it glosses over the changes that would have had to take place between now and then, and shoots down straw men in lieu of objections. Most of the characters are conveniently rich and famous, and the plot turns more than once on coincidence. And because it is so talky, *The Rainbow Cadenza* does not come as close as *Alongside Night* to being "a good read". Far from being unable to put it down, I frequently had to force myself to get back into it.

That the influence of Heinlein is widespread in the United States is common knowledge, but the baleful effects of that influence are seldom as blatant as in this case. Except in the hands of the master, and then only occasionally, Heinleining—like mainlining—is for addicts only.

The Compass Rose
by Ursula Le Guin *(Gollancz, 1983, 276 pp, £7.95)*

reviewed by Sarah Lefanu

In the preface to this volume of short stories written over the last ten years, Ursula Le Guin makes claims for them that are both grandiose and obscure. She starts by talking about a map on which, or near which, the stories take place. It is a map of the author's mind, she suggests, then abdicates responsibility by saying that one's mind is never one's own. What does that mean? That the formation of our minds is multi-factorial? Well, yes. One's mind is never one's own and "ever less so as one lives, learns, loses etc." That etc bothers me. Is the alliteration obligatory? One could perhaps continue with loves, lies, leans on or leaps.

She goes on to describe the map of the Compass Rose and how its four directions arise out of an "unspoken fifth direction, the center, the corolla of the rose." Unspoken? Le

Guin herself has just spoken it. In the next paragraph this structure is jettisoned in favour of one with six directions, the four wind directions and Above and Below, the latter two being radial to the "center/self/here and now". These three apparently interchangeable states of being "may", we are told, "sacramentally contain the other six, and thus the Universe". Well, that's a bold statement, but I am no clearer about this map than I was at the beginning. Wait, though. The obscurity is explained in the next paragraph, for "as a guide to sailors" the book is not to be trusted. Dreary old weather-beaten sailors whose deeply unspiritual attitude to the world comes from their use of maps to get from point A to point B. Why is the book not to be trusted? Because it is perhaps "too sensitive" to local magnetic fields. Aha. Much is revealed in that little phrase. If one carps at the irritating portentousness of the preface, it is because one is obviously not open to a world "alive with symbol and meaning". If you fail to catch the underlying pattern then you must be a spiritual imbecile.

The stories are grouped under directions, NSEW, Nadir and Zenith, yet we are told that the reasons why they are so assigned are "not very serious". So why do it? murmurs a small voice. We are, however, generously given some hints as to relations between the first and last stories, for instance. Try to visualize these circling motions. I imagined a kind of horizontal spiral along which all the other stories in the book are placed; but how does that fit in with the multi-directional compass rose, not to mention their sacramental containment within the centre/self etc? Or do perhaps all the other stories somehow circle about the first and the last? My suspicion is that this, too, is "not very serious"; what is important is the concept of circularity, which is, as we all know, philosophically right on, unlike nasty old rationalist linear-type logic. The advantage of circles is two-fold: there is no hierarchy within the circle itself, by its nature it connects to itself and, better, if you have more than one of them you can make them all into links in a chain. And there we have a holistic approach to the Universe. But perhaps the circling motions represent the six years that passed between the writing of the two stories, as it is well known that planet Earth moves in a circle (more or less but accuracy doesn't seem to be a priority here) round old Sol and thus we have our years. No-one, I think would deny that in a writer's work connections of one kind or another can usually be made. In this instance I don't think much useful light is shed on them by the author's own commentary.

The preface is only a page and a half long, but for those who don't like to be told how to interpret the text on which they're about to embark it is annoying in the extreme and in some cases might even lead to what could be described as a negative attitude. This is a great pity. Ursula Le Guin is generally considered to be a serious and skilful writer, and this collection of stories does not contradict that. Her skill in story-telling is, however, undermined when she lets the preachiness that is apparent in her preface enter into her fiction.

"The Pathways of Desire", for instance, starts well, with the depiction of a planet 31 light years from Earth inhabited by people who appear to live in a state of pre-cultural innocence. The lack of complexity, the almost boring simplicity of their lives create an uneasiness in the minds of the researchers from Earth that leads to the sinister discovery that the language of the Ndif is no less than a crude form of English—basic, uninflected and almost ludicrously transparent. How is this possible? No-one from Earth has ever visited this solar system. One of the researchers suddenly dies as the result of a knife wound incurred during a fight that seemed to be purely ritualistic. At this point the story

has an eerie, disquieting feel to it; I was reminded of Harry Harrison's depiction of innocence corrupted by bungling Christianity in his short story "The Streets of Ashkalon". Yet while maintaining its effects right up to the resonant and horribly predictable climax, Le Guin then sacrifices the tension she has built up for a speculation on the nature of reality that retrospectively undermines the story—the planet is nothing but the dream of a fifteen year old boy on earth—and whose unoriginality is, if anything, emphasized by semi-mystical talk of infinites of universe and infinities of dreams. "We are the dreamer", is the line, "and the worlds will endure as long as our desire". This is soppy stuff compared to Harrison's spine-tingling finale.

Le Guin is good at landscapes, atmospheres, nature—although I found the description of extreme cold in "Sur", an interesting story about an all-female expedition to the South Pole in 1909, nowhere near as chilling as the famous journey across the ice-cap in *The Left Hand of Darkness*—but again, in "The Eye Altering", the power of her physical description is dissipated by a quasi-philosophical denouement: that beauty is relative, not absolute, and that one woman's meat can be, literally, another's poison. In this story the colonists from earth have to take metabolizing pills twice daily to break down the foreign proteins of the ugly dimly-lit planet that is now their home. The plot depends for its resolution on the assumption that a largish group of people will infallibly take their daily pills and, further, that adaptation to foreign protein can be achieved in one generation—both rather unlikely, it seemed to me.

Ursula Le Guin herself, I imagine, might not accept that a distinction can be drawn between the spiritual and the political, yet it seems to me that the stories that are more overtly political, that is, those that deal with the social control of individuals, with questions of state organization, repression and dissent, are more successful than the others. "The New Atlantis" offers a vision of the lost Atlantis as a symbol of hope and freedom in a rigidly authoritarian society in which the state controls its citizens' lives to such an extent that to be private is to be subversive. This is a passionately angry picture of totalitarianism, which is further developed in "The Diary of the Rose" (published a year later), a diary kept by a government psychoscopist whose relationship with one of her patients, or prisoners, forces her into questioning the work she does and the ruling ideology of Positive Thinking. Le Guin has a fine ear for the turns of speech that reveal vanity and self-deception, and she is skilful at depicting how petty tyranny flourishes in the endless corridors and countless offices of a bureaucratic state.

I must admit to a partiality for short stories that deal with the specific and an impatience with the extrapolation from them of weightier matters. "The First Report of the Shipwrecked Foreigner to the Kadanh of Derb" is, specifically, about methods of narration, and the Foreigner chooses to describe the paticular, in this case the city of Venice, as a means of expressing the general. Yet there is a problem that follows predictably from the somewhat hectoring tone of the preface to the collection: it is that Ursula Le Guin or, in this case, the Foreigner, despite assertions to the contrary, will not let the particular speak for itself, but must spell out its links with the generality.

I enjoyed *The Compass Rose* as a collection without connections: it shows Le Guin ranging from the serious to the playful, and if some stories seemed completely obscure—in particular a couple about animals, which perhaps means I am guilty of speciesism—the majority are entertaining. As the charmingly loquacious hero says in "Schrödinger's Cat", "Many things are not worth doing, but almost anything is worth

telling." Even for a spiritual imbecile there is enjoyment to be had in hearing these tales.

The Wind from a Burning Woman
by Greg Bear *(Arkham House, 1983, 270 pp, $13.95)*

reviewed by Nick Pratt

Not long ago Pocket Books adopted the Timescape trademark from Gregory Benford. Now Greg Bear has borrowed the singularly unappealing title of this collection from the poetry of Michael Bishop. Increasingly, sf publishing displays signs of self-referential retrenchment.

What of the fiction itself? Bear's first novel *Hegira* (1979) is memorable for setting credibly fallible characters on a world so laden with sensawonder trappings that a coherent resolution was impossible. The majority of the stories gathered here also date from the late seventies and the common ground is extensive. Bear declares his allegiance in the preface: "my intellect has been nurtured and guided by science fiction", he says, and the rest of the book supports this claim with a welter of hollow-asteroid starships and cyborg cities, clones, genetic manipulation and convoluted alien cultures. But again all this stock material is inhabited by plausible people prone to fears and uncertainties, and with good reason too—Bear may be a scientific true-believer but he doesn't deal in simple problems. The issues he raises range from the morality of terrorism to the insidious links between protracted warfare and self-destructive tendencies.

There are the makings of complex and multivalent work here, but Bear leaves a lot unsaid. When the going gets rough he is inclined to lose himself in lush backgrounds and glossy generic diversions, leaving the reader to sort out the deeper connotations of these "playgrounds of the mind". A favourite ploy is the last minute revelation which forces readers and protagonists to pause, reflect, and reorder everything that has gone before, like the unfortunate Jeshua of "Mandale" who discovers that his whole life has been a lie shaped by a secret mission in which he has lost himself all too well. An unfair example perhaps, as Bear later incorporated this story in a full-length novel *(Strength of Stones,* 1981; which makes this reprint a curious choice) but the pattern recurs more subtly elsewhere. Open endings rule OK.

Well, no, it's not OK when there are clearly evasive strategies at work, as Bear only confirms by arguing that it's "brave" to speculate on a universal scale and implicitly mean, narrow and cowardly to think in immediate human terms. That's rhetoric as old and as flawed as the pulps; there's no harm in a bit of abstract speculation of course, but until abstractions interact with the pottage of human (or at least sentient) experience they remain emotionally—and fictionally—null. And for all the attention that Bear pays to his characters he still balks at the task of dramatizing what the fullest implications of his subject matter really *mean* to those involved. The shaggy castaway story cum informal ship's log "Scattershot" is ostensibly bequeathed to a new captain, who will discover that—from the accumulated experience of *thirty centuries*—the preceeding captain has recorded nothing more than her own initiatory confusion. Those readers not dazzled by starshine may feel similarly short-changed by these stories.

In fact it's the book's shortest pieces which emerge as clear winners, though vignettes don't play in the same league as novellas. "The White Horse Child" is a fey little number

stiffened with sarcasm, whilst the slickly strange "Petra", with its echoes of early Zelazny ("I'm an ugly son of stone and flesh, there's no denying it," begins the narrator), offers some milder and much needed humour.

For the rest, Arkham House have given us a handsomely produced volume in which high ambitions are stifled by sf's lingering constraints. So it's fiction of retrenchment after all. A pity.

Various Booklets by Chris Drumm

reviewed by John Clute

Amateur bibliographies of sf writers have existed for decades now. Some of them have been invaluable, though generally because of the relentless assiduity of the fan responsible rather than through any sophistication in the result. How bad some of the amateur checklists can be many of us have had a chance to find out; how well it is possible to do the job has been demonstrated by a series of booklets issued by Chris Drumm, PO Box 445, Polk City, Iowa 50226, USA. As he charges for the work he self-publishes, though very modestly, one might even feel obliged to think of him as a professional full-fledged; his work is certainly of professional calibre.

Available at the moment are checklists of:
Hal Clement, $.50, slim;
Mack Reynolds, $1.00, thorough;
Tom Disch, $1.00, very patchy and under extensive revision;
Algis Budrys, $.75, satisfactory;
R.A. Lafferty, $1.25, very thorough.

In the same series, Drumm has also released two pamphlets of a different sort:
R.A. Lafferty, *Four Stories,* $2.00; and
Algis Budrys, *Non-Literary Influences on Science Fiction (an Essay),* $1.25. This is the original version of an essay, under the title "Fiction in the Chain Mode: Non-literary Influences on Science Fiction", which was published in *Science Fiction Dialogues* (1982) edited by Gary K. Wolfe. The story of what happened to copy after it left Wolfe's hands and underwent editing at the book's publishers, Academy Chicago, is a tangled one, and has already caused a good deal of acrimony amongst all concerned. Suffice it that Budrys was outraged at what was eventually published, Wolfe was embarrassed at his lack of control over a book he was responsible for, Academy Chicago was adamant in claiming all the rights of precedent and overriding necessity in transforming a rambling manuscript into a neat job of work. Until now, it has been impossible to judge on Academy's desperately unlikely claim that Budrys gave them incompetent work. And indeed as Drumm's publication of the text shows, there are three or four sentences in Budrys' piece which *have* gotten slightly out of control, and which might legitimately have been *queried* by a conscientious editor. But that is part of the give and take between any writer and editor worth their respective salts. What happened to Budrys' excellent (and in its original form extremely important) piece was something entirely different. Without any consultation Academy completely rewrote the piece, shortened it radically, stripped every point Budrys made of all qualification or cognitive emplacement in the flow of argument.

And how else, since not only did they rearrange and mutilate and compress whole paragraphs into single utterances, they also entirely rearranged the order of what argument survived. What appears in *Science Fiction Dialogues* is a fatuous travesty of the original. It may not have been actually criminal to bugger the text far more viciously than the editors whose practices Budrys describes, but assuredly it was a moral treason.

The Drumm Booklets are post-paid.

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