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FOUNDATION

35

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

IN THIS ISSUE

Bruce Sterling tells how he became Twisted for a Living
Brian Stableford on Michael Jackson and Animal Spirits
Edward James on SF from a historian's point of view
K.V. Bailey explores the games of science fiction
Gregory Stephenson on J.G. Ballard and the Ontological Eden
Brian J. Burden continues his decoding of the Time Machine
Richard A. Slaughter on SF, Metafiction and Transcendence

Letters from Benford, Finch, Lowndes and Yarbro

Reviews by Barbour, Carol, Caracciolo, Feeley, Gentle, Gorton, Harrison, Hassler, Hay, Mathieson and Pollack of books by Brian Aldiss, Isaac Asimov, Jack Dann, Harry Harrison, Frederik Pohl, Thomas Pynchon, Keith Roberts, Kim Stanley Robinson, Geoff Ryman, A.E. van Vogt, Jack Williamson, Gene Wolfe and others

FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

Contents
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Editorial

As Robert Lowndes reminds us in a letter published herein, the "April" 1926 issue of *Amazing Stories* actually appeared in *March* 1926. Since the present issue of *Foundation* is unlikely to reach its readers' hands before March 1986 we can fairly claim that this very moment of publication is the 60th anniversary of English-language magazine science fiction. Hurrah! The fact that *Amazing* still exists (after a fashion) 60 years on, and the fact that the genre it helped shape still persists—indeed, *prevails* (again, after a fashion)—are facts that are well worth noting and, perhaps, celebrating. But this 60th anniversary should also give us pause. Attainment of the age of 60 is commonly seen as the onset of "old age." Just consider how many of the books covered in this issue's review section are by writers who are well over 60 years old—Isaac Asimov, A.E. van Vogt, Frederik Pohl, Jack Williamson, and so on. Even Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison have now reached their seventh decade (just). One should cheer such robustly extended careers, and one does, one does—but at the same time one cannot help feeling slightly chastened, slightly melancholy, slightly apprehensive. *Timor mortis conturbat me:* not a fear of the death of individuals, but of a genre.

Ah, doom and gloom. Actually, if one is in search of youthful vigour and bright hopes for the future one need only cast an eye over American magazine sf as it exists, right now, at the beginning of 1986. There are exciting new writers aplenty—William Gibson, obviously (he has promised us a "Profession" piece in the very near future); Bruce Sterling (whose brief autobiographical essay appears in this issue); Greg Bear; Lucius Sheppard; Kim Stanley Robinson; and so on and on. There are the new American writers who have been published by the British magazine *Interzone* in the past three years—Michael Blumlein and Scott Bradfield among others. There is also Geoff Ryman, a Canadian resident in Britain. But the fact that the three last-named are among *Interzone*'s proudest "discoveries" also points to the sad fact that there have been few new *British* writers of sf to cheer us in recent times. Yes, there have been some (Lee Montgomerie, for instance) but not enough, not enough . . .

Still, we press on, with both *Foundation* and *Interzone*. The latter has been taking up more and more of my time as its original team of eight equal co-editors has shrunk to two Editors plus an Associate Editor and various helpers. *Interzone*'s circulation *is* expanding, but painfully slowly, and the magazine has recently adopted full-colour covers in its attempt to reach a wider news-stand audience. It continues to search for genuine sf by new and established writers. If there are to be new British sf writers of exciting promise I firmly believe that Britain's only commercial sf magazine is the place where they are most likely to emerge. Sf may be dying; long live sf!

As I say, the *Interzone* quest, to which I am deeply committed, has been taking up more of my time, and this has been one of the reasons for the slippages in *Foundation*'s schedule of late. I have no wish to see *Foundation* suffer because of *Interzone,* so I have conferred with Ian Watson and John Clute—as well as the other members of the SF Foundation's Council—and we have decided to expand the journal's editorial team. Edward James joins us as Deputy Editor, and Valerie Buckle as Assistant Editor. We extend a warm welcome to them both, and hope that they will soon have a real effect on

the quality (and frequency!) of *Foundation*. Ed James is an academic, an historian at the University of York, as well as a longstanding fan and critic of sf. Valerie Buckle is a professional editor of trade journals and has handled the British end of the Philip K. Dick Society for the past several years. Both have knowledge and experience which we think will prove valuable.

David Pringle
January 1986

The Science Fiction Foundation and North East London Polytechnic

Foundation is published by North East London Polytechnic (NELP) on behalf of the Science Fiction Foundation (SFF). The SFF is a semi-independent body, set up in 1970, which has its own council of management. Half the Council members are staff of NELP; the remaining members, not directly connected with the Polytechnic, are writers, critics, teachers, etc., of science fiction. The current Chairman of the Council is Dr John Radford, Dean of Faculty of Science at NELP.

Foundation's editorial team is elected annually by the Council. None of the present team is employed by NELP, although the Polytechnic does provide the SFF with a large office at its Barking Precinct where a part-time secretary, Mrs Joyce Day, handles the journal subscriptions. Also in that office is the SFF's library, containing upwards of 12,000 books, magazines, etc. The library is open to visitors by prior arrangement with Mrs Day: please write to the address shown on the inside front cover of this journal.

North East London Polytechnic offers Diploma, Degree and Higher Degree courses in Arts and Social Studies, Business and Management, Engineering and Science.

Edward James, born in 1947, read History at Oxford then researched a D.Phil thesis at Oxford's Institute of Archaeology, on "The Merovingian Archaeology of South-West Gaul." Currently he is a lecturer in History at the University of York, as well as Honorary Secretary of the York Archaeological Trust, devisers of the first archaeological museum with an sf motif—for the Jorvik Viking Centre sends visitors backwards in time through a Time Tunnel, riding a "time-car". Edward James has authored six books on Dark Age history and archaeology, including The Origins of France *(1982). Active in fandom 20 years ago—a contributor to* Zenith *and* Vector*—he resurged a couple of years ago by organizing a series of lectures on sf at the University of York, featuring Shippey, Stableford, Sudbery, Watson and himself. The following article is based upon one of his own lectures on that occasion.*

The Historian and SF

EDWARD JAMES

A professional historian, particularly one specializing in early medieval history like myself, has long since had to devise plausible academic or pseudo-academic justifications for an interest in sf amounting to obsession. And in the process of self-justification I have almost come to believe my own contention: that the sciences which have received the most attention from sf writers are the historical sciences. On which, more below. But I have also realized that very few have as yet looked at sf from an historical viewpoint. There are now scores of literary critics (American) who endlessly compare Le Guin or Lem with Swift (Jonathan, not Tom, unfortunately). There are semioticians (French). And there have been any number of historians *of* sf, who look at the development of the genre from within. There is even one sociologist of sf (whose approach will be familiar to those who have subscribed to *Foundation* since no. 15).[1] But these approaches often differ profoundly from those which a "straight" historian might bring to the field. The literary critic is the furthest removed, perhaps, for he is largely concerned with what he perceives to be the literary achievements of the field; the historian is probably going to be much more interested in Sturgeon's 90 per cent. The historian *of* sf is concerned with the development of themes, with the interaction of writers and fans, with the problems or paranoias of editors. It is history, certainly, but it is predominantly literary history, and frequently anecdotal history, and sometimes bears as close a relation to the wider concerns of most historians as a history of postage stamps does.

An historian is going to view sf first of all as source material. A perceptive and late lamented colleague of mine (another reader of sf), Denis Bethell, used to describe saints' lives as "early medieval sf." And just as historians can devote themselves to studying the ways in which saints' lives, also arguably a branch of popular literature, might illuminate the interests and concerns of the seventh century, so might historians treat sf. One or two have. Excellent examples are Wagar's study of views of the end of the world, Clarke's study of that sub-species of sf which warns of future wars.[2] Another pointer to possible directions of research is Professor Shippey's study of 'The Cold War in Science Fiction, 1940-60', which shows how

> fantastic elements of the stories were a cover, or a frame, for discussion of many real issues which were hardly open to serious consideration in any other popular medium: issues such as the nature of science, the conflict of business and government, the limits of loyalty, the power of social norms to affect individual perception.[3]

Shippey concentrated on one element, the sf image of the scientist in the period after his loss of innocence, after the Bomb. But the Cold War may well lie behind many sf themes of the late 40s and 50s. The numerous stories featuring the alien within—telepath, android, robot—must surely reflect the political situation; stories featuring the aliens taking over the bodies of Americans (Heinlein's *Puppet Masters,* Russell's *Three to Conquer*) are even more relevant. It is, after all, not an sf writer, but Barry Goldwater, who in 1960 claimed that the US was "in clear and imminent danger of being overwhelmed by alien forces."[4] A study of sf's reaction to this threat, and to the threat of the Goldwaters of the world, is a potentially interesting but as yet hardly explored sidelight on American history. Just as interesting would be an historical study of the changing attitude to extra-terrestrials in the light of changing attitudes towards the American black. A number of stories published in the 1950s and early 60s are clearly designed to arouse sympathy for minority groups;[5] Simak's *Time and Again* (1951), with its sympathies for the oppressed androids, must be one of the earliest. The potent role that sexual aggression plays in the mythology of racialism has been well studied by the historian; again the development of this theme in sf (and the joyful miscegenation practiced in some post-Farmer sf) would make an interesting study. Other research topics would come to the mind of any historian interested in the genre. The study of utopias, frequently discussed from a literary point of view, has much to offer the historian. So has the study of the influence of sf upon the science, or pseudo-science, of futurology. Sf imagery has been blamed for the success of high-rise building projects in post-War Britain: is this historically true? A major research topic (although it is perhaps a generation or two early to attempt it) would be the investigation of the role of sf in preparing the public for the immense technological changes of the post-war years. Ian Watson is perhaps the most prominent of those writers today who believe that sf has a significant role to play in altering human consciousness of itself and of human destiny.[6] A marvellous future doctoral thesis there, if we still have universities in the 21st century.

But much of the interest of sf for the historian may come from the very particular relationship which the sf writer has with the discipline of history itself. Sf is an historical fiction. All fiction, we have been told,[7] is "fictive history": it narrates events within an historical framework, and discusses, implicitly or explicitly, the relationship between the individual and his historical environment. But most novelists do not need to spend much of their time elaborating the historical framework, because they borrow their own, and that of their readers. The authors of what are conventionally called "historical novels" have to spend much more time on the historical framework; they cannot assume that their readers are familiar with the background, and, if they are any good, have to make some effort to portray the alien or at least unfamiliar thought-world of the past. But they are grossly restricted in what they can do, constrained by the realities of the past, or current perceptions of the past, or, all too frequently, by their own ignorance. Sf authors are doing a similar job, but are under many fewer constraints. But, since all fiction is concerned with events which have occurred in the narrator's past, sf writers too must be concerned with the construction of an historical framework. For some this has been a

perfunctory necessity. But it would be possible to argue, as I suggested at the beginning, that history has been even more of a protagonist of science fiction than science itself. One thinks of those hundreds of stories which have been concerned implicitly with historical processes: those that deal with the impact of a particular technological innovation upon society. And there are many which have explicitly taken history or historical development as their main theme. It is these works that I want to look at in the rest of this paper.

There are perhaps four ways in which sf writers have approached the theme of history. They have been interested in historical theory and made it their theme; they have put historical theory into practice by devising Future Histories; they have investigated history in time-travel stories; and, most interesting of all for the professional historian, they have devised alternative histories for our own world.

The *Foundation* series (now, sadly perhaps, no longer a trilogy), can hardly go without mention, although I have little to add to Charles Elkins' excellent study.[8] The science of psycho-history which underpins the entire plot is based, clearly, but tacitly, upon a vulgarization of ideas of historical determinism, as is clear from the *Encyclopedia Galactica*'s definition: "that branch of mathematics which deals with the reaction of human conglomerates to fixed social and economic stimuli."[9] It seems to me that Marx lies behind Asimov's ideas (as Wollheim and Elkins say, and Asimov and Gunn deny)[10], although Arnold Toynbee and John Campbell are his stated sources. The influence of Toynbee's *A Study of History* and Spengler's *The Decline of the West* upon sf writers has been considerable, as Shippey, among others, has pointed out.[11] In the 30s and 40s sf writers were able to proceed on the assumption that there *are* laws of history, and that history is in some sense cyclical. The former assumption allows for the existence of prophets such as Hari Seldon; the latter allows Asimov to imagine that the collapse of the Galactic Empire would be on similar lines to that of the collapse of the Roman Empire. Some of Asimov's sub-plots were taken directly from Roman history, a procedure which can still be justified on the same unimaginative philosophical grounds by sf writers, who are not above adding the hoary old corollary, "after all, human nature stays much the same, doesn't it?"[12] That was not a mistake made by James Clavell in *Shogun*, a portrayal of an alien thought-world that was more alien than those of many an sf writers' extra-terrestrials. But it has lurked behind many of the Future Histories, from Heinlein onwards.

The historical determinism of the *Foundation* series is not common in sf, despite Shippey's claims to the contrary.[13] I know of only one other series, the as yet unfinished Dorsai series by Gordon R. Dickson, where we have a philosophy of history similar to psycho-history. "We Exotics have a calculative technique now, called ontogenetics, that helps us to resolve any present or predicted moment into its larger historical factors . . . we believe in a physics of human action and interaction . . ."[14] Certainly there are other writers who have learned, perhaps from historians of science, that change is the creation of social and economic forces rather than of individuals: security men, bemoaned Ove Rasmussen at the end of Harry Harrison's *The Daleth Effect*, "will never understand that when it is steam-boat time you build steamboats, airplane time you build airplanes."[15] But most sf writers, particularly in America, seem wedded to the idea that individual free enterprise and choice can dramatically change the course of history; all too frequently the heroes of sf are the history-changers (or, in their most developed form, universe-savers). The image which encapsulates this attitude is that of John Barr (in Williamson's *The*

Legion of Time), standing in a field; if he picks up a magnet rather than a stone, the history of the Galaxy will be transformed. An arresting image, but one which is unlikely to convince a hard-headed historian.

The only other major sf writer apart from Asimov to make History his theme was Olaf Stapledon, although the gigantic scope of his *Last and First Men* meant that it was evolutionary or astronomical history as much as purely human history which interested him. It was a powerful vision, couched not as a novel but as an historical narrative, but, however influential, it remains a freak, and probably an unrepeatable one. What Stapledon did bequeath to sf, however, was the Time Chart, the inescapable companion of Future Histories. The reaction of literary critics to the Future History has often been harsh, and understandably so. They have, after all, often been no more than a market device for the production of short stories for the magazines which can then be cobbled together into a book, or a whole series of books. They can be a refuge for the mentally lazy, and a capitulation to the demands of fans, who enjoy the twin games of assisting the author in his historical creation and of complaining to him of errors or inconsistencies. The most interesting fictional histories, whether in sf or fantasy, are perhaps those which obviously represent a long-term emotional investment by the author. Whether or not Paul Linebarger was the teenager who confused his science-fictional imaginings with reality, as discussed in Dr Lindner's psychological casebook, it is clear that "Cordwainer Smith"'s Instrumentality stories, the first of which appeared when Linebarger was 15, owe much of their visionary power to the fact that this complex man placed much of his emotional life over a period of fifty years into his Future History. The most convincing of imaginary worlds are precisely those in which the history is as elaborate as the geology or the sociology, and that may require long gestation. Tolkien spent much of his life on Middle Earth; Marion Zimmer Bradley has written that the basic vision of Darkover came to her in childhood.[16] But the genre still has to wait for its Gibbon, or even for its heir to Stapledon, to capture the immensity and complexity of time as ably as some have portrayed the immensity of space.

Time has more frequently been presented by the sf writer either through the device—or metaphor, if you like—of the time machine, or else in what English writers would probably prefer to call alternative history, what American writers have generally called alternate history, and what some historians would call counter-factual history. Frequently time travel stories shade into alternative history. The scenario in which a time-traveller accidentally or deliberately changes an historical event and returns to find his own society altered has become an sf cliché. The classic image, recalled in a number of later stories, is that of Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" (1952) in which a tourist returns from the Jurassic to find his world subtly changed; he looks down and finds a dead butterfly embedded in the mud of his boots. He had been warned before he left, "Step on a mouse and you crush the Pyramids. Step on a mouse and you leave your print, like a Grand Canyon, across Eternity."[17] The efforts of a number of authors in this sub-genre have been devoted to making sure that this did not happen, either by denying it on philosophical or (pseudo-) scientific grounds, or else by creating a Time Patrol, or whatever, whose task was to eliminate the history-changing actions of the criminal or careless. Undoubtedly the most carefully conceived novel on these lines is Silverberg's *Up the Line* (1969), not only for its beautifully portrayed eleventh-century Byzantium but also for its investigation of the problems of a past littered with time-travelling tourists. His wonder-

ful picture of Calvary at the crucifixion crowded almost exclusively by tourists, including several versions of the same time couriers, was carried to its logical horrific conclusion in Garry Kilworth's "Let's Go to Golgotha."[18] These elaborate games, the sf equivalent, Malcolm Edwards has said, of the locked-room mystery,[19] culminate in stories in which the paradox is the theme, and historical speculations form only a minor backdrop. But it is worth mentioning that the ultimate time-paradox story, David Gerrold's *The Man who Folded Himself,* offers something new: a protagonist who uses his time-travelling device in order to create, by judicious historical changes, an ideal world for himself (from which he can return as an old man to present his young self with the device). Gerrold provided in this story a refreshing contrast to the general run of such stories in which our own overpopulated, polluted, injustice-ridden world is presented as the best of all possible worlds which must be preserved from time-meddlers at all costs. L. Sprague de Camp's justly celebrated *Lest Darkness Fall* (1941) is another such exception, in which the time-travelling historian attempts to stave off the "Dark Ages" by a few judicious innovations. The same author presents the problems involved in inducing technological change in past societies in "Aristotle and the Gun",[20] where a modern scientist expounds the principles of scientific method to Aristotle; the Greek is so appalled by the drudgery of experimentation, and daunted by the fact that barbarians (for so the time-traveller represents himself) have done it all before, that he decrees the futility of such efforts for Greeks.

There is a small sub-sub-genre of time-travel, which has produced some delights for the historian: that in which men from the past are brought, invariably unwittingly, into the future, usually our own present. In R.A. Lafferty's *Past Master* (1968), it is Sir Thomas More; in Stuart Gordon's *Fire in the Abyss* (1983) it is Sir Humphrey Gilbert; in Ian Watson's "Ghost Lecturer" (*Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* March 1984) it is Lucretius. But the master of them all, a writer who deserves to be much better known to lovers of sf and fantasy, is Hendrik Van Loon, whose *Van Loon's Lives* (1943) is the tale of the dinner parties Van Loon had with great figures from the past. They came in response to an invitation put under one of the stone lions outside the town hall of Veere in the Netherlands, and it starts sedately enough with Erasmus. Later dinners, such as the one with Torquemada and Robespierre, were rather less fun, and the invitation addressed in a spirit of curiosity to "the greatest inventor of all" was disastrous: it resulted in the appearance of the apeman who invented the first stone tool. It is a splendid book, full of wit, erudition and humanity, even if it is somewhat too didactic for modern tastes.[21]

It is in the alternative history story proper, which makes do without time-travel to link it to our own present, that sf comes closest to the speculations with which historians have entertained themselves for several millennia. Counter-factual speculation has a reasonably respectable ancestry in the profession. Livy digresses in Book 9 of his *History of Rome* to meditate upon what the fate of the world would have been had Alexander the Great not died at the age of 33—a particular speculation that has appealed to other historians, from Tacitus to Toynbee. One of the most famous counter-factuals in British historiography is in Chapter 52 of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* where he speculates on what might have happened had 'Abd ar-Rahman defeated Charles Martel in 732 on the road from Poitiers to Tours:

> A victorious line of march had been prolonged above a thousand miles from the rock of Gibraltar to the banks of the Loire; the repetition of an equal space would have carried the Saracens to the confines of Poland and the Highlands of Scotland; the Rhine is not more

> impassable than the Nile or Euphrates, and the Arabian fleet might have sailed without a naval combat into the mouth of the Thames. Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mohammed.[22]

(A speculation which probably afforded considerable amusement to Gibbon, who disliked both Oxford and Christianity.) Counter-factuals have, indeed, been the besetting sin of those who write about military history in particular. Any book such as the *Twelve Decisive Battles of World History* by Major-General J.F.C. Fuller (that fascinating man, who was disciple first of the black magician Aleister Crowley and later of Adolf Hitler[23]), inevitably implies some thought about why those battles were decisive. And the idea of certain battles as turning points in world history—Marathon, Actium, Poitiers, Hastings, Las Navas de Tolosa, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Waterloo, Appommatox—has appealed to sf writers as well as historians. But the pragmatic British historiographical tradition has on the whole been reluctant to have anything to do with what is generally regarded as methodologically and philosophically dubious, as well as a pointless complication of something which is complex enough as it is. Fischer called it "the fallacy of fictional questions,"[24] and objected to it above all because of its inversion of normal historical ideas about evidence and proof. He concludes, not without reason, that the counter-factualists could learn from "those learned, if unlovable, logicians, Tweedledum and Tweedledee": "if it was so it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't." It is not surprising that it is the British historian Toynbee—who believes in laws of historical evolution—who again swam against the tide of fashion, and offered in *A Study of History* a number of counter-factual suggestions. He examines Gibbon's counter-factual, which I have just cited, and suggests that in fact if 'Abd ar-Rahman had won Poitiers, or if St Wilfrid of York had lost his case at the Synod of Whitby some sixty years earlier, the result would have been the triumph of Irish rather than Muslim civilization: the sf story by Sprague de Camp, "The Wheels of If," is directly based on this suggestion of Toynbee's.[25] Toynbee also envisages the potentialities of Viking culture for domination of the Atlantic world; the lost opportunities for Ottoman strategists in the early sixteenth century (realized in part in Silverberg's *The Gate of Worlds,* 1967), and so on. Toynbee regarded such speculation as a useful but minor adjunct to the process of historical analysis: to inquire about the "Great 'Ifs' of History" (to use the title of one of his essays) was a way of focusing on what were the most important factors and events in the real world.

Such is also the main justification of the new school of counter-factual historians that emerged in the United States in the 1960s. They argue, rightly I think, that any historians who make statements such as "Smith was an indispensible figure in such-and-such an event or process," or "the most significant factor in the process was X" are in fact offering an implied counterfactual—suggesting that if Smith or X had not been there, events would have turned out differently. But conventional historians would probably admit that if they let slip a counter-factual implication that "something would not have happened without the intervention of Smith, or X" they were writing in a sloppy manner; they would not agree with the counter-factualists that open and systematic use of counter-factuals is an aid to historical understanding. The counter-factualists are mostly American, and are almost entirely economic historians: most of them in fact call themselves New Economic Historians, or even Cliometricians, rather than Counter-

Factualists. The problems they have dealt with include, most famously, an evaluation of the importance of railways in the growth of the 19th century American economy by estimating what would have happened if an extensive canal system had been built instead,[26] or what would have happened to the economy or political structure of North America had the British government not applied the Navigation Acts strictly in the 18th century. That most counter-factualists are economic historians is easily explained: they are accustomed to thinking in economic terms, of cost benefits and the effects of choice in a free market, and it is an easy step to move from programming a computer to determine possible economic futures—which all economists are familiar with—to programming one to report on alternative pasts.

Even historians who will admit the benefits of such speculations for economic history are wary about extending these speculations beyond the quantifiable boundaries of economic history into the much less predictable area of politics. There have been only occasional attempts to do so in recent years—interestingly, sometimes in areas which sf authors had entered long before. The possibility of Britain winning the American War of Independence has been discussed by Piers Mackesy and Robert Sobel;[27] Bruce Russett has investigated the consequences of America not entering World War II;[26] and so on.

The delight for the historian in sf alternative histories is then obvious; he can ignore his professional qualms and revel in historical speculation. He can even, if he wishes, give a scientific rationale to ideas about alternative universes with the help of quantum mechanics.[29] Sf writers have not yet gone to the lengths of Ts'ui Pên (in Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths"), who wrote a novel which defied comprehension: "In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên he chooses—simultaneously—all of them. He *creates* in this way diverse futures, diverse times, which themselves proliferate and fork."[30] But sf writers have already produced a large number of alternative history novels and stories,[31] with "Jonbar points" (decisive moment in history, named after the character in Williamson's *Legion of Time,* mentioned above) ranging from the extinction of the dinosaurs (Harrison's *West of Eden*) to Nixon's victory in the 1960 presidential election (Barry Malzberg's "January 1975," from *Analog* January 1975). And such novels often do give hints of other—an infinite other—possible worlds. The eponymous character in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), the classic of the genre, set in the world in which Germany and Japan have carved up the US between them, is writing an alternative history novel called *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy,* in which Germany and Japan have lost the war and Hitler had been tried at Munich along with other Nazi war-criminals. (The victory of Nazi Germany, of course, is virtually a whole sub-species of the genre, starting with a number of novels actually written during the war[32] and continuing with Sarban, Bailey, Deighton, Roberts and many others.[33]) Dick's vision is characteristically subtle, designed to make us question our own grasp on historical reality; in the hands of less skilled writers of sf the same approach can degenerate into a joke, albeit, as in the case of Kingsley Amis' *The Alteration,* a good joke. This is a world, of course, in which the Reformation had never happened, in which Heinrich Himmler and Jean-Paul Sartre become cardinals, and in which Philip K. Dick is writing a novel called *The Man in the High Castle,* describing a world in which Martin Luther never became Pope, and in which the American colonies had actually won their independence (after the 1848 revolution). Amis reports some discussion as to whether Dick's book,

clearly CW (counterfeit world) can really be classed as TR (time romance): ("the most commonly suggested alternative, Invention Fiction, made a beguiling acronym"), a nice satire on real-world discussion of whether alternative history novels are *really* sf, but ruined, for me, by Amis' explanation as to why TR was not called sf—"Science was a word and idea considered only in private: who would wish to publish a bawdy pamphlet under the heading of *Disgusting Stories*"[34]—an inexcusable auctorial aside which a good writer of sf, cw or tr would never have perpetrated.

Among Amis's many literary jokes in *The Alteration* is a mention of a cw novel by Keith Roberts called *Galliard*. In our world, of course, Roberts danced a less energetic dance. But *The Alteration* and *Pavane* are only two of many alternative histories which have swallowed the Tawney thesis wholesale: the scientific and commercial revolutions would not have happened without the Reformation; the Catholic Church would inevitably have stifled scientific achievement (to the extent that "science" is an obscenity); and cw books, like such books in Dick's fictional America, would be regarded as subversive by an inevitably un-democratic (because un-Protestant) government. It is an interesting comment upon the WASP domination of sf that we should not (to my knowledge) have had an alternative viewpoint, and that fictional speculations about a world in which the Spanish Armada won[35] should be so unanimous about the dire consequences for humanity. Carlos Fuentes, in his eccentric and (for me) virtually unreadable alternative history epic *Terra Nostra,* would seem to be the only comment from the Spanish speaking world, although it is hardly any more optimistic. Alternative worlds seem inevitably more backward, as in Catholic worlds or in the plethora of stories about Confederate victory in the American Civil War, or more tyrannical, as in the Nazi victory stories referred to above. "This world is the best of all possible worlds" has survived Voltaire's satire almost unscathed. If only for that reason, the field of alternative history has much left for the sf writer to explore; we may hope that future explorations avoid this trap of temporal parochialism. There is no reason why we should not find utopias as well as dystopias in the myriad alternative worlds postulated by some theoretical physicists. History is not just a question of western civilization congratulating itself for what it has created; it can also be an enquiry into what has gone wrong.

Notes

1 Brian Stableford, "Notes Toward a Sociology of Science Fiction," *Foundation* 15 (1979), 28 – 41.
2 W.W. Wagar, *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington, 1982); I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1973 – 1984* (Oxford, 1966).
3 T.A. Shippey, in Patrick Parrinder, ed., *Science Fiction: a Critical Guide* (London, 1979), p.107.
4 Quoted in R.S. Chapman, "Science Fiction of the 1950s: Billy Graham, McCarthy and the Bomb," *Foundation* 7/8 (1975), pp. 38 – 53, at p.49.
5 See, for instance, the anthology edited by Allen DeGraeff, *Humans and Other Beings* (Collier Books, New York, 1963).
6 See "W(h)ither Science Fiction?," *Vector* 78 (1976), 5 – 12.
7 After Robert F. Canary, "Science Fiction as Fictive History," *Extrapolation* 16 no. 1 (Dec. 1974), 81 – 95, reprinted in T.D. Clareson, ed., *Many Futures, Many Worlds: Theme and Form in Science Fiction* (Kent, Ohio, 1977), pp.164 – 81.
8 C. Elkins, "Isaac Asimov's 'Foundation' Novels: Historical Materialism Distorted into Cyclical Psycho-history," *Science-Fiction Studies* 3 (1976), pp. 26 – 36, reprinted in J.D. Olander and M.H. Greenberg, ed., *Isaac Asimov* (Edinburgh, 1977), 97 – 110.
9 *Foundation* (British PB, 1960), p.16.
10 See the discussion in James Gunn, *Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 27 ff.

11 Tom Shippey's two articles, "Science Fiction and the Idea of History," *Foundation* 4 (July 1973), pp.4 – 19, and "History in SF," in P. Nicholls, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (London, 1979), pp. 283 – 4, are excellent introductions to the whole subject of sf writers' use of history.
12 "The nature of man . . . has always been the same and will remain the same forever": Arsen Darnay, in "The Future is the Past," *Bulletin of the Science Fiction Writers of America* 68 (13 no. 4) (Fall 1978), 11 – 12.
13 In *Foundation* 4 (1973), p.8.
14 *The Spirit of Dorsai* (1979), quoting Sphere ed 1983, pp. 142 – 3.
15 *The Daleth Effect* (in UK *In Our Hands, The Stars*) quoted from Berkley PB 1970, p.191.
16 In the "future history" issue of the *Bulletin of the Science Fiction Writers of America* 71 (1979), p.18.
17 Quoted from the Bantam PB (1961), *The Golden Apples of the Sun*, p.88.
18 First published in *The Gollancz/Sunday Times Best SF Stories* (London, 1975).
19 In Nicholls, ed., op. cit., p.605.
20 "Aristotle and the Gun" was published in *Asounding* May 1958 (British ed.). For an excellent discussion of this and *Lest Darkness Fall*, see Shippey in *Foundation* 4 (1973).
21 It is primarily time-travel as history lesson; there is a recent interesting example of this, of time-travel story as lesson in culture shock, with Eric G. Iverson, "Hindsight," in *Analog*, Mid-December 1984.
22 E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. J.B. Bury), vol. VI p.15.
23 According to John Symonds, *The Great Beast: the Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley* (rev. ed. 1973): see index at "Fuller."
24 D.H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Towards a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York, 1970), on "the fallacy of fictional questions," pp.15 – 21.
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26 Robert W. Fogel, *Railways and American Economic Growth: Essays in Econometric History* (Baltimore, 1964); on this see now P. O'Brien, *The New Economic History of the Railways* (London, 1977). A useful study of Cliometrics is to be found in D.N. McCloskey, "The Achievements of the Cliometric School," *Journal of Economic History*, 38 (1978), 13 – 28.
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30 Jorge Luis Borges 1941, in *Labyrinths*, quoted from the Penguin ed. (1970), p.51.
31 Everyone interested in this subject is indebted to the excellent compilation of Barton C. Hacker and Gordon B. Chamberlain, "Pasts that Might Have Been: an Annotated Bibliography of Alternate History," *Extrapolation* 22 no. 4 (1981), pp. 334 – 78: I have found it indispensible.
32 On which see the relevant section of Bibliography C in I.F. Clarke, op. cit.
33 Sarban, *The Sound of His Horn* (1952); Hilary Bailey, "The Fall of Frenchy Steiner," *New Worlds* July-Aug. 1964, repr. e.g. in J. Merrill, ed., *SF 12* (New York 1968); Len Deighton, *SS – GB: Nazi-Occupied Britain, 1941* (1978); Keith Roberts, "Weihnachtabend," *New Worlds Quarterly 4* (1972), repr. in H. Harrison and B. Aldiss, ed., *The Year's Best SF 1972* (London, 1973).
34 Quoting the British paperback ed., Panther 1978, p.26.
35 Which include John Brunner, *Times without Number* (1962) (originally published as three stories in *Science Fiction Adventures* (London), May, June and July 1962); Phyllis Eisenstein, *Shadow of Earth* (1979); Fritz Leiber, "No Great Magic," *Galaxy* Dec. 1963, repr. in Leiber, *The Change Wars* (1978).

Bruce Sterling was born in 1954. He is the author of three sf novels—Involution Ocean *(1977),* The Artificial Kid *(1980) and* Schismatrix *(1985)—as well as a number of short stories which have appeared in* Fantasy and Science Fiction, Omni, Interzone *and other magazines. He lives with his wife in Austin, Texas, surrounded by home computers and imported copies of* New Musical Express. *In addition to being one of the finest American sf writers of the younger generation, he is rapidly becoming known as a proselytizer for the future development of a serious science fiction.*

The Profession of Science Fiction, 33: Twisted for a Living

BRUCE STERLING

To my eye, the best science fiction comes from those who can't help it. Writing sf as a commercial venture is perverse; the odds are long and there's more cash in an honest trade.

Of course, once one is trapped in the writer's professional life, the repugnance may wear off. One may end up committing novels in cold blood, just as the wild man of Borneo is led by slow stages to bite the heads off chickens. But why write sf in the first place? The impulse has to lurch up from within, as a mere symptom of a much more profound disequilibrium.

I was a fanatic reader as a kid; the kind of omnivore who pores through encyclopedias for fun. I chanced on the pop fireworks of pulp sf: Edgar Rice Burroughs, and of course Robert E. Howard, the lunatic patron saint of Texan sf writers. The effect on my schoolwork was ruinous, giving sf the allure of a secret vice. Soon I was haunting libraries, yanking books from the shelf at random.

No twelve-year-old addict could have resisted the eerie Ernst cover of J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World.* I have a copy of the thing beside my word processor as I write. I never look at it without a Proustian rush. This was the hard stuff: by the time I'd finished it, my spindly pre-teen arms were like golden cartwheels and my head was a spectral crown. From that moment I was a dedicated rebel against the consensus reality of Gulf Coast Texas.

A year later *Dangerous Visions* showed up. Trembling with perverted eagerness, I pored over Farmer's "Riders of the Purple Wage." The thing was a revelation, an astounding torrent of subversive lunacy. It amazed me that I got away with reading it, that it didn't burn its way onto my chest like the parson's "A" in *The Scarlet Letter.*

I might have recovered from this early exposure, except for another formative event. When I was fifteen my family moved to Madras, India. I adjusted to this without trauma; it seemed pretty mild compared to galactic emanations crystallizing Africa. But in India I

was a true alien, thrown on my own resources, and I got used to the feeling. America was a distant dream, symbolized by battered copies of *Analog* arriving by boat mail.

I'd soon scouted out the town's libraries. My immediate favourite, the scene of many happy hours, was the British Consulate. Thank you, British taxpayer, for giving me Aldiss, Moorcock, and John Keats. You made me what I am today.

At eighteen I returned to Texas for the university. I'd already been writing for some time, filling up notebooks that I ritually burned. Back in the States, I felt profoundly alienated, and had to recover my drawl by stages. But I soon drifted into fandom, where I got along splendidly. By my junior year I was part of a group of young Texan sf writers, wryly known as "Turkey City" because of the quality of our manuscripts.

Those were glory days, and I ignored my journalism degree to write sf seriously. It's now been ten years since my first sale, long enough for me to become known as a "new writer."

I attribute my success, such as it is, to the fact that I was yanked from my milieu. Instead of being forced to conform, I was left to fester. This is what twisted me and made writing necessary. I was mutated, but I found sf as a natural niche.

I've always believed that sf can and should do things other forms of writing can't. I consider sf a popular art form with great subversive potential, much like pop music. Stealing through our culture like invisible radiation, sf's influence is unfelt, unseen, and yet profound. Sf is a cultural mutagen. It is more than a psychedelic light-show; at its best, it gives off blasts of gene-shattering cosmic rays.

Most sf writers labour in profound obscurity. It may be wise of society not to reward people like us too lavishly. We are dangerous, as can be seen by occasional eruptions from the sf ghetto, such as pop religions and the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Sf's native milieu is a society in stress. A static utopia would have no use for us. The growing popularity of sf is a gauge of how deeply future shock has disrupted our culture. Much sf is a narcotic, an escapist sedative for that fraction of the population painfully estranged from the norms. The growth of pure fantasy is a clear market response to the demand for an opiate.

But if we have a social duty, it is clearly to throw off as much mutational energy as possible. Load every rift with ore; put pennies on the fuses; jam the pedal to the floorboards, and go for broke. We're not going to survive this weirdest of centuries by dressing as elves. We need every last mutant and nutcase we can spare, to beat the brush for paths to the next millennium.

We need ideas, and the literature of ideas is a natural source for them. I feel a deep optimism about the future of sf; from what I see from my contemporaries, I think the late 80's will bring the greatest burst of sustained creativity that our genre has seen in twenty years. There are writers at work who are thinking seriously about the future again; writers who are bored with the apocalypse, and fascinated by the creative powers liberated by turmoil. They are not mannered or comfortable or soothing writers and when they are pinched they scream. Sometimes they scream for the hell of it.

They don't follow formulas or party lines. They don't apologize for writing sf; instead they grit their teeth, turn up the amps, and do it like it mattered.

And it does matter. Once I was twisted and had to hide it; now I'm twisted for a living. I write sf because I can't help it, but I'm glad of it, proud of it. If I could think of something better, I might do that instead. But I truly believe that I have nothing better to do.

Brian Stableford's last sf novel was The Gates of Eden *(DAW Books, 1983). Since then he has been taking a rest from the writing of novels. Nevertheless his name has appeared on two new books published in 1985*—The Third Millennium: A History of the World, AD 2000 – 3000 *(Sidgwick & Jackson, £12.95), co-written with David Langford; and* Scientific Romance in Britain, 1890 – 1950 *(Fourth Estate Ltd., £19.50), partly based on essays which first appeared in* Foundation. *In the following unusual piece he takes a critical look at a relatively new art form, the fantasy video.*

Animal Spirits: The Erotic and the Supernatural in Michael Jackson's "Thriller" Video

BRIAN STABLEFORD

Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video, co-written by Jackson and John Landis and directed by Landis, is both an instance of and a commentary on the changing implications of erotic symbolism in supernatural fiction. It is, in a way, a celebration of the fact that what were once covert meanings have risen to the level of consciousness, permitting modern supernatural fiction a depth of ironic reflection which has some interesting consequences. One of those consequences is that while the technology of cinematic special effects has become more sophisticated, permitting the imagery of horror films to become much more gruesome, the films have actually become less frightening, and have in fact moved almost into the category of black comedy. The *Thriller* video, which co-opts all the tricks of contemporary make-up artistry to stunning effect, awoke sufficient disquiet among American Fundamentalist moralists to call forth a quasi-apologetic disclaimer from Michael Jackson, but in fact the video subverts its own imagery very efficiently, and the net effect is to delight rather than to terrify. Because it is *self-consciously* nightmarish it is a story *about* nightmares, not a nightmare in itself, and what it says about nightmares is partly a decoding of their nature and symbology.

The story told in the video has three distinct phases. Phase one begins with a car rolling to a halt on a country road. It contains a boy (played by Michael Jackson) and a girl. The boy tells the girl, uncertainly, that the car seems to have run out of gas. She does not question this, though she obviously knows it for the clichéd pretext that it is. The two go for a walk in the dark, and the boy raises the question of their feelings for one another; with her tacit encouragement he asks her to be "his girl". She gratefully accepts this offer, and in the course of a tender embrace he gives her a ring. Then he says that he is "not like other guys". This is a joke for the audience to share, because we know that she will take the wrong inference from the remark. She thinks he is simply trying to convince her of the seriousness of his affections, but we, already wise in the ways of cinematic convention, know that he is actually implying something more sinister. So far, the girl has been

entirely correct in "reading" the covert meanings within the boy's courtship manoeuvres, and she is being entirely consistent in interpreting this one the way she does—but we in the audience are quite aware that a crucial shift of interpretative framework is taking place. The shift is symbolically signalled by a shot of clouds moving away to expose the face of the full moon, and then the boy begins to turn into that curious kind of humanoid wolf which has been—since Stuart Walker's 1935 film *The Werewolf of London*—the cinema's stereotype of lycanthropic transformation.

When the girl catches up with the audience in realising that she is in a new kind of situation she reacts in the manner which countless old movies have established as a stock response: she starts screaming and runs away. The boy, at first, urges her to run (confirming that, in this stereotype, the werewolf is a rather tragic figure—the unwilling but helpless victim of his condition.) Once the transformation is complete, though, his bestial self obliterates both conscience and consciousness, and he chases her.

At this point, phase one fades out into phase two, becoming only an image on a cinema screen that is being watched by a boy (played by Michael Jackson) and a girl (played by the actress who played the girl in phase one). Their clothes and hairstyles are quite different now, much more in tune with current fashion, suggesting a marked time difference between the two sets of images. This reminds us that phase one reflected the imagery of 1950s low-budget teenage scare-movies (the archetype of the species being, of course, Gene Fowler's *I Was a Teenage Werewolf,* made in 1957).

The reactions of the watching boy and girl are quite different. The girl is repelled by what she is watching, and seems to be finding it hard to bear, but the boy is obviously enjoying himself, seemingly enthralled while he wolfs popcorn with unthinking relish. (The obvious symbolic propriety of the popcorn and the relish with which it is being consumed is unlikely to be accidental.) The girl leaves the cinema, and the boy reluctantly follows. He tells her, with an element of contempt in his reassurance, that it was only a film; she replies resentfully that "It's not funny". He charges her with being afraid, and her denial—though obviously false—does serve to emphasize that fear is not the only matter at issue. The display that has so fascinated *him,* she has found repulsive. The boy at this point assumes a protective role, assuring her that he will see her safely home.

It is while they walk through the dark streets that Jackson begins to sing. Here we have another change of interpretative framework—the transference made conventional by countless musicals, which allow the play and its performers to move smoothly out of a "naturalistic" mode of presentation into a highly-stylized one. Audiences have long since given tacit permission for this kind of transference to be very extreme indeed—the cardinal examples being found in such movies as Mervyn LeRoy's *Gold Diggers of 1933,* whose story-line about dancers struggling to get by in the Depression is seamlessly juxtaposed with Busby Berkeley's fabulous musical set-pieces.

Until he starts to sing Michael Jackson is an *actor* in the video, playing the parts of ordinary adolescents trying to make out with their girl-friends, but once he starts to sing the context shifts according to the convention. It is an interesting paradox that it is when the story shifts from the naturalistic to the fantastic mode that he stops pretending and becomes himself. The lyrics of the song, of course, relate explicitly to the mundane storyline. The title and keyword is first made to refer to the kind of film which the boy and girl have been watching, and to the effects of such a film on its watchers. The hypothetical "I" of the lyric (to be distinguished from the performer) claims the role which the boy

assumed in protectively offering to see the girl home, guarding her against the phantoms of her imagination. The fact that he is willing and able to do this is credited to his accepted affection for her (the point is made even more deftly in the lyric of another recent hit, "The Power of Love" by Frankie Goes to Hollywood, which includes the reverently-crooned lines "I'll protect you from the Hooded Claw/Keep the vampires from your door".)

At this stage, however, Jackson completes only part of the song, because the lyric itself is going to undergo a transformation, offering us in its latter part a different set of meanings for its title and keyword. In the video, Jackson reverts to the part of the boy, but the interpretative context of the film does not revert all the way back to the naturalistic. We are still in a fantasized mode, and this is signalled to us by the sound-track, which supplements the pictures with a short poem read by the actor Vincent Price, in the marvellous camp-horror style which he made famous in such films as Roger Corman's *The Raven* (1963) and Robert Fuest's *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971). (When the boy and girl emerged from the cinema the lighted advertisement above the entrance claimed that Vincent Price was starring in a film called *Thriller*.)

As the poem proceeds the images on the screen are once again taken over by the iconography of the horror film, but this time the films whose imagery is being co-opted belong to a more recent and more visceral tradition begun by George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Rotting corpses emerge from their graves and from the sewers beneath the streets, congregating into a ghoulish and threatening company. The boy and girl now seem equally afraid, but when the girl turns to the boy for the protection which he promised her, he again begins a transformation. This is a more complicated shift of mode within the film, because the boy-into-ghoul change is coupled with the actor-into-performer switch as the singing begins again. Now Jackson and the ghouls embark upon a stagy dance-routine—a change of behaviour which is sanctioned by the conventions of movie musicals, and which is just as smooth as the first eruption of song. The import of the lyric is now quite different, with the hypothetical singer promising the addressee of the song that he can provide her with a bigger thrill than any horror film if she will let him make love to her. While the hypothetical singer is making this rather extravagant promise the actual singer, Jackson, is made up to look like a pseudo-Karloffian monster, leading a dozen other such monsters in disco-style programmed cavorting.

The choreography of this section of the video requires the girl to put on a show of trying to escape her "pursuers", but it is only when the song ends and the context reverts again to the more commonplace fantastic mode that she runs indoors and tries to barricade herself into her room. The barricading is ineffectual, as monsters begin smashing their way through a shuttered window and up through the splintering floorboards. The boy-ghoul strides implacably through the shattering door to embrace her.

At this point, phase two of the story gives way to phase three. Just as the first point of transition relegated the substance of phase one to the level of "harmless fantasy", so the second relegates phase two. This time, the recourse is to the hoariest of all literary and cinematic clichés, reducing the horrific experience to the status of a dream. Instead of the boy-ghoul reaching out for the girl, we now have only the boy; it is light instead of dark and the filthy, empty room has become a cosy furnished one. The boy tells the girl that she has been dreaming, and he soothingly assumes the protective role again, promising her as he did in phase two to see her home. The girl accepts this, but the audience is again

expected to be one step ahead of her—the climactic moment when the boy, as he guides her towards the door, half-turns to the camera to reveal yellow slit-pupilled eyes (the same eyes he wore as a wolf man) is a confirmation as much as a surprise. The constant moves from "fantasy" into "reality" are, we are assured, nothing of the kind. The abandonment of a particular set of symbols does not allow us to escape or set aside that which is being symbolized.

The form of the storyline which Jackson and Landis use in the *Thriller* video has several literary precedents, ranging from Jan Potocki's *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1804) to Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983). The idea of a series of apparent returns from fantasy to reality, all of which ultimately prove to be nothing of the kind, is extensively deployed by Philip K. Dick in numerous novels, including *Eye in the Sky* (1957), *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964) and *Now Wait for Last Year* (1966). All these literary works, though, are asking questions which are metaphysical in character; they attempt to cultivate a sense of existential unease by challenging the idea that we can readily identify what is real. In the *Thriller* video this is not so much the end as the means of raising a further series of questions about the relationship between our fantasies and our feelings.

Underlying the symbology of the *Thriller* video and the other horror films to which it refers is the very old idea that human nature is in an important sense *divided,* and that our powers of reason and moral conscience are engaged in an ongoing war with more bestial impulses and passions. For Plato the human soul was pure reason, but when embodied it became embroiled with mortal and irrational elements: a "spirited part" of nobler aspirations like ambition and the love of power, and "lower appetites" that should, ideally, be annihilated by the force of the will. The Stoics considered the passions to be perturbations and diseases of the mind, overpowering impulses contrary to nature and insubordinate to reason. In a later era, the rationalist philosopher Spinoza founded his ethical theories in the proposition that "Our mind acts certain things and suffers others," proceeding to offer one discourse "On human servitude, or the Strength of the Emotions" and another "Concerning the power of the intellect, or Human Freedom." Descartes, in his similar philosophical system, represented the passions as excitations of the soul caused by the movement of "animal spirits." In a more scientific era Darwin, in his book on *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals,* conceded that our emotional responses are atavistic, innate and in the final analysis uncontrollable by the power of the will. Freud imagined the essential self—the *ego*—developing as a result of the dialectical contention of the moral and rational *superego* and the anarchic, thrustful *id.*

In view of the fact that this is the way we experience our inner life, it is hardly surprising to find in myth and supernatural literature exaggerated images of divided man: stories in which the fragile grip of reason is broken down by the awful force of animal passion. This is why we can "understand" such non-existent beings as werewolves, and why we are so fascinated by the plight of Dr Jekyll in Stevenson's brilliant nightmare-based fantasy *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde,* the basis of three of the best horror films ever made. It is significant that the film versions of *Jekyll and Hyde* are all much less coy than Stevenson in giving Hyde's evil a specifically sexual context, because it is in the area of sexual relationships that we are most likely to encounter the irresistible influence of "the passions." In modern parlance, of course, "passion" is almost invariably used in a sexual sense, to signify lust and jealousy.

There have been individuals, like Plato and various adherents of Victorian morality, who have regarded the "baser" part of man's nature as an unmitigated evil, to be ruthlessly suppressed, but the vast majority have always had mixed feelings about it. We can see, and regret, certain destructive aspects of the dominion of passion (this is what underlies the modern sense of tragedy) but we find the image of the paragon of reason and unshakable morality a rather horrible one. We find it impossible to be wholeheartedly ashamed of our lusts, and it is from the experience of passion that we derive our moments of intensest pleasure and our occasional ecstatic conviction of the worth of existence. Even the most high-minded of intellectuals is aware of this—it was not the force of pure reason that made Archimedes leap from his bath crying "Eureka!"

Just as we tend to see human nature in the broad sense as something "divided"—a unity of conflicting forces—so we tend to see sexual love as an almost paradoxical confusion of impulses. The lover intends to be caring, protective and sensitive, but these intentions are in dialectical opposition to the urges of physical lust which aim toward ends that seem (in the moral context superimposed by our social codes) to amount to violation of the female by the male.

This is what the sexual subtext of the *Thriller* video is all about. In each of the three phases of the story the boy overtly represents his affection for the girl in terms of protectiveness. In phase one, which looks back to the attitudes of a generation ago, his shyness and hesitancy imply a kind of reverence. This is how the girl "misunderstands" his claim not to be like other guys—she takes him to be affirming adherence to the mythology of the day according to which, because he really loves her, his carefully running out of gas in a remote spot is not simply a standard ploy in routine seduction. That he *does* subscribe, at least partly, to the idea that if he really loves her he will "respect" her and refrain from pressuring her into having sex, is suggested by his despairing instruction to her to get away as he begins to change. The transformation represents, in symbolic form, the hollowness of the mythology—his shyness and his protectiveness are masks concealing the force within him of the Cartesian "animal spirits," the idea of whose possible release easily lends itself to representation in terms of nice boy becoming ravening beast.

The changed clothes and manner of the characters in phase two emphasize that in the course of the last thirty years we have become more sophisticated in sexual matters. The mores and mythologies of the 1950s now seem quaintly hollow to us. The implied reverence is gone, and instead the boy is impatient with the girl's inability to take pleasure from the film. She is herself rather ashamed of the fact that she is frightened and repelled by the imagery—as a member of the audience she is assumed to have been one step ahead of the girl in the film, able to appreciate the humour of her misunderstanding. Basically though, nothing has changed. The boy is again representing his feelings for the girl mainly in terms of protectiveness, and this is still a mask, which will be symbolically stripped away by a new infusion of "animal spirits" in unhuman form.

Because this is the 1980s and not the 1950s we do not expect that the boy's courtship of the girl will be respectfully unsullied by actual sexual contact. The assumption of premarital virginity has been set aside not merely as a folly but also as a hypocritical misrepresentation of the way things actually were. The fact that sex is no longer to be seen as spoliation—as the proverbial "fate worse than death"—does not, however, mean that the opposition of protectiveness and lust has been fully reconciled and the second phase of

the story makes this clear. The lyric of the song *promises* such a reconciliation, by equating the excitation of fear with the excitation of sexual congress, and promising that the former will be overwhelmed by the latter, but the way that the song is integrated into the story subverts that message. The lyric is split into two distinct parts, dividing the protective representations from the libidinous ones in a perfectly literal way, and in between the two bursts of song the appearance and environment of the singer are dramatically transformed. The girl's "natural" reaction is still to run away, screaming, to try to secure herself against a violation which, in this phase of the video, is actually represented. The third phase is not shifted in time, arising as a movement from dream to waking rather than film to reality; what it implies is that it is only in the private world of her dreams that the girl sees things in this way and gives way to her anxieties—in the "real world" she suppresses the fear-reaction and the idea of violation and is content to appear to accept that the boy's caring protectiveness is not compromised by the animal spirits which, symbolized by the werewolf eyes, still move within him.

The contrast between old and new attitudes which is displayed in the video is achieved cleverly and self-consciously. While the horror films of the 1950s tacitly assumed a naïve audience unaware that the story could be decoded to reveal a sexual subtext (though the script-writers were certainly aware of it), Landis clearly assumes that his audience knows about the patterns of sexual symbolism that he will be deploying. This enables him to "replay" scenes from old horror movies in the knowledge that they will be seen differently, with ironic depth. (He does much the same thing in his revisitation of the wolf man theme in *An American Werewolf in London*). The sexual subtext of the naïve horror movie becomes an ironic joke in the *Thriller* video, although the song "Thriller," taken in isolation, is in its own way just as naïvely straightforward as the films. The joke, in addition, has a subtext of its own, of which the audience is expected to be just as conscious as the "exposed" subtext of phase one.

What this second subtext points out, in essence, is an important shift in sexual politics that has taken place in the last thirty years or so. In the fifties, it was the male lover who was considered to have a "predicament" in respect of the conflicting nature of sexual feelings. *He* was the one who, in the evocative words of the most famous werewolf film, George Waggner's *The Wolf Man* (1941) walked a "thorny path" through "no fault of his own." It was he who was in danger of "violating" the person he was supposed to "revere." The female lover was imagined to have a much easier time of it, because it is much easier to reconcile tender feelings of care and concern with *being violated* than it is to be at once protective and threatening. It was tacitly assumed then that when a girl made love she was not necessarily pandering to her own animal spirits, but graciously granting a permission to her lover. In the eighties, by contrast, the situation is more confused. Once it is accepted that sexual intercourse is *not* a matter of violation, but rather a natural part of an intimate relationship, the male is no longer in such a contradictory situation. The dialectical opposition between intention and impulse is not destroyed, but the conflict is nowhere near as fierce. The male of the eighties, as represented by the boy in phase two of the video, can much more readily accept in himself a combination of protective and lustful feelings. The pulling of the thorn from *his* predicament, though, is parallelled by the intrusion of a more painful dilemma into the situation of the female. She now finds that the burden of moral conflict has been largely transferred to her. Now that she is no longer simply permitting herself to be violated, she can no longer get off the hook of

reconciling calculation with impulse. This is clearly displayed in the video story, initially by her embarrassment after leaving the cinema, and ultimately by the narrative transition that relegates her fearful flight from threatened violation to the "safety" of private experience.

The song "Thriller" and the *Thriller* video are both "about" the relationships that exist between fear and sex, but they are "about" it in rather different ways. The song reminds us that fear is a stimulant, that it excites us and that it can enliven our experience; it points out that this is why we find horror films ("thrillers") pleasurable. It goes on to suggest, though, that the thrill to be got from watching horror films is pretty feeble by comparison with the thrill that can be obtained from aspects of real existence—specifically (if we leave the euphemisms aside) from orgasm. The video, by contrast, takes a different course. It reminds us in the first instance that sex is, among other things, an anxious business which has its fearful aspect. It reminds us also that this fearful aspect of sex, which arises partly from the conflict of impulse and morality, lends itself very readily to representation in the symbology of horror fiction, and that horror films exploit this anxiety along with all the other anxieties they exploit. This line of argument leads in a direction quite different from that of the song, concluding with the slightly ghoulish suggestion that our sexual relationships cannot be freed from the infection of this anxiety, and that they are in fact corrupted or spoiled by it, at least to some extent. While it is, in its fashion, illustrating the song the video is also, in its fashion, subverting its message.

The *Thriller* video is a remarkable piece of work for several reasons. Its psychological ingenuity is intimately connected with its technical ingenuity. It contains an astonishing profusion of modes of fictional representation: film, dream, story, song, verse; and it makes elaborate use of conventions associated with two distinct kinds of cinematic discourse in order to fuse them together in seamless continuity. No consideration of the layering of meanings which is achieved by this complex interweaving of representations should overlook the fact that the video belongs to its own distinct mode of representation. We should not lose sight of the fact that although it borrows so heavily from the conventions of film, it is *not* a film itself but a promotional video for a popular song. In many ways, of course, it is very *like* a film (albeit a short one) but there is one more observation we need to make about the way it relates to its assumed audience. As well as all the other things it is, it is a celebration of Michael Jackson's superstardom—it is, indeed, part of the apparatus of that superstardom. It is not irrelevant that it is *he,* and not some virtual unknown, who sings the lyric of "Thriller." In normal circumstances, an actor is someone ordinary who is pretending to be someone exceptional, but when Michael Jackson acts the parts of the boys in the video, he is doing exactly the opposite. When he stops acting and starts singing, it is almost as though he is Superman having cast aside his Clark Kent disguise. One corollary of this is that although the hypothetical singer of the lyric might well have trouble convincing the hypothetical addressee that he can give her a bigger thrill than any lousy horror film, Michael Jackson addressing the legions of his fans (which he does simply by singing—his medium is his message) is in a very different situation.

Michael Jackson invites description as a "divided man" in a way rather different from that in which (we have suggested) all men see themselves as divided. He is divided into a seemingly fragile and gentle real individual and a public image of awesome proportions. There can be no sharper contrast than between the tremulous boy of phase one of the

video's storyline and the Michael Jackson who finds the sexual fantasies of thousands of adolescent girls focussing upon the fiction of his image. If, while watching the video, we can stand back a little further from the customary assumptions which surround our role as members of an audience, we will remember this fact also, and we will appreciate that there are even more ironies buried within this curious work of art than show up under the microscope of an initial decoding.

Brian Burden last appeared in Foundation *31 with "Decoding the Time Machine." Here he returns with a sequel in which he argues plausibly that H.G. Wells actually borrowed his time machine from a science fantasy novel published 15 years earlier, Percy Greg's* Across the Zodiac*—a revelation which we believe has never been made in print before.*

Decoding the Time Machine, 2: Across the Zodiac

BRIAN J. BURDEN

Section One: A New World

Percy Greg's novel about a visit to Mars was published by Trubner & Co., Ludgate Hill, London in 1880. At some stage, the evidence indicates, H.G. Wells became aware of Greg's novel, possibly during the period 1881 – 1883 when he was an apprentice draper at the Southsea Drapery Emporium. His employer, Mr Edwin Hyde, "even provided a reading room, with a library of several hundred books," mainly popular novels (*Experiment in Autobiography,* Chapter Four, Part 1).

Greg's Martians are, conveniently, in view of the author's racial obsessions, miniature caucasians (caucasianoids?). His space-traveller falls in love with a Martian princess whose name, "Eveena", looks and sounds a great deal like "Weena", heroine of *The Time Machine.* Eveena resembles Weena in appearance as well as name. In Chapter Ten of *Across the Zodiac* she is described as follows:

> . . . a miniature type of faultless feminine grace and beauty. By the standard of Terrestrial humanity she was tiny rather than small; so light, so perfect in proportion, form, and features, so absolutely beautiful, so exquisitely delicate, as to suggest the ideal Fairy Queen realised in flesh and blood . . .

Her pedigree resembles Weena's too, for she is

> the child of ancestors who for more than a hundred generations have never known hard manual toil . . .

The phrases "grace and beauty" and "exquisitely delicate" are echoed in the Time Traveller's early descriptions of the Eloi. The first Eloi male he meets, in Chapter Four*,

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* Chapter division as in original Heineman edition.

is "very beautiful and graceful" but "indescribably frail," and, two paragraphs later, at the beginning of Chapter Five, he and his companions are described as "exquisite creatures".

Greg's novel is subtitled "The Story of a Wrecked Record." Our narrator's informant is Colonel A—, a former Confederate officer. Just as the Time Traveller's friends refuse to believe his story, one of them dismissing it as a "gaudy lie", so A—'s story has been "utterly ridiculed" by friends and acquaintances. The Colonel's story concerns the discovery on a remote coral island of a wrecked spaceship and a coded manuscript in a battered box of unearthly metal. The manuscript, which proves to be a record of the space-traveller's Martian expedition, occupies the remainder of Greg's novel.

The space-traveller voyages to Mars aboard a ship called "The Astronaut". Wells, it will be recalled, entitled his abortive first draft of *The Time Machine* "The Chronic Argonauts." When the space-traveller reaches his destination, the landscape, "by reason of the mists (was) totally invisible" (AZ, p.75). The Time Traveller arrives in 802701 during a hail storm: "A colossal figure . . . loomed indistinctly through the hazy downpour. But all else of the world was invisible" (TM, pp.32 – 33, in the Pan Books edition of 1953). Thereafter, for several chapters, the adventures of Greg's space-traveller closely anticipate those of Wells's Time Traveller in a sequence (please note the page numbers) which suggests that a process less innocent than coincidence is at work.

Our travellers experience similar reactions on reaching their respective destinations:

> I will not attempt to express the intensity of the mingled emotions which overcame me . . . (AZ, p.76)
> "My sensations would be hard to describe." (TM, p.33)

Both travellers share the same qualms:

> Of the perils that might await me I could hardly care to think. They might be greater in degree, they could hardly be other in kind, than those which a traveller might incur in Papua, or Central Africa, or the North-West Passage. (AZ, pp.76 – 77)
> ". . . the full temerity of my voyage came suddenly upon me. What might appear when that hazy curtain was altogether withdrawn? What might not have happened to men? What if cruelty had become a common passion?" (TM, pp.33 – 34)

After the respective hail and mist of Greg's and Wells's novels have cleared, our heroes make the acquaintances of the natives:

> In another minute I discerned the object of my paramount interest . . . (AZ, p.87)
> "In another moment, we were standing face to face . . ." (TM, p.36)

Greg's Martian is:

> undoubtedly a man, but a man very much smaller than myself . . .
> He was about four feet eight or nine inches in height . . . (AZ, p.87)

Wells's man of 802701 is:

> ". . . a slight creature—perhaps four feet high . . ." (TM, p.35)

The Martian sports a beard and moustache, whereas all the Eloi are beardless. However, the little men both wear brightly-coloured clothes and have similar tastes in footwear:

> His bare feet were guarded by sandals of some flexible material just covering the toes and bound round the ankle by a single thong. (AZ, p.87)
> "Sandals or buskins—I could not clearly distinguish which—were on his feet; his legs were bare to the knees . . ." (TM, p.35)

After contact comes communication. In answer to a question from the Martian, the space-traveller relates:

(I) shook my head; but, that he might not suppose me dumb, I answered him in Latin. The sound seemed to astonish him exceedingly; and as I went on to repeat several questions in the same tongue . . . his wonder grew deeper and deeper, and was evidently mingled first with alarm, and afterwards with anger . . . (AZ, p.89)

The Time Traveller seems unwilling to repeat a fifteen-year-old gaffe, and when one of the Eloi addresses him, it occurs to him "oddly enough" that:

". . . my voice was too harsh and deep for them. So I shook my head, and, pointing to my ears, shook it again." (TM, p.36)

Both travellers attempt to communicate by sign language. Wells's hero finds himself

". . . hesitating for a moment how to express time . . ." (TM, p.37)

Greg's space-traveller has come better equipped:

I took from my pocket . . . a watch, very small and elaborately enamelled and jewelled. To the ornament he paid no attention whatever; but when I opened the watch, its construction and movement evidently interested him. (AZ, p.88)

Lacking a watch, the Time Traveller "pointed to the sun" in his efforts to express time, and is horrified when one "quaintly pretty little figure" makes it clear by his reaction that he thinks that the Time Traveller has come from the sun in a thunderstorm. Since Greg's space-traveller uses an identical gesture to indicate that he has travelled through space—" . . . I pointed to the sky . . ." (AZ, p.89)—perhaps the "quaintly pretty little figure" is not such a fool after all—especially since the Martian reacts with angry disbelief to the idea of space travel.

The little people proceed to lead their visitors to their respective habitations. On the way, the space-traveller encounters the ambau, servant creatures of near-human intelligence, who may be regarded as one of the prototypes for Wells's Morlocks—creatures which

from their occupations and demeanour, I first took to be human; but which, as we approached nearer, I saw were only about half the size of my companion, and thickly covered with hair, with bushy tails which they kept carefully erect so as not to touch the ground; creatures much resembling monkeys in movement, size, and length and flexibility of limb, but in other respects more like gigantic squirrels . . . (AZ, p.90)

When it comes to siting their dwellings, Martians and Eloi show similar preferences. During the space-traveller's descent from the mountain where the Astronaut has landed, he sees below him "a broad river" (p.83), and, later, "more immediately beneath me and scattered at intervals over the vast plain . . . were walled enclosures." (p.84). The building to which the Eloi take the Time Traveller is "situate on the slope of a broad river valley" (p.43) and looking down from the top of a hill he sees "great palaces dotted about among the variegated scenery" (p.46).

One feature of the space-traveller's panorama seems at first to be missing in Wells's future.

To the southward this plain was bounded by the sea . . . lying in what seemed from the distance a glassy calm. (AZ, p.83)

But this reckons without the Time Traveller's "Further Vision" in Chapter Fourteen. Travelling forward in time from the world of the Eloi, but without changing his location in space, the Time Traveller halts his machine thirty million years hence:

"The sea stretched away to the south-west to rise into a sharp bright horizon against the wan sky. There were no breakers and no waves, for not a breath of wind was stirring. Only an oily swell rose and fell like gentle breathing . . ."

Both travellers are introduced by friendly guides into the domestic world of the little folk. The space-traveller is led through the

> crystal gate of an enclosure of exceptional size . . . Through grounds laid out in symmetrical alternation of orchard and grove, shrubbery, close-carpeted field, and garden beds, arranged with evident regard to effect in form and colour . . . we followed a straight path which sloped under a canopy of flowering creepers up to the terrace on which stood the house itself. (AZ, pp.96 – 97)

Wells preserves the huge entrance and offers us a garden which is the very converse of Greg's well-ordered domain:

> The building had a huge entry, and was altogether of colossal dimensions. I was naturally most occupied with the growing crowd of little people, and with the big open portals that yawned before me shadowy and mysterious. My general impression of the world I saw over their heads was of a tangled waste of beautiful bushes and flowers, a long-neglected and yet weedless garden. (TM, pp.38 – 39)

Rest and food await the travellers. Here is Greg's version, somewhat abridged:

> In two corners were piles of cushions and pillows . . . There were three or four light tables . . .
> My host then led me to a seat among the cushions and placed himself beside me . . .
> (An ambau brought) a tray on which were arranged a variety of fruits and what appeared to be small loaves of various materials. Breaking one of these and cutting open . . . one of the fruits, my host tasted each and motioned me to eat. (AZ, pp.98, 99 – 100)

Greg's full account occupies two complete pages. Here is Wells's version, uncut:

> "Transverse to the length were innumerable tables made of slabs of polished stone, raised, perhaps, a foot from the floor, and upon these were heaps of fruits. Some I recognised as a kind of hypertrophied raspberry and orange, but for the most part they were strange.
> "Between the tables was scattered a great number of cushions. Upon these, my conductors seated themselves, signing for me to do likewise. With a pretty absence of ceremony, they began to eat . . ." (TM, p.40)

Not surprisingly, a similar verdict is pronounced on the meal by both travellers. The space-traveller reports that "the food offered me was very delicious and varied in flavour" (AZ, p.100), and the Time Traveller agrees that "the fruits were very delightful" (TM, p.41)

Section Two: Language, Laws and Life

Philosophically, Greg was an absolutist and a racialist. He was extremely sympathetic to the Southern cause in the American Civil War, and certain of his novels, notably *Sanguelac,* commend the chivalry of the Confederate armies and proclaim the inferiority of the Negro. Chapter Five of *Across the Zodiac,* which concerns Martian history, society and politics, seems to have attracted Wells's special attention. It is fascinating to see how Wells has drawn upon Greg's language and phrasing without buying his attitudes.

The space-traveller's host identifies himself as "Esmo" and proceeds to discourse at length and in detail about his planet. Greg's method here is transparently contrived. In Chapter Eight of *The Time Machine,* Wells expresses contempt for this type of approach (if he had heeded his own advice, we might have been spared *The Sleeper Wakes*):

> In some of these visions of Utopias and coming times which I have read, there is a vast amount of detail about building, and social arrangements, and so forth. But while such details are easy enough to obtain when the whole world is contained in one's imagination, they are altogether inaccessible to a real traveller amid such realities as I found here.

Greg's chapter is drawn upon in Chapter Six of *The Time Machine,* where the Time Traveller attempts to explain what he sees in 802701 and ends by concluding:

Very simple was my explanation, and plausible enough—as most wrong theories are!

Esmo informs the space-traveller that Mars passed through a Communistic phase before becoming the benevolent despotism in which the space-traveller now finds himself. The Time Traveller initially and incorrectly assumes that the world of 802701 is Communistic. Greg writes:

> Universal Communism was established in 3412, none being permitted to own, or even to claim, any portion of the planet's surface, or of any other property except the share of food and clothing allotted to him. (AZ, p.126)

In *The Time Machine,* this becomes:

> Apparently the single house, and possibly even the household had vanished . . .
> 'Communism,' I said to myself. (TM, p.46)

Both writers raise the issue of population control. Greg relates how

> Finally, as the produce annually diminished and the number of mouths to feed became a serious consideration, the parents of many children were regarded as public enemies. (AZ, p.128)

Wells's Time Traveller observes that:

> Where population is balanced and abundant, much child-bearing becomes an evil rather than a blessing to the state . . . (TM, p.45)

Both writers discuss the role of woman in society, Greg in terms of political polemic, Wells, using very similar language, in terms of social and biological speculation. Greg's Esmo is made to declare:

> The entire independence of women as equal citizens, with no recognised relation to individual men, was the inevitable outcome, logically and practically, of the Communistic principle. (AZ, p.128)

According to the Time Traveller,

> . . . the strength of man and the softness of a woman, the institution of the family, and the differentiation of occupations are mere militant necessities of an age of physical force . . . Where violence comes but rarely and offspring are secure, there is less necessity—indeed there is no necessity—of an efficient family, and the specialisation of the sexes with reference to their children's needs disappears. (TM, p.45)

And where the children are concerned:

> Martial (i.e. "Martian") parents are not prolific, and the mortality of our public nurseries is very large. (AZ, p.136)
> Possibly the checks they had devised for the increase of population had succeeded too well, and their numbers had diminished rather than kept stationary. (TM, pp.50 – 51)

Great advances in medicine are claimed for the worlds of Mars and of 802701. Esmo informs the space-traveller that:

> Physically, no doubt, we have great advantages over you, if I rightly understand your description of life on Earth. We have got rid of old age and, to a great extent, of disease. Many of our scientists persist in the hope of getting rid of death . . . (AZ, p.139)

The Time Traveller informs us that:

> The ideal of preventative medicine was attained. Disease had been stamped out. I saw no evidence of any contagious disease during all my stay. And I shall have to tell you later that even the process of putrefaction and decay had been profoundly affected by these changes. (TM, p.48)

And in Chapter Eight, still innocent of the horrid truth, the Time Traveller further echoes Esmo by adding:

> I could see no signs of crematoria or anything suggestive of tombs . . . The thing puzzled me, and I was led to make a further remark, which puzzled me even more: that aged and infirm among this people there were none.

Now follows Wells's most audacious borrowing from Greg; the similarities both of language and of ideas are unmistakable. Both the space-traveller and the Time Traveller are attempting to sum up the worlds in which they find themselves. The space-traveller exclaims to Esmo:

> "Mars ought, then," I said, "to be a material paradise. You have attained nearly all that our most advanced political economists regard as the perfect economical order—a population nearly stationary, and a soil much more than adequate to their support: a general distribution of property, total absence of any permanent poverty, and freedom from that gnawing anxiety regarding the future of ourselves or our children which is the great evil of life upon Earth and the opprobrium of our social arrangements." (AZ, p.138)

As the Time Traveller sees it, in 802701,

> Social triumphs too had been effected. I saw mankind housed in splendid shelters, gloriously clothed, and as yet had found them engaged in no toil. There were no signs of struggle, neither social nor economical struggle. The shop, the advertisement, traffic, all that commerce which constitutes the body of our world was gone. It was natural on that golden evening that I should jump at the idea of a social paradise. The difficulty of increasing population had been met, I guessed, and population had ceased to increase. (TM, p.48)

After *Language, Laws and Life* the similarities between *Across the Zodiac* and *The Time Machine* become less obvious, though broad similarities of plot remain. The space-traveller saves Eveena's life when members of her own race are inclined to desert her (Chapter Seven); there is a subterranean interlude and an underground fraternity (called "The Children of Light"). Civil war breaks out on Mars, and Eveena perishes during a battle:

> Eveena had flung her arms around me and sheltered my person with her own . . . then, as I caught her in my left arm, I became aware that it was but her lifeless form that I clasped to my breast. Giving her life for mine, she had made mine worse than worthless . . . I placed her gently and tenderly on the ground . . . Then, grasping my weapon again, and shouting instinctively the war-cry of another world, I sprang into the midst of the enemy. (AZ, II, p.282)

Like the Time Traveller, the space-traveller shortly leaves this alien world, and at this point the narrative ends.

Section Three: "A New Thing Under the Sun"

By far the majority of the passages compared above come from two consecutive chapters of *Across the Zodiac*—"A New World" and "Language, Laws and Life," Chapters Four and Five respectively—and three consecutive chapters of *The Time Machine*—"Time Travelling," "In the Golden Age" and "The Sunset of Mankind"—Chapters Four, Five and Six.

Chapter Six of *The Time Machine,* "The Sunset of Mankind," contains at least six passages (in its total of eight pages) which are similar in language and subject matter to passages in Chapter Five of *Across the Zodiac,* "Language, Laws and Life" (which occupies nearly thirty-three pages). It will be noted from the comparisons above that, for the most part, the similar passages follow the same sequence in both novels.

Coincidence is out of the question. Whether the borrowings were unconscious or represent a calculated risk, there is no way of telling, but it is worth noting that a contem-

porary review of *Across the Zodiac,* in the Pall Mall Gazette, contained the following remark:

> There is reason to suppose that Mr. Greg and his Innominate believe themselves to have been dipping far into the future, and to have seen "a vision of the world and all the wonders that shall be". This question their readers—and they should have many—must settle for themselves.

Evidently Greg's readers were not so "many" as the reviewer hoped, for fifteen years later, a reviewer for the *Daily Chronicle* (27 July, 1895) was to write of *The Time Machine:*

> For his central idea Mr. Wells may be indebted to some previously unpublished suggestion, but, if so, we must confess ourselves entirely unacquainted with it, and so far as our knowledge goes he has produced that rarity which Solomon declared to be not merely rare but non-existent—"a new thing under the sun."

And yet . . . if there was no unpublished suggestion why raise the issue at all? Is this paragraph, quoted by Bernard Bergonzi in *The Early H.G. Wells,* just another sample of Victorian windbaggery, or did the reviewer have reason to suspect that Wells's novella was not as original as it appeared to be—and a healthy respect for libel laws which make it perilous for a critic even to hint at plagiarism on the part of a living author?

And Greg? He was in his fifties when *The Time Machine* was published and may well have read both the novella and the review. If so, he made no comment. He died in 1899.

K.V. Bailey's most recent publication is Broomstick-Drive: Space-Age Rhymes and Ballads *(Triffid Books, Alderney, 1985), one of which, "The Widdershins Time Machine," was a Prix d'Honneur award-winner in the light verse category at the 1984 Guernsey Eisteddfod. Other recent writings and translations, mostly published in Channel Island journals, have centred on Victor Hugo and his association as an exile with those islands.*

Pawns, Puppets and the Worlds They Move Through

K.V. BAILEY

Foundation 27 contained an article I contributed with the title "Play and Ritual in Science Fiction." A more accurate title for the article might have been "Science Fiction *as* Play and Ritual," for its main argument was that much SF and fantasy, while not overtly concerned with games-playing, is structurally comparable to certain forms of play and ritual, and may serve similar purposes. Like them it is capable of effecting a release or expansion of the imagination through the operation of "bisociative" mental processes, such as were observed, for example, in fictions as diverse as *Gateway, Non-Stop* and *The Time Machine,* none of which have specifically games-oriented content.

In the course of that article I did, however, refer briefly to a few special cases of *actual* games being integral to plot, or instrumental in progressing narrative, e.g. Jack Vance's "hussade" in *Trullion: Alastor 2262* and the flying of kites in Arthur C. Clarke's *The Fountains of Paradise.* It was not then relevant to my main theme to develop further examples; but in this article I am primarily concerned with fantasy and speculative fictions involving essentially the modelling of a story or a novel upon some game, sport or variety of play—a sub-genre study which can, I believe, reveal some curious and rewarding routes taken by the imaginations of authors, and along with them by those of their readers.

We start with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass.* They were mentioned only in passing in my earlier article, but now we stay with them a good deal longer, both because of their intrinsic importance in this "games" context, and for their relevance to works to be looked at later. Carroll was an enthusiastic inventor of games—"Lanrick," "Doublets" and "Mischmasch," for example. Both Alice books incorporate and are considerably based on games, *Looking-Glass* being more closely structured in this respect than *Wonderland.* The preface to the 1896 edition of *Looking-Glass* enumerates and explains the moves in a real chess problem (with Alice as White Pawn) which codify the action of the story—though Carroll has to admit that he deviates from the rules in that the alternation of Red and White is not strictly observed. This is consistent with a 'dream' scenario such as he uses, in which logical rules provide a grid which may constantly be warped by the pressure of an anarchy of subjective symbols. As Santayana once put it: "Our logical thoughts dominate experience only as the parallels and meridians make a checkerboard of the sea."[1]

As an example here is a fragment of Carroll's "game"—his framework of "parallels and meridians":

Alice meets W.Q. (with shawl)
W.Q. to K.B's 5th (becomes sheep)
Alice to Q's 5th (shop, river, shop)

And here is a glimpse of the kind of things going on within that framework (omitted passages describe the peculiar behaviour of the objects in the shop—"Things flow about so here!," Alice says.):

> She looked at the Queen, who seemed to have suddenly wrapped herself up in wool. Alice rubbed her eyes and looked again . . . she was in a little dark shop, leaning with her elbows on the counter, and opposite to her was an old Sheep, sitting in an arm-chair knitting, and every now and then leaving off to look at her through a great pair of spectacles . . . She was . . . working with fourteen pairs (of needles) at once, and Alice couldn't help looking at her in astonishment.
>
> "How *can* she knit with so many?" the puzzled child thought to herself. "She gets more and more like a porcupine every minute!"
>
> "Can you row?" the Sheep asked, handing her a pair of knitting needles as she spoke.
>
> "Yes, a little—but not on land—and not with needles—" Alice was beginning to say, when suddenly the needles turned into oars in her hands, and she found they were in a little boat gliding along between banks; so there was nothing for it but to do her best.

Such counterpointing of rule and misrule shapes the narrative right through to the crowning of Alice at the eighth square, and beyond into the palace of the castling where the Looking-Glass creatures are all finally summoned to the Feast with the chorus "Mix sand with the cider and wool with the wine—/And welcome Queen Alice with ninety-times-nine!" *Wonderland,* however, is less closely developed around a single game than is *Looking-Glass.* Carroll himself says that card games involve part skill, part chance,

whereas chess calls purely for skill. The deployment of a card game in *Wonderland* produces a flexible and casual framework for the dream narrative, while allowing absurdity constantly to supervene.

In the chapter "The Queen's Croquet Ground" we find the complete deck displayed. Hearts are the royals, Diamonds are courtiers, Clubs are soldiers and Spades are the servants. It is interesting to note that this hierarchical descent matches in ranking order of suits that of Carroll's own invented game *Court Circular,* the rules of which entail the turning of cards from face-downwards to face-upwards—just at the Queen of Hearts has the delinquent gardener-Spades turned over. Alice, as dreamer, cheats the Queen's rules, preventing the cards from being taken and beheaded, by popping them into a large flower-pot:

"Are their heads off?" shouted the Queen.
"Their heads are gone, if it please your Majesty!" the soldiers shouted in reply.
"That's right!" shouted the Queen. "Can you play croquet?"

This sudden dream-type irrelevance introduces the croquet game. In this the two games merge, for the soldier-cards of the Clubs suit form, by bending over, the croquet hoops. The game *Croquet Castles,* invented by Carroll shortly before the writing of *Wonderland,* involves soldiers, sentinels and prisoners, and, like all of his created games, has a most complex set of rules. In the 'dream' games what amounts to a parody of the logic of rules is applied e.g. the execution of players for missing turns; but it is only against the background of a game governed by rules of some kind that we revel in the anarchy of nonsense e.g. the hedgehogs decamping, the flamingoes twisting and the hoop-soldiers continually changing locations. Throughout *Wonderland,* in fact, rules are continually being cited and made to affect the course of the narrative (though not necessarily to determine the experiences) right through to the end, when Rule 42 states "Everyone over a mile high must leave the Court." Here Alice is (literally) growing out of her dream. The King of Hearts says it's the oldest rule in the book. Alice says that it's not a regular rule; that it has just been invented by him. She ignores it and continues to contest the logic of the Wonderland rules:

"Let the jury consider their verdict," the King said, for about the twentieth time that day.
"No, no!" said the Queen. "Sentence first—verdict afterwards."
"Stuff and nonsense!" said Alice loudly . . .

When the pack of cards dissolves into a swarm tumbling pell-mell about her, then transforming into falling leaves, the order and logic of the waking world replaces that of the dream-framework.

A logic of equity and fairness is something that Alice has persistently tried to maintain amidst the alien logics and experiences of the dream world, sometime supported by, more often opposed by, its inhabitants. Principles of fairness were something to which Carroll in his own character paid a good deal of attention. He tempers logic with reason and reason with feeling. As the Professor says in *Sylvie and Bruno,* "All extremes are bad . . . For instance, Sobriety is a very good thing, when practised *in moderation:* but even Sobriety, when carried to an *extreme,* has its disadvantages." It is in such vein that Alice champions the playing-card gardeners and the Knave against the Queen of Hearts and the extremities of her Wonderland rules. It is significant that Lewis Carroll devised for Lawn Tennis Tournaments a "True Method of Assigning Prizes with a Proof of the Fallacy of the Present Method." This he said he did out of a feeling of dissatisfaction with the

freakishness and unfairness of a simple (and logically sustainable) knock-out competition. In *Wonderland* this is reflected in the Caucus-Race beside the Pool of Tears. It is half-organised by rules, half-chaos; but when it achieves its desired end (which is that all the animals get dry) the Dodo concludes, "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes."

In those Carrollian examples dream and game are juxtaposed, or rather the one is superimposed on the other. Barrington Bayley's story "The Exploration of Space" (contained in his collection *The Knights of the Limits*) uses a not dissimilar device. The dream is in this instance an opium-induced reverie: the game is again chess. His first-person narrator's preoccupation, while brooding, dream-entranced, over the board of a game played by correspondence, is with the nature of space in chess. Pieces move, he thinks, "directly from square to square with no locations existing between the squares: none of them possesses the power of continuous non-discrete movement we enjoy in our own world." This is something surely that Carroll is also conscious of in his construction of *Looking-Glass*. He indicates moves from square to square by triple rows of asterisks, and though in the narrative he sometimes speaks of crossing a brook, the locations usually change without any "continuous non-discrete movement"—as, for example when Alice's environment metamorphoses immediately from that of the railway carriage of the goat and the gentleman dressed in white paper to that of the wood of the Fawn and the twin Tweedle brothers. In the case of Bayley's narrator, while he is meditating on such things the interstices of his thought permit the penetration of the exploring alien ship, lost in the mazes of spatial multiplicity:

> . . . like a faint beacon of light in the unrecognizable limbo, they had sighted a tiny oasis of ordered space, and with great expertise and luck had managed to steer their ship towards it.
>
> That oasis was my chessboard . . . illumined and made real by the thoughts I had entertained while gazing upon it, imbuing it with conceptions that approached, however haltingly, the conditions of their home world.

The chessboard then comes alive and the alien explorer-commander "occupies" the White King's Knight, through whom he conducts a dialogue with the narrator enabling him to reorientate his ship. Before departing he is persuaded to describe many of the alternative spatial universes through which he has travelled: "Origami" space; time-reversed space (not unlike that of Carroll's White Queen); transfinite Cantorian space; and space such as that of which the explorer was native, in which systems and events consisted of "convoluted arabesque patterns of successive occupations, and of the game-like relationships these manoeuvres hold to one another."

Some of the explorer's profounder revelations are lost because their content was too ephemeral to remember, or too abstruse to be outlined in words, or, as a tongue-in-cheek fictional editorial note suggests, because the narrator's imagination had run dry. This ties in with a specific textual linking of this opium-tinted reverie to the circumstances of Coleridge's composition of *Kubla Khan*[2]. What is present and seems real in dream may be lost or changed in walking—rather as the noises and voices heard by Alice's sister, when waking to "dull reality" from the second *Wonderland* dream, fade into those of field and farmyard.

In "The Exploration of Space" some common ground as to what is "real" is reached by explorer and narrator before the reverie dissolves and the ship departs. It is centred on the concept contained in the alchemical "As above, so below" aphorism of Hermes Tris-

megistus. This the narrator associates with his own interpretative metaphor of two mirrors, each one reflecting the image of existence into the other; and the explorer relates it to a form of space in which an entity was conscious, not only in himself, but was "also conscious at every moment of his appearance to the physical world around him, which was also conscious." Once more, this joins with the mood and metaphysic of *Looking-Glass*, particularly the passage describing the "other room," following Alice's penetration of the mirror:

> The pictures on the wall next the fire seemed to be all alive, and the very clock on the chimney-piece (you know you can only see the back of it in the looking-glass) had got the face of a little old man and grinned at her.

When Alice first encounters the chessmen in Looking-Glass House she intrudes as an invisible being and an irresistible force (the "Volcano"), as though emerging from a different dimension. The chessmen neither see nor hear her, though they are bodily and mentally affected by her actions. This condition changes after her entry into the garden and embarkation on the game. She becomes an object of their curiosity and attention, and her dream existence subject to action by the chessmen, who are now grown to life-size. Finally, as the story ends, the Red Queen again dwindles to the size of "a little doll," becomes first a passive puppet and then, in waking existence, an unresponsive and uncommunicative kitten.

All this has, in essence, much in common with the emergence of Barrington Bayley's explorer on to and departure from the chessboard—though he, in his White Knight manifestation, is really the intruder into a dream universe. (As in the last chapter of *Looking-Glass* we are tacitly left with the question "Which dreamt it?"). Terrestrial space—indeed our own Einsteinian universe—is for him *terra incognita,* but the chessboard is at least a familiar simulacrum. It is the case that in the fictions of both Carroll and Bayley the game of chess, its rules and patterns of play are paradigmatic in respect of main preoccupations of the authors. Each in his individual way is building his narrative around the respective potentials and limitations of logic and experience. The dream or reverie is the vehicle of experience and of metaphysical speculation; the rules of a game, even when they may become distorted by the pressures of experience or speculation, provide framework and discipline. The game selected is ideal for the purpose, both in its form and in its imagery.

Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt," so very different in mood, style and setting, may not seem to be closely related to the works so far considered; but, chiefly because the playing of a game is central to it, there are many interesting points of correspondence. "The Veldt" is the first episode in Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man,* a work which provides an overall dream-like framework for its sequence of illusory visions. The specific framework for this first story, however, is derived from an extrapolatively imagined technology. It is a "games" framework consisting of the nursery of the Hadley home, in which the veldt, and other fields of play, are created on crystal walls by "all dimensional, super-reactionary, supersensitive colour film, and mental tape film behind glass screens . . . all odorophonics and sonics." Once set in motion the instrument seems to be programmed for cyclic repetition until it is switched off.

The Illustrated Man was written over thirty years ago, but the technology of "The Veldt" looks forward to the worlds created by the effects studios of *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark.* It foreshadows also play with the home computer. Bradbury develops the idea of computer games, but adds, as an adjunct to the creation of electronic puppets, the

fantasy of subjective dream-play being made objectively operative:

> Remarkable how the nursery caught the telepathic emanations of the children's minds and created life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there were lions. The children thought zebras, and there were zebras.

In the past the children's desires had been for play in the Land of Oz and in Aladdin's Cave, sky-voyaging with angels and with Pegasus, or discovering Alice's Wonderland, complete with Gryphon and Mock Turtle. The children "lived for the nursery." Their imaginative life had almost repeated the fantasy life of children's play as expressed in Lewis Carroll's poem prefatory to *Wonderland*:

> Anon to sudden silence won,
> In fancy they pursue
> The dream-child moving through a land
> Of wonders wild and new,
> In friendly chat with bird and beast—
> And half believe it's true.

But there is in this nursery a difference. The children's play is addictive and, as their father puts it, too persistently concerned with contemplating their own mechanical, electronic navels. The socio-psychological environment Bradbury creates is one of automated surrogate living and schizophrenic fantasy. The game has gone beyond "friendly chat"; the birds are not Dodos but vultures, the beasts not White Rabbits but lions; and they are not half-believed in, but have become real—or at least "real" in terms of the story's symbolism of a devouring technology. Lydia Hadley is on the edge of despair and wants to close down a house where every need cooking, mending, cleaning—even the children's play is attended to by programmed servitors which seem to be assuming control. She has had her glimpse of the interior of the nursery, has sensed the lion-grass, the water-hole, "the great rusty smell of animals," has seen the lions and has retreated before their advance:

> She looked beyond him, at the nursery door. "Those lions can't get out of there, can they?"
> He looked at the door and saw it tremble as if something had jumped against it from the other side.
> "Of course not," he said.

The children, on being threatened with expulsion from the electronic paradise within which they can project their frustrations and aggressions, experience a kind of withdrawal trauma and opportunistically seize a moment to lock their parents into the closed world of the nursery with the telepathically motivated yet "real" beasts, which not only destroy them but do so on a recurring loop. The screams they heard when they first looked in on the veldt were their own.

"The Veldt" is grimmer than anything Carroll created (except perhaps the macabre conclusion of *The Hunting of the Snark.)* All the same, there is a nightmarish quality about the endings of both *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* which has a little of its flavour. In the former we recall Alice's screams "half of fright, half of anger" as she tries to beat off the swirling pack of court cards, which turn in reality into falling leaves. In the latter we recall the terrible feast: the dismemberment of the pudding; the kangaroo creatures climbing into the mutton dish and lapping the gravy; the sprouting candles, flying plates and winged bottles. In waking at that point Alice is still haunted by the question which gives its title to the last chapter of *Looking-Glass,* "Which dreamt it?" In so far as the lions are "dream" creations, the question has also relevance for "The Veldt". Just as

Carroll achieves the unique imaginative and slightly alienating effect of the Alice books by combining dream fantasy with regulated games, so Bradbury similarly achieves his effect by projecting patterns of psychological and social malaise on to electronically determined and cyclically progressed play.

In "The Veldt" the technological structure became over-saturated with the creations of a fevered imagination. There is a story by Robert Silverberg ("Basileus") where much the same thing happens in a particular form of computer gaming. Silverberg aims to leave one wondering whether such "toys," absorbing such imaginings, may not, in crisis, assume autonomy and take control. At the beginning of "Basileus" a fairly innocent hobbyist game is played of feeding the content of angelology into the computer. In its ending personal neuroses enter into a kind of symbiosis with what is computer-stored to produce an irresistible angel of destruction.

My final case-study is of a story by James Tiptree Jnr.: "Faithful to thee Terra, in our Fashion." It is included in her collection *Ten Thousand Light-Years from Home,* but was originally published in *Galaxy* under the more prosaic but more revealing title "Parimutual Planet"—more revealing because in it the sport of racing is the "game." Whereas in previous examples the "field of play" has been a croquet lawn, a chessboard, a nursery, a laboratory, it is here an entire planet. A planetary canvas is, in fact, not unusual when the author is reflecting the activities of whole populations in terms of a game or a spectator sport—as Brian Aldiss does in his Helliconia novels or as Olaf Stapledon does with the aerial ballets and acrobatics of his Seventh Men—the flying men of Venus—in *Last and First Men.*[3] In my present example, however, we are concerned with a planet used exclusively as a games venue, the nature of the planet determining the rules which attempt to govern a fantastic and overflowing measure of diverse action and experience.

The experiential content of the story does not actually assume dream or reverie form; but the teams of assorted dinosaurs, mini-rodents, Xenosian avians or giant bore-worms which flock from all parts of the galactic federation to the arena of Raceworld constitute the weirdest of phantasmagorias. They are the actors in what the Solterrian gamesmaster, Christmas, calls "a bright improbable dream":

> The Ankru entries came to his screen: the red archosaur type . . . then a burly-legged running bird, and a cheetah-like affair with a build like a rope slung between four stumps, and finally a slimy-looking tub of a thing which apparently navigated on a broad keel, propelled by paddles.

"Jabberwocky" or the Caucus-Race could offer nothing more curious in the line of xeno-zoology; but the world on which they compete is a model of stability and regularity. Raceworld has been chosen for its days of ideal weather, its mild nights for floodlit racing, its graded temperatures suited to many varieties of oxygen-breathing beasts. It has oceans, savannahs, mountain ranges and canyons, and "stretching around the planet's curve . . . the special atmosphere domes where indescribable creatures met to dig or spin or spit or display whatever competitive frenzy their home worlds had developed as sport."

The story's plot involves the need to impress visiting extra-galactic (Magellian) envoys with the fairness and probity of the planet-orphaned Solterrian stewards. The working-out of this provides occasion for neat touches of first-world/third-world satire and for amusing snippets of parodic extravaganza, as, for example, when the order goes out for "FTL priority around the clock"; but the main interest lies in, and the resolution of the plot depends on, the conflict between, on the one hand, the rules appropriate both to the

nature of the sport and that of the planet on which it is played, and on the other, the almost anarchical diversity of nature and needs in the creatures performing there. As the controller, Christmas, points out, his task is to ensure that the rules are observed in detail and in spirit, but, where contestants are unequally matched by virtue of some condition, to find a basis for handicapping, or for tempering the rules. So, when the devastating progress of giant bore-worms through the mountains affects the terrain for the following Betelgeusian team, the contest is switched to a requisitioned asteroid; and when the handicapping of the Ankru team is found to be at fault, due to computer error in registering averaged gravity differentials on their home planet, the results of their races have to be adjusted. Dramatic incidents central to the plot depend largely on such disjunctions between "rules" and "nature."

The half dozen or so works considered here have certain factors in common. There are the players, together with those pieces, tokens, or puppets which are their surrogates and represent them or are manipulated by them over the various fields of play. Alice herself is such a pawn—and we are left finally with the query as to whether she or the Red King is also a manipulator.[4] The neurotic at the computer keyboard is such a player, and the angel Basileus is both his puppet and his master. These are all invested with a measure of apparent self-determination; but then there is also the combination of game and field of play—an environing complex of conditions, restrictions, opportunities and rules in which the "actors" find themselves placed.

A work of fiction built around these polarities and within these parameters tends to develop as fantasy. This has often taken the form of dream or reverie, which provides a continuum permitting, even encouraging, a fair amount of give and take, shuffling and manoeuvring, as between rigid rule and would-be-free participant. Authors get a deal of creative mileage out of such shufflings and manouevrings. The reader is in each case put into a play-based problem situation, invited to look with the author at alternative routes, and then held in a state of speculation as to what may be the outcome of which alternative. As Alice says, in the wood where things have no names: "And now, which of those finger-posts ought I to follow, I wonder?". As things turn out *both* finger-posts point to the same destination; and readers are, of course, eventually led to whatever is the author's conclusion—but they arrive there having experienced all the hazards and stimuli of a game.

The adoption of an actual game as story framework should perhaps be regarded as a special case of SF *as* play, as this was considered in my earlier article.[5] But it is a form that has extraordinarily rich constructional potential for the author; a form particularly compelling of imaginative collaboration on the part of the reader ("A knot," said Alice. "Oh, do let me help to undo it!"); and therefore, I have thought, one meriting some specific analysis.

T.H White, author of *The Once and Future King* and *The Book of Merlyn,* was once invited by the Queen's College don, L.J. Potts, to play bowls in Cambridge. He accepted but wrote that actually he despised all games with rules. The happiest thing, he said, would be simply, as children might do, to "roll the things about the Grantchester Meadows." Children were the only ones who really knew how to play games.[6] This comment, from a man whose life—and writings—manifested a mixture of anarchical freedom and disciplined control, glosses my argument admirably. The fictions I have been describing make their imaginative impact by a perpetual balance-shifting from one

side of the equation to the other; by making use first of the world of free play, and then of the world of rules; by eliding the two; by exploiting the tension between them; and frequently by employing as media for inter-reaction those malleable structures dear to children—dream and reverie. One recalls the contention (in the "Bruno's Lessons" chapter of *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*) between Bruno, who said, "There oughtn't to be such a lot of Rules," and Sylvie, who said that there ought. Bruno simply wanted to get on with his King-fisher Song, an anarchical *omnium gatherum* of inconsequentialities (Sing Cats, Sing Corks, *Sing Cowslip-tea!*"), the words of which were eventually discovered to be printed on the reverse of that large Map of the World which represented the *disciplinary* side of Bruno's lesson. As Charles Williams made one of his characters say in that esoteric "games" fantasy *The Greater Trumps:* "Between these cards and the activities of things there is a very close relation . . ." Cards, chessmen, chimeras of the imagination and of the computer screen: certainly there are such relationships which make these figures apt as manoeuvrable symbolic counters in many of fiction's wildest, wittiest and wisest ventures, ranging from Wonderland to Edgewood,[7] from Looking-Glass House to the race-tracks of Galactica, and through those electronic skies where winged horses and singing angels mingle with predatory vultures and with all the brooding demons of apocalypse. It is, however, only because there are governing, if bendable, rules that the actions of these puppets and pawns can be made to carry the dramatic or anagogic significance invested in them by their creators.

Notes

1 *Selected Critical Writings of George Santayana,* ed Norman Henfrey (Cambridge University Press, 1968). Vol. 1, p.72. Santayana prefaces his metaphor by saying that even when we are most consciously alert, we are also deeply dreaming: ". . . the real world stands drawn in bare outline against a background of chaos and unrest."

2 Bayley's narrator says: "By opium, it is conjectured, Coleridge glimpsed the poem *Kubla Khan,* only fragments of which he managed to remember. By opium I met my new, though sadly soon-departed, friend, the Chessboard Knight." Coleridge studies now largely reject the specific "dream composition" account given in Coleridge's 1816 Preface in favour of his alternative, earlier and more generalised description (contained in the autograph "Crewe" manuscript) of the poem's genesis out of "a sort of Reverie," opium-induced. The theme and images so arising, critical assessment indicates, would then be the subjects of conscious art. See particularly Norman Fruman's *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), Chapter 22. The latter process is quite like that experienced by Barrington Bayley's narrator.

3 It is even possible fictionally to imagine play on a cosmic scale in which entire planets or star systems are involved. In Brian Stableford's *The Paradise Game,* for example, the planet Pharos is depicted as a tragic pawn in the game; and in my own collection *Other Worlds, and Alderney* (Blanchard Books, 1982) there is a poem which starts:

> As the coloured sunlets roll
> each to its predestined hole
> or as a supernova rocket
> is made to seek a distant pocket
> we ask who plays this random game
> within our time-conditioned frame . . .

4 It is, in part, this ambiguity of identity that gives *Looking-Glass* its distinctive metaphysical flavour. It is something that any player may experience in thinking introspectively of his role in a game. In *Wonderland* Alice "once tried to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet, for this curious child was very fond of being two people." Quoting and commenting on this, Francis Huxley says: "The well of fancy would be useless without this pretence . . ." See his *The Raven and the Writing Desk* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) pp.123,124.

5 It may even be considered as a special case of fiction in general—one emphasizing those antinomies inherent in the story-writer's mind and art: the spontaneous flow; the shaping or restrictive frame. Angus Wilson, writing of Kipling, defines that situation in an extreme form

when he diagnoses a "deep inner struggle between the anarchic, romantic childlike force of his creative impulse, and the ordered, complex, at times almost self-defeating pressure of the craft he imposed upon it." See *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977) p.205.

6 In *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend,* ed. Francois Gallix (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984) p.26. White also says that all children's games are like the one he prescribes for Grantchester Meadows. In this he is wrong. Rules and ritual play a large part in children's games, form their substratum; but, of course, in the actual progress of these games there is continual interplay between observation of the rules and the breaking out of the children's own fantasies and aberrant initiatives.

7 Edgewood: the archetypal arcadian mansion of *Little, Big.* John Crowley's novel could command an essay to itself illustrating the topic of games as models for fantasy fiction. Sophie's dealing of the Tarot cards at Edgewood, counterpointed with the love-making of Sylvie and Auberon at Old Law Farm, epitomises the structure and theme of the entire novel. Sophie sees the cards as a "Geography"; and Cloud says: "You can think of them as a story . . . or a piece of music, and you must find the tonic and signature; or anything at all that has parts and makes sense." Crowley also writes of "hints of speech (which) proceeded from and then retired back into the gabble of the cards' alignment"—a figure perfectly suggestive of that dichotomy between, on the one hand, the formed and formal, and, on the other, that which is dormant (yet has latent creativity) in contingency and randomness. Such a dichotomy is built into games and is the key to much that has been discussed in the present essay.

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J.G. Ballard has often been analyzed as an entropic author; but may he not more rightly be regarded as a novelist of ecstasy?

J.G. Ballard: The Quest for an Ontological Eden

GREGORY STEPHENSON

A central concern in the work of J.G. Ballard is the problem of transcendence, that is, of exceeding, escaping the limitations of the material world, time and space, the body, the senses and ordinary ego-consciousness. In various wise, this theme informs the greater part of the author's work, and has often been misapprehended by critics as a nihilistic or fatalistic preoccupation with devolution, decay, dissolution and entropy. In the following, I would like to trace the development of the theme of transcendence in Ballard's novels and short fiction, demonstrating that it represents, not a negation of human values and goals, but an affirmation of the highest humanistic and metaphysical ideal: the repossession for man of authentic and absolute being.

Ballard's reputation for pessimism may originally have been founded upon certain of his early stories, such as "The Voices of Time," (1960)[1] which does depict both devolution and an entropic universe. But even in this instance the protagonist, Powers, achieves a kind of transcendence, a psychic union with the current of cosmic time. And, it is precisely the transitory nature of physical existence and of the material universe, as portrayed in "The Voices of Time" and similar stories by Ballard, that serves to incite the author's quest for a mode of deliverance. In this sense, Ballard's early pessimistic stories may be seen as diagnostic, hortative; they establish the situations and conditions that lend such urgency to the quest for transcendence.

One of the earliest attempts of a Ballard protagonist to liberate himself from time and the material universe occurs in the story, "The Overloaded Man" (1961).[2] The main character of the story, Faulkner, has developed a mental ability to de-identify and dissociate from sensory input, seeking by this means to escape from the external world into "an absolute continuum of existence uncontaminated by material excrescences" (p.92). Faulkner's efforts ultimately result in the murder of his wife and in his own suicide. Despite his determination, the flawed character of the protagonist is incapable of true transcendence, and he attains only solipsism and extinction. The urge for transcendence is clearly present in this story but the necessary spiritual qualities are entirely lacking.

There is a Sufi proverb to the effect that "When the mind weeps for loss, the soul claps its hands with joy." This sense of the duality and radical opposition of ego-self and deep-self or spirit provides a key to what may be called the disaster tales of J.G. Ballard, the recurring motif of world cataclysm in his work. Ballard's visions of disaster, by flood, by drought, and so forth, are seen ultimately to represent the deepest, most secret desires of humankind. It is not Thanatos, the instinctual desire for death, to which I allude here, but rather the desire for apocalypse, in the most literal sense of the word: a destruction that uncovers, a purifying process by which the false and evil are exposed and abolished and the New Jerusalem established. Ballard has himself expressed such a view in his discussion of the cataclysms and dooms of science fiction literature: "Each one of these fantasies represents an arraignment of the finite, an attempt to dismantle the formal structure of time and space which the universe wraps around us at the moment we first achieve consciousness."[3] The disaster motif in Ballard's fiction is thus grounded, not in nihilism, but in the desire for transcendence.

Ballard's first disaster tale, *The Wind from Nowhere,* (1962),[4] differs markedly from those that follow it in that it remains within the conventions of what Brian Aldiss has called "the cozy catastrophe."[5] There are only a few hints in the text of the direction in which Ballard was to take the disaster motif in succeeding novels and stories. At one point of the narrative, the protagonist, Lanyon, (one of the very few Ballard figures who is unambiguously heroic) recognizes the potential apocalyptic renewal inherent in the disaster, though in keeping with his conventionally heroic character he equivocates and recants even as he speaks:

> It's curious, but until I saw Charlesby lying in that ditch I didn't feel all that concerned. In a way I was almost glad. So much of life in the States—and over here for that matter—could use a strong breath of fresh air. But I realize now that a garbage-disposal job of this size rakes away too much of the good along with the bad. (p.42)

The protagonists of Ballard's subsequent disaster tales, as we shall see, exhibit signifi-

cantly fewer reservations with regard to the cataclysms with which they are confronted.

It is in Ballard's second novel, *The Drowned World,* (1962),[6] that his apocalyptic vision first finds real expression. In distinction to its immediate predecessor, *The Drowned World* possesses not only a tightly-plotted, fast-paced narrative level, but also the strange quality of "inner landscape," the resonance of psychic myth. Indeed, the meaning of the story is much more to be understood through its imagery than through its action.

The central imagery of *The Drowned World* is directional: north versus south, with the concomitant associations of up and down, forward and backward. The former direction represents the world as it is perceived by the rationalist/materialist intellect, the external world of time and space. The latter represents the unconscious mind, the internal world of timeless, transcendent reality. The movement of the book is from north to south, from rationality to instinct, from the conscious to the unconscious, from serial time toward cosmic time, through the psychic metamorphosis of the novel's protagonist, Robert Kerans.

At the beginning of the story, Kerans is a full participant in the scientific/military expedition of which he has been a member for three years as it has moved northward across the drowned European continent. But already the initial signs of Kerans's inner transformation are manifesting themselves: he has begun an "unconscious attempt to sever his links with the base" (p.8); he realizes that he has reached "a concluding phase of his own life—a northward odyssey" (p.11); and he begins to discern "a personality that had remained latent during his previous adult life." (p.11) Psychically, Kerans has entered a "zone of transit." (p.14)

Kerans is not alone in exhibiting signs of psychic disquiet and incipient metamorphosis. Other members of the expedition experience similar symptoms. In particular, the strange dreams of Lt. Hardman, his obsession with travelling south and his desertion from the expedition serve to prefigure the transformation to be undergone and the actions to be undertaken by Kerans. There are also indications that the process will eventually become universal as humankind begins to undergo "a major metamorphosis" (p.14), evolving a new psychology.

In this sense, the inundation of the continents of the world by the rising waters of the oceans is an image of the overflowing and overpowering of the individual, conscious, rational intellect by the ascendent energies of the unconscious, ultimately of a sort of primordial, transcendent, collective unconscious. As Kerans observes, "the terrestrial and psychic landscapes were now indistinguishable" (p.74). Significantly, Kerans becomes identified as Neptune by Strangman and his crew. And, in keeping with his role as god of the sea, Kerans assists the forces symbolized by the water against the materialist, sensualist Strangman, and the rationalist Riggs.

Additional recurring images that unify the narrative and extend its meaning include clocks and the sun, which function as oppositional images in the text. Clocks, of course, suggest the arbitrary, quantitative, serial time of human convenience and convention: Hardman is instructed to use alarm clocks to counter his dreams of the sun; Riggs reactivates clocks in the drowned cities. Misfunctioning clocks suggest other cycles and systems of temporal measurement: the timing device on Beatrice's generator runs backwards; the two clock towers of which one is stopped at what is by coincidence "almost exactly the right time" (p.63) and the other of which is without hands, symbolizing

Kerans's choice between human time and cosmic time.

The sun, with its corresponding interior "archaeopsychic sun," represents "Deep Time" (p.70), "total time" (p.84), the pulse and rhythm of the cosmos, of eternity. To harmonize and synchronize one's being with cosmic time is to transcend "the single plane of time . . . so transparent as to have a negligible claim to reality" (p.96), and to perceive those who operate on "this tenuous plane" of time as "flat and unreal . . . like intelligent androids" (p.158).

The southward odyssey, the quest for the sun, is, in symbolic terms, a quest for absolute, authentic being, for an ontological Eden. Allusions in the text to Adamic man and lost paradise (p.23, p.70) culminate in the closing sentence of the novel where Kerans is described as "a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn sun" (p.175). Like the paradise of the Christian faith or those of other spiritual traditions, Ballard's ontological Eden (the phrase occurs in his story "The Terminal Beach") is both primordial and final, a lost state of being that can be regained. In the interim mankind is seen to inhibit the fallen world of fragmented being and to endure imprisonment in matter and in time and space.

The Drowned World establishes two essential patterns that are repeated, deepened and extended in Ballard's subsequent disaster tales. The first of these is that of the self-divided protagonist, most often a doctor or a scientist, who comes to recognize the apocalyptic potential of the particular disaster he is faced with, who perceives it as a metaphor for his own and the general human psychic state, as an interior landscape exteriorized, as the fulfillment of an unconcious human desire, and so accepts it, co-operates with it, assists it. Again, this attitude is not nihilistic, it is grounded in an affirmation of a higher human potential and in the apocalyptic process which is necessary to realize such a potential.

The second pattern is that of the relationship of the protagonist to the other figures in the story. The protagonist usually finds an ally in a female figure who provides guidance and who often acts as an intermediary to and protection from the antagonist. The antagonist is often an ambiguous figure, a sort of anti-self of the main character, an embodiment of those qualities in himself and in the world that the protagonist opposes and struggles against. Overcoming his antagonist, the main character also resolves his self-dividedness and achieves psychic integration. There are obvious parallels here with the Anima and Shadow figures of Jungian psychology and with Carl Jung's theory of the individuation process. In this sense Ballard's fictions are psychic myths, a working out in symbolic terms of our common psychological/spiritual predicament.

In *The Drought* (1964),[7] although the imagery is quite different from that of *The Drowned World,* similar patterns of meaning are discernible. Here the central oppositional images are those of aridity versus those associated with water, the former suggesting the inner staleness and sterility of the psyche, and the latter suggestive grace or rebirth. Biblical and literary parallels and allusions (*The Tempest, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*) reinforce and extend the associational dimensions of the imagery.

Dr Charles Ransom, the protagonist of the novel, is keenly aware of a sense of personal failure and of a discontinuity in his life, for which he seeks "an absolution in time" (p.37). The Tanguy painting, "Jours de Lenteur" which is a recurrent point of reference in the story, seems to promise such an absolution, a deliverance from the "disaster area" (p.20) of the human condition. As the drought transforms the landscape, Ransom begins to perceive the latent meaning of the disaster, reading it as a series of

"calligraphic signals" (p.25), "fragments of an enormous collapsing message" (p.38), and "ciphers . . . (a) cryptic alphabet" (p.81). The drought becomes recognizable as an exteriorized inner landscape, an apocalypse answering "mankind's unconscious hopes for the end of their present world" (p.41).

At first Ransom flees from the disaster but eventually he is drawn back to confront it, to merge with it. His return to Mount Royal, toward the center of the drought, represents a journey "forward into zones of time future where the unresolved residues of the past would appear smoothed and rounded" (p.152). (The imagery recalls that of the Tanguy painting "with its smooth, pebble-like objects, drained of all associations, suspended on a washed tidal floor" p.15.) Ransom finally completes his journey among the smoothed and rounded dunes, losing his shadow-self at last, and entering "the inner landscape he had carried in his mind for so many years" (p.188). The falling of the rain that ends the long years of the drought, although Ransom is oblivious to it, signifies the grace that follows penitence, the redemption and renewal that follow expiation and absolution.

The Crystal World (1966),[8] may be seen as the concluding volume of a disaster trilogy (or tetralogy if you include *The Wind from Nowhere,* as I do not) treating the problem of psychic integration and transcendence in terms of world cataclysm. The imagery of *The Crystal World* is more explicitly spiritual or visionary than that of the preceding volumes and the thematic resolution more conclusive.

The contrastive metaphors of *The Crystal World* are those of light and darkness, perhaps the most primal, archetypal and resonant of all visual or literary symbols. The scenes and characters of the novel divide themselves into paired opposites associated with darkness or with light: the darkness and "spectral brightness" (p.11) of Port Matarre in the opening paragraphs of the story; the light and shadows of its streets; the white-clad Ventress and Father Balthus in his black clerical garb; the cold, somber beauty of Suzanne Clair, dressed in black, and the lighter humour and warmth of Louise Peret in her white suit; the advent of the equinox at the equator, dividing day and night into equal lengths.

The main character, Dr Edward Sanders, is similarly divided, his psyche locked in conflict between its dark and light aspects, between his desire to heal and his desire to die. As has been the case with previous Ballard protagonists faced with disasters, Sanders instinctively identifies himself with the crystallization process in the forest of Mont Royal (echoing the Mount Royal of *The Drought*) seeing in it the opportunity to transcend his fragmented being and to repossess the lost ontological Eden: "he had a curious premonition of hope and longing, as if he were some fugitive Adam chancing upon a forgotten gateway to the forbidden paradise" (p.71), and "this illuminated forest in some way reflects an earlier period of our lives, perhaps an archaic memory we are born with of some ancestral paradise where the unity of time and space is the signature of every leaf and flower" (pp.75 – 6).

In the manner of a mystic awakening from a transcendent vision to cold, quotidian reality, Sanders, upon his return from the crystallized zone, views the objects and inhabitants of the world as "inert and empty . . . shadowy images of themselves, replicas of illuminated originals in some distant land" (p.108). He feels the loss of true being and identity and realizes that the only resolution to his psychic imbalance and division is to surrender to the crystallization process. Leaving behind the world of conflict, contradiction and contrariety, Sanders re-enters the crystal world, to be transfigured, to take possession again of authentic and absolute being beyond that of physical and temporal identity.

In *The Crystal World* Ballard achieves what is perhaps his most compelling vision of an ontological Eden, a realm of sublime beauty, with the praeternatural light and intensity of colour that (as Aldous Huxley indicates in *Heaven and Hell*) are characteristic of the visionary experience and of the heavens and paradises of various religions and spiritual traditions. The crystallized forest of Mont Royal combines both the natural beauty of the biblical Garden of Eden with the bejewelled brilliance of the New Jerusalem (see allusion p.125) with its "jasper . . . pure gold, like unto clear glass . . . and . . . all manner of precious stones." (Revelation: chapter 21, verses 18 – 20.) Here the snake and the cross are reconciled (p.145); here all divisions and opposites are resolved and transcended: light and darkness, time and space, life and death.

The theme of transcendence is further treated in a number of the stories in *The Terminal Beach* (1964).[9] In "A Question of Re-entry," "The Reptile Enclosure," and "The Delta at Sunset," Ballard contrasts the civilized and the primitive mind, the conscious and the unconscious, depicting the deep malaise of rational, technological man in contrast to the equilibrium and wisdom of primitive man; the stasis and circumscription of the conscious, ego-intellect in contrast to the transforming energy of the unconscious. Civilization is seen as an evasion of the central issue of human existence, an impediment to the deepest human desire and governing purpose, which is: "to escape from the existential role of ordinary life and return to the universal time-sea" (p.111); to transcend "the peripheral world" (p.129) and enter "the world of absolute values" (p.129); to liberate oneself from "the hazards of time and space . . . the world of quantal flux" and to recover "an ontological Garden of Eden" (p.153).

The inter-related "condensed novels" of *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970)[10] evince a similar preoccupation with a "revolt against the present continuum of time and space" (p.14), and the attempt to rediscover a "lost symmetry" (p.16). The composite protagonist of the stories, whose changing names and occupations suggest the tenuousness of his identity, is unable to accept either "the phenomenology of the universe" (p.45), the fact of his own consciousness, or "the biomorphic horror" (p.104) of his own body. His sense of alienation is total.

The separate stories of *The Atrocity Exhibition* represent episodes in the protagonist's quest to rediscover his original and latent identity, and thus achieve "rapprochement" (p.45) with the universe. To do so he carefully cultivates his mental breakdown, externalizing his psychosis, acting out his fantasies and obsessions, moving toward a personal apocalypse. His efforts in this direction are analogous to Rimbaud's "systematic derangement of all the senses" in order to achieve visionary consciousness, and also to the psycho-mythical "night sea journey" of the individuation process, a descent into the inferno of the unconscious by which vision and identity are attained. *The Atrocity Exhibition* presents no clear resolution to the problem of the protagonist, but links his condition and his quest inextricably with the events and objects of the contemporary world, such as warfare, advertising, sexuality, automobiles. These are examined as artifacts and fixations of the collective human psyche and are re-interpreted in terms of their latent content: the urge for apocalypse, for transcendence.

Ballard's clearest exposition and fullest resolution of the theme of transcendence occurs in his novel, *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1979).[11] In contrast to the cataclysms of the disaster tales, or the dark visions of terror, violence and desire of *The Atrocity Exhibition, The Unlimited Dream Company* portrays what is essentially a

peaceful, affirmative, and finally joyous metamorphosis, though no less radical in its repudiation of material reality, nor less extensive in its revelatory import. Also, in distinction to Ballard's previous works, in *The Unlimited Dream Company* the quest for transcendence is no longer an isolated, individual undertaking, but, rather, by its nature a common human endeavour.

Aside, however, from these distinctions and developments, *The Unlimited Dream Company* employs motifs and images familiar from the earlier stories and novels. Most significant here are Ballard's use of images of light and flight, erotic and spiritual metaphors, Edenic imagery, and Shadow and Anima figures. The novel represents an integration and a culmination of Ballard's vision, and it is his most mythic, most explicitly metaphysical, most directly allegorical work.

Blake, the protagonist of *The Unlimited Dream Company,* is a young man who in the span of only a few days is transformed from a socially-rejected outsider (expelled from half-a-dozen schools, thrown out of medical school, a "rejected would-be mercenary pilot, failed Jesuit novice, unpublished writer of pornography" (p.13), into a messianic figure of enormous charisma and supernatural power. His metamorphosis occurs as a result of his physical death, that is, the liberation of his deep-self or spirit from his corporeal self. Through his acquired powers Blake effects the transformation of a placid, English town into "a reconditioned Eden" (p.128), fertile and innocent, and he delivers the inhabitants of the town from their narrow, sterile lives in the material world into the radiance and ecstasy of true being.

Blake's role is that of an archetypal saviour or redeemer, with many parallels to Christ, including miraculous cures, eventual rejection by those he has come to save, abuse and humiliation, death and resurrection, and the promise of a second coming. Blake is also a very pagan figure, a primitive fertility deity for whom erotic desire is a key to spiritual transformation. And, in addition, he is the incarnation of a mythical, primordial winged man, an original and final man, of whom we are the fallen descendents and to which form we shall again evolve.

Blake, as protagonist, represents a significant evolvement from the more insular, self-involved figures of the earlier works, and most especially from the solipsistic "overloaded man" from the story of the same title. In contrast to Ballard's earlier protagonists, Blake achieves communion and full mutuality with the human community, as well as with the natural world. There is a reciprocal relationship between Blake as messiah and the inhabitants of Shepperton. He infuses them with motive and power which ultimately derive from their own deepest selves, while they, in turn, sustain and revitalize him. This relationship becomes apparent during the crisis of faith at the climax of the novel: "Through me a town of pilots was dying, and through them I in turn was dying" (p.196), and "I was reborn within them and within their love for me" (p.201). Blake is capable of ultimate love and self-denial and of unconditional forgiveness. He is the first truly whole, truly heroic figure in Ballard's oeuvre.

Ballard's essential metaphysic, as it is expressed in *The Unlimited Dream Company,* has affinities with elements of neo-Platonism and of Eastern spiritual traditions. The material world, the realm of physical existence as perceived by the senses, is seen as an inferior, even illusory, level of being, a fallen world. There is an innate urge in the psyche to return to the realm of true and unified being, the ultimate and ideal world, which exists utterly beyond what we mistakenly perceive as reality. Dreams, desire, the unconscious

mind, visionary and sur-rational states are gateways to the Absolute, as are love and forgiveness since they transcend ego-consciousness, and are (as William Blake believed) the highest expressions of the imagination, of the deep-self.

The central metaphor used by Ballard in the novel to represent the relationship between the two realms of being is that of an advent calendar: "Each leaf was a shutter about to swing back and reveal a miniature sun, one window in the immense advent calendar of nature (p.81) . . . I could release the light waiting behind the shutter of reality each of them bore before him like a shield (p.82) . . . the real world that waited behind the shutter of every flower and feather, every leaf and child" (p.93).

Ballard also employs recurrent images of sleeping and waking, death and life, to express the respective states of being in the material world and in transcendent reality. The townspeople of Shepperton, under Blake's transforming presence, are "sleepers waking from their long dream" (p.159). And, as Father Wingate remarks to Blake "it was not death you survived but life . . . it's not you who are alive but we here who are dead" (p.79). The images of flight and light that are so central to the novel (as to nearly all of Ballard's fiction) culminate in the final apocalypse of the story as metaphors of unified and absolute being: "the infinitely chambered heart of the great bird of which we were all part" (p.222), the sun toward which the merged inhabitants of Shepperton ascend, and "the sea of light that formed the universe" (p.223), which is the first and last, the perennial and eternal ground of all being.

As a sort of coda to the disaster and transcendence theme, Ballard recapitulates, rephrases, and further extends and elaborates upon the motifs and images of his previous fictions in the two closely-related stories, "News from the Sun" (1981)[12] and "Myths of the Near Future" (1982).[13]

In the first of these stories, mankind is afflicted with "the time-sickness" (p.86), whose symptoms are a series of swoons or fugues of increasing frequency and duration, until in the terminal phase of the malady conscious mental-life ceases altogether. The protagonist, Dr. Franklin, is engaged at first in an attempt to find a cure for the time-sickness until he begins to see it as "a preparation for something (p.87) . . . a good thing, a sign that some great biological step forward is about to take place" (p.99). At last, himself afflicted, Franklin happily embraces the fugues as a mode of transcending time and "the world of appearances" (p.111) and returning to an ontological Eden.

Again, the Shadow and Anima relationship, images of light and flight, and erotic and Edenic imagery are central to the story. The material world, the world of serial time, is imaged here as an arid desert landscape, a "realm of harsh light and rigid perspectives" (p.114), in contrast to the timeless world of the fugues which transform the desert to a Garden of Eden, a place of refreshing, gentle beauty and fertility. The new lucidity of perception which the time-sickness permits is a return to original perception, that of "the first men and women who probably saw the world as a paradise" (p.110), and that of the new-born infant babbling of "that realm of wonder from which they had just been expelled" (p.111). In Wordsworthian terms, the time-sickness restores the "celestial light/The glory and the freshness of a dream," which characterize our original, unconditioned perception of the world. In Blakean terms, the time-sickness cleanses "the doors of perception" so that everything can again "appear to man as it is, Infinite." For Ballard, those whose true sight is regained in this manner become "the people of the sun" (p.113) free of time and living in forever.

The second story, "Myths of the Near Future," has many parallels with the former. In this instance, it is the "space sickness" which constitutes the vehicle of apocalypse, and the space-sickness proves to be "really about time, not space" (p.33). The final significance of the malady is again as a mode of "escape into a world beyond time" (p.33), a liberation of consciousness from mortality and finitude.

Once more, the images of light and flight, of confinement and escape, awakening and resurrection, together with the pattern of rivalry of protagonist and antagonist for wife/lover, and the motif of a disaster which is psychological in origin and apocalyptic in import, are central elements in the story. And again, the sun symbolizes the original paradisiacal state of being from which human consciousness has fallen and to which it aspires and strives to return. The space-sickness is seen by Sheppard, the protagonist, as a collective human "journey home to the sun"; he feels that through the alteration of consciousness that is a consequence of the malady "the entire human race was beginning its embarkation, preparing to repatriate itself to the sun" (p.13).

I have, of course, emphasized the continuity of theme and imagery among Ballard's works but I do not wish to convey the impression that I find them repetitious or predictable. On the contrary, I am continually amazed and delighted by their seemingly inexhaustible variety and ingenuity, as well as by their aesthetic refinement. In my view, the recurrence of particular images and themes only serves to enhance the imaginative power of Ballard's fiction and to reinforce its artistic unity as a body of work.

There is a clear development in the author's treatment of the theme of transcendence. In the earliest works the quest for an ontological Eden is portrayed as an individual undertaking, sometimes attempted in direct opposition to and in conflict with other individuals while in the later works transcendence has become a collective human endeavour undertaken in a spirit of mutuality and love. In the early fictions Ballard's apocalypses are violent and tragic, while in the later works they become more affirmative and even agreeable, or more nearly so. The apocalypses also become at once more subtle and more manifest, no longer involving cataclysms, catastrophes and disasters, they are yet more readily perceived as the externalization of inner landscapes, the fulfillment of unconscious desires.

The imagery by which the deepest meaning of Ballard's fiction is communicated undergoes a similar refinement. From the earliest works, such as "The Voices of Time," "Overload Man," and *The Wind from Nowhere,* in which few or no deeper resonances or larger dimensions of meaning are implied, Ballard proceeds through an increasing use of archetypal imagery in the disaster tales to a more direct use of myth and a more pronouncedly metaphysical imagery in *The Unlimited Dream Company.* At the same time, the metaphysic implicit in Ballard's fictions becomes increasingly explicit, more apparently principal to his work.

The theme of transcendence has been recurrent in science fiction.[14] Perhaps the most widely-read work that treats the theme is Arthur C. Clarke's novel, *Childhood's End.* More recently, the novels of William S. Burroughs have also concerned themselves with the problem of escaping time and physical being. Among contemporary writers Burroughs is probably the closest to Ballard in terms of thematic preoccupations, and certainly he is the author for whom Ballard has expressed the highest esteem.

Ballard also has affinities with the English Romantics, with William Blake and Samuel T. Coleridge in particular. (There are numerous allusions to *The Rime of the Ancient*

Mariner in Ballard's work, and it cannot be entirely fortuitous that the protagonist of *The Unlimited Dream Company* is named Blake.) In addition, Ballard has close affinities with the Surrealists, especially the visual artists, such as Delvaux, Ernst, Tanguy, Magritte and Dali, whose paintings often provide points of reference or prophetic images in his fictions. The Surrealist doctrine of a transcendent *point sublime* "from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low, are no longer seen as contradictory,"[15] has an obvious relevance to Ballard's work.

"The urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood is," according to Aldous Huxley, "a principal appetite of the soul."[16] It is also a major theme in art and imaginative literature. Ballard's work represents a contemporary expression of this perennial human desire. It has been his contribution to extend and renew a visionary tradition, to create a new synthesis expressed in a new idiom, and to invest the tradition with new clarity and urgency. Drawing on myth, archetype, cultural and spiritual traditions, and the creative power of his imagination, Ballard achieves in his work that most essential and valuable quality of art: to provide us with new insights into, and new perspectives on ourselves and our world.

Notes

1 First published in the collection *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare,* London: 1963; later included in *The Voices of Time,* London: J.M. Dent, 1984.
2 Page references to *The Voices of Time,* London: J.M. Dent, 1984.
3 *The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction,* Brian Ash, ed., London: 1977, p.130.
4 Page references to Berkeley edition, N.Y. 1962.
5 *Billion Year Spree,* by Brian Aldiss, N.Y. 1973, p.294.
6 Page references to J.M. Dent edition, London: 1983.
7 Page references to Triad/Panther edition, London: 1978.
8 Page references to Avon edition, N.Y. 1981.
9 Page references to J.M. Dent edition, London: 1984.
10 Page references to Jonathan Cape edition, London: 1970.
11 Page references to Jonathan Cape edition, London: 1979.
12 Page references to *Myths of the Near Future,* Triad/Panther, London: 1984.
13 Page references to *Myths of the Near Future,* Triad/Panther, London: 1984.
14 See, for example, "Religion: Space, God and Science Fiction," in *Strange Horizons: The Spectrum of Science Fiction,* by Sam Moskowitz, N.Y. 1976, pp.3 – 21; and "Science Fiction, Religion and Transcendence", by Tom Woodman, in *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide,* ed. Patrick Parrinder, London: 1979, pp.110 – 30.
15 *Manifestes du Surréalisme* by André Breton, Paris: Jean Jacques Pauvert, 1962, p.154.
16 *The Doors of Perception* by Aldous Huxley, London: Chatto & Windus, 1972.

The following piece reached us via the Soviet VAAP-INFORM agency. We are grateful to them, for in it the Russian literary critic Nina Berkova provides us with a brief but useful overview of the works of three of the newer Soviet science-fiction writers—Sergei Drugal, Pavel Amnuel and Oleg Korabelnikov.

New Names in Soviet Science Fiction

NINA BERKOVA

Sergei Drugal is not a newcomer to literature; his stories appeared in the magazine *Uralsky Sledopyt* in the mid-seventies. However his first book was published only recently. In the afterword to this book, the critic Evgeny Brandis writes: "Sergei Drugal, a Doctor of Engineering Sciences and the author of a series of inventions, successfully combines his scientific work with writing . . . Experience shows that such a "combination of professions" is by no means an accidental phenomenon. As to its applicability to the author of this book, one may remark thus: the inventiveness and brilliance of imagination of Sergei Drugal is, in a sense, a continuation of his inventive work. It is a case where science and art begin to merge. And that is probably one of the "secrets" of Sergei Drugal's success."

Sergei Drugal considers that the distinctive features of a good science-fiction story, originality, unconventionality, ingenuity and elegance, are the very features which distinguish good inventions. His collection *The Tiger Will Accompany You to the Garage* (Sverdlovsk Book Publishers, 1984) contains two cycles of stories.

The action of the first cycle centres around the Institute for the Restoration of Nature (IRN) which is, with great difficulty restoring the flora and fauna of the Earth and at the same time, the authority of man, which has been thoroughly damaged by his centuries-long disrespectful attitude towards the environment. Here people live in harmony with nature; they are surrounded by intelligent or almost intelligent animals and talkative cybers. The attitude to technology is one of respect, one may even say of symbiosis, while love for animals is considered one of the most necessary prerequisites for a meaningful life. Only under such an arrangement of things can Earth seek contact with distant civilizations.

In the second cycle of stories, entitled *Celestial Affairs,* the author investigates the problem of contact. Galactic worlds received signals from Earth long ago (Earthmen transmitted to them a natural series of numbers and Pythagoras's theorem), but did not take them seriously. "Either you consider us to be Mirobles or you are Mirobles yourselves," was the answer received on Earth from one galaxy. In this galactic language "Mirobles" are primitive beings not worthy of membership of the cosmic community. In an attempt to re-establish their reputation, the Earthmen set out on an expedition to the planet Lomereya (the story "Rehabilitation"). In the future, the Earthmen decide, their good name will depend a great deal on the question they ask when they first meet

intelligent beings. And the captain of the starship asks: "Do you know what a fairytale is?" So reputation is saved and contact is established.

Essentially Sergei Drugal's stories are also, in their own way, fairytales combining folklore and folk humour, fable and conventionality of place and time.

Pavel Amnuel's story "The Overcoming" could be called an apologia of science fiction, in the original meaning of this word—high praise or defence. The first is understandable. Who other than science-fiction writers would praise the genre in which they so passionately work! As for a defence . . .

Today, it seems, science fiction is not short of defenders. It confidently occupies a worthy place among the other literary genres. The times when science fiction was attacked for being the "Cinderella" of literature are long past. But Pavel Amnuel would not be the master of the paradoxical idea that he long ago proved himself to be, if he began defending science fiction from present-day critics and present-day biassed readers. The fact is that Amnuel's "defence" is addressed to the future. He is defending science fiction from attacks which will rain down on it in the 22nd century.

The situation imagined is striking: the number of discoveries being made in all branches of knowledge is sharply declining and people are beginning to search for the cause of this worrying phenomenon. Someone sees here a general, supposedly objective slowing down of progress; another tries to blame science fiction which they say, long ago foresaw everything and forecast everything: no "free" discoveries remain.

The hero of the story, the science-fiction writer Leonid Afanasyevich, makes a brilliant defence of science fiction. He doesn't attempt to vindicate the literature of this genre but rather the method of fantasizing on which it is based. Leonid Afanasyevich's logic is irreproachable. He, within a few hours, not only comes to the very same conclusion that the scholars have taken months in reaching, he also solves the seemingly insoluble task of contacting other civilizations.

"A method exists," says Leonid Afanasyevich "Science-fiction writers have been using it for a long time but scholarly specialists consider it to be dilettantish and they are very condescending in their attitude towards it. They don't want to recognize the fact that when they come across something new, even in their own field, they are no better than a professional science-fiction writer who has a command of the methods of fantasizing."

Nevertheless, is there a decline in the number of discoveries being made in the 22nd century? The answer to that question is, as one would expect from Pavel Amnuel, paradoxical: because the laws of nature have no strict system. Because our Universe is a "scrap heap for the laws of nature". Because in the olden days, a long time ago, the carriers of reason in the Universe disturbed the ecological balance and now we are reaping the fruits of that irresponsibility. And so there follows the inescapable conclusion—in order to restore order in the Universe mankind must go and make contact with other intellects.

Not with civilizations but with intellects. The question of such contact is a favourite theme with Pavel Amnuel, an astro-physicist and Candidate of Sciences (Phys. & Math.). In the story "Today, Tomorrow and Always," which gave the title to this talented author's book published by Znaniye in 1984, mankind meets up with a powerful intellect in the form of an intelligent atmosphere of a distant planet. The story "A Link in the Chain" acquaints us with a whole range of intelligent beings: human and humanoid, a brain in the form of a gigantic gaseous body living and feeling outside concrete space-

time, and intelligent gravity fields moving the stars.

Ultimately, in the story "20,000,000,000 Years After" we meet with an intelligent Universe. This work, one of the best in the collection, is a warning-story. It describes a world on the brink of a nuclear catastrophe—only a small step and a terrible war will break out, the last war in the history of humanity. The Earthmen have sufficient sense of responsibility and good sense to prevent themselves from falling over the precipice. Civilization will survive, which means the Universe will also survive, a universe which has already experienced a catastrophe. That catastrophe occurred, in the author's opinion, twenty billion years before. At that time the Universal Intelligence just didn't have sufficient sense of responsibility, the key notion in any system of ethical relations, be it earthly or cosmic. It is not accidental that the author of the afterword to this story, the international affairs journalist Vitaly Gan, also stresses this point:

> . . . In the closing monologue of the story the intelligent Universe mouths the words: 'They have already enough power to be able to destroy themselves. Their planet . . . They must save me . . . First themselves and then me' . . .

This, it appears, is the spirit of the story.

Somewhat separate from the rest of the stories in the collection is the story "Higher than the Clouds, Higher than the Mountains, Higher than the Sky . . ." It is a parable about a planet covered in fog and about the people who live in this fog. The metaphor used is clear to readers: the fog symbolizes ignorance and obscurantism, while the striving of the hero, the young boy Logh, to reach the sky is the striving to gain knowledge. This story by Pavel Amnuel is a rare instance when the parable form does not influence the science-fiction plot.

The foreword to the collection was written by Twice Hero of the Soviet Union and Doctor of Sciences (Phys. & Math.), Georgy Grechko. This celebrated Soviet cosmonaut singled out as one of the great merits of Pavel Amnuel's book the highly scientific nature of its fantasy.

Sergei Drugal and Pavel Amnuel have already established themselves as sf writers. Oleg Korabelnikov, a young writer from Krasnoyarsk is not quite so experienced although he has already had two of his books published. Oleg Korabelnikov is a doctor and of course his professional life leaves its impression on his writings. It is quite clear to any reader familiar with Korabelnikov's works that it is his medical calling that has determined the subjects he tackles: he is attracted by psychological sf, by situations occupying that border region between the real and the unreal, the known and the inexplicable.

If one wished to single out the ethical problems underlying this Siberian writer's stories, then one would have to say it was man and conscience. The acuteness of moral conflicts, the subtle movements of the spirit pushing heroes into taking decisive action and the sphere of psychological conflicts—that is what interests the author above all. Oleg Korabelnikov investigates human conscience. The central story of the collection *And the Doors Will Fly Open* (Krasnoyarsk Book Publishers, 1984), entitled "What Hasn't Come True—It's Wonderful!" with its very first lines draws the reader into the contradictory world of the complicated interrelations between personality and its inner "I":

> Without waiting for morning, conscience awoke first. For a long time it tossed and turned, sighed dolefully, whispered to itself, sobbed a little, and Chumakov, realizing how all this would end, quietened down and covered his head with the blanket trying to think all the while about pleasant, happy things.

Not all the stories included in this collection could be justifiably termed science fiction. At times the sf element is undoubtedly present—for example, the story "And the Doors Will Fly Open" tells of parallel worlds. Here and there the sf element vacillates and is ephemeral: the story "What Hasn't Come True—It's Wonderful!", for instance, is based on the dialogue between a man and his "alter ego" which leads a sort of independent existence, whereas the novella "For a Long Time, May Be Forever" does not reveal to us, even at the end, the identity of the demanding, secret interlocutor, in arguments with whom the main hero, "the little man" Klimov, finds his previously lost virtue.

But most importantly, fiction serves Oleg Korabelnikov merely as means of "infecting" his readers with an agonizing for people. Stylistic construction of Korabelnikov's prose, the precision of artistic means, the metaphors skilfully combined with natural speech—all is subordinated to one aim: to show the reader that philanthropy must be achieved through suffering.

The task of fighting one's way through ordinariness in order to see in every person a distinct human being and personality, is not an easy one; however, for a true writer it is a task of commanding importance. For it is precisely this task or, more exactly, the path to its solution, that turns fiction into genuine literature.

"Polyakov was an ordinary person. More accurately, almost ordinary, because every man on earth has his own peculiarities, which distinguish him from the multitude . . .," we read in the story "And the Doors Will Fly Open".

The above words can well be applied to writers and to their books, each of which has characteristic features distinguishing it "from the multitude". This is fully applicable to the collections of our three talented writers, Sergei Drugal, Pavel Amnuel and Oleg Korabelnikov.

Foundation Forum

The following fine, constructive polemic is expanded from the winning entry in the Yorcon III (Leeds Eastercon 1985) essay competition, "What Do We Do Now the Future is Here?" by Richard A. Slaughter.

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Metafiction, Transcendence and the Extended Present: Three Keys to Post-Galactic SF

RICHARD A. SLAUGHTER

During research at the interface between futures study and education I have often been surprised at how people tend to associate the former with prediction. I suspect this indicates a need for reassurance, a search for security, a response to the disintegration of contemporary structures and meanings. But neither futures study nor speculative literature have been concerned to predict the future, or even to forecast it. Rather they utilise a range of views of the future as a means of elaborating the present.

The future is radically uncertain and the images and meanings read onto it at one time appear to serve the needs of that time only to be falsified at a later date.[1] One generation dreams of multi-level megacities, personal helicopters and tourist trips to the moon while a later one dismantles its high-rise accommodation, addresses the world from an armchair at home and cultivates the eastern arts. The future which became the present has always differed from what was expected or feared. Only fragments of yesterday's anticipations became our "now" and, in this particular sense, the future never arrives. (In a much more fundamental sense it remains an *epistemological constant* permeating the unbounded mental present, but I will return to this below.) Forecasts are nearly always wrong and futuristic images collectively cover a far wider imaginative range (individually, a much narrower one) than the subsequent course of history.

Yet something of a crisis has occurred within sf as traditional genre materials have been rendered imaginatively obsolete by real-world developments. Furthermore, the rise and rise of low-grade fantasy is widely perceived as a "disaster" for sf, the assumption being that the latter is somehow a superior form, or at least was, or could be. There is some justification for such a view: the disciplined imagination is surely superior to unbridled wish-fulfilment. Yet it is useful to recognise that, as Algis Budrys has suggested, both science fiction and fantasy arise from the speculative imagination.[2] While the former does lead in different directions, and while I will have cause to comment on some of the implications, my main interest resides in the latter. In that connection I want to suggest that "post-galactic" speculative fiction, or something very much like it, could represent a new stage of development which may resolve the long-standing boundary dispute between science fiction and fantasy by transcending that boundary and that dichotomy. While the present exhaustion of ideas and images may indicate a temporary loss of confidence and creative insight, there is no evidence to suggest that the speculative capacity itself is in decline. It is rather that external conditions have changed rapidly over the past decades and have exerted a heavy toll upon the inner life. Far from plotting a "safe course into the future," as some apologists have argued, science fiction and fantasy authors are very much caught up in the turbulence of the times.

As we near the end of the Twentieth Century, we are witnessing a series of fundamental shifts in our values, perceptual categories, social and economic structures. While many of our leaders and leading institutions assert a "business as usual" approach, millions of ordinary people, particularly those without work and without prospect of work, know that we are near the end of an era, the so-called "industrial era". Even the well-heeled cannot insulate themselves from deep-seated changes in inherited structures and meanings. The uncertainty, the feeling that the world is "shifting on its hinges," is unavoidable. Many of the core assumptions which underlay the social landscape have now run their course and no longer appear self-evident and compelling. As one distinguished observer wrote, "the structures of this civilisation, interdependent work, bargaining, mutual adjustment of individual ends, are beginning to be felt not as normal and best suited to man, but as hateful and empty."[3]

Much the same could be said of the assumed beneficence of science and technology, the ideology of continuous economic growth, patriarchy, the autonomy of the nation state, the earth viewed merely as a collection of inert resources to be exploited without limit.[4] Whereas once a measure of consensus about underlying assumptions prevailed, albeit one imposed from above, there now exists open conflict and a series of *seemingly* irresolvable dilemmas. I stress the word "seemingly" because dilemmas only appear irresolvable when viewed from within the web of commitments of the culture and world view that produced them. As the world changes we are free as never before to revise assumptions and re-negotiate commitments. For good or ill, speculative writing is deeply involved in this process (as reaction, innovation and much else between). It holds before us the possibility of discerning new levels of integration, new modes of knowing and being, new or renewed systems of value and belief.

This is not simple idealism. For during the present period, an hiatus between more settled times, the speculative imagination keenly experiences all the stresses and contradictions of contemporary life, yet finds the common reality-avoidance devices of the time largely unavailable because they are revealed as the false solutions of yesterday. That is to

say, clear-headed speculation requires both a deep insight into changing conditions *and* a mastery of controlled modes of de-familiarisation which reveal the underlying *provisionality* of accepted social norms and beliefs. But such a balancing act can clearly lead to numerous pathologies not least of which is the regression to substitute satisfactions, to the many available forms of induced mindlessness which dull the critical faculties. It is in just such conditions that regressive fantasy thrives.

As noted above, fantasy represents a vital part of our imaginative repertoire and may even display a certain subdued radical potential.[5] Moreover, the more insightful and literate forms cannot be dismissed as mere escapism. Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy is a case in point.[6] Similarly, the psychological value of fantasy-as-therapy has been argued by Bettelheim and others.[7] However, fantasy rapidly deteriorates when it is not subordinated to some higher purpose or principle. The rows of interchangeable pseudo-medieval trilogies and series now weighting the bookshelves across the western world are little more than formulaic commodities designed precisely to ease the burden of selfhood, of individuation, not to extend the latter in useful ways. While the value of escapism has been defended by Stableford and others, this kind of material is invariably disappointing. It draws us away from an *engagement* with our world, our deepest needs and our highest selves.[8] Few people can be truly refreshed and invigorated by such trivial diversions; they are more likely to be subverted by "the exotic lure of modes of life that have already been examined long ago and found wanting."[9] The need is rather for a fruitful *balance* between different needs. Robert Scholes put it well when he suggested that

> we require a fiction which satisfies our cognitive and sublimative needs together, just as we want food which tastes good and provides some nourishment. We need suspense with intellectual consequences, in which questions are raised as well as solved, and in whch our minds are expanded even while focused on the complications of a fictional plot.[10]

I do not mean to imply that speculative fiction is, or need be, merely an intellectual resource. Much of the heart-searching by those who have transcended the banalities of formula fiction is fundamentally a *search for significance* which passes beyond the purely rational. That, really, is the point: the *direction* of this movement is what is at stake in fiction. If the reader is driven back to the irrational, to magical and pre-rational modes of consciousness, there is clearly a regression to simpler, less inclusive, forms of knowing. If, on the other hand, the movement is toward the superrational and the transcendent, then more truly advanced forms of integration can take place. It is a fact that more highly evolved beings have dwelt, and do dwell, among us *but* they have very little in common with the clichéd super-heroes of fantasy and science fiction.[11] I'll return to this point below.

In this search for significance, one is bound to turn toward speculative fiction as a major source of insight and meaning. No other branch of literature deals centrally with those shaping forces of the Twentieth Century: the subversive realities and potentials of science and technology. But innovations quickly turn into cliché, harden into orthodoxy, when writers retreat from the leading edge of social consciousness. Though it seems almost heretical to say this, my reading of Ballard's striking novel *Empire of the Sun* suggests to me that much of his fiction has been a kind of therapy for the writer, a slow working-out of fearful adolescent obsessions engendered by the cruelty of warfare. Can it be that Ballard's skill has seduced us into overlooking that entropy, ruin and derangement are but variations upon a single theme: *the celebration of disaster?* It is certainly no crime

to be fascinated by temporality and the fall of all man-made structures into ruin. But, in the absence of a creative balancing principle, such a diet may only feed the wellsprings of depression and despair.[12] It may be no accident that the nearest Ballard comes to achieving such a balance is in *Vermilion Sands* which, until *Empire . . .*, was widely considered to be among his best work. However, the canon continues with new writers like Geoff Ryman and William Gibson who bring considerable writing ability and a surface brilliance to similarly oppressive themes.[13] We are entitled to ask why the good news appears to be so indigestible. Dystopia may well be close at hand (and I'll suggest below that it has its uses) but it is too easy, too simplistic and certainly unnecessary, despite the terrors of the Twentieth Century, to see the future *only* as "a kind of continuing catastrophe".[14]

Certainly a great deal of contemporary science fiction is irredeemably reactionary. In the context noted above, of breakdowns in meaning and purpose, writers who seek to retrieve the past, to re-animate the galactic empire, the mad scientist, the World War Two space dogfights, the one-dimensional supermen and so on, are missing the chance to participate in the *renewal* of meanings which undelies our sense of significance in the present and our hopes for a livable future. In other words, science fiction which embodies dated world views and assumptions, and which fails to deal with perennial human concerns *as they appear to us at this historical moment,* is likely to remain moribund. There is thus a distinction to be made between socially shared needs for fictional futures which reveal aspects of our particular present, and the narrower, basically critical and academic, task of re-assessing earlier work. This paper works toward a fruitful dialectic between those needs and those tasks such that each may illuminate the other.

It will be suggested below that our present reality is by no means restricted to the "here and now". It *necessarily* incorporates aspects of yesterday, fragments of past aspirations and imaginings; and there are, of course, many items of value that transcend their time and period. To some we accord the accolade that they were "ahead of their time" and hence a valued part of ours. But in the mid 1980s our main interest is in the world *we* inhabit and construct. Thus, fiction which seeks to nourish our sense of significance must grow from this present world and reflect the nascent problems and potentials inherent within it.

False dawns have occurred before in the history of speculative writing and, no doubt, they will happen again. The Panshins' attempt to say *Goodbye to Yesterday's Tomorrow* seems to have been universally ignored.[15] All I would venture at this time is to say that the *potential* exists for writers to participate in negotiating our transition between cultural eras. J.T. Fraser is right to suggest that "it is the artistic gifts of man that are first to meet all worlds, and it is through the community of moods that these new worlds first reach other minds".[16] Today the impact of technicism and instrumental rationality has rendered the status of that symbolic community somewhat problematic. Yet, while it is death for the writer of fiction to descend into overt didacticism, there are within our own multiplex reality, more issues, images, dangers and opportunities for transcendence than ever before. It can hardly be doubted that regressive elements will persist and even appear dominant. The primitive power fantasies, formula hackwork, literary wet dreams will be made available so long as there is an audience sufficiently out of touch with itself to demand them. But those who are alert to the newness in and around them will write, and read, books which expand the boundaries of sf, and hence of contemporary awareness.

It is significant that in the *Helliconia Trilogy,* Brian Aldiss, ever the innovator, draws on advanced notions of temporality, recent debates about the "Gaia Hypothesis" and the possibility of a "nuclear winter". The standard props of science fiction largely occupy the background. In the foreground we witness the rise and fall of cultures upon Helliconia. Here we have a framework to speculate upon the nature of cultural change, a mirror in which to view our own anxieties and fears and a metaphor of mortality itself. Nor is the work simply a re-telling of Gibbon's well-known theme.[17] Work of this quality permits an imaginative grasp upon our contemporary world which can be gained from few other sources.

Much of the best contemporary speculative fiction would hardly be called "sf" by those addicted to the norms of Van Vogt and E.E. Smith, though I hardly think that this matters. The speculative imagination is not merely the wellspring of science and fiction but of philosophy and social movements too. It pre-dates the organised search for external understanding and control by millenia. Hence I am very attracted to Lewis Mumford's view that "tool-technics . . . is but a fragment of biotechnics: man's total equipment for life". He adds,

> to consider man . . . as primarily a tool-using animal is to overlook the main chapters of human history. Opposed to this petrified notion, I . . . develop the view that man is pre-eminently a mind-making, self-mastering and self-designing animal; and the primary locus of all his activities lies in his own organism, and in the social organisation through which it finds fuller expression. Until man had made something of himself he could make little of the world around him.[18]

Such a view has consequences both for the present enquiry and for our understanding of how, or where, to "situate" science and technology within culture. Stableford is quite correct to note that "for sf writers . . . machines are spectacular sources of value".[19] But the deeper point is that, despite their evident power and surface attractions, despite the way they have transformed human life and its prospects, they are but *secondary* sources of value and meaning that are fundamentally dependent upon, and derivative of, human capacities. The *reversal* of this relationship is one of the greatest pathologies of the age and it is one that many writers of science fiction and fantasy have fudged or, worse, unwittingly promoted.[20]

Critiques of technicised culture are therefore of inherently greater interest than naturalistic accounts of journeys to the galactic core. They are "post-galactic" in the sense that the former *confront* repressive ideologies, while the latter tend to domesticate and sustain all that is taken-for-granted within the present social order. As Ken Wilber and others have shown, there is much to work through and understand in our own cultural past and present, before routine space travel and colonisation becomes a real and compelling option. Until we have mastered atavistic drives, resolved what Hardin called "the tragedy of the commons" and refused the archaic misrepresentations of the arms race there is no real prospect of a viable future in space. At present this is largely a diversion sustained by techno-military imperatives and American frontier myths. I do not agree with George Hay that "the urge into space is religious at base."[21] It is rather *a debased expression of the urge to transcendence,* and the latter has nothing whatever to do with rockets and physical journeys to distant places. If, and when, we evolve to the point where the inner world of humankind can mediate the outer in benign and sustainable ways space travel may then acquire practicability and higher meaning.

An important part of the present struggle to transcend more primitive modes of

consciousness is the feminist critique of patriarchy. Works such as Sally Gearhart's *The Wandergrounds* and Marge Piercy's impressive *Woman at the Edge of Time* reveal new sensibilities at work re-negotiating accepted meanings, revising common notions about ourselves as social beings. Piercy's subordination of science-fictional devices to her strictly *human* concerns is well achieved. Similarly, her evident disinterest in the banalities of fictional violence represents a telling contrast with "macho" writings generally and certainly with the slow-motion amplification of simulated savagery on T.V. and in films like *Blade Runner*.[22]

There is also a deeper project. The metafictions of Borges, D.M. Thomas and John Crowley (to mention but three) function not merely to comment on the external world, but to interrogate the categories by which it is known. Crowley's novel *Little Big* appears to have flopped on the American market and seems to have done little better in the UK. Yet, in my view, it is a true masterpiece. It tells a story to be sure, yet also discourses without preaching on time, causality, memory, reality itself. For me the focus of the work is the sheer unlimited recursiveness of human identity and meaning. It therefore deals with issues of major importance in a period of gross technological overkill and incipient reductionism.

One "attraction" of reductionism is that it permits simple views of complex phenomena (though at the cost of confusing ontological levels; that is, of placing the "lower" over the "higher"). Yet as E.F. Schumacher and many others have pointed out, no upper limit to human potentials can be discerned.[23] Works of fiction that reflect this openness are therefore of greater interest and value than those which try to effect an arbitrary closure upon the reader, thereby constructing inadequate models of personhood. Yet a good deal of speculative writing and criticism has fallen into just this trap: the power and insight of metafictional approaches have been widely overlooked in favour of naturalistic narratives of worlds which never were, *twice* removed from social reality (i.e. fictions of fictions). Much has been written about the "suspension of disbelief", the attempt to seduce readers into setting aside their critical awareness in favour of an illusion woven of words. But as Umberto Eco has noted, "it is impossible for there to be *a* story".[24] Texts are *inherently* plural and "a novel is a machine . . ." (I would prefer to say "a structure") ". . . for generating interpretations".[25] Budrys is quite wrong to equate fiction with lies.[26] *Fiction is construction*. To understand this is to begin to notice that naturalistic writing *obscures* its own constructedness and assumes readers who will passively accept the author's interpretations. This is a major reason why speculative writing can be irredeemably regressive and even patronising since, by undermining the interpretive autonomy of the reader, the latter is impelled back toward child-like states of dependence. If that is what people want, we need to understand the kind of game we are in.

On the other hand, writers have genuine concerns about the fact that "it is hard enough to get the reader's attention without distracting him/her with technicalities".[27] This is certainly a problem if one is operating according to naturalistic conventions and the "model reader" in the author's mind is passive and disabled in the manner noted above. However, such a view does lead the writer into commitments he/she may not wish to uphold: one-way "communication," superiority of viewpoint, a naïve, common-sense view of language and meaning which no longer holds. It is hard to see how the reader's search for significance can proceed along these lines. All that can really happen is that certain taken-for-granted categories and ideological positions can be displayed and

reinforced. This interpretation calls the bluff of functionalist analyses of literature which appear to look kindly upon what are called "restorative and maintenance functions".[28]

It is arguable whether or not authors can be held responsible for the "needs" and tastes of their readers. What has happened is not a conspiracy. It is rather that the often self-referential world of sf has become bogged down in certain assumptions and marketing conventions. Far from being "the only authentic mirror to the predicament of contemporary man in the whole literary spectrum," the field has not kept up with wider developments.[29] Patricia Waugh suggests that "the materialist, positivist and empiricist world view upon which realistic fiction is premissed no longer exists".[30] But it may be nearer the truth to note that, sad to say, it does exist and continues to exert a range of malign effects. It *has* been superceded. In other words, writers are as prone to culture lag as anyone else, particularly if they are caught up in the business (I use the term advisedly) of replicating spurious futures. Those who continue to market naturalistic fiction *without irony,* and without signalling that their choice of a realistic mode is a conscious and intentional one, will increasingly be seen to be "out on a limb" supported only by conventions that have been overturned. It matters not at all that subject matter or surface content is ostensibly set in the future since "the concept-space of the science fiction story has always been purely hypothetical".[31] Fictional futures are spurious to the extent that they invoke dated epistemologies and regressive notions of personhood.

The insight that "at every turn we run into patterns of shaping force that have gone unobserved by our instrumental approach to the world" is, by now, no longer new. Scholes is also correct to state that "it is because reality cannot be recorded that realism is dead. All writing, all composition, is construction. We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only poesis. No recording. Only constructing." Hence, he adds, "we are free to speculate as never before".[32] Yet the more freedom, the more responsibility. The more advanced the organism, the more ways it has to fail.[33]

I do not know if writers of naturalistic fiction inhabit a different universe or time-stream. But it is evident that, in attempting to conceal its own status and constructedness, realism pursues an impossible quest. All works cannot but reflect the author's hand (eye, brain), preferred conventions, ideological commitments and intertextual meanings.[34] Yet, as Waugh notes, "metafiction is not so much a sub-genre of the novel as a tendency *within* the novel".[35] This provides a basis for resolution. For, rather than *suppressing* such a tendency, it may be revealed and enjoyed. The question is not one of metafiction *or* realism, but one of balance, awareness and intentionality. Of course one may cite examples of work in which the metafictional elements are crude or mannered.[36] But there remain infinite subtle ways that writers can address readers not as passive observers but as *co-authors* wholly capable of calling forth meaning, purpose and insight. The distinction is crucial. It is the difference between object and subject. While naturalistic stories may perform a range of soothing operations upon the naïve and dependent reader, this is achieved at a considerable price.

Many of the most interesting questions are, indeed, epistemological and metaphysical in nature, a fact understood best of all, perhaps, by James Blish.[37] But this does not mean that their embodiment in speculative fiction has to "heavy" or "boring". Some of the most resonant sf classics are set in alternative worlds. They permit almost unlimited opportunities for speculation upon a number of levels, and only the most rash critic could believe that their potential is exhausted. The reverse is probably true. For the well-

constructed alternate world can satisfy Scholes' criteria by engaging us with a fictional plot while, at the same time, undermining the taken-for-grantedness of the world we assume to be real. By setting up an alternative "now" it demonstrates how the context of our own knowledge and experience could well have been drastically different. It usefully re-opens what conventional, linear and retrospective views of history domesticate as "natural" and unproblematic. This world is *in fact* only one of many alternatives and the spectrum of options handed down from above in regard to the future would be farcical if there were anything remotely funny about it. Yet the "unfreezing" of historical and temporal perspective gives each person the opportunity to stand at the centre of their own history as an agent, not a spectator. Furthermore, we begin to understand our lives in a broader, long term, context and in relation to future generations whose reality is grounded in, and depends upon, our own. This *extension* of concerns beyond the alienation and narcissism of the narrow "here and now" represents a movement toward maturity which contrasts strongly with the regression to the "creature present" induced by inferior work.[38]

Fictions involving temporality may also invoke the wider world which we share with past generations, the living and those yet unborn. In Western linear time the notional present has been continuously sub-divided such that it seems to vanish beneath perceptual thresholds. Yet this rather old-fashioned "physicist's conceit" is very misleading. The boundaries we have erected in space, time and human relationship are neither natural, nor are they ultimately necessary. Rather, they are part and parcel of an instrumental world view which extends back through Newton and Bacon to pre-history. Linear time is an artefact of an alienating mode of consciousness. It may have been overthrown *conceptually* by Einstein, but the notion (and the way of life which flows from it) is held firmly in place by cultural and psychological forces.[39] Writers of speculative fiction often appear to be as much caught up in this dilemma as anyone else. But their playful, half-serious, attempts to roam at will among different temporalities and moods reflects biological and metaphysical truths. Namely that, as Fraser has pointed out, the processes of life *insert* a meaningful present into the pure succession of the inanimate world and, in so doing, *erect no firm boundaries.* Similarly, "the *nunc fluens,* or passing present, returns to the *nunc stans,* or eternal present." Wilber is emphatic that "*this* present is no mere slice of reality. On the contrary, in this now resides the cosmos, with all the time and space in the world".[40]

It is clear that the tripartite division of the tenses plays cruel tricks. I have argued, for example, that school curricula cannot be understood merely as derivations from past culture.[41] Virtually all human activities are grounded in the past, enacted in the present (however defined) and inherently oriented toward futures. In other words, past and future are *enfolded* in a broader present which touches infinity. Hence *The Holographic Paradigm,*[42] David Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicit Order*[43] and, indeed, the Perennial Philosophy itself. George Hay was quite right to see this as the bedrock, "the wisdom which underlies all religious and metaphysical systems".[44] The challenge for serious writers of speculative fiction is to represent these relationships, this much wider canvas, in ways that are appropriate to the historical "now" but which reach far beyond it. Such an enterprise is no mere conceit. The Perennial Philosophy teaches that we participate in the "all" as unbounded spirits and intuit this in moments of clarity. But even without venturing that far, it is clear that simply as incarnate beings we are caught up in a

series of change processes that may alter, or eliminate, sentient life upon the earth. In other words, the *nunc stans* is our primary frame of reference, not the *nunc fluens* as is commonly assumed.

It is sometimes frustrating to see the richness of temporality dissipated in unsuccessful paradoxes.[45] Again, writers have tended to assume that time is unitary, a single process that can be mapped unproblematically through accepted modes of discourse ("he sat in the time machine and travelled into the future"). Stories like Tiptree's "The Man Who Walked Home" and Ian Watson's "The Very Slow Time Machine" indicate more fruitful possibilities. As does the work of J.T. Fraser. His hierarchical scheme of distinct temporalities which correspond to the *Umwelts* of integrative levels in nature makes a brave bid to unravel aspects of the micro-structure of time. I cannot say if Fraser has "solved the problem of time",[46] but he has certainly resolved a number of classical paradoxes and proffers an impressive body of interpretation about time and culture. If I have any real reservation about his work it is that the perspective falters as it moves from past to future. Yet this is precisely where Wilber's analysis of distinct stages in the evolution of consciousness takes over.[47] Taken together, these writers provide a framework for intelligent speculation which appears to go well beyond anything yet on offer.

One use of such a framework may concern the much-maligned utopia.[48] It's about time this under-rated form was re-habilitated and given new life; not in a classical, stifling, form but as an imaginative rehearsal of plausible and sustainable futures. Callenbach's *"Ecotopia"* provides one view of a "New Age" culture but there must be a whole range of "solar-age futures" to be explored *and* falsified. The latter may involve plausible reactions *against* the new orthodoxies of wind, wave, solar power, methane digesters and neo-Gaian "Earth people". More importantly, writers might want to look seriously at the kind of psycho/spiritual innovations which I have hinted at above and which could foreshadow entirely different cultural forms. While there are many distinguished exceptions, it remains a matter for serious concern that the *Zeitgeist* of American sf remains so firmly grounded in paranoia, reality-avoidance and regressive fantasy. I had started to wonder if, under the collective influence of writers like Benford, Le Guin, Schenck and Tiptree (Sheldon), some sort of a "sea change" had not occurred in that country. But looking carefully through some recent copies of *Locus* that was clearly not the case. Along with the seemingly endless repetition of fantasy trilogies and series set in stereotyped pseudo-medieval settings the same juvenile concern with "total war in space" and suchlike was much in evidence. Perhaps, as I suggested above, this will continue. But, *because genre fiction is basically substitutive it remains deeply unsatisfying to writers and readers alike.* Others will have to judge the extent to which this is merely a cynical marketing exercise. The point I want to emphasise is that there are other creative options. Options which, far from driving the reader back into juvenile dependence, open up new paths and perceptions about the self and its relation to the whole.

Lem hit the nail squarely on the head more than twenty years ago when he wrote in *Solaris* that "man has gone out to explore other worlds and other civilizations without having explored his own labyrinth of dark passages and secret chambers, and without finding what lies behind doorways that he himself has sealed".[49] It could not be put more plainly. The reason why speculative fiction often tends to be genuinely regressive and unhelpful is that it overlooks the nature and the primacy of the inner life and stimulates

habits and modes of consciousness that *prevent* individuals from coming to know their deeper selves. *Advanced technology and exotic locales are simply no substitute for the perennial concerns shared and intuited by us all.* When the latter are by-passed, both readers and writers are on a hiding to nothing. Or, more precisely, to earlier stages of human consciousness. Wilber is very clear about what is going on here. He writes,

> because man wants real transcendence above all else, but because he will not accept the necessary death of his separate self-sense, he goes about seeking transcendence in ways that *actually prevent* it and force symbolic substitutes. And these substitutes come in all varieties: sex, food, money, fame, knowledge, power—all are ultimately substitute gratifications, simple substitutes for true release in wholeness. This is why human desire is insatiable, why all joys yearn for infinity—all a person wants is Atman; all he finds are symbolic substitutes for it.[50]

If there have been any major American novels (other than those cited) dealing with true psycho/spiritual developments, I would like to hear about them. Gibson's award-winning *Neuromancer* seems to me to move in an entirely different direction toward surfaces, techno-nihilism and de-personalisation: concerns which, as Lewis Mumford long ago pointed out, were disastrous when they first appeared in pre-history. Olaf Stapledon, C.S. Lewis and James Blish, among others, indicated a different kind of enterprise which seems to me to be even more important today than it once was.[51]

On a more mundane level, a significant proportion of speculative work will probably continue to act as a kind of informal technology assessment literature. I have always enjoyed this "widgit sf" in its own terms, particularly in the hands of a master like Philip K. Dick. Yet I do maintain that technology *per se* is a secondary issue. Speculative writers have had very little to say about the realities of scientific innovation and technological development, the social relations, ideological commitments and conflicts of R & D in the real world. With a very few exceptions, such as Gregory Benford's *Timescape,* few have attempted to look seriously at how scientists actually function. Yet much has been learned about these processes in recent years and a whole field of study, often called "Science, Technology and Society" (or STS), has developed complete with a supporting literature. This could be utilised to substantiate and inform future work.[52]

A literature of speculation is at its strongest when it draws on living cultural sources, is keenly alert to the changing concerns of the times and is focussed upon human qualities and needs. If machines have been regarded as "spectacular sources of value" much remains to be stated and discovered about their creators. The inversion of man/machine relations is to be deplored and fictions which naïvely subordinate personhood either to machines or to magic (both of them stand-ins for the dominant *social* order) may well be parasitic upon the shared *symbolic* order. A major category error is committed when meanings derived from intersubjective human discourse are either "read upon" or, worse, attributed to, machines or *irr*ational powers. Insofar as this false transference is achieved in stories *and agreed to by readers,* the latter participate in undermining their own expressive autonomy. Yet works which look beneath the surface to the deepest strivings of the human mind and spirit may serve quite different ends. Such a literature stands in no danger of dying out. Indeed, writers who will avoid the seductive simplicities of regression, ennui and escapism can participate in the wider renewal of meaning and purpose by generating images of futures worth inhabiting. Such images are deeply involved in the processes of cultural continuity and change, and we will continue to need dystopian visions to depict what we may wish to avoid. Dystopias are not invariably

depressing unless they exert a false closure upon the reader, driving one back toward resignation and despair. However, the major creative task is to move decisively away from the celebration of disaster to the exploration of that spectacular plateau of achievement where human capacities and purposes on the one hand, and technical skills on the other, achieve harmony with each other and with the natural world in which they are located. Such a balancing of incommensurable forces is bound to be only temporary and beset with numerous conflicts and practical difficulties. It therefore provides fertile ground for the imaginative writer.

What might such a plateau look like? We cannot know for sure, though there are indications in several of the works cited.[53] What seems certain is that it will involve that which is most uncertain and problematic in the present order. Thus a literature of speculation can usefully highlight what Fraser calls the "metastable interface" rather than glossing it over in misguided allegiance to the *status quo*. The latter is all but played out. It, utopia and dystopia can be transcended within a larger, more inclusive, vision.

To summarise: my central proposition is that speculative fiction only need admit an "identity crisis" insofar as it is identified with a set of obsolete images, meanings, purposes and techniques. The progressive dis-integration of belief systems underlying industrialised ways of life help to account for the crass, unhelpful, nature of some sf. However, the public taste for reality-avoidance is stimulated by commercial factors within publishing and by writers who either do not know better or do not care. It is not so much that space fiction and fantasy are no longer appropriate forms of expression, far from it. Rather, the all-too-common preoccupation with conquest, domination, depersonalisation and psychological regression is part of a common syndrome which has been superceded. Existential fear and anxiety cannot be resolved in this way, they are merely soothed and repressed. However, when shifts toward the subjective are informed by higher knowledge they pass beyond mere narcissistic indulgence. Though it is still not yet widely recognised in the West, the Perennial Philosophy provides a basis for recognising that *subjectivity conceals a universal objectivism:* the ground of being, that which is, Atman, the *nunc stans*.[54] Such knowledge and insight does not usher in the Millenium. That will take much longer than many would wish. It does suggest that the growing sense of dis-orientation, conflict and fear can be reinterpreted, transcended and finally dissolved. But boundaries are protected by ancient cultural taboos and no atavism is readily given up. In this context, the present *rapprochement* between Eastern and Western modes of perception (and indeed that between "Northern" and "Southern" modes) can inform and energise new developments in fiction, as in the wider culture which it models.

Within such a culture lie many unexplored potentials. We remain a very long way from understanding novel interactions (and here the dual meaning is appropriate): computer networking, gene splicing, higher states of consciousness, tropical de-forestation, expert systems, the near-universal pollution of land, sea and air, disarmament, gender shifts, green politics, monetarism and so on. It seems quite clear that we are taking part in an unprecedented global experiment which requires serious and sustained attention, and which implies unpredictable (but not unimaginable) outcomes. What I most want to emphasise is that, far from attempting to "escape" into fantasy, the past, or spurious futures, the only *real* escape is by way of a deeper engagement in the extended present. That involves a high-level commitment to each other and to future generations to achieve

this dangerous transition toward a more sustainable way of life.

I am emphatically not suggesting that the speculative imagination be shackled to present concerns. One of its most notable features is the way it can rise above the latter, leaving a trail of awkward questions to nibble away at the conventional wisdom of the day. But it can draw on new sources of inspiration and knowledge, some of which were once esoteric, the "property" of restricted groups, and also on notions of personhood which recognise the unbounded nature of the human spirit. It is here that decisive rejoinders to the false gods of a grasping and fearful culture may be found. Nor do I believe that the best use of sf is to armour us against moral relativism, for that god has already tumbled.[55] The urge to transcendence has been widely overlooked though it is present in every intentional and expressive act. Far from living alone in the cramped confines of an alienated present and mocked by the dark immensities of an uncaring universe, we can choose to awaken to a world without boundaries brimming with meaning and significance.

If, therefore, we are approaching the time when supra-human states of integration and consciousness become more widely attained, we may see a steady decline of interest in technical feats as such and progressively greater interest in human evolution. Thus, I would not be at all surprised if much of the gaudy hardware of early science fiction, along with the relatively primitive world views it sometimes represented, were superceded by some little practiced use of the human mind and spirit. This is foreshadowed in the lives of great spiritual leaders and echoed in contemporary movements toward integration and wholeness.[56] Moreover, speculative writing has a part to play in the process. But to have any chance of achieving a "destiny among the stars", it will be necessary to resolve some ancient difficulties here on earth. Otherwise we shall only carry the contagion with us. That, perhaps, is the underlying subtext of all those wearily warring galactic federations and empires. Until we have mastered the inner world, control of the outer will remain elusive. The central task is to understand, synthesise and transform the impulses and habits of perception inherited from our forebears.[57] We need to understand that technology is but a means to ends and not an end in itself. It may give us much in the way of tools to live *with*, but nothing to live *for*. Human purpose and intentionality occupy a higher ontological level than any physical artefact or any collection of things whatever. Higher still are trans-personal purposes, meanings and potentials. Here lies wholeness and answers to all the questions about the ambivalence of science which have plagued the present century.

If writers so choose, what I have called "post-galactic sf" can be a step on that road. Fantasy is not invariably regressive when it expresses a higher vision, when it is subordinated to higher principles than escapism and wish-fulfilment. Science fiction need not remain lost in the desert of naïve realism, propagandising on behalf of earlier world views and ideologies. It can develop reflexivity, insight, prodromic power. It can look beyond mere technicism, simple dichotomies and boundaries that have been falsely inscribed in space and time to the constitution of significance in a wider, common, world. Who will produce the first anthology or novel along these lines?

Speculation is not a trivial pursuit. It is about the constitution of things as they are and as they might be. Thus, finally, speculative fiction is less about galactic empires and external machine technologies (though these may have a place) than it is about the human spirit exploring its ontological status from the vantage point of a particular location in

space and time. At its best it prefigures an enterprise which takes us beyond the need to be "fussing about in the world of time looking for the timeless".[58] As our view has shifted during the mid 1980s, as we move from the known and bounded toward the less known and the unbounded, so the world in which the bulk of sf was produced becomes increasingly remote. Hence, the present exhaustion of ideas and images signals only the decline of speculation within a particular cultural matrix, not the end of the speculative capacity itself.

The latter is a permanent attribute of civilized life and one that interrogates the new era even as it is shaped by what it perceives.

Notes

1 See Clarke, I.F., *The Pattern of Expectation:* Cape 1979.
2 Budrys, A., "Literatures of Milieux," *Foundation* 31, July 1984, 5.17.
3 Taylor, C., "Hermeneutics and Politics," in Connerton, P. (ed) *Critical Sociology:* Penguin 1976, 189-90.
4 See Henderson, H., "The Entropy State," in *Creating Alternative Futures:* Berkley 1978.
5 So argues Jackson, R., in *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion:* Methuen 1981.
6 Here the elements of fantasy are disciplined both by internally coherent "laws" and, crucially, by forms of higher knowledge within our own reality.
7 Bettelheim, B., *The Uses of Enchantment:* Thames and Hudson 1976.
8 See Stableford, B., "The Needs and Demands of the Science Fiction Reader: a Sociological Perspective," *Vector* 83, Oct 1977, 4-8. Also, "Notes Toward a Sociology of Science Fiction," *Foundation* 15, Jan 1979, 28-40. The question about what people are escaping *from* and *to* is begged in these papers. See below.
9 Fraser, J.T., *Time as Conflict:* Birkhauser Verlag 1978, 245.
10 Scholes, R., *Structural Fabulation:* Notre Dame Press, Indiana 1975, 41.
11 See Wilber, K., *Up From Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution:* R.K.P. 1983, particularly chapters 18 and 19.
12 As Panshin notes: "His inert inner landscapes of the imagination are an expression of Ballard's hatred of the postwar universe of sterile plastic. But his stories offer no alternative to the Future History of Heinlein and the others. They offer only exaggeration of sterility, ennui and death." *Farewell to Yesterday's Tomorrow:* Berkley 1976, 209.
13 See "The Unconquered Country," *Interzone* 7, Spring 1984, and "O Happy Day!", *Interzone: The First Anthology:* Dent 1985, 1-35. Also Gibson's *Neuromancer*: Ace 1984.
14 Stableford, B., "Man-Made Catastrophes in SF," *Foundation* 22, June 1981, 77.
15 op cit note 12.
16 Fraser op cit 296.
17 Aldiss rightly believes that sf should not merely re-capitulate past history.
18 Mumford, L., *Technics and Human Development:* Harvest/HBJ 1966/67.
19 Stableford, B., "Marxism, Science Fiction and the Poverty of Prophecy: Some Comparisons and Contrasts," *Foundation* 32, Nov 1984, 10.
20 See Rucker, R., *Software:* Ace 1982 for a particularly blatant example. ("Cobb Anderson's brain had been dissected, but the software that made up his mind had been preserved. The idea of "self" is, after all, just another idea, a symbol in the software": p.179).
21 Hay, G., "Sleep No More," *Foundation* 24, Feb 1982, 75.
22 See Lewicki, S., "Feminism and Science Fiction," *Foundation* 32, Nov 1984, 45-59.
23 Schumacher, E.F., *A Guide for the Perplexed:* Cape 1977.
24 Eco. U., "Reflections on *The Name of the Rose," Encounter,* April 1985, 15.
25 Ibid., 7.
26 Budrys, A., op cit note 2, 13.
27 Paraphrased from a conversation with Greg Benford, YORCON 3, Leeds 1985.
28 Stableford, B., 1977 op cit note 8.
29 Stableford, B., "Icaromenippus or the Future of Science Fiction," *Vector* 81 May-June 1977, 26.
30 Waugh, P., *Metafiction:* Methuen 1984, 7. Also see Belsey, C., *Critical Practice:* Methuen 1980.

31 Stableford 1977, op cit note 29.
32 Scholes 1975, op cit note 10, 37.
33 See Fraser 1978, op cit note 9, 96-7.
34 Eco writes: "Books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told": op cit note 24, 10.
35 Waugh 1984, op cit note 30, 14.
36 For example John Fowles' *Mantissa:* Cape 1982.
37 This is implicit in novels like *Doctor Mirabilis* and, indeed, in the others of the "After Such Knowledge" tetralogy. D. Ketterer renders the point explicit in "The Last Inspirational Gasp of James Blish: The Breath of Brahma," *Science Fiction Studies* 11, 1 March 1984, 45-49. It is also worth noting Nicholls' view that "sf may derive its muscle and sinew from science and sociology, but much of the time its heartbeat derives from the intellectual drama of metaphysics": *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* Granada 1979, 397. Ian Watson is one of the few contemporary sf writers to take this "drama" seriously.
38 Elise Boulding argues convincingly for the notion of a "200 year present" stretching 100 years in each "direction". See "The Dynamics of Imaging Futures," *World Future Society Bulletin* 12, 5 1978, 1-8. Also my own paper "Towards a Critical Futurism," reprinted in Slaughter, R., *What Do We Do Now the Future is Here? Essays on: Futures, Education and the Speculative Imagination:* University of Lancaster 1985, 8-25.
39 See Wilber 1983, op cit and Mumford 1966/67, op cit note 18.
40 Wilber, K., *No Boundary:* Shambhala 1979, 69.
41 See Slaughter, R., "Futures Study in the Curriculum," in Skilbeck, M. (ed) *Readings in School-Based Curriculum Development:* Harper & Row 1984. Reprinted in Slaughter 1985, op cit note 38.
42 Wilber, K., (ed), The Holographic Paradigm.
43 Bohm, D., *Wholeness and the Implicate Order:* R.K.P. 1980.
44 Hay, G., 1982, op cit 76.
45 For example, John Varley's recent *Millenium* (Sphere 1985) contains some excellent and evocative writing. But it badly fudges the central paradox of the story and has a crude *deus ex machina* ending.
46 A Brief "off the cuff" comment by Brian Aldiss at Seacon, April 1984, Brighton, UK.
47 Wilber 1983, op cit note 11.
48 See Segal, H., "Appropriate Visions: In Defence of Utopianism Today," *World Future Society Bulletin* 18, 2 1984, 24-29.
49 Lem, S., *Solaris:* Berkley 1970 (orig. Polish 1961), 165.
50 Wilber 1983, op cit note 11, 13.
51 Cowper's "Piper at the Gates of Dawn" (in *The Custodians:* Gollancz 1976) represents a high point in this tradition.
52 See, for example, Mulkay, M., *Science and the Sociology of Knowledge:* Allen & Unwin, 1979.
53 See Wilber 1983, op cit 336.
54 A fine introduction is Steiner, R., *Higher Worlds:* London 1923.
55 From the viewpoint of this essay, Stableford's belief that sf is "basically a literature of re-assurance" which is appropriate to "a universe of moral and philosophical relativity" (op cit Oct 1977, 7) reflects an unacceptable and inadequate epistemology.
56 See Wilber 1983 op cit, especially chapters 18 and 19. The women's movement, the peace movement and diverse "New Age" cultures are not without their difficulties and critics. Yet the underlying impulse is toward integration and wholeness: precursors of transcendence. A useful summary is provided by Capra, F., *The Turning Point:* Fontana 1983, and Caldicott, L. and Leland, S. (eds) *Reclaim the Earth:* Women's Press 1979.
57 See Assagioli, R. *The Act of Will:* Turnstone 1984 and *Psychosynthesis:* Turnstone.
58 Wilber 1983, op cit 336.

Note: the original version of this paper was written for the YORCON 3 essay competition, which it won. I should like to thank Brian Aldiss and Paul Shackley for their comments on an early version of that draft. Also Kev Grisedale for turning up at the right time with copies of *Locus*. If a publisher feels like taking up the idea of an upbeat anthology he/she should write via this journal. The subject matter of the essay forms the basis of part of a major critical work on sf, temporality and conflicts of meaning, which is now in preparation.

Letters

Dear *Foundation:* August 1985

Some comments on the usual excellent *Foundation* (#33).

Gavin Browning's reflections on Scientism are much needed, for they focus on one of the central tenets of sf. On the other hand, I sense distressing hidden agendas in his judgements. Often he seems to want to dethrone science in order to trundle forward his own political ends.

Let's not forget that socialism often had a Scientistic cast. Indeed, the whole 19th century program of "scientific revolution" leading like a lab experiment to Socialist Man was the enthronement of views now seen as easily destructive. (It wasn't a great leap to assert that a vanguard party had to light the Bunsen burner, keep the lab notebook, write up the results.) And maybe it's not surprising that few sf novels deal with Browning's "future without poverty and conflict within society," since conflict is crucial in fiction. Utopias always look pretty dull; even *The Dispossessed,* probably the last hurrah of 19th century idealism, doesn't escape this.

But my central criticism of Browning's plea for more sf *sans* Scientism is that his world has little room for that vexing complication, the irreducible individual. His post-Scientific vision looks curiously like the middle ages to me, where the rogue force of science is neatly cowed by society's shibboleths. Browning wants to dethrone science, but I wonder if this just asserts that society's aims are superior to science's freedom.

Let me be specific: after a deft description of *Timescape,* which he has well understood, he sadly remarks that the novel presents no alternative "to the practice of science as it now is in the west . . . Maybe Benford will give us the other kind of story next time." I chuckled at this, because, you see, I thought I *had. Against Infinity* was deliberately written to depict the sense of science as genuinely radical, untimately uncontrollable. I wanted to write a book which didn't have the same claustrophobic-lab feel as *Timescape,* so I couched the argument in terms of my own past (the American south, with storytelling methods and sociology, all transformed yet re-emergent far from Earth) and my own sense of nature. Into this comes an Earth scientist, who is seen as pious, circumscribed, ever-mindful of the social function of his work. I suspect this kind of scientist will emerge under socialism, as Heilbronner has speculated in a different context. Like him or not, this kind of scientist should be envisioned. To me, the book is about this.

Science *is* deeply radical. It doesn't guarantee a comfy socialist future or a world-view that lines up with current thinking. Browning would like E.O. Wilson's sociobiology ideas to be "increasingly discredited," but what if they aren't? I'm sure he would protest that they're, well, not *good.* Not *useful.* By asserting that science is an expression of class relations, he seems to be hoping that it is *merely* that. Ain't so.

Gregory Benford *Laguna Beach, California*

Dear *Foundation:* August 1985

I read Gavin Browning's article, "Scientism in Science Fiction" (Number 33, Spring '85), with some interest. I was raised a socialist in London in the heyday of Labour popularity

right after World War II; many's the conversation I heard at home about the brave new future socialism would open up. I was indoctrinated with the notion that I had a duty to advance the socialist cause through political action. And despite reaching middle-age, living in archetypal-capitalistic California, becoming a property-owner (a landlord, even) and all that, I still think of myself as a socialist, and I still believe in socialistic solutions to the world's problems.

I also write science fiction.

Therein lies the quarrel I have with Dr Browning's thesis. As a writer, I defend my license to write about any future I can imagine—socialist-utopian or not—to describe whatever characters interest me as a writer, whether I (as a political being) find their philosophies worthy or reprehensible. I resent being told I *should* write about certain things, in order to advance the millenium. That is not the province of fiction.

Unfortunately, Dr Browning has only offered a variation of a tune I hear frequently as a *woman* writer. Social critics of all persuasions seem much too eager to tell me what themes I should or should not write about. They also frequently confuse the writer with what is written. Because I may choose to depict (with some degree of identification and sensitivity) a macho, capitalistic, authoritarian male scientist who believes in the status quo does not mean I'm offering a model, nor that I necessarily think he's the Man of The Future—only of a possible future.

Requiring *any* fiction to serve political ends, it seems to me, is far more dangerous than the incorporation of "scientism" in sf.

Sheila Finch *Long Beach, California*

Dear *Foundation:* September 1985

Thanks very much for the copy of *Foundation* 33, which arrived about a week ago. I found John Dean's comments on American vampires (fictional) very interesting, although I disagree with him on some points, which is to be expected. Your reviews are much easier to read than many, and you know how I feel about reviews.

You might want to be caught up on what's going on in my work, since the interview which you published is about three years old. I've taken some of my own advice and provided myself more recreation in the form of an 18-month-old horse named Magick that I bought a year ago and have been training in the basics (how to stand tied, how to lead, how to longe, how to wear a bridle and other horse-kindergarten stuff). I drive out to Martinez four afternoons a week to work with him. On the professional front, I've sold my 33rd book and it seems that after almost five years, I'm back in the vampire business again. Tor Books has bought the reprint rights to the first four Saint-Germain books, plus contracted for three books about Olivia Clemens (Saint-Germain's lover in *Blood Games*). They will be set during the reign of Justinian I, in Rome and Constantinople; during the Third Crusade, set all over the greater Mediterranean basin; and in France from about 1635-1645. Back to the books and reading.

Looking over the interview, I recall that neither of the projects that I was waiting on at that time came to pass. That's part of the fun of free-lancing, it says here. It was only last year that things began to pick up again and I'm starting to regain some of the ground I lost there.

Your letter section was fascinating to read, and I'm impressed with the generally more eclectic view of your readers than is sometimes found with their US counterparts. Since I'm all for eclecticism, it was very cheering to read all that your readers had to say.

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro *Berkeley, California*

Dear Foundation: November 1985

It was particularly interesting to encounter a well-read European's outlook upon science fiction, past and present, in "Adventures in the Pulp Jungle," by Sam J. Lundwall in issue 34. There are, however, a few errors that need correcting.

In the first sentence, we read: "The modern history of science-fiction magazines really began in April, 1926, in New York when a Luxembourg-born immigrant launched an sf magazine filled with short stories by French, German and British writers . . ."

Not quite so: The magazine, *Amazing Stories,* did not appear *in* April, 1926; it appeared *in* March, 1926. All American science-fiction magazines have been dated ahead: monthlies, one month, bi-monthlies, two months, etc. The cover date that we see on the magazine indicates when it is to go *off*-sale, not on-sale. Not noticing that apparently recondite fact (to many people), has led to numerous errors in ascertaining just when a certain author had his or her first story published, just when a particular magazine had its first issue, etc. It gets most sticky when a "first" appears dated "January" or "February," and the publication time must be dated back to the previous year.

Again: *Amazing Stories* featured *novels,* rather than short stories, by Europeans. The first issue is dominated by the first half of Jules Verne's "Off on a Comet," and serialized novels form the bulk of the magazine's content throughout its first year.

Later, after Gernsback lost control of Experimenter Publications, in 1929, he inaugurated a new, small chain of science-fiction titles: *Science Wonder Stories, Air Wonder Stories,* and *Science Wonder Quarterly.* The first two titles were combined in 1930, to become *Wonder Stories,* and the quarterly was retitled *Wonder Stories Quarterly.* And, more important, starting in the first issue of *Science Wonder Quarterly,* Gernsback began to present readers with translations of science-fiction novels from the German and the French. Between 1929 and 1935, 15 such novels were published (although two of them might more properly be called novellas). German authors accounted for 12 of those titles, French authors the other three.

Thus the reader of the time who had no language but English, had his or her first exposure to science-fiction written by Europeans. The quality of the stories varied, true; but none of them were quite like the fast-action, heavily plotted pulp stories one found in the pulp science-fiction magazines published in the USA after Clayton Publications discovered that there was money to be made in the sf type of story—though not the Gernsback type. *Astounding Stories of Super Science* (first issue dated January 1930, but on sale in December 1929) was the original sf pulp magazine; themes from stories that Gernsback had run earlier, as well as from the classics (such as Wells and Verne) were merely poured into the action-pulp mould. But with the German and French novels presented by Hugo Gernsback, we encountered a different *tone,* quite unlike what we read in British and American science fiction. And while all the selections may not have been the best available at the time, I would require massive documentary evidence to be convinced that, as some have claimed, Gernsback systematically chose the worst.

"Modern Electrics was later changed into the *Electrical Experimenter . . .*" Not so: Gernsback sold the title, *Modern Electrics* in 1913, either before or not long after inaugurating the *Electrical Experimenter,* the first number of which appeared in April, 1913, dated May. That's not a crucial point, I agree; but why not get the record straight when it's possible? (My source is M. Harvey Gernsback.)

Page 9: "Gernsback was for many years the grand-daddy of US science fiction even picking a young sf fan, Charles Hornig, to edit a new Gernsback magazine, *Wonder Stories . . .*"

Not so, and far aside from fact: as noted above, *Science Wonder Stories* and *Air Wonder Stories* were combined to form *Wonder Stories* in 1930. Gernsback's first Managing Editor, in 1929, was David Lasser; it was when Lasser left the company in 1933 that Charles D. Hornig was picked to replace him. It's true, however, that he was a "young fan" at the time; age 17.

In reading yet again that Hugo Gernsback was a "disaster" to science fiction, I'm reminded of G.K. Chesterton's little known comment: "What is worth doing is worth doing badly, rather than not at all." (When you do see that quotation, you're likely as not *not* to see the words following the commas.) I'm not convinced that Gernsback did it so badly as to justify the extreme reactions we see to him in some circles today. But, as my comment on his presentation of translations of foreign-language science fiction shows, had he not done it, it's very likely that it would not have been done at all. Certainly not in magazines at prices that the common reader could afford. (I almost said "readily afford" before I remembered that the particular pioneering operation took place during the Depression, when many sf enthusiasts—including me—often found it difficult to scare up 25 cents for the latest issue of *Wonder Stories,* or 50 cents, for a new issue of the quarterly.)

And for all my occasional distaste for some of the pulp magazines of the 30's and 40's, we ought to remember that the highest cannot stand without the lowest. It was from the enthusiasms aroused by even such material that science fiction proliferated to a point where big book publishers decided that it was worth adding to their lists. Had there been no Hugo Gernsback, do you really think that there would nonetheless still have been a *Foundation* magazine in 1985, where literary "experts" now snipe at him—along with other, more worthwhile efforts?

Robert A. W. Lowndes *Hoboken, N.J.*

Reviews

Helliconia Summer and **Helliconia Winter**
by Brian Aldiss (*Cape, 1983, 398 pp, £8.50; Granada, 1985, 576 pp, £2.50; and Cape, 1985, 281 pp, £8.95)*

reviewed by Peter Caracciolo

> Great Mother of Aeneas, and of Love;
> Delight of mankind, and the powers above;
> Who all beneath those sprinkled drops of light
> Which slide upon the face of gloomy night,
> Wither vast regions of that liquid world
> Where groves of ships on watery hills are hurled,
> Or fruitful earth, dost bless, since 'tis by thee
> That all things live which the bright sun does see . . .

Is the genesis of C.S. Lewis's "liquid world," of the "watery hills" of *Perelandra* to be found in Rochester's rather free translation of *De Rerum Natura* I 1-5? Must we begin to consider what exactly is the place that Pope's *Essay on Man* (modelled on Lucretius) occupies in the history of British sf? The answer to such questions, I think, has to be yes. After reading Brian Aldiss's masterpiece I am persuaded that such realignments of tradition and the individual talent are inescapable. "Each writer *creates* his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future." Borges's words come to mind as one realizes that the quotations from Lucretius (Penguin version) that open and close both the *Spring* and *Winter* volumes of the *Helliconia* sequence convincingly establish a brilliant new genealogy for science fiction itself, thereby offering a necessary perspective onto the strange world delineated in the enthralling volumes of what has proved to be a conceptually impressive, weirdly poetic trilogy built on the grand scale and with much to tell us of the limits of humanity. While Lucian is the generally accepted ancestor of the genre, Brian Aldiss's characterization of sf in *Billion Year Spree* as "the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge" has led him inevitably, in quest of the prototype, back beyond his first dubious choice, the Gothic novel, to the greatest philosophical epic of antiquity. What modern sf typically requires is both scientific fidelity in speculation and imaginative adventurousness—exactly the qualities Bertrand Russell finds in the Greek atomists, whose acute observations and bold theories, reshaped by Plato and Epicurus, were sublimely embodied in *De Rerum Natura.*

With vastly more success than in his earlier experiment *Barefoot in the Head,* Aldiss here attempts to emulate Joyce in the use of a classical model for his own masterpiece: Lucretius inspires much of the characterization, plot, setting, imagery and themes of *Helliconia Spring, Summer* and *Winter.* After outlining the atomic vortices structuring the universe, the formation of Sun, Moon and Earth, Lucretius provides in Book V a celebrated account of the evolution of primitive man through technological and moral change into a precarious state of civilization threatened by climate, disease and war; from this very section of *De Rerum Natura* Aldiss extracts the colophons that frame his own narratives, thus emphasizing such affinities between sf and Lucretius as: the zestful

inventiveness with which the Roman poet speculates about the possibilities of curious life-forms on planets elsewhere in the cosmos; the casting of an intellectual (rather than the stoical warrior Hercules) as hero of Lucretius's revolutionary poem. Not surprisingly, Plato's fable of the cinematic cave lies close to the surface of each volume: the underworld theocracy of *Spring,* the satellite "Avernus" of *Summer,* the immense Piranesi-like stone wheel of *Winter* in Aldiss's own tales within tales. *De Rerum Natura* re-echoes with praise for Epicurus as the moral leader who released mankind from the prison of those superstitious fears that had turned life into a hell on earth, the hero who brought humanity into a growing awareness of a whole series of greater realities culminating in an almost mystical communion with the divine—a sequence paralleled in *Helliconia* by a succession of culture-bearers, both indigenous and alien. Significantly, an increasing proportion of these are women who play a vital role in Aldiss's cyclic history of the rebirth of society climbing back from a cave-age culture through feudalism to a renaissance of scientific humanism and then the decline and fall of empire, since as with *De Rerum Natura,* civilization crumbles before a plague though paradoxically on Helliconia the epidemic has benign effects too. This *yang-yin* context justifies the blend here, as in Lucretius, of obsolete and nonce words; for alongside the figurative extension of scientific jargon, enantiomorphic simile, emblem, the archaisms and verbal coinages do vividly evoke the wonderful metamorphoses of landscape, the grotesquely alternate ecosystems and bizarrely opposed sentient species created in the harsh seasonal extremes resulting from the vagaries of a binary star system.

Aldiss's touch can be amusingly deft: the supernatural machinery, the remote and ineffectual gods of Epicurus are here demoted into the scientists aboard the observing space station "Avernus" which dismantles its Helliconia data "atom by atom" for transmission back to a questionably superior Earth. A delight in word play flourishes in both: Lucretius is fascinated by the thought that as the different letters of the alphabet (*elementa*) through varying combinations build up into different words, so atoms (*elementa*) create all the phenomena of the world; Aldiss exploits the anagramatic potentialities in the name "Helliconia" which is semiotically considered an "icon" of both "hell" and "Helicon," the first element of both "heliocentric" and "helico-virus": all four representing crucial factors in this planetary equation. As in *Finnegans Wake,* where Joyce's "tris-turned initials, the cluekey to a world room beyond the room whorled," HCE and ALP, recur in ever new and meaningful combinations, the lettering of the currency and the nomenclature of the Helliconian protagonists are also thought-provoking cyphers. The design of the "Roon" coins recalls diagrams of molecular structures; in the names of the different pieces, too, as in those of almost all the principal characters, are incorporated, spiral fashion, acronyms of the genetic code; though tellingly in the case only of the priest and the scholar does one find transfer RNA linked with information DNA, "the double *helix*" lately discovered to be the biological "key to life."

"Novels," Aldiss has recently reminded us, "are messages, not only to the reader, but to the self." And not least the book design, one might add, since the dust-cover illustrations of Aldiss's trilogy when decoded can sometimes prove most illuminating. For the wrapper to their handsomely printed *Winter,* the American publishers Atheneum have used a reproduction of a finely atmospheric painting by Albert Bierstadt, "The Sierra Nevada in California"; its indisputable grandeur notwithstanding, no terrestrial mountainscape can represent the awesome terrain Aldiss has here imagined. Happily,

Jonathan Cape have followed (what from its extraordinary aptness one can only assume to be) the author's recommendation, basing the cover designs of the British publication on the fantastic creations of those North European painters who in the Renaissance invented a pictorial genre quite as revolutionary as sf, landscape painting. Of the three beautiful Cape illustrations, the first (for *Spring*) seems the most informative, if teasingly so. At first glance no more than a fitting vision of the dawn sun warming up a sub-arctic world, this image is eventually identified as a detail only, from the top right hand corner of Albrecht Altdorfer's monumental painting of the sun setting over Alexander the Great's defeat of Darius at the River Issus. Reminiscent of the seige of some city during the Crusades, the concentric spirals of tumultuous masses of horsemen in the foreground and middle of the picture are at once dwarfed and echoed by the background panorama of swirling rivers and gulfs, islands, promontories, fiords and mountains, which in turn are both reflected and amplified by Turneresque vortices of cloud, the "cosmic struggle" of a Van Gogh sun, moon and stars. *Die Alexanderschlacht* (Alte Pinakothek, Munich) is an unforgettable imaginary world outside historical time and space, in which individuals (even the rival "kings of kings") are less important than humanity's kinship with nature, Altdorfer's Mankind is allied to the fauna, the primordial forest, the rock of ages and above all the weather. Almost as if hovering on its wing-like drapes over these multitudinous convolutions hangs a framed tablet carrying a Latin inscription—the image of the space station Avernus that records the triumphs and convulsions of Helliconia, so much so that it is difficult to resist the idea that here in Altdorfer's masterpiece Aldiss found inspiration for his own *chef d'oeuvre*—at least in part. (Did he not collaborate with Mike Wilks on that visual jeu d'esprit *Pile*!) Moreover, the relatively insignificant role played by the individual in this analytical landscape (which appears to reflect Altdorfer's experiences during the peasant's revolt and the subsequent wars of religion), matching the smallness of the figures in the vast panoramas of space and time surveyed by Lucretius, allows Aldiss to suggest not only Viconian social patterns spiralling from theocracy through monarchy and democracy to anarchy—and back again—but also to gesture towards political climates nearer home: from Hot War to Cold War to (God forbid) Nuclear Winter.

Four years before Aldiss's trilogy began publication, the Altdorfer painting had been used also on the front cover of *The Past We Share,* E.L. Ranelagh's excellent anthology (with commentary) of tales from collections oriental and mediaeval, such as the *Panchatantra,* the *Bible, Persian Tales, Disciplina Clericalis,* stories that illustrate the eastern ancestry of western folk literature. Similarly in *Helliconia* names often have an oddly Central Asian look: "TatromanAdala" or "Bardol CaraBansity." Indeed, given the climatic extremes endured on Helliconia by humanity in its perennial conflict with the non-human intelligent species of minotauresque phagors, the *nomenklatura* of the ancipital hordes is significant: the "kzahhn Hrr Brahl Yrpt" is plainly related to Genghis Khan and his successors, those elements in those Mongol storms that burst over Iran, swept around the Himalayas before settling down to come to fruition as the enlightened Yuan dynasty in China and the resplendent Mughal Empire. Not for nothing did Aldiss spend four years' war service in the East Indies.

Turning to Hinduism to help decode the enigmatic mutations of Helliconian life, Aldiss explains the plague that paradoxically enables humanity to survive the appalling seasonal changes:

> These two great diseases to which the phagor tick played vector were in reality one disease, that Shiva of diseases, that destroyer and saviour carried on its bloodied sword, survival for mankind in the extravagant conditions of the planet. (*Spring*, pp. 314-15)

When too in *Helliconia Spring* there is talk of Wutra who banished warmth from the frozen planet, memories are aroused of Brahmin doctrines that Indra was the Vedic slayer of Vritra the Drought Demon: "the spring, summer, rainy seasons—they are those who vanquish Vritra the water-confining snake." In *Rig Veda* X, 925, there is mention too of a deity as ancipital as the phagors of Helliconia: "Rudra, storm god, riding the whirlwind, puts the water in motion." Rudra's role in the south of India is taken by Shiva the god of Bull and Moon. The Wild Huntsman of India is related to Harlequin, and, as Aldiss clearly knows, *Commedia dell'Arte* has not only its reincarnated *avatars* but at least one spaceman.

Not genetics alone obviously, culture too has its codes; genres, like myths, are mental signals enabling creator and audience to adjust themselves to new challenging world views. The masterpieces of Altdorfer and Lucretius anticipate that shift towards the encyclopedic evident also in Aldiss's trilogy. *Helliconia* is a fascinating mixture of literary and non-literary kinds, containing elements of tragi-comedy, farce, love interest, glimpses of the book of the dead, of fairy tale, epic and the heroic, barbarian as well as scientific fact, speculation and faith. As such, fans may be inclined to link *Helliconia* with *Dune,* but Aldiss deserves to be associated with better things, especially since to find its like one must range far afield. Parallels though are to be found: among capacious works combining realism with fantasy there are *The Arabian Nights*; for historical sweep the *Waverley* novels; as to sf, Stapledon's *Star Maker* springs to mind, especially its symbiotic species and telepathic space communication—despite, that is, passages in *Helliconia* that sink to the level of the concluding scenes of Shaw's *Back to Methuselah.* Having this encyclopedic character, *Helliconia* clearly belongs to that literary category usefully labelled by Northrop Frye "anatomy." Was the generic schema of the mythoi of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter (i.e. Comedy, Romance, Tragedy, Irony and Satire), as adumbrated by Frye in his now classic *Anatomy of Criticism,* yet another influence upon Aldiss's trilogy of seasons? I wouldn't put it past him, there is such delightfully Joycean wit to the texture of the trilogy that puns may be expected to inform *Helliconia's* very anatomy. There is more than a hint or two. There is the implication of the name given to the intelligent species opposed to Helliconian humanity: "phagor" suggests not only cannibalism but also "phagocyte," a white corpuscle of the blood which has the power of protecting the system against infection by absorbing and destroying pathogenic microbes—even when as here they are as endearing as Billy Xiao Pin, the Earthman dissident from the space station. Again there is a tendency for the heroic figures in this Lucretian epic to be anatomists or at any rate associated with that trade. Not least in spreading the ecological message of Jim Lovelock's *Gaia,* for the epigraph to *Summer* Aldiss draws on the metaphysical poetry of the Renaissance, a period like our own in that "the new philosophie calls all in doubt." As with the creations of Lucretius and Altdorfer, so again *Helliconia* is far from coming off badly by comparison with George Herbert's exquisite evocation of "Man," the microcosm of the universe:

> Man is all symmetry . . .
> And all to all the world besides . . .
> For head with foot hath private amity
> And both with moon and tides . . .
> Ah mighty love! Man is one world and hath
> Another to attend him.

Kiteworld
by Keith Roberts *(Gollancz, 1985, 288pp, £8.95)*

reviewed by M. John Harrison

There has been, we are to assume, a nuclear war. It was some time ago. Great kites stream all day above the Realm, on the same prevailing westerlies which have spared it the worst of the fallout. They are decorated with powerful symbols. From them, observers keep watch for demons, coming out of the east. With one powerful cut down through both concepts, Keith Roberts identifies the assumption common to radar early warning systems and those prayer wheels, streamers, firework displays and gargoyles which used to protect Tibet from the supernatural but always failed to protect it against itself. This is a good perception or metaphor, which has got down into every level of the work. Its scene is the whole Roberts: the Realm is southern England.

After that, *Kiteworld* is not much of a book.

Roberts has transferred the man-lifting kite with love and precision from its place in the real history of aerial reconnaissance. But then he has lost concentration as he so often seems to do, and been less successful with the people who fly the kites, or the people it is their duty to foster. As in some of his other work, the effort has gone into the blueprint.

At the time of its hasty evolution from the Royal Flying Corps, T.E. Lawrence was concerned that the RAF become something more than a military institution. Pivotal to it, he thought, would be that self-motivated individual the skilled worker; he saw the necessity of an internal structure based on this. Further: people who flew or maintained aeroplanes, he thought, would need a greater sense of responsibility than ordinary soldiers; they should be encouraged to develop it; they should carry it back into society, to society's benefit. (He thought the Air Marshals would organize this for him. His disabuse, from personal experience, and his subsequent depression, are graphically conveyed in *The Mint*.) The romantic-philosophical core of this idea was taken up and popularized enthusiastically by writers like Nevil Shute, where it is summed up as nicely as you like in the title *Trustee from the Tool Room.*

Models like these are more useful generically and historically than the obvious one—Kipling and "The Night Mail"—because in *Kiteworld* Roberts, showing us a similar institution in its moment of vertigo, presents it, the way you would traditionally present the RFC towards the end of the First War (Derek Robinson's *Goshawk Squadron* comes forcibly to mind), as exposed, lacking resources, its self-confidence shot and its self-image wavering.

The Kitemen wonder if there are, after all, any demons in the east; and what could they do if there were, with a percussion pistol and an exorcism? They are losing their fear of the mutants which haunt the badlands at the edge of the Realm—shadow humans of a feeble blue translucency, melting like jelly babies in the sun—as they recognize in it an inherited communal guilt. Increasingly they are aware of the moral and social corruption of the society they protect (a corruption expressed in the sexual habits of Lady Kerosin, cleverly linked in parallel with and contrast to the symbols of female sexuality painted on the Cody kites to hypnotize demons "shaped like fish"). They retreat from this confusion into the certainties of their profession, into an obsessive dedication to its machinery, forms and skills. Both confusion and retreat tend to be described in terms of adolescence: the central

structural unit of the *Kiteworld* fit-up is a kind of repeating Bildungsroman in which similar boys make similar discoveries, maturity being represented as arriving by catastrophe and adult life thereafter as a dying-away.

This might have worked well but it is undercut at every turn by the meanness of the generic message. Genre is a weak bag of tricks, its poverty of artifice organic, automatic, determined by the generic values. In the science fiction order of priorities, for instance, explanation is valued above verisimilitude, encouraging rubbish like this:

> "But I needn't tell a Kitemaster a thing like that," he said.
>
> I clasped my hands behind me. I said, "Refresh my memory."
>
> . . . "Flying a Cody rig isn't an easy business," he snapped . . . "The Pilot takes up five hundred foot of line," he said. "Less, if we can find stable air. The Lifter Kites come next . . . The Lifter's job is to carry the main cable; the cable's job is to steady the Lifters. It's all to do with balance. Everything's to do with balance." He glanced sideways once more; but if he expected a comment on this truism, he was disappointed.

It would be useless to point out that a pretence of dialogue is not necessary to carry this information (or that, if it was, greater attention might have been paid to the tone of experts when they talk about a skill they have in common, and the kinds of things they are likely to say to one another): the "disguise" of information as dialogue is a convention—or vice—of the genre, bad technique enshrined as purpose. The tragedy is that by the time this exchange takes place, we already know so much about the Kiteworld. By assembling invented details to look as if they have been selected from an established matrix (a "reality"), Roberts has already created the whole, authentic feel of it; he has *assumed* its realness, on our behalf.

Even the verisimilitude of the travel book has to be composed, assembled with patience and skill so that the aspect represents the whole. It is the mark of a very competent writer indeed to be able to turn metonymy against itself and by a further extension of the scandal contrive from the completely unreal, as if he had travelled in a dream. The fact that Roberts succeeds every time he can be bothered to do this shows that it is the genre which is at fault, not the author—science fiction which can't write, not Keith Roberts—but it makes his laziness less easy to forgive. We are used to Roberts as an exemplar. There was nothing lazy about "The Grain Kings," "Weihnachtabend" or "Missa Privata"; they remain some of the sharpest templates we have for a mature science fiction.

" 'No problems,' he said. 'You run a tight base, Raoul.' " Before they were forced to say things like this for the reader, these mouthpieces looked very like people. What they reveal, as soon as they are encouraged to act again, is a threefold entrapment of their humanity. They are caught between the demands of their personalities, their profession, and the ideology their profession serves. This is Roberts' own obsessive subject matter, the crisis behind the ferocious absurdism of "Monkey & Pru & Sal" or the tenderness of *The Chalk Giants*. He shows the Kitemen what, from our perspective as readers, it is easy to see: that they are as responsible for shaping the culture which lies under the kites as for protecting it. They make the world they live in, more literally than they think—" 'What has been assembled can be disassembled'." The demons without are a dogmatical, empty canon, at best emblematic of those within. What he is able to show *us* about the Kitemen—and about Kitemen in general—is this: the worst thing in the world for a human being who has dedicated himself to an institution is the discovery that from now on he must maintain his world by individual effort of definition.

T.E. Lawrence evaded this discovery by a continual renewal of his obsessive commitment; Kipling, in his Imperial airship, never so much as looked up from the job.

Keith Roberts' very cleverness with genre has often been a liability to him, causing him, like Henry Treece, T.H. White or Rosemary Sutcliffe, to write something difficult to place: in its direct engagement with the world too raw to be precisely sf or fantasy or a historical novel, yet too much of all these things to admit him to the "main stream" (I don't mean the General Fiction shelf) where you always suspect he belongs. Nevertheless, something fruitful has always come out of the mix.

This time, perhaps because the quality of the writing and structure is so low, the genres seem that much more generic, and muddled rather than mixed. We aren't sure whether we're reading a post-disaster or a political satire; a Bildungsroman—fragmented, repetitive and disguised but nevertheless dealing with deeply-felt material—or one of those coy Heinlein tales of teenage policemen.

Once having opted wholeheartedly for the genre he gets no help from his innate honesty and intensity, either. Victoria Glendinning, we learn, was moved to describe *Pavane* as "a cross between Thomas Hardy and Russell Hoban." While this indicates nicely the poverty of her models—or anyway the paradigm from which they are drawn—it also points in the other direction, straight at the major infirmity of in-genre science fiction criticism. Keith Roberts *is* a bit like Thomas Hardy, inasmuch as Hardy was nothing if not human and rather rawly, rather desperately aware of it. The genre now has some small critical apparatus for detecting this, but none for identifying it as central. The hierarchy of values precludes work in which it is central from being work at all. This renders *Kiteworld* even more of a limbo than Roberts, I suspect, intended.

West of Eden
by Harry Harrison *(Granada, 1984, 578 pp, £8.95 hc, £2.50 pb)*

reviewed by Mary Gentle

West of Eden begins with traditional sf speculation of the what-if variety: what if a meteor hadn't struck Earth, altered the climate, and killed off the dinosaurs? (Who said it *had*? Tune in next week for yet another academic theory . . .) You wouldn't believe anyone could do the Desmond Morris/Robert Ardrey/Lionel Tiger anthropological theory in an uncritical way these days, but here it is—macho Stone Age hunter-gatherers, male-bonding and all. Not a blind bit of notice of the half-bricks (feminist, academic, and otherwise) that have been heaved from the sidelines by Elaine Morris, Sally Slocum, et al. Here in *West of Eden* are hunters who hunt all the time, not as supplement to a mainly gathered vegetable diet; sky-father spirits with no hint of previous Mother-cults; male shaman, with no hint that women may have been the keepers of culture . . . Well, you say, there's no evidence for the latter. True; but there's no evidence for the former; not even observation—the "primitive" societies studied today are little guide to what might have been then, since present-day tribal societies exist, in material terms, on the fringes of the world, and, in cultural terms, in a world made over by more than one complex ideology.

Okay, so *West of Eden* begins by positing something that didn't happen—the evolution of intelligent dinosaurs together with human beings—so why shouldn't it have its own version of how men *might* have been in that hypothetical world? No reason why not.

However, it might be a little more interesting if the humans didn't follow the me-mighty-hunter cliché quite so precisely. Speculation can be put to variant purposes: to explore alternatives and question basic premises, or to legitimize an existing situation. Sf is the former (in theory), *West of Eden* is the latter (in practice). The characters talk in something one remove from Tarzanspeak, that is, an unelided archaic style, with the occasional modern American phrase plonked down in the middle of it. The hero's mates sound like nothing so much as an anthropologically "respectable" Conan the Barbarian. And while we're talking about the anthropologically respectable, it's a curious fact that in *West of Eden* all the Humans are male—with the exception of the Hero's disfigured girlfriend, another subsidiary character with unrealized possibilities—and all the Yilanè are female. There's the seeds of something interesting here about the link between biology and sex-roles, since male Yilanè incubate the eggs of the young. Unfortunately, what it comes out as is a simplistic equation: Good Guys = individualist warrior Males, Bad Guys = communal intriguing Females.

Oh gawd . . .

Why these complaints? *West of Eden* is being marketed as what I think *Locus* recently referred to as a "breakthrough book," that is, a work by a *genre* author aimed for the mass non-sf audience, and for the bestseller lists. So it ought to be better. Better than what? Better than the standard, right-wing, well-researched and psychologically schizophrenic sf that the *genre* produces so much of. It ought also to be a couple of steps above *Clan of the Cave Bear* (although that did have its moments).

Come to think of it, *West of Eden* has its moments too, and they mostly occur when the narrative shifts from tribal hunter-gatherer humans to the intelligent hominid reptile Yilanè. If it's legitimate to compare one medium with another, then *West of Eden* has a startling amount in common with *V* (otherwise known as "Nazi Lizards from Space Invade Los Angeles"), *V*, of glorious memory. The resemblance being that the tv series also relentlessly plugged the heroics of its noble human Resistance organization, and bored the pants off all and sundry. There was only ever one reason to watch: the chief lizard villainess Diana. If things got boring, you could always rely on Diana to be poisoning a superior officer, or supping goldfish in brandy-glasses with a side-dish of white mice and tarantulas, or interring someone alive, angling for promotion, or seducing her latest toy-boy Lieutenant with that chin-down Lauren Bacall smoulder. Likewise in *West of Eden* it's Vaintè, dictator of the Yilanè's new North American settlement, who walks away with the action—Vaintè, who feels a deep (and some would say natural) repugnance towards humans, who slaughters them at every turn; who is treacherous and autocratic and still manages to come off with the undoubted honours as heroine.

The problem is that she isn't supposed to.

The humans are there to be heroic, to suffer and win through to victory through their noble individualism. There's even a group of pacifist-individualist Yilanè, the Daughters of Life, to throw the hierarchic authoritarianism of the other Yilanè into sharp relief. It doesn't work that way. The Daughters of Life are almost as much of a pain in the reptile rectum as Vaintè thinks they are. The humans are strictly one-dimensional Hunters and Shamans and Proud Mothers of Sons, and the rest of the crew from Central Casting. Anyone with an eye for where the dramatic action lies would have junked them and stuck with Vaintè's machiavellianism, for which one feels the morally dubious admiration that unstoppable dictators often excite. The Yilanè connive, gain allies, fight adversaries,

suffer defeat and victory—do all the things that make a good novel. Beside that, the human's narrative of being massacred, massacring in return, and coming forth with a super-weapon to attack the lizard Visitors—sorry, Yilanè—pales into insignificance.

Leaving the joys of the pulp media aside for a moment, there is a character in *West of Eden* that could have been a real character, and that's Kerrick: a child of the hunters, captured at the age of eight and raised by the Yilanè, who escapes back to his people, the Tanu. Kerrick is a "bridge," a human who thinks like a Yilanè, who can also see the good in both aspects of the Tanu: the nomad hunters and the city-farmers. Except that Kerrick is also one-dimensional. He feels hate for the Yilanè and love for humans and displays no qualms at all about genocide—so few qualms that one could make a case for his being totally schizoid, all his emotions (divided between species) repressed, and so controlling him. One waits for the explosive realization, the psychic shock, but it never comes. Kerrick remains the macho son-fathering right-wing hero.

Which is not to say that's a peculiar characteristic of "right-wing" writers (to use a rule-of-thumb classification). After all, the last time anything of this precise nature came up, it was, not Tarzan, but Mowgli—Kipling's changeling child, caught not only between human and alien (talking animals are as alien as Yilanè, and vice versa) but between Indian culture and the English Raj. Mowgli's realization that he is always Outsider, neither one thing nor the other, is painful and complex and frightening. Kerrick's is non-existent.

There used to be a classification in anthropology, of "simple" and "complex" societies, until it became apparent that most tribal societies are as complex as the complex industrial Western societies that study them. *West of Eden*'s tribes are "simple" in the sense of being simplistic, and so is the rationale behind the novel. For one thing, it has an idiot plot; for another, it ignores the resonances of the symbols it uses—and so, like Kerrick, is controlled by them. Regarding the idiot plot: no one as ruthless as the Yilanè would have failed to see that the best way to destroy an infestation of humans is through disease. *Eden*'s tribes aren't disease-ravaged, but then this is the Western-industrial male's fantasy Eden, in more sensese than one. The novel recognizes this by having a Yilanè scientist die because she refuses to tailor a virus to kill humans. Now the Yilanè have a biological technology, they grow cities and boats and even guns from genetically-tailored animals. It seems logical, therefore, that there would be many Yilanè competent in doing this, and that Vaintè would have gone through them until she found one that would cooperate. Of course, the human denizens of this USA would have a hard time being noble guerrillas in that eventuality. They can manage it nicely when Vaintè tries to wipe them out via a military campaign.

Which brings us to point two, and symbols. *Eden* can't decide whether the symbol at base is the noble revolutionaries of 1776 socking it to the musket-toting British, in which case it's a fantasy of the USA being retained by its native population (no, don't even *ask* about the American Indians); or whether this is the freedom-loving individualist USA being invaded from the Old World by an evil empire of cold-blooded, communal, treacherous, baby-slaughtering Bad Guys. (Hello, tovaritch.) In which latter case the genocidal ending of the story is far too uncomfortably Promethean, not to say nuclear. It's also worth noting that the "non-leaders" of the humans display the same hierarchical power-structure as the Yilanè dictatorship, for all that the novel claims otherwise. There may be an intention in *West of Eden* to have social organizations and different biologies

contrasted, so that the reader can draw their own conclusions about "human" and "Yilanè," but that would require a different built-in and author-approved response to the ending.

Mind you, we may get another ending yet. As with the first series of *V,* Diana—sorry, Vaintè—escapes to fight another day. I guess it's back to the bad old days of cheering on the villains and hissing the heroes. Which is, when you consider the amount of imaginative work put into the Yilanè's biology, social organization, life-cycle and language more of a pity than might at first be thought.

Robots and Empire
by Isaac Asimov *(Doubleday, 1985, 383 pp, $16.95; Granada, 1985, 383 pp, £9.95)*

reviewed by Douglas Barbour

What an institution we have in Isaac Asimov! Needless to say, this new novel by the good doctor will shoot up the bestseller lists this Fall, just as the latest Dune saga did last summer, especially since it has something for just about every reader who has ever enjoyed any of Asimov's various series, the Foundation novels, the Robot stories, or the Lije Bailey and R. Daneel Olivaw trilogy. Asimov, you see, is tying up the loose ends in his *oeuvre,* and are there ever a lot of loose ends to tie up.

Asimov began the process a few years ago with the publication of *Foundation's Edge,* the conclusion of which implied that perhaps some robots had had an historical impact on the development of the Galactic Empire which the Second Foundation was striving to preserve, and that those robots had developed mental powers equal to or more powerful than even those of the initiates of the Second Foundation. Next he moved back a number of eons to give us some hints as to how Elijah Bailey and thus his robot partner, R. Daneel, as well, had, in the early centuries of humanity's emigration to the stars, perceived the need for a greater seeding of settlers from Earth on habitable worlds throughout the galaxy. By the end of *The Robots of Dawn,* Asimov had created the necessary elements for a novel in which the actual program for humanity's creation of a galactic empire could be worked out, if only in a preliminary fashion. All this required a lot of ingenuity on his part as he had not originally written the various series with any apparent thought to uniting them. But by now it seems clear that some time in the recent past he decided he wanted to make of his major novels a unified, even visionary, whole. And, by space, he is going to do so, somehow or other.

Robots and Empires takes some further steps in that direction (yet also leaves room for at least one more sequel). Set 200 years after *The Robots of Dawn,* with Elijah Bailey long dead, it deals with the efforts of Bailey's Spacer-world lover, Lady Gladia, and the two robots, R. Daneel and the telepathic R. Giskard, to prevent Bailey's long-ago adversary, Dr. Amadiro, from destroying the Earth and its "barbarian" hordes, thus preventing the eventual settlement of the galaxy. For readers who have always enjoyed Asimov's ratiocinative science fiction, this new novel will be a delight. For others, well, there is still a kind of old-fashioned charm to his storytelling.

There is, of course, a kind of suspense: Daneel and Giskard know that Amadiro is likely planning something to prevent the new Settler worlds from gaining ground on the original Spacer worlds, which have cut all their connections to Mother Earth, and which,

if the disappearance of all the Spacer humans from Solaria is any indication, have already begun their decline. The two civilizations are utterly different: the Spacers live extremely long lives coddled by their many robot servitors; the Settlers are short-lived but have a cultural energy lacking among the Spacers—they are still explorers. The Lady Gladia, who has inherited Daneel and Giskard, proves a surprising exception to the Spacer norm, however, possibly because of her association with Bailey so long ago, and in her fortieth decade she finds a mission: to unite humanity once more in its mission to the stars. Will she succeed? Will the robots be able to prevent disaster? These are the questions the book presents, as she begins to work with and eventually falls in love with one of Bailey's descendents (from Baileyworld, of course, and a Trader), proving that various kinds of people can get along if they are willing to try. As she travels with D.J. Bailey to Solaria, Baileyworld, and even the crowded "Caves of Steel" (which is how Bailey refers to them) of Earth, Asimov indulges his desire to describe and discuss various kinds of socialization and enculturation (as well as his desire to *present* the earlier novels as a given part of the future history he is pulling together).

There is suspense of a kind, then, but very little of the action usually found in novels where "the future of humanity" is at stake. But then Asimov has never been that interested in battle; rather he is fascinated by problem solving, and so it is a series of problems which he sets his human protagonists and his robot heroes to solve. Most of the novel is made up of long conversations, many of the most important between the two robots. Asimov, as I said, is a ratiocinative writer, most interested in explanations and in working ideas out in full. And since the two robots are engaged in working out the possibilities of the future of humanity (as already inscribed in previous Asimov novels), plus a *new* Law of Robotics which takes precedence over the famous Three Laws, they do a lot of talking.

Yet somehow, it all works. The machinery groans and clanks, but the engine does turn over and the whole thing moves along with stolid grace. Despite Asimov's inability to write emotional scenes with much conviction—he has real trouble with the flashback love scene between Lady Gladia and Elijah, and can only use euphemistic humour to suggest the growing love between her and D.J.—he nevertheless achieves some truly affecting moments—especially with the robots (Daneel's deathbed scene with Elijah; the surprising finale), which is perhaps only proper for such a scientifically-oriented sf writer. Their conversations are deliberately unemotional, yet Asimov manages to imply that in simply trying to think like human beings they begin to feel like them too: this is no small achievement. So, while there is much one could criticize about *Robots and Empire,* including the hubris of its author's apparently sincere attempt to make of his scattered writings a single *work,* nevertheless Asimov's grand vision of humanity's vast settlement of the galaxy finally wins the reader over. He may finally be a terribly prosaic visionary, but he is a visionary nonetheless.

Null-A Three
by A.E. van Vogt *(Sphere, 1985, 215 pp, £1.95)*

reviewed by George Hay

The World of Null-A first appeared in *Astounding* in 1945 in serial form. It was the first hard-cover science-fiction novel published by a major publisher (Simon and Schuster)

after World War II. A sequel, *The Players of Null-A* (also published as *The Pawns of Null-A*) was serialized in *Astounding* in 1948/49. With *Null-A Three* the series is complete. That, of course, may seem a rash assumption on my part, in a world where bet-hedging publishers seem ever more insistent on having name authors produce "Great-Grandson of—" sequelae for evermore. However, there are internal reasons backing my assumption. In the first place, we have the author's word for it that only the insistence of his wife and of his French publisher finally got him to write the novel. More importantly, the book ties up satisfactorily the loose ends left dangling by its predecessors, so that it and they can now be read as one long narrative, thus closing the whole thing out.

The whole work is used to dramatize the benefits of General Semantics, a linguistic discipline formulated by Alfred Korzbybski in his book, *Science and Sanity* published in 1933, and promoted since his death by the Institute of General Semantics. The Null-A novels thus present a simon-pure archetype of sf idea-promotion, and it is in this light that I shall be treating them here. Lovers of literature can exit left at this point, since Van Vogt not only has no interest in style—as distinct from the mechanics of plotting—but, as far as he is concerned, firmly repudiates it. His repudiators must find it distracting that the first two books have been continuously in print since they came out, and that *World* . . . at least, has been translated into nine languages. Jacques Sadoul, the French publisher mentioned above, has stated that the latter, all by itself, created the French science-fiction market. Surely there is something here that needs looking into?

But first, *Null-A Three* . . .

Those familiar with the earlier books—and anyone not thus familiar really should read them before embarking on the third—will recall that Gilbert Gosseyn, clone descendant of survivors of a vast catastrophe in some distant galaxy, and recipient on earth of Null-A training enabling him to use his nervous system as some sort of matter-transmitter, has managed to kill off the villainous Follower, and to hold off from Earth and Venus the ambitions of Enro, head of the Greatest Empire and master of space-fleets innumerable. As *Null-A Three* opens, Gosseyn finds himself awake in some sort of coffin-like container. His original body having been killed off in the course of the first novel, he now realizes that he must somehow have been "translated" into yet another of the clone-bodies stored away through the millennia as some kind of—well, life-insurance. This makes him Gosseyn Three. This is confirmed when he makes telepathic contact with Gosseyn Two, currently still recovering somewhere in Outer Space from an attempt by a group to "jump" to the original home galaxy, origin of the human race. (I must warn you that if you are the kind of person who thinks "small is beautiful," you should stay away from Van Vogt).

Let me keep this short. Gosseyn Three is now imprisoned in a ship belonging to yet another human group, the Dzan, run in feudal manner by a boy-Emperor, his beautiful Queen Mother and sundry courtiers. Somewhere in the offing is the battleship of the Troogs, genuine aliens, and Up to No Good. All he now has to do is, working in telepathic conjunction with Gosseyn Two, to settle the hash of the Tzan courtiers, take the hand of the Queen-Mother, arrange a draw with Enro, and use his super-human powers to despatch the Troogs back whence they came. Child's play, really. The breathing-spaces between these operations is spent explaining to one and all the civilizing effects of General Semantics.

Having already dispensed with lovers of English usage, we can also now dispense with

lovers of Samuel Delany, Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, et al. There is no Deep Mythos here, no recall to Paradise, lost or otherwise, no swan-song of the soul. The dialogue and emotional and sexual to-ings and fro-ings are about on a level with those of a Raymond Chandler novel, only less refined, and the writing style is of the "and then he . . . and then he . . ." variety. So where the hell is the attraction? Whence the success of these stories? How comes it about that, read and re-read, they still evoke that unique thrill that only Van Vogt can produce?

Partly, of course, it is the plotting. Van Vogt is a systems writer if ever there was one—you can read about that in interviews with and articles about him—and, repugnant though many find this, he has refined to a fine art the skill of keeping the reader hanging on for the next even more incredible development. But how account for the fact that, having once worked one's way through the incredible intricacies of the plotting, one can still want to go through it again?

One answer, of course, is the sheer magnificence of the sweep of these tales through time and space, the sheer *largesse*. This is counterpointed by the abrupt contrasts of scale. In the first novel, for instance, Gosseyn at a given moment finds himself helped by an hotel clerk. Naturally, we think of the latter as a mere third assistant spear-carrier, and forget all about him. Yet, in *Null-A Three*, here is Gosseyn, pausing between intergalactic dashes, and going to considerable trouble to see that this man gets a better job and has his sex-life sorted out. Coming from the man who, not long since, has just put paid to the parsecs-long Battle of the Sixth Decant, there is something quite sweet and old-fashioned about this. I say this in all seriousness: Van Vogt is no E.E. Smith—he *does* care about individuals.

Which takes us to General Semantics. Can I remind those old enough to remember, and inform those young enough not to, that in those Golden Forties of science fiction, readers the world over, like the young Wordsworth, believed that it was only a matter of time before the application of science to the human mind would transform life for the better before our very eyes? Where would Dianetics have been without John Campbell? Where would General Semantics have been without Van Vogt? Scattered throughout these three novels are statements such as:

> NULL-ABSTRACTS. In making a statement about an object or an event, an individual "abstracts" only a few of its characteristics. If he says, "That chair is brown!" he should mean that brownness is one of its qualities, and he should be aware, as he speaks, that it has many other qualities. "Consciousness of abstracting" constitutes one of the main differences between a person who is semantically trained and one who is not.

or:

> Children, immature adults and animals "identify." Whenever a person reacts to a new or changing situation as if it were an old and unchanging one, he or she is said to be identifying. Such an approach is Aristotelian.

Accurate though such statements are, they give only the faintest hint of the truly polymathic nature of *Science and Sanity*, a work which, if dropped on your foot, would hospitalize you, and which covers everything from differential equations to colloid chemistry. The keynote of the work is that all and any of these sciences are being explicated *in terms of the individual human being*, as distinct from classes of human beings: a rare thing, indeed. Less intimidating books have been written on G.S. (as we call it in the trade): those by S. Hayakawa and Stuart Chase, for example. Serious teachers in the sciences and humanities, however, would do best to go straight for Korzybski—plus,

of course, the occasional papers and proceedings of the Institute, details of which can be obtained from: The Institute of General Semantics, Office of the Director, 3029 Eastern Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21224, USA. My own correspondence with the Society elicits the statement that G.S. works "are still used in many high schools and colleges in the United States. Scores of other books in the fields of English, Speech-Communication, Language, Arts and related areas contain a chapter or more on general semantics principles and applications . . . at Harvard Business School it was instrumental in helping introduce the case method of study and the many practical findings resulting from the use of this method over the years." Well, there you are, then: you can mark that one up for Applied science fiction.

I cannot refrain from some comment on the historical issues here involved, the more so since in the age of the micro-chip the use of historical comparison seems increasingly to be regarded in the same light as the use of the essay or the sonnet—elegant, but irrelevant. The vast majority, I believe, of those who were impressed by Van Vogt's presentation of Korzybski, must have come to the conclusion that Aristotle was some ancient buffer entirely bound up by his strictly-of-its-own-time system of logic. Korzybski himself gave the Stagyrite more credit than that, but most readers got their G.S. from Van Vogt, Hayakawa or Stuart Chase, not from Korzybski himself. It seems to me that Aristotle was a good deal more subtle than that. Consider: ". . . this difficulty of definition is inherent in every object of perception; such questions of degree are bound up with the circumstances of the individual case, where our only criterion *is* the perception." The man who wrote that was not exactly simplistic. The validity of Korzybski's case relates more, I believe, to the limitations of Aristotle's culture than to the philosopher himself. Thus, dealing with the nature of deliberation, he says: "Surely, nobody 'deliberates' about eternal things, such as the stellar system . . . the reason why we do not deliberate about them is that nothing we can do affects the issue." This would not go down well with the followers of *Star-Trek*! Are they then more intelligent than Aristotle? No—but their culture has a wider grasp of what is physically possible. If this point be accepted, then it just may be accepted also that a comparison of the two cultures might show that this wider willingness to handle the human environment may be conter-balanced by an equal reluctance to handle the "inner space" of the mind, an area in which the Greeks delighted. For all the appearances to the contrary, it is not nuclear or space technology which darkens our future, but the reluctance to look into the technology of the soul, a reluctance which leaves us stuck with power-mad politicians and dictators on the one hand, and God-mad Ayatollahs on the other. Yet, back in the 1940s, as I have said, the sf world was ready and eager to believe that "the answer" might come from systems propounded by such as Van Vogt, Ayn Rand, L. Ron Hubbard or whoever. The sceptics dismissed such systems out of hand, the gullible swallowed the words, but not the perceptions behind them: a relatively small number took what they thought fit, and benefited accordingly. The historical point here is that a mere forty years separates us from the date of the first publication of *The World of Null-A*. It took nearly *fourteen hundred years* before Aristotle's formulations could be refined into a system widely and effectively usable by the West. In the eleventh century we have Anselm of Canterbury, Primate of England, dealing with Korzybski's key issue of identification, distinguishing three ways in which we identify things. "We can do so with signs expressed in words, which we hear or see when they are pronounced or written down, we can secondly recall these words in our mind

and identify our object with this mental concept, or we can do without any mediatory signs by thinking the object itself . . . *real words* (my emphasis) *are only in exceptional cases identical with the object which they define."*

I impute no crime to Korzybski or Van Vogt when I say they have re-invented the wheel. In the contingent world, re-invention is a necessity. But why should *science fiction,* that allegedly "forward-looking and imaginative" genre, show such staggering lack of interest in the wheels so long ago invented and perfected? I sit here trying to think of authors who have tackled these issues: offhand, all I can come up with is Blish, Miller and Lem. Is it not time we moved forward into the past?

Heechee Rendezvous by Frederik Pohl *(Gollancz, 1984, £8.95, 311 pp)*
The Merchants' War by Frederik Pohl *(St. Martin's Press, 1984, $13.95, 209 pp; Gollancz, 1985, £8.95, 209 pp)*
The Years of the City by Frederik Pohl *(Gollancz, 1985, £9.95, 334 pp)*

reviewed by Kenny Mathieson

The mystery and poetry of the interstellar wastes has been one of the great enduring themes in science fiction. When handled properly, the deep emotional excitement generated in its evocation has marked books like Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (crassly retitled in the UK) or, to select a more recent contender, Spinrad's *The Void Captain's Tale,* as masterpieces of their kind. Transcendence has always been a key to their appeal: transcendence of the merely terrestrial, of the restricted limits of space opera, of the wondrous but painstakingly slow actuality of the real space missions, as well as in its more fundamental sense. I suspect it is this quality (or illusion) of something beyond the range or grasp of human experience, something not subject to our limitations, that sends us back again and again to these books. It is no accident that *Moby Dick,* Melville's great forerunner of all these works, is so often echoed in modern science fiction.

Frederik Pohl's *Gateway* (1977) was arguably a contender for this distinction. The elements were all in place: man chancing upon the route to the distant stars, beyond his making or control, but offering vast rewards or death; in the background, the mysterious, ineffable, vanished creators of the Gateway asteroid and its star ships, the unseen Heechee. Gateway prospector Robinette Broadhead faced this challenge, afraid, desperate, ultimately guilt-ridden at having struck it rich at the cost of losing his lover(s), perhaps by his own panic, in the slowed-down eternity of a black hole. Broadhead relives his story in a series of sessions with a computer's psychoanalytic programme, learning to pay the price of pursuing dreams. If prose and structure tended to the functional rather than the inspirational, the book was nonetheless one of the successes of contemporary sf.

It would have been better left there. In the nature of such things, however, sequels were called for: first *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon,* and now *Heechee Rendezvous.* While science fiction and fantasy potentially lends itself to the extended series novel, there are precious few examples of the form which actually succeed in maintaining, far less advancing, the original concept. It is not so much that either of these books is particularly bad in itself; the decline is rather more subtle, and inevitable, than that.

Heechee Rendezvous continues the pattern of the previous books; a computer

programme (an upgraded version of the holographic Albert Einstein created by Broadhead's wife in *Blue Event Horizon*) remains a central character; Broadhead grows richer, more powerful, and more guilty; Heechee artifacts turn into an eventual manifestation of the Heechee themselves. Regrettably, it also continues the slide away from the initial peak achieved in *Gateway*. Broadhead was a far more interesting character as a frightened human facing awesome personal challenges than as the "vastened" artificial intelligence manipulating world events he becomes in this book. More importantly, the Heechee themselves pale into a mere shadow of the felt presences dominating *Gateway;* the evil, unseen Assassins which replace them in the background are too much of a plot convenience to be genuinely thrilling.

Pohl himself seems to lose interest. The Heechee rescue of the human race which ends the book (though not necessarily the series) falls very flat indeed, rushed through as though the writer had grown tired of his circular and repetitious plot, one *deus ex machina* too many to be entirely convincing. What the sequels steadily and damagingly lose is precisely their quality of transcendence; the drama of the interstellar void itself slowly evaporates as the numinous uncertainty of the Heechee fades, leaving us with a somewhat ponderous, mechanically-cyclic space adventure. In fairness to Pohl, it remains a fairly superior space adventure, with serious intentions: the sense of disappointment is all the greater for the promise of its beginnings.

Pohl's reputation as a satirical writer owes much to his 1953 collaboration with C.M. Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants*. Long considered one of the modern classics of the genre, it elevated the increasingly powerful Madison Avenue advertising business to the status of effective government, dedicated solely to sales, product, and consumption. Thirty years on, Pohl has returned to that original dystopia, advancing the fictional world by the same span. Writing a sequel at such a distance, and to such a monument, is rather unusual, though certainly not without precedent (a case, perhaps, of anything Asimov can do, I can do better); it also inevitably invites invidious comparisons.

The Merchants' War actually stands up to such comparisons fairly well. Reading both books in succession produces a slight sense of *déjà vu;* it might be better described as a reworking rather than simply a sequel. The colony which Mitchell Courtenay set out to found with the Conservationist rebels on Venus is now an established community. Advertising has been outlawed on the planet (menus carry notes like "all cocktails are canned premixes, and they taste like it"), while Earth is permitted to maintain only a diplomatic presence and a penal colony, which serves as a recruitment centre for new colonists. Both sides, it emerges as the book goes on, are preparing to overcome the other, as ever in the name of national security and protection of their way of life.

The central protagonist, Tennison Tarb, is an advertising copysmith, and his path through the book closely parallels that of Courtenay in its predecessor. Like Courtenay, Tarb is a successful, dedicated, sales-fearing adman; he, too, falls in love with a woman who proves to be a Venusian agent (love is often the motivation for larger political action in Pohl's novels); makes his own descent into the hell of the lower orders of Earth's society, the victim of an addictive soft drink which he eventually kicks; and, again like Courtenay, returns from his nightmare experience a convert and reformer.

Tarb's solution is neither the way of Earth nor Venus (and an explicit reference to the Soviets as having been forerunners of the Venus colony in their rejection of mercantilism invites analogy); he wishes, at a crucial moment of partial insight, that "this was a

different world," without really knowing what he means. As it becomes clear to him, he turns to manipulation of the puppet political infrastructure as the means to his end; in a year when the defeated US Presidential candidate (the real one) admitted that it was now impossible to be elected without the skills of the television performer, the relevance of Pohl's return to this fictional world becomes clearer. The power of the advertising and promotion industry has increased vastly since *The Space Merchants* was written: advertising *does* elect Governments in the 1980s.

Pohl's ending, however provisional he attempts to make it, will strike the cynical, not to say the merely realistic, as being unduly idealistic. Our age has conditioned us to respond more easily to the kind of genuine irresolution which ended *Gateway,* an acceptance of the imperfect solution, the necessary compromise, the ultimately irreconcilable. *The Merchants' War* attempts a less convincing moral triumph, though one which remains faithful to the assumptions of the novel itself; Tarb, and his team of society's rejects, turn the very weapon of enslavement, advertising itself, to the liberation of its victims. Whatever doubts we may have, the principle which Tarb espouses is one which bears repetition; if it mars the ending with optimistic wishful thinking, that is a worthy fault. *The Merchants' War* is a timely criticism of the way our own world is drifting, and at an alarming, and perhaps irreversible, rate. It will not detract from the reputation of either its predecessor or its author.

Many readers, and reputedly the author himself, feel that Pohl is more at home in the short story than the novel. As a writer whose ideas are generally more arresting than their execution, and whose mastery of form and structure is sometimes rudimentary, the shorter form seems to encapsulate his strengths more completely than even the best of his longer works. *The Years of the City* lies somewhere between the two, being a series of five longish stories tracing a potential future development of the City of New York. The stories are linked both thematically and through continuity of characters, coming full circle with the re-introduction of two recipients of cryogenic freezing to join the first and the last.

The book traces the putative future of the city from the first great crisis reform in the near future, the establishment of a governing apparatus known as the Universal Town Meeting, to a society quite different from ours, and unwilling to tolerate the fundamentalist reactionary tendencies of the newly unfrozen representatives of the opening story. Unlike *The Merchants' War,* the process has produced an improved society, if not exactly a utopia; like that book, it criticizes quite directly aspects of the social and political tendencies of our own period. Pohl has no qualms about the propriety of inserting mini-essays into his fictions, producing in each of these stories a sometimes uneasy blend of descriptive social planning with the personal dramas on which he focuses. The city itself is as much protagonist as the various characters whose lives and perennially human problems reflect the changing social order, but Pohl ultimately lacks the genuine fiction writer's gift of making the fusion a wholly seamless one.

In the course of the book, New York acquires a genuinely representative local government (by the people, for the people), survives a potential nuclear wipe-out at the hands of a psychotic criminal, is enclosed in a twin dome to keep a gradually deteriorating planetary weather system at bay, eradicates organized crime and official corruption, and evolves a society based on self-help, decentralization, deregulation, and communal government. In the process, it also undergoes a simplification of language; the Supreme

Court conducts its affairs in a mild street slang, and the 31st Amendment of the Constitution, taking precedence over all others, reads simply "nobody has any right to dump on anybody else." It is not entirely clear whether the attainment of a higher degree of civilized behaviour is dependent upon this loss of verbal facility, and thus of much potential duplicity and obfuscation, or is simply an extrapolation from current trends. Civilization through the loss of linguistic complexity seems an odd notion for a writer to hold (less so, perhaps, for a writer more fundamentally concerned with content than form), even if it is clearly aimed at the impenentrable undergrowths of legal and official obscurantism.

The Years of the City works through some of the fearsome crises facing our major urban configurations, and arrives at a more hopeful outcome than has been customary in Pohl's fictions. The central generating stimulus for this new society lies squarely in one of the oldest principles of the American Constitution: it is only when government is genuinely turned over to the people, through the capabilities of electronic communications systems, that the new order emerges. It is a principle which Pohl clearly feels has been grossly compromised in the Republic's two hundred-odd year history. His future chronicle seeks to sketch out the skeleton of a more literal application of that much quoted, much abused, document, as the basis of a solution for our currently ailing cities. Here is the implicit core of the book; the problems of the city are those of civilization itself, just as the city provides the "cricital mass" that brings together all human activities and prepares the ground for that state. Whatever the book's faults, it is good to see one of the genre's established figures still prepared to take on the most serious of issues.

The Man Who Melted
by Jack Dann *(Bluejay Books, 1984, 280 pp, $14.95)*

reviewed by Gregory Feeley

The Man Who Melted, Jack Dann's third novel, departs forcefully from the rather timid strategies of his previous two. *Starhiker* and *Junction*, like enough to be fraternal twins, dealt with the serial adventures of single protagonists venturing footloose and feckless beyond the confines of their backwater homegrounds. Graceful and rewarding within its small compass, each was limited by weak characterization in its picaresque hero and less yet in its secondary characters; the novels consequently gave little scope to exploring human relationships.

No charges of inadequate ambition can be levelled against the present work. Set in a dissolute Europe of the early twenty-second century, *The Man Who Melted* propels Raymond Mantle, its eponymous hero, into a Strindbergian inferno of intolerable relationships embracing the three major figures in his life. Central among them though absent is Mantle's sister and lover, with whom he remains obsessed although the disaster in which she disappeared also destroyed virtually all his memories of her. The complexities of the era's high-tech and somewhat inhumane society has produced atavistic comeuppance in the Screamers, ravening urban packs who revert under stress to a schizophrenic state whose psychic tide can pull others in. The Great Scream destroyed New York and lost Mantle his beloved Josiane; some years later, numerous cities have fallen, others resist with draconic measures, and a millenialist sect, the Church of the Christian Criers, preaches that psychic hook-up with a moribund Screamer allows fitful

contact with all other Screamers, including those dead.

The novel concerns Mantle's self-destructive attempts to find Josiane, which draws him into the fold of *les Criers* and ultimately hurts everyone around him. Contact with what seemed to be Josiane during a hook-up ceremony leaves Mantle with his mind permanently affected but his obsession unslaked, to the dismay of both Pfeiffer, an older friend whose value to Mantle rests in his recollections of Josiane, and Joan, for whose love he struggles vainly to relinquish the dead hand of his sister. Mantle engages in his dangerous hook-in ceremony while Pfeiffer and Joan, driven by needs of their own, find a casino that offers organ gambling; the trio, in a doomed *menage à trois,* leave Europe on the refloated *Titanic,* whose scheduled disaster seems merely a distorted echo of their own morbid bondage to each other and to a dead past. Mantle's suspicions that Pfeiffer knows more of Josiane's fate than he acknowledges finally precipitate disaster.

Dann has always been an essentially dark writer, and the novel is at its most intense and successful when the characters are confronted with the monstrousness of their own or each other's naked selves. What follows such an epiphany is the stuff of resignation or redemption, both of which constitute new territory for Dann, which he treads with definite uncertainty. Dann's prose here is sometimes tentative and even weak, as in his frequent recourse to set phrases to describe the numen of the Screamers' world—"the dark spaces" and "the black and silver," as well as the repetition of aquatic imagery—as though the complexity of themes Dann is handling compels him occasionally to touch base to retain orientation. The density of much of his material leaves Dann with more than he can confidently resolve, prompting a perfunctory conclusion to some of the story's threads and an overwrought ending.

In a sense *The Man Who Melted* can be read as a virtual repudiation of aspects of Dann's earlier work, portraying as it does the Romantic egoism of the charismatic protagonist as untenable and inhumane. Other touches seem more compatible with the conceits of Dann's previous fiction and much conventional sf, such as the assertion that some of Mantle's casual graphic work was having a profound effect on the advertising industry, or Mantle in conversation "remembering that American slang had only recently become faddish again and would not reach the coast for another few weeks." These character strokes have a curiously unearned quality in their suggestion of this hypercomplex society's susceptibility to the passing attentions of the protagonist, who like the earlier Bo Forester and Ned Wheeler is able by way of "lateral thinking" or similar attributes to achieve by intuition what the *polloi* cannot through effort.

More problematic is the novel's pacing. When the narrative focuses upon some dramatic event Dann is able to bring his considerable power in rendering psychic stress and creating mythopoeic resonance vividly into play, but for much of the intervening stretches the characters simply *talk* of their problems and situation, as though personifying a genre writer's contemptuous notion of a contemporary novel. The dramatic high points of the novel (all of which save the climax were first published in magazines) are unmistakably more alive than the rest, which should not be adduced as counsel that Dann should stick to action, nor as evidence than the novel is a halting fix-up (the shorter pieces were rather adapted from a draft of the novel), but as further indication that Dann's distinctive use of metaphor finds its locus in dramatic events, which at his best (as in "The Dybbuk Dolls" and "Timetipping") can complexly inform the disturbing subtexts of his fiction. When Pfeiffer and Joan try organ gambling, in a

sinister variation of *chemin de fer* that requires pairs of physically linked players to attempt to guess their opponents' cards while concealing their own, the gambit the two must adopt—while pursuing their own private campaign of pursuit and evasion—is manifest in figurative terms that deepens and enriches Dann's savage psychodrama. The agonized discussions between protagonists in the last quarter of the book, conversely, are merely talk.

The Man Who Melted remains for most of its length a powerful and engrossing novel, audacious and even impassioned in its themes of failed artistry, imperfect love, death, transfigured consciousness, and redemption. It stands as a transitional work for Dann, whose long fiction, to judge from his recent novelette "Bad Medicine" (adapted from a contemporary novel in progress) has completed the shift in focus from the heroic lineaments of genre characterization to a mundane vision of suffering humanity in which society figures as more than a stultifying backdrop for less memorable beings. Uncertain in places, it stands nonetheless as Dann's most rewarding and mature novel, a harbinger of better work to come.

The Novels of Philip K. Dick
by Kim Stanley Robinson *(UMI Research Press, 1984, 162 pp, $24.95)*

reviewed by Donald M. Hassler

Reading Kim Stanley Robinson on Dick and enjoying it, I was reminded of my days as a graduate student in New York when word was that there existed a very exclusive club with only six to eight members in the whole City. To be a member one had to have read all of *Clarissa Harlowe* and had to have admitted to it. I could not join either that club or Robinson's club of those who have read all of Philip K. Dick, but I know now that I want someday to join the Dick club. (I assume this is distinct from the PKD Society, which I am a member of, that requires more a sentimental and small financial commitment than such a rigorous scholarly devotion.) Further, I think it is significant that Robinson's book was first a doctoral dissertation directed by a Wordsworth scholar and that the title uncovers the fact that this study deals with much more than Dick's science fiction. It is a survey of all Dick's novels, some not yet published and many "realist" novels, as well as a theoretic discussion of Dick's impact upon and relation to the genre conventions of science fiction. Though Robinson also hints at literary biography in his discussion of Dick's intentions and ambition, this book is not a biography of the artist and struggling human being in the works. It is, however, a full dress academic attempt to locate the entire Dick canon and to place it in the larger study of science fiction and, even, modern fiction. I will say at the outset that I think Robinson's accomplishment of this work is major though it seems to me haunted strangely both by small errors that shake our overall confidence in its reliability and by a rather trendy dismissal of certain notions that cry out for a more balanced discussion.

Since I am greatly impressed and want to leave this review with a favourable report much as I still stand in awe of Clarissa fans, let me get rid of my reservations first. With the authority behind him of Lem, Brian Stableford (who loves to attack on this front though he is not part here of this Dick study), Darko Suvin, and others, Robinson lays the foundation for his theoretic discussion of Dick's use of familiar conventions from science

fiction on the rubble left from a neat deconstruction of Asimov. I enjoy watching a good playground bullying as much as the next person (is that why we enjoy *Lord of the Flies* so much?), and certainly Asimov and his own Foundation associates have done their share of bullying and so hardly deserve to be handled with kid gloves. But the question is too important to be resolved on the playground and should be brought back into the library. So I must say the least scholarly part of Robinson's book is his ganging up behind Lem and Suvin (I guess I should leave Stableford out because, though he may be the best bully of Asimov around, he is really not brought out by Robinson) on the Asimov Foundation. Is hard science fiction prior to the changes worked on it by Dick and others a lifeless, flat, dismissable literature? Perhaps since that question is not the main topic for Robinson, he does not answer it adequately. Further, he continually gets the spelling wrong of Pohl's first name, of Olaf Stapledon's last name, and seems only aware of Gary Wolfe's essay and not the book it grew into though the dissertation date is three years after that fine, award-winning scholarly book *(The Known and the Unknown).* These lapses in Robinson's scholarly completeness surprise me since in so many ways his work seems so thorough. I think it must be the syndrome of bullying the old Foundation that he is swept up in, and I for one hope to live to see more balanced treatments of those wonderful decades when Dick was being Dick and the New Wave was cresting all over the Old Foundation.

In any case, that is not the task Robinson set for himself. He says himself that he is a "first explorer" into the entire canon of Dick's novels, and he maps that area extremely well. His book gets better and better as it develops so that the reader is well prepared and eager to comprehend finally the balance in what sadly turned out to be Dick's last trilogy. The realist tone and use of point of view in Angel Archer balanced against the "reality breakdowns" in the science fiction of Horselover Fat are clearly and effectively described by Robinson. In fact, I think he helps us best to appreciate this self-conscious artistry in Dick's work by taking us from the start of his book toward an understanding of the way in which Dick used his fictions to refer back to themselves, to gloss each other. He explains that Dick learned to use sf almost as a global metaphor in itself to help him work out his ambition as a writer. Robinson is helpful on all the smaller metaphors associated with the genre (though as I say above perhaps a bit unfair and, even, unscholarly about it); but I think he is best in describing Dick's use of realist fiction and science fiction themselves as metaphors for what he wanted to say. Didn't poor Clarissa do approximately the same fertile activity of cross-referencing herself in her endless letters? Robinson has done a fine job of mapping rich cross-references all through Dick's nearly forty novels, and in so doing he has persuaded us again of Dick's deep artistry.

Slow Learner
by Thomas Pynchon *(Cape, 1985, £8.50)*

reviewed by Mark Gorton

He's funny, brilliant and baffling. But apart from this there's not much to know about American writer Thomas Pynchon. As elusive as he is "important," he shuns publicity; his personality is a mystery, his whereabouts unknown . . . Strange? Maybe, but perfectly in tune with fashionable critical theory: the author is an unimportant shadow; we must

concentrate on the texts.

And what weird texts they are. Pynchon is a polymath with a slapstick sense of humour, and by far the best of a small number of novelists who've manipulated contemporary science and technology for metaphorical and symbolic ends. His characters, paranoid or perhaps prescient, teeter on the brink of dangerous revelation. They stumble through a world that's horrifyingly contingent . . . or maybe carefully plotted . . . a world strewn with garbage, both animate and inanimate. Pynchon is a great poet of decay and disposession; his heart's in the right place, with the neglected and the rejected, the Preterite, those for whom The System, controlled by the Elite, has little or no use.

To date Thomas Pynchon has written only three novels. They're books at once funny and melancholic, intricate, or massive, or both. They all have one thing in common: the same underlying scientific metaphor. To a physicist a system in a good state of repair is one low in a quantity called entropy, which is the measure of the disorganization within the system. A vital system is therefore highly ordered, though order here means differentiation, not uniformity. Time and again Pynchon explores what might be called the politics of entropy. It's a law of physics that a closed system must, in the end, succumb to total disorder. And yet we have the power to resist entropy: we must keep our systems open, and protect diversity, if we really want to stay *alive.*

But, concludes Pynchon, we seem to choose entropy. *V.* (1963) burrows through our century of power politics and total wars; *The Crying of Lot 49* (1967) draws on the information theorist's concept of entropy to paint a dismal picture of the failures of communication in modern America; while above the post-war world of the huge *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) hovers the ballistic rainbow of the V2 rocket, forerunner of the ICBMs which may one day deliver the ultmate release of energy . . . and the ultimate triumph of entropy.

With *Slow Learner* Pynchon has broken a silence of more than a decade. It's a collection of most of his early short stories, apprentice attempts to fly which are engagingly shot down in his unexpected introduction. He offers the stories as "how-not-to" guides for aspiring writers. He says that he over-writes, that literary allusions tumble like carefully placed dominoes. He's right, but nevertheless, here in embryo are the skills which make his writing so valuable.

Take "The Secret Integration." Three children live in a town dominated by bigotry, and when a black family moves into the neighbourhood there's worried talk of "integration." Young Grover Snodd, a maths whizz, understands integration as "the opposite of differentiation." Explaining to his pal Tim Santora, he draws lines from a curve down to the x-axis. "It never gets solid," he tells Tim, "if this was a jail cell, and these lines were bars, and whoever was behind it could make himself any size he wanted to be, he could always make himself skinny enought to get free."

Grover knows that the lines are imaginary. But ironically, in the world of his parents, imaginary divisions do function as prison bars. There will be no freedom . . . disparate elements will not work in concert, making the system viable and vital . . . but instead homogeneity and sameness will prevail, which adds up to a kind of death. Sadly the children will be claimed too, for in the end this is a moving account of the loss of innocence.

Pynchon's introduction to *Slow Learner* torpedoes each tale in the collection.

Don't be put off.

Isaac Asimov's Fantasy
edited by Shawna McCarthy *(Dial Press, 1985, 348 pp, $12.95)*

reviewed by Gregory Feeley

I am not certain of the title of this book, which the review slip calls *Isaac Asimov's Fantasy* but which seems on cover and title page to bear an exclamation mark, and could be read, to heed its typography, as a work called *Fantasy!* by Isaac Asimov, edited by Shawna McCarthy. It is in an important sense scarcely a book at all, being a collection of stories originally published in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (a fact to which jacket copy, copyright page, and lack of editorial material give no clear indication) reprinted, in happy consequence of that magazine's policy of setting type in single rather than double columns, exactly as they appeared there, complete with full- and double-paged illustrations and blurbs in big type. What little matter was not simply photographed from the magazine's sheets, such as the Contents Page, is set in that typeface familiar to American readers of *IAsfm* (as it is here called), and includes such bonuses as a masthead giving the complete magazine staff, down to Circulation Director Retail Marketing and Classified Advertising Manager. The jacket copy, besides strengthening the impression that a titular exclamation mark was intended at some point by whoever casually oversaw such a production as this volume enjoyed, notes that the work contains "acknowledged masters of the field like Leigh Kennedy, John Kessel, Tanith Lee, George R.R. Martin, Lucius Shepard, and Connie Willis," suggesting that the copywriter knows as little about genre fantasy as about grammar, since marginally better known writers, such as Ron Goulart and George Alec Effinger, can be found among the bundled tear-sheets within.

So *Isaac Asimov's Fantasy* is less an anthology than a rebinding, copyrighted not in the name of its putative editor or even The Dial Press, but of the magazine's publisher. Shawna McCarthy, editor of *IAsfm*, assuredly chose these stories for magazine publication and edited them there, but may not have chosen which stories were to be included in this volume nor their order of appearance, nor any other aspect of the book's production. I rather hope this is the case, for McCarthy remains an editor, and whoever has been serving up this series of Dial Press/Davis Publications, Inc. ventures, the earlier volumes of which were straightfacedly entitled *Isaac Asimov's Space Of Her Own* and *Isaac Asimov's Aliens and Outworlders,* can rightfully call himself nothing of the kind.

So forget any claims to this volume's status as a book, and consider it merely as a document representative of the fantasy published in this very popular American magazine, conceivably thus of greater interest to British readers than to Americans. The volume does not of course contain any of that magazine's monthly features, its letter column (mostly those of young aspiring writers), its puzzles, light verse, informal articles and fannish reviews. British readers may be assured they are missing nothing of more than sociological interest. What *IAsfm* mainly serves up is fiction, short (few serials) and of surprisingly catholic nature. As *Locus* regularly notes in its annual review of science fiction magazines, *IAsfm* is difficult to characterize, publishing highly dissimilar and uneven work ranging from the literate stories once characteristic of *F&SF* (and which might have appeared there save that *Asimov's* pays better) to fare for genre addicts only. What does characterize the magazine is that it published, until recently at least, very little fantasy. The stories reprinted here (all but one copyright 1983-84) thus seem a fair index

of—indeed constitute a high proportion of—what genre fantasy is still being written at less than trilogy length.

The volume's opener is "The Storming of Annie Kinsale" by Lucius Shepard, who has in eighteen months attracted considerable attention in American sf, having had no less than nine stories on the preliminary ballot for the 1984 Nebula Award and a nominee in all three of the short categories, a record which Shepard nearly compounded with a clean sweep with his novel *Green Eyes*. Shepard however is no Barry B. Longyear, for the odd social vectors and massed opinion that inform the Nebula are this time favouring a genuinely talented if uneven author, whose strangely gothic tales from real places that seem fantastic seemed to be appearing everywhere in 1984. Gardner Dozois, an abler anthologist than the present perpetrator, has remarked that "The Storming of Annie Kinsale" is probably the worst of them, and so it is, but the rest were not published in *IAsfm,* or were not fantasies, or were too long, so here we have it. Editor McCarthy has preserved in hard covers stark evidence that Shepard's gift for evoking local colour is a product of his experiences knocking about odd corners of the world and not research, for this dreary tale set in a sentimental Hollywood Ireland, full of false lilts and bittersweet enchantments, has something to offend both the pure stylist and the social realist who knows something of the real Eire. Readers who don't see the Yank mags should consult *Universe 14* or next year's "Best" anthologies for evidence that Shepard can indeed write well for more than half a novel.

The other stories merit little comment, for nearly all are badly written, less often owing to strained efforts at a false style as with Shepard than—depressingly—a simple lack of skill. The reviewer jots down solecisms and amateur lunges at metaphor and then realizes he is compiling an editor's query sheet that somebody was already paid not to do. Ron Goulart turns in a professional if routine piece of work, and George Alec Effinger and Robert Thurston, who both know that a short story is something other than the way to dispose of an idea too slight for a novel, fail interestingly with unusually turned ventures into irony, for which one can forgive them, if not the editor who reprinted them.

Perhaps one could make too much of this. Bad anthologies are published every month, and review space is short. Nevertheless, the measures taken by various publishers to make anthologies (which do not do well but remain cheap to compile) more attractive than straightforward packaging would allow has in these good days for sf novels, bad ones for anthologies and collections, reached heights that call for some comment. Literate, intelligent anthologies such as Dann, Disch and Dozois edited a decade ago no longer interest publishers, causing Disch to retire from the field and Dann and Dozois to trim their sails perceptibly. (They are now editing jointly a series of theme anthologies for Ace, decent if unambitious assemblages whose trademark, the eponymous exclamation mark that was wittily xenophobic in *Aliens!* but less appropriate in anthologies dealing with unicorns and cats, was recently stolen by another Ace anthologist.) One new phenomenon is the celebrity anthology, whereby a busy but prominent author is credited as first editor of a collaborative anthology for which the less known partner in fact did most of the (undistinguished) work. The ubiquitous Martin H. Greenberg, perched upon Isaac Asimov, is the most shameless practitioner of this scam, but he is by no means alone. (Tor Books has a forthcoming fantasy anthology "edited by Andre Norton and Robert Asprin," wherein the industrious Asprin must even write his own Contributor's Note.) Another practice is to disguise an anthology as something else, preferably a novel. The

fourth volume of Jerry Pournelle's warmongering *There Will Be War* series (also coming in May from the enterprising Tor) is credited on the cover as "Produced by Jerry Pournelle," deftly avoiding a bad word, and emblazoned *The Saga Continues* as though it were (hurrah!) a sequel rather than (horrors!) an anthology. Compared to these, the sins of the anthologies occasioned by Cap'n Asimov's Whiz-Bang seem positively venial, being prompted by nothing worse than the perception that most of the production costs had already been paid for.

Bad anthologies are published every month, and review space is short. Dann's *Wandering Stars,* Dozois' *A Day in the Life,* Silverberg's *Dark Stars* and everything edited by Disch are out of print. Good anthologies, unlike good fiction, are not themselves creative, and doubtless have their unextendable shelf lives. But the volumes that currently obscure reviewers' desktops and clog newsstands are dishonest even when the stories they contain are not bad; an insult to intellect, a waste of trees.

Age of Wonders, Exploring the World of Science Fiction
by David Hartwell *(Walker, 1984, 205 pp, $15.95)*

Wonder's Child: My Life in Science Fiction
by Jack Williamson *(Bluejay Books, 1984, 276 pp, $15.95)*

reviewed by Donald M. Hassler

The dustjacket and boards of the New York edition of David Hartwell's pop study of the genre are a rich gold colour with reddish lettering that deepens nicely on the gold. Looking at the book, I am reminded of the 1974 hardcover edition of Asimov's anthology *Before the Golden Age.* I hope that none of this is accidental because Hartwell's most important idea may be his opening idea, which Asimov also articulated well in 1974 and with no acknowledgement here by the hasty Hartwell, that science fiction is an exciting literature of "wonder" which we always associate with youth, vigour, adventuresomeness, and the golden age of bygone days. When we are drawn further into what Hartwell has to say about the field and realize that he is as much sociologist and futurologist as literary critic in this book, the challenge and depth of the notion of "Golden Ages" in modern times become truly puzzling and provocative. How can the subculture orbiting science fiction, which he describes in some detail, be both adolescent and prophetic? Is the literature itself, in fact, the most recent challenge of the "Moderns" over against stuffy, academic "Ancients"? Is the golden child of wonder in all of us here, indeed, the father of the man? Those are the questions at first that Hartwell's book raises in my mind, and those are the questions that his book has been designed specifically not to answer.

I suppose it is a combination of marketing tactic and sincere distaste for academic and systematic argument that has shaped Hartwell's book. The result is one long ramble. He calls it a "tour," and I understand many people are going along because it covers a lot of ground and stops only occasionally to challenge the tourist. One of the stops is at a wonderful 1835 ancestor of our "new species of literature" that Gernsback actually reprinted in the September 1927 issue of *Amazing.* Just as with regard to the venerable debate between the Ancients and the Moderns, we would love to learn more about R.A. Locke's "Moon Story." But Hartwell's discussion jumps quickly to the New Wave, and

we are off on tour again. My objection to the book, then, is the classic quibble of the reviewer. I want the book to be something it is never intended to be. But in this case I think there is some justification. Hartwell knows the field too well to be only a tour guide. He may not be a 19th-century scholar (I believe his graduate training is as a Medievalist); but his material is there and waiting for more geologic probing, not just surface touring.

Jack Williamson, also, has put himself through the initiation of graduate literary training; but in his case the treble denial before the cock crows came before rather than after his doctoral degree. When he first began to write for the pulps at the age of 20, he left college because he knew pulp writers learned nothing of their craft in college. Further, I think that in the case of Williamson and, in particular, in this welcome autobiography of his the deep ambivalence surrounding how one should treat science fiction can teach us much more. Hartwell toys with ambivalence and plays at a structureless, rambling enthusiasm in order to sell his book to laymen who need to be amused and entertained. (Don't misunderstand me. I am glad for the promotion of sf that Hartwell's book will accomplish.) Williamson is genuinely thoughtful about being one of the children of "wonder."

And he structures his book so that all the childlike, primitive, Ancient/Modern, pioneering images become accumulative and, ultimately, problematic. He begins with his family ancestors, who knew little science or literature; but they knew they had a restless feel for pioneering and were alone in a vast America—doubly alone since the actual opportunities for pioneering had passed. He tells of his lonely boyhood with almost no friends. He tells of the twelve to fifteen years of lonely writing, broken occasionally by visits with Edmond Hamilton and a few others; and this writing was clearly, as he describes it now, primitive, groping, and yet "sublime" in its adolescent energy and open willingness to learn from the market. He tells of personal loneliness and of the value of psychoanalysis; and we see a tough, emotional High Plains boy under analysis rather than some overbred Austrian matron. Finally, he tells of continuing insecurity and writer's blocks. Numerous times in the latter half of this "Life," Williamson speaks of learning to keep up with the talented new writers in the field. This is truly an Ancient worried by Moderns, who himself is a childlike modern.

The great problem in the life of this writer, as I see it, is the change that took place sometime in the late 40s and early 50s from friendless, driven and lonely writer to "friendly" member of society. As he talks about his many travels in recent years, he emphasizes again and again the many friends he made. Was it his analysis, his marriage, his job in the military during the War? Williamson never actually articulates it as a problem of interpretation, but his book carefully maps out the progress of the change. And he also tells us that his favourite narrative formula has always been the bildungsroman. Thus, the character of Quin, the boy in the Oort Cloud station in his most recent novel *Lifeburst,* may be more important than reviewers have realized in the overall accomplishment of this honest, and still-driven writer. In any case, the Williamson book is both a delight to read and an invaluable resource for the future study of an enigmatic writer and of an enigmatic genre.

The value of both these books, with the common word in their titles, is that they emphasize for us the importance of the early origins of science fiction in America. Hartwell suggests it was and is a dynamic subculture—though even his methodology as a sociologist begs for more documentation and more systematic organization. Williamson

speaks with an authentic voice of origins that are human and artistic at the same time. I think he is best on the decade of the 30s and very good not only in recollecting and portraying his own work and moods but also in capturing impressions of people such as Hamilton, Harry Bates, and the young Asimov. He admits wonderfully to caring more about writing than about people for long years of his life, and then paradoxically now is able to pack his autobiography with insight into people who are his friends. Obviously, I prefer the probe to the rapid fly-by; but the surface to be studied is wonderful.

Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind
edited by Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu (*Women's Press, 1985, 248 pp, £2.50*)

reviewed by Avedon Carol

Mary Shelley has been called the Mother of Science Fiction, but it is certainly not unfair to say that for most of its history, sf has been largely written by and marketed for males. Virtually any piece on the relationship between women and science fiction usually mentions that while there were indeed women writing it, they often used non-gender-specific bylines and frequently wrote about male protagonists. And over the last fifteen years or so, many of us have written that piece. What led us to the discussion was the belief—and one I still hold—that literature has enough power to mould the attitudes of readers that writers must bear some responsibility for helping to shape and reinforce those attitudes, and that the attitudes which have been brought to readers via fiction have, so far, been often neglectful and frequently downright damaging where women are concerned.

In the last 15 or 20 years, a number of sf authors, both male and female, have worked hard to overturn the trend and image of science fiction as a "male" genre. In many cases, this has brought us some excellent fiction, and in fact it wasn't so long ago that the late Theodore Sturgeon made his oft-quoted declaration that most of the best modern sf authors were women—excepting perhaps James Tiptree, Jr. I wish I could say that *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind* could live up to that kind of praise, but I'm afraid it suffered from too light an editorial hand to make the grade.

"The Women's Press Anthology," as it is so often called because of the awful clumsiness of the title, has been described as an attempt "to reclaim Science Fiction for women." Unfortunately, the editors seem to disagree with my feeling that the way for women to make our influence and abilities felt in sf is to write and edit good, tight, illuminative works. Instead they have given us 17 short titles in a mere 248-page book, and every reason to believe that little or no editorial discretion was used in the compilation process. In most cases, the best and most cohesive stories are the work of accomplished authors, and the contrast between these and the works of the less experienced writers is great enough to lead me to believe that few if any structural changes were suggested by the editors and that they pretty much printed whatever they got. Several stories give the impression of having been merely the notes for much longer works, or fragments of novels.

Certainly, there are good, or at least competent stories in the collection. If James Tiptree, Jr. had published "Morality Meat" before it became known that his name and that of Racoona Sheldon were pseudonyms for Alice Sheldon, it would have drawn raves.

Tiptree could always get away with saying things that a woman could not. The Tiptree/Sheldon style has always been to take some bitter truth from our mundane reality and then give it a good science fictional kick in the pants, taking it to an extreme that clearly illuminates the true face of the horror in our own world. I do not doubt for a minute that if the sf element in this Sheldon story—a plague that wipes out food stock, but not human beings—should ever coincide with the (all too possible) overturning of the 1973 US Supreme Court decision on abortion (in *Roe vs Wade*), the situation described in "Morality Meat" could easily become reality. Sheldon, under whatever name, has always been a powerful and insightful writer, and the combination of that talent with the horrific plausibility of her nightmare vision gives this story a terrifying force.

I like to think that Pearlie McNeill wrote "The Awakening" with every intention of creating the sf short-story version of Kate Chopin's classic novel. True, the women in McNeill's story don't realize that their escape from their own (much more consciously repressive) society will lead to their deaths, unlike Chopin's character, who walked into the sea. And it is also true that, given the choice of the title, it would have been hard *not* to write a story that paralleled the novel. But both authors described "awakening" as a painful and costly process, and neither of them seemed willing to project a more positive outcome. Perhaps there is some validity to this perception. Kate Chopin had been a promising author with some successes before she scandalized the public with *The Awakening*. In effect, she committed literary suicide—the reaction was sufficiently intense that she never wrote another word. Perhaps McNeill has given us Chopin's vindication.

Josephine Saxton concentrates on the hard questions for a woman caught between her career and a desire to have a child in her story, "Big Operation on Altair Three," while taking a bit of a swipe at the advertising industry as well. The piece itself is a reasonably clean illustration of this rock-and-the-hard-place dilemma in a coldly commercial world, but I found it very difficult to become absorbed in it. Still, she gets points from me for not pretending that the only people who have to worry about these things are welfare mothers and very young women.

In "Love Alters," lesbianism and male homosexuality are the norm, and our protagonist discovers that she is attracted to a man. Yes, Tanith Lee has written a gay-straight reversal story. This certainly isn't a new idea—Joe Haldeman, for example, used the heterosexual-as-pervert motif in *The Forever War*. But Haldeman's character was born in a heterosexist society, and he never saw himself as a pervert. In Lee's story, we have a woman who has led a "normal" lesbian life, and even loves her wife—and so she experiences herself as having abnormal feelings, and as being alone, perhaps one-of-a-kind. There are virtues to both approaches, but I like Lee's attempt to create a situation that more nearly parallels what an awakening lesbian often really feels in our society, believing that what she has been taught is true, that she's sick—and the aloneness, the knowledge that she is, for the most part, surrounded by people who would be horrified by what she is feeling. And the terror of revealing those feelings to anyone, even someone who might be sympathetic. Again, this story didn't draw me into itself as much as I would have liked, but I must confess to a fondness for anyone who is willing to make the attempt to show heterosexuals what it means to live in a heterosexist society.

Lisa Tuttle's "From a Sinking Ship" is a fairly straightforward story about intelligent dolphins at the end of the world. The ideas in it are not particularly original nor are they particularly feminist. We've all seen plenty of end-of-the-world stories, and even whole

anthologies of end-of-the-world stories (for example, *Chains of the Sea,* edited by Robert Silverberg). We've also seen stories with intelligent dolphins who know more about what's going on than we do. Most of these, come to think of it, have been written by men. The protagonist is female, of course, and I suppose a case is made for what some people call a "woman-centered" aproach (that is, the male in the story fails to understand what is going on by use of "male" analytical devices, while the woman catches on a lot faster because she uses her intuitive, "feminine" comprehensive skills—or so some would say). The writing is nice and clean, but I would certainly expect no less from a writer of Tuttle's proven abilities. By no means is this a bad story—it is neatly put together and, as I say, well-written. However, I had hoped for more from someone like Tuttle whose background with both sf and feminism is extensive enough that she can reasonably be expected someday to write truly outstanding feminist sf stories. This seemed to me the perfect opportunity, but I don't feel that she took it.

The introduction to the collection mentions mothering as a recurring theme in the stories, but there is an unmentioned theme running through the book as well—the desperate need to escape from an essentially hopeless world. In "Atlantis 2045: no love between planets," Frances Gapper's characters actually create a window through which they flee their dystopia to a better place. It's as simple as that. And it is certainly no compliment to the world we live in that it took me so long to wonder about the amount of despair running through some of these stories. Yet the editors, who surely spent more time reading these pieces than I did, show no signs of having felt this negative quality in their work. Have we, despite all the hopeful signs and successes of the last 15 years, really come to take that despair so much for granted that we believe we can escape only through magic or death? Certainly it is little short of magic that saves the protagonist in Margaret Elphinstone's "Spinning the Green" from a life of, at best, unremitting dreariness. Penny Casdagli's "Mab" is more hopeful, but only because we haven't really been shown what ailments the cure is *for*—and that "cure" is somewhat less than convincing, again being too much like magic. I must wonder why feminists are so much less suspicious of martial and philosophical arts which come from the East than they are of those from the West. We are, after all, talking about cultures which gave us such lovely, ideologically sound customs as suttee, foot-binding, purdah, and infibulation. Is it really desirable to escape from the use of nasty male technology by resorting to nasty male Yoga instead?

Joanna Russ contributed not a story, but rather a few of her sarcastic jokes in "The Clichés from Outer Space." Her jibes at dumb stories about alien rape, phoney liberation, unbelievable separatist futures and role-reversals would be a welcome break from the more negative outlook in most of the other pieces, but it appears too early in the book to do much spiritual healing for the reader. Nor have we yet been hit by the murkier stories, some of which come very near to incomprehensibility. In fact, I question whether readers who aren't well versed in feminist theory would have understood some of these stories at all, since they draw such sketchy pictures of their subjects.

Too many of these stories keep the reader from making contact with the characters, as well. Pamela Zoline spends so much time explaining why the reader must become involved with the child/children in "Instructions for Exiting this Building in Case of Fire" that one is constantly kept aware that one is reading an experiment. It's hard to know what is actually being done, let alone care who it happens to. And while Beverly Ireland's story makes a fairly absorbing beginning, "Long Shift" appears to have some pages

missing at the end, so that we never learn enough about the protagonist, her situation, or what has happened to her.

In the end, the disappointments become too numerous to mention, but what I find most distressing about this book is that in its attempts to help create a feminist literary tradition in sf it neglects the better efforts which have already been made while making the task even harder. Most of these authors were capable of far better work with the proper editorial guidance, but they haven't given us very encouraging models here. In general, the characters and ideas are too inaccessible to be of much use in developing a literary tradition for feminists and women. Were this not the case, it might be interesting to discuss the fact that this collection, primarily by British authors, seems so much less hopeful than American feminist anthologies have been. But with so many under-developed stories, it's hard to tell just how much of that hopelessness would still be coming through had the authors been encouraged to round out their visions and give them more depth. Certainly, there is a lot of unresolved anger to be found in *Despatches,* but I had the feeling that the authors were still too afraid to tell us much about it.

Free Live Free
by Gene Wolfe (*Gollancz, 1985, 399 pp, £9.95*)

reviewed by Rachel Pollack

Four people, two men and two women, answer an ad in a newspaper: "FREE LIVE FREE Live w me, pay no rt. Hlp sv hs. B Free, 808 S 38th". Officially "Live Free" refers to the lack of rent, for the house is in danger of being torn down, and the owner seeks people to help him protect it. It is also a moral call to break whatever constrains their lives. The proprietor's name is Benjamin Free, and for the purpose of the ad it is natural for him to shorten this to "B Free." Notice, however, that there is no full stop after the B. At the end of the book we learn that this is not his real name. He has chosen it, presumably for the sake of the pun.

The four people who come to Live Free are all outsiders. Jim Stubb is a failed private detective, a man whose life and desires have been truncated by his being short—as his name implies. Candy Garth is an obese prostitute, penniless and chained to her hunger (a later character misnames her "Girth"). Madame Serpentina is a gypsy witch, an occultist given to posing as someone with great powers and higher wisdom ("I laugh often but not at jokes"), yet she is as much a victim as the others, a slave to her search for "masters" and higher beings who will enlighten her. Osgood Barnes, "Ozzie," is a failed salesman who has lost his career and family, and tries to stay alive by selling novelty items (such as rubber flies and toilet-shaped cigarette lighters) to stores and bus stations. Later in the novel, his son, Little Ozzie, appears, sent off on a bus by Barnes's ex-wife who clearly is abandoning the boy. Though he loves his son, Barnes too abandons him, pursuing an empty dream of romance and respect. (Is it coincidence that he bears the same last name as Cliff Barnes, the perennial loser on "Dallas"? There is, in fact, a minor character named Cliff.)

The house is destroyed, despite feeble attempts by Stubb and the others to save it. In the process Free vanishes. Before this happens, however, he gives his boarders the impression that he is hiding something valuable. He also says that he comes from a place

called The High Country. His boarders take this information in different ways. Madame Serpentina assumes Free is a secret master, and he has hidden the key to occult powers and treasures. Stubb considers that Free is the black sheep of some illustrious family, and has kept some secret which can be used to blackmail them. Despite their different interpretations the four agree to seek the treasure together, sharing whatever they might find. At the same time, though they pretend they care only about rewards, they also search for Ben Free, hoping to help him if he's still alive. And through their efforts, they come to care about each other.

Now, this phrase, "The High Country," sets up a certain response in the reader, especially the reader familiar to sf. Having seen so many fantasy novels in which people leave this world of compromise to follow magical quests in places called something like The High Country, we tend to think that Free indeed has come from such a pure land, seeking champions. But Wolfe is setting us up. At the end, the explanation turns out to be pure science fiction, and very traditional science fiction.

Except it isn't. For it doesn't make sense, not once you start examining it. One of the fascinating things about this book is that you can read it as a straightforward comic science-fiction novel with a traditional ending—until you start to think about it. At that point it comes apart, or rather the surface comes apart, for as the explanations unravel and the incidents and co-incidents seem more and more implausible, so the book comes to seem more and more carefully constructed.

Near the end of the book the four have been captured by a secret military group that has been watching them. The group's representative tells them that they have been tested, exposed to individual temptations which have caused all of them to fall from their purpose. But no serious explanation for this explanation is ever given. The people who did the testing were "ordered" to do so. But by whom and for what purpose? The four are then taken to a place where they find Benjamin Free—or rather, a different version of him. Because they tried to help the other Ben Free he says he will arrange to grant their hearts' desires, beginning with a trip back in time to give them a chance to live better lives. Though the trip apparently takes place, and Ozzie is back with his son at the end (there is no indication of how Free could have arranged such a reunion) any further wishes appear to be ignored.

The structure of temptation, fall, and miraculous, unearned redemption gives the book an allegorical quality. So do the descriptive names: Stubb, Candy Garth (Girth), Serpentina (whose real name is Marie, or Mary, the Virgin, and her gullibility and yearning for enlightenment indeed give her a virginal quality). Wolfe manages the trick of making his characters types ("I've never double crossed a client and I never will" says Jim Stubb in a parody of Sam Spade) yet somehow real people. If the structure is allegory, however, its direct source is not Christian myth but something lighter and more contemporary.

The only character without a descriptive name is Osgood Barnes. Ozzie. At the beginning of the book, in Free's house the television is on to an old movie *Hellcats of The Navy* (this film connects to the sf explanation at the end) and Candy Garth says, "I wish they'd run *The Wizard Of Oz* again. That's the one I like." At the very end she calls Madame Serpentina "Glinda," the name of the good witch in Baum's story. A Black character in the middle of the book refers to *The Wiz*, the all-Black version of the Judy Garland film, while at a certain point one of the characters says, "We're off to see the wizard."

Though Barnes bears the name Oz, and like the wizard is a huckster conning people with cheap tricks (all four are con artists in their own way, and all four use sleight-of-hand tricks, primarily to steal) he is not the wizard. That role belongs to Ben Free, the man who grants their hearts' desires, or at least promises to do so. (In Baum's book the wizard is a fake, while the person whose real magic sends Dorothy home again is Glinda.)

Though arranged superficially as an allegory, *Free Live Free* avoids the dry overstrained quality of many allegories, and in much the same way it avoids the cleverness of standard science fiction, in which everything is explained in cosy pseudo-rational terms. In short, it doesn't make sense. Who has decided to tempt them? For what purpose? At the end, when they all come together again, they are still penniless—Ozzie and Little Ozzie are reunited, but in rags—and Free's house still lies in ruins. Perhaps they have found values beyond materialism. Earlier, Madame Serpentina claims to see a prediction in a mirror. In ten years, she says, a quadrumvirate of powerful men will rule the world, dominating not just politics, but economics, the arts, everything. At the end, when Ozzie appears, "Glinda" says (the last sentence in the book) "The quadrumvirate is complete." Since they do not seem in any position for a coup, we can take this as her (their) discovery of deeper values.

"The High Country" sound like a cliché fantasy novel. Madame Serpentina interprets the phrase in the occult cliché of a secret group managing the world's destiny. Superficially the novel follows that pattern as well, for though The High Country does not involve esoteric masters it does invoke the conspiracy theory in which the world's true rulers remain hidden behind their puppets, such as the president of the United States and other public figures.

And yet, the book constantly slides away from all these resemblances. Its true method is closest to a dream, for in dreams everything seems to connect but doesn't, events seem to follow logically but don't, and we come away (awaken) with a sense of an opening to secret depths, if only we could somehow find our way down to the reality. I'm not suggesting that the story is literally some character's dream, as in *Alice in Wonderland* (though Barnes's hopes appear to us through his dreams). Rather, the book follows what we might call the aesthetics of dreams.

The book conveys a sense of timelessness, of being displaced in time. Officially, this quality derives from the sf explanation at the end, but it goes more deeply than that, for many of the displacements cannot be attributed to that explanation. The book opens with a quotation from Franklin Roosevelt, and though the setting is now it somehow feels more like the 30s or 40s. Barnes wears wingtip shoes and a vest with a chain across it. They watch old movies, make almost no reference to current fashions or politics (though Madame Serpentina uses a computer to cast spells the machine is described as if no one has ever heard of such a thing before), and occasionally hear the "drone" of airplanes, a sound made by propellors, not jet engines.

The action, particularly in the beginning, shifts abruptly without explanation, similar to the shifts in dreams. At one moment Free is speaking. The next, "Stubb leaped up. By the time he reached the door the parlor behind it was empty. So was Free's bedroom." On the next page Stubb is walking through the snow. In the following sentence "The woman behind the register looked up and smiled when he came in." What register? Came in where? It takes us a moment to recognize that he has returned to a coffee shop where we saw him a chapter or so before.

Free tells Madame Serpentina that his house is his body. When his house is destroyed he becomes disembodied, which also describes the dream state, for in a dream we experience events without our bodies.

In dreams the incidental aspects of reality change to suit the moment, with no notice taken of the previous versions. On page 38 Free smokes a cigarette with Candy who says, "I thought blind people didn't," to which Free replies, "I ain't blind. I can see *smoke,* for Pete's sake." Four pages later, in a completely black cellar with only a single candle, Free notices that the pupil of one of Barnes's eyes has not expanded in the darkness and is therefore glass.

The sf explanation at the end is essentially dreamlike. It thinks it is logical, it acts as if it explains everything, but in fact it creates as many questions as it answers.

Central to the dream aesthetic is the way in which the characters constantly meet each other without plan, drift apart, and then show up again somewhere else at the same time. In the book's central scene, a combination of the Marx Brothers and a claustrophobic nightmare, virtually every character in the book shows up, independently, at a mental hospital. One by one they become trapped by ludicrous doctors who assume they are insane and interpret everything they say or do as proof of psychosis. An inmate—a character whom Barnes had met before and now again—forces Barnes to change clothes, stripping him of his identity. The inmates escape from this hospital prison through a power blackout which plunges the world into darkness and cold, a further vision of hell, where mannequins burning in bonfires mimic souls tortured by devils.

Wolfe has found an innovative response to questions of genre and cliché. While establishing a story which we can read in any one of several traditional modes—sf adventure, allegory, occult conspiracy—it escapes the banalities of all of these—and creates a sense of mystery and depth, through the daring technique of simply—not making sense.

The Warrior Who Carried Life
by Geoff Ryman (*George Allen & Unwin, 1985, 173 pp, £7.95*)

reviewed by Gregory Feeley

The peculiar beauty of Geoff Ryman's *The Warrior Who Carried Life* lies not in any originality of form, nor in distinction of style, but in the startling rightness Ryman brings to detail, which conveys powerful authenticity in the company of a prose and story-line that are felicitous and apposite enough. The story of Cara, whose bucolic adolescence is despoiled by the invasion of inhumanly malign Others, prompting exile, the quest for a liberating talisman, trial and eventual triumph is consistently given new life by the arresting and unexpectedly true detail, such as the Men who are Baked or the Men who Advance like Spiders, warrior castes whose skills seem close to supernatural but never suffer the flatness of being declared so. The Men who are Baked, whose skin is "a caked, yellow scarring that felt no pain and resisted the slashing of swords," seared of facial features and genitals, dramatize with particular vividness Ryman's vision of the dehumanization attending all violence. Ryman's formal twist on the liberating talisman theme—that the evil force literally multiplies when slain, and can only be defeated through the blessing of eternal life—turns the story to pacifist fable, a singular repudia-

tion of the tenets of heroic fantasy that meets the genre on its own ground. The book is thus itself a liberating talisman, though uncertainly copyedited and printed (to mention the point right off) on the poorest-quality paper I have seen used by a reputable publisher since the War restrictions.

Not all of *The Warrior Who Carried Life* transcends the conventions and strictures of heroic narrative. The first chapter, in which Cara's mother foretells Cara's future in visionary rapture and is killed by fearful villagers, recalls the beginning of too many fantasies, though striking specifications of detail (the villagers' dogs "burrow their snouts into her mother's stomach and make quick chewing motions until they had a grip on something they could tear," and afterwards the villagers repair and return the dress) mark the story from the beginning. The scene in which Cara disembowels the prince who mutilated her family only to find him burst into flower is appropriate to Ryman's polemic, but gains beauty through the horrible sexuality infusing the act, where the monstrous Galu lolls in delight upon being stabbed, fingering the wound wider in a grotesque parody of procreation.

The centre of the novel is a journey to the land of the dead, where Cara goes to recover the Flower of Life that will render the Galu immortal. Surprisingly, her prize is not some relic of a fuzzily higher or essential plane of existence (as in most heroic fantasies of nervously vague cosmology), but forthrightly the last fragment of God left in the universe sice the Fall of Genesis. In Ryman's version Adam, not the serpent, enticed Eve, and upon his punishment took revenge upon all mankind to come by destroying the Tree of Life and taking to the underworld its last Flower, which would have fulfilled divine intention by rendering humanity immortal and allowing eventual unification with God. Adam was cast into parodic phallic form—for the lust for Knowledge that brings Death is seen as peculiarly male—and crawled thereafter upon the ground. Cara confronts the Adam-serpent and tormented Eve, wins the Flower of Life (at a price) and returns to a final confrontation above.

Ryman's explicit cosmology (sin but no Tempter; a reversible Fall) is appropriate to the pacifist fable if not itself inspired. The revelation concerning men as warmakers seems inadequate in this age of Thatcher and even faintly old-hat; the evil of the Serpent revealed as shame and self-loathing works better because Ryman can effectively dramatize its tormented writhings. An engaging griffin called the beast that talks to God, who appears to transport the heroines from points A to B, works as a character even when he takes on the attributes of a stuffed toy, is called the Wordy Beast, and suffers a sentimental death and resurrection fraught with more potential for risibility than attended Little Nell's. When Ryman deals with human feeling, whether of tenderness or horror (as in the worms infesting the body of Cara's still-living father, themselves once human and pleading for forgiveness in tiny voices) he seems effortlessly sure-footed and surprisingly affecting. One suspects he would aver that the novel's moral underpinnings need not be accomplished or artful, merely right.

The Warrior Who Carried Life is a beautiful and redemptive work, able to stand alongside the fantasies of the early John Crowley and Ursula K. Le Guin. Fans of Stephen Donaldson who come upon it will be amazed, perhaps even redeemed. One hopes a copy sells to every reader of Thomas Lord Covenant, along with a few for the rest of us.

All correspondence should be sent to the SF Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, RM8 2AS, UK.

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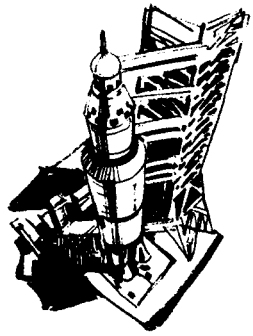

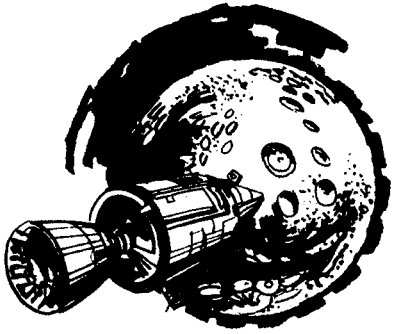

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