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the review of science fiction

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editorial

With this issue, the Management Committee of the Science Fiction Foundation has taken over the responsibility, through the editorial committee of *Foundation*, of producing this journal. Warmest thanks are given to Transcripta Books of London, in particular their Mr. S. Chomet, for enabling the journal to be launched more than a year ago. Without this invaluable help, *Foundation* would just be starting. We hope to build on what Transcripta Books started.

New brooms sweep clean – and in this respect, we would like to do various things. For example, we would like to lower the cost of the journal, or to give more wordage for the same money. Lowering the price is economically impossible at the moment, but we intend to try to keep the journal to the enlarged size of issue number 3, that is, something like twenty pages longer than the first two issues.

Minor changes have been made in the format, and these we hope, will produce a more attractive layout. We are also toying with the idea of re-designing the cover.

Because of the cost of processing overseas cheques and money orders, we regret that, in future, we shall have to charge six U.S. dollars for annual subscriptions to U.S. subscribers. Subscribers may still pay two pounds sterling for four issues. Incidentally, those who subscribed for the first four issues will appreciate that their subscriptions finish with this present number. A renewal form will be found at the back of the journal.

Negotiations are still under way to give the Science Fiction Foundation a legal corporate identity as a non-profit making limited liability company. In the meantime, we are very happy to announce that the Management Committee has been enlarged and strengthened by the addition of Mrs. Ursula Le Guin, one of the most distinguished of modern writers working within the genres of science fiction and fantasy. Mrs. Le Guin is resident in America, and, therefore, she can fulfil an advisory role only. However, we are very pleased to have a second representative from the United States working with us (James Blish has been with us from the beginning) especially as slightly more than half of our subscribers come from the United States and Canada. From the outset, we had hoped that our function would not be purely local: now we feel we are genuinely international.

Tom Shippey is a Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, and was previously a lecturer in the English Department of Birmingham University from 1965 to 1972. He is the author of Old English Verse *published by Hutchinson's in 1972. Most of his published work is on Old and Middle English, but he is also well known to science fiction enthusiasts as the author of a number of well-informed and intelligent book reviews that have appeared in the fanzines. He is 29 years old. The article below is a slightly revised version of a paper delivered at the November 1972 Science Fiction Convention (Novacon 2) at Birmingham.*

science fiction and the idea of history

Tom Shippey

Just over half-way through his "juvenile" novel, *Citizen of the Galaxy*, Robert Heinlein gets his hero Thorby involved in a play. The play is a historical one, dramatising the origins of the queer, nomadic, matriarchal, spaceship-society of Free Traders among whom Thorby now finds himself, and is to be produced publicly at their great Gathering. But it is introduced irreverently, like this:

> Aunt Athena Krausa-Fogarth . . . had the literary disease in its acute form; she had written a play. It was the life of the first Captain Krausa, showing the sterling nobility of the Krausa line. The first Krausa had been a saint with heart of steel. Disgusted with the evil ways of *fraki*, he had built *Sisu* – single handed – staffed it with his wife – named Fogarth in draft, changed to Grandmother's maiden name before the script got to her – and with their remarkable children. As the play ends they jump off into space, to spread culture and wealth through the galaxy.

Within the plot of *Citizen of the Galaxy* itself this play has a very obvious function: it is an attempt by the dictatorial "Grandmother" who runs the ship to involve Thorby in her society's mythology and make it impossible for him to get away. (Significantly, he is helped to escape just before the play opens). But the description of the play

quoted above is enough to show the true weaknesses, or rather falsities of "Grandmother's" position. For one thing it is the essence of the nomads' philosophy to believe themselves different from *fraki*, i.e. the planet-bound; yet clearly their ship must have been built somewhere and its crew must have had a planetary origin. Indeed they must have been *fraki*, and their motives for going into space can hardly have been those of people established in nomadism for generations. Aunt Athena's interpretation of the decision as a purely moral one is thus improbable and anachronistic, while her motive for seeing it that way is indicated by the insertion of her own name in the script, and by the alteration of it to "Grandmother's". The play projects the self-image of a society, exclusive (the word *fraki*), arrogant ("their *remarkable* children"), materialistic ("culture *and wealth*") – but not, one must add, without its virtues.

Heinlein is aware of all these falsities, and indeed uses the play to make them ironically clear. He is aware also of the tendency of most human societies to rewrite history in conformity with their current self-images; Thorby's difficulty all through the book is that of breaking through the basic, unquestioned assumptions of the various societies he comes into contact with, in order to find out what is true. It would be possible to write about *Citizen of the Galaxy* on its own as exemplifying the struggle between these two attitudes: the introspective, self-regarding, moralistic one of men certain of their own position in the universe, and the functionalist, anthropological one of those who move from one role to another. But it is more useful to suggest that in science fiction as a whole one can see something like such a contest; also that its existence is a feature of modern times alone. In history as in the physical sciences, science fiction relies on a view of the world which, if not exactly created in the 1920's, does not go back so very much further, and in many people's minds has not been accepted even yet.

The origins of this "world-view" are no doubt endlessly debatable. There is no event in historical studies comparable to the appearance of *The Origin of Species* (1859) for biology or Lyell's *Principles* (1830-33) for geology. One book, however, which at least exemplifies the way in which views of history and of society were forced to change is Thomas Malthus's *Essay on Population* (1798, rev. ed. 1803).[1] This, of course, is not primarily historical at all; Malthus's main concern is with his own present and with the future, and his central thesis is a socio-economic one: that the population is always rising up to and beyond the level of food-supply, and as regularly being cut down

again by famine and its attendants, war and disease. Malthus goes on from this thesis to suggest that the only way of stopping the permanent and dreadful oscillation (apart from "vice and misery") is through "moral restraint" – a theory which has a history of its own. Nevertheless, Malthus's importance for this present article is that although his main interests were not historical, he did suggest both directly and indirectly new attitudes to history and to society. The direct influence can be seen, e.g., in his complaints that though population-pressure and its oscillations have been a force throughout human history, earlier historians have taken little account of it. When writing about the Germanic invasions of the Roman Empire, for instance, he notes (vol. 1, p. 61) that it is of less interest to consider the motives of the leaders, the Alarics and Theoderics, than to wonder why they were provided with so many "willing followers" – a fact he would explain simply by the permanent threat of starvation. Since his time there is no doubt that historians have been more willing to consider economic and impersonal matters of this kind. But Malthus's indirect influence is more pervasive. Though he does not in fact offer opinions about historial matters, if his thesis is accepted, then clearly a different view of people's motivations in history must be taken. He seems to suggest, for instance, that individuals are less important than and may even be created by general social conditions. To put it crudely, one might think it less a case of Alaric leading the Goths than of the starving Goths pushing Alaric, with the further corollary that if Alaric had not existed the role would have been thrust on someone else. Whether this particular instance is true or not hardly matters, for one might conclude also, from the *Essay on Population,* that these "general social conditions" could be powerful in ways less obvious than simple starvation. Malthus noted, e.g., that the Dutch mortality rates bore a close resemblance to the marriage statistics. One cannot imagine that many people actually said or thought "Hurrah! Granny's dead, now there's room for our children". Yet in a statistical mass something like this motivation seemed to be present. What the *Essay on Population* suggested to many readers was that the whole of society was bound by invisible but powerful forces, hardly detectable through the experience of any one person (which was why earlier historians had said nothing about it) but nevertheless *there.* To some this was an exciting prospect: it meant that one could hope to change society for the better by using these forces (e.g. to promote "moral restraint"). To others it was profoundly depressing. In *Crime and Punishment* (1866), Dostoyevsky has one of his characters remark that "in our age even pity has been outlawed by science and . . . in

England, where they seem to be very keen on political economy, people are already acting accordingly".[2] It is easy to trace the origins of this back to Malthus's argument (Vol. 2, p. 39) that it is impossible to "raise the condition of a poor man" by giving him money "without proportionably depressing others in the same class"; and the argument (difficult though it might be for poor men to grasp) was no doubt believed and acted on by many not naturally uncharitable Victorians.

Malthus and his peers,[3] then, forced on their contemporaries a different and rather darker view of human society, one in which the individual will seemed less powerful and the statistical mass more so. One casualty of this general change was that style of history exemplified by Heinlein's "Aunt Athena" and often called nowadays " the whig interpretation".[4] It has not been a total casualty. In my own schooldays I was subjected to bits of the English version of this history, basically a nineteenth century "self-image" seeing in the past a gradual climb towards constitutional democracy and parliamentary government, and dwelling therefore on Anglo-Saxon institutions, on Magna Carta, on the battle of Crecy (where English *yeomen,* it was stressed, defeated French *knights),* on the Spanish Armada, the Civil War, the revolution of 1688, the two-party system, and so on. The gaps in this history are obvious, and it is no doubt more rarely found than it was. But other national versions of it still flourish. Heinlein himself, in *Citizen of the Galaxy,* shows a quite un-ironic loyalty to the American branch of the "whig interpretation", which runs from the Pilgrim Fathers to 1776, the Alamo and Abraham Lincoln, all centred on the themes of external independence and internal definition[5] – one wonders whether Thorby could be made, in 1973, to accept so readily that Lincoln "freed the slaves". But nevertheless, people are on the whole nowadays quicker to see the defects of history of this type: namely, that it ascribes too high a role to individual heroes, and tends to assume that those heroes (gifted with implausible foresight) did what they did because they knew their actions would lead to something like the present situation.

Science fiction authors – to return to the main subject – are in general even extremely sensitive to such defects. They do their best to avoid "whig interpretations" and *not* to project current self-images and ideals into either the past or the future. But, as with Heinlein, this does not mean that they are not aware of such ideals and images. Indeed, as it is the main purpose of this article to suggest, many science-fiction stories depend for their success on a strong tension between those two views of history, and of society, which one may label, for

the moment, "Malthusian" and "whig". The former is impersonal, technical, economic; it depends on the assumption that societies are bound together by very powerful forces, invisible but not unreal, which can in some circumstances be used positively but which may all too easily betray the careless or ignorant reformer. The latter is mythopoeic, hero-making; it assumes that history is purposive, leading strongly or inevitably towards the superior institutions of the present (or of an imagined future). It is perhaps predictable that the former should be the stronger. Nevertheless, it is not quite a foregone conclusion. The interaction between the two views has provided many fine stories. It allows one also to see how strongly science fiction has developed, and how authors seem to have affected each other in developing a consistent world-picture.

The tension between the two views can be seen most obviously in the many stories about time-travellers who return to change the past. Of these the most famous must be L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* (1941). But before considering that, it is useful to have for comparison a lesser-known story by the same author, "Aristotle and the Gun", published first in *Astounding Science Fiction,* British ed. of May 1958.

The hero (or perhaps the villain) of this story is an American scientist called Sherman Weaver. He is working on a project to build a time-machine when Washington cuts off his appropriation. He resents this bitterly, the more – as he confesses – because it is done by non-scientists, and he is himself an awkward and misanthropic person with little ability to succeed socially in any way except through science. He therefore decides that before closing down entirely he will try to go back in time and put the world on a line where science, that unqualified good (as it seems to him), will be advanced earlier and quicker. The key personality whom he decides to try and affect is Aristotle, during that period when he was tutor to Alexander the Great in Macedon. Briefly, Weaver does go back; he represents himself as a travelling Indian philosopher; he shows Aristotle a telescope, teaches him geography, astronomy, physics, etc.; and tries always to stress to him that the key to all these advances is scientific method, "the need for experiment and invention and for checking each theory back against the facts". This, he feels, is in the long run more important than any single invention or piece of information. Aristotle absorbs all this most thoroughly. But unfortunately he lives in a military court, and Weaver, partly through his own naïveté, runs into trouble with Macedonian "security". In the end he has to draw and use a gun, but is overpowered and on

the point of execution when catapulted back into his own time. He looks round eagerly for signs of the "super-science" he meant to create; but finds himself in a wilderness. He has indeed altered the course of history, but away from science rather than towards it. America has only been contacted and not conquered by a relatively barbarous Europe, the Red Indians advancing towards a kind of feudalism. Weaver is enslaved, works his way up at last to being a librarian, and finds the mistake he made, in a resumé of the Aristotelian treatise (clearly based on the events of his own visit) "On the Folly of Natural Science". In this Aristotle explains that there are three reasons why "no good Hellene should trouble his mind with such matters":

> One is that the number of facts which must be mastered before sound theories are possible is so great that if all the Hellenes did nothing else for centuries, they would still not gather the amount of data required. The task is therefore futile. Secondly, experiments and mechanical inventions are necessary to progress in science, and such work, though all very well for slavish Asiatics, who have a natural bent for it, is beneath the dignity of a Hellenic gentleman. And lastly, some of the barbarians have already surpassed the Hellenes in this activity, wherefore it ill becomes the Hellenes to compete with their inferiors in skills at which the latter have an inborn advantage. They should rather cultivate personal rectitude, patriotic valor, political rationality, and aesthetic sensitivity . .

Weaver *has* inculcated scientific method – but forgotten to make it attractive. His final motto is "Leave Well Enough Alone".

Now (as may be obvious even from this summary) this is a good story on its own; and it has a point to make about scientific method, that however attractive it may seem to us, this is largely a result of the fact that it works! Yet scientists who lived before this was obvious must still have had *some* motivation. But the true point of the story, I would suggest, is about history. Weaver's hobby is the history of science – he even writes for *Isis*. But, as has been said recently, "no history is more whiggish than the history of science".[6] And as a "whig historian" Weaver is regrettably convinced that the ideals of his own time are immutable and eternally applicable. He is as misled as Heinlein's "Aunt Athena" and (such being the respect still paid to science and to its mythology/history) more dangerously so. "Aristotle and the Gun" is thus a pointed parable of the downfall of one misguided interpretation of history.

The comparison with de Camp's earlier work, *Lest Darkness Fall* (1941), is obvious. In this also a modern man, Martin Padway, finds himself thrown back in time (though in this case accidentally) to a

sixth-century Rome under Gothic occupation, at the start of the Dark Ages. He too exerts himself to change history, and in what is basically a twentieth-century direction. But unlike Weaver he seems to succeed. For this there are several reasons.

One is that he is not himself a scientist, but an archaeologist, as he puts it himself, "a historical philosopher". As a result he has no particular wish to urge people towards twentieth-century solutions to their problems, whether these might be scientific method, or democracy, or a secularised society. It is, for instance, obvious to him that the orthodox Church is hopelessly corrupt, while even more than the corrupt clerics he fears the honest and dedicated ones with their attendant enthusiasts, "no doubt because their mental processes were so utterly alien to his own." Yet when threatened by these forces he wastes no time on indignation, using instead a kind of blackmail; and though his actions may be morally dubious, they do at least show him recognising that his enemies have a kind of sense and consistency which is not to be dispersed, as Weaver might have thought, by a short explanation of the virtues of religious tolerance. In the same way Padway does not boggle at the customary high interest-rates, at the inability of the rich to understand investment or of the Goths to understand tactics; he sees all too clearly that people are moulded by their environment and that his superiority over the others (while not to be denied) comes only from his different background. He cannot, then, simply *tell* people things which contradict all their previous experience. Indeed, another reason for his success is that he tells very little to anyone. At no point does he try to teach theory or scientific method. Instead the list of things he introduces very largely consists of items that work straight away without much need for explanation: Arabic numerals, double-entry bookkeeping, distilling, horse-collars, telescopes, staff co-ordination, political propaganda etc.[7] Of course they are intended to have just as disruptive an effect as Weaver's theorising in "Aristotle and the Gun"; but the challenge they present is not immediate, while the rewards are. One notes that items which do *not* fit this pattern (like Copernican astronomy) are introduced in a much more roundabout way, while printing, the major invention introduced, is used at first only for the attractive but undignified purpose of a gossip-and-scandal-sheet. All in all, Padway has a much lower opinion of himself and his world than Weaver – he even has expensive failures, like his inability to produce either a decent clock or fireable gunpowder. The last reason for his success is a strong awareness that he is "living in a political and cultural as well as in an economic world".

But even when he remembers that, one should note that he still thinks of the political and cultural rulers as products of forces outside themselves; it is this that preserves him from simple horror at the blood-thirsty habits even of his associates and people he likes.

Padway, in short, is more tolerant than Weaver. I should stress that this tolerance does not go very far. Padway is not prepared to *like* the sixth-century world or to behave in a sixth-century manner, and his determination to make changes is as strong as Weaver's. But he *is* prepared to accept that the people and their habits have a kind of logic. He behaves as an anthropologist rather than a missionary.

This may nowadays seem a very natural, indeed inescapable response, and it is significant that de Camp has to work harder at creating Weaver as a character than at Padway. But proof of the distance science fiction has travelled comes from a comparison of *Lest Darkness Fall* with a very similar book written fifty-two years earlier, Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). The two books are in many respects astonishingly close, so much so that it is hard to believe that de Camp had not some idea of rewriting Twain in his mind. In Twain's book as in de Camp's a "modern" man is catapulted back to the sixth century, though in this case to Arthurian Britain rather than Gothic Italy, while in Twain's book also the "Yankee" does his best to change matters by the introduction of printing, advertising, gunpowder, and pragmatic engineering. Some devices overlap. Both Hank Morgan and Martin Padway, for example, gain a reputation for wit by translating literally the clichés of their own century, and both have troubles with sub-editors. But such similarities are far outweighed by one enormous difference: that both Hank Morgan and his creator hate and despise practically everything they meet in the past, from the institutions of feudalism to the widespread drunkenness, from the unrealistic art to the indecent conversation, and above all both project hatred and fear of established religion and especially of the Roman Catholic Church.

This may seen a hard saying, and (Twain being an accepted "classic") critics have on the whole preferred not to say it. There are two arguments that might be used in defence of *A Connecticut Yankee:* one, that Hank Morgan is an "unreliable" narrator whose opinions are to be distinguished from his author's; two, that the book is after all a comic one and not meant to be taken seriously. There is a grain of truth in both arguments, but no more. For the first one, it is true that in places Hank's Philistinism is meant to reflect on himself, e.g. when he criticises the art of the Arthurian court and goes on in a general way

to compare Raphael unfavourably with nineteenth-century insurance "chromos", or "three-colour God-Bless-Our-Homes". Nevertheless even there the final criticism of Raphael's "Miraculous Draught of Fishes" – that it is unrealistic – is I feel meant seriously; and in other places Twain seems to drop the "Hank Morgan" personality altogether, in order to lecture the reader directly, even going as far, on occasion, as to add genuine historical references to assure the reader that what he says is true. Furthermore, though Twain exploits the "culture-gap" between the sixth century and the nineteenth for comedy, that comedy always has a touch of anger in it. We are given, for instance, the comic picture of knights riding round with advertisements on their shields, or of a sewing-machine being rigged up to an ascetic pillar-squatter to turn out shirts. But the purpose of the former (as Hank admits) is to make "this nonsense of knight-errantry" ridiculous, while the latter simply treats the unfortunate saint as a mad machine. Twain has no time even for the Arthurian knights' admitted courage; he simply calls them "white Indians". The opinion Morgan expresses at the start of the book – "Camelot – Camelot . . . Name of the asylum, likely" – is never significantly changed.

Indeed, the difference between the *Connecticut Yankee* and *Lest Darkness Fall* is precisely that the hero of the former does nothing but mirror his author's nineteenth century American prejudices. Both Morgan and Padway, as has been said, try to disrupt ancient social systems. But Padway's intentions are merely pragmatic: to prevent a new barbarism by any means possible. Morgan on the other hand sets himself from the start to destroy the Established Church and introduce a republic, two goals which he hardly distinguishes. To a modern reader also, one of the most curious things about the book must be its assumption that democracy and efficiency inevitably go together, said to be (my italics) "an always *self-proven* fact". At one point Morgan laments his inability to get people to understand his ideas or to escape from their basic assumptions (a common theme in science fiction from then on):

> Old habit of mind is one of the toughest things to get away from in the world. It transmits itself like physical form and feature; and for a man, in those days, to have had an idea that his ancestors hadn't had, would have brought him under suspicion of being illegitimate.

But the irony is that neither Morgan nor (I believe) Twain ever sees that this could apply to themselves as well. To both it is not only axiomatic that "freedom = technical efficiency" and vice-versa: it is

also quite clear that both are intimately bound up with sobriety, modesty, capitalism, and, one suspects, religious non-conformity.

The *Connecticut Yankee* presents a flattering self-image of what is now a dead society. (If nothing else proves this, it stands out from the Yankee's crusade against slavery, an institution of negligible importance in any Arthurian story from the *Gododdin* to Malory, and clearly imported with all its trappings from the cotton plantations of America.) As such, the novel is of extreme historical interest, but open to criticism in a way (or so I imagine) that would be impossible with de Camp's more cautious cultural relativism. In a curious way Twain parallels de Camp's character Sherman Weaver seventy years later; both (at least on the evidence of this book by Twain) are "monoculturalists" – they see the logic of history as pointing only to themselves.

Twain has had a good deal of influence over the years, if not on de Camp, then certainly on the similar but feebler "Leonardo da Vinci" story, Manley Wade Wellman's *Twice in Time* (1951), and I suspect on several other "alternate universe" stories as well. But on the whole authors have seen its weak points. There are, for instance, two very strong attacks on his point of view by relatively "mainstream" authors, both of them deserving some analysis. The first is Rudyard Kipling's short story "The Eye of Allah" (1926).[8] Unlike anything discussed previously, this is not a "time-travel" story. But it is one about anachronism – specifically, about the microscope which one of the four central characters, the artist-monk John of Burgos, has brough back to his monastery from Arab Spain. *He* wants it only to provide inspiration for the devils he draws on his manuscripts; but two of the other characters present, the doctor Roger from Salerno and the friar Roger Bacon, see immediately its wide importance – the one medical, the other optical. But at the end of the story, after hearing all the others out, the abbot Stephen takes the microscope and destroys it. From this extremely bald summary one might think that the story confirms Twain's picture of the mediaeval Church as an obscurantist organisation, or that it fits the rather common science-fiction pattern of the "Galileo" or "persecuted innovator" story (see, e.g. "The Thing in the Attic" in James Blish's *Seedling Stars*). But neither of these is true. Abbot Stephen is neither stupid nor bigoted. At the start of the crucial conversation he takes off his official ring, to show that he listens as an individual; only when he puts it back on does he speak from authority, with the threat of force behind him. Nor, indeed, is he personally unaffected by the decision, having at the time a mistress, desperately ill,

whose only function in the story is to make it obvious that he realises the misery to which loss of the microscope (and the theory of germs) must condemn the world. Since Kipling goes to such lengths to excuse the abbot, one wonders *why* he is made to decide the way he does. The reason is given, with typical indirection, as the party walk out on the monastery roof after dinner and see:

> three English counties laid out in evening sunshine around them; church upon church, monastery upon monastery, cell after cell, and the bulk of a vast cathedral moored on the edge of the banked shoals of sunset.

The scene is one of utter social stability, guaranteed by the Church. What the abbot fears is any premature disruption of this; and his awareness that science is connected with belief-systems and so with politics is clearly meant to be taken as correct. At the end he confesses that he has seen microscopes before, while a prisoner of the Saracens, and seen also:

> what doctrine they drew from it . . . this birth, my sons, is untimely. It will be the mother of more death, more torture, more division, and greater darkness in this dark age. Therefore I, who know both my world and the Church, take this Choice on my conscience. Go! It is finished. He thrust the wooden part of the compasses deep among the beech logs till all was burned.

"It is finished", of course, translates the *"Consummatum est"* of Christ on the Cross. The words show that Stephen realises that what he has done is also in some sense a crucifixion.[9]

Kipling's story, then, takes the point common to both Twain and de Camp – that science cannot be dissociated from cultural change – but defies both of them by suggesting that sudden cultural change, however great the potential benefits, may not be desirable. In a short story written some thirty years later William Golding suggested further that the forces opposed to cultural change are so strong as to make anachronisms like the mediaeval microscope not only undesirable but next to impossible. His story, "Envoy Extraordinary" (1956, but reprinted in the recent collection, *Scorpion God*), betrays the influence of science fiction relatively clearly.

In it, as in "The Eye of Allah", there are no "time-travellers". But the central character is a wildly anachronistic Greek called Phanokles, who appears in a late Roman Empire setting possessed of all the attitudes of the twentieth century. In particular he has discovered steam-power and proposes to build a paddle-steamer. To this the materialist

and sceptical Emperor gives a grudging assent, largely to please his enthusiastic grandson, Mamillius (in love with Phanokles's sister). But the other grandson, the ambitious and soldierly Posthumus, gets to hear of this and thinks it a plot to supplant him. He arrives at the harbour with massive force; and the core of the story lies in the attempts made by the Emperor, by Phanokles, and by the grandson Mamillius, to persuade or overpower him. Phanokles's arguments are frankly useless. He tries to convince Posthumus of his good intentions and of the benefits steam can bring, only to find that even the galley-slaves are against it (fearing redundancy), while the soldiers are terrified of the peaceful, sordid, loot-less existence he seems to promise. More effective is the Emperor's device of inspecting his guard at great length in full armour in blazing sunshine, so that his long and patriotic harangue is punctuated by the "Crash" of disciplined soldiers fainting. But in the end the situation is saved by deeds not words: the steamship *Amphitrite* runs amok in the bay and sinks half the invading fleet by accident, and Phanokles's sister, the dumb and beautiful Euphrosyne, removes the arming-vane from Phanokles's artillery-shell, and blows Posthumus to bits. The comedy of the story lies essentially in the success of the Emperor's pragmatic man-management as opposed to Phanokles's naïve ideals of progress (with which a modern reader is at first disposed to sympathise). At one point Phanokles proposes the well-known Wellsian truism,[10] that "Civilization is a matter of communications." "I see", replies the Emperor, thinking of Caesar and Alexander and no doubt of that other would-be world conqueror, Posthumus, "They should be made as difficult as possible." Similarly, at the end, when Phanokles has just invented printing, the Emperor at first shows enthusiasm, thinking of public libraries. Then maturer consideration takes over:

> **Diary of a Provincial Governor. I built Hadrian's Wall. My Life in Society, by a Lady of Quality . . . Prologomena to the Investigation of Residual Trivia . . . In the Steps of Thucydides . . . I was Nero's Grandmother . . .**

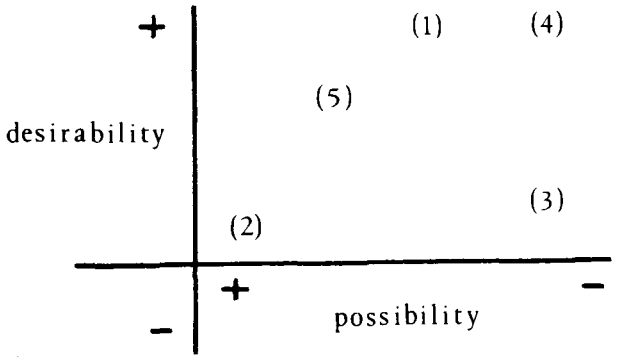
And then the reports! He sends Phanokles as far away as possible, as "envoy extraordinary" to China. Of all the inventions he keeps only one – the pressure cooker, to rejuvenate his own palate. So in the end Phanokles is rejected, like Kipling's John of Burgos, but (one should note) not simply in the interests of public order. Despite the comic tone of the story there is one moving moment, when the galley-slave who has tried to kill Phanokles gives his reason for fearing him. It is

not that he *wants* to be a galley-slave. But, anticipating the future proposed for him, he quotes the speech of Achilles' ghost in Book 11 of the *Odyssey.*:

> **I had rather be slave to a smallholder than rule in hell over all the ghosts of men.**

Bad as his life is, the mechanised world of Phanokles seems to him a living death. Though Golding does not quite endorse this, he makes the human resistance to scientific progress evident in a way done by none of the authors discussed earlier.

What these five stories have in common is a tension between our present view of society (as exemplified by the "time-traveller" or the anachronism) and some ancient view (as exemplified by the various resistances put up by Goths, Romans, Macedonians, or mediaevals). Only Twain, of the four authors cited, sees this tension as one between good and evil, leaving the ancient society with nothing to say for itself; he is the only "whig" among them. But in spite of the general similarity of theme, it should be obvious that *all* the authors provide quite different answers to the same kind of question. This similarity-in-difference can best be represented by a graph. One axis grades the stories along the line "whether it is more, or less, *desirable* to change the past", the other along the line "whether it is more, or less, *possible*".



No two stories are very close together. To take the most extreme cases first: Twain, in the *Connecticut Yankee,* sees it as 100% desirable to change the past, but is clearly uncertain about its possibility (for at the end the Yankee, having defeated the nobility, loses to the Church

and Merlin in a way that makes him approach despair). That story therefore occupies position (1). Kipling, by contrast, feels that it might have been easy for history to have taken another turn (indeed it costs abbot Stephen great pain to prevent it), but finds it undesirable because potentially disruptive. He is therefore at (2). (3) is William Golding. Phanokles's vision of the future has little charm for him, and he sees also a determined resistance to it by rulers and ruled alike. De Camp takes up both (4) and (5), i.e. "Aristotle and the Gun" and *Lest Darkness Fall* respectively. In both cases he admits the desirability of changing the past, though Weaver's feelings about this are stronger than Padway's; but (through faults of technique perhaps) Weaver in "Aristotle and the Gun" finds history all too easy to change but impossible to change successfully.

It must be stressed that this graph is not merely a visual aid. This tension between "desirability" and "possibility" is what all the stories are really *about.* If it did not exist, then they would be simply about survival, i.e. what the inventor or time-traveller might have to offer. But instead they are about what he has to offer *that the world is able to accept!* Without some sense of the way in which people are moulded by their social conditions and philosophical assumptions, the last qualification is meaningless, and so are the stories. One may feel (like Twain and to a lesser extent, de Camp) that modern men are wiser and less hidebound than their predecessors, in which case the stories deal with modern men overcoming more or less excusable resistance; or else (with Kipling and Golding) that the ancients had a good deal on their side, in which case the stories involve merely a choice of one set of advantages-and-disadvantages or another. But either alternative depends in some degree on the analysis of history, and on viewing it moreover not just as a sequence of events but as an interaction of forces. It is this last point which is the novelty of Malthus; this also which is signally lacking in history as dramatised by Heinlein's "Aunt Athena".

There are then several remarks which might be made in conclusion. One is, that stories of this type seem to be something genuinely modern. One cannot imagine any author or reader from an earlier age having the background of ideas about history, or science, or society, which would enable him to appreciate what is going on in them. Another is that, apart from the many other stories which could simply be placed on the graph without further explanation,[11] the type lends itself very easily, indeed inevitably, to stories of slightly different but equally familiar types. Consider Martin Padway. He goes back to sixth-century Rome and changes things so that another history ensues. He must then

either have created a "parallel universe" *or else* have destroyed his own. Both these possibilities lead to recognisable story types, the first to the one about the "parallel universe" where history has taken a slightly different turn (e.g. Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle,* Harry Harrison, *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!,* Ward Moore, *Bring the Jubilee,* Randall Garrett, *Too Many Magicians,* etc.), the second to the "Time Patrol"/"Change War" type (e.g. Fritz Leiber, *The Big Time,* Isaac Asimov, *The End of Eternity,* Poul Anderson, *The Guardians/ Corridors of Time* etc.) Bastard genres are not impossible either (I think of the H. Beam Piper "Gunpowder God" series). The point is, however, that all these stories also owe their very potentiality to modern conceptions of history, and are attractive to us at least partly because they show us how we too might be different if subjected to a different set of social pressures.

My third and last point is that the consideration of history in science fiction need not stop there. A good deal has already been said in this article about the tension between an individualist view of history and that view which holds that personalities are more or less accidental. To show that this too is important in science fiction I need do no more than mention Asimov's *Foundation* series. This is set very much in the future and contains no time-travellers or anachronisms. Still, it must be obvious to everyone that the trilogy could not have been written without some sense of historical analogy, while for much of the time the stories do nothing but dramatise the subordination of the individual will to the "laws" of sociohistory. Could Asimov have written as he did without the ground-breaking theories of Malthus and his many successors, down to A.J. Toynbee?

NOTES

1. Quotations in this article are from the two volume Everyman edition, a reprint of the 7th ed. I have been encouraged to choose Malthus as an example rather than, say, Ricardo or Marx, because he crops up frequently enough in science fiction to show that he has made some impression on a few authors, especially (I would think) Frederik Pohl.)
2. Penguin classics trans. by D. Magarshack, p. 31.
3. I regret that my own ignorance prevents me from estimating how Malthus stands in relation to other political economists. A useful book on this area, though, is R.E. Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers* (rev. ed. 1969).

4. The phrase is taken from H. Butterfield's book, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931).
5. Another science fiction author who shows a weakness for it is Asimov. At the end of *The Stars Like Dust* (1952) a fairly implausible importance is attached to the Constitution of the long-extinct United States.
6. This remark comes from J.D.Y. Peel's *Herbert Spencer: the evolution of a sociologist* (1972). However, the point is made more familiarly and at greater length in Arthur Koestler's book *The Sleepwalkers* (1959).
7. Some of these have taken their place in science fiction folklore. One finds very similar lists in M.W. Wellman's *Twice in Time* (1951), or in H. Beam Piper's "Gunpowder God", *Analog* Nov. '64. Poul Anderson's much more original story in *Analog* Oct. '63, "The Three-Cornered Wheel", still turns on a very similar point – the introduction of calculus to a backward alien civilisation.
8. To be found in the collection *Debits and Credits* (1926).
9. For a longer but similar account of this story, see the chapter on "Healing" in J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling* (1959).
10. In section 2 of ch. 25 of his *Outline of History* (6th ed., 1931) H.G. Wells asserts that the Roman republic was doomed a) by its lack of printing, b) by its cumbersome method of non-representative government. In the next two chapters he goes on to compare the Roman Empire unfavourably with the Chinese. It may be that Golding took some ideas from there. Certainly Phanokles is very much a "Wellsian" man, with his technical and democratic bias and his belief in the ease of progress. I should add that the *Outline of History* has probably been as influential as any book in spreading a progressive and materialistic (but rather ill-natured) view of history.
11. E.G., Dean McLaughlin, "Hawk among the Sparrows", *Analog* July '68 (somewhere between (5) and (1)) or Arthur Porges, "The Rescuer", *Astounding* Feb. '63, British ed. [anywhere above (2)].

This issue of *Foundation* is a large one. We had ample material on hand, partly resulting from the delay in number 3. We are unfortunately unable to print it all this time, and we are therefore holding over the long article: *Science Fiction and the Mainstream Part 2: The Great Tradition of Proto Science Fiction* by Peter Nicholls until the next issue. It had been announced for this issue, and we apologize for its absence.

This is the fourth in our series in which leading science fiction writers discuss their own relationship to the field, and how they entered it.

a citizen of mondath

the development of a science fiction writer: IV

Ursula K. Le Guin

One evening when I was about twelve I was looking through the living-room bookshelves for something to read, and pulled out a little Modern Library book, in the old limp leather binding; it had a queer title, *A Dreamer's Tales.* I opened it, standing beside the battered green armchair by the lamp, the moment is perfectly vivid to me now. I read:

> Toldees, Mondath, Arizim, these are the Inner Lands, the lands whose sentinels upon their borders do not behold the sea. Beyond them to the east there lies a desert, for ever untroubled by man: all yellow it is, and spotted with shadows of stones, and Death is in it, like a leopard lying in the sun. To the south they are bounded by magic, to the west by a mountain . . .

I don't entirely understand why Dunsany came to me as a revelation, why that moment was so decisive. I read a lot, and a lot of my reading was myth, legend, fairytale; first-rate versions, too, such as Padraic Colum, Asbjornsson, etc. I had also heard my father tell Indian legends aloud, just as he had heard them from informants, only translated into a rather slow, impressive English; and they were impressive and mysterious stories. What I hadn't realised, I guess, is that people were still making up myths. One made up stories oneself, of course; but here was a grown-up doing it, for grown-ups, without a single apology to common sense, without an explanation, just dropping us straight into the Inner Lands . . . Whatever the reason, the moment was decisive.

I had discovered my native country.

The book belonged to my father, a scientist, and was a favourite of his; in fact he had a large appetite for fantasy. I have wondered if there isn't some real connection between a certain kind of scientific-mindedness (the explorative, synthesising kind) and fantasy-mindedness. Perhaps "science fiction" really isn't such a bad name for our genre after all. Those who dislike fantasy are very often equally bored or repelled by science. They don't like either hobbits, or quasars; they don't feel at home with them; they don't want complexities, remoteness. If there is any such connection, I'll bet that it is basically an aesthetic one.

I wonder what would have happened if I had been born in 1939 instead of 1929, and had first read Tolkien in my teens, instead of in my twenties. That achievement might have overwhelmed me. I am glad I had some sense of my own direction before I read Tolkien. Dunsany's influence was wholly benign, and I never tried much to imitate him, in my prolific and derivative adolescent scribblings. I must have known already that this sort of thing is inimitable. He was not a model to me, but a liberator, a guide.

However, I was headed towards the Inner Lands before I ever heard of them. I still have my first completed short story, written at age nine. It is about a man persecuted by evil elves. People think he is mad, but the evil elves finally slither in through the keyhole, and get him. At ten or eleven I wrote my first science fiction story. It involved time travel and the origin of life on Earth, and was very breezy in style. I submitted it to *Amazing Stories.* There's another vivid memory, my brother Karl on the stairs, looking up at me on the landing and saying very reluctantly, "I'm afraid this is your story come back." I don't remember being very downcast, rather flattered by a real rejection slip. I never submitted anything else to anybody till I was twenty-one, but I think that was less cowardice than wisdom.

We kids read science fiction, in the early 40's: *Thrilling Wonder,* and *Astounding* in that giant format it had for a while, and so on. I liked "Lewis Padgett" best, and looked for his stories, but we looked for the trashiest magazines, mostly, because we *liked* trash. I recall one story that began, "In the beginning was the Bird." We really dug that bird. And the closing line from another (or the same?) – "Back to the saurian ooze from whence it sprung!" Karl made that into a useful chant: The saurian ooze from which it sprung/Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung. – I wonder how many hack writers who think they are writing down to "naive kids" and "teenagers" realise the *kind* of pleasure they

sometimes give their readers. If they did, they would sink back into the saurian ooze from whence they sprung.

I never read only science fiction, as some kids do. I read everything I could get my hands on, which was limitless; there was a house full of books, and a good public library. I got off science fiction some time in the late 40's. It seemed to be all about hardware and soldiers. Besides, I was busy with Tolstoy and things. I did not read any science fiction at all for about fifteen years, just about that period which people now call The Golden Age of Science Fiction. I almost totally missed Heinlein, *et al.* If I glanced at a magazine, it still seemed to be all about starship captains in black with lean rugged faces and a lot of fancy artillery. Possibly I would never have gone back to reading science fiction, and thence to writing it, if it hadn't been for a friend of ours here in Portland in 1960 and 61, who had a small collection and lent me whatever I glommed onto. One of the things he lent me was a copy of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* containing a story called "Alpha Ralpha Boulevard," by Cordwainer Smith.

I don't really remember what I thought when I read it; but what I think now I ought to have thought when I read it was, My God! *It can be done!*

After that I read a good deal of science fiction, looking for "that kind" of writing; and found some, here and there. Presently it seemed that since there was so little of it, why not do some myself?

No, that is not true. It is much more complicated, and boring.

To put it briefly, I had been writing all my life, and it was becoming a case of publish or perish. You cannot keep filling up the attic with mss. Art, like sex, cannot be carried on indefinitely solo; after all they have the same mutual enemy, sterility. I had had a number of poems published, and one short story, in little magazines; but this wasn't enough, considering that I had written five novels in the last ten years. I had either to take off, or give up.

One of the novels was set in contemporary San Francisco, but the others were set in an invented though non-fantastic Central European country, as were the best short stories I had done. They were not science fiction, they were not fantasy, yet they were not realistic. Alfred Knopf said (in 1951) that he would have published the first of them, ten years ago, but he'd lose too much money on it now. Viking and other publishers merely remarked that "this material seems remote." It was remote. It was meant to be. Searching for a technique of distancing, I had come on this one. Unfortunately it was not a technique used by anybody else at the moment, it was not

fashionable, it did not fit into any of the categories. You must either fit a category, or "have a name", to publish a book in America. As the only way I was ever going to achieve Namehood was *by* writing, I was reduced to fitting a category. Therefore my first efforts to write science fiction were motivated by a pretty distinct wish to get published: nothing higher or lower. The stories reflect this extrinsic motivation. They are kind of amiable but not very good, not serious, essentially slick. They were published by Cele Goldsmith Lalli, the kindly and courageous editor of *Amazing* and *Fantastic,* in the early 60's.

The shift from the kind of writing I had done before to categorisable "fantasy" and "science fiction" was not a big one, but I had a good deal to learn all the same. Also I was pretty ignorant of science, and was just beginning to educate myself (a hopeless job, but one which I continue to enjoy immensely). At first I knew too little science to use it as the framework, as part of the essential theme, of a story, and so wrote fairytales decked out in space suits. If anything gives these merit, it would be my long apprenticeship in poetry and in the psychologically realistic kind of novel.

The first science fiction story I wrote that begins to break from the trivial became the source, and prologue, of the little novel *Rocannon's World.* I was beginning to get the feel of the medium. In the next books I kept on pushing at my own limitations and at the limits of science fiction. That is what the practise of an art is, you keep looking for the outside edge. When you find it you make a whole, solid, real, and beautiful thing; anything less is incomplete. These books were certainly incomplete, especially *City of Illusions,* which I should not have published as it stands. It has some good bits, but is only half thought out. I was getting vain and hasty.

That is a real danger, when you write science fiction. There is so little real criticism, that despite the very delightful and heartening feedback from and connection with the fans, the writer is almost his only critic. If he produces second-rate stuff, it will be bought just as fast, maybe faster sometimes, by the publishers, and the fans will buy it because it is science fiction. Only his own conscience remains to insist that he try *not* to be second-rate. Nobody else seems much to care.

Of course this is basically true of the practise of all writing, and all art; but it is exaggerated in science fiction. And, equally of course, it is not true in the long run, of science fiction or any other form. But it is an awfully long run. One can trust in the verdict of posterity, but

it's not a handy tool to apply in specific instances. What almost all of us need is some genuine, serious, literate criticism: some standards. I don't mean pedantry and fancy academic theorising. I mean just the kind of standards which any musician, for instance, has to meet. Whether he plays rock on the electric piccolo or Bach on the cello, he is listened to by informed, profoundly interested people, and if he's second-rate he will be told so; ditto if he's good. In science fiction, sometimes it seems that so long as it's science fiction at all, the fans will love it – briefly; therefore the publishers will put it in print – briefly; therefore the writer is likely to settle for doing much less than his best. The mediocre and the excellent are praised alike by aficionados, and ignored alike by outsiders. In such a situation it is simply amazing that writers like Philip K. Dick continue in excellence. It is not at all amazing, though very sad, that writers like Roger Zelazny may be forced into a long period of floundering and groping, after initial sureness. After all, writing is not only an originative act, it is a responsive one. The lack of genuine response, and therefore the lack of the sense of responsibility, is painfully clear in those writers who simply go on and on imitating themselves – or others.

I think the standards are rising, however. In fact I know they are, when I think back to the saurian ooze from whence we sprung.

Along in 1967-68 I finally got my pure fantasy vein separated off from my science fiction vein, by writing *A Wizard of Earthsea* and then *Left Hand of Darkness,* and the separation marked a very large advance in both skill and content. Since then I have gone on writing, as it were, with both the left and the right hands; and it has been a matter of keeping on pushing out towards the limits – my own, and those of the medium. Very much the largest push was made in my last (not yet published) novel, *The Dispossessed.* I hope rending sounds and cries of dismay are not heard when it comes out. Meanwhile, people keep predicting that I will bolt science fiction and fling myself madly into the Mainstream. I don't know why. The limits, and the great spaces of fantasy and science fiction are precisely what my imagination needs. Outer Space, and the Inner Lands, are still, and always will be, my country.

This is the fifth article in our series by leading science fiction writers.

up and away from the school of invention

the development of a science fiction writer: V

L. Sprague de Camp

The story of how I got into professional writing is short and fairly simple, as follows:

I graduated from California Institute of Technology in 1930 with a degree of B.S. in Aeronautical Engineering. At that time, I fully expected to become an aeronautical engineer. Unfortunately, the Great Depression of 1929+ nixed that plan. After a couple of years of fruitless job-hunting and of working for my father (real estate and lumber in the Adirondack Mountains) I went back to college for more education. I got an M.S. in Engineering and Economics from Stevens Institute of Technology in 1933. When I was offered a job in technical education – correcting examinations and helping to write a textbook on patent law and practice – at the splendid salary of $75 a week, I took it.

A few years later, in 1936-37, I found myself principal of the School of Invention and Patenting of the International Correspondence Schools of Scranton, Pennsylvania. I had an old friend, Dr. John Drury Clark, with whom I had roomed during my last year at CIT. He was living in New York and job-hunting. To continue to eat, he wrote

a couple of stories for *Astounding Stories,* as it was then. I used to come in on the train (we then had passenger trains that ran whither you wanted to go) on alternate weekends, and John and I would sit up late over a few bottles of beer, plotting these stories.

He sent the stories in and, to our mutual amazement, they sold. My next thought was: if he can do it, why not I? I had plenty of spare time, knowing few people in Scranton and getting out from work at 4.20 p.m. daily. So I wrote a couple of stories and sent them in. To my amazement, they also sold. My reaction was: Whee! Why hasn't somebody told me about this before? It surely beats working!

In late 1938, I quit my job in Scranton to take a slightly better-paying one in New York, as one of the editors on a trade journal having to do with oil heating and air conditioning. After three months, I was laid off. The publisher had become nervous when some advertisers in his periodical stopped advertising, and to economize he decided to fire the two most junior editors. So I got the old axe and block. He was very apologetic, but I didn't really mind; for this employer was a real bastard. If the late J. Edgar Hoover had worked for him, Hoover would have led the Communist contingent in the next May Day parade. He had all sorts of silly rules, such as "Employees may not fraternize with one another outside of business hours." He didn't want them getting together to bitch about the boss. Nobody paid attention to the rule, but it shows what kind he was.

Years later, one of my former fellow employees called me up. After we had exchanged amenities, he said: "Say, you know it wasn't we who were crazy back when we worked for B. It was B. himself. They've got him in a padded cell in a loony bin in New Jersey, as a dangerous paranoiac!" It was a relief to know that our discomforts in working for B. had not been due to our own shortcomings, as we – being then young and inexperienced – had suspected.

When I lost my job on the *Fuel Oil Journal* I thought: if I can make so much money by working on the side as a writer for five hours a week, I ought to be able to make ten times as much by working fifty hours a week. Why not try free-lancing instead of these piddling editorial jobs? So I did. Of course there was a fallacy in my reasoning, since one soon runs up against a law of diminishing returns; but at any rate I soon found that I was making as much money free-lancing as I had been as a wage slave, being my own boss, and having lots more fun. So, save for a few temporary jobs in editing, technical writing, and the like, and for the Hitlerian War (in which I piloted a desk in a naval engineering laboratory as an officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve) I have

been free-lancing ever since. I have, however, been able to get saleable copy out of all my jobs, however undistinguished. For that reason, I advise young persons with literary ambitions to work at regular employment – preferably in several different fields – before trying full-time free-lancing. Being employed is like making love – if you have never done it, perhaps you can fake a pretty good description of it; but you are better off if you know it from personal experience.

While I was still living in Scranton, I fell in with John Clark's friend P. Schuyler Miller, of Schenectady, New York. (For the benefit of British readers, the "sch" in "Schuyler" and "Schenectady" is pronounced like "sk.") Schuy (pronounced "sky") was making a name as a writer of short science-fiction stories but had never tried a novel. Between us we developed the idea for collaborating on the novel that became *Genus Homo,* with a plot very much like that of the more recent *Planet of the Apes.* We worked on it in desultory fashion from 1936 to 1938, but we did not succeed in selling it until 1940. Before I began any regular Science Fiction short stories, I also wrote a short cave-man tale, *The Hairless Ones Come,* in 1937. I sold it in 1938, after the regular Science Fiction outlets had turned it down. It appeared in 1939 in the short-lived magazine of historical fiction, *Golden Fleece.* This was followed by the Science Fiction short stories, *The Isolinguals* and *Hyperpilosity,* and then by the article, *Language for Time-Travellers.* The last got such favourable notice from readers of *Astounding* that it started me on a career as a popularizer of science. This part of my work has grown until it now takes most of my writing time. I have also branched out into other literary fields; fantasy, historical fiction, biography, popularizations of history, and even verse.

So that is how I got into professional writing. Before 1937 I had been an occasional reader of Science Fiction magazines and had read a good deal in the Science Fiction classics such as Wells and Burroughs. But I had never had the remotest idea of making a literary living. In fact, my adolescent ambition had been to be a paleontologist. When parental disapproval (not a prohibition, merely a sad resignation to the fact that I should probably be poor all my life) turned me away from dinosaurs, I picked engineering as the next best bet. All of which goes to show that it is impossible to give every young person an education that is relevant to his particular needs, because at 15 he has no idea what those needs will be at 25 or 35. They are quite likely to be something he never even dreamed of.

John Sladek, a writer who seems equally at home with science fiction and the detective story, is an American resident in London. The sharp, wry mind that has previously found expression in black comedies like The Reproductive System *(1968) has recently been scrutinising unconventional scientific and pseudo-scientific theories. The article below results from this work, as does the forthcoming book* The New Apocrypha *(Hart-Davis MacGibbon) due out in September this year.*

fossil astronauts

John Sladek

The distant past has always provided forgers with a decent income. During the Renaissance, there sprang up an army of men skilled at mutilating statues to meet the sudden demand for Roman antiquities. Our own age has its labour force of pseudo-archaeologists – men like Robert Charroux, John Michell, Peter Kolosimo and Erich von Däniken – ready to deliver the armless and headless theories we seem to need.

Evidently our need is great. Von Däniken's two books, *Chariots of the Gods?* and *Return to the Stars,* have sold a million copies in as many minutes (a statistic that might have interested Phineas Barnum). Any archaeologist who can manage this, especially a man without formal training in archaeology, must have something timely and sensational to offer.

He offers us a fossil astronaut. That is, the hypothesis that men from space landed on our planet in the dim, dumb past, condescended to be worshipped as gods by the natives, and then blasted off to further adventures. The exact time and place of this invasion are left open, which allows von Däniken to cull evidence from every culture (Japan to Egypt to Mexico) and every age (Late Tertiary to Jonathan Swift).

Occult sources provide some of his evidence, as shown by the index of *Chariots.* Here are the hardy perennials: Edgar Cayce, Ezekiel, Easter Island, Madame Blavatsky, Mu, pyramids and Rosicrucians. Certain omissions (Atlantis, Cabbala, Teilhard de Chardin) are made good in his second book. Hardly a hopeful sign in an author who speaks of "uncontrovertible facts" and a longing to "examine evidence with the greatest scientific care."

The examination goes like this: Beginning with doubtful or spurious data, he moves along the preferred path of all high priests of hokum, whereby the barely possible becomes the absolutely certain. Do cave drawings show men with clubbed limbs, large heads or antlers? These are nothing but space suits, bubble helmets and antennae! As for a Mayan carving:

> **Could primitive imagination have produced anything so remarkably similar to a modern astronaut in his rocket? Those strange markings at the foot of the drawing *can only be* an indication of the flames and gases coming from the propulsion unit.**

My italics indicate the flames and gases coming from von Däniken's logic unit. The carving in question shows a man reclining against a heap of Mayan ornament. The remarkable similarities seem to be:

1. The ornament looks like machinery. But then most Mayan pictures look like machinery (with rivets) to most of us.
2. The reclining figure. Astronauts do recline, but then so do corpses. The carving is taken from a coffin lid.

There are other anomalies not explained by von Däniken. The "pilot" is outside the spacecraft (which is just as well, because the flames and gases seem to be inside). Some of the machinery seems to be suspended in midair (free-fall?), and some of it is suspended from the tail-feathers of a large condor (the co-pilot?).

Von Däniken performs this kind of naive analysis on hundreds of other items, too tedious to list. Let's move at once to some of the silliest examples.

In *Return to the Stars* he shows a wooden plaque from Australia, marked with twelve circles. Is it, he asks "a drawing of a planetary system?" Sure, why not? Especially if a pair of feathered wings in an Assyrian picture can be a "flying machine", and polka dots in the background of a Peruvian painting can be "strange flying objects". The threshold for acceptable evidence is low here, but it gets even

lower. Von Däniken displays the photograph of a hole in the ground, with this intriguing caption:

> Close-up of a hole. Diameter 23 ins., depth 5 ft. 7 ins.

Again, this is in *Return to the Stars,* whose subtitle is "Evidence for the Impossible".

The overripe mystique of pyramidology provides von Däniken with a heap of impossibilities. For a century the pyramidologists have been puzzling over "unsolved riddles" of the Great Pyramid: How could the Egyptians have quarried millions of tons of stone, moved it several miles to a building site, cut it to fit neatly together, and oriented the whole so that it faces the four true directions? Earlier pyramidologists have imagined that it was all the work of Noah, under the direction of God; or used the Pyramid's dimensions to deduce that the British are the Lost Tribes of Israel. Edgar Cayce figured that the stones were moved by writing magic formulae on pieces of papyrus, placing the stones on these, and flying them to the building site by levitation.

Hard-headed von Däniken prefers a "scientific" explanation: The stones were quarried with lasers, and transported by helicopters. Nor was the Pyramid, as others assert, a time machine, a secret Rosicrucian temple, or a repository for the Philosophers' Stone. Von Däniken recognizes it at once as a cryogenic chamber, used to freeze astronauts for stellar travel. Thus at one blow he smashes my belief that the Pyramid was a kennel for sun-dogs, and all other occult theories, he answers all the questions that no one but occultists have been asking for years, *and* he refutes all the wild scientific theories, such as the notion that the Egyptians built the Pyramid.[1]

From his privileged perspective,[2] von Däniken can easily see that all past cultures are, basically, moronic.

> **Where did the narrators of *The Thousand and One Nights* get their staggering wealth of ideas? How did anyone come to describe a lamp from which a magician spoke when the owner wished?**

The idea here is that Aladdin's lamp was a radio. Notice that, to promote it, von Däniken must first debase the original story (a genii with mountain-moving powers becomes a voice) and then ask how it got so interesting. Repeatedly, he mutilates the poetry of myth to make it resemble the prose of gadgetry. Sindibad's Roc "can only be" a helicopter, and Ali Baba's magic Sesame "can only be" a supermarket door.[3]

Well, where did the Arab writers get their ideas? Von Däniken dismisses one obvious source, just as he speaks of the Mayans' "primitive imagination". The Egyptians didn't build the Pyramid, and the Hebrews didn't make up the Bible. He seems to have nothing but contempt for the ancients. None of these dolts ever dreamed up anything interesting -- they merely kept chronicles of real events, leaving all the creative work to modern European hack journalists.

To summarize, the space visitor theory, as von Däniken puts it, has serious flaws. First, it accepts evidence from spurious sources, such as pyramidology and the Book of Dyzan.[4] Second, it accepts virtually anything as evidence – even a hole in the ground. Third, any facts which enhance this theory are called "proofs" (e.g. that there is probably life in the universe), while facts which diminish it are ignored (e.g. that the universe is very, very large). Finally, it is smugly ethnocentric, assuming that modern Western technology is a key to all previous cultures, that the ancients had defective imaginations, and that the vastly superior "space gods" were exactly like us.

Few of these flaws are shared by any scientific hypothesis. But *all* of them are the earmarks of an occult doctrine, and of the easiest type of space fiction. The theory *could* be true, but only in the special sense that the earth *could* be flat.

NOTES

1. All of the questions raised by all of the pyramidologists so far have been answered again and again. The best answers may be found in Richard A. Proctor, *Myths and Marvels of Astronomy* (London: Longmans Green, 1896); Martin Gardner, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956); and I.E.S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).
2. "Privileged perspective". I refer of course to von Däniken's being a modern man, and not to the place where he wrote his second book (a Swiss jail).
3. A dull idea even when Poe tried it, in "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" (Sindibad is amazed by the electrical telegraph, the railway, and other modern wonders).
4. The Book of Dyzan is usually claimed to be an ancient text of wisdom revealed to Madame Blavatsky. It is, however, cribbed from H.H. Wilson's translation of the ancient Indian *Vishnu Purana* and similar documents. Von Däniken spends half a chapter finding "proofs" in it. For an account of Dyzan, see L. Sprague de Camp and Catherine de Camp, *Citadels of Mystery* (London: Fontana, 1972).

Angus M. Taylor is a Canadian from Toronto. It is pleasant when good manuscripts arrive from our friends and acquaintances, and even more pleasant when, as is beginning to happen with gratifying regularity, solid and interesting material comes in from someone who was previously only a name on our subscription list. In the last few years there has been a surge of interest among science fiction enthusiasts for the work of Philip Dick, but so far not much of this has filtered through to the consciousness of the public at large. We are especially happy therefore to publish this assessment of a writer who is surely amongst the most important, if least recognized, in the field.

can God fly? can He hold out His arms and fly? – the fiction of philip k dick

Angus Taylor

"Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust"
– Isaiah 26: 19

Horace Denfeld, once the evolved New Man, his mind now broken by the alien power from the stars, gazes at the conclusion of *Our Friends from Frolix 8* with childlike wonder at a small plastic statuette of God, and affirms his faith that "every living thing will fly or anyhow trudge or run" up and up forever. "All of them will make it eventually, no matter how slow they go. Leaving a lot behind; that has to be done." As Horace Denfeld has left a lot behind, now that the fantastic has shattered the familiar realm in which he moved for so long.

Unlike many other writers, Philip K. Dick has not hesitated to inject his science fiction with a liberal infection of unhuman beings. The return of *alienated* Thors Provoni or Palmer Eldritch from the interstellar void shatters the statistical regularities of the familiar solar system; the alien presence announces the intrusion into human affairs of a higher order, manifesting itself as fate or divine will. In a literature which has prided itself on rational extrapolation and shunned the chaos implicit in more outright forms of fantasy, such a quantum leap into the unexpected strikes a note very close to heresy.

This is not to say that flights of fantasy, manifestations of the

divine, auguries of new universes have been absent from science fiction – quite the contrary – but their relevance to the field has tended to be downgraded as technicians have set about carefully graphing themselves into the future or churning out entertaining re-runs of plots signifying little. Philip K. Dick is not the first to understand the importance of the improbable as a method of casting light on the possible. Wells understood implicitly that the real purpose of science fiction, apart from its value as entertainment, was to describe the evolving potentials of man-in-society, and that technology stood at the nexus between man and his continually changing relationship with the world around him. But Wells had no use for the juvenile and ultimately boring Gernsbackian preoccupation with technology-for-the-sake-of-technology; in his quest to tell mankind more about itself, his fecund mind showered the public with tales of time travel, alien beings, animals transmuted into men, invasion from outer space, alternate continua, invisibility, atomic warfare, and just about every other improbability so dear to later science fiction writers. If science has been "catching up" with science fiction in the interval, it is only because, or to the extent that, the field has tried too hard to be respectably "scientific" The wholesale extrapolation of present trends into the future leads nowhere but back to the familiar present. The "objective reality" expounded by respectable technocratic culture rests on a misconception of the nature of science, which exhibits over time the subjectivity of succeeding *Weltanschauungen.*

The malaise of modern science fiction, unrecognized by some, can be seen as in no small part responsible for the so-called New Wave of the Sixties, which coincided with a more general revolt against the technocracy, and a search for a new cultural paradigm. The new romanticism of the era can be discerned variously in the mystic sociology of McLuhan, the song poetry of Morrison, or the science fiction of Ballard. "Mere facts" are relegated to building blocks in the imaginative attempt to construct, or understand, a larger reality. Emphasis switches from simple accumulations of isolated data to whole patterns of which the data are parts. In science, this development is embodied in general systems theory, which Ludwig von Bertalanffy has said "is the scientific exploration of 'wholes' and 'wholeness' which, not so long ago, were considered metaphysical notions transcending the boundaries of science."[1]

Camus has described how the artist works through selection, by isolating the unique in the context of the universal. The artist plucks an instant from passing time and gives it a permanence, but a perma-

nence which is shaped by the artist's own vision. Camus' rebellion expresses the desire for coherence and unity; rebellion is a "fabricator of universes", a method of imposing pattern on the world in much the same way that the artist imposes pattern on the world. The present encompasses the past, allowing its events to be transformed into art through selection. Memory is the instrument of the mind by which the past is edited, recreated, and given meaning beyond that which it possessed originally. In the political theory of Frantz Fanon, memory is the key to alternate futures; through the processes of memory, past events reappear in new lights, thus negating the deterministic qualities of the material world.

But the present encompasses not only the past, but the future as well, albeit in a different form. The possibilities of the future lie latent in the present, awaiting the selections that determine reality. Alternate futures can be the key to the recreation of the present; through the processes of fictional dreaming, present events may reappear in new lights, and the world take on new form. The future and the past meet in the present, where they are interpreted and given meaning, and thereby interact to influence each other.

The literary reconstruction of reality finds its foremost expression today in that nebulous mid-spectrum area lying between, and overlapping, the provinces of traditional science fiction and traditional mainstream literature, and is reflected in kaleidoscopic ways in the writings of such as Nabokov, Ballard, Borges, and Gabriel Garciá Márquez – and even Hermann Hesse, whose work has provoked recent renewed attention. Here, in this surrealistic landscape, we find the merging of the psychical and the physical, human and non-human, animate and inanimate at a time in history when the technological externalization and universalization of the human nervous system is recreating that "reciprocity of perspectives, in which man and the world mirror each other"[2] which existed formerly in lithic times. This technological reintegration of man and the universe, apparent to varying degrees in the work of numerous science fiction writers today, is nowhere confronted in such explicit terms as in the work of Philip K. Dick, who notes that ". . . our environment, and I mean our man-made world of machines, artificial constructs, computers, electronic systems, interlinking homeostatic components – all this is in fact beginning more and more to possess what the earnest psychologists fear the primitive sees in his environment: animation. In a very real sense our environment is becoming alive, or at least quasi-alive, and in ways specifically and fundamentally analagous to ourselves."[3]

Dick shares with other mid-spectrum writers an existential view of man's place in the world. "The world of the future, to me, is not a place, but an event," he says, ". . . a construct in which there is no author and no readers but a great many characters in search of a plot. Well, there is no plot. There is only themselves and what they do and say to each other, what they build to sustain all of them individually and collectively, like a huge umbrella that lets in light and shuts out the darkness at the same instant. When the characters die, the novel ends. And the book falls back into dust. Out of which it came. Or back, like the dead Christ, into the arms of his warm, tender, grieving, comprehending, loving mother. And a new cycle begins; from her he is reborn, and the story, or another story, perhaps different, even better, starts up. A story told by the characters to one another."[4]

Here, where fiction exists in a dialectical relationship with reality, the outrageous can be commonplace. Dick does not hesitate to conceive a world in which metabolic processes run backward, so that persons greet each other with "good-bye" and bodies rise from the grave, revitalized, to grow younger. The merging of the literal and the metaphoric infuses the world with new meaning. Dick's work is characterized by what John Brunner has called "an almost hallucinatory sharpness of detail"[5] – but it is a sharpness of detail which extends beyond mere enumerative naturalism to the very quality of objects themselves: a magic realism in which things are seen double, simultaneously familiar and unexpected.

It is pointless here to ask which aspect is true and which is false. A television commercial, for example, assumes a super-clarity when it is given a three-dimensional mechanical form and the mobility to seek out and harangue audiences far from more conventional communication devices. Such an artifact not only reifies consumer perception of modern mass-media advertising, but also presents a concise vision of advancing technological manipulation of the human environment. Talking doors, suitcases that act as psychiatrists, newspapers that publish themselves, creditor balloons with articulation circuits, rats clutching crude weapons – it is a world anthropomorphized and at the same time *not* anthropomorphized, for the anthropocentrism of the human world-view converges with the evolutionary findings of latter-day science, with "the understanding of nature as an integral network of ordered interdependency of which man is a part."[6] If Dick's stories are filled with objects and machines that mimic life, and life forms that more specifically imitate human forms, this is

neither more nor less than the imaginatively logical extension to the world at large of the common robot figure in the literature.

The robot in science fiction is not simply a mechanism, nor is it, simply, a human being in disguise. It is both and neither. In addition to its morphological and functional relatedness to its organic analogues, it assumes a symbolic role in the literature. It speaks in riddles and offers new insights, as Gully Foyle discovered. It puts man in contact with the mysterious. Asimov's robots are not simply chess-playing computers; the Three Laws are never quite enough to explain the fascination they hold for us all. The telepathic robots and super-human machines of Clarke's *The City and the Stars* are part of a larger order of things, a greater design than the inhabitants of Diaspar can, or want to, understand. Dick has simply infused his entire panoply of fictional props with intimations of this larger significance. Thus, like the robot, other objects, natural or artificial, may participate with human beings in a single universe.

> "Considering you're a robot," Joe said, "I don't see what you have emotionally involved in this; you have no life."
>
> The robot said, "No structure, even an artificial one, enjoys the process of entropy. It is the ultimate fate of everything, and everything resists it."

Joe's robot acquaintance has written in his spare time an exhaustive theological pamphlet, which he sells to the human for ten cents. "I wonder," he thought, "how many theologically inclined robots there are in the universe. Perhaps Willis was the only one. . ." Robots in science fiction may not usually be into theology as heavily as Willis of *Galactic Pot-Healer,* but they nevertheless often act to reveal, even if ambiguously, hidden knowledge or to dispense bits of wisdom. (Willis' real ambition, by the way, is to become a free-lance writer – a suitable profession, perhaps, for an oracle.)

Aliens play a somewhat different role. In Dick's *Now Wait for Last Year,* as in Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven,* the non-humanoid aliens, contrary to human expectations, prove to be friendly, helpful and wise. The alien tends to speak in proverbs and platitudes, but not like a robot, not because of its own inherent limitations, but because of the inherent limitations of inter-species communication. The robot is a channel to the divine, but is itself closer to the human. The alien partakes of the very essence of a divinity which lies beyond the merely human. Even when on familiar terms with humans, aliens are infused with an aura of *otherness* and are associated with powers denied

humans. Lord Running Clam, a telepathic slime mold from Ganymede – who is incidentally an accomplished businessman and a passionate collector of postage stamps – lays down its life for the human hero of *Clans of the Alphane Moon,* only to resurrect from its own spores.

> "Ganymedeans possess what St. Paul called *caritas* . . . and remember, Paul said caritas was the greatest of all the virtues." She added, "The modern word for it would be empathy, I guess."

But not all aliens are so friendly toward humans; some may act in opposition to them, like the alien "vugs" who come into conflict with humans in *The Game-Players of Titan.* In this story, the inhabitants of Earth, even when on speaking terms with these creatures, keep "vug sticks" in their apartments, with which to poke at unwelcome extraterrestrial visitors. The vug stick is a construct at once ludicrous and appropriate in terms of Dick's fiction, and suggests a double aspect to the symbolism of the alien. For aliens may be seen on occasion not only as representatives of a higher order, but also as projections of the human psyche, reifications of subconscious fears or imaginings.

But in either case, as fate or divine will, or alternately as fears or irrationality, aliens represent the unpredictable in human affairs. Thus they manifest themselves to humans as creatures of bizarre appearance, and often act without discernible motives. As alien ships invade the solar system, the protagonist of "Top Stand-By Job" muses that "you never can tell about unhuman life forms – they're unreliable." The aliens temporarily knock out Unicephalon 40-D, a "homeostatic problem-solving system" which has been installed as U.S. President, thus unexpectedly catapulting its redundant human stand-by into the position. The stand-in later realizes that making decisions gave a meaning to his life which is otherwise missing, and he plans to get rid of the computer. "I mean, let's face it; the aliens showed us how."

The jolt provided by the intervention of the unexpected can radically alter an existing structure, may in fact be required for such alteration. This is a concept common to many of Dick's stories, and one that can be seen in as early a piece as "The Variable Man". The character around whom this story centres is "A man from two centuries ago . . . And with a radically different Weltanschauung. No connection with our present society. Not integrated along our lines at all." The variable man is one about whom no predictions can be made, and his presence "knocks everything else out of phase." He is the addition that forces the transformation of a society, opening up new possibilities.

Though Dick has grown more accomplished and outrageous in his style over the years, thematically his fiction has remained fairly consistent. Even in an early short story like "The Preserving Machine" he is concerned with the ephemeral nature of man's world, with change and adaptation. A Doctor Labyrinth attempts to defeat time by designing a machine to process the musical scores of the great composers into living forms, the better to survive. But once created, the animals begin to change, to follow a course of development their creator is unable to control:

> Music would survive as living creatures, but he had forgotten the lesson of the Garden of Eden: that once a thing has been fashioned it begins to exist on its own, and thus ceases to be the property of its creator to mold and direct as he wishes. God, watching man's development, must have felt the same sadness – and the same humiliation – as Labyrinth, to see His creatures alter and change to meet the needs of survival.

Dick seems fascinated by the concept of the self-stabilizing or self-organizing system. Homeostatic devices abound in his stories, from mobile vermin traps to talking taxicabs. "Autofac" presents what is almost a textbook picture of the operation of goal-directed self-organizing systems. When such systems assume human or quasi-human form, as in "Second Variety", we are plunged into the world of the simulacrum, where illusion and reality begin to masquerade as each other.

The difficulty of perceptually distinguishing the real from the illusory is paralleled by the difficulty of separating right from wrong. These dilemmas are quite apparent in *The Man in the High Castle,* a novel set in a universe where the Axis powers have won the Second World War. The difficulty of distinguishing pre-war *objets d'art* of historic interest from virtually identical, but worthless, forgeries is paralleled by the difficulty of choosing the correct path of behaviour in a world where there are no clear alternatives.

> On some other world, possibly it is different. Better. There are clear good and evil alternatives. Not these obscure admixtures, these blends, with no proper tool by which to untangle the components.
>
> We do not have the ideal world, such as we would like, where morality is easy because cognition is easy. Where one can do right with no effort because he can detect the obvious.

The world of Hawthorne Abendsen is not so very different from our own, but rather is a metaphoric transformation of our world. The alternate world envisaged by this novelist-within-a-novel, with the aid of the I Ching, the ideal or "real" world, *is not in fact the world we*

know, but a slightly different one, brighter and more comprehensible. The world of Nazi ascendancy is a magic-realist mirror in which we may perceive more immediately the partially submerged forces of disintegration in our own. Dick recognizes in Nazism a collective death-wish, a longing for the ultimate destruction and universal chaos foretold by Germanic mythology.

> What upset him was this. The *death* of Adolf Hitler, the defeat and destruction of Hitler, the Partei, and Germany itself, as depicted in Abendsen's book . . . it all was somehow grander, more in the old spirit than the actual world. The world of German hegemony.

> Suppose eventually they, the Nazis, destroy it all? Leave it a sterile ash? They could; they have the hydrogen bomb. And no doubt they would; their thinking tends towards that Götterdämmerung. They may well crave it, be actively seeking it, a final holocaust for everyone.

This side of the German character is identified by Dick with destruction and entropy. Neo-Nazi types appear aften in his stories, characters like the mad scientist Bruno Bluthgeld, who is responsible for the nuclear catastrophe that haunts the world of *Dr. Bloodmoney, Or How We Got Along After The Bomb.* But at one point in *The Unteleported Man* he makes it explicit that there are also Germans who have chosen the side of life in opposition to this Nazi aspect; and his evident interest in German philosophy and music demonstrates that he recognizes the vital or creative aspect of the Germanic type. Deutschland thus becomes in Dick's fiction a Janus-faced cultural symbol for the struggle between good and evil, organization and chaos.

> Evil is simply a lesser reality, a ring farther from Him. It's the lack of absolute reality, not the presence of an evil deity . . . This is what people experience as evil, the decay of form.
>
> *(Counter-Clock World)*

Dick does not always hesitate to postulate the possible existence of an evil deity, but his correlation of form, or *organization* (with its connotations of system and harmony), with good, and formlessness or chaos with evil, is consistent. It's the fight against entropy, and Dick sees the enemy everywhere, even in the steady accumulation of "kipple", or useless objects, like junk mail or empty match folders, in

an apartment. In *A Maze of Death* the antagonist is the Form Destroyer; in *Ubik* the breakdown of the rational order of the world occurs in a state of "half-life" after death, where a malevolent entity preys on the life force.

> Metabolism, he reflected, is a burning process, an active furnace. When it ceases to function, life is over. They must be wrong about hell, he said to himself. Hell is cold; everything there is cold. The body means weight and heat; now weight is a force which I am succumbing to, and heat, my heat is slipping away. And, unless I become reborn, it will never return. This is the destiny of the universe. So at least I won't be alone.

Life is a function of organization; the vital, creative force is negentropic, in opposition to the entropic tendencies of the universe at large. Glimmung, the great superhuman, yet mortal, creature struggling to raise a sunken cathedral from beneath the sea in *Galactic Pot-Healer*, is compared to Goethe's Faust, himself struggling against a flood. "The flood is a symbol for everything that eats away structures which living creatures have erected. The water which has covered Heldscalla; the flood won out many centuries ago, but now Glimmung is going to push it back."

The disintegration of things-as-they-are is a preoccupation – indeed, an obsession – of Dick's. On a television commercial a housewife says, "I came over to Ubik after trying weak, out-of-date reality supports. . ."

> "Yes," Runciter's dark voice resumed, "by making use of the most advanced techniques of present-day science, the reversion of matter to earlier forms *can* be reversed, and at a price any conapt owner can afford. Ubik is sold by leading home-art stores throughout the Earth. Do not take internally. Keep away from open flame. Do not deviate from printed procedural approaches as expressed on label. So look for it, Joe. Don't just sit there; go out and buy a can of Ubik and spray it all around you night and day."

Here the entropic process manifests itself as a regression in time of material constructs into earlier, less organized forms – i.e., a decrease in the negentropy laboriously built up over time in human society. With characteristic inventiveness Dick describes the devolution of Platonic idea-objects, with everyday objects regressing in time, not into earlier, newer versions of their particular selves or constituent materials, but into previous versions of the universal archetypes of whole classes of objects – so that, for example, a television set may turn into an old radio playing a pre-World-War-Two soap opera. "The

man contains – not the boy – but earlier men, he thought." The hero of *Ubik* finds his whole world devolving in this manner, reverting from 1992 to 1939.

The "normal" orderly reality of the human world exists only precariously; this delicately constructed negentropic reality exists only through the systemic configurations of human society. Persons who allow themselves to become separated from the society of their fellows are in that much more danger of having their individual realities undermined:

> In the absence of the Batys and Pris he found himself fading out, becoming strangely like the inert television set which he had just unplugged. You have to be with other people, he thought. In order to live at all.
>
> *(Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?)*

Here is alienation emanating not from without, but from within, a retreat from society manifesting itself often in forms of schizophrenia.

> The reality which the schizophrenic fell away from – or never incorporated in the first place – was the reality of interpersonal living, of life in a given culture with given values; it was not biological life, or any form of inherited life, but *life which was learned.*
>
> *(Martian Time-Slip)*

The failure of an individual to integrate himself with reality as defined through learned cultural values results in the breakdown of his perception of that reality. On a more general level, social integration and subjective perception is a theme that runs through *A Maze of Death,* where the author's usual tendency toward shifting the focus of viewpoint among his protagonists is made a deliberate narrative ploy.

The cultural patterns of separate social systems reveal the codifications of separate views of reality held collectively by their respective members. In *The Game-Players of Titan,* radically different worldviews generate conflict between humans and aliens, each species seeing the other in a negative light, each able to perceive only a partial truth about the other. On the inter-personal or inter-societal level, the *disintegration* of relationships means the dissolution of culturally-conditioned reality and the emergence of more "primitive" modes of perception, often characterized by visionary or extrasensory experiences.

But the need of humans for the company of their fellows is not only perceptional, but spiritual as well. The detachment and introversion of the schizophrenic reduces his ability to experience the presence of others in a meaningful way. For if artificial entities can become more like natural entities, natural entities can also become more like artificial ones. The authentic human experience is identified by Dick with the capacity for *empathy,* a theme which is dealt with metaphorically in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* and then in a somewhat more direct manner in *We Can Build You.* Thus human society is seen not only as the basis of secure reality, but also as the vehicle for the expression of man's authentic nature.

In relating to other human beings we at least temporarily transcend the existential predicament in which we otherwise find ourselves. The boundaries of human society mark the limits of safe journeying. The void beyond the solar system, like the shadowy land between death and rebirth, is a place of tigers and sea monsters.

> *"Fragile Earthmen, venturing out here, go back to your own system! Go back to your little orderly universe, your strict civilization. Stay away from the regions you do not know! Stay away from darkness and monsters!"*
>
> *(Solar Lottery)*

In "What the Dead Men Say" the connection is actually made between interstellar space and the realm of afterlife, when what seems to be the voice of a recently deceased tycoon is picked up coming from beyond the solar system by radio telescope. Typical of Dick is the fact that messages from *beyond* should announce themselves through scientific instruments, and other technological instruments like radios and televisions. Typical also of Dick is the fact that in this particular story a character should wonder irritably if this metaphysical interference with normal communications channels violates government regulations.

Beyond the well-charted territory of normal human experience, then, are realms fraught with danger. If the alien presence is often the manifestation of a higher order, then the higher order, that reality which lies beyond satisfactory human comprehension, is not necessarily hospitable to the human presence. This concept, which plays a prominent role in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch,* is made even more explicit and dramatically concise in "Faith of Our Fathers", where God is portrayed as evil, or at least utterly inhuman, and is identified with the forces of destruction. Here Dick is treating the

mysterious as grounds for speculation, rather than making any statement of belief. In an afterword to this short story he says, "I, myself, have no real beliefs about God; only my experience that He is present . . . subjectively, of course; but the inner realm is real too. And in a science fiction story one projects what has been a personal inner experience into a milieu; it becomes socially shared, hence discussable."[7]

> "God is dead," Nick said. "They found his carcass in 2019. Floating out in space near Alpha."
> "They found the remains of an organism advanced several thousand times over what we are," Charley said. "And it evidently could create habitable worlds and populate them with living organisms, derived from itself. But that doesn't prove it was God."
> "I think it was God."
>
> *(Our Friends from Frolix 8)*

Through the projection of ideas and inner experience upon the social universe, philosophical concepts are made more concrete and vivid. Theology and metaphysics infuse all areas of life in Dick's stories, and his characters discuss theological and metaphysical questions with a casualness and intensity generally reserved by people for last weekend's football games. Thus it should not surprise us to be presented in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* with a concise summation of Dick's philosophy in the form of an interoffice audiomemo which, with no attempt at the niceties of elocution such subject matter might be expected to command, pronounces:

> I mean, after all; you have to consider we're only made out of dust. That's admittedly not much to go on and we shouldn't forget that. But even considering, I mean it's a sort of bad beginning, we're not doing too bad. So I personally have faith that even in this lousy situation we're faced with we can make it. You get me?

Everybody talks about entropy, but nobody does anything about it. At least, not in any permanent fashion on this world, though there are always glimmerings of new worlds waiting, and prophets like Wilbur Mercer of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* to point the way, however ambiguously – if not in the direction of salvation, then at least toward a kind of self-acceptance and the hope of a new start, in this life or the next. For though corruption touches all the works of humankind, and the body itself must disintegrate, perhaps the *idea* underlying the outwards form is permanent, and we can all be reborn:

> Christ, I hope so. Because in that case we all can meet again. In, as in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, another part of the forest, where a boy and his bear will always be playing . . . a category, he though, imperishable. Like all of us. We will all wind up with Pooh, in a clearer, more durable new place.
>
> *(Ubik)*

As might be inferred from the tone of these stories, Dick gives us few larger-than-life heroes. Rather, his heroes are relatively ordinary folk, regardless of whether they can divine the future or possess telepathic ability. The characters that populate Dick's fantasies are everyday men and women, together, adrift in an uncommon universe. How they survive, and what they make of their lives, depends to a very large degree on how they relate to each other.

> However, there was no explaining the chemistry which joined men and women, locked them in embraces of hate and mutual suffering sometimes for ninety years on end. In his line, Tito had seen plenty of it, enough to last him even a *jerry* lifetime.
>
> *(The Crack in Space)*

Women are unusually prominent in Dick's stories – unusually prominent by the standards of the vast body of science fiction, at least. Not only are they numerous, but they are more than matchstick characters; not a few are talented or powerful, many are intelligent, and almost all are fiercely independent. In light of this situation, relations between men and women are never to be taken for granted – indeed, are often difficult, even desperate. But despite Tito Cravelli's mystification, the sexual chemistry can be explained by the human longing for love and understanding:

> "Is that important?" Nick asked. "Is that what it's all about, instead of invasions by aliens, the destruction of ten million superlative brains, the transfer of political power – all power – by an elite group –"
>
> "I don't understand those things," Amos Ild said. "I just know how it's wonderful, someone loving you that much. And if someone loved you that much, you must be worth loving, so pretty soon someone else will love you that way, too, and you'll love them the same way. Do you see?"
>
> *(Our Friends from Frolix 8)*

Whatever the roles of particular women in these stories, however, the concept of *woman* fulfills a larger role in the scheme of Dick's fiction: in this context woman symbolizes the source of human life.

"As Spinoza pointed out so clearly, each finite thing, each individual man, eventually perishes . . . and his only true consolation, as he perishes, as each society in fact perishes, is this return to the mother, the woman, the Earth."[8] Thus woman is also a symbol for life, society, the world, for the configurations of human reality which are the "umbrella that lets in light and shuts out the darkness". Out of the ground of human culture arise over time new configurations, new stories told by the characters to one another. Today Dick sees us on the verge of a new transformation: "And now, perhaps, what the Medieval pietas looked forward to: in the arms of the Earth Mother, who still lives, the dead solar deity, her son, lies in a once again silent return to the womb from which he came . . . what lies ahead is new . . . the realization, the fulfillment, of the Medieval pieta, as a living reality, our total environment, a *living* external environment as animate as ourselves . . . "[9]

And so the symbolism of rebirth is everywhere in Dick's fiction, sometimes muted, sometimes calling attention to itself as at the conclusion of *Counter-Clock World:*

> **And then, as he sat, he heard voices. He heard them from many graves; he detected the growing into life of those below – some very close to it, some indistinct and far off. But all moving in that direction. He heard them coming closer; the voices became a babble.**

The babble of new life, of new stories. The world reborn.

But whatever the important issues that may be dealt with, whatever the author's obsessions, science fiction, as literature, functions also on the level of entertainment. Philip Dick's fictions, while they may delight some and baffle others, are characterized by a wonderful inventiveness, unencumbered by convention, and limited only by the demands of internal logic. For despite the seriousness of the topics confronted by Dick, the play element in his writing is unmistakeable; indeed, as Huizinga had pointed out, play and seriousness are far from being mutually exclusive. The range of invention in Dick's stories, his extravagant style, his outrageous humour – all attest to a developed sense of play.

> **A small man, wearing a stylish but somewhat gaudy Ionian purple snakeskin jacket with illuminated kummerbund and curly-toed Brazilian pigbark slippers, Mini looked exactly what he was: a dealer in wholesale dried fruit.**
>
> ***(The Crack in Space)***

If the world is worth examining, then it is worth examining with a slightly jaundiced eye. According to Huizinga, "A half-joking element verging on make-believe is inseparable from true myth."[10] For Dick, a sense of the ridiculous is inseparable from a true vision of the startling, humdrum world. His straight-faced wackiness may seem incongruous in the context of the issues he tackles, but then he has always worked through juxtaposing seemingly incongruous elements and making of them multifaceted wholes. This approach can be seen in his attitude toward science fiction in general, of which he has said: "Without being art, it does what art does, since as Schopenhauer pointed out, art tends to break free of the reality around us and reach a new level of gestalting. The virtue of its approach, too, is that it can reach persons who do not have a developed esthetic sense, which means that it has a higher degree of sheer communicability than great art."[11] His own work belies these words only in the sense that his commitment to his own vision of science fiction has demonstrated a considerable artistic potential in the field.

The principal – and subtly interconnected – themes in Dick's work include:

1. the survival and evolution of natural and artificial systems,
2. the relation between reality and illusion,
3. the problem of human morality and behaviour in an uncertain world.

These themes – scientific, metaphysical, and existential – subsume a great number of related ones, such as the struggle between good and evil, between organization and entropy, the relationship between man and God, the social construction of reality, the question of individual free will vis-à-vis chance and determinism, and the place in life of the unexpected, the sacred, and the mysterious.

If these are large themes for a writer to confront *en masse,* perhaps large enough to be intimidating for many, they are also representative of the potentials inherent in a literature whose essential nature emerged with the Industrial Revolution, and which today offers unique opportunities for exploring the possibilities that have recently exploded in the wake of that revolution. It seems to me that Dick is very close to the heart of what science fiction is all about: not a literature of comfort, but one that unsettles while still retaining a strong medicine of humanism. Dick plunges madly into the heart of life and refuses to come out. At the end of *Now Wait for Last Year,* Dr. Eric Sweetscent,

on the verge of suicide, his wife irretrievably ill, rediscovers, in the actions of two crudely-built automated cars battling for survival in a dirty alley in Tijuana, his own will to survive, and to find joy in the struggle for survival. To the autonomic cab he hails, he begins, "If your wife were sick –" Only to have the machine chide him, "I have no wife, sir. Automatic Mechanisms never marry; everyone knows that." But the vehicle, in the manner of its kind, is willing after all to counsel him on his broken marriage:

> "I'd stay with her," the cab decided.
> "Why?"
> "Because," the cab said, "life is composed of reality configurations so constituted. To abandon her would be to say, I can't endure reality as such. I have to have uniquely special easier conditions."

At the heart of life, the configurations of reality fuse the familiar and the unexpected, liberating modern science fiction from a false dichotomy. The reintegration of the sciences, of science and philosophy, of philosophy and everyday life, reveal to investigators exciting new areas of opportunity. Here, in the union of humanism and wonder, morality and science, Philip K. Dick pursues his pioneering vision of a literature at once factual and fantastic.

NOTES

1. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, foreword to Ervin Laszlo, *Introduction to Systems Philosophy* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1972), p. xviii.
2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 222.
3. Quoted from "The Human and the Android: A Contrast Between the Authentic Person and Reflex Machine" – a speech delivered by Dick at the University of British Columbia (February 17, 1972) and at the Vancouver Science Fiction Convention (February 19, 1972).
4. Dick, Vancouver speech.
5. John Brunner, "The Work of Philip K. Dick" in *New Worlds*, Volume 50, Number 166 (1966), p. 143.
6. Laszlo, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
7. Quoted in Harlan Ellison, ed., *Dangerous Visions* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), p. 215.
8. Dick, Vancouver speech.
9. Dick, Vancouver speech.
10. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (London: Paladin, 1970), p. 167.
11. Quoted in "Profiles", *New Worlds*, Volume 30, Number 89 (December 1959).

As announced in Foundation 3, *here is the second of two articles on J.G. Ballard. This piece is written by David Pringle, a recent graduate in English Literature from Sussex University, about to launch into an M.A. David Pringle is a member of that quite large body of critical writers who have thus far appeared only in fanzines, and who, in our view, deserve to have their work circulated in more permanent and widely circulated form. (This is not meant to suggest that fanzines suffer from any intrinsic inferiority. At least three in England are at the moment maintaining consistently high standards of serious discussion and comment* – Vector, Speculation *and* Cypher.)

the fourfold symbolism of j g ballard

David Pringle

As Northrop Frye has pointed out[1], the *Bible* is the source of the symbolism that underlies most of Western literature. It has supplied the basic apocalyptic and demonic images which have been used repeatedly by poets such as Dante, Milton, Blake and Eliot. The ultimate source of all literary symbolism is of course the cyclical rhythm of life itself – for instance, the seasons of the earth, the summer,

autumn, winter and spring in which men have always tended to see an analogy to their own experience of birth, maturity, death and rebirth. The four great states of being that are described in the *Bible* run the gamut from desire to revulsion. There is Heaven, or the City of God, place of eternal bliss; there is the Garden of Eden, or the Earthly Paradise, place of innocence and joy; there is the Fallen World into which Adam was cast, place of daily toil and suffering; and finally there is Hell, place of endless pain. William Blake used much the same fourfold symbolism in his personal mythology, although he invented his own names, such as Beulah (for Eden) and Ulro (for Hell). Symbols often tend to come in clusters of four, like the quadrants of a mandala. For instance, the ancients believed that everything was comprised of Earth, Air, Fire and Water, and these four elements have been used as symbols in literature as recent as T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets.*

The realistic novel, which has held sway in the literature of the past two-and-a-half centuries, has tended to 'displace' such symbolic patterns in favour of a close scrutiny of manners and social surfaces. But science fiction, which is the modern equivalent of Biblical eschatology, lends itself to analysis in terms of fundamental symbolism.

Such an analysis is particularly fruitful with the stories of J.G. Ballard, who sometimes maintains and sometimes alters the traditional symbolic patterns in order to suit his own sensibility and the situation of modern man. He uses a fourfold symbolism. The four main 'elements', the primary images, of Ballard's fiction seem to me to be Water, Sand, Concrete and Crystal. These substances set the tone of Ballard's stories, they dominate his landscapes, and each is in fact a symbol with an aggregate of meanings. Secondary symbols group themselves around these four major ones, and in different stories they combine in different ways. Ballard's work must above all be taken as a *whole,* rather than as a number of discrete tales. Viewed as a whole, it will be seen to have quite profound significance – which is not to say that Ballard has an overt 'message' for us. He is definitely not a didactic writer (as so many science fiction authors are). He has used literary symbols in the manner of a poet, to state the modern existential predicament. He offers no definite answers to man's problems; he does not spur to action. He simply presents us with the experience of being alive today, in an age when "science and technology" have become "the nearest thing we've got to the imperishable and unquestioned values of our forefathers."[2]

In a radio interview with Christopher Evans, Ballard has stated that he considers his novel *The Drowned World* as presenting a psycholog-

ical image of the *past*, whereas his novel *The Drought* presents an image of the *future*. At first, this seems confusing, since both are works of science fiction ostensibly concerned with events in the future. However, when we study the novels Ballard's meaning becomes clear. *The Drowned World* is a tale of biospheric disaster, superficially in the John Wyndham mode, concerned with the melting of the ice-caps and the inundation of man's cities. It is a statement of the obvious to say that it is a novel absolutely dominated by the image of *water*. *The Drought* is also a disaster-story, concerned with the cessation of rainfall and the consequent aridity. It is equally obvious that this is a novel dominated by *sand* (and its correlatives such as dust, ash, salt, etc.) Now, there are many reasons why, for Ballard, water should be a symbol of the past, and sand a symbol of the future. Before exploring these, let me jump ahead to add what Ballard did not say in his interview, but which becomes obvious on reflection – namely, that his two other major books, *The Crystal World* and *The Atrocity Exhibition*, are concerned respectively with *eternity* and the *present*, and their dominating images are, respectively, *crystal* and *concrete*.

The meeting-place of water and the past in Ballard's imagination is the womb, where the foetus hangs suspended in warm amniotic fluid. Another such meeting-place is the sea itself, whence all plant and animal life came millions of years ago. Thus water is associated with the past, with birth, and with organic life itself. In ancient Egypt, the flooding of the Nile was the source of all growth and fecundity, and thus floods, although destructive, have always been thought of as life-bearing. The waters scatter the seed and bring new life to the wasteland. Although the floods in *The Drowned World* have destroyed London, Ballard is far more concerned with the new life that has come in its place. Significantly, of all Ballard's stories, this is the one that contains the greatest abundance of natural, living things. "The dense groves of giant gymnosperms"[3], the mosquitoes, the iguanas, the bats, the spiders, the marmosets, the alligators, even the "rich blue moulds sprouting from the carpets"[4] of the abandoned Ritz hotel – these are probably the things that readers of the novel remember most vividly. The characters of *The Drowned World* are encroached upon by a renascent biology, a humming, chittering, screaming world of life. This watery world is in fact Ballard's science-fictional equivalent of the Garden of Eden. At first, this may seem a strange statement, since the environment he describes is not exactly friendly or comfortable to live in. It is typical of Ballard's sombre imagination

that, in describing nature's reconquest of London, he has chosen to visualize it in terms of the Triassic rather than the Arcadian. The typically 'English' landscape of green-wood, meadow and piping hedgerow (the landscape, in fact, of Richard Jefferies' *After London* or Brian Aldiss's *Greybeard)* holds no interest for Ballard; it appears nowhere in his fiction. He sees nature in a less sentimental light: it is rich, fecund, but essentially alien to man.

The principal theme of *The Drowned World* is devolution, return to a prehistoric past. That is why the natural world is represented by giant plants, reptiles and insects, and not by warm-blooded mammalian creatures. Under the impact of freakish solar radiation, the earth's ecology is literally reverting to its state of millions of years ago. Mankind is ceasing to procreate, and, as Ballard explicitly states, "a point might ultimately be reached where a second Adam and Eve found themselves alone in a new Eden."[5] Far from being repelled by all this, the hero is fascinated. He collaborates in the devolutionary process, and begins a dream-journey back down his spinal cord, from level to level of the biological record. He is deliberately seeking to return to the water-world of the past, to the womb, to unthinking organic existence. Thus the ending of the novel is quite logical, when he sets off on an impulsive journey to the south, to regions of still greater heat and humidity. In an earlier short story, "Mr. F. is Mr. F.", the hero follows a similar route, growing backwards from adulthood to youth, and finally rediscovering "the drowned world of his first childhood"[6]. At the conclusion of *The Drowned World,* the hero himself becomes Adam "searching for . . . forgotten paradises"[7]. We must conclude from this that for Ballard the past does not belong to man. It belongs simply to organic life, symbolized by water (and its correlatives, which, in Ballard's fiction, are vegetation, fish, reptiles, insects and birds.) For man, the conscious animal, there is no place in the past. However much he may yearn to go back, the gates of Eden are closed. If he attempts the return, he ceases to be man, and becomes dissolved in the great biological soup in which we all originated.

What, then, of the future? The answer would seem to be — sand. In his stories dominated by this symbol, such as those included in the collection *Vermilion Sands*[8], Ballard gives us a picture of a future in which man has become a more and more mental creature. As this 'intellectualization' of the human race proceeds, man removes himself ever further from his biological roots. He becomes lethargic and affectless as the life force itself seems to dry up. A sandy desert becomes the appropriate symbol of this spiritual state. In *The Drought*, a film of

industrial waste on the surface of the sea prevents the evaporation of water to form rainclouds, and thus the entire land-surface of the globe turns into parched desert. Ballard sees sand as an apt symbol of the future because it is dry and lifeless, and also because it is essentially formless. Sand-dunes drift around, ever changing shape, and obliterating the particularity of the objects they cover – houses, roads, machines. The future, Ballard fears, will obliterate us in a similar way. The correlatives of sand in his symbolism, apart from substances like ash and salt, include rock, fire and lava-flows – in fact, the mineral world in general as opposed to the vegetative world of his water symbolism. (A short story like "The Volcano Dances" fits the 'sand' mode.) Of course, Ballard is not predicting an actual biospheric disaster, such as that outlined in *The Drought,* but a general desiccation of all life as human beings become less and less sure of what exactly they *are.* The relationships between people will become increasingly tenuous. As the hero of *The Drought* muses:

> "With the death of the river, so would vanish any contact between those stranded on the drained floor . . . Ransom was certain that the absence of this great moderator, which cast its bridges between all animate and inanimate objects alike, would prove of crucial importance. Each of them would soon literally be an island in an archipelago drained of time."[9]

As our biological drives wane, and our powers of conscious choice grow, our identities will dissolve and we will turn increasingly to neurosis, psychopathology and perversion.

The whole of Ballard's fiction is haunted by echoes of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* and it is particularly appropriate that in *The Drought* images of dead and dying birds abound. He sees man's future state as that of the Mariner in the doldrums after killing the albatross – but unable to bless the water-snakes because they are dead and gone too. The Mariner is evoked again in the story "Storm-bird, Storm-dreamer", where the protagonist lives on board a stalled ship rather like Ransom's at the opening of *The Drought.* Like Coleridge (and Melville in *Moby Dick*), Ballard regards man's assault on the natural world as an analogue of his assault on the animal within himself. In cutting of our roots, we kill ourselves. At the end of *The Drought,* the hero has reached such a state of living death that he does not even notice when it starts to rain again. If *The Drowned World* gave us Ballard's Eden, then *The Drought* certainly represents his Hell, and his American publishers were not entirely mistaken when they

chose to change the title to *The Burning World.* The image of fiery retribution is apt. The stories of *Vermilion Sands* are lighter in tone, and full of a sad beauty that the earlier book lacked, but the characters behave in much the same way – a slow lethargy giving way to sudden outbursts of insane violence.

Dried-up rivers and drained lakes are probably the images that readers retain most vividly from *The Drought,* and indeed they form one of Ballard's most important secondary symbols. "The Voices of Time", for instance, begins with a man drawing a mandala on the floor of an empty swimming-pool, and in another short story, "Deep End", the oceans themselves have been drained and the characters wander around the dried-up bed of the Atlantic. Fish are important as a symbol of natural life, and the plot of "Deep End" concerns the hero's attempt, and failure, to keep alive the last fish on earth. As one of the characters states:

> "The seas are our corporate memory. In draining them, we deliberately obliterated our own pasts, to a large extent, our own self-identities . . . Without the sea, life is insupportable. We become nothing more than the ghosts of memories, blind and homeless . . .
> *(The Terminal Beach,* Gollancz, 1964, p. 162)

Another important secondary symbol is the beach, meeting-place of water and sand, and thus of past and future. At least twenty of Ballard's stories contain beach scenes, and one of the most effective of these is "The Drowned Giant". Reminiscent of Melville's descriptions of the cutting up of whales, this story concerns a dead giant who is washed up, Gulliver-like, onto a beach near a city. Like Melville's white whale, the giant is a symbol of all life, and the description of the callous dismemberment and scattering of his body is intensely moving and sad.

There is no denying the pessimism of this view of the future, but I doubt that it represents a conviction on Ballard's part so much as a fear. As the contrast between *The Drowned World* and *The Drought* reveals, Ballard is highly conscious of the paradoxical position of modern humanity. Man is of the animal world, and yet not of it, unable to move in either direction without losing his identity. As a result, he finds himself stranded on the terminal beach of the present. In fact, the beach in the story of that name is made of concrete, not sand, and concrete is pre-eminently the symbol of *now* in Ballard's fiction (and the related symbols are steel, glass, plastic, helicopters,

automobiles, etc.). In this category I place all his claustrophobic city-stories, such as "Billenium" and "The Subliminal Man", together with the series of condensed and fragmented pieces that make up his book *The Atrocity Exhibition.* In these works, Ballard shows a fascination for modern architecture; he has become the poet of the motorway clover-leaf junction and the multi-storey car-park. Claustrophobia is a key to Ballard's view of the present world. There is a continual sense of being hemmed in and enclosed by a universe of concrete. This is quite literally the case in the early short story called "The Concentration City". Here, the protagonist (named Franz M. as a tribute to Kafka) attempts to escape from the city that he has grown up in. He goes on a long journey on the underground railway, only to end up at the point he started from. In other words, the city is global; there is no 'up', no 'down', no way out. The very concepts of 'space' and 'flight' cannot be grasped by the inhabitants of this metropolis.

The atmosphere of claustrophobia is more subtly conveyed in *The Atrocity Exhibition.* The hero's world is claustrophobic because it represents an exteriorization of his own mind – or rather, of the collective mind of modern urban man. In this environment (and in many ways it is the actual landscape of contemporary London and its suburbs that Ballard describes) everything is man-made, and thus is psycho-analysable, like the contents of an individual mind. Every skyscraper, advertising hoarding or television broadcast has its latent as well as overt meaning. In Ballard's 'water' stories, we are among natural living things, however hostile; in the 'sand' stories, we are in the presence of an impersonal geology. Both introduce landscapes that are *other* to man. But in the 'concrete' stories man is trapped within his own creations, and thus within himself. He is living in a completely 'fictional' world – a world that is in fact a work of science fiction, since it has been brought into existence by technology. As Ballard puts it, life becomes a huge novel. In this enclosed, narcissistic present, he sees man as having a terrible existential freedom. The individual can choose to do literally anything he wants to do. Consequently, he is turning increasingly to perversions, particularly those involving violence, such as the vicarious enjoyment of war atrocities in newsreels from Vietnam, or the pleasure of automobile 'accidents'. After all, man is a naturally perverse animal; his perversity is the measure of his removal from the normal biological round. Most men who have ever lived have in fact followed the traditional Arcadian rhythms of existence; they have not 'planned' their lives, but have simply lived, following the way of all flesh. However, contemporary man's technological

expertise has now given him the means to escape this lot and to fulfil his perverse nature, to realize his every fantasy. Sex has ceased to be a biological function; it has become a purely conceptualized pleasure, and this has led to what Ballard calls "the death of affect". As Dr. Nathan, Ballard's spokesman in *The Atrocity Exhibition,* says:

> "Consider all our most real and tender pleasures – in the excitements of pain and mutilation; in sex as the perfect arena, like a culture bed of sterile pus, for all the veronicas of our own perversions, in voyeurism and self-disgust, in our moral freedom to pursue our own psychopathologies as a game, and in our ever greater powers of abstraction. What our children have to fear are not the cars on the freeways of tomorrow, but our own pleasure in calculating the most elegant parameters of their deaths."
>
> (*The Atrocity Exhibition,* Jonathan Cape, 1970) p. 104

In the earlier short story "The Terminal Beach", the protagonist, choosing to maroon himself Crusoe-like on the concrete-covered nuclear-testing island of Eniwetok, exclaims to a would-be rescuer: "for me the hydrogen bomb was a symbol of absolute *freedom.* I feel it's given me the right – the obligation even – to do anything I want."[10] The irony is that this freedom can only be exercised within the bounds of man's own concrete world, where we all become the victims of each others' fantasies. Where else is there to go? The past is a biological swamp, the future is a sandy desert – and the present is a concrete play-pen. This present is equivalent to the Fallen World in Biblical symbolism, the place where men toil and die – although increasingly, in Ballard's modern version, it is the place where men act out their psychodramas and die. If Western man's ambitions have brought him to this impasse what other attitude should he adopt in order to live with grace? The dead Japanese doctor suggests to the hero in "The Terminal Beach": "Have a proper humility, pursue a philosophy of acceptance."[11] This is a note that has been sounded several times in Ballard's fiction, and it leads us on to a consideration of the fourth category of stories – those in which the dominating symbol is crystal or something akin.

In "The Impossible Man", Ballard suggests that the inhabitants of a future society in which transplant-surgery has become commonplace might choose to die rather than have their self-identities violated by the grafting of organs and limbs from other bodies. The theme of this story is precisely one of 'humility and acceptance'. In explaining his feelings to the boy-hero, the aged Dr. Matthews uses a very interesting image:

> "You're seventeen? . . . At that age, if I remember, life seems to stretch on for ever. One is probably living as close to eternity as possible. As you get older, though, you find more and more that everything worthwhile has finite bounds, by and large those of time . . . The hard lines drawn around things give them their identity. Nothing is brighter than the diamond."
>
> *(The Disaster Area* p. 203*)*

The implied fatalism of this story is hard for us in the modern Western world to accept. It runs exactly counter to our tradition of regarding personal immortality as a goal to strive for – whether through the Christian religion or medical science. But is it just fatalism that Ballard suggests here? He mentions eternity, and he uses the symbol of the diamond – hard-edged, shining and everlasting. The concept of eternity embodied in the transient is a mystical one, reminiscent of the Eastern philosophies. It is not simply 'fatalism', but a joyful acceptance of the *justness* of existence that is suggested, the very antithesis of Western man's perennial discontent.

The diamond or crystal symbol is one that Ballard has used sparingly in his short stories, but it does of course appear profusely in his novel *The Crystal World.* This fascinating tale begins with descriptions of a "dark river" overhung by a sombre African forest. We are reminded of the mutated London of *The Drowned World,* or the oppressive South American jungle of "A Question of Re-Entry". Here we have Ballard's usual vision of the natural world that man has forsaken – frightening, alien but alive. The port at the river's mouth is one of those depressing 'outposts of civilization' highly reminiscent of scenes in Conrad's novels. As the hero remarks ironically, "Port Matarre has more than a passing resemblance to purgatory."[12] But when the characters move up-river they discover a beautiful world of cancerous mutation. The forest and all its denizens are effloresc ing, turning into a vast crystalline mass which is gradually expanding to fill all space. Ballard's science-fictional explanation for this phenomenon is obscure, involving the "super-saturation" of time and space: "As more and more time 'leaks' away, the process of supersaturation continues, the original atoms and molecules producing spatial replicas of themselves. . . ." The important point is that the crystal world is *without time;* it has become a fragment of eternity, and eventually it will "fill the entire universe . . an ultimate macrocosmic zero beyond the wildest dreams of Plato and Democritus."[13] The living things that are caught up in this process do not die; they become, as it were, embalmed in eternity. In the crystal world, all opposites merge: light and dark, man and animal, life and death, space and time – all are resolved into one. Each of the characters gradually succumbs to the enticement of this world and blends

with it. The hero eventually undergoes a self-immolation which is superficially similar to those of the protagonists of *The Drowned World* and *The Drought,* but which is in fact totally different in content. In this most mystical novel, Ballard has used the symbol of the crystalline forest as a science-fictional objective correlative to our sense of oneness with the universe. He has created his Heaven or City of God.

It is natural to associate the stars with diamonds, the galaxy with crystal, and indeed much literature of the past has done so. In Ballard's symbolism too, crystal expands to embrace the heavenly bodies. Indeed, in *The Crystal World,* the phenomenon of crystallization is in some way triggered by events deep in outer space. Anti-matter and anti-time have appeared in the universe and the distant galaxies are "doubling". The first to be discovered by earth's astronomers is "in the constellation Andromeda, the great oblate diadem that is probably the most beautiful object in the physical universe, the island galaxy M 31."[14] This thoroughly traditional association of crystal, eternity and the Milky Way leads us on to a consideration of the theme of space-travel in Ballard's fiction. Ballard has sometimes been reproached for being the only science fiction writer who is apparently uninterested in what many would consider the quintessential themes of the genre: space-flight and encounters with alien beings. In fact, this is unfair, since several of his most brilliant and suggestive short stories deal with just such themes – I am thinking in particular of "The Waiting Grounds", "The Voices of Time", "The Time Tombs", "A Question of Re-Entry" and "The Venus Hunters". In contrast to most science fiction writers, what characterizes Ballard's approach to space-travel themes is his extreme caution. After all, if the stars 'are' the City of God, they must be approached with a suitable awe.

The space-ship itself is a frequent symbol in Ballard's work. When space-capsules appear, they are invariably wrecked, grounded or trapped in an endless orbit. "Thirteen to Centaurus" presents us with a huge spacecraft which is in reality an earth-bound testing laboratory. Its inhabitants think they are flying to Alpha Centauri, but in fact they are all guinea-pigs in a failed experiment. Crashed space-vehicles recur in such stories as "Deep End", "The Cage of Sand" and "Tomorrow is a Million Years", and in *The Atrocity Exhibition* Ballard evinces a fascination for the Apollo disaster at Cape Kennedy in which Grissom, White and Chaffee were burned to death on the launch-pad. The recurrence of these motifs would certainly

suggest that Ballard regards the space-programmes as doomed to failure. But, again, I doubt that this really represents a conviction on his part, so much as a symbolic expression of a fear, a doubt. The fear is perhaps that modern man's frontal assault on the heavens – an approach lacking in humility – will lead to further damnation rather than salvation. As the hero of "A Question of Re-Entry" puts it: "If the sea was a symbol of the unconscious, was space perhaps an image of unfettered time, and the inability to penetrate it a tragic exile to one of the limbos of eternity, a symbolic death in life?"[15] It is the all-too-likely *failure* of the space-programmes, the inability of man to face up to the sheer vastness of the universe, that frightens Ballard, rather than the attempt itself. His current attitude to the moon-landings was expressed in a review of Norman Mailer's *A Fire on the Moon.*[16] Here, he blames Mailer for not having sufficient respect for the astronauts, and for deriding Aldrin's "quiet and moving" celebration of communion on the moon's surface. Ballard admires the selfless dedication of the NASA team, and regrets that the public response to the event has not been greater. It should all have added up to a change in "the real substance of our lives, our private communion, however stuttered, with the unseen powers of the universe." The blame, he implies, is on *us,* and on people like Mailer, for not being sufficiently imaginative.

'Communion with the unseen powers of the universe' – what does Ballard mean by this? He is certainly no Christian (elsewhere, he has written that "science fiction is totally atheistic",[17] though this is perhaps a dubious assertion) but that he has a leaning towards mysticism has already been testified by my brief analysis of the crystal symbol in his fiction. His story "The Time-Tombs" is set on a far planet, where a group of earth's outcasts make their living by scavenging the relics of a dead civilization. The oldest of the tomb-robbers has come to regret his occupation:

> "He hated stripping the tombs. Each one robbed represented . . . a diminution of his own sense of eternity. Whenver a new tomb-bed emerged from the sand he felt something within himself momentarily rekindled . . . a serene acceptance of the brief span of time left to him"
> *(The Overloaded Man,* Panther Books, 1967, pp. 25-26)

The hero comes under the influence of this philosophy, and when he discovers an intact tomb he cannot bring himself to violate it, but gradually becomes more and more fascinated by the personality of its

long-dead occupant, an alien woman whose image is that of a goddess whose "long copper hair streamed behind her like an entrained time-wind, her angled body in flight between two infinitely distant universes, where archetypal beings of superhuman stature glimmered fitfully in their own self-generated light."[18] This is typical of Ballard's treatment of alien-beings. It is as though we are seeing them from the corner of the eye rather than full on, and the result is much more mysterious and suggestive than the banal descriptions of so many science fiction writers. After all, how do you describe the indescribable? Few other writers have achieved this 'corner of the eye' effect (although James Blish does, in his story "Common Time"). In "The Voices of Time" the first men to land on the moon never return, although they send back fragmentary messages about "blue people who had come from Orion and spoken in poetry to them of ancient beautiful worlds beneath golden suns in the island galaxies, vanished for ever now in the myriad deaths of the cosmos."[19] The technique Ballard uses here is exactly the same – an evocative glimpse, no more. But it is enough. These are examples of the 'unseen powers of the universe', alien intelligences who are to all intents and purposes gods. Their message is the same: have humility, accept mortality. As one of the characters in "The Voices of Time" advises the hero: "Think of yourself in a wider context. Every particle in your body, every grain of sand, every galaxy carries the same signature."[20]

The 'summit' of Ballard's symbolic vision, his most apocalyptic image, is to be found in the comparatively early short story "The Waiting Grounds". This brilliant, if flawed, piece concerns a man on an alien planet who discovers a strange temple of the galactic races. Amid a landscape of sand, ash and intense heat, the hero is rewarded with a glimpse of the cosmic cycle. He sees the future evolution of the sentient races, their expansion in space, their ability to slow their subjective time-rates, until they abandon physical existence and become a "great vibrating mantle of ideation" which eventually swallows all matter and "achieves the final predicates of time and space, eternity and infinity."[21] Once this zero has been reached, the system explodes, time and matter re-emerge, and the cycle begins again. An alien voice tells the hero of the purpose of his vision and of the Waiting Grounds:

> " . . . we wait here, at the threshold of time and space, celebrating the identity and kinship of the particles within our bodies with those of the sun and the stars, of our brief private times with the vast periods of the galaxies, with the total unifving time of the cosmos . . ."
>
> (*The Day of Forever* p. 80)

The theme of acceptance cannot be stated more clearly; the universe may be a place of 'myriad deaths', but it is also, ultimately, a single entity, every particular existence bodying forth its meaning. Of course Ballard does not expect that men ever will just sit and accept – in "The Time-Tombs" the other tomb-robbers eventually come and shatter the illusion that has been sustaining the hero – but this cosmic or crystal vision represents one pole of human consciousness. Eternity is always there, as an alternative to the unconscious past, the arid future, the claustrophobic present.

Finally, let me add that I have pursued the theme of Ballard's symbolism with an earnestness that is perhaps out of keeping with the irony, ambivalence and wit of all his writing. His work adds up to an exploration of various states of the modern mind, not a new scripture.

NOTES

1. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (Atheneum, New York, 1965).
2. Quoted in Douglas Reed, *Ballard at Home*, in *Books and Bookmen*, April 1971.
3. *The Drowned World* (Gollancz, 1963), p. 7.
4. *Ibid.* p. 10.
5. *Ibid* p. 23
6. In the collection *The Disaster Area* (Jonathan Cape, 1967) p. 128.
7. *The Drowned World*, p. 175.
8. Berkley Books, New York, 1971.
9. *The Drought* (Jonathan Cape, 1965) p. 15.
10. In the collection *The Terminal Beach* (Gollancz, 1964) p. 147.
11. *Ibid.* p. 154.
12. *The Crystal World* (Jonathan Cape, 1966) p. 35.
13. *Ibid.* p.105.
14. *Ibid.* p.104.
15. In the collection *The Terminal Beach* p. 9.
16. *The Guardian*, December 1970.
17. "Fictions of Every Kind", *Books and Bookmen*, February 1971.
18. In the collection *The Overloaded Man* (Panther Books, 1967), p. 30.
19. In the collection *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare* (Gollancz, 1963) p. 41.
20. *Ibid.* p. 35.
21. In the collection *The Day of Forever* (Panther Books, 1967) p. 79.

reviews

edited by Ken Bulmer

The journal *Foundation* for these first four issues has relied on a small cadre of contributors to the review section, nearly all of whom are closely connected with the Science Fiction Foundation. The reason is simply that I have been reluctant to request criticism when the journal was going through publication problems, for adequate science fiction criticism demands considerable time and effort and subsequent non-publication is a flagrant act of literary vandalism. Now that the journal looks set for a regular quarterly appearance I am busily requesting criticism and reviews and there are good things in store. But I feel it is appropriate that a sincere thankyou for the time and work put in by these few contributors to the review section should go on the record.

The lead review this issue, which is of importance in the bibliographical area, has been contributed by Malcolm Edwards who is a librarian by profession and who, sharing *Foundation*'s concerns for literary and critical standards, here examines his own speciality. In addition, he edits *Vector,* the Journal of the British Science Fiction Association, and has made of it certainly the best *Vector* for very many years and probably the best regularly-appearing *Vector* series in the history of the journal.

Much of this review section is devoted to the incestuous but sometimes useful business of criticising the critics. In addition to our leading article we have Peter Nicholls surveying recent science fiction criticism, concentrating on Tom Clareson's recent anthology. Our regular reviewers George Hay and Christopher Priest are here, and we are happy to welcome Brian Aldiss to these pages. On recently hearing him say that he didn't mind if he never reviewed another book again, we adroitly requested him to review a film for us. It will be our continuing policy to review important science fiction films on their English release.

In the next issue of *Foundation,* (Vol. 2, No. 1, Whole No. 5) we are presently planning to increase the size of the review section temporarily to take note of the many new books received. Long articles will look at the recent Penguin re-issues of Olaf Stapledon, at Gollancz collections and at the work of James Blish.

losing your way about science fiction

The Tale of the Future
by I.F. Clarke. 2nd ed. London, The Library Association, 1972, 196 pages, 6 plates, £3.75 (£3.00 to members of The Library Association), ISBN 0 85365 046 2

reviewed by Malcolm Edwards

"Do you want to find your way around your science fiction?" asks the advertisement for this book in the October 1972 *Library Association Record.* It goes on to describe the scope of the work: "The first listed is *Aulicus his dream of the King's sudden coming to London,* which is a Puritan political tract of 6 pages published in 1644 . . . the last is *Isle of the Dead* by *Zelzany* (sic), short stories about space published in 1970." Of course, Professor Clarke cannot be held responsible for the manner in which his book is advertised; but having seen so much inaccurate coverage and so much bad scholarship in dealing with science fiction in the past, I think one may be forgiven some disquiet and foreboding on reading this. (If it *doesn't* cause any disquiet, I suggest you reconsult the Zelazny book.) Professor Clarke *can* be held responsible for the fact that his book, far from dispelling these feelings, actually confirms and reinforces them.

The first edition of this annotated bibliography of "those satires, ideal states, imaginary wars and invasions, political warnings and forecasts, interplanetary voyages and scientific romances – all located in an imaginary future period – that have been published in the United Kingdom" appeared in 1961 and covered titles published up to 1960. It was and is a valuable reference source. The listings were extensive, and Professor Clarke's assiduous research unearthed a great many obscure early titles which would otherwise – one suspects – have been forgotten. This second edition is entirely reset in a handsome new format, which allows many more entries per page without any sacrifice in clarity. Professor Clarke has polished and rewritten his Introduction, which is an intelligent and illuminating tracing of the history of the tale of the future, defining the main types and showing the chief influences. Furthermore, the coverage is now considerably more

exhaustive: a quick check shows that for the period up to 1900 there are about a third as many entries again in this edition as there were in the first. It is regrettable, however, that none of the entries from the earlier edition have been revised, so that several errors are perpetuated. I would also demur mildly with Professor Clarke's definition of his subject area – it is basically a definition of science fiction which excludes, to no useful purpose, one of its most interesting facets, the parallel worlds story. It should also eliminate those time travel stories set entirely in the past. That there are, in fact, entries in the book for stories in these two categories is an indication that Professor Clarke has given himself a difficult division to make.

Bearing in mind the established value of the first edition, and noting that considerable steps have been taken towards making it more complete, I intend to concentrate mainly on the entirely new section covering the years 1961-1970. This is actually the period for which information is most easily accessible to us, and we shall see that the standard of completeness and accuracy is so low that, despite what I have previously said, it must inevitably call into serious doubt the rigour with which the earlier information (where details must have been proportionately harder to come by) was compiled. The book's failings are of four broad types: titles which have been omitted; titles whose claim to inclusion seems dubious; plain errors of fact; and inaccuracies in the main entries and indexes.

The most serious complaint is that there are so many titles missing. When I first received the book, I quickly filled a sheet of paper with omissions simply by flicking through the author index to see what was listed. The suspicion that I had only touched the tip of the iceberg was confirmed by a brief session checking the entries for 1969 against the classified entries in the 1969 *British National Bibliography* (the obvious place to start work on an updating of this kind). Professor Clarke's own bibliography lists an impressive number of sources, which naturally include *BNB;* but his research here has plainly been less than thorough. While there was no entry for 1969 in *The Tale of the Future* which did not appear in *BNB* (one or two missing from the 1969 edition duly appeared in 1970), the reverse was by no means true. Among the titles which Professor Clarke missed were: *Moon Zero Two* (Burke); *The Towers of Toron* and *City of a Thousand Suns* (Delany – *Out of the Dead City,* the first volume of this trilogy, was published in 1968; it is missing too); *The Waters of Death* (Greenfield); *The Black Corrider, The Ice Schooner* and the *Runestaff* tetralogy (all Moorcock – while the *Runestaff* series is fantasy, it is set in a fairly

well-defined future Europe, and thus has a fair claim to inclusion); *Miners in the Sky, Space Gypsies* and *The Wailing Asteroid* (all Leinster); *The Several Minds* (Morgan); *Tarnsman of Gor* (Norman); *The Seedy* (Ray); *Intermind* (Sellings); *The Man in the Maze* (Silverberg); *Let the Fire Fall* (Wilhelm); *Orbit 3* (Knight, ed.); *Worlds to Come* (Knight, ed.); *Citizen in Space* (Sheckley). This list does not claim to be exhaustive. It omits some likely titles with which I am not personally acquainted; nor does it include novels such as *Heroes and Villains* (Angela Carter) and *The Four-Gated City* (Doris Lessing), which are tales of, or partly of the future by authors not normally associated with the form.

There are many, many more. It would be futile to list every single omission I could find, but here are a select few: *More Than Human* (Sturgeon); *Rogue Moon* (Budrys); *Return to Otherness* (Kuttner); *The Silver Eggheads* and *The Big Time* (Leiber); *Beyond This Horizon* (Heinlein); *Pawns of Null-A* (Van Vogt); *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra* (C.S. Lewis: these two omissions, carried over from the first edition, are perhaps the least comprehensible of all); *The Stainless Steel Rat* (Harrison); *The Legion of Time* (Williamson); *Through A Glass, Clearly* (Asimov); *The Night of the Puudly* (Simak); *Night Walk* (Shaw); *Out of My Mind* (Brunner); *With a Strange Device* (Russell); and every single book by Dan Morgan. The writers in the above list represent a good quorum of the leading modern writers of science fiction. One thing that a lot of these titles have in common is that they have only appeared in this country in paperback editions, and may therefore never have been listed in such sources as *British National Bibliography,* whose coverage of the paperback field is notably incomplete. However, this does not excuse their absence: the essence of a work of this kind is that it should not only catch the obvious entries which anybody could trace (something which, as we have seen, it fails to do), but should also track down the titles which are less well-known, less easy to find. This is known as research.

The question of titles which do not seem to merit inclusion is perhaps less easy to assess; Professor Clarke's parameters permit a good deal of elasticity. But he does say (p. 7) that "juvenile fiction has been excluded", and one may therefore point with confidence to the many juvenile novels by Blish, Christopher, Del Rey, Norton and Walters which are listed. It might be argued that many of these books are aimed at adolescents, and so do not strictly qualify as juveniles – but in that case one could ask why, for example, only two of Miss Norton's innumerable and generally indistinguishable novels are included. Other

doubtful candidates are stories which are horror or plain fantasy, such as *The Stealer of Souls* (Moorcock – *Stormbringer,* however, is missing), *Hell Hath Fury* (George Hay, ed.), *From Unknown Worlds* (Campbell, ed.), *The Shadow Out of Time* (Lovecraft and Derleth), *The Dark World* (Kuttner), and *Musrum* (Thacker and Earnshaw).

More difficult to decide on are various borderline titles. I would not criticise Professor Clarke for including them, but it seems to me that although they may conform to the letter of his definition they do not conform to the spirit of it. Examples are: *Our Man in Havana* (Greene); *War Is Heaven* (Mano); *A Plague on Both Your Causes* (Brunner); *Glide Path* (Clarke); *Right of Reply* (Harris); *North Cape* (Poyer); *A Grue of Ice* and *Hunter-Killer* (Jenkins). Mostly these are thrillers of some kind which may be set marginally in the future, or in an imaginary country, but are nevertheless writing about the world as it is; the change of name or the setting a year or two in the future is merely a minor fictional device. Only the names are changed. If these books do qualify, I think the logical end would be the inclusion of books like all those genteel English detective novels set in an imaginary county in the West Midlands, generally called Loamshire.

The errors of fact in *The Tale of the Future* include the perpetuation of several old favourites, although the book comes up with one or two new ones. Pseudonyms are the main problem. Jack Vance is still thought thought to be a nom-de-plume of Henry Kuttner, and that other old favourite of bibliographers everywhere, E.H. Waldo, is still apparently responsible for all Theodore Sturgeon's work. New to this reviewer, anyway, is the revelation that John W. Campbell, Jr. only ever existed as a pseudonym of Don. A. Stuart! Professor Clarke credits all the work of that most evocatively-named science fiction writer, Volsted Gridban, to John Russell Fearn, whereas many of his books (including at least one not listed) were actually written by E.C. Tubb. Tubb was also responsible for a number of novels as "Charles Grey". Professor Clarke correctly notes this in the main entry for *Enterprise 2115* (although there is no reference to it in the index under either Grey or Tubb), but this is the only "Grey" title he mentions. Of course, we are now down in the rather jumbled basement of 1950s British science fiction – a fascinating field, if a nightmare for bibliographers. Before leaving it: the index tells us, intriguingly, that Karl Zeigfried was really R.L. Fanthorpe and that, conversely, R.L. Fanthorpe was really Karl Zeigfried. It is interesting to speculate how Professor Clarke might have coped with the dozens of "John E. Muller" titles – but speculate is all one can do, for not a single "Muller" book is included.

Back in respectable areas, several names which are in fact pseudonymous, such as Richard Cowper and John Christopher, are not so listed. "Rex Gordon" is correctly stated to be a pseudonym of the late S.B. Hough, but the book goes on to list *The Time Factor* under Hough's name instead of Gordon's. Although the index lists *The Time Factor* under both names it is little help if you are looking for the book under the correct name, since the entry under Gordon gives the date as 1965 (as does the title index, anticipating that approach) when it should be 1964. We also discover that Curt Siodmak apparently never existed: *Donovan's Brain* is missing, while *Hauser's Memory* is attributed to Clifford Simak. And *SF Showcase,* the memorial volume to C.M. Kornbluth, turns out to be posthumously edited by Mr. Kornbluth himself!

Lastly, there are the inaccuracies in the entries and the indexes. Many of these errors are trivial in themselves, but there are so many of them that one must conclude that the book was hastily and carelessly compiled. This is a serious charge to level at a book published by the Library Association. These matters of accurate bibliographical information and proper indexing are ones with which the Association should be professionally concerned, and its publications ought to reflect this expertise. After all, if an organisation of professionally-trained librarians is unable to produce a properly assembled work of this kind, how on earth can we expect anybody else to do so? Worse, because the book appears under the L.A. imprint it is certain to be taken up by many libraries as a standard work: they will, reasonably enough, assume the qualities I have mentioned. If they do not get them – and they certainly do not get them in *The Tale of the Future* – then the standing of the L.A. is inevitably devalued. To a small degree, admittedly, but devalued nevertheless. Self-respect, if nothing else, should have ensured that more care was taken.

I have already mentioned one or two errors in the index. There are others. In at least two cases, a book appears in the title index but is omitted from the author index [*The Long Result* (Brunner) and *Nova Express* (Burroughs)]. These are two that happened to catch my eye; I have no reason to suppose they are the only ones. Some authors are indexed twice: Walter M. Miller is listed as Miller, W. and, separately, as Miller, W.M.; Damon Knight appears as Knight, D. and Knight, D.F. In a number of cases the indication that a book is an anthology is omitted. There are insufficient cross-references. Of the five Pohl-Kornbluth collaborations, four appear under Pohl's name and one under Kornbluth's. There is no reference from one to the other.

Errors in the main entries are largely the result of poor (or non-existent) proof reading. The entries themselves are quite brief: they give the author, title, publisher, number of pages, a (very) brief annotation, and an indication whether the book first appeared in the U.S.A. Page 128, for example, contains four obvious errors. The second entry reads, in its entirety:

Cripin, E. (Mongtomery R.B.) *The Stars and Under*

Further down, no indication is given that Gordon Dickson's *The Space Swimmers* first appeared in the U.S.A. A little further, and the second entry for Thomas M. Disch calls him Disch, T.D. Further still, and the entry for *The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction: 16* fails to give the number of pages. Otherwise, elsewhere in the book we may find books listed under the wrong year (e.g. *Glide Path* (Clarke) under 1967 instead of 1969) or the wrong edition (e.g. The Sidgwick & Jackson edition of *The Rose* (Harness) rather than the earlier Compact edition).

This is an annotated bibliography. The purpose of an annotation is to give some brief guide as to the content and/or merit of a book. In the *Tale of the Future* the annotations are so brief, so arbitrary, and sometimes so plain wrong as to be worthless in many cases. How arbitrary they are can be seen by considering Robert Silverberg's novel *Hawksbill Station,* whose change of title (the British hardcover edition was called *The Anvil of Time;* the paperback edition reverted to the original title) fooled Professor Clarke into entering it twice. In one case the annotation reads "Time travel adventures"; in the other "Time travel adventures in the distant past". Neither is exactly informative, but at least the second does differentiate it in some way from other time travel books (and also, incidentally, makes it ineligible for inclusion). Though these are unhelpful, at least they are not inaccurate. But what is one to make of some of the other annotations? When Mr. Silverberg's *Thorns* is described as "Space travel adventures"; when John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* is summarised as "Troubles come when General Technics prepare to develop a small African country"; when Kenneth Bulmer's *Behold The Stars* (a novel about the impossibility of faster-than-light travel) is annotated first as "Faster-than-light travel in space" and then (it is entered twice) as "Warfare in space as men from earth begin to penetrate the galaxies"; when Henry Kuttner's *Fury* has its plot transformed into "In the twenty-seventh century the Immortals, a new human species, return from Venus to colonise the earth" – one can only wonder where Professor Clarke obtained his

information, and suggest that he might have been better advised to annotate selectively, and in a little more detail, those books which he had actually *read.*

I find it difficult to comprehend how such a botched job could have come about. Professor Clarke seems not to be really interested in contemporary material, and has perhaps assembled the data on it without taking much trouble. This is understandable, but it is not possible to excuse the presence of so many errors in a bibliographical work. I am not exaggerating when I say that a far more complete set of entries for 1961-70 could be compiled in a week (and probably much less) from one reference source only. And he has had advice from at least one expert in science fiction bibliography. It really is a mystery.

I think I am right in suggesting that Professor Clarke's real interest lies in the antiquarian material, and although I have been critical of the recent additions, I do recognise that he has produced a valuable listing of early stories (up to 1940, let us say). Thereafter he had one of two choices: he could have produced a select bibliography of later material; or he could have tried to cover everything. He tried the latter course, and the result is an inadequate bibliography, poorly annotated. It would have been a much better book if he had been selective and had tried to tell us a little more about the works listed. It is noticeable that the annotations, never very extensive, become successively shorter as we approach 1970.

Let us hope that we do not have to wait another ten years for a new edition which will repair some of these faults. As it is, the book has two distinct faces, and ought to be issued with some kind of warning to unsuspecting users. On the one hand is a worthwhile piece of research into early tales of the future; on the other is an incomplete and inaccurate piece of bibliographical work which may be useful as a casual guide to titles of possible interest, but which should be regarded only as a basis for further enquiry.

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symbols of transience

Solaris
Curzon Cinema (released in May). Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. Based on the novel by Stanislaw Lem. Mosfilm Studios. Length, 165 minutes.

reviewed by Brian W. Aldiss

Something fugal on a dim organ by Bach; the screen brightens; we gaze on the riverain waters of Earth, in which sedges ripple continually. By the river banks, wild parsleys flower and seed. Kris Kelvin stands there, about to leave this strange but familiar planet. Young children play, plunging indoors to avoid a thundery rainstorm. Symbols of transience are all round us.

Throughout this beautiful film, we are strikingly reminded that stability is achieved only by constant minor instability. There are shots of snow, of smoky bonfires in which Kelvin burns bits of his past, of a little bright twig fire made by a boy in the snow, of roaring traffic, of plants, and of Kelvin and his parents at different stages of their lives (Mosfilm must have the best make-up artists in the world). And, of course, the last heartbreaking scenes where the rain falls on the unheeding shoulders of the old man.

Mutability does not exist on the sterile world of the research satellite which men have put in orbit about the planet Solaris. In that respect, the satellite is in opposition to the planet, which is all mutability. Its vast flying tides, its slow crawling patterns, its indecipherable structures, are unimpeded by any hindrance; this is a water world without coastlines. Over the ages, it had achieved its own sort of consciousness.

The power of Solaris is such that it can insert thought-made-flesh into the satellite, using as its vehicles images or memories from the minds of Earthmen there. When Kelvin arrives on the satellite, he is confronted in due course by a copy of his wife, who had committed suicide some years before. These copies, too, are capable of change.

I stress the theme of mutability because it is present but uninsistent, and capable of drawing powerful emotional responses from the viewer. But how far should we trust to the objectivity of science, how far to the subjectivity of our emotions? Or perhaps we should re-phrase the question this way: maybe the script-writers designed an argument

about science versus emotion; if so, the director, Tarkovsky, imprinted his own answer on every scene. He is for emotion.

His will be a widely acceptable answer; more and more we hear that we ought to trust to our intuitive feelings and not doubt personal experience, rather than being quelled by experts telling us what we feel. There are, I believe, intellectual reasons for conceding that this should be so. The trouble is that, in a popular medium like film, where emotion has always been made free of, objectivity and detachment have never had had much of a showing; Madame Curie's work always played second fiddle to Miss Greer Garson's sex appeal. And in adapting Stanislav Lem's novel, Tarkovsky has played havoc with it much as David Lean did with the intellectual structure of *Dr. Zhivago*. What we essentially get here is what we had in *Dr. Zhivago* – a stunning cast of actors, some beautiful cinema, and a great love affair played out, not over a disrupted period of history, but a disrupted patch of psychology.

Having delivered myself of this sizeable objection to the film as adaptation, I am free to speak of its tremendous delights as film, to which end I hope to make no extended comparisons with Lem's fine novel (for that would be in itself an exercise in solaristics) and no comparisons at all with Kubrick's *2001,* for that would be an idle exercise.

To give an idea of what happens in the film: Tarkovsky presents a worried, bear-like Kelvin, sauntering about his parents' *datcha* on the eve of his departure for Solaris. He is a psychologist, and is going to see what has gone wrong on the space-station. An ex-astronaut, Burton, arrives with a film about Solaris. Through his film, we gather a few basic details: that Solaris has been studied by Earthmen for many years, until solaristics has become a major study, and that now only three men out of eighty-five remain on the station. The problem seems to be how to make contact with the alien consciousness. As one of the experts says, man's knowledge is limited but thought is boundless (and that was the first platitude I consciously noted).

We are given a few oblique references before Kelvin leaves Earth. His moody estrangement from his loving parents, the death of his wife. "I cannot let myself be guided by emotion", he says. A horse trots about; perhaps it is the most alien creature in the film. The children are frightened by it, yet it is utterly gentle and dependent. There is also the curious metal box (a radio, a mess-tin?) which Kelvin carries about with him. The method of the film is to speak mainly in long-held takes, very carefully composed, yet always to leave much that is

mysterious. The early shots in the house glow with interest as the humans move among chiaroscuro and fascinating objects.

Solaris. The wheel of the satellite moving above those cryptic waters, gonging out great bronze reflected rays from the sun as Kelvin's shuttle approaches. All the spaceware is effected with economy and some flair. In particular, the interior of the station, into which Kelvin moves with advisable caution, is and remains a powerful presence, its smooth surfaces draped with roughly-laid coaxial cable, lights faultily flickering where a contact has broken, rubbish lying about the curving corridors.

We meet Snauth and Sartorius, the only two survivors on the satellite. Kelvin's friend Gibaryan has committed suicide. Before dying, he left a visi-tape which explains that the 'guests' on the satellite are "something to do with one's conscience". We catch glimpses of the succubi and incubi which attend these doomed men: a little girl for Gibaryan, a fearsome dwarf for Sartorius.

Finally, Kelvin falls asleep in his comfortless room. When he awakes, morning has dawned. The rays of the sun light upon tawny hair, upon a splendid cheekbone, upon a pair of finely moulded lips. Kelvin has his own succubus now. A copy of his wife Hari awaits him.

The scenes between Kelvin and Hari are superb, vibrating with fear and sex and other enjoyable emotions. Kelvin jettisons the first copy by firing her out of the station in a spare shuttle, but another Hari soon materialises. Despite his objective mistrust of what she represents, and to the disgust of Sartorius, Kelvin falls in love with Hari, and a several-sided debate ensues. The other men are annoyed by Kelvin's behaviour; they try to cope with their own baffling problems, and Sartorius complains that they have in fact achieved what was required of them and made contact with Solaris, although they don't recognise contact when they find it.

It is the chilly Sartorius who announces, after experiments on his own 'guest', that the materialisations are made of neutrinos which remain stable only in Solaris's atmosphere. Whether this double error is committed in the original film or is a product of the subtitle-writer, your Russianless reviewer can but guess; what is possibly meant is that the guests are composed of neutrons rather than positrons, which hold stable in the planet's gravitational field. The implication is clear: Kelvin cannot take Hari with him back to Earth. Although he later reaches an extreme point at which he rejects science, he is still subject to natural laws, implicitly accepting this when he tells Hari that they will live together and never leave the station. He has reversed his earlier position and is now entirely guided by emotion.

By this time, Hari has done considerable damage to herself, battling her way through steel doors and drinking liquid oxygen. The damage is impermanent, her wounds transient. These scenes are immensely exciting and well faked. Here at least the film has it clear over the novel, since we are involved in the suffering of a splendidly impressive female creature, the Hari of Natalya Bondarchuk, the sort of succubus men dream of. All the while, she – or Solaris – is learning what it is to be human, and this is extremely moving. Hari admits to Sartorius that she may be a copy; "But I am becoming human", she says. The others, however, do not learn what it is to be inhuman, except indirectly, and this seems to weaken somewhat the grand theme of first alien-human encounter.

One says this reluctantly, for beyond doubt the cinema has never before made so superb an attempt to imagine that staple revelation of science fiction, the meeting of human and alien. Or so successful an attempt. But because the learning is imposed on the copy instead of the humans, the central situation loses its fulcrum; solaristics are so much wasted time, since from now on the ocean can pretend to be human whenever it needs to, and thus baffle all human investigation.

Towards the end of the film, as this flaw reveals itself, one begins to notice the platitudes creeping in. Are men really just objects for love? Will the new knowledge save mankind? Has life a meaning? So the men ask themselves. I should add that I have seen the film twice so far, once without subtitles, once (the Curzon version) with. I preferred, was more profoundly stirred by, the version without subtitles – not only because the clichés did not get through to me but because the actors and the camerawork (by Vadim Yusov who has worked with Tarkovsky previously) are so telling. The dialogue does not quite match the superb visuals. The poetry is more of the image than the word. Unlike the novel, this is meat for the sensualist as well as the intellectual.

Before mediocrity can threaten to close in, the film is saved by a flood of new pictorial inspiration, such as Kelvin's hallucinations in his fever, when more than one Hari is present, and he dreams of his young mother, seen first chaste and Pre-Raphaelite, wrapped in a pink-and-white squared gown by a green brook, later bathing the symbolic dirt from her son's arms – and always looking hauntingly like Hari. There is also the strange excursion into Brueghel's paintings, when we linger over the details of a reproduction of his "Hunters in the Snow". Perhaps we are to infer, always obliquely and never wholeheartedly, that the ocean is pleased to turn from water into the slightly

more substantial form of snow we call flesh; if so, how astonishingly egocentric of us. Then the viewpoint moves on, over other Brueghels (including his "Land of Cockaigne", which one might think fairly apposite to Kelvin's case!), and to more teasing mysteries. Aren't we all, in a platonic sense, copies of some greater thing?

Kelvin recovers from his fever. Hari has gone, leaving an unconvincing letter. He looks towards the circular window of his cabin. There lies that box (radio? mess-tin?) he has been carrying around. For the first time, we see it open. A green plant grows from it. This struck me as so banal, that I felt that the plentiful Earth symbols to which we had been treated were meant to be seen as failing at last, as ultimately meaningless; but that no doubt is too sophisticated a reading. However, it would lead logically to the final scene, which follows after Kelvin, gazing at the plant, admits it is time he left the station.

What can one say about the ending? Is it a spirited trick á la Philip K. Dick? Is it a literal illustration of a Jungian proposition concerning some oceanic consciousness? Or is it (as I believe) both of these things and a last lingering restatement of the film's theme, that there are varying degrees of reality and mutability? Whatever it is, it is certainly full of strength and pathos, making up abundantly for faltering towards the end, enhancing the human quality of the whole.

Solaris is a mysterious and abundant film. Although it has opted cautiously and perhaps wisely towards being yet another great cinema love story, it still deals honourably with profound matters. There is no reason why it could or should make itself clear on them, provided it convinces us of their richness, and this it does in a majestic manner. For all that, there are a few puzzles I should like to have cleared up. Why did Lem and the Russian film-makers prefer Western names on their satellite – Kelvin, Sartorius, Burton? When Snauth sings, his song is *Oh Susanna,* in German. Only Gibaryan is a Russian name, and Gibaryan is dead.

Well, the sense of loss is strong in Tarkovsky's film. Yet one must close by emphasising its positive qualities. It bids fair to stand as the best science fiction film so far. References are made to both Tolstoi and Dostoevsky, and perhaps much of its strength lies there – that Tarkovsky tries to deal with both man-in-society and man-in-relation-to-the-unknown, matters of interest to everyone, not simply science fiction readers. He may not be entirely successful in this endeavour, but of his power to conjure images illumining his theme there is no doubt.

identikit simak

A Choice of Gods
by Clifford D. Simak. Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973, 190 pages, £1.75
ISBN 0 283 97920 8

reviewed by George Hay

Sometimes I dream of composing the Identikit Clifford D. Simak novel. It will feature a reversible background, one side showing a planetary surface (alien, abandoned), the other a pastoral scene from the Middle West. Against this will show up one hero (lost, but with a Sense of Mission), one Robot (puzzled, philosophic), one heroine (fey), one alien (fuzzy and cuddly) one alien (shadowy and hostile) and one alien (totally mysterious, but who turns out in the end to be On The Side of Life). Music, courtesy of Muzak Interstellar.

I kid you, I kid you. Actually, I would hate it if any Simak novel were to venture into the black and bitter. I am a sucker for all his stories, and have been since the days when Hitler began to trouble the dreams of Neville Chamberlain. All the same, I don't think I can be the only reader who wishes that this writer would for once give us something that has one dimension more than what is, in effect, a mood piece.

A Choice of Gods, for example. Here we have earth, abandoned to a handful of humans and sundry robots, the rest of the race having vanished One Dark Night. In recompense, those remaining have longevity and the ability to teleport among the stars. Some of the robots have formed a religious community, worshipping they know not what. Others, loyal to technology, are working on the Project, a mysterious scheme to contact something Out There. That there is someone – sorry, Someone – Out There is confirmed by returning starhoppers who bring the news that Someone is not very chummy. The travellers have also located the kidnapped earthers, or their descendants, who apparently have kept up with all their nasty technological devices, and are about to return to now-idyllic earth and re-cover it with hamburger stands and all the ills that man is heir to.

Junior hero (acts). Heroine (intuits). Senior hero (philosophises). Someone Out There (saves earth for the glow-worms by warning the would-be homecomers off).

And yet – I travesty. None of the criticisms one could throw at Simak could outbalance the sense of magic, mystery and, yes, of

kindness, that the man can generate. He is wordy? Very well, he is wordy. He is woolly? Yes, he often is. He is sentimental? Yes, thank God. He relies on the same old props? Indeed, and so do his readers, addicts all.

Well, let us continue to hope for the Simak novel that will have that extra something. Perhaps it will never come. If it does not, we shall still be in this author's debt to an extent that is, perhaps, not fully recognised. Gentle reader, a little thought-experiment. What would your lifestyle be like if you had *not* read *City?*

pure victorian uplift

A Translantic Tunnel, Hurrah!
by Harry Harrison. Faber & Faber, 1973. 192 pages. £1.90
ISBN 0 571 09996 3

reviewed by George Hay

In the November 1972 issue of *Analog* – where this novel had been serialised – there appeared the following, part of a reader's letter from one David King, of Layton, Utah:

> **"This is . . . a fine yarn, very poorly told. For one thing, the dialogue is stilted and unnatural all the way through. Even the intimate conversation between Gus and Iris is stilted and formal, reminding the reader more of the stilted squibs that passed for letters in the Nineteenth Century than a conversation between what should certainly have been intimate friends.**

Oh God! Oh Layton! Oh Mr. King! It was a *joke,* Sir, a tour de force – and your complaint was the measure of Harry's triumph. I can only hope he read the letter . . . such backhanded compliments come too rarely to the Deserving Author.

The tale is – of course – a truly melodramatic one, where our hero, one Augustine Washington, of an alternate worldline without benefit of Spain or Columbus, dedicates himself to the achievement of dominion status for the American colony, to make up for the ill done to it by his wretched ancester George, who lost the battle of Lexington to Cornwallis. An engineer in the Vernian tradition, he is committed to

the construction of a transatlantic tunnel linking Lands End with Long Island. Since the tunnel was designed by Sir Isambard Brassey-Brunnel, whose daughter Gus hopes to marry; since Sir Ismbard looks ill upon newfangled approaches to technical problems; since there are those who are determined the tunnel Shall Not Go Through – since, in short, the author has used every device formulated by his predecessors in this genre, you may rest upon it that Mr. King was right, and that this is a fine yarn.

One can just imagine what Thomas Disch or John Sladek would have made of the book. As it is, we have pages and pages of purest Victorian technological uplift without a hint of *arrière-pensée.* To quote Mr. King once more: "The idea of a coal-fired turbine engine on the super-sized air liner is intriguing. It *would* work! Only thought is: what about the abrasive effect of coal ash on the bearings?"

I can't recall this detail being raised in the story, but if it was, one of of the writer's stalwart engineer-heroes would have waved it away. Mason, for example "who was young for a Cunard captain, but . . . was proud of his charge."

> "Waterline weight one hundred and ninety-eight thousand pounds, Mr. Washington, two hundred and forty feet from stem to stern, seventy-two feet from the bottom of the step to the lookout's position top of the central tailfin . . . We have a two thousand horsepower turbine in the tail that does nothing more than pump air for the boundary layer control and deflected slipstream, increases our lift to triple that of an ordinary wing. Why, we'll be airborne at fifty miles an hour and inside four hundred feet. Spray-suppressor grooves on both sides of the hull keep down the flying scud and smooth the sea for us . . ."

Or how about the Mark IV Challenger Dredger? Or the butane-driven helithopter "as large as a two-decker London omnibus standing on end"?

Actually, I have cheated slightly. The author has not *totally* deprived those who read for the benefit of their death-wish. By using the ingenious device of a medium looking into our world from that of Gus, he has indicated what happens in the kind of world where, as in our own, one has dared to deviate from puritan capitalist uplift:

> "Penicillin, petrochemicals, purchase tax, income tax, sales tax, anthrax, Woolworth's, Marks & Sparks . . . great ships in the air, great cities on the ground, people everywhere. I see London, I see Paris, I see New York, I see Moscow, I see strange things. I see armies, warfare, killing, tons, tons, tons, tons of bombs from the air on cities and people below, hate him kill him, poison gas, germ warfare, napalm, bombs, big bombs, bombs dropping, men fighting killing, dying, hating, it is, it is . . ARRRRGH!"

For the rest, it is back to Jules Verne, Herbert Strang, et al., with the best of H. Harrison's plotting and gusto thrown in. Looking the whole feat over, it occurs to me that the tediously-lamented loss of a Sense of Wonder – not lost in *this* book – is perhaps linked to the loss of a sense of humour. Thesis, anyone?

a magnificent liar

Tomorrow Lies in Ambush
by Bob Shaw, Victor Gollancz, 1973, 204 pages, £2.00
ISBN 0 575 01602 7

reviewed by Christopher Priest

If you accept the notion that the writing of fiction is essentially the telling of an untruth, then it follows that the writing of science fiction is essentially the telling of a magnificent lie. And, as any regular purveyor of falsehoods will tell you, the best way to tell a lie is to start with a grain of truth and build up from there . . .

I can think of no contemporary science fiction writer who can do this better than Bob Shaw. He has a happy knack of isolating a detail which is pure observation, and using it as an integral part of his story. Who could ever forget, for instance, Lieutenant Converly in *The Two-Timers* who had never grown out of the childhood ambition to make his hand talk? Converly's final exit, his hand twitching irresistibly, made sense of the entire novel.

In the third story in this collection, . . . *And Isles Where Good Men Lie,* Shaw writes the following:

> "Passing through the lobby he stopped abruptly, staring into his study at the telephone. Christine was left-handed; and it was one of his most triumphant little secrets that she never seemed to realize she set the handset down the opposite way to right-handed people. The phone was facing the wrong way now and, playing a hunch, he dialled Geissler's number."

Anyone who has ever shared the use of a telephone with a left-handed person will instantly recognize – perhaps for the first time consciously – the inspirational truth of this. But it's no gratuitous minutia included for effect. In this short passage, Shaw encompasses

an unwritten history of petty marital strife and the fact that Christine has concealed the fact of a phone-call from him . . . both important elements in the plot.

Or again, from *Repeat Performance:*

> "His name probably doesn't mean anything to you, but C.J. Garvey was a bit player in upwards of a hundred undistinguished movies, always as a kindly, world-wise pawnbroker. I doubt if he ever spoke more than three lines, but any time a script called for a kindly, world-wise pawnbroker, Garvey was automatically the man.

Don't we all *know* that actor? As Shaw says, the name doesn't mean a thing (more often than not we only learn the name when the details of his career are published in the obituary column of *The Times*) but the face is instantly familiar. And that is precisely the point in the story: the narrator is the proprietor of a cinema, who keeps seeing bit-part actors walking out of the screen and into his audience.

So it is with an eye as keen as this that Bob Shaw constructs his stories. The second reason he is such a good writer of short stories is that he pays attention to plot, as well as to story. There is a fine and subtle difference between the two, and Shaw recognizes it well. The plot of something like *Pilot Plant* is tightly constructed, if none too original (alien spaceship needs a spare part, and co-opts an aircraft factory and its entire staff to manufacture it), but the characterization of its protagonist and the motivations given to him by the events in the story make it utterly memorable.

Oh yes, and the other reason he writes well is that he writes well. One often hears it said of a writer that "not a word is wasted". If you wish to see what this means in practice, then read Bob Shaw. His prose is economical and neat, his images are graphic and instantly clear. His use of metaphor is always exactly to the point. But there is an aspect about the construction of his work that worries me. To a large degree, the impact of a Bob Shaw story derives from the tension between the characters – nothing wrong with this, and nothing particularly unusual either – but Bob uses one specific device of dramatic tension over and over again, and that is the mutually destructive marriage. It is here in these stories (*Call Me Dumbo, Telemart Three* and the above-mentioned *. . . And Isles Where Good Men Lie*) as well as in several of his novels (*Ground Zero Man, The Two-Timers* and *Other Days, Other Eyes*). This isn't to say that it doesn't work well – to the contrary, some pretty harrowing relationships are described therein – but it *is* a device and the interesting thing is that when he writes about a good relationship (e.g. *Pilot Plant*) the dramatic tension works just as well.

Bob Shaw is already a very popular writer, and I think he's fast becoming one of the best. The two aren't always the same. But any man who can logically create a Roman legion fighting its way out of a cinema called the 'Colosseum' is OK by me.

the sun shines at bowling green

SF: The Other Side of Realism
edited by Thomas D. Clareson, The Bowling Green University Popular Press, Ohio, 1971, paperbound, £1.40, 376 pp., Library of Congress No. 72-168385.

reviewed by Peter Nicholls

Bowling Green University. The name conjures up a rural idyll, white flannelled dons strolling over the smooth lawns. A most unlikely milieu, one would think, for the emergence of one of the very few important books about science fiction over produced. Those who know the name of Tom Clareson will not be surprised, of course. He edits the little magazine *Extrapolation* from Ohio – the longest running critical journal about science fiction currently in print, outside of amateur "fanzines". It comes out twice a year.

SF: The Other Side of Realism has been available in this country for over a year, and we should have reviewed it earlier. But better late than never. It is an anthology of critical articles about science fiction, containing an introduction and twenty eight articles. Six pieces have no source credited, and were presumably written specially for the collection, seven are reprinted from prominent fanzines, six more from Clareson's own *Extrapolation,* and the other twelve from sources as diverse as the *Virginia Quarterly Review* and *Fantastic Stories.* Clareson is an enterprising editor, who has dragged his net through a variety of waters.

As a writer he is enterprising too. His own article, entitled *The Other Side of Realism,* very properly leads off the collection. The most wide-ranging of all the articles, it is an ambitious attempt to place science fiction in the context of the literary and social history of the last 250 years.

For the first half of the article, lively ideas pop up in almost every paragraph. For example, Clareson suggests that the sort of psychological realism usually known as "naturalism" is a kind of science fiction,

though not in the usual sense. As he explains it, Zola believed that life was subject to scientific laws, and that the logic of nineteenth century science could be used to explain personality and behaviour. Zola's naturalism is "science" fiction in that respect. Clareson then goes on to say that with Freud we get the reinstatement of the myth, as a reaction to naturalism, and that it is the "mythic" qualities in Freud which still appeal to writers and artists even after his dethronement by the psychologists.

These ideas are stimulating, but elusive. They would be more convincing if all those meaning-laden words – "realism", "fantasy", "myth", "naturalism" – referred to mutually exclusive and definable categories that everybody agreed about.

The other side of realism, Clareson suggests, emerged as a definable genre around 1870, a "kind of fantasy" growing out of the Gothic – in short, what we now know as science fiction. He sees it as a "companion-response to the new age of science" – along with "realism-naturalism" – and quantitatively just as important. (It is true that only in recent years have we realized how widespread a genre science fiction was in its infancy – everybody from Kipling to E.M. Forster seems to have tried his hand at it.)

It seems as if the central thesis of the Clareson essay is to be that science fiction is an *alternative* literary response to a rapidly changing world, rendered necessary by the fact that realism in literature had entered the "cul-de-sac" of naturalism – a form in which the merciless weight of representational detail is used to "immerse animal-man into the hostile environment of a meaningless nature." This would be a difficult point to establish. Not all the important realistic fiction of the time was "naturalistic", notably not in the cases of Henry James, Joseph Conrad and, later, D.H. Lawrence. Clareson recognizes that the "finest accomplishments" don't quite fit the pattern he is describing, but he puts it, quite amazingly, in this way: "those novelists who escaped the cul-de-sac . . . led twentieth century fiction through those many distortions producing . . . the *grotesque*". (My italics) I find this amazing, because surely irrelevant and wrong. *Grotesque* is not a word I would choose to define the greatest triumphs of realistic fiction.

Indeed, one of the things wrong with Clareson's apparent thesis is that if science fiction first appeared around 1870 as an alternative response, we should also expect that to be around the time when the inadequacy of the "realistic" response started to become apparent to everybody. But far from this being the case, the period 1870 to 1920 surely saw the great flowering of the traditional realistic novel. That

half century saw, not decadence, but a splendidly flourishing maturity.

Another flaw is that Clareson, it seems to me, is wrong to suggest that the literary technique of naturalism always goes hand-in-glove with with an ultimately nihilist relativism. Some of the so-called naturalists were quite cheerful gentlemen who didn't let the lack of absolute factors (like God) upset them too much, and conversely, the literary genre of science fiction is itself prone to fits of despondency. Entropy – the idea of a universe inexorably fragmenting itself down to its primal chaos – is a favourite theme of science fiction these days, as witness Dick and Ballard. Indeed Clareson's phrase "immersing animal-man . . . into meaningless nature" suits Vonnegut just as well as Zola.

The odd thing is that Clareson abandons what looks like being his central theme, almost as soon as he voices it, and turns instead to an analysis of the last 100 years of science fiction (though little is said about anything since 1945) primarily in terms of a sort of sociological reflection of contemporary ideas about progress. In my view this is an ill-judged change of direction. Nothing Clareson says about any book in this period suggests much intrinsic merit beyond that of being an accurate image of the *zeitgeist* – a fact of greater interest to historians and sociologists than lovers of literature. Little is said that would convince the non-fan, idly leafing through the essay, that the alternative tradition of science-fiction-fantasy (not established in this essay at least as a genuine alternative tradition in its own right – Clareson himself points out that "all literature forms a continuum") is exciting stuff. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, and in my view it is pretty difficult to see a viable tradition in works as minor – as dead, really – as *To Mars Via the Moon, A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Bottle, The Vanishing Fleets, Darkness and Dawn* and *Ralph 124C 41+.*

A newcomer to science fiction, well read in traditional literature, would surely say of Clareson's article, "He must be joking". I think Clareson sees this himself, and that the uneasiness of his argument results from the old problem of trying to show the non-fan that the whole genre is fascinating, while simultaneously demonstrating to the fan that much of it is second-rate, and that the whole field is in need of critical standards. Clareson says himself – and I think it's the most important thing he does say – that "whichever its mode, the best fiction escapes the literal and moves towards metaphor, towards symbol". But that, unfortunately, as he sees very well, does not serve to distinguish science fiction from the mainstream. It is as true of *The Golden Bowl* as it is of *Canticle for Leibowitz.*

So although Clareson talks about the delusion of criticising science fiction purely in terms of its concepts, and makes gestures towards the need of a tempering humanity in science fiction, his own analysis does little to establish the presence of that humanity, or even to suggest with any exactness what science fiction does that ordinary literature doesn't, and how, historically, it got that way.

Clareson's essay promises more than it delivers, because the good bits do not cohere into a seamless whole. The large concepts are there, but they are too fuzzy to be integrated into a really satisfying overview of science fiction. The country on the other side of realism is a challenge to any critic, but we don't yet have any really sophisticated maps.

All editors of anthologies strive to put together a collection in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This is a difficult thing to do, especially with a critical anthology. It is even more difficult when the total amount of available material is comparatively sparse. In what sense does this anthology cohere? Is there a mutual illumination between the different views expressed?

Turning to the second piece in the book, we find that it is in some way similar to the first. Here, too, we have a generalising, synthesizing piece, making free with large concepts in order to establish an intellectual framework within which science fiction can be displayed. The piece is called *Realism and Fantasy,* and it is written by a Russian critic, Julius Kagarlitski, the author of a work on H.G. Wells (and, surprisingly, a Professor of the History of the European Theatre).

Like Clareson, Kagarlitski is haunted by what I take to be a chimera: it is what I call "the pigeon-hole fallacy" – the idea that by defining the pigeon-hole we say something useful about the pigeon. Kagarlitski's thesis is, in part, that fantasy itself gained independence as a genre comparatively recently, and that science fiction is a distinct sub-genre, of what he calls "realistic fantasy".

Kagarlitski's piece is difficult to follow, and not entirely, I suspect, because it is translated from Russian. The trouble stems primarily from the very high level of abstraction on which Professor Kagarlitski operates, an abstraction which could only be justified if the categories appealed to had known and agreed-upon definitions. In fact they have not. They become labels, with no agreed-upon semantic content. Consider how many questions are begged in this sentence:

> **If the words 'science fiction' are no more than a designation of contemporary realistic fantasy, then does it not seem strange that science, at a certain point, begins to undermine the rights of realism and help romanticism?**

The self contradiction which most readers would surely see implicit in a phrase like "realistic fantasy" is partly resolved later on, but not adequately. The biggest oddity is using the phrase "a certain point" for a point that must be very uncertain indeed, but perhaps that is the fault of the translator.

There have been many distinguished socialist literary critics in the past, but socialist criticism has always had a tendency to philosophize at an altitude where the air is too thin. Certainly Professor Kagarlitski does not operate down in the valleys where the books are. I have always believed that the greatest criticism is that which moves from the particular to the general – from books to principles about books – and this, of course, is also the usual method of science.

As an overview the Kagarlitski article is not without substance, even if it lacks precision. It is a pity the phraseology has such a dampening effect. It is at its most interesting in its plea for "romanticism" in science fiction. It is not quite clear what exactly "romanticism" means in this context, but whichever of its elusive denotations Kagarlitski has in mind, it is not what most of us would expect from a member of the Soviet Russian literary establishment.

Turning to another Eastern European critic, Stanislaw Lem, we find something very different, and much more precise. Lem's article *Robots in Science Fiction* is tart, abrasive and shrewd. One memorable formulation is "I have forgiven Asimov many things, but not his laws of robotics". He goes on to justify this castigation by a chillingly logical analysis.

He works through menacing numbered paragraphs, which descend step by careful step from Kagarlitski-like discussions of category, of philosophical criteria, of myth and ontology, to the particular works of particular science fiction writers. The fact that Lem is a creative writer himself – a science fiction writer indeed – does not lead him to show mercy to his peers. I doubt if he considers many of them his peers, though he has (elsewhere) evinced a strong admiration for Philip K. Dick and a partial one for Ursula Le Guin.

Lem as critic is both irritating and stimulating. His tone is sometimes reminiscent of the great Protestant divine, Jonathan Edwards, the bitter, brilliant New Englander. One feels the same passionate seriousness, the same cold arrogance, the same readiness, even need, to consign those who do not share his beliefs to the outer darkness, though of course the beliefs in question are quite different. One rather expects Lem's article to rise to a crescendo of thunderous commination against the sinners, though in fact he stops a few millimetres short of a formal curse. I rather sympathise with all this. Criticism usually suffers from

an excess of politeness, and it is refreshing to find a critic completely ready to undertake what he sees (and I agree) as the urgent work of separating the intellectual sheep from the goats, in order to ensure the future health of the thinking herd. (The metaphor is unfortunate perhaps – I mean by it that Lem prefers the goats – the independent omnivorous ones.)

Lem's article is the best generalising piece in the book, as opposed to the articles on specific texts and authors. His acid contempt for so much modern science fiction is occasionally rather humourless, and sometimes he looks as if he takes too unholy a pleasure in breaking butterflies upon his wheel, but even though he may be wrong in details, I think he is right over all. The real values of science fiction will will never meet full public recognition so long as friendly critics confuse the most elementary kinds of gimmickry with the establishment of genuine new concepts. When Lem attacks Frederik Pohl or Henry Kuttner or Harry Harrison for "skillfully avoiding all the depths that begin to open, much as in a slalom race – but literature isn't a slalom, for it brings intricate problems into the light of day", it is probably quite unfair to the writers concerned, who have never, so far as I know, claimed any special importance for the particular works Lem attacks, beyond the simple effort to entertain. But if the attack is not particularly relevant to the writers, it does need to be made for the sake of those fans and critics whose "sense of wonder" is touched off by such minor stimuli that it appears to be a conditioned reflex rather than an emotional or intellectual response of the consciously engaged mind.

Lem's distaste for much science fiction seems to run deep. He has a real knack of sharply pointing up its deficiencies, as when he says "Science fiction does sometimes mention such wise computers which then, sadly, as in the case of Simak for example, offer the most trivial banality as an intellectual revelation". On the other hand, he has obviously read an amazing amount of American science fiction, which has somehow found its way into Poland. Something about it must attract him. At least he realizes the potentiality of the genre, even though the lack of profundity to be found in a great many of its actualities may depress him.

I take issue with his final paragraph, however. Here he attacks science fiction writers who:

> have not seemed to understand that the salvation of the creative imagination cannot be found in mythical, existential, or surrealistic writings – as a new statement about the conditions of existence. By

> cutting itself off from the stream of scientific facts and hypotheses, science fiction has helped to erect the walls of the literary ghetto where it now lives out its piteous life.

It is true that the dominant impression of modern science fiction is of "mythical, existential or surrealistic writing". Science fiction has never, after all, had an especially close relationship with science *per se*. I cannot agree, however, that these qualities of modern science fiction are *necessarily* a bad thing, though sometimes they may be. Certainly the statement rings a little falsely when we remember that it comes from the author of *Solaris*, which uses both myth and surrealism to make its point – a point which is at least connected with the *limitations* of a science which is based on anthropomorphic modes of thought.

With Lem we reach the aspect of this anthology that makes it unusually interesting. I wonder if it is only an accident that Lem is himself a writer of fiction. Clareson has been quite generous to the fiction writers, in their rather unfamiliar guise as critics and historians. Out of twenty-six articles, seven are by well-known authors. (The others are Norman Spinrad, Alexei Panshin, Judith Merril, James Blish, Samuel Delany and Brian Aldiss.) Between them they produce some of the best things in the book, proving to me at least that criticism need not get lost in cotton wool abstractions – that it can and should co-exist with a crisp and lively prose. In the good old days, most of the great critics, from Dr. Johnson to Henry James, were creative writers as well. Many a fine critic is not a creative writer, it's true, but just the same it is pleasant to see that in science fiction some of the old standards are being kept up, and that the falsest of all critical dichotomies – the one that insists that criticism and creative writing are the products of basically different minds – is denied by the facts.

Spinrad's little review of *Stand on Zanzibar* is brief and rather commonplace, but the other writers do pretty well. Panshin's piece is one of the few items that is reprinted from a commercial science fiction magazine (*Fantastic Stories*), and it shows that a critical tone adapted to a mass audience need not over-simplify or condescend. Panshin talks brisk common sense about the New Wave versus Old Wave argument, and shows himself thoroughly aware that science fiction is a form of *literature,* and not just a junk-bin in which enthusiasts can rummage around in search of gimmicks and concepts.

This recognition appears in particularly attractive form in Samuel Delany's remarkably pungent piece, *About 5,175 Words* – a fluent and witty cry from the heart. In one matter, in which I have a personal interest, Delany turns out to be my spiritual brother. In ten years of

"teaching" literature, the one basic concept that I found myself trying to ram home, again and again, sometimes with shrill hysterical cries and near-violence, was that (despite what 99% of the literate population of this planet seems to think) there is no such thing as style apart from content, or content apart from style. The two things do not exist in isolation, and cannot and must not be separated, even "for the sake of argument". Delany feels the same thing, and puts his case sharply and amusingly. Above all, he's right – and a critic who is right will always get my vote over one who is wrong. I suppose that calling a writer "amusing" is always a subjective judgment. A science fiction writer to whom I confided my judgment of Delany's article stared at me in amazement and said, "you mean that dreadful rubbish about the word 'the' being like a fuzzy grey ball balancing on the floor?" It's true that there is a certain archness or cuteness in Delany's analysis of a sentence word by word, showing exactly how each new word modifies what has gone before. But the end justifies the means here, I think, and the end is to get across to as wide an audience as possible the basic principle on which all intelligent reading rests.

Delany's novels have always shown him to be very conscious of the subtleties of language, especially in *Babel–17*, where language is the *subject* of the story. So this piece comes as no surprise. To agree, even passionately, with Delany's axioms is not necessarily to agree with his conclusions in individual cases. For example when he says (with reference to the tone of voice implied by an author's words) that "this is what makes Heinlein a better writer than James Blish", he seems to me to be confusing loudness with density, and softness with barrenness. Heinlein's voice is more obviously commanding than Blish's, but Blish's voice is not toneless, only quieter. Blish, to me, seems a far more interesting narrator than Heinlein, at least 80% of the time, because he is more subtle and ironic, but it is true that Heinlein is sometimes the superior in creating voices for his other characters. (Both writers have a tendency for their characters to sound like their presumptive selves. Blish's books have lots of waspish, intelligent introverts, and Heinlein's are full of amiable, bull-headed, dogmatic extraverts. However, this sort of analysis is full of pitfalls. Our attention should not be focussed on what sort of chap the writer might be, which is irrelevant, but on what sort of tone is created by his *personae*, his masks in the story – and that is very relevant indeed.)

James Blish (as critic) is represented in this anthology. I suppose that of all working science fiction writers, Blish is one of the three best known for their extra-curricular critical activities, the other two

being Damon Knight and Brian Aldiss. Under his critical *nom de plume*, William Atheling, Blish has had two books of criticism published by Advent in Chicago – a publishing company gratifyingly ready to take a chance. Many people have regretted that Blish's criticism tends to come in relatively brief, snappy pieces, and that he has never apparently had the time to extend himself on any substantial overview of the whole field of science fiction.

Clareson's selection of a Blish piece is a bad one. It is an article which in turn attacks another critical article, *Science Fiction: the Crisis of its Growth*, by Michael Butor. The Butor piece originally appeared in *Partisan Review*, but is reprinted here by Clareson immediately before Blish's counterblast. From most points of view the Blish attack is excellent. He has the skill that conceals itself – utterly bare, precise prose that looks easy until one attempts it oneself. The trouble is that Butor's piece is so ill-informed. James Blish shows its worthlessness briskly, six or seven deft thrusts leaving it a lifeless corpse on the ground. One can almost see the look of aristocratic distaste on Mr. Blish's face as he wipes the blood off the rapier, and gently slides it back into its sheath. Given the initial silliness of the Butor piece, was it worth including? Could not Mr. Blish's critical virtues have been shown in action against some worthier opponent? (The two pieces constitute an interesting piece of recent cultural history however, and a significant one. The Butor article was printed in an internationally known and prestigious journal, but Mr. Blish's response was *not* printed in *Partisan Review*, although I understand it was submitted to them. It originally appeared in a privately produced fanzine (admittedly of high quality) called *Riverside Quarterly*. This recent drama (1968) shows how even five years ago the literary establishment was loath to pay very much in the way of favourable and informed attention to science fiction, even during the very years when the James Bond books were being hailed everywhere as significant cultural phenomena.)

It seems generally acknowledged in conversation, and even by newspaper critics, that J.G. Ballard is one of the best writers ever to work in the science fiction idiom (or partially within it – the idiom itself has been deepened and enriched by what Ballard has added to it). It is very odd then that careful searching reveals very few detailed critical considerations of Ballard. Even *Extrapolation*, Mr. Clareson's own journal, has not dealt with Ballard so far as I can recall. The piece here on Ballard is by Brian Aldiss, his contemporary and peer. There are temperamental affinities between the writings of both men, too, so Aldiss

seems particularly well fitted to speak with insight on Ballard's achievement. Unfortunately this article was written too long ago (1965) to take account of more than five or six of Ballard's books. (There are over a dozen of these, although American collections of Ballard stories tend to duplicate the English ones under different titles, and with a slight reshuffling of the stories). Aldiss's evaluation of Ballard, incidentally, originally appeared in *SF Horizons,* an attempt at a professional critical review of science fiction still well-remembered, even though it lasted for only two gusty issues. It was edited by Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison.

As a critic, Brian Aldiss is usefully unpredictable. Most critics of Ballard would promptly home in on the apparent despair, the grim symbolic landscapes, the copious Jungian references. Aldiss is aware of these, but he concentrates instead on Ballard's wit (in the seventeenth-century sense, I think – not to be confused with humour, Aldiss says), and even on his affinities with Thomas Hardy. The latter point sounds mildly insane, on the face of it, but its very oddity brings about the most valuable of all critical acts – the throwing of new light on important but neglected aspects of a writer's art. The Aldiss piece sends the reader back to Ballard with enthusiasm, and a fresh perspective.

The final writer-critic to be considered is Judith Merril. In the science fiction world, Mrs. Merril has become extremely well-known for her espousal of so-called New Wave writing, which has featured with fair prominence in her many anthologies. It is said that Mrs. Merril saw it as her special task to bring examples of what the sophisticated English were producing, and wave it before the startled eyes of the sullen American natives. This account of things is probably calumnious and inaccurate. There is not much special pleading in the long article, *What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?,* which Clareson prints here. It is one of the more enjoyable pieces in the collection, and in some ways one of the more useful. Written in rather a personal style, the article disarms criticism by giving ample warning of its own prejudices, which are anyway not at all extreme. Its primary value is in its detailed account of the publishing history of science fiction, especially in the magazines over the period of which she has personal knowledge. In a way it is more of a historical memoir than a critical article, and valuable, I should think, in giving a newcomer to the field a vivid impression of how its feeling changed, even from the inside, during the forties, fifties and sixties.

On the other hand, Mrs. Merril's piece displays a number of the rather parochial attitudes that have delayed, I think, the wider accep-

tance of science fiction as a mature art form. Part of the trouble has always been that the claims of the fans have often seemed rather naively ignorant of the larger world of literature which provides a context for the achievements of science fiction. (This ignorance is often defensively rationalised by saying that science fiction, anyway, can not be judged by the same criteria as mainstream literature – a proposition that I doubt.)

Mrs. Merril, for example, honestly admits that back in 1952 her ignorance of literature other than science fiction was considerable. This confession is made in a likeable way, but the trouble is that there are points in her essay when it *still* seems that there are considerable gaps. Only in an essay by a science fiction insider is one likely to find this:

> There were people, in 1952, who understood emotionally/intellectually that both intellectual/emotional components of man were indivisibly meaningful: that new ideas required new forms, that new modes of experience demanded new techniques of expression: but most of them were mathematicians, cyberneticists, and air- or space-craft designers. A very few (like Bretnor) had begun to comprehend that the same principle applied to literature.

She goes on to identify Cordwainer Smith's first story as the first "integrative" effort that she read.

It is very hard to make the necessary point about all this without sounding that pompous condescending note only too familiar from the mouths of critics with a fairly standard literary-critical university background, such as myself. I do not mean at all to imply that Mrs. Merril is stupid or silly, or to sneer at her in any way. On the contrary, she is a woman who has done a great deal for science fiction, and clearly she is also a person of considerable intelligence. The trouble is not that she is wrong, but that she has rediscovered one of the most important ancient principles in literary criticism, and mistakenly supposed that it is a discovery made within the science fictional field. This would strike many general readers, no matter how kindly disposed they are to science fiction, as a very odd claim indeed, and not unlike those jokes about the Russians claiming to have invented everything from the boomerang to the combine harvester.

The first oddity is in nominating the little-known Mr. Bretnor in 1952 as the important critic arguing in favour of a unification of thought and feeling in literature. Mrs. Merril is here buying into an argument – perhaps the most important of all twentieth century critical arguments – which has been raging unabated at least since

T.S. Eliot's essay *The Metaphysical Poets,* published in 1921. This is the essay in which Eliot introduced the phrase "unified sensibility" into literary criticism. It has since become a cliché – certainly by 1952 – but its meaning was fresh when Eliot introduced it, and by it he meant that unification of thought and feeling which he distinguished as the dominant characteristic of metaphysical poetry. "Tennyson and Browning are poets" wrote Eliot, "and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility." Thus, in one sentence, nineteenth century poetry was pushed off its pedestal (and has never quite recovered) and a new literary era was ushered in.

The second oddity is in giving the mathematicians the greater part of the credit in noting that new modes of experience demanded new techniques of expression. It *is* important to remember the mathematicians, and to give them every credit for the fantastic advances in their subtle art, but not, surely, to the exclusion of the writers. What else were James Joyce or D.H. Lawrence doing, way back in 1916? Or Eliot himself – remember *The Waste Land?* What about Wagner, or Picasso, or even New Orleans jazz, to turn to other arts? As soon as we look to the wider world of which science fiction is only a part, that sort of claim for science fiction is made to look trivial – all the sadder in that there are genuine claims to be made for something new happening in science fiction, but not in those terms.

It is very much to Mrs. Merril's credit that she began, according to her own account, to feel a little cut off in the world of science fiction, and that she did find it necessary to work out what relationship it had with affairs outside. But not only the account of her thoughts "then" in 1952, but her comments on them made from the perspective of a further twenty years, seem insulated from the main current. Even retrospectively, Cordwainer Smith appears to Mrs. Merril as an appropriate name to illustrate "new ideas" requiring "new forms". Smith was certainly one of the most interesting science fiction writers of that period but what, say, of Robert Lowell, or what of Resnais's *Last Year In Marienbad?* It is simply not true to say that science fiction has ever been in the vanguard of artistic experiment. Its subject matter has been constantly challenging and exciting, but again and again it has been held back through being incorporated into a style or a narrative technique which is conservative to the point of stodginess, or when ambitious, ambitious in a curiously old-fashioned way. I remember all those old *Fantasy and Science Fiction* stories in which the height of daring was to print an interior monologue in italics, or to leave a

wide space between paragraphs to show a time dislocation.

Cordwainer Smith was a fine writer, but "fine" is a double-edged word, and there was about his prose more than a whiff, at times, of a self-conscious elegance reminiscent of the 1890s. Other names amongst those Mrs. Merril mentions are obviously stronger in the originality of their style, notably J.G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss and Thomas Disch. (Then again, originality is not always a virtue either, and all three writers have different and deeper claims on our attention.) Surely the point here is not that these writers are forging *ahead* of whatever the mainstream is doing, but simply that they have earned the right to be compared with the very best of the mainstream. With writers like Aldiss or Ballard or Vonnegut, there is no point in endless arguments about whether they are, or are not, science fiction writers. They transcend the categories, and must be looked at simply as writers. Is this not true of the best writers within *any* genre? Genres themselves can only be described, can they not, in terms of lowest common denominators?

But if Judith Merril's article is disappointing about the intellectual context within which science fiction is written, she nevertheless has a lot to say about the field itself which is both true and informative.

The rest of the book is similarly uneven, but usually interesting. There are too many pieces for an individual mention to be made of each. Surprisingly few of the pieces on individual authors or books are really satisfactory.

Willis McNelly's account of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* is a disappointing if typical example of the way academic American criticism so often adopts a tone, often a solemn tone, totally inappropriate to its subject matter. If Mrs. Merril displays some of the inadequacies of the "amateur" end of the critical spectrum, we have here some of the grotesqueries of the opposite, "professional" end. I wonder if the naivety of the other end is not preferable to the banality of this:

> For the final statement of *Slaughterhouse 5* is not one of death and its concomitant "So it goes." Rather it is a statement of rebirth, the cyclic return of springtime and singing birds that tell Billy Pilgrim "Poo-tee-weet". If, as Vonnegut suggests, mankind has come unstuck in time through the dissociation engendered by slaughter, Earthlings can find stoical, helpful acceptance in the pattern presented by Tralfamadore. On the final page of the novel, mythic cycles incarnate into trees that are leafing out. Time and eternity, fiction and science fiction fuse to become Vonnegut's parable. Ultimately, through science fiction, despair becomes hope.

Well, goodness me. Is it really possible to find stoical acceptance

surrounded by a lot of little determinists shaped like plumber's friends?

The above passage propounds the same old academic cliché that has been applied to every second or third book written, from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* through *Paradise Lost* to James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* – that the last chapter completes a pattern of hope out of despair. Apart from boringly reducing the huge variety of literature to the level of *Pollyanna,* it seems, in this specific instance, the hell of a lot to get out of solitary "Poo-tee-weet". Also, it completely ducks the question of Vonnegut's nihilism, which may or may not be the dominating factor in the book, but certainly cannot be conjured away by a bird call. Whatever one makes of Vonnegut's attitude to life (which I find ultimately unpleasant, and not nearly as profound as the undoubted verbal fireworks lead many people to suppose), at least Vonnegut takes a very human pleasure in absurdity itself, but the nervous laughter implicit in the end of the book, and the undoubtedly ridiculous situation it presents, are here annihilated, so far as Professor McNelly's review goes, by its tone of unctuous gravity which reduces everything to its own monotone.

On general principles I'm all for Professor McNelly, who has been one of the pioneer academics in America to take notice of science fiction, and according to the last issue of *Extrapolation* is planning to bring out a quarterly or possibly monthly journal himself, devoted entirely to reviews of new science fiction. My peevishness above is directed at what seems to me a dangerous lapse – allowing the conventions of a particular sort of academic review writing to obscure what elsewhere appears as a brisk intelligence. It is dangerous, because now that the academics are noticing science fiction, the writers and fans often express a natural fear that this unlooked for attention will be the kiss of death to the genre. The sort of solemnity which might encourage this fear is to be deplored.

To even the balance, a final good article should be mentioned – one of the liveliest in the book. This is Richard Mullen's piece, *The Undisciplined Imagination: Edgar Rice Burroughs and Lowellian Mars,* which is scholarship at its best – meticulous research paying off in terms of genuine insights, not simply asserted, but demonstrated. The article is ultimately damning of Burroughs, but it's all done with affection and good-humoured wit, and some very telling and well chosen details from the books themselves. [By coincidence, Mullen, too, is editing a new critical journal on science fiction, in conjunction with Darko Suvin. It is to be called *Science-Fiction Studies,* and will be published semi-annually by the Department of English at Indiana

State University (Terre Haute, Indiana 47809).]

SF: The Other Side of Realism is an important book, and if I seem hypercritical of much of the contents, that is because the book *is* important, and deserves to be taken seriously. After all, what else has been published in book form on science fiction in recent years? To be sure, the collected reviews and articles of Damon Knight and James Blish have separately appeared as books, and they are indeed valuable, but of necessity the books have the fragmentary quality that results from the rather piecemeal way in which they had to be compiled.

J.O. Bailey's *Pilgrims Through Space and Time* came out in 1947, and is dated, and suffers also, in my view, by analysing in terms of themes rather than writers, which has the effect of making most of the concepts dealt with seem rather anonymous, and to have little to do with any literary value. (The book has recently been re-issued.) Reginald Bretnor's critical anthology, *Modern Science Fiction* (1953) and the incisive, if irritating, *New Maps of Hell* by Kingsley Amis (1961) are both useful, but also badly out of date. Sam Moskowitz's two studies, *Explorers of the Infinite* (1963) and *Seekers of Tomorrow* (1966) are more recent, though very difficult to get hold of. But I am bound to agree with James Blish's assessment, which he expressed in an article republished in *More Issues at Hand* (page 18) that their procedures are faulty and critically naive.

L. Sprague de Camp produced the *Science Fiction Handbook* in 1953, and it is said to be good, but it too is almost impossible to locate and has been long out of print. The contemporary scholar of science fiction has a tough time finding useful secondary sources. Patrick Moore's little primer, *Science and Fiction* (1958) is trivial and in some matters of detail, apparently ignorant. (I always remember his statement that "'science' is absent . . . in most magazines as well as many books . . . sensational magazines are not only fantastic, but usually, unwholesome as well . . ." (A charge that would have horrified John W. Campbell!)

In 1972, we saw Donald Wollheim's *The Universe Makers* (Gollancz) and Sam Lundwall's *Science Fiction: What It's All About* (Ace) but while both contain useful material, and while Lundwall especially has flashes of real critical shrewdness, they both seem debilitated to me by their consciousness of writing very much from a fan's point of view. Neither book sees science fiction in a larger context, and both are content, in the main, to limit their accounts to simple description in terms of plot. There *are* some implicit evaluations in Donald Wollheim's book (most obvious in the names he leaves out), but they are difficult to take

seriously. Although Wollheim admits from the beginning that his book will be personal, and in no sense a real history, it is nevertheless startling that though he devotes quite a bit of space to André Norton, Bertram Chandler, Clifford Simak and Edmond Hamilton (for example), he nowhere mentions Alfred Bester, James Blish, Algis Budrys, Philip K. Dick, Thomas Disch, Charles Harness, Frank Herbert, Henry Kuttner, Ursula Le Guin, Fritz Leiber, Walter Miller, William Tenn, Jack Vance, and Roger Zelazny. This seems to suggest an order of priority almost stunning in the intensity of its anti-intellectualism. The level of the social concerns is suggested by the following (about Edgar Rice, not William):

> When I hear that millions of young people are reading Burroughs and enjoying him, I rejoice. It may not be brilliant science fiction, but there is a light of hope here that outshines all the sour statistics of youth gone wrong.

Insofar as Mr. Wollheim's book represents the rather defensive attitudes typically and needlessly held within the science fiction ghetto, it is an instructive work, but to me, at least, a disappointing one.

This sketchy survey of what else has been recently published about science fiction serves, I hope, to point up the value of Clareson's anthology, which clearly emerges as the most considerable work on the subject in a long time – if not ever. Half of the contents are good by any standard, and the remainder, though patchy, has much of interest. It seems to me a necessary book for anybody who takes science fiction seriously.

Nevertheless, the field of science fiction criticism is still wide open. I have heard of at least 13 books on the subject which, it is rumoured, will be published within the next few years, though how many of these have been definitely accepted by publishers I do not know. This surge of recent interest may drag along numerous absurdities in its wake, but surely it can do nothing but good in the long run. Brian Aldiss's study of science fiction, *Billion Year Spree,* is being brought out by Weidenfeld and Nicolson in the near future, and my own critical book will be brought out by *Allen Lane: The Penguin Press,* hopefully within 18 months. Several American studies will, it is said, be definitely on sale in the next two years. The sun that is presently shining at Bowling Green will be shining elsewhere too, but action lovers can confidently expect, I think, that there will be plenty of thunder and lightning as well.

books received

The mention of a book below in no way precludes its review in a later issue.

Adlard, Mark	*Volteface* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972, 210 pages, £1.60, ISBN 0 283 91832 5)
Aldiss, Brian	*Hothouse* (Sphere, 1973 [1969], paperback, 206 pages, £0.30, [originally published Faber, 1962])
Aldiss, Brian	*Cryptozoic* [originally published as *An Age*, Faber, 1967] (Sphere, 1973, paperback, 187 pages, £0.30)
Anon	*The Reign of George VI 1900-1925* [originally published 1763] (Cornmarket Reprints, 1972, 106 pages, £4.50, ISBN 0 7191 6510 5)
Ball, Brian N.	*The Probability Man* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973, £1.60, ISBN 0 283 97919 4)
Bester, Alfred	*Starburst* (Sphere, short stories, 1973, 158 pages, £0.30) [originally published Signet, 1958]
Biggle, Lloyd Jr. (Editor)	*Nebula Award Stories 7* (Gollancz, anthology, 1972, 320 pages, £2.50, ISBN 0 575 01591 8)
Bok, Hannes	*Beyond the Golden Stair* (Pan/Ballantine, introd. by Lin Carter, 1973, paperback, 209 pages, £0.40, ISBN 0 345 09782 3) [originally published in a short version in *Startling Stories*, 1948]
Bok, Hannes	*The Sorcerer's Ship* (Pan/Ballantine, introd. by Lin Carter, 1973, paperback, 205 pages, £0.40, ISBN 0 345 09783 1) [originally published *Unknown Worlds*, 1942]
Bova, Ben	*Star Watchman* (Dobson, 1972, 223 pages, £2.10, ISBN 0 234 77626 9)
Brunner, John	*Age of Miracles* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973, 190 pages, £1.75, ISBN 0 283 97921 6)

Campbell, John W.	*The Best of John W. Campbell* (Sidgwick & Jackson, A SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION COLLECTION, short stories, foreword James Blish, 1973, 278 pages, £2.25, ISBN 0 283 97856 2)
Clareson, Thomas D.	*SF: A Dream of Other Worlds* (Texas A & M University Library Miscellaneous Publication 6, 1973, paperbound lecture, 15 pages, available from the publisher at College Station, Texas, U.S.A.)
Dick, Philip K.	*The Game Players of Titan* (Sphere, 1973, paperback, 157 pages, £0.30) [originally published Ace, 1963]
Green, Joseph	*Gold The Man* (Pan, 1973, paperback, 224 pages, £0.30, ISBN 0 330 23461 7) [originally published Gollancz, 1971]
Harrison, Harry	*Captive Universe* (Sphere, 1972, paperback, 185 pages, £0.30) [originally published Faber, 1970]
Hjortsberg, Willi	*Gray Matters* (Gollancz, 1973, 160 pages, ISBN 0 575 01575 6)
Hodgson, William Hope	*The Night Land Volume 1* (Pan/Ballantine, 1973, introd. by Lin Carter, paperback, 244 pages, £0.40, ISBN 0 345 09786 6) [originally published in 1912]
Hodgson, William Hope	*The Night Land Volume 2* (Pan/Ballantine, 1973, introd. by Lin Carter, paperback, 243 pages, £0.40, ISBN 0 345 09787 4) [originally published in 1912]
Knight, Damon (Ed.)	*Towards Infinity* (Pan, 1973, anthology, paperback, 284 pages, £0.35, ISBN 0 330 23431 5) [originally published Gollancz, 1970]
Knight, Damon (Ed.)	*100 Years of SF Book Two* (Pan, 1972, anthology, paperback, 179 pages, £0.30, ISBN 0 330 02983 5) [originally published Gollancz, 1969]
Kurtz, Katherine	*Deryni Rising* (Pan/Ballantine, 1973, introd. by Lin Carter, paperback, 271 pages, £0.40, ISBN 0 345 09772 6)
Kurtz, Katherine	*Deryni Checkmate* (Pan/Ballantine, 1973, introd. by Lin Carter, paperback, 302 pages, £0.40, ISBN 0 345 09772 6)
Laumer, Keith	*Envoy to New Worlds* (Dobson, 1972, 134 pages, £1.75, ISBN 0 234 77648 X)

Laumer, Keith	*The World Shuffler* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973, 185 pages, £1.75, ISBN 0 283 97940 2)
Le Guin, Ursula	*The Farthest Shore* (Gollancz, 1973, 206 pages, maps, £1.60, ISBN 0 575 01603 5)
Locke, George (Ed.)	*Worlds Apart: An Anthology of Interplanetary Fiction* (Cornmarket Reprints, 1972, illus., 180 pages, £2.50, ISBN 0 7191 7193 8) [facsimile reproductions of magazine stories from the period 1899-1914]
Lovecraft, H.P.	*The Haunter of the Dark and Other Tales* (Panther, reprinted from 1951 edition, introd. by August Derleth, 1972, 256 pages, £0.35, ISBN 586 01474 8)
Moorcock, Michael	*Count Brass* (Mayflower, 1973, paperback, 140 pages, £0.30, ISBN 0 583 13198 5)
Moorcock, Michael	*The Bull and the Spear* (Allison & Busby, 1973, described as the first volume of *The Chronicle of Corum and the Silver Hand*, 168 pages, £2.10, SBN 85031 087 3)
Morland, Dick	*Heart Clock* (Faber, 1973, 213 pages, £2.35, ISBN 0 571 10210 7)
Niven, Larry	*Inconstant Moon* (Gollancz, short stories, 1973, 251 pages £2.20, ISBN 0 575 01586 1)
Pohl, Frederik	*The Frederik Pohl Omnibus* (Panther, short stories, reprinted from the 1966 edition, 1973, 348 pages, £0.40, ISBN 0 586 03756 X)
Pohl, Frederik and Williamson, Jack	*Rogue Star* (Dobson, 1972, 213 pages, £2.00, ISBN 0 234 77631 5)
Russell, Eric Frank	*Dreadful Sanctuary* (Dobson, 1973, introd. by Tom Boardman Jr., 255 pages, £2.10, ISBN 0 234 77825 3) [this edition is a reprint of the Four Square edition of 1967, itself revised from the Museum Press edition of 1953]
Smith, E.E.	*Grey Lensman* (Panther, 1972, paperback, 256 pages, £0.35, ISBN 0 586 03845 0) [originally published in England by W.H. Allen, 1971, taken from the serial in *Astounding Science Fiction* October 1939 to Jan. 1940]
Stover, Leon E. and Harrison, Harry	*Apeman, Spaceman* (Penguin, 1972, foreword by Carleton S. Coon, anthology, paperback, 378 pages, £0.45, ISBN 0 14 00 3485 4) [originally published Doubleday, 1968]

Vernier, J.P.	*H.G. Wells at the Turn of the Century* (H.G. Wells Society, 1973, paperbound, Occasional Paper No. 1, 10 pages, £0.50, free to members, ISBN 0 903592 02 9)
Van Vogt, A.E.	*The Far-Out Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973, short stories, 223 pages, £1.95, ISBN 0 283 97947 X)
Wallace, Ian	*Deathstar Voyage* (Dobson, 1972, 191 pages, £1.80, ISBN 0 234 77498 3)
Walters, Hugh	*Passage to Pluto* (Faber, 1973, 148 pages, £1.30, ISBN 0 571 09908 4)
Williams-Ellis, A. and Pearson, M. (Eds.)	*Tales from the Galaxies* (Piccolo Pan, 1973, anthology, paperback, 126 pages, £0.25, ISBN 0 330 23507 9)
Wolfe, Gene	*The Fifth Head of Cerberus* (Gollancz, 1973, 244 pages, £1.90, ISBN 0 575 01597 7)
Wyndham, John	*Sleepers of Mars* (Coronet, 1973, paperback, 155 pages, £0.30, ISBN 0 340 17326 2) [John Wyndham was a pseudonym of John Beynon Harris, and it was under the pseudonym of John Beynon that this novel was originally published in 1936 as *Planet Plane.*]
Wyndham, John	*Wanderers of Time* (Coronet, 1973, paperback, 158 pages, £0.30, ISBN 0 340 17306 8) [originally published as by "Johnson Harris" in 1946]
Zelazny, Roger	*Creatures of Light and Darkness* (Arrow Books, 1972, paperback, 189 pages, £0.35, ISBN 0 09 906750 1) [originally published Doubleday, 1969]

letters

Dear George Hay,

I was mightily pleased with *Foundation 3.* My feeling about this particular issue was that it was possibly over-heavy in the direction of respectability and the higher think. Together with its format, the impression was verging on, well, the mortuary. Now I am perhaps untypical. I used to be a very solemn type. I did things like reading Spinoza's Ethics (you know, demonstrated in the geo-

metrical manner) and once I understood distinctions between *naturata* and *naturans*, and wrote heavy bits about Freudian precursors in Spinozan philosophy of the emotions. And I am probably the only person you will meet in a year who has read the whole of Ruskin's Modern Painters, somewhere I have a forty-page typewritten single-spaced taxonomic analysis of it that I would scream if confronted by. Ah yes, I was studious. I thought. I read. I took notes – on ten million 3 x 5 cards. I clambered up higher-order abstractions like a sex-starved gibbon. But, George, somewhere . . . somewhere along the line traced drunkenly through various sheds of academe and vaults of government . . . somewhere I lost it. Somewhere I took to, well, grunting. Pointing. Nudging people and suggesting one go out for a gin . . . sitting around in my undershirt and breathing. It's all up, George. The old fire-horse that used to come roaring and snorting out at the mere whisper of the words "definition" or "system" has gone to grass. I am a mental slob.

So perhaps my reaction is atypical.

I missed HAIL TO THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD, that type of thing. I found Chris Evans' stories entrancing. Now, mind, I would fight like a badger if that sort of thing *seriously* threatened the hand-writing of sf. It does not. In the first place, that computer didn't program itself. But it raises charming speculative questions as to why the hell it *isn't* real, uh, literature.

Perhaps it's just that I have the writer's disease, George. Voyeurism. I'd rather read a page of Richard E. Geis gruffling around in his smelly underwear than the most elegant attack on the sf definitional problem. Because . . . well, because I might learn something, I guess, from R.E.G.

I did have a few comments. Your writing, despite my disabilities above, went down well; I thought the style sturdy. Clear. Lots of luck. Brunner of course I read compulsively, although he saves his wings for flying. The reviews in general satisfied; two comments: For my own taste, I would shorten unfavourable reviews. More professional, perhaps also more sincere. Unless one is doing a really loving job of demolition – like some of Damon Knight's "chucklehead" stuff – the pedestrian negative wears. Second comment is on format: despite the fine titles of the early reviews, I would suppress them, visually, in favour of title, author and reviewer's name. Confusing to look at, to find again. Leaves one thinking there was a film called "Hanging Gardens of Space". (Really great review titles, as I said – work 'em in otherwise.) Around page 76 when you went to the normal format I was happier. I think I enjoyed Ryan on Ballard most.

Now let's see, before I forget, I was delighted with the beautiful treatment given my thing. My, it looked fine. But reading your last-page notes about someone missing a Herrick (although thank God, correctly judging its quality) in Harrison, perhaps I should make sure that readers realize the poems quoted in my piece *were* such. (Somewhere the attribution sheet must have got lost, my carbon has it.) Of course, they are so well-known that I can't imagine anyone not picking it up, after all part of the point was the allusion and contrapuntal – is it? – reference. In order, just for the record, the first quote is from Sherrington's im-

mortal preface to MAN ON HIS NATURE. Second is of course Pope, ESSAY ON MAN, I believe, not checking. Third is Yeats' ON A PICTURE OF A BLACK CENTAUR BY EDMUND DULAC – isn't that "murderous horseplay" beautiful? The brow is of course Edwin Markham MAN WITH A HOE. The bomb bit is Tom Lehrer, forget title. Noted for the beautiful rhyme: "And this is what he said on/ His way to Armageddon." Last is of course Hart Crane, what was it, "Take this Sea, whose diapason knells . . ." . . . VOYAGES? VOYAGES II, I checked. Did you know Hart Crane wrote about rockets to Mars . . . well, "engines", anyway, in the late 1920s?

McLean, Virginia *James Tiptree Jr.*

Gentlemen:

I must protest Nicholls' statement *(Foundation 2)* that Niven's novel *Ringworld* "is based on a grandiose piece of engineering whimsy that has a vanishingly small chance of ever finding fruition in the real universe." Niven's "grandiose" piece of engineering, the ringworld artifact itself, is a simple modification of a type of hypothetical construction commonly known as a Dyson shell, sometimes Dyson sphere. This hypothesis was presented in a report by Freeman J. Dyson, *Search for Artificial Stellar Sources of Infrared Radiation,* in the A.A.A.S. journal, *Science* (131: 3414, June 3, 1960) and was discussed in *Intelligent Life in the Universe* by I.S. Shklovskii and Carl Sagan (Holden-Day, San Francisco, 1966.) It is thus evident that there are some segments of the scientific community that think the Dyson shell unwhimsical.

It was Dyson's thesis, as I recall, that any extraterrestrial culture of very high technological development would have energy requirements such that it would be forced to utilize a major portion of the radiation from the primary of its stellar system, the ultimate means for which would be a shell to absorb the entirety of that radiation. (I believe he said that for our system Jupiter would serve nicely the material requirement.) Wherefore, said Dyson, astronomers searching for evidence of intelligence would do well to seek invisible sources of infrared radiation.

Rather than ridicule Niven for his Ringworld concept, I would chastise the class of science fiction writers in general for having allowed a passage of ten years between publication of Dyson's report and Niven's novel. The journal *Science* alone publishes dozens of reports annually which have a high science fictional potential. That it and all other scientific publications are evidently so thoroughly ignored by our writers is, I suspect, one reason why real sf is so scarce a phenomenon. And Niven, for being one of the few who do draw upon scientific sources, deserves our gratitiude.

Glendale, California *Roy A. Squires*

I was aware of Dyson's theories when I wrote the review, and I confess his concept is appealing. My own judgment is that its possible fruition in the universe remains minimal. Considering the thinness of the proposed shell, what imagined method of construction would result in cohesive forces able to counteract the forces tending to fragment it? It would not be balanced until complete. If the proposed source of building material is a gas giant such as Jupiter, the atomic weights of the building materials will be very low on average will they not? Wouldn't these materials be largely substances that would be gaseous or brittle when subjected to a substantially higher "temperature" closer to the sun? (Though, granted, it is thought Jupiter might have a substantial iron core.) If Niven were imagining a transmutation of elements as being a prerequisite to the building of a Dyson shell, we are up against a particular facet of the energy paradox, which is that such a shell would be needed by an energy-poor society, but the amount of energy required in the actual construction of the shell would surely be enormous. I take Mr. Squires' general point about the need for more sf writers to keep abreast of scientific theory as being quite true, and it is to Larry Niven's credit that he has done so. As a rider, I would add that this knowledge alone is not a sufficient condition for the production of truly imaginative science fiction.

Peter Nicholls.

the great science fiction take over bid for the united kingdom

British interest in science fiction seems recently to have increased dramatically. Some symptoms:

i. The National Film Theatre, in conjunction with the Science Fiction Foundation, mounted a major season of science fiction films, including 60 feature films, which began on May 27th and goes on to July 19th. The National Film Theatre in Edinburgh also mounted a science fiction film season in May.

ii. The United States Embassy (!) recently sponsored a two day conference on science fiction, complete with a literary computer which turned out short stories almost as fast as some of the most notorious hacks that have ever worked in the field.

iii. The publishers Victor Gollancz Ltd. have mounted a science fiction competition in conjunction with the *Sunday Times*. £500 awards will be given to the best hitherto unpublished science fiction novel, and the best volume of unpublished science fiction stories. Entrants must not have previously had science fiction published in volume form, although they may have been published in magazines or anthologies. This should be a great encouragement to new writers. (Entries close on January 31st, 1974).

iv. The University of St. Andrews in Scotland is building up a collection of documents in popular culture, emphasizing the changing role of the hero in twen-

tieth century mythology, which includes a good collection of the more interesting comics, and many science fiction magazines. This collection, charmingly entitled the Krazy Kat Archive, is being built up on the basis of material given to the university by the well-known sculptor, Eduardo Paolozzi.

v. The Science Fiction Foundation is now curator of the library of the British Science Fiction Association. Together with the Foundation's own holdings, this represents a research library of over 5,000 volumes, very probably the biggest in the U.K. It is available to visitors, and for postal loan to members of the BSFA.

vi. More courses in science fiction are being offered. The School of History of Art and Complementary Studies, at the City of Birmingham Polytechnic, is giving two particularly interesting courses aiming at an interdisciplinary approach, tying the genre in with, for example, social anthropology. The courses have been designed by Mr. Ian Watson, and we hope to publish more details about them at a later time. New short courses are popping up here and there in London. Mr. Tony Ryan will be conducting one in Ealing.

vii. Next September the two main London courses begin again. The extra-mural course at London University (Friday nights) will be taken this year by Philip Strick and Christopher Priest, who will alternate. The course at the City Literary Institute will continue to be taken by Peter Nicholls, on Monday nights. Both courses run for about 24 evenings, and are open to all comers.

viii. The English chapter of the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Workshop, which is organised by James and Judy Blish, has its second annual meeting this July, running for a full week with an attendance of eighteen writers.

ix. England now seems to have its *two* regular conventions a year, the main one over Easter, and the Birmingham November convention, which enters its third year this year.

x. The Sunderland Arts Centre, tucked away in the North Eastern sector of the country (often forgotten in London), is preparing a massive festival of science fiction and space exploration, beginning in late October, and going on for a month. Their financial support seems very solid, and the programme is ambitious and fascinating. A special festival book is to be published, and a large number of science fiction writers and artists, not to mention critics, is expected to be attending and, perhaps, performing.

xi. More publishers are taking an interest in science fiction. The Picador series of paper backs, for example, have published several science fiction books. Penguin books, who almost dropped out of the science fiction field for some years after a very honourable list in the late fifties and early sixties, have come right back into it with a number of new titles, including most of the important works of Olaf Stapledon.

xii. Radio, television and the press have all shown an increased interest in science fiction this year. BBC television is producing a one hour documentary on science fiction, to be shown in the Autumn, which will feature prominent American and English writers as disparate as Robert Heinlein, Philip K. Dick, and Brian Aldiss.

All this ferment of activity looks rather frenzied in cold print, but we think it's a Good Thing.

THE H.G. WELLS SOCIETY

Among the books we have received for review in the last few months is *H.G. Wells: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (H.G. Wells Society, 1972, revised and with a new index, foreword by Kingsley Martin, 74 pages, SBN 90229 165 3). We have been unable to review it in this issue, but are prepared to say off the cuff that it is a handsome and highly professional piece of work. We would like to draw to the attention of Wells enthusiasts that the society exists, and holds regular meetings at the Imperial College, London SW7. Membership is international, and carries with it (for the £1.00 a year subscription) regular issues of the society's journal, access to an information service on all aspects of Wells, and a books service. The H.G. Wells Society is also producing a useful series of occasional papers on Wells and his work. Please direct further enquiries (and subscriptions) to Mr. Eric F.J. Ford, 125 Markyate Road, Dagenham, Essex, England; he is the Secretary.