FOUNDATION

the review of science fiction

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Number 5, January 1974

editorial

Peter Nicholls

There have been changes again in Foundation. *I would like to begin my term as editor by expressing the gratitude we all feel at the Science Fiction Foundation to Charles Barren, who not only acted as editor for the first four issues of our journal, but also, together with George Hay and Kenneth Bulmer, got the project off the ground in the first place. This was a difficult task. It resulted in headaches for all concerned. Were we to be a magazine with a circulation of, say, 5000 – publishing primarily fiction, together with some critical and historical articles? Or were we to be an academic journal, emphasizing criticism and history, more intellectually demanding, and probably with a much smaller readership? Could we find an outside publisher who would give us complete editorial control? How glossy a format did we want, or could we afford? Should we use illustrations? Should we reprint from fanzines? Could we meet a regular quarterly schedule?*

Would too much academic rigour alienate the general reader? Would too informal a manner alienate the academics, and result in our not being taken seriously?

Some of these questions involved matters of principle. Some depended upon what, pragmatically, we could accomplish with virtually no capital. The circulation of 5,000 was never more than a pipe dream of course. Without capital there can be no decent distribution, and only a minimal sales campaign. Even finding the right printer becomes a difficult chore.

According to what process of printing is chosen, and how much time the typesetter and printer are given, a journal such as Foundation *can cost anything between £200 and £1,000 to produce. Readers with mathematical minds will correctly deduce that we need a minimum sale of 400 copies for financial survival. Because our aim was always to appear professional, we decided not to produce* Foundation *by the cheaper method of reproducing pages (by offset lithography) which have been originally typed out on an ordinary typewriter. Some superior fanzines, such as* Vector, *do this. But we wanted to start out looking like something more than a fanzine. In retrospect our* hubris *is evident. Our first three numbers were badly proof-read (partly our fault), and had a cramped and sometimes sloppy layout (not our fault), with the result that in terms of appearance we looked* less *professional than such elegant fanzines as* Algol, Riverside Quarterly, *and* Vector. *The A5 format, incidentally, was chosen because we were assured that bookshops preferred to display something of pocket book size. This turned out to be irrelevant, since as a specialist magazine, our chances of being distributed in the retail bookshop chains were negligible.*

The question of our publishing fiction, which has been mentioned in previous editorials, was partly a matter of principle. If we brought out a regular fiction magazine, then in effect we would be entering the commercial publishing business, in competition with Analog *and* Galaxy *and* New Worlds. *This might compromise our supposedly objective status. We might find ourselves with axes to grind. Such was the view that I held strongly, and it was shared by several others on the Science Fiction Foundation Committee. But there was no need to go into such rarefied questions of principle, it turned out, because there was not enough good fiction to go around, and people like us who weren't able to pay for it, would not be likely to get the best that was going. This by no means* precludes *our occasionally publishing fiction. It sometimes happens, less often than it used to I'm happy to say, that truly interesting stories are not acceptable to the commercial publishers, because they are too experimental perhaps, or because they do violence to various popular prejudices. We hope to print some of these. We also hope that every now and then a good hard-bitten professional writer might suffer a temporary blackout, write a story, and think to himself, "I'd like to see this in* Foundation". *It doesn't hurt to hope, and the short piece by James Tiptree Jr. in* Foundation 3 *received a Nebula nomination this year, so our track record is not bad. We have only published four stories in five issues, after all, and one of those was written by a computer.*

This seems to be taking us a long way from the editorship of Charles Barren. My point is that the job was not easy. It involved difficult and controversial

decisions, and was carried out as an unpaid addition to a full teaching load. As new editor I have inherited a going concern, and it is largely thanks to Charles Barren that this is so. Thanks are also due to the author H. Kenneth Bulmer, who (relaxing into the less formal sobriquet of Ken Bulmer) was our Reviews Editor for the first four issues. Ken is a very busy man these days, editing the New Writings in SF *series, which he took over from the late John Carnell, in addition to continuing his own writing of fiction (by no means science fiction only) at a gruelling rate. We are sad to lose Ken's help on* Foundation, *though he continues to play a very active role on the committee of the Science Fiction Foundation itself. But I am happy to welcome Christopher Priest, Ken's successor. As most readers will know, Mr. Priest is also an author. His third novel will be published soon in the U.S., and his second,* Fugue For A Darkening Island, *recently won third prize in the John W. Campbell Memorial Award.*

Christopher Priest has fulfilled in this issue the promise made by Ken Bulmer in the previous one: that the scope of the review section would be increased, and that the comparatively small group of reviewers would be substantially enlarged. He has devoted much time and energy to this, and in my opinion the results are startling. Previously small review sections (and late publication) have led to a backlog of books, which this time we have largely eradicated – to the extent that half this issue is devoted to reviews.

Although we have no special policy about the selection of reviewers, I could not be better pleased at the result Christopher Priest has brought about, striking a neat balance between reviews by well-known professionals (usually known as writers of fiction), and those who may be very loosely called the scholars and critics. (I don't mean to suggest that the writing of fiction precludes scholarship!) The science fiction writers who have put on their reviewing hats are Brian W. Aldiss, John Brunner, George Hay, David I. Masson, Josephine Saxton, Brian Stableford, and, of course, Christopher Priest himself. The rest of us might be described as academics of one kind and another: Malcolm Edwards (graduate library student at the North London Polytechnic), Tom Shippey (Oxford University), Philip Strick (a part time lecturer on science fiction for the University of London, whose main work is with a film production and distribution company), Tony Sudbery (University of York) and myself.

It hardly needs saying, I hope, that reviewers are given their heads, short of wanton abuse. Their comments cannot be taken as representing the views of the Science Fiction Foundation. Indeed, the SF Foundation being a group of individuals, it has no monolithic views of which I am aware, other than a desire that science fiction should be dealt with responsibly and intelligently. We do not accept that reviewing is less demanding than fully fledged criticism. We hope not to publish plot synopses, or unsubstantiated opinions with no visible criteria, as reviews.

The third member of the original Foundation *editorial committee is still with us, as Associate Editor. George Hay was also the original force behind the setting up of the Science Fiction Foundation itself. In this issue he has contributed a kind of manifesto. He has felt for some time that the Science Fiction Foundation*

was losing sight of the aims that he at least had originally had in helping to set it up; that we have lowered our vision from the stars to meaner if more easily attainable objectives; and that, in working for academic solidity, we are letting slip the chance of becoming a truly revolutionary body in a society that is being stultified by intellectual conservatism. I am not able to agree with everything George Hay says, and his views are not always representative of the Science Fiction Foundation as a whole, yet I must here record my feeling that the world needs more people like him, and my pleasure that we can publish his fiery and often witty salvo. George Hay feels that the Science Fiction Foundation could "hold the futures of many worlds in its hands". As administrator of this potentially august body, I confess that holding such a brief would make me nervous – should I have a special uniform designed? But I am genuinely grateful to George for his (sometimes needful) reminder that our importance goes prospectively beyond the comfortable worlds of scholarship and literary criticism.

It must have been hubris *that made us think we could do what has rarely been achieved in the science fiction field – organize a punctual programme.* Foundation *1 came out in March 1972. Number 2 was dated in June, but came out three months later. Number 3 fell even further behind schedule, but we had reason then to feel more confident about our future, and we told our subscribers that from that time on things would improve. Well, the last issue, number 4, was also three months later than advertised.*

Greek Tragedy tells us of the various nasty things that happen to those who try to evade their destiny. But if there had been no Prometheus or Orestes around defying fate, there would have been nothing interesting enough happening to make the stuff of tragedy in the first place, and we'd all be living in caves. Fired by this noble analogy, we intend to keep on trying to produce this journal at quarterly intervals. The baying of the pursuing Furies rings in our ears, and we haven't managed to do it yet, but there is this: subscriptions continue to come in at a gratifying rate. Since our difficulties are basically financial – we have enough material on hand – the more subscriptions that come in, the more likelihood of our getting the independence that will enable a prompt and efficient printing.

At the moment, this journal is typeset by an outside company, but printed by the North East London Polytechnic presses. These presses are under the control of Mr. Ted Weedon, who has been very helpful to us, but to some extent his hands are tied. The presses are overloaded, and our journal ranks low in priority alongside the mass of administrative papers, prospectuses, time tables etc. that the Polytechnic must produce. However, new presses are being installed, and we retain our optimism. Subscribers, of course, pay for four numbers. This is conventionally called "a year's subscription", but even if the actual period is a year and a half, four consecutive numbers are still what you will get.

I will be combining two jobs as editor. I became technical editor with the previous issue, and I retain responsibility for layout, typography and proof-reading now that I am full editor. Comments will be welcome. We recognize that content is more important than form, but it always helps if a journal is actually

pleasant to read. Subscribers will have noticed the new appearance of the journal that began with number 4. We hope it is more satisfying than it was before. You will note also that the size has been expanded. We hope to maintain this size of approximately 100 pages, though this may necessitate putting up the subscription rates soon, given the present situation of rapidly inflating costs.

The feature article in this issue, which had been previously promised, is my own piece on proto science fiction. I also have a long review, and I am a little embarrassed at this editorial pre-emption of space. In future issues I intend dropping back into the review section and staying there.

The history of science fiction was indeed to have been prominent in this issue. We had also planned an examination of the important new book on the subject, Brian W. Aldiss's Billion Year Spree. *At the time of my writing this editorial (mid September), we have an interesting article on the subject by Mark Adlard, the novelist-cum-critic-cum-steel-executive. We are momently waiting on another by the Swedish critic Göran Bengtson. The book has already been published in the United States, and the British edition is due out in November – just before the expected publication date of this issue of* Foundation. *Unfortunately, we simply do not have the space this time around. It would mean devoting most of this issue to the single topic of science fiction's history, thereby squeezing out the largest and most spectacular review section we have so far produced. Also, it is possible that changes may be made in the British edition of* Billion Year Spree, *and we would prefer to take these into account. We apologize to Mr. Aldiss (himself a contributor to this issue) for this delay, but the discussion is definitely scheduled for number 6. We hope that the publication of these pieces in the next issue, following on my own remarks about science fiction's history in this, will give the effect of a kind of four way dialogue on the subject between Messrs. Adlard, Aldiss, Bengtson and Nicholls.*

It is pleasant to welcome David Ketterer back to these pages. He was the author of the controversial reading of Stanislaw Lem's Solaris *which appeared in* Foundation 3. *His article on Budrys's* Rogue Moon *may serve to stimulate interest in this extraordinary novel which, apart from a very enthusiastic notice by James Blish, seems to have been largely ignored by critics and fans alike.*

A seminar on the function of science fiction was not planned in advance for this issue, but happily one seems to have emerged by way of three quite different viewpoints on the subject. In addition to the George Hay piece, noted above, we have Poul Anderson's frank statement of his own feelings about the field, and Ian Watson's lively account of some unexpected ways in which science fiction can be used in education. Groans are sometimes heard in connection with this currently fashionable topic, but a careful reading of the Watson article will reveal that there are more ways than one of academically skinning the sf cat. These three articles contain, it seems to me, three implicit ideologies, whose juxtaposition is instructive. The topic will be pursued in future issues. In Foundation 6 *we intend to publish a stimulating article by Robert S. Chapman, a Californian interested in history, who draws revealing parallels between science fiction and social prejudices of the United States in the 1950s.*

Serendipity has seen to it that Ian Watson's article follows soon after the publication of his first novel, The Embedding, *which is reviewed in this issue. We don't have much room for comment on our reviewers as a general thing, but I must say we were fortunate in persuading David Masson to review this book. Mr. Masson was the author of all too few short stories a few years back, to be found in the collection* The Caltraps of Time. *Although he seems to have dropped out of the science fiction field, he was obviously the right man to review* The Embedding, *since he is by profession an expert in linguistics, which is the subject at the heart of the book.*

Another man who links a fascination with linguistics with science fiction is S.R. Delany. We hope to feature Mr. Delany in the next issue with a personal statement about his relationship with science fiction, and also as the subject of an article by the Canadian critic Doug Barbour. The next number, then, will be a kind of Aldiss/Delany special issue. The conjunction should be illuminating, though not the result of a conscious plan. Books reviewed next time will include the Aldiss/Harrison Astounding-Analog Reader, *Aldiss's* Frankenstein Unbound, *J.G. Ballard's* Crash, *and Stanislaw Lem's* The Invincible, *the latter being reviewed by James Blish.*

Other coming features planned include an examination of the two James Blish tetralogies by Tom Shippey, and Brian Stableford talking about the relevance of Laingian views on schizophrenia to science fiction. Authors to be featured in the series of personal statements by prominent science fiction writers will include Bob Shaw and Philip K. Dick.

With such good things coming, we hope that all of you with subscriptions due for renewal send your money promptly. We cannot keep on going without it. Our current rates appear near the beginning of this issue.

Finally, an advertisement for our friends in the north east of England – an area unexpectedly rising to prominence in science fiction circles with the November science fiction festival in Sunderland, an ambitious and exciting event which will be over by the time this editorial appears. The 1974 annual Easter Science Fiction Convention will be held in Newcastle Upon Tyne. We urge readers who have not previously experienced a convention to attend. The programme should be stimulating. It is being prepared by a keen and intelligent committee. It is planned that details should accompany this issue of Foundation *on a separate enclosure.*

* * * *

This article gives some detailed documentation of the general thesis set out in its predecessor, published in "Foundation No. 3". Briefly, the thesis is that modern science fiction continues a tradition of the artistic imagination which is very ancient – considerably more ancient than the tradition of the traditional "realistic" novel, which is often rather naively taken by science fiction fans to be equivalent to "the mainstream". In the chapter of my forthcoming book, from which this piece is taken, I give fifteen important examples of "proto science fiction". For reasons of space I have here omitted detailed discussion of "Gulliver's Travels", "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", and "Frankenstein". I would anyway assume that most science fiction enthusiasts who are familiar with these works would quite readily, and without too much argument, admit them to be amongst the more obvious forerunners of modern science fiction.

science fiction and the mainstream: part 2: the great tradition of proto science fiction

Peter Nicholls

1. With due caution, then, we will begin the tradition with a myth, *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* first written in the third millenium BC, and descending to us in an Assyrian text, engraved in cuneiform on clay tablets, and dug from the ruins of Niñeveh. I am not the first to propose it as a precursor of science fiction. It is an obvious candidate, being the first known story that describes the great flood – the deluge which is the precursor of all those plagues of earth and air, fire and water, that have put an end to life as we know it in hundreds of science fiction stories. (Somewhat unexpectedly, the English seem to be the nation with the strongest apocalyptic leanings these days, and in recent years John Wyndham, John Christopher and J.G. Ballard have

sometimes seemed to be striving, with some success, for a corner in the end-of-the-world market).

The Epic of Gilgamesh has another less well-known aptness to the great tradition of proto science fiction. The landscape through which the hero and his friend Enkidu roam is the precursor of the allegorical or significant landscape which has been such a feature of literary narratives for millenia before the invention of the "realistic" novel. Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* are monuments of this sub-genre, and a peculiarly grotesque modern example, David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus,* gives great prominence to the metaphysical implications of its alien landscape's physical properties.

It is fair to say, however, that the personal-relationship-centred manner of "realistic" prose fiction has led to a progressively smaller emphasis being placed, over the last two hundred years, on the intrinsic significance of things and places. When landscapes *are* given significance in the modern novel, it is usually by way of the so-called pathetic fallacy, which is when you say, "the sea looks sad today", and mean that *you* feel sad. The human mind is very ready to seize on aspects of external nature as correlatives of its own conditions – this was Thomas Hardy's regular procedure, and in science fiction we might think of J.G. Ballard. This can be interesting, but to show Nature imitating Man is basically narcissistic. To show Man finding himself in a relationship with a Nature that is given a solid and independent existence – not simply a reflection of what we feel it should be – is to celebrate Nature's intrinsic being. *Gilgamesh* does just that.[1]

The belief that objects themselves can be significant reappears in much hack-written science fiction as an irritating emphasis on gadgetry, but a number of recent sf writers as disparate as Ursula Le Guin, Brian Aldiss and Stanislaw Lem have devoted considerable loving care to establishing the significance of the landscape and the furniture of their worlds. (As a corollary, all three are writers who do not seem to accept Man as the necessary and inevitable centre of the universe, and all three seem to have recaptured something of that generosity so characteristic of myth, that lavishes significance upon the whole created world, and not just upon the psychological problems of its primate rulers).

1. One of the great strengths of D.H. Lawrence as a writer, for example, was that he did respect the essential qualities of places, and of creatures other than his human protagonists – as in *Women in Love* or *St. Mawr.* But I would regard this as no longer a common preoccupation in modern mainstream fiction.

2. The second item is Homer's *Odyssey*. It ushers in the sub-genre of the imaginary voyage, a genre of extraordinary popularity and longevity, especially when it becomes the voyage with a purpose – the voyage as quest. *The Odyssey* will always remain the archetype. The word "odyssey" has itself passed into the language, precisely because it denotes this archetypal quality. Though other items in my tradition may be akin to science fiction much as an uncle, an aunt or a cousin is akin, *The Odyssey* must stand as a father. It is the true thing itself. We could put it vulgarly, at its very lowest, by saying that *The Odyssey* is the space opera[2] of the second millenium BC – precisely that, except that the sea of outer space, these days, substitutes for the Mediterranean.

This suggests the necessity of a sideways glance at a fascinating cultural phenomenon. The growth of the known world can be charted precisely by the unknowns on its literary fringes, or, to be less cryptic, as writers have sought out unknown areas, *tabulae rasae* on which to locate their imaginary settings, they have had to move progressively further afield. Homer was content with the Mediterranean. Shakespeare does not nominate the location of his island in *The Tempest,* but it has been shown that he was much influence by a contemporary account of shipwreck in the Bermudas. Swift, to the eternal gratitude of Australian satirists, located Lilliput not far from Alice Springs. El Dorado, the mythical city of gold in the Americas, was popular from the time of Cortes clear through to the nineteenth century. The South American jungle provided many an exotic locale, notably for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World.* Both the Arctic and Antarctic have had their moments of glory, and the idea that somewhere in the Antarctic there might be a lush, temperate basin heated by volcanic action appeared in many stories, and was used as recently as the 1920's by John Taine and even H.P. Lovecraft. Even the humble Himalayas have their Shangri-La.

What with the blank bits of the map being so assiduously filled in by a variety of Empire builders, the inevitable happened not long after the turn of the century, and Edgar Rice Burroughs sent his hero,

2. "Space opera" is a term, usually but not necessarily pejorative, much used by science fiction fans. It derives from the term "horse opera", used of a melodramatic story set in the Old West. Space operas are usually rip-roaring adventure stories, full of dramatic incident, set in outer space, where the space ship substitutes for the horse (or the galley).

John Carter, off to Mars. The planets had been used in literature before, but as places to reach rather than nice blank venues in their own right. The solar system retained its popularity for a long time, but as early as the 1930s a number of writers began to feel claustrophobic in the narrow confines immediately adjacent to Sol – perhaps because the scientists were already beginning to learn too much about them, and the satisfying blankness was no more – and the era of galactic exploration set in, launched by E.E. "Doc" Smith amongst others. Goodness knows, the home galaxy should have satisfied everybody for a few years at least, but soon a variety of writers were cocking a jaded eye at the greener galaxies over the horizon.

Returning to *The Odyssey*, I am reminded to say what all of us with missionary intentions about science fiction sometimes forget, that it has always been predominately a literature of entertainment, which almost invariably involves a managing of things so that the reader is impelled to ask "What will happen next?". *The Odyssey*, archetypal in so many respects, is so in that respect too. People who have only dim school room memories of the story may have forgotten that it is more than a picaresque; it is not just a matter of fantastic episode piled upon fantastic episode. The story revolves upon a crucial (and superby told) matter of human relationships, prefigured at the beginning of the poem, and satisfyingly resolved at the end. We are never allowed to forget that Odysseus, a man of considerable sexual *sang-froid*, nevertheless quite simply misses his wife. *The Odyssey* is a story where what happens next matters, and while this is an element common now to most fiction, it has been especially strong in science fiction, which in this respect and others has some of the characteristics of folk literature.

There is a puritanical streak in the Anglo-Saxon heritage, which often leads to the belief that a book which is entertaining cannot be doing you good, (and that if it is not entertaining, it *must* be doing you good). One of the unspoken beliefs behind much modern criticism is that the "meaning" and the "significance" of a novel are not to be located in the events of the story *per se*, but rather in the profundity of characterisation and the sensivity of the narrator's response to events. Plot has been downgraded, and the most tightly plotted modern novels are often those belonging to the genres: the detective story, the thriller, and science fiction itself. It is notable that the temporary slump in Dickens' reputation amongst many critics of the forties and fifties was regularly accompanied by talk about his story lines being over-elaborate and somehow "unreal". It is only recently that the general feeling that science fiction was

sub-literate has shown signs of weakening. The often observed phenomenon of the *literati* reading science fiction with overt signs of guilt and embarrassment (even binding the colourful volumes in plain wrappers) is probably connected with the feeling that so obviously entertaining a literature must be "escapist" and therefore juvenile.

It is in this respect that *The Odyssey* is a useful paradigm. We must assume that the early listeners to this incident-packed story were not in the least self-conscious about their enjoyment, and would not have understood any criticism which included the word "escapist" – always supposing that archaic Greek even contained a word meaning "escapist", which seems unlikely. Certainly it was important to see how Odysseus reacted to events, but the events themselves would be seen as having an intrinsic significance. Narrative interest was not a merely secondary virtue, because the problems which the gods chose to face their mortal children with were important in themselves. Calypso, the Sirens, Nausicaa, Circe – it matters that *these* were the women who tempted the man who has lost his Penelope – these and not others. The events in a man's life partly define his being, his individuality, even if they are not of his own choosing. It is possible to believe this, without necessarily believing that the events are wished upon us by the Gods. It is a very drab and limited realism which disapproves of plunging a moderately ordinary protagonist into great affairs on the grounds that in real life this seldom happens. The extravagant plot which catapults an apparently ordinary man into danger and a heightened living is not escapist. It symbolises to all of us potentialities that really do exist in the mundane world. The fact that we know they exist, even if rarely, makes living that much more of a challenge and that much less of an empty ritual.

3. The third item is as far as we can go from folk literature. Plato's *Republic* is a very sophisticated piece of work indeed. (So is *The Odyssey* of course, but in a completely different way although, interestingly, Plato quotes copiously from Homer throughout *The Republic*). Written half way through the fourth century before Christ, *The Republic* is not properly speaking a work of fiction at all, although it is given in the form of a fictitious dialogue between Athenian intellectuals. The leading role is taken by Socrates, who had been dead (of hemlock) for many years when this book was written.

Before specifying the direct relevance *The Republic* has to modern science fiction, I should make the broader and more important point

that Plato's influence still saturates Western thought generally. It is, in some ways unfortunately I believe, one of the key texts in Western history, and most specifically in the history of education. It can be argued that Plato's idealism had an almost paralysing influence on Renaissance philosophy, but it is just that idealism that gives the book its importance, for amongst other things, *The Republic* is the first and most important of the utopias.

I have neither the competence nor the desire to analyse Plato's view of the perfect republic. The important thing for our purposes is that he did have very strong views about what would constitute such perfection, and that the perfection he believed in was remarkably static, as we see in the amusing passage about children's games from another of his books, *(The Laws,* Book VII):

> . . . when innovations creep into their games and constant changes are made in them, the children cease to have a sure standard of what is right and proper. The person most highly esteemed by them is the one who introduces new devices in form or colour, or otherwise. There can be no worse evil for a city than this. The man responsible for these changes is surreptitiously changing the character of the young folk and leading them to despise old ways. Change . . . is most dangerous for a city.

The specific influence of Plato on science fiction is strong, but indirect. One might hazard a guess that the number of science fiction writers who regularly read Plato is only a small proportion of the whole, though probably large enough to surprise those critics who see science fiction as a crude verbalisation of inarticulate popular fantasies. But the point is that the whole of Platonic thought specifically, and utopian thought generally, exists today in the very air of Western culture.

Although in modern terms Plato was a political conservative, he was nevertheless one of the first to realise that things need not necessarily remain as they are. The future could be better than the past. It is possible to imagine other ways of life – and such an imagination, no matter how fatuous in its details, opens the floodgates to the muddy rush of social criticism. Plato, we can see in retrospect, was a much greater revolutionary than he knew. The philosopher who feared change, and argued passionately for an idealistic stasis, bequeathed to us the technique of imagination without which change can never happen. We can always ask the question, what would a better world look like? This question is absolutely fundamental to the procedures of modern science fiction.

The *direct* influence of the utopian tradition on modern science fiction, however is very much smaller than is often assumed. The last great flowering of the literary utopia was in the nineteenth century, with Bellamy, William Morris, and many, many others. H.G. Wells inherited this tradition, and gloried in it, but he was also the man who utterly changed its emphasis. He popularised the *dystopia.*

The reason why modern science fiction concerns itself so little with utopias *per se*, is that its whole temper is inclined towards evolution and change. Literary utopias always tended to be static. Once the perfect state was achieved, be it Marxist, Capitalist or nostalgically medieval, it had nowhere to go. It just kept ticking over like a clock that never needs to be wound. Indeed the way of life outlined in Plato's *Republic* does regularly appear in science fiction, but as a dystopia. A dystopia – for the uninitiated – is a utopia turned on its head, a place where it is not good for you to be. Arthur C. Clarke's most exciting novel, *The City and the Stars,* begins by emphasizing the *dystopian* elements of a society quite similar to that utopian republic presented by Plato as being ultimately desirable (insofar as anything earthly and therefore not "ideal" can be desirable).

But the indirect influence of utopias on science fiction has been enormous, for the dystopia is the product of utopian thought, and of all the forms of modern science fiction the dystopia is perhaps the most characteristic. (Kingsley Amis's *New Maps of Hell* gives only the most fleeting consideration to any other kind). The utopian proposes the ideal way of life; the dystopian, equally compelled by his sense that things right now are not good enough, concentrates his wrath on the present by satirising its worst qualities in terms of imaginary societies in which these bad qualities are concentrated and laid bare. The archetypal dystopian text is still *Gulliver's Travels,* and with H.G. Wells we find the Swiftian vision (less concentrated perhaps, but equally, more obviously humane and accessible to the general reader) rendered anew, in such stories as *The Time Machine, The War of the Worlds,* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau.* Well's special strength was his ability to give a swift, onward-flowing narrative structure of his sceptical vision of man – a great enticement to the sort of reader, not consciously intellectual, for whom Swift would remain a closed book. Wells open the way not only for such "respectable" writers as Huxley *(Brave New World)* and Orwell *(1984)* but also for the pulp magazines, where for so long, unknown to so many, most of the dystopian action was concentrated. But Wells as we know him could not have been if there were no Plato before him.

4. *Beowulf* has an honourable and spectacular role, as the first English science fiction story in the great tradition. It is not really science fiction of course; indeed the "furniture" of its world (in Part I of this article I discuss how in science fiction the furniture is always "changed") is very familiar – not to us, but presumably to the original Anglo-Saxon auditors of this stirring poem. They would have recognised this world of fighting chieftains and their hard-drinking and boastful retainers as an accurate account of the way things were. *Beowulf* does, however, contain three very impressive monsters (an ogre, his mother, and a dragon), described not in the inflated terms of bad fantasy, but with the same detached realism as the rest of this remarkable piece.

The Teutonic melancholy of *Beowulf* is different in spirit from anything we normally find in science fiction. Beowulf's ultimate death from the poisoned fangs of the dragon, and the curse laid on the hoard, before which the most redoubtable heroism is finally reduced to nothing beyond the memory of "Lof-dædum" – "*actions* which merit praise" – shows a pessimism (and an arguable maturity) alien to Beowulf's modern equivalents. These equivalents have generally not been worth much, of course. The alien-monster story is not one of the sub-genres of modern science fiction notable for its sophistication.

But in a broader sense, the theme of Man faced with threats from outside the borders of the world he knows and understands is one of the most recurrent and interesting in literature generally, and in science fiction in particular. It goes further than the physical grotesquerie of whatever the monsters might be – they may not be monsters at all in anything other than the metaphysical sense. (Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, Grandcourt in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda,* and Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* are metaphysical monsters, just as the pig is a monster – within certain societies – in the anthropological sense. They are all creatures that defy categorization within the usual boundaries, and hence are to be feared, propitiated, pitied, and – in the case of the pig – not eaten.[3])

Beowulf itself is a far from primitive work in this respect, especially in the unexpected pathos of its momentary glimpse into the monster's own psyche. It is hard to forget the image of Grendel's suffering, as he dwells in darkness, listening to the music of the harp and the clear voice of the bard drifting to him across the fens, as the bard praises the beauty of God's creation – a God from whom Grendel, as one of

the family of Cain, is cut off forever. The emotional reverberations of this go far beyond the simple *frisson* we expect from stories of monsters. To this day, in skilled hands (such as Mary Shelley's, to take a nineteenth century example), the "monster" story remains one of the most potent metaphors of alienation.

Beowulf also presents an ancient paradigm in quite another respect. The story of the hero discovering his own capacity for kingship after a series of arduous tests, as Beowulf does, is older than *Beowulf* of course, but returns new-minted many times every year. It is, for instance, Robert Heinlein's basic plot, and he has used it at least a dozen times. The juvenile novel *Starman Jones* is a particularly pure example.

Beowulf was written (probably) in the eight century. The following seven centuries (The Dark Ages, The Middle Ages, call them what you will) are rich in precursors of science fiction, but three of them will have to stand for the whole.

5. *The Voiage and Travaile of Sir Iohn Maundevile, Kt.,* a fourteenth century work, purports in its second part to be an eye-witness account by an English gentleman of the marvels to be found in distant Asia. It is full of wonderful inventions tossed off as casual reportage – dragons, the queen of the Amazons, the hippopotamus that is half man and half horse – spiced with sufficent half-truths to ensure a certain plausibility.

Although the claim of eye-witness veracity is certainly false, it is quite possible that the book was written out of motives that were far from cynical. The anonymous author may well have supposed, as he repeated all the fantastic gossip drifting in from the East, that he was giving a sober and educational account of the way things really were.

It is often supposed that the typical science fiction reader is a credulous and gullible fellow. If we go by the sophistication of much that he reads, it can hardly be claimed that this is a fair judgement, but it contains an element of truth. Back in the nineteen thirties

3. Dr. Mary Douglas has a number of interesting things to say about the anthropological implications of monsterhood in general, and pigs in particular. The line of thought I have been following was partly stimulated by hearing her lecture to the Science Fiction Foundation on the subject. Also germane is her Henry Myers lecture "Self Evidence", to be published in the 1973 Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

this was clearly more pronounced than it is today. Sir John Mandeville's imaginary voyage is the undoubted archetype of the sort of fiction that plays on this innocent desire for miracles, and it testifies to at least one medieval imagination almost identical to that of Charles Fort, to take one prominent twentieth century example.

Charles Fort was an indefatigable chronicler, who compiled (partly from old newspapers) an index of wonders seldom equalled in the annals of research – frogs falling from the sky, sea-serpents, telepaths, showers of blood from the heavens.[4] Some feel that Fort's research was conducted with his tongue planted firmly in his cheek, though it seems odd that a man should devote a lifetime to a practical joke. At all events, though Fort did not write science fiction himself, his catalogues of inexplicable phenomena (some of them, incidentally, reported by apparently irreproachable witnesses) have provided a wonderful grab-bag of material for writers – and for silly-season newspapers – to this day.

As one of the founders of this noble tradition of providing literary side-show freaks for the slack-jawed peasantry, the pseudonymous Mandeville has an important and likeable part to play in any summary of the seminal works of proto science fiction.

6. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is one of the very few authentic masterpieces of the Middle Ages. The Middle English in which the poem is written is not too difficult if the reader is armed with a glossary. (One of the standard editions [Oxford, Clarendon Press] is edited – significantly? – by that same J.R.R. Tolkien better known to the general public as the author of *The Lord of the Rings).*

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight exists more towards the fantasy end of the spectrum than the science fiction end. But although it fits my earlier definition of fantasy (the "furniture" much the same as in the real world, but the laws of nature changed), to call it fantasy misses the point, since "fantasy" tends to suggest *something* of no special relevance to the mundane world. The clarity with which this poem creates images of the powerful natural forces which can erupt into and disturb the most polished of sophisticated societies – naked sexuality and brute violence being two of these – has every-

4. Fort's books, written in the early 1940s, have been kept in print by the New York publishing house, Ace Books. They are *The Book of the Damned, Lo, Wild Talents* and *New Lands.*

thing to do with real life.

Of all the items in the tradition of proto science fiction as I see it, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the one that at first sight has the least connection with modern science fiction. I include it, nevertheless, not because of its element of magic, but because of its landscapes. The two worlds of *Sir Gawain,* the elaborate code of manners and the luxury of the courtly settings on the one hand, and on the other, the grim but green world of nature where growth and death, beauty and blood, are given equal emphasis, are both of them realistic – as realistic as anything we find in medieval writing. But there is more to be said than this. The furniture of the story is *so* real, so crisp and dense in its texture, that it becomes charged with a meaning beyond itself, and this charge of meaning is supported by the story. Every nuance in the prolonged flirtation between Sir Gawain and his hostess in the castle, for example, turns out to be quite literally a matter of life and death for Gawain, and the poetic juxtaposition of the lady's elaborate coquetry with the exhilarating violence of her husband's boar-hunting (which is going on at the same time) lends an ironic perspective to each of the two activities.

What we are talking about here, I think, is surrealism. Not the sort that creates fantastic lunar landscapes, but the sort that presents the familiar with such a clear and vivid intensity of vision that its familiarity disappears and becomes something else. It is comparable to the feeling we get when we see a stranger staring at something. Our instinct is to look at what he is staring at, and the object of his gaze becomes momentarily, for us too, charged with significance. In art, the parallel would be Magritte rather than Max Ernst, both of whom, I confess, seem a long way from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* In literature one thinks of Kafka, or in science fiction proper, of certain aspects of J.G. Ballard, or Brian Aldiss, or Philip K. Dick.

I am conscious of perhaps stretching a point, here, pre-empting *Sir Gawain* for my purposes in this way, but I wanted to bring in a forerunner of the sort of writing that operates not by creating a metaphorical world whose very strangeness comments on some of the familiar aspects of our own, but by fixing the objects of *our* world with such an intent gaze (like the eye of the Ancient Mariner) that the very clarity with which we seem them makes them look different, makes the domestic look alien, makes us realize that we did not understand them as well as we thought we did.

This kind of vision, I suppose, belongs more to a kind of "realistic" fiction than to science fiction – in theory at least. In practice, it is quite commonly found in science fiction proper, which has always had a powerful element of what Becht called "alienation", what Darko Suvin (with reference to science fiction) calls "estrangement"[5] and what I can find no single word for, that satisfies me. It is to do with a child-like vision[6] – with forcing us to see the world freshly and without preconceptions, a procedure basic to science fiction, whether consciously or unconsciously .

7. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is of all medieval texts the one most fundamental to the view I am espousing. It is pure science fiction in that it creates three quite self-consistent, detailed imaginary worlds. It is also pure science fiction in that its subject is cosmological – it offers us a picture of the way the universe is structured, not just for its own sake, but in order to show us where we fit in. It is *science* fiction in that it purports to tell us the way things are, not just the way things might be if we made certain fantastic presuppositions. That is to say it is not written as fantasy.

It may be objected that medieval science such as it was, is quite exploded; that today the Ptolemaic cosmogony is not even accepted by Catholics, and that few of us have a literal belief in hell, purgatory or paradise. These objections miss the point. The procedure of *The Divine Comedy* emphasizes verisimilitude throughout – not perhaps in the way of literal truth, but the scrupulous detail and naturalism of the whole poem argue strongly for its emotional truth. I sometimes think that the really important distinctions between science fiction and fantasy depend not upon the subject matter, but upon the author's attitude towards his subject matter. *The Divine Comedy* is written in the spirit of the scientist, in the best and broadest sense in which we can take that phrase. (And for that reason I am sure that if the ghost of Dante were presented with the fantasies of William Morris, E.R.

5. *Foundation No. 2, 1972. Cognition and Estrangement: An Approach to Sf Poetics* by Darko Suvin.

6. I said "child-like", not "childish". The view that children have this innocent depth of scrutiny is a romantic one, attributed to them by self-conscious adults. Of course it could be true – I have been trying to remember whether I ever attained this Wordsworthian state as a child, and think perhaps I did, very occasionally. Children often don't see very much at all.

Eddison or Lord Dunsany, at least two of whom claimed to be his spiritual descendants, he would have been nauseated by their whimsy, woolliness, and inflated prose.[7])

It may be more cogently objected that while the procedures of Dante bear an accidental resemblance to those of science fiction, his aim, which was theological and philosophical, was totally different. The answer to this objection is simple, but of crucial importance to my view – to any rational view, I would like to think – of what is happening in modern science fiction.

Much modern science fiction *is* theological or philosophical in intent. It is hardly surprising – indeed it is entirely natural – that a genre so preoccupied with causes should include the First Cause in its sphere of interest. It is hardly possible, in fact, to ask questions about the nature of the universe, as science fiction regularly does, without trespassing on theological territory.

This is not at all to say that modern science fiction regularly works in the intellectual framework of Christianity, though it sometimes does, as in the notable case of C.S. Lewis's Ransome trilogy. More often, but still not very often, Christian thought is *ambiguously* present, and capable of more than one interpretation, as one might say of Walter Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz,* Ray Bradbury's *The Fire Balloons* (one of the chapters of the novel *The Silver Locusts,* known in the U.S.A. as *The Martian Chronicles),* or James Blish's *A Case of Conscience.* But more generally, metaphysical questions are the meat and drink of modern science fiction; consider the works of Aldiss, Ballard, Bester, Budrys, Clarke, Delany, Dick, Disch, Golding, Harness, Herbert, Le Guin, Lem, Lindsay, Silverberg, Sturgeon, Van Vogt, Vonnegut and Zelazny – to make an incomplete and alphabetical attempt to outline the scale of the phenomenon. Even such "hardliners" as Asimov and Heinlein are by no means without their

7. This rather ghastly minor tradition has recently been given a new lease of life by the American writer Lin Carter, who, as editor of the "adult fantasy" series published by Ballantine paperbacks in New York, has made much of it. The recent popularity of this sort of writing (which can often be diagnosed by the excessive use of "whither" and "thou" for "where" and "you") is often attributed to an appetite created by Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings.* This is hardly fair to Tolkien, whose book succeeds precisely because in its centre it is quite simply and ordinarily human. He reserves the High Style for those characters who can no longer cope with the world as it is. For representative specimens of the prosy-fantastical tradition, see *The Well at the World's End* by William Morris, *The Worm Ouroboros* by E.R. Eddison, and *The King of Elfland's Daughter* by Lord Dunsany.

metaphysical implications. One might say that metaphysics plays a more prominent role in science fiction that physics does, though after Einstein it is perhaps no longer possible to make any simple distinction between the two fields of enquiry.

I might seem here to be putting a rather rickety cart before a very spectacular horse. The importance of Dante is not that he helped to make Van Vogt or Vonnegut possible – indeed, I have no idea to what extent he is even read by science fiction writers. (*All* those I have asked – eight or nine – say they have read Dante, which is suggestive, if not statistically important). It is perhaps more meaningful to put the proposition the other way around. Modern science fiction did not spring *sui generis* out of the industrial revolution, though it is with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* that it began to take its distinctively modern form. It *continues* a tradition of intellectual enquiry, often into metaphysical and philosophical questions, over which the figure of Dante towers like a Colossus. In the nineteenth century it is true, it began to take the form of prose narrative rather than poetic epic, and its distinctive images and metaphors began more and more to take their coloration from contemporary and predicted technology. The mention of Mary Shelley is appropriate here, however. Just as a well-read reader can hardly read Asimov's *I, Robot* stories without thinking (with a certain piercing regret perhaps) of Mary Shelley, he can not read *Frankenstein* without thinking of Dante. The line of development may pass at times from the sublime to the ridiculous, but is unmistakeable nevertheless.

The line of development is important for another reason, too. It gives us an imaginative standard against which modern science fiction can be measured. Certainly there is nothing in science fiction that can measure up to Dante, but then that is largely true of the whole of literature. At least, it seems to me, the comparison is not wholly pointless. I do not believe that it is possible for those critics such as Sam Moskowitz and Donald Wollheim who see science fiction existing cut off from the rest of literature like a fortified town behind its forbidding ramparts to evaluate its importance with anything but the most myopic of perspectives. Their only criteria are incestuous.

8. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is not the only one of his works that could be seen as among the precursors of modern science fiction – *The Winter's Tale* is another – but it is the most appropriate. It has two of the intrinsic qualities of science fiction.

First, it is set in a new world – in this case an unknown island -- which, as with the other side of the Mediterranean for Homer, gives

Shakespeare a blank slate on which to create whatever he likes, without all the self-conscious difficulties of re-creating the dramatically conventional *milieux* of cities like Venice or Rome. This impulse to seek out unknown worlds as the setting for a story is more than a simple desire for elbow room. It even goes beyond the literary equivalent of the biologist who seeks out an uncontaminated Petri dish on which to conduct his experiments; (the isolation of Shakespeare's island has an obvious importance in this respect). More than this, the creation of new literary worlds is nearly always connected with the philosophical question, what forms might creation take? What, for example, might a totally natural man be like – a creature as if new sprung from the soil, utterly ignorant of civilisation? Shakespeare's sceptical rejoinder to the theory of the noble savage is Caliban.

To put this in another way, although it can happen and has happened that a new world is created only to give a focus for the writer's views of his own world, as Swift does with Brobdignag and Lilliput, it can also happen that in peopling the new world the author finds the intrinsic intellectual excitement of the process acts as a catalyst. His mind ferments with creation of different order; he is no longer merely producing a neat metaphoric reflection of the known world; he has rediscovered the ancient exhilaration of being a God. It must necessarily occur to any God worth his salt that other forms of being, apart from Man, have an intrinsic interest, and once such forms are imagined, we are already one giant step away from seeing Man as the inevitable centre of the universe.

The second way in which *The Tempest* resembles science fiction is its theme, which has to do with power and responsibility – specifically the power of the scientist, the man who understands natural law and can use his understanding to effect great changes in the world. Such a figure is another of the archetypes of science fiction. Prospero is a magician, a man very nearly corrupted by his own art. He is strongly attracted by the visions of disorder which his own knowledge of natural order, and how to manipulate it, could bring into reality. Finally Prospero finds the strength and the humanity to repudiate the Faustian possibilities within himself, but not without a pang. We do not even have to paraphrase his final great speech for it to fall naturally into the mould of science fiction. It states one of the great sf themes as it stands. The staff and the book that Prospero eventually destroy are his magical emblems, his symbols of power. Perhaps – to spell it out rather crudely – a slide rule and a book of logarithmic tables would perform the same function today. It does not matter much what they are, because the essential symbolism remains the same:

I have bedimm'd
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azurd vault
Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up
The pine and cedar: graves at my command
Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let em forth
By my so potent Art. But this rough magic
I here abjure; and, when I have required
Some heavenly music – which even now I do, –
To work mine end upon their senses, that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my Book.

Act Five, Scene 1

The relevance of this to the atomic age hardly needs stressing.

What is surprising is that *The Tempest* is *not* usually given in the genealogies of science fiction, although Kingsley Amis gives it a mention in *New Maps of Hell.* The omission of *The Tempest*, together with the inclusion, say, of its near contemporary work, Bishop Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1683)[8], suggests an extraordinarily mechanical notion of just what constitutes a tradition, or of just what constitutes science fiction. I think the reason why the few scholars who have written on science fiction (Moskowitz, Philmus, Bailey et. al.[9]) take such a limiting view is that they are intent

8. This work can be found in *The Man in the Moone: An Anthology of Antique Science Fiction and Fantasy* edited by Faith K. Pizer and T. Allan Comp, illus., Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971.

9. See *Explorers of the Infinite* by Sam Moskowitz (World 1963)
Pilgrims Through Space and Time by J.O. Bailey (Argus Books, 1947, reprinted by Greenwood Press, U.S.A., 1972).
Into the Unknown: The Evolution of Science Fiction from Francis Godwin to H.G. Wells by Robert M. Philmus (University of California Press, 1970).
as to the "et al", it is more a matter of short articles rather than entire books, though we could add *Yesterday's Tomorrows* by W.H.G. Armytage (1968) which concentrates, a little boringly, on futurology and utopias, and the very useful though specialised *Voyages to the Moon* by Marjorie Hope Nicolson (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1948). As against these, however, we could place *Billion Year Spree* by Brian W. Aldiss, out from Weidenfeld and Nicolson this year. Aldiss takes a much wider view of the early prototypes of science fiction, although he won't allow that science fiction proper came about before Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.*

on emphasizing the truly scientific aspects of science fiction, but this was always a lost cause. Any quite mechanical checklist – say of the short stories published in ten science fiction anthologies chosen at random – will show what a small proportion of science fiction stories has science at its focus. In any event, setting a story on the moon is small guarantee that it will be scientific, although Godwin did quite remarkably anticipate Newton when he described the diminishing gravitational force as his space raft (drawn by birds!) gets further from the earth.

It is interesting to note what happens to *The Tempest* when it is given the trappings of the modern science fiction romance. This is precisely what happened in the case of the film, *The Forbidden Planet,* which readers whose memories stretch back to the 1950s may recall as one of the better of its often disastrous kind.

A star ship is landed on a strange planet, peopled by a talkative robot called Robbie, a brooding scientific genius played by Walter Pidgeon, and his beautiful but unsophisticated daughter – not to mention a horrendous but invisible monster that thuds around the place leaving great, clawed talon-prints. The ensuing happenings follow the Shakespearean original with, in some scenes at least a moderate fidelity to plot if not to poetry. The robot is the Ariel figure, the scientist and his daughter are Prospero and Miranda. The love affair remains ("O brave new world/That has such people in't!"), and there is still a drunken butler. The invisible "Monster from the Id" is, of course, the Caliban substitute. There is a little more than gimmickry here. The interesting thing is how easy and natural the transition seems, for all that the end product is in literary terms a travesty of its great original, (though not disastrously – the film is vivacious, and has an ebullient visual inventiveness). The aptness of a Shakespearean plot to a space age theme results directly from Shakespeare's early awareness of what were to be the great questions hanging over the Age of Science. Shakespeare was a Renaissance Man, and it is in the Renaissance that men first found the tools to analyse the secrets of the natural world. The Space Age was already beginning with the Borgias.

9. One of the infallible signs of the science fictional imagination is the literary creation of alien worlds, and what world could be more alien, newer and fresher than our own before the Fall? Milton showed the science fictional imagination *par excellence* in *Paradise Lost* (1674).

Paradise Lost is paradigmatic in four respects. (i) It asks the scientific questions, how did the universe come to be the way it is, and by

what laws does it operate? (ii) It creates new worlds. (iii) It images its philosophical issues in the variety of metaphor which is often called "pastoral" – the imaging of the complex within the simple – and this is, today, though seldom recognized as such, one of the basic procedures of science fiction. (iv) It reveals a deep interest in the contemporary state of scientific knowledge, and in questions of technology.

Of these, perhaps the most important is the first. But I have already discussed, while speaking of Dante, the ways in which questions which are now recognized as being scientific, used, until approximately the end of the seventeenth century, to be phrased in philosophic or specifically Christian terms. The important thing to recognize is how misleading the old dichotomy between science and superstition can be. There was no sudden leap in the average human intelligence quotient in the eighteenth century, the "Age of Reason" notwithstanding. Nor has the basic nature of the important questions changed in that time. It is true, for example, that Milton would have discussed the complex question – Why does man, who carries in his mind such potent images of what is Good, so regularly act counter to his own aspirations? – in terms of original sin. In the post-Freudian age we speak of childhood traumas, of repression, of an instinctual territorial aggression inherited from the days our forefathers hunted in packs. But the phenomena remain the same, and even the explanations differ only in detail. We may now see "original sin" as a metaphor rather than an actuality, but surely a profound metaphor, and in its way a *scientific* attempt to explain a fact that everyday experience showed to be true. There are even good grounds for believing that Milton knew very well that he was presenting a metaphorical rather than a literal account of how things got to be the way they are. His was a sceptical and profound habit of mind, and only the most superficial of modern readings of the long poem which was the pinnacle of his career could dismiss it as "superstitious" or "irrelevant".

The point about the creation of new worlds is self-evident. There are three of them – Heaven, Hell, and Eden, created with a wealth of sensuous detail which reveals Milton as a writer who found deep satisfaction in the essentially science fictional procedure of commenting sidelong on contemporary modes of life by creating alien modes. It's notable, of course, that Heaven is more boring than the other two, and this presumably stems from the old Utopian problem of imaging a static spiritual perfection with a vocabulary which draws much of its force from a world – our own – where struggle, mutability, transitoriness, the passions of the flesh and death itself seem to move us more profoundly than anything else.

The fascinating question of what links Milton with the pastoral mode (and what in turn links the pastoral mode with modern science fiction) might best be approached by creeping up on it, rather than tackling it directly. So let us consider Milton's contemporary, the poet Andrew Marvell, who shared with Milton a nostalgia for our lost innocence, and also the intellectual processes whereby this nostalgia is transformed into the creation of new aspirations – into the creation of what we now call science fiction. The following lines sum up for me the essence of what I imagine Brian Aldiss, or Ursula Le Guin, or Philip Dick, or even (why not?) A.E. Van Vogt, to be driven by:

> **Meanwhile the Mind, from pleasure less,**
> **Withdraws into its happiness:**
> **The Mind, that Ocean where each kind**
> **Does streight its own resemblance find:**
> **Yet it creates, transcending these,**
> **Far other Worlds, and other Seas;**
> **Annihilating all that's made,**
> **To a green Thought in a green Shade.**
>
> ***The Garden – Stanza vi***

That last couplet captures more sharply than any critic has ever done the ambiguity at the heart of much science fiction – the way the gain, the fresh "green" of a new world or a new thought is counterbalanced by the loss, the annihilation of all the multiplicity of the present world in the mind to make way for the new in an ecstasy of nihilism that may result in nothing more substantial than the attractive green shadows of a sunlit garden – a garden that at its richest is itself only a shadow of that original garden to which we can never return. (Even if we deny, as most of us do, that Eden ever really existed, it lingers as the most ample of all the metaphors we have for an excellence of harmonious beauty that we feel ourselves to have lost, perhaps never to regain. This sense of loss seems so profoundly and generally felt – even if only intermittently – by mankind as a whole; and so omnipresent that it is diffused through the whole of our literature, that one wonders if it is not somehow ingrained in our very genes.)

Marvell's lines do not readily admit of so unambiguous a paraphrase, but I have suggested at least one of their possible meanings. The danger to writers that is signified by Marvell's lines is clear enough. Most science fiction that fails, fails precisely because of an impoverished imagination incapable of creating new worlds anything like as interesting as the one the reader lives in.

The Garden is a pastoral poem – a poem that recalls a desired Golden Age, half imaged in the crazy fertility of the garden where the poem is set, and more potently imaged in the withdrawing mind of the poet who is conscious of what all that greenness might mean. It points directly towards the more ambitious pastoral of *Paradise Lost* – especially that of Books V, VII and IX, where the prelapsarian earthly paradise of Eden is created. *Paradise Lost* is more mature than most pastorals in that it recognizes that static perfection cannot last – perhaps there will always be an intruding serpent or a forbidden apple – but it is pastoral nevertheless. Pastoral is a sort of game, a convention whereby all the complex craziness of life is imitated as in a child's drawing, or a simplifying mirror where the unmanageably complex becomes the goldenly (or blackly) simple – where all evil is reduced to a single serpent, or where the ambiguous and mutual cruelties of man and nature are imaged as a woman (whether Persephone or Eve) picking flowers, herself to be plucked by death.

Pastoral need not necessarily draw its images from simple natural or rural life, though it normally does. I suppose its basic tension is always that between the Golden Age, the Utopia where it is always springtime, and mutability and death, where with the changing of the seasons we are offered natural but always moving images of the grass withering and the flower fading. At its strongest it has the compulsiveness of myth, and is capable of amazing sophistication within its apparently simple rules; at its weakest, it is merely silly.[10]

Both sorts of pastoral are relevant to science fiction. Sadly, the merely silly aspect is the most familiar. Science fiction of the 40s and 50s is riddled with pastoral conventions, usually in the form of the rural or small-town utopia in which it is implied that everything will be all right, if we can avoid – in the words of Matthew Arnold which are surely engraved on the heart of Clifford D. Simak – "this strange disease of modern life, /With its sick hurry, its divided aims". Simak is the most notorious offender (if one of the most likeable) along with Ray Bradbury, but their hostility to science and nostalgia for the simple times of the nineteenth century small town is fairly typical of the lower echelons of the genre that calls itself *science* fiction.

On the other hand, the sophisticated variety of pastoral manifests itself in books as good and diverse as James Blish's *A Case of Con-*

10. Further enquiries about pastoral should be directed to the expert, William Empson, whose *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New Directions, 1960) is one of the most vivid and subtle critical works of this century.

science and Brian Aldiss's *Hothouse.* One can say with certainty that both writers are conscious of working within a pastoral convention, and that both are thoroughly aware of its historical dimensions. Indeed pastoral themes run strong and deep in an amazing variety of modern science fiction, from Arthur Clarke's *The City and the Stars,* through Ballard's *The Drowned World* and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* all the way to Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and (much more obviously) George Stewart's *Earth Abides,* which is a pastoral almost transparent in its purity.

After this, the final point about Milton may look a little trivial, but it is also of interest in the history of early science fiction. Milton was an innovator in many things, not least in his early statement of what he took to be the link between wickedness and mechanical ingenuity. We find this expressed when the fallen angels build themselves a palace (called Pandemonium) in Hell. Much emphasis is laid on the skill with which devils can mine ores, work in metals, and construct huge and beautiful buildings – not to mention the installation of modern lighting systems – for all the world like self-sufficient astronauts marooned on a strange planet:

> . . . from the arched roof
> Pendant by suttle Magic many a row
> Of Starry Lamps and blazing Cressets fed
> With *Naphtha* and *Asphaltus* yeilded light
> As from a sky . . .
>
> *Book I*

Mind you, before we nominate Milton as the first Luddite, we should remember what has often been observed of Milton, notably by William Blake – that he seemed to express a certain sympathy for Satan, whether knowingly or unknowingly. It is true that we can detect in the poem a note of genuine admiration for Satan's ability to so splendidly make the best of a bad job. Exiled to the black depths of Hell, in no time at all, with all the dogged courage of a pioneer in the Old West, or of a Puritan artisan in Milton's own age, Satan is furnishing the place with all the comforts of home. Although Adam is rebuked by the angel Raphael for seeking into the meaning of the stars and planets, it is clear that Milton himself is fascinated by the subject, which comes up eight or nine times in the poem, as in:

> . . . . he . . . . windes with ease
> Through the pure marble Air his oblique way
> Amongst innumerable Starrs, that shon
> Starrs distant, but nigh hand seemd other Worlds,

Or other Worlds they seemd, or happy Iles,
Like those *Hesperian* Gardens fam'd of old . . . .

Book III

or as in this precursor of Doc Smith or Van Vogt:

. . . . they with speed
Thir course through thickest Constellations held
Spreading thir bane; the blasted Starrs looked wan,
And Planets, Planet-strook, real Eclips
Then sufferd . . . . .

Book X

or as a final and totally archetypal science fiction image, this, about the great flood:

. . . . all dwellings else
Flood overwhelmd, and them with all thir pomp
Deep under water rould; Sea coverd Sea,
Sea without shoar; and in thir Palaces
Where luxurie late reignd, Sea-monsters whelpd
And stabl'd . . . .

Book XI

10. *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift (1726). *(Discussion omitted).*

11. *Rasselas* (1759) by Dr. Samuel Johnson was published the year after *Candide* by Voltaire, and the two stories have much in common, though fortunately Johnson's tale is free of that rather cheap sarcasm which for the last two hundred years has been mystifyingly supposed to constitute Voltaire's profundity[11]. *Rasselas* is a novella with a great deal of talk and very little action – not much more than a dramatised philosophical essay, in short, and more obviously a precursor of George Bernard Shaw than of anything in science fiction.

11. This is a convenient point at which to observe that Voltaire's *Micromégas*, the tale of two giants from Sirius and Saturn who visit Earth, is not a precursor of science fiction in anything but the mechanical sense. *Micromégas*, which is only a short story anyway, is a satirical squib, written very much in the manner of Baron Munchhausen's tall stories. The giants comment on how small whales are – they need magnifying glasses to see them. Most of the comedy is at this level of sophistication. I suppose it could be argued that Voltaire is some sort of precursor of Kurt Vonnegut Jr. in the ironic mode, but really *Micromégas* is quite opposed to the spirit of science fiction, and its resemblances are accidental.

But *Rasselas* is relevant to the tradition I am proposing in more subtle ways. For one thing, its particular dystopian elements represent a sort of ground swell, a *continuo* on the organ, that rumbles throughout dystopian writing. Most dystopias work by criticising society. *Rasselas,* with a profounder pessimism, is dystopian about Man's ability to be happy, no matter what the circumstances. For Dr. Johnson the matter goes well beyond social forms and customs – it is an intrinsic limitation of humanity. It is usually argued that science fiction is informed throughout by a spirit of optimism, and with reservations I would agree. But the warning Johnsonian note, the cry of the vanity of human wishes, has its place in science fiction, as in all fiction. Science fiction constantly asks the question, how will mankind evolve? It is in some of the answers to that question, notably J.G. Ballard's, that the Johnsonian note or its modern equivalent is characteristically found.

Rasselas tells the story of a Prince of Abyssinia, who lives in a happy, secret valley. All nature's wants are satisfied, or seem to be, within the valley's confines. But Rasselas thinks:

> The birds peck the berries, or the corn, and fly away to the groves, where they sit, in seeming happiness, on the branches, and waste their lives in tuning one unvaried series of sounds. I, likewise, can call the lutanist and the singer, but the sounds, that pleased me yesterday, weary me to-day, and will grow yet more wearisome tomorrow. I can discover within me no power of perception, which is not glutted with its proper pleasure, yet I do not feel myself delighted. Man surely has some latent sense, for which this place affords no gratification; or he has some desires, distinct from sense, which must be satisfied, before he can be happy.
>
> *Chapter 2*

This passage strikes with uncommon perfection exactly the note that has vibrated through so much science fiction. It is the claustrophobic feeling that even a contented life, free from want, is not enough. We need audacity, ambition, greater knowledge. For example, Harry Harrison's wonderfully lively novel *Captive Universe* begins with a situation very similar to that of *Rasselas.* The hero, living in a fertile rural valley, hemmed in on all sides by apparently impenetrable mountains, becomes desperate to escape. The interesting thing is that Harrison probably did not take his idea direct from Samuel Johnson. His immediate and (I assume) conscious sources were two earlier science fiction novels, Robert Heinlein's *Universe* (published in England as the first part of *Orphans of the Sky*) and Brian Aldiss's *Non-Stop.*

This merely reinforces my point, that in *Rasselas* we find one of the earliest appearance of what came, very naturally, to be one of the central themes of science fiction – naturally, because this has always been a genre which regarded curiosity as one of the highest emotions, and regularly and consciously assumes Prometheus to be one of its archetypal hero figures. (Many other examples could also be given. Direct retellings of the *Rasselas* theme are found in *The City and the Stars* by Arthur C. Clarke, and *The Wall Around the World* by Theodore Cogswell. Amongst the literally hundreds of other examples, the following books and stories all regard present happiness as being a partial fraud, and the result of ignorance: *Dark Universe* and *Counterfeit World* by Daniel Galouye, *Wolfbane* by Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth, *Time Out of Joint* by Philip K. Dick, *The Einstein Intersection* by Samuel Delany, and *The Planet Buyer* by Cordwainer Smith. A good pessimistic example is J.G. Ballard's *The Concentration City* where the protagonist is unable to move outside his own world, and his driving curiosity is frustrated. If one had to pick out a single theme which symbolised the obsessions from which science fiction emerges, the "Rasselas" theme would be it.)

Rasselas (along with the earlier *Gulliver's Travels*) also shows that by the eighteenth century it had become natural, when speculating about the condition of mankind, to bring science into it. Science had become a fact of life. Rasselas, for example, is so keen to escape from the Happy Valley that he helps to conduct some research into aeronautics:

> "The labour of rising from the ground," said the artist, "will be great, as we see it in the heavier domestick fowls; but as we mount higher, the earth's attraction, and the body's gravity, will be gradually diminished, till we shall arrive at a region, where the man will float in the air without any tendency to fall; no care will then be necessary but to move forwards, which the gentlest impulse will effect."
>
> *Chapter 6*

This spirit of genuine scientific enquiry, keenly interested in its subject, and eager to define it with the utmost precision, is characteristic of Johnson. But even more characteristic is the consequence of the experiment:

> In a year the wings were finished, and, on a morning appointed, the maker appeared, furnished for flight, on a little promontory: he waved his pinions awhile, to gather air, then leaped from his stand, and in an instant, dropped into the lake. His wings, which were of no use in the

> air, sustained him in the water, and the prince drew him to land, half dead with terrour and vexation.
>
> *Chapter 6*

Later in the story Rasselas meets an astronomer who has become confused in his mind between prediction and causation. He must be one of the most amiable archetypes of that later stereotype, the mad scientist. He is worried about who is going to take over his tasks when he is dead, and the tasks are indeed onerous:

> "I have possessed, for five years, the regulation of weather, and the distribution of seasons: the sun has listened to my dictates, and passed, from tropick to tropick, by my direction; the clouds, at my call have poured their waters, and the Nile has overflowed at my command; . . . the winds alone, of all the elemental powers, have, hitherto, refused my authority, and multitudes have perished by equinoctial tempests, which I found myself unable to prohibit or restrain. I have administered this great office with exact justice, and made, to the different nations of the earth, an impartial dividend of rain and sunshine. What must have been the misery of half the globe, if I had limited the clouds to particular regions, or confined the sun to either side of the equator!"
>
> *Chapter 41*

Dr. Johnson was the first great hack writer. He refused patronage from the great, and supported himself by freelance journalism, editing magazines, the writing of a dictionary – anything that came along. He wrote *Rasselas* in one week, in order to find the money to pay for his mother's funeral. It is to be hoped that Dr. Johnson is properly revered by the science fiction professionals of today, as the first great writer not to sneer at Grub Street.

12. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1798). *Discussion omitted.*

13. *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley (1818). *Discussion omitted.*

14. By the middle of the nineteenth century, we can no longer speak properly of "precursors" of science fiction, or of "proto science fiction". The industrial revolution has come along, and with it, science fiction proper in a form recognizably similar to that it has today. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published in 1818; in the 1830s Nathaniel Hawthorne was writing about robots, and Edgar Allan Poe about hypnosis, lost worlds in the Antarctic, and various other science fictional

matters. By 1850 the young Jules Verne was 22 years old, and wide-eyed with wonder at the world of technology that he was, a little later, to make so much his own province.

But if science fiction had become a separate genre, as we can see by hindsight, the separation was not total, as it is not today, and, we must hope, never will be. Several of the "classical" or "mainstream" writers of fiction wrote works that still defy easy categorization – works that have certainly been strongly influential on twentieth century science fiction writers, and which manifest a spirit that is clearly *not* traditionally "realistic", though not "science fictional" in any cut-and-dried way either.

Herman Melville was one of these men. He did write one pure science fiction story, *The Bell-Tower* – a highly-wrought symbolic piece about a craftsman murdered by his own automaton-creation. (The symbolic elaboration, and the slight preciousness that accompanies it, point directly forward to such modern science fiction writers as Roger Zelazny and S.R. Delany.) But Melville's greatest achievement, and the one most relevant to the theme I am pursuing, is *Moby Dick* (1851).

Moby Dick is, of course, a realistic novel in that its world is created throughout with a robust solidity, and it contains nothing – not even the great white whale – that could not exist in the world as we know it[12]. But it would be quite untrue to our experience of the novel to call it "realistic"; that word comes nowhere near defining its essential quality. It has often been called an allegory, but the rather mechanical quality suggested by that word won't do either. The characters and objects in an allegory have a one-to-one relationship with abstract concepts, but if we read *Moby Dick* by saying that Ahab equals *Obsession,* Moby Dick equals *Destructive Nature,* or even Moby Dick equals *God,* we will have missed the point.

The novel obviously deals with a variety of metaphysical questions, and dramatises them, but it is not a metaphysical novel in that it presents any coherent scheme of belief or even of speculation. Its metaphysics are ambiguous and open-ended.

We cannot call *Moby Dick* science fiction, either, in any unequivocal sense. The imaginary world of the novel bears too close a re-

12. The whale Moby Dick appears to be too big for a sperm whale, a species now known to be quite a bit smaller than the blue whale, though probably more dangerous. But Moby Dick is *not* an exaggerated monster, and his size is consonant with those facts available to Melville.

semblance to the real world – it speculates not about the way things might be, but about the way things are. Yet the *spirit* of *Moby Dick* is very close to the spirit that permeates much science fiction.

This is a difficult quality to pin down. The spirit I mean is not a single quality, but a tension between two qualities – the old terms "classical" and "romantic" are inadequate, but they point in the right direction. In *Moby Dick*, exactly as in science fiction, we find a tension between the writer's respect for and understanding of orderly scientific thought (the classical), and his love for the phenomena which do not submit to this order (the romantic). Melville is a writer whose creation takes equal account of the calms and the turbulence of experience.

Melville's "classical" habit of mind is shown in the scientific procedure of the narrative. He scrupulously sets his story in a world where science is meaningful. It is not a fantasy world. The novel begins with several thousand words of whale lore, quotes from explorers, scientists, geographers and chroniclers of the past. Melville wants us to know everything about whales there is to know. They are classified and explained. The actual procedures of whaling, too, are given with extraordinary precision – the flensing or cutting up of the whale is written as meticulously as a chapter in a text book of surgery. Verisimilitude, even of a sometimes plodding variety, is the aim throughout. But that is only half the story.

The other, "romantic" aspect of the story is found in the intellectual exhilaration that pervades it. It seems to stem from the writer's belief that "there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy". We see in Melville a remarkable openness to the potential *strangeness* of experience, and very often, I think, an actual yearning towards it. "Strangeness" is a vague word. It refers to something that Melville himself does not articulate with precision; it emerges through metaphor, and the very tone of his descriptions.

Here is a passage that gives us a moment of calm during a very violent description of whale slaughter on a massive scale:

> . . . these smaller whales . . . evinced a wondrous fearlessness and confidence, or else a still becharmed panic which it was impossible not to marvel at. Like household dogs they came snuffing round us, right up to our gunwales, and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them . . .
>
> But far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world met our eyes as we gazed over the side. For suspended in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers

> of the whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers. The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth exceedingly transparent; and as human infants while suckling will calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast, as if leading two different lives at the time; and while yet drawing mortal nourishment, be still spritually feasting upon some unearthly reminiscence; – even so did the young of these whales seem looking up towards us, but not at us, as if we were but a bit of Gulf-weed in their new-born sight. Floating on their sides, the mothers also seemed quietly eyeing us.
>
> *Chapter 87 – "The Grand Armada"*

It is difficult to demonstrate a case about a complete novel with only one illustration, but that passage shows as well as anything could the classical and romantic aspects of Melville's art in harmony – combined in an imagery which is scientific in its precision, and yet implies feelings beyond those that science is competent to deal with. The passage really needs a context. It is among the thrashing bodies of murdered leviathans, a grisly blend of blood, pain, and heroism, that the calm, sightless gaze of the infant whales is met by the narrator, who sees a totally alien world beneath the surface that is Eden-like and mysterious in its serenity.

Melville's respect for order, and the huge pleasure he gets from an intellectual understanding of technological and natural processes throughout *Moby Dick* is allied with a sense of satisfaction, I think, that human understanding is as yet so limited – that mysteries remain to challenge us and lure us on. It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this feeling to modern science fiction generally.

The romantic aspect of this feeling is essential to it, but if uncontrolled it leads readily to the cul-de-sac that Dr. Johnson recognized in *Rasselas,* in the passage where Imlac criticises the astronomer whom we met in the previous section:

> . . . the mind, in weariness or leisure, recurs constantly to the favourite conception, and feasts on the luscious falsehood, whenever she is offended by the bitterness of truth. By degrees, the reign of fancy is confirmed; she grows first imperious and in time despotick. Then fictions begin to operate as realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind, and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish.
>
> *Chapter 44*

The unreality of a certain kind of romantic excess that Johnson is talking about here (a full generation before the romantic movement got under way, interestingly enough) is a commonplace in science fiction today, where "dreams of rapture or of anguish" regularly appear unrestrained. Everybody will have his own examples. My

own would include Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth,* or much of Ray Bradbury and (in a different way) A.E. Van Vogt.

Moby Dick is a direct and obvious precursor of only a few modern science fiction stories. For example, Philip José Farmer's *The Wind Whales of Ishmael* and Roger Zelazny's splendid *The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth.* But in the extended sense in which I take him to be archetypal, he looms, whether consciously or not, behind much that is most interesting in science fiction today, from Frank Herbert's *Dune* to Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris.*

15. As this list of works which make up a "tradition" of proto science fiction draws to its close, I nominate its most controversial item – this time not a single work, but a body of work. I am speaking of the novels of Charles Dickens, especially those written at the height of his powers, in the 1850s. Since Dickens transparently appears to belong to the so-called mainstream of realistic fiction, his inclusion here might seem like perversity.

I want to return to an earlier point, that literature is a continuum. There is no single point between realistic fiction and science fiction where we can confidently draw a boundary line, and Dickens illustrates this difficulty. If all the worlds of fiction are imaginary, but some more closely resemble the real world than others, where are we to put Dickens on the spectrum? The objects of the real world that appear in Dickens' novels are selected with such a bizarre emphasis, the imagery with which he creates people and places bears so many symbolic connotations (almost as the imagery in poetry does), that we cannot say with any confidence at all that Dickens' worlds are "real", and leave it at that. The creatively distorting lens of Dickens' art transforms the real London of the nineteenth century into a symbolic, sardonic world of the imagination. The real world is not abolished, however: it is perhaps more intensely present in this projection than it ever could have been with the techniques of photographic realism.

It would take too long to show how these procedures are consistent to the extent that they permeate entire novels – in some cases they do not. But we can see them in action by simply recalling some of their celebrated focal points: think, for example, of Clennam's mother's house in *Little Dorrit,* and the apparent malignity with which it moves and creaks at points throughout the novel, before its climactic and death-dealing collapse; remember the all-pervading fog of *Bleak House,* and the way it so diffuses the airless Court of Chancery that the fog and the suffocating procedures of the law

seem to become manifestations of the same natural force, inimical to life. These court rooms, incidentally, precisely point the way to Kafka's novel, *The Trial.* Remember, too, the dust heaps of *Our Mutual Friend* – real, soft, dirty dust heaps, but acting also as images of the collected detritus that is seen as clogging up the workings of an entire world.

In Dickens, the significant landscape (which we first noted way back in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*) has its apotheosis. His novel *Hard Times* offers many concise examples of the way in which the whole of an alienated society is imaged in people, places and things:

> It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of buildings full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness.
>
> *Chapter 5*

That was Coketown. Here is a typical inhabitant, the child, Bitzer:

> His cold lashes would hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes which, by bringing them into immediate contrast with something paler than themselves, expressed their form. His short-cropped hair might have been a mere continuation of the sandy freckles on his forehead and face. His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white.
>
> *Chapter 2*

And here, for comparison, is another passage:

> The door, meagrely, opened and he saw within the apartment a fragmented and misaligned shrinking figure, a girl who cringed and slunk away and yet held onto the door, as if for physical support. Fear made her seem ill; it distorted her body lines, made her appear as if someone had broken her and then, with malice, patched her together badly. Her eyes, enormous, glazed over fixedly as she attempted to smile.

There is no mistaking the kinship between the second and third passage above. The second has the more concentrated poetic force, but both writers, creating a kind of inhumanity in the very appearance of

their characters, are undeniably using language – highly charged with feeling – to a very similar end, and with a similar use of imagery. Both are preoccupied by the less-than-human masquerading as the human, although the Dickens character is only metaphorically an android, whereas the character in the third passage, from Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* is literally an android, though paradoxically, described with more sympathy than Bitzer.

A reader coming across any of the three passages above, in the context of a story published as science fiction, would be hardly likely to say "This won't do – the author is playing by the wrong rules". There is no important respect in which they are not science fiction.

The influence of Dickens, whether direct or filtered through intermediate writers such as Wells (who belongs to the Dickensian tradition) is very evident in science fiction. If we try to make sense of science fiction by positing the mechanical little tradition that we find in Bailey's or Moskowitz's books, we will be in trouble with a novel like Kornbluth and Pohl's *The Space Merchants,* where the affinity with Dickens is very much stronger than any affinity it may have with, say, the works of Jules Verne. Not all satire – and *The Space Merchants* is satire – is in the Swiftian mode of *Gulliver's Travels.* The phenomenon of Philip K. Dick, without doubt one of the most compelling science fiction writers working today, is even more obviously Dickensian in its origins. The use of slightly down-trodden everyday characters as protagonists, the grotesque use of landscape and cityscape, the emotional blurring between the animate and the inanimate, so that some objects seem imbued with life, and some characters seem machine-like, the quick slides from the sardonic to the sentimental, the baroque metaphors, the acid, loving wit – both writers have these qualities to an amazing degree of similarity. Yet both are unmistakeably themselves.

Our tradition must include Dickens, not just as a peripheral phenomenon, but as a central fact. That is why I have used the moderately extensive quotations – to demonstrate in the clearest way that this is so, for the two passages of Dickens will surely strike a responsive chord in the heart of any regular reader of science fiction. They should inspire him, I think, with *deja vu* – 'I have been here before'.

Of course, it could be argued, and I would agree, that generally speaking Dickens' plots are not those we expect from science fiction. However, some of the sub-plots most definitely *are.* The most perfect example is the death of Krook in *Bleak House,* as unwittingly observed by Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy:

"Why, Tony, what on earth is going on in this house tonight? Is there a chimney on fire?"

"Chimney on fire!"

"Ah!" returns Mr. Guppy. "See how the soot's falling. See here, on my arm! See again, on the table here! Confound the stuff, it won't blow off – smears, like black fat!"

And two pages later:

Mr. Guppy sitting on the window-sill, nodding his head and balancing all these possibilities in his mind, continues thoughtfully to tap it, and clasp it, and measure it with his hand, until he hastily draws his hand away.

"What, in the Devil's name," he says, "is this! Look at my fingers!"

A thick, yellow liquor defiles them, which is offensive to the touch and sight, and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it that makes them both shudder.

"What have you been doing here? What have you been pouring out of the window?"

. "I pouring out of the window! Nothing, I swear! Never, since I have been here!" cries the lodger.

And yet look here – and look here! When he brings the candle, here, from the corner of the window-sill, it slowly drips, and creeps away down the bricks; here, lies in a little thick nauseous pool.

"This is a horrible house," says Mr. Guppy, shutting down the window. "Give me some water . . . "

The source of all this oil in the air, and trickling down the walls, is discovered some little while later, and it is indeed horrible; the remains of Krook are discovered – nothing but human grease and ashes – his own corrupt body has spontaneously burst into flame and deliquesced:[13]

. . . it is the same death eternally – inborn, inbred, engendred in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only – Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died.

Chapter 32

13. Naturally enough, this scene was much criticised at the time as being in the worst possible taste, and also as utterly fantastic. Dickens leaped to the defence, and produced medical testimony to show that there *were* cases on record of corrupt and dirty bodies spontaneously bursting into flames and melting away. This is difficult to believe, though clearly Dickens did believe it. The important thing is that the episode is presented factually, in the belief that it could happen. It is by no means written in the spirit of fantasy, for all its Gothic quality.

The scene is truly memorable of course, but not only as a *pièce de resistance* of Gothic horror. Krook's death, and the manner of it, is functional – it is not there to create a pleasurable little *frisson* of disgust in the reader. It is, in fact, a central symbol in the novel of the corruption imaged elsewhere as implicit in the decayed legal procedures of the Court of Chancery. It is a truly science fictional image that Dickens brings to bear on what horrifies him about the real London that he lived in.

It has often been observed that this Dickensian procedure, the production of vivid metaphors which simultaneously create a world and the moral perspective in which we view it, is the procedure of poetry. If I have used the word "metaphor" a good deal in outlining the tradition of proto science fiction, it is because it *is* a poetic tradition. So much is platitude – at least for the period up to and including Dickens – indeed, of the fifteen items I have nominated for the tradition, seven are poetry in the literal sense. But has it ever been observed that science fiction continues the poetic aspects of this tradition? Science fiction is a poetic mode in just this sense – it works like poetry through the juxtaposition of images which are metaphors for our being and our aspirations – and so we find the amazing but pleasing spectacle of a true if minor poetry emerging from the pulp magazines.

Well, there it is. The basic point is not easy to grasp at first, and it does require, I think, the detailed substantiation I have given it. But now that I have presented the evidence, can there be any doubt left that there *is* a literary tradition, so old and so substantial that it must loom very large in any account of what has happened since men began writing books, which is outside the tradition of "realistic" fiction with which the "mainstream" is usually identified. It is not a linear tradition of course, and clearly has much variety within it, and does not exist as a totally separate entity from the rest of literature. As an example of the non-linear nature of the tradition, it would be obviously silly to argue that Plato's *Republic* led on in any inexorable way to, say, *The Voiage and Travaile of Sir Iohn Maundevile, Kt.* The nature of literary traditions and influences is not as simple as that. On the other hand, one could argue quite cogently that both books have a mutual, if remote descendant in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine,* and in that sense they are a part of the same network.

The tradition exists then, and science fiction, as I hope my examples have made clear (because I have in every case attempted to locate science fictional descendants of the original texts) is very much a part of it. It is a very important tradition – so much so that one logical response to it might be to abandon the more conventional notions of the literary mainstream, and to substitute the tradition I have outlined, with its genuine continuity over the centuries, as the *true* mainstream.[14]

This central point, with its intimations of critical euphoria, must not be misunderstood. I am not claiming a false dignity for science fiction by arguing that it is the final justification, the ultimate revelation towards which the whole stream of literature has unswervingly flowed for 4,000 years. Science fiction, though it *does* belong to the tradition I have outlined, is only a small part of it, and has as yet produced no books even comparable in importance with many of those I have nominated. We must hope that one day it will; it is a genre with ample vitality, and if it has seldom achieved greatness, it is quite sufficiently jaunty to be by no means anti-climactic in the tradition I have outlined.

As to this tradition – there may be suspicions in certain quarters that after I had combed the bibliographies for months I could only come up with fifteen items, an arbitrary and skimpy selection, it could be argued. In fact the tradition as presented had to be highly selective, for reasons of brevity. This was the short list. I ask you to consider some of the failed candidates, any one of which could be readily defended as being in one respect or another very much a part of the same tradition:

Lysistrata by Aristophanes; *The Book of Revelations* attributed to St. John; *The Satyricon* by Petronius; *Gargantua and Pantagruel* by Rabelais; *The Morte D'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory; *Utopia* by Sir Thomas More; *The Faerie Queen* by Edmund Spenser; *Dr. Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe; *The New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon; *The Alchemist* by Ben Jonson; *The Anatomie of the Worlde* by John Donne; *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan; *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe; *The Dunciad* by Alexander Pope;

14. When making this point in lectures I had supposed that the thought was original with me, and I cherished it accordingly. I seem to have been suffering from premature *hubris*. I have since learned that John W. Campbell (who else?) said that the so-called mainstream of literature was "an eddy within the main current of SF".

America, A Prophecy by William Blake; *MS. Found in a Bottle, Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and various other tales by Edgar Allan Poe; *Alice Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll; *The Haunted and the Haunters* by Bulwer Lytton; *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy; *News from Nowhere* by William Morris; *Erewhon* by Samuel Butler; *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson; *Moxon's Master, The Damned Thing,* and other tales by Ambrose Bierce; *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain; *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad.

This subsidiary list, which ends arbitrarily in 1900 because thereafter the choice is too wide, shows clearly enough that the creation of imaginary worlds, for whatever reason, has a long and spectacular history. And imaginary worlds, to simplify a little, are what science fiction is all about.

One last point. In all of the above my position has been, inevitably, that of an observer standing at the science fiction end of the continuum between science fiction and realistic writing. I take it as a truism however, that most "realistic" writers are aware of how philosophically elusive a concept "reality" is. The novelist Joyce Carol Oates writes to me:

> I have a new novel coming out called *Wonderland* (Gollancz) which was taken, and probably can be taken, as naturalistic fiction back in the U.S., but which is of course like all fiction, speculative and fantastic.

The whole notion of constructing or locating literary traditions, particularly in terms of genre, must always be subject to the modifications caused by the impossibility of defining the genres, as Professor Oates' letter implies. We are left with elusive and deceptive likenesses, confused always by differences either spurious or essential. The tradition outlined above has played safe, on the whole, by cowering close to the "imaginary" end of the spectrum, with only the one cautious sortie out as far as Dickens, who lives somewhere in the middle of the debatable lands.

Perhaps a really adequate overview of science fiction should pay a much greater attention to naturalistic literature also. But ultimately the labels don't matter. Many science fiction writers actively loathe the words "science fiction" appearing on their book covers – they resent a pigeon-holing which tends to result in critical indifference from the world of letters. If the world of science fiction were more generally realized as belonging to an ancient and honourable tradition, this might no longer be so.

We are happy to introduce Poul Anderson as the sixth science fiction writer to appear in this series. (The other five have been John Brunner, James Blish, A.E. van Vogt, Ursula Le Guin and L. Sprague de Camp.) Up to now, the series has been called The Development of a Science Fiction Writer. *Several writers, James Blish and Poul Anderson among them, have expressed a distaste for the autobiographical approach. Others have said they are more interested in writing about where they are at today, rather than where they were years ago. We hope that the new title for the series will allow for a greater variety of approach, and that each future contributor will choose to talk about those aspects of science fiction that most interest him or her, without any editorial lines of demarcation laid down by us. What they all have in common, is that science fiction is what they profess. Hence the series is now:*

the profession of science fiction: vi: entertainment, instruction or both?

Poul Anderson

It is an unexpected honor to be asked to contribute to this series. If an occasional philosophical disagreement with the leaders of the Science Fiction Foundation gets expressed in what follows, believe me, it is purely philosophical and in no way indicates lack of appreciation or friendliness.

Peter Nicholls suggested an autobiographical or autoanalytical essay. But I'm afraid that won't work for me. The trouble with autobiography is that all the most interesting and significant events in a life – or at least their subjective impacts – are nobody else's business. Besides, I'm not given to studying my own personality, which strikes me as a pretty uncomplicated one anyway. There's a whole universe to explore out yonder, and the time in which this may be done is very short.

Nor does it seem wise for me to discuss my work in detail. The risk of foolishness is far too great. As I have remarked elsewhere, a good wine needs no bush and a bad one is better off without. A story should speak for itself. The reader may find a guidebook useful when dealing with a James Joyce, but science fiction doesn't include anyone that subtle.

Still, it may amuse you to have a few glimpses from this side of the fence.

In my opinion, the artist's first duty is to entertain. That doesn't imply he must furnish mindless diversion. To many people, the latter is *not* entertaining, while Sophocles, van Gogh, Beethoven's last quartets, or the newest revelations of science are. By "entertaining" I mean "arousing and holding the interest." The public has no obligation whatsoever toward the artist: it's up to him to make his product attractive. As Robert Heinlein says, we writers compete for the reader's beer money. That is, he won't cut back on the necessities in order to buy our books, but if he likes us enough, he will skip an occasional drink. This observation is not philistine. It simply states a fact which, in the long run, all the foundation grants and tax-supported sinecures in the world cannot evade.

Science fiction is especially suited to offer two particular kinds of entertainment. (By no manner of means does this suggest that only sf can offer them, or that they are the only kinds which sf can offer.) One is romance, glamour, wonders, beauties, and, yes, horrors beyond this increasingly constricted and cluttered existence of ours. The other is the challenge of ideas, the stimulus to thought; some individuals actually do enjoy thinking. These two kinds are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the best sf joins them indissolubly.

As a single arbitrary example, let me cite *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin. Along with much else, it shows that the far-faring romance may include elements of tragedy, and that the thought may include psychology and philosophy as well as scientific-technological speculation. It is at this ideal that I, with varying degrees of success, aim most of my work within the field.

Most, not all. We have further possibilities, which from time to time I investigate. They range from board farce or slam-bang adventure to dark and involuted miniatures like *Journeys End.* To me, there is no such thing as an inherently bad literary form. Even porno-

graphy has its cases of high art, especially in the Orient. What matters is what the artist does with his materials. So I never put down a colleague because he happens to operate differently from me. Rather, I wish I had the insight into the human soul, the ability to evoke it, of a Karel Capek – who, frankly, in this regard stands head, shoulders, waist, and ankles above everybody now labelled "science fiction writer," from Kurt Vonnegut (though he disowns the name) and Stanislaw Lem on down.

Thus, while respecting the efforts of my fellows, and sometimes trying to emulate them – if only for exercise – I have become reconciled to the fact that Shakespeare himself doesn't speak everybody's language, and probably the one I speak best is the traditional dialect of sf, namely a blend of romanticism and rationalism.

Hence I was quite surprised recently when a correspondent mentioned that in a textbook on the subject, the frequency of my name is second only to that of Heinlein. It must be a fluke. Heinlein is too fundamental to be ignored even by English departments. But I honestly doubt I do the sort of thing which interests academic types, unless perhaps as an awful example.

While of course every writer's fans come from every walk of life, mine tend to be associated with science, engineering, politics, diplomacy, industry, finance, medicine, the military – in brief, people whom I look on as doing the work of the world. Or who are engaged with what the monkey man in Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* calls "little thinks," as opposed to the "big thinks" about God, destiny, Angst, masturbation, and so on.

My *litterateur* acquaintances will not believe that the foregoing isn't sarcastic. But it isn't! Life would be one long bore if we humans weren't the magnificent potpourri which we are. They get invited to collegiate conferences; I get invited to laboratories; everybody's happy. Meanwhile, the reader has a wide variety of stories from which to choose.

Speaking for a moment as a reader, I must admit that the *New Worlds* kind of story turns me off. I'll take my Kafka and Cheever straight, if you please. But, not being a professional critic, I don't rank my personal tastes among the eternal verities. The *New Worlds* kind of story turns me off, that's all, and the fault may well be my own. The sole judge is time. Come back in a hundred years and

see what contemporary sf writers have endured. My guess, admittedly just a guess, is Theodore Sturgeon. Period.

The different types do cross-fertilize, and this is crucial to the continued development of the whole field. Thus today's academically oriented young writers could not employ such symbols as spacecraft, robots, automation, telepathy, mind conditioning, time travel, or what have you, if earlier "hard science" (more often, "hard pseudoscience") narrators had not developed these concepts for them. But, by introducing comparatively modern literary techniques, the young writers have also revitalized sf for us old hands. To give a personal instance, I have publicly admitted that my own well-received *Goat Song* owes much to Harlan Ellison's *I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream.* Now how much does Harlan's story owe to my *Sam Hall* of twenty-odd years ago? It isn't worthwhile keeping accounts; it's better to keep going a lively interchange.

Of course, not every young writer is academically orthodox. Larry Niven is an obvious case of one who is not. And few of them are so terribly young any more. Most have been around for at least a decade. If the cyclical pattern of the past thirty or forty years continues, sf is about due for a new influx of new talent, doing things totally different from what has gone before. I sincerely hope this will come to pass.

While eager to learn from others, I'll write nothing I don't feel like writing. Life is too short to do anything else, or to pay attention to any but an extremely small number of critics.

Who are they? Not all of them publish; some comment privately. What they share is something to tell me.

If a writer has a professional conscience, he's always looking for ways to improve. This includes getting feedback from readers. But what readers? Let's face it, the average one is casual; he buys nothing except an evening's distraction from his daily cares. So the writer must turn to the minority who give him a close reading, in short, critics.

What critics, though?

I think that to be useful to a given writer, a critic must be *simpático* with him: must, without being slavish, feel he's doing a worthwhile job. Otherwise, why should either party bother? When my wife warns me I'm overworking the ironic conclusion to stories, it causes me to think long and hard. But when some faaaaan complains about use of

the passive voice, to me this shows that the person doesn't understand what it's for.

None of the half-dozen commentators who have significantly helped me was ever a full-time critic (unless we put a couple of editors under that heading). In spite of having sometimes appeared in academic areas, always courteously treated, I doubt if I have much to say to academe, or it to me. And this is perfectly all right. It would be pleasant to appeal to everybody; but since that is impossible, I'll cheerfully settle for those classes already mentioned.

What, then, can I give them?

Old-fashioned story-telling. Exotic settings, characters, and events. Exploration of possibilities within this endlessly marvellous cosmos which we are briefly privileged to inhabit. Exploration of closer-to-home human possibilities, for good or ill. It would be ridiculous to claim that these functions are the be-all and end-all of sf, let alone literature as a whole – as ridiculous as it is to claim that the total purpose of literature is the sensitive analysis of personality. However, I believe they are legitimate functions. Enough people agree, to the tune of their beer money, to keep this household going.

In conclusion, we might raise the subject of ideational content. Like Heinlein, I have been labelled a hardshell conservative. Though flattered to be put in that company, I must point out that the truth, for both of us, is rather more complicated.

First we have the elementary but often overlooked fact that fictional characters are usually not versions of the author. Robert Louis Stevenson and Long John Silver were quite different men. Likewise, members of a society unlike our own will think and act unlike us. Whether a protagonist of mine be a pirate or a pacifist, my desire is to report on him, not moralize about him. Apart from adapting a few real incidents to story purposes, I have never written autobiography or, for that matter, biography of any individual known to me.

Yet inevitably we all speak from our distinct philosophical platforms. The closer a tale approaches the here-and-now, the more obviously true this becomes of its author. If you study the entire body of his work, not just isolated items which may be atypical, no doubt you can identify certain motifs as recurrent, even basic. Is conservatism one of mine?

Well, each of us is a conservative, in the sense that each of us has

things he or she wants to conserve. The question is what they are. For example, some persons want to keep and, indeed, make dominant a particular form of religion, while others consider atheism an advance from which it is important that humanity not backslide.

This is not the place to recount my painful odyssey away from twentieth-century liberalism. Suffice it to say that over a period of decades, fact and logic drove me to the conclusion that Marxism is among the most grotesque frauds ever perpetrated upon mankind, and Communism the central monstrosity of our era: Nazism (National *Socialism*, remember?) was only a lunatic-fringe offshoot of it. The conviction has not prevented me from having good friends on the other side, including Soviet citizens. Rather, to the extent that we can establish relationships across ideologies, we undermine the damned things.

(But don't I myself promulgate an ideology? No. I have an emotional preference for individual freedom, and an intellectual suspicion that the eighteenth-century British-American idea of government by contract is so profoundly revolutionary that a thousand years would scarcely serve to exhaust its potentialities, and that it might conceivably move us onto an entire new level of social evolution. However, neither the attitude nor the thought is ideological, in the sense of claiming to be a revealed truth which must be forced upon men whether they want it or not).

In any event, having a normal amount of concern for what sort of world our children are to inherit, whenever opportunity offers I do snipe at evil or at stupidity, which latter can have effects just as disastrous. The sniping is incidental to stories. As said, readers want to be entertained, not preached at, and they are entitled to what they have paid for. Nevertheless, it is heartening how many of them say, "Yes, I enjoyed the yarn, and I got the message too." They far outnumber those who deplore me as a dreadful reactionary: especially the younger ones do.

Oh, I have no illusions of influence. The odds are large that we will go down the gullet of the almighty state, and not emerge for centuries to come: perhaps never, if the state uses its total power with the witlessness which has hitherto characterized it. But liberty has not yet altogether perished, and might yet be saved: history records equally improbable occurrences, every now and then. I can do

no more than wage a little guerrilla warfare on its behalf, but that much I will do as long as the gods allow.

Meanwhile, we in the West are not badly off in our private lives. Let's enjoy that while it lasts. This attitude is of course far easier to take for myself than for my daughter and prospective grandchildren. Yet it strikes me as the only sane one.

To hell alike with fatuous optimism and fashionable despair. Given guts and luck, we may still prevail: and win or lose, the effort is infinitely worth making. I plan to keep on saying so. If the artist's first duty is to entertain, his last duty is to show reality the way he sees it.

Professor David Ketterer of the Sir George Williams University in Montreal is the author of a book, New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature, *due to be brought out by Doubleday Anchor at about the same time that this article appears. By a happy coincidence,* Rogue Moon *has just been re-issued as a paperback in England by Arrow Books after having been out of print for many years.*
(192pp, £0.35, ISBN 0 09 907540 7).

rite de passage
a reading of Rogue Moon

David Ketterer

Rogue Moon by Algis Budrys is an enigmatic work – at least as enigmatic as the mysterious formation discovered on the moon which provides the catalyst for his plot. It is not even known whether the formation is "somehow natural or artificial" (p.87).[1] One thing is known, however, the formation kills anybody who attempts to make his way through it. In this respect, the formation is similar to the matter transmitter, designed by Dr. Hawks, which creates human duplicates but at a price – the original is utterly destroyed. This transmitter is used

to beam duplicate personnel to a resolving station on the moon. There is also a third "death machine" in the book in the shape of Claire Pack, the archetypical bitch, who will "chew you up and spit you out" (p.21). Her chuckle resembles 'a silvery ladder of sound" (p.32), thereby recalling the "clouds of silver" (p.26) which account, in part, for the appearance of the formation on the moon. Later, while thinking about Latourette, his one-time chief assistant, who has cancer, Hawks considers the possibility of a matter transmitter which could duplicate a diseased man minus the disease in the manner of "a camera that could intelligently rearrange the grains of silver on the film" (p.82). It would seem that the word silver serves to equate the three death machines.

The reader, then, is confronted with a maze of mirror images. His journey through the book of nine intricately structured chapters is equivalent to the psychedelic journey made by Hawks and the daredevil Barker who finally pass through the formation on the moon in "nine minutes, forty-two seconds" (p.165) – presumably, in both cases, a process of gestation is completed. In a passage (and the pun here is intentional) where Barker explains the moon structure, an equation with the book itself is strongly implied:

> "There's – I don't know exactly what you call it, but there's a pattern to life . . . ought to be a pattern, anyhow: a beginning, a middle, and an end. Chapters, or something I mean, there's got to be a pattern, or how could you control things?" (p.136)

The relationship between the lunar formation, Claire and the transmitter is a means of making the formation symbolic of the novel's major concerns – death, love and birth – concerns which are suggested by these three elements. It would seem that the reader, like the fictional protagonists, must solve a kind of initiating intelligence test or, more revealingly, undergo a *rite de passage*, if he is not, in some sense, to die. Only in the event that a person achieve the kind of expanded consciousness that comes through genuine communication with another – as in a mature love relationship – will a solution pre-

1. All parenthetical references to *Rogue Moon* may be located in the original Gold Medal Book publication (Greenwich, Conn., 1960).

sent itself. Hence the emphasis in the story on the immature relationship between Barker, the suicidal maniac, and Claire, *la belle dame sans merci*, on the one hand, and that between the driving cerebral Hawks and the motherly Elizabeth Cummings on the other.

It is posited that mental growth, expanded consciousness, is the only form of growth possible within a universe where everything physical is dying. Mental growth is the mainspring of human evolution. Physical death would not be important if something is continually added to the sum of knowledge. Only mentally is the man of today the child of yesterday. As in the matter transmitter, the atoms composing his physical being will have changed radically through a process of death and renewal. If the conquest of space can be equated with that moment in the history of evolution where man's antecedents left the sea, then existence on the moon will require an analogous evolutionary spurt. Man must overcome death, for if his mind does not grow rapidly in response to the new environment, then, like everything else in the universe, his mind is dying. The duplicate personnel on the Moon who have not progressed through the formation are "zombies," "They're the living dead . . . " (p.172).

The evolutionary imperative is evident from the various beach scenes in the book. Barker's house, accessible only at a certain risk, is situated amongst coast-line cliffs. Hawks and Elizabeth communicate most effectively while "they walked together down the beach" (p.155). When Barker is first introduced he is swimming and looks like "a vaguely man-shaped, flesh-coloured creature thrashing from one end of the pool to the other" (p.18). Moving in a space suit "feels like swimming" (p.52). From inside, the moon station appears to be "at the bottom of a sea" (p.158). Barker refers to the formation as "the hostile shore" (p.157). On an earlier occasion, in order to check for any substantial divergence between the original Barker's mind and the duplicate Barker (because accidents do happen and with every duplication, there is a certain seepage or variation of the basic data), Hawks asks the new Barker the colour of his first school book. Barker does recall the colour as well as a story "about three goldfish who climbed out of their bowl onto a bookcase and then, dived back into it" (p.100). But the evolutionary point is made most directly by this statement concerning the in-progress chart detailing the safe route through the formation and the places where previous explorers have died:

> [Hawks'] fingertip moved along the uncertain blue line, twisting between the shaded black areas, each marked by its instruction and relative time bearing, each bordered by its drift of red X's, as if the chart represented a diagram of a prehistoric beach, where one stumbling organism had marked its laboured trail upon the littered sand between the long rows of dying kelp and other flotsam which now lay stranded under the lowering sky(p.138).

It is clear from this simile that the formation symbolizes the accelerated evolutionary test which must be passed if death is to be surmounted. As in the transmitter, "A man is a phoenix, who must be reborn from his own ashes, for there is no other like him in the universe" (p.71).

Given this Darwinian situation, where presumably only the fittest survive, Hawks recognises the need for a survivor-type to negotiate the perils of the "death machine." Thus far, by creating two duplicates from one original, beaming one up to the moon, keeping the other in the laboratory deprived of all sensual stimulation and relying on a tenuous telepathic link between the two doubles, the chart of safe moves has been painstakingly constructed from the report of the laboratory double. Unfortunately, the laboratory double's experience of the lunar double's death has resulted in madness. What is required is a mind that "will feel the pain, the shock, the as yet totally indescribable anguish of the end of its world" (p.95) and not go insane. Such a man might, then, be repeatedly duplicated and make repeated forays within the formation, benefitting each time from his accumulated knowledge. Barker, who sees himself as a "whole man" (pp.28,55) in spite of his missing leg, fits the bill.

All the talk in the book about competition and conflict makes sense in relation to the survival of the fittest ethic. Two interesting ambiguities intrude into the text here. First of all, what kind of competition is of primary importance – is it a matter of sensitivity, intelligence or brawn? Secondly, depending upon the kind of competition, it is not by any means inevitable that the winner will be particularly likeable. Certainly Hawks, Barker, Claire and Connington, Director of Personnel for Continental Electronics (which organisation provides the resources for the transmitter), do not come across as admirable human beings. Connington (note the first syllable of his name), because of his ability to manipulate people, sees himself as the control-

ling figure. He does eventually win Claire and drops by in order to let Hawks know that he "is the winner of the contest" (p.137). But is she worth having? Hawks, however, wins the competition with a pump attendant for Elizabeth. Yet Barker asks Hawks, "Would you know a contest if you saw one, Doctor?" (p.49). The resemblance between a space suit and armour, which Barker makes much of, might imply that the important contest will depend upon physical might. The story is set in 1959 and, in view of the competition between Russia and the U.S., it is supposed that an understanding of the murderous structure "might well be major – perhaps even, decisive, as far as control of the moon is concerned." (p.86).

In this particular competition, however, the quality of empathy, the ability to communicate is at least as important as the aggressive willingness to court death. Here Hawks falls short. In his mind, love is similar to death because it involves what may appear to be a certain loss of identity. When a girl that he loved asks him to do something more than just talk at her, he immediately falls out of love: "It was as if she'd turned into a cobra" (p.131). And he felt the same fear as when he "was trapped in a lab fire and barely got out in time. For a few minutes, I was convinced I was doing to die" (p.130). Any form of genuine personal communication is anathema to Hawks. Barker recognises that all the scientific gadgetry revolves around himself, around "One man and, what's in his mind. Or maybe two of us. I don't know. What's in your mind, Hawks?" Hawks replies, "I don't pry into your mind Barker. Don't set foot in mine." The metaphor indicates that the formation on the moon is to be seen as a mind also and that survival depends upon a process of empathy and adjustment to that new mind and the apocalyptic reality it promises.[2] After replying, Hawks picks up the phone and dials Elizabeth's number: "He waited for an answer, and as he waited, he stared without focusing at the old familiar blank wall. Suddenly he moved in a spasm of action and smashed the flat of his free hand violently against it" (p.150).

2. On the critical usage and relationship to science fiction of the term "apocalyptic", see my "New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction and American Literature," *Mosaic*, V (Fall, 1971), 35-57; reprinted in *The Novel and Its Changing Form*, ed. R.G. Collins (Univ. of Manitoba Press, 1973). For further elaboration, see my book of the same title (new York, 1974).

If the powers of the mind are to grow, if knowledge and intelligence are to increase, communication must take place. When Hawks and Elizabeth meet that night, Hawks recalls a magic moment from his childhood which lingers as a memory in his mind. He was out with his father on a cold night after a snowfall:

> It was cold enough to make my eyes water, and I found out if I kept them almost closed, the moisture diffused the lights, so that everything – the moon, the stars, the street lamps – seemed to have halos and points of scattered light around it. The snowbanks seemed to glitter like a sea of spun sugar, and all the stars were woven by a lace of incandescence, so that I was walking through a universe so wild, so wonderful, that my heart nearly broke with its beauty. (p.154).

Hawks believes that this apocalyptic state existed and exists only in his own mind and when he dies it will be gone forever, until Elizabeth reminds him that it now exists partially in her mind also. But it further transpires that this place exists concretely within the lunar formation. The place which Hawks describes when he says "I took the tears in my eyes, and I made a wonderland" (p.154), recalls Barker's description of his experience within the formation: "It's . . . well, *rules,* and the crazy logic: Alice in Wonderland with teeth" (p.99).

Perhaps we are now in a position to make some sense of the perplexing ending to this intricate story. After Barker M and Hawks M on the moon (as distinct from Barker L and Hawks L in the laboratory) have passed through the bizarre structure, Hawks M counsels Barker M against returning to Earth, first of all, because the other duplicate already exists there and, secondly, because the facilities for beaming a duplicate back from the moon are inadequate. Hawks M commits suicide by waiting for his oxygen to run out. Barker M has the same option. Or he may return to one of the airlocks, which is where he is when he is last referred to. Once inside, Barker M can decide to stay on the moon or risk being transmitted back to Earth. My guess would be that, having lost Claire, he remains on the moon. After all, he has passed the evolutionary test and Hawks has held out the possibility of repeated duplications and new worlds to explore. Although Hawks M has negotiated the perils of the formation, he has not learned the new reality in the costly manner that Barker

M has. He gets through the formation by simply following in Barker M's footsteps. By himself he would have died. Perhaps his decision to suicide is a recognition of this failure – the death machine kills him at a distance. As the air expires, "his eyes watered. Then he blinked sharply, viciously, repeatedly, 'No', he said. 'No, I'm not going to fall for that' " (p.174). He dies denying the new apocalyptic world of mind glimpsed as a child and lived momentarily within the formation. Does the above interpretation get me through the labyrinth? I don't know. I do know, however, that *Rogue Moon* is an unusually impressive work of science fiction.[3]

3. See William Atheling Jr., *More Issues at Hand* (Chicago, 1970), pp.61-66, for an admiring analysis of this story. Atheling even goes as far as to suggest that "A full-scale analysis of *Rogue Moon* might turn out to be nearly as extended as Stuart Gilbert's study of *Ulysses*" (p.62). This is highly unlikely and the implied comparison with *Ulysses* is critically dishonest. But see also David Samuelson's lengthy analysis of *Rogue Moon* in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Studies in the Contemporary American and British Science Fiction Novel" (Univ. of Southern California, Jan. 1965), pp. 280-328.

Ian Watson is a science fiction writer, and his first novel, The Embedding, *is discussed in the Reviews section of this issue. He is 30 years old, and was born in Tyneside, and educated at Oxford. He then lectured in literature for two years in the University of Tanzania. This was followed by three years' teaching at various universities in Tokyo, where he "started writing sf as the only sane reaction to modern Japan." His first science fiction stories appeared in* New Worlds. *He is married, with a baby daughter. His present work – or part of it – is described in the article below.*

sf idea capsules for art students

Ian Watson

Since 1970 I've been running science fiction courses for Art and Design students of Birmingham Polytechnic. The location: a canal-side

annex in Summer Row disguised as an abandoned warehouse. However, a small nameplate admits that the warehouse is really the School of History of Art and Complementary Studies. Students spend one day a week here, through their three years at the Art and Design Centre: two-thirds of the day dealing with Art History, and the remaining third with Complementary Studies – these latter being intended to back up the students' main study (painting, graphic design, industrial design, fashion etc.) with courses on, for example, the psychology of perception, or the sociology of the mass media.

My science fiction courses are mainly attended by painters, sculptors, and graphic designers. They aim to present sf as a set of probes for investigating the nature of the future environment we shall be living in – within the context of which the artist will have to work – an environment the designer will play a part in fashioning through advertising, packaging, media manipulation. My sf courses are thus socially oriented, rather than aiming for a historical 'in-field' approach to sf.

Teaching takes place in a large, almost windowless, steel-girdered cell, decorated with photographs of nuclear fireballs, the US war computer in Thailand, the hara-kiri death of Yukio Mishima, and other relevant nightmares. Alternatively, when the heating packs up or the rain is coming through the roof, it takes place 200 yards away in a canal-bank pub called The Longboat (beloved of Ian Nairn, as one of the principal beauties of the 2nd City).

Each class lasts 1½ hours. At the beginning I distribute photocopied extracts from an sf writer – whom at least one of the group will hopefully have been reading at some length during the previous weeks and be ready to talk about. The extract takes about 10 minutes to read, then one or two of the group will speak about the writer and how well (or badly) these particular pages represent him/her; and I introduce some factual data about the ideas presented in the extract, leading into a discussion about how relevant or accurate the sf ideas are to the society we know and future societies we can extrapolate. The sf is organized into various 'idea capsules', three of which I'd like to describe here. Each capsule may occupy two or three consecutive classes, with new sf material and new factual data being fed in each week . . .

There's one Ballard-based capsule focusing upon THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT and THE AUTOMOBILE AS POPULAR ICON OF MODERN TIMES. I use the "Crash!" and "Assassination of Jackie Kennedy"

pieces from *The Atrocity Exhibition,* and the story "Journey Across a Crater" (along with an interview Ballard gave to *Penthouse* a couple of years ago, which gives a good summary of the ideas behind his fiction). These being somewhat cryptic pieces, some account of Ballard's development as a writer and the logical continuity of his books from the earlier, more 'objective' disaster novels, through to the conceptual media landscape of *The Atrocity Exhibition,* is pretty well essential. But then I prefer to concentrate on the scenery of the media landscape itself.

Ballard's concept of the technological environment as representing a set of coded messages, which are 'read' by the participants – by ourselves – but which we mightn't realize consciously we are reading, can be handled from two different standpoints. The Freudian view of civilization as sublimation of repressed drives, and history considered as the progressive return of this repressed psychic material – outlined in Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death* – strikes me as a useful entrée to Ballard's landscape of 'polymorphous perversions'; while the social science of Semiology (the theory of signs developed by Roland Barthes and others) helps towards an understanding of precisely why there should be a relationship between the angle between two walls and a masturbating woman, or between Karen Novotny's anatomy and a multi-storey car park.

The concept of the perceived world as a set of sign languages – of garment as one mode of communication, architecture as another, auto design as a third, along with the gestures and contours of the human body as articulate language – isn't merely a quirk of Ballardian psychopathology, but on the contrary an increasing preoccupation of designers, particularly of architects (as witness Jencks and Baird's recent volume *Meaning in Architecture*), while Roland Barthes, writing a decade ago about the Citroën DS 19, anticipated Ballard's rapt meditations upon the automobile.

A propos of the automobile, primary image of the mediation of our emotions via technology, and the whole clutter of expressways, service stations, etc. that are extensions of the auto, the question arises whether in fact the contemporary programmed environment is psychologically gratifying, as Ballard maintains, or a perversion (in the ordinary non-Freudian sense of the word). A resounding 'No' comes from Herbert Marcuse in an interesting passage in *One-Dimensional Man,*

contrasting love-making in a meadow with the same activity in an automobile, to the disadvantage of the latter. ("A mechanized environment seems to block self-transcendence of libido . . . Libido becomes less "polymorphous", less capable of eroticism beyond localized sexuality" – which, interestingly, is the precise opposite of what Ballard is saying!) A resounding 'Yes' comes from Reyner Banham (one of the co-authors of the Jencks/Baird book) in his study of Los Angeles where he writes lyrically about the gratification of driving the Angelino expressways.

Cars, of course, in a world of energy crisis, Jimmy Saville and Ralph Nader, suggest an alternative viewpoint (which Ballard has in fact touched on in an article in *Ink* in 1971 about Nader as future dictator of the USA) – the car safety, environmental pollution aspect; and with this in mind my classes analyse the shifting trends of car ads – precisely what marketing features become paramount at different times and what emotive images different manufacturers wish to put over (e.g. Fiat's "Cars are choking our cities. Buy a small Fiat" campaign); leading on to the concept of cars as iconic objects – an amusing analogy being with the Coke bottle as icon (more about which in Anthony Haden-Guest's *Down the Programmed Rabbit-Hole* with its fabulous maniacal guide to the Coke Museum, the Muzak Factory etc.)

My capsule on HUMAN ACTIVITIES AS MODES OF COMMUNICATION is a lead-on from this, and is Delany-based, the idea being to parallel the sf of Samuel Delany with the factual, but still highly speculative social anthropology of Claude Lévi - Strauss.

Again, the basic concept is that all human activities – garment, menu, kinship patterns, mythology, architecture – represent articulate, though non-verbal, languages which can be analysed syntactically, and cross-correlated with one another.

This approach to the basic structure of human thought, through the analysis of these 'languages' is Lévi - Strauss's lifelong project. In an age of intellectual *diaspora,* he cobbles together an epic poem of mind for the western world from the myths and table manners of the Mato Grosso and the Aborigines. He is, in fact, fulfilling the same role as Delany's typical hero, Mouse in *Nova;* and Delany's works parallel Lévi-Strauss's to a remarkable extent.

The Einstein Intersection anatomizes myth just as Lévi-Strauss

does in *Structural Anthropology* and his commentary on the Tale of Asdiwal; while Delany's "Star Pit" presents a beautifully tight-knit set of parallels between kinship and language and social patterns – the structure of the story being a set of binary oppositions (Free Abnormals versus Imprisoned Normals; hyperadvantaged Telepath who is disadvantaged by drug addiction; safe, frustrating Inside of galaxy/planet/ecological zoo, versus the rich, fulfilling but insanity-fraught Outside . . .) such as Lévi-Strauss discerns at the root of all human communication systems.

Finally, *Babel-17* deals with the root of communication, Language itself. Which leads on to a third capsule, dealing with ALIEN LINGUISTICS AND HUMAN LINGUISTICS, which I'm currently expanding into a one-term course option dealing entirely with THE CONCEPT OF THE ALIEN.

Babel-17 (ignoring the sabotage weapon aspect) deals with a theoretically 'perfect' language, which doesn't just represent reality at a few removes, but is so directly mimetic of reality that the language functions as a control instrument, rather than a describer. Set against this, in passing, is Delany's proposal for an alien language arising in a culture dominated by temperature changes, called Ciribia.

Frank Herbert's *Whipping Star* also deals, interestingly I feel, despite the rather sloppy thriller format, with the problem of how humans could communicate with an entity possessing an entirely different frame of reference from ourselves.

These two novels raise the vital question of how much we can ever hope to understand or communicate about this universe we find ourselves in – given the fact that we are programmed biologically by our evolutionary development upon this particular planet as the particular creatures we are.

Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* raises the further, salutary point that we might find ourselves unable, however much we stretch our intellects, to comprehend the Alien when we encounter it: so that, wherever we go in the universe, we shall only and inevitably come face to face with our own selves.

Our use of aliens as psychological crutches is well worth exploring – from the 'aliens as gooks' syndrome (in *Starship Troopers,* for example, and in many other stories – a to-me regrettable aspect of traditional sf ideology), through to aliens as god-substitutes (as in

Was God an Astronaut? 2001, the UFO phenomenon).

Also relevant, is the Chomskyan revolution in Linguistics – the realization that we humans have an innate capacity for language. With this important corollary, that it will be a certain kind of language relevant to our biological make-up. What kind of 'universal grammar' is it that we manually-dextrous, visually-oriented apes have developed, which determines how we must inevitably think about the alien, as well as about the familiar? How 'universal' in fact is it?

With this in mind, I think it's important to take a look at the aliens who may have been in our midst unnoticed all along, namely the whales and dolphins in the sea. John Lilly's *Mind of the Dolphin* has some particularly valuable ideas about what sort of alternative reality the dolphin might perceive in its predominantly acoustic universe. Lilly's own realization of the near impossibility of coming to terms with this while our own mental behaviour still remains ambiguous to us (leading him to experiment with sensory deprivation, LSD, Yoga) takes us back to the central problem of the nature of the human mind, which ought really to prefigure any discussion of aliens or designs for interstellar languages. Piers Anthony's Macroscope has universally applicable logic messages relayed through it (given a certain I.Q. level, as it were). But what guarantees have we that our logic is anything other than one of many possible choices? Or even that our science and mathematics are more than locally applicable? Carlos Castaneda's books about the Yaqui Indian Don Juan are valuable in shaking our complacency – and if they do turn out to be fiction, as some recent rumours suggest, then they are science fiction of the finest, a light year beyond the sf of Galactic Esperanto.

What sort of success do I have with my courses? I enjoy teaching them myself, but how about the students? Main complaints: (a) the courses aren't about sf, but about almost everything else; (b) on the whole they're rather gloomy and death-oriented (there are several capsules concerning nuclear war, urban breakdown, weapons technology, the surveillance society, ecocatastrophe, overpopulation – well, that's the way the cookie may crumble, and while it'll be wonderful and life-enhancing if we do, say, make contact with the dolphins, we're realistically more likely to use them as living torpedoes and mine detonators!); (c) using photocopied extracts of short, even though relevant, bits of longer works leaves all the cards in my hands

and demands too much by way of instant response – on the other hand, distributing material the week before has proved inefficient, when some people turn up one week who haven't been along the week before, and vice versa; and asking everybody to read entire books week by week is impractical, given the heavy demands on the rest of the student's time, as well as the tendency of sf paperbacks to slip out of print precisely when needed; the best that can be done is to rotate responsibility round the group for reading up on one future capsule each.

On the plus side, a lot of people have gone on to read numbers of sf books after the event, which I don't think they would have got round to otherwise without this initial exposure; while others have been turned on by the ancillary material – Lilly, Castaneda, etc. And I have had some stimulating creative work produced. I think particularly, this year, of a remarkable, haunting poem in the style of John Clare on the subject of Black Holes submitted by a graphic designer called Michael Westley; and an exciting 12-panel sequence of graphics called *Media Game for Two* by cartoonist Richard Burn (editor designate of *Birmingham Street Press*), picturing the conflict between Old Wave and New Wave in an image war between pulp magazine protagonist Rocketman and the conceptual Ballardian anti-hero with his sex symbol Karen Novotny – exhibited as the major section of Richard Burn's final diploma show for the Art and Design Centre. Which, I suppose, was a pretty good piece of infiltration!

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for the record: what the Science Fiction Foundation ought to be about

George Hay

How, practically, does one go about laying the foundations for an interstellar culture? This is a question I have been putting to myself for some decades: the Science Fiction Foundation is the result of one of the answers that came up.

What we know as 'Western Culture' reached its height about the end of the eighteenth century, and has since been moving ever more rapidly downwards. At the moment, it promises to go right out through the bottom, possibly in spectacular fashion. Unpleasant though this may be, it is not necessarily any cause for worry in itself. As the assassin said to the merchant in the Arabian tale, "What! Would you live forever?" However, it does present us with a problem of some interest, inasmuch as our culture covers, not just what its predecessors would have called 'all known territory'; it literally spans the globe. Any post-cataclysmic renaissance must do more than get us back to the *status quo ante;* it must start a new cycle in a new space — Outer Space. And as it happens, what many now call 'the evils of modern science' have left us with a superb opportunity — the technological capacity to get out from under, to expand into what is, for all practical purposes, an illimitable New Frontier.

The ways and means of this are something that has occupied the minds of many science fiction writers: a good example is James Blish's 'Cities in Flight' series, which contains many thoughtful pointers on the problems involved. Here, I am not concerned with the merits or otherwise of particular proposals, but with the neces-

sity for selling mankind on the urgent need for considering these matters in terms of ethics, politics and technology. Let us take these in order.

The unwillingness of contemporary 'leaders of thought' to take a firm stand on any philosophical viewpoint at all – in itself, a sure sign of a disintegrating culture – has had the accidental result of leaving science fiction holding the baby, it being the only literary area left where authors can dramatise their ethical views over a wide range of subjects. The subject-matter of, say, *The Humanoids* or *The Cold Equations* could have been covered in non-sf fiction – but would the writers have found a publisher outside of science fiction? One doubts it. Now, when we come to consider a subject as momentous as interplanetary settlement, we run into ethical problems of the toughest. For example, I am advised that the legal status of outer space is that its properties can belong to no individual, but must be available for 'all men'. Well, with the French and Russian Revolutions as examples, we can guess what that will mean. However, such subjects would take a book to cover – what I want to demonstrate is that science fiction writers and readers would do well to look at basic premises and their implications before they start to consider problems of hardware.

Politics, now, is not something that has been exactly overstressed in this genre. Further, many of the forecasts made were way off target, though there have been a few remarkable bullseyes. Academic research could well move towards a study of what leads to accurate prediction, or otherwise, and meanwhile, it is to be hoped that writers will devote more of their time to the nitty-gritty of this subject, where, once again, their peculiar literary freedom can enable them to get across to the public certain matters far too often blocked off by mainstream literature. As an example, I am going to instance Ayn Rand's controversial *Atlas Shrugged,* in which, decades ago now, the author traced with truly remarkable accuracy, the line leading from internal contrdictions of thought in modern philosophy, through the muddled education and blurred thought it evoked, to the breakdown of a whole culture. It is essential to understand that Miss Rand, through her stress on the use of thought as an analytical tool, was able to predict, not just in cloudy generalisations, but in specifics. As I write this, the headlines shriek of President Allende's defeat and suicide in Chile – something that could have come straight from Miss Rand's pages, in view of the unfortunate President's determined attempt to hold to two contradic-

tory postulates at the same time. Nearer home, a passage from *The Observer* for 26th August gives us an even more exact parallel with the events in *Atlas Shrugged.* In this novel, a steelmaster is asked, on grounds of 'national interest', to agree to the merging of his and other companies in a nationalisation grab. When he protests, not so much the ethics of this, but its simple unworkability, they look at him blandly and say 'You'll think of something'. In his financial article in *The Observer*, Robert Heller has this to say of the British Steel Corporation:

> 'Last year's loss was reversed'. The losing was certainly large – £50.4 millions before extraordinary items, £68 million after – but to call it 'reversed' involves an abuse of langugage worthy of Haldeman and Ehrlichman. Last year, BSC made just £3 million – an amount so small, in the context of a £1,478 turnover, that accounting conventions or normal margins of error could have eliminated – or truly reversed it – entirely . . . before nationalisation, John Summers (whose Shotton works is now under sentence of death) used to earn more all by itself . . . after nationalisation, the remaining tiny private sector firms like Dunford and Elliott (forecasting the best part of £2 million) collectively outdo the mighty BSC with some ease on a fraction of its turnover.

It would be interesting to know how many members of the Government, or the BSC, had ever heard of Ayn Rand, let alone been aware of what she – and other right-wing sf writers – have been saying over the years. (Left-wingers will forgive me; I am sure they can find their own equivalents.) The point is, science fiction can carry a massive political punch – and, frequently ought to, if it is to retain its integrity.

Technology . . . it would be an insult to sf buffs to belabour them with examples of the influence of such men as 'J.J. Coupling' and Arthur C. Clarke in the actual development of technology. It is perhaps more important to draw attention to the overall effect on our technological society of those scientists, engineers and technicians of the middle rank who have been brought up on sf from their earliest years. From Hero's steam-engine on, it has been shown that no advance in science will get far if there is not a public prepared to ask for it and use it. That we have today a public prepared in what is quite a remarkable degree to apply sf 'lateral thinking' to problems of technology, is due in large part to the growth of sf literature from the 1880s onward. Even more fascinating, sociology, that Tom Tiddler's

Ground of the vapid and the fashionable, is commencing also to feel the inroads of a type of thought at once more incisive and wide-ranging. See, for example, what use S. Delany and Ian Watson have made of recent linguistic research. The fictionalisation of this data is of course only half of the cycle; when this in turn feeds back to the subject, the results will be fascinating indeed.

In the paragraphs above I have outlined my views as to what the Science Fiction Foundation ought to be about – all in addition, of course, to its strictly literary functions, which it is no intention of mine to minimise. I must reiterate, though, that nature will simply not permit a vacuum, and that in a Caesarist world such as ours, one increasingly falling under the influence of intellectual and political thugs, it is inevitable that increased responsibility must accrue to any body insisting that futures exist, or can be created. By its very terms of existence, the Foundation is to act as a communication channel for what is undoubtedly the most responsible literary genre still surviving. This is a very hot seat indeed, since it is liable to involve at some stage setting out succinctly just what are the factors leading to high-level survival or to disaster – not, I must point out, a procedure calculated to Make Friends or Influence People. Readers who think I am overstating my case are referred to a letter from Philip K. Dick in Issue 6 of Richard Geis's journal *The Alien Critic,* in which Dick records how in 1971 his house in California was burgled, his files blown open, and all business records, documents and correspondence stolen. Appeals to local police resulted only in cryptic warnings that he was 'in extreme danger' and that 'he had enemies' – no further information forthcoming. In the end, he fled to Canada, whence he has but recently returned. With hindsight, and knowing this author's political views, it is not hard to draw conclusions. Can you imagine, though, what would have been the reaction if Dick had publicly expressed his suspicions at the time?

Anthony Burgess, defending himself against attacks on *Clockwork Orange,* declared that art imitates life. Never! As Wilde said, it is the other way round. For this reason, the Foundation, and indeed any body representative of science fiction writers, holds the futures of many worlds in its hands. Pompous words? I think not. Nowhere between earth and Deep Heaven is there anything more powerful, more dangerous and more unstoppable than a dream.

reviews

edited by Christopher Priest

cry of pain

Breakfast of Champions
by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (Cape, 1973, 296pp., £2.25, ISBN 0 224 00888 9)

reviewed by Philip Strick

It took Kurt Vonnegut twenty-five years to come to terms with the bombing of Dresden, but with *Slaughterhouse Five* he finally managed to get the event into some kind of perspective. Looking back, one sees (rather too smugly, perhaps) how all his earlier books were preparing for the encounter, experimenting with narrative, with characters, with disasters, and with reasons for survival. An unimaginable horror, Dresden happened to Vonnegut and had to be lived with; the contradictions could only be resolved with the help of science fiction, in which context the placid fatalism of Tralfamadore offered a comfortable detachment. The horror remains unchanged, indeed it is constantly recurring, but so are the other events in a lifetime; pain and pleasure are alternately immediate, and equilibrium is maintained.

But if Dresden is a theme that underscores the early Vonnegut writings, it is far from being their most memorable quality. As today's hordes of Vonnegut students are eager to point out, his stories wander in and out of each other, peopled with Wanda Junes and Rumfoords and Rosewaters who appear not to notice when one novel ends and another begins. Vonnegut's chapters have become brief and arbitrarily disordered, as if to express as accurately as possible the pin-ball progress of the human memory – a face here, a landscape there, an observation no sooner made than sidestepped or, alternatively, pursued headlong through a maze of collisions until halted by an incantation.

And these disordered chunks of text, a patchwork of harmless untruths and laughs both cheap and expensive, have revealed Vonnegut to himself as much as to his readers, as if the portrait would be unbearable in its entirety but can just about be tolerated if unveiled piece by piece.

In *Breakfast of Champions,* Vonnegut completes the unveiling. "This book is my fiftieth birthday present to myself," he declares, and sets out to clear his head of all the "junk" that still remains after Dresden has been written out of his system. We are thus disposed to expect a light, even inconsequential bit of fun – nothing, after all, could be as traumatic as the firestorm – and with his proud display of infantile drawings and easy jokes about America, Vonnegut seems inclined to offer nothing more complicated than the securing of loose ends in the story of Kilgore Trout. Unforgettable creator of *Venus on a Half-Shell,* tatty old Trout has been shambling about on the edges of Vonnegut's stories for years, and his emergence into the spotlight is as welcome as it's necessary. At last we are given the facts about his life, his disastrous childhood, his exploitation by the publishers of pornography, his poverty-ridden existence in the company of a parakeet called Bill, and his abrupt ascension to fame and fortune (applying the Tralfamadorian method, Vonnegut talks omnisciently about Trout's future successes even though they occur *after* the period covered by the novel). We are given the synopses of a marvellous collection of Trout works, and in a spirit of rising suspense and concern we are prepared for the book's climactic collision between Trout and car salesman, Dwayne Hoover.

The oddest paradox involved in Vonnegut's experience at Dresden was that he was buried beneath the firestorm. He saw its results, but not the fire itself. In *Slaughterhouse Five,* the climax is consequently defined by the incidents that took place all around it; the fire's presence infuses the whole novel, but never envelops it. There is a similar feeling about the Trout-Hoover meeting in *Breakfast of Champions* which, even though it is described, is almost dismissed by contrast with the elaborate preparations to which Vonnegut submits his readers. We are forewarned that the event will be momentous; it turns out to be a meaningless tussle in a cocktail lounge. As a consequence, Trout becomes "one of the most beloved and respected human beings in history", but that, too, is another story. Instead,

the book concludes with an encounter for which there has been all too little preparation – one that seems to catch Vonnegut as much by surprise as his readers. Trout meets his Creator, and shows him up for the meddling, incompetent, facile, purposeless spectator that he is, a clown like all the Gods in Vonnegut's work. "I couldn't help wondering," says Hoover at one point, "if that was what God put me on Earth for -- to find out how much a man could take without breaking." If Vonnegut's conclusion is to be trusted, the task of clearing the junk from his head has proved to be unmanageable; he ends the book a broken man, a fifty-year-old whose life has been written out.

Vonnegut's characters stand duty as representatives of a changing purpose; he loves them all (there are never any villains in his universe), and all of them speak for Vonnegut. Yet one cannot simplify Kilgore Trout or Billy Pilgrim into Vonnegut substitutes. Vonnegut himself insists on appearing in his novels as if to dissociate himself from the opinions of fictitious creatures, so that Billy is sometimes Vonnegut and sometimes Billy and sometimes, logically, all the rest of us. It is dazzling sleight of hand, nicely summarized by one American critic, John Somer, as 'geodesic Robbe-Grillet' (which I can best explain in parenthesis with the reminder of Robbe - Grillet's own appearance in *Trans-Europ Express*), and Vonnegut has perfected it in ***Breakfast of Champions*** only to find not the insulation he expected but a terrifying nakedness. Trout is part-Vonnegut, his masterpieces appearing in pulp magazines until belatedly recognized; part-Trout, being beaten up, encased in unexpected plastic footware, and losing a finger-joint; part-Everyman; and part-Vonnegut Sr.

Having put himself in the position of filling in the details about one of his best-loved Vonnegut-substitutes, Vonnegut discovers he has been writing about his own father – and, for that matter, about both his parents (but "my mother stayed far, far away, because she had left me a legacy of suicide"). What began as a birthday present ends as an autobiography, enclosed by distorting mirrors giving an endless vista of reflections. In desperation, Vonnegut scrawls a giant ETC. at the end of the text – the incantation that both closes his multi-chaptered statement and leaves it recurringly open. He has frequently begun with the plea: "Listen:", as though now, for once and for all, the hard facts will be revealed. No use; time and again he realizes that he has plunged off at a tangent along narrative paths

that have no end and must be blocked with the phrase "And so on", the successor, of course, to "So it goes". For a while, he becomes obsessed with penis sizes, a fascinatingly irrelevant series of statistics reaching its magnificent extreme with the revelation that the most decorated veteran in Midland City has a penis eight hundred miles long and two hundred and ten miles in diameter, practically all of it in the fourth dimension. Or he becomes distracted by apparent coincidences such as the behind-the-scenes activities of Don Breedlove, the white gas-conversion unit installer, or by the amazing inventions by the Creator of the Universe, such as the rattlesnake or the Mexican beetle which could make a blank-cartridge gun out of its rear end ("Sometimes I wonder about the Creator of the Universe"). Try as he will to describe the American way of life in a dry, plausible fashion, it continually evades and startles him by its failure to make any sense whatever. Even the most bizarre of Kilgore Trout's plots are unable to outdo the 'real' world in pathos and idiocy -- and of course each Trout novel described in *Breakfast of Champions* turns out to illustrate a further contradiction or social obscenity in the ways of life that enfold us.

Like the Tralfamadore theory, *Breakfast of Champions* does what it can to find compensations for human suffering. One suggestion is that everyone else on the planet is a robot and only *you* have free will, which relieves you of the need to worry about other people. Then there is the carefully-developed analysis of schizophrenia, or indeed any irrational form of behaviour, as the result of an imbalance of chemicals over which we, of course, have no control. Vonnegut constantly tries to lift the blame from his characters, from us, from the Creator of the Universe, and to persuade us through laughter that he has succeeded. But it doesn't work for long, and he then pays the price. " 'This is a very bad book you're writing,' I said to myself behind my leaks (glasses). 'I know,' I said. 'You're afraid you'll kill yourself the way your mother did,' I said. 'I know,' I said." If *Breakfast of Champions* is science fiction (and part of the problem in coming to terms with it, I suspect, is that it *isn't*), it's one of the funniest and most tragic additions to sf's small list of masterpieces of the past twenty years. But as a Vonnegut novel, unclassifiable as most Vonnegut, it is an extraordinary and desperate cry of pain.

showing children the value of death

The Farthest Shore
by Ursula Le Guin (Gollancz, 1973, 206 pp., £1.60, ISBN 0 575 01603 5)

reviewed by Peter Nicholls

The saga of Ged the Magician is ostensibly for children. It began with an epic, *A Wizard of Earthsea.* It continued with a romance (in the old sense), *The Tombs of Atuan.* And now it is ended with *The Farthest Shore,* which begins as a quest, and shades into a lament, and finishes appropriately, not as a paean, but as a muted triumph, a quiet lyric. Ursula Le Guin is not a writer to rework earlier successes it will be seen. Certainly not within the scope of a single trilogy. It is amazingly varied in tone, even though in theme the three books knit into a single, integrated work.

The last fifteen years, which have seen the decline of the traditional novel growing ever more marked, have been fortunate years for the children's book. The art has never been more healthy. In my own order of priorities, I would put Ursula Le Guin in the first rank, along with Alan Garner, and perhaps T.H. White from an earlier generation. They are closely followed by William Mayne, Phillipa Pearce, John Gordon and J.R.R. Tolkien. My own prejudices are probably revealed in that these are all writers of fantasy, though not to the exclusion of everything else. Fantasy is in a much fitter state in children's literature than it is in the so-called adult version, where we find Thongor and Brak, and all those mindless bastard offspring of Conan and John Carter.

With writing of the order represented by Ursula Le Guin and Alan Garner, the distinction between books for children and books for adults becomes meaningless. Even the publishers become confused. In England, *A Wizard of Earthsea* is published by Puffin Books, as "for readers of eleven and over", but I understand that it has been published in the United States in an edition for adults. The same thing happened to Alan Garner's *Elidor.* These are books that deal with real feelings that are not the exclusive property of children or adults.

They do not condescend or simplify, in feelings or ideas – unlike some earlier writers, even those as good as E. Nesbit. The only things that really make them children's books is that they deal with subjects, such as magic, that are supposed to have a traditional appeal in childhood, that they are written in a language sufficiently lucid to be intelligible to children, and that at least one of the protagonists is either a child or an adolescent.

Oddly, the best children's books have never restricted themselves to those areas of experience which we may assume to be familiar to children. William Mayne and Alan Garner have both touched on sexuality. Garner's book *The Owl Service* is at moments quite heavy with passion, and Mrs Le Guin's most recent book, our subject here, deals much of the time with pain, impotence, loss and death.

The *Earthsea* trilogy tells of the growth and adult power of a magician, Sparrowhawk. His secret name is Ged, but this is only revealed to a few, for a man who possesses the secret name of another knows his essence, and consequently has power over him. In our own world, laughingly known as the "real" world, the theory of secret names is very ancient, both in traditional magic and traditional religion. Mrs Le Guin can nowhere be faulted in her anthropology, by me at least; not surprisingly, as she is the daughter of the famous anthropologist A.L. Kroeber. (If only heredity were always so successful). Her stories, however, are not *about* anthropology – not even the celebrated *Left Hand of Darkness* – even though they use that expert knowledge to give body and texture to the societies they describe.

The world of Earthsea is smaller than our own. It consists of a complex archipelago (map provided) stretching maybe 2,000 miles from rim to rim, and consisting of about 400 islands. Beyond is open ocean, and its roar or mutter dominates the first and third books in the trilogy, though the second is thick with the heaviness of earth. (I have a totally unprovable and chauvinistic theory, coming as I do from the East Coast of Australia, that the ocean dominates the consciousness of the Pacific-born more strongly than that of the Atlantic peoples. One notes that Mrs Le Guin lives in Oregon). The secular power of Earthsea is conventionally enough in the hands of princes, barons, burgesses and pirates, but the power grown of knowledge rests with the magicians.

Being a magician is no easy matter. One may be born with an aptitude, but his power over the world of matter is possible only if he has a full knowledge of the nature of that world, and this knowledge is gained only by patience and hard work. The secret name theory, which is so prominent in the trilogy, seems to me a sort of shorthand for the understanding of essences – what Gerard Manley Hopkins used to call the "inscape" of things. In this respect the magicians of these stories are the same as the scientists of today. It is the rigour with which Mrs Le Guin deals with the magical laws she invokes that makes this a trilogy which can properly be reviewed in a journal devoted to science fiction. In all the essentials her magicians are indeed scientists. She never uses magic as a narrative gimmick, a cheap and easy way of working the impossible and allowing the reader the mild *frisson* of identifying with the superhuman. Indeed, she is at pains to show how difficult it is to upset the natural balance, the equilibrium of the created world, by magical or any other means. Only the greatest of magicians are shown as being able to harness real natural forces, and that at the cost of a sapping of energy. Most magic is of appearances only. A magnificent feast may be conjured up, but the illusion of nourishment will last only as long as the spell is maintained. It has no permanent effect. Protein is not conjured up where no protein was before.

Acclaim for *A Wizard of Earthsea* (published in 1968) was just about universal, but that book set up expectations in its readers which were not always fulfilled by the second, *The Tombs of Atuan.* In the latter book, our field of vision is narrower and more concentrated, the tone more sombre. The sphere of action has shrunk from that of a whole world to the walled-in darkness of the catacombs where an adolescent girl, perverted by her training, is using her newfound powers of womanhood to celebrate the old powers of earth and darkness. (In each of the three books a voyage into darkness is central). The patience and understanding of the magician, Ged, now grown into a mature man, finally release the girl priestess from the bondage of her training and the warping of her own budding sexuality. We see all this through the eyes of the heroine, a girl who understands little of what she sees. Ged is seen from the outside, and takes on a kind of bulky strangeness, a little alarming for readers who have identified strongly with him in the first book of the trilogy. The sense of

an oppressive spiritual danger, rendered with frightening immediacy and narrowly averted, is strong in this book. The book was deliberately different in kind from its predecessor, I would guess, but this confused many of the critics. Where the earlier book seemed expansive, this concentrates all of its power into one single, massive metaphor.

The Farthest Shore is different again. It is barely possible to summarize the nature of this complex book in only a few paragraphs. Its subjects – maturity, death, ambition, balance, corruption, the significance of meaning itself – are so big. Far bigger than one has any right to expect in a book for children, and some might think too big to cope with, for writer as well as reader. Most of the themes, it's worth noting, are also present in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings;* they are, after all, the epic themes. Individual similarities with the Tolkien book are many. In both trilogies we find the traditional quest pattern for instance, where the external voyage becomes the mirror of an internal movement towards maturity, acceptance, self-knowledge, and finally the ability to come to terms with one's own imagined death. Both writers, to take a more trival example, are fascinated with dragons as symbols of ancient knowledge and power, although here Mrs Le Guin clearly has the better of it. Her dragons are more dignified than Tolkien's. Incidentally, unlike Tolkien, Mrs Le Guin makes almost no use (apart from dragons) of beasts and monsters. No wargs or orcs or balrogs here, only people, rarely seen in the morally absolute blacks and whites that Tolkien uses.

The important differences are these: where Tolkien is expansive, Ursula Le Guin is condensed; where he has a tendency to approach his wonders through allusiveness and indirection, she renders them with clarity and precision. I admire Tolkien very much, but I believe Mrs Le Guin has deeper resources of language than Tolkien possessed.

Quotation might help here. One of the most difficult tests occurs quite often, for both writers have a taste for the incantatory and poetic, and here the danger of over-writing is the strongest. Tolkien used regularly to succumb to a rather hollow "high" style, jerry-built from a number of medieval sources, sometimes looking as if they had been filtered through William Morris. It comes out with the elves, the men of Gondor, and the Rohirrim, and sometimes, too, with Gandalf. Take Gandalf's descent into hell:

> Far, far below the deepest delvings of the Dwarves, the world is gnawed by nameless things. Even Sauron knows them not. They are older than he. Now I have walked there, but I will bring no report to darken the light of day.
>
> *The Two Towers* chapter 5

Has anybody yet thought of tracing the similarities between Tolkien and Lovecraft? Compare Arren's descent into the land of the dead:

> All of those whom they saw . . . where whole and healed. They were healed of pain, and of life. They were not loathesome as Arren had feared they would be. Quiet were their faces, freed from anger and desire, and there was in their shadowed eyes no hope.
>
> Instead of fear, then, great pity rose up in Arren, and if fear underlay it, it was not for himself, but for us all. For he saw the mother and child who had died together; but the child did not run, nor did it cry, and the mother did not hold it, nor ever look at it. And those who had died for love passed each other in the streets.
>
> *The Farthest Shore* chapter 12

Literary precedents for voyages to the underworld are many: Homer, Vergil, Dante, even the Bible. Dante above all others, and it is not a wholly ridiculous name to conjure up in the context of Ursula Le Guin. It would be less appropriate in Tolkien's case. In both Le Guin and Tolkien, of course, the literary impulse is considerably more romantic than it was with Dante, and even with the Le Guin passage above, some readers may be more reminded of the better pre-Raphaelites, say, than of Dante. Both Tolkien and Le Guin have a tendency to archaize, to claim a dignity of expression by evoking rhythms and word orders which themselves recall the great books of the past. Even Mrs Le Guin does it too much for my taste ("quiet were their faces", "there was in their shadowed eyes no hope") but she is a very mild offender when compared with Tolkien. She does have in common with Dante a telling precision of imagery, seen above in the remark about the mother not even looking at the child. Her language does not attain the ease or naturalness of Dante's, but she does understand, as he did, that the strongest emotional resonances are achieved through accuracy, by capturing the individuality of a particular situation or character. Tolkien tends more towards incantatory rhythms, and sha-

dowy if noble images of a more abstract and general kind . . . a language imprecise, but sufficiently charged with emotion that the less experienced reader automatically fleshes out the details according to his own fantasies (or nightmares), and then innocently assumes the potency of the effect to be Tolkien's skill rather than the vividness of his own imaginings.

Some examples of the clarity of Mrs Le Guin's images:

> They stood in the boat, three of them, stalk-thin and angular, great-eyed, like strange dark herons or cranes.
>
> (Page 120)

> He saw on the shore what he took for a moment to be a ruined fortress. It was a dragon. One black wing was bent under it and the other stretched out vast across the sand and into the water, so that the come and go of waves moved it a little to and fro in a mockery of flight.
>
> (Page 158)

> . . . the eyes he dared not look into, the eyes like oil coiling on water, like yellow smoke behind glass, the opaque, profound and yellow eyes watched Arren.
>
> (Page 198)

These are not perfect, but they come close. The third example strains a fraction too hard for the exotic, perhaps. The first would be improved by the omission of "strange" which is redundant in the context, but how piercing an image it is, notwithstanding one adjective too many.

This does point, though, to a more general criticism. There are times when one wishes that some of the adjectives, the ones that don't work hard enough, had been blue-pencilled. These are the moments that most remind me of Tolkien, usually in his graver mood – words like "strange", "dim", "vast", "fierce", "sad", "lean", "cold", "noble". The writing is never simply mechanical, but it is tauter and more attentive in some places than others. However, the reader is seldom given the chance to become impatient. Every few paragraphs a phrase here, a word there, astounds by its freshness and directness of vision.

Mrs Le Guin is a metaphysician. Her ultimate belief, at least as ex-

pressed in this series of books, is that dualities are mutually necessary, that only death gives meaning to life, that joy cannot exist in the total absence of its opposite. It is said that she has been much influenced in her writing by the Tao, and this may be. Certainly the philosophy seems more Chinese than, say, Indian, but I would have thought it more Western than either, in its emphasis on dualism. The still, intuitive centre that she so finely implies in Ged may seem Eastern, but his readiness to act seems alien to Taoism, which I take to be an essentially passive belief, but here I am aware of displaying a possibly massive ignorance.

Certainly, whatever the source of the beliefs expressed in her books, I am in profound agreement with them. I would guess that Mrs Le Guin (to continue evoking possibly grandiose comparisons) is a reader of Yeats and of Donne. Tricks of thought and phraseology often recall those two poets whose concerns were so close to Mrs Le Guin's own. There are temperamental affinities too. Mrs Le Guin's trilogy is by no means as sombre as I may seem to be suggesting, with its constant awareness of death and pain, but as with Donne and Yeats happiness is rarely unalloyed.

The theme runs through all three books of the trilogy. It is expressed on page one of *A Wizard of Earthsea,* where the epigraph is a small poem:

> **Only in silence the word,**
> **only in dark the light,**
> **only in dying life:**
> **bright the hawk's flight**
> **on the empty sky.**

It is no coincidence that Ged is usually known as Sparrowhawk.

In *The Tombs of Atuan* the final knowledge is *not* that darkness is evil, but rather, that it gives meaning to light. (Ursula Le Guin is always careful not to see darkness and death as evil *per se* – that is part of the point of her books. Her dualism is not of that Zoroastrian variety that was later imported into Christianity, where the light simplistically signifies good, and the darkness, evil. She is not, I would think, a *moral* dualist.)

The plot of *The Farthest Shore* is based on the discovery by a warped magician that there is a way to ensure partial immortality. The

whole balance of nature and being in Earthsea is upset by his actions, for if death is rendered meaningless, then life too, by a natural balancing out, is drained of meaning and desire. And if life is drained of meaning, then magic, which relies on the knowledge of meanings and the names of things, can no longer operate. Ged and his assistant, the young prince Arren, have ultimately to journey into Death themselves, not to attack it, but paradoxically, to renew its power. Death cannot be conquered by making it go away. The sense of oppression built up in the book by a profound misuse of power lingers even through the final triumph . . . a literary triumph too, in its finely rendered realization that even good men acting on the side of right cannot expect to get something for nothing. Ged is able to keep the natural powers alive and available for the use of men, but only at the cost of exhausting and losing his own powers – powers through which he had moved like a hawk through the sky, at home in his element. This summary of the theme of *The Farthest Shore* shows it, I hope, to be a wholly natural, even inevitable climax to the trilogy, though I am sure that many critics will once again accuse Mrs Le Guin of having changed direction.

The theme is not new. So well worn is it, in fact, that it may not even be supposed important. On the other hand, a theme that has endured some thousands of years may be allowed to have intrinsic staying power, and to many children it will be new. I hope that they make sense of the often beautiful but sometimes cryptic metaphors Mrs. Le Guin uses to make her point, as where Ged explains to Arren:

> There is no safety. There is no end. The word must be heard in silence. There must be darkness to see the stars. The dance is always danced above the hollow place, above the terrible abyss.
>
> (page 130)

Again, there, just a touch of over-writing. I would have preferred "abyss" to have been unqualified by "terrible", but all in all, it is a moving and true statement. Again, too, we see that precision of metaphor, in this case given by the context, where two pages later, on midsummer eve, a dance is performed on a great raft, floating above the hollow of the deep, open ocean, giving life retrospectively to what may have seemed a rather notional image.

All three books, incidentally, are quite deeply un-Christian, though not anti-Christian. The abode of the dead that Mrs Le Guin invents

is neither heaven nor hell, but much closer to the Greek Hades. When she speaks of "only in dying life" she does not speak of a life after death. She means, I think, that the keenness of living is kept sharp by the imminence of death, and that is a very different point. The trilogy is certainly religious, and she speaks of "creation", but there is no sense of any Jehovah figure brooding over it, let alone ever interceding. (If that's what you want for your children, lead them to C.S. Lewis.) Ursula Le Guin's "philosophy" values *this* world highly, and one feels that the Eastern Nirvana and the Christian Heaven would be equally distasteful to her, as representing states which turn the spirit away from what it can make of itself in the here and now. For Mrs Le Guin's other great theme is the growth of the spirit – the "self", if a less loaded word is preferred – towards understanding its own nature, and the best way to bring that nature into inter-action with the world it inhabits. (Yes, I know that Christians and Buddhists too encourage the growth of the spirit, but my own biases lead me to see the emphasis and purpose of this as being rather different from what I take Mrs Le Guin to be writing about.)

All of the above, no doubt, has the misleading effect of making the three books sound like heavy going, but in fact the brisk sweep of the narrative, with much sparkle and wit along the way, makes the stories compulsively readable, though always too intelligent to make for totally *easy* reading. I would like to know how much they appeal to children, and would be interested to read Mrs Le Guin's fan mail. It seems to me that they should appeal, but it is difficult for an adult to recapture the sort of thing that touched him most deeply as a child.

The *Earthsea* trilogy is Mrs Le Guin's finest achievement to date, I believe, but the themes are very similar to those we find in her recent science fiction – in *The Lathe of Heaven,* and notably in *The Left Hand of Darkness.* Mrs Le Guin herself (in an article published in *Foundation 4*) distinguishes between her fantasies and her science fiction, but it seems to me that the similarities are more essential than the differences. In both genres she uses metaphor to speak about what most matters to people in the real world.

It is tempting to over-praise her, and perhaps I have done so. The sensitivity and accuracy of her writing are so far beyond what we expect in adult fantasy, let alone children's, that by those standards she

is made to seem amongst the greatest. She combines intelligence with feeling in a genre normally preoccupied with the most simplistic feelings to the near exclusion of thought. It is this that we value her for, and yet I feel that the honesty and depth of her feelings, and the transparently subtle intellect, have not yet found their wholly adequate form. In the *Earthsea* trilogy, and occasionally in *The Left Hand of Darkness,* the quality of feeling drifts sometimes towards the plangent, and minor characters especially seem a little sentimentalized. I think of Vetch in *A Wizard of Earthsea,* whose rough sincerity and kindly solidity seem a bit too much like Horatio to Ged's Hamlet. But these faults, if such they are, are superficial matters of writerly control. For me, the inner impulse of the books is as lucid as crystal. I look forward to her next with genuine excitement.

life sentence: in my end is my beginning

The Embedding
by Ian Watson (Gollancz, 1973, 254pp, £2.20, ISBN 0 575 01687 6)

reviewed by David I. Masson

A first novel of enormous competence. The author has done his homework *and* learnt the tricks of his trade, to some purpose. What purpose? Read on.

Who should read the book? Anyone who is disturbed at world news nowadays. Anyone who is fascinated by TV programmes like *Horizon* or *The World About Us.* Those who are turned on by James Burke, and those who turn him off with a shudder. Anyone who is concerned at the manipulation of human beings by human beings – as experimental material, as propagandist material, as torture material, as political pawns. Anyone who supposes that the English language bears a one-to-one mapping relation to reality, and anyone who thinks reality inexpressible. Anyone who is seeking new modes of religious experience. I don't say they will find an answer, but they will all find something good. It's not, of course, for the innocent or shockable – if there are any in this year of disgrace 1973.

This is not a forecast novel. It is not a Doomwatch novel. It is not a conservationist/eco-logistical novel – the only mention of a steady-state world is a government-inspired parenthetical repudiation on p.203. (So far as I know, the great conservationist novel has yet to be written. I can't think of anyone who could tackle the task alone. It will be a vast three-decker like *The Lord of the Rings,* with appendices, and present various alternative futures stage by stage in slices. By the time such a work is completed events will have caught up with it: humanity will be in its main Resources crisis.)

The Embedding is not a neo-mythological fantasy or allegory, a satire, or a single-minded extrapolation-exploration of a particular theme. It is not a political novel, an adventure novel, or a quest pure and simple.

It is one of those stories set in the near future, in which a few individuals, with whom we may empathize, are involved in great issues and ultimately in world events. My sympathies were not really deeply engaged by the characters, nor did I feel an irresistible fascination with the shifting issues, but the author has done very well.

Why "embedding"? Well, this term gets used like a musical theme, but stands for quite a number of different things, including especially one aspect of sentence-structure in recent American linguistic theories about the infantine neurological basis of all human syntax in "transformational" and "generative" grammar. (Stay with me, we are coming to the plot before long.) In "embedding", expressions get encapsulated in mid-sentence while the short-term memory has to store the first links in the main chain of statement till the encapsulated expressions are over. To illustrate how the thing may be carried too far, I may quote or misquote a super-embedded German joke-sentence, to the effect that the lorry, which on the bridge, that on the road, that between Mainz and Darmstadt runs, lies, stands, has broken down.

Carried beyond normal complexity, this structural phenomenon becomes in the book an incarnate symbol or sacrament of a new mode of experiencing reality, in three manifestations (never quoted, alas): a French surrealist poem; the excruciatingly distorted syntax in which some isolated experimental orphans are being secretly reared in an English institution; and Xemahoa B, the drug-induced second mode of speech of a Brazilian tribe.

The author does not actually say so, but Raymond Roussel and his

poem are real. Roussel was born in 1877, and the *Nouvelles impressions d'Afrique,* a volume whose title harks back to his prose *Impressions . . .,* came out first complete in 1932. Its four sections total 1,276 lines, including those 286½ that are printed as long verse footnotes, and each section (one has 644 lines) incorporates immense parentheses within parentheses, the major ones being enclosed within successively one, two . . . five brackets, thus – (((((. Roussel would actually have preferred the use of different-coloured inks. Cutting across all this, and looping remorselessly into the footnotes and up again, the line-structure is one of common alexandrine couplets. The syntax of phrases is more or less conventional (unlike some of Mallarmé). Generally the first "argument", soon relinquished, in each of the four great sections, has to wait till nearly the end to be resumed. (To pad the book the poet commissioned unsuitable illustrations.) The poem can only be "read" by back-tracking on the pages, i.e. it is primarily visual, plus perhaps long-term articulatory memory where mental cues can be attached. The question has to arise, whether any merely auditory-articulatory short memory mechanism could cope (no matter how brain-development were stimulated) with actual discourse so introvoluted and elephantine.

But the plot of *The Embedding* is lively enough. The English "linguist" Chris Sole has a wife whose young son is her child by a French ex-lover, while Chris is more interested in one of his experimental orphans. (These orphans are Indian or Pakistani – why not Vietnamese?) This situation precipitates a final crisis. The ex-lover, ex-Frelimo (Mozambique), an anthropologist, is studying the Brazilian tribe and falls under their spell in every sense. His letter to the Soles, and his notes, keep the current of information flowing which ultimately sparks off a world crisis. The tribe, meanwhile, with all its complex culture, is due to fall victim to a vast Amazon-basin flooding project. Chris is brought over (as linguist) for a confrontation in Nevada with some very credible aliens from outer space. A secret official deal is made with the aliens, who are on an age-old Quest; a deal which requires the most horrifying betrayal (lightly accepted) of six (or seven) individuals whose language-structures are needed for the aliens' plans: and this also involves the Xemahoa. In the end, cross-purposes, miscalculation, national paranoias and greed, and power-politics, wreck almost everything (though amid a lot of short-term disasters, the

tribe at least is saved). The tribe's drug-experience is discredited (or so I read Chris's and Pierre's disillusioned disgust) and the orphan's linguistic-neurological miseducation goes hideously awry.

What are we left with? I am not certain. Perhaps the author merely wanted to write a successful sf novel without profound conclusions. Perhaps he is telling us that the daily round of human culture *de son jardin* should not be tampered with. Or perhaps he is expressing an apathetic fundamental despairing cynicism in the face of human ruthlessness. From the book's silence about the larger ethical issues one might suppose that the moral cataract into which we are all drifting has already cast its fogs over spiritual vision in the novel.

Watson's mental imagery, I should guess, is rooted in visualizing rather than in utterance: so often he "realizes" something in visual terms. He sketches each new arrival's appearance, behaviour and manner, bringing him to life. He is full, too, of brilliant incidental touches illuminating the scene throughout:

> He was a small, once muscular man, whose muscles had turned to flab since his days in the army . . . The knobbly upturned end of his nose stood out from his features, softened with large greasy pores and slightly too large – as though he'd spent a few years with a finger up each nostril stretching them . . .

And his dialogue fits its speakers well. But I would have liked more about sound. And how about some "real" examples of self-embedding orphan speech; we really need to experience this in action. Aldiss would have done it with relish.

The author does well, too, with introspective states (for instance, Chris's mood-swing on p. 215). Perhaps because this is a first novel, the book contains many strictly irrelevant similes and fancies, which for me actually help the sense of reality (it is a mistake to be too brisk and functional). Here and there, though, they over-reach into over-writing – for instance (p. 237) on explorers aloft on an exploded spacecraft:

> . . . this vast metal fruit . . . like wasps they had flown out to suck the juice . . . Flies to a hunk of rare venison. . . in the icebox of space . . .

(And so on.) SF too often lends itself to this sort of bogus poetry.

Similarly, perhaps, when his speakers, however hardened or intellectual, get euphoric, I find their reasoning and their expressions become naively fantasist. (The author should keep in check his penchant for wisecracking). But there's a very good presentation (p. 247-251) of a terrifyingly bizarre mental state (not drug-induced).

The book is firmly rooted in parts of the present-day scene, and a great deal that might have been garnered from recent popular scientific and anthropological programmes and writings (and news) has found its way in: threatened tribal ways, tribal mythologies and customs (details brilliantly invented), tropical life, guerrillas, torture, Pentagon and White House thinking, the RAND Corporation, Skylab, spatial optical illusions, orbital scanning, stimulation of neural development, experimental psychologists, Chomskyan linguistics, and so on.

The Xemahoa bird-feather-reference system for number and time-markers is a well-invented curiosity. Why, talking of linguistic world-view oddities, was a Hopi speaker not one of the victims selected for the aliens? However, the man who made the choice of victims was not a linguist but an opportunist in a hurry. Else why select three speakers of Indogermanic syntax out of six? (There's "redundancy" for you!) Couldn't a hapless Turk, Finn or Magyar have been shanghaied, and how about some African-language speakers, and an Australian aboriginal?

"Xemahoa" ought presumably to be pronounced *Shemaawa,* and "Bruxo" *Broosho.* The author ought to have told us so, to save some *aficionados* going around putting their feet in their mouths with *Ksemma-HO-a* and *Bruck-so.* And how, for some Amerindian tribal words, does a *w* manage to be written in Brazil or by a Frenchman?

I give full marks to the aliens and their language-realities quest, also to the bits of information they throw out about other beings, etc. Even their mode of travel is fair enough for an sf convention. Perhaps the bit about cosmic dust-whales was a bit rash?

Echoes? John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* paved the way for easy acceptance of stylistic and scenic sandwiching, perhaps. Arthur C. Clarke could have inspired the down-to-earth treatment of the aliens? The fungus-drug and state of the miracle-birth babe reminded me of the brain-stimulating morel in Brian Aldiss's *Hothouse.* The aliens' twin worlds and their millennia-old encounter with *para*-beings whom

they have been vainly seeking ever since, reminded me of the "twin radioceles" and the so-Other beings and speech in Blish's "Common Time", which Garrard vainly and deeply longs to return to.

Best of the author's verbal time-bombs in the official memoranda (excellent jargon and double-think there, by the way): "Welles Farrago".

I would like to see Ian Watson, or someone, attempt some time a different kind of reality-language concept, where instead of the ordering of clauses, the nature of the word-categories was changed. Chomsky and others consider noun, adjective, verb and so on to be essentially natural to humanity. How about (say) a being which conceives conditions and transitions where we conceive *things?* Can a language be constructed without concrete nouns or pronouns? What sort of self-identity, if any, could such a being be aware of? How would it act? If, say, a slime-mould had a language, what kind of language would it have?

esp yes - mysticism no

Jack of Eagles
by James Blish (Faber, 1973, 256pp, £2.10, ISBN 0 571 10276 X)

reviewed by Tom Shippey

Although this is the first British publication (apart from a paperback edition by Nova Publications, Ltd.) *Jack of Eagles* is over twenty years old. The difference between the expectations of the 50s and those of the 70s is at times perceptible, in plot and characterization, but the heart of the novel – its consideration of extra-sensory powers, their likelihood and limitations – is surprisingly unaffected. One reason for this, no doubt, is that few authors have cared or have had the stamina to outgo Blish in the pursuit or retailing of scientific information; while I suspect, furthermore, that several have had *Jack of Eagles* in mind if not in hand when composing their own handlings of ESP, so that this book has created a form or sub-genre which still persists. Readers of *ASF* during the 50s and 60s, in particular, may remember the various stories and serials published there in which a

present-day society was hit by the sudden control or development of psi; Mark Phillips even went so far as to take over a couple of characters from Blish, in his *Occasion for Disaster.* But *Jack of Eagles* differs from the "standard" layout of this sub-genre in several ways: of which the important is, that unlike some of the Campbell-dominated group, Blish refuses to set up an opposition between ESP and orthodox physical science, or to follow the lead given by Charles Fort in the direction of pure nominalism – the belief that in all ages facts are twisted to suit world-views or theories, that there is "nothing, in religion, science, or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while." This belief led several authors to argue more or less wholeheartedly that only "crackpots" were likely to make fundamental advances. But Blish's hero insists of himself that "no more ordinary guy ever walked the earth until I was given *skilled help*" (my italics). All through the novel there is a stress on skill, knowledge, communicability. And this is not only reassuring for those resistant to mysticism; it gives the book a firm theme, of development, rather than the wayward eventfulness of some of its successors.

The book's structure can be summed up fairly readily. Like J.W. Dunne (whose *Experiment with Time* is mentioned several times by Blish), the hero, Danny Caiden, suddenly finds himself shocked by a series of incidents which suggest that he is somehow able to foresee incidents, not helpfully but confusingly, so that he can hardly tell future from past. His publication of something that has not yet happened leads to his being fired. And he then embarks on a search for a more controlled understanding and use of his "wild talent". He visits in succession Mme. Zaza the fortune-teller; Dr. Todd the Rhinean parapsychologist; Cartier Taylor of the Fortean Society; and Sir Lewis Carter of the Psychic Research Society, four figures easily gradable on a scale from "charlatan" (Zaza) to "scientist" (Todd). At the same time he tries to use his ability by making money, through dealing in shares or betting on horses. But these two strands of enquiry and gambling intertwine, in showing Danny what can and cannot be done. He has no success with the horses – individual creatures in small numbers. But when he remembers from Dr. Rhine that "ESP shows increasing accuracy with increases in the number of things it handles", he bets on money-flow instead, reaching his goal another way. Similarly, he learns nothing from Mme. Zaza except to distrust talk of the psychic

continuum and the materialistic West: but when Todd explains the formula for determining gravitational strength, and relates it to the sensations he has already felt, Danny gains conscious and repeatable control of psychokinesis. At the end of a hundred pages or so the reader has a fair discrimination between what's possible and what isn't, and has acquired also the habit of trying to judge critically the various theories offered to him. Probably the most difficult part of the book is holding on to scientific rules – as Blish means you to – not only in the face of a series of unpredictable happenings (as Danny is pursued by the bookies and the FBI, and finds himself in the middle of a psychic war between Sir Lewis's mystics and a smaller but more rationalistic group) but also through all the conflicting and misleading arguments offered by different characters and not always overtly commented on by the author. Thus Sir Lewis explains the non-repeatability of psychic powers on p. 75. This is a standard point in sf as in spiritualism, but Danny is instantly suspicious, apparently correctly. However, when another character argues for the power of coincidence on p. 35 we are left to believe him or not till p. 180, when the point is suddenly recalled and firmly ridiculed; while in the same way Cartier Taylor, a nominalist paranoid on p. 71, is revealed as a *tester* for those very qualities on p. 183. A weak-willed reader emerges from these switchbacks with a sense of his own inadequacy; a strong-willed one has the choice of considering the argument (and Blish cites about a dozen books to help him do so) or of trying to fight it with superior knowledge or logic. Whatever the decision, it's at least apparent that the novel has an argumentative structure as well as a narrative one. And it avoids wish-fulfilment like the plague.

The gritty quality in the thought fits well with a certain ruggedness in the characters which has perhaps begun to date. Obviously ferocious villains are still easy to find in modern sf. But in the background of *Jack of Eagles* there are odd assumptions – like the firing of Danny, or his remark that "the employment of force and fraud are the distinguishing characteristics of political power" – which have been overtaken by the decline of that abrasive, rational, individualism now enshrined (for me) in the adverts of the old pulp magazines. Certainly I do not think that Blish would now feel compelled to bother with the character Marla, Mme. Zaza's niece, who attaches herself to

Danny but functions only as a proof of the hero's masculinity. And in 1973, too, Blish might feel some pressure on him to tone down his flow of assured, bizarre information on human senses, proverbs, strangling, psychotics, electrons, and so on. They affront the modern cultural ideal of multiple valid opinions mediated by gentle and inarticulate uncertainty. Still, reading this novel makes you realise the confidence sf has lost along with its brashness. Blish's asides, like the glimpses of the other universes separated by different values of Planck's constant, or his "film-strip" illustration for the serial-universe theory, repay study and suggest the power in reserve. Alas, that power was at times too much for the proof-readers: the Heisenberg equations on pp. 160 and 202 do not match.

another Silverberg outsider

A Time of Changes
by Robert Silverberg (Gollancz, 1973, 221pp, £2.10, ISBN 0 575 01610 8)

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

Like so much of Robert Silverberg's work in the last few years, *A Time of Changes* is a study of alienation. Beginning with *Thorns* in 1967 and concluding (for the time being) with *Dying Inside* in 1972 the author has produced a whole series of studies of the literary archetype which Colin Wilson has called "the outsider". Throughout this series of works, Silverberg has used the methodologies and the vocabulary of symbols appropriate to science fiction in order to provide a whole new series of perspectives.

Silverberg began this line of thought by characterizing his outsiders in terms of physical stigmatization – Minner Burris of *Thorns* and Richard Muller of *The Man in the Maze* have suffered alienation in a real and literal sense. Another straightforward representation is found in *Downward to the Earth,* where Gundersen is a literal alien on the world of Belzagor. Later, Silverberg was to use genuine psychological alienation in *The Second Trip* and *Dying Inside.* The present volume belongs to a further sub-category in which the author has attempted detailed analyses of relationships between mind and environment.

The other books in the same category are *Tower of Glass* and *The World Inside*, both of which employ future societies as *milieux*, and *Son of Man*, Silverberg's most ambitious work, which takes the entire problem on to a mystical and allegorical level. *A Time of Changes* places a human alien in a wholly synthetic cultural environment, and develops his alienation from his own society from feelings of unrest to complete moral rebellion, using contact with an Earthly mind and Earthly values as a catalyst.

In *A Time of Changes*, Silverberg set himself a more difficult task than in most of his other works in this vein. Instead of an extrapolated society which owes a great deal to the realities and concerns of the present, we find here a completely synthesized alternative. I cannot help feeling that the Nebula award which this book won was a testament to a heroic attempt rather than to a success. Silverberg has actually set out here to create a meaningful and realistic version of the sort of society which Ayn Rand envisaged and presented in a highly stylized form in *Anthem* in 1937.

Like the hero of *Anthem*, Silverberg's Kinnall Darival opens his account by telling his readers what a terrible sin it is that he should be writing an autobiography at all. Like Equality 7-2521, Darival has discovered the sacredness of EGO. Like *Anthem*, *A Time of Changes* is the story of how he did it. The primary difference between the two works is that Silverberg is writing a novel instead of a polemic, and is therefore obliged to maintain a sense of proportion, which Ayn Rand never has. While Equality 7-2521 was deprived of the word "I" by law, Darival is deprived only by his cultural mores. The simple discovery that selfishness existed was enough to make Equality condemn his whole world out of hand, and a few vague statements about lovelessness and a whipping scene were supposed to help the reader to agree with him. Darival, however, already knows "I" as an obscenity, and what he has to do is to overcome his guilt-feelings and discover the inherent *value* of the word and the way of thought it represents. But again, it is the lovelessness and the cruelty of the society which are invoked in order to persuade the reader into agreeing with the protagonist. While I have no wish to condemn *A Time of Changes* simply because it shares *Anthem's* faults, I must confess that I find it difficult to keep my judgment of the later book from being coloured by my distaste for the ideas contained in the earlier because the parallel

between the two is so exact.

Societal design in *A Time of Changes* is cursory but comfortable – it is in the construction of his background that Silverberg makes the most use of his excellent craftsmanship. We have a pseudo-feudal society into which Darival is cast adrift by virtue of being the younger son of a dead ruler, faced with a virtually inevitable choice between exile and eventual execution. The mores of the society are based on self-effacement, and the ultimate in depravity is to be a "selfbarer" – one who plagues another with the contents of his soul. In order to provide this sort of outlet, the society has created a special class of priests whose function is to hear confession. Here, therefore, we have a society designed to alienate, with a shortage of therapeutic institutions. The questionable value of the confessional is a foregone conclusion in this day and age, and we see that Darival's problem is a valid one, and that its solution has to be sought outside the conventional cultural context in which it is set. To some extent, therefore, Silverberg is playing with loaded dice – the situation which he develops is *sociologically* unrealistic.

The remedy which is offered to Darival for the soothing of his soul is home-grown, but it takes an Earthman to introduce him to it. Perhaps it is not untoward to think of Schweiz, the Earthman, as a symbol rather than a character. In order to introduce Darival to the Sumaran drug, a new attitude of mind must be introduced into the plot – Schweiz merely provides a vehicle for this attitude. He is the voice of temptation, the sales talk of the medicine show, rather than a person. His off-worldly origin is quite unimportant except insofar as his viewpoint is extracultural. To some extent, I think Schweiz would have been more believable as a wayward factor within Borthan society rather than something from outside – certainly, Borthan society is constructed in such a way as to lead one to expect that there *ought* to be more wayward factors within. The fact that selfishness is obscene hardly accounts for its absence. In the end, of course, Darival becomes just such an "enemy within". But we know already from Silverberg's other works of this type and this period that unlike Colin Wilson, Silverberg does not see the role of the outsider as messianic. Darival remains alienated, his role remains equivocal. His text is intermingled with the thoughts that come to him as he is writing it down. The doubt is always present, throughout the book. (Here, at least, we

do not have to suffer the influence of Ayn Rand, who regards doubt as moral treason.)

I wish that Robert Silverberg had won the 1971 Nebula award for *Son of Man* or *The World Inside* instead of *A Time of Changes*. Both are better books. The import of this book into England in advance of the other two – and in advance of a good deal of Silverberg's earlier work – is, I think, to some extent unfortunate in that it removes the novel from its context within the author's work. *A Time of Changes* was a natural, if adventurous experiment within that context. Outside that context it is only one failure, albeit a craftsmanlike one.

metaphorical egyptian tomb

Rendezvous with Rama
by Arthur C. Clarke (Gollancz, 1973, 256 pp, £2.00, ISBN 0 575 01587 X)

reviewed by Christopher Priest

On first sight the most noticeable thing about Arthur C. Clarke's new novel is its cover. This cover is in itself an interesting departure from Gollancz's habitual yellow jacket, but Bruce Pennington's painting is a most extraordinary piece of work in its own right. It is strictly representational: a perspective view down the interior of a cylindrical spaceship, one large enough to contain its own ecological system. As a piece of craftsmanship I have rarely seen better; the cylindrical perspective must have created agonizing problems, but for his master's touch Pennington adds a spiralling cloud-system that has to be seen to be believed.

In theory, one should discuss the goods and not the packaging, but in this case the irresistible thought is that the two are interchangeable. The text of the book does exactly the same job as the painting, which is to describe in some detail a very large spaceship. This is the major weakness of the book: in the absolute sense it is not a novel at all, but an account of an imaginary exploration. There is no plot to speak of. That is not a sweeping statement . . . there really is no plot. The book opens as the spaceship (dubbed 'Rama' by an astronomer) enters the

Solar System, and it closes as the spaceship leaves. In between, a team of astronauts carries out a brief survey.

Clarke's optimistic view of the future is a remarkably palatable one in these days of dire predictions. His Solar System society of the 22nd Century is pure pre-war British Interplanetary Society dreamstuff, with a Space Advisory Council (the fantasy of every science fiction writer!) a United Planets Headquarters, and tempestuous Ambassadors from the colonies on Mars and Mercury, etc. His spacemen have names like Bill and Jimmy, and his spaceships are given names like *Endeavour* and *Calypso*. All this is curiously past-oriented, and indeed there is considerable substantiation for this in the text. Throughout *Rendezvous with Rama,* Clarke draws parallels with the past. As Commander Bill Norton goes through the hatch:

> Not since Howard Carter had first peered into the tomb of Tutankhamen could any man have known a moment such as this – yet the comparison was almost laughably ludicrous.

Quite. Later, extensive parallels are drawn between Norton and Captain Cook (who also commanded a ship called *Endeavour*).

All this is not as irrelevant as it might seem. Clarke has an undeniably attractive way of presenting his ideas, and this habit of finding historical counterparts is worked neatly into his own brand of image; that quote about Tutankhamen that I took rather unfairly out of context goes on to point out that the opening of the Tutankhamen tomb was, on a geological scale, only a brief instant after its closing . . . but that Rama itself was older than mankind.

This takes us into a wider consideration. My word will have to be taken for the fact that – with the sole exception of a bit of political chicanery by the Hermian Ambassador – *Rendezvous with Rama* has no plot. In which case, only two criteria can be considered: how well does the spaceship work as an artefact, and how well are the implications described?

Clarke's past-orientation is the betrayer of the second criterion. When the exploration is done, and Rama is on its way towards the Greater Magellanic Cloud, Clarke says: ". . . what (Norton's) men had discovered in Rama would keep scientists busy for decades". This is rather like the latest pile of moon-rocks from an Apollo mission piling

up in the Smithsonian vaults and awaiting analysis; frankly, there is much about reading the book that reminds one of watching a moonwalk on television. A sense that History is Being Made . . . but what's on the other channel? Somewhere else in the book, Clarke says: "But that was in the days before Rama; now nothing would ever be the same again". But why? Clarke doesn't say. The implication is that now mankind knows that it is not alone in the universe, something quite radical and fundamental will happen to it. It's an optimistic sentiment, but it's one without substantiation and Clarke also ought to know that it's certainly one without precedent. Human nature is not revolutionized wholesale by sudden awarenesses, except on a local scale; religious conversion is just one example of this. Bill Norton's life might well be radically changed by what he experiences, but to the ordinary folks of the United Planets it would be just another tv programme.

How convincing an artefact is Rama is best answered by the book itself. Clarke has obviously thought it out carefully, and the descriptions are mostly excellent. Every now and then there is a nice touch which gets the adrenalin pumping, but I wish that Clarke had had more faith in his reader's intelligence and hadn't reminded us *quite* so often that the bit of the spinning cylinder above our heads would actually be the floor, if we were to walk there. As Clarke is a writer with something of a reputation as a science-conscious man, he had me blinking when he threw Newton's Third Law out of the airlock in the manner of the pre-war superscience writers, and earlier there seemed to me to be a slight inconsistency. Rama travels very near the Sun. As it does so the heat penetrates through the kilometre-thick hull and melts the Cylindrical Sea. Why then does the Sea not later boil, when the ship is much nearer the Sun? Quibble, quibble, quibble, eh, Mr. Priest!

A final word about the *dramatis personae.* In the entire book I could not find one character who did not seem to me to be a phoney, from the bickering and expounding politicians back on Luna to the boyish gang of spacemen bravely risking their all in the cause of furtherance of knowledge. The level of characterization is that of a boy's adventure magazine, and were it not for some wholly gratuitous and naive sexual elements ("Some women, Commander Norton had decided long ago, should not be allowed aboard ship; weightlessness did things to their breasts that were too damn distracting") that is where *Rendezvous with Rama* might well have appeared. As I write, it is the

best-selling novel in London, and in some ways it is possible to see why. It's bland and inoffensive, and written in a simplistic prose that could be read by your nonexistent Aunt Edna; it's also as musty and sterile as that metaphorical Egyptian tomb, a piece of space popularization masquerading as science fiction. If the novelization of *2001* is discounted, this book is also Arthur C. Clarke's first full-length adult novel since *A Fall of Moondust.* Sometimes novelists benefit by lying fallow for a few years; in this case the author has apparently allowed the weeds to grow up around his ankles. *Rendezvous with Rama* is full of glimpses of the stunning novel it might have been, but that's no substitute for the real thing.

pith or pulp?

Age of Miracles
by John Brunner (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973, 190pp, £1.75, ISBN 0 283 97921 6)

reviewed by Josephine Saxton

The outstandingly bad thing about John Brunner's new book *Age of Miracles* is the cover: the artwork is atrocious, and the blurb states that the story is expertly constructed. I do not agree that it is this; I would say rather that it is a careless conglomerate, written by a man who has proved himself elsewhere to be an expert.

Chapter One introduces no less than nine changes of scene, none of which gives a clear impression of what follows in the rest of the work. John Brunner may have intended his style to suit his material which concerns several different territories and a warped continuum – a state of chaos on Earth – but I question the validity of the method in that case.

There are only 190 pages to connect all the parts of the story together, and it would take a master of literary form to do so satisfactorily.

The language could be judged to be concise and punchy but I felt that it was too near to the stuff of schoolboy adventure stories; flat, and uncomfortably terse.

I think that this novel would make a lively television play, or come

out well in the form of an illustrated comic. All the elements are there for either medium, including occasional silly melodrama which ruins the texture of the printed page. One such incident is the smashing of a drinking glass, by a man banging it upon a table in irritation. Does the author mean to convey that the man was stronger than normal men, or that the drinking glass was especially fragile? I cannot be sure, but anyone who thinks this a niggling criticism should test the amount of irritated crashing needed to shatter a glass to fragments, wearing goggles during the experiment. If the man was insanely angry I would allow the scene, but not otherwise; not in a deeply imagined novel.

The Disposall with which the mess is cleared away is not carefully designed either. If left switched on it gobbles carpets: that is not a vacuum cleaner of the future, but a weapon of horrible possibility, and a hostile character should somewhere have used it as such.

Other furniture in the novel includes equivalents of the Philosopher's Stone or a Magic Talisman resembling a radio valve, and Faery Mountains with doors opening only to the Pure in Heart. There are corpses seemingly having suffered the fate of Brian O'Flynn's breeches, and some attractive types called weirdos which other characters in the story do not like. If *Age of Miracles* is a serious novel then it reads like an amusing romp, and if it is an amusing romp it reads like a bad serious novel. The writer possibly lost track while writing it as often as I did while reading it.

I think this book must be what happens when a good writer in a great hurry takes large metaphysical concepts, high moral tone, political and social comment, religious ideology, sentiments of anti-violence (the descriptions of violence were especially gripping) and then trusts to luck (or miracles) to stick it together into a cohesive work.

The protagonists can – after certain experiences which I shall not reveal, as I am not sure what they are – recall both past and future. If T.S. Eliot had had a taste for light reading this novel might have amused him, but it did not amuse me. Upon recovering my sense of humour I would suggest that it be sub-titled *Dick Barton Trips Out,* and offer that perhaps I am taking the whole thing too seriously and am therefore bemused and disappointed.

Perhaps this religious, political, philosophical novel is, after all, just intended as fun? I hope, and even confidently expect, that other readers will find it to be just that.

a clever male chauvinist

Gold at the Starbow's End
by Frederik Pohl (Gollancz, 1973, 187pp, £1.80,
ISBN 0 575 01658 2)

reviewed by Josephine Saxton

It may well be that the only readers of Frederik Pohl are his established and numerous science fiction fans, plus unwary new readers who will immediately divide into two types: those who join the *aficionados,* and those who are looking for something better. If this is a satisfactory state of affairs, then what I am about to say is superfluous.

I sighed somewhat while reading *Gold at The Starbow's End,* which is a collection of five stories of greatly varying lengths although the cover states boldly that they are all long. I sighed partly with nostalgia for that time twelve years ago when I happily read every word Mr. Pohl wrote, and partly with relief that I had been rescued by a natural defence mechanism of the psyche from reading any more: I had then absorbed what I could of this kind of science fiction. Having now undertaken, with renewed curiosity and excitement, to read more, I regret to report an unchanged dissatisfaction with the way in which these otherwise brilliant stories are actually written.

My interest was held to some extent by the enlarged range of material. I am told that Mr. Pohl has already treated Zen satirically, and he now writes unequivocally of the *I Ching,* personality cannibalism, and – did he see it this way? – Lovecraftian archaeology. Perhaps, I thought, Fred Pohl has been studying human psychology, and his characters now live. I read on.

I forced myself through every word and equation of the pseudo/politico/science; I gritted my teeth at such phrases as 'No sweat of any kind with the ship'; I suppressed horripilation at 'Mission Control' and the like; I nobly made allowances for the disgusting bits of male chauvinism. I was not going to be guilty of writing a *biased* review!

I put to one side my disappointment that Pohl stories were still being set on Aleph and Venus instead of in *invented* environments,

and I was partially rewarded.

I had to admire Fred Pohl's ingenuity. The entertainment value was at times almost as high as that of science fact books, which I have taken to reading for pleasure.

What reduced me to a state of misery – apart from the horrendously out-dated argot which immediately locates Aleph and Venus in the American mid-west of *circa* 1963 at the latest, and reveals that the author has failed to extrapolate from the present extinction of the hippie, *per se*, to the fact that the species is unlikely to reappear in the future unchanged – were some sketchily researched details. When employing "hard" scientific knowledge in fiction, the data must be impeccable, and he who employs "soft" and/or pseudo sciences must pay his material the same compliment. It is general knowledge that trigrams and not hexagrams are stacked over one another in consulting the *I Ching*, and I think little of Charlie deSalle's psychiatrist in the otherwise interesting "Call Me Million" for not knowing that personality and psychic cannibalism is established practice in certain Bonpos-cum-Tantric sects, and in Black Magic.

Leaving such irritations aside, I can say that Frederik Pohl has a richness and versatility of ideas and a talent for handling complexities which he displays in "The Merchants of Venus", and a sense of humour which is both dark and glowing in "Shaffery Among the Immortals": yet another "Sorcerer's Apprentice" story. Shaffery's blunder was so believable that I mentally checked the location of my sunlamp and yoghourt machine; had something frightful already occurred due to the rays from one shining upon the bacteria of the other? But even this delightful silliness was insufficient to outweigh my disappointment with the book as a whole.

I speculated on the effect these stories would have had upon me if they had been written by an even greater master of complexity and humour who is also a master of language: Jorge Luis Borges. I mentally played Mad Scientist, and created a literary monster composed of Frederik Pohl, Lawrence Durrell and Dylan Thomas: Ideas, Form, Language.

I realized, of course, that it is stupidity to expect every science fiction writer also to be a great writer. It is not stupidity, perhaps, to hope that a first-rate man of ideas might use some of his energy for that part of his work which needs it: the writing. Then, instead of

stories which have somehow been got down on paper in readily saleable and just-about-readable form, we might have memorable literary creations. Mr. Pohl could please not only the greedy and uncritical fans, but a much wider audience including quite certainly one regular reader: myself.

I might read more Frederik Pohl after a further twelve years, but for now *Gold at the Starbow's End,* clever though it is, suffices.

a slick thriller, but....

Heart Clock
by Dick Morland (Faber, 1973, 213pp, £2.35, ISBN 0 571 10210 7)

reviewed by Tony Sudbery

In Britain in 2029 the population is geared to the economy by the Age Laws, which provide that every human heart in the country shall be fitted with a clock which is set to stop when its wearer reaches a given age; when the clock stops, so does the heart. The age at which the clocks stop, a grim descendant of the Bank Rate, is adjusted in each Budget and is regarded as an indicator and regulator of the economy.

Matthew Matlock, who introduced the first Age Bill and was himself fitted with the first heart clock, later cut short his brilliant political career by resigning in protest against the way the Age Laws were being used. In the eighteen years since then he has been in the political wilderness. His meetings attract little attention, the small audiences are largely hostile, and they invariably end in a riot; everybody accepts the Age Laws, and the slogans on the walls jeer that "Matlock is getting old". So Matlock is mystified when he suddenly becomes a desirable personage; he is invited to join the government, and his presence is eagerly sought by the seceded Scottish government and by the mysterious abbot of the Brotherhood of the Meek.

The scene of this fast-moving thriller switches between Westminster, Fountains Abbey, Edinburgh Castle and the inside of one of the mobile dungeons known as Curfew Wagons, as Matlock falls in

and out of the hands of the three contending groups. In the process he learns something about the nature of personal loyalty, and about the reality of political power.

Dick Morland's first sf novel is a craftsmanlike, intelligent and literate political thriller, none the less enjoyable for the fact that of course, it couldn't really happen here – or could it . . .?

I almost feel that a conventional blurb like this is a more appropriate response to *Heart Clock* than a critical review. Its routine dishonesty answers to something equally false in this type of thriller. But there's no reason why anyone should be very interested in such a response; so let me have a moment of puritanical earnestness and ask, briefly, why Dick Morland didn't write a different novel. The imaginary blurb-writer's hints of higher significance in his phrases about personal loyalty and the reality of power, hollow though they sound, do in fact refer to real elements in the novel, and one could wish that they had been developed for their own sake rather than being placed at the service of the formal patterns of excitement. The loyalties of Matlock's secretary are handled as part of the general skulduggery, but Dick Morland writes about them with enough warmth to suggest that they could have been placed in a less frantic context as the nucleus of a more substantial novel. More radically, one could suggest that Morland's end should have been his beginning, or at any rate his middle. He finishes *Heart Clock* with Matlock back in power and realizing that his policies cannot be altogether different from those he has been opposing. This is a good slick way to cast off, but it rings truer than you might expect and, leaving aside any cant about asking questions being more valuable than answering them, it would have been nice to see this worked out in the story of the first year or two of Matlock's new administration. Of course, it's good tactics to leave your audience wanting more; only I'm asking for more but different.

Unpursing my lips, I owe it to Dick Morland to be more specific about the good things in the simple thriller he has actually given us. He has all the abilities one always asks for, but by no means always gets; the thriller-writer's skills have been visibly developing in the conventional whodunits he has written under another name, but the sf-writer's skills seem to have emerged fully formed. He presents his (pretty complex) plot and (not unduly large) cast with complete

clarity, so that the reader is never in doubt as to who is who and what is happening to him. The characterization of the main characters is decidedly more than adequate, and there is a good sense of place; one is quite convinced that this drab police state really is England, and I don't think this is just due to the obvious trick of staging the big set-pieces in the Houses of Parliament, Fountains Abbey and Edinburgh Castle. The central idea of the heart clocks is worked out in convincing detail, and made believable by having these details presented casually in the course of the story, in the best science fiction manner. Morland's style is smooth and clear, with flecks of wit: he has a likeable habit of probing at a cliché to see how hard its centre is, and if his hero has a tendency to wisecrack at moments of stress, they are superior wisecracks. If Dick Morland continues simply to entertain us, he promises to do it well; I hope, and think it possible, that he may do rather more.

compulsive balderdash

The Three Eyes of Evil
by A.E. van Vogt (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973, 218pp, £1.95, ISBN 0 283 97983 6)

reviewed by George Hay

This book comprises two novels – properly, novellas – *The Three Eyes of Evil* and *Earth's Last Fortress.* They are listed as having been published – the former as *Siege of the Unseen* – by Ace Books in the United States, and these tired old eyes seem to recall seeing them under yet other titles.

The Three Eyes of Evil tells how Michael Slade found he had a third eye, trained it, and found himself in the decadent city of Nase, where the inhabitants live by drinking each others' blood. Escaping, he undergoes training in the superior use of his nervous sytem by the supporters of the spaceship of Leear, which has been locked in battle with Nase since first the mists of time were parted. Little does he know, however, that one of his trainers is a Master of Nase. A sticky death is only avoided by cunningly precipitating the Master into another Time-level. As he happens to be on the eightieth floor at the time, his downfall is abrupt.

Earth's Last Fortress also deals with alternate time-streams, on a

vaster scale and even more complicated fashion. Call it the poor man's *Weapon-Shops of Isher.* Sliding out from under its incomprehensible plot, let me deal with something far more interesting: what is it that makes even third-rate Van Vogt so readable? The sole attraction of the plots is their intricacy, and I really do doubt if most readers can say at the end of one of these stories that he really understood what was happening, or why. The characters are for the most part throw-aways: a few have distinct possibilities, but, maddeningly, are seldom allowed to develop them. The style – ah, here we have something. Enter the Hay Theory of Projective Reading. This states that satisfactory compulsive reading will only develop in the presence of a highly *generalized* style, upon which the reader can project his own images. Real attention to detail demands thought, and frustrates the flow of projection. Take a look –

"The Wizard man whirled on him. His voice was a vibrant force as he raged." "And still he had no premonition of the incredible ending that was coming." "His fury faded into vast surprise as he stared at the Captain." "He willed himself calm. And was safe from madness!"

As 'good writing', this is balderdash. As compulsive reading-stuff, it is superb; it allows full emotional projection, unchecked by any specifics. Watch the reader whirl, rage, will himself calm, ignore the incredible ending . . .

Students of B.F. Skinner, I declare this field-day open.

are myths translatable?

View From Another Shore
edited by Franz Rottensteiner (Seabury Press, 1973, 234pp, $6.95, ISBN 0 8164 9151 8)

reviewed by Brian M. Stableford

We are all familiar with that hoary old anecdote about the computer which, when asked to translate the phrase "out of sight, out of mind" into Russian and back, produced the answer "invisible idiot".

Less well known (owing to the fact that I just made it up) is the story of what happened when Richard Nixon was asked to test the Pentagon's brand-new political computer DEMOCAC. Mindful of the above-mentioned anecdote, Nixon asked DEMOCAC to translate "out of sight, out of mind" into Russian and back. The computer came up with the answer "silent majority".

What does this have to do with my reviewing a book of translated sf stories from Europe? Simply this – the original anecdote is too often mistaken for an indictment of computers, but what it really shows is the dangers implicit in the process of translation. In my own version of the story the computer is in no way responsible for the cynical humour in its answer – that arises from the fact that we have a "political translation" rather than a literal one. All of which, I hope, is evidence to the effect that what the Anglo-American public reads in these translations is not necessarily similar to what the original audience read.

One of the most recent critical clichés applied to sf is that sf is a "mythology of the space age". Anthropological studies have taught us that the evolution of myth and the evolution of language are so inextricably bound that they are virtually interdependent participants in the same process. It is therefore inevitable that literature as a whole is a major contributor to the reworking and replenishing of mythologies, but sf – offering as it does a wide range of hypothetical symbols – participates in a way which is more like the popular conception of mythology as a pattern of fabulous tales. We cannot, however, expect that sf in translation can retain any sort of mythic significance. In the very act of translation, the stories in this volume have been robbed of one dimension of their meaning.

How important is this observation? Well, if you are a high-flying literary critic who believes that the vital contribution of sf to twentieth-century consciousness is the refurbishing of obsolescent mythology, then you might as well not bother with this book, because it can only mislead you. If, on the other hand, you are – like me – only a reader, the implications are somewhat different.

It should go without saying that we need to read this book in a slightly different way from the way we read fiction native to our own tongue, in exactly the same way that we would apply a slightly dif-

ferent way of reading to a book written in the nineteenth century. We cannot make all the same assumptions. So much of what is written in the English language for Anglo-American readers is based upon certain formulae – cultural and mythic – which allow easy participation. We call this fiction "lowbrow" or "pulp" or "popular" or "formula" or just "trash", but it supplies a high percentage of the sf on the market just as it supplies the bulk of any other literary category. Literary critics have always been very spiteful about it, but it remains the bulk of what people actually read, use and enjoy. Publishers, of course, are very fond of this sort of fiction, and are probably not so interested in the sort of fiction that the critics prefer, which transcends the formulae and has merits which are not necessarily mythic or cultural. This is not the time or the place to discuss what those merits might be – I only want to point out that these are the *only* kind of merits you are liable to find in fiction which comes from a different cultural milieu. In short, no matter how many of these stories were hackwork when they were written, they are not hackwork now. These writers may have started out, like ninety per cent of the Anglo-American writers we know and love, to write pot-boilers, covertly assuming that their audience is composed exclusively of "invisible idiots" (by virtue, of course, of their readers being out of sight and out of mind). Nevertheless, the book which I hold in my hand is for readers who think and feel rather than for readers who merely consume and digest.

I am particularly pleased to report that I found this collection very enjoyable, because it suggests that there is more to sf, at least outside the Anglo-American culture, than myth-making. It suggests that there is real thought and real feeling, and I only hope that the Russians are enjoying their translations of our sf as well.

The longest story in the book is by Stanislaw Lem, who reads very uncomfortably indeed in translation. Rottensteiner describes Lem's robotic fables – of which the present story is one – as "elegant and witty, linguistically inventive, full of new and striking ideas in every paragraph" and refers in complimentary terms to their mythic qualities. Lem himself, on the evidence of his essay on "Robots in SF" (in *SF Commentary*) is an ardent believer in sf as mythology. It is hardly surprising that Lem reads badly in translation and that Rottensteiner, in singing his praises so volubly, often sounds like a voice crying in the

wilderness. Even if Lem is a great writer – and there are elements in his work, this story included, to suggest that he might be – I fear that we may never be able to read him comfortably in English.

I think that for the same reasons, there is a gulf between Svend Madsen's "The Good Ring" and the reader that the reader will find difficult to cross. Likewise Vsevolod Ivanov's "Sisyphus, the Son of Aeolus" and Gerard Klein's "The Valley of Echoes".

One writer who does read well in English is Josef Nesvadba, author of the brilliant "Vampire, Ltd." and here represented by "Captain Nemo's Last Adventure". Having spent so long in trying to isolate what we cannot read in these stories, I must surely offer some account of what we *can* read there, and this story provides a good example. Its form may seem naive (though mythic meaning is lost, mythic form is often preserved with misleading consequences) but within that form can be found a very fine sensitivity and sympathy which can only gain from the false simplicity of the style. Captain Nemo's heroism is approached from several angles during the story, and all its facets are incorporated into the story's delicate evaluation of it.

A more obvious transcendence of the process of translation is to be found in Sever Gansovski's "The Proving Ground", which crosses the language barrier very successfully in dealing with the ethics of weaponry. Lino Aldani's "Good Night, Sophie" is almost as successful, and also hinges on an ethical question. Vadim Shefner's story, "A Modest Genius", is also very pleasing, but gains its cross-cultural impetus from the fact that it is commentary on the universal human condition.

One of the most remarkable stores in the book is Adrian Rogoz's "The Altar of the Random Gods". Occasionally the process of translation has bizarre effects – while robbing the story of some qualities, it inevitably introduces some new ones at random. It is particularly appropriate that this story, which concerns itself with microscopic probabilities, should be one that benefits from the odd juxtaposition of wayward inferences. The idiosyncrasies of the translator are no doubt responsible for some of the beautifully surreal qualities of the concluding sequence, but I think it is largely a collaboration between Rogoz and chance.

Fiction only becomes Literature-with-a-capital-L when we can free it from its cultural environment and assess it with some degree of ob-

jectivity. Personally, I am a great believer in the use of literature (small L) rather than the kind of idolatry which is preached in establishments of learning, but I think that no member of the sf fraternity is free from a desire to see sf accorded more respect in all circles, and its merits accorded due applause. For this reason, I am an ardent supporter of translated sf because it is in collections like *View From Another Shore* that we can most easily see the wood instead of the trees. We can get far more idea of the potential of sf as a Literary form from foreign literature than we can from our own. Literary elitists, here is an opportunity to learn. Readers, here is an opportunity for you to appreciate not being invisible idiots. I hope that you all enjoy this collection greatly, as I did. This book is only part of a vast series to be issued by the Seabury Press, and I hope that they do very well out of it.

foreign constellations

The Temple of the Past
by Stefan Wul, translated Ellen Fox (Seabury Press, 1973, 137 pp, $6.95, ISBN 0 8164 9148 8)
(Originally Le Temple du Passé, *Editions Laffont, 1957)*

Hard To Be A God
by Arkadi and Boris Strugatski, translated by Wendayne Ackerman (Seabury Press, 1973, 219 pp, $6.95, ISBN 0 8164 9121 6)
(Originally Trudno byt Bogom, *Vsesojuznoje Objedinenije, 1964)*

reviewed by John Brunner

It is just possible that inexact translation or careless proof-reading may account for some of the flaws in the first of these novels. Responsibility for the majority, I'm afraid, must rest with Monsier Wul.

Consider this plot. A *rocket* – the fact is repeatedly stressed – on an interstellar journey from Alpha I System to Alpha II, scheduled to last about a month (!), crashes on a planet with liquid-chlorine oceans and is swallowed by a sea-creature 300 yards long. The respiratory system of this beastie can use "nothing but a highly rarefied chlorine of loose molecular structure . . ."

The four survivors, all of whom bar the protagonist Massir die off before the fourth and final part of the novel, undertake to cause a mutation (!) in this creature which results in it growing legs and emerging on to dry land.

The said mutation gives rise, in just *one* batch of eggs, to thousands of intelligent telepathic lizard-like animals which receive from Massir basic devices like the stone axe and the windmill and put them to use, are found ten thousand years later to be the planet's dominant species – and to have progressed no further than where they were left by Massir.

Who was, of course, from Atlantis.

I say of course because by the time this "revelation" is sprung on us disbelief has been not suspended but strangled in a tight noose. The novel reads as though it was tossed off in a week or so by an amateur who didn't care enough about his work to plan ahead or even re-read what he had produced. One of the survivors' initial tasks, for example, is to seal their dead companions' bodies in a vacant airtight cabin to avoid the smell as they rot (p. 42). They hold no funeral or memorial service.

On p. 77 we are suddenly told that they adhere to a religion, with a god called Roms and a sacred legend recounted on the next page in pseudo-archaic diction – "Soldier, if thou knowest what thou dost, then art thou blessed, and needst fear naught" – which enjoins on them respect for human remains. This, obviously, was snatched out of the air, not built into the story.

Combine that with "Maian and Aejuptian slaves" and "waving handkerchiefs" as a rocket is launched into space . . . and you'll perhaps see why I'm obliged to say I've read nothing as excruciatingly awful as this since the heyday of Curtis Warren and Scion Publications in the late forties and early fifties. Indeed I would suspect that a prime influence on M. Wul was Volsted Gridban.

It's a relief to turn to the Strugatskis' book.

The translation of this one reads far more smoothly.

It is admittedly marred here and there by faults which could have been rectified at the galley-proof stage: on p. 26 there are references to a dragon, Pech, and a wild sow, Y, and on p. 27 to "the old wild sow Pech" (!); one doesn't say in English "the law of the preservation

of energy" – and so on.

And, equally, there are what one is compelled to regard as elementary flaws in the actual construction of the novel. It is not until p. 199 that we hear more than casual mention of Arata the Hunchback, formerly Arata the Fair, who turns out to be one of the major characters involved in the tangled development of the crisis at the climax of the book, and the action thereupon stops for three pages while data long overdue for the reader's attention are retailed in the pluperfect tense . . .

These shortcomings, however, are so minor as barely to diminish the impact of an otherwise well-written and admirably complex story. The protagonist, posing as Rumata, a nobleman on a planet where (for unexplained reasons) humanity has slipped back from the state of advanced civilisation now obtaining on Earth, is one of twenty undercover agents instructed to watch, report on, but not interfere with the local situation, since according to the inflexible principles of historical necessity the population must take command of their own destiny rather than accept outside aid, which would entail the risk of their becoming spineless parasites. (Near the end of the book, this view is set out in an ingenious debate between Rumata and a native doctor, Budach, who can only reason in terms of "God's will"; the whole passage is very cleverly done.)

Rumata, however, partly because he is in love with a native girl, finds it harder and harder to adhere to this rigid *ukase* as what might have developed into a tolerant, relatively free and creative culture on the death of its old tyrannical king is undermined by the intrigues of a power-hungry but small-minded usurper, aided by hordes of black-clad monks intolerant of anything that conflicts with their own narrow view of the universe, and determined to impose blind unquestioning faith on the populace regardless of how many people they must torture or drive into exile.

The Strugatski brothers develop their alien society in depth; they equip it with legends, local differences of manners and customs, an economy, trading-relations . . . It is rare to find such a wealth of detail in the presentation of a non-Earthly culture. True, some of the details are stock – one recognises in Waga Koleso Brecht's "King of the Beggars" virtually unaltered – but the overall effect is impressive. Recommended.

formula but fun

The Winds of Gath
Derai
Toyman
by E.C. Tubb (Arrow, 1973, 192pp, 189pp and 192pp, 35p each, ISBN 0 09 907610 1, ISBN 0 09 907620 9 and ISBN 0 09 907630 6)

reviewed by Malcolm Edwards

In Britain we see very little of the formula science fiction paperback which constitutes a significant percentage of the market in the USA. (The reader may *think* he is encountering a large number of formula novels, but in fact he is only seeing the cream of the crop, although this may be far from obvious.) In recent years E.C. Tubb's series of novels about the wandering adventurer Earl Dumarest have been among the more successful excursions into this sub-genre; now, the first three books of the series have appeared in British paperback editions, with, presumably, the rest to follow.

The essence of a formula novel is, of course, that it follows a predictable sequence of actions and introduces a familiar set of characters, both of which vary only nominally from book to book. In a series, this depends on the author devising a set-up which will enable him to put his hero or heroes through an ostensibly different but in fact fairly similar adventure each time.

The background of these novels is perfectly suited to such a procedure. Man has spread across the galaxy, colonizing thousands of different worlds, each self-sufficient, each embracing a different social and political system. Even his origins are forgotten; the idea that he originated on a single world is scoffed at by sophisticates. Throughout these very various worlds exist two unifying forces. The Universal Brotherhood, a pragmatic set of monks, do their best to alleviate the apparently universal poverty and misery of the masses; the

Cyclan, whose semi-cybernetic members are cold intellects incapable of emotion, works to its own end of universal domination through manipulation of the ruling classes.

Earl Dumarest is an Earthman who has lost his home: when a boy he stowed away on a ship, and the intervening years have taken him countless light-years from home. Now he wanders from world to world, seeking any clue to the whereabouts of home, living on his strength and fighting skill. Always, he comes into opposition to the Cyclan, whose members he hates. Gradually, the reason for this hatred crystallizes into the knowledge that the Cyclan's ultra-secret base is on Earth: this is why they always thwart his search for information.

In each novel, Dumarest arrives on a new world, where he becomes embroiled in a power struggle. Each time a Cyber has recently been introduced into the royal household, appearing to aid one faction while actually only serving its own ends. After suffering various hardships, Dumarest disposes of his various enemies (though he often also loses his friends in the process) and ultimately kills the hated cyber. He may encounter some romantic involvement, but it is generally brief and inconclusive. Then he is on his way once more, with perhaps a hint of an extra clue to aid his quest.

Since each novel portrays roughly the same events against a different backcloth, reading three of them in quick succession gives one a distinct sense of *déjà vu,* as the same scene occurs over and again. For example, in each book there is one scene where we see the cyber, in a private moment, using a special mental technique to establish rapport with his base on earth:

> "Relaxing, he closed his eyes and concentrated on the Samatchazi formulae. Gradually he lost the senses of taste, smell, touch and hearing. Had he opened his eyes he would have been blind. Locked in the womb of his skull his brain ceased to be irritated by external stimuli. It became a thing of pure intellect, its reasoning awareness its only thread of life. Only then did the grafted Homochon elements become active. Rapport quickly followed.
> "Dyne became really alive."
>
> *(The Winds of Gath)*

> "Relaxing, he closed his eyes and concentrated on the Samatchazi formulas. Gradually he lost the sense of taste, smell, touch and hearing. Had he opened his eyes he would have been blind. Locked in his skull

his brain ceased to be irritated by external stimuli. It became a thing of pure intellect, its reasoning awareness its only contact with life. Only then did the engrafted Homochon elements become active. Rapport quickly followed.
"Regor became truly alive."

(Derai)

"Lying supine on the bed he closed his eyes and concentrated on the Samatchazi formulae. His breathing grew slower, shallow, regular as that of a man asleep. He gradually lost the use of his senses; had he opened his eyes he would have been blind. He floated, detached, unstimulated by external reality. Within the confines of his skull his brain became a thing of pure intellect, its reasoning awareness his only connection with normal life. Only then did the grafted Homochon elements become alive.
"Creel entered a new sphere of existence."

(Toymán)

But perhaps it is unfair to draw attention to this kind of repetition. These are not books intended for careful, critical reading. They are certainly not intended to be read close together. They are books, perhaps, for a train journey or an evening's simple relaxation, pleasant and undemanding. The series structure gives a sense of coherence to the reader who has encountered more than one of the novels, and although it is infinitely extensible in theory it does seem to be working slowly towards a climactic battle between Dumarest and the might of the Cyclan in their caves beneath Earth. But the author must assume that the reader *hasn't* come across the other volumes, and therefore the various key elements must be re-established each time. And in a work of this kind, once you have thought up an adequate description of a process, why bother to think up another, if you require it only once per book?

Individually, these books can provide a couple of hours' undemanding relaxation. Mr. Tubb has a nicely original touch in devising the different planets which form his backcloths, although the societies living on them tend to be repetitively feudal. Also, despite the violent nature of the stories, the author shows an unusual distaste for violence; Dumarest, like too few other such heroes, uses his fighting skills only very reluctantly, when he has no alternative. Only *en masse* do they become indigestible.

sleazo inputs I have known

Cults of Unreason
by Dr. Christopher Evans (George Harrap, 1973, 264pp, £3.00, ISBN 0 245 51870 3)

reviewed by Brian W. Aldiss

Speaking with the decorum of his age, Horace Walpole declared that the world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel. There may have been truth in the aphorism at the time, but the world has rattled on since then, acquiring a more exquisite complexity, and becoming both tragedy and comedy, inseparably mixed.

One of the many delights of Dr. Christopher Evans's book is that the author perceives comedy and tragedy together. His twentieth-century cults are crazy, illogical, and built round ideas which should be confined to sf magazines – yet they mirror faithfully the illusion we feel the world to be.

Some examples. A good half of the book is taken up by an examination of L. Ron Hubbard's Dianetics, later reborn as Scientology, with its jargon of Clears, processing, and Operating Thetans. Then come ufology and ufolatry; the Aetherius Society, gallantly swarming up mountains to give a heave for the Spiritual in the galactic battle now raging round us; the Process, hip guys who believe in Jehovah, Satan, and Lucifer; various nice chaps who place faith in Black Boxes of various kinds – such as George de la Warr, whose laboratories in Oxford were fashionable in the fifties – the Hieronymus Machines, the Dean Drives; Ted Serios, who photographs thought; Dr. Wilhelm Reich and his sexy old Orgone Box; the mystics who act as bellhops between the East and mystic West, such as Gurdjieff and Ouspenski, the Subud clan, Lobsang 'Third Eye' Rampa, and sundry swamis; those who believe that Tolkien's Frodo lives; and the pundit of prehistoric interstellar travel, Erich von Daniken, whose question 'Was God an astronaut?' has proved irresistible to many millions of people.

About the only cult that Dr. Evans omits is the Knights of St. Fantony! Even then, its founder, Eric Jones, gets a mention as the builder of a Hieronymus machine.

It will not escape the notice of readers of this journal that all these cults thrive on theories dreamed up by E.E. Smith and John Russell Fearn in the pulps of the thirties, or embody science-fictionalised versions of earlier and less swinging theological ideas, or actually incorporate sf machines of mysterious functional value, from the E-meter, through Dynamisers, oscilloclasts, and flying saucers, to the currently vouched-for Toomin Alpha Pacer.

Of course it has not escaped Dr. Evans's notice either. Those who have heard him talking enthusiastically at conventions or read his articles in *New Worlds* when that magazine was drumming up a storm, will know that he knows his science fiction. They will also know that he has his own stimulating theories about parallels between living brains and computers and their dreaming states.

His chapters on Scientology are boldly headed 'The Science Fiction Religion', and chronicle the evolution of L. Ron Hubbard from a writer of pulp fantasy to the High Priest of his own religion, showing how Scientology's emphasis has changed from psychiatric activities to more pietistic ones – and not only because the Clears predicted by *Dianetics* in its early days either failed to materialise or turned up to embarrass the founder. This history has many dramatic moments, for instance when the Church of Scientology sued the MP for East Grinstead, Geoffrey Johnson Smith, and the case went to the High Court. After a lengthy hearing, it was decided that Mr. Johnson had said nothing defamatory, and the case was dismissed, with the Scientologists having to pay costs – some £70,000. In fact, the Scientologists made rather a good showing in court.

John W. Campbell and A.E. van Vogt put in guest appearances in these chapters; Campbell launched Dianetics in *Astounding* and took the cure himself; Dr. Evans notes that Campbell began as a pulp writer like Hubbard. It would have been interesting – though no part of his brief – if he had also mentioned that extremely successful author, Arthur C. Clarke, whose beginnings were in pulp magazines, and whose writing has often shown an engagement with the religious as well as the technological, notably in *Childhood's End* and *2001*.

Legitimate sf writers have steered remarkably clear of flying saucers, although the discs used to appear on covers of sf magazines, in an understandable editorial bid to raise circulations. Dr. Evans also comments that sf writers are more hard-headed than some fans. One cannot imagine that any sf writer worth his salt would muff a meeting with real Venusians to the extent that George Adamski (*Flying Saucers Have Landed*) did. After the publication of *Gulliver's Travels,* Jonathan Swift wrote gleefully to his friend Pope to tell him of an Irish bishop who had read the book and claimed that he didn't believe a word of it. As a reviewer of over fifty books on flying saucers, this critic can say much the same thing.

It would be a pity to run through *Cults of Unreason* chapter by chapter; the book demands to be read. Here and there, Dr. Evans plainly has his favourites, like Lobsang Rampa, who scores high for imagination and local colour, and George de la Warr, who would gain an alpha in anyone's charisma stakes. Like L. Ron Hubbard, de la Warr made a brave showing in the courts, although costs also went against him.

But Evans remains constantly interesting, his tone never lapsing into the style of journalistic paste-up books (Lunatic Fringes of Today, Great Mysteries of Small Religions, etc.). Freakiness seems to interest Dr. Evans less than what makes the cults tick. Here one regrets that he devotes no space to Charles Manson, who founded his own cult and has become something of a minor cult-figure. The whole tawdry Manson affair is recounted by Ed Sanders in *The Family*[1] with great gusto and secret formula English. Mr. Sanders points out how Manson's "sleazo inputs", as he picturesquely calls them, include a dose of Scientology and a big helping of Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land.* Manson also believed in a variant of the old Hollow Earth theory, an sf delusion if ever there was one.

There are two more complaints, both minor. Firstly, it is odd to list and discuss Ron Hubbard's writings without mentioning his stories about Ole Doc Methuselah[2], which contains what one imagines must have been Hubbard's previsions, nineteen-forties style, of the Church of Scientology of California.

Ole Doc is an immortal galactic medico who travels round the galaxy clobbering disease and graft, aided by his multi-armed slave, Hippocrates. He is a Soldier of Light and a member of that elite organisation, the Universal Medical Society, which ceaselessly patrols

the universe. "Saluting no government, collecting no fees, permitting no infringement, the UMS became dreaded and revered as the Soldiers of Light, and under the symbols of the crossed ray rods impinged their will upon the governments of space under a code of their own more rigorous than any code of laws." Ron eventually went on to found that big Health Service in the skies – the days of Auditing, The Org Book, Suppressive Persons, the Ethics Officers, and Ron's ship mysteriously sailing round the Med., are presaged in the Ole Doc stories.

My second complaint concerns Dr. Evans's treatment of Ouspenski. For once, the author's sympathy with cranks deserts him, and he speaks of P.D. Ouspenski's writing as "among the most obscure and humourless works ever penned by man". Not so. He should try Kant and Nietzsche. Quite a lot of Ouspenski's work is highly readable, if not actually a bundle of fun. *In Search of the Miraculous*[3] is as bumpy and enjoyable a ride as its title suggests; here one sees a nut cult through the eyes of the chief nut.

It's true that Ouspenski goes in for strange parallels between, for instance, food, music, and chemistry, and one soon has enough discussion of food octaves, and such elucidation as "The note sol 48 by uniting with 'carbon' 12 present in the organism passes into nitrogen 24 – la 24". The importance of Ouspenski is that he tries to incorporate what he understood as science into what he understood as religion; and it is this comparatively early striving for union which is a common factor in all the later cults under survey.

In his fiction, Ouspenski does better than in his non-fiction. *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin*[4] is an interesting tale of time-reversal and human alternatives, while the two long stories in *Talks with a Devil*[5] are highly imaginative and reveal a nice sly sense of humour, related to the Absurdist school.

The cultist search for an equation between religion and science is one that many of us find funny; and of course the goofier of these cults are nothing but comic. But it is to Dr. Evans's credit that he finds them not only comic but worth study. He is for rather than against Scientology. Even the Aetherians chatting up Master Jesus on Venus raise in him only a tolerant smile, rather than rage at man's idiocy.

Not so long ago, it was widely believed that science and scientific thought might banish religion entirely, and that people would then

lead rational lives; one sometimes sees a faint hope of this kind gleaming through the clouds of H.G. Wells's pessimism. We understand better now that unmitigated rationality is merely another variety of madness, and that the religious impulse is deeply rooted in our natures. Indeed, the religious impulse is probably part of the creative impulse; stamp out religious feeling and you stamp out the arts and sciences.

This impasse is both tragic and comic. Legit science allows us no reason to deduce that there is an Afterlife in any form; we have to turn to vaudeville science, the science of prestidigitation, of Gernsback and Campbell, of radionics and psionics, for hope of pie in the sky. On the other hand, the legit religions shift their ground uneasily and are wary of offering pie anywhere. So the sermon has given way to the astrology column. When God drops out of touch with the twentieth century, the sleazo inputs give you a better buzz.

Dr. Evans appears to regard the cults as a number of life-rafts, some less buoyant than others, floating in a sea of doubt. This is a too flattering view of things, much as one admires the generosity of the mind behind it. For in fact the cultists are generally kidding themselves that they and only they are the saved, the ones in possession of truth. To maintain a position of doubt is a braver thing. The cultists have their equivalent in the tribes who participate in Pacific cargo cults, where poor benighted natives pray to the big white birds that roar overhead to drop largesse, or at least wrist watches, upon them. The poor benighted natives of the West pray similarly to black boxes or UFOs or reflexophones for hope of similar technological largesse. It is noticeable that many of Dr. Evans's cults employ clique words for some sort of fluid or vague emission, from ectoplasm to orgone, odyle, and telepathy; thus one gets a suck at the twin teats of Nature and Science at one and the same time.

Mercifully, Dr. Evans does not moralise. We are allowed to draw our own moral from his entertaining book. To each his own, but my moral would be: let's keep sf in paperbacks where it belongs; once it seeps into the world outside, it can be dangerous! The Process is a better example of sf coming true than Verne's famous submarine.

The basic imaginative *donnée* of the pulps to which Hubbard, Campbell, E.E. Smith, van Vogt, Heinlein, and the others contributed was a pretty primitive bit of power-fantasy: that Man (rarely woman) has various God-like abilities. In the knockabout farces of their paper universe, Man always won through by force; Galactic Law replaced

ethics. That was entertainment. When it becomes religion, as it did with Charles Manson – watch out, the sleazo priests pack blasters, the Soldiers of Light tote lasers, and the infinite is full of crap.

FOOTNOTES

1. *The Family*, by Ed Sanders, Longman, 1971.
2. *Ole Doc Methuselah*, by L. Ron Hubbard, Daw Books, 1972.
3. *In Search of the Miraculous*, by P.D. Ouspenski, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955.
4. *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin* by P.D. Ouspenski, Faber Paperback, 1971.
5. *Talks with a Devil*, by P.D. Ouspenski, Edited by J.G. Bennett, Turnstone Press, 1972.

books received

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

Aldiss, Brian W. (Ed.)	*The Penguin SF Omnibus* (Penguin, 1973, 616 pages, £0.60, ISBN 0 14 00 3145 6 [originally published in 3 Penguin volumes, 1961, 1963, 1964])
Aldiss, Brian W.	*Report on Probability A* (Sphere, 1973, 156 pages, £0.30, ISBN 0 7221 1101 0 [originally published Faber 1968])
Aldiss, Brian W.	*The Saliva Tree* (Sphere, short stories, 1973, 253 pages, £0.35, ISBN 0 7221 1102 9 [originally published Faber 1966])
Ballard, J.G.	*Crash* (Cape, 1973, 224 pages, £2.25, ISBN 0 224 00782 3)
Clarke, Arthur C.	*Profiles of the Future* (Pan, 1973, 249 pages, £0.40, ISBN 0 330 23619 9 [originally published Gollancz, 1962 – this edition is revised])
Compton, D.G.	*The Electric Crocodile* (Arrow, 1973, 222 pages, £0.35, ISBN 0 09 907290 4 [originally published Hodder and Stoughton, 1970])

Engdahl, Sylvia	*Heritage of the Star* (Gollancz, 1973, 246 pages, £1.60, ISBN 0575 01669 8)
Harrison, Harry and Aldiss, Brian W. (Eds.)	*The Astounding-Analog Reader Volume One* (Doubleday, New York, 1972, xvi, 530 pages, $7.95, ISBN 0 385 02334 0)
Harrison, Harry and Aldiss, Brian W. (Eds.)	*The Astounding-Analog Reader Volume Two* (Doubleday, New York, 1973, xv, 458 pages, $7.95, ISBN 0 385 02732 X)
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