GEORGE TURNER'S 'BELOVED SON'

SOME NOTES CRITICAL HISTORICAL AND CRYPTOPHILOSOPHICAL BY THE AUTHOR AND HIS READERS

BELOVED SON may well be traced back to an article that George wrote for **Australian Science Fiction Review** no.12 (October 1967) called 'Nothing to lose but the chains'. Writers of science fiction, George said, 'have built themselves a neat set of cages, which contain and constrain their imaginative faculties, and it is time for them to find their way out'. One of the tightest of these cages, he suggested, is the conventions of sf. 'I propose now to stick my neck out, put my hat in the ring and list a few of the conventions due for scrapping, plus some suggested lines of thought for the rejuvenation of the basic ideas behind them.' And he did: telepathy, psi talents, sub-space, the all-female world, robotics and automation, werewolves &c, re-education of criminals, population explosion, one-world government — the sloppy thinking, or lack of thinking, behind the treatment of these subjects in sf was neatly and quickly exposed.

I enjoyed publishing that article, and not least because readers reacted (as I had hoped they would) by asking who the hell George Turner thought he was, what sf had he written anyway, and when did he intend to put his money where his mouth is — that sort of thing. I knew the answer to the first question: George not only thought he was George Turner, but insisted on being George Turner. That's not meant to sound facetious. Whatever George may have in common with St Paul, he is not 'all things to all men'. Accommodating, yes, but never (at least in the twelve years I have been getting to know him) anything else but himself. Before I met him I had been aware of him as, for example, 'among the two or three finest novelists now practising in this country' (Stephen Murray-Smith, in Australian Book Review). The late John K. Ewers, in his *Creative Writing in Australia* (1962), had written that 'several of our younger writers — in particular, Randolph Stow, Elizabeth Harrower, Thea Astley and G. R. Turner — are bringing to the Australian novel a pleasing degree of depth and sophistication'. With this awareness, and meeting George as a fellow sf enthusiast, can you blame me for trying ever so gently to nudge him in the direction of writing the stuff?

Well, it took a while, and George might dispute the gentleness of the nudging — in which I was soon joined by many folk, fans and writers, here and overseas — but the objective was achieved. One day in 1971 George told me he'd been giving some thought to a science fiction novel — and went on to detail certain problems he

was having with theoretical astronomy, biology and the like, which had never occurred to me as being problems before, mainly because I don't go in for that kind of thing, but I listened, and made sympathetic noises, and kept his glass filled, and if I said anything at all apart from 'Golly!' or 'Yes, I see what you're up against', it didn't put him off the idea, because he kept on coming back to talk about it. (Some time later, after I moved to Canberra in 1972, he said something to the effect that we had been talking a novel into existence. At the time I was reminded of Howard Schoenfeld's story *Build Up Logically* and was pleased. These days I think of Malcolm Fraser talking-up the Australian economy, and I shudder. I suppose it depends a lot on who is doing the talking. When I moved — I have never verified this, but I think I'm right — Robin Johnson took my place as sympathetic listener. Robin *does* go in for things like theoretical astronomy and biology, and he has read vastly more sf than I ever want to, so I don't feel too guilty about leaving George in mid-idea and moving off to make my fortune editing politicians in Canberra.)

GEORGE TURNER
19 April 1972

Have you really been in that aseptic tank for six weeks or more? It seems only yesterday that we strolled arm in arm among the grog blossoms. Since then I have given up smoking. ... (The novel) progresses at a fast crawl. Section 2 — some 10 000 words in type and a good 50 000 in the wpb — is now disposed of, and nothing seems to be much further forward. In fact I have thrown in a couple of random ideas which must now be worked into the plot to justify their existence. And there the matter rests until the next flash of genius. Do you realise how frustrating it is to be a little, tiny, uncertain hanger on of the skirts of genius? You spend all this time waiting for something to be genial about. And then it turns out to be unworkable. And all these big snotty geniuses knock off masterpieces with one hand while, presumably, they masturbate with the other. No, I don't think I want to grow up to be a genius after all — at least, not a little, frustrated one. I would like to be just normally intelligent and reasonably competent — like, say, John Russell Fearn. Hear that, God? I don't ask much. ... Robin Johnson and I sank a bottle of gin last Sunday night and exchanged some shameful confidences. See if I don't get him into a book some day!

6 October 1972

I have been moving among the intelligentsia, and was recently invited, along with some thirty other similarly poor types, to address a seminar at La Trobe U, where they are studying (if that is the word) capacity and education. My part was to give a talk on the novelist at work. ... You could, when your paralysis lifts, tell me how it affects you. *(I published George's address in Scythrop 28. — JB)* Just remember that I don't listen to criticism but react strongly to even the most mindless applause. What in God's name *are* you doing in that farflung outpost of relegated civil servants and disgraced politicians? ... You will recall that on seeing the name of biologist John Heathcote in my sf novel you asked me to insert a mention of Gangoil? Well, you know my objections to private jokes and all forms of Tuckerisation — but I did promise,

didn't I? So here is the relevant passage. *(And I'm not about to reproduce it here. Look it up: page 112.)* ... So you see that I have given you your reference and salved my literary conscience by turning it into a part of the plot. Satisfactory?

30 November 1972 The Trollope business, which began as a private joke, has developed some life of its own, emerging in the character of a gentleman who lives in a replica of a nineteenth century drawing room and is never sure which century he is operating in. And, believe it or not, I have dug up some biological and psychological justification for his existence. I think John Heathcote will tickle your fancy, and may give you pause at the thought that the things done to him are the subject of laboratory experiments today. Just to leave you pondering, I will reveal that he is the original John Heathcote of 1980, but in 2032 is only twenty years old — and has not been the subject of rejuvenation or time travel or anything else you are liable to think of. I hope.

From *Philosophical Gas* 28, Winter 1974: (7.5.74) ... I am on leave for another three weeks and working fairly solidly on a novel called 'Second Chance', which you may have heard of as 'Amateur Hour' or something else before that. (Probably 'Skylark of Space'.) With luck I may get the draft finished before I go back to making beer. At any rate I have discovered what it seems to be about — and have forgotten what it was once supposed to be about. It is a very bad novel, structurally, but may get by on its individual bits.

((I thought it was about the philosophical bases of morals, the concept of individuality, liberty, social responsibility in science, and the worth of Anthony Trollope — but it's a while since we last talked about it. And it started out with the title 'That Has Such People In It'. Are you still writing the same book?))

— Of course he was. I was just being funny. But oddly — or so George told me — I seemed to have hit on some of the things he really was writing about.

From *Philosophical Gas* 31, July 1975: (14.4.75) At the moment I am engaged on correcting, titivating and feeling generally disconsolate about a 130 000-word novel called BELOVED SON, which may or may not stir a chord in your memory.

((Not so much a chord as a distant but distinct drum. And in the last couple of weeks I have read *Beloved Son*. Some time ago I said that this book would turn out to be as difficult, as important and as magnificent as *Last and First Men*. Having read it, I still say that (but you are a much better writer than Olaf

Stapledon: need I say that?), and I am glad you didn't write something else.))

— Before I published that issue of PG there had been this note from George:

28 May 1975 In approximately the same mail (as this letter) you will receive a typescript. It is not a submission for Scythrop, or whatever that kaleidoscope is called this week. It is the third carbon, almost illegible, of a novel you outlined to me several years ago under the provision title of 'Harry Heathcote of Gangoil'. I have changed the title to 'Son of Trollope' but otherwise retained your scenario intact — plus, of course, a few decorations of my own. (Just can't resist meddling with other people's ideas.) Since all other copies are in the air en route for England and America, yours has rarity value. Which means I may want it back in a hurry for editorial reference. At any rate, please bring it back with you in August, if I don't send a frantic SOS before then.

— 1975: ah, that was a year! Labor was in office (but not in power) and all was almost-right with the world. One day in July Ursula Le Guin stayed with us in Canberra, and I showed her George's manuscript. I think she said she liked the look of it, but so much happened in that week we spent with her — it was less than twenty-four hours actually, but it seemed like a week — that I can't recall exactly what she said. Then we had a World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne. Meanwhile, other people had been looking at *Beloved Son*.

HOWARD MOOREPARK
444 East 82nd Street
New York 10028
23 July 1975

Dear Mr Turner,
I have read BELOVED SON, and am sorry to say that I do not think it would be saleable here — apart from being twice as long as a s-f novel should be.

In my opinion, it moves slowly, cumbersomely, and the characters are so dim that I couldn't find any of them interesting enough to care.

It goes back to you by seamail. I'm sorry.

CARL ROUTLEDGE
176 Wardour Street
London W1V 3AA
20 August 1975

My Dear George,
I am very sorry about this. I enjoyed reading the novel, but then I am in a special position vis a vis yourself: I am interested in you, and also in Barnard's Star, and all my desire is to like it. But that doesn't alter the fact that it is a long book (it would have to be priced £5 in the UK — nearly £10 in Australia) and it is a long slow read, and you need your wits about you. I can't imagine the Woolworths readership going for it, next door to Michael Moorcock and Azimov on the SF shelves, in paperback, can you? ... Try for publication in Australia. I am very, very sad.

JOHN BUSH
Victor Gollancz Ltd
14 Henrietta Street
London WC2E 8QJ
26 November 1975

Dear Mr Routledge,
I am afraid we cannot make an offer to publish George Turner's BELOVED SON despite the fact that there is a great amount of good in the novel. Basically, it is far too long for its own good and if it were only half the length — for my taste a lot of the long dialogues about philosophy, sociology, science etcetera could go — it would be very promising.

So, regretfully, would you like to pick it up?

— George was in London during 1976, collecting art galleries and operas and sitting at Ursula's feet in Golders Green. I saw him next in August, at Bofcon in Melbourne. He had taken his manuscript to Faber's, he said, dropped it on a desk, and fled.

CHARLES MONTEITH
Faber and Faber Ltd
3 Queen Square
London WC1N 3AU
3 August 1976

Dear Mr Turner,
I'm just off on holiday but before I go I wanted to write you a brief note to say how very much I enjoyed and admired BELOVED SON. It's an excellent science fiction novel — and I've already made an offer for it to Mr Carl Routledge from whom you'll doubtless be hearing very shortly. As we all realize, the real problem, commercially, is its jumbo size — but I don't honestly think (and I'm sure you'll agree!) that it would be easy to make any major cuts in it without doing it a major injury since one of the most attractive features of the whole novel to me is the closeness of the plotting and structuring.

I hope — indeed I feel confident — very shortly after I get back to the office at the beginning of September I'll be able to settle all final details with Mr Routledge; and all I need to do in the meantime is to congratulate you again on a first class book and thank you for having sent it to me.

— *Beloved Son* was published in January 1978 — and this is where the story really starts, because now the book was read not only by agents, publishers and friends of the author, but by what the inimitable Peacock called 'that very large class of literary gentlemen who are in the habit of favouring the reading public with their undisguised opinions'. The following selections from reviews are presented in no particular order.

GEOFF MUIRDEN
The Herald
Melbourne
6 June 1978

It's good to see a science fiction novel set in the Melbourne of the future... (Arthur's) waspish tongue serves unerringly to lay bare the social fabric, so that he is a central element in the story. ... The product of a mature but cynical mind.

TOM SHIPPEY
The Guardian
London
23 February 1978

Mr Turner needs a few gaffing lessons from Mr Pohl, but his ideas keep hopping out. The trouble is, we don't know which ones will come true. But some of them are bound to. It's a relief to get to George Martin's *Dying of the Light*, a first novel, but...

GARY TIPPET
Sydney Morning Herald

Turner is obviously worried about some of the directions of the modern world in science, politics and personal liberties, and has extrapolated his fears into this novel of a frightening future. It is a powerful, stimulating first book.

TOM PAULIN
New Statesman
26 May 1978

And what *Beloved Son* is essentially concerned with is the danger of genetic experiment, 'the power latent in a process of endless, controlled duplication'. Once the geneticists are allowed to release that power they can create regiments of group-indoctrinated, uncomplaining serfs who believe that 'everybody's replaceable, it's the race that matters'. ... George Turner is consistently witty and intelligent in his depiction of outmoded starmen blundering through the brave new world of Australasia, 'all Earth itself lost in the paradoxes of time dilation and slow metabolism'. And often his prose has a lyrical and energetic wonder, as when Raft gazes from the windows of a plastic barracks at 'soft stars in familiar constellations, in clear air lovelier than the diamond dust fields of space'. But the form of Turner's novel, like Raft himself, is too much of a baggy monster at odds with a bright efficiency — the narrative tends to sprawl in places and this sometimes makes the story-line seem oddly precarious and absent-minded. Nevertheless, this is a compelling and often brilliant fiction.

The Sunday Press
Dublin
2 April 1978

I went off science fiction after a time and George Turner's fine novel is the first work in that genre I've read for many years. If it is a true reflection of what is being done in that area then I've certainly been missing something. *Beloved Son* is a tightly written, complexly plotted novel of adventure and suspense; its characters are believable... the ideas postulated are serious and well thought out; the writing never descends to the banal... The whole thing adds up to an immensely readable and diverting work of fantastical supposition.

ALEX DE JONGE
Spectator
1 April 1978

A long, dense and sometimes difficult work... The plot is elaborate, complex and comes to a conclusion so remote from the point of departure that it renders this quite unnecessary. In other worlds *(Spectator's typo — JB)* it could do with cutting. But that being said, it reveals a profound sense of politics, some of the best dialogue and characterisation to come from science fiction in years, and is both vivid and absorbing.

DAVID PATERSON
Newsagent & Bookshop
London
February? 1978

Here in this great block-buster of a novel (375 pages, at least 150,000 words of pure SF) and from the hand of a complete unknown, out of the blue, just like that, is a huge chunk of world-mothering creativity, a damp gust bringing rain to the waste land of British SF. ... Don't expect me to give you a summary of a plot that George Turner needs 150,000 words for, not very many of them wasted. ... The science is good, with a few minor quibbling points — for example, communication between Earth and a sub-light-speed spaceship is surely possible over much greater distances than a miserable 10 million miles? ... Turner is not yet at home with common speech and it shows in a slight stiltedness such as we sometimes find in translations from a foreign language. ... Probably he's very young (and if so we've a genius on our hands)...

JOHN FOYSTER
The Age
Melbourne
15 April 1978

When he deals with the society he has created, George Turner's writing is powerful indeed: very few science fiction novels so richly repay a re-reading. And there's the rub. *Beloved Son*, whether intentionally or not, dramatises the main problem of the science fiction writer and his craft. George Turner, like most readers of novels, is interested in human beings and how they behave. Science fiction elevates ideas above human interest, and science fiction writers who try to avoid that prescription run into trouble. And because *Beloved Son* is so much better written than the average, the scientifictional warts are all the more obvious. These disfigurements arise whenever 'science' (biological or otherwise) is pressed into the service of the plot. No, that is unfair, for all of the scientific content arises naturally (given the novel's structure). What is certain, however, is that when a chunk of science is introduced, it disrupts in a painful way the reader's interaction with the characters and the spirit of the novel. Whether or not this is an essential fault in science fiction, George Turner has shown that even a good novelist cannot avoid it.

DAMIEN BRODERICK
24 Hours / The Critic
Sydney
August 1978

My emotions reject almost all the characters in *Beloved Son*. The least acceptable is his protagonist, an Australian with the unfortunate name of Albert Raft, whose descent into psychopathic megalomania is so unlikely that it is craftily ascribed to the misfiring application of psychochemical interrogation. That is, the pivotal psychic change in the book results from an accident, not from growth, response or revelation of character. ... (The characters) tend to hiss and spit poisonously at one another, which lends a peculiarly prissy tone to the confrontations of allegedly hard types. Indeed the only agreeable character is Arthur... an exemplar of the controlled baroque melodrama which provides the book's best scenes. ... Turner's loving indulgence in set-pieces foreshadows the rediscovery by his innocent demagogues of manipulatory political

theatre. But finally that rediscovery seems to me contrived, essentially an artefact, a *function* of Turner's auctorial dynamic. ... I began by hailing *Beloved Son* as a gratifying turning-point in Australian science fiction. In case my remarks convey a different impression, let me emphasise that a book of such merit deserves close attention.

JAMES CLAYTON
Birmingham Post
2 March 1978

George Turner brings a depth of understanding that is rarely found in science fiction, but his writing style is so flat as to be dull. Despite the fascination inherent in the subject, it's a difficult novel to get along with.

JIM MACKENZIE
Nation Review
Sydney

It is not clear what the central problem of the book is — I conjecture biological research, but it may be the exceedingly interesting (and ambivalent) society of 2032, and the culture clash between it and the crew members... It is also not clear what we are intended to think of the ending, with the political situation that is developing when the book closes. Is it merely that fascism of one sort or another is always a danger, or is there some idea more complicated than that? I don't think books should give easy answers, but if Turner's intention was to raise questions they need to be more substantive than 'What is this book trying to get at?' One additional negative remark — a few of the puzzles are too easy. And that's all I can say against it. It is engrossing, vivid and thought-provoking. The characters are complex and interesting even if rather grotesque; the ideas are exciting and so is the plot. ... A fascinating book.

PETER BRADLEY
The Oxford Times
27 January 1978

It's a work of breathtaking complexity founded on a deceptively simple theme: the homecoming of the first starship after an absence of 40 years... Central to its argument is a prediction by Professor Fred Hoyle that in 20 years' time it will be the biologists, not the physicists, who are working behind barbed wire. ... Yet 21st century society is not especially vicious, corrupt or evil. In many ways it is preferable to our own. It is one of the strengths of *Beloved Son* that Mr Turner, unlike many a more famous sf writer, has not created a preposterous pasteboard world in order to knock it down in favour of one more like ours. His world picture is plausible, consistent, attractive — and doomed from the moment our forgotten starmen from the past arrive in it.

MOIRA McAULIFFE
Australian Book Review
July 1978

As a novel George Turner's *Beloved Son* is primarily concerned with two things — with creating a believable story with believable characters, and with being Australian. As a science fiction novel — a novel of speculation derived from present trends in ecology, biology, psychology and technology — it is

concerned with the general matters that informed *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Chrysalids*. ... the nexus and focus of the book is relationship — specifically family relationship, but, just as pointedly, the parent-child, parentless-child relationship of Turner's future to our present. ... Central to the book is the strangled father-son relationship of Raft to Heathcote... Turner's concern with identity, character, the close future and the plausibility of settings and events tends to clutter and clog the first third of the book; technological details and characters' motivations for quite trivial pieces of dialogue obtrude into the flow of the novel and block off the world that Turner is creating. ... Ironically, however, given the book's premises about identity, the most sharply drawn 'character' is the homosexual clone-brother Arthur, whose sexual preferences aren't allowed to cloud and determine who and what he sees and will understand. As a clone-brother Arthur is supposed to lack individual identity. But as Turner handles him, Arthur is an intelligent human being and shown to be so. ... On the surface Turner's Australianness is sometimes forced and sometimes natural — it produces both unnecessary jolts and unforgettable images of Australian summer and pathetic, destroyed Melbourne, or lovely interflows of dialogue about the meanings of twentieth-century 'gutter-slang'. Turner's prose is undelighted, unpoetic, without the apprehension of paradox and illumination. But the cumulative effect of the novel, the real thrust of his Australianness, is the disturbing suspicion that here, where we live, the beginnings of his twenty-first century may well be shaping themselves.

I think that's a fair sampling of the response of book reviewers to *Beloved Son*. Some of the comments are absurd; some, I think, gave even George a better idea of what his book is about. I particularly liked the reviews by John Foyster, Moira McAuliffe and (for its sheer enthusiasm and honesty) Jim Mackenzie.

I haven't written a review myself, because I don't go in for that kind of thing, and I haven't even published one yet. Normally when I want a book reviewed I ask George Turner. (And he's always too busy. A bloke must be caught up in awfully urgent and important things not to have time to review Robertson Davies and John James, I reckon. This is the same bloke who claims that I'm forever conning him into doing things he doesn't want to — 'bullying' him, in fact. Strewth!) I couldn't ask George to review this book, so I thought hard about who might be up to it — I was in Adelaide at the time, and in a rush to get a review published by Easter — and I had the happy thought of asking Mike Clark. He met the deadline, too. I missed it.

BELOVED SON

George Turner

Faber and Faber,
London, 1978
ISBN 0 571 11152 1

Reviewed by
Michael Clark

George Turner has written a very large book, and this is not meant to imply merely that it is long: in its 375 pages *Beloved Son* covers more complex themes, and makes more perceptive comment, than many novels twice its length. It is hard to point out a single theme and declare 'This is what the book is all about.' The book concerns more things than one.

In so far as it is possible to state, in the most general terms, the main current of thought in this novel, one might conceivably reason that its disparate elements might be loosely unified in describing the structure and outcome of change in science and society, and the manner in which they interact (as inevitably they must). Such interaction is involved primarily with the manner in which the freedom of individuals — of identity and of association with others — may be encroached upon and ultimately destroyed by a powerful authority (however conceptualized) armed with the appropriate tools, even if it believes it is functioning for the common good. Those who wish to exercise such control in *Beloved Son* certainly believe themselves to be operating in the best interests of mankind, but for all this, their methods are far from libertarian.

This is not to suggest that Turner's book is a dry and hoary treatise on politics and sociology. Nothing could be further from the truth. While *Beloved Son* is a profound examination of many issues that do, or should, concern us today, it is also a compelling narrative, peopled with real, fascinating, truly multi-dimensional characters. In this way Turner has transcended the limitations of the conventional science fiction novel, with its preponderant concern for escapism and adventure. These qualities, virtues in the science fiction genre, are not to be found in abundance here, where Turner's concern is to write a modern novel, dealing with contemporary problems, in a manner in which the sf setting happens to be the most expedient. The issues that Turner analyses are ultimately the fundamental concerns of humanity.

To present a precis of a novel under review is a thankless and usually fruitless exercise, and would be, in the case of this book, an extremely lengthy one. A shorter and finally more satisfactory course is to outline such relevant detail as is necessary for an understanding of individual themes as they are discussed.

Certainly one of the strongest warnings delivered pertains to the potential for society to misuse the findings of science, and for scientists themselves to be blind to the moral and ethical considerations of their work. In *Beloved Son* it is the life sciences — in particular, biology, genetics and psychology — that are subjected to this scrutiny. Albert Raft, commander of the first interstellar expedition, and his crew return from the stars after forty years (eight years for them, the starship having travelled at near light speed) to discover the awesome results of

cloning experiments begun on Earth before they left. Raft finds a large group of identical clones, whom he finds supremely distasteful, regarding this troupe of 'simultaneous dancers' (as one of the book's characters describes them) with utter contempt. However, turning out carbon copies of man by cloning is scarcely the beginning of the experimentation being undertaken in this 21st Century laboratory, secluded from the outside world. The model for this research had been selected because of his strong embodiment of certain physical and mental traits, skills and reflexes — an ideal starting point for the hastening of the evolutionary process, the aim expressed by the leader of the geneticists, Dr David. The kind of improvements in man he aims for are described as:

> 'The usual dreams of men — longevity, an improved immunological system, control of reflexes, increased muscular efficiency, self-replacement in brain cells and others, regrowth of injured members and so on. The ultimate body should be virtually immortal, with total control of its autonomic system and even of cellular structures, but we are a long way from that yet. It will not be arrived at in my time.' (p.307)

What has been arrived at in David's time is frequently abhorrent — travesties of humanity:

> It was about three feet high and mostly head, and it moved with the smooth flow of tiny footsteps on stumped legs under the floor-length gown. As it skittered between the benches it held aloft a kidney dish, like an offertory vessel borne from one research assistant to another. ... The tiny mouth and splayed nose were lost in the dish-shaped visage; the face was a disk of skin under sparse hair, for there were no eyes, none at all, nor depressions where they might have been, only a soft pudding-crust of featureless flesh. (p.301)

And so these geneticists proceed; in the conviction that they are operating for the ultimate benefit of mankind, they act out of the grossest inhumanity, ignoring and dismissing any immediate social or moral responsibility for their actions. Their myopic view of their role is typical of the blind, reductionist attitude to science, which is all too prevalent today (although mercifully the awareness of this seems to be growing). This method was practised with great success in the early days of the physical sciences, and was incorporated in to the philosophy of the life sciences as a matter of course. Broadly, it holds that by dissecting a phenomenon into its component parts, analysing these until they are understood, and reassembling them to form the original whole, complete knowledge may be had of the phenomenon under study. This notion is simplistic, and it does not work. Complex structures do not fit together like jigsaw puzzles: they are arranged in different levels of function and complexity, and the levels interact in a way that cannot be accounted for by examining each level independently. The basic inadequacy of reductionist principles was recognized by atomic physicists decades ago, yet, despite an abundance of evidence (for

a biologist's viewpoint see, for example, the chapter by Paul Weiss in Koestler & Smythies, *Beyond Reductionism*), researchers in the life sciences cling to them as to a divine law.

The biologists and geneticists of *Beloved Son*, in their zeal to produce a prototype of ultimate man, do so by piecing together and developing the traits and features they wish to enhance. By neglecting the way in which the individual components impinge upon each other in countless interactions, they ignore what it is that gives man his essential humanity. They seek to create highly efficient containers for human tissue, which hold not a grain of humanity.

If the geneticists' abuse of their knowledge is practised in seclusion from Turner's 21st Century society, that of the psychologists is not. The star-travellers have returned to a world in which advances in psychopharmacology have made possible the most subtle psychological manipulation. Aberrant traits and habits can be identified and eradicated; a personality considered undesirable can be erased and replaced with one that is more compliant. For those who think that such a society may be admirable, there are of course problems — the same problems that afflict such a world as envisaged by B. F. Skinner in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. In a society in which the use of drugs and techniques of conditioning and psychotherapy allows those in power to exercise control over people's minds and behaviour, who keeps watch on the custodians? When attitudes and beliefs can be directly influenced, it is not only possible but probably inevitable that authority will degenerate into totalitarianism.

The world of *Beloved Son* is a new world being rebuilt from the ashes of the old. It is a world in which nearly everyone is young. Under the watchful eye of Security, the young are brought early to maturity, largely by psychological techniques, and led to develop and use their intellectual potential to a maximum. They are intellectually mature, but only in a limited sense. They are spoonfed with knowledge, and encouraged to proceed to research, so as to assist the construction of the new society. Scientifically they are sophisticated, but because Security appears to solve their social problems for them, they cannot profit from experience. As a result they are terribly naive socially; if ingenious, they are also ingenuous. Society uses them up mentally, but does not allow them genuinely to grow, and their view of society is a simple and uncomprehending one.

The inevitable consequence is that, despite Security's assurance to the young that they are helping to build the new world, they feel directionless, powerless and alienated. They are depressed and often angry, yet are unable to perceive exactly what makes them feel the way they do. In sociology this social condition is usually called *anomie* — a term not easy to describe exactly. Robert K. Merton suggests that anomie be defined as a condition of breakdown in the cultural structure, occurring particularly when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the ...

capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them'. (*Social Theory and Social Structure*, p.185) Alternatively, Emile Durkheim, who originated the use of the term, describes anomie as a condition in which 'the norms of society are unstable and malintegrated, and in which the individual is prone to states of malaise'. (*The Division of Labour in Society*, p.368) Sociologists generally agree that the existence of anomie in a society renders it ripe for upheaval — certainly the case in *Beloved Son*.

The social parallels between the 21st Century and our own, which Turner implies, are often most impressive. It is made quite clear that the maladies that afflict societies are not the product of a single, unique, constant group of causes — different forces in different societies may operate to produce the same effects. The young people of *Beloved Son* are alienated partly because they are told that the work they do is helping to build a new world, yet they feel remote from it and cannot see how their actions have any influence. This is in perfect accord with Erich Fromm's description of the alienated man as one who

> does not experience himself as the centre of his world, as the creator of his own acts — but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. (*The Sane Society*, p.29)

Perhaps one of the ultimate points that Turner makes is that all societies, however organized, share common fundamental problems, whose assessment, as Marcuse suggests, may be distilled into two basic value judgements:

> 1. The judgement that human life is worth living, or rather can be and ought to be made worth living ...
> 2. The judgement that, in a given society, specific possibilities exist for the amelioration of human life and specific ways and means of realizing these possibilities. How can these resources be used for the optimal development and satisfaction of individual needs and faculties with a minimum of toil and misery? (*One Dimensional Man*, p.10)

In *Beloved Son* authority has misused its resources, with the result that a society has been produced that not only is incapable of dealing with its needs, but is largely unaware of exactly what its needs are. A symbolic hint of this is given early in the book, when Raft is confronted with a Security Headquarters building:

> Plain, ugly, efficient and temporary, it was uncompromisingly an administrative block. Like the rest, like this entire civilization if he understood Jackson correctly, it was there only to serve a passing purpose and be torn down. It symbolized with repellent neatness a world with an immutable past and a hopefully solid future but only a ramshackle, disposable present. (p.81)

The allusion to the world's 'immutable past' is indicative of one of the most striking aspects of the new world — its abhorrence for

the old world, and its conviction that no information of value for the organization of a new society can be gained from a study of mistakes made in the old. Their refusal to learn the lessons of history leads them into ways of error that might have been avoided had they been possessed of a historical perspective other than one that assures them that the past can teach them nothing but folly and terror. The essential innocence of this juvenile society makes its members easily manipulable by those with dreams of obtaining power. And indeed the malleability of the young is exploited to this end, but to illuminate the way in which this is done will first require some digression.

A most noticeable feature of *Beloved Son* is the transformation that most of its characters undergo during the course of the action. Not one of its major characters does not emerge a significantly changed person by the conclusion of the book. Raft, for example, is initially a bitter, perhaps slightly disturbed man, who by degrees becomes a megalomaniac with delusions of self-deification, until psychological treatment turns him into a 'well-adjusted' individual, by the standards of this society. In this connexion, though, the most important metamorphosis is that undergone by Ian Campion, who at the opening of the story is the Commissioner of Security in the Australian Sector, secure in the conviction that his work is justified and focused in the right direction. Campion is a remarkable individual; in a surprisingly short time he comes to appreciate, at least partly, what is wrong with the way in which Security is supervising the creation of a new society. The moment of realization is superbly depicted:

> As if he were not embroiled in complexities enough, another came to him with the urgency of fate, the one which was finally to strip a lifetime's blinkers from his brain ... Never before in his life had he found himself in the position of observing his world from the viewpoint of one who dwelt in it. Security dealt in masses and movements, watched from the eagle's eyrie and never saw from ground level; the new perspective shamed and frightened him and finally stripped him naked. (p.201)

It finally comes to Campion, as it has already to Raft, that it is he who is to be the saviour of the new world. At this point the religious implications in which the book is rich become explicit. In a session of psychological interrogation Raft is asked why he is prepared to assist Campion. His reply, most significantly, is 'Because he is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.' (p.187) His use of this quote from the Gospel of Matthew is the first sign of his incipient megalomania. While there is a suspicion of a blood relationship between Raft and Campion, Raft's conception of himself as deity makes plain the deeper meaning of this statement: Campion is to be the messiah, his beloved son, sent to save this new and dangerously tottering world.

It is not surprising that Campion chooses religion — largely ignored and dismissed as cultism in this society — as the central theme of his crusade to win over the masses. He is assisted by Parker, the

Controller of Police, who turns out to be a most unlikely religious fanatic, and Lindley, the 20th Century psychiatrist of the star-travellers, who introduces them to forgotten techniques of crowd persuasion. Lindley comes to deeply regret his decision to help, when he sees the direction that the new movement is taking. For Campion, religion is an expedient way to win the bulk of society to his cause, but while espousing it, he does not himself particularly believe it. He has a dream of an ideal society, and religion is a means to achieving that end. Parker, the religious zealot, preaches a society of love and peace, and is uncompromisingly prepared to use any means to achieve this end. Lindley's disillusionment is contrasted with Parker's true position in a conversation near the end of the book:

> 'I am oldfashioned. I love truth.' *Is this Lindley talking such bull? But it's true, it's true.*
> 'Don't shit me, Doctor.'
> 'Tut, tut, Controller. In the cathedral!'
> 'What of it? God isn't petty.'
> Nice to be certain. 'That's as well for an honest policeman who'll acquiesce in anything promising power and authority.'
> Parker leaned forward. 'You think that of me?'
> 'Of both of you. Power-grabbers lining the kids up as blind babes!'
> 'You know better than that. We see the possibility but we won't let it happen. They're ours, yes, but they *think* when they're away from us. They don't follow blindly.'
> Talking hurt but he could not contain the overflow of insight and betrayal. 'After today they'll have no chance to think. You mean to frighten their wide-open wits out of them. But if you think you can balance between fears and ecstasies forever, forget it. You've loosed a beast you can't chain and the next step is what we called totalitarianism — revealed truth demonstrated by violence, and argument disallowed. May your morally obliging God preserve you from it.' (p.361)

Lindley is right. Campion and Parker seek to win the young by giving an aim to their directionless lives. Each believes in the expendability of the other, once the end is in sight. As Lindley says, the end never justifies the means. The ideal society envisaged by Parker and Campion is a utopian fantasy with the potential to become a nightmare, and when pursued with such self-righteous hypocrisy is doomed from the outset. Turner is indeed skeptical of the appropriateness of religious fervour as a basis on which to organize a well balanced society.

While the strength of the book lies in its deft handling of complex themes, this strength derives largely from the force of Turner's characterization. Raft is marvellously depicted — a genuine multi-faceted personality whose actions, like those of real people, do not allow for exact prediction. The transformation that changes Campion's basic character is handled with a sureness and subtlety that renders it totally believable. And Lindley, the

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20 July 1975

Dear John,

Finishing a book always leaves me with a couldn't-careless feeling, as though, having rid myself of an obligation grown intolerable, I would see the result of it burn or drop into the ocean without a regret. Which probably accounts for the frivolous reply I gave your last note. The next stage is, inevitably, one of complete disillusionment with the thing, a stage wherein all the work's faults stand out stark and I know that the years of composition have been total waste. I've been through it so often now that even at the worst of the depression I know it will pass in a day or two or ten, but it recurs, dead on time, without fail. Talk about being creatures of habit! Then, of course, some sense reasserts itself and at last I am able to think sensibly about it.

Despite you, it *does* hang together, but the continuity is of ideas and inevitability rather than of overt structure. Structurally it is clumsy and no doubt plenty of people will tell me so, but they will be mainly the ones who looked for space opera and got a lecture instead. What I have said is:

a) There's little point in giving present-day man a second chance (that is, if he muffs this one) because he'll muff it again, and for the same reasons.

b) At the end of his technological and ecological tether, man's only chance lies in spiritual rebirth, in the creation of a philosophical rather than a technological civilisation.

c) There can be no spiritual rebirth until he throws away our present civilisation entire. What dooms the Ombudsmen from the outset is their attempt to preserve the luxuries they thought were necessities.

d) The first necessity is an absolute honesty, the kind that could stand up even to telepathy and for that, as the clone-queen points out at some stage, some practice will be necessary.

If you have understood the novel in something of this fashion, I can stop worrying about structure and sequence, because it will have succeeded. If not, then it has failed. There is a sense in which it deserves to fail: it never quite makes up its mind whether it is a novel or an adventure story and in the end is a little less than either. I *could* have done it without such matters as the murder of the Ombudsman or the idiotic death of Raft or old Mother Mantrap and her art gallery, but I'm just not the bloke who can relinquish such lovely scenes once they pop into my mind. In they go, and to hell with the consequences. Even Raft's first mention, under question-therapy, of the 'beloved son' was almost a matter of automatic typing; having set down the words I sat and stared and wondered, 'Where do we go from here?' It was while I was thinking this out that I went back over chapter 1 and

realised that I had set Raft up as a really classy repressed paranoiac. It at once became obvious that he had murdered Fraser, and why. That led without any trouble to his decision to dominate his son and be the power behind the throne in the new world, if not its eventual ruler... From then on it was just a matter of keeping him out of Gangoil until I was ready for him. But killing him off was also a spur of the moment thing — the scene was too good to cut off with less — and that left me with all the closing action to go and a dead protagonist. So I breathed a sigh of relief that some good fairy had caused me to give the psychiatrist (already I can't recall his name) a prominent role, and reeled him in to carry the denouement, no matter what the purists may say about swapping thoats in mid-Barsoom.

In any case, a man of action would have got himself out of Jim Thingummy's troubles in the last chapter, whereas it needed an intelligent, thinking type to become patsy to his own indecisions. So wasn't I lucky to have one waiting in the wings?

And now you know just how these watertight plots are planned meticulously in advance.

The Gangoil business was, of course, your fault. But I must admit that once it had got out of hand I was content to let it run and see where it would end. But it wasn't supposed to end in killing off the main character. And who would have thought that a mild joke would involve a dissertation on artistic appreciation, a clone of queens without fear of man or beast and a Heathcote who literally didn't know who he was at any time or which of the possibilities at any given minute — the sort of man who had to say something in order to find out what he thought.

If, on the way, I have managed to point out that all the people who have so far written about cloning, the next war and telepathy (I didn't finally decide to let telepathy in until the last minute when it had to be introduced or another plotline developed) have missed some of the obvious things that should have been said in sf many years ago, then I am very happy.

Throughout, of course, all sorts of opportunist techniques take the place of good writing. This was essential for the saving of wordage; proper expression of the major premises would have required a book of twice the length. (This compression to market-requirement length has been the ruin of much good sf writing. There are plenty of signs that people like Blish, Aldiss and Disch have suffered by it.) Nonetheless I think that it is not badly written. You will be better able to judge that than I. I am aware of individual weaknesses and faults but cannot judge the overall impression.

Curiously, I had from the first thought of the thing as ending on a note of hope, with a new vision of civilisation. It wasn't until I realised just how practical (and practicality is the small brother of opportunism) these Ombudsman-bred kids would have to be that I saw where their training would lead them. After that the last chapter wrote itself. No success, except of the kind they could better do without, was possible.

I have certainly learned the hard way — though I realised it theoretically before — why there is so little memorable characterisation in sf: there is so much to be presented that is not 'people' in the sense of individuals. The temptation to use types instead of characters must be overwhelming, especially to the bloke writing for a living, who can't afford the time to ponder his moves while the characters make the running and the plot waits for them to tell it where to go. I don't think I cheated anywhere, but the writing was painfully slow at times where it looked as if everybody had reached the end of their immediate tether and the whole thing must collapse in futility. The difficulty is not in finding things to happen (Raymond Chandler: 'When in doubt, have someone come through the door with a gun') because any ass can introduce a new menace or an accident or some such; the difficulty lies in finding some useful continuation which arises out of the natures of the persons concerned. Things must happen not so much *to* them as *because* they are the kind of persons they are. (And that, in passing, is as good an indication as any of the nature of both characterisation and plot.)

Dear me; here I am lecturing like mad, which wasn't at all the reason for this letter. ...

And that, I think, is about all for the moment.

Too right. Nineteen pages about one book isn't too many, but it's rather more than I thought I was embarking on back on page 151, and my typing arm isn't what it used to be — certainly not what it was in the good old days when I was belting out forty-page ASFRs every month or so, and not even what it was before last weekend when the diabolical Foyster had me out playing tennis, of all things. I'm sure I sprained a margin or two that day; certainly I discovered italics I didn't think I had.

I didn't really intend to publish a second instalment of *Australian Science Fiction Review : Twelfth Anniversary Issue*, but that's obviously what this is. Not quite so obviously, this issue is also published to mark two special occasions. Next Tuesday — 3 October — the Nova Mob will be meeting at Foyster's place to discuss a novel called *Beloved Son*, a work of sky-fi by some local chap, and it seemed an idea to provide some ammunition for that discussion. And the following week we'll all be going to Foyster's again, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of ANZAPA. If you think you've seen the back cover illustration before, you could be right. It appeared on the front cover of my very first apazine, *The New Millennial Harbinger* no.1, October 1968. Ah, it seems like only yes that's enough. See yez.