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But he needs the money.

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OUR COVER: The cover of this issue is a six-foot high neon sign which flashes its  
message at tenth of a second intervals. The message is ROTSLER FOR TAFF!  
Unfortunately it has not been possible to include the cover with every  
copy: just ask someone else if they'll let you look at theirs.

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CLAUSEWITZ: an annual review of science fiction

As usual the important news concerns the magazines. ANALOG continued to increase  
its circulation, and thus remain clearly Top Mag. GALAXY and IF were sold, and it  
would be unfair to evaluate the work of the new publishers at this stage: but it  
doesn't look all good. F&SF, in Joanna Russ, now has a reviewer one can take  
seriously. The revival of VENTURE looks only moderately successful, and we don't  
see COVEN 13 or SPACEWAY or the Lowndes magazines out here. No, I don't know.

But the biggest changes were with AMAZING and FANTASTIC were Ted White has done  
things which were, well, amazing, fantastic, etc. If this move succeeds, Ted deserves  
endless amounts of praise: if it fails - well, editors for Ultimate have been easy  
come, easy go.

In the UK NEW WORLDS has been really struggling this year, and several times there  
have been rumours of demise. So far they are only runours (I hope). If NEW WORLDS  
goes down SF will have lost something vital, but there are so many problems, and, in  
Australia, there's virtually no circulation for NEW WORLDS. Want an agent, Mr. Moorcock

VISION OF TOMORROW got off to a mixed start, but has steadily improved. To say that it has settled down to any particular standard would be to do the magazine as injustice. Some ideas may not have come off, but most have. It is worth noticing that Tony Lewis, in LOCUS, has suggested that Eddie Jones should be nominated for the Hugo on the basis of his work in VISION.

I guess the book market has expanded slightly, but there have been no revolutions, unless it is the case that the expanding market for original paperback anthologies/magazines constitutes a revolution. I know of at least 4 such projects in action in the US (counting NOVA (HHarrison)) which is actually hc (and I'm not sure there is a pb straight off - maybe it is an ORBIT-type deal). Things look good, in other words, except that the baddies are still with us.

#### TWO BOOK REVIEWS:

THE ENVIRONMENTAL HANDBOOK (ed. G De Bell) Ballantine, 95 cents, 384 pages.

When I last looked we seemed to have only one future. That's the trouble with the real world: there's only one of them.

This book describes what Man is doing to this one world that we have, both the good things and the bad things. Three basic problems: population, pollution, conservation. To me the population problem is the central one, because overcoming that leads to an automatic easing of the others. Solving the other problems won't stop anyone breeding. So I would say that this book under-emphasises the need for control of population.

On pollution it is good: matters like smog and other chemical pollution are handled in some detail. Likewise there's a good coverage of the 'spaceship Earth' concept which is becoming more and more vital to a healthy understanding of our future.

The various articles range from the rather staidly scientific to more popular treatment. The suggestions as to action to be taken are handy and sometimes amusing. There's very little hysteria.

I'm suggesting that you buy and read this not because it is the last word on the subjects, but because it is something, it will fill you in on the general problem. And there is a good bibliography, though it is by no means complete.

Two particularly interesting items: ECO-PORNOGRAPHY or HOW TO SPOT AN ECOLOGICAL PHONY, and ON HOW TO BE A CONSTRUCTIVE NUISANCE.

Earth Day, April 22, 1970.

AUSTRALIA'S CENSORSHIP CRISIS (ed. Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris) Sun Books, \$1.65, 224 pages.

If ever a book will succeed in demonstrating to the world that Australian literary circles are composed of nose-picking, dribbling morons this is it. It is difficult to imagine a more repulsive piece of work (papal encyclicals apart) than this attempt to "stir a furore of debate".

The book is extremely anecdotal, makes no attempt to examine the problem of censorship, either in gen<sup>er</sup>al or in Australia in particular: there is no indication of a crisis of any kind (except, perhaps, a financial one involving the publishers) for most of the material deals with the far past.

Certainly the Australian Government's attitude towards censorship (and many other things) is deplorable, but the situation will hardly be remedied by naive, childish and boring whines like this.

AND SO TO BED:

All letters of comment to Bruce Gillespie, please: to save on postage.

::John Foyster

T H E  
T E N - F O O T  
C H I C K E N

an sf.verse

by Jack Wodhams

On the whole, can Science console us?  
Come, my children, listen closely,  
and I will tell you a story  
about dreamers and destroyers,  
of the pulsing brains and pulsing greed  
of the Scientific breed,  
of the madness they call progress,  
and of the blindness of power  
and of knowledge without wisdom,  
and the vanity of success  
that denies simple sanity.

A fairy story? Well, perhaps.  
But a story of the morrow,  
a foreseeing of a sorrow,  
a finger pointing and showing  
the road down which we are going.  
Mighty Science! its problems solving,  
involving tricky this and that,  
eyes gleaming, minds scheming, drumming  
and throbbing brains overcoming  
weighty and important matters.

How to feed the population  
that was growing, growing, growing,  
seek an answer and a knowing  
of how? What method to employ  
to bring joy and a welcome crumb  
to fill every hungry tum?

Science moved, to concentrate on food,  
the brightest of that faculty  
met to cogitate and brood.

And these men, being broody, they  
took a hen and, unrelenting  
in creative experimenting,  
produced, live, pocking and kicking,  
a chicken, and what a chicken!

A monster chicken ten foot tall.

Bow and flatter the gray matter  
that put such wishbones on a platter.

What a bird! The Roc of fable  
born again to grace a table.

A chick for Sunday dinner left  
more for Monday, cold but tender.

One egg made two hundred pancakes,  
a boon to the flapjack vendor.

One plucked pullet was big enough  
to feed a hundred at a feast,  
and the pile of down was stuffing  
for a thousand pillows at least.

'Oh, marvellous!' the people cried,  
and then, 'Let Scientists be praised!'

'The new High Priests!', 'The Glory Boys!'  
and many suchlike accolades.

It was wonderful, but farmers  
soon began to voice discontent,  
complain of what the chickens ate,

and of the money that they spent  
on common corn so small and wee  
that the giant hens could hardly see.  
Science, now challenged, never missed,  
and gratified its religionists  
by growing, in the fewest days,  
a quantity of massive maize,  
with stalks as thick as mountain pine,  
with yellow corn at thirty feet,  
each grain a boulder, golden fine,  
a treat for any hen to eat,  
and clustered thickly every one,  
and each cob weighed near half-a-ton.

Scientists.

They applied their skill, enlarging bees  
to pollinate the larger seeds,  
and spread their scope to beans and peas,  
to carrots, cabbages and cress,  
to pigs and cows, and sheep no less  
than any other thing that grew,  
forgetting not the humble grass  
as pasture for the strapping herds.  
And all, apparently, was well,  
starvation became redundant  
for, thanks to test tubes and retorts,  
good tucker was now abundant.

But people had some troubles, too,  
that likewise grew, and grew, and grew.  
As when, in milking cows, they found  
the milk was six feet off the ground,  
which called for steps and agile feats  
to clasp and work the whopping teats  
hung like soft ash-cans upside down  
that oft, in wild, swinging wrenching,  
gave the milker's feet a drenching.

Many, hanging on below, were  
unprepared when the cow did go.  
With sheep, shearers feared to bungle,  
standing in a woollen jungle  
hacking, sweating, machete chopping,  
swearing, profane, grimly cropping,  
many a man becoming lost  
to spend a night of deep unease  
in woollen wander, mutton tossed,  
and fighting back at obese fleas.  
Harvest time, the farmer, armed with  
formidable machinery,  
used cranes, 'dozers, saws and winches,  
and hardly scratched the scenery.  
People hauled, and perspired, and toiled,  
embroiled in a grandiose realm,  
their puny efforts scarce despoiled  
a verdure built to overwhelm.  
They swatted fearsome bugs that drugs  
had much distended all ways round,  
for turgescence, once started, was  
advisable throughout they found.  
A louse, say, enlarge to a mouse  
ensured a bulk, when it met it,  
proportionately more suitable  
to the predator that ate it.  
In the tops of the trees the birds  
and the breeze in the leaves, went unheard.  
Mammoths roamed the farm, doing harm,  
and flimsy fences failed, and trailed,  
dragged by a thoughtless claw or hoof,  
while humans struggled valiantly,  
desperately, to raise a roof,  
a shelter for their hulking stock,

a capacious hall as a stall  
for a horse, or a sow, or a cow.  
They fought a losing battle with  
the overgrown crops and cattle,  
and the station and situation  
of folk throughout the nation  
became quite intolerable,  
or even downright horrible.

So they turned to Science once more,  
in fretful anguish, to implore,  
and to beg rescue from their fate.  
And it was now, at this late date,  
that the college men with knowledge  
realised, to their mild surprise,  
that in the course they had taken  
their direction was mistaken,  
and that their world of monstrous food,  
so well developed, was no good.

It was wasted effort, wasted  
time, an ignoring of the prime  
end result, which they now believed  
could have more simply been achieved  
not by making chickens taller.

In the Scientific game they  
became conscious that much the same  
effect could have been obtained by  
making homo sapiens smaller.

See what I mean?

So wisdom triumphed in the end,  
and the people went on a spree,  
and shot the stupid Scientists,  
returning to normality,  
and living ever happily  
after.

Goodnight, children.

FROGS & SNAILS & PUPPY-DOGS' TAILS::

the science fiction writer

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John Foyster

In the March 1961 issue of The Magazine Of Fantasy and Science Fiction (one of the by-now all too common ALL STAR issues) Mr. Alfred Bester wrote about the 'All Star Author'. After four pages of discussion Mr. Bester was able to come up with the following:

"Our All Star Author, then, would be made up of the dramatic virility of Robert Heinlein, the humanity of Theodore Sturgeon, the gloss of Robert Sheckley, the dispassion of James Blish, the encyclopediac enthusiasm of Isaac Asimov, the courage of Phillip Farmer, and the high style of Ray Bradbury."

This is known, I believe, as making the best of a bad lot.

It would not be particularly difficult to find fault with Mr. Bester's endeavour to emulate Dr. Frankenstein. And this could be done in various ways. For example, I find Robert Heinlein, when he makes any impression on me at all, to be scarcely either virile or dramatic, which makes the recommendation rather less than exciting. Similarly, I have recently published in my own fanzine an article quite seriously and accurately titled STURGEON'S SADISM. So it could go on.

Alternatively, one might take advantage of the passing of time since Mr. Bester wrote his article and suggest that what our All Star Author should really have would be the dramatic virility of Samuel R. Delany, the humanity of.....

But both of these arguments accept Mr. Bester's pragmatic approach. On the contrary, this approach seems to me to be self-defeating, and certainly one which tells nothing useful at all about science fiction as she is wrote.

I propose to take a slightly different approach to the problem: if we are to create an ideal science fiction writer, what must we ask of him?

Let's start by examining the scientific side: it is perhaps no accident that this subject is scarcely mentioned by Mr. Bester, who refers to "the gadgetry of science" and, derogatively, to "the physical mysteries"; and that's all. There's no overt reference to some scientific knowledge, but I suspect that Mr. Bester assumes that most SF writers have enough. I do not think we can take this attitude, especially since it is one avowed by Mr. Bester, whose assertions are to be treated with care (he regards Rudyard Kipling as the "finest prose craftsman" of the 19th and early 20th century....).

Yet is this of any importance? Take the case of Isaac Asimov, whose fiction almost never has any contact with his special scientific interest. It is probably equally the case for those few scientists who write science fiction: that they tend to avoid their speciality. Perhaps such a person feels he has too much knowledge, too much familiarity. The dangers of the latter are obvious, I think: the author cannot afford to over-estimate his readers.

Nevertheless we cannot allow the opposite - that our ideal author shall know nothing of science. This is, as anyone will observe who cares to look, a more common type than the trained scientist. I can't believe that the majority is correct in this case.

So we need to strike a balance - a Ph. D. in one area would probably be less useful than a broader knowledge, though of course it would be no handicap.



What I want to try to do is estimate what knowledge a person would have to have in order to make reasonable speculations about the future. This would include both knowledge of particular items and of the threads of discovery and meaning which hold together those facts. To do this is not easy.

I'm not going to suggest that the only measure of knowledge is a bit of paper: on the contrary I simply don't believe it to be true. However, to outline quantities without reference to tertiary levels would be extremely difficult. So what I propose to do is indicate amounts of knowledge in terms of full-time study at a middle-upper university or college. These amounts of knowledge don't have to be gained at a university - they can be gained with greater or lesser degrees of efficiency elsewhere, but at least in this way I have made a start.

I have just completed a first degree in mathematics. During those three years I sat through 800 hours of lectures. The result is that I know virtually nothing about some areas of mathematics and nothing at all about the rest. Let us assume that our ideal author is more efficient than I am, and that in the three years he might have studied he'd have done a satisfactory job (he might, of course, have done it in a shorter time in some way, but let's say that he took in the maximum possible for the three years in which I seemed to be taking in the minimum). Let's be even fairer and say that in the same three years he acquires a sound knowledge of the mathematical side of logic, which will stand him in good stead when he comes to write NULL-A REVISITED.

I think we should also allow this fellow some useful knowledge of basic sciences. Let's put him down for two years of each of physics, chemistry and stretching a point or limiting ourselves to one aspect of the subject, psychology. With a bow towards Mr. Campbell, whose Analog - Engineering Fiction - Engineering Fact continues to dominate the field from the point of view of circulation, let us allow our fellow one year to catch up on the necessary points of engineering he didn't gain in the physics and chem courses.

A hell of a lot of science fiction is written about unexplored parts of the universe: I think we should be generous here and allow three years for study of the various space sciences.

In Australia a GP takes 6 years to get his degree. Let us allow 5 years for our man to gain a thorough knowledge of medical and biological sciences. After all, anyone who has been able to keep up with the program so far is pretty slick.

Now we will turn away from science and, throwing caution to the winds, try to include some other useful pieces of knowledge. Verging on the ridiculous, we shall allot one year to each of the following: English Literature and language, Linguistics, Architecture, Anthropology, History, Economics, Political Science, Philosophy (with the rest of logic) and the rest of Psychology. During this time we shall require our author to come to appreciate Music and the Arts in general.

So what?

Twenty-seven years, that's what.

Our man must also be a writer of talent, perhaps even having some of the qualities Mr. Bester described. It would also be desirable that he have read SF in large quantities.

It is no wonder that I am sometimes dissatisfied with the SF I read. In practice we seem instead of the above ideal to have a mixture of two attitudes: there is one attitude which I think is perhaps the most practicable - that of trying to do the above on the run, and of concentrating upon well-known areas. But we are, you will recall, looking for the ideal. The other attitude is less satisfactory - that of pretending that the whole lot doesn't exist and wishing it would go away.

Let us set aside once more the immediately practical discussion and try to find the best reasonable compromise. To do so I shall have to encroach upon the subject of a later article in this issue of SFCOMMENTARY, but no matter.

To discover what we may reasonably expect of a science fiction writer it will be necessary to come to some conclusions about the nature of science fiction itself. There was a time when the sugar-coated pill theory held sway. In the main the argument here was that by introducing science in an entertaining form children and young adults could become interested in science seriously. practical experience shows this to be quite useless. On the one hand we see on every side children being encouraged to enter 'scientific' careers. In Australian schools at least there is a division at around age 14-15 into 'science' and 'humanities' streams of the children still attending school, and it is no secret that the average child in the science stream is brighter than the average child in the other one.

A second argument against this school of thought lies in the quite superficial and frequently flawed scientific knowledge possessed by its authors.

A third argument is to be found in the pages of the JOURNAL of the British Interplanetary Society just before and just after the Second World War. The implication is that the readers of science fiction tend to identify with the romantic (pace J J Pierce) and in practice nearly non-existent side of science. A less than surprising modern adherent of this notion of science is Charles Platt (NEW WORLDS 187 page 62).

A fourth argument lies in the distressingly low standard of the fiction written with this notion in mind.

And so on.

A modern heresy, upon which I don't propose to waste any space at all, is that which proclaims science fiction to be, now, the one true and worthwhile literary form.

Between these lies a realistic evaluation of science fiction's place in society and in literature. Science fiction is essentially a fiction for young adults (to stretch a point) because it is more suited to dreamers than doers. As relaxation reading it plays a role, or can play a role, in the lives of workers whose minds are normally very active and appreciate the sometimes fertile imagination which gives birth to some of the best science fiction now being written. As a fiction for young adults, the major role fulfilled by science fiction is that of entertaining. From this point of view it is not too difficult to see why so many supposedly mature adults were fired with enthusiasm for STAR TREK, an unashamedly commercial and juvenile television program which lacked all the best qualities of science fiction: because it was better than what had gone before (apparently) it must be good - a typically childish attitude.

I have detailed the qualities essential in a writer of science fiction in the highest sense. What qualities are required of a science fiction writer who is going to produce the product now under discussion - good, commercial and entertaining fiction for a market composed of readers largely under the age of, say, 20?

Some things are unchanged, at least in name. Certainly it is essential for the writer to have some familiarity with current science fiction. There may be rare occasions on which a complete novice will produce worthwhile work, but these are too rare to concern us here.

With respect to scientific knowledge I think we can safely settle for requiring an easy familiarity with the basic notions underlying the philosophy of

science (yes, I do realise that this would rule out Mr. Campbell). We should also require that our writer can make his way through an average issue of SCIENCE or NEW SCIENTIST or SCIENCE JOURNAL without stumbling - I don't think SCIENCE DIGEST really counts (but you could include SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN at the light end with the latter two) - even though I know some editors would prefer POPULAR MECHANICS.

In addition our writer should have a more extensive knowledge of one or two specialised areas: not so much for the little lumps of knowledge which will float around in his mind as for the knowledge of the methods and approaches involved in scientific research. It is not surprising that many (well, more than one) present-day writers meet this requirement rather satisfactorily.

But furthermore we do want our writer to be able to see just what place science will have in future societies. It must be remembered that the readers, or the most vocal section of them, will almost certainly have some instruction in the nature of society and societies, and any gross miscalculations as to the role of science will make the fiction laughable instead of entertaining: this is so often the fault with the sugar-coated pill variety, as we well know. The fault is the same, because we are working in roughly the same areas.

So this fellow should have some knowledge of futurology, in order to make reasonable forecasts (and I remind you that we are still operating in the shadow of the sugar-coated pill school). But this, like so many other things, is more a matter of avoiding gross errors than of being particular and accurate.

To be puritanical, I think our writer should have some degree of political and social conscience, but no more than we expect of any writer for children.

It may seem to you that I have over-emphasised scientific knowledge: this, alas, is due to my subject. I have no objections to other requirements for writers of ghost stories, werewolf stories, sermons, avant-garde works or menopause fiction - just don't come to me with your problems.

So far as general competence in the matter of writing fiction, I think we must ask for quite high standards (high, that is, by comparison with past performance and with the general level of writing in the region of pulp/commercial writing). And it is here that our ideal parts company with so many of the present-day writers. To be sure, there are quite a few writers of science fiction whose best work is quite good, and would meet this standard comfortably. The average story by these writers, alas, is something else. We need a particularly high standard because (a) young readers are more demanding, in some ways, than adults, who have usually compromised and (b) science fiction writers, I believe, wish also to have adult readers, alert adult readers, and these will have more exacting standards than the average televiewer.

This kind of approach could be carried further, but it might now be best to see just what practical conclusions can be drawn from the above. The most obvious thing is that there aren't too many good SF writers around, but I think almost everyone except blurb writers and members of the SFWA knows this already. I don't think that the number of writers who are good in the above context will increase greatly in the future because the markets for science fiction are too nearly compartmentalised, though this may break down, the present writers will not attract the right kind of readers (the boom in new SF writer in the late 40s and early 50s was due to the quality of ASTOUNDING in those years and the few before) and there are too many writers around now who are made of

Sighs and leers  
And crocodile tears

John Foyster: February 1970

revised by John Foyster from the translation by Valeria Alcalay

oo

Dutch Learmouth, the hero of the novel THE MAN AND THE APPARITION, is an American astronaut who, flying about the Sprite, lands on an island on Venus. An international expedition (in the Vulcan) lands on another island. The crew consists of the Indian astronomer Krishnadat, the Soviet pilot Tomonin, the Romanian geologist Scorus and the French physician Saint-Serpentaire. The two spaceships keep in touch by radio and Learmouth describes the incidents in the area where his spaceship is. The extract below describes his meeting with a Venusian girl.

...Sullen darkness collapsed over me...blinding lightning flashed...there was a building - with sides? - four?...I groped against a door which, sliding at my touch, opened as a windy gust thrust me against it, through the opening into a sort of greenhouse...I slammed against the door, shutting it...I brushed against plants, stems, feet slipping in the greasy mud...I grabbed a sapling, clutching, stood, waiting...though I could see no aperture the wind still got in somehow...then a clattering, a window opened, the hurricane screamed through the greenhouse...my foot slid, I felt myself being lifted, the sapling strained...the sapling...it wasn't...my hands slipped from the useless...a girl...not a willow...I had actually...she was now crouching at my feet...I tried to reach her, lift her, carry her...a whirlwind snatched her from me, away, towards a door...I jumped, but she was gone...I ran from the shelter...towards her...tossed by the wind like a feather she drifted in and out of reach...I caught her...stumbled back, draped, to the building now just visible in the ghastly light. Then the sky darkened even more, and we were separated, cast aloft: a thunderbolt penetrated my body, and I lost consciousness...

Whatever I was lying on was rather spongy. I was at the bottom of a ravine. I tried to get up. The clouds were scattering and soon the light was dim but useful. I sat up. All around huge rocks were piled, reaching to the top of the ravine. One of them, I think, must have torn my spacesuit, which I now decided to discard. Equipped only with helmet and oxy-cylinders and light shoes, I felt exactly like a man from another world. Then I remembered the sapling-girl whose chimerical image still lingered in my mind, remnant of a dream. Was she real? I looked about me and, to my great disappointment, saw no one.

I started to climb the rocks and found that they too were covered with the spongy substance. I had travelled only about ten yards when I stopped - for seated there, just a few feet in front of me on a slab of stone, was the creature of the storm, looking at me with wondering, wide-open eyes. I didn't know what to do. Phantasmogoric, this weird blend of plant and human confused and bewildered me. I decided to try to speak, and switched the excom in the helmet.

Just as I did it my mind span. I imagine that something like that happened to her, too. For here were two very different creatures which might, just might, be able to come to understand each other. But I couldn't get past the fact that she was a plant, thinking or not. From under the rich long hair which reached her ankles two strange roots sprang, like the small paws of a seal.

I tried to imagine how she might see me. Suppose she were capable of reasoning; was she amused at the metamorphosis whereby I lost my skin? How was it that she had not died once her roots were pulled from the soil? She gazed at me, neither hating nor fearing.

I went up to her, reached my hand out to her. Her neck (or was it peduncle?) was as soft as flesh, but also as tenderly strong as a plant-stem. To my surprise she quickly avoided my touch. From the wall of the ravine she stared at me. Then her eyes darted from one direction to another: she wanted to get away, any way.

"Right, let's go away" I said stepping up to her and, before she realised what I was doing I seized her by the waist and picked her up. Carrying her, I was able to get her almost to the exit of the ravine. But partly because of her tossing about, and partly I think because of the strange coldness of her body, I let her slip from my hands. She stood, looked at me a moment. A queer sound came from her. Were her eyes jeering at me? And then, even more lightly than I expected, she scrambled over the last rock, hardly using her hands.

By now the weather was wonderful. As a contrast with the sultry heat before the thunderstorm the atmosphere was chilly, almost painfully transparent. Perhaps it seemed so because I had no spacesuit. But still there remained waves in the air which blurred the images of nearby objects - and I with my head in a goldfish bowl.

"Where are you going?" I called to the girl-plant as she seemed to be making for the greenhouse. My voice made her stop. She turned to face me, but made no attempt to approach.

How could I make her come nearer, right up to me, and follow me of her own free will? Could she really reason? And to what extent would it be possible for us to come to understand each other? When it came to the point I decided on a move which may seem childish, but at the time I couldn't think of anything more appropriate: I whistled. I whistled whatever crossed my mind as being possibly pleasing to a vegetable creature. Were there any tunes I missed? I did "Adelaide", a melancholy tune by Beethoven; "Humoresque" by Dvorak; the suave flutter of the violin in the first part of Mozart's Concerto in A Major; and I also hummed - for her, pathetic melodies by Tchaikovsky, limpid arias by Bach, hectic rhythms by Gershwin. She listened to me in absolute silence. I began to realise that music has, perhaps, certain inherent qualities which can influence, almost physiologically, the listener. I don't think she could make much out of my melodies, for even the best whistler can't create the polyphonies of an orchestra. Nevertheless, from her quietness and later, her mimicry, I discerned a sign of her soul's existence, as well as a way to investigate it...

While all this was going on a breeze began to blow refreshingly. Now and then, from the rock against which she was leaning, I heard a murmur, or a sigh, but I couldn't make out whether it was the girl or just the wind. When I stopped whistling the strange melody became more intense, and there was a buzzing sound with it. I soon realised that some sound came from the girl's mouth, but some was caused by the wind passing through her hair. I tried to detect an earthly modulation in her queer chant but this endeavour only threw my mind into more confusion. Should I say that in the cooing of that turtle-dove I recognised the ecstatic finale of Bach's Fourth Brandenburg? No words could describe the fascinating Aeolian music gushing from her silky hair. And no words could give that music meaning. All that I remembered from her music was a suave sadness.. Who can tell what it had actually meant?

I thought that perhaps I could now approach her. If her music had had some

overtones of sympathy for me, her pride and fear must have been lessened. I touched her with my hand: she slipped away. This happened several times.

"You haven't even told me your name " I said as I concluded that it would only be by force that I could get her to my spaceship. "Can't you speak to me? I shall have to find a name for you, a name to suit a girl-plant: Chlorella? No, you are hardly something to eat. Ondine? Perhaps, but you are a nymph of the forest, not one of the sea. Dryada? No! Hmm, what nymphs turned into plants or trees? Myrrha, Lotis - no! Leucothea? Harrumph - too medical. That leaves Daphne. Daphne. Hmm, you are orange rather than green, but it will do. Daphne. But I shall not play Apollo..."

It may be that if I'd kept on talking to her she would have listened, for ever. But I was tired of the game. The spaceship was the best place to be in a thunderstorm and I didn't want to be outside in the next one. So I turned around and made for the Sprite. And she followed me.

So she was like a human to that extent. And now I could put it together: stubborn, musical and inquisitive. Not unattractive, put all together.

I suppose if I'd turned back towards her she'd have run again, so although it was a long way I let her walk by herself. Every now and then I'd look back at her. By now the sun was scorchingly hot, and Daphne seemed almost to float in the trembling air. Suddenly, a bit over halfway back as I guessed it, she vanished, ravished by a mirage.

"Fata Morgana, where are you?" I shouted.

It was a mirage: she floated back into existence, and after that I didn't bother looking back. I started to whistle and the wind, passing through Daphne's living harp, immediately answered. After some little time even this sign of her presence ceased. I looked back, alarmed. She was nowhere to be seen. Was it another mirage? I waited. Nothing happened. I retraced my steps and there, a hundred feet or so back, she was lying on the ground. I went back to her. She was completely exhausted. I took her firmly into my arms: there was no resistance, and I started off again. Irregularly, the breeze moaned through her hair.

Back at the Sprite I was more than tired and Daphne had fainted. I took a large aluminium can from the ship and filled it with seawater. And with it I gave my guest a shower. When she came around I invited her in to the safety of the Sprite. At first she was hesitant, but she was also inquisitive..... And besides, she was assured, now, of my peaceful character.

I was famished, so as soon as I got inside I started getting lunch. While the soup was warming I took off my helmet. I should have realised that it would frighten Daphne, but she recovered soon enough. After all, everything in the cabin was strange. I suppose her feelings were compounded of astonishment, attraction and fear... She was only a child, I decided.

Soon trouble began. I was moving about, doing things, and then she started too, playing with everything she could lay her hands on, even the instruments on the control panel. I gave her a rap on the knuckles: I couldn't afford to have her destroy any part, or even start the ship.

At first she didn't understand why I had done this. She thought it was all in fun. Then the meaning of what I had done began to penetrate, and she became cross with me. But this soon passed, helped especially by my gift of a mirror. She took the mirror in her hands and then, the moment she saw her face reflected, put one hand under, as though to catch the water which would run out. When she realised that this did not happen, Daphne looked at me with astonished delight.



But I was more interested in my lunch, and let her resolve her own difficulties.

For Daphne everything was doubly strange. I'd better explain that. Later, when we could talk, I learned that very early, even in the period of their "roots", the children on Venus are told a lot about the life lying ahead of them. Even then reality has many surprises in store. The distance from the greenhouse to the Sprite was immeasurably astonishing to Daphne. Before the sky was that filtered through the transparent ceiling, and the only familiar air was that nourishing and confined air of the greenhouse. Thunderstorms were animated paintings. Then she came to see the painting become a real thing, and the sky cleared and was no longer bounded: the air cleared, whistled through her hair. And then the Sprite - and I.

Surprised by the water she turned to me and saw something even more remarkable: a man putting a lot of things in his mouth. She came nearer the table, fascinated, watched me swallow and drink. She cooed excitedly and showed me the roots peeling from her paws. Later, she was to ask how the roots had grown inside me.

Wishing to send her to sleep, I took her out to the sea-shore, and played music to her - but this time on a tape recorder. I had about a dozen tapes with me. She enjoyed immensely everything I played - she even remembered some passages - the more impressive passages. I guessed from her speech that Venusian speech is nearer human music than human speech. How well she responded! I was playing the largo of Vivaldi's Concerto Grosso in D minor and it was then, I think, that I first saw how much music stirred her. Roused by the music, Daphne made me witness to the communion between Venusian plant and earthly genius. Daphne's arpeggios reminded me of a queer murmuring mountain in the Nevadas. And the breeze wound through her hair, dripping, bubbling, flapping, rustling. Now and then, amongst it all, Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Gershwin.....

As I listened I began to understand. Do you remember, Krishnadat, those bridges men build across the gulfs separating them, and our discussion of galactic bridges? I now thought I might be near one of them. Daphne fell asleep, lulled by her own songs, but the songs echoed for hours, for me.

... Sometimes, Dutch offered Daphne several words for the same notion and Daphne, remembering them all, would nevertheless choose the most melodious. For "laughter" Learmouth had at his disposal ouarai, rire, Lache, and she chose the first. On the other hand, lacherlich actually made her laugh as if it tickled. It was as though the main languages of Earth had sent gifts and the girl on Venus, delighted, received them as toys...

At the end of every "day" Daphne would ask for a song, and Dutch would play some quiet tune on the taperecorder. And would begin to whisper sweet words:

Lalla! the girl uttered and Well he said Lallo. And breathing deeply that he might not make a mistake, Dutch began humming the Venus-Earth lullaby:

- // - laile ich hulle you ile eclows, rous, ich hulle you ile laulu

And Daphne was lying on her couch and was watching Dutch and he put out the big light and put on the small lamp, which had a lampshade beside his bed.

Horreo she muttered La la ihi

Haya! he comforted her. And getting down, by her side, he patted her hair: Lull E he he lilla he! and she took his hand and he went on Come wee lulu lalulilo Lela lula luli ... lul ... Lull.

Sleep

ADRIAN ROGOZ

# FUTURE IMPERFECT

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by John Foyster:::::::::

Making the rustics gape can be an amusing game, and Professor H Bruce Franklin engages in this pastime quite joyfully in his FUTURE PERFECT (Oxford University Press, New York 1966). Whether or not it is surprising that Damon Knight should have appointed himself First Rustic I leave to you, but that is what he does in his PROJECT BOSKONE speech.

FUTURE PERFECT is subtitled "American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century" so, as it were, we know what we are getting: if you believe.

My remarks on FUTURE PERFECT can be divided into two parts: those on the general approach of the author, and those concerning the stories selected.

In making the selection of stories, Professor Franklin must surely have taken one or the other of two attitudes: that the stories are so self-evidently science fiction that he could select more or less at random from a semi-infinite store, or that he would choose those stories which would be most convincing to people who believe that it all started with Gernsback. The first assumption leads to further possibilities: to present the best stories, either from a "literary" point of view, or from the point of view of SF as she is today, or from some other point of view, or to present typical science fiction stories of the period.

Let us try to keep in mind these possibilities.

The dustjacket hints at the approach which has been used, but not very well: "for their intrinsic interest and for the values they represent". That almost sounds like mining shares, doesn't it? The dustjacket does tell us that in the book is "an original, theoretical definition of science fiction". This is of great importance, because we could accept Professor Franklin's definition, and then examine his book in the light of it, or else argue with this "original" definition. I propose to examine all 'definitions' appearing in the book.

## definitions of science fiction

In several places Professor Franklin talks about science fiction, but he doesn't say anything. So far as I can make out the relevant pieces are as follows:

- a) On page ix, there is a general discussion of science and fiction. Professor Franklin describes them in the following way -

"Science, a cumulative process which exists to be superseded, and fiction, a series of individual attempts to create matter which cannot be superseded, have vastly differing relations to time."

I would not go so far as to claim that there is not a sense in which this statement is true. But it would not be frightfully distressing to anyone to suggest that there is a sense in which science is permanent, and fiction impermanent. Besides, Professor Franklin compares the individual attempts of fiction with science on a collective basis. One can simply interchange the words fiction and science in the above sentence without, I think, producing something which would offend Professor Franklin. Each scientist strives to make his the permanent contribution which will last for ever, while most fiction is written by authors



who stand upon a heap of unsuccessful works by unsuccessful authors. Logically, the sentence does not provide different meanings for "science" and "fiction" vis-a-vis time; and from the sense of the sentence we can deduce only that collectively there is a tendency towards mortality for individuals, whereas the individual strives for immortality. Not exactly news, I think.

But supposing Professor Franklin actually had been successful in placing "science" and "fiction" in separate categories, forgetting all about collectivity and individuality. He goes on to say that fiction is timeless whereas science is impermanent. Is this a useful distinction? What does Professor Franklin do with it? He uses it to show that "any story...which has withstood time...has...managed to bridge the chasm...between fiction and science". And he refers to the stories in this collection.

Now stop right there. Professor Franklin is talking about works of fiction: that is to say, works of permanence. He is not talking about science, that fragile mortal being, but fiction. Individually, of course, as we have already seen, we need not expect a particular story to 'survive', but fiction, in terms of the obese concepts Professor Franklin uses, survives individually.

Have you got that clearly? By Professor Franklin's own words, fiction is "a series of individual attempts to create matter which cannot be superseded". Such as the stories in FUTURE PERFECT. But what does Professor Franklin say of these stories? He says that if they have withstood time (which by his understanding is to be expected of fiction) then they have bridged the chasm between fiction and science. You remember science - the impermanent fellow (probably balding). I really don't see where poor old science fits in at all, unless Professor Franklin thinks that a science fiction story is science (which is hardly likely) or is it, perhaps, that he thinks science fiction combines the properties of the two (and just how would you combine mortality and immortality in one being??)

While I'm here, I don't want to be too difficult about logic, but Professor Franklin did say: Science implies mortality, Fiction implies immortality. In this last section, talking about the stories in his collection, he argues, I think, that immortality implies Fiction. Now that just isn't very nice. It is very naughty, in fact. But what else can you expect in these degenerate days?

Look, I just work here: I'm trying to make sense out of two sentences in a book which sells in Australia for \$6.10 and sent Damon Knight into a tizzy. And it's has taken me damn near a page. I can't go into everything like this - not in Bruce Gillespie's fanzine. Let's go back to something simpler.

b) One page 3, Professor Franklin divides all fiction into four parts: realistic, historical, science fiction, fantasy. (I should note that it is nowhere stated that this is a comprehensive division). For science fiction Professor Franklin claims the following: "science fiction seeks to describe present reality in terms of a credible hypothetical invention - past, present, or, most usually, future - extrapolated from that reality", "science fiction views what is by projecting what not inconceivably could be", "science fiction tries to imitate possibilities". These are accompanied by descriptions of a similar type of the three other categories. Suppose we wish to show that this definition, assuming that Professor Franklin is here only reflecting facets of one jewel, is inadequate or false. All we do is find a story which is science fiction, but which is not covered by the above definition, or a story which is included in the definition which is plainly not science fiction.

But this is all in vain, for we have been thwarted by the all-wise academic who states, on page 4, that "In practice, every piece of fiction is a combination of all four theoretical modes, deriving what we may call its nature from the proportions and arrangements of its elements." Its nature, indeed. What a peculiar

suggestion! Imagine anyone so arrogant as to claim that a work of art may derive its nature from his classification! You will recall that we only have some very vague remarks, thus far, about the nature of science fiction. It is inherent in every work of fiction, yet is detectable by the extent to which it follows prescriptive definitions of one H. Bruce Franklin: it sounds not unlike the ether.

What Professor Franklin means, it seems, is that if a story has two lumps of science fictional sugar then the cup of tea becomes science fiction. But since Professor Franklin has defined science fiction in terms of its aims, we might just as well give the cup a stir and let everything go round in circles.

But let's examine these three suggestions anyway. Not all science fiction "seeks to describe present reality"; perhaps the greater part of science fiction fails to meet this prescription. But the best science fiction does, you may argue. Whether this is true or not is irrelevant, for nowhere is there any hint of restriction to the best (and what is meant by best, anyway, operating with this kind of definition? This leads to the self-fulfilling prophecy - the best science fiction is that which best fits the definition). One could continue.

The second attempt echoes the first. The third, "science fiction imitates possibilities", is not useful in view of the large number of alternative subjects for which the statement is also true: "advertising", "my daughter", and so on.

Quite apart from that, I don't think that Professor Franklin's division of fiction is a useful, or correct, or adequate one.

c) On page 99 we find further attempts at definition. The first suggestion is:

"Science fiction as a form of physical (as distinguished from utopian, moral, psychological, or religious) speculation is what Poe may have provided with significant new dimensions"

The statement "Science fiction as a form of physical speculation" implies that science fiction is a part of physical speculation. Pray tell, what lies in the remaining part? But the implication of the whole is that science fiction may take many forms - physical, utopian, moral, psychological or religious speculation. While dealing with this section it would be well to include a passage on page x:

"the tales of strange psychic phenomena, utopian romances, wondrous discoveries, and extraordinary voyages in time and space"

are included in Professor Franklin's practical definition of science fiction. I should really like to know how utopian speculation ("speculation about no-place") really differs from "moral speculation" and some of the others (remembering that we are still dealing with fiction, for science fiction is the form in question). Do psychological speculation (the same as "strange psychic phenomena"?) and religious speculation (fictional) belong in science fiction? And what about "wondrous discoveries"? But let us go on to Professor Franklin's expansion upon this subject.

"(this kind of science fiction) is not a fiction which seeks to popularize scientific ideas but a fiction which seeks to formulate ideas that could not be formulated in any other way, certainly in no "non-fictional" way."

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\* Be careful here. It is too easy to suggest the answer "scientific hypotheses". How are these distinguished from science fiction written in the form of an article? "The hypotheses turn out to be true" Then what was that bit you had about science fiction "imitating possibilities" (as opposed to impossibilities (fantasy)). But let's not try to be consistent.

I wonder if there is an excessive negative in that last phrase - but no matter. The first part of this indicates that the previous listing (physical (this one), utopian, etc.) is incomplete, which is useful. The second half could come straight out of a LEAD-IN for New Worlds, but that doesn't make it any more meaningful. At any rate, the same claim could be made for detective fiction, surfing fiction, hairdressing fiction, insect fiction and leather fiction. At the same time we should perhaps recall that all these alternatives are intended to be describing the same object, and it could be that putting everything together will make the separate parts more clear (you do realise that I'm putting you on, there, don't you?).

The next one is very nice:

"a fiction concerned not with actual physical details but with hypothetical possibilities which may have physical existence or which may only be represented metaphorically as physical things."

Oh yes. But the only writers I can think of who fit the description are Anais Nin and Paul Ableman, and I'm hesitant to claim them as writers of science fiction.

And the last - oh, this is the one.

"the fiction which merges indistinguishably into the new scientific hypothesis"

Indistinguishably? Then how can one tell the difference? Remember, too, that science is mortal, fiction immortal. Indistinguishable? And "a form of physical speculation" - we were looking for the other part, remember, and now we see that it can't be "scientific hypothesis".

Later I say add some more remarks on the subject of "utopian fiction" and similar varieties. But the above are, so far as I can tell, the possible constituents of the "original, theoretical definition" of science fiction mentioned on the dust-jacket. Perhaps that is what it is, but it also seems useless, self-contradictory, prescriptive rather than descriptive, and not at all what appears to have been used in putting together FUTURE PERFECT. For there the definition is more practical. Science fiction is that which appears in the volume titled FUTURE PERFECT.

What I have said so far would seem to indicate that this book is not exactly scholarly. On the contrary, it is scholarly, even to the point of having footnotes. But perhaps that is the problem.

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1. Some of the footnotes are quite useful. For example, from a footnote on page 93 we learn just where to check up on the first Spanish recognition of Poe's worth. On page 144 we have a short essay on the meaning of "utopia", which unfortunately goes beyond Sir Thomas More's brilliant use of the word, but no matter.

But on page 392 there is a quotation from Dostoevski. It is identified by translator, publisher and date of publication. But not by title. On page xii we have a reference to "specialised magazines of fantasy and science fiction (which appeared) late in the (19th) century". But no footnote indicates what the author had in mind. The indications are that the Frank Reade Library was in his mind. Most regrettable of all is the absence of a footnote on page 96: "And there are those - ..... - who argue that the chief value of science fiction is to make available with a sugar-coating of drama some scientific facts and figures." We needn't worry about too much about Hugo Gernsback and the sympathetic reviewers of Verne, but it may just be that not everyone knows where to check up on Maxim Gorki's views on the subject

•For nowadays too much "scholarship" is the result of the publish-or-perish philosophy. Getting it right doesn't matter: getting it written, and published, does.

#### general remarks

"There was no major nineteenth-century American writer of fiction, and indeed few in the second rank, who did not write some science fiction or at least one utopian romance."

writes Professor Franklin on page x. Let us note that we have already seen science fiction described as "a form of utopian fiction", but here they are distinguished in a way which suggests that "utopian fiction" is in some way inferior to science fiction. Professor Franklin then goes on to discuss some of these works, giving a brief description of each. The relevant phrases are as follows:

"spontaneous combustion of a living man  
almost superhuman ventriloquism  
hallucinations  
extraordinary plagues  
extreme somnambulism  
time-travel  
a society of monkeys  
a utopian society  
lost continent  
mesmerism  
utopian societies  
robot  
time-travel  
utopian romance  
telepathy  
clairvoyance  
teleportation  
ghostly stories  
strange psychic phenomena  
time-travel  
variation on Frankenstein  
disappearance into "the fifth dimension"

How many of those, I wonder, can legitimately be classed as themes related to science fiction? Some of them can, but the majority, it seems to me, cannot. Quite apart from that we have to make some assessment of Professor Franklin's description. Take, for example, his allegation that "Washington Irving's most famous story is a time-travel story". I don't know that that is quite an appropriate description. Then there's the suggestion that "Oliver Wendell Holmes, insofar as he was a writer of fiction, was a writer of science fiction". Indeed? And of course, in this very paragraph, Professor Franklin has distinguished "utopian romance" from "science fiction". And what of the other descriptions? Well, "telepathy, clairvoyance, teleportation" go together in Professor Franklin's mind, so that we can easily see what he is thinking of.

Both here and on page 141 Professor Franklin claims Mrs. Shelley's Frankenstein as science fiction and, following his custom, makes no attempt to justify.

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and that the location of the report concerning the "1940 Soviet conference on science fiction" is not well known either. I've found reference to neither in the several Soviet articles on SF I've read. And Professor Franklin declines to provide us with the information. But if you're interested in Poe in Spain.....?

his classification. In this case that classification is hardly acceptable. For Frankenstein is fairly clearly of an older tradition - the Faustian tradition - and it doesn't match up too well with any of the definitions given by Professor Franklin. If Frankenstein is science fiction then we have opened the floodgates and should give up completely: everything is science fiction, if you wish it so.

And then, concerning the ghost stories of Henry James, I find myself objecting once more. I can't regard the doings of the SPR as "science", no matter that they are sometimes reported in New Scientist.

Professor Franklin concludes his introduction with some words of advice to "those who find science fiction 'sub-literary'". He makes three points: (a) that science fiction, like all other forms of fiction, follows Sturgeon's Law. This is scarcely a daring proposition, but it fails to explain why even the best of science fiction is rather poor. (b) that much science fiction is unpopular because it is based upon currently critically unpopular notions about fiction. Speak up now, John J. Pierce! As it happens, I don't believe that science fiction is based on the assumption that "the creative artist should imitate ideal forms rather than actualities." You may choose to recall here Professor Franklin's remarks concerning possibilities and impossibilities (which form the substance of fantasy). In addition, this remark seems to be used to imply that pulp fiction, churned out carelessly at top speed, is unpopular simply because the author writes of "ideal forms". (c) that science fiction is "different", and must be read in a different way. Perhaps so, but what has that to do with Professor Franklin's point? Consider any sub-literary work (I assume that these exist): then it is certainly different from a literary work. Therefore, by Professor Franklin's reasoning, it must be read differently. Further, by Professor Franklin's reasoning, you only think it is sub-literary because you have not read it correctly. Ergo, no sub-literary writing exists. In this way it is possible to prove anything, and indeed it is in this way that Professor Franklin has endeavoured to make his points.

From the point of view of the theoretical, the non-fiction, content, then, this book is thoroughly disappointing. It has many of the worst features of current literary practice, presenting vacuous arguments, idle and unjustifiable assertions and quite meaningless definitions. By itself it fails utterly to make the point which, one presumes, Professor Franklin intended it to make: that that "science fiction" over there is not very different from this science fiction over here.

But let us turn to the fiction: for, even if the theoretical content were sound, it would be this which would make or break Professor Franklin's argument.

#### American fiction of the nineteenth century

Professor Franklin introduces each of the stories in the anthology, though not always individually. In making these introductions, Professor Franklin frequently calls our attention to other stories with a similar theme, describing them in terms which make it quite plain that the story could easily have appeared in Astounding Science Fiction in 1948 (and perhaps it was only the policy of "no reprints" which prevented this?). Such gems, however, are not printed. Instead we get other stories, the description of which is very similar. These stories, as I shall try to show below, do not measure up to their advertising. Can it be, I wonder, that Professor Franklin is relying on this build-up to persuade us to see things which are not there? The discrepancy between the story as described by Franklin and the story as read by Foyster was often alarming.

The first three stories are by Nathaniel Hawthorne. I summarise, probably unfairly, the plot of each.

- a) Guy tries to remove wife's birthmark with chemicals. . Kills her.
- b) Guy makes mechanical butterfly.
- c) Guy feeds daughter poison. She lives and breathes poison. Lover tries to provide antidote. Kills her.

It does not seem to me that any of these stories qualifies immediately as science fiction from the nature of the plot. Both in this, and by the nature of the stories themselves, we are led to the conclusion that they are best classified, if we are to follow Professor Franklin's division, as "fantasy". It is possible, certainly, that one could include them as science fiction by the third definition appearing on page 99, but as I remarked earlier that definition does include much which is not science fiction. The mood of the third story is quite close to that in J.G. Ballard's THE GARDEN OF TIME and that would only marginally be described as science fiction.

Nevertheless there is something to be gained from looking at these stories carefully. I would not be so foolish as to claim that this kind of story is not a forerunner of science fiction. But that does not make it science fiction, any more than alchemy is chemistry. Which brings me to another point. The first two of these stories (THE BIRTHMARK and THE ARTIST OF THE BEAUTIFUL) readily fit a class which might be called "alchemical fiction". Maybe RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER does too. At any rate, the first two stories go so far as to list the names of some alchemists, and both include, for example, St. Albert the Great.

It is true, alas, that some science fiction magazines do publish "alchemical fiction" (and "technology fiction" and so on) but that does not mean much. The appearance of a story in a science fiction magazine does not guarantee that it is science fiction.

The next three stories are by Edgar Allan Poe. In the case of A TALE OF THE RAGGED MOUNTAINS and THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF M. VALDEMAR I would argue very much as I have done with regard to Hawthorne's stories. MELLONTA TAUTA might, at first sight, seem to be a good example of early science fiction. Poe was, as I read the story, seeking to make comments upon the society in which he lived and the philosophies whereby it lived. Does a piece of fiction written with this intent constitute science fiction? It may do so. But this is not such a case, I would suggest. Poe chose a futuristic setting in order to simplify his own task: a false sophistication enables him to make ex cathedra statements which in another context would require more substantial support. Science fiction is not necessarily a refuge for the mentally incompetent.

And I prefer Artemus Ward. MELLONTA TAUTA is science fiction only if GULLIVER'S TRAVELS is; I cannot take this position.

These stories are introduced under the sub-head of the names of their authors: the remainder appear in a section titled Explorations, with the following subtitles: Automata, Marvelous Inventions, Medicine Men, Into The Psyche, Space Travel and Time Travel.

In his introduction to the section on Automata, Professor Franklin again makes reference to a large number of stories which are, by his description, plainly science fiction. But I find his judgements difficult to trust. Take, for example, the description of Melville's THE BELL TOWER which appears on pages 145 and 146. Compare this with the story itself, which appears on pages 151-165. Dammit, sirs, fiction about machines is not necessarily science fiction. And in this case it is not.

DR. MATERIALISMUS, by Frederic Jessup Stimson, is a story which, by its own postscript, must be excluded from the realm of science fiction. The remarks made earlier regarding Hawthorne's stories apply once more.



On the first page of THE ATOMS OF CHLADNI by J. D. Whelpley we find, yet again, the word "alchemy" (in a rather curious context). Like some of the earlier stories this is alchemical fiction rather than science fiction. Now the machine proposed in this story might easily be regarded as a vision of the future. But on page 190 the inventor, Mohler, describes his machine, which is intended to record sound.

"It was a means," he said, "to discover falsehood and treachery."  
The spirit of Chladni communicated that to him - Chladni, the Frenchman who discovered the dancing of the atoms. "It is the same," he said, "in the atoms of the brain; they vibrate in geometrical forms, which the soul reads."

This is alchemy: indeed, both here and elsewhere the writer concerns himself with the machine as an object of fantasy, rather than one having anything to do with science fiction.

This was the first story under the heading "Marvelous Inventions". The second, WAS HE DEAD? by Silas Weir Mitchell, M.D., is scarcely fantasy, much less science fiction. Just at the end the flame of fantasy flickers to life, along with the murderer of Mrs. Gray. Apart from this - nothing. Put it this way: is a story about a heart-transplant science fiction? The elements introduced in this particular case seem to present a good case for fantasy.

The introduction to the next section, "Into The Psyche" begins as follows:

"Perhaps the most widely exciting science of the nineteenth century and certainly the most influential on fiction was psychology. The century which began with Mesmer and ended with Freud....."

So much for Professor Franklin's "science"! So much for his "psychology", for that matter! Professor Franklin elucidates:

"Because the aims of psychological science and of almost all fiction overlap, it is extremely difficult to separate the science fiction which explores human psychology from any fiction which aims at psychological revelation. But even if psychological science fiction is limited only to stories about hypnotic states, extra-sensory perception, teleportation, identity transfers, and extraordinary psychological experiments, still the nineteenth century stands as its first great age." (page 248)

Why? Why, that is, does Professor Franklin wish to limit "psychological science fiction"? Does he correspondingly wish to limit the science fiction concerning physics to experiments relating to, say, gravitation and Newton's Third? If psychology was "the most widely exciting science of the nineteenth century" then we hardly expect to be told, in the next paragraph, that only some aspects of psychology may be examined and the result be classed as science fiction. Why?

Because Professor Franklin has argued himself into a cul-de-sac. If we accept that psychology as described by Professor Franklin is a science then we must accept that "almost all fiction" is science fiction. As I have argued above, this is the obvious implication of Professor Franklin's approach anyway. The truth is that in his excitement Professor Franklin has made apparent what was once hidden: that his distinctions between science fiction and other fiction are almost worthless. Now, seeking to save the day, he proposes that only those aspects of psychology which fit his pre-conceived notion of science fiction material (which, as we have seen, generally fall into the groupings of fantasy or realistic fiction) shall be regarded as psychology for the purpose of the exercise.

But let us return to the stories presented as "science fiction". THE MONARCH OF DREAMS by Thomas Wentworth Higginson is claimed to be science fiction (whereas STEPPENWOLF, by Hermann Hesse, is fantasy) yet the arguments are weak: Professor Franklin puts it as follows:

"in "The Monarch of Dreams" the ego traps itself as it deliberately, almost routinely, moves into its interior world of fantasy in order to conduct a scientific experiment."  
(page 251, my emphasis)

The important thing is that the world is a fantasy world and therefore, again in terms of Professor Franklin's own descriptions, the story tries to imitate impossibilities. The story is simply not science fiction.

Professor Franklin summarises Ambrose Bierce's A PSYCHOLOGICAL SHIPWRECK with the words "inconceivable psychic dimensions". This is suspicious in itself, in the light of what has gone before, and reading the story shows that once again we are deceived: A PSYCHOLOGICAL SHIPWRECK is not science fiction, by Professor Franklin's definitions or my own.

In introducing Edward Bellamy's TO WHOM THIS MAY COME Professor Franklin also introduces (I think - he may have used it earlier, but I have not noticed it) a usage of "science fiction" for "science fiction story" or "science fiction novel". Thus we have references to "four future-scene science fictions" and "an extract from one of Kurd Lasswitz's science fictions". One may speculate idly for a moment on the reason for this use.

At any rate, TO WHOM THIS MAY COME is described (page 279) as "a story which explores what life might be like if we could see into each other's minds". But it isn't! This telepathic device is used by Bellamy simply to enable him to make comments on the nature of people in his own society. He doesn't investigate the claimed problem at all. (Had he done so, there would be an argument of sorts for the suggestion that the story is a science fiction (story).) But really, looking at the problem from the most generous angle, we must assert that TO WHOM THIS MAY COME is utopian fiction, frequently distinguished from science fiction by Professor Franklin (the nearest example being on page 278).

Bellamy's THE BLINDMAN'S WORLD, described by Professor Franklin as "a story which explores what life might be like if we could see the future" leads off the section titled "Space Travel", which is, I think you will agree, a trifle confusing. The reader will find, however, that the story's relation to science fiction is very much the same as that enjoyed by TO WHOM THIS MAY COME.

The next story labelled "Space Travel" is Fitz-James O'Brien's THE DIAMOND LENS and, recalling Professor Franklin's idea of space travel, one would hardly object, except that this section includes a sub-group with the heading "Dimensional Speculation". But the story is scarcely more than fantasy, for even poor old ephemeral science could have seen that the events described could not have taken place. Perhaps we could class the story as Faustian, but it is certainly not science fiction.

Bierce's MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES is most entertaining, but is fantastic folk-lore rather than science fiction.

"When one says time travel what one really means is an extraordinary dislocation of someone's consciousness in time." (page 364)

This is the first sentence in Professor Franklin's remarks on "Time Travel". Is this what Marcel suffered, then, in SWANN'S WAY? As usual, Professor Franklin's description/definition is too loose, too all-embracing - but he needs such a definition if he is to succeed in his argument.



It is not surprising, then, to find that Professor Franklin's selections in this area are no more "science fiction" than were any of the others. CHRISTMAS 200,000 BC is historical fiction if one wishes to be generous, fantasy otherwise. Mark Twain's piece of correspondence (FROM THE "LONDON TIMES" OF 1904) is hardly science fiction or "Time Travel", and that must surely extend even to those who regard A CONNECTICUT YANKEE AT KING ARTHUR'S COURT and RIP VAN WINKLE as examples of "time travel" science fiction. The invention is not necessary to the plot - it merely adds some drama. Now was the invention of a kind to make the story science fiction. Would we regard as science fiction, now, a story about the Concorde jet?

The last story, IN THE YEAR TEN THOUSAND, is an example of the type of story I have discussed above, in which a particular setting is used merely to lend anonymity of a sort to the author's social comments. Such an approach does not lead to science fiction, necessarily, and especially this is true if this is the author's only stepping aside from the path of "realistic fiction".

One cannot help but be disappointed by this book. There is probably a case for the view which the author holds: that Professor Franklin did not make that case adequately is our loss. If there is a connection between science fiction as it now is and some particular pieces of fiction from the past then an examination of that connection might bring about some deeper understanding of just what constitutes science fiction. As we have seen, Professor Franklin does not seem to be an authority upon this latter subject.

We must admit, however, that many of the stories printed here are of great interest. Some of them show how modern science fiction might have originated, while not being science fiction themselves. Most of them are written rather shoddily, but a few are excellent. On average, the collection is an enjoyable one to read.

Professor Franklin's arguments, and his views on literature, are too shaky to be taken seriously. But he does put together an interesting book.

I have directed most of my remarks towards Professor Franklin's discussion of science fiction rather than to the stories themselves. If you wish to find out more about the stories you have only to buy the book (which is now available in paperback). But Professor Franklin's ideas seem to have born seed at least in some places, and those ideas seem mistaken and misleading: taken to extremes, they could be damaging to science fiction.

Professor Franklin closes as follows:

"This view (of "a past vision of the future" in which "what we see is the past, and, in reflection, ourselves") may disclose..., how the mirrors of time reflect upon each other so that we, standing in the midst of them, can see ourselves coming and going."

But Professor Franklin does not know whether he is coming or going.

Finally, I recommend buying (or at least reading) this book. There's some pleasure to be gained from it, and some things to be learned.

But, really, you should have it on hand, just in case someone asks that age-old question:

"Where are the snow-jobs of yesteryear?"

John Foyster

(revised and expanded from an article which originally appeared in EXPLODING MADONNA, July 1968)

POBTRAIT OF A MAN UNKNOWN

the science fiction critic

john foyster

It is much too easy to simply say that there are no critics of science fiction. After all, don't we hear, on all sides, references to these beings? Haven't you, Foyster, actually been referred to as such? Did not the SFWA only a year or two ago publish a booklet titled CRITICISM - WHO NEEDS IT?

Let me tell you about that.

But not just now. We shall leave that for later - oh, as much later as we can reasonably manage. Going backwards slightly, what about Foyster as critic? Yes, you have me there. Of course, at the time allegations of this nature were made they were not true but now the secret can be revealed: at a secret meeting in Sydney, attended only by science fiction fans sworn to keep it secret, I actually did attempt and, I think, encroach upon the criticism of science fiction. But not before, and probably not again.

Does this mean a Geisian dialogue? No, most definitely not. But let us do away with reality, in view of our subject. But should this subject properly be the critic of science fiction or the criticism of science fiction? Properly, it should be both. But half of the pair has been chewed over already, leaving just the subject of our title.

Let me tell you about that.

But not just now.

For if we are to examine the notion of a critic of science fiction we, you and I, will need to know what I, as author of this article, mean by criticism (with respect to science fiction). There has been some criticism of science fiction written. James Blish writes some in THE ISSUE AT HAND - perhaps ten or a dozen pages of it in all. I don't think there is any at all in IN SEARCH OF WONDER by Damon Knight, but if so, I missed it. There's some sort of critical stance in NEW MAPS OF HELL by Kingsley Amis, but criticism is rather rare, there. And there are critical moments in "British Science Fiction Now" by Brian Aldiss in S F Horizons. The most recent issue of my own fanzine, THE JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY, carried a piece of criticism by the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem (and the reaction of readers has been wholly negative).

That isn't much. But what is important, for us right now, is to know just what I have been pointing at in the above.

I exclude (or tend to exclude) from "criticism": plot summaries,  
cutting remarks about trivia,  
editorial remarks,  
pieces of literary history,  
feuds,  
ratings,  
biography,  
amongst other things.

Nevertheless, I do not intend only to regard as "criticism" what is in fact "meta-criticism".

And let me tell you about that right now. The most useful form of criticism, to me, is that in which the writer deals with general problems rather than specific ones. In turn, this implies that I am less interested in discussions of particular works than in a discussion of the Theory Of It All. The reason is simple: given the second kind of discussion, one may easily attempt to match the ideas to one's perception of reality. But a discussion of a particular work is too frequently dependent upon unstated premises.

At any rate, to go a little further, the natural consequence of my inclinations is that I prefer the writings of novelists or poets on their craft to that of academics on someone else's craft. Given this, how do I find myself placed vis-a-vis science fiction?

Theoreticians of science fiction don't exist. The "academics" of science fiction do not exist as a class either. The relatively disinterested writers in amateur magazines like this one are simply not competent for the job at any but the lowest level. And the active writers are not in the slightest disinterested. They fall into two classes - the boosters and the bleeders. The former devote their space in fanzines to magnifying their own works (generally speaking, a necessary procedure). The bleeders are those who faint at the first touch of critical disfavour - and then bleed voluminously over as many pages as are available.

In a few words, the Knights and Blishs are too rare.

But anyone who makes his living from his writing can scarcely take time off from that to write careful criticism of the works of others for virtually no return.

So, do we find, or are we likely to find, competent readers, who might be able to indulge in "criticism", however loosely defined, when there is practically no return for this?

The answer is a resounding maybe. I imagine that there are quite a few young and competent readers of science fiction who have the time and the skill. But it is too easy to do half the job. Some time ago I noticed in KALLIKANZAROS an article which drew some inspiration from Aristotle's POETICS. The idea appealed to me - but not for long: the author had jumped into his subject without looking around him. He had not stopped to consider the difficulties.

What difficulties face a person planning to become a 'critic' of science fiction, putting aside for the moment the strong reservations I have about the possibility, and also putting aside my personal feelings about the nature of criticism - the kind of criticism I like - and what difficulties would continue as such a person worked?

Like the writer of science fiction, any critic must be very familiar with the field of science fiction, and he must be prepared to keep up with the field as it develops. There are quite a few people like this - and some of them are quite competent at discussing science fiction in a relatively limited way. There are two problems which arise from this "virtue". Firstly, there is a blunting of sensibility, resulting from reading large quantities of bad fiction. This suggestion has implicit in it, of course, the belief that science fiction is not the greatest literature ever written, and if you disagree with that suggestion you will disagree that I have described a disadvantageous position. Secondly, the quantity of science fiction published now (and for some time in the past) is so great that it doesn't seem quite possible for someone to hold down a job, read all the science fiction published and read widely outside the field of science fiction. Such a problem is usually solved by (1) not reading very much outside of science fiction and (2) reading only some science fiction.

It is widely claimed, in the USA, that the first of these methods is not used to any great extent. Yet there is rarely any evidence that US SF readers do much more than read SF plus occasional mass-market paperbacks picked up to provide variety in the diet. For a critic to be so limited would be disastrous.

The second approach is probably widespread. Readers soon find writers whose works they dislike, and that saves time. There's also the element of chance that throws a writer in our path, perhaps, leading to inquiry and then investigation. Of what use is this to the critic? If he follows the path of selectivity he will obviously not be competent to judge the entire field and, to date, most critics or near-critics have seen themselves as universal arbiters of excellence. The editor of SF COMMENTARY (in more worthy times) is a notable exception, and his decision to concentrate upon a limited number of authors (Dick and Aldiss, say) pays obvious dividends, although it may also lead to a narrowness of vision which could become disabling.

I would think that this is the most satisfactory path for the young intending critic: to select one author and become thoroughly familiar with his work (not his personality). It should be possible, from this vantage point, to gain some appreciation of the field of science fiction as a whole and, from here, to move on to investigate a small number of other writers, so that he eventually is able to discuss very competently a small section of the field of science fiction. Five such persons are far more valuable from the critical point of view than 100 P. Schuyler Millers, though this should not be taken as any sort of criticism of P. Schuyler Miller who has performed miraculously for so many years.

If this is an approach which a young investigator might take, what could we expect of his audience? Disinterest, perhaps (in THE EARLY SHORT STORIES OF DEAN EVANS), but later irritation or fascination might follow upon the publication of THE APOTHEOSIS OF DEAN EVANS. By the time our young critic has written PRECURSORS OF DEAN EVANS IN ELIZABETHAN POETRY we might expect for him some kind of authority.

It may seem strange to be suggesting that the best way to understand science fiction as a whole is to investigate closely the works of one of its writers. But the alternative is too depressing: it is better to know something about no one than nothing about everyone.

But what of the present state of the art?

I've made some remarks about some "critics" on page 24 - now I want to look a little more closely at CRITICISM - WHO NEEDS IT? Obviously this is a question of some depth, with shades of meaning (and echoes of resentment). We might expect to find in there some approach to the problem of criticism as a whole, the question of the object of criticism, and so on.

Actually it is all rather disappointing. The SFWA couldn't muster a really good team, I'm afraid. Just what is it that today's science fiction writers want in the way of "criticism"?

Gordon R Dickson wants a critic to tell him why his stories aren't (weren't) selling.

Doris Pitkin Buck wants the critic to be the perfect reader - and no more.

James Blish - ah, James Blish - wants the critic to act as a perfect editor, doing for the writer what Z.Q. Hamhand should be doing as well picking half-written stories for his magazine.

Alexei Panshin ("as a critic -- I've written two books about science fiction") wants everyone to act dumb so that he can tell them.

Harlan Ellison wants book-reviewers to think before they stomp. A worthy aim,

but there is just the slightest hint that critics should be the toadies of the writers. There's definitely the view that criticism is meant for writers rather than anyone else.

Ben Bova - no, I don't quite feel up to summarising that.

But you can see the drift, I think. A pretty ego-centric situation (and why not?- writing can be a lonely job) and hardly a reasonable reaction to the apparent question.

Who does need criticism? Well, no one needs the best criticism because, like all art, it is useless. Obviously some writers need the kind of criticism to which James Blish refers - but they should get it from the editors. Some writers probably need egoboo, but that is a psychological rather than a critical problem. Readers don't need criticism - they need reviews. Students of science fiction, and writers who are interested in more than their own personal success are probably the only people to whom criticism is necessary.

And there are not many of them: perhaps this explains why criticism, of any kind, is almost non-existent.

All that I have said, here, shouldn't be taken to imply that I think that criticism of science fiction, or criticism of any kind, is a worthwhile thing in itself: it may only be that it is of some value if it sparks off reactions in those who read it: or it may not be of any value at all. But given that some people talk about criticism, and some even think they write it, there does exist some room for discussion.

The problems which are almost unique to science fiction lie in the origin of science fiction criticism - the first thing a young fan does, more or less, when he starts his own fanzine, is to take the opportunity to tell the world what he thinks of it. Science fiction being one of his major interests (if not, all too often, and sadly, his only interest) it becomes a focus for his critical energies, and so we find reviews and discussions which are, quite reasonably, juvenile. But many readers of this material are older, and take it seriously. The young reader will be bombarded with reactions which probably encourage bad rather than good critical habits ("know what you are talking about" is one of the last things a science fiction fan is likely to learn, following at a great distance number one - "talk loud"). In such a situation it is hardly likely that many critics will emerge from within the field..

Outsiders, alas, have almost invariably failed to do their homework. Thus their opinions, though possibly of sound structure, are based upon rather inadequate information.

What of the probable future? As science fiction fandom expands it is probable that standards will rise. Unfortunately, as I have indicated elsewhere in this magazine, there is some slight tendency to venerate any show of cleverness amongst science fiction fans, and this may instead encourage the promoter rather than the thinker. The swing, in the last few years, towards discussion of science fiction in fandom has not brought about any great improvement in the level of discussion - perhaps there has even been a decline. With luck, the younger fans will opt for writing fiction, where a professional kick in the teeth is available and probable. But anyone can write a book review (as we all know only too painfully).

I read science fiction from 1956-1958 and then took some time off to recover. When John Bangsund started AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW I had to take it up again and haven't had much of a rest since. It doesn't hurt much now, and that is what makes me worry. Is it a measure of a critic's (or a reviewer's) worth to SF that it hurts him to read it?

- John Foyster

A TRIBUTE TO JOHN BRUNNER AND JACK WODHAMS

a Poem by Henry Newton Goodrich: THE OLD GREY HACK \*

Steady, Bob! - nay, from thy floundering race  
With thyself thou should'st fall to a firm, dainty pace:

- Thou canst not, for old age, alack!

Thou'rt brave as thou'rt gentle, - thy gallop's for fun,  
Or to show what, in times that are past, thou hast done, -  
Though small thy pretensions - no prize hast thou won -  
Thou'rt only 'Our Old Grey Hack!'

- Yet - many a weariness, sorrow, disgust,  
Or vexation, of mine hast thou cast, with the dust  
Of thy heels, to the winds at my back!  
And many a joke, or wise word, or kind look  
Had I missed - or steep glade, or still vale, or wild brook,  
Or flowered-gemmed, verdure-set, joy-lighted nook -  
Thee wanting, my good 'Old Grey Hack!'

When somewhat 'used up', and 'life' seems 'a mistake',  
For the coach-whirl and waggoner's whistle I make,  
Where the Post-horn enlivens the track,  
And notes of the song-birds and horse-bells abide,  
And farmers look after their hay-loads with pride,  
And sunny, smiled greetings of market-maids glide  
Me after, and thee, 'Old Grey Hack!'

\* reprinted from: THE POETICAL WORKS OF NEWTON GOODRICH (author of "The Martyrs of Myletene," "Raven Rockstrow," &c., &c.): Melbourne, George Robertson, MDCCCLXXIII

When rankles my thought, through some friendship estranged -  
Some loved one departed - some fair prospect changed -

Some hate come my spirit to rack -  
Some loss of content with myself or my lot -  
Of power some smooth villain's use, or what not -  
How I steal off to ride it all down, in a trot  
To the fields thou well know'st, 'Old Grey Hack!'

And when friends have lauded my rhymes, with a hint -  
So like pity! - at years that should pass ere I print,  
While foes vowed for rhymes I'd no knack,  
How I've pitied the pity, or laughed at ill-will,  
As I've cantered away, vain enthusiast still,  
To be kissed into song by the breeze on this hill  
Or embraced by yon woods, 'Old Grey Hack!'

Up! Soho! Steadily! - How the scene dreams,  
Here in tableland-slumber! - the distant hum ~~scans~~  
(So faint-coming, o'er the expanse)  
The low sigh of its Spirit - whose murmur appals,  
As 'mid the lone silence it solemnly falls  
On thought of the hush when the Death-angel calls  
Our loved and lamented ones hence!

- Steady! Still steadily! - Here the road dips,  
'Neath the trees, to the turn where the little bridge skips  
The daisy-banked creek and cascade, -  
And now rounds the hill whence the village-cots peep  
O'er the small, punt-crossed river, and climbs where the steep  
By the little Inn's crowned o'er which green willows heap  
In broad masses their quivering shade.







Rottensteiner on Blish on Rottensteiner on Blish & Knight: A TORRENT OF FACES

I'm glad to see that Mr. James Blish is going to great lengths to educate ignorant reviewers, but it is an unfortunate fact that his natural indignation about "bad manners" in criticism (an also very natural discovery, after bad reviews) has had its effect on his thinking.

Mr. Blish takes great pains to rationalise Biond's preference, but chooses to ignore my main point: that the "gigantic radioactive cloud" wouldn't be as radioactive as Mr. Blish wants us to believe. As I clearly stated, even today it is possible to set off relatively "clean" explosions of fusion bombs, and one should expect that in the future there'll be some progress. The blowing-up of Flavia would produce far less radioactivity than that spread all over the Earth during the atmospheric atomic tests. And this fall-out didn't do very much harm - far less than the effects Mr. Blish ascribes to his asteroid. And perhaps he really does think that the radioactive fall-out should have been confined to a clearly isolated space, instead of being spread over a wide area, since he apparently believes there's no such thing as a radioactive dose: none that is "more harmless" or - if he prefers - "less dangerous". Whether or not Flavia is radioactive may not be important for the impact of the asteroid: but it makes a hell of a difference for the properties of the radioactive cloud, and that is why I discussed it at such length. His contention, that my statement that "the cloud is more harmless the bigger it is" is flatly wrong, might be justified if all or at least very many of the particles of the cloud were heavy radioactive nuclei - but there is no idea of such a thing, although his accusation that I confused it with the dilution of a cloud of chemically lethal gas makes me suspect he thinks it is. But whereas poison gas consists of identical atoms only some of the particles of the radioactive cloud would be heavy nuclei - depending upon the kind of bomb used and the material of the asteroid.

And if he thinks that the blowing-up of an asteroid 11 miles long would produce too much radioactive dust - his so very competent elite could have blown up only the remainder of the asteroid with atomics.

But it's clear that the authors needed the asteroid for a spectacular ending of the novel, as the easiest way out (or they wouldn't have introduced the thing in the first place), although the "problems" that Mr. Blish cites at the bottom of page 11 could alone have served a better novelist for a score of books.

And regardless of what Mr. Blish may think sane or insane, I don't believe in his problems. But considering Mr. Blish's statement, it seems small wonder that SF writers in general believe that they are dealing with problems of the utmost depth. It's a case of the Emperor's New Clothes: those who fail to see them are just unfit. Next an author will claim that he's written a piece of "Astronomical SF" just because his hero happens to land on a planet. We have already seen Mr. Farmer's claim that Mr. Zelazny "wrestles with immortality" because his hero Sandow happens to be an immortal, and Mr. Dahlskog's claim that Mr. Blish's antimortalica happen to be meaningful because they appear to be desirable. But that certain objects, or strange patterns of behaviour appear in a work of fiction doesn't mean that there are problems. In a literary work a problem is only there when there is a certain depth of reflection: if not, the author has not just treated a problem badly, but the problem isn't there at all, and I find Mr. Blish's co-authored work sadly lacking in this respect.

I'll single out just one thing Mr. Blish considers to be a psychological problem: Marg't Splain's allowing her romantic view of an interstellar drive to blind her to the fact that emigration is no answer to over-population. I take this to be an indication that Messrs Blish and Knight wished to engage in a favourite sport of SF writers: the knocking-down of straw-men. Unable to think out real alternatives, they present a point of view so obviously stupid that only a madman would hold it: but

this offers no psychological insight (save with respect to the authors), nor is it of any therapeutic or other value.

"God, one is inclined to believe, sent a meteor to punish the wicked humanitarians for their sins." There is no mention of god in the book in this context....." True. And if I had written: "The authors, one is inclined to believe, were not up to their task", Blish probably would have objected that there is no mention of authors in the book in this context; it would indeed greatly surprise me if there had been. I saw no necessity to spell it out, but in view of what Mr. Blish considers to be "factual errors", I have to do it, I fear. The thinking of Biond fatally resembles that of a man who conceives of plagues as sent by god as punishment for sins (the "sin" of "humanitarianism" in our case). It doesn't matter whether the authors are aware of this: it is there in their work; Biond is the protagonist, there are no other, more rational opinions, so that's the impression the reader gets. As for Mr. Blish's contention that the administrative elite is not a faceless group, I have to disagree with Mr. Blish's opinion of his characterisation.

I have to admit that I was wrong in saying that the rulers didn't think of birth control: there was indeed one birth control campaign three hundred years before the beginning of the novel. But a government that didn't do anything further, because this one campaign didn't work out as expected (or not at all, according to another opinion), and that can conceive only of some impossible alternatives (compulsory sterilisation, mass executions or emigrations) and so does nothing at all save fatalistically await the big catastrophe, is so criminally incompetent that it ought to be shot.\* I can offer as an excuse only that it's hard to believe in such things, even when you see them in cold print.

Can anyone really expect a solution from just one attempt. Implicit in all this is the stupid notion that the problem could be solved by one solution, the solution. As if it weren't possible and necessary to combine a variety of methods: social, legal, psychological, scientific and so on. None of these methods will "solve" the problem, but they all may contribute something to a solution, may help a little. But perhaps it is pointless to tell SF authors such simple things when they want to present the Philosopher's Stone - or nothing.

As for the stupid masses: perhaps Mr. Blish would care to explain to me the fundamental reason for the success of the introduction of xenophobia, whereas those rascals wouldn't take the pill?

And may I point out to Mr. Blish, with regard to cliches, that the facts of Copernician astronomy and the alleged xenophobia and stupidity of the masses are not facts of the same order? That Copernician astronomy is questioned by no sane man, whereas many excellent people hold different opinions on the stupidity and xenophobia of the masses? That the facts of astronomy can simply be stated in a novel, whereas a novelist has to do better if he wants to convince us that the masses are stupid? And that the screaming xenophobic mobs of SF would still be a cliche, even if we grant that xenophobia is an important factor of modern life?

Anyway, I'm grateful that Mr. Blish told me about the facts of life: but as I recall from my own writings I have mentioned this xenophobia somewhere and would like to add here that xenophobia is not an exclusive property of the masses: it seems to be especially marked in elitists and in SF writers, for instance - but then those groups are true representatives of the multitude.

If I had just accused Messrs Blish and Knight of "literary cheating" (and the "literary" is important) he would have been right in his complaint. But I have discussed the "strategy of literary cheating", and told them what I thought this strategy was. Mr. Blish can accept or reject this, just like any other sort of criticism, regardless of what he thinks is implied about his own motives. I prefer to call the pattern I have described "literary cheating". I am less interested in Mr. Blish's motives than he seems to think. While I'm aware of the enormous difference it may make for an assessment of him as a person, I'm not greatly concerned whether this pattern is caused by a conscious intention on the part of the authors, or just the

result of ineptitude, i.e., whether the authors cheat only their public, or also themselves, because they really think like this. The important thing is: they don't treat their theme as it should have been treated; their book contains patterns (structurally identical with certain superstitions) that have no place in supposedly rational fiction. That it is painful I don't deny, but since I don't happen to know Mr. Blish I don't know which is more painful for him: the accusation of ineptitude or literary dishonesty. Since there are no other alternatives, he may take his choice. Whether my remarks are useless depends upon Mr. Blish and Mr. Knight, but since the faults of their novel are such that they cannot be repaired easily I don't expect them to rewrite - in some 18 years - their novel, which would amount, in effect, to the writing of a totally different book. If they can't do better in 18 years, they can't do better, and that's that. But still, although useless for Mr. Blish perhaps, I don't think my review altogether useless: reviews are hardly written for authors, and I certainly don't write for them.

I'm glad to hear, though, that Mr. Knight is such a valuable human being, and if I ever intended to write on SF writers as persons I would be without doubt very interested in the Blish/Knight relationship. Some time ago I read in a fanzine that some SF authors are good to drink beer with: very interesting for those who want to drink beer with SF authors, no doubt. But what has this got to do with the quality of their work? It is little consolation for the reader who must suffer from their texts.

Mr. Blish's notions of what constitutes good manners don't interest me: they are his affair, not mine, but I surely grant him the right to take all the liberties with me that I take with him, if it makes him happy.

- Franz Rottensteiner

\*How many governments, I wonder, would escape this censure? jmf.

#### Brian Richards

Regarding the late lamented ASFR, Andy Porter makes the most moving comment, Hal Colebatch the most pertinent, in view of the lethargy of fandom, it is quite astonishing that ASFR ran its course for such a length of time. Not a single one amongst us has anything to be proud of in this sad affair.

One must take up John Foyster on his horrendous misunderstanding of the English language. The word "One", in the context in which one by personal custom places in, is not the third person, it is a valid form of the first person (singular), the purpose of which is to serve as an I/Me avoidance and thus lessen the impact of one's considerable egotism upon the reader. If one wrote in the third person, which one does only in the preparation of technical article, one would write for example:- "The writer feels that Mr Foyster should revise his grammatical studies on an elementary level".

John is of course perfectly free to remain horrified by one's personal style of writing, that is his undoubted privilege and, one's egotism is staunch enough to allow one to remain happily impervious to his adverse opinion(s).

//// If "one" is "a valid form of the first person (singular)" why do you use it in association with such third person (singular) verbs as "places" and "does"? I am sorry, Mr. Richards, that the current edition of MODERN ENGLISH USAGE devoted so much unhooded space to the subject: but I do not intend to repeat here what is said there so carefully. I regard that, alas, as a higher authority than yourself. And ask me about the use of the apostrophe sometime.

You are much more amusing when, from the mighty metropolis of Port Hedland, you pontificate upon the size of Australian science fiction fandom and the activities of those fans. jmf.

#### Brian Aldiss

It is rather a long time since I received S.F. Commentary 6. Between wrestling with Christmas and the second of my HAND-REARED novels, I am afraid I have let a lot

of correspondence lapse; since the novel is still with me, although Christmas has long since disappeared, I can be confidently relied upon to do the same thing again.

But I thought that I would drop you a line at last to say how impressed I was with your review of INTANGIBLES, Inc. Not just that you were enthusiastic, although I was certainly grateful for that, but that you were so perceptive. It is entirely the best review of the book that I have read. Among the many points worth making was your remark that my mind is particularly un-American. It was about time somebody said that. There is probably an essay to be written on the difference between American and English outlook; I would say that on the whole, Americans were still romantic, whereas over here we prefer the ironic. Even today the big American writers like Mailer and Bellow and clear-cut romantic, as opposed to, say, the ironic vision of Graham Greene. The whole sword-and-sorcery field is eaten up by romanticism. I do not know where Australia stands in this opposed view, but from the general outlook of ASFR and SF Commentary, I would say you think as much as we do here.

In this context, it is interesting that you admire Dick so much, because he seems to be an exceptional American SF writer in that his vision is decidedly ironic (not that it does not also include a strong dash of the romantic); I know that my liking for Dick is sustained by this quality of his. I distrust the romantics who seem to me to be trying to foist a too glowing view of the universe upon me.

Have you seen any copies of HAND-REARED around your part of the world? The novel is published here on Thursday, and has already been receiving attention. I would be glad to know if it is banned over there; if it is, I will send you a copy.

Bob Smith

You may be right about SF conventions, I don't know. A possible difference between science fiction and other conventions or conferences is the almost parallel "fandom" that attends SF conventions, or at least the big overseas ones. Australian SF conventions, through necessity, are "peculiarly different", I think, from the hullabaloo of the American ones. ...

I agree with John Foyster (in his talk) that most SF fans do not have a serious attitude towards the future; but then, I doubt the majority of people do anyway... The reading, collecting and discussion of science fiction doesn't make us much different! But the education system doesn't foster this attitude, even now, in the second half of this "enlightened" 20th century, does it? Robert Ardrey, in The Territorial Imperative, tells us that our children are being taught the basics of Science, with little indication or knowledge of recent developments that might have them thinking for themselves about problems of the future. A lecturer recently said that the man in the street believes that "Science" will solve all these increasingly, uncomfortable close problems that effect our future, because that is what his text books at school tell him; that it isn't really his concern...

Part of our problem is that we saddled ourselves with this term "science fiction" and then spent the next 30 years arguing about what belongs within its territory and what doesn't...but science has moved fast, and we haven't: the SF writer doesn't research before he writes, and we (mainly) are not qualified to properly understand or appreciate his work, anyway! An answer of "rubbish!" to the person who suggests the writer read text books and technical magazines for his ideas and answers is just not good enough; in fact, this question gets consistently evaded, I notice. The non-fiction writer is providing much more interesting, readable and thought-provoking books these days than the SF writer; and I bet the SF writer doesn't even take advantage of them! I would suggest to John Foyster that even in those 9 to 5 hours the "fantasy element is there, and I think that some people do worry about the real world in "off-duty" hours occasionally... The various pollution problems we have or are going to have cannot be brushed off that lightly, though, and how can the population problem be anything but an "intellectual exercise" to your average man? What can he do about it? (Well...you could, but what do we give him as a substitute?)

///// THE HAND-REARED BOY by Brian W. Aldiss. Weidenfeld & Nicholson 30s?? jmf.

S E N T I O   E R G O   S U M: the novels of Brian W Aldiss  
Part one - THE GREAT ADVENTURES  
By Bruce R. Gillespie

"Life was a pleasure; he looked back at its moments, many of them as much shrouded in mist as the opposite bank of the Thames; objectively, many of them held only misery, fear, confusion. A fragment of belief came to him from another epoch: Cugito ergo sum. For him that had not been true; his truth had been, Sentio ergo sum. I feel so I exist. He enjoyed this fearful, miserable, confused life, and not only because it made more sense than non-life.

"...They were all actors performing their parts against a lead curtain that cut off for ever every second as it passed." - Brian W Aldiss: GREYBEARD

1958: EQUATOR

The first words of Aldiss's first long piece of fiction are suitably impressive:

"Evening shadows came across the spaceport in long strides. It was the one time of day when you could almost feel the world roasting. In the rays of the sinking sun, dusty palms round the spaceport looked like so many varnished cardboard props. By day, these palms seemed metal; by evening, so much papier mache. In the tropics, nothing was itself, merely fabric stretched over heat, poses over pulses."

The images are stark, clear and pictorial. The march of the evening shadows sets the reader's mind striding as well. The tropical environment glints in the reader's mind with end-of-day heat. It is too breathtaking to surround the reader, but it is a more interesting start than you would find on almost any "average" sf yarn of 1958.

The third paragraph starts with "The three occupants of the ship..." and you can almost see some newspaperman's lip curl as he takes the measure of "the latest sci-fi effort". Brian Aldiss was off and away (although with one interesting short story collection already under his belt) but was this much reason for rejoicing?

The taste of the first paragraph continues through EQUATOR - this was not just a ploy to catch the attention of some jaded magazine reader. In 1958, did Isaac Asimov or Damon Knight start their stories with terse little word games like: "In the tropics, nothing was itself, ... merely fabric stretched over heat, poses over pulses"? Did Heinlein ever attempt corrupt Marvollsims like "living meant extra adrenalin wallowing through his heart valves, the centipede track of prickles over his skin, the starry void in his lesser intestine"? That last phrase does not really mean much, but isn't it unusual in an sf story to pick out an interesting image like this, to enjoy saying it under one's breath.

It looks as if the beginner Aldiss's main interest was in language - the English language for its own sake. A welcome change, but not even a guide to the ultimate direction of Aldiss's work. It just meant that Aldiss was trying harder than the others. The story that contains these words has little enough to recommend it. Aldiss whirls his hero, Tyne Leslie, from Earth to Moon, where the alien 'rosks' ambush Leslie and his party. Knocked about the head, then set free, Leslie drops back to Earth and the Sumatran jungle, tries to discover who killed his best friend on the moon, suspects his other friend, chases him all around Sumatra and surrounding district, and finally finds out the Solution To It All. And all this in 100 pages! Tyne Leslie hardly ever looks puffed, but the reader nearly has a case of vertigo.

But Leslie's buddy was not killed at all, the 'betrayal' is an unwilling decoy for a drippy Rosk plot, and ... the pattern is familiar, and Aldiss plays it by the book. Or at least he seems to run through the rules without much thought or originality.

But Tyne Leslie, except for his physical endurance, does not look like a hero by the end of the story. He tries to solve the mystery by himself, and ends up with the puzzle explained carefully to him by amused United Nations agents. All the other characters treat him as a nuisance; one harassed agent, Dickens, tells him that "the situation is too complex for you; it comes in layers, like an onion".

But Leslie does not like being called superfluous all the time. The United Nations agents try to take him back to safety, the Rosks spot the intruders on their base, attack the whole party with a 'fly-spy'. Leslie ruins the party's chance of escape



when he complicates everything with his own escape:

"Dickens!" Tyne yelled.

"The agent slithered over the rocking surface of the fky-spy. His legs dangled, kicking wildly in the air. Then he caught a finger hold in the machine's central mesh and drew himself into a more secure position.

"All this had obviously taken the Rosks who controlled the big disc completely by surprise. It just drifted where it was, helplessly. Then it moved. Its pervasive note changing pitch, it shot up like an express lift. Dickens was knocked flat by a bough.

"Heedlessly, Tyne jumped from the tree to sprawl full length in a flowering bush. Picking himself up, he broke from the trees, running along below the fly-spy, shouting incoherently. He dare not fire in case he hit Dickens.

"Dickens knelt on top of the thing, wrenching at the screens on its upper surface. In a moment, he had unlatched a segment of screen, a wedge-shaped bit that left the rotors revolving nakedly underneath. He wrenched his shoe off and flung it in the rotors.... Tyne was still running when it crashed into the river he had noticed earlier, bearing its passenger with it. They did not come up again."

This is one of the most clearly described and most exciting action sequences in Aldiss's novels - but it contains something that goes beyond the dizzy flight of uncontrollable events. Dickens tries to rescue Leslie when he need not have put himself in immediate danger. Dickens saves them all when he puts his shoe in the rotor, but the only thing Leslie can do is shout ineffectively. The hero is saved, but from a self-induced danger, and at the same time kills one of the few people who know what is really going on.

Aldiss ends the story 'happily ever after', and so clings to the outer garments of the sf fairy tale. But the mystery that Tyne Leslie tries to solve with great gusto was 'pure bluff from start to finish'. The embarrassed UN officer can only say: "You were really ill-advised, if I may say so, to get mixed up in it". And the hero still does not wake up to his own foolishness.

EQUATOR should therefore read as much like a comedy as an adventure. Indeed, there is almost a subgenre of science fiction that takes the mickey out of its brave heroes. If Aldiss had left EQUATOR at that, he might have written a minor classic within the sub-genre. But unfortunately Aldiss breaks the light surface of the story in many passages:

"It's crazy!" Tyne thought, "all absolutely crazy!" He had time to wonder about the respect he held for the men of action. He had seen them as people at the equator of life, in the hottest spots, going round the fastest; he saw now it was true only in a limited sense. These people merely went in circles. One minute they were hunters, the next the hunted.....

"A game! That was the secret of it all! World events had become too grave to be treated seriously. One could escape from all their implications by sinking into this manic subworld of action, where blood and bluff ruled."

Shades of Dostoyevsky! The naive hero, stricken for the first time by the world's realities, breaks down with the horror of it all! But the whole novel depends on Tyne Leslie's ignorance - if he were the sort of person who could probe the metaphysics of world politics, he would not have been foolish enough to involve himself with all this tomfoolery in the first place. Aldiss has made the mistake of trying to write a self-conscious intelligent character into a role that already demands the opposite. The Tyne Leslie that makes sense to the reader is the one who slithers around tropical islands.

Of course it is not Tyne Leslie, boy adventurer, who speaks these words, but Brian W Aldiss, author, who wants to impress the reader. The corruption of frantic action is that you do not have time to think: instead Tyne Leslie is made to slip in phrases like: "It was a lovely night, so quiet you could hear your flesh crawl" when the action stops for a paragraph or two. And while the Rosks prepare to throw him into the sea, Leslie exclaims to himself: "Absolute poverty, like absolute power, corrupts absolutely". The swirling tip of the author's cape again stirs the verbal stew.

A literate science fiction writer in 1958 must have come as quite a surprise. However, in this beginner's exercise in the sf long story, Aldiss did not realize that literate or mock-'significant' language in a subliterate medium merely destroys the conventions of the medium without replacing it with anything believable. Aldiss still had a long path left in his search for a self-consistent voice.

## 1958: NON-STOP

A similar problem strikes us in the first sentence of NON-STOP:

"Like a radar echo bounding from a distant object and returning to its source, the sound of Roy Complain's beating heart seemed to him to fill the clearing."

"Like a radar echo" is not a bad simile, but it only takes us a few pages to find that Roy Complain inhabits an environment so primitive that he could never have heard of radar. This is Roy Complain's own impression of his own reactions to whatever situation has still to be described. This is not just the author reporting his view of Complain's feelings, a second-hand image that would maintain the author as the kind of figure who would know about radar echoes. The second sentence reads:

"He stood with one hand on the threshold of his compartment, listening to the rage hammering through his arteries."

and the reader is placed in the mind of Roy Complain, although already baffled by Aldiss's metafaux-pas.

What sort of attitude may we have towards Roy Complain? Aldiss starts the novel with one of Complain's lovers' quarrels and runs from there into all of Complain's other doubts, fears and pleasures. Aldiss make the unspoken claim that he is writing a traditionally English 'novel of character' despite the science fiction puzzles that must be solved. The 'Greene' tribe is ruled by 'The Teaching', and any habitual sf reader may spot a 'starship story' before he has read a dozen pages. This mindless tribe lives in a world of decks and metal, the walls and floor of which are covered with jungle-like growth - this is a centuries-travelled starship in which 'something has gone wrong'. Without Aldiss telling us, we can see that Complain's people are the descendants of the original inhabitants.

NON-STOP relates the story of Complain as he escapes from his unimaginative tribe with Marapper, the cynical priest and several other tribal malcontents. They leave their own area, called Forwards, travel through the empty Deadways, which still shows signs of some long-gone catastrophe, and reach the more 'civilised' people of Forwards. (Gillespie, you've got it wrong again: Foyster) The shape of the novel loosely parallels that of the rise of civilization, but Aldiss is not too severe in his choice of symbols. The travellers find the secret of the Starship, and all mayhem breaks loose in the last 50 pages of the novel. A simple story with dozens of surprises at the end.

But NON-STOP does not sound like a novel of intimate human experience. Aldiss prefaces the novel with R L Stevenson's smug little phrase "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive", and these pilgrims have great fun travelling. But Aldiss spoils the fun, because he pays as much attention to his main character as to the other aspects of the novel. Complain is an outsider in his own tribe, because they accept the unchanging cycle of life in the bowels of the Ship. Complain and Marapper simply try to bring a bit of life, however destructive, to the tribe:

"The crisis powered his inspiration. Flinging both hands over his face, he bent forward, groaning loudly and staggering, making believe the edge of the door had struck him. Through his fingers he saw Zilliac, the Lieutenant's right-hand man, next in line for the lieutenancy, burst into the room and kick the door shut behind him... As he turned, dazed ready, to survey the room, Complain whipped up Gwenny's wooden stool by one leg and brought it down at the base of Zilliac's skull, square across the tense neck. A delightful splintering sound of wood and bone, and Zilliac toppled full length."

Aldiss captures the stupidity of the violence as well as the fun of it. Like a couple of schoolboy delinquents, Complain and Marapper have been bored into violence - they now must escape from the tribe. At the same time, the verve of this scene is almost Shakespearean: the tide of energy and mental restlessness of an explorer and a clown flows in Complain's veins.

Complain's explorations lead the party through Deadways, which nobody had crossed before because nobody could be bothered. His party discovers a Manual of the ship's electrical wiring - most of the other vital information about the ship had been burnt as useless by previous generations. When he discovers the diary of the original ship's captain, Complain is one of the few people who understand most of its implications.

But he does not discover the most important secrets of the ship until they are revealed to him. His knowledge does not bring him any success (he wants to captain the ship back to Earth) but tears the ship apart:

"It's the Emergency Stop!" Fermour shouted. "The moths have activated the Ultimate Emergency Stop! The ship's splitting into its component decks!"

"They could see it all. The fissures on that noble arch of back were swelling into

canyons. Then the canyons were gulfs of space. Then there was no longer a ship: only eighty-four great pennies, becoming smaller, spinning away from each other, falling forever along an invisible pathway. And each penny was a deck, and each deck, with its random burden of men, animals or ponies sailed away serenely round Earth, buoyant as a cork in a fathomless sea."

This is both one of the most beautiful scenes in sf and one of the most desperate. The reader becomes part of the ship, and he is fully involved in Complain's desire for the answer to it all. But with The Answer comes the destruction of everything that Complain considers important: a religious statement of sorts, except that Complain is not struck down by the revelation but accepts it with the same verve with which he faces everything else.

Compare the end of the journey with its start:

"Cables hung in the middle of the opening. The priest leant forward and siezed them, then lowered himself gingerly hand over fist down fifteen feet to the next level. The lift shaft yawning below him, he swung himself onto the narrow ledge, clung to the mesh with one hand and applied his cutters with the other. Tugging carefully, levering with his foot against an upright, he worked the gate open wide enough to squeeze through.

"One at a time, the others followed. Complain was the last to leave the upper level. He climbed down the cable, silently bidding Quarters an uncordial farewell, and emerged with the others. The five of them stood silently in rustling twilight, peering about them."

Here is all the briskness of Complain's other actions, and the same concrete feel of the environment that marks all the best passages in NON-STOP. There is the feeling of expectancy and optimism as well - like Alice going down the rabbit-hole, the characters feel that anything may emerge from the "rustling twilight". But even the actuality overwhelms any of their imaginings.

But the pattern of the novel only appears clearly when Aldiss sits on his little platform in space and tells us a story. Complain's part in the whole remains mysterious: he can discover loads of information about the ship and understand it whenever he feels like it. On the other hand, his intimate relationships with the other people in the ship remain perfunctory or badly described. The meeting between hero and heroine in the middle of the novel comes straight out of Gernsback's AMAZING STORIES.

At times Complain faces the ship's metamorphosis with vitality and insight, but at other times in the novel Aldiss gives us almost the opposite impression:

"The shock of finding the controls ruined had been almost too much for both of them. Once again, but now more insistently than ever before, the desire to die had come over Complain; a realization of the total bleakness of his life swept through him like poison... Instinctively, Complain made the formal gesture of rage. He let the anger steam up from the recesses of his misery and warm him in the withering darkness. Vyann had begun to weep on his shoulder; that she should suffer too added to his fury. "He foamed it all up inside him with increasing excitement, distorting his face, calling up all the injuries he and everyone else had ever undergone, churning them, creaming them up together like batter in a bowl. Muddy, bloody, anger, keeping his heart a-beat."

Complain's little ceremony almost embarrasses the reader - how can such a silly child discover the secret of the ship, weld together two of the Forwards tribes, and hold the novel together? The answer is that he does not. Aldiss thinks he does, but sometimes he lets us enjoy Complain's antics, sometimes he lets us laugh at him, and much of the time he takes over the story altogether and lets Complain wander around a corridor or two. Complain is a circus trick, not a person.

And, as in EQUATOR, the reader would feel satisfied is only Aldiss did not identify himself so closely with the viewpoint of Complain. At times the reader is put through an emotional Klein flask: take the incident where Complain's party discovers the long-lost swimming-pool in Deadways. First we share the wonder of the discoverers as they gaze at a swimming-pool for the first time:

"Lit only by one bulb which burned at their left, it seemed to stretch for ever into the darkness. The floor was a sheet of water on which ripples slid slowly outwards. Under the light, the water shone like metal. Breaking this smooth expanse at the far end, was an erection of tubes which suspended planks over the water at various heights, and to either side were rows of huts, barely distinguishable for shadow."

Aldiss defines the severe limits of physical vision that usually surround the ship's



passengers ("it seemed to stretch for ever into the darkness"); the soberly limited expectations that cannot account for any new elements ("The floor was a sheet of water!"), and the way in which eyes rove around the large room, fitting all the detail into an acceptable pattern.

Then Complain tries to form his personal view:

"He saw that there was a sight here which needed a special choice of vocabulary. His eyes shifted back to the water: it was entirely outside their experience. Previously water had meant only a dribble from a tap, a spurt from a hose, or the puddle at the bottom of a utensil. He wondered vaguely what this amount could be for. Sinister, uncanny....."

This is a second type of prose: Aldiss reporting Complain's confused impressions and the sense that he does not ask quite the right question ("He wondered vaguely what this amount could be for"). At the same time, we must worry a little at the first sentence: Complain is not an artist and does not come from an artistic environment. It is hard to believe that this man in this environment would wonder about the right word for the occasion. Perhaps it is only Aldiss who scurries around for the right word.

Our suspicions have some basis. One of the party, Roffery, thinks that this stretch of water must be what the old books call a 'river':

"This meant little to Complain; he was not interested in labels of things. What struck him was to perceive something he had worried over till now: why Roffery had left his sinecure to come on the priest's hazardous expedition. He saw now that the other had a reason akin to Complain's own: a longing for what he had never known and could put no name to."

This first sentence contradicts the first sentence in the other passage on the same page. Is Complain really interested in the pool or not, or is he just interested in protecting himself against the dubious menace of Roffery? Complain's quest is vague and cliched and again he seeks what he 'could put no name to'. The reader is led back along the path to confusion. The vision of the pool contains its own justification. Complain's confused and nonsensical thoughts twist the novel's pattern, but Aldiss insists upon Complain's importance.

Yet the pattern is never broken altogether. In the first half of the novel are many splendid passages in which Aldiss maps the wonders of this world of the Ship. There are few lines in sf that could match the balanced tension and visual pleasure of :

"They moved through the tangles in silence. Progress was slow and exhausting. A solitary hunter on his own ground might creep among ponics without cutting them, by keeping close to the wall. Moving in file, they found this method less attractive, since branches were apt to whip back and catch the man behind. There was too another objection to walking by the walls: here the chitinous ponie seeds lay thickest, where they had dropped after being shot against this barrier, and they crunched noisily as they were trodden on.

"No diminution in the plague of flies was noticeable. They whined endlessly about the travellers' ears. As Roffery in the lead swung his hatchet at the ponics, he wielded it frequently round his head, in a dangerous attempt to rid himself of this irritation. The ship swells with ponie growth, and the floors crunch like a forest walk. The reader is not pushed into Complain's tiny spirit, but allowed to walk with Brian Aldiss around his living world. The "characters" are merely blood corpuscles in the body of this vessel and nearly all of the best passages in the novel are intensely biological. Like modern factory-owners, the ship's inhabitants pollute and destroy their world as soon as they learn something of its function. When they learn that Earthmen have imprisoned them within this world, the Ship's brigands cut into the vitals of their only support:

"Never before had the inspection ways been open to the inhabitants of the ship; never before had a madly brandished welder played among all those delicate capillaries of the vessel.

"Within three minutes of switching on power, Gregg ruptured a sewer sluice and a main water pipe. The water jetted out and knocked a crawling man flat, playing wildly over him, drowning him, streaming and cascading over everything, seething between the metal sandwich of decks.

"A power cable went next. Sizzling, rearing like a cobra, live wire flashed across the rails the inspection trucks ran on; two men died without a chirp.

"The gravity blew. Over that entire deck, free fall suddenly snapped into being."

The fate of the ship most involved our emotions, not the fate of Complain. Aldiss's main mistake in NON-STOP was to think otherwise; so NON-STOP remains a vital penetrating novel about a remarkable world and humanity in general, but Aldiss tries to make it more than that, and so renders it something less.

## 1961: THE MALE RESPONSE

A superficial cynic like myself could easily say that all of Aldiss's novels are re-writes of NON-STOP, and prove it. But Aldiss's comedy-adventure, THE MALE RESPONSE, would remain the exception to the rule, even if I wanted to advance the rule, which I don't. Where NON-STOP is hesitant and confused, THE MALE RESPONSE is full-bodied, robust and well-controlled. Where NON-STOP glows, THE MALE RESPONSE shines.

While NON-STOP is too earnest to be sophisticated, THE MALE RESPONSE is perhaps too sophisticated for timid publishers to call it earnest. Long strings of good jokes, puns and epigrams put this book in the first rank of English novels during the sixties, and Aldiss's viewpoint glints like a multi-faceted jewel. Dangerously thoughtful stuff at any time.

The alien environment of NON-STOP becomes the 'darkest Africa' of THE MALE RESPONSE, hot-headed Complain becomes the hesitant Soames Noyes (whose mother was fond of Galsworthy) and nothing about the Starship is more mysterious than Africa's mysteries, embodied in Dumayami, the very dangerous witch doctor.

Soames Noyes is as much of an emotional fool as Roy Complain and Tyne Leslie but at least he is the kind of fool we can identify with ("Primiticism cast no spells over Soames. He was a Manchester Guardian man".) The only piece of scientific hardware in the novel is the world's most expensive white elephant, the 'Apostle Mk II, Unilateral's newest, most svelte electronic computer, bound for the Palace of Umbalathorp, Goya'. Except for a few important scenes (in which it can only mutter INSUFFICIENT DATA) the Apostle interests us no more than the superficial gadgetry of NON-STOP's Starship.

THE MALE RESPONSE surpasses NON-STOP (and many of Aldiss's other novels) because Soames Noyes and darkest Africa form part of the same pattern, and part of a complex conflict in which the main character gains no special privileges. Aldiss laughs at himself in his occasional asides to the audience, compared with NON-STOP where Aldiss's earnest dissertations form the only pieces of real meat in the novel. Note the hearty travelogue cliché that commences the novel:

"This is the miracle of our age: that one may be borne swiftly and smoothly along in winged luxury, constantly fed and reassured, while underneath one unrolls the great veridian mat of central Africa, that territory to be flown over but never conquered, whose mysteries.....(etc. etc.)"

No, says Mr. Aldiss, this will not be another one of those novels: we have far more interesting business at hand:

"Soames Noyes did not remember the chatty man's name. They had been introduced rather hurriedly by Sir Roger at the Southampton airfield. Soames never remembered names upon introduction; although his thirtieth birthday was creeping up on him as surely as a tide, he was still paralyzed on all meetings with people. For an instant he would be back at his kindergarten, Miss Munnings would be conducting the Deportment Class and saying, "Now, when you are introduced to somebody, you stand with your feet so, left hand resting gently on the hip so, right hand extended so, and you say, 'How do you do?' Now, Soames, will you come out here and give the other boys and girls a demonstration?"

The whole field of social behaviour still mystifies Noyes, and in good old Freudian manner, it all began in childhood. Soames can see many of his own shortcomings, but does not see nearly as many of them, or their results, as the reader. All Soames Noyes's most debilitating self-doubts spring from the sexual:

"Just let us loose in Umbalathorp, that's all I say," Timpleton remarked.

"Soames said nothing. He could not casually reveal his sexual experiences in this way - not that he had ever felt anything so exotic as an Arabian heel grip in the small of his back. Obviously it was time he asserted himself.

"Ignoring the chatter of the other men, he fell into a reverie. Now or never, presumably, was his chance to break the bonds of his confounded reserve, to leap free from the constraints of a cold temperament and climate. On this trip he would prove himself a man or die in the attempt."

Soames Noyes has still to find out the prophecy in those last words. Goya challenges his very English personality to its limit, so that Africa fills our mind filtered through an English mind, and all the mysteries of Africa sap all Noyes's certainties. Noyes runs the gamut of inhibitions as analyzed by Freud:

"He was the son of a doggedly timid father and an assertive mother, and the war between his parents had been perpetuated in him."

Soames is a man in search of the main thread of the pattern of his own soul, and so must seek the main thread of the pattern of Africa.

In almost mystical fashion, Africa represents all those aspects of life that Aldiss' Englishmen are least willing to talk about but most need. So Aldiss appears to let his hero loose in Africato bruise himself on its psychological thronbushes and entertain the reader. In fact, THE MALE RESPONSE bears all the marks of careful stitching, as Aldiss tries to express the greatest amount in the least number of words that he can use.

Africa contains within it a vast supply of possibilities for the uncareful Englishman. Its most dangerous symbol is Dumayami, the witch doctor who fears the Apostle computer as a dangerous rival. Soames Noyes is in charge of the computer, and upon him falls most of Dumayami's hatred: the plane bearing the computer crashes, just as predicted by the witch doctor, who also predicts that:

"If you do not stop over this sign, you do not leave Africa," he said. Raising one hand, he stepped from view and was gone as noiselessly as he came.

"Damned silly," Soames muttered aloud. "Of course I can step over it."

He went over the doorway to examine the mark Dumayami had made. Before he got there, two little yellow and red birds had fallen squabbling and copulating on to the path outside. Their bright wings, fluttering in lust and anger, erased the witch doctor's sign."

The symbols of Africa remain consistent: lust, anger and more than a little flatfootedness keep Soames within this unexplored territory until he experiences all its possibilities.

Less terrifying than Dumayami, but just as mysterious to Noyes, is King M'Grassi Lander of Goya and his quaint half-African, half-English family. Princess Cherry dabbles in an unconnected mixture of European customs:

"On a long cane chair lay Princess Cherry, heiress to her mother's estates and physiognomy. She wore a heavy, heavily flowered dress; a blue plastic bow slide was clamped into her tight curls. One pair of earrings adhered to her ears, another was clipped to the superb dihedral of her nostril flange. In her hand, negligently, was a copy of Thomas Mann's BUDDENBROOKS; it was right way up.

"This is the Englishman, Mr. Soames, Princess dear," said the Queen. "Get up and put your shoes on at once."

A few epigrams reveal the sad, but sufficient cultural mixture of these very constitutional monarchs. M'Grassi Lander thinks he has both Noyes and Dumayami summed up, and his people think they have the best of all possible worlds. Aldiss shows their state of mind as an insulation against the savageries of both Europe and Africa. M'Grassi still loses his son in the power struggle between 'progress' and the traditional darkness that everyone tries to ignore.

It is left to Noyes himself to discover the deepest emanations of Africa. He recognizes part of the wonder of Africa that he had never discovered before:

"Coitila," Soames said aloud, savoring the name. The black girl had been aptly christened. Seen so close, Coitila was a whole country, hills, valleys, plains, embankments, tumuli, every inch of it flawless. Soames touched the magnificent landscape with his fingers, marveling. He found himself thinking, as he had done long ago before the plane crash, that this was another planet, that the creature beside him was of another species, quite alien. The only thing they had in common was a difference of sex.

"A gentle wonder at what he had done filled Soames. It would have been unthinkable a week ago. Not only time and color changed as one yielded up to the arms of the equator, but life itself, and one's attitude to life. Here, no withholding was possible. In the heat, the pores of the heart opened. One was an organism, involved in all the organisms around, the ability to be aloof was lost in Africa.

"He saw the depths of Africa full of eyes and flowers and genitals and lizards and mouths and corn and mammals and leaves, going on for ever - individuals changing, types unchanging, parts fading, the whole always bright, something too rich to be grasped, a pattern of fecundity making the rest of the world a desert by comparison, a moon of a place with craters for breasts."

Aldiss's romanticism flows deepest here, and it is a romanticism that has already soured one novel. "No withholding was possible" but we cannot tell exactly what has captured Noyes. The central metaphor rolls majestically through the passage, defining the limits of Noyes's perception, not its extent. He becomes a geographer of his own possibilities: Coitila remains mysterious and Africa remains mysterious. But Noyes now has a base from which to explore - we now wonder whether this vision will render him any more potent than he has been before.

But, as in most of Aldiss's best passages, we stop short of complete belief in the viewpoint of either character or Aldiss. There is the flavour of revealed truth here that disturbs the pattern of revealed possibilities. You almost expect Aldiss to break in with a 'Hallelujah' at some inconvenient moment. Aldiss nearly breaks the main pattern of the novel, in which Noyes's ignorance is our revelation, not his own.

So Aldiss has not lost his habit of poking his nose in with digressions that should have formed part of the mainstream of the novel. One particularly bad example reads:

"The way the opposed forces of piety and wickedness have of intertwining together like lovers has been remarked since the earliest times; good and bad, beauty and horror, comedy and tragedy - they walk hand-in-glove down the ages like the figures of an old morality. Only in our psychological epoch, with its emphasis on behaviourism, has this duality been forgotten, superseded by the dangerous theory that no natives are entirely black or white... In Umbalathorp, the powers of light and dark miscegenated with their traditional abandon."

You can almost see all the old ladies in the audience going to sleep as the vicar steps down from the pulpit. Is this Aldiss sending up his own beliefs? It may be, but it looks as if he is in earnest in this paragraph. Surely no sf novelist has ever done more to shatter the simplicities of black and white into their more interesting shades of grey? Africa educates Soames Noyes not to think in all the old categories.

But it is true that Noyes fails when he fails to keep his eyes open for the colours at the extreme ends of the spectrum: the 'light' end and the 'dark' end. There is the novel's classic last sentence:

"Soames: "We thought it better to let you go free; you are an old man now, and harmless. It was my decision not to have you shut away, so you need not bear me any grudges, need you?"

"Carion birds at last eat all grudges," Dumayami said.

"By the single mud step, a snake lay motionless in the shade.

"That's the first snake I've seen since I came to Africa," Soames confided, inspecting it with cautious interest.

"Black mamba. Very deadly; one bite - death come at once," the witch doctor said gravely. "This fellow I kill this morning. Kick him, make you feel better, prove your new power."

"All right," Soames said, humoring the old man. "Take that, you sinister-looking -"

"The kick never landed. As Soames' boot moved, the casual coils of snake twisted and launched themselves with deadly accuracy. The fangs sank into the flesh just above Soames's ankle. Dumayami, without pausing, turned and went up into his shack, as Soames rolled among the oleander bushes."

So all of Noyes's ebullient discoveries end, with Africa having the last laugh. We never really learn any of Dumayami's motives, Noyes discovers Coitila's body but never glimpses the minds of Africa's inhabitants. The most moving encounter in the book is Noyes's brief entrance into the lives of the outcast Englishmen, the Pickets, who need the help of one interested person so much that Noyes fails them altogether. Africa brushes aside Noyes as if he had never existed.

But Aldiss's most penetrating 'raid on the inarticulate' still does not provide a prose style strong enough for all the demands placed upon it. The argument of THE MALE RESPONSE, to the extent to which there is one, is that Noyes must seek the mysteries of Africa because there are mysteries to be sought. Do the greatest novelists climb Mt. Everest because it is there?

In a sense, yes (although Aldiss never looks like reaching the summit). All the great novelists face the paradox that dogs THE MALE RESPONSE: if the intellectual view of the world gathers insufficient data about the world, what do we do in its place? If we do put something in its place, such as the subconscious, or the deepest feelings for life, how can we test the validity of this data except by intellectual means? Aldiss's novels are best when the author maintains the question in the face of all the data about any one of his worlds. They fail, and even THE MALE RESPONSE fails badly in places, when the author plumps for one side of the question or the other. Noyes's vision of Coitila and Africa is dwarfed by the whole pattern of the novel, but for a few paragraphs Aldiss drops the ironic tone of the novel and speaks as though Noyes's view was sufficient to life. But in THE MALE RESPONSE, Soames Noyes proves nearly adequate to the novel, and for that reason alone, we can see that NON-STOP was merely the first step in Aldiss's written pilgrimage. THE MALE RESPONSE steps way ahead of it.

1962: HOTHOUSE

The main mistake of Aldiss's early work is his assumption that he must wrap theory



like clothing around the flesh and blood of novels that express in their structures what Aldiss tries to add in digressions. Perhaps Aldiss only follows the unfortunate belief of English novelists that the only real thought in a novel can be the main character's reflections 'recollected in solitude'. They forget that Hamlet always did look a bit of a fool when he lounged around a stage making all those soliloquies.

But HOTHOUSE contains no soliloquies, and the theory that explains this over-heated world is Aldiss's, not the characters'. With what some may consider illegitimate means, Aldiss makes action, description and 'theory' strain together in this most adventurous of his 'great adventures'.

Aldiss's main character cannot reflect Aldiss's own preoccupations, for all the characters in HOTHOUSE are waif-like remnants of humanity, descendants of a race doomed by an overheated Sun. This world is not merely a biological workshop, like that of NON-STOP: this is a world where non-human life ignores humanity altogether, except at feeding time:

"The dumber bore Lily-yo down to the rescue of the helpless child. Clat lay on her back, watching them come, hoping to herself. She was still looking up when green teeth sprouted through the leaf all about her.

"Jump, Clat!" Lily-yo cried.

"The child had time to scramble to her knees. Vegetable predators are not as fast as humans. Then the green teeth snapped shut about her waist.

"Under the leaf, a trappersnapper had moved into position, sensing the presence of prey through the single layer of foliage. The trappersnapper was a horny, caselike af air, just a pair of square jaws, hinged and with many long teeth. From one corner of it grew a stalk, very muscular and thicker than a human, and resembling a neck. Now it bent, carrying Clat away down to its true mouth, which lived with the rest of the plant far below on the unseen forest Ground, in darkness and decay."

Here again is the mindless life-energy of NON-STOP's automatic ship and THE MALE RESPONSE's subliminal Africa. But this time the humans are part of the supply of prey, caught in the processes of churning life and death of a tropical forest. One side of the Earth is forever turned to the Sun, the Sun has come closer to the Earth, and nearly all animal life except humans has disappeared from the Earth's face. Its place has been taken by plants that act like animals, and one vast banyan tree that covers half the Earth. These humans can do little but accept Clat's death - and for this reason the tribe constantly grows smaller.

HOTHOUSE is the story of their diminishment. At the start of the novel the forest is a green womb where humanity can maintain a status quo but no real purpose or hope. The dumblers, trappersnappers, wiltmits and burnurns have no mercy and the humans have a great amount of energy - the reader is completely involved in this world from the first page of the novel. Aldiss gives us no chance to stand back and pontificate, and he also refrains from slipshod writing.

The pilgrimage starts when some of the characters break through the dangerous status quo towards a new environment. One party, seeking a ritual death, rises through the top of the forest and climbs into their seed pod 'coffins', carried into the sky by a 'traverser, that gross vegetable equivalent of a spider':

"The traverser was descending slowly, a great bladder with legs and jaws, fibery hair covering most of its bulk. It floated nimbly down a cable which trailed up into the sky.

"Other cables could be seen, stretching up from the jungle close by or distantly. All slanted up, pointing like slender drooping fingers into heaven. When the sun caught them, they shone. It could be seen that they trailed up in a certain direction. In that direction, a silver half-globe floated, remote and cool, but visible even in the sunshine.

"Unmoving, steady, the half moon remained always in that sector of the sky... Now Earth and Moon, for what was left of the afternoon of eternity, faced each other in the same relative position. They were locked face to face, and so would be, until the sands of time ceased to run, or the sun ceased to shine.

"And the multitudinous strands of cable floated across the gap between them, uniting the worlds. Back and forth the traversers could shuttle at will, vegetable astronauts huge and insensible, with Earth and Luna both enmeshed in their indifferent net.

"With surprising suitability, the old age of the Earth was snared about with cobwebs." With extraordinary sonority, Aldiss introduces whole new visions, each more pleasurable than the last. There is also the ironic state of a world that becomes more stable as it

slowly dies. No wonder the small humans expect to travel to some sort of heaven - the Earth now has its gods' eyes permanently fixed on it. The Earth now has an almost intimate relationship with the rest of the universe, just as the small humans are pressed into intimate relationship with all other life-forms. The uninterpreted mixture of life and death that we call Nature surrounds us completely in HOTHOUSE - no need now for painstaking explorations by silly Englishmen.

But all the forms of this nature are new - Aldiss writes a novel to set our mouths gaping. When the small band of adventurers reaches Nomansland, the border between the banyan and the sea, they experience this version of nature at its most ferocious:

"Two rayplanes fluttered by, locked in combat. The rayplanes were so mortally engaged they did not know where they went. With a crash they sprawled among the upper branches near the group.

"At once Nomansland sprang to life.

"The famished angry trees spread up and lashed their branches. Toothed briars uncurled. Gigantic nettles shook their bearded heads. Moving cactus crawled and launched its spikes. Climbers hurled sticky bolas at the enemy. Cat-like creatures, such as Gren had seen in the termight's nest, bounded past and swarmed up the trees to get to the attack. Everything that could move did so, prodded on by hunger. On the instant, Nomansland turned itself into a war machine."

Again, the most energetic life lies closest to the most violent death. The forest 'lashed', 'uncurled', 'crawled', 'bounded' around the characters' (and the reader's) heads. Aldiss's magnificent names for his creatures give this writing an extra rhythm and energy. With his sense of seeing-that-which-we-have-never-seen-before, Aldiss writes the kind of novel that justifies the existence of science fiction as a separate field of literature.

But decay riddles every process of the planet, and the human party breaks down into smaller parts. The hot-headed, but still childish Gren is thrown out of the band and left to assert his own individuality. This he does with assorted adventures and disruptions of the other human life that he meets. An intelligent fungus called the morel drops onto his head and parasitically invades his nervous system. The last trace of formal 'intelligence' in the world, the morel, drives Gren out of the forest, onto the sea, and away from the sun towards the dark side of the Earth. As in Aldiss's other pilgrimages, knowledge brings enlightenment but no pleasure, some power but ultimate destruction. Gren meets Yattmur, and they travel together from their Eden. The tummybelly men tag along, the only creatures in the novel to whom we give unreserved sympathy.

But the morel's knowledge deals only with memories of former human 'civilization' - it knows no way of resurrecting civilization in this dying environment. When the party discovers the 'heckler' left over from the twentieth century on a remote island they name the bird-like machine Beauty, but its message has no relevance to them at all:

"With scarcely a murmur, Beauty rose from the ground, hovered before their eyes, rose above their heads. They cried with astonishment, they fell backwards, breaking the yellow container. It made no difference to Beauty. Superb in powered flight, it wheeled above them, glowing richly in the sun.

"When it had gained sufficient altitude, it spoke.

"Make the world safe for democracy!" it cried. Its voice was not loud but piercing...

"Who rigged the disastrous dock strike of '31?" Beauty demanded rhetorically. "The same men who would put a ring through your noses today. Think for yourselves, friends, and vote for SRH - vote for freedom!"

"It - what is it saying, morel?" Gren asked.

"It is talking of men with rings through their noses," said the morel, who was as baffled as Gren. "That is what men wore when they were civilized. You must try to learn from what it is saying."

But nobody can learn more from the morel than they can from Beauty, the flying heckler. Aldiss's only direct swipe at modern civilization in the book strikes just as effectively as any longer passage could have.

The pilgrimage lands on a lonely hill at the end of the Earth, from which a faint glimmer of sunlight can be seen. But their isolation only intensifies the human consciousness in Gren and Yattmur. Yattmur gives birth to a son; at the same time the morel grows towards duplication and it wants Yattmur's baby:

"Gren stood against the wall by the entrance, half-concealed. She was past him before she realised it, only turning as he began to bear down on her.

"Helpless with shock, she screamed and screamed, her mouth sagging toothily wide at

the sight of him.

"The surface of the morel was black and pustular now - and it had slipped down so that it covered all his face. Only his eyes gleamed sickly in the midst of it as he jumped forward at her.

"Gren, the morel thing is killing you," she whispered.

"Where's the baby?" he demanded. Though his voice was muffled, it had too an additional remoteness, a twanging quality, that gave her one more item for alarm. "What have you done with the baby, Yattmur?"

The life-form that gave them 'knowledge' and self-awareness now threatens procreation, the central part of life. For a time, the relationship between Gren and Yattmur became a genuine marriage under the guidance of the morel. Now it becomes the form of life that can most harm that human emotional core left entirely untouched by the routine murder of the novel's early chapters. For just a few pages, the characters themselves symbolize the fecund death of the whole planet.

But even in this novel, Aldiss cannot let the experience speak for itself. At the start of the novel he tells us the *raison d'être* behind his hothouse:

"Obeying an inalienable law, things grew, growing riotous and strange in their impulse for growth. The heat, the light, the humidity - these were constant and had remained constant for...but nobody knew how long. Nobody cared any more for the big questions that begin "How long...?" or "Why...?" It was no longer a place for growth, for vegetables. It was like a hothouse.

Aldiss captures the sense of overgrowth and overcrowding in this passage which characterizes the rest of the novel. At the same time we must object to the use of terms like 'inalienable law' and 'impulse for growth'. Link this passage with the morel's explanation at the end of the novel:

"Nature is devolving. Again the forms are blurring!" They never ceased to be anything but inter-dependent - the one always living off the other - and now they merge together once more... All of us here have by accident been swept aside from the main stream of devolution. We live in a world where each generation becomes less and less defined. All life is tending towards the mindless, the infinitesimal: the embryonic speck. So will be fulfilled the processes of the universe."

We know that biologists sometimes talk as if evolutionary processes were automatic, or purposive - that one species 'learned' how to fly, that another species became 'redundant'. But here Aldiss goes beyond the scope of his novel and accepts loose talk about the fulfillment of the processes of the universe. The whole wonder of the hothouse world is that it is as ahuman and neutral as any other natural process. Aldiss insists on the superfluous flourish at the end of the novel. He wants us to accept a metaphor as scientific possibility. In general, HOTHOUSE succeeds because the metaphor convinces - the life-forms impress on us their own truth. Aldiss tries to convince us that he has some great answer; that he is a great thinker. Fortunately he is both less and more than that - a splendid artist.

#### 1964: GREYBEARD

You might regard GREYBEARD as a peak of enterprise, the end of a period, or a magnificent failure. Certainly Aldiss puts nearly all of himself into this novel, and the result is strange.

GREYBEARD contains all of the Aldiss virtues. From the eager swim of the stoats at the novel's beginning to the dawn of ambivalent new life at its end, the novel throbs with the texture and substance of life. We feel more sunk in Nature than in any other Aldiss novel except HOTHOUSE. Perhaps the author writes so well because this is Aldiss home-territory: the country surrounding Oxford:

"Behind them, an overripe winter's sun blinked at them from among trees. Except for the sun, distorted by the bare trunks through which it shone, all else was told in tones of grey. A mist like a snowdrift hung low across the land. Before them, beyond the littered road that crossed the bridge, was a large building. It seemed to stand on top of the mist without touching the ground. Under a muddle of tall chimney-stacks, it lay ancient and wicked and without life; the sun was reflected from an upper window-pane, endowing it with one lustreless eye."

This passage does not contain the violent agitation of HOTHOUSE's images - this is Aldiss in his Wordsworth mood, or wearing the cloak of William Cowper. The cosiness and secretiveness of the English countryside glows in the first sentence and in the phrase: "all else was told in tones of grey". Aldiss captures the ecstasy of a winter moment in "It seemed to stand on top of the mist without touching the ground". Passages like this must drive Australian-resident Englishmen mad with nostalgia.



Yet the impression is not wholly romantic. The building is more important to these travellers (yes - another band of pilgrims) than the scenery, and the winter's sunlight glows dismally on this hoped-for resting-place. GREYBEARD is another novel of restlessness, after all.

Algy Timberlane, nicknamed Greybeard, his wife Martha, and their friends Charley Samuels and Jeff Pitts escape from the haven of Sparcot, a village in the Thames valley, seeking only an acceptable life in the last days of the world. Fifty years before, atomic explosions in the Van Allen belts had washed the biosphere in hard radiation, destroying the reproductive ability of numerous animal species including man. At 50, Algy is one of the youngest men alive. Everybody is doomed to shuffle off the mortal coil in step; as one weary character says: "That's life, as they always say about death". Another captures the tone of the novel with his words: "Everyone is doomed for ever to think and say what they thought and said yesterday".

As a fulfillment of this memorial approach to life, Aldiss writes most of the novel in a series of flashbacks, some of which telescope back into more distant memories. Aldiss has an eye for the teaming life of the Thames that takes over from man; he can also scour the reader's mind with this image of an Oxford under martial law:

"The new day had brought no improvement in Oxford's appearance. Down Hollow Way, a row of semi-detacheds burned in a devitalized fashion, as though a puff of wind might extinguish the blaze; smoke from the fire hung over the area. Near the old motor works, there was military activity, much of it disorganized. They heard a shot fired. In the Cowley Road, the long straggling street of shops which pointed towards the ancient spires of Oxford, the facades were often boarded or broken."

Some readers may recognize a part of the long tradition of British 'disaster' novels in this passage. But this is not just a novel of despair, as so many of 'the tradition' were. For a start, this is merely one of many impressions of Oxford which Aldiss shows us throughout the novel. All the impressions together render a dry etching of a town that maintains the virtues of scholarship although often commandeered by barbarous forces; a town that maintains three freak children as the only results of fifty years' 'research'. Greybeard and Martha do not accept the desolation of Oxford. They view this scene while escaping from the despotic Captain Crowther: no form of despotism keeps Greybeard down.

The novel has two complementary movements. The journey from Sparcot to Oxford is short, but adventurous enough to prepare Greybeard for his ambivalent role placed on his shoulders at the end of the novel. Meanwhile Greybeard's memories drift further and further back towards childhood, until he reaches the point which, for him, summarizes the world that created The Accident:

"Through the kitchen window, they had a glimpse of Algy running in long grass, on a pursuit no one would ever know about. He ran behind a lilac tree and studied the fence which divided this garden from the next... The fence was broken at one point, but he made no attempt to get into the next garden, though he thought to himself how enjoyable it would be if all the fences fell down in every garden and you could go where you liked."

And they did, and he could... without direction, and with these memories the most vivid part of his mind. Aldiss relates the story of Algy's recuperation from 'the illness' which killed many children, and left all of them with destroyed gonads. But the sickest thing in Algy's childhood was not the unseen radiation bath but the sterile marriage between Algy's mother and father:

"Patricia Timberlane came out of the backdoor with two men. One of them was her husband, Arthur, a man who at forty-odd gave all the appearance of having forgotten his more youthful years.... Arthur cut a glum figure; he was a man saddled with troubles who had never decided to meet them either stoically or with a sense of defiance.....

"What Arthur most resented was that this trouble, into which his firm slipped more deeply even as he spoke, should come as a barrier between Pat and him. He had seen clearly, a while ago, that they failed to make a very united couple; at first he had almost welcomed the financial crisis, hoping it would bring them more closely together.. The uneasy relationship between Algy's mother and father involves us far more deeply than anything that happens to Algy. Genuinely, but rather boringly, Greybeard seems a bit too good to be true. His painfully awkward father presents an emasculation that prefigures the sterility of later years. He sums up a world whose main reaction when it learns of the effect of The Accident is:

"Arthur prided himself on remaining unscared by the dangers of nuclear warfare. "If it comes to the point - well, too bad, but worrying isn't going to stop it coming": that

had been his commonsense man-in-the-street approach to the whole thing." When the disaster comes, it deprives the world of the children who buy the children's toys made by Arthur's company; he commits suicide and saves himself from the further worry that falls on his son.

Like the miner's family in AN AGE, Aldiss's vignette characters are drawn magnificently. The miniature portraits along the pilgrims' route - Jingadangelow, the old man with the badger wife, Jeff Pitts - are drawn with similar skill. They are all part of the very familiar leavings of time: they are ourselves in the same situation.

But Algy Timberlane, Greybeard himself, is the blind spot of the novel. For this reason we can say that Aldiss cobbles together all his old faults as well as his virtues in this novel. Aldiss's eye runs truly over the outer surfaces of this twilight world, but observes the main character uncertainly. Aldiss will not laugh at Algy in the way that he gently chaffs all the other characters. He lets Algy get away with self-pity and far too much moaning. "I've been a flop all through my life", he tells his wife towards the end of the novel, and his dutiful wife (and Aldiss) rush to reassure him of his basic goodness.

Greybeard is a sensible man, living his strange life in the only way possible. But with almost the air of an election promotion manager who tells us that his man is "basically a good ordinary bloke", Aldiss keeps telling us that: "Timberlane was a man who only rarely indulged in self-examination." Everything in the novel persuades us to the contrary! Many of the most interesting impressions of the novel reach us through Greybeard's thoughtful, clear mind. When he finds the first members of the "new generation" at the end of the novel he exclaims to himself:

"The fraudulent Master was right in at least one respect: human hands were turned against children in practice, if not in theory. He himself had fired at the first child he had seen close to! Perhaps there was some kind of filicidal urge in man forcing him to destruction."

This is the voice of one of the few people who have kept thinking during the last few barren years, and can bridge the gap between the suicidal humans and the new race. You cannot back away from Greybeard or patronize him because Aldiss always makes him so very right.

And Aldiss tries to speak directly to the reader through Greybeard's thoughts: "Life was a pleasure; he looked back at its moments, many of them as much shrouded in mist as the opposite bank of the Thames; objectively, many of them held only misery, fear, confusion. A fragment of belief came to him from another epoch: Cogito ergo sum. For him that had not been true; his truth had been, Sentio ergo sum. I feel so I exist. He enjoyed this fearful, miserable, confused life, and not only because it made more sense than non-life.

"....They were all actors performing their parts against a lead curtain that cut off for ever every second as it passed."

Aldiss nowhere else expresses his artistic credo more forcefully. "Life is its own lesson" to paraphrase the Goethe quotation that begins REPORT ON PROBABILITY A. In most ways, in most parts of his novels, Aldiss renders the unexpected and the life-like in such a way as to support the truth of feeling. But the question comes back to us over and over again: is this enough? Aldiss can be excused from ultimate explanations every line of his novels reveals rationality combined with feeling. But Aldiss excuses his characters' stupidity (or anything else about them, so we become really confused) in a way that he would not excuse in his own writing. The greatest irony of Aldiss's work is that he comes so close to his main characters that he does not allow us to see them at all. Therefore Aldiss loses the subtleties that his thought and feeling should lead him to. Aldiss remains science fiction's poet of living - it is a pity that he sometimes allows himself to become prosaic as well.

Bruce R. Gillespie 1970

NOVELS AND EDITIONS USED IN THIS ARTICLE:

EQUATOR - Digit Books R533, 1958, 102 pages (plus SEGREGATION in the same volume, total 160 pages)

NON-STOP - Faber paperback, 1958, 252 pages

THE MALE RESPONSE - Beacon Books Nom. 305, 1961, 188 pages

HOTHOUSE - Faber & Faber, 1962, 253 pages

GREYBEARD - Panther 24603, 1964, 219 pages

This is not a Bibliography. These are the editions used in the preparation of this

article, and may in some cases vary considerably from the United States editions of the same books. Many of these books appeared under different names in the USA: NON-STOP as "STARSHIP", for instance, and HOTHOUSE appeared (I think) as "THE LONG AFTERNOON OF THE EARTH". Parts of GREYBEARD were deleted in the US edition. A complete bibliography might appear when I have written the three articles in this series.

The other two articles should appear as

PART TWO:    The Desperate Comedies    -    THE INTERPRETER, THE PRIMAL URGE, THE DARK LIGHT YEARS and THE SALIVA TREE

PART THREE:    (as yet unnamed)    -    EARTHWORKS, AN AGE, REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD

(Editor's note: I do hope that I don't have to kick you for six months or so to get each of those as I did for this one.

Perhaps I should point out that had I been informed that the length of this article was to be over 10,000 words rather than "2000-2500 words" it just might have been a little less crowded.)

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