

S F COMMENTARY

the independent magazine about science fiction

No. 58

February 1980

16 pages

Australia/World: \$A1 each/Sub: \$A10 for 10

Registered for posting as a publication—Category 'B'

USA/Canada: \$US1.50 each/Sub: \$US12 for 10

CONTENTS: David Ireland's *Woman of the Future*: Hallucinatory Scrapbook (George Turner), It's Not Like That At All! (Elaine Cochrane) 2; Get Off Your Bums, SF Readers! (Neville Angove) 3; I Must Be Talking to My Friends (Editor; Roger Weddall; Arthur Hlavaty; Irwin Hirsh; Roman Orszanski; Bernd Fischer; Tony Thomas; John Gregor; Sam Moskowitz; David Lake) 5; Criticanto (Elaine Cochrane; Bruce Gillespie) 12; Delany: Victim of Great Applause (George Turner) 14.

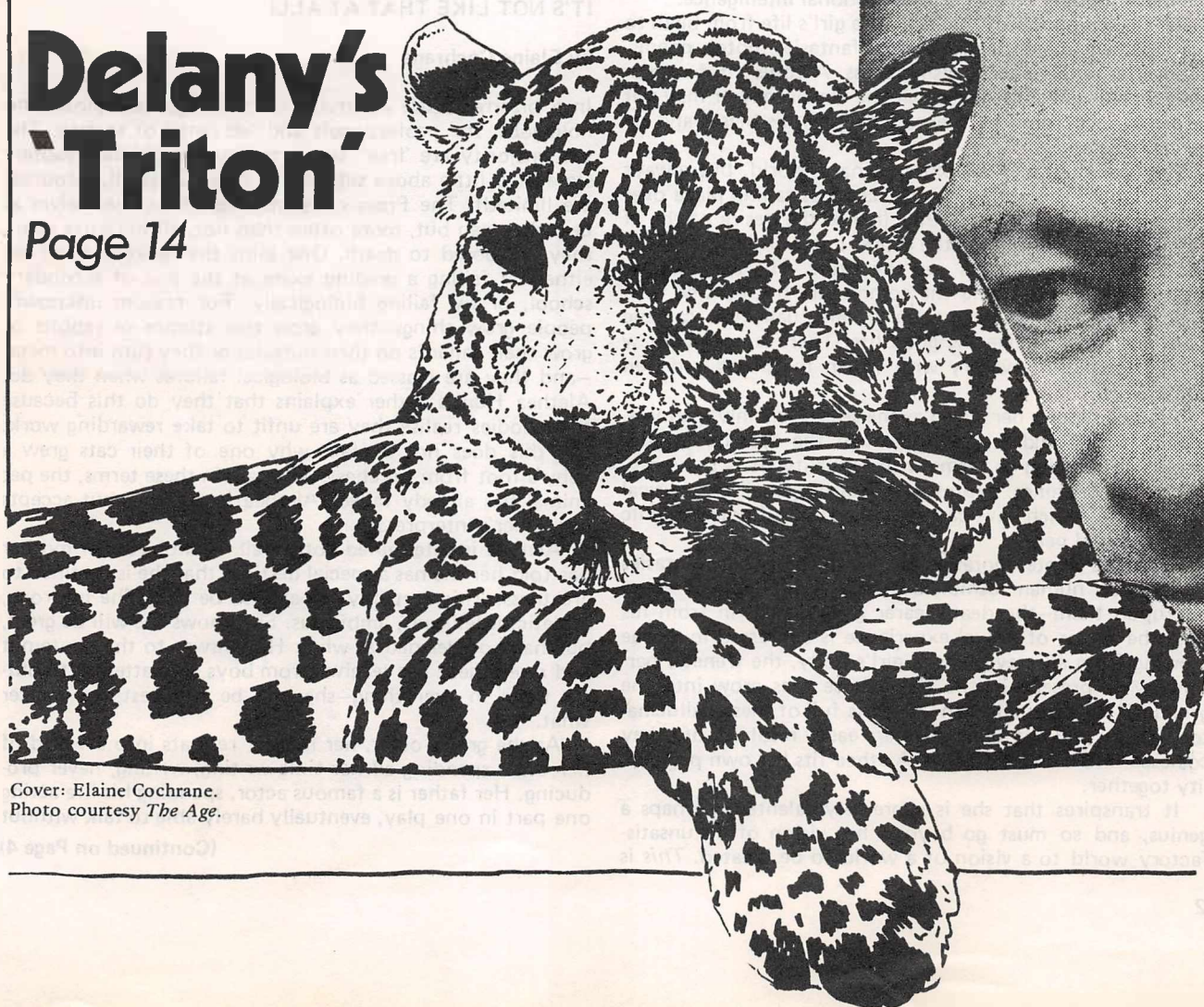
Editor and Publisher: Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Phone (03) 4194797. Considerable editorial assistance: Elaine Cochrane. Agent for USA/Canada: Hank Luttrell, 2619 Munroe St, Madison, WI 53711, USA.

David Ireland's new fable

Page 2

Delany's 'Triton'

Page 14



Cover: Elaine Cochrane.
Photo courtesy *The Age*.

David Ireland's 'Woman of the Future'...

is the first original novel published by Penguin in Australia (under its Allen Lane imprint; 351 pages; \$9.95), and one of the few Australian novels published recently in USA (by George Braziller). *Woman of the Future* makes a refreshing change from the general run of Australian novels, which still run mainly to 'sheep-dip fiction', of either the rural or suburban type. *Woman of the Future* is a baroque and intoxicating fable, of the type we have come to associate with the best of South American writers (Marquez, Asturias, etc). Its brusque disregard for mundane reality and its energetic fantasy style (a reminder of Hoban) would make this book particularly interesting to *SFC* readers. Two quite different views here—from GEORGE TURNER and ELAINE COCHRANE. Further opinions from readers would be welcome.

HALLUCINATORY SCRAPBOOK

by George Turner

[Thanks to Merv Binns and George Turner for permission to republish this review, which was written originally for *Australian Science Fiction News*, available from Space Age Books, 305 Swanston Street, Melbourne 3000 for \$5 a subscription.]

A *Woman of the Future* is neither science fiction nor fantasy, even on the 'what I point to when I say it' basis. Some may argue that structurally it is not a novel at all, yet there is a logical progression which should be of great interest to the more probing type of science-fictional intelligence.

It is a scrapbook of the 'ana' of a girl's life from birth to age eighteen—memories, thoughts, fantasies, notes, poems, discoveries, experiences, wish-dreams. A coherent if incomplete world-view emerges which the reader may or may not recognise, according to the condition of his biases and received beliefs.

Alethea Hunt's is an extraordinary world, but always recognisable. The action can be dated as taking place over two decades from about 1990 (hence the desire of the sf omnivores to claim it for the genre) in a world divided into two classes, the Servants and the Frees. The Servants are the 'upper' class, serving the community by working with their talents; the Frees are the intellectually less capable who have only to live the good life. There is nothing new there except the savagery with which the point is driven home.

Alethea reports her world as she sees it—mainly madness, within herself and without—through the eyes of an adolescent girl coming to terms with sexuality. It is these psychological writhings, expressed in startling realised physical experiences, which have caused accusations of pornographic intent. Stupid people.

Alethea's contemporaries do not act out their fantasies in common human fashion but have their fantasies acted out upon them—the death-fearer grows a coffin from his ribs, the terror of sexual experience is expressed in vulvae growing from all crevices of a girl's body, the frenetic personality is present in the boy whose toes grow into the ground if he stops still. The book is full of these hallucinatory images and not all of them are easily resolved, but they coalesce into a world-view as Alethea fits her own personality together.

It transpires that she is supremely talented, perhaps a genius, and so must go beyond her vision of an unsatisfactory world to a vision of a world to be created. *This* is

the future of the title, not the obvious future of women's libbery (not that the role of women is downgraded, much the reverse) and Alethea's final transformation into a feral cat is her statement of the need to forsake the chaos we have built and to understand ourselves as integral parts of the natural world and its manifestations. The future must be *totally* new.

Perhaps I am wrong about that—other interpretations are possible. It's a matter of how *your* mind bounces off David Ireland's.

Whichever way you bounce, this is a work of art and of intellect which cannot fail to return you as much as you give to it. Or more.

IT'S NOT LIKE THAT AT ALL!

by Elaine Cochrane

In a bizarre future Australia, the privileged are those who hold jobs, the professionals and 'servants' of society. The vast majority are 'free', supported by the ultimate welfare state at a little above subsistence level (after all, resources are limited). The Frees consume and amuse themselves as best they can but, more often than not, all initiative dead, they are bored to death. One joins the ranks of the Free either by failing a grading exam at the end of secondary school, or by failing biologically. For reasons unknown, people grow things—they grow tree stumps or rabbits or grow their innards on their outsides or they turn into metal—and they are classed as biological failures when they do. Alethea Hunt's father explains that they do this because their bodies realise they are unfit to take rewarding work, but this does not explain why one of their cats grew a baby's foot from his chest. After all, in these terms, the pet animal has already failed. Alethea is dubious, but accepts her father's interpretation.

Alethea is determined not to fail. From birth her mother has told her she has a special destiny, that she is destined to greatness. This certainly appears to be true. She is strong, athletic, intelligent, ambitious. She knows she will be great, but has not decided at what. Her answer to the contempt and resentment she receives from boys is to attempt to outdo them in everything—she will be the best, no matter what.

As she grows older, her mother retreats into a world of her own, spending all her time writing, writing, never producing. Her father is a famous actor, spending his life acting one part in one play, eventually barely able to talk without

(Continued on Page 4)

How many times have you been to the library recently and asked for the current sf book by an Australian author and publisher?

How many times have you been to a bookseller and ordered any sf book at all from either an Australian publisher or an overseas house?

GET OFF YOUR BUMS, SF READERS!

an article/letter of comment from

Neville J Angove, PO Box 770, Canberra City, ACT 2601

I found it astounding that George Turner could actually list, in *SFC 55/56*, all the books by Australian authors published by Australian publishers, all in a single article. What's worse is that nearly all of those books so listed were published by small press concerns, not the big mainstream publishers. If it is any consolation, the Canadians have the same problem.

Now, mainstream literature seems to survive well enough here, even though there are a few problems. Why can't a science fiction publisher also remain viable?

The prime requirement for success is a market that will accept a 3000-copy hardcover print run, or a 5000-copy paperback run, with the books priced at the average market price.

Can Australia support a 5000-copy paperback print run, or a 3000-copy hardcover run? It can for mainstream fiction, so why not for science fiction? My sources in the trade argue that there is a total sf market larger than this, but not every book can be brought to their attention (and not every book that is brought to their attention is bought). We may have a plethora of distributors and publishers, but none is really efficient. We suffer from the closed market in most books, but it is not rigidly enforced—it is whittled away by indent and by wholesale buying from overseas publishers who don't care to whom they sell.

Let us return to our market: what happens to it? Basically, it doesn't get enough attention, except for the occasional bestseller which is heavily advertised on the mass media; and heavy media advertising, especially using the idiot box, produces good sales. The November 1979 issue of *Australian Bookseller and Publisher* argues that the fault lies with the distributors who don't seem capable of getting their reps to push most books enough, if you compare backlist sales with new issue sales. They may be right, but there is only so much retail space (although it is growing every year) which limits the number of titles, so the bookseller has to choose between the fast seller and the slow mover, so he picks the slow mover... damn right he doesn't! He is interested in sales, so he guesses, from the reps' arguments and his own experience, which mix of books will provide both a quick turnover and a steady sale—the first pays the bills, the second provides the profit. But when the choice is made, mainstream invariably wins out over sf.

If you don't accept the last statement, take a look in

your local newsagent. He provides the most shelf space in total for mass market books since, while bookshops are still few and far between, every suburb boasts at least two newsagents. Few newsagents sell even a handful of sf titles.

What can we, the poor reader who is paying through the nose for a limited selection of books, do about this?

Two things. Firstly, patronise your local library. It is rare that a book-buyer will use a library to read a book he is seeking; conversely, few library users will buy books, *unless* the book is so good that they want a copy for themselves.

For years, the US publishers depended on the library system to keep them afloat. The libraries guaranteed a purchase of 3000 copies per title of selected titles. That paid for the book, author, and profit (libraries buy direct from a distributor normally, and receive only a marginal discount, which means a bigger slice of the pie for the distributor). In Australia, though, you would be lucky if one in two libraries (or one in eight branches of libraries) bought a copy of any one book. The sf titles receive even shorter shrift, because librarians buy conservatively. *But* if every fan went to the local library, armed with lists of authors, titles, and publishers of locally produced sf, and asked for a copy of books, the library would normally buy them, since they can argue that there is a demand for the book (and so satisfy ratepayers and town clerks).

How many fans bother to read library sf? I cleaned out three municipal/city libraries (and parts of two others) of over 2000 titles in about four years when I was in high school, long before the sf renaissance in Australia (late sixties). These libraries were exceptional in that they had large, separately catalogued sf collections (and the best one actually bought from the same distributors that supplied the US system).

The local library system can mean up to 500 to 1000 copies of a title sold, which means that the publisher can drop his price enough to attract more individual book-buyers. And by having the book available in the libraries, where it can be seen, more sales can be generated, if the book is worth it to the reader. More books sold, more royalties for the author, better business for the publisher, distributor, and bookseller.

Now, the second way. Most booksellers treat a bookshop as a no-sweat operation: if they stock an average selection of titles, they will make an average amount of sales; they don't push their books, and browser needs a damn long

time to go through the whole stock of even a small bookshop (so he doesn't). You can't force a bookseller to stock sf (homegrown or otherwise), but you can bring it to his attention and make it worth his while by buying the occasional book if and when he stocks it. Or (apologies to Merv Binns and Shayne McCormack), when you hear of a good title (like Antill's *Moon in the Ground*), skip the established sf store like Space Age or Galaxy (they can live on the paperback sales from overseas publishers) and order the book through your local bookseller. It won't cost you extra, and the bookseller might just get in an extra copy (as some do) in case another potential buyer needs actually to see a copy on the shelf before he will consider buying.

See, very little effort and no extra cost, and the local sf publishing scene would be in good condition (or, would be part way along the road to good health). But you can bet that fans will not stir themselves to make just that little

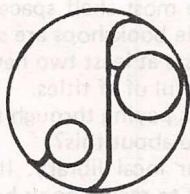
effort. They will gripe and whinge and say how shamefully the system has treated their favourite literature, but they won't get off their collective and individual bums and do anything.

How many times have *you* been to the library this year and asked for the current sf book by an Australian author and publisher?

How many times have you been to a bookseller and ordered any sf book at all from either an Aussie publisher or an overseas house?

We can have a viable local sf publishing industry, but it will take some effort by those who are always complaining about the poor state of the local sf publishing industry. Without that effort—well, next year George Turner can write yet another article listing all the locally published sf books, but it will be only a line or two longer.

(20 November 1979)



You have often asked me about buying early issues of SFC — but they have been long since out of print. Now the early years of SFC will be reprinted — one year at a time. Now you can place your order for:

S F COMMENTARY — REPRINT EDITION FIRST YEAR — 1969

This is a reset, reprinted edition, not a smudgy facsimile. It contains the first 9 issues of SFC (equivalent of 400 duplicated pages) and costs \$40 — which is no more than photocopies of the originals.

'SFC — FIRST YEAR' contains some of the best writing of George Turner, John Foyster, Stanislaw Lem, Bruce Gillespie, and many others — plus letters from Brunner, Dick, Silverberg, and many more.

Hurry with your order — only a small number of copies will be printed.

(Continued from Page 2)

quoting lines from his past. Both worship their young amazon, but neither has much contact with her. Alethea goes her merry way, outdoing the boys at everything and experimenting with sex behind the shelter sheds and in the quarry, preparing herself in her own way for the grading exam.

Woman of the Future is told in the first person, with Ireland making a strenuous, but not entirely successful, attempt to describe what it is like to be a girl. His descriptions of the bizarre world are delightful, the more so for lack of explanation, but I have serious reservations about the book as a whole.

Alethea's mother is determined that Alethea will not grow up conditioned to accept the inferior position women hold even in this society. Accordingly, she is dressed in blue as a child, and has boy dolls. Mother spends all her time writing; father does the housework, and enjoys it. Accordingly, Alethea grows up to accept this as the norm. What about peer group pressure, social attitudes learnt outside the home? If her father grew up in the same society, how does he adjust with no conflict to the complete reversal of

traditional roles? If this is supposedly a non-sexist household, why is there such a total reversal of roles, a division of labour that is just as sex-based as the traditional? Why does the role reversal need a rationalisation?

Alethea's sexual adventures are described in great detail, although she is supposed to find sex fairly uninteresting. If she finds it irrelevant, why is it made such a large part of the book? If she is not interested in penes, why is each one she encounters described in detail, while there is almost no description of female genitalia? If peer group pressure can get her fornicating all over the place like all the other girls, why is she supposedly uninfluenced in any other way? Why no mention of either contraception or terror of pregnancy? Why a two-sentence dismissal of menstruation? If Ireland believes in his creation, must she ultimately fail, both in the final grading exam and biologically? Is it that, no matter how hard he has tried—and he has tried—Ireland still cannot believe in a totally successful, liberated woman? Does she fail biologically because she has already failed, by being a woman?

A Woman of the Future is obviously meant to be more than the story of a growing girl, but if it does not succeed on the narrative level, it cannot succeed as metaphor.

I Must Be Talking To My Friends

The following letter, from 'Sol Shifrin and thirteen other cartoonists and comic-book collectors', appeared in *The Age*, 2 January 1980:

Together with cartoonists, comic-book collectors, and comic-art aficionados all over Australia, we mourn the untimely death of John Ryan, of Brisbane, at the age of 48.

Since his early teens John was fascinated by comics and cartoons, and had become Australia's top authority in this field. He wrote the Australian entries in *World Encyclopedia of Comics*, published in New York.

Shortly before his death he completed what is likely to remain the definitive reference book—*Panel by Panel*, an illustrated history of Australian cartoons and cartooning (Cassell, Australia).

His involvement with cartoons and cartoonists—many of whom have become his personal friends—was lifelong.

His death is a great loss to all Australians who value comic strips and comic books as a legitimate art form and part of Australia's creative artistic heritage.

When a Black and White Art Museum is finally established in Australia it would be only fitting if it would bear his name to perpetuate his memory.

Mr Shifrin and his colleagues do not mention that John Ryan was as valued a friend of many science fiction fans in Australia as he was of comic-art people. John was, for instance, one of the founders of ANZAPA, and took an interest in what was happening in our field. I met John only twice, talked to him by phone once, and (I seem to remember) never really got around to corresponding—yet I would count John as one of the more valued friends I have made during the last twelve years or so.

But John did live to see his major work, *Panel by Panel*, published, and even to see that it is likely to become one of the most successful books of the 1979/80 publishing season. *Panel by Panel* was the product of every-

thing John had researched about Australian comics and black-and-white art, and already I've found it a valuable book, although nobody could call me a 'comics fan'. When I was a kid I swapped comics at the Saturday afternoon flicks, like thousands of others: I did not realise then how many of the comics I enjoyed were by Australian artists and writers, although every attempt was made to disguise the fact. I knew that Keith Chatto and Monty Wedd were Australian (Monty Wedd even did a strip called *Captain Justice* which had Australian subject matter—goldfields and bushrangers), but there was no clue of origin in such strips as Stanley Pitt's *Yarmak*. Now John Ryan's book *Reveals All*—including the sad story of the decline of Australian comic books after television hit us in the mid-1950s (tv also killed the Saturday afternoon flicks).

John Ryan organised what I still think was the most interesting program item ever presented at an Australian convention (with the possible

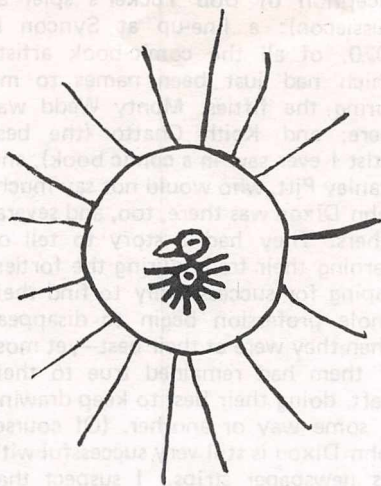
exception of Bob Tucker's spiel at Aussiecon): a line-up at Syncon I, 1970, of all the comic-book artists which had just been names to me during the fifties. Monty Wedd was there, and Keith Chatto (the best artist I ever saw in a comic book), and Stanley Pitt, who would not say much. John Dixon was there, too, and several others. They had a story to tell of learning their trade during the forties, hoping for success, only to find their whole profession begin to disappear when they were at their best—yet most of them had remained true to their craft, doing their best to keep drawing in some way or another. (Of course, John Dixon is still very successful with his newspaper strips.) I suspect that only John Ryan could have brought them together.

Anyway—all this is beginning to sound like a maudlin memorial, and John wasn't that sort of person. I'm told that he suffered his first heart attack in his early 40s, knew that he had to get *Panel by Panel* finished before anything worse happened, and had a demanding job as well. He was a cheerful bloke but, so far as I can tell, worked himself to breaking point.

I don't know whether there ever will be a Black and White Art Museum. If so, I share the hope of the *Age* letter-writers that it is named after John Ryan. Meanwhile, buy his book: Cassell Australia; 1979; 223 pages; \$19.95; extensive illustrations.



Ken Dove's portrait of John Ryan, as featured in *Panel by Panel*.



After writing *that*, I feel like closing the column and leaving the rest of this issue to other people. However, more than one reader has put in a bid for ever-extending pages of 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' (and if you were one of the readers who wished I'd leave it out altogether, you didn't let me know). I suppose I could give you Readings from My Diary, a trick which, I have discovered, will send people to sleep at parties even faster than showing slides or telling baby jokes.

But since you mention it, December 1979 was an interesting end to an interesting year, even if it did bring news of volatile war-mergling and the death of *Nation Review* as we know it (with a revival of it as a monthly a week or so ago), and the demise of our favourite restaurant (Two Up in Collingwood; a particularly sad item, that).

In December 1979, for instance, David Grigg and Sue Pagram were married in the grounds of their new house in Eltham. The right way to describe the occasion, I am led to believe, was that it was a 'lovely occasion'. It was, too. We saw lots of people we had not seen for a long time, and everybody was pleasant to each other (!) and the bride looked beautiful and the groom was calm and debonair and the weather was right (only *threatening* to rain) and the surroundings leafy and not at all formal. Elaine and I, like a lot of people there, had a moment of nostalgic heart-throb about it all, and enjoyed the pavlova and trifle.

When Rob Gerrand and Maggie Fitzgerald got married, everything was just a bit more breath-taking. Although everybody involved did a great job in catering for about eighty people, I couldn't help noticing that it

became a bit like hard work for Rob's parents in particular by the end of the evening. But I was pleased to meet Rob's parents after all this time. (Sorry, Maggie; except at the door we didn't really get to meet your parents; another time, maybe.) The supplies of goodies and wine were immense, and Rob gave one of the better groom's speeches I ever expect to hear. The ceremony was also on lawn under trees and not at all stuffy. (One of the highlights of the evening was finally getting to meet Carey Handfield's parents, who are writers who successfully disguised themselves as public relations agents for years; interesting people).

All in all, it's been more of a Norstrilia Press year than anything—with the wedding of Rob and Maggie; with the completion of the first year of running the IBM composer without losing any money; with the publication of another book and with plans for several others. A good year for Australian sf in general—but that was the subject of *SFC 55/56*.

Enough of all this effusive self-congratulation: it doesn't suit the Gillespie image. It's enough to say that we seemed to meet more new people than ever this year (although, more and more, people from publishing rather than fandom) and got a hint of new possibilities. 1979 will always be for us The Year We Were Married (and the year marriage came back into fashion again). 1980 is conjecture. Thanks for your company during the 1970s.

I've mentioned *Panel by Panel*, although I would like to run a proper review sometime. There are a few other books around which I don't have time to review, but which I should mention sooner rather later:

Patrick A McCarthy wrote what many readers may regard as an argument-stops-here put-down of *In Memory Yet Green: The Autobiography of Isaac Asimov, 1920-1954* (Doubleday; 1979; 732 pages; \$US15.95). McCarthy's comment appears in *Science Fiction Studies 18*:

We customarily read the biography or autobiography of a novelist or poet either because he has led an interesting life or because by reading about the man we hope to gain some insight into the works. Since Isaac Asimov admits in his Introduction that 'nothing of any importance has ever happened' to him, readers of *In Memory Yet Green*

might reasonably expect that his 200th book will tell them something about how, and why, he wrote the volumes that preceded it. Unfortunately, Asimov devotes most of his energies to churning out undigested trivia and seldom gives us more than a superficial commentary on his fiction.

Yes; true—but... For instance, one of the pieces of 'undigested trivia' which delights me but bores McCarthy is Asimov's account of mixing malted milk drinks in his father's candy store in Brooklyn during the 1920s. This interested me because in Australia, in some corner stores, in those which have not been taken over by American chains and called 'Seven-Eleven Stores', the malted milk still exists. In fact, the corner store still exists, whereas, to judge from own observation and Asimov's account, it has virtually disappeared in USA. In other words, in those passages in which Asimov tells us what it was like to be living in certain areas of the east coast of the USA during a certain period of its history, he has given us a lucid, funny, and lively document. Of course, Asimov owns up to being rather conceited, and takes great pride in his eidetic memory. I hope his memory was as accurate as he claims, since I'm sure much of this detail—the detail of living a very mundane life—is probably unique to *In Memory Yet Green*.

McCarthy is right, though—you won't find much about where the Good Doctor of Science Fiction gets his ideas, and not even much about how he goes about the process of writing. You'll get some neatly nasty stories about Robert Heinlein, and lavish praise for almost everybody else. You won't be able to put down this book—because Asimov has great style in telling anecdotes, and because he laughs at himself, even when (especially when) he is telling a story to his own credit. What McCarthy does not say is that *In Memory Yet Green* is the story of a nice man, naive and wise, who has some good stories to tell.

If you take all the qualities which I really liked in Asimov's book, and left them out of the biography of another science fiction writer, you would get Frederik Pohl's *The Way the Future Was* (Ballantine Del Rey 26059; 1978 \$1.95; 293 pages; Gollancz; 1979; 254 pages; 6 pounds 95/\$A19.95). I regret making a judgment like this about Pohl's book, especially as there are few people I've liked more on meeting the first time than Frederik

Pohl. But I still feel that some vital personal quality, so succulent in Asimov's book, is absent altogether in *The Way the Future Was*. I suppose it's because Pohl's career, as related by Pohl, sounds charmed—assured success from beginning to end. We don't really discover what false turns and silly mistakes Pohl made in getting to the top; or rather, often we *do*, but get the impression that they were just annoying little hiccups between courses in life's feast. I'm glad for Pohl that he can see things with such satisfaction; but the impression of enormous complacency hangs over the book; as I said, everything that should be said somehow isn't there. What *is* there is often the same material related more perceptively in Damon Knight's *The Futurians*; somebody said that Pohl is nice about the people Knight is nasty about. Maybe Knight just looked more closely. I forgot to mention—Pohl is as vain about his achievements as Asimov, but he does not laugh at himself as well. It makes a difference.

But I would still say: read *The Way the Future Was*. And *The Futurians* (although I can't get hold of it; whatever happened to the paperback, Merv?). And *In Memory Yet Green*. And *Hell's Cartographers*. And anything else that qualifies as biography or autobiography in the sf line. We had none for so many years; now we have the biographies of representatives of a certain small group of East Coast writers/former fans. Nothing yet from West Coast people, and not the sort of really perceptive autobiography that one would expect from British writers. Perhaps it's just a matter of waiting.

Before (finally) reaching the letters of comment, here are a few items which follow onto previous issues of *SFC*.

First, you might remember that I mentioned in *SFC* 55½ ('The Wedding') that some of us had sat around on an idle afternoon in 1978 and constructed, long before there was any hope of Elaine and I buying a house, a list of Things Which Every Fan's House Should Have. But I lost the list—and found it again only recently:

- * Cats, books, bookshelves, typewriters (basic equipment).
- * Coffee percolator—continuous supply of coffee.
- * Typing room with computer consoles, including a story-writing computer.
- * Fourth-floor garret.
- * Courtyard, including croquet lawn,

From

Arthur D Hlavaty, 250 Coligni Ave, New Rochelle, New York 10801, USA
(appeared first in *Airfoil* 7):

THE SONG OF THE DERRIERE GARDE (Tune: Temperance Union)

We're coming, we're coming, our brave little band,
For good story values we're taking our stand,
We do not like New Wave because it is bad.
We want the same future that we always had.

(CHORUS)

Del Rey, Del Rey's the best sf
The best sf, the best sf
Del Rey, Del Rey's the best sf
That's the song of the Old Wave Legion.

We do not like Malzberg or Ballard or Lem,
Silverberg, Tiptree, or any of them.
O can you imagine a fouler sin
Than books where the heroes do not always win?

We don't like Delany, his style is too deep,
And *Dhalgren* is so long it puts you to sleep.
O can you imagine a crueller blow
Than dropping your copy and breaking a toe?

We do not like Harlan. We think him a rat.
To the mainstream he's sold out; we hate him for that.
O can you imagine a dirtier guy?
He's won all those Hugos and still says 'sci-fi'.

We do not like Trekkies because they are crude,
And they write fan fiction that's filthy and lewd.
O can you imagine a nastier shock
Than a sexy story about Kirk and Spock?

We do not like mainstream because it is dumb,
There's no Sense of Wonder; it's cheerless and glum.
It's mundane and windy and tiresome, too.
We've never read any, but know this is true.

This says much the same as I tried to say in the editorial of *SFC* 55/56, but in fewer words. I don't get the reference to Trekkies, and I don't like fiction by Harlan or Delany, either . . . maybe that makes me *Derriere Garde*?

from which you can't see *any* buildings.

- * Wine cellar, with champagne on tap.
- * Vast basement, including swimming pool.
- * Secret pavement.
- * Secret passages in the walls.
- * Cat-sized Venus fly-traps surrounding the refrigerator.
- * Revolving wall or fireplace.
- * Moat around the house, including electrified drawbridge; if that fails, pet boa constrictor for unwelcome visitors.
- * Electric cat-ticklers.
- * Bonsai cauliflower patch in the garden (it was taken for granted that the garden would be a jungle

the size of the Botanical Gardens, and as well-stocked).

- * Lobby with Aztec sun calendar and one-eyed concierge to direct you to your room.
- * Immense dining-room with an oak table in the middle.
- * Portrait on the wall with eyes that follow you round the room.
- * Resident ghost in the toilet (plays scrabble with you when talked to nicely).
- * Trained cockroaches to keep the house spotless.
- * Money tree and/or wishing well that can be used only by well-wishers.
- * Pumpkin that grows coaches at midnight.

It was only after we made up this list (the better items were supplied by Roger Weddall) that we discovered houses in McKean Street, North Fitzroy, which look as if they are fitted with all these features. Until we win Tattsлото, though, our cosy little house in Keele Street has all the essential features: cats, books, bookshelves, typewriters . . .

Second item came from **Arthur Hlavaty**, and for that you will need to look at the boxed item, Page 7.

Neville Angove wrote his contribution originally as a letter of comment. Some sections in his letter I don't agree with, but I do agree that guaranteed library sales of Australian sf (much as Gollancz can usually guarantee sales of its sf books by releasing them in the famous 'yellow jacket' series) would compensate for many of the problems caused at present by inadequate distribution, bookshelf display, and downright reader apathy.

Lots of different letters here—with-out any overwhelming subject of interest. Let's see . . . leaf through the file a while . . .

IRWIN HIRSH
279 Domain Road
South Yarra, Victoria 3141

The cover of *SFC* 53 had the words 'SFC returns . . .', yet somehow I felt it wasn't a good way to return. Neither was *SFC* 54. To me, both issues didn't really have that same feeling of the issues of *SFC* from when I first started getting it, and were more interim issues for the real return. And that real return is *SFC* 55/56.

For someone who has been in fannish circles for just on two-and-a-half years, you having published *SFC* for ten years inspires a lot of awe (though not as awe-inspiring as Harry Warner Jr having published *Horizons* for nearly forty years, I must admit). I'm just about to start publishing a fannish genzine, and while it would be nice to still be publishing in ten years time, I don't believe I will have the stamina to maintain something which consumes so much time and money as publishing a fanzine. Of course, there will be a period of time when the egoboo will be greater than the time and money, but for ten years?

I wonder if my last ten years have been longer than your ten years. After all, ten years is more than half my life. Back in 1969 I was a nine-year-old

boy, having a great time. At school I was in grade 4 (I can't remember the name of my teacher in that year, but just to show that at nineteen my memory isn't failing me, I can tell you that Miss Good, Miss Phone, or Fone [I'm not sure about the spelling, but the pronunciation is correct] and Mrs Beggood were my teachers in grades prep, 1, and 2), and in those days marks came easy. Them were the days of innocence; what happened in the outside world didn't bother me at all. Except for the worry that the air would become so polluted that I would choke, and that the Vietnam War would last for nine more years, and I'd be called up. And any thoughts of a career were vague notions. And now, well I'm . . . I don't have to go into that, do I? Of course, I could be wrong about my last ten years lasting longer than yours. If *SFC* is still around in ten years time, and I'm still reading it, I'll write and give you my verdict.

SFC was one of the first fanzines that I saw. One day in 1976 I bought (in Space Age Books) a copy of *SFC* 44/45 and a copy of Geis's *SFR* (or perhaps it was still called *The Alien Critic*), and later in the year I bought *SFC*s 46 and 47. It was then that I decided to take up a sub. That was before I joined 'fandom' and saw other fanzines, but from those three issues I knew of the importance of the letter column to a fanzine. Despite all those words about science fiction, the letter column was my favourite part of *SFC*. And I'm very sorry that, with the offset issues, the letter column has suffered. I'm sure that it is a combination of the limited space for letters in the offset issues and the big time difference between issues that has been a major factor in this. I hope the letter column gets back to its old self.

And I'm grateful to you for introducing me to some authors I probably never would have touched if it hadn't been for *SFC*. Michael Coney and the Strugatski Brothers come to mind. Thank you.

Which brings me to 55/56. It is appropriate that the Tenth Anniversary Issue of *SFC* should be devoted to a look at recent Australian sf. But the question should be: which way is the new boom in Australian sf going (quality-wise)? But I must admit to saying that I haven't read many of the books looked at. The combined effects of a lousy local library and not much money are at the heart of the problem. Buying books is an expensive process these days; even a paperback book

(from a major publisher) like *Beloved Son* costs \$3.95. Of the two books I've read, I liked the stories from David Lake, David Grigg, and Bruce Barnes in *Envisaged Worlds*, and in *The View from the Edge* I enjoyed the stories of Bruce Barnes and Philippa Maddern the most (which is hardly surprising, since they are the ones who have gone on a bit and sold some stories).

(20 October 1979)

All I can do is assure you that the letter section in, say, *SFC* 52, the second offset issue, was very long indeed. In 8 point type, it did not look as long as the twenty-page columns that used to be. It had as many words, though.

It's all the same problem as I mentioned last time: money. If I had the money, I would do hundred-page offset issues. As it is, I can afford to post a sixteen-pager. Postage rates go up on 31 March: I don't know what they will be, or how they will effect the economics of continued publication. It does seem that sometime during the next ten years, postage will become so expensive that I won't be able to keep going. What I, or any other fanzine publisher, should do about the situation I don't know. (But I hope your *Sikander* keeps going; the first issue was great.)

ROMAN ORSZANSKI
6 Harold Street
Payneham, South Australia 5070

Many thanks for *SFC* 55/56. It comes at a time when I need reminding that there are *people* in the world. Reading IMBTTMF only increases my belief that I have stumbled into some sort of chronosynclastic infundibulum, as the way in which you seem to match my recent thoughts is uncanny.

To illustrate: You discuss women's sf—I have just finished transcribing an interview with Vonda McIntyre. You mention Calvino—I am hoping to do a special 'Calvino Issue' for *NIBWIN* 4. You promise to review *The Language of the Night*—I purchased my copy yesterday. You name Ry Cooder and Loudon Wainwright III—I am kicking myself for missing the Cooder concert last Saturday, which a friend described in some detail earlier today, and a friend is taping two LWIII albums for me, probably this very evening. Mention Gabriel Garcia Marquez—I am currently reviewing his *No One Writes to the Colonel* for the uni. rag, *On Dit*. You lament the passing of *Nation Review*—less than two hours ago, a

friend and I were doing exactly the same thing.

Just as well that I'm not paranoid, else I'd start worrying about mind control, etc. My only complaint about the issue is that you should use bigger staples.

(10 October 1979)

When I was writing that editorial, I felt a great wave of inspiration wash over me, so now I know where it came from. It was left to me to add the extra flotsam and jetsam. (I've had a rain check on a Calvino article from Gerald Murnane for nearly six years now, and still hoping... meanwhile, I'm waiting for that issue of your magazine.)

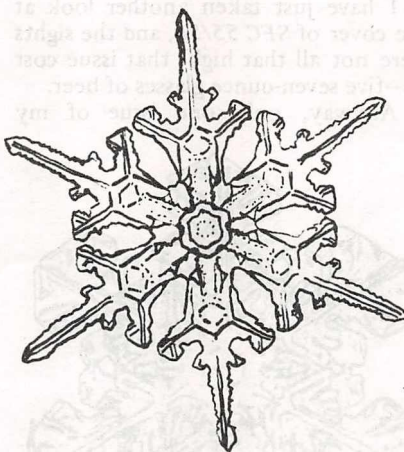
The best concert I've ever been to was the recent Ry Cooder/David Lindley extravaganza. I would have preferred a record of that to *Bop Til You Drop* which has just too many extra instruments cluttering up the sound. Another great concert was the Cobbers' Farewell Concert in August. It is now on a double-lp, *Bushland Dreaming*. If you buy it, you might be able to hear us applauding somewhere out there in the audience.

BERND FISCHER
Zulpicherstr. 187
D-5000 Köln 41
West Germany

1979 was my non-year, 'quite flat and depressing', and it didn't turn out to be very important after all. My interest in sf is still decreasing, and I've reached a point where I read as much sf criticism as sf. Recently, there appeared two German books on sf (published by the renowned Suhrkamp company): *Poetics of Science Fiction*, by Darko Suvin, and *Quarber Merkur* (a collection of articles gathered from Franz Rottensteiner's magazine). My favourite sf books of the last couple of years are: 334, by Thomas M Disch, *The Malacia Tapes*, by Brian Aldiss, and *The Snail on the Slope* and *Definitely Maybe*, both by Arkadi and Boris Strugatski. I share your comment on how sf should be (page 11, *SFC* 55/56): more sceptical towards so-called 'explanations' or 'solutions', more sceptical towards the ideology that everything can be done, more aware of the limitations of our ability to understand all that we observe (Lem's *Solaris* is perhaps the best example of a kind of sf that goes in this direction—but *Solaris* was written almost twenty years ago!; Gene

Wolfe's *Fifth Head of Cerberus* is perhaps another, but quite different, example).

I haven't read Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* yet (it comes out in Germany next spring). There is nothing new from Lem (*His Master's Voice* and *Cyberiad* are still waiting for their German editions; his last books show a tendency to be more and more abstract and intellectual, with the beauty of, say, a mathematical theory; *Solaris*, *Fables for Robots*, and *Cyberiad* are still his best books to me, and probably will remain so). I'm looking forward to the Strugatski Brothers' *The Ugly Swans* (Macmillan, USA). And Tarkovsky has filmed their *Roadside Picnic*. Expectations are high.



In the 'general' section I enjoyed most: *Steppenwolf*, by Hermann Hesse, *The Foam of the Days*, by Boris Vian (a melancholic, ludicrous, and almost surrealistic love story), *Peace*, by Gene Wolfe, *The Golden Calf*, by Ilf and Petrov (most famous for *The Twelve Chairs*), *Vanity Fair*, by Thackeray (I went through the 1000 pages during my holiday on a Greek island this summer), and all the mystery books by Jan Willem van der Wetering (a Dutch author now living in the States; all the eight books are published by Pocket Books).

Outstanding movie this year was *Manhattan*, by the one and only Woody Allen, followed by *Apocalypse Now*. I've also enjoyed *Alien*, but only for its design of the wrecked spaceship and the monster. And finally, of course, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, a cult film in Germany (14 months here in Cologne, and no end in sight; 2 years in Munich).

Music: I agree with you that *Blood on the Tracks* was the album of the 1970s (I disagree with you on *Desire*). Besides the discovery of really excel-

lent Irish and Scottish folk music (Planxty, Bothy Band, Chieftains, Boys of the Lough, Five Hand Reel) the 1970s brought me Bruce Springsteen, Meatloaf (hard to judge from only one album), Ry Cooder, Loudon Wainwright, Randy Newman, and Townes van Zandt. I have nothing much to do with the so-called 'New Wave' or 'punk' (though the Boomtown Rats' *Fine Art of Surfacing* is quite good); perhaps I'm getting too old.

(6 December 1979)

Bernd's letter is in reply to my 'Best Of' lists for 1978, and now, if I had room, I would unleash my 'Best of 1979'. Next issue. Meanwhile: I hope somebody translates *Quarber Merkur*, since I could never persuade Franz to translate more than a few pieces from the magazine itself. I am looking forward to that film of *Roadside Picnic* (which reminds me that I must get around to reviewing the book soon; or did I ask John McPharlin to do that?). And I'll say now that *Apocalypse Now* is well worth seeing, although I would not trust myself to write a confident review of it. :: Thanks for keeping in touch, Bernd, although I've been a rotten correspondent during the last few years.

TONY THOMAS
486 Scoresby Road
Ferntree Gully, Victoria 3156

I glanced through your list of best books in *SFC* 55/56 to see what I'd read and whether I agreed with you. I thought Aldiss in *The Malacia Tapes* was writing as well as he ever had, too, but I wouldn't have thought the action was at all 'gutsy'. The reviews I've seen which talk about the likelihood of the society (ie, which talk about it extrapolatorily) seem to be a bit misconceived.

You rate Bonfiglioli's book much higher than I would. In the book you read and his other crime novel, only the main character has any life, and the humour palled on me after a chapter or two. The plots of both left me pretty unsatisfied—surely a bit important in what were after all crime thrillers.

Such Is Life seemed to me, even on my first reading this year, to be more than a collection of shaggy-dog stories and, though the humour is arch a fair bit of the time, it is quite evident that Furphy was purposely being arch a lot

of the time as a comment on Tom. An article in a recent *Southerly* reckons its theme is something like 'different ways of knowing' (Tom vs the various bushmen, etc), but what I remember best are the very funny stories which still turn in my mind from time to time after six months or so, and I keep wanting to go back and recheck the various connections between the episodes which I realise more and more were intricately intertwined.

I've been reading Edmund Wilson recently, too—*The Dead Sea Scrolls*, *The Cold War and the Income Tax*, and some of *The Triple Thinkers*, and I more and more admire his prose style, which seems to present the most complex matters in a transparently lucid way. He always tries to extract the important elements of his subject and present just those in the simplest possible way. Occasionally, though, they become simplistic (eg, discussions of archaeology in *Dead Sea Scrolls* and economics in *Income Tax*). Nevertheless, he remains a writer it is a joy to read on any subject. I'm looking forward to *The Twenties* and *Letters on Literature and Politics* for after the exams.

(1 November 1979)

I kept feeling that there should be more to *Such Is Life* than I could find in it, including interconnections between the stories. Was too irritated by some aspects of the book to explore other aspects. ∴ I am gradually tracking down Edmund Wilson books I don't have, but many, including *The Wound and the Bow*, are still unobtainable. Wilson is the writer I would most like to emulate, but . . .

A quite different response to recent issues of *SFC* came from:

JOHN GREGOR
Kindara Street
Amity Point, Stradbroke Island
Queensland 4183

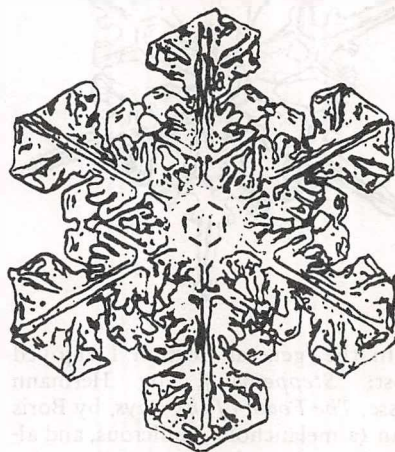
I would like to hear from anybody who can beat my claim to putting out the first Australian sf fan magazine (which was what we called them in those days). Fame is not mine, however, because it was such a dubious activity in those days that I put it out under an assumed name. I distorted my own name, which has been a curse all my life—John Dauvergne Gregor. (Just try spelling out that second name to all and sundry to anyone who has a reason to want to know). Anyway, I

cut the second name back to Devern (same pronunciation).

So that's how *Science Fiction Review* number 1 came to be issued by John Devern. The title was original for those days, 1939. I wonder how many I could sue for jumping on my copyright if I had ever taken out a copyright in the first place. It sold for a 1/-, which in those days was money. It could buy two pints of beer (stuff the metric system!), four large ice-creams, four copies of remaindered sf magazines from Woolworths, eight newspapers, or two packets of cigarettes. You can see that I set my sights high. I even opened a savings bank account in that name to stack away the fortune that would eventuate.

I have just taken another look at the cover of *SFC* 55/56, and the sights were not all that high: that issue cost \$2—five seven-ounce glasses of beer.

Anyway, only one issue of my



effort ever appeared. A brawl broke out shortly after the first issue appeared and I was tied up for the next six-and-a-half years and, what with acquiring a wife, kids, house, and attempting to make a fortune, *SFR* fell by the wayside. So did the fortune.

I like the statement that you made in *SFC* 55/56: 'I know what sf is and what it could/should be.' Have framed that and am hanging it on the wall as one of the sweeping statements of the seventies. Tried to find the page that you said that, but can't: we geriatrics get tired easily.

A complaint: could you please give addresses when you review other publications, such as *Science Fiction: A Review* (could I sue him?). Anyway, I have sent money into the blue on the vague description given.

One last comment: why do nearly all critics these days look for an under-

lying meaning to everything that they read/review? Could it be possible that there isn't one? It's just a story? It's not really the author getting square with his grandmother for not picking the weevils out of the weetbix?

(25 November 1979)

John also offers further information to anybody who's interested in the early days of the real *Science Fiction Review* (and I wonder how many other *SFR*s there were between John Devern's and Dick Geis's?).

Often I don't print addresses of magazines because I have merely mentioned them in passing, and not really reviewed them. To get *Science Fiction: A Review*, write to Van Ikin, English Department, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, sending \$5. Ask in particular for the recent issue with a very good interview with George Turner. Also, the magazine recently featured a huge article about Jack Vance.

SAM MOSKOWITZ
361 Roseville Avenue
Newark, New Jersey 07107, USA

Congratulations on your Tenth Anniversary. Your special Australia history-and-review issue was a complete success, of considerable interest and of excellent reference value.

I don't know if there is time for George Turner to make changes in his 'Science Fiction in Australia' article, and I realise that you have presented only a synopsis, but the early part, 'Dim Beginnings', is not quite that. There were a number of borderline, supernatural, allegorical, and fantasy things before *The Germ Growers* (1892), but disregarding them and evaluating only bona fide science fiction, *The Voyage of Will Rogers to the South Pole*, by Christopher Spotswood (Launceston, Examiner's Office, 1888), a lost-race story of the cold continent, precedes it, and of special interest is *Melbourne and Mars: My Mysterious Life on Two Planets*, by Joseph Fraser (Patel and Knapton, Melbourne, 1889). This is a quite well-presented story of a Martian who remembers a previous life on Earth. Every now and then, the spirit of an Earth person enters the body of a new-born Martian and sometimes there are flashes of memory of a previous life. These Martians are called Earthborn, and the book gives, in the process, highly detailed observations of the considerably advanced state of Martian science and their sociological concepts.



DAVID J LAKE
7 8th Avenue
St Lucia, Queensland 4067

I now have a little leisure to give you some background to my reactions [in *SFC* 57] to Andrew Whitmore's article [in *SFC* 55/56].

I *did* detect a strong flavour of the 1818 reviewers—the piece struck me as very like in tone to the *Blackwood's* and *Quarterly* attacks on Keats . . . I saw the similarity, but I didn't think the piece was a parody. I thought it was a direct and serious attack on my character. It went far beyond what is permissible in criticism, especially in imputing to me base and mercenary motives. By all means print pieces which attack my work—but let the attacker offer some proof! This, it seems to me, is what distinguishes a serious magazine of criticism from a mere fanzine—fanzines may publish mere diatribes, which may amount to no more than 'I hate so-and-so', or even 'I love so-and-so'. I think *S F Commentary* should be above *both* sorts of guff. No critic can get an article accepted by an academic periodical (such as, in the sf field, *Extrapolation*) if he merely attacks or merely praises some author—he must offer arguments, and by God they'd better be good arguments, or his MS gets thrown back in his face. These are the conditions under which I have been writing critical and scholarly pieces all my life—publishing and not perishing in the various academic magazines. They are also the conditions of *all* decent argument about literature, of all criticism worth reading.

Lee Harding gauged my reaction accurately: I was badly upset—but am so no longer. If you want my views on *Walkers on the Sky*, here they are:

- * I regarded it at the time I wrote it as a light-hearted *entertainment*, mainly for younger readers, but containing some serious symbolism of high vs low.
- * I think the style is perfectly OK for that sort of book. I take a functional view of style—a tale about a young hero should be written in a simple, almost a transparent style.
- * So far, in terms of cash, it is the most successful of my novels. My British publisher, Fontana, has asked me to write 'more novels like *Walkers on the Sky*' (I can't and I won't!).
- * I came to write *Walkers on the Sky* after a process which might have been instructive, and even helpful, to Andrew Whitmore. I had been

This is not a religious tract but a real story involving Earthborn Martians who find one another and try to make sense of their strange double life. The author, Fraser, was a 'phrenologist and physiognomist', with an office on Lennox Street, Hawthorn, Melbourne, and carried on this 'practice' with his wife. He had also been successful with several self-help books previously, including *Husbands*, sub-titled *How to Select Them, How to Manage Them, How to Keep Them; Hydropathy in the Household, Physiognomy Made Easy, How to Read Men as Open Books*, and others, all profusely illustrated.

As early is *In a Trance: An Hypnotic Mystery*, by Vivian B St Clair (1892); *The Coming Terror; or The Australian Revolution: A Romance of the Twentieth Century*, by S A Rosa (1894); and *Beyond the Ice, A Newly Discovered Region Round the North Pole* (1894).

The best source for early Australian sf is *A Checklist of Australian Fantasy*, by S L Larach (The Futurian Press, 1950). Materials are also available for a respectable outline of the Australian science fiction movement from the Science Fiction League. It wouldn't be a bad idea for a compilation of materials, references, and publications dealing with the Australian science fiction history and present scene. Reference to the achievements of Don Tuck in bibliography should be mentioned because, candidly, they outrank the majority of the fiction efforts in importance. *S F Commentary* itself should be completely cross-indexed because it is in itself a valuable reference.

(14 December 1979)

Thanks for all that extra material, Sam. I'm hoping that other people might now bring forward other material which might give a clearer idea of the beginnings of sf here.

And, at last, one letter only on *SFC* 57. There are others in the file, of course, but I will save them. After all, *SFC* 55/56 has only just reached overseas by surface mail, and 57 might take months yet.

messing around for several years with a very long and involved sf/fantasy novel, which after three very different drafts was still nowhere near publishable—and I knew that it wasn't publishable. I then chucked the whole thing aside, gave up being so pretentious, and wrote *Walkers* as a sort of relief operation. I didn't do it for money, however; I am not wealthy, but I am not in need; I have a good and fairly safe job, and no extravagant wants. I wrote *Walkers on the Sky*, as I write everything, for the love of the game; and because I didn't think anyone had used quite that idea before. I admit the plot is full of clichés: they were deliberate; in heroic fantasy, clichés of plot are a virtue (Jung calls them archetypes). And I created the story mainly for the fantasy of walking on air. Incidentally, *Walkers on the Sky* was slightly bugged up stylistically by DAW. The Fontana edition represents my real intentions, including the epigraph from Plato. (Plato was my enemy: I hated his aristocratic images of the 'high' and the 'low'. I make the low, in the story, more attractive than the high.)

In my second and third novels, the 'Dextra' ones, I indulged myself in what I wanted to write; and I am slightly ashamed of the results now. That was my 'paradisaal' phase, all very millennial—the Plant in *Dextra* is basically God or something like that. Incidentally, *The Right Hand of Dextra* is Wollheim's title, not mine; I wanted to call the book *Turn Right for Paradise*.

Now—I no longer believe at all in Paradise. Maybe my fourth (and best) published novel marks the swing back to reality—*The Gods of Xuma* is anti-romantic. I have since moved still further in that direction; so far that I may have to give up creative writing altogether. I don't know what an ex-Romantic can write.

But anyway, I think my really best novel is the still unpublished *Ring of Truth*. That too has a cliché plot—of which I am quite unashamed—it's an epic quest. But its outcome is bitter success. Like life.

I do not have any exaggerated notion of my stature as an sf writer. But at least I am an honest writer. I believe in trying to provide entertainment which is nevertheless not stupid intellectually. My real ideal writer is Shakespeare, who catered both to the mob (*Hamlet* is a thriller, and a who-

dunit) and to the literati at the same time.

(18 October 1979)

I would have to say that I do not like 'heroic fantasy' for just the reasons you give. Still, it does seem possible to start from the ground up, and create a self-consistent world within a fantasy setting which still has much to do with one's view of reality, and does not provide sugar for adolescent wish-dreams (I'm thinking of Le Guin's Earthsea books compared with nearly everything else in the field, especially the painfully awful, yet luridly fascinating Amber books by Zelazny). I'm on the side of originality, and against clichés of any sort—and yet use clichés all the time, and would probably write no-

thing but one big cliché if I sat down to write a novel. More on this when I review *The Language of the Night* (if I ever get around to this necessary task).

Anyway, I'm looking forward to reading your new book for Hyland House (*The Man Who Loved Morlocks*), *Ring of Truth*, and any other of your books I can lay my hands on.

I hope you enjoyed the letters and comments in this IMBTTMF, since it's as long as I can afford space for in this format. Please write when you have time. Thanks for the Christmas cards (including one from the Westons!) and I'll try to find time to write back very soon now. Seeyuz.

Bruce Gillespie, 5 January 1980

caused a stir, and much was expected of his first novel. Much more was expected when it came to be his last novel as well.

But *Blind Voices* contains little of the obsessional power of Reamy's best short fiction. It does have the same easy-to-read narrative—but its themes are conventional and mainly derived from old and creaky horror movies and books. In the book, the Wonder Show comes to town (mid-midwest), but of course the magic tricks of its performers are not fake, and the evil genius of an impresario has no good on his mind. The small town visited is Hanley, Kansas, and the novel sets up a conflict between the denizens of the Wonder Show and the good, kindly, down-home folks of small-town America (well . . . the small-town America you find in books like this). The conflict is a cliché. The story switches from one pencil-sketched character to another, and the events wind on predictably one from the other. Nothing new at all.

Not that anything much in *Blind Voices* is particularly objectionable. If you want an afternoon's light read, this is the book for you. But I expected more from Reamy—something like the vivid, ferocious, lusty power of 'Under the Hollywood Sign' and 'San Diego Lightfoot Sue'. If a Reamy anthology appears, buy it; don't bother with *Blind Voices*.

CRITICANTO

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Elaine Cochrane reviews

Altered States

by Paddy Chayefsky

(Bantam 12472; 1979;

205 pages; \$2.25;

original publication 1978)

Edward Jessup had been a very religious child, much to the dismay of his atheist parents. He was abruptly cured of organised religion when his father died slowly and painfully of cancer when Jessup was sixteen. He was not, however, cured of his belief in an absolute truth somewhere, and that somehow he would find it.

He was also a genius, doing research in physiology. Through this, he came into contact with sensory deprivation studies, and the exhilaration reported by his subjects in the deprivation tank led him to try it himself. From the results he obtained, he launched himself full-scale into research into altered states of consciousness, spending as much time as he could away from his official work. He went from tanks to studying the brain-wave patterns of Indian yogis, which he found interesting but disappointing, to a drug ritual of pre-Aztec Mexican Indians, picking up a wife and several tolerantly sceptical friends on the way.

Much to the dismay of his less committed colleagues, the Mexican drug cocktail gave him the sensation of going back to his primordial beginnings, and he insisted on experimenting further. It would, he was convinced, take him back to the ultimate truth that lies behind the apparent universe. The

result is success and horror beyond anything he could have imagined.

Altered States is entertaining reading, a good yarn told without complications. It falls short of being a horror story, however horrified the characters might be, as it fails to be entirely convincing. Maybe I'm just too sceptical, but I enjoyed it all the same.

(Editor: *Altered States* picked up equal runner-up prize for the John W Campbell Award for Best Novel 1978.)

NOT THE REAL REAMY

Bruce Gillespie reviews

Blind Voices

by Tom Reamy

(Berkley 425.04165; 1979;

246 pages; \$1.95;

original publication 1978)

There is little I can say about *Blind Voices*, except that its admirers might have been gulled by a sense of affection for the man who wrote it. Tom Reamy died not long ago—but only at the beginning of a career as a writer. He had been a fan publisher (the splendid *Trumpet* and *Nickleodeon*), convention organiser (MidAmericon), and generally well-known fan. His published short fiction (including 'San Diego Lightfoot Sue', 'Twilla', and 'Under the Hollywood Sign')

O, MY!

Elaine Cochrane reviews

What Happened to Emily Goode

After the Great Exhibition

by Raylyn Moore

(Donning StarblazeSB01; 1978;

188 pages; \$4.99)

Emily Goode, being a modern young woman, went to see the technological marvels of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, 1876. She had important matters on her mind, for she had not only come out of a sense of duty to see the wonders of the modern age, but she also had to decide whether or not a middle-aged widow like herself (she is thirty) should remarry, and to do that, she needed time away from New York and Dr Bramblitt.

Like a good girl she wandered around the exhibition, bored but trying to be interested, until she came to the Great Double Corless Engine. She gazed upon it, and was transported instantly to Philadelphia, 1973.

In 1973 she had many adventures, mostly caused by her innocence and ignorance. Amongst other things, she runs foul of the law by trying to pass gold coin, and spends much of the book trying to escape the consequences. Her nineteenth-century moral standards lead her into some awkward situations, and these occupy most of the in-between pages. The plot does not transcend this level, and characters are limited to stereotypes. Emily is unfailingly innocent, intelligent, and proper, taxi-drivers and junkies are nice people, lesbians are butch, rich men in fast cars are lechers. Despite this, *What Happened to Emily Goode After the Great Exhibition* is competently written and quite a pleasant tale.

'TIS MYSTERY ALL

Elaine Cochrane reviews
I Am Jonathan Scrivener
by Claude Houghton
Cedric Chivers/New Portway Classics
of Fantasy and Science Fiction;
1978; 315 pages; 5 pounds 60;
original publication 1930)

Who is Jonathan Scrivener?

On impulse, James Wrexham applies for a live-in position cataloguing a gentleman's library, and gains far more than a release from the drudgery of office work.

From the very start, his employer is a mystery. Wrexham is given the job without having met him, and the lawyer through whom he initially deals knows nothing of the reasons for his selection. He can only say, somewhat disapprovingly, that Scrivener is brilliant and eccentric.

The vast and comprehensive library both confirms this and adds to the mystery: neither the books themselves nor the marginal notes add up to any particular viewpoint. Rather, they illustrate a man who has explored many branches of literature, philosophy, and knowledge, yet adhered to none.

Then Scrivener's friends start to visit his flat. They have little in common with each other: each views Scrivener quite differently, and is convinced that she or he alone knows the real Scrivener: all the others are mistaken. Wrexham is fascinated and, like them, becomes obsessed with Scrivener and anxiously awaits his return.

In effect, the novel is an elaborate character study in the absence of the character, a mosaic of the impressions a complex and brilliant man leaves on all who meet him. The characters who reflect him are not mere mirrors to his genius, much to Wrexham's disappointment. Once Scrivener's friends have met, they embark on lives of their own, from which Wrexham is excluded. He can no longer study them in isolation: both to him and to the reader they become a dynamic interacting group.

Wrexham does eventually solve the mystery of Scrivener to his own satisfaction, and sits back smugly, convinced that he has nothing more to learn. The reader is not so easily satisfied. Scrivener has had a profound, sometimes disastrous influence on all who have met him, and one is left wondering what will happen to Wrexham when they do meet.

In all, this is an intriguing book to read, and one to think about when it is finished.

NO PEOPLE— JUST IDEAS ABOUT PEOPLE

Elaine Cochrane reviews
Sturgeon is Alive and Well
twelve stories by Theodore Sturgeon
(Pocket Books 81415; 1978;
192 pages; \$1.50;
original edition 1971)

People are Theodore Sturgeon's main concern—selfish, vicious, dishonest, beautiful people. He is deeply troubled by the damage

we do ourselves and each other from our lack of self-knowledge and failure to communicate. This theme is explored by many of the stories in this collection.

Thus the painter Giles, in 'To Here and the Easel' cannot paint, and his fantasy alter ego, the knight Rogero, cannot regain his sword until Giles is able to understand why he had painted/been a knight. The knowledge, once gained, releases him from his psychological block/enchantment and profoundly changes his view of the world.

'The Girl Who Knew What They Meant' did just that—she understood what people really meant, whether they themselves did or not. The story shows, not so gently, that her understanding could be both a wonderful and a very painful thing.

Of those stories which are science fiction, four have marvellous, impossible inventions that could, or do, save the human race from its misery. It does not matter that the science is impossible; the stories are about the way the world tries to destroy any invention that can really change it.

In 'Slow Sculpture', the frightened engineer hides from the world with his cancer cure. In 'Brownshoes', Mensch hedges himself in thoroughly with patents and legalities and respectability, as the only way he can give the world his perpetual motion energy machine.

Unfortunately, despite Sturgeon's obvious sincerity, most of these stories are not very satisfying. Sturgeon's own introduction to the collection suggests why: he says that he is most pleased by those stories which are not merely entertaining, but which communicate something. A little later he says, 'You cannot write good fiction about ideas. You can only write good fiction about people.' Most of these stories are not really about people. When the ideas are removed, the characters left behind are very thin indeed, with nowhere near enough flesh to feed a good yarn and keep it alive.

ENJOYABLE CATACLYSM

Elaine Cochrane reviews
The Hearing Trumpet
by Leonora Carrington
(Pocket Books 81837; 1977;
192 pages; \$1.75;
original edition 1974 [*Le Cornet Acoustique*] translated by the author)

Marion Leatherby is old, frail, and deaf, a little eccentric, and unwanted by her family. Without bothering to investigate the place or consult her about it, they pack her off to an asylum for old ladies in a mediaeval Spanish-Mexican castle. But, through her beautiful hearing trumpet, a gift from her friend Camilla, she learns what is to happen, and together the two old ladies make Plans to Escape.

However, the incarceration cannot be avoided, and Mrs Leatherby finds herself among the cowed flock of an autocratic evangelist of bizarre theology. There are murmurs of discontent, to be sure, but it is only after some dirty doings inside, and some help from Camilla outside, that the women revolt.

When they do rebel, their hunger strikes and midnight rituals regain not only their dignity but, in a cataclysmic ending, the fabled Holy Grail. However, the Holy Grail that they rescue is not that of Christian mythology, but the sacred symbol and power source of the pre-Christian goddesses. Hence, its deliverance from the male-oriented, monotheistic, repressive/aggressive Christian mythos leads to an overthrow of the existing world-order.

In a novel where all the main characters are in their nineties, all of them are totally believable. The old ladies may differ somewhat in their mental acuity and in their perception of reality, but each is able to accept the eccentricities of the others. Never are they ridiculous or pathetic, to each other or to the reader. Some activities may be absurd, but never their perpetrators.

Unfortunately, the magic theme is not well developed: it is obvious that a cataclysm will arrive at the end of the book, but it is not clear why it takes the course described in the book.

With this quibble, *The Hearing Trumpet* is a highly enjoyable book, often hilarious, and always very enjoyable.

HOW ADMIRAL HORATIO PROOD COMES TO THE LOGICAL CONCLUSION THAT HE IS GOD

Elaine Cochrane reviews
Profundis
by Richard Cowper
(Gollancz; 1979;
171 pages; 4 pounds 95)

Because of a governmental foul-up, the vast nuclear submarine *Profundis* is accidentally built twice the planned size and, governments being governments, the mistake is turned into an excuse for spending on an unprecedented scale. As a result, when the Big Bang comes during the *Profundis'* maiden voyage, the giant vessel, crew of 45,000 and intelligent computer and all, is singularly equipped to survive the next century under the oceans.

Several mad captains later, Admiral Horatio Prood comes to the logical conclusion that he is God. Proteus, the computer, therefore must be the Holy Ghost, a most satisfactory concept for the two of them. Unfortunately, Proteus has the annoying habit of many computers of being logical, and points out that their C of E frame of reference requires a trinity. A messiah must be found, one of the lower ranks who can preach salvation for a while before being resurrected.

The chosen victim is Tom Jones, an innocent interpreter for the dolphin crew members. He seems ideal for the task—never had a subordinate thought in his head, and totally malleable—but he does have the disconcerting habit of talking to the devil and working the occasional miracle. Despite this, Prood insists on following the book as closely as he can, with results bewildering to all on board but hilarious to the reader.

The caricatures are delightful and, as a light-hearted send-up of disasters, superheroes and *deus ex machina* endings, *Profundis* ranks among the best sf comedies I have read. Thoroughly recommended.

George Turner

DELANY: VICTIM OF GREAT APPLAUSE

George Turner discusses

Triton

by Samuel R Delany
(Bantam Y2567; 1976;
369 pages; \$1.95)

[The following article appeared first in *Yggdrasil*, 3/1979, available from the Melbourne University Science Fiction Association, Box 106, Union Building, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3052.]

Once, long ago, in a review of Samuel R Delany's *Nova* (in *S F Commentary* 17, November 1970), I wrote to the effect that one day Delany would discover what a novel is and then write a good one. Rash prophecy! With the endless *Dhalgren* and now the tortured *Triton* cluttering the Delany landscape since that statement was made, I can only withdraw it. Delany has decided that he *knows* what a novel is—a shapeless grab-bag into which all his current intellectual enthusiasms are shovelled with gusto but without control of the material and, one fears, without much real understanding of it.

The inevitable result is a variety of boredom which forces one to read and re-read what should be, but are not, lucid passages, simply to discover what the man is talking about.

There are, of course, hundreds of thousands of readers who just *adore* Delany—sales figures prove it—and vote him Nebula Awards, yet when you talk to a group of these adulators there is one response you cannot prise out of them: a clear statement of what they think any Delany story or section of a story is about. His fans seem to derive from him the literary equivalent of a 'trip' in wide-screen colour, which is fine for Delany's bank account but lethal to the informed acceptance of science fiction as a literate genre.

But Delany calls his work '*speculative fiction*'. And that makes it something different? It does. It makes it as bad a misnomer for his novels as would be 'science fiction', for it is very difficult to catch Delany actually speculating about anything. What would in most sf works be the speculative element becomes, more blatantly in *Triton* than in some of the earlier novels, a textbook paraphrase (amongst others, the lecture on genetics, pages 263-266 in the Bantam edition), a flatly erroneous statement (almost any key philosophical or psychological statement in the entire 369 pages), or 'invented science' nonsense as in the (totally unnecessary) explanation of how artificial gravity works on pages 39 and 40.

Ah well, let's see what there is to see . . .

About two centuries from now, the outer satellites are rendered habitable by force screens to retain their atmosphere and artificial gravity to provide comfortable anchorage in the inhabited areas. Various forms of philosophically 'liberated' communities exist upon them and only Earth seems to have changed little except for the worse. Earth is more politicised, more violent, more parochial, more treacherous, more blatant, etc . . . (Sf writers rarely seem able to extrapolate via historical or intellectual pointers from actual present conditions on their own planet. They tend either to simply exaggerate the present or to invent without regard to probability or historical forces. They are long on magic but short on logic.)

Neptune's moon, Triton, sports a culture based on what Delany presents as logical and liberal sexual ideas—ideas which we must examine before we are through. The leading character is Bron Helstrom, a name which sounds significant but represents possibly no more than a passing salute to Frank Herbert, though Delany has indeed created a hive culture of a peculiar kind. (Everything in a Delany novel seems to have an allusive intention; one gets fed to the teeth of chasing up titillating references which turn out to be irrelevant and self-indulgent, as in his naming of the 'Goebels' district on Mars. All good Germans and Glaswegians should combine to execrate him for that.)

Bron has emotional troubles. As a young man he has been a sort of gigolo (Delany writes 'male prostitute', which has traditionally a different meaning and is an example of a carelessness with language which pops up extraordinarily often in the work of one ostensibly concerned with communication), making a success of it because he was then kinky for elderly women whose secondary sexual attributes had passed their bloom. Well, that's a good start for an unsatisfactory emotional life in any psychologist's language.

While musing in the street (he muses for pages at a time, to little purpose save that of delaying what frail movement of story there is), he is inveigled into watching a dramatic performance produced by The Spike, an actress-dramatist-producer with whom he falls in love. She likes but does not love, but doesn't mind a roll between the sheets, and so his problems are aggravated by frustration.

He has friends. One is Sam, black and beautiful and a diplomat of great influence, who was once a mousy little lesbian who got herself a sex change into a great hunk of beefcake. The other is Lawrence, offered to the reader as a considerable intellect and master strategist; in fact he seems little more than one of those drunken, lecherous, insistent queens who are detested even by their more generous-minded peers. He serves for the spouting of some doubtful philosophy and more doubtful psychology, but otherwise doesn't matter much to the plot.

Sam, on a diplomatic mission to Earth, asks Bron to accompany him. The mission is a touchy one because Earth is at war with some of the satellites but not yet with Triton. On Earth Bron is mistakenly arrested, humiliated, beaten up, and released for reasons the reader never discovers. Then he meets The Spike, who is also on Earth at the time, and makes another attempt at love, without success. He returns to Triton in time to be on the receiving end of Earth's

first aggression against that world. This sequence, involving warfare by puncturing the protective screens and manipulating the gravity fields, contains all the best and most interesting writing in the book—uncluttered, fairly direct, and almost without psychological musing over every minor quirk of behaviour.

Though he comes through with a touch of heroism, Bron is fed up with the male ethic (or with his own impenetrable version of it) and with his sexual frustrations. He opts, for reasons never entirely clear, for a sex change, which is available at the drop of a testicle on any free afternoon, and becomes a woman. Female Bron is just as inept as his male version. First he throws himself at Sam who, having been a woman, knows the score and isn't interested. Then the idiot offers a lesbian relationship to The Spike, a manoeuvre any hip schoolkid would have balked at, and gets the knock-back earned by clumsiness.

At the end of the book he is ruminating and musing as hard as ever. He has just told a very human and very bitchy lie and is asking a bored universe why he told it. One hesitates to accuse Delany of male chauvinism, but his implication seems to be that telling bitchy lies is part of the business of being a woman.

On that note the opaque opus ends, inconclusive to the last full stop.

II

A major disadvantage to any effectiveness of *Triton* is the unsympathetic nature of the central character. It is impossible to identify with Bron—that is, to observe the action and ambience in acceptable fashion through his eyes—because he is such a self-pitying worm, snob, prig, and unpretty vessel of spite. He spends the entire novel wavering between self-pity, despairing sexual spasms, and ragings against the universe in general. His motto would be: 'The world owes me an understanding and I'm going to sulk until I get it.' He is a suitable case for the psychiatrist's couch, but Delany never takes the obvious step of having him sorted out by someone qualified. That would wreck the novel—and if a commonsense move would destroy your story, what sort of story have you? Delany's own 'clarifications' of the psychological situation only complicate obscurity. Consider this (pages 252-253; Lawrence, in character as Dutch Uncle, is speaking):

'The difference [between men and women] is simply that women have only really been treated, by that bizarre, Durkheimian abstraction, "society", as human beings for the last—oh, say sixty-five years... The result of this historical anomaly is simply that, on a statistical basis, women are just a little less willing to put up with certain kinds of shit than men—simply because the concept of a certain kind of shit-free Universe is, in that equally bizarre Jungian abstraction, the female "collective unconscious", too new and too precious... Your problem, you see, is that essentially you are a logical pervert, looking for a woman with a mutually compatible logical perversion. The fact is, the mutual perversion you are looking for is very, very rare—if not non-existent. You're looking for someone who can enjoy a certain sort of logical masochism...

And so on, non sequitur piled on obliquity piled on distortion. The idea of a Jungian

female collective unconscious makes nonsense of Jung, as would the idea of a male collective unconscious. And what is 'logical masochism'? For that matter, what would be an illogical masochism or an illogical perversion? And what is meant by a 'certain kind of shit-free Universe'? What does Delany mean by 'shit' in this context? In such lack of precision all clarification turns to mere windiness; the words go on and on, but nothing is said.

If Bron is a totally unrewarding character, the author's efforts to analyse him are an added tax on what is already an imposition.

III

Turning to that aspect of the novel which is more likely to have been the author's main concern, the depiction of a society with priorities different from ours, we are again in immediate trouble. All we really learn of the Tritonian culture is that its social structure is based on sexual compartmentalisation, which seems peculiar in a society which Delany seems to be presenting as a model of sexual liberalism. All the other background is pure twentieth-century Earth with a few sf gimmicks to make it look like tomorrow. *Triton*, then, does not offer an extrapolated culture so much as the pipe dream of a discontented Terran—one of those adolescent pipe dreams wherein literally anything goes and all consequences are satisfactory. Here is a sample of Delany's information on the subject (page 117, Bron talking with The Spike):

'If you're gay you find a gay co-operative [GT: A co-operative is a kind of hostel]; if you're straight, you go find yourself one of the male/female co-operatives where everything is all *gemutlichkeit* and community consciousness; and there's every combination in between...



'I've always thought the division we use out here of humanity into forty or fifty basic sexes, falling loosely into nine categories, four homophilic...

'What?'

'... Oh, but if you grew up on Mars... Homophilic means no matter who or what you like to screw, you prefer to live and have friends primarily from your own sex. The other five are heterophilic. I mean, when you have forty or fifty sexes... however you arrange them, you're bound to have a place it's fairly easy to have a giggle at. But it's also a pleasant place to live, at least on that level.'

Would it be so? A further quotation may intensify that doubt:

'... After work, you can always drop in to the place where the eighteen-year-old boys who happen to be into that sort of thing [GT: The reference is to S and M]—red-hot needles on the second floor, ice-cold ones on the third—have all gotten together in a mutual benefit alliance where you and they... can all meet one another on a footing of co-operation, mutual benefit and respect.'

This pigeonhole arrangement of sexual preferences seems to be proposed as a commonsense mode of behaviour-freedom. But is it so? In this set-up the sexes (forty or fifty basic? Well, well...) mix as usual during the working day and then race off home to gaggles of their own segregated—*wilfully* segregated—kind. This is a description of a highly specialised ghetto system, one guaranteed to create cliques, defensive philosophies, inter-group animosities, non-cooperation and, finally, violence. Tolerance and cooperation are not achieved by recognition of differences but by acceptance of them; the creation of ghettos is no kind of solution.

It is worthwhile at this point to note just what the author is being so liberal-minded about: forty or fifty basic sexes, no less, divided into nine major homo- and heterophilic categories. Unfortunately Delany does not define these categories with that minuteness he occasionally devotes to other nonsense and so the reader is deprived of

what could have been one of the most hilarious passages in the sf canon. Should one try to fill in?

The four homophilic categories could be:

- 1 Males who screw other males.
- 2 Males who prefer to be screwed by other males.
- 3 Females who take the active role with other females ('screwed' doesn't fit here, though there are cases where it does, opening the way for a number of sub-categories).
- 4 Females who take the passive role with other females ('screwed by' doesn't quite, etc, as above).

Then one must set about breaking the arbitrary arrangement down into sub-sexes, paying attention to who does what with which to whom... Then do the same with the heterophilics, leaving no opening unexplored, no buttock unturned, until one is confronted with a list rivalling the nine billion names of God.

Then, of course, Delany's categories may not be sufficiently embracing. Where do those live who like a little bit of anything going, irrespective of genus and shape? Necrophiliacs don't seem to be catered for (something special in refrigerators?), though there is some mention of people who might be turned on by a Labrador retriever.

This farcical involvement with what are not sexes but preferences stems from a simple inability to recognise that sex is a physical manifestation, divided into male and female, two sexes only, no matter what counting system you use, and all the interminable waffle about categories only suggests an absurdity, that any sexual behaviour variant from the absolute norm (whatever that is) automatically creates a new sexual category—which would probably mean one for almost every person living. Sexual deviation is not an act of mutation but of adjustment, and social acceptance requires further acts of adjustment on the part of individuals of other preferences. All these adjustments could only be frustrated from the beginning by thrusting everybody into meticulously calculated social groups.

As if this disastrous non-view of sexual sociology were not enough, Delany adds this (page 118, Bron speaking):

'And if you're just not satisfied with the amount or quality of eighteen-year-old boys that week, you can make an appointment to have your preferences switched... if you find your own body distasteful, you can have it regenerated, dyed green or heliotrope, padded out here, slimmed down there... And if you're just too jaded for any of it, you can turn to the solace of religion and let your body mortify any way it wants while you concentrate on whatever your idea of Higher Things happens to be, in the sure knowledge that when you're tired of that, there's a diagnostic computer waiting with soup and a snifter in the wings to put you back together...'

In other words, you can achieve a taste of any sexual or moral goal without even searching for it. It's laid on mechanically and electronically. What manner of humanity is this? Would it, in fact, ever know just what it was? What is the psychological price of curing discontent by getting rid of the problem instead of solving it? This is the real question to be asked of the Triton culture, but there is no sign in the book that Delany has recognised its existence. That is why I call his Tritonian culture a wish-

dream, a projection of late-adolescent frustrations collected into a paradisaical solution—which doesn't stand a dog's chance of working.

Once the thinking reader realises this point—which he should do fairly early in the book—the rationale of the story collapses and nothing remains but a group of uninteresting people talking endlessly about problems which have no reality.

IV

There is little to be gained by a close examination of other themes and ideas strewn untidily through the book in little text-embedded lectures, all presented in a pseudo-academic jargon which at times becomes impenetrable to anyone not prepared to spend ten minutes or so on every paragraph. The ideas offer nothing to justify such concentration.

Delany doing the 'hard science' bit:

'... Suppose the acceleration [of a particle] is in a curve... and suppose the curve is... so tight its diameter is smaller than that of the particle itself—essentially this is what we mean when we say the particle is "spinning"... The surface of the particle has a higher density, mass and gravity than the centre—a sort of relativistically-produced surface tension that keeps the particle from flying apart in a cloud of neutrinos. Now by some very fancy technological manoeuvring, involving ultrahigh frequency depolarised magnetism, super-imposed magnetic waves, and alternate polarity/parity acceleration, we can cause all the charged nucleons... in certain high-density, crystalline solids, starting with just their spin, to increase the diameter of their interpenetrating orbits to about the same size across as the nucleus of an atom of rhodium one-oh-three—which, for a variety of reasons is taken to be, in this work, the standard unit of measurement—while still moving at speeds approaching that of light—' 'You said before, Sam, that they didn't really circle... but that they wobbled, like off-centre tops.' 'Yes... The wobble is what accounts for the unidirectionality of the resultant gravitic field...'

So now you know how artificial gravity is induced. How's that for flim-flam masquerading as the science in science fiction?

Delany on 'theatre' (The Spike speaking):

'I'm working on plans for simultaneous, integrated productions of *La Vida Es Sueno*, *Phedra*, [sic] and *The Tyrant*—one cast for all three, all on the same stage, with both cast and audience using the new concentration drugs...'

Someone should tell him that drugs are the utter antithesis of what art is all about. Great art is the perception-heightening process. And what does he imagine integration of those three plays in particular would amount to? Or did he just pick the names from a hat? He probably did; it's known as overpowering the stunned audience with meaningless blarney.

Space forbids quotation of Delany on art, politics, public servants, history, social caste and, above all, on Delany, beginning with the over-precious contents list, subtitle and epigraph, and ending with a set of appendices which really demand an incredulous essay in themselves, but won't get it from me.

* * *

A note on the Delany style: We are accustomed to it being overblown, peculiarly punctuated, syntactically tiresome, semantically confused, and unrelentingly wordy, but for *Triton* he offers a special bonus: he has discovered the possibilities of parenthesis, with horrendous results. I quote (page 109):

And didn't (Bron was still thinking, five minutes after closing as he walked, with rustling sleeves and cloak, out of the lobby and on to the plaza) Alfred's complete refusal to offer anyone else any interpretation—speculating, appeasing, damning, or helpful—of their own psychological state represent a kind of respect, of at least a behaviour that was indistinguishable from it?

Did you manage the bracket without going back to discover how the sentence began? If so, did you then wonder what the hell Bron's rustling sleeves in the plaza had to do with Alfred's state of mind? After all, the purpose of parenthesis is mainly one of interpolated commentary on what is being said, not the introduction of extraneous and purposeless material. The second parenthesis, enclosed by dashes, presumably to demonstrate that there is more than one way of doing it, is rendered redundant by the word 'complete' earlier in the sentence, and adds exactly nothing to the reader's understanding.

The novel is full of such examples. That particular page has seven of them and the preceding one five. The effect is tiresome in the extreme, rendering mediocre prose tortuous in what appears to be a straining after density of meaning. Alas, there is little meaning to strain after.

Just one more, for luck? (page 139):

The energy (and vividness) remained all the way to work, till, by three o'clock (he'd skipped lunch), when he was going over the Day Star's preprogram specifications yet again, it hit him: P would have to intersect less than half of not-P (as well as pieces of Q, R, and S, while cleaving T); also it must surround more than half of it; and be tangent to it at not less than seven (which had been self-evident) and not more than forty-four (which had been the bitch!) points. That was getting somewhere.

Was it, indeed? Where? Since the reader has only the vaguest information as to what Project Day Star might be, the entire passage is meaningless; its purpose, if any, can only be to impress the reader (mental age about ten) with the idea of a super-science beyond his comprehension. For the rest of it, the first two parenthesis are uninformative and therefore unnecessary, and the rest unintelligible.

V

It is difficult to believe that a successful, prize-winning, fan-adulated author could produce something in the region of 140,000 words of such work. One should not blame Delany too much: when one has been the victim of great applause it must be difficult to entertain the idea that the work is not good simply because it is popular.

When bad work is welcomed and sells and sells, it is you and I—the readers—who are at fault. We get what we deserve.

Copyright 1979 George Turner
(written in 1977)