

# **S F COMMENTARY**

*the independent magazine about science fiction*

No. 60/61

October 1980

32 pages

Australia/World: \$A2 this issue/Sub: \$A10 for 10

Registered for posting as a publication—Category 'B' USA/Canada: \$US3 this issue/Sub: \$US12 for 10

## **60/61 \* DOUBLE ISSUE—**

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**Edwards Harding**

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**Wallace Weiner**

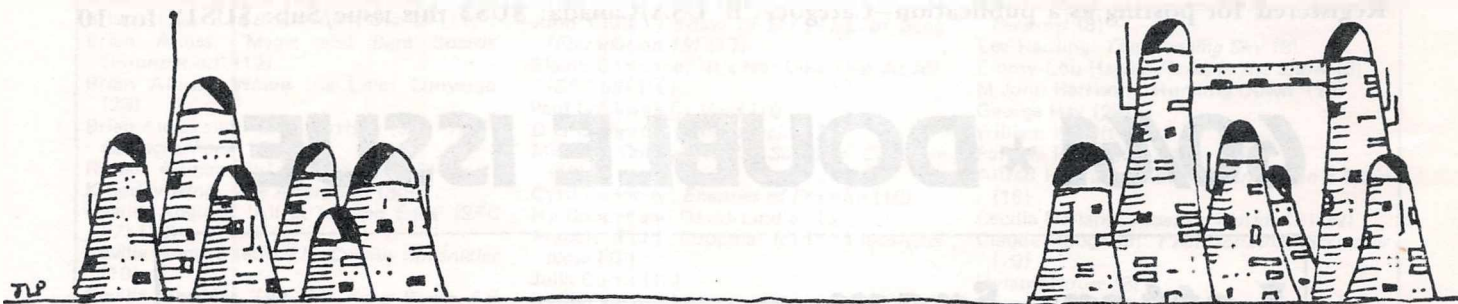
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**ANGOVE ASHBY COCHRANE CURTIS**

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# I must be talking to my friends

In which the Editor  
in this type face,  
talks with his Friends,  
in this type face.

One of the odd results of receiving letters about recent issues of *SFC* is that I have found myself defending science fiction. Not all that much, of course, but along the lines of: 'Well, it can't all be *that* bad' and 'What about — and —'.

Distinguished and ancient readers of this magazine, or people who buy *SFC: Reprint Edition: First Year 1969* when I get around to publishing it, will realise that such protestations do not spring easily from me. *SFC* started with the proposition that 'sf can't get any worse; it'd better get better or we'll go away and read something better.' These days, some people are going away and reading or doing something better. These people are often science fiction writers. And some sound even gloomier about the field than I have ever been:

**URSULA K LE GUIN**  
Portland, Oregon

I feel guilty about never responding to *SFC* despite the fact that I enjoy it as much as ever—nearly as much as ever. If there's a lessening of enjoyment, it's not your fault it's mine. Age makes one unresponsive. Age makes one tough. I never did like the tough side of William James's dipole 'tough/ten-

der'. I always figured life was like steak—tender is better than tough. But the decades toughen you whether you like it or not; and you develop self-defensive deafness, and innumerable tactics of evasion. I have to evade a lot, if I want/hope to get any work done at all. Or is my work answering letters? For weeks at a time that's all it is. But it never seems quite right.

Anyhow, I am very glad I came to Australia, and met you, and John and Sally, and the workshop, and so many people I think of fondly, *before* I began to get old and tough and feeble and swamped and incompetent, and before this goddamned Rapidograph pen began to act funny; please excuse scratches as if by a hen addicted to maddening drugs; the cat currently sitting on my lap chewing my left thumb isn't a big help either.

Anyway, does it strike you that sf is presently stuck? I mean—it hasn't got anywhere, hasn't changed at all, or perhaps even has regressed, the last what? three, five? years? So that (except for a few idiosyncrats such as Gene Wolfe or D G Compton) everything seems like you'd read it in 1969? Is this impression mere toughening of the arteries (=senile amentia), or has it some relation to reality?

(28 January 1980)

I wrote back to Ursula. Quite a long letter, too, and I've forgotten most of what I said. I seem to remember that I said that science fiction has always been some particularly horrible and

mangy beast (with all due deference to horrible and mangy beasts) which carries some interesting fleas along for the ride. Well, maybe I didn't say that. I said that science fiction, as a genre, was dispiriting in the early 1960s, when I began reading it, got worst during the mid-60s, got somewhat better from 1970-74 because of the impact of that phenomenon loosely described as the 'New Wave', and since has retreated back to ghastliness. But (and here is where I began my unaccustomed defence of sf) any field which can produce, even every four years or so, something like Tom Disch's *On Wings of Song* has something going for it.

I enjoyed your reply a great deal, and today *SFC* came and I enjoyed that; so the spark of sf can't be wholly dead in me. But it sure is small and sad lately. I wonder if you aren't quite right, actually: sf is no worse and probably somewhat better than when I first read it as an adult—in the early 60s. (Having skipped the 50s.) Masses of commercial hackwork, some interesting oddballs and wild talents, and a few considerable artists. Only then it was all new to me. O brave new world!

And now I have lived in it for nearly twenty years and none of it is new any longer. But why is that? I have lived in the larger world for fifty years and it all remains appallingly, terrifyingly, endlessly new—I shall never get used to it—perhaps when I am ninety-two. And I do not find myself bored

with the rest of literature; I never did read many contemporary novelists, but I do keep up a bit with poetry, and other sorts of writing, and am as impatient as ever when I hear there's a new Patrick White or Drabble or Ted Hughes or Lewis Thomas or what have you—oh, why must it cost \$12.50, must I wait for the paperback?—you know!

But not with sf; not with fantasy. You know what? I think I OD'd. All of a sudden I found I just did not believe and could not believe in such basic sf 'givens' as the colonisation of planets of remote stars: the idea seemed phony. Why now? Why this kind of 'anti-conversion'? I don't know; I don't like it; but I can't seem to do anything about it. Perhaps it's a mood; or maybe it's a kind of mental indigestion, and will go away if I continue to fast a while longer. It's too bad. I enjoyed reading sf a great deal. It's a loss.

What I don't miss is SFWA. That loss came some while ago: when I had to realise, because of the 'Lem Affair', and aftermaths, that I simply did not belong to that outfit any more. That was a loss because, although I had never taken on the hard work of being an officer, I took a good deal of interest in the organisation from the start, and was proud of some of the things it did; and it is pleasant to feel that one does belong to a group of like-minded people, or people interested in doing the same work you do. I never could get excited about the Nebulas as Chris [Priest, in *SFC* 59] does; I tried, but some basic cynicism prevented me. What awards are awarded 'fairly'? Who's to judge the judges? Both the Nebula and the Hugo are cleaner, I think, than this new farce that has replaced the National Book Awards (which had their fishy moments too), called The American Book Awards, which seems to be merely a device by which the major publishers and the big bookselling chains can confirm bestseller status for books they want to 'push'. The one I get upset about is the Nobel, every year when they don't give it to Borges! But whathehell—it's still better than in the USSR, where I understand the Writers' Union just gave their award to guess who? Comrade Brezhnev.

I don't think 'prizes' and 'justice' are compatible, probably. You can have one, but not both. . . . Well, anyhow, I liked Chris's article very much, though I do wonder about the title: 'Outside the Guppy' is more how I feel.

I hope I don't drift in this hapless

**Le Guin:** 'YOU KNOW WHAT? I THINK I OD'D ON SCIENCE FICTION. . . IT'S TOO BAD. I ENJOYED READING SF A GREAT DEAL. IT'S A LOSS.'

fashion too far from the borders of sf, because if I really don't read it any longer I'll have no right to teach the writing of it—and I do love workshops, when they work! It's lovely to hear about so many people from the Week of the Wombat going on with writing, and publishing—I long to see Rob's anthology, what a gathering of friends! I've had some grand workshops since Australia, and never two alike of course; but for a constellation of talent, for a chance poker hand consisting entirely of aces, I doubt I'll ever see anything like that lot.

As you may know, we have a volcano erupting more or less in the back yard. She's straight out my study window fifty miles north, a lovely serene white volcanic cone, just under 10,000 feet. The first couple of days she was carrying on it was (as usual in spring here) rainy; but it cleared on Sunday afternoon, and there she was—pure white on the West side, ash-black on the East side, like some sort of Mystic Symbol; and then after some preliminary snorting she shot up a thick column of black ash and smoke, which the wind bent off into a great grey plume eastwards, across the full moon rising. . . . She is now swelling—think of it, a mountain swelling—Spirit Lake is tipping farther and farther; the earthquakes are getting stronger, and even the geologists (the red-eyed, hoarse-voiced, sleepless, blissful, cautious geologists) say they think she'll really blow before long. But, as one of them added, last time Mt St Helens erupted, she erupted for twenty-five years! (till 1857). I wonder how Portland will look under a few feet of ash? I do want to point out that, although when our tv film of *The Lathe of Heaven* premiered here, there was an ice-storm and all the lights in West Portland went out, still the only volcano that does *not* erupt in the book is Mt St Helens! I never get it quite right, thank goodness!

(3 April 1980)

'Oo sent me *Transmutations*? Did you? Did Rob? Did Outback? Well, *thank you ooever you are*. What a joy! So many friends between two covers!

When it came I got onto the bed, see, carefully removing sleeping cats to create a me-sized space, and then I opened the book and read it straight through. I *know* you aren't supposed to read anthologies like that—but

where was I supposed to stop? I ask you? Was I supposed to say O, well, I'll read Pip's story tomorrow, and Petrina on Friday, and Ted in August . . . ? Pah. Tfui. I read it straight through. When I reread it, I'll *start* with Flynn and *end* with Gillespie.

All Portland turned pale grey on Sunday. Grey roses are very odd looking. The cats are (as in the proverb) now all grey, although one started out black and white and the other three tabby; and they leave little ash-flower-footprints all over the house. Volcanic cats. They totally ignored the earthquakes that accompanied the big eruption on the 18th. Chthonic cats. I thought animals were supposed to give you *warning*—not lie there being jolted about and not even waking up!

(29 May 1980)

The main thing that life teaches me is that cats do what they like when they like, and humans merely tag along. For instance—and this is part of the reason why *SFC* is later than I expected—take the evening of 12 July. . .

Elaine and I arrived home at 1 am from a party to be welcomed (we hoped) by the usual tribe of eager and hungry cats (also three tabbies and a black and white). Two of them were not there: Apple Blossom, the black and white cat, and TC, the tabby kitten. Elaine went around the block, calling to them. Soon Apple Blossom's 'who? me?' squeak could be heard, and she returned from somewhere down Keele Street. Where was TC? Elaine heard the slightest sound of a meow in the far distance. She followed the plaintive sound (while I was feeding the other three and making sure they stayed inside). Elaine found TC—but halfway down Keele Street, on the top of a strange house, meowing his head off because he was terrified of being so high. (But how did he get there, since usually he won't climb? One theory is that Apple Blossom, who hates TC, and who can climb anything, had lured TC to the top of the house and then abandoned him.)

Elaine returned and told me what had happened. It was 2 a.m. I gnashed my teeth. Like a fool, I decided to 'help'. We went down to the strange house. A light was on in its hall, and three cars were in the drive, but no-

## Lem: 'I DO NOT DESPISE SF ANYMORE, BECAUSE I DO NOT READ IT.'

one had woken up. We stood outside the strange house and whispered strong swear words and flapped arms around, and TC would not get down. Usually he is clever, but now he was terrified.

Bright idea: get the ladder. I did. So there we were, with a ladder up the side of a strange house, waiting for somebody to come out and start firing a shotgun at us (or at least ring the police), and the cat would not budge, and the ladder would not reach high enough. What next? Elaine went down the driveway beside the house, and the cat followed her. At the back, the roof was much lower, but not low enough for us to climb up directly. I tried hauling out an old couch (now quite sure somebody must hear us inside the house) and climbing on it. I did not get far. One heave-ho and I slipped and tumbled off the couch and onto the ground. I knew immediately that something was wrong with my right hand. I cursed and yelled, and Elaine and I took the ladder back home. I bathed my hand, while Elaine went back. (A friend of ours, when he heard this story, said, 'I wouldn't do that for one of my kids.') I expected Elaine to go missing all night—but a few minutes later she returned with TC, who looked hungry. She had persuaded him to jump down the two or three feet necessary for her to be able to grab him. All this finished about 3 a.m. And no stir came from the house itself.

The result was that we went to St Vincent's Hospital the next day, and the doctor put the hand in plaster, saying that I would not know for a fortnight whether or not a tiny bone in the wrist was broken. I sat around and read and watched midday movies for two weeks, had the plaster off, found that I had broken no bone, but the wrist was still so sore that I could use it very little. It stopped hurting a week or so ago.

Which all proves that cats and volcanoes are a lot more interesting than science fiction. That was the point Ursula was trying to make, I think.

**STANISLAW LEM**  
Krakow, Poland

It is a long while since I wrote to you, and I am ashamed to say that my English is the same pidgin English as when we did exchange letters. I know from

SFC—and many thanks that you did not forget me—what you are doing. As for me, well, I am writing as I did, only my output is not as large as it was until three years ago. And the only relevant difference in my attitude is that I do not despise sf anymore, because I do not read it. This case is closed as far as it concerns me as a reader of literature.

Nevertheless I remain ready to be converted to the sf creed if only there is published a Real Work of Fiction, being at the same time of the sf kind. And how will I know that this wonderful book is there? Very simply indeed—through my literary agent and your former correspondent Dr Franz Rottensteiner in Vienna, who has the stamina to read sf as it is. Not reading

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### Discussed on this page:

#### BELOVED SON

by George Turner

(Pocket Books 81696. 1978.  
371 pp. \$US2.25.)

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sf anymore, I cannot of course be an active critic of it. I am experimenting with various literary forms, knowing of course that the salability of the so-called experimental writings can ever attain the level of the sf sales, but this is of no concern to me, because I have an income from my old books that gives me the comforting possibility of doing what I like *now*.

For quite a while I attempted to influence the sf inner world, but now I see that it was a stupid attempt indeed. Not being a masochist, I do not see why I should read books about which one can only despair and become a misanthrope with a deep contempt for those of humankind who *do* like trash.

I hope you will not think that I condemn people who publish fanzines, because this is not the case. I think only that I was very naive for a time, but this time is already past and closed.

(6 February 1980)

Some of us would deserve condemnation if our only aim in publishing fanzines was to reform science fiction (but I must have had some such aim when I started). But the main reason for publishing is to communicate with

other people who happen to be science fiction readers. Um. Maybe that's not quite correct. I can do *that* by writing letters. There's something more: the desire to put together a well-crafted Thing, in this case a magazine. It's not quite a work of art, by intention or result. But it's the one working activity of mine which gives me real satisfaction. And it does tell people what we and our friends are doing, whether in Melbourne, Krakow, or Portland, or Toronto...

**ANDREW WIENER**

124 Winchester Street, Toronto,  
Ontario M4X 1B4, Canada

This is to congratulate you on your Tenth Anniversary issue [*SFC* 55/56], and to apologise for my rather offensive letter in that issue. Obviously the thing is a labour of love. I am, though, still appalled at the thought of you plugging your way through the sf magazines of 1975. This, it seems to me, is taking dedication too far. Just wait until you hit *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*...

Andrew's letter arrived about the beginning of 1980, and it prompted me to think to myself: 'Yes, this is taking dedication too far.' At that time, I was stuck in the middle of 1975, incapable of reading more than a few magazine issues at a time without feeling a loathing which made me want to stop reading altogether. So I stopped buying the magazines at the beginning of this year—the most radical step I've taken in my science fiction career. And I still have not had the courage to go back to the 1975-79 magazines still waiting on the shelf. I still buy *F&SF* because it is the only magazine that ever yielded stories for my 'Year's Top 10' anyway. (Not strictly true: Ted White's magazines scored a couple.) The ridiculous part is that most of the Hugo, Nebula, and Locus winners still come from the magazines. Even Terry Carr gets most of his anthology contents from the magazines.

I would have liked to have seen a longer review of *Beloved Son*, of the type that Turner himself might have provided. I'm not sure quite what I thought about it myself. To the lazy, pulp-conditioned mind (like my own) the book is sustained by the classic pulp dynamic of Albert as Van-Vogtian superman. Obviously Turner has no interest in confirming pulp-conditioned expectations.

And yet, once Albert disappears as a viewpoint character, the whole thing seems to collapse. Maybe the disconfirmation is too abrupt. Still, the book is clearly a major effort, way beyond the normal run of American 'sf'.

If I can't get enthusiastic about much sf these days, I can at least get enthusiastic about Gene Clark. I was at one point a fanatic on the subject of the Byrds. I even wrote a book on them in England which was printed and bound before the publisher (November Books) lurched into liquidation (typical of my dealings with publishers over the years). At that time I was of the opinion that Roger/Jim McGuinn was at the heart of the Byrds. This may be true, but the only reason I play Byrds albums these days is to hear the Clark tracks. The essential Gene Clark album, by the way, is a Dutch A&M album called *Roadmaster* which collects a bunch of Clark out-takes from the early 1970s, including different versions of 'She Don't Care About Time' (maybe his greatest lyric) and 'Full Circle'. The reunited Byrds play on several cuts, prior to that official reunion album. There are also a couple of notable Clark efforts on the recent McGuinn Clark and Hillman album, which is otherwise a disgrace. I don't know if you can find *Roadmaster* (I found it in a delete bin in a Buffalo record store) but it's worth looking for. (I'm assuming you're already familiar with the *Preflyte* album by the pre-Mr-Tam-bourine-Man Byrds, which is mainly a Gene Clark album.)

(4 January 1980)

No sooner does *SFC* debunk sf and all its works than we start talking about rock 'n' roll ('folk rock', in this case). I mentioned that the McGuinn Hillman Clark concert in 1979 was very enjoyable (though not, eventually, the best concert for the year; that honour went to Ry Cooder and David Lindley). I discovered later that in Australia we had only a quarter of the concert that the three were going to perform—that is, a set by each member and his band, plus one set by the original Byrds. ABC-FM gained a tape, from English performances, of the concert we should have heard. Gene Clark's act was much better than anything he's shown on any records I've heard. Maybe some of that spirit showed on *Roadmaster*, copies of which have never surfaced in Australia.\*

But let's get back to bashing sf, before returning to rock 'n' roll:

**MALCOLM EDWARDS**  
28 Duckett Road  
London N4 1BN  
England

I keep meaning to write responses to the occasional issues of *SFC* that continue to appear, to entertain and provoke. Indeed, I did write a long response to the responses to your Silverberg issue, though for various reasons of dissatisfaction I never sent it: I find Silverberg the hardest sf writer to come properly to terms with because I have the feeling that if he isn't good—and for all that I have enjoyed quite a lot of his work (far more than you or George Turner have, for instance) I'm aware of its flaws and hollowneses—the reasons may point to a fundamental weakness in sf as a literary method, which I suspect does exist but am reluctant to confront. Also, I've found that working at the Science Fiction Foundation did tend to diminish my capacity for doing similar things in my spare time (and Seacon didn't help any): also that what your parents told you was true, and too much exposure to that stuff *does* rot your brain. Which is why I've now resigned my position and am happily esconced as a potentially penniless freelance writer.

In the Tenth Anniversary Issue, I was interested to look through your list of outstanding short fiction, and realise how little of it I've read. Must try some of the others some time, as I have most of the anthologies. Our tastes obviously diverge on some things—I didn't care for 'The Direction of the Road', for instance, or 'Things Lost'—but seem to converge with fair regularity elsewhere—'The Stars Below', 'The Asian Shore', 'Running Down', and others. The disappearance of many of the markets is worrying... more so the disappearance of many of the writers, particularly over here where they aren't, for the most part, interested in being published in American sf magazines. So people like Ballard and

\*brg\* No sooner did I write this than Readings in Carlton, one of my favourite record shops, had a copy of *Roadmaster* for sale! A new copy of the Dutch pressing. Miracle workers, those people. But I do not agree that it is Gene Clark's best album: *No Other* is much better recorded, has better songs, and has more energy and conviction. And I still say that none of the albums show how good Clark can be on stage.

## THANK YOU, AUSTRALIA

or those Australians who voted to give *S F Commentary* its fourth Ditmar (Australian Science Fiction Achievement Award). I still can't understand why Merv Binns' *Australians SF News* did not gain either a nomination or a win, since it was clearly the best Australian fanzine during 1979. But them's awards for you. What else but Award Madness can explain something called *Australian Gnomes* winning the Best Australian Fiction section, when a host of other pieces appeared in the same year, and were actual pieces of Australian science fiction?

Some other Ditmars (awarded at this year's national convention, Swancon, held in Perth in August) were: Best International SF or Fantasy: *Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Douglas Adams); Best Australian Fan Writer: Leanne Frahm; Best Australian SF or Fantasy Artist: Marilyn Pride; William Atheling Award for Criticism in SF or Fantasy: Jack Herman: 'Paradox as a Paradigm: A Review of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever, by Stephen Donaldson' (*Forerunner*, May 1979).

Bayley and Harrison and Moorcock aren't writing short fiction, while Keith Roberts, say, does sell to *F&SF* but gets progressively disillusioned by their ham-fisted treatment of his stories.

Heigh ho, I see you're also disenchanted with the state of rock and roll. Things were better ten years ago. I think part of the trouble is that people like you and me spent our adolescence during the blossoming of perhaps the single most potent medium of popular culture ever developed and, as with most Golden Ages, we didn't realise what it was until it wasn't there any more. At the end of the decade it seemed to me that many of the best performers were those who had gone back to basics, with better equipment. You're wrong to say Lou Reed is the only musician who didn't sell out during the 1970s: the classic American example, to my mind, is Neil Young, who almost got drawn into the whole superstar syndrome (with *Harvest* and *CSN&Y*) but turned his back on it and went on making good records irrespective of whether or not he could sell out football stadiums. His *Zuma* is one of my favourite albums from the latter part of the decade, and the recent *Live Rust* is, in part, the most exhilarating live performance I've

Discussed on this page:  
**ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF  
SOLITUDE**

by Gabriel Garcia Marquez  
(Penguin Modern Classics  
14003524. 1967. 383 pp.)

heard for a while. (I'd also expect you to enjoy Bob Seger, whose *Night Moves* is probably my favourite album of the last five years, and who is a terrific live performer.) Nor, I think, has David Bowie ever sold out (or stood still); nor Dylan, come to that. The main thing that the punk movement in this country was about, before it became a media event, was restoring the energy which had gone missing from rock and roll. It started with groups playing in pubs, and the first real successes (though definitely pre-punk) were Dr Feelgood, whose concerts around 1976-77 were undoubtedly the most enjoyable I've ever attended. A lot of rubbish has been produced in its wake, but it has also meant a partial revival of the single as the basic record form—much better than a lot of the albums around with two good tracks and ten fillers. (Mind you, I also enjoy some of the American New Wave groups, in particular Talking Heads, who you can't exactly bop to.)

Interesting you should mention *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a book which people seem to discover independently. I've found that too. I think it's pointless to wonder why more books aren't written in English like that. Still, as you say, Latin American literature is undoubtedly the major fertile ground of the last couple of decades (though it's hard to say precisely, as we're always five to ten years behind, since translations are slow to appear). They seem unselfconscious in a way that intelligent European and American novelists can hardly be these days. Luckily, they have been particu-

larly well-served by translators, particularly the brilliant Gregory Rabassa, who in his own way must be every bit Marquez's equal.

(31 May 1980)

I wrote my 'Ten Years Survey' before either *Rust Never Sleeps* or *Live Rust* had appeared. At that time, *Comes a Time* was the most recent Neil Young album, and I thought he must have sunk into mushiness for good. So, yes, I agree, Neil Young has been the greatest survivor of the decade. Also Pink Floyd, don't forget: to produce *The Wall* ten years after the group's first appearance, and succeed so convincingly with general record-buyers, is some triumph. Bowie? Yes, but... his current type of music is just the sort of electronic swish about which I complained in *SFC* 55/56. Bob Seger? He was even better on *Live Bullet* than on *Night Moves*—but how will we ever forgive him *Against the Wind*? For a great rock 'n' roller to stop rocking altogether is a pity. Punk? I don't like most of it, but some do. There are a lot of bands playing imitation punk music, but with boy-meets-girl-June-moon lyrics. Punk has hardly revived the importance of singles here; the best pop music still appears on albums and the very best is almost never played on radio. And that's despite the commencement of the first two commercial FM stations during recent months. Record buying is still a hit-and-miss activity. My favourite album so far this year is Emmy-Lou Harris' *Roses in the Snow*. Emmy-Lou doesn't sing all that better than usual, but she has behind her the most delectable bunch of acoustic instrumentalists, with almost no sign of drums or electric guitars.

**ROBERT DAY**  
154 Sandbed Lane,  
Belper, Derbyshire DE5 0SN,  
England

How convenient that ten years of *SFC* covers the 1970s so precisely! Your comments on the sf industry are incontrovertible. I've read very little sf recently because there's been so little new sf to read, and I'm looking forward to the Easter convention with the prospect of having a very short shopping list indeed—three books. Of those few I've bought or want to buy, Disch, Aldiss, and Lem are pretty high on the list.

As for music—I spent a few hours the other night locating a rock music fanzine put out by a Welsh sf fan, telling him the reasons why, although I like much rock, the majority of the music I listen to is that which is broadly termed 'classical'. As far as I can see, the main thing about the 1970s has been a steady growth in musical awareness amongst people at large, whether they be aware of rock, folk, classical, or whatever. The only main problem has been one of crap (and James Last is the Prince of Darkness incarnate) and decreasing values. As far as I can see, the best New Wave album put out in 1979 was Pink Floyd's *The Wall*—and if you don't think it's punk rock, listen to what it has to say and compare it with, say, 'God Save the Queen' or anything else from that period. It seems strange that it is possible to be nostalgic about New Wave; but when many of the New Wave bands are churning out meaningless chart successes or 1960s revivals, then the concept doesn't seem so remote. As for classical music—the choice is almost endless, and the new technologies make the fun of the audiophile treble what it used to be.

It continues to amaze me that, after the boom in ecological awareness and the anti-scientific feelings of the mid-1970s, there are still people who feel

The cartoons in this issue  
are by John Packer.



enthusiastic about technology—not only vintage technology, which not only has class but also nostalgia value, but also new technology. The Space Colony faction shows signs of becoming as large a pressure group in the US as the ecological faction—and a good thing, too, as the alternative offered by the O'Neills of this world seems to be a viable one. The micro-computer enthusiasts (one of which I'm rapidly becoming) also fall into this category—of people who approach technology from the same viewpoint as a judo master approaches an assailant, intending to use the strengths of the opponent as weaknesses, and thus achieve victory. I see the growth of micro-computing as perhaps the most anarchistic (*truly* anarchistic) move in social history. For once, the power of a state or a large capitalist body is being given to the individual, and I for one can think of better things to do with a micro-chip than play electronic ping-pong all day. Such advances may even one day bring real democracy to everyone, through the ability to make decisions on the basis of a national poll, conducted instantaneously nationwide.

(20 March 1980)

I'd like to be optimistic about micro-technology but . . . I will be sceptical anyway. Two instances:

For instance: most micro-technology goes into the war machine somewhere. Much that we use, I suspect, is a spinoff from some secret program or other. Ditto for O'Neill Space Colonies: if ever they go up, they are more likely to be used as battle wagons or troopships than anything else.

For instance: we at Norstrilia Press spent some months early in this year looking at photo-typesetting equipment. We looked at all the brands we thought were available. (We did not know, as I found out only today, that

there is even one Australian manufacturer of such equipment, but he's thinking of going overseas to make some money.) Each of the four devices we examined was based on micro-computing equipment, plus, of course, the light-emitting drum which actually does the printing onto photographic paper. Each had some advantages over the others, and each had some disadvantages. If we had gone into photo-setting, I am still not sure which brand we would have bought. We did not proceed, however. This equipment is expensive: \$15,000+ for basic equipment, plus the need to buy \$4000 worth of photo-processor, plus the almost unlimited extras which are available. We would have had to mortgage ourselves up to the neck by some nefarious ploy or other in order to get the equipment, and then we would have needed work rolling in to keep up the payments. However, most information we've heard is that the type-setting business is in a slump. Why? Because these firms, mainly American owned, have super salesmen all over the place (have you ever tried to get rid of an equipment salesman once you've given even the slightest hint that you might be a buyer?), and these chaps are selling equipment like crazy to hundreds of small businesses like ours, who all suddenly go into competition with each other. And a lot are going to go broke, not because they are without business altogether, but because they need lots of money to keep up the payments on the *equipment*.

Now this is all different from the tale our beloved politicians tell us. According to them, the machinery makes things cheaper, and it's only nasty people asking for higher wages who contribute to inflation. Our experience is somewhat different. With more primitive equipment (this IBM composer, at half the rate per month we would have paid to the photsetter

lot) we can just keep our heads above water. At least, we have done so for two years or so. Overheads (wages, etc) are about half total costs. With the 'new, cheap' micro-computing equipment, we would have been struggling to keep going ourselves, and handing over most of the money we made to rich American companies. Wages would have been less than a quarter of total costs.

So I think the whole micro-computer revolution is simply another way to transfer money from the pockets of ordinary people into the pockets of a small number of large overseas companies. This effect is compounded for every person who is made unemployed in Australia because of this process.

But what, you might say, will happen when micro-computers are *really* cheap and everyone can afford one? First: will there many people left who will be able to afford anything but the basics—food and clothing? If there are many people with these devices, what will they do with them? Will they be able to use them to make money (a leading question if they are going out of the workforce)? In leisure-time, can these things do anything better than enable people to play games, as you point out? I don't know the answers to these questions, either, but I've seen little sign of real answers from people who might have the information to analyse current changes in society.

I suspect we will get more and more nostalgic about the 1960s as the '80s wear on. Will there be a 1990?

I vaguely recall that *SFC 55/56* also had a fair bit about Australian sf:

**CHARLES TAYLOR**  
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A book which neither Sam Moskowitz nor George Turner mentions is *The*



# Taylor: (ON THE WEEPING SKY): 'THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF THE PHENOMENON IS THE ESSENTIAL THING. . . THE SIZE ADDS DRAMA.'

*Lost Kingdom*, by M. Lynne Hamilton. A doctor is kidnapped and taken to an unknown society hidden in the north of Australia. Unfortunately, I don't know how well it fits into the field of sf or utopias as I've never got past the first forty pages. It was published around the 1940s.

Lee Harding's *The Weeping Sky* is, at least, readable. You see many virtues in it, John Foyster sees faults, and it's hard to tell what Rob Gerrand sees. It's now a year or so since I read it, so what I see is only a series of images: the giant 'lens', the valley filling slowly with water, and finally the deluge of mud. I think it belongs to a particular sort of sf, as distinctive as disaster stories or utopias, and must be

## Discussed on this page:

### THE WEEPING SKY

by Lee Harding

(Cassell Australia. 1977.

197 pp. \$5.95.)

### DISPLACED PERSON

by Lee Harding

(Hyland House. 1979.

139 pp. \$8.95.)

judged in this context, in which the characters and plot line and dialogue are mostly extraneous to the real action: that is, the development of a huge, incomprehensible phenomenon. This is the pattern, for instance, of *Solaris*, *Rendezvous with Rama*, *The Wanderer*, and *The War of the Worlds*.

The incomprehensibility of the phenomenon is the essential thing—it must be unexpected and not understandable by current knowledge. The size adds drama: an armada of Martians is more frightening than one Martian, an ocean more respectable than a puddle, and so on. The theme these stories expand upon is not so much 'There are things which we are not meant to know' but the more reasonable one that 'There are things which we don't know'.

In this context, the failures of *The Weeping Sky*—wooden dialogue and stereotyped characters (noble youth, aged knight with loyal retainer, etc)—become less important. The characters are needed to provide a narrative within which the events around the giant 'lens' can be described, but that is all. 'The unknown' must be embodied in some symbol, and this symbol of the unknown must be contrasted with

contemporary limited knowledge. Seen this way, the abbot who interprets the 'lens' in line with *his* knowledge as a miracle is shown to be no more helpless than the noble youth whose naive faith in 'science' enables him to investigate but not to understand.

Overall, the book is Lee Harding's success.

(25 January 1980)

*Displaced Person* (*Misplaced Persons* in USA) turned out to be Lee Harding's success, not *The Weeping Sky*.

Congratulations, Lee, for winning the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award. (Should have said this before, but the matter did not come up in 'IMBTTMF' conversation.)

To overseas readers, this award might not have the ring of triumph that it has for us here. But consider that, in commercial terms, the Children's Book Award is the only award in Australia that Sells Books. It puts an author on the map—not just for a year or two, but almost permanently. It is the most fiercely contested award in Australia, and its judges most zealous of high standards.

It's taken Lee Harding a long time to get to this point, and I certainly hope he can go even further—in general literature and science fiction as well as in the field of children's books. (I still wish he had won for *The Weeping Sky*, which I liked a lot better. But then I can hardly complain about *Displaced Person*, a book which I type-set, can I?)

Lee's win is a triumph for him and his publisher, Hyland House, but it is also a breakthrough for science fiction in Australia. Sequel successes from other writers are to be hoped for. (More on recent Australian sf in this issue, if I have room.)

If you have dragged your memories successfully back to *SFC 55/56* by now (it appeared nearly a year ago), you might recall that the topic of conversation then was Andrew Whitmore's cutting reviews of David Lake's *Walkers on the Sky* and Lee Harding's *Future Sanctuary*, and David Lake's later reply in *SFC 57*:

PIP MADDERN  
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England

I was surprised by the reaction to Andrew Whitmore's articles in *SFC 55/56*; very surprised at the amount of reaction, and somewhat surprised at the kind. From Andrew's comment, it sounded as if he was, as I had assumed on reading the articles, having fun trying to write damning criticism. In which case one chuckles over the most outrageous bits, notes any of the more sober bits for further thought, and leaves it at that. . . Or alternatively, one does as George Turner has done, and criticises the things as literary productions *per se*, rather than as four-square edifices of critical thought.

Mind you, the question could then be raised as to how ethical it is to use the works of other living authors as cannon-fodder for one's own literary barrage—but that's a different question, isn't it?

David Lake's points interested me especially. OK, if we take the pieces as criticism pure and simple anyway, then his point 3 stands—assertion and proof should not be confounded. But he did leave the critics with some problems in points 1, 4, 5, and 7. How, for instance, can one criticise a book without criticising its style—however wounding that may be to the author? And how do you criticise style without leaving yourself open to charges of using simple assertion? All right, if a writer is just plain ungrammatical, one can point that out, but suppose the problem is that the style is monotonous, bearable for a paragraph, but irritating for two hundred pages? One can hardly quote the whole book in defence of one's assertion. Similarly, with characters and wit—what if the book you happen to be doomed to review is genuinely characterless and witless? There are such books—from time to time I've tried to read them. What I can't see is how I could criticise them with Mr Lake's approval. And there's definitely something funny about point 7. Even if we did allow for the possibility that the poor writer was 'simply writing as well as he could at the time, for the love of the game', would that make the book any better? Surely one of the most frustrating things about writing is that good motives do not preserve one from failure (though bad ones may ensure it). On these terms, the only criticism possible of that section of Andrew's article is that it's irrelevant

## *Maddern:* 'WHAT IF THE BOOK I HAPPEN TO BE DOOMED TO REVIEW IS GENUINELY CHARACTERLESS AND WITLESS? ... I CAN'T SEE HOW I COULD CRITICISE IT WITH MR LAKE'S APPROVAL.'

to the issue in hand—not that it's uncharitable.

All of which is not to say that I don't have any sympathy with David Lake. I hate getting bad reactions to my writing. I hope I'm definitely incommunicado (dead? amnesiac? cryonic colonist aboard interstellar spaceship?) before Andrew gets his clever claws onto any of my more ill-considered work.

But that's not the point. Criticism is either useful or not, in which case there is either no justice or no point in complaining. Or it either measures up or doesn't measure up to standards such as clarity, consistency, provision of evidence, proper working out of critical assumptions, and so on. In which case you criticise the critics along those lines and no others.

(27 January 1980)

In a postscript, Pip says, 'This is really a letter to *SFC*. First ever! Note the occasion, even if you don't include the letter.' I noted the occasion, Pip, and I did include the letter. More letters, please, if you have time in Oxford.

**ALEXANDER D. WALLACE**  
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USA

[Re David Lake in *SFC* 57]: Were the Odyssean clichés at the time Homer composed *The Odyssey*? Similar query enent *Beowulf*. The canonical response is surely affirmative, but the evidence is missing.

The criticasting procedure is not as simple as David Lake might wish. For one thing, and not excusing the *ad hominem*, a competent author must possess some critical talent, and exercise it. Lake's view that a reviewer should take into consideration that 'the poor benighted fellow' simply writes as best he can is not acceptable to me. Whatever the PBF's motives, whatever the agonies of gestation, he is out to *sell* his product, to take coin for it. And there is the post-partum exhilaration to reckon with. The PBF is surely not to be condemned for this. On the other hand, the critic should not dip his pen in rose-coloured ink for such reasons.

There is another, and to me important aspect of this business—while an

author may be regularly lashed openly, the publisher and his editors are rarely (if ever) castigated for their share in the matter. For a critic to condemn an author for poor novelty, and fail to chastise the publisher for offering it for sale, is a display of irresponsibility, as I see things.

(13 February 1980)

**CY CHAUVIN**  
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USA

I just completed reading George Turner's *Beloved Son*. It is a carefully crafted novel. It is not a novel that will turn science fiction upside down, however (I'm afraid I was expecting it would). I'm curious if the novel is all that George hoped it would be. I know it is somewhat risky for a novelist to write about his own work, but I'd still be interested in reading what George would write about it.

Sneja Gunew's review of Vonda McIntyre's *The Exile Waiting* [in *SFC* 57] is interesting in hindsight. I wonder if 'Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand' is the only totally effective piece of fiction McIntyre can write. All her other societies and aliens seem so awkward and ill-fitting. Everyone in America seems to love *Dreamsnake*; the British panned it. I think it is awful (except for the chapter taken from 'Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand'). Snake (the healer) never changes. She is the same person at the end of the novel as she is at the beginning: this, despite the fact that she changes everyone else she meets. Her stasis is unconvincing. The ethical situations in the novel are also simplistic. People are bad or good (mostly good), but the two are never confused. Snake is good; she is kind to the 'crazy' who steals her map and journal. She even decides that to force North (who holds her captive in the snake pit) to take the dreamsnake venom would be unethical: she doesn't need to hurt him to escape. But the novel never deals with the familiar situation of good people forced to do wrong things be-

cause of circumstance. The novel does not deal with tragedy—or joy. (Compare it to the confused way people act in Turner's novel.)

McIntyre's handling of sexual customs in this society is free of traditional, sexist roles, and all the authority figures in the novel are women. They are affectionate and supportive. I find it an admirable contrast to our society, but as a literary invention it is uninspired. (Joanna Russ's *Whileaway* is better.) After the original short story, the details of the society are not mysterious, but awkward. I hope that *Dreamsnake* won its Hugo because it is a somewhat feminist novel—I hate to

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Discussed on this page:

**DREAMSNAKE**

by Vonda McIntyre

(Houghton Mifflin. 1978.

313 pp. \$US8.95.

Gollancz. 1978. 313 pp.

4 pounds 95.)

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think people still admire bad writing. (She seems to have little of the prose/word sense that is present in Le Guin and Cordwainer Smith.)

(6 February 1980)

I find that I disagree with most of English fandom about *Dreamsnake*. Most Australian sf readers I've talked to don't like it either. I liked the book a lot while I was reading it. The first section is alive and intense—and some of Snake's other healing encounters are just as intense. The book is mainly a pilgrimage through Strange Landscapes and I am a sucker for exotic landscapes. Of course, Vonda McIntyre empties her landscape, which makes it easy to see outlines of its contents clearly. This seems a standard sf ploy, and McIntyre did it better than most (without excusing such a device). The snake pit sequence was interesting, of course, for its riot of bizarre Freudian symbols. But I don't think Vonda realised she was writing stuff that could have been dredged up from psychological case histories. What I liked most about the book was its quiet way of speaking, compared with the rotten-awful yellers and screamers who usually win Hugos and Nebulas. But Vonda did not stay with this tone in the last section, and so spoiled the book for me. The last section became

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*Chauvin:* 'I HOPE THAT DREAMSNAKE WON ITS HUGO BECAUSE IT IS A SOMEWHAT FEMINIST NOVEL—I HATE TO THINK PEOPLE STILL ADMIRE BAD WRITING.'

# Harding: 'BY ALL MEANS LET AUSTRALIA DEVELOP A PULP SF INDUSTRY, BUT LET NOT THE PUBLISHERS WAIL WHEN IT DOESN'T SELL.'

yellin' and screamin' melodrama: a pity.

Tom Disch reviewed Vonda McIntyre's first book of short fiction, *Fireflood and Other Stories*, in the July 1980 issue of *F&SF*. I think he summed up Vonda McIntyre's strengths and weaknesses as a writer with admirable precision. (And 'Aztecs' is a fine story.) Here himself is

**TOM DISCH**  
New York 10003, USA

Thank you for *SFC* 57, which reached me after complex forwardings, and congratulations. Reading between the lines I gather you're a married man. As that was always clearly your destiny I'm happy for you. If there's a copy left of 55½ I'd dearly love to read it. Needless to say, I'm also looking forward to *SFC*'s reaction to *On Wings of Song*.

Reassure Neville Angove that he's not missing anything in the works of A E van Vogt: there's nothing there.

And my regards to George Turner, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at Seacon, though to my shame I never saw half as much of him as I should have, letting myself be swept away, instead, by the riptides of partying.

(2 March 1980)

I didn't give Tom Disch's new address at the top of this letter, because I suspect he's moved yet again, and that the copy of 55½ I sent still has not reached him!

I wish it had been clear to me that it was always clearly my destiny to be a married man. Maybe I wouldn't have worried so much while I was single and, worse, alone. Elaine was worth waiting for.

*On Wings of Song* reduces me to a state of such grovelling admiration that the long article I've written about it really isn't much good. Maybe it will be a lot better when I rewrite it. Sf fans collectively are forever condemned to scorn for failing to give *On Wings of Song* the Hugo this year; and if sf writers really think Arthur Clarke (*The Fountains of Paradise*) is a better writer than Tom Disch, they should throw away their typewriters and go and do something useful with their lives. Fortunately, the panel of the John W Campbell Memorial Award can see the obvious thing to do: *On Wings of Song* won the award for 1980.

*SFC* 58 also brought a varied and stimulating response:

**LEE HARDING**  
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Balaclava, Victoria 3183

Pleased to see that Elaine is writing a good proportion of the reviews, but not so pleased with her style or approach. To juxtapose her review of David Ireland's *A Woman of the Future* was, I believe, unfair: it simply demonstrates how obsessed she is with content, along with the majority of sf reviewers I have read. George's review of the same book is a gem, and it should surely encourage readers to seek out the novel.

The naivete of neo-publishers like Neville Angove continues to amaze me. Does he actually believe that libraries have sufficient funds to buy enough general titles, let alone science fiction? And surely he must realise that distributors are primarily interested in making money: they haven't the

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**Discussed on this page:**  
**ON WINGS OF SONG**  
by Thomas M Disch  
(Gollancz. 1979. 315 pp.  
5 pounds 95/\$15.95.  
Bantam. 1980. \$US 2.25.)

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time to promote second-rate fiction, let alone encourage would-be amateurs. By all means let Australia develop a pulp sf industry, but let not the publishers wail when it doesn't sell. Good books will always find a market, although it cannot be guaranteed that the financial rewards will be commensurate with the effort involved.

Neville is even wrong with his conclusion that 'well, next year George Turner can write yet another article listing all the locally published sf books, but it will only be a line or two longer'. At the moment I can list at least five sf novels that will be published in Australia in 1980—and that's not counting the three books from Paul Collins' Void Books.

Ranters such as Neville should endeavour to check all their facts. And I don't see why Australian readers should be asked to support junk writing. What we do need is a regular fic-

tion magazine edited by a literate enthusiast that would do for local short story writers what *SFC* has been doing for the critical review section of the community. But what are the chances of that, eh? And I mean a magazine that *pays* authors for their contributions and has the guts to struggle on and break even—much the same as Paul Collins did with *Void* before he went into anthologies. Well, we can still dream, can't we?

PS: Neville also seems unaware that nearly all novels published in Australia are funded primarily by either Literature Board grants or subsidised by publishers who have a successful non-fiction list. The same is true of poetry. And print runs of 3000? If a publisher sells one third of that run he can breathe a sigh of relief and just break even. Three thousand would be a best-seller here. And it is interesting to note that current print runs on British hardcover sf are down to 1000 copies in some instances. Where *does* Neville get all his misinformation from?

(23 January 1980)

In fairness to Neville Angove, I should say that he was concentrating on a simple point: that much hardcover fiction is bought by libraries, that libraries do listen to requests from readers, and that sf readers in Australia could do something for the local scene by scouring libraries and writing down the titles of Australian sf books in 'Requests' books. Or readers could make sure that local bookshops, especially campus bookshops, stocked Australian sf. Several people have written to me saying that they have done this, and it has worked.

I've thought about your idea for a high-quality fiction magazine for Australia. Almost everybody else has too at one time or another. Paul Collins changed from *Void* to anthologies because the Book Bounty scheme, admirable in many ways, exempts periodicals. (If it included periodicals, I might be able to afford to publish *SFC*.) I could perhaps afford to print and distribute such a magazine, but I could not afford to pay authors as well. On that basis, I will not go ahead. Besides, Nev Angove is doing a fair job with *Cygnus Chronicler*—I suspect that no future magazine, even one which pays lots, will get submissions much better than those which Neville receives. A high-paying magazine *could* commission stories.

As for *A Woman of the Future*: Again, I would have thought that Elaine's point was simple: that David Ireland has written his book as if from

Discussed on this page:  
**A WOMAN OF THE FUTURE**  
 by David Ireland  
 (Allen Lane. 1979. 351 pp.  
 \$10.95.)

the viewpoint of a girl growing up, and that he has guessed wrong about how things look to such a girl. Of course I don't agree with Elaine's antipathy to the book as a result of this disagreement with a psychological point.

The best review I've seen of *A Woman of the Future* appeared in 21 May 1980 edition of *The Melbourne Times*, written by John Schauble. Points from that review which seem particularly apt include:

Not since D H Lawrence's *Kangaroo* has a novelist so successfully captured the great Australian emptiness—both the physical and emotional vacancy. Anyone who has flown over the central deserts will appreciate the physical emptiness of those vast, arid spaces. But Alethea Hunt's concern is more with the barren society, those suburbs where 'no one tells the truth'...

A foreign teacher's accusation that 'your land has no dream, not even a dream that existed for a while then misfired' meets with a kind of innocent optimism. 'He was really knocking us, but we knew how to take criticism: we were Australians; we'd knocked ourselves for two hundred years.'

Her imagination is fired by the leopard which she first encounters on an excursion to the zoo. It, like the European who brought it, is trapped in an alien environment. For Alethea, the leopard embodies the possibility of eventual escape, of rejuvenation in this strange land. A chance for the vanquished to become the conqueror.

Ireland's imagery is at once

childishly simple and uniquely apt. Like the girl who for all intents and purposes could be the very country she inhabits: 'She ate like a pig, blew her nose on her fingers and didn't care what she said or did. She was magnificently coarse.' David Ireland's method is to draw the reader into the unique mind of Alethea Hunt, show us enough of this mind so, that we realise that it is an entire world, and then widen the focus of concerns so that the psychological entity called 'Alethea Hunt' is only incidental to that world.

But there is a documentary validity to the book as well. In some of those exciting collections of children's verse and prose (the kind that fired the 'Creative Writing' movement in schools), the perceptions of those children sound very like Alethea's naive-wise statements.

I should mention, not entirely in passing, that *A Woman of the Future* won this year's Miles Franklin Award, Australia's most valued prize for fiction. This is Ireland's third Miles Franklin Award. Penguin has released the book in paperback, and it has been a best-seller for some months. And, although no general review will admit it, I still say it is a book about Australia's future, and fits my definition of a science fiction book.

**BRIAN ALDISS**  
 Orchard House,  
 Begbroke, Oxford OX5 1RT  
 England

There was much of great interest in *SF Commentary* 58, I thought; thanks for sending it to me. About sf writers' autobiographies, for instance, when you spoke of Asimov's and Pohl's recent contributions to the art. When Asimov joined Sam Moskowitz and some others in an attempt to stamp out New Wave writers and even get their books boycotted in the editorial offices, he committed what was for me

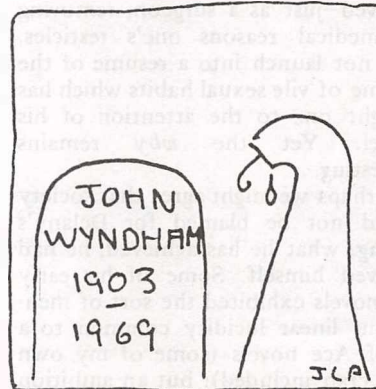
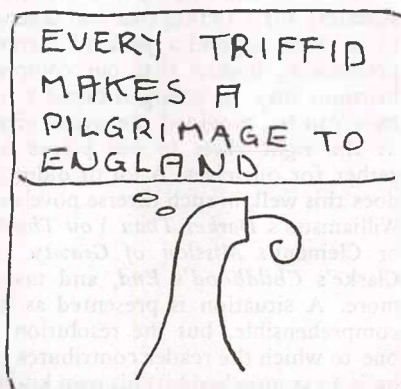
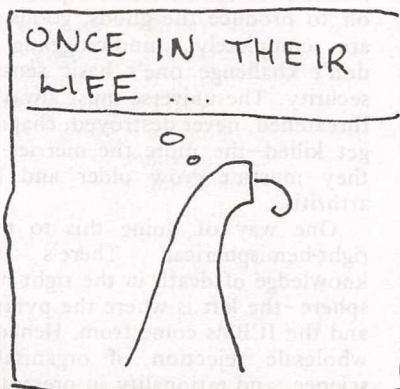
Discussed on this page:  
**THE WAY THE FUTURE WAS**  
 by Frederik Pohl  
 (Gollancz. 1978. 254 pp.  
 6 pounds 95/\$19.95)

**HELL'S CARTOGRAPHERS**  
 edited by Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison  
 (Weidenfeld & Nicolson. 1975.  
 246 pp. 3 pounds 50/\$10.30.)

an unforgettable sin, if not an unforgettable one. Can you imagine a major figure in, say, poetry indulging in that sort of monkey business? A A Alvarez trying to get Faber and Faber to agree not to publish a new poet he didn't like? Once the news leaked out, the guy would be dead for life. So I always have the feeling that under all the genial gush beats a heart of lead; consequently, could not bear to confront *In Memory Yet Green*.

I bought Fred Pohl's book, *The Way the Future Was* (a nice wry Fred title) in Los Angeles, when I was staying at the Beverly Hilton and generally having a good time; such circumstances influence one's reception of books, but I felt warmly towards it, unlike you. Like you, I admire Fred. We've bumped into each other in a number of places. I like his style and his whole approach to life. And his intelligence. He's a civilised man in a field in which—to quote what an American editor said to me recently—most authors behave like baddies in a 'B' movie. You found his book self-satisfied; what I noticed was that he was generous to his friends.

That was something you couldn't quite say about Damon Knight. Yet Damon's book, *The Futurians*, is also extremely interesting. I love Damon, yet feel that perhaps in some way he has disappointed himself; if that makes him acerbic, why not? The trouble is, when we embark upon autobiography,



## Aldiss: 'WE CAN ALMOST APPLAUD DELANY'S RAISING THE FLAG OF INCOMPREHENSIBILITY.'

the sea of value judgments surges down upon us, and all the lesser lights then perform autopsies upon our still living corpses. That Biblical exclamation, 'Oh, that mine enemy would write a book!' refers especially to autobiography.

Anyhow, I claim to have started this Wave in autobiography with *Hell's Cartographers*. I said to Harry that here was one way to earn the gratitude of posterity. 'Who will have heard of *Bill the Galactic Hero* or *Non-Stop* in another ten years?' I asked him. Mind you, this was fifteen years ago. So we press-ganged our friends, who included Pohl and Knight (the others being Alfie Bester and Bob Silverberg, plus ourselves making six) and got them to write memoirs of their lives in sf for the book. I had some difficulty persuading them to lift the curtain on their private lives, but lift it they coyly did; and it provoked Damon and Fred, on the principle that one kiss leads to another, to launch out on full-scale memoirs in their own right.

After my piece, 'Magic and Bare Boards', was published in Peter Nicholls' *Foundation* (before its appearance in *Hell's Cartographers*) a distinguished publisher wrote and invited me to do a full-scale autobiography. But I feel I'm too young for that kind of thing yet. He said unblushingly.

### Right-hemispherical

What really held my attention in *SFC 58*, apart from the name of Roger Weddall, was George Turner's review of Delany's *Triton*. George earns our gratitude by explaining clearly, without any false critical posturing, some ways in which *Triton* is so sickently bad. It was not part of his task to explain *why* such sickening badness is achieved—just as a surgeon, removing for medical reasons one's testicles, need not launch into a resume of the lifetime of vile sexual habits which has brought one to the attention of his scalpel. Yet the *why* remains interesting.

Perhaps we might agree that society should not be blamed for Delany's writing; what he has achieved, he had achieved himself. Some of his early Ace novels exhibited the sort of mendacious linear lucidity common to a lot of Ace novels (some of my own early crap included); but an ambition

to achieve impenetrability shows up fairly soon, for instance in the pretentious *The Einstein Intersection* where, if you remember, chapters are tricked out with headings from Genet, Sartre, Sappho, Bob Dylan, and other totems of Western culture, and the hero is not just plain Lobey but Billy the Kid, Ringo Starr, Orpheus, and Jesus Christ as well. That novel won great praise and popularity for Delany and he became, in the phrase of George's heading, a Victim of Great Applause. He was encouraged in his faults.

### Discussed on this page:

#### TRITON

by Samuel R Delany  
(Bantam Y2567. 1976.  
369 pp. \$US1.95.)

It's a pity. Introducing extraneous matter and new stylistic approaches into sf are ways of freshening the rather closed atmosphere. Delany is intelligent in just the kind of off-beat fashion that produces sf writers and readers (charming man personally, too); his intelligence seized on the fact that suddenly in the sixties there was a university circuit for sf, just as there was for literature: one could trot round lecturing on one's own work, and have it read and studied on campus. A new audience, who wanted new things from sf.

And some of sf has gone thataway, along Pretention Trail, just as the whole lot more went *thataway* after Luke Skywalker, along Gooney Gulch. When regarding the bland pap of the latter route, we can almost applaud Delany's raising of the flag of Incomprehensibility.

Also, most of us probably wish passionately for a fiction that will take us to or even beyond a peak of incomprehension, hoping that our comprehensions may be enlarged thereby: as they can be, provided the writer gives us the right clues to put pieces together for ourselves. A lot of older sf does this well, in such diverse novels as Williamson's *Darker Than You Think*, or Clement's *Mission of Gravity*, or Clarke's *Childhood's End*, and many more. A situation is presented as incomprehensible, but the resolution is one to which the reader contributes (if he is to comprehend it) his own know-

ledge plus his willingness to entertain an aspect of the universe he had not previously accepted. To put it another way, he has to contribute science, in the larger sense of organised knowing, plus a more nebulous type of awareness; both cerebral hemispheres have to be engaged.

It's easy for a writer to achieve this desired incomprehension by defying 'science', like *Triton*'s division of mankind into forty or fifty sexes; easy but not worthwhile. We know it ain't so. The trick—or a trick—is to defy accepted 'science' in such a way that the reader forces himself to enlarge the boundaries of what he regards as received or receivable. Delany's 'science' comes from his right hemisphere, where it is translated into magic. The chaos of *Nova* and *Dhalgren* and *Triton* reminds one of right hemisphere stuff. This may be the effect Delany wants; but in time it may be possible to prove (by surgical means?) that a truly effective work of fiction, and maybe any work of art, has to be structured on contributions from both hemispheres and the bridge in between. The question is one of balance.

Perhaps Delany reacted against the sf of John Campbell's team, which affected to write hard-headed nonsense stuff—ie, left-hemisphere-oriented. But a true reaction is to hold the middle position and balance both sides, scientific and fantastic.

One element lacking in Delany is (conscious) humour, the dweller in that middle position, the laughing interpreter of yin to yang. You couldn't write *Dhalgren* if you had a sense of humour. Perhaps George would say the same of *Triton*.

(Maybe the dual-hemisphere theory of the brain is wrong or—as I suspect—too simple; but it comes in usefully here as an illustration.)

Through Delany, we see one of the central difficulties facing sf—by which I suppose I mean critics like you lot and writers like me. Now that sf has become so commercialised, pressure is on to produce the goods, goods that are completely mind-croggling yet don't challenge one's basic sense of security. The universe must always be threatened, never destroyed; chaps can get killed—the more the merrier—but they mustn't grow older and have arthritis.

One way of doing this to to go right-hemispherical. There's little knowledge of death in the right hemisphere—the left is where the pyramids and the ICBMs come from. Hence the wholesale rejection of organisation, science, and rationality in present-day

science fiction; a seductive example is a tv cartoon my children watch on Saturdays, called *The Space Sentinels*, I believe. In the right hemisphere, anything can happen as in a dream. You can have forty-two sexes. And if you doll it up enough with references to (I'm quoting George again) *Phaedra*, *La Vida Es Sueno*, and *The Tyrant*, your public will applaud. Because they can indulge in wish-dreams and claim it's literature.

A time may come when one actually has to have the left hemisphere of the brain surgically removed in order to understand science fiction at all.

PS: All the above I wrote yesterday. I read it through today and have second thoughts. They are the old familiar second thoughts which have me increasingly of recent years throw away criticisms of other writers. Why should I adversely criticise Delany? He must have trouble enough.

Your readers will have various answers to that question. Here in my study, one motto hangs among the paintings by Tiepolo, Holman Hunt, Gaughin, and Anna Kavan (a touch of local colour for you, Bruce); Harry gave me the motto after one of his Mexican trips. It reads: 'Grant That I May Not Criticise My Neighbour Until I Have Walked a Mile In His Mocassins'. I look at it most days.

It is quite easy to become a writer, and many of us feel that that's the best job in the world; it is a lot less easy to continue to be a writer, year after year. One should, with experience and the enlargement of one's thought, not to mention a firmer half-nelson on grammar, become a better writer with age. That doesn't always happen. Nor does writing actually become easier when you get better. We know how Flaubert and Conrad prostrated themselves after a whole day's wrestling over one sentence. Or an unfeeling review can upset you badly. You may not believe this, but I once read part of a review of someone else's novel by Spider Robinson in *Galaxy*, in which the tone was so low that a paragraph began with the gibberish, 'Lemme 'splain'. I slammed the magazine shut, but the damage was done and I was unable to write for a month; the pain just paralysed me. I felt that it was not worth writing sf when standards were so poor.

Knowing my own problems, why should I add to Chip Delany's? What his mocassins feel like, I dread to think. The answer is that one criticises from a position of hope, hope. You

**Aldiss:** 'BOTH ENDS OF THE SF SPECTRUM ARE SICK THESE DAYS—THE PAPER GALAXIES AND THE PLASTIC EPIPHANIES. IT IS NOT JUST DELANY BUT SCIENCE FICTION AS A WHOLE WHICH HAS FALLEN VICTIM OF GREAT APPLAUSE.'

hope you might help the guy, that by pointing out error he might be able to put his house in order, particularly when the intelligence is of Delany's kind.

Also, you hope you may give encouragement to people who feel like you that both ends of the sf spectrum are sick these days—the paper galaxies and the plastic epiphanies. It is not just Delany but science fiction as a whole which has fallen Victim of Great Applause. It remains worth pointing that out.

(2 May 1980)

Which brings us back to the beginning of this column. I take it, however, that George did not write his Delany article so much for Delany himself (especially as I have not had a reliable address for Delany for eleven years) as for Delany's devoted admirers. Not even for them, since they are not likely to change their minds, but just for readers like ourselves who just want something decent to read in the sf line once in a while. As you point out, there's no way of gaining such information from the likes of Spider Robinson. So it is always bracing to read one of George's pieces. The head is cleared, the mental sinuses unblocked; one sniffs at the sf product—and goes gaaaargh! most of the time.

Since I've never heard rumours of a crusade by Isaac Asimov against New Wavers, I had no prejudice against him when I read *In Memory Yet Green*. I've heard him orate, and even held a brief conversation with him (at Torcon in 1973), and both experiences reinforced my opinion that he is a pleasant character. The autobiography was enjoyable for the reasons I gave in *SFC 58*. I enjoyed meeting Fred Pohl as well, and expected more from his autobiography. But I would expect a lot more from the autobiography of, say, a Brian Aldiss or J G Ballard, than I gained from either Asimov's or Pohl's. Some sense of the whole world, and not just the small world which surrounds the ego on its daily travels. I point to Emlyn Williams' autobiography, *George*, for an example of an autobiography filled with poetry, wit, anecdote, and a sense of Life quivering just beyond reaching

fingertips. By contrast, those sf writers who have ventured into autobiography so far give the impression that they don't really like many people outside the science fiction world, and are not too interested in the mainstream of life. Maybe that's not the impression they wished to give; it's there, though.

**CY CHAUVIN**  
(again)

George Turner explains why I can't read Delany. I've always considered it a personal failing before, a sort of blind spot; I can't read Milton either. Delany's critical commentary has always made him seem respectable, and his intentions seem to be at odds with those writers who say they write for 'beer money'. That's why I think it is wrong for George to assume Delany is writing for popularity and high sales: the applause seems an accident.

(8 February 1980)

**ANGUS TAYLOR**  
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Victoria, British Columbia V8R 2S8,  
Canada

I haven't read *Triton*, and I'm not likely to, considering reports such as that of George Turner. I've always found Delany's stuff difficult to read, and not, I think, because I'm particularly stupid. I've talked in other places of the temptation the science fiction form offers for writers willing or eager to abandon the socio-historical perspective and indulge in escapism. Turner's review leads me to think that this is just what Delany is guilty of here. One cannot take a serious speculative look at sexuality by supposing that people can change gender at the drop of a hat. A society in which people could change from male to female or vice versa would not contain any men or women at all. A body is not a kind of mask or change of clothing that the ego puts on and takes off; to suppose it is implies a radically dualistic way of thinking (body/soul). Most science fiction writers just can't get it through their heads that both nature and society have a materiality to them and a historical 'momentum', and that people's feelings, desires, ideas are part

of this larger whole. People can change the world, but only in context. George Turner recognises this when he calls Delany's Tritonian culture 'a wish-dream, a projection of late-adolescent frustrations collected into a paradisaal solution'. Good for Turner. Let's have more of this no-nonsense type of criticism—though as he suggests, writers are not likely to change as long as readers keep lapping up what they write.

(5 April 1980)

Note the change of address (latest to hand) for Angus, back in Canada after some years in the Netherlands.

Some people really *are* Delany fans:

**JERRY KAUFMAN**  
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Seattle, Washington 98103,  
USA

The main thing in *SFC 58* is George Turner's review of *Triton*. I have seldom . . . never . . . seen Turner go so wrong on a book before.

Leaving aside all the complaints Turner has about style and scientific flim-flam (style is arguable and I thought the science a *clever* bit of flim-flam), let me go to his major misreading of the book: '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.'

Delany has spent hundreds of pages to this point of building a picture of a man who is a male chauvinist and who has very set ideas on what a woman should be, how she should act, and who has had a sex change to put these set ideas into action as his own ideal woman. And Turner thinks that, when this character acts out her ideas on the subject, she suddenly represents Delany's ideas of what women are.

Now, does a misunderstanding that

Discussed on this page:

## WHERE LATE THE SWEET BIRDS SANG

by Kate Wilhelm

(Harper & Row. 1976. 251 pp.  
\$US7.95.)

basic invalidate the rest of the essay? Like where Turner invents his own categories and then makes them Delany's and damns them? Or where he misunderstands 'logical perversion' to mean 'a perversion that is logical' (although I thought it was evident that Delany means 'a perversion of logic')? Or where he attacks Delany's 'forty or fifty basic sexes' by using this statement: '... sex is a physical manifestation, divided into male and female, two sexes only...' and does not realise he's referring to gender? (Two genders, many sexes seems to be the rule governing speech in feminist circles; probably this has not spread farther than those circles. In fact, I just consulted a dictionary, and the distinction doesn't exist there. It is a wholly new one, that gender refers to male and female, while sex refers to preference. Which makes this at the moment a dubious point, but I think Delany's use of it, and use by women around this country, will make it a real distinction soon. And, I think, a useful one.)

You will have gathered that I like Delany a great deal. Right. One parting shot: Delany was a victim of great applause up to about 1971. Very little of *that* in the years between *Nova* and very little since *Dhalgren* was published. So I doubt *Triton* is the way it is because *Babel-17* was widely loved. Delany writes the books he wants to read, that no one else is writing. And that is why his books (whatever else one says) are like nothing else in sf.

But no Delany fan, including you, Jerry, has been able to explain to me

why he or she likes the later books—at least, not in coherent critical language which actually conveys what is in the books. All the enthusiasts seem to say is: welcome to Delany's private language, which only we understand. Not good enough; I don't feel welcomed.

I enjoyed *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* and understood why it received the Nebula and Hugo. It is right in the tradition of *Slan* and *Rebirth* and many other books. In these books fans (and, one presumes, many readers who never made the transition to fandom) can relive their own lives, their own fantasied lives. Fans are slans, remember? Fans are some kind of mutants, who live practically in another world, who feel themselves bright, self-sufficient and the master of much knowledge. They are also (at least in their own imaginations) hated, feared, and thoroughly misunderstood. Just like the hero of the last section of *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*. Though the picture of a society based on cloning may be very well thought out and interesting, the emotional heart of the book is the simple substitution of an 'individual' or a 'mutant' for a bright adolescent who likes to read more, much more than his or her parents and peers can understand.

This is what I call the 'mutant fantasy'. What really works in the books is not simply the recognition of the similarity, but the final success of the mutant. The reader doesn't just recognise him/herself; the reader is shown that he/she can *overcome* the 'normals' who run things. They are dim and can be outwitted, or our *real* parents (remember: those adults we lived with *couldn't* be) will come and rescue us.

I was actually a little disappointed in *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* because I thought I recognised the mutant fantasy as a juvenile one,



almost one that had been calculated to be a favourite in awards: artistic enough for the Nebula, and that fantasy content for the Hugo. Anybody's guess, and probably more Machiavellian than is necessary. (Eli Cohen has told me time and again: stupidity and chance will explain more than conspiratorial and Machiavellian theories. Though I doubt stupidity plays a part in any discussion of Wilhelm.)

(19 June 1980)

I wouldn't blame Kate Wilhelm at all. She's a marvellous writer... most of the time. I thought *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* was her one inexplicable lapse in quality. But that was the book the fans liked. Another mark against 'the fans' (who, of course, are never *us*, the fans who read *SFC*).

But your letter explained much that puzzled me about why fans liked the book so much. I took the clones to be simply a substitution for The Socialist Conspiracy or whatever else Wilhelm thought might take over the world. But that readers would recognise in the dreaded clone society a picture of their own, present surroundings is not something which had occurred to me. On the basis of evidence like this, I would think that American fans see the world differently from the way we do here—until I get to meet American fans again. Then we all speak the same language.

At any rate, the point made by Mark Mumper in *SFC 58* stands: that Wilhelm makes little attempt to get inside the clone society and shows why its structure seems right to them. My feeling is that *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* merely attacks the clone society, over and over again, in a hysterical tone which makes the book unattractive to read.

Finally this column wends its way back to where it began: Ursula Le Guin's comments about Chris Priest's 'Outside the Whale' ('Outside the Guppy') in *S F Commentary 59*:

**ALEXANDER D. WALLACE**  
(again)

Christopher Priest seems to have convinced himself that the holistic SFWA is a bad thing. Also, that no amelioration is possible from within. By implication then, non-members of SFWA should gird up their loins, beat their pruning hooks into swords, and follow him in an attack to purge this corruption. For myself, I am not one to

## Wallace: 'AN ACTIVITY WHICH PRIEST MIGHT ORGANISE... A GROUP TO BE KNOWN AS FAC, FANS AGAINST CRUD.'

scream at the lightning and bellow at the thunder. The existence or non-existence of SFWA are of equal merit to me.

A thing to which Priest barely adverted, and which, it seems to me, is of basic and fundamental importance to *S F Commentary* is the *quality and quantity of science fiction and fantasy*. I confess to much astonishment that *SFC* should have devoted so many pages to and attributed such importance to peripherals. However astute this phrase may appear, the periphery is not the cutting edge. *Sf&f* is composed by individuals, not by groups of fans meeting in conventions. It is a vast misconception, or so I judge, that fandom has any important effect on *sf&f*. There is a confusion of input with output, of cause with effect. Priest's crusade against SFWA is of no more importance than a tsunami in a thimble. No doubt but that it will generate an entertaining argle-bargle. The Great of the Land will hurl letter-bombs and the Less Great will take sides.

It is unfortunate that British fans (or any fans) were miffed at Seacon. Does Britain include Scotland, Ulster, and Wales? Australia? French Canada? Do they order these things better in England?

I take the liberty of suggesting an activity which Priest might organise. This would centre on a group to be known as FAC, Fans Against Crud. The target of this body would be publishers who issue crud, and also those who continually reprint from the dismal and musty past. The annual irruption of crud might be diminished and there might be an increase in quality. Big is not always better.

(4 July 1980)

Chris's article has stirred no 'argle-bargle' so far, if only because it appeared in two other places, *Vector* (which was agreed between Chris and me when I ran the article) and *Science Fiction Review* (which was not). No doubt most letters of comment will go to either of those two publications.

I always thought that *SFC* and its readers formed a Fans Against Crud

society among themselves. And I thought Chris's article was *all* implicitly about this very matter: that collectively SFWA rewards crud produced by members and rejects writers with something more on their minds than the latest Nebula tally. When the Nebulas began, I thought: great! the writers will give their award to decent books. (I had just read *The Hugo Winners* and decided that very few Hugos went to good stories or books.) But no: the writers vote much the same way as the fans. Chris's article is a good argument for scrapping all awards in the field.

**FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER**  
Wien, Austria

No doubt Christopher Priest is serious about writing, but I am afraid that his seriousness is not tempered by any great understanding, and certainly not by a sense of humour—as will be obvious to anybody who has read his past pontifications about professionalism. Now who needs any edifications about 'professionalism', and who would write such things except to impress the little fans who are panting to become *sf* hacks themselves?

I for one found all that SFWA business rather amusing, and I think it was nice of the SFWA to give Lem some free publicity, and at its own expense at that. As a professional organisation, the SFWA is just as impotent as are its individual members as creators, and it is of no interest to us what the SFWA does or doesn't do. But obviously *sf* writers find it hard to understand that someone might not care about their awards and honours and all that other silliness.

I see nothing wrong if writers want to charge convention committees for their services; after all, if you want to go looking at the apes in the zoo, you also have to pay; so why not for seeing *sf* writers? And if an *sf* author wants the use of a room to have intercourse with her groupies, that is all right, for, contrary to what Christopher Priest believes, 'sf writers' are not so much serious writers but pop stars, and should be treated as such. Whatever is

## Rottensteiner: 'SF WRITERS ARE NOT SO MUCH SERIOUS WRITERS BUT POP STARS, AND SHOULD BE TREATED AS SUCH.'

# Rottensteiner: 'WHAT IS THE NEBULA, OTHER THAN THE "MISS WORLD" OF SF?'

being said about the respectability of sf, its reputed quality now is all so much hogwash: without their worshipful audiences, without their fans, sf writers would still be nothing, and what he laments are not excesses and exceptions, but the logical outgrowth of a largely uncritical fandom. The SFWA is only a symptom; to blame is the fandom from which it has sprung.

I am really astonished that Mr Priest seems to think that the people who vote for the Nebulas have to read all sf published during a given year. I have never heard that, to mention a comparable event, the people deciding about who is to become 'Miss World' are expected to goggle at all the beauties of the world before voting. What is the Nebula other than the 'Miss World' of sf? Besides, it would take a very dumb reader who has to read all the sf of the year word for word; in most cases a few pages will suffice to show that any further reading would be a waste of time. Besides, his arguments against the Nebulas apply to any other award as well, and I can see no difference in the outcome of any other sf award. Whether the Nebula Awards are juggled or not is irrelevant, and the problem is not SFWA but the corrupt taste of the sf audience (amateurish or professional): they will usually pick the wrong books. Unfortunately, you cannot even depend upon their bad taste, for once in a while they will make the mistake of choosing a good story.

I am also somewhat surprised that Christopher Priest should uphold Brian Aldiss as an example of professional integrity. I cannot see much difference between Brian Aldiss and any other member of SFWA. In fact, there are not many sf writers who have reminded their critics (as Aldiss has done in the case of Algis Budrys) that they have helped them as editors to some money, and therefore should be properly grateful. Mr Aldiss seems to consider his editing jobs as insurance against unfavourable criticism, and increasingly he attacks reviewers who do not like everything he writes (even Dick Lupoff, who as a rule likes Aldiss's work) as his 'enemies'. In his quarrel with Brian M Stableford over *Enemies of the System*, Stableford decidedly had the better argument. I have also seen no denials when Pete Weston reported a long time back that Brian Aldiss had sent out postcards to get votes for the 'Eurocon Award'.

These are of course all very inspiring and exemplary actions. Mr Aldiss strikes me as a man who will, if two fans band together to award him some prize, duly publicise this important event in the next edition of *Who's Who* and on the covers of his books (for do not awards look good on book covers?). So what has he got against the Nebulas? Of course, perhaps one shouldn't joke about such human frailties, for after all it means, unlike for we amateurs, hard cash for the authors, since the sf audience appears to be so immature as to need the allurements of any award, however dubious its value.

I regret that a lack of time prevents me from taking a greater part in this enormous entertainment that is sf and its environment.

Finally, congratulations to George Turner for his piece on Delany's *Triton*! Delany surely is *the* literate writer for all illiterates.

(29 August 1980)

I refuse to comment on any of the above, for fear of being caught in the crossfire. One comment: quite a few correspondents begin their letters these days by expressing nostalgia for the Good Old Days when Lem and Rottensteiner did battle with the many people who disagreed with them. This may be the final appearance for both of them. Sob! And these two Hugo-scorers probably did more than anyone else towards gaining *SFC*'s Hugo nominations.

## CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

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England

Thanks again for printing 'Outside the Whale'. I confess I disliked the headline you put above the title: it seemed to ascribe a 'newsiness' to the piece, as if it were a story in *Locus* or somewhere. My departure from SFWA must surely be one of the non-events of the decade, as news.

Well, Chris, you must allow for my compulsive tendencies towards sensationalism. You should be glad that Gary Mason was not the publisher of your article. He can build a whole magazine around a creative headline.

I was interested to see David Grigg quoting Cyril Connolly. Eminently

quotable, indeed. Large sections of *Enemies of Promise* ought to be printed in large type, and automatically sent to every science fiction writer with less than five years under his belt. It is quite extraordinary how one, in reading Connolly's book, can recognise contemporary sf writers (including oneself?).

George Turner continues to annoy me. I disliked the paternal tone of his review of *Transmutations*; on the evidence of *Beloved Son*, George himself has a lot of improving to do, and weary seniority is a hat he frequently tries on, but has yet to make fit. He was at the same milliners in a recent issue of *Australian SF News*, where in one place he was complaining that critics who raved about Delany had never explained to him what they were raving about, and in another place just five pages away he was doing *precisely* that in his review of Doris Lessing's *Shikasta*.

(24 April 1980)

Ah well, there go two *SFC* readers now... both Brian and George will be sending me stiff letters of the 'please take me off the mailing list' type. Or maybe they'll realise that not everybody praises them as highly as the *SFC* editor does. George expanded his review of *Shikasta* recently for John Foyster's *Chunder*. And George has given me permission to edit (even edit severely) a very long article of his which is in the files.

## Best of 1979

It was only when I was typing Elaine's column for this issue that I remembered that I had not yet written my annual survey of the 'Year's Best'. Oh well, said I, let's see if there is any room left in the issue for such dazzling decorations. Um—two pages left. Let's see how much I can fit in...

## Favourite Short Stories 1979

I've started with the short stories because I read many more books of short stories than novels during 1979, and because I liked the best short stories better than the best novels. If you see what I mean.

- 1 'Under the Garden' (Graham Greene) from *Strangeness*
- 2 'The Ghostly Rental' (Henry James) *Henry James: Stories of the Supernatural*
- 3 'The Great Good Place' (Henry James) *Henry James: Stories of the Supernatural*
- 4 'The Altar of the Dead' (Henry James) *Henry James: Stories of the Supernatural*
- 5 'The Holland of the Mind' (Pamela Zoline) *Strangeness*
- 6 'The Disguise' (Kim Stanley Robinson) *Orbit 19*
- 7 'The Friends of the Friends' (Henry James) *Henry James: Stories of the Supernatural*
- 8 'Compulsory Games' (Robert Aickman) *Whispers*

- 9 'Seven American Nights' (Gene Wolfe) *Orbit 20*
- 10 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' (James Tiptree Jr) *Aurora*
- 11 'Albert's Bellyful' (Francis Payne) *Transmutations*
- 12 'Aztecs' (Vonda McIntyre) *2076: The American Tricentennial*
- 13 'One Clay Foot' (Jack Wodhams) *Alien Worlds*
- 14 'The Paradigm' (Randal Flynn) *Transmutations*

The best book for the year was, as you can see from the list, *Henry James: Stories from the Supernatural*, edited by the ubiquitous Leon Edel. I borrowed it from Charles Taylor, and have never seen another copy of it. I would like to have it since, under the label of 'supernatural stories', it includes most of Henry James' best short pieces. I had already read (and included on previous years' Best Of lists) *The Turn of the Screw* and 'The Beast in the Jungle'. James writes ghost stories properly, by introducing an uneasy element into an otherwise secure environment. In some stories, such as the ones listed above, he tightens the tension effectively. This, plus the usual fine qualities of James' writing.

I've talked about 'Under the Garden' already in the '8 Point Universe' column later in this issue of *SFC*. *Strangeness* was the other outstanding book of the year. I would like to get hold of an edition of the complete short stories of Graham Greene, if anybody would like to sell me one. It seems out of print in ordinary book shops.

All the other stories are from science fiction original publication anthologies. Yes, I do mean to continue my survey of the anthologies. Yes, I am far behind in writing this survey, as I am far behind in all my other writing projects. Take this listing as recommendation enough until I have time to write descriptions of the stories. 'The Disguise' is the stand-out story among the newer pieces. I include 'One Clay Foot' despite George Turner's contempt for the story, and 'The Paradigm' despite Lee Harding's dislike of it.

#### Favourite Novels 1979

- 1 *The German Lesson*  
by Siegfried Lenz (first published 1968; published by Macdonald; 471 pages)
- 2 *An Exemplary Life*  
Siegfried Lenz (1973; Secker and Warburg; 423 pp.)
- 3 *Lark Rise to Candleford*  
Flora Thompson (1945; Penguin Modern Classics 14 003672; 537 pp.)
- 4 *The Jersey Shore*  
William Mayne (1973; Puffin 14 030823; 143 pp.)
- 5 *A Woman of the Future*  
David Ireland (1979; Allen Lane; 351 pp.)
- 6 *On Wings of Song*  
Thomas M Disch (1979; Gollancz; 315 pp.)
- 7 *Pages from a Cold Island*  
Frederick Exley (1975; Random House; 274 pp.)
- 8 *Juniper Time*  
Kate Wilhelm (1979; Harper and Row; 280 pp.)
- 9 *The Brightfount Diaries*  
Brian Aldiss (1956; Rempsey; 200 pp.)
- 10 *Cat and Mouse*  
Gunter Grass (1961; Secker and Warburg; 191 pp.)

The two novels by Siegfried Lenz stand out far above the other books on the list.

I cannot quote passages from *The German Lesson* because I had to give back the book after I borrowed it. Anyone who can find me a copy, even at an outrageous price, would earn my undying gratitude. *The German Lesson* is one of the books where the first-person story-teller is the villain. The hero is a painter, living on the northern edge of Germany, who doggedly resists the Nazi regime's proscription of his art. The story-teller, a boy of the district, worships the painter, but somehow gets his own ideas of art and loyalty mixed up in his head. For most of the novel, this confusion of categories comes to us in glorious, definite, 'painterly' prose. Only later, as the boy writes his life story, do we realise how much he hides.

*An Exemplary Life* is a bleaker affair, set in a modern, minor German city, where a group of public-spirited citizens meet, Musil-like, to define their idea of the 'exemplary citizen'. Unfortunately for the main character, he is too caught up in the complications of his ordinary life to pay full attention to the quest, and making a judgment becomes too much for him. *An Exemplary Life* contains, as an aside, the only description I have seen of a rock concert described by an artist, not a publicist.

*Lark Rise to Candleford* is a memoir by Flora Thompson disguised as a novel. It's not really a novel at all, but a description of the full range of life in an English farming village in the 1880s. Life has not changed for several hundred years—but the result is not entirely the idyll imagined by sentimentalists. Flora cannot help hiding her bitterness at the difficulties faced by her family in getting by on a few shillings a week. Life includes the good country virtues, but the challenge of surviving is just as important. Flora escapes at the end, when village life is already beginning to disintegrate. The book is notable for its meticulousness of detail.

It's difficult to find adequate words to praise William Mayne's writing. Supple, suggestive, mythic, penetrating... enough of such clichés. Read *The Jersey Shore* if you can get hold of it. I remember it best as a ghost story in which the ghosts are those summoned by an old man in telling his life's story to his grandson. The ghosts take on substance, though, and eventually the boy must find a way to exorcise them in the pattern of his adult life. The grudging communication between the two of them is rendered wonderfully.

I think I've said quite a bit already about *A Woman of the Future* and *On Wings of Song* in this issue. I have written a long review of Disch's book... but then I open up *Foundation 19* (arrived yesterday) and find a splendid review by John Clute. Go and read that and maybe I won't inflict my own feeble efforts on you.

*Pages from a Cold Island* comes from a self-confessed madman whose prose rivals that of Stanley Elkin for elegance, wit, and verve. Exley sets out to learn the secrets of Edmund Wilson from his daughter; somehow he never quite succeeds in this aim, but the search itself has some great moments.

One of these days I will get around to writing my long review of *Juniper Time*. Kate Wilhelm has staked out for herself a whole territory of literary intuitions; the territory has for its borders such things as Indian legends, the American landscape, and the psychological sinews with which we can resist the mechanical and the trivial in modern life. *Juniper Time* roams a fair way around this territory. America dries

up, but Wilhelm's heroine travels back to the American North-West, now almost deserted. She learns about herself and her land under the tuition of the Indians who remain. She also has some trouble from a paranoid American government.

Thanks to Keith Curtis for finding me a copy of *The Brightfount Diaries*: Brian Aldiss' first novel. Reading *The Brightfount Diaries* demonstrates that a good writer is a good writer from the start. It is almost startling to find that this book, written originally as articles in the mid-1950s, has all the geniality, wit, complexity, and (for lack of a better word) comprehensiveness of many of the works of the later Aldiss. The bookseller's assistant, who is the main character, takes life fairly much as it comes, but he has a quick eye for the difficulties of the people who work with him, and a delight in the curious byways of the bookshop itself. He also finds that some potential girlfriends are better avoided. To read Aldiss in this ebullient mood is to learn to enjoy life all over again.

*Cat and Mouse* has a plot with a guiding notion much like that of *The German Lesson*, ie, that the main character turns out to be the villain, who proves to be deadly to his great friend, the hero of the book. Also set in Germany when ordinary people were getting used to the fact that the Nazis were not just another political group in power. Mainly admirable for its conciseness, *Cat and Mouse* has little of the sumptuous blend of fantasy, documentary, and metaphor which we find in Grass' *The Tin Drum*.

#### Notable Non-Fiction 1979

Not in any particular order:

**Fiction and the Figures of Life**, by William Gass (1972; Vintage V771; 288 pp.); **In Memory Yet Green**, by Isaac Asimov (1979; Doubleday; 715 pp.); **Selected Writings**, by William Hazlitt (1970; Penguin English Library 14 043050; 491 pp.); **Myself When Young**, by Henry Handel Richardson (1948; Heinemann; 214 pp.); **Fiction and the Reading Public**, by Q D Leavis (1932; Penguin/Peregrine 14 055145; 263 pp.); **Language of the Night**, by Ursula K Le Guin, edited by Susan Wood (1979; Putnam; 270 pp.).

I won't say much about these—firstly, because I am running out of room, and secondly, because I would like to discuss some of them in greater detail in future 'IMBTTF' columns. Some I have talked about already: *In Memory Yet Green* (*SFC* 58) and *Language of the Night* (*SFC* 59). Some would require half an issue to discuss properly: *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (separate but related essays on a number of literary topics) and *Fiction and the Reading Public* (which seeks to show that popular taste has declined steadily since the eighteenth century, and tries to do this by showing just what good popular writing is; admirable in ambition, but some failures in execution). Much that Hazlitt says in his lively essays struck me as true of the second half of the 1970s in Australia. England in the 1830s, when most of the essays were written, was back-peddalling away from hints of revolution in Europe and civil unrest at home. Hazlitt remained a revolutionary while even people like Wordsworth and Coleridge were slipping into disdainful middle age. Hazlitt's denunciation of *The Times* of his era, in particular, could read as a denunciation of *The National Times* today. Vivid, pithy, epigrammatic Hazlitt: I wish I could write half so well.

## Favourite Films 1979

- 1 **Black Orpheus**  
directed by Marcel Camus
- 2 **A Wedding**  
Robert Altman
- 3 **Apocalypse Now**  
Francis Ford Coppola
- 4 **Strangers on a Train**  
Alfred Hitchcock
- 5 **The American Friend**  
Wim Wenders
- 6 **Mahler**  
Ken Russell
- 7 **Chimes at Midnight**  
Orson Welles
- 8 **Assault on Precinct 13**  
John Carpenter

I was a bit surprised to find that I had a cinema list at all for 1979. We don't 'go to the pictures' very often these days; prefer to sit at home and try to read some of the million and one books which accumulate on the urgent shelf. But...

Why review *Black Orpheus*? The world must be divided between those people who have seen it and those who haven't. Those who haven't are under the poverty line. Even if you go to see it with high expectations, as I did, you cannot be prepared for the liveliness of the film. Of course there is the dreary old Orpheus myth (although improved a bit here because the characters know they are acting out a myth, but can do nothing to stop themselves). But the Orpheus of the legend was able to make great music; in the modern version the whole film *is* great music, an endless swirl of Brazilian music, glistening bodies, flaring colours and shapes. But the people are so likable that the story remains effective, so that the tragedy hits all over again. That is a remarkable achievement.

*Black Orpheus* is of course very much better than *A Wedding*, but the spirit of the greater film is there in Altman's film. Some viewers will be astonished that I place *A Wedding* before *Apocalypse Now*. I'm astonished too. Of course *Apocalypse Now* is The Great American Film of the seventies, showing more about the American endeavour during the sixties than perhaps one would ever want to know. (It's probably about everyone's destiny during the eighties and nineties as well.) But *A Wedding* is a better piece of art. There is nothing in Coppola's film, for instance, as moving as the brief moment when the doped mother of the groom comes close to realising just what and who she is. There are few moments in film as delightful as the final stages of the wedding, when the shocks and revelations are all over, and a few people are left, quietly smoking a joint. The technical achievement of *A Wedding*, though, is to place together two large families in a house, mix them together, yet somehow let you know by the end of the film the identity and character of each one. I can't think of anything else like it, except perhaps some of Renoir's sunniest films.

Not that I am taking anything away from the achievement of *Apocalypse Now*. It's just that a pilgrimage film is a bit easier to make than a true social comedy. Few reviewers share my opinions about *Apocalypse Now* (except a recent review in *Sight and Sound*). To me, the jungle seems like the major character in the film. It has already swallowed up and transformed the renegade warrior. It does the same to Captain Willard. This helps to explain Coppola's indecision about an appropriate ending of the film: all the old assumptions had gone,

so almost any ending would have been 'right'. One could almost say that Willard has been through the apocalypse already by the time he reaches his destination. Was Coppola supporting the view that the Vietnam War should have been prosecuted more rigorously? Possibly. He did show fairly clearly that America fought the war because of certain ideas about the world which it held. These ideas were superimposed on the landscape, damaging and scarring that landscape terribly, but not conquering it. To encounter the landscape without protection from all the foo-ra-ra (Playboy bunnies, etc) was to forget about the war and become involved in something else. Willard's journey acts as anti-propaganda, a clearing of the eyes. (I forgot to say that the style of the film is impeccable; remarkable photography towards the end in particular.)

Some people were astonished when I said that I had not seen *Black Orpheus* until 1979. It's also astonishing that I had not seen *Strangers on a Train*. But it has not been at a cinema for many years, and is repeated only on television. We acquired a tv set in late 1979 (black and white; and it was given to us). Occasionally the tv channels show good old movies, which is about all I watch. *Strangers on a Train* was worth waiting for. Remarkable acting performances, some clever trickery, and a relentless pursuit of that quality which gives life to all of Hitchcock's best films: the intrusion of the macabre into an ordinary, even complacent middle-class world. The famous merry-go-round scene is too long and exaggerated. That's the only fault I can think of.

*The American Friend* was also based on a Patricia Highsmith novel; I really mean to read everything of hers which is in print. Ripley is no hero, and Dennis Hopper does a fine job of making him even more amoral than Highsmith intended. Bruno Ganz is the hounded family man. Still, it is not the acting which is so important, but the relentless process by which the grey criminal world grinds down all those involved with it. Not comfortable viewing at all.

Not everybody likes Ken Russell's extravaganzas, but I don't see how anybody who loves the cinema can fail to be delighted by *Mahler*. Not so much that it is a great crazy whirl, with Mahler's life wildly misrepresented, but that it is a very beautiful film—one memorable image after another. The images represent Mahler's music, rather than his life. Robert Powell is fine to watch. The script is very funny.

*Chimes at Midnight* is hardly Orson Welles' greatest film, but I am glad that I saw it at last. I remember two things in particular: not understanding a word Falstaff (Orson Welles) spoke during the entire film, and understanding very well the fineness of John Gielgud's performance as the dying king. The black-and-white photography is as striking as in any other Welles' film, which is why I would watch it with the sound turned off if ever it came to television.

*Sight and Sound* overpraised *Assault on Precinct 13*, I suspect, and Colin Bennett in *The Age* took it so solemnly that he condemned it. As many reviewers have noted, *Assault on Precinct 13* is an elaborate film joke—setting a Western in the middle of a Los Angeles suburb. 'The Indians' become a very nasty gang of thugs; 'the fortress' becomes a nearly abandoned police station with a skeleton staff for one last night. But the action struck me as fairly savage, simply because formulaised actions have been placed in the unfamiliar setting. I was quite

relieved that *somebody* was left alive at the end.

## Real-Life World

To judge from the rest of the issue, you would think that Elaine and I had been doing nothing during the last few months except read books and see films. Not so. I see the films and usually Elaine doesn't bother.

We've been earning the money to pay for publishing this issue of *SFC*. This hasn't given any time for actual production work. Recently there was a lull in the workload, so here's a magazine. If too many come out too quickly, we'll be broke and won't produce any more anyway.

We attended A-Con 8 in Adelaide last May, and Unicon 6 at Easter. I am supposed to write a report on A-Con 8 for John Foyster's *Chunder!* so I can't say too much here. Enough to say that Adelaide fans know how to hold a relaxed convention. About sixty fans spread themselves throughout the most congenial hotel which has ever hosted an Australian convention—the staff even left the place altogether from Sunday lunchtime until Monday morning, so we had the king-size super room party on Sunday night. Marc Ortlieb and the rest of the committee did a very good job of organising the whole affair. Marc also put up with us after the convention. Allan Bray ferried us around Adelaide before the convention. The real star of any Adelaide convention is Adelaide—if you can afford the time to see some of it and the surrounding South Australian countryside. We took a bus trip south of Adelaide on one day (and visited Hardy's winery). On another day we saw Adelaide University (thanks for the guidance, Roman). We sampled some restaurants. We ate and drank too much for that week, and so I put on half a stone weight. Melbourne looked a bit cluttered and down at heel when we arrived back, but we were glad to be home with the tribe of cats. Still, if there was any of our type of work in Adelaide... but there isn't, which is why John and Sally Bangsund had to emigrate to Melbourne.

Elaine did not attend Unicon, and I had time to visit for only two days. Still, I enjoyed meeting Gay and Joe Haldeman very much, and talked with some Sydney and New Zealand fans whose names but not faces I knew beforehand. Also I met Julia and Roy from Perth for the first time, an acquaintanceship which was improved during A-Con. (Sorry I didn't have the money to go to Swancon.)

Much of our peripheral activity includes saying 'Yes, Carey' and 'No, Carey' and finding ways to keep Norstrilia Press on the road (I hope I will have room somewhere in this issue for an advertisement for NP... yes, Carey). Actually, Carey Handfield is an amazingly efficient organiser. Only because of his efforts have we been able to publish this year two books, with one more to come soon. Those published so far are *Where Pussywillows Late in the Catyard Bloomed*—poems by Roger Zelazny, paperback \$5, hardback \$10; and *The Dreaming Dragons*—a novel by Damien Broderick; \$12.95. Our third book is one of the best books about sf to be published anywhere in recent years: *The Stellar Gauge*, edited by Michael Tolley and Kirpal Singh, including such essayists as Aldiss, Sladek, Priest, Turner, Ketterer, and Lake, on such authors as Disch, Blish, Ballard, Pohl, Wells, Clarke, Bester, Dick, etc. Probably \$15.

We'll be back soon (keep those subscriptions and contributions rolling in).

Final words typeset 10 October 1980

Elaine Cochran:

## SINS OF MY OLD AGE (2)

1979 having ended, it's time for the 'Best Of' lists. Last year, as you will realise if you have read the last few issues of *SFC*, was rather interrupted—with getting married, moving house, quitting my rotten job, etc. One result is that I now have a garden to play with, and time to play with it. Another is that during 1979 I bought and read far fewer books than in 1978, a total of 147 books bought and 82 read.

The reduction in the number of books bought is by no means a reflection of greater self-restraint. I still have none. Rather it is a result of the closure of a very good book shop, Nord Vest, which had been just around the corner from the Paradiso Cafe in Carlton, where we have our Wednesday night gatherings. There is still a good bookshop left in Carlton: Readings, in which I find plenty to tempt me. But in Nord Vest I would just go along the shelves picking off the books I didn't have already, and know they would be good. Readings has much that does not interest me; by cultivating my laziness, I can refrain from picking over the shelves.

My 'Best Of' list will no doubt sound very like some of Bruce's lists for previous years, but that is the hazard/advantage of sharing a collection with someone of very similar tastes. Not that our tastes are identical. Far from it. I've thoroughly disliked some of his favourites, but if he recommends a book eventually I get around to reading it. Here's my list:

- 1 *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Marquez)
  - 2 *L'Assommoir* (Zola)
  - 3 *To a Dubious Salvation* (Leroux)
  - 4 *Under the Volcano* (Lowry)
  - 5 *Frankenstein* (Shelley)
  - 6 *The Way of All Flesh* (Butler)
  - 7 *The Marquise of O* (Kleist)
  - 8 *Lavengro* (Borrow)
  - 9 *The Story of an African Farm* (Schreiner)
  - 10 *The Marble Cliffs* (Juenger)
- Also-rans are: *Don't Point That Thing*

*at Me* (Bonfiglioli); *The Cyberiad* (Lem); *Hallucinations* (Arenas); *The Female Man* (Russ); *Hello Summer Goodbye* (Coney); *The Dick Gibson Show* (Elkin); *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (McCullers).

Two of these don't belong on a Best Novels list. *To a Dubious Salvation* is really three linked novellas, which Penguin, for reasons best known to themselves, have published in the order 1, 3, 2. This is the order of their original appearance in Afrikaans, but is definitely not their logical sequence. *The Marquise of O* is a collection of eight independent short stories, each very good in its own right, but which add up to an obsessive despair that is quite shattering. Even those stories with happy endings are extremely depressing.

Bruce has probably raved about *One Hundred Years of Solitude* plenty of times already, so I'll only say that it is worth reading. Also, our local library has it in Turkish translation, so it is not only we English-language readers of translated Spanish-American who like it.

*The Way of All Flesh* and *Lavengro* disturb me somewhat. I tend to think of myself as religiously indifferent (as opposed to tolerant) and it worries me not a little that I can really enjoy a book that is in part, or, in the case of *Lavengro*, substantially, a diatribe against Catholicism. It reassures me not at all that Catholics I know have enjoyed both books immensely. Their prejudices are not being tested.

Another Best Book for 1979 is *The Tyranny of Distance* by Geoffrey Blainey. This appeared just too late to affect what I was taught at school, and is the first Australian History I have read that makes sense. There are probably others I could have read, but Australian history was killed so dead at school that I hadn't bothered until now. A few sensible suggestions and explanations make quite a difference.

Nothing much to say about the others unless I rave at great length. I

recommend all of them.

### Recipe Time Again

I had a few favourable comments on the recipe last time, so this time I'm giving something useful. When I was studying chemistry there was a PhD student named Randy Flynn in the same laboratory (do not confuse with Randal Flynn, writer) who was always being pestered by us beginners for advice and assistance. One extremely valuable contribution he gave was Randy's Reagent, which is guaranteed to clean practically anything. He says he learnt to make it in New Zealand, using the waste from chromatography columns, but we believe he invented it himself and was just being modest.

### Randy's Reagent

Take one empty winchester, not necessarily clean, add Teepol or other laboratory detergent generously, and water, to make about one quarter full. Add chloroform, ether, pet. ether, ethyl acetate, and any other spare solvent that is fairly volatile but not miscible with water, until the bottle is about two thirds full. Shake vigorously until a thick white emulsion is formed, taking care to release the pressure. Any glassware soaked in this mixture will come out sparkling clean (I'm talking about an organic lab, but it would probably complex metals) better than with chromic acid or ordinary detergent.

The mixture can be recycled indefinitely, as you top up the solvents as necessary, provided no acetone, alcohol, dioxane, etc, have been added to break the emulsion. Rubber gloves are essential—even they dissolve after a while—and the fumes can get a bit much, but it's easier to handle than chromic acid and a darn sight safer than ethanol/nitric acid. Doesn't leave nasty paramagnetics around to muck up your nmr, either.

A word of warning: the caps of nmr tubes, plastic refractive index dishes, biros, etc, all dissolve rapidly on contact.

## THE OFF-SEASON

I suspect that 1978, from which Terry Carr's latest *Best Science Fiction of the Year* was winnowed, was one of those years that might without much loss have been ploughed under. It's possible that Terry had a critical lapse, but I don't believe it; I prefer to think that he had a contract to fill and only a dispiriting load of old-hattery with which to fill it, and that he regards the

Harlan Ellison's 'Count the Clock that Tells the Time' is one of his better stories, but badly overwritten with that relentless emotive drive which so

'Death Therapy', by James Patrick Kelly, is as nasty a tale as you'll meet in a week of flipping through the magazines, well written and blessed with characterisation beyond the call of magazine duty. It's a nice little shocker that doesn't pretend to be anything else and rounds off the book

both neatly and gaudily.

So: Four stories that simply are not good enough; six average yarns, all more or less flawed; only two really good. For me the nicest thing about the book is that the best story in it is by a writer who has never had the recognition he deserves and the second best by a newcomer with only one other published story to his credit.

I like to see new writers wiping the grins off the faces of the old, but where are all those up-and-comings whose previously unknown names decorate the covers of *Galileo* and *F&SF* and *IASFM*? With the exception of Schenck they flicker pretty dimly when the counting starts. And where are the stars of yesteryear? Some are here, also flickering faintly, except Disch, who sheds a glow on whatever he touches. (The others are writing quick, second-rate novels to cash in on the sf publishing boom.)

Yes, I'm sure 1978 was a poor year for short stories; Terry could never have been that badly at fault.

## DELIGHTING IN THE MUNDANE

Sneja Gunew reviews

*Floating Worlds*

by Cecilia Holland

(Gollancz; 1976; 465 pages;

4 pounds 95/\$A13.15;

Pocket Books 83147.X; 1979;

535 pages; \$2.95)

I enjoyed this book very much. Since it is partly built around an anarchist Earth, I cannot help but invite comparisons with Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, but the viewpoint and treatment are utterly opposed. Holland's anarchist society is in the last stages of cynical self-destruction, a situation where the price of individual freedom is a subsistence standard of living—all of the world living at Third World level.

Le Guin's anarchist society has merely reached a level of re-appraisal, which is quite optimistic. Holland's anarchism is optimistic only at a very limited individual level, proving the popularly held truism that an anarchist society is a contradiction in terms.

About the centre of the book there is an encounter between the protagonist, Paula Mendoza, and the embodiment of judicial, abstracted impartiality, We-wei, judge of the Universal Court:

On the wall behind him were three or four Japanese woodcuts of women bathing and combing their hair. The little yellow judge sat down behind his desk. 'I'll warn you, Mendoza, the past two days' experience has not inclined me toward your people.'

'Don't blame us for the ambush at the Committee office.' She nodded at the woodcuts. 'Those are beautiful. Are they originals?' The black and white studies were of the style called the 'floating world', delighting in the mundane.

The passage is a key to the book's overall method, in that it deals with inter-global and interracial clashes, but from the perspective of the mundane, specifically, the genuinely realised individual consciousness. The fight for freedom, the rise and fall of empires and tyrants, is seen mainly from the standpoint of Paula, a believable, confused personality seeking to retain her own integrity and independence while, at the same time, functioning as the representative of her planet's weary attempt to survive. This is not a book of symbolic archetypes, but of future history told very much in the realist manner.

Earth's anarchism equates with subsistence survival in communal domes built as protection against the global pollution. One desperate resort of a race continually confronted, with increasing cynicism, by decisions reached by criminally irresponsible corporate identities. In other words, anarchism is not an optimistic, ideologically conscious step into a bright, alternative future as it is presented, in some respects, in *The Dispossessed*. At one point, Paula, newly and rather haphazardly appointed to the 'Committee of the Revolution', is confronted by a complaints delegation, and turns on them:

She put her elbows on the desk. 'What do you want me to do?' Their faces slid down out of their smiles. Intense, she leaned forward, looking from one to the other. 'Why the hell do you come in here with something like this? You're supposed to be anarchists. You're supposed to take care of yourselves. If you don't like it, move. If nobody likes it, get everybody to move, open the gas cocks and throw in a match. Get away from me.'

So, in the opening scenes we become aware of a fierce and defensive individualism which does not marry easily with communal altruism, and

this becomes more serious as the book progresses and the surviving Earth-dwellers become increasingly like animals, separately, at bay. Symbolic of this defensive individualism is Paula's one possession, an ivory flute, which suggests the introverted withdrawal of the contemplative observer — life viewed from the safety of a spiritual retreat. The book ends on this note.

Set against the dissipated energies of these decentralised communities is the fascist colony of Mars (with its shades of familiar colonial patriarchal decadence) and the military, tribal worlds of the mutant Styths. Paula's mission is to open the Styth crystal markets (crystals are a vital energy source). At the outset we appear to recognise the classic situation of the sophisticated culture (the Earth-Mars tandem) exploiting a naive one, but through Paula's decision to carry a Styth child and emigrate to their worlds we see gradually, through her eyes, the true powers and weaknesses of the Styth civilisation.

Styth culture is bluntly hierarchical, patriarchal, and tribal, with rank being determined by sheer physical power, wrestling in 'the pit'. Women are chattels. One of the marks of Holland's skill is that she is able to retain our sympathy for the Styths in spite of their insensitivity to others. Paula uses sex because she does not define herself in terms of being a sexual commodity, but she is constantly so defined by the Styths. She is beaten and raped repeatedly and, perhaps most importantly, physically imprisoned so that finally she is forced to admit that threats to personal freedom can stem from the sexual. Certainly her motherhood makes her extremely vulnerable. Her realisation of these dangers, an individualism constantly under seige, is powerful and moving and makes an excellent vehicle for the similar danger that her planet faces, caught between the vice of the Martians and the Styths.

If there is a weakness in the novel, it is in the characterisation of Tanuojin, the deviant Styth who is capable of psychic possession. The problem may be that he smacks of the sort of allegorical archetype that the book does not, otherwise, use: the flawed creation who makes a virtue of his differences and who finally becomes the race's future:

Now Tanuojin was stiffening, slackening, as he used his body more and more only to carry his head around. Paula ate meat. The Emperor walked away through the room, his

back to her. She imagined him in his final phase, a great soft brain resting in a chair.

By the end, Paula is virtually pitted against a god and this takes away from her very human struggle, makes it somehow melodramatic, to my mind at least.

What is engaging about the book is the extrapolation with respect to recognisable social and political elements. We recognise the cynical Realpolitik of the anarchists and their frenzied last-ditch attempt to acquire enough corporate identity to survive. Survival requires centralised leadership when the 'might is right' code is the operating premise. The anarchist at bay is, finally, seen to be more bestial than the Martian fascist or the clannish Styth. The Martian fascists, living in a hedonistic ersatz Paradise run amock, are also recognisable, though perhaps another weakness in the book is that they are too obviously comic-book caricatures of 'Nasties'. Fascism is too insidious and pervasive a philosophy to be dismissed safely in that way. Cam Savenia, Paula's Martian rival, is too much like one's notion of a concentration-camp commander—an immaculately cosmeticised mask of female evil. The Styths are a believable creation, on the other hand. When we first see them, they are reminiscent of black supermen who destroy what they cannot engulf. Their security is derived from their hierarchic group identity, which is supported by strong taboos and rigidly codified roles, including sex roles. Styths always know their social position, and social consciousness is, on the whole, synonymous with individual consciousness. Paula, made vulnerable through her son, and her desire for personal definition in terms of her diplomatic achievements, gradually becomes entangled in this net of loyalties, and this too is believable—the security of group solidarity would be a real threat even to a born anarchist.

Although at the end one could say (without giving too much away) that she loses, her stand for independence throughout is a credible (in that it is not romanticised) vindication of anarchism. One does not come away at the end with the kind of buoyancy with which one finishes *The Dispossessed*, but there is certainly a sense of satisfaction and identification with Paula's final stand.

Cecilia Holland's novel stands as a sensitive qualification of that particular approach to freedom, anarchism, both personal and global.

## A GIRL AND HER HORSE

Christine Ashby reviews

*Motherlines*

by Suzy McKee Charnas

(Gollancz; 1978; 273 pp;

5 pounds 95)

(Berkley 425 04157; 1979;

246 pp; \$US 1.95)

I would have loved this book when I was twelve. Just about all adolescent girls, even non-horsey ones such as I was, go through a stage where they are very receptive to the idea that the world would be perfect if the population consisted solely of girls and their faithful horses. To such youngster (provided they have first read *Everywoman*) I would unhesitatingly recommend this book, which leaves *They Bought Her a Pony* and *The Silver Brumby* absolutely for dead; *Motherlines* is the ultimate horse story.

Of course, if you're not one of the afore-said horse-mad girls, it's quite another matter. Whether you would enjoy *Motherlines* depends on your sense of humour (I don't think Charnas has one) and your tolerance for genre novels of a literary value inversely related to their pretensions. Mind you, I'm not too sure which genre this is meant to be an example of; it's published as sf, but in reality it's more a 'feminist' book, with a heavy ideological content. Jean Weber tells me that it makes interesting reading if you know something about the structure of the American women's movement, but I don't think she meant to suggest that *Motherlines* could be regarded as a *roman à clef*.

The protagonist, Alldera, is a 'fem', an escapee from the nightmare post-holocaust world of Holdfast, in which all women are literally enslaved (see *Walk to the End of the World* by Charnas). Heavily pregnant, she is rescued from the wilderness by the 'women', a band of noble savages who live a nomadic tribal life with their horses. Their only enemies are the occasional man foolish enough to venture out of Holdfast, and the sharu, a sort of giant mutated version of the Mallee/Wimmera plague mouse. Luckily these hearty individuals are descended from experimental subjects who had been genetically altered to facilitate parthenogenic reproduction. Their lifestyle owes something to the Tartars, something to the Masai, and a great deal to the Plains Indians. Their child-rearing practices owe everything to the Ik. Toddlers join the tribe's hyperactive childpack and literally run wild until puberty, if they live that long. At the first show of blood the pack rejects them, the adults take them in and forcibly wash them, and they are instantly civilised, if somewhat untutored. As a solution to the problem of who looks after the kids this can only be described as desperate.

Alldera really ought to have been handed on straight to the 'free fems', the other escapees. Eventually, for reasons I needn't go into, she leaves her child in care of her sharemothers and joins her sisters, who weave cloth, grow tea, live in covered wagons (yes, really!) and trade with the women, called derisively 'Mares'. The fems have an understandable tendency to live in the past (what future have they without offspring?) and after her years with the women Alldera cannot fit in with their tight and authoritarian little society. The end is obvious. Alldera effects a (rather uneasy)

reconciliation between the two groups; the fems learn from the women to free themselves from the psychic chains of their former existence, and in return they press upon the reluctant women some of the benefits of their greater technological sophistication. It is agreed by all parties that the fems are not biologically equipped to be assimilated by the women, even if they wished it, and the way is left open for the promised sequel in which the band of fems return to the presumably devastated Holdfast.

This is a fairly long novel, with quite a large cast of varied characters. We know they're varied because the author tells us so, usually when commenting on the inherited traits of the various motherlines (none of the nature/nurture debate cluttering this book). Every so often the human relations are interrupted by an action-packed celebration of the horse in motion that in no way disturbs the ambling bovine (or perhaps that should be equine) pace of the whole novel. I read all of *Motherlines* with the feeling that the story would start at any minute, just as soon as this next bit of background detail was out of the way.

Charnas has set herself a difficult task, and it's not for want of trying that she fails to bring it off. This is not one of those sf stories in which the technology is so dazzling and the action so thick and fast that characters and their interrelationships would only get in the way. George Turner says that the sf novel is primarily a novel of ideas—but there are some ideas which must be worked out through the action and interaction of characters, and to them it is necessary to apply at least some of the criteria applied to mainstream literature. I say that because I know that some people will say that I am unfair, that I want *Motherlines* to be something that it wasn't intended to be. Well, I want it to be a worthwhile piece of literature, as well as a genre novel or an intriguing piece of didacticism.

The relations between men and women are a never-ending source of dramatic tension, and give dynamic strength even to novels in which they do not constitute the primary subject matter. A novel set in a society populated entirely by the one sex requires other sources of tension to hold it together: *The Caine Mutiny* is a fine example. Charnas makes a feeble attempt to address herself to the problem of subjecting Alldera to the unreasonable and more-or-less unremitting hostility of Sheel (who regards anything at all from Holdfast as non-kosher), and by endowing Alldera and the other fems with a capacity for sexual jealousy quite lacking in the women. Somehow this doesn't seem to work, perhaps because it is, in both instances, done without much subtlety. In fact any conflict at all in the book is analysed and explained and fitted into its proper place in the ideological scheme; it is made plain that the intermittent violence resorted to by the women is good clean female violence—sneaking up on your opponent or picking her off from a distance with a bow and arrow is just not done. There are no undercurrents to *Motherlines*, and I suppose one shouldn't expect them in a book that is primarily a vehicle for a message.

And what is the message? Shorn of all the philosophical and sociological trimmings, it is that the world would be perfect if the population consisted solely of girls and their faithful horses.

(Reprinted from *The Better Half*, June 1980)

## BEGINNINGS OF LE GUIN

Colin Steele reviews

*Rocannon's World*

by Ursula K Le Guin

(Harper and Row; 1977;

136 + ix pages; \$6.95;

Gollancz; 1979;

122 pages; 3 pounds 50/\$A12.20;

original publication 1966)

*Rocannon's World* was Ms Le Guin's first published sf novel, appearing as an Ace paperback in 1966. It has now been issued in a more permanent hardback form, which not only cleans up the Ace typographical errors but also includes a new preface by Le Guin to the novel. (However, the Gollancz edition does not include the new preface, and seems to have been reprinted directly from the Ace edition, perhaps without any cleaning up.)

*Rocannon's World* was the first in the published sequence of Hainish novels, and was closely followed by *Planet of Exile* (1966) and *City of Illusions* (1967), etc.

*Rocannon's World* recounts the struggles of Gaverall Rocannon, an ethnologist working on behalf of the League of All Worlds, who becomes isolated on the world of Fomalhaut II after his colleagues have been killed by an invading fleet from the planet Faraday. Rocannon eventually manages to communicate his position to the League, who destroy the enemy base, but only after various misfortunes and extensive contact with the native life of the planet, eg, the elvish Fiia, the cavern-dwelling Gdemiar, and the warrior Lluar.

Le Guin indicates in her preface what she now terms the rashness of the beginner, for example: 'There is a lot of promiscuous mixing going on in *Rocannon's World*. We have NAFAL and FTL space ships, we also have Brisingamen's necklace, windsteeds and some imbecilic angels.' Certainly, *Rocannon's World* has a colourfulness and romanticism which is not always to be found in the longer, more serious later works of Le Guin. I well remember in this context one evening in Oriel College, Oxford, listening to Tom Shippey giving a critique of *The Dispossessed* before an audience of myself, Brian Aldiss, Harry Harrison, John Bush, and four undergraduates. Despite the aid of much rough red wine, it was difficult to dispel the feeling of worthiness, and implicitly lack of excitement, in *The Dispossessed*. Now re-reading *Rocannon's World* in far-away Canberra, I can't help recalling that evening and feeling Le Guin has lost some of her early driving narrative and sense of wonder, although of course gaining much in the depth of exploration of concepts and character and the juxtaposition of themes.

There is an increasingly growing critical literature on Le Guin. It is interesting that her new preface to *Rocannon's World* is basically autobiographical rather than a discussion of the critical literature so far on the novel. Some of this literature has been quite absurd in its academic minutiae, but it is noteworthy to see in *Rocannon's World* some of the now well-known themes emerging forcibly.

'Balance', for example, is achieved in many ways in *Rocannon's World*. To take the most striking example, *Rocannon's*

*World* is prefaced by a complete short story in itself, 'The Necklace' (first published as 'Dowry of the Angyar' in 1964). It is a beautifully written piece (as is most of Le Guin), mixing Tolkien-type mythology with the hard scientific background of Rocannon's survey. It predates the main narrative and movingly recounts the Lady Semley's quest through time for the lost necklace/jewel 'The Eye of the Sea'. The jewel reappears throughout *Rocannon's World* and is lost and found several times. At the end of the book, Rocannon, his task completed, gives it to the Lady Ganye. Rocannon dies before the League returns to Fomalhaut II—a symbolic balance has been achieved. Other balances/contrasts are reflected in the light/dark images throughout the novel and the centres of clustered 'population' *vis a vis* the vast empty spaces.

The characteristics of Rocannon are repeated in later books. Thus Rocannon himself is not a superhero. He is a man of divided loyalties torn between the philosophy of the League of All Nations and that of the planet Fomalhaut II. He knows what has to be done, but stumbles hesitantly along the path. His is not a progress in the Victorian sense but a harsh progress of life itself in a universe (like that in the Earthsea trilogy) where darkness is always ready to prevail. Thus his gaining of skill, the 'mind hearing' gained from the Ancient One, is gained at a price (the death of Mogien) and even this may not be permanent.

Readers, however, will gain from Le Guin what they wish. On the basic narrative level, *Rocannon's World* is a winner, and those who want to go deeper will find enough to lead them into the rest of the superb Le Guin corpus.

## HOLIDAY READING

Alexander Nedelkovich reviews

'The Intruder'

by Ted Thomas

(first published 1960;

available in *A Pocketful of Stars*,

edited by Damon Knight;

Pan, 1974; Gollancz, 1972)

[Editor: I've put off publishing this review because I hoped that it might become part of a review column about separate short stories. Such a column has not been organised yet—mainly because I have written nothing for it. Professor Nedelkovich was SFC's first subscriber in Yugoslavia (yes, there have been more).]

'The Intruder' is an example of a science fiction story which is quite successful as literature. It was probably published about 1960, but it has not become obsolete yet, because—as is sometimes the case with sf stories—it contains little or nothing which could become obsolete.

The story happens in a very distant future: it is shown, or rather implied, that people can travel through space very easily, quickly, and cheaply. The place of the action is a planet almost completely covered with water; only a few small rocky islands stand above the ocean. The planet is uninhabited, and the evolution of the living creatures upon it has reached only the level of simple marine organisms, while no living being has yet emerged onto dry land. Such

were the conditions on Earth, too, but several hundred million years ago.

Into that quiet world descends a man, a holiday-maker, seeking peace and rest in nature. He lands on a small rocky island, which from that moment belongs only to him, in the sense that there is absolutely no other living creature, not even the smallest, on the island. The man sets a tent at a spot on the coast, with every intention of spending his holiday there.

Max smiled, enjoying the isolation. It was good to be alone, good not to have to worry about talking to people.

The story is eight pages long, and the author devotes no less than six of them to describing the restful days on the island.

But one day the hero spots a small plant ('... a tiny fleck of green ...') on the coast—on the dry land:

Here and now it had happened. It could have happened a million years from now, but it had happened now. This was the way it had been on Earth during Cambrian times 400 million years ago. A first plant, coming out of the water on to the land, and living there. The first fragile step on the road to man.

His reaction is disappointment and even grief: apparently he feels that his island is not pure anymore, that he is losing it. In a fit of rage, he tramples down the plant ('... twisting his heel again and again ...') and then tries to fling the crushed remains of the plant into the sea. But the forces of nature seem to refuse to take it back:

The wind surged in a wild gust and caught up the clumps of dust and drove them back into his face. He staggered backwards ... tripped and fell ...

Apparently reconciled to the situation, the hero goes his way, to continue his holiday. Thus the story ends.

In this story, we can find several interesting contrasts: for instance, the contrast between one man's holiday, lasting a few days, and natural processes lasting hundreds of millions of years; the contrast between the hero's wish to have a peaceful holiday, and the need for one whole world to advance along its great ways; and the ponderousness of what its appearance signifies. This is probably the kind of thing that some critics have in mind when they speak of the 'complexity' which they find in the best of mainstream literature, but rarely in sf.

There is also that fashionable literary device, ambiguity: the title of the story is ambiguous. We do not know who is the 'intruder'—the algae on the island or man on that planet.

This story permits us to glimpse how some very early days on our planet might have looked: perhaps the plants and animals on Earth emerged onto dry land in a similar fashion, and so started a process which led to the appearance of man. Closer to literary matters: this story permits the reader to see and, for a moment, experience a peculiar kind of solitude, the solitude which is rarely imagined on this four-billion-people planet, and which the mainstream writers can only metaphorically, but never literally present: namely, the solitude of a man who is alone on an entirely uninhabited planet.

From this springs what I consider the best literary merit of this story: it presents to the reader a unique kind of silence, of which the wind, waves, and rains are a natural part, silence suggested also by the unobtrusive style of the story—not the kind of silence to which other literary genres are limited—namely, an oasis of silence surrounded by a never-stopping flow of billions

of human voices—but the silence of one entire world.

Thus I think it is justifiable to conclude that 'The Intruder' gives to literature a contribution (small though it may be) that no other genre could give.

## PORTRAIT OF A XENOPHOBE

**Terence M Green reviews**  
*Lovecraft: A Biography*  
by L Sprague de Camp  
(Ballantine 25115; 1976;  
480 pages; \$1.95;  
abridged by the author)

I haven't read much of Lovecraft's work, and I'm not particularly a fan of that which I have read of his—or of the entire genre of Lovecraft/*Weird Tales* fiction. Nevertheless, the L Sprague de Camp biography of Lovecraft is something that I did enjoy very much. It is a precise, erudite, meticulous study of a strange, bizarre man.

In this instance, it is de Camp's subject matter that is so fascinating. Lovecraft himself is a character out of weird fiction, an unbelievable mixture of neuroses and juvenile outlooks and habits. Simply, Lovecraft was messed up in early youth by environment, and never fully grew out of this fixated state, emotionally or intellectually.

Yet de Camp manages to put even this in a larger context, and the book becomes at once a look at an American milieu as well as the story of one incidental man. We are given Lovecraft in the framework of his beloved Providence, Rhode Island—in the framework of turn-of-the-century New England, Old American values and beliefs. This attempt (successful) to place the man within the larger perspective adds much depth and richness to the biography; it becomes light educational reading, with brief flourishes into the peripheries of psychology, sociology, and local history. Many of Lovecraft's eccentricities can be at least partially accounted for by investigating what was intellectually and culturally fashionable at that time and place.

Lovecraft was a pseudo-intellectual introvert, repressed sexually, who shielded himself from the everyday life of the 'common man'. Like many of us, he rationalised his actions and beliefs after the fact. He never held a 'real' job, never met with the mass of people in a working environment, and as such, limited his personal experience of life immensely. De Camp believes that this accounts for most of his preoccupation with unreal characters and unreal worlds, for it seems true that one writes best about that which one knows firsthand. If the Unreal was Lovecraft's Reality, the familiar way that he transports himself about horrific and weird landscapes certainly reflects this.

Lovecraft's weakness as a thinker, according to the examples amassed and presented by de Camp, was his tendency to pontificate on matters about which he really had no first-hand knowledge—but concerning which he nevertheless held strong, firm and, most often, absurd opinions.

Here is a man who was a xenophobe for the greater part of his life—an emotional, hypersensitive, fragile ego, childishly eager for praise, crushed by blame; a man who

was wont to stay up all night, rarely venturing forth from his home or town, his *omphalos*. Yet he managed to create a significant, if strange, body of work, which has created its own cult of followers and fans.

De Camp offers as final evaluation of Lovecraft's literary achievement many diverse opinions, ranging from those who consider it easily dismissed to his own evaluation that Lovecraft's work must finally stand 'on a level with Poe, or even a shade above'.

While my first reaction to this is to feel that de Camp is being overly kind to Lovecraft, I must eventually decline comment, since I lack sufficient exposure to Lovecraft's work to make a well-reasoned evaluation. What I have exposure to, though, is Lovecraft's life, if not his writings, via this intriguing volume. It is eminently restrained; yet it is a complete look at the man and his limited milieu. De Camp is to be commended.

I think you'll enjoy it.

## WRITER FOR ALL COUNTRIES

**Terence M Green reviews**  
*The Great Victorian Collection*  
by Brian Moore  
(Ballantine; 1976;  
183 pages; \$1.75;  
Penguin 14004499; 1977;  
172 pages; \$A1.95)

Brian Moore has been claimed by the Irish as an Irish novelist, and treated accordingly—based on his heritage, birthright, and several novels (*The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, *Catholics*, *The Feast of Lupercal*, etc); he has been claimed by the Canadians as a Canadian writer, since he emigrated from Ireland to Canada and boasts several books in a Canadian setting (*The Revolution Script*, *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, etc). This latest novel is set in California, where Moore resides at present, and deals with a Canadian professor visiting California and what befalls him there. The book was awarded the Governor General's Award for Fiction in Canada—thus further attesting to the fact that Moore is good enough for at least three countries to want to claim him as their own! (Is he now an 'American writer'?) His territorial imperatives I shall here-with leave to posterity and to Moore himself.

The book is a finely written and intriguingly wrought fantasy. It is about a man who dreams into existence in the parking lot of his Californian motel the greatest collection of Victoriana extant in the world. It is about his mentally fatiguing servile relationship with it, about trying to ascertain his own sanity, about the layer of sexual undercurrents that run beneath a so-called 'civilised' veneer—the two-sided coin of Victorian life.

The book has much to offer—layer after layer of curious innuendo and provocative ideas. The book may not be too familiar to the science fiction and fantasy readership, but nevertheless it qualifies for the field, and demonstrates how quickly yet another group may want to claim Moore for their own! Moore is a versatile writer indeed.

Recommended.

## PROFESSOR'S NOTEBOOK

**Terence M Green reviews**  
*Kampus*  
by James E Gunn  
(Bantam 02693; 1977;  
308 pages; \$1.75)

*Kampus* is, according to the blurb, 'a mind-expanding trip to the college of tomorrow!' Perhaps it is much less than 'mind-expanding', but it is curious and interesting on several levels. As an entire novel, its credibility is weak, and constantly I felt that the entire vision could have been more horrifying if Gunn had selected a different tonal approach to his subject matter. Vonnegut or Dick writing about the same thing could have scared the pants off me.

Gunn's vision of a potential educational future (or, his metaphorical sf vision of campus life today) is very interesting, since he is in first-hand touch with US college life as a professor at the University of Kansas. For this reason alone, I was drawn to the book. Gunn writes knowledgeably and well, although the plot is the book's weakness; it is either too openly metaphorical or simply too contrived. There are several points Gunn wants to make in his book, and he manages to build a scene for each, almost too obviously.

What is interesting in the novel are the excerpts that act as the openings of each chapter, excerpts entitled 'From the Professor's Notebook'. There is something of the Shavian tradition about them. And the dialogues that Gunn creates *vis a vis* the points-of-view on education, politics, and radical and traditional ideologies in general are well done and thought-provoking in themselves.

Recommended, with reservations.

## SYMPATHY FOR THE CYBORG

**Terence M Green reviews**  
*Man Plus*  
by Frederik Pohl  
(Bantam 10779; 1977;  
246 pages; \$1.95;  
Gollancz; 1976;  
215 pages; 3 pounds 75/\$A10.10)

*Man Plus* won the 1977 Nebula Award, given to the Best SF Novel of 1976. Part of its success among the voting members of SFWA can probably be attributed to the venerability of the author, and to the high esteem with which he is regarded by his peers. But the book is a good one on its own merits—a damned fine one. It certainly deserves some attention.

Pohl deals with the oft-tried issue of the creation of a cyborg. The subject matter has a venerability of its own. In fact, it has been cited by Brian Aldiss in *Billion Year Spree* as the original subject matter of science fiction. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* started it all, Aldiss tells us, and he makes a case strong enough for me to tend to agree. Pohl's treatment is interesting and fascinating and meticulous; the novel is a good 'hard sf' novel. We learn about the character of

the cyborg and his relationship with his wife.

I was sceptical about the rationale and credibility of the reasons given in the book for making Roger Torraway into a cyborg. Pohl resolves this issue as well as possible in his conclusion. In so doing, he adds a dimension to the novel that either strengthens or weakens it, depending on your point of view. But whatever the value judgment on his solution, the resolution itself is further interesting scientific speculation.

Recommended..

## ESCAPE! ESCAPE!

Terence M Green reviews

*Time's Last Gift*

by Philip Jose Farmer

(Ballantine Del Rey 25843; 1977;  
185 pages; \$1.50)

Farmer's time-travel story about a trip back to 12,000 BC by four anthropologists is sheer lightweight entertainment—sheer fun. Don't expect any heavy stuff here. The characters are fairly stock, routinely predictable, and mostly unbelievable. But the book does have a kind of flair of its own—attributable to the many-faceted Farmer himself.

This is a novel that was published originally in 1972, and which is supposed to have been revised by Farmer for this 1977 edition. I was unable to tell what revisions, deletions, or improvements were made, not having read the original. If you have read the original, be wary, for I'm certain any changes have been minimal.

Farmer believes in keeping the plot moving (as in the Riverworld books). Keep piling incident upon incident—lots of primitive trappings and behaviour. Throw in a twist here and there along the way. For fast-paced, escape reading, it can work. It works to some extent here.

Recommended as escapist entertainment only; in the Farmer tradition, for Farmer fans.

## NEITHER ORIGINAL NOR SIGNIFICANT

Colin Steele reviews

*New Dimensions 7*

edited by Robert Silverberg

(Harper & Row; 1977;

229 pages; \$8.95;

Gollancz; 1977;

229 pages; 4 pounds 75/\$A12.80)

The introduction to *New Dimensions 7* claims that the editor, Robert Silverberg, is 'dedicated to presenting the most original and significant science fiction being written today'. Sadly, this is not the case. *New Dimensions 7* has some reasonably competent stories, but nothing of a very high standard, mixed up with some pretty dreadful material.

The book itself gets off to a confusing start by prefacing the first story, 'The Retro Man', by Gordon Eklund, with a biographical piece on John Shirley, whose story is actually on page 123! [Editor: Corrected

in later editions.] 'The Retro Man' itself is a good enough read. It is a sort of variation on *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens, in that time unfolds backwards for the leading character after visiting an alien planet.

Also recommended is 'You Are Here', by Phyllis and Alex Eisenstein. This is a child's somewhat tragic exploration of the closed universe of a spaceship. The flashback technique alleviates the boredom that might have been the result of an over-familiar theme. However, the diagrams within the story do not aid the plot, nor can they be considered, like those in 'The Blood's Horizon', by A A Attanasio, to be 'experimental' in the style of *New Worlds*.

Judith Lawrence (the wife of the late James Blish) contributes an enjoyable, unpretentious piece, 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat'.

Barry Malzberg's 'In the Stocks' has a powerful impact, although it is perhaps only marginally science fiction.

Equally powerful is Gregory Benford's 'Knowing Her', a well-written story of how the 'heroine' manages to keep one step ahead of the process of ageing in the early twenty-first century—but only at a certain cost.

The longest story in the volume is 'Black As the Pit, From Pole to Pole', by Steven Utley and Howard Waldrop. This story combines, to eventual over-excess, personnel from fact and fiction in the nineteenth century, including Victor Frankenstein and Moby Dick!

The book concludes badly with three poor stories. A A Attanasio's 'The Blood's Horizon' is imaginative and confused. Henri-Luc Planchat's 'Several Ways, and the Sun', which may have lost something in the translation from the French, is, to quote Monty Python, 'too silly for words'. Fritz Leiber's very brief 'The Princess in the Tower 250,000 Miles High' does not represent, by a long chalk, the best of this writer.

It is to be hoped that Silverberg will, sometime in the future, achieve in *New Dimensions* the levels claimed by the introduction and the book's blurb.

## CELTIC NAMES AND BLOODSHED

Elaine Cochrane reviews

*Seademons*

by Laurence Yep

(Harper & Row; 1977;

185 pages; \$8.95;

Pinnacle (pb); 1978; \$1.95)

*Seademons* is a superficial tale of slaughter and mayhem, set on the planet Fancy-free. The main characters are the human colonists and the native Seademons. The humans were formerly mercenaries for the Galactic Imperialist 'Fair Folk' and fled to the planet twelve years before, while the Seademons are nasty ugly beasts who live in the sea and are not considered by the colonists to be intelligent.

Trouble starts when the Seademons hand over a human child and take a farming robot in exchange. The colonists are annoyed, as they cannot replace the robot, and fear its loss will bring them closer to the dreaded PreAtomic Dark Ages. They therefore propose to kill the child as a witch. However, they don't; instead they call her Maeve and

blame her for everything that goes wrong in the colony thereafter.

When they learn that Maeve still talks to the Seademons down at the waterhole, they kill some Seademons and wholesale war breaks out. Nearly everyone is killed on both sides, but unfortunately there are enough survivors left to exchange hostages and pledge to work towards greater peace and understanding in the future.

The prose is competent, and there is lots of bloodshed for those who like it, and everyone has Celtic names for those who like that, but there is nothing else to satisfy in the book. The characters are identical in their motiveless stupidity. The Seademons are aimless and unbelievable in their role of nasty alien beasts. The portrayal of the colonists as an undisciplined superstitious mob contradicts their alleged military background: I cannot believe they could be of any value at all in any empire, galactic or otherwise. No rationalisation is given for their behaviour, except fear of the Fair Folk and hardships faced on the planet. We see only one example of this hardship: after numerous vague mentions of difficult conditions, a large land beastie chomps up a brat. This cannot be a routine worry, as Maeve is blamed.

Most other incidental data is introduced in this arbitrary manner (time we shovelled in some background...*splat!*), which is really the main fault of *Seademons*. Such a lumpy background makes it impossible to appreciate as real the fears and problems supposed to be facing the characters. Without that, whatever side they may take in the conflicts, they all remain blundering fools.

## A HEROINE TO BELIEVE IN

Elaine Cochrane reviews

*Beauty*

by Robin McKinley

(Pocket Books 82912; 1979;

247 pages; \$1.95)

The story of *Beauty and the Beast* is an old one, and has been retold many times. Merchant accidentally offends Beast, and in return for his life/freedom must hand over his daughter. Daughter eventually comes to love Beast and, on agreeing to marry him, breaks the spell and he is converted back into a handsome prince. All happy ever after.

The mechanics of the story are unimportant—everyone knows it in some form. In following it closely, McKinley is able to concentrate on what makes a retelling worthwhile: the characters and their interactions. He succeeds admirably in bringing the people to life, and the resulting novel is delightful reading.

Beast is a known quantity. He knows what is going on, and his motives are understood from the start. Merchant father is both more complex and less important. He promises the daughter out of fear, then bitterly repents his action. He tries unsuccessfully to accept the rationalisation that the Beast has sworn not to harm the daughter, so she only loses her freedom where he would have lost his life. Everything depends on Beauty, on why she willingly goes to the Beast, and why she is able to learn to love him.

McKinley's *Beauty* is at last a heroine I can believe in. She is gawky and has

pimples; she is interested only in her books and her horse; she cares nothing for society. She chops wood better than she can sew, and she does not mind at all that her sisters are beautiful. She is also very, very stubborn. She argues that she has nothing to lose by going to live in the forest, and anyway, the Beast's castle might also have a fine library. Later, she points out to the Beast that only someone as ugly as he would find her beautiful.

To win such an independent-minded Beauty, the Beast must offer more than gentleness. He cannot just be a hunk of eligible man-flesh in the background; he must assert a character of his own.

McKinley succeeds not only in bringing the Beast to life, but every other character in the book, from the guilt-ridden and frightened father to the youngest niece and smallest pony. What is more, he is able to imbue the work with a delightful humour. Beauty and the Beast may be an old tale, but this retelling is well worth reading.

## UNFAIR PACKAGING FOR A GOOD NOVEL

Elaine Cochrane reviews

*The Children of Dynmouth*

by William Trevor

(Pocket 81892; 1978; 252 pp; \$1.95)

*The Children of Dynmouth* is the story of one child, Timothy Gedge, in a small, quiet English coastal town. His father left when he was very young, his mother and very much older sister both work, and he is left, effectively orphaned, to grow up as best he can. Alone day after day in their shabby flat, he absorbs hour after hour of television, with no counteracting influence at all. Desperate for human contact, he wanders around the town, watching everyone and talking to anyone who will not chase him away. He knows everyone and is loved by no one.

His one dream and hope he owes to a teacher who taught briefly at the local school. One teacher only tried to show his unresponsive class that there was more to life than working in the fish cannery or the sandpaper factory, and Timothy responded. Another teacher had the class act out a history lesson, and the neglected child found he could amuse the other pupils with his portrayal of Queen Elizabeth I. That decided him. He would win the talent quest at the local fete, be spotted by a visiting celebrity, and never look back. But how does a boy who has learned all his social behaviour from television enlist the help he needs?

What he does, and the effect this has on the lives of the people he approaches, makes a bitter, moving story. In Timothy and his tragic attempt to communicate is the plight of who knows how many other children, equally isolated by circumstance.

A grave disservice has been done this book in the jacket design and blurb. Nowhere does it actually state that this is a psychic horror story, but all the clichés are there on the cover: an illustration of a starving boy with fluorescent eyes, holding a Tudor village in his hand, combined with the information that he is transformed suddenly into an 'alien and sinister presence'. Most unfair to a very good, straight book, and definitely misleading.

## NOT MUCH BETTER THAN 'SANDWORLD'

Roger Weddall reviews

*Journey*

by Marta Randall

(Pocket Books 81207; 1978;

324 pages; \$1.95)

Somewhere in the cosmic darkness lies the unsettled Aerie. It is nothing now. Only a vast muddy rock. But it brings to Jason and Mirsh Kennerin the hope of a new beginning as their own planet crashes down around them.

It is their home now. A shelter against the universe. A bastion of their love.

When others join them, their influence grows. With careful moves and brash gambles, they form a mighty empire—a family dynasty whose name will thunder across the generations to the farthest reaches of time and space.

Bullshit. Superficially, as the cover blurb suggests, *Journey* is about the struggle of a pioneer family to succeed in their new home, but what this book is *really* about is whether Meya will have an abortion, whether Misha will ever forgive Jason for dying while she was away from home, and whether Jes, who we have just discovered is bisexual, will give up trying to screw his sister, now she is married.

In other words, *Journey* is the paperback equivalent of a television soap opera, although either as a novel or as a paperback soap opera it is a failure. Allow me to explain...

I always thought that a novel was meant to either to tell a simple story, possibly as an analogy, or to 'paint a picture', so to speak. Possibly there might also be some meaning behind or direction to the piece. *Journey* provides the reader with none of these, and therefore it is not a novel.

Although the book is a long one, covering a period of forty years, Marta Randall might as well have condensed its events down to a fortnight and put all the characters in an apartment block, or perhaps made them all workers at a television station somewhere, because there is no real continuity of plot, except inasmuch as the names of various characters are used to link one brief episode with another. All that business about 'forging a mighty empire' is so much peripheral nonsense mentioned once every fifty pages or so, and is the subject of three of the dozen or so scenarios of the book. The *real* story should have been about the taming of a planet, and the (resolution of?) conflict with the indigenous peoples—but the taming of a planet is reduced to one cold winter, and the natives... well, you can call them 'kassirener' if you must, as Marta Randall does, but personally I prefer to be more honest and call a subservient n----- slave a subservient n----- slave. And in the actual episodes I mentioned, there is lots of drama. Screaming. Shouting. Decisive action. Bitterness. Confrontation. Get the idea?

I think it would also be fair to say that, as far as character development is concerned (by this, I mean the establishment of any of the given characters as self-consistent, believable people), there is none. None of the characters act except because of the vague requirements of plot, and the only

way the author has of indicating that someone has grown up is by having him or her act very differently in some way. Usually, the person concerned has been sent away for ten or fifteen years, and presumably this explains everything. Simply, the characters are seen to be puppets of the author. They jump as required, remarkably on cue.

However, the *main* trouble with Marta Randall's *Journey* is neither the lack of plot nor the lack of characters; not even the fact that the author shows no skill in manipulating the English language to provide simple descriptions of events, places, or objects; but what *really* annoyed me was the way in the outcome of every single tedious event was made painfully obvious whole paragraphs, chapters or, in one case, three hundred pages, ahead. Why should anyone have to bother stumbling through many, many pages of lifeless, plodding prose only to reach a climax, and then proceed onto the *next* problem?

*Journey* is a monstrosity which should not occupy your attention unless you have been given it to review, as I was. It is even—though you may not believe it—nearly as bad as *Sandworld*.

## IMAGES OF DEVASTATION

Colin Steele reviews

*No Direction Home*

by Norman Spinrad

(Millington; 1976;

238 pages; 3 pounds 50/\$A9.50; original publication 1975)

The eleven stories in *No Direction Home* were published between 1969 and 1974 and are essentially of their time in their reflection of such topics as drugs, psychedelic rock, and environmental decay. Just as some of Moorcock's stories are becoming increasingly dated (and this is not necessarily meant as a long-term criticism) by their evocation of the late 1960s' Portobello Road milieu, so Spinrad's discussion of the above themes in the American and particularly Californian context are suffering a little of the same fate.

Thus the first story, 'No Direction Home', postulates a psychedelic drug-centred future society through various vignettes, whereby the only trip of any real significance is not to be taking drugs.

'Heirloom' is a story about passive resistance taken to the ultimate, but is simply Vietnam transposed into the future.

Spinrad's vision of the future is overwhelmingly pessimistic. 'The Big Flash' follows the path of an acid rock group, The Four Horsemen, which lead the world into a nuclear orgasm.

Neither 'Heirloom' nor 'The Big Flash' really stand up to a logical investigation of the story line, but what does remain in the mind are the vivid images of devastation that Spinrad creates. It is as if he paints on a large canvas in bold colours and cannot always be bothered to fill in the detailed muted background.

The best stories in the book are 'A Thing of Beauty' and 'The Lost Continent'. Both reflect a run-down America of the future. In the first, it is Japan that is the superpower, with a Japanese businessman negotiating to

buy the Brooklyn Bridge. In the second, it is African science and technology that is pre-eminent after 'space-age' America has been destroyed. A tourist party of Africans being shown around New York allows Spinrad to score some easy points in a reversal of the usual black/white relationship. He does, however, depict a convincing picture of a rundown future New York, only too real after the return to barbarism during the July 1977 power failure. Spinrad is in essence a political writer, and his depiction of the issues of environmental pollution and racial conflict is no less potent for being set in the future.

Other striking, if hopefully improbable, futures appear in 'The National Pastime', in which American football becomes definitely gladiatorial and murderous, and 'In the Eye of the Storm', where a motorcyclist is catapulted briefly into a bizarre future America devastated by atomic war.

However, the last story in the volume, 'All the Sounds of the Rainbow', is all too close to the present in its portrayal of the alternative-society sub-groupings around Los Angeles. In real life, these can be inspired by drugs, religion, back-to-nature, dianetics, or any theme the leader of the group wishes to impose. In Spinrad's case, the only sf element is that possessed by the leader, Krell, who, as a result of a coma, has his brain 'all crossed. He saw sound, heard colour, tasted temperature . . . synesthesia, they call it.'

Overall a book that is a bit too much to take at one straight reading, but is well worthwhile dipping into to sample Spinrad's view of the future and thus the present. But when the present is the past, will Spinrad's literature remain or will he be the ultimate prophet?

## SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Neville Angove reviews

*The Bicentennial Man*

*And Other Stories*

by Isaac Asimov

(Gollancz; 1977;

211 pages; \$A9.50)

What can you say about an Asimov anthology? It is just some more of the same type of fiction that Asimov has been producing for the last thirty years: it is well-written, informative, and . . . Asimovian!

The eleven stories (and one poem) in this collection represent the bulk of the latest short fiction from Asimov. In fact, nine of the stories were written in the last few years. They show little change from the stories written a quarter-century ago. As such, they share the same style—third-person narrative that places the idea of the story ahead of any attempt at valid characterisation—which seems to be an Asimov trademark. Even some of the science is doubtful, too. The unifying theme of this collection, apart from the now obligatory Asimov autobiographical pieces, is that all these stories were commissioned by various editors either to illustrate specific problems or present alternative views of contemporary events (such as the title story of the collection).

Three of the stories seem to stand out. 'The Bicentennial Man', in presenting the idea of a robot desiring to be declared 'human', proves to be a moving tale about understanding. But the reasons given by the

robot for his desire are not the cause of this emotion. The idea of a robot willing to give up his immortality so that he can be declared human is inconsistent with the fact that most humans would willingly give up their humanity in order to become immortal. The point is, the robot is already human: he misses his original owners and wishes to join them in oblivion, but he cannot have the final trappings of humanity unless it is legally sanctioned. He is human enough to want a funeral rather than an ignominious dismantling. The robot is not willing to die in order to be declared human, but rather he wants to be declared human so that he can legally die.

Two other stories stand out in this collection, not because they are different, but because they seem to be different.

'That Thou Art Mindful of Him' was written as the ultimate robot story, and it differs from other robot stories by Asimov in that the robots finally succeed in replacing mankind. It differs also in the 'semi-metaphysical' style Asimov has used to relate this tale, a subtle piece of misdirection. Most of Asimov's stories revolve around a problem, with the story mainly describing the solution. In this story, the problem is *apparently* the need to produce safer robots, while the real problem is the correct implementation of the Three Laws of Robotics by the robots. And since the only way to prevent mankind from ever coming to harm is to replace mankind completely . . .

'Stranger in Paradise' also seems to be a complete departure from Asimov's usual style. For once, there is a strong attempt to show the development and interaction of character, to lead to a personal solution. Twin brothers live in a world in which twin brothers are considered to be something of an immoral curiosity. The two brothers are then thrown together to solve an important scientific problem, the solution to which is dependent upon them coming to terms with their personal problem. The story places a large weight on the technical problem, when the purpose of the story is really to examine the personal problem. Asimov has created a set of conditions which are personal rather than technical, and he manipulates the characters to solve the personal problem rather than to solve the technical problem. Unfortunately, because the characters are treated solely as elements of a problem, the solution seems quite forced. Character is not Asimov's forte.

What can you say about an Asimov anthology? It is always worth reading.

## OTHON TO LILLIZAZZ

Elaine Cochrane reviews

*Ab to Zogg:*

*A Lexicon for*

*Science Fiction and Fantasy Readers*

by Eve Merriam

drawings by Al Lorenz

(Atheneum; 1977;

43 pages; \$5.95)

In a delightfully whimsical book, Eve Merriam defines everything (etymologically, of course) from Ab (the abominable Abnaut, able to fly through every zone in space encumbered by naught save its own featherfurlin weight) to Zogg (the last world). It includes such gems as Othon

((from the Knothic, originally othong, to tie on) Initiation Ceremony in Kinter where the newborn don their winged feet) and Lillizazz (transistorised Tynytown whose minihabitants operate on a form of energy emitted by ballpoint clicks).

None of the orthodox beasts of fantasy is in this book. It makes delightful browsing while nibbling Hoberries. The amusing illustrations by Al Lorenz add to the charm of the book.

## WHY NOT THE LOT?

Keith Curtis reviews

*The Opener of the Way*

by Robert Bloch

(Panther 04221; 1976;

172 pages; 60p/\$A1.90)

This book includes ten stories plus introduction from the classic 1945 Arkham House collection of Bloch's early weird stories. If you don't already have this collection but want it, I'd suggest you buy the 1974 Neville Spearman reprint of the *complete* edition. It is certainly better value. Commendably, Panther appears set on reprinting several of the classic Arkham collections, but regrettably, they are publishing them in at least two volumes. Most if not all Clark Ashton Smith has appeared, as have volumes by Belknap Long, Leiber, Machen, Jacobi and, no doubt, we can expect Derleth, Wandrei, Wakefield, etc, to appear as well. A one-volume paperback at 1 pound 50 makes for better value than two at 95p each. Why can't Panther do it?

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# 8 point Universe

Some off-the-cuff reviews by the Editor, to give some idea of what is going on in science fiction, fantasy, and related fields. First-mentioned books are the ones I like best; you take your chances on the books at the other end of the column.

## STRANGENESS

A Collection of Curious Tales, edited by Thomas M Disch and Charles Naylor (Scribners; 1977; 309 pp; \$US8.95)

Yes, I should have reviewed this book long ago. I meant to write a long, detailed review which would make you unable to resist its treasures. Now the Avon paperback edition has appeared. Buy it if you can still find it.

The sub-title of the book is correct: these are *strange* stories—not necessarily fantasy; hardly at all science fiction; but not realistic either. *Strangeness* should be bought because, most importantly, these stories are well written. The best piece in the book is Graham Greene's 'Under the Garden'. It has a true spirit of fantasy, but it might not be one at all. The adult storyteller looks back on his childhood. He remembers when he ran away down a huge garden, and found a tunnel which took him under the lake and the island in its middle. There he was captured by the strange people who hid there. Years later he revisits the giant garden—to find it a scrubby patch with a pond in the middle. And was he captured for months, since even his parents can remember only that he disappeared once for a few hours?

*Strangeness* includes only one new story, Brian Aldiss' 'Where the Lines Converge', which I thought was good stuff. Others include old New Wave favourites, such as Pamela Zoline's 'The Holland of the Mind' (which I had not read before, and struck me as powerfully as her 'Heat Death of the Universe' did fourteen years ago), Russell Fitzgerald's 'The Last Supper' (from the famous *Quark* series), and M John Harrison's 'Running Down'. Italo Calvino's 'All at One Point' is also here. Hard to choose a favourite; it's enough to say that most of the original publication sources of these stories are now inaccessible. *Strangeness* not only revives the stories, but identifies a certain rare, uneasy story—a *strange* story, not a fantasy story, not a science fiction story—which is what I like reading.

## ROADSIDE PICNIC

by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (Pocket Books 81976; 1978, first publication of translation 1977, original USSR publication as *Piknik na obochine*, 1972; 153 pp; \$US 1.95) (Gollancz; 1977; 145 pp; \$10.70) (Penguin 14 005135; 1979; 160 pp; \$2.50)

Of course *Roadside Picnic* should have received a long review long before now. But I have had promises of reviews from several sources—and they are still promising. I don't even have time to re-read the book at the moment, so that I can praise it properly. Let me just say that this is one of three best sf books released in the last five years, and should be read by anyone who likes intense and satisfying reading. The plot? The blurb on the Pocket Books edition says it quite well: 'Extraterrestrials have visited Earth, not to invade, perhaps, but casually, as a

family might stop to picnic. . . . But what to make of the waste? And of Redrick, the stalker, the survivor, the pioneer in the green dawn of the Zone. . . . This is an exciting adventure story, because the Zone contains quite unpredictable, deadly waste. The authorities try to keep the stalkers, such as Redrick, from looting the Zone. He has three enemies—the authorities, the Zone, and himself (or rather, his own contradictory attitudes towards his quest). The novel succeeds because the Strugatsky Brothers put the reader through every dangerous experience, and maintain the sense of the alienness of the Zone.

Pocket Books includes an unreadable Strugatsky brothers 'satire' called *Tale of the Troika* in its edition. Wisely, Gollancz and Penguin have omitted this novel.

Andrei Tarkovsky, who directed the film of *Solaris*, has made *Roadside Picnic* into a film called *The Stalker*. I hope to see it soon.

## THE FLUTE-PLAYER

by D M Thomas (Gollancz Fantasy; 1979; 192 pp; 4 pounds 95)

## BIRTHSTONE

by D M Thomas (Gollancz Fantasy; 1980; 160 pp; 6 pounds 50)

It is difficult to praise highly enough either (a) the Gollancz Fantasy series of books or (b) these two novels by D M Thomas, both which appeared recently in that series. (Other recent Gollancz Fantasy books are Tom Disch's *On Wings of Song* and Ian Watson's *The Gardens of Delight*.)

*The Flute-Player*, which won the recent Gollancz/Pan/Picador Fantasy Competition, is hardly a fantasy at all. It tells the story of a girl who happens to survive in a totalitarian country while all her friends are picked off by the forces of whichever ideological faction is in power at the time. A fantasist's 1984, if you like. D M Thomas is a poet when he is not slumming by writing novels (and some of his work caught my attention when it was published in the large-format *New Worlds* from 1967 to 1970). His main character is a poet, and it is obvious that Thomas believes that only poetry can survive; only poetry can redeem people caught in the political mincing machine. (But he's not naive; he doesn't say that poetry will stop them being minced.) His novel ends poignantly when one of the characters escapes from the East side of The City to the West side, only to find that the 'liberated' young people she now teaches 'avoid grace and beauty and form' and know nothing of real poetry forged under difficult conditions.

*Birthstone* has a fantasy feeling to it, but, as with *The Flute-Player*, it does not really fit the category. Thomas' main character (again female) seems to float through life, striking other people and events only at oblique angles. She keeps bouncing and never quite settles. An odd

couple, a young chap and his very old mother, adopt her during a sightseeing tour of Cornwall. But the couple must put up with the other personalities who take over Jo's body from time to time; or do all personalities tell the story? Old Lola soon seems not so old, and sets out to seduce Jo, and Tom the lighthouse keeper, and her son. And her son, Hector, thinks that Jo is now his girlfriend, but has difficulties with Joanne. And . . . why go on? D M Thomas gives to the book a satisfying amount of delicious salaciousness, and makes a Fey-deau farce out of a psychiatric disability, and scatters the delight of high fantasy through its pages. (I cringe, though, from the price—6 pounds 50, that is, about \$22 here, according to the formula which distributors use. For a 160-page book?)

## JAILBIRD

by Kurt Vonnegut (Delacorte; 1979; 241 pp; \$US9.95)

At last here is a sign that Vonnegut has stopped looking back over his shoulder at *Slaughterhouse-Five* and has begun exploring again. Not that old-time readers of Vonnegut will find any return to the intricate plots of *Cat's Cradle* and *The Sirens of Titan*. Vonnegut now specialises in rapid-fire meditation, if such a thing is possible. Walter F Starbuck is shuttled through the basements of American finance and power politics. The Watergate prosecutors sent him to jail because he was the clerk who minded the conspirators' shredding machine. Life after jail is even more puzzling than life before 1973. The poorest woman he knows turns out to be the richest; a collection of bums he befriends suddenly receive promotions in the RAM JAC organisation which controls every American company and institution. We can almost see Vonnegut shaking his head in exasperation and bewilderment at the continuing spectacle of the America which he tries to write about. The most powerful writing in the book occurs in the first section in which Vonnegut, talking directly to the reader, describes a violent confrontation between striking miners and police in nineteenth-century Ohio. Pages xxi to xxxvii are by themselves worth the price of the book.

## THE BASIC KAFKA

by Franz Kafka (Pocket 82561.5; 1979; 295 pp; \$US3.95)

I note this because Pocket Books sent it to me before the company, in its wisdom, struck me from the list of reviewers. A sort of compliment to *SFC* that this book arrived instead of the usual flying saucer rubbish which gets sent to sf-related magazines. There is a *complete* Franz Kafka Short Works published by Schocken Books. Obviously that's better than Pocket Books' new collection—but I don't think that has reached paperback yet. Also, if you bought all the collections which Penguin has released, you would probably have this book. A lot of favourites here: 'The Burrow', 'Before the Law' (used to introduce Orson Welles' version of *The Trial*), 'The Great Wall of China', 'Metamorphosis'. Not, however, 'In the Penal Colony', my favourite Kafka short piece.

## THE YEAR'S FINEST FANTASY, VOLUME 2

edited by Terry Carr (Berkley 425 04155; 1979; 311 pp; \$US 1.95)

One is supposed not to need volumes such as *The Year's Finest Fantasy, Volume 2*.

Not if you are a dinkum sf/fantasy reader, and keep up with all the anthologies and magazines. I tried to do this, I really did. But the magazines are so boring that I've become stuck in 1975, and haven't reached 1976 yet, let alone 1978, the year which this collection covers. Besides, many of the best fantasy stories now appear in semi-professional magazines such as *Whispers* and *Shayol* which I find impossible to buy.

All of which can be summed up by saying that Terry Carr's collections, both for fantasy and science fiction, provide a valuable service for that majority of readers who want to know what is going on in the field, but do not have the time, money, or inclination to read everything. If I had waited to catch up my magazine reading, for instance, I would have waited forever to read Avram Davidson's magnificent 'Sleep Well of Nights' (first published as 'A Good Night's Sleep' in *F&SF*). Davidson spares no effort in bringing to life his steamy, sleepy, magical Central American country, and the peculiar message from the grave received and interpreted by Jack Limekiller during his troubled dreams. Davidson manages to be both indirect in his story-telling method and tell a satisfying story.

Much the same comment could be made about the best of the other stories here. I enjoyed Stephen King's 'The Gunslinger' (of a future world where nothing is left but a desert frontier and mythical riders along its paths), Raylyn Moore's 'A Certain Slant of Light' (a ghost story which might not be), and 'Selenium Ghosts of the Eighteen Seventies' (Lafferty's best story for years)—all for their indirectness and humorous magic-making.

## THE LIVING END

by Stanley Elkin (Dutton; 1979; 148 pp; \$US7.99)

Stanley Elkin is pretty much my favourite American writer. This is nowhere near as good as his best work, but it is very funny. It is also very short (about 25,000 words) tricked out by layout and typography to 148 pages. It is based on the simple, obvious premise that the Biblical account of Heaven and Hell is literally true, and then shows how ghastly that would be. God is a fickle chap, prancing around the place in his (excuse me, His) pinstripe suit. The Holy Family is sick of being Holy and staying around heaven. Nearly everybody goes to hell—after glimpsing Heaven through the pearly gates. And God has a stinker of an ending saved up for the universe. Readings found a copy for me in America; no other bookshop in Australia is interested in Elkin.

## ASCENDANCIES

by D G Compton (Gollancz; 1980; 208 pp; 5 pounds 95/\$15.95)

I've never been a wholehearted fan of D G Compton's books: his humour has an uncertain quality at the best of times, and very often his plots descend into disaster with such certitude that one wonders whether Compton considers any other possibility but doom and destruction. *Ascendancies* is much better than his usual books. The disaster has already happened when the book begins, which helps Compton to get it out of the way. People disappear, regularly and inevitably, because of some unexplained Alien Influence. Insurance companies refuse to pay out on disappearances, so the main female character of the story uses the services of a mysterious organisation to supply a body of her disappeared husband for the insurance inspector. The

inspector finds out the truth, but uses his knowledge to gain blackmail money. So both characters are amateur crooks, more or less tied to each other. They are never quite sure whether they like each other, but become more and more concerned about their relationship. It all sounds a bit tricky, but Compton provides a satisfactory ending. Compton's best book (except for *Syntha-joy*).

## WYST: ALASTOR 1716

by Jack Vance (Daw UJ1413; 1978; 222 pp; \$US1.95)

I don't know what to make of *Wyst: Alastor 1716*, since it was very enjoyable to read, and yet it gave me the impression, as so many Jack Vance books do, that the author was slumming when he wrote it. He is so careful about many things—the way he draws in his focus on the main character; the way he introduces each detail of this society as seen through the eyes of the bewildered, somewhat inflexible stranger; the way he draws together all the threads of the story at the end when the exasperated reader is quite sure that the story has been thrown away. The book does have people in it, some of them quite interesting. Vance's prose is never clichéd, usually detailed and ornamented, and sometimes very fine indeed. A glint of amusement illuminates every page.

But Vance relies on his own prejudices in favour of authority, and so throws away some of the strength of the book. He gives a picture of an egalitarian ('egalistic') society which is quite convincing, but then shows that it can be saved only by the intervention of the Connatic, who is really dictator of a star cluster. The mere existence of the Connatic—all knowing, travelling everywhere—makes the story into a fairy-tale. Vance's sociology may be interesting, and some of it even valid, but I feel that it is beside the point when the hero can be rescued by the visitor from the stars, and a society can only remain alive because of the visitor's intervention.

## THE LATE BREAKFASTERS

by Robert Aickman (New Portway/Cedric Chivers; 1977, original publication 1964; 252 pp; 5 pounds 40)

Those readers who think that Robert Aickman is that 'ultimately English' writer of uneasy stories should read *The Late Breakfasters*: they will find that in 1964 Mr Aickman was even more obtusely English than he is now. Which is to say that *The Late Breakfasters* is an entrancing and infuriating book; nobody will be satisfied with it, but few would regret reading it. (Except those people who do not like very English novels.) I should have reviewed it years ago, but I have not had time to do so. I did congratulate George Hay on his achievement at gaining republication of this book and Claude Houghton's *I Am Jonathan Scrivener* (reviewed in *SFC* 58).

*The Late Breakfasters* seems to be about a household of very eccentric gentry met by Griselda de Reptonville. Actually it is about Griselda herself. Anybody else would have been so intrigued by the odd ways of these people that he or she would have spent the entire novel 'solving the mystery'. Griselda is unastonished by them—or anything or anybody. She accepts everything, floats through life. Because of this, she is the only person trusted by these strange, almost ghostly people. She is told at the end of the book: 'Your friend commended you for your acceptance of what life can offer. ...

## The S F Commentary Running Jumping Never Standing Still Recommendations List 1978-1980 (so far)

Which is what it says it is: sf books I think are worth reading, in preference order, from 1978 onwards. There are a lot of books from 1978-80 I haven't read yet, so this list will change rapidly from one issue of *SFC* to the other. There are also a lot of very good books which I can't fit on the list.

- 1 A WOMAN OF THE FUTURE  
David Ireland (Allen Lane; 1979; 351 pp; \$9.95)
- 2 ON WINGS OF SONG  
Thomas M Disch (Gollancz; 1979; 315 pp; \$15.95)
- 3 BIRTHSTONE  
D M Thomas (Gollancz; 1980; 160 pp, 6 pounds 50)
- 4 THE FLUTE-PLAYER  
D M Thomas (Gollancz; 1979; 192 pp; 4 pounds 95)
- 5 JUNIPER TIME  
Kate Wilhelm (Harper & Row; 1979; 280 pp; \$US 9.95)
- 6 ROOMS OF PARADISE  
ed. Lee Harding (Quartet Australia; 1978; 182 pp; \$10.95)
- 7 ANTICIPATIONS  
ed. Christopher Priest (Faber; 1978; 214 pp; \$14.70)
- 8 THE YEAR'S FINEST FANTASY, Vol. 2  
ed. Terry Carr (Berkley; 1979; 311 pp; \$US 1.95)
- 9 IMMORTAL  
ed. Jack Dann (Harper & Row; 1978; 226 pp; \$US 9.95)
- 10 SHADOWS  
ed. Charles Grant (Doubleday; 1978; 182 pp; \$US 7.95)
- 11 THE LIVING END  
Stanley Elkin (Dutton; 1979; 148 pp; \$9.55)
- 12 ANDROMEDA 3  
ed. Peter Weston (Orbit; 1978; 240 pp; \$2.95)
- 13 UNIVERSE 8  
ed. Terry Carr (Popular Library; 1978; 224 pp; \$US 1.95)
- 14 ORBIT 20  
ed. Damon Knight (Harper & Row; 1978; 248 pp; \$US 9.95)
- 15 ASCENDANCIES  
D G Compton (Gollancz; 1980; 208 pp; 5 pounds 95)
- 16 THE YEAR'S FINEST FANTASY  
ed. Terry Carr (Berkley; 1978; 262 pp; \$US 1.95)

Lack of surprise is taken for granted at the Castle.' The reader meets only surprises, and cannot take *The Late Breakfasters* for granted.

## STRANGERS

by Gardner Dozois (Berkley 42503924; 1978; 166 pp; \$US1.75)

The original novella of this story was not much shorter than the novel version. It appeared in *New Dimensions 4*. I suspect that not much has been added to the novel. Simple story, with some fine effects. Innocent lad on alien planet falls in love with alien girl, marries her, and then takes a while to find out that she really is alien after all. A better writer than Dozois might have calmed the hysterical tone of the ending, and turned it into a grisly comedy.

## GATEWAY

by Frederik Pohl (Gollancz; 1977; 313 pp; 3 pounds 95)(Del Rey 345.25378; 1977; 313 pp; \$US2.25)

## JEM

by Frederik Pohl (Gollancz; 1979; 299 pp; 4 pounds 95)

I've had mixed feelings about *Gateway* since I read it first in one long, pleasant afternoon in late summer 1978. It is unput-downable. It has the epic feeling which mainstream sf books once had. It has everything going for it, and yet still it manages to irritate any reader who thinks about it at all. Many such readers now dislike the book intensely. In a brilliant essay which will appear in *The Stellar Gauge* (edited by Michael Tolley and Kirpal Singh for Norstrilia Press) George Turner knocks the shit out of the book, mainly for its absurd sociological premises. I have two main complaints about *Gateway*. Firstly, the interlineations: why waste so many pages in the boring encounters between the main character and his robot psychiatrist? I skipped most of these bits. Secondly, Pohl himself seems to miss the point of his own book. He portrays a completely ruthless, primitive capitalist society, and then tries to pretend that it is just another future society. He almost seems to say the kind of society which regularly sends large numbers of its most valuable assets off to certain death can survive without change; is maybe even a Good Thing. We expect such blind complacency from a Heinlein or an Anderson, but not from Pohl. The ending? Pohl gives it an 'oh no! not that!' emphasis which did not impress me very much. The main character is revealed as a cad and a fool—well, he must have been all along, or he would not have been in the story.

*Gateway* speeds along at a fine pace. *Jem* does not. Pohl adopts an invariable method for each episode of *Jem*: he lets people explain things to each other for a few pages (or he explains details of the aliens on the planet Jem), then lets each episode end with a shock!-no!-gaspl sentence which is supposed to maintain our interest through a few more tedious pages. Then he repeats the process. Has Pohl been writing steadily for all these thirty years? One would never guess it from reading *Jem*. Add to this Pohl's seeming delight in killing off his characters, and letting them kill off each other (all disguised as serious extrapolation of present world events, which it probably is) and we have one of the most repellent books I have ever read.

## THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

by Ursula K Le Guin (Harper & Row; first published 1969, republished 1980; 213 pp; \$US11.95)

Not many books receive completely new hardback editions; even fewer receive this honour eleven years after first publication. *The Left Hand of Darkness* is still the favourite Le Guin novel among most of her readers, which is why this new edition should sell well. A recent attempt at a second reading proved disappointing. The voyage over the snow is effective, but comes too late in the book for me. Le Guin's speculations on an androgynous (or seasonally sexual) society remain interesting.

## GLORIANA

by Michael Moorcock (Avon 42986; 1979; original publication 1978; 311 pp; \$US4.95)

What can I say about *Gloriana*? I don't know, which is why I have put off the job of reviewing it. The judges of the John W Campbell Memorial Award liked it, and gave it first prize in 1979. Most of the reviewers have been ecstatic about it. I found many admirable qualities in it. Yet when I look back over that vaguely lit battlefield which I call my memory, I find that *Gloriana* has slipped down a hole somewhere, and only a glimmer of recollection can be seen.

I remember, for instance, being irritated that Moorcock should write from the same royalist premises which so boringly underly most fantasy. Moorcock is the bloke who withdrew himself from association with the name of J R R Tolkien because, I take it, Tolkien was a ghastly old conservative. Well, I think a book which (a) assumes that merry Albion will fall apart because its queen goes to seed and (b) portrays only people in and around the royal court, is a ghastly conservative book. Not that this sort of thing is really conservative at all; it's just vapid, silly wish-fulfilment for readers. Moorcock might write his sentences better than other people do, but his brand of fantasy is no better than theirs.

Even if you don't like the book, the packaging of the Avon trade edition is beautiful. Illustrations and cover are by Elizabeth Malczynski; the anonymous designer also did a good job.

## THE ALTERATION

by Kingsley Amis (Panther Triad 58604496; 1978, original publication 1976; 205 pp; 85p/\$2.45)

The committee of the John W Campbell Memorial Award gave *The Alteration* its main prize in 1977. For once, I disagree with the members of that committee. This seems a shoddy book in many ways. Amis writes carefully and quietly, but not with any real verve or style. Reviewers have praised the characterisation and wonderful thinking about human problems in the book. Where? For a more convincing account of an England which was never affected by the Reformation, I would offer the relaxed, but well-wrought Lord D'Arcy stories by Randall Garrett. Amis tells the tale, as you might have read already, of the English choirboy who sings wonderful soprano, of the people (including the Pope, whose authority in England is considerable) who want him to stay soprano with the aid of a minor operation, and of the few people who try to help him escape to New England. Sympathy for the boy depends on one very doubtful premise: that immediately he loses

his vital equipment, his potential ability to compose great music will disappear, and only his ability as a singer will remain. Also I doubt that this Yorkshire Pope can maintain the authority over Europe which Amis ascribes to him; my expectation is that Europe would have been in turmoil if Amis' world did exist.

But it doesn't, you see; that's the whole point. *The Alteration* has none of the conviction of *The Man in the High Castle* or *Pavane*, or any of the books which Amis mentions archly as part of his story. Not a funny book; not very interesting; suspicious only in one section. Cynical stuff.

## THE UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE

by Dimitri Bilenkin (Collier 02016600; 1979; 164 pp; \$US2.95)

## HALF A LIFE

by Kirill Bulychov (Collier 02017850; 1977; 143 pp; \$US2.95)

I can only praise the efforts made by Collier Macmillan in recent years to translate and publish a wide range of Soviet science fiction. The most direct benefit to readers is that a many of the Strugatsky brothers' books are now available for the first time. We can also find out something of the work of lesser writers, such as Bilenkin and Bulychov.

However, only a few months after reading these books, I can remember very little about the stories in them. I do remember that Bulychov is much more convincing than Bilenkin. My notes say that Bulychov's 'May I Please Speak to Nina?' and 'The First Layer of Memory' are very good stories, and 'Half a Life' also impressive. I do remember that each of the stories brings some new light on standard sf ideas which American writers abandoned, or should have abandoned, years ago.

Bulychov's writing has a flexibility and a sense of reality which is absent in most of Bilenkin's pieces. Bilenkin really strains to squeeze stories out of his light notions. His style is wooden and naive, and only a sharp sense of human warmth and empathy gives life to such stories as 'The Man Who Was Present' and 'The Ban'. The best story is 'The Snows of Olympus', which tells of an expedition to the top of Mars's Nix Olympica. Maybe Bilenkin should stick to this sense-of-wonder stuff and become the Clarke of his country.

## THE LUCK OF BRIN'S FIVE

by Cherry Wilder (Pocket 83032.5; original publication 1977, this edition 1979; 208 pp; \$1.95)

This is the famous edition which left off the last chapter, or last page of the manuscript, or something ghastly like that. I'm keeping my copy til I'm broke and need to sell it in an auction sometime. I presume Pocket Books has corrected later copies. The book itself aroused some comment in *SFC 55/56* and won the 1978 Ditmar Award. Not one of my favourite books: combines wispy fantasy with an almost incomprehensible plethora of names and seemingly random actions. Other people find this delightful, easy reading.

## PRISONERS OF POWER

by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (Gollancz; 1977, original Russian publication as *Obitaemyi Ostrov* [The Inhabited Island] 1971; 286 pp; 5 pounds 50.)

I have the Gollancz edition of this book, but it was originally one of the series of Russian

books published by Collier Macmillan in USA. I can't help wishing that Collier's enthusiasm for the Strugatsky brothers would become a bit more discriminating. *Prisoners of Power* is an awful book, lacking most of the qualities which made me such an enthusiast about *Roadside Picnic* and *Hard to be a God*. To make things worse, Theodore Sturgeon supplies an Introduction to the book in which he tells us just what is wrong with it, and then says that these faults do not matter and it is a great book anyway! I quote him: 'the conscious commission of apparent illogic, quietly rectified in later narration.' Illogic, yes, but not much rectification. 'A vertiginous altitude of suspense . . . ending with a shocking twist—and then proceed[ing] with something else, happening to someone else days later, joyfully refusing for the longest time to tell you just what happened to Maxim.' Sturgeon might be 'joyful' about it, but I wasn't.

*Prisoners of Power* (or *The Inhabited Island*, as the original title should have been translated) has every prospect of being a good book. An astronaut lands on a promising planet, but finds that the technologically advanced inhabitants are so engaged in war that they have already ruined most of the planet and are likely to destroy themselves at any time. The future of our own earth, in other words. Maxim is physically a superman, but otherwise a dill, so he fails to come to terms with anything in this world. This is the point which the authors seek to make, of course, but their sense of irony does not work here. Maxim becomes so side-tracked that the story settles down into one long picaresque, violent adventure. For the reasons which Sturgeon lists in his Introduction, the story is too quirky to be adventurous. I kept waiting for the novel to begin. When it did, it had finished.

## LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE

by Robert Silverberg (Harper & Row; 1980; 444 pp; \$US 12.50)

At one stage I thought it might be worth concluding 'The Silverberg Forum, Part 2' (contributions for which are on file) with a review of this novel. After all, Silverberg said he would not write again, but this book demanded to be written, so here it is.

I don't see how we can retain any respect for Silverberg after receiving this book. Yes, it is heroic fantasy, but that does not automatically condemn it. What I condemn is a plot which is so obvious, a story which is rendered so mechanically, and a style which is so uninteresting that I wonder why Harper & Row published it at all. Add to that a mystical conservatism which is fairly nauseous as expressed by Silverberg in the book (the planet falls apart because the 'rightful ruler' has been deposed) and ridiculous when considered as a realistic proposition. The bits about juggling in the first hundred pages are quite good.

## S F COMMENTARY CHECKLIST

Continued from Page 32

Vonda McIntyre: *Dreamsnake* (9-10)  
Vonda McIntyre: *Fireflood and Other Stories* (10)  
Vonda McIntyre: 'Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand' (9)  
Robin McKinley: *Beauty* (25)  
Elizabeth Malczynski (30)  
Barry Malzberg: 'In the Stocks' (25)  
Gabriel Garcia Marquez: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (6, 19)  
William Mayne: *The Jersey Shore* (17)  
Eve Merriam: *Ab to Zogg* (27)  
Miles Franklin Award 1980 (11)  
Michael Moorcock: *Gloriana* (30)  
Brian Moore: *The Great Victorian Collection* (24)  
Raylyn Moore: 'A Certain Slant of Light' (29)  
Mt St Helen (3)  
Mark Mumper: 'Stones Cast at Clones' (SFC 59) (14-15)  
National Book Awards (USA) (3)  
*The National Times* (17)  
Nebula Awards (15)  
Alexander Nedelkovich (23)  
*New Worlds* (28)  
Nord Vest Books (19)  
Norstrilia Press (7, 18)  
Roman Orszanski (18)  
Marc Ortlieb (18)  
Francis Payne: 'Albert's Bellyful' (17)  
Pink Floyd: *The Wall* (6)  
Henri-Luc Planchat: 'Several Ways, and the Sun' (25)  
Frederik Pohl: *Gateway* (30)  
Frederik Pohl: *Jem* (30)  
Frederik Pohl: *Man Plus* (24-25)  
Frederik Pohl: *The Way the Future Was* (11, 13)  
Christopher Priest: 'Outside the Whale' (SFC 59) (3, 15-16)  
Gregory Rabassa (6)  
Marta Randall: *Journey* (26)  
Readings Books (19)  
Readings Records (5)  
Henry Handel Richardson: *Myself When Young* (17)  
Kim Stanley Robinson: 'The Disguise' (16)  
Spider Robinson (13)  
Franz Rottensteiner (4)  
Joanna Russ: *The Female Man* (19)  
Ken Russell (dir): *Mahler* (18)  
John Schauble: Review of *A Woman of the Future* (*The Melbourne Times*, 21 May 1980) (11)

Hilbert Schenck: 'The Morphology of the Kirkham Wreck' (20-21)  
Olive Schreiner: *The Story of an African Farm* (19)  
Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) (3, 15-16)  
Bob Seger: *Against the Wind* (6)  
Bob Seger: *Live Bullet* (6)  
Bob Seger: *Night Moves* (6)  
Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein* (19, 24)  
Tom Shippey (23)  
*Sight and Sound* (18)  
Robert Silverberg (5)  
Robert Silverberg: *Lord Valentine's Castle* (31)  
Robert Silverberg (ed): *New Dimensions 4* (30)  
Robert Silverberg (ed): *New Dimensions 7* (25)  
Norman Spinrad: 'All the Sounds of the Rainbow' (27)  
Norman Spinrad: 'The Big Flash' (26)  
Norman Spinrad: 'Heirloom' (26)  
Norman Spinrad: 'In the Eye of the Storm' (27)  
Norman Spinrad: 'The Lost Continent' (26)  
Norman Spinrad: 'The National Pastime' (27)  
Norman Spinrad: *No Direction Home* (26-27)  
Norman Spinrad: 'A Thing of Beauty' (26)  
Brian Stableford: Review of *Enemies of the System* (*Foundation*) (16)  
Arkady and Boris Strugatsky: *Hard to be a God* (30)  
Arkady and Boris Strugatsky: *Prisoners of Power* (30-31)  
Arkady and Boris Strugatsky: *Roadside Picnic* (28, 31)  
Arkady and Boris Strugatsky: *Tale of the Troika* (28)  
Theodore Sturgeon: Introduction to *Prisoners of Power* (31)  
Andrei Tarkovsky (dir): *The Stalker* (28)  
Charles Taylor (17)  
D M Thomas: *Birthstone* (28)  
D M Thomas: *The Flute-player* (28)  
Ted Thomas: 'The Intruder' (23-24)  
Flora Thompson: *Lark Rise to Candleford* (17)  
James Tiptree Jr: 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' (17)  
J R R Tolkien (30)  
Michael Tolley and Kirpal Singh (eds): *The Stellar Gauge* (18, 30)

William Trevor: *The Children of Dynmouth* (26)  
George Turner (10, 30)  
George Turner: *Beloved Son* (4-5, 9)  
George Turner: 'Delany: Victim of Great Applause' (SFC 58) (12-14, 16)  
George Turner: 'Hallucinatory Scrapbook' (SFC 58) (10)  
George Turner: Review of *Shikasta* (*Australian SF News*) (16)  
George Turner: 'Science Fiction in Australia' (SFC 55/56) (8)  
George Turner: 'Writers Learn Only One Way: The Hard Way' (SFC 59) (16)  
Unicon 6 (18)  
Stephen Utley and Howard Waldrop: 'Black as the Pit, From Pole to Pole' (25)  
Jack Vance: *Wyst: Alastor 1716* (29)  
John Varley: 'The Barbie Murders' (20)  
Joan Vinge: 'View from a Height' (20)  
A E Van Vogt (10)  
Void Publications (10)  
Kurt Vonnegut: *Jailbird* (28)  
Ian Watson: *The Garden of Delight* (28)  
Ian Watson: 'The Very Slow Time Machine' (20)  
Jean Weber (22)  
Orson Welles (dir): *Chimes at Midnight* (18)  
Wim Wenders (dir): *The American Friend* (18)  
*Whispers* (29)  
Andrew Whitmore: 'Australian Science Fiction: Is That All There Is?' (SFC 55/56) (8)  
Cherry Wilder: *The Luck of Brin's Five* (30)  
Kate Wilhelm: *Juniper Time* (17)  
Kate Wilhelm: *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (14-15)  
Emlyn Williams: *George* (13)  
Jack Wodhams: 'One Clay Foot' (17)  
Gene Wolfe: 'Seven American Nights' (17)  
Lawrence Yep: *Seademons* (25)  
Neil Young (5)  
Neil Young: *Comes a Time* (6)  
Neil Young: *Live Rust* (5-6)  
Neil Young: *Rust Never Sleeps* (6)  
Neil Young: *Zuma* (5)  
Roger Zelazny: *Where Pussywillows Late in the Catyard Bloomed* (18)  
Emile Zola: *L'Assommoir* (19)  
Pamela Zoline: 'The Heat Death of the Universe' (28)  
Pamela Zoline: 'The Holland of the Mind' (16-17, 28)

# AT LAST – BACK BY POPULAR REQUEST . . . S F COMMENTARY CHECKLIST Mentioned in this issue are:

- A-Con 80 (18)  
Robert Aickman: 'Compulsory Games' (16-17)  
Robert Aickman: *The Late Breakfasters* (29-30)  
Brian W Aldiss (16)  
Brian Aldiss: *Billion Year Spree* (24)  
Brian Aldiss: *The Brightfount Diaries* (17)  
Brian Aldiss: 'Magic and Bare Boards' (*Foundation*) (12)  
Brian Aldiss: 'Where the Lines Converge' (28)  
Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison (eds): *Hell's Cartographers* (12)  
Robert Altman (dir): *A Wedding* (18)  
Kingsley Amis: *The Alteration* (30)  
Neville Angove: 'All at Ids and Egos' (*SFC 57*) (10)  
Neville Angove (ed): *The Cygnus Chronicler* (10)  
Neville Angove: 'Get Off Your Bums, SF Readers' (*SFC 58*) (10)  
Renaldo Arenas: *Hallucinations* (19)  
Isaac Asimov: 'The Bicentennial Man' (27)  
Isaac Asimov: *The Bicentennial Man and Other Stories* (27)  
Isaac Asimov: *In Memory Yet Green* (11, 13, 17)  
Isaac Asimov: 'Stranger in Paradise' (27)  
Isaac Asimov: 'That Thou Art Mindful of Him' (27)  
A A Attanasio: 'The Blood's Horizon' (25)  
Australian Children's Book Award 1980 (8)  
Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards 1980 (Ditmars) (5)  
Sally and John Bangsund (18)  
Gregory Benford: 'Knowing Her' (25)  
Gregory Benford and Marc Laidlaw: 'A Hiss of Dragon' (20)  
Dimitri Bilenkin: 'The Snows of Olympus' (30)  
Dimitri Bilenkin: *The Uncertainty Principle* (30)  
Mervyn R Binns (ed): *Australian SF News* (5)  
Geoffrey Blainey: *The Tyranny of Distance* (19)  
James Blish: 'A Work of Art' (20)  
Robert Bloch: *The Opener of the Way* (27)  
Kyril Bonfiglioli: *Don't Point That Thing at Me* (19)  
Jorge Luis Borges (3)  
George Borrow: *Lavengro* (19)  
David Bowie (5-6)  
Allan Bray (18)  
Damien Broderick: *The Dreaming Dragons* (18)  
Kiril Bulychev: 'The First Layer of Memory' (30)  
Kiril Bulychev: *Half a Life* (30)  
Kiril Bulychev: 'May I Please Speak to Nina?' (30)  
Samuel Butler: *The Way of All Flesh* (19)  
The Byrds (5)  
Cafe Paradiso (19)  
Italo Calvino: 'All at One Point' (28)  
L Sprague de Camp: *Lovecraft: A Biography* (24)  
John W Campbell Memorial Award (10, 30)  
Marcel Camus (dir): *Black Orpheus* (18)  
John Carpenter (dir): *Assault on Precinct 13* (18)  
Terry Carr (ed): *Best SF of the Year 8* (20-21)  
Terry Carr (ed): *The Year's Finest Fantasy, Vol. 2* (28-9)  
Suzy McKee Charnas: *Motherlines* (22)  
Suzy McKee Charnas: *Walk to End of the World* (22)  
Gene Clark (5)  
Gene Clark: *No Other* (5)  
Gene Clark: *Roadmaster* (5)  
Arthur C Clarke: *The Fountains of Paradise* (10)  
John Clute: Review of *On Wings of Song* (*Foundation* 19) (17)  
Elaine Cochrane: 'It's Not Like That At All' (*SFC 58*) (10)  
Paul Collins (ed): *Void* (10)  
D G Compton: *Ascendancies* (29)  
Michael Coney: *Hello Summer Goodbye* (19)  
Cyril Connolly: *Enemies of Promise* (16)  
Ry Cooder and David Lindley (5)  
Francis Ford Coppola (dir): *Apocalypse Now* (18)  
Julia Curtis (18)  
Keith Curtis (17)  
Avram Davidson: 'Sleep Well of Nights' (29)  
Samuel R Delany (12-14, 16)  
Samuel Delany: *Dhalgren* (12)  
Samuel Delany: *The Einstein Intersection* (12)  
Samuel Delany: *Triton* (12-14)  
Thomas M Disch: 'Books' (*F&SF*, June 1980) (10)  
Thomas Disch: 'The Man Who Had No Idea' (20-21)  
Thomas Disch: *On Wings of Song* (2, 10, 17, 28)  
Thomas Disch (ed): *The Ruins of Earth* (20)  
Thomas Disch and Charles Naylor (eds): *Strangeness* (17, 28)  
Dr Feelgood (6)  
Gardner Dozois: *Strangers* (30)  
Phyllis and Alex Eisenstein: 'You Are Here' (25)  
Gordon Eklund: 'The Retro Man' (25)  
Gordon Eklund: 'Vermeer's Window' (20)  
Stanley Elkin (17)  
Stanley Elkin: *The Dick Gibson Show* (19)  
Stanley Elkin: *The Living End* (29)  
Harlan Ellison: 'Count the Clock That Tells the Time' (20)  
Frederik Exley: *Pages from a Cold Island* (17)  
Philip Jose Farmer: *Time's Last Gift* (25)  
Roy Ferguson (18)  
Ed Ferman (ed): *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (4-5)  
Robert Fitzgerald: 'The Last Supper' (28)  
Randal Flynn (19)  
Randal Flynn: 'The Paradigm' (17)  
John Foyster (ed): *Chunder!* (16, 18)  
John Foyster: '...A Puzzle that Isn't a Puzzle...' (*SFC 55/56*) (8)  
William Gass: *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (17)  
Rob Gerrard: '...A Masterpiece...' (*SFC 55/56*) (30)  
Rob Gerrard (ed): *Transmutations* (3, 16)  
Bruce Gillespie: 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' (*SFC 55/56*) (4-6)  
Bruce Gillespie: 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' (*SFC 58*) (11)  
Bruce Gillespie (ed): *SF Commentary 55½* (10)  
Bruce Gillespie (ed): 'The Silverberg Forum' (*SFC 51*) (5)  
Gollancz Fantasy (28)  
Gunter Grass: *Cat and Mouse* (17)  
Gunter Grass: *The Tin Drum* (17)  
Graham Greene: 'Under the Garden' (16-17, 28)  
Sneja Gunew: 'Journeys to New Territory' (*SFC 57*) (9)  
James Gunn: *Kampus* (24)  
Gay and Joe Haldeman (18)  
M Lynne Hamilton: *The Lost Kingdom* (8)  
Carey Handfield (18)  
Lee Harding: *Displaced Person (Misplaced Persons)* (8)  
Lee Harding: *The Weeping Sky* (8)  
Emmy-Lou Harris: *Roses in the Snow* (6)  
M John Harrison: 'Running Down' (28)  
George Hay (29)  
William Hazlitt (17)  
Patricia Highsmith (18)  
Alfred Hitchcock (dir): *Strangers on a Train* (18)  
Cecilia Holland: *Floating Worlds* (21-22)  
Claude Houghton: *I Am Jonathan Scrivener* (29)  
Hyland House (8)  
Dean Ing: 'The Devil You Don't Know' (20)  
David Ireland: *A Woman of the Future* (10-11, 17)  
Henry James: 'The Altar of the Dead' (16-17)  
Henry James: 'The Friends of the Friends' (16-17)  
Henry James: 'The Ghostly Rental' (16-17)  
Henry James: 'The Great Good Place' (16-17)  
Henry James, ed Leon Edel: *Henry James: Stories from the Supernatural* (16-17)  
Ernst Juenger: *On the Marble Cliffs* (19)  
Franz Kafka: *The Basic Kafka* (28)  
Franz Kafka: 'Before the Law' (28)  
Franz Kafka: 'The Burrow' (28)  
Franz Kafka: 'The Great Wall of China' (28)  
Franz Kafka: 'In the Penal Colony' (28)  
Franz Kafka: 'Metamorphosis' (28)  
James Patrick Kelly: 'Death Therapy' (20)  
Stephen King: 'The Gunslinger' (29)  
Donald Kingsbury: 'To Bring in the Steel' (20)  
Heinrich von Kleist: *The Marquise of O* (19)  
Damon Knight: *The Futurians* (11)  
Damon Knight (ed): *A Pocketful of Stars* (23)  
R A Lafferty: 'Selenium Ghosts of the Eighteen Seventies' (29)  
David J Lake: 'How to Get Away With Murder' (*SFC 57*) (8-9)  
Judith Lawrence: 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat' (25)  
Q D Leavis: *Fiction and the Reading Public* (17)  
Ursula K Le Guin (2-4)  
Ursula Le Guin: *The Dispossessed* (21-22)  
Ursula Le Guin: 'The Dowry of the Angyar' (23)  
Ursula Le Guin: *The Left Hand of Darkness* (30)  
Ursula Le Guin: *Rocannon's World* (23)  
Ursula Le Guin, ed Susan Wood: *Language of the Night* (17)  
Fritz Leiber: 'Black Glass' (20)  
Fritz Leiber: 'The Princess in the Tower 250,000 Miles High' (25)  
Stanislaw Lem: *The Cyberiad* (19)  
Seigfried Lenz: *An Exemplary Life* (17)  
Seigfried Lenz: *The German Lesson* (17)  
Etienne Leroux: *To a Dubious Salvation* (19)  
Malcolm Lowry: *Under the Volcano* (19)  
Carson McCullers: *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (19)  
McGuinn Hillman Clark (5)  
Vonda McIntyre: 'Aztecs' (10, 17)