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The Critical Journal of the BSFA



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VECTOR

The Critical Journal
of the BSFA

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Editorial and advertising correspondence should in future be sent to the new editor, Geoff Rippington at: 6 Rutland Gardens, BIRCHINGTON, Kent, CT7 9SN. Correspondence about features will continue to be dealt with by Paul Kincaid and reviews correspondence by Joseph Nicholas.

Eternal thanks to Rochelle for typing all of this issue (except for these few lines) and, again, many thanks to John Harvey for printing this issue and having much patience with me for being late once again.

Back In The Groove Again- An Editorial

For the second time in three years, Vector is without a regular editor. It may be said that this is a poor state of affairs; why is it that Vector, which to many people is the premier BSFA publication, should find it so hard to maintain continuity of editorship?

The reason is very simple. It is a demanding occupation. Certain basic editorial skills are required, together with a genuine interest in SF as a subject and the sheer determination necessary to produce (in all its connotations) the finished product. I'm afraid that simple visions of a peak-capped dynamo of an editor are way short of the mark. Sure, the editor edits the material. But, he also has to solicit the material; chase late articles, ensure that reviews editor and features editors are doing their jobs, and then tie the whole lot together into an issue. But the work doesn't stop there. Then it has to be proof read, corrected, typed and then pasted up into the final form ready for printing. The actual Editorial part - the sifting of the wheat from the chaff and bringing personality and feeling to the issue as a whole takes up comparatively little time. The glamour is short-lived. In reality, it's a tough life.

There are bonuses of course. The feedback in the form of letters. The ability to draw material from well known people in itself is a positive plus, if you'll forgive the tautology. Then there's the feeling that you, the editor, has his finger on the pulse of SF in this country - and that it's your responsibility for imparting this valuable information to your readership.

Perhaps I'm making the job of editor appear to be an impossible task. Surely nobody could be that dedicated and have that much enthusiasm. That's fair comment, and I don't expect anybody operating under the circumstances in which BSFA people find themselves would disagree. However, I'm very pleased to report that we do have a new editor - and despite the delay in announcing his name - it has given the BSFA committee the chance to ensure that the new incumbent is of the correct quality. Starting with Vector 108 (June 1982), Geoff Rippington will be controlling the editorial reign, bringing a proven record on Arena SF with him. Paul Kincaid remains as Features editor, whilst reviews will continue to be handled by Joseph Nicholas.

Vector will doubtless see a few changes in the coming issues. Geoff has already discussed these with me, and the signs are that the solid respectability and interest Kevin Smith built will be maintained, and strengthened. Meanwhile, Geoff is finishing his last issue of Arena SF, and I return (albeit temporarily) to see this latest issue through. I hope the efforts of all involved are appreciated.

Finally, a word of thanks to Kevin Smith. Kevin very ably described in the last issue what he achieved with the magazine. I'd like to add that he enlivened it to a degree that had been sadly lacking since the days of Malcolm Edwards in the early 1970s. For that alone, I salute him.

***** Alan Dorey **

Standpoint: SF In The Modern World

((Whilst I was thinking about the actual preparation of material for this issue of *Vector*, a couple of ideas come to mind. One was to start a regular column by some SF notable. The latter has been shelved because Geoff Rippington intends doing that very thing, whilst the former hasn't gone quite to plan because I failed to organise myself sufficiently. However, there is a theme running through this issue, although the strands of it do get nebulous at times. The theme is the future of Science Fiction, which I assure you, doesn't sound as stupid as one might think. My concern is for SF and what it's about in the 1980s. The following piece pulls together a few ideas and thoughts. It's not intended to be instructive, nor particularly original - but it does perhaps illuminate some of the areas in our subject that should be concerning us. See it as my won Standpoint if you like - the one I would have written if Kevin was still editor.))

There is a huge gap between what people think in public and what they think in private. The width of this chasm depends upon many factors, but for illustrative purposes, let me use that of the Politician. By day he avoids the issue, makes vague statements, leaves his speechwriting to committees and upholds the traditions of the party to the utmost. At home, he's immersed in the minutiae of daily living, coming into conflict with the very things he's helped to establish. Here his mind has free reign, and no matter how much solace he can seek in the knowledge that he's doing all right by the party, the truth must surely bite deeper than that. For example, what does a Bromley Councillor really think the day he arrives home from the Law Lords ruling in the recent Greater London Council *Fares Fare* case? Does he really think that it's all to the good? Does he feel that it's a major victory? A radical step forward? The kind of move that's going to make him a hero in his constituency? Unlikely. If he/she has any kind of mind at all, the drawbacks will be considered. The longterm effects will begin to crystallise, and his utter glee as depicted in the newspapers or on the radio may begin to evaporate. Come the next day, however, and it's all forgotten.

The point I'm making is simple, and has two sides. Firstly, what do the producers of SF novels really think they are doing when they write/publish a work - and what does the consumer really get out of the book that's being distributed/read? If we can find answers to these questions, perhaps we'll be a little nearer that elusive definition of what Science Fiction is. However, for the purposes of this discussion, let us be more modest with our aims. Let us try to answer the question "Where is Science Fiction today?", and to do this we'll need to take a look at the readers, writers and the publishers.

Science Fiction in the Modern World

The Readers

The readers are the front line. In theory, their buying habits and preferences should dictate the sort of material published. Regrettably we are very far from this ideal. People love categorising things, hanging labels round their necks, making things black and white instead of various shades of grey. So many readers only read what is labelled science fiction. Anything that crosses over seems not to fit the parameters, and is thus discarded. Readers are an intelligent bunch of people, but unless motivated, may not be aware that there is much more material worthy of prospecting. I've met so many people though, whose whole attitude to SF is summed up thus: -

"If it's not Science Fiction, it's not worth reading."

This almost suggests that many readers are falling back into the old view that SF is good, solid escapist stuff, and little else. A blinkered view if ever there was one, and one which should have been buried with John W. Campbell. Writers have shown that there is so much more to SF than that; SF is no longer just a genre, it is a fully fledged part of literature, a fiction for today.

But again, it is the SF books in all their cliched glory that sell the volume copies. Specialist book shops shift huge mounds of Star Trek photo-novels, yet barely part with more than a trickle of books by respected literary writers. I conducted a very brief survey one Saturday afternoon in Forbidden Planet, the London SF bookshop. Some interesting results emerge:

No. of people surveyed - 46

(Excluding those specifically there to buy comics)

No. buying more than two novels - 38

Average expenditure per person - £5.20

Most popular authors: Jack Chalker, Isaac Asimov, Anne McCaffrey,
Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson.

Admittedly, the survey was very rough and ready and certainly not up to the standards of Mr. Gallup. But it shows that it is the volume writers rather than the literary writers who feature prominently. Quantity of novels written rather than the quality - although, Brian Aldiss is very much an exception and only appears because there were posters displayed advertising a forthcoming signing session. It's a problem for the reader to know what is good, but it's not necessarily his fault. A publisher eager to cash in on a boom for SF will design his book as a package. Thus the original cover for John Sladek's fine short story collection "Keep the Giraffe Burning" (Granada paperback) which, oddly enough, pictured a set of burning giraffes in an African landscape, was junked in favour of a Chris Foss style space ship. This latter had no relevance whatever to any of the contents, but obviously in the eye of the publisher, epitomised Science Fiction. What is the reader to think? What is his feeling?

Readers, unfortunately, often stick to a rigid pattern of reading. Set authors, set genres, set types of book. It doesn't help matters that publishers encourage this. Certain wise authors have insisted that their SF books are published without the SF label to try and tap the general market, and hopefully pick up a more discriminating reader who hasn't been exposed to the strictures of the common SF novel. But without the label, will it be missed by those who might actually appreciate it the most. And if they do miss it, does it really matter?

The Publishers

Increasingly, publishers are losing touch with the SF readership. With the demise of many of the SF magazines, novels and short story collections are often the first line of attack as far as contact with SF is concerned. Attitudes are developed early on via published books, and by clumsy management on behalf of the publishers, the readers can be nurtured on the same old menu of stodge and more stodge. New English Library show little care about the kind of SF they produce. The quality of their packaging and the style of their covers suggests a standard approach that dates from pre-war days. At the other extreme, early SF paperbacks from Penguin (at least into the early 1970s) had a degree of care and literary respectability that is all too hard to find these days. On the hardback front, Gollancz and Faber remain loyal to SF, but even they are feeling the effects of the recession. However, there is an old adage which takes care of many publishers's attitudes to recession and economic gloom: "If there's a recession, the people won't want to buy our books anymore, and we won't sell as many copies. Therefore we'd better stop advertising them as much. And, do you know, our sales did drop off, so we were right after all".

I appreciate that publishers tread a very thin line between selling a book on its literary merits, and its capacity to sell thousands of copies. If the two come together, then there is happiness. But in our far from ideal world, that is rarely the case. The decision to take a risk with a new or unknown author becomes harder to make, and more often than not, tends to be negative. Arrow Books are building up their SF list, and doing so by having somebody (Richard Evans) who is capable of having sympathies toward the readers and writers alike. John Bush and Malcolm Edwards at Gollancz also have a keen understanding of what the market will bear. But, one wonders, how many times does a publisher enter the SF market with just a few sales statistics and projected sales surveys to hand? What sort of a guide could that ever be to the type of book that they publish? The sort of book we read?

A pleasing event recently was the publicity Jonathan Cape afforded Brian Aldiss for his new novel, *Helliconia Spring*. This book (first part of a trilogy, and to be reviewed in the next *Vector*) has the signs of being a major work in Aldiss' career, and to help possibly unsympathetic critics (unsympathetic because anything labelled SF or Fantasy is bound to come in for the treatment - the classic put down "It's okay for Science Fiction") an explanatory brochure describing the bases of the book was produced. In a lesser novel, this is the sort of thing that would have taken the form of a map and introduction at the beginning. Then not only does the reviewer have it rammed down his throat, but the reader is also cast in the mould of a person with little understanding of what a good SF novel can be like. The brochure describing *Helliconia Spring* was brief but cogent, and showed Capes's determination to promote the book in an acceptable manner. You only get out what you put in. Lacklustre promotion and advertising speaks for itself.

Publishers, thus, are responsible for what we can read, but it is up to us as to what we do read. If they are to become more au fait with our requirements, the readers must demand higher standards, they must make their voices heard.

Science Fiction in the Modern World

The Authors

It is difficult to describe the ambivalent position that many writers can find themselves in. Torn between writing for the good of the soul and hacking for the sake of a living. Again, the happy medium is rarely achieved. I often feel that SF is the one genre subject that is easy to write badly, but difficult to write well.

It lends itself to hackneyed phrases and tired out jargon, which any two-penny writer who has learnt even the most basic skills of spinning a yarn can adapt for his own nefarious purposes. The mere mention of "visi-screen" or "Android" speaks volumes for the creative genius at work. On the cinema screen it's even easier - by simply showing bank upon bank of flashing lights and dials, the director can create an instant image familiar to all SF readers. And he's done it without any thought or imagination whatsoever.

Attitudes are hardened by the worthlessness of awards like the Hugos and Nebulas, the latter of which (surely) must be outlawed if the present "below-the-belt" behaviour of certain publishers vis-a-vis "promoting" the books to SFWA members is concerned. Turning to the Hugo, how can Barry Longyear justify his award? Kevin Smith in Vector 106 states his own personal objection to the book involved and I can go no better than that. How can writers like Clarke and Asimov be awarded Hugos late on in their careers for below par works? If they deserved it in their heyday, then that was the time they should have received it, not as an afterthought almost as if it were an obituary.

Thankfully, there are promising signs in the UK that authors are not accepting a passive role, and there is a genuine desire for creativity and literary worthiness. They deserve plaudits for their actions, especially when publishers are becoming as fickle as some soccer fans when their team is relegated. The authors write the material; they are the ones (supposedly) with the inventive ability and anything that can maintain their desire to create should be supported. What cannot be excused is the simple-minded making a fast buck attitude displayed by a selection of authors at the expense of the reader.

So, Where is Science Fiction Today?

SF today is in an unhappy state, I'm sad to conclude. Of course there are signs of hope, but the general feeling is that either a complete overhaul is necessary, or a gradual change for the better must be initiated. The latter course can be assisted by reader participation; by the campaigning of groups like



the BSFA and the SF Foundation; by the activities of the new magazines like Interzone. I make no apology for the sweeping generalisations I've made, and I'm certain that I've made a few errors of judgement, but I felt that it was important for some type of statement to be made. The whole object of the exercise has been to find answers to a difficult question; the answers are there, but clarification and dissection is essential and that is where the readers of Vector, where the members of the BSFA come in. Let's have a large meaty Letter Column for Geoff to inherit.

ECHOES FROM THE FUTURE

An Interview with JACK DANN by Gregory Feeley

Jack Dann became generally recognized as a writer of importance in the late seventies, though he published his first story in 1970 and was producing work of distinction within three years, achieving something like a mastery of the shorter forms by 1975 with "Timetipping" and "The Dybbuk Dolls." Never a prolific writer, Dann published a number of dense, highly original stories, including the novel Starhiker, whose stylistic beauty, individuality of form, and uncompromising fidelity to their own less accessible natures contrasted sharply with the fashion in the mid-seventies for future histories, novels expanded from award-winning shorter works, serials, series, and artlessly long "epics" -- to speak only in quantitative terms. Even more radical was Dann's singular unsentimentality -- a characteristic rarer even in good SF than one would think before encountering the real thing -- and his unflinching dramatization of the darker aspects of human nature, which, more than his stories' seeming difficulty, probably account for the coolness of their initial reception. But even if Dann missed the mid-seventies boom in commercial SF (and its attendant heyday of five-figure advances), his work found markets, was occasionally anthologized, nominated for the Nebula Award (he has never been nominated for a Hugo) and was collected in 1980 in Timetipping, which proved unexpectedly popular. Best known for his superior anthologies, Dann published little fiction in 1978-80 as he worked on an ambitious novel, The Man Who Melted. Near-completion of that novel seems to have sparked a release of creative energies, and 1981 saw publication of a variety of stories by Dann, including his second novel, Junction, long in inventory at Dell.

The following interview was conducted during an SFWA function in New York in November 1981, shortly after completion of The Man Who Melted. The novel, his longest, Dann sees as a turning point in his work; and looks beyond it to a number of essentially different books he intends to write, including SF collaborations with Gardner Dozois and Jay Haldeman; another SF novel, Distances; a borderline fantasy, The Carbon Dreamer, based on a story sold to The Last Dangerous Visions almost ten years ago; and two contemporary novels: Extra Duty, concerning life in a military school, and Counting Coup, which he discusses below.

* * *

GF: Both Starhiker and Junction seem to adopt their structures from the mythic folk tale Joseph Campbell calls the Hero Journey: the story of a resourceful young man who leaves his provincial homeland to journey through successive worlds of increasing wonder, from which he returns, after triumphing over

adversity, as a figure of eminence. An earlier story, "The Marks of Painted Teeth", evokes a wide range of mythic ritual, most familiarly that concerning the eating and rebirth of the slain god. For one who has written almost no straight fantasy, you seem unusually attracted by subjects that surpass the conventional boundaries of the rational. Is this a deliberate artistic goal?

JD: Starhiker was originally conceived to be a quick adventure novel. I adapted a quest framework for it, and the first chapter came very quickly. I was offered a contract and settled down to write the book -- and I got bored; I just wasn't really interested in doing an adventure novel. So what I did is, I kept inserting things that were interesting to me--that is, I kept giving myself problems for the protagonist to solve. These problems entailed the development of consciousness, which has been a pattern throughout my work, something that has started changing just very recently. So what was originally supposed to be an adventure quest framework became, for me, the quest for evolving consciousness.

The same is true in "Painted Teeth"; however, I was not conscious of that while I was writing it. For when I first started writing, I was writing to be sane. In other words, I was writing to help myself work out things I didn't even understand. What I see now in retrospect was: I was a late bloomer, and I feel quite frankly that I came to what I consider consciousness late. When I look back on my past, I can remember how I viscerally felt about the world, it was as if I were 90% blind. So what my work has been, it has seemed in retrospect, is an attempt to deal with consciousness. But when I started out I was not conscious of this, as in "Painted Teeth", where the story was born, like an organism, fully structured and formed.

Junction was conscious work in that I knew what I was doing. However, I was dissatisfied with the original, short version because the ending was internalized. It made sense only in a dreamlike, subjective form. Junction is a journey to that consciousness of dreams, and in that way, I believe it has a true coherence. In other words, it is a mapping out of that side--right-brain, whatever you want to call it--where intuitive, undiscerned but not less essential activity of mind goes on. In the novella, it was done as it intuitively felt right, but it did not bear enough reference to the objective world, and that's what I tried to clear up in the novel version.

GF: Nevertheless, you printed a revised version of the original "Junction" in Timetipping, suggestion that you regard the shorter version as a variant of the story, and not just a text that the novel has supplanted.

JD: Yes, I felt that the original urge that produced the novella, which came out at a rate of fifteen pages a day, was valid and I wanted to retain that. The novel is an expansion, with additions, but it is fundamentally different in the way it tries to reach into the objective world.

When I write something, I see it essentially as the tracks of where I have been. So when I have done something, I leave it at that and go on. It's almost like living in an eternal present. Previous work is merely my record of where I have been. The novella was done in a different stage in terms of the way I was feeling about the material. So I left it there.

I've always seen myself as a process. When I looked back upon the work and saw that it didn't do what I would like it to do now, that never bothered me because the whole idea of fiction for me is the act, the process of reaching--pushing through to something else. I always feel like a student.

Many other writers feel that after they become master of a certain form, they must hold or strengthen their position at that successful level. Although writing is something for which you have to have a sort of enormous ego, for me it's a very bizarre composition of ego and a true humbleness, because I always have in mind that numinous ideal which I can't reach at the time, and never will.

GF: Which can only imperfectly be realized in a finished work.

JD: yes. It's very Platonic, actually.

GF: Your mention of an "eternal present" is interesting, because Jung's concept of the unus mundus, a continuum underlying the empirical world where all time is experienced as a single unchanging present, seems to be echoed in Junction (the novel).

JD: Very much. I came to Jung, believe it or not, through Kate Wilhelm, who was also a great influence.

GF: Through Margaret and I?

JD: I have to say I haven't read Margaret and I. Kate's influence on my earlier work was through her Orbit period short stories. She was dealing with Jungian ideas, which interested me. For me, Jung's formulations feel intuitively valid. They've intrigued me. In the novel the playing with Jung's ideas was done consciously, more so than in the novella. I did the same kind of thing with Borges' idealism as expressed in his "A new Refutation of Time". I was also reading Leibnitz and Borges, and all of these people actually do come together; there are similarities, they build upon each other. I discovered this as I was working and playing with ideas.

What I find interesting is that, though I am working very differently now, I was taking ideas for their numinosity--a sort of Jungian aura, or perhaps, again, Platonic forms. The fact that the whole end came to me as a kind of numinous flash also links together like a story within a story.

GF: It is interesting how you seem to work both intuitively and with a conscious design--with a map yet in the dark, in a sense.

JD: The fact that you mention is interesting because before I can write, or give structure, I have to have that almost numinal kind of idea or form. Either the form informs the structure or vice versa--in other words I can't disentangle them in the actual doing; this only comes later when I analyze. Once I have that numinal feeling, a sense of where it is and what it's about, I hang a loose structure over it. I then write it any way it comes out, and then turn a very critical eye upon it.

GF: The Man Who Melted seems to be an attempt to explore new ground, distinct from the overlapping themes and recurrent imagery in the previous novels and the stories in Timetipping.

JD: A lot of the time when I'm working on something, I don't realize how much of a piece my work is. This is something that is almost frightening, in a way. But now that I've finished The Man Who Melted I have an overview of it; when I was working on it I thought I was doing something much more removed. However, I wasn't.

The Man Who Melted is also about evolving consciousness. The evolving consciousness of Junction was almost a malevolent evolving God, the opposite of Chardin's. In other words, it was Chardin's kind of evolving God, but was malevolent. In The Man Who Melted we sort of echo that; again you can see the Chardinist influence because the Screemers form a group that becomes conscious, a new kind of consciousness. I also echo Heidegger's idea that "the dreadful has already happened," which I mention in the book. This new consciousness is not quite understood, and it's so totally different as to defy standard morality. What I did here, and what I'm trying to do now, in terms of control and technique, is to try to tell a story set in the future as if it were a mainstream novel--as if it were Daniel Martin. It is grounded as much as I could make it in the gritty stuff of reality, though it also concerns the numinal element. I wanted to bring out perceivable reality, everyday reality, and have all the other things going on through that. That was a real juggling act, as I was dealing with dissimilar kinds of concepts.

GF: I'm surprised you mentioned Daniel Martin, as all of Fowles' work, Martin as much as the rest, has articulated a chastening, self-admonitory ethic: curbing the overweening ego, forcefully by necessity, so as to protect humane society from the blundering ravages of the self-conscious impulse, which Fowles associates with, among other things, abstract art and all sexual adventurism. At its less doctrinaire, Fowles' art seems closer in sensibility to the SF of George Zebrowski, as compared to the more Romantic concern in your work with the isolated individual moving toward some form of self-realization.

JD: Before and while I was writing The Man Who Melted I was reading Daniel Martin, and I think there is an influence. Fowles is an influence in my work, although I'm sure that no one would ever see it. I think it is somehow a style, the technique of close-focus character interaction. I'm interested in Fowles' craft, not his moral prescriptions. The Man Who Melted was mainly influenced, I would say, by Mann's "Death in Venice". There is also some sense of the unremitting pull of fate...the certainty, moral certainty, of the future.

GF: What form did you feel appropriate for the material that suggested The Man Who Melted? I assume the gritty worldliness of what was intended to seem a contemporary novel of the future would dictate some form different from the heroic quest of mythic subtext underlying so much of your SF.

JD: This novel on one level is structured as a tragedy in the classical sense. The protagonist lives in a time and in a society, and is in a situation, where he cannot make proper moral decisions; where everything he does, it seems, is going to hurt someone. He's also working against a memory that he doesn't consciously have and yet is operating within him, and which is drawing him into a larger consciousness such as I used in Junction. It's a grim novel in terms of everyday life being grim. It's also very decadent in terms of the society that I envision. Also, much of the background stems from my own experience in Cuba and Europe at an early age.

GF: It also seems a very personal novel; the protagonist's struggle to regain psychic wholeness, like Stephen's very different struggle in "Camps", has a kind of passionate intensity, a sense of cutting close to the bone one does not feel in the more distanced unfoldings of Starhiker or "A Quiet Revolution for Death." In reading these one feels a powerful emotional undertow.

JD: A lot of this stuff you understand after the act of writing it. An example--when I wrote "Camps" I was writing about the protagonist going back and forth in time, and it was about my hospital experience. But it was also about how my memory worked; it was part of working out my own amnesia--and I didn't even realize this; this became clear to me afterward.

When I was twenty-one I had an appendicitis attack. I was operated on, but there were complications and I developed peritonitis, ran a temperature of 104° and was in a coma for a week. I was in the hospital for four months. It was one of the forming experiences of my life; it was after that that I would try to become a writer--I decided that I was going to take chances. Many things come about as a result of that experience--the way I perceive myself, in that in my guts I feel that every day I am alive is really a gift. It was as if I had died... and was given another chance at life. They had given me a 5% chance for survival.

But this whole thing about loss of memory--I did not realize that I had amnesia as a result of my fever and coma, just that there were things that were fuzzy. All that changed when I met an old friend, and memories started coming back in almost hallucinatory kind of images. It now seems to me that in "Camps" I was paralleling my own life. In fact, I often have this fear when I'm writing that I may be delving into stuff that I'm not yet aware of consciously.

GF: So "Camps" traces the double story of Stephen working his way back to health as an individual concurrent with Stephen in the death camp trying to survive as a Jew--the endeavor to live both as an individual and as a people, like two cycles turning on one axis.

JD: They were each a metaphor for the other. Stephen in the hospital and Stephen in the concentration camp were each fighting for life, and fighting for the will to live, if that makes any sense.

I had an experience when I was at the worst, in a coma. I remember it very clearly. If you remember that part in "Camps" where Stephen receives a Demerol injection and goes walking through ice fields--well, that's all true. Almost everything that occurs in the hospital is taken from my personal experience, except the sex act with the nurse and one or two other scenes. I had come at one point while high on Demerol and free of pain to where I was walking through the ice fields--it was as if I was initiating myself into death. I always had to have that ice when I was given a shot, and then of course I would spill the ice, just like Stephen, and wake up into a world of pain. As I was walking through the ice fields I saw two doors. One was completely black, and the other was blinding light. And one was obviously death and the other, life. And I had to choose one. And I remember as I walked through the door that was light, and woke up as the water spilled all over me, that it made not difference whether I walked into the dark room or the bright room--they bore equal weight, and it is as if I had simply flipped a coin. That will to live is part of the pain and hell of consciousness. The decision to walk through the door of light had already, somehow, been made.

GF: Most of your work until recently has concerned the possibilities of human transcendence, often dramatizing the transfigured consciousness of a hitherto unprepossessing individual, though such sea-changes seem distinctly sinister, as in "The Dybbuk Dolls" or "I'm With You in Rockland", as often as not. The Man Who Melted, however, clearly uses some of the theory

Proposed by Julian Jaynes in The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind, where Jaynes suggests that consciousness is a much later development in human history than is generally thought, before which time humans reasoned without self-awareness, acting when confronted with new situations on "orders" from the intuitive side of the brain, which one experienced as auditory hallucinations--

JD: Literally, as voices from the gods.

GF: Yes; which was what they were taken to be. I'm interested in the tension in the novel between the "advance" of the Screamers' telepathic group consciousness and the atavism of their reversion of bicameral thinking.

JD: When I read Jaynes' book I was very impressed with the idea aesthetically; I don't know why, but it seems to resonate somehow with my own sense of things. Oddly enough, I don't believe it's possible to prove whether Jaynes is right or wrong, so I take his work purely aesthetically, as I would platonic forms.

GF: So that it's a formal assumption underlying the novel, more than something you personally accept.

JD: Right. Somehow, I think my work tries to give coherence to the wild side, to the right brain. I seem to keep insisting on somehow making a lateral move, a quantum jump, instead of the way we usually progress; analytically.

GF: By syllogism, or building like bricklayers upon firm empirical foundations.

JD: Yes. The problem is, what began Romantically, as you said, is somehow turning...malevolent. As if it's turning on me. And I'll somehow have to deal with it.

GF: The traditional critique of Romanticism, which Fowles certainly endorses, is largely that-- the monstrosity inherent in its emphasis on the autonomous individual, which is seen as insidious and conducive to great social evils. This is essentially the tradition that insists a work of art must express some clearly moral sensibility, and holds culpable the work of art that declines this commission (or fulfills it too subtly for the critic to notice), or suggests an ethic with which the critic disagrees. These critics hostile to the Romantic impulse as being outside moral law, F.R. Leavis or John Gardner, would probably regard this malevolence as vindication of their position--the Romantic birds coming home to roost.

JD: This is a problem because I am of two minds about it. It's basically a question of what I want to do with my own fiction. Like many other people, I seem to have been given a gift of perceiving from odd angles, seeing certain colors. What I've done with these stories is to try to "catch the bird", try to put it down. I've tried to do that for that super-sense of the world that you feel maybe a few times in your life, for an instant. That is not a question of morality. It can be amoral, immoral--the point is, one has to put it down. Some of my work has been violent; I'm against violence. I would like perhaps one day to write a socially uplifting novel to which young people could look for some degree of guidance.

GF: Like Daniel Martin.

JD: What you feel about Daniel Martin is interesting because I perceive it to be, yes, about man trying to find his proper place in society; but in the moment. Making the minute decisions that constitute life. The Man Who Melted stands in relation to Junction rather as Daniel Martin stands to The Magus. In The Magus he went for that numinal element, the demonic. After the masque scene, the reader felt he had been pushed through. Even if you didn't understand it, you had seen the colors. While Daniel Martin is not about the colors; it's about the minor morals of five-minute periods, of meetings and intersections. I perceived it as always grey.

GF: The difference you note is certainly there, yet the Fowles novels each develop a critique of modern egoism which the reader is clearly intended to take away from the text. Junction does not seem to possess any such didactic purpose.

JD: Though one was underlying it. Junction does refer to our world; it is critical, in a mocking fashion. The way the whores comment on how politics work: in that society, they are the people who do the thinking.

GF: Kind of a chorus.

JD: Yes. This was done not darkly, but I was sort of jabbing at our own mores because Junction was, in a way, a micro-version of our own world, of American society.

GF: Some reviewers seemed to accept that, but balk at the characterization of Ned Wheeler--a "slimy" protagonist, as one put it, whom you did not plainly censure, to their discomfiture.

JD: That has rather irritated me, this bit about Ned being slimy. Most of us are "slimy" in that way; my belief is that if a real human being--not a superhero--were to be confronted by a monster, as Ned is by the birdbeast, he would react as Ned did: with fear. Ned is a young man who like many young people is not interested in longer term goals, but in the present; yet he is being pulled by outside forces that decide where his life is going and which are taking control of his life. Ned is not a superhero. He is a hero, maybe an anti-hero; also, like most of us, he makes decisions, but he makes them within a greater framework, which limits him in all kinds of ways, even though this is a novel about seemingly unlimited vistas. So where the external doesn't limit him, the internal does; he limits himself.

Those readers wanted something else out of the book, which I was not providing. Junction was not written as popular fiction in the sense of fiction being written to reinforce values; to make reader comfortable. It was written to make them uncomfortable. Much of science fiction is reassuring; it's a very cozy and comfortable genre, for all that we talk about science fiction expanding your mind and being a means to explore alternative lifestyles and world views.

I'm not making a value judgment. I don't think either one is better, just different. My particular demons push me to do this. This is what I must write, right now.

GF: The Man Who Melted then has roots in personal experience such as your onetime amnesia and, I assume, your feelings of having come to real consciousness late; and also in theories you find intellectually provocative such as Jaynes' and Jung's. There is one more immediate origin: your story "Whirl Cage" (1972) in which the protagonist, the Screemers, and the collapsing society all appear in prototypical form. This is a very early story; the period between it and the completion of The Man Who Melted constitutes virtually your entire writing career, just as the periods of writing "Junction" and Junction frame the appearance of Starhiker, making the gestation times for your three novels a series of Chinese boxes. Did you intend all along to base a novel on "Whirl Cage", and how has its design changed over the years?

JD: "Whirl Cage" was a very important work for me because it had sold to what was an important market for me at the time, Damon Knight's Orbit. It was after I sold that story that I quit Law School to write full-time; it gave me that kind of push. Later, when I set out to write a novel--I needed money, I needed something to write--George Zebrowski suggested I do "Whirl Cage", because I had been toying with doing some other stories sharing that same background. So I wrote a proposal, which began as what is now the novella "Amnesia" and the first part of the eventual novel, which however resulted with Mantle becoming part of this hive mind. And then the story--which was based on Damon Knight's A for Anything in its structure--goes 500 years into the future where the rest of the novel was to take place, in a setting almost like Aldiss' The Long Afternoon of Earth. I sold this proposal to Harper & Row, but when I sat down to write it, a few years later, I was a different person. I saw I didn't want to write what would have become a philosophical adventure novel; I wanted to write a novel. So half of the prospectus was never used, and I wrote an entirely different novel.

I did research into crowd behavior. Elias Canetti, who just won the Nobel Prize, wrote a book called Crowds and Power, which is absolutely brilliant. I had also read some other things, one a paper by a fellow named MacDougal written about 1910 where he actually posited that part of mob behavior was almost telepathic in origin. I took all of this to build on, but it started with "Whirl Cage" which was one of those wild ideas built upon "What if?"

I think the novel is about society coming apart, a reflective novel on our own society. Canetti is in there as an influence--stylistically, through his novel Auto-da-Fe.

GF: "A philosophical adventure novel"--that proposal sounds similar to Starhiker. You originally planned Starhiker to inaugurate a trilogy; are you tempted to go back and mine that unused portion of the Whirl Cage proposal, either as a serial successor or as an offshoot?

JD: I've thought of using it. But not now. I've got other projects I want to write. And later, I might feel that to rework early material would set me in a different direction. I'll have to wait. My work is cyclic, so there is a chance...

GF: Your first published stories were in collaboration with George Zebrowski, and you have since written collaborations, all short, with several other writers. Do you feel that these undertakings generate some hybrid vigor, or are they essentially left-handed exercises?

Dann Interview

JD: Many of the stories George and I did together, like "Od", were obviously not really serious--and I think not very good. But I think a story like "Yellowhead" shows us bringing our strengths together. More recently I have been doing most of my collaborations with Gardner Dozois, anthologies and fiction, and I do believe we bring our strengths together. I did a story with Michael Swanwick and Gardner called "Touring", which for what it did I thought was successful. Closer to my heart--I guess, closer to where my own intuitive expression lies--is a story Gardner and I did called "Down Among the Dead Men", which is about a prisoner in a death camp who is a vampire. It sounds silly--it is a story Gardner prodded me to get going on, and I didn't take it seriously; but then I was caught in it. Everyone who has seen it has said it is very powerful, but too grim; it has fallen through the slick market, and we're afraid it may fall further. But it's a piece of work I would be proud of at any time.

GF: Did _____ see it?

JD: Yes. Thought it was too dark.

GF: That charge has been leveled before, against "A Quiet Revolution for Death."

JD: Interestingly, that story was really written as a homage to Thomas Disch, whose work I love. I wrote it for an anthology he was editing, but Tom didn't like it at all. Bob Silverberg loved it, though; saw it as a watershed work.

GF: The Man Who Melted seems to contain another homage to, or echo of, Disch's work: the furry boy.

JD: Yes, it's there. I bought a novella from Tom for my anthology Immortal which gave me the idea.

GF: Literary influence is itself a kind of collaboration, although one of the partner--the primary--may be unwitting, or even long dead.

JD: Of sorts; though it seems a very personal and subjective one. When I first started writing I read and reread authors such as Fowles and Kosinski--people whose work I really loved--and memorized passages; took people's work apart and put it back together to see how it worked. I was very much influenced by Kosinski--the title "The Marks of Painted Teeth" was a homage to The Painted Bird--and I wanted to capture that numinal sense by which the boy in that book could, say, look up in a tree and see a spirit, and then look down and see the body of a dead woman; and both were of the same order of reality because of his childish mind. I thought the influence would be obvious, but when I asked if others saw it, their response was "What?" This is why when teaching I tell my students not to worry about influence, because no one's going to see it; you're going to put it through your own sensorium and it's going to be you. You don't fabricate your own style; style is a way of seeing.

To my mind, writing fiction is an intense and private means of experiencing oneself. When we are able to do this, it's as if we've broken through iron doors, escaped for an instant that prison we fashion for ourselves. This prison is the way that we perceive the world. I write to try to see myself out of my perceptive prison (which sounds like a contradiction in terms). It seems to me that it is that idea--trying to see yourself out of your perceptual mode--that necessarily involves delving into unconscious areas. This kind of delving--which one imagines as listening for echoes from the future--is always, in some way, dangerous. Joe Haldeman once told me that if I kept going into this stuff I would go crazy. And I responded that No, on the contrary, if I didn't, I would go crazy.

GF: Despite these deeply personal creative impulses, you have always collaborated and project several future collaborative projects, including some novels. How do you embark jointly on such a venture of self-experience?

JD: Each collaboration is different in terms of the distance between its authors and their material. The act of writing with Jay Haldeman--since we actually wrote "High Steel" together and Jay produced a clean draft--was intensely personal. However, I think it's a question of subject matter. There's a kind of subject matter I get into only in my own work. I may explore personal themes in my collaborative work but would only see it after the fact. The struggle is in my own work. There I wrestle with the dangerous snakes... whatever that means. (laughter).

GF: Does this struggle go on then in collaborations, or are they more impersonal?

JD: It's not more impersonal, but you have someone you are working with, as though you are walking down a dark tunnel with someone else--it's less frightening. The act is still very personal and many things can come out through it, as they would in your solo writing. But this merging of expression, intent, does seem to push the work away from private concerns.

In a collaboration you plot it out, say "This happens and this happens and this happens;" whereas if you're writing it yourself, it need only have an intuitive rightness--which may itself just be a self-imposed barrier, I don't know. The very idea of collaboration assumes an effort in which each partner has something the story need; otherwise there's no need to collaborate on it. So already your idea has some kind of form, which precludes those kinds of writing where you can simply run with the story, to see where it leads you.

GF: Which new project do you intend to undertake first?

JD: I've been leaning heavily toward Counting Coup. It's about two old men who go on a last tear to prove--well, they don't know exactly what to prove; perhaps that they're still alive. One is an old medicine man who has lost his visionary sight, the other a handyman on Social Security, with a family, who had money once but spent it all. There's no real way out of their situations, and they take off on a month-long tear, which ends with the two of them in a visionary pit, with the medicine man trying to regain his power.

Now that I've finished The Man Who Melted and had a chance to look it over, it seems in its way of a piece with much of my previous work in that it is agonized in its subject matter. It is, as much as my other work, I find, is frightening to me as I look back on it. However I think that, slowly, I'm passing through the flame, because the work that I want to do now is of a different nature--I'm thinking now of Counting Coup, which is affirmative, even though the Protagonists' lives do not change at the end. Within restriction--the same human restrictions I've been dealing with in my previous work--they reach an accord with difficult circumstances and, if they can't change their lives, they change their perspective. That gives a degree of freedom my other protagonists haven't had. They were pulled by outside forces, by almost mythic tragic imperatives which swept them along, fight as they might. What is intriguing me now is a book where the characters make a statement, such as the last screaming drunk of my two old men in Counting Coup. By Indian tradition, after an arrow has pierced the flesh and the enemy is dead, others can make symbolic strikes, and that's called counting coup. And the two old men are making a symbolic strike and they change nothing and they change everything.

THE HORROR! THE HORROR!

or THINGS THAT GO ARRGGH! IN THE NIGHT

MARY GENTLE



How do you feel about being scared shitless?

Horror fiction, as a genre, is the hardest to justify in terms of being worthwhile literature. It's an emotional button-pusher, beginning with fear and progressing round the daisy-chain of terror, horror, revulsion, antipathy, disgust, awe, and back again to fear. To being scared shitless. And there's a sizable collection of authors and publishers convinced that's just what the reader wants.

There are two types of horror fiction written today: the supernatural (which has its roots in Fantasy), and the Pathological. The latter is by far the most prevalent.

Ramsey Campbell's recent novel *The Parasite* can stand as a paradigm for Pathological horror fiction. Rose Tierney is invaded by an evil presence as a child; as she becomes adult she discovers she has psi-powers --- these are side-effects of the parasitical soul within her, a man seeking immortality by transmigration --- and she eventually commits suicide on finding that he inhabits the foetus within her.

There are unwritten rules in Pathological horror: one is that, although there is no benevolent God, there certainly are Evil Forces that wish to possess humans. Perhaps this is part of the post-Christian society, that the genre abandons the angels but retains the demons in all their power. In fact there is a tendency almost to regard God as evil --- the 'parasite' is an ex-clergyman with the ambiguous name of Grace; his psychic prison for Rose's soul is a church. Rose herself experiences contact with some vast impersonal force outside the Earth, but there is no help or salvation to be had from it.

Another rule, in accordance with the out-of-the-body and other similar experiences that Rose has (seances, tarot cards, etc), is that psi-powers will be inextricably entwined with the occult, will be harmful and devil-inspired. Science fiction took witchcraft and called it psi, Horror takes psi and returns it to being witchcraft.

The book follows the female protagonist through adolescence, marriage, and pregnancy. As *The Parasite* demonstrates, the young are particularly dangerous, destructive, powerful, and open to demonic possession; and unwritten rule with the corollary that female biological functions (menstruation, sex, gestation, birth) are all extremely dangerous. Well, so they

can be, in cases of medical emergency; but we're not talking doctors, we're talking writers, and male writers at that.

Anthropologists have pointed out the fear and reverence accorded to birth among humans at the primitive stage. Sex is not always associated with conception, and when not the woman is then seen as all-powerful life-giver; and --- since what creates can also destroy --- power naturally gives rise to fear. The worship of mother-goddesses has declined, but the female physical processes are still powerful subconscious symbols. And how are these symbols used?

In The Parasite there is a constant connection between possession by evil powers and possession by a foetus. Like Rosemary's Baby (and quite a few other little devils), the child will embody an ancient evil. Rose has carried this potential dormant within her since she was a child, it begins to awake with adolescence, it grows into something that overwhelms her completely with its desire to enter the world, and when it arrives she dies --- what else does this parallel but the traditional view of the woman as child-bearer? The Parasite is a pun: evil spirit and foetus. It's the male view of parturition; the ancient primitive fear that procreation allows evil into the world. The child Rose carries is something that possesses her, takes her away from the male (her alienation from her husband, Bill is easily seen as the preoccupation of a mother-to-be): is something that gains life by draining strength from the mother.

The book's end is a cop-out: Rose chooses suicide, the inevitable choice of self-sacrifice. (Had she really desired Grace's defeat she would have let him be born --- what is more helpless and malleable than a baby?) The view behind this may be a subconscious idea that all mothers sacrifice themselves to their children; or perhaps a horror novel demands a death to end it as a fairy-tale does a marriage.

Horror fiction of any kind is not concerned with the rational, the explicable; but with the logic of the subconscious. Using deep-rooted fears as symbols to fuel a horror novel has a wide appeal. The question of pathology arises when we consider: is the writer using the subconscious or is the subconscious using the writer? Certainly there are things on the dark side of the mind not conducive to mental health --- but are they recognised as such when presented to the reader in The Parasite? Similar themes reoccur in Campbell's work: 'The Brood'. For example, in the anthology Dark Forces. Here a man is made the unwilling host-mother for parasitic unhuman children. The same message is presented to the reader, the same fears, the same symbols --- but does the reader take them for reality?

I'll come back to that point later. Next, to consider something ostensibly more respectable --- there is a recent work by that publishing phenomenon, Stephen King.

Firestarter should really be titled Carrie Revisited, since it's an expanded and diluted version of King's first novel. It has neither the power, the economy, nor the genuine horror of Carrie, but it does illustrate some trends of Pathological fiction.

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One is King's painstaking description of the minutiae of everyday life, in this case the USA of the late 70s. The eight year old girl Charlie McGee and her father Andrew go on the run, and the build-up of detail is very convincing. Charlie can start fires with her mind (a more specific power than Carrie White, who was telekinetic). The awakening of this psi-power is due to her parent's participation in a government-controlled experiment with hallucinogenic drugs. Charlie McGee doesn't convince as a character. Few writers can accurately portray children, and the only one to keep it up for novel-length, Richard Hughes, said this in A High Wind In Jamaica:

"Their minds are not just more ignorant and stupider than ours, but differ in kind of thinking (are mad, in fact): but one can, by an effort of will and imagination, think like a child...."

But can one think like a child who can turn a man into 'a burning bundle of rags'? Not on the evidence of Firestarter. But Firestarter isn't strong on character, it's not required by this kind of book. What is? Consider the description of the drug experiment:

"The young fellow on the cot appeared to be doing something to his eyes. Yes, he was definitely doing something to his eyes, because his fingers were hooked into them and he seemed to be clawing his eyeballs out of his head. His hands were hooked into claws, and blood was gushing from his eyes. It was gushing in slomo. The needle flopped from his arm in slomo. Wanless was running in slomo. The eyes of the kid on the cot now looked like deflated poached eggs, Andy noted clinically. Yes indeedy."

Poached eggs --- yes indeedy! Violence: bloody, shocking, and gratuitous. Admittedly it is intended as the stream-of-consciousness of a drugged man (and not just an object lesson in how to write very long books): still, the dwelling on detail, the 'clinical' but delighted observation, the gruesome cheerful satisfaction, these are all defining features of King's work.

Violence in graphic detail --- to shock? To enjoy? There will always be armchair sadists. However, another reason suggests itself. Books aren't real, runs the subconscious train of thought, therefore anything that happens in books can't happen to the reader. Paradoxically, the more convincing the illusion of reality, the more the reader is protected by it's being fictitious. Reassurance is one possible function of fiction. Where it becomes pathological is when the detailed reconstruction of physical accidents implies that, not only can evil and deliberate malice not touch us, but that we're safe from blind chance as well.

In contradiction, another trait in Firestarter is paranoia. Horror fiction is a paranoid's paradise --- nobody is to be trusted. In The Parasite it's close friends, husbands, wives; in Firestarter it's the civil authorities, the CIA, the government --- possibly the world. Or is that a contradiction? It is, after all, far more comforting to think that the universe is actively out to get you, because the alternative is that it doesn't give a shit. This comfortable self-delusion comes to a head with the end of the book. Charlie escapes the government baddies to carry her story to the free press, where all will be revealed to the world, and everything will be fine.

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Will it, hell. This book could have had an ending to make Carrie look like a wet roman candle. Consider:

'I started thinking about things like pulsars and neutrinos and black holes and Christ knows what else. There are forces loose in this universe that we don't even know about yet... I began to think of the girl as a crack---a chink, if you like --- in the very smelter of creation....'

And again:

'But with a sudden sureness that came from deep inside she knew that she could change the sun if she wanted to... The potential had hardly been tapped.'

King has it both ways. The scientists investigating Charlie are obviously interfering with things man was not meant to know, and come to suitably violent ends. At the same time, Andy McGee's psi-powers weaken him physically each time he uses them, and eventually kill him. Firestarter manages to be simultaneously anti-science and anti-superstition.

And manages a spurious happy-ever-after ending. Why? The clue lies in the structure. Carrie, the original template, was told as a novel, including newspaper cuttings, teletype reports, extracts from casebook, court transcriptions, even death certificates. Firestarter has a straightforward descriptive narrative, interspersed with a few uncomplicated flashbacks. It is visual --- and that's the key. Lift the dialogue for a script, the narrative for shot-by-shot action: Firestarter is a made-for-TV movie lying dead on the printed page. Hence the cop-out. TV audiences don't like unsettling endings. They might have to actually think about them.

The most common and popular form of horror fiction is the Pathological, then, with its half a dozen immutable law: evil forces, possession, dangerous offspring, destructive psi-occult powers, paranoia, fear of sex and biological functions. But what's the alternative?

The second and much smaller field has its roots in Fantasy, myth, and fairy-story. The Supernatural form of horror fiction takes in more than the traditional 'ghost story'; it encompasses all that is inexplicable, all that is 'above nature'. An example is Suzy McKee Charnas's The Vampire Tapestry. There are five sections of the novel, and four separate narrators. Each one is a convincing human being: the white South African woman Katje de Groot, one of history's casualties astray in a foreign land; the 14 year old boy Mark suffering a streetwise childhood; the therapist Floria Landower; and the academic Dr Edward Weyland --- the vampire himself. In this type of fiction there must be 'real people', a depth of characterisation beyond the stereotypes --- Victim, Demon, Judas, Tormentor --- of Pathological horror.

Edward Weyland is not Dracula but a non-human predator dependent on the human race for his prey, adopting their form as camouflage. It only needs an 'alien lifeform' explanation to classify this as science fiction, but Charnas wisely doesn't push the analysis that far. Weyland is nature triumphant over urban technology, a fugitive from the feral past. And another difference between this and Pathological horror: Weyland is not devil-inspired. Nor is he humanly moral or good. There is no obligation for him to be either. In Supernatural horror, the paranormal can be amoral.

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The vampire has often been used as a symbol of sexual attractiveness, initiation, or revulsion, depending on the author. Bram Stoker, with both male and female vampires, created paradigms of male domination and female seductiveness. There is not titillation in The Vampire Tapestry: anyone looking for sexual aberration is going to be sadly disappointed. The wolf does not couple with his prey. And yet Weyland becomes steadily more affected by music, by art, by human emotion; and so eventually by human beings. There is a delicately-handled relationship with Floria Landauer. Pathological horror emphasises it as an act of love. What violence there is also happens briefly, but it shocks in a far less pleasant way than, say, in Stephen King's novels. There is no 'attractive' violence to appeal to the sado-masochistic element in the reader. Pain hurts, human suffering results.

The Vampire Tapestry chronicles one life of the vampire before his return to the hibernation that will last decades. This retreat into long sleep only partly avoids the issue. He is retreating before he becomes too human to feed off his prey. Since the sleep wipes out his memories, it's logical to suppose that he has done this many times before --- that, taking on the shape of his prey, he must come in time to sympathise with them; and to survive must extinguish his personality and wake to begin the process over again. There is horror in that, but it is not Grand Guignol.

But returning to the original question --- what does the reader get out of horror fiction of either kind? To understand this, take for example a book that bills itself as the Dangerous Visions of the horror field, Kirby McCauley's anthology Dark Forces.

Whatever the opinions of its success, Dangerous Visions tried to be experimental. Dark Forces doesn't. Horror fiction is fear-pornography. There are different kinds of terror, but with a handful of exceptions Dark Forces is the same old tried and true Pathological button-pushing. There is premature burial (Richard Matheson), time travel and murder (Ray Bradbury), Lovecraftian subhumans in the sewers (F.E.D. Klein), Grand Guignol (Robert Bloch) --- the latter so gruesome as to be hilarious. There are stories of rape and sexual revenge (Theodore Sturgeon), parasitism (Ramsey Campbell), paranoia (Dennis Etchison, Stephen King); and two stories where a woman, by voodoo, causes a man to become pregnant! Both have fatal outcomes, implicit in Edward Bryant's 'Dark Angel' and explicit in Joe Haldeman's 'Lindsay and the Red City Blues'. Fear of the female is alive and well and occupying the subconscious of many a horror writer; much of the work in this genre bears the mark of compulsion rather than control.

Physical and emotional terror are closely linked: fear of being hurt, in whatever manner. It is the ancient fear of what the dark may disclose: monsters? Or some unimaginable revelation about our nearest and dearest? Or about ourselves? The fangs and claws may belong to anyone. In 'The Bingo Master' by Joyce Carol Oates, for example, the spinster who desperately seeks sexual experience with Joe Pye, owner of the bingo hall that provides harmless titillation for the women of that town, suffers a humiliating and dreadfully funny rejection. The horror comes from people being what they are --- human.

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It's a long way from parasites and psi-powers, and a misanthrope might well agree that human beings are the greatest terror of all. To take it a stage further, there is spiritual or moral horror. Gene Wolfe's 'The Detective of Dreams' reads at first like Poe, and later like Borges, being a metaphysical detective story. The detective is required to find and destroy that Dream-Master who has entered the dreams of a seamstress, a head of secret police, a banker, and others in ways that seem subtly familiar: judging, punishing inexorably. So he comes at last, cheerfully confessing his own ignorance, to where 'the Dream-Master had set up His own picture, and full-length and in the most gorgeous colours, in His window.... I destroyed the Dream-Master as He has been sacrificed so often, devouring His white wheaten flesh that we might all possess life without end.' That is horror --- subjection to a vindictive deity, whom no one will escape.

Supernatural horror, then, is the stiletto rather than the butcher's cleaver. That is not to say that all Pathological horrors are bad, nor all Supernatural horror good. Admittedly the latter pays more attention to the actual writing, style and vocabulary and structure, but it has its weaknesses --- a certain coyness about sex and violence, some slackness and unoriginality. Some stories are only classifiable as Supernatural by what they lack. Simak's 'Whistling Well' and Manly Wade Wellman's 'Owls Hoot in the Daytime' are both rural fantasies, light and inconsequential, with no desire for the infinite.

Correspondingly, there are virtues in Pathological horror. 'The Brood' is likely to provoke more shudders of revulsion than 'The Bingo Master'. Even the Stephen King novella 'The Mist' grips the attention, and it's really nothing more than an excuse to shut up a crowd of good ol' American folks in a supermarket, besiege them in various gruesome ways. But the thing about King's writing is that it works, even when an illiterate dyslexic could predict the plot. No matter that the reader is aware what button is being pressed: reflex takes over.

The desire for fear is many-faceted. One is curiosity. A child, for example, has not been taught that certain kinds of curiosity are socially undesirable, and it will therefore investigate dustbins, turds, blood, soiled clothing, or dead bodies with the same interest it gives to flowers, toys, sunlight, and kittens. Accidents, illness, and death are mostly concealed in this society, rushed off to the hospital, the morgue or the crematorium. An ambulance draws a crowd at least partly because there is a child in all of us whose curiosity was never satisfied. And children, before they become self-aware, have little empathy with the pain of others. There is a case for horror fiction as the literature of immaturity.

There is a darker side: the death-wish and the desire for domination. The reader is victor-victim, suffering and inflicting fear. Fear-fantasy can be wish-fulfillment, vicarious experience, vicarious revenge; rarely carried over into the real world (where such things hurt) unless by a truly aberrant personality.

Regarding the influence that literature has on life, the question is endlessly debatable. Kirby McCauley in his introduction to Dark Forces says 'There may well be no permanent escape from the inner and outer darkness that troubles us all, but in its way the tale of terror and fantastic encounter mitigates our fears by making them subjects of enter-

The Horror! The Horror!

tainment. Who is to say that is a bad thing?' The implied view is that horror fiction is therapy for the reader --- a justification often put forward for pornography of other kinds.

The alternative is horror as a literature of investigation. J.B.S. Haldane said that the universe is queerer than we can suppose, and it's as well to be forcibly reminded of that. The world is not as cosy as a Western middle-class upbringing would have us believe. Supernatural horror fiction opens us to the possibilities of unknowable dangers --- dangers of the body, mind, and soul.

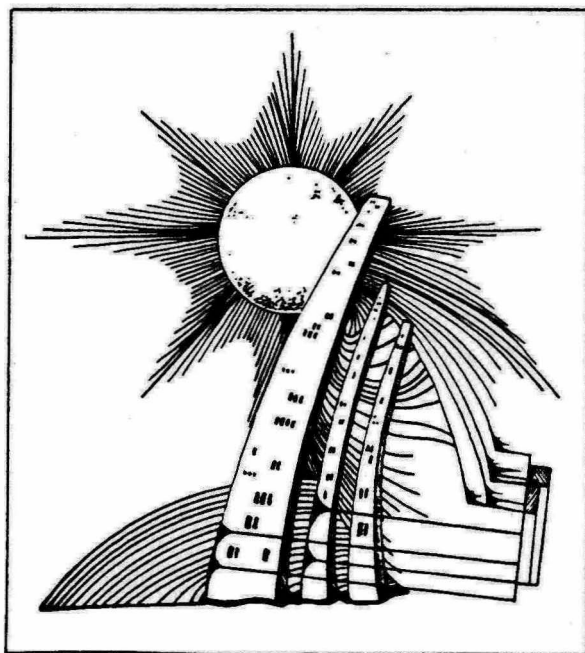
Where does the Supernatural become the Pathological: what are the humus of the subconscious and waiting for a strange flowering we cannot control? Or do we think about what we read? The question for the writer is, is the writer in control or is the material? The question for the reader is precisely the same.

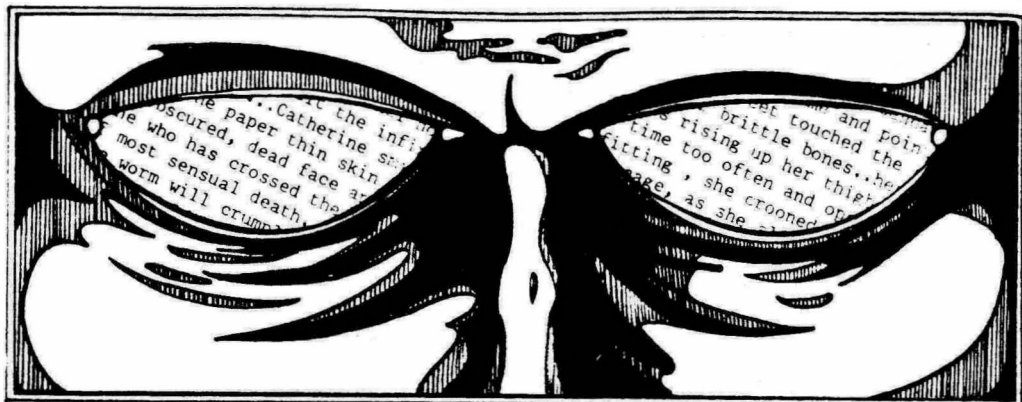
Ramsey Campbell --- THE PARASITE (Pocket Books, 372pp, \$2.95)

Stephen King --- FIRESTARTER (Futura, 510pp, £1.95)

Suzy McKee Charnas --- THE VAMPIRE TAPESTRY (Pocket Books, \$2.75)

Kirby McCauley (ed) --- DARK FORCES (Futura, 551 pp, £1.95; and Bantam, 538pp, \$3.50)





REVIEWS

J. G. Ballard -- THE DROWNED WORLD, illustrated by Richard French (Dragon's Dream, 158pp, £9.95)

Reviewed by Rob Hansen

The first question you have to ask yourself is: why? Why was it felt necessary to put out an edition of The Drowned World in this format and what purpose does it serve? Cynicism suggests that the motive was no more than to turn a fast buck, which may be unfair to the publishers, but I doubt it. Still, the book exists, and as such it needs to be assessed on its own terms.

I have to confess that I've always preferred a hard-edged, graphic style of illustration for SF, a preference formed, I suppose, by all those SF novels with their covers by Chris Foss and his clones that I read in my formative years. I've spoken before of my distaste for the habit publishers have of using spaceships on book covers as a sort of "brand label" regardless of whether or not such craft play any part in the novel, but when Foss covers adorned books for which they were appropriate they seemed to complement the high-tech SF, within perfectly. All well and good for technological SF, but for the work of a writer such as Ballard, where mood and imagery are more important, it is obviously inappropriate.

Dragon's Dream realised this and so commissioned painter Richard French to do the illustrations. French is described by the blurb as someone whose "work has been widely exhibited in England, France and Belgium" and, apparently, is at present "working on the illustrations of another of J. G. Ballard's books, The Terminal Beach, to be published by Dragon's Dream in 1982". Hmm. But his work is interesting and is certainly far removed from the usual run of SF illustration. With its running colours and soft focus approach it manages to capture some of the unique atmosphere that makes The Drowned World the book it is, the hot, humid and oppressive nature of Ballard's dystopian vision being suggested fairly effectively.

So: the paintings are well-executed, and while you might disagree with French's choice of scenes it is probably as valid as anyone else's would be, given that the book is not an "action" novel with those easily identified points of high drama that make the illustrator's task such an easy one. But, having given the paintings qualified approval in their own right, you have to consider whether or not they actually add anything to your appreciation of the story or enhance it in any other way. And in this respect, I would have to say that, in truth, they don't. Ballard's book is sufficiently well-realised and self-contained that there is little scope for an artist, however good, to illustrate or highlight anything that isn't described or dealt with better in the text. You get no additional insights from studying the artwork, and are left with the impression that the paintings are ultimately irrelevant.

If you like expensively packaged editions such as this -- printed on high quality glossy paper, with heavy board covers and some three dozen or so illustrations -- then by all means rush out and buy it: you will be getting a good story for your money. But, then again, the non-illustrated paperback edition of the same classic novel is available for a hell of a lot less.

Phyllis Eisenstein -- IN THE HANDS OF GLORY (Timescape, 236pp, \$2.75)

Reviewed by Ian Williams

"Eisenstein is an up and coming writer to watch". That's not an actual quote, but I could have written it when reviewing her first three novels for Paperback Inferno several months ago. She struck me then as a new, young writer attempting different forms to see how they worked and what she could do with them. Her first book, Born To Exile, was a sleepy series of novelettes about Alaric the teleporting minstrel, cobbled together to form a sleepy novel. It was classified as a fantasy though it could have been set in a post-holocaust world, and although readable was rather obvious and not very exciting. Her second book, Sorcerer's Son, a lengthy, full-fledged fantasy, was much better, with pace, imagination, excitement, romance....superficial, but with all the ingredients for "a good read". Her third, Shadow Of Earth, was even more successful if less flashy, taking an intelligent contemporary woman and shoving her into a parallel America that hadn't progressed beyond the sixteenth century and where women were chattels; it was realistic and harrowing.

Eisenstein has the potential to become a good writer with all the basic requirements: reasonable characterisation, and imagination. But this new book does not mark a progression. She is still exploring.

In The Hands Of Glory is a space opera, with a very straightforward plot. A century after the dissolution of the Stellar Federation, the supposedly disbanded Federation Patrol still controls the colony world of Amphora and continually battles against guerilla rebels. The heroine, idealistic Dia Catlin, a member of the said Federation Patrol, is shot down and her lover killed in the crash. She is nursed back to health by a rebel doctor, aided by a friendly, furry little alien called Strux. When she finally gets back to her base, the Brigadier, the Patrol commander, decides that she deserves promotion and a place in his bed. This gives her an insight into what really goes on in the upper echelons and she decides that the rebels perhaps have a point. When the friendly rebel doctor is captured and tortured, she rescues him and goes over to the good guys in order to stop the Patrol from doing what it really wants to --which is apparently a lot more than ruling just one planet.

Book Reviews

The characterisation isn't as shallow as the above plot synopsis might suggest. The heroine isn't a fool, and goes to bed with the Brigadier deliberately in order to advance her career. The Brigadier isn't very nice, but then neither is he a shrieking tyrant; and the rebel leader, far from being sweet and clean, is a paranoid pain in the arse. Nor does Eisenstein overdo Strux, the cute furry alien. In addition, the prose style is smooth and vivid -- and, in fact, much too good for this book.

Not that it's bad; just unnecessary and very obvious, made even more so by the titles of the four parts into which it's split: "Prisoner", "Hero", "Collaborator", and "Rebel"--A to D in four easy stages. Everything is surface; there is no depth, no insight. It is exactly what it says it is -- the blurb and delicious Rowena Morrill cover sum it up perfectly, and anyone who buys it will get exactly what they expect. And, no doubt, be entirely satisfied on that level. The only thing that raised it a little, in my eyes, is the bitter-sweet taste of victory in the heroine's mouth; it doesn't end, thank God, in a fanfare of trumpets.

So where does this leave Phyllis Eisenstein? As I've said, she has the essential gifts of a writer and her prose can be very good indeed. If she wants, she can probably carve out a lucrative career writing potboilers of this ilk, and I for one will continue to buy them because she is very entertaining. But there are plenty of forgettable easy reads around and too few writers of substance, too many potentially good writers taking the soft option. We can only progress by taking risks, and I would therefore urge Eisenstein to take one, to use her undoubted gifts in a more adventurous manner.

Stuart Gordon -- SMILE ON THE VOID (Arrow, 294pp, £1.75)

Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

Milleniarism is a strangely potent manifestation, particularly considering the number of different calendars we perverse, diverse human beings use and, therefore the number of millenia either approaching or receding at any one time. The last Christian societies. Given the developments in, and the hair-trigger state of, our world today, the years leading up to 2000 AD could well be quite lively. Those years are the background against which Gordon has set Smile on The Void.

The quality of milleniarist movements generally is their adherence to the apocalypse factor, either in the form of an individual messiah or some event that will usher in the millenium. Gordon presents a composite messianic figure, part human agency, part natural force. Born in, and surviving, the last days of the Warsaw ghetto, raised by reclusive French aristocracy, educated by a Kikuyu witch-doctor during the Mau Mau interlude, taken into trade by a Maugham-like renegade who buggers him in return for freeing him from a Rhodesian prison cell, Ralph M'botu Kitaj is the richest man in the world. He has made his pile by selling what we want most -- guns, dope, slaves, women -- outraging society along the way, daring it to stop him and then frustrating it by using its very own weapons of money and corruption. Charisma on the cloven hoof, Kitaj is in many ways a Gatsby for the eighties, an utterly corrupt showman/shaman with a taste for the spectacular and any drug he can ingest. There is, in fact, only

one thing he loathes more than the world his fellow men have made (and he has so superlatively exploited), and that is himself.

Kitaj, you see, is not what he seems. He is in fact the channel through which "Higher Forces" desire to fill mankind with the knowledge we need to prevent ourselves from choking on the waste products of our materialist insanity. These "Higher Forces" hail from Sirius, and through Kitaj they show the way, which is to take a chance on our "supernatural" abilities. The tyranny of hard-eyed scientific empiricism is to be overthrown, and we must tap the potentialities of the ley lines and much else besides if we are to make it to 2 January 2000. If we don't make it by then, the Sirians will knock us back into the Stone Age so that we can try again.

On the other hand, Kitaj is a monstrous liar. Nothing of his life story is verifiable and much of what he does is enigmatic. His personality cult is largely the creation of his deliberately mythopoeic biographer, John Hall, the narrator/author of *Smile On The Void*. Right to the very end of the book, we are left with doubts, the suspicion that everything we see is nothing more than a con, a fiction within a fiction within a fiction. On Christmas Day 1992, though, Kitaj supplies proof, by turning himself into pure energy in full view of the world's media in the piazza of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice. None of the recording instruments work -- but then they never do -- but all the witnesses "hear" a promise to return in time for a very important day, the millenium.

Smile On The Void is about myth and faith in a savagely materialist world -- shaky ground indeed, as we watch American fundamentalists propound their "creationist" pseudoscience. Gordon has created a messiah who could catch the mood of our times, a man by turns and often simultaneously exotic, erotic, quixotic and charismatic. Gordon also highlights the inherent contradiction in his proposition, in that Kitaj is a messiah who preaches that salvation is within the individual, that spiritual progress does not rely upon adherence to princes, potentates and popes and, by extension, to messiahs.

This is a discursive book that relegates the conventional dramatic event to a background against which the "higher drama" is played out. It is concerned with situations that have no dramatic resolution, a book about people and their social structures. The essential philosophical thrust is as chimerical as the doped up West Coast "tune in, turn on, drop out" ethos from which it appears to have grown. On the other hand, it does show up the strengths of that ethos, reminding us of the potentialities of the individual human being in a mechanistic, materialistic society.

There are resonances reminiscent of Gore Vidal's prose. From time to time, the narrative tautness slips, and the final two-thirds of the book, the description of the future, are distinctly weaker than the first third, a description of the "past", Kitaj's formative years. But Gordon is painting a broad canvas, giving us everything from Tarzan to TV game shows, from a Stone Age culture to manned expeditions to Barnard's Star. Unlike so many books that these days masquerade as serious science fiction, this novel has ambitions, some reason to exist other than contracted advances on royalties. While it is not "the stunning novel of the coming millenium", as the cover blurb proclaims, and its ambitions occasionally shade toward pretension, *Smile On The Void* is not without its fascinations. It is probably naive and certainly flawed, but Gordon has at least tried to present a genuinely imaginative and intellectually stimulating picture in a "serious" novel. Even if that were not all too rare these days, *Smile On The Void* is still a book that deserves to be read.

Charles L. Grant -- A GLOW OF CANDLES AND OTHER STORIES (Berkley, 211pp, \$2.25)

Reviewed by Mary Gentle

Draw a line from the saccharine morality of Spider Robinson to the slick porno-violence of Orson Scott Card and A Glow Of Candles will fall at the midpoint between the two: neither fish, fowl, nor even an occasional red herring.

Why, though, should it be necessary to define a science fiction writer in terms of other science fiction writers? There has been a rumour going around to the effect that SF and mainstream are two sides of the same coin.... but the rumour evidently hasn't reached Berkley, who have published as genre horror ("across fear's threshold, to terror....and beyond") this collection of stories which are basically fantasy with the odd touch of grue. The book also features an introduction concerned with which stories won the Hugo and Nebula Awards, which didn't, and to whom they lost; and papagraph-long introductions to each story. Stories shouldn't need introductions, particularly snippets of the "how I came to write this" and "this is part of my famous series" variety. Ask who will be interested, and the answer comes back: fans. Not the ordinary reader. Certainly not the ordinary reader who rarely opens a science fiction book. This is specialised publishing. A Glow Of Candles lies safely behind the ghetto walls, immune from the cold winds of criticism.

A theme is difficult to discover; if anything unites these twelve stories, it must be the eponymous hero. Appearing under various names, he is in essence the same man -- a loner, with no family or emotional attachments, generally unhappy in whatever half-creative profession (journalism, teaching) he follows, the passive recipient of strange happenings, desperate to change his circumstances and full of self-contempt because he doesn't have the ability to do so.

The fan as psychologically-crippled social incompetent is a standard cliché, and one that has been applied to readers in general, and even writers. Now it reappears here as an object of reader-identification, Charles Grant's "ordinary man". Ordinary? If so, we're a poor lot: poor in action, imagination, realisation and perception, if these stories are our measure. Horror-fantasy has all the opportunity in the world (and out of it) to expand the mind, unbounded by whatever form of scientific plausibility is currently in vogue; but these ordinary protagonists find the unknown threatening instead of stimulating.

Most of the stories don't stay in the mind after (or even, in some cases, during) reading. Perhaps that's because the book is such a collection of old chestnuts. For example: wishes coming true, with dire consequences ("Temperature Days On Hawthorne Street"); mob killing "different" individual ("A Crowd Of Shadows"); spot-the-werewolf ("White Wolf Calling"); the narrator who is dead ("The Rest Is Silence"); children with supernatural powers ("When All The Children Call My Name", "Secrets Of The Heart" and "Come Dance With Me On My Pony's Grave"); and the death of the arts ("The Dark Of Legends, The Light Of Lies" and "A Glow Of Candles, A Unicorn's Eye"). Not to mention the old fairground hustler with Evil Powers, as in "The Three Of Tens", a story that by no stretch of the imagination takes place in England, except the "England" of the author's mind.

There is also the matter of style. It is prevalent among short story authors at the moment to write as is repetition, lack of punctuation, and chopped phrases in place of sentences produce the effect of unbearable emotion. From the title story, by way of example:

"Helena.
Is dead.
Last year.
She was eighty."

and from "The Dark Of Legends, The Light Of Lies":

"It's the one chance I have as I run for the birch the one chance
have
but the white has gone grey
and the shadows are moving."

Earlier in that same story, there is:

"And I screamed.
And I screamed.
And I screamed.
And....I wept."

I know the feeling.

To be fair, there is one story where this narrowness of style, characterisation and theme works to advantage: "Hear Me Now, My Sweet Abbey Rose". The narrator, ostensibly possessed of a wife and three children, still sounds young enough to give an emphasis to the unstated theme of incest that lies behind his possessiveness of one daughter. He is passive when they are attacked, passive after that daughter's murder; and the wistful tone of pathos does lead us to expect, from her spirit, "a voice on the wind that did not blow, a young girl's voice that would touch his mind with melancholy and a final goodbye...." In this case, it gives the closing line the force of a steel trap.

All the same, one story out of twelve is not a good average.

Linda Haldeman -- ENBAE: A WINTER'S TALE (Avon, 224pp, \$2.50)

Reviewed by Ann Collier

It is dismaying to read, in successive books, of women of resourcefulness and initiative whose considerable intellectual capacities only bring them frustration, unhappiness and danger. The previous book I read for review, Pournelle's *Janissaries*, at least allowed its female character to redeem herself at the very end of the book by bold action; in this one the heroine is tied, helpless, to a tree, dependent upon being rescued from death by those who all along have vainly warned her of the peril for which she was destined.

Unsophisticated, vulnerable, chaotic, sexually inexperienced Sophie is given by Haldeman intelligence, studiousness and a good nature, and it is precisely these qualities which predispose her to be used by her fellow student Chuck, whose excellence as the college stud and bum is not matched by any similar achievement in the academic field. He picks Sophie's brains for information on demonology so that he can conjure Asmodeus who, by conferring instant knowledge upon him, will save him from being thrown out of the unremarkable small town college at which he and Sophie are students. Sophie realises that she is being used but allows it for the excitement and status that being dated by Chuck brings. When the realisation of what Chuck plans to do dawns upon her, she extricates herself and finds the (meant-to-be-)compensatory love of a good, kind, man -- her violin-playing, paternalistic, "safe" Professor, many years her senior. This is intended to be a happy ending, but it smacks of Sophie having learned her lesson and settling for suburban domesticity. The patronising treatment of women is by no means new in SF, but to find variations of it in authors as different as Jerry Pournelle and Linda Haldeman is depressing in the extreme. Thank God for Kate Wilhelm.

But this is not all that is irritating about this cosy little book. Linda Haldeman has a richly-textured, detailed, poetic style which is here wasted on a tree fairy tale which is forever celebrating the pretty-pretty of woods, heavy with snow, shining in the moonlight and the scamperings of the cute furry creatures who live there. Indeed, there is something genteelly passe about the whole tone of this book, suggesting it as a Romantic protest against the grim realities of life or, to misquote the author, "an age of men of very small heart, men who for no good reason went out of their way to tread on crickets". Mixed in there somewhere are elements of suspense and comedy, but their laboriousness negates their impact.

Chuck does succeed in conjuring Asmodeus, who demands for his services a blood sacrifice, and, since intelligent women are the dish of the day, Sophie is stalked by Chuck for the remainder of the book until the inevitable final confrontation between the forces of Good and Evil. The former is represented by the title character, a spirit needing to redeem itself by a noble deed and who chooses Sophie as its mistress so that, entirely by coincidence of course, she and her Professor have some non-human help just when Asmodeus threatens and they need it most. This triangular relationship of good, stout-hearted beings embarrasses with its coyness and unimaginativeness, which latter quality also mars the treatment of the supernatural characters. Esbae seems to spend most of her time doing Sophie's cooking and cleaning and thereby ensuring, if nothing else, that her "noble deed" is done, but this domestication of the spirits weakens the contrast between the uneventful mundanity of the college and the sudden, dramatic but secret events happening there. Esbae does spend time watching over Sophie's movements, but the repetitiveness of this is tiresome, particularly as every other chapter seems to have Esbae transforming itself into a squirrel, mouse or bird to follow Sophie around. We are given a detailed account of this each time it occurs, whereas far less care was expended on tying up loose ends at the book's conclusion, the most notable being that a very dead body from which protrudes a rather conspicuous spear is left to be discovered in the woods whilst the wholesome lovers potter off in a rosy glow of self-satisfaction.

The pity is, as I said earlier, that the quality of the writing in this book is often high. It should have been put to better use than to punish or patronise a heroine for being more than dumb or blonde and to create a fairy tale which yearns after a world inhabited by people whose niceness would be, when not stultifyingly boring, irritating beyond belief.

Russell Hoban -- RIDDLEY WALKER (Picador, 214pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Phil Palmer

Oi! Sit up at the back there, Molesworth. What's that you're playing with? I think you'll find Russell Hoban is a Modern Novelist, Molesworth, not a sci-fi Biggles writer. Put it away now, you won't be interested.

Actually, no. Russell Hoban's Riddley Walker stands so firmly in the mainstream of the American SF tradition that it is hard to believe that the man who wrote it is not a golden-aged pulp writer. In fact, Hoban's two previously best-known works, Turtle Diary and The Lion Of Boaz-Jachin And Jachin-Boaz, are blends of angst and whimsy unambiguously fixed in the twentieth century modern world and unconcerned with the technological or philosophical speculations that distinguish SF. One thing in particular that emerges from them, however, is that Hoban seems more interested in the situation of his characters than in the balance of their emotions. This is not to fault his characterisation, but to say that he sees human beings as shapers of, and shaped by, events, an idea which may go back to the Marxist ideal of the self-betterment of man. Certainly, in The Lion Of...., a tale of strife between a father and his son, the father's mid-life crisis and the son's own development appear as irresistible processes, rather like puberty, and not as the result of any spiritual activity on the part of the characters.

This attitude is the most contentious feature of Riddley Walker. A post-holocaust novel set in Kent, it has a hero (not, note, "protagonist") of only twelve years old, the age at which the Viking first took part in raids, and develops its theme around the unfolding of events rather than the interrelation of the characters. To put it more simply, it is a Ripping Yarn of the first sater -- within a few days, Riddley has experienced the death of his father, enjoyed a visit from the Prime Minister ("Pry Mincer"), become friendly with a pack of fierce dogs and has been grabbed from behind at the end of chapter thirteen. It climaxes in the denouement of a two-thousand-year-old mystery which, in the best Agatha Christie tradition, is first wafted under the reader's nose, then spiced with clues and finally exposed with an olé of auctorial bravado that owes much to art and nothing to reality.

What equips this book with seriousness and respectability, however, and has currently assured it cult, if not best-seller, status is the construction of prose in which it is written. This is a garbled, semi-savage version of English used not only for the characters' speech but also for the narrative, so that a certain effort is required of the reader before he can enter and leave the novel as easily as he might if it were more conventional. Language-construction is a gimmick that has been done before, you might say, but where Hoban's version differs from Burgess's A Clockwork Orange or Boucher's Barrier is the totality with which it is deployed -- it is as though 1984 were written entirely in Newspeak. As for whether this is how people would really speak 2347 years after the Bomb dropped no one can really tell, but its appeal is not its linguistic virtuosity but the disorientation to which the reader is subjected, and the excellently-turned phrases and puns:

"Granser he wer what they callit a knowing man he knowit herbs and roots and mixters he done deacon terminations he done healing and curing plus he knowit dreams and syns."

When you've stopped laughing over "deacon terminations", note all the ways in which Hoban has avoided the "easy" options. For example, "what" is not spelt "wot", "and" does not become "an", and "-ing" is not abbreviated to "-in". He is also careful to modulate those words that are in common everyday use and thus easiest for the reader to decode, so giving the maximum of strangeness with the minimum of difficulty. No wonder it took him five years to write.

The length of time it took Hoban to write is no doubt the reason for the easy facility with which he uses the conventions and clichés of SF, in particular the blurring of half-remembered science and magic. This slickness evaporates, however, when he introduces a telepathic mutant as the *Ardship of Cambry*, which is both jarring and unnecessary. The idea that radioactively-induced mutation in humans will produce a species of telepaths is now so widely accepted as to be in a stock-in-trade, but in fact it does not bear any inspection and is in rather bad taste -- I'm sure that the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are noted not for their psi powers but rather for having children with gaping-open spines, hydrocephalic features, missing limbs and organs, or being just wasted by cancer. Perhaps a comic like *2000 AD*, which is principally concerned with images and surfaces, can get away with this through self-knowing campiness, but *Riddley Walker*, if it is seriously trying to evoke an insight into post-holocaust society, cannot. Authors as a whole appear to freely disregard the responsibilities inherent in merely writing about life after the Bomb, and to many people the pastoral simplicity of *Riddley Walker's* life much be attractive. But just by having a post-holocaust society at all, Hoban is denying Nevil Shute's *On The Beach* and supporting those who advocate civil defence programmes and the thinkability of nuclear war. Further, in *Riddley Walker*, the possibility is raised that the human race has returned to the crossroads point where civilisation began, typified by the situation in which *Riddley's* tribe finds itself, where it is under pressure to cease its nomadic ways and become farmers instead of hunters. One can see how the farming option would give rise to ordered central government, and Hoban does contrast the tribe's simple hunting philosophy with the complexities of civilised life; but this too does nothing to make the tribe's lifestyle seem unappealing, and several times the reader is subverted into believing that the anarchist closeness to nature of the hunter to a more protestant lifestyle in the towns and on the farms. The only way in which Hoban is able to convey a sense of horror at the devastation is by appealing to technophilia -- several times *Riddley* stops to mourn that mankind, having risen to high as to have ships in the air and pictures on the wind, should have fallen so low, and that so long after the holocaust should have made so little progress.

The introduction of psi powers into the story is doubly irritating because it removes any sense of contemporary relevance that the book might have had, reducing it to merely an exercise. In other word, the future society that it portrays cannot be equated or contrasted directly with the present-day society we observe.

However, these caveats should not prevent anyone from reading the book, which, if nothing else, is terrific fun and well worth anyone's time and money. Simply for its prose, it deserves a wide recognition, and is already showing signs of becoming one of those books that people who are not SF enthusiasts will read. In short, it's a cross-over: technically accomplished, but naive.

Colin Kapp -- THE "CAGEWORLD" SERIES: SEARCH FOR THE SUN and THE LOST WORLDS OF CRONOS (New English Library, 172pp each, £1.25 each)

Reviewed by Jim England

It would be possible for a computer to categorise SF novels in an almost infinite number of the "either/or" ways favoured by computers, stating whether they are long or short, have characters called Smith or Jones, deal with plausible or implausible futures, and so on. But the question of whether a novel is good or bad is sometimes rather like the well-known paradoxical question: is "heterological" (meaning a word that does not describe itself) itself a heterological word? A novel is not ipso facto good or bad because it belongs in any number of simple categories; and how can we qualify "goodness" or "badness" anyway? Dickens once said: "There are some books of which the backs and covers are by far the best parts". Do Search For The Sun and The Lost Worlds Of Cronos fall into this category? Such is the awful quality of their writing that I do not find this an easy question to answer. Besides, covers are much more colourful than they used to be -- the first of this series has a Manhattan-like city of the future peeping through clouds of pink and blue, and I like it.

In Search For The Sun, we are invited to consider a staggeringly implausible human future inside a vastly modified solar system (called Solaria), with the sun surrounded by solar, concentric shells of matter (called Mars Shell, Venus Shell, etc.). all of them crammed with human beings on their outer surfaces to a population density of ten thousand to the square mile. The stuff from which the shells are made has been collected by "spacesweepers"; their outer surfaces are lit by "luminaries"; they are in many places studded with Earth-like planets rotating like ball-bearings in special places protected by "pi-inversion fields". This whole scheme of things is presided over by a super-computer called Zeus, who masterminds the enforced emigration of millions from the inner to the outer shells every day by a variant of Arthur C. Clarke's space elevator which, for the convenience of the plot, is supposed to take them only outwards from the sun.

So far, we do not have a plot: only a staggeringly implausible background to a plot. And the author has invented a staggeringly implausible plot to go with it. It seems that Zeus has been in charge of things for so long that people have come to take it for granted and to forget what lies at the centre of the solar system -- i. e., the sun. Of all these billions of people and in all the preceding millenia it has occurred to no one to try to find an answer to the question -- from which we might presume the Solarians to be morons or to have lapsed into barbarism, but we are not told that they are or they have. (Indeed, they have advanced means of travel, large buildings; universities, even!) And it is left to a single eccentric scientist (confined to a wheelchair) to ask the question and, having asked it, to build a spaceship for the journey to the sun and then look around for the rare specimens of humanity suitable to make the journey. He finds three: a Master Assassin, a Space Illusionist, and a Mistress of the Erotic with green skin who is capable of giving shocks like an electric eel; and these three set out to seek the sun, using the holes wherein the Earth-like worlds rotate to gain access to the inner spheres. They have various arbitrary adventures on the way, shooting their way out of trouble with the aid of a "small projector which could rapidly fire a wide range of incendiary, gas, stun, high-velocity, high-explosive and other pellets". Once they have seen the sun and made a few other less interesting observations, they return home, where the Master Assassin is rewarded for this "research" by being

appointed Director of the Centre for Solarian Studies, whereupon he is moved to utter the last sentence in the book: "'Sometimes it does pay to have friends in high places'", leaving me with thoughts concerning the truth of this in the world of publishing.

In The Lost Worlds Of Cronos, the same unlikely trio sets out in the other direction -- away from the invisible sun towards the invisible stars, but do not get to see them. (I have a feeling that they are being reserved for the third or even the fourth volume.) This time, they investigate an unsuspected shell called Boxa Shell -- "a shell of utter darkness, cold and silent, where only the extreme mutants could survive". Their adventures are rather more interesting and less arbitrary than before. There are space battles and pseudo-scientific explanations reminiscent of those of E. E. Smith, whose awful style Kapp's resembles, with such lines as: "Despite its momentum, the little ship was seized by a series of most tremendous forces..." The style never aspires to much beyond grammatical correctness. No attempt is made at characterisation: the characters are puppets leaping about in a vacuum, having banal conversations. It is hectic hokum, as though the writer had set out to blow the minds of technology-mad eleven-year-olds accustomed to Dr Who and Star Trek and desiring nothing better.

Having nothing more to say about the literary merits (or lack thereof) of the two books, I turn to other aspects of them, specifically the plot and the scientific background to it. Can we really believe that the immense task of building shells of the sort Kapp imagines would be carried through, even if it were at all possible, when birth control and other methods of limiting population are so much easier? Secondly, building such shells would be disintegrated by gravitational forces acting at right angles to their radii. Thirdly, what is the force of gravity supposedly acting on the inhabitants of the outer surfaces of the various shells? The assumption implicit in the text is that it would be Earth-normal, but it obviously would not be. Finally, what has happened to all the real planets of the solar system, especially Jupiter and Saturn, of which there is in these two books no mention whatsoever? Are we to suppose that they have been broken up for scrap and swept up by the spacesweepers? I know that there is a place for pseudoscience in SF, but a line should be drawn somewhere.

Reading these two books, I saw several parallels that could be drawn between them and Jules Verne's Journey To The Centre Of The Earth, which (pardon the pun) thrilled me to the core as an eleven-year-old despite the abysmal quality of its writing. But then it was the first piece of SF I ever read, and it depresses me to think that the quality of the average SF potboiler has not improved -- and may, in fact, have declined -- in all the years since then.

Peter Van Greenaway -- MANRISSA MAN (Gollancz, 208pp, £6.95)

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

For some time, under various editors, Vector has taken occasional glances at the entries into SF of "outsiders" from other branches of literature, and the richness this brings. Unfortunately, there is another side to this activity, and Manrissa Man shows it only too well.

"What would happen," announces the blurb, "if we were to breed a race of apes that were more intelligent than Man?" To which the habitual SF reader responds by thinking back on the interminable retellings of Pierre Bouille's Planet of the Apes (aka Monkey Planet) on TV, film, comic strip and probably illuminated souvenir tea-towel and, yawning, reaches for the Beano. Which is an unfair put-down, of course. Peter Van Greenaway is writer of successful thrillers, some with near-SF themes, and while Manrissa Man is packaged as "Gollancz Suspense" rather than as an SF novel, there's no reason to suppose that by definition Van Greenaway's science fiction is any less authentic than that of writers who happen to have a more fashionable track record within the genre. The fact that the theme of the book -- a US defence project to breed semi-intelligent apes produces a highly intelligent hybrid race of beings which wreaks a terrible revenge -- is unoriginal counts for very little. When Doris Lessing writes a variant on "Was God an astronaut?" in Shikasta, when Russell Hoban writes a variant on "After the Bomb" in Riddley Walker, even (possibly) when Moureen Duffy in Gor Saga writes a variant on the particular theme under discussion there, we have books which cannot be ignored because "it's been done before". (Ho-hum, Mr. Shakespeare: another revenge tragedy?) No, the reason why Manrissa Man induced tedium has less to do with the way it contrasts artificially intelligent monkeys with a corrupt humanity than with the curiously leaden wit with which Van Greenaway actually tells his story.

I was about halfway through the book when I realised that what I originally saw as particularly lame pieces of writing could in fact be taken for humour. Three Manrissas -- hybrid chimpanzee/gorillas named after the Manrissa Primate Research Centre and developed under the auspices of the US government -- are taught to speak by Matthew Longmore, a linguistics professor in a one-horse college so run-down that the Engineering Faculty is dropped because it requests a lathe in its room: "This here's a place of learning. Headwork counts -- they want that kind of doodad they can join General Motors". Longmore later drives the Manrissas to Washington to meet the Press -- or, rather, they take over the wheel, which sparks off comic reactions among the people they meet along the way as they come up against "talking monkeys". However, the tone of the comedy is very much that of a third-rate TV sitcom, with the notion that after the first double-take the humans behave "normally" and try to, as it were, live around a situation played for all that it's worth:

"'Do you have a spare manager with time on his hands?' Alpha wondered politely.

Four mouths opened as one. It was like a scene from Jaws. The manager studied the situation from a crack in the door.

'I forgot,' Alpha smote his forehead, 'you people have a lingo all your own. Luckily I speak Bemelman's. Summon the maitre d'hotel!'

The manager had no choice. An ex-British diplomat, so suave even Britain's FO couldn't stand him, he decided to stand forth or be fired for dereliction; stepped out with the kind of smile that slips down the face sooner than a powerful lubricant. He bore a faint resemblance to Edgar Allan Price (sic) if that helps. 'How can I help you, gentlemen?'

'You're a credit to your country's educational system,' Alpha said.

'Eton and Harrow.' It slipped out automatically. The manager stiffened his upper lip before he bit it. One sensed an inner struggle to regain initiative. 'I very much regret, sir, the rules do not allow primates on the premises.'

To some extent, this fits in with the theme: Mankind, to the Manrissas, is nasty, contemptible and degenerate, the butt of sneering dismissals and shown in these passages to be anything from dumb to moronic. Also, in some areas, the satire hits the mark; that "It was like a scene from Jaws" isn't bad, and there's a nice realistic touch in the fact that the Manrissas are farmed out to whichever colleges will take them because of cuts in the Defence budget. But there's a curiously unintegrated contrast between the naive humour of the "talking monkey" sections and the horrific atmosphere of the conclusion, when the apes return to Manrissa, take over the establishment, and feed Man the results of his own biochemical research. The revelation of the nauseating experiments which led to the creation of Alpha, the Manrissa leader, seems to come from another order of story altogether.

As a satire, Manrissa Man lacks impact. As a thriller, it lacks pace and tension. As comedy, it drags. As SF, it possesses little of that imaginative scope we claim we are looking for....but I could make epigrammatic statements like this all night. Manrissa Man is by no means a real stinker: if it were, I'd have dismissed it in a couple of lines. Fundamentally, it's just not very good of its type, however you define that type. It's a professional product which will probably sell in satisfactory quantities to librarians with little time for thorough book selection -- like much SF, in fact. Its function for us as Vector readers is perhaps to remind us that there are still times when such product can be churned out more skillfully by "our own" professionals from inside our ghetto walls.

Which is hardly an excuse when you come to think about it, whichever side of the ghetto wall you stand.

Michael Moorcock -- THE ENTROPY TANGO (New English Library, 152pp, £5.95)

Reviewed by Roelof Goudriaan

The series of particularly impressive works which Moorcock has written over the past few years led me to welcome this new Jerry Cornelius novel as compulsory reading material. Most of its characters, like Major Nye, Colonel Pyat, Bishop Beesley and his blonde daughter, Prinz Lobkowitz, Miss Brunner, Mr. Koutrouboussis and, in the leading role, Una Persson, should be familiar from earlier Cornelius chronicles, and many events and loose remarks should likewise trigger a feeling of deja vu.

Once again, we find Miss Una Persson travelling through time and alternate histories, between the revolutions of the twentieth century, perpetually in opposition. In 1948, she bargains with the anarchist Nestor Makhno, who has conquered Ontario from the Mounties with his army of Indians and Ukranian settlers. In the seventies, she takes over one of Jerry Cornelius's jobs after he has been wounded in a failed attempt for the Presidency of the USA, and in the early fifties she's involved in a failed revolution led by Bohemian anarchists. When Jerry loses his power, stuck in the fifties in a world which didn't have a Second World War but never got over the General Strike, she gets him out -- in a hearse.

In such a rapidly changing reality, every time-traveller runs the risk of losing their grip on that reality, of being trapped in another period or timetrack, of identity failure. Una Persson gets trapped by a fracture (or was she shot by Miss Brunner?), and when even the roof garden of Derry & Toms, one of her favourite refuges, has made way for Marks & Spencers it's clear that she has lost the battle for survival. A near-madom succession of newspaper clippings and stills, in loose chapters of only one or two pages, show her without the power to control at least some of her talent, suffering from amnesia and a fear of other people, leading to frantic attempts to escape from her lovers and her flight into a hospital, a nunnery. The fifth and final part of the novel is a stroboscopic repeat -- the Theatre, Leon Trotsky, the raid on San Francisco, the hospital where two of her ex-lovers desert her, and a final flicker of hope.

The Entropy Tango undoubtedly has its own, meaningful place in the chronicles of Jerry Cornelius, perhaps as a gloomy, blackened breechblock, but it is by no means the place at which to start reading those chronicles. The chances are that, between the persons, scenes and symbols of the earlier novels popping up without the least introduction and the seemingly chaotic and totally unconnected successions of events, melodies and illustrations, the less devoted Cornelius connoisseur will feel nothing but utter bewilderment. As did I, for quite a while.

D. M. Thomas -- THE WHITE HOTEL (Gollancz, 240pp, £6.95; King Penquin, 240 pp, £2.25)

Reviewed by Nick Lowe

There are two stories called The White Hotel, and one might be forgiven for mistaking which was the fantasy. The first is the tale of Lisa, an Ukranian Jew, who starts as a fascinating case history of Freud and ends as a statistic in the Holocaust. The other is the story of Donald, the ghetto boy, who sets out from poverty and anonymity sustained by nothing more than his own merit and integrity, and ends by conquering the world and achieving the fame and riches he always deserved. Both are remarkable tales, and each has its own message for our age. Lisa's story is by now well-known, and through it several thousands of people have experienced the essence of the twentieth century. Donald's story is less universal in its relevance, but for those of us still languishing in the ghetto it is as inspiring and astonishing a tale as any fiction. Before looking at The White Hotel as a novel, then, we can hardly avoid studying it as a phenomenon.

SF readers remember Donald M. Thomas as a minor New Worlds writer, whose poems, at first on orthodox SF themes but turning later to wider-ranging and more experimental subjects, appeared frequently in the magazine and its subsequent incarnations from 1968 onwards. In 1977 he was made redundant when Hereford College of Education, where he lectured, closed; with three children to support, he turned to full-time writing and in a rapid burst of creativity produced two fine novels, Birthstone and The Flute-Player. The latter won the Gollancz/Picador Fantasy Competition and the first eventually rode to publication on its back, both appearing in the ill-fated Gollancz Fantasy Collection. But despite Thomas's numerous media appearances and his growing reputation as a poet and translator, neither sold well. The Picador edition of The Flute-Player did poorly and was not reprinted, which led to Birthstone's failing to find a paperback publisher.

D. M. Thomas looked set to become another superior ex-ghetto novelist whose career would be throttled by his own uncompromising literary ambitiousness.

In 1979, however, he had published a poem in New Worlds entitled "The Woman To Sigmund Freud". One of a number of pieces about Freud and his circle he was writing around that time, it seemed to reflect his increasing preoccupation with a range of highly esoteric, private obsessions. Looking at that poem now, nobody could truthfully say that it reads like the opening pages of a best seller, and nobody could have suspected that within two or three years it would have been read by more people than anything else the magazine ever published.

When The White Hotel was first published in January 1981, it looked at first like another worthy failure. Reviewers were interested but lukewarm; The New Statesman dismissed it as "pornography". It sold better than Thomas's previous novels, managing a second edition in April, but as far as the British public was concerned it still didn't exist -- Picador turned it down twice, and Penguin eventually bought the paperback rights for a modest sum. But, that same spring, it took off in the USA like it was Rubik's Cube, and although it didn't achieve the 90,000 hardback sales claimed for it by The Sunday Times, however, that really established it in the public mind in the UK, with the splash heading "This novelist is a sensation in America. He is British. Have you heard of him?" The book was back at the printers within the week, and shortly afterwards was proclaimed a Booker Prize finalist. It reprinted three times in two months, and in November crawled onto The Sunday Times's best seller list. Penguin, who initially planned an upper limit of 20,000 on their print-run, have now issued it with a run of 100,000 -- equal, for example, to the initial printing of The Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy. The American paperback edition will appear with an initial run of one million copies. I suspect the rest will be history.

So there it is: the rags-to-riches, or dols-queue-to-bestsellerdom, tale of the generation. In a depressed market, D. M. Thomas has achieved the British SF author's dream, of taking the mainstream by storm on the merit of a single novel, soaring from utter obscurity to international recognition without having made the slightest concession to popular accessibility. A gleaming example to us all -- but what kind of book can stand up to the hype attendant upon such phenomenal success?

In the event, The White Hotel survives being a phenomenon very well indeed. It could, in honesty, hardly have happened to a more deserving case. Perhaps the first thing to stress is its sheer impact on the reader -- Brian Aldiss wrote, and the quote quickly found its way onto the jacket blurb, "When I finished reading it I walked out into the garden and could not speak. It overwhelmed me". Everyone I know who has read the second half of the novel in a single sitting has felt a similar effect. I read it in November 1981, and had nightmares all night; when I re-read it for this review, I had nightmares all over again. Not like me at all.

The book explores first the inner, then the outward, life of one human being over a period of 22 years. Although the SF elements are limited to a spot of precognition and telepathy, a Dantean fantasy coda and an enthralling inner-space manhunt drawing on the metaphors of Freudian analysis,

the importance and inner logic of the imaginative element easily bring the novel into the same tolerant definition of SF that includes, say, The Unlimited Dream Company and The Affirmation. Its theme, however, is anything but speculative. It is a simple and tragically neglected truth, mankind's capacity to ignore which is a matter of horror and incredulous astonishment to Thomas and his heroine: the inexhaustible richness and mystery of the human spirit contrasted with the mindless vacuity of manmade annihilation. Thomas addresses these twin realities through what he sees as the most powerful expressions history has yet given them, Freud and the Holocaust; and by following one patient from her first encounter with Freud to her death in the Babi Yar massacre, he brings them shatteringly together. It is, of course, hardly the first work to confront the reader with the sanctity of human life and the brutal fact of its continued violation, but what makes it unique when compared with other examples is the depth in which the psyche is probed and experienced by the reader before the final, shocking exposure to mass slaughter.

The book opens with a brief scene-setting prologue in the form of a loose set of letters among members of Freud's circle in 1919. While it fails to reveal to me exactly what Thomas finds so fascinating about the interrelationships of Freud and his apostles, the pastiche is virtuoso and engaging, neatly establishing the existence of an intriguing woman patient and her remarkable fantasy journal. The novel proper is divided into six sections, each of which completely transforms the meaning of what preceded it, although the reader could stop at the end of any section and be left with an artistic, satisfying whole. Section I is the woman's verse journal, an extended version of the New Worlds poem, introducing us to the ambiguously seductive White Hotel of her fantasy, where Eros and Thanatos, the little death and the great, are inseparable, and a violent sexual affair is played out amid equally violent background catastrophes and a pervasive ethereal imagery of falling stars and floating orange groves. Section II is a matter-of-fact prose version of the same events, with the settings, characters, and action fleshed out but the same dreamy quality to the narrative, at once reminiscent of The Flute-Player, Emma Tennant's Wild Nights and the writings of Anna Kavan.

Having spent a quarter of the novel immersing the reader in the White Hotel for its own sake, Thomas then springs his most flamboyant illusion by launching into an imaginary case-history from Freud's own pen. As a pastiche of Freud, "Frau Anna G." is perhaps not entirely convincing, if only because none of the real case-histories Thomas so profoundly admires are as consistently riveting as the psychoanalytic detective story of hers. But this is certainly the part of the novel that grips the reader by the forelock, as Freud delves -- with more sustained wisdom and insight, one feels, than he ever showed in real life -- into the causes of the woman's hysterical symptoms and the meaning of her strange journal. One by one, the pieces come together, the secrets of her psyche are exposed; and she returns to her operatic career with her symptoms conquered, if not wholly eradicated.

Section IV moves on ten years to 1929, where for the first time we meet the real life "Anna", a cosmopolitan Jewish soprano named Lisa Erdman. It's impossible to convey here the fascination of being able to study, in the round, the outward person through whose interior world we have been conducted until now. We follow Lisa's life over the next 7 years, across

the summit of her career and into late contentment in a happy remarriage that restores her to her native Kiev. And there the sensitive reader is advised to shut the book and drive six large bolts through it, for when the story resumes five years later it's like a cold wind suddenly blowing all the lights out. The action of Section V covers a single day, which is to be the last of Lisa's and her ten-year-old stepson's lives. If "Frau Anna G." is the most accomplished piece of writing in the book, this is easily the most powerful, as we follow Lisa from initial optimism through uncertainty, panic and the final realisation of the fate in store for 200,000 Kiev Jews, to her death, and their death, and the novel's frightful moral:

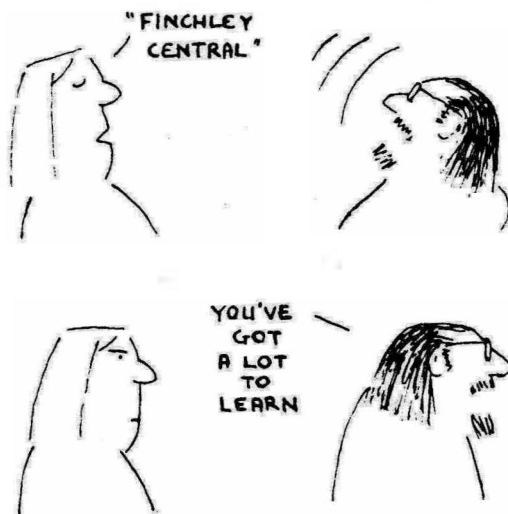
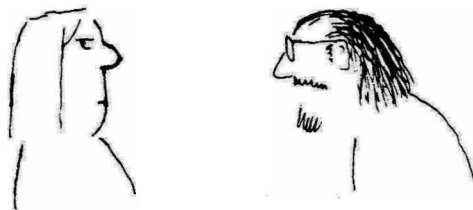
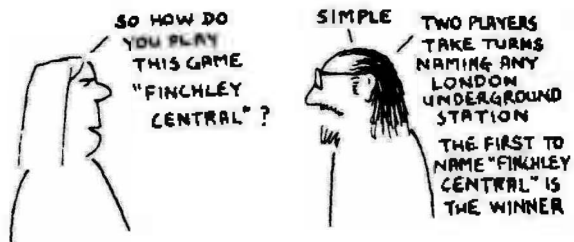
"The soul of man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored. Most of the dead were poor and illiterate. But every single one of them had dreamed dreams, seen visions and had amazing experiences, even the babes in arms (perhaps especially the babes in arms). Though most of them had never lived outside the Podol slum, their lives and histories were as rich and as complex as Lisa Erdman-Berenstein's. If a Sigmund Freud had been listening and taking notes from the time of Adam, he would still not fully have explored even a single group, even a single person.

"And this was only the first day." (page 220)

This, to the author's credit, is not the end of Lisa's story. Section VI is a visionary epilogue that finally realises the numerous Dantean references in the body of the work, in which Lisa and her fellow victims enter the first circle of the afterlife, the promised land, the place of healing, where the wounds in Lisa's soul that Freud could only salve at last begin to knit up. Thus baldly summarised, it sounds cheap and nasty; it is not.

The White Hotel is nevertheless not a flawless work. It is difficult to suspend disbelief so far as to imagine the poetic journal, so thoroughly contemporary and D. M. Thomas in style and content, as the work of a Russian singer writing in German in 1919. There are lapses, too, into over-cleverness, as when Lisa answers her marriage proposal in the style of Eugene Onegin; and I'm not sure that Lisa's clairvoyance (she is troubled by a recurring nightmare, which Freud is unable to explain, that is in fact a premonition of her death) is used to any great effect. Thomas has said that "any Central European Jew certainly must have gathered up the whole spirit of the age in their own mindspast and future flow through her", but one wonders if the explicit clairvoyance isn't there simply because he was attracted to Freud's interest in psychic phenomena during his last years.

But it is, of course, a marvellous novel, easily the best of 1981, and while (like Lisa) it carries the blood of the ghetto only in diluted form and can be taken for an outsider where convenient, it's sufficiently rooted in SF for us all to feel proud of it. I doubt, myself, that D. M. Thomas will ever write another novel as good, having effectively given his three chief obsessions -- Cornwall, Russia and Freud -- their definitive expressions in his first three novels. What really counts, however, is that an immensely talented but struggling writer has reached a wider public than would ever have been believed possible, and that he now has the security to write his next novel, and a good quarter century's worth of novels after that. So buy The White Hotel for the sake of Donald Thomas's well-earned bank balance, and read it at least once a year for the good of your soul.



Ian Watson (ed.) -- PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION (Greystoke Mobray, 168pp, £1.25)

Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

As I begin this review my feelings resemble those of Mark Anthony. I come wanting to praise this book, and there is much about it that is praiseworthy. In the final analysis, however, I am forced to bury it. The balance is negative. I find that a great pity.

To begin on a positive note, the volume is the product of a small press seemingly unaffected by the "megamania" of so many larger publishing houses. This, combined with the use of newer, more flexible (and cheaper) printing technologies, should reduce the marginal cost of publishing a book. All things being equal, that should lead to the publication of more adventurous books, which would indisputably be a "good thing". In its way, Pictures At An Exhibition is an adventurous effort, being an anthology of mostly British stories. Two of the authors are new. In theory, then, the reaction should be applause. What has gone wrong?

The stories in this volume are centred upon a theme which they are meant to illuminate. This is a device that I have not discovered in use too many times, and it should be a source of strength to the volume. It is unfortunate that Ian Watson and Roger Campbell have constructed nothing more than a childish conceit, which they have executed, at best, ineptly. As a creation myth it is leaden-footed and unconvincing, displaying none of the depth of thought we have come to expect from Ian Watson. I found the resolution downright embarrassing, coming after the last story (by Watson), and my final feeling was of having been intellectually short-changed. The volume is mostly sober in attitude, even sombre, and I think the reader has the right to expect something better and more convincing than this.

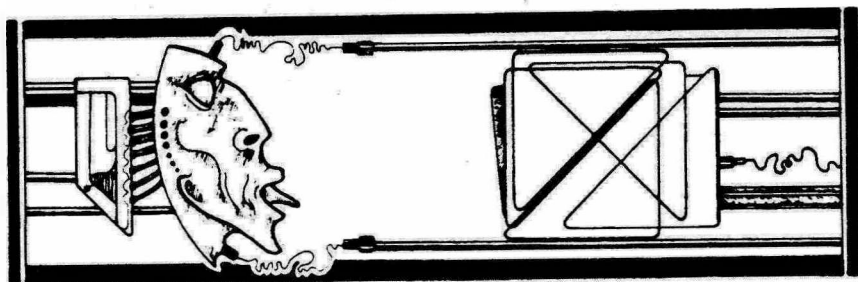
As for the stories themselves, they range from the downright dreadful to the really rather fine. Brian Stableford's squib, "Second Chance", with its pseudo-Freudian God, bolshy Adam and "liberated" Eve is limp, ultimately offensive and would probably not have been considered had it had a lesser name at the masthead. David Langford's "Transcends All Wit" is predictably finely-written but if it has any content I missed it. It is interesting but ultimately frustrating, nothing more than a stylistic exercise. A similar judgement applies to Michael Bishop's "A spy In The Domain Of Arnheim", in which Bishop evokes echoes of James and Poe without saying anything about his character or his predicament. "The Cry", by Richard Downes, and "Et In Arcadia Ego", by Patricia and Lionel Fanthorpe, are both similar tales told in a similar mood -- both deal with humans at the whim of benign higher beings, and the authors' choice of an innocent storytelling is surprising in its conviction. But both pieces are subverted by the very humanness of the gods invoked, and I found nothing in the least awe-inspiring in them. The Fanthorpe story also irritated by utterly incongruous Shakespearean reference in a Graeco-Roman pastoral setting.

Three of the nine stories just about stand on their own feet.. Roger Campbell redeems himself of responsibility for the central theme by "The Sacrament Of The Last Supper", in which one shinningly original (I think!) idea does battle with a host of lesser ones and just about wins.

The idea is just about worth the cover price, so I will not reveal it here, and while the story is ultimately unsatisfactory, Campbell is a writer to watch with interest in the future. Ian Watson's story, "The mystic Marriage Of Salome", surprised me. I am not a fan of his work, and find his trenchant defence of the SF idea over characterisation tiresome, but this story is a character piece in which the characters are convincing and the idea is weak. All in all, though, this is the most complete work I have read from him. Several of the stories address themselves to the subject of sex but only Watson creates any genuine human emotion or (dare I say it?) real eroticism. For me the most successful story in the volume is Chris Morgan's "Brief Lives". In many ways, it is the slightest story present, but Morgan hits most of his targets. This pastiche puts a seven stone weakling in Conan's clothing and gives him powers of resurrection. I doubt that it will win any prizes, but it made me laugh, and the humour was a pleasant relief from the relentless, numbing earnestness of the other stories.

The stories are all prefaced by a depiction of the paintings which "inspired" them. These line sketches, and the cover painting, are by Pete Lyon and, while a reasonable case can be made that any Pete Lyon art is better than none, these are not of his best. Like the stories themselves, they lack the vitality rightly associated with his work, and seem to have been produced to commission rather than out of any internal compulsion on the part of the artist.

Pictures At An Exhibition gave me a lot of problems. I have read the stories again and again, until I know them better than most stories I like, searching for some reason to enthuse. I still wish that I could find a reason. The book could have amounted to something significant, but does not, and the reason lies in the concept itself. The core of the volume, Watson's and Campbell's central theme, is simply too weak, and the generally uninspired stories only compound this flaw. The volume is an attempt to break some new ground, and I hope that its relative failure does not discourage the publishers, editors and writers from having another try, for the notion itself is sound and has the potential to create something exciting.



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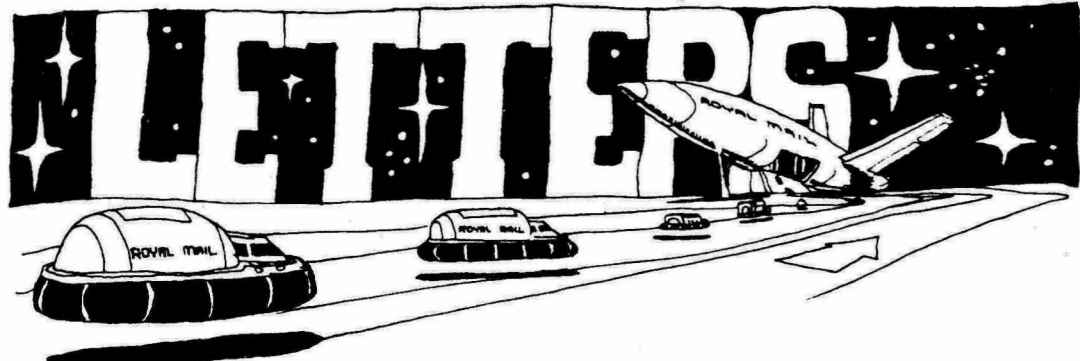
An American reader, Karen Foster, wrote recently: "Your magazine was brought to my attention by my Professor... It is not often that I am impressed with a magazine that a Professor recommends, but I am impressed with Foundation. It is so unstuffy that it can be read with ease... and that is only one of its fine features. It's inspiring to read articles by writers like Gene Wolfe and Philip K. Dick about the writer's craft... Keep up the good work!"

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John Bull.

A. D. Wallace
306 E. Gatehouse Dr. H
Metairie, LA 70001
U.S.A.

Turning to meatier matters contemplate if you will Mary Gentle's definition of mainstream (Vector 105): fiction concerned with (I) exhaustive psychological exploration of character, (II) set in a society operative during the author's lifetime. Both conditions are satisfied by Robinson Crusoe, but with (I) holds in Le Guin's Malafrena. The latter is clearly neither science nor fantasy, as these terms are commonly used in our genre, and is not really historical. My own word for it is Parahistorical. Whatever, Gentle's definition is at least an approach to an interesting problem, that of deciding what we mean when we use the word mainstream. It seems to me that Silverberg's Dying Inside is mainstream à la Gentle. This being so we have a confused category -- Mainstream science fiction and fantasy.

❖ Back to definitions again. As I've mentioned in the Standpoint article, people love labels because they're such a convenience - and to increase the number of labels. I presume that the definitions we invent have to become even more precise and limiting. I'm not at all certain that this is a good thing - aren't we drifting away somewhat from the subject matter ie: the literature we're reading?

Jon Wallace
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A few thoughts on Vector 106. David V. Barratt's Standpoint on the Subject of Reassessments was quite valid...up to a point. Surely the mark of a good book is that your opinion of it should change for the better--not worse with time. If you dislike something now, which once you liked, then that book was obviously aimed at a limited market, ie: a market consisting of those who had (if you like) less mature taste than you do now. Therefore, the book must be extrapolation, ignore your new maturity, must have been condescending to the old you and thus a bad book. This may be a good thing of so-called juveniles, though I'm not convinced, but material aimed at an adult market must not condescend. This is an insult.

Also, I'm afraid there is no way to escape the trap of innovation becoming cliché. But style is a different matter. In this, I feel (along with Kev, apparently) that naive style cannot be forgiven because it was right at the time.

One other point is that it is difficult to be scathing effectively towards a classic. Re-read the Reassessment of 'Nightfall'. Although the story is criticised for naivety of style, depiction of social behaviour etc, the final analysis remains that it still has the power to move, and that the central images are thought provoking. These things are the lasting quality of any work. Stylistic conventions change, outlooks become fashionable, then not, but a classic transcends this. Perhaps that should be the purpose of Reassessments, to examine and point out the qualities that last. We could do with some these days.

Lately I've been depressed at the general publishing recession and the kind of bilge that is being churned out by the publishing companies (I was going to say 'pumped out' but thought better if it). You know, the "this stuff has sold before, it'll sell now" approach. But two recent articles in a Sunday paper has lightened my darkness somewhat. The first was about four best-selling books of recent date, the second was about the new 'Best of British' marketing wheeze designed to part you from your money in exchange for a good book instead of using "Best-seller" material. All 'heavy' authors, literarily speaking. Perhaps this is a sign that the reading public has finally made it plain that the stuff they want to read is other than the aforementioned "Best-seller" gunge. Obviously this has percolated through to the publishing houses who are now going to pretend that their campaign is providing the impetus for the change. Still, a change for the better. Isn't it?

** *Actually, I feel that the recent "British Best" promotion is fine in theory, but doesn't work in practice. The authors that were selected are representative and diverse, and whilst it was emphasised that they were not the best of British (but just a best), the bookshop displays have rather tended to polarise the variety of reading material to this "ideal". I don't think the publisher saw this exercise as an indicator of changing tastes - ie: the switch from the W.H. Smith style "top ten sellers" - but simply as a method of increasing sales whilst at the same time as feeling very pleased with themselves. I do admire it, but I wonder whether it's going to degenerate into similar promotions in the future.*

William Bains
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I have recently discovered a very peculiar thing. You know, publishing firms are very conservative. Rather than back a new author with promise, they prefer to stick to the names they know, even if this looses them useful books, valuable authors and, both immediately and ultimately, money. What? Oh, you know already. Yes, I thought you might.

It is the last part of that loss that struck me recently. It should have struck the accountants among you, too, and some years ago. A company is usually formed to make money (tax-losses etc. can be discounted in the book trade: books can lose enough on their own). Publishers D, in adopting a policy of buying the latest blockbuster by R. S. at the expense of a dozen novels by lesser writers, not only kills those writer's chances of getting their work published for yet another year. Nor does he only kill for all time the public's chances of reading a good book, be it heavy or light, skiffy or S & S whatever. He also guarantees that, in the long run, he makes less money. Because the public can take only so much of R. S.'s terrible blockbusters, and the fees D needs to pay R. S. to get him to write another are increasingly not justified by the sales of 'Valentine's Day Castle'.

Now, this is daft. Somewhere in that publisher's organisation an accountant is asleep, and is letting the book-choosers run amok. As ardent fans of the highest of literary standards, we have been presuring publishers, booksellers, book distributors, even on rare occasions book-buyers to stop this madness. Of course, this has had no effect because the book-choosers 'know what the public wants', and ignore such things as expert advice from the public. May I suggest we stop pushing the book choosers and push instead the accountants. Then let them push the book-choosers (I avoid the term editors, because they aren't) for us, and with the clout of money behind them.

Letters

How? Accountants, I am told, understand money. So tell them that there are better ways of making profits from a publishing firm. The writers among you, use the figures at your disposal to write to accountancy journals, booksellers newsletters, shareholder's meetings, anything that might get the message through. Because quality does go hand in hand with saleability, all other things being equal (which they are not, of course). Point out the errors of their ways to the people who really count, the men with the cash. It is an unfamiliar and uncomfortable approach for a primarily literary organisation to take, but it has always worked wonders before, in politics, in business, even in arts and science. the heads of major research departments do not write of their penary solely to learned journals. They point out to the minister for canine affairs how much their research will mean to dogs. Or weapons or heart transplants. They talk to the relatives of the victims of the diseases they are researching. And, if they are good at it (not necessarily the same thing as being good at science), the money flows once more. So go thou and do likewise, I say. Because Money talks. Just hand it the right script.

** Accountants advise their clients about their financial affairs, and indeed it must be a very sad world if publishers see their job in purely monetary terms. I'm sure Kevin Smith would wish to comment on you views, but having discussed some of them with a bookshop manager here in Leeds, it does seem as if there is more than just a grain of truth in what you say.

Anyway, let's move from definitions and publishers to the actual works themselves - here's Sue Thomason...

Sue Thomason
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This is a letter in reply to Dorothy Davies' in Vector 106. I read Crystal Crone all the way through, too. I don't find lesbianism an unsuitable topic for SF stories, and my main criticism of the mag is that these stories aren't very good ones. They lack plot, certainly, but in my view

they fail as stories because the writers are more concerned with lesbianism/feminism than with storytelling. It's the plot which is the afterthought, for these writers, not the lesbianism.

'...completely ignored the male sex', well, yes they do. Perhaps this is a reaction to 'traditional' SF stories which have three roles for women; to be dumb (so that the hero can explain what's going on to them, and incidentally, the reader), to be sexy (to provide masturbation fantasies for the predominantly male adolescent readership of the pulp magazines they appeared in), and to be rescued (thus providing the plot). Thank our lucky stars things have changed since then. Because SF is a field in which anything is possible, many excellent stories exist which reature people who are female. In most other fiction, the lead characters, the norm is the male, and any females leads stick out like a sore thumb. Not SF, not any longer.

Personally, I enjoy reading stories by women and men which have strong female leads. There were none around in my adolescence. I remember wanting to be an astronaut, and being told firmly that I couldn't because they were all men. Not any more, in fact or fiction. This is very satisfying, I don't have to change sex in my daydreams. I am constantly reminded that I am a woman when I step outside the restricted life some people still think I should lead (they even object to me buying my round!!) and it's great to have the bounds of possibility enlarged.

Letters

If I am honest, I want people to read my writing, in the hope that they might get some of the pleasure out of it that I put into it. I want to entertain, to tell a good story...and to be admired for doing something well. I didn't send my work to Crystal Crone either. I'd rather be published in better company, despite writing stories about both lesbianism and feminism (shouts of 'egoist' off). Perhaps Focus...?

** ---well, we have a re-born Focus, so if Chris, Allan or Dave are reading...

Harold Powell
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I've just started reading 'The Shadow of the Torturer', mainly as a result of the rave reviews in Vector and Paperback Inferno, because my own preference is for the SF end of the spectrum rather than Fantasy.

In particular, Dave Langford in P.I. Vol.5 No.1 - "Wolfe makes triumphant use of the English language, writing with utter clarity yet outdoing Vance in his pillaging of dictionaries for one right (though obscure) word...."

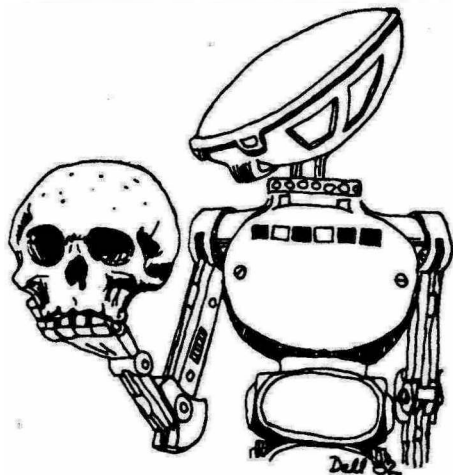
What a pity the publishers have, by lousy proof-reading, done their damndest to set this all to naught so early in the game!

I refer to page 16 (of the paperback), parp. 4 line 3 - "While he shited his ground..."

Heaven preserve us from four-letter words in print beginning with 'f', but it's almost worse to leave 'f' out of the middle!!

** It looks very much as if Kev Smith missed this line when compiling his series of one-liners that used to grace these pages. Maybe Geoff Rippington has been avidly reading further exciting books for future inclusion.

Unfortunately, I've been pushed for space in this issue, so the Letters section has seen a reduction in size. Nevertheless, we did hear from ARNOLD AKIEN (extensively) who added further fuel to the fire on the subject of criticism and DOROTHY DAVIES about why she wasn't applying for the post of VECTOR editor. On that subject, whilst we now know that Geoff Rippington will be taking on that role in the next issue, I'd like to thank all those who did volunteer for the post. Who knows? Perhaps one day....



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