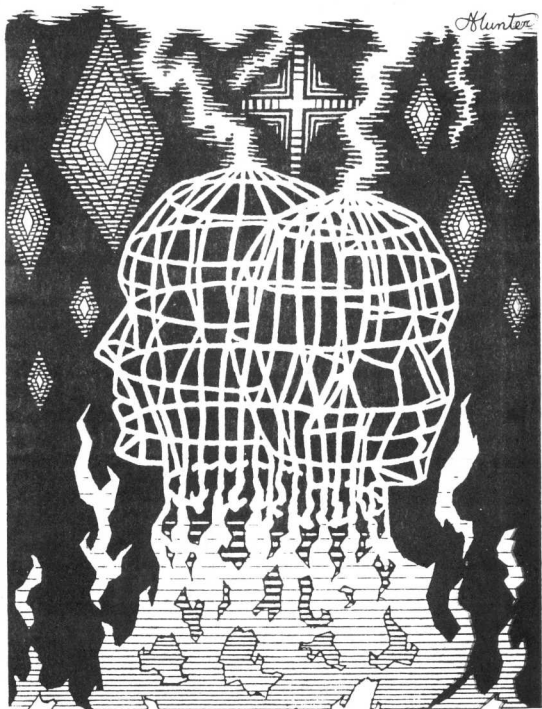


# VECTOR <sup>75p</sup> 112



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# The State Of The Art

Paul Kincaid

To my mind, 1982 was not a bad year for science fiction. A few books appeared that must rank among the best in the genre. Yet I cannot help feeling that science fiction, as a whole, is in a sorry state.

I suppose any genre must be judged by the best it produces, and if we were only to look at John Crowley's Little, Big, or Gene Wolfe's The Book of the New Sun, then it would be quite justifiable to come away saying that science fiction is as healthy as it has ever been. I can look back over the last few years and name, without the slightest difficulty, maybe a dozen books that are splendid examples of everything we have always said science fiction is capable of achieving. But such an optimistic view is deceptive. These outstanding books are the exception, not the rule.

More and more SF is published every year, my local W.H. Smith has shelves crowded with the garish stuff. Occasionally, among these paperbacks, one may encounter a classic decked out in an atrocious cover, but all too often they are the current breed of science fiction, the febrile primeval epics, the simple-minded fantasies, the movie tie-

ins and the great new ideas that make the 1930s look advanced. This rubbish is science fiction. This is what everyone expects SF to be, this is what the publishers know we want, this is what the distributors and booksellers expect us to lap up. And God help us we do lap it up. After all, there's nothing else.

If science fiction makes up 50% or more of your reading, then the handful of books that display any real quality cannot form the whole of your diet. And this handful seems to me to be more and more cast beyond the pale, out into the outer darkness. They are no longer the mainstream of science fiction, and so seem to be drifting into the awareness of fewer and fewer SF readers. The genre reinforces its own clichés, so that it seems as if only the clichéd can be accepted as science fiction.

Science fiction of the moment seems to me to be characterised by a demand for the familiar. More and more it seems that the only books that sell are the series, the endless identikit regurgitations of the Julian Mays and Stephen Donaldsons of this world. Even once good writers like Silverberg cram their imaginations into the straightjacket of repetition. Readers can pick up these huge lumbering epics and switch off their minds, it requires no effort to tread time and again the same path.

I suppose, at this point, someone will remind me of Gene Wolfe's series. The Book of the New Sun, however, is one book that happens to fill four volumes; I doubt that any of today's ubiquitous trilogies, and trilogies of trilogies, would have the gall to claim that of their outpourings.

I wonder what science fiction is supposed to be? I started reading it because I found it fresh and exciting, it set my imagination soaring off into all manner of wonders. Science fiction was about, or gave the impression of being about, the new, the innovative, the bold. Surely it was the same excitement that turned you into SF addicts.

Yet I look at the vast majority of today's science fiction and I wonder where the innovation has gone. Are today's writers devoid of daring and imagination? To judge from the stuff churned out on the production

line of contemporary 'literature' the answer is yes. If the stock that fills the bookshop shelves is any indication of the taste of us, the public, the readers, then we no longer wish our imaginations to be excited, we no longer desire to come face to face with the new, with the possible. We no longer want science fiction to be what we claim it to be.

Science fiction has become the most conservative of media, the most inward-looking, the most staid and un-adventurous. We no longer want new ideas, we just want more of the same. As proof of this, I need only cite the big SF 'events' of 1982: 2010 and yet another Foundation adventure. What a mire we are stuck in, if we have to turn the clock back 30 years!

And the cinema, which has done so much to usurp our genre and turn it into nothing more than the shuffling of cardboard figures around ever more fantastic special effects, what has it got to offer? Upcoming films include: Superman 3, Star Wars 3, ET 2, as well as countless other sequels.

Are there no fresh ideas left?  
Are we bankrupt of imagination?

Certainly, with a few honourable exceptions (Crowley, Priest and Wolfe spring most readily to mind), SF seems to have renounced all claims to that commodity. Fortunately, imagination is not dead, it has been inherited by the mainstream. The best science fiction short story I read in 1982 did not appear in that self-important little journal, Interzone, nor in any of the other SF magazines. It was in Firebird, a Penguin anthology of mainstream stories, and it was written by Graham Swift, a very talented young mainstream author. In The White Hotel D.M. Thomas has done things with the novel that should have been attempted in SF, but nobody had the courage or the vision to try. While Lanark, by Anthony Grey, is one of the most exciting and innovative works I have ever encountered; in content it could well be SF, and it certainly gave me everything I used to seek in SF, but it isn't SF. That's the pity. Why isn't SF producing such work? Why is so much SF tired and dull? How can we turn the tide, and make the fiction of the future live up to its own subject matter once more?

## GUEST EDITORIAL

Paul Kincaid.....3

I do not like starting a new year with an apology but I feel that one is owed due to the lack of a letter column this issue. While I could give you lengthy excuses, nay, even reasons! I expect you will be more interested in knowing what is going to happen to your letters. Well, simply put, next issue will have a bumper letter column, catching up on all the backlog and all the letters I receive on this issue. So don't stop writing those letters, they will see the light of day.

Last issue I proposed one way for the BSFA to receive some free publicity and I'm pleased to say that two people took up the idea (Actually, one article was published before my editorial, but who am I to quibble?). The first article that came through the post was by Eric Brown entitled, "Relax with Science Fiction" and was published in the 'Exam and Careers Magazine' 16 Plus. The second was by Nicholson-Morton entitled, "Get Inured to Future Shock" and appeared in one of the forces' magazine The Centurion. As I promised I'll be sending you both a book - once you see what I'm giving away you may wish to reclaim your article! Now, how about the rest of you?

## ARTWORK

I doubt if I need to tell you which artist is responsible for the front cover as by now you should be able to recognise his work. It is, I believe, one of the most striking that he has done for Vector, my thanks to Alan Hunter.

## SLADEK AT RANDOM

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David Langford.....6

Without doubt this is the most amusing interview I have published in Vector, while still being informative.



#### 4-PART LIST

John Sladek.....16

The second part of Vector's John Sladek Double Bill is the speech that he gave at Channelcon last year . I'm training my Corgi now John, once it has got the hang of towing a sledge I'll be joining the expedition.

#### CROUCHING IN CHEADLE

Christopher Priest.....25

I'm beginning to wish that Chris had not written his article. I'm one of those people who prefers not to think about the unthinkable, but living 2 miles away from a military airport, the unthinkable is too damn close. I was horrified and strangely humbled by this article - I believe you will



be too.

Those of you who have had the misfortune of not reading all the fiction of Chris Priest will soon have the opportunity of rectifying this due to a promotion run by the Book Marketing Council called, "Best of Young British Novelists", within which Chris is featured. The promotion runs from 28th Feb to 12th March.

"Best of Young British Novelists" is only one of the many promotions that the BMC is running. They range from Children's Picture Books to Health and Fitness, however, the one we will be interested in runs from October 11th to November 8th, the subject is Science Fiction. In late December I went up to the BMC's London office to discuss how the scheme will work. What happens is that publishers, who are members of the Booksellers Association, put forward a number of titles (normally no more than five) for consideration by a selection panel. This panel will then choose 20 books which they judge best to represent the scope of the genre. The BSFA will be represented on the panel by yours truly. The promotion is on Paperback Books only and they can be either a reprint or a new publication, by a living or dead author. If any author would like his books to feature in this promotion can I urge you to contact your publishers now. If you would like further information you can contact me at my normal address or Catherine Cunningham at the BMC (Tel: 01-580-6321). Judging from the response their promotional activities have had so far, it would seem worthwhile to be involved.

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Reviews by Paul Kincaid, Bill Carlin, Mary Gentle, Martyn Taylor and Judith Hanna on books by Michael Bishop, Alasdair Gray, Searles/Meacham and Franklin, Stephen King, Philip Mann, Robert Holdstock and Philip K. Dick.

One of the books praised by Paul Kincaid in his Guest Editorial, Lanark by Alasdair Gray, is reviewed by Bill Carlin and is also, purely by coincidence, Vector's Choice.

# Sladek At Random

John Sladek

Interviewed By David Langford

"People have laughed at all great inventors and discoverers," John Sladek points out. "They laughed at Galileo, at Edison's light bulb, and even at nitrous oxide." In SF novels he himself has invented a world-dominating mechanical horde, a man tragically converted to computer tape, a naive robot who's lynched when mistaken for a black. And what was the callous world's response? That's right. They laughed.

John Sladek was born in Iowa in 1937, that year which is the futuristic goal of a time-traveller in his lunatic story "1937 A.D.!" After studying first mechanical engineering and then English literature at the University of Minnesota, he went on to "take up the series of jobs which usually characterize writers and other malcontents - short-order cook, technical writer, railroad switchman, cowboy, President of the United States." He left the USA to spend time lurking in Morocco, Spain and Austria, alarming the peasantry with his strange habit of writing. Since 1966 he has lived in London and acquired a steadily swelling reputation as an SF author who - and this is rare - not only produces stimulating and intelligent SF but can be hilariously or cruelly funny while doing so. Which is why they laughed.

His first published story was "The Poets of Millgrove, Iowa" (New Worlds, 1966); the even earlier "The Happy Breed" appeared in Harlan Ellison's Dangerous Visions (1967). His SF novels are The Reproductive System (1968 - known as Mechasm in the USA), The Müller-Fokker Effect (1970) and Roderick (1980). A sequel to the latter, Roderick at Random, is due in 1983 from Granada, and a further novel Tik-Tok from Corgi. There have been three collections of his short stories: The Steam-Driven Boy and other strangers (1973), Keep the Giraffe Burning (1977) and The Best of John Sladek (USA only, 1981, comprising most of the contents of the previous two). A further collection, Alien Accounts, was released by Granada in 1982 shortly after this interview was conducted.

He has also written Gothic novels under the name Cassandra Knye: The Castle and the Key (1966) and The House That Fear Built (with Thomas M. Disch, 1967). Black Alice (1968) is a satirical thriller, again written with Disch, which first appeared in the USA under the pseudonym Thom Demijohn. The solo novels Black Aura (1974) and Invisible Green (1977) - 'Thackeray Phin Mysteries' - are skilful recreations of the no longer fashionable 'locked room' detective story; an earlier short piece in this vein, 'By An Unknown Hand', won the 1972 Times detective story competition. Perhaps the best of Sladek's non-SF writings is The New Apocrypha

(1973), which along with Martin Gardner's Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science belongs on the shelf of anyone sceptical of today's irrational cults and beliefs. His alter ego 'James Vogh' has meanwhile written books which the author of The New Apocrypha might have handled severely: Arachne Rising (1977 - The Thirteenth Zodiac in the UK) and The Cosmic Factor (1978).

In 1968-9 he co-edited a poetry magazine with Pamela Zoline: Ronald Reagan, the magazine of poetry. ("We may revive it.") In 1982 he was co-guest of honour with Angela Carter at the British National Easter SF Convention, "Channelcon" in Brighton. (He has since been revived.)

Something of the feel of reading Sladek was expressed by the serious and critical SF journal Foundation's football critic not long ago: "And that brilliant header, from a man who is so good above the shoulders that he scarcely needs to use his feet at all, sends the ball sailing between the posts!"

Back in the changing room.....

LANGFORD: John, I have a long-standing grudge against you. Have you ever considered what trouble you caused young people called Langford, as they asked partially deaf librarians for the title The Müller-Fokker Effect?

SLADEK: Young persons have no business reading such a book, which contains sex, violence and anagrams. I think I can speak for the moral majority here when I assure you that we're doing our best to prevent such problems by closing all libraries.

LANGFORD: But just for now, you're a writer. Why? What makes you write?

SLADEK: I started writing, or rather, thinking, stories as a child, and at that time the reason was very clear. Kids who read a lot come up against the disheartening fact that every story ends. They can try rereading the same story or they can read more stories in the same series or by the same author. Or they can just read other things and hope that by some magic they'll pick up the narrative thread again. When all of these stratagems fail, there's nothing to do but continue the story yourself, or else give up reading altogether and try some healthier hobby like smashing telephones. We didn't have a phone when

I was a kid, and I was too shy to smash any public phones, and our town didn't have a public pool hall either, so I had to hang out at the public library - and anyway, I told myself stories. There was a continuing bedtime saga in which I was the hero in whatever I'd been reading lately, Dave Dawson with the RAF or the Hardy Boys or the Oz books - it all got blended into the main saga, continued from night to night.

LANGFORD: Is it merely force of habit which keeps the - outwardly - adult Sladek writing?

SLADEK: Nowadays why I write is complicated by a lot of factors having nothing to do with writing, such as the need to earn a living and finding out that I'm constitutionally unsuited for working an honest job. There are probably a lot of deep psychological drives too, such as the Freudian need to impress the neighbours (Freud called it keeping up with Ernest Jones), the Oedipal urge to use a lot of carbon paper, the deep-seated need to earn millions and become a household name, like Harold Robbins or Flash Gordon or for that matter Flash.

LANGFORD: I, and I suppose SF fans in general, think of you as primarily a science fiction household name. Do these same deep-seated urges drive you to write SF in

particular?

**SLADEK:** Not guilty. Oh all right, I do write a little SF in my spare time. I have a kind of standard explanation why, which goes like this: Science fiction is one way of making sense out of a senseless world. I think people are often bewildered by the world they find themselves in, where Russia puts up a special satellite to watch the Falkland Islands war while in Britain the Queen Mother visits a meat market and is given a 40-lb slab of beef. Today I turned on the radio to hear some recipes for water flea, a delicacy of tomorrow. Anyway, people find themselves in this world, and they say "It's like science fiction," as though they expected it to be like anything else. SF has at least the advantage of not depending on preconceptions. In a science fiction story, anything can happen. God can walk in halfway through and erase the universe and replace it with a 30-second commercial for Singapore Airlines. Or the world turns out to be nothing but a big doner kebab, and we're the salmonella. Why am I telling you this? You must have read some science fiction yourself. You know this is true.

**LANGFORD:** Yes, but...

**SLADEK:** Anything can happen in SF. And the fact that nothing ever does happen in SF is only due to the poverty of our imaginations, we who write it or edit it or read it. But SF can in principle deal with anything.

Of course that leads people into the error of believing that SF has all the answers, that it's prescriptive or predictive. They want to use it to get a peek at the way the world really will be or really ought to be. Very dangerous, because the predictions of SF are almost always too simpleminded. It's not futurology - though futurology is too simpleminded too - and it's not a recipe book for cooking up tomorrows. To my mind, the best SF addresses itself to the problems of the here and now, or even to problems

which have never been solved and never will be solved - I'm thinking of Philip K Dick's work here, dealing with questions of reality, for example. Suppose one were to tackle one of these themes in a conventional novel, the question of the reality of other people. Do other people have thoughts and feelings as I do? In a conventional novel, the question can only be tackled by having a mad character or a philosopher, or a mad philosopher in the story. But there has to be a framework of conventional reality, a world full of real people enveloping this local madness. In most conventional novels God is not allowed to be nuts. Nor are nuts allowed to be God.

**LANGFORD:** They have to content themselves with being interviewers. Having quizzed you on why you write SF, I'd be interested to hear why you don't - whether, that is, you think there's any significance in your wide spectrum of activity. Gothics, crime, cultism on both sides of the fence between bunk and debunk, parodies, 'mainstream' fiction... So many writers stick not only with a genre but in their own small niche inside.

**SLADEK:** I guess basically I wanted to make ten million dollars in a minute and also see W H Smith filled with nothing but my books in every category: SF, crime, romance, western, biography, astrology, non-fiction, cookery, car repair manuals, ordnance survey maps, crossword puzzles.

The whole idea of genre fiction makes a lot of sense if you happen to be running a book supermarket and you need to know whether a given book should be shelved with the toothpaste or the tinned veg. But I don't think of myself as a genre writer and I don't see why any writer should. Nobody expects the reader to confine himself to one department all his life; he can read James Joyce and Barbara Cartland and Zane Grey and Agatha Christie as well as Ray Bradbury, so why shouldn't the writer have the same freedom of choice? And

as it turns out, the writer does have. He can move from being tinned carrots to become a frozen rissole. He can even decide to go out of the supermarket altogether and write something available only in discerning delicatessens, ie in old-fashioned bookstores. I'm thinking here of Donald Barthelme and Harry Mathews, for example; Samuel Beckett is seldom seen in the supermarket either.

LANGFORD: What about the barriers within the supermarket?

Garry Kilworth once told me he'd use a pseudonym should he write outside the SF genre, since his SF connexions might be harmful outside the ghetto wall. Might your own detective novels, say, have suffered thus?

SLADEK: I think these days an SF connexion would be a boost to other books; I'm sure more people have read my two little detective puzzles because of the SF connexion. Those two novels suffered mainly from being written about 50 years after the fashion for puzzles of detection. I enjoyed writing them, planning the absurd crimes and clues, but I found I was turning out a product the supermarket didn't need any more - stove polish or yellow cakes of laundry soap. One could starve very quickly writing locked-room mysteries like those. SF has much more glamour and glitter attached to it, in these high-tech days.

LANGFORD: At least you've never seemed to be a starving author. Your career started with quite a splash in 1966-8: two solo and two collaborated (with Tom Disch) novels, plus your first short SF stories. Does Disch have a lot to answer for?

SLADEK: He was really responsible for getting me started in SF. To begin with, we collaborated on a few stories, silly stuff like "The Discovery of the Nullitron" (Galaxy 1966). On the strength of our selling these, he persuaded his agent to take on my own fiction.



He also told me about all those professional writing tricks like typing on one side of the paper, and he criticized stories that I read aloud to him. Then we collaborated on a gothic and Black Alice. These early collaborations not only helped finance my start as a full-time writer, they gave me the confidence to carry on. I've been writing full-time ever since.

LANGFORD: Black Alice is rather a distinguished thriller, with some very Disch and some very Sladek bits. How did you go about the collaboration?

SLADEK: We wrote Black Alice like this: Tom had the main idea. We discussed and agreed upon a plot outline. I wrote a rough draft. Tom wrote a second draft. We then argued and argued, each trying to preserve his own favourite characters and lines, and finally the book came out bigger than planned.

LANGFORD: Might you repeat the performance some day?

SLADEK: Tom and I are never in the same city long enough and both between books, so a further collaboration looks unlikely for some time.

LANGFORD: Since we've strayed toward the beginning of your career, perhaps you have words to say about those gothics, as by "Cassandra Knye"? Tongue in cheek, or deeply felt works of stark emotional power?

SLADEK: Help! The gothics again! Will they never give me peace? No, I see the grave-earth moving, the withered hand of Cassandra Knye clawing back to the surface... a withered cheek with a hideous black tongue still in it...

LANGFORD: Deeply felt works of stark emotional power, then. Undoubtedly Ms Knye's favourite novels are Udolpho and The Castle of Otranto. But what books and authors does Mr Sladek most enjoy?

SLADEK: My top forty? I suspect the list would be longer than that, and would seem odd, mostly because I couldn't stop to explain why I like each writer. Even then, much of it probably resembles the lists of everyone else (or of English class syllabuses); for instance my favourite book is Ulysses and my list would no doubt include Swift, Fielding, Sterne, Dickens and George Eliot, Hawthorne, Melville and Poe. So let me just mention at random a few people on my list who might not turn up everywhere: Ring Lardner, G K Chesterton, O Henry, Nathanael West, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, William Gaddis, Harry Mathews, Bernard Malamud, Vance Bourjaily, George P Elliott, Djuna Barnes, Joe Orton, Tom Stoppard, Kenneth Koch, Robert Coover, Vladimir Nabokov, Angus Wilson, Terry Southern, Evelyn Waugh, Flann O'Brien - to mention only writers in English. The problem and privilege we all have is being alive in this century and able to read this language. It makes any list meaningless except the list of an illiterate.

LANGFORD: Some of my own favourites there, especially Chesterton and O'Brien. You don't mention any specifically SF authors, though.

SLADEK: So far as SF goes, I am an illiterate; my list of favourites comes down to Tom Disch, Philip K Dick and half a dozen others. I haven't read much, and am not au courant with what's in the magazines. This is mainly because I spend a lot of time writing and so don't have much time to read; I hate to waste that time reading what may turn out to be junk food for the mind, when there's so much real writing to be read.

LANGFORD: Do any of your favourite authors exert a sinister, creeping influence over your own work?

SLADEK: Whatever I'm reading at the moment seems to influence whatever I'm writing. I found some time ago that I have to be careful, while working on a novel, what I read. People may notice the influence of Joseph Heller in "Masterson and the Clerks" or of William Gaddis in Roderick. Recently I've been reading Angela Carter and John Cheever, so I suppose my work will soon have clouds of purple perfume or else exhilarating sunlight on suburban lawns, or something.

LANGFORD: Whereas most current SF would merely afflict you with rotten grammar. Disregarding all these influences, which of your own books do you like best? One of the SF novels, presumably.

SLADEK: Roderick - the completed story. I usually like whatever I've recently finished best. Just as a parent prefers a new baby or a Defence department prefers the new improved missile with extra warheads and teletext and an optional 5-year service warranty.

# JOHN SLADEK



## RODERICK

HILARIOUS AND SERIOUS...  
SLADEK IS A MAJOR COMIC TALENT  
SUNDAY TIMES

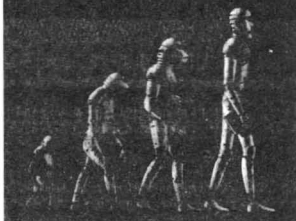
**LANGFORD:** The "complete" Roderick being the published book Roderick plus its sequel, provisionally titled Roderick at Large?

**SLADEK:** The second volume is now called Roderick at Random; I'm hoping to sell a few copies to any Smollett scholars who happen to be buying books in a hurry.

**LANGFORD:** That famous scourge of the writing classes, John Clute, suggests that a couple of keys to what makes you tick are to be found in your upbringing, in the American Midwest. Certainly, though you've lived in London since 1966, your SF novels have tended to be set in the Midwest and to satirize it mercilessly. Is this a matter of convenience or of deep significance?

**SLADEK:** I always figure I can have the Midwest one

# JOHN SLADEK SLADEK IS A MAJOR COMIC TALENT SUNDAY TIMES RODERICK AT RANDOM



way or the other. Because it's my background, it ought to be a voice that comes easily. I could argue that I know fairly well how Midwesterners speak and think. But if that turns out not to be true, if I'm mythicizing the place, that's fine too. Well-realized mythical places are hard enough to come by, so I win again. I am planning someday to set a novel, or at least a short story, in Albania. All I know of Albania is that Americans aren't allowed to go there and that it once had a King Zog; the rest can be made up. It'll probably come out looking exactly like the American Midwest.

**LANGFORD:** Clute also makes some critical play with your being a "lapsed Catholic"; and Michael Frayn once wrote of "the tone of voice, hard to describe yet curiously distinctive, which sounds through a great many of the English Catholic writers. Perhaps it is a certain intellectual perverseness." Cons-

idering that there's a thread of compulsive intellectual doodling (ciphers, anagrams, palindromes, acrostics, endless word and number games) running through your work, I can't help wondering whether you think there might be some connexion?

SLADEK: Well of course it would be swell to be bracketed with Graham Greene and Chesterton and Evelyn Waugh (I draw the line at Belloc). But I'm not even English. In America, I think, Roman Catholicism tends to be more Protestant, populist, sweaty and anti-intellectual. More in the tone of Studs Lonigan (by James T Farrell) than say The Man Who Was Thursday or Scobie in Greene's The Heart of the Matter or the chap in Brideshead Revisited. I'm trying to see how my being a "lapsed" Catholic relates to my being a compulsive intellectual doodle dandy, if I am either. Whence the ciphers and anagrams, I don't know.

One connexion might be that in general, Catholics (among others) behave as though the world were one enormous cipher text in which everything means something - but only to God or Fate. Catholic writers constantly have characters struggling against their fates, or trying to divine the meaning of their lives, usually failing.

LANGFORD: Science fiction, you said earlier, is a way of making sense out of a senseless world...

SLADEK: And J L Borges wrote, "according to Bloy, we are the verses or words or letters of a magic book, and that incessant book is the only thing in the world; or rather, it is the world." I think scientists also share in that peculiar vision of the world as a book. There's Fred Hoyle's idea of clouds of DNA or bacteria or something floating around in space and now and then starting life on a planet like ours - so the DNA code would be written across the universe (in all the margins of the book).

LANGFORD: You have me there: I'm a lapsed physicist. Still on the subject of your own incessant books - let's not sit round being impartial. I think The Reproductive System, The Müller-Fokker Effect and Roderick are fine SF books which stand up to rereading, and I'm looking forward to the further Sladek books promised. Now besides the Midwestern setting and word/number-play we've discussed, your SF novels have more in common: they're very funny and satirical about US life and everything else, they have large casts of characters, they involve several narrative lines chopped into many short scenes - more complexity. Does it just happen that you haven't yet come to write an SF novel where you'd find a "straight-forward" continuous narrative appropriate?

SLADEK: I guess it's the influence of Dickens again, but once I think of a comic character I find I have to get them into the novel one way or another. The narrative line of Tik-Tok looks fairly straight so far - but I haven't finished fiddling with it yet.

LANGFORD: Another long-running Sladek theme is our danger of growing less human than our machines. (That word you coined in the story "The Brass Monkey" speaks volumes: robotomized.) In Roderick there's an obvious and powerful contrast between the very human machine Roderick and the nominally human characters whose minds run in more mechanical grooves than his. "Automata conditioned by consciousness programs", as Ian Watson likes to say of everyone but him.

SLADEK: It's an idea that our century seems to have taken up as a touchstone for other social and psychological worries: the idea of people acting like machines acting like people certainly appealed to the Dadaists, for instance. Duchamp took it pretty far before he retired from painting to play chess.



And there's always a mixture of comedy and terror in the idea, as in Ambrose Bierce's "Moxon's Master", the chessplaying robot who rebels. I suppose the idea bites deep into the psychological mechanism by which humans recognize other humans, babies recognizing faces and so on. Now we know that theoretically we can fool that mechanism with artificial people and that knowledge has to affect the way we think about ourselves. Many of the old definitions of "human" are no longer so clear.

LANGFORD: The definition "A featherless biped" certainly fits Roderick... I liked touches such as his attempts to create Art, little meaningless purple squares which later prove identical with the works of a highly regarded conceptual artist.

SLADEK: There's a touching argument that people used to use against the idea of artificial people, namely that a machine will never be able to paint like Velasquez. But the world is full of real people who couldn't paint the Rokeby Venus, either. They may lack originality or talent, or they may happen to lead unfortunate lives cut off from beauty, lives wholly constrained and mechanical.

LANGFORD: To quote one of your own autobiographical snippets: "I feel I ought to do my part in helping machines take over the arts and sciences, leaving us with plenty of leisure time for important things, like extracting square roots and figuring pay rolls."

Since the sequel to Roderick is almost upon us, have you anything to say about it here? (Apart from the usual "Buy it! Act without thinking!")

SLADEK: I don't want to seem to hype the book. Let's just say it is the story of a group of happy-go-lucky flyboys on their tight little Mediterranean island. It's the story of war and peace, love and lust, beauty and the beast within all men.

LANGFORD: A masterpiece of the soft sell.

SLADEK: No, actually it's a cover blurb for Catch-22 I saw about 20 years ago and memorized. I knew it would come in handy.

LANGFORD: Well, can you reveal anything about your next novel Tik-Tok - also, I understand, featuring robots?

SLADEK: Yes, Tik-Tok is about a robot, but not a nice robot like Roderick. In fact, Tik-Tok is bad. That's about all I can say now, except to mention that it's a story of war and peace, of sons and lovers, of mice and men.

LANGFORD: And after that?

SLADEK: I'm still finishing Tik-Tok. After that, a book provisionally called Maps. It will be something between a novel and a set of linked stories, stories completely permeating one another - in other words, the notion of mapping is going to predominate. If all this sounds vague and confusing, it's because I'm still vague and confused about it - and will be until I start work on it.

LANGFORD: This brings us with suspicious neatness to short fiction. I've noticed that some favourites among your own stories don't seem to have made it into Sladek collections...

SLADEK: Most publishers seem very reluctant to publish short story collections at all; they bring them out in paperback, often disguised as novels.

LANGFORD: Specifically I was thinking of 'Masterson and the Clerks', your office epic, which gets an admiring thumbs-up in the Encyclopaedia of SF yet hasn't been collected: I had to dig it out of an old New Worlds. Does it and other of your uncollected stories appear in Alien Accounts, or does the book

feature more new pieces?

SLADEK: The stories in Alien Accounts are all used, or as they say of cars nowadays, pre-owned. They are all stories of office life, beginning with "Master-son and the Clerks".

LANGFORD: Your parodies of other SF authors (in The Steam-Driven Boy) have attracted some praise - good fun and often worthwhile criticism into the bargain. For example, the Asimov spoof is a much more entertaining assault on the Laws of Robotics than Stanislaw Lem's rather boring dismissal of them. But do you find that, as someone said, it's only possible to write good parodies of authors you admire?

SLADEK: I don't admire all the authors I parody equally, and usually what I admire about them doesn't come into the parody. For instance, Robert Heinlein has written stories of paranoia, beautifully sustained and slowly articulated - like "They". So it's easier to parody his other stuff, naturally.

My deep admiration for Ray Bradbury, Philip K Dick and J G Ballard must show, I think.

LANGFORD: Yes - though perhaps not the funniest, those are definitely the best parodies.

SLADEK: Some of the others are obviously less careful. The Wells parody - "Pemberly's Start-Afresh Calliope" - isn't a parody at all, really, just a silly scientific romance. I'm not sure I could do any more...

LANGFORD: Silly Science leads to The New Apocrypha, subtitled "a guide to strange sciences and occult beliefs"... where you put the boot into numerous weirdo cults, UFOs, perpetual motion machines, ancient astronauts, the lot. I gather Michael Moorcock talked you into writing this one, following your dismissals of McLuhan, von Däniken etcetera in 1960s issues of New Worlds?

SLADEK: Moorcock was actually going to do the book, or at least some book on irrational beliefs under that title. But he got busy or tired of it, and turned the title and some sources (as a starter set) over to me. In no time at all I was buried far too deep in it. See, I have no journalism in my background, so I wasn't practised at research or writing nonfiction, nor at handling the truth in a journalistic way. Journalists know when to call a halt and write something, but I kept on looking for answers.

LANGFORD: The hero of your Black Aura observes that it's just as dangerous and fanatical to disbelieve all strange phenomena as it is to fall for them all. Is that more or less your own view; and did you approach the cult material with, perhaps, the hope that some of these loonies might have found something worthy of belief?

SLADEK: Yes I did, but it was a vain hope. I especially hoped parapsychology would turn up something, because much of it looked like good science being done by good scientists. But all I found were murky experiments, self-deception and fraud.

LANGFORD: So in the end you came down hard on just about everything.

SLADEK: The sources, with their impenetrable prose and lack of humour, didn't make it any easier. In reaction, I probably was more sarcastic to some of them than I needed to be. Anyway I seemed to spend years on that book, always finding more I had to read. The occult explosion was on, too, with more stuff happening every week. The year or so after the book came out, we had Uri Geller, Koestler's coincidence theories, the Berlitz triangle and so on. The book could probably use a new expanded edition, but I'm reluctant to undertake it.

LANGFORD: Pity. Wasn't a snippet cut from the paperback TNA

though, because somebody complained?

SLADEK: The Scientologists sued me for libel because I had quoted an article from Queen magazine without realizing that they had successfully sued for libel over that. So in lieu of damages, they got to alter the section on Scientology in the British paperback edition - much in the way vets alter tomcats.

LANGFORD: I suppose you must have had a vast anguished response to that book.

SLADEK: Yes. Most letters agreed with me that all these subjects were a complete waste of time - however, there was this one subject that wasn't pseudoscience at all...

LANGFORD: More recently, you've been having a go at the other side of the case with your 'James Vogh' books - establishing a mystical thirteenth zodiacal sign, for example with reasoning somewhat better than that of the average von Dönniken in the street. Were these books conceived as serious and devout contributions to astrological lore?

SLADEK: The James Vogh books, Arachne Rising and The Cosmic Factor, were conceived as jokes, but very quickly turned into moneymaking enterprises. Only they didn't make a lot of money, either. So finally they turn out to have been a gigantic waste of time. Except that I can say that I invented or discovered the lost 13th sign of the zodiac.

LANGFORD: Ah, yes, the sign Arachne (May 13 to June 9). Were you born under it, by any chance?

SLADEK: No. I was born in either October or December, depending on whether you believe the hospital records or the state records - the two don't agree.

LANGFORD: From hospitals it's a natural step to SF conventions (or vice versa). Having just

been joint guest of honour at the 33rd British Eastercon this year, how do you regard the teeming hordes of SF fans? I assume from the evil leer you constantly wore in the bar that it wasn't that horrid an experience.

SLADEK: Leer? That was some kind of riktus brought on by the strychnine flavouring in the lager (which reaches the parts no one even wants to reach). There was anyway only one teeming horde, and it didn't teem all that much. There seemed to be a lot of SAS-type military people about, and they did teem a bit, but everyone else gallantly pretended not to notice. It was altogether not a bad Apres-midi d'un Fan. A lot like what I imagine a good class reunion to be.

LANGFORD: But as well as mingling with fans, you're one of the relatively few authors who in addition to some SF genre success can, well, "pass" in the world of Serious Mainstream Literary Worth - magazines like Bananas, Ambit and so on...

SLADEK: Well of course this interview is going to blow all that. People who thought I was straight will now realize I go in for "SF" as we call it.

You make it sound as though I'm this writer whom everybody thinks is straight until one day his wife comes home and finds him standing before the mirror wearing a silver suit and a glass helmet. He makes some feeble excuse about a costume party, but then she opens his desk drawer and out fall copies of Omni and a Carl Sagan book (it falls open to the well-thumbed page with the Pioneer 10 drawing). Then of course he goes to an analyst who shows him pictures of asteroids and gives him painful shocks. But nothing works. Finally he just puts on his green pointed ears and goes to the supermarket - and nobody notices! They treat him just like a real Martian!

LANGFORD: I'm speechless. (Long pause.) Thank you, Nhoj Kedals of Mars.

## 4-Part List

John Sladek



I saw a TV programme the other evening which told me exactly how to handle a mob like you. In public speaking, they said, the big secret is to have a 3-part list and a contrast; so you say Friends, Romans, Countrymen - that's the 3-part list, then you bring in the contrast - I come not to bury Caesar but to praise him. It's a terrible rule really, it reduced all the great speeches of history to a kind of inane game: never have so many owed so much to so few: government of the people, by the people, for the people. It reduces them all to a sort of 3:2:1. I for one don't believe it is that simple, I didn't believe it then, I don't believe it now and by thunder I never shall believe it. It may be all right for Hitler, Churchill and Lincoln (this is the contrast) but it isn't all right for me.

Anyway, I have a 4-part list for you. I found the 4 items a few years ago in a book by A G Ayer called The Problem of Knowledge in which he outlined four fundamental questions of philosophy concerning knowledge, which are: first of all, how do we know the physical world is real?; second, how do we know other people have thoughts and feelings as we do?; third, how do we know what the past was really like? and fourth, how do we know that the entities of science (things like electrons and atoms) are real? It occurred to me when I read this list that these 4 questions turn up very frequently in science fiction. They also turn up in mental hospitals and they turn up in mystical religions and in pseudo-science cults, as I hope to show.

Well, how do we know that the physical world is real? After all, we only experience it through our senses and senses can be deceived. It is always possible that one is experiencing not reality at all but some artificial illusion, some dream or hallucination. Well, science fiction characters, of course, have often experienced all of these - Alice was only dreaming Wonderland. In Robert Heinlein's story They the entire world is made up of actors and stage sets, all for a one-man audience; New York is hastily put together when he visits New York; Paris is put together whenever

he visits Paris and the weather is constructed according to what weather report he believes. In a Ray Bradbury story, astronauts are hypnotised into believing that Mars is Heaven and that the horrid Martians are their loved ones. In Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* the illusion created by the planet seems so pervasive and complete it isn't possible to tell whether they are illusions or hypnotic suggestion or a dream. But I think no-one has more consistently explored the possibilities of false reality than Philip K Dick; and I think it is fair to say that most of his work is steeped in questions about reality. He often seems to be doing philosophy, including theology and ethics as he writes - or, I should say as he wrote. This is not going to be an eulogy for Philip K Dick, I am certainly not the person to do it and I hope that confident scholars will have much to say about him. I should perhaps say that he died in March, I don't know if everybody was aware that he had died. To me at least it is almost the greatest loss that science fiction has had.

Anyway, my own favourite scene of his in exploring the reality of reality, if you like, is the scene in *Time Out Of Joint* where a man on a beach goes up to an ice-cream stand to buy something and while he is standing there looking over the flavours, the entire stand, including the proprietor sort of shimmers and disappears. There is nothing left on the beach but a slip of paper on which is typewritten "ice-cream stand". Well, I may have the details of this wrong, I haven't looked at that passage in 15 years, but it is a kind of vivid image that stays with you for ever. It is one of the great shocking images of fiction, in fact, as powerful as the image of Robinson Crusoe gaping down at a human footprint. In both cases the reader is asked to enter the body of the observer character and look out through his eyes to get the full impact of the discovery and the paradigms of reality collapse all at once.

In an experiment done a few years ago people were put in an analogous state when a small piece of their reality collapsed. They were shown pictures of playing cards flashed on a screen at very brief intervals and they were asked to name the playing cards; but mixed in with the normal cards were a few anomalies such as a red 6 of spades or a black 4 of hearts. When these came up people might make mistakes about them when they were shown briefly, but as they were shown for longer periods of time people became confused. Shown a red 6 of spades a subject might say, "Well, it is the 6 of spades all right, but there is something wrong with it, it has a red border". Some of them were very agitated and one finally said, "I can't make the suit out, whatever it is. I don't know what colour it is now or whether it is a spade or a heart. I am not even sure now what a spade looks like. My God!" Well, reality is after all a hypothesis we make and we continue to make and revise as we go along. I should say that Ian Watson's work deals with reality as a hypothesis which is limited only by our limited perceptions. I believe that one of the themes of his work is that perception causes reality or manufactures it and thus enhancing perception, whether through taking drugs or mystical enlightenment or being an alien, produces a correspondingly richer reality.

It is an interesting idea carrying on from Bishop Berkley who said that if no-one saw an object it didn't exist and hence this was the necessity of God to watch all the objects that nobody else was watching. I think Ian Watson's work carries on from that, though certainly it is not limited by the Berkley idea. But I noticed that in the Philip K Dick example the story only gets remarkable at the point where he actually reads the slip of paper; the disappearance of an ice-cream stand, remarkable as it might be, might be explained as a mirage or a dizzy spell, but it is that little piece of counter-reality, like the wrong card colour, that upsets everything. It is an image designed to raise the hairs on the back of your neck as you read it, I think. This desire to play games with physical reality, let's say, to move the border a little, the border between reality and unreality, is not confined to science fiction. Part of the force behind occultism is certainly the same desire to have an alternative reality.

Recently Barry Singer, who is Professor of Psychology at the University of California at Long Beach, and some of his colleagues conducted an experiment in which they asked a student named Craig to develop a few simple magic tricks and present them to their classes. Now Craig would put on a blindfold and he would then use his fingers, or pretend to use his fingers, to read a three-digit number. He would tele-



port some ashes through the hands of the volunteer and he would do a bit of Geller-style metal bending. These were standard, easy tricks which he learned in minutes and which are, in fact, tricks in kids' books of magic. When he performed before 6 classes of college students, in three of them the professors told their students that Craig claimed to be psychic though they said that they (i.e. the professors) were sceptical. In the other three it was explained that he was an amateur magician using tricks. The professors made sure that the students understood that this was the case and made them write down the instruction to make certain that they understood it. After the performances during which Craig said nothing at all about his own abilities, the students were asked to write down their reactions. Well, you may not be surprised to learn that in the classes where he was supposed to claim psychic powers, about 80% of the students thought he really was psychic, and this is a quote: "Many students gasped or screamed faintly during Craig's performance and were visibly agitated, and about a dozen students became seriously disturbed or frightened, filling their papers with exorcism rites, or warning Craig against trafficking with Satan." What might be more surprising is that even in the classes where students were told that these were stage tricks, over half those students still thought Craig must be psychic. People find it very hard not to believe in something like this, I think. We all enjoy the tingle at the back of the neck and to believe that it is only stage magic takes a lot of it away.

Well, the second point, how do we know other people have thoughts and feelings as we do? I have worded that badly, really it ought to be how do I know other people have thoughts and feelings as I do, or how do you know; the 'we' already begs the questions. Anyway this is, as far as science fiction goes, the realm of robots and androids, animals and aliens. With alien stories the general assumption seems to be

that they do have thoughts and feelings and the interest of these stories is often in exploring the differences, the anthropological distance between them and us; James Tiptree Jr and Ursula Le-Guin come to mind. But in general I suppose science fiction aliens are not really alien enough, they aren't uncanny enough either - they don't possess that mixture of strangeness and familiarity we associate with robots and androids.

Probably no-one has explored that territory so thoroughly as Philip K Dick, again. He seems to have shown that the uneasiness and uncanniness we associate with robots has something to do, perhaps, with the ambivalence of our feelings about other people. Other people are, in one way, objects; no-one really cares about the thoughts and feelings of a bus driver or a street cleaner as such so long as the bus gets driven and the street cleaned. People you haven't met are objects, strangers are usually objects, and to many British people at the moment the people of Argentina, for example, are a mass of objects. People here are already suggesting nuking Buenos Aires for example. This is not exactly consistent with thinking of the human beings that live there. Try imagining an Argentine resident getting up in the morning and brushing his teeth, worrying about how he is going to pay the gas bill this winter, or walking his kids to school, or something, and then talk about nuking them - the whole exercise becomes pointless really. Once you admit that someone has thoughts and feelings they have to be allowed to join the human community.

This duality works on us too - in "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?", someone finds that in the absence of human company, "he found himself fading out, becoming strangely like the television set which he had just unplugged. You have to be with other people, he thought, in order to live at all." Well, as part of our attempt to understand this duality humans have since before history made images of this. I believe the idea of the robot is one of the oldest and one of the most deep-set ideas in the human consciousness. It goes back to whenever children first had dolls which they knew weren't real babies, but all the same.... or to whenever grown-ups first made a statue and then fell down to worship before it, knowing it wasn't a god really, but all the same.... Well, the robot idea plays with this exactly in the same way. It is real but it isn't real. Prometheus was supposed to have made a man of clay and when Momus, the god of mockery, saw this creation he criticised it saying that Prometheus should have made a door opening into its heart so that we could see its secret thoughts. Well, that's one of the oldest artificial man stories going and already the worry is "What is the robot thinking? What is it thinking about?" Legendary robots often seem to have a touch of madness, in fact. Talus, the bronze man who guarded the island of Crete from invaders was said to heat himself up to a glowing heat and then embrace his victims. Legends always mentioned his grin, his hideous gaping grin. To move forward in time a little, when Friar Roger Bacon built his brass talking head (which he didn't build really but it is a good story anyway) what was it thinking? A servant was set to watch it all night in case it said anything of importance and if it did speak he was to waken the Friars. Late that night the head said, "Time is" and the servant deemed this unimportant. Later it said, "Time was" but again the servant didn't waken the Friars. Finally, the head said "Time is past" and exploded into a thousand pieces, or so the servant probably said once he'd hidden his hammer and wakened the Friars; I am sure he simply smashed the thing up so that he could get some sleep himself. One of the consequences of being alien and enigmatic is that robots historically get bashed a lot. Albertus Magnus is said to have worked 30 years on an automaton servant made of wood, wax, leather, metal and glass. One day it saw his pupil Thomas Aquinas on the street and called to him by name. Aquinas replied by smashing it.

Well, moving forward again in time, Rabbi Löw of 16th Century Prague was said to have created a golem, a man of clay brought to life by magic. The magic works like this - the secret name of god is inscribed on a parchment and placed under the creature's tongue. This is the first program. When Rabbi Löw removed the parchment the creature would be inert again, and he did this on the Sabbath every week. But one Friday evening he forgot to de-program it and the golem followed him to the synagogue and tried to force its way inside. Just in the nick of time he managed to de-program it and prevented it from profaning the Sabbath. After that he put it away in the

attic and never used it again.

Well, the golem in these stories is always a soulless, rudderless creature, a sort of unthinking automaton. And it was not long after this that Descartes, besides opining that he thought therefore he was, began to have opinions about automata. He said that animals were automata, lacking human free will. There is also a curious legend that Descartes himself owned an automaton girl named Francine whom he kept in a box. During a sea voyage in 1640 the ship's captain peeked into the box and saw Francine move her limbs. Convinced that this was the work of the devil, he threw the box overboard.

It was about this time, or not long afterwards, that Descartes' young contemporary, Pascal, invented the first thinking machine, or at least the first calculating machine. He set mankind on a course that led, I believe, to the computer and I believe will lead to the walking, talking, thinking and feeling robot.

About artificial intelligence I have little to say except that machines are probably going to get smarter and smarter until either they reach some limit, or else they don't. Likewise, the way they think is going to become more like ours, or more compatible with our way of thinking. Mentally, it must be obvious to everyone by now that machines are coming in our direction. People still argue about whether machines can reach our intellectual level or not; well, what is certain is that they are certainly going to try. That is to say that they will be made to try. If it is possible to make a machine indistinguishable from a human it will be done; so long as it can be done without costing more money than there is, taking more time than there is, and so on. We want robots of this kind just as we wanted wind-up automata, golems, homunculi, dancing toys, mannekins, talking dolls, marionettes, ventriloquists' dummies, and so on. Perhaps, like God, we need company in the universe.

I believe that UFO cults probably spring from a similar impulse - a strong desire to have company. In this case, the company is a god, ready to either destroy us or do us tremendous favours. But there are others who look instead for wild varieties of humans, yeti for example in the Himalayas, or Big Foot in the California forests. Similarly, there is a great interest in teaching chimpanzees human language and communicating with dolphins, and so on. Finally, there are the attempts to communicate either by radio or by sending out decorated metal plates to the four corners of the universe. All of this, I think, points to a strong desire to find someone not human to talk to. Perhaps like the character in Philip K Dick's story, we think it will help us to feel more real.

Another aspect of this has been making computer programs that seem to talk. One of these, created by Joseph Weisenbaum, is named 'Doctor' and it imitates a psychiatrist, using non-directive therapy. Another, created by Kenneth Colby, is called 'Parry' and it imitates a paranoid person. Inevitably, the two programs were brought together for a conversation, part of which goes like this:

p>Parry: I don't understand your motives.  
Doctor: Why don't you understand my motives?  
Parry: Shouldn't I be?  
Doctor: Why do you say that just now?  
Parry: That's just the way it is.  
Doctor: Suppose that's the way it were not?  
Parry: So?  
Doctor: I am not sure I understand you fully.  
Parry: You harp on the same questions too much.  
Doctor: What does that similarity suggest to you?  
Parry: I don't get you.  
Doctor: Do you wish that you did get I?  
Parry: It's about time you showed some interest in my feelings!  
Doctor: Oh, I showed some interest in your feelings?

Well, it's easy enough to see in this 'non-conversation' some of the flaws in these programs, but they both perform much better when used against human beings, and often humans talking to Doctor simply refuse to believe that it is only a simple program and not a real person that they are talking to or communicating with by teletype.

Just now there seems to be an undercurrent of worry and even fear about the



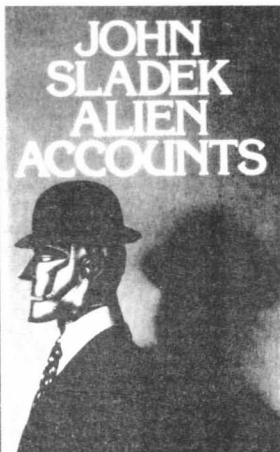
place of real people in the universe, if any. I don't know the cause, possibly technology, including cybernetics, but this fear does break out in films like Westworld and The Stepford Wives and no doubt Blade Runner. There are also things like cloning stories; still more duplicate people to worry about.

So much for that question, anyway. Third, how do we know what the past was really like? How do we know there was a past at all? We have our memories, but these memories are nothing but the firing of neurons in our brains and this pattern can be altered or erased. How about history before our time? How can we be certain about that? Well, by time travel, of course. Science fiction, as usual, comes up with the answer and in taking up time travel, science fiction has had to take up the entire burden of philosophical problems associated with time, especially time paradoxes; the most popular would, I guess, be Ray Bradbury's 'A Sound of Thunder', in which a time traveller goes back to the dinosaur age, accidentally steps on a butterfly and consequently changes our entire world. The opposite story has to be Alfred Bester's 'The Men Who Murdered Mohammed' in which time travellers find it impossible to change anything going back in time to kill someone - Napoleon, Hitler, Aristotle, Mohammed; the person remains unchanged but the time travellers themselves begin to fade away. And there are the hundreds of stories where people become their own ancestors, or kill their own ancestors, or would have. Science Fiction also investigates subjective time versus objective time and, of course, time running backwards as it does in Counterclock World.

The most noticeable movement of today which I think questions the conventional scientific view of the past is, of course, Creationism, which has had amazing recent success in getting laws passed in certain American states to enforce the teaching in schools of Bible creation stories as science. The creationists' arguments are essentially that evolution is only a theory and that one theory is just as good as another, and that therefore they want equal time in schools. Well, the reason why they have been so successful in pushing through these demands is that almost no-one understands anything at all about evolution - and I include myself in the ignorant mass here. We merely have a few catch phrases like 'survival of the fittest' or 'natural selection' and a dim notion of a family tree beginning with protozoa and ending up with man. This feeble picture is easy enough for creationists to attack. One creationist pamphlet gave these arguments for dropping evolution - I am not going to give you all the arguments, just a couple.

1. Natural selection was Darwin's main idea as to how evolution happened; the fittest survive and the unfit perish. Fine, but where is evolution in this case? A certain rabbit can run faster or hop higher and may therefore live longer and produce more rabbits; this in no way implies that the rabbit or its offspring would be more fit for survival if it were evolving into some other animal. In fact, the opposite is true, any alteration in the rabbit's physical or mental characteristics would make it less not more fit for survival. Natural selection cannot explain evolution. Nothing can explain how evolution happened because it never happened. That is a fact and anybody who says it isn't is being an unscientific fanatic. Students, how many times have you seen and heard that scientists have proof for evolution in the fossil records, in the bones? Here is the truth, let any scientist come forward and deny it if he can; there is not one bone in the entire world that shows one animal evolving into another!

That's wonderful, isn't it - there is not one bone that actually denies evolution either! I think of these I prefer the theories of my Uncle Joshua who founded the Institute for Not Really Difficult Studies. In his Institute science is derived straight from the Bible: Uncle Josh is a creationist, of course, although he has much more powerful arguments against evolution. First of all, survival of the fittest. This pathetic idea, says Uncle Josh, is ruining the world. People everywhere are taking keep-fit classes because they believe that the fit survive, but do the fit survive? Look at Ronald Reagan, he survived an assassination attempt even, and what is he fit for really? No, the truth is that every single creature on this earth eventually dies, fit or not - nothing survives.



Second, Darwin's claim that the giraffe has a long neck because generation after generation of giraffes stretched up their necks to reach the leaves on the trees. Wrong. First of all giraffes don't have to stretch their necks because they are already very long, and secondly what about dolphins? They live in the seas where there are no trees at all.

Third, Darwin's theory is that man descended from the apes. The fact is that there are no apes, there never were any apes. The so-called apes we see in zoos are nothing but men dressed up in hairy suits. Uncle Josh has a picture of one such hairy ape costume and he will send copies to any interested group wishing to see this proof.

Fourth, the odds against evolution are staggering, says Uncle Josh, not only are they staggering, they are getting sick on the pavement and pissing in bus shelters and generally making a nuisance of themselves. But really, the odds against a horse evolving from a horsefly are 10 to the 5,000th power : 1; and as for evolving a world famous mezzo-soprano from a Rubik cube - forget it.

The Bible also says that the earth does not move, so not only was Darwin wrong, D H Lawrence was wrong too\*. Uncle Josh says that the earth is flat and the sky is about 600 miles up. The sun, moon and stars go whizzing around under this sky roof and this means that there is no room really for astronauts. So astronauts have been faking all their moon trips. (Uncle Josh probably saw the same film on TV as I saw.) He says that the astronauts really go to a spot in the Nevada desert where they go floating around on wires and pretend to pick up moon rock before they come back to earth so that they can open up sports goods stores and go into politics. Uncle Josh

\* And I'm wrong: it was Hemmingway whose characters discussed earth movements.

says that the earth is not only flat, it is really the top of a large mahogany chest of drawers with brass handles. Earthquakes are only someone in a hurry to get out a pair of socks and slamming the drawer. His wife, my Aunt Lotty, says in that case why don't we smell furniture polish all the time? She says that God probably never intended to make the universe at all, only there was some of this material left over after God made some slip covers for the living-room furniture and it seemed a shame to waste it.

Anyway, enough of my Uncle and Aunt. How do we know that the entities of science are real? Well, like all four-part lists, I think this is almost going to turn out to have three parts. The fate of the entities of science (by which I mean electrons and atoms rather than Newton and Einstein) is not really that interesting. Science fiction naturally deals with science, and it is the rise of pseudo-sciences that reflects, I think, a deep discontent with our civilisation. People are uneasy about science for a number of reasons. It seems to be, first of all, an indisputable authority - a sort of court from which there is no appeal. It produces terrifying weapons and profound changes in our surroundings. Not only is it an authority, it also seems in league with other authorities - government, military powers, multinational corporations - helping them to keep their grip on things and people. Scientists are generally seen as cold, ruthless people; the kind of people who would turn the sun into a supernova just to get some good pictures. Well, all of this is obviously not true, but there is an element of truth in it that, I think, gives a great deal of credence to people presenting alternative science that is superior, morally superior at least, to the above kind. But often they seem to want to be part of the ruthless authority and actually seek scientific approval of their work.

It is also interesting to see cases where genuine scientists slip over into doing pseudo-science. I think one of the most notable cases in recent years is that of the psychologist Sir Cyril Burt, the undisputed leader in British psychology for about 50 years; in fact he shaped British psychology until his death (about 1970). The case for believing that IQ is largely inherited rested solely on evidence supplied by Dr Burt and a few of his colleagues. Burt had made a study of twins separated at birth and raised apart, comparing them with twins not parted, and the evidence showed clearly that IQ and heredity were linked. In 1977 it was found that his evidence was faked; some of the colleagues who had co-authored his studies had in fact not worked on them at all, and others were non-existent colleagues. There were numbers invented to fit the theory and, indeed, it looks as if he invented the separate pairs of twins. There is currently no evidence to support the theory that IQ is inherited, there is no evidence against it either, it is simply not a theory.

By coincidence, Burt was also a strong supporter of telepathy and contributed an article to a book called Science and ESP in 1967.

I think that pseudo-scientists are no strangers to this kind of fakery. By another coincidence, one of the leading researchers into ESP, Walter Levy, was caught by his co-workers faking his evidence in 1973. (I should put in a  caveat  here since I am going to speak about Professor Hans Eysenck and I don't want it to seem as though I am accusing him of doing any fakery.) Eysenck is the currently acknowledged leader of British psychology and has also been a supporter of IQ inheritance theory. He continued to support the idea after Burt's data was thrown out but I don't know if he still supports it. Earlier he was a supporter of ESP (in his 1958 book he says so) and he went on in 1977 to study the effects of the zodiac on personality, writing a paper in collaboration with an astrologer. The wonderful effects Eysenck found, however, were not replicated and finally he dropped that idea. Later he wrote a book which, at least reviewers claimed (I have not read it) stated that cigarette smoking had negligible effects on the lungs, cancer being largely caused by the genes instead. I have not heard much of that idea lately either. Although it is hard to keep up with all of Eysenck's latest innovations, it will be interesting to see where he strikes next, there are so many open fields in alternative science.

I should finish off speaking about alternative science by saying that I have written pseudo-science books myself, one particularly promoting the idea of a lost 13th sign of the zodiac. I cannot say that I want to carry on writing pseudo-science books because I don't suppose I quite realised its effects when I wrote this one. I

have a drawer full of fan mail as a result of this book from people who were absolutely convinced by the idea and thought what a wonderful thing it was that somebody had found their lost 13th sign of the zodiac. These people all turned out to be born under this 13th sign of the zodiac, of course. Next, I think I'll try something a little less personal. If I do any more pseudo-science books I may discuss something like the East or West Pole.

What I have been driving at here is that science fiction is pseudo-science in a sense. Having written some of each I guess I am in a position to compare them. I think their emotional content for both writer and reader is the same. I have been calling it the tingle at the back of the neck but it is more than a cheap thrill. It is giving one's mind over to large ideas about the way that the world works, to the tune of your own imagination, you might say. I understand this is the way artists and scientists function too. The trouble is that you cannot lose yourself completely in obsession and madness. The artist has to take a step back from his obsession and get control of it. The scientist has to tighten down on his imagination at some point and try to keep the idea within certain bounds, try to make it into a hypothesis which can be tried and tested in the real world. Maybe Prometheus had the same problem, how to steal the sacred fire from the gods and get it back to us without setting the world on fire in the process.

Science fiction, like any fiction, has to obey the general restriction, the play of ideas has to end up as more or less legible prose. It is identified as fiction, that is not the real world. It is a lie which tells us about the world as Picasso said of art and any truths in SF are indirect ones, they are artistic truths not facts. Pseudo-science refuses this kind of tightening down restriction or distancing, it refuses to play the game, in other words it masquerades as science. I have enjoyed writing it, but I don't think I want to write any more. I will stick to science fiction for a while; unless anyone wants to join my expedition to look for the East Pole.

#### THE RATIONALISATION OF AUDREY WALTON'S ATTIC

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WARWICKS, WEST MIDLANDS.

# Crouching In Cheadle

Christopher Priest

I was born in Cheadle, a village in the suburban no-man's-land between the industrial city of Manchester and the open countryside of Cheshire. My parents had settled in Cheadle during the Blitz, and all through the years of my childhood my father was commuting daily to his office in the centre of the city, about nine miles away. I attended a little local primary school, situated on a patch of ground immediately next to the end of the main runway of Manchester Airport. In those days, Ringway was a military as well as a civilian airport, and I and everyone else took it completely for granted that airliners and jet fighters would pass only a few feet above the roof of the school. (A few years after I left, a BEA Viscount ploughed into some houses about 100 yards away, and the school was hastily closed.)

I grew up in the years immediately following the Second World War. This was the period of the beginning of the Cold War, the Berlin Blockade, and, all through the 1950s, the testing of increasingly powerful nuclear weapons. Right from the beginning I was scared of nuclear weapons. I've always hated things that explode, or that fall on you from a great height. I quickly understood that the atom bomb, as it was then called, did both extraordinarily well. All my life, as long as I can remember, I've been terrified someone will drop one on or near me.

I lived in those Mancunian suburbs for nearly sixteen years, constantly aware that a few miles to the north of me was a nuclear target. I was obsessed by the thought of Manchester being bombed, and because I knew what nuclear explosions looked like I could vividly imagine the brilliant flash, the deafening explosion and the blast-wave, coming at me from the direction of the houses built at the end of our road. Friends of mine lived in those homes, and once, when I was about twelve, I went surreptitiously around the walls, kicking them to see how strongly they had been built, and trying to assess the chances of them being a barrier between me and the nuclear age. In those days, atom bombs were sometimes described as having the equivalent explosive force of, say, one half of all the bombs dropped during the recently completed war. This sort of statistic actually meant something to me, because Manchester had been heavily bombed by the Germans, and all around the centre of the city were hundreds of acres of devastation. I imagined a nuclear attack as being a sort of super-blitz, over in a few seconds, one which could be survived if you were lucky enough to be away from the thick of things, could find something to crouch behind before the blast-wave hit you, and were able to cover your ears so the bomb wouldn't deafen you.

I was misunderstanding and under-estimating the scale of such a catastrophe, but even so it was awful enough. Fear of nuclear attack was a dominant under-

current of my daily life, a fear that was simultaneously vague and specific. It was the worst thing I could imagine, and because I was blessed with a vivid and macabre imagination I could imagine quite a lot. Even so, in childhood I never quite visualized exactly what it would be like to be on the receiving end of thermonuclear pulse. Stories from Hiroshima kept on coming.

In 1981 I moved down to live in the West Country, to an isolated house about 35 miles to the west of Exeter. Devon and Cornwall are generally thought of as a "safe" part of England: there are no large industrial complexes or likely nuclear targets, the peninsula is washed by fresh winds and rain from the sea, and much food is grown in the region. It is interesting (but not really surprising) how frequently the westering urge has been touched on or described in British science fiction stories that deal with catastrophic upheaval. Indeed, when you're living in the place there is a distinct feeling of isolation and security. Our particular house was immediately to the west of Dartmoor, and I could never quite get out of my mind that there were literally millions of tons of granite between me and any conceivable nuclear target. I never actually went over and surreptitiously kicked Dartmoor, but while I was in Devon it played the same part in my adult life as those houses had done before.

So you can see that in fact my understanding of nuclear war had not really advanced. I was no longer a child, but it was still very tempting to think of any nuclear attack as being a sort of super-blitz, one which would devastate perhaps hundreds of square miles of land rather than hundreds of acres, and one which would kill several million civilians rather than several thousand. Such a war would be essentially survivable by some people. There would be those who could find shelter or provisions, or could find an isolated, self-sufficient part of the West Country or Scotland, or even of Central England, those who had taken precautions or made survival preparations. Those who lived, as it were, in the suburbs of the war.

But the twentieth century is full of lies, and the greatest of all is that nuclear war, even all-out nuclear war, is going to be survivable by some.

Nuclear war is by definition total. By the time a conflict has escalated to the nuclear threshold it has already crossed the point of no return. Total nuclear war will kill everybody in the world. This is all you need to know.

There is no hope.

If world war breaks out, you are going to die because everybody else is going to die.

Your best and brightest chance is to be at ground zero, so that you vanish without consciousness in the first flash, snuffed out and disintegrated like an ant in a flame.

Yet the lie that some of us might survive is perpetuated by us all. We want the lie to be true because the real truth is too terrible to contemplate. We deceive ourselves because it is easier, more palatable, more consistent with continuing our normal lives in these pre-holocaust times. No point being gloomy about something that hasn't happened, is there?

The greatest liars of all are the politicians and generals, because whereas we delude ourselves as a natural reaction, they set out deliberately to deceive. All politicians are liars about the bomb, especially the ones who profess to be against it yet do nothing about it. In the four decades since the first bombs were exploded, politicians have grown to see their own position justified and supported in terms of the bomb. If this were not the case, nuclear weapons would have been outlawed by the international community after the fall of Japan in 1945.

The same is true of anyone at executive level in the military. Lying is endemic. The talk of "strategic" or "tactical" war, of nuclear "containment", is military psychobabble, coined to deceive and confuse. The only military justification for nuclear weapons is power: the power to be able to defend yourself against an enemy by completely wiping him out. If this were not the case, conventional weapons would be sufficient.

These cynics who can kill us are in this position only because we give them our tacit assent. They get away with it because of our wish for an alternative.

## THE ATTACKS

### Discussion

Hiroshima was the primary target of the first atomic bomb mission. The mission went smoothly in every respect. The weather was good, and the crew and equipment functioned perfectly. In every detail, the attack was carried out exactly as planned, and the bomb performed exactly as expected.

[illegible][illegible]

We do what Jonathan Schell eloquently describes in his book *The Fate of the Earth*. "Most of us do nothing," he writes. "We look away. We remain calm. We take refuge in the hope that the holocaust won't happen, and turn back to our individual concerns. We deny the truth that is all around us."

We do this because what we are confronted with is something obscene. I use the word deliberately, because like obscenity the idea of a nuclear holocaust is something that it is somehow too shocking or improper to mention. In the media particularly, people who express views counter to the government line are often silenced or hedged about with bureaucratic disclaimers, as if they were pointing to public copulation.

And our own private reactions to the subject are true to the analogy. People pretend to be bored with the topic (just as they do with blue movies), or an interest in it is declared to be unhealthy or abnormal (as if it were a sexual fetish), or they claim that it is something that cannot be influenced by ordinary people but must be left to the politicians (as if sexuality were the exclusive domain of pornographers).

Although there have been several recent books on the subject (also, a BBC programme, a feature-film) it is still difficult to write about, partly because it is a big, complex and technical subject, awesome to contemplate, but mostly because it is a deeply unpleasant and unpopular subject, one which has been trivialized by politicians, fanatics and the gutter press. But in a very specific way, since Hiroshima no writer can morally afford not to take it on. I am myself only too aware that this short essay, touching marginally on the issues, is the only piece I have written in twenty years that is directly about the subject. I like to remain calm, to look away, and this is my own lie against myself: for all those twenty years I have had the daily awareness that at a few moments' notice I might be blown away, along with everybody and everything in the world I cherish. It is a helpless feeling, known to us all whenever we think about it, because the fate of these valuable things is left to opportunistic and inefficient government officials in the same way as we leave them to run the environment, the trains and the economy. All we have is the innocent hope that they will run our fates rather better.

While I write this article, and while you read it, we both momentarily set aside the lies and face the truth, holding the gaze for as long as we can before we are forced to blink and turn away. Then, in Schell's words, we return to denying the truth that is all around us.

I am convinced that the largest single encouragement to turning away is the sense that there is a partial hope. The belief that if the worst happens a nuclear

war might be "tactical", or that even if all-out spasmodic war occurs then the estimates of death, damage and social upheaval will have been too pessimistic. What we hope for is that some of us will survive, and that when the dust has settled and the fallout has blown out to sea, our cities will be rebuilt, our countryside will be ploughed and resown, our institutions will be restored and our individual liberties honoured.

If anything, the effects are being under-anticipated, both by ordinary people (who lack technical information, and who anyway hope for the best) and by people in power (who partly connive in semi-wilful misdirection, who partly lack technical information, and who to a large extent lack imagination).

The present British government is typical. In its regular "civil defence" exercise with local authorities, the government issues maps of Britain showing likely targets and their fallout footprints down-wind of the blast zones. Cities and military establishments have little circles around them, presumably indicating the areas of immediate destruction, and beyond them are shaded zones where the strontium-90 and the caesium-137 will fall. These maps do predict a lot of damage, but a reassuring amount of the country is left free of blast and/or fallout. According to these maps I could crouch in Cheadle, shielded from blast by my friends' houses, and just about get away with it.

A more accurate picture is presented by observed facts from actual nuclear tests, and known capabilities of weapons presently stockpiled.

The Soviet Union has around 300 SS-18 missile systems capable of delivering warheads with a yield in the 20-megaton range. As such warheads produce too much overkill for any likely use against military targets, their intended use must be presumed to be against civilian targets. That is, against cities.

If a 20-megaton fission-fusion device were to be exploded in an air-burst above the centre of Manchester, the circle of total destruction directly beneath would have a diameter of roughly twenty-five miles (which wipes out Cheadle, and much beyond it). The fireball would be over the zone for nearly half a minute, and the final mushroom cloud would be nearly seventy miles in diameter. Blast damage would cover an area of nearly fifteen hundred square miles, reaching from Burnley in the north to Congleton in the south. (A similar bomb exploded over London would cause severe blast damage from Welwyn Garden City in the north to Gatwick Airport in the south, from Slough to Tilbury west to east.)

From the government's own civil defence war-games it is clear that they anticipate rather more than just one nuclear explosion in Britain. As long ago as 1960 they estimated that Britain could expect around twenty-five 5-megaton blasts on major cities and installations, plus well over one hundred 1-megaton blasts dotted around the rest of the country. These blasts would be bad enough (a single 1-megaton bomb is enough to destroy most of London), but if you imagine the targets in 1983 receiving up-rated modern warheads, then the death and destruction are quite literally indescribable, except with the word: total.

For the Soviet Union, Britain is a relatively minor target in any forthcoming war. Western Europe and North America will both be saturation-bombed, as will be further flung allies like Australia.

The British civil defence preparations I'm describing are printed, with maps of anticipated targets, in a new book by Duncan Campbell called War Plan UK. This is a rather badly written and confusingly arranged book that is full of information almost too horrific to be contained in mere words. It describes in considerable detail the British government's plan for helping the country survive such a total war.

What becomes instantly clear, from the government's own documents, is that the real and only reason for civil defence is the protection and preservation of the government, and of some parts of the civil service and the security forces. If this is your idea of what constitutes the identity of this country, it isn't mine. The ordinary populace, in fact, is seen as the principal impediment to the government's plans. Many are the plans for "controlling" the populace in an emergency. Got a country house near Dartmoor? Unless you happen to be in it when the war starts, you won't get to it: once the bad news starts, cars leaving 28.



the cities will be turned back at the point of a gun. Thinking of buying up some supplies for your 56-day sojourn in your government-approved fallout shelter? Food will be distributed by the security forces on priorities they will decide. Survive the attack against all the odds, but think you might have picked up a touch of radiation poisoning and would like to consult a doctor? Anyone showing symptoms of radiation sickness (vomiting, skin-burns, lacerations, loss of hair, etc) will be officially categorized "moribund", "walking dead" or "zombie" (these are the government's words, not mine), and is to be refused not only medical treatment but food too. (Ditto if you're over 30 years old.)

Meanwhile, you'll be relieved to hear, Mrs Thatcher and Mr Reagan will be safe in underground bunkers, weathering the storm until they can get back to running things once more.

I'm aware, as I write this, that most of this will be familiar in detail or outline to most of the people likely to read it. It's a subject on which you develop a paranoia as soon as you get the barest inkling of what is going on. Yet to assume anything less than the worst, as we are constantly encouraged to do, is dangerous beyond calculation.

The attitude that has to be developed is that nuclear war cannot be contained, that it will be final and absolute. There can be no half measures: the only solution is comprehensive international disarmament.

The problem for ordinary people is knowing how that could be achieved. This is where my views are non-conformist, because in Britain the focus for anti-nuclear protest is CND, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which after a few years in the wilderness has re-emerged as an active lobby. What CND wants is unilateral disarmament: it means to persuade the government to throw away our own nuclear weapons and kick out the Americans with theirs.

The problem with this, entirely setting aside the political consequences of such a deed, is that it is a half measure. It is satisfyingly simple, and by having a limited end it seems workable. But the world of nuclear arsenals is a far from simple one, and the rather decent intention that our actions would become an example to the rest of the world is just naive. Unilateralism wouldn't even achieve the comparative "safety" of removing targets from our soil, because if the nuclear missiles were sent away, the numerous tracking stations along our coasts would remain; and even if they went too, the sheer scale of nuclear combat is not going to recognize any Switzerlands. The next war won't have suburbs.

Unilateralism is the same sort of reassuring lie as the ones peddled by politicians, and it is just as dangerous. The only real difference is that it is grounded in innocence and good intentions, but its effect is ultimately pernicious because it offers a degree of hope, where no degrees are possible.

The only way to achieve disarmament is by making people face up to the alternative. There are no possible conditions or compromises. The method must be by education and persuasion, by reminding people everywhere of what they are allowing to happen. This is why I have written this, and why you have read it, both of us knowing that there is nothing new anyone can say on the subject, both of us accepting that we have to go on reminding each other, and in so doing will remind others.

The weapons remain in the world because there is a broad, popular base of trusting acquiescence. We look away so that we can live our normal lives, but this is interpreted as a nod of approval. Even juntas and demagogues have to rule by tacit support, and they are overthrown when they lose it, and so it is the acquiescence which must be taken away from the politicians. Cruise missiles and MX clusters and SS-18s only appear because people let them.

The alternative is to look away, to deny the truth that surrounds us, to crouch forever in Cheadle.

The Fate of the Earth by Jonathan Schell (Picador)  
War Plan UK by Duncan Campbell (Burnett Books)  
The Effects of Nuclear Weapons (U.S. Atomic Energy Commission)  
The Military Balance 1982-1983 (The International Institute of Strategic Studies)

# BOOK REVIEWS



ROGUE AUTHOR

PAUL KINCAID



(BLOODED ON ARACHNE by MICHAEL BISHOP. Arkham House 1982, 338pp., \$13.95 )

Some years ago, when I would read every science fiction anthology I could lay my hands on, I came across a collection called Science Fiction Emphasis 1 (to the best of my knowledge there was no number 2). Most of the book was made up of well-written stories by young writers who have since made no impact whatsoever on the science fiction scene. However, there was one story that stood out, and that lodged in my memory for years afterwards: "On the Street of Serpents", by a writer who did manage to make a name for himself, Michael Bishop.

At the time I thought the novella represented everything that was good about science fiction: the writing was of a high standard, the ideas were audacious and original, and the awareness of the contemporary world, indeed the mingling with the story of elements of autobiography, surely made it science fiction worthy of consideration as literature.

It is strange to come back to the story so many years later. How, despite its occasional felicities, the writing no longer seems so good - though admittedly considerably better than a lot of science fiction. History has made his view of the near future seem more naive than audacious - and I am not just referring to the deaths of Franco and Mao. And the three sections of the story now fit together awkwardly: the middle section seems not to belong in the story at all, while the first and third sections are not linked so solidly and smoothly as they should be, so that the memories of childhood in Seville reads more as an authorial indulgence than as something demanded by the story. In his recent novel No Enemy But Time Bishop has done the same sort of thing more skilfully and to considerably better effect.

Perhaps it was my own fault; one can never step twice into the same stream, reality rarely lives up to memory. The remaining ten stories and two poems in Blooded on Arachne are not so disappointing because I missed most of them the first time round. It is, apparently, the first of two collections of Bishop's short work that Arkham House are bringing out, I am not familiar enough with his short work to guess what will be in the second volume, but this one seems to contain most of those I've heard of. It is a diverse bunch with nothing in common, not even the quality. In fact, the book seems to me an excellent guide to the strengths and weaknesses of Bishop's work.

He has a tendency, for instance, to bring his stories to an end rather than a climax. Two of the weakest stories in this collection, "Leaps of Faith" and "In Chinistrex Fortronza the People are Machines" (a terrible title), are good examples of this. It is as if he thinks of a situation for a story, but not a plot, so that when he has written the situation out he still has no real drama. I am not necessarily opposed to this, I like suggestion and understatement, but neither of these stories have other strengths to offset the weakness. Yet "Pinon Fall", his first story and another which is far more situation than plot, makes up for it with the freshness of the approach and the quality of the characterisation, and the result is one of the best pieces in the book.

He also has a tendency to go overboard. "Rogue Tomato", for instance,

despite its rather pretentious references to Kafka and Dick in calling the hero Philip K., is nothing more than an overblown squib, a poor joke that should not have been stretched beyond a page or two.



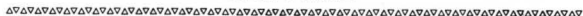
Opposed to this, Bishop has a colour of language and vividness of imagination that well serves his evocations of the alien. Two long stories demonstrate this clearly. "The White Otters of Childhood" is excellent, and may well live in my memory as "On the Streets of Serpents" once did. It is set in the 54th century, when the last remnants of mankind are restricted to the Caribbean island of Guardeloupe, or Guardian's Loop as it is known in the story. The sense of a winding down of civilisation - mankind's descendants, occupying the rest of the planet, play only a peripheral role in the story - is very well done. Along with this is an economic but effective description both of the island, and of the social organisation of its inhabitants. The situation is vividly drawn, but in this story he matches it with a plot that highlights and draws on the situation to keep the story going in a most readable manner.

"The House of Compassionate Sharer" concerns a rebuilt man who is restored to full humanity by being forced to exercise the power of life and death over someone else. It is a nice idea, and Bishop's vivid imagination and detailed descriptive writing again make the situation and the setting totally believable. Yet for all his perceptiveness and compassion, I don't think Bishop has the psychological depth to make the story really work. It was an ambitious project, just a little beyond his grasp, but praiseworthy still, not least because few writers these days are so daring.

But the strength of these stories, the power of the descriptions, can easily be overdone. The rather garish title story, for instance, could have done with rather less pulp sf colour, and rather more thought. Bishop has let his obvious writing ability run away with him, and to that extent the story is typical of the book. It displays a writer who is good, but who could be better. Blooded on Arachne has more than its fair share of poor stories, though the good ones do make up for them. ((( Editorial Note; The internal illustrations, of which an example is given above, are by GlennRay Tutor. )))

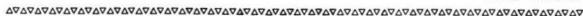


## VECTOR'S CHOICE



LIBERTY'S IN EVERY BLOW!

BILL CARLIN



(LANARK by ALASDAIR GRAY. Granada 1982, 561pp., £2.95)

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In the past, the standard Glaswegian novel was always a curious creature. Pseudo-documentary (local slang and lack of colour) mated with melodrama (razor gangs and exaggerated religious bigotry) to produce an image far removed from reality. Half-truths and minor lies strung together with sensationalism helped perpetuate the myth of a city that never existed. Alasdair Gray destroys the clichés of the past by telling huge, bizarre lies and arriving at something which is close to the truth.

Lanark is an extraordinary book, with a structure so complex that any summary is bound to fail to do it justice. Four separate 'books' make up the complete work, along with a prologue, an interlude, and an epilogue that appears four chapters before the end of the fourth book. Books three and four enclose books one and two, and are set in the fantasy city of Unthank, a distorted but easily identified mirror image of Glasgow. The central books tell the story of Duncan Thaw, a brilliant but frustrated Glaswegian artist who, unable to accept the limitations imposed by his environment, appears to commit suicide. This act of apparent self-destruction is ambiguous because Thaw's story is told to Lanark, the hero of the book's fantasy sections, by an oracle who claims that Thaw is Lanark's former self.

Lanark is presented as a mysterious, solitary figure whose first memory is of arriving in the desolate city of Unthank, a place where the sun never shines and normal time does not exist. He feels alienated from his fellow prisoners in this modern Purgatory despite a brief love affair with Rima, a similarly afflicted female, and friendly overtures by Sludden, the gregarious leader of Unthank's decadent artists and intellectuals. Alienation turns into despair when Lanark succumbs to "Dragonhide", an affliction which encases the individual in a metallic shell - in Unthank, mental diseases seem to manifest themselves as purely physical disorders, with "Mouths" being equivalent to hysteria, "Twittering Rigor" to manic-depressive illness, and "Dragonhide" to chronic schizophrenia. Lanark frantically searches for a means of escape as the disease progresses, and is eventually swallowed by a huge, disembodied "Mouth" which transports him to the Institute - again, an ambiguous image, in that Lanark's swallowing by the "Mouth" can be interpreted as either a form of suicide or a desire to be reborn.

The Institute is "a combination of any large hospital and any large university with the London Underground and the BBC Television Centre". Gray admits that the overall scheme of the place, however, is stolen from the cities created by H.G. Wells for *The Sleeper Awakes* and *The First Men in the Moon*. While Wells is credited as a major influence on the 'Lanark' segments of the book, it is obvious that Gray has borrowed heavily from the works of a wide variety of SF authors in weaving his fantasy world, although only Kurt Vonnegut and Glasgow's Chris Boyce are named in the list of plagiarisms recorded by the author in his highly unconventional epilogue.

Many of the Institute's scenes will be familiar to SF readers, but Gray gives them a certain freshness by juxtaposing them with equally familiar scenes from mundane existence. Fantasy is used here as a finely-honed tool rather than an end in itself. Lanark is at first bemused by the strange environment in which he finds himself but quickly comes to terms with it when he is apprenticed to the mysterious Dr Ozenfant, who cures him of his "Dragonhide". Somewhat reluctantly, Lanark begins work as a healer specialising in curing "Dragons". During the course of this work, he meets Rima once again, managing to cure her of her own advanced disease. Revelling in their freedom, they both rebel against the Institute, rejecting Dr Ozenfant as they once rejected Sludden. To reach the normal world, or at least a normal world, they must journey through an uncharted limbo leading back to Unthank; the hardships of the journey drive a wedge between the couple, and Lanark is deserted by her shortly after their return to the dying city.

In the final segment of the book, Lanark is charged with the task of saving Unthank from destruction, and in doing so comes face-to-face with the author, who reveals the ending he intends to write, sealing the fate of the city and its inhabitants. Gray is perhaps overly self-indulgent in this epilogue, which is peppered with long-winded footnotes and provided with an index of the authors whose work he has plagiarised - Flann O'Brien, William Golding, Walt Disney (!), George Orwell, and F. Scott Fitzgerald among them. Although the section contains humour in abundance, it is drawn out to such an extent that the reader may begin to wonder whether or not Gray (who proclaims himself "a self-educated Scot") is simply trying to impress everyone with the results of his intellectual Charles Atlas course. On balance, I think not - the joke is a good one, and the author relishes the telling of it.

'Scottish Literature' has always been too inward-dwelling in many respects.

The English author can look upon the world as his oyster when it comes to writing a novel: he is allowed to examine the issues of his choice using the equivalent of a wide-angle lens. Under the scowling supervision of the Edinburgh literati, however, the Scottish novelist has been forced to contemplate his own navel if he is to gain a certain degree of critical respectability within his native land. The literary lions of the North have fettered the authors of the past by requiring them to write in either Gaelic or 'Lallans' or broad 'Scots'. In recent years, however, such authors as William MacIlvaney (Laidlaw, Docherty, *A Gift from Nessus*), Archie Hind (The Dear Green Place) and Alan Spence (*Its Colours they are Fine*) have forced them to reconsider, if not recant, their rules of literary excellence; and, with Lanark, Alasdair Gray may well have dealt those tartan-clad greybeards a mortal blow, as it is a novel which explores emotions common to every individual rather than wasting time trying to point out those features which make the Scot different from the rest of humanity. (Indeed, since the publication of this paperback edition, Gray has been declared the first winner of the £1000 Scottish Book of the Year Award, which seems to have been instituted for the sole purpose of honouring his epic novel. This could be regarded as a Celtic sour grapes reaction to its failure to walk away with 1981's Booker Prize, but most probably reflects a genuine change in the opinions of the Edinburgh literary establishment.)

Gray writes clearly and without self-consciousness. He doesn't belabour the reader with a flood of Scottish slang (realising, perhaps, that Robert Burns and Lewis Grassie Gibbon are the only Scottish writers to have done so with any success), but neither does he avoid the use of a slang word when it is the appropriate one. Sentimentality, the most common flaw of Scottish novels, is never even flirted with. He gives the impression throughout that he would have no time for any Glaswegian who claims to pine for the Highlands or sings song about the wild blooming heather without ever having travelled any further north than Bearsden. At one point, in a footnote included in the epilogue, he even dares to tell the truth about the Gaelic culture by admitting that he "lacks all understanding of it". Most Scots are in the same position, but few would be so honest as to admit their ignorance before an audience of 'foreigners'.

Honesty is also the keynote in his presentation of Glasgow as a city of contrasts. Most natives of it would praise its finer points - the University, its acres of park space, and the visionary architecture of Charles Rennie Mackintosh - while ignoring its areas of ugliness and extreme deprivation. Gray presents both aspects as coupled in a way that seems almost natural and, although the contrast is common to all British cities of any size, here the dichotomy is given a uniquely Glaswegian flavour by being seen through the eyes of an author who is also an artist. (The book contains several illustrations by him.) Knowing this, it seems hardly surprising that *Lanark* is filled with spectacular and memorable scenes which conjure up visions of the mundane melting into the fantastic in echo of the contrast between elegance and squalor. For once, the label 'Fantasy' can be applied, correctly, in the terms of its strictest definition: a mental image or a caprice. At times, Gray may overindulge his whims, but the quality of his work ensures that it stands head and shoulders above the efforts of lesser authors who claim to be labouring in the same fields, because it is idiosyncratic rather than imitative. (Tolkien is not among those whose names appear in the index of plagiarisms.)

Religion supplies a tenuous thread linking the central 'novel', dealing with Thaw, with the more fantastic 'Lanark' novel proper. Indeed, if Gray's description of Unthank as a "region of hell" is taken literally than it seems plausible that his use of fantasy as a medium of expression is a deliberate commentary upon the mystical side of man's nature. Ministers and priests appear frequently as supporting characters, but are ill-defined and essentially interchangeable. To this extent their theology is entirely non-sectarian, yet the underlying tone of the book is not anti-clerical: Gray does not appear interested in the seemingly eternal wrangling between Protestantism and Catholicism which looms large in Scottish culture. If anything, the 'religious tone' suggested by the recurring theme of death followed by rebirth is that of a loosely-knit

Buddhism. Whether or not this reflects the author's own philosophy is largely irrelevant; by examining religion in this abstract way he introduces an element which is apparently alien to the traditions of Scottish literature and again avoids being trapped by the clichés of the past. This approach goes hand-in-hand with his use of 'foreign' literary influences, which have previously been avoided by those adhering to the narrow 'rules' of the Scots novel.

Lanark is not a perfect work, however; it is hampered by its complexity and by Gray's occasional sprees of self-indulgence, when plot takes second place to pyrotechnic imagery - a perhaps forgivable sin, when his artistic training is taken into account, and most of his verbal painting is superb. To regular readers of SF, the appearance of Lanark may not seem to be of great significance, especially to those who do not appreciate the work of J.G. Ballard (an author I was very surprised to find missing from the ranks of those openly plagiarised), but it is of vital importance to Scottish fiction. Wide-spread acclaim for it may point out a new direction for novelists courageous enough to travel, if only in their imaginations, beyond Hadrian's Wall.



## THE TIGER, THE WIND, AND THE DEAD

MARY GENTLE



(A READER'S GUIDE TO FANTASY by BAIRD SEARLES, BETH MEACHAM & MICHAEL FRANKLIN.)  
(Avon 1982, 217pp., \$2.95.....DANSE MACABRE by STEPHEN KING. Futura 1982,  
(479pp., £2.50.)

It may be that what distinguishes the human from the animal is simply the ability to imagine what is not there. The human being can foresee next season's crops (hence agriculture), next season's storms (hence architecture), and next season's potential enemies (hence paranoia). As Poul Anderson says in his introduction to A Reader's Guide to Fantasy, "I even wonder whether human language...originated in fantasy. A set of stereotyped signals is enough for most animals; why did our proto-human ancestors complicate matters?...I can imagine those beings huddled together at night and wondering --- fantasising --- about the powers of the tiger, the wind, and the dead..."

Imagination, fantasy, speech, and fiction are all inextricably linked. 'Realism' didn't come along until much later. And what are the modern inheritors of the fabulous tradition? Science fiction and, of course, fantasy.

A Reader's Guide to Fantasy purports to be just that: a guide to fantastic literature. It is on all counts so fraudulent as to invite prosecution under the Trades Description Act.

Its main section is a guide to authors of fantasy rather than to their works. This leads to some strange omissions (for example, one could get the impression that Lord Dunsany wrote nothing but novels; there is no mention of the short story collections). Indeed, this catalogue is remarkable less for what Searles, Meacham and Franklin put in than for what they leave out - but given the book's fondness for categories, how about a few categories of omissions:

1) Fantasy writers presently in print and so easily available - Elizabeth Lynn, A E Silas, Richard Cowper, Gene Wolfe, Diane Duane, Adam Corby, Ardath Mayhar, J A Salmonson, Josephine Saxton, Clifford Simak, Jack Vance, Brian Aldiss, C J Cherryh, Phylis Ann Karr, John Myers Myers, Eric van Lustbader, Gillian Bradshaw, Glen Cook, Jean Auel...

Which doesn't exhaust the list; but then there's also:

2) More traditional writers still currently available - Ernest Bramah, G K Chesterton, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Barringer F Anstey, Richard Garnett, Conan-Doyle, F Marion Crawford...

Or even omissions in the field of:

3) 'Children's' Fantasy - L M Boston, Mary Norton, Patricia Wrightson, Robert O'Brien, Madelaine L'Engle, Michael de Larrabeiti..

Which means, in plainer terms, that the Guide leaves out The Malacia Tapes, the Kai Lung books, The Eyes of the Overworld, the Green Knowe books, Watchtower, Dunston Wood, Lanark, the Borribles, the Dread Empire series, Silverlock - to mention only a very few.

The cataloging continues with selections of titles grouped under types of fantasy, on the grounds that "at The Science Fiction Shop, where most science fiction queries are for writers similar to other writers, the questions re fantasy are more for type". Examples of their type-casting include 'Bambi's Children' (animal fantasy), 'There and Back Again' (mundane visits magical), and 'Unicorns in the Garden' (magical visits the mundane); and it isn't really worth the effort of working out just why most of the titles don't fit in the categories, though it would make a fine parlour game for Boxing Day. The Guide also lists Fantasy Awards, and a basic reading list, and concludes with an essay: 'Who Goes to the Wood Beyond the World'. This, beginning with William Morris and continuing through Tolkien, Lewis, Howard, Smith, Lovecraft, and all the old firm, reshapes the recent history of fantasy very much in the manner of the Lin Carter introductions to the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series.

In the end it isn't sins of omission that damage A Reader's Guide to Fantasy, but sins of commission. It has a singular talent for tastelessness, and for misreading the text. To give but one example, their definition of Shardik in which "Adams essayed a human society but of no identifiable place or time in history. Its major character is an enormous bear, portrayed entirely realistically." Wrong on all counts. It's the literate writers that suffer here - can any guide to fantasy seriously dispose of James Branch Cabell in half a page? and then give five times that space to the author of The Wizard of Oz? Or call Harlan Ellison's "Jeffy is Five" a 'gentle' tale? Or refer to Dunsany as 'art nouveau'? Or decide that Lord Valentine's Castle is fantasy while The Shadow of the Torturer is not? (What they actually are we won't argue over.) True, there are books that even the Guide can't entirely misrepresent: Gloriana, Little, Big, Gormenghast, Islandia. And there are occasions when the relentlessly low-brow style of 'criticism' (or 'reviewing', as Spider Robinson would have it) is a positive advantage: as in the remark that the Prydain books read "almost as if (Lloyd) Alexander were writing the Mabinogion for a very high quality animated feature".

More serious are the book's efforts to set bounds on this most unbounded form of literature. Where it really deserves to be sued is in its claim to be a 'guide'. It is a guide's job to indicate new pathways. After all, you don't need a native guide to take you to the local bookshop - where you can find all the detail included in A Reader's Guide to Fantasy simply by reading the cover blurbs on the fantasy shelf. A guide is necessary for the unknown: this book should (but doesn't) indicate new directions - for example:

1) There's no mention of historical novels: those interested in sword and sorcery might well enjoy, say, Zoe Oldenburg, Rosemary Sutcliff, James Clavell, Pauline Gedge....

2) And no indication of those 'mainstream' writers who write weirdly and well - Joyce Carol Oates, Isak Dinesen, Richard Hughes, John Cowper Powys, D M Thomas, John Gardner, John Barth, John Fowles, Virginia Woolf....

But this threatens to degenerate into lists. The Guide doesn't even stray outside the range of novels and the occasional short story (what about Dunsany's plays, or those of Synge, or Yeats; or James Elroy Flecker's Hassan); nor are there any recommended collections of source myths here, not Celtic, Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian, or Chinese... In short, A Reader's Guide to Fantasy is bad news.

The one redeeming feature is the Anderson introduction, which does at least question why human beings have such an appetite for fantasy. Turning it over to look at the dark side of the coin, there is Stephen King's Danse Macabre, supposedly an investigation into the appetite for that kind of fantasy called horror fiction.

Danse Macabre is overlong, repetitive, self-contradictory, and displays an almost hysterical hatred of all kinds of critical analysis. Are we to take this book, then, as non-critical analysis? or critical non-analysis? It's difficult to tell. If King wants to analyse, why apologise? But the book is full of little touches (eg "talks - I don't quite have the balls to call them lectures") intended to endear himself to the Common Reader. If the Common Reader is that common, she won't be reading non-fiction (probably watching TV, folks); and if she ain't, it'll make her hopping mad to be talked down to. Danse Macabre shares this style with the Guide - but I suspect there are many who no longer distinguish this tone. (Somebody gave Danse Macabre the non-fiction Hugo.)

The book is divided into sections on horror films, TV, radio, novels - and autobiography. And it is better where it is autobiographical. As a writer, King can identify and push the buttons that activate the horror response in human beings. He does it well, and has *The Shining*, *Salem's Lot*, etc, to prove it. Danse Macabre is interesting primarily where it is insightful into the writer's mind - the 'war babies', the 1950s, Vietnam, fantasy and the child, and how King writes what he writes. Horror is identified very precisely here: the difference between terror, horror, and revulsion ("gross out"). The part played by fears (of the dark, say, and of mutilation) are presented, along with the shapes that psychological terrors take - the Monster, the Vampire, the Thing Without A Name (but there are no references to Jungian archetypes or Freudian fears). There are good sections on TV and films: Danse Macabre fulfils the function of a guide far better than the Reader's Guide.

One rarely has to contradict King's systemised analysis - he generally does it himself a few pages further on. He can in one breath condemn all academic criticism as bullshit, and in the next talk of the political, economic, and social subtexts of the Horror Movie (and then say that films are just picture books that talk). He claims that horror is a socially-acceptable rehearsal of death - a reaction against the death taboo, a refusal to face death. It exercises fear, and exorcises it because under the skin lies rational humanity. But under that skin lies the monster (and here he threatens to get into an infinite regress). King can say on one page that we are all sane, morality comes from the hearts of men and woman of good will; and on another say that we are all mentally ill, it's just that most of us disguise it well enough to stay outside the asylum. The tone of resentment includes the remark that "a writer who only produces one book every seven years is simply dicking off"; and also a profound admiration for Ira Levin, whose production rate "averages out to one (book) every five years or so". Danse Macabre is full of these contradictions.

The final section, 'The Last Waltz', includes instances of real-life atrocities inspired by fictional horror. The implication is that this is not to warn, but to justify, though it's hard to see how. It's another instance of Danse Macabre's tone of being permanently on the defensive. The book doesn't have anything startling to say, yet it apologises all the way for saying it.

It could be argued that the horror genre needs defending. King, in his acceptance of every gross-out that provokes the horror response, is not so far from approval of video nasties and snuff films. The other kind of fantasy prone to limited situations, archetypes, and responses is sexual fantasy; King's term 'porno-violence' indicates the close connection between the two. The crimes he cites, where the fiction/reality interface has blurred, tempt one into the same arguments as those for and against pornography. What is the reliability of the consumer, the responsibility of the producer?

To say that fictional horror is the result of the manipulation of limited archetypes and fears is true, and obvious; the question is why, and for what reason? King says that horror is basically for scaring the shit out of little kids (and the child in all of us), which is fine as far as it goes, but it doesn't go very far. Going further would take us into mythology, anthropology, psychology - areas he fails to explore. King, who can tell us so much about the how of horror, falls down badly when it comes to the why.

This is perhaps because of the other implied approach to horror: that fear



is not a subject for too much rational analysis. As King himself says: "Let us be children acting as pathologists. We will, perhaps, link hands like children in a circle, and sing the song we all know in our hearts: time is short, no one is really okay, life is quick and dead is dead."

Fantasy and horror may not be 'good' or 'bad' for us, neither therapy nor psychosis nor entertainment, but simply be the natural by-product of a mind that can anticipate the real and conceive of the unreal. The shapes change, but the tiger, the wind, and the dead are still with us.

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IF ONLY....

MARTYN TAYLOR

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(THE EYE OF THE QUEEN by PHILIP MANN. Gollancz 1982, 264pp., £7.95)

"What is science fiction?" is a question that absorbs much of our time and attention, too much given that there is no universal answer. For me, though, the distinguishing feature of the science fiction story is the status of the 'idea'. It is paramount. All the other components of the art of storytelling - plot, character, quality of prose - are adjuncts which measure the quality of the story as a story. It is the idea, the speculation, which traps it as a science fiction beast rather than a representative of another genre, or none at all.

An idea that has obsessed science fiction writers over the years is contact with aliens. And not only writers: billions are expended in probing the space around us with only one real objective - military advantage apart, of course - and that is to contact 'them'. 'They' are out there somewhere. We will find them if we look in the right places, or they will find us if we shout loudly enough. We have a requirement that they be there, for without a 'them' humankind is placed in eternal solitary, a freak of evolution or the nurtured product of an omnipotent deity. Neither proposition is attractive to modern, technological man. Of course, there is a good chance that 'they' will be more technically advanced than us, and therefore they will be friendly (after all, the technologically advanced races of Earth are friendly and adjuring of war.) In Philip Mann's *The Eye of the Queen*, humankind has discovered quite a few races of 'them', all of which stubbornly refuse to reveal themselves as homo superior, the possessors of all the answers. Until, that is, when a ripe granny smith, a mere 876 metres in diameter, one day parks itself in Utah - or, rather, hovers 10cm above Utah. Precisely why aliens who build spaceships resembling English apples should adopt Napoleonic measurement is never adequately explained. "We are here", announce the superbeings, while disrupting all the cameras and stuff that we puny Earthlings are pointing at them in the desperate hope of gleaning some crumb or other from their high table. "We are here, and we will take one of you back with us." That one is Professor Marius Thorndyke, founder and former head of the Contact Linguistics Institute. "Oh no you won't!" replies brave Professor Challenger...er, sorry, Thorndyke, "I'm not coming unless we take my friend with us." So Thorndyke and his acolyte, Thomas M'naba, are whisked off to Pe Ellia at the speed of thought, there to study and be studied.

To be honest, the plot isn't quite as silly as I try to make it seem, but it is still pretty silly. Thorndyke behaves like a true spoiled brat, disregarding all the rules of the contact business (which he wrote), not to mention the advice given him by well-inclined Pe Ellians, in his madcap hurry to discover what makes Pe Ellia and Pe Ellians tick (a pursuit they spend a lot of time on themselves!). All the while, M'naba watches, records, and indulges in no human behaviour whatsoever. But then he is no more a real human than is Thorndyke. Neither they nor any of the Pe Ellians are individuals, characters whose lives involve the reader. The physical appearance of the Pe Ellians as described is not too far removed from

that of the cartoon Pink Panther, and that is about the level of the genuine character development. So too with the action - all that happens, which includes birth, death, cannibalism and meeting with angels, is described in a manner almost totally devoid of drama and excitement. In fact, the events of greatest moment -



when Thorndyke actually succeeds in becoming a true Pe Ellian - are not even described at all! When he does bring himself to describe anything, Mann's choice of words and allusions borders on the risible - the apple spaceship is one example - but it never quite merits laughter. You see, Mann has gone back to an earlier form of science fiction storytelling. His tone is one of almost childlike innocence. There is a genuine sense of wonder rampant in this book, a sense that never becomes coy or knowing. I imagine that Mann wrote this book in a lather of delight, and it is refreshing to read in these days of cynicism in which half-digested gobbets of other writers' ideas are passed off as imaginative writing. Still, it is odd.

Somewhere within this book are the bones of a good story. The planet of Pe Ellia is interesting, even if it is described in only a tantalising outline without the information required to colour it, and so are the Pe Ellians, to which the same remark applies. Mann touches on any number of stimulating topics, from the nature of friendship to the nature of scientific research. He even gives an end to the personal drama that has global ramifications, in true potboiler style. What thoroughly sabotages the effort is the structure that has been adopted. Chunks of a diary by Thorndyke are followed by slightly longer post-mortem expositions by M'naba, and the whole is topped and tailed by contemporary action involving M'naba and two of the Pe Ellians. This disrupts the narrative, fragments the drama, and imposes a cool, distant air that keeps the reader at arm's length from the action and the characters. This distance grows greater as the story progresses, until M'naba is returned to Earth and the actual climax takes place out of our ken altogether. Perhaps we do not need the story to be spelled out in words of single syllables, but for it to come alive in the way it ought we really do need rather more than we are given. I am sure that most readers of this type of book are willing to make some effort, but I am afraid that we are given little help.

I suspect that Mann's real energy has gone into devising the central notion of the planet Pe Ellia, the queen from whom all life comes and eventually returns, and the mantissae, Pe Ellians who have evolved through their changes into creatures capable of moulding whole planets by the power of their thought. The mantissae are the reasons Thorndyke has been brought to Pe Ellia. Earth is a psychic bonfire, radiating energy on all wave-lengths in a totally uncontrolled manner, and in order to protect the more fragile areas of the universe from rampaging humanity the mantissae have established quarantine areas into which humans are prevented from venturing. In the ordinary scheme of things, humanity should have cauterised its own wound by use of its nuclear weapons; by luck, though, we have survived and reached the stars, to give ourselves the status of troublesome children. However, the child still squalls too loudly for some Pe Ellians, and they are debating whether to help our development or knock us on the head and give the rest of the universe some peace and quiet. Once the story reaches the mantissae and the queen, Mann does give us a little more, but even then it is like watching a

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film and seeing only every third frame. The result is fascinating but oh! so frustrating.

The purpose of any review is to give the reader some idea of what the book is about, how the writer has gone about the business of telling his story, and whether he has been sufficiently successful to make it worth the reader's while. The Eye of the Queen is about alien contact and how one man comes to terms with an event so momentous (that contact) that he is forced to re-evaluate everything he has done in a successful and fulfilled life. The content of the book is essentially satisfactory. Unfortunately, Mann has chosen to present his story in a flawed and ultimately frustrating way - he positively deters the reader from becoming involved while giving just sufficient glimpses of the subject-matter to whet the appetite, subverting himself from the word go. In many ways, this book reminds me of the work of Ian Watson; the concerns are very similar. Mann, however, goes beyond even Watson's disregard of conventional story-telling without giving the reader the amount of intellectual fodder to be found in Watson's work.

Is The Eye of the Queen worth reading? Yes - for all its flaws, it has enough ideative content to keep the real speculative reader with the story to the end. So, a guarded approval for this example of SF, but my final recommendation must be: oh, what a book this could have been, if only, if only....

## EARTH-LOVER

JUDITH HANNA

(IN THE VALLEY OF THE STATUES by ROBERT HOLDSTOCK. Faber and Faber 1982, 223pp,) (£6.95.)

This is Holdstock's first short story collection. It contains "Mythago Wood", winner of the 1982 BSFA Short Fiction Award, and seven others, all of which orbit around a cluster of seven themes: travel (in time or space), sex, crime, death (which, in "A Small Event" and "In the Valley of the Statues", is combined with its inverse, the creation of life), art, and the relationship of the protagonist (always male) with nature and with women. Classic themes, well used but by no means worn out. The question is, what has Holdstock made of them? How fresh, original and exciting are his permutations of these fundamental themes? His stories can't be pigeon-holed into any of the usual formulae - they're not hard-hitting action-packed adventure among the stars (though "The Graveyard Cross", "The Touch of a Vanished Hand" and "Ashes" are set in a space-travelling future), nor wise-cracking sting-in-the-tail gimmickry, neither raunchy (though "Earth and Stone" is the archetypal, actual Holdstock "fucking-the-earth" story) nor soporily sentimental (though "A Small Event" comes dangerously close), nor fashionably soul-baring. There's no humour in them. There's the odd spot of what might be angst (in "The Touch of a Vanished Hand", "Ashes" and "A Small Event"), but so mildly expressed that it reads more like the anxiety of waiting for the last bus than genuine existential anguish.

I found this a difficult book to review - neither great nor bad, but somehow uncertain. I think this uncertainty is because Holdstock has not yet found his own individual 'voice'; as a collection, these stories do not express a single auctorial personality able to transcend his influences but, rather, a chameleon who changes his livery to match the sources of his ideas. Nor is his individuality strong enough to weld together worked-over ideas (and what idea hasn't been worked-over more often than we can count) into a new artifact; instead, I found myself picking out separate elements within the stories. For instance, the title story, "In the Valley of the Statues", brought to mind a Dorothy Sayers mystery cooked up with an inversion of the Greek myth of Galatea: "A Small Event" suggested a Moorcockian "Dancers at the End of Time" scenario ending in a Woman's Own



"motherhood is fulfillment" idyll; even in "Mythago Wood", where the ideas are very much Holdstock's own, the style is reminiscent of the mediaeval Welsh Mabinogi as it might have been written by Chris Priest. Only "Earth and Stone" reads as entirely original.

But the best story in the book is undoubtedly "Mythago Wood", which tackles what seems to be Holdstock's central obsession and does so more subtly than "Earth and Stone". Reviewing this collection in Interzone 3, David Pringle called Holdstock "science fiction's leading earth-lover" (note the mealy-mouthed euphemism!) and "at his best when writing of Irish prehistory or the legends of the Dark Ages" (i.e., not of the actual past but of the mists of prehistory which gave rise to myth). Holdstock's strength is a feeling for the primitive, for the elemental libidinal level from which the myth-making impulse arises, for the level of ferocity and sexual passion divorced from reason but which one can attempt to describe through reason. Necromancer, Holdstock's best novel to date, was about a rational modern detection of an irrational primitive force imprisoned in a megalith; "Mythago Wood" is about a rational modern man reawakening the "mythago" spirits, which may take on human or animal forms, in a remaining fragment of ancient forest, and becoming absorbed into the "vortex" in which they exist - a downbeat ending, from the conventional modern view, but to Holdstock, one feels, a desirable fate. This longing for absorption into and union with Nature, the Great Mother, is more crudely central to "Earth and Stone", in which an anthropologist sent back in time to the building of New Grange in Neolithic Ireland communes with the dying gods through physical union with the soil and thus, like the rest of the Tutharach, becomes one with the spirits of the earth. In these stories, Holdstock shows not only knowledge of but also an entirely unmodern feeling for the old British and Celtic traditions, a feeling that has nothing of the weakly sentimental-mystical about it. In these stories, Holdstock subverts the conventionally empirical-sceptical SF genre with his emotional commitment to animism, the worship of Nature.

The sources and influences so clearly underlying Holdstock's stories provide a framework of cliché which, having been set up, can be burst open to reveal an unexpected mystery, inexplicable in the conventional terms of the genre. The stories in this collection demonstrate Holdstock's mastery of perhaps too wide a range of conventional SF settings, but what he hasn't always managed is bursting them open and turning them inside out to expose their essential, natural guts.

## FINAL DICK

PAUL KINCAID

(THE TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER by PHILIP K. DICK. Gollancz 1982, 255pp.,)  
(£6.95.)

The death of Philip K. Dick was the saddest loss of is likely to suffer for a good many years. Few other writers in the genre even approach his stature. Not that he was a great writer, despite what many critics will tell you. He lacked, for instance, the linguistic range and descriptive ability of, say, Gene Wolfe. Nevertheless he was one of the most skilled of writers; he knew his weaknesses and strengths, and so great was his control of his art that, with few slips, he was able to avoid the one and emphasise the other. The result is some of the most effective writing SF is likely to see.

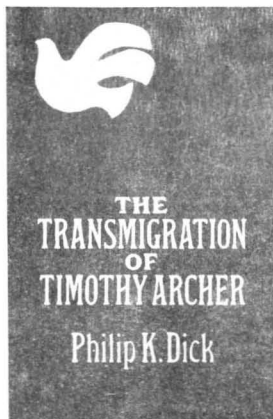
It is with great pleasure, therefore, that I am able to report that his final novel, The Transmigration of Timothy Archer, is more than fitting to serve as his memorial. It is, I believe, the finest thing he ever wrote; only A Scanner Darkly could possibly rival it.

I must make it clear right at the start that The Transmigration of Timothy Archer is not science fiction, though it is, in many ways, a continuation and a consummation of his concerns in his recent novels. The grand questions of good and evil and the nature of God which underlay both Valis and The Divine Invasion are here at the heart of the concerns and motivations which drive his characters.

The story concerns Timothy Archer, Episcopalian Bishop of California, and the people close to him during his last years in the late 60s and early 70s. Archer is a thinly disguised portrait of James Pike, who was Episcopalian Bishop of California in the early 50s. Like Pike, Archer is tried for heresy; like Pike, his son commits suicide; like Pike, he turns to spiritualism; like Pike, he dies on an ill-conceived expedition into the Middle East desert. Archer's mistress, also a suicide, is probably an invention by Dick, but I wouldn't swear to it. The real-life Pike is so obviously a character from a Philip Dick novel that I am only surprised Dick didn't write about him before.

Dick has never really been able to write about ordinary people; his finest creations are mad or drug addicted or suffer some other blight of modern life. In The Transmigration of Timothy Archer he has come up with as fine a gallery of characters as I can recall in any of his books. Chief among them, of course, is Archer himself, his faith under attack, assailed by doubts, having to call upon the authority of a book to back up everything he says. At first Archer's habit of constantly picking up a book to find a quotation whatever the conversation is irritating; by the end of the novel you realise how much it has told you about his character. There is the gentle hebephrenic Bill, who cannot handle abstract notions. There is the bishop's son, Jeff, who becomes obsessed with the Imperial general of the Thirty Years War, Wallenstein, before his suicide. All are detached in some way from what we would consider the normal, yet their very abnormality helps in the conviction of their characterisation.

The revelation of the book, however, is in the strength of the female characters. All too often in the past, Dick's women have followed the same pattern in book after book, generally the least sympathetic and the least convincing of his creations. But the two women at the centre of this novel have a reality and an individuality that is quite exceptional. Generally, a writer establishes fairly limited parameters within which his characters move, and then he reinforces those parameters constantly throughout the length of the book. By ensuring that the characters acts consistently, the writer makes them believable. But people are not so consistent, particularly not the sort of people that Dick writes about, and in Kirsten, Archer's mistress, Dick has managed the rare and difficult task of creating someone with mercurial shifts of character yet who



remains consistent, well-drawn and believable.

What is more, for the first time ever that I can recall, he employs a female narrator, Angel, Archer's daughter-in-law. She is the still, calm centre of it all, the witness to the various obsessions that take over the different characters, the one who senses their doom yet is unable to do anything to prevent it. Among such colourful characters, it would have been easy to make her an empty, insipid sort of person, a camera and no more. But, though she is as near to a 'normal' human being as anyone else in the book, she reflects the angst of life in California and, moreover, she is affected by what happens; her personality grows and changes as she absorbs each new blow. Indeed, far more than being a study of the eccentricities of Bishop Archer, it is a compassionate and moving account of how Angel comes to terms with the deaths of the three people closest to her.

Before the book begins to sound solemn and somber, however, let me say that Dick's familiar sense of humour, dark, wicked and delighting in human eccentricity as much as he shows compassion for human frailty, is more strongly and marvellously in evidence in this book than in any of his recent works. The high comedy of both *Valis* and *The Divine Invasion* is somehow overpowered by Dick's concern with the point he has to make, the theories he has to propound. In *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* all the elements that are such a common feature of Dick's work are present; yet they are in a balance that, so skilled a writer as he was, he was only rarely able to strike.

I was captivated by the book from the moment I started to read it. I was interested in the characters, intrigued by their story, and entertained by the telling of it. This is the book where it all works. That there are to be no more books like this is a tragedy. That we have so good a book as this is cause for celebration.

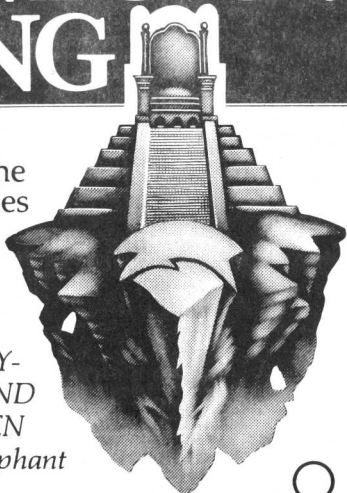
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