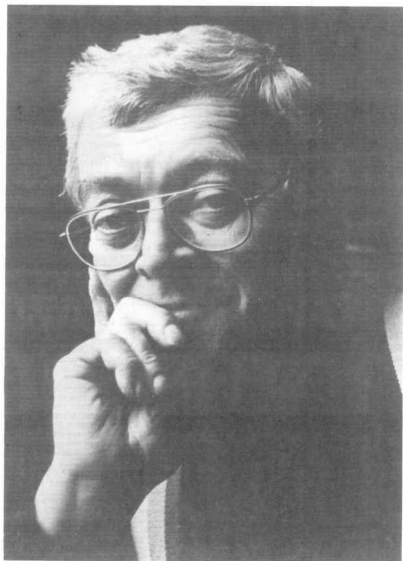


124 / 125

VECTOR



75p

Interview With Russell Hoban

VECTOR EDITOR

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THIS issue of Vector is a special combined issue to make up for the lack of a Vector in the February BSFA mailing. This issue has been edited throughout by Paul Kincaid, and produced by Alan Dorey. Commencing with the next VECTOR (issue 126, June 1985), Paul Kincaid takes up his role as REVIEWS EDITOR, whilst David V Barrett comes in to take over as Vector Features Editor. A full time Production editor is due to be appointed very shortly.

ALL CORRESPONDENCE on this issue should be addressed to Paul Kincaid at the VECTOR editorial address.

This issue dedicated with many thanks to GHOFF RIPPINGTON for his sterling efforts over the past three years.



EDITORIAL

It is only when you take on a job like this that you realise how much work is involved. I am only doing one issue, but Geoff Rippington kept it up for 16 issues. I think we all owe him a big vote of thanks. And the best of luck in his new job, new house, and with his new family. I stepped in to do this issue at the last minute and I wouldn't have produced anything if not for the considerable help of a number of other people. To Alan Dorey in particular for taking on all the boring work of getting the issue typed, laid-out, and printed. And to everyone who has contributed to this issue, especially Ken Lake who produced more ever than I asked him for. Now I look forward to a much quieter life as Reviews Editor from this issue on.

VAT 85

It is not going to be long before the government decides whether or not to introduce VAT on books and newspapers. With the size of their majority in parliament the only thing that might possibly prevent this eventuality is a public outcry sufficient to alarm Conservative backbenchers and prompt the sort of revolt that is becoming more and more common.

Is this a question that should be considered within the pages of the BSFA's critical journal? A considerable proportion of Vector's readership has objected whenever anything vaguely political has cropped up between these hallowed covers. Unfortunately we cannot escape real life forever, and things that happen in the big bad world out there easily affect our cosy little world in here. VAT on books is one of those things. Indeed the gloom-mongers would have us believe that it will have a devastating effect.

The scenario they propose is that VAT will be introduced and book prices will rise steeply of necessity. Book prices are high already, and VAT at 15% on a £2.50 paperback will push the price up to £2.87 or, since round figures are always preferred and for some strange reason prices never seem to be rounded down, £2.90. The price of an average hardback is liable to rise from £8.95 to £10.30. In the current economic climate, it is argued, a sudden jump of this size is going to mean people will buy fewer books.

The biggest victim, however, is going to be the library system. Recently the second measly cheque has gone out to those few authors lucky enough to qualify for PLR. The government made a special, if minute, fund available for this purpose. The amount they receive back from libraries in VAT on books, should the measure be introduced, will more than cover this amount. And that money will have to come from an already underfunded library service. In his recent pronouncements on the economy the Chancellor of the Exchequer made it clear that libraries are one of many areas of the public sector which will suffer a reduction in real terms in its funding over the next few years. In other words, the government intends to give the libraries less money, and take a sizeable proportion of that money back in tax.

The inevitable result - a major cutback in library sales, so they will tend to rely more and more on the books and writers with a proven record. Shops and libraries will more and more be filled with blockbusters and Mills and Boon. New writers will have a more difficult time than ever breaking into print. And the worthy but low-selling writers will find themselves dropped. Everyone with any interest in literature will be the poorer, the cultural life of the country will suffer, dress will reign.

Such, for what it is worth, is the pessimistic view. It is not one that I altogether go along with. The problem is, this scenario sounds all too familiar. It is the sort of doom-laden view of British publishing one has encountered numberless times before - indeed I have been guilty of propagating such views myself in the past. So far there is little sign of it coming to pass, and I see no reason to suppose that the imposition of VAT will prove an exception.

I remember years ago when the average paperback was 3/6 (three shillings and sixpence in old money to those of you too young to recall those halcyon days). Then, splashing out five bob on a book was a rare extravagance - rare mostly because books at that price were rare. Even as the higher price became more common, I would still have found it unthinkable that not so many years later I would be paying £2.50 or more for a paperback. Now I hardly raise an eyebrow. In fact book prices now vary more than they ever have done before. The 100 top selling paperbacks of the year (1984) listed by Alex Hamilton in the Guardian have prices that range from 95p to £3.50. Given that, I doubt that many people will actually notice any price increase. If there is a falling off of custom it will probably be a very temporary hiccup, and, I would guess, more among the blockbuster readers looking for something to while away a summer afternoon in the deckchair than among our dedicated readers looking for our next fix or keeping up with a favourite author.

None of this should be taken to mean that I support the imposition of VAT on books. I do not, I oppose it with every bone in my body. Although I have my doubts about the picture painted by the gloom-mongers I can see no way in which this act can make things better, and I suspect it will make things a lot worse. It may not be the end of civilisation as we know it, but it is far more likely to bring about the nightmare of the doom-mongers than if the books are left untaxed. And I certainly think that the effect of this tax upon a beleaguered library system, and its knock-on effect upon small publishers, is an affront to some of the more cherished concepts of a liberal state. A tax on knowledge, which is the way it has commonly been put, is maybe pitching it a bit high. If we are to propose a moral argument against the tax, how do we stand on the latest Catherine Cookson or John Norman. Let's face it, the majority of books that are published actually have very little or no literary merit, and damn - all cultural or social meaning. Is it an attack upon society if we are taxed for buying the latest Gor book? To be honest I take the opposite point of view. If some tax system were found that was borne only by those who purchase the pap that constitutes the majority of our literary output I wouldn't have a leg to stand on. In fact I rather suspect that I would applaud the move. But that isn't the case. There is no way you can discriminate. If books and newspapers are to be taxed, then that can only mean all books and newspapers. It means school textbooks, it means new bibles for the church, it means vital journals on the latest state of research for the university library, and it means those books that enrich the lives of every one of us, whether or not we actually get round to reading them, like the works of Dante or Cervantes, Freud or Einstein, George Orwell or F.Scott Fitzgerald.

It is for these reasons that I feel a moral opposition to the very idea of VAT on books. Books are our means of communicating our culture, books are the way in which we have achieved our highest artistic, scientific, social, cultural expression. It is through books that we learn about our world and ourselves, and it is through books that we tell others about ourselves and our world. This mode of expression, this artery through which the life blood of our knowledge and understanding flows, is something I feel instinctively must be kept free. VAT brings it all into the realm of economics and politics, a realm in which it does not belong. After all, if books are a means of conveying ideas about economics and politics, surely the conduit itself is best left free of any sort of bias?

There are other arguments to be considered. For instance, the Chancellor is proposing the full rate of VAT, 15%. No other western country has imposed the full rate of VAT.

Newspapers are zero-rated in Belgium, Denmark and Greece. In Luxembourg and West Germany the VAT on books is half the standard rate. In Holland the standard rate is 19%, VAT on books and newspapers is 5%. France has a special rate for morning newspapers which works out at only 2%, though the standard rate is 18.6%. And in Ireland, which suffers VAT at 35%, the rate for books and magazines is 23% and liable to come down. In these circumstances the full rate of VAT is a deliberate attack upon the media. And there is the further consideration that EEC regulations on VAT dictate that once VAT has been charged upon something, there is no going back to zero rating. So once we accept that our books are taxed, they will always be taxed.

Now I am not about to claim that VAT on books is the only area in which there is a moral argument. There are all sorts of other areas. Should there be VAT on necessities like children's clothes, for instance? I think not. But that doesn't reduce the argument against VAT on books.

Maybe you agree with me, maybe not. If not, I'd be interested in hearing your arguments. If you do agree, then maybe you should be signing the petitions in most libraries, or writing to your MP, or any other way in which we can express our opinion on how we are governed.

Paul Kincaid

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THE MOUSE, THE LION AND RIDDLEY WALKER

RUSSELL HOBAN Interviewed by Paul Kincaid

(This interview was conducted as part of the programme at Tynecon II - The Mexican, in Newcastle in May 1984. A second Mexican is to be held in Birmingham in February 1986.

PAUL KINCAID: I want to start by quoting something from your first adult novel, *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz*. "The straight people agree that some things are not allowed to be possible and they govern their perceptions accordingly. Very strong, the straight people. We are not so strong as they. Things not allowed to be possible jump on us, beasts and demons, because we don't know how to keep them out." This seems to me to sum up the whole of your work. Would you agree?

RUSSELL HOBAN: Yes, I'd agree that I'm open to anything that jumps into my head. I don't really make distinctions between fantasy and what is called reality. As far as I'm concerned, reality is whatever is, and so whatever is in anybody's head is also part of reality equally with what is outside the head.

PAUL KINCAID: Does that explain why, in so many of your books, objects talk?

RUSSELL HOBAN: Yes, well things are always talking, either audibly or inaudibly. A very narrow pavement says you have to walk alone, a hard chair says you have to sit up straight. Things are always talking in one way or another.

PAUL KINCAID: I'd like to go chronologically through your books, starting with *The Lion*.

RUSSELL HOBAN: Let me start with *The Mouse and his Child*, that was my first novel. As a matter of fact I can help you out with the whole thing, because I've brought with me the artifact that got me started in novel writing. (At this point Russell Hoban produced a clockwork model of a mouse holding a baby mouse by its hands. He set this down on the table before us and started it going, and the mouse turned round and round, lifting and lowering the baby). This is the actual mouse and his child, father and son. The actual toy is a father and daughter, but I've always been obsessed by fathers and sons, so I made it a son.

I first saw it under the christmas tree of some friends of ours. They had a collection of clockwork toys, and for about three years I used to look at this toy, then I thought perhaps I'd do a little story. I had no thought of writing novels then, but I found that the story kept opening out in front of me.

The reason that I made such a point of going back to my first novel and to this toy is that the whole thing of writing novels for me came out of looking at a particular thing and just paying very close attention to what was in it. I had a very gifted editor at the time, Ferd Monjo at Harper - he's dead now. I used to send him stories as I worked on the book. I'd send him 20-25 pages at a time and he'd write me letters or talk to me on the telephone, and he inculcated in me the idea of very patiently exploring one's material to find what was in it. It seems a very simple thing. You'd

think you wouldn't have to learn that. But you do have to learn it, because I've found in workshops and in talking to people who thought of writing that they'd begin having an idea of where they want to go, and then they ruthlessly drive everything ahead of them like herdsmen to make it get there. But in talking to Ferd while working on *The Mouse and his Child* I began to learn just to look very carefully and patiently at what was there and see what action would come out of it, and then see what action would come out of that action, and so on down the line.

PAUL KINCAID: This was while you were still in America?

RUSSELL HOBAN: Yes. I began *The Mouse and his Child* in 1963 and I finished it the end of 1966.

The Mouse & his Child

RUSSELL HOBAN



Pictures by Lillian Hoban (3)

PAUL KINCAID: That took quite a long time to write. Was it just because you were writing at a much greater length than you'd done before?

RUSSELL HOBAN: I'd never written a novel, and I didn't know how novelists really got it together, how they managed to find out all the names of the bits of architecture and plants and trees and plants and birds. In didn't know how they managed to put together narrative and dialogue to make it a whole. When I was writing it I used to lay out my pages along the living room floor and run up and down trying to get a synoptic view of the whole thing at once.

PAUL KINCAID: Did it work?

RUSSELL HOBAN: Yes, it worked.

PAUL KINCAID: There was quite a long gap, from '65 to '72/3.

RUSSELL HOBAN: Well The Mouse and his Child was published in '67 and I thought: that's done, now I'm going to write novels from now on. And I didn't have another idea for two years. I'd always expected to come to England for an extended stay, and I did the planning and got all that together. I began to get an idea for a sequel to The Mouse and his Child called The Return of Manny Rat. I just made a beginning on that, and came to England, and then my life took a complete turn. My wife and I parted company and I stayed on in England and began a whole new life in which I wrote adult novels, and The Return of Manny Rat got lost in transition. And since then I've written about men and women.

PAUL KINCAID: The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz is about the relationship between father and son, and also about the break up of the marriage. Was that writing about the break up of your own marriage?

PICADOR

The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz Russell Hoban



RUSSELL HOBAN: Absolutely not. It isn't that simple.

Well, I mean it is that simple for a lot of novellists who just purvey chunks of experience, but that isn't how I work. Yes I used the idea of a man coming to a crisis at the age of 45 and leaving his wife and in this case his son, but the lion idea had been percolating for a long time. I'd seen, in 1968, a book on Mesopotamian art in which there was a photograph of a detail of the lion hunt relief from King Ashurbanipal's north palace. The lion was so remarkable in that all human beings in the relief were almost ideographs, they were just conventionalised and totally without individuality but each of the lions was an individual tragic portrait. It was as if the artist, the sculptor, had been prohibited from making the king and the hunters and the people individuals, but with the lions he was free to do that because they're animals. I simply became obsessed with those lions and began to invent extrapolative mythology to fit in with the Sumerian mythology that was available in books. I thought that I'd get something like a 36 page story out of it.

I'd always fancied writing supernatural stories because one of my favourite literature is supernatural. One of the reasons that I was so keen to come to England was that I'd long been a heavy reader of Oliver Onions

and Arthur Machin and M.R. James and Sheridan Le Fanu and Algernon Blackwood, all the ghost story and supernatural writers. I thought perhaps I'd get a good supernatural story going. And then, after I left my wife and my son, and all my other children were angry with me, then the idea of the lion as a mystical force, an embodiment of all kinds of things evoked by the son's anger, came to me. And that's how that novel got itself going.

PAUL KINCAID: What led from Lion to Kleinzeit?

RUSSELL HOBAN: Well, every one of my novels has some kind of specific meaning. Lion was what I've just told you, and the Mouse you've seen. Kleinzeit I was in the hospital for some tests - I'm diabetic and I was there so that the doctor could watch me on a controlled diet to regulate the sugar balance. They didn't divide the patients up into routine tests and terminal patients, they had everyone together. So there were men groaning in the night there and splatting their bed pans and making terrible sounds. It was like the Battle of Trafalgar every night.

I got a mental image of life as a smooth facade, like one of these curved Inigo Nash facades, and one hopes to cruise along very smoothly without any misadventure. But actually this smooth curving facade is really tissue paper thin and any moment you might crash through it and find yourself in hospital, in prison, in the mad house, in some kind of heavy trouble that is always waiting there for you. So that's why Hospital in Kleinzeit is this huge entity crouching and waiting for people to fall into its paws.

PAUL KINCAID: Obviously one of the most significant characters is Death.

PICADOR

KLEINZEIT RUSSELL HOBAN



RUSSELL HOBAN: Kleinzeit was a very important book for me because that was where I made friends with Death. At the age of 45 I think one ought to; and it happened that being in hospital and getting into that book and going through some very difficult times personally, it became my time to do that. So the book may not be thought to be one of my best, but it's the closest one to my heart.

PAUL KINCAID: The thing I find most interesting about your books is the considerable difference between each one. Do you sit and think, well I've got to do something very very different for the next one? Or does it just turn out that way?

RUSSELL HOBAN: Well, first of all I started writing novels late in life. Even The Mouse and his Child, I was around 38 when I began that. The

first of my adult novels I began in '71, so I was 46 at the time. Now if you're not an idiot and you begin writing novels at a fairly advanced age, you'll have certain standards and certain capabilities that make it unnecessary to waste a lot of time. And then maybe you can get into a straight line of development. So it oughtn't to surprise anyone if my novels lead from one emotional, mental, intellectual territory to another. I mean, the premise in art is development, I should think.

Look at it this way, in *Lion* I was writing the closest to autobiography, the way most first novelists do. I was more concerned with myself and with what was happening to me immediately in my life. In *Kleinzeit* I continued to be mostly wrapped up in myself and in the happenings in my own life. In *Turtle Diary* my view began to widen out a little bit and take in more, and widened out a whole lot more in *Biddley Walker* and *Pilgermann*. So it simply begins from a narrow beginning and takes in more as it goes.

PAUL KINCAID: Your first three novels in particular draw a lot on your personal experience, thought it's interesting to note that you don't use, for instance, your army experiences during the war as the subject matter for any of your novels.

RUSSELL HOBAN: I also don't use my American background very much. Since the beginning of my unlimited writing took place here, the beginning of my writing about men and women, it seems all of my people in one way or another originate either in England or out of my present experience since I've been here. I don't find myself able to use any of my childhood or my growing up, except indirectly. I mean, not the way James Farrell used his Chicago growing up in *Studs Lonnie*. I'm not able to do that at all.

PAUL KINCAID: Have you any idea why?

RUSSELL HOBAN: I don't know. I think the people in the arts attain focus in different ways and accumulation of event and experience and emotion. And because he's what would be called a social realist the natural outcome of it was that, as he got to an age where he began to reflect and to write, he wrote about what was happening to him. But I personally am not that kind of a continuous entity that Farrell is. My life has a very discontinuous feel. It feels as if it's had bursts of being here and there, but not as if there is a continuous accumulation of experience that led up to my writing. It was a sort of a jungle, and eventually I broke through to a clear space where I could write.

PAUL KINCAID: *Biddley Walker* marks quite a sudden change. You'd written three novels in three years, then suddenly there's a five year gap before *Biddley Walker*.

RUSSELL HOBAN: Well of course for me there wasn't a five year gap. You see, I finished *Turtle Diary* in 1974 and walked around wondering what would come next. Then, one evening in March, I was invited to the St. Augustine's Teacher's Centre in Canterbury. It was a rainy evening. I was invited there to give a talk and three people showed up, of whom I was one. It was explained to me that it was the end of term and the wells had been poisoned and there was plague, and various reasons why people didn't come out. The next day, my host, Dennis Saunders, very apologetically spent a lot of time showing me round Canterbury. He took me to the Cathedral and there I saw, in colour, a cut up into sections version of this.

(At this point Russell Hoban holds up a board on which, in black and white, is reproduced the medieval drawing of the legend of St. Eustace (from Canterbury Cathedral).)

What this is, is a reconstruction. At the time I went to Canterbury in 1974 what was visible on the wall where the painting of the St. Eustace legend had been was only the faintest earth-green tracery of some of the outline. A Dr. Tristram had done a reconstruction which was in three or four pieces along the wall, and the story of the legend was there.

People always ask me how I got the idea for *Biddley Walker*, and they ask about it as if an idea arrives like the cake at the conclusion of the putting together of a recipe, as if the whole can be explained as the sum of the parts. That isn't how it works. I was standing in front of this painting and it explained how Eustace had started out as a commander of cavalry for the Romans. He went hunting in the forest, and there he saw a stag. He got down on his knees and made a vow and got rid of all his worldly goods and with his wife and two sons set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Early on his wife was carried off by pirates. Then Eustace comes to a river, crosses it with one son, leaves that son on the far bank and comes back for the son on the near bank. But when he's in the middle he sees the one son carried off by a wolf and the other carried off by a lion. And here's poor Eustace in the middle of the river, treading water and hoping for the best.

It was at a time in my life when various of the people that I loved had gone off in various directions, and I suddenly had a strong fellow feeling for Eustace.

Also in my mind at the time, for no reason, was Mr. Punch. (Here, Russell Hoban produces the traditional head of Mr. Punch fitted on his finger.) This is a traditional English Punch head done by Fred Tinker of Gravesend. He's got a smiling face and a hooked nose, and he's got blue eyes, but not like Paul Newman, and he's not someone you'd leave the baby with without giving it second thoughts.

Now, I had Punch on my mind, and I stood there looking at this poor bastard in the middle of the river. All of a sudden what happened was what one hopes would happen

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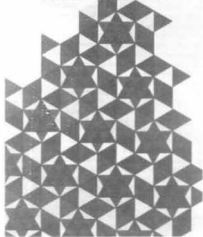
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EE. EVERYMAN FICTION

more often but it very rarely has happened to me, that I got that much out of the air at the beginning of the novel. But all of a sudden out of the air there came to me the idea of an England desolate from radiation 3,000 years or so after the end of the century, at which time one supposes civilisation had gone bust with a nuclear war. The people are living in semi-primitive settlements fenced in because of roving packs of killer dogs, and they long for the technology that we have now. They talk whistfully of boats in the air and pictures on the wind. Christianity is long since defunct and such religion as there is is carried on by travelling puppeteers who tell variations on what they call the Eusa story, which is didactic and which carries on the state line, what the establishment wants them to think and how it wants them to behave. That's more that I ever had to start with before. And it isn't accountable for by adding up the picture and the Mr. Punch. It's just one of those things.

PILGERMANN

Russell Hoban



Now I've had critics get impatient with me because in the forward to *Pilgermann* I said sometimes it seems to me there are such things as idea pheromones. Just turning the pages of a book you might pick up the ideas without reading the book. And they went Ha! Ha! Ha! listen to him. But the fact is that I do feel that way. I feel as if there are emanations if you like, there are ideas in the air, there are things wanting to get themselves told about and written about in one way or another. Somehow that offered itself to me, wanting to be the book *Riddley Walker*.

I got started on it, began making notes and everything that leads up to page one. In a few months I had a tentative page one, which changed later. The first two years were spent in writing 500 pages that were totally discarded. I discarded them because they weren't *Riddley Walker*. There were too many people running around too much space, too many events. There was too much external action, not enough internal action. By then a critical standard had established itself for the book so I could tell what was right and what was wrong for it. And I could tell it wanted to get very compact and concentrated and not try to be too many things, just be itself.

The language didn't happen as a result of planning, it didn't happen as a result of research either. I began to write it in straight English and little by little the straight English began to blur at the edges and slide

together in places and new little words would come in, I'd combine things, change existing English words. I saw what was happening and it seemed right, it seemed that these people wouldn't talk English the way the BBC talks English, and it seemed their language would encapsulate history and experience they knew nothing of. So they talk about 'blips' meaning anything symbolic, anything that referred to something else. They have no idea of such a thing as a radar screen. They use all kinds of words of which they don't know the meaning, and they combine words in quaint ways. And of course, they totally misinterpret the preserved story of the legend of St. Eustace as we misinterpret so many things.

PAUL KINCAID: Is that why it took five years to write?

RUSSELL HOBAN: It took five and a half years. I just had to get rid of everything that wasn't Riddley Walker.

PAUL KINCAID: In *Riddley Walker* there is a very passionate picture of post-atomic society. Was that in your mind when you wrote it, that it had a particularly powerful message?

RUSSELL HOBAN: I didn't have the idea of the message and then write the book around the message. As I was working on the book I found that I had mixed feelings about what you would call the message of it. Obviously I was aware of what I was writing about and I could find myself saying, well do you think it's going to happen this way? Do you think civilisation is going to go bust and people are going to go back to slogging around in the mud carrying spears? I always avoided answering that question. I'd say to myself, well maybe if they think about how it might be, it won't happen. So I suppose at the times when I did think about that element of it I perhaps thought of it as something of a cautionary tale.

PAUL KINCAID: When we first met we were talking about the short pieces you've had published in 'Granta' and the 'Fiction Magazine'. You were saying something along the lines that they're an attempt to find a new way of presenting a novel, or putting together a novel. Would you care to say a bit more about that?

RUSSELL HOBAN: Well, I'm in a state of formal discontent now. I do a lot of re-writing, so by the time I deliver a final typescript to my publisher I have all sorts of chunks of things lying about that have writing in them I like or ideas in them I like, but they don't seem to belong in the novel. They don't work cohesively with it. And I find myself more and more thinking that once you start at a certain point and go on a mind ramble, that almost everything is pertinent in one way or another, even if you don't know in what way it's pertinent. And perhaps some kind of a linked series of short things, a somewhat different montage of words and images from the usual novel, divided up into chapters all carrying on the same narrative, might even be a worthwhile way of putting a book together. I keep hoping that some sort of thing like that will come to me, and so far it hasn't.

What I hoped would be my next novel is currently in a state of disarray, standing around in a jumble of places while I have got involved in a number of things that are keeping me from it. It might be that as I settle back into my writing and stop rushing about displaying myself I'll find ways of using shorter elements and having a less apparently continuous sequence of things.

PAUL KINCAID: Can you tell us about your method of working?

RUSSELL HOBAN: My way of working is not what most people would think of as a writer's concentration. I have a desk that I built into a bay window. It's an asymmetrical desk which places me at the optimum angle for seeing the world which goes on past my window so I want to see what's going on in the rest of the world. I can see District

Line trains going past, I can see people walking about, and I can see crows nesting in the plane trees across the common. I always have my Drake R7 or one of my cassette decks going - either I'm listening to short wave broadcasts or I'm listening to tapes of short wave broadcasts. In various ways I keep things going that will make a little space between me and the line of thought that I'm on, so that I'm not bolted down to it and so that unexpected elements can come in and take me by surprise. And I always get up from my desk if any thought whatever comes to my mind. If I'm sitting at my desk working on Riddley Walker and suddenly it occurs to me that I can't remember what it was I read about the use of the squinch in Islamic architecture and refresh my memory on how the squinch was used.

My mind is only goo for what I use it for. It's a kind of ramshackled circuitry that needs a certain amount of maintenance, but as long as I faithfully maintain it and jump up to look at books whenever it prompts me that way, it seems so far to offer me continually new things to work with.

PAUL KINCAID: Ten hours a day is a hell of a long time to write.

RUSSELL HOBAN: Well, as I say, it's not what a lot of people would consider concentrated writing. It's ten hours a day desk time that is in one way or another connected with my literary output.

PAUL KINCAID: Don't you find the window distracts?

RUSSELL HOBAN: Yes it distracts, but I like being distracted.

Let's say for example, that I'm involved in narrating an action that seems to embody the idea that such and such an action will lead to disaster. Here's my person embarked on a disastrous train of action. I don't want to be so bolted down to it that something can't jump in and take me by surprise. Maybe embarking on a disastrous line of action means that instead of ending in the shit everything comes up roses in this case. So if suddenly the roses jump in unexpectedly, then I value that, because it made itself happen. It didn't arrive theoretically and predeterminedly.

PAUL KINCAID: Russell Hoban, thank you.



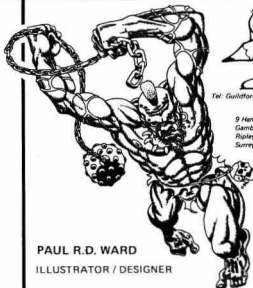
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* * *



PENNY PLAIN TWO PENCE COLOURED

SF Paperback Covers examined

When I bought my first paperbacks, in the opening years of the 1939 War, they came decently swathed in plain covers, colour-coded for instant recognition - orange for novels, green for detective thrillers, blue for current affairs...you knew where you were, for the appearance of the title under the Penguin logo virtually guaranteed quality.

Slowly, pictorial covers started to creep in from the U.S., mostly when the publishers' aim was to imply a spurious sexuality or violence in the plot. As I didn't read that sort of book, this failed to worry me at the time, but I still recall the sense of outrage I felt when such classics as *Faust* and *Dr. Faustus* appeared with garish pictorial wrappings.

Next came the psychedelic cover - brash and intrinsically meaningless, its aims to catch the eye and to imply the modern youth-image of the decade. Again there was some value in this - it enabled one automatically to buy or to reject, secure at least in one's interpretation of the basic style of the contents.

It's only in recent years that I have embarked on a determined attempt to build up a library of SF (with some fantasy, mostly humorous) in paperback, and after suffering for some time the blandishments of covers which failed to deliver readable contents, and the alternative of fine works whose initial appeal was blunted by appalling artwork on the covers, I started to dig a little more deeply into this whole question, my investigations really sparked by the discovery that there are few who actually collect the work of certain artists regardless of the contents of the book!

This is, I realise, made difficult by two factors: first the fact that in most cases cover artwork is unsigned and uncredited; secondly that publishers obviously treat cover art with the disgust it so often deserves. A harsh statement? - Then why do they so often change the covers when a new edition appears, the more so when in many cases none of the artwork used as any real bearing on the book's contents?

My investigation was suitably pragmatic: I dragged out the steps, climbed the Ken Lake paperback stacks, and starting carefully from "A" (for Douglas Adams) I scanned each cover in turn, noting its pictorial content under one of four heads. The categories formed themselves as I went along, and by the time I'd reached the 200th cover I was both confirmed in my findings - no new varieties had appeared, and percentages were stable throughout - and fed up, so I stopped.

The four categories I discovered were: covers whose artwork was totally meaningless from any pictorial viewpoint; covers where the pictorial content was actively misleading if one sought to guess the book's contents; covers where the artwork did contribute toward understanding the book's contents, without actually telling you anything about the plot (for example, a spaceship or a BEM at least indicating that the subject was SF), and finally, covers which really reminded me in some way of the book's plot, its characters of some specific aspect of its contents. The actual findings went like this:

Meaningless covers	22.5%
Misleading covers	22.5%
Covers indicate type of book	35%
Covers actually tie in with book's contents	20%

I confess it was the bottom line that saddened me most: can anyone tell me whether cover artists are actually illiterate, whether they just don't care, or whether their hubris is such that they expect books to be rewritten to fulfil their own fancies?

Two small comments: most books containing collections of shorts by a single author had covers which did at least indicate that they were SFnal; most fantasy books had covers which actually told you something meaningful about the plot or characters. And one possibly nitpicking final observation: few of the spaceships so skillfully delineated were either logical or spaceworthy.

Is it time for us to organise a "back to plain covers" movement, before we are totally bemused by publishers' stupidities and artists' baroque splendours?

Ken Lake

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1984

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

ORIS BAILEY

Another puff for *Empire of the Sun*, distinguished from all the others you've read only by the fact that it doesn't come from an unregenerate Ballard addict. For all the hypnotism of the prose, his attitudes have occasionally struck me as being pretentious. Scan the litany of the chapter headings to *Empire of the Sun* - 'The Abandoned Aerodrome', 'The Drained Swimming-pool', 'A Landscape of Airfields'. (Are these ur-images being established in their rightful place, or is Ballard retrospectively slotting them into the canon?). But *Empire of the Sun* is a triumph because young Jim lacks the tendency towards self-immolation of previous Ballard characters who have been pinned in such landscapes. You sense that Jim's story will not end in defeat. He is after all a child, with a child's perceptions, 'wondering if he had caught beri-beri or malaria or any other of the diseases that he had heard Dr. Ransome discussing with Mrs. Hug. He was curious to try out some new diseases...' With his inability to distinguish between 'right' and 'wrong', by stubbornly surviving in this hostile adult landscape, he reveals to us the diseases we all have caught.

And otherwise? Sladek's *The Lunatics of Terra* and Watson's *The Book of the River* are both immense fun - Kilworth's *A Theatre of Timesmiths* is his most substantial novel to date - and new works by Priest, Gray and Holdstock must enter the reckoning. What price 1984? Even from this short distance, the imaginative legacy looks considerable.

COLIN GREENLAND

The book of 1984 - *DIVINE ENDURANCE*. From its elegant cover to the last period of its serenely modulated prose, *Divine Endurance* is something sf should be and so rarely is - radical, intricate, rich and supremely intelligent. It's no hyperbole to say that Gwyneth Jones's first novel has the consummate artistry of Gene Wolfe, and if anything, more of a grip on the things that need to be said.

What else was there? Well, Angela Carter's *NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS* - more on that elsewhere this issue. Robert Holdstock's *MYTHAGO WOOD* - a wonderfully absorbing tale, profoundly traditional and remarkable original at the same time. Holdstock managed to expand his British SF Award-winning story of the same title without so much as a bump, which in this genre of creaky fix-ups and cobblings is an achievement in itself. *Mythago Wood* was the only book I read twice last year, and I don't have time to read things twice.

Alongside Holdstock's new interpretation of inner space, two books that considerably illuminate the eminence whose realm that is. J.G. Ballard's *EMPIRE OF THE SUN* really is the ultimate Ballard novel because it is (in a characteristically upside-down way) the first - a vivid (of course) unsettling (ditto) account of the making of a modern mind under terrifying pressures of physical deprivation, hallucinatory violence and mechanised glamour. Ballard's version of their pubertal origins make so much more sense of his obsessions, as does *RE/SEARCH 8/9*, a large-format, sharply-designed package displaying Ballard for the American reader. Assorted fiction and non-fictions,

fascinating interviews, miscellaneous quotes about and from, plus lots of intriguing and atmospheric photos - crystal landscapes, drained swimming-pools, enigmatic collages, the lot. It really is worth the seven quid (from David Pringle, 124 Osborne Road, Brighton, BN1 6LU).



JUDITH HANNA

The trouble with writing frequent reviews that most BSFA members have had the chance to read in various issues of *PI* and *Vector* was what I thought about the science fiction I read last year, good and bad. As years go, last year seems to have been a good year for new sf - but most of the impressive new works galore down at me from the Still To Be Read pile (John Calvin Batchelor's *The Founding of the People's Republic of Antarctica*, *Further Adventures of Halley's Comet*, *Delany's Stars in My Pocket*, Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*, Gwyneth Jones' *Divine Endurance*, Greenland's *Daybreak on a Distant Mountain*...) overshadowing the few books I've actually read (Priest's *The Glamour*, Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, ah er umm... Why have I read so shamefully little of the good sf coming out? Well, this was the year I discovered the magic of feeding Book Request forms filled in whenever I came across a tempting review or reference, into the local library which, in due course, spits up books like Christopher Chippendale's *Stonehenge Coming*, about all the different theories advanced through the ages to explain Stonehenge amounting to a history of archaeological thought in Britain, E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, J.F.C. Harrison's *The Common People*, and various works of feminist history, which together place the grassroots activism of the contemporary peace movement in a continuing tradition

of protest which over the centuries brought about manhood suffrage, votes for women, and much improvement in the lives of ordinary people in this and other countries, a story with all the broad sweep of a multi-volume fantasy saga, and much of the aliveness we seek in science fiction.

KEN LAKE

The Year Of The Film (and wasn't that disappointing?) produced for me some very strange experiences. There was *The Integral Trees*, the first Larry Niven book to bore me to tears - the discovery of the four (so far) Starblaze editions of Robert Asprin's fantasy series (*Another Fine Myth*, *Myth Conceptions*, *Myth Directions* and *HTE or Myth*) now appearing in UK mass editions and a source of constant joy to me - the sheer disappointment with which I read *Starblade Rising* (the more so since it was overpriced elsewhere) from David Brin, whose *Sundiver* I had found diverting and whose *The Practice Effect* I have actually returned to within the year - the Jerkiness and yet still the epic sweep of John Brunner's *The Crucible of Time* with its infuriating framework of nawkish prologue/epilogue, a practice to be deprecated in all of writers... all in all, yes, a year of rather more disappointments than pleasures.

1984 was the year in which Dave Langford one of the funnier books of the last decade, *The Leaky Establishment*, but also wowed my wife Jan so that she dropped all anti-fannish attitudes, signed on for three conventions and bought a copy of said book from its author and actually asked me to have it scribbled in by his own hand. Score one for Dave.

A. Bertram Chandler's *Kelly Country* revived my interest in that writer, though I confess it sounded to me as if it had been written by someone outside the sf field - probably because it was created for the mass market and not for keen students of time travel and alternate history like me. Still a damn good read, and of course one you can recommend to all your mundane friends.

Robert Rankin's trilogy-completing *East of Ealing* gave me a thoroughly enjoyable evening (including an hour giggling aloud on the tube, to the evident embarrassment of my fellow commuters), joining *The Antipope* and *The Brentford Triangle* on my 'to be read again sometime' shelves. (Don't confuse this with Robertson Davies' *The Brentford Trilogy*, the new title for three books now available in one binding, a great read for a long weekend in the country and really nothing to do with this article at all.)

I was disappointed, though not surprised, to see Donald Kingsbury's *Courtship Rite* (an excellent title, weirdly changed in the UK to *Getis* which says nothing to anyone) so firmly dismissed by other reviewers. True, it has some verbal infelicities - true, there are some loose ends which give the appearance of being errors in the ecology of the planet. But I confess I was gripped by this tale of cannibalism and a people's struggle against almost overwhelming odds. I found the different societal frameworks fascinating, the characters oddly moving and quite believable (perhaps I have learned to suspend my disbelief more successfully than the other reviewers), and I must say I'm looking forward to the next instalment.

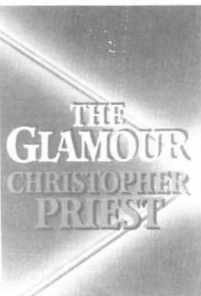
Ever since 1979, I have been dropping hints to fans about a near-future novel I discovered in hardcover in a left-wing book shop in Covent Garden. By J. Neil Schulman, its title is *Alongside Night*, subtitled *A Novel of 1999* (Crown Publisher's Inc., N.Y., ISBN 0-517-539233, \$8.95) and as basically I am totally fed up with downbeat decayed-inner-city visions you will understand that when I praise it I do so from a non-partisan viewpoint.

I was reminded of the book and its author by the serendipitous sight of *The Rainbow Cadenza*, a 8-format paperback from NEL which I spotted on Paddington station a month ago. I've not seen this reviewed or even listed by sf specialist bookshops, so here is my New Year gift

to you all - plenty of sex, some of it kinky, plenty of action (most of it believable), a book written around a musical theme and one that demands re-evaluation on several levels once you've read it and waited for its message to sink gradually into your subconscious. Publishers' Weekly called it 'suspenseful, wickedly funny and chilling' and that's about it - enjoy!

DAVE LANGFORD

You might expect that writing a monthly review column would leave you with the Best of '84 right there at your fingertip - not so, as the routine grot sent for review leaves no time for those goodies you have to buy yourself and an unread *Nights at the Circus* still stares at me balefully... on the 'must read again' list are Tom Disch's *The Businessman - a Tale of Terror* (not merely the horror spoof to end all spoofs, but truly horrible and strangely sad), William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (heading the Nebula nominations, its high-tech, high-squalor, high-speed, streetwise future transcends the wonky plot), Alasdair Gray's 1982, *Janine* (mindboggling in its energy and wit), and Chris Priest's *The Glamour* (unique chilling and disconcerting, as false notes in 'reality' accumulate until whole sections shift in retrospect - am still trying to decide whether the ending takes it too far). And in the name of eclecticism, a few more which I enjoyed... Ian Watson's *Book of the River and Book of the Stars*, for sheer outrageous sf fun. Diana Wynne Jones's *The Homeward Bounders*, another reminder that on shouldn't scorn the 'children's' list. Paul Preuss's *Broken Symmetries*, a laudable try at the kind of super-hard sf which seems unfashionable. A.K. Dewdney's *The Planiverse*, for a touch of that old 40s sense of wonder, brilliant two-dimensional science, thuddingly two-dimensional writing. Lastly, for sheer egotism and lots of jokes, my own *The Leaky Establishment*, which has an element of borderline sf even if bloody Geoff Rippington wouldn't let it be reviewed in his nice, purist Vector..



HELEN McNABB

Isn't it odd that someone has only to say 'write about the best books of 1984' for my mind to go blank. What did I read in 1984? All I could think of was Dick Francis' latest. When I began to remember what I'd read I realised how few were written in 1984, and of the ones I'd enjoyed how few I'd include in a 'best books' list, and to get annoyed

that I haven't yet read some of the ones I probably would have put on such a list like *Golden Witchbreed* or *Empire of the Sun*. However, when I'd eliminated all the books inappropriate to an sf list and all the books which were 'O.K. but...' only one author remained outstanding and he is hardly new to sf, but he was new to me (always meant to read him, but never quite got there before) and the two 1984 reprints which I read for the first time more than lived up to his reputation. The author is Philip K. Dick and the two books are 'Time out of Joint' and 'A Maze of Death'. They both stand out from everything else I read in originality, with a range of ideas that was exciting and stimulating in stories that were eminently readable books which can divorce me from the world as few and far between but these did it. By comparison most of the other sf books were pedestrian, the only others I feel inclined to nominate are *The Citadel of the Autarch* by Gene Wolfe which is really a 1983 book and is also the final volume of a quartet but is everything people have claimed for it, and possible *Eye of Cat* by Roger Zelazny which I am half way through and has already sent me to the library for a book on Navaho mythology. What they all do, what any really good book should do, is arouse interest, excitement, even astonishment, make a positive contribution to the life of the reader. The only shame is that it doesn't happen more often.

CHRIS MORGAN

Without doubt some of my selections will result in cries of 'Here's Morgan pushing books by his friends again' but I shall do my best to ignore such ill-mannered reactions (however true they may be). I found Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* a thoroughly enjoyable novel (which relieved me somewhat, because I couldn't think of anything good to say about a couple of his previous books). I liked this one because it manages to combine fast-moving action with superb myth-creation. Next comes David Langford's *The Leaky Establishment*, chosen because it maintains a high standard of humour from first page to last and is full of characters who talk just like Langford himself - it isn't, of course, sf. Neither is *The Great Steamboat Race* which occupied John Brunner for five years. It's a massive historical novel, worth reading for its character development alone, and is arguably Brunner's best book, yet has still to find a UK publisher. My fourth choice is *Survey of Modern Fantasy Writing* edited by Frank Magill, published in five large volumes (Salem Press, \$250.00), and containing more plot summaries and critical analyses than one could ever want - a marvellous work for dipping into. Indeed, I have a spare copy of this going cheaply, should any of you have succumbed to my persuasive words. Lastly comes a little book that is not only useful but brimming over with wit - *Driff's Guide to All the Second Hand and Antiquarian Bookshops*, written and published by a man of mystery who calls himself just Driffell (\$4.50 from Driffell, 14 Charing Cross Road, London WC2). However, the best books I read during 1984 were published in earlier years... but space (not to mention Vector's temporary editor) forbids.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

Most of my reading in 1984 was non-fiction - not out of any antipathy towards fiction, but simply because the non-fiction seemed more interesting. A review of mine in *Paperback Inferno* 49 named six of the books concerned - other recommended titles include Duncan Campbell's *The Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier*, the true and terrible history of how the UK has been turned into an American Military colony and how the British government either hasn't known hasn't cared or has deliberately lied about it to the British public - Jeff McMahan's *Reagan and the World*, a brief but comprehensive survey of the Cold War concerns that animated US foreign policy in the President's first term, from the FR aspects of the Geneva arms negotiations to the propping-up of brutal Third World dictatorships - and Marion Sheard's *The Theft of the Countryside*, which should disabuse everyone who reads it of the idea that farmers are somehow 'natural' conservationists. Never mind the various journals and magazines - 17 regular titles at the last count, not including *The Guardian*.

More relevant to this exercise was *Re/Search 8/9*, a special double issue of a Californian magazine (which in this case is more like a large format paperback) exclusively devoted to the life and work of J.G. Ballard. The full transcript of a nine-hour interview that for the most part covers entirely new ground, selected works of fiction and non-fiction, critical essays about his work, photographs by others inspired by it, collages by Ballard himself...

Thus to *Empire of the Sun*, which had to be content with *The Guardian* Fiction Prize when some tedious piece of academic wanking took the Booker away from it. The fictionalised autobiography of Ballard's own boyhood internment in wartime Shanghai, *Empire of the Sun* serves both to 'explain' the images and metaphors that move through his fiction and to demonstrate - by its avoidance of easy battlefield heroics and its concentration on the erosion and breakdown of civilised norms of behaviour - the totality and chaos of modern war. Its style becomes a little repetitive towards the end, but its power and vision never flags. It is, in short, a triumph.

Wually powerful and visionary is Rob Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*, which does his earth-and-stone obsessions not only better than ever before but also, I suspect, better than he ever can again. His blend of English myth and legend, his grasp of historical resonances, his affinity for the land and its old, forgotten ways, above all his term 'mythago' (surely the most original fantasy invention of the past decade), all make for a genuinely stunning and exciting novel. If it doesn't carry off the BSFA Award by a landslide then there is no damn justice.

And finally, David Langford's *The Leaky Establishment*, a magnificently funny tale of arcane and unlikely doings at a nuclear research centre, sudded with bizarre yet believable caricatures and autobiographical anecdotes of his own time at AMRE Aldermaston. There's at least one good line on every page, and if you find that you can't laugh because you think the subject is too serious then by God there must be something wrong with you. The novel is a riot - not great, but very, very good.

NIGEL RICHARDSON

1984 was a not a good year for science fiction. The only two books I enjoyed during the year that were recognisably sf were both paperback editions of books published earlier, these being Barrington Bayley's *The Zen Gun* and Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale*. Though Bayley's roots are in pulp and Helprin's in 'The New Yorker', both writers have created wildly apocalyptic novels that combine the comic with the cosmic, the baroque with the metaphysical. Even in a year with a decent crop of worthy competitors these books would have stood out for their sheer inventiveness and verve.

Beyond the genre walls, of course, things were more interesting. Alasdair Gray's 1982, Janine and Martin Amis's *Money* both read like superior sf in their portrayal of people trapped in chillingly recognisable worlds dominated by technology and pornography. In comparison with these vivid pictures of today, most novels about the future seemed as dated as drawing room comedies. The novel of the year, however, had to be J.G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*, a book of almost unbearable intensity and power that will haunt me, and most readers, I believe for a long time to come.

Finally, my non-fiction choice of the year would have to be Paul Davies's *God and the New Physics*, which, like Davies's other books, is a clear and unpatronising introduction to the latest theories in physics and cosmology. For anyone suffering a sense-of-wonder deficiency this book is required reading.

ANDY SAWYER

J.G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* is essential. It's considerably more approachable than much of his work, although the paradoxically rich bleakness and alienation is still there - even stronger because of its 'realistic' historical and personal setting.

Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* explores a more collective past - the power and danger of British myth. Yet again, I'm amazed by the resonance of the Mythic Fantasy behind so much of our literature, and the changes that can be ringed upon it by a writer so obviously in emotional touch with this heritage.

MYTHAGO WOOD

— A fantasy —



ROBERT HOLDSTOCK

I've recently discovered the wealth of Latin American writing which possesses similar qualities. In Mario Vargas Llosa's wonderfully comic *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* the narrator's love affair with his aunt alternates with increasingly frantic narratives from his colleague's radio soap operas. Someone recently told me that *sf* didn't sell in South America. But books like this seem to provide a completely satisfying native literature of the Fantastic.

Michael Moorcock has developed his own brand of 'magical realism'. *The Laughter of Carthage* is a far cry from his heroic romances, but not the least of its attractions is that the ironies and idealism presented in them find richer and more thoughtful parallels in his more ambitious recent work.

Finally a novel from a writer with no overt links with *sf* or fantasy. Yet interestingly enough, Keith Waterhouse's *Thinks* is in some ways closer to a traditional *SF/Fantasy* theme. We are enabled to overhear (subject to certain authorial conditions) the thoughts of a pathetic middle-aged trendy as we observe his encounters and confrontations. It's very clever, very funny, and made me uncomfortably aware of exactly what I was thinking for days afterwards!

MARTYN TAYLOR

Amid the narcissism of mainstream library 1984, Umberto Eco's shamefully delayed *The Name of the Rose* demonstrates the possibility of writing about writing and scholarship while remaining entertaining. Easily the best book of the year, it is written with wit, 'high style', erudition and genuinely muscular rather than merely decorative prose. All this by an Italian structuralist professor! Robert Holdstock's prose in *Mythago Wood* is muscular too, and as distinctively British as his subject matter - the mythic bones of Britain. Like Eco, Holdstock blends erudition with a strong plot and raises high expectations for the future. Ian Watson's future, however, may be better rewarded than his past. In *The Book of the River* he manages to graft his customary ideational profligacy to a storyline which doesn't make the brain ache. A deceptive book and, like Eco's and Holdstock's, one which rewards

repeated reading. Stuart Gordon's auctorial voice may be somewhat less distinctive but his ageing hippy fantasies tickle my funnybone and *Fire in the Abyss* is splendidly preposterous. Lastly Garry Kilworth's *A Theatre of Timesmiths*, shows his voice beginning to find its own range and timbre. A modest story perhaps, but finely written and attaining most of its ambitions.

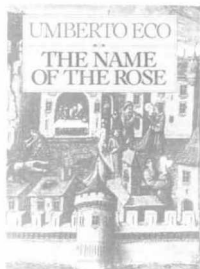
It is noticeable that while Holdstock's English is very firmly 'British' both Watson and Kilworth affect an American accent. Sad, that.

SUE THOMASON

The books I've chosen are *Lost Dorsai* by Gordon R. Dickson, *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco and *The Compass Rose* by Ursula K. LeGuin.

Why did I choose them; *Lost Dorsai* - I was buying all the Dorsai books I could lay my hands on, having recently discovered the series. I'm fascinated by the larger design behind the novels, the psychological fragmentation and recombination of humanity. I understand there are some historical novels and present-day novels in the same sequence, working out the same design. I'm now looking for them too.

The Name of the Rose - Two very good friends, whose judgement I trust, mentioned (in letters) reading an enjoying this book. Neither of them told me to read it. They just seemed to have enjoyed it a good deal themselves. I saw it in a bookshop and bought it on spec as a Christmas present to myself (unusual - I very rarely buy books I haven't already read). They were right. It's super.



The Compass Rose - I suspect I'm probably guilty of LeGuin-worship. She's on of the very, very few writers whose name alone would sell a book to me (I've picked up some extraordinary rubbish that way). I'd read two thirds of *The Compass Rose* in hardback, a year or so ago, in Gateshead library, waiting for a job interview (I didn't get the job). Then while visiting a friend in Oxford, I wandered into Blackwell's, dived myself over the new illustrated Hobbit for an hour or so (another book I'd like but can't afford), then noticed the paperback shelves. There it was, *The Compass Rose*, complete with rather unattractive blue blobby cover. I bought it, and found to

my delight, that I'd missed reading the best story of the collection in Gateshead, because it came at the end. Now, if anyone can point me in the direction of 'The Language of the Night' (a book I've been after for years), I'll be happy.

I don't make any claims for these books being 'great literature'. But I've enjoyed reading them intensely. They're not the best books of 1984, and they're possibly not the books I've enjoyed reading most. (I find books improve with keeping and re-reading. I'm approaching 100 readings of several favourite titles). I'm not sure I'm not sure I'd recommend them to YOU. You have your own tastes to cater for. But they're here because they pleased me; if my writing ever does as much for somebody else I shall be well satisfied.

PAUL KINCAID

I only realised what a good year 1984 had been when I came to make my selection of favourite books of the year, and realised what I should have to leave out. Brian Aldiss's collection of spare and elegant stories, *Seasons in Flight*, for instance, and Umberto Eco's brilliant *The Name of the Rose* which I finally and reluctantly eliminated only on the technicality that it is really a book of 1983. With those to one side, what did I choose? Well firstly *Empire of the Sun* by J.G. Ballard. Obvious, you think? Not so. I am most certainly not a fan of Ballard's work. I may provoke a shocked response with the confession that this is the first of his novels that I've managed to read, and I've found very little to stir me in his short stories. But this touches all sorts of chords, and despite its harrowing nature I was genuinely sorry to finish the novel. A book of real and haunting beauty, in a perverse sort of way. In strictly alphabetical order, my next choice is *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter, again a writer I keep feeling I should like more than I do. But this rumbustious, picaresque romp won me over from the word go. *Fevvers* is one of the great characters of fiction, flighty (in more senses than one - but this is a book that seems to demand puns in response), unreliable, larger than life, and absolutely wonderful. In contrast to these two, Alasdair Gray is a writer of whose work I am hopelessly enamoured, and 1982, Janine thrilled and captivated me from the word go. I wondered how on earth he was going to follow *Lauren*, and this is the answer.

Arousing, funny, daring, humane, and full of a remarkable joie de vivre that is especially surprising when you consider the beaten and depressed character of his 'hero'. Like most really great books, 1982, Janine works its magic by being fun to read. None of these books fit any strict definition of science fiction, though all challenge our notion of reality, and make bold in ways that I firmly believe science fiction should be following (if not leading the way, which it isn't). My next choice, however, does lie within the old familiar bounds, though it does things to those bounds that may make some purists uncomfortable. *Mythago Wood* by Robert Holdstock is one of the most astounding books I've read in a long time. This is one of those satisfying occasions when a critic can say that the promise he spotted long ago in a first or second novel has finally been fulfilled. All of Holdstock's obsessions have come together in a book that is a pleasure to read on so many levels: the writing is superbly assured, the ideas are fresh and enthralling, and the working out British myth is something that reaches to something deep seated inside me. Also science fiction, though also pushing at the boundaries, is *The Glamour* by Christopher Priest, a book I believe to be every bit as skilled and as original as its predecessor, *The Affirmation*. Like that book, *The Glamour* essentially concerns the nature of fiction and the creative process, but again it comes at it from an odd and satisfying angle. The ending of the Cape edition sadly left the rest of the book down, but I have seen a manuscript version of a revised ending which solves most of the problems I mention in my review elsewhere in this issue.



1982
JANINE
ALASDAIR GRAY



SPACE TRAVEL IS UTTER BILGE

In June 1984 the British Post Office issued a set of four stamps honouring the centenary of the Greenwich Meridian which passes through the back garden of the Astronomer Royal.

At the P.O. press preview of these stamps, I was able to interview this gentleman, Prof. F.Graham Smith. I did so with some diffidence, as I did not want to upset him, but honestly forced me to put to him, for his expert judgement, some earlier Astronomer Royal's comments on space travel.

It was in 1956 that Dr. Richard Woolley, then newly appointed to this august position, announced that Space travel "is utter bilge". The following year, Sputnik 1 spun dizzily around the Earth infuriating every patriotic westerner and driving to a frenzy those who had believed the experts' denunciation of what Prof. A.W.Bickerton in 1926 called "this foolish idea".

Of course there have been subsequent attempts to whitewash the experts. Media guru Patrick Moore "excused" Woolley because, he said, he was under great pressure from newsmen at the time. It was Moore who in 1958 informed the world that sending a rocket around the moon was "highly over-optimistic" (it happened just a year later).

Hence my decision to ensure that Prof. Smith was not "under pressure" - he was, in fact, ensconced in the corner of the room with a drink and a plate of quite reasonable buffet nosh, having given the assembled hacks and P.O. officials the benefit of a warmly welcoming speech about the new stamps. The result of my laid-back approach was, I confess, not astonishing: Prof. Smith is a pleasant and wily interviewee, well warned about wild statements. I recalled to myself that when, on an earlier occasion, I had twitted Dr.Woolley on his "bililge" comment, he had irascibly reacted by claiming that "I was, of course, referring to interplanetary flight, which is quite outside the realms of possibility."

That was 27 years ago, and when I innocently put the same "bilge" query to Prof. Smith, he carefully explained to me, as to a small child in search of an explanation of the Trine Godhead, that "Of course, he was really talking about interstellar flight." I take this as a firm pointer to the first interstellar spaceship's departure by 2011 at the latest - and that's from the horse's mouth!

Prof. Smith continued to maintain that $e=mc^2$ effectively precludes man from ever mastering interstellar flight, and smiled away my mention of the generation ship without comment. Not wanting him to feel under pressure from newsmen, I tried a different tack: where does he stand on space flight in general?

"Well, that is really not for me to say. It's all a matter for government nowadays; my task is to observe the heavens and deduce things from observations made by satellites and probes."

I rather liked this adroit sidestep, and tried to raise the question of costs. At last I hit a paydirt - up to a point - for while making it clear that he was in no way advocating or commenting on any ideas of unilateral disarmament, Prof. Smith did go on record with this statement:

"If we could persuade them (i.e. government) to release just a little - and it would only have to be a very little of the money used for the arms race, and apply it to space exploration, we could have valuable observations from all over the solar system very speedily. Really, it's just the lack of money that is slowing us down."

Perhaps if we all went and bought vast quantities of the Greenwich Meridian stamps, we could raise enough cash for the government to send Prof. Smith to live permanently on the Moon - now there's a really sensible place for Greenwich Observatory.

Or perhaps the government would prefer to send me there - and that would please a sizeable slice of fandom, too, I guess.

Ken Lake



Keith Roberts

A TIMELESS DANCE

Keith Roberts' PAVANE

Re-examined: L.J.Hurst

Pavane is now published in full for the first time in Britain. Originally published in 1968, it is probably the best known British alternative history. Beginning with a Prologue that describes the assassination of Elizabeth the First, the victory of the Spanish Armada, and the restitution of Roman Catholicism, it continues in a series of short stories set between about 1950 and 1980, linked by locals (Dorset) and references to the growing traction engine haulage business of the Strange family.

As a result of conscious rule by Rome, society is feudal, industrial growth is limited, technology has not developed under Catholicism as it would do under Protestant regimes. The lower classes are prevented from moving about the country by the Papal Bull, "Petroleum Veto". The Inquisition is still at work (one of the stories 'Brother John', describes the uprising caused by this) but technology is sometimes smuggled in. This smuggling, of radios, is described in 'The White Boat', previously excluded from British editions.

Against the developments represented by wireless communication, the rule of Rome is seen in other lines of development: not railways but traction engine drawn caravans cross the countryside between walled towns, harried at times by bandit gangs. There is no police force, only the military; long distance communication is done by relays of semaphore towers, which are under the control of the Guild of Signallers, a powerful body almost independent of the church.

It is at this point that we begin to notice that more things have changed in this alternative history than the non-appearance of the Protestant Kings. One of the Guilds' signal stations is described: "Silbury 973 was part of the C class chain that ran from near Londinium, from the great relay station at Pontes, along the line of the road to Aquae Sulis: place names have changed. Rather than continuing in development, names have reverted to the Roman. Although the official language is Latin, English being subsidiary and itself subject to class differences, this is not how British place names seemed to be developing in the sixteenth century. Soon it becomes clear that there is a greater difference between the present world and the world of *Pavane*, than the divergence of 1988 could explain. The forces of the church seem at odds with the tendencies of the Counter-Reformation: the phantasmagoric "Fifth Measure", "The White Boat", with a peasant girl at ease on a yacht, with its sea toilet, wearing "jeans and an old sweater", seems almost to cross into our own time; and finally we learn why the world does not seem to have progressed from 1988 as a knowledge of history suggests it would have, had Elizabeth died: this is not an alternative history but a future history: "The ways of the Church were mysterious, her policies never plain. The Popes knew, as knew, that given electricity men would be drawn to the atom. That given fission, they would come to fusion. Because once, beyond our time, beyond all memories of men, there was a great civilisation. There was a coming, a Death and Resurrection, an Armada, And a Burning, an Armageddon." As in Walter M. Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz*, the Roman Catholic Church is the repository of knowledge: "The church knew there was no halting Progress; but slowing it, slowing it even by half a century, giving man time to reach a little higher toward true Reason: that was the gift she gave this world".

Pavane is thus more like Keith Roberts' other Dorset fantasy, *The Chalk Giants*, than it is like his own 'Welshnachtabend' (Christmas Eve), or even Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*.

Pavane is a book of images, the writing is elusive. Although about the end of Papal Rule, it is set in an obscure area, and only once deals directly with the issues that bring the end about. The new American Independence that ensures Papal Rule is broken is mentioned only in the Coda, for instance. Similarly, 'The Signaller' is an account of a boy joining the Guild given as he lies dying from a wild cat's attack, in which we are told of the Guild's importance, but the boy, Rafe Bigland, does nothing by which history progresses. The Strange family reappear in the series, hauliers who are in the process of expanding, taking over rivals, or driving rivals out of business: a daughter marries a feudal Lord of Purbeck but all of this is without any psychological investigation,

the last Lady of Purbeck rebels against Rome and the King, but her rebellion is described again without investigation. Keith Roberts externalises all of this, especially into descriptions of landscape, but also into accounts of, for instance, mythology or working practice. In 'Brother John', about a Monk driven to lead a rebellion after seeing the work of the Inquisition, this externalisation is clear: "Brother John ignored the skinning; or perhaps he never saw. Riding now, driven forward by the noises and the noises in his brain, he reached the cliff edge. Below was a waste of water, wild and white, tumbling into the horizon and beyond. Here were no rollers; the hurricane into which a man might lean, flung the tops off the waves. From a score of run offs the cliffs spouted water into the bay; but the streams were caught by the wind and held, flung bodily back over the land, wavering upwards arcs that fed a ruffled lake of flood". This is not what John saw ('perhaps he never saw') nor have the following crowd arrived to see it: it is the author's image, pre-empting the battle to which John's followers will succumb. This cross reference is evident in the language where words are used abnormally - adjectives as nouns, passive verbs as active etc. The story often relies on images like this to carry it, the events are not always clear. In the middle stories, 'Lords and Ladies' and 'The White Boat', this is especially true. In 'The White Boat' it is difficult to tell whether the yacht is being used as a metaphor for technical progress, whether there is a great technical hiatus between the Catholic and Free world, or whether some sort of time travel is supposed. Many like this nebulous narrative style: *Pavane* has been called "Moody, eloquent, elegiac", and an F & SF review said the novel "has that lyrical meaning that is so easy to feel and so hard to explain". However, it then means that two other subjects, which are clearly meant to be raised in the novel, are less clear, and less available for discussion.

The two subjects are the connection of economics and religion, and the Philosophy of History. Tom Shippey has pointed out that one of the influences on *Pavane* is R.H. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Tawney showed that from the eleventh century onwards, Churchmen had to take increased interest in, and control of, three areas: usury (money lending), inflation, and land ownership and distribution. Changes in agriculture, wider reaching trade that required more capital, the early appearance of industrial development, all of these had massive social consequences, and the Church tried to control them: money lending for profit is forbidden in the Bible but as monasteries and churches grew richer they began to lend for profit. Churchmen began to ask not "How can usury be stopped?" but "What is a just interest rate?" (just as they stopped trying to prevent war, and instead started teaching "just war"). Similarly, but less clearly, religious reformation and social change began to be taught by Priests who stirred up society and were then punished by Rome. Such Priests were often identified with new economic or industrial interests: John Huss, for instance, who taught the English John Wycliffe, was very popular with the growing ranks of silver miners in Bohemia. When national interests are tied to religion, religion can give a lot of justification to government practices. It can also be a hindrance: Henry the Eighth got a large income from the sale of monastery lands, and a great many people also got involved in land speculation. On the other hand, just before Philip of Spain sent off the Armada he took off all the doctors and replaced them by additional Priests. As a generalisation, Protestantism appeared with and helped justify industrial and monetary progress and reorganisation, the tendency of Catholicism was, intentionally or not, to hinder it. The only major economic development that originated in Catholicism was double entry book keeping.

As *Pavane* progresses we see the development of Strange and Sons, Hauliers. They overtake their rivals, and reach a local monopoly. Ruthless in their dealings, one daughter marries into the aristocracy, and her child leads a rebellion against Romeover economic tribute. There is little evidence of church intervention in the Strange business, little evidence of the Strange family considering charging the "just price". Now they overtake their business rivals, how their capital is raised for expansion is never made clear. Some of the mentions of economic organisation are at odds with medieval practice: 'Eli Strange' had never believed in overstaffing, he'd worked his few men hard for the wages he paid, and got

his money's worth out of them. Though how long that would go on was anybody's guess with the Guild of Mechanics stiffening its attitude all the time". The Guild here seems to be thought of as a trade union, which they never were, and the Guild's practices are not those, say, of the Signallers. But it does show the increasing separation of Masters and Journeymen, which preceded the division into capitalists and proletarians. The Church, of course, as the Code explains is actively intervening (although it is never seen), and the transition that will occur will occur much faster. Although not a clear exposition, it is an interesting introduction to Tawney.

Rafe Bigland's childhood, and the social stratification, from which the Guild offers him an escape, are also well detailed.

The second point about *Pavane* is the Philosophy of History: in other words, must things reoccur? Here, *Pavane* seems at its weakest: how much oil would be available to a feudal economy, that would necessitate the Papal Bull 'Petroleum Veto'? 'The White Boat' opens in a bay black with coal that was never mined. There are no scarcities of metals or other materials. *Pavane* is not set in a scarcity world. Where have these elements come from, if the society destroyed by fission used them as ours does?

How can an organisation like the Popes' have ensured that ages repeat themselves, so that even Kings and Queens 'have the same names as those of aens before? It is here that *Pavane's* structure shows its weaknesses. The Code is sometimes ignored, so that people do not mention the repetition. In

the light of it, the novel's philosophy seems much weaker, and other features (like the numerest spoken by the lower classes) more dubious. Ignore it, regard events as occurring once only, and the novel seems more accurate.

Like *The Man in the High Castle*, events, their sequence, and their causes are not stated directly. But 'The Grasshopper Lies Heavy', the novel within Dick's novel, is discussed as though it were a philosophical-historical work, even though, from the extracts quoted, it is a novel about "the boy Eric" in the shell of Berlin... and Karl viewing Hitler's corpse. *The High Castle's* characters discuss only how historical events could change, they do not discuss characterisation. And this returns us to the problem of what an alternative history is about: characters in a changed world, or how history is not the same. No matter what characters are invented (and the characters of *The High Castle* are far more rounded than *Pavane*, possibly because of Keith Roberts' opaque style), one ends discussing the ideas. Both Philip K Dick and Keith Roberts give major roles to individuals, their lives or their deaths; in the end they ignore movements in history. Ironically Hitler had the same view of the importance of individuals, and he was finally proved wrong. Hitler had great hopes that Roosevelt's death in 1944 would cause the allies to collapse, as Frederick the Great was saved by the death of Louis of France. History did not repeat itself, no individual was so important. The novel, which has to be about individual people cannot sustain a full Philosophy of History. It can, though, show some of its trends at work. On these, religion and society, *Pavane* is very successful, as a generalisation on reoccurrence it is less so.

BOOK REVIEWS



NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS - Angela Carter.

Chatto & Windus, 1984, 295pp, £8.95.

Reviewed by Colin Greenland

Jack Walsler is a globetrotting young Californian journalist. He is urbane, and rather vacuous: his sensibilities are dormant. To awaken them he has to change his occupation, twice. First he becomes a circus clown; then a Siberian shaman. The first he does for love, the second absent-mindedly. The inspiration, object and overseer of Walsler's transforming passion is Sophie, a cockney seraph, also known as FEVERS. It is 1899. FEVERS is the toast of half the known world. She is six foot two, with a six foot wingspan. This is not a conventional novel.

Angela Carter is not a conventional writer. Her idiosyncrasy is spontaneous, engaging and unnerving, but also highly principled. She is impatient with conventional wisdom. Her fiction is subversive literature. Angela Carter, thank God, is scrappy, and she is fun.

So is FEVERS. FEVERS talks loud and long, first in monologue and later as narrator. FEVERS is a bit glib. In fact, FEVERS is glib as all hell. We cannot altogether trust everything FEVERS tells us. At the last, she warns Jack Walsler: "You mustn't believe what you write in the papers!" But the wings at least are real enough, however suspicious Walsler may have been to begin with. Of course, it's in FEVERS's interest to promote public scepticism. Like the Elephant Man, if she's simply a clinical anomaly, the Albatross Woman, she's a freak. But if she's a riddle, if she might be a fake, then she's a star. "Is she fact or is she fiction?" is FEVERS's slogan, scrawled across the poster of her by Toulouse-Lautrec - "some Frog dwarf," as she remembers him.

Or pretends to. For FEVERS may be brassy, sentimental and crass, with the appetite of a carthorse and a commensurate desire for money. But she is also, once you get to know her, extremely well-educated, an eloquent and forthright political philosopher, thoroughly conversant in the analysis of class struggle. These accomplishments she owes to the influence of her manager, dresser, foster-mother and constant companion Lizzie. Lizzie is an anarchist and a witch. Lizzie conducts a clandestine correspondence with Karl Marx, in exile in the British Library. Her despatches, written in invisible ink and posted with those of the unwitting Walsler, tell him how things are going in Russia. Where she and FEVERS are touring with the bombastic and opportunistic American showman, Col. Kearney. "Tuskers across the tundra!"

It's some indication of the richness and variety of *Nights at the Circus* that I can pull out this many plums to entice you with, and not diminish its delights one whit. Angela Carter is a prima donna of fantastic fiction, now at the peak of her talents. Her range is remarkable, her timing acute and her tone exhilarating. Anyone who enjoys seeing an imagination working full tilt should read *Nights at the Circus*. Anyone who believes fiction should challenge expectation should stand up and cheer.

Does she believe what she writes in the papers? Is she fact, or is she fiction? Where does passionate conviction fit in with all this titillating ambiguity? One tradition Carter is a sucker for, and that's the traditional! With all her canny irony, her existential doubt, her political discontent, she candidly enjoys the world and being in it. She continually affirms a basic human goodness, celebrating it in enduring social and narrative forms, the customary rewards, couplings and dances. Inevitably, certain shades of socialist feminism are antagonistic to this, and doubt Carter's integrity. Romantic

humanism is incompatible with political consciousness, they argue, never realising that that's exactly the point. Glum people disapprove of Angela Carter.

Sometimes FEVERS is an allegory, a symbol of the New Woman. Her first patroness tells her: "I think you must be the pure child of the century that just now is waiting in the wings, the New Age in which no women will be bound down to the ground." It's not a comfortable role to live with. As Lizzie observes: "You never existed before. There's nobody to say what you should do or how you should do it. You are Year One." Jack Walsley is more brusque. "She looks wonderful, but she doesn't look right." Sometimes FEVERS is just a kid.

Sometimes FEVERS is a rare avis, the Albatross Woman. "Like the duck-billed platypus, half the people who clap eyes on me don't believe what they see and the other half thinks they're seeing things." FEVERS is a fiction a creature made of words, made up. She is inconsistent, just as her book is inconsistent. Lizzie's lost thaumaturgic handbag, mourned on p.226, is inexplicably present for a moment on p.228. Characters are arbitrarily introduced, abruptly written out. Even the shape of the book is like a circus show. The Prince of Wales and his paunch, the Princess of Abyssinia and her tigers, Toussaint the Mouthless Manservant, all make their appearances, perform their comic or tragic turns, then disappear completely. The style is entertainingly acrobatic. "I get bored quickly," Carter told an audience at the ICA, with barely a trace of apology. But don't be fooled: she has the concentration and stamina of a trapeze artist. When did you last see Anita Brookner or Anne McCaffrey walk a tightrope?

THE INTEGRAL TREES - Larry Niven

Mardondale & Co., 1983, 240pp., £8.95

Reviewed by Ken Lake

Hands up all those who normally start a book at the back. Hands up anyone, then, who when finding he cannot keep all the characters of a novel in his head, or cannot grasp the multitudes of handmade pseudotechnical terms shoe-horned into the text by a manic SF writer, turns to the back of the book for guidance.

I thought so. To be honest, I'm pretty fed up with writers who are so handfast that they need a dramatis personae or glossary even at the front of their books. To admit the need, and then hide it at the back end of the book, strikes me as pretty pointless, not to say frustrating when you have manfully fought your way through the myriad distorted Earth-names and the serried ranks of imitation technical terms or coy Earth-name borrowings for the flora, fauna and assorted physical aspects of the author's invented world.

Examples: there's a machine that acts like God, and hovers in space keeping a rather desultory eye on mankind below; it's named *Discipline*; the humans catch an immense animal which uses its prehensile nose as a weapon and flies with its ears (there's with its wings?); I begin to feel someone's making a dumb-o of me, and of course another tribe is discovered which just happens to call the creature a dumb-o. Funny?

Why *Integral* trees, you ask? Simple: they are shaped like integration symbols. Everyone should have realised that of course. They bend right at the top, left at the bottom - and they float in a torus (doughnut) so you'd get gas way up there in a sky over a planet whose surface we never touch. Also, of course, the trees (sole source of *Lebensraum* for the inhabitants) are integral to the story. Funny again?

SF appears to be going through another of its phases: this one is tied into biology. Remember when authors used to craft their worlds with generally understood physical eccentricities tailored to astronomical circumstances with which most of us, at a pinch, could come to terms? Now, authors invent truly strange bishperies with incredible veneration, and let the humans live around the edges of their creations.

There's a second major shift, too, away from the generally appealing concept of man-as-we-know-him face to face with honest-to-God aliens of intellect. Now we get post-holocaust man, mutated man, and most frequently (and depressingly) man marooned in a hostile environment, bereft of his technology and his cultural inheritance - barbarism subman or umman, with whom we are asked to empathise but who too often can call forth nothing more than a vague sympathy from the reader.

Now hang this mutated Tarzan with half a dozen comrades - mostly damaged in some way, legless or vertiginous or dwarfed - in a rapidly disintegrating integral tree, face him with the usual run of straight adventure gimmicks, wrap it in an occasional cocoon of pseudo-scientific mumbojumbo, and you have some idea of the content and style of this work.

It's a great pity: Larry Niven has long been one of those authors I have admired for his adherence to straight SF of the worldshattering kind. His 'Tales of Known Space' series, running from the 1966 *The World of Ptolemy* to the two 1980 books, *The Ringworld Engineers* and *The Patchwork Girl*, may have incurred the giggles of the modernists, but they were in every way a damn good read, challenging, convoluted, full of hard SF concepts and with a storyline that seemed to grip one's attention.

His other works - for example *Dream Park* (1981) and *Inferno* (1976), both written with collaborators - have tended to the picaresque but, for all that, have also provided a fairly gripping story line in an intriguing ambience. The present work, however, has leapt so far out of our conceptual parameters that one finds it hard to believe in the world he has crafted. And when the reader can't 'feel' himself into the author's world, all is lost.

Try ing to see into a writer's psyche is always dangerous, but it may not be too far from the truth to propose Niven's suctorial analysis thus: first we have the straight SF tales, leading to his *Known Space* oeuvre; to escape this he turned to fantasy (*The Flying Sorcerers*, *The Magic Goes Away*) in that strange reaction against 'typecasting' which is so ludicrous when the 'type' breeds true and creates a demand for real fans; then he found invention running thin and fell into the hands of collaborators - David Gerrold, Jerry Pournelle, Steven Barnes - for whom he provided careful crafting while they led him into strange waters.

The Integral Trees, then, is a failed return to individually designed plotting - failed because it turns its back on what Niven does best, and then tries to disguise its own shortcomings by wrapping them in mysticism and confusion. Look, as a writer I was taught always to open a story with something that caught the reader's attention and interest; my task was to persuade him to stay with me and read on. Niven prefaces his book with five diagrams which, without the information buried in the story, are both meaningless and offputting. He follows this with a Prologue entitled *Discipline* (hardly a turn-on) which opens with the words "It was taking too long, much longer than he had expected ... But it was taking too long!"

From there on in, it's every reader for himself. Pick up the clues where you can, wait for the occasional explanatory chapters, stuck out like plums into the pudding of his tale, to tell you what the hell you are reading about, and meanwhile follow the simplistic, unpatterned, basically uninteresting story of sub-Tarzan and his cohort as they fight their way through oddities seemingly invented solely to save Niven from the onerous task of actually thinking up a meaningful plot.

It's perhaps significant that the only writer quoted by the blurb-writer is Jerry Pournelle, who must owe Niven many a debt of gratitude for helping him sell space opera as real SF. When Pournelle tells us that *The Integral Trees* is "the most imaginative work I've seen in the last five years" we are forced

to ask ourselves just what he has been reading, how he defines 'imaginative' and how he rates Niven's Ringworld Engineers and Dream Park, both written within the period of time and both, no matter how formula-ridden, far superior in content and style to this latest confection.

Me, I'm going back to Known Space for a good read!

FUZZIES AND OTHER PEOPLE - H. Beam Piper

Ace Books, 1984, \$2.95

THE RETURN OF RETIEF - Keith Laumer

Baen, 1984, \$2.95

Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

This last autumn two new books were published that continue series begun in the 60s. The Return of Retief is a short novel published with a "bonus Retief novella" that is actually an unacknowledged reprint from Retief: Diplomat at Arms. Fuzzies and Other People was written by Piper and rejected by Avon in 1963, resulting in his bankruptcy and suicide. It was lost until (according to the cover) "it was discovered in a trunk in basement in Pennsylvania". Ace have been reprinting all of Piper's works with detailed (if repetitive) critical prefaces and promises of large rewards for the location of this manuscript. Surprisingly there is no introduction to this book and no other details of its discovery, nor details of any reward paid. But it shows all of Piper's recognisable style and limitations - with just a hint of improvement.

Fuzzies and Other People effectively ends the Fuzzy series. At the end of Fuzzy Spawns the fuzzies had been saved from capitalist exploiters intent on genocide. Fuzzies and Other People shows the problems of putting the exploiters on trial: although it took people years to discover fuzzy intelligence, the galactic judiciary has a veridicator capable of recognising when humans and other species are telling the truth and when not (it works on brainwaves). But the fuzzies are so innocent they cannot tell a lie, not even to show that the machine is working and would recognise when they are telling the truth. So, to get a trial and judgement, a way of showing that a fuzzy can lie, so the machine can discriminate, has to be found. That problem is half the novel, the other half, running parallel, describes a fuzzy clan in its struggle for existence and co-existence. The lie problem is solved by the clan in a way that suggests it is an evolutionary step, and the novel ends happily for all but the villains. Or rather that is how Piper presents it.

I've always wondered why the Fuzzy books are not sold as juveniles. The sentimentality of the style and imagination is so strong that surely no adult could bear it. There are other strains but they are not so obvious and I doubt if many readers are interested in them.

Fuzzies and Other People is probable Piper writing as best he could. The Return of Retief is dreadful - almost plotless, padded and with only a gesture at the humour that makes Retief at his best so good: Return of Retief is Keith Laumer in the pits. The Retief series is marked by a strong sense of black humour, understated threat, and a vital pessimism that anything done by authorities is for the worst, while Retief and other individuals are pretty decent and self-controlled. In the latest book Retief shows no control, little care and he is sometimes worse than his enemies. For instance, after one of his prisoners has tied himself up, "(Retief) stepped in close and slammed a pile-driver hand to the Ree's pinkish nerve plexus, at which Slive instantly doubled over hard in irresistible reflex response." Compare that gratuitous violence from a thinking hero, written in a clichéd style, with a previous encounter with

a gun-toting alien (from Retief's Ransom): "Hey, you little aliens all look alike to me, but it seems you got a little different look to you somehow." He studied Retief, comparing him with Wilth and the guard with quick side-glances. "Two legs," he muttered. "One torso, one head - ah! Got it! They got five eyes each, and you only got two, kind of sunk-in ones." Hoe come?" "Birth defect," Retief said. "That kind of wit has disappeared from Return of Retief along with everything else.

Both Piper and Laumer are writing about The Stranger: no matter where Retief went or who or what he met he was never a xenophobe. Even his warped implacable enemies, the reptilian Groci, were treated with consideration but that has disappeared. Retief, the cosmic diplomat, has never been simply an allegory of U.S. diplomatic desires before now but that distance seems to have disappeared, along with changes in U.S. government. Similarly Piper has to treat the fuzzies sentimentally because he has to maintain the economic inequalities of his galaxy: the exploiting corporations are prevented from genocide but they get the mining leases anyway. The trustees for the fuzzies accept low royalties - but while they have fought for the fuzzies to get a legal hearing to pronounce them sentient, there is no suggestion that they will do anything to stop the fuzzies having to sell their planet's products to the corporation, or to prevent similar attempts at genocide on other worlds. Fuzzies are teddy bears given life on the proviso that they do not muck the nursery. Retief has retarded to a child on a wrecking spree. Piper saw the fuzzies end as best he could, his imagination limited: I hope that Keith Laumer can do better than this in another book, it would be a rotten way to say goodbye to Retief.

THE WIZARDS OF ARMAGEDDON - Fred Kaplan

Simon & Schuster, 420pp.

Reviewed by Tom Jones

This is a history book. It covers the period from the end of the second world war to the mid-point of the first Reagan administration. What should make it of interest to SF readers, and in fact anyone who is interested in today's world, is that its subject is the operational analysis and systems analysis work undertaken in the USA, particularly as it relates to nuclear weapons.

Kaplan is a science writer and he has adapted his article writing style well to this much longer work. Normally I find 400 page novels off-putting and would not even consider reading a 400 page textbook but I found this book easy to read and sufficiently interesting to keep me turning the pages. I should perhaps qualify this by saying that I am at present employed as a systems analyst, in the sense used by this book rather than as now commonly used in the computing industry. None the less it was fairly easy to read the situations across to my own field. Fortunately the book gives you sufficient early explanation that you do not need any pre-knowledge of the field.

This is not a dry list of facts, it is a book about people, the people who were asked to "think the unthinkable", to plan the use of nuclear weapons. It would have been easy for the book to have become yet another diatribe either pro or con nuclear weapons, Kaplan manages to avoid this. Only at the end of the book is their a hint of personal voice, a feeling that having these weapons is crazy but we do have them and the real politik means that we are not going to get rid of them easily so those who control them had better think sensibly about them.

The book basically deals with the development of the RAND Corporation (the "think tank" set up by the US Air Force), how its ideas gradually permeated

the military and politicians and became accepted policy. The in-fighting between the various US military services and the role of the US government is also described. The background of the characters is explored so that their viewpoints can be understood. The "characters" develop, their ideas change, often dramatically. There are no real villains even though some of the people may seem extreme, even Strangelovian. Certainly people do things for personal reasons, but the impression given is that they genuinely felt they were making the best decisions they could.

Vietnam was a turning point for a number of those involved. The theory of using limited force to "send messages", to warn the opposition that unless they de-escalated you would increase your force level was put into practice with the bombing of North Vietnam - it didn't work. This exposed the problem of a number of theories current at that time, and some still current now - they only work if the opposition is willing to play by the same rules.

None the less the impression is that the politicians and their advisors will go to almost any lengths not to use nuclear weapons. This leads to a desire for options rather than having to fire everything off in one spasm and this can lead observers to conclude one is willing to fight a nuclear war. The subject is filled with these conflicts where the desire to do one thing apparently leads to the opposite happening.

I have read a number of books about the nuclear weapons debate, usually it is easy to pick up their bias within a page or two if it's not obvious from the blurb, at this point the cynic in me questions each unsupported statement. Kaplan's book is, on the whole, objective reportage and the long list of sources given at the end gives some idea of the research which must have gone into producing it.

Not only is this an important book it is also a readable one, read it.

HEECHEE RENDZVOUS by Frederik Pohl

Gollancz, 1984, 311pp, £8.95

Reviewed by Edward James

One choice an author of the third volume in a series has to make is how to let the reader know what has gone before. Does he offer a brief summary (Donaldson), does he devise the book so that it doesn't matter what's gone before (Tubb), does he simply assume readers are going to re-read, or does he convey the information subtly in then course of the first few chapters? Frederik Pohl chooses the most original, and silly, method I have yet come across: a conversation within a computer between the main program and a subset of the program written for the purpose of the conversation.

"I have now surveyed the entire history of the Heechee in their relationship with the human race up to the time when Robin will start telling his story. Are there any questions subset?"

Q. 2-2-Z-2-2-2-2.

A. "Subset.. don't be a smartass. I know you're not asleep."

Any information which he can't offer in this embarrassing fashion in the prologue he inserts on framed single pages. This was a device used to good effect in the first volume, to display adverts, notices, bulletins and other background documentation, but here it often degenerates into explanatory footnotes from the computer to the human-generated narrative.

Those who do remember the first two volumes of what is clearly going to be a series (I predict the next title will include the word Assassin) are strongly advised to skip the first chapter. They will remember

that Gateway (winner of the Hugo and Nebula awards in 1977) was Robin Broadhead's reminiscences about his experiences on Gateway, an asteroid obligingly left behind by a vanished alien race, dubbed the Heechee, equipped with working, but uncontrollable, PTL spaceships. The ships took prospectors to places which might bring them enormous profit, or death. Broadhead's reminiscences were interspersed with the annoyingly detailed conversations between himself and his computer psychoanalyst 'Sigfrid von Shrink'. But it was an interesting setting, made more so by typically Pohlsonian sociological extrapolation. By Beyond the Blue Event Horizon (1980) Sigfrid has been replaced as a major character by the slightly more bearable computer hologram, Albert Einstein, Broadhead's friend and scientific adviser. Broadhead's guilt at the loss of his prospecting companions, and above all his wife Klara, in a black hole has been assuaged, thanks largely to his marriage to the expert who created Albert Einstein. He has made a fortune out of the trip in which Klara was lost, and he uses it to investigate the mystery of the Heechee. Further major artefacts are found; the Heechees "prayer-fans" which litter former Heechee sites turn out to be computer-decipherable books; the secret of controlling the Heechee ships is discovered. The curiosity aroused by the first volume is sustained in the second, in part because of the new and inhabited Heechee station which is found by Broadhead's employees, a setting almost as interesting as Gateway itself.

Heechee Rendzvous has much less going for it than the first two volumes. The silly device in the first chapter does enable the book to be read in isolation, but it would, I think, mean little to those whose interest has not already been aroused. And those who were curious about the Heechee (as I was) are going to be faintly disappointed. Partly, perhaps, because the third volume is not a crashing finale to the trilogy, an unravelling of all the clues left lying around in the earlier volumes. Crashing finales are, after all, something one expects from space-opera. Think what Doc Smith would have made by way of Grand Finale with the appearance of the entire Heechee space fleet, a potentially awe-inspiring moment which Pohl introduces in a lacklustre fashion of which Smith himself would have been ashamed. Pohl is, of course, really too intelligent for space-opera, although he knows that it sells (as Heechee Rendzvous is selling: it has only just been pushed from its top place on the Locust list of best-selling hardbacks in the US by Harrison's West of Eden). He includes many of the expected elements, but he gives the impression that his heart is not really in it. The old Pohl imagination, which carried him through the first two volumes, has not lasted the course, and the new elements - the intelligent computer, the aliens - are not new at all, but only variants on the creations of other authors. When we finally meet the Heechee themselves, for instance, we find they are close cousins of the puppeteers (psychologically not biologically), even if they have chosen a different method of escaping from the Peril Which Threatens the Entire Galaxy.

Pohl has probably always been more interested in people and human society than in gadgets and aliens. Heechee society is described in tantalisingly sketchy fashion (more in volume 4 perhaps?). There are typically Pohlbian comments on human society, however, such as the brief appearance of hi-tech terrorism and the equally brief glimpse of what has happened to Earth under the impact of Heechee-derived technology. But Pohl is more concerned with the development of individuals than of society. Albert Einstein, the computer-generated hologram, becomes much more interesting as it/he develops an independent personality. Broadhead, who in the course of the novel is 'vastened', as we are told in the first sentence of chapter 1, is the other main focus of interest. The psychological aspect of 'vastening' (transfer of personality into a computer) is the most intriguing creation in the book, even if it does have its SF predecessors. Vastening may at least have the effect of quietening down Broadhead's sexual life, which Pohl presented with a coy bravado all too reminiscent of latter-day Heinlein. Perhaps

that explains why Broadhead's final confrontation with his long lost Klara, over whom he has been agonising for a thousand pages or so, was not the psychological climax of the three books, as it might have been: it is presented as hardly more than a curtain-raiser for the next volume. Judging a series of its penultimate, or ante-penultimate, volume is a dangerous exercise. But Pohl ought to know that he will have to pull out all the stops next time if he is to give the series the 'classic' status which once seemed a possibility.

FROST - Robin W. Bailey

Unwin, 1984, £2.95

Reviewed by David V. Barrett

Raven-haired, green-eyed, beautiful Frost, stripped of her witch powers by her mother's dying curse, is charged with delivering the Book of the Last Battle to a certain sorcerer; in her travellings she has to defend it, and herself, against all comers.

'her sword bit through his mouth, shattering teeth, cleaving bone.' (p21)

In my evident naivety I didn't think anyone actually wrote this sort of basic sword & sorcery any more. It's adequately written, though cliché-ridden, with the quality perhaps of sub-early Moorcock - the type of thing he used to churn out in a weekend - and identical to a hundred others.

'She lashed out; her weapon hummed as she swung from side to side, spewing blood and brains.' (p131)

Why bother? The Forces of Light will triumph in the end - they have to. There is really no high moral, no revelation of redemption, no purpose behind the story except blood and guts. If these novels were measured by deaths-by-sword-per page, this one would rate highly.

'Metal clanged on metal. Flesh tore; bone crunched... Frost's first blow split a shield. Her second severed the head from its bearer.' (p164)

Why are Unwin publishing this sort of thing, when so many damn good British authors are being turned away? I'm told the answer is commercialism. For a lesser publisher that might be sufficient justification, but Unwin have - or perhaps had - a reputation to uphold.

'Her sword sang through flesh and bone as she raced from one part of the battle to another, a remorseless killing machine, bent on single-handedly gutting every Shardhani in sight.' (p180)

This book has one thing to recommend it, a really beautiful cover painting by Steve Weston: the girl Frost, in a cast iron bra, astride a rearing unicorn, amongst the bodies of her vanquished, all in an eerie blue-black light. Quite impressive. Which is more than can be said of the contents.

THE GLAMOUR - Christopher Priest

Cape, 1984, 302pp, £8.50

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Considering its subject matter and aspirations, science fiction is a surprisingly conservative genre. Very few writers these days seem to be prepared to take any risks, either with style or content. Those who dare, therefore, are particularly welcome because of the excitement they bring back to science fiction.

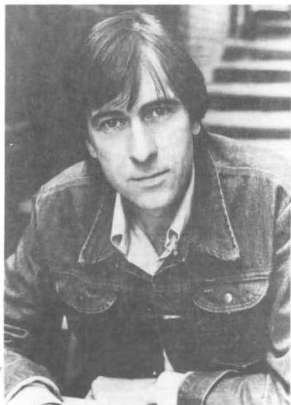
Christopher Priest is prepared to dare.

Yet he is not actually a good writer, at least not in any of the usually accepted meanings of the term. Reading *The Glamour* one is constantly aware of the author labouring over his prose, and it still does not rise above the prosaic. His sentences never sparkle with poetic images, his metaphors do not provide unusual perspectives or point vivid and surprising pictures. Nevertheless this rather flat style suits his stories to perfection, building up a mundane ordinariness into which a gradual strangeness is injected most effectively.

Like *The Affirmation*, Priest's new novel sits between science fiction and mainstream. The central device is science fictional, but it is set within a solidly realised contemporary world, and is used as a way of throwing light upon the characters. Any such mix risks the danger of combining the faults of both, but there is also the exciting chance that it will have the virtues of both. *The Glamour* doesn't quite hit these heights, but Priest has skirted most of the dangers very skilfully.

Richard Grey - a name that turns out to be appropriately anonymous and colourless - is the victim of a terrorist bomb. His injuries are severe, but as he slowly recuperates he discovers that, perhaps even worse, the months immediately prior to the bomb have been wiped from his memory. Then a girl called Susan Kewley turns up, a girl who had obviously been close to him, yet who he does not remember at all. With the help of hypnosis and under the stimulus Susan provides, he reconstructs those last months, remembering meeting and falling in love with Susan on a holiday in France while she tried, not very successfully, to end her relationship with her former lover Niall. Gray and Niall never meet.

After Gray leaves the convalescent home, he and Susan start to pick up their relationship. So far we are presented with a routine romantic triangle. Susan and Gray love each other, yet to Gray's irritation Susan cannot disentangle



herself from Niall, a forceful character but someone who seems to be perpetually off-stage. Even so, there is clearly more to it; even in Gray's reconstructed memory there have been disturbing hints of something out of the ordinary.

The Glamour is marvellously structured. Hints and suggestions and oddities are inserted into the story in exactly the right places to build up the requisite sense of mystery. Meanwhile Gray and Susan and even, from afar, Niall, are vividly realised people whose tale keeps us engaged while the disturbance grows. And only now, half way through the novel, in a coup de theatre of remarkable boldness, does Priest reveal what the glamour is - the central device around which all else turns.

Glamour is invisibility. Yet invisibility as I think we have never encountered it within science fiction, for this is not the result of some concoction a la Wells, or an electro-magnetic disturbance of the photons or whatever pseudo-scientific explanation SF writers have been able to devise. The glamour is, if anything, a social condition. Think of all the times you have stood at a crowded bar totally failing to attract the barman's attention. The glamour is that, magnified; more an unwillingness of people to see you than anything else.

Despite the grand claims that are sometimes made, the vast majority of SF writers, given such a device, would have done no more than make it the hook upon which to hang some drama. But Priest is a better writer than that, and glamour grows to become a metaphor for something far wider. This, actually, while being on one of the things I like about the book, is also one of the complaints I have about it. Whether it is a final failure of nerve I don't know, but in the end I think Priest narrows the relevance of the metaphor far more than I think the novel deserves. But I shall come to this shortly.

The introduction of invisibility undermines and overthrows the reality Gray has constructed. The three main characters are all revealed to possess this attribute of invisibility - Niall very strongly so, Susan attempting to leave it behind, and Gray unconscious of it though it has played a significant part of his success as a television cameraman. Gray's relationship with Susan is uneasy, he finds invisibility hard to take and Niall's continuing influence infuriating. Eventually Susan reveals her version of those lost months, and it is totally different from Gray's reconstruction.

The Affirmation has a three-fold development - Peter Sinclair starts to write his autobiography, it turns into a work of fiction, which turns out to be a pile of blank paper. Its central theme is the writing of fiction and its direction away from reality towards unreality. The Glamour echoes this construction very closely, perhaps a little too closely. A real person becomes invisible becomes a character in a fiction. Fiction is again at the core of the novel, and again there is a flight from reality, or at least the hard-edged reality we are used to.

Everyone in The Glamour is, in some way, to some extent, creating their world around them. Susan's parents reconstruct the visible presence of Niall after a visit during which he remained unseen. Gray's psychiatrist, who sees Gray become invisible under hypnosis, re-writes Niall after rationalising what he saw. When the three-fold structure of the novel runs its inevitable yet nonetheless surprising course, when Niall gives his version of reality, the whole picture changes dramatically once again.

Here, however, lies my main criticism of the novel. This final upset is too sudden and too rushed. The novel is distinguished by a careful and thorough development of character and atmosphere, yet this care and thoroughness is absent in the final few pages. Almost as if, after the labour of the novel, Priest had suddenly run out of energy and brought the book rather too abruptly to its end.

The way in which the novel is tied together is, perhaps, the only way in which these sequences of creations could be ended: though I must confess to being a little disappointed

that it comes down to yet another book about writing fiction. I really had thought the metaphor of the glamour was much wider-ranging. But it is the brevity of the ending that is its main weakness. A great pity, since the novel displays considerable strengths up to this moment.

On the whole, though, it is these strengths that stick in the mind. The Glamour is intriguing and entertaining, full of mystery and surprise, and casts a spell that only a powerful and skilful work could achieve.

CONVERTS - Ian Watson

Grenada, 1984, 191pp, £1.95

Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

It is an article of faith that SF is the literature of ideas. We mumble this incantation as we gaze along endless shelves of books which display no literary merit, no imagination not crudely pillaged from elsewhere, and not two ideas to rub together. 'SF is the literature of ideas' - Marion Zimmer Bradley. 'SF is the literature of ideas' - Philip Jose Farmer. 'SF is the literature of ideas' - John Norman. 'SF is the literature of ideas' - Ian Watson. Ah ha, a bright light shines in the land. SF is the literature of ideas, at least so far as Ian Watson is concerned. Watson is profligate with ideas to the point of being a spendthrift. The central themes of his books have never exactly been easy going, and his habit of tossing in the odd spicily intellectual diversion has been at once a delight and a despair. Had he stuck to the point a little more, given his books rather more recognisably heroic heroes, made the sex and violence rather less realistic and more ritualistic Watson would probably be a richer man today (even if his books would be the poorer). His public image is that of a heavy writer, over whose books your fingers hover before moving leftwards to light upon the new, say, Bob Shaw. Of late, though, there seems to have been a sea-change in his writing. A lightness of tone has manifested itself. The pace has been picked up. In Chekov's Journey, the intellectual thrust is still Watsonianly convoluted but the tale is earthily comedic and taken at a brisk hand. The Book of the River is an almost juvenile adventure, stood on its head of course and made to sit up and beg, but as easily readable as anything splurging from the novelists. Converts is slapstick comedy for the bar after a heavy first year philosophy tutorial, smirking and the pace is breathless. Somewhere along the line the stern Mr. Watson seems to have inhaled the spirit of Grog. Gone is the intellectual rack of his earlier work, and in its place we are assailed by a feather duster bastinado.

It must be said that while the pace and timing of the book are those of farce the ingredients are peculiarly Watsonian. We have one fabulously wealthy man who wants to live for ever (no prizes for guessing the name - King, of course) in whose employ are a pair of typically inscrutable Japanese pharmacists who have developed a virus which will enable a person's secret desires to be fulfilled, physically. King, mistakenly, believes that the virus will usher in the ubermensch but human beings are a good deal more twisted in the id than he can guess. The first 'victim' evolves into a giantess with a pathological but purely logical terror of Sansevieria trifasciata (Mother in Law's Tongue). So far so interesting. It is when King takes his medicine that plan begins to slide off the rails. In King's heart of hearts he doesn't want to be some mighty thewed Titan to bring forth the master race from Geneva's ample womb. He wants to be a fairy, which does not prevent his imaginative and novel sexual congress with his intended. Later converts really want to be a centaur, a fireman (as in the fireman in Fahrenheit 451), a tree, and a Mies van der Rohe chair - and they are the normal ones! Outside King's establishment God nuts prove the nation, eager to beat piety into anyone who doesn't think that Bishop Usher wasn't right in every degree (a scabrous parody of those American fundamentalist evangelicals who take everything the Bible says straight, no chaser, and wickedly funny).

While storm clouds gather outside the walls inside the new Eden there is a split in the ranks which brings about the inevitable (well, yes, this is an Ian Watson novel) - superintelligent chimpanzees and a Panapsians God from another time stream who can't hack bananas growing on an apple tree. This is a kaleidoscopic work, and it is the manner in which the individual components mesh together which creates the effect rather than the components themselves. As in any good farce there are a lot of old jokes, but they are delivered in the manner of a true farceur, with conviction, style and relish. Whether or not the whole business succeeds is, of course, a matter of taste - all comedy is. For myself, I laughed a lot, even reading the book for a second and third time.

I suspect this book is intended to open up a whole new audience to the delights of Ian Watson, and I hope it is successful. I do have one major reservation about 'Converts' though. Along with a certain intellectual rigour the badge of all his earlier works was a very precise sense of place. Whether the location was a provincial British university, the belly of the world worm, the high Andes, John the Baptist's cell, or somewhere in Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights the reader was given a detailed and convincing sense of place. This is absent from 'Converts'. Indeed, any sense of place is subverted ab initio by an ambivalence as to where the story is actually located. Watson never makes an American setting explicit, but it is implicit in the entire ethos of the story. Despite this all characters speak English for the most part, and the intrusion of the occasional American colloquialism is just that, an intrusion. Reference is made to the town of Pompey, in France, near Nancy, but the plain fact is that Pompey is Portsmouth. King's estate and its surroundings too call to the mind the downs of Hampshire rather than New Hampshire. The taste of the novel is English, and the gestures towards US citizenship seem to be no more than gestures. To my mind this is a serious flaw in the book, and suggests that it was written rather more hurriedly: than was good for it.

In the final analysis 'Converts' seems like an amusing confection, written with an abandon Watson has not shown at any length before, and he can be a very funny writer when he sets his mind to it. It is by no means one of his better books, but it is a 'jolly good read', which is not something I ever imagined writing about an Ian Watson novel.

THE SONGBIRDS OF PAIN - Garry Kilworth

Gollancz, 1984, 187pp. £8.95

Reviewed by Nigel Richardson

Obsession, agony and death - not necessarily in that order - are the three major dimensions in the far lands and further worlds depicted by Garry Kilworth in this, his first collection of short stories. Since his debut in the *Gollancz/Sunday Times Best SF* anthology of 1975, Kilworth has gradually developed a recognisable style - in his short works at least. Generally told in the first person, his stories tell of obsessed men looking, whether they know it or not, for self-destruction. Kilworthland is not a cheery place, and I found it difficult to read these stories without interspersing them with more heartening reading. There are no happy endings in Kilworthland, and even death may not bring the suffering to an end. I usually like my fiction serious, but this collection presents the most unmitigatedly gloomy and painful outlook on life I've read since Joseph Heller's *Something Happened*.

That said, some of the stories in *The songbirds of Pain* are as impressive as anything the genre has recently produced, read singularly, rather than as part of this monotonously grim and single-mindedly pessimistic collection, the most recent stories come across as serious explorations of people in extreme situations. The Sense of Wonder meets the Sense of Futility: the characters are hollow men in search of the unobtainable - the answer to what lies beyond the grave, a fourth primary colour, perfect

beauty - and whilst their obsessive quests are what brings them alive in an otherwise meaningless world, it inevitably brings them death, or worse.

In these stories Kilworth has given up decking them out with the trappings of science fiction, realising that the Middle and Far East are far richer grounds for the fantastic than made-up places on other worlds; indeed, Kilworth's best stories are those that don't even try to be science fiction, owing more to Conrad than anything else. With stories such as 'The Dissemblers', 'Blind Windows', 'Sami Dreams of a Paper Frog' and the title story (plus the uncollected 'Spiral Winds' to be found in *Interzone 9*), he has created a small but important body of work that points towards a new kind of fantasy (or rather, a reinvigoration of the long dormant 'exotic adventure' genre without the nasty tang of imperialism), that should be encouraged even if it does owe little to SF. In fact, the closer Kilworth gets to conventional SF the less satisfying are the results, as can be seen in the dour 'Scarlet Fever' and 'The Man Who Collected Bridges', where the generic elements stand out like awkward distractions.

The future looks bright for Kilworth, particularly if he can bring a little variation of mood to his stories. His writing still has its dodgy moments (except for in 'Sami Dreams of a Paper Frog' where the form and content work together superbly) and he has the tendency to overuse commonplace symbols (both 'The Dissemblers' and 'Blind Windows' strongly feature treacherous women in dark caves - open season for Freudians!) but to find a SF writer whose talents are still growing rather than stagnating is such a rarity these days that these things can be overlooked. I can't see any reason not to buy this book when the paperback comes out - just don't read them all in one go unless you're really into pain.

J.G. BALLARD: A PRIMARY AND SECONDARY BIBLIOGRAPHY - David Pringle

G.K. Hall, Boston Mass., 1984, \$40.00

Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

Science Fiction has generated one big success in conventional literary criticism - bibliography. It is a critical practise that has faded in mainstream literature but has always been important in the genre, presumably because of early problems of acquiring magazine runs and in identifying copyright through many rewrites and fix-ups. At the same time as sf readers take the standard for granted, many academics appear incapable of dealing with sf, or of realising its significance (both in the treatment of individual authors and in discussion of general themes). David Pringle's new Ballard bibliography shows how high a critical standard has been achieved, and, indirectly, makes obvious the failure of the mainstream critics.

The book lists all of Ballard's fiction, non-fiction (articles, interviews etc.) up to 1982 (with annotations of the non-fiction); lists foreign translations of Ballard's work; and a third long section lists reviews of, and critical references to, Ballard's work chronologically, with updates given 'in the hope that this section of the bibliography can be read almost as a continuous narrative of the author's career'. An introductory essay and transcript of an interview with J.G. Ballard complete the book.

Ballard's originality touches many fields - style, content, exposition, cultural reference - but his influence has been simultaneously widespread and limited. His originality is always admitted, even by those who do not like his work, but without his genius it is almost impossible to work in the Ballardian style that is so necessary to deal with the world that he has identified. In part this world has created this problem: sometimes in speaking he has failed to discriminate between the 'narrative voice' of his stories and himself as the author. (The two things are not the same - for instance, J.G. Ballard the narrator of *Crash* is not J.G. Ballard the author of *Crash*, but Ballard has sometimes spoken as if they

were. And similarly, even in stories told in the third person, the narrator is not to be identified with the author. Defending the narrator's position when all he needs to do is defend his authorial position has caused problems.) Also the world view of his fiction is not the same as the world-view of his non-fiction. Most of the non-fiction has not been re-printed and it is difficult to find (hence the usefulness of this book in locating it) but it is possible to say on the basis of a third or half of it that Ballard is not the best exponent of his own ideas.

This curious claim requires some evidence: once or twice Ballard has contradicted himself, perhaps because he was trying to please an interviewer (reading some of the interviews listed here one notices that Ballard tends to adopt the language and mannerisms of his guests). While Ballard has summarised the ideas and themes of his various books, his summaries have not been conclusive; his books contain much more detail than he explicitly mentions. And sometimes his statements are just paradoxical. An example of Ballard adopting one of his interviewer's notions can be seen in an idea first propounded by David Pringle himself. This idea, which he repeats in the interview reprinted here, is that Ballard's novels fall into three - or four - novel groups (or periods). This idea actually works only for Ballard's disaster novels and urban novels, and the third period Pringle claimed to see beginning with *Low Flying Aircraft* was really a miscarriage if not a stillbirth, i.e. not totally true. It is useful as a guide but it is not a critical discovery, and not really an eventful line to take. However, having trailed the idea other critics have picked it up and Ballard has recently used it himself, saying that *Empire of the Sun* may be the first of a Ballardian group. Here, I think, Ballard has taken up an idea of one of his critics which is not Ballardian.

A far worse lapse (i.e. gap between the fictions and Ballard's spoken opinion) can be seen in an interview with Peter Ronnov-Jessen: "You've got to accept the fact that I'm not writing naturalistic fiction. In fact, I'm writing a very stylised form of fiction. It is almost always about extremely solitary people, a fiction of fabrication. A lot of the women characters, and the men for that matter, have to be seen within the conventions of similar kinds of fiction - is that realm of princesses in castles" (Literary Review, August 1984). Now, Ballard has never argued this before, and the trends and themes of his work stylistically are completely the reverse of the structuralist heresay, whose language he adopts here. In fact, he has argued the opposite - "the relationships between my characters don't interest me very much. There is only one character I am interested in by and large. All my fiction is in a sense about isolation and how to cope with isolation" (1976). I am inclined to believe that he has adopted the mannerisms of his interviewer rather than changed his opinions. (Rather than the position of structuralist fabricators - Robert Scholes, Malcolm Bradbury etc - that real life may 'invade' fiction, producing the unreadable works that they seem to prefer; Ballard has argued that fictions have invaded real life - "the balance between fiction and reality has changed significantly in the past decade. Increasingly their roles are reversed...We live inside an enormous novel" (1974)).

One or two British critics (specifically David Pringle and Colin Greenland) have been neither notable Ballardian in style nor trendy in their studies of Ballard. Despite their hard work, despite his always having been reviewed by the mainstream press, Times Literary Supplement included, Ballard's importance has not been realised by the critical authorities. The success of *Empire of the Sun* has produced nothing new, and no admission of error from mainstream critics. David Pringle must feel a little peeved that Methuen, Fontana etc. publish critical series dedicated to the most minor authors of the English and American literary scene, while his own excellent *Earth is the Alien Planet* was published only by the small San Francisco Borgo Press. Similarly, a Ballard non-fiction collection has been postponed for years.

There are one or two small signs that Ballard is being recognised (writings by Soviet and French critics) but

the annotations in the second bibliography section make it clear that these are still not deep enough. For instance, there have been no linguistic analyses of Ballard's work, and no explications of the philosophical positions in Ballard's work (no matter whether it is a philosophy that Ballard holds or not). For instance, *Foundation* recently published an essay by a Soviet critic on Ballard's treatment of time, which made no mention of the fact that chronology, sequence, iteration are all indicated by Ballard's choice of words, verbal structure, phrasing etc. At an unconscious level this is well known in circles, seen in the parodies of Ballardian first sentences that any fan can produce, but it has never been consciously expounded. While, on philosophy, for instance in *The Entropy Exhibition* Colin Greenland makes no discussion of the phenomenology that is explicitly mentioned in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, nor does he discuss the implications of the 'ontology' in his text.

But Colin Greenland and David Pringle have made the attempt to come to terms with Ballard's analysis, the mainstream critics have not. Malcolm Bradbury, Booker nominee and commentator on Channel Four on this year's Booker Prize debacle, seems to have written nothing before a 1979 newspaper review. Other critics - David Lodge, Frank Kermode, for instance - seem to have written nothing at all.

On the other hand David Pringle has once or twice qualified his praise of Ballard. In the annotated criticism section he includes details of some of his own criticism, mentioning stories he finds not up to scratch, and calls *Crash* 'tedious to a certain degree'. It is this constraint that seems to have led to two omissions. In an essay in *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide* (ed. P. Parrinder), Christopher Priest says "*Crash* is one of the best novels of the 1970s", and in his essay "A Climate of Warm Indifference" published in *Bananas* (ed. Emma Tennant), Martin Seymour-Smith says "*Crash* may not be a good novel. But it is truly modern" and is "full of meaningful phenomenological detail." (among other praise). While he mentions the laudations of both men, David Pringle refers to less permanent sources (a fanzine for the Priest, a newspaper review for the other), vaguely implying that their praise has the permanence only of the media.

Generally his editorial intervention is ideally transparent, with only one or two minor annoyances (mention of a missing story without saying which; lack of clarity about translations of *The Burning World*, can they all be translations of a US paperback quickly replaced in the canon by the rewritten *Drought*? and these points are minor). Even lists of Ballardian titles are worth re-reading and extensive quotation from him is much more worthy of regard. In this bibliography David Pringle has provided a major tool to work with the products of perhaps the world's greatest author.

THE PEACE MACHINE - Bob Shaw

Gollancz, 1985, 160pp, £7.95

Reviewed by Chris Bailey

What this is, is a 1971 Bob Shaw novel, *Ground Zero Man*, revised and recycled, equipped with a title more appropriate to the concerns of a different decade. The hardened cynic might add that, if you are going to repackaging novels, then you may as well repackaging Bob Shaw's - from *Night Walk* through to *Fire Pattern*, these are books that show an even tenor of production, serviceable commodities that wear their years well...

However, enough of such cynicism. For a start, that 1971 novel - originally published in America - is genuinely difficult to obtain, making only a fleeting British appearance as a Corgi paperback in 1976. (And consequently I am unable to check the extent of the revisions made for *The Peace Machine*.) More to the point, the reurrection is well merited.

Terrorists detonate an atomic device over Damascus. The bomb is but a squib, really - six megatons - yet still enough to obliterate half a million people, and, as the story progresses, a horribly plausible sense

is conveyed of global indifference to this event. The carnage quickly ceases to be news and is recalled only by those relatively few thinking individuals, those people who are willing to destroy themselves in taking on the burden of the world's guilt - people like Lucas Hutmman, an obscure mathematician. All that distinguishes him from you or I is the fact that he has cracked the equations and the technical obstructions involved in conceiving a 'nuclear resonator', a machine that will relay impulses harmlessly through every neutron in the planet - harmlessly that is, until the signal encounters a concentration near to critical mass, when a disastrous closed-circuit knock-on effect is achieved. In other words, press the button and the world's nuclear stockpile goes up. So Hutmman does what you or I would do when in one of those moods of impotent outrage. He builds the machine.

And that is as political as the novel gets until it reaches a convincingly sombre conclusion (where one realises a beautiful irony in the novel's new title). The body of the book is presented as a taut near-future thriller, and a good one at that, Shaw forcing more action, character and insight into an episode set in Bolton than the run of sf writers provide while going to Metelgause and back. If anything, the book is too taut, and I wished for the occasional break in which to catch breath and review the situation, and to savour a wider variety of incidental characters than Shaw usually offers. I enjoyed especially the appalling accountant Don Spain, the acidulous Inspector Crombie-Carson, and Hutmman's wife Vicki, a fascinating study in jealousy. The relationship between the two is utterly convincing: relentless, attritive arguments on 'sub-jects such as the underlying psychological reasons for (Hutmman's) referring to a dress which zips up the back as a dress which zips down the back". Indeed, the entire narrative throbs with sexual tension (a menacing constriction which also helps tide the reader over the few slight hitches in the plot). For, at the last count, these are the things that may be exercising our minds. Hutmman's campaign to expiate mankind's guilt seems secondary when he is brooding over his more personal concerns. He is weak in the crucial ways that all people are weak: Shaw is asking us, can there be anybody fit to hold a gun to the world's head?

The qualities of *The Peace Machine* are thought, incident and character in equal measure. I have mentally filed it along with *Vertigo* as being outstanding amongst Shaw's novels.

THE ANUBIUS GATES - Tim Powers

Chatto & Windus, 1985, 387pp, £9.95

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

The first thing to say about this novel is that it is great fun. It is, in fact, a romp through some of the most familiar motifs in science fiction and fantasy. Here you will find time travel, Egyptian gods, black magicians, shape changers, immortals and who knows what else, all embroiled in a glorious farrago that should be a mad mess, a series of clichés piled one upon the other into an ugly and unsteady edifice, an embarrassment. But it isn't. It is, I have to repeat, it is fun.

Science fiction is a genre that seems to have grown old before its time. A few brave souls are beaver away in exciting and innovative directions, though they tend to be directions that take them away from what most of us have to come to recognise as sf. The rest tend to produce weary reworkings of what has gone before. And suddenly Tim Powers comes along and shows us that these reworkings don't have to be weary after all, and at once the whole genre seems revitalised.

It begins quietly enough when academic Brendan Doyle is summoned to London from California to deliver a lecture on Samuel Taylor Coleridge. But the person who invited him is a multi-millionaire, Darrow, who has discovered a way of travelling through time through inexplicable holes in the space-time fabric, and Doyle is to lecture a group of tourists who are travelling back to see the real Coleridge. Doyle goes with them, only to find himself trapped in the London of 1810.

But that's only the start of his problems. He is kidnapped by a spsise under the leadership of a black magician, hunted by an underworld gang that out grotesques anything Dickens came up with, and attacked by Darrow's hirelings because he represents an unwitting threat to Darrow's elaborate quest for immortality. He crosses the path of mysterious Dog Face Joe, finds himself transferred into another body, and meets a clone of Lord Byron. There's another trip through time to the frozen London of the 1680s, and a trip through space to confront a powerful Magus in Egypt who plans to overthrow the British Empire as part of a move to re-establish the ancient gods. Along the way he helps a girl disguised as a boy out to avenge the murder of her fiancé that she committed; becomes more closely involved than he would ever have imagined with the object of his academic interest, the obscure poet Ashbles; learns how to be a very successful beggar; and is taken up by the literary society of the day.

The book is overloaded with plot. Even giving so brief a synopsis is to tie oneself up in complicated knots, and there is much that I have perforce had to leave out. Coincidences abound, in fact they are presented brazenly as if Powers is daring the reader to disbelieve him. And because of the gusto with which the tale is told, one does believe him. There is so much going on, improbabilities are piled upon improbabilities, this book should not work. Yet it does, triumphantly. Powers controls it all masterfully, slotting everything together into a seamless whole that really did have this reader turning the page in breathless excitement at the pace, the daring, the complexity and spirit of the adventure. I did spot one glaring inconsistency, but quite frankly, it hardly seems to matter.

A lot of research has gone into the vivid account of London at that period, the literary world at that time, and the politics of the age. But the research sits lightly on the tale, giving it the detail and solidity to suspend disbelief without ever slowing the pace or obtruding grotesquely from the narrative. More than that, a lot of very good writing has gone into the book, particularly in peopling it with sharply delineated and believable characters. Even the grotesques, the clown-faced robber-baron on stilts, the deformed homunculi, fit naturally into the story as if the London of that time might have generated just such unsavoury characters.

The Anubius Gates has given me more pleasure than any work of science fiction I have read in many a long month. It has restored my faith in sf: there is life in the old dog yet. Read, and enjoy.



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