VECTOR

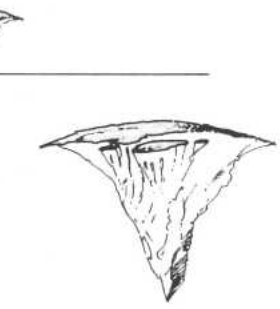
131

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

75p

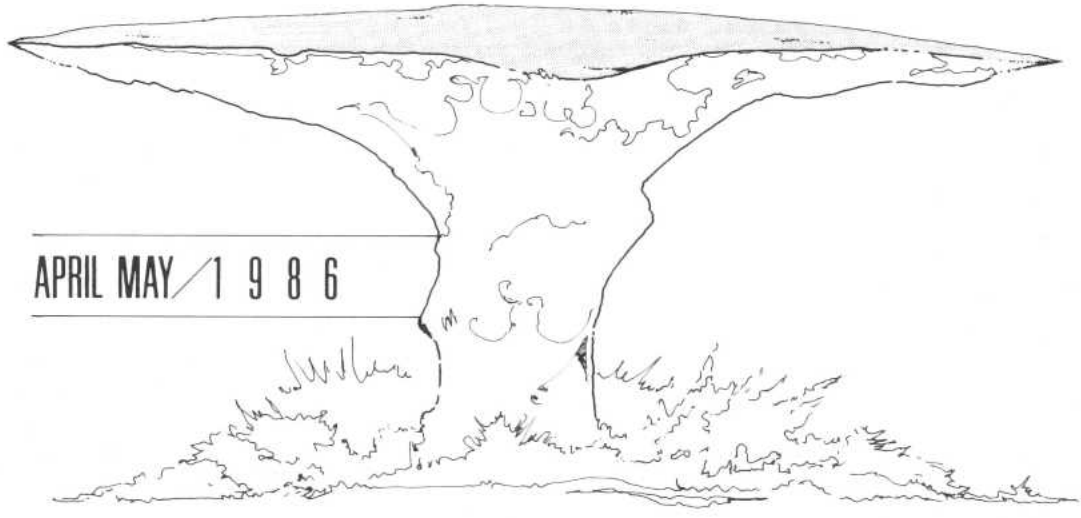
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY

DAVID WINGROVE on YES



Alasdair Gray interviewed

Books, and Letters



APRIL MAY / 1 9 8 6

VECTOR 131

APRIL MAY/1986

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PRINTED BY:
PDC Copyprint 11 Jeffries Passage, Guildford, Surrey GU1 4AP

CONTRIBUTORS: All manuscripts must be typed, double spaced on one side of the paper. Length should be in the range 2000-6000 words, but shorter or longer submissions may be considered. Footnotes should be numbered consecutively and typed on a separate sheet. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope. Please note that there is no payment for publication.

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THE BSFA: The British Science Fiction Association is an amateur organization, formed in 1958, which aims to promote and encourage the reading, writing, and publishing of science fiction in all its forms. We publish Vector, a bimonthly critical journal; Matrix, a bimonthly newsletter/magazine; Focus, a biannual forum for writers, and Paperback Inferno, a review magazine of the latest paperbacks. Other services include Orbiter, a postal SF writers' workshop, an SF Information Service, a postal Magazine Chain and an SF Lending Library. Membership costs £7.00 per year. For details, write to: Sandy Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Lanarkshire, G72 9NA or if you live in the USA: Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred, Detroit, Michigan 48213, USA.

EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT

NAVEL REFLECTIONS

AS I COME TO THE END OF MY FIRST YEAR IN the hot seat, it's time to look back on what's been achieved, and look forward to what is still to come.

The last twelve months have been particularly hectic. Apart from BSFA work, which now only takes about 20 hours a week, I've moved home three times, changed job twice, joined a folk-rock band, and taken on all sorts of other writing/editing/production tasks - and not written a single word of my own fiction. I could happily use a 36 hour day.

THE STORY SO FAR

One of my aims from the start has been to broaden the spread of writers in **Vector**. The **Albion Writ** series of articles was introduced to provide a regular slot for British science fiction authors to write about themselves, their work, and subjects that particularly interest them. So far we have had articles by Mary Gentle, Chris Priest, Dave Langford, Colin Greenland and Michael Coney, and more are planned for the future. I've had less success in bringing in writers new to **Vector**; Liz Sourbut and Ian Pemble have been the only ones so far, but in the last couple of months a number of members have offered articles, and these will be appearing before long. More would be very welcome. Interviews with authors have always been one of **Vector's** strengths, and this I have been able to continue, with Paul Kincaid doing the hard work.

Paul has also done sterling work with the review section. Books are at the heart of SF for most of us, and the reviews are an essential part of **Vector**. By making reviews shorter and having more of them, we have been able to extend our coverage to include 'borderline SF', those almost mainstream books by SF writers or almost SF books by mainstream writers; here is where speculative fiction is furthest from the ghetto, where it sometimes approaches literature, and where it is finding a certain lefthanded respectability. We're also looking at children's SF and fantasy, an area too long neglected by adult SF readers. I'm not talking about Asimov's 'Paul French' novels, or Wyndham's 'Jon Beynon' novels, or McCaffrey's baby dragon books, or even the assorted juveniles of John Christopher. I mean those works which are damn good novels in their own right, but where the story and the the characters tell the author they want to be read by children. The sort of books written by Joan Aiken, Jan Mark and Gwyneth Jones; the sort of SF and fantasy published by Julia MacRae books, to name just one publisher that we have only recently discovered, though they have been producing good children's books for some time.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

There is still room for improvement in **Vector**; I'm by no means complacent. I'd like to produce a bigger and better magazine, but this depends on two important factors: money and writers. Even with everything but the actual printing being done for nothing , the magazines still cost money to produce and to mail. The BSFA, as usual, is anything but flush. Membership rates, which have remained static since Spring 1983, will be rising shortly. We're also hoping to raise more revenue by getting more publishers advertising in **Vector**, and by selling more copies of **Vector** in bookshops. If you can persuade your local bookshop manager to take **Vectorf**, please let me know. If we can afford to increase the size of **Vector**, we will need more articles from members to fill the space available. I'd also like to have a vigorous and controversial letter column. So blow the dust off your typewriters, and get your thoughts down on paper.

Over the next few months, I'm planning to produce a number of special issues, the first being **Vector 132** which will focus on Keith Roberts, a British writer who has long deserved far more acclaim than he has received - and who has written books other than **Pavane**. Later in the year there will be issues devoted to feminism and SF, and SF in Children's Fiction. I've already commissioned some of the articles for these, but if any members would like to contribute, please let me know as soon as possible. And while **Focus** is in (I hope temporary) abeyance, there may also be a **Vector** aimed specifically at writers.

Thinking of **Focus**, we are looking for one or more people to take this on. An interest in writing is essential, and at least partial success in crossing the border between amateur and professional would be preferred. Some knowledge of the world of publishing, and of markets for fiction, would be helpful. And applicants MUST be hardworking and reliable. **Matrix** has gone through a bad patch recently; John and Eve Harvey are stepping in temporarily, and a new editor will take over later this year.

WHO ARE YOU?

I hope as many members as possible will complete the questionnaire enclosed with this mailing, and return it to me. We need to know more about our members so that we can aim BSFA publications and services more accurately. Are 95% of you under 14? Or do most of you have Ph.Ds in surfboarding? (I kid you not; a California university offers this academic gem.) How many of you write fiction? What do you enjoy reading? **What do you want to see in Vector?** The more personal information will enable us to build a membership profile which we can use to attract advertising in **Vector** - see above. And the final set of questions will help us to find people who will keep the BSFA healthy, people who will be willing to step in when magazine editors and other BSFA officers step down.

Some of the questions will no doubt annoy some of you. In which case, don't explode, don't resign in protest - just don't answer those questions. If you want your replies to remain anonymous, don't put your name and membership number on the form. (In which case,if you want to offer your services, please do so separately, with your name!) But remember that any response is better than none, and that your reply will be of genuine use to the BSFA.

So... into my second year, which with your help should be even more productive than the first. •

L E T T E R S

I APPRECIATED THE INTERVIEWS WITH GEOFF Ryman and Brian Aldiss (V129). I've liked what little I've read by Ryman very much, and I hope his present successes encourage him to write a lot more. It's always a pleasure to discover a good writer. In the Aldiss interview,I was happily surprised to discover new angles and opinions about his books - you imagine that a writer interviewed as often as Brian Aldiss might run out of anything fresh to say about his books or SF. Some writers do.

Colin Greenland's 'Yes, but did you like it?' is very entertaining and rings with much experience and truth, but I get the feeling that he doesn't believe there are any objective standards for reviewing. 'It's no good disparaging Anne McCaffrey for failing to be Joanna Russ...' Yes, but isn't there some sort of ideal, internalised SF model we use as a guide to judge whether a story comes up short in originality, characterisation, versimilitude? Generally speaking, after all, Joanna Russ does write better than Anne McCaffrey, and in part it's not only execution but the attempt to be more ambitious and write SF a little differently than it's been done before. Or is this just the difference between reviewing and criticism?

'City in Ashes' by Ken Lake (about Simak's **City**) and Peter Ellis's comment in the lettercol ('I'll forgive Isaac Asimov his inconsistencies... because years ago his stories lived in my dreams and still give me a feeling of nostalgia') are very revealing. Childhood memories, or even adolescent memories of stories cannot be trusted. The memories become more powerful than the stories. Unfortunately, I believe that many anthologies are compiled on this basis, including the **SF Hall Of Fame** series, and the stories not reread prior to publication. It could be that the best work is lost. Really, as Ken Lake and Peter Ellis should discover, the trick is finding those old stories which do survive a present day rereading. I reread 'A Work of Art' by James Blish and found it far better than I ever remembered, or had any right to expect. Isn't this the way a story should be - that it rekindles the image we had, rather than being a dimmer version of our memory of it?

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WOULD IT NOT BE POSSIBLE TO JUST HAVE ONE BSFA mag dealing with book reviews? Extend **PI** to include both paperback and hardback books, so leaving **Vector** more space for other articles. Having said that,I do like the idea of the 'Books of the Year' review, and something I would like to see is three or four people reviewing the same book, so getting different views in one place, making it easier for the reader to decide on the book without having to hunt around for other opinions.

In **V130** I found the Michael Coney piece the most enjoyable yet. I like the idea of having an interview or**Albion Writ** in each issue. Something I would like to see is, over a three issue period, a piece by an author, an agent and a publisher, giving their views on the professional relationship between them and the other two, thus giving a three-sided view on the production, selling and marketing of a book, and how each person benefits from the help of the others.

Other articles I particularly enjoyed were Colin Greenland's 'Yes, but did you like it?' (**V129**) and the Geoff Ryman interview (**V128**). I would like to see more articles like Colin's and the like of Ken Lake's look at an old classic ('City In Ashes' **V129**).

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YOUR EXTRACTS FROM DAVID PRINGLE'S **SCIENCE fiction: the 100 Best Novels** (V130) interested me strangely, for several reasons. First, I too had spotted the Anthony Burgess book and had decided to compile a similar book on SF. However, I did not claim they were THE 'Best', merely '99 Best SF Novels'. I certainly take issue with Pringle in his wild claim which cannot possibly be substantiated.

Second, my aim was somewhat different from Pringle's. Basically, he retells the stories' plots, which strikes me as a singularly pointless exercise - the aim is surely to encourage the reader to try each novel in turn, but giving away the storyline defeats any such attempt. My aim was to set each novel in its place. That is, to introduce the author, mention other works of similar or different kind, explain how each trend or plot developed through the literature, show how authors influenced each other generally, and all in all to introduce the reader to whole world of SF, its themes and its styles, through the medium of 99 'best' stories - best in the sense that they were not only among the best written and plotted, but that they also showed best the message of SF. I aimed not to be too controversial, not to write too erudite,ly,not to sling in fannish chat or obscure references - this was to be a book for the ordinary reader who wanted to be guided through the whole world of reasonably-modern SF so that he'd know 'where to go from here', while gaining a lot of pleasure along the route.

(Ken describes how his idea was not taken up by publishers, then continues:)

I'd welcome readers' comments about the feasibility of such a work, and about the aspects in which I differ from David Pringle. To stress that I would restrict myself much more firmly to 'mainstream SF', eschewing 'difficult' books that are likely to deter the newcomer to our genre, goes without saying - certainly **Riddley Walker** would not feature there, while I do feel that Pringle's attempt to liken it to **A Canticle for Leibowitz** and **A Clockwork Orange** is so farfetched as to be laughable.

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ENJOYED **V130** - THOUGHT THE COVER WAS hinting at some marvellous subtle pun on 'Coney' = 'rabbit' but to cap it all, his piece was actually about rabbits! Far out!! (as they say).

Nice to see the extracts from David Pringle's book. I think the pre-publication extract idea, if it can be arranged, is an excellent one. As a link to your extracts from David's book I plan to run a short piece in **PI** based on David's summary of Bernard Wolfe's **Limbo**, suggesting that **Limbo** actually is that mythical object, a 'sadly neglected masterpiece'.

I'm looking for similar pieces on o/p classics from other people. If you have any ideas on worthwile books which are not in a p/b edition, I'd be glad to have them.

I enjoyed your editorial and agreed with most of it. I've never read Malcom Saville, although W.E. Johns was my introduction to SF, despite his inability to tell the difference between stars, planets and asteroids. I think some of the current wave of children's SF/fantasy is excellent although I suspect the dividing line between 'realism' and 'fantasy' is more subtle than you suggest. (And if I ever get my magnum opus on Arthur Ransome written, I'd develop that!)

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(**Vector** is mainly about written SF, and I believe that reviews of new books are an essential part of the content, keeping members informed on what is new and worthwhile in the genre; **PI**'s role is to cover the paperbacks that we actually buy, whether new or reprints. With particularly interesting or controversial books, we do occasionally publish multiple reviews, but unfortunately there isn't the space to do that too often. I'm hoping to use articles by a literary agent and a publisher's editor in the near future. I'm also hoping to run further re-evaluations; any offers? - Ed.)

MIKE DICKINSON'S REVIEW OF **FOOTFALL**, TO which I was myself a little bit more favourable, is very politically sound and all that. But while Mike is on target about the effects of nuclear devastation on Kansas, he himself seems a bit hazy about the power released by a nuclear explosion - specifically, he appears doubtful that a pulse-driven spacecraft which is being slammed in the rear once a second by a bloody great H-bomb would be able to overcome the modest tug of gravity. (And this at ground level too, so Mike needn't even be worried about what, in the vacuum of space, the bombs will push against...) Better to save the raised eyebrow for the enthusiasm with which our authors set up a situation which 'justifies' the launch of the monstrous thing. Oh, well, at least they didn't do it from Britain.

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-STOP PRESS-

SITS VAC

DESIGNERS! VECTOR NEEDS you! In the very near future we will be needing the skills of either a professionally trained graphic designer or someone with similar qualifications. Our limited financial resources mean a talent for making a little go a long way is essential. For more information call the Editor (see masthead for number) or the Production Editor on 01.546 1621. Soon!

1985

ALASDAIR

– a daft divine comedy

ALASDAIR GRAY interviewed by Paul Kincaid

TO CALL LANARK A LITERARY NOVA SEEMS SOMEHOW TO DO IT A disservice, it burst upon the literary scene in 1981 winning elaborate plaudits from the most unlikely quarters. It is a strange combination of grim realism and wild surrealism, of the comic and the serious, yet while it sketches bows to all manner of literary precursors, from Dante to science fiction, it remains resolutely its own man, ambitious, inventive, a true original. Its author, Alasdair Gray, was born in Glasgow in 1934, and though he had previously had plays produced on television, radio and the stage, he was best known as an artist. His drawings have been a dramatic feature of each of his books. In person he is disheveled, both in appearance and speech; his talk is as wild and comic as his writing, delivered in a breathless Glaswegian accent and forever inclined to shoot off in unexpected directions or dissolve into hoots of laughter. Lest anyone suspect that his unique literary debut was a one-off, he followed it up in 1983 with **Unlikely Stories, Mostly**, a remarkably varied collection of tales. Then in 1984 the promise of **Lanark** was confirmed with the publication of his second novel, **1982, Janine**, in which elaborate sexual fantasies and a dialogue with God vie with each other against a background of anarchic typography. 1985 saw the publication of his third novel, 'a fable of the Sixties', **The Fall of Kelvin Walker**, and of **Lean Tales**, a collection of stories by himself, James Kelman and Agnes Owen, three members of the 'Glasgow Mafia' of which Gray has become the leading light. He has produced no two pieces of fiction that are alike, though all are distinguished by a clarity of vision and expression, and a disdain for conformity whether it be to sexual mores or typographical style. It was these qualities which he brought to this interview, conducted at Silicon in August 1985, in which he expressed his views on a number of subjects ranging from the history of **Lanark** to his views of God.

ON THE HISTORY OF LANARK. . .

I'D A NOTION OF A STORY THAT WAS A RATHER EXAGGERATED SPIRITUAL autobiography of someone who started off like me, went in for murder and suicide in fits of sexual frustration and insanity, and went into a kind of afterlife - you know, a daft Divine Comedy - and worked things out slightly better there. I had the idea of the plot, including that, when I was about 18. I even thought I could write it in three months because at Art School most of the Glasgow School of Art folk whose parents weren't immensely rich took jobs as tram conductors during the summer holidays, and I remember explaining to my father that rather than do this I would rather write this novel, which he allowed. In fact I got a chapter and a quarter finished, and realised it was a more difficult job than I'd thought. The things I'd imagined happening in the book are still in it, but the longer I worked on it I realised that the journey between those points that I'd imagined was more difficult and longer than I'd thought.

. . . AND ITS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS

BOOK 1, WHICH TAKES SOMEBODY UP FROM THE AGE OF ABOUT FOUR TO THE age of 17, uses things that happened to me, but I left out all the happy bits. I remember thinking: Gosh, I went on quite nice holidays with my father. I don't think I presented folk as being nasty, except for the central character who's presented as the nastiest person. The parents are quite well meaning by him and try to do their best, but I don't actually present any of the relaxed, happy times in which we were quite cheery together. Well actually happiness is very hard to dramatise unless it happens at a moment just before the crisis that shatters it, or if it happens at the moment of: 'And now we say farewell...'

But Book 1 is like that. Book 2 isn't, though again it uses material. I've got the character, my man, doing things that I always managed to avoid doing. I made this Thaw character much more dour and uncompromising and unable to bend than I ever was. And therefore, though there were certain crises I'd present in the book, like the business of him refusing to sit a higher examination because he thinks he's got something more important to do with his talent, and being told that if he doesn't sit it they have to expel him, and refusing to sit it and being expelled - though I was given severe warnings because I was doing work other than the exams, I actually did just enough of the exam for them to say: 'Ach, well, all right, you've passed.' - but I was deliberately wanting to construct somebody who would go further than I would, and be less adaptable. And actually I've never been mad. Sorry, I've never had what is officially called a nervous breakdown.

ON THE DESIGN OF HIS BOOKS. . .

NOWADAYS AS FAR AS PRINTING ILLUSTRATIONS IS CONCERNED IT IS AS cheap to print an illustration as a page of type, in fact cheaper because of the photographic process, so it was quite easy for me to get **Lanark** illustrated and even designed as I wanted, because I didn't ask for any money for it.

With the business of getting the blocking, I remember it was with my second book that Canongate of Edinburgh were bringing out. They have blocking on the spine usually for the lettering and they can have a wee design because it doesn't cost any more. And I asked, wouldn't it be possible to have it done on front and back, and they said: 'Oh it will be prohibitively expensive but we'll enquire about it but nobody does it these days'. But they made an enquiry and found it was actually astonishingly cheap. It didn't cost ten times as much to print, it cost rather less than twice as much. It was helpful because it got a book award for design and things like that - the publishers got the book award. So by the time I'd signed with Jonathan Cape for **1982, Janine** - normally the contract says that the author shall have no control or jurisdiction over the cover design or lay-out of the book - but because it started with a small publishing house that found it cheaper to let me do all that rather than pay a designer, and there had been some awards and publicity for it, Jonathon Cape were more prepared to be bullied. When I say bullying, I think it's partly a matter of keeping up pressure. I've generally found that in publishing - it's probably just a general thing - people rather than say No to something that is put to them tend to say 'Yes, we'll see about that',and they actually mean No and hope you'll realise this and not bring the matter up again. When they do say No I don't go away and weep, rave or yell, I may look thunderstruck and slightly appalled, but I'm obviously not angry with them. But I generally find that if you keep saying: 'Well what about these coloured endpapers', they say 'Well....'; and if

G R A Y

you keep saying: 'And will you ask so and so about the coloured endpapers', eventually..

But it was only through the luck of starting with a firm that was small, nearby - as I say, 40 minutes train journey away - and so small that you knew everybody in it. Whereas in a big firm there's always enough people you don't know so's that the people you do know can say it wasn't them who stopped it.

. . . AND THE TYPOGRAPHY

AH THERE WAS NO TROUBLE. WELL, THERE WAS A BIT OVER ME GOING ON longer than they wanted to get it a bit better. But the very typographically complicated bit of tapering columns of different sizes of print interlocking, in order to show that it could be done, I got a friend to type it on an ordinary typewriter, varying between double spacing to present big lettering, and single or non-spacing for the smaller. I built it up as a collage to show them that since it could be done on a typewriter it could also be done on a world processor. Of course the initial reaction to that, as always, the typesetter looking at it said: 'of course, this would have been quite easy in the old hot-metal days.' What he was saying was that with hand set type this could easily have been done, now , through the magnificent progress of modern technology, they can't do that. I knew they were wrong, in fact it was much easier really, it was just that the particular modern technology hadn't been asked to do that before.

But it does happen again and again that something which could be done by a certain process, in a giant technological advance, becomes a reason for explaining: 'Oh, yes, once we could pay you a cheque we owed you only a fortnight late, but now ha ha ha it's computerised, it'll take three months'. These computers are really quite intelligent, if you'd only train them a bit better they could operate as well as in the old days.

IS THERE NOTHING MORE TO COME?

NOT, I THINK PROSE FICTION AT ALL. I'VE GOT SOME PLAYS AND POETRY that I'm working at pushing. I have a tail-end of a story. That is, I got a letter from The New Statesman asking if I'd got a story, and since I've sometimes sent them stories that they've sent back, and my Dad took the new Statesman... But I'd got none left. Than I did remember a small idea that I'd thought could be developed, and it's just a two-page story, or perhaps a page and three quarters. I think, honestly, that's the last.

I've been wanting the books I write to be different from each other, and I think so far they have been. Any other novel I wrote, or even any other short story I wrote, would be very like one of the ones I've done so far.

There's a collection of four illustrated books that Canongate Books may be publishing a year this December. We're planning it. A set of four books to fit into a little box. One is a fantasy illustrated. There's an early poem of Hugh MacDiarmid. Another is a set of figure drawings. And we're reproducing some of the paintings I've done in colour. It'll be called **Some of Glasgow**. Not **Son of Glasgow**, but **Some of Glasgow**. In which there'll be a set of reproductions of paintings of Glasgow and its surrounding landscapes, and portraits of folk.

ON THE 'GLASGOW MAFIA'

IT'S A PRETTY USUAL THING. PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TO CAMBRIDGE TOGETHER come out of it, and write books about being in Cambridge and coming out of it, and they write television plays about being at Cambridge together and what their different friends did. And very often the people who are producing the plays on television are the people they were at Cambridge together with. The mutual support between neighbours will always have a slight touch of the vicious circle, the "Aha, they're plotting to take over", and thinking: "Of course, they're very clannish, you know."

I'm slightly uneasy about it where the rest of Scotland is concerned, because - I believe it was a phrase I first used myself: 'The Glasgow Mafia', and some people in Edinburgh have taken it up. I don't like that because as far as Scotland is concerned a bit of the publicity, both from London and elsewhere, also possibly from Glasgow, would seem to indicate that Glasgow is a separate city state quite divorced from the rest of Scotland, and I rather hate that.

The thing that makes me feel cheery about this in a weird way is the fact that my own first book was turned down by quite a lot of London publishers and it was in fact an Edinburgh publisher that did it. And most of the writers you're referring to (Kelman, Owen, Liz Lochhead and others), though from Glasgow, it's been small Edinburgh publishing houses - Polygon, Edinburgh University Press - that have published them. The history of even that is quite interesting, because what you had was that up to the major depression of the Thirties, Scotland had some very big publishing houses. Within the last twenty years the big Scottish publishing houses like Collins and Blackie shifted their headquarters to London and the Scottish bit became a subsidiary - a normal process, just intelligent financial organisation. But suddenly there were really no Scottish publishing houses at all. Then, because there was actually a Scottish market, but a market that was too small for the ex-Scottish publishing houses, you had a few small publishing houses coming into existence and existing rather precariously. But it is through these that the Scottish writers you've referred to have got a kind of start. Of course one of the handy things has been nice critical reviews in the London press which has led to Penguin and Abacus Books - even Collins, my God - reprinting these books that got really their first presentation in Scotland.

ON GOD

IT'S LIKE A CHARACTER IN FICTION. PEOPLE GO AROUND, QUITE intelligent people with academic positions, talking as if Hamlet existed, and disagreeing with each other about why he said this thing and did the other. And anything that has been very clearly imagined, that has been imagined clearly enough to be shared between several folk, obviously has an important communal existence. I mean, it has a communal reality, like the British Constitution and various other fictions of that kind.

And obviously God, as far as most societies are concerned - well, perhaps there are tribal ones in which there isn't a single big daddy - as far as most urban civilizations are concerned, the fiction of God is the one we all share, more or less. Pantheists might be the closest to it, tending to regard God as: The Character of the Universe, or the soul of the universe. But being a bit of a materialist I tend to regard someone's character as they way they behave and I think: How does the universe behave?

Well, in the first place, I came out of it, and so does everything I know and like, therefore I'm for it on that point. Then there's the bit of saying: 'Why do I get hot so often, and I'm sure it's not my fault, and if it is, it's not my fault that it's my fault'. There is this in me.

But anyone who thoroughly approves of God - and it's a trick governments have of identifying God with themselves. Of course, nowadays they say it's just Nature, so if you quarrel with certain forms of social organisation, in the olden days they would have said you were blaspheming God in opposing his legislators or his spokesmen on Earth, today they say you're opposing human nature and have no respect for law and order. And again law and order is identified with the order of the universe.

If you say: 'I believe in God and I love Him', you may turn out to be a collaborator of the worst kind, in which the most horrible things occur and you say: 'Well, it's his will'; or you say: 'It's human nature'. One's a bit haunted by the Christian notion, which I haven't the guts to take seriously, because it would mean you'd have to set an example every time you did anything. But the notion that God became a rather fragile human being in order to set an example, and that we shouldn't identify Him with the organisations that crucified Him, but we should identify Him with the ones they crucify, that's an idea that is the most important part of Christianity.

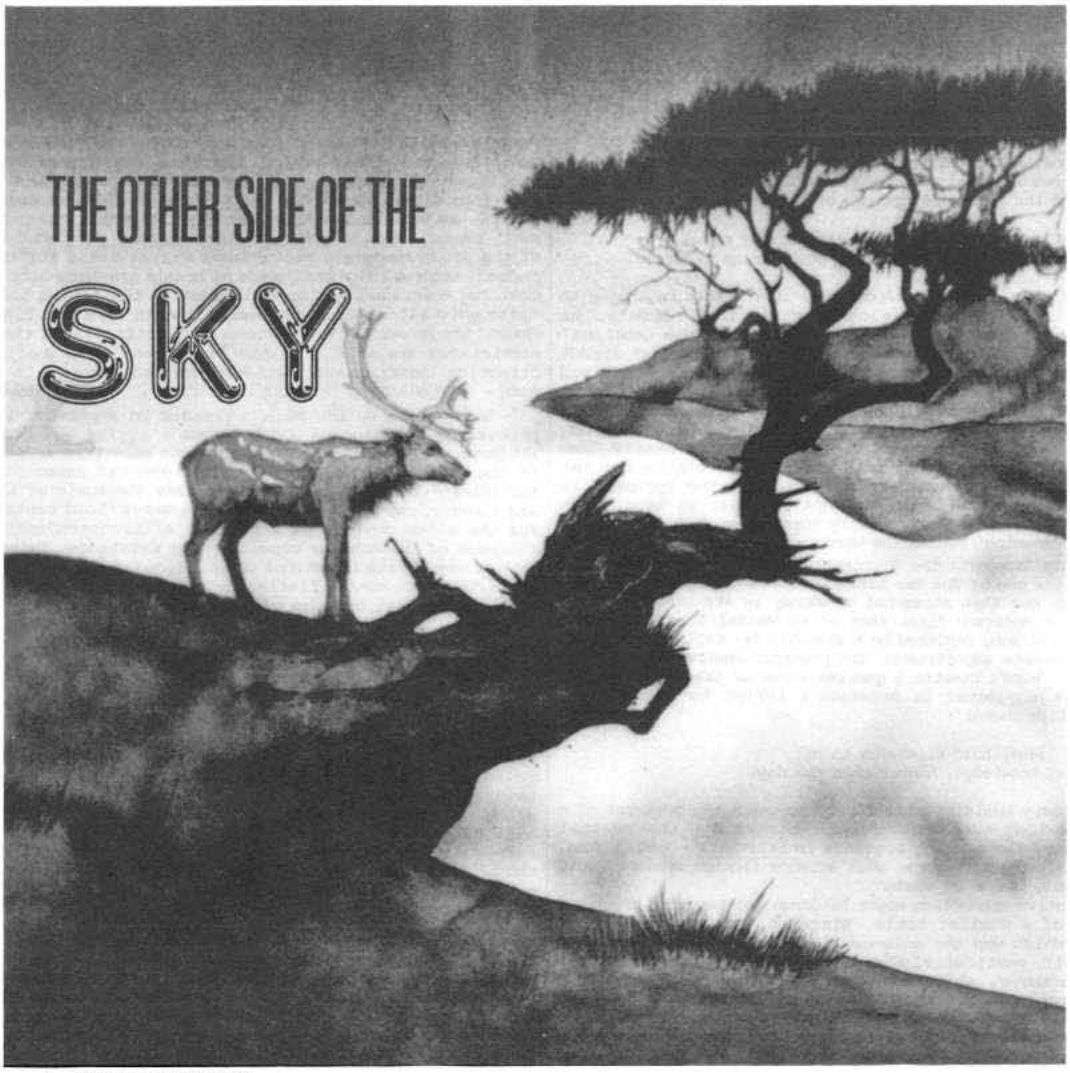
ON SCIENCE FICTION

I THINK I TURNED TO SCIENCE FICTION AROUND 11 OR 12. BEFORE THAT I read only fairy stories. Anything from Enid Blyton to the Golden Fairy Book. Reading as far as I was concerned, and most film viewing, was a means of finding a world which I found more interesting than the world I lived in. It wasn't that the world I lived in was a terribly painful one, I don't think that the world I lived in was a terribly painful one, i don't think it was more painful than most children's early lives, but I did find it terribly boring. And the kinds of fantasies I liked - I mean, things like Billy Bunter didn't interest me because they struck me as being realistic, and I was out for magic.

About 11 or 12 I suppose I'd gone through the magic phase and I suppose I got rather sick of its repetitiveness. And also I wanted to make some kind of bridge with what appeared to be the possible. Of course that was quite easily done through H.G. Wells in the main, and some of Edgar Allen Poe, and ordinary things like Conan Doyle's Lost World. I was interested in space ships and prehistoric monsters and all the kinds of things which you got in the comics then and get now.

There are some science fiction novels which are positively great, the majority as with all other kinds of genre that are just rather interesting which you wouldn't want to re-read. And in fact when I want to relax it will usually be with a science fiction book, and you do stumble across books which do seem to be full of very interesting ideas. You know the in-joke of Vonnegut's Kilgore Trout, who's a rotten writer but his ideas are good.

I remember reading **The Paradox Men** by some accident and thinking how, in a sense, it was one of these really moral novels which attempt to take, if you like, the Christian hatred of the pain of human history and use the thought of time travel as an attempt to grapple with it. I suppose it's humanistic in a way which I really liked.



by DAVID WINGROVE

FEW BANDS HAVE BEEN SO APPROPRIATELY NAMED AS YES, WHOSE affirmative, major-chord, classically-oriented music formed so great a part of the seventies progressive rock movement. For a band who were briefly known as Mabel Greer's Toyshop, however, the change to Yes in the summer of 1968 scarcely earned a footnote in the music press of the time. They probably seemed just like another club band playing other people's covers ('The Midnight Hour', 'Light My Fire' and 'Dancing In The Street' were regularly in their set); a band far more influenced by the close harmony styles of The Beatles, The Association and various soul artists, than by contemporary 'progressive' rockers like Hendrix and The Stones. Such influences are clearly discernible on their first album, **Yes**, released in August 1969, which featured cover versions of The Byrds 'I See You' and The Beatles 'Every Little Thing'. Nonetheless, the musicianship on the album suggested that the band -Bill Bruford (drums), Tony Kaye (organ/piano), Peter Banks (guitar/vocals), Chris Squire (bass/vocals) and Jon Anderson (lead vocals) - was anything but the standard pop-rock fodder. There was a tightness and a polish to their music that made some of the rock establishment sit up and take note: amongst them Tony Wilson of **Melody Maker** (now boss of Factory Records), who wrote the sleeve notes for that debut album.

Time And A Word, which appeared in July 1970, confirmed Wilson's faith in the band, yet gave only the smallest indication of their future direction. Once again there were two covers in the mix, and the emphasis was on love songs like 'Sweet Dreams', 'Clear Days' and 'Time And A Word', just as it had been on their first album ('Sweetness' and 'Yesterday And Today' in particular). But two tracks on **Time And A Word** suggested the revolution that was to occur in the band's lyrics and music within the next two years.

With 'The Prophet' and 'Astral Traveller', Jon Anderson began to bring his growing fascination with what we might term 'astral-mysticism' into the arena of the group's music. And, as the strongest and most determined personality in the band it was little wonder that his obsession with transcendence and the transcendental - perhaps best expressed in a half-line from 'Astral Traveller': 'Leave out the body load' - was to radically alter the musical direction of Yes, particularly when he found sympathy for his ideas in Chris Squire, who co-wrote 'The Prophet' with him. Peter Banks, however, had little time for this dalliance with the etheric realms and quit the group; replaced almost at once by the virtuoso guitarist Steve Howe.

Howe's entry into Yes marked a considerable change of emphasis in the group's repertoire, and with **The Yes Album**, released in March 1971, yes began to explore new lyrical and musical structures, embracing not merely the mystical and the symphonic, but also the science fictional. During the rehearsals of the material for **The Yes Album** (in Church Hill, Devon during the spring of 1970) Bill Bruford had played the other members the first two King Crimson albums with their razor-tight, hard-edged rhythmic patterns and - under the influence of poet Pete Sinfield - their science fiction/fantasy-influenced lyrics. The possibilities inherent in both the lyrical material and the rhythmic patternings were not lost on a band who were already moving in that direction under their own steam, yet Anderson and Squire wanted to keep those distinctive close harmonies and the optimistic major chord sequences. The results of Bruford's enthusiasm are more to be heard on **Fragile**, released in January the next year, than on **The Yes Album**; nevertheless, Yes can be seen at this stage of their career, as an alternative King Crimson, the affirmative to Fripp's stark negation: the other side of the sky, if you like. Indeed, when it was time to record the third Crimson album, **Lizards**, Jon Anderson sang the vocals on 'Prince Rupert Awakes'.

The Yes Album, with its longer, more complex and far more ambitious pieces, marked the birth of a distinctive 'Yes' music, close enough to the band's roots to remain recognisable as rock, yet in its time sequences and melodic structures sharing something both with classical (Howe) and jazz (Bruford) forms. And, for the first time, there was a use of overt science fiction

imagery, in particular on 'Yours Is No Disgrace', a curiously-optimistic post-holocaust song with a poignant final verse and a memorable chorus, implying mankind's lack of a coherent life direction and the potential outcome of that lack:

> On a sailing ship to nowhere, leaving any place.
> If the summer change to winter, yours is no disgrace.

Even at this stage, Jon Anderson's lyrics were beginning to lose the clarity and concision of grammatical form as he experimented with blurred, oblate forms where the emotional effect of key words and sequences of words replaced direct meaning. The music, with its soaring instrumental runs and grandiose chordal structures, emphasised this new lyrical emphasis: the emotions created by the merging of music and oblate lyrics creating an indivisible emotional bonding in the listener, such that what makes sense in context can quite easily seem (particularly in mid-period Yes) semantic drivel on the col page. But it was never Anderson's intention for the lyrics to be taken out of context. If the attempt is made, as here, that musical context should be constantly borne in mind when trying to unravel the 'meaning' behind the words.

'Starship Trooper', the 9 minute mini-epic in three parts that made side one of **The Yes Album**, was also the first of a new kind of song: one that attempted to embody in its structure that astral flight Anderson first sang of in 'Astral Traveller', the balloon of that song replaced by a starship (an evolutionary leap that seems somehow significant). The powerful instrumental climax of the song, 'Wurm', creates a genuine sense of transcendence - a sense first suggested in Anderson's lyrics to the opening movement, 'Life Seeker':

> Mother light, hold firmly on to me:
> Catch my knowledge, higher than the day.

The same slowly building climax also suggests the movement of a vast, mile-long spaceship through the void - the musical equivalent of the opening sequence in Star Wars - and evokes, through this suggested image, what science fiction readers would recognise as a 'sense of wonder'.

A tentative connection might be drawn between this track and the novel of a similar title, **Starship Troopers**, by Robert Heinlein, which won the science fiction field's coveted Hugo award in 1960, particularly because of the line 'Sister Bugler flying high above', which seems to refer directly to Heinlein's tale of future war. But apart from that connection - which may well have been the starting point for the song - Yes's affirmative vision of mystical wonder doesn't correspond with the book, with its dour xenophobic arguments, wholly alien to Anderson's philosophy.

Fragile pushed the musical and lyrical experimentation a stage further - in certain respects as far as Yes were to take them. To my mind, it's the most flawed of their albums, particularly on the five solo pieces, yet the group compositions, coldly atmospheric as they are, are classic Yes.

At first hearing, 'Heart Of The Sunrise' could easily be King Crimson, with the combination of Bruford's drumming, Squire's bass and Howe's guitar every bit as tight as Giles, Giles and Fripp on **In the Wake of Poseidon**, but the entry of Jon Anderson's voice following the hectic instrumental introduction distinguishes the track as something only Yes could have done. Once again the lyrics are inferential rather than descriptive: suggestive of a mood which varies as the mood of the music itself changes - 'How can the wind with its arms all around me'. Here, as never before, the lyrics are utterly dependent upon their musical context and upon Anderson's clear, soaring delivery, his voice essentially another instrument with its own range of expressive sounds.

Jon Anderson's developing taste for classical music - for Sibelius and Stravinsky in particular - was accompanied by a growing love of esoteric literature. He was reading Melville, Herman Hesse and science fiction at this time - and whilst he was never a part of any of the drug-oriented cults that then flourished (particularly in America), his interest in consciousness-raising and in cosmic awareness was very much of its time, even if it was more than a passing phase for Anderson. Millions of years, millions of miles, sunlight, dreams and soaring flight - these things, expressed in the lyrics of **Fragile** and illustrated by the music, are all evidence of Anderson - and, more importantly, Yes - assimilating and reformulating his influences. However, to ascribe the whole of the band's sudden lurch into Cosmic territory to Anderson is to do a great disservice to Chris Squire (a glimpse at his 1975 solo album, **Fish Out of Water** demonstrates how attuned he was to Anderson's vision) and Steve Howe. Also to new keyboards man Rick Wakeman, who arrived midway through the **Fragile** sessions to replace the departed Tony Kaye. Wakeman was a science fiction enthusiast in his own right (if of the rather 'schlock' kind which surfaced on his 1974 solo album, **Journey to The Centre of The Earth**).

If **The Yes Album** had created a distinctive Yes sound, then **Fragile**, with its Roger Dean cover of a strange flying boat hovering above a tiny, disintegrating planet, created a distinctive Yes image - one that was to be developed over the next four albums (and which was eventually used on seven albums in all, as well as becoming the basis of their massive stage-set). Dean's graphics emphasised the science fictional otherness of the group's appeal, providing a visual motif for the music. Indeed, such was the influence of Dean's graphics upon the band that Jon Anderson developed the idea of the flying boat in his first solo album, **Olias of Sunhillow**, in 1976 (calling it 'the Moorglade Mover') - a pure science fictional idea that demonstrates what Yes might have done if they had moved wholly in this direction. Anderson acknowledged Dean's influence in a sleeve note - 'FOR PLANTING THE SEED Roger Dean'.

With **Close to the Edge**, released in September 1972, the process of oblation in Jon Anderson's lyrics had reached its ultimate. It was no longer possible to ascertain a 'story-line' in the three lengthy tracks, only a general sense of Blakean mysticism - 'a dewdrop can exalt us like the music of the sun' - and a sense, captured in Roger Dean's marvellous centre-spread for the album cover - of a plateau of transcendence: of the conquest of the mundane conditions of existence. Indeed, these lyrics are oblate in both of the dictionary definitions of the word; there is both a flattening of effect, of meaning, and a solemn yet joyful offering of a vague something to the 'Gods':

> All in all the journey takes you all the way
> As apart from any reality that you've ever seen and known.

The title track begs some kind of explanatory note, denying, as it does, the expected progression of ideas. In its imprecision of setting and subject - that wide area of interpretations it allows -it is a kind of SF/fantasy, particularly in the third movement, 'I Get Up, I Get Down', where the Lady's domain could well be anywhere at any time. In the face of such veils of allusion, one is bound to ask, Close To The Edge of what? Of Enlightenment? Of the Taoist Way? Hesse's **Siddhartha** was supposedly Anderson's chief influence in writing the lyrics, though there is only, once again a tentative connection: the motif of the enlightened man (Siddhartha) sitting 'close to the edge, down by the river'. Yet the lyrics, if not the music, have an eternal, timeless quality - they are set, if you like, in an ever-present moment of otherness. Such a timeless moment, indeed, as exists in 'Heart Of The Sunrise' and 'South Side Of The Sky' on **Fragile**, and which Hesse (whose use of science fictional ideas in a Cosmic, mind-expanding manner echoes Anderson's) often used. And like Hesse, while Yes used Western artistic techniques (the most advanced recording techniques of the time), it was to the East that they looked for their philosophy.

The questions about the lyrics arise, however, only when you struggle against the powerful interchange between music and lyrics. In both 'And You And I' and 'Siberian Khatru' there is the hallucinatory clarity of a drum-dream revelation. The first is a love song, but with the Cosmos as much as with an individual woman - with Mother Earth, as Hesse would have said. It is anti-political and pro-mystical, and the 'answers' given - if answers they are - are personal, not social. One thing can be clearly deduced from the lyrics, however, and that is the belief of the band in the eventual spiritual evolution of Mankind:

> There'll be no mutant enemy we shall certify,
> Political ends as sad remains will die.
> Reach out as forward tastes begin to enter you.

As with much of Yes's lyrics, they are talking of a far future state of events - of how Mankind must evolve. And in that first line is, perhaps, a teasing reference to Isaac Asimov's **Foundation** series, where the Mutant enemy, The Mule, dramatically changed the planned evolution of a peaceful and rational galactic empire. Perhaps...Elseways it makes little sense.

'Siberian Khatru' is the most obscure of the three songs - 'Khatru' is a Yemeni word meaning 'as you wish' - where, in the final upward rush of the song, the singularly uttered words become simple emblems of spiritual aspiration. There is the density of meaning of esoteric poetry here which again both demands and yet denies exposition. Is it a Christian song? A song about seasonal variation and a need to accept such? Or is it best, perhaps, merely to note the imagiste juxtaposition of evocative phrases; 'cold reigning king', 'Blue tail, Tail fly', 'Cold stainless nail'. In any case, it scarcely matters, for the powerful combination of fast-paced melodic phrasing and intense lyricism creates a definite sense of invigoration, almost of accomplishment, in the listener.

If some critics were quietly dubious about the direction of the music on **Close To The Edge**, most were openly hostile when the next studio album, **Tales From Topographic Oceans**, appeared in November 1973. With the side-long 'Close To The Edge', Yes had produced what could best be described as 'symphonic rock' - and on **Tales...** they took it a stage further, with a four-part

'symphony' extending over the whole of a double album - the 'Grand Concept' Anderson had secretly visualised for years.

The idea for **Tales...** originated with Anderson's reading of Paramhansa Yogananda's **Autobiography Of A Yogi**, with its description of the four-part Shastric scriptures, covering the whole of Mankind's existence. From this starting point, Anderson and Howe sketched out their own four-part vision of Man's existence, a concept echoed by science fiction's foremost philosopher/novelist, Olaf Stapledon, whose **Last and First Men** (1930) covered the same kind of vast time-scale (from Creation to the final evolution of Man into spiritual super-being).

Tales... has a 'horizontal' structuring rather than any true musical progression - it's more a succession of atmospheric layers than a working out and embellishing of themes. Many accused it of lacking any structure at all - it was, as Yes later admitted, inched out in the studio, and was in every sense an experiment in composition for the group - but as with **Close To The Edge**, there is a distinct 'feel' to each of the side-long movements. As before, the lyrics melt and flow, and a meaning can be discerned often only at the expense of grammatical sense: syntax must be sacrificed in analysing the lyrics to **Tales...** But what emerges is not simply the old mystical concerns - that dream of a higher consciousness extended from the individual to the race - but also Anderson's acute distaste for modern materialism and cultural vulgarity. In a **Melody Maker** article of June 1973, headed 'Yes Today', the writer commented on the 'spiritual fervour and clear-eyed vision' of the group: this communicates itself not in the literal meaning of the lyrics to **Tales...** but in the experienced sense of the words, if such a distinction can be permitted. In the same article, Anderson spelt out what the Grand Concept was about:

'The Album will contain four pieces - the first about the revelation of God, and the enjoyment of knowing there is a God, and why things happen in life, like a patchwork quilt... The second part is about remembering your own life, and remembering there were civilisations before ours. The third reflects on the ancient civilisations of China, India and Mexico, and the fourth is concerned with the ritual of life, based on the scriptures of Sanscrit. It will be very joyous.'

From Anderson's over-simplistic explanation it would seem that they had not strayed far from Yogananda's four-part Shastric scriptures, whereas the album does far more than this. It is 'very joyous' - almost ethereal - in passages, but it's also highly varied, moving from moments of intensity to sections where the band seems to relax utterly and drift. And it is not concerned simply with tracing Man's past and drawing those threads together, but in projecting them into a future where Mankind returns to nature as children of the sun - 'Nous Sommes Du Soleil' enacts this projected return. In this sense, what **Tales...** depicts is a utopia - indeed, much of Yes's material posits this better, finer future when Mankind has awakened from its present folly.

As far as overt futuristic references are concerned, there are few in **Tales...**, yet in the second movement, 'The Remembering', there is a passage - following 'Don the cap and close your eyes...' - where the time-sequences and unusual harmonies, linked with the lyrical material, are evocative of something alien, something other: 'Other skylines to hold you...'.This is also the section of **Tales...** which refers forward to their next album, **Relayer**, which again uses that 'ever-present moment of otherness' I mentioned when discussing 'Close To The Edge'. The topography is not of a definite place or time, but of a state of being: Yes, like science fiction's utopian writers, are attempting to chart Mankind's spiritual aspirations. Unlike most of science fiction's writers, however, the conclusions Anderson and Co. reach are affirmative, positive visions and not the grey dystopian visions of such as Orwell, Huxley and Zamyatin. For Yes the future is all potentiality: a movement home - 'Flying Home/Going Home' - and not a divorce from Gaia and the self.

It is difficult to discuss Yes at this period without examining their philosophy, because that intensity of vision shapes the music, indeed is the music, when all's said and done. And sufficient people shared that vision - that is, liked the music - that all of their albums at this stage of their career were in the top five of the charts throughout the world. Even so, few critics attempted to come to terms with what Yes were doing and dismissed the lyrical content either as pretentious dilettantism or as obscurantist rambling. Very few discerned that the power of the music derived from the lyrical vision. Many - like Chris Welch in his **Melody Maker** review of December 7th, 1974 - gave a huge sigh of relief when Yes presented them with **Relayer**, a 'relatively low-key project'.

Relayer was - excepting 'Awakening' on **Going For The One** - the band's last dalliance with lengthy suites, and stands in some respects as a postscript to **Tales From Topographic Oceans**. 'The Gates of Delirium', which fills side one of the album, is a timeless message about the need to fight for freedom against

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oppression and argues against any simplistic view of Yes as weak-kneed vegetarian pacifists. Vegetarian they are, but the lyrics of 'The Gates of Delirium' leave no doubt that they are realists as well as visionaries: 'Destroy oppression' and 'The pen won't stay the demon's wings...' are realisations that the visionary future glimpsed in the song's final section, 'Soon Oh Soon The Light', must be earned - 'Create our freedom'. The message might be timeless, but Yes express it in a very modern way, utilising a science fictional concept, that of alternate possibilities:

Choose and renounce throwing chains to the floor
Kill or be killing faster sins correct the flow
Casting giant shadows off vast
Penetrating force
To alter via the war

These lyrics are perhaps the clearest for some time - again, another reason why the critics embraced **Relayer** as fervently as they'd rejected **Tales...** - and, but for that final, ethereal section, are Yes at their most aggressive ever.

Rick Wakeman, never wholly attuned to Yes's intense lifestyle, had left the band before **Relayer** and Patrick Moraz, a Swiss jazz musician had come in on keyboards for that album. by the time of **Going For The One**, in July 1977, however, Wakeman was back. It was the first new Yes album in three years, and the first since **Time And A Word** not to be engineered or produced by Eddie Offord, the 'sixth member of the band'. The result was a rather muted production for what were otherwise classic Yes tracks. 'Turn Of The Century' and 'Wonderous Stories' are both science fiction stories, the latter summarising, perhaps Yes's particular use of SF's imagery and range:

Hearing your wonderous stories
It is no lie I see deeply into the future

A future where 'Love!' is the only imperative. Indeed, in 'Wonderous Stories', Anderson is again talking of the 'Astral Traveller', himself:

He spoke of lands not far
Nor lands they were in his mind

While in 'Turn of the Century' Anderson creates an eternal love story - between Roan and his lady on the face of it, but also between the artist and his spirit - again evoking that sense of a timeless realm of otherness. In this respect Anderson shares a kinship with The Moody Blues and is, perhaps, more successful in conveying the nebulous otherness of the visionary/spiritual world.

'Awaken', the 15 minute track which ends **Going For The One** seems almost to be a condensation and personalisation of **Tales...**, utilising the same ideas and motifs to create what is, ultimately, a love song. The idea of key words and key phrases reaches an ultimate in 'Awaken', almost as if Anderson had used William Burroughs' cut-up techniques on previous songs and juxtaposed them: 'To the sun, oh let my heart dreaming'. But it's more than a word-game, or concept-game. Once again, the music embraces the lyrics and gives them an emotional sense that suddenly spills over in the final, gentle section when the lyrics revert to something simple, direct, and grammatical:

Like the time I ran away
And turned around
And you were standing close to me.

This reversion is crucial in yes's evolution, for after the spiritual and lyrical extremes of previous albums - which seem to reach peak intensity to a personal and not Cosmic love song. The four-fold mastery (Master of Images/Light/Soul/Time) becomes a singular love, as if to say that whatever else changes, this much is true and eternal. The awakening is to the imperative 'Love!'.

'Awaken' is, to my mind, a high point from which Yes descended. Which is not to say that **Tormato**, released in September 1978, was a poor album, simply that the almost religious intensity of 'Awaken' has subsequently disappeared from their music. Indeed, as far as science fictional influences are concerned, **Tormato** was primarily an SF album, with no fewer than four of the nine tracks having an SF premise.

Side One of **Tormato** opens with 'Future Times', set, seemingly, in the 'seventh age' of 'Madrigal' (the fourth track on side one). Its lyrics merely reiterate in SF terms the mystical utopianism of earlier songs: that the future will see a return to innocence for Mankind - a reversal of the original Fall. The song's conclusion seems to itemise the six stages of Man's evolution towards the 'seventh age', before segueing into the next song 'Rejoice', which is the return intimated in 'Future Times': not merely a return 'Home' as in **Tales...**, but a return to the band's own roots after 'Ten true summers long'.

'Madrigal' again takes up the theme of a 'golden age' - which is the 'inner flame' of Yes's vision. The astral travellers have become 'Celestial travellers', but they're essentially the same, with their future ideal of 'Sacred ships' which 'sail the seventh age'. It's a song which casts its retrospective glow over all of Yes's previous work, making explicit at long last what was formerly obscure - at least, in lyrical terms it achieves this much, for the madrigal setting actually reduces the effect of the words for once.

What is significant on **Tormato** is the collaboration of Anderson and Wakeman - the two SF fans - on three of the explicitly-SF songs. Wakeman's slightly 'schlock' influence surfaces on 'Arriving UFO' which abandons for once Anderson's insistence on 'inner space' and, as the lyrics state, sees 'The coming of outer space' into Yes's music for the first time. Even so, it's Anderson's voice, surely, which comes through in the second verse of the song:

Strange and Startling
Was this voice of time just saying
There's got to be a linking of everyone

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If Anderson's vision was grounded somewhat by Wakeman in 'Arriving UFO', in 'Circus of Heaven' he deliberately lets himself be grounded by his own son, Damion, who rejects his father's visionary, Mystical 'Circus of Heaven', preferring one of the more mundane kind, with clowns. If Wakeman's vision was of the **Close Encounters**, wide-screen kind, Anderson's was more akin to Ray Bradbury's mystical fantasies (in particular to stories like 'The Fire Balloons' in **The Illustrated Man** collection), blending together myth, fantasy and futurism.

If Jon Anderson was becoming tired with or frustrated by the format of Yes by 1978, **Tormato** shows no evidence of it. Even so, the experience of two solo albums, and of working with Vangelis Papathanassiou on the album **Short Stories**, resulted in him leaving Yes early in 1980, before a start could be made on the new album. **Drama**, the first album without Anderson, appeared in August 1980, and, whilst it's distinctively Yes, there's something of the spirit of Yes absent from the music. It's a harder, colder album, lacking moments of real joyousness. Something of that slick coldness results from the introduction of Trevor Horn and Geoff Downes, who, as The Buggles, had released the highly successful, SF-oriented album, **The Age Of Plastic** in 1979 (with overtly science fictional tracks like 'Plastic Age', 'Miss Robot' and 'Astroboy'). Wakeman had followed Anderson into exile before the album, and only Squire remained of the original 1978 Yes, along with Alan White and Steve Howe. Horn and Downes, long time Yes fans both, were quickly assimilated into the sound, but, and it proved a huge 'but' for Yes fans, the spirit of Yes - that soaring ethereal voice and its accompanying optimistic lyrics - was no longer present in the mix. **Drama** was, again, far from being a bad album - the music is quite excellent - but it was a shell without a yoke, typified by the image-obsessive tracks, 'Machine Messiah' (a bleak, dystopian vision - the first in Yes's pantheon) and 'Into the Lens. As might also have been expected, with Anderson gone, the lyrics were now crystal clear, and, as a result, unambiguously ineffective.

Perhaps it was clear to the remaining members of Yes that, without Anderson, they were musically adrift, for Steve Howe left the band before a new album could be cut, joining the blatantly commercial supergroup, Asia. Downes and Horn also bowed out, the latter staying on only as producer. For a time it seemed that Yes were dead as a group, and then, late in 1983, **90125**, a new Yes album appeared in the shops (the title derived from the Atlantic code number for the record, 79-0125-1, evidence of a lack of unified direction behind the conception of the album). Not only was Anderson back in the group, but original organist, Tony Kaye had rejoined, together with Trevor Rabin on guitar.

90125 is, to date, the purest rock album Yes have ever made; heavier, simpler and more direct - part of that thanks to Trevor Horn's production work; he also produced Frankie Goes To Hollywood at this same time. Jon Anderson, no longer group-leader-cum-visionary, took a back seat for most of the album, coming to the fore only on the two compositions, 'Our Song' and 'Hearts', where the old Yes sound emerges for the only time on the album. Squire and Rabin are the primary composers, earning themselves a Number One single (Yes's first ever!) in the States with 'Owner of a Lonely Heart'. And along with Anderson's muted role with a muting of the SF/mysticism influences in the lyrics. As on **Yes** and **Time And A Word**, the emphasis was once more on the love song. Yet, in spite of the new emphasis - which has, strangely made Yes more successful than ever - it is hard to believe that Anderson will be satisfied with taking a back seat, and whilst we may not ever see another **Tales...**, it's more than likely that in future Yes will be extending the range of their music - and embracing SF-visionary themes - once again.

MILFORD '85

A report by SUE THOMASON

MILFORD, AS ANYONE WHO HAS READ FOCUS 5 OR FOCUS 7 know, is an annual gathering of professional writers of science fiction, who congregate for a week at the Compton Hotel in Milford-on-Sea near Bournemouth, to read and criticise each others' manuscripts. Each invited writer brings an unpublished work of fiction, up to 10,000 words long. Present at Milford 1985 were, in alphabetical order, John Clute, Richard Cowper, Neil Gaiman, David Garnett, Colin Greenland, Gwyneth Jones, Garry Kilworth, Paul Kincaid, Rachel Pollack, Alex Stewart, Sue Thomason and Lisa Tuttle. As far as I know, three of the attendees were there for the first time, myself among them.

I found Milford 1985 both great fun and very disappointing. I think the disappointment was entirely my fault, for not having read the (implicit) small print carefully enough. My only previous experience of writers' workshops was a week-long residential one funded by my (then) local Arts Council. There were around twenty attendees, with a wide spread of interests and concerns, and the whole week was explicitly organised for talented newcomers, not established professionals, with two course tutors leading the poetry and prose workshop sessions. Also, although every attendee had to bring a MS for criticism, as at Milford, the main function of the course was to stimulate the attendees to write, and to give them time and space to do so. In this, the week was a very successful one for most participants (including the two tutors).

I went to Milford '85 for three reasons. The first, obviously, because I'd been invited. The invitation made me feel very good. That somebody, presumably some other writer, really thought I was doing work of professional status was a novel concept: a surprising idea, but one I rather liked.

The second reason for attending Milford is not one I'm proud of. I decided that if I was serious about wanting my work published, it would do me no harm to try the equivalent of "being seen at the right parties". And I'd heard various reports of Milford attendees selling work to other attendees over breakfast... Apparently, with the publishing recession, that's now a thing of the past.

The third reason developed after the original invitation, and by the time the gathering actually came round, had become a pressing need. I hadn't finished a work of fiction in nearly a year. I had (I have) a fairly demanding, low-income, full-time job, a number of other time- and energy-consuming commitments (including BSFA work), and a tremendous doubt about my ability to finish (or continue) the project I had started a couple of years ago, a fantasy novel. I wanted to know if a bunch of Real Writers could see any worth in my work. I wanted some answers to the question "If this was Chapter One of a novel you'd picked off the New Books shelf in your local library, would you take it out to read?". I expected a wide range of responses - from "No" to "Yes" - having previously sent a chunk of the MS round my Orbiter group, and having found that features particularly liked by one reader might well be particularly disliked by the next.

Apart from this, I thought that talking to other writers would be a morale-boosting activity. I often feel ashamed and embarrassed by my desire not simply to write, but to have my writing published and read. By wanting these things, I am in effect saying that either my perceptions, my imaginations, or my 'message', the thing I want to say or to direct people's attention to, are of superior quality in some way, and therefore potentially 'important' not simply to me, but to other people. If not, I can't see why anyone should have the slightest interest in my work, except perhaps as a not-very-remarkable psychological case study. This seems a very arrogant and egotistical thing to assume, and I thought that at least other writers would understand the problem. It can be far more helpful to have a problem understood than solved...

So. Sunday night, Milford '85. I arrive at the hotel, having had a lift down with another attendee. We are late; everyone else is out at the pub, eating. There is only one room left, a twin. First problem; can I share a room for a week with someone I don't know very well, when I am deliberately stretching the limits of my perception, making myself as sensitive and receptive as possible to everything? (The answer turns out to be no. I am increasingly uncomfortable and unable to communicate with my room-mate, but the friendly helpful Milfordians pander to my neurosis and arrange a room-swap. For this I am deeply grateful.) Second problem; find the pub, and a meal. Pub found with no trouble, but oh shit it's an expensive pub. I have borrowed the money to cover the hotel bill, and someone is recommending the oysters to me when what I want to know is where's the pie-and-peas? (or whatever they eat in the South instead of pie-and-peas). I have never eaten oysters, I am hungry and tired and nervous of all these strange people, and I'm damned if I'm going to analyse my angst in terms of class right now. I simply want to eat something large, hot and cheap. Settling for pate, I notice that people who eat oysters in pubs drink wine in pubs. Amazing, I think to myself over the rim of my pint.

After the meal, we go back to the hotel. It's the first night, so I'm expecting some sort of 'welcome game' to introduce us all to each other. But I have forgotten something. This ain't no ordinary writers' workshop, this is Milford; a group of cultured and charming people who all seem to know each other well already. I'm not yet a full member of the group, but very much there on trial. This is terrifying. I can't even go and hide in my room because I don't have a room of my own to go and hide in (this is probably worse if you're used to living alone). Rescue appeared in the shape of a woman who came up to me, smiled, and said, "Hello, I'm Rachel." Bless you Rachel, for introducing yourself; you were the only person who did so, and it helped tremendously.

After that, things started to improve. Until we got to the first criticism session. I had read the story and disliked it. It was a satire, an in-joke, a writer writing (well) about a writer writing (badly). It seemed to me to be a story meant to amuse a group of writers (Milfordians) who would generally feel themselves to be superior to the group satirised (writers and readers of popular fantasy). The Milfordians displayed a good deal of ambiguity about readers as a group; it seems to be a common trait of people who make a living from their 'art' to affect to despise and hold in contempt the group that they have to please to earn a living.

There were three stories about writers and writing at Milford '85, and this worried me a good deal. Firstly, because to a greater or lesser extent, all the stories seemed to have been written for the entertainment of a privileged group (Real Writers, Milfordians, 'cultured, intelligent people') at the expense of another group, seen as less privileged and a lawful target for mockery. Secondly, they all denigrated the profession or practice of writing, and to do this to one's own calling makes me feel uncomfortable. I was disturbed by the underlying premise of at least two of the stories: that popular writing is of necessity hack writing, that the popular/hack writer cynically and deliberately sets out to exploit his (in each case) readership and make money. As far as I know this is not necessarily true. Finally, I am worried by the self-referential element of writing about writing. It seems to me that it must be very hard to make writing sound an interesting activity, and that and that it must be very easy to slip into a peculiar kind of egotism (solipsism?) when trying to do so.

I was given to understand that the traditional activities at Milford, apart from lit. crit., were drinking and silly literary games, not necessarily (but probably) in that order. This turned out to be more or less true. There is also a swimming pool, and the beach is within easy walking distance. The fun bits of the week were very good indeed, the Milfordians, as individuals, were very good company. But that's not what I went to Milford for.

The criticism of the first chapter of a projected novel which I had brought to Milford was not really very helpful to me. It boiled down to "this isn't really very good". Nobody at Milford really liked the piece. I haven't done any further work on it in the month since Milford, and I've spent a long time wondering whether I'm capable of writing a novel, after all. I came to Milford feeling very unsure of my abilities as a writer, and went away convinced that whether or not I have it in mey to b a professional writer, I'm certainly not one at the moment. But I knew that already.

I didn't find anyone to have a reassuring moan with about the difficulties of the writing life, either. I listened to conversations about problems with foreign rights, agents, contracts - problems out of my orbit. Nobody else there appeared to have my problem of finding time to write - fitting it round a full-time job which often leaves me tired in the evenings, trying to balance writing time against the recreational activities that keep me in contact with the rest of the world.

Conclusions: Writing is a middle-class activity. Milfordians are a really nice bunch of professional writers. Two short story sales do not a professional writer make. Milford is tremendous fun, moderately expensive, and highly recommended for self-confident extraverts with incomes of over £5,000 p.a. Next year I'll try an Arvon Foundation course...

ECOLOGICAL NICHE

FRANK HERBERT
1920 - 1986

A personal recollection of the Dune books of Frank Herbert

WHEN A FRIEND TOLD ME THAT SHE HAD READ OF THE DEATH OF Frank Herbert, the first thing I felt was regret that the saga of **Dune** had come to an end, followed by guilt and lastly, before reason set in, slight indignation that my initial feelings had more to do with what others might think of my fondness for **Dune** than regret at the passing of a major name in science fiction. Was **Dune** and all its sequels, worth the effort?

Memory cannot always be trusted. I think I first read **Dune** (and **Dune Messiah**) when I was at school; the effect was powerful and immediate. I dreamed of shadowy figures walking silently in single file across an endless moonlit sea of sand, baroque duels and ornithopters! The richness and breadth of the vision transfixed me. It will seem to many people, quite reasonably, that this is a straightforward and natural reaction for an adolescent to what could be seen as a romantic fantasy.

Publishers described **Dune** as a cult novel; it was said at one time to be a campus favourite in many American universities because of its mixture of science, politics and mysticism. I remember a cover blurb (attributed to a 'leading' SF author) describing the book as being in the tradition of **Lord of The Rings**. Having read Tolkien I was struck more by the lack of similarities, although the impact was similar. The end result of the hype was a publishing event of astonishing proportions, books selling worldwide in their millions and known even by people who were never likely to read them. The word **Dune** became talismanic.

Big name American SF writers have received short shrift in recent times from critical SF commentators on both sides of the Atlantic. Herbert, who wrote five sequels to **Dune** was not left out of this debate on whether authors who make a reputation with high-selling work can expect to be taken seriously when appearing to cash in on their success with umpteen sequels. **God Emperor of Dune** (**Dune IV**) was variously described as turgid, boring, and incomprehensible which in some respects it was. There is no doubt that the popularity of **Dune** helped spur Herbert to the writing of **God Emperor** and yet it seems odd that he should attempt to capitalize on his success with a sequel set three thousand years on, involving an entirely new cast of characters. Even the philosophical bent of the book is different from its predecessors.

Herbert is said to have conceived **Dune** because of an interest in the messiah complex in societies and following an excursion to view a government sand-dune regulation experiment while he was a journalist. The story first appeared as a serial in the December 1968 **Analog**. Perhaps the time was right for a story in which religion played such an important part, after all it was only two years since **Stranger in a Strange Land** by Robert Heinlein had appeared. Whatever the reasons for the success of **Dune** they were sufficient for Herbert to continue expanding the story into a saga that spanned those thousands of years and even the destruction of Arrakis in **Heretics of Dune** (**Dune V**). I have recently begun to read **Chapter House Dune** (**Dune VI**) the last book Herbert wrote in the sequence and already there is a feeling that he might have gone off on another completely new track, spawning another host of sequels in the process. There is some evidence in **Chapter House** that Herbert might have felt the need to include discussion having a greater bearing on present reality than previous books. Whether this is Herbert begining to tire of the chase or not is difficult to tell. I believe he had at least one further book planned. Whether sales would have allowed him to stop there had he lived is a moot point. Herbert did sometimes maintain that the books had originally been conceived as a complete saga and the sequels were not the result of publishing pressure, but who can tell?

In 1985 a film version of **Dune** appeared, directed by David Lynch (**Eraserhead** and **Elephant Man**). It was long (in first cut impossibly long), filled with dark wood and gold, and special effects. Almost to a man the press panned it; variously condemning it as turgid, boring and incomprehensible. Fans too showed their disappointment for widely differing reasons. Some people liked it, or saw its potential -Harlan Ellison in **The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction** applauded it as a brave effort to make a real SF film. It disappeared almost without trace, leaving a 40 odd million dollar hole in the pockets of its producers and a legion of fans who had waited years and could not believe it was all for nothing. Herbert is on record as both supporting 'in general' a 'pretty faithful' version of the book, and also complaining about the liberties taken with his complex and difficult storyline. It is interesting to note that the Fremen as portrayed in the film do not wear robes as they do in the book. The immediate effect of this is to remove a very potent visual reference to the Arabic-like Fremen background. Indeed the numerous references to and descriptions of the culture of the Fremen in the books is almost completely missing from the film. The rich multi-levelled atmosphere of the books is attempted in filmic terms not so much through labyrinthine plotting as through surface texture, sets and costumes and so forth. Unfortunately this tells only half the story and contributes to the overall feel of incoherence.

I doubt if **Dune** could ever be made into a satisfactory vehicle for the cinema (or television as some have suggested), for the very reasons that SF is considered such a unique genre. Visualising future galaxy-wide societies is grist to the mill of SF authors and one of the most important things that over the years has kept SF apart from all other literary genres. To put all this into a cinema feature would either mean a twenty hour super-epic, or sensory overload. Neither would be considered commercial.

I do not think that the **Dune** phenomena can be usefully analysed from a purely literary standpoint. To say that **Dune** is often melodramatic is self-evident. To say the dialogue leaves something to be desired is nothing new to SF. To say that the description of the Fremen and their culture is masterly is demonstrably true. I know something of my own cultural background and on reading **Dune** I instantly felt that here was a true picture, whether derived from first hand experience or not. I cannot remember anywhere else in SF reading about an Arabic/Muslim-like culture that had quite the same sense of people and place, except perhaps **The Two of Them** by Joanna Russ. Is this an achievement that must inevitably pale beside the less rigorous attention to literary style and characterisation of the remainder of the book? It occurs to me that I am still reading **Riddley Walker** some two years after I started, and not because the highly inventive language is difficult (it isn't for an attentive reader) but rather because the book for all its complex aura is small in scope and not terribly original in content. It has impeccable credentials, whereas **Dune** does not but all I remember of Russel Hoban's book is the cleverness of the invention, not the story itself. This is not to say that **Dune** is great literature, only that what it has is in many ways just as valid as any other qualification for high literary accolades.

The sequels do not stand by themselves as complete novels, which can be seen as a failing, but read in close sequence the overall structure of a very large novel becomes quite clear. To varying degrees the sequels are unsatisfactory in telling the greater story of the worms, of the Prophet Muad'dib, of the history of the galaxy; but they are endlessly fascinating in their depiction of a detailed future that has many similarities with our present and past and is at the same time utterly alien. Religion and politics do often degrade to mysticism, but the science is never far away and neither is the desert. Even the bogus mental powers of many of the characters in **Chapter House** is mitigated by the presence of Duncan Idaho in his nth incarnation, the only original character from **Dune** still alive, and the women of the Bene Gesserit manipulating as never before.

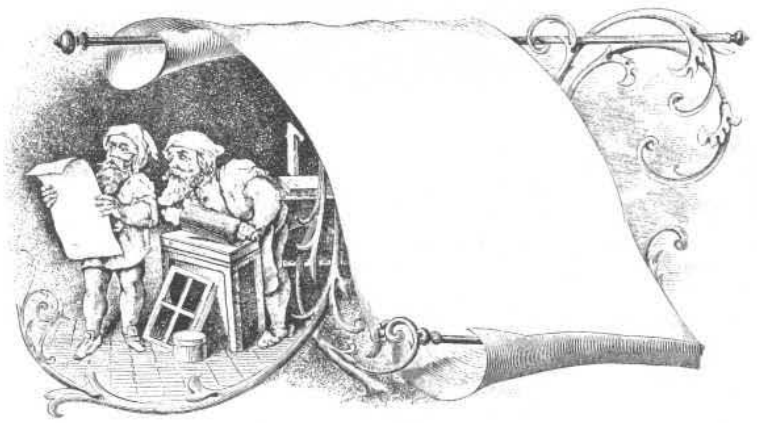
The many diverse descriptions of the **Dune** books that come to mind have have some truth in them, but none of them really attempt to explain their enduring popularity. The gulf between what great numbers of people like to read and what is of a high literary standard seems as great as ever. Which is not to say that the two are necessarily mutually exclusive; **Timescape** by Gregory Benford is both fascinating as a novel of science and as a novel of people. I can still read a **Dune** novel and recall the silent Fremen on the dunes, or the ornithopters in flight across Arrakis, or the dangers of the Padishah court. It was then a romantic fantasy filled with resonances of the real world as well as pure make-believe, and for me it remains so.

That Herbert will never write another **Dune** book will make no difference at all to the state of the SF art, nor would it had he lived and written another dozen. But had he never written one in the first place would that not have impoverished a genre that has as its core the ability to transport with delight (or terror) to places none of us are ever likely to see?

◆ Hussain Rafi Mohamed

BOOKS

REVIEWS EDITED BY
Paul Kincaid



SHERLOCK HOLMES THROUGH TIME AND SPACE - Edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh
[Severn House, 1985, 355pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO THIS COLLECTION OF Holmesian stories, Asimov suggests Sherlock Holmes to be '...the most successful fictional character of all time'. Even those of us who do not regard Holmes as the greatest detective - fictional or otherwise - of all cannot but agree with that statement. That his methods were not original and that the solution to the mysteries all too often relied on his disclosing some information not previously given to the reader - not to mention Conan Doyle's resounding hatred of his creation - cannot obscure the fact that even in cultures where more cannot read their name than can, the name 'Sherlock Holmes' conjures up a definite image.

Indeed, the present disturbing trend of TV watchers being incapable of distinguishing actors from the characters they play in soap operas was foreshadowed by Holmes being widely regarded as a 'real' person. Holmes has many reflections in SF, both pale and otherwise (who are Heinlein's insufferable patriarchs except Holmes on a more than 7% solution?) and many SF writers would pay homage to a character from whose unromantic loins sprang so much contemporary popular literature.

So, what sort of tribute is this volume to the great detective? The shade of Conan Doyle might well be insulted by Barbara Williamson's woeful 'The Thing Waiting Outside' and S.N. Farber's adolescent pun that is 'The Great Dormitory Mystery'. He might also disapprove of Richard Lupoff having Holmes associate with such pulp luminaries as Doc Savage in his overlong and much too thin 'God of the Naked Unicorn'. I expect he would find Asimov's 'The Ultimate Crime' as tedious, dull over-wordy and boring as I did. As for Mack Reynolds' 'The Adventure of the Extraterrestrial', I doubt he would find it worth reading, so shallow an exercise is it

But enough of the dross; is there anything worthwhile here? Well, there are two efforts by Philip Jose Farmer, which means pastiche is well to the fore. 'The Problem of the Sore Bridge' is the best Farmer short I've read (which is not saying much, I know) and it's briskly efficient presentation almost manages to carry the pretence off to the very end. The other, a shaggy dog tale, 'A Scarletin Study', is very Holmesian - in that 'Holmes' has all the information he needs but the reader does not - while also having Farmer's absurdist bravura. Something similar imbues Poul Anderson and Gordon Dickson's Hoka Holmes tale, 'The Adventure of the Misplaced Hound'. Of course these role playing teddy bears are light and inconsequential, but I have a soft spot from them and this story works well as a spoof Holmes.

There are just two good stories in this volume. Sterling Lanier's 'A Father's Tale' manages to put Holmes into Conrad country and has him thwart someone none too far removed from Dr Moreau. This is a very atmospheric tale and Lanier tells his story with point, economy and elegance. Literary elegance is, of course, something we have come to expect from Gene Wolfe. His 'Slaves of Silver' is a small enough tale and lightweight with it - a future Holmes rescuing hijacked robots - but Wolfe's ingenuity in his device surpasses anything in the other stories, his puns do not grate and he manages to infuse more wit and real imagination into his 19 pages than there is to be found in the entire remainder of the book.

Some indication of the general standard of the stories in this volume is given by the fact that - the Lanier and Wolfe tales apart - the very much second rate Conan Doyle story included, 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot', is easily the best story here. Perhaps the Dr Asimov in his guise of Chief Baker Street Irregular might like to ponder that fact. After reading this volume I am left with the same question which springs to mind after reading most Holmes stories, except in this case I add 'bother' after 'why?'. In this, as in so much else, there is no substitute for the real thing.

BOOKS OF BLOOD, VOLS 4, 5 & 6 - Clive Barker
[Sphere, 1985, £1.50 each]
Reviewed by Neil Gaiman

THE FIRST THREE **BOOKS OF BLOOD** WERE released in 1984 to mixed responses; mostly enthusiastic, yet always with reservations about individual stories that didn't work, or weren't liked by the reader or reviewer. One was tempted to wonder whether the furore and hyperbole were merely hype. The final three volumes, however, are a different kettle of corpuscles.

Fourteen stories, almost all of which are outstanding, with scarcely a duff one in the bunch. And the good ones are among the best short stories that I have ever read; especially notable are 'The Last Illusion' - the penultimate story, an analysis of magic and hell which stars a magician's corpse and a washed-out private eye; 'Twilight at the Towers' - John Le Carre's lost werewolf novel condensed to thirty pages; 'The Forbidden' - Ramsey Campbell territory, of decaying inner city nightmares and urban myths; 'Revelations' - a tale of love, murder and ghosts in the Deep South; the outre 'The Body Politic', out on a limb, and a stupid idea, but brilliantly carried off; and 'In The Flesh', which we find out how sin came into the world, and how Billy got into his grandfather's Pentonville grave. Barker even manages to redeem the clumsy opening/framing sequence of 'The Book of Blood' in the postscript and final story, 'On Jerusalem Street'. Visually dense, written with a love for language which occasionally surfaces as pun, wordplay or epigram, but sometimes (as in the last sentence of the last page of the last book) in a choice of words that is almost perfect.

Thematically, too, the books are more consistent than the first set: recurring motifs, of love (and the cost each character pays for it) and travel (of which the journeys from life to death, and towards some kind of redemption play a repeating part) are far more prevalent, and more important to Barker's fiction than the 'graphic blood and sex' tag that he (and the books) have acquired. A joy to read, marred only by the fact that my copies were obviously proofread and typeset by a foreign-speaking ape with a bizarre sense of humour.

THE DAMNATION GAME - Clive Barker
[Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985, 374pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Mark Greener

THE IMMENSE COMMERCIAL SUCCESS OF STEPHEN King and James Herbert underlines the fascination that the horror genre holds for the general public. The reasons underlying this obsession remain obscure in spite of the numerous attempts of critics to formulate a theory that is entirely consistent and convincing. **The Damnation Game** is a horror story of rare distinction all the more remarkable as it is Barker's first novel.

Barker is best known for his collections of short stories, **The Books of Blood**. The style of **The Damnation Game** is entirely consistent with his previous work;

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it is by turns witty, macabre, frightening and thought provoking. **The Damnation Game** is, without a doubt, the best horror novel I have read in a very long time.

The central character, Marty Strauss, is released on parole to act as bodyguard to pharmaceutical baron Joe Whitehead. Strauss gradually becomes aware of Whitehead's increasing fear of the mysterious Mamoulian, a man of immense occult power. Mamoulian is obsessed with vengeance on Whitehead in retaliation for an earlier betrayal. Meanwhile Strauss becomes emotionally involved with Carys, Whitehead's heroin addicted daughter. When Mamoulian, with the assistance of the obese, perverted 'razor eater', destroys one of Whitehead's dinner parties in an orgy of violence, Strauss escapes with Carys. However Carys falls under the influence of Mamoulian who intends to employ her clairvoyant powers to locate her father who also escaped from the ill-fated meal. When Carys is kidnapped by Mamoulian, Strauss sets out in pursuit.

The characters in **The Damnation Game** are not the crude stereotypes typical of King and Herbert. Indeed the fundamental strength of **The Damnation Game** lies in the perfection of Barker's characterization. It comes as no surprise to learn that Barker is a playwright. A play requires the characters to be defined in terms of appearance, environment and speech, since the psychological aspects of the character can only be expressed thus. Barker defines the characters in **The Damnation Game** in these terms and leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions about the psychology underlying their behaviour. This economical characterization increases the pace of the narrative's development without undermining the credibility of the characters.

A common theme in many horror stories is the defeat of a seemingly omnipotent force by 'the common man'; fate is generally perceived to be such a force which has an influence on everyday life. This theme may partially account for the success of the horror media. Fate has cast the characters in **The Damnation Game** adrift from mundane society for a variety of reasons. Whitehead and Strauss are reaping the consequences of gambling. Carys loses herself in an intravenous utopia and, as a result, gambles with her life. The 'razor eater' and Mamoulian are anachronisms belonging to an earlier age where their ambiguous morality may have been better tolerated. This results in frustration with the modern world which is released in perversity and violence. The 'razor eater' is one of the most disturbing and original characters in modern horror fiction and although his actions undermine most of the social norms which cloister and underpin our society, he is in essence a sympathetic character.

The violence and sex in the book are not described in the eulogistic terms employed by Herbert. Barker restrains the horror and violence and plays them as his trump card. The violence is released only when enough tension has been created by virtue of his superb narrative technique to augment its effect. The result is stunning.

Barker writes with an impeccable prose which gives the impression that he actually cares about what he writes. The plot is carefully constructed and is internally consistent, a rare occurrence in horror fiction.

However Barker has the potential to be more than a thinking man's James Herbert, within the confines of the horror genre he has created a masterpiece. Barker has the potential to be the natural successor to Shelley, Machen, Poe and Lovecraft, all of whom changed the definition of horror fiction. He should build upon the reputation he established with **The Books of Blood** and has consolidated with **The Damnation Game** and create a truly original horror story.

ORION - Ben Bova
[Severn House, 1985, 432pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Chris Bailey

BEN BOVA HAS NEARLY WRITTEN A SUPERMAN book. While John G. O'Ryan is not Clark Kent, neither is he far away: 'Just under six feet tall, with a trim build dressed in an executive's uniform of dark blue three-piece suit,off-white shirt and carefully knotted maroon tie'. He is not called upon to change into a blue body-stocking, although he variously dons the breeches and jerkin of Ogotai Khan's hordes, a caveman's skins and futuristic battle armour. He is in truth Orion (geddit?), agent through time and space of the good god Ormazd against the wicked god Ahriman, as in the ancient struggle delineated by Zoroastrianism.

It would be too easy to be supercilious about **Orion**. It does have some potentially worthwhile features; where it fails is through what might on the one hand be construed as ambitiousness, which is no bad thing, and on the other as having pretensions, which is. Falling between two stools, **Orion** does not succeed either as crash-wallop adventure or in realising its more rewarding possibilities.

The narrative is unsatisfactory and I am not being sanctimonious when I suggest that this is in no small part due to the amount of violence in the story. All too seldom is the narrative properly paced, Bova preferring to close each episode with a fight or a battle. The book's climaxes are visceral rather than emotional or intellectual, and the effect swiftly becomes monotonous. Monotony gives way to alarm once you realise that Orion cannot be killed, that Ormazd will let Orion carry on losing and will continue to revive him until he does win. This daunting prospect negotiated, you reach the end, to be confronted with a flurry of time paradox revelations and the slight consolation of a neat grace-note concerning Ormazd's motivations.

If the cheap thrills are not satisfying, then neither are the books' more pensive moments. As intimated above, Orion is not a character it is easy to sympathise with, yet every time he shows signs of becoming more approachable, Bova jumps on him smartly. Occasionally he ponders mutinously, resenting Ormazd's manipulations and his own neutral status, neither man nor god. There is much potential interest here, as Orion's growing realisation of what it means to be human is sporadically witnessed. These themes are never developed. 'I remembered how easily, how callously I had killed others of my own kind', he thinks at one point. It's just a passing observation, though. He draws no conclusions and the narrative races off again.

More thought required and less rumbustiousness: the faults of **Orion** are all too familiar.

THE POSTMAN - David Brin
[Bantam, 1985, 294pp, 14.95]
Reviewed by Edward James

DAVID BRIN HAS HAD A COUPLE OF NOVELS published over here now - the double award-winning **Startide Rising** and its predecessor **Sundiver**; the third volume in this relatively sophisticated space opera series, reminiscent at times of Clarke, Cherryh or Niven, is due out this year, as

The Uplift War. In a totally different vein there's his **The Practice Effect**, a light-hearted fantasy. And now, a third side of Brin, a serious contribution to post-holocaust literature. The first two sections have been re-written somewhat since they appeared as 'The Postman' (**Asimov's** November 1982) and 'Cyclops' (**Asimov's** March 1984): the style has been improved, and some minor amendments made. (The door on the University of Oregon campus building used to bear a plastic sign saying 'ERB Memorial Student Union'; it now reads ' Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Center'.)

It starts sixteen years after the holocaust (nuclear and bacteriological) with Gordon Krantz, who had been keen on drama as a student, keeping himself alive by offering one-man performances of old plays in the scattered communities that have managed to survive the post-holocaust chaos. He escapes a group of survivalist thugs, and finds an old US mail van, its dead occupant still dressed in the uniform. He puts on the uniform to replace his own tattered clothing, and slowly his 'act' begins to change. He pretends he is an official of a revived United States back East, and almost everywhere he goes he is welcomed as a representative of civilisation and of order. He realises the power he has, and begins to play his role in earnest, using his status to knit together the scattered villages of Oregon with a restored postal service, and to organise resistance against the raids of armed survivalists.

The book is dedicated 'To Benjamin Franklin, devious genius, and to Lysistrata, who tried'. Norman Spinrad has recently (**Asimov's** January 1986) called it 'an earnestly Jeffersonian treatise on democratic communal idealism with a bit of guilty male feminism thrown in on the side'. Franklin rather than Jefferson, perhaps, but certainly earnest: it is a defence of the rights of the ordinary man and woman in the face of autocracy and violence, and a panegyric on the virtues of old-time American democracy. But the 'male feminism' is indeed odd. It is at one point stated that feminist ideals died with the holocaust; this is surely a reference to the same statement in **Lucifer's Hammer**, but rather than revelling in the situation (as Niven and Pournelle did) Brin apparently deplores it. Yet his militant feminists, who try a reverse Lysistrata tactic on the male chauvinist survivalists, are portrayed as unrealistic and naive, and they fail dismally. The very last words of the book (on the acknowledgement page) refer to women, in what one might see as an old-fashioned romantic and sexist way: 'There is power there, slumbering below the surface. And there is magic.'

Brin may well go on to become an SF writer of note, and **The Postman** may be remembered as his first serious SF novel. There is much in it that is excellent, and I found it at times very moving. The development of Krantz's character, is very well treated, and some of the minor characters, like Mrs Thompson, are beautifully sketched. The first part in particular contains a very convincing and thought-provoking picture of what the breakdown of civilisation might actually mean in practical terms. But those first sections, largely taken from his **'Asimov's**

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stories, formed much the best part of the book. In the second half, plot development turns into action for action's sake; as Spinrad notes, by the end Brin is expressing 'his noble ideals through page after page of detailed description of physical combat'. And, like Brin's other novels, **The Postman** sometimes gives the impression of being an assemblage of SF themes (even cliches) put together for the sake of the market and in disregard of the integrity or plausibility of the novel. Spinrad argues we've had too much unthinking violence in SF; we've also had too much of the victory of the lone hero against all odds. **The Postman** is clearly a very much better book than Hubbard's **Battlefield Earth**, but it may appeal to much the same unhealthy (?) fantasies. A miss, then, but a near one, and a promise of better things to come.

THE LAST ELECTION - Pete Davies
[Andre Deutsch, 1986, 234pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid.

SATIRE AND SCIENCE FICTION HAVE HAD A LONG and uneasy relationship. As often as not a future setting will be employed by the satirist to make his point about today, but only occasionally, as in Orwell's **1984** or Huxley's **Brave New World** does this future have a life of its own. We are happy enough to claim these rare successes for our own while dismissing the rest, though I happen to think that the poorly realised future is bad satire rather than anything else. Satire and SF are really siblings, at their best each partakes of the other, and their realms are almost entirely congruent.

The Last Election is satire set in the near future, and it is as powerful a piece of satire as Britain has produced since Orwell. My ambiguity about the book is caused by the fact that the future is really not that well created. Davies has taken every liberal fear about what this country will be like with Thatcherism run rampant, strung them together with lashings of sex and drugs, and that is his world. It is a frightening, dank and cruel place: the Money Party is in power, Nanny is at Number Ten, and there is no effective opposition. The rich are richer and more powerful than ever, but the vast bulk of the population is made up of the unemployed, the old and the poor. These are pacified with an endless diet of snooker on television and drugs, while around them the world falls apart. The social services cannot handle the number of unemployed and old people, so they don't care for them at all. A rump of a National Health Service survives, but starved of funds so all it can do is feed its patients drugs and leave them. The water supplies have been privatised, so only the rich can afford uncontaminated water. And on and on, the privations and degradations are recorded vividly, relentlessly, almost gleefully. Nothing relieves the scene. It makes the satire most effective, but this is not an easy or a pleasant read.

And part of me wants to cheer, to chain Maggie and her cohorts down and force them to read this book over and over, to din into them that this is what they are doing, this is what it will be like.

Yet the targets are obvious, and Davies's method is hardly the most subtle; he's like a bull that simply puts his head down and charges straight at them. I cringed at the world he was creating, yet I always had to struggle to visualise any of it. The scene-setting takes a good quarter of the novel, and when he does get round to the plot it is largely melodrama thinly disguised by some not-so-original literary techniques. The names of characters like Grief, Wally Wasted and the like seem to make the whole thing a sort of up-dated **Pilgrim's Progress**, though by the end some at least of the actors in this drama have acquired a measure of dignity and humanity.

Even so, the more the novel progressed the more I found myself caught up in its raw anger, and I am left with a memory of something frightening, savage and necessary. It is the power of the satire that is its most overwhelming success.

I HOPE I SHALL ARRIVE SOON - Philip K. Dick
(Ed. Mark Hurst & Paul Williams)
[Gollancz, 1986, 179pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

THIS COLLECTION CONTAINS FOUR STORIES FROM the fifties and sixties, and six from Dick's last years (his entire output from that period). Mark Hurst edited the **Golden Man** volume, but what he or Paul Williams did in this book is not clear: there is an inaccuracy on the copyright page and another on the jacket. Dick's 'introduction' is described as an essay, when it is clearly a speech, presumably given at some time and therefore already in copyright. Similarly, the short story, 'Strange Memories of Death' is not credited as having previously appeared although it was published in **Interzone**.

All that apart there is no discriminating between the style of Dick writing in the 1950s and Dick writing in the 1970s. As a collection this is homogenous to read and the fifteen year gap between one story and the next is not apparent. Nothing here is badly written, and if you rate Dick highly you will find that this collection maintains that standard. I have some reservations.

The introduction, 'How to Build a Universe that doesn't fall apart two days later' is the second longest work in the book. In some ways it is the most interesting, although it repeats Dick's ideas that reality is always subjective and, even to its subject, impermanent. Yet it seems to show Dick's failings in thinking as well - Dick intercuts his first few pages between descriptions of fake fakes with scientific analyses of how we watch TV (and therefore 'see' the world). It seems quite reasonable that 'after a few hours of TV watching, we do not know what we have seen. Our memories are spurious, like our memories of dreams; the blank spaces are filled in retrespectively' (because of the left/right brain split), but Dick then goes into a list of the coincidences between his life and the characters of his fiction, never realising that the coincidences prove nothing, yet taking many pages to make his list. In the end the essay has little to say and tends to destroy any impact it may attempt to make by its confusion.

Of the stories, 'The Short Happy Life of the Brown Oxford' is an early comedy, and 'The Alien Mind' is a late, very black comedy. 'Explorers We' and 'Holy Quarrel' use Dick's ability to combine simulacra with the closing of the universe. 'What'll We Do with Ragland Park' has to read in conjunction with **The Crack in Space** because it has difficulty standing up on its own. Everything else is about personal failure and misery. The earlier stories are about personal failure and misery and other things, the later work is about them exclusively.

'Strange Memories of death' is about rack-renting in California mixed up with the girl who inspired the Boomtown Rats 'I Don't Like Mondays'. 'The Exit Door Leads In' asks who is testing who in a college of the future, and 'Chains of Air, Webs of Aether' deals with one man's care for a sick woman to the point of pretending to love her. The title story was originally published as 'Frozen Journey' and deals with a computer's problems in keeping a man sane for ten years, when his body is restrained for space flight.

The background to the misery is Dick's concern with illusion and reality. unfortunately, **I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon** arrived the same weekend as I sat down to read Christopher Priest's **The Glamour**. If the new arrival had been **A Scanner Darkly** I might have concluded otherwise, but as far as ability to deal with the reality problem is concerned Dick is nowhere. Heaven knows, **The Glamour** is flawed, but it is open while Dick is closed. **I Hope I shall Arrive Soon** is bound within its genre and would always be limited. It is good, don't be put off -I'd rather re-read it three times than **Dr Bloodmoney** once - but it is not great. It does not have any answers.

IN LIMBO - Christopher Evans
[Granada, 1985, 288pp, £2.50]
Reviewed by David V.Barrett

THINK OF YOUR FIRST THREE OR FOUR SEXUAL relationships as a teenager or student. Remember the first fumblings in the dark, the first time you saw and touched another's naked body, the first time you went all the way.

Remember your conflicting and confusing feelings: excitement, curiosity, pride, maturity, nervousness, shame, fear of inadequacy, worry of rejection, frustration, physical discomfort, failure, triumph, physical delight, amazement, joy, depression, exhaustion, boredom.

Remember the novel you started to write, based on those early experiences, the hero, or anti-hero, being an insecure but basically nice young person. You'd write them as flashbacks; that way you can have all the exciting bits without the boring bits inbetween. You'd need to give it a framework, something to link the sexual episodes. How about that story of Kafka, the one where the guy was arrested, but had no idea why? **The Trial**. That's it: you'll put your character in a prison - no, let's add a touch more mystery: it's an enclosed environment, you're basically well-treated, but still confined, and there are a few other inmates (that way you can study their reactions as well: good point), and of course the guards, who will be a little, but not too, threatening, and who, of course, won't answer your questions.

And then you can fit in all your sexual flashbacks at convenient points, and follow through your character's life, right through to the night before waking up... **In Limbo**.

Christopher Evans should have written this ten years ago, then left it in a shoe-box under the bed, to join the thousands of similar unpublished, and usually unfinished youthful soul-searchings. Or left it another ten or fifteen years, until he had the ability to handle the subject far more skillfully and sensitively than he does here.

Having dismissed it as the sort of stuff that we've all written or planned to write, I should say that this book is in fact very readable, that the quality of writing is, on the whole, good, and that the main character, who shares a surname with his creator's pseudonym, thus reinforcing the author-character identification) is well drawn.

But it's not well enough done to turn a very ordinary idea into something worthwhile. The major theme, a character trapped in an enclosed environment, is almost lost because of the amount of space devoted to the character-building/destroying sexual flashbacks. And

the frequent flashes of undergraduate humour are either clumsily contrived, bluntly slapstick or standard jokes inserted into the text.

For me, Christopher Evans's first novel, **Capella's Golden Eyes**, remains his best. When I interviewed him in **Vector 119**, he acknowledged Christopher Priest's influence but asked, 'Who wants to be...a pale imitation of Chris Priest?'. Unfortunately, his second novel, **The Insider**, and his third, **In Limbo**, are exactly that. He must return to and develop his own writing style; there's no doubt that he's a capable writer, and probably worth following in the future, but it's time he struck out on his own and built his own niche.

THE BONE PEOPLE - Keri Hulme
[Spiral/Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, 450 pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

THE CURRENT RECEIVED OPINION OF THE BONE people states that it is unreadable, poorly constructed and unwieldy, not to mention the fact that it is concerned with child-beating, an emotive subject at present. These are, I suspect, the excuses offered by people disappointed to find that it is not the easy read that its Booker Prize predecessor was; people who do not expect to work at a novel. Call it intellectual laziness, tinged with misplaced moral indignation, and ignore it completely. The novel does require some perseverance: in particular the first few pages are slightly mystifying, although the Prologue's title offers a blatant clue, but the effort is handsomely rewarded.

In some respects **The Bone People** is remarkably straightforward in its structure and content: an exploration of the development and disintegration of a relationship between three lonely people brought together by a barely recognised need, and driven apart through tragic circumstances created by this inability to understand their own wants. The man is imprisoned for beating his child, the child is taken into care, and the woman, Kerewin, takes to the road, searching for somewhere to die in peace, for she has cancer and refuses all treatment.

But that is only the most superficial level of the novel. Setting the narrative in New Zealand has enabled Keri Hulme to use Maori legend in her story, blending myth with reality to the point where the shift from one state to another is hard to distinguish. Maori belief holds that man should live in harmony with himself and his surroundings, otherwise he is lost, cut adrift. Both Kerewin and Joe have experienced this. She is at odds with her family, unable to reconcile herself with events in her past, and in turning from the world has lost her great talent, her artistic ability. Joe has forsaken his own culture for the ways of the white man, without being fully assimilated into their culture, and Simon, the child, seems to have no place in the world, having lost both his parents and his real name. All three, on a quest for inner peace, must be called back from the threshold of death, physical as well as spiritual before they can find stability.

This book has been criticised for being too firmly rooted in New Zealand, the implication being that with its elaborate use of Maori myth and language, it has no relevance to anyone outside the country. Whilst a greater knowledge of the myths might give a deeper understanding of the author's intentions, I don't believe that the message is at all impaired, for the theme of the need for spiritual renewal is universal. More than that, couched in unfamiliar terms, it acquires an entirely new perspective in a society which has lost touch with the concepts of magic and ritual.

What I do find difficult to cope with is the strong authorial presence in the character of Kerewin. The similarity in names is obvious, but the more one reads about Keri Hulme the more striking some other similarities become. Whilst she claims not to like the character I harbour a suspicion that Kerewin is rather as Keri Hulme would like to be, a kind of wish-fulfillment. I can also understand why the book was rejected by so many publishers, and why they asked for rewrites. The prose style is remarkably idiosyncratic, with some very eccentric punctuation at times, peppered with literary allusions that I mostly didn't recognise (apart from the Tolkienisms which were particularly annoying for some reason) and padded out with some very self-conscious and over-indulgent writing in places. Having said that, I'm still forced to the conclusion that rewriting and editing would have been unwise, as they would have destroyed the unique quality of this book. The words flow smoothly, almost as though the author was speaking into the reader's ear, and some of the descriptions and imagery used are very beautiful. There is a fascination in reading on, just to see what she will do next, and I was never disappointed. This may be a flawed masterpiece, but it is a masterpiece, nevertheless, and I am already looking forward to her next book.

A MAGGOT - John Fowles
[Cape, 1985, 460pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

THE NEW NOVEL BY JOHN FOWLES IS THE BASTARD offspring of his two most famous books, for it marries the constant revelations and games with reality of **The Magus** (revised version, 1977), with the loving and detailed creation of a past age compared to our own by regular authorial interjections of **The French Lieutenant's Woman** (1969). Yet it contains one element that would have been out of place in either of those books, and occurs most unexpectedly within the context of this one, and which earns its place in the review columns of **Vector** - a visitation from the future.

For Fowles the past is not a foreign country, it is an alien world as different from our own as Mars or Jupiter. The alien world of **A Maggot** is 1736, England lies peacefully and unexcitingly under the rule of the Georges and a new form of religious dissent will shortly be born. Fowles presents this world in microscopic detail, with asides on the social order, agriculture, politics, religious belief, the economy, and the lack of underwear upon even the gentle-born ladies of the day, all designed to show just how different that time was to the world and attitudes of today. This is no historical novel where the characters say 'Gadzooks' and behave exactly like a liberal of the late twentieth century. Fowles may not pastiche the language as successfully as Peter Ackroyd in **Hawksmoor** (1985), but he is extraordinarily successful at pastiching the attitudes and characteristics of the time. He even punctuates the novel with reproductions of one of the Chronicles of the period.

Across this carefully drawn but empty landscape parade a small group of characters, they are seen briefly then disappear into the West Country. Once out of our sight, one of their number is found hanged, the others have vanished. It falls to conservative and intolerant lawyer Ayscough to investigate the occurrence, and the bulk of the novel is made up of transcriptions of his interviews with witnesses and participants. As each one tells his story and we progress, presumably, closer to the truth, the events shift and change until the final testimony which takes us right to the heart of the matter, recounts a meeting with oddly dressed people in a strange room that we, with the knowledge of our age, can recognise as visitors from the future in some sort of spaceship. Was this the vision that inspired the Shaker religious movement? There's no answer, Fowles leaves it up to the reader to decide how far to believe the witnesses and ends the novel with a personal statement about religious dissent in England and the birth of the Shaker movement.

This is an odd novel, drawing the reader into a superbly visualised world, yet with strange dissonances that are unsettling and in the end unsatisfying. Even so, for all its drama the plot takes something of a back seat in this book, and the pleasures of characterisation and world creation make this a worthy successor to its illustrious parents.

FIRE AND HEMLOCK - Diana Wynne Jones
[Methuen, 1985, 341pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

WITH **FIRE AND HEMLOCK** DIANA WYNNE JONES HAS attempted a complex, possibly over-ambitious, reworking of the old ballad of Tam Lin, a mortal held prisoner by the Faery Queen until released through the intervention of his true love. In our time the faeries have become part of the rich and powerful privileged classes, but the Faery Queen must still ensure her immortality with a continual series of young male consorts from whom she can draw her vitality, and then discard when they are no longer of any use to her. Some things apparently don't change.

Polly, as a child, accidentally gatecrashes a funeral, where she meets Thomas Lynn. He is one of the Queen's cast-offs but has somehow struck a bargain for his life, though how is never adequately explained. To Polly, rejected by her parents after their divorce, and now living with her grandmother, he is simply the young man whose friendship sustains her during a difficult time. And yet, there is certainly something unusual about the friendship, conducted mainly through letters and presents of books, in an atmosphere of increasing secrecy as they both receive threats from the family who were present at the funeral, warning them not to have any contact with one another. It is only at the last moment that Polly, now nineteen, realises that Tom's life is to be reclaimed by the queen, and that her intervention may save him, although the final twist to this story is far more sophisticated than the original ballad's ending.

I enjoyed this book immensely - it's probably the best thing that Diana Wynne Jones has written - but at the same time it is incredibly frustrating to read, riddled with half-formed hints and speculations. I can't tell how much of this is the author's intent and how much of the uncertainty stems from my own knowledge of the original source.

For example, there is a suggestion throughout the story that Polly really should understand what is happening to her, when it is plain that she doesn't, only making the connection with the ballad when it is almost too late. The suggestion is never satisfactorily resolved unless one accepts other vague hints that Polly herself is, unknowingly, part-faery. On the other hand, it becomes apparent towards the end of the book that Polly's grandmother

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has known all along what's happening, yet never offers advice or encouragement until it is no longer of any real use. The implication seems to be that Polly's grandmother has some powerful magic of her own, but there is no explanation as to why she never uses it. Neither situation is ever satisfactorily resolved and this weakens the plot.

On other levels, the book functions more easily and the author seems at home. There are elements of a very touching love story in the narrative as the friendship between Tom and Polly develops. Literally starting as hero-worship from the games they play, the emphasis shifts as Polly grows older, lending an interesting ambiguity to the story's ending. Overshadowing this is the presence of Polly's parents, both of them powerfully drawn characters. Ivy is an appallingly unnatural mother, seriously regarding her child as a rival for the affections of first her husband, and then later the succession of 'lodgers', eventually turning Polly out to live with her father. In his cowardice he cannot tell his girlfriend what has happened and Polly is rejected a second time, homeless and penniless in a strange city until Tom finds her.

The basic problem with this book is that it is full of wonderful but undeveloped characters and ideas. I can't help feeling that the author has been too ambitious and consequently has left the narrative strewn with frustrating loose ends. Much more should have been made of Granny Whittacker, who is by far the most interesting character in the book for what isn't said about her, whilst the plot is messily constructed, particularly the episode in which Polly summons Tom using a picture he gave her, which seems to have no reason for its existence. However, I'm satisfied with the ambiguity of the ending - I'm not sure that there can be any satisfactory resolution when Faery is involved - and I think the author has struggled nobly with the story, to create a compelling novel. Next time I hope she manages to overcome the plot and subdue it more successfully.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S YOUR SHARE OF FEAR
- edited by Cathleen Jordan
[Severn House, 1985, 348pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Rosemary Pardoe

THE 'ALFRED HITCHCOCK' ANTHOLOGIES USUALLY contain a rather uneasy mixture of thrillers and murder mysteries, ranging from straightforward whodunnits through supernatural tales to outright science fiction. This latest collection is no exception. Most of the nineteen stories in **Your Share of Fear** are taken from American mystery and science fiction magazines of the past sixty years, and it is a very American selection. So much so that the three classic British tales included - M.R. James' oft-reprinted 'The Mezzotint', Conan Doyle's 'Lot No. 249' and Algernon Blackwood's 'Confession' - seem totally out of place, even though they are by far the best stories in the book.

It is a strangely old-fashioned collection, filled with out-dated cliches, only a few of which serve to enhance the stories built around them. One which works is Erle Stanley Gardner's science fictional locked room mystery, 'A year in a Day', a tale involving a drug which speeds up movement to the point of invisibility. First published in 1930, it shows its age but has a creaky period charm. More than can be said for Isaac Asimov's exquisitely dull account of murder by anti-gravity, 'The Billiard Ball'. Larry Niven's tale of teleportation, 'A Kind of Murder', promises more than it gives, but Damon Knight's 'Anachron' is a polished and appealing description of how crime with the aid of time travel never pays. If ultimately it fails, it is because the time paradoxes are not entirely resolved.

Aside from the British classics, the supernatural stories in **Your Share of Fear** are not worth mentioning. The non-fantasy is only a little better, although August Derleth's ersatz Sherlock Holmes, Solar Pons, puts in an appearance. I have always thought him vastly overrated, but I know he has many fans.

The one thing to be said for **Your Share of Fear** is that most of the stories are unfamiliar and not often anthologised. By the end of the book the average reader will have realised why.

MODERN SCIENCE FICTION AND THE AMERICAN LITERARY COMMUNITY - Frederick Lerner
[The Scarecrow Press (UK Distribution: Bailey Bros. & Swinfen, Warner House, Folkestone, Kent CT19 6PH), 325pp, £26.00]
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

THIS EXPANDED AND REVISED DOCTORAL DISsertation is a welcome summation, commentary and work of reference relevant to a variety of SF approaches - literary/academic,sociological, historical, critical and fan-oriented. Of its 325 pages over half are occupied by notes, source-references, bibliographical appendices and index: an apparatus of some practical value. Particularly useful are the detailed source-references, by no means exclusively American. Taken in conjunction with the text they illuminate and give firm grounding to both the generalisations and specifities of the author's scholarship.

The text itself is for the most part a readable one. Occasionally a disjointed piling of example upon example is somewhat wearisome, but out of such exercises in documentation emerge lucid and well-based summaries of the successive phases and external relationships of the genre between 1926 and 1976. Those dates embrace the half century subsequent to the first publication of Gernsback's **Amazing Stories**, which event, for reasons given in the first chapter, the author uses to signal the birth of modern American science fiction. Incidentally, this first chapter yields a fine assemblage of that elusive and protean entity, the definition of science fiction.

The five following chapters deal with successive stages of development, relating them to such factors as changes in popular taste, printing and marketing capabilities, academic and literary attitudes and the impact of scientific and technological achievements. The first period is the pulp phase to 1945, the period of the hacks, the reprints, of the beginnings of fandom, and eventually of the rising Campbell-nurtured talents of the Golden Age - a period when science fiction 'lay wrapped in a sort of literary cocoon' waiting to emerge. Between 1945 and 1950 (designated 'the atomic age') publishers and others began to take SF more seriously. 'Science Fiction and Ideology' heads the chapter covering 1950-1957, which, in a range of print and other media, was, until recent upswings, the high-water mark of the genre's popularity. The survey continues through the period after Sputnik, when to some it appeared that technological advance would render SF obsolete: but over the same period 'the genre's peculiar forms and conventions' were beginning to be recognised by both critics and popular press. (If these well-researched chapters seem to lack colour, read as complement to them Fred Pohl's **The Way The Future Was** and let them draw life from that.)

The period since Apollo (ending 1976) is the last to be considered. By the end of it, Lerner contends, SF had matured to achieve the status of a minor literature. It was regarded, particularly by the ideologically-minded, as relevant to accelerating social change, and the literary community was at least aware of it. Each of the succeeding four chapters recapitulates the 50 year span, each concentrating on one aspect of the genre's impact - on university, school, library and laboratory. In the final chapter, 'The Descent into Respectability', SF's infiltration of academe is related to expansion of higher education, to the staking out of new cultural areas for research, and to the emergence of a generation of SF-oriented teachers.

Although 1976 is the deadline later sources are quoted, and it is not difficult to add one's own updatings, e.g. a narrowing the mainstream/SF gap, and, conversely a reactionary tendency to, as it were, safeguard the ghetto. Also an increasing body of the academic wing of the American literary community has taken to SF criticism. Among the book's bonuses are documentations of the attitudes of religious bodies to SF, and of the ambiguous relationships between SF and futurology - scattered through chapters and appendices, but usefully available.

Naturally in covering this wide spectrum selection has been necessary. The hundred or so authors comprising a sample qualify by being both American and prolific (making 'a substantial quantitative contribution...of fifty ore more stories to American magazines'). The list which includes Milton Lesser and Nathan Schachner excludes Cordwainer Smith and Alfred Bester - so much for quantitative sampling. Those well-known American authors Brain W. Aldiss and Arthur C. Clarke are included, perhaps rather has Shakespeare has been claimed for Germany. Not to quibble, though: as I said, the book is welcome; but its price is likely to steer it towards library rather on to home shelves.

MICROWORLDS:TALES OF THE COMPUTER AGE
- Edited by Thomas F. Monteleone
[Severn House, 1985, 193pp, £7.95]
Reviewed by Tom A. Jones

Eighteen stories, each about computers. In time they stretch from Arthur C. Clarke's classic 'The Nine Billion Names of God', 1953, and Isaac Asimov's equally classic 'The Last Question', 1956, to seven stories from 1984. The book thus gives us a mixture of reprints and stories presumably written for it.

I hadn't read these two old classics for some years and was pleasantly surprised that they held up very well. They're both 'idea' stories and have no characters as such, but they demonstrate that with tight writing the short story form can be ideal for this type of fiction. It's also interesting that both stories have a theological 'punchline'.

Of the reprints Harlan Ellison's 'I have no mouth and I must scream' (from the era which favoured long titles) is my favourite. When I first read it in the magazine I was amazed and immediately reread it. This story of the ultimate computer torturing the last four living humans for eternity, a computer whose only task is to create hell, a computer who hates humans but is dependent upon them for a purpose to its existence. you can read whatever theology you want into this one; there are many layers below the surface action. Time passes and the shock value isn't as great today but it's still one hell of a story.

Of the other reprints none are as exceptional but I did enjoy Joe Haldeman's 'Armaja Dos' about a computer and a gypsy curse; unfortunately I think the ending was too escalatory. Of these reprints I

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disliked Ray Bradbury's poem 'The haunted computer and the android Pope', I'm not a poetry fan but I doubt this mixture of modern and archaic phrases would rate as great.

And what of the new stories? Nothing really outstanding I'm afraid. I enjoyed John Sladek's 'Answers', an SF detective story combined with alien invasion for its touches of humour and the detective story 'feel' it generates. Also on the humorous side is Roger Zelazny's 'Loki 7281'about an SF writer and his word processor - there may be more than a touch of truth to this story!

Amongst the modern stories, new and reprint, two themes are predominant;computer games and the personal computer (sometimes as part of a network), the latter theme usually involving the computer(s) being/becoming intelligent. The stories this mirror today's technology expanding it here and there in fairly predictable, almost stock-in-trade ways. Indeed the intelligent computer has been a stock SF theme along with ftl and time travel, the 5th generation computer projects just make its advent seem more probable. Most of these stories can thus be considered traditional, they explore nothing new.

Accompanying each story is a little drawing. I don't know if I have a poor copy or if they're meant to be like this but they looks smudged, indistinct, as though they've been through a poor photocopier.

Ignoring the three classics, which you've probably read, the standard of this anthology is about that of a standard SF magazine. You'll have to decide if you want to pay £7.95 for that.

THE HOUNDS OF THE MORRIGAN - Pat O'Shea
[Oxford University Press, 1985, 465pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

THIS BOOK HAS A LOT TO RECOMMEND IT EVEN before you start reading it. The cover is stunning and, for a wonder, is entirely relevant to the contents. However, I'm far less enthusiastic about the price. This is novel whose principal audience is children, and I fear many parents will baulk at spending £9.95.

And that would be a tragedy because this is quite the nicest story I've read in a long while. I admit that I approached it slightly warily, fearing another of those interminable mythological rehashes that some writers indulge in, presumably in lieu of original ideas, but I'm glad to say that I was totally wrong. Whist it does employ many elements from the Irish myths and legends, this story is completely new and original, a rare enough phenomenon these days,and it comes as a breath of fresh air amid the stories of doom and disaster that permeate so much fiction at present.

Inevitably there is a quest. Pidge has discovered a piece of parchment on which St. Patrick imprisoned Evil, personified as a green snake. His find has enabled the Morrigan and her sisters, the tripartite Irish goddess of war, to to re-enter Ireland. with the parchment in their possession they would have the capacity to do much harm, so it must be destroyed. To do that Pidge and his sister Brigit must find a drop of the Morrigan's blood and take advantage of its corrosive properties.

The wonderful thing about this book is the quest. It's not so much an expedition to find something as an exploration of Ireland's mythological past and a celebration of all things Irish. Their search is conducted in a landscape in which modern Ireland and the land of Faery blend, making it very hard to tell where one starts and the other ends, or is this just a fancy way of saying that the Irish have a greater regard for the power of Faery than the rest of us. I particularly enjoyed the journey through Galwaytown, when the children moved backwards and forwards through time with each step they took.

The characters are even better. the children are helped by many humans and animals on their journey. The humans are gods, goddesses and heroes in disguise, but there is something altogether charming in their appearance as itinerants and vagabonds, more like clowns than divine beings, and they are never anything but gentle and kind, though not in a sickly, sentimental way. Neither is there anything cloying or 'Walt Disney' about the talking animals. The two frogs, sounding more like repentant drunks on Sunday morning than anything, are extremely funny; as is Cooroo the Fox in his elaborate if suspect justification for killing hens. The Morrigan apart -she is simply the distillation of all that is evil -even the 'baddies' have certain attraction. The Morrigan's two sisters would be more at home in Cinderalla and one can't help but feel sorry for the Morrigan's hounds, tracking the children with no chance for food or rest, and badly treated to boot. I'm sorry more wasn't made of them - their ability to turn into tall, thin grey people was extremely eerie.

Inevitably, the most outstanding characters are Pidge (Patrick Joseph) and his sister Brigit,representing Ireland as both a heathen and Christian country (look at the names), and children only insofar as this is a book for children, so there ought to be some children in it. Their wisdom far outstrips their years, but ultimately I'm not sure it matters.In such a story, anything might be possible, and seems to be. There is no great message here either, other than that good always triumphs over evil, but that's irrelevant. What is important about this book is that it communicates a joy in life that I've not come across in any other book. I'm not sure whether this stems from its Irish background - and this book is unashamedly 'irish' - or from the author's storytelling skill, but either way it pervades the entire narrative, and I like that. This is Pat O'Shea's first novel. I'd like to see a second, but I hope she does something entirely different. I'm not sure that this book could, or should,be improved on. It is wonderfully unique.

POHLSTARS - Frederick Pohl
[Gollancz, 1986, 203pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Jim England.

THIS IS A COLLECTION OF ELEVEN SHORT stories by Pohl with an Introduction pointing out that,whereas there were formerly economic reasons for writing short stories, it is now definitely better to write novels.

The first story, 'The Sweet, Sad Queen of the Grazing Isles', running to 75 pages, is almost a novel and is the only one previously unpublished. The reader is unlikely to spend much time wondering why. Its basis is the idea that power can be generated by making use of the temperature difference between surface and deep waters in the ocean. True. But Pohl has built upon this a diabolical tale of mobster rivalry in making a fast buck out of this power. The characters are nearly all millionaires or people hoping to be millionaires. The big question is 'Who will inherit the vast Appermoy billions?'. It is rather like a glossy American soap opera translated into dreary black print by someone used to writing dull technical reports. The technology mixes with the contrived human interest like oil with water.

The second story, 'The High Test',involves Pohl in writing tongue-in-cheek about someone serving as a driving instructor to two-headed Fomalhautians and writing home to his mother. In a brief foreword, Pohl tells us that the first draft was written on the typewriter of E.E. (Doc) Smith - a writer he greatly admired in his youth. both stories inspire depression at the thought of how little SF has changed since then, and at the bleak prospect of the same kind of idiots who have messed up our world proceeding to mess up other worlds in the future.

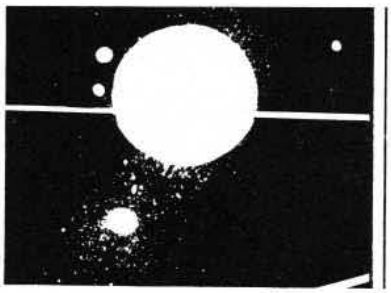
The third story, on the theme of over-population and how lotteries might help to deal with it, is quite good. The fourth, 'Second Coming', is only three pages long but has a foreword telling how editors in Pohl's early days 'spent a lot of their time thinking of tricks, devices, and subtle manipulations designed to get writers to write stories for them that might not otherwise have got written'. (All present-day writers without Big Names will groan with envy.) 'Enjoy, Enjoy', about a man being paid to have fun and allow his feelings to be recorded, is fun to read. 'Growing up in Bdge City' is a very strange story written in a very flat style invented for it, and which Pohl says he wrote between lunch and dinner. It occupies thirteen pages! 'We Purchased People' is another story on the the theme of possession, interestingly written from two narrative viewpoints. 'Rem the Rememberer' is a forgettable tale about pollution. 'The Mother Trip' is about very alien aliens, well worth reading and evidently inspired by a weekend Pohl spent with an encounter group. Pohl tells us in the introduction that he is in the habit of 'doing at least four pages worth of writing' every day of his life, wherever he happens to be (and he gets around a great deal). 'A Day in the Life of Able Charlie' is a short and spooky tale about advertising in the future. And, last but not least, we have 'The Way It Was', probably the best story in the collection, about organ banks and (again) the power of money in the mercenary future world to which Pohl keeps returning.

There you have it. Not much else to say. No-one reads Pohl for his literary style, I suppose, or for his hopeful vision of the future. At his worst (as in the first story) he is almost unreadable, at other times (as in the second) he is very silly, but at his best (as in the last) when he has good ideas and writes in telgraphese, with no words wasted, he leaves us in no doubt that he is a professional, in every sense of the word. Whether that means the book is to be recommended or not, I don't know. It's not cheap, but...as the saying goes.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OCCULTISM AND PARA-PSYCHOLOGY 2ND EDITION
- Ed. Leslie A. Shepard
[Gale Research Co., Detroit, 1984-85, 1617p in 3 vols., £245]
Reviewed by Keith Freeman

THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO GAUGE THE USE-fulness of an encyclopedia - a) look up items you already know about and see how much you agree with what the encylopedia has (and, even better, see if you gain more knowledge); b) dip at random into the contents and try to see what range and depth is covered; c) keep the encyclopedia with your other reference books and see how useful it is. This is not only the best guide but also the one that is most impractical for a reviewer without a time machine...

B O O K S



First method of estimation revealed two things: finding any specified item (if the encyclopedia contained it) was easy and when found I had no arguments with the factual content though I was sometimes unhappy about the style.

My second method of trying to quantify the encyclopedia's usefulness showed some odd facts. I was surprised to find UFOs covered and certain authors of horror and supernatural stories (such as H.P. Lovecraft) though others (E.A. Poe, Stephen King come to mind) are not present. On some articles a list of 'Further Reading' is given and this attempt to give further references where possible seems eminently sensible though I confess I haven't yet followed any such leads. Where potted biographies of people are entered, some have details of birth and death whilst others don't; was it too difficult to find or just sloppiness?

As well as a straight-forward index (an absolute essential which would only be worth mentioning if absent) there are a series of 'Topical Indexes' (topical, meaning here not 'having reference to current events' but 'to do with the topic'). This might well prove useful for tracking down information on closely related subjects rather than tediously working out which subjects are required and then looking them up individually in the main index. (But, what serendipitous discoveries could be missed!)

COSMIC ENGINEERS- Clifford D. Simak
[Severn House, 1985, 159pp, £7.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

Those who read my article 'City in Ashes' in **Vector 129** will know that I hold Simak in every high regard. In **The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction**, David Pringle rightly describes him as 'SF's reading spokesman for rural, Midwestern values. His stories contain little violence and much folk humour, and they stress the value of individualism tempered by compassion'.

It is Simak's essential folksy decency that makes my task in reviewing this work so incomprehensible that anyone should have felt it worthwhile reprinting this expanded version of a xenophobic juvenile 1939 story, of which the final 1950 version must have been outdated in style, content and sentiment when it first appeared.

Style first: the sentences are brief, snappy, loaded with outdated slang and totally lacking in finesse - 'pulp fiction' at its pulpiest.

Content: our two heroes are named Herb and Gary, they whiz around the solar system in a spaceship named 'Space Pup, and they yatter interminably at each other in the opening sequences to explain why they are there and what they are doing. They are best categorised as drunken slobs, one of whom smokes a 'foul, black pipe' and their universe is stuck firmly in the late thirties - thus when they discover a spaceship without rocket tubes they are loathe to believe it is a spaceship at all as it can't have taken off from a planet!

'Find something to hang onto', he said grimly. We're stopping to see what this is all about.' (This is interplanetary space, to slow from the speed necessary to flip from planet to planet to a complete stop in a few miles.)

Oh yes, and this is the year 6948, by the way,when all the grown men act like hyperactive teenagers, reacting with shouts and cries galore to the most obvious stimuli.

As for sentiment: we are plunged into the hoariest of oldtime cliches again and again -our heroes immediately identify an alien as having 'insane' laughter; they happily slaughter other aliens with 'more disgust than horror' because they are reptilian in form (and they name them 'Hell-hounds' so that you cannot miss the message). 'There is no sleep',she said. 'No rest at all. We have just started. We have to save the universe...' (Not just Earth, or the galaxy, but the whole damn universe - and the way they aim to do this is by destroying another complete universe with its billions of galaxies).

But what of the inhabitants of that universe? Ah, the 'cosmic engineers' (who turn out to be robots and thus, despite their vast universe-wide civilisation, grossly inferior to humans whom they admire with doggish devotion) are going to bring them over into our own universe with its billions of star systems etc.

And how do our heroes react to this mission of humanity? 'What bothers me... It's just like letting undesirable elements come in under our immigration schedule on Earth. You can't tell what sort of people they are.' Yes - blatant racism transferred to the cosmic arena, I kid you not!

If you <u>really</u> want to read, even to keep, such appalling trash, I would suggest you seek out the £1.50 Magnum Books paperback, printed from the same plates (which have been blown up in size for the hardcover, providing thick, clumsy type with wide spaces between each line). But other than typifying the whole mess as **Biggles of the Spaceways**, I feel I can best summarise it in the author's own words:

He spat.
'Stuff for kids', he said.

ALTOGETHER ELSEWHERE - Anna Wilson
[Onlywomen Press, 1985, 139pp, £2.95]
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

IS NOT A 'NOVEL' (= TRADITIONAL NARRATIVE) but is a 'novel' (= news). The setting is urban, and close to our home reality (near future? near alternative timeline?) The 'where' doesn't matter, what matters is that it's close). The subjects of the book are women, women and violence, women and violence against women, in a braid of three strands, interwoven for the length of the book.

The first strand is documented in the sections labelled 'street scene' (five of them). In this city, a women's vigilante group has coalesced under the increasing pressure of violent attacks on women, by men. The group patrols the street at night. The aims of the group are to prevent or discourage violence towards women, to intervene in potential or actual confrontations which threaten women, to make the streets a little less dangerous for women. The vigilantes are 'varied in age, race, class and sexuality; united only in desperation'. For some of them, the night patrols become an end in themselves. Towards the end of the 'street scene' sections, one woman is badly hurt in an attack. One woman attacks and kills a man. In seeking to prevent violence the women have taken violence into themselves.

The second strand is 'source material' on the women in the vigilante group, as individuals. Personal histories. If nothing else in the book is real, these women are real.

The third strand is 'Elsewhere', a set of stories (I want to call them' fables'' but I have a feeling that they're probably correctly metafictions or something like that) about women and violence, women and strength.

The first time I read the book straight through, cover to cover, and came away feeling that I'd missed something (everything?). This is a frustrating feeling. I waited for a couple of weeks, then read the book through following the strands. This time I've seen something; something disturbing. I probably won't be ready to write a proper review of this book for another six months or so (whatever's in there works slowly). In the meantime, I think you should probably read it. yes, I think you probably should.