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Ursula le Guin Article

Lawrence Sutin, Katherine Kerr Interviews

Vector

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Contents

Cover Art by Jana Kupkova who lives in Northern Moravia. She has worked as a geologist and in advertising design, but is currently a freelance illustrator specialising in SF and fantasy illustration. Her pictures have appeared in a variety of Czech periodicals, including **Ikarie** and the comicbook **Kometa,** and her illustration to 'A Toothsome Smile, An Artificial Death' by Eva Hauser is scheduled to appear in **BBR**.
A small selection of her paintings were exhibited at Hillcon II in Rotterdam, November 1991

Editor:
Catie Cary 224 Southway, Park Barn, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 6DN ☎ 0483 502349

Contributing Editor
Kev McVeigh 37 Firs Road, Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7QF ☎ 05395 62883

Reviews Editor:
Christopher Amies 56 More Close, St Paul's Court,Gliddon Rd, London, W14 9BN

Editorial Assistant: - Camilla Pomeroy

Production Assistants:
Alison Sinclair, Alan Johnson, David Barnes

Technical Support: - Surendra Singh

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Contributors: Good articles are always wanted. All MSS must be typed double spaced on one side of the paper. Submissions may also be accepted in ASCII format on IBM format 3.5" disks. Maximum preferred length is 3500 words; exceptions can and will be made. A preliminary letter is useful but not essential. Unsolicited MSS cannot be returned without an SAE. Please note that there is no payment for publication. Members who wish to review books must first write to the Editors.

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Some Girls Wander by Mistake

An Editorial By Catie Cary

This is an issue in transition. Next issue will see the mergeing into **Vector** of **Paperback Inferno,** and a lot of my time and attention has been focussed on the necessary planning for this event. I'm planning to redesign the magazine, and you will notice that I have been trying out a few ideas in the layout of this issue. I'd be extremely grateful for your comments and suggestions.

So, in **Vector 169** a paperback review section will be added , and also a section of magazine reviews. I believe that Stephen Payne will be laying out his plans in the current issue of **Paperback Inferno**. I find that a lot of my own favourite reading is in magazines; on page 16 of this magazine you can read of Maureen Speller's intentions for magazine reviews in **Vector**. These are very exciting changes, and I for one am looking forward in anticipation to the next issue.

A new feature beginning in this issue, and described as "Read This" in the last is "Compass Points".I am indebted to Terry Broome for suggesting the title. As he stated in his letter to me, "the title **directs** the reader to significant points of interest in the SF/FantasyHorror genre, ... maybe it will also conjure images of **quests** & **maps**". The purpose of this feature is for writers to share with us their enjoyment of works, whether classic or obscure, pointing us in the direction of stories that have either failed to come our way, or that maybe we have failed to appreciate. Over time, I am hoping that the series will build into a definitive guide to the best in the genre. We start with articles by Kev McVeigh and Ben Jeapes.

Finally, Sally-Ann Melia has asked me to mention the writers workshops she will be conducting at Novacon 22. These will be at two levels, dictated by the seriousness of the participants. For more details contact Sally-Ann at 11 Spinney Drive, Cheswick Green, Solihull, B90 4HB

Artwork by Claire Willoughby

COMPETITION RESULTS

I was extremely pleased by the level of interest shown in the competitions last issue, based on this we shall almost certainly repeat the experiment. The winners were:
Mike Jefferies
First prize: Nigel Parsons
Runners up: Daniel White, Chris C Bailey, Colin Johnson, William Powell

Sue Thomas
Steve Grover, Roger Robinson, Ray Smith, Tarin Brokenshire, Judith Johnstone
Your prizes should reach you shortly, Commiserations to the losers

Letters

A Doctor Writes:

In mein professional experience, I often encounter a vide variety of people -- accountants, und dentists, und estate agents being among zee most common. But zee verld of science fiction is, for me, zee most interesting und also zee most alarming. People who valk around mit zee false pointy ears und crying "Zat is illogical, mein Kapitan!" und "Beam me up, Scotty!" have provided me mit many many years of verk, und inspired several books (e.g., **Zee Loneliness of zee Long Distance Science Fiction Fan**, Simone und Scheister, 1983, £14.95 -- available from all good remainder stores at half zee price).However, reading his editorial in **V167**, I must say zat Herr McVector clearly takes zee biscuit. His enthusiasm for zee "SF" has degenerated into a pseudo-erotic reader/author relationship, und he can barely contain his *excitement* as he reels off name after name of his favourite authors. Why else, for example, does he mention so many *American* authors in an article purportedly about zee *British* SF? Von imagines him reaching an uncontrollable orgasm mit a cry of "Lois McMaster Bujold!" vhenever he is left alone mit his books; it is a sad case indeed, und vill inevitably end in vot has become known as the Asimov-Heinlein Effect -- zat is in vhich authors of no great talent are held up for deification by zer followers und zer peers, see **Locus** und zee Hugo Awards, etc.Zis is a terrible condition, und Herr McVector should contact me as soon as possible for urgent treatment.

Ich bin,

Dr Wilhelm J. Erkoff
Department for zee Study of Sad Lonely People
University of Barrow-In-Furness, Cumbria

I blame Sellafield, either that or the author was dropped on his head as an adult - KM

More and More and More

Another issue! My oh my, I bet the time flies for you. With the demise of **Paperback Inferno**, and the subsequent expansion of **Vector**, I bet it will go all the quicker. Increasing **Vector** by eight pages, however, does not seem a fair exchange for the 16 or so in PI, plus whatever was in Focus which I have not seen. By more room, I meant MORE and MORE room! (Will hopefully be a 12-16 page increase - Ed)

I wonder if the editorial board of **Vector** is not going to look a little top heavy: Editor, Contributing Editor, Reviews Editor, Magazine Reviews Editor, and Paperback Reviews Editor??? There is a danger here that **Vector** will become some hydra-headed uncontrollable monster, when all are trying to get their oar in and compete for space. No doubt it makes less work for you {He must be kidding! - Ed.} but on the other hand you are going to have to be fairly ruthless as EDITOR, at times. Because there are bound to be instances where your desire for space conflicts with others. Happy Hunting - I hope you have your red pen sharpened.

To the issue at hand, which still feels as though it is in slight transition. The Asimov pieces were interesting, without being astounding. Norman Beswick had me nodding in agreement in places, though I am not too sure if Leslie Hurst had much to say. Indeed, I found him a bit debatable. He says: "I doubt if the people who leave **A Brief History of Time** on their coffee tables had previously bought **The New Intelligent Man's Guide to Science**".

The Hawking book has the reputation of being one of the least read, and even less understood, bestsellers of all time. The coffee table is where it most commonly belongs, as a show of intellectually ostentatious one-up-manship. On the other hand, most of the Asimov science books were bought to be read, and will end up well-thumbed, next to the dictionaries, on the reference shelf. They were bought as tools, to be used again and again. In the end that is what Asimov will be remembered for, that brilliant ability to explain clearly.

Another bit of snobbery from Leslie Hurst's piece I found amusing - and somewhat indicative of his whole attitude - was the sneering reference to **Fantastic Voyage**. In its time, **Fantastic Voyage** was a BIG film, with a big budget, special effects and all. The novelisation gave Asimov a big boost and was widely read. My main point was the implicit sneer that Asimov was somehow soiling his hands by doing work! One of Asimov's appeals was the very fact that despite the fame that he got, he still saw himself, in his writing at least, as a journeyman professional. Does one sneer at Orson Scott Card for writing **The Abyss**? {Probably - Ed.}

In Leslie Hurst's final paragraphs, Asimov is scolded for, amongst other things, not seeing the significance of the decline of the Soviet Empire. Oh come on! In all of the endless millions spent on thinktanks, strategical studies, spying, and all the paraphernalia of prediction and information-gathering of endless governments, who the hell did?? It would have certainly saved us all a mountain of money, if anyone had, or at least if anyone was believed. Hindsight is a truly wonderful critical tool....

The interviews with both Sue Thomas and Mike Jefferies were interesting, although I thought that the introduction to the Sue Thomas interview was somewhat pointless. By the time A, B and C had finished their equation, I wanted some simplification! If interviews need this amount of introduction, then perhaps there is something inherently wrong with the structure of the interview. Which brings one to the point: how important *are* interviews? They do seem to be used a lot lately, I suppose because they make easy copy. Yet they are difficult to do well. All too often, they tend to resemble a pub chat. After reading a number of them, one comes away unsatisfied: information obtained, but deeper motivations not. It depends crucially on the questions asked, and it's easy to be fatuous. The best ones I have seen lately have been those by Stan Nicholls in **Interzone**.

The mini-reviews continue to annoy. I must admit I cannot understand Chris Amies' policy of inserting these usual double-barrelled couple of paragraphs into the body of the review section. Mini-reviews in essence are extremely difficult to do beyond the level of "This was good; this was bad" and point to one or two faults.

The mini-reviews here tend to prove the point. Martin Webb on **By Bizarre**

Hands: ''the book should never have been published, fails to stir, vulgar'' - but why, but why??? A brief statement of opinion is not a review. Similarly Martin Webb on Dean Koontz: ''As a fan of Dean Koontz, it is difficult to be objective and critical.'' So if he finds it difficult, what does the poor reader make of only two paragraphs devoted to the book?

I would truly like to know how the emphasis on length of review is decided. Koontz, for instance: interesting writer. From the depths of some truly execrable SF in his early career, he has moved into the bestseller area, via a more pedestrian treatment of the Stephen King territory. Yet he gets little space. Similarly Laymon: for ''a book Laymon should be proud of'', he receives little attention.

Fantasy also seems to get the brush-off, namely **The Sapphire Rose**, **The Winds of the Wastelands**, **Wolfking** - all the same short shrift. If fantasy and horror are going to be reviewed (and that is another argument altogether), then at least it should be done on a level playing ground. There is no doubt that the more ''heavyweight'' books - Le Guin and Wilhelm here for instance - need space for review, but on the other hand all that cascade of fantasy and horror is not all dross, and I for one would like longer reviews of the better examples.

I think that Steve Palmer missed an opportunity of investigating the Hawking phenomenon in its social and publishing context. Why *has* the book been on the bestseller list for three to four years? Why is it bought, when so few people understand it? Indeed, why is there now a small publishing industry devoted to basically explaining Hawking, or have you not looked into your local Waterstone's lately? Why is it that it has almost become a social phenomenon??? When, truly, people are trying to understand esoteric, immensely complicated scientific theories that most of them have not got a snowball in hell's chance of kenning? Indeed, the very programme that Steve Palmer examines is a product of this phenomenon. Name the last time a programme about a science professor merited prime time?? Is it Scientist as God? or GENIUS? or media circus?

The idea is obviously not to upset Ken Lake. {Why not? - Ed.} I must admit to a certain ironic smile when, after going for Gillian Rooke hammer and tongs, he accuses her of being immature!!! By your own petard be hoist.

I again enjoyed this issue of **Vector**, for which much thanks. The only thing one would wish, with a merged magazine, is a more professional appearance. When one witnesses what can be done with desktop publishing, **Vector** does suffer in comparison. Still I suppose that depends on money more than much else. I like the typoes!!! {What typoes? - Typist.}

Philip Muldowney
Plymouth

Paperback Reader

Paperback Inferno is a **BSFA** service I've always greatly valued. I suspect I'm like many other people who almost never buy hardback SF but regularly use **PI** for buying paperback editions. If like me you live in an SF desert, it's a question of matching **PI** reviews with mail order listings from specialist shops (I buy through Andromeda Bookshop in Birmingham).

When you merge **Paperback Inferno** with **Vector**, may I make a plea that there be at least a short 250-word reminder of later paperback editions of hardbacks already reviewed? My guess is that quite a proportion of current **PI** reviews are of books that **Vector** never had the chance to notice; and many others are of much older books **Vector** may have covered in previous decades, giving an opportunity for reassessment.

As my **Foundation** articles indicate, my particular interest is SF books that deal with, mention or involve religions, religious institutions or religious themes. I found it most useful combing **Paperback Inferno** for any hints of books I might find worth looking at and buying.

Norman W Beswick
Church Stretton, Shropshire

A Matter of Gravity

I was amused at the hero-worship accorded the discredited Hawking by Steve Palmer in his first lamentable **Insight** column. Perhaps I could take up just one small but essential point: that of Gravity.

The thing about Gravity is that, like Matter, it doesn't exist. Quite early in his book, Hawking carefully sets forth what I've heard rather delightfully referred to as The Incontinence Theory of the Universe - that is, the Rubber Sheet Theory.

Simply explained, this postulates that the entire Universe has the property of a rubber sheet: that is, it easily accommodates itself to stresses and strains, herein called Tensions. What we know as stars, planets and the rest are all, of course, mere perturbations of nothing upon nothingness - at base they are merely *waves*, albeit waves perceived by our feeble senses as particles.

The rubber sheet does not *contain* these waves: it *is* the sum total of the waves, held in a permanent and ever self-adjusting Tension. Planets and stars do not act upon each other - they are all part of the one phenomenon which we call the Universe.

Now it may well be that this Universe contains vortices in the form of Black Holes which are ''our end'' of White Holes, which are in fact other Universes: since there is little chance of our ever penetrating them alive, these must necessarily remain ''mysteries'' to us - things, like the true nature of electricity, at present beyond our ability to comprehend and certainly beyond our ability to explore. The silly argument that, since we have found no White Holes in our Universe, this cannot be true, ignores the simple fact that within this theory our Universe *is* a White Hole, a continuing influx of Universe-stuff from another Universe's Black Hole.

The concepts all fall neatly into line with current major concerns of The New Physics, and indeed with the **Holographic Universe** theory set out by Michael Talbot in his book of that name, which postulates that the Universe is not only ''of a piece with itself'' but is holographic in essence - each ''part'' contains the whole, in ever fuzzier detail as one subdivides it.

But to return to Hawking: the fatal flaw (one of several) in his popular but unread book is that, having carefully delineated the Rubber Sheet Theory and indicated its validity in all our observations, he then proceeds to ignore it and to carry on throughout his book *pretending* that Gravity exists, and basing absolutely all his cosmology on that faulty premise. Realising that Dr Hawking cannot cope with correspondence, I wrote putting this point and asking that one of his assistants or students should comment; I received a printed acknowledgement, a disavowal of any ability to reply, and nothing further. Thus are great reputations made, and thus do unaware readers like Steve Palmer fall for them: Goebbels' principle of the Big Lie lives on in Science as it always did.

Ken Lake
London

Insensitivity

Jim England's letter was quite amusing. Particularly, the line about ''insensitivity ... what all the young aspire to nowadays.'' One thing clearly not the exclusive property of the young , is insensitivity - insensitivity to the irony and facetiousness with which Liz Counihan applies comment to the horror genre as a whole.

It's not surprising then to see him miss the point made by the Czech women writers. Of course it's ''no great art'' to be ''better than the majority of men''. Sturgeon's law applies. I suspect that the real point is that while there are more acclaimed male writers than women, most don't actually deserve this status. Most women find their assigned roles difficult to break out of; when they do it's hardly surprising if they consider those men who haven't faced this struggle for acceptance as lazy and stupid. Jim England, in his narrow-minded letter, proves all these points without even trying.

Helen Bland
Edinburgh

Please address all letters of comment to:
Catie Cary (Vector)
224 Southway
Park Barn, GUILDFORD
Surrey, GU2 6DN

A Hand Held Out In The **Dark**

Some relationships in the science fiction of **Ursula Le Guin**

Examined by Cherith Baldry

In her introduction to the 1977 edition of **Planet of Exile** Ursula Le Guin states that the principal theme of her work is marriage. She states in the same introduction that she is not sure what that means, and what was true in 1977 may not necessarily still be true today, but the idea may still form a useful jumping-off point for a consideration of relationships in her work.

If we take marriage to mean "the forging of a significant relationship", without insisting on the ceremonial connotations of the word, then a whole list of paired characters springs to mind, few of whom are married in the conventional sense. Genly Ai and Estraven; Shevek and Takver; Ged and Tenar. The relationship illuminates the individual.

But if the theme of the works is marriage and the reader is encouraged to attend to how that relationship is established, then this implies a beginning in which that relationship does not exist. Time after time in the novels and short stories of Le Guin, we are presented with a character in isolation.

Sometimes the isolation is practical and physical, and in some of the shorter fiction this isolation is itself the theme; we think of the alien in 'Mazes', or the child in 'The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas'. In other short stories, and in the novels, the isolation is the beginning of a more complex movement. Genly Ai is the sole human being on the world of Winter. Shevek, the only Anarresti on Urres. Ged, the only whole man in the Place of the Tombs. Rocannon, the only one of his people to survive the massacre. Falk in **City of Illusions** begins by knowing nothing of himself, except that he is different from all those around him, the only one of his kind in the world as he and they know it. From that position of isolation these people must make their choices and order their lives.

The isolation is, of course, often intentional. Ai and Shevek both chose their course. Ged came to the Tombs with a purpose in mind. Even Falk, though he had no idea of being abandoned in Earth's forests with his memory wiped out, voluntarily abandoned his wife and his own world to move out, with a small group of his own people, to investigate the silence of Earth. Like all those who travel between the stars in Le Guin's universe, he has given up his family and those he loves, because the time distortion inherent in travelling close to the speed of light means that they have lived out their lives and died while he was on the voyage.

If the isolation were only physical, it would be relatively simple. But in the work of a complex writer like Le Guin there is more to it than that. Many of these isolated characters are isolated not only physically, but within their own perception. Genly Ai feels acutely his separateness from the people of Winter. His appearance is - moderately - different. His customs and what he takes for granted are even more so. But the major isolating factor is his sexuality, not just the physical differences between an Earth male and the androgynes of Winter, but his perception of the differences. The problems that he faces arise chiefly from his reluctance to form a genuine relationship with Estraven, because he shrinks away from the Gethenian's sexual ambiguity. It is ironic that Genly, judging a world and its individual representatives against the norm of his own masculinity, comes to be known in Pulefen Farm as "The Pervert". His story might in one way be seen as his journey towards accepting that designation.

Ai's isolation, however involuntary, is ultimately destructive. He can only accomplish his purpose by casting it off, and his delay in doing so costs Estraven's life. In other works, however, characters isolate themselves from their society, or move out from it, beginning to form their own judgements instead of those imposed on them, and this activity is seen as creative. In two early novels, **Planet of Exile** and **The Eye of the Heron**, the young girls Rolery and Luz move away from the restrictive surroundings of their childhood to investigate groups of people of whom they have been taught to think nothing but evil. The fact that they do so proves to be a turning point for their world, the point at which growth, stunted for so long, begins again. In the recent **Always Coming Home**, another young girl, North Owl, also moves away from her society, rejecting it in favour of her father's people. This is a more complex book, even for readers who disregard the wealth of anthropological detail about the Kesh. North Owl is mistaken; among her father's people she does not find the freedom she had hoped for, but only greater restriction, and yet her journey was important, for she returns mature. She does not create a new beginning for her world, but she forms her own being.

Over and over again in the work of Le Guin, we find central characters experiencing restlessness with their surroundings, a restlessness which impels them to move out and grow: Shevek, long before he journeyed to Urres, felt himself uneasy in the apparently free, but in reality restrictive, society of Anarres. Tenar among the tombs questions the apparently unquestionable assumptions of the religion she serves. In

'The Diary of the Rose', from **The Compass Rose**, we see the growth of Rosa's isolation, from the obedient, unquestioning little beginner to the profoundly alienated, but mature, person she becomes.

Often the isolation is neither voluntary nor an outgrowth of the personality, but is imposed from outside. Ursula Le Guin is not a violent writer, if by violent we mean self-indulgent in the depiction of blood and guts, but there is violence in her work, its destructiveness shown because it destroys relationships and isolates its victim from the rest of humanity. George in **The Lathe of Heaven** is isolated first by his own society, which insists on his undergoing therapy, and then by Haber, the therapist, who uses and abuses his abilities. Violence used to wipe out memory, with Falk, and Flores in 'The Diary of the Rose' does little physical harm, but destroys the personalities, and with it the relationships they formed. The child Tenar, taken away from her family to serve the Nameless Ones, retains no memory of her mother. No physical harm at all is done to Semley by the Gdemiar, yet the time dislocation, isolating her from her own people, destroys her. In the same way, Argaven in 'Winter's King' is forced to leave the child Emran, and does not return until Emran is old and disgraced. Government officials take away Simon in 'The New Atlantis', in the name of welfare. Most shocking and pitiable, perhaps, is Therru in **Tehanu**, a child raped and disfigured so that her foster-mother, Tenar, despairs of her future, fearing she will be condemned to live alone because so many people, looking at her, see only the ugly outside.

"The averted faces, the signs against evil, the horror and curiosity, the sickly pity and the prying threat, for harm draws harm to it.... And never a man's arms. Never anyone but Tenar." (**Tehanu**, Chapter 6)

The isolation of all these characters is enforced, not an opportunity for creative growth, but the ending of it.

If the ultimate violence is the enforcing of isolation, then the "villains" of the stories are those who so enforce it. Yet there are few if any villains in Le Guin. So often the violence is not carried out by individuals but by faceless officials, representatives of a Government, or by individuals like Estrel in **City of Illusions** enslaved to an evil system. The only "lost souls" are the rare characters like Haber, who knowingly choose to break down the bonds which others have created.

Salvation comes from the forging of a true relationship: "marriage" as I set out the terms earlier. Out of their isolation, or perhaps because of it, the characters find each other. The relationship might not be a successful one, or a permanent one. That between Luz and Lev, for example, scarcely has time to get going before his death. Rosa and Flores are separated by his loss of memory. Estraven is killed. Many years elapse between the meeting of Ged and Tenar, and their eventual "marriage". Yet the relationship has value; in creating it, the characters create their lives, and incidentally, the story.

I want to examine in more detail the story 'Nine Lives', originally published in **Playboy** in 1969, and then appearing in the collection **The Wind's Twelve Quarters**. Not because I think it is necessarily a more important story than others I have mentioned, or even ones I have not, but because it illuminates very clearly the issues I am discussing.

A clone of ten individuals is working as a Planetary Exploitation team on the world Libra, along with the two men, Pugh and Martin, who first opened up the planet. Because the units of the clone are essentially one person, their rapport with each other is flawless.

What would it be like, then, to have someone as close to you as that? Always to be answered when you spoke; never to be in pain alone. Love your neighbor as you love yourself... that hard old problem was solved. The neighbor was the self: the love was perfect.

But it is not as easy as that. Pugh and Martin both feel there is something unnatural about the clone and the relationships within it. The reader feels the same. These relationships are "manufactured", in the sense that they are inherent in the nature of the clone. They have not been established through human contact and a recognition of the other. We cannot help asking ourselves what is the value of such relationships. We are told to love our neighbour as ourselves because it is difficult; the clone is a cop-out.

Because their rapport with each other is perfect, the members of the clone cannot reach out and form relationships with others. Pugh and Martin for their part find contact difficult because they cannot distinguish individuals, or provoke an individual response.

"And part of the difficulty was that they never really talked to Pugh and Martin. They joked with them, were polite, got along fine. They gave nothing. It was nothing one could complain about; they were very pleasant, they had the standardized American friendliness."

Nine individuals of the clone are killed in an earthquake, and the story focuses on the survivor, Kaph. Horrifically, he suffers the dying agonies of the other nine. Afterwards, he is totally alone. He has no experience of forming relationships; he cannot even carry on a normal, trivial, everyday conversation.

"Do you tell yourself good night?"

He begins to learn about human communication by observing Pugh and Martin. Their relationship is what we might expect between two men who have worked together for a long time. They co-operate, get on each other's nerves, have spells of not speaking; when Martin is caught out in another bad earthquake, Pugh goes out to find him, though Kaph sees no point in taking the risk. Because of this, Kaph at last begins to understand about love in human terms, and to see himself as an individual with the possibility of relating to other individuals.

"Kaph looked at him and saw the thing he had never seen before, saw him: Owen Pugh, the other, the stranger who held his hand out in the dark."

That would be all very well: a suffering creature brought to some kind of peace, a valid story. But there is another complication, another set of ideas, because this is not really, or not only, the story of Kaph; it is also the story of Pugh and Martin. For all their long-established relationship, there is a sense in which they do not know each other at all.

"Pugh was pleased. He had hoped Martin would want to go on working with him, but neither of them was used to talking much about their feelings, and he had hesitated to ask."

In our culture men must be strong and silent, and not admit to feelings, or at least, only to approved feelings. When Kaph asks Pugh, at the end of the story, if he loves Martin, Pugh's first reaction is anger, and he tries to wrap up this evident truth in other words, because it is not acceptable to ask one man if he loves another, or for the man to admit it. Pugh does, in fact, admit it; possibly Kaph has taught him something. It is just as difficult for Pugh and Martin to accept their love as it is for Kaph to understand it; they do it but do not acknowledge it, and the experience is richer for being acknowledged.

Looking at this story can cast light on other relationships of love in Ursula Le Guin's works, and I should like to continue by analysing some aspects of what is, for me, her finest novel so far, **The Left Hand of Darkness**. It may be that the feminist interest which this book has rightly aroused has obscured the fact that it is also a profoundly moving love story.

Genly Ai is just as inarticulate about emotions as Martin and Pugh, again because of his acculturation. He has been taught not to show his feelings; Estraven does not understand why he is ashamed to weep. He admits only to what he finds acceptable. He feels himself - however much his intellect tells him different - to be a normal male in a world of perverts. This attitude prevents him from seeing and accepting the true nature of Estraven, and therefore from reciprocating the trust that Estraven offers to him. His recognition of this comes late: for his mission, almost too late, and certainly too late for Estraven.

"And I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man. Any need to explain the sources of that fear vanished with the fear; what I was left with was, at last, acceptance of him as he was. Until then I had rejected him, refused him his own reality... I had not wanted to give my trust, my friendship to a man who was a woman, a woman who was a man." (Chapter 18)

The conclusion it takes Genly a good portion of the book to come to has been evident to the reader well before this. Evident in Genly's interest in Estraven, even when it is a hostile interest; in the powerful sense of presence even in the Gethenian's absence; in the recognition of Estraven's vitality.

"He set off down the street, walking with a deft, definite grace, a quickness of being that made him seem in that minute the only thing alive in all Mishnory." (Chapter 10)

Genly's discovery of the truth of his own feelings is a difficult one, preceded by much embarassment and constraint on both sides during the enforced closeness of the journey across the ice. Once recognised, it is the love that - literally - moves the universe. Recognising it first, Estraven has acted, out of personal commitment to Genly and commitment to the purpose of his mission, and has created the situation in which that mission can be completed. Genly's reappearance in Karhide breaks the deadlock and sets in motion the train of events which ends in his bringing down the ship. It also - unintentionally but inevitably - leads to Estraven's death. Genly cements the keystone of his endeavour with the blood of his friend.

In retrospect, the days on the ice and the borders of Karhide take on an almost unbearable poignancy; this was their time together, in danger and uncertainty, and it was so short. Genly himself recognises its importance.

"... I know beyond doubt what the real center of my own life is, that time which is past and lost and yet is permanent, the enduring moment, the heart of warmth." (Chapter 18)

The ultimate result of the love between Estraven and Genly is the joining of Gethen with the Ekumen. Here as elsewhere, Le Guin is concerned not only with the fate of individuals, but with whole worlds. Gethen and all its inhabitants are brought out of isolation and into union. Nevertheless, momentous as this result may be, I am sure it is the novelist's intention that we care less about this than we do about the union of Genly and Estraven, and then about Genly, thrown back into isolation after Estraven's death.

"I held him, crouching there in the snow, while he died. They let me do that. Then they made me get up, and took me off one way and him another, I going to prison and he into the dark." (Chapter 19)

In his pain he cannot understand the need for Estraven's death, and sees himself as betrayer, for failing to do what he promised, in sending for the ship before Estraven's name is cleared. I cannot read any hope into the final encounter with Estraven's child. Hope for the world, perhaps, but not for Genly the individual. As he said of Ashe Foreth, he is "damned to love once", and his story is tragic.

Estraven, the stranger holding out a hand in the dark, is the pivot of the book and of Genly's life. The discussion of isolation, throught Estraven's diary in Chapter 16, incorporating the verse from which the book takes its title, shows how difficult Estraven too finds this reaching out, and how essential it is to his perception of the human spirit. The same point is made in **The Dispossessed**.

"We know that there is no help for us but from one another, that no hand will save us if we do not reach out our hand. And the hand that you reach out is empty, as mine is. You have nothing. You possess nothing. You own nothing. You are free. All you have is what you are, and what you give." (Chapter 9)

The Dispossessed is a much sparer and more cerebral novel than **The Left Hand of Darkness**, its thematic material for that reason much clearer. Here the reader attends not so much to the relationship between individuals, as between the two worlds, Urres and Annares. We are left with the conviction that however much Urres might try to make use of Annares, and be rejected by it, the ultimate good of both worlds lies in reconciliation, and, further, that with the opening up of the system to other intelligent beings, this union must take place.

This is perhaps the clearest statement of what I feel to be a dominant theme in the works of Ursula Le Guin, the sense of duality, the "I and Thou", coupled with the conviction that the human spirit is at its finest when it tries to achieve from that duality a unity.

The Entire Enchilada

LAWRENCE SUTIN

Interviewed by Paul Kincaid

Lawrence, I want to begin by asking, why did you write the biography?

Well, just out of personal passion. I have been a fan of Philip K Dick for years, and I can recall - I'm not a regular newspaper reader, but for some strange reason I was reading my local paper one day, and I saw this little box: "DEATH Elsewhere" was the headline. And then I looked down and it said Philip K Dick had died. It was the tiniest little thing, maybe a half inch of type. And I thought "My God...." At that time I was very unhappily engaged in the practice of law, and I had determined that I was going to quit at all costs. I can't say that the biography made me quit, but when I thought about a writing project that I wanted to undertake it occurred to me, without any particular solid reasoning, that what I wanted to do was a biography of Philip K Dick. It was only later that I learned that it was very difficult to get people to talk about Philip K Dick, and people would assure me that there was no commercial market for a biography of Philip K Dick, that Philip K Dick was so impossibly complex a man that the very idea of a biography... These were all things that I was too stupid... I just knew that I wanted to do a biography of Philip K Dick because I wanted to know about him.

It *is* notoriously difficult to get people to talk about him. How did you achieve that?

In two stages. First of all, on my own time and money, I flew out to California: I went to Paul Williams' home where he had the Philip K Dick archives in his garage, and I did some research of my own, read some of the letters, and managed to interview Paul and a couple of people who were in the vicinity that knew Philip K Dick, and based on this I wrote up a proposal. Philip K Dick's agent at the time, now my agent, Russell Galen, when I 'phoned him for information, informed me, "Well, you know this is a commercial impossibility" - which was a great bolster!
I then proceeded to send out my proposal to an agent I'd heard of, Dorothy Pitman. She raved about the proposal, and was fascinated by Philip K Dick. I owe a great deal to Dorothy Pitman, because after fifteen rejections of a book most agents would have sent it back and told me to get lost. She didn't, and the sixteenth person was an editor then at Harmony Books, by the name of Michael Peach, who said "I love this proposal. Let's do the book." I got a pittance, which I promptly spent, for on- the-road research. Once I had a book contract, a number of people who knew Philip K Dick - not everybody: there were about five, seven people who just would not talk to me; a few who would only correspond with me - but most people who knew and loved Philip K Dick, felt that they wanted his story to be told.
My attitude towards people that I interviewed was very stringent: "I have no preconceptions; I'm not out to paint him as a saint; I'm not out to describe him as a madman; I simply want to know. And I promise you I will do my best to tell the truth as I see it." Actually, once I arranged the interviews, people were very forthcoming. Many people cried during the interviews; many people laughed uproariously. I think for many of them it was a tremendous opportunity to relive their feelings toward him.
Dick was constantly revising the truth about his life: how did you go about disentangling that?

To be absolutely honest with you, I'm not sure that biographers ever disentangle the truth of someone's life. Now let me be clear here. I don't want to be falsely modest: I worked for years researching this book, I made every effort to be scrupulously accurate, honest, as objective as objectivity is possible on this plane of existence. Nonetheless, what I did was tell the story based on a blending of as many different fascinating accounts as I could find. I don't claim to have told the truth with a capital T about Philip K Dick. What I tried to do, my philosophy of writing as it were, was if I felt that there were contradictions or entanglements I tried to set them down on the page clearly. Part of what I was after was not to hide the difficulties. If three different people said three different things about something - Phil being one of them, and him perhaps giving two out of the three versions at different times of his life - I tried to let the reader know: "Here are the three versions". If I felt I had any reason to shade towards one, I tried to make that clear. So I guess when you say "disentangle", I pray that I made at least an interesting bow out of all the tangles. But there's still entanglements aplenty.

Have you found things out since that you felt would cast a different light?

Oh, three or four letters have come to light. But no, quite honestly I haven't. I've read various other essays by people in which they theorise about what can be so or can't be so. Someone could hand me a secret envelope tomorrow with revelatory Philip K Dick documents, but I must say that I am content with my version. As I say, the estate discovered three or four letters about his writing methods in the fifties that I wish I could have quoted about a paragraph from, but that's about it.
What about things like the "pink light"? How did you work out how to go through that?

Certain things influenced me. For one thing, it was not my primary interest to diagnose Philip K Dick. In the first chapter of my book, when I talked about the influence of his lost twin sister, I felt I was on very solid ground. Since he had written over and again in his life how obsessed he was by her loss, I felt compelled as a biographer to apply what psychological knowledge, and psychiatric knowledge, I could find on that subject. But there has been a tendency among certain writers to try and pin a diagnosis on Philip K Dick's later visionary experiences. I think that these experiences make many people very uncomfortable. I tried not to come to a final conclusion about them, although in the book I offered one diagnosis: I thought that temporal lobe epilepsy could fit. Schizophrenia could fit, and Philip K Dick argued that one. There's been all sorts of theories.
I think that to apply psychological diagnostics to Philip K Dick posthumously would ultimately have been reductive. And there is a sense in which the vitality of Philip K Dick's message, if you take the final novels that he wrote seriously, as I do, then I'm damned if I wish to say "This was the product of psychosis, or multiple personality disorder, or temporal lobe epilepsy." That's the reason I quoted William James in the book: James points out that we all feel very uncomfortable when our subjective spiritual experiences are pasted with a diagnosis by someone else. I tried to look for what wisdom, what creative ability there was in those novels - while acknowledging that I didn't know myself whether they are "genuine" mystical experiences. We'll never know.

I found it fascinating reading the biography: more than I expected, the life and the fiction seem to interlink. Did you set out to try and get a grip on the fiction?

Oh, absolutely. I will confess to the world that I am not a fan of straightforward academic literary criticism, and those biographies that contain long, long, long sections devoted to close, textual analysis of works generally strike me as sludgy reading. At the same time, what I

felt I could do with the novels was, first of all, relate them to the life, and second, give the *best* of my insights about them, the most exciting, the most original, interweave them into the text. I also have a chronological survey in which I go through each and give a plot summary, and the highlights. So yes, I tried to make the novels and stories - and the **Exegesis**, which I quoted from extensively in the book - relevant to the life, but without engaging in long, long, long passages of literary criticism divorced from biographical context. That was how I felt a readable, exciting biography could be written, and that's what I wanted to write.

Did you find yourself changing your own ideas or opinions as your research went on?

I *had* no ideas or opinions at the outset. I know that must sound slightly phony, but all I knew about Philip K Dick when I started was he wrote novels I loved, and I wanted to know more about him. I really feel like I formulated my opinions as I wrote the book. I didn't think "Philip K Dick was this, and now I'm going to go off into the world and try and prove it." So I formulated my opinions, I found it fascinating to come to them, but I don't think I changed them because I didn't have them to change.

So, actually, uncovering the life, or a version of the life, was a way of...

My way of motivating myself as a writer is to pick a topic that I know nothing about, and that fascinates me, and *do* it. If I had felt that I knew who Philip K Dick was, and I was going to go out and get the quotes and get the data and the textual evidence and support it, I probably would have been so bored half way through that I would've resigned from the task. Whereas coming in to it wondering who he was, and letting the gestalt form itself... that's the way I worked.

At the same time, right now, you're selling off a large chunk of your Philip K Dick collection! Has the biography cured you of Philip K Dick?

Oh no, not at all! Having a new baby daughter, and spending a week here in England without earning income, has instilled in me the desire to make some spare change. It has nothing to do with Philip K Dick! Don't interpret my selling off some Philip K Dick books as a sign of being cured of him. But I also have to admit I've spent a lot of years on him. I don't have the same incredible grasping curiosity that I had when I started. No, I still love the man, I still relish his work, I'm happy that he's receiving the attention he's receiving. It's like anything else you spend a few years at: I'm no longer in that initial pinprick stage of anticipation: "What happened in 1974?" I think I know, more or less, what happened in 1974. These days it's fun for me to hear what *other* people think. I like the fact that Philip K Dick keeps perplexing people, and more and more theories and interpretations, and the books are being reprinted; I think that's all wonderful.

The books are being reprinted, and a lot of books that were never published in his life have now come out.

Nearly all of the mainstream novels were published posthumously. I think that's in part the sad state of affairs when an artist dies: suddenly he becomes a little bit more collectable and marketable. There's this cachet of the never before published, posthumous sort of thing. Not that I wish to diminish the small press publishers who did it, and the mainstream houses who did it - I just wish more of those mainstream novels had come out while he was alive to enjoy the fact. I think that's more economics than anything to do with the merit of those novels.

Do you think the novels could have been published in his lifetime?

Well, **Confessions of a Crap Artist** was. And **Transmigration of Timothy Archer** was sold in his lifetime, the hardcover came out right after his death. Could they have been? Well, certainly, given that so many of them were small press publications. I can't explain it except to say there is something about an artist dying that leads people to rummage about and say "What can we salvage now from this life, and what can we present?" I suppose people could accuse *me* of being ghoulish: why didn't I start my biography before he died? I guess the answer is it never occurred to me.

Talking about rummaging about in someone's life, it strikes me that with a character such as Dick you must constantly be considering alternative versions of the truth, and wondering "What would have happened if...?" Did you find that with Dick? "What would have happened if" those novels had sold when he was writing them? Would he have been a mainstream writer? Would he have written any other science fiction?

I think if Philip K Dick had been allowed into the mainstream with his mainstream work he would have written more mainstream novels. I think it was a heartbreak to him, and I think he wrote mainstream novels that were good enough to publish. But I also think that his best work is his science fiction. I think **Confessions of a Crap Artist** is a terrific novel; that's a mainstream novel, and that's one of his finest. But taking the mainstream novels as a whole, and taking the science fiction work as a whole, I have no trouble in saying that **Valis** and **Ubik** and **Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch** and **Dr Bloodmoney** and **Martian Timeslip**, just to name ones that come to the top of my head, and **Scanner, Darkly**, are better than any of the mainstream novels. I think that what's most unfortunate is this damn - and get "damn" in there! - mainstream/science fiction distinction. *That's* what is sad: he deserved "mainstream" recognition for his science fiction novels. It was the damn *label* that was his problem. People should have held up **Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch** and said "This is a great novel". Period. Oh, and **Man in the High Castle** is another one I'd put in that list. That one was, I think, Philip K Dick's attempt to combine absolute mainstream stylishness with science fiction plotting. It was marketed originally more as a political suspense novel than as a science fiction novel, and Philip K Dick hoped that it would be reviewed by mainstream publications like **Time** and **The New York Times Book Review**. It wasn't; it found a home in the science fiction community, and it won the Hugo award. So, in terms of the mainstream works... I've said what I've said: I think he deserved mainstream recognition for his science fiction novels. Certainly, if **Pottering About In A Small Land** had been a mainstream success, and editors had said "Gee, Phil, more please", probably we would have had a whole different batch; it would have been an alternate world in which Philip K Dick was a successful mainstream author. Michael Bishop has written a novel about that very situation, so that's been thought of.

I liked the little bit on each of the novels at the end of the book. That's not something you usually find in a biography. Was it something you just felt like doing for fun?

Well, I'm a completist in the sense that I wanted all the books discussed. I wanted my biography to be both objective and scholarly, and tremendously exciting to read. I was sick of biographies that were huge bricks filled with footnotes and quotes and no narrative life to them, and the pseudo-objectivity of a scholarly biographer who makes all their guesses in terms of suppositions: "perhaps" and "it may be" and all the rest of it. I wanted to write in a passionately engaged manner. I discussed the novels in the text that I thought were the best, and I felt as a reader, as a potential reader of my own book, that what I would really appreciate, given the dizzying array of Philip K Dick books in the world, was one chapter that simply set them all out in chronological order, and said: "Here's what they're about; here's what their high points are; here's how good I think they are."

The rating system must have aroused a bit of controversy.

It is, if you decide you're going to fight over whether something is a "six". I said, as a matter of fact, in my chronological survey that I assumed my rating system in this survey would start pointless arguments. But the point was I really felt there were a number of people coming up to me and asking "What should I read by Philip K Dick? There's fifty titles...." After all, I do discuss the books at some length, and the number at the end is simply that: it's a shorthand way of letting readers know what I think are the best. I would *never* engage in a quarrel over whether a Philip K Dick novel was a "six" or a "seven" or an "eight". But I will admit that there have been a couple of reviewers who are mightily offended over the fact that I would dare put a one to ten rating on the books. And my answer is "It was fun." And it was a shorthand guide, just like record guides, where you give four stars and three stars, nothing more than that.

You say people have come up and said "Which Philip K Dick novels?"... Do you think that the biography is actually opening Dick up?

Well, yes, I know it is. At least, I can't say that hordes around the world have seen the light, but I've had at least thirty, forty people communicate to me in person or by mail saying: "Thank you. I've gone and found the novels." I assume there's at least a few dozen more. Yes, I think my biography has helped the cause of Philip K Dick. I don't think people are reading my book and going "My GOD! I will never touch that!" But then again, a book like this tends to be read primarily by people who have already made up their mind. I don't think too many people read biographies about a writer that they've never heard of and have no interest in. I once said in an essay I wrote in the **Philip K Dick Newsletter** that I think, if Philip K Dick were

alive to read my book, he would be pleased by the high assessment I made of him as an artist and writer, and displeased by my rummaging around in his private affairs and giving contradictory accounts as to the women in his life.

Would he be pleased about the fact of the biography at all?

Yes. I think he anticipated that. There's a couple of letters he wrote when he jokingly referred to future biographers. He wanted to be remembered and he wanted value to be placed upon his life and struggle. But whether he would have been pleased by my particular book, I would never dare say.

I wouldn't ask! There's a strange industry around Philip K Dick, and I wonder why he in particular has attracted that industry.

I think, because he's good.

Simple as that?

Yes. He's good. Not quite as simple as that. I'll add: he's unique. If you like Philip K Dick's works, it's hard to find someone else who writes like him. It's the combination of his quality and the uniqueness of his vision. I think that's also why many people shy away from him. They read this and go ''YUG! This doesn't resemble anything I like, and I don't much care for the occasional sloppiness of the prose, and the weirdness of the psychological and spiritual perceptions.'' But if you do, he's a voice who cuts through. And obviously he has cut through for me.
I hear references to a Philip K Dick ''cult''. I'm glad you used ''industry'' instead of ''cult'', because ''cult'' has all sorts of negative connotations. As though Philip K Dick people band together in little enclaves and have secret beliefs around the world. I'm not a member of any Philip K Dick ''cult''. As a matter of fact, there are many people who like Philip K Dick who I have virtually nothing else in common with. So as a cult goes it's a rather disappointing cult. But as a body of work about him, I'm going to have to say it's because he's good. Primarily. He's *worth* it.
But it would be nice if he could just be there on the shelves along with the other good authors in the world, and not be this prized obsession of a certain cadre of fans. I'd like to see him simply take his place among the authors who are out there and available, and be done with the kind of clannishness and huddled anticipation and enthusiasm of a small group. I think people look at that and back off. I don't blame them. I think what's happening in the United States with Philip K Dick being published by Vintage Books is just right. Put the books out there; they'll find their own audience. They're fun to read too: I think you can't overlook the fact that Philip K Dick novels are highly entertaining. They're funny. He's got a great sense of humour. He's not just a profound, angst-ridden thinker; he's a hilarious person, with great plot twists and loopholes...

Do you think he would have been equally hilarious in person?

Well, everybody who met him says he was. So I'm going to have to say yes.

The usual thing is the angst-ridden clown: you know, funny on paper but bleak in mind.

Well, depending on the day you found him. He had his bad days, on which you wouldn't want to be near him, but when he was feeling his oats he was a very funny man. Although nobody can remember specifically what he said that's funny. I think that's one of the laws of biographical research: people carry on about how funny a certain person was, and then you go ''Really? Tell me something he said that was funny'' and invariably people will clutch up and go ''I can't remember.'' I found that with Aleister Crowley as well. I don't think that anybody can dispute that in real life Philip K Dick could be hilarious.

Aleister Crowley?

That's who I'm doing a biography on.

What's the connection? Or is there one?

There is a connection. The connection is they were both brilliant writers, controversial men, and they tried to shape a vision that encompassed the universe. And that seems to be what I like in people. Neither of them to my mind succeeded. But both wanted to grasp the entire enchilada of existence. I like that. Because that's what I want to do too. And I'm drawn to people who take a good shot at it, and aren't afraid to ask big questions, and aren't afraid to seem silly, going ''What is real? What is human?'' There's this tendency to shy away and go ''Well, that's unanswerable!''

Did they actually see the world differently? Or did they try to make the world *be* different?

Both. Philip K Dick did not see the world in the way you or I do. I can't get inside his skin, but having read the **Exegesis** in its entirety, having read every word he published, I'd have to say that he saw the world differently than most people on the planet that I have run into do. And certainly the same is true about Aleister Crowley. He was a bizarre, obsessed mystic and occultist, who simply could never rid himself of his own ego, no matter how many times he tried. And he was obsessed with trying to do so. Philip K Dick was obsessed with trying to grasp what reality was. He actually thought he could do it! That's what is the single most astonishing fact about the **Exegesis** to me. You read the **Exegesis** and you realise: he thought he could figure it out. Do you know anyone who thinks they can figure it out? **No**.

No! Everyone goes ''Well, we'll never know. Let's watch TV, and have a nice meal, and love one another...'' Philip K Dick did all those things: had nice meals, watched TV, loved one another - he also thought he could encompass the universe. That makes me love him. Why, I don't know. I can't decide why.

Do you think he got close? Or rather, do you think *he* thought he got close?

I think, as the **Exegesis** reveals, he had moments in which he went ''Aha! I've just discovered it.'' And then within a few minutes or a few hours, or at most a day, he would rush out and go ''Well! I've thought again, and here's what it all means'' anew. I think he loved the quest. I think the fairest thing that can be said about Philip K Dick, as he would have said in his best, most optimistic moments - and he did actually say this in the **Exegesis**, in that story I quote in the book - ''Maybe one of my theories is right. Maybe in one formulation here, I nailed it.'' But one of the things I really appreciate about Philip K Dick, and I think this needs to be underscored, he *never* wrote so as to convince other people of his beliefs. He was not dogmatic, he was not evangelistic. He never sought to convert the reader to what he thought or felt. He only put it out. And in his science fiction, in his mainstream novels, he put it out in what he hoped was an entertaining and engaging form. But nowhere in the **Exegesis** is there a sentence like ''I hope everyone on Earth believes this'' or ''If I could only set up a multimedia television church organisation, I could rule the world.'' No ambitions to shove his beliefs at others. The same can't be said of Aleister Crowley. So in that sense my feelings about Philip K Dick are a little less encumbered by suspicion than in the case of Crowley. I love the fact that Philip K Dick simply tried to figure it out.
There's no evidence he ever intended to publish the **Exegesis**. I can't say that he would have been unhappy if that was done. By the way, the book called **In Pursuit of Valis: Selections from the Exegesis,** edited by me, is coming out by Underwood Miller. I don't think he would have been opposed to posthumous publication, but he made no effort in his own lifetime to publish it, and there's no line that I found in the **Exegesis** or in any of his letters in which he says ''I hope someday somebody publishes this.'' He did type up certain portions of it, which leads you to believe he liked them better than other portions... or could it mean he was just working at his typewriter when the mood overcame him? Most of the **Exegesis** is handwritten, which makes me feel that it's a very provisional, workshop type of writing, with the sawdust flying all about, trying out different ideas.

Did he ever go back and do any revisions or rewrites on the Exegesis**, or was it just like a diary?**

Once in a while, for a particular evening's session, he would add a note at the bottom of the page: ''here's what I meant'', or he would go: ''Looking back over what I just wrote...'' and then - another vast stretch of writing. He never went back, but then again he did very little revision on his novels, so it would be odd if the **Exegesis** was suddenly finalised.

But he did reread it.

As best as I can tell from the pages that are left, he would reread sometimes the previous entry, or maybe a couple of previous entries, more or less to refresh himself as to where he had just been, and to fuel himself for the next flight. There is no evidence that he ever sat down and went ''Well, here is my **Exegesis**; I think I'll start from page one and see what I've said.''

How big is it?

Eight thousand pages, most of which are handwritten.

That's a hell of a lot of words. But it was of course unfinished.

Well, it was unstructured, so it was never going to be finished. Death was the only thing that was going to finish the **Exegesis**.

It was more or less like a diary.

A diary, and a philosophical journal, and a notebook for his novels - it fulfilled many

functions. It had no set structure. It didn't even have overall page numbers: different sections had different page numbers. I referred earlier to "page one of the **Exegesis**": there *is* no such thing as "page one of the **Exegesis**". There is just a pile of notes, randomly assorted into various manilla folders when he died. I could date them chronologically only by going back and looking at the internal textual evidence. Once in a while you can put a date on a piece of writing that he wrote, but very seldom. The **Exegesis** served him as an inner world in which he could fly about philosophically, spiritually, ponder his life, ponder what happened to him in 1974, ponder what was going on in his relationships; once in a while he would ask anxious questions about his writing career.... All sorts of things are in the **Exegesis**: it's a hodgepodge.

How much were novels like, well particularly, Valis, giving a structure to the Exegesis?

I believe he started **Valis** while writing the **Exegesis**. I found some draft of **Valis** in the **Exegesis** pages, that's published in the **Selected Exegesis**, where he just literally began writing **Valis**. He had been desperately seeking a voice to give to his February/March 1974 experiences. So occasionally the **Exegesis** will have some rough draft or some novel outlining, but I cannot find a structure in the **Exegesis**, other than the belief that it was Philip K Dick's personal workshop domain for exploring everything of interest to himself. You can say certain sections deal with this, certain sections deal with that; overall structure - no. Although I should say, and again this'll be **in Selected Exegesis**, there is a title page that he composed in early December 1980, when he felt he'd finally figured it out. I think it was November 1980. He'd just had this huge mystical experience - that story I give in the book? the long one about meeting God and all the computer cards piling up? - and he wrote this title page: he said that the **Exegesis** was begun in February/March 1974, and here was the closing date, I can't remember the exact day, and below the word "Exegesis" he wrote in Latin: "Apologia pro mea vita", or in other words "Apology for my life".
So I think if you want to ask what the structure of the **Exegesis** was: in a sense he regarded his quest for what February/March 1974 meant as absolutely essential to his being. So that was the structure. What happened to me? What does my life mean? That's obviously very broad, but that's the structure, the best I could get at. I think it would be false - although I'm sure people will - I think it would be false at least on my part to attempt to structure the **Exegesis** any more than that.

I don't know so much about Crowley. It's one of those names that seems to have dropped out of fashion a little recently.

Well, it is reviled! He is regarded as the wickedest man on Earth, and all the attacks in **John Bull** and such...

I always thought that "the wickedest man on Earth" was his own self-reference?

No, it wasn't, actually, it was a headline that I believe appeared in **John Bull** back in the twenties. Although he certainly relished the publicity and the fear. Why do I take him up? Because a friend of mine was reading a book of Crowley's, **Eight Lectures on Yoga**, and said "Boy, this is really good." I had the same sense as you, of Aleister Crowley being a shaven-headed figure that idiots with pseudo-Satanic inclinations were fond of parading about as a trivial justification for their inanities. I read this, and I read some other works of Crowley, and I thought "My God! This man is a brilliant writer. He is intelligent..." How could I think everything Aleister Crowley wrote was wonderful? I don't, and I think his poetry is *bad*. I will strain for a polite word! I think his poetry is really bad. But his books are marvellous for their mystical insights, and philosophical brilliance, and a keen sense of alternate realities and the view of human perception, the human brain, as shaping reality. So I became intrigued by him. And then when I read what has been written about him, he's been painted black, and painted as a Satanist, which I don't think he was. I think he believed in a number of divine forces of whom Shaitan or the dark force was one. He believed - although people won't believe this as I say it - he believed in the power of Jesus Christ, as much as he believed in the power of Satan. He was certainly not out to form a Satanic organisation. So I felt that here was a man who appealed to my criteria for writers - brilliance and a desire to understand the whole - and needed a biographer who was neither an adoring cult-following partisan nor a disapproving person who had absorbed thepulp attacks on Crowley without question. And that's what Crowley's gotten so far, either idolatry of his followers or repeated allegations from the pulps of the twenties that have in some cases little or no basis in fact.
Having said all that, I'll say Crowley was a brilliant writer and man who could be an incredible asshole. I don't want to act as though Aleister Crowley was this sort of saint whom I've discovered, and is about to be held forth shining, but he deserves a *lot* better treatment than he's gotten from the world. Let's not forget that Giordano Bruno, who these days is revered as one of the great thinkers of the sixteenth century, was burnt at the stake.
There is actually another link, and then I'll shut up about Crowley, but I forget about this one that only occurred to me after I was doing Crowley - science fiction is rather a despised genre, in which no-one who writes it can be taken seriously as a literary figure; the occult, or Western esotericism, is a despised field, in which everyone who is in it is regarded by the mainstream as a pretentious, unquestioning, ill-trained fool who merely likes to wear long robes and raise their eyebrows up. So there is that connection, that both science fiction and the occult strike me as realms where most people will dismiss them out of hand when they first hear it. "Crowley wrote on magic," I've said to people, and they sort of go: "Eugh!" You know? Either they think it's a rabbit being pulled out of a hat, or they think it's a Satanic rite. The answer is that it's neither; it's a mode of Western mysticism.

So the link might be: things that are on the edge of acceptability?

I hate to say it because, as a belief I would think that you should like things wherever they are, but my life progress seems to indicate that if I'm going to write a life of someone, I'm not going to write a book about Anthony Burgess or John Updike; I'm going to write a book about Philip K Dick or Aleister Crowley, yes. So I'm pinned to the wall! Although I think that simply to like things because they are on the edge is a silly way to live, and there are a number of things that I like that are eminently respectable, but the things that inspire me to write, they're the edgy, out of the way ones.

How's the Crowley going?

Oh, it's overwhelming, I'm lost in it. I'm on page 140, and I'll let you know next time!

How long did it take you to write Divine Invasions?

Total of research and everything? Four years. Going through various drafts and all that.

How long have you been working on Crowley?

I started working on Crowley in earnest in mid-1989, so it's been two years now. But there's much more. Crowley lived 23 years longer than Dick; he wrote - my ill luck is that he wrote even more than Dick did, published and unpublished. If I ever do another biography, which is questionable, I want to find someone who never wrote a lot! A blues musician!

Yes, I was going to ask you who the next one would be.

I think that the next book will not be a biography. I think the next book will be a book focussing on relationships in the course of history between human beings and animals. I'm not going to take a strict animal rights stance, and I'm not going to take a strict "kill the animals for medical knowledge" stance: my question is "Why do human beings like to think of themselves as different from animals?" Since my entire life, since the time I was a child, I've never understood it. It's always been apparent to me that we were one more animal amongst the rest, and all my life I've heard these "We are human, and they are animal" and all sorts of assumptions as to what goes on in animal psyches. My proposed title for a book is **Chapters in the History of Humans and Animals**.
I don't know if I'm going to do another biography because I'm getting a bit tired of the structure imposed by doing someone's life. If I did do another biography, the two subjects I would like to do are Muddy Waters, who should have had a biography by now - I think a malpractice suit against the writers of the world should be filed - or perhaps, perhaps, Timothy Leary. But I don't think I will.

OK, similar sort of...

Well, Muddy Waters I don't think quite fits the mould; the Timothy Leary certainly does.I think my only qualm about doing Muddy Waters would be, is there really a need for one more white writer to interview a bunch of blues musicians, going "What was life like on the road with Muddy?" That's the reason I probably won't do it. In the case of Timothy Leary, I think I need to break away from weird biographies and find another mode of writing for a while.

Well, I think...

... that you have more than enough for an article.

Yes, I'm really grateful for that, thank you.

Oh, it was fun. Fun.

Compass Points

1 Deserted Cities of the Heart – Lewis Shiner

Recommended by Kev McVeigh

There are two forms of SF and Fantasy: that in which the idea, the fantastic element, is the focus of the story; and that in which the fantastic is a conceit upon which to tell an altogether different story. Lewis Shiner's second novel, **Deserted Cities of the Heart** is, on the whole, in the second style. So much so, that it is only marginally a fantasy at all.

It may be an alternate history: the Iran-Contra scandal breaks during the span of the novel span, and the Mexico City earthquake of 1986 is also a major event (though Shiner recognises that the 'quake did not stop at the city limits). Or it maybe a magical realist attempt to mythologise the recent past in order to explain or enlighten it. Or both. In any case, the substantial political content has a significant effect on both characters and readers. On the major political level, this is the story of an attempted revolution in Mexico and attempts to stop it by "The Fighting 666th", a US-based, CIA-funded, private army on a quasi-religious quest to destroy communism. Carmichael, a reporter for **Rolling Stone**, manages to achieve an interview with the leader of one of the major Marxist factions, Carla. Her husband, reputed to be the one leader all the groups backed, has been assassinated a few months previously. Carmichael then comes across the 666th, and tries to get proof of their presence in Mexico for his editors. Inevitably he gets caught.

Shiner is not, often, a hard-SF writer, but when relevant his science is appropriately researched and detailed. Thomas Yates is an anthropologist and the author of a famous book on Mayan culture, working on a soft-tech ecological project at Cuernavaca, until the *guardia* take over and send almost all the staff home. Naturally, Thomas gets to stay, which is fortunate for his sister-in-law, Lindsay. She arrives the next day with news of her husband Eddie. On the personal political level, this is their story.

Eddie Yates was a well-known rock guitarist who once played with Hendrix, but got dissatisfied and disappeared. Carmichael finds him by chance amongst the Lacondones, a tribe descended from the Maya. Thomas and Lindsay (for whom Thomas has long had a secret lust) set out to find Eddie.

Bearing in mind the fiercely accurate temporal fixing of the political events, this may be a time-travel novel. The Lacondones use a hallucinogenic mushroom which appears to transport the eater back to the Mayan zenith. As an indulger in most drugs of the 70s, Eddie tries the mushrooms as soon as he gets a chance, and experiences a sequence of flashbacks, initially to his own past, and thence further back.

Although most of this novel is set in Mexico, and well-away from major population centres, the four viewpoint characters are all US American. At one point Carmichael identifies himself as American, only to be told *"Somos todos Americanos"*. In this way, Shiner avoids patronising attempts to portray the Indian culture firsthand, whilst remaining unchauvinistic. The Mexican characters, the rebels Carla and Faustino, the *guardia* Lieutenant Espinosa, the *brujo* Chan Ma'ax, are all developed characters - the latter especially, for instance, perhaps more so than Carmichael. The variegated ethos of Latin Socialism (*montoneros* versus *tercerismo*: hard/not-so-hard Marxist) is convincingly evoked, threaded evenly throughout the novel rather than in scattered chunks of authorial exposition, and Mayan history is equally well used, if to a lesser extent than, say, Pat Murphy's **The Falling Woman**.

Although this is fiction, and there was no Mexican revolution in 1986, one way in which fiction operates is through the dehabituation of the reader: to cause reflection on particular aspects of the human condition normally hidden amidst the day-to-day bustle of modern life. In an overtly politicised novel, packed with reference to "real" events and people, the reader is forced to consider the "reality" of the author's speculation. Is the Fighting 666th a true representation of the tactics used by the US in Nicaragua, or an allegorical device to demonstrate this activity qualitatively? In some ways, the answer matters far less than the fact that the question has been asked, the issue acknowledged and challenged. Since this novel was written, the USA has invaded Panama, and bullied Iraq in order to demonstrate its muscle in the Middle East. As Paul DiFilippo points out, those wars bore no relation to the mystical drug-fuelled wars of Lucius Shepard's **Life During Wartime**. In Shiner's novel, their political corruption, lies and manipulation are clearly visible, and like them the skirmishes of **Deserted Cities of the Heart** remain effectively unresolved. In contrast, Iain Banks' **Canal Dreams**, which also invokes covert US interference in Central American politics, climaxes in a sweeping bloody victory straight out of Hollywood. In this respect, Shiner is both politically very aware and, in a literary sense, very honest.

Deserted Cities of the Heart is much more than simply a political thriller, however. It delves deepest into the field of individual human relations, with the military conflicts acting as parallels to the human feuds. It is a question of desire: Carmichael's dream of a Pulitzer for his article is plain. As much as the ancient ruin of Na Chan, it is the incestuous triangle formed by Thomas, Lindsay and Eddie that provides the novel with its title.

(**Deserted Cities of the Heart** is a song from Cream's 1968 album **Wheels of Fire**, which may in turn be paraphrasing WH Auden.) From the moment he reads Thomas' book, Eddie's desire is for the mushrooms and, when Chan Ma'ax warns him off them, his actions are effectively

predetermined. In the trips, he perceives a chance to rewrite elements of his past. At one point, he makes love with his wife on a beach where, previously, Lindsay had sex with Thomas. Thomas' desire is for Lindsay - and proves interesting. He observes her accidentally in the preliminary build-up to sex with Eddie, and anticipates both the act and the pain he will feel at it: but although he knows he should leave he is unable to. He sees everything, and is haunted by it, resulting in some ambiguously macho action later. On another occasion, he sees Carla partly unclothed as she has a wound dressed, and forces himself to look away. This intense examination of male sexuality is a frequent theme in Shiner's fiction, most notably in 'Love in Vain' and 'Scales' (both of which you should read frequently). Although Lindsay operates as a viewpoint character in her own right, she is mostly seen through Thomas' mind. Critics have complained that she is not a well-developed female character, but I believe that this is, in part, the author's intention. The climax of the novel serves as her rite-of-passage, overturning our Thomas-generated view of her as weak and ineffective, an object of desire defined purely in relation to the men around her. In the end, it is really only Lindsay who achieves anything that we think might last in her life. The others all have resolutions and hopes, and (typically Shiner) these are aimed away from mainstream life, but Lindsay has a self-made decision and a growing confidence to act upon it.

This inner growth, or regrowth, of the characters, and the repopulation of the deserted cities of their hearts, is not fully developed: there are ambiguities. Lindsay's reassertion of herself happens too quickly amidst the frantic denouement. The dichotomy between Thomas' ecotopian ideals at Cuernavaca, and his knowledge of guns and his violent acts at the close, ought to have been expanded. There is a sense that most, if not all, the male principals are iconic figures - rock star, rock journalist, ecologist: this is trendy stuff - and hence partially stereotypical. The fantastic element itself, Eddie's mushroom trips, is not well depicted, and adds to the ambiguity. (One, the Hendrix scene, is widely acclaimed as the best description of a rock gig in SF, but that stands apart from the trip sensations, per se.)

These are minor points. **Deserted Cities of the Heart** is beautifully written, invoking chaos theory as a structural device and thus complex and often fast moving. There are no great linguistic pyrotechnics, just concise prose which does not distract from the complexities of the text. Shiner tackles two major elements, the political and the personal, and demonstrates the deep relationship they share, whilst juggling a host of minor themes. The reader is left with much to contemplate both within the novel and external to it, on a personal and global level. SF can do little more.

2 The Wind From Nowhere–J.G. Ballard

Recommended by Ben Jeapes

This is for anyone out there, any kindred souls, who might dare to utter the occasional doubt--"Is J.G. Ballard really all that good?"

I'll say it now. I find Ballard tedious with his endless repetition of the same old themes, and nowhere does this happen more than in his disaster novels. The world ends, or society collapses, or something like that. One or two cardboard, implausible charaters, instead of getting the hell out like any sensible person, get this weird urge to go further into the catastrophe--find the source of the river/penetrate the crystallisation zone/go south/whatever. I won't say the images don't work--the drowned London with Leicester Square as a tropical lagoon is brilliant, ditto the crystallised African jungle, ditto the apartment building where all that is ordinary and accepted collapses while the real world continues outside it. But, over and over and over again? Time after time? That's what irks me.

But then, take The **Wind from Nowhere**. This was J.G.'s first novel and, yes, it shows in places. Sometimes it's a bit clumsy, but what the heck? Savour it as a relic from the time when Ballard was new and fresh, and when it wasn't apparently in the contract that no copy editor should come within a mile of a Ballard manuscript.

Ballard has subsequently disowned this book, apparently. More fool him.

Here the disaster is--you guessed it--a wind. For some reason, never adequately explained (but who needs it? Chaos theory, the Butterfly Effect, will do nicely) the Earth's atmosphere is stirred up into what becomes, with a five m.p.h. increase every day, mega-hurricane force winds, getting to the point where no building can stand and where the planet's surface erodes as you watch.

The seeds of what have since become traditional Ballard themes are all there, of course. Civilisation collapses, a handful of weirdos ... No, not weirdos. These are real, everyday people. They either try and *do* something about keeping society going or they lie low and wait for it to go away--both sensible, believable actions. There are a couple of nuts, of course. One is the self-destructive, obsessive type, the estranged wife of one of the characters, whose resultant demise is briefly handled at the end of one chapter. That's all it needs. Ballard makes his point and he gets on with the story. The other is a millionairenamed Hardoon, who builds a pyramid that actually can withstand the wind. This guy is seriously screwed--his idea of fun is to play the sound of the wind, transmitted live from outside the pyramid, into his office so that he can face the elements in the comfort and safety of his own home, as it were. It's good! Hardoon is well drawn, he's menacing and his monomania is not only a danger to everyone else but is actually perceived as such.

He gets his in the end, as well. Not even his precious pyramid can stand the onlaught and it comes crashing down. Point made--on with the story. I just wish I could get rid of the feeling that nowadays, thirty years later, Ballard would devote a whole book in itself just to the pyramid.

There are no, repeat no, allusions to drained swimming pools, Ronald Reagan, famous has-been actresses, JFK (admittedly this was written before 1963), A-bomb testing sites, Ralph Nader ... not even once, let alone umpteen times. You will recognize the usual Ballardisms poking up here and there, that's inevitable, but it won't be with a sinking sense of "Oh, no, not again."

This is an adventure story. It's gripping. There is genuine tension even in, say, the description of a trip across London ... a trip in a heavily armoured personnel carrier which will get blown away if it goes too fast. You can actually feel sorry for the people who die.

Finally, the book actually ends on an optimistic note--the wind begins (only begins, mark you) to die away. Cop out? No, not really. This is one book where, instead of being given the post-holocaust world as a *fait accompli*, the reader can trace the decline and fall of civilisation from the start, back when the wind was simply strong enough to ground every aeroplane in the world. The wind gets stronger and stronger throughout the book and society crumbles and collapses. All the chaff, all the illusions, all the good old Western values get blown away. Then when the wind has done its cleansing work, it does down and you can believe that things can start over in a better way.

At least, I think so, and that's how I read it. Maybe he did write it as a cop-out. Maybe all the Ballardeenies out there regard this book as heresy, something like a fifth Gospel showing the other four were wrong. Bring out your **Wind from Nowheres**! Build a bonfire! But those who do like good reads, with challenging ideas, well-handled imagery, convincing characters and situations, and sufficient verbiage to tell the story and nothing else, and who *don't* like J.G.B. for all of the above reasons, should find that they enjoy this one.

Barbed Wire Kisses

The Future in Magazine Reviews by Maureen Speller

Recently I read a comment that it was difficult, if not impossible, to review magazines. The implication was that It's better not to try. It struck me as an implicit challenge, and one that I intend to meet, as fully as possible, in this column.

How do you review a magazine? It seems to me that there has been little real attempt to review magazines in the same way as one would review a book. **Locus** offers contents listings of forthcoming titles, like **F & SF** and **Asimov's** as well as an irregular column which examines the stories at slightly greater length, but critical discussion is kept to a minimum. There is nothing in the way of comparison, either with other magazines, or with previous issues of the same title. Comments stand alone, and to me at least, are meaningless because they lack context.

Coverage in other journals is sporadic. **Paperback Inferno** discussed **Interzone** in 'Upon the Rack in Print' but there were no ***regular*** reviews of other titles, either professional or small press, just occasional columns which existed without reference to one another. **Critical Wave**'s intermittent, confusingly named 'On the rack' seems to be yet more contents listings and news material. Most of the small press magazines include a listing column of one sort or another, with brief critical comment, but I've yet to see anything which approached the kind of in-depth discussion I intend.

Why hasn't it been done before? It might be that hitherto there has been no perceived need for regular reviews of magazines. Although SF magazines have existed for many years, within the last two decades the choice narrowed considerably. **Analog** and **F & SF** have existed for aeons and by comparison **Asimov's** and **Interzone** are mere novices in the field. **Amazing** has appeared and disappeared with ***amazing*** regularity. In the old days the content was shaped very much by reader feedback, sticking with the tried and trusted formulae that the readership had grown accustomed to. I've been reading the big three US magazines for some years now and they haven't changed at all. I don't think it will hurt any magazine to come under severe scrutiny.

Some years after **Interzone** came the explosion of the small or independant presses that have changed the shape of magazine publishing. Once dismissed as "fan fiction", a pejorative term, too often brandished by people who didn't understand what it meant, the small press magazines have become a genuine and necessary force within SF publishing. They provide a vital showcase and market place for new writers and frequently attract the attention of established authors. Although their circulation is much smaller than that of the professional magazines, so that they can't be said to pose an economic threat, in terms of artistic integrity and quality of fiction they can give the big boys a run for their money. Take **BBR**, **Auguries**, **Works**, **New Moon**, **New Pathways**, **Strange Plasma**, **Aureolis**, **Scheherazade** as just a few examples. However, some small press publications fail to match the professionals either in aspiration or content. All the more need then for someone, somewhere, to offer a critical overview; to sort the wheat from the chaff.

This may give you a clue as to how this column will shape up. I don't want to simply list or review the contents of a magazine, story by story, column by regular column. Naturally, I want to discuss the contents, but I want magazines to be judged as complete entities, compared and contrasted with their peers, evaluated and judged; strengths and weaknesses highlighted and analysed. What sort of line is a magazine pursuing? How does an individual issue fit into the overall ambience of the title? And is this magazine worth your money? As an example, I've been following the birth pangs of the new **Pulphouse** magazine with a mixture of interest and concern. After eight issues of floundering around, testing various ideas, #9 suddenly snapped into focus as the editorial team at last worked out what it was doing.

But SF magazine publishing is not just about fiction magazines. In fact, a lot of magazines pursue a much more omnivorous line. **Imagination** has evolved from, apparently, a magazine about role-playing games into something more diverse. Including very variable fiction and a fascinating series of overview articles about such subjects as product licensing for role-playing games and a very helpful survey of the cyberpunk phenomenon. **Flickers and Frames** mixes fiction with book and media reviews, and **SF Nexus**, which is currently struggling to take flight, is another hybrid. There are also the news magazines such as our very own **Matrix** and **Critical Wave, SF Chronicle** and **Locus**. I definitely envisage a comparative survey of these in the future.

And what about the critical magazines? **Extrapolation, Science-Fiction Studies, SF Eye, Vector, Foundation, Territories, Quantum, Nova Express, New York Review of SF, SFRA Review, Monad.** I was amazed at how many critical magazines exist and how diverse their approaches are. In an arena where criticism is often a dirty word, I think it will be important to see what the critics are saying, and how they say it.

I could invent a few more categories and cite representative titles, but this column is not about listing and categorising. It's going to be wide-rangeing in it's concerns, and will be ferreting in some under-regarded corners of the SF publishing scene.

That's the theory, now let's turn to the practise.

I'm intending to commission two, maybe three, reviews per issue, covering a specific group of magazines, or a certain subject area. These will be accompanied by the usual information on where to obtain the magazines and possibly a commentary on events in magazine publishing.

Whilst I intend to do some reviewing myself, I want to gather a stable of reviewers. Ideally they should be prepared to tackle just about anything, but I'll not turn my nose up at specialists. if you are interested in reviewing magazines, please contact me. At this stage, what I need is your expression of interest and a list of the magazines that you regularly see, not just those magazines mentioned above, but anything else you think might be relevant/ I would also like a short sample review, just to get some idea of what you can do.

Primarily I'll be concentrating on SF and fantasy, but I would be glad to hear from anyone with a good working knowledge of horror magazines, to see if it is practical to take a look at this subject area. I'd also like to hear from anyone who has a familiarity with foreign language magazines, as well as anyone ith an interest in SF poetry magazines.

Apart from that , I'm putting out the inevitable appeal for review copies from any editors who happen to be reading. I'd also appreciate further suggestions of magazines I ought to cover, and any other suggestions for the column. I read widely but am constantly discovering new magazines, particularly from abroad. A couple of small but important notes: this column is not intended to be a market report for aspiring authors, if you feel that you can extract helpful information, that's fine, but I do not intend to discuss guidelines for submission or payment rates. Neither is this a fanzine review column, so, while you're always welcome to send me fanzines, I won't be reviewing them here. On the other hand, if you think your magazine might fit in this column, by all means send it and I'll let you know.

Next issue, I'll be kicking off with an overview of **Asimov's, Analog, F & SF, Interzone** and one or two other magazines. In the meantime any correspondence directly concerning this column should be sent to me at 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ. I'll look forward to hearing from you.

Katherine Kerr

Interviewed by Catie Cary

Katherine Kerr is the author of the popular Deverry series of Celtic fantasy novels with a revisionist flavour and a strong sense of humour, and the SF entertainment **Polar City Blues**. I went to meet her on her recent visit to London, and spoke to her in the quiet haven of her hotel room overlooking the Thames. There are six Deverry novels published to date, with at least three more planned. I asked her, since the work's so huge whether she had planned it all intricately in advance. She laughed and said:

"No, this is a funny story. Years ago, in February 1982 to be precise, I read such an *awful* fantasy short story by F Gardner Fox. It was all the cliches of what some people think all fantasy is. Just terrible. I was mitching and moaning to my husband Howard, and I said ' Oh. I could write a better short story'. So he said 'Why don't you?', *Well*...The Deverry Books are the result."

"The original short story is at the end of **Time of Omens**. The last hundred pages. The first four books turn out to be background. **Time of Exiles** is like a bridge book, and *finally* at the end of **Omens** you get the original short story. And then It's going to go on from there, because I never did finish the original short story. It's one of those things, when you start out you ask yourself, who are these people? How did they get here? And so, this is the result."

" I had never intended to be a fantasy or a science fiction writer. I was working on a very large and elaborate historical novel, set in California in the 1920's, that never sold. **Daggerspell** did, and I kept on because the story intrigued me so much. And I imagine I'll stay writing in this field, because I do love it. I always read it. I grew up with Heinlein's 'Young Adults' and I read them as they came out, which gives you an idea of how ancient I am. Talbot Munday was the other big influence."

Talbot Munday?

"He wrote lurid Theosophical romances set in British India, in the 20s and 30s. They're not what you would call politically correct. And as a child I loved them. They have a heavy magical element in them. If you're ever looking for a good read and can find it, try **The Devil's Garden and Nine Unknown** by Talbot Munday and also **King of the Khyber Rifles**. I will give Munday credit, he wrote very good strong women characters and in the 20s and 30s that was very rare."

You write very strong female characters.. Jill, for instance is something of a career woman.. She doesn't give it all up for love.

"*I am* a feminist, here's no doubt about that, and I certainly wasn't going to write some romance."

Incest, Drug-runners, a lot of heavy social issues crop up in these books...

"That's true, but incest appears in all the old ballads. If you study the English and Scottish ballads that Francis James Child collected, incest in these isolated castles was a very common hobby. It usually ended very badly, too. There's one of the old ballads called 'The Cruel Brother', in which you see the sister weeping and moaning because she's pregnant and she's not married. And everyone, her mother, her father is saying 'all right, who's the father?'And she says 'Oh no, I'm not going to tell you, I'm not going to tell you' and so finally her brother comes up and he says 'What's wrong with you' like all the others have and she says 'I'm pregnant', so he kills her because he's the father. This was a very common thing."

"And as to drugs, Opium, and especially the abuse of Alcohol is a very common thing in the classical world, more than perhaps people realise. And the Celts themselves were *extremely* fond of heavy drink. I thought there would be something decadent and, you know *foreign*, about drugs. I don't know if I'd write that the same way now. And also I am so tired of fantasy books where women just *love* being in brothels and being prostitutes, whereas the truth is only a very desperate woman does that, and it was very common in Greek or Roman times, to addict women in brothels to drugs to keep them quiet. Not necessarily opium, but unmixed wine, because of course the Greeks and Romans watered theirs way down. But of course It's common now. Most women who are prostitutes are drug addicts. "

One of the things I liked about these books was that there was a seedy element. You don't portray a wonderful rustic idyll.

"No, a wonderful rustic *decadence*."

Something that intrigued me was that you have a lot of "horsedung" , throughout the first book or so, then suddenly "horsedung" disappears to be replaced by "shit."

"I thought at first that 'shit' didn't sound very archaic, but eventually I realised, that's one of the oldest words in English. It's perfectly archaic to say 'shit'. Don't forget that first one was the first book I ever really wrote and I would like very much to back and revise it, because It's not as well written as the others. Its a question of learning your craft; the dialogue is more stilted in it for instance, and there's a vast excess of adjectives. There's some oddly awkward prepositional phrases which echo the structure of Celtic languages, but they don't really work in English. It's just somewhat more awkwardly written."

Are the Deverry books based on a break in history somewhere? Because you've got things like the Greeks and the Romans and the Druids in the background...

"The postulate is that there was a tribe in northern Gaul called the Devrii, they have contact with the Greeks, they trade, learn to drink wine, learn the Greek alphabet, start to write things down. And then were conquered along with the other Gauls when Caesar took over that part of the continent, but they were freedom loving people, so they joined the rebellion of Julius Vindex. When the rebellion failed, they set off to sea away from this land of oppression through magical means which are made clear in **Time of Omens**. They reach this new country, somewhere, I don't know where. The first warleader of these people is King Bran, who sails for the western Isles, they talk about Vercogenerix and Vindex as the grand old heroes of the homeland. But they obviously have a few books from there too, because Cicero the Roman consul, spent a few years writing philosophy, and he was always very hospitable to Gaulish ambassadors. He would advise them on legal matters in Rome and suggested books to take home to the people. So, I'm assuming it was Cicero who gave them a copy of his own book, and of course the other one was Aristotle..."

The names all ring true in the books. They all have a proper Celtic derivation?

"I have this wonderful book called 'Dialects of Ancient Gaul' which has tons of personal names, which I took and progressed using linguistic principles. And It's funny because there's some very famous Gaulish names which you couldn't use once they'd been progressed, for instance there's Novaeobrontus who came out No-brain. I suppose I might have given it to a very stupid character..."

The Magic system "dweomer", can you explain that?

"It's basically the magic studied by Dr John Dee, the Rosicrucian Cabalism. What I've done is taken the idea that in Deverry the etheric plane must be closer to the physical plane than it is in our world, so that things that are only symbolic and internal here become external and possible there. And then adapted it to make a good read rather than a dry treatise."

Polar City Blues felt like a book that was written just for fun.

"Yes, I was so sick of doom, gloom, death and futility in the Deverry books that I took three months off and wrote that very quickly. It was just an entertainment, but it was a great break."

I found it zestful. You exploit every cliche in the genre, but it's all just for fun.

"It's really revisionist cliche, because It's the woman doing all of it. It's funny, a number of the male reviewers of the book didn't get who the hero was. I had three reviewers say 'but there was no hero in this book', because she was a woman she was invisible to them. It was really amazing; they were saying 'this man can't be the hero, and *he* can't, and *he* can't.'...So that there was no main character, that a main character would be female just never occurred to these guys. And I thought that was *highly* symptomatic."

So, what for the future?

"There's going to be more 'Deverry's. The end of **Time of Omens** is a terrible cliffhanger, I have to return to that. There will be at least three more; I'll be turning the first one in in the fall. I want to write more science fiction. I'll be turning in another volume of that next year."

"In America my publishers Bantam have a series of thin novellas published at very overpriced rates, they asked me to do one of those; Its a story called **Resurrection,** set in San Francisco about 80 years from now. I offered it to Harper Collins, whom I think of as my primary publishers, but they don't do just novellas so they asked me to write another novella to go with it, the project as a whole is probably going to be four stories published in a family album; It's about a chain of the generations of women in one family in the future. A small future history, but with women as the central characters."

I look forward to that, Katherine, thank you.

Insight

Consciousness - Explored by Steve Palmer

Two remarkable books dealing with the topic of consciousness have appeared this summer: Nicholas Humphrey's **A History of the Mind** (Chatto, £16.99) and Daniel C. Dennett's **Consciousness Explained** (Penguin, Allen Lane, £20.00).

Nicholas Humphrey, well known as an explorer of the human mind, has written a quite exceptional book. It is in the form of a journey of enlightenment. As he remarks in a rather waggish preface, this mirrors the way his thinking has gone. There is nothing about computers in the book, he notes, nor anything concerning AI, cognitive psychology, quantum theory or fractals. In short, the book concerns what Humphrey considers to be the raw stuff of consciousness, which is feelings and sensations: "I feel, therefore I am."

This may seem ordinary enough; but given the amount of time and effort spent by virtually all other writers in the field (and the amount of paper consumed in the process) as they wrestle with consciousness and the mind-body problem, it is both an unusual and commendable statement.

Humphrey begins by emphasising that his is a history of the mind; it is underpinned by evolutionary theory. By considering the importance of bodily boundaries, he draws a picture of creatures becoming sensitive to the world; to its light, its physical touch, sounds, tastes, and so on. He concludes that the evolution of sensitivity--required if creatures are not to die "through ignorance"--gives rise to a dual way of picturing the world; what is happening to me, that is, sensation, and what is happening in the world "out there", that is, perception. These mental modes are processed in parallel. So, for example, a rose gives a chemical odour at the nose, which in turn gives both the sensation of being "sweetly stimulated" and the perception of the rose as having a sweet scent. The difference is crucial; the former is an actual sensation existing in time, whereas the latter is a more abstract form; less immediate.

After various intriguing proofs of this theory (including blind people who learn to perceive by means of tactile sensations on the skin of the back) Humphrey discusses further points, concluding that it is no accident that waking imagery and memories have no immediate sensory quality; with such an arrangement, human beings can remember, imagine, and think, without surrendering their hold on the present moment.

This allows Humphrey to declare his theory: " to be conscious is essentially to feel sensations." Moreover I am feeling, at the present moment, sensations laden with affect; with sensory quality. These occur at the body's boundary through one of the five senses, any other forms of mental activity count as such only when they are accompanied by reminders of sensation.

Having declared himself, Humphrey continues in the province of the senses, describing five properties that they have which distinguishes them from perceptions: these are, belonging to the subject, being associated with defined sites in the body, being felt in the present, having one of five modes (sight, taste, etc.), and being self-characterising, which means that sensations immediately disclose themselves.

From this it is suggested that, when, for example, my toe is hurting, I myself am creating the sensation; in other words an actual intentional activity exists to create the pain. Sensations can then be equivalent to bodily activities.

This seems counter-intuitive, but Humphrey continue to find evidence in favour of the idea. He describes an evolutionary continuum, from amoeba wriggling parts of their cell-surface, to similar responses, for example in an earth-worm, travelling to and from a central ganglion, to human beings, who contain a network of skin and nerves and a brain. All incoming nerves in humans, he notes, also contain outgoing ones. It is just that our sensory loops have lenghened from local like-or-dislike wriggles. The problem with this, however, is that it does not seem to explain the vast range of human sensation--and the five distinct types.

To overcome this, Humphrey points out that senses are tied to particular parts of the body. You do not smell an odour at the eye, or hear a symphony at the elbow. In short, the distinct qualities of the five senses come from the stype of sensing done at the body's boundary. From this it is a short step (though long in evolutionary terms) to reach human sensation.

A final difficulty presents itself. What about such phenomena as the phantom limb? The answer lies in the sensory loop described earlier. Originally with input and output at the body surface, the output was over time directed at areas of the brain; it is not an accident that the brain has distinguishable sensory areas. In other words the brain's output was directed at itself; it modelled the body in which it existed. The above only skims over one of the most compelling books I have ever read. Beautifully, clearly written, with both scientific skill, humour, and cultural range (the author is the only scientist ever to have edited the literary journal **Granta**), all I need to say is buy it, or ask your library to.

More detailed and weighty, and more ponderous, is Daniel C. Dennett's **Consciousness Explained.** When I first read this title I thought he was taking a bit of a risk. Now, I think it was maybe justified.

Dennett, a philosopher who worked with Douglas Holstadter on the acclaimed book **The Mind's I**, has written a sustained attack on Descartes and the whole edifice of a separate mind and body; Descartes, who coined the phrase, "I think, therefore I am"; and who decided that the body and mind where wholly separate entities, linked only by the pineal gland in the brain. Dennett rubbishes anything remotely Dualistic.

Dualism's stumbling block is, how can the non-corporeal mind affect and be affected by the body? Dennett describes the many attempts at reconciling these too entities as anti-scientific; wallowing in mystery. He considers Dualism to be "giving up on consciousness."

The other main obscuring metaphor that Dennett attacks is that of the stream of consciousness. Consciousness is not, he says, a stream; it is fuzzy and spread out over time.

Time enters a lot into his narrative. One of the major points in his argument is the weight of the evidence pointing to the odd fact that there is no one defined instant at which the brain becomes aware of a stimulus. If so, how can the Cartesian manager be acted upon, and act itself? Related sections describe the many experiments that show subjects becoming aware of stimuli before the actual stimuli exist; for example, being aware of a change in colour from red and green before the red lamp in question actually is green.

Dennett presents two analogies; that the mind is itself somehow changing the past in Orwellian fashion, or that it is ignoring data in a Stalinist manner. Time is spread out; there are no pin-sharp moments of consciousness, instead a number of thick moments in which much "invisible processing" takes place.

For Dennett, the brain is a parallel processor. At any given time, uncountable parallel operations are going on. Some are more important than others. Over a small, yet not infinitessimally small, period of time, these operations come to one or more conclusions; that is, they contribute to consciousness. What is not required, or trivial, of plain confusing, is lost.

According to this view there is no central self; rather, the sense of "I" that we all feel is an imagiram pervading the mind. It is because we all have individual and unique lives, with all our associated memories, thoughts, and so on, that we experience a coherent sense of self. Dennett presents the analogy that our selves are like narratives.

Each of us is cobbled together, he suggests. Consciousness is not a single stream, it is a shimmering series of multiple drafts. There is nobody with Cartesian dictatorial powers.

So, for example in the production of speech, is there a bureaucratic mechanism at work, or is it pandemonium? The former mechanism explains the sensation we have that our speech has meaning and is intentional, but it is dangerously close to positing a Central Meaner, and that will not do. Yet pandemonium seems too chaotic. Dennett solves this by describing a model of speech production that is of the pandemonium type, yet which satisfies the need for meaning. If there are several goals in sight, and there is mumbling continually going on, and if an evolutionary process takes place in which a multitude of content-parts and word-parts come together, then speech is certainly possible. Here, Dennett alludes to Marvin Minsky's "Society of the Mind", again comparing the mind to a collection, with no lone central manager.

Freudian slips, by this view, should be renamed. They have no unconscious meaning, and are instead a symptom of the furious and manic semi-pandemonium within the mind. There are Dennittian slips.

This is another compelling book. While more difficult to read than Nicholas Humphrey's, it is just as fascinating. Where it falls down, for example in suggesting that introspection first came about when a proto-person talked thinking there was somebody nearby to hear, when actually there wasn't (a curious proposal in a book with a whole chapter on mechanisms of mental evolution), it falls down only slightly; and there are plenty of other speculations that inspire. It too is wholly recommended.

Book Reviews

Edited by Chris Amies

Hellburner
CJ Cherryh
Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, 359pp, £14.99

Cherryh's latest forage in the Merchanter universe is a direct sequel to **Heavy Time** and as such comes second, to date, in the series' internal chronology.
The basic story could be described as a hybrid of **Top Gun** in space and a science-fictional variation on **The Right Stuff,** with test jocks risking their lives managing experimental military craft in a politically sensitive programme. It's also a continuation of the story begun in **Heavy Time**, reuniting potential burn-out and screw-up, Dekker, with his disavowed self-serving rescuer, Pollard, and their female sidekicks, Sal Oboujib and Meg Kady.
All set for a cushy civilian posting on Earth, Pollard is suddenly yanked into military service, ostensibly to help bring his buddy, Dekker, back to his senses after a simulation flight has killed all the other members of the latter's crew. Dekker's medical care seems to be doing him more harm than good and there are suspicions that sabotage and attempted murder got him there. then Dekker's mother becomes the centre of attention in a media circus on Earth, embroiled in legal battle with Alyce Salazar, mother of Dekker's dead partner, Cory, once again serving a pivotal role in a plot thick with political manoeuvring.
Cherryh avoids the convoluted language she occasionally employed in her **Thieves' World** stories for a sometimes incomprehensible stacking of futurespeak technical and social jargon, which becomes seriously irritating after a while. On the positive side, the language she utilizes is rich and natural-seeming, the stock situations presented in the story benefitting from it greatly. One solution to the problem would have been to add a glossary, as Cherryh's introduction, giving some details on her future history, is not very informative. A chronological chart, like the one that Larry Niven has used for his **Known Space** series, would also have been of great benefit to readers wanting to navigate Cherryh's universe.
The characterisation is superior to that in most military SF and, despite peacenik Pollard's easy conversion to soldierhood, his constant protests against becoming involved in a war situation add a novel twist to what could easily have become a rightwing manifesto, although more play could have been made of this.
Dekker's own breakdown serves a more sobering note, underlining this concern for realistic attitudes, the description of his sojourn in hospital being particularly effective. However, towards the end these elements are shunted aside rather too conveniently for the sake of the plot.
The characterisation is further weakened by the limitations of the plot, and the plot, in turn, limited by the number and type of dramatic situation realistically possible within a spacestation training camp. The fights between friends, the bickering of their senior officers, the inter-forces rivalry, the need, not only to solve the protagonists' problems, but to end on an upbeat note, all mean there is a certain inbuilt predicatability in this kind of novel which stifles character development.
On the plus side, again, the novel stands complete unto itself and grips like a baby, its very predictability no doubt comforting to series addicts, the plot elements reaching a satisfactory solution at close, the political and military ramifications of the outcome enticing the reader into exploring the Merchanter universe further.
Terry Broome

Cat-a-Lyst
Alan Dean Foster
Orbit, 1992, 325pp, £4.50 pb

Cyber Way
Alan Dean Foster
Orbit, 1992, 306pp, £4.50 pb

Cat-a-Lyst starts with an exciting action scene set in the American Civil War. Just as we reach the thrilling climax, the black actor, who has done Shakespeare, protests the script does not make sense. Exit one troublemaker from both film and book. Gorgeous beefcake star, Jason Carter, who is too hunky to ever play Iago, then finds a computer disk, which the middle-aged wardrobe mistress Marjorie hacks into and copies before they return it to the rich archaeologist who is owned by a tom cat. Jason and Marjorie then head off to South America in search of lost Inca treasure, where they acquire a native guide called Igor and a dainty female cat. At an ancient site they are surprised by the archaeologist, his cat, a neurotic Spanish beauty and two Indians with ambitions for their Inca Cola factory, followed by a Vietnamese journalist who writes less for the gutter press. Pausing only to collect some displaced Incas, this motley crew embark upon a huge piece of hokum, encompassing subliminal conditioning, a BSkyB soap, British soccer hooligans, snarks, boojums and Incaworld.
This simple entertainment, with no sex and very little violence, moves along at a brisk pace, pausing only to remind us who is really in charge, through locations in North and South America, Europe and Elsewhere. The characters are somewhere between two- and three-dimensional, and none of the humans are completely villainous. I found it impossible to put this truly dreadful book down, and it is highly recommended for boring train/plane journeys and stays in hospital. And as presents for cat people.
Cyber Way on the other hand starts with four pages of stream of consciousness from the murder victim, whom we do not see killed, and never really gets going. The Tampa police spend days mulling over the death of a rich art collector and the destruction of his priceless Navaho sand painting, before finally deciding to send solid, reliable, computer-dependent Detective Vernon Moody to the Navaho Reservation in Arizona to investigate the significance of the sand painting. He and Sergeant Paul Ooljee jam the police computer network, burn down the Ganada police precinct, escape from giant snakes quite capable of overturning pickup trucks and battle unnatural coyotes in unseasonal storms (snow in high summer) in their attempts to solve the riddle.
This cyber-without-the punk story is a highly sanitised, old-fashioned thriller. Sex, drugs and artificial augmentation feature only in passing, as part of the backdrop. There is some violence against people, slightly more against property. The relationship between Moody and Ooljee is of the **Boy's Own** variety, but the terrain is well visualised, and Foster likes to show off his knowledge of the Navaho culture. The computer is ubiquitous and its slang is different and believable. However the novel lacks any real tension, grinding along at a slow pace, and the climax is predictable. **Cat-a-Lyst** was compulsively awful; **Cyber Way** is just tedious.
Valerie Housden

Sarah Canary
Karen Joy Fowler
Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, 290pp, £14.99

It is somewhat unnerving to discover the book I am asked to review was deemed "delightfully readable" by the **Washington Post**, and a *"tour de force"* by the **New York Times Book Review**, but such is the case with **Sarah Canary** by Karen Joy Fowler. Oh, by the way, this book is not SF&F. First novels in the SF&F genre do not normally ignite the previously described literary rapture. **Sarah Canary** is a fiction woven around the history of California, a true-to-life western so to speak.
The story tells how a Chinese railway labourer Chin Ah Kin is approached by a babbling incoherent white woman. Chin holds dear his native superstitions of the existence of immortals and ghost lovers. He also fears any white man's reaction to finding a white woman seemingly turned insane by a Chinese man. So Chin embarks on a quest to return the woman to her own people and in doing so undertakes a twisting and ever more complex journey through the California of 1873.
Chin's voyage of self-discovery introduces the reader to an unformed country, a mishmash of nationalities, White men, Indians, Blacks and Chinese living a precarious co-existence of mutual distrust and loathing. Chin incurs the wrath of Indians by hanging one of their warriors, befriends a lunatic, falls in love with a suffragette, and is repeatedly tricked by a paranoid survivor of the Civil War. All these characters, and a few more, become involved in the story of **Sarah Canary**, and pursue the speechless, helpless, ugly white woman across several states to a grand finale in San Francisco. **Sarah Canary** has an elegant structure, episodes of Chin's tale intertwine with pages of historical facts cut from the newspapers of the day. A picture emerges of an extremely complex early American society and highlights, perhaps for the first time, nineteenth century discrimination towards the Chinese. In educating her reader, Karen Joy Fowler has an admirably light touch with snippets of information stitched into the narrative like so much gossip. Did you know... she whispers, then she smiles as you gape and the story continues. Better still, **Sarah Canary** has a rhythm of sentence and melody of style that is a delight to read. Whilst Karen Joy Fowler has not the vocabulary of her English contemporaries and her editor may have trimmed detailed descriptions, the flow of words keeps you tirelessly reading, page after page after page. My one reservation about **Sarah Canary** was the distinct lack of plot. I'm a mug for a story with a beginning, a middle and an ending. This novel is a case of plotting by wandering about.

Things happen to Chin and in the end he returns a better man to China, but there's no real story I could put my finger on. Maybe that's more the way of real life.
So forget the wagon trail with its praying women and children, forget the screaming, painted Indians galloping to the slaughter, forget the blue and yellow cavalry saving the day in the last reel. **Sarah Canary** portrays the West as it was. It has the taste, the smell, the sound of historic reality, a complete experience that is easy for me to recommend.
Sally-Ann Melia

Villains!
Mary Gentle and Roz Kaveney (Eds)
Roc, 1992, 337pp, £4.99 pb

A fantasy volume that purports to explore sympathetically the ways of the Dark, to map out the geography of evil: instead of boring conventional goody-goody heroes, here we have **Villains!** This seems a good idea and one can well imagine those responsible getting quite excited at the notion. Unfortunately the end result is very much an orc's egg of a book: bad in parts.
The first indication that all is not well is provided by the appalling cover, without doubt one of the worst that I have ever seen on a fantasy novel published by a reputable publisher. Inside, the cover is complemented by a succession of undistinguished stories that range in quality from average to terrible.
How is it that so many accomplished, interesting and enjoyable writers could so signally fail to deliver the goods, expecially when the original idea seemed so promising? At least part of what seems to have happened is that they have chosen to attempt a kind of humour that is just not appropriate to stories that are concerned with the Dark. The humour is too slight: cheap cracks, shallow jibes, trivial comeuppances. For this kind of project, the real joke is, of course, the human condition. Too many of these stories are rather lazy attempts to be clever at the expense of the Fantasy genre rather than to use the dark aspect of Fantasy to comment on life. They send up the genre (not very well), instead of using it to send up humanity. In too many of the stories one is left with the distinct impression that the piled skulls are plastic rather than bone and the spilt blood is ketchup rather than genuine gore. An opportunity to do something distinctive has been missed.
However all is not completely lost. Amidst the failures are some successes: Stephen Baxter's 'The Strongest Armour' and Charles Stross' 'Examination Night'. These two stories are both commendable efforts, worth a read. And then there is Graham Higgins' marvellous 'Jabberwockish'. This one story comes near to redeeming the whole volume and must surely figure in the short story award stakes. It is an incredible account of the Boy's hunt for the Jabberwock, a tale that relentlessly drew this reader back for further visits. This is a story well work checking out. Pity about the rest of the volume.
John Newsinger

Blood and Honour
Simon Green
Gollancz, 1992, 316pp, £14.99

This book is much better than the cover and the blurb would lead you to expect. When I looked at the cover, I thought "Oh dear, yet another run of the mill fantasy, with a beefy hero, a sexy heroine and a lot of magic. Ho hum." Well, there is quite a lot of magic, but the rest of it was much better than I had anticipated, and I thoroughly enjoyed the book and can recommend it to anyone who wants an enjoyable undemanding read.

The hero is an actor, down on his luck, who takes on an offer of a part which is irresistible because of the amount he is offered for it. All he has to do is act as Prince Viktor until Viktor is feeling better, which Jordan thinks sounds simple enough and to which he agrees. Life, however, is seldom so simple, and never so simple in fantasy stories. Jordan is acting the part of a Prince, one of three eligible to inherit the throne of their murdered father, but from the beginning he is unclear about whether the Prince he is acting is hero or villain. Jordan does not do villains, he specialises in heroes. The tangle in which Jordan finds himself gets more and more complex as the true nature of the magic which is in the fabric of Castle Midnight, uncontrolled in the absence of the king, impinges upon him, and the characters of the people to whom he has allied himself, not least Prince Viktor, become clearer.
The book is fun because Jordan is an endearing character. Not a hero, not brave, he finds himself acting as both because he is a nice, decent and honest man. And the value of a nice, decent and honest man becomes more and more apparent in the vicious world of the nobles of Castle Midnight, particularly the Princes, who have power without responsibility.
This novel has a number of very good points. It tells a cracking story well, fluently, and kept me gripped till the end. The characterisation is good and believable; although I cavilled somewhat at the excesses of the Princes, some thoughts about pre-revolution France made me change my mind. They have personality. So do the women, and there is far from being a bimbo or a reward to Jordan at the end. She too is a character in her own right. The writing is smooth and capable, without irritating misuse of words or awkwardness of phrasing. It makes no attempt to do anything other than tell the story, and does that very well.
If you want to be negative, then you could say this is not a great work of literature. No, it is not. Nor is it innovative or particularly original. It uses many accepted fantasy conventions about magic/royalty/etc., without questioning them. However, within those limitations, it is a good book, a good read and fun. If that's what you want, I can recommend it.
Helen McNabb

The Course of the Heart
M John Harrison
Gollancz, 1992, 216pp, £14.99

This book comes after years of hoping for something like it, though I did not expect M John Harrison to be able to produce much of his output from the last fifteen years has been the high fantasy Viriconium series. The Course of the Heart is written much more in the realist style of his early Committed Men (1971), though if you wanted something to compare it to, there are Christopher Evans' **In Limbo (1985)** and Christopher Priest's **The Glamour** (1984). The plot revolves around a mystery - four students together at Cambridge performed an occult rite, invoking the other world of the "plenum". The invocation worked in a way they did not expect, and two of them, who went on to marry, were both haunted - literally and figuratively - ever afterwards. After the event none of them remember what it was that happened or why.
Of the other two characters, one is Yaxley, who would always have been a nasty piece of work anyway, and the other is the nameless narrator and part of the mystery is what he inherited from the disaster.
Most of the story is set in the present day (or perhaps a little later) and describes the everyday life of the characters. Lucas Medlar becomes an English teacher in the north, while Pam his wife stays at home, affected by the epilepsy she has had from childhood. Though they try to make a go of it, they cannot be happy. Yaxley tries to involve more people in his circle, and pulls the narrator into a plot involving a kidnapped child which ends in deaths, but the narrator otherwise has a successful life in publishing.
However, there is another world if not two intervening in this one: Lucas Medlar has the manuscript autobiography of a traveller from the 1930's with its view of the past, and he has an account from alchemical texts of a city which disappeared - this city is the Coeur, the heart from which Richard the Lionheart took his name, possibly the heart of a heartless city.
So the ordinary world of working and doing the washing up is being invaded or penetrated by the course of the Coeur, by the traveller Michael Ashman, by the hallucinatings from the pleroma, by the machinations of Yaxley. The narrator has to make sense of it all and try to make it all work out. Only by two of the four dying can this happen, but the reasons for the deaths and whether they are happy or sad, satisfied or unsatisfied, are very different.
The narrator finally sees everything in a different way; even Medlar's familiar changes, and the world becomes a world of possibilities in which that morning in Cambridge did not condemn them forever. There may not be one Coeur but many, so that the title becomes a pun. Or he may have gone mad.
This novel seems to escape genre - it is essentially realist, but it revolves around aspects of the fantastic. Yaxley and his efforts make it a detective story or thriller, but they are only a small part of the book. Then there are the then and now stories of the pre-war traveller, and the ancient stories of the Coeur, in which fourteenth century battles are described, and of course the alchemical theories on which the characters explain what has happened.
In addition to all these fictions within the book, it has a structure (I have not imagined this as I read) - in different parts there are echoes of other texts. For instance, on the third page there is a half-page description of a railway halt; it is described as "the branch-line halt of middle-class children's fiction forty years ago", but it also recalls Edward Thomas' poem 'Adlestrop', about Thomas' own experience of a railway halt before the Great War. All through the book, I found this sort of echo and wondered why they, like the pleroma, were penetrating the novel. The biggest of these is also at a moment of major revelation - when the narrator finally sees Medlar's familiar, the thing that has haunted and wrecked the man's life. It comes from Sheridan Le Fanu's classic short story, 'Green Tea'. At the end of **The Glamour**, Christopher Priest explained his fantasy away as a literary theory, something that Christopher Evans explicitly avoided. Harrison has taken neither of those approaches, although I do not claim my reading here is the right one. I would be interested to know the history of the construction of this book - it is very elaborately constructed.
I leave this book with just one fear - that if it has its justified success it will be bought and not read, to lie on coffee tables as a sign of its owner's literacy. Anyone who did that would be doing themselves an injustice.
LJ Hurst

Hot Head
Simon Ings
Grafton, 1992, 300pp, £4.99 pb

The back cover boost says : " ... it is post-cyberpunk, it is post-modern, it is totally unique." Of course every novel is unique. Imaginative and inventive this one surely is; yet it uses and draws power from some of the oldest paradigms. Its map of fate and hazard is set out as a Tarot spread, and the pattern of its heroine Malise's involvement is essentially that of the Joseph Campbellian hero who experiences "call to adventure", initiation, conflict, dismemberment and resurrection.
Malise undergoes successive adventures; first in conflict with the Moonwolf (lunar-located AI turned nasty), and secondly spearheading opposition to an all-devouring alien Von Neumann machine approaching from Jupiter.

That briefly is the space-opera, the chief function of which is to provide a kind of Wagnerian set for the ongoing psychodrama focused on the consciousness / subconsciousness of Malise. She is a "hot head", a template for what might be the next stage in human evolution, with implanted "datafax" to empower large empathic and interpsychic extensions of neural activity. What is extended or projected, however, must utilise "menemes", or accessible memory units. These in turn are shaped by the basic human tensions and polarities - infantile, atavistic, altruistic, erotic etc. Thus the whole cosmic shooting match seems to deconstruct psychologically as the plot is developed in terms of interaction between Malise's often solipsistic modes of consciousness and the situations of subversion, aggression, seduction, and deprivation that envelop her in the course of terrestrial power-struggle and interplanetary war.
Simon Ings manages all this adroitly. The story of Malise's girlhood, the 'call to adventure' and 'initiation', the traumas of childhood and adolescence where attachments and alienations are formed, is told in sections titled after figures of the Major and Minor Arcana of the Tarot. These are related to a key incident of Malise's adolescence where her gypsy guru-lover, Sevai, initiates her into the Tarot, 'The Papess' identified as the arcanum on which Malise's life is "founded". The several associated symbolisms of this arcanum, 'upright' or 'reversed', reverberate through the novel. The Tarot-labelled sections are interleaved with untitled ones in which we follow her subsequent deeds and sufferings as victim / hero. It's a heady, exciting, if sometimes bewildering mixture; bewildering because unpredictable mood-shiftings and scene-shiftings may merge and/or change. What seems to be going on entirely in Malise's head (when, for example, she eidetically summons an "icon" to activate the "story engine") will correlate with, and may determine or be determined by, externality. Such "cloning" occasions some of the narrative's most bravura passages, including those "story engine" sequences in which Malise voyages through fractally multitudinous seasides to pursue her affair with Rosa, a beautiful cybernetic construct. Sensual, idyllic and mysterious as this relationship is, it proves to have a Frankensteinian dimension which links it to nightmarish happenings in real life. Simon Ings has a talent for atmospheric, yet compact, descriptions of place. On the "story engine" coast, for example, "the white edge of the sea was just visible over a bank of red sand"; in real time Rotterdam "lights from ships, gantries and refineries reflected the blackness like the running lights of giant space stations". Landscaping of that kind provides anchorage in the familiar when the going gets extravagantly psychedelic - when Jupiter's white spots favour us with enigmatic smiles, or when a white gull swoops to lead Malise from the the confines of a "universe the size of a towerblock". Even on the computer screens, where Ings gives free rein to typographic and semantic innovation, Africa is still Africa though it "sparkles, as though it were covered in jewels". Such anchorage (rolling grassland, sunlit mountains) is particularly welcome in the limbo land of the penultimate episode where Malise, swallowed and chewed up by the Von Neumann monster, recapitulates, mediated by a Tarot 'Nine Card Spread', her individual epic. There, as 'The Papess Upright', she halts the invasion and "saves the world" before being spat out, Jonah-like, to be reborn on Earth in an amniotic tank. Von Neumann 'evolution' is at least suspended.
This ending climaxes a classic 'hero' myth of sacrifice, death and resurrection. That Ings's first novel is great entertainment, contains not a little intentional pastiche, offers the fun of recognising (relevant) Carrollian allusions (the Cheshire Cat, the rabbit-hole fall, the 'magically' appearing instructions) - all this does not lessen its impact as meaningful psychodrama; and for its significant, not arbitrary, employment of the Tarot, the only novel I would compare it with is Charles Williams's **The Greater Trumps**, which is to rate it high.
KV Bailey

White Queen
Gwyneth Jones
Gollancz, 1991, 312pp, £14.99

If there is a common factor in Gwyneth Jones's novels it is that the main character in the opening narrative is an outsider who offers us an objective focus for the story as it unfolds. The outsider in **White Queen** is Johnny Gugliogi, exiled electronic journalist. Johnny is a carrier of QV, a petrovirus that affects coralin, the 2058 AD answer to the silicon chip. He maintains that he is not infected, believing it all to be some political conspiracy, and dreams of returning to his wife and child in the USA.
However, despite the commonality of an outsider, the plots and settings of Jones's adult novels themselves have been anything but similar - from the near fantasy of **Divine Endurance** to the acronymic SF of **Escape Plans** to the Thatcherite nightmare of **Kairos**. And now we have the near-future "aliens have landed" scenario of **White Queen,** although to say **White Queen** is "about an alien invasion" is to miss most of the book.
The story opens in Asabaland in West Africa, where Johnny meets one of the alien Aleutians. At this point, they are observing humanity incognito. Johnny also meets Bracmar Wilson, a British media personality. It is the relationship between Bracmar and Johnny - predicated on the relationship between Johnny and one of the Aleutians - and the relationship between the revealed Aleutians and Earth's chosen representative body (a conference on women's affairs that seems to be going nowhere slowly), that form the backbone of **White Queen.**
The White Queen of the title is the name of a group of anti-Aleutians led by Bracmar. White Queen's, and Bracmar's, motives for opposition to the aliens are complex and revealed to us piece by piece. Bracmar sets out to recruit Johnny into White Queen, but he rejects the group, its reason for being, and her. As Johnny comes to accept his position, including the fact that he is indeed QV-positive and has no hope of return to his family, he becomes an active member of the group, if not the most active member ...
White Queen is an intensely political novel - as, in fact, are most of Gwyneth Jones's adult novels. The aliens' arrival naturally has severe political repercussions throughout the world - partly a result of their actions, and partly a result of the existing world situation. Some things are profoundly different - Japan, for instance, disappeared beneath the waves during a global environmental catastrophe in 2004; but some things don't appear to have changed at all - "The English Prime Minister, that utter nonentity ..." (p.152).
This is a book that takes time to read and needs to be savoured. The Aleutians are no "men in rubber suits" - it's difficult to understand them at first, and it is not until we begin to learn more about their society and origins that we can even start to comprehend them. The human characters, on the other hand, are about as three-dimensional as you can get without them standing there in front of you. In Bracmar Wilson, Gwyneth Jones has created a character as real and alive as Tabitha Jute (in Colin Greenland's **Take Back Plenty**), if not more so.
I understand another book involving the Aleutians is in the offing. Bracmar Wilson is far too strong a character to leave languishing in just one novel.
Kairos (a book that was described to me as "a bad book, beautifully written, or a beautiful book, badly written) was a hard act to follow. There's no doubt in my mind that **White Queen** is the better novel, although I've yet to decide whether I prefer it to **Kairos. White Queen** is no book of the Eighties as **Kairos** was, but is it a book for the Nineties? What it is, is a textbook example of that intelligent, thought-provoking, and involving brand of SF that has been eclipsed in recent years by cyberpunk (another leftover from the Eighties). You find yourself reading **White Queen** with a wry smile and a real sense of admiration for the author. Highly recommended.
Ian Sales

Standing on Shamsan
Garry Kilworth
Harper Collins, 1992, 280pp, £14.99

This book is, in its way, very readable and Garry Kilworth is a many-sided author. As well as a string of competent SF novels and stories, he has also written poetry and three children's books; the latest of these, **The Drowners,** was one of the nominations for this year's Carnegie Medal.
Standing on Shamsan is not SF in any sense, but a realist novel: a good, middlebrow, lending library read, based on part of his own life. Just as JG Ballard eventually came to write the story of his formative experiences during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, so Kilworth tries to distil the essence of his own boyhood in Aden and the trauma of his return there during a fifteen year RAF career. Unlike Ballard, he does not name the chief character after himself, and there is no clue to how close the match is between autobiography and the story he tells, but it's fairly easy to imagine the Oliver "Cass" Carson of the novel growing up into the Garry Kilworth who wrote (say) **Abandonati** and **Cloudrock.**
Kilworth is, of course, a less ambitious writer than Ballard, and **Standing on Shamsan** has an air of deliberate understatement both in prose style and plotting. The feeling is there but it is under close control. Some writers might have tried to squeeze more Significance from it all, but not Kilworth. The boy who left school at fifteen with no exam passes, and only took a degree in English after reaching his late thirties, is not going to start putting on pretentious airs at his time of life.
Most of the novel is in the first person and concerns the boyhood of young Cass in Aden, with his friends Dix and Heather and Abdulla. Interwoven with it is a third-person narrative of Corporal Cass returning in 1966 to help quell violent unrest caused by the proposed British withdrawal. His unease, and his eventual dilemma, are brought neatly into focus with a spare precision lacking fuss or purple passages. Bombs explode; people he knows get suddenly shot; he is faced with an unenviable task; at the climax for a moment he shouts violently at a superior officer. The ending is calm, recognising the end of childhood. An early sentence, "His feelings were in gentle turmoil", about sums up the general tone.
If you want high drama, lurid sex, cosmic significance, or sesquwunda, it's not for you. But of its kind, and as far as it wants to go, it's sensitively and skillfully done.
Norman Beswick

Gerald's Game
Stephen King
Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, 343pp, £14.99

Someone once said a good writer could produce an interesting story about a man going to post a letter. Well, Stephen King has produced a 343-page story about a woman handcuffed to a bed in an isolated country cabin.
Gerald's Game is bondage, but don't laugh, it isn't as funny as it first sounds. The game has progressed from scarves to real handcuffs, but suddenly his wife, Jessie, sees it for what it really is: humiliating and demeaning.
She has had enough. But Gerald thinks it's just her contribution to the game. "That's good, Jessie. The whole thing, I mean. You could be an

actress...” he tells her, ignoring her pleas for release as acting.
Seeing that he won’t listen unless she forces him to, she kicks out with her untethered feet at the two places she knows will hurt him the most. Gerald, stunned by her attack on his manhood, clutches at his chest, unable to draw breath.
“Breathe!” Jessie shouts, and Gerald manages to suck in half a breath before collapsing. She did not bargain on this unexpected turn of fate. The keys to the handcuffs are across the room, but Jessie can’t reach them. The holidaymakers have gone, so nobody will hear her screams for help. A hunger-crazed stray dog happens by, drawn by the smell of freshly killed meat. It realises that the woman is no threat, and partakes of the meal she has unwittingly supplied for it.
While this is as taut and thrilling as **Misery** (1988), it is more sexual than anything King has done since **Cujo** (1982). Like **Misery**, the heroine is bedridden, but the terror is not another person, but memories of child abuse, incest, and friends whom Jessie doubts the sincerity of. All these things come back to haunt and taunt her as she envisages a slow and painful death from dehydration.
King has come up with a masterpiece (as has been said about most, if not all, of his other works) that is one part **The Shining**, one part **Cujo** and two parts **Misery.**
Martin Webb

Resurrections from the Dustbin of History
Simon Louvish
Bloomsbury, 1992, 215pp, £6.99 pb

A novel, this isn’t. Vignettes, yes, from which you must try and compose your own novel, striving to hold in mind a dozen different viewpoints and half a hundred historical characters who appear here in a way we’d never recognise. What else should one expect from the author who, born in Glasgow, living in Jerusalem, served in the Israel Defence Force as a cameraman, studied film technique in London, co-produced controversial “independent” (i.e. leftwing) documentaries, and now teaches part-time at the London International Film School? Cut and splice, show us snippets, forget the “how” but give us plenty of “now”.
Hitler, Gable (formerly Goebbels) and Goering escaped the Soviet isation of Germany and settled in the USA, where Hitler’s son Rudolph heads the American Party - in a country where President Joe McCarthy has died, Los Angeles was nuked by a kamikaze Japanese pilot, almost all the oldtime movie stars died, but Congressman Reagan turns up at their convention, his face half burned away, spine bent and minus a hand, to support the resurgent neo-Nazis.
President Leon Trotsky (formerly Bronstein) has just died in the USSR. The war is 1967, a cantonised Palestine has Dominion status within the British Empire, but still British squaddies march the streets chocking passes at the behest of Prime Minister George Brown’s Labour government under King Edward VIII and Queen Martha, while Sir Oswald Mosley plans a Jewish Repatriation Scheme and Jews worldwide find themselves threatened.
With the disappearance of Hollywood, British films in ElstreeScope bring us fictionalised versions of the Pacific War, including the revenge nuking of Tokyo - was it Soviet Russia or Soviet Germany that leaked the A-bomb to the Japanese? We see all this through the eyes of Che Guevara, Joseph Gable, and others less easily identified: Louvish knows his modern history and politics, but assumes we do as well, leaving too much unsaid for our comfort. Try and fit together Nasser in Egypt, Nkrumah in the Gold Coast (not Ghana), Stalin shot by Lenin as a double-dealer, General Spandidakis’ junta in Greece, Mussolini finally dying in power, and you get nothing but alternate-history tummy and a severe case of propaganda overkill.

Need I tell you that much of the action - and talk - centres around the London Film Academy, that Pier Paolo Pasolini is shooting film in Ethiopia while dodging the Italian Imperial troops, that Alabama has “no wildlife conservation here: this is gun country - Niggers, Jews and raccoons watch out!”? The whole book is a hothouse of OTT descriptions and accusations, all orientated for maximum impact on young British readers of intelligence but limited political experience; the criticisms are cartoon-style, and not biased; the characters pasteboard, with lashings of pastiche and parody about them, and I have to confess that the title alone depresses and antagonises me, while the cover artwork is so juvenile I’m astonished they wanted to credit Andrzej Klimowski, other than as some obscure anti-Polish joke.
Can I do better, I wonder, than leave you with someone else’s judgment? The **New Statesman & Society** reviewer tells us on the back cover that it “makes le Carre read like a recipe for making chopped liver.” I wonder what he means?
Ken Lake

The Stress of Her Regard
Tim Powers
Grafton, 1991

The story begins a few days after the famous dinner party at the Villa Diodati in 1816, from which **Frankenstein** was born, and some would say SF was too. The protagonists include Byron, Keats, the Shelleys, and even Francois Villon. The atmosphere, then, is thick with gothic romance, poetry, and speculative thought. But this is a *secret* history; it delves into the dark of the poets with a sick, tortured intensity, fleshing out the record and seeking always to *explain*....
It seems there was another race upon this earth before man; The *Nephilim*, a stony people who lay with humans in order to reproduce, choosing a semblance of either sex at will. This race had been revived by a Epigsburg in the 11th Century, and by the early 19th century a number of them are abroad. Centred on the Swiss Alps, they feed vampirically on the blood of their human mates, forming a fond attachment to their prey, who become addicted to these erotic attentions. They have the capacity to inspire great poetry in their hosts, but the attachment is ultimately ruinous, since they jealously destroy the host’s family and in most cases eventually kill their host. the one exception to this rule is when a human is accepted into the nephelim family, usually by marriage. In this case, immortality for the individual becomes a serious proposition and Powers draws an affecting picture of the care of the vampire race for their human partners.
Michael Crawford, the hero of the tale, accidentally marries a lamia when he leaves a ring on a statue’s finger for safekeeping. The story follows Crawford, a surgeon, and Josephine, the sister of his human bride, as they fight, aided by the poets, to remove themselves from the vampires’ influence. The most indelible characteristic shared by these two is their sheer endurance. Tortured, maimed, crippled, mortified, surrounded by horrific deaths and destruction, still they continue; intent for the most part on being of service. Josephine is one of the most unusual heroines to have ever come my way. Traumatised by her mother’s death, she has escaped into multiple personalities in order to survive. Her main escapes are into the personas of her sister, Julia, and the “wind-up woman” initially resorted to in childhood to overcome night fears.
“she would rock back and forth like a pump-arm or a clockwork ... so that the scaries would say to themselves,...‘oh, *this* isn’t human, *this* isn’t prey – this is some kind of a *construction*”
Many of the most memorable parts of the book are little details, often grotesque, glimpsed in passage: the woman whose great love was the hand of a statue; the Galatea tavern, frequented by the perverted “neffers”, in the shadow of London Bridge; the beggars who pose in the hope of being commissioned by painters (“saints and madonnas and even entire Holy Families stood in shivering clusters along the shallow gray slopes of the steps”.)
Powers raids the treasure house of romantic poetry and legend, drawing in all the paraphernalia of garlic, wooden stakes, and silver bullets. We meet Trolls, lamiae, the Carbonari and Venetian coin laggers; the Graiae awaken and the Sphinx’s riddle is intriguingly recast. However, Powers’ mania to systematise and *explain* everything becomes tedious at times.
I had difficulty accepting the premise that human poets should have needed the assistance of another race in order to have written their greatest works and in many ways this is a frustrating book; the logic wears alarmingly thin in places, and lapses in language and continuity constantly work against the suspension of disbelief. Powers’ formidable research is sometimes a little *too* evident, and if there were a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Characters, I think he would be in the dock. This is a flawed feverish nightmare of a book, but a masterpiece for all that; a story of stunning imaginative scope, following two extremely fallible people in a story powered by love against all odds. *Read* it.
Catie Cary

Small Gods
Terry Pratchett
Gollancz, 1991, 272pp, £14.99

Gods need people. According to Terry Pratchett, belief is the food of the gods, and gods who do not get fed become *small gods*. Small gods exist in the wilderness, chittering and sighing till they fade away to djinns or voices on the air; theur one driving impulse is to gain a believer, any believer, the competition is fierce. Imagine then, the position of a once-great god who is down to his last believer; such is the plight of the Great God Om. Having intended to incarnate as a big white bull for a week or so, maybe fit in a little trampling of the infidel, he is rather put out to find himself in the body of a one-eyed tortoise. His consternation deepens as he realises that his sole remaining believer is the apparently dimwitted novice, Brutha.
The plot thickens and takes us to Ephebe; we meet the Quisition, Philosophers, a hermit with an invisible friend, a retailer of convenience foods named Cut-Me-Own-Hand-Off Dhblah, the Pantheons of half the Discworld and Scalbics. Scalbics are disreputable members of the crow family; “Nothing the scalbics, except other scalbics.” Most of the expected Pratchett ingredients are here, the humour builds in the same relentless fashion as of old. We also have a new feature in the “DIY” joke. Pratchett lays the trail in the expected fashion, so that for instance you notice that church functionaries are referred to as bestor and supreme Duns, and you brace yourself for the great one... but he doesn’t do it. Whether he got bored, or forgot, or was confident that you will have spotted it for yourself is debatable, but there are a number of examples to look out for.
There are plenty of laughs in this book, based as usual on Pratchett’s insightful observations of human nature. However some passages which are structured like jokes are not funny. And this is not because the story is badly told, but because the areas of human nature under observation are darker than before. **Small Gods** is an angry book, although witty, and this fact is not mitigated by its redemptive humanism. An excellent novel recommended for serious readers with a sense of humour. If all you want is gags, though, I’d look elsewhere.
Catie Cary

Was...
Geoff Ryman
Harper Collins, 1992, 356pp, £14.99

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by Frank L Baum has become a portmanteau myth for the 20th century, a piece of pop trash subject to almost limitless reinterpretation. The real wonder of the wonderful wizard is that he, mostly, withstands everything from St Judy emoting her heart out on the yellow-brick road to the mighty Sean auditioning for the Chippendales in a bleak future (the interpretations are always, always, as camp as a row of pink tents...).
Enter Geoff Ryman, bearing a multilayered interpretation, a fantasy writer captivated by "realism". We see little Dorothy fleeing the dip(theria) into the deepest gulch in Kansas, straight into the whalebone(d) disappointment of Aunty Em and worthless Uncle Henry. Whatever else life was like fighting the recalcitrant soil of Kansas for a living, it was relaentless and hard, and it broke strong people. Dorothy gocs from her arrival through subjection to the iron incomprehension of Aunt Em, who has married a long way beneath her, to her fracture and the twister which takes her out of Kansas and into an institution by way of prostitution. The telling compels. The portrayal is vivid. Yet we are never given the reasons why she breaks the way she does. Surely, her life was unrelenting and bleak, but not any more so than it was - and is - for millions. Ryman presents statements like "Dorothy had learned how to hate." as though there is an explicatory causal inevitability where there is none.
Similarly we see Baby Frances Gumm taking her first steps on the stage, singing and dancing during the intervals in her father's Kinema in Lancaster, California. Yes, young Judy had talent, and, yes, her family had problems, but never are we told exactly why "Frances knew she existed to hold her parents together." Now Judy Garland was a real person with a gift which could make it seem like sunshine on a rainy day, a gift she squandered on pills, cheap booze and cheaper men. This might be thought of as a real tragedy. To begin to discuss it surely requires the presentation of some illuminating insight. To say she succumbed to her own expectations is pretty cheap, tabloid "insight". A sentence would have given us Geoff Ryman's interpretation, but the sentence is not there, and I found no evidence of any real insight implied in the text.
Yet when it comes to the villains they are presented in almost cartoon vividness (and dimensions). Henry Gulch carries the story only to slobber his way between the adolescent Dorothy's legs, while Frank Gumm is there only to break his family on the cross of his taste for rough trade. One is an abuser, the other a bugger - or should that be ABUSER and BUGGER: big emotion-laden labels, rather than realised human beings. Now this is not an accident. It is authorial choice. Geoff Ryman can write characters. Dorothy and Judy and Aunty Em and Bill Davirson are as finely realised characters as you will find in any book (editorial deletions allowing). Yet after two-thirds of the book, we leave them behind and devote ourselves to Jonathon, an actor of Hoffmanesque integrity, who is searching for the grail of St Judy, only to find himself on the trail of the "real" Dorothy. But poor, gay Jonathon is dying of AIDS (although we are never told how this monogamous good guy picked up the virus - surprise, surprise). He could have been as finely realised a character as Dorothy [et al], but he isn't, because he is present not as a character but as a sacrificial MARTYR. The story concludes with his magically vanishing up his own fundament at the nexus where "reality" and fantasy meet, as he must - because this is Magic Realism here, guys, the fact that all fiction is fantasy, metafiction and semiotics.
Was... is a very clever book. In places it is exceptionally well written. It compels the reader - it compelled me right to the end despite having comprehensively got up my nostrils with the tale of Baby Frances - and it surprised me more than once with the direction the story took. Yet it lacks any real emotional centre. There is no unique insight into Dorothy or Judy or Jonathon and their harrowing predicaments, insight we are entitled to expect because these are characters in a fantasy. The author knows what motivates them and, I suggest, is obliged to let us - the readers - know too. That is what fiction is all about, when you get right down to the basics - why characters respond as they do. Yet these characters are picked up and dropped at the whim of whatever game Geoff Ryman is playing with himself. Perhaps if you share his particular political agenda (not Political or party political but just political), you won't mind. As for me, I was bitterly disappointed. The "fictional" Dorothy and the "real" Judy deserve much, much better than this.
As I say, this is a very clever book, but cleverness is not enough. Frank L Baum gave his tin man a heart, which is what Geoff Ryman does not give. **Was...**
Martyn Taylor

Transcendence
Charles Sheffield
Gollanz, 1992, 270pp, £14.99

The full title of Sheffield's latest, judging from the cover, is "Transcendence Book Three of the Heritage Universe". This was enough to bring a sinking feeling to the pit of my stomach. I had enjoyed everything Sheffield had written in the SF field (and a lot of his science as well) until he got his head up his bonnet about an open ended series. The first, **Summertide**, was just plain dull, with masses of time spent on boring characters, obscuring a rather neat piece of scientific "what if?". The second, **Divergence**, I skipped as a result. I am now prepared, grudgingly, to admit that maybe I was wrong to do so. **Transcendence** isn't a patch on **The Web Between the Worlds** or **Between the Strokes of Night.** But it is quite good as space adventure, with a mixed crew of humans, aliens and computer-intelligences battling against the forces of evil and suffering under the stifling bureaucracy of the human-dominated spiral-arm-spanning civilization of the far future.
For the benefit of new readers, I should mention that the basic premise of the series is that humanity has expanded into a Galaxy populated by sundry alien beings and littered with often incomprehensible artefacts left behind by a super-civilization that vanished millions of years before. Even the present interstellar civilization is thousands of years old. Some of these artefacts are still functional, in bizarre ways, and some are attended by keepers awaiting the return of their masters. So there is ample scope for the kind of technology that is indistinguishable from magic.
There are elements of E.E. Smith, Larry Niven, Fred Pohl, **Star Wars**, and more sub-genres than you can shake a stick at. The most serious omission is humour; a dash of **Red Dwarf** would have leavened the mix. The basic storyline is simple: ill-assorted crew, thrown together out of necessity, seek to resolve a puzzle left over from the previous book. This involves tangling with naked singularities and vicious opponents. Problem is duly resolved, only to leave another loose end. Such is the nature of open-ended series.
John Gribbin

The Collected Stories of Robert Silverberg Volume 1: Pluto in the Morning Light
Grafton, 1992, 396pp, £5.99 pb

The first question is posed by the title: Silverberg is still alive, and continuing to produce, and until this changes there cannot, unlike the Philip K Dick volumes, be a true "collected stories" series. The backcover blurb, raising another question, announces this as the first of "a five-book series that will bring together all his most important short fiction": but important by whose criteria, the author's or his editors'? Confusion is compounded by Silverberg's introduction, in which he states that the book comprises all the shorter work written in the four years following the period covered by the stories collected in **The Conglomerated Cocktail Party**. One is left with a strong impression that this is an ordinary collection packaged to look like something else. The stories in **Pluto in the Morning Light** are from the early eighties, a period follwoing Silverberg's return from retirement with **Lord Valentine's Castle**. Shortly before starting them, I read John Brunner's review of **The Face of the Waters** in **Foundation 55**, in which he suggested that Silverberg no longer wrote artistically and intellectually exciting novels of the kind he'd produced in the late sixties and early seventies, because there was no longer a market for them; that editors wanted far future space fantasies rather than another **Dying Inside** or **The Book of Skulls**. But I recall that Silverberg abandoned writing in 1973 because such books had failed to sell, and that following his return he'd made a statement that SF writers were wasting their time trying to produce art, because readers weren't interested - the cynical assumption being that writers should give them what they wanted and forget about everything but the money.
Whether he really meant this, or was simply sick of hearing the same old arguments, is unclear. But the stories of this "third period" Silverberg (apart from the **Valentine** chronicles, I haven't read any of the novels) do seem less sparkly, less probing, more concerned to reiterate familiar themes and tropes than to push back the boundaries, even (dare one say it) more complacent. Many of the stories in this collection - 'Against Babylon', 'Snake and Occan, Occan and Snake', 'Multiples', 'Sailing to Byzantium'. 'Blindsight' - were reprinted in various year best anthologies, award-nominated for awards, but there seems something lacking in them. 'Sailing to Byzantium', for instance, is set in the Earth's distant future, where the population amuses itself by rebuilding and then demolishing cities from the past, and where a man from the twentieth century attempts to discover who he really is and why he was brought there. He turns out, in the end, to have no past life, because he is as much a construct as the cities - but in the far future, when people are immortal and anything can happen, what can there ever be to surprise the reader? In the story introduction to 'Blindsight', Silverberg states that he thought of it as an inversion of hunt for Josef Mengele, in which his victims want him, not for revenge, but because his skills were needed for a particular project - an idea with great potential, but here smothered by its jokey South American space station setting and the gimmickry plot rationale that space pilots who have their eyes removed will be able to cope better in hyperspace.
To sum up, these are well-written stories. They are elegant, clever, deft, suggestive, erudite - everything that one expects a Silverberg story to be. But they are like the proverbial Chinese dinner: an hour after putting the book down, it's difficult to recall anything memorable about them.
Joseph Nicholas

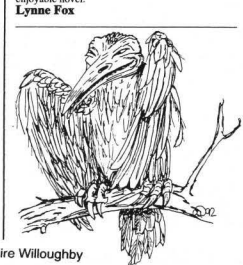
Valentine
SP Somtow
Gollancz, 1992, 383pp, £14.99

Timmy Valentine was a pre-teen popstar, an idol to pubescents of both seaes the world over. Seven years after his disappearance, his best known song, 'Vampire Junction', is still popular. The merchandising business is reaping rich rewards from the sales of t-shirts, posters and

other memorabilia; the few promotion videos Timmy made are still in the shops, his records have been reissued on CD. Now a major Hollywood studio is running a Timmy Valentine Lookalike Contest; the prize is to play the legendary singer in a film of his rise to fame, comparable to that of Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly.
Onto the scene comes Angel Todd, a mature twelve year old who sleeps with his own widowed mother. Angel is the perfect candidate. At the climax of the televised competition, Angel meets Timmy Valentine.
Brian Zottoli, the last surviving member of the Gods of Chaos, and uncle to a victim of Timmy Valentine, and PJ, a part-Shoshone teenager, thought they had killed all the vampires when they burned down the town of Junction, Idaho, but one of them, Terry Gish, a friend of PJ, returns with news: ''Timmy is coming back.''
Zottoli, who was forced to stake his incestuously abused niece in 'Vampire Junction', is in the audience at the Lookalike Contest, and with Petra, a reporter mourning her suicidal son's demise (for which she blames Timmy). Driving her to a restaurant as a prelude to sleeping with her, he meets the granddaughter of Prince Prathna, leader of the Gods of Chaos. She knows, as does Zottoli, the vampire hunt is not yet over.
After viewing in flashbacks Timmy's tormented two-thousand year life, during which he has been raped by de Sade and Baudelaire, and imprisoned in a concentration camp, readers will sympathise, perhaps even empathise, with the vampire and hope he finds the salvation he seeks.
One has to wonder where regular talent ends and phenomenon begins. Somtow has done as much in twenty years as some do in a lifetime: an acclaimed composer/conductor, Thai rep for music with UNESCO, children's writer, SF novelist (winning the John W Campbell Award for best new writer, and the **Locus** Award for best first novel), horror novelist, screenwriter, film director: Somtow has done all but paint his own dustjackets.
If his past record is anything to go by, Somtow Papinian Sucharitkul (SP Somtow) will become, as the **Bangkok Post** has predicted: ''... an accomplished example of an extremely rare breed.''
Martin R Webb

Beauty
Sheri S Tepper
Harper Collins, 1992, 362pp, £14.99

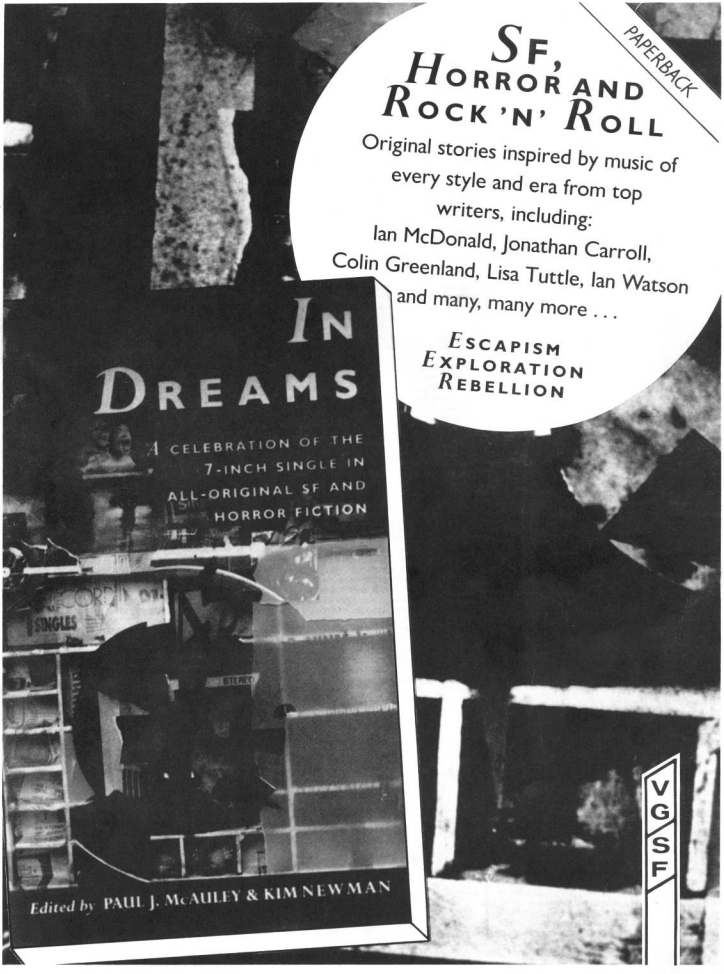
Beauty is not science fiction. To be fair, Tepper doesn't claim it to be science fiction either; I only make the point first because I am a little uneasy about the increasingly wide variety of books which fall into the catchall of SF. Will I one day, I wonder, scan the pages of **Vector** - critical journal of the British **Science Fiction** Association - only to find reviewed anything but SF? However, enough of mild paranoia.
What **Beauty** is, is not quite a faery tale either. As its title suggests, it makes use of the convention of faery tale with the central story being that of Sleeping Beauty. A number of other faery tales are also featured, linked through the central character of Beauty. Cinderella, Prince Charming, Snow White and her prince all make their appearances, though not quite the ones you might be familiar with. This series of tales constitutes the history of Beauty's life as she strives to understand the nature of the curse laid upon her and the burning object concealed within her body.
Many of the characteristics of the classic faery tale are to be found in **Beauty**. It is the vehicle of unpalatable truths about life; that dabbling in the enjoyment of cruelty, even in the imagination, can corrupt; the truth that all we have that is beautiful in life can be easily destroyed. But because Beauty is a faery tale, it has a happy ending. It also has the usual supporting cast of witches, faeries and monsters; a scenery of castles, enchanted heaths, hovels, magical realms and a props list which includes a cloak of invisibility, seven league boots and a magic cap. **Beauty** skips about in time and in and out of time, at one point visiting our own future.
Beauty is an ambitious book in its size and scope. It is not tightly organised but loose and discursive in structure. Like a picaresque novel it wanders, indulging in many digressions and introducing us to many characters as we follow the travels of its heroine through time and space.
Despite its size it lacks extremes; there is no grandeur, no real horror; it is consistently domestic, local, personal in its range and tone. Bu i f that can be a criticism levelled at the novel, it is also, paradoxically, a strength. **Beauty** is never pretentious, which is a common pitfall of overweening ambition. The statements which the novel makes about fundamental issues such as good, evil, cruelty and destruction are always located within personal relationships. When Beauty descends into the underworld, as payment of the eternal ransom of Good to Evil, the sufferings of hell are familiar and human.
The characters in the novel, though they are often amusing or frightening or strange, are never convincingly real. I don't think this is due to lack of skill on Tepper's part but rather due to the result of the placing of the story in the faery tale genre, which inevitably shapes the reader's response. Because we know that Beauty must succeed ultimately, we cannot really fear for her despite the terrible events which befall her. Nor does she need to learn or develop as a result of the terrifying, strange or hilarious episodes in her long life. Beauty exists supremely as a symbol. As such, Tepper's characterisation of her is abundant in superficial detail but lacking in any psychological depth.
What the novel lacks in depth it makes up for in surface detail. Places and people and events are seen through the eyes of a woman who is never above taking an interest in the smallest of details. We meet the bizarre aunts and father (not to mention the ubiquitous cat) inhabiting Westfaire, the enchanted castle where Beauty eventually sleeps; we meet Bill, the gentle transvestite of the 21st Century; we experience the cool illusion of faery which transforms the world with a strange glamour and for which Beauty nearly pays the price of her life; we are shown the squalor of Cinderella's home where that particular tale is given an unpleasant twist. The result of this piling up of sensual details is to weave a rich, untidy, fascinating texture in the novel.
This complex texture, and the reader's enjoyment of it, is part of the novel's statement. **Beauty** is concerned with the conservation of the variety of life and the novel presents that variety and through our enjoyment engages our sympathies. In the end the novel can be identified with the burning force which lives within Beauty herself.
I would certainly recommend **Beauty** as a very enjoyable novel.
Lynne Fox



Artwork by Claire Willoughby

Lost Futures
Lisa Tuttle
Grafton, 1992, 208pp, £4.99 pb

The film **Three Faces of Eve** was practically the first time that the notion of multiple personalities moved from the realm of the case history into entertainment. It became a popular device in the fiction of the last half-century, and science fiction writers in particular soon found it fruitful to put more than one personality into one mind. Developing the theme further, while moving away from its psychological origins, they began to investigate the notion of providing each of these personalities with its own world. Quantum physics provided a handy rationale with its many worlds thesis, and writers as diverse as Frederik Pohl, with **The Coming of the Quantum Cats** (1986) and Alan Brennert, with **Time and Chance** (1990), have taken it up. Now Lisa Tuttle has added her voice to the chorus.
I mention this long tradition not to suggest any lack of originality on Tuttle's part, but to emphasise how much she has made the theme her own. She does this, quite simply, by turning back to the psychological forebear of the subgenre. In Tuttle's hands the many-worlds scenario has become an analogy for many minds. Taking Brennert's **Time and Chance** as a paradigm, the typical many-worlds story follows the pattern of the film **It's a Wonderful Life** rather than its progenitor **Three Faces of Eve.** Someone, generally approaching that period of middle-aged angst which most of us experience, feels regret for past decisions which are to blame for his current unhappy state. A parallel world gives him the chance to experience what might have been, and in some way the old mistakes are corrected or the hero becomes reconciled. Tuttle's protagonist, Clare Beckett, follows the classical model : she is approaching middle age, feels trapped in a job which in no measure matches her youthful ambitions, has no husband or boyfriend, and above all her life hinges around one moment in which she made a wrong choice and her brother died. But Tuttle immediately breaks out of the format. Instead of the many worlds healing, they isolate Clare more and more. In dreams, she starts to glimpse a series of might-have-beens, and slowly her grip on the real world breaks down so as she loses track of which memories come from which worlds. As a former boyfriend (in one alternative, her husband) tells her : ''You've always wanted to believe that everything was possible, that you didn't have to make choices ... You said the Universe split rather than make a choice - well you can't split, not without going crazy.'' Such is the tenet of the book, a crisp, unsettling and exact analysis of the mental toll exacted by guilt and regret.
For most of the book we get no more than sidelong glimpses of the parallel worlds, an impression, a hallucination, a wish. They may be real or they may be no more than symbols of a woman losing her grasp on reality. Then, at last, as she plunges into psychological crisis, she slips across into one of these alternatives. But it is a world in which Clare is mentally damaged, still cared for by her distraught parents, while her brother survives in a coma which has already lasted 17 years. This is the most chilling passage in the book, as a woman battling to preserve her sanity finds herself consigned to madness with no hope of escape. And it is a passage which brilliantly employs the novel's science fictional rationale to enhance its psychological impact.
A further sequence, in which Clare moves on into an overtly science fictional world is the only false notes struck by the book, since it serves to advance neither the dramatic nor the psychological development of the book. But this uncertainty aside, **Lost Futures** is a controlled and powerful work which is one of the finest things Lisa Tuttle has ever written.
Paul Kincaid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