VECTOR 78

VECTOR 78

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Southcote
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United Kingdom
(0734-594890)

Vector's ISSN is 0505-0448

VECTOR 78 : November/December 1976 : Journal of the British SF Association : Vol 4 No 2

Front Cover by Carol Gregory: Back cover by Eaianne Cooke: Interior art by Paul Ryan (3, 4, 14, 46, 57) Paul Dillon (59) Nclean Storey (49) David Higgins (12)

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Copy date for Vector 79: Friday, 24th (provisional) Dec, 1976

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Proof-reading by Terry Corbin and Florence Russell; in different ways, Heroines of the Revolution both

Collating/stapling/etc. by Keith Freeman, Martin Hatfield, Tom Jones, David Wingrove, and the editor

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Printed by Sanderson Design and Print Ltd, 18 Portman Rd, Reading

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This issue is for J, eternal hope...
It's only words/But words are all I have/To take your heart away

Vector is the official journal of the British Science Fiction Association Ltd.

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Vector subscriptions outside the UK are 6 issues for $7, 12 issues for $12, (or $1.50 per issue air mail) to individuals; institutions: 12 issues for $16. Equivalent rates elsewhere. Please send sterling cheques or money orders, payable to "Vector", or, failing that, cash in US dollars.

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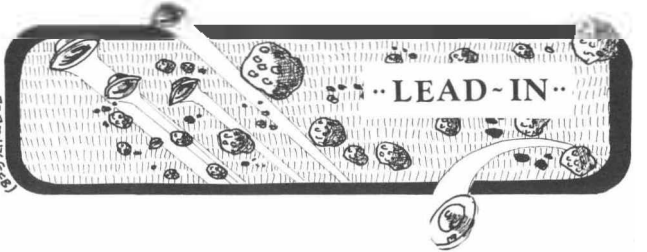
Print run this issue: 600

Vector 78 has been produced singlehandedly by Chris Fowler, with a little help from an IBM 82C, and a great deal of support from Dora, Florence, Terry, Steve, Brian and Sarah: thanks folks, it's pointless without you...



Hoho, Fowler. Vector going to printer's tomorrow and you haven't written your editorial again, I see.

Be careful, Spiby. I balance on a knife edge. I am tired. It is late. I am Not In The Mood.

Cop-out, Fowler, cop-out. Your loyal readers are going to want to know why you've chosen to reduce the central 32 pages of the magazine so much more than usual...

To try to clear the backlog of reviews, that's why. I'm just trying to pack more into the same number of pages.

Don't give me that. I know you've been taking kick-backs from magnifying-glass makers. Anyway, aren't you going to tell them why the Bob Shaw piece isn't in?

I was hoping no-one would notice that. It was going to be in, but I didn't get the illustrations in time. But the readers are getting Cy Chauvin, Brian Stableford and Andrew Tidmarsh instead. And Bob Shaw will be in next time.

Who's this Carol Gregory you've got on the front cover? She's not that incredibly pre-Raphaelite artist from Leeds, is she? Who doesn't like Eisenstein?

I rather wish you hadn't used that description, Spiby. I think she is rather sensitive about being told how pre-Raphaelite she looks. Though I must admit that a dislike of Eisenstein is a negative factor. Anyway, she's a very talented artist, and will soon be in the professional wegatibes.

OK - so much for this issue. What lies and false promises are you going to make about the next issue?

Well...if this experiment in greater reduction of type-size works, then the next issue should finally clear the reviews backlog, and have the Elwood interview, and will definitely have the return of the letter-column.

I'll believe a letter-column when I see it, Fowler. You said it would be in this issue...

Yes, but I didn't get any letters. How can I run a letter column with no letters? All the hacks are sending their letters to that ratbag Jones in Bracknell.

All right, so make an appeal. "Make an editor happy. Send him a letter today!"

So I'll do it. Now leave me alone. I am tired. It is late. An overwhelming sense of the Pointlessness of It All overcomes me. The Intolerable Chaos of Reality is seeping into my room. The Pain of Existence assails me....

Ah, our old friend the Existential Dilemma raising its ugly head again. Tell the truth, Fowler. We all know what is really wrong...

(cont. p. 58)


PAHAN '76
(SFS)

W(H)ITHER SCIENCE FICTION?

Ian Watson

I was on a panel at a science fiction convention recently, where I said that I thought that science fiction ought to aim to put itself out of business; that the ambition of SF should be to become obsolete. This suggestion caused a certain amount of surprise in the audience, and it was apparently misunderstood by those people, since some of the feedback afterwards was that I'd said that SF is now obsolete because Man had now advanced scientifically to the point where there is nothing left to speculate about any more. We've landed on the Moon, unravelled the Genetic Code somewhat, transplanted hearts, etcetera - so SF can now shut up shop.

I'd like to expand on what I said on that panel, because it is open to misunderstanding, and it is rather a vital point. So I'm entitling this article "W(h)ither Science Fiction?" to ask two questions in one. Firstly, which way should SF go? And secondly, what's all this business about SF aiming to wither away, like the Marxist vision of the State?

Beginning with the idea that Man has advanced scientifically to the point where there's nothing left to speculate about... I know there's a school of thought which points out that 90% of all scientists who have ever lived are alive today - and that we've nearly reached bedrock in Physics, Astronomy, Biology. We know roughly what to look for to get the Final Answers. In Physics, give us a few more years, a few more particle accelerators, and we'll know what the ultimate basis of matter is; we aren't remotely in the same situation as in the 19th Century before the splitting of the atom. In Biology, we know what the genetic code is; we just need more refined techniques to read it perfectly. Or in Astronomy, a few more radio telescopes or satellite experiments and we'll be able to estimate the total mass of the universe at last and decide once and for all whether it's expanding towards Heat Death or will collapse back in again. 100 years ago scientists hadn't the foggiest idea about subatomic structure, DNA, red-shift, radio and X-ray astronomy and all today's fundamental building blocks. But for us today, possessing this knowledge, it's only a matter of fine tuning henceforth; 90% of really fundamental breakthroughs have already been made.

Well, I don't agree with this for a moment. Nor does the history of modern science lend much backing to this view. Essentially it's a view based on the idea that science progressively discloses Absolute Truth to us. That science is objective and rational in method; that its findings are based on a hard, cool look at raw data, and represent The Facts.

But scientists never look at "raw data" in so unbiased way. There's no such thing as raw data. Scientists have to have a theory before they set out to prove their theory. That theory is usually conditioned by the dominant orthodoxy of the time - and heretics can be punished as sternly as by the Spanish

inquisition; only not with burning at the stake, so much as by cutting off research grants, rejecting research papers, refusing tenure at universities.

A recent study of Apollo scientists (1) (who were about to have their theories proved one way or the other by actual lumps of rocks) showed that subjective and irrational elements run deep in science - and may even be essential to its existence. The scientists polled greeted the idea of the unbiassed observer with a range of negative reactions from hoots of laughter to downright rage. They insisted that bias was necessary (a) to motivate you to work energetically, and (b) to maintain critical debate, from which truth emerges. Still, they added, you had to make a clear distinction between being "responsibly biassed" - and downright cheating. Cheating is out. But actually, what is "cheating" in science?

Consider the case of Immanuel Velikovsky. (2) Velikovsky's seemingly outrageous idea that the solar system was, within near-historic times, behaving rather like a snooker table at the start of a game (with Venus, newly born out of Jupiter, and Mars and Earth crashing into each other and rebounding) was backed up by the specific predictions (about the temperature of Venus, the Sun having an electric charge, radio noise from Jupiter and so on) which were errant nonsense at the time of the publication of *Worlds in Collision* in 1950, but which have since turned out to be spot on; prompting the current re-investigation of Velikovsky's ideas. However, the interesting thing here isn't so much whether Velikovsky was right or wrong or half-right, so much as the sheer rage of most scientists at him in 1950. In fact their behaviour was so paranoid as to attract the attention of American psychologists. The editor of Macmillan who signed the contract with Velikovsky was sacked and the book hastily transferred to another publisher following threats from academics to boycott buying Macmillan textbooks, or write any more textbooks for the firm, unless Macmillan publicly dissociated itself from Velikovsky. The reputable *Science News Letter* carried denunciations of the book, before publication, from respectable scientists who hadn't even read it yet. The curator of Hayden Planetarium who was also chairman of the astronomy section of the American Museum of Natural History, and who was preparing a favourable review of the book and wanted to stage a planetarium display based on the ideas in it, was sacked brusquely, told to quit his office the same day, and has been boycotted from any job in astronomy ever since. Major scientists such as Harlow Shapley and Otto Struve joined in this witch hunt. Science was so bitterly opposed to the sheer existence of Velikovsky's ideas that it was prepared to go to almost any lengths to squash them.

More recently, we saw the curious episode of the abrupt rise and fall of Polywater (a sort of rubbery form of Kurt Vonnegut's ice-nine in *Cat's Cradle*) from first "discovery", through a popularity boom when hundreds of papers were being published describing how to make polywater in the lab and what its properties were, to its sudden downfall when - lo and behold - it no longer existed; and had never existed! This was a sort of counter-Velikovsky Effect when everybody leapt on to a many bandwagon about something very fundamental indeed - water, the source of *life* - and even manufactured material that did not exist. Looking back on the Polywater episode, a Princeton Chemistry professor (3) claims that "the polywater phenomenon has further verified the efficacy of the scientific method" - on the grounds that a new theory was fervently and rapidly tested to destruction. Yet the same professor admits that investigators might have changed their minds simply because after a time some major journals such as *Science* announced that they were "fed-up" with Polywater and didn't want to print any more papers on it. In this changed climate of opinion, could a lone scientist stand out any longer without being seen as a crank - and even seeing himself as one? Could he continue to think in terms of producing genuine polywater? So, exit polywater from the scene - no doubt just as well, considering what happens in *Cat's Cradle*!

In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Thomas Kuhn analysed the way in which one scientific orthodoxy will be defended quite bitterly, until it has so many loopholes in it that it visibly cannot serve; whereupon an abrupt gestalt switch will take place to another, new orthodoxy, which may very well be the opposite of the old one - though that doesn't mean it is the true and final one, let me add. But woe to anyone who puts forward the new orthodoxy before its time has come. An example in geology is plate tectonics - the theory that the Earth's surface consists of six major rigid plates moving relative to one another. The theory of continental drift, under a new name Sheer heresy when Wegener put it forward in 1912; a textbook cliche now. But does that mean that it will remain a textbook cliche in 2050? Maybe by then Velikovsky's colliding planets will be what pulled the continents apart. Well, I'm being flippant here; but the point is that science remains permanently provisional. So if we think we know everything, or nearly know it, we're fooling ourselves

How does this apply to SF? I would say that working within the framework of what we know scientifically at the moment, and what we can extrapolate as possibles, SF has every right - and duty - to re-invent science, provided that this is loosely within the compass of Reason, baseline 1976, 77, 78...By this I mean that Faster than Light spacedrives are on for me (even though current calculations prove their unreasonableness, as of now) not merely as plot devices for getting from A to B - because Faster than Light drives are not outside the compass of Reason; they can be thought about, lucidly enough, as possible future technology. I say "loosely" within the compass of Reason, because actually SF can be too technically accurate. It can be accurate in the context of its time - and plain wrong. A good example of this is Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*, where Stapledon wants to write about a mental voyage contacting life in the galaxy but ties himself to the James Jeans theory of how planets were formed (by the close approach of one star to another, tearing off a gob of matter to condense into planets) - by which theory planets would be relatively rare. Stapledon had to spend an awful lot of time speeding through barren stars before he could get down to the subject of his book; whereas, writing it now, when the dominant theory is that planets are a normal byproduct of star formation, he wouldn't have had this problem, caused by being too scrupulous! At the same time I respect him for working within the compass of Reason of his time. That's what makes him an SF writer, whereas David Lindsay's magnificent *Voyage to Arcturus*, (where the mode of travel is bottling starlight, which contains "back-rays", is a fantasy for it was written outside the compass of Reason; even though some new cosmological speculations about Action at a Distance logically require what are in effect "back-rays". Does this mean that a book can be non SF at one period, and then fortuitously become SF later on? No. Because *Voyage to Arcturus* wasn't written within what I'm calling the Compass of Reason, of its period. SF should and must take liberties with scientific orthodoxy; but what is known now, and more importantly, what is known not-yet-to-be-known, but which is still potentially knowable, should be the starting point: and into this latter category fall the central enigmas of Why Life is, Why a Universe is, is there any structural relationship between Life and a Universe, What is the evolutionary potential of Man and Man's Mind - the growing tips of scientific speculation, and at the same time "unknowables" which we can still ask relatively informed, if outrageous, questions about.

It's partly because of the contradictions between writing within the framework of (a) the expectations of the SF genre, and precisely how much readers, publishers, reviewers will allow the SF writer to explore; versus profitably rehashing old ground and sticking to stock cliches; and (b) the framework of what we know now, when SF declares itself to be about the Future, the Alien, the Other which by definition we can't know, that I think Barry Malzberg has opted out of SF. His 1976 novel *Galaxies* is a set of sardonic notes towards a novel, rather than a novel, partly as a satire on genre limitations, reader-demands, publisher-demands; partly because he knows that ideally

he should be writing what cannot yet be written, by definition. To quote Malzberg: "This is not a novel but merely a set of notes for one. The novel itself remains unutterably beyond our time, and hence outside of the devices of fiction...These notes are surely as close to the narrative as anyone of this time can get, because the novel cannot be written for almost two thousand years...the very language of the techniques necessary to write it will not be ours for two millenia". So Malzberg opts out. He is right in what the book should have been about - and just try to imagine any writer two hundred years ago, let alone two thousand, being able to write or even conceive the meaning of such sentences as "this book cannot be written for almost 2000 years"! Malzberg isn't as trapped as he thinks. But he is wrong, science-fictionally, (though not sociologically) in writing it as a satire. He takes refuge, in a word, in literature - bip, slick literature where black holes and tachyons become a deliberate kitsch, a stylishly employed nonsense, to ornament a stretch of prose.

Quite a lot of SF today is taking refuge in literature. I think the much-touted convergence between SF and literature is a Bad Thing, for it makes SF simply part of the literary game, to be played smartly and stylishly (as opposed to clumsily and crudely, as in the old days). This particular literary confection, SF, should henceforth be served with chopsticks, not a shovel. But it is only a confection; a sub-category of literary art. I've read a lot of recent stories which are written beautifully beyond the dreams - or capacity? - of the pulp writers of the 30s or 40s; yet which amount, in spirit, to a mere gastronomy of words, which have forgotten that the point of food is to nourish, to fuel, to build. I don't suggest that meals shouldn't be served well, on principle; they should be. Everything should be done as well as possible. Nor am I ignoring the fact that the art of cookery, and the act of eating together, play an important role in human communication and interaction rituals. Cookery and the act of eating builds communication as well as body protein; but the whole business can become grotesquely exaggerated, and too often is, in the affluent West - till it becomes non-functional, over-specialised, a dead end. Likewise, overstressing the literary virtues of the new SF is to lose the point of SF. Which is not to say that anything should be badly written; just that if it is only well-written and that's all - even though it permutates Alien Consciousness, Black Holes, what have you, as icing on the cake of the enduring human condition that literature so cleverly reveals to us - then it's not enough.

The point is that the human condition isn't enduring; nor is it art; nor is Man as we know him/her. I'm not talking about the prospect of nuclear war or extinction of the species by pollution or whatever cause, but simply about the fact that we are an evolving, changing species. Literature is part of the evolutionary process. It only has meaning within this biological and social context. And what is unique about SF is that it consciously takes as its subject matter this sense of Man changing within and by contact with the physical universe at large - which is a very different thing from its subject matter being "the human condition" which most Great Literature is supposed to be about; for most Great Literature assumes that the human condition is unchanging down the ages. This may be true in the short term, but it is certainly not so in the long term - or we wouldn't have evolved into the beings we are now, we'd still be frozen in Nature, without language, without tools, without culture. SF can aim - at least in theory, even if in practice it betrays this a lot of the time - at this far view. That's what Malzberg was talking about: the ideal of SF, the look into the future, the bok at change, really radical change; and the paradox of how we are to guess at it from our baseline here. SF isn't a sub-unit of the Novel, since the Novel - which we tend to assume to be so representative of the Human Condition, the obviously valid art form par excellence of our culture, for discussing Man - is only a creature of the last 200 years. SF has split off from the mainstream of fiction, yes. But it mutated; it became something else.

It became a more "naked" literature (with the attendant "embarrassments" of nudity: visible imperfections by the standard of the "well-dressed" book) because it takes as its subject the idea of life in the universe, rather than simply ideas about contemporary living patterns. What we think of as Classic Literature is really a subconscious literature, wrapped up short-sightedly (though with microscopic attention to detail and style) in the near-present, or more accurately the cultural backing of the near-past.

I was recently reading Lyall Watson's *The Romeo Error* with its extraordinary reports and speculations about the faith-healers of the Philippines who can materialise and dematerialise matter from inside the body; about Kirlian photography of human and plant auras; about the possible existence of a mental field, or hierarchy of mental fields, which may explain ghosts, astral projections, reincarnation and many other inexplicables - which until now have been outside of science, but are now fast becoming possible science. There are plenty of demented books on the market about Atlantis, Flying Saucers, Chariots of the Gods etc, where fact and fancy trip each other up in a hopeless tangle; and it's possible to interpret these books as a sign of Western decadence, the failure of faith in technology, the resort to a bankrupt spurious mysticism drawing wildly upon all and every tradition, every nook and corner for its proofs. Lyall Watson's book doesn't read to me like an irrational one. Acupuncture, for instance, demonstrably works; and what is acupuncture based upon? The existence of invisible force-fields, lines of force in the body. A whole lot of fundamental mysteries about the nature of life and relationship between life and the cosmos at large are about to open up; when they do, there will be a whole Grand Canyon of them to explore - and they will radically alter our present provisional concepts of Life, Death, Evolution, Mind, the Universe. Which is what SF already does - as an entertainment medium. It explores the unknown, rather than sophisticating our knowledge of the known. What does the Great Tradition of the Novel have to say about these areas? Precious little, on the whole. It can't have. It cannot take them for its main theme and still be the Great Traditional Novel; it has to subordinate them to exploring the consensus Human Condition, whereas the truth is that the Human Condition and all our current understanding of it is subordinate to larger, still mysterious areas which are only just now opening up. Fundamental mystery and "alienness", human or nonhuman, can only be a plot device within the Novel, not its prime theme - whereas it can be the prime theme of SF. To be sure, great writers - Dostoevsky, Balzac, Strindberg - have touched upon these ones; but Strindberg's *Inferno*, for instance, has to be treated by the literary critics as the "factual records of a diseased mind" or as "anguish transmuted into art" or as "making symbolism the bridge between naturalism and the occult and in so doing greatly influencing Dadaism and Surrealism" - it has to be treated as a literary phenomenon, or as a biographical footnote to the author of Great Plays. So, outrageous speculations (in this case alchemical) must be subordinated to the ordinary, the normal, the human tragic condition, albeit of a mind at the end of its tether. Consequently Strindberg remains safely literary, when all's said and done. SF by contrast sets out to explore the unknown; for SF to turn around and apologise that it is all really just a literary metaphor for the human condition in an era of scientific breakthrough and technological impact, seems a miserable cowardice - even if the literary laurels of non-sci respect from critics and academics are an agreeable enticement. In some respects even, though rooted in modern Western science (and indeed needing to be written with the Compass of Reason conditioned by this, to be science fiction) SF is also almost verging on the mystical tradition of the East or the worldview of American Indians, on what would till recently have been classified as sorcery - worldviews which are now becoming possible science; for essentially SF is about alternative reality, alternative kinds of beings, alternative humanity, alternative Earths. It's a medium for alternative worlds. So there's a paradox here, that SF should work within the Compass of Reason, yet push out constantly from this (at a time, be it said, when this compass is plainly enlarging). To choose to use science

ideas and possible-science ideas as kitsch, as stylishly employed rococo, to produce baubles of Art, because the art world has decided they can be classified fashionable, strikes me as very unfortunate, at a time when on all sides there really are signs of a process of radical change in the directions of a higher evolutionary state of society and human consciousness, mediated by our science and technology; as well as great pressure for this. SF has to think harder. SF has to generate new thoughts about the world, Man, Mind, the Universe. And this - here's paradox number two - is the hard task; for how can one think what is as-yet unthought? How can one really write about Aliens or Future Man, even if one feels one has to? Well, SF can certainly try to mimic the experience of these, and the more convincing the mimicry the better. Still, the temptation is to use the genre-cliches programmed into SF, as mere decoration, a meaningless elegant shorthand whose form signifies more than its content, and lapses back into literature - just as Harry Malmberg at the end of *Galaxies* lapses back from the Black Hole to a small town in New Jersey, as something utterly amazing in itself. I see his point, I see why he has to end this way, and bid adieu to SF in the process (presuming that it really is adieu!) but I'm not knocking the book as such, for I find it extremely thought-provoking. But I still think his solution is wrong, and unnecessary. SF isn't ruled out, simply because we haven't yet the conceptual tools to indicate the Alien, or Future Man who will also be quite alien to us - whilst this is what SF is nominally about. SF can try. This is what it is all about. And it is at least able to show what is needed. This is why we read SF -even if we're frequently disappointed by what we read. This is also why, in seeing Man as part of an evolutionary growth process and in seeing SF as a "baked" literature trying to grapple with the implications of this, I suggest(perversely, it may seem) that SF is a way of thinking which should be trying to put itself out of business- because one day SF will be as obsolete as a stone axe - because it has fulfilled its specific role, thrown up by the present stage in historical, cultural, mental development, of creating a climate of thought and feeling about Future Man who awaits us; and because there will be other, finer tools. But meanwhile there is SF - and let's at least fashion that stone axe as well as we can! This is why I think that SF writers (far from treading well-worn ground and doing what they know that they can do) should try to write what they can't yet write - in order that we, as humans, can think what we can't yet think. Perhaps the language of SF is all wrong. Perhaps we can't write this sort of thing in current normal languages - and what we need are new symbolic languages of greater precision and power, produced by close co-operation between psychologists, linguists, mathematicians and communication engineers; and that actually fiction would be too imprecise, too foggy, to be written in them (or perhaps too terse, too simple-mindedly explicit) (4). But we can mimic this future; we can suggest it, for the present. (The trouble with such non-SF being that it mimics what is already here - SF has to mimic what isn't here yet!) And that's why I said, on the Manchester panel, that SF should aim to phase itself out of existence. Then it will have succeeded.

We must remember that science is still very junior; the human race is very junior. SF can contribute to the growing-up of Man -entertainingly, if it is a sort of toy; and there's nothing trivial or unserious about toys, they're vital to the learning process - and artistically, for there's no reason for it to be crafted clumsily or carelessly. SF is about perspective; the view into distances. To put SF itself into perspective, it is a small part of a very long process of change and evolution of human life and consciousness. Right now it can and should be a growth-tip of that process. It may fall to the Barbarians, who churn out programmed trash, or to the Aesthetes, who would make it purely decorative, merely an aspect of the Craft of Letters; however its real role is an evolutionary one, and if there's to be any evolution, there must be a withering away of the earlier stages - which we are still at, right now.

We are at an early stage in human history; an early stage in consciousness. Over the past ten million years, as Lyall Watson remarks in his first book *Supernature*, Nature has equipped us with an enormously cerebral cortex of seemingly unlimited capacity. Yet we use only a minute part of it. We are only partially aware of ourselves. "At the moment, we are like a small family of squatters who have taken over a vast palace but find no need to move beyond the comfortable, serviced apartment in one corner of the basement." (5) So far we have only had brief glimpses into the other rooms. I think that human physical science is only in its infancy; life science and the science of consciousness are only in their infancy too. I think, I hope, that we are on the brink of the most exciting breakthroughs in our understanding of the Cosmos, of our own consciousness - and in what way cosmos and consciousness may be related.

This is basically what my own SF books are about. *The Embedding*, among other things - such as political and ecological unscrupulousness - is about the relation between Mind and Nature, the relation between language, the logic of human thought and the logic of Nature. *The Jonah Kit*, among other things - again, unscrupulousness - is about the possibility of a rapport between human and non-human thought processes, the non-human in this case being one of those "aliens" we share our planet with, the whales; as well as about the idea that mind and universe are inter-related - that we are in the sort of universe we are in because we are here to observe it: what, then, is the connection between thought and reality, cosmologically? My next novel due out (in January '77) *The Martian Inca*, is about the possibility of extending our fragmentary knowledge of ourselves, by grasping our own thought processes "externally" in a kind of visionary projection on to the outside world of the inward world of thought; along with idea that such access to the rest of the "vast palace" of mind is not only possible, but is actually programmed in to us evolutionarily by the dynamics of the universe in which we have evolved.

This is the area I intend to go on exploring in my own SF in the future. I don't want to label it "inner space", because I feel sure that "inner space" and "outer space" are intimately linked, through the patterning of the universe; and because I'm in no way against Outer Space, Space Travel, etc. I don't see NASA essentially as an expensive public sideshow, the money for which could be better spent on human beings on this world. I look forward with the greatest excitement to what we will find out directly about Mars, Jupiter and if at all possible (and I hope it will be possible) the Stars - and don't see this as a contradiction of the expansion of human consciousness, but rather as a complement to it. The really stupid and dirty waste is the whole nuclear weapons, missile, bomber, submarine and general warfare expenditure - compared with which the money spent on Space is really very small indeed.

Yet the Arms Races, and human political madness continue. We are very like a baby with a live hand grenade for a rattle. To be realistic, tragedies and disasters are a very plausible part of our future scope. So I haven't felt able to write purely upbeat books. They wouldn't be an honest model of where we are at present. People have complained to me that *The Embedding* and *The Jonah Kit* end in complete disaster. So many hopes are raised, so many are brutally dashed. My answer to that is that the potential breakthroughs in understanding in both books almost succeed. Success is conceivable. That it isn't actual is, I think, a true reflection of the world we inhabit - the world of babies with hand grenades. But that it is still conceivable is, I think, something hopeful, something verging on triumph.

However, the really triumphant breakthroughs in human consciousness and human exploration of both inner and outer space worlds together - the coming evolutionary climb - will mean that science fiction which anticipates this dual evolution (technological and mental); the science fiction which seeks to mimic it, before the event, which seeks to create a climate of expectation of radical change, will no longer be necessary; because the reality will have overtaken

us, and we will be as aliens to the infant humans we still are today (whose achievements, needless to say, show great potential). Then we can put aside our kindergarten toys - which in no way diminishes those toys, least of all that important learning-toy which is science fiction.

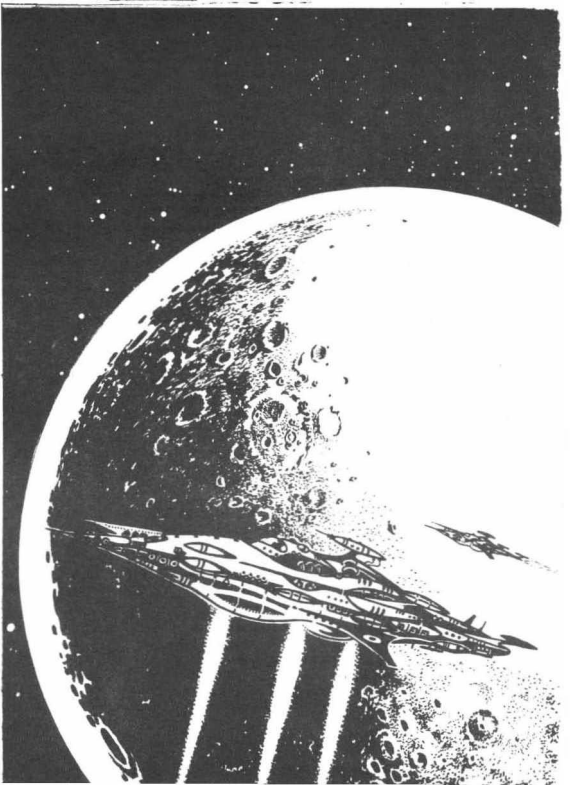
(1) Ian Mitroff, "On studying the Moon scientists" New Scientist, 27.12.73

(2) Euan MacKie, "A challenge to the integrity of science?" New Scientist, 11.1.73

(3) Leland Allen, "The rise and fall of polywater" New Scientist, 16.8.73

(4) Joel Elkes, "Language and the human psyche" in Muses and Young, Consciousness and Reality (New York, Avon Books, 1974)

(5) Lyall Watson, Supernature (London, Coronet Books, 1975) p. 238



EDGAR FAWCETT: GHOST IN THE MANSION OF SCIENCE FICTION HISTORY

BRIAN STABLEFORD

The reprinting of works of "antique" science fiction in sets designed primarily for sale to American universities has become fashionable. Two series by the Gregg Press, two by Hyperion Press and one set by the Garland Press have rescued pre-Gernsbackian scientific romances and placed them alongside notable works from within the SF establishment. British novels like Robert Cromie's *Plunge into Space* Percy Greg's *Across the Zodiac* and even David Russen's *Iter Lunare* are scheduled for much recovery, as are Otto Gail's *Shot into Infinity* (German), Erle Cox's *Out of the Silence* (Australian) and Charles deFontenay's *Star* (French). It seems curious, therefore, that one of the most significant American contributors to science fiction *avant la lettre* should have been completely ignored.

Edgar Fawcett was not only a writer of science fiction, but a man who wrote a manifesto for such a *genre* thirty years before Gernsback. In the "epistolatory preme" to one of his speculative novels, *The Ghost of Guy Thyrle* (1895) (1) he had the following to say:

"Perhaps I am only a poor pioneer, in the direction of trying to write the modern wonder-tale. It seems to me that this will never die till what we once called the Supernatural and now (so many of us!) call the Unknowable, dies as well. Mankind loves the marvellous; but his intelligence now rejects, in great measure, the marvellous unallied with sanity of presentment. We may grant that final causes are still dark as of old, but we will not accept mere myth and fable clad in the guise of truth. Romance, pushed back from the grooves of exploitation in which it once so easily moved, seeks new paths, and persists in finding them. It must find them, if at all, among those dim regions which the torch of science has not yet bathed in full beams of discovery. Its visions and spectres and mysteries must there or nowhere abide."

He goes on to discuss in general terms the nature of Romance, reaching the following conclusion:

"Romance is a shadow cast by the unknown, and follows it with necessitous pursuit. It can only perish when human knowledge has reached omniscience. Till then it may alter with our mental progress in countless ways, but the two existences are really one. Books like "Zanoni" and "A Strange Story" thrilled us in earlier years. Nowadays we want a different kind of romanticism, a kind that accommodates itself more naturally to our intensified skeptic tastes."

And finally, he makes this judgment:

"To make our romances acceptable with the world of modern readers, we must clothe them in rationalistic raiment...I should name them "realistic romances" - stories where the astonishing and the peculiar are blent with the possible and accountable. They may be as wonderful as you will, but they must not touch on the mere flimsiness of miracle. They can be excessively improbable, but their improbability must be based upon scientific fact, and not upon fantastic, emotional, and purely imaginative groundwork."

(Cont. on page 47)

THE INFINITY BOX

All the Vector regular reviewers plus honoured visitors and new faces survey the latest publications in the field. John Brunner finds the Two Cultures "alive and sick in the United States"...Brian Stableford takes Corgi Books to task, and finds Dave Kyle's SF History "facile and juvenile...as History, in any meaningful sense of the word - it is a joke"...John Clute looks at Wonds M. McIntyre and her "American Pale" novel...Mike Dickinson gets "tenged" by Vernor Vinge...John Harvey gets to like James White...David Wingrove proves more and more prolific as he examines Silverberg, Dick, Russ, Aldiss, Cordwainer Smith and gets incensed by David Downing's Future Rock...Peter Hyde looks at Children of Dune and finds it "a disappointment"... Brian Griffin discovers the delights of Vonnegut and The Magic of Findhorn... Chris Evans displays opposing feelings about Silverberg and McCaffrey... James Corley ploughs loyally through the slush-pile of Hals review books . Chris Morgan looks at some good things from British newcomers, and bad ones from American names...

...and David Pringle just fails to make the deadline with his review of Low-Flying Aircraft, the latest Ballard collection...which means a wait until January to read this, along with James Corley on Brian Aldiss, more by David Wingrove on Philip K. Dick, plus lots more by Chris Evans, Chris Morgan, Brian Griffin, Brian Stableford, John Harvey, plus whatever else comes in in the next two months.

SCIENCE FICTION AT LARGE edited by Peter Nicholls. Gollancz, London: 1976; 224 pp; £5.95, ISBN 0-575-02178-0

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This book results from the 1975 lecture series offered at the ICA under the same title. All ten lectures are represented, though not all by transcripts of their talks. Edward de Bono's contribution is a paper written for publication elsewhere that covers much the same ground as his talk. Harry Harrison spoke ad lib, somewhat at the mercy of his audience, and the essay here is one that was compiled by him after the talk. Alvin Toffler has only a few paragraphs here, the rest of what he said being on offer in The Eco Spasm Report. There is one extra essay, by Philip K. Dick, who was supposed to speak but could not, and was replaced by Robert Sheckley.

Papers designed for verbal delivery are not necessarily equally interesting in cold print - they are, so to speak, orchestrated for performance rather than scored for perusal. In approaching this collection, therefore, the reader must not expect the standardised efficiency typical of cold print. He must expect polemics, slightly lurid metaphors, ringing phrases. Peter Nicholls cleverly guides the attitude of the reader in his introductions to the pieces by noting the appearance of the speakers and describing their style of delivery as well as (or instead of) making the usual biographical notes. This is a good strategem.

Reading the book makes me wish that I had attended the lectures themselves, to have experienced instead of consuming them at second hand. This is not to say that they lose a great deal in transcription. Only two read slightly awkwardly - one of them being Peter Nicholls' own piece, whose lurid metaphors sit slightly uneasily on the page, the other being Harry Harrison's summary after the fact, which, understandably, lacks vigour (something that could never be said of a live Harry Harrison performance).

Peter Nicholls cast his net wide in finding people who would have interesting things to say, and even after substitutions the eleven who take the field here is a very strong team indeed. There is an astonishing range in the coherence of the comments and the perspectives explored. Some of the speakers had axes to grind that were peripheral to the main topic, but the fact that science fiction remains supplementary to their main concerns does not render these articles any the less interesting. Edward de Bono came to talk about lateral thinking, Alvin Toffler about future shock and eco-catastrophe scenarios, John Taylor about speculation in science and John Brunner about the evils of pseudoscience, and all refer to science fiction, if at all, obliquely or by way of comparison. But their thoughts remain appropriate to the overall brief. Far more remarkable, perhaps, are the indirect approaches executed by Alan Garner and Philip K. Dick. Garner offers an autobiographical account of psychological experience and derangement, and his painful relationship with his own works and their imaginative (mythical) content. Dick goes even further, offering an account of the universe and man's relationship with it that is either pure science fiction or rather adventurous hypothesising. Alongside such bizarre statements the essays which stick more closely to the point look a little pale. Ursula le Guin, the model of painstaking sanity, offers a measured and slightly patronising account of the way that SF writers might aspire to write proper novels. There is a devastating argument by Thomas M. Disch, seeking to explain the literary shortcomings of SF in relation to the particular species of audience demand which control it. If only this were more closely argued, and its analyses conducted in more detail, this could be the basis for a competent sociological account of the uses and gratifications of the genre. In the midst of all this, drifting in a haze of bewilderment like one of his own archetypal characters, is Robert Sheckley, whose piece is redolent with amber and delicate wit.

Of all the books on science fiction which have flooded forth in recent years this is by far and away the best. It is a great jungle of ideas, all-but-trackless, but an equipment for beginning to understand what SF is all about it is unparalleled. It provides an inordinately elaborate multidimensional commentary on the genre, exposing its strengths and weaknesses, its functions and its uses. These pieces are the work of intelligent, involved writers, and though each in its way is narrow, there is nothing narrow about the whole. Better than all the pseudohistorical studies and tarnish effusions and critical diatribes this book conveys something of the possibilities inherent in the science fictional imagination, and reveals many of the ways in which it relates to the real world about us and to the unreal worlds that are only potentially there.

A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION by David Kyle, Hamlyn; London, 1976, 173 pp; £3.95; ISBN 0-600-38193-5

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Here we have yet another big, gaudy SF picture-book. It is nicely-produced, using good quality paper, and not terribly expensive. Cheap, in fact, is a good way to describe it in more ways than one.

The pictures are standard fare. If they are not precisely the same illustrations from the same issues of the magazines as those we have seen before they are not noticeably different. They have not been chosen for their originality (or for their beauty, or for their technical expertise) but for their typicality, their essential familiar hatchiness. Nostalgia may help to make the pictures exciting and attractive to the committed SF fan, but it will not serve to make them interesting to anyone that burden must be assumed by the text. The text, in this case, is not up to the job.

The text is supposed, in this case, to illuminate the pictures by providing a historical account of science fiction, thus establishing a contextual background against which the illustrations might be set. Even if the job were done properly there would still, I feel, be something of a gulf between the text and the pictures, which really require independent analysis, but the fact is that the job is not done properly.

There are, if one wants to be simple-minded about it, two species of history. One tells you who did what, where, when, and how. The other tries to explain why. Science fiction history has, in the past, avoided the second species of historical thought and analysis like the proverbial plague, and even in its tentative attempts at the preliminaries has proved lamentably inadequate.

While it is undoubtedly true that some race horses are drastically improved in performance by the fitting of blinkers, the same is not true of historians. Unfortunately, SF's

historians are primarily noted for their heavily blinkered outlook on life. Because the notion of science fiction is recent, historians have had to journey back into the literary wilderness of previous centuries in search of its roots and antecedents. Some, they have found. Others they have failed to find. Others, however, they have deliberately ignored or rejected. The reasons for this process of selection and wilful blindness is to do with the type of blinkers favoured. In their attempts to make a simple and coherent story (with a pre selected moral) out of the history of science fiction avant la lettre they have settled for synthesising an imaginary set of relationships between literary texts because the real ones are too difficult to cope with. What has emerged from this kind of exercise is two very different pseudohistorical daisy-chains, each pretending to be the family tree of science fiction. One (the elitist doctrine) regards labelled SF as the aberrant and embarrassing excrescence of a literary tradition once noble and good but now besmirched by a pulpish leprosy, and thus regarded by the healthy as unclean. The other (the fan doctrine) regards labelled SF as the one pure elixir, and historical antecedents and fellow-travellers are seen as interesting to the degree that they are similar to it.

David Kyle belongs to the latter camp, committed to the importance, the vitality and the merit of pulp SF. As a viewpoint this is no more inherently absurd than its counterpart, but because the counterpart has an already established paradigm to which it may egregiously affiliate it has a chance of winning friends in literary circles. The fan viewpoint has not, and is therefore more vulnerable and has a tendency to defensiveness. Its vulnerability was never so exposed as in Kyle's version. His account is largely second- hand - it is the gospel according to Sam Moskowitz, with one or two gaps filled by borrowing from Brian Aldiss (a strange procedure in that elsewhere Aldiss becomes the hypothetical devil's advocate whose views must be vigorously opposed and demolished).

As a second-hand dealer in Moskowitzian gaucherie Kyle is unexceptional. Where his own voice is apparent - in his sustained defence of fan opinions versus elitist criticism - his incompetence is awesome. His arguments are facile and juvenile, amounting to, I like it, and therefore it's good because it contains the things I like.

As a source of information this book adds nothing at all to already-extant sources. As a commentary upon these sources it is pathetic. As history - in any meaningful sense of the word - it is a joke. In my opinion this book makes no contribution whatsoever to science fiction, or to the debate surrounding it. It may, however, appeal to those people who like it, and will therefore maintain that it's good, because it contains the things they like.

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ANATOMY OF WONDER: SCIENCE FICTION edited by Neil Barron; R. R. Bowker; New York, 1976. 471 pp; price not known; ISBN 0-8352-0884-2

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This book is part of a series entitled "Bibliographic Guides for Contemporary Collections", whose concept, according to the foreword, "was derived from a realisation that many librarians, students, teachers and lay persons lack in-depth guidance to subjects of current interest". The other books in the series are on Cities, Cooking for Entertaining and Progressivism and Muckraking, which suggests that we are not so far out in the hinterlands of Academe as that proud boast might suggest. Anyhow, the book attempts to provide a basic guide to science fiction. It has four main sections: pre-1870, 1870-1926 ("The Scientific Romance"), 1926-37 ("The Gernsback Era") and 1937-75. Each section has an introduction on the kind of ideas prominent in the period, followed by a list of the most important titles, including date of initial publication and a note on current availability and price. Each title carries a one-paragraph annotation which summarises the plot of the story and offers some slight critical commentary upon it. Certain titles, marked with stars, form a "core collection" - a basic library of the genre.

Section 1 notes 50 items, section 2 has 177, section 3 has 73 and section 4 has 701. There is a supplementary list of juvenile novels (98 items) and a series of appendices covering "History, Criticism and Biography", "Bibliographies, Indexes and Teaching Aids", "Magazines and Book Review Indexes", "Periodicals" and "Literary Awards". There is also a core collection checklist and a list of collections held by various universities in the USA.

An enterprise of this magnitude crammed into 471 pages is bound to have its shortcomings. It is easy to point out errors of omission, especially in view of the fact that the compilers of the various sections show a distinctly chauvinistic bent - many minor American works are listed while notable English writers (William Hope Hodgson, Edwin Lester Arnold, Marie Corelli, Richard Jefferies, Robert William Cole, John Martin, Eden Phillpotts, John Gloag) are left out and some of the most important French writers (Camille Flammarion, J. H. Rosny aîné, Claude Farrère, Maurice Renard) are ignored. Some of the modern East European writers are noted, but older ones (Tsiolkovsky, Belyaev and Alexei Tolstoy) are not here. Similarly, it would be easy enough to mount an arduous quarrel regarding the editors' selection of a "core collection", which - even granted the American bias - seems strangely equipped in omitting Clarke's City and the Stars and Vonnegut's Sirens of Titan and containing nothing at all by Jack Vance, Henry Kuttner, Robert Sheckley, Charles Harness, Harry Harrison and many others. This kind of quibbling, while not irrelevant, would be possible in respect of any set of editorial judgements. Conceding the editors their patriotic prejudices and minor failings, however, it seems to me that there are some more serious problems.

The worst aspect of the book is the way that some of the books listed are annotated. The annotations in Sections 1 and 2 are by Robert Philmus and Thomas Clareson respectively, and are competently executed, but Ivor Rogers, compiler of Section 3, and the two compilers of Section 4 - John Pfeiffer and Joseph de Bolt - are not in the same league. Here is Rogers' notation to Conan the Conqueror:

"The SF reader should know the Conan books which have inspired dozens of others in the so-called sword and sorcery vein.

Conan is a barbarian who wanders around pre-historic Europe getting into fights, wooing women, and escaping from supernatural and monstrous enemies. The SF element is minimal, but the sword and sorcery books are often called SF because they are written by SF writers. The Conan books are racist, sexist trash, which combine a simpering sexuality with mind-numbingly adventure. They appeal mostly to readers as simple-minded as Conan himself, but I confess to a liking for them in small doses. At least one is required reading, any will do -

This is not helpful. It fails to describe the content of the Conan stories in any meaningful way. It employs abuse instead of analysis. Whether the Conan books deserve such treatment is quite irrelevant - what should be provided is information and guidance, not a catalogue of insults. The expression of approval or disapproval might justifiably be included in such a note as an afterthought, but it should never replace the informational content of the annotation. The example I have chosen is an extreme one, but sections 3 and 4 are unfortunately replete with reactive opinions, which displace a good deal of useful description and analytical comment. In a book with the ambitions and pretensions of this one, such conduct is inexcusable.

Secondly, it is to be regretted that pure ignorance (to be differentiated from editorial bias or poor judgment) sometimes shows through. Again, Rogers is the main offender, and provides the following examples, but he is not alone. The only work listed by John Taine is Green Fire, one of the author's earliest and poorest works. Rogers claims that the novel is typical, which is quite untrue. It is a trivial secret weapon story, while the best, the most important and the most typical of Taine's work is to be found in the evolutionary fantasies (The Time Stream, The Iron Star, Before the Dawn, The Crystal Horde and Seeds of Life). It is these novels that are of interest to the student of SF. Similarly though Wollheim's Martian Odyssey collection and The Black Flame are noted, The New Adam - his important contribution to the superman-as-hero mythology - is not. Charles Williams is included, but the work summarised is the grail-quest detective story War in Heaven - the two novels he wrote which are relevant to the scientific imagination (Shadows of Ecstacy and Many Dimensions) are not mentioned. Andre Maurois' A Private Universe is included, though it contains only a couple of fragments from an imaginary future history, while The Weight of Souls and The Thought-Reading Machine - both significant SF novels - are omitted. Merritt's Ship of Ishtar and The Face in the Abyss are noted, but the one place he wrote with any interest relative to scientific speculation, The Metal Monster, gets not a footnote.

I do not think that any of these misleading entries arise from editorial judgment - which would have to be peculiar indeed to create them - but from simple carelessness and unfamiliarity with the literature. Such incompetence as this must undermine what could have and should have been a most worthwhile endeavour. The literature of the scientific imagination has been around for so long without any interest being shown in its status as a special category that putting together a reasonable reference collection must be a librarian's nightmare. Many students of the genre, whose interest is not chronological and whose time is limited, could find the kind of summary notation this book employs to provide an immensely helpful guide to his studies. But where there is great opportunity for guiding the innocent, there is also considerable opportunity to mislead, and Anatomy of Wonder is, alas, misleading in many respects.

It would be unfair not to comment on the book's strengths as well as its weaknesses. It is, in many ways, a useful guide to the ideas contained in the literature and their historical distribution. But it must be used with care - ideally only by those who are already aware of its shortcomings (although, of course, they are the people who need it least). I find it difficult to estimate whether the usefulness of the book might be totally outweighed by its capacity to mislead. At worst, it could guide research which is already channelled away from the most interesting resources still further into stagnant backwaters, and I fear this may be its fate. Used properly, it could have done so much to alleviate that problem.

SUPERNOVA 1 - edited anonymously; Faber, London; 1976; 225 pages; £3.95, ISBN 0-571-10984-5

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Faber's answer to the Gollancz/Sunday Times Best SF is a patchy package of eleven new stories and one reprint from Science Fiction Monthly by six new writers, without a named editor. In fact, one of the six - Robert Holdstock - can no longer be classed as a new writer, now that he has one novel (Eimo from Faber) in print and a second awaiting publication, so his two stories might be expected to be the best in this volume. One, "The Time Beyond Age", is good indeed. As an experiment into the process of ageing, two children are isolated and artificially aged at the rate of a month per day. They mature, marry and wither, while a team of medical researchers keeps them disease-free. As the subjects' ages increase to a hundred, then a hundred-and-fifty, tension mounts and a watch is kept for signs of any further physical or mental development. The quiet style of the writing adds realism, thereby amplifying the horrific nature of the whole project (set in the 1980s), right up to the grisly climax. The second Holdstock tale is much poorer.

For my money the author who shows up best here - just beating Robert Holdstock into second place - is Michael Scott, with a long novelette, "Gaming" (really three loosely-linked episodes). In an after-the-bomb future where people have regressed to a medieval level and developed ESP. Despite following such a well-worn track, Michael Scott manages to maintain reader interest. He has wit, subtlety, a talent for conveying time and place, and a knack for using just the right word. Once he learns to strengthen his plotting and to curb his liking for philosophical contemplation he may become a very good writer indeed.

Some distance behind is Cliff Gardner with "Spider Web", a story of life on North Sea oil-rigs and town-sized dwelling platforms after 150 years of inflation. Following an unspecified disaster. This is a juvenile adventure story, but good of its kind.

Martin Ricketts offers two competent but uninspired tales which might have gone down well twenty years ago. One concerns a couple of space scouts who unravel an improbable alien life cycle. The other is about the losing - and finding - of one's senses. Out there in the great void between Earth and Proxima Centauri during the first few FTL flights.

Robin Douglas (the only female present) and Edward Allen contribute three stories each with precious little originality or credibility between them.

I cannot believe that this volume represents the best of Britain's up-and-coming SF writers: certainly Messrs Holdstock, Stell and Ricketts have had better work published elsewhere. While Supernova is something of a misnomer (an overstatement, anyway) there is enough good stuff to make it worth borrowing from your local library.

IN THE PROBLEM PIT AND OTHER STORIES by Frederik Pohl; Corgi, London, 1978; 85 p; 143 pp; ISBN 0-552-10334-9

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

You know how some pop groups capitalise on a good single by using it as the title track of an LP and filling the rest of that LP with one or two good old numbers and a lot of rubbish? It happens with short story collections, too.

"In the Problem Pit" is a good novelette which appeared in F&SF in 1971. In a dream between jury service and national service, a problem-solving group of Americans of varied age and sex is shut up in a comfortable cave, away from all outside influences. Participants may volunteer or wait to be drafted. The group is not released until it has solved sufficient (self-suggested) problems, which may be of a personal, local or national nature. This is a common technique in the 1980s, and the average duration of a group is three weeks. I am full of admiration for the idea, which offers great scope for characterisation and human interest, though I feel the author could have done rather more with it.

The closing story in the collection is twenty years old and still a joy to read. "The Man Who Ate The World" tells of a time when people are forced to over-consume in order to maintain full employment in a heavily-automated world. Only the rich can afford to live moderately in this topsy-turvy economy: the poor must occupy palaces, over-eat and spend their lives in frantic, wasteful consumption. Such an upbringing turns Bobby Trumis into a compulsive consumer. As an adult he consumes more and more, becoming a big problem.

There are two other stories here from the 1950s which make good reading ("To Mee Another Mountain" and "What to do Until the Analyst Comes") but the remaining eight pieces (including two articles from Clarion anthologies) vary from okay to pretty poor. There's even a time paradox tale dug up from Planet Stories, 1949 vintage.

As most of the better stories here are easily obtained from other sources I suggest that all except the completists amongst you should give this particular collection a miss.

HIERO'S JOURNEY by Sterling Lanier, Panther; St Albans, 1978; 75p; 348 pp; ISBN 0-586-04185-0

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

A sprawling adventure set in a mutated, pair-ridden North America some five thousand years after The Crash, this has a wealth of background detail (in the manner of a Jack Vance novel) but lacks depth and originality.

A young warrior-cum-priest-cum-woodsman of American descent is sent south-eastwards across North America to seek the marvels of our long-dead civilisation - computers in particular. He is Hiero by name and most definitely hero by nature, being tall, strong, ruggedly handsome, clever and a talented telepath. With him goes Ekeete, a large mutated mouse, which is intelligent and telepathic. Along the way they are joined by a small brown bear which is - believe it or not - another telepath and of human intelligence. But Hiero's prospects of becoming a second Dr. Doolittle are diminished by the fact that about half the animals around are the foul minions of the Unclean - an evil brotherhood dedicated to the eradication of decent, god fearing heroes. And most animal life - whether controlled by the Unclean or not - has grown, via radiation-induced mutation, to an alarming extent: weasels are ten feet long, baboons are as big as gorillas, and snapping turtles are the size of a small car. There is even a giant frog with eyes ten feet apart, which weighs fifteen tons and manages to leap well over a hundred feet at a time. [Totally impossible, in my humble opinion.]

But it isn't only the animals which strain one's credulity; the characters all polarise neatly into goodies (too good to be true) and baddies (too bad to be true). This means that the outcome (the goodies will win hands down) is predictable from an early stage. Even the course of the action brings few surprises. Hiero saves a beautiful girl (a princess, of course) from a nasty death. He is captured by the Unclean but manages to expand his mental powers sufficiently to escape. Then he falls in love with the girl. Then they meet a powerful old wizard who is on their side. There are attacks by animals, pirates and the Unclean. And so on. Shamelessly, Sterling Lanier piles cliche on cliche. In telling his story he adopts the omniscient point of view of a Victorian novelist, employing twentieth-century allusions and displaying knowledge of which his characters cannot be aware. But he does this inconsistently, sometimes admitting that he is uncertain of causes or origins.

The writing style is patchy but frequently purple and peppered with archaisms. For example: "At this dread hour came the Dweller in the Mist. From what foul den or lurking place it issued none may ever know." (p. 76 "dread" is an obscure Scots word meaning "doleful".) "Steeped in evil and all vileness and cruelty were the adept wizards of the Unclean." (p. 287) Very Lovecraftian, methinks.

You should have gathered by now that Hiero's Journey is full of incident and a sense of wonder, but is really only a vehicle in which the author can take his readers for a guided tour of the larger-than-life background. (Never mind the plot, just sit back and marvel at the size of these birds, at the unspeakable malignance of this toad heap...) But the background isn't all that good (as always that ridiculous fifteen-ton frog). A comparison with Igor Pangborn's novels Davy, The Judgment of Eve and The Company of Glory, which are superficially similar to Hiero's Journey, shows up the latter in a very bad light. Edgar Pangborn's stories are subtle, poignant and beautifully told. Sterling Lanier's is none of these things, being closer to ERB's Martian tales.

I know that Hiero's Journey was well-received when it appeared in the USA, but I cannot imagine why.

THE EXILE WAITING by Vonda N. McIntyre; Gollancz; London; 1978; £5.95

Reviewed by John Clute

Vonda McIntyre's first novel had been long awaited when it came out a year ago in the States already, but trusty Gollancz has managed to scoop the Icelandic translation and we have the book now, poor thing, along with kindly blurbs from Joanna Russ and Roger Zelazny appended to the dustwrapper copy, so that we know that The Exile Waiting is weather, that there has been a rallying-ground. It is a sort of space opera about relationships, or space-soaper, a new generic mix frequently to be found in the works of younger American SF writers influenced by the models provided by Joanna Russ, Roger Zelazny, Samuel R. Delany, though not Ursula Le Guin. It does not include a kitchen sink but everything else: there is a good clone and bad clone, guess which one of them falls in love, guess which one of them uses emotional blackmail to almost break up the romance between clone and human female; there are two human females both hungry - it turns out - for love, one a high-ranking slave who has had to keep her emotions under check, the other - who is also the protagonist - a high-ranking speak-thief who is tied by bonds of paranormal empathy to a family of touchingsiblings and a wicked uncle but who eventually finds strength through love and chums to escape with her kms to the stars; there is a poetical paraJapanese male from the stars to fall in love with the paranormal empath; there is a cave city at the end of time run by a Van Vogtian palace cabal from which genetic freaks are excluded but they all remain chums in the tunnels beneath the town and have a lot of paranormal powers to relate to each other with and to help the protagonist with and they are like a family together; there are starships, vaginal tunnels, interstellar trade, high politics, armed confrontations, chases, duels, wind and sand; whippings; sadomasochistic sexual slavery, a corpse from the stars to be buried on Earth (where it all happens) Sturgeonesque emotes. Also, there are all the forms of love, not excluding the necrological, all made as easy as ABC. The book is dead easy to read.

Space-soapers seem to be the coming thing these days. In a review to be published elsewhere, I began to try to get to grips with what bothered me so much about novels like this one and Foster's Icntro and Delany's Dhalgren and Piserchia's and Foster's and Bryant's and so forth's and even Russ's The Female Man, and I'd like to paraphrase a little of what I said about the American Pale soaper and go on from it. What seems to define this sort of story is a deep axial assumption that no matter how superficially divergent from one another and isolated within the prisms of selfhood the characters of a book may be, deep down inside everybody is capable of communing with everybody else, deep down inside true relationships are available for everybody for free, or nearly. There may be initiation rites and plot difficulties, but essentially all the baroque tawdery that gives this kind of story a sort of local colour (the way Sunday painters do) proves in the end to be mere facade, epiphenomenal cobwebs. Beyond the cobwebs lies (I suggested) the same pitiliated intersubjectivity endemic to the rhetoric, if not the reality, of the writers' workshops and conferences which have proliferated through America in recent years, those intense sessions where writers-in-be meet each other and of stardom is an atmosphere that conspires against external enemies (the wicked uncle in The Exile Waiting) and urges creative complicity with a version of plebiscitary selfhood one is more familiar with in studies of mob psychology. Earlier (i.e. non-oceanic) versions of plebiscitary selfhood may be seen in the women of Robert A. Heinlein and in the film children of John Wayne, though its prime generic avatar may well be the love-novelettes of Theodore Sturgeon or Stanley Ted - in fact many American Pale soapers can be read as transMogrified nurse romances, though without the sociocultural relevance of a hospital setting...The sf books that come out of this very American forcing house - nurse romances being merely the lowest common denominator linking writers' workshops and communes - obviously answer profound though hopefully evanescent needs in the readership, as adolescents do tend to the oceanic when it's free (i.e. democratic), and perhaps one shouldn't blame writers for egging in on weak links in the human condition, or blame them only when they confuse market savvy with virtu. Dogpaddling in the oceanic philosophy-zine, ism wet-dream, stories in which the children of John Wayne copulate in the plastifoam with the women of Robert A. Heinlein in a city at the end of time for womb with a data vue) tend to get up the nose, like calories

As usual with this kind of tale, The Exile Waiting has a very complicated but unexamined plot, which serves as a sort of father-figure (or wicked uncle) to be annulled. It is far into the future of an Earth desolate and unpeopled but one semi-underground city where Mischa, the speak-thief protagonist, enters our ken all trammelled up in her constricted existence, but though she hasn't yet encountered the paraJapanese poet, as he's still en route from the stars with the corpse of an irrelevant old Earth lady who wanted to be buried on her home planet, one does get the sense that her tribulations (her paranormal empathy with her deformed siblings ties her to her wicked uncle who controls them and lives on her takings, and she gets whipped when she tries to enter the Van Vogtian palace as a step in escaping to the stars, and her beloved paranormal empath brother has just cobbled out on her) will soon be transcended They soon are. Jan Hikaru, the paraJapanese poet, arrives on Earth, is the ship of the pseudosibs, one good clone, one bad clone, finds Mischa, discovers her paranormal mathematical abilities (she's not your ordinary far-future speak-thief paranormal empath), falls in love with her and follows her into exile beneath the city after the bad clone has treacherously caused the good clone to cause her down and killed her paranormal brother, his arithmetically pure body and soul are as yet untransformed by his budding love for the high-caste slave in the Van Vogt palace who keeps herself nicely in check till near the end of the book, at which point she too becomes a paranormal chum; in the caves under the city, Hikaru and Mischa find one of her deformed siblings and a commune of exiled genetic rejects from the Van Vogt palace and elsewhere; chased by the good clone they go deeper and deeper but finally convince him, the good clone, of the error of his pseudosib's ways, no longer his pseudosib's keeper, the good clone, Hikaru, Mischa, and the high-caste slave all escape to the stars, leaving the commune to regenerate the city. The wicked uncle is kaput, as are some other fathers.

That's by no means all, but it's more than necessary. There are some decent adventure shticks immolated in this plot, the magical tunnels are lots of fun, the idea of the pseudocibs could have been developed nicely, it's gratifying to see a female protagonist who doesn't have to discuss the fact and a very good sign too: What has gone wrong, beyond Ms McIntyre's unfortunate recourse to American Pale idioms and values to "transpose" the grab-bag of tropes she's stuffed between Gollancz's yellow covers, is a peculiar enervating sense that none of the work Farrago is actually meant. From previous examples of her work, Ms McIntyre writes a shapely, muscled, forthright kind of story, and does not fudge issues with the kind of bathos that vitiates this sad foggy snaper. One gets a sense of duress, as though she forced herself to write the kind of novel she thought would go down, and very much disliked doing it. I think Ms McIntyre got very bored in her snaper at the end of time. If she had thrown in the kitchen sink, it might have drawn a little blood.

FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID by Philip K. Dick; Panther; St Albans; 1976; 60p; 204 pp; ISBN 0-586-04203-9

Reviewed by David Wingrove

Is this "reality" all we have, or is it a fragile illusion woven about us? In a future world, James Taverner, TV celebrity, loses his basic existence and becomes an "unperson". Police General Felix Buckman is intrigued by this situation and lets events take their course; as interested as Taverner in discovering just what exactly is happening.

In the hands of anyone else this situation would develop into a simple, tense thriller with the denouement never in doubt. Dick, however, plunges us into the morass of human existence and leaves us in no doubt that this is no thriller. This is existence, what it means "to be".

"It would be funny, he thought, if it were happening to someone else. But it's happening to me. No, it's not funny either way. Because there is real suffering and real death passing the time of day in the wings. Ready to come on at any minute." (page 92)

This is Dick through Taverner; the Phil Dick of 1974, no longer the harlequin of pyrotechnical philosophics but a man covered by near coincidence, by a set of circumstances so similar to those of Taverner that this could almost be a fictional biography. He could well have written a story that seethed with hatred against the system; one that "pointed the finger". But Dick is Dick and above that. General Felix Buckman is no sneering fascist. He acts because he must; a higher morality begs his service. Taverner's eventual sacrifice to the politics of higher-echelon policy decisions is justifiable and Dick makes it clear that he understands the motivations of the sinners as well as those sinned against.

This is a sour book by comparison with all else that Dick has written; as strong in theme as The Man in the High Castle yet without light relief, without contrast. But it is typically Dick in all other respects. Telepaths and "sixes" (a genetic experiment of which Taverner is a part), "quibbles" (flying cars) and strange experimental drugs form part of the tapestry of 1988. We are hurled sprawl into a police state of horrifying proportions: the blacks are a slowly dying race due to a compulsory sterilisation programme; the students beneath the ground like hunted rats, kept there by the storm-trooper "pol-mot" forces; there are street check points and a profusion of bureaucratic demands upon the individual. Dick seems to ignore this, accept all this, whilst exploring the facets of personal reality. But by so doing he creates an atmosphere in which the social morality of Taverner's world is made questionable.

Taverner is a "winner" at the beginning of this book, a man without doubts. But the wheel of fortune turns swiftly and discards him at the bottom. He becomes a "loser", admittedly a man of great inherent capabilities, but with a comparative naivety. He is used by Dick as a touchstone. The manner in which people react to him is revelational:

"'So what are you, then? A man who has his picture taken all the time that no-one's ever seen or heard of.'" (page 36)

Thus the enigmatic Kathy (herself a product of schizophrenia and paranoia) describes him, and this revelation (which comes slowly to him) provides the tension of the book. Only by extracting someone from their environment as totally as Dick does here could we reach the inner core of the man. The irrationality of Taverner's world is mirrored in the illogic of the psychotic Kathy. She is forever turning a question back upon itself, entrapping and confusing, complex and unstable. Her relationship with Taverner is an exchange of conundrums, a dance to an anarchic music which terminates abruptly. And this is all so real, so achingly real that even the trappings become credible - even Cheerful Charlie, the capable talking-doll, a deus in machina (and part of Taverner's subjective reality?)

Characterisation is Dick's major achievement in this novel. Taverner and Kathy are strong, unpredictable "people", but Buckman and his sister/wife Alys are on a different level of complexity. General Buckman explains himself this way:

"I am like Byron, he thought, fighting for freedom, giving up his life to fight for Greece. Except that I am not fighting for freedom; I am fighting for a coherent society." (page 97)

One has the feeling that despite all else Dick would endorse that view.

Alys is a woman who is neither owned nor owns; a woman whom even the powerful Buckman fears. She is freedom incarnate, without rules, and therefore beyond good and evil. That we learn that she is the fulcrum of the strange happenings in the novel is unsurprising. Through her we tumble into multi-dimensional vistas of perception and peel back the attenuated skin of reality. Her death is the release of this tension and the beginning of comprehension. "Reality" is back with us. Taverner is a person again (and a celebrity) and, with that, prone to the hazards of existence. That he is accordingly "used" is understandable in terms of the world Dick envisages: that Buckman can do nothing else is consonant with the demands of the situation. Taverner is betrayed, framed for the murder of Alys, and that, to him is the final revelation.

This is all heavy metaphysical stuff indeed. But Dick is enjoyable even at his most morose. Moreover, the purely irrational things within his books are those which make him unique as

a writer. The small touches of pathos (Emily Fusselman's rabbit which tried to be a cat and failed; Buckman's meeting with the black man, Montgomery L. Hopkins, in the all-night filling-station) are unforgettable. They, along with Cheerful Charley and the all-too-human characters, make this a unique book.

Like The Man in the High Castle, this book is rooted firmly in reality. Without that anchorage an exploration of "reality" would be untenable. That it is once again by drugs (a perception drug here) is predictable in view of Dick's past record (Ubik, Now Wait For Last Year, The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch) but hardly a fault.

Dick is the great explorer of the interface of morality and immorality. Within this novel these aspects merge into each other with surprising ease whilst the layers of reality and hallucination shift and coalesce constantly. That Dick is little known outside of this claustrophobic genre is, to me, incomprehensible. But then Dick explains that too.

"The blue vase made by Mary Anne Dominic... wound up in a private collection of modern pottery. It remains there to this day and is much treasured. And, in fact, by a number of people who know ceramics, openly and genuinely cherished.

And loved." (page 204)

And in that same way I admire Dick's work: "openly and genuinely cherished. And loved."

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HELL'S CARTOGRAPHERS edited by Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison; Orbit; London; 1976; 75p; 246 pp; ISBN 0-8600-7907-4

Reviewed by David Wingrove

Before my own humble effort rambles on I must refer you to the excellent precis of this book by Malcolm Edwards in SFM (Vol 2 no 12). I bought the book on the recommendation Malcolm gave there (and the advice of a "concerned" friend) and can only now add my own endorsement and my own impressions to his.

Autobiographical sketches have a charm of their own, for a genre all their own. This generic study, therefore, is somewhat peculiar in that it is now in a mass medium format. It will convince few who are not already aware of SF's true opulence, that such is the case; it may well scare away the timid, occasional reader of "sci-fi" (yuk!). There is a strong undercurrent of "truth" that the unconverted will seize upon as justification of their arguments. "Look! here are six of the very best of writers saying that most of what they wrote was crap!". And at times it does seem that way. Bob Silverberg disowns the "berserk robot" that was his younger self. Harry Harrison acknowledges his early limitations when he knew no better and was content to write straightforward but exciting operatives. Alfred Bester talks of his "education" on the comic books while Damon Knight makes the Futurians seem like a society for the socially and sexually deviant. Perhaps they were! Frederik Pohl comes nearest the truth when he talks about the recent academic "discovery" of SF, with its acclamation of everything poor and banal in SF! Brian Aldiss, whose path is unique amongst these six "pulp-indoctrinated" savants, writes a rosy picture of a childhood shattered suddenly by public school and army life, with his subsequently determined literary aspirations.

Malcolm thought Damon Knight's "sketch" entertaining. I found it quite different: embarrassingly boring, a hotchpotch of confused and often spiteful recollections. Though I can admire his writing ability and editorial capacity I would refrain from social contact at all costs having read this piece.

Bester is rather self-deprecatory and at times touching as he conceals far more than he ever reveals. Silverberg's essay is, of course, the most impressive in the book, although much of its material has been reiterated in several recent interviews he has granted. Nevertheless, there is much here that has not been repeated, and as a study of literary re-birth it is, I believe, unique.

Harry Harrison comes across as a charming man struggling ever-upward through layers of literary enlightenment. That he has, to a great extent, succeeded is an endorsement of his dynamism (something that could be said of each of these six "survivors").

Frederik Pohl gives only a brief impression of what must have been a highly eventful and incident-crowded life, perhaps the most frustrating of these six pieces.

Brian Aldiss writes a lyrical sketch of his early childhood in Dereham, Norfolk, that ends far too abruptly and metamorphoses into a discussion of modern sf. I was sad to leave the delightful vistas of Norfolk in the twenties and thirties from which so much of Aldiss' literary motivation has obviously stemmed.

After the six essays are brief notes by the authors on "How We Work", which again emphasise the wide disparity in motivations, methods and interests: Aldiss mutters incantations; Pohl struggles with four sides a day "basic"; Knight spends hours "getting the names right"; Harrison demands absolute silence and concentration; Bester spends his whole life observing and notating; Silverberg - well, read his short section for yourself.

Here then are all the varied aspects of SF as epitomised in six of its creators. Here is humour and despair in the service of an exotic fan. And do I now seem to be displaying a "closed-shop" attitude? If so then it is only an excusable over-compensation for the insulting ignorance of the mass media. And the writers? Yes, they're somewhat defensive too, but nevertheless ever-willing to criticise the bad in SF. Which is where I came in.

Perhaps we are now witnessing the "inevitable flowering" of SF. Perhaps we shall have to continue as we are, defensive and self-derisive, encompassing both the idiotic and the inspired for the sake of an amorphous vision. Perhaps.

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A TRANSATLANTIC TUNNEL, HURRAH! by Harry Harrison; New English Library; SF Masters Series, London; October 1976; 75p; 192 pp; ISBN 0-450-02897-2

Reviewed by David Wingrove

Sat here warm in the afterglow of the Victorian perspective I have time for thought. The wry

smile fades, exchanged for an expression of concerned cogitation. Parallel worlds are fragile creatures; one word, one concept, out of place and the gossamer castle falls. Mr. Harrison completes the course here without toppling a barrier - a clear round - but one has the feeling that the predicate was an excuse for something else (the horse plastic, the fences cardboard?). Roberts' Pavane and Dick's The Man in the High Castle are genuine exercises in the construction of alternate worlds. Transatlantic Tunnel, however, is merely an exercise in continuity.

'What could have sustained the Empire?' Harrison asks. Leave Germany divided in its principalities, Spain and Portugal in the hands of the Moors, France as a non-colonial power and America as a colony: that's for starters.'

But what does that entail?

According to Mr. Harrison it would prolong the world of Free Enterprise in all its Victorian glory; and this aspect of the book is well drafted. But the view (the "Victorian perspective") Harrison presents is derived second-hand from Kipling and Wells, Verne and Conan Doyle. It is a fictional alternative, still-born - sicking only by courtesy of Harry Harrison's excellent humour.

Paradoxically, the major strengths of this book are also its weaknesses. By inference the opulence of an extended "Victorian perspective" (which Harrison delights in showing us in its baroque and tasteless totality) would entail a large working-class on the poverty line with all the accompanying evils. Harrison never shows this. His eyes are firmly fixed on great people and great events. We watch from the shoulders of those who act, not those who suffer. Men die, but never anyone important. Exploitation of Labour is accepted along with the preposterous Victorian morality, and whilst HG pokes holes (naturally!) in morals, assassins and summary he is content to accept Expansion economics and tory politics. The intelligent reader will provide his own perspective and manage to keep his feet whilst the current of Harrison's competent prose on rides the susceptible mark on a Verian adventure of great wit, inventiveness and literary insight.

Reading this novel too literally one would believe that Harrison preferred the world of privilege and order, of solidity and calm "progress" to our own age; and, superficially, the world picture he paints is preferable to our own (or, at least, as seen through the eyes of the like of the medium Madam Clotilde, who has broken through into our Alpha-2 parallel"). But who would welcome again the injustice and frustration of the Victorian world despite its order and despite our own entropic tendencies. Modern life is not as black as Brunner and Harrison (Make Room! Make Room!) would have it, nor was it as rosy as Harrison would have us believe.

But I enjoyed this book for its adventure, its escapist qualities and its superbly humorous prose. The cast of characters - cardboard as they were - gave excellent service; Lord Amis, Verdun Aldiss, Sam Washington, Richard Tracey et al. I've outlined its faults but barely sung its praises. This is far, far better than Lumley's dire parallel worlds adventures (Elliry Queen meets the continuum) yet I was sorry to see Harry Harrison, on this showing a potentially excellent writer, content to hit the lower-scoring of the two possible targets presented to him.

Dick's remains the apotheosis of this sub-genre, a much neglected room in the SF house. I recommend this book for its wit and excitement if not for its sincerity. But then, why should the writer provide everything?

A TOUCH OF INFINITY by Howard Fast. Coronet; London: 1976. 70p: 192 pp. ISBN 0-340-21008-5

Reviewed by David Wingrove

"Who is this Mr Fast?"

"An American by the sound of it, a New Yorker I'd guess - most of his stories seem to be set in that area..."

"An SF writer?"

"Author of Spartacus it says on the cover. None of these stories have been published before though."

"So what is he like then?"

"Competent enough. Harmless and competent. He seems to like theological subjects."

"An intellectual?"

"How did I say that? No, he just likes talking about God and the nature of Man - adds meaning to stock SF situations I suppose."

"A fraud?"

"Now you're putting words into my mouth. So, he writes a good story when he tries. No alien worlds or novel social organisms - but good, solid, hard-core SF situations."

"Like early Asimov?"

"Something like that. His profundity is transparent but his ideas are sound. 'The Hump' is a good example of that - he tells us that there's a price to be paid for everything."

"What's new in that?"

"Nothing, I guess. .but it's nice to be reassured."

"So why did you finish the book?"

"A sense of duty, I guess. Chris sent me the book for review . that was the main reason. But I'm an optimist too and I hoped for something better. 'The pragmatic asses' and 'The Egg' made up for the humbug - or most of it - in the other eleven stories. Some nice images."

"So you liked it after all?"

"No, only three two . and perhaps 'The Hoop' for being so tidy."

"So he can write?"

"Oh yes, he can write. But he can't write SF yet, he can only use its gimmicks in a mainstream manner. He might become an SF writer one day if he ever comes to realise the nature of social change."

"Worth the 70p then?"

"I didn't pay 70p!"

WHO WAS THAT MONOLITH I SAW YOU WITH? by Michael Goodwin; Heritage; 1978; $2.50; 110 pp no ISBN listed

NOW YOU SEE IT/HIM/THEM by Gene de Weese & Robert Coulson; Hale; London; 1976; £3.25; 157 pp ISBN 0-7091-5019-3

MINDSLIP by Michael Elder; Hale; London; 1976; £3.25; 173 pp; ISBN 0-7091-5500-3

THE CONCRETE HORIZON by Dan Morgan; Millington; London; 1976; £3.50; 227 pp. ISBN 0-86000-073-7

THE JOY MAKERS by James Gunn; Panther; St Albans 1976; 60 p, 204 pp. ISBN 0-586 04288-0

THE BIG SHOW by Keith Laumer; Hale; London; 1976; £3.10; 157 pp; ISBN 0-7091-5620-0

Reviewed by James Corley

Despite its regrettable lack of due gravity, Monolith will be required study material for Star Trekkers as they boldy wait for the BBC to boldy repeat the reruns of the repeats of the reruns again. Meanwhile yet another twisted superwimp in the shape of Michael Goodwin has seized control of the Star Fleet Command's favourite Federation Class Dreadnought and on a Pegasus type mission the USS Enterprise is boldy beaming down drollery with a panache no starship has ever dared show before. Even the intrepid Snoopy, in defiance of the laws of space, time and copyright, makes a guest appearance alongside the dumb Villagos ship, Columbus's galleon that sailed off the edge of the world and of course 2001's black monolith. Those notoriously weird Trekkies will use Warp Factor Ten to capture these rogue cartoons, if only to court-martial them for blasphemy; more normal life-forms should wait for Spock to compute 1.506 into $24 before deciding whether this slim but occasionally genuinely witty paperback should be bought - you'll have to go to a bookstore that stocks American imports. Coming soon: The Tardis meets the Terror of Barbi.

Although the tubby brylcreemed worldsaver has decided to boldy keep out of sight in Monolith, Captain Kirk does, through the serendipitous application of an adhesive Star Fleet triangle to a roll-neck sweater, provide a disguise for the hero of Now You See It during a fancy dress ball. Espers variously possessing powers of invisibility, teleportation, psychokinesis and emotion sensing mixed up in a wave of gangland killings may sound a trifle unlikely but the authors have cunningly solved the feasibility gap by setting their tale against the background of a World SF Convention. This, and never allowing both feet of the plot to touch the ground at the same time, makes it just about work for their eidetic-memoried reporter hero; but only nerves of steel or an imagination of clay could have persuaded Deweese and Coulson to forgo the comic possibilities of a ballroom full of loonies dressed up as Captain Marvel, The Devil, Spiderman, an Alligator and assorted monsters of the Galaxy. "Those aren't suits, they're science fiction fans!" one character tells a bemused Chicago detective. Well, I'll give him half marks for that.

And now for something completely different. Mindslip tells of shady goings-on around a man with an eidetic memory and powers of teleportation. Certainly it's different! For one thing the mild mannered reporter has been replaced by a down at heel escapologist and the World SF Convention by a seedy Soho strip club! Oh, I don't know though, I heard this story about... Back at the novel, Elder's world is far more downbeat than the froth of Now You See It. He presents an engaging study of a character on his uppers as the unscrupulous head of a Giant Corporation tries to force him to use his powers for other ends than a dismal night-club act. Perhaps it owes more to the hard-bitten school of crime than SF with the hero concentrating on squeezing sub-Chandlerian wisecracks out of a life-style in which the high spot was the day he ate sardines on toast instead of bacon and eggs. It's such a shame someone threw a bucket of water over the ending.

In surprising contrast to these lightweight offerings is Dan Morgan's Concrete Horizon. Surprising because I'd never considered Morgan a major writer. This may have had something to do with his Teach Yourself to Play the Guitar manual which after five years of arduous study only produced notes of complaint from the neighbours. Still, Bert Weedon fared no better. This latest book is an order of magnitude above, for example his pen portrait of Richard Burton after a heavy drinking bout - Thunder of Stars. There are no surprises on the inventive front, the setting is a familiar urban moored society in conflict with the Outsider agricultural subculture and itself internally. What is important about the book is the density of the writing; it's a closely plotted survey of the frightening control mechanisms required in a concentrated, introverted world which has grown too complex for men to make their own decisions with any certainty of success. Trying to keep the lid on the simmering cauldron of humanity needs tranquillised air, planned euthanasia, the secret elimination of subversives by officialdom, abdication of power to a sentient and unstable computer and the odd bacchanalian orgy - but let's not get side-tracked by Conventions again.

With faults in both the sociology and cybernetics it couldn't be classed as a prognostic novel but it's still an impressive one, comparing favourably with treatments of similar themes such as T. J. Bass's The Godwhale. Concrete Horizon is narrower in scope but deeper in examination and even the almost mandatory escapade through the air-conditioning ducts has been replaced by a trip down the outside of the two mile high city tower in a maintenance cradle. But again, as with Mindslip, the ending seems to have been rushed; the denouement is satisfactory enough, but the actual writing shows its seams in a minor torrent of cliches. Are British writers lacking in stamina or do they need the royalties fast? In any case the fact that Morgan is British doubtless means Concrete Horizon won't get the attention it deserves. The Americans shout louder about these things and often with less reason.

A classic way of damning with praise is a sly comparison with Aldous Huxley in a book review. It's rumoured that Huxley advocated doping the world into quiescence with soma but forcing the masses to read Point Counter Point would subdue them more effectively though less pleasantly. The Sunday Times once inflicted this invidious libel on The Joy Makers which also dopes the world, but there the similarity ends. I'm thinking of writing to the ST revealing that Falstaff used to get boozed to see if they compare Gunn to Shakespeare. In fact, The Joy Makers originally sprang from three shorts published in the fifties in Fantastic Universe, Startling Stories and Thrilling Wonder Stories. Hardly the dizzy heights of EngLit but right

"back in the gutter" where I feel more at home. The connecting theme is the development of Hedonics, the science of applied happiness. Although happiness is as basic an imperative as sex and violence it has been largely ignored except as a last-sentence wrap-up because of the appalling dullness of truly euphoric folk. So Gunn's book has the advantage of novelty while by concentrating on the few odd-balls whom the system fails he keeps a conventionally dynamic story-line.

Starting as a simple mixture of yankee know-how and diluted zen happiness rapidly conquers the world but then needs to sustain itself with liberal quantities of the old soma juice. Eventually the dark utopia produced by its Panglossian/pharmacological techniques becomes as desireable as Dan Morgan's euthanasia. An inevitable conclusion but Gunn handles it entertainingly as an escapist melodrama and on a level far more accessible to us proles than Brave New World.

Happiness is a state of mind, Hedonics swings from the optimistic belief that the greatest success in life is being born and the greatest failure dying to the pessimistic opposite. In the final analysis Gunn suggests that we retain a balance and keep digging the garden. Keith Laumer agrees that business comes before pleasure: his collection of short stories deals mostly with skirmishes with the Amore, the Hukk, the Hee and worst of all by far the Bureaucrats, out on the frontiers of civilisation, where a man's got to do what a man's got to do and barg the consequences. General Patton would have been proud of these guys.

But what would a straight-talking machismoist make of the existentialism of In the Queue? Laumer is a writer of wide talent; he ranges from farce to tragedy, from stories tailored for Analog to stories tailored for Dangerous Visions and all points in between. Versatility isn't always an asset, good as the individual stories may be the collection hangs together uneasily, the frame of reference jumps clumsily from tale to tale. Even in an anthology a good editor can occasionally impose a sense of coherence and unity, here it's lacking. And that brings us to the point that Laumer has been so widely anthologised that you're almost certain to have read at least one of these stories before. Multiple publication may be good for an author but all too often it short-changes the readers. In such circumstances how can we react but by wretchedly exclaiming Hi-ho. And I hope old Beergut doesn't pinch that line.

PERCHANCE TO DREAM edited by Damon Knight, Coronet; London; 1976, 218 pp; 80p; ISBN 0-340-19920-1

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

This must be one of the best subject-anthologies around. Just about every story is a winner, evoking a variety of moods, from the jokey to the wondrous; and as you read on you become aware of subtle interconnections between the stories. Thus, H. G. Wells' "Under the Knife" - surely the most vertiginous tale ever written - has the same sort of overall redemptive pattern as Dostoevsky's "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man", which likewise apes the common. The Dostoevsky is, in fact, a kind of wilder, darker, vaster Christmas Carol, with a typical modern intellectual playing the part of Scrooge. The idea of a man hovering between life and death during an operation (to make a very crude precis of what is, really, a much vaster notion) likewise connects the Wells story with Conrad Aiken's excellent metaphysical fantasy, "Mr. Arcularis". You could say that the Aiken story is a precursor of J. B. Priestley's Johnson over Jordan, though it is well worth reading in its own right; and it is not as predictable as it seems on first reading. It's the kind of story that illuminates areas of your experience you previously assumed to be wholly personal and private.

The theme of Eternal Regaining in "Mr. Arcularis" is echoed, unforgettably, in Rudyard Kipling's "The Brushwood Boy". This is perhaps a unique story: it is intensely romantic and unworldly, while simultaneously providing its own corrective. (And Kipling is first-rate at evoking the actual experience of dreaming.) The basic idea behind "The Brushwood Boy" links it in turn with Somerset Maugham's "Lord Mountdrago", which has always been a favourite of mine - perhaps because it is, in the end, a kind of infernal version of Wells' "The Door in the Wall".

As Damon Knight says, John Collier's "Interpretation of a Dream" could be a parody of "Lord Mountdrago"; but it's a very good joke in itself, the main feature being an irresistible sort of literary Escher effect.

There are, no doubt, more resemblances between the stories in this collection. Perchance to Dream is a book to be read and re-read for its own sake. Meanwhile, suffice it to say that James Thurber's "A Friend to Alexander" is very funny, and more poignant than I remembered, especially in these times of apparent US decline: for the dream in question involves Aaron Burr, the black sheep among the founding fathers of America. Graham Greene's "The End of the Party" is (if you can imagine it) a very English, very Greene like version of Bradbury's Something Wicked this Way Comes: it involves two brothers born minutes apart, one born effortlessly into the light, the other somehow struggling still after him in pain and darkness. Henry Kuttner's "Dream's End" is just great: it succeeds in defining (imaginatively) just what constitutes sanity and insanity, and is all about a doctor who tries to cure an insane patient in the most direct possible way, without (he hopes) getting "infected". Ambrose Bierce's "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" doesn't need my recommendation. Fritz Leiber's "The Secret Songs" is disarmingly light in touch for a story about a husband and wife who are on paraldehyde, benzedrine, and the brink of madness. There's definite touches of the Vonneguts in Leiber's presentation of their visions. It's nonetheless memorable, and echoes some of the vast metaphysical implications of the Aiken, Wells or Dostoevsky stories. It is also (for the husband in question is an SF freak and has corresponding tripe) a sort of comment on fantasy and SF generally, straight from the horse's mouth.

Lastly comes "The Circular Ruins" by Borges. At first (for I'm one of the few people who have not yet read Borges) I was disappointed: it seemed stilted and overstudied. Then, just over two hours later, the truth started

to bit me. Now.

I repeat - this is a classic anthology, crammed with antiroots. It makes you think again about dreams, and things generally. Come to think of it, I've been dreaming with renewed vigour lately.

THE SKULL OF THE MARQUIS DE SADE by Robert Bloch, Corgi, London; 1978, 50p, 127 pp; ISBN 0-552-10234-2

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

Screaming! shrieks the back cover. Savage! Shivery! Shocking! Apart from the title story, which is adequately unsettling, this just ain't so - what we have here is a fairly stock set of weird tales, mostly from the forties. Rather tame, really, these six supporting stories, especially "The Man Who Knew Women", which isn't even weird (a Weird Tales scene (it was written for the Saint Mystery Magazine), and is spread thinly over 27 pages. Three of them - "Lizzy Borden Took an Axe - -", "The Devil's Ticket" and "The Bogey Man Will Get You" can be enjoyed, providing the reader is in a pleasantly unperturbed state of mind, there's certainly nothing special about them. "A Quiet Funeral" is an interesting oddity - a Hemingwayesque horror story, told in period gangster lingo. "The Weird Tailor" is the second-best story in the collection, about a tailor who is employed to make a suit out of the Cloth of Fate. Rather ludicrous, and spread pretty thin - but atmospheric, and it stays in the mind.

I like the title story, which is soap-bread H.R. James. But there's only 20 pages of it, and it has some of the trimmings Hammer put in when they made the film.

THE MAGIC OF FINDHORN by Paul Hawken, Fontana; Glasgow, 1978. 80p. 222 pp; ISBN 0 00-634178-0

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

I'm not going to attempt a flip judgment on this book. Much of it reads like fantasy-and-SF, and as such appeals to me; but if Paul Hawken is to be believed, it is also the gospel truth. This poses problems. But I would say that chapters 6-9, especially, will repay the attention of anyone who has read C. S. Lewis's The Abolition of Man, or likes reading Lyall Watson or Rudolf Steiner.

Findhorn is a small community on the North-East coast of Scotland (an address is provided for correspondence) founded by an ex-RAF man and his wife. The ex-RAF man, Peter Caddy, is very much a product of occult societies and 'positive thinking' - an authoritative, ebullient type who may perhaps be a kind of creative trickster in the Uri Geller mould. His wife comes through as an essentially simple and sincere person who really goes into trances and receives direction from - well, from somewhere, though her husband declares that the source of this direction is, quite simply, God. Associated with them is a woman (and I wouldn't dispute her sincerity either) who claims to receive direction from Devic presences (angels, formative spirits of the natural world, of which man forms a part). With her/their help, Peter Caddy and his wife began planting vegetables in a rubbish dump beside the caravan site where they were living on their uppers, back in the fifties. The "land" was mainly constituted of sand, peat, with the aid of compost and the formative influence of the Devic presences, it soon produced a phenomenal yield, in quantity and quality, that could not be explained in scientific terms. This rubbish-dump garden has by now become something more like a wooded estate, but it was only the beginning. Rumours have spread over the years, until the Findhorn Foundation is now spiritually-thriving community, with its emphasis on the growth of the community itself rather than that of the garden, which remains as a symbol in Findhorn, apparently, spiritual regeneration is the rule rather than the exception, and everyone there (from the latest quasi-dropout to Stockhausen's wife) is convinced that it, and similar communities, represents the first flowering of "the New Age" in which Man will reassume his dominion - through understanding, not force - of the natural world.

The other chief member of the community is Robert Crombie, scholar and recluse - a thoroughly personable character when allowed to speak for himself - who is sensitive to the world of the "elementals", and first met the great god Pan just off Princes Street in Edinburgh. (Whatever that is, it can't be a lie, surely.) Fauns, elves, gnomes, Pan himself - all are familiar to Crombie, and with him as mediator they enter the Findhorn community, so that the bond between Man and the world of the elementals (for so long broken, to the perilous detriment of both) is being re-forged. Findhorn is, in fact, the beginning of a new worldwide web of cosmic powerlines, not Hieratic and druidical as in ancient times, but democratic in spirit. "No doubt, man had to lose his sensitivity and awareness in order to develop his intellect," says Crombie. "The time has now come when the sensitivity is gradually being restored, a time in which man will retain his intellect while heightening his awareness." As to how this great change is coming about, the book is regrettably vague; but on page 158 [if you look hard enough] Crombie seems to be re-asserting Rudolf Steiner's emphasis on what Steiner called 'the mystery of Golgotha'.

Crombie is not a lunatic. He explains that "gnomes", "elves", "fauns", etc., are the thought forms whereby the elementals communicate with us, they have no factual substance. But to ignore the thought-forms, as we do, is to ignore the reality behind them. As a result, our attempt to dominate Nature through Science means a disastrous loss of that very understanding whereby we can truly find our place in Nature. The Findhorn community is (among other things) an attempt to renew that understanding.

I find all this fascinating; partly as a fantastic fiction - after all, the Devas and elementals are to much the same predicament as the Ignore in Bob Shaw's The Palace of Eternity, and relate to us in much the same way - and partly as supposed reality. (The Devas, or archetypal growth principles, illuminate the idea of phanta in mediaeval philosophy.)

For the rest, I reserve judgment. The first 112 pages are taken up with the author's arrival in Findhorn, his first impressions, and with fictionalised spiritual biographies of the founders of the community. (The best part deals with Peter Caddy's adventures in Tibet, which echoes Jung's experiences of the East.) Pages 113-160 are the heart

of the book, and definitely worth reading. After that, the book becomes a catalogue of people associated with the community, and their testimonies, these range from a Californian Christ-figure called David Spangler, to Lady Eve Balfour (niece of the Tory Prime Minister). Both ends of the spectrum would arouse the worst suspicions of M. John Harrison (see New Worlds 8), who would no doubt point out that Findhorn could be an irrational growth-point for something far from benign. And I would take this point: no doubt we must live our myths, but we should be certain of the relation they bear to reality. There is a lot of gaseous talk, of cosmic white noise, in The Magic of Findhorn, and one sometimes feels very wary. Some of the influences mediated by the Findhornians seem good, some of them seem bad- and no-one - certainly not Paul Hawken - seems able to distinguish between them. The reaction against intellectualism (so-called) has gone too far.

One naturally suspects a certain amount of plain trickery. But if there has been, then it is of the Geller variety - i.e. by sleight-of-hand it forces us to ask the right questions. The DNA model of life, superb though it may be for certain purposes, does it actually explain our experience of life? If not, then something like Davie presences is on the cards. But one needs to be very clear about the relation of symbolism to belief, of myth to reality, when making such an assertion. And among the Findhornians only Robert Crombie seems to have the slightest clue.

Paul Hawken himself is one of the new breed of American Whole Earth journalists, and as such he is an adequate reporter, though rather given to travelogueese: he gives us an outsider's, a semi-sceptic's viewpoint. This is fine, as long as he stays descriptive: but when he tries to explain he gets rather out of his depth. The main fault is an inability to see any spiritual alternative other than individualism and Group Living, so that the Findhorn community, having (rightly) rejected individualism, is seen as a kind of spiritual holiday camp in which everyone is part of the Whole. Admittedly, this viewpoint seems to be shared by Peter Caddy, the founder of the community, so that Hawken is probably reflecting the spirit of the place. Only Robert Crombie, the scholar of Findhorn, the lone "intellectual" among these mind-blown people, seems to have understood that the chasm between Man and Nature can only be bridged by a new kind of creature, neither a lone individual nor a group experience. Yet curiously, Hawken manages to get this across by mythologising Crombie, making him into a Tolkienesque magician who by his meditation creates new relationships between Man, Elves, and Angels. This chapter - "The Wizard Meets the Elf King" - obviously owes something to Tolkien's "On Fairy Stories". This is effective but weird. Is it fact, or fiction? At no point, as far as I can see, does Paul Hawken make this clear. Carlos Castaneda created the wrong sort of precedent here.

PICNIC ON PARADISE by Joanna Russ; Star Books; London, 1976, 157 pages, 50p; ISBN 0-352-39865-3

Reviewed by David Wingrove

I have mixed feelings about this book. Ms Russ is a fine writer and Picnic on Paradise is well-written, but I finished it with a sense of disappointment, an irritation occasioned by the fact that this novel is far too short to deal with the chosen subject more than adequately. What may have been a masterpiece has here been reduced to merely another "good" book by her failure to "flesh-out" the superficially interesting characters she presents to us.

There is little plot in the novel and even scantier adventure. Alyx, a female thief from ancient Greece, is transported by accident 4,000 years into the future. Her savage talents are recognised and put to use on Paradise, a "resort" planet, where she is to escort a group of rich tourists to safety during a commercial war. The journey has few hazards, and those easily surmounted, the greatest danger lying within the group itself as alien psychologies clash. In this clash is the heart and soul of the book, and unfortunately Ms Russ' examination whilst very good as far as it goes, does not delve anywhere deep enough. To Alyx the tourists are pampered children, dependent upon drugs and a stable environment, a naive collection of "amateurs" with a predilection for rigorous self-examination. We soon discover Paradise and the future in which it exists is heaven indeed for psycho-analysis, but hell for flesh-and-blood humans. The destructive forces at work on the (almost) uneventful journey result from the tourists' refusal to recognise even the most basic rules of survival, and the complete failure of either party to understand the other is the most lasting and memorable element of the book.

Whilst there is a total (and probably intentional) failure to evoke any sense of extreme danger, Ms Russ does manage to stir up violent and credible emotions as the novel progresses. Alyx's love affair with Machine, an "emotional" rebel, is certainly one of the most original literary relationships in any book. In an age where psycho-therapy is the rule rather than the exception, Machine has opted out, sickened by their obsession for deep self-analysis. You can only sympathise when he says to Alyx:

"I don't believe they have feelings. They talk about their complexities and their reactions and their impressions and their interactions and their patterns and their neuroses and their childhoods and their rebellions and their unspeakable insides until I want to vomit..."

But there was always the feeling lurking in the murky depths of my mind that Ms Russ was talking of America today rather than the Paradise of the future. True, I sympathised with Machine's reaction to his world, with Alyx's hatred of the two suns, with her brutal killing of Gunnar after he had let Machine die through his inaction, but all the while there was the feeling that Ms Russ was scoring points against contemporary American society, and whilst that is a worthy enough target for her work, her presentation in this case lacked both strength and conviction.

Ms Russ is far from explicit in tracing the emotions of her characters and never really allows us an insight into any of them, even Alyx. This is a weakness in a book which depends upon the psychological conflicts of its characters for its life and energy (and reminds me very much of Leiber's The Big Time, and Delany's The Einstein Intersection - also small novels - which were flawed in much the same way). I enjoyed the subtle interplay at times but found too

often that I was being made to do all the work rather than merely participating in the flow of ideas between author and reader.

Unlike Fritz Leiber (who is quoted on the cover notes) I could and frequently did put this book down at first, finding only the last seventy pages or so compulsive. It is frustrating to see such an obvious talent as Ms Russ has hint at so much and (for whatever reasons) fail short. Nevertheless this is worth reading for a first novel (and a Nebula candidate at that) it stands up well in any company. Over-ambitious and under-planned it may be, but worth the fifty pence? Yes, I think so

RESTORATE by Anne McCaffrey; Corgi, London, 1976; 223 pp; 65p; ISBN 0-552-10161-9

DECISION AT DOONA by Anne McCaffrey; Corgi; London; 1976; 221 pp; 65p; ISBN 0-552-10102-1

THE SHIP WHO SANG by Anne McCaffrey; Corgi; London; 1976; 208 pp; 65p; ISBN 0-552-10103-X

Reviewed by Chris Evans

Three attractive paperbacks from Corgi, whose covers have improved appreciably of late. But just as clothes do not make the man, so the interior contents of these books leaves something to be desired. McCaffrey has some virtues as a writer, these being the ability to characterise and to explore the inner emotions of her characters, but on the whole her writing lacks vigour. The basic problem, I think, is that of credibility. McCaffrey never quite manages to make the activities of her characters and the environments in which they move convincingly really.

Restorate beginns quite promisingly with an account of a woman kidnapped by an alien creature in Central Park who finds herself in enforced labour on a distant planet, Lothar, suffering from partial amnesia and mild cultural shock. The early chapters are a pretty convincing portrayal of someone exploring a strange environment and gradually recovering their memory. But after her escape from the institute where she has been labouring, the plot takes on a familiar guise a baddie has usurped the seat of power on the planet and the heroine is soon involved (via the inevitable romantic attachment) in the restoration of the monarchy and the saving of Lothar from the evil Hil, aliens who are threatening the planet. There is a space battle between rival "navies" during which the opposing fleets carry out manoeuvers more suited to ocean-going vessels than to ships in aerial combat. The entire confrontation reads like an adaptation from a Dan Dare strip. I didn't believe a word of it

Lothar is described as having been a mediaeval culture which the alien overlords have brought rapidly to maturity so that the people now possess an advanced technology while still retaining many of the trappings of feudalism This is an interesting idea and could have formed the basis of a novel in itself But in Restorate the notion is hardly explored; it serves merely as a convenient device for the creation of a pseudo-aristocratic system of government with its lords and ladies and all the intrigues of the court. Within this rather tawdry framework the characters, sometimes quite skilfully delineated, struggle with their roles and eventually expire

The same is true of Decision at Doona which has an interesting theme but a treatment bordering on the adolescent. A group of colonists leave an overcrowded Earth to settle on Doona, a planet which appears to have no dominant species. Soon after arriving, however, they discover a village inhabited by cat-like creatures, the Erruhan The Principle of Non-Cohabitation prohibits the coexistance of two sentient species on a planet following the mass suicides of a race in an earlier experiment The colonists agreed that they should return to Earth but they are unable to understand why the preliminary surveys of the planet did not reveal the presence of the Erruhan settlement. The Erruhans are civilised and friendly but somewhat mysterious With the arrival of officials from Earth, they and their village promptly vanish. At this point, too, my suspension of belief began to grow a little shaky. The colonists are visited several times by various delegations representing different interests on Earth. Given the probability that space travel will be inordinately expensive in the near future, especially for an overcrowded Earth with strained resources, it seems hardly likely that the administration of a colonising programme would be carried out in the manner that the author describes with one-hop rockets arriving on Doona in rapid succession like fleets of London Transport buses. All plausibility finally vanishes near the end of the book with a six-year old child conducting negotiations with the Erruhan. It would require a writer of some genius to make such a scene convincing and to invoke the irony so clearly intended but swamped by sheer implausibility.

McCaffrey is essentially a small canvas writer, more comfortable with a small cast which allows her to explore her characters and, more importantly, an uncomplicated plot which does not make impossible demands on them The Ship Who Sang, a series of sequential shorts, is, for these reasons, the best of these books. The brain of a baby girl is removed from her deformed body and installed as the controlling mechanism of a spaceship. Helva, the girl, retains the mental characteristics of a human and is psychologically adapted to her role. McCaffrey is more at ease within the cloistered environment of the ship and the conflicts between Helva and her human passengers have a better ring of authenticity than the antics of Gorlot in Restorate and the dreadful Landrau in Decision at Doona As an observer of human emotion, McCaffrey can be acute. Her abilities are primarily descriptive rather than analytical (not a flaw in itself) but are confined to impulses which spring from basically "good" intentions she is incapable of creating characters which win our sympathy but not those which engender our disgust. Her villains are invariably stereotypes. She also has difficulties with the movement of a story, especially in describing events which do not have an immediate bearing on her protagonists and in creating a convincing background. Her characters move through a comic-book landscape, real people with nowhere to go

THE MALACIA TAPESTRY by Brian Wilson Aldiss. Jonathan Cape; London; July 1976; 213 pp; £3.85; ISBN 0-224012468-X

Reviewed by David Wingrove

Brian Aldiss is a writer who embraces all styles, all crends and yet has never spoken out in any voice but his own The Malacia Tapestry is distinctly Aldiss; the humour, the richness, the amusing asides and the disturbing philosophical undercurrents - each

quite subtly underplayed - are, to me, the important facets of any work by Brian Aldiss. This book is his finest yet - a masterpiece.

I hesitate to elucidate upon the plot because, like *Hothouse*, Aldiss presents us here with yet another of his compulsive dioramas, best encountered personally. But I shall, nevertheless; even knowing the outcome and with the benefit of considered afterthought I am compelled once again to start at the beginning and wander through the opulent and teeming alleyways of Malacia with Perian de Chirolo, the narrator and protagonist of this tale. Few books have that effect; there are always far too many other good books unread to contemplate re-reading a recently completed volume - *Malacia* is good enough to warrant an exception.

Perian is an actor, a profession little demanded in economically-depressed Malacia. His bohemian life-style - scrounging meals and funds, wenching and drinking - is shown to us from the start. As we observe life through his eyes the enigma of Malacia, a city-state where change has been abolished for several millennia, gradually emerges. Is this set far in the future or in an alternate world to ours? Perian neither thinks about this nor cares to think: his philosophy is to accept the social framework of Malacia (much akin to the divided Italy of Machiavelli's day) and try to climb, by fair means or foul, into the higher echelons of the rich and the powerful. We become acquainted with the nature of religion in Malacia through Perian's everyday dealings with the powers of superstition and darkness, the natural and higher religions, advocates of both the good and the bad in Man (though it is generally held in Malacia that Man has descended from Satan). Later, these are to play a crucial part in Perian's re-evaluation of his life, but for now they are, like his social circumstances, merely an integral part of his life, to be accepted but not considered.

Perian is a charming character and even his small deceits carry the taint of innocence. His worldly actions hide an inner-confusion of emotion even he does not recognise until the very end. Whilst unemployed he encounters a northerner, Otto Bengtsohn, who offers him work. Perian accepts and becomes involved in an innovative process for producing photographic slides (a process forbidden under Malacia's creed). His motives for doing so are, as ever, self-centred, the beautiful Armida Hoytola (whom he wished to bed) is to "act" in the zahnoscope production and there is, of course, the incentive of a full stomach and beer money. Armida's father, Andrea, is an influential man, a wealthy merchant of considerable power. Perian recognises an opportunity of ascending in the social order and sets out to gain Armida's favour (and seems to succeed), winning from her a secret promise of marriage. That achieved he must prove himself worthy of her in the cold, calculating eyes of Andrea Hoytola.

I must pause before I continue, for part of the impact of this book lies in Aldiss' skilful use of a "dumb show" (as in the mouse-trap scene in *Hamlet*). Otto tells the story of Prince Mandicula, the piece they are to produce with the zahnoscope. This proves to be a fairly accurate, if not exact, parallel to the fate of Perian; telling of the betrayal of Prince Mandicula by his most trusted friend, General Gerald, his lover's unfaithfulness and her ultimate rejection of him. Aldiss' ability as a subtle but compelling story-teller is never better. We are wooed by Perian's self-contained view of Malacia and begin to accept his value judgments. The poor are pitiful, yes, but that is the way it is and they could do something about it; the rich are powerful, yes, but again it is the way things are and they know best how to hold the reins. And so we begin to accept Malacia as Brian Aldiss sets to work to pull the edifice down about our ears.

The ideas of Gurdjieff seem to have an attraction for Mr Aldiss - the philosophy that a single action is only one of an infinite spectrum of actions carried out at that same instant. This seems to be at the core of the enigma of Malacia, at the heart of every exotic difference we become accustomed to as the novel progresses. Man descended from the reptiles and the goats; winged men and satyrs; wizards and ancestral animals (dinosaurs); magic amulets and the Turk at the gate. One man, it seems, has accepted the nature of the enigma - Perian's father, a hermit scholar, who describes it thus:

"It has well been divined by the scholars that our world is only one of a number of alchemically conceivable worlds. In some other worlds of possibility, to make an extreme case, *homo sapiens* may have been wiped out entirely - say at the great battle of Uitzenboshiquetzilaba, over three million, one thousand and seven hundred years ago. The result would be a nightmare world in which one of the other human races had supremacy and Malacia never existed."

Alchemy sits with philosophy even where the truth spars, and the vision has, for that reason, a vivid credibility as we remember our own renaissance past.

Perian continues oblivious of his father's remarks, and then falls foul of love. He is set tasks to perform by Armida's father and succeeds beyond all expectations. As in all the best fairy stories, Perian expects the hand of the "princess", but he is in the wrong fable - this is the story of Prince Mandicula - and his best friend, Guy, indulges in carnal sport with his beloved, who in turn rejects him.

Thus, in a nutshell, the story.

As we reach the denouement we find Perian a mellowed and much more considerate character, the same charming personality but without his colourful faults. He has rejected the creed of revolution offered him by the followers of Otto but he has also rejected the excesses of the society in which he lives. He has suffered a spiritual visitation and a crushing emotional blow and his disillusionment allows for a most touching finale.

The story, as given above, is only the fleshless skeleton of what is Aldiss' most opulent work. The book is a tapestry, forever hinting at the world beyond Malacia whilst gorging our senses with every sight, sound and scent to be found in the city. It is almost a picaresque novel contained within one city; Perian travels about Malacia meeting dukes and artists, actors and merchants, parasites and peasants. Malacia has all the flavour of the ancient Jugoslavia captured so well in his travel book *Cities and Stones*, and it is fun trying to track down the geographical whereabouts of Malacia (and to fail!)

The packaging deserves a mention. *Malacia* is resplendent in a Tiepolo dust jacket, a black and white etching evocative of the atmosphere of the novel. Scattered amongst the texts are another seven full-page illustrations (six by G. B. Tiepolo, one by Francesco Maggiotto), each one a beautiful augmentation of the story. It is also noticeable that nowhere, either on the cover or in the lining notes, is it mentioned that this is SF. If this is an attempt to deliberately break from the confines of a publisher's label then I wish it luck - it deserves to be a best-seller!

In recent years our best SF has had a cold and austere feel to it, typified by Le Guin and Silverberg. This book is a delight, as deep as anything by those two and yet so warm, so engrossing and attractive. It suggests that we are only now beginning to see the best of Brian Aldiss, and if so then the field of SF must flourish in response in the coming years. Aldiss tends not to repeat a successful formula, I wish, here, he would.

Hugo and Nebula, without a doubt...

THE BEST OF CORDWAINER SMITH by Cordwainer Smith. Ballantine; New York- July 1975; 377 pp (+ 18 pp intro.), $1.95; available on import from Futura; 75p; ISBN 0-345-24581-4

Reviewed by David Wingrove

It is rare to come across a writer like Cordwainer Smith, a man with the patience and vision to construct an alternate universe in its totality. The SF novels and short stories produced by Smith between 1945 and 1966 were set in a future he had constructed in great depth; his stories linked by a multiplicity of events, creeds, and mythical figures. Which is all to say that this "Best of" collection is unique, for it reads like a disconnected novel (in the manner of Wolfe's <u>The Fifth Head of Cerberus</u>), twelve stories that trace Smith's "mythological" future history across ten millenia.

The introductory essay by J. J. Pierce, complete with its "Timeline from the Instrumentality of Mankind" (a placing of Smith's works in proper time sequence) is an excellent commentary on the enigma of Dr Paul Linebarger and is a fascinating glimpse into the range of influences assimilated by the man, Linebarger and transmuted into fiction by the writer, Smith.

Man spreads to the stars and conquers the spaceways: his expansion throughout the universe is rapid and he begins to "manage" nature. Thus far Smith's vision can be likened to Heinlein's. But Smith's kaleidoscopic history is secondary to the quasi-religious theme of the loss and rediscovery of Man's humanity. Read a single story in isolation and this is only vaguely apparent. Trace the influence through from genesis (as this book does indeed attempt) and it is wholly evident. In this collection the stories are presented in an "historical" sequence, progressing from 6,000 AD through to 16,000 AD.

"Scanners Live in Vain" was written in 1945 and shows considerable inventiveness for such an early piece of work. The Scanners are men adapted to live and work in space (and so long before "Mariner" etc...) and the story tells of their reaction to the news that they may have become "obsolete". Pierce compares Smith to Silverberg, and the comparison is valid. Even at this stage the depth of Smith's creation is quite staggering. The prose is clumsy but then this is a story about clumsy beings who only become human fully when "cranched".

"The Lady Who Sailed the Soul" is a beautifully sensitive story with a considerable wealth of detail - both technical and psychological. Helen America is raised as the perfect child; her life blighted by total media coverage for the first fifteen years of her life. She meets a star "sailor", Mr Grey-No-More, who has spent 40 years bringing a starship to Earth (in one month of his subjective life). This is a simple love story with a difference: strong moral undertones and a genuinely touching ending.

"The Game of Rat and Dragon". Planoforming has been discovered, a means of travelling in two dimensions across vast distances in nanoseconds. It brings its accompanying dangers - strange forces that destroy ships and leave men mindlessly insane. "Pin-lighting", a means of combatting these dangers, is developed, and telepathic men, partnered by intelligent cats, fight the "rats and dragons" in the depths of space. Beautifully told.

"The Burning of the Brain". This story impresses upon me that SF is losing a lot by neglecting the emotional for the psychological. Smith takes the best from both worlds and provokes both an intellectual and emotional response from his reader. His language is simple but the underlying philosophy is deeply considered and well presented. This is another story about "deep space" and tells of Go-Captain Magno Taliano and his final voyage in the planoforming starship Wu-Feinstein.

"The Crime and Glory of Commander Suzdal". Nowhere is it more obvious that Smith regards these tales as his future's "myths" (like the Odyssey, King Arthur, Beowulf) and this intriguing tale toys with time and space in the manner of grand space opera. We have our first mention of Shayol, the "hell" planet, and also an obscure glimpse of the future of Man on other planets.

"Golden The Ship Was, Oh Oh Oh!". The beauty of the best SF is that it has a timeless quality. Whereas "mundane" literature will often age (and quite noticeably), SF, as it reaches each new generation, remains as fresh as ever, the ideas - for the main part - still lively. The more it is detached from everyday life (i.e. towards fantasy) the more so this is true. Literary anachronism and scientific discovery are its sole erosive forces. Here, Man defeats a hostile invader by means of a ruse (a ninety million mile long spaceship. Van Vogt take that!). This is a very short, very compact story rich in its references to the Instrumentality.

"The Dead Lady of Clown Town". A novella of considerable complexity. Smith reconstructs the story of Joan of Arc in an SF idiom. This is almost a fairy-tale. Everything is pre-determined and the characters (!) are waiting just to undertake their role in it. (Smith explains this very vaguely in terms of mathematical possibilities - Gurdjieff strikes again!)

Clown Town is the sanctuary of the Underpeople (the workers of Smith's future Universe, created by Man from animals in human form), who are prepared for the days when Elaine and D'Joan (D' = dog) lead them in a rebellion of love. Smith's subdued Christianity surfaces in this story. It is a tale about faith. But his version can be stomached; his use of ritual and romance is restrained

and the "religious" moments are moving because they are gut-reactions and not "sugar-and-spice" theories. D'Joan's "love" is an amalgam of the spiritual, the revolutionary and the practical. She admits that they are outnumbered and outgunned by Man but they nevertheless make the gesture (futile but optimistic) to try to change things. She knows they cannot succeed, but she also realises the value of heroic (and well-publicised) failure.

Smith uses a style of writing of Chinese derivation (Pierce informs us) in this story, and it is most attractive. He hints that the mundane and expected is about to occur and then throws the poetic and totally surprising at us in the next paragraph. For example:

Humans are people, the underpeople are the equivalent of machines, to be treated as such. The dead Lady Panc Ashash (in robot form) is about to be "killed for revolt." We are prepared by Smith for this eventuality. She talks to the robot sergeant: "See for yourself. Read my brain. I am a robot. I am also a woman. You cannot disobey people. I am people. I love you. Furthermore you are people. You think. We love each other. Try. Try to attack." "I - I cannot," said the robot sergeant, his milky eyes seeming to spin with excitement. "You love me? You mean I'm alive? I exist?"

How often has Phil Dick done this, for example, to us at a critical moment and lifted the mundane into the sublime?

It is interesting to note the "myths within myths" Smith creates. He tells us of the historical inaccuracy of the folk-songs, paintings and dramas that have arisen from these events, and states how the "real" facts can be easily verified from scientific records. Smith hints that he is looking backward from a time that is very much like our own (now); where "chance" and "accident" are accepted as important shaping factors in life, and where diversity is valued above uniformity.

This is the tale most concerned with the "Rediscovery" of Man's humanity. The strong pacifist nature of Smith (who, as Linebarger, was an advisor on Foreign Policy for Heads of State and an authority on Psychological Warfare) surfaces here (pages 195-199) as the underpeople die happily, shouting declarations of love at their bemused executioners (a la Michael Valentine Smith).

"Under Old Earth". The Instrumentality of Lords "controls" Mankind (400 years of life without work, unhappiness, pain or fear) everywhere except in the Gebiet, "under old Earth". The Lord Sto Odin goes down into the Gebiet to learn how he might save "terribly happy man" and meets strange, untameable forces from the stars. Smith throws in a handful of wonders and leads us a merry dance.

"Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons". This is the only story to deal directly with Norstrilia (Old North Australia) and describes the ingenious defence mechanism devised by the wealthiest people in the universe to guard their wealth. I'll leave you (like the thief, Benjacomin) to discover what the Kittons are.... A marvellously worked tale.

"Alpha Ralpha Boulevard". This is the culmination of the "Rediscovery" and the personal discovery of one man and his woman of fear and true happiness, love and hope, good and evil, none of which existed for them while they were beneath the "control" of the Instrumentality. We meet C'Mell (C'= cat) for the first time in this touching love story, and encounter a few more of the wonders of Smith's future.

"The Ballad of Lost C'Mell". The social matrix Smith describes throughout is (in its own terms) quite credible. If these wonders came to pass it would happen as Smith depicts it, an elite and a slave class, creators and created. It is a familiar theme in SF but rarely investigated at this length. The underpeople must work to live, we learn; if they become sick or bankrupt they are "terminated" and replaced, if as children they fail in their lessons they are "terminated".

This is the story of the Lord Jestocost and his unfulfilled love affair with C'Mell, a beautiful girlygirl (geisha-type). It is also the story of how the underpeople win their civil rights.

"A Planet named Shayol". This is the final and finest story in a fine collection. A powerful climax, it is an SF interpretation of Dante's "Inferno". Shayol is a planet which changes humans into abominations, a planet inhabited by an over-friendly virus/intelligence that sustains and promotes human life and growth. Opponents of the Empire are sent to Shayol for punishment. There they suffer intense pain but are given to experience overwhelming pleasure at the same time in the form of the drug super-condamine, provided by a benevolent Instrumentality.

A man, Mercer, is sent to Shayol for committing the "unmentionable crime". He becomes a walking "culture-dish", growing spare parts galore which are pruned from him at regular intervals, deep-frozen and shipped throughout the universe as prosthetics. Even "hell" has its economic role to play in Smith's scheme! Mercer is one of many, but only he finds love in that perverse place. All turns out well; those beyond hope are given a soothing overdose and the savable are saved. Such is myth, Smith-style, a joyous-horrific romp through nightmare and fantasy, the incredible and the starkly real juxtaposed.

Having completed the book the plot details have blurred, only the last story retains any individual identity. The early Smith reads much like the late Smith; it is all part of the same complex vision. Go-Captains and habermans, congohelions and homunculi, manshonyaggers and stroon; these are only a few of the wonders he presents to us. The prose is simple, but rarely ineffective, and the immediate appeal is emotional. But that is intentional. These are future "myths" told in the manner of ancient mythology. Beneath the simpler veneer is a cauldron of philosophical riches. I enjoyed the book immensely and can only hope Ballantine will package the remaining twelve Cordwainer Smith short stories in a similarly convenient manner.

What else can I say? Recommended without reservations.

NOVA 1 edited by Harry Harrison; Robert Hale; London; 1978, £3.10, 1300 0-7091-6702-0

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

In his introduction to Nova 1, Harry Harrison defends the relatively new idea of the original SF collection, as against the old "Best of.." anthology tradition. Certainly the idea is a good one; in fact, the ideal original SF collection would combine the maximum of variety and originality with the maximum sense of unity, according to the old Renaissance ideal of story-sequences. This would supply us with something neither the anthologies (concentrating as they do on individually excellent stories, at the expense of unity) nor the magazines can provide.

Nova 1 certainly has variety. In fact, until around page 70 I thought it was going to be a grasshopper-minded book, flitting easily over a variety of themes, but leaving the reader finally unsatisfied. J. B. Pierce's "The Higher Things" - an efficient and amusing tribute to Stanley Weinbaum's Haskell van Manderpoots - does just this, settling finally and rather belatedly on the theme of body-mind dualism, and expanding into a vision of an all-mental future (for why Manderpoots has finally fixed everything ecologically so that men are set free to pursue the Life of the Mind). Yet when it's all over, nothing has been settled- a few problems have been touched on, and that's all. Then there's Chan Davis's "Mermaids", the hero of which is a closed social unit comprising six members. (I won't reveal more than that. It's an original and charming idea, well worked out.) This is one of those stories that somehow call up all the other SF tales ever written in the Golden Age; not because it's derivative (it isn't) but because the author obviously meant it to do just that. It exists very much within the context of the whole SF output of the last thirty years, and this is the essence of the pleasure it gives. You could force it into line, thematically, with other stories in the Nova collection; but you'd be doing the story a disservice.

Gene Wolfe's "The Horars of War" is likewise good, as far as it goes. The scene is some future war, in which human combatants have been, by and large, replaced by humanoids - Homolog Organisms (Army Replacement Simulations), or HORARS. The story is narrated by a reporter who has somehow disguised himself as a HORAR in order to experience their life at first hand - or so it seems, until uncertainty sets in and we're no longer sure that the narrator is human. The story is vivid and detailed, and Wolfe flirts beguilingly with the notion of the HORARS being redeemed by one of their creators entering the sub-human world he has created, and bearing everything the HORARS have to bear. Good stuff- but again, these issues are raised rather than dealt with.

For me, at any rate, Nova 1 only got off the ground (taking me with it) around page 70, with Brian Aldiss's "Swastika!". This is Aldiss at his most plain and unambiguous, and is done the worse for that: taking the form of an interview, conducted by Aldiss, with Adolf Hitler (who lives in retirement at Ostend under the name of Geoffrey Bungleweather), it is very funny within the Beyond the Fringe tradition, and also very true in its summing up of the world situation since 1945. It isn't just a political piece, either: it fits in with Aldiss's deepest preoccupations, and it fits in with the rest of Nova 1. According to Aldiss's Hitler, 1945 was the beginning, not the end, of the War: the time of the Dictators is upon us. (See Jung, Dreams, Memories, Reflections, pp 357-358) Unless of course, man can somehow step out of the order of things represented by the Dictators, and become Man; unless, that is, the dream of Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" can be realised. Within the framework of this question, Gene Wolfe's "The Horars of War", and the van Manderpoots story, take on a clearer meaning: how do men become Man?

The problem is presented clearly in "The Winner" by Donald E. Westlake. In which the two types of the Dictator and the Poet are set against each other. The Dictator is governor of the ultimate rationalised Prison: the prisoners all have a black box implanted in them, and if the Box is taken too far away from the prison's central Transmitter, it transmits agony to the whole nervous system. Prison walls are unnecessary. To the Prisoner-Poet, the situation is perfectly clear: "I'll never stop leaving. I'll never stop being. I'll not stop believing I'm who I must be". Good stuff, impeccably told.

But suppose men do not succeed in becoming Man? Robert Silverberg and Barry Malzberg readily supply visions of ultimate failure. The Silverberg - "A Happy Day in 2381" - is saved from being yet another trip to Dystopia by an unobtrusive but masterly piece of subtlety. The story describes the visit of one Nicanor Gortman (a socio-computator from Hell, one of the cities on Venus, which has been terraformed) to Earth, which has become a planet of "urban monads" vast skyscrapers comprising whole cities piled one on the other. The global population is 75,000,000,000 and rising steadily hour by hour. There are men in abundance - but there's not a human being in sight, because Man has been abolished. People are constantly having it off with each other, everything is perfectly organised, and none of it adds up. The wicked twist is this: Nicanor Gortman, the visitor from Hell, is a lost soul from the outermost reaches of the human experiment. In spite of all the ingenuity and organisation, part of him remains alienated and homeless - he is damned. Yet in comparison with the happy world of the "urbmons", this hellish personage makes a bewildered, sympathetic character. Poor Nicanor Gortman ("recognised by his out-building costume in crimson and ultraviolet") is now really in danger of losing his soul. In the year 2381, even the Devil has become outmoded, part of the abortive human experi-

Barry Malzberg, in "Terminus Ego", presents a future of wholly unmitigated failure. Man's giant step onto the Moon was, apparently, the prelude to total harbour: we didn't make it, it didn't come together. "Nothing ever happens on the Moon". Only the dregs, the dropouts, remain. "Perhaps the true horror of the swindle only assaults us at the moment of someone's death there; to bury on the Moon would be a complete severance from our history". Here Malzberg sets up a strange alliance with C. S. Lewis. For Lewis, of course, the Moon was set up there to be written about in stories, thus becoming part of Man's spiritual landscape: it was not set up there as an object of territorial ambition and general vainglory. But whereas Lewis was well acquainted with the spiritual landscape, Malzberg's narrator can only shrug with apathy. "Just a speculation, I'm not very good at this sort of thing". The Moon, after Man's withdrawal,

reminds him of Coney Island, with which he is well acquainted. His disillusionment is only qualified by the suppressed rage of disappointment that comes to the fore at the climax of the story. Man cannot escape their history they cannot become Man.

"And This Did Costs Do", an SF poem by Ray Bradbury - and one of his best - approaches the same questions by an indirect and fantastic route. Take Chicago. Either this cityscape represents a final lack of meaning, a denial of Man, or else it does possess meaning - as one of the circles of Dante's Hell. Meaning - even such a terrible meaning - is surely better than no meaning, for while there is meaning there is at least the possibility of Man. If there is a Hell, then there must be a Heaven; and in Goethe's Faust the Devil is an active agent in Faust's redemption. The Heaven-Hell antithesis seems to be built into the creation of Man. But Bradbury's attitude to the Judaeo-Christian tradition can be ambivalent (see "The Last City of Mars") - isn't Hell too great a price to pay for Meaning? Isn't the whole Man-creating, Meaning-creating tradition of Western civilisation a terrible trap? He lets the question hang in the air; but not before he has stated it in terms of the most vivid fantasy.

Until its very last paragraphs, David Gerrold's "Love Story in Three Acts" promises to contribute something to this doubt-and-despair side of Nova 1, then, suddenly, it dissolves into pure bathos by using a singularly unsuprised O. Henry type ending. Gerrold's formula seems to have been O. Henry, plus Sex, plus Circularity (a Love Machine is involved), minus Inspiration. Very disappointing.

Now to the more optimistic side of the collection, which is represented by an excellent short story and very good novella. In Naomi Mitchison's "Mary and Joe", Man (or, if you like, Woman) really seems to be winning through, despite the police and the military, though the battle's a hard one. This is the best piece of SF romanticism genetics I can remember reading; and, as befits the talent of J. B. S. Haldane, the science in it is really convincing. It is also deeply thought-provoking, and highly ambitious. Harry Harrison has given us a companion piece, F. M. O'Donnel a "In the Pocket", which treats the healing of diseased tissue (literally diseased, yet at the same time the incarnation of Original Sin) from the opposite direction, being very pessimistic. It nicely offsets the Mitchison story, but I didn't find it very distinguished in itself. Basically, it's a variation on Asimov's Fantastic Voyage.

Last, but certainly not least, there is the novelette by Gordon Dickson, "Jean Duprez". This is the "rattling good yarn" mentioned in the blurb - and it is, too, with its Last-Grand Western and Rider Haggard associations. It's all about the spiritual point of contact between Man and Alien on Alpha Eridani, and the hero is the young son of one of the settlers. The boy has never seen Earth, and is half-alien in spirit - the first human to find himself in this position. The story enacts, in convincing adventure-story terms, the resulting struggle. It is about the making of a boy into a man - and it is about the making of Man, his creation, in terms of a whole new context on Alpha Eridani. Very good story-telling, with a mysticism that is wholly integrated into the story.

Verdict. Nova 1 is a nice omnibus, nicely balanced on the whole, with a few exceptional items in it. Typos, however, seem to be proliferating these days - on page 61 we have "stayltations" for "simulations", on page 58, Manderpools a famed subjunctivisor becomes a "subjunctivisor"; and, worst of all, on p 51 Bradbury's zombie parameter - hardly a thing you can miss, for crying out loud - is butchered to liar tan, "wilderness" becoming "wildness".

THE FEAST OF ST DIONYSUS by Robert Silverberg: Gollancz; London, 1975; 255 pp. £3.80. ISBN 0-575-02183-4

Reviewed by Chris Evans

New Silverberg collections seem to be proliferating at the present time, as publishers frantically gather together his final offerings. The five stories in this volume are all recent works having appeared within the last three years, two of them ("Schwartz Between the Galaxies" and "In the House of Double Winds") in magazines in this country. It is interesting to examine them in the light of Silverberg's retirement and with particular reference to the interview which appeared in Vector 76/77 in which he explains that he gradually developed a sense of apathy and futility towards writing. Similar themes - those of alienation and world-weariness - manifest themselves in the stories which make up this collection.

Thom Cameron, the astronaut in the title story, returning from an abortive Mars mission, in which his companions have died, suffering from guilt and a loss of purpose. Thom Schwartz the anthropologist in "Schwartz Between the Galaxies", fantasising about the exotic life-forms on other star-systems because the real world is now a genetic melting-pot. Thom Cameron, the explorer in "Trips", shuttling through parallel time streams, seeking diversion and entertainment without any real purpose. How closely does fiction mirror the private life of the writer? How alike are Cameron the famous astronaut and Silverberg the celebrated science fiction writer? Page 40 of "The Feast of St Dionysus":

Obviously they had never heard of him. Were they even aware that a spaceship from Earth had lately journeyed to Mars? Probably not. He found that rankling. For years Cameron had had to cope with children paralysed with astonishment at finding themselves in the presence of a genuine astronaut. Here he could shed the burdens of fame.

A passage which could have had its genesis at a convention with a bored Silverberg surrounded by admiring fans. Still, it is the work and not the man that we must judge, and Silverberg is, as always, eminently the artist.

In the title story, the protagonist's alienation and guilt-ridden conscience serves effectively to debunk the myth of the astronaut as the epitome of the all-American male, the supercompetent frontiersman. Cameron is a man, obsessed by memories of the abortive mission and increasingly fascinated by the rituals of a strange cult in the Californian desert devoted to the worship of the god of wine. Or is the desert settlement merely a fantasy? No matter, for the real interest lies in the

interplay between the rational half of Oxenhuer's mind, as represented by the astronaut, and the once dormant but now increasingly important mystic element of his persona, as represented by his growing affinity with the Celtiats. Oxenhuer seeks to lose himself in their celebrations and revelries, to forsake rationality forever and drown himself in wine.

In "Schwartz Between the Galaxies", the main character's rejection of the real world has more humorous overtones, though it, too, carries a sting. Schwartz is a man born out of time, devoted to the study of different cultures but lacking the raw materials for his work in a world where ease of travel and interbreeding have erased all ethnic barriers. This idea of world-wide racial uniformity is not new (Anthony Burgess used it in The Wanting Seed and Ursula Le Guin in The Lathe of Heaven) but Silverberg's story is the first I've encountered which explores one of its implications: if all mankind becomes alike, then we lose all frames of reference with which to judge our society. And so Schwartz (significantly a Jew) journeys around the world delivering lectures condemning the loss of cultural diversity to enthusiastic by unappreciative audiences, dreaming all the while that he is on a starship surrounded by aliens with whom he can swap information on customs and life-style. "Schwartz" is all "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty", although Silverberg's hero is far more aware of his anguish than Thurber's (he, like Oxenhuer, is undergoing a nervous breakdown) and this somehow makes his sufferings less poignant than Mitty's.

"Tripe" is less successful, an idea in search of a plot. Whereas Oxenhuer and Schwartz are in great distress, Cameron's dissatisfaction with his world merely results in wanderlust. Parallel world stories have become commonplace in sf and although Silverberg has his protagonist shuttling through a variety of time-streams, the fact that he is not on any real quest (apart from a vague search for counterparts of his real wife) means that "Tripe" is less a story than a series of loosely related scenes. Towards the end, Silverberg attempts to introduce a little drama but the deus ex machina which he chooses is too predictable.

The two remaining stories in this volume are on slightly different themes. "In the House of Double Minds" is the closest approximation to a "pure" sf story, that is, one in which the speculative element is of the greatest importance. The "double minds" are children who have had the two hemispheres of their brains separated in order to develop them into oracles. Silverberg conveys his fascination with this idea in his descriptions of the children's training and the story is thoroughly absorbing - so absorbing that at the end I wanted to know more about the strange almost oriental world in which it is set.

The final story, "This Is the Road", is a fantasy in a similar mode to "Nightwings". Its theme is fatalism, the same fatalism which Silverberg himself expresses when he says ". there are no solutions, only adjustments" (interview, Vector 76/77). His character Loaf echoes these sentiments at the end of this tale of a post-technological Earth with its diverse array of peoples greatly evolved from present-day man. Loaf and his companions are fleeing from the Teeth, a breed of sub humans who are ravishing the countryside. In order to finally escape they must give up the wagon in which they have been travelling in addition to most of their personal possessions, and afterwards Loaf tells his companion: " .nothing matters, Shadow, nothing except learning to accept what comes". Personally, I find this philosophy unacceptable, but there is no doubt that Silverberg is a very eloquent espouser of his lack of convictions.

Looking at the collection as a whole, it becomes clear that the stories strongly reflect many elements of present-day West Coast society. Thus Silverberg presents us with a global California in "Schwartz", a benevolent bunch of Mussolinis in the title story, the sense of rootlessness which seems to possess so many Americans in "Tripe" and their obsession with material possessions in "Road". Only in "Minds" does he really break free from current preoccupations in order to explore a science fictional theme, and even this story owes something to the now-fashionable flirtation with eastern mysticism and philosophy. "Minds" is the most refreshing story in the book; a sense of decay and resignation pervades the other stories - clinical in their execution, they are the work of a talented but tired mind. For this reason, Silverberg's retirement from writing may ultimately prove to be a wise decision, for it is possible that after a period of reappraisal he may eventually return to the field ready to tackle new themes and to ally his undoubted literary abilities to a vision of the world in which resignation gives way to a modicum of hope.

RATNER'S STAR by Don DeLillo. Knopf; New York, 1976; 438 pp. $10.00

Reviewed by John Brunner

Increasingly, even though belatedly, the American literary establishment is trying to come to terms with that area of the modern world where creativity and inventiveness make themselves manifest through scientific, technical and mathematical channels rather than what are conventionally regarded as artistic ones.

Welcoming this as I do, any prospective purchaser might be deceived by the flap copy of Don DeLillo's new novel into imagining that it's some sort of milestone on the road to a much-wished-for reconciliation. Here's what is promised by the blurb:

"DeLillo...has concentrated his unique talents on a central paradox of our age: the delusions and chimeras of the scientific [illegible].

One brightens. One perks up. One thinks of the perceptive reviewer who said of Hoyle's The Black Cloud that he would recommend it not for its story but for the insight it gave into the scientific power-dream. One dares to hope for the same on a grander scale: a novel in which the scientists will be neither misunderstood heroes nor malevolent monsters, a fair and honest depiction of a world in which what scientists work at matters to everybody, and is regarded as important - like politics, like business, like belief.

We need - oh how we need! - fiction that can cope with the implicit realities of the strange country where scientific research pays off its mortgage in coin less current

than the pound, the mark, the dollar or the riyal, yet which they take more readily. We hunger for the novelist who can make us understand how on some half astral plane an Einstein could prefer his figuring to his food. Composers? We've been offered them, and automatically we invoke Mann, with lesser writers by way of an afterthought. Painters? Well, if we didn't laugh at The Agony and The Ecstacy we broke through to The Horse's Mouth where painting is concerned we are at least not deprived.

[illegible]

But as to scientists we are still where we were before, in spite of Ratner's Star. DeLillo has not supplied our long-felt want. On the contrary, he has done the inverse. He cheats. He retreats. He defeats. We are left with the stock mockery of a superior (quote and unquote) literary mind, too lazy to strive after identification with the scientist as a real person, too obsessed with his internal cleverness to dispense with fashionable word games and too frightened of what he suspects scientists may know to stand his ground and take a long hard look.

All the characters in this novel are defined as scientists, apart from some miscellaneous types hanging around on the fringe who pass as entrepreneurs, car-drivers, secret agents and mobbish furniture. None of those brought to the foreground is convincing: all are straw men dressed up in the prejudices of someone who has been misled, probably by favourable reviews of earlier novels, into imagining that any long book is ipso facto a masterpiece, and what counts above all is to keep on going until the word count specified in the contract has been met.

Is it reasonable to demand of a book devoted, frankly enough, to "chimeras and delusions", this degree of clear-sighted observation?

How can it not be?

If a writer presumes to judge what is, what is not, chimerical in the scientific world-view, if he undertakes to caricature and parody scientists' attitudes and behaviour, he must abide by the basic laws of satire which exact a standard by which to find wanting what you ridicule and a vision of what might lie beyond it in a more perfect world. One mocks a braggart, one sympathises with a cripple, one treats an Aunt Sally as a mere object., and here is the essential weakness of DeLillo's book. Upon the dummies with which he has populated it he has projected not, as promised, the chimeras and delusions of scientists, but his own, those which he shares with all too many people in his position: the misapprehensions which in a dream might be alarming, even nightmarish, but which by the light of day show in their true guise of phantoms as absurd as ogres and ogres and less amusing.

In fairness one must admit that the general gloom is occasionally lightened by an epigram or an aperçu, but most of this pile of pages is taken up with a wearisome procession of "scientists" named Billy Twillig, Orang Mohole, U F O Schwartz, J Graham Summer, Viverrine Gentian, Shlomo Glottle, Sibe Iolce-Kore, Armand Verbene, and so on. Sometimes they appear separately, sometimes they congregate in large numbers, particularly at an underground torch-lighting ceremony for Nobel prize-winners only. I think the writer may believe his choice of names to be funny, and indeed it amounts to as good a joke as the book can offer.

Ostensibly Ratner's Star is about mankind's first communication from the stars, which proves to emanate from our own ancestors. On closer examination it turns out to be about the dismal fact that the Two Cultures are alive and sick in the United States.

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KURT VONNEGUT, JR. A CHECKLIST compiled by Betty Lenhardt Hudgens; Bruccoli-Clark, Detroit; 1972; 67 pp. $12.50; ISBN 0-8103-0903-3

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

I didn't know what to do when I received this review copy, because, you see, I hadn't read any Vonnegut. No, not even Slaughterhouse-Five, which always seemed to be one of those books that are valued according to political rather than literary criteria. (On the other side of the political fence, of course, there's Solzhenitsyn. I haven't read him either, for the same reason.) Besides, Vonnegut has become so awesomely respectable: the news release concerning this Vonnegut Checklist quotes a critic called Richard Schickel as saying that "serious people" should take Vonnegut "seriously", and that 'Vonnegut has advanced from diagnostician to exorcist, finding in intensified comic art the magical analgesic for the temporary relief of existential pain'. Aaaaaargh! This seemed to confirm my worst fears, and it is true that, since he became academically respectable, Vonnegut's creative output seems to have suffered badly - judging by the reviews, anyway.

But somehow I had to review this checklist: so I went to my local library and borrowed - not Slaughterhouse-Five but The Sirens of Titan. And, on the whole, enjoyed it. Vonnegut is certainly distinctive (which is all I desire of any writer), and very much at the social-satirical end of the SF spectrum. Perhaps a bit too much so. No doubt this is what makes him so handy for the Lit.Crit. boys - take a writer like that, and you can easily treat him as, primarily, a Critic of Society, and write endlessly about him, making him so much grist for your mill. A pity. But Vonnegut's actual stuff is still good, distinctive, and worth following up, suddenly I found myself feeling grateful for having been provided with the Vonnegut Checklist.

The Checklist is pretty well exhaustive up to 1972 (thus, arguably, covering the author's best creative years, so far anyway) - unless you insist on finding out about Vonnegut's pseudonymous work, which is reputedly massive in extent. None of this is dealt with; but as Ms Hudgens says, "one of the purposes of the present checklist is to uncover the unidentified stories". The Checklist does deal with all Vonnegut's novels and collections (accounting for 25 stories in all), from Player Piano (1952) to Happy Birthday, Wanda June (1971), listing in each case the first edition, followed by all the other US, Canadian and British editions, plus Book-of-the-Month-Club editions, together with bibliographical details (which printing, pagination, binding, etc.). Interspersed with this are facsimiles of title pages (as in William Nolan's Ray Bradbury Companion, though the Vonnegut Checklist is on a much smaller scale - and much more neatly arranged).

Then come sections dealing with first book publication of five stories, then the first magazine appearances of forty-four stories,

two plays and one poem. After that, all Vonnegut's published articles and letters are located precisely (18 items), then two non-fiction books with contributions by Vonnegut are designated, as are four of his book reviews, six blurbs by Vonnegut, nineteen interviews with Vonnegut, and a list of thirty-four juvenile contributions to The Shortridge Daily Echo, plus an indication of similar material, probably by Vonnegut, in the Cornell Sun. Finally comes "related material" (A TV play, two films, a dramatic adaptation. Here the Checklist is beginning to show its age, for the TV script for Between Time And Timbuktu is no longer "unpublished"], and "References and Aids" (which means a list of four college symposia on Vonnegut, and the programme of an occasion at Ohio State University at which Vonnegut was the main speaker).

Vance Bourjaily contributes an informal introduction which nicely conveys Vonnegut the man, and the subtlety of his humour. There's a highly characteristic photoof K.V.

So there you are. Whether this classy treatment of Vonnegut is really worth it - as opposed to the much more humbly-produced Aldiss Checklist, say - is open to argument. Arguably the Hudgens/Nolan treatment gets SF out into the open, which must be a good thing; meanwhile, interested parties will simply have to badger their local librarian about the Vonnegut Checklist. Or direct their queries to Yours Truly.

COSMIC PERSPECTIVES FOR COLLECTORS

THE STAR ROVER by Jack London; Corgi; London; 1976; 303 pp, 85p; ISBN 0-552-10235-9

FOUR ENCOUNTERS by Olaf Stapledon; Brad's Head Books; Hayes; 1976; 111 pp; Hardback ISBN 0-905220-01-3, Paperback ISBN 0-905220-02-1

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Bracketing these two books together for review is something which requires doing for two reasons. Firstly, there is a kinship between London's work and Stapledon's which may serve to illuminate the two texts, and secondly, there is a point which needs to be made concerning the presentation of work whose value must be assessed in historical terms.

To take the second point first, I have previously had occasion to complain about the Corgi "SF Collector's Library" issuing works such as The Star Rover without any introductory material to explain the provenance of the work, the aspects of it which are interesting, and the reasons for that interest. Without the provision of a context this kind of book is likely to be useless to the great majority of readers, who are certain to approach it with the wrong attitude and assess it according to the wrong criteria. Even the data which the publisher is obliged to provide is, in this case, wrong - Corgi claims that this is the first British publication of the work, which has to my certain knowledge gone through at least five editions since it first appeared from Mills and Boon in 1915. (That first edition, and most subsequent ones, carried the title The Jacket, but the alternative title appears in brackets on the spine and title page of the first and second editions, and on the title page of the cheap editions which followed.)

The presentation of the Stapledon book, which carries both an introduction to the specific work and an afterword assessing it in the context of the author's whole output, provides eloquent testimony to what can be achieved by the gesture, even when the attempts are very poor. Brian Aldiss's introduction exhibits the attitude of egregious elitist camaraderie which is one of his two critical voices (the other being flip patronisation) and Richard Kirby's afterword could easily be adequate for an essay in self-congratulation, but still they manage to provide some sort of explanation of why this work merits resurrection from Stapledon's papers and to offer some kind of context in which the reader may reasonably approach and evaluate it. Without such a context the reader would almost certainly be totally at sea, and unless Corgi begin recruiting such material their SF Collector's Library will be hopelessly inadequate.

The works themselves are both literary expressions of the cosmic perspective - the assessment of the human situation and evaluation of human potential in terms of a wide historical context which appreciates the true size and time-scale of the universe.

London's perspective is largely the product of the historical theory of Marx, and retails the adventures of a condemned man who escapes the tortures of intolerable oppression by escaping into a panoramic past to observe first-hand the "spirit of man" perpetually engaged in the struggle against cruel circumstance and towards its ultimate historical goal. (A similar, and to my mind slightly superior, novel - Chaina - was produced by the French Marxist Henri Barbusse some years later).

Stapledon's cosmic perspective, as displayed in such works as Last and First Men and Star Maker, was much more ambitious. The product of a sense of personal alienation and a very strong philosophical curiosity, Stapledon's literary work pushed back the horizons of the rational imagination as far as twentieth century science would allow. Four Encounters is not, like these earlier works, a visionary novel, but part of an attempt to apply that vision as a tool in understanding and coming to terms with the contemporary human situation. The author confronts four breeds of faith, four approaches to the problem of human life, and subjects them to logical testing and evaluation in the light of his own supposedly objective and realistic attitudes.

Both books are polemical, but there is a significant difference between them. London is operating from a base of conviction and faith, Stapledon from a base which retains an essential uncertainty and suspicion of faith. Thus we find Stapledon's discussion with a Christian interrupted by the following sensation:

"Suddenly I saw the Christian and myself as two large and solemn bipeds making strange noises at each other. The words that I had been using in my own mind echoed in my memory as poor animal calls labouring to signify things utterly beyond their range. How can the primitive grunts of any terrestrial animal ever signify truth about the depths and heights of reality? The little set of human discourse can sample only the ocean's surface, and all its harvest is flotsam. How should it possibly reach down to the beauties and horrors of the deep?" (p. 18)

While by contrast, London's novel moves relentlessly to its dramatic conclusion

"There is no death. Life is spirit, and spirit cannot die. Only the flesh dies and passes, ever a-crawl with the chemic ferment that informs it, ever plastic, ever crystallising, only to melt into the flux and to crystallise into fresh and diverse forms that are ephemeral and that melt back into the flux. Spirit alone endures and continues to build upon itself through successive and endless incarnations as it works upward toward the light. What shall I be when I live again? I wonder I wonder ." (p. 303)

YOUR ENCOUNTERS by Olaf Stapledon. Argo & Head Books; London; 1976, 311 pp. £1.40; ISBN 0-905220-00-1

Reviewed by David Wingrove

I have read an interesting new book and now I must tell you about it. Of Stapledon's "SF" novels Mr Aldiss has to say: "The atmosphere Stapledon generates is chill but intoxicating. Reading his books is like standing on the top of a high mountain. One can see a lot of planet and much of the sprawling, uncertain works of man, but little actual human activity; from such an altitude, all sense of the individual is lost." (Billion Year Spree) Here Stapledon takes us down amongst the "actual human activity" and looks up at the mountain top for a change. It is not SF, it is philosophy; nevertheless this small gallery of conversations is important to anyone who wishes more than a superficial understanding of his work.

Mr Aldiss introduces these pieces with a few comments on Stapledon's import and a brief history of the manuscripts, and his observation that these are "conversations, not controversies" prepares us for what follows.

"A Christian" - there is a clarity to Stapledon's prose and his manner of presenting ideas and ideologies reminiscent of Herman Hesse. His mild scepticism provokes our sympathy when he says:

"Well, and Jesus? Surely his true glory also was not that he was a supernatural being, descended our athaven, but that he was a human individual (actual or fictitious) whose life, through its unique perfection, had become a symbol reigning in the hearts of men, and strengthening them with the vision of love's divinity."

Christ as a Kaspar Hauser figure- his purity rewarded with rejection and ultimately violent death.

The Christian is depicted as a person deserving of sympathetic consideration. He has progressed from self-delusion and faithlessness to self-knowledge and belief. Stapledon (in his fictional form) does not succumb to the "light" but admits to the Christian's vision whilst poking shrewd holes in his garment of faith. The Christian (like all dogmatists) sees the need for an intelligible universe and a "certainty" to which Stapledon cannot admit without betraying his "spiritual integrity". His use of language and metaphor is never better demonstrated

"Calmly, and without dismay, even with unreasoning joy, I reminded myself that you and I, loved and loving, might well in fact be short-lived sparkles, merely, in an age-old pyrotechnic."

Stapledon continually lifts the debate towards a consideration of a "higher consciousness", a theme fully developed in Star Maker. He accepts the insignificance of a single being but, at the same time, stresses its importance (as a repository of the spirit) for that very reason. It is a ghastly encounter with Christianity, and, as to all these pieces, it results in a mutual agreement to differ

"A Scientist" - there is the superficial appearance in Stapledon's work of an elitist manner at work ("Be careful, Comrade, lest you trick yourself into some sort of Fascism" warns the Revolutionary in the final encounter.) but his frequent self-effacing comments counterbalance this impression and leave the residual feeling that he is merely "different" in his contemplation of what Man is. By exploring the four "extremities" of thought presented here and tempering them with his own, milder opinions, he cleverly gives credence to the latter

He meets a young man, a scientist, at a party, attracted to him by his solitary manner. He listens to the Scientist's analysis of humanity, his simplification of Man into understandable component parts. It is the familiar argument of technological progress versus standards of living: well-grassed pasture in SF. The Scientist argues that everything has a scientific explanation, and Stapledon counters this in his familiar role as sceptic. There are aspects of both that ring true, and Stapledon's view was popular in the years preceding and immediately following the War. The question was raised in many guises, by Lawrence, Huxley, and Tolkien to name but three examples. But rarely are both sides given as they are

This almost becomes SF (in the Sirius vein) as he tours the Scientist's laboratory and sees his experiments in genetic engineering. The Scientist (biologist) is many ways represents the early generation of SF writers, prophesying without counting the cost.

The argument develops into one which examines the legitimate realm of scientific investigation, and Stapledon infers that there are things Science cannot rationalise, religious experience, art, love. Again dogma meets scepticism and flares briefly but inconclusively. Once again the Scientist is presented in a sympathetic light. He is not preaching theories but his deeply held convictions

"A Mystic" - like both the Christian and the Scientist, the Mystic has rejected his old life (and loves) to follow a "calling" The Mystic is condescending and self-absorbed while professing the opposite:

"Fool, how can I tell you what I see? How can I describe sight to the born-blind?"

I disagreed with Mr Aldiss here; I find this the least compelling of the four dialogues The Mystic is consistently self-congratulatory and intolerable. As Mr Kirby points out in his afterword, Stapledon failed to come firmly to grips with the motive being the Eastern doctrines and as such this dialogue falls short of the others. For Mystic substitute 'self-absorbed Man', for even in realising his own nature, the Mystic does not escape it.

"A Revolutionary" - each of these four is shaped by his past, his class, but mainly by his temperament they all tend to seek extreme solutions. The Revolutionary is the most sympathetic of the four. He favours violence as a means to achieve a

just god, but otherwise is as gentle as a lamb (and considerate too) in his dealings with his fellow human beings. Nietzsche shows us the "will to power". Stapledon refutes this and argues for the "will to love". His final "piece about the spirit" summarises his philosophical position. (Pages 98-99)

Richard Kirby writes an epilogue in the form of an essay on the philosophical basis of Stapledon's work. Onemore, perhaps, be gives a definition to the phenomenon witnessed in the last decade in SF. He writes:

"Thus Stapledon regarded not only his non-fiction but also his fiction as being conjectural approximations to truth."

These "conjectural approximations to truth" are the trademark of our better, modern SF writers.

Mr Kirby criticises Stapledon for showing these four "types" as imperfect incarnations of their "breeds". But to do otherwise would have been to lose all philosophical value. Admit the other is right and there is no argument; no exchange of views. Typical people hold these views (and I know acquaintances of mine who fit each would perfectly). Imperfect as they are Mr Kirby notes in his introduction that these were intended as part of a much larger series of "conversations". Perhaps an encounter with a fellow philosopher would have gotten to the core of his philosophy. In any case, I believe Stapledon was attempting to depict the spiritually-inadequate man and his failings. To show that "man" striving for spiritual perfection serves to highlight his moral illiteracy.

As I have already implied, this can be read as a codicile to such works as Star Maker and Last and First Men. It perceives our lives from the same macrocosmic viewpoint. It is a difficult volume and requires some attention and patience, but the rewards are great, and to devotees of Olaf Stapledon it is a fascinating and illuminating experience.

SWEETWATER by Laurence Yep. Faber, London; 1975; 204 pp; £3.25; ISBN 0-571-10883-8

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Sweetwater is, I suppose, a juvenile novel, although the only clue to this is the fact that the ads on the back flap are for other juveniles. But as to the claim of so many good juvenile SF books, Sweetwater is a good deal better written, and more mature, than the commonplace mass-produced genre novel.

Apart from the trivial point that it features a juvenile protagonist there are several aspects of the book that mark its appeal to young readers. It is a very conservative book, placing high value on tradition, on patriarchal authority, on family and community loyalty, and it presents these values in a manner loaded with nostalgia, for the secure world which all these things represent is, in the plot, slowly and irrevocably decaying. Nostalgia is something which is always attractive to adolescents, who are trapped in a situation of rapid and inevitable change, moving out of security into uncertainty. This is also a book much concerned with darkness and loneliness and learning and modern creativity - all characteristic adolescent preoccupations. On top of all this, as the title suggests, Sweetwater is a book steeped in sentimentality. It has a powerful emotional voice.

The plot, simply, is the story of a hard-pressed community living in a semi-submerged city on an alien world, and of its invasion by the forces of crass civilisation at its most vulgar. The community cannot, in the long run, prevail - but it can resist, and it tries hard.

Neither the plot nor the set of values it carries would normally attract my admiration. But Sweetwater has one powerful thing going for it, and that is the fact that its writing is, in every sense of the word, beautiful. The saccharin is too strong at just one point, when the protagonist's alien mentor is described as "the Ultimate Uncle". Otherwise, this is prose of a quality far too rarely seen in science fiction.

THE YEAR'S BEST SF (1975) 9 edited by Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison. Orbit; London, 1975. 65p. 208 pp; ISBN 0-8600-7884-8

Reviewed by David Kingsnow

I can remember an issue of "Best of" that had Sheckley, Asimov, Mack Reynolds, Leiber, Silverberg and Sturgeon in it. The names have changed but the quality keeps on improving. This is a highly articulate volume, evidence of an increasing succinctness of expression within the genre. But this blossoming of literary technique has not meant a dearth of well-plotted and captivating stories; so, quite the contrary. If the genre is perhaps a little less naive and innocent (delightful traits in the immature) it is, in compensation, rich in cultural reference and deep in its investigation of the human condition. Intellectual fun? Perhaps more so that the usual anthology of "beats". But fun even so, and decidedly moving in parts.

'A Scraping at the Door' - Algis Budrys
I felt Mr Budrys excellent craftsmanship was wasted on this mid-pace future-detective-cum-population-increased tale. Nothing new was said and little impact was made; almost like gift-wrapping a lump of coal.

"Changeling" - Lisa Tuttle. Lisa Tuttle is fast becoming one of our very best. I have begun to look out for her stories in the same way that I search out those of Dick, Silverberg, Disch, Tiptree and Aldiss. This is a sensitive tale of a reactionary future where rebellion in any form is muted by medicinal means (drugs, operations and, less obviously, by education) and a passive crimeless state evolves. Lisa glances behind the scenes and takes a deeply personal look at the effect on one ordinary family (and at the horrifying power of the media in promoting a social policy!). Like Le Guin, she writes with economy and the result is achingly memorable.

"The Santa Claus Compromise" - Thomas M. Disch. "Watergate" meets Santa Claus. And the five-year-old voters spill the beans. This was, however, written for Cavendaddy and therefore no political content is to be expected. Corruption wins out and a pair of new cowboy boots busts the truth. Read it; it's delightful.

"A Galaxy Called Rome" - Barry N. Malzberg
This is a set of notes towards a novelette. Malzberg never takes the direct path and for that reason I find him always readable if sometimes depressing and monomaniacal (and with that I come to the sudden realisation

that Malzberg's "Noise" read so differently from his fully-fleshed novels - he is not writing but notating.)

"Hard of" say the editors. Malzberg tells us here that our technology is a veneer and however "advanced" we may seem, we are still, biologically, primitive

A highly polished examination of all the possibilities inherent in an SF story of this type.

"The Custodians" - Richard Cowper. Mr Cowper demonstrates an excellent mastery of English. His style is simple, without semantic sword-games, and as pure as one could wish for. Prefoguition is the chosen subject, which Cowper deals with intelligently

This story alone justifies the existence of this collection The delightful mixture of romantic quietude and future "vision" (so beautifully captured by Miller in A Canticle for Leibowitz) is used with considerable sensitivity by Richard Cowper.

A chilling vision; the impact not lessened by the fact that we have seen this outcome before, but rather) strengthened by that which preceded the denouement. I too have felt that need to search out all I can about an author. But - I hope - never with such

"The Linguist" - Stephen Robinett A linguist's ability to learn languages quickly becomes a "commodity" as society finds a means of transplanting learning skills and the Mafia takes over. Written with restrained humour it manages to remain within the bounds of "credibility". And the link with Don Quixote is, of course, intentional). An intellectual diversion that is very well crafted. I recommend it to you.

"Settling the World" - W. John Harrison. Mike Harrison adopts a deliberately pedantic style that is precise and, at times, frustrating But it matches the character, Orlando, perfectly. God has been brought back from the far side of the Moon and the World has changed. Things become more relaxed, carefree - all "purpose" seems to have been drained from society. Orlando is sent by his department to investigate God's Notoriety and discovers strange happenings in the wilds that surround it. The mixture of the familiar and the totally unusual works well and Harrison's final question has a sublimical power. A mellow tale of considerable craft A thoughtful piece.

"The Chaste Planet" - John Updike When the "modern masters of English prose" flirt with SF it always seems to be in this vein (see Steinbeck's "The Short-short Story of Mankind" in Aldiss' SF Omnibus as a further example). Equating sex and music as sources of ecstatic experience is scientifically apt in this case and Updike's "factual background" is quite logical On this evidence he could get in like the genre and perhaps write some

"End Game" - Joe Haldeman. This is the last section of the Nebula-winning novel The Forever War and is only slightly different from the comparable section in the novel. I enjoyed it immensely first time and did so once again Haldeman does (obviously) bear comparison with Heinlein in that his narrator/hero gives us a raw view of everything and anything as it happens. The technical details were less interesting second time around, as was the concept of Khe-Sahn, the cloned race. I feel such a race would die through lack of purpose, but Haldeman, whilst giving the "human" viewpoint, totally ignores the Question of motivation. Hard SF with a "conscience" of sorts, and of course, good entertainment.

"The LopEared Cat That Devoured Philadelphia" - Lorna Phillips. Humorous (?) poem - the title is self-explanatory! (ditto Peter Redgrove's "A Twelvemonth").

"A Dead Singer" - Michael Moorcock. We drives his Mercedes van about the country, high on drugs and the hard rock sound of Hawkwind. Hendrix was his hero and now he sits beside him in the van, resurrected, preparing for his comeback. As Mo's tenuous grip on reality fades, Hendrix's spectral existence solidifies. A cloying style to anyone unaccustomed to the idiom, but Moorcock, as ever, uses it tastefully and convincingly A chilling tale on the periphery of SF

Harrison and Aldiss seem a strange pairing at first glance, but these anthologies are so successful because they reflect the diverse interests of the two men. Harry Harrison looks at the commercial aspects of SF in his essay, whilst Brian Aldiss views the literary/political side - and displays his eclectic tastes

And, to be honest, I cannot comment upon this as a "Best of" volume because any such evaluation would be both subjective and uninformed But, as a representative cross-section of the SF of 1975 it fulfills its function well. Tuttle, Disch, Cowper, Malzberg, Harrison, Haldeman and Moorcock are some of the most prominent writers today, the talents of whom I, particularly, look to for the future. Of course, such a "Best of" venture is bound to provoke complaint and polemic on matters of inclusion and omission, but the wide scope of its sources is commendable and I believe anyone's quibbles with this selection will be few.

NEW DIMENSIONS 6 edited by Robert Silverberg; Gollancz: London; 1976. 207 pp; £3.95; ISBN 0-575-02173-X

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is, I believe, the first of Robert Silverberg's New Dimensions anthologies to appear in Britain. The original anthologies - particularly New Dimensions, Terry Carr's Universe and Damon Knight's Orbit, together with the frequent three-novella collections, have usurped the magazines as America's principal show-cases for short fiction. Few of them, however, are reprinted on this side of the Atlantic, which means that the British reader's access to this substantial fraction of the field's short fiction has been limited. It is good to see this important work being made available here, but I must confess to having strong doubts about the wisdom of Gollancz's move in issuing New Dimensions in hardback.

One of the functions of the magazines that has been partially pre-empted by the original anthology series is the introduction of new writers, their exhibition, promotion and encouragement Silverberg is particularly devoted to this aspect of his work. "Of the seven contributors to this volume," he writes, "only four - Farmer, Tiptree, Malzberg and Effinger - are reasonably familiar to regular readers of science fiction. Two - Naudsli and Goldschalk - have appeared in previous issues Two - Beamy and Pollack - have had stories published in other anthologies

recently. And the rest - Girard, Jeffers, Zimmerman and Marshak - are reaching print for the first time in a widely distributed publication." An editorial policy, this is, of course, to be applauded. But it is surely questionable as to whether this work should appear in an expensive hardback version (and it should be remembered, too, that of Silverberg's "familiar" writers, two - Tiptree and Effinger - are virtually unpublished in Britain, so that the whole collection is likely to seem strange to the British buyer).

Short stories, unlike novels, can be reprieved independently. By a process of "natural selection" the best work appearing in the magazines and anthologies can be creamed off into best-of-the-year selections, and it is inevitable that the good stories in MDS will shortly appear elsewhere, in better company. The collection as an entity is vulnerable. Unlike a novel, MDS cannot be a long-term investment, available for frequent reprinting if popularity warrants it. As the good stories reappear and the mediocre ones are passed by, the collection as a whole will become redundant. Should it not, therefore, be an ephemeral publication itself - a paperback?

In saying this I am in no way running down Robert Silverberg's qualities as an editor. This edition of MD contains no very exceptional stories of the calibre of Vonnie's "Stranger" or Tiptree's "Girl who was Plugged in" from previous volumes, but it is full of good, readable and interesting stories. Effinger's "Target: Berlin", in which the second world war is postponed until 1974 and fought with cars instead of planes as an economy measure, is pleasantly eccentric. James Tiptree's "The Psychologist Who Wouldn't Do Awful Things To Rats" is a competent version of an old myth introduced into new surroundings. James Girard's "The Alternates" is indeed a promising piece, with some rough edges - suggesting that this is an author who might do much better next time out, and is capable of good things. The best story is Marta Randall's time-swinging treatment "Secret Rider", adept and economical. But it is intrinsic to the very nature of the exercise that a showcase is of transient value - even if every story were a potential Nebula winner the process of selecting, of re-presentation and re-combination would still go on. Let us have quick and easy access to all the significant original anthology series via rapid paperback reprints, and let the survivors accumulate in hyperwide hardback editions in their own good time.

THE STAR DIARIES by Stanislaw Lem, translated by Michael Kandel; Secker & Warburg, London. 1976. 275 pp; £3.90; ISBN 0-436 24621-7

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is, by my count, the seventh book by Stanislaw Lem to be translated into English. The first - Solaris - arrived to the accompaniment of a fanfare proclaiming Lem to be the high priest of East European SF - a literary giant compared to whom the petty bourgeois writers of the West were mere pygmies. Leaving aside the propaganda (which is unnecessary, in that Lem is by no means a Marxist polemicist) Solaris was an exceptionally fine novel, a novel of contact between human and alien in which the alien was genuinely alien - incomprehensible, inexplicable and yet evocative. It was followed by The Invincible, obviously earlier work and suffering from dual translation (into English via German), but nevertheless interesting in its approach and relentless in its conclusion.

And then came the rest.

The Star Diaries, like The Futurological Congress, The Cyberiad and Memoirs Found in a Bathtub (I regret that I have not read the seventh book, The Investigation), is supposed to be very funny. Opinions as to what kind of humour it contains are likely to vary. Michael Kandel notes that the stories read in chronological order (which is not the order of presentation) "shift from playful anecdote to pointed satire to outright philosophy". This may be true (there is definitely a whole paragraph of philosophy in the most recent of the episodes) but for the most part the stories are sheer farce - too rambling and ill-organised to be very pointed as satire, and often displaying a tiresome and exhausting bluntness.

Humour is almost impossible to translate, largely because what is funny and what is merely silly are very often largely determined by culturally specific attitudes (Try telling a joke about an Irishman in Dublin, and you'll see what I mean). What makes things even more difficult for Lem's translators is that his comedy relies very strongly on wordplay, particularly on neologism and acronym formation. Michael Kandel has probably done a wonderful job in conveying something of the method and style of the original, but to retain the essential humour and satirical propriety of the original must have been impossible. There is no way that we are going to be able to read the comic Lem in English translation.

What we have here, then, is a pretty boring book. I do not blame Lem for this, nor Kandel, though at times it seems that so little is left after translation that there can't have have been that much there beforehand. The Star Diaries are not quite so tedious as the abominable Cyberiad, and a lot more ground is covered more successfully than in the satirical novels, but they still take a lot of ploughing through. I advise the uncommitted to avoid them.

It does occur to me, incidentally, that perhaps the reason Lem is so bitterly and repeatedly nasty about Western SF is that Anglo-American wit seems just as pointless and stupid in translation as Polish wit.

THE MAN WITH TWO MEMORIES by J. B. S. Haldane; Merlin Press, London; 1976; 220 pp, £2.80, ISBN 0-850-36708-1

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

J. B. S. Haldane has made an extremely significant, if indirect, contribution to the literature of the scientific imagination. His essay, Daedalus, or Science and the Future, provided the blueprint for future society which was worked over so caustically and comprehensively by Aldous Huxley in Brave New World, and another essay, "The Last Judgment", was surely the seed of Olaf Stapledon's Last and First Men, producing a prospectus for the evolutionary future of mankind and calling for a proper time-scale in the building of such speculative futures. Again, in the essay "Possible Worlds" he produced the famous quotation which has almost become sacred dogma in the

philosophy of so many SF writers

"Our only hope of understanding the universe is to look at it from as many different points of view as possible. Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose... I suspect that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, or can be dreamed of, in any philosophy. That is the reason why I have no philosophy myself, and must be my excuse for dreaming" [Possible Worlds, London, 1927, p. 285-286]

As a speculative scientific essayist, Haldane was rivalled in imagination only by Wells. Had he cared to develop some craftsmanship as a writer, he might have been a literary figure comparable to Stapledon. As it was though, his fictional ventures are little more than finger-exercises. There is the fragment of future history in "The Last Judgment", the children's stories collected in My Friend Mr Leakey, and the incomplete scientific romance The Man With Two Memories, now made available by the Merlin Press. This last is, as one would expect from a man of Haldane's intellectual calibre and imaginative vision, a book full of ideas. It is an ambitious work, provocative in many ways, but it bears the self-indulgent hallmarks of work undertaken for private amusement rather than with wholly serious intent. Certain Haldanian idiosyncrasies are prominent here and there are some wry ironic twists, including the nomenclature partly borrowed from William Blake. As a novel, assessed by literary standards, it is possessed, I fear, by an awful ineptitude.

The narrative is an account rendered by one James Murchison of a second set of memories he has acquired, belonging to one Ngok Thleg of the planet Ul-la. The attempt to build an alien world, to describe its society via the autobiographical account of one of its citizens, is undertaken with less care and logic than one might expect, and the attempt to present it as a dramatic account and an engaging reader-experience is hardly there at all. Even granted that there is far too much of Haldane the essayist and none at all of a hypothetical Haldane the novelist, this is a first draft. It would, however, be a shame if Haldane were to be represented in science fiction only by the vicious parodies in Huxley's After Many a Summer and C. S. Lewis's Out of the Silent Planet (both of whose demonic scientists are partly modelled on him). The Man with Two Memories, although not a good book, deserves to be in print, to speak for the man himself. Though it is not for the casual reader it is a book which will hold a certain fascination for students of the scientific imagination and its history. I hope that the Merlin Press reap a modest profit from their enterprise, and I thank them for their effort.

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TERMINUS by Peter Edwards: Macmillan, London, 1976; 330 pp; ISBN 0-333-17700-6

Reviewed by Peter Hyde

There is no indication from the dust jacket that Terminus is anything other than Peter Edwards' first SF novel. If that is indeed the case, it is a remarkable achievement. Certainly, the basic setting is mundane enough: the twenty-second century, most of the world uninhabitable after two nuclear wars with what remains, Europe and Northern and Central Africa, united in the republic of - you've guessed it - Eurafrica! But from this basis Edwards creates a novel rich in imaginative power, characterisation and writing style.

Eurafrican society, although nominally democratic along very English lines is in fact increasingly being controlled by members of the sinister Universal Fellowship of the Stigmata - a sort of mystical sado-masochistic freemasonry. (The name is splendidly inappropriate since membership is strictly by initiation and invitation.) Paul Amber, the novel's hero, is one of the few aware of the Stigmatics' increasing power and plans for overt domination. He has already penetrated the organisation in an attempt to expose its plans but now languishes in Camp Deadend, a prison colony on Mars.

Then a number of events occur which unexpectedly give to Amber the opportunity to resume his struggle against the Stigmatics. First, a mysterious assassination attempt is made on Amber and his two friends Sisle and Shaverley. The prison governor, himself a Stigmatic, tries to predispose Amber against pressing for an enquiry by a conciliatory policy. Thus when a mysterious alien city is discovered and convicts are needed to excavate it, Amber and his friends are among those who go. Then when Eurafrica's president, Charles Osaku, comes to see the work, Amber is one of the few prisoners who is allowed to petition him. Osaku however is an old friend of Amber's and responds, albeit unwillingly, to Amber's request for help. So Amber formulates a plan, to kill the Stigmatic leader, Dionysus (on Mars in pursuit of a mind-influencing drug), stow away on a ship to Earth and then reveal information about the Stigmatics which he has stored away on Earth. Amber's preparations come to a shattering and tragic culmination in the alien city, which while its mysteries are never unravelled has the last word.

The great strength of Terminus is its characterisation. Too often in science fiction characters are merely cardboard cut-outs, pieces on a board, whose activities merely enable the development of the plot. In Terminus the characters are all-important and are developed and fleshed-out with rare skill. This applies particularly to the main characters: Amber, Shaverley, Dionysius; but also to minor characters like the prison governor, the beautifully named Roger (Rigor?) Mortis. Inevitably there are some weaknesses, notably Seymour Marx, a postgraduate student who has developed the drug which Dionysius is after. His character is rather underdeveloped and he seems a bit out of place - very much a drug enthusiast of today rather than the future. Similarly there is Michelangelo, Dionysius's bumbling assistant, who is clearly not the stuff Stigmatics are made of and who does not therefore really ring true.

In so far as Terminus has a fault it is that the social conditions which give rise to Eurafrica society: the rise of the Stigmatics, the increasing size of the penal colony on Mars and so on, whilst they are outlined are not really very convincing. But perhaps this is unimportant as social trends are here just as a backdrop for what is essentially a story about people - even the plot is really very slight to support a novel of over 300 pages.

So, a remarkably impressive first novel, and memorable for its writing and characterisation

and for one delightful piece of naming. The civil service of the day goes under the splendid name of the Bureausaurus ("a large reptile with an egg-sized brain")

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THE BEST OF ROBERT SILVERBERG stories by Robert Silverberg; Pocket Books: New York; Feb 1978, 256 pp; $1.95, ISBN 0-671-80282-8

Reviewed by David Wingrove

There are a number of "Best of" volumes on the market at this moment, neatly packaging the shorter pieces (or extracts from longer works) of the giants of the field. Sheckley, Leiber, Herbert, Simak, Clarke, Asimov, Pohl, Heinlein and Van Vogt have all been presented in this fashion. Now it is the turn of the masterful Silverberg, and this is perhaps the best (if not absolutely perfect) format put on the market yet. Pocket Books, like Sphere, undertake a chronological presentation of the subject's work, serving theoretically to illustrate that particular author's literary development. In this case, there are also brief circumstancial notes by Silverberg; too brief for my personal taste.

Is this really the "best" of Silverberg presented here? That question must be asked. All the shorter award winners are here, "Sundance", "Passengers" and "Good News from the Vatican", but only in "Nightwings", so obviously part of something much larger, are we really aware of the great talent that is Silverberg. The opener, "Road to Nightfall" written in 1954 (and published in 1958) was an eye-opener for me. I had not read it previously and was amazed at the literary standard achieved and the emotional stand-point taken by the young Silverberg. Cannibalism is the subject and the gradual acceptance of it as a survival factor. The characters seem at first rather wooden - caricatures almost - but Nat[redacted]och's confused reactions to his circumstances are, on consideration, most realistic. Many writers would be proud to reach this standard after a decade of writing; Silverberg managed it first time out! (I was amused by the obvious references to Silverberg's personal interests at that time, the game Galaxy still plays but which Silverberg learnt quickly to subdue - that is until Dying Inside with its essays on Kafka and Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.)

"Warm Man" follows, dating from 1957 and hardly outstanding in a genre that abounds in excellent ideas of this nature. It tells of a man who is a natural empath and draws his life force from other people's miseries. Good. But you expect more than good from Silverberg.

"To See The Invisible Man" (1963) was inspired by Borges. Borges' "The Babylon Lottery" dealt with something entirely different and yet his influence on Silverberg is strongly marked in the style of this short story. Unlike Borges however (who can imply a whole novel in just a few pages) Silverberg fails to develop the idea to its full maturity and in a sense he loses much of the impact he might have made. The conclusion is atypical of Silverberg; a character acting from impulse rather than circumstance.

"The Sixth Palace" (1964) is a nice short, quickly forgotten and with little psychological depth. Silverberg usually clings like a pleasant scent long after reading his work. This is a puzzle story utilising the "standard science fiction furniture". The least interesting of all the pieces here.

"Flies" which follows was the Dangerous Visions offering, overshadowed by many other startling stories in that memorable anthology. I enjoyed the fresh approach when I first read it. Several readings later it provokes other responses, basically concerning its inner truth and the insights it gives upon human reactions to external influences. Silverberg himself notes here that this was a template for much of his later works and so this has an importance if only for that reason.

"Hawksbill Station" was interesting if annoying. The anomalies of time travel were gradually solved by means of notes in the text a lot less subtle than I would have liked. But the story is not about time paradoxes, it is about people - the prisoners sent a billion years back in time. I liked the character Barrett very much and reading this has prompted me to take the novel version off the shelf. (I guessed the ending, but it spoiled nothing!)

"Passengers" is a story much in the same vein as "We Purchased People" (Pohl in the recent Final Stage anthology) and depicts the controlled use of humans by aliens. Whereas the Pohl story accepted the situation (as, in fact, slavery for economic reasons) in Silverberg's piece it is resented - an amorphous threat that cannot be combatted. The abuse of our bodies and minds in such an impersonal manner is perhaps the ultimate terror, control of their own personal circumstances being each individual's desire. Stories such as this then have a built-in horror factor and it is the degree to which this is brought out that is important. Silverberg's (written so much earlier in 1967) is that much more threatening because of the enigmatic nature of the menace. "Passengers" also acts as a watershed in this book, the first story to be written in the first-person narrative style that has come to be synonymous with Silverberg and which has allowed him such psychological depth.

"Nightwings" (1968) astonishes me. This was my third reading and I still cannot believe that Silverberg wrote this from scratch in seven days. The depth of the social matrix he portrays is such as to make every fantastic device he presents to us convincing. The style is so rich, the presentation of pre-history and social custom so subtle that I must admit to Silverberg's genius if his claim is true. It is a relaxed and absorbing tale of the Third Cycle (eight or ten thousand years from now) and the guilds of Earth as an alien invasion nears. Like the best of everything, its simplicity belies its underlying depth and complexity.

"Sundance" is my favourite Silverberg short, and in my opinion the best he ever wrote. If you cannot feel empathy with Tom Two Ribbons your soul (or whatever you would like to term it) is dead. Perhaps it is also the most didactic of Silverberg's works with its obvious comment on subjective states and morality; that we all commit genocide in somebody's terms, humanitarian or vegetarian, we all have to live, eat, breathe.

It was therefore somewhat deflating to have his tongue-in-cheek "Good News from the Vatican" as the final piece. Clever enough in its own right, it is too much like Arthur C. Clarke's glib SF jokes, a two-fingered exercise, if you like.

Nevertheless I enjoyed this collection even if I had encountered almost all of the stories beforehand. It is nice to have all these in one volume, and the comments by the man himself are invaluable to Silverberg-philes such as myself. One possible criticism as to the format was that there was no bibliography (which would entail quite a few pages with Silverberg) as there is in the Sphere collections. Perhaps a British edition would remedy that.

Now I can only await with impatience the Pocket Books Best of Barry Malzberg. Perhaps Silverberg will write the introduction and be as kind about Malzberg as Malzberg was about him. Not perfect but still a very good introduction to the work of one of our finest writers.

CHILDREN OF DUNE by Frank Herbert; Gollancz. London; 1978. 444 pp, £3.95; ISBN 0-575-02190-X

Reviewed by Peter Hyde

Dune, winner of both the Hugo and Nebula awards, has been widely acclaimed as the greatest science fiction novel of all time. For Frank Herbert it represented a great triumph, yet paradoxically it was also in a sense a disaster. A disaster because it invited further instalments yet intrinsically made it impossible for them to match the original.

Certainly, if ever a book cried out for a sequel it was Dune. At the level of grand strategy the situation is pregnant and tense: Paul Muad-Dib has defeated his enemies the House Harkonnen and the Padishah Emperor Shaddam IV, he has been hailed by the Fremen of Dune as their Lisan al-Gaib, their Mahdi, and now stands on the verge of the holy war which will envelop the countless planets of the Imperium. The situation is similarly expectant at the personal level, too. Paul is about to marry the Princess Irulan, the daughter of the defeated emperor, and his Fremen wife Chani is doubtful of her assigned role of concubine. Who could read Dune and not ache to find out what happened next?

That Dune is so hard to follow reflects the nature of its strengths. Perhaps one of its greatest merits is the solidity and believability of the social structure in which the action is embedded. The basis of this is a fairly conventional feudal system with the hereditary emperor, the great houses and a socially rigid class system. (The latter, of course, is not explored in any detail since the main actors are either aristocrats, Fremen or Bene Gesserit, of whom more below). A delightful piece of technological determinism makes feudal weapons constant and plausible: the Holtzmann field generator effect which negates the effect of laser-based weapons more akin to the general level of technological development.

Into this feudal system more excellently innovative elements are introduced. The Combine Honnete Ober Advancer Mercantilan which has a virtual monopoly is a beautiful device to explain the unearned wealth of the Emperor and the aristocracy: not tithes or taxes but simply profits. A second element is the mysterious, autocratic and slightly sinister Spacing Guild, one leg of the power balance with the Imperium and the Great Houses, which has a total monopoly over interplanetary travel and transport.

But the most interesting creation is the Bene Gesserit, an organisation of women dedicated to an ambitious breeding programme intended to produce the Kwisatz Haderach, a male Bene Gesserit whose powers would enable him and them to go beyond space and time. Meanwhile, the Sisterhood has evolved a science of bodily self control and awareness (especially of the myriad social signals given off by people) the culmination of which was the awesome power of Voice by which a command spoke in the right way would have absolute authority for a particular hearer.

Embraced by this social order yet in many ways outside it we find the Fremen of Dune, an inhospitable planet yet vital for the geriatric and prescience-inducing spice, melange. Dune is a fascinating creation and so are its people. The implications of the scarcity of water are followed to interesting and logical conclusions. On the one hand, the technology of moisture control and reclamation: stillsuits, stillsuits, moisture seals and most macabre of all the deathstill. On the other hand the implications for speech and custom are traced out: thus to kill someone is "to take their water" (literally!) and crying becomes an extreme act which occurs only as a result of intense emotions. To give water to the dead, the Fremen call it and they go in awe of Paul when he sheds a tear after killing Jamis. Other aspects of Fremen culture are related - the casual attitude to the lives of outside, the largesse and the fierce self-reliance. Finally, the whole description of Fremen life is rendered more convincing by the judicious use of words derived from Arabic which gives just the right flavour.

The characters too are beautifully drawn, not just the complex major character of Paul Atreides, struggling to come to terms with apparently unbearable destiny but other important characters too, such as his mother Jessica, the evil Baron Vladimir Harkonnen, and the Fremen Stilgar. So too are more minor characters like Gurney Halleck, Liet-Kynes and the intriguing Imperial emissary, Count Fenring.

With these major elements and many lesser details e.g. mentats and the Imperial Sardaukar, Frank Herbert created an elaborate plot which moves on many levels. Some of the main themes are the Imperial/Harkonnen plot against House Atreides, Paul's destiny and his evolving relationship with the Fremen. The plot unfolds both at the grand level and the personal level in a balanced progression and at the same time the nature of the particular universe in which it takes place likewise becomes clearer.

This pinpoints the first major problem which Dune Messiah, the immediate sequel to Dune, comes up against: the main features of the social order are already well known and understood by the reader. Certainly further aspects do become clearer in the course of the book, but the sense of being on a voyage of discovery which would possess a reader of Dune is [illegible].

Dune Messiah is a disappointment in another way too for its story, although quite complicated lacks the broad canvas of action which Dune depicts. Firstly, of course, the jihad and the creation of Paul's empire happen off-stage as it were, in the 12-year gap before Dune Messiah takes up the story. But secondly, whilst it is concerned largely with the machinations of Paul's enemies against him, its events can only be described as small-scale.

The plot in question is entered into by the remnants of the old established order: the

Guild and the Bene Gesserit; and by a new force, the Tleilaxu. The Guild are represented by the alien Edric who lives in a capsule of gas and the Tleilaxu by the scarcely less alien Scytale. The Bene Gesserit element is both the Reverend Mother who originally tested Paul, Gaius Helen Mohiam and Paul's wife Irulan.

The plot is a subtle one for it involves restoring to life the Atreides war master Duncan Idaho as a Tleilaxu ghola, giving him to Paul as a mentat, and then doing what has been done for no ghola before - restoring his original memories. In doing this Paul is faced with the ultimate temptation - to have the same restoration for his concubine Chani who has died giving birth to their twin children. Paul however ultimately triumphs over temptation, defeats his enemies and then binds the Fremen irrevocably to his memory by voluntarily accepting the traditional Fremen custom for blind men (for such he has become) and walking out into the desert alone to die.

Just as one of the strengths of Dune is its characters, so is this one of the weaknesses of Dune Messiah. In particular the motivations of the arch plotter Scytale, the Tleilaxu are particularly unclear. A related point is that one of the strengths of the characters in Dune is their essential humanity: Dune Messiah seems to me to be all the more run of the mill for its use of aliens. In this, I think Frank Herbert falls into employing a common tactic of SF writers, to use aliens not as actors in their own right but as a means of making characters who are behaving largely as humans do things that humans cannot do. Thus, the Tleilaxu's particular trick is that he is a Face Dancer and can take on any appearance he wishes and this talent is made material use of in the conspiracy.

For all its flaws - and perhaps bravity can be added to those already enumerated - Dune Messiah does still leave the reader wondering what will happen next. Although Paul has left the stage, the fate of his sister Alia and his children Ghanima and Leto, all of whom are "preborn" (of which more later) remains unknown. In Children of Dune which is intended apparently as the completion of the story this challenge is taken up.

Children of Dune starts very promisingly. After 80 or so pages a complex and interesting situation has been established which has much of the feel of Dune itself. Nine years have passed and Alia's personality has become taken over by one of the strongest of her forbears - Paul's old enemy, Baron Vladimir Harkonnen. The Lady Jessica, after a sojourn on Caladan, has returned to Dune apparently reconciled with the Bene Gesserit and in search of Atreides genes for the not yet given up breeding programme. Another daughter of Shaddam IV plots with the remnant of the defeated imperial Sardaukar to place her son Farad'n on the imperial throne which Alia occupies as Regent. A mysterious blind preacher has appeared to denounce the deification of Paul Muad'Dib and some say that it is the man himself returned or never dead. In this fraught situation the twins Leto and Ghanima seek their own destiny.

At this point one thinks that somehow against all the odds Frank Herbert has managed to match Dune but unfortunately from here on things start to go wrong. One problem is that the narrative theme becomes too complicated. A complex web of plot and counter-plot is developed with actors several times using each other to further their own ends. However, with Leto, Jessica, Farad'n, the Preacher and Alia all pursuing their own schemes and Idaho, Hallack and Stilgar acting with varying degrees of willingness as true and false agents for the principal plotters things just get out of hand. The effect is two-fold - either major events happen off-stage or major plotters suddenly become quiescent. This applies particularly to the latter stages of the book where one detects a certain desperation creeping in - writer and reader alike wondering how it can be made to end. The ending is quite fitting (you can guess who comes out on top) and ingenious but all rather hurried.

I won't go into the many complexities of plot and counter-plot, but two themes recur throughout. Perhaps the pre-eminent one is that of Abomination. The term occurs in Dune Messiah but it is only in Children of Dune that its meaning is elucidated. To become a Reverend Mother one undergoes the spice ordeal; this creates a mental (?) link with a dying Reverend Mother whose memories (and those of her predecessors) are then transmitted to her successor. If a pregnant woman undergoes the ordeal her child is "preborn" - cognitive at birth and with access to the memories of all her forbears. The problem is (as happens with Alia) that one of the multitudinous clamouring within may assume control. Abomination therefore is possession. It features as a major theme (through its happening to Alia and though Ghanima's and Leto's struggles in their different ways to come to terms with being preborn; although in their case it is something they inherit, if you like, from Paul (this seems to involve no inconsistency, but who can say what the children of the Knights Hadarach ought to be like)? It is important, too, to Jessica's concern to test Leto to see if he is, in fact, Abomination.

The other interwoven theme concerns the spice cycle. For the first time the whole cycle is made manifest and the "deep sand vectors", the creatures which turn into sandworms, referred to in Dune are named as sandtrout. Gradually it becomes apparent that the ecological transformation of Dune begun by Liet-Kynes a father in threatening the sandtrout and in turn the worms and ultimately of course, the spice. Alia is content to let this happen, thus giving her a corner on a very valuable market with a relatively fixed demand and declining supply. Others, however, are not so content - notably the older desert Fremen who intimately understand the impending doom of the worms and who are repelled by the changes in life style and attitudes brought by the greater availability of water. Leto and the Preacher are others who understand the trend and in their different ways have their actions guided by it.

The essential point about Children of Dune is this: it is in itself an elaborate and complex tale, with interesting characters and quite a stunning climax. Were it not for the fact that it is the culmination of the Dune trilogy it could only be judged, despite its faults, as a worthy offering. However, since it is the end of the Dune saga, it must be judged by Dune's standards, and as such it must be seen as a disappointment.

Dune was too good.

FUTURE ROCK by David Downing; Panther; St Albans, 1976. 64p; 173 pp, ISBN 0-586-04308-X

Reviewed by David Wingrove

First let me assure you that I am not quibbling because Mr Downing's tastes do not coincide with my own, to a great degree they do. However, it seems a strange paradox (but, I suppose, one to be expected) that the most liberal forms of expression (of which rock is one, SF another) have a disturbingly extensive number of blinkered commentators conservative beyond the staunchest Tory. And so here also Mr Downing who sets out ostensibly to chart the intersection of SF and rock (why else Chapter 8? - but more later...) He fails and fails miserably. The intention is clear (the blurbs herald this with "explores the wild, cosmic, freaky and sometimes sinister worlds of Future Rock - where time-travellers disguised as electronic Pied Pipers rock beyond the clock to unleash tomorrow's music today"). Is it Mr Downing's fault that he failed to live up to that classic of hyperbole? I must answer, in this case it is! Two pages do not pass without the committing of some atrocity. A few examples:

1) "A book concerned with visions of the future in rock music must begin with Bob Dylan" (P.11). Why? Dylan is to modern SF-orientated rock as Samuel Butler is to modern literary SF. The original intent in both cases was never the same. Perhaps Dylan was the instigator of the West Coast folk/rock symbiosis, but certainly he was never at the heart of the SF-rock movement.

2) "Like most SF literature it is not rooted in the perspective of the present, but in a future set exaggeration of present tendencies" (P. 38). He sees SF as the exclusive realm of social prophesy and sees philosophy, and his interpretation of the genre, for that reason, suffers badly.

3) "Thematically it is an updating of George Orwell's 1984" (p. 62 - on Bowie's "Diamond Dogs"). It is nothing of the sort, it is the antithesis of that novel, antithesis to the whole of Orwell's writing.

4) "But in a situation of profound social change it is easy to see how a book like The Chrysalids could become almost a revolutionary handbook" (p. 79). Oh, come now! "Revolutionary handbook" !!! Camp Concentration possibly, The Dispossessed certainly, but The Chrysalids?

5) "Musical doodling of some of their recent offspring" (p. 106 - of Pink Floyd's recent music). Not only is this inaccurate - they began with "musical doodling" - but also is the type of unknowledgeable and imperfect diatribe offered by the ignorant.

6) "It would be truer to see them as a return to 'pop'" (p. 110, on ELP). Has he not heard "Karn Evil"? Cold shamans they may be, but Pop? I think not.

7) "Imagine the Hallelujah chorus sung at speed over a rock backing. Imagine a pub full of drunken singers. Imagine The Sound of Music performed by the inmates of Charenton under the direction of the Marquis de Sade" (p. 111, on Magma a "Mahavishnu Orchestra Commandeth"). With this trite and childishly inept and inept comment he taps on a quotation from a press release; one of many no doubt used for his "remarches" (in lieu of hearing the records?). Is it because they use more than three chords and use time signatures. Mr Downing? (And I must apologise immediately for my own rather trite responses.)

8) "Exploration can also express a refusal to face the realities of an existing situation" (p. 118). Surely experimentation is never a refusal to face reality but exactly the opposite.

9) "... the forces of the future were in retreat" (p. 130 - on 'rock' between 68 and 70) He is talking of social-revolutionary music which is not SF-rock, which took flight in the same years and blossomed in the next few.

10) "It is tempting to talk of 'psychedelic fascism'" (p. 123, on Hawkwind). He again misinterprets and fails to understand the motivations of the Hawkwind phenomenon.

11) He echoes the "profusion of mystic cults that would have done credit to declining Rome" (p. 138) and then gratis, presents us with the full Zen-Buddhism trip (read pages 121 onwards, I could scarcely believe he was serious).

And there are numerous other examples in my thirty sides of notes. It was never my intention to produce a "list of faults" in place of a review, but this book warrants it. What angered me most about the book was its superficial character, the "I don't understand this so it's obviously beyond those morons out there" attitude, tantamount to a breach of the Trades Descriptions Act. Downing never looks at the roots of the phenomenon. He assumes it grew out of Dylan's side like a musical Eve. He ignores (rational) argument again and again and even resorts to petty vilification at some stages. Moreover, the central theme - the selling plot, if you like - of the book is a sham. Read Chapter 8 in your local bookstore (no, I implore you - don't buy it, just read chapter 8!) and you'll understand. He begins by attempting to define SF and then stumbles through its literary offerings like a Mohammedan asked to lecture on the Talmud. His scant examination of Tea, Magma, Hawkwind and Co. whilst devoting whole chapters to Dylan, Lennon, Bowie, Lou Reed (!), Jackson Browne and Joni Mitchell/Neil Young (folk singers all) emphasises his interests. The publishers didn't want a book on Dylan but Mr Downing wanted to write one! In chapter 13 he abandons all pretence (you've read that far - and even suffered the chapter on country music - as you're likely to read to the very end, poor soul!) and writes a chapter on "Love", not making even the slightest "appearance" of linking it to SF. It's the best chapter in the book; perhaps a fair reward on the sincerity of this author? For the other 13 chapters he scatters names (Spengler, Marx, Huxley, Lawrence, Orwell) and quotations (Samuel Beckett, R. D. Laing, Ballard, Philip K. Dick, Rossetter) in all the inappropriate places (almost as a 'gesture of respectability' - a common allergy of many of today's rock commentators) and almost always contradicts their ideas/gist with what he writes about/beneath them.

As a book on rock and "social prophesy" it is [illegible] poor. As a book on "future rock" it is [illegible]

Avoid this like the plague.

THE LOST TRAVELLER by Steve Gilman. Macmillan, London; 1974; 245 pp, £3.95. ISBN 0-333-19749-6

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

There was a time when people were frightened by the idea of the atom bomb. Nowadays, like Dr Strangelove, we have learned to stop worrying. The effect of this historical change upon the mythological content of science fiction is interesting. Once upon a time (1945-61, approximately) atomic holocaust stories were horror stories. We read The Long Loud Silence, Ape and Essence, On the Beach, and Shadow on the Hearth. In such books the holocaust was immediate, whether the time-scheme of the novel placed it in the present, the future or the past. The destruction of the world was the focal point of the myth.

Nowadays things are different. The post-holocaust world has become, in the contemporary imagination, a romantic milieu. In today's fiction the holocaust is no longer the focal point of the myth, and it is no longer immediate but remote - a legacy and a memory. The image of the ruined world has become a kind of perverted Cokaygne, where heroism thrives and the monsters of barbarism and mutation exist, like dragons of old, only to be fought and vanquished. These days, no one likes the world much anyway, and it is not much a nightmare to imagine it crumbled and smashed. The post-holocaust world has become a receptacle venue for heroic instant and marvellous questing. We read Damnation Alley and Hiero's Journey and Obsidian, and a pale, rather sickly (but quite cosy) romanticism has even made its way onto TV in 'The Survivors'. Will it be long, I wonder, before we all backtrack with J G Ballard from the celebration of wrecked worlds (The Drowned World, The Crystal World) to the celebration of the process of wreckage and disintegration (Crash, High Rise)? Hooray for Armageddon!

I cannot help being slightly alarmed by this trend - and not least by the consummate artistry that goes into the glamourisation of ruination in the works of Ballard and Zelazny. Perhaps, then, I ought to find a certain satisfaction that The Lost Traveller - "A Motorcycle Grail Quest Epic and Science Fiction Western" as its author has it - is definitely lacking in artistry, and that its glamour has no guts. But I am here as a literary critic, not a social critic, and I am thus compelled to regret its failings.

After the holocaust, says the gospel according to this particular myth-maker, the Hell's Angels will Come Into Their Own. The freedom they love will be theirs, and life will be one long routine of Aggro, punctuated by the occasional gang bang. The meek might ultimately inherit the Earth, but they will have to wait until everyone else has finished with it. The plot is standard. The angel who Feels There Ought To Be More To Life discovers his heaven with the nomadic lowlife (who also Come Into Their Own) but not until much blood has flowed under the bridge. It is easy to see where Steve Gilman stands - he abandons his hero to his boring fulfilment and continues the tale of slaughter in a journalistic tone. Who needs characters when you can have battles?

This book is unadulterated garbage, but I cannot help a niggling suspicion that it may turn out to be popular garbage. There may well be people who feel that it expresses all too well the spirit of the age. Some will rejoice in its endless romanticised violence, its fevered obsession with motorbikes and motorbike riding. C'est la vie.

THE DREAM MILLENNIUM by James White; Corgi; London; 1975; 65p; 222 pp

Reviewed by John Harvey

The setting for The Dream Millennium is on board a space ship travelling at sub light speed. Its crew and passengers lie frozen in suspended animation whilst the ship, directed by its computer, scours the universe for a new world suitable for colonisation. Not a particularly new concept, but one which James White has brought a new look. That ability, to take an old, tired idea and turn it into something original, is probably one of the chief skills of a good writer. All too often an idea is declared 'played out' when all it needs is a little imagination to breathe fresh life into it. Imagination is just what James White shows he has in abundance in this book.

Whilst in their 'cold sleep' the passengers on the ship dream. At first they are ordinary, pleasant dreams but gradually they become more and more realistic and frightening. The sleepers find that they are dreaming the lives of people and animals of which they have little, if any, knowledge and yet the experience is filled with vivid detail. The dreams begin to haunt the crew during their periodic awakenings. So much so that eventually they become afraid to go back to "sleep" and, in fact, one colonist commits suicide rather than return to his dreams. Not only do their memories of the dreams become more intense but so do their memories of past events in their own lives. This quickly leads to the development of powers of total recall of events, emotions and even sounds and smells. The individual can literally relive his memories, both pleasant and unpleasant.

James White uses the crews' dreams and heightened memory to produce a novel in which the setting is constantly changing. There are dreams of the lives and deaths of dinosaurs and kings; memories of an overcrowded violent Earth from which the colonists are escaping, incidents on board the space ship during the awakening periods and even a space battle sequence when the ship encounters hostile aliens.

James White has handled a complex piece of plotting extremely well to produce a very readable science fiction novel. Whilst being very much a space ship story, it is far more than just space opera. The characterisation is successful so that the reader can identify with the crew, and the descriptions of an overcrowded Earth of the future are believable detail. All the book's problems and mysteries are well solved in a clever ending which although not a shock ending, has a good twist to it. I have never disliked James White's fiction, but I would not have listed him amongst my favourite authors. The Dream Millenium has gone a long way towards changing the

THE WITLING by Vernor Vinge; DAW, New York; 1976; $1.95

Reviewed by Mike Dickinson

I am sure that, dear reader, you have experienced that peculiar sense of guilt from buying a science fiction book having read the quotes on the back cover. From to discover a novel sensationalised as "the clash of swords and the ageless power of sexuality sign-post another blood-soaked path

to civilisation" is really both intelligent and sensitive does not remove that first unease. However, with The Witling a new element emerges - the blurb which is more intelligent than the book. For one thing it not only defines Witling (a pretender to wit) but also strives to make it applicable to the plot, something Vernor Vinge has no qualms about neglecting to do. It also states the central problem as:

"How to demonstrate that science is worthwhile and how to keep the mediaeval masters from Giri from realising their potential for cosmic mischief."

Not deathless prose (admittedly), but that second half interested me - a significant advance on Stambeli, etc's formula of Scientist as magician. However, that is precisely what the book does not set out to do. It runs into a rather thick-ear chase.

The plot can be briefly summarised.

Spindly archaeologist Bjault and pilot Yoninne Leg-Wot, who "combined a squat, slab-like body with a clever mind and a crippled personality" are surveying Giri. We have little evidence of her crippled personality except her bossing around of Bjault, but her clever mind is evident in such remarks as this:

"These hills must be lousy with native copper and I'll bet the '-eng' class of words have to do with mining" (In fact they are onomatopoeic 'Keng' for example meaning to kill - geddit?).

AND

"This is only the fifth time in thirteen thousand years that the human race has run across another intelligent species - or even artefacts of another species. It would be hell (sic) of a surprise to me if there weren't a lot of unanswered questions".

However, she does make one remark to which I can give qualified agreement.

"Hell, I speak this Azhiri lingo better than English."

We have many examples in the dialogue of the English that she cannot speak. She has however, the asset of her shape, which by the greatest of coincidences makes her attractive to one of the natives - a prince who also coincidentally almost entirely lacks psi-powers himself. The rest concerns primitive politics and flight from the horrid natives, accompanied by the most powerful acolyte of the Guild (the ones with the telepathic gifts). However, even the Guild's power would seem to have certain odd limitations since they can 'reng' rocks from the moon to squash a villainous army, but cannot move the vital communications station from an island in the middle of a dangerous lake to its safe shore.

Finally Yoninne gets herself kenged (brain tissue jumbled) saving her lover, but is not killed! She is transported from the planet in a grievous state.

She is partially cured (how one can only guess) but the doctor warns:

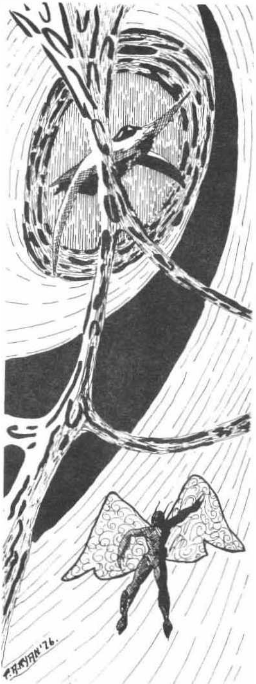
"It is possible she will never again be able to reason at the highest levels of abstraction."

This hardly seems to be a crushing blow judging from earlier parts of the book. The concluding thought of Yoninne is:

"She had lost much that was of value, but she was no fool. She knew a happy ending when she found one."

Ah, there's nothing like brain damage for a happy ending! Well, if this makes the book sound unreadable, at least with pleasure, it is. I certainly am not proud of having finished it. In fact, I felt 'kenged'. A certain narrative pace is all it presents - definitely no consideration of the wider implications hinted at by the blurb. For connoisseurs of exotic names it does offer extras, though, besides Leg-Wot (what?) we are given Pereptu Moragha, Thees Ragha, Thengala del Prou, and Pelio-uge-Shozeru. The natives also have colourful oaths such as "blood and bile".

Of course it could be a pastiche but if so it is Neanderthal in execution and ought not someone to have told DAW?



EDGAR FAWCETT - GHOST IN THE MANSION OF SCIENCE FICTION HISTORY (CONT)

Here, in this prospectus for "realistic romance", Fawcett anticipates exactly the primary demand made of science fiction writers, the basic principle (or pretence) of the modern *genre*. (He was not, of course, the first to draw up such a prospectus, having been anticipated by the man who first coined the term science-fiction in 1851, William Wilson (2).)

Edgar Fawcett was born in New York in 1847. He published his first novel, *Ashes Zara* in 1871 and his last, *The Vulgarians*, in 1903. He died in England the following year. He published, in all, more than forty novels, and registered copyright on some twenty others that were not published. He also had five plays produced and published nine volumes of poetry and verse drama.

He was, according to Stanley Harrison (3) "constantly tormented by the thought that he was destined for literary obscurity", and, it seems, justifiably so. The Penguin Companion to Literature does not acknowledge his existence. He was constantly at war with critics and publishers, and scornful of the public, and became something of a celebrity in consequence - but it did not lead to more favourable comment on his books and he was forgotten soon after his death.

The majority of his prose works fall into two categories - melodrama and realistic novels which may be seen within the tradition of American literature to belong to the same *genre* as the novels of Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser. An important minority of his novels, however, belong to the category he labelled "realistic romances". In the poem quoted above he lists four more: *Douglas Duane* (1888), *Solarion* (1889), *The Romance of Two Brothers* (1891) and a story called "The Great White Emerald". In addition to these there is a psychological puzzle story, *The New Nero*, whose plot sounds rather reminiscent of Guy Endore's *Man From Limbo*. Among the unpublished manuscripts which he copyrighted are *The Destruction of the Moon* (1892) and *Man From Mars* (1891). But it is *The Ghost of Guy Thyrle*, published in the same year as Wells' *Time Machine* that I want to describe here.

Guy Thyrle is the discoverer of a drug called Osorline which enables the consciousness to leave the body and journey instantaneously wherever it is directed by the effort of will. Thyrle enlists the help of his friend Vincent Ardilange in his experiments, but in their private lives they are in competition for the same girl and Ardilange takes advantage of the cataleptic state of Thyrle's body while he is off exploring to have him declared dead and his body cremated. Tyrle's disembodied self is thus marooned. Though he manages to thwart Ardilange by contriving a manifestation which drives the guilty man to suicide (but also results in the death of the girl) he is desperate to find some form of release from his existential state.

Thyrle sets out on an odyssey through the known universe. His disembodied consciousness descends into the earth, finding cities and fossils buried in the solid strata, and then into the bowels of the planet, where he finds a subterranean fire which confirms his belief that planets are cooled stars.

He goes to the moon, where he finds the remnants of a great civilisation on the now-dead world. Then he transports himself to the planets of the stars. On a planet of Canopus gold is common and the savage, dogfish inhabitants use wooden money. On a world of Mirach in Andromeda the dominant species is reptilian, on a world of Vindemiatrix in Virgo it is leonine. On yet another there are intelligent avians. A whole host of worlds are uninhabited or now dead, and he wonders at the entire panoply of evolutionary possibilities set out before him. He goes on, searching for a clue to the solution of his predicament:

"He swept onwards, past systems of unrecorded stars. Here it was the same as among those astral cohorts which the sky-gazers of earth had science visually to observe and count. Suns, moons, planets, asteroids in numbers incalculable!

Worlds that yet were floating coils and wreaths and ragged rifts of vapour; worlds that yet were prodigious heavenly bonfires, fed by showers of attracted meteors and even by occasional vast nomadic comets; worlds that teemed with a beauty eclipsing the conception of man; worlds hideous beyond all human belief; worlds just born, youthful, matured, dying or dead; worlds of sin, degradation and debauchery; worldas of chastity, idealism and peace; worlds in which not a single animal or vegetable shape bore the faintest likeness to those we meet on earth; worlds in which trees thought and spoke and saw; worlds that were earth in miniature or a thousand times magnified; worlds in which wolves, serpents, tigers, birds and countless other creatures of undesirable sort, had won mastery, and risen by inflexible laws of evolution to that same superiority over their primary conditions which marks the ascendancy of earthly man over his ancestral ape

Here were the same appalling distances between system and system. On and on he sped, yet continually space unfolded new proofs of its awful fecundity." (pp. 252-253)

In the end, Thyrle tries by a supreme effort of will to appeal to God Himself, to ask what hope there is for him. He projects himself into the world of spirits - a sightless world of voices - and converses with one of them. He is told that his situation is unique, unplanned, and must be suffered for all eternity. He asks about God's omnipotence and mercy, and is answered cryptically. In the dialogue following it seems that God is not quite what Thyrle had imagined, and is perhaps for him unimaginable. But in the end the voice offers him a solution: if he can find another man who will voluntarily give up his life, to allow Thyrle to share his body at the moment of death, and hence death itself, then release may be obtained. Armed with this answer, Thyrle take his quest back to earth.

The Ghost of Guy Thyrle is an important book for several reasons. It is one of the earliest flowerings of the cosmic imagination in literary form, standing chronologically between Camille Flammarion's *Lumen* and Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*. Its principal springboards for imaginative flight are the astronomical discovery of the infinite universe and the Darwinian theory of evolution. As the quotes show the combination of these guided Fawcett to the notion of a universe filled with alternative worlds and life-forms just as the same combination guided Wells in the years immediately afterward. There is no one else in American literature of this period whose imaginative reach and ambition can be compared to Fawcett's as represented by this novel. His other novels are more parochial in concern, focussing far more on psychological notions, but they do include *Solarion*, a novel about a dog with artificially augmented intelligence. (Students of coincidence might care to take note that this, too, anticipates one of Stapledon's speculative exercises.)

It is, I think, something of a tragedy that the American SF critics and historians do not seem at all concerned about this important writer within their own literary heritage. Why are *The Ghost of Guy Thyrle* and *Solarion* not in print alongside *A Plunge Into Space* and *Across the Zodiac*? Certainly not because they are of inferior quality as novels - they may have a tendency to melodrama, but no more so that their contemporaries. Do the manuscripts of the SF novels which Fawcett copyrighted still exist, and if so, why are they not put into print now as examples of American scientific romance? That they are known is obvious in that they are listed in the bibliography of Harrison's book on Fawcett. It could, perhaps, be simply a result of the fact that Fawcett is not blessed by a mention in Bailey's *Pilgrims Through Space and Time* or any of the other inadequately researched forays into the history of science fiction. If so, it is a pity. If research into the literature of the scientific imagination in American universities is to be guided by works which contain serious errors of omission then that research will inevitably be crippled until those errors are rectified.

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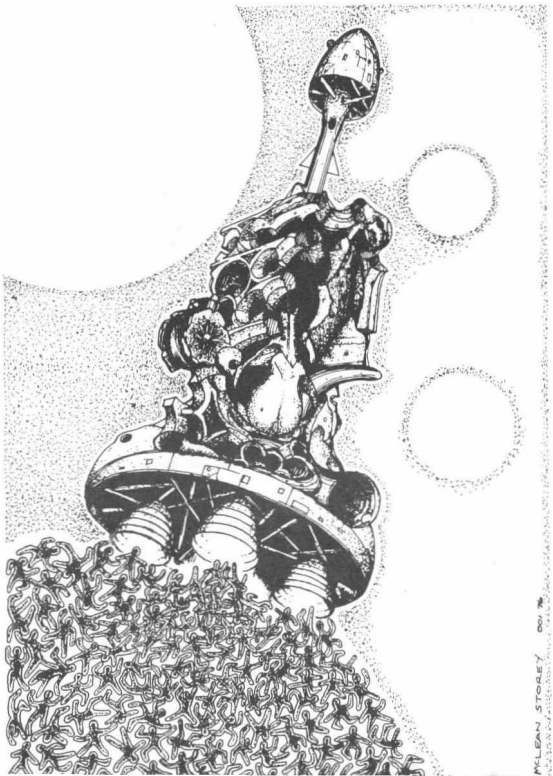

DORIS LESSING BRIEFING

Cy Chauvin

Doris Lessing has approached science fiction from the "outside", so to speak; she has gained her reputation from writing contemporary fiction, and has not been a self-conscious author of science fiction in the sense that Brian Aldiss, Robert Silverberg and Joanna Russ have been (to name three prominent writers who have written outside the science fiction field, but who are still largely identified with it). I am not sure if her approach to sf is radically new or different; all good writers are eccentrics, and her visions are more her own I suspect rather than any quality held in common by writers generally specializing in mundane fiction.

The two Lessing novels which I have read and have found to contain science fiction elements are *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1975).

The first, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, is about a man discovered on the London streets who is suffering from amnesia and fails to respond to treatment. He dreams of being a sailor, and mumbles what seems to be gibberish to the two doctors in charge. They discover he is a professor of Classics at a university, and his name is Charles Watkins. He is married with two sons.

The crux of the whole novel depends on whether you believe Watkins is mad, or whether you believe something altogether different - that he is not Watkins at all. That he is an alien, who has somehow come to "Planet Earth":

"You will lose nearly all memory of your past existence. You will each of you come to yourselves, perhaps alone, perhaps in the company of each other, but with only a vague feeling of recognition...Some of you may choose not to wake, for the waking will be so painful, and the knowledge of your condition and Earth's condition so agonizing, you will be like drug addicts: you may prefer to breathe in oblivion." (p. 133)

This is how Watkins feels; towards the novel's end, he confesses to one of the other patients in the hospital that he has something to remember. "There's something I have to reach. I have to tell people. People don't know it but it is as if they are living in poisoned air. They are not awake...they are living like zombies and killing each other." (p. 174) Watkin's "madness" seems to have been provoked by a long letter he received from Rosemary Haines - or, alternately that the letter awoke in him some other form of consciousness. Ms Haines was, greatly moved by a talk Watkins gave on education, and the raising of children; she was "stung awake" by his ideas:

"I sat by the window that night and I thought: Don't let it go, don't forget it. Something extraordinary did happen. Perhaps during that night while I sat looking into a suburban garden, I saw quite like a child of three, four, five, a creature quite different from the person she was doomed to grow into. I remembered things I had forgotten for years...Before the trap had shut."

Children have a different sort of consciousness, a different sort of awareness from adults: we can see it in people's child-like wonder and delight, and it is really an infectious sort of enthusiasm, altogether different from the rational and carefully planned adult gaiety. Ms Haines' letter in all

about a change in her life, and (ripple effect) changes she sees in others. The letter is probably the most eloquent piece of writing in the novel; and it has power not only as a piece of fiction, but as a call for people to "change their heads" (look at life differently).

The novel is a collage: letters, interviews with the "mad" patient, straight narrative, poetry, stories the patient has written and possible dream sequences all combine in a most aesthetically pleasing fashion (*Stand on Zanzibar* was constructed far more cleverly - and originally - than is *Descent*, but not as smoothly, alas). The science fiction elements of the novel are contained in what could be interpreted as its "dream sequences": depending on one's interpretation of the novel, of course. A man on a ship (we are never given a name, but assume it is the protagonist) which is searching for a Disc, or Crystal, which from the description Lessing gives, is obviously a flying saucer or UFO. "Our expectations had been for aid, for explanation, for a heightening of our selves and of our thoughts," he says. The ship encounters the Disc those aboard it have been searching for, and all are transported aboard (in a mysterious, ethereal fashion) except for our narrator. He builds a raft, leaves the ship and goes to shore. There he discovers a strange deserted city (built in unconventional fashion, and roofless), cleans a deserted square in preparation for the Crystal's return (its schedule seems to follow the phases of the moon). A large troop of baboons invade the city, overpopulating it and (later) fighting for food. He rides on the back of a great White Bird across the sea of the dead and participates in primitive, bloody rituals in the jungle.

There are some beautiful sections in this portion of the novel: "A creature looking at its image, as an ape or a leopard leaning over a pool to drink, sees its face and body, sees a dance of matter in time." This particular passage indicates the difference in the way sf readers and mundane ones approach fiction. According to Samuel R. Delany, "Science fiction literalizes the language, and casts it into a sort of real mode that you just don't have with any sort of discourse. There are so many new sentences. The actual gallery of sentences is much larger that you have in mundane fiction...'He turned on his left side.' That doesn't mean he's twisting and turning. No, in science fiction there's a little switch. These sentences are suddenly cast into the foreground of their literal meaning." (*Algol*, Summer 1976, p. 18) Delany also mentions Bester's *The Stars, My Destination*, where at one point the protagonist is undergoing synesthesia: his senses of smell, sight, etc. are switched. So when Bester says, "His skin was raked with the taste of lemons," he is not speaking metaphorically. Likewise, this phrase from Lessing's novel is both a striking metaphor and has a scientific basis (the atoms that compose our bodies are in constant motion, "a dance of time"). Readers conditioned to this sort of approach will interpret Lessing's novels differently from those exposed to sf. Is it illusion or reality?

In the novel's middle portion, there is a section in which the narrator gives a rambling, vague account of his view from the Crystal. There is a short segment about a briefing on Venus for a Descent Team here, and it is obviously science fiction: but this section of the novel is merely presented as the "contemporary mode" which is "preferred" to a more "whimsical" version (complete with Roman gods) which presents the same message: that Earth must be changed, that it must be altered in some way, before it progressed to such a state that it threatened the well-being of the entire social system. We know that some exterior force works upon our narrator, but Lessing leaves it open to us whether we accept an sf viewpoint, or fantastic metaphor ("Mercury the Messenger...divides himself effortlessly into a dozen or so fragments, which fall gently through the air on to the Earth, and the Battalions of Progress are strengthened for the Fight.")

The Memoirs of a Survivor, in contrast to *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, has more definite science fiction elements. It is a disaster story - or, more

accurately, the story of life during the breakdown of civilized society. There is no atomic war, no alien invasion, or raging plague; only slow, gradual breakdown of civil services. Food becomes scarce, electricity is not available, trains and buses run more infrequently, gangs roam the streets, people move from their homes and leave them empty. The cause for all this is not given; nor is the name of the country or city in which it happens (but details in the novel clearly set it in England, probably London, though the *effects* of the breakdown are worldwide). Even the name of the narrator is left unmentioned (like her earlier novel, this helps give *Memoirs* an aura of mystery, cut off from the ordinary reaches of time and place).

The story is quite unmelodramatic. A girl of 12, Emily, is dropped into the narrator's flat by an unknown man, who asks that she take care of the girl. The relationship between the two changes in different ways through the novel, as the young girl quickly grows into a woman and learns to cope with the outside world, which is becoming more barbaric all the time.

But like *Briefing for A Descent into Hell*, *Memoirs* has a mystical side, too, and it is this that makes the novel exceptional, and not just another example of the British disaster novel subgenre. It is a world on the 'other side of the wall'. The narrator says:

"I had to admit that there was a room behind the wall, perhaps more than one, even a set of rooms, occupying the same place as - or rather overlapping with - the corridor...I looked at the glow and pulse of the yellow ((spot on the wall)), looked as if I were listening, thinking - and then I was through the wall and I knew what was there."

The wall is an ordinary one; it forms one side of her flat - and so these rooms on the other side of the wall may seem an illusion, a dream. This world beyond her apartment wall is intensely appealing, and reflects in many ways (or at least *seems* to reflect) her emotional states at various times in her life. "The rooms were disused, had been for some time. Years, perhaps. There was no furniture...I did not go in but stood there on the margin between two worlds, my familiar flat and these rooms which has been quietly waiting all this time."

Portions of the description of this world beyond the wall are obviously symbolic, such as the section where the narrator walks into a room where people are diligently putting pieces of cloth on a carpet, matching up the pattern; the narrator finds a piece (her piece?), places it in the pattern, then drifts away.

At the end of the novel, Emily, her boyfriend Gerald, their cat and the narrator are together in the flat; it is winter and they have been threatened by juvenile gangs. The narrator sees a yellow stain form on the flat wall, and she calls the others to her - and a strange transformation takes place.

"Both walked quickly...out of this collapsed little world into another order of world altogether...And now it is hard to say exactly what happened. We were in that place, which might present us with anything - rooms furnished this way or that and spanning the tasts and customs of millenia; walls broken, falling, growing again; a scene, perhaps, of people matching pieces of patterned materials on a carpet..."

Just as in her earlier novel, the question arises: is this transformation meant to be real, or is it an illusion? The clues in *Memoirs* are more definite: the title is *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, and the book is cast as a reflection, as a looking back - by a narrator who expects her audience to be familiar with what happened. "We all remember that time. It was not different for me than for others." And (about comparing experiences): "Yes, it was so, it must have been, I wasn't imagining things." (My emphasis)

Lessing's description of the tiro's entry into "another order of world altogether" matches (in its jumbled, kaleidoscopic details) the typical sf convention of entry into other dimensions. What makes Lessing's novel different

from most of is her lack of explanation for these conventions. How does the narrator enter into these rooms beyond the wall, this different "order" of world? There are no alien beings, no esp or teleportation, no 'holes' in space, no reality altering drugs of the sort Philip K. Dick writes about; there is not even a fairy godmother tapping the narrator on the shoulder. The conventions of sf have an advantage in that their verisimilitude is already established: there is no need for the author to explain how a spaceship can travel from planet to planet It is "common knowledge".

In a good science fiction novel or short story, the sf elements are not mere gimmicks or trappings, but have a significant effect and influence on the actions and feelings of the characters, its plot, and even its literary style. By this standard, *Memoirs* is important, since the novel's imaginative trappings affect at every turn the characters. Anthony Robertson, in his article "The Science Fiction of Doris Lessing", says: "The mind under pressure does not break down but through;through to contact with the cosmic experience that was once shared by all men". This is a very standard sf theme (Silverberg's *Downward to The Earth* is the best recent treatment of the idea); but Lessing develops it originally, Her novels approach it obliquely, with great subtlety and elegance. As Robertson points out, however, for the novels to mean anything to the reader, he or she must believe in "revelatory madness" - in the possibility of transcendental experience. This is easier for the steady reader of sf than for the mundane, since the best sf deals with changes in consciousness, and the alien or unusual viewpoint,

Alexei Panshin, in his review of *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, makes a related point: "Lessing endorses her protagonist's fantasies. They are the most serious things she can imagine. Like any good sf writer, her sympathies are with her fantasy and not with objective opinion". (*Amazing*, June 1973, p. 104) That is why we feel such disappointment when "normality" triumphs, and the protagonist does not remember what he was so desperately searching his conscious for; it means nothing to him, and he does not even have time to discuss it over dinner with Ms Raines, the woman who wrote him such a heart-felt letter. Likewise, the mystical ending of *Memoirs* gains power for the same reason.

Both novels might be interpreted as novels of "growth". In *Memoirs*, when Emily is first brought to the flat with her cat, she says little and stays in a small side room by herself. At first she merely regards the narrator as an "elderly person", as someone to provide for her; but the narrator gradually wins her trust. In the interim, Emily wanders out to talk with the young people on the street, the small bands gathering to leave the city for the countryside. She even forms a commune with some others, and leaves the narrator for a time. A couple of sentences seem to sum up the entire novel: "So much was happening, and every hour seemed crammed with new experience. Yet in appearance all I did was to live quietly there, in that room..." The novel's"action" is interior: in the narrator's emotions, and in the world behind the wall.

In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, Charles Watkins (or the man of changed consciousness and memory who inhabits Watkins' body) is changed more slowly. He is confronted with the problem of desiring to know about his past self, but unwilling to lose his present identity (something the doctors and all his past friends seem bent on destroying, to return him to "normal").

In these two novels, Lessing seems to be saying that knowledge is derived from intuitive sources, rather than from objective experience. I have found that the two novels were more relevant to my personal life than any other fiction I've read since *Earth Abides*, and the novels seemed to have peculiar connections to other books I've read on psychology, the counter-culture and sf criticism. Alexei and Cory Panshin especially are worth quoting, and comparing:

"In these last brief one hundred and fifty years a new revolution in lifestyle has occurred...all our old familiar sureties have collapsed. Until we rebuild our minds, we will be in agony, unsure of anything, including our very survival.

We need to make new integrations. Our need is overwhelming. We need to move beyond the limited particularities of sensible perception and play again with the universals of feeling and idea, and there discover new life giving alternatives." (*Extrapolation*, May 1972, p. 140)

Lessing's two novels are nothing if not about mental survival: about alternate points of view. The Panshins say that all sf presents (in symbolic form) what goes on inside ourselves when "we face our limitations and then suddenly redefine ourselves - in terms of confrontations with powers, beings and places that are not objectively known to exist." ("The Search for Renewal", *Fantastic*, July 1973) This is exactly the sort of situation Lessing deals with in these two books - and why, as I've said, we are so disappointed with the protagonist's failure in one novel, and overjoyed at the success in the other.

It is also illuminating to compare the two remarks of the Panshins with a statement Alan Watts makes in "The Book (On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are)". Watts seems to share with both Lessing and the Panshins the same dissatisfaction with present day society, and agrees that we must achieve an altered state of consciousness. His suggested means to this end parallels Lessing's and the Panshins':

"Just as sight is something more than all things seen, the foundation or 'ground' of our existence and our awareness cannot be understood in terms of things that are known. We are forced, therefore, to speak of it through myth - that is, through special metaphors, analogies and images ((my emphasis)) which say what it is like as distinct from what it is. At one extreme...'myth' is fable, falsehood, or superstition. But at another, 'myth' is a useful and fruitful image by which we can make sense of life..." (p. 12-13)

At another point in his book, Watts comments (favourably) on science fiction, and says "one of the best ways of understanding what goes on today is to extend it into tomorrow" (p. 42). He sees it as containing two morals: that neither order - nor chance - must win, and that the more things change, the more they remain the same. He stresses the need for balance and wholeness in life.

How does this relate to Lessing? Well, one critic characterised her as a "novelist of affirmation" - she sees the dark side of life, but does not believe it is the only nor the most significant facet of life (in contrast, perhaps, to someone like Thomas M. Disch, whose latest collection is entitled *Getting Into Death*). She believes in the need for "survival, human dignity, and hope" - an attitude that most closely resembles that projected by Ursula Le Guin in her fiction, I think. Neither automatically equates realism with pessimism, yet deal with their characters honestly. There is a balance, as in the Tao that has influenced Le Guin's fiction so much: the yin and the yang. The melancholy happiness, the joyous despair. Let me close with an illustration of this duality from *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*:

"Again, the air was filled with the loneliness of the sunset hour. I was melancholy enough to cry, or to hide my head under a blanket - if I had got one, and slide with my sadness into a regression from the light. But the scene was too magnificent not to watch..." (p. 47)

--- Cy Chauvin, June 1976

BARRY MALZBERG'S HEROVIT'S WORLD

Andrew Tidmarsh

The novel is the story of a man who is gradually losing touch with the world outside of his head: the physical and social world. That he is a writer is not incidental; that he is aware of the gulf between production and ambition is the core of his problem. For many years he has insulated himself from the true - and painful - knowledge of an inadequate personality, an unsatisfactory marriage, a total failure to transcend the niche (and recognition) acquired easily as an adolescent. A child is born: the man realises that he is growing old and becoming weak and still has not done what he widely, publicly promised he would do. (What else do young writers promise than that soon - "when I have some money in the bank from writing this trash" - soon they will write a great novel.) He reacts in the only way he can: he creates a more pleasant world into which he can slide. He assumes, first of all, the personality of his ever-concealing pseudonym, then the personality of the main (characterless) character of his fiction. Both steps take him into simpler worlds, over which he has more control. Both steps take him further from reality, from a coming-to-terms with his own limitations.

As always, Malzberg is concerned with a disintegrating mind.

Stop.

A day has passed: my conception of the novel has changed. Now, I see that it is a limited book, that it deals with only a few of the problems that a writer faces. Let me make public that I hope, I wish to be a writer. (Let us ignore that though several years were spent writing SF stories I no longer can. I can write what I have known, have seen, have felt. Too much SF is unconvincing because it is unnatural.) I have not so far produced a worthwhile story, and will not do so if I continue with my present job. However, I write voluminously at work. I was beginning to think, judging by the favourable words of my boss, that I was writing well. Today I have been proved wrong. Or, I have not grasped that I am not valued for my writing ability, am merely a hack who is employed to generate ungrammatical, shallow poems (ah! a strange insight) from which untalented Minister can pick up an emotive word or phrase. We Civil Servants are administrators; it is of no importance that we might wish - as I do - to make an artistic statement through our work, and, moreover, to give everything we have, to display all our knowledge and perception, in everything we do. No; what we are is unimportant- we can submerge our personalities and our uniqueness (merely) so that some "hard-pressed" person can more quickly read two misleading words than a paragraph that is truthful and complete. Now I know why so many Civil Service documents are incomprehensible, why so much use is made of the tautological "also", the delaying "however", the clumsy "with respect to". The requirements of time push aside any inclination Civil Servants may have to use language properly; if one can save two seconds by omitting an important conjunction why notice that the resulting sentence is inaccurate or meaningless. (One, of course, can pursue this terrifying misuse of language to make a strong case that one cannot understand what one cannot express, that what one cannot think/talk/write about one cannot know. Isn't language man's most precious possession.) Malzberg's book is weak in this area.

We are told that Jonathon Merovit proposes to write "great novels"; we are told that he has written only crud. We are shown why: his prose style is inadequate. Also, the quotes from his novels show why he is falling apart. Somehow, though he has so long denied its existence, he is writing about his life; he is trying to grow up. It is too late, he fails. We understand then why Merovit has never broken with Mack Miller and the Subway Team. Though he can speak and tell stories, he has not learnt how to write and therefore writes about nothing. Merovit's novels are shown to be flimsy, disposable contructs; SF, by implication, is shown to be an artificial fiction, to have been built by Hugo Gernsback and not to have grown since. My quibble that Malzberg does not explain why Merovit did not mature, though seeing that he should, is insignificant beside the author's greater achievement: he has not only shown how difficult is the life of a writer and how often a writer frustrates his own ambitions; he has also shown why Science Fiction is an adolescent fiction (so young!) and why it will become an adult fiction if the Fiction is placed before the Science (Maybe, this is something I had unconsciously realised: I can only successfully write Science Fiction if first I can write Fiction.) I retract my earlier negative statement.

To coin a phrase: "Malzberg is a true hero". He is a mature writer, his is adult fiction. What more need one say.

On the third day;

One needs say more about the analogy already drawn here between the Civil Servant and the hack writer. I have learnt that in my work ambition is futile, that to be accepted, even to be successful, I can write in any mad fashion I choose. What beautiful, enlightening prose I could write will be treated with as little respect as any ugly, misleading prose I have written or, worse, will be made unattainable by the foolish encouragement of a lax and clumsy prose style. Perhaps I am pushing the point to a ludicrous extreme. Certainly, young writers of fiction have been sidetracked by unwarranted praise- as Jonathon Merovit was (if only he had known!); but not all. I believe there are more incentives (than money) to draw a young man to literature than to the higher echelons of the Civil Service. I also believe that some people are aware that good prose is valuable, that good prose is more insightful, moving and informative than bad prose. A fool, surely, is a man satisfied with the unstructured outpourings of an adolescent (of any age). But...it is useless to talk of the quality of prose when standards are non-existent - either unnecessary (as in the Civil Service) or never sought (as in Science Fiction).

Now, to pin this argument to the wall. Science Fiction has for too long run on without critical control, without the guidance of critical standards. This situation may have been, in the past, tolerable and may have contributed to the disdain with which the term SF (or Sci-Fi) is generally greeted. But it does not seem sensible - or even possible - for this aimless blundering to continue. After all, we all know what a great future SF has. Without motivation, without a desire to be better than ever, better always than the past, there can be no progress; there can be only stagnation and death. A meaningful and constructive dialogue between readers and writers is required. Maybe - who can say? - Malzberg quit SF because he saw that his audience would not benefit further from books more advanced than those he had already written; perhaps he has reached the limit of the audience to appreciate what he was writing. Are we reassured because Malzberg is such a talented writer; is our sophistication really so great. We may have lost Malzberg, and Silverberg, and Disch, and Ellison. Do we wish to lose Le Guin, or Aldiss, or Priest? Michael Bishop, Gene Wolfe, Ed Bryant? (Though we would not be losing them. They would be losing us; they would be doing things we could not grasp. Have I just bared my Science Fiction-is-a-ghetto soul? People make ghettoes.)

I cannot end on this point.

I must turn again to the novel, and, always, always, to its author. I must - I really must - tell you that I think the novel is little more than a series of clichés; that in order for the book to be effective its reader must take to be truth everything he reads. This makes the book less appealing. One cannot dismiss Berovit and his childish obsessions as mere fabrications: no. Malzberg intends to ridicule his protagonist (which might less be Berovit than SF itself!) and therefore must convince that Berovit is real. If we dismiss Berovit we must dismiss everything around him. If we dismiss Berovit we might as well not read the novel. (That is my feeling; others might find the surface sufficiently entertaining.) But if we accept Berovit we accept everything around him: we accept his easy passage to stardom as an author, we accept his relationship with his literary agent and that agent's crassness; we accept that SF fandom comprises young people who loathe what they so avidly read, that SF authors lack self-respect because of what they write, that writers can only write if drunk. I recognise these things as clichés; (they could actually be totally true; that would be irrelevant to this argument). Of course, Malzberg writes to devastate the field of science-fiction, to show that its limitations are self-imposed, arise from the inability - or refusal - of those to whom SF is most precious to widen their horizons, to lift their eyes from the pages of a magazine to someone's face. Yet, Malzberg's use of clichés reduces the scope of his novel. *Berovit's World* may not be Science Fiction but its background limits its audience appeal to one familiar with SF. (I hope I'm not, by making such a statement, again endorsing my own narrow horizons. What portion of the casual readership of SF has any knowledge of fandom?) OK; I've made a fool of myself again. I may see many clichés in the novel that most of its readers won't see. Yet, there is some truth in what I was saying. The novel's audience will be limited: not by the novel's content but by the way it is packaged.

I could go on. (What possibilities there are in 'SF as a commercial publishing category; discuss'.) I won't. I would like to end with a penetrating insight, or a provocative question; I can't. I can only trail away, leaving you with the thought that whatever SF is - is it many things? - we, the fans and the aspiring authors, have moulded it. We can make it what we want, what I want. We can change it, rearrange it; dispense with it entirely. Most of all, we can love it without understanding love.

--- Andrew Tidmarsh, 19/6/1978

O'RYAN

Dear Fandom,

During the last few months I have been swamped with letters (bo-hum...) pleading for copies of O'Ryan, which is a fairly new British fanzine. To all those nutters I must now publicly apologise that the zine can no longer exceed the number of 200, unless aided by yourselves. The simple reason is that my pocket just will not allow it, even as much as it wants to. Without subscriptions O'Ryan cannot extend its readership (unless through trade). I know subscription is an ugly word to many people but it just cannot be helped. So, if you do want O'Ryan desperately then I'm afraid it is the only answer. Again, sorry.

But you do have the fulfillment of knowing that for £1.00 per year (or the equivalent) you will receive a litho, forty page plus, artfilled, literature-packed, fan-shitting, humorous and serious, Papal fanzine! Hope to hear from you...

EDITOR: *Paul A. Ryan*
29 Morritt Avenue
Halton
Leeds LS15 7HP
Yorkshire

LEAD-IN (cont)

All right, smartyboots, what is really wrong?

What is really wrong, editor, is that you have allowed your emotions to seize control of you again. You have failed to Think Rationally. You have allowed yourself to hope.

I suspect I lose the drift of your argument, Spiby...

Bullshit, Fowler, bullshit. You know exactly what I mean. If I were to hint that the Little Red-Haired Girl has been replaced by...

Careful, Spiby, careful. You tread on thin ice. Certain Persons read this magazine. Certain Persons might not be pleased.

...another.....

SPIBY!!!BE SILENT!!!

Calm down. Just my little joke. I'll retract it all. Just my little joke.

I allow you your own type-face and this is the way you reward me. False insinuendo. Dangerous statements. If you are not careful I shall not allow you into my editorial pages again. BE WARNED!

Forgive me, mighty editor. Spare me the wrath of your blue pencil.

Just this once, Spiby.

Good. Now get on with your editorial...

TALES FROM TIME AND SPACE - BACK NUMBERS OF VECTOR

76/77 (double-issue) Aug/Sept 1978 - Robert Silverberg Interviewed by Chris Fowler, Opening Minds by Brian Stableford, book and film reviews; cover by Brian Lewis

75: July 1978 - Harlan Ellison Interviewed by Chris Fowler, book reviews, including David Wingrove's in-depth look at Again, Dangerous Visions; cover by Paul Ryan

73/74: (double-issue) March 1978 - J.G. Ballard Interviewed by David Pringle and James Goddard, book reviews; cover by Paul Dillon

72: February 1978 - Dan Morgan's Gob speech from Novacon, Robert Silverberg Interviewed by Malcolm Edwards, book reviews; cover by Brian Lewis

71: December 1975 - The Stone Ax and the Musk Ox by Ursula Le Guin, Towards an Alien Linguistics by Ian Watson, book and film reviews; cover by Dave Griffiths

70: Autumn 1975 - Time Travellers Among Us by Bob Shaw, Violence in SF by Edmund Cooper, SF's Urban Vision by Chris Hammett, book, film and fanzine reviews

69: Summer 1975 - The Science in SF by James Blish, Early One Oxford Morning by Brian Aldiss, The Value of Bad SF by Bob Shaw, Science or Fiction by Tony Sudbery, film and book reviews; cover by AMES

67/68: (double issue) Three Views of Tolkien by Ursula Le Guin, Gene Wolfe and Peter Nicholls, Letter from America by Philip K. Dick, Period of Transition by Michael G. Coney, After the Renaissance by Brian Aldiss, Machines and Inventions by Brian Stableford, Down-at-Heel Galaxy by Brian Aldiss, book and film reviews: Spring 1974 - the last Malcolm Edwards issue

64: March/April 1973 - The Android and the Human by Philip K. Dick, The Extraordinary Behaviour of Ordinary Materials by Bob Shaw, Author's Choice by Paul Anderson, book and fanzine reviews

61: Sept/Oct 1972 - The Arts in SF by James Blish, An Interview with Peter Tate by Mark Adlard, book and fanzine reviews

60: June 1972 - Through a Glass Darkly by John Brunner, SF and the Cinema by Philip Strick, The Frenzied Living Thing by Bruce Gillespie, Edward John Carnell 1918-1972 by Harry Harrison, Dan Morgan, Ted Tubb and Brian Aldiss, book and fanzine reviews

59: Spring 1972 - An Introduction to Stanislaw Lem by Franz Rottensteiner, A Good Hiding by Stanislaw Lem, A Cruel Miracle by Malcolm Edwards, Why I Took a Writing Course...and Didn't Become a Writer by Dick Rowett, SF Criticism in Theory and Practice by Pamela Bulmer, book reviews

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The editor also has a few copies (autographed) of the Paul Dillon award-winning cover from Vector 73/74 at 50p each