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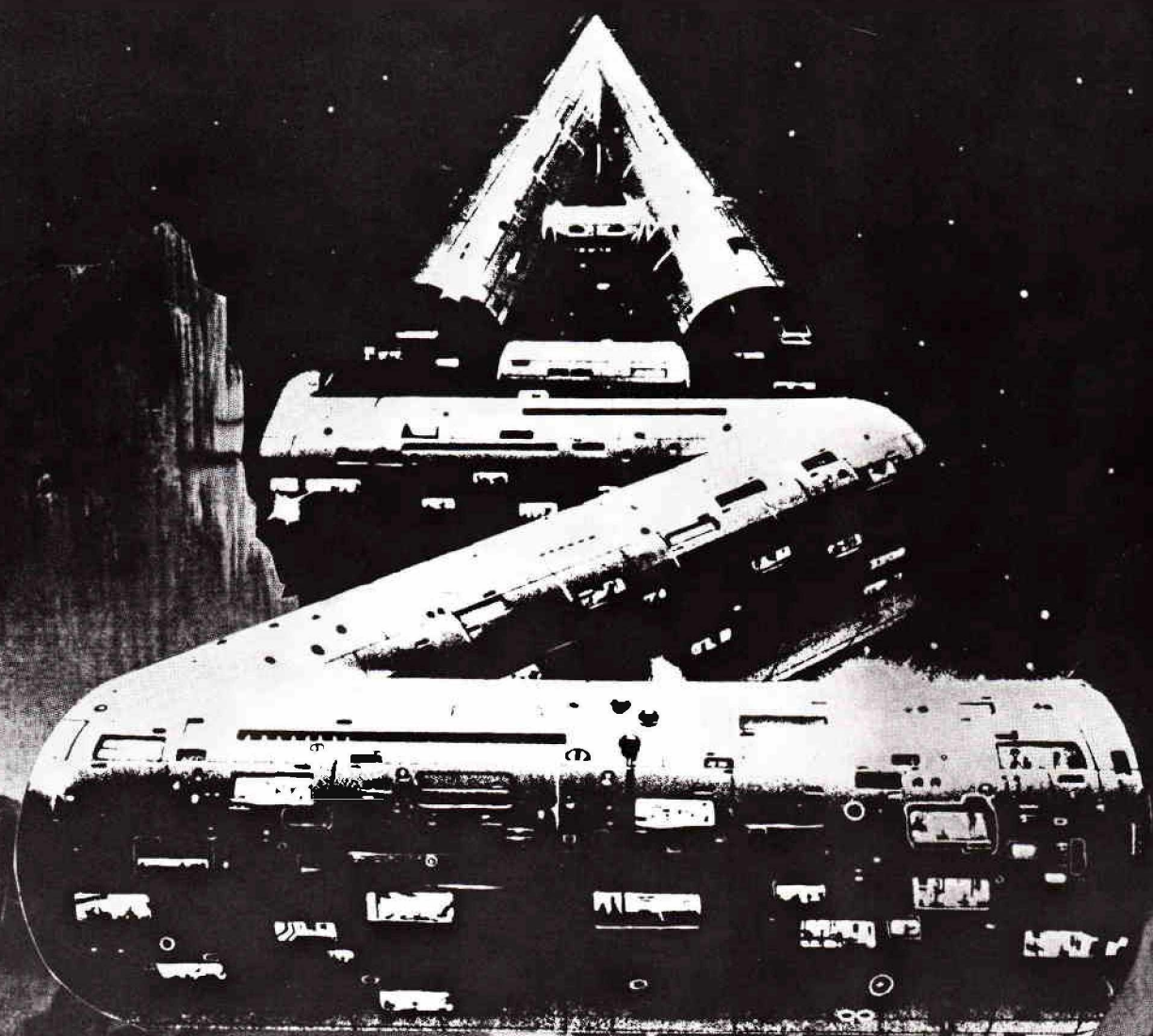
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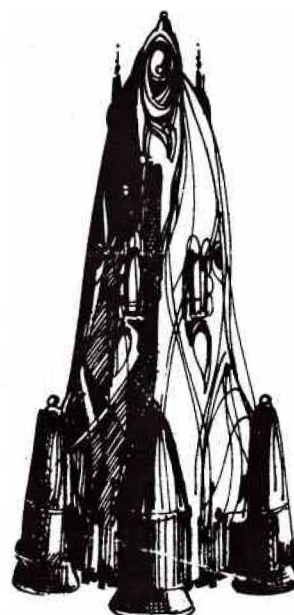
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The Needs and Demands of the Science Fiction Reader: a Sociological Perspective

by Brian Stableford

(This article was prepared for and read at the first World Science Fiction Writers' Conference in Dublin in September 1976.)

This paper will deal with a series of questions which are of fundamental importance to the people gathered here: writers of science fiction, publishers of science fiction and critics of science fiction. The questions are: Why do people read science fiction? What do they get out of it? What do they expect from it?

These questions are a special case of a more general series: Why do people read fiction at all? How do they make use of this species of second-hand experience? In what ways is the use which they make of it similar to the way that they use real experience and in what ways is it different? It will be necessary to deal with these general questions before applying any perspectives specifically to science fiction. I cannot pretend to offer final answers to these questions but I hope to be able to clarify them somewhat and to provide a context of inquiry within which we might legitimately search for the answers.

Literary critics adopt a method of approach to the literary text and the process of reading which is specialised, and therefore narrow. They regard the text as a self-contained entity, an object with definable content. When they consider the reader-experience which it represents they are concerned with the one "correct" or "ideal" reading of the text - a set of relationships between reader and text which is singularly appropriate.

The sociologist must, however, take a much broader view. Whereas the critic concerns himself only with those selected texts which he considers aesthetically valuable the sociologist must deal with all texts. Where the critic is concerned with the correct and ideal reader-experience the sociologist must concern himself with all kinds and classes of possible reader-experience. The sociologist is not concerned with the maximum communicative potential of the text but with the nature and kind of the communication which is habitually achieved.

In order to begin the work of sorting out actual communicative processes involved in the reading of texts we must draw up some kind of a categorisation which will allow us to make distinctions between different kinds of reading behaviour. We must distinguish, if and as we can, between different modes of reader usage and between different species of messages which are operating through the medium of the text.

It is a commonplace in literary criticism that there are two ways to read a text - the right way and the wrong way. The strongest distinction between them is drawn by C. S. Lewis in the opening chapter of his Experiment in Criticism, in which he attempts to define two different species of reader. Literary readers, he claims, read slowly and attentively. They may seek to deepen their relationship with particular texts by re-reading. For them, reading requires privacy and the absence of potential distractions. It is an active, assimilative process. The unliterary, according to Lewis, not only read the wrong books but read them the wrong way. Their reading is passive consumption. They skim over the text, quickly and inattentively, so that the presence of minor

distractions does not interfere greatly with the process. They rarely re-read because they have no need to deepen a relationship which is essentially without depth. They will, however, read books which are basically similar in considerable quantities and with a degree of consistency - because they are interested only in surfaces it is only the surfaces that need change, not the real content of the literary message.

A version of this distinction crops up in the sociology of literature by virtue of Robert Escarpit, who takes the more reasonable view that it does not serve to separate two kinds of people (the cultural elite and the masses) but two kinds of activity available to all. Even the cultural elite, he notes, may read detective stories for relaxation. He concedes that some people may use only the second mode of reading, but attributes this to choice and the failure to develop skills. He also notes that there are not two mutually exclusive categories but rather two opposite poles of a spectrum. The individual act of reading considered as a whole may involve operation in both modes, to a greater or lesser extent, simultaneously.

I should like, if I may, to put a label on this spectrum. I think that we may conveniently refer to it as the spectrum of disposability. The kind of reading which Lewis deplores is reading in which the text is treated as something essentially disposable, whereas in the kind of reading he approves of it is not. Actual reader usage may differ greatly as to the degree of disposability implied by attitude and attentiveness.

In non-disposable reading the use which is made of the text seems much more similar to the use which is made of real experience. It is carefully stored, carefully evaluated - and, indeed, a pertinent feature of this mode of usage is the conviction that the experience has a value akin to the value of real experience. The reading which Lewis deplores seems to him less worthy simply because intrinsic to it is the attitude that the experience does not have this kind of value - that it is "only fiction". In disposable reading the experience is transient - it is not stored, and the demand for similar experience may not be diminished. In disposable reading the reader experience is important and valuable only while it is being consumed.

If books may be metaphorically described as food for thought then at one end of the disposability spectrum we may find food which is commonly assessed in terms of its nutritional value, and at the other end food which is commonly assessed in terms of its taste sensations. Just as all food has some nutritional quality and some taste, so all books may be available for non-disposable use or disposable use, but there are two different criteria in operation when it comes to exercising preference. This analogy is a useful, and perhaps a particularly apt one. It is, at any rate, already accepted into common parlance in the way we refer to "literary taste" and all the ambiguities implicit within the phrase.

The disposability spectrum helps us to clarify two important points. The first, and fairly trivial, point is that of the different nature of the standards brought to the reading of books by people with different attitudes and expectancies. The second point, which is not so trivial is the economic theory of literary mass-production.

As we all know, mass-production necessitates the maximisation of potential consumption. The mass-market publisher is interested not simply in making a product to meet a demand which is initially high, but in making a product to meet a demand which does not diminish when matched by supply - a sustained demand. The habit of disposable reading is, so to speak, God's gift to the publishing industry, because it is what enables them to standardise their product. The mass-market publisher is interested only in the requirements and demands of the reading habit in which books are used disposably. The actual number of readers involved is really a secondary consideration - what is important is that the demand is both steady and predictable. When dealing with books geared to non-disposable reading

every individual venture is a gamble, but the marketing of disposable reading is so secure as to make possible the specialisation of different species of disposable fiction adapted to different variants of literary taste.

In this economic situation we find the seeds of conflict. The economic system of the capitalist countries puts the writer in a social situation where the publisher, the essential mediator between writer and audience, may have motives and priorities significantly different from his own. Writers, by and large, tend to be more interested in the non-disposable aspects of their work. The publisher, in terms of potential profitability, is interested in the disposable aspects. The inevitable results are, in various sectors of the social group which writers make up, warfare, capitulation and compromise.

We often hear the accusation levelled by writers and aesthetic critics at the publishing industry that mass-market publishing has vulgarised the literary taste of the reading public and has all-but-obliterated literature itself. The terms in which this accusation is framed often suggest that this is the result of some evil manipulation of minds, and that publishers are deliberately deadening the literary sensibilities of the public by a kind of deliberate narcosis. This is not so. The anguish which many writers feel in consequence of their neglect by publishers and audience is neither the result of a conspiracy on the part of the mediators or the intrinsic dullness of the audience itself, but of the priorities which must necessarily dictate publishing policy given our economic system and the fact that the disposability spectrum of reader usage does exist.

Science fiction, of course, is a publishing category which was first established in the pulp magazines, which marked the middle phase of mass-production in American publishing (after the dime novels, before paperbacks and comic books). Because of this, science fiction publishing has always been geared to the production of an essentially disposable product. This fact has led numerous writers to try hard to escape such categorisation and has led some to despair of the genre altogether.

Now let us move on to categories of communicative function. Attempts to make such categories distinct have been made in the sociology of literature by Hugh Dalziel Duncan and in the sociology of the mass media by Gerhardt Wiebe. Both of their categorisations are tripartite. In Wiebe's terminology communicative exchanges are divided into instructive messages, maintenance messages and restorative messages. I think it is at least convenient, if not wholly necessary, to split off from the category of instructive messages the category of affective messages. This distinction is often important in the analysis of individual texts and groups of texts. The four categories could, of course, be further subdivided, but the system should not be allowed to become too cumbersome.

The basis on which the four categories are distinguished is as follows:

Instructive messages include statements intended to convey information, or attitudes to information, or new ways to organise information. The category goes beyond the simple didactic function to include what may be called "demonstrative functions". Instructive messages are essentially innovative, in that they are intended to bring about a change in the knowledge, attitude or capability of the recipient.

Affective messages include statements intended to evoke an emotional response from the recipient - to excite sympathy of one kind or another. The concept of catharsis is related to the affective function of literature but the purpose of affective evocation need not be cathartic. Again, this is essentially an innovative function, being designed to bring about a change of mental state in the recipient, although of a more temporary nature than is pertinent to the instructive category of function.

Maintenance messages include all statements intended to confirm attitudes and opinions already held by the recipient. All world-views require constant support and reinforcement from the environment as experienced - in the absence of such continual reinforcement world-views become aberrant and the individuals who hold them are said to be mad. This support is provided by a constant flow of maintenance

messages, and most ordinary conversation belongs to this category. The function is inherently confirmatory, not innovative.

Restorative messages include all communicative exchanges whose function is not to inform, inspire or maintain but rather to allow the recipient temporary relief from confrontation with reality. It appears that the strain of maintaining a conscious and rational relationship with the real world is such that periodic rest is very necessary. Relief from the exhausting effort of sane conformity is provided physiologically by sleep and psychologically by fantasy. Literature designed to supply the restorative function is commonly described as "escapist" but the derogatory undertones of this label are inappropriate. It is vitally necessary. This function is not necessarily innovative, in that fantasies and modes of relaxation may often become very standardised, but where it is innovative it is on a strictly and necessarily temporary basis.

If we consider the definition of these four categories one thing becomes strikingly clear, and that is that they differ dramatically in terms of their inherent disposability. Messages in both the restorative and maintenance categories are intrinsically and necessarily disposable. Restorative messages provide temporary relief from reality, and should not interfere with it, although the need for such experiences is maintained. Maintenance messages are likewise required continually. Both of these needs are undiminished by supply.

Affective messages are less disposable. Their effects may linger and they may, in fact, be permanently incorporated into the mental structure of the recipients in that they constitute a process of training and provide a vocabulary of symbolic associations for the emotional responses of the individual. Our emotions are not instinctive - we have to learn to feel. Affective messages help us to organise and develop our emotions, and inevitably control that organisation and development. To this process affective messages in literature make a genuine contribution.

Instructive messages are less disposable still, for information and principles of informational organisation are intended to remain permanently with the individual unless or until they are forgotten or rejected. All individuals rely much more on information and attitudes gained at second-hand than on the lessons of first-hand experience. Instructive messages in literature make a definite contribution to this process, especially in the matter of the organisation and development of attitudes and ways of understanding.

Thus we may build upon the conclusions which were drawn from the initial categorisation of modes of reader usage. We may say that texts which are used disposablely are being used - whatever the intention of the writer or the critic's interpretation of the text - primarily for their maintenance and restorative content. Any instructive material which the text may contain is, in all probability, not being received, but either misread or ignored. The affective function may operate, but in a shallow and transient fashion. The consequences of this fact may perhaps best be illustrated by consideration of the policies of newspapers. Although the function of a newspaper is nominally to inform it is obvious that the more popular publications - the tabloids - owe their appeal to their intense concentration of the maintenance and restorative capacities of so-called news, and that this is the reason for much of the distortion of information perpetrated under that name.

As, however, the mode of reader usage passes along the spectrum and becomes non-disposable the instructive and affective functions will be served as well as - and to a progressively greater extent at the expense of - the maintenance and restorative functions. The maintenance and restorative functions are never totally lost, but the character of the material which supplies them may change. To draw, again, an example from the newspaper field, the nature of the Times crossword is inherently different from that found in the Daily Mirror.

One thing which must be remembered is that the needs which are met by these different communicative functions

are not equal. Restorative and maintenance messages are the more necessary, in that one cannot get by in life half as well without them as one can without instructive and affective messages. Ideally, all four are vitally necessary, but some are more dispensable than others. The contempt in which maintenance and restorative material in literature is held by many members of the various aesthetic elites which exist in our society is unjustified, and is based upon false assumptions as regards to the real communicative needs of the individual. What the cultural elite regard as "good literature" is not adequate to the whole social function of fictional communication. The importance of this point cannot be emphasised too strongly.

Now, after that rather lengthy introduction, let us turn our attention specifically to science fiction, and investigate the application of these perspectives to this particular case. What are the genre's special communicative functions, and what elements can be detected within the spectrum of reader demand?

Because it is a genre which has obtained a separate identity and evolved within the mass-market, subject to the assumptions of mass-production in publishing, the need which science fiction fulfils is primarily a disposable one. I submit, however, that there is also a significant non-disposable function which is characteristically superimposed upon it.

The demands and expectancies of readers can conveniently be identified by taking census of the attitudes and opinions expressed by habitual readers. An immensely valuable guide to these expectancies is provided by the letter columns of the magazines which were for many years the principal vehicle of the genre and by the host of amateur magazines which circulate within the science fiction community. It is the existence of this close-knit community - which has been enormously influential in governing the evolution of the genre, though it comprises only a relatively small minority of the readers - which sets science fiction apart from the other categories of mass-market publishing, and which is symptomatic of something unique within the needs and demands that are being supplied.

A survey of these expectations of demand and expectancy reveals the following. As might be expected, the largest demand in quantitative terms - and perhaps an important aspect of the expectancies of all readers - is for the service of the restorative function. All reading involves an element of escapism but some reading is entirely escapist. The vocabulary of symbols which science fiction employs is particularly amenable to use in this respect. It provides for the dramatisation of fantasies of virtually every type. It is inherently exotic.

The first thing which sets science fiction apart from the other popular genres is not this strong priority upon the restorative function. Though the mythology of other genres may be more conservative the restorative function is nevertheless vital to the shaping of it. It is, in fact, not what science fiction has but what it lacks that marks the basic division. It is fairly obvious that what supplements the restorative function of most disposable literature is the maintenance function. The western, the detective story and the love story all operate within a fixed and stable ritual framework which embodies a particular world-view. Sometimes these world-views are subject to a change of fashion, as when the characteristic thriller of the early part of the century went into a decline to be replaced by a much tougher variety incorporating a different attitude to the world. In addition, all the world-views are subject to processes of evolution. But in these cases the ritual element is vital. Conformity is conspicuous. Formalisation and standardisation of these products can often go to extremes, as in the case of the romantic novels published by Mills & Boon. The prominence of this type of maintenance ritualisation varies quite considerably from genre to genre, and it is certainly obvious in certain fields allied to science fiction - notably "sword and sorcery" fiction and the kind of fantasy associated with Edgar Rice Burroughs. But science fiction taken as a whole exhibits a much greater

variety than any other popular genre.

This is not to say that science fiction does not perform a maintenance function. There have always been formulae of action and presentation, and there are certain world-views which have characterised different groups within the field at different times. But these have never been uniform. Science fiction has always been a literature of alternatives, and the simple existence of alternatives necessarily weakens the maintenance function considerably. There has always been a manifest demand for alternatives in the reactions of the readers - a quest for new ideas and new treatments. This is not a demand for the service of the maintenance function but a demand for the priority of a certain instructive function over the maintenance function. In this science fiction is unique among popular genres.

Because of this tendency towards non-disposability many members of the science fiction community have always considered that science fiction never really "belonged" to the spectrum of publishing mass-production. They have felt that the labelling of the category within the pulp magazines was an unfortunate historical accident, placing the field in a literary ghetto where its true affiliations to elite literary culture could not be recognised or developed. There is some justification for this kind of attitude, in that reader demand does require certain non-disposable content from a fraction of the material produced. However, the demand is for a very special kind of instructive function by no means identical to the kind of demand which is effective in the non-disposable aspects of the literary mainstream.

In its crudest form, represented by the prospectus for science fiction initially issued by Hugo Gernsback, the special demand for instructive qualities in science fiction was for a straightforwardly didactic function. Science fiction was intended to contain science fact, and also to inculcate in its readers a properly positive attitude to scientific knowledge and technological progress. Gernsback designed a literature that was basically advertising copy for science - propaganda to the effect that science was good and that technological possibilities were wonderful and exciting. Over the years, however, this kind of demand became somewhat more refined and sophisticated. According to John Campbell, the author of the modern philosophy of science fiction, the demand is that science fiction stories should aspire to be experiments in thought which have an instructive capacity by virtue of their logical and rational investigations of imaginative hypotheses. In the subtitle of his magazine Analog Campbell stated this simply and clearly as: "science fiction is analogous to science fact". Science fiction thus becomes the imaginative instrument by which the realms of fantasy may be investigated, analysed and systematised, just as science provides the imaginative instrument for the investigation, analysis and systematisation of real phenomena.

This demand has never been rigorously applied (not even by Campbell) but an eroded version of it is characteristic of the reader demand. The demand may often be satisfied by pretence or illusion, and in practice it almost always is - most readers prefer jargon of apology to an actual fidelity to known scientific principles - but it is nevertheless a force which shapes the fiction and, more importantly, affects the attitude of the reader to the text. The demand itself, whether or not it is honestly met, is a factor in the mode of reader usage. The mode of reader usage employed by the majority of science fiction readers seems to be located further along the disposability spectrum than that which is pertinent to the consumption of other mass-produced fiction.

At this point I wish to return briefly to a more general question. I have observed that mass production of literature to meet disposable needs permits specialisation to cater to different literary tastes. I have also observed that different popular genres contain - and must be presumed to assist in maintaining - different world-views. Some discussion is now necessary with regard to the evolutionary forces, of social

or psychological origin, which have led to the development of the particular specialised world-views manifest in popular fiction.

The popular genres which we know today arose in the dime novels, the penny dreadfuls and the magazines both in Britain and America by a process of natural selection. The formulae which sold survived, those which sold best flourished, those which did not sell were abandoned. If we wish to look for an explanation of why particular mythologies - the love story, the western, the detective story, etc - survive, then we must ask two questions: firstly, we must ask about the nature of the social pressures and tensions relative to which these fictions are restorative; and secondly we must ask about the utility of the world-views which they maintain.

For example, the detective story maintains the faith that all problems have solutions, which may be obtained by ratiocination. As maintenance mythology this is a mythology appropriate to an age in which philosophies are dominated by science rather than by religion. But there is also a powerful element of reassurance in the common structure of the detective story, which recognises that the basic situation is one of mystery and confusion, often rather desperate and frightening. The ritual of the detective story is the insistence that the truth can be discovered despite the conspiracy of circumstances to conceal it. It is a myth of intellectual triumph, of the victory of reason over the mares of delusion. By the same token, the western embodies the myth of the triumph of purpose. The gun is the magical agent of destruction which will defeat the menacing forces no matter how numerous and powerful they may be. The reason why the detective story is approved by the cultural elite while the western and the thriller are most often condemned is, I think, obvious in this comparison of mythologies.

The restorative function and the maintenance function collaborate in these genres. Women, under the strain of their allotted inferior role within our society, and of the social institutions which support it, escape through restorative fiction. But they do not escape to a world in which their role is superior to the male role, or to a world where the attendant social institutions do not exist. They escape, instead, to a world where their role and the institutions which surround it are more appropriate and intrinsically meaningful - into the fiction of romantic love. Similarly, with respect to westerns, men who feel threatened by multitudinous vague social restrictions and impositions escape not to a Land of Cockayne where all is peace and harmony, but to a violent milieu in which all threats and restrictions can be immediately and effectively opposed and defeated.

We must, therefore, ask of science fiction how this same logic can be extended and how it must be modified in order to account for the partial replacement of a maintenance function by a special instructive one.

Any historical study of the literature of the scientific imagination makes it abundantly clear that the class of anxieties which have provoked the emergence of this kind of fiction are the anxieties corollary to scientific and technological progress. This is probably obvious without detailed supporting arguments. What is also obvious is that a great deal of science fiction meets that anxiety straightforwardly, and by the same strategies of reassurance that the other genres employ. Mass-produced science fiction tends to imagine a world in which technology is meaningful and appropriate, and in which technological problems inevitably have glib technological answers. With the aid of a cunning invention and a little planning the alien invasion can always be repelled, the manipulators exposed and rendered helpless. The hero's miraculous machine is always superior to the villain's miraculous machine, thanks to skill and ingenuity, in exactly the same way that the hero can always outdraw and kill the villain in the western. It is equally clear, however, that this is by no means a complete description and characterisation of science fiction, though it is of the western.

Readers of science fiction characteristically demand, and perhaps require, a much greater emphasis on the analysis of situations. In the vast majority of cases they will still ask for ritual resolutions, and will undoubtedly

prefer that analysis should lead to such a resolution, but in science fiction as in no other popular genre the reader will often accept the analysis instead of the ritual resolution. If the analysis of the situation precludes successful rational resolution then the science fiction reader will often accept an unresolved or negatively resolved situation. The frequency with which such stories can be published in science fiction is far greater than the frequency which would be tolerable in other genres.

As to why this is so, we can at present only speculate. Much more detailed work and very careful consideration of methodological problems is necessary before we can draw up hypotheses which are amenable to any kind of rational testing. However, it seems to me that the following suggestions are worth considering.

I do not believe that the observations I have so far made are adequate grounds for rejecting the notion that science fiction is basically a literature of reassurance. Rather, I should like to suggest that it deals in a rather different kind of reassurance which is particularly appropriate to a characteristic modern world-view.

In the era of the victory of scientific rationalism - the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth - it was possible to place a great deal of faith in the ability of science, potential or actual, to answer all questions. Ernst Haeckel, in 1900, wrote *The Riddle of The Universe* as an expression of his confidence that all the great enigmas of existence had already been solved, barring a few inconvenient details. This was the era in which the myth of Sherlock Holmes proved immensely powerful. Today, that faith has almost disappeared. We no longer think that the riddle of the universe is solved, but rather that it may be unanswerable. Twentieth century science is complex, arcane, mysterious - and it has retreated from many of the questions relating to the meaning of existence which Haeckel once thought it might usurp from the realms of the religious imagination. But this is not necessarily a loss of faith in science - it is a loss of faith in final answers.

If we have a new faith today - a reassurance that science fiction supports and disseminates - it is faith in our ability to get by without final and absolute answers, a faith in our ability to live in a universe of moral and philosophical relativity. Science, in this mythology, becomes not the means to our ritual victory over the forces which threaten and confound us, but the means which will allow us to exist in the absence of such a ritual victory. This is not a myth of confrontation and destruction but a myth of the attempt to understand and the acceptance of a compromise with that understanding.

The evidence of such a change in the historical development of science fiction is clear in various attitudes to characteristic symbols. The alien was once employed almost exclusively in Anglo-American science fiction as a menace to be destroyed. Then the priority shifted to the achievement of a mutual understanding. Now we can find the emergence of a new attitude to the alien which involves the dramatisation of the problem as the necessity to co-exist in the absence of any such genuine mutual understanding. Simply put, science fiction writers once tended to set out to destroy the unknown, now they tend to work out ways to admit and accept the unknown as the unknowable. This is the evolutionary trend which is identifiable in the science fiction of the past, and I suggest that it is the one which may allow us to predict the form and acceptability of many science fiction stories yet to come.

I consider that the reason why the reader demand for science fiction places a priority on the innovative instructive function at the expense of the confirmatory maintenance one is due to the pace at which the social anxieties controlling the response of the fiction are changing. New fears are constantly emerging from the technological remaking of society, and science fiction must constantly innovate to keep pace. But the existence of this demand in turn makes possible the design of experiments not only in imaginative thought but also in

the processes of literary function. In this respect science fiction is definitely a bastard genre, unlike other popular genres but by no means identical, or even particularly similar, to the generalised literary mainstream.

This paper constitutes an introduction to the analysis of reader demand and expectancy. It is no more than an introduction. Its conclusions are necessarily vague and tentative. I would suggest, however, that the perspectives which are contained here are relevant, not only to authors but also to editors, publishers and critics of science fiction. It is, I think, useful to ask not only what manifest forms reader demand and reaction takes, but also how that demand and reaction has been formed and why. At best, this kind of study may allow us better to direct our anticipations - and even at worst it may still help us better to understand what it is that we are doing in our collective enterprise.

--- Brian Stableford
1976

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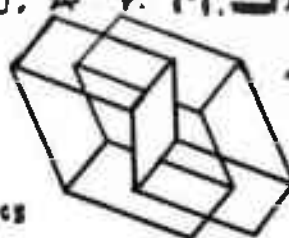
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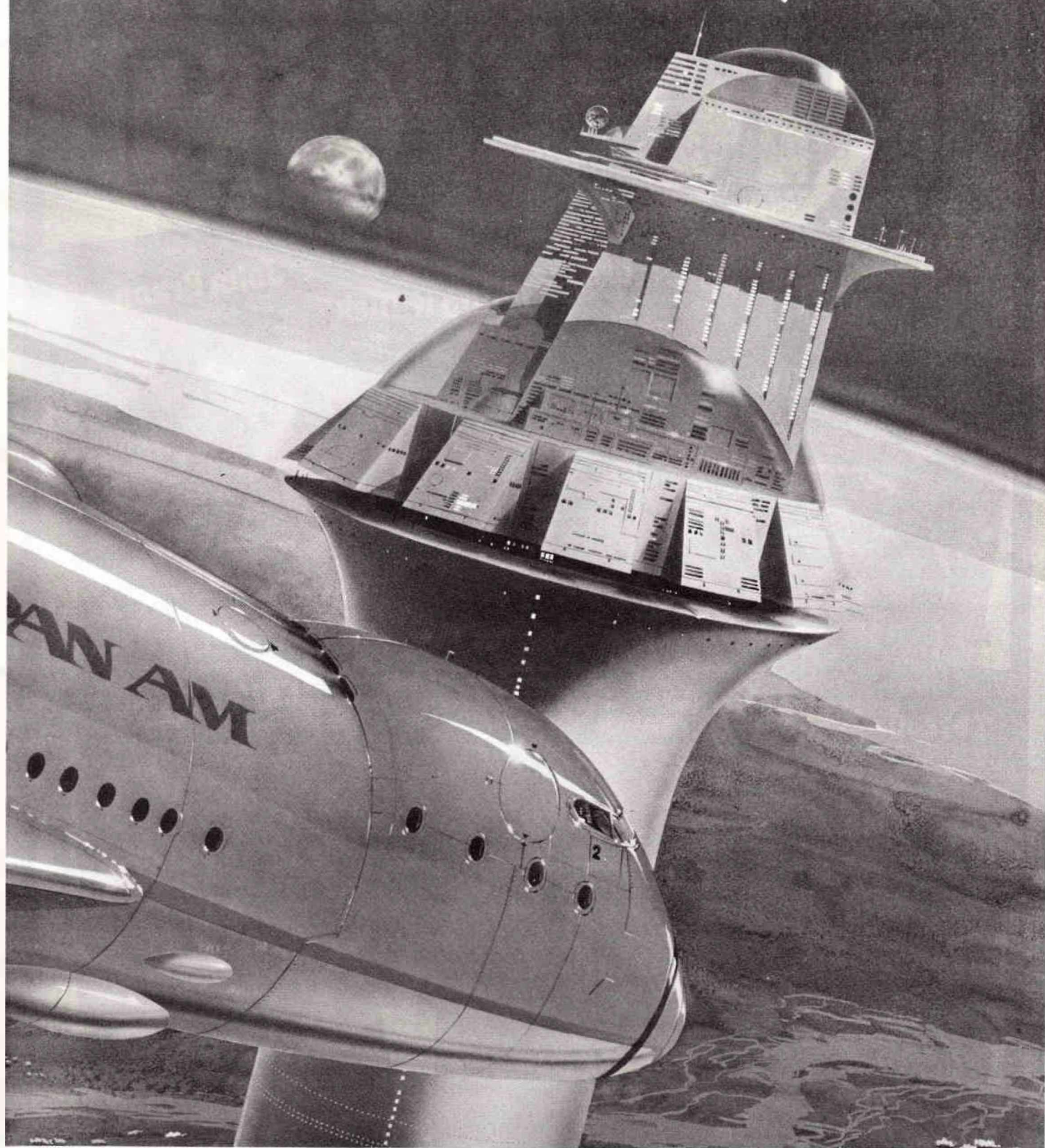


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LEAD IN

As most of you reading this will know by now, I have resigned as Editor of VECTOR, and as a member of the BSFA Committee and Council. I have done this for a simple reason: VECTOR had become virtually a full time job, occupying about 30 hours a week. I was able to do the job for the last year only because I was on a re-training course which allowed me a great deal of free time. Having finished that in July, I faced the prospect of having to get a job; but without the necessary time to do so. I tried for some time to combine part-time work of various kinds with the task of editing VECTOR, but this proved economically and physically disastrous. Finally, reaching the point of breakdown, I wrote to Tom Jones, the BSFA Vice-Chairman in September, telling him that I would have to resign unless I could be relieved of most of the burdens of editorship. The Committee duly deliberated, and decided that it would, with regret, have to accept my resignation.

The intention then was for me to get out a last issue of VECTOR, no. 83 (the one you hold in your hands) in early October. Then, David Wingrove was to take over and produce the December issue. Unfortunately, the strains involved in producing the final issue in less than a month precipitated the breakdown in my health which I had feared, and rendered me incapable of finishing it. Thus it has had to wait until the return of my health, and the December mailing. I can only offer you all my apologies for the delay in getting this issue out. I hope that you will feel that the wait has been worthwhile.

You should also be receiving David Wingrove's first issue of VECTOR, no. 84, with this mailing. I am sure that Dave will make an excellent editor, and I ask you to give him a chance to work himself into the job before you make any judgments. He will need three or four issues to get used to editing and producing the journal. I hope that I shall be able to render him any assistance he asks for. I shall retain my contacts with the BSFA, and help in any way in which I am able. In particular, I expect that I will be aiding with mailings, and perhaps get back into the swing of writing material for the journal.

Despite all the hard work, editing VECTOR has been an exciting and very rewarding experience.

It has been good to have a readership which is interested in the journal. I have been particularly grateful to the many people who have contributed regularly to VECTOR. I don't want to single anyone out, as there are so many who have helped to make VECTOR possible under my editorship, some of whom have names which are familiar to you, some who are anonymous.

All that remains to me is to say, not goodbye, but au revoir.

--- Chris Fowler//Reading//December, 1977

The I.S.S. scientists are attempting to contact the "oblique entity" which is moving through time within the locus of its own momentary present, orientated at an oblique angle to the straight line along which Earth's time-fronts are moving.

etc.

Harry Bayley is a man of ideas. His inventiveness is perhaps unparalleled in contemporary SF. We pride ourselves in being involved with a literature of ideas and infinite possibilities, but attendant upon this pride is a failure of the imagination, for we sometimes forget how deep the roots of SF's self-inflicted clichés really are, and how very rarely we manage to peep out over the ridges to view the territory still unexplored. There are a bare handful of writers who seem able to move across those ridges easily and naturally, who can still invent consistently and imaginatively. Harry Bayley is one - his stories are always fresh and always fascinating.

Bayley's manner of dealing with ideas is cavalier and melodramatic. He has little time for rapt contemplation of the eternal mysteries - he writes with verve and vigour, often playfully and never tediously. In the present work (which was first published in the USA in 1973) he is a little below his best - he has published four novels in the USA since this one (*The Fall of Chronopolis*, *The Soul of the Robot*, *The Garments of Caean* and *The Grand Wheel*) and he is still improving. *Collision with Chronos* suffers slightly from the manner in which it arbitrarily switches from one lead character to another in relentless pursuit of its fascinating notions. Personally, I am quite happy to be switched about in such a good cause, but the more recent work has better organisation and greater coherence. I am told that Allison & Busby intend issuing a lot more of Bayley's books over the next couple of years, and this represents a publishing event of major importance. The fact that such an interesting and readable author has for so long been neglected in his own country is a tragedy. Look out for all these books - take pains to seek them out. You will find it a rewarding experience.

BARRINGTON J. BAYLEY: THE DREAMING MIRRORS

THE GARMENTS OF CAEAN by Barrington J. Bayley; Doubleday and Co; New York; 1976

Reviewed by Andrew Darlington

To a simple Sartorial (Tailor) of the Ziode Cluster a suit of Caeanic clothing is looked upon as something that most exactly epitomises the art of Tailoring. In much the same way I,

with a more first full of professional sales, and a writing style stumbling and shuffling towards some kind of satisfactory coherence, look to the writing of Barrington J. Bayley as something that most directly embodies my ideas of what the art of Science Fiction is all about. I first came across his name largely through the sparse but perfectly encapsulated short stories in *New Worlds* - copies of which I have been known to buy merely through the inclusion of his work (I remember earlier stories as far back as the *Vargo Station* magazine days, but on Bayley's own admission he has only produced truly satisfactory material since 1970). I later graduated to his British novels like *Soul of the Robot* (Doubleday/Allison & Busby, 1976) and *Empire II* (Two Worlds (Harp) 1973), plus American-published work like *The Fall of Chronopolis* (DAW).

His latest novel, *The Garments of Caean*, will achieve its UK publication in December 1977 (from Fontana) - fattened out by about 10,000 words, including one whole chapter, which Doubleday edited out - and it shows no lessening of Bayley's abilities or his talent to amaze. The vortex of ideas leaves the reader as staggeringly punch-drunk as ever, the much maligned and oft-jaded science fiction "sense of wonder" still opens up the reader's skull, leaves the cerebral cortex shimmering exposed like a mid-blown jelly-fish, the mix of ideas and concepts still flow as wildly voracious and all-consuming as ever.

Bayley's approach to *The Garments of Caean* is almost a dialectical one. The reconciliation of internal stylistic contradictions. He takes his thesis from various and diverse elements of science fiction (and other) traditions; he provides an antithesis of intellectual and literary integrity fused with his own restless freshness of vision; and emerges with a synthesis in the form of an amazing body of work.

The basic idea of *The Garments of Caean* goes back at least as far as Richard Matheson's early '50s *Worlds Beyond* vignette-of-a-story "Clothes 'faketh' Man" in which garments obsess, and eventually assume control of the individual. The Caeanics, a "nation" made up of hundreds of planets in the 21st Arm, are human exoskeletons: their consciousness is focussed not inwards but on externals. They are, to use Bayley's own term, "clothes robots". There have been other examples of similar usage of the idea of such internal/external relationships. In James Elish's *Cities in Flight* stories, genetic engineering equipped human beings to live in all manner of hostile environments - even that of Jupiter. But Elish treated the problems of such transformations on a purely technical level. Bayley approaches what is basically the same situation of induced mutations from a more

philosophical point of view. "Body image is self-image" states one of his characters. Placed in a different body, he asks, does human consciousness remain human, or does it adopt a new psychological outlook to match the form? "Suppose," continues Bayley, that "the original human body-image has no instinctive or genetic component? What if it can be erased permanently?" This is an extreme polarisation of the great "nature versus nurture" debate, the genetic versus environment argument that lies behind so many contemporary issues - comprehensivisation of schools, conflict between Socialism and Capitalism, and in religion the question of "free will". According to one of Bayley's characters "the social forces acting on an individual could be calculated as precisely as the forces of gravity or nuclear energy, if one could only find the basic principles by which they operated".

The Caeanic issue follows the same principle - the one that Elish ignored - the one that indicates that the human mind is malleable, reacting to its environment - and hence its most immediate environment, its physical form. In Caeanic terms the argument goes that "Man's naturally evolved form was adventitious, lumpy and incomplete, and did not fit his creative inner powers. If he was to exteriorize these dormant inner powers then he must acquire the appropriate interfaces with reality. Only then could he confront the universe in its true garb, become the creature of effective thought and action he should be, and experience all possible realms of existence. But the evolution of his physical form beyond the status of the hairless ape could not be left to blind biological forces. It had to be done by conscious art. In a word, it was to be accomplished by 'reimant'". Stated in these terms the issue sounds like a mildly interesting, if a vaguely self-indulgent and dilettante cultural experiment. It is only when the full implications of Caeanic culture become obvious - its startling origins, and the insidious influence of the sentient Prossim, that the Caeanic philosophy assumes menace.

Unlike certain UK-based writers attempting to breach more lucrative markets, Bayley does not adopt an American orientation in terminology, in standards of literacy, or in concepts. He stands very much in the Wells-Stapledon-Aldiss lineage. Such writers were aware that one of the precepts of art is to change or alter perception, and, as one of the most directly accessible forms of 1970s art, that particular branch of experimental writing known as science fiction is at its most valid when attempting this process of consciousness-lateralation. *The Garments of Caean*, in the tradition of "The Time Machine" and *Last and First Men*, manages to achieve this, if not a somewhat more modest level. At the same time the writing is economical and concise; the style is perfectly balanced between the genre's extremes of the imaginatively credible and the outrageous; and the plot is, on the whole, well-constructed, plot and sub-plot merging together in pleasing symmetry.

There is, however, an occasional loss of pace. After the initial thrust of the spy-ship dispatched from the rival Ziode Cluster nation into the periphery of the Caeanic culture, and the revelations it uncovers there; and before the final build-up of the novel towards the discovery of the Prossim planet, there does seem to be a period of drift - as if the momentum of ideas that had originally carried the writer had necessarily been suspended for a space of chapters to build the logical foundation and impetus upon which the next sequence of ideas would be based.

In Bayley's *New Worlds* 10 short story, "The Cabinet of Oliver Naylor", it was Britain that had assumed the leadership of expansion into the universe through a kind of reversion to the Victorian back-yard inventor (like Wells' Cavor, or his Time Traveller), while the American conceptual contribution to the story was the Humphrey Bogart Hollywood-movie derived image. In the same way the gangster/speakeasy overtones that occur in certain passages of *The Garments of Caean* more accurately present an affectionate pastiche/parody of movie conventions than an expedient attempt at the literary gate-crashing of a market. But at the same time Bayley does not subscribe to the irritating convention of a male caucasian capitalist hegemony in space exploration. Not only have Soviet and Japanese expeditions opened up large areas of space, but women are active on subsequent missions on naturally equal terms to their male counterparts. They are treated neither as surrogate males, or with the simpering condescension of traditional science fiction - as prizes awarded for dragon-slaying.

It seems to me that in this way Bayley's canon of ideas is both eclectic and dynamically original. He is the conscious inheritor not only of the tools of the science fiction tradition, but the spirit of awe and revelation with which the tradition was born. His style draws upon science fiction convention more directly than any other New Wave experimental writer, yet uses those exact conventions in such a way that they become refurbished and new. He can restore faith in devalued "sense of wonder" using implements that, in the hands of other less competent writers, remain as dry and oxidised as the plains of Mars.

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COLLISION WITH CHRONOS by Barrington J. Bayley; Allison & Busby; London; 1977, 169 pp; £3.95; ISBN 0-85031-222-1

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

An archaeologist discovers evidence that the ruined city he is studying is slowly getting younger. Time scientists find that the past is fixed and dead and that only in the momentary present can life and consciousness exist. The moving finger writes, etc. - except that it turns out that there is not one moving finger but two. There are two momentary presents and they are sweeping through time toward one another.

Meanwhile:

Earth is ruled by militaristic neo-Nazis intent on purifying the human race.

The Interstellar Space Society, who can control time and whose city is far from any time-locked planetary body, unwisely permit themselves to become involved in the situation on Earth.

He can write of the discovery of a new star system and make you believe that you had never before read a description of anything quite like such a phenomenon; make it new and alive with reality and ideas.

In *The Garments of Caean* he can take Cyborgs and Metalloids (a culture from which Caeanic philosophy evolved) cruising naked on open space-rafts - a concept as bizarre and mind-boggling as the most outrageous Space Opera - yet raise it all to a level of literacy that such ideas have seldom before enjoyed - or deserved. He can describe sword-wielding barbarian warriors as audaciously brash and as tastelessly arrogant as anything from the pens of Burroughs or Moorcock, yet not only make it all seem logical but integrate it all into the same scenario.

Accept for a moment, this parody of the sword-and-sorcery genre. A figure 'with black-goggle-eyes, his cowl drawn back, his bizarre mouth making him appear supercilious and amused. The loose gown had fallen aside, revealing a massive belly, corrugated and metal-studded. His vast abdomen swelled over a broad, sash-like belt in which were thrust two huge curved swords, his puffy hands resting on the two pommels, to which were clipped dozens of appurtenances. Not one, but two turrets projected from his skull, jutting out at angles on either side of a semicircular plate of gold which bisected his brain, completely separating the right and left hemispheres.... Or again, a passage that recalls the full crass overstatement of a 1940s horror-pulp: "...she stooped and stood stock-still, a petrified snarl of fear on her face, staring at the apparition: Castor's suit now worn by a body of flies. The head, hands and feet were each composed of a black, fuzzy mass." The legs, even though they floated a foot above the floor, persisted in striding slowly in walking fashion as the monster came slowly towards her...."

Built into the internal logic of such a concept - and also into the deliberately artless form from which it derived its archetype - was a strong overtone of the surreal in the most specific application of the term. A later passage is as bizarrely surreal, with all the intrinsic humour that that particular discipline implies, as the Magritte-esque cover illustration that envelops the American hardback edition. Like the imaginary landscape in a surreal painting Bayley wrote "suits. Hundreds, thousands of suits, accompanied by matching undergarments and accessories, were growing all over the plain".

As soon as this novel is published I urge you to go out and buy it - if only on the strength of that one single image!

In private correspondence Bayley admits that "in these novels I was simply trying to write good space opera". *The Garments of Caean* bears about as much relationship, and as significantly evolved a relationship, to Space Opera as the Concorde does to a Sopwith Camel.

SOJAN by Michael Moorcock; Savoy Books; Manchester, 1977; 157 pp; 80p; ISBN 0-7045-0241-0

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Sojan is a collection whose main feature is a series of stories written while Moorcock was editor of *Tarzan Adventures* in the mid-fifties (when he was in his teens). One or two of them are followed by an apologetic note pointing out that they were initially drafted even earlier. The book is filled out with a few fanzine pieces.

The *Sojan* stories are quite unreadable, and I think that no one knows this better than Moorcock. Had he not had such a generous and sympathetic editor they might never have reached print. They are prefaced here by a delightful parody of the general tone of sword and sorcery fiction called "The Stone Thing" (which has also been reprinted in the semi-professional magazine *Fantasy Tales*), and this must surely constitute an ironic comment. There are also comments (straightforward ones) on Elric and Jerry Cornelius in the informal non-fiction extracts from fanzines (which appear to be letters rather than articles) and these, for me, were the only items of real interest in the book. Devoted collectors of Moorcockiana will need this book - others beware.

MANALONE by Colin Kapp; Panther; St. Albans; 1977; 197 pp; 75p; ISBN 0-586-04234-2

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

I found *Manalone* to be an extremely annoying book. It belongs to the easily recognised sub-species of paranoid sf, in which one man, alone in a hostile and bewildering world, is tormented by a Problem and hounded by the Establishment. The sub-species has produced many excellent works, providing ample opportunity for plot and counterplot, conflict and movement, suspense and climax - but it does, alas, also make it easy for an unwary author to get trapped in a rut heading helter-skelter towards an embarrassing and clichéd non-ending. (Out of duty I shall refrain from describing this non-ending in all its gory detail, but hardened readers of sf will recall it with a groan as an all-too-common destiny for Establishment-bounded problem-solvers.)

Colin Kapp is an author of considerable ability and ingenuity who shows his gifts, alas, all too rarely. I got about fifty pages into this one with no more than mild discomfort occasioned by the unsuitable nomenclature. Before suspense was replaced by the inevitable horrible dread that we were headed for a conclusion of stupefying banality. We were, too, I readily forgive him the fact that the answer to Marsione's Problem (no relation to *Piracy's Complaint*) is both fairly obvious and a little bit silly, but I cannot forgive that dreadful conclusion (or lack of it). Colin Kapp can do much better than this.

HAWK AMONG THE SPARROWS by Dean McLaughlin; Robert Hale; London; 1977; 198 pp; £3.80; ISBN 0-7091-8263-4

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is a collection of three novellas, all from *Astounding/Analog*. The title story, which dates from 1968, deals with the adventures of a contemporary VTOL jet fighter accidentally transported back through time to 1918 and the era of primitive aerial dogfights. "The Permanent Implosion" from 1964 tracks the attempt to stop Earth's atmosphere disappearing through a "hole" created in a space-warping experiment which links a point on the Earth's surface to interstellar vacuum. The last story, from 1960, is "The Brotherhood of Keepers" - a more ambitious story focussing on the moral dilemma facing humans observing the evolution of intelligence in an alien species under extreme environmental pressure.

Dean McLaughlin has never been a prolific author, producing three relatively undistinguished novels and a dozen or so magazine stories. He once suffered the painful indignity of being used by James Blish as a horrible example in an acerbic essay on bad habits rife among sf writers. He is, however, a writer with virtues to compensate for his vices. There is not much innate grace in the way he writes, but there is a neatness about the way he constructs and answers logical problems. All these stories are about apparently-simple problems which generate more-or-less unexpected complexities and corollaries. They are readable and satisfying. The author has contributed an introduction which contains a remarkably honest assessment of his limitations, declaring that "The Permanent Implosion" is a good story because it accomplishes what it set out to do, while "The Brotherhood of Keepers" may be even better because it doesn't. McLaughlin doesn't pretend to offer the reader more than he can and is quite right to believe that what he does offer is full value for time and attention invested. This collection represents, I think, the best of his work.

NIGHTWATCH by Andrew M. Stephenson; Orbit; London; 1977; 238 pp; 85p; ISBN 0-8600-7957-0

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Nightwatch is a book that seems slightly unsteady on its feet - its plot cannot walk a chalk line but persistently changes direction. This is not the result of too much alcohol but a different form of intoxication - the uncertain exuberance of a writer letting it all hang out for the first time - this is unmistakably a first novel. Andrew Stephenson has not been able to resist the temptation to put in too much.

There is an uneasy opening section which drops some heavy (but, it turns out, quite irrelevant) emotional turmoil and cryptic pseudophilosophical conversation into a lengthy section of tense, matter-of-fact prologue. Then we go to the moon - the main environment of the novel, steeped in cloak-and-dagger and a bit more emotional turmoil. Offstage, Earth reels towards destruction, while in the wings on the other side of the stage lurks an alien spaceship making heavy weather of invading the plot. We skip a few years at one point, and then finally get to grips with the spaceship. The central character has his horizons expanded, but barely has time to readjust his emotional turmoil before we are back on the moon, cloak-and-dagger away again. Weighty phrases fly hither and yon, and ultimately we all pretend that the loose ends of the plot are tied together, if not exactly cleared up.

The materials which Stephenson is using are familiar ones, and so (alas) is the pregnant-with-significance manner in which he handles them. There is some good writing here, but it is more than balanced by the rather painful posturing to which the author is prone. I found it all rather exasperating - attempting to promise much but mostly content with faking it. The book has redeeming features - there is a certain determined enthusiasm which attracts sympathy if not admiration - but it does not quite come off. I think Andrew Stephenson will do much better work than this next time out, when he is a little more sure of what he wants to do and is prepared to relax a little. There is a good writer lost in the confusions of *Nightwatch* who may not have to struggle too hard to get out and show what he can really do.

STAR WATCHMAN by Ben Bova; Sphere; London; 1977; 75p; 187 pp; ISBN 0-7221-1793-0

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

I'm not sure whether this is intended as a juvenile or is merely an excessively simplistic adult novel. At any rate, I found it all a big yawn as it followed a well-worn road towards its predictable conclusion.

A major fault (though not the only one) is that the author makes no technological or sociological concessions to the future; in other words the book could have been set in 1970s Vietnam or last century AD Roman Empire without altering the plot, whereas the actual setting is the far future (when "the Terran Empire stretched over half the Milky Way galaxy..." on an Earth-like alien planet. The story concerns a junior officer in a Terran military elite (the Star Watch) whose task is to put down a native revolt and make peace with the members of an invading race who were invited to the planet by the rebels. (All the races are human.) There is advanced technology, of course, but it's no more than gadgetry, inessential to the plot.

To detail the plot holes and character deficiencies would be a waste of space. This was written some fourteen years ago by a younger and less wise Ben Bova than the current editor of *Analog*. I'm sure he'd rather forget about it. So would I.

ANALOG 9 edited by Ben Bova; Dobson; 1977; £3.95; 249 pp. ISBN 0-234-77323-5

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

This is an outstanding anthology; it's a pity that its publication in Britain is four years late - too late, in my opinion. The six stories all appeared in *Analog* in 1970-72. During Ben Bova's first eighteen months in the editorial chair. One of them is a Nebula-winning novella, one was runner-up for a Hugo, and one became part of a Hugo- and Nebula-winning novel. The consequence is that these three (which comprise three-quarters of the book's length) have already been read and enjoyed in other volumes.

Katherine Maclean's "The Missing Man" takes us into undersea living-domes near New York, with two members of the Rescue Squad who are hunting for a missing maintenance engineer - a hunt which turns into a sabotage investigation. Frederik Pohl's "The Gold at the Starbow's End" takes us most of the way to Alpha Centauri - towards a planet which doesn't exist - with a crew of eight young people who are expected to save the human race from itself.

Joe W. Haldeman's "Hero" tells the first part of the story of William Mandella - of his rather unusual military training and first skirmish with the aliens - the whole tale being available as *The Forever War*. In their separate ways these are three very good stories.

The other three are lightweights - both in length and theme. "The Plague" is a typical Keith Laumer offering - predictable and with the goodies and baddies clearly differentiated, but highly enjoyable. "Answer Affirmative" or "Negative" by Barbara Paul is a delightful tale about a computer which begins to answer questions poetically. (But I notice that the author has made at least one literary blunder in trying to show how well-read she is. The fact that the blunder remains uncorrected demonstrates how unlitrary are Ben Bova and the readers of *Analog*; perhaps some of them - Ms Paul included - have actually read Capek's *RUBI*. "Out, Wit!" by Howard L. Myers is a piece of fairly subtle fun-poking at the scientific establishment. All these stories are entertaining.

If only *Analog* could be relied upon to be as good as this I'd take out a subscription immediately.

WAR OF THE WING MEN by Poul Anderson; Sphere; 1976; 60p; 160 pp; ISBN 0-7221-1161-4

VIRGIN PLANET by Poul Anderson; Warner/Wyndham; 1977; 65p. 159 pp; ISBN 0-446-88334-4

THE CANCER FROM ATLANTIS by Poul Anderson; Sphere; 1977; London; 75p; 171 pp; ISBN 0-7221-1163-6

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Poul Anderson is a very capable writer of fantasy; his science fiction is either too pedagogic in matters of planetary motions and ecologies, or else it has a tendency to become fantasy at the drop of a space-helmet. In each of these three novels (two date from the fifties, the third is only five years old) there is a science fictional framework which provides somewhat inadequate support for a fantasy plot. All three plots are soggy in the middle for lack of writing power (Anderson has little ability to hold the reader's attention) and character development.

The earliest of the trio, dating from 1958, is *War of the Wing-Men*. But for the fact that it contains galactic trader Nicholas van Rijn - surely Anderson's best character - this would be a failure. But fat, clever, vociferous, greedy, loveable van Rijn - who has more than a touch of Shakespeare's Falstaff about him - keeps up the level of entertainment with wisecracks, complaints and malapropisms. He does

this throughout various hardships and a war between alien tribes of (yes, you guessed it!) wing-men, who are too dumb to realise what the reader can spot at an early stage - that they belong to the same species. (It's a pity Anderson takes a whole chapter towards the end of the book to explain this to us.) This is the first British edition, its cover carries a marvellously accurate portrayal of a wing-man (though his axe-blade looks more like steel than the flint it should be) by Chris Achilleos.

And now for something completely silly:

"Corporal Maiden Barbara Whitley of Freetoon, hereditary huntress, wing leader of the crossbow cavalry and novice in the Mysteries, halted her orpser and peered through a screen of brush. Breath sucked sharply between her teeth."

That's the opening of *Virgin Planet*, from 1959. Here we have an alien but Earth-type planet populated exclusively by human females, who use a machine to facilitate parturition. They are an Earth colony, but have forgotten most of their technology over the generations; they have even forgotten what men look like, though myths persist. Then a one-man scout-ship lands there. And does this lucky fellow succeed in relieving the entire planetary population of their virginities, or does he die of exhaustion in *flagrante delicto*? Well, neither actually, because this is a fifties soft-core porn novel, which promises much but delivers nothing. Few of the women believe that their visitor is a man, rather than a monster, and he, poor devil, never quite gets around to proving it, due to a lack of privacy and some well-timed interruptions. Offhand I can't recall an sf novel which is less believable from the psychological and sociological points of view.

The Dancer from Atlantis is almost a very good novel. Its opening is basically hackneyed but powerfully presented: four people - a mid-Twentieth Century American, a mediaeval Russian, a Dark Ages nun and a mysterious Greek woman - are accidentally snatched from their own times and deposited on the North African coast in the 15th Century BC. The time machine and its "pilot" are there, too, but he has been fatally injured and dies as soon as he has provided them with an instant mental language-teaching device and a minimum of information (plot necessities, all). They are picked up by a passing ship and taken to the Athens of Theseus and his father, King Aegeus.

Poul Anderson seems to have done his homework well. The backgrounds of all four of his time-

fugitives are detailed and convincing. When he deals with Theseus and the Minotaur myth he admits to a different interpretation from that of Mary Renault, but the events of that era are very much a matter of guesswork, so that this refusal to copy from her is to Anderson's credit. The American, Duncan Reid, and the woman, Eriasa, are by far the best-drawn of the characters. She is a former bull-dancer from Atlantis (here Anderson accepts the currently-favoured theory that this was a large island north of Crete, destroyed by volcanic action, of which Santorini - Thira - is the remains).

After a soggy patch half-way through, where little of interest occurs for forty pages, the pace suddenly quickens and the plot thickens; the characters scamper ever faster through paradox and predestiny to a marvellously exciting climax.

THE SQUARES OF THE CITY by John Brunner: Fontana. London: 1977; 80p; 311 pp; ISBN 0-00-814610-4

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

A disadvantage of setting novels in the near future is that it has a nasty habit of catching up with one. But John Brunner made such a good job of writing *The Squares of the City* that even after seventeen years (the author's note at the back of the book is dated May 1960) it remains in the near future - age has not wearied it, nor the years condemned. At the same time, though, this is one of those borderline novels which help to render a definition of science fiction well-nigh impossible; it's as much a political thriller as sf.

The newish capital city (Vados) of an imaginary South American state (Argazul) has a traffic problem and hires a traffic expert (Royd Bakluyt) to solve it. But the problem is wider than it seems, involving every aspect of the city and resulting in wide-spread murder, revolution, etc. The other side of the plot is that it is very closely based on a classic game of chess. John Brunner supplies a list of the pieces the characters represent, but not of the actual moves.

Because this is only a paperback reprint (it was formerly issued by Penguin Books) I shall not say much more. Certainly it's a good, exciting novel, less depressing than Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up* and less formidably large than *Stand On Zanzibar*. Read it.

THE JEWELS OF APTOR by Samuel R. Delany; Sphere; London: 1977; 159 pp; 75p; ISBN 0-7221-2192-2

Reviewed by David Wingrove

Most writers at the age of nineteen are to be found struggling with the technical difficulties of plot structure, narrative and character development. Poetic vision, human insight and lucidity of prose are unexpected bonuses at such an early stage of a writer's development. The *Jewels of Apor* was Chip Delany's first novel - in fact, his first attempt to write sf - and was accepted by Ace Books when he was just nineteen. In terms of pure imagery it is his most opulent and engrossing book, a rehearsal in many respects for the later trilogy, *The Fall of the Towers*, though lacking the delicious ambiguities of that work. This edition, by Sphere, is Delany's 1968 revision of his 1962 book, first published at two-thirds this length. This is much more fluent than the abridged version and replete with images that are to find fuller expression in Delany's later books.

The sf of Chip Delany seems suspended midway between fantasy and quasi-realistic; in that realm that Ursula Le Guin has termed "psychomyst". Mythology is at the core of Delany's work, at its most basic in the enigmatic city of Belloba, setting for *Dhalgren*, and at its most fantastic in *The Jewels of Apor*. In much the same manner as Cordwainer Smith, Delany takes the familiar and, by taking it outside its normal setting in Space and Time, transforming it. It is a fascinating process. The prose is crisp and economic, capturing a mood or an image with the clarity of a photographic still. Beyond this effect is the story itself - the myth. Clarity of prose and lucidity of vision raise the story into the purer realm of Myth. It is worth considering an example from *The Jewels of Apor* to show how Delany achieves this:

"Fire leaped from the boy's hands in a double bolt that converged among the dark bodies. Red light cast a jagged wing in silhouette. A high shriek, a stretch of burst fur. Another bolt of fire fell in the dark horde. A wing flamed, waved flame about it. The beast tried to fly, but fell, splashing fire. Sparks sharp on a brown face chiseled it with shadow, caught the terrified red bead of an eye, laid light along a pair of fangs.

Wings alope withered on the ground, dead leaves sparked now and whips of flame ran in the clearing. The beasts retreated and the three men stood against the wall, panting. Two last shadows suddenly dropped from the air toward Snake, who still stood with raised arms out in the clearing."

(p. 63)

The language is staccato, read aloud the tonal and alliterative qualities are astonishing whilst the whole effect is startlingly lucid and powerful. The very best writers are always distinguishable by such care. Each word is chosen for its effect, and this novel is no exception. Damon Knight has often stressed the importance of names, and Delany's use of short, descriptive names for his characters integrates well with the texture of his work. Urns, Geo, Snake, Urson, Hama and Argo - these are names from a mythology of his own creation, later to become Lobby, The Dove and Green-eye in *The Einstein Intersection*, Jon, Tal and Clea in *The Fall of the Towers*, Kid, Tak and Kemp in *Dhalgren* and finally Sam and The Spike in *Triton*.

The Jewels of Apor is very much a blueprint of Delany's later writing. It is far more straightforward than the greatest part of his subsequent work (something it shares with *Neu*) but like so much else that he has written has the unfortunate tendency to seem contrived rather than organic in nature. This is hardly a great fault though when the writer is nineteen and in full possession of skills as author, twice his age would be proud of; but it cloya at the end of the book where two pages are spent explaining the dubious motives of the characters. At nineteen, perhaps, Chip Delany was unaware that a motive unexplained is a motive heightened - a enigma is the essence of good fiction.

The story itself concerns the Jewels three pearl-like artificial orbs that convert thought to power. In the manner of Tolkien's rings, possession and use of a jewel corrupts. Geo, a poet, together with Snake (a four-armed telepathic mute) and Urson (a man-mountain) join the ship of the goddess-incarnate Argo to steal the third jewel from the temple of Hama, the dark god. The world they exist in is 1,500 years after the holocaust and knowledge has transmuted and become myth. They leave their homeland, Leptar and sail for Apor where the effects of the War are to be seen everywhere; mutants and ruined cities help form a narrative skein about them.

But whilst the story at first seems a simple quest - steal the jewel and return with the true goddess, Argo - it is never that simple. As Geo and his friends discover. The quest is not for something external but for something within them: something that can only be gained by suffering and experience. It is an astute realisation for a writer so young.

"He looked from rock to rock now. Each one was different, shaped and lined distinctly, but losing detail as the ship floated further out, like the memory of his entire adventure was losing detail.

...And the waves, measured and magnificent, followed one another onto the sand, like the varying, never duplicated rhythm of a good poem: yet graceful, ordered and calm. He tried to pour the chaos of Urson drowning from his mind onto the water. It flowed into each glass-green trough that rode up to the still beach. He tried to spread the pain in his own body over the web of foam and shimmering green. And was surprised because it fit so easily, hung there well. Somewhere, a very real understanding was beginning to effloresce with the sea's water, under the heightening sun."

(p. 153)

The Jewels of Apor is a breath-taking first novel, not lessened by the fact that Delany built solidly from this poetic debut. It is comprehensible and easily accessible; stimulating without becoming, at any stage, didactic. It is the ideal introduction for anyone unfamiliar with Delany's work and daunted by his latest two novels, *Dhalgren* and *Triton*, from reading any of his books.

"Burn the grain speck in the hand and batter the stars with singing. Hail the height of a man, also the height of a woman."

Delany began as he meant to go on.

THE HAB THEORY by Allan W. Eckert; Sphere; London: 1977; 717 pp; £1.50; ISBN 0-7221-3204-2

Reviewed by Chris Evans

I have mixed feelings about this book. Eckert is a meticulous writer and it's obvious that he lavished a great deal of care and attention on this fiction. *The HAB Theory*, a novel of upwards of a quarter of a million words, requiring a paperback of more than two inches in thickness to contain it, is a book grand in aim and wide in scope. Eckert has taken a speculative notion worthy of a Clarke of a Heinlein and embedded it within a matrix of human relationships complicated enough to have carried a novel by, say, Philip Roth. That he never loses sight of both the outward thrust of his plot and the inner urges of his characters is, in itself, an achievement. For this is a long, long book. I hesitate to condemn it in any way, especially when it comes complete with glowing tributes from publications more august than our little journal (including one reviewer who more or less asserts that Eckert has rescued the modern novel). And yet...

Before I get to my objections, perhaps I'd better describe what kind of book we have here. *The HAB Theory* is science fiction of the Michael Crichton variety, that is a disaster novel told from a non-partisan viewpoint by an author showing a wide knowledge of things technical, military and political. Eckert has no particular axe to grind, except possibly a belief in the innate conservatism of most scientists and politicians. *The HAB Theory* itself is the creation of one Herbert Allen Boardman, who has spent his long lifetime studying geology and has come to the conclusion that the world is faced with impending cataclysm. Like most barbingers of doom, his warnings have hitherto been ignored and so he stages a deliberately unsuccessful assassination attempt on the US President which immediately thrust him into the limelight and gives him the opportunity to bring his theory to the attention of the world. When Boardman suddenly dies, the burden of proof is left in the hands of a writer, John Grant, and the President himself, who reluctantly becomes convinced of the validity of Boardman's theory. Grant, however, has his own problems, for he is having an affair and is torn between his love for his mistress and his wife. The plot also involves political maneuvering between the US and the Soviet Union in an oil-rich Kenya, several subsidiary love affairs, scientific rivalry and slices of what might be described as von Daniken-type evidence which Eckert employs most effectively to buttress the theory underlying the *HAB Theory*. Indeed, the most impressive thing about the book is that Boardman's theory about the coming of the end of the world is so convincingly accounted for much of the anomalous data which science has turned up over the years, such as the perfectly preserved carcases of rhinoceroses uncovered in the Siberian tundra, cubes of a nickel-iron alloy discovered in a 300,000 year-old vein of coal, an aluminium firdle found on a Chinese warrior who died over 1,500 years ago, and much more. This welter of out-of-information leads one to suspect that Eckert considers his idea of more than fictional interest. Which immediately raises the question of why he chose to present it in novel form.

Assessing *The HAB Theory* on its merits as a novel, which we must, I believe that it leaves a lot to be desired. Broadly speaking, (prepare for a generalisation) there are two kinds of writers: those who show and those who tell. Some writers are capable of expressing the tension between two people in a single line of dialogue, while others have to spell it out. Eckert, alas, is in the latter category, and this is one of the reasons why *The HAB Theory* is such a long (yawn) book. When the theory itself is being discussed, Eckert is lively and imaginative, but when we come to the details of Grant's private life, he is tedious and

repetitive. Grant a wife and mistress spend much of the novel with "aches in their heart" and "a heaviness inside"; they both tell Grant that they love him so much they can't possibly express it (but, unfortunately, they continue to try) and Grant tells them both he loves them too, over and over again to the point of distraction. Many of these passages read like excerpts from the best of *Woman's Own*, simply because Eckert finds it necessary to describe in minute detail every little quivering of desire, remorse, anger, pity, jealousy, hatred, longing - whatever emotion happens to be prevalent at the time. Eckert is, in fact, devoid of subtlety; every encounter, every conversation is depicted with such assiduous attention to detail, every nuance, every unexpressed thought is described so specifically, every movement, every shift of expression is portrayed so precisely that, just like this sentence, it leaves the reader with a severe dose of mental constipation.

The best fiction, it seems to me, always says more than what is literally stated. One thinks of Le Guin's novels, for example, wherein the exotic locales and events are themselves symbols of something larger. Literature never most effectively when it speaks to the reader indirectly by affirming his dreams, hopes, prejudices, and so on. Similarly, the best prose is not simply written speech; it possesses a descriptive or imaginative power which allows us to see things in a fresh way, and to do this it often relies on literary devices such as simile, metaphor, and allusion. Eckert writes carefully, grammatically, but not once does his prose rise above the level of reportage, not once do we gain the impression that his text is anything more than the imparting of information. Thus, on literary grounds, I must deem *The HAB Theory* a failure.

Of course, all this may be beside the point. No doubt, *The HAB Theory* will reach a wide audience, and as a well-constructed, often thought-provoking novel, perhaps it deserves such success. But the thought lingering at the back of my mind is that Eckert might intend his novel as a warning in disguise - a more subtle method than Boardman's of getting across his message of the Earth's impending doom to as wide an audience as possible. If *The HAB Theory* is rooted on firm scientific foundations, then it's going to make any quibbles about its artistic merits completely academic.

TO LIVE AGAIN by Robert Silverberg, Fontana, London; 1977; 231 pp; 75p; ISBN 0-00-614609-0

Reviewed by Chris Evans

First published in 1968, *To Live Again* is less well known than other Silverberg novels of the same period, possibly because the storyline is basically introspective, relying less on dramatic external event than on the interplay between characters. It is set in a future in which the wealthy elite can have their personas recorded on tape so that after their deaths these personas may be implanted on willing hosts who thus gain access to their memories and experiences. This idea enables Silverberg to make use of the novel literary technique of interior dialogue (James Joyce, eat your heart out) and presents him with a superb opportunity to add a new dimension to the novel of characterisation. It is an opportunity which sadly goes begging. Silverberg, not yet fully freed from the rigours of commercial writing, is less interested in exploring the existential implications of multiple personality than in keeping the story moving; the slick proficiency which often wars his work rears its ugly head here, resulting in a taut, deftly plotted drama which is curiously devoid of any real emotional depth.

Paul Kaufman, the great financial wizard of the time, has recently died, and there is an intense rivalry for the possession of his persona between his nephew, Mark, and John Roditis, Kaufman's greatest rival. Both Mark and Roditis are ruthless men, and it is fair to say that everyone in the book exhibits little more than the most rudimentary signs of humanity. We dwell in the rarified atmosphere of the rich - a favourite Silverberg locale - in a dissolute, hedonistic society which the author describes without so much as a quivering of moral disapproval. As a backdrop to the story, and as a compliment to the motif of reincarnation which informs the book, Silverberg invokes an updated Buddhism as the burgeoning new religion of the country, doubtless intending it to serve as a philosophical counterpoint to the stark scientific method of the personality implantation process. However, it is soon relegated to a position of token interest in the face of the demands of the convoluted machinations of his cast. *To Live Again* never really gets to grips with its own potential: the expedient crush of the plot leaves all ethical considerations languishing in the lay-by, and although the denouement exhibits Silverberg's capacity for irony to fine effect, it does not redeem a novel of wasted opportunity. Oddly, the most intriguing character in the book is Charles Noyes, a minion of Roditis who is a weak, unstable man,

continually threatened and finally overwhelmed by the greater mental vigour of his persona. Noyes could be viewed as an exemplar of Silverberg himself, who, at the time of writing this book was written, was under increasing pressure from his own (artistic) conscience, a pressure to which he too, finally, and more happily succumbed.

SCIENCE FICTION: HISTORY-SCIENCE-VISIONS by Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin; Oxford University Press; New York; 1977; £1.50; ISBN 0-19-281221-1

Reviewed by Chris Evans

Scholes and Rabkin state in their foreword: "The premise on which this book is based is that a sufficient number of works of genuine merit have been produced (in sf) to justify its study as an aspect of literature as well as an important feature of contemporary culture". One must assume from this that the book is primarily aimed at those who are intrigued by sf but have never read much of it. After all, we all know how valid and vital sf is, don't we? The authors continue: "The first part (of this book) undertakes to provide a history of science fiction as an aspect of the history of fiction as a whole, concluding with a chapter on science fiction in comics, film, radio and television. The second part offers discussion of those aspects of the sciences themselves most important for an understanding of science fiction. The third part returns to the consideration of science fiction as literature, with Chapter 4 covering the typical forms and themes of this kind of fiction and Chapter 5 presenting brief interpretive studies of ten representative novels from the past century and a half".

In other words, this is an analytical rather than a critical work, an attempt at a thinking man's guide to science fiction. By and large, it is successful, containing things of interest for even the most seasoned reader, although the brief literary history of sf which comprises the first chapter traverses already well-trodden ground for those familiar with *Billion Year Spree*. The authors concur with Brian Aldiss in choosing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the progenitor of what we now know as science fiction, and I was interested to see that in their section entitled "The Twenties and Thirties" they divide sf into two distinct branches which closely correspond with Mark Ardland's "The Genre Tradition" and "The Other Tradition" (see VECTOR 82). It would appear that most critics are finally moving towards some genealogical consensus for sf. The authors' truncated history of the field is inevitably selective (I thought Henry Kuttner and Charles Harness deserved at least

a mention), although it was good to see D. G. Compton's novels merited a page of discussion - Compton being an unduly neglected writer at present. The short chapter on "Science Fiction in Other Media" illustrated, for me at least, that outside prose fiction sf does not exist as a genre (with the probable exception of comics). Film-makers and radio and TV producers have tended to dabble in sf but not use the term exclusively, and there has never been the intense cross-fertilisation of ideas in these media that obtains amongst novelists and short story writers.

The second section, on "The Sciences in Science Fiction" contains some interesting insights into the way in which the prevailing scientific ethic has been reflected in sf. The authors use sub-headings such as "Scientific Method", "Physics and Astronomy", "Thermodynamics", and so on, to examine how the different scientific disciplines have been incorporated into sf and how it attunes itself to the political and social aspects of science - for example, the implications of Darwinism on Victorian society as expressed in Wells' fiction, and the present preoccupation with different states of mental consciousness how that psychology has established itself as the secular religion of our times. Also worthy of mention is the concise and elegant manner in which Scholes and Rabkin have synthesised some of the more difficult concepts of scientific theory such as special relativity and the wave-particle duality of matter.

The first chapter of the final section, "Visions", explores some of the myths and themes which have dominated sf. Although it is interesting and at times fruitful, I feel that it suffers from over-compression. Myths are dispensed with in under five pages, which does scant justice to a topic which could fill a book itself. Following this there is a suitably brief passage on fantasy (the book is, after all, entitled *Science Fiction*), followed by an analysis of themes under the headings of "Utopias", "Imaginary Worlds", and "Imaginary Beings" (a tripartite grouping which struck me as being nearly comprehensive), then finally a short discussion of "Sex and Race in Science Fiction".

The ten representative novels which comprise the final chapter reflect the authors' slight preference for that type of sf in which the speculative idea is embodied in the external environment (as opposed to the work of writers such as Ballard and Disch who concentrate more on mental landscapes). The ten novels span the period 1818 (*Frankenstein*) to 1976 (*The Shockwave Rider*) and employ the perspectives attained in the earlier sections of the book for thematic analysis. Especially noteworthy

are the discussions on Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle For Leibowitz*, which combine both religious and Spenglerian views of history to provide some penetrating insights into the themes underlying the book, and David Lindsay's *A Voyage To Arcturus*, which the authors succeed in justifying as a work of science fiction rather than fantasy.

The book, if carefully written, seems to have been sloppily proof-read. There are at least two references to source-books which I could not find in the bibliography (pages 141 and 161), plus a number of lesser errors (an incorrect date of publication for Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* and a couple of references to Ian Watson's first novel as *The Embeddings*) which should have been rectified before publication. The bibliography is of limited value since it lists only US editions. And finally, I would warn prospective buyers that the book itself is rather fragile; the pages of my copy coming away from the spine under the dreadful pressure of being turned. B. S. Johnson once composed a novel which was unbound and to be read in a random order, but I don't really think that books of this nature lend themselves to such a radical approach.

WINDBRIDGE by Joe Haldeman; Orbit, London; 1977; 186 pp; 75p; ISBN 0-8500-7932-5

Reviewed by Robert Carter

Orbit really do seem determined to make money from their sf, and adding this latest Haldeman effort to their line should not hinder that aim. Like Haldeman a successful *Forever War*, this book should sell more than the average number of copies.

Inside another "relevant" cover we find a strangely structured novel, comprising 53 sections of which 11 are chapters (The rest are autobiographical inserts of the hero, not Haldeman - which are presented like little plays; graphs and other excerpts from fictitious text books.) There is a varied appearance which attracts one to the pages, and I found myself reading through compulsively after a while. Yes, this is one of those books which gets you impatient looks from the booksellers who say, "If you want to read it, I'd rather you bought it first".

Haldeman's style is fast and flowing, his prose is colloquial, and, dare I say it, almost adolescent in exuberance. He whips you along with merging scenes of pure action, a breathless trail of sex and terrific deaths and hostile places, all those things we thought had disappeared from sf. He hooks the unwary on the first page with an arresting opener:

"Denver pissed him off"

Then he deluges them with great columns of information which other authors might have confined to their notebooks. He draws his names from Norton's *Star Atlas* and creates as his stage a sort of Terran Empire or sphere of influence less than two hundred light years in diameter which considering this is only a hundred years away, might be just a teensy bit optimistic.

The book, like *Forever War*, is a veritable orgy of freshman physics-cum-astronomy which Haldeman manipulates and explains away with relish. He is always at great pains to cover the ifs-and buts which sf fans might dream up. He intrigues us with his super spacesuits once more, he has a boxful of gadgetry, he has aliens and matter transmitters, but after all this delightful stuff, we begin to look for something else. The story is of a young man who joins a ruthless organisation which sends him via a matter transmitter to hostile planets. He is a prelude to terraforming. He meets a colleague whom he falls in love with - it's all right, it's a girl - and they have adventures, face dangers, see their friends killed... where have you heard all that before?

It is a glorious romp through space; thoroughly enjoyable stuff, invigorating, worth 75p. It goes untainted by any literary pretensions, and on that level it was perfectly adequate. I am left with a compulsion to compare it with *Forever War*, and find that it lacks that quality which made that book a little special - originality. My own tastes run to more serious stuff; I prefer to grieve for characters who die in books. Haldeman's arc actors who live down dead and somehow seem to wink at you, they never seem quite dead no matter how they have been killed - they're always the corpses on TV whose chest you can discern still going up and down. His hero-heroine pair are strangely immortal from the start - you know they can never be harmed irrespective of the jeopardy in which they are placed.

I hope Haldeman writes a third soon - I'd be interested to know that he was budding into someone able to write with diversity... Or, sadly disappointed to find the same old plate served once more. He's definitely found his successful formula; the question is - is he going to stick to it?

THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN by Ray Bradbury; Panther; St Albans: 1977; 169pp; 60p; ISBN 0-356-04358-6

LONG AFTER MIDNIGHT by Ray Bradbury; Hart-Davis, MacGibbon; London: 1977; 256 pp; £3.95; ISBN 0-246-10986-8

THE DRAMA OF RAY BRADBURY by Ben P. Indick; T-X Graphics; 1977; 19 pp; £1.00 from: Bran's Head Books Ltd, 91 Wimborne Avenue, Hayes, Middx.

Reviewed by Briar Griffin

The Golden Apples of the Sun was, I think, the very first Bradbury I ever read, way back. I think "revelatory" fits the experience well enough: only M. C. Wells had a comparable effect on me, at about the same time. I experienced for the first time the sheer relish of starting another Bradbury story. And another. And another. ... Bradbury didn't reveal his soul on paper, he revealed mine. He had no "message" that I could see; but he possessed a unique atmosphere, a purely adjectival state of affairs, that turned me one, and still turns me on, completely. The stories were as different as "The April Witch" and "A Sound of Thunder", but there was usually a sense of indefinable unity behind them. As I say, a purely adjectival thing.

Long After Midnight is the latest Bradbury collection. The mixture is much the same as in Golden Apples: seven stories are immediately recognisable as sf, four stories are immediately recognisable as fantasy, there's a fantastic satire on literary life, and the other half of the collection is a distinctive blend of fantasy and naturalism (in which both of these artificial categories are actually obliterated). As usual, this mixture makes for variety while preserving a certain unity of feeling. Only I'm beginning to be more conscious of some of the elements that make for this unity. In particular, I'm thinking of the factor that unites the title-stories of Long After Midnight and The Golden Apples of the Sun.

"South," said the captain ---

It may seem trite to say that Bradbury continually makes use of North/South, white/black, cold/warm, June/October polarities. After all, what could be more trite than the Pathetic Fallacy? But with Bradbury there's more at stake than an ancient literary convention. For him (I think) these polarities are basic elements in us and in the world: in fact, they mark the point at which the distinction between us and the world breaks down. Thus: if you're wholly a Sun-person, you're potentially destructive ("The Burning Man"). Conversely, if you're a cold person, you're liable to end up in the heart of a volcano ("Interval in

Sunlight"). If you are wholly given over to October, then you're doomed to melancholy and madness ("The October Game"). And if you allow the long-after-midnight hour to possess you --- man, you're dead! ("Long After Midnight"). What we should aim for is a balance between Dublin and Italy ("Getting Through Sunday Somehow"), hot and cold ("Drink Entire: Against the Madness of Crows"), lean and fat ("Have I Got a Chocolate Bar for You?") ---. This hardly sums Bradbury up, of course; but it seems to haunt his work.

Now down to the nitty-gritty. Long After Midnight spans Bradbury's output from the days of Weird Tales and Planet Stories, up to 1976; but there's little evidence of barrel-scraping. "The Pumpernickel" is an insubstantial exercise in nostalgia, and two stories - "The Wish", and "The Better Part of Wisdom" - show Bradbury at his yuckiest (which, as you well know, is really horribly yucky). But the rest of the collection is a constant pleasure.

First, the obvious sf. "The Blue Bottle" and "The Messiah" read like stories that didn't fit into the main sequence of "The Silver Locusts"; but if the plot of the first is not all that original, the Martian atmosphere makes it seem brand-new; while "The Messiah" is a highly-original approach to the theme of the Second Coming. The theology is as questionable as in that awful poem, "Christ, New Student in an Old School"; but in this case it doesn't dominate the story, which works very well. "Punishment Without Crime" is in the tradition of "Marionettes, Inc.", and a good specimen thereof. "Forever and the Earth" - in which Thomas Wolfe is borrowed from the twentieth century to write the first real account of life in the twenty-third century, is fine, and says a lot about literature and the human spirit. In "Darling Adolf", an actor playing Hitler in a movie re-creation of the Third Reich has really got into the part, and demands another Nuremberg Rally: all good, resonant stuff, and funny with it. "A Piece of Wood" which is about a soldier who discovers how to reduce all the weaponry of the world to instant heaps of rust, comes near to being commonplace, but somehow isn't; while "G.B.S. - Mark V" concerns the intense relationship of an idealistic young astronaut with an all-talking android replica of George Bernard Shaw, who keeps going on about the Life Force. Whimsy, but good whimsy.

Of the obvious fantasies, "Drink Entire: Against the Madness of Crows" introduces an ice-house witch into a New York heatwave, and is a good exploration of that simple-seeming polarity of Hot and Cold. "The October Game" is vintage Weird Tales, and has only appeared elsewhere in an Alfred Hitchcock anthology.

It's up to the high standard of The October Country, and is really grisly. "The Burning Man" is a haunting oddity, involving a man who seems to have been literally torn out of a sweltering heatwave. And "The Wish" - well, "The Wish" is a shocker in the bad sense, a numbing combination of yucky sentiment and necrophilia, written in B's worst "poetic" manner. I've come to the conclusion that the man has no personal Shit Detector (to use Harry Harrison's term). Luckily, he hasn't much need of one.

The other half of the collection - in which fantasy becomes inextricably mingled with naturalism - contains some of the most evocative stories. The most original is "Have I Got a Chocolate Bar For You?", in which a lean and hungry priest (in Dublin, of course), confesses a young and incredibly fat soul who is being damned, but by the usual sins of the flesh, but by chocolate bars. By means of a tight control so noticeably missing in inferior stories, Bradbury makes this a really funny, incredibly serious piece: somehow it transcends whimsy and becomes high spiritual drama. And the same can be said about "Getting Through Sunday Somehow", which also takes place in Bradburian Dublin and is a kind of inverted "Day It Rained Forever" (for desert drought, substitute eternal grey drizzle). "The Miracles of Jamie", which is all about an adolescent boy with a dying mother and the conviction that he can perform miracles, could have been terrible, but isn't: there's no sentimentality here, just a thought-provoking story. "One Timeless Spring" also deals with adolescent fantasies - the narrator thinks his parents are trying to poison him - but rather inconsequentially. In "The Utterly Perfect Murder" the narrator tries to annihilate his own adolescent past: this works quite well. In "A Story of Love", a thirteen-year-old boy falls in love with his 26-year-old teacher, and the love is reciprocated: incredibly, this is wholly convincing, with a rather awesome sense of the (non-sentimental) mystery of love. "Interval in Sunlight" recalls "The Next In Line" (in The October Country). No mummies this time, though - unless you count the self-immolated tourist couple in the small Mexican town. This time the couple are attracted not by the catacombs, but by the local volcano. Good atmospheric stuff. In "The Better Part of Wisdom" a Bradburian-Irish grandfather visits a homosexual marriage in swinging London, and comes to terms with his repressed homoerotic feelings. The old man's childhood memories turn out to be yucky in the extreme: I suppose transient adolescent queerness is a valid subject, but B certainly doesn't bring it off here.

Met and on a triumphant note: "The Parrot Who Met Papa" is a fine satire in the tradition of "The Watchful Poker Chip of R. Matisek", and concerns the ageing parrot Hemingway dictated his last novel to. Really great stuff. Unprecedentedly, it made me want to give Hemingway another try.

Finally, I must draw your attention to an interesting item from T-X Graphics: a nicely-annotated and intelligent essay by Ben P. Indick called "The Drama of Ray Bradbury", comprising sections on Radio Productions (1 page), Films (4 pages), Bradbury's published and unpublished work for the Stage (7 pages), and, as a speculative afterthought, Bradbury's thoughts on the future of the Theatre (1 page). Especially interesting is Indick's detailed account of what B did to Melville in preparing the screenplay for Moby Dick: this goes a long way towards explaining my conviction that Bradbury improved on Melville. In his section on the Stage, Mr. Indick explains the theatrical implications of the Idea-as-Hero element in Bradbury (and, of course, in sf as a whole), which can become verbose moralising on stage, annihilating the characters as individuals. Bradbury is quoted as being thoroughly opposed to Absurdist or existential drama: he wants to draw upon a fund of positive, explicit ideas and ideals (as did all dramatists from Shakespeare to Ibsen). Yet he shares with dramatists like Beckett and Ionesco (whom he loathes) a tendency to treat his characters as pawns without individuality. Apparently he just can't help this, living as he does in an age that belittles individuality. But for Bradbury, of all people, to fail on stage for that reason, is a supreme and revealing irony. It hadn't occurred to me: my thanks to Ben Indick.

THE TESTAMENT OF ANDROS by James Blish; Arrow; London: 1977; 216 pp. 60p. ISBN 0-09-914840-4

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

This is The Best SF Stories of James Blish (1964) revised to include the 1970 novella "We All Die Naked", a short story from 1966 ("How Beautiful With Banners"), and omitting "There Shall Be No Darkness".

Can this, then, be read as a kind of Testament of Blish? In overall quality, yes; though the actual title-story can only be regarded as such in a very indirect way. Blish does admit in his short, thought-crammed "Preface to Tomorrow" that "there is at least a little of the private vision in every work of fiction, but it is fantasy that the distance between the real world - that is, the agreed-upon world, the consensus we call reality - and the private vision becomes marked and disturbing". Sf

was Blish's answer to unrestrained fantasy; but he had to admit that, in the end, the "science content" was just as symbolical as the mise-en-scene of any other piece of fiction. Short stories - any short stories - attempt to "identify the self to the self", and "science content" is no guarantee of objectivity. In "The Testament of Andros" (1953), Blish was telling himself just this; for it is a story or series of stories, narrated by an sf-addicted paranoid schizophrenic, using all the tricks of the trade with hallucinatory vividness. We are, at first, taken in: only gradually do we realise that all is not what it seems. But in the final section - all the layers of illusion are stripped away to reveal - what? The naked self, unknown and unknowable. Genuinely disturbing stuff, this; and also an oblique comment on sf as the medium whereby Man seeks to identify himself to himself in an increasingly surrealistic world.

Blish's own (self-confessed) personal testament is revealed rather in "A Work of Art" (1956) in which Richard Strauss (composer of the 2001 signature tune) is "resurrected" by mind-sculptors in the year 2161, and sets about writing a new opera in a whole new cultural milieu. This is an incisive exploration of the creative process (all the best of these stories re-create mysterious states of mind with extraordinary vividness), and Blish's belief that the "I" is a kind of empty mould into which archetypal forms can flow, is deeply felt. This, then, is Blish's highly convincing answer to the problem of self-identity, both as an artist and as a man.

"Common Time" (1953) is concerned with the same recalcitrant areas of experience. Significantly, in view of what Blish says in the preface, the whole thing builds up in a crescendo of brilliant scientific detail, as a starship headed for Alpha Centauri adopts a faster-than-light drive and the astronaut hero realises that his personal time now varies catastrophically in relation to ship-time. But at the climax everything dissolves into pure surrealism as the Centaureans appear. For the question of identity, both personal and universal, is again the central issue; and it is precisely at this centre that the "science content" falls away like scaffolding, and the story is revealed as - well, almost a kind of spiritual exercise. (The atmosphere is reminiscent of the final paragraphs of Widsunder Century, only more genial.)

But Blish needs that scaffolding of "science content": if, say, Brian Aldiss is a great romantic of modern sf, Blish was a great exponent of the classical approach. Because that scaffolding of his is super-sound, the basic spiritual shape of the story is

etched with marvellous precision; and that very precision brings with it a great depth of feeling, all the more convincing for its lack of any kind of sensationalism or trickiness.

In "Tomb Tapper" the central figure has the official job of probing, via "telescope goggles" the visual imagery within the cortexes of dead Russian pilots, all of this during the next War. This one also typifies Blish's attitude to scientific detail. On the one hand, this detail is formidable, and is surely unsurpassed even by Arthur C. Clarke: for most of the time, indeed, "Tomb Tapper" reads like an extroverted Clarke-type story - is the crashed aircraft in the railway tunnel not an aircraft at all but a missile, and will the central figure escape with his life? Then you finish the story, the extra resonances start rushing in on all sides, and you realise that "Tomb Tapper" is a really haunting exploration of the status of human imagination in the scheme of things: all those nuts and bolts have subserved this central vision, of what constitutes self. Yet every nut, every bolt, has been essential.

"How Beautiful With Banners" (1966) is the one story here that can be described as self-consciously "literary": it was written for Damon Knight at a time when "literary" sf was becoming OK. But the basic preoccupations are the same: What is the self? What is consciousness? This time the myth of Cupid and Psyche is re-enacted on the glacial surface of Titan, with the consciousness of a frigid female biologist playing the central role of the all-revealing lamp in the myth.

"The Oath" is a post-holocaust story. It's basically a character-study of two opposing types, like Arthur Clarke's "Breaking Strain". Here we have two doctors, one who knows everything except how to cope with actual patients, the other a self-confessed quack who yet knows how to deal with real medical situations. Here, Blish and Clarke are about on a level with each other, though I suspect that the Blish carries more shades of meaning, is more subtle in its inwardness.

This really impressive collection begins and ends with novella-length stories, of which the first, "Surface Tension" (1952), is surely the best. This is the one about a humanoid, sub-aquatic, microscopic race, genetically planted by long-dead humans on the planet Hydrot on Tau Ceti, and how this race decides to take its fate in its own hands and rise from the aqueous depths, to fulfil its essentially human destiny. There's a swollen ingenuity in this vision of a microscopic world; and while its advocacy of reason and technology is more a part of the sf tradit-

ion than a unique contribution from Blish, its sense of a *Logos* defining the fate of a world is near to the spirit of *A Case of Conscience*. It is inspiring, in a thoroughly old-fashioned way.

"We All Die Naked" (1970) was written for the Clarke-edited collection of ecological-disaster stories, *Three For Tomorrow*. It nicely offsets the optimism of "Surface Tension", and is good by normal standards in its evocation of a totally distasteful world. But I thought that, by Blishian standards, it was a series of formulaistic gestures rather than a single story. Still, perhaps there was something faulty with my reception.

THE END OF ALL SONGS by Michael Moorcock; Mayflower; St Albans; 1977; 307 pp; 95p; ISBN 0-583-12105-5

Reviewed by Brian Griffin

MJM's everyday story of chrononauts and self-created personalities at the End of Time here reaches its conclusion - though in its end, to coin a phrase, is its beginning. It kept reminding me of Brian Aldiss's *The Malacra Tapestry* (definitely a point in its favour). While Aldiss's everyman-figure, Perian de Chirolo, exists within the relatively small, exquisitely detailed framework of Malacra society, and corresponding Moorcockian figure of Jherik Carnelian exists within the cosmic framework (drawn with proportionately broad, crude strokes) of a continually-interlocking "multiverse", there is a thematic resemblance between their highly picaresque adventures: in both cases the "hero" teeters on the brink of individuation, but the whole process is chancy and extremely uncertain. As Mrs. Amelia Underwood, originally from the year 1896, and just translated with Carnelian from Palaeozoic peril to the furthest End of Time (thanks to Una Peterson and the Time Centre) explains to My Lady Charlottina: "The tale is not yet finished. I regret. Many clues remain to be unravelled - threads are still to be woven together - there is no clearly seen pattern upon the fabric - and perhaps there never will be". Will the Tapestry ever be finished? And who is the ultimate Author? Both Aldiss and Moorcock are concerned with such enigmas.

This weaving together of threads, both within the life of the (prospective) individual and within the context of his world, is the process of individuation. Will Jherik Carnelian finally discover the identity of his father? Can he make sense of his mercurial relationship with the extremely Victorian Mrs. Underwood? Can the history of the human race be seen to make some final sense, or will "universal darkness

bury all" (as is imminently threatened by the extreme decrepitude of the Critics at the End Time)? Is there any sense in this desire to have things make sense? Lord Jagged of Canaria would deny this: to him, the multiverse is a playground, neither more nor less, but Carnelian the Ultimate Aesthete, the Innocent Amoralist, begins to see behind the evangelistic/capitalistic attitudes of Amelia Underwood the seed (or perhaps the husk) of something real and a world of illusion. Anyway, these personal and universal enigmas are all related to the process of individuation: whether Jherik Carnelian's existence has a meaning, and whether the multiverse has a meaning, have become the same issue. This is, basically, what keeps the reader reading. For all the unanswerable hedonism of Lord Jagged - who turns out to be, in origin, another chrononaut from Mrs. Underwood's time, in aspiration rather like the hero of Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" who wants to free man from the last trammels of Christendom and start the world afresh - the reader sees in the ambivalent relationship between the innocent, amoral Carnelian and the moralising, self-tormenting Amelia Underwood the beginning of something very much else, a real relationship cannot exist without meaning; and if meaning exists on a personal level then it must exist on a universal (or multiversal) level ---.

This is the meaty centre of Moorcock's tale. For the rest - well, one can see why he's called the Anthony Trollope of sf: he has turned the Trollopean method on its head, but the result feels very much the same. There's hardly any sense of social or moral or meta-physical norm in Moorcock's world, and the plot, while brilliantly improvisatory, is still improvisatory: nothing stays put for one moment, not one relationship, not one personality. The result of this lack of any kind of norm is that lengthy sections read prosaically, even boringly: the authentic Trollope-effect. It's only when the possibility of a norm arises, in the dealings of Carnelian and Mrs. Underwood, that things really perk up. Possibly this is all intentional on W's part: amid all that chaos, one single shaft of meaning, however faint, has the hallucinatory force of revelation. But the boring passages are still boring. And I'm afraid I don't take too well to all that endless Pythonesque humour. It's all to do with this lack of any kind of norm: only in the last, supremely grotesque chapter did I actually laugh: here, Moorcock strikes a truly Joycean note of cheerful blasphemy. You laugh with Joyce because there's a force of belief behind the blasphemy; and so it is with the obscene multiple-marriage service at the End of Time. The symbolism of marriage still carries enough "normative" force for us to get a really

blasphemous laugh out of its perversion.

The blurb is right, though, up to a point: when Moorcock works he is "dazzling". The Inverted Trollope Effect is marvellous when it comes off; and using his multiversal canvas with its correspondingly bold, crude brushwork, he brings off some big effects. I often wish he wasn't quite so bold and crude; but if he wasn't, he wouldn't be fully Moorcock. I suppose.

Or would he?

THE VARIABLE MAN AND OTHER STORIES by Philip K. Dick; Sphere; 1977 (first ed. 1969); 220 pp; 75p; ISBN 0-7221-2962-9

THE GAME-PLAYERS OF TITAN by Philip K. Dick; Sphere; London; 1977 (first ed. 1969); 157 pp; 65p; ISBN 0-7221-2961-0

WE CAN BUILD YOU by Philip K. Dick; Fontana; London; 1977; 208 pp; 70p; ISBN 0-006146163

Reviewed by Andrew Darlington

On the cover of *We Can Build You* it says "Fantasy Science Fiction", which is just as well because there is little sf content within the covers. Those sf derived images that Dick uses are introduced as a kind of Kafkaesque absurdity quotient, a mere quirky addition to the unpredictable plot. There is a token Space-ship, and with a kind of sad nostalgia Dick, through his protagonist, wonders "What's it got aboard? Soil Samples?" The first non-terrestrial life to be found? Broken pots discovered in the ash of an extinct volcano - evidence of some ancient civilised race? More likely just a flock of bureaucrats". It is a bleak, humorous, wistful book, with the science fiction content reduced to cyphers manipulated for effect, as symbols of surreal strangeness. VECTOR is quoted on the cover of *The Game-Players of Titan* to the effect that "if it's ideas you want then Philip K. Dick is the author to read". The anonymous scribe is gnawing at the edges of an understanding of what Dick is all about. It seems to me that increasingly Dick has used conventional sf images as symbols, and has brought out the significance, or lack of significance of the symbols, through his manipulation of them: a process of increasing stylisation that is clearly defined over the years covered by these three books.

One of the predominant themes from Dick's early work was the aftermath of apocalypse. Four of the five stories in *The Variable Man* collection fall into this category. A similar percentage of the stories in Dick's recent Coronet collection *The Turning Wheel* (from 1952-55),

and also *The Game-Players of Titan* show the same pre-occupation. To sub-classify the theme, two of these Dickian visions of way-back-when futures are concerned with the robotisation of aspects of warfare. "Second Variety" (1953) is one of the bleakest, most pessimistic stories this side of Beckett, a much reprinted story that features the robot "Cetaws" one of sf's nastiest inventions. Some of the imagery from the story, mutated rats, acres of desolation and drifting ash, are reprinted into a later story, "The Antioch" (1955). In both stories terminology and plot are similar. In the first story the machines "seed" themselves to the human moon colony. In the later story they seed beyond even the solar system; while in both stories the machines eventually begin to fight against each other. Perhaps these images of the mechanisation of warfare are meant to be some kind of elaborate analogy showing the dehumanising effect of war itself. But more likely they are just the fusion of stock forms of 50s sf hardware not yet fully developed into total Dickian symbols.

In a second sub-section of Dick's themes both *The Game-Players of Titan* (originally published in the US in 1963) and "The Variable Man" (1955) deal with the aftermath of war, and a subsequent contact with alien races. In the novel a fallout of Hinkel radiation used in a Sino-Soviet war has created wide-spread sterility and a resultant drop in population compensated for only by surgically-induced longevity (through the removal of the Hynes gland). An interplanetary war followed fought against the Vugs - bisexual silicon-based slug-like nasties from Titan. Earth lost the war. In the title story of the collection the reconstructed post-war civilisation has got as far as space and time travel. In the first direction it has come up against, and is defeated by, the nasties of the Centaurian Empire. In the other direction it has scooped an odd-job man out of 1913 to inadvertently solve the problem of faster-than-light travel that will compensate for the defeat.

Another 50s pre-occupation, the onslaught of uniformity, also appears in this story when the "variable man" from the past can synthesise scientific and social disciplines that have become segregated into areas of specialisation. The "fixit-man" representing the triumph of Good Old American Know-how; just as in "Captive Market" (in the *Tomorrow Inc* anthology; Robson Books) the spirit of American-styled supply-and-demand free enterprise is represented by an old lady from the past - travelling in a pickup truck - to equip the survivors of a nuclear war. Similarly it is odd, in retrospect, to hear Dick state "perfect socialism. The ideal of the Communist State. All citizens interchangeable" (in "Second Variety"), when

more recently, according to *Science Fiction Review*, he cried upon hearing of Mao Tse-Tung's death. Although in the story he does name-drop Soviet agro-biologist Lysenko just to prove that he knows better than this apparently simplistic statement would seem to imply.

Another constant theme throughout Dick's work, and another symbol within the mix of his ideas, is that of psionic talents. In the story "Minority Report" (1955), for example, idiot-savant Pre-cogs with the limited ability to foretell the future provide the basis of a Pre-Crime organisation. A post-war civilisation has overcome the problems of crime through this pre-cognition system, but inevitably in doing so they have run into the old temporal paradox chestnut. If a crime can be predicted, and if Pre-Crime act upon the prediction to prevent the crime from happening, there are criminals without a crime. It is an intriguing idea onto which Dick hangs a lack-lustre convoluted plot. The pre-cog ability is taken to its logical extreme in the story "The Golden Man" (in *Evil Earths*, edited by Brian Aldiss; Orbit Books). The post-apocalypse mutant in the title has total knowledge of variable futures, but no memory of the past. Such psionic talents proliferate, with all kinds of additional mutant variations - resurrectors, telepaths, telekinetic animators, and anti-pain - right through "A World of Talent" (1954). The most original piece within the short story Dick-orama, it has a complex plot, borrowing some of the paradoxes from the Pre-Crime story, but developing a situation of wide-spread psi talents integrated into a revolutionary society established on break-away star colonies. The colonies promote these "wild talents" while Earth, afraid of the ubermensch overtones of the evolving mental powers, repress and sterilise such variations from the norm. Psi talents such as pre-cognition, telepathy and telekinesis feature strongly in *The Game-Players of Titan*. The obese "Big Noodle" in the "World of Talent", with infinite para-kinetic power and the mind of a morose three-year-old, has the ability to snatch objects at will from any point in the universe. He winds up metamorphosed into a seething mass of spiders by a rival psi. The "Big Noodle" facsimile (Doctor Philipson) who occurs in *The Game-Players of Titan* instantaneously transmits humans to the Vug's home world. In the same novel a telekinetic "poltergeist" at one point picks up Pete Garden, the central character, moves him through a solid brick wall, and returns him intact.

Despite the malevolence of "Second Variety", and the pointers to the future to be found in "World of Talent" (the only non-post-apocalypse story), *The Variable Man* collection is largely of academic interest. Viewed in retrospect it provides further proof, if further proof

were needed, that far from making predictions about the future, science fiction is more concerned with isolating and exaggerating current social pre-occupations. But *The Game-Players of Titan* was written a decade after "The Variable Man" collection. Social pre-occupations had shifted - and judging by Dick's visionary LSD novel *A Maze of Death* his head had shifted with it. The symbolism evidenced by the raising of the Cathedral in Galactic Pot-Healer had taken on all kinds of beautifully outlandish surreal dimensions, juggling conventional sf image/symbols into a bizarre configuration, or logger-heading them into oddly exaggerated configurations. But even without referring to such related examples of Dickery, *The Game-Players of Titan* is a good example of the process.

Many of the stock symbols from earlier stories remain the same, but over the space of a decade issues had become a little more fuzzy-edged, a little less precise. At one point Pete Garden comments that all is "blurred and twisting, people and things merging back and forth into each other", and that is more or less the way that Dick utilises his imagery in the novel. Garden goes out on a spree to celebrate his new wife's pregnancy. He is drunk and high, hallucinating continuously. A psychiatrist and a girl shift from human to Vug and back again. He is sick over the seat of his car, and the car scolds him. He trips to Titan - or does he? He isn't too sure. Like the game of the title - a combination of poker and monopoly played with real cities - the novel can be seen as a kind of game. A complex game of possibilities, of impossibilities. Even the aliens themselves become cyphers in Dick's game. Their personalities differ in no significant way from human beings despite their alleged incredibly different metabolisms; their alienness - like the origins of, of all places Titan - is a literary device, a literary game, a symbol. Yet the novel is well structured on a number of levels, it is tense; all the diverse pieces and strands come together satisfactorily at the end. It is a brilliant book, and it is garnished with perfect humour. "Paranoia" for example, is defined in a throw-away aphorism like something H. D. Laing may once have written. It becomes "the involuntary reception of other people's suppressed hostile and aggressive thoughts".

The shift in the emphasis from science fiction as alliterary device to science fiction as surreal symbol is completed in *We Can Build You* (serialised in 1969/70 by Ultimate Publishing, and issued in the US by DAW in 1972). The main narrative theme is of Louis Rosen, an electronic organ and spinnet salesman for the Frauenzimmer Piano Company, and the

development of his relationship and his doomed love for the schizophrenic Prita Frauenzimmer. The sf content comes in the shape of Simulacra - exact electronic representations of the historical characters Abraham Lincoln and Edwin M Stanton. But, just as there was no real attempt to invest the Vugs with believably alien psychology, there is no attempt to make the simulacra convincing as constructs. That is not Dick's purpose. Lincoln and Stanton merely join the cast on equal terms with the other characters, and at one point Rosen even observes that "in many ways it (Stanton) was more human - God help us - than we were". More likely they, with electronically programmed memories and absolutely Pavlovian responses are intended to present analogies to the novel's obsession with mental health. The novel's title referring, not to simulacra, but to prevailing attitudes to sanity which imply restoration not to a state of multiplex humanity, but to a pre-programmed statistically-determined social norm.

The plot, the gimmicks, have become vehicles for Dick's quirky existential humour, for his discourses on Spinoza and the soul, on Jewishness, mental illness as "current fashion", a drug the effect of which is directly analogous to that of Beethoven's Sixteenth Quartet, and for Dick's own experiments in anecdotal writing styles which, at no time, are less than brilliantly executed. It is an immensely wistful, humorous novel, yet the underlying bleakness of relationships is as pessimistic as anything from "Second Variety". "The basis of life is not a greed to exist, not a desire of any kind. It is fear," writes Rosen. "Absolute dread. Paralyzing dread so great as to produce apathy ... All the activity of life was an effort to relieve this one state ... Birth is not pleasant. It is worse than death. There is no philosophising, no casing of the condition. And the prognosis is terrible: all your actions and deeds and thoughts will only embroil you in living the more deeply." Sentiments that recall Dave Gaden's suicidal compulsions.

A strange, oblique, love-story novel, less accessible and direct than *The Game-Players of Titan*, but with much compensatory subtlety. For example, there is an in-joke directed at his own less sophisticated science fiction pulp origins. One of the quoted motivations behind the simulacra construction had been a "science fiction magazine called *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and ... a story about robot attendants who protected children like huge mechanical dogs; they were called Nannites".

TWO DOZEN DRAGON'S EGGS by Donald A. Wollheim; Dobson; London; 186 pp; £3.95

Reviewed by Mike Dickinson

Those who have noticed the title and the number of pages will have made the first crucial discovery about this book: the stories are very short, the longest being fourteen pages; and that is double the average. This is not, of course, unique. Those readers fortunate enough to know the best stories of Fredric Brown will recognise that the shortest of stories can be pungent, witty and stimulating. Donald Wollheim is not Fredric Brown.

He is, of course, an excellent editor, responsible for the discovery and encouragement of many major authors; but recognising and nurturing literary talent is not the same as possessing it. This is not to say he is devoid of ideas (indeed it may be said that he is swamped by them); however, a dab of custard is not the same as a trifle, and skolethal trifles are all we get. Working at such a length is difficult; every word has to be used to its maximum effect, either hinting at hidden depths or producing a high gloss surface glitter, the intensity of which blinds you to its limitations. Failing this all you get is a sort of wham-bam-thank-you-mam and you don't need Xavier Hollander to tell you that's unsatisfactory.

It is impossible to read more than one of these stories at a sitting. I have tried and the tedium which they produce is numbing. There is little variation to the formula. The first one or two pages are set up in describing the protagonist, not characterising. This may be accomplished in his normal, flat, lifeless fashion, often with an attempt at Fieldingsque man-of-the-world chattiness, or, as in "The poetess and the Twenty-one Gray-Haired Cadavers", with a sort of elephantine clog-dance which informs you that he is writing a "witty" story. (He constantly refers to her as a "lady poet" throughout, like a TV comic with a successful catch-phrase, in the sort of condescending leer that almost justifies Joanna Russ).

Those ideas, which "forced themselves" on Donald Wollheim, which "jar a bit on the smug structure of everyday reality" (quoted from his introduction are parcelled out one per story. He seems very proud of them. He claims one story, "Mimic", has inspired several novels from "good" writers and "makes one feel one has contributed something lasting to the patterns of Science Fiction". That particular story warns us that any unsociable person may turn out to be an alien insect in disguise. If one can recover from the "jar" of that one can receive other timely warnings such as not to leave dirty rags under radiators in case they come to life; not to make pacts

with the devil; not to forget to heat your ship on moon flights; not to swat flies; and, if you find a shop selling alien salt-collars, buy as many as you can since it may disappear.

However, these hammer-blows to one's concept of reality are compensated for somewhat by reassurances that alien gas creatures will be destroyed by concerted storms; Santa Claus does exist but comes in a flying saucer; and invaders from the future will die of hay fever.

Things happen but we rarely know why; indeed we rarely care since often we are presented with a naked idea dressed in only the most transparent of plots. With ideas like those above, that is simply not good enough. If Wollheim really wanted to make something of these he should have given them as editorial suggestions to docile souls with talent. As it is, perhaps this would, from fear of the Trades Descriptions Act, be re-titled "Two Dozen Duck-Eggs" and even then it should be accepted that most are infertile.

(Was this the hand that launched a thousand ships...?)

HEALER by F. Paul Wilson; Sidgwick & Jackson; London; 1977; 183 pp; £3.50

Reviewed by Mike Dickinson

The blurb proclaims this as a first novel by a "prominent science fiction writer" for which "his experiences as a general practitioner and his keen interest in mankind as an interstellar race have provided the focus".

It is a first, but more of a collection than a novel. It is also one of his first publications in major science fiction circles (the only other thing I can find is the first third of this published in *Analog*). There appears to be no connection between the Prologue, Epilogue and three novellas which comprise this "novel" other than the central figure, Steven Dalt, and his friend, Pard.

Pard is an alaret, a "furry, lichen-eating cave-slurp", one of a species which though "possessing no natural intelligence" become parasitic telepaths when anything unwary enters the cave. This is usually a mistake since the host, and presumably the now-infiltrated parasite, perishes if it is of high intelligence; however, they continue to do it. Of course, this coupling survives, but as what? The alaret describes, in almost the only use Wilson makes of his medical knowledge (other than his GP Healer fantasy in Part II and the Epilogue), exactly how he infiltrated Dalt's system; but he does not say what he is. He

can, without intelligence, remember, take Dalt's brain apart not merely physically but mentally. He can restore Dalt to perfect condition, make him immortal and even re-grow his hand.

"You've still got deposits of omnipotent mesenchymal cells here and there in your body. I'll just have them transported to the stump...."

He shows greater maturity than his host (which can only have come from hanging from cave ceilings for years) but he can still make the odd endearing mistake, as in colouring the band gold. His exact nature is difficult to determine since in the coupling he left his body behind. Nevertheless he can in the crucial phase of the third novella remove himself from Dalt, aided by a handy psychic attack, and ride like the CIA's ultimate dream down the thought wave to spy on the wicked telepath Kali (!) in her own cave!

This telepath, i.e. goddess, is the only real villain in the book, powering on a people who, like Starship Troopers with the control stuck, only live to kill and devastate, for unexplained reasons. But Wilson is hardly concerned with giving any Devil its due, let alone a word. The only important view is Pard/Dalt's, and so that is the only view given. Pard and Dalt unite to polish off the dreaded Kali in less than eight pages.

Still, most villains get shorter shrift; because of Dalt's immortality he can just outlive them. The Tarks, who threaten the Galaxy in Part II, are defeated off-stage by Part III, because of the "diversification of humanity". More importantly those who opposed this entropy, the Federation, and the more communistically inclined Restructurist movement also fall apart. Dalt is pleased about this as he has found Utopia on the neo-anarchist world Totive. De Moise, the Restructurist representative who meets Dalt in his Healer phase, is given all the humanity of a Russian in an American cold war film:

"We shall soon be running the entire Federation our way ... and when the tide turns for us, you will join the current or be swept under."

Dalt's response to this is to disappear for 250 years from the Universe only he has been able to protect from a deadly plague. Despite his taking his ball home the Universe survives.

Totive, however, is truly the centre of the book. It is a world of complete *laissez-faire*, on which people may ruin themselves gambling, become drug addicts, or alcoholics, or merely starve. Nobody disturbs them with things like

wellfare, or compulsory, or even free, medical care. Should they steal they are flogged publicly on a wonderful apparatus that administers precise dosages of pain. (It is a scientific world so one can expect such sophistication.) If they are violent they are completely isolated or may choose to have their brains blocked. Dalt is, of course, a success and only meets successes and wonderful people. Presumably the failures are confined in an idyllic ghetto where they cannot mar the beautiful scenery. Some of Wilson's other publications appear to have been in anarchist journals, and the growing popularity of this form of right-wing anarchy, also advocated by Papa Dick Geis, is bound to add support to this otherwise feeble book.

It is a first novel, and, despite the publishers' puff, one likes to say encouraging things about first novels. However, one which is so cliché-ridden, structured in such a ramshackle way (Wilson even manages to produce a rather silly rip-off from *Dune* by way of intermittent extracts from "The Healer: Man & Myth" by Emmerz Pent, mainly to allow himself some facile irony), and so didactic as to grate on both the reader's reason and its own internal logic deserves little. If Wilson really shares his fellow enthusiasts' concern for ecology he can, with ease, protect at least some trees from devastation, follow the counsel of Huxley to keep his piece nine years, or, even better, that of Steve Dalt and keep it up for two hundred and fifty.

Certainly one world can well be spared such delights as:

"A golden hand, a crown of silver hair, and a rather large flametomb hanging from your neck - you cut quite a figure, Steven Dalt ... You have lots of colour for a microbiologist," she was saying and her smile was very warm now. "And I think you'll make a few waves at J.M.C."

NIGHTMARE BLUE by Gardner Dozois and George Alec Effinger; first published, 1975; Fontana; Glasgow; 1977; 190 pp; 70p; ISBN 0-00-614617-1

Reviewed by Robert Gibson

Earth is being taken over by the use of a horrible bright blue drug. The general public have not been told. Neither do they realise that the territory occupied by the alien Aensalords, near Schwabisch Gmund, Germany, was not ceded by peaceful trade treaty but by ultimatum.

At the beginning of the story, Karl Jaeger is a member of the general public. He is also the world's only remaining private consulting detective. He has been hired by a certain

Schiller, who knows more than he does, to enter the heart of the Aensalords' domain, and photograph it. Jaeger has assumed that his "blindcoat" would render him invisible. But the Dktar, the Aensalords, see by a different range of the spectrum, one of which the blindcoat does not hide. So the first sentence of the book reads: "Karl Jaeger was a dead man". This is supposed to glue the reader to the book straight away, but actually I found the quieter Chapter 2 more interesting, as I could understand more of what was going on and where.

The lobster octopoid Corcail Sendijen is co-hero, ensuring that the book is not sweepingly anti-alien. However, it is the atmosphere of chilling menace conveyed by the Aensalords and the Dktar which gives the book some distinction. Or rather, it is that menace plus the snippets and vistas of ordinary life around it. There is just enough of the latter to give the former something onto which it can cast its shadow.

It all adds up to a good thriller, nothing less, nothing more.

THE EYE OF HOLLERL-RA by William Thomas Webb; Robert Hale; London; 1977; 190 pp; £3.60; ISBN 0-7091-6162-4

Reviewed by Robert Gibson

The setting: a world called Paerighrood. The hero, T'Marraff, comes from Lamarkand, a kingdom with "traditions of charity, freedom and tolerance". Instead of training soldiers it hires mercenaries, and non-combatants are highly esteemed.

In Tseeland, greatest of the Five Kingdoms of Paerighrood, the reverse is true. The men of Tseeland, who keep fighting with the Tseros (or Tserofas) of Tserofia, are ruled by the Shar Morwald-Mor, descendants of Rothak-Roth, "son of Hollerl-Ra", the "Daystar God". Belloueth, daughter of Morwald-Mor, must make the perilous journey to Ganra, the Wizard Kingdom, and there gaze upon the Sharfex Speculum, before she can succeed her father on the throne. The way to Ganra lies up the River of Death, full of corpses, ogres, etc.

Ganra, like Lamarkand, is a non-violent kingdom. It contains the Tormello Tower which houses the Sharfex Speculum, which some call the Eye of Hollerl-Ra. The Tower and the Speculum were built, it is said, by a "super-scientific race of cell-like beings", long ago departed to their home among the stars. Hollerl-Ra's opposite number is Jaggerl the Evil One, the Grinder of Souls, who keeps appearing in mirrors and causing the hero to go berserk.

We know all this because, according to the

Foreword, a novelist of Earth was contacted telepathically by T-Marraff, who told him story. He was much less wise than the Last Man who chose Olaf Stapledon as his vehicle. T-Marraff's novelist attempted to put the language of Paeirghrood "into words that her own people might understand", but she changed it too thoroughly. The story reads like a pastiche of various Earthly tales. Nouns are borrowed from all over the place, with slight alterations or with none: "Kupressos (trees)" (Greek); "Larsander, son of Larko-Lars (Gracoco-Scandinavian); "Iustrium", "Speculum" (Latin); "almirante" (Italian); "Ra" (Egyptian); "Sham" "Lamarkand"; "Ziggurats" (Oriental); "Ali-Beg-Burn" (Anglo-Oriental); "Fragstone Jail" (American).

Perhaps the excuse for all this lies on page 174, where there is one mention of the past "arrival of men" on Paeirghrood. But surely, there should still be some tang of Otherness about another world and its culture.

Sometimes the nouns are invented or constructed rather than borrowed, but here the effect is even savior. For example, "swampire" (this should of course mean a vampire who lives in a swamp, but it doesn't; it lives in a river); "Volkovonk-Ben" the Grand Vizier; "King Klaverkip" of the Taroifans; and, on page 35, "a meadow where meelies were grazing". From the ridiculous to the superfluous: Webb keeps writing "ari" instead of "warrior", "daystar" instead of "sun", "lyke" instead of "horse", and "lanthorn" instead of "lantern".

There's no point to it all. Logical and symbolic strengths are lacking. Neither can the jejune style create significance out of an ambience amorphous and unexplained. The book neither makes sense directly, nor indirectly via the medium of inspired nonsense. Perhaps the author has the makings of a storyteller, but he'll have to learn to write first.

THE BEST OF FRANK HERBERT 1952 - 1964; edited by Angus Wells; first published 1975; Sphere; London; 1977; 153 pp; 75p; ISBN 0-7221-4514-9

Reviewed by Robert Gibson

For general comments, see the latter part of my review of the companion volume. First, some remarks on each story.

"Looking for Something" (1952, 11pp) is a passable "things are not what they seem" story. "Nightmare Blues" (1954, 48pp) is a weighty deadline-and-disaster novelette. The plot concerns the connection between "amusictron" and city-wide outbreaks of insanity. I don't think I understood all of it, and I'm not sure

whose fault this is. Next comes a 24 page extract from *Dragon in the Sea* (1956), which makes me want to read the whole novel. It sounds like the archetypal suspense thriller. This time I'm sure I didn't understand all the jargon, and I also know that here this didn't matter. "Cease Fire" (1958, 20pp) is a very good, very memorable story of an anti-war and what it will do to us all. "Egg and Ashes" (1960, 6pp) is about an alien who hears in the spectrum in which we see. Perhaps there is too much difference between electromagnetic and sonic vibration for this story to make sense; but the main fault of the story is that it is too short. Much more could and should be done with a synaesthetic theme. On the other hand, "Mary Celeste Move" (1964, 7pp) is just the right length; a neatly structured, original traffic story.

THE BEST OF FRANK HERBERT 1965 - 1970; edited by Angus Wells; first published 1975; Sphere; London; 1977; 167 pp; 75p; ISBN 0-7221-4535-7

Reviewed by Robert Gibson

"Committee of the Whole" (1965, 18pp) set in the present or in the near future, is a smooth, taut story about the coming of what could be either freedom or chaos. Usually I have to read Frank Herbert more slowly than I read (say) Clarke or Asimov; but not in this case. The 7-page extract of *Dune* (1965) is well chosen: Liet Kynes' exposure to the desert. I have cast admiration, though little affection, for *Dune*; this sample reveals some of its complexity, realism and originality. "By the Book" (1966, 25pp) is a "something is wrong with the machine and I'll have to go Out There and fix it" story. The theme of ironical by-the-bookish reflection is not brilliantly fused with the contrasting external situation. The ingredients of "The Primitives" (1966, 34pp) by contrast left me satisfied: one picturesque and murderous crook, one picturesque non-murderous crook, assorted hoodlums, a Russian ship, a Marrian diamond and a palaeolithic woman. In a word: fun. Next comes a 24-page extract from *The Heaven Makers* (1967), about aliens interfering in people's lives; echoes of Clarke's "The Parasite". Probably a good "human interest" story. In his introduction Frank Herbert writes that an idea behind "The Being Machine" (1969, 20pp) is that "law and order inevitably lead to chaos". The machine in this story reminds me of the Games Machine in van Vogt's *The World of Null-A*, only it has a different style and is more extreme. I found the story hard to understand. It is an ideas story only, not an ideas-and-people story. "Seed Stock" (1970, 13pp) does not suffer from this limitation. It is a compressed gem of a story, containing both characterisation and a good treatment of an old idea.

Frank Herbert is a "faceless writer" in the way that Alec Guinness is a "faceless actor". There is nothing that I can say is a typical Frank Herbert story, and perhaps (judging from *Dune* and the extracts here reviewed) this is especially obvious as regards the novels (on which, I gather, his reputation largely rests). Perhaps his "fundamental optimism", to quote the blurb on the 1952-1964 collection, is a recurrent feature, though vague. Also, labels such as "technology-run-riot" and "hard" sf could be pinned here and there among his work. As for style: italicised thoughts are frequent, and a certain turbidity wells up now and then.

About "The Best of..." series: the best things about them are the introductions and bibliographies, not the choice of stories, which have been selected to demonstrate the authors' literary development, rather than the best that they can do. In other words, the title is a misnomer. Instead, how about "Selections..."

A FUNERAL FOR THE EYES OF FIRE by Michael Bishop Ballantine; New York; 1975; \$1.50/\$1.00; 294 pp; ISBN 0-345-24350-1

Reviewed by David Wingrove and Tom A. Jones

Michael Bishop is one of several impressive young American writers whose work is only just coming to the attention of a British audience. He is one of a new generation of American authors who are following the example set by Delany and writing sensitive and "spiritually attuned" sf.

Bishop's first story was "The White Otters of Childhood", a story of tremendous depth which was nominated for a Hugo. Since then he has produced consistently good works of shorter fiction and is again in the Hugo nominations at the time of writing with "The Samurai and the Willows".

A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire is Bishop's first book and is certainly indicative of a considerable talent. Two brothers leave the hives of Earth and accept a job moving a non-conformist type from one planet to another. They become involved in a spiritual intrigue, wherein lies the core of this tale. The book is about spiritual states and perspectives: distances and intellect in opposition to community and emotion (more basically it is about souls). But in examining the polarity it challenges the attitude that any of these spiritual perspectives is the right one.

The two brothers are well chosen for the task. Peter Baldwin is a non-emotive, rational

creature, whilst his brother Gunnar is an instinctive, receptive person. It is Gunnar who, with two Glaparcian high officials, lands on the planet Trope and encounters the tribe of Ouemartsee in the basin of Indigo Hearts. The maze of intrigues, perspectives and coded that emerges from the meeting of three very different cultures - Tropemen, Glaparcians and Ouemartsee - can only be traversed by an instinctive creature. The social systems to which the characters we meet belong are complex, and through Gunnar Bishop conveys their internal diversity to us.

Obscure motivations gradually become clearer as the book progresses and apparent betrayals become acts of faith (which is the key to the relationship between the two brothers, we discover). In a sense the story also reflects the age-old controversy between systems of discipline. The Tropemen and the Glaparcians accept the "law" and externally-derived order, whilst the Ouemartsee are a self-disciplined caste. Archism and anarchism; this is one of the several undercurrents of the book.

The twists of the plot and interplay of characters are far too complex to be described briefly here and it would be unjust to do more than hint at the themes as I have above. But I cannot resist expanding one point, the use of the eye as a symbol. Eyes are emotive, biologically we receive more information from the eye than any other sense organ but we have a strangely ambivalent attitude towards them. "Eyes are the window of the soul", "laughing eyes", etc show a fascination for eyes, a belief that we can ascertain something about the personality of the person from their eyes, and yet a large percentage of the population seem to have an abhorrence bordering on fear of them. Though sf writers love to describe the physical attributes of their aliens this is the first book I've read where the eyes are described in great detail; this is for a specific purpose, to reiterate the above quotation: "eyes are the window of the soul".

The book is beautifully written - Bishop's aliens are amongst the most convincing I have yet encountered fictionally. Trope itself is a credible vision and possesses an austere and cold beauty.

Sf books like this are rare and should be treasured.

A VERY SHORT LETTER-COLUMN...

Phil Stephenson-Payne: London, 1 Lewell Avenue, Old Marston, Oxford, OX3 0RL

...Beautiful cover, of course. Perhaps we could change VECTOR to a Star Wars fanzine and keep up such superb cover art? The material within on Star Wars I found fascinating, and though that's rather a brief comment on seven pages of material, I'm not sure there's much more I can say until the film turns up here. The pieces told me a lot about the film that I didn't know (but then I didn't know much), which presumably was their aim, and certainly fired me with even more enthusiasm to go and see it (though a trailer for it I had seen three days before VECTOR arrived had really already convinced me).

"Half-Life" I enjoyed as always, a welcome change from some past VECTOR artwork.

Perhaps I'm missing something obvious, but why is "The Infinity Box" headed "Core" - it looked odd. Anyway, the contents thereof... John Clute seems to be back at his logomantic best in the Silverberg review - amusing to read, though I'm not sure it said a lot about the book - though the more pedestrian review of the LeGuin was just pedestrian. Brian Griffin got off to a bad start. I felt, with the review of *The Silver Locusts* - and I agree reviewing such a well-known book must be difficult - he hovers between trying to use a new approach to an old book and trying to review the thing. However, he picked up rapidly thereafter, with good reviews of *Lord of No Time* and *The Caves of Drach*. The review of *The Black Beast* suffered I felt, from the same fate as many collection reviews - many small comments on individual stories which say little about the book. Also, I thought the *Did Time Return* one rambled rather in the middle. Finally, I had only one complaint with the review of *The Tolkien Companion*, viz. that it ignored the much earlier work *A Guide to Middle Earth* by Foster, which I think Ballantine recently reissued. I had a brief glance at Tyler's book and felt it was only a more prolix version of Foster's with a couple of illustrations but no new material (certainly the samples Brian quoted are nothing new). I think a comparison between the two is essential in any review of this book, especially as Foster's book is cheaper, and it is unfortunate that Brian omitted this.

Andrew Darlington's reviews were reasonable (though the Delany one tailed off towards the end) but not outstanding.

Ian Watson is always a joy to read (it seems) though I confess I had my doubts about ploughing through his review of *Cette Chère Humanité*. I was delighted to see a review of a prize-winning French book in VECTOR, but 2 3/4 columns of plot summary followed by 3/4 of a column of review seemed a little top-heavy. No complaints about his review of *Stolen Faces*; a very enjoyable piece.

Brian Stableford's piece on *New Dimensions* was all right, but a little unconvincing.

I think I must be rude about Chris Morgan's reviews more often - his review of *Dragonsinger* was far more enjoyable (quite apart from the topical references therein) and reasonable than his review of *Dragonsong*. The Starburst review was fine - though suffering again from the problems of reviewing a collection. As for the *Drop In* review, I disagree not with its quality, but with the policy of including reviews of such bad books.

Lastly we come to Robert Gibson, who, I think (and my apologies if I'm wrong), is a newcomer to VECTOR and to reviewing. Certainly his reviews whos somewhat the lack of polish that is natural in a beginner. The first, *Mission to the Stars*, was not unreasonable, but *The Universe Maker* was rather overlong and unnecessarily filled with plot, and *The Secret Galactics* is another review of an abysmal book which could have been better demolished in a sentence or two. The Ice Schooner starts off with the surprising comment that "a novel of ice should be icy" - I recommend Barjavel's *The Ice People* as a good counter-example - and I felt his lack of sympathy with the book rather coloured his review thereof. Finally, the Andersons, which were reasonable but uninspired. Still, despite my harsh comments (to which I am prone) Robert Gibson seems to have the makings of a good reviewer and I hope he perseveres.

Mark Adlard's piece I enjoyed very much, and found little to disagree with (except perhaps the contention that all but the very young fans would have recognised that quotation from T. S. Eliot - I certainly didn't.) No doubt this will spark off opposition from some people in future letter columns, though, and mayhap I will have more to say then.

((Which is where we must leave the letter-column this time, with hopes for a continuation under the new Editor....))

HACK, WHY ARE SOME AUTHORS SO MUCH BETTER THAN OTHERS?



I'VE HEARD IT SAID THAT THERE ARE 3 KINDS OF WRITERS...



SOME ARE BORN WITH AN INNATE TALENT...



OTHERS HAVE TO STRUGGLE TO NURTURE THEIR GIFTS...



THE REST ARE DOOMED TO MEDIOCRITY!



THAT STILL DOESN'T ACCOUNT FOR YOU!



HALF-LIFE

The life & times of
ELMER T. HACK

YESTERDAY MY LATEST "GOODMAN OF THE GALAXY" NOVEL WAS REVIEWED IN THE T.L.S.



HE GAVE IT DETAILED STRUCTURAL AND STYLISTIC ANALYSIS!



THE CRITIC WAS JEREMY HIGGINBOTTAM-SMYTHE, THE EMINENT NOVELIST!



IT'S NICE TO GET A MENTION IN RESPECTABLE PLACES!



HE DEVOTED A WHOLE PARAGRAPH TO MY BOOK!



EVEN IF HE DID CALL IT "THE PUERIL WARRLINGS OF A DISORDERED MIND!"



WORDS: CHRIS EVANS
PICTURES: VIM BARBER



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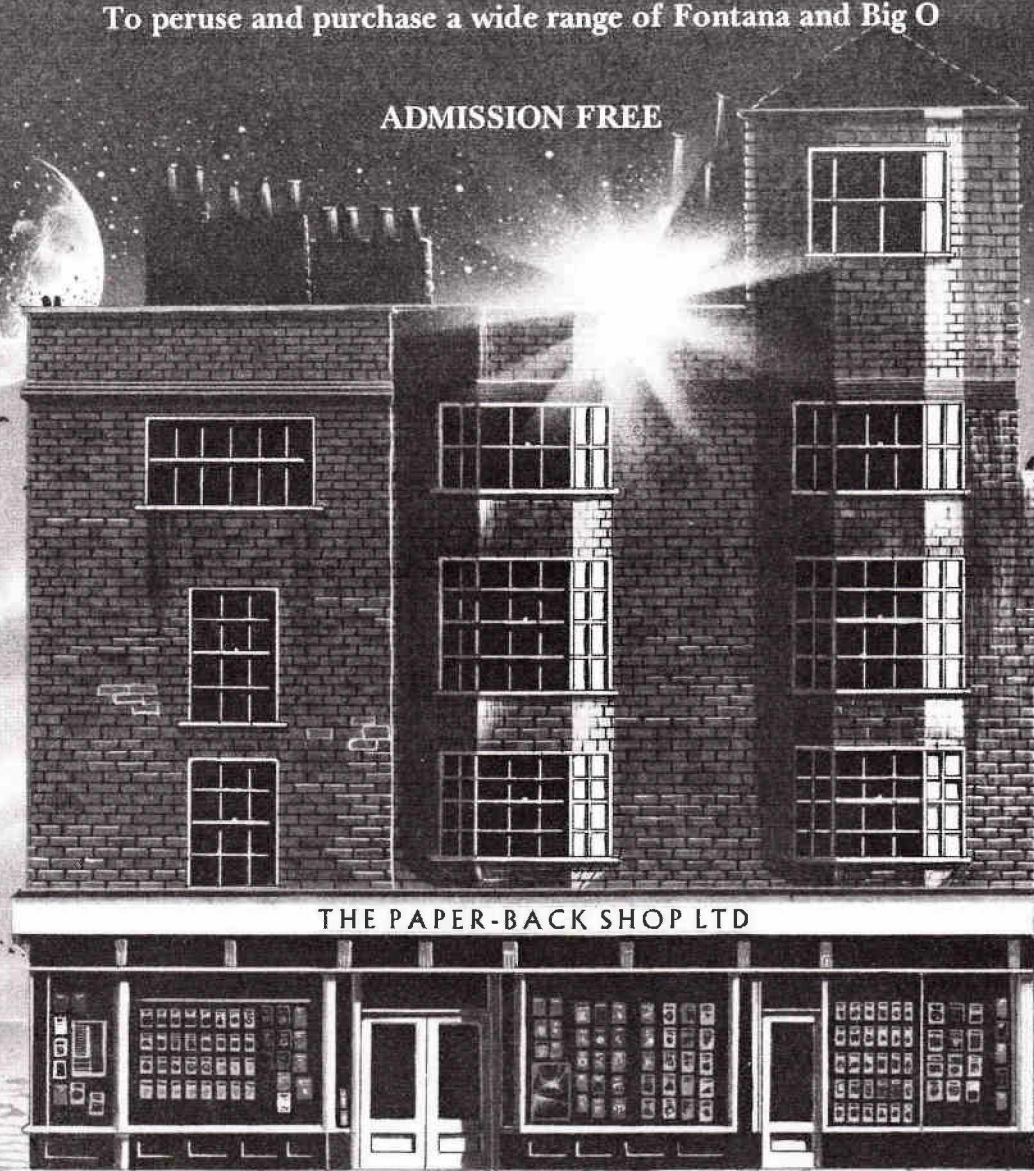
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METROPOLIS

THE FIRST GREAT SCIENCE FICTION FILM

BY STEVE DIVEY

Metropolis, directed by Fritz Lang in Germany in 1926, is the most important pre-talkie science fiction film. Excluding comedies it is the most frequently shown silent film in clubs and art-houses today. It has been on British TV twice in the last five years (only a meagre half dozen other serious silent films have been shown in that time), and it is written about in all histories of film both sf and "straight". Yet, despite being the most ambitious and expensive European film of its day, it was a financial failure, attracted more critical vituperation than praise, was described by its director as silly and naive and on arrival in America in 1927 was cut by its distributors by over a third (this cut version is the only one now surviving), whereupon Lang repudiated it entirely.

The theme of *Metropolis* is very common in sf writing and cinema. It extends a present social evil to monstrous proportions in a not-too-distant future as a warning to contemporary society and then shows humanity is capable of solving the biggest problems. Made at a time when the international scramble for full industrialisation, mass production and bureaucratic control had already changed the "civilised" world beyond recognition, it provided prophecies of a future totalitarian society that have come unfortunately close at times to reality.

The story takes place in the year 2000 (Stanley Kubrick's film title *2001* is apparently a tribute to *Metropolis*) in an enormous city, whose building tower into the sky, and around which planes fly. (This vision was inspired by Lang's first visit to New York in 1924.) The population of the city is divided into two distinct social classes. The Masters, who live at the tops of the buildings, control the operations of the city from their offices and in their leisure cavort in luxurious pleasure gardens. The Workers live ten floors underground in spartan apartment blocks, wear uniform overalls, work exhausting shifts in a sort of industrial hell, and have very aspect of their lives regimented. The workers' revolutionary feelings are sublimated by a religious cult centred on a young worker-girl called Maria. She preaches patience and passivity, promising the imminent arrival of a messiah who will improve their lot.

The people's messiah turns out to be Freder, the son of the city's ruler. Appalled when he realises the inhumanity of his society, Freder pleads with his father to improve conditions. When he is rebuffed, he descends to the lower depths and substitutes for one of the workers so as to make contact with them. Meanwhile his father, being totally opposed to any kind of reform or compromise with the oppressed workers and concerned about the influence Maria has with them, plans to discredit her in their eyes. He enlists the aid of the scientist Rotwang, who kidnaps Maria and creates a robot which looks exactly like her. The robot is the opposite of Maria, seductive and passionate instead of virginal and placatory. She/it attends the next workers' meeting and inflames them with rhetoric, urging them to destroy the system. The workers, who in the hands of Maria were obedient and peaceful, become, under the robot, an enraged mob surging upwards, smashing as they go. In their anger they wreck the machines which are the symbols of their oppression, overlooking the fact that they are also destroying the pumps which protect their homes from flood waters. The inevitable happens, the workers' living quarters are flooded along with their families and children. The mob panics when they realise what they have done, discover they have been betrayed by the robot and burn her at the stake. Meanwhile, fortunately for the workers and the story, Maria escapes from Rotwang, unites with Freder and together they rescue the workers' children from their plight, arriving in the nick of time to stop the workers' orgy of destruction extending to the part of the city where the rulers live. Rotwang recaptures Maria and after a rooftop battle with Freder plunges to his death. Freder's father then realises the error of his ways, relents in his attitudes towards the workers and accepts Freder as

the mediator between the two classes. And everyone lives happily ever after except Rotwang.

Viewing *Metropolis* today produces mixed feelings. Visually it is one of the most impressive films ever made. Parts of the most spectacular scenes have been copied or referred to again and again in films ever since. By necessity, it was shot entirely in the studio, where Lang preferred to work, giving him control over every detail of the scenes, some of which were vast. (Lang's education had been in architecture and graphic design.) It employed over 30,000 extras which Lang handled marvellously. The actions and motivations of mobs was a recurring theme in Lang's work, particularly his first American film, *Fury* (1936). The camera work was so unobtrusive it is scarcely noticeable. (One of the cinematographers was Karl Freund, who later became an American director with such works as *The Mummy* (1932) to his credit.) The zoom lens and other technical devices not having been invented in 1926, Lang swung his cameras on ropes and threw them around in ways others had used before, but never so smoothly.

The script was co-written with Lang by his wife, Thea von Harbou, and based upon her novel. Lang detested the film when he finished it but accepted "at least 50% responsibility for it". He was trying to explore the tendency society has for dividing people between those who work with their brain and those who work with their hands. He took it to the extreme situation presented here to show that without a "heart" with feelings mediating between brain and muscle tragedy would ensue. Implicit here too is the suggestion that both sides of the class conflict were equally "heartless", the ruler cold and unrelenting and the workers submissive and spiritless. Many of the themes that appear in the film were extremely prominent in 1920s Germany. Mob violence was frequent in the streets as the fascists rose in power and attempted to crush their opponents. The Germanic folk-myths were used by the Nazis to cultivate acceptance of superheroes, preparing the way for Hitler. (Lang's previous film had been the epic two-part saga of Siegfried, *Die Nibelungen* (1924), although this was in no way a Nazi film. Siegfried, although heroic, is very human and devious and gets a spear in his back at the end of Part I. The two-part film is an enthralling study of the wasteful futility of revenge - a brave concept in post-war Germany with the Nazis on the rise.) In *Metropolis* the city is controlled by one man and the workers do the bidding with equal willingness of both Maria and her robot facsimile. All the main characters are powerful people who brook no argument. This element is in sharp contrast to the great Soviet films of the twenties by Eisenstein, Dovzhenko and Pudovkin, where the people as a whole exhibit heroism, without being led from above. The best American films also concentrated on humble ordinary people who would make good individually by their own merits. The ideology of not only the social divisions in *Metropolis* but also the personalities and their relationships to society must have been very appealing to the Nazis. *Metropolis* is reputed to have been Adolf Hitler's favourite film. Despite making a brazenly anti-Nazi film, *The Last Testament of Dr Mabuse* (1933), the third of a series about an evil master-criminal in the midst of society arbitrarily killing and destroying, which was banned and confiscated, Goebbels offered Lang the post of head of the German film industry on the strength of *Metropolis*. (That same day, and without being able to get to the bank before it closed, Lang fled to France, abandoning everything to the Nazis. His wife divorced him and joined the Nazi party.)

In addition to the dominant political themes of *Metropolis*, there is also a strong overtone of Catholicism. Maria represents both John the Baptist and, later, the Virgin Mary, while the robot becomes Mary Magdalene. Freder is of course JC who descends from heaven to save humanity from a stern and unyielding God. In the film's ending he fares much better than the original folk-hero. The mystical elements present here and in all the films Lang wrote with Thea von Harbou are completely absent from the films he made without her.

The content of the missing third of *Metropolis*, which was "unsuitable to American tastes" and cinema running times, has been deduced from the novel the film is based

on and from interviews with the participants. There was originally a prologue establishing the relationship between the scientist Rotwang and Freder and his father, which goes a long way towards explaining their attitudes to each other and indeed the film's ending. There was also considerable footage devoted to the personalities of a couple of minor characters, which while not crucial to the plot explains their actions and in one case their disappearance from the story. (One should note that this practice which Distributors have of shortening films continues to this day; but we must remember that time wasted showing films in darkness can be more profitably used selling ice-cream.)

The acting ability of the performers is with one exception high. Whilst some of the characters' behaviour might appear incongruous, owing to missing scenes, the actors themselves may not have been aware of preceeding action as the order of shooting would have been planned according to availability of sets rather than sequence of story. For all this the portrayal of Freder is the only performance that is overly melodramatic. There was far less screen naturalism then than now but the fault here lies not with the age of the film but with the actor. The rest of the cast are largely faultless. Rudolf Klein-Rogge as Rotwang in particular is superb. He not only retains his central force in the story despite the severe truncation of his appearances, but is also capable of suggesting emotions from the missing scenes to partly cover their absence. He had incidentally preceded Fritz Lang as Thea von Harbou's husband.

Lang has said in interviews that his intention in all his films has been to provide food for thought for his audiences after they leave the cinema as well as entertain them while they are in there. The first part of this intention is a fundamental criterion for consideration of film as an art-form, as well as sound business sense. People who are still thinking about a film days after they saw it are passing the word to their friends - the cheapest and most effective form of publicity. The importance of the second part goes without saying. If people aren't entertained they won't come back, nor will their friends, and any message in the film will be wasted. The initial public response to *Metropolis* was disappointing; to the extent of not covering the cost of production and nearly ruining the company that made it. However, the film received widespread distribution in Europe and America and stimulated enormous controversy about its content. On this ground alone it was an artistic success. The survival of *Metropolis* as a film classic is due to the conception and scale of its scenes and atmosphere, rather than the simple-minded morality of the plot on which it is based. *Metropolis* is a great film because of the ability of its most enduring impressions to transcend the banality and mutilation of its story, and still have important things to say to an audience fifty years after it was made.

--- Steve Divey, Bracknell, 1977

PHILIP E. HIGH .

THE MAN WHO INVENTED THE WOODEN SPACESHIPS

BY ANDREW DARLINGTON

Despite a virtual domination of British science fiction magazines throughout the late 50s and the early 60s alongside Bulmer, Tubb and Aldiss; and despite a considerable body of novels published since; the style of Philip E. High is one that is currently out of favour. He is not a writer of startling originality, he tinkers within the established science fiction spectrum, modifying ideas, picking up discarded threads here and there, meshing them together into different juxtapositions, re-walking old or forgotten paths. He is a mainstream writer. At one point he confessed: "I am an old-timer, and my sense of wonder should be a little blunted by now, but it obstinately refuses to lie down" (19). On present evidence it would seem that he will not cause Silverberg and Ellison problems in the Hugo-grabbing stakes.

Yet, High's stories are, more often than not, immensely readable. They are set at a fast-moving pace, a swift action conveyor-belt narrative that holds a reader's attention. Even though the reader may remain unimpressed by the superstructure that the words are carrying him through, he hangs on through the next incident, and the next

The universe of Philip E. High is populated by people using Negation Cannons, Trembler Projectors, Dis-pistols, Dream Machines, Protes and Syntha-worms; it is a universe in which submarines on routine Atlantic patrols disappear into the Jurassic past; in which trucks carrying super-computers up the A40 disappear into a "probability future"; in which Earth is sold for a space-ship; in which aliens organise safaris to hunt human beings; in which a Galactic court with robotic jurors is presided over by a robot judge; and in which a "tree which looks like an oak exhales a narcotic vapour which can knock you cold" then clubs you around with its branches (4).

Yet beneath this garish facade of mainstream Space Opera there are a number of recurrent pre-occupations and themes that underpin the stories. A unity that gives the work a validation, a sense of continuity.

Perhaps the most important and most easily identifiable theme behind Philip E. High's work is the central core of a philosophy of non-violence. There is a repetition of the idea that violence is not an ineradicable trait within human beings, that it is due to extraneous influences, or that it

is about to be purged from the world in a kind of racial transfiguration. This assertions is not, I think, invalidated by the fact that many of High's stories are set against a military background, or one of apocalyptically destructive warfare. High knows how to hold his readers' attention, he knows that action is imperative if the story is to be made readable, and that warfare on a planetary scale is one of the best attention-grabbers in the science fiction canon of idea. In the novel *Come, Hunt An Earthman*, Earth has been conquered by an unholy alliance of alien races; the planet suffered a similar fate in *Sold - For a Spaceship*; in *Prodigal Sun* the Earth has just won a Pyrrhic victory in a war against the eight-foot tall insectoid Vrenka; in "A Race of Madmen" Earth was barred from the Universe by a logic-bound and unimaginative Galactic Federation who destroyed all of Earth's metal deposits to prohibit further space expansion. Human beings retaliated by conquering the entire galaxy - in wooden space-ships! (The theme of the human race "coming out for revenge" cropped up again in "Shift Case".) In the novel *Butterfly Planet* an undercover war was being waged of which 60% of the population remained unaware. "Look down into the street, the buildings, the parks," it read "There is your battleground. Down there is the enemy - an enemy who wears no uniform. He walks behind you in the street, sits with you when you eat and perhaps swims beside you in a public pool. He may ask you for a light, bow you into a hotel, sell you a flyer, or in another form, leave the smell of perfume on your pillow. The enemy is young and old, male and female, and he is everywhere." War and militarism are seen to be, in this sense, eternal.

High is also at his best when describing situations delineated by a military hierarchy, from the submarine in "Routine Exercise" to the star-ship of "To See Ourselves"; from the totalitarian regimented societies in "Lords of Creation" to the "Starship Troopers" of "The Meek Shall Inherit". Both themes of totalitarianism and militarist warfare coincide in the latter story. In the totalitarian society pictured in the novel *Prodigal Sun* a kind of aversion therapy called Programming gets rid of dissident voices. It is described thus: "the patient experiences psychosomatic pain when his thoughts, actions or emotions are contrary to the therapeutic plan designed to restore him to health and his rightful place in society". It is a Gulag Archipelago principle - dissension as a form of mental illness

Yet creeping out from behind the bomb-craters and devastated planets of the stories is the continual reiteration of the pacification theme. In story after story High restates that violence is not part of human nature, but is artificial, or a temporary perversion that can be eradicated. In

Prodigal Sun he had one character say: "No-one has seen human nature, only its distortion". At the climax of the novel violence was eradicated from the Earth by the introduction of gas into the atmosphere to seal off "rogue radiation" from the sun. It was a benevolent apocalypse in which love flourished and the evil either repented or shrivelled up and died ("with a kind of frozen calm he leaned forward, picked up the little finger of his right hand and dropped it into the disposal slot" (20)). But there were none of the poetic transcendental overtones that a J. G. Ballard or a Robert Silverberg would have infused into the process; it was a purely functional transformation. A mechanical device on a par with the removal or addition of a component. One aspect of the restored Eden thus produced, for example, was that marriages lasted forever!

"True order" wrote High, "is a complete symbiosis of all nature with man at the peak just as the brain is the peak or natural fulfilment of the functioning human body". (20) In the novel the ideas appear to develop naturally and logically. Yet a throw-away line in a short story published three years previously, "Probability Factor", showed that its philosophy went deeper. In the story High had a man from the future state that "the sun is too harsh, the radiation too fierce an erratic. The result is emotional instability leading to wars and similar outbreaks of violence" (18). Digging deeper, a story called "The Meek Shall Inherit" published in 1958, seven years before the novel, introduced a character asserting that "as a psych I can assure you that the race is growing away from violence" (4). The "psych" went on to discover an Eden among the stars that destroyed evil or violent thoughts as a reflex action. This phenomenon, "a complete symbiosis of all nature", also appeared in a 1959 story "To See Ourselves", a story that High developed from an idea by Emmanuel Swedenborg. In the story the environment of the planet Teltha mirror-imaged what was within the mind. Only by, again, thinking beautiful thoughts could the "seeded" colonists survive. The story ended "In time the human race can eliminate war, cruelty, want, suffering, hatred. It can become a race of gods in its own heaven", by using the planetary mutation. An elixir. A universal panacea.

In this way we get Philip E. High's version of the Redemption - but he also has theories about the Fall which are directly linked to the ideas of ineradicable violence. High - admittedly like a few other science fiction writers of the time - predated Von Daniken by a decade with theories about alien intervention in Terrestrial evolution.

The most direct writing of this theme occurred in Speaking Of Dinosaurs (28), in which all of history - and prehistory - had been genetically manipulated by the war-like Ordnan fusing the seed of "Earth-apes" with that of Yewmens from the planet Terth! Even the dinosaurs of the novel's title were the results of artificial modifications and experiments by rival groups of alien engineers. The novel was predated by the short story "Routine Exercise" (13) which left a hanging tail-end question about whether the human race had evolved from the descendants of a crashed alien star-ship. In "The Lords Of Creation" (7) the "space-ship Earth" concept was developed, in which life had been "seeded" and that not only the solar system but "the entire observable universe" was a mobile experiment speeding towards a final destination in space-time. The idea is in some ways reminiscent of an idea used by Arthur C. Clarke in "The City and the Stars", about the artificial movement of entire constellations. While a still earlier Philip E. High story, "Shift Case" (6) also saw the human race as originating beyond Earth - but this time as the survivors of a cosmic war. The central character of the story had a "racial memory" compulsion to build a weapon the technology of which he did not understand. The literary device was directly analogous to the Speaking Of Dinosaurs racial memory realisation of the artificiality of the prehistoric reptiles. "I am not an atheist as you know," remarked the novel's protagonist, David Standing, in an attempt to rationalise his intuitive perception. "So I'll say here and now that I think a Deity was above all this. No sane man could associate the titanic blunders, abortive experiments and wasted effort (of evolution) with a Supreme Being. If a Deity exists, I am firmly convinced he was way above all this". Evolution, he seems to be arguing, is illogical, and hence artificial. He later seemed to find the rejection of this hypothesis by experts similarly illogical! More concisely he commented: "if automobile manufacturers of today made so many monumental blunders they'd be out of business".

At the climax of High's Dinosaur novel, the main character Standing evolved beyond (or reverted to form beyond) the intervention of the meddling aliens, and hence became another of the writer's lietmotifs - the uber menach, the one man with the destiny of the race in his hands. He was a "Dominant Strain" (a term that echoed Colin Wilson's "dominant 5% of society") - as, incidentally, was Jesus Christ. Compton, the central character in "The Martian Hunters" (15) underwent a similar metamorphosis emerging as a synthesis of human and Martian. Peter Duncan of Prodigal Sun (20) had the advantage (like Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange Land) of being brought up by the aliens. In this case the technologically advanced Mattrain had rescued Duncan from a space-wreck as a baby, and returned him to the war-devastated Earth as the catalyst of a racial transfiguration. Duncan escaped from the tyrannical Earth regime to a subterranean city beneath the "Devastated Areas" where there was much talk of such Nietzschean topics as the Triumph of the Will, the undiscovered human potentials, and the coming Superman.

The escape directly paralleled that of Mailing in "The Lords of Creation" (7) who left a similarly draconian regime to reach "Free City".

An amusing side-light on High's work is that, almost inevitably, his characters - supermen included - smoke compulsively. Perhaps the intermittent interjection of "lights a cigarette/exhales deeply" is directly related to High's writing procedure; or then again it could merely be intended to provide a reflective pause in the narrative; or a tactile affirmation that, despite the alienness of the settings the stories deal with real people.

Philip E. High was born in April 1914 in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire to parents of Norfolk descent. According to the biographical outline to a New Worlds guest editorial (19) he grew up in Kent (his bank-worker father was transferred to Whitstable in 1921) and it was here that the young High became ensnared by the "garish and often crude" pulp magazines of the day. The first one which he discovered was a 1927 imported copy of

Amazing Stories. He wrote: "I devoured Jules Verne, I plagued the Librarians for H. G. Wells and gloated over a growing pile of sf magazines". Later he became a Commercial Traveller, an Insurance Agent, a Reporter, a Car Breaker and an Estate Agent's Assistant, while by night he was writing his own early short stories as a side-line. After experimenting with a number of styles - writing detective stories, Westerns, Romances - he sold his first story, "The Statics", to Authentic Science Fiction Monthly in September 1955. It was a British magazine edited by H. J. Campbell. The story concerned a murder investigation in an almost crime-free future society. Science fiction was an area of writing in which he felt at home, and within which he soon made further sales. The unique Scottish science fiction magazine Nebula, edited by Peter Hamilton, became an early market. He made his second sale, "Wrath of the Gods" - about an astronaut stranded on an alien planet - to Nebula, and it was voted the second best story of the issue. The same year Nebula published his story "City at Random", and he was subsequently voted the magazine's "Top Discovery of 1956", and the fifth most popular writer of the year.

As his style developed and became more accomplished his stories were published more regularly to more consistent acclaim. "Further Outlook" from 1957 was voted sixth most popular story of its issue; it was followed by his first published novelette, a 12,000 word piece called "Assassin in Hiding" given cover-illustration treatment by Authentic Science Fiction; and by the end of 1958 a subsequent novelette for Nebula, "Lords of Creation", was rated the edition's best story. The evolving style was often brash, and at the very least wide-screen. One story opened with the casual understatement: "there are two ways to conquer a galaxy"! (4) In another story a psychiatric patient under "mind-probe" revealed a subplot about an apparently prehistoric pioneer hyper-drive mission encountering a militant alien race in space (6). But carried along by the momentum of such extravagances were some well-constructed and intelligent stories. The narrative of a tense 1959 story "To See Ourselves" (10), for example, balanced the idea of a planet that killed each man "dropped" onto its surface in turn, with that of a retired super plastic-surgeon whose technique

carefully analogized the action of the planet by reflecting the person's "inner light" in its their appearance. Despite the story's use of the adjective "hissingly" twice in the space of three magazine pages, the style seemed to auger well for the writer's future.

John Carnell, then editor of *New Worlds*, wrote about High's short story "Routine Exercise" that it "was almost rejected when originally submitted, because of its over-familiar plot - yet its publication brought in more enthusiastic correspondence than any other story for weeks" (29). The plot concerned the nuclear submarine *Taurus* cast inexplicably back in time to the Jurassic where it encountered and destroyed a vast alien star-ship. The success of the story seemed to suggest a follow-up, and, stylistically at least, "Probability Factor" appeared to fill the role. Amusingly the story was written on a rainy Sunday afternoon in August 1961 when High, working by then as a bus driver, was placed as standby driver - and paid double time, for a holiday rush that never materialised. While waiting, however, the story was drafted out. Like "Routine Exercise" it opened and closed with an enquiry into missing Government equipment, and the situation having been outlined in this way, the story then merged into the central narrative. In the second story it was a transporter ferrying a giant computer that vanished into the mist to emerge, not into the past, but into a "parallel probability" future. In a still earlier story (2) it had been an entire city that had been cast beyond the mist into a vast hypno-induced "reality" from which there was no escape. There it had been allowed to degenerate into savagery, as a test imposed by aliens to see whether human beings were racially mature enough to enter the universe.

The human race failed the test.

By March 1962, although *Nebula* had ceased publication, High featured stories in both of the month's leading British magazines, *New Worlds* and *SF Adventures*, and was at his most prolific. But ironically, the "golden age" of High's short stories came to an end around the mid-60s with the death of most of the magazines that had carried his work, and the replacement of John Carnell with Michael Moorcock at *New Worlds*. "Routine Exercise" went on to appear in a Penguin anthology, and in 1967 a story called "The Big Tin God" was bought by Frederik Pohl for his new American magazine *International Science Fiction*, but High's straightforward lack of pretension was out of place in the new rarified atmosphere of experimentation. Moorcock (in the guise of James Colvin - *New Worlds*, vol 59 no 156, Nov 1965) commented that High's novel *Prodigal Sun* was "one of those run-of-the-mill British novels which isn't particularly bad and not particularly good". He commended only the cover illustration. The novel was the second title to be published by Compact Books (at 3s 6d), the other being Moorcock's *The Sundered Worlds*, which, incidentally, Colvin recommended.

High's future, as indicated by this trend in the short story market, lay in novels.

At that time Philip E. High was living in Canterbury, and holding down a bus-driver's job by day because "it gives him more time to write" (blurb of (20)). *Prodigal Sun* was his first novel, having been sold first successfully to the States. A contemporary photograph in *Nebula*'s "Writers Profile" showed him smoking a pipe in a rather rugged Kenneth Moore-ish fashion, and his expressed attitudes seemed to confirm that impression. "I'm a story-teller," he told an Autumn 1976 Radio Medway interview in a series on Kentish Authors. "I'm not a literary man". While in *New Worlds* he wrote: "As regards science fiction I have a simple and almost child-like philosophy - one likes the genre or one doesn't. Place me unshakably in the latter category. I am a die-hard" (19). He listed, as his major interests of the time "literature, psychology and drama, plus a ruling passion for cars and his eight-year old daughter Jacqueline" (blurb of (20)).

Yet the short story period was of value. Many of the ideas and pre-occupations to be expressed more fully in novel form first saw print in one or more of his 44 short stories published either in *SF Adventures*, *Nebula*, *New Worlds* - or the single appearance in *Analog*. And since then the novels have been issued with some regularity: *Invader On My Back* was written in 58 days while High worked on the night shift;

it was followed by *Time Mercenaries* in which antiquated defenders a thousand years out of date became the planet's only chance of defeating alien invaders; *No Truce With Terra*, in which an idyllic pastoral planet was invaded by "dimensional travelling" human armies; *Reality Forbidden*, featuring an entire chapter evolved from High's illogical childhood fear of an unused room in their home; and *Come, Hunt an Earthman* ("You may consider yourselves experienced hunters; many of you, no doubt, have hunted on many planets, but on this reserve you move into a new realm of hunting. Here there are no mindless monsters or charging carnivores, but a devious, intelligent and dangerous prey. Trophies won in this game reserve carry high prestige for they are acquired at considerable personal risk. There are reasons for this - the prey is out to get you before you get him" - (22)). At the time of writing two new novels are in the pipeline, *Fugitive From Time*, and one which develops ideas of psi faculties, called *Blindfold From The Stars*.

From the beginning the stories were never less than adequate, and at their best were tense and immensely readable. It could be argued that in many ways the novels failed to deliver the promise of the magazine work. *Speaking Of Dinosaurs* in particular is a poorly constructed narrative. The phrasing, and even the grammar fault with harring regularity; the awkwardly worded sentence: "He had forgotten that he had once regarded this creature as a crude machine but it was" is unfortunately not a unique example of poor construction. He also continually quizzes the reader: "A couple of hours to kill, what could he do?". The character sees a museum: "Hell, he hadn't been round one of those since he was a kid - why not?", the reader being left with the job of working out fitting replies before moving on to the next paragraph.

This, from a writer who had once built a story - "A School-room for the Teacher" - around the single line "the ship sat like a bronze arrowhead on a black outcropping of rock", a writer who once delivered evocative lines like: "a detonation which seemed to shake the planet to its foundations and set the metal buildings humming like tuning forks" (8); a writer who had coined neat descriptions like "the face of an irritable peanut" (20), a writer who quoted Keats in *Double Illusion*, Wilfred Owen's "Spring Offensive" and Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" in *No Truce For Terra*; a writer who even inserted a poem of his own (dating from the time of the barbed wire infested beaches of 1940) into *No Truce For Terra*. The poem translated amazingly well, retaining both metre and rhyme, into its German edition.

One of the better novels, *Sold - For a Spaceship*, pictured a people who had sheltered in safety while destruction raged above them. When they awoke and emerged from their places of refuge, the world had changed. Nothing familiar remained: plants, grasses, trees, all had changed beyond recognition, and they soon discovered that human beings were no longer the dominant species. There were other creatures, not only ready to dispute the point but well prepared to prove it. The world had, in fact, been bartered over their heads like so much real estate.

"We (science fiction writers) have on many occasions destroyed the entire planet," wrote High (19), "but our purposes are often misunderstood. Remember, please, the mainspring of our work is, what-would-happen-if? Worlds might collide, an alien race might attempt invasion. We are, in effect, reporters of a possible future and, as reporters it is our business to write the story". A wide-screen approach to the future, a Space Opera view perhaps. "A good story," he continued, "captures the imagination and if it is found necessary to explain it there is obviously something wrong" (19). He leaves no room for trendy obscurantism, open-endings or vignettised techniques. "I believe a story should have a beginning, a middle and an end," he told Radio Medway listeners. "The same applies to plays on TV, plays on the stage."

Yet, quietly and consistently, working within these self-imposed limitations, he has produced an impressive body of work: stories like "Project Stall", about the discovery of an extinct Martian civilisation that had been based on organic engineering. Its follow-up, "The Martian Hunters", featured perhaps his best literary invention, the thought-cubes which contained the incomprehensible

essence of Martian culture and ethics - and the effect of the thought-cubes on the central character, turning him into a strange hybrid of Martian and human. It was voted fourth most popular story of its issue, even if the espionage aspects of the story got in the way of the ideas until the reader was left with only the first stages of the transfiguration, and the full implications and possibilities of thought-cubes were left unexplored. Espionage and political manipulation also slowed the flow of ideas in *Prodigal Sun*, *Speaking of Dinosaurs* and *Butterfly Planet*.

Yet, at his best, he is able to deliver concise, workmanlike and memorable stories. "Infection", for example, a story - almost a parable - of the colonisation of Venus after the devastation of Earth. It had mildly ecological overtones, ending on the paragraph "perhaps in the body of the universe we aren't quite so big as we think we are ... just an unfilterable, sub-microscopic virus, a blight - an infection. Maybe, if we aren't careful they'll send a cosmic doctor to cure us".

You have been warned!

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- (30) *Those Savage Futurians* (1969)
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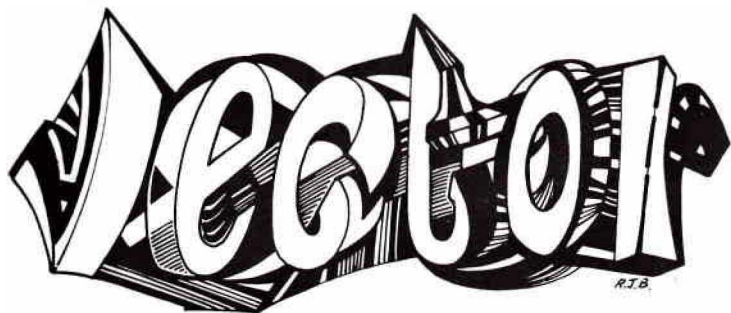
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