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Richard Cowper:
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Found In A Bathtub: Readers' Letters.

The INFINITY BOX: Reviews.

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Scheduled Contents for next issue: Article on and by Christopher M. Priest: John Bush's Guest Of Honour Speech, Coventry Convention 1977; "Samsa And Sensibility", an article on the short fiction of Thomas Disch by Christopher D. Evans and The Infinity Box Review Section (Frank Harbert, Peter Anthony, Ian Watson etc)

This issue is dedicated to Chris Evans, Friber's newest author.

"Thus, though the sacrifices have been considerable, it indeed not prohibitive, we have observed the innocent lying in our forks and held fast to our precious metaphor."

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An Interview with Richard Cowper

fool and reason . . ."

VECTOR:

You said in FOUNDATION 9 that you "realized early on in life that the ability to "escape" is but to exercise the divine faculty of the human imagination." Your books are original and, indeed, "escapist" in many senses. You've said that the first draft of a novel almost writes itself - that you can't wait to find out for yourself what happens next - but how much of the second draft has this conscious aim in mind, of producing something into which the sensitive reader can immerse?

Richard Cowper:

For the second draft I'm constrained to let the copywriter take over. The task is to clarify, to sharpen the writing, to give it more of a cutting edge. I'm mindful of Coleridge's wise observation: "Words are like pinheads, but more they are compressed the deeper they burn." But, even so, I'm really writing for myself rather than for any potential reader. My few attempts to "write for a market" have all been dismal failures. So perhaps the true answer to your question is: I try to create something into which I can escape!

VECTOR:

Then you don't consciously aim for communication?

Richard Cowper:

First and foremost I aim to please myself. Experience, in the form of some fifteen novels, has taught me that if I do this I usually contrive to please some other people too. There's just as well, for to write books which did not give me pleasure in the writing would be a grim sort of punishment and I'd very soon pack up writing in altogether. But having said that I feel bound to add that I am profoundly conscious that I am in the entertainment business where "those who live to please must please to live." Luckily I like entertaining.

VECTOR:

Your interest in constructing the minutiae of a story is obvious in the books of reference, the records, the place names. "The Harford Manuscript" is a example of this. What is at the root of your fascination with this form of story-telling, and are there any books or authors who you feel may have encouraged or influenced you in this respect?

Richard Cowper:

It stems, I believe, from an acute visual sense. In my mind's eye I really could see that ancient register in the Harford library and the vivid medieval manuscript in "The Custodians". And there's no doubt that I enjoy indulging my taste for looking up history in that way - I dare say I over-indulge it at times. But I can't honestly think of any writer who has consciously influenced me in this respect, unless, perhaps, it was M. R. James in his "Ghost Stories Of An Antiquary". Maude Faulkner and R.L. Stevenson may possibly have contributed their mite too.

VECTOR:

You produce all of your work in longhand, written in your distinctively neat script, and then have the final version typed. How did this manner of writing come about, and have you ever tried to change it?

VECTOR:

Peter Nicholls, in his introduction to your essay in FOUNDATION 9, lists upon one of the more noticeable aspects of your writing - the concentration upon the "dream state". It is echoed in many other writers in the sf genre, but you use it as a plot device (as in BREAKTHROUGH). How crucial do you feel the "dream state" is to literature, and to your own work in particular?

Richard Cowper:

Until Peter Nicholls drew my attention to it I hadn't been conscious that I was particularly fascinated by dreams. But he was right. I suppose that the reason lies somewhere in my conviction that we are all prisoners of our own ego and that our dreams offer us a temporary (and no doubt illusory) opportunity to escape. Certainly I believe that dreams are far more mysterious than Freud would ever allow, and the aspects of the "dream state" which fascinate me are precisely those which do not permit a mechanistic psychological explanation, a.e. pre-cognitive visions and so forth. They point a shadowy finger towards those elusive areas of the human spirit which have been the happy hunting ground of poets, artists and seers ever since Man first looked up at the stars and wondered.

VECTOR:

Your attitude seems very hostile to the "mechanistic" approach to life - do you ever feel that this works against you in your writing in that there is too little impulse to explain? Or is it, as I tend to suspect, a "liberating" factor?

Richard Cowper:

I certainly hope it is a liberating factor. Nevertheless I take your point that it could be said to work against me - particularly in s.f. where there seems to be a predilection towards trying everything up into neat rational parcels. Maybe I'm content to remain "in uncertainty, mystery, doubt, without any irritable reaching after

Richard Cooper:

It must seem very old-fashioned and quirky to write a s.f. (of all things!) with a fountain pen. But when I started out, all those years ago, writing books in longhand wasn't considered particularly odd or idiosyncratic. Besides, during the War, a pen and notebook were no sort of encumbrance, whereas a typewriter (that I began able to afford one) certainly would have been. The other aspect of the matter is, I suppose, the part of me which delights in drawing and painting. Writing neatly and legibly in longhand is a sort of art in that side of my creative nature.

VECTOR:

Can you describe your writing technique? How does idea become story? You told me a tale about Cutley and the mole in one of your fave posts about the old man and the boy. How did it all fit together?

Richard Cooper:

Aha! that conception in which the genesis of 'Piper At The Gates Of Dawn' crisscrossed, I hunted out my original note. This is what it says: 'The Story Teller's tale: Post-disaster story of old man and boy (apprentices) who wander the countryside as latter-day equivalents of medieval story-tellers. Tom, Tom the Piper's son.' I recall coming across that note in 1974 (it had been written about two years previously) and suddenly seeing a clear mental picture of a swamp, wooded valley; drifting clouds of rain; a swollen, pebbly river. I spent an hour devising the first sentence and then gave the tale its head. I know it sounds more than a little precious but the truth is I simply followed those two in my imagination, worked them, listened to them, and wrote it down. There was no question of struggling to get things into focus. From the second sentence the story unfolded itself as blight and clear as a 14th Century Book of Hours. I certainly didn't start off with the idea that Tom was doomed. That just happened.

VECTOR:

You seem to like to break your work up into various personas. There are even two Richard Coopers, one who writes comic sf stories and the other who writes about paranormal events in serious, compelling prose. What do you think it is that drives this schizophrenic desire to compartmentalise what you do? How much of it (especially the comic novels like CLOJNE, WORLDS APART and the forthcoming PROFUNDEUS) is simple inner compulsion, an outpouring of mood?

Richard Cooper:

I would dearly like to write an s.f. novel in which the disparate elements of wild comedy and stark tragedy are perfectly blended into a compelling whole. I think I came within striking distance of it (twice) in modestly in two of my 'straight' novels - A PATH TO THE SEA and PRIVATE VIEW. But so far, in my s.f. it has evaded me. I'm not sure why. So I think you are perfectly right in ascribing my comic potboilers to a 'simple inner compulsion' - far too strong for me to resist - to come to fictional terms with a world in which, to borrow a phrase from Pascal, 'men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness'.

VECTOR:

It has been remarked on that when writers get together they talk more often about money than they write - probably because each of them is so individually different in their approach to writing. But what is the essential difference in financial terms of writing sf?

Richard Cooper:

Well, here's an illustration. ONE HAND-CLAPPING and SHADOWS ON THE GRASS took me two years to write and have together earned me about £4,000 gross. ONE HAND was published in the States. Neither have yet appeared in paperback. If they do I might conceivably expect to push that total up to £6,000. THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS, on the other hand, has so far earned me about £10,000 gross (spread over 5 years) and will, I hope, go on earning me money for several years to come. It's really as simple as that. For s.f., there appears to be a steady and growing market, particularly on the Continent. My UK sales supply me with my bread; France, Germany, Japan as of yet the butter on it; hopefully the USA will come up with some jam to spread on the top. I have never been able to count on selling my work in the States where I am still regarded as a very English writer even though four of my novels have been made SF Book Club choices over there. I have actually had books rejected in America

on the grounds they were 'too literary'. But every so often they seem to discover me all over again, which is nice.

VECTOR:

You've talked to me about doing some more 'Colin Murray' novels, of taking a few years out of the sf genre and writing a few mainstream books. Is this yet possible, or do you think that the 'Cooper' persona will allow you to take such a break at present? If it will, what are your plans?

Richard Cooper:

It is simply a question of finance. By writing five or six novels in fairly quick succession I bought myself the time in which to write the two volumes of my autobiography. I enjoyed doing them and they earned me quite a lot of critical kudos, but from a financial point of view they were pure self-indulgence. Hopefully in another couple of years I'll be in a position to take a similar chance with a straight novel. I'd really like to do it because I have at least two such books clamouring to get themselves written.

VECTOR:

Between 1961 and 1967 you, in fact, had no novels published. What was happening in your writing and personal circumstances at that time which resulted in this hiatus?

Richard Cooper:

In 1960, by barter-giving everything we possessed, we were able to acquire an ancient house in Sussex. 'Ancient' is no exaggeration - even the modern bits were Elizabethan! It needed a lot of work done on it. This effectively knocked out a couple of years, though I did manage to fit in a fair amount of literary journalism - most of it ephemeral.

In 1963 I wrote my fourth Colin Murray novel (PRIVATE VIEW) which was rejected by Hutchinson on the grounds that it was pornographic (it wasn't). Next year I wrote BREAKTHROUGH and followed this up with PHOENIX in 1966. Had PRIVATE VIEW for MARS ALIVE as it was originally titled) been published in 1964, I think it quite likely that I would have stuck with 'straight' fiction for several more years. But nothing is ever that simple. The prosaic facts I've retold were really just the surface evidence of a lot of seismic activity on the subconscious level.

VECTOR:

Which personality traits do you feel have helped you most in accomplishing your desire to be a professional writer? How much of it was one persistence 'against the odds' and in the face of disability? And how much do you still question your own abilities as a writer? (Which also tends to - do you often suffer writers' blocks?)

Richard Cooper:

I suppose I'd have to put dogged independence at the top of the list. Rightly or wrongly I've always believed that I could accomplish almost anything in life, provided I wanted to do it badly enough. But I have never kidded myself that I could be a popular SF writer. If for no better reason than that I seem constitutionally incapable of following up to success. 'Son Of Clane' and 'Son Of Clane Meets The Monster From Another' will for ever remain among the great unmitigated comic classics of science fiction! As for questioning my own abilities as a writer, I do it all the time - up to the moment when I have to put pen to paper. Then, happily, I forget all that nonsense and continue to lose myself in the work in hand. I am probably fortunate, too, in that I have lots of other creative interests beside writing which I am able to indulge in on the side. This may well explain why (touch wood!) I have so far managed to avoid those black holes known as writers' blocks.

VECTOR:

In both of your autobiographical volumes, you have stated how much of a critical influence your father was. Can you explain in what manner his views affected the type of writer you became? Was his position as a celebrated literary critic a burden or a help in the early formative years?

Richard Cooper:

He made me set my sights very high when I was starting to write fiction, from plays to the ages at 17 to 25) and my chief aim was always to win his approval. I regard his judgement implicitly throughout my literary

approachability and, though I often resisted his criticism strenuously, in my heart of hearts I had to admit that he was right 90 per cent of the time. The one occasion when his judgement faltered and I chose to trust my own was when I knew I had finally learnt how to stand on my own two feet. The standards I absorbed from him have been of incalculable value to me ever since. But having named 'Wildfowl' I was not much help as far as getting into print was concerned. My father was an out-of-fashion and had no more Grosvenor Street amusements during the last ten years of his life that the connection was probably a positive disadvantage. Anyway, all my early work was written under pseudonyms. I adopted 'Murry' only after my father's death in 1957.

VECTOR:

What is your response to criticism, and how do you go about evaluating which voices you might listen to and which you can discard? And, has anything ever made you seriously contemplate giving up your aspirations as a writer?

Richard Compton:

There is a dearth of serious criticism in the s.f. world - for reasons which we needn't go into here. But it's a fact that the good critics have always been far rarer creatures than good writers. Even good reviewers are pretty thin on the ground.

The good critic is one who has a true - almost instinctive - sense of literary excellence, which has been acquired only proved during his voyages of exploration among a wide range of classic writing. He also has the ability to write well himself and the gift of communicating his enthusiasm to his reader. He must be able to convince that reader that he could substitute every one of his value judgements even though he lacks the space in which to do it. There aren't very many of those around today, are there?

Nothing has ever made me contemplate giving up writing.

VECTOR:

You've been well known to the generalist community as a critic. Can you recap upon the origins of your critical interest (including your role as English teacher) and your future plans in this regard?

Richard Compton:

Well, for seventeen years I earned my keep by teaching adolescents how to write English and how to appreciate works of literature - mostly the English classics. Doing it almost certainly taught me more than I ever taught my pupils. I approached the at least always from the point of view of an aspiring fellow practitioner and rejected whenever I found something superbly well done. As a result I'm now pretty deeply imbued with literature and it is bound to show up from time to time in my own writing. This doesn't worry me in the least, but it occasionally lays me open to attack from reviewers who seem to think that s.f. by its very nature should not aspire to any intellectual level much above the Neanderthal.

Such criticism as I have written in s.f. has usually been produced in response to editors' requests. I enjoy doing it but I find it hard work - much harder than writing fiction for instance. I have no immediate plan to write more, though, for the last couple of years, I have been toying idly with the notion of doing a couple of full-scale retrospective essays on the works of Ursula LeGuin and the early writings of Ray Bradbury. It would be an opportunity to communicate some of my own enthusiasm. Whether I'll ever get round to it is a different matter.

VECTOR:

You are an admirer of Ursula LeGuin's work, and your own *THE ROAD TO CORLAY* displays similar preoccupations (a long, timeless journey as an metaphor to drive towards conclusively, progress being misused in spiritual rather than its material sense). What do you look for in a work of fiction? Where does your enthusiasm lie, and on what does it focus?

Richard Compton:

First and foremost I demand that my imagination be fully engaged by the writer's vision. He (or she) must make his/her fictional perspective real to me. It has been said, most wisely, that a novelist's main task is to tell the truth as only a liar can tell it. We hail him; we dramatize; above all we select. And we succeed or

fail by means of the intensity with which we project the images, the ideas, the dramatic conflicts which go to make up our stories.

I suppose I would have to say that my own enthusiasm is kindled in direct proportion to the intensity of the imaginative experience I receive from the work. I want a novel to go on reverberating in my imagination long after I have put the book down.

VECTOR:

IN ONE HAND CLAPPING you expressed the joy that you used to receive when in "communion" with nature. If emerges in your work, this pantheistic streak, but just how vital is it?

Richard Compton:

Ah, now we're getting very close to what really makes me tick as a writer. It will not have escaped your heads that practically every book or story I have ever written - and that includes the comic stories - deals with moral issues of one sort or another. I have a very clear concept of right and wrong but I would be hard put to distil it into any ethical creed. And this 'moral landscape' - if I may call it that - is intimately bound up with what a rather snooty reviewer of *ONE HAND CLAPPING* called my 'pantheistic predilection'. Maybe it is because I live in London, in the shifting patterns of light and shade, in water, clouds, trees and hills, a sort of eternal absolute of



which I detect echoes and reflections in certain aspects of human behaviour - in love, innocence, generosity of spirit; and so on. I dare say that sounds nebulous to the point of absolute incomprehensibility. It does? Well, I tried my best.

VECTOR:

You have said that you often had to compromise 'to a point' to survive. What type of compromise do you regard making, and which do you find necessary in your writing?

Richard Compton:

Well, part of me agrees with Chesterton that 'anything worth doing is worth doing badly', but there is another part which insists that it's even better to do everything as well as one can. Several times in my life I have rejected the well-meant advice of publishers and agents to alter books I have written in order to make them more readily 'saleable'. In the long term I think I was right to do so. I cannot escape that a job of half a million or so copies is automatic proof of a book's excellence. Sales - of whatever kind - seem to me to have little or no bearing upon literary worth and it is that which I am chiefly concerned with. Naturally I would be delighted if one of my books happened to become a best-seller, but, as far as I am concerned, any such outcome would be wholly fortuitous.

VECTOR:

And which compromises, in a more general sense, do you have to make?

Richard Cooper:

Going into teaching when what I wanted most of all was to be a writer - that was a compromise. Teaching allowed me periods of up to ten weeks in the summer in which to write my novels. It also allowed me to bring up my family in modest comfort. Most important of all, it took the pressure off me. I could write to please myself. It did not matter to anyone except myself that I wrote very little money out of writing. The eventual outcome has, I think, been favourable in that I have been able to go on "doing my own thing" even though I am now a professional.

VECTOR:

This attitude of 'doing your own thing' seems to reflect itself in an overt hostility towards the sort of power-fantasy that is concerned with Galactic Conquest and social experimentation; that you have, in fact, parodied now in two books, *CLONE* and *PROFUNDIS*. Do you feel parody and satire are adequate tools against the blindness of this 'ends justifies the means' philosophy?

Richard Cooper:

In a word, 'no' - but they are the only tools at my disposal. If satire was sufficient in itself Joseph Heller's *CATCH 22* would have put paid to modern war, but, alas, it hasn't. The philosophy behind so much of it strikes me as being jargon and therefore, too often it is little more than odd recent power-fantasy - gut-wad-gimmie - which is, I suppose, the outcome of an attempt to project the capitalist business ethic into outer space. Yet much of the best of the post-thirty years has come against this idea, e.g. Black's *A CASE OF CONSCIENCE*, Miller's *A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ*, Dick's *THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE*, to name the first which spring to mind.

VECTOR:

As a recent review in *VECTOR* intimates, you have a strong sympathy for the work of George Orwell. How much do you feel that the search for an honest response to the world, which is at the core of his work, has to be re-stated by the writers that follow him? And just how relevant is he to today's world?

Richard Cooper:

Orwell has long been one of my heroes - along with Blake, Keats and Coleridge. They all have one thing in common - their massive contempt for cant and humbug. In Orwell's case this could be expressed as a passionate belief that the moral conscience of the individual human being was the most precious element of his humanity. I agree with that. More than that I love the man himself. When he died I felt a tremendous sense of personal loss even though I didn't suppose I'd exchanged more than a few minutes' childish conversation with him in my life. What I missed most of all was that passionate integrity he brought to everything he wrote. You must take the truth at all costs, he insists, while you have the breath left to do it. I do not think he was a great hero at all, but he was something far, far rarer - a great human spirit. I suppose I feel about him rather as Chabon feels about Ray Bradbury. While he is out there, sheltering us all, I feel able to grow to my own full stature. I wish I could believe that the kind of values he personified were flourishing somewhere in Fleet Street today. I see no sign of it anywhere.

VECTOR:

Do you feel that this intense sense of integrity is something Orwell termed 'decency' - is missing in our current social climate? Is it still possible to tell 'the truth' (however you wish to define that) - I'll use it here as an attempt to strip all the hypocrisy and compromises we are forced into by our social mores and, perhaps more important, is it possible to communicate anything that is such an attempt at honesty without falling foul of the labelling 'fantasy' or 'dreams' or, even being called an 'idealist' in the face of 'reality'?

VECTOR:

PIPER AT THE GATES OF DAWN is about the conquest of fear. But in the story - and in its setting in a Post-Flood world - you seem to

say that this process of liberation can only be accomplished once the present technological age has been completely destroyed, and a return to a more simple style of living achieved. Is this a streak of primitivism in you, or do you really feel that Mankind is 'lost' spiritually unless he gives up his present direction?

Richard Cooper:

Can there really be any question that Mankind has not lost his way spiritually? Today we are drowning in the backwash of 19th Century materialism - the turbulent wake the great scientific revolution left behind them. We need something to cling to, to have faith in, and all we are offered is a golden calf in the shape of the Great God G.M.P.: ever more sophisticated technology is the answer. For every problem technology solves it drops five others in its laps. The more technically sophisticated society becomes, the more vulnerable it is, and the more threatened humanity feels. Because we can measure things only in terms of money, of financial profit or loss, we grow as shadows. But I do not think that mankind is capable of 'giving up' his present direction. The whole house of cards is bound to come tumbling down about his ears. I think it will happen quite soon - probably in my own lifetime. Speculating on what may emerge from the ruins is one of the things that keeps me working in the field of F.

VECTOR:

Would you say you were a pessimist in this one respect? I feel the whole genre has a long way to run yet before it strengthens itself, and so think that it will all topple in our lifetime is perhaps an extreme view, even though it is within the scope of chance. When you read books like Voltaire's *CANDIDE*, written in 1758, and read of the 'Old Woman's Misfortunes', is our age really so different? Do you feel science makes any essential difference to the human condition?

Richard Cooper:

Well, obviously I hope it won't happen, but I'm very much afraid that it will. I see far too many contemporary parallels with the fall of Rome for my own peace of mind. And where are the signs that any sort of radical re-appraisal of the human situation (which alone might stem off disaster) is being made on a meaningful international scale? We are using up the Earth's resources which is just another way of saying that we are spending our dwindling capital at a rate which would have been all but unthinkable even thirty years ago: the global population continues to expand; our capacity for nuclear genocide increases with each year that passes; we are ruining our oceans, our atmosphere, and our social governments with a single-minded devotion to the task which is like a racial deathwish. What daring wishes our age from Voltaire's Age of Reason is precisely the sheer scale of our lunacy - that and a sort of numb acceptance of our own powerlessness to do anything about it. At least Voltaire believed he was capable of moulding public opinion - and indeed he did so to some extent through his influence on one or two enlightened despots - but remember that in the end he had to flee for his life.

VECTOR:

You have travelled about quite a bit in the last twenty years, but have always returned to have had an overstay to Cities. Do you think this is just the natural reaction of someone brought up in the country, or is it something else? It emerges, once again, in your books. The metropolis is seen as a sprawling, soulless machine full of automata, amongst whom the hero makes his way. This is very much linked to the last question - do you see Cities as a regressive rather than a progressive step?

Richard Cooper:

Some people love cities; others have a love/hate relationship with them. I am to a hate/hate relationship. Few of the great men who have sung the City's praises would recognise the megastates which pass under that title today. Paradise Athene and Dr Johnson's beloved London were mere villages compared to our grotesque sprawling megapolises. Like Hitler Black hated the way they work the country dry. In creating them we have lost everything and gained nothing. Who shall we blame? Is Carburist who was housed as 'machines for living in' (and, I suspect, saw men and women as the machines to live in them?) or all the 2nd and 3rd order architects and town-planners who, lacking their Master's genius, applied his

theories piecemeal in our Tower Hamlets and Turf Greens and their Continental equivalents?

Once upon a time towns and cities were organic creations, shaped by men for men to live in and constructed in the proportion of man's aspirations out of materials which were readily to hand. In them it was possible for men to feel overawed but not overwhelmed. Today's great cities are what? monsters: bottoms of ferro-concrete canyons: dotted with dingy cases of sub-standard housing and the odd, pathetic 'park', ankle deep in dog-shit. Well, yes, all right, I exaggerate, but not that much. I believe that the modern city oppresses the human spirit and dehumanizes those who are to pass their lives in such places. Taking a good look at the faces in a tube train during the rush hour is a salutary experience and, I think, a very frightening one.

VECTOR:

Cities are also, I feel, amazingly dramatic demonstrations of the fact that simple human values can survive in the midst of a totally dehumanizing process. I am forever amazed by the small gestures of kindness and understanding that still exist under the intense pressures



of City life. Do you think that Cities might, indeed, be one crucial step - viewed as it were from the vantage point of one of Stapledon's LAST MEN, for example - in human development; an intense 'shaping' exercise, preliminary to a shift in spiritual emphasis?

Richard Cowper:

It's a nice idea and, for all I know, you could well be right. I hope you are. But what you appear to be saying is that human relationships can survive in spite of the City when, to my way of thinking, they should surely be enriched because of it.

VECTOR:

Is there an actual blueprint in the modern world for 'Corlay'? Is it a place you know and have visited? And is there a plan to write another Corlay tale (and, if so, from what viewpoint, or is that

begging the question)?

Richard Cowper:

If by 'Corlay' you mean the castle set in Brittany which I mention in THE ROAD TO CORLAY then the answer is no - it is as physically immaterial as the Abbey of Hautaire in the CUSTODIANS but, like that ancient edifice it will no doubt prove to have certain features in common with places I have visited in France. If you mean the setting for the novel - the Somerset, Quantock Isle, Blackdown and so forth - then I suppose you could say they'd been extrapolated from a relief map and a general love of landscape for its own sake. Before writing THE ROAD TO CORLAY I spent a day driving around in the Quantock hills and amused myself by imagining what it would look like after the Deluge MkII. Mostly, though, I prefer to work from Ordnance Survey maps - giving a story a local habitation and a name seems to act as a prop to my imagination.

I certainly hope to write at least one more story in the sequence. I'm far from sure yet precisely what form it will take but I suspect it will be set partly in the year 3798 (PIPER AT THE GATES was ostensibly written in that year) and partly in the years 3018-3050. I should imagine it will have a multiple viewpoint but that will depend entirely on how the story develops as I am writing it.

VECTOR:

I know you have been asked to put together a collection of children's stories. Can you tell me a little about these (I believe they are ones you wrote many years ago in your apprenticeship), and your plans to add to them?

Richard Cowper:

They were (are) classical fairy tales in the Hans Andersen/Oscar Wilde vein. I think it unlikely that I shall add to them because I find it so difficult to recapture the mood (maybe the word should be 'innocence') in which I wrote them.

VECTOR:

Which begs the question - how much does an exposure to various styles of writing change your own? How soon do you feel you had found your own voice? I am conscious, for example, that THE GOLDEN VALLEY is written in what is basically the same tone and quite certainly by the same person as the author of THE ROAD TO CORLAY, but where, do you feel, have the developments occurred? You mentioned to me that you are more and more conscious, as the years go by, of the recurrence of certain images and phrases. Is it simply a matter of a growing awareness of the process involved?

Richard Cowper:

I found 'my own voice' quite early on, but it took me a long while to recognise it. During the war I wrote a lot of short stories and some of them were at least as good as anything I could write today, but overall the quality was extremely variable. I was peppering the target with buckshot. It brought me one or two bulls-eyes, some near misses, and lots of failures. Then, in about 1954-55, I finally learnt how to trust my own intuitive judgement. I discovered that I could pick out the phoney elements in my own prose. That was the real watershed for me. I was

certainly helped on my way by having to spend so much time studying the Classics of English Literature and, in the early days, by consciously imitating the styles of various writers I admired. This taught me a great deal about how to use the medium to the best effect.

I suppose it's inevitable that as you get older you become more self-aware. Ideally a writer should be able to see everything afresh each time he sets out to write a new story, but I don't really think it's possible. Even a great natural genius like D. H. Lawrence repeats himself now and again in his later works, and if he does it how can we, infinitely less gifted mortals, hope to escape? But just being aware of the problem helps. So does iron self-discipline in the form of a steadfast refusal to be satisfied with second best.

VECTOR:

Has a closer contact with the sf world brought any noticeable change

In your writing, or your attitude to your writing? What, for example, do you look for in an novel, and has that basically changed from twenty years ago, say?

Richard Compton:

One positive, practical result is that I have been writing the occasional s.f. short story or novella. This would certainly not have happened had I not been invited to attend a *Milford* conference by Jim and Judy Blich in 1972. I wrote "The Custodian" because I had an unpublished m/s to take along to the second *Milford* conference in 1974.

I have never been an ambitious discoverer of s.f., and I probably read rather less now than I did in the '50's. It tend to wait until my friends in the s.f. world say "You really must read this - it's smashing!" It doesn't happen that often. Occasionally I will be tempted by a review or will buy a new novel by a writer I admire simply because I have liked something he or she has written in the past.

For the rest I've said on more than one occasion that I do not regard s.f. as being different in kind from other forms of fiction, though I'm fully aware that there are a lot of writers in the field who disagree with me. They lay great stress on the ideas. It is the sheer brilliance of these ideas, their malotru, which does, in fact, make s.f. into a different species of fiction from any other. Perhaps it is my upbringing which prompts me to wonder whether they are not lauding the idea at the expense of the well-known and time-worn staples of good 'straight' fiction (viz. language, character, plot, etc.) simply because 'ideas' are the things they themselves are best at.

The problem, as I see it, is crystallised in E.M. Forster's dictum: "Only connect..." The ideas in s.f. must be made imaginatively real to the reader, often him using his identification, and this can only be done through the writer's skills in characterisation, description, dramatization and so forth. Otherwise his reader would be better off getting the ideas straight from a text book. In my own view I suppose I'd have to refer you back to that earlier question, when you asked what qualities I looked for in a work of straight fiction. As far as I'm concerned they are no different for s.f.

VECTOR:

You talked (in FOUNDATION 9) of compiling a list of the thirty most influential books you had read up to 1960. That list has obviously changed a little. What sort of books have impressed you over the last ten years, and where do you stand in literature currently in?

Richard Compton:

I wrote that piece for FOUNDATION less than ten years ago, so there's bound to be something of an overlap. Where shall we start? Solzhenitsyn's *CANCER WARD* figures on in my imagination as does Garcia Marquez's *ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE* - two novels totally different from each other and totally beyond my own range. Non-fiction brings in Penzance's *ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE*, Gregory Gossard's *THE REVOLT OF THE MASSES*, Schumacher's *SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL* and A GUIDE FOR THE FRUSTRATED, Basil Hall Henrywood's *THE SIXTH SENSE* and THE INFINITE MIXED, Pablo Neruda's *SELECTED POEMS*, Ursula LeGuin's *WILD ANGELS*, some stories by Babel and others by Borges - I could go on. As it is I've probably left out someone who ought to be there.

Specifically in the s.f. field I enjoyed Chas. Prater's *A DREAM OF WESSEX*, Brian Aldiss' *THE MALACIA TAPESTRY*, Alan Garner's *RED SHIR*, Fred Pohl's *GATEWAY* and at least three of the essays in Peter Nicholls' *EXPLORATIONS OF THE MARVELOUS*.

VECTOR:

You used to write poetry in your 'youth'. Do you still try to express certain ideas in verse?

Richard Compton:

Not any more. Such poetry as I write now goes into my prose.

VECTOR:

Do you subscribe to the view that s.f. as a genre, is closer than any other to poetry, in that it is image intensive?

Richard Compton:

Some writers are better than others at handling images and a few of those writers happen to write sf. But that doesn't really make sf any more 'poetic' than straight fiction, does it? Graham Greene handles images as well as any writer alive today but so far as I know he has written only one or two stories that could be claimed as sf. Yet, having said that, I think I know what you're getting at. I have detected in certain sf writers a respectable tendency to wallow in purple prose - to pile on the emotive adjectives and swoon around drunkenly in over space. This leads some misguided people to believe they are in the presence of fine poetic writing, but what they're really getting is a lot of self-indulgent, over-slippery mush.

VECTOR:

I believe you have been involved in several amateur dramatic productions. Can you enlarge upon that and intimate where you rather lie in the theatre?

Richard Compton:

I've always enjoyed acting and producing but it is terribly time- and energy-consuming and I've given it up since I left the teaching profession. I suppose a lot of novelists have something of the actor's attitude in them. My favourites among contemporary dramatists are Tom Stoppard and the other Peter Nichols (one N.).

VECTOR:

What are your tastes in music and art? And do you still paint?

Richard Compton:

Musically speaking I am a near dilettante, but I suppose you could say my tastes - such as they are - tend to the classical. I adore Chopin and have done ever since I was a teen-ager. I revere Mozart, most of Beethoven and Schubert. I find Bach a bit cold (I told you I was an ill-theorist). I enjoy lots of others too and I like listening to guitar music - Beano and Williams TOGETHER is a great favourite. I find that music warms my often-muddled soul and sometimes induces in me moods which I can encapsulate in stories or books. Pop music leaves me cold, or does most Jazz.

In painting I am by no means illiterate. There are (have been) fine artists on both sides of my family so I dare say the odd gene got passed along the line. I could have gone to Art School instead of to University and for years I regretted my choice. I no longer do so. My favourite period is, I think, the whole of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th. I start with the English Topographical School and go right on up through the Impressionists to the futurists. After that it just breaks down into brilliant individuals. I will draw and paint from time to time but not so much as I should like to. Painting taught me how to see.

VECTOR:

Have you any great unfulfilled ambitions in your writing? You've mentioned that Golding's *THE INHERITORS* is the 'only sf novel I would love to have written myself' - have you ever attempted anything that was of great variance to your own natural way of writing, and, if so, what was the result?

Richard Compton:

I made that remark about *THE INHERITORS* because I felt (and still do feel) that it is one indistinguishably fine sf novel that I might - just might - mind you - have been capable of writing myself. I could never conceivably have written *THE LORD OF THE FLIES* much as I admire it.

I suppose that remark about it is just what it has always been, namely to write fine novels. By that I mean novels in which, at it were, I continue to put the beat of the human heart on to the printed page - to make the reader endure and enjoy the whole power of human experience through the medium of my imagination. If I am to succeed it can only be by means of such technique as I have by now acquired - and (hopefully) mastered - during my nearly forty-odd years' apprenticeship in the art. I am fully in agreement with the French critic who avowed that style is the man himself. I also draw consolation from Pascal's remark: "When we are a distinct entity, we are embarrassed and delighted; for we expected to see an other, and we find a human being."

Questions posed for VECTOR by David Wingrave, February 1979.

The Rest Is Dreams; the work of RICHARD COWPER

by David Wingrove

In a genre in which emphasis is laid upon the innocence of the idea, it is all too often the case that the simplest measures of literary excellence are neglected. It is simply literature, and scarcer still are recognisable characters. It is a lack that has often been commented upon and which is commonly excused by the supposed excellence of a well-plotted story, an innovative concept, an established reputation. This is not to say that there is a total absence of standards within the genre, simply that the plethora of third-rate material is wont to depreciate the achievements of those few writers who are consciously striving to write to the very limits of their literary means (inconsiderable capabilities).

Any statement about the art of genre is bound to merit with the stain of generality, but it does seem that between the chilled, often indifference of some writers and the cloyingly genial nostalgia of others, there is very little genuine compassion. This would seem to be contrary to the lack of recognisably 'human' characters (I'll ignore the claims to avoid over-complicating matters). It would also account for the lamentable dearth of an honest novel tone in so much of the real thing. It is, I suppose, only my own bias but I, like Mr Elliot before me, feel that literary considerations cannot be divorced from moral ones when considering the worth of a piece of writing (1). Thus I am drawn to those writers who use the undoubtedly attractive landscape of art to explore their own personal moralities.

These writers fall into two camps: those who approach the moral issue by means of the intellect (an approach tempered by the emotional) and those whose approach is instinctively emotional (and, of course, tempered by the intellect). Aldrich, Ballard and Dick are notable examples of the former group, whose styles lend themselves to an objective focus that achieves its moral end by providing the reader with the perspective of distance: the view through the microscope. The latter group would include writers such as Dick, LeGuin and Cowper, whose deep-felt involvement with their characters provokes an instinctive moral empathy in the reader. The distinction is that between observing and participating, a simple matter of immediacy.

Richard Cowper is a compellingly immediate writer and it is unsurprising that he should have entered the art genre 'from without'. He is one of the rare breed in it, whose habitual concentration upon character, often to the denigration of idea, justifies an examination in more general, literary terms than normally granted a strictly art author. In that respect I intend to look at the various literary personas of John Murry: Colin Murry, the mainstream novelist; Colin Middleton Murry, the autobiographer; and Richard Cowper, the

In the second volume of his autobiography, Colin Murry tells of his first two abortive attempts to break into print. The first, *BEFORE THE SNOWS* was finished but never submitted for publication. The second, *TIME TO RECOVER* died in embryo. But it was only a brief while after this, in 1954, that he produced *THE GOLDEN VALLEY*, which was eventually accepted by Hutchinson and published in 1958. (2) (3)

The first thing to say of *THE GOLDEN VALLEY* is that it possesses an immediacy of style that typifies Colin Murry's writing. The wistful, adolescent love story about which the book is concerned is told from a first-person narrative viewpoint throughout and in a tone which is, curiously, recaptured only in the two volumes of autobiography and in *PRIVATE VIEW*, the most recent Colin Murry novel (4). The mood

of lost innocence and the sense of irreversibility inherent in the story of the narrator, Tony, make this one of Colin Murry's most sensitive books. It is highly readable, and even at this stage in the author's development there is the tendency, seen later in maturity, to let the dialogue carry much of the burden of plot exposition.

At the time of the book's publication, comparison was made to Alain-Fournier's *LE GRANDE MEAULINES* (5) and there are, without doubt, parallels. In each the elusive period of adolescence is evocatively drawn, and each has its own sense of ineffable loss. It is, perhaps, the likeness of *THE GOLDEN VALLEY*, indicative of its author's insistence that the reader should be in there participating, rather than outside observing as in the case of Fournier's narrator, Saurat - that the reader should become, in a sense, *Meaulnes* rather than his passive and observant friend - that separates these books. As it is, both books moved me considerably, recapturing, at each end, something extremely precious in their pages.

THE GOLDEN VALLEY was followed in 1960 by *RECOLLECTIONS OF A GHOST* and in 1961 by *A PATH TO THE SEA* (6). *A PATH TO THE SEA* has the same raw honesty of emotion that was a crucial part of *THE GOLDEN VALLEY*. A switch to third-person narrative does not affect the intensity of the novel nor detract from its immediacy. To my mind, however, the importance of this novel is not that it is a progression in literary technique from its predecessors (it is, quite definitely, a far more accomplished piece of work, the prose is Orwell's term - a window through which we can perceive the raw instance of the characters' thoughts). Or, as Colin Murry himself puts it in the novel, "all business down", but that it states themes and discusses moral issues that are later to become the core of Richard Cowper's science fiction.

In the story *Michael Rogat*, a young student in his twenties, meets and falls in love with his professor's wife, Mary Forster, more than ten years his senior. Their affair and its tragic culmination is vividly described. In this, as in all of his best work, there is an artist's eye at work, observing the minutest detail and noting its importance in the overall scheme. The love affair is delicately constructed, a carefully choreographed development of mood that builds through an accumulation of impressions to a 'moment of recognition' where the eyes of lover and beloved meet and acknowledge their commitment to each other. This 'moment of recognition' is a crucial factor in many of Colin Murry's books, a moment when the characters are lifted from a mundane state of existence into a state of hyper-awareness. Love is one of the catalysts and another (7).

But, this again, there are several other interesting things in this book that I would like to pause to examine, if only briefly. They demonstrate quite clearly how the predilections of Colin Murry, budding mainstream writer, are not so different from those of Richard Cowper, experienced science fiction author.

A PATH TO THE SEA begins with a pre-cognitive dream and ends with a naked man being washed up on the Cornish coast, the latter incident almost a direct parallel with the ending of *THE ROAD TO CORLAY* Richard Cowper's recent novel. The sense of 'greenness' after death and the 'aura' of the landlady, Mrs Survey, (later about Michael and Mary are other elements that were to be developed in the first three 'Richard Cowper' books. In *A PATH TO THE SEA* these elements are peripheral; they are alluded to as notions, feelings, thoughts and dreams. It is to Richard Cowper that we have to look to see the dreams become plot elements in their own right. This process of 'making



[Rural] dream symbols is, essentially, one definition of it [8], and the movement of the dream elements from the wings to center-stage, (so become actual things in the fiction, explored in their own right) mark the creation of Richard Cowper. But this process is embryonic in *A PATH TO THE SEA*, more noticeable, perhaps, in retrospect, but still evident as a disturbing undercurrent.

"Perhaps they didn't sense the insubstantiality of their dream and knew it for what it was, but that knowledge must itself have seemed an alien thing, a betrayal of the truth which they discovered upon each minute of the day. Even when they spoke of the existence from which they had escaped, they spoke as travellers speak of far-off lands which they once visited long ago, where things were done differently, and all seemed inconsequential, strange as some half-remembered dream." (9)

Before leaving this novel to examine the genesis of Richard Cowper there is another aspect of this novel that is perhaps just as important as the aforementioned undercurrents of dream and "recognition".

"I suppose what I value most in people is generosity - not in the money sense - but a sort of willingness to give, to share. So many people spend their lives putting up fences, building themselves barricades. I suppose they're afraid without really knowing what it is they're afraid of." (10)

It is the first open statement of this kind in Colin Murray's *Parables*; that biting fear is the motivator of human action. This notion is consistent with the character, Michael's search for truth and moral honesty. This, indeed, is where Colin Murray's own morality is firmly anchored. Michael is not condemned for his sucking ditty of Professor Foster (who he both admires and loves and who, quite certainly, reciprocates these feelings) just as Tony Dawson is not judged and loved - wanting for his adultery in *PRIVATE VIEW*. The moral laws he makes himself however to do with sexual codes but with notions of behaviour. It has to do with essential honesty. To be open, to care, to share - these are enough. It is embodied in the single, fragile character of Michael here. Later, in *CORLAY*, the concept is widened to embrace a whole sect. In both cases, whether by coincidence or conscious design, there is the same contribution to be - made to nature - a body to the sea.

The first three "Colin Murray" novels are intensely visualized and no doubt cast their author much in terms of emotional commitment. In the first three "Richard Cowper" novels (produced after an hiatus of six years) there is a sense that the reins have been loosened, that the author has withdrawn to reconsider his stance. Perhaps it is simply that while the fabric of social normalcy held in the late Fifties and early sixties it was possible to write as "Colin Murray", but as the hectic present became a reality in the mid-sixties it was no longer possible to approach the moral issues in any other than science fictional terms. They are lighter books than the ones that preceded them and in them, as I have already intimated, the dream state becomes concrete, the notion materialized.

BREAKTHROUGH was the first of these early Cowper novels, its contemporary setting allowing a solidly recognizable backdrop for a story that drifts into the realms of the unfamiliar. Using Swift's poem, "The Fall of Hyperion" as a starting point, Cowper makes the Sky Children of the poem an actuality, attempting throughout the book to make their presence felt through the minds of Jimmy (our protagonist/first-person narrator) and Rachel. This device is to be used again in *THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS* and *THE ROAD TO CORLAY*, the out-of-body experience reversed to let a "perceiver" share the vision of the mind. It is a single aspect of Richard Cowper's approach to paranormal phenomena. Jimmy is the first of an line of protagonists: the young and curious teacher who has a special gift (of a paranormal kind), who drifts into a relationship with a young girl (several years his junior and finds his grasp of "real life" eroded and replaced by another. *BREAKTHROUGH* sets the archetype, and it finds its best expression in *THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS* with the fascinating Calvin Johnson. There is not enough time to deal with each single case, and so I'll concentrate on the sensitive Mr. Johnson later in this essay.

BREAKTHROUGH is also important for its connection with *THE ROAD TO CORLAY*, for in the "concretization" of paranormal - themes via the Encyclopaedia-Visual Converter and through the person of Peter Klomer the two books share a common background. *BREAKTHROUGH*

is set in the recognizable, civilized world - an extension of the world in which Colin Murray's novels are set. But between this yet-tense and yet-comprehensible world and the pre-flood/post-flood scenarios of *THE ROAD TO CORLAY* lies a huge leap. It is still possible in the world of *BREAKTHROUGH* to achieve individual solutions to problems, to make simple plans for a determinable future. By the time *THE ROAD TO CORLAY*, there is only the possibility of a more simple existence after the holocaust. In fact the change in emphasis is to begin with his very next novel, *PHOENIX*, but that is moving ahead before exhausting the attractions of Cowper's first offering.

It is surprising that with the change in emphasis from "the natural affecting the specific" to "the unnatural affecting the general" (yet another tentative definition of it) that is inherent in this switch to the y-mesem, the "moment of recognition" should switch from the synchysis of recognised love to the far more intense (if less emotive) recognition of self. It is something that occurs again and again in the Cowper books, what Richard Cowper himself seems seeing through the eye and not just with the eye. The idea of a "third eye" or "inner eye" is implicit in this act of self-recognition. It is or almost characterizes the pre-requisite of a Richard Cowper hero that he should be "different" in a way that is not immediately recognizable, even to himself. Jimmy Haverill displays this throughout *BREAKTHROUGH*, trying to come to terms with something that even he finds laughable and incredible. But when he does come to terms with it he no longer suffers from the "blank mixings" of a creature, moving about in worlds not realised (11) but becomes excitingly alive and aware. The visual and emotional immediacy of the story and the narrator's own incredulous response to the events breaks down any hostility on the part of the reader to what is, in its terms, unfathomable thematic mystic and makes the fantastic denouement, where the "breakthrough" of the title is made by the Sky People, Arcton and Mosler, credible on a fictional level.

"Again and again throughout that intimate journey I touched Rachel's forehead with my fingertips, and each time it was like hearing a low child whimpering soundlessly in the night." (12)

The fantastic happens, it comes with and assimilated. Once the dream has become real it then fades again and life goes on normally. It can still be set aside and forgotten in time, last Arcton, adrift in the mind of Rachel, made part of a nightmare long past. It is possible in *BREAKTHROUGH*, but in *PHOENIX*, the book that follows, the process is taken a stage further, the umbilical cord of the dream state stretched a little thinner, a little tighter.



PHOENIX displays the second line of Richard Cowper's preoccupation: the young man who is still within the educational system as the tale begins, a "misfit" in certain respects or, as Bond, the young man of this story puts it, "a throwback, a genuine freak. I'm the last romantic... My spiritual home is the eighteen hundreds" (13). Like his older counterpart, his "difference" from others is something purely internal, something he only recognizes, if at all, recognizes. In this story his internal difference is made manifest by allowing him to escape his own time (by means of suspended animation) and emerge in a simpler future world where he is evidently different from all others.

If **BREAKTHROUGH** displayed certain affinities in theme to the more recent **CORLAY**, **PHOENIX** is as near to a 'day run' as could be wished for. Bard is tired of his own age (2325 AD) and, following on unsuccessful love affairs with an older woman, he goes to take 'SA' for a period of three years – until he obtains his majority and comes into his inheritance. This is all conveyed in the first 40 pages of the novel, ending as the needle sinks into Bard's arm and with his feeling that he has made a grave mistake.

Part two of the book opens lyrically, and it is immediately obvious that this is a singular world from the one we have left only a few pages back: more barbaric but with a charm that is undeniable. It is a world that is two thousand years on, that has suffered a devastating plague and reverted to barbarism, to a culture that is at one and the same time attractive and repulsive. There are genuine spiritual values alive in the world once again, but there are also regressive forces counterbalancing this. There is the brotherhood of The Great Maker, the Inquisition of his age, preventing unorthodox thinking, innovation and the threat of reversion to the old ways of technological progress. There is a certain amount of sympathy for its aims, but none for its means, and this story is ultimately that of the triumph of individual values over dogma, the ever-present moral streak in all of these

The society Bard enters is a mixture of the medieval and the Roman, classical in its structure (the Ten Cities with their tributaries and overseers, legions and slave culture) but with romantic undertones present in the mysterious sects, the sense of primordial natural symbolism inherent in the religion of The Great Maker (more than in **CORLAY** where 'The Church Affluent', with its Black Bishops, is tinged with even hostility, its dogmatism tempered by the streak of socialism inherent in its religion). There is still room within this society for a good man to thrive and achieve a sense of spiritual enlightenment. This perhaps is the greatest difference between this novel and the later **CORLAY**. The latter sets out the issues in a more allegorical manner, defines things more readily as good and evil (though admitting the intermediate states) and is thus amorally more powerful. But in detail the books have some remarkable similarities. Bard flees from Andreus Kemp in **PHOENIX**, the older married woman who has rejected him, and finds himself tended by his doppleganger, Mithey, as he wakes in the future. In **CORLAY** there is Rachel in the present and her doppleganger, Jane in the post-laid future. It is an image which, in both cases, emphasises the dream state. And yet there are dreams within these dreams. The characters believe they are dreaming at first, but in the course of the story it is proved to them that they are not, this undermines our own disbelief, our innate hostility to the events related, much in the same way as he undermines our reluctance to accept the idea of the paranormal. And when Mithey looks into Bard, it is similar to that moment in **CORLAY** when Jane looks into the mind of Thomas of Norwich and sees the fugitive figure of Carver and 'the Old Days before the Drowning'. Bard, survivor of the Plague is resurrected after being 'buried'. Carver, survivor of the Flood, returns from drowning. But whereas Bard is given the choice to return to his own age and change it all, Carver/Thomas has no such choice, for the sea demands a body. In **PHOENIX** it is Bard and Mithey who eventually leave to journey to Aetharis; in **CORLAY** Jane makes the journey alone to Corlay. It emphasises that the card has not yet been broken, the irreversible choice made: the fantastic can still be stimulated and 'normal' life resumed.

PHOENIX is the best written of these first Cooper novels, its fluency much more evident in the second part of the book, as if Richard Cooper felt more at home in this less crowded future world, echoing Bard's feeling that 'I was always out of tune with my own age, which is, I suppose, the reason why I'm here now...' (14). In many ways it is a style of writing that is not to emerge in his writing until 'Piper At The Gates Of Dawn' and **CORLAY**, pregnant with imagery and as vivid as a cinematic still.

"For one impossible moment he seemed to be floating suspended in the quiet air above his own body, and then her eyes were holding him and a miraculous stillness had descended upon him like warm summer rain. Her eyes seemed to have become two enormous windows through which he could see the whole world turning like a grey-green jewel in the darkness of eternal night..." (15)

Here, in **PHOENIX**, there is no real solution to society's problems, only individual solutions. It is left to **CORLAY** to extend this question

to society in general and approach the 'conquest' of fear. Here Bard has his Mithey, which is enough; the White Bird is a later development.

The possibility of changing events, of altering the course of history by returning to the Past has often been explored in SF. Bard thus has the opportunity in **PHOENIX** and decides to stay with the woman he loves, who carries his child, his future. In **DOMINO** this idea of altering the Past is used as the central plot element, Christopher Blackburn is in the same character mould as Bard, a young man engaged in taking his A Levels who gets involved in Astral Meetings and apocalyptic and finds the whole matter escalating. He is, of course, 'different' in a way in which he cannot recognize. His interest in genetics and historic reactions (DNA inhibition), in one timeframe, to lead to a system of genetic programming and thus to a future society where a master-slave power structure has developed. Elements of this future society compel him to try to prevent this and what was at first familiar and closely becomes ominous and highly sinister as the story develops. As a device it is as effective as the landing of the Martians on Marsell Common, and we are, once again, led gently from passive inactivity to credulous acceptance of the situation. Christopher's feat is more firmly placed on the ground at the start of this tale; he is a sceptic whose attitude to the whole cannot be briefly summarised: 'But it's just plain gibberish, like table-levitating and ectoplasm. This is the 20th Century AD, not BC.' (16). His eventual acceptance of the 'reality' of the events that are overwhelming him is accompanied by a recognition of the moral issues involved:

"A society will arise in which all humans are programmed for specific tasks and ruled by a self-perpetuating tyranny. There will be slave-masters and the slaves; the living and the dead. Humanity, as you understand it, will cease to exist. The depths of our degradation are beyond imagination. For us the concentration camps of the twentieth century would be a paradise. We are the damned." (17)

It is noticeable that certain ideas are becoming slowly more articulate. "We are the damned" is an indictment of Marley's hedonistic "Brave New World" which is, for all its spiritual poverty, at least pleasant to live in. It is nearer Orwell's vision of the future a book stamped on a human face again and again. There is also the realisation that reality could be "no more than a consensus of opinion as to what was real" (18). It seems almost as much a revelation to the author as it is in the character, the development from an either/or position to a stance where "maybe the 'reality' was illusion". The robot and rational and distant of scientific concepts that Christopher exhibits in his novel, his adherence to the viewpoint that sees the Cosmos as a "super-sophisticated machine set", is to become the material of Richard Cooper's next science fiction work, **CLONE**, but in the interim there is a fourth Colin Murray novel, **PRIVATE VIEW**.

If the first three Cooper novels lacked anything, it was the sense of rounded emotional immediacy. **PRIVATE VIEW**, written some years before it was published in 1972, is compulsive from the very first page. Its naked pain unqualified in any of the other books. Once again there is the first-person narrator, this time Tony Braydon, whose penetrating self-honesty involves the reader on the most primal of levels. It achieves an emotional pitch after just ten pages that most books simply fail to reach. There is nothing 'special' about Tony Braydon and the only inexpressible things that happen to him are those sensations of ungraspable perception that occur to us all from time to time. He is a young teacher, passionately involved with life and the simple acts of living, possessed of a loving wife and a beautiful daughter, and enjoying his job as an art teacher. Then, without preamble, he loses it all as his wife and daughter are killed in a car crash. In four sensitively realised sections the author evokes the emotional realities, stark and often absurd. It is still my favourite place of his writing and begs us as do the other Colin Murray novels the non-critical question 'did it make you cry?' My answer is yes. It is genuinely moving and, if emotional honesty embarrasses you, highly embarrassing. In all of his novels there are numerous 'near observations' that create a definite mood, the emotional style of this particular author, but here they are highlighted, brought to their full potential. It is not romance, nor melodrama; it is all dictated with a subtle numbing realism. The swift transition from cold rationality to passion, instinctual action is totally believable, as is the consequent reaction from humour to tragedy and the sense of reality being whisked out from under the narrator's feet and then just as suddenly replaced, like a motorist's clock. And in spite of the superficially depressive choice of subject matter this is a very positive book, emphasizing that one can come to terms with tragedy (realising that Jane learns in **THE QC AD TO CORLAY** and, having come to terms with it, surmounts it).

PRIVATE VIEW also illustrates another consistency in John Murry's writing, whether as Colin Murry or as Richard Cowper; his observation of young children:

"For me she was like that mirror in the fairy tale: through her I saw things come and go. Some I remember clearly, hundreds I must have forgotten, but she never remembered any. ... I suppose the very act of remembering entails an awareness of detachment, a sense of looking in from the outside, and she was always on the inside, living it, being the things she did, the things she saw. And now she's dead! I have to write it down, to see the words on the paper, to convince myself yet again that it really is so. It just doesn't make sense. Light doesn't 'die' when the candle's blown out - it's going on somewhere. And what is 'death' anyway? Or 'life' for that matter? There have been times when I've been absolutely convinced that it's all some fantastic illusion worked with invisible mirrors. It was knowing Sue that first put the idea into my head, and then Mandy brought it back again. I mean she quite obviously didn't see the world I was seeing. Sometimes when I've been watching her I've felt I'm travelling on a course precisely parallel to life but a couple of paces to one side, and that between me and the real thing is a sky-high fence." (19)

It is another illustration of the author's mistrust of perceived reality; sensing that with the loss of innocence comes a distancing from 'the real'.



In dealing with an author's work in order of publication it is often noticeable how certain novels which, whilst written prior to other published works, do seem to appear 'at the correct time'. Thus it was that Richard Cowper's next two sf novels, KULDESAK and TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS were both still 'doing the rounds' when CLONE was brought by Gollancz. (20). It is an exercise in letting off steam, not only at bureaucratic madness and present technophilic trends, but also at the sacrosanct clichés of sf itself. It marks an abandonment of any familiar trappings and throws the reader headfirst into the Candide-like tale of Alvin, an innocent of unnatural virtue. He is cleverly described in the early pages as having "an expression of near-idiotic bliss on his round guileless face" and is told (and takes to heart) "now you be good... and leave the others to be the smart cookies" (21). As he stumbles through the various processes that lead him to the discovery that he is part of a four-man gestalt, clones from a single egg, the reader is led through numerous comic episodes that are genuinely funny. In a world where power-politics lead to sinister experiments in social manipulation (riots in Hyde Park, where the Ministry For Procreation finds new means of weeding out dissidents), where high Government officials make deals with guerrilla leaders that are financially beneficial for both sides and where 1984-style surveillance is commonplace, Alvin keeps his moral virginity intact and survives to become a super-elderly freak with enormous paranormal powers. It is a romp that is not without its poignancy and it hits its satiric targets, laying certain attitudes open to scorn, demonstrating the buffoonery behind the apparent menace and the threat behind the apparently absurd.

It is a story about moral corruption in an over-populated world lacking in spiritual values; a world that has created intelligent apes and organisations to help people kill themselves (the Samaritans); that sees people as units to be experimented upon, where the Minister of Sociology can watch an experiment in mass slaughter and comment "I usually find it helps to think of it simply as high-grade animal protein". It engenders the thought that subjects like this are so horrific that they can only be approached in this satiric manner.

The comic strengths of the book are many: its riotous sending-up of terrorist organisations through the U.A.B. (United Ape Brotherhood); the everpresent undercurrent of sexuality that embraces various combinations of Ape/Human/Machine; the coincidences that pile up like rotting rubbish in a strike-torn city; the perpetual vigilance of machines that monitor conversations for nuance/inflection/sematology. These things are shamelessly de-bagged and on occasion after occasion in CLONE situations develop where various of these factors interrelate with hilarious results (my own favourite being the fate of the ape 'spy', Pinkerton with Hortense, and the resultant sematological analysis of the sounds emitted)(22).

It was a successful experiment and did more for Richard Cowper's career than the previous three novels, and it is only with his most recent book, PROFUNDIS, that he has returned to this approach. But whilst CLONE was to bring him immediate recognition in the genre, it was more important for the fact that it opened a market for what is, to my mind, his most important sf work, THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS. Before it, however, I'll deal briefly with the other sf novels that appeared from the pen of Richard Cowper in 1972 and 73, KULDESAK and TIME OUT OF MIND.

KULDESAK is an interesting book in several ways, and my own approach to this book is to treat it as a highly sophisticated metaphor rather than as a typical sf adventure. Man has gone down the cul-de-sac of placing himself in the hands of machines, safely en-wombed beneath the Earth's surface, passively acquiescing to the desire to become vegetables, to accept and no longer to question. But the book also shows a single man revolting against this dead end and emphatically announcing (as others did before him) "I am a man!". It has echoes of our own culture in it; the message that Richard Cowper constantly asserts in his fiction - that we are heading in the wrong direction by kowtowing to the gods of technological progress, and that that path is only a Kuldesak that will lead to a world such as that he describes in this novel.

He uses the book, nevertheless to tell the tale of Mel, a young 'roamer', and makes the setting sufficiently credible to enable the reader to escape into these pages. It is an unique experiment in Cowper's oeuvre, the background of the tale dissociated by time from anything overtly familiar; but it does express once again his optimism in Man's future and his scepticism about his present. KULDESAK represents the rut into which Man has fallen now, and it is left to the alien and the paranormal to bring the men of this story to a state of possible transcendentalism. Man is man, this book pronounces, not because he can breed but because he has the ability to reason and to choose.

TIME OUT OF MIND appeared the next year and is, without any doubt, the weakest of all the Cowper novels. It is, nevertheless, an ambitious book that deals with a similar theme to that dealt with in DOMINO, of the future altering the past by returning to change events. A drug is discovered that releases untapped psychic energies, and that besides being addictive is totally fulfilling. A Colonel Magabian obtains a monopoly of the drug and begins to use it for his own mad designs. It is the nearest Richard Cowper gets to a mad scientist story, and its up-beat ending seems hurried. It does manage to avoid the flaws of time-travel paradoxes by only projecting images into the past (the story begins with one such projection), but its real strength is in the language and use of imagery - always a strong point in these novels. It is didactically moral throughout and this perhaps detracts also from its overall effect. But amongst the maxims are a few items that express quite succinctly Richard Cowper's attitudes:

"And beware of pity. Pity is frequently confused with love, but don't you make the mistake of confusing them. Pity is a by-product of superiority: love demands total abnegation, total identification, total understanding." (23)

A familiarity with others of Cowper's young protagonists will give an idea of the Laurie Linton of this story, an individual "in an age when

the adolescent personality seemed to come mass-produced from the moulds of the Image-makers." (24). Laurie joins NARCOS (the United Nations Narcotics Security, an organisation set up to stop the drug exploitation of large multinational). It is 1996 and old drugs are easy to get, there are vague shadows of 1984 in the air, with the Ministry of Internal Security (M.I.S.) the baddies of the story. It is, moreover, more of a detective thriller than any other of Richard Compton's novel and the dialogue once again is used to carry the plot development, disposing with the need for bulky exposition. It makes it highly readable and compensates for the otherwise disappointing cover design. If I am harsh with this book it is quite simply because it is the only Compton book that I still find distasteful, even if it has a number of compensatory facets (25).

But if TIME OUT OF MIND is less immediate and has far less impact than any other Richard Compton novel, THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS, published the next year in 1978, has the emotional impact of a Colin Murray novel: a richly poetic book that is far subtler than anything that preceded it.

"So that moment joined my previous glimpses of the un-solved hints as just another strand of the elusive web that had spun up here, and, as I stumbled forward beside her up to the house, I had the wisest feeling that I was a fugitive in time fleeing between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." (26)

This echo of the Matthew Arnold quotation that prefaces the novel captures the mood that is present in almost all of Richard Compton's books, the sensation of being 'af but not part' of the world. It is symptomatic of his technophobia, his mistrust of the purely material. One feels that Calvin Johnson, the first-person narrator of this story is only a very thinly disguised version of the author.

Calvin is a middle-aged teacher of English, happily married at the beginning of his tale and surrounded by the secure and solid contemporary world of 1983 where the only fear is of internal stagnation and the 'trap' of mundane existence. 'The trap' is here defined as "School - A Levels; University - degrees; job of some sort; marriage, I suppose. Kids. Grow old. Die." (27). But this pattern is shattered by the occurrence of a supernova 150 light-years away in Briareus. The effects of this occurrence are not immediately felt, but it is discovered after a few months that the whole family population has become sterile. Like the plague of PHOENIX and the Flood of CORLAY, the cul-de-sac of RIBBANSAR and the comic-horrible holocaust of PROFUNDUS, it is a means of derailing the Earth, of halting the mad advance and counting the sanity of spiritual values once again. And when CORLAY deals with the concept of fearlessness and freedom, BRIAREUS examines a much more primal idea; that of 'soul'. Calvin is a man who never, until the very last moment, realises his full potential; 'his own quality I shall always associate with him is gentleness' says another character of him. (28). As the world attempts to come to terms with the direct result of the supernova, Calvin himself has to assimilate the more disturbing presence of another mind within his own. I have already mentioned the idea of 'passengers' in connection with both RIBBANSAR and CORLAY, and it must be asked; 'what is the function that this image holds for the author?' I feel that it serves several purposes, most important of which is to re-narrate the 'dream state' within which these novels grow their own seedling. But they are also demonstrations (and particularly so in this story where Calvin's martyrdom is the sign for regeneration) that the real monsters are in the mind, that all important matters are resolved in the mind. There is also, of course, the sense of subconscious links with other states of being and a pantheistic sense of the oneness of all things, but these are subsidiary purposes. TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS is the definitive explanation of this inner conflict, and in Calvin's movement away from the normal patterns of his life Richard Compton finally severs that umbilical cord Calvin can no longer assimilate and forget, nor discount it as nightmare, nor, indeed, can he assimilate and pursue this time, as lived moments to do in PHOENIX. To choose between alien landscapes and the old 'meat' is the contest that takes part in his mind, and his choice to sacrifice himself (partially unconsciously) so that old and new might harmoniously merge is his act of reverence. The 'normal' can no longer assume its solid hold and from the wreckage of the old world the new realm of the 'fantastic' can emerge.

If BRIAREUS was the peak of Compton's moral polemic at this time, the novel that followed it, WORLDS APART, was on a different scale altogether: a comic novel that strangely enough dealt with similar elements but in a mocking, almost flippancy manner. But, as in the case of his other two comic novels, there is a profundity in this book that is not evident in the more serious works:

"One famous Christian museum contains a large room in which a working model of the entire cosmos is said to exist. No one has ever seen it, but countless thousands of Christians have heard it. It consists of a quiet chuckle and gently repeated in quiet darkness." (29)

There is something of Kurt Vonnegut in that, and this tone is maintained throughout the novel. The story is that of George Craggs, parent, headmaster and Junior Science Teacher at Brighton Royal Comprehensive School who is, in his spare time, writing a science fiction story about Zil Bryn, 'an impetuous Agnosticon pedagogue - he nevertheless possessed mystical though unacknowledged powers.' Zil, in turn is writing a story about George Craggs known to him as Shogor and Ugh. This comic Doppelgänger effect allows Richard Compton the opportunity to satirise the attitudes of science fiction writers far more directly than he was able to in CLONE, whilst Zil Br.'s observations of Earth as viewed from another culture highlight the absurdity of many of our social customs, whilst putting forward concepts like Oho (a strangely pantheistic concept that is god and a few things besides) and Hwylth (which can be substituted in both sides of Rums' "Beauty is truth" equation, and a few things besides). It is a quite humorous contrast between the mundane and the sublime that slips between dream and reality throughout and ends with a dream of intelligent dolphins. (Ironically enough the starting point for PROFUNDUS). But, writing the comedy element aside, this is still very much in the same philosophical mould as the other books and George's conclusion that 'the world he inhabited was either a gigantic confidence trick or that everyone in it was simply insane.' (30) is typical of a Compton protagonist, and the eventual mystical revelation that 'All time is now, we do exist but in a dream, whose dreamers lie almost unseen, but unseen they, we thence' (31) is another exponent of this sensation of being caught between two worlds 'one dead, the other powerless to be born'. It is an image that occurs far too often to be given anything but this emphasis.

It was at this time that Richard Compton's first short stories were being produced, but between their appearance in the US magazines and their appearance in the collection THE CUSTODIANS, their outline, under his third pseudonym, Colin Middleton Murray, was writing the first of two volumes of autobiography, ONE HAND CLAPPING, which was published in 1975 in considerable critical acclaim.

ONE HAND CLAPPING is the story of John Murray's life from 1926 through to 1942, a highly personal account that unsurprisingly gives many insights into the fiction of both Colin Murray and Richard Compton.

"... I became a thorough-going pantheist without realising it. When, years later, I came across the line in 'Tintern Abbey' - 'Nature then to me was All in All'. I knew at once what Wordsworth meant. I recognised myself. In the Lulling woods, on the heaths, among the fields and fens, I found peace. And something more than peace. I found an element, a spirit, that was not indifferent to me; did not respect me. It was my secret pleasure to creep along the overgrown tracks, ghosting between the bushes, moving so silently that more than once I was able to stand up within an arm's length of a snubbing rabbit. I watched the birds like a spy until I found their hidden nests, but felt no urge to take the eggs. What I collected was private knowledge - incidents and places that were known to myself alone - yet all the while I was conscious of that incommunicable sense of having been there before, of re-discovering things already known." (32)

It is insight into the life of his father, the eminent literary critic, John Middleton Murray (nephew of Katherine Mansfield and friend of such as Orwell and Lawrence), who an added bonus to this book which, in its lyrical directness and depth of observation is every bit as compelling as the fiction. Whilst I have a personal preference for PRIVATE VIEW, this book and its successor, SHADOWS ON THE GRASS, which followed in 1977, are by far the best written of Mr Murray's books.



It is a perfectly crafted story and deserving of an award [35], with a strong congruity to the things observed and a sense of slow gathering symbols, it is the densest piece of his writing, over-brimming with marvellous descriptive passages, affect of raw-ecceps philosophy and prose poetry:

"But how had? What is it you do?"

Tom sighed faintly. "I join myself to them. I build a bridge and walk to them over it. I take their thoughts and give them back my own."

"And Moradd taught you that, did he?"

"He taught me how to find the right keys. A different one for each person. But I believe there's a master-key, Peter. One to unlock the whole world. I call that key the White Bird." (36)

The frustrating necessity to be brief means that I must move on from what are two sacral texts to deal with what is, to cite, Richard Campion's only collection of short stories. He is not a prolific short story writer, but those that have appeared have been noticed as for their lyrical quality and depth of feeling. My own feeling is that these shorter pieces were representative, that they were necessary steps on the road to CORLAY, what a period of intensive work within the genre. The density of these novellas seems somewhat imposed as much by the choice of material and artistic intent as by the limitations of the brief structure. It was the short story, "The Custodian" which first made me interested in Richard Campion's work, and no doubt its effect on the US market, through the medium of Fantasy And Science Fiction Magazine, was similar. The affinity with which the mass of this story is constructed is something different in kind from most of his previous writings as Richard Campion and hints at a re-emergence of the Colin Murray persona, its cautious, poet's like reminiscent of THE GOLDEN VALLEY, its use of the central image of 'floodwater' and 'Providence' powerfully evoked, linking the peaceful Pop with the horror of a future very close to hand:

"Something scratched a line like blood-red ink high up into the southern sky and a ball of white-white fire blossomed in orange and amber silence

And later a wind began to blow from the north." (33)

This story opens the four-story collection, and "Paradise Beach". The story that follows, is the only weak place in this book, as if the author were not, at once, wholly convinced by his own fiction. Whatever, it is a sense of uncertainty that is conveyed in this story - something quite new in Campion's oeuvre and only evident elsewhere in TIME DLT OF MIND. But this is a small price to pay for the last two stories in this book, the latter of which, "The Harford Manuscript", I'll deal with first.

A seventeenth century book is handed to the narrator, and stitched in its back-cover are twenty sheets of paper from another time, nearer to the present. It is the diary of a time-traveller, unfortunates enough to have moved back in time to the time of the Great Plague in London. With vivid strokes, Richard Campion paints pictures of a London long-buried beneath a concrete semi-transparent layer of over-civilisation, giving the tale a convincing if fictitious background and linking it, incidentally, with Wells' "The Chronic Argonauts" (a forerunner of "The Time Machine"). The story has a great deal of punch and, unlike "Paradise Beach", hints that here are territories in which the author is completely at home.

"The first coming was the moon; the second was fire to burn him; the third was the water he drew the fire, and the fourth is the Bird of Dawning." (34)

"Piper At The Gates Of Dawn" is the prequel to THE ROAD TO CORLAY, a novella of immense wealth and feeling that is the best thing in this collection. It is the final development of Richard Campion's intense fictional themes, exploring the nature of fear and man's bondage to it. Throughout the tale there is a sense of natural balance that brings to mind LaGuin's EARTHSEA trilogy and as we follow the adventures of old Peter and Tom, a young pipe, there is all the magic and power of pipe story-telling. The subtext feeling that these two are playing out a pre-destined script adds to this tale's polygraphy and, like a well scored symphony, builds to a truly emotive climax with the boy's martyrdom and the reappearance of the spirit embodied in the cult of the White Bird and the later kingdom.

Both of these are expressions of the symbolic, the key to pass a's ideals lies in the power of his flute-playing - to unlock the good in them and realize their ambitions, teaching them not to fear. The interweaving of images is intoxicating, the language littered with rich dialect and marvellous allusions to the basic elements of life, to the old Mor who was "all like like bricks in a brick wall" and "all hurrying on to death on long ago" (37). The overall effect is that this is a story that is experienced more than simply read, that does so with the exciting time that heralds in a new age for Man, that challenges the old regime and promises that long-chained utopia of a better-than of Man. It is this last factor that gives the tale its importance, that makes it the culmination of Campion's search for a tangible solution to Man's corporate lack of spiritual (or hence, in his terms, moral) values. It is as if Orwell wrote a material fantasy and imbued it with the language of the romantic poet, and it is, without doubt, a perfect combination. But if utopia has been glimpsed in the flight of the White Bird, it is not the stagnant creation of an inert, pragmatic mind but a vision that must always be slightly out of reach.

At the conclusion of this story Peter asks himself "why was it that man could never use things truly till they were gone?" (38), and it seems that the answer here is that things are still changing, that they are still moving towards their final, perfected state. And, in a sense, they must never arrive at that state, must never become a dogma. It is a plain fact that is ever-present in all of Richard Campion's work, that feeling that the characters are still on their journey and that it is only we, not they, who must leave the scene of events. So it is in THE ROAD TO CORLAY we pick up the threads of Tom's tale, eighteen years after the martyrdom and find that the kingdom have made little progress and are being ruthlessly hunted by the Church Militant and their institutional arm, the Gray Brotherhood. The 'road' of the title is travelled in hope, but within this book Corlay, like Aethelred in PHOENIX, is a destination - a novel, a play, a playfully a fictional exploration of Robert Louis Stevenson's saying.

That Richard Campion is of that camp that is instinctively emotional but tempered by the ordering processes of the intellect is never better illustrated than in the pages of THE ROAD TO CORLAY. It is a message book that pumps the imagination and feeds the gluttonous desires of both heart and mind. The setting is the Post-Flood world of the Seven Kingdoms, AD 3018, and tell us the kingdom (of the White Bird), Thomas of Norwich and of Corvey, a 20th Century scientist who, whilst in an 'out of body experience' experiment finds himself trapped in Thomas' mind. Corvey is the link with the Pre-Flood, technological world, transmitting the things he sees through Thomas' eyes back to his own time. It is the original use of the 'dream state' in Campion's fiction, and the most compelling, incorporating the image used once before in PHOENIX of the woman from the past whose soul is found in the future. It is the movement between a near-contemporary society to one distanced not only by extreme time but also by extreme attitudes, that emphasizes the basic movement in the author's mind between current values and those which could conceivably replace them 'after the Flood'. (It is a problem of the intellect ("how can we better the world we live in?") that is being explored by 'feeling' what is right. The solution seems to be "clear it all away and start again", but the author is honest enough to know that starting again is only a temporary solution unless the foundations are built correctly. It is for this reason that Bird's second Industrial Revolution has to fail in PHOENIX, why Thomas of Norwich must never reach CORLAY or, most important, why the great one must eventually be enclosed 'or not'. It is for this that Campion attacks in CORLAY, not the Church which is subject to that loss. It is the reason why Corvey, one of the Gray Brotherhood and the killer of Tom in "Piper At The Gates Of Dawn" must become the disciple

of Tom's teachings in THE ROAD TO CORLAY, his own conquest of law as a temple to be placed before the people.

CORLAY is a beautiful book but, when all is said and done, one is left wondering how much of a solution this is and where the author is to go from there. The story begins positively with the early Christian myths and the persecutions faced by those teachers, but the creed preached by Tom is based almost entirely on this mystical on-shrinking of the soul by the tones of the flute. The pacifistic question that springs to mind is "Is this the only way in which man can free himself from law?" In the story Cooper is aware of this essentially tragic side in his fictive religion: the betrayal of the pastor in the tale is basically no more than an expression of human weakness, of the primitive doubt in Man's heart that there are possible solutions to the ontological and changing forces emanating from Fear.

"He sold that happiness was simply not having afraid of anyone at all. He called it the last secret." (39)

And though it is a secret that lives in this book, it is possessed of an ethereal transcendence that, throughout the book, one senses cannot last too long. The possible worlds of DOMINO lie there, heavy and brooding, in the future.

As if sensing that a sequel to CORLAY would involve a resolution of this inherent tragic element, Richard Cooper has turned, in his most recent novel, to the fruitful realm of satire once again. PROFUNDUS is, as the title suggests, a very profound and acute comic novel, its similarities to COLE pronounced, its distinguishing characteristics subtle. Imagine a real satirist with a sensitive conscience which destroys known civilisation and then, with the aid of a mad captain, re-creates the Christ Myth using an Africanist innocent. The result is a novel that is perhaps better than CLONE, that combines the wit of the seventeenth century with the devices of the twentieth in an undeniably attractive blend. The similarities to one of Henry Fielding's picaresque adventures is not only emphasized by the choice of name of the protagonist, Tom Jones (40), but also by the deep moral concern that both authors display in their comic novels. And though it is hard too see whether PROFUNDUS will stand the test of time as well as Fielding's novels, it is a genuinely funny book.

The distance between innocence and corruption is explored more seriously here and in CLONE than it is in any of the more serious

The necessity to be brief in an article and to distill fiction down to its elements is a daunting process. There is no way that style can be conveyed other than by comparison with other writers and by the use of metaphor at second hand. It is especially so in the case of writers whose excellence lies in their subtlety of imagery and in the precision of their prose, whose emphasis is upon the 'felt' and not the 'thought'. Going back to my definition of the important writers in the game into two camps, I feel it is easier to describe the Ballards and Blochs than it is to convey the power of the LeGuins and Campers. The extensive use of quotation and concentration upon central themes is only a partial solution. It is here in this article. It only tells half of the story. The true strength of a writer such as Richard Cooper cannot be related, only experienced as a cumulative effect within a story or a novel. And that, I'm afraid, is up to you, the readers.

I have tried to give the broad geographical outlines of his imaginary countries, but the detailed explanation of those countries is a personal affair. The "Idem" he used was, as I said at the start, basically unimportant; to my mind they are simply literary devices. The true importance of his writing lies in an intangible sense of aestheticism, something that Orwell once termed the second great motive for writing (41), mixed with an essentially political (42) or moral sense of purpose. To say that, quite simply, that his writing asks questions of one that cannot really be answered in such an essay as this, is to say something of what of a writer. Which is the best recommendation I could give to any writer.

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NOTES:

(1) T. S. Eliot: "To Criticize The Critic" (1961) from TO CRITICIZE THE CRITIC AND OTHER WRITINGS (Faber & Faber, 1978)

(2) SHADOWS ON THE GRASS; Victor Gollancz; 1977; Pages 166 to 178.

(3) THE GOLDEN VALLEY; Hutchins; 1958. Max, how long out of print. (184pp)

(4) LE GRANDE MEURNE, or "The Last Domain", or "The Wanderer" by Alain-Fournier (Henri Aron), first published 1913. Publishing by Penguin Books, 1977.

(5) PRIVATE VIEW; Doherty; 1972; 192pp.

(6) RECOLLECTIONS OF A GHOST; Hutchins; 1960; A PATH TO THE SEA; Hutchins; 1961; 223pp

(7) "As my feet a mural of silver paper twinkled in the sunlight beside such a wonder even the little bronze statue was a fabled artifact, the meagre garbastic symbol of the sublime truth. Everything was lit quivering had being: Awareness broke over my like a tidal wave, and in that sudden, blinding moment, I saw. I felt as though I was a child's balloon being blown up by a glimmer breath. Water and water I expanded. In a moment I combined the pink; the whole city itself; the dim, blue, unseen hills. Trees broke and formed within me; clouds spun through me like silver tape. I held the turning world; the bleeding orb of the sun, all the heavens and the angelic hosts. Brighter and brighter shrouded the terrible light. My blood moved in my veins. I felt the fast tortures of my sanity being torn apart. One moment more and I would begin. In one long silent scream my terror sent the veil of the universe. NO! My mystic dropped. A billion multi-coloured catharine wheels exploded behind me. Then blackness. No. It was over. Time passed; none. Fraternity itself. My created senses faded gradually to nothing. From outside faint sounds of traffic penetrated my ears. I opened my eyes and looked down. There, in my hand, lay Susan's hand. At my feet, netted by a tulle of grass, the tiny shroud of silver paper pills gipped in the breeze I stooped, and picked it up, and turned it over. A thin silvery film transferred itself to my fingertips. With a quiver of distaste, I flicked the scrap away and watched it flutter into the shadow of the trees. Nothing had happened. Nothing."

(Pages 76/77 PRIVATE VIEW)

There is the same possibility of breaking through to another level of existence, and this sensation is ever-present throughout all of his books.

(8) Here I would refer the reader to Kate Wilhelm's introductory essay to NEBULA AWARD STORIES 9 which touches on this very idea of making concrete man's thoughts and speculations. Here is, I feel, the most rational examination of this topic yet.

(9) A PATH TO THE SEA; Page 134. This is a theme that is made concrete in BREAKTHROUGH and THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS.

(10) A PATH TO THE SEA; Page 92.

(11) BREAKTHROUGH; Doubday; 1967; Page 174. Here Cooper is using a quote from William Blake, as he does throughout this book. (214pp)

(12) BREAKTHROUGH; Page 134. An image that is akin to that of Corvus exists in the mind of Thomas O. Norwich THE ROAD TO CORLAY

(13) PHOENIX; Doherty; 1968; 180pp. Page 22

(14) PHOENIX; Page 117

(15) PHOENIX; Page 91

(16) DOMINO; Doherty; 1971; 175pp; Page 91

(17) DOMINO; Page 160

(18) DOMINO; Page 62

(19) PRIVATE VIEW; Page 43

(20) I marked examples from amongst today's best-sellers is John Fante's whose THE MACQUS, whilst written before THE COLLECTOR, was given a market by the appearance of the latter book first

(21) CLONE; Victor Gollancz; 1972; 190pp; Pages 10/11.

(22) CLONE; Pages 128-130.

(23) TIME OUT OF MIND; Victor Gollancz, 1973; 124pp; Page 12

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A NOVEL?



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(24) TIME OUT OF MIND: Page 10

(25) One such is the image of the fly buzzing against the window, used here, as elsewhere, as a symbol of pointless endeavour. It is an interesting book, mainly through its links with other Richard Cowper novels - primarily DOMINO, but also PHOENIX with its "multiplicity of time-streams" of which "there is one which for you will become reality. The rest is dreams." (p. 177). Besides which, Louie is found to be 'b'hoop' in this story - another case of the unknown-gifted individual who discovers he has paranormal powers.

(26) THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS; Victor Gallancz; 1974; 255pp, Page 13

(27) THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS; Page 43

(28) THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS; Page 255

(29) WORLDS APART; Victor Gallancz; 1974; 159pp; Page 8

(30) WORLDS APART; Page 92

(31) WORLDS APART; Page 147 (This is a fine poem that comes to George in a dream)

(32) ONE HAND CLAPPING; Victor Gallancz; 1973; 208 pages; Page 59

SHADOWS ON THE GRASS; Victor Gallancz; 1977; 190pp.

(33) THE CUSTODIANS AND OTHER STORIES; Victor Gallancz; 1976; 191pp; Page 54

(34) THE CUSTODIANS; Page 131 ("Piper At The Gates Of Dawn")

(35) It was a runner-up in the 1976 Hugo Awards; a comment, I feel, solely on Cowper's lack of prestige in the States, not upon the excellence of the story.

(36) THE CUSTODIANS; Page 319

(37) THE CUSTODIANS; Page 120

(38) THE CUSTODIANS; Page 147

(39) THE CUSTODIANS; Page 115

(40) In fact, Tom is more able to Fielding's Joseph Andrews in the manner in which he defends his 'chastity'.

(41) George Orwell's "Why I Write" (1946)

from "The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters" Volume 1, AN AGE LIKE THIS:

"Putting aside the need to earn a living, I think there are four great motives for writing, at any rate for writing prose... They are:

1. Aesthetic enthusiasm. Perception of beauty in the external world... Desire to share an experience which one feels is valuable and ought not to be missed." (Pages 23/26)

(42) From the same essay, Page 26:-

"... 4. Political purpose - using the word 'political' in the widest possible sense. Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after."



MY GOODMAN of the GALAXY BOOKS WERE
RECENTLY ANALYZED IN FIXATION, THE
PRESTIGIOUS
CRITICAL
QUARTERLY...



HE COMMENTED ON MY UNUSUAL USE OF
THE FULL 6TOP.



THE REVIEWER WAS MORTIMER SHREND,
WHOSE ACERBIC PEN HAS REDUCED MANY
A REPUTATION TO TRITERS.



HE SAYS I'VE MADE A NEW ART-FORM OUT
OF LITERARY ANARCHY...



HE FOUND MY GRAMMATICAL
CONSTRUCTIONS EXTREMELY INNOVATIVE



OVERALL, I THINK HE WAS
QUITE IMPRESSED...



HALF LIFE

The life & times
of Elmer T. Hack

HEY... YOU'RE ELMER T. HACK, AREN'T
YOU? I'VE BEEN WANTING TO MEET
YOU... I'M MARLON ELLINGTON



YOU MEAN YOU WANT TWO
CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ME?

I'M COMPILING A MAMMOTH
ANTHOLOGY FEATURING ALL
THE BEST SF WRITERS



NOT EXACTLY... I'VE JUST RECEIVED
AN UNADDRESSED MANUSCRIPT
UNDER AN UNFAMILIAR BYLINE...

AND I WANTED TO KNOW IF
YOU EVER WROTE UNDER A
PSEUDONYM...



IT WAS SO GODAWFUL I THOUGHT
MAYBE YOU WERE RESPONSIBLE
FOR IT...



THE INFINITY BOX

BOOK REVIEWS



Stephen R. Donaldson
THE CHRONICLES OF THOMAS COVENANT THE UNBELIEVER.
 ("Lord Foul's Bane", "The Eleventh War", "The Power That Preserves") : Fontana: 1978; £1.25 per volume; Page Count: (1)446;(2)479;(3)447; Each contains an 8-page glossary; ISBN Numbers: (1) 0 00 615239 3; (2) 0 00 615246 5; (3) 0 00 615247 1.

by Douglas Barbour

Stephen R. Donaldson's epic fantasy trilogy, "The Chronicles Of Thomas Covenant The Unbeliever", seeks to break new ground in the genre, and indeed, it accomplishes this to a degree. A Tolkien-like fantasy insofar as the essential "historical" situation of the Land -- with its noble leaders battling to preserve it against the evil and essentially utterly deadly -- ecologically wasteful attacks of Lord Foul the Despoiler, the very principle of despoil -- can be seen to derive from that of Middle Earth, it departs from Tolkien in two major ways. The first could be said to be "modernist" in content: Thomas Covenant, upon whom the eventual outcome of the great war to preserve the Land depends, is an almost archetypal twentieth century anti-hero, a man of "our" world broken by the losses engendered by his suffering epilepsy -- loss of wife and child; loss of livelihood; loss of human place in his society. The second deviation from Tolkien can be seen as structurally regressive: where Tolkien (and Le Guin or McIllip, for example) creates a whole world which we enter as we open the book, Donaldson enters "realistically" in "our" world and then transports his protagonist (and us) to the magic world of fantasy that is the Land (and by this play indicates his own final unwillingness to suspend disbelief in that world). Shades of E. R. Burroughs.

"The Land" is an interesting place, however, and while I doubt Donaldson could create its Silmarillion -- no one has created as full an historical world as Middle-earth -- he has managed to invent a convincing historical context for the half-century of strife in the Land which is the subject of his trilogy. The basic values which the Lords of Revolt, the Lords of the Land, seek to preserve are values of pastoral ecology: if possible the Land should remain a place of pastoral beauty and innocence. The most difficult and dangerous thing for those in power to do, however, is transcend despair in their worst moments of fear: this is something each will have to face at various times during the forty-seven years of battle which follow Thomas Covenant's first appearance in the Land. It is especially difficult because one of the greatest Lords of the past die give in and angrily destroy the Land forever in the so-called "devastation" in which he hoped also to bring Lord Foul low, but failed.

Covenant is brought to the Land by Lord Foul (and perhaps was there by a force for good, but this good cannot in any way use him) to introduce a possible hope in the Land while at the same time eventually, creating them all to despair even more completely, than they had previously thought possible. Covenant's wedding ring is white gold, the metal of "wild magic" in the Land, a magic beyond even the control and power of Lord Foul, and if he can use that "wild magic" to fight Foul, Covenant could save the Land. But Covenant is a leper and though the power of the Land physically cures him while he is in it he refuses to believe in it. He is a leper who is dragging the whole thing as an escape fantasy; it is not real -- his sanity depends on that

So, in his inability, he shores in many adventures, quests for power and knowledge, and makes the acquaintance and sometimes the friendship of many of the Land's people. Lord Mhoram -- perhaps more than anyone else the Land's major protagonist in the story -- Fomfollower the Giant, Benno the Bloodguard and others have their stories too, and Donaldson does them justice, yet though it all Thomas Covenant, wretched, moves to wreak loss and pain by his inability to act and his great ability to warp others in their ears in order to avoid committing himself to personal positive action against Lord Foul.

At the end of each volume, Covenant is returned to "our" world but he is called back, the first time forty years on, the second time a few years later. During that time the Land is ravaged, the ordinary people are killed, ravaged and ruined with the Land itself fantasy is an upper class literature in this respect, the masses exist only to obey the orders of their leaders and be killed fighting the evil or simply by the evil having its way as it conquers some part of the good place the fantasy is set in; here, for example, during the Eleventh War, the Worms laugh his army so far so fast that fully a third die before it even reaches the battleground where or least half the remainder fall, and all this simply to draw the enemy's supernatural forces into a trap I suppose you either accept this fact or give up on high fantasy, but is this the only choice open to us? Surely the question can be raised: must there be great war and practically no human action in such wars? Perhaps that's really two questions. At any rate, I don't believe this must be so, but the question is too raised to explore in a review). Covenant's own daughter, the result of a rape he committed during his first few days in the Land, is High Lord during his second visit but she, having fallen in love with him (why?) and then having been turned towards impossible hopes by his desire to avoid committing himself to battle with Foul, falls through despairing hubris into Lord Foul's hands.

Finally, of course, Covenant, even he, is driven to fight for the Land he cannot fully believe in yet desperately needs to. At the same time, Mhoram, now High Lord and driven to the brink of despair, discovers how to forge strength out of potential disaster. The Land is saved, if at tremendous cost and utter extreme destruction has been visited upon it. And Covenant returns to Earth with a new sense of self gained by finally fighting the very concept of despoil (yes, the whole thing is a kind of symbolic cure). Of course, we are relieved, but the manner by which he actually defeats Foul when he finally confronts him in his fortress is, in fact, too anticlimactic for conviction in contrast: he beats this incredibly evil, god-like power with the cleansing power of laughter.

Donaldson has created an epic fantasy which holds your attention on the whole. He uses the negative power of fear more than the positive power of hope, but both are present to keep us going high. By this I mean that what we are afraid will happen happens more often than what we hope will happen: this is one specific effect of the anti-hero as protagonist. Covenant is an intriguing fantasy protagonist, yes, but he is a bit apocryphal as well, of course, he must forever nurture himself with his thoughts of weakness, inability, fear and sickness, but as I began to count up the number of times he reminds himself (and us) of his basic condition as a leper, I began to wish Donaldson would hint us to remember it on our own.

I guess I'm saying that Donaldson overstates his time-potential as a writer in a number of instances of over-writing (over-writing which implies a certain lack of trust in the readers on his part). These could

not only be slightly shorter and much lighter books, they could be a lot less ornate (an obvious comparison on this level, as well as that of megacriticism, is Le Guin's Earthsea trilogy). Through his use of arcane language reveals a sincere love of language, his misuse of ordinary language discloses that he loves not *style* and not even that wall, and that both he and his publishers possess a rock-solid editorial sense. I cannot find a really good example of simple error at the moment, but when Covenant finally faces Lord Paul, we are told that Paul's presence "reached of other". The implication of the phrase in context is that Paul is essentially foul-smelling, but 'other' means 'essential perfume of roses'. As I do not detect irony here this suggests to me that Donaldson thought the word sounded right and therefore did not check it out. There are many *errors* of this type, and many grandiose descriptions which are too 'poetic' and reveal something of a tin ear on his part.

Against this fault must be placed the often interesting handling of character-development and change (I am thinking especially of Bannor, Fogelmellow and Mhoran) and the power of some natural descriptions (others suffer from the linguistic uncertainties mentioned above). On the other hand, although the philosophy of the work -- a form of American humanism which tends to lead to despair because it is human-centred, unlike the Taoism in Le Guin (Taoism sees humanity as simply part of the process of the universe, not central to it; therefore the importance of the concept of 'balance' in Earthsea) -- is interesting, that is mostly because its presence is on the whole consciousness.

THE CHRONICLES OF THOMAS COVENANT THE UNBELIEVER is certainly head and shoulders above such a monstrosity as THE SWORD OF SHANNARA, but it is nowhere near the level of LORD OF THE RINGS or EARTHSEA, or, to point to a fantasy which engages us entirely through the wit and linguistic complexity of its style, Brian Aldrich's glorious THE MALACIA TAPESTRY. It is a pretty good read though not I think a work to read as those others are) and the fact that it is a first work suggests we may look forward to better work from Donaldson, if he can learn from his mistakes. Let us hope so.

Richard Francis
BLACKPOOL VANISHES (Faber & Faber: London: 1979; 191pp;
ISBN 0 571 11280 7)

reviewed by Chris Evans

Let's start with a few quotes:

"Arthur felt no more like his food, which was potatoes like white round eyeballs, and horrid glistening bacon, lip-pink with one small white tooth in each corner."

"On the street it was still mid-afternoonish even though it getting on for half past six. The sun was still high in the sky, many of the shops were still open; and people were bustling about. There wasn't that feeling of early-evening lapse which happened before the pub gathered momentum, when one sensed that the whole population, discrete but unanimous, were watching Nationwide."

"Sheila was in the kitchen, sorting out the vegetables she'd bought earlier that day. . . it was the sort of job that could take her a surprising amount of time, as though the potatoes, carrots and onions lurked in the dark recesses of the shopping bag in a spirit of hostile ferromagnetism."

"She turned to Mr Porvey and smiled at him, or rather, gave him a detailed sketch of a smile, the expression a-cold in its host of lines."

A great book, this. Richard Francis has written his first novel in what I can only describe as a rambling, vernacular style, littering his prose with slang and idiosyncratic expressions. His ear for a stunningly ordinary and rather boring Joe who spends a great deal of time eating, going for walks, or having inconsequential conversations with one another. The book is written in a series of short chapters which are individually so lightweight as to be almost none, and I must confess that I nearly abandoned it after about sixty pages, simply because its surface seemed to me mundane and the characters' interior monologues little more than gossip. What kept me reading

was the author's style which, though frequently ungrammatical, randomly punctuated and overly preoccupied with domestic trifles, nonetheless possesses a weird sort of charm by virtue of the frequent appearance of incongruous yet acute similes and metaphors, as for "There was something about the sky, a lumpiness and softness, which reminded him of cold dinner." It's a very English book, filled with all sorts of homely references which would be barely comprehensible to a foreign reader. I cannot, in all honesty, say that it is well written or that it has an original plot, but it does have a kind of humbling eccentricity which makes it likable despite its deficiencies. The plot, by the way, concerns the disappearance of Blackpool and the subsequent attempts to find out where it has gone, although the author is less concerned with the actual mechanics of the story than with the reactions of his cast, which vary from surprise to outright indifference. Imagine an episode of Conan Doyle's which deals with an alien invasion, and you'll have some idea of the flavour of the book. There's even a character based on Eddie Waring. What more can I say?

William Burroughs
NOVA EXPRESS (Panther: 85p; 157pp; ISBN 0586 023771)

Reviewed by Andrew Durlington

Burroughs has been known to quote the cliché of writing being "fifty years behind" painting -- and though his own work has attempted to close that gap, utilising techniques assimilated (or flavoured) from visuals. The technique of collage fragmentation and juxtaposition of language into odd, unexpected combinations of often startling originality. In the "foreword note" he proclaims the technique "an extension of Brian Gysin's cut-up method" -- but it could just as easily be traced back as far as the Dada-craze tinkering around the Coburn Volume in 1916. Another aspect of collage is its black-hole ability to draw the detritus of cities -- nam-pickles, discarded tin leathers, rusty and bits of last week's wall-posters into atomised universes neatly delineated by frames hung on Art Gallery walls. Burroughs adopts a similar approach for language, drawing on the garbled culture of N.Y. subway sleaze. The complex, continually-shifting reflections of bath-house slang, the huge textured symbolic mythologies of junkie-orgies, the submerged interplay of nonsense found in existence by the precarious homestead underworld of gay-bars, dol through with advertising hyper-speak and so on technical jargon. "A composite of many writers living and dead."

NOVA EXPRESS is allegedly a Science Fiction novel -- it says so on the blurb -- "Novel" -- as in new, "Express" -- as in fast, quick. But it's not strictly SF (despite the introduction of KP, a character whose existence precludes any other of similar nomenclature), neither is it strictly a novel in the sense that, say, Heinlein would use the term. But that hardly matters -- such categorisation is the tool of book-sellers and closed minds. The removal of all mental partitions and barriers is a necessary prerequisite for reading Burroughs, but it's worth the effort -- there's a million poems in NOVA EXPRESS and each one contains a Government Health Warning, a million characters like The Subliminal Kid, the Nova Police, Itzy the Push, the Heavy Metal People of Uranus (pronounced 'you-remur'), the crab-people from a land of gross without mirrors, the Death Dwarf -- and each one of them is lethal. Each one of them either a predator or a mark in the apocalyptic Nova War for the destruction of the biological rim, the destruction of the very DNA halo of reality itself. Completed by Burroughs in Tangle, 1968, and re-issued regularly since, this is more than a novel, and probably more than a painting too.

Gordon R. Dickson
THE FAR CALL (Stoughton & Jackson: 1978; 414pp; £5.95; ISBN 0 283 98498 8)

Reviewed by Brian Sableford

The serial which provides the narrative core of this novel appeared in Angels in 1973. It was then a relatively straightforward story of an international expedition to Mars doomed to failure because it is run by politicians according to the priorities of diplomatic and political expediency. Dickson has carefully fleshed it out, adding

THE LATHE OF HEAVEN is another Gallenex re-issue in hardback and it is, to my mind, unique amongst LeGuin's novels: almost a tribute to Philip K. Dick in both style and construction; emphasising the essential similarities of the two writers.

"He never spoke with any bitterness at all, no matter how awful the things he said. And there really people without resentment, without hate, the wounded. People who never go cross-grained to the universe? Who recognise evil, and resist evil, and yet are unaffected by it? Of course there are. Compassion, the living and the dead. Those who have returned in pure compassion to the wheel, those who follow the way that cannot be followed without knowing they follow it, the share-cropper's wife in Alabama and the lama in Tibet and the geologist in Peru and the millworker in Odessa and the grocer in London and the goatherd in Nigeria and the old, old man sharpening a stick by a dry streambed somewhere in Australia, and all the others. There is not one of us who has not known them. There are enough of them, enough to keep us going. Perhaps." * (p. 99)

George Orr has the power to dream "effectively", to change reality down to the smallest memory of the most mundane person through his dreams. The novel follows his attempts to handle this power and the abuse (kindly though the intention is) made of this gift when a psychiatrist, Dr William Haber, tries to make the world a better place by channeling George's dreams. This novel-work gives LeGuin ample opportunity to deal with the obvious questions of morality such power poses, to lead the reader gently to the humane conclusion that choice is more important than the brave new world of grey, peaceful, healthy, self-expressive people. The catalogue of "things cured" by Dr Haber's interferences reads like the utopia of many a less incisive science fiction writer, lacking in Ursula LeGuin's vision. The catalogue (read page 146) is slowly compiled, readily tumbles through drastic changes, George Orr learns to stand alone and make an ethical choice. He is cured and loses his power: the changes cease. It is very much the formula Philip Dick has proven on numerous occasions, but here LeGuin delivers it with a delicacy of style Dick only begrudgingly manages. Orr does not come to his conclusion by learning, he does not work out a solution "by working" as does he "reason it" by using reason; he lets understanding slip at what cannot be understood and in the final pages we learn that Dr Haber, unable to live up to the words of Chuang Tzu, is "destroyed on the lathe of heaven" and ends his days in the asylum.

Which leaves me with the final of the volumes to hand, ORSINEAN TALES, a book I find myself still far too close to as yet, and thus I hope it'll be excused the rather subjective tone in which this last section is couched. Works that genuinely move me both intellectually and emotionally are rare and this volume (together with THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS and THE DISPOSSESSED) can be placed in that category. There is not a weak story in this fine collection, and there are two giants, "Conversations At Night" and "An die Musik" which I consider pure art. The eternal trappings we sweep aside in these tales of a fictional land and a series of characters are presented for our observation, naked on an empty stage. It is, in my opinion, LeGuin at her very best, embracing the necessities of genre convention to give us the blind man, Sotelo Cheyue, surrogate in his love affair with Laha, sensitive to everything but the light, to give us Ladislas Goya, a great composer whose talent must be buried beneath the circumstances of his birth, his marriage, his family, and finally to give us Paul and Zida and Freya, playing in their imaginary country of childhood.

It is not sufficient to say that Ursula LeGuin is one of the genre's best writers (gender being irrelevant) because she justifies (in the sense of indicating) the belief held by many that the genre has some worth, some importance, beyond being a provider of simplistic, trifely written entertainment that contrives to say very little and at considerable length. All three of these books say much, say is eloquently and with economy.

"He was still a long time. Music will not save us, Olla Egerin had said. Not you, or me, or her, the big golden-voiced woman who had no children and wanted none; not Lahmann who sang the song; not Schubert who had

written it and was a hundred years dead. What good is music? Name, Goya thought, and that is the point. To the world and its stakes and armies and factories and leaders, music says, "You are irrelevant!" and, elegant and gentle as a god, to the suffering man it says only, "Listen," "For being saved is not the point. Music saves nothing. Merciful, unseeing, it dangles and breaks down all the defenses, the houses men build for themselves, that they may see the sky."

(pp 144/145, "An die Musik")



Arthur C. Clarke
THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE; Gallenex; 1979; ISBN 0 575 02520 4; 256pp; \$4.95

Reviewed by Paul Kinnell.

A new novel by Arthur C. Clarke is an event, but does this rest solely on his name? Is there anything within the novels to live up to the reputation?

Reading anything by Arthur C. Clarke is an exercise in nostalgia for me these days. I had read the usual Asimov and Heinlein when I was younger, but it was 2001, the film and the books, that first turned me into a loving of him. Just as I was eventually to become disenchanted with science fiction, so I quickly became disillusioned with the stylified by the work of Asimov, Heinlein and Clarke. Hence my attitude as I approached this new novel. I wanted to enjoy it for old times' sake, but I rather doubted I would.

Apparently, Clarke has claimed that this is his best novel to date. I never gave much attention to such claims by authors and THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE does not begin to approach works like CHILDHOOD'S END. It is, however, a far more ambitious novel than we are used to from Clarke, particularly at late. He has tried to invest his characters with some degree of humanity and does at least manage to flesh out the cardboard a little. He has tried his hand at a more adventurous use of language, welcome even if the pen does seem to be constantly "watering" in the early pages. Indeed, the prose does tend to veer wildly between the purple and the leaden, and somewhere in there it is inevitable that the occasional felicity should creep in. For such small merits, let us be duly grateful. Particularly as it does not last long; Clarke quickly settles down to his more usual writing style, which never rises above the merely functional.

One of the things that has put me off Clarke is his worship of the banal and end-all god of Technology. Linked with this, though it runs directly counter to his established reputation, is an astounding lack of vision. The main body of this novel is set in the middle years of the 22nd century; yet the world he describes is recognisably contemporary in structure and attitude, with the odd, hackneyed, 'futuristic' flourish.

Oh, there is the odd point of difference. Young people, it seems, have to do two years of social service, somewhat on the Chinese model. But rich, refined diplomat and celebrity (a Kissinger type) Rajalingam wins three of them in a state lottery to become his servants.

He is obviously a benevolent master, well loved by his servants and his makes it clear that servants are a core privilege. Even so, this seems like a different man from the privileges of wealth enjoyed by a good old-fashioned 19th-century capitalist.

There is, indeed, a lot of the 19th-century capitalist in Clarke. It was a comfortable, short-sighted age for the wealthy who could see nothing beyond the continuance of society exactly as they knew it, and the benefits of material progress. Clarke appears to be obsessed with the status of technology, but only in so far as it will shore up our contemporary western way of life. We are presented with a world apparently freed of our modern world problems. Fossil power has been mastered, giving us cheap, clean power and no new problems. There is a world government, presumably ending most of our major political squabbles without generating any new ones. There is no mention of poverty or unemployment or anything like it which is hardly surprising considering we move exclusively in the circles of top scientists, journalists and politicians – the new aristocracy.

Yet for all these major changes, and not a few lesser ones, on the sidelines of this story, this is not a new society. There are, maybe, a few labour-saving devices that have been added to technology's repertoire; but the message seems to be that science can make things better for us, but not really different. It is a bland and comforting notion, and totally unrealistic. We have only to consider the sorts of changes that are predicted over the next few years – with the advent of microprocessors to realise that advances of the scale Clarke predicts would have an incalculable effect upon the shape of our lives.



Clarke actually acknowledges this. Some years before the main events of this story an alien spacecraft had flown past trading knowledge. This is one of the many old clichés that crop up in the course of the novel, in the manner of much contemporary SF. He concludes: "Human civilisation could never be the same." (p. 79). All the more remarkable, then, that we do not see any effects of this alien contact; or less so in Clarke's beloved material culture. Did we learn of a new technology from these highly developed aliens? It would not appear so.

The aliens, however, did have one major effect: they brought about the end of most of the world's religions. A point Clarke feels called upon to make very strongly:

"It had put an end to the billions of words of plume gibberish which apparently intelligent men had copied their minds for centuries." (p. 88)

Yet the astronomer, Dr Isaac Goldberg, having declared: "Now that superstition has effectively destroyed all traditional religions, we can at last pay serious attention to the concept of God." (p. 84)

goes off to become a Buddhist monk on Taprobane, Clarke offers no explanation for the fact that Buddhism, apparently alone of all the religions, still flourishes here on Taprobane. A fact that is even more mysterious when we are told later on that the Lotus of Tibet, Buddhists also, are in severe trouble and the Vatican is just about bankrupt.

This strange blindness towards the effects of change is something that is carried through into the main theme of the story. This is a scheme to build an elevator between Taprobane – a wholly disjunctive Sri Lanka mysteriously shifted to the Equator – and a satellite in synchronous orbit. It will shunt us with the need for expensive rocket fuel, and cope with the increased traffic between Earth and our colonies on the Moon, Mars and Mercury. Fine. A neat little 'about-face'. But can you imagine the changes that would come in our society? Clarke apparently, cannot, or, at least, they get no mention.

In the first section of the novel the scheme, and the character of its creator, are highlighted by incidents from the ancient past of Taprobane. An emperor defiled the Buddhist religion of the island, tried to make himself a god, established the fantastic pleasure gardens of Yakkala that are a sort of earthly paradise, and was finally overwhelmed with his pleasure gardens left to the ravages of time and the jungle.

It is a nice, if unoriginal, idea. But the parallels are too crudely drawn, the symbolism so lacking in any subtlety, that the strongest comes nowhere near succeeding. Nor do these sections stand on their own; which is troubling in a broader sense. The science fiction writer, and the writer of historical fiction are both creating. Whether dealing about the past or the future, both have to create a believable world that is not our own. And both have to create characters shaped by that world.

It is clear that Clarke is trying for this, but the nearest he comes is a rather slightly unconvincing in a sound-and-vision recreation of King Kallidasa's life. The death of young Kallidasa's god monkey, which is the beginning of the sequence of events that will lead to his seizure of the throne, becomes a parallel for the loss of Vannor Morgan's wife when he was a child, which in turn was the thing that led him into becoming an engineer. The incidents seem to come straight from "A Child's Introduction To Psychology", and the parallel is so blatantly unconvincing that it loses any impact for even point it might have had. It was intended reminding of the fact, this is just one more demonstration that Clarke is a writer of mechanisms, not of people. The final section of the book, where it at last manages to lumber off the ground, is further proof.

As an aside I would mention that I just cannot believe that a non-scientist would begin on such a 'Once upon a time' level as: 'This is the story of a king who murdered his father and was killed by his brother' (p. 26). Nor can I accept that Chivalric tales dating from the 14th century after Clarke would include such details as the fact that a cart had squeaking wheels, even if that cart was carrying a king to his death. Nor do I think that four sentences as banal as:

"My name is Vannor Morgan, I am Chief Engineer of Taron Construction's Land Division. My last project was the Gibraltar Bridge. Now I want to talk about something incomparably more ambitious." (p. 52)

would instantly capture the full attention of a top archaeologist and the world's most famous journalist. Come to that, I don't really think that any industry would call itself Taron Construction. And would a copy of the OED and the Encyclopaedia Britannica be enough to allow an alien computer to speak perfect English? No chance. If you are starting from scratch it is not enough to define a word with more words in the same language, you have to point things out. Also, language is not just the words used, but the way in which they are used and the conceptual framework that underlies them. This information is not usually contained in a Dictionary or an Encyclopaedia. And while I am on about these little things, did Clarke really have to make that coy reference to an old film called 'something like Space Wars 2000' (p. 149)?

There are minor, nagging little inconsequential points. But the book is crammed with things like these that accumulate into a general dissatisfaction with the novel. It is all thought out in the small details, but these are as vital to the book as the larger concepts.

But to return to the plot: Vannor Morgan, engineer extraordinaire, wants to build an elevator from Earth to a satellite in synchronous orbit. Unfortunately the ideal site is a sacred mountain on Taprobane. The scene is set for a dramatic clash of personalities and cultures, and particularly a science-religion clash. But Clarke backs away from it. (It stages there is a legal battle and the Buddhist monks win. We learn about it from a passing reference in a later dialogue. In fact, too much of the book is like

this. It is like a stage play in which nothing actually happens on stage; all we get are odd characters mulling each other and reporting the events off-stage; something Stoppard can manage, perhaps, but not Clarke.

But not to worry, all is not yet lost for the cause of technology. The Independent Republic of Mars is interested in the idea of the elevator in order to convince them finally, though, Morgan has to stage demonstration on Earth. This time he wins permission to use Topobane as the site of the test. And this scene is set, half-way through the novel, for the first real piece of drama. A single, thousands-of-kilometers-long thread of "hyperfilm" is to be lowered from a Weather Control satellite. But, as it descends, a fresh hurricane blows up. Here we have all the ingredients of a tremendously climactic scene. Indeed, Clarke does manage to endow the scene with a fair amount of dramatic tension. Yet how much more effective would it have been had he described the scene, rather than letting it hang upon a series of figures that include such things as rate of descent, height and tension upon the thread. For example, the figures tell us that the thread is holding off over the place; but the people on the ground seem to be as little affected as by a stiff breeze.

When it is all over we learn that the storm was conjured up by Choom Goldberg, who has given up the Buddhist monastery to become head of Weather Control in this region. Moreover, he is not only a genius, but suddenly it is revealed that he is mad. It is too much, springing this upon us without warning. I do not object to a mad genius, but Clarke should at least have played this by giving adequate notice that Goldberg was head of Weather Control, and that he was mad. As it is, it appears to be some sort of blanket condemnation - as if his madness is a natural corollary of his being a scientist who turned to religion.

In the sections up to this point Clarke has created the framework for a really good, dramatic novel. The clash of ideas and ideologies, building up to this physical clash, with nature taking on the role of weapon in the hands of the mad scientist, ending up with a nice, ironic conclusion as the storm blows away some golden butterflies up onto the mountain, fulfilling a prophecy that begs the monks to abandon the mountains. It is a pity that this ends the novel - we get, because the book he did produce is so lacking in drama and convincing characterisation.

Take, for example, the central character, Morgan. He is supposed to be dynamic, powerful, unpleasant; or, at least, this is the picture you are supposed to build up from the testimony of other characters. I have said before that the characters have more flash than has been evident in Clarke's novels normally. Even so, Morgan is called an awful lot more than he is shown to be. Instead he appears to be a sort of blind, all-purpose super-scientist, of writers for the use of. Certainly he is clever; whenever Clarke comes up with a problem, he puts the solution into Morgan's mouth. And he is sure that he is right; but since Clarke also believes he is right, and convinces the reader of this by not giving much room to anyone who might gainsay him, it takes it of any hint of conceit. Morgan accepts defeat all too readily, too gracefully, when the monks with their court case - he's not as hard as the character should be. In short, Clarke seems to be afraid to make his hero as objectionable as he is supposed to be.

But back to the plot... The end of section 3, with the barrier lifts driving the Buddhist monks off the sacred mountain, marks a convenient break in the novel. From here on in, it is the old familiar Clarke back on old familiar ground, and hence more relaxed. Morgan is now free to build his Space Elevator on Earth after all. There are no by-the-by passages about ancient Topobane or the alien visitation. Characters like Goldberg the mad monk and Rajandha drop quietly into the nuts and bolts world of building the

In passing, the objections of a "crackpot" professor about vertigo are dealt with in rather perfunctory fashion, and we are through to the real meat of the novel. In the middle of building the Space Elevator all the balloons suddenly fall on one of the vehicles and a group of people find themselves stranded halfway between Earth and the satellite. No complaints about lack of drama here, this is the sort of technological drama that it is like in the films involved on. It is A FALL OF MOONDUST revisited, but none the worse for that. Where this sort of it is concerned, Clarke has few equals.

The big problem with THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE is that it contains at least two separate novels, and possibly two or three short

stories as well. In squeezing all that into the length of one novel he has sacrificed so much that every part loses out. A bit more work and care was needed on the early sections. And perhaps the final section, with a little expansion, could have stood as a novella on its own. Indeed it might well have benefited from that.

To conclude, THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE does have the makings of Clarke's finest book but unfortunately the end product does not live up to that promise.

Arvid and Bill Strugatsky

PRISONERS OF POWER, Victor Gollancz: 1978; 284pp; £5.50; ISBN 0-573-02545-X

Reviewed by Chris Evans.

I was disappointed with this book. Compared with the wit and inventiveness of MONDAY BEGINS ON SATURDAY or the stark realism of ROADSIDE PICNIC, PRISONERS OF POWER seems somewhat reminiscent of plot and pedestrianism of imagination. There are, to be sure, some good moments in the book - the Strugatsky are intelligent and resourceful writers - but overall I felt that they had wasted a good idea on an unimproved storyline.

Maxim Kammerer, an explorer from Earth, is stranded on an alien planet where he is adopted by the humanoid natives who assume that he has come from a remote mountain region and describe his ignorance of their world to loss of memory. Maxim soon learns the language, makes friends, and is enlisted in the Legionnaires, a select group of soldiers who are fighting a war against the degenerate degenerate - their word for mutant. The society in which he finds himself is highly militaristic and the story follows Maxim's gradual discovery of how the masses are being manipulated by the ruling elite. The novel's title reflects its central image, for the people are indeed prisoners of power, their excessively militaristic attitudes being artificially induced by the dictatorship. Maxim survives numerous adventures with the Legionnaires, the rebels and various bands of mutant before finally discovering the secret of the rulers' control, the authors peeling back each layer of the plot-onion up to the last few pages.

What failed to convince me in this book was the Strugatsky's imagined society, which seemed far too reminiscent of a Twentieth Century European state under a repressive regime to pass as an alien world. While this may be to the Strugatsky's purpose on a symbolic level by way of making it clear to the reader that the planet is really representative of present-day Earth, it spoils the integrity of the book itself by eroding the reader's credibility (take off, we would expect some exotic element in an alien society). Equally disturbing is Maxim's adventures, which rely too much on coincidental meetings and improbable escapes from difficult situations to be convincing. If synthesised, this book's plot would read like a typical adventure story. There's nothing wrong with this, of course, as long as the author is only concerned with telling a rattling good yarn, but the Strugatsky have serious pains to get across in this book which would have been better presented within a more credible storyline. As it is, an intriguing set of characters meander through a scenario with far too many pulp trappings, and the result is an uneasy amalgam of the serious and the trivial, as if the real of "Hamlet" had been plugged into a "Flash Gordon" episode. Better luck next time, comrades.



Gollancz

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