

S F COMMENTARY 15



SEPTEMBER 1970

MONTHLY

\$3 FOR 18 (\$7 AIRMAIL)

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

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and is available at 20 cents a copy or \$3 for 18 surface mail, or \$7 for 18 airmail. Please send cash only to me or to my AMERICAN AGENT: Charlie Brown, 2078 Anthony Ave, Bronx, New York 10457, U.S.A. In Britain we cost 30/- for 20, and 70/- airmail and my BRITISH AGENT is Peter R Weston, 31 Pinowall Ave, Masshouse Lane, Kings Norton, Birmingham 40, England. Also available for articles, reviews, letters and graphic contributions.

COVER: An odd mixture of the work of Dimitrii Razuvaev (the "bits" of the collage) and Stephen Campbell (who arranged the bits on a sheet of paper). An accidental inspiration. Drawing on Page 13 by Bill Rotsler. Neither Bill nor Charlie Brown won TAFF by the way, but I'm trying to work out how to enlist Elliot Shorter as a contributor. Production help by Stephen Campbell.

AUSTRALIA IN SEVENTY-FIVE: Robin Johnson has just left to represent us in Heidelberg, Germany. Watch our pages for further developments.

I AM AGENT FOR: LOCUS, the biweekly newsmagazine, published by Charlie Brown (address above). LOCUS costs 10 for \$3, and contains as much news as possible about fans, fanzines, professionals, books, conventions and other stuff I haven't room to print. Airmailed to your friendly agent, who mails them to you.

AND AGENT FOR: SPECULATION, the world's best English-language magazines of s f book reviews and critical comment; from Peter R Weston (address above). 50 cents an issue and quarterly, this is (curses!) the best reading around.

The image shows a rectangular object, likely a piece of paper or a small board, with a grid of small, dark, circular marks. The marks are arranged in a regular pattern, suggesting they might be holes or dots. The object is oriented vertically and is set against a dark, textured background. The lighting is somewhat uneven, with the top of the object being brighter than the bottom.

* And I nearly lost some friends last issue. I didn't mention some very mentionable people, for instance. In the mail several days after the despatch of last issue, came the latest issue, all 102 pages full, of the WSFA JOURNAL, published for the Washington Science Fiction Association by Donald L. Miller, 12315 Judson Road, Wheaton, Maryland, 20906, U S A. It contains an article titled intriguingly SEX AND THE SINGLE CELL as well as a longer version of the Perry Chapdelaine article which appeared in SFC 13, and it takes two full pages to list the contents of this issue. Don Miller mentions S F COMMENTARY a large number of times, and even prints one of my letters. Brave man. Australian agent is Michael O'Brien, 158 Liverpool St., Hobart, Tasmania 7000 - cost, 8 for \$3.

* Several weeks earlier, I received AUSTRALIA IN SEVENTY-FIVE Number 8, published by the Australia In Seventy-Five Committee, and edited this issue by Robin Johnson, Flat 33, 100 High St., North Sydney 2060. The magazine costs 50 cents each, some of which money will support our bid for... what else?... the World Convention in 1975. Business address is P O Box A215, Sydney South, N S W 2000, and cheques should be marked "Gary Mason". I presume that number 8 is Robin's debut as a fanzine editor, and, despite duplicator and high water, he does a good job. Far more importantly, the magazine provides the latest information on our campaign to change the Worldcon rules so that they are more favourable to non-American countries, and to take advantage of these rules when they are changed. The Committee's financial position is sick, and this doesn't give much hope for the next five years. You Aussies voted to pursue this bid: please support it with hard cash.

* From my distant platform the general fanzine scene does not seem too healthy. I mentioned last time that most of the really great fanzines have not published issues within the last twelve months. LOCUS and HAVERINGS feature long lists of new fanzines every so often, but very few of them sound like possible successors to ALGOL, let alone WARHOON. There are exceptions to the rule, like QUARBER MERKUR (Franz Rottensteiner, A-2762 Ortman, Felsenstrasse 20, Austria; 2 DM per copy) of which Numbers 21 and 23 arrived this week. But I can't read a word of its 80 pages: they are all in German. It looks as if the large fanzine is on the way out, except for really successful magazines like SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. And, as I mentioned last issue, the brightest ray of hope comes from Bill and Joan Bowers' OUTWORLDS (6 for \$2 from P O Box 87, Barberton, Ohio 44203, U S A). Number 3, which arrived recently, contains little beside letters of comment on Numbers 1 and 2... but you have never seen letters presented with so much style. Each letter has been made into a small article, surrounded by artwork from people like Steve Fabian. A letter received today informs me that Number 4, just released in USA, is even better, but the magazine needs more original articles. * And all we need now are the latest issues of WARHOON (a monster Walt Willis reprint issue has been promised for over a year), ALGOL (Leigh Edmonds tells me that Andy Porter has joined model trains fandom, of all things), NIEKAS (Ed Meskys now publishes Tolkien fanzines) and maybe even SCYTHROP. S F COMMENTARY will attempt to compensate for these dear departed with its reprint issue of John Foyster's Ditmar-winning fanzine, EXPLODING MADONNA/JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY which should run over 100 pages and appear in December. Only regular traders, regular correspondents and subscribers will receive this issue, although there may be a few extra copies at \$1 each. Read the very best of John Foyster, George Turner, Samuel Delany, Franz Rottensteiner, Stanislaw Lem and others. In the meantime, New York fan/critic Barry Gillam, will edit one issue of this magazine in the near future. John Foyster will edit another issue early in 1971.

* Meanwhile, some of my friends talk back to me:

* DENNIS STOCKS (36 Cambridge Street, West End, Brisbane, Queensland 4101):

What is the Brisbane Fantasy and Science Fiction Association? A few years ago there appeared an advertisement in one of our daily newspapers, deploring the fact that Brisbane lacked an organised s f fan group. The writer behind that letter, David Campbell, left for England before anything concrete could be done; and handed most of the work to a David Gray. David tried to get a group off the ground but his Brisbane Science Fact/Science Fiction Club never really got anywhere. However he did collect several names and addresses of interested fans.... and so the months passed. I began to correspond with John Bangsund, and in one letter asked if he knew the eventual fate of the group; the reply was a suggestion to start my own group. John must have told Gary Mason of my interest, for Gary began sending me copies of NEW FORERUNNER, together with a lot of advice about starting an s f group. I collected more addresses, placed an ad in the local COURIER MAIL, rented a room at an exorbitant cost and the first "meeting" got under way. At our second meeting we showed two movies. One of our members donated his business rooms for meetings, I recovered a library that belonged to an s f group that was active before the War, and that is it. We have Frank Bryning in our circle of attending members; finance is by donation. (April 24, 1970)

* BUCK COULSON (Route 3, Hartford City, Indiana 47348, U S A):

(Re SFC 7): I like THE SCARR better than SFR, but then I'm used to being in the minority. Of course, quite possibly THE SCARR doesn't have the wide US following because George doesn't send out many copies; two or three years ago he wasn't even sending it to the Willisos. (Since then, I don't know).

STEFANTASY, from Bill Danner, is equally good and maintains a deliberately restrictive policy. (You may think I'm hardheaded about YANDRO, but Bill won't even accept money). Charters may value his time more than he does a wide following, while Gois advertises for new subscribers in the pro magazines.

Ah yes, why don't you go commercial and put out 1000-copy issues and make money at this scurvy little hobby? We used to regularly get the same sort of letters as David Penman's (in SFC 7). Seth Johnson in particular could never understand that running 1000 or 2000 copies of YANDRO would be too much work for a hobby and produce too little income to live on, and was therefore not done... ... I seem to agree pretty much with Paul Anderson's reviews. (After the tone of the rest of the letter, I can see Paul reading this, hiding his head in his hands and saying, "Where have I gone wrong?")
(February 15, 1970)

* CHRIS PRIEST (1 Ortygia House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Middlesex, England):

Thanks for the copy of SFC 8, which Pete Weston handed to me at the Easter Convention the other day. Curious to sit at one convention and read of another. One gathers that they're much the same wherever they are... I'd just like to set the record straighter, about that conference you quoted me on. They aren't all disastrous; I rather think that the facts that I attended that one and that it was also disastrous, are not entirely unconnected. The first conference that Calder threw was something of a success, in fact. That was in Edinburgh a few years ago, and the highlight was the entry of a nude girl. Being a few years before "permissiveness", it was sufficient to rock the literary establishment. But in Harrogate, alas, no less. There was talk amongst some of the turdier writers of creating a happening, but they were so lacking in creative imagination (it shows in their writing, too) that they couldn't think of one. Meanwhile, my contribution to the proceedings was a series of mental snoots... my continual resort when all else seems low. On the other hand, at s f conventions, when one collects together writers, it is as if they are representatives of a firm or a partnership, which directs by its very activities the future of s f. The actual truth is that each writer is very isolated, and works a large part of the time without reference to other writers.
(April 6, 1970)

* JOHN FOYSTER (12 Glengariff Drive, Mulgrave, Victoria 3170):

I would like to feel that George Turner (in SFC 11) was right about Golden Ages, but unfortunately what I see as the Golden Age was not the period in which I began to read science fiction, nor even the period from which came most of the science fiction I first read. I started reading s f in March 1956, and for a year or so read strictly from s f of the fifties. As soon as I started to read s f of the late forties I quit buying the current magazines. This hardly fits George's psychological explanation. I do know that the phenomenon he mentions is quite widespread, but that doesn't mean that every manifestation has the same cause.

Re. the presence of the Worldcon Committee at the convention after their election; may I point out that they were absent on the Friday evening (during a film session) and again on the Sunday afternoon for 90 minutes and then this latter only because programming changes made the other arranged time impossible? From the time of election until the Monday morning, committee members participated in seven of the twelve program items listed in the con booklet, and four of the twelve were feature films. I'm sure the

committee members, each and every one, would have been pleased to appear in BARBARELLA or even 2001, but as yet they do not aspire to such heights. I don't know what happened on the Monday, not having been there, but I gather that members of that committee were again active, except in the feature films. As for Harding not asking a question - you must have missed the comics panel, when he asked all the questions, and the Saturday afternoon program, when he did the same thing. (April 20, 1970)

* But he wasn't present at the Consorship Panel, and so missed quite an argument across the length of the hall between a pro-censorship defendant and myself. Very few panel members were at the Convention on the Monday, and I certainly missed the support of s f fans during the Fan Panel. But that's all past. As I've said before, the Trekkies kept us going whenever things flagged, and the Melbourne S F Club has had a renaissance since the Easter Convention. But... a suggestion. Let the Worldcon Committee members have their discussions before or after the convention at New Year. This will be one event not to be missed (if anybody ever releases a program, that is). *

* MICHAEL DECKINGER (25 Manor Drive, Apt. 12-J, Newark, New Jersey 07106, U S A):
I was pleasantly surprised to read of John Baxter's success in the book field. I used to correspond with John 11 years ago, when he was a fan, publishing BUNYIP and writing long and interesting letters. Through the intervening years I've lost contact with him, although I was aware he had sold some stories to John Carnell. There is a new book on s f films available in the U S, written by a John Baxter whom I never associated with the John Baxter I know. Apparently they are one and the same, and I will have to secure a copy, if, for no other reason, than to assist him in getting the royalties. (April 18, 1970)

* JACK WODHAMS (8 Stone St., Boralu, N S W 2141):

(Re. SFC 11): George Turner tries hard to be a Jeremiah, but the Golden Age never is and never was. Before Jonah, and since, there have been folk sadly deprecating that they've seen everything and that the world can have little more to offer. The Golden Age of flying. The Golden Age of steam. The Golden Age of sail. The Golden Age of chariots. "What's it you call it? A... a wheel? Dang me if that don't beat all. Whatever will they think of next, I wonder?" ... It is a demonstrable truth that humans make the same old mistakes over and over again. This is because cumulative human knowledge is not cumulative personal experience. Personal experience is always unique and fresh - unless, like George, there is a predisposition towards being jaded. George speaks authoritatively upon Wells: Wells the Innovator, Wells the All-Encompasser, Wells the hog cleaning the plate and leaving nothing for the rest of us. Good luck.

To me the innovators were Ray Bradbury and John Wyndham. I never have read Wells or Jules Verne, who are two authors of note in my experience only through screen adaptations of their work. Once, long ago, THE TIME MACHINE was a prize I received at school. As with the written version of THE INVISIBLE MAN, tackled around the same time, I found it hard to read, and didn't get past the earlier chapters. It was a lot easier and less tedious to see it on film, along with Flash Gordon, Tarzan and Buck Jones. Now there was a Golden Age if you like - a whole morning of Cowboys and Indians, Musketeers, Micky Mouse, and God knows what else, a great swag of impartially varied entertainment to suit every taste, and all for a penny. Ah me, those days will never come back.

But the point is that George says that the Golden Age of SF has come and gone, that all that has followed has merely been amplification of Wells, borrowing from Wells, embellishing of Wells, refurbishing of Wells. Wells, it would appear, was God. The rest of us, it would seem to be implied, are inferior imitators, jumpers upon a bandwagon, copiers with a paucity of wit. And to this picture I, personally, object. Wells, au naturel, along with Dickens and Shakespeare, fails to inspire me. Thurber, Runyon, Steinbeck, Korsh, O Henry, London, W W Jacobs, de Maupassant, yes. Harry Harrison, yes. Keith Laumer, bless his incompetent psychiatrist, yes. But Wells? No. The Golden Age of SF? Aw, come on, break it down, sport, Jack Wodhams has hardly started yet. (May 27, 1970)

* BERT CHANDLER (Cell 7, Tara Street, Woollahra, N S W 2025):

Am at home at the moment ((June 6)) having been flown from Hobart to Sydney in rather a ruddy blush to play nurse to an ailing wife/secretary/chauffeuse. When I'm not sweating and slaving over a hot stove (and kitchen sink, washing machine, ironing board, etc, etc) I'm sweating and slaving over a hot typewriter, churning out yet another Grimes novel for Ace. The last one was Commodore Grimes (two of him, in fact) mixed up with The Outsiders' Ship, a plurality of Mrs Grimeses, the ex-Empress Irene and her low friends, that peculiar artist/teleporteuse Clarisse, and Captain Sir Dominic Flandry (borrowed from Poul Anderson, with his consent). It will be called (unless Ace change the title) THE DARK DIMENSIONS.

Work in progress on THE INHERITORS - Lieutenant Commander Grimes, commanding FSS SEEKER, having fun and games in a Lost Colony, with Captain Drongo Kano, the rather piratical Master of Southerly Buster, getting in his hair. Yet to arrive on the scene is Captain Roger Danzellan, in Schnauzer - the Dog Star Line's senior Master. I don't know yet how it's all going to work out, but Grimes will finish up with another large blot in his copy book and will realise that he'll never make Flag Rank in the Federation's Survey Service...

* SANDRA MIESEL (8744 North Pennsylvania St, Indianapolis, Indiana 46240, U S A):

Many thanks for S F COMMENTARY No 10. The sheer volume and detail of your essays is astonishing. (And you do this every month? The mind boggles!) Indeed, my husband glanced at all those single-spaced pages and gently laid the issue aside. I was particularly impressed by Mr Gillospie's Aldiss analyses. The previews don't mention them, but do you intend ever covering his two integrated collections, GALAXIES LIKE GRAINS OF SAND and STARSWARM? I think Aldiss did a beautiful job in those, weaving together individual stories with commentary.

Mr Foyster's description of the "ideal" science fiction writer is entirely too rigorous. Surely breadth is preferable to depth in factual knowledge, because the details change so rapidly. And familiarity with method and language of science is even more important than factual knowledge. I disagree with your implications that scientific knowledge can only be acquired by formal university education and that the physical sciences are the only proper bases for science fiction. But I couldn't agree more wholeheartedly about John Campbell's gross scientific ignorance.

I also agree with your program for critics. I've done some detailed research on Poul Anderson and am now working my way through Delany. Close acquaintance with a few authors also provides bases for comparison and contrast when reviewing or studying others. Yet I doubt if even PRECURSORS OF OUR AUTHOR IN ANGLO-SAXON POETRY would exactly electrify fandom. (July 6, 1970)

* The mind indeed boggles at the thought of turning out an SFC 10 every month. Why do you think the magazine now runs only to 26 pages an issue? At the moment I'm saving my full energies for the special issue which I've discussed already. No, I'm not planning on a discussion of Aldiss' short story collections, mainly because I doubt whether all of his best stories appeared in the collections. He has written over 70 short stories, I've heard, and I haven't worked out how to read them all. I'm working on it. :: I was thinking of having a race with Sandra to produce the first Delanyrama, but I suspect John Foyster will beat us both. Besides, there are two parts of the Aldiss landscape yet unfinished. :: Sandra has just written again to send me the second part of the PLATYPUS MYTHOS. The first part appeared in DOUBLE:BILL 21, and I thought then that John Bangsund must have had a hand in it. But no... there are two genuine Australia-fans alive and well in Indianapolis, and they've never met an Australian. (You can guess what will happen when they do). PLATYPUS MYTHOS II will appear in SFC as soon as possible.*

* HARRY WARNER JR (423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740, U S A):

In S F COMMENTARY 10, the highlight for me was the start of your Aldiss article. Even if you'd botched it, I would lie like the dickens and praise it, simply because of the example it may help to set for other fanzine writers to tackle the whole corpus of writers other than Tolkien, Heinlein, and the three or four others who are invariably chosen. But you've made these novels seem very real and have given them the aspect of essential parts of a jigsaw puzzle which you will completely reconstruct after you've finished the remaining sections of your article. Unfortunately, Aldiss started to publish in the era when I was reading next to now current science fiction. So I am familiar only with HOTHOUSE, and after all this time I can't even be sure if I read it as a book or as a series of magazine stories. Probably the latter, for I can't remember the episode with the heckler. Perhaps if I'd read all the Aldiss science fiction stories, I couldn't bear to think of their not having been created; but on the basis of what I've read, I react in the same way as I do to the science fiction of Jim Blish and wish desperately the writer had decided to write mundane fiction and become one of the foremost novelists of the century instead of a foremost novelist in the backwater puddle of science fiction. The talent to do it seems to be there in both men.

This issue is quite filled with John on topics which really can't be commented upon in any detail in this space. I'd better restrict myself to one small but important matter. I'd like to see science fiction critics adopt one pledge that their brethren in mundane fiction have never taken. That's the promise to criticise science fiction stories, not other critics. Arguments over criticism of science fiction stories are one thing; devoting the space intended for criticism to endless criticism of someone else's criticisms is the thing I dread in fanzines. We've had little of it so far, and it's encouraging that few people take seriously the Pierce-Moskowitz crusade. But it's still ominous that the crusade arose at all, with its emotionalizing, generalities and personal attacks on people who write about science fiction.

THE TEN-FOOT CHICKEN was pure delight. Get Jack Wodhams to do something like this in every issue and we'll have a poetry Hugo competition at the Worldcon within a year or two. Meanwhile, either my ignorance or my provinciality prevents me from certainty about the authenticity of the "Henry Newton Goodrich" poem. I am not familiar with the poem or the poet, my familiarity with an American lyric about the Old Gray Mare doesn't help me, and I can't even imagine whether the two to whom you pay tribute with the poem will be proud or furious. It's a remarkable reconstruction of a kind of

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GIBSON	ON	HARNESS
PENMAN	ON	POHL
ANDERSON	ON	VONNEGUT

THE ROSE

by CHARLES L HARNESS

Panther : 80 c

THE ROSE first published 1953

Collection first published 1966

Reviewed by John Gibson

It's a pleasure to write about a really good piece of work, which THE ROSE unquestionably is. Harness has, to my knowledge, written very little. His only other novel of this period is THE PARADOX MEN, a humane science fantasy of a kind that has always been more than rare, in a genre which is primarily supported by authors whose mechanistically simplistic views would horrify anyone but a

proselytising engineer. I have a particular sympathy for the Harnessian viewpoint - he sets out the battle lines, here stated barely, of Art versus Science, in which there is no doubt as to the author's loyalty. Art quite obviously gets the better of Science in the unique conversational duel carried on by the characters of THE ROSE, although Harness does suggest that there is something worth more than both.

What? Harness only hints; the reader must guess. Michael Moorcock, introducing THE ROSE, says that Harness is making the point that Science and Art can be complementary. The evidence of the book itself would seem to contradict this opinion. Those who support Science, at least in THE ROSE, are portrayed as cold, power-lusting, absolutely ruthless, even their arguments possessing a certain logical deadness. The scientist's greatest presumption is burlesqued under the name of "Sciomnia" (all knowledge), and "all knowledge" takes on the more sinister

meaning, quite naturally, of "all power".

For Science, represented by the reputation-proud Martha Jacques, is under the guardianship of the State, here represented by secret policeman Grade. Suffice to say that Art has the best people, the best arguments and the best motives on its side. There are no megalomaniacs or secret policemen among the artists. If Harness had intended to say that Science and Art are complementary, as Moorcock claims, you'd think he would at least balance their cases. The balance, however, has obviously been loaded in favour of Art - well, who could speak a kind word for Science? Science: the thing that poisons our environment with chemical wastes, the thing that aids armies to commit genocide, the thing that regiment people into factory production lines until they are less than the machines they serve, the thing that started by discovering how to kill disease organisms but now helps to manufacture more effective disease organisms for killing people. No; Art has beauty and is reasonably harmless, except to censors. All Science can offer is regimentation, ultimately total destruction.

To distill a personal credo into a few sentences is to make diatribe. Harness has the art not to do this: I have not the space to do otherwise. The Harnessian hero of THE NEW REALITY runs into a renaissance Eden thinking, and they keep it this way, simple and sweet forever, and their children after them. To hell with Science and progress - well, within practical limits, of course.

Aye, there's the rub. Science is destructive to man because the philosopher-king neither exists nor ever will exist. Our kings, democratic or not, cannot but use Science for its worst potentialities. THE ROSE presumes that the counterforce of Art will ameliorate, even when brushed aside by that destructive potential. Here is Harness indulging himself in wishful thinking, just as in THE PARADOX MEN we clearly see his wishful thinking in the miraculous advent of the Toynbee-22 civilization that would make all men brothers.

I part company with Harness at this point. Science has already carried the battle. There will be no wondrous Toynbee-22, nor will the counterforce of Art or homo superior arrive on the scene like the trumpet-tooting horse soldiers of some Western.

But if Harness is guilty of absurd optimism, he is not guilty of bad art. His ability is in his strength to write suspenseful dialogue, dialogue that is far away from the natural, yet sounds true. The characters use conversation as all of us do in real life, as a spear upon which to impale an adversary. The whole of life in both THE ROSE and THE PARADOX MEN is an inquisition. The heroes and heroines are always wondering what they can say to divert the suspicion of the inquisitors away from themselves.

I would like to read another Harness novel, one written in this year of ultimate disillusion, 1970, to find out whether Harness has retained his optimism. Even if he has, I would still like to read his work for the pleasure of it.

Of the two short stories contained in this book, THE CHESSPLAYERS and THE NEW REALITY, I can only say that the first is very funny (which is a new side of Harness for me) and the second a bore. How many s f writers have indulged in this retelling of this Adam-Eve-Lucifer story? The names Adam Prentiss, E, and Luce, give the game away too easily.

I think I can agree with the blurb that THE ROSE is an s f "science fantasy" classic, which is the same as saying that I enjoyed it a hell of a lot.

(**brg** John seems to have missed Charles Harness' most recent novel THE RING OF RITORNEL, Berkley X1630, 1968, and stories in ANALOG and ORBIT 4 which have won high praise. Anybody like to help in a Harness fiesta? **)

THE AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT

by FREDERIK POHL

Gollancz : 1969

stg.25/-

Reviewed by David Penman

The theme of a man from one time suddenly finding himself in another and very alien time is not new. Stories such as THE TWO-TIMERS deal with a man from the past transported into our present. He naturally finds that the world has become confusing and different from what he used to know. Other books, such as this one, follow a man from our time who finds himself in the

future. It seems likely that, taking into account a technology that changes the world faster and faster each year, such a traveller would find himself at least as much out of place there as would a man from the past in our century. To describe such a future society so that it is real, and not just a gadget-strewn playroom with a couple of twentieth-century trends taken to ridiculous extremes, is a task requiring literary skill and a first rate imagination. Such qualities are rare.

Charles Forrester is a volunteer fireman burned to death in a fire in 1970, deep frozen till medical science has advanced enough for him to be revived. This happens in year 2527. He naturally finds the world has changed somewhat in five and a half centuries, and the book mainly concerns his troubles in adjusting to the new society.

He begins by finding a girlfriend and offending a (human) Martian with a Polish accent who sets out to kill him. As the people of the time patiently explain to him, this is quite logical and acceptable and not at all permanent. It is only his out-of-date thinking that makes him run from such a trivial thing as being murdered. Charles, however, continues to run.

He takes two jobs, first with an alien from Sirius captive on Earth, then as a machine minder. He quits this job over-hastily, leaving himself penniless. This leaves him badly off, for without money he cannot get another job, and is forced to join the "Forgotten Men". Further developments lead to a predictable ending.

Which brings us to the world in which the hero finds himself. Its most obvious facet is its great advance in technology over the previous five centuries. This includes death-reversal techniques in medicine, interstellar flight, and a sort of portable computer-telephone-pill information-dispenser service called a "joymaker". Primitive hallucinatory drugs of the twentieth century have been replaced by techniques that provide any given mood without unpleasant side effects. Sexual inhibitions, frustrations of any major sort, and war (at least between humans) appear to have been forbidden by law, along with any major problems of the present day. Along with any major problems of any sort. Everybody is happy, everybody is free, everybody (with minor exceptions) is rich, and nobody starves. It all sounds very nice.

I am prompted to ask, then, why does the hero find so much trouble in adjusting to the new world? Not because the world is initially hostile to him. On the contrary, he is given all the relevant information in a pamphlet for 1970-1990 revivals before he sets out into society. That he chooses to completely ignore this service is no one's fault but his own. It is worth mentioning, though, that however much physical science might have advanced, educational standards among pamphlet writers have regressed to an all-time low. Someone who introduced the present world to a literary mediaeval friar could possibly get past the first paragraph without explaining the steam engine, but he would need to think deeply about the second.

Even so, all the hero's troubles can be traced to his own lack of foresight, to

the blunders he makes in the face of clear warning against them, and to his overbearing arrogance in his attitude towards the new society. Such people exist, but the fact that they find difficulties in a future society is not necessarily a reflection on that society.

A mediaeval peasant transported to our present day would run the gauntlet of our modern problems. He might be run over by a car, die from drinking water with an oil film, be mugged in a back street, infect himself with a dirty heroin needle somebody had offered him, and so on, just because nobody could tell him everything. The visitor to the 26th century meets no such problems, or so it seems, simply because there are none to be met. Why should the advance of civilization up to the present produce new difficulties for society at every step, while the advances in the future only eliminate those that already exist?

The answer is, of course, that the really great, the revolutionary, advances, are the ones that produce the new problems. Relativity led to nuclear fallout, industrialization to pollution, affluence to increased crime, medical advances to dangerous drugs. The world of the 26th century has few difficulties because there has been nothing really new in the preceding five centuries to produce them. Pohl states in his blurb (or "author's note") that the germs of all his strange-seeming innovations exist today. And there is the whole weakness of the book. In other words, THE AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT may be a fun setting in Pohl's imagination for a light-hearted adventure, but it is not and never could be a real world.

Then could there be any possible reason for reading this novel? Yes; in that the author tries to create a possible future of the kind which forces us to look at the accepted values and customs of our own world by showing another that is completely different. He fails. But in the process, he does write a passable adventure story, and some of the gadgets and ideas strewn around his child's playroom of the future are worth picking up and regarding for awhile. By all means borrow the book from your neighbour and pass a pleasant hour or two some Sunday afternoon. But save your money for better things... or pick up the paperback when it appears.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE

by KURT VONNEGUT JR

Jonathan Cape :: 1969

186 pages. :: \$A 4.35

Reviewed by Paul Anderson

The name of Kurt Vonnegut Jr should be well-known in science fiction circles as the author of such great novels as PLAYER PIANO and THE SIRENS OF TITAN. His style is rather unusual, to say the least - since THE SIRENS OF TITAN his writing has become more and more off-beat and surrealist, and his latest book can only be described as bizarre.

You could call this book science fiction because it introduces the kidnappers from the planet Talfamadore. This is not an average "capture and escape" adventure story, however. The brave terrain does not fight desperately against the evil hordes from outer space, but instead, Vonnegut shows the effects of an alien way of thinking upon the hero, Billy Pilgrim.

In order to follow this book the reader must be able to remember, in detail, the events that have taken place and their position in time and space. As the story unfolds we are shown the life of the hero, but we see it from unusual angles; instead of a normal progression of events, the story divides into loosely related incidents from the hero's past, present and future life, seemingly presented without order. The reader is shunted from the past to future and back again willy-nilly throughout the length of this short novel. This chopping and changing is strangely effective. We come to appreciate the aliens' view of life in a way

that could have been impossible if written in a conventional manner. His method could have backfired, leaving him with an unsalable, unreadable mess, but it does not.

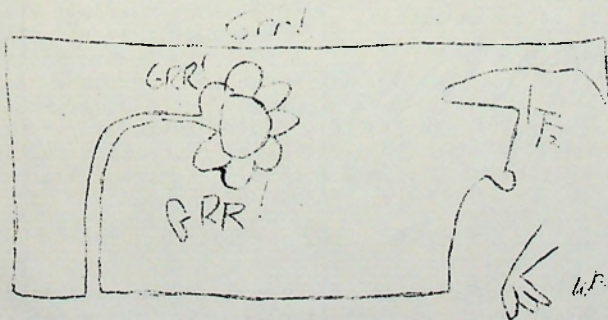
The book centres about an eye-witness report of the fire-bombing of Dresden, Germany, and the events that lead up to it. Vonnegut returns to this incident after every sequence in Billy's future existence. These events take place within the normal time-flow from past to future, compared with the nature of the rest of the book and the Tralfamadorian way of viewing time.

The Tralfamadorians are completely fatalistic in their view of life, and have a quite different perspective of it from ours. They consider it to be an immutable unchangeable unit. They also appear to be completely materialistic in outlook and ignore the possibility of a life after death. Perhaps this is because they are able to relive every moment of their lives in this Universe, ad infinitum. They are trapped in an eternal time cycle between birth and death without hope of relief and escape. No event can touch them because if it is not to their liking they can relive a better time. Their only perceptible reaction to life is a calm, detached "So it goes".

The horrifying part of this book is that the hero is indoctrinated in their way of existence, while living in their zoo, and comes to understand them without seeing how limited they are. He is made a convert to their view of existence and not once does he realize how pitiful it really is. The Tralfamadorians are doomed to an existence in a hell far worse than the one described so vividly by Dante.

Like Aldiss' AN AGE, this book also concerns a method of time-travel and Vonnegut does a good job of showing the reader what it feels like cast adrift in the stream of time. This has a curious effect on his manner of characterization: the characters do not participate in the usual relationships of human society, but appear as actors in a previously-written play. Even their tiniest, most insignificant actions have been scripted beforehand and no one can break the strings held by the puppet-master.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE was runner-up to Ursula LeGuin's THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS in the recent Nebula Awards and it deserves to do well in the Hugo-voting later this year. Not every fan of more conventional science fiction will like this book, but I consider it as one of the best books produced this year.



heroes he is isolated from life. He watches the world go by and wants to be a part of it but cannot bring himself to step into it. This novel details the events that force him into action. The metaphor in his case is Aldiss' brand of time travel. Mind-travellers are substantial only to each other and are isolated from the physical reality of the time they mind to.

The book opens with Bush on a Devonian beach, watching a legged fish, one small piece of evolution. He is an artist, sent back to depict the past, and, more importantly, the effect of mind-travel on man. Using the shorthand of s f, Aldiss examines the relationship of man and time, But more of this later. Bush returns to his present to find that a new regime has come into power. He is trained as a spy and sent back to track down an "enemy of the state". This enemy is actually a professor who has proposed a "revolutionary" new theory of the nature of time.

Let me say that CRYPTOZOIC! is a failure as a novel. And yet its concerns are so important and its parts are so good that it warrants serious discussion. And I do recommend a reading of it. CRYPTOZOIC! relies on a surprise pay-off. The hunted professor believes that time actually flows backwards. This revelation is so large (and phony) that, even as the characters say, it is impossible to accept. As a result, the last sequences are largely specious. And, as always, there is Aldiss' pocket psychology.

But there are many good things about the novel. Aldiss' characterizations are strong even if the characters are not. One feels presented with the new model English failed man in recent Aldiss works, but they are people. This has always been one of his strengths: from the living quarters and ship corridors of NON-STOP (STARSHIP) to the vegetable Earth of HOTHOUSE (THE LONG AFTERNOON OF EARTH) and the desolate rivers of GREYBEARD. Here, Aldiss evokes the green Devonian and the muggy Jurassic settings, the dreary present of 2093, and the thirties English mining town. A time traveller from the far future follows Bush wherever he goes and appears to him as a dim shade; he calls her the Dark Woman. It is a very nice nod to Shakespeare's Dark Lady of the Sonnets. And: "The greatest novelist of our age, Marston Orston, created in FULLBRIGHT a deliberately unfinished novel of over four million words that solely concerns the actions of a young girl rising to open her bedroom window."

The British title, AN AGE, is much better than the banal American CRYPTOZOIC! For the novel, while wandering via mind-travel through most of the past, deals primarily with the problems of 2093. It does not deal with the practical political problems so much as the collective mind of an age that must come to terms with mind-travel. And Bush, the artist, is the focus of this collective dilemma. There is an essential displacement that corresponds to the one felt today. Technology has leapt ahead of our grasp of its consequences. Time is one line in this battle. It seems to objectively rule our lives via machines. Sterne played with time in the Eighteenth Century but it is now, in the Twentieth, that our artists are, en masse, dealing with it. It is one of the chief concerns of Joyce, Proust and Nabokov, as well as Dali, Stravinsky, and others. Most deny time (Borges' A NEW REFUTATION OF TIME) and replace it with memory. The mechanical and observable fail before that other measure, man.

There is a misunderstanding in the novel of the new medium of mind-travel. Ann, a girl Bush meets in the Devonian, says to him, "We're millions of years from our birth - we ought to be free to do it, oughtn't we?" But their personal chronologies are uninterrupted. They might as well be geographically far from home. ("But that was in another country.") The novel is divided into two books and this incident takes place in the opening chapter of the first book. The answers to this and other questions brought up here are to be found in the first

chapter of the second book. Bush has been mobilized and given the task of killing the professor. This hasn't really affected him and when he goes back into the past he hides from his assignment in a 1930s mining town. He watches daily life in the town, specifically that of the Bush family - relatives, supposedly, of his. What he sees - a young girl growing up, a long strike crippling the town and starving its inhabitants, love, despair, death, hope: life - this changes him. "He knew what he had to do. The lesser things before the greater, material before transcendental." Bush accepts life, he goes to embrace it. The point is that he cannot escape into the past: his personal responsibility stays with him. This drama played out before him has brought him a sense of proportion. He has become involved in what he cannot touch. The frieze of Proust's narrator has affected change in Bush.

The subplots present, basically, other approaches to time. Bush is representative of the age: experiencing mind-travel but still wary of it. As an artist he cannot quite touch the essence. He is "cosmically tired", having tried to assume the burden of his generation. But it is Roger Borrow, a friend of his, who, having settled back in the Jurassic, expresses the sought after. As proprietor of The Amniote Egg, a general store, he is in contact with many mind-travellers and, charging this material with his talent, he creates moving structures - a new art form to give voice to the new problems. Borrow is perhaps the happiest person in this catalogue of unresolved lives. Bush had been escaping from responsibility into the past. Bush's father might, on the other hand, have sprung fully formed from Wordsworth's line: "The world is too much with us." He has nothing but memories at the end of a long, hard-working life. Mind-travel is external to him, he has no contact with it except through his son. For the military, it is one more map. They have a purpose and this sets them apart from most of the others wandering through the past. But in reality their forms only mask a lack of confidence with this most unpredictable medium.

At the end of the book objective time has become nonsense. What is left is subjective time: memory, emotion, creation. This brings up another Aldiss work which is largely about the same thing. It is MAN IN HIS TIME, one of his two great stories (the other is A KIND OF ARTISTRY). Here is much more vivid, clear and terse writing. Aldiss examines the ties that bind a man to his milieu and how they fare when stretched. The situation is more immediate and intangible: an astronaut returns from the first flight to Mars, only to discover he is living three and a half minutes ahead of the rest of the world. He answers questions that will not be asked for three minutes, etc. This isolation is perhaps more terrible than the one presented in CRYPTOZOIC! for its being directly observable. Again the temporal discrepancy is a metaphor for natural, already existing barriers and silences between people - in this case the astronaut and his wife and mother. His family cannot understand what has happened; this is, they cannot appreciate the consequences of the displacement and accommodate themselves. There is, in the end, no solution, but Aldiss does say that future generations will have to come to terms with these problems.

MAN IN HIS TIME was, as far as I can tell, the earlier work and CRYPTOZOIC! seems an attempt to expand the themes and develop the implications. While doing this, it takes on a diffuseness, and, hampered by plot requirements, is much less successful. It is still one of Aldiss' better novels, and deserves your attention.

- Barry Gillam 1970

BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD

by BRIAN W ALDISS

Faber & Faber :: 1969

281 pages :: \$A 3.55

Reviewed by Alf Van Der Poorten

Quite in desperation, I went to a party, got mildly drunk, and high on low-grade pot, and returned to BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD in the hope that its mystic gibberish would magically echo the dislocated world of twisted perception now mine. But it was not to be. True, it did, as if magically, become easier to traverse the pages, but after some minutes this effect turned out

to be the result of smoothly turning the pages whilst I meditated on better things unperturbed by the polluted air of Charteris' Europe. Returning to the writ, no spark of feeling flowed, only the soggy conglomeration of dubious doggerel and dislocated language.

But, wait! shouts the defence; Aldiss wishes to describe the dislocation of the LSD trip, of the world on a drugged journey. Therefore his language and his poetry (sic) do not, in the old-fashioned manner, just describe the scene, but in McLuhanesque completeness they are the scene. Like reality, the words lie mixed arbitrarily, some meaningful, most not.

A wonderful idea, you say? Well, perhaps it can be. But Aldiss does not seem the author to carry it off. I readily admit that I am not sympathetic to the new Aldiss; thus whilst I liked NON-STOP (STARSHIP) which I read quite some time ago, very much, I found that AN AGE (CRYPTOZOIC!), though readable, left me almost entirely cold. Perhaps I do not like my s f to be too difficult, and want it to read smoothly and easily. Yet on the other hand my favorite s f authors are Dick and Vonnegut, and I have found myself rating their books not on their smoothness nor readability, but on their authors' abilities. They leave behind images which seem to contribute towards one's understanding of the world.

For a short while it did seem to me that BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD might succeed in creating such an image. There is merit in Aldiss' description of Charteris' vision in Metz when suddenly the world becomes an insubstantial pageant and Charteris loses certainty of his own reality. A little later, ^{during} his arrival in aerosoled England, Aldiss again succeeds momentarily in describing the dislocation into possible identities which Charteris suffers. But mostly I found reading this book an unrewarding struggle.

I have no kindness in my heart for Ouspenski and Gurdjieff and their type of mysticism; perhaps if one has, certain of the repeated insights and images one is offered might fit into a coherent picture. On the other hand, I do feel kindly towards Simon Templar and frankly feel that Aldiss serves us badly because he does not attempt to make a running contrast between the Saint's imaginary world and the one in which Charteris now finds himself. Indeed, if, as we are told, Charteris' whole understanding and love for England arises from the books of the author whose name he has taken, then it remains a surprise how little Charteris' view of England is coloured by his reading experience. I suspect that Aldiss has given little thought to this point and has imported the name Charteris solely in order to pun weakly on "temple" and "sainthood".

I can hardly deny that BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD succeeds in picturing hopeless dislocation, for it is hopeless dislocation. It is as annoying a book as the world it images. But surely this is not a creditable point. I recall the case of the novel that presents a typically boring day in the useless life of its anti-hero. Unless such a novel is written with a touch and quality that stretches beyond the limitations of the main character, the novel itself will be boring and useless. The debating team that proposes the motion that the affirmative case is incompetent must not be so incompetent as to prove its case by demonstration; rather, it must argue so colourfully and well that its claim that it is nonetheless

J G BALLARD AND THE BLOWN MIND

Apart from the critical notes by Melbourne's John Foyster, Australian sf readers have been strangely silent on this subject. It is time to lift off the wraps and consider his achievement. For myself, the first time I consciously read Ballard was just on three years ago. THE CLOUD SCULPTORS OF CORAL ID (in FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION) struck me as a moody little story but nothing more. The later perspectives were missing so it could only be the surface things that I saw. The surfaces were good: Vermilion Sands, that vague amalgam of sea-cliff dust and coral tower, and the story that concerned the fortunes of four oddly assorted men who scrounge a living from tourists, at least until they meet the alluring Miss Chanel.

BOOKS REFERRED TO IN THIS ARTICLE :

THE TERMINAL BEACH (Penguin Books) (collection):

THE ILLUMINATED MAN
BILLENIU

THE DISASTER AREA (Panther Books) (collection):

MR F IS MR F
THE SUBLIMINAL MAN
NOW WAKES THE SEA
CONCENTRATION CITY
MINUS ONE
THE IMPOSSIBLE MAN
STORM BIRD, STORM DREAMER
ZONE OF TERROR
MANHOLE 69

THE FOUR-DIMENSIONAL NIGHTMARE (Penguin Books) (collection):

THE GARDEN OF TIME
THE VOICES OF TIME

THE DROWNED WORLD (Penguin Books) (novel)

THE DAY OF FOREVER (Panther Books) (novel)

Look more closely at CLOUD-SCULPTORS OF CORAL D and you will see that his brilliant tour de force has hoodwinked you: you thought he was describing real people and a real place but it's nothing of the kind. Take the characters. He very seldom gives direct descriptions of characters and such descriptions as do occur, whether referring to physical appearance or to temperament, are more elusive than descriptive. CORAL D gives us these fine examples: "One was a small hunchback with overlit eyes": that's Manuel. "His morose eyes were set in a face like a bored Gaughin's": that's Nolan. And when you look at Miss Chanel you'll find she has not been described anywhere. Apart from a vague hint of voluptuousness, she is left as mystical as the Unicorn.

He does not describe anything, so much as give the illusion of description. The characters escape from being only thumbnail sketches and outlines because of something greater - the immense dry charge of electricity in the background, the potential that flows around the characters but not in them, building them up to a larger-than-life status. A good analogy could be a reflective metal coin that is bathed in light. These characters are bathed in emotion: it coalesces around them and they live.

With CORAL D I encountered the first of Ballard's myth-figures, the strongest and least defined of which was Leonora Chanel. Leonora has more than a dash of Valkyrie blood in her, as she dares the fates contemptuously. Manuel is lured to almost certain death by her taunt. How surprising to realize later that her whole personality is "contained" in the incident, and there is really nothing more told about her in the story itself. Only these hints and a kind of deliberate studied vagueness remains to show that Ballard is at work.

Phrases like "his eyes lit by an astronomy of dreams" and "In her face the diagram

of bones formed a geometry of murder" would worry me the way they worry John Foyster if I considered this to be a Realist tale. From such a viewpoint the plot and much of the end smacks of cheap melodrama, but such considerations are not relevant because I conceive of Ballard as a writer of fantasy, although fantasy of a peculiar form. This explains why Ballard as a political, social and general thinker is pretty trivial, for I maintain that he is not dealing with our world at all.

The proper word for this writing is "subcreation" after the style of Tolkien or C S Lewis. He takes elements of the present world and uses them to build up a complete little world of his own. In this field of fantasy, the improbability of the story does not matter. His worlds are like and yet unlike our own. Elements of it have been taken, reconstituted or distorted to Ballard's God-like whim; at its gentlest the result is a world very like our own which gives a semblance of ordinary life. At its harshest it is hard to realize that this creation came from today's Earth at all. One writer speaks about Ballard's "jammed or reversed time sequence", to sum up all sorts of peculiar things in his stories.

In the same way the "science" of Ballard's stories have been distorted at will. Although superb, his scientific backgrounds have the air of being more excuses for stories than things in their own right. He is not above twisting known scientific fact when it suits his purpose. (Find your own example). He's not really concerned with the reality of the thing - why should he? - no mention of Biafra or Vietnam or Aid to Independent Schools. He's making up hells of his own.

THE ILLUMINATED MAN is my second experience of Ballard's work, and a fantastic excursion it is too. This story brought home to me Ballard's overpowering mastery of words - an apocalyptic sense and surreal power, all within twenty nine pages. There is an air of reality about the whole, as well as its subliminal feeling of the protagonist running through the crystalline forest "his arms like golden cartwheels, his head like a spectral crown." To think of a lesser artist attempting this is laughable. If it were not for Ballard's verbal talent this would have been a collapsed mountain of words, characters of wood, pulp plots, and crystalline alligators lurching to death in their tracks.

Instead, with Ballard, we see it happen. With the fences covered with crystals - a sense of cold envelops us (the same technique he uses for his characters is applied to inanimate objects as well). The characters and objects are bathed with emotion, in Ballard's hands a powerful and diffuse kind of stuff. The last memory left with me was of the hero tearing through the woods in a blaze of light, with his crucifix.

We can observe the same elements of Ballard's writing in a selection of stories from Ballard's recent collection THE DISASTER AREA. MR F IS MR F with its variation on the theme of perpetual shrinkage gives us a fair idea of what's to follow. Halfway through we know the ending but we want to plod on to the end anyway.

THE SUBLIMINAL MAN is even more firmly set in a present day world and it is not the idea that interests but, once more, the language Ballard uses to express it. Hathaway is everyman's dream of a revolutionary, the free soul who sees through the system and dreams of revenge, of a world without supermarket values and something better than the next freeway. He comes - as you might expect - to a dismal end. Much the same theme appears in an earlier story not included in this collection, BILLENIUM, which is about the trials of a young man who finds himself slowly pressured out of house and home (for there isn't enough room for the people).

In NOW WAKES THE SEA you get the feeling of "Yes, I've been here before". Ballard

uses the same ideas and preoccupations as in many of his other stories, even using some of the same images. It should get rather boring - if you wanted it to. A story all about a man who finds that his nights are invaded by an immense sea that covers everything but vanishes without trace in the morning.

CONCENTRATION CITY is the simple tale of a mechanised world that has no end.

MINUS ONE concerns an escapee presumed missing from a mental asylum and gives a neat chorus of ghouls.

THE IMPOSSIBLE MAN is a disturbing story. The normal round of nature has taken on sinister connotations equated with a car accident and other matters.

STORM BIRD, STORM DREAMER makes use of bird imagery. As has been pointed out before, decomposers would have carried away all those corpses (bad science) but I suppose that's irrelevant to the tale itself, for mutations fly through the pages like bad dreams. Just the thing to make a Gould League Birdlover's stomach quiver.

ZONE OF TERROR is about the psychologist and the patient. There is more to this morbid little fantasy but I think I'll let you find out yourself.

MANHOLE 69 is the only other thing in the book and I think it is really a straightforward bit, catatonic blackout or whatever. The theme of trying to do without sleep is one he has touched on before, and of course the interest in Time and psychic levels of the unconscious, although not found here, is another theme that keeps returning.

This book is simple and entertaining and would provide a good introduction to those who have not had the pleasure of reading Ballard before, though the boy who said his style was "unease inducing" was telling the truth. You'd do well to have some blood and thunder from Jack Vance to follow it.

I think I know why mainstream reviewers also rate Ballard highly. They pour lavish praise on him but for some wrong reasons. To the s f reader a story like SUBLIMINAL MAN is just another "crowded world" story. To them the ideas are different and new, whereas we can't help seeing glimpses of Poul Anderson and wondering what sort of a job Van Vogt would have made of it.

Another one of Ballard's short pieces, THE GARDEN OF TIME, is again built around a simple idea. A Byronic-Romantic villa is subjected to frontal attack. Why this "strange, onrushing horde" should decide to come his way is an interesting if unanswered question. Nothing is completely described - that is characteristic of Ballard. So is the moodiness which shows the fatalism that has been compared with Joseph Conrad. Fatalism makes up for the absence of action, and there are some flowers to be picked... but I won't spoil it for you. The fragility of the structure lends it loveliness - not only would one empirical fact stand out of place but the whole superstructure would crumble.

THE FOUR-DIMENSIONAL NIGHTMARE is a book full of Ballard's longer short stories. Taken as a whole it's considerably heavier than his others. One story in it, THE VOICES OF TIME has particular complexity. The story concerns a doctor named Powers who looks after a weird and wonderful laboratory left him by a biologist, Whitby, who committed suicide. In this lab are things like the tortoise with a coat of mail, a spider with outside neural connections, and so on. Powers is sleepless as the result of a new surgical technique; perhaps this explains his interest in the large four-ended mandala Whitby cut in the bottom of a swimming pool. He has this inexplicable obsession to duplicate it in concrete so that he too can hear a message from the stars.

Complex and difficult as the story seems, it resolves into a few simple elements. Make a list of the elements in any of his stories and this is what you'll find. Ballard adds little to our stock of science fictional "ideas". If s f is the literature of ideas then I might even call his work impoverished: again it is the language that makes the ideas significant, not the other way round as with most s f writers. (Asimov's stories, for examples, contain almost nothing but ideas).

It's a simple technique that is also very difficult. It is easy to write a plot, that age-old convention where X follows Y and is in turn followed by Z, but with Ballard this sequential order of events is not so important. He writes not so much a plot as a gestalt, a minute and many levelled description of a whole world. Think about this. When I make a description, say, of a garden, I do not have to give a logical sequence of events. I can describe the rhododendrons and then the gate. It does not particularly matter what order I use. Ballard works like this. If you have a whole world of intricate relationships and levels of imagery ready-made then you only have to select a part that appeals to you and move on when ready (little connection is necessary). Often the chapters from his novels could have been written backwards.

The atmosphere of the novel THE DROWNED WORLD covers us like a murky blanket, stifling, oppressive, yet when you are in it, very compelling. When I first read this novel some time ago, I found it very heavy going and did not even finish it. Ballard is an acquired taste and not an author to read lightly. But again, the structure of THE DROWNED WORLD is by no means complex. There is a biological testing station in the remnants of what was London (before the ionosphere arose and the ice melted and all the usual things happened) and it is manned by two biologists, Bodkins and Kerans. We are never told much about Bodkins. However Kerans, who passes for the novel's central character is shown in detail to us. His world is centred in the Ritz Hotel but outside are the silt-jungles of Hell, the basis of this world which may have come from our own. Denizens of the triassic past, reptilia, giant palms and ^{etc} like make up a supra natural world that is very weird.

The two resident biologists are protected by the military, eighteen men under the control of one Colonel Riggs. A pilot called Hardman, subjected to the recorded sound of his own heartbeat as part of an experiment, decides to flee. We chase him through forty or fifty paragraphs and there is the luscious Miss Dahl to add her bit, should we get tired of chasing him on the waterways as he heads south to the causeways of the sun. Predictably self-immersed, beautiful, eminently aloof and sexless, she is all that we have come to expect from Ballard's heroines. We need action? Strangman arrives... and provides 60% of the book. Nearly all the last nine chapters are taken up with his doings.

There are many superficial ideas embodied in the book which a cursory reading may miss. I'm not referring so much to the idea that an increase in radioactivity will lead to a loss of the ionosphere, etc. Rather I have in mind the notion of organic memories, the racial Jungian archetypes of the whole evolution of man which have their seat in the subconscious mind. The "zone of transit" in the story represents the point at which change in environment (mass regression) recalls hidden memories to the surface of the mind. The result of this permanent and rather painful process is hallucination and nightmare. Ultimately it includes the fundamentally more disturbing idea of living on at least two levels, unable to tell the reality from the dream and finally passing into the dream alone... consciously. This horror is what makes Hardman flee. The amplified sound of his own heartbeat merely speeds up the process to an unbearable degree.

Ballard wants us to think of the sinking of the testing station as significant, some kind of symbol of futility or psychic breakaway, in the same way as

the flooding of the lagoon and the wrecking of his apartment act on Kerans as a catalyst to convince him that he must take the road that Hardman has already taken.

There is some wonderful imagery here. The most effective^{image} is the vast red amniotic sun with the iguanas baying to its throb, the dream of dreams (which haunts all the characters' waking hours). Strangman himself shares in it. He has to be distrusted, a man of shifting moods and half-controlled motives who is introduced with the words: "A curious air of menace pervaded the depot ship." It is this "air of menace" which Ballard capitalizes on. The same in-joke, or at least the same kind was seen before in one of his stories where there is a softly managed reference to one of Sturgeon's best stories, and again in CONCENTRATION CITY where the interrogator was called "M" in true Bond style. The in-jokes give the book's later stages such relief as it has. Strangman is ambivalent enough as a character to form the source of more than one emanation: menace, and a kind of wry humour too;

"And what about you, Miss Dahl? You look a little melancholy. A touch of time sickness, perhaps? The chronoclastic bends?"

Ballard's fund should not hide from us the fact that he is laughing at himself here. And he can do this only because he has first built up a powerful effect. It's no good painting "Time Zone" in letters thirty feet high unless those words actually mean something to you first.

Look at the last chapter with its story of the jungle and you'll find it totally freaky; it reads like a bad LSD nightmare. Kerans heads off into oblivion and the book ends as cheerlessly as it started. The vision of the rotting Hardman should make me sick and yet I find I still enjoy the writing.

That he deals with such subjects is not surprising. That he can do it and succeed is a staggering achievement. It calls for natural control of words, imagination and imagery that the born writer might envy... and then just that little bit more. Call it perception if you will. I need hardly emphasize the point that this kind of talent is unlikely to come twice within the same generation of s f writers. Within the field, Roger Zelazny comes closest, with the attention he pays to colours, surfaces, the psyche; but although a very fine writer indeed I feel that he meets his match in Ballard.

Other comparisons flow easily from the pen - with William Burroughs, Conrad, Ray Bradbury and even Patrick White, but the truth is that Ballard is too individual to resemble anybody, and whatever the influences upon him, he still must be called an extraordinary writer.

John Foyster finds stylistic problems in Ballard but I find that I simply cannot agree. Even in his least successful stories (e.g. TRACK 12 or perhaps THE THOUSAND DREAMS OF STELLAVISTA) it is not language that fails him but mood and length. TRACK 12 is like a pendant or a piece of snuff, curious but too short to move me. The other story does not so much fail as succeed too well, as it is moodiness taken to extremes. If the best time to learn about a writer is when he is least successful, then I would say that Ballard comes off well.

To read THE DAY OF FOREVER is still a worthwhile experience and for a "first" book this shows better style than many an established writer (such as Heinlein or Aldiss). There are few traces of pulp writing. On the odd occasion you see Ballard groping for the right nuance and phrase. I think that Brian Richards had it right when he remarked how other people worked their way up but Ballard just arrived complete, whole, and isn't it incredible? There is no apprenticeship in these stories.

(MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE - S F COMMENTARY 15 CHECKLIST)

brian w aldiss: general (pages 7 to 8, page 18) * brian w aldiss: BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD (17-18) * brian w aldiss: CRYPTOZOIC! (AN AGE) (14-16) * brian w aldiss: A MAN IN HIS TIME (16) * j g ballard: general (19-25) * j g ballard: BILLENIUM (21) * j g ballard: THE CLOUD-SCULPTORS OF CORAL D (19-20) * j g ballard: CONCENTRATION CITY (22, 24) * j g ballard: THE DAY OF FOREVER (24) * j g ballard: THE DISASTER AREA (21-22) * j g ballard: THE DROWNED WORLD (23-24) * j g ballard: THE FOUR-DIMENSIONAL NIGHTMARE (22-23) * j g ballard: THE GARDEN OF TIME (22) * j g ballard: THE ILLUMINATED MAN (21) * j g ballard: THE IMPOSSIBLE MAN (22) * j g ballard: MR F IS MR F (21) * j g ballard: MANHOLE 69 (22) * j g ballard: MINUS ONE (22) * j g ballard: NOW WAKES THE SEA (21-22) * j g ballard: STORM BIRD STORM DREAMER (22) * j g ballard: THE SUBLIMINAL MAN (21) * j g ballard: THE VOICES OF TIME (22) * j g ballard: ZONE OF TERROR (22) * john baxter: SCIENCE FICTION IN THE CINEMA (6) * bill & joan bowers (eds): OUTWORLDS (4) * BRISBANE FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY (4) * a bortram chandler: THE DARK DIMENSIONS (7) * a bortram chandler: THE INHERITORS (7) * perry a chapdelaine: general (25) * george charters (ed): THE SCARR (4-5) * bill danner (ed): STEFANTASY (5) * john foyster: FROGS & SNAILS & PUPPY-DOGS' TAILS (SFC 10) (7) * john foyster: PORTRAIT OF A MAN UNKNOWN (SFC 10) (7, 8) * bruce gillespie: RAISON D'ETRE (SFC 8) (5) * bruce gillespie (SFC 11) (5-6) * bruce gillespie: SENTIO ERGO SUM: PART ONE (SFC 10) (7-8) * henry newton goodrich: THE OLD GRAY HACK (SFC 10) (8, 25) * charles harness: THE CHESSPLAYERS (10) * charles harness: THE NEW REALITY (10) * charles harness: THE PARADOX MEN (9-10) * charles harness: THE ROSE (9-10) * robin johnson (ed): AUSTRALIA IN SEVENTY-FIVE (3) * sandra miosel: PLATYPUS MYTHOS II (8) * donald m miller (ed): WSFA JOURNAL (3) * charles platt: Letter-SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW 32 (25) * frederik pohl: THE AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT (11-12) * franz rottensteiner (ed): QUARDER MERKUR (4) * george turner: GOLDEN AGE PAPER AGE (SFC 11) (5, 6-7) * kurt vonnegut jr: SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (12-13, 18) * h g wells: general (6-7) * jack wodhams: THE TEN FOOT CHICKEN (SFC 10) (8) *

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