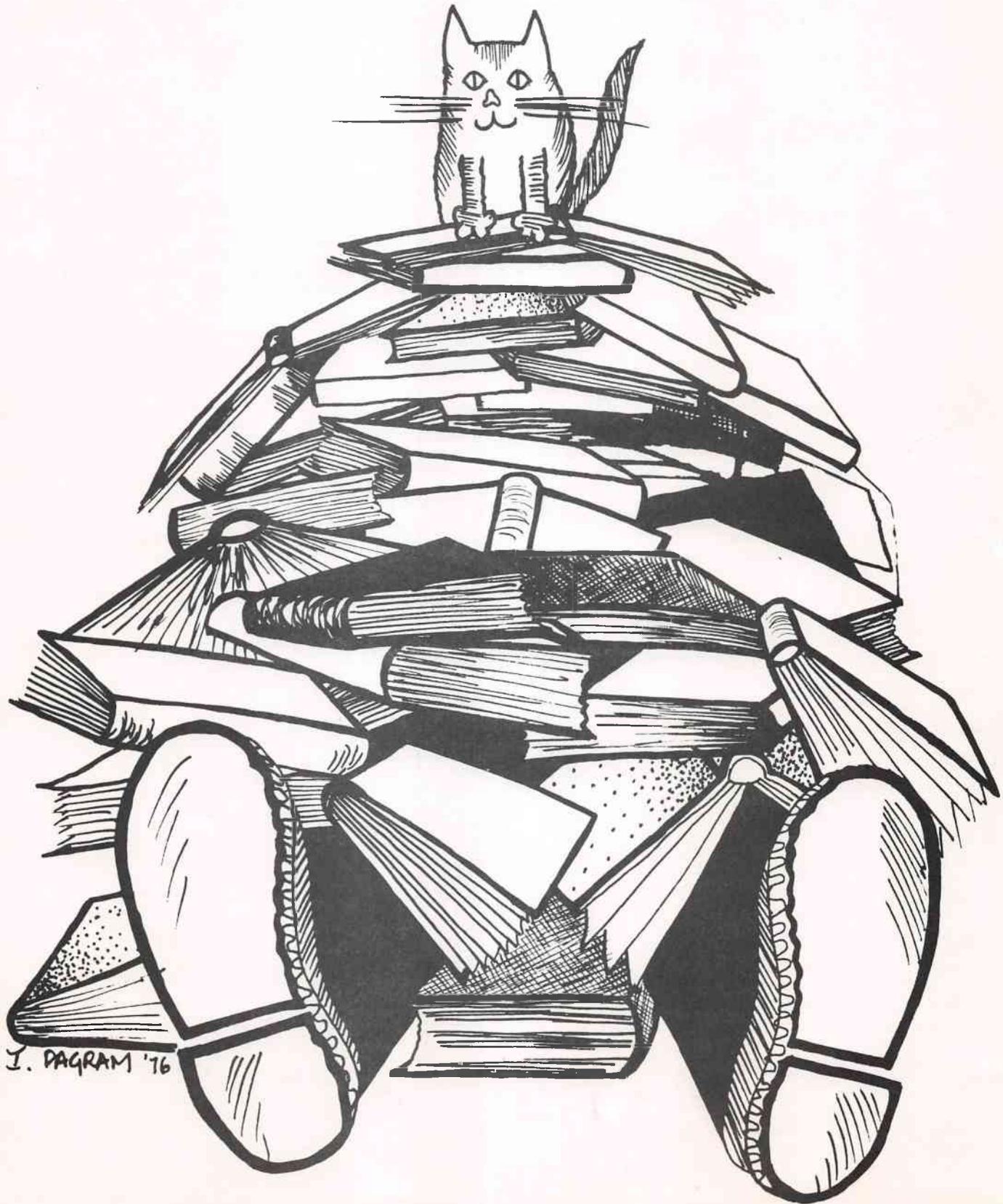


S F COMMENTARY 47

AUGUST 1976



August 1976

48 pages

COVER

Being a skilful rendition by Irene Fa-gram of the despotic power structure in the Gillespie household - with the Editor of this august journal lying collapsed from overwork, mercifully put out of his misery by a swarm of nearby books, and purred over triumphantly by Flcnap, the Absolute Ruler at 72 Carlton Street.

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Editor

Bob Tucker

Leigh Edmonds

Mark Mumper

Neville Angove

David Grigg

Philip Stephensen-Payne

Joan Dick

Eric Lindsay

Marc Ortlieb

Micheline Cyna-Tang

Buck Coulson

John Millard

Bert Chandler

(in absentia) Lee Harding

CRITICANTO 21

George Turner reviews The Jonah KitPeter Nicholls reviews Time Enough For LoveBarry Gillam reviews The UndefeatedVan Ikin reviews The Wind From The SunThe Best of John W CampbellPstalemateDerrick Ashby reviews Arrive at EasterwineMark Mumper reviews Mixed FeelingsNeville Angove reviews Mother Was a Lovely BeastScience Fiction Special 13Terence Green reviews The Man in the High CastleChristine McGowan reviews The Bitter PillDon Ashby reviews Inconstant Moon

Bruce Gillespie

THE GOOD NEWS...

S F COMMENTARY IS GOING OFFSET. Well, that is my plan at the moment. The first of the new series of SFC will feature the long-promised Robert Silverberg Forum. SFC welcomes new subscribers, advertisers, and all the help it can get. The price stays the same.

S F COMMENTARY now has American agents for the first time in several years. They are

Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell
525 West Main
Wisconsin 53703

Please send all subscriptions to them, marking cheques "Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell", but say clearly what you are paying for.

Editor Printer Publisher:

Bruce Gillespie

GPO Box 5495AA, Melbourne

Victoria 3001, Australia

(03) 347 8902

SUBSCRIPTIONS Australia:

\$1 per copy; \$5 for 5

USA & Canada: \$6 for 6

North American agents:

Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell

525 W Main, Wisconsin 53703

Elsewhere: Send local cash

or cheque converted already

into Australian currency.

Last stencil typed

17 September 1976

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

* Readers of SFC have begun to expect that the beginning of each issue will feature Bruce Gillespie's ramblings through his fairly empty mind. But there's no act harder to follow than oneself, and this time I won't even try.

Not a lot has been happening to me, but a lot has been happening to my friends Out There - either the people who send me letters or those I meet each Wednesday night at "the new De-graves".

* I've just finished recovering from BOFCON the 15th Annual Australian Convention, held this year at the Palm Lake Motor Inn in salubrious uptown St Kilda, near Melbourne. It was a good convention. It was so good that even I enjoyed it. (I haven't really enjoyed a convention for some time, so I was relieved to find that my convention-celebrating days are not over.) All the credit for its success must go to various members of the organising team, such as Carey Handfield and Leigh Edmonds, and lots of other people, like Paul Stevens and me, who had jobs to do. I will give a special pat on the back to George Turner and me for being "resident panelists" for a total of 7 hours or so.

It's always difficult to say why one convention is enjoyable and another is not. Usually it has most to do with the mood of the convention-goner. But on the last day of the convention (15 August), I was determined to take my things back home in a taxi between 2pm and 4pm (between two different panels on which I was supposed to appear). Every time I was going to call a taxi to leave the place, somebody or other would sit me down to talk about some interesting topic or other. (Mainly it was John Foyster talking about fanzines.) Or on the first night of the convention different people kept inviting me to their rooms and offering me drinks and sharing chit-chat...and it was all so good. Special thanks to Andrew Whitmore (whose twenty-first birthday it was) for providing just about the very best convention party I've ever attended. The party was still improving when I had to leave at 2am (I'd run out of stamina).

Bofcon gave plenty of signs that Aussiecon was the beginning of an era in Australian fandom, rather than the end of one. By the time of Aussiecon, we had been campaigning and organising for about six years. After Aussiecon, we thought we could rest a bit. Carey Handfield, among others, had other ideas. Kitty Vigo (the hardest-working fringe-fan in Melbourne) joined fandom, and Lee Harding decided to do something about a Workshop book, and Randal Flynn moved to Melbourne, and... Will all you people stop being so busy!

The results include:

* Bofcon, which awarded 1976 AUSTRALIAN S F ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:

BEST AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION

The Big Black Mark (A Bertram Chandler) (Hale)

BEST INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION

1 The Forever War (Joe Haldeman) (St Martins Press; Ballantine; Crest)

2 Inferno (Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle) (Galaxy;

3 The Shockwave Rider (John Brunner) (Harper & Row; Ballantine)

"Down to a Sunless Sea" (Cordwainer Smith) (Fantasy & Science Fiction)

BEST AUSTRALIAN FANZINE

1 Fanew Sletter (ed. Leigh Edmonds)

2 Interstellar Ramjet Scoop (Bill Wright)

WILLIAM ATHELING AWARD FOR WRITING ABOUT SCIENCE FICTION

1 "Paradigm and Pattern: Form and Meaning in The Dispossessed" (George Turner) (S F Commentary 41/42)

2 Alternate Worlds (James Gunn) (Prentice-Hall)

3 "Foundation and Asimov" (Algis Budrys) (Analog)

Other awards at Bofcon included:

ART SHOW: BEST SINGLE ITEM: to Cindy Smith.

Special mentions to Greg Gates and Chris Johnson

Bofcon let go, as I say, a wave of exuberance - with the result that somebody donated a lot of money to the winners of

THE S F SHORT STORY CONTEST 1976

- 1 "And Eve Was Drawn From the Rib of Adam" (Van Ikin)
 - 2 "The Second Coming" (John Emory)
- Best story by a previously unpublished writer: "Sex and Violence Among the Irq-sh'lata" (Francis Payne)

Right at this moment, none of these stories has a publisher, but I'm sure the authors would let you see them if you were interested (that's if you are a publisher, of course). The organiser of this highly successful event (nearly 100 entries) was Kitty Vigo, 2 Grattan Place, Richmond, Victoria 3121. The judges were George Turner, Lee Harding, and Gerald Murnane.

Particular congratulations to the two people I know from the winners - Van and Frank. I've never met Van Ikin in person, but during recent months he has sent me the excellent reviews which appear in this issue of SFC. He edits his own excellent fanzine, Enigma. He doesn't, it seems, attend conventions. Maybe next year.

Frank is a medical student with a ferocious Scottish accent. He lives with other creative people in Johnson Street, Collingwood, and he collects books and records and whatever else is cheap, esoteric, and lying around.

I've read all the winning stories from the competition. The winners are eminently publishable, although I prefer some of the non-winners. I hope that this competitions happens again in 1977.

ALSO ANNOUNCED AT BOFCON...

* George Turner has sold Beloved Son, that 160,000-word child of his which has been gestating in his skull for six years, and has spent three years being born. George has a heartening story to tell about this novel. He had failed to sell it to several other publishers but, on the last day of his recent trip to England, he walked into Faber and Faber and plunked the manuscript on the counter there. He did not have time to talk to the editor. A week before Bofcon, he received the news that the s f editor there (Mr Charles Montieth, who has done many good things for s f) had read the novel and is very enthusiastic about it. Of course, with publishing schedules in their current state, it will take a while to get published. But it means that George Turner the fiction writer is back in business officially, which could mean that he will set about some new fiction in the near future.

* S F Commentary is going offset. SFC is going into business, instead of resting between last gasps. Maybe I can publish the magazine that I've always wanted to publish. The specific reason for rejoicing is that Bruce Barnes, a

Member of the Workshop and a regular visitor to Melbourne from Tasmania, has agreed to lend me the money to put SFC on its feet. It's a ghastly gamble, of course. If I fail, then I'm very poor. But my big plans succeed..

* Norstrilia Press has given birth again. This time the squawling child, not easily ignored, is The Altered I, edited by Lee Harding, promoted by Carey Handfield, proofread by Rob Gerrard, introduced by and containing much work of Ursula Le Guin, and produced by the various members of the Australian S F Writers' Workshop. To me, this is the book about writing - not about the long years of disappointment, etc, but about how writers begin in the first place. The price is \$A3.60 (\$US4.90), from Norstrilia Press, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, or from Our Man in America, Fred Patten, 11863 West Jefferson Blvd, Apt 1, Culver City, California 90230. While Carey is overseas, he might arrange some further roving agents as well. (I hope to review the book at greater length as soon as possible, and I hope to gain a review from a more independent reviewer as well.) I nearly forgot: the marvellous cover art and design is by Irene Pagram, and the initial financing comes from a whole host of people who have provided funds on long-term loans.

* Several months ago, a group of people who met at the residence of Kitty and David Vigo decided on the framework of an organisation to be called THE AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION. It sounds suspiciously like an attempt to organise Australian fans (remember Comorg?), but it isn't. The aim is that when Australian fans decide to organise an event or fund an activity which requires the raising of large sums of money, there will be an official organisation to receive such money and guarantee its proper use. The specific event for which the Foundation has been formed is THE SECOND AUSTRALIAN S F WRITERS' WORKSHOP, to be held for three weeks in mid-January at Monash University. This will, we hope, take off from where the first Workshop began. Writers in Residence are George Turner, Vonda McIntyre, and Christopher Priest. The main difficulty with this vast project is - you guessed it - money. Donations would be received cheerfully. Write to Kitty (address above), or phone her on (03) 429 1506. Or write to or ring me, for that matter. Like Kitty, I am home sometimes on weekdays.

* I have lots of other things to announce as well - especially interesting books I have received to review. But all that has been pushed on to the next episode of "IMBTTMF".

For the moment, it is enough to say that science fiction seems to be doing well in Australia. The indefatigable Lee Harding has two books to appear from Laser, and another book from Cassell here in Melbourne. David Grigg has two books to appear from Cassell (I saw copies at Bofcon). Pip Maddern has sold her "Ins and Outs" story in England. Cherry Wilder (now in Germany) has sold a book to Atheneum. Best wishes to all.

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

MY FRIENDS ARE TALKING TO EACH OTHER

* This was going to be the 47/48 lettercolumn, part 2. Now it is the 48/49 lettercolumn, part 1. For it includes about half the letters which I intended to publish. And these are the letters in which SFC readers talk to each other, as well as back at me. This is very encouraging. The only way that this trend can continue is if I keep publishing regularly. Response to recent issues is a good enough reason to do just that. In general, I have left out letters talking about s f (except Bob Tucker's), and comments on my Lists. Feel free to enjoy the savouries: *

BOB TUCKER

* 34 Greenbriar Dr, Jacksonville, Illinois
62650, USA

What a pleasant surprise SFC 43 is! And what flatterers your contributors are. The issue builds up my ego in a way that is almost embarrassing, but the saving grace is/are the criticisms directed at several books.

I'm thankful for those criticisms, for the exposures of weakness in plotting or narration, because in several instances I was not aware of them until you or Lesleigh pointed them out. Mind you, I'm aware of poor books and bad books because I've had years to find out, but I wasn't so acutely aware of my shortcomings as a writer; I was not always aware of just where a story went wrong, and why. I don't agree with you on some points (don't think Karen should reappear in Wild Talent) but, until now, I wasn't aware that I was doing the same thing to several women characters.

Lesleigh pointed out something very much like that; she pointed out a few strong females and a number of less-than-successful female villains. Perhaps I should leave women out of my books until I understand them better, and cause them to act in a more rational manner - or bookish manner. I probably won't do that, mind you, but perhaps I should.

Well, the point is the magazine was received with cries of joy and glee, and I thank you for it. I also took a gentle ribbing from Jackie Franke and Larry Propp. Last weekend the three of us drove out to Kansas City together and both Jackie and I had just received our copies. She took hers along for others to read, and some did read it, and I got the ribbing. But I ignored the scoffers. I only let them shine my shoes and touch my ring. (20 May 1976)*

* Bob also asked whether I was going to the Worldcon this year at Kansas City. I gave one of those really hollow laughs of derision. As the entire Australian population says when our Federal Treasurer suggests that we spend more money - what with?

I don't think I said that you should not write a about women characters, Bob. In fact, if I had done my article properly, and had rewritten the Year of the Quiet Sun section to make it fit the rest of the argument, I would have said that Kathryn van Hise is not only the finest woman character, but probably the most distinctive character, in any of the Tucker s f novels.

Several people have hinted that my bits of the Tucker Issue contain too much "hero worship". That hurts. I said that Tucker is a fine writer, and I hope I proved my case. But also I said that it took him a long time to become the writer who could create The Year of the Quiet Sun. Probably only that novel and The Lincoln Hunters (and Ice and Iron, in its quirky way) have really everything going for them. I tried to show that Bob's real problem was the conflict between the attempt to fit within the bounds of the s f/mystery genre, and the continual attempt to write a Good Novel. It is a problem that affects every s f writer. Few of them face the challenge, and fewer master it. I think that Tucker has achieved this in his most recent work, and I wanted to show how he achieved it; what is, specifically, so good in the books. If I succeeded in doing this for The Lincoln Hunters, in particular, then I'm content with the result.

Lesleigh's article on the mysteries is the kind of article I intended to write about the s f. And it is her article (plus the Interview) which makes the Tucker Issue such a valuable momento. *

LEIGH EDMONDS

* PO Box 76, Carlton, Victoria 3053

I object to being pointed at as somebody who praises the efforts of "failures" and "second-raters". Also, I object to the sly little trick you pulled to make it look as though I said that one "puts" science into science fiction. None of this is true.

Exactly which "second raters" am I praising? I said that Niven is okey and that Van Vogt is not too bad either.

Maybe you are hacking away at me for a different reason - because I'm willing to put up with science fiction as it stands and not want to see it improved. Of course I want to see it improved, but obviously not in the same way that you do.

Science fiction is a fiction of ideas. If s f is the wrong name, probably it is too late to do anything about it, so let's smile and put up with it. If s f is about ideas, then plot and characters are of secondary importance. So much for the three points raised in your Unicon GoH speech.

Well, not quite. In your third point you do mention ideas as things to be seen through the characters. You say, "It is helpful if the series of events ((plot)) which happen to the characters are enjoyable because they spring from some new idea or changed way of looking at the universe." You put your emphasis on the characters. I just leave them out. Which is about what most s f writers do. Being a critic you have your right to want something else, but not the right to dump on me when I disagree. ((brg* Sez who?*))

My objection to most s f as it is written these days is that the ideas are not developed well enough, or not expounded in a way that lets the reader use them himself/herself. Ideas, be they scientific, political, sexual, mechanical, or artistic are the product of the human brain. I think it is not inhuman to look for a form of literature in which these things are used, played with, and contemplated. This is not to deny our humanity and literature, in which this facet of the universe gets manipulated, but let's not fool ourselves that that is all there is in this universe (not to mention all the others there might be).

Okay, so why don't I go off and read New Scientist and Scientific American? Answer: because, in the vast majority of cases, these authors stick to the rigorous scientific method, which doesn't use the free-flowing association of ideas which I enjoy.

I'm sure that I should have more to write about your uncalled-for attack, but my concentration lapses. Prod me again and see what happens.

* Let's see what happens. Part of what I was trying to say was that s f stories are stories, no matter what they are "about". And I think a good story involves all those elements which I mentioned in SFC 46 and in the Unicon speech. A story has to happen to somebody, and it's a lot better story if that somebody is interesting, even if in only very circumscribed ways. I can't think of any exceptions to this observation. I've heard at least one judge of the recent s f short story contest say that many people disqualified their pieces because they wrote only about a good idea they might have had. They did not take the trouble to write stories. (Of course, my idea of a really good story is much stricter than most. I think a story should feature a single dramatic event, and should preserve the other classical unities, such as time and place. But not even most of my own favourite stories fit these criteria exactly.)

I made a vow to shut up and listen when I began this group of letters. Perhaps I had better renew this vow. Shut up, Gillespie. Now back to Leigh Edmonds: *

Let's jump over to other subjects.

Maybe most fans are their own best friends. I know I spend more time in my own company than with anybody else and I'm rarely, if ever, bored with myself, or even intensely dissatisfied. My worst character trait is laziness and I tell myself about it quite often. I am much less interested in other people than I used to be - less interested in their problems, which is all a lot of people have to show, when you get down to it. At least that's all they are willing to put up of themselves. Trying to help people out with their problems is just about as useless as trying to fill Port Phillip Bay with a hand shovel. All you can do is listen and make sure they know you're listening.

That happiness through others is an illusion is an interesting thought. Eric is one of those people to be envious of, if we want to be envious of anybody. But then happiness is one of the greatest illusions of all. What comes from reaction with or off other people is self-awareness. Sometimes it might make us feel good and sometimes bad. Still, people feel something called happiness and, since it is a good feeling, they want more of it, addictive like. Eric must be getting his self-awareness from somewhere because he is demonstrating a lot more of it these days than he did a few years back. His being able to do it from a hermit-like existence is a good thing for himself, but we all go about it in different ways.

Playing down egos, as Dave Piper puts it, really doesn't have to be part of a close two-person relationship. Maybe it has to do with what an ego happens to be. But I would have thought that, in any good relationship, it is only the little things that are given up (some freedom of action, for a start) and there is an overall gain. At least that's my experience. This sort of relationship should change a person, but it is still a self-made change. The difference is only in the amount or intensity of exterior stimulation to bring it about.

Okay, enough beating about the bush and time for a bit of up-frontedness. In various places like SFC I see people struggling to become themselves. I too did it, but for a while now I've known where I'm at, have drawn up my boundaries, and am working in them. 1969 to 1971 was my big push on self-awareness, and a month that didn't go by without some spectacular realisation was a dull one. Now self-awareness comes out, not through further overt searching, but as a side product of my goals and my struggles to achieve them. Any changes I undergo now are subtle ones which I hardly notice. I can still say that I am a different person

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from the one I was this time last year, but the process of change is so delicate that I am no longer aware of its various parts. I do not believe that we all live in our own "prisons". (Did you pick that term because of its odious connotations? Why not, "I am a rock/I am an island"? The difference might be only in the emotional overtones, but it's worthy of note.)

When I say goals which I have set myself, I mean things like writing decent music and knowing what decent music is, making the perfect plastic model, and producing the perfect fanzine. Living a worthy life, in fact, worthy by the standards I set myself. Everything else grows from and is secondary to these ideals.

But in all this, and above all this, there has to be flexibility. I think I still have it; it hasn't been tested for a while. If something doesn't work, it has to be given up. Attachment to things or people is not bad, just so long as a person is willing to give them up when he/she must. "If I'd never loved, I never would have cried" reverses to "If I'd never cried, I never would have loved." Giving things up makes a person ready to take up new things, new ways of thinking and so on.

Also, I guess that I have internalised the protestant work ethic. If I don't work for myself, I achieve nothing for myself (for my self-awareness). I am my hardest master, my harshest critic. Believing in no god, I am my own saviour (and a pretty miserable one, but the best available). I am proud/humble of and in myself. As I get older, sometimes I think the single word that typifies me is "grim".

Ah ha, but I still have my Shield of Umor, and I polish it often.

So now you know what it's like to be me.

You may not remember it, but I too can make lists:

- 1 "Ball and Chain" (Big Brother and the Holding Company)
- 2 "Voodoo Chile" (Jimi Hendrix Experience)
- 3 "Politician" (Cream)
- 4 "Almost Cut My Hair" (Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young)
- 5 "Midnight Rambler" (Rolling Stones)
- 6 "The Pusher" (Steppenwolf)
- 7 "Happiness is a Warm Gun" (Beatles)
- 8 "Motor Cities Burning" (Pacific Gas and Electric Blues Band)
- 9 "Aunty Jack and the Box" (Aunty Jack)
- 10 "Desolation Row" (Bob Dylan)
- 11 "I'm Mad Again" (Animals)
- 12 "Sitting on Top of the World" (Cream)
- 13 "Little Queenie" (Rolling Stones)

- 14 "Stormy Monday" (John Mayall and the Blues Breakers)
- 15 "Jumping Jack Flash" (Rolling Stones)
- 16 "Baby It's You" (Beatles)
- 17 "Machine Gun" (Band of Gypsies)
- 18 "Hoochie Koochie Man" (Steppenwolf)
- 19 "Won't Get Fooled Again" (Who)
- 20 "Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except For Me and My Monkey" (Beatles)

It's a good working list. Sometime soon I will hack out half of them and you'll be in business (working title: "The Ten Best Tracks of Rock Ever Put on Record, IMHO").
(26 July 1976)*

* Where do I start on answering this letter? Answer: I don't. I've answered it already so many times in SFC and in other places that I would be just repeating myself. But I will repeat:

- (a) Happiness may be an illusion - but unhappiness is sure as hell not an illusion. I don't think happiness is an illusion either, so I will keep looking.
- (b) Prison cell? Rock? Straitjacket? At any rate, it's the absolute boundaries on one's personal possibilities, the boundaries which one would most like to break through. For me, it's personal relationships. For other people, different boundaries.
- (c) Your Shield of Umor keeps shining brightly, Leigh. I don't know why you would describe yourself as "grim". Everybody to their own self-image.
- (d) Let's not start on Lists. I would find it almost impossible to make up a similar list. I would have to make a division between pre-1964 and post-1964, since a lot of my real favourites (Roy Orbison's "The Crowd" and Ray Charles' "What'd I Say?" and Johnny O'Keefe's "It's Too Late" and "Shout", for instance) come from pre-1964. But it's only during late 1965 and in 1966 and after that incredible things like "House of the Rising Sun" and "We Love You" were released. They are unbelievably better than anything before. My favourite tracks from that whole era are "Stop Breaking Down" (Rolling Stones) and "Tell Me" and "Honky Tonk Women" and "The Last Time" (also by the Stones - of course). But the best single of all time was made in 1966: Ike and Tina Turner's "River Deep, Mountain High" (for which real credit should go to Phil Spector, the producer). That was in 1966. The best slow song of the last decade or so didn't arrive until 1969: "Bridge Over Troubled Water" (I heard that first during the first week I was at Ararat.) Pop music was splendiferous for a few years there.

* What about a bit more upfrontedness? *

MARK MUMPER

1227 Laurel Street, Santa Cruz, California
95060, USA

After years of planning for the "great" education, I'm not going to achieve it, or at least start. In August I'll be travelling to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to attend St John's College. It has a four-year liberal arts program - liberal arts in the classical sense: literature, language, music, science, mathematics, philosophy. The program is based on the Harvard Great Books, and involves no strict classes or lectures. Emphasis is on free discourse, developing reasoning ability within an open, no-teacher/student-dichotomy format. It's what I've needed since I first realised what learning was all about, and needed more since lately I've discovered the extent of the gaps and lacks in my knowledge.

Since I've been out of high school (five years now) I have gone to school sporadically, and worked a bit, but I haven't committed myself to any large, disciplined, and busy program of anything. I tend to laze around, read and think a lot, but not act much. Now I hope this will change, once I have an exciting and (unfortunately) external force pushing me to work. Finally starting again as a freshman at age twenty-three,...

As emotions go, I don't really know where I stand at the moment. My life has been very detached and rational lately, and only my closest friends understand and appreciate how that has affected my attitudes towards others. While I have all the same theoretical feelings about love and communication and hope that I've had for years (that love is free and life isn't bound by any "natural" rule, at least that we can decipher, and a lot of other related thoughts), their expression has been either stifled lately or I have reached a spot where they are simply there, given and understood, and I assume others that I meet will understand them and accept them too.

But this doesn't work. We are not all telepathic or that empathetic (me least of all, which is another confusion). I have a theoretical life and an actual one and, while they merge well in my mind, I'm certain that my behaviour doesn't show it, and this has caused problems with my emotional relations for some time. It reached a point last year where I decided to quit speaking for a while (didn't last long, though), because it seemed that my ability to make sense with words was not there anymore. Great way someone to be who will depend on verbal/oral ability when he goes to school!

So now I feel very asocial, very content to be by myself and just explore things from a

mental perspective. I don't feel as if I "need" anyone to share this with me (if you forget for a moment that we all "need" - or actually that concept doesn't exist in life; we have no choice - everyone and everything else around us), and this is a large and good step away from how I used to feel: dependence on another or others for strength and belief in myself, etc. This is not a healthy way to be - one can't depend on anyone but oneself. Sharing comes after (or comes best when they don't come from that but from pure, unneeded desire.

(10 May 1976)*

* Good, sensible sentiments at the end of your letter. I hope the Santa Fe experience goes well. Your perception of yourself sounds like mine of myself - except when I look at things in quite the opposite way, of course. The division between what one wants to do and what one can actually do is something that has obsessed me ever since I can remember. Once I was very ashamed because I could not ride a bicycle. Then, one day when I was fourteen, I tried riding my sister's bicycle. (No reason at all; I just began.) By the end of the afternoon I could ride. There was no way I could have ridden it before then, though. So I keep hoping that I can hoist a few more things from the can't-do side of my life to the can-do.*

NEVILLE ANGOVE

* Flat 13, 5 Maxim St, West Ryde, NSW 2114

SFC 44/45 hit me pretty hard. It was quite an outpouring of semi-intimacies; unfortunately, much of what you said about yourself could be said easily by me about me. And seeing it all in print, where it could not be easily ignored; caused quite a bit of re-evaluation. It's surprising how seeing someone else's problems can help me to face one's own problems, especially when they are so familiar. There is a lot more I'd like to say, but Joan Dick, Susan Wood, Leigh Edmonds, and others, have said it all, and in a much better fashion than I could.

As an aside - baring your soul in SFC is about the best way possible for, if not actually solving your problems, then finding some way to live with them. If you've ever been to a therapist, you'd know that the therapy consists mainly of just talking about what bugs you. The act is the catharsis and the treatment. All the therapist does is to listen, and prod you when you try to avoid something. And you have several hundred people listening to your problems, your feelings, your hopes, your disappointments, your dreams. The feelings of relief you evince in SFC 46 are due to the coming to terms with yourself in the earlier issues. I only wish I could show the same relief myself, but my problems are far from

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being admitted to and accepted. A Terrible confession for a psychologist to make, eh!
(10 July 1976)

In SFC 46, there are several references to your "heavy" writings about yourself, and how you wanted to find out more about the "real people" behind the names on your letter column. I hope that this letter will give you some insight into the me behind my name.

I suppose the real development of me as me began during my schooldays. I never got on well with people, and spent most of my time observing life from the outside, circulating around the perimeter, and trying to minimise the inevitable contacts. This type of behaviour began so far back in my childhood that I cannot remember when it started, and as yet it hasn't stopped. I was lucky in discovering two major interests: psychology, and science fiction.

Actually I ran into s f first. Although my family was of (still is) the lower working class, we had a fair few books lying round the house. My father stressed the value of literature in general, and made certain that I read widely. Since I had no objections to reading as a pastime, usually I received a variety of books for birthdays and such. Occasionally one might be s f-type adventure: rocketships, BEMs, blasters, space pirates and such gave me an escape from what I considered already to be a dreary life. One day, a boarder gave me a huge "boys' annual" book, and in it I found a reprint of Heinlein's Starman Jones. That was my first real contact with s f. Unfortunately I did not know what this stuff was called, and I could not bring myself to ask anyone else, so I resigned myself to reading that other pap. One day, while I was browsing in the forbidden adults section of the local library, I found Simak's Aliens for Neighbours. Now I knew that, if the library had one such book, it might have another, and yet another still. More importantly, the edition I had found was published by Gollancz: bright yellow dust jacket with a big red "S F" on the spine. I spent the next few days searching for yellow dust-jackets with "S F" on the spine! I found a few, and then used the list of authors I had acquired (including those on the back of the jackets), to search the author/title catalogue.

High school found me a confirmed s f fan. And it was through s f that I found my friends (all one of them). We swapped s f titles and book locations, and survived the derision of our classmates.

This time also found me somewhat involved in the study of psychology. I felt that if I knew more about the people who made up the world, I would find it easier to survive (my

Paranoia was already in evidence). About the only major rule I learned was that I couldn't get hurt by people if I kept apart from them. And that is just what I did. Another habit I've continued to the present day.

I suppose that my life would have continued in the same vein: reading (especially s f), and observing society from the outside. But I won a place at ANU when I was seventeen, and a scholarship to pay my way there. Four years at ANU, from 1971 until 1974, left me with three major achievements: a BSc (Hons) with a major in psychology, an s f library of 400 paperbacks, and one major romantic interlude. I would not have completed the fourth year of my degree if the jobs hadn't been so scarce at the end of 1973; and the second achievement left me in perpetual penury. As for the third: I had refused steadfastly to become involved in the undergrad social scene, and what few girls I had met didn't seem too interested in a bespectacled societal disaster area (I found out later that in this assumption I was wrong - some girls actually liked me, but I was too shy to do anything). One night in March 1973, while I was contemplating a particularly nasty future for an uncooperative Rattus norvegicus, I discovered that my new laboratory partner was an attractive young lady. Well...Peta and I have been together ever since.

The only other event which interrupted my steady (or unsteady) march to the unemployment queue, was the discovery of s f fandom. I had begun reading some of the professional magazines a few years before, but it wasn't until the middle of 1974 that I began on Amazing. My first issue had Susan Wood's "The Clubhouse", and promptly I sent in a subscription to S F Commentary. Since then I have been learning more and more about the scope of the fandom that underlies s f readership, a fandom I never knew existed until then. S f means a lot to me: of the few people I can call "friend", all are avid s f readers. I often wonder what it is about s f, and about s f readers, that draws the two groups together.

I hope that this capsule history of Neville Angove will give you some insight into the me of me. At least it explains my likes and dislikes in s f: I have enough answers to the world's problems, enough opinions about the state of mankind, enough cruelty, and comments about cruelty, in life without being forced to read more. I'd like to escape. I prefer s f that lets me do this, while telling me that life does have a happy ending if you work for it. And I like it to be well written; rubbish is as close, generally, as the nearest undergraduate essay. So excuse me for not really appreciating all of Dick and Delany, Moorcock and Malzberg, Aldiss and the rest. The writing is not as

not as is argued, and anyway, it's just not my bag.

My past is easy to describe, but my present is more difficult, since it is too close to me, too easily changed in trying to pin it down. Bits of it I can give, but the important pieces I can't even explain to myself. Peta and I moved to Sydney in mid 1975. She began a job as a research assistant at Macquarie University, and I did some tutoring there in psychology. Three months trying to write, when the academic year ended, left me with no money, and a few rejection slips (not a rich enough background to draw from). Hopes of making a career foundering, since what was offered to me professionally wasn't attractive. So I accepted an appointment as a research officer at James Cook Uni in north Queensland (rains inside in summer). I was hoping the relevant experience would open up some more doors in psychological research and teaching - what I want to do. I've been here five months, the Federal Government just closed all the doors, and in five more months I'll be back home with Peta. Next year is an overshadowing question mark.

I can't pin myself down on my likes and dislikes - the conventional categories don't fit. My main professional interest is psychological research; my main trait is curiosity - finding answers helps combat my insecurity; my main hobby is people (from a distance). But except for my fears about my professional future, I'm fairly satisfied with life now, and my attempts to face it.

(13 July 1976)*

* My own life story has many similarities, but I've told that life story so many times, and in so many places and in so many forms that even I don't know which is the most accurate version.

You did mention therapy, however. My only encounter with an encounter group (so to speak) was generally disappointing. The therapist, as you point out, didn't say much but he would have been the interesting person to talk to. The other people tended to magnify their own and each other's problems by the way they talked about them. There was a tacit agreement that nobody in the group would make contact with the others except within the group. In the end, I felt ashamed because my doubts were so relatively minor compared with the real problems of some of the other participants. Perhaps, for that realisation alone, I've had a relatively less depressed year in 1976.

But SFC is the opposite of an encounter group. Firstly, the basic principle is not to "bare one's soul" but to write well - to tell a good story. That was the main impulse behind the best of my own efforts, and certainly I wrote my piece in 44/45 to "finish off the story".

The second basic principle is that any communication in SFC can form the basis of real and enduring friendships, even if only by mail; not just friendships between me and you (although there are many), but between one correspondent and another.

And a third principle is that people can help each other, rather than merely talk to each other. People ask me what is the difference between a fan and an s f reader. The answer is that a fan is somebody who does something about his or her interest in s f. Frequently, this interest takes the form of all the mutual self-help projects of the kind that I listed at the beginning of this issue.

A person who can make a minor artwork from his or her own life story is more likely to be able to fashion a finer life. That's the basis on which I welcome letters like Leigh's, Neville's, and, last issue, Michael O'Brien's: *

* DAVID GRIGG

Flat 2, 36 Princes St, St Kilda, Vic 3182

Reading over SFC 46, I'm slowly coming to realise why you called it the special Pres-digitations issue. Mike O'Brien's letter is a real bombshell; yours was not the only mind in which it set up ringing echoes.

Well, everybody's lonesome,
So it's safe to assume you're lonesome...
But are you ticklish?

Carly Simon, from Playing Possum

I'm starting to believe that the major reason that people form any kind of group is just that: everybody's lonesome. But it's not just fandom where people band together because of their individual loneliness: the groups that form everywhere, the groups at school that kept Michael an outsider: those groups were formed to try to keep out the cold wind of loneliness. People have a desperate need to belong...to something, whatever it is. Because we're all alone, inside our skulls, inside our prison walls. And nothing you ever do, no matter how many friends you have, no matter to how many groups you belong, can relieve that loneliness. Some people realise that consciously but, for the Great Unwashed, it's subconscious.

The average Australian would laugh, or think you were a queer trying to chat him up if you asked if he was lonely. He'd laugh, and turn away to his mates at the pub, drinking beer til they're sick, ogling the girls from the safety of their group.

I did just that, the other day. One of the guys at work invited me down for a drink at the pub, because it was his birthday. So I went along, to be sociable. And stood and

followed the tradition of shouting beers when my turn came around, and remained silent when the comments began as a girl crossed the street within sight of the pub window. But I was drinking cider: I can't stand beer. And that was enough to set me far apart. I don't fit in well with the people with whom I work. I don't drink beer, I don't own a television, I don't watch or play football. I'm strange, a bit funny, a writer. If it wasn't for the fact that I mention Sue's name every so often, they would call me a queer, a poofster, too, I'm sure. I've been called that enough, other places I've worked, before I had a girlfriend. But why is this so? Why is that the first thing that the average run-of-the-mill Australian thinks to call someone who is different? The Australian who spends far more of his time with men than with women, who tends to treat his wife with contempt, if not violence; why is it that he is afraid of homosexuality? Can it be that he is afraid of himself? And why that? I am tempted to think that it is that he is afraid of being different himself. Afraid of being left out of the group. Afraid of being lonely. And there's no cure for that, not ever.

The Greeks had a word for it, as always: xenophobia, fear of the stranger. You may feel safe, unalone in your close group, your little town. But comes the stranger from over the hill, and if you accept him you are reminded that there is more in the world than your little group, and that perhaps the group is not a sufficient defence against the great emptiness of the universe that you can feel. So you fear the stranger, and with fear, as always, comes violence. Aggression. Spikes to wear to fend off the close approach because, paradoxically, you're lonely.

Australians are aggressive because they fear emotion. Aggression isn't an emotion, it's a defence. Emotion demands that you try to breach the unbreachable walls of one's self, and that means acknowledging that those walls are there. To be aggressive, violent instead of kind; to be lustful, to rape, rather than to love, is to have one's ego say to itself: "I am in control; there is nothing to fear, there are no prison walls around me because I can do as I will and go where I like."

I'm probably talking bullshit, Bruce, but I'm saying what I feel. And I'm lonely, too, or else why be a writer? Even lying in bed at night with my love by my side, there are times when I am still lonely, and I know it. That's one set of prison walls I know I shall never scale, and I accept that. Just as I accept that I sit in the middle of a series of concentric rings of walls, all belonging to different prisons: the Prison

of Mortality, the Prison of Humanity, the Prison of Being Planetbound, and out to that ultimate wall which runs around the very universe itself. They're all there, and I'll not climb one of them. ("Why, this is Hell, nor am I out of it!") But by acknowledging those walls, in a way, one is set free.

I know a little of how Michael feels. Being different, being apart from the group, means that you have to recognise the walls immediately. I know, too, how he must have suffered in school. Weak, little, bespectacled, and bookish; that was me, too. My best friends used to beat me up. And yet they were the only friends I had, so I did not avoid them: how could I? wasn't game enough to try the defence that Michael used. So I developed, I think, a sense of humour. I played the fool, rather to be laughed at than ignored. And then people began to tolerate me, to let me join their groups, just because I was sometimes amusing. I think a lot of other people just develop camouflage, merge with the scenery, so as not to appear different, so as to be part of the group. Others, perhaps, become aggressive, and bull their way into the group, and perhaps become its leaders. And perhaps in all of the group, there is no one who is truly average, ordinary, and run-of-the-mill. There are just people hiding.

But in fandom I found a group which was made up of people who seemed to have been left out of other groups, and so I was at home, average, ordinary, and run-of-the-mill. For that strange group. But some people never find a group like fandom. There are not many groups the same, I would think.

But, you know, like many things, loneliness is two-sided. I think that this is something that you discovered, Bruce, when you were living with Kristin. There are times when one craves solitude, when one can accept loneliness, and use it. If we are to drag in happiness, then there are times when I am happier alone than when I am with other people. Partly this is because I have been forced by society to be, like you and Michael and most other fans, a loner in my childhood and adolescence. Solitude can become a habit, that way, to be retained into adulthood. But, like other habits, it can be taken to excess and become a bad habit. It's easy to strengthen the walls of your prison, and shut out the world that way.

If we can't get out of our skulls, we owe it to ourselves and others, at least to try.

I've talked enough rubbish for one afternoon. But please be aware that I appreciate receiving SFC, even though I may not say so for years at a time.

(20 June 1976)*

* That letter was a great pleasure to receive, David. It was a pleasure to read because of what it said. You've put into words things which I believe but which I cannot say nearly as well. It was a pleasure to put on stencil - not a word out of place; the whole piece typed clearly with wide surrounding margins and an attractive type-face. A considerate letter, which shows clearly how much its writer has become a professional during recent years.

It took a fair section of my life to realise that almost nobody is "average, ordinary, and run-of-the-mill". Most people are encouraged to think they are so, and derive some satisfaction from being thought ordinary. But if ever people will talk to me with any honesty, then I find out that nearly everybody has an extraordinary story to tell; has some remarkable possibilities. There are no dull people, but a lot of people who have had to cover themselves with many layers of dullness in order to protect themselves that their lights cannot shine through. I suspect that it is the special skill of the good writer to find the particular qualities of any person and of all people, and to find themselves as well.

Your last few paragraphs, David, touch on all the things which I find difficult to accept, and which still make me uncomfortable to consider. There's the whole concept of "marriage" for instance:

* PHILIP STEPHENSEN-PAYNE

28 Woodfield Dr, Charlbury, Oxford OX7 3SE, England

Perhaps a reason for people to marry early - they can develop their bad habits together rather than separate ones apart? For I think the most difficult part of a marriage - or lasting relationship, if you prefer - is the psychological adjustment from living for/with/by oneself to having to share everything with somebody else. From your comments on yourself and Kristin, Bruce, this seems very much what happened. You had built yourself a life and a personality, but the basis of that character was that you be alone and not really "share" such a person, by its very nature. You fear being alone less than you fear losing your "identity".

Which, I think, is bound to be true of anyone with a "strong" personality. I was only twenty-two when I got married, and had been living with Philippa for almost two years before that, but had already built up a strong personal routine that proved incredibly hard to disrupt. I suspect the marriage would not have lasted til now had it not been for a serious illness on Philippa's part, which forced me to disrupt my personal routine to take care of her. Even so, it is still very strained at times.

For simple love is not enough (as you say,

you still love Kristin - but couldn't live with her), nor is the "Take me, I'm yours" attitude between two intelligent people. I suspect that it is this process that cements many marriages; one personality (in social history, usually the woman's) becomes totally submerged in the other. A compromise situation is needed in all the silly areas where compromise seems impossible. The most trivial things need resolution - things like how to wash dishes correctly; how to treat a friend if he drops round for dinner (formal or informal?); the importance/irrelevance of small habits that can irritate. To take an example: my routine always involved an abhorrence of "wasted" time, and so whenever there are five minutes or so with nothing to do I tend to pick up a book - from behind which, I am told, it can be very difficult to prise me.

So I think marriage is always a struggle - the stronger the personalities, the stronger the struggle. So why is it worth it, you ask? What makes marriage so special that it is worth the effort? I can't speak for anyone else, but for me it is worth it because my life had no value when it wasn't shared. Did you read Asimov's "That Thou Art Mindful of Him"? In that, the robot George Ten requests the company of George Nine because

...As soon as I create a line of thought the mere fact that I have created it commends it to me, and I find it difficult to abandon it. If I can, after the development of a line of thought, express it to George Nine, he would consider it without having first created it. He would therefore view it without prior bent. He might see gaps and shortcomings that I would not.

So too with marriage. The "power behind the throne" is no myth; I find it incredibly more satisfying doing difficult jobs with support from Philippa. Everything is so much enriched, incredibly so. As with George Ten, an individual thought/action/experience has little meaning on its own, as there is no yardstick, but the sounding board of another opinion adds a whole new dimension.

Another concrete example. I never submit a review without going through it with Philippa, because she is so likely to point out areas that need strengthening which I have missed; often because a partial phrase has for me a particular meaning, and I overlook the fact that it might mean something else to someone else. I think the end product is much better than anything I could produce alone.

Which I think is probably my main argument for "marriage" - the contract is not too important if you object to it. No one can

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really sees his life in perspective, except through another's eyes. It can often be hard work, and there will always be the nagging, "But did I marry the right person?", but I think it's worth it.

All of which is a bit rambly, I'm afraid, Bruce, but I hope it gets the idea across. I suspect that fanzine editors already get some of the advantages of marriage without it - ie, the feedback via letters of comment on what you say and do. But imagine getting a loc on your whole life as it happens. Despite the things you would rather other people didn't know about, doesn't it sound worth it? (11 July 1976)*

* "Imagine getting a loc on your whole life as it happens." What a truly horrifying prospect, Philip. Have you just put me off marriage for life?

Not that I was arguing against it. Of all subjects in the world, "marriage" (in the wider sense we are talking about) seems the one least amenable to reason. It happens or it doesn't. Last time it nearly happened to me, I made a complete blunder of it. I don't see any prospects of getting a second chance, but I still have a sneaking desire to try.

The truth is that I am the sum of all my bad habits - which somehow I put to creative use. And, of course, the feedback on this magazine does give me much of the feedback satisfaction you are talking about. Hardly the other kinds of satisfaction, though.

I don't know about seeing my life in perspective "through another's eyes". My constant struggle is to try to see myself clearly through my own eyes.

But how did we get back to me, and problems I've raised? I began with replies to Mike O'Brien - but somehow replies to him turn into replies to me. For instance:

JOAN DICK

* 379 Wantigong St, Albury, NSW 2640

"Presdigitations": I loved that cover. The more I looked at it the more I saw,

Michael O'Brien really wrote of himself. It was interesting. It was good. Your comments were the same. Years ago, perhaps, I would have written the same kind of letter. Loneliness may seem the worst sort of fate. It's not. Don't make the mistake I made. Don't marry to escape a situation you find intolerable. Loneliness is not the worst thing that can happen. I could really fill a whole issue on that subject. But I had better not start. However, this I must say. I am up to my grey hairs in housework, etc, and only a fool would think I am happy. But the one thing I would never change -

from twenty-five years of married life - is my five wonderful children. They are the only worthwhile thing I have found in marriage and they alone make everything else bearable. I hate housework, gardening, shopping, cooking, etc. I do it because I must, but they are the most mind-muddling things anyone can do.

The Tucker Issue: a credit to all concerned. In particular you. The only one of Tucker's books I have read is The Year of the Quiet Sun and I enjoyed that very much. I will keep my eyes out for the others and, if I get a chance, I will read them also.

(30 June 1976)*

* I thought I would include that last comment because it will reassure Bob Tucker that, if he can ever withdraw those books of his from the grip of the problems they have, he has a whole new audience of people who have read the Tucker Issue. Which is much of the reason why Lesleigh and I compiled it in the first place: to get Tucker's books back in print.

Thanks for the nice pungent comment about fates-worse-than-whatever-fate-has-struck-Michael-O'Brien. *

ERIC LINDSAY

* 6 Hillcrest Ave, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776

As I have said probably all too often, the trivia of which SFC 46 is composed seems to me more important than the weighty issues. Self-indulgence (and both "trivia" and "self-indulgence" are the terms you use yourself) is not a sideline in fandom; it is the very purpose of it. It is when we decide that such is not befitting our dignity that we are most unhappy with what we are doing.

I was surprised by Mike O'Brien's letter, which seemed totally atypical, even when it started. It had a directness that I have never associated with him, and was even at first rather stylish.

I don't know how to say this without sounding somewhat insulting, so I'll just go ahead and hope that Mike understands. I sort of saw him at a distance, and infrequently, at conventions, and also in his ANZAPA magazines. Mostly he seemed "someone who is interested in s f, and has stuck around in fandom for a long time", but there was absolutely no personality there - even the working in a pub, which might have been expected to lead to some sort of comments, never really seemed to help him come alive for me. And so I tended to ignore him completely, aided, I'll admit, by not hearing from him much in any case. A sort of distant figure at a con, as I've said, somewhat, "Hi, Mike, nice to see you, have to go see..."

In his letter, there are whole aspects of life with which I can identify. The childhood bullying, and the berserker rage, for example. The reading will be common to the majority of fans, naturally enough. I wonder more about the lack of social outlets - since I didn't discover fandom until much older than Mike (courtesy John Bangsund again, however, via copies of ASFR sold through the Mary Martin Bookshop lists from Adelaide) it didn't supply my friends at that stage.

One obviously large divergence is that my father died when I was five, and so I don't have Mike's problems there. There was a period of considerable problems with my mother when I was working in the country, and I suspect this as a rather late rash of psychosomatic illness designed to get me back. Now that I have my own place and spend a relatively small time at my mother's, things seem much better since there is very little bickering. I'm no longer pushed into doing things to please her, but rather do so at times because I wish to.

Every now and then I think of the advantages of a permanent girlfriend, but it is, as Mike so correctly mentions - did you intend it in a wider context? - mostly a matter of image. Also it implies a possession, one for the other, that is alien to anything I would now be willing to put up with, or expect anyone else to put up with. It would also, for most of the people I know, have implications of settling down and various other accommodations to society that I have no intention of making.

When I was much younger, and going to Legacy, there was a very helpful gentleman who taught the boys how to fix radios, and took groups bushwalking and so on. He was obese, but not bespectacled, softly spoken, and not bookish, and would certainly have been called a fag had the more "respectable" people who organised Legacy known of his tendencies. This, of course, was before the Gay Liberation Front, or whoever, convinced people that "gay" was not invariably followed by the word "nineties". During a camping (no pun intended) trip I discovered that (1) he was gay and (2) that I wasn't - I had been a little concerned about tendencies that way, despite an intellectual conviction that it wasn't important anyway. I don't mean that to sound like a "Oh horrors, I am forever dishonoured" situation, but rather as one which had absolutely no favourable emotional impact, but more a neutral-to-slightly-distasteful one. The only appropriate footnote occurred in a hotel at Toronto during Torcon (and I still suspect that Bill Wright or Robin Johnson arranged it to get a funnier set of incidents in a con report). I'd never been propositioned in a hotel corridor before Jerry Jacks came along, and

within half a minute of meeting me had given out an invitation, which I gravely declined.

* I have never been propositioned by anyone, female, or male, goods unseen, so to speak - not even by Jerry Jacks. *

Actually I suspect that you are totally correct in saying the real discrimination comes when a person is non-aggressive. It is certainly obvious that a person who ignores competition is disliked more than one who either wins or loses.

* I suspect that some of us are the victims of a really insidious form of discrimination. This is part of the assumption that a person is either "gay" or "straight". Nonsense. Between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five I was not in love with any girl, and I had no interest in other males. At that time I felt effectively neuter - appreciating, as somebody once put it nicely, books much more than people (a practising bibliosexual!). At that time I would have put myself in a third group - people who have no bodily, sexual interest in others, but simply appreciate the various pleasures of good companionship. (Of course, now I fall in love every second week, but heart-swelling women show their innate sense of discrimination and ignore me completely.) *

In my own letter, I suspect that I made myself sound much more mechanical and unemotional than is true. In saying that happiness is not provided by someone else, I am talking about a restricted range of people. The vast majority of people marry only once and live lives of reasonable happiness. There is a fraction, perhaps half, who change partners, either legally or otherwise. There are some who extrapolate from their current and past experiences, assume that their future ones will be, in essence, no different, and decide on this basis that, no matter how good the present seems, there will come a time of disagreement or even hatred. They will also see that relationships which are not as intense may well continue for longer, although these are non-exclusive relationships. And they may decide this is a way of life more suited to them.

This was so in my case. I found myself thinking that way fairly early in life - early twenties at any rate. Before then, I'd been no different from most other moderately shy young men in my experiences. I chased tail all night, the same as everyone else, but didn't boast about it as much, and wasn't as efficient as some people of my acquaintance who made their first question on every date, "How about it?" Since I had a lower sex drive than average (according to Kinsey, etc, although I'm not sure he had a bunch of figures for youths scheming to get dates), and since I was lazy enough to find sweet talk and movies and all the rest

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sweet talk and movies and all the rest somewhat tiresome, I rather welcomed the chance to take a break and rethink where I was going in life. Eventually I decided that dating wasn't worth the effort, so I haven't approached a girl with specifically sexual purposes in mind since. That is what I mean when I say I don't need anyone else, and that I won't need anyone else. It doesn't commit me, in the sense of not having alternatives. It just means that I don't bother rushing after every possibility.

Now, Dave Piper has hit it exactly, when he talks about playing down yourself to make room for another. Possibly I could, and at times I've wished I had, but most of the time I'd rather be me than make the compromises needed to have a deep relationship with another person. At the same time, shallow relationships seem to me such a waste of time that I'm just not particularly interested in looking for them. I don't believe in hurting another person by starting a relationship with their expecting more of me than I'm willing to give. Life was a hell of a lot easier when other people were devices for me to use to gratify myself, but I will not go back to that. (28 June 1976)*

* This is fascinating. The things you don't know about other people that you find out only by reading their mail. Like: *

MARC ORTLIEB

* 70 Hamblynn Rd, Elizabeth Downs, SA 5113

I'm not easily impressed by people airing their souls in public (unless they are brilliant poets like Sylvia Plath). However, the Michael O'Brien letter struck a chord in me. I have experienced a number of the things he mentions, though normally I can laugh them off. The entire Australian anti-pooof phenomenon is so sick it isn't funny. I experience it every day at school. When a kid dislikes another kid, the immediate response is to shout out, "Well, you're a queer anyway." As a teacher, I tend to isolate myself from the outside community in general, so I thought that older people were slightly more mature in their attitudes. I see that I have underestimated the prejudice of the average ccker. Mind you, the minute I start to talk about prejudice I am on dangerous ground because, in disliking people who are prejudiced against homosexuals, I am myself being prejudiced.

A couple of times I've had cause to speak to my kids about defaming other kids and I've asked them why they have such a down on homosexuality. The immediate response is always, "They're not natural" or something to that effect. No amount of reasoning will convince them otherwise.

Naturally my long hair and English accent leave me wide open for unfounded accusations, so once again my personal prejudices come into it. I am automatically prejudiced against people who judge me on a cursory glance. (Which doesn't stop me from judging other people on a cursory glance. Aren't we hypocritical creatures?) (I just realised that I covered myself with the word "unfounded" in the above paragraph. Maybe I'm not as unprejudiced as I thought I was.) (29 June 1976)*

* Kids seem to choose any weapon to hand, either physical or verbal, to beat the hell out of any other kid. It sounds to me as if "pooof" has just become the clobber word for the last few years. It sort of has the equivalent meaning of "unAustralian". It seems to me that Australian boys really think the worst they can say to each other is that such-and-such "is like a girl". The Women's Lib people haven't even begun to succeed with the under-sixteens yet. *

MICHELINE CYNA-TANG

* Flat 2, 83 Blessington St, St Kilda, Vic 3183

I am sitting in bed at 2.30 am on Wednesday 7 July. I was up all last night. Why I suddenly felt I had to write right now I don't know. I even got out of bed to get the pen, and it's cold out there. Perhaps it's because I saw you earlier, at Degraeves night, and didn't get to talk. I got SFC 46 instead. And you know how I like to interrupt, answer back, make an offside connection. (I LISTEN TOO - The capital letters were for Steph. Often in arguments he insists that I don't listen or rather, that I don't stop talking.)

I often feel like writing to you while reading SFC. (I read mainly late at night, or I'd phone.) But I put it off and talk next time we meet instead.

I am happy; not content, though that is part of it. I enjoy being me. I am often excited, thrilled, amused. I feel very lucky, though I've had my bad times and moods, been depressed, in fact have been so down and out that I was a little more than willing that life should end, on more than one occasion. The secret for me has always been to accept every emotion, totally, now, while it's happening. So, you see, I haven't the time or the urge to hang on to the hurts or the joys of before. I don't forget, but I don't dwell on them. No matter how bad a period of time is, during it I will fully enjoy the sight of a sunny day, a rose I smell, a book, an idea, a film, an old friend, a new friend, a "regentag", a smoky haze, bright misted mornings, foods, wines, jewellery, art, argument. I think one has to remember hard to stay unhappy. And I'm lazy.

At one stage, my life was so much like a soap opera it wasn't funny: "The Tangs of Tennyson St". I thought of it like that, with a touch of Pollyanna thrown in. But I don't propound a "silver lining" or "looking for good in every hardship". It's just that one shouldn't hold on so hard to bad realities that unrelated good realities don't get through.

Thanks for remembering that conversation. I just happened to need that reminder of time scales personally at the moment.

Here's a small note for Michael O'Brien (the man who didn't come to dinner on the last night of Eastercon '73, so Steph was asked to join us, as he looked hungry and there was good for one more; strangely hinged interactions), for BRG, *brg*, and anyone else reading it. After the age of seventeen or so, one can create one's own environment, and basically recreate oneself too, more to one's own liking. That is not to say that it is easy, but it is quite possible, if you want to be different or make things different. If you have a child you, the adult, create a good deal of his environment and are conscious of the fact. In the same way, you the adult can create the environment to recreate you the child. If you know the sort of person you wish to be, it is easier to set about artificially (or consciously) creating the suitable environment for that personality's growth. The environment and the personality become eventually fully formed and a reality; not in any way artificial.

If you don't know who you want to be, but are discontent as you are, any change could be desirable. Even sitting down and consciously thinking out who you would like to be will alter your present persona in some ways. (7 July 1976)*

* The trick is to escape the limitations of the personality you want to be. As someone said, the main trap in life is that you do get what you want. Well, some people do. I'm living now the sort of life I wanted specifically for myself when I was fourteen years old. When I discovered at age twenty-five that I wanted to change direction, probably it was already too late. Certainly I have not become the sort of person that suddenly I wanted to be. But perhaps I'm a different person for wanting to change direction.

You give your version of what I call The Principle of Continuous Serendipity. Susan Wood is another person who seems to live by this principle.

"Steph", by the way, is Stephen Campbell, best known as ace SFC cover artist and collator during 1969 and 1970. Both he and Miche have come a long way since then. They held their first

exhibition a few weeks ago, and Stephen has just landed a job as layout coordinator with Village Cinemas.

Thanks for your letter, Micheline. But why are you one of the few women readers of SFC to send in long letters like yours? Help rid SFC of its MCP image - the only way to even the balance between the sexes is to jump on the other end of the scales. *

BUCK COULSON

* Route 3, Hartford City, Indiana 47348, USA

((Re SFC 44/45)): You aren't going to like this, but one of your problems seems to be that you admire neurotics. Specifically, this time, Owen Webster. Certainly one should take responsibility for one's actions - and one should have enough backbone to keep going in the face of adversity. I never heard of Webster before, but I can't have any respect for the man you describe; a man who kills himself because he can no longer have the job he likes or the woman he wants. In other words, if his life isn't perfect, he can't take it. He may well have been a genius as an author, but the man you describe was a failure as a human being. (Emphasis because the map is not the territory and all that crap; you may well have left out traits that I would appreciate.) I don't have any idea why this marriage failed, but I have observed quite a few "sexually liberated" males, and they make damned poor marriage partners for anyone but a female masochist.

So would you, I guess; if you can't stand your neighbours, how are you going to put up with a wife? Happiness is an unreachable ideal for you because you won't work at it; you expect it to fall in your lap. Or to borrow it from someone else. I don't write about what moves me because it's none of your business, really. (Besides, you get quite enough of my motivations in Yandro. Or you should - I don't spell them out, but I certainly don't try to hide them.)

I've never in my life had a job I liked or particularly wanted but they all had their amusing aspects. The secret of the world is that it's funny, as are most of the people in it. Phil Dick is occasionally hilarious. So is Harlan, though his humorous aspects do tend to lack variety. Pottensteiner is a scream. Learn to enjoy other people, including your neighbours with their imitation of the Beautiful People. ((*brg* It wasn't their pretensions I objected to; it was their very powerful record player.*)) (Or, if you simply can't stand neighbours - I admit that's failing of mine - move out in the country. Sure it has its drawbacks; make up your mind which you dislike the least, and then put up

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

with that. You're in love with your scr-
rows; you sound like you'd rather be Tragic
than happy.)

There, that should get your adrenalin flow-
ing. (7 August 1976)*

* Well, it has the typewriter running hot.

Maybe I drew the map incorrectly. The thing I liked most about Owen is that he didn't stop kicking. Then suddenly he folded up and stopped being defiant. All the things I described in my obituary had happened to him before, some of them many times. But this time...? That is the puzzle. In some way, all his assumptions have been proven wrong, and I don't think any person can recover from that. Maybe find new assumptions, but not just get up again and try to start walking on the same legs. I don't think it was possible for Owen to be successful in Australia in the way he wanted - ie, to be paid adequately as a free-lance novelist, thinker, and commentator. George's attitude, as expressed in his Silverberg article (SFC 48/49) is more realistic for Australian conditions. But I still admire Owen for trying to do the impossible.

The rest of your letter is true enough - but then I thought I said as much by the documentary way in which I tried to write "My 1975". I'm certainly better at misery than at happiness. And I won't put up with anything that really annoys me (and I don't expect anybody to put up with me when I annoy them, as long as they are honest about their reactions). And my sense of humour fails me often enough. And...well, I've written such things before.

Yep - Yandro is exactly the sort of personal reminiscence which I like to read in fanzines, which is why I nominate it every year for a Hugo.

* JOHN MILLARD

18-86 Broadway Ave, Toronto, Ontario M4P
1T4, Canada

Bruce, I really enjoyed reading your comments about The Writers Workshop and the Smoooth Convention. "The Smoooth Convention", even in more ways than Tucker's definition of smceth. It was a very smooth-operating convention. Don't get me wrong; there were problems, of course, but there always are with such undertakings. It's the mark of a well-organised group that these problems do not become common knowledge of the members of the Convention. As I said at the close of the Convention, "I see no reason why the Committee shouldn't be proud of what they have accomplished. It was an excellent and well-run Convention and I enjoyed every minute of it."

I think I can say the same for the country of Australia, too, Bruce. I enjoyed almost

every minute while I was there. We travelled many hundreds of miles, by air, train, bus, tram, and car, and some of us by boat. When I say "we", I mean myself and seven others. Early in 1975 I realised that it would be more enjoyable to tour Australia after the Convention with a small group, rather than do it alone. I contacted the other members of my group, people I have known for a number of years as fans, but with whom I have never travelled or lived with. Lynn Hickman and his wife Carolyn, Roger and Pat Sims, Fred Prophet, and Roy and Deedee Lavender. Lynn and Roy are old timers in fandom and, like myself, are members of First Fandom, as is Roy's wife Deedee. Roger and Fred were Co-Chairmen of the 1959 Worldcon in Detroit.

In order to qualify for the special discount fare on TAA, for internal flights we had to lay out our itinerary, include it and pay the additional, along with our overseas flight. For neophytes we did very well. On the Monday after the Convention, we went to Ballarat with the rest of the group. Stayed overnight at the Southern Cross and left Melbourne on Tuesday morning for Hobart. We spent the day poking about in the city and had dinner that evening with Don Tuck, his wife and son, Michael O'Brien, and some others. The next day we made an auto trip to Port Arthur to see the Penitentiary and some other things on our return trip. It was an overcast, rainy, and a very wild day, but it was a very enjoyable day, too. The next day, Thursday, we took a local bus from Hobart to Launceston, which was quite an experience and enjoyable. Fortunately the weather was quite good. We spent that afternoon looking about Launceston and left early Friday morning for Melbourne and then on to Adelaide.

We did our shopping in Adelaide on Friday, and had a nighttime tour on Friday; did another tour on Saturday afternoon. Did a full day tour of the Barossa Valley on the Sunday, including a winery.

After the Valley tour we went directly to the airport for our flight to Sydney. We arrived in Sydney after midnight, went to bed late and were up real early the next morning for a bus trip to Canberra. Had a tour of Canberra in the afternoon and returned to Sydney late at night. That was Monday.

On Tuesday about noon, we went out to Ron Graham's to see his library and collection. Roger and Lynn were more interested in the large pool table than in the collection. When it came time to go, I had a devil of a time to get them to leave. I am afraid we wore out our welcome.

BERT CHANDLER

Flat 23, Kanimbla Hall, 19 Tusculum St,
Potts Point, NSW 2011

Thanks muchly for SFCs 43 and 46. Both were very interesting - 43 because I had the pleasure of meeting Bob Tucker again at the Midwestcon. He was toastmaster.

The English contingent - Ted Tubb, Dave Kyle, and Leslie Flood - left the Berkeley Books cocktail party earlier than I did so were able to tell Lou Tabokov that I was on the way eventually. They caught the Greyhound for Cincinnati at 2230 hrs. I caught the one at 0145 - a Jesusless hour. Anyhow, arriving at Cincinnati I was pounced upon at the bus station and rushed to the Quality Inn, where the Con was being held. I was told that I must attend the Banquet. I said that I must have a shower, shave, and change of shirt and underclothing. I was allowed a shave and change of shirt.

The banquet was organised on cafeteria lines. By the time that I got down all that was left was cottage cheese and beetroot salad. Oh, there were a few shards of what I decided were fossilised pteranodon wings but which were inedible.

Bob had his fun introducing "the distinguished refugees from Sexpo..." - these being Messrs Tubb, Kyle, Flood, Johnson, and myself. We all had to say our party pieces into the microphone. I told the true story of the taxi driver in New York - a Puerto Rican, I think - who noticed a slight accent and asked where I was from. I told him. He told me that I spoke very good English, then asked what was the official language of Australia. I told him, Australian. He then said that he thought that Australians spoke English. I told him that the English and the Americans speak a sort of bastardised Australian... The trouble was that everybody at the Midwestcon thought that I'd made the story up.

Also very interesting was the "Special Presdigitations Issue". Michael O'Brien's letter clears up a mystery that had me puzzled for quite a few years. Even when drunk, I've never been thrown out of a pub - so to be thrown out of a pub when stone cold sober was a somewhat disconcerting experience. Still a mystery, however, is why the hell Mike stands for it. Surely by this time he must have realised the truth of the old saying: Our relations are chosen for us, but thank God we can choose our own friends!

Very shortly after my return to God's Own Country, the everloving flew the coop, she proceeding on a conducted tour of Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan. She is now back in civilisation. She has realised, belatedly, that she missed her chance with the postcard of

That evening, our last in Australia, we celebrated by partaking of dinner at a lovely little bistro run by two New Zealanders, not too far from our hotel in King's Cross. In fact, most of the meals we had in Australia and New Zealand were very good. The only bad spot was the Coffee Shop at the Southern Cross. It was not only bad, but atrocious, poorly made up, poor service - the whole bit ((*brg*...and now demolished*)).

On Wednesday morning, our last day in Australia, we did our final sight-seeing and shopping and left that afternoon for Auckland, sixty strong. Each of us trooped on board the aircraft carrying a daffodil, supplied by Shayne. From there to New Zealand, NASFiC in Los Angeles, and home to Toronto.

I understand from Fanew Sletter 55 that on 4 June a group of fans in Adelaide will be meeting to organise formally The Worldcon Bidding Committee for Adelaide in 1983. I don't know if I should send my commiserations or congratulations? Hopefully, if they do win, they will give some consideration to the time of the year when they will hold the convention. Some other time than August, when it can be expected to have fair weather. Aussiecon was excellent, as I said before, but the weather was mostly a nuisance.

Overall, the Aussiecon Tour was a fantastic and enjoyable experience and one that will stick in my memory for many years. I am ready to go back, anytime. As I have said to some others - Australia has a lot that we in North America can learn about in the conduct of life. I say this, Bruce, not to make you feel good, but because I feel genuinely that you have a lot we could and should learn about. (30 May 1976)*

* For that reason alone it would have been gratifying if more people had been able to travel to Australia for Aussiecon. The choice of time of year was quite deliberate, of course - it was the only time that enough overseas people would have time and opportunity to make the trip at all. If it was left to our choice, and people were willing to take off the odd time for them, we would choose November or early December. This is after most signs of winter have cleared away, and before we begin to get really hot spells. But then again, an August convention in Brisbane would usually guarantee good weather.

Glad you had a good time, and I'm pleased that I can publish at least one trip report by one of our overseas guests for Aussiecon. After all those people left Melbourne after the Convention, we lost touch with them. It is only during recent months that I have been able to see any of the trip reports.

The following letter does not fit into any of the neat slots into which IMBTTMF has been divided so far. Perhaps it is a "trip Report" too: *

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

Mr Fujiyama that she sent me. Mine to her, from the Grand Canyon, bore the message: Not a patch on Ayers Rock! Hers to me was no more than a substitute for a letter.

She had free time in Tokyo so was able to inflict herself on Messrs Hayakawa, my Japanese publishers. They did her proud. She returned bearing gifts and wingeing slightly. I pointed out that I had to lug, all the way from San Francisco, eight jars of homemade jams and jellies from Norma Vance to her. Among the gifts was an advance copy of the sixth Grimes/Rim worlds novel to be published in Japanese, this being The Broken Cycle. The cover's a beaut. A golden, winged centaur galloping (flying?) through Interstellar Space with a naked brunette clasped to his manly chest. It made my day. At last, after all these years, I have a publisher who realises that I like naked ladies on the cover. The interior pics, however, were disappointing. No naked ladies on bicycles although that was in the story. I've seen naked ladies behind the wheels of cars, astride horses, and riding bicycles and, of the three modes of transport, I, as a spectator, prefer the velocipede. A certain incongruity...

And that's about all for the nonce so will close, with best wishes. (1 August 1976)*

* And best wishes to you - and to the dozen or so correspondents whose letters have still to appear next issue. But before ending...

ABJECT APOLOGY

to Lee Harding, for losing the letter of comment he sent me. I'm very annoyed, since it is the first time I have lost a letter of comment to SFC. Also, Lee said some very complimentary things about Michael O'Brien's letter, and some not-so-complimentary remarks about the attitudes expressed by Eric Lindsay in his letter. One thing I can remember from Lee's letter is that he thought Mike's letter should go in the canon of great existential literature - because of the style of the letter and the way it shows somebody facing up to a particular situation. As I interpret Lee's attitudes, he thought that Eric's attitudes about being a hermit were not defensible.

* And what late news can I put in this small spot? (For those who are interested in such) I'm burdened with yet another lot of new neighbours. They have an even more powerful record player than the last lot, and a dog named Horrie. They're nice people (or, the girl who answered the door certainly is) but even nice people can make a lot of noise (take me, for example). So, if they're so loud that they stop me reading, maybe I will just put more time into typing SFC. A happy thought.... Seeyuz. 17 September 1976*

S F COMMENTARY 47 CHECKLIST - cond from page 46

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|--|--|---|
| Philippa Maddern: "The Ins and Outs of the Hadhya State" (5) | Larry Niven: "Inconstant Moon" (45) | T D Suzuki (43) |
| Barry Malzberg (36) | Larry Niven: "Not Long Before the End" (45) | Wilson Tucker (6, 14, 19) |
| Midwestcon 76 (19) | Larry Niven: "One Face" (46) | Wilson Tucker: <u>Ice and Iron</u> (6) |
| Sandra Miesel: "Challenge and Response" (46) | Larry Niven: "Passerby" (45) | Wilson Tucker: <u>The Lincoln Hunters</u> (6) |
| John Millard (18-19) | Norstrilia Press (5, 48) | Wilson Tucker: <u>The Year of the Quiet Sun</u> (6, 14) |
| Walter Miller Jr: <u>A Canticle For Leibowitz</u> (43) | Michael O'Brien (11-12, 14-16, 18-20) | George Turner (4-5, 32-33, 46) |
| Charles Montieith (5) | Marc Ortlieb (16) | George Turner: <u>Beloved Son</u> (5) |
| Mark Mumper (9-10) | Irene Pagram (3, 5) | George Turner: "Paradigm and Pattern: Form and Meaning in <u>The Dispossessed</u> " (SFC 41/42) (4) |
| Peter Nicholls(ed): <u>Foundation</u> (24) | Francis Payne: "Sex and Warfare Among the Irqu-Sh'lata" (5) | George Turner: "Robert Silverberg The Phenomenon" (SFC 50) (18) |
| Larry Niven: "At the Bottom of a Hole" (46) | Dave Piper (13, 16) | Jack Vance (42) |
| Larry Niven: "Becalmed in Hell" (45-46) | Frederik Pohl & C M Kornbluth: <u>The Space Merchants</u> (45) | Kitty Vigo (4-5) |
| Larry Niven: "Bordered in Black" (45) | Christopher Priest (5) | Kurt Vonnegut Jr (36) |
| Larry Niven: "Convergent Series" (46) | Christopher Priest: <u>The Inverted World</u> (24) | Ian Watson: <u>The Embedding</u> (21) |
| Larry Niven: "The Deadlier Weapon" (46) | Larry Propp (6) | Ian Watson: <u>The Jonah Kit</u> (21-24) |
| Larry Niven: "Death by Ecstasy" (46) | Mack Reynolds: "Relic" (38) | Owen Webster (17-18) |
| Larry Niven: "How the Heroes Die" (46) | <u>Science Fiction Special 13</u> (39-42) | Andrew Whitmore (4) |
| Larry Niven: <u>Inconstant Moon</u> (46) | S F Short Story Contest 1976 (5) | Cherry Wilder (5) |
| | Clifford D Simak (37) | Gene Wolfe: "Tarzan of the Grapes" (38) |
| | Clifford D Simak: <u>A Choice of Gods</u> (41-42) | Susan Wood (17) |
| | Herbert Spencer (25) | Susan Wood: "The Clubhouse" (Amazing) (10) |
| | Philippa Stephensen-Payne (13) | Roger Zelazny (46) |
| | Philip Stephensen-Payne (13-14) | |

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GEORGE TURNER
 FETER NICHOLLS
 BARRY GILLAM
 VAN IKIN
 DERRICK ASHBY
 MARK MUMPER
 NEVILLE ANGOVE
 TERENCE M GREEN
 CHRISTINE MCGOWAN
 DON ASHBY
 BRUCE GILLESPIE

AND GREAT WHALES CREATED GOD

George Turner reviews

THE JONAH KIT

by Ian Watson

Victor Gollancz :: 1975
 221 pages :: \$A7.10

More and more often I find myself upgrading my opinion of a novel on a second reading, and not always because of depths or implications that have eluded me at first sight. Sometimes the fault is indeed my own in not having been quick enough on the intellectual uptake; sometimes it lies with the author for having so structured his novel as to obscure rather than reveal the points he wishes to make. Too many good s f thinkers are less than totally competent novelists. An example of this second type is Philip Dick's Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said, wherein melodrama drowns the thought. Another is The Jonah Kit, and in this one it is a lack on the author's part of clear communication which makes an already complex work more difficult than it need be. Since both this and his previous The Embedding have communication as an ever-present sub-theme, the lack is culpable; a writer should attempt the practice of his preaching.

So, as a reviewer writing for those who may read it only once, I warn that The Jonah Kit may be something of a disappointment after the brilliant first novel. It is structured in the same three-strand mode as The Embedding, it contains a central conception both original and philosophically titillating, it brings its three disparate parts to a point with some neatness - and leaves the reader with the feeling of a promise unkept.

The reason lies, for me at any rate, in considerable imbalances in the telling of the story. Matters which should be clear from the start remain cloudy too long, sexual complications which receive plot emphasis turn out to be only metaphors of side issues, and a potentially overpowering climax is diminished by authorial misjudgement about what to include and where to include it, as well as about what to leave out.

That the book succeeds fairly well at a casual reading in spite of its deficiencies is a tribute to the magnetism of its ideas and incidents. But it needs a second reading to sort out the relative importance of various sections and - most unfortunately - to understand what one entire strand of the narrative is all about.

Strand 1 concerns whales. This is the difficult one which clears up as one proceeds, but it is initially irritating in its obscurity. Watson knows what lies behind the allusive prose but the reader does not. Consider this descriptive passage which concerns the central creature in the "whale" strand:

Yet his copulatory thrust carries within it the weak echo of an earlier sensation - hint of a time when his tail blades were forked far wider apart than now; when the underside of his body squirmed upon the soft warmth of some other clinging, shifting being; and all along his spine was bitter cold; and it was black dark everywhere...

The reader may be forgiven for wondering whether "forked far wider apart than now" refers to a previous evolutionary state, particularly if he knows that whales were land mammals who returned to the sea after an unsuccessful foray in early biological times. It will be many pages on before he discovers that it refers to false memories of human sexuality welling from a human mind which has been imprinted over the whale's own.

And on page 9 we get, as part of the same section

Cruising. Copulating with the sea. Mapping this world of waters. Occasionally thrusting himself through the sky's soft roof to spill out numbers that seem to grow in him spontaneously...

No reader could reasonably be expected to divine that the whale's brain is being used as a sort of idiot savant computer, spouting answers to problems posed through the imprinted mind (which has not yet been plainly mentioned); nor does he learn this for some time.

Watson is, in such passages as this, trying to

enter the unfortunate whale's divided intellect and take the reader gently with him. He succeeds only in being mystifying about matters central to his story, matters which should be stated plainly in order to provide orientation for the reader. Mystery in a story can be an advantage; mystery in description can hardly be so. One suspects Watson (possibly unjustly) of playing that pseudo-artistic game of refusing a statement whenever an obliquity is possible.

The first three or four "whale" sections do much to cloud the remainder of the book. By the time the reader has discovered the nature of the major whale character, a large amount of significant detail, important to the ultimate resolution, has been lost because of its apparent meaninglessness, discarded by the reader as literary background noise.

Eventually he discovers that the whale population has a social structure, with the highly intelligent sperm whales as an intellectual elite, the hump-backed "singing" whales as a communications system, and all types down to the dolphins serving specific purposes. The sperm whales, incapable of physical manipulation, have developed a philosophical culture involving morality and communication through agreed thought forms (not telepathy in the usual sense - something more intelligent) which are exchanged in the Thought Star. The Thought Star is Watson's explanation of the occasionally sighted whale groupings in a wheel-spoke head-to-head formation on the ocean surface, and no one has yet suggested a better one than I know of.

Strand 2 of the story concerns Russian scientists who have discovered how to imprint a human mind on a whale's brain and maintain a form of radio communication with it. The political aim is to use the whales to obtain total control of the oceans. They also arrange for a small boy with an adult imprinted brain to "defect" so that the Americans will realize what is happening and that in the power game Russia has them over a barrel. The point - not an easy one to adjust to - is that all this activity is taking place in a universe which American scientists have decided is unreal.

Strand 3 brings us to this "unreality", the pivot of the tale. An American astronomer has penetrated, by radio telescope, to the fringes of the detectable universe, i.e. the fringes represented by the expanding material and radiation from the primordial big bang. Radiation "windows" at the outer limits reveal a universe beyond ours, surrounding it. Some fascinating reasoning (to be quoted at length further on) determines that our universe is a figment, a shadow only, of the "real" universe glimpsed in another dimension beyond ours. These glimpses become known as the Footprints of God; the deduction is that God exists only in the "real" universe and not in our "unreal" one. (What happened to "Cogito, ergo sum"? A good question, which we will return to.) Humanity, deprived first of belief in God and then of trust in its

own existence, begins to crumble. Scientists question the American deduction, too late. It is deduced that if the universe exists only in our minds, it can be changed by changing our minds about it - by deciding it is something else. (But - if we are unreal, would the change of mind be meaningful?)

And is the "unreality" theory correct, anyway? It is decided to take advantage of the cetacean Thought Star, which has been discovered to be a biological computer system of tremendous power. Through the imprinted whale the American data is presented to the Star for assessment. And the climax is precipitated.

For the sake of those who will read the book, I must withhold the whales' reaction. It leads to one of the most monstrous conclusions in science fiction, one which, in the hands of an evocative writer such as Bradbury, Compton, Aldiss (when he isn't fiddling with technique), or even Sturgeon could have been overwhelming. In Watson's hands it comes close to falling flat. Where he has the opportunity for immense emotional impact, he fritters it away with intrusions of data and philosophical argument which should have been cleared from the track before the climactic run commenced. He quite literally writes his best scene into the ground, and a book which could have risen to great impact peters out in too many words in the wrong place.

This is a pity, but please don't think that therefore The Jonah Kit will not be worth your while. With all its faults it stands a powerful head above the science fiction ruck. I repeat that a second reading, when one knows in advance what Watson is talking about and can savour the packed ingenuities of his thought, is almost mandatory. It is then that one can come to grips with his argument, and the remainder of his review concerns that argument.

** ** *

The central concept of the thesis of The Jonah Kit (as distinct from the story or entertainment line) is the nature of God, and it is on this that the reader's acceptance must be given or withdrawn.

Some detailed exposition is needed here, beginning with the Big Bang of the "primal Egg". Watson starts from physical aspects of the Big Bang theory which have puzzled most laymen who have thought about it, including your reviewer. For instance, how does one account for the explosion of such a mass - the entire universe - when smaller masses, such as black holes, cannot explode because their enormous masses preclude even the escape of radiation? In answer, Watson takes one of the longest strides into "scientific" (i.e. sciencefictional) possibility since alternate universes were first thought of. His own words explain it compactly.

His scientist-discoverer is speaking:

"Now, this primal 'Egg', into which all the matter and energy of a future universe is packed, wraps the fabric of space around it, tightly. There is no elsewhere, no other place for anything to exist. Then this Egg explodes... But consider the manner of its exploding. From Hubble's Constant...we must deduce that the original Egg measured only three to four light years across. Yet within four minutes from the instant of the bang, the fireball would have grown to eighty light years across, and six minutes after that it would have to be eight hundred light years across... Something is very wrong here... An expansion within six minutes by a factor of seven hundred and twenty light years supposes a figure for the speed of light of two light years per second. Which is quite impossible unless we tinker with the concept of time itself. In this situation each particle would soon reach infinite mass, with an infinitely strong gravitational field. Thus each particle will have to collapse into a singularity. The fabric of space can't grow fast enough to contain such an explosion as the theory envisages. The only expansion must have been inwards..." ((GT: This seems to be an acceptance of the "white hole" theory.)) "The universe emigrated internally. Leaving a myriad of extremely tiny black holes, to bond together violently to form what we call 'matter'. Such are the 'quarks' - the granules of subatomic matter - that so many million dollars have been spent vainly hunting for in the cyclotrons! This is, of course, why there's no vast mass of anti-matter in the cosmos. Statistically there ought to be a fifty-fifty balance of matter and anti-matter. There was. But all such trivial distinctions vanish in the black hole. We have a cosmos bonded almost purely by matter because it is founded on bonded shells of nothingness. But this is not, of course, the universe that was created by God. ((GT: My italics.)) We can only speculate about what happened in the 'real' universe... Where is the real universe that God created? That exists in another dimension that all true matter and anti-matter was forced into by the physics of expansion. This universe of ours is...an illusory by-product. Maya - an illusion."

There is more, a great deal more, covering some of the more obvious objections. One can only admire the corroborative detail embedded in these paragraphs - and then beware of the sudden remarks about God, without corroborative detail. There is some sleight-of-typewriter in this passage, a transition from logic to an assumption that you will agree with Watson's idea of the nature of God. He does not, in fact, make any statement about such a nature, or offer any definition, but his thesis can, under inspection, tell us something of the God he presents - and a peculiar deity it turns out to be. (Capital D for Deity? Suit yourself; I take no sides in

this essay. Some other time, perhaps.)

So we have here a "real" universe, of which ours is only a cast shadow, a "real" universe obeying utterly other physical laws, leaving ours behind in its vast expansion and thus creating the illusion of defying the lightspeed barrier - a barrier which must itself be a shadow of "real" conditions in another dimension.

Where did this "real" universe come from? Why, from the explosion of the primal Egg, of course.

But where did the primal Egg come from? It would seem, since no conception of primacy succeeding primacy back into the endless depths of time can do other than repeat itself ad infinitum, and so satisfy no question, that we must be satisfied to believe that it was created by God. (Anyone asking, "Who created God?" will be strung up by the thumbs until he has answered his own question. Oscar Wilde's wisecrack will not be accepted at this point, though soon we will have to consider it.)

What we have here, then, would appear to be a limited God, not an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent deity but one who is unaware or careless of the results of his actions. If he is not omni-aware and omni-responsible where even such a detail as the cast shadow of his creation is concerned, then he is not God, only some sort of incomplete godlet. Mankind can do without such.

What happened, I asked, to "Cogito, ergo sum"? In Watson's translation it becomes, "I only think I think, therefore I am an illusion of my own creation." And this, I suggest, is a circular statement raising questions as ultimately unsatisfiable as "Who created God?" It won't do. If the thing thinks it thinks and was created, however inadvertently, by a galloping God, then a God who is God and not merely a god is at all times present with it and in it. (And an omnipotent God cannot be simply disposed of as a careless craftsman.) If God is indeed omnipotent and omni-present, then mankind, however shadowy, is still the child of God and need not despair.

If you take the view that God did not create the universe, but is the universe, the same arguments still apply. So it begins to look as if the Watson thesis collapses on a point of logical definition, and I feel that, in fact, he does not make a good case for dragging God into the act simply to present a picture of man as a non-existent entity in a non-existent universe.

Yet he could have achieved his effect by using Oscar Wilde's epigrammatic inversion (I think it was Oscar; someone please correct me if it wasn't): "Man created God in his own image."

The obvious conclusion would arise that man had created the legend of God to account for his own presence in the universe. No real God would then need to be postulated, and mankind would still be faced with the paralysing destruction of its own importance.

The introduction of the one detail too many has, in my view, set Watson's whole conception toppling on a point of rationalisation. Not that I really care too much, because his whole argument is a gorgeous piece of sciencefictional extrapolation containing such ingenuities as have not come our way in many a year.

There is also a question - and this is a real stinker - that the reader may ask himself when he learns the whales' answer to mankind's question (no, no, you must read the answer for yourselves): Since it is possible to create a universe, however illusory, by thinking it (this is one of the byproducts of the real-unreal thesis) is it possible to enter the "real" universe by thinking that - even if you have no reality to think with? Are your thoughts shadows of thought - or...? Watson's extrapolation implies that it can be done.

Think it over. I for one refuse to throw myself into the maze of paradoxes involved in such a transformation. Let someone else go mad in the attempt.

However much The Jonah Kit may disappoint as drama on first reading - I continue to insist that a second reading is mandatory - it has no match in recent years as a grab bag of ideas about the nature of the universe, the nature of the great whales, the nature of thought, and a dozen other things. The evidence of The Embedding, together with The Jonah Kit, would suggest Watson as the most inventive s f intellect since the late John W Campbell.

** ** *

The copy of The Jonah Kit used for this review was lent to me by Editor Bruce, so I hit below the belt by revealing here his habit of making marginal notes, which I read with some joy along with the received text (didn't agree with at least half of them...nya-a-a-ah!). At several points where Watson juggles with reality Bruce has made little notes invoking the ominous name of the master scene-shifter, Philip K Dick. Well, this reality business is occupying authorial minds of late. I have just completed a review of Christopher Priest's Inverted World (for publication in, as they so delicately put it, "another place") and noted in it that Priest has just about beaten Dick at his own game of striving to make an alternative "reality" plausible.

Now here comes Watson to finish it all off - and us with it. His thesis makes "reality" something we have never partaken of and ourselves illusions.

Science fiction has finally justified its existence by beating nuclear physics to the punch and disposing of the entire universe.

Not with a bang. Not even with a whimper.

Just with a mistaken idea of itself.

Please don't start looking in mirrors to see if you are really there. It's all a big joke. Bruce imagined me and how you are imagining that imaginary me wrote this review in an imaginary SFC. Furthermore, you imagine that you are reading it...

But you aren't reading it because you aren't there, and somewhere "else" God is laughing his head off.

HEINLEIN - A LAZARUS TOO LONG?

Peter Nicholls reviews

TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE

by Robert A Heinlein

NEL :: 1974

607 pages :: £3.25

((EDITOR: Peter Nicholls is the Administrator of the Science Fiction Foundation at North East London Polytechnic, England. He is also editor of my favourite magazine about science fiction, Foundation. A subscription costs £2.70 (approximately \$4) or \$US5.50, from The Editor, Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Essex RM8 2AS, England. While he was visiting Australia for the World Convention recently, as his first trip "home" for some years, Peter gave SFC permission to print this review/article which appeared first in Foundation 7/8, March 1975.))

Being taken seriously is the penalty paid by famous science fiction writers. For those of them who maintain stoutly to the last that they are nothing but popular entertainers, any sort of academic and intellectual attention must provoke puzzlement, laughter, or even active resentment. With Robert Heinlein, the problem might be the reverse.

Heinlein asks to be taken seriously. In nearly all his books since at least 1959 (Starship Troopers) he has produced what are, in effect, homilies about the nature of society, and the ways in which it needs to be changed. With hindsight we can see that even in the earlier books, including the many juveniles, the same obsessions were there: but earlier on they were rendered in much more actively dramatic terms, and in the later books, as everyone has noticed, there is much more talk, and the heroes are getting older all the time. I can't take these later books seriously, and I should explain why.

It's hard to do this without scolding patronising to a man who, after all, gave a huge number of readers, including myself, great pleasure over the years. going right back to the 1940s, when his stories seemed to tower over those of most of his now-forgotten contemporaries. If you read the many reviews of Heinlein written over the last decade (I seem to have read dozens) you will find a curious tone about them.

Although they are generally hostile, and with good reason, there is often a note of sadness or even real distress. Especially for those critics with longer memories, there is every reason for wanting to like a new Heinlein book.

The whole situation is confused by its sociology, which is worth a thesis in itself. Heinlein didn't really get through to the great American public until Stranger in a Strange Land (1961). The paradox is this: here was a book written by exactly the sort of conservative that the campus radicals normally loathed (am I right in remembering that Heinlein actively supported Goldwater in the 1964 presidential election?), which became a huge success with the college kids, exactly the audience which one would expect to dislike it. Why?

Critics have talked about Heinlein's politics enough, perhaps, but much of the talk has been wrong-headed. Heinlein is not a fascist, though he has often been called one. What he actually is, is an old-fashioned, free-enterprise, Emersonian, anti-centralised-government, Western conservative. Does that make it clear? It is a hard thing for English readers to understand, because there is no generally recognised equivalent over here. Heinlein is a romantic. He has what many Americans like to think of as the "frontier" mentality. (The most readable section of the enormously long Time Enough For Love, which features two protracted flashbacks in the life of its hero, Lazarus Long, as moral footnotes to the main plot, is a story of pioneers on the frontier, wagons and all.)

Heinlein believes that a man has to be resourceful, to look out for himself. He cannot expect anybody to help him. Heinlein believes in hard work, duty, and loyalty. There is a genuine romantic attraction to his every-man-his-own-hero ethos. He believes in tight discipline in a context of comradeship, especially in war. He does not believe in conscription. He does not believe in abstract patriotism. He is not a democrat. He believes that the strongest and most intelligent have a duty to do what they see right, even if the majority disagree. But he loathes slavery. He is, in short, the Ayn Rand of science fiction.

Much of Heinlein's popularity on campus presumably has to do with his contempt for sacred cows, from government by the people, through mother love (a subject he deals with very literally at the end of the book) to the virtues of chastity. These have always been easy targets, of course, and there are many sacred cows left which Heinlein seems to worship as whole-heartedly as the next man. His easy-going attitude to sexual morality is not in the least paradoxical, though many would find it so. It fits in exactly with his individualist beliefs. (It's an error to suppose that sexual liberalism is an exclusively left-wing phenomenon. An interesting survey some ten years ago in the mid-West, on the subject of wife-swapping, revealed that it was very much a sport of Republican voters rather than Democrats. For years this has been my favourite statistic.

Although, when you think of it, the very term "wife-swapping", with its implications of property deals, is both sexist and capitalist. One never hears of husband-swapping.)

Many of Heinlein's beliefs are antipathetic to my own, especially his brutal Social Darwinism (though he never calls it that) which looks as if it comes straight from Herbert Spencer, the disciple of Darwin who applied Darwin's theories to the social sciences in Man Versus the State (1884) and The Principles of Ethics (1891-3). In its non-theoretical, pragmatic form, Social Darwinism was also very much a frontiersman's ethos. Remember the cry of "manifest destiny" in the nineteenth century, used to justify the expansion of the USA to the Pacific coast? The strong survive and the weakest go to the wall. That's the way it is, and no use being sentimental about it. (Heinlein repeatedly tells us, in most of his books, that man "is the most dangerous animal in the universe" - a thought he seems to find pleasing.)

I hope I don't seem to be splitting hairs in saying that Heinlein's novels are offensive to me, not because I dislike his ideas (though I do), but because I dislike what he does with them, which in my view is almost nothing. I admire Heinlein for laying his head on the chopping block so often; for having kept on trying, wanting to say something when most science fiction had nothing to say. I'm amused at the way that sex came into his writing as soon as he got out from under John W Campbell (not a new phenomenon, of course - it happened to many of Campbell's writers - including the previously saintly Asimov in The Gods Themselves). No, Heinlein's courage is admirable, but I have to say that his sociology is execrable, his sense of history minimal (though he boasts of it), and his mode of argument repetitive and boring. The ideas are there in embryo, but they are simplistic, undeveloped, and sentimentalised. (My calling Heinlein simplistic would probably prove to him that I'm a fancy-pants intellectual who has never really experienced life. It's true that I wasn't in the Marines.) Even the ideas that Heinlein likes are simplified. Opposing ideas barely exist in this novel and, when they do, they are so caricatured as to become instantly disposable paper tigers.

Heinlein's individualistic universe, in Time Enough For Love just as in Stranger in a Strange Land, The Moon is a Harsh Mistress, and I Will Fear No Evil, is vitiated by its sentimentality, its garrulousness, and its crotchiness. Reading this latest novel especially, and its predecessor I Will Fear No Evil, I feel exactly as if I've been buttonholed by an elderly, maudlin eccentric in a bar, and have no way to stop him talking.

Just as Heinlein's beliefs seem to have no middle ground between the cynical and the sentimental (I quote some examples further on), so his literary style oscillates amazingly between a down-home folksy crudeness ("Llita turned out to be

tighter than a bull's arse in fly time" (page 223) and a euphemistic coyness, so that the intellectual targets, such as they are, tend to be bracketed on either side but never hit.

"'Ira,' he said, 'there were many years when I hardly bothered with women - not only unmarried but celibate. After all, how much variety can there be in the slippery friction of mucous membranes?

"'Then I realised that there was infinite variety in women as people...and in discovering this, I gained renewed interest in the friendly frolic itself, happy as a lady with his first bare tit warm in his hand. Happier - as never again was I merely a piston to her cylinder.'" (page 425)

The ideas are unreal because of the way they are expressed. The cynically adolescent sentiment being criticised, the seeing of women as merely "the slippery friction of mucous membranes", seems no worse than the supposedly mature man's "friendly frolic - happy as a lad with his first bare tit warm in his hand". The late experience, at least when described like that, is as empty of adult feeling, or even of real sexuality, as the first. The passage could only be saved, in the context of the whole book, if we were shown Lazarus Long actually responding to an infinite variety in his women. Even a finite variety would do. But he addresses everyone the same way, and he is well advised to do so, because the women all sound the same. Indeed, they all sound like Lazarus himself. Here, for example, is (wait for it) 'Dorable Dora the frontier wife:

"I'm not 'little Dora'. I'm Rangy Lil, the horniest girl south of Separation - you said so yourself. I cuss and I swear and I spit between my teeth and I'm concubine to Lazarus Long, Super Stud of the Stars and better than any six men - and you know darn well what I want, and if you pinch my nipples again, I'm likely to trip you and take it. But I guess we ought to water the mules." (page 311)

Yep, the authentic down-to-earth tone of old Lazarus, reappearing in one of the many female alter egos that populate his book. How are we to respond to the individualism of Heinlein's universe, when everybody goes around being individualist with the same tone of voice? The novel is not toneless, but it is monotonous. There's a great deal of talk which, in its smug, confident, folksy, didactic way, reminds me of Hugh Hefner's editorials in Playboy in the days of yore. Do you remember? Hefner was always coming out with all those truisms we came out with ourselves in adolescent bull sessions (before we began to understand what relationships between the sexes really meant) with a self-congratulatory air of triumph, amazed at his own daring, as if nobody had ever said it before.

I still haven't really pinned down the tone. It

isn't easy to do. Though a lot of it has the brash self-confidence of adolescence, it isn't expressed that way. Adolescents, for example, don't constantly address one another with meaningless endearments. I really mean constantly, on almost every page. A representative collection is: "Beautiful", "Beloved", "Darling", "Dear", "Dearie", "Dear One", "'Dorable", "Honey", "Pretty Tits", "Sweetest", "Wench", "Woman". Not to mention "Uncle Cuddly". These, it seems, will be the affectionate terms of the future.

Yes, there's almost something matronly about Lazarus Long and all his friends. Lazarus is rather like a Jewish mother (not a real one, but the one that appears in all the jokes). His preoccupation with getting laid, even, seems rather menopausal (not the real menopause, but the one in all the jokes). This pretty well defines the tone throughout. All we need to round it off, is to stir in one straw-chewing wise old hillbilly, and we have it. (The gabbiness that results from the adolescent-bull-session-Jewish-mother-hillbilly combination is very much part of the cardinal fiction-writer's sin that Heinlein commits: his ideas are not dramatised (except in the 100-page interlude about the frontier, "The Tale of the Adopted Daughter"), they are talked about. Heinlein has turned preacher.)

I've put off telling the story, I see. Basically, the plot is minimal. Lazarus Long (first seen in Methuselah's Children, 1941) is getting old and tired, after more than 2,000 years of life, but some of his grateful descendants talk him into getting his body rejuvenated so that he can keep on going, and incidentally give them the benefit of his accumulated wisdom.

Actually, Long's wisdom, which seems indistinguishable from Heinlein's, comes off best in the epigrammatic form he gives it in the novel's two "intermissions", twenty-three pages of cracker-barrel philosophy. The wisdom sounds much shrewder when kept brief than when blown up on a wide screen, as it is in the other 584 pages of the story, where all the flaws are visible. There's no quarrelling with "Small change can often be found under seat cushions" or "What a wonderful world it is that has girls in it!". The cynicism seems harmless enough, usually, in the proverbial form, as in "Never appeal to a man's 'better nature' - he may not have one - invoking his self-interest gives you more leverage." "A woman is not property, and husbands who think otherwise are living in a dreamworld" sounds good, and one notes that the women in the story aren't property. (Though their free will does seem a little compromised by the way Heinlein makes them all so hot to go to bed with Lazarus, even his mother, and his cloned female other selves. However, he never rapes them. On the other hand - Super Stud of the Stars - he always gets them pregnant, first time off.) Here is Heinlein at his apophthegmatic, sententious silliest:

Those who refuse to support and defend a state have no claim to protection by that state. Killing an anarchist or a pacifist

should not be defined as "murder" in a legalistic sense. The offence against the state, if any, should be "Using deadly weapons inside city limits", or "Creating a traffic hazard", or "Endangering bystanders" or other misdemeanours.

However, the state may reasonably place a closed season on these exotic asocial animals, whenever they are in danger of becoming extinct. An authentic buck pacifist has rarely been seen off Earth, and it is doubtful that any have survived the trouble there...regrettable, as they had the biggest moths and the smallest brains of any of the primates. (page 364)

(The reviewer will award a £1.00 prize to the first child of eleven or younger who explains clearly and logically why this is silly, and why it isn't funny.) Heinlein obviously puts things as crudely as he does because he gets so impatient with endless talk, as Lazarus often says. He loathes committees, for examples, and labels pacifists as "big mouths". Yet Heinlein himself has one of the biggest mouths in science fiction, which creates something of a paradox. The jeer at pacifists comes oddly from a man who has the self-indulgence to let his novel run for more than 600 pages, even though all his basic points have been made by a third of the way through!

The action in Time Enough For Love is minimal. The rest of the story is crudely summarisable as: Lazarus will only consent to having his body renewed if they can dig up something new for him to do, so they invent time travel and, as a bonus, they put the friendly computer he likes into a woman's body so that he can fuck it (no, he doesn't say that her movements are rather mechanical), and then they all go and live on another planet, and Lazarus travels back in time and makes love to his mother, and gets killed in the First World War, and then revived by his pals.

It is, as they used to say, a very vulgar novel - certainly tasteless. In both senses. There is very little in it with enough flavour to taste - even the bad taste is mostly the combination of verbosity with evasiveness that was noticed by so many in I Will Fear No Evil. There is tremendous talk about the joy of sex, so much so that the old Shakespearian line about protexting too much comes quite sharply to mind, but the sex is not one thing or the other. There is no meeting of minds, because none of the women has a personality separable from Lazarus's own. There is no good physical sex because, apart from some extraordinarily coy scenes between Lazarus and his mum, he veers away from describing sex per se. You might even say that there is no real sex at all in a novel whose title is Time Enough For Love and whose theme, if it is anything, is Do Whatever You Want, Especially Sexual, So Long As You Don't Needlessly Hurt Anyone. And that leaves a mighty big vacuum. (I remember promulgating the same philosophy at age seventeen, as most college kids do. I didn't know then how hard it is to know in advance what does hurt,

and how easily the nature of what one wants and needs slips from the grasp. I'm sure that Heinlein doesn't really think life is as straightforward a thing to cope with as this book makes out. He just wants it to be, quite deeply and bitterly, I would imagine. However, conjecture about the motives and personality of the author himself go beyond the critic's brief.)

The cop-outs come so fast and furious that it is depressing. Sure, one can imagine a society where incest is all right if it's not genetically harmful. But in our society it is a taboo (presumably, in part, because it was found in primal days to be genetically harmful). Heinlein has nothing to say about incest in the real world at all, because he manipulates things so that the taboo can be safely evaded. Even Lazarus' own taboo about not needlessly hurting others is got around by having his father hurt at the War, having left instructions that he doesn't mind if he's cuckolded. The situation, in other words, has no human significance, because it represents no relevant case. Heinlein does not confront the issue. He evades it. Lazarus only gets to see his mum because of time travel. He is an adult, with his earlier self as a small boy also on the scene, so that he can never, to his mother, emotionally feel like a son.

An interesting point about Time Enough For Love is that it is not really science fiction. Apart from passing references to genetics and cloning, there is almost no science in it. Nor is there any genuine sociological extrapolation in the novel. All the societies depicted are very much like our own. Most of the social manners we see would barely raise an eyebrow in Southern California. We never even see what it might really mean to have a society constructed on the principle of the ruthless Social Darwinism that Heinlein apparently espouses (perhaps because this, too, already exists in California). Even with two millennia of experience behind him, Lazarus Long sounds at best like a Tammany Hall Boss, a Fat Cat, getting a bit sentimental with age, sitting on his galactic back porch and yarning. He is totally twentieth century - or even late nineteenth.

To lay it on the line: I believe this book to be one of the worst science fiction novels of the decade. Nevertheless, it is exactly the sort of book that ought to be widely discussed, probably at greater length than I have the patience for, because, as I understand it, Heinlein is still very much a best-seller. This means that "out there" is a huge audience which presumably takes all this second-rate cracker-barrel philosophising as representing deep thought. Perhaps it simply confirms the prejudices of the mythical silent majority? I don't know, but I'd like to know. Simply dismissing Heinlein with a shrug of the shoulders as only "a bad writer" is missing the point. He is an important social phenomenon.

If Heinlein were a new writer, an unknown, then this would be yet another of those self-serving,

smart-aleck reviews that appear so regularly in print in England, disfiguring the literary scene at the expense of the authors. (Americans are often aghast at the bitchiness of the reviews produced by the supposedly mild-mannered race over here.) But to many, Heinlein is still a guru. It is therefore important to be very clear that this is, in almost every way, a very bad book. (Bad enough, together with its predecessors of the last fifteen years, to cast a dark shadow retrospectively over Heinlein's early work, which I once enjoyed so much. Of course, I was younger then. I read seven or eight of these stories recently, after reading Time Enough For Love, and found that I could no longer respond to them. They remain fast-moving, but now the seeds of the later Heinlein can be seen all too clearly in the act of germination. Look again, for example, at the anti-unionism of "The Roads Must Roll".

Time Enough For Love sees itself as life-affirming, and here is the real danger. Readers, too, may see this book, which strips human-feeling of all subtlety and grace and tension, which shrinks life down to a mean, dreary business, whose hearty jollity is as convincing as a Hick Carnival about to close for winter, as a real Ode to Joy. God help us all if Heinlein's young audience is able to read it like that.

CHOOSING DEATH AND CHEATING IT TOO

Barry Gillam reviews

THE UNDEFEATED

by Keith Laumer

Dell :: 1974

207 pages :: US95c

The latest Laumer collection consists of four novelettes: "Worldmaster" (Worlds of Tomorrow, November 1965; Once There Was a Giant), "The Night of the Trolls" (Worlds of Tomorrow, October 1963; Greylorn), "Thunderhead" (Galaxy, April 1967; The Day Before Forever and Thunderhead), and "End as a Hero" (Galaxy, June 1963; Nine By Laumer).

Why, if all have appeared previously in book form, is this being published? Putting aside the profit of Dell and Mr Laumer, the stories provide a very interesting case of parallels. Charlie Brown noted, in Locus, that all feature "unconquerable heroes. I could not tell them apart." While that is an adequate (and accurate) assessment for the casual reader, I suggest that we try to tell them apart and try also to see in just what ways they are alike. We may learn something about Laumer.

The protagonists are all military personnel or, in the case of "End as a Hero", a civilian working with the military. With one exception, they are young and all are idealists. As servicemen (and

officers, at that), the protagonists are archetypal upholders of order. Each is put in a situation in which he has to make a choice: succeed in performing his mission or survive. The fact that three of the four do survive (and thereby earn first-person narratives) is irrelevant. Their survival is as improbable as their success in their tasks.

More so, in fact. Their tasks, such as singlehandedly overthrowing a tyrannical regime or singlehandedly breaking into Fort Knox, are improbable in the extreme. The odds against them are incalculable. Their antagonists are men who command vast resources of power. When, in the last two tales, aliens are present, they are no more than catalysts for the action of the story. As the protagonist of "End as a Hero" puts it, "I had gotten clear of the Gool, but I wouldn't survive my next meeting with my own kind."

What makes mankind so dangerous to the protagonists is that Laumer envisions only two structures of power: tyranny or anarchy. There is no middle ground. Even in the first and last stories, which describe democratic governments, a single man with enough willpower can always gain control. When that man is threatened, all order is threatened. No hope is held for orderly succession or the chain of command because the individual at the top is so unique as to be irreplaceable.

The paradox of a Laumer story is that, while the insane villain has a clear purpose in all his actions, the sane hero often has no real reason for undergoing his incredible hardships. And he always makes it harder on himself than need be. Given the choice between joining the villains and death, Laumer's heroes always choose death - then cheat it. What are we to make of men whose honesty is so obtuse that they cannot foreswear the words of honour and duty to live and have the chance of fighting for liberty some other day?

And yet, finding this character in Laumer again and again, it seems clear that he does not regard his heroes as the fools they often appear to be. They save mankind from one fate after another. I can see that Laumer is using an ironic device to put his heroes in perspective. But I get no feeling of a cosmic irony which would let the reader in on the joke.

The four novelettes at hand are all fast and "readable". While the critic may find their juxtaposition interesting, the reader inevitably tires of the repetition. The first story, "Worldmaster", would probably be the best, even if it weren't in such an advantageous position; but the placing helps. None of these stories is long enough to have the kind of sustained, inventive scene that makes a Laumer novel worth reading (eg the "Pink Hell" section of The Star Treasure; the confrontation with the alien fleet in The Glory Game). "Worldmaster", however, is the best-written in this collection.

What is most interesting about it is its careful series of order-vs-chaos oppositions. The clear

hierarchy and rules of the Navy are compared to the tangled and dangerous web of civilian politics. The fact that the spaceship on which the opening scenes take place is hanging above Washington helps to visualise the relationship. The officers "go down" to report to Congress.

The hero is Academy-trained; Laumer also uses this background in other works as a scale against which the breakdown of the ideal is measured. The sharpest image, though, is of Admiral Tarleton, the villain. Having been friends when they were at the Academy together, the villain and hero, like two racehorses, have started from the same gate.

Typically, in their confrontation, the hero is dishevelled from honest exertion while the villain is unnaturally neat and well-groomed. The old friends size up each other; the hero is a captain, the villain an Admiral. "We've taken our separate ways," Tarleton says, "I didn't make the Navy...but...I learned to live with it - to beat it at its game. You didn't. You bucked it. Sure, you made your points - but they don't pay off for those. What do you expect, a medal for stubbornness?"

The contrasts are clear. When the hero remembers their time together at the Academy and Tarleton's prowess at football, inevitably he sees a comparison between the rules of the game and the ruthlessness of war and power politics.

The bulk of "Worldmaster" is given over to the adventure the hero undertakes to warn someone about the villain's megalomania. Inevitably the hero's political encounters unearth, instead of allies, more villains. What separates the military from the civilian in this line is the Admiral's decisive, immediate actions. To his evil of commission, the civilians have only the corruption of omission. For Laumer, both the speed of the military elite and the lethargy of the elected government are grave potential dangers.

As usual, the hero's liabilities for outweigh his assets. In this case, the hero is sleepy, hungry, and bruised (he has a "mild concussion") after a twenty-eight-hour battle when he decides to take on the world singlehandedly. Although "it took all I had left just to stay on my feet" before he reports to Tarleton, he is so filled with righteous indignation from the Admiral's words that he overpowers his guard, sneaks aboard a boat "going down", finds a forger in a town he does not know, fast-talks his way into a senator's house, forces his way into the Vice President's penthouse, etc, etc. Laumer makes it entertaining but he can't make it plausible.

"The Night of the Trolls" takes place in a post-disaster world controlled by those who can still use the remaining technology, in particular the artillery. The settings are often evocative, but Laumer's handling is too clumsy to exploit them. In the midst of a gutted world the ruler gives a ball in his castle. The hero infiltrates by overpowering each cordon of guards, and using their

successively higher-ranking uniforms to gain further admittance. The possibilities are wasted, however. There is even some suggestion of situation ethics: without an iron hand, no order at all would have been saved. Is order worth the tyranny that always accompanies it in Laumer? The author is silent on this point. Both anarchy and tyranny are offensive to him.

The irresolvable conflict at the centre of the politics of Laumer's fiction arises from the fact that the tyrannical villain represents the order that the author secretly cherishes. Laumer is worldly enough to realise that the hero must rebel against such tyranny, but his sympathy is divided. He seems to admire his strong, evil men who have the strength of personality and intellect to imprint their own order on a chaotic world. It is because their strength is an expression of their personality that the villains are often more vividly characterised than the rather nebulous heroes. The latter are sustained only by an anonymous feeling of rectitude.

"Thunderhead" concerns a lieutenant stranded on an "outer" world, waiting for orders. After twenty years of neglect, he receives his orders and obeys blindly. Here Laumer pits the devotion of a dedicated officer against the insensibility of the Army's bureaucracy. As in "Worldmaster", the hero's mirror is an Admiral, this time his brother, the comparison expressing the potential thwarted by circumstances. The hero's flashback is a dream image that has sustained him: "The trim Academy lawns, the spit-and-polish of inspection, the crisp feel of the new uniform, the glitter of the silver crest as Anne pinned it on..." What is interesting here is the parallel-memory vision that the alien has: "Youth, aspirations, the ringing bugle of the call-to-arms. A white palace rearing up into yellow sunlight; a bright banner, rippling against blue sky, and the shadows of great trees ranked on green lawns... the touch of a soft hand and the face of a woman, invested with a supernal beauty..." (in italics). For Laumer the military is the universal profession. Unfortunately, "Thunderhead" descends into ludicrous space opera.

"End as a Hero" is sheer wish fulfillment. The protagonist learns mind control from aliens who were trying to use him as a traitor. The adventure becomes ridiculous when the hero starts mentally blanking out everyone who opposes him. Even the hero's ability to say, "I had to start getting ready for the next act of the force" does not improve the tale.

I cannot recommend The Undefeated as an introduction to Laumer and, as I stated earlier, his old fans will already have the stories. But otherwise this collection is par for the course.

FROM THE FRIVOLOUS TO THE WONDROUS

Van Ikin reviews:

THE WIND FROM THE SUN

by Arthur C Clarke

Victor Gollancz :: 1972
193 pages :: £1.75

Clarke writes in the preface that probably this will be his last book of short stories, for his rate of literary production has slowed to the point where it will be best to add future stories to later editions of this book. So The Wind from the Sun, a collection of all Clarke's short stories from the decade of the 1960s, becomes the sixth and last story collection.

As usual, it is maddeningly impressive; maddening, because it is so good and yet so bad. Of the eighteen stories in the book, six are little more than doodles - short, frivolous pieces in a throwaway vein, usually building up to an ironically bathetic ending involving a verbal pun. (The classic example of this kind of thing is the Asimov story which ends with the phrase, "A niche in time saves Stein" - though I think Clarke's "Neutron Tide" is undoubtedly destined to become the classic of that genre.) Such pieces are meant to be tossed down like a quick tot of rum, savoured for the immediate effect and then forgotten. They certainly have no pretensions to being "literature", for one of the ways to test the universality of such pieces is to ask if the witty joke would survive in translation. If it does, it encapsulates some human truth; if it doesn't, it merely seizes upon some opportune gimmick. Clarke's gleeful puns would not survive.

It is hard to describe these brief pieces without spoiling their effect for the reader but, in general, they latch onto some logical pseudo-scientific idea (the energy potential of mass orgasm, the similarities between a telephone network and the human nervous system) and pursue this to a whimsically logical conclusion. The term "doodles" is apt for such pieces because, like an artist's doodle, they are skilful low-key executions of something which (by purist standards) is not worth doing. They are probably the impish concoctions of Clarke's literary id - or else they're just the natural by-product of Clarke's more carefully wrought achievements, like the inevitable crumbs left over from a banquet.

In the next category there are six stories of a flat, plodding, unpoetic, un-Clarkeish nature. That's not to say that they're bad, but they do lack the imprint of Clarke's genius for creating a sense of wonder.

"Last Command" resembles the doodles in form, but rises above their level by making a simple statement about the kind of patriotism engendered by nuclear war. The story is simply the record

of a defeated President's last command to his defeated troops and, as such, it is probably too brief to induce the reader to pause over it. But if you do stop to think about it, you realise that the story is making a pithy (if not profound) comment on the illogicality of human nature (as seen in the ironic means by which men learn to give allegiance to their species and not just to their country).

"The Light of Darkness" is a more extended attempt at a moral theme, dealing with the plight of a peaceful intellectual who discovers that it is within his power to eliminate a dictatorial African chieftain. (His name is Chaka, but you can read it "Amin" - though I guess I could be shot for making that comment.) The story is really little more than a diluted spy yarn, using technology to bring about its denouement, and so, in a sense, it is not really s f at all. Yet it is interesting as an insight into Clarke's thinking, particularly as it shows how his glee at the scientist's god-like inventiveness can eclipse his more mundane moral codes. The story begins with Hamlet-like anguish and ends with the happy chortle of the murderously successful scientist.

"Crusade" and "Playback" have a similar value, for they display - in fact, parade - the limitations of Clarke's technique.

"Crusade" tells of a world "cold beyond imagination", encrusted with an intelligent computer-like network of crystals. To avoid boredom, this intelligence sends out probes, and the story portrays its reaction to the unthinkable discovery that creatures such as man, on planets such as Earth, could actually possess intelligence. The trouble is that the story is totally lacking in any kind of unity: it opens with sonorous authorial narration ("It was a world that had never known a sun..."), involves authorial intrusion to note the passing of millennia, then dabbles in the terse immediacy of dialogue (supported by the clumsy crutch of authorial asides encased in square brackets).

"Playback", on the other hand, is one of Clarke's rare attempts at sustained interior monologue (in this case, the monologue of an entity undergoing reconstitution after its annihilation). Regrettably, it is an utterly pedestrian attempt at this form and its ending is so hackneyed and throwaway that it almost reduces the story to doodle status.

The final two stories in this bracket are more competent but still uninspiring: "The Secret" deals with an outbreak of an unexpected kind of "plague" on the moon, and "The Cruel Sky" tells of an ambitious cripple's ascent of Everest with the aid of a specially designed levitator. Although it incorporates moments of suspense and brilliant comedy, it never truly gets its claws into the reader's imagination.

Finally, there is the category of stories for which Clarke is justly famous - including the celebrated "A Meeting with Medusa". The

difference between these and his other stories is best summed up in a phrase from Longinus: "Invariably what inspires wonder casts a spell upon us and is always superior to what is merely convincing and pleasing" (On the Sublime, chapter 1).

The poorly titled "Maelstrom II" is set in Clarke's happiest literary hunting ground - the Moon. Anxious to return to his wife and children on Earth, astronaut Cliff Leyland takes a cheap trip on the freight catapult instead of waiting for the rocket shuttle. There is a one-second power failure, and his craft does not reach escape velocity. While the computers calculate the precise instant of his fatal return to the moon, Leyland says goodbye to his wife and children via relay satellite. Planet Earth will be in intimate radio contact with him right up until his final second of existence. Thus the story presents a powerful and moving homily against modern man's technological egotism, showing that the panoply of science provides no more comfort than a soft pillow when a man is on his deathbed. Leyland orbits toward death as a thousand computers mull over his problem; then the high command comes up with a bright idea, and Leyland finds himself alone in the void, stripped even of the steel clothing of his spacecraft, a tiny human figure suddenly silhouetted against the dazzling brilliance of a Lunar Earthrise. Although marred by Clarke's inability to get much below the subsoil of human psychology (the dying astronaut never once thinks of God, existential oblivion, or the purpose of life), the story is, nevertheless, a visually compelling imaginative expression of man's place in the cosmos.

"Transit of Earth" has similar strengths and weaknesses. Astronaut Evans is stranded on Mars with a movie camera, destined to become the first human being to witness a transit of Earth across the face of the sun. As if to counterbalance the vision of "Maelstrom II", "Transit of Earth" presents a picture of man as lord of his universe and, in order to emblazon that vision on the reader's mind, Clarke describes the triumphant march of Earth across the sun's disc, our own small, lovely planet biting a great circle out of the large forbidding sun. And, to cap that vision (and also to translate it into vivid human terms), Clarke's hero finds a way to face death, not merely with bravery, but with triumph: his lonely march into the vast Martian wilderness proves an archetypal image of man's triumphant acceptance of death as the final journey, or the last frontier. Though it ends with the astronaut's death, "Transit of Earth" ends triumphantly.

The title story, "The Wind from the Sun", is a much less ambitious work, but its psychology is more pleasing for that reason. Built around the concept of small, sail-equipped spacecraft powered by the radiation blowing from the Sun, the story documents a space race between such craft, zeroing in on John Merton, skipper of the sun-jammer Diana. For forty years Merton has worked with distinction as part of a huge team of designers, but Diana is a solo creation, the

expression of Merton's individuality. And this is the last time that Merton will be able to enter such a race, for races can only be held in the period of the Quiet Sun and, by the time of the next such period, Merton will be too old. The account of the race is handled well, with Clarke establishing a personality for the crews of Merton's rival craft, and applying a light touch of genial humour in his descriptions of the (sometimes ignominious) fates of some of the contestants. Eventually calamity befalls the race, and Merton is forced to snatch a highly personal kind of victory from the jaws of cosmic failure.

"The Shining Ones" is set in the deep range of the Indian Ocean. The central character ("Don't call me a diver, please... I'm a deep-sea engineer") is summoned to the aid of a Russian project to harness the thermal energy of the sea. Someone has been tampering with heat-producing grids 3000 feet down in the Indian Ocean, and the diver is plunged into the deeps with ominous passages from Moby Dick still unsettling his mind. It would be wrong to tell just what he finds lurking on the floor of the ocean (though, to give the diver's own words, "I knew that beauty and terror were rising toward me out of the abyss"), but it is right to say that the story does capture the awe of a lonely, benighted encounter with creatures of horrifying loveliness.

"A Meeting with Medusa" is Clarke's evocation of Jupiter, and is probably the most famous of these recent stories. Personally, I think that at least three of the other stories are better. "Medusa" opens in the pilot's cabin of the airship Queen Elizabeth IV shortly before an accident crashes the airship and injures the pilot. He survives the crash (in a manner reminiscent of Steve Austin) and is soon assigned the command of another airship - this time, the Kon-Tiki, the craft destined to explore Jupiter's upper atmosphere, floating with the help of a hot hydrogen balloon. Clarke populates his Jupiter with exotic living organisms and even weirder natural phenomena; as usual, his creations are impeccably logical, awesomely beautiful, wondrously enchanting. For "sense of wonder", this story is as good as anything Clarke has written - but the goodies are parcelled in an ill-wrapped package. The entire section about the Queen Elizabeth IV is wasteful, for its only role in the story is to foreshadow the ending, and this could have been done more effectively as a brief flashback. By devoting a titled sub-section of the story to this incident, Clarke destroys the story's unities of time and place. Moreover, the foreshadowed ending is in itself a gaffe, for Clarke fabricates a conclusion by switching the story's emphasis from the planet to the pilot and, although this switch has been foreshadowed, it is jarring all the same. Also, the writing is often below par:

Yet the explanation did not destroy the sense of wonder and awe; he would never be able to forget those flickering bands of light, racing through the unattainable

depths of the Jovian atmosphere. He felt that he was not merely on a strange planet, but in some magical realm between myth and reality.

This was a world where absolutely anything could happen, and no man could possibly guess what the future would bring.

And he still had a whole day to go.

The last two paragraphs are boys'-magazine stuff (in fact, you can find similar material in Clarke's children's book, Islands in the Sky), but there is an even more serious flaw here. T S Eliot's notion of the "objective correlative" has been forgotten: the good writer never tells you how wonderful/terrible/exhilarating an experience has been; he lets the experience itself recreate the emotion and thereby removes any need for the writer to gloat over it. Generally speaking, Clarke obeys this rule - and with good reason, for his "sensawonderish" experiences do carry their own impact - but in "Medusa" he seems to be over-indulging. (It's only a theory, but I wonder if this could be because he felt that this story's material was exceptionally good, and that this justified a bit of overkill?). Whatever the reason, "Medusa" is a badly flawed story by "literary" standards. Nevertheless, it makes a damn good piece of reading, holding one's attention at all points, and that kind of achievement should not be scorned.

The same statement applies to the book as a whole. Clarke's biggest failing is in the form of his stories, and sufficiently good content will go a long way towards whitewashing the blemishes of bad form. Judged by these standards, The Wind from the Sun is near-spotless; judged by any standards, it is a significant and worthwhile contribution to the s f genre.

UNUTTERABLE SUBLIMATIONS OF DEVASTATING WRATH

Van Ikin reviews:

THE BEST OF JOHN W CAMPBELL

Foreword by James Blish
Sidgwick and Jackson :: 1973
278 pages :: £2.50

In regard to Campbell, George Turner sums it up pretty well: "Let's not pretend that John W Campbell was of any importance - as a writer" (John W Campbell: An Australian Tribute, page 47). As literary efforts, none of the five novellas in this collection are of great interest, except for historical and sociological reasons.

"The Double Minds" is a kind of warriors' ballet set in science fiction music. It concerns a political revolt led by the first human beings on Ganymede. Fighting free of their seven-foot-tall, green-haired Ganymedian jailers, the humans join forces with a politically oppressed group on the

satellite, and the story degenerates rapidly into a blasters-and-super-science battle to seize control of the enemy's inner court. Along the way there are pleasant diversions, of course: the humans steal a car, finding out - the hard way - that Ganymedians steer with their feet, and they encounter the "doughball" monsters, which act as watchdogs for the political establishment. Confering with the underdogs they hope to help, the humans learn that, in the course of their struggle, they will have to find a weapon to overcome the monstrous protoplasmic jellies called the shleath. In this way, the basic battle plot is given a twist in the direction of s f (for it is only through gadgets and gizmos that the shleath can be defeated) but the fact remains that this is essentially an action yarn. Characterisation is nil. Certain of the Ganymedians have "double minds" - meaning that the usually inert second half of the brain is made to operate along with the other half - but this leads to no salient differences in their psyches. The story's emphasis is on action, and a remarkable number of sentences focus on words like "abruptly", "terse-ly", and other trademarks of the action yarn.

The same can be said of "Out of Night" and "The Cloak of Aesir", works which both depict a future in which the human race has been overrun by the long-lived matriarchal race known as the Sarn. In the first piece, the Sarn Mother (perhaps the ultimate form of American "momism") decrees that her human underlings shall be accorded no further special privileges and that, in order to bring about a correct male-female ratio in the human population, four out of every five men are to be killed. The humans don't readily agree to this, so the Sarn Mother allows certain human rebels to get arms, knowing that in the ensuing civil war a sizeable number of human males will be killed. Once again the story degenerates into a battle, with the good guys finding a way to neutralise their enemy's weapons, thus wresting the weapons away from their owners so they can be used in mankind's defence.

"Out of Night" introduces the figure of Aesir, a creature who is the incarnate form of the will of freedom, nurtured in the bosoms of the billions of oppressed human beings. Campbell's descriptions of this cold black creature are particularly well-handled (for Campbell; he's no Lovecraft), and so it is not surprising that the concept reappears in "The Cloak of Aesir". Here the Sarn Mother is beginning to feel weary and alienated; her matriarchal lieutenants are beginning to plot intrigues, putting their ruler to the tiresome task of proving that she is always one step ahead of them. The humans are once more growing restless and the Sarn know that, before they can hope to control the impending rebellion, they must obtain the secrets of the Aesir figure.

"The Double Minds", "Out of Night", and "The Cloak of Aesir" are all enjoyable as highly forgettable action romps. The plots are formularised, and it is only by virtue of the formula that they come to be called s f. At the heart

of the story there lies an actual or threatened battle, but around that core there is a crust of science: the sleath must be overcome before the inner court is attacked; Aesir's secrets must be known before the rebellious humans can be creamed. The science is intriguing, diverting, and explained superbly (even to a layman's satisfaction) - but it lies on the periphery of the story and serves only to justify the use of a particular range of background props and exotica. To change my metaphor, Campbell's stories are s f only because the music of atomic harps plays in the background: the action itself is political, military, and bloodthirsty.

Very bloodthirsty:

Somewhere outside a man shouted, screamed a curse as a muffled thunk cut it off abruptly. A bedlam was loosed, a score of cursing voices, a great bull-roaring voice giving orders, scurrying feet, and the clang of metal on metal - and on flesh. It stopped with a long-drawn, thin scream that died away in gurgling bubbles of sound. The door of the cottage trembled to heavy blows.

Or:

And through it came the sweet, thrilling, killing note of the glow-beam Grasun carried in his hand. Its faint light shot out straight for the black shadow of a charging man... The beam touched him, sang through him, and roared in sweet, chilling vibrations as though his twisting, tortured body were a sounding board. The men near him writhed and fell, twisting, helpless, their weapons dropping from numbed, paralysed hands.

Campbell talks of violence with a barely concealed fascination - a fascination that borders on glee. He seems to rejoice in the triumph of metal over flesh, to exult at the way the products of science can chop off a human life so abruptly, cutting words to silence, turning living cells to dead meat. This need not represent a sadistic element in his work (though there is some kind of sadistic pleasure underlying the loving description of the death rattle) but it does represent the triumph of unbridled indulgence over the author's more sober moral ideals. And the really frightening thing is the political basis to all these actions; it seems that Campbell believed that the political "rightness" of an action (pun intended) was justification for even the most barbaric bloodletting.

The other two novellas are more promising. "Forgetfulness" is the first published version of the work that won fame as "Twilight". In a far-distant future, man colonises the planet K.R.L., discovering that the people of the planet have forgotten their technological heritage. Under human guidance, they are encouraged to return to "the climbing path", but with rather unforeseen results. Campbell handles the story's

Suspense element with competence (though not with eclat) and the set-piece attempts to evoke "atmosphere" are passable. Above all, the s f element in the story matters: the reader is induced to lament and deplore the Rthians' plight because he is beguiled into accepting the premise that man's heritage, his future, and perhaps even his very nature and raison d'etre are all associated with his mastery of technology. A shaky premise, but it makes for good fiction.

"Who Goes There?" is the best piece in the book, and it's good partly because the locale is realistic. This enables Campbell to come to grips with his scene-setting, supplying solid concrete detail:

The place stank. A queer, mingled stench that only the ice-buried of an Antarctic camp knew, compounded of reeking human sweat, and the heavy, fish-oil stench of melted seal blubber. An overtone of liniment combated the musty smell of sweat-and-snow-drenched furs. The acrid odour of burned cooking-fat, and the animal not-unpleasant smell of dogs, diluted by time, hung in the air.

Because of this solid grounding in tangible reality, the story is far more compelling than the other four. Moreover, it avoids the thinness of texture of the battle-syndrome novellas. When men at the Pole unthaw an alien creature, which promptly goes on the rampage, it is clear that the battle lines are forming for another man-versus-alien confrontation. But then Campbell adds a brilliant complication: the creature's nature is such that it could have taken over the body of any number of the men on the expedition, and so the story develops into a tense psychological thriller. It is to Campbell's credit that, when he turns from monsters to men, he produces a better piece of fiction.

Nevertheless, Turner was right about him: as a writer, Campbell did not amount to much. All through the book I was amazed at the infantile ineptness of practically all his dialogue; it seems that the author had problems whenever his characters opened their mouths, and so he stuffed their apertures full of scientific jargon, prosaic re-cappings of the action - anything to cram those vocal open maws. As an example of his clumsiness, tortured dialogue:

"Nothing Earth ever spawned had the unutterable sublimation of devastating wrath that thing let loose in its face when it looked around its frozen desolation twenty million years ago. Mad? It was mad clear through - searing, blistering mad!"

No man ever spoke like that man.

DELIGHTFUL TEACHING

Van Ikin reviews

PSTALEMATE

by Lester Del Rey

Gollancz :: 1972
190 pages :: £1.80

Pstalemate is Del Rey's first novel in more than ten years. Ambitious and multi-faceted, nevertheless it honours the "tradition" that s f should be entertaining, and so the novel takes the form of a mystery story cum psychological thriller.

Harry Bronson discovers that he's a telepath. Being a rationalist, he doesn't much like the idea, and it becomes downright repulsive as the "talent" asserts itself. At first he is exposed only to the agony of other people - a girl being pack-raped, a woman going mad - but soon more personal demons rise up to haunt him. The first ten years of his childhood have always been a blank ("traumatic amnesia", the psychologists call it), but now the anguished memories fly like arrows from his past, their wounds reducing him to sobbing, teeth-gritting anguish. To make matters worse, the future assails him too, for his powers of precognition show that in three months he will go mad. Telepathy is a ticket to near-instant insanity.

So Pstalemate is a novel about telepathy, and Del Rey tries to make it the telepathy novel. By making Bronson the diffident member of a fantasy and s f group, Del Rey is able to invoke the stock s f ideas on telepathy, using them as straw men to be burned in homage to his own individuality of approach. Such trumpet-blowing could be tiresome, but Del Rey earns his stripes, particularly in the way he tries to come to grips with the "hard science" of telepathy. He discusses the kind of signal that passes between minds, the velocity of propagation, the way one mind "tunes in" on another. He speculates that the mind propagates information in time as well as in space, which means that precognition is really telepathy working through time, permitting a man to read his own future thoughts. Relating the science more directly to Bronson's personal plight, Del Rey discusses the body's ability to evolve a censor against the thoughts of others. Thus Pstalemate really tackles the nitty-gritty of telepathy, firmly placing the concept in a realistic context. Maybe I just haven't read enough, but in my view it's the first novel to do this.

It also portrays telepathy as a social fact - as a phenomenon that is just beginning to impinge on the social consciousness. The telepaths themselves run the full gamut of social types, from "decent citizens" who go mad abruptly to evil schemers like the deranged Ziggy, an insane telepathy who has learned to harness the energy of his insanity. A poor negro associates telepathy with

whites, believing that the course of evolution has finally twisted the knife in the hopes of his race; a man who publicly calls telepaths freaks sets up equipment in a pathetic attempt to detect the power in himself. Del Rey views his concept from all sides - as social phenomenon; as personal burden.

Yet telepathy is not really the novel's main theme, though it is possible to read the book as an absorbing and well-researched thriller built around that concept. As I've said before, Bronson is a rationalist, and so he sets out to fight the onset of madness, pitting the clear lights of reason and knowledge against the dark shadows forming over his sanity. In short, the old story of rational man fighting the primal being - except that Del Rey has plenty of new material to add to the old, most notably in the area of ironic complexity.

He doesn't really doubt that reason and knowledge can come to grips with the impending madness - though there's always the tension-breeding possibility that they may not do so in time - but he does ask if man's inbuilt inhibitions may not lead him to reject the (often callous, brutal, or repulsive) measures that reason dictates. It would spoil the novel's suspense to discuss this theme in the novel's terms, but it can be illustrated by an arbitrary example - say, the case of a child dying of cancer, where reason dictates a quick knife stab rather than slow, painful death. Del Rey doesn't question that reason can find the answer; he just worries that man may not use the solution provided. Ironically, it is the irrational "primal" man that resists reason's answers, and so the entire theme is artfully thrown open once more. In terms of "intellectual content", Pstalemate has plenty to offer.

My only criticisms are levelled at form, for Del Rey has not brought about a complete fusion of theme and plot. Eight pages from the end one finds that suddenly the intellectual game is over; the theme, pursued to its logical ending, lapses. But the pure mechanics of plot drag on, and so there are eight or so pages of fairly prosaic mopping-up, as each character delivers himself of insights that tie the remaining threads together. Although such mopping-up is necessary, it provides a rather flat anti-climax to the main action.

The other criticism is far less noticeable, but a flaw all the same. It relates to Del Rey "cheating" in order to increase suspense. This is done by giving Bronson the precognition that, once his telepathy has driven him insane, his mind will become possessed by an "Alien Entity". The suspense, of course, centres upon the nature of this entity and, for much of the novel, one is encouraged to wonder if it is genuine alien possession (ie possession by Martians or the like). According to the rules of s f, this is cheating, because no story should have more than one key s f element. And, although the novel's denouement does not contravene this rule, it does make a lot of capital out of the suspicion that the rule might be broken.

In summary, then, Pstalemate is an interesting and worthwhile work of fiction, particularly because of its emphasis on entertainment and excitement. This captures the vigour and readability (not to mention the nostalgia) of earlier sf novels, yet still lives up to modern demands for intellectual "substance". And after all, it's perfectly legitimate to combine pleasure with message: the ancients called it "delightful teaching".

YES, YER HONOUR, THAT'S WGT IT SEZ!

Derrick Ashby reviews:

ARRIVE AT EASTERWINE:
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A KTIISTEC MACHINE

as conveyed to R A Lafferty

Charles Scribners Sons : 1971
216 pages :: \$4.95

Guilty, yer honour.

Well, it's so difficult to write a review of a Lafferty novel - in the accepted sense of the word "review", anyway. In the accepted sense of the word "novel" too, come to think of it.

Case rests? But, yer honour, I've hardly started. You think that's a good thing for Bruce? Give us a break, yer honour. This column's got a marble statue and George Turner to support.

Arrive at Easterwine: The Autobiography of a Ktistec Machine, as Conveyed to R A Lafferty is what it says it is - the autobiography of Epiktistes, a creative machine (Lafferty tells us that Ktistec is the Greek word for creativity, but it wouldn't surprise me if he just said that because it sounded good) from the time when "it" becomes self-aware (during the first few minutes before conception) to a period of time a few weeks after its birth. During this time it becomes the most intelligent creature on Earth and nearly succeeds in revitalising the human soul. So it says.

Arrive at Easterwine is nonsense from beginning to end. You cannot believe anything you read in it. You cannot even believe it when it tells you that you cannot believe it. The plot is a string of improbable events linked together by the most outrageous symbolry outside the Christian church.

What, yer honour?

Bruce doesn't like rave reviews? But this isn't a rave review. I'm raving? Well, if you tried to review Arrive at Easterwine, you would be raving, too. Trying to tell the Court its own business? But I'm not, yer honour. I was merely saying... I'll get on with it and shut up.

(How I can do both, I don't know. Interfering old busybody.)

DERRICK ASHBY

Er, nothing, yer honour.

And watch what I say about the Christian church? Yes, yer honour.

Actually, Arrive at Easterwine is only science fiction by accident. (I was going to say that it isn't science fiction at all, but thought better of it.) Epikt is built by the Institute of Impure Science, so we are told, and that's about as close to science as the entire book gets.

Epikt is not an end in itself (shortly after being born it abrogates to itself the responsibility for deciding its gender; no prizes for guessing which pronoun it chooses) but a means to the Institute's ultimate end - the revolution of the human spirit. The revolution is designed to lift humanity on its next quantum jump up the evolutionary ladder. They need Epikt to find out what that jump will be. That's not quite correct, though, for actually they don't know what Epikt is for. They find out only after they have made him. It is Gaeton Balbo who really knows what Epikt is for, and Epikt finds out for himself anyway. However...

Who are they, yer honour? Well, there is Gregory Smirnov, a quiet giant of a man, self-appointed director of the Institute. There is Valery Mok, the most beautiful woman in the world - sometimes. There is Augustus Shiplap, who may or may not be a god. There is Charles Cogsworth, the outstanding husband of Valery. There is Glasser, who specialises in making machines smarter than himself. And there is the late Cecil Corn, who hangs around because he is unfinished. Finally there are Audifax O'Hanlan and Diogenes Pontifex, who are not members of the Institute because of the minimum-decency rule.

I'm talking nonsense? Of course I am, yer honour. I'm writing a review of Arrive at Easterwine, aren't I?

Now where was I? Ah yes. The minimum-decency rule...which is immaterial to the case, so we'll just go onto something else, won't we?

The most consistent feature about R A Lafferty's writing (apart from its all-round excellence) is his compassion. Lafferty loves the human race, despite its idiocies - possibly partly because of them. When he writes such obviously lunatic material about people, he is not laughing at them, but with them. And he wouldn't be in bad company if he did laugh at them.

What now, yer honour?

Getting too deep? But five minutes ago I was being accused of flippancy. I was being flip-pant? Strike a balance?

How's this?

(Falls out of witness box while trying to make like the statue of Eros. Gets up hastily and barks shins trying to regain place.)

All of Lafferty's characters are sympathetic characters - even the villains. He pokes fun at them all, but to tickle, not to wound. When he criticises in any depth (and he does, however gently) he takes it all back on the the next page, and bandages the wound, all in the same tone of voice - or tone of pen. Yet the criticism remains, for all that, and is valid.

Lafferty does not blame humanity for its faults. He cannot bring himself to, for that is the way we are and it isn't our fault. We are just not responsible.

Illustrations from the text, yer honour? Why don't you go away and bloody well read it yourself?

MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT EFFINGER

Mark Mumper reviews:

MIXED FEELINGS: SHORT STORIES

by George Alec Effinger

Harper & Row :: 1974

220 pages :: \$7.95

Science fiction is a haven for social allegory and fable. It makes commercially available certain modes of fiction which have apparently become closed to writers elsewhere: the serious satire, the political metaphor, the manipulation of probability to determine its effect on life and creativity. These areas have been inhabited by a few well-placed writers - Vonnegut, Ballard, Aldiss, Heinlein, and Wilhelm and, lately, Barry Malzberg - but their richness is not explored completely.

George Alec Effinger has now also come along to dig into the possibilities, and his first collection of stories presents a characteristic sampling of his results. For the most part he shows here the beginnings of a perception that warrants the rather excited initial appraisal of him by the established powers in s f, but he also fails to exploit this perception fully, often enough, to call for a reappraisal of his writing to direct it beyond the foundational hints and preparatory excursions it has given us so far.

For Effinger knows his intentions and capabilities, I believe, yet most of his stories remain tentative, held back from a complete statement. They deal in generalities, simplifying complex reality and yielding a simple, often trivial point. However, their tone is not so restrained: it is pretentious, "dear", and disingenuous in the worst of the stories and, in some of the better ones, is emphasised over weak thematic substance. He transcends these mannerisms occasionally, but mainly the offerings are disappointing.

The fiction (there is, in addition an introduc-

tion by Theodore Sturgeon and a patronising, self-conscious preface by Effinger) includes a 10,000-word Analog throwaway about a psychokinetic baseball pitcher, a faithful and touching pastiche of A A Milne and Kenneth Grahame, a terrible "ecology" story ("Wednesday, November 15, 1967", from The Ruins of Earth), and several fables and science fiction stories.

The fables or allegories are idiosyncratic and pedantic. Their prose style is mainly all Effinger's, but the technique is close to Vonnegut's and Malzberg's: speculative fiction or overt science fiction trappings are used not so much fictionally as metaphorically to portray an ironic world of stasis; the stories are author's constructions with a moral. Whether they "work" or not is partly dependent on your prejudices, but it's plain that the emphasis is on thought and not on story. Effinger makes this an either/or situation; his characters and events are usually stereotyped and superficial, symbolic tools only, and any impact that might come from fictional manoeuvring of real characters and occurrences is usually lost.

Usually; for there are at least three stories out of the ten here which transcend his simplistic or pretentious inclinations. Others try, but fail to speak clearly enough to be really substantial.

None is more typical of this than stories in the "Grammage, Pa" saga that involve the character variously named Steve Weinraub, Steve Wenrope, Sandor Courane, et al. Their world is a bland Amerika of dying spirit and hypocrisy, through which Weinraub, a vague pseudo-"hippie", wanders and copes with as best he can - which, we are continually told but seldom convinced why, is none too well. I suppose the point of this is to portray paralysis and the pervasive decay of American life, but the situations Effinger creates don't do this any justice. For instance, in "Steve Weinraub and the Secret Empire", Steve hitchhikes around the country, his battered guitar case at his side, getting rides from old ladies (always) in Dodges and "rich fags" (always) in Saabs, continually going nowhere. Effinger tells us early on that Steve is fooling himself about dying America and the worth of his reactions to it. We reach the story's end none the wiser, but now certain that he is, indeed, fooling himself, so what. And there is this, from "Things Go Better":

Oh, and now I must tell of those adventures, although it pains me much. I must relate his only exploits, his bootless fame, if you will, and how those events tore from him his very heart and soul, and stabbed deep into his visceral privates to wrench there from the darkling roots of identity.

This and other weighty things we are told repeatedly, but nowhere are they really seen or felt. Rather, Effinger depends heavily on pop-liberal culture props and cliches - "straights"

and "hippies", fundamentalist sod-ism and dope, bloodthirsty feminism and the hitchhiking mythos - that fail to say anything new or even important about things as they are. Somehow there is a feeling that all the implications are known to the reader and will be triggered by these weak truisms and fantasies, but again this depends wholly on the reader's set: there is little underlying substance beyond a nebulous welt-schmerz. The final effect is rather like reading Newsweek as edited perhaps by the staff of National Lampoon - flashy and depthless.

Effinger departs from such clever emptiness and bathos in "Lights Out", the best of these Grammage tales and one of two reasons for buying this book. It is the story of a hack science fiction writer stuck in this backwater Pennsylvania town and grappling with his weaknesses - self-deception, escape from reality, loss of identity (but this is done convincingly here), and acceptance of cornball American mediocrity. The Grammagers "capture" him and the town achieves its potential for stasis - force-fields wall it off from the rest of the world. Here Effinger has coalesced and completed the half-formed images of creative vacillation, cultural decadence, and his characters' searching and foundering in probability that he sketched before, to produce a vision of all that is possible and yet still stifled in America. All the attempts toward feeling in the other stories (which include "Things Go Better", originally from Orbit, and the Hugo nominee "All the Last Wars at Once"), all the seriousness previously hinted at, come to life here in a whole realisation. It remains a bit contrived, as allegory must, but there is a true sense of life. Instead of belabouring fuzzy, abstract points of social philosophy, here he has acquiesced to the fictional demands of an honest fineness and specificity toward life, and the result is an excellent novelette.

There are two other fables: "World War II", an ambitious grappling with the nature of work and industrial production, and "The Ghost Writer", on the same subject but with a narrower focus on art. Both are told sparsely and effectively, free from the usual weighty editorial presence. ("World War II" is too much a story of men, though, ignoring half of all humans while speaking to the subject of mindless work and the labour force.)

Finally, there is " $f(x)=11/15-67; x=her, f(x)\neq 0$ ", the other reason for buying this book. Surely it is one of the very few brilliant speculative fictions published recently and, incidentally, the purest if not the only "science fiction" in the book. It concerns the sterility resulting when science becomes too "empirical", too far from the human and natural; it shows how methodology, categorisation, and analysis can be so refined that they blind one to the spontaneity that generated them. Read it as a metaphor for creativity.

At the end, the promise inherent in this book is what interested me. I hope Geo Effinger can

achieve it on the foundation of these false starts and first successes. His greatest assets are pure writing ability and his notions of time and creativity that are put forth, weakly but repeatedly, in the Steve Weinraub tales and others. His fictions say that our dreams are realisable, even though we kill them and preserve them in death more often than face them; they show that we are all things at all times, but that we are presently wasting ourselves and had better wake up. Notions worth writing about, at least.

OF APES (ETC) AND MEN

Neville Angove reviews:

MOTHER WAS A LOVELY BEAST

edited by Philip Jose Farmer

Chilton :: 1974
248 pages :: \$6.95

Mother Was a Lovely Beast is the first book in a series of anthologies concerning feral man and society. These stories of children raised by wolves, bears, apes, and even condors glorify the natural life of the wilderness (where, incidentally, the average life-span was only thirty-five years) and serve to illuminate the faults in society we accept as the norm. The feral man, raised outside of society, is able to look "objectively at the discrepancy between the ideal and the real" to an extent beyond that allowed to "civilised" man.

Only two of the eight stories in the collection are by Farmer. But the remainder, tied together by Farmer's forewords, support his theme. Like Simak in Ring Around the Sun and A Choice of Gods, Farmer advocates a life free from the unnatural pressures of technological society; unlike Simak, Farmer prefers his Nature "red-in-tooth-and-claw" (the World of Tiers series is a good example). And like Brunner, Farmer condemns all modern society has to offer, regardless of any inherent merit. This undercurrent courses through all the stories, but the merit of each guarantees the reader enjoyment whether he accepts Farmer's premise or not.

Following Farmer's attempts to validate the "feral-man hypothesis", the reader meets the cliché of the genre - searching for religion - in "The God of Tarzan", by Edgar Rice Burroughs. In the books he has been reading at his parents' shack, Tarzan has found a reference to "God", an apparently all-powerful entity (like an editor?). But he is unable to find out what God means, or what he looks like. In his subsequent search for God, Tarzan finds that those things or people who seem to be God are less powerful than he is: the moon cannot harm him, and the native witch doctor begs him for his life. Tarzan realises finally that God is within each man and thing, and all around them as well; it is the force that causes altruism, love, pity, and respect to

win out over the self. The story closes with Tarzan wondering who created evil...

The Tarzan series was the vehicle which Burroughs used to lambast society in the best Swiftian manner. In "The God of Tarzan", Burroughs argues that our conception of God and our formal religions are both attempts to explain away that which we cannot understand. And, on a different level, they provide a means of controlling others for our own profit: the village witch doctor maintains his position via superstition, as a source of material wealth; the village chief supports the witch doctor as a matter of politics. A final theme is that there is not a "meaning" of God: it is for each person to find his own conception of God, rather than to accept that of others.

"Extracts from the Memoirs of 'Lord Greystoke'", edited by Philip Jose Farmer, is a continuation of the "real story of Tarzan, begun in Tarzan Alive! (1973). "Extracts from the Memoirs of 'Lord Greystoke'" amplifies and corrects the history of his early life published by Burroughs, giving Tarzan's views on religion, sex, politics, and society in general. Personal details, such as the size of his erection when he first saw "Jane", intersperse the commentary. He describes the ape society, with reference to language structure, sexual proclivity, toilet habits, and caste system. But this story is really a criticism of society from a (supposedly) neutral viewpoint, rather than the incidental exposition developed by ERB in the Tarzan series. It is a forceful analysis of the hypocrisy, suppression, and slavery which maintains society. If only it could be taken seriously.

"Tarzan of the Grapes" by Gene Wolfe describes the hunt for an accidentally created vineyard "apeman" (the result of a press stunt). The police overkill in attempting to catch this fake Tarzan epitomises the easy refusal of society to accept that it is holding the wrong values; the hunt for the apeman symbolises the extremes to which man will go in order to deny an alternative mode of existence. The story's conclusion may auger a hope that will not be fulfilled.

"Relic" by Mack Reynolds extends the theme of "Tarzan of the Grapes". Superficially, it is the description of an ageing Tarzan displaced by an automated society, a schizophrenic Tarzan unable to distinguish between his real life and that of his fictional counterpart. The re-living of his adventures results in a trail of corpses, but the one person who deduces the truth is ignored. In this lies the key to the story -- society does not attack its creation, since then there would be some hope for it, if only because it would be forced to confront its faults. Instead, it turns its back on the truth. The characters are similar to "prexy" in Brunner's The Sheep Look Up, in that they can see only what they want to see. People must face up to the "monster" they have created (their own society), or be destroyed by it. Although Reynolds' technique is not his best, the story is still one of his better efforts.

"One Against the Wilderness" by William L Chester and "Shasta of the Wolves" by Olaf Baker, have in common the struggle that feral man faces in choosing between his species or his "people". Chester's "One Against the Wilderness" is the tale of a "reverse" feral man: an orphan white boy raised by a primitive Amerind tribe. As Kioga, he finds himself rejected eventually because he is different, but then adopts the beasts of the wilderness as his friends. The village shamans who lead his expulsion keep the tribe in check by regular sacrifices to the river gods. For their own undisclosed ends they attempt a secret sacrifice of another village orphan, but Kioga rescues the intended victim. In keeping with his reputation as a trickster, he causes the orphan to be reaccepted into the tribe, at the expense of the lives of the shamans. Kioga is a trickster because this allows him the limited human contact he needs desperately. Self-sufficient in the wild, he still desires to be accepted by his own race. It is ironic that only the beasts of the forest will accept him for what he is.

Olaf Baker's "Shasta of the Wolves" is the simple biography of an Amerind orphan raised by a wolf. The excerpts selected by Farmer from the original book detail Shasta's early development, his first recognition of "belonging", and the startling discovery that he is not a wolf, but does not want to be a man either. It is only when the wolves rescue him later from certain death by human hands that he realises with whom he belongs. "Shasta of the Wolves" has more depth than "One Against the Wilderness". It describes the search for self and identity by one who has neither. Identity is not defined by external appearances, but by attitudes, and a feeling of being one with someone else. Baker's indirect attack on the accepted concept of human individuality highlights the shallowness of a man who accepts another's opinions and beliefs as his own, rather than search himself.

The prose creates powerful and definitive word pictures of life with Nature. The Simakian pastoral scenes are uncluttered by the unnecessary; although images like "brush-grown banks peeling with care-free laughter" are almost cliches by now, they allow one to understand why so many writers find the feral-man plot an attractive vehicle.

"Scream of the Condor" by George Bruce differs from other feral-man stories in that the principal character manages to reconcile his human and bestial heritages. Craig, a young airman, is facing his first combat in World War I. But his flying ability far surpasses that of the most experienced airmen, while his brooding violence sets him further apart from his fellows. In a flashback we discover that he was abducted by a condor as a baby, to replace a dead fledgling, and learned to fly clutched in the talons of his "foster father". But from the time he was "rescued" from the Andean Alps, he has longed to regain the air, an end he achieves in the skies over France. "Scream of the Condor" was written

as an adventure tale for an early pulp magazine. But this humble origin cannot hide the depth of feeling developed by skilful prose. Craig is well suited for the battlefield, his animal nature expressed in every deed and thought. This left-handed compliment to the military continues until the conclusion, when the "animal" attitudes, untouched by civilisation, are in reality the most altruistic. As an adventure story and as a comment on the man-beast dichotomy, "Scream of the Condor" is entertaining and thought-provoking.

The penultimate selection is an article describing the life of "The Man who was Tarzan". Thomas Llewellyn Jones details the history of one William Mildin, a British noble who was shipwrecked on the African coast when he was 11 years old. For sixteen years Mildin lived with the apes and natives of the jungle before finding his way to civilisation. Jones claims that Burroughs drew from the reports of Mildin's ordeal when creating Tarzan. After Tarzan Alive!, I'm not about to believe anything (or reject anything, either).

Farmer concludes the book by tying these stories of feral man into one neat bundle, in his "The Feral Man in Mythology and Fiction". This semi-scholarly essay examines the premises behind the feral-man tales: as rationalisations to explain the acceptance of totemic or mythological animal connections; as Swiftian satires; or as attractive fantasy/adventure tales. The stories themselves can be subdivided into three definitive classes, independent of the stories' purposes: fantasy; realistic; "super-realistic". Farmer's contentions in this regard are less supported than the "true" tales of feral humans they define.

As an attempt to analyse the feral-man concept in s f, Mother Was a Lovely Beast is successful. Farmer has presented a well-organised work that is both entertaining and educational. This collection validates the use of the feral-man counterpoint as an effective means of examining society's structures and fundamental beliefs. But to receive the full impact, the reader must suspend his disbelief, and be willing to accept the stilted prose and improbable (?) situations, if only for a short while. All the stories have something valuable to say, and it is not surprising to note that the much-vaunted sentiments of today's "relevant" novels are only echoes of those expressed, in a more readable form, fifty years ago (Bruce's indictment of the human attitude towards war, and Burroughs' assault on formal religion, for example).

The book is thought-provoking, enjoyable, and readable - all that one can ask of s f, or of any literature.

MALADAPTATIONS

Neville Angove reviews:

SCIENCE FICTION SPECIAL 13

The Probability Man by Brian N Ball (original publication DAW 1973)

Age of Miracles by John Brunner (Sidgwick and Jackson 1973)

A Choice of Gods by Clifford D Simak (Putnam 1973)

Sidgwick and Jackson :: 1975

550 pages :: \$A12

This collection of novels examines three aspects of the meaning of life.

The first is concerned with the place of man in the cause-effect equation. Is man the originator of events, or only their puppet? If the former is the case, isn't he constrained by the effects he causes? Man is not in control of his society, and never has been. He was forced to develop a technology, which in turn dictated the direction of any new growth. He is trapped.

The second novel pictures man as nothing more than vermin aspiring to pesthood. He does not make use of his world, but simply uses it, making the worst of a bad situation.

The final novel is obscure in its aim, and apparently so is man. What is the role of man in the scheme of things? If you have ever wondered that the human race might be only a minor cosmic experiment, then you can be reassured that it does not really matter.

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The Disinvention of Work has resulted in a bored and sated galactic populace. The solution to this problem was the Frames and their Plots. Developed on the planet Talisker, and then spread throughout the galaxy, the Frames were accurate re-enactments of famous episodes of probable history, complete to the most minute detail. The Plots were the individual stories within each Frame: you could engage in a fox hunt in Victorian England, sweat in the mines at the Siege of Tournai, or face lions in the arenas of Rome. A human either went into the Frames and took his chances, or worked on the Frames to manufacture other people's probabilities. The Plot Directors and their assistants created new stories for re-enactment, while the giant Comps (computers) checked the individual probabilities, altering the participant behaviours until they resulted in the correct Probability Curve - the perpetual wheel of existence of the Plot. Individuals with similar psychic profiles and implanted appropriate memories were matched by the Comps to the characters of the Plots. There were Plots for psychotics, would-be dictators, sexual deviants, or any other psychological need; no one was ignored. To this universe add a super-intelligent alien imprisoned within Talisker for 100 million years, and a Plot Director who adds a random factor to

the Frames, and the result is Brian N Ball's The Probability Man.

Springarn escapes from certain death at the Siege of Tournai by calling on a half-forgotten memory which allows him to ask for Time-Out from his Plot. His gradually returning memory tells him that his reprieve is only temporary - he must rebuild the probabilities in his old Plot, manipulating the actions of the characters, to build a Probability Curve that does not entail his death. In his success, he finds that he has escaped to what he entered the Frames to escape from. He was a renegade Plot Director who had written himself into every Plot of every Frame. Since his death, or absence, would have caused the collapse of every Frame, the Frame Control Comp had been forced to use any means possible to ensure his survival as he shuttled through increasingly dangerous situations. But now that he had, unwittingly, written himself out, he is back where he started, minus his memories and facing a fate that no one will mention. He is to be sent to the Frames on Talisker. Earlier he has re-activated these Frames, but randomly. Even entry to these Frames is accompanied by random chromosome fusion, creating various physical forms for the characters. Because the Plots are random, no one can adapt to the situations to survive long enough to rebuild a viable Probability Curve. And the randomness is threatening to spread to the Frames on other planets. Springarn, who created this situation, and sought to escape from its consequences, is selected by the Comps as the only person able to provide the solution.

Springarn is searching for his past, and for a meaning to his past. As his memory returns, his feeling of anomie increases. He cannot believe that he has done what he has done, and cannot believe in what he has done. He criticises the Plots being produced currently, not because they are not viable (the Comps have checked the probabilities and decided they will work), but because of a sense of "wrongness". This wrongness haunts him throughout his struggle on Talisker until he realises the difference between being a cause of randomness and an effect of randomness - the difference between being free to choose a course of action, or being forced to choose. It is the difference between being controlled by destiny, and actually controlling it.

The search for a meaning to life by controlling one's destiny is a common theme to Ball's novels. The amnesia victim of Sundog changes from a pawn on the board to a player. The spaceman in Singularity Station achieves freedom only when he understands the singularity that has been forcing his actions. Springarn, in The Probability Man, goes a step further since, in one sense, he has been in control already: he finds a purpose to act. The juxtaposition of Springarn's past and present, as the present causes recall of the past, shows the contrast between purpose and purposelessness. His questioning of the wrongness of the Plots reveals his unremembered dissatisfaction with a system in which everybody is either manipulated to meet the predictions, or is a

manipulator. Because the Comps are the final arbiters in any case, everybody is actually a slave to the technology they created. Springarn's answer is the Frames of Talisker. But with a lack of predictability there is a concurrent lack of control. Manipulation is still possible, but there is no meaning when everything is in a state of constant flux.

The Alien is enigmatic (ie I haven't the vaguest notion of his why and wherefore). He is the source of the randomness of the Frames of Talisker, because he needs the constant flux of change to orient himself to this universe, so he can go home. His opposition by Springarn, the Probability Man, in an attempt to restore the probabilities, serves an unknown purpose. Make of it what you will.

Ball has circumvented the making of the background, a major problem in s f, by having Springarn play the role of the naive victim. His discoveries are also the reader's. It is the way his actions differ from those expected by the reader that define his character. Only his character is believable; the others are only stereotypes whose actions are always the expected. This grates on Springarn, since it is the reason he reactivated the Frames on Talisker. The plausibility of this future, and the surrealistic settings of Talisker, can provide enough material for many more plots, if only to satisfy the indefinite ending of this one. For those interested, a sequel, Planet Probability (DAW 1973), continues Springarn's adventures on Talisker.

** ** *

Age of Miracles seems to have been written in the style that Brunner used in his earlier novels. That it may have been written much earlier than its first publishing date (1973) might explain why it is so relatively simple in plot and characterisation.

Without warning, all the world's fissionable material has been detonated. The major nations are crippled and, in the ensuing chaos, several alien structures, thought to be cities, have appeared. They cannot be entered, and anyone who approaches them with hostile intent is driven mad. The military cannot approach closer than several hundred miles, but refugees fleeing from the fallout zones can somehow live within the sight of the cities. In the dead ground around the alien structures, self-governing rebel states have grown. Free from military intervention, and immune from outside law, these states have prospered, partly because of the sale of alien artefacts: garbage thrown away by the unseen visitors. But in the remains of Russia, one of the rebel leaders has found a way of entering the alien cities, and with the "live" artefacts so acquired, has begun to overrun Europe. The race begins to find some way of entering the North American alien city in order to find similar weapons or a defence against them.

The three main characters provide an interesting

series of interactions, both with each other and with what little of the world that remains. It is their development which plays a major role in the plot. Waldron is a US city police chief, wondering if it is all worth it. He keeps a map in his office on the wall, and updates it regularly to show those areas still affected by the nuclear fallout and the alien presence. Large tracts of land are still uninhabitable, and "Grady's Ground", the rebel state surrounding the North American alien city, is growing larger and more powerful. But Waldron still works overtime at his job, as if the aliens had not really changed anything. To him, it seems that nothing is being done about the aliens. They are just being accepted by the human race which crumpled beneath them. Man has given up ideas of doing the "big things" he once lived for; the old world and all its ambitions died the day the aliens came, but no one seems to have noticed, and no one seems to care.

Radcliffe is one of the bosses of Grady's Ground, dreaming of and planning for the day when he ousts Grady. Radcliffe does not care that mankind seems to have forgotten all its grand plans and is content to live with the present. He wants to make the most of the changes: leadership of Grady's Ground is the best he believes is possible, since one day the aliens might destroy the humans if they become too big a nuisance. He only wants to make the most of the present opportunities, since there may be no future in anything else.

Potter is a government official leading the study of the North American alien city - a difficult undertaking since he cannot get near it. His character combines much of Waldron and Radcliffe. He knows the world has changed, but knows that it is impossible to go back to the old ways, or to just accept the aliens' presence. "We could get along when there was no other competition bar other human beings...but the aliens are not people...to survive in the face of the challenge they present...we have got to give up making mistakes." Like Radcliffe, he wants to make the most of the aliens' coming. But his plan is to rebuild, utilising the best of the old and new combined. His superiors cannot see the aliens as the threat they are, and while acknowledging the changes they have wrought, want only a return to the status quo. They cannot adapt.

All three characters have much in common. They all see mankind as scavengers on the aliens' garbage, as vermin which may be either tolerated or destroyed. It is in their fears that they differ. Waldron feels hatred for the aliens, for they destroyed the world in which his existence had some small meaning; Radcliffe fears the power they wield, but realises they created the world in which he found some purpose; Potter is frightened of the stupidity of his own people, realising that the aliens mean a possibility for a new purpose for mankind.

Brunner's stories stress the maladaptive

behaviour of man. Problems may be met and overcome, but never in the best way, only in the most expedient. In The Sheep Look Up, the threat of increasing air pollution is "solved", not by reducing the emission of pollutants, but by installing filtermask dispensers in all public buildings. The destruction of micro-organisms in the soil by insecticides is "solved" by importing earthworms from overseas. In Age of Miracles, the alien threat is met in one of two fashions: people try to live as if the aliens never really happened, and ignore the changes their advent has caused; or they adapt to the alien presence by taking advantage of the military no-man's-land around each alien city, in setting up a society free from outside legal restrictions, and selling alien garbage. Even then, the aliens are effectively ignored. But this adaptation is wrong. There is an increasing threat of their destruction as nuisances, countered by the adoption of the aliens as saviours. Even the purpose of the aliens and their garbage is misperceived.

The development of the major characters emphasises this theme of maladaptation. It is only when the aliens are accepted finally for what they are, and the problem they pose perceived correctly, that a solution is made available. The characters achieve completion in the discovery of the purpose of the alien structures, and their adaptation to them. Like Spingarn in Ball's The Probability Man, the characters are after a purpose, and the change which overcomes them when they find it is readily apparent. An undercurrent in the plot is the notion that the aliens are people. They have garbage problems, problems with the vermin, and they lose things. It is an idea often expanded in s f, but normally it is quite forced (as in Piers Anthony's Prosthodontia Plus and Triple Detente).

Brunner's major themes have often been repeated by other writers. But his ability to show the interaction between the individual and the situation creates a depth of feeling easily understood by the reader and adds to the credibility of the theme. The writing is clear and concise, and a good story is not sacrificed for a "plot of message".

** ** *

Clifford D Simak's A Choice of Gods brings up the tail end of the collection, but in many respects it is the best of the three stories. The plot is relatively simple: envision a world, overpopulated, saved from collapse only by its robot-controlled industries; then have all the population, bar a few thousand, transported miraculously to other star systems, disappearing overnight. How would those left behind react? They would survive easily, with the robots guaranteeing food, housing, and labour. But then add a life span increased to ten thousand years. And the ability to transport yourself to the stars, or talk telepathically with aliens, via gradually developing psionic abilities. What type of society would evolve? And what of the robots?

If this is not enough, add a few thousand years for the land to heal the ravages of Man, a group of robots carrying on with the Faith, and an alien visitor in search of a soul.

Like most of Simak's writings, this novel is slow, sedate, and pastoral. Simak has often been criticised for his use of the pastoral setting to such a degree that it has become a cliché. But it is not the physical setting that guarantees that pastoral atmosphere. Jack Vance's Alastor series and Durdane series generate the same atmosphere, even in the most desolate of situations. It is that the reader is allowed to watch the development of the emotional states of the characters, and to see their plans of action arrived at by cerebration rather than by indiscriminate gonadal activity. The cool deliberation, rationality, and untroubledness of their thinking plays the major role in creating the atmosphere. The emotions are there, but are mellowed by maturity and circumstance. In opposition to the pace of the technological rat race.

Simak is concerned with the role of man in the universe; his place in the cosmic design, if there is one. The central story of the novel is concerned with the reactions of the Earth's remaining inhabitants, adjusted to the new conditions, discovering that, after five thousand years, the bulk of the species has found them, and might return. Alternate chapters examine several characters in their search for a meaning for their existence, and compare those who have found it with those who are still searching. The differences are exemplified by three robots, Thatcher, Hezekiah, and Stanley. Thatcher is content to serve a human couple living in their old family home. He wants no more than to fulfil the role for which he was designed. He is the most contented of all the characters. Hezekiah, with three other robots, is continuing the study of religion, maintaining the faith that the humans had given up. But he is beset by the worry that it may not be the robots' place to have faith. Although they are best suited for the necessary logical analysis, they may not be the ones it was meant for. Stanley is a spokesman for the Project, a robot construction. He represents those robots who could find no humans to serve, and so banded together to maintain the knowledge of the old world by creating a super-robot. Their need to serve man has now evolved into a need to serve their Project. They are content also, but are aghast at any notion of returning to the old ways.

A similar trichotomy is apparent among the humans. One group has adapted to the new life: as star rovers; or by the return to a life with Nature; or by utilising a little of the old technology to develop a comfortable existence of earlier standards. All these live within their environment, rather than control it. A second group is still searching for their place in the new life, haunted by the past, and unsure of the future. The third group, the bulk of the race, has managed to maintain its technological

culture on new homes in the centre of the galaxy. It is the comparison of the three groups of robots, and the three groups of humans, which Simak uses to develop his theme. Some ignore technology, others use its best aspects, while the majority are its willing slaves.

Simak is concerned with the removal of Man from his own ecological niche: "Somewhere we may have taken the wrong turning, accepted the wrong values, and permitted our concern with technology to smash our real and valid purpose." He has usurped a role which is not his, and he has allowed technology to become the master rather than his servant. Hezekiah's ruminations on the purpose of faith and technology are the main source of this theme, but the differences between him and Stanley, a slave to his former servant, give added weight to this view.

Simak's characters are not the ideas they represent. They are believable, and it is in their naturally evolving viewpoints that the bases for the arguments are provided. Even the robots are "human". It is not the carping, pedantic argument so often found in s f, but a real interplay between character and environment. The technique of juxtaposing the robots and the humans adds credibility to an often-worked theme, creating one of the best stories of 1973.

** ** *

This Sidgwick and Jackson collection, although not the best that 1973 had to offer the s f reader, is still fine reading. There is no Way Station or Stand on Zanzibar in this lot, but the same can be said for most collections. But the broad range of writing styles should allow some satisfaction to most readers.

THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE SEEN AS A JAPANESE TEA CEREMONY

Terence M Green reviews

THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE

by Philip K Dick

Re-issued:

Gollancz :: 1975 Penguin 14 002376 :: 1976
222 pages :: £3.20 249 pp :: \$2.10

Original US publication

Putnam :: 1962

239 pages

The Man in the High Castle is a quiet book. It is a restrained book. It is so tightly controlled, so skilfully wrought, that one is unsure whether to feel relaxed or tense while reading it.

When one puts it down finally, one is as close to the Japanese "satori" (or the Chinese "wu") as one is likely to get with a piece of literature. For the novel is an expression of Zen Buddhism - in tone, method, and in final achievement.

Is such a statement an attempt to simplify the book - to reduce it to a graspable commodity? Hardly. As a book it is much too complex for such over-simplistic reduction. The Man in the High Castle defies attempts to find one way of reading it; in this, it is like most great works. Once we enter into it, immerse ourselves in the labyrinth that is the novel (for a comparison with Joyce's Ulysses is appropriate), the number of visions that can result is evidence of the richness of the production.

However, it has always struck me as somewhat strange that a book that burst onto the scene so dramatically and unexpectedly in 1962, that won the Hugo Award as Best Novel for its year, that was so highly lauded then, faded so easily from print for more than a decade. Stranger in a Strange Land has been in print continuously since its 1961 Hugo; the same is true of A Canticle for Leibowitz, which won the previous years. Yet, until Victor Gollancz re-released the book in England in 1975, copies of The Man in the High Castle have been virtually unobtainable.

Why was this book not as commercially viable as the other "classics", even in paperback editions?

Perhaps one reason for the purchasing public's strange lack of interest was the strangeness of the book itself. It just didn't seem like other s f "classics" - especially to the average buyer. Possibly it was too quiet and restrained, for it does not overwhelm with vast new concepts. It merely is.

Perhaps, also, the Alternate World them of the book fails to seem like s f to many readers. Dick himself seems aware of this possibility, and even offers an "explanation" by one of his characters. In the novel, Paul Kasoura is speaking of The Grasshopper Lies Heavy - an alternate-world novel within Dick's own alternate-world novel:

"Not a mystery," Paul said. "On contrary, - interesting form of fiction possibly within genre of science fiction."

"Oh no," Betty disagreed. "No science in it. Nor set in future. Science fiction deals with future, in particular future where science has advanced over now. Book fits neither premise."

"But," Paul said, "it deals with alternate present. Many well-known science fiction novels of that sort." To Robert he explained, "Pardon my insistence in this, but as my wife knows, I was for a long time a science fiction enthusiast..."

Why include this at all in the novel? Explanation? Apologia?

At any rate, the novel's "low-key" profile is in keeping with the Zen Buddhist "quietness" and "restraint". Even Dick's zany sense of humour - which he unleashes in his later works - is under

taut control in this novel; it is there, but restrained. The Man in the High Castle marks the turning point for Dick as an author.

William Barrett, in his introduction to D T Suzuki's writings (Suzuki being perhaps Zen's chief exponent in English) - and Suzuki is the man referred to in Dick's own "Acknowledgements" prefacing his novel - states:

Zen Buddhism presents a surface so bizarre and irrational, yet so colourful and striking, that some Westerners who approach it for the first time fail to make sense of it, while others, attracted by this surface, take it up in a purely frivolous and superficial spirit. Either response would be unfortunate, Zen...is an achievement which we Westerners probably have not yet fully grasped (William Barrett (ed) Zen Buddhism (Selected Writings of D T Suzuki), Doubleday Anchor Book, Garden City, NY, 1956, page vii).

Earlier I stated that The Man in the High Castle "merely is"; and that a possible comparison to Joyce's Ulysses is not altogether irrelevant - Again, Barrett speaks of:

...One final literary example that involves no preaching or thesis whatsoever: the most considerable work of prose in English in this century is probably James Joyce's Ulysses, and this is so profoundly Oriental a book that the psychologist C G Jung recommended it as a long-needed bible for the white-skinned peoples. Joyce shattered the aesthetic of the Georgians that would divide reality into a compartment of the Beautiful, forever separated from the opposite compartment of the Ugly or Sordid. Ulysses, like the Oriental mind, succeeds in holding the opposites together: light and dark, beautiful and ugly, sublime and banal. The spiritual premise of this work is an acceptance of life that no dualism - whether puritanical or aesthetic - could ever possible embrace (Barrett, page xiii).

That Philip K Dick is well read in Zen Buddhism is obvious in both his "Acknowledgements" prefacing The Man in the High Castle and from a reading of the novel itself. His enjoyment of Carl Jung is self-avowed in the interior blurb ("Meet the Author") to at least the Popular Library edition of the book. And in an earlier Dick novel - The Man Who Japed - some of Dick's characters discuss Ulysses. (Ulysses and some other unnamed volumes are being examined...)

Sugarmann considered. "These, as discriminated from the others, are real books."

"What's that mean?"

"Hard to say. They're about something."
(Ace edition)

These books, another character asserts, "tell the truth".

We would seem, then, to be on the right track in our consideration of Dick's novel and his "artistic" intentions. Zen Buddhism's essence consists:

...in acquiring a new viewpoint on life and things generally. By this I mean that if we want to get into the inmost life of Zen, we must forgo all our ordinary habits of thinking which control our everyday life, we must try to see if there is any other way of judging things, or rather if our ordinary way is always sufficient to give us the ultimate satisfaction of our spiritual needs (Barrett, page 83).

This would apply to The Man in the High Castle. For in this novel, Dick asks us to "see if there is any other way of judging things". Perspectives are altered, both for the reader and the characters, all of whom see several alternate worlds. None of these "visions" are the result of rational thought or logic: the visions emanate from sudden intuitive flashes, sudden revelations. One does not reason one's way to Truth in Dick's novel, any more than one reasons one's way to "satori" in Zen Buddhism ("satori" being "that condition of consciousness wherein the pendulum of the Opposites has come to rest, where both sides of the coin are equally valued and immediately seen" (Christmas Humphreys, Buddhism, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1971, page 185)). Just as "Truth" can be the object of the writer, "Satori" is the goal of Zen.

The characters experience their satori (Mr Tagomi glimpses our world; Hawthorne Abendsen and Juliana both glimpse the truth of Abendsen's novel) just as the reader experiences his or her own personal satori upon experiencing the totality of Dick's novel. The reader becomes one with the characters - we all experience "insight" and liberation from our illusions simultaneously. However, the experience is virtually "incommunicable"; again, the "quietness" of the novel.

Perhaps one should realize the folly of attempting to communicate the "incommunicable" and should avoid trying to convey one's own satori, even humbly. However, a couple of suggested "visions" may be attempted, modestly and briefly.

In Dick's novel, Japan and Germany have won World War II; in Abendsen's novel the USA and her allies have emerged victorious. The satori that emerges after weighing all the visions in the novel - and our own subjective experiences of Reality - is: Who really did win World War II? Did we? If so, in what sense are we truly victorious? Why are Japan and Germany in a superior position to Britain today? Who really wins any way? Are all victories in war illusions? - all Pyrrhic victories?

And we might consider the powerful implications the theme of Appearance vs Reality has upon the historical persecution of the Jews during World War II. If you change your appearance, are you still a Jew? What is a Jew? The very nature

of Dick's theme holds up for implied examination the persecution of all minorities.

If the function of Art is to mirror Reality, then what is Reality? In his "quietness" and "restraint", Dick does not seem to profess to know. Therefore, for him, Art would seem to lead totally toward the Zen aim of Art: the capturing of Wu, or the releasing of Satori.

If we read the dialogue between Paul Kasoura and Robert Childan in The Man in the High Castle regarding Art, perhaps we may glean more insight into Dick's own Art. Kasoura comments:

"For it is a fact that wu is customarily found in at least imposing places, as in the Christian aphorism 'stones rejected by the builder'. One experiences awareness of wu (or satori) in such trash as an old stick, or a rusty beer can by the side of the road. However, in those cases, the wu is within the viewer. It is a religious experience. Here, an artificer has put wu into the object, rather than merely witnessed the wu inherent in it...

"In other words, an entire new world is pointed to, by this (the artwork being examined)... What is it? I have pondered this pin unceasingly, yet cannot fathom it. We evidently lack the word for an object like this. So you are right, Robert. It is authentically a new thing on the face of the world."

As Ulysses was a "new thing on the face of the world", a labyrinth, a conundrum in its time, so, I contend, is The Man in the High Castle in its time. Let us ponder it and try to fathom it, in the spirit of Zen. The artistic product of Zen is not art as we, Western man, know it. And Dick's book is not Science Fiction as we, Western man, know it...

...Sense is the product of reasoning and logic, of the laws of thought; Zen roars with laughter at all of them. Zen is the joke in a joke, and cannot, like a joke, be "explained". It is the life within the form; it is that which reasoning strives to enshrine and frequently strangles.

It is Philip K Dick's The Man in the High Castle.

DAMN GOOD TRY

Christine McGowan reviews:

THE BITTER PILL

by A Bertram Chandler

Wren :: 1974
148 pages :: \$4.95

It is a curious thing, surely not intended by

the author, that this book acts as a kind of litmus test. Fans, even confirmed admirers of Bert Chandler, really don't seem to like it; but reviewers in the newspapers and national magazines (non-fans who will read anything for money) have all been at least kind and at most warmly enthusiastic. Why is this so?

Perhaps the answer lies in the attitude expressed by all, fan and non-fan alike, that The Bitter Pill is a "damn good try". The underlying problem is just what it is a damn good try at. It has all sorts of science fiction trimmings: space travel, Mars colonisation, next year's technological gadgets, and a gloriously simplified view of the society of the near future - with the usual totalitarian overtones. Examined closely, however, it is not a science fiction story. It is a mini-"best-seller" of the kind usually sold by the pound, and that is why the mainstream reviewers find it so appealing.

The story is well larded with sex, of a rather clinical but hardly cheerful variety. Perhaps I should have written "varieties"; it's all there: sex consenting, unconsenting, desperate, violent, calculating, heterosexual, homosexual, sado-masochistic, and just plain unsuccessful. What with the violence and general nastiness of all concerned, it would make a splendid movie. But it's just not science fiction.

The initial premise - an Australia politically at the mercy of an incredibly paranoid bunch called the League of Youth - is probably no more unlikely than the premises of most near-future s f novels. But Chandler doesn't bother to examine the socio-economic implications of it all, so besotted is he with the idea of oldies lib. The book is not devoid of good writing; the chapter in which Captain Starr navigates his ship into Devonport is vintage Chandler. On the whole, though, the writing is uninspired, and the cynicism of the plot unleavened by the sort of satiric wit that so distinguishes such a near-future novel as the classic The Space Merchants. Worse still, dramatic tension is very much lacking. The principal characters are no more cardboard than is usual in most s f, but they are faced with no underlying dilemma, not even a decent mystery. Even their survival is never in doubt, since the goodies are so obviously superior in every way to the unmitigatedly venomous baddies. It's a pity, because it is really a damn good try.

TEST TIL DESTRUCTION

Don Ashby reviews:

INCONSTANT MOON

by Larry Niven

Gollancz :: 1973
251 pages :: £2.20

Most of the stories in this collection highlight a theme that runs through most of Niven's work. That theme is - test til destruction. Most of his stories contain this theme, either explicitly or implicitly, in their plots. It is an idea basic to science and technology. It is the idea that makes Niven's stories "hard science". He applies the scientific method to the structures and plots of his stories.

In "Inconstant Moon", the title story of this collection, it is the main protagonist who is tested under extreme conditions. Here, an ordinary man must face not only his own imminent death but also the destruction of the Earth. How should he react? In this case, he is forced to evaluate his life style, ideas about himself, and his place in the scheme of things - and wait for the end. He has the traditional last meal in the company of someone he loves, then makes a gesture toward survival precautions. He behaves in a rational manner and passes the ultimate test.

In "Becalmed in Hell", a machine is tested and found faulty, but that is not the real test. It is the examination of the relationship between two crew members. That is tested and fails, as did the machine. The centre of the story concerns the lack of faith in the sanity and judgment of the cyborg by his friend and crewmate. The irony of the story is that the crewmate treats the cause of the problem while thinking it is the symptom. Although the main characters survive the mission, there is still a failure on the human level.

We find the same idea of "test til destruction" in "Passerby". Although the protagonist is not destroyed totally, certainly he is not the same person after the test as he was before.

"Wait it Out" is a ghoulish suspended-animation story, with smatterings of cryogenic science thrown in. It takes place on Pluto, a planet that is about as far out as the idea.

"Bordered in Black" is equally ghoulish, but a completely different story, set in Niven's famous Known Space milieu. Until I read this story, I thought that the lost-colony story had exhausted itself. It hasn't.

"Not Long Before the End" shows the conservation of energy as it can be applied to magic. The story includes a sneering look at the Conan type of gorilla and drops a neat explanation of why there is no more magic in the world.

"How the Heroes Die" shows, on the one hand, the lack of forethought, planning, and character of the world space-planning authority, and on the other, what happens when we find that there really are Martians. There is also a highly strung, neurotic scientist, and a fast-moving adventure set within the closed confines of a bubble dome.

"At a Bottom of a Hole" is also set in the early era of the Known Space stories. The "hole" of the title is the planet Mars as seen from someone born in space. His attitudes towards "flatlanders" provide much of the interest of the story.

"The Deadlier Weapon": Gun vs car and a freeway.

"Convergent Series" is another story about magic, and it is also the story I liked least. Yet another scientist outsmarts yet another iron-clad contract with the Devil.

I can't tell you anything about the plot of "One Face" or it will spoil the story entirely. A story of suspense and human adjustment, it is one of the best in the collection. It's set on a spaceship. That's all I can say. Read it.

"Death by Ecstasy" is one of the "organlegger" stories and is the longest in the book. It shows more of the reprehensible habits of an organlegger and the tough job of an ARM agent trying to solve a tricky murder and avenge a friend.

** ** *

Altogether, Inconstant Moon is a collection of elegant, well thought out, and brilliantly executed stories by the best current writer of "hard" science fiction. You may have read some of these stories already in the magazines, but it is well worth buying the book for your library. These stories are always convincing, whether they tell of a simple matter of a small heat-expansion fault vs the faithlessness of a comrade ("Becalmed in Hell") or involve complicated suspense, as in "Death by Ecstasy" or "One Face".

Niven does not create memorable characters, which is a fault typical of s f authors - but mightn't the characters get in the way of the ideas? Niven has a different specialty: he presents the reader with a situation that can be solved (often, it is true, in a tangential manner) and solves it to the lasting satisfaction of the reader. If you are a jump ahead of the author you can sit back and say, "I thought so" and feel smug. If Niven outsmarts you, give a mental hiccup, kick yourself in the pants, and say, "Whythehellldidn'tIthinkofthat?" Which means that the whole book is a great success.

SHORT NOTICES

Bruce Gillespie reviews:

AND STRANGE AT ECBATAN THE TREES, by Michael Bishop (Harper & Row; 1976; 154 pp; \$7.95)

When he writes short stories, Michael Bishop is one of the very best writers in the s f field. But, at novel length, Michael Bishop's productive typewriter becomes a disaster area. George Turner tells me that Bishop's first novel, A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire, was inadequate. I have not read that book but, unfortunately, I have read And Strange at Ecbatan the Trees.

This book has an extremely simple story; it tells of how the viewpoint character, Ingram Marley, helps to rescue his homeland from invaders. His new weapon is given to him by Gabriel Elk, resident wiz and mystery man. It's a lot more deadly than previous weapons, and Marley dislikes killing all those people, even if they are furriners. There's nothing more to the book than that. It is the English Versus The Vikings all over again, with the English winning with the help of a magical gadget. Only the names and planet have been changed. The rest is decoration. But what decoration! It's as if the pastrycook lost control of his doo-dad that squirts curlicues of cream all over the cake - squish! the cake is drowned in cream. And so with this book. The words squelch all over the page, but have no substance. Meant to sound portentous, the book sounds tendentious. It reminds me of early, technicolour Zelazny. If you liked ..And Call Me Conrad, you might like Bishop's book. Lots of other people won't.

THE MANY WORLDS OF POUL ANDERSON, edited by Roger Elwood (Chilton; 1974; 324 pp; \$6.95)

This book has a beautiful cover and illuminating articles by two of the people who know most about the work of Poul Anderson - Sandra Miesel and Patrick McGuire. But the fiction is poor, and is more likely to turn people away from Anderson than to attract them.

The problem with Anderson's short fiction (as represented here) is best illustrated by comparing Patrick McGuire's long article, "Her Strong Enchantments Failing", with the story it explicates - Poul Anderson's prize-winning novella, "The Queen of Air and Darkness". If you read McGuire's article first, you turn to the story expecting a dazzling piece of s f/fantasy writing. And that is not because Patrick McGuire goes ooh and ah. It is because he teases out the notions of the story so clearly and perceptively than even a sceptical reader (like me) becomes quite interested in them. They seem like the essence of s f/magical drama. Turn to the story itself and you find no drama at all. Half the story is scene-setting, and most of the rest is tedious explanation (of ideas explained much better in the essay). The story has about one vivid page in it. The rest of the stories have the same quality of show and tell, tell, tell. Not the best of Anderson, but merely the most typical.

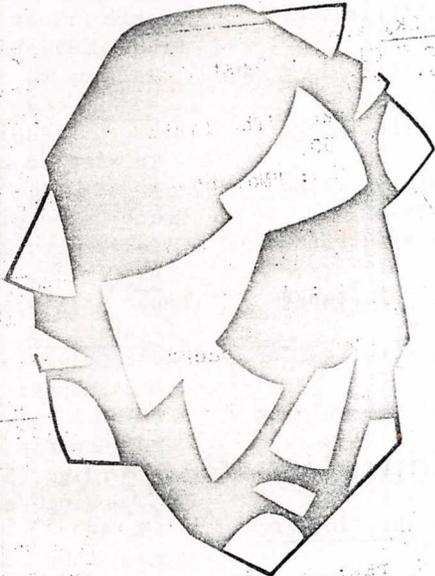
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AN ENCOUNTER WITH SCIENCE FICTION
BY URSULA K. Le GUIN AND OTHERS



Edited by Lee Harding

Introduction by Ursula K. Le Guin

THE ALTERED I is the story of a moving experience which happened to twenty people during one week in 1975.

The experience began as a mutual endeavour to learn and practise the craft of writing. It became a profound shared enlightenment and personal alteration. (It was fun as well.)

THE ALTERED I is the story of the Australian S F Writers' Workshop, August 1975. The book includes 21 stories and 11 articles. It is edited by Lee Harding, one of Australia's most experienced science fiction writers.

At the centre of the experience was Ursula K Le Guin - perhaps the finest writer in the s f field today. She contributes a story, a playlet, an article, and takes part in "workshopping".

THE ALTERED I

\$3.60 in Australia (or overseas equiv.).

Norstrilia Press, GPO Box 5195AA,
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