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OUR COLLECTIVE WAYS

Issue 10 of ASFR is coming to you decidedly early, even as issue 9 plonks in your mailbox a bit late, all to agree with the globe-trotting of the Mean Editor, four-sixths of which (that's two-thirds in anyone else's language, I suppose) is finding its way to Conspiracy for the tail-end of the Aussie winter. With most of us out of action (or perhaps into action) for great scads of August-September, we've tried to get all of our ASFR commitments tidied up pre-Exodus. So here's two full issues, cobbors, and don't complain when you hear from us again not until November.

The eleventh ish is slowly being licked into shape, and will feature non-genre skiffy-like writing, which compels me to finalize my recent Nova Mob talk on John Calvin Batchelor. You've been warned. January's issue, now, will be a post-Conspiracy one, and you can look forward to whatever tit-bits and brickbats are collected from the Old Country (as us Aussies used to call Pommiland), plus the inevitable WorldCon reports and similar, concocted among four-sixths of our number.

Four-sixths, old mates, because we welcome an old mate aboard the good ship ASFR. Janeen Webb joins the editorial collective from this issue, and to emphasize the point has provided her article (also pre-presented at Nova Mob) on the Women's Press sf series. We're delighted to have the article and the extravagantly decorative Dr Webb ('Male chauvinist wombat!' bawls four-sixths of the Collective - a slightly different four-sixths from that finding its way to the annual Grand Skiffy Mardi Gras ... and yet, I protest, the epithet was coined not by me but by the extravagantly politically correct Judith Hanna (who'll probably buy me a beer at Conspiracy for thus dobbing her in - she knows I hate beer at the best of times, much less the Bester times (go halves in a good bottle of imported Aussie red expatriate chum?)).

Forgetting, now, about this sixths business, some interesting new statistical facts about the Mean Editor float forth scum-like with the addition of Janeen the Bold. Now, it turns out, one half of the Mean Editor was educated at the University of Newcastle, NSW (not Pommiland, Joseph), and one-third of the Mean Editor holds a Ph.D from that venerable institution. The Mean Editor's mean age seems pretty much unaffected by the addition, but it is now only one-third blonde, and has become one-third redheaded (if we believe that little pharmacological bottle, hisses a cat in the background), and was five-sixths born outside of Melbourne, which brings me to another point.

Almost all the word salad - letters from our friends (blame the pun, like so much else, on Damien Broderick) - appears to be coming from the respective sides of the Atlantic, with surprisingly little home-grown produce. We're immensely pleased with the feedback from Britain (there, Joseph!) and North America, so keep it up, you lot! As for the ambient collective Aussie fan, get off your bum and contribute to the dialectic, cobber, or else. The letters we've been getting have pleased us not only because it's nice to know someone out there is still reading, but also because we're getting some real critical feedback. I was particularly interested in Darrell Schweitzer's missive, and its ruminations about sf as (not, after all) speculative fascism. In fact, I agree absolutely that it is horrifically slack criticism, politics, and lexicography to refer to the 'fascism' of Heinlein, Niven, Pournelle and Co. (which is probably going to get me in trouble with Andrew Whitmore - which, in turn, is to the good: maybe he'll LoC, getting stuck into Schweitzer and me in his magnificent haughty, Hobbesian (or Hazlittish) prose).

I've always taken Heinlein, in particular, to be a kind of Ayn Randian figure within sf, and I've gone on the record elsewhere about my ambivalent feelings towards the values implicit in his work (see my largish essay on *Stranger in a Strange Land* in the Aussiecon Two critical anthology *Contrary Modes*). I'd like, one day, to investigate the question 'Why is libertarianism so popular with skiffy writers (and fans), and what's wrong with libertarianism anyway?' - the short answers being: (a) that libertarianism is a philosophy that bites pretty deep into socially constructed values and attitudes, and so is attractive to people who are attracted to a genre that emphasizes the contingency and constructedness of social time-slices; and, (b) that libertarianism does not bite deeply enough, doesn't conclude, for example, that Western concepts of property, acquisition, and 'the market' are also socially constructed and contingent. We don't have to construct concepts of individualism and liberty within that kind of discourse unless we want to. But there's an argument for another day. Writers like Heinlein and Niven may end up over-emphasizing possessiveness and conflict, but that hardly makes them fascists or erases the attractive aspects of their best work. I, for one, would like to see some more debate on this subject.

Final word: good on yer, Bob Hawke, re-elected last night and going into a record third term as ALP Prime Minister in Oz; it's nice to see a pragmatic and efficient Labor government getting on with the job (boos from my wimpoid colleagues, most of whom voted for the Australian Democrats - yes, it appears that at least half of the Mean Editor turned out, this time, to be a Democrat voter!).

RKB 12.7.87

COUNTRIES OF THE MIND (1) OR BLAME JOHN FOYSTER

FOR ASKING ME TO MAKE NOTES AND REPORT BACK

GEORGE TURNER

I am not sure that I would be interested in attending another Canberra Word Festival in its present form, even if invited: it seems sprawling and curiously unimaginative, a venue for too many writers with little fresh to say but sheaves of their works for reading aloud. (And this one had for its theme, God help us, Imagining Australia.)

Scores of writers were present, brought travel-free and accommodation-paid from all over Australia, representing too much money down the drain for what they contributed. Others came from America and Europe - such heavyweights as William Gaddis and Melvyn Bragg - and too little use was made of them.

My presence cost the festival about \$300 (those from Western Australia cost about three times that amount), for which I was required to speak for ten minutes as a member of a panel of six. No more was asked of ninety per cent of the writers present. I felt guilty, as though I had wilfully overcharged for an on-and-off-quickly performance. To make it worse, most performers were ill-equipped for public hearing, paid only lip service to the subject demanded of them, and shamelessly overran their time with long, consciously 'beautiful' quotations from their fairly ordinary works. The casualty, of course, was Question Time; the public had small opportunity to ask questions even when the subject matter warranted them. The poets were, expectably I suppose, the worst offenders, having little fresh to say and quoting themselves extensively. And most of them read drearily badly, as if for elocution exams by incompetent teachers.

The panel graced (if you accept the word) by my by-then ill-tempered presence was one of the better behaved ones. We started ten minutes late because of other people's overruns but kept reasonably well to our speaking limits and were able to give an audience of eighty or so proper time for questions, which they asked and which received, I think, proper answers.

So much for spleen and after-school bitching.

In fairness, not every session was a loss. One of the most successful, on the nuts-and-bolts business of agents, publishers, and getting published, attracted sensible questioning and plenty of it. Good! What is the use of writers talking only to each other? The public is their business, otherwise why publish? Why not write only, as the Russians phrase it, for the drawer? Writing is not an esoteric art, despite critical efforts to make it seem so.

Colin Steele - ANU Librarian and science fiction buff from way back - was moderator of the only panel which would, I think, have interested genre fans or ASFR. (Not the same things? Ah, well, take your pick.) The title of the session was 'Countries of the Mind' and the speakers were, in order of presentation:

1. John Scott - English-born long-time Melbournite, poet, ex-script-writer, at present CAE lecturer in Media.

The inclusion of poets in this panel was a good idea, enlarging the interpretation of the theme to more than simple fantasy and futurism, obvious targets which in fact received only minimum attention, though Scott straddled the ground unexpectedly by mentioning his forthcoming trilogy of narrative poems set in the early 21st century. His speech made two useful points.

(a) The translation of an inner vision (the country of the mind) into prose or verse assimilable by the reader closely parallels the processes of translating poetry from one language to another. You can give a word for word rendition which will inevitably be pedestrian and lacklustre; you can rehandle the verbal form, using inexact but meaningfully equivalent words and constructions to reproduce the feeling and music of the original; or, you can quite literally build a new poem, using the materials of the original though with new words and images to state the meaning in terms of the new language and the culture ambient to it. The first two methods are commonly accepted. The third is still matter for debate, though John suggested that Ezra Pound's free rendition (and very free it is) of the poems of Propertius was a good example. It occurred to me that a less controversial example, one which is generally accepted by the reading public, would be Fitzgerald's uninhibited but effective manhandling of the 'Rubaiyat' of Omar Khayyam. John's point was that rendering the country of his mind into terms apprehensible by your mind and mine represents an effort to reduce a personal vision to a generalized communication. The visionary eternally cries out in his lonely country but only the rarely sensitive listener will penetrate the screen of words. Hence the need for translation.

b) We use the future as a means of talking about the present. This, while a little puzzling at first to some in the audience, is a commonplace of sf appreciation.

2. Janine Burke - Melbourne-born mainstream novelist, biographer and art critic.

She pointed out that reality is 'ragged', hard to grasp, in need of tidying up, and that one's country of the mind is an inward effort to

reduce ragged reality to a comprehensible neatness. She then said that her country of the mind is Australia but that the Australia one sees is a personal variation and not the basic reality of the land or its people. It has to be viewed from an inner distance in order to attempt to view it whole.

This reverses the common concept, suggesting that reality is the country of the mind which intellect must penetrate and understand. It is a seductive idea.

3. John Baxter - sf writer, script writer, film historian, broadcaster.

Baxter pointed out what contributors to Harlan Ellison's *Down Deep* should be aware and beware of, that obsession with the Australian landscape can be dangerous. The Central Desert, Ayers Rock, and Aboriginal cave paintings are part of Australia but not the whole of it. Obsession can create a mythology (I at once think of Ned Kelly and our two great fables, 'Anzac' and 'mateship') which is inaccurate in fact and distorting of the psychological reality. The business of the writer is to reorganize the past into a 'durable myth'. I took this to mean that only an understanding of the truth can produce a myth that will bear probing of the facts, as my samples above do not. This seems eminently sensible and adds an additional perspective to Janine Burke's view of sensual reality as the country of the mind which needs exploration by the intellect.

We would still emerge with an infinity of individual interpretations but these would be based on a more intelligent consensus on the facts - a consummation devoutly to be wished.

4. Rodney Hall - actor, poet, biographer, and novelist (the beautiful *Just Relations*).

Hall attacked John Scott's problem - of establishing contact between minds - from a technical angle, suggesting that there is a simple way of enticing the reader into accepting your vision as real.

This idea (and it is one most writers follow without considering precisely why they do it) is that at the outset of your narrative you introduce some matters so plainly factual that the reader recognizes them as part of his own experience, settles his mind into them as into a comfortable pair of old slippers and accepts your fantasy as part of the solid base which he knows and trusts. The example he gave was of planting your reader at once in Number 2a, Blank Street, in the suburb of Homelife, a brick house in a working-class neighbourhood. Even-though you live at the other end of the country and have never seen that particular area, you translate these instructions into an equivalent

surrounding that you do know, and are immediately prepared to accept what comes next because you can visualize it, however strange it may be, in a familiar and rational framework.

I at once recognized the definitive idea which had eluded me when talking to the Nova Mob only three nights before and trying to explain why the fantasies of Greg Egan and Terry Dowling in *Aphelion 5* failed to make an impact. While I emphasized that their failure lay in their total removal from rational human experience, I failed to pin down the technical reason why this contact with the everyday is essential to the suspension of disbelief.

The impact of the strange lies precisely in its contrast with the known. Saki's horror story, 'Sredni Vashtar', to take an example, is mere interesting nastiness until the everyday detail of Conradin buttering a piece of toast turns it into monstrousness. So Egan's horrors and Dowling's bizarreries take place in a vacuum because they depend on the external trappings of fantasy and lack the mundane touch which could render them suddenly and shockingly thrilling.

In Hall's words, the authentic details 'give authority to the text'. Horror at the breakfast table is at once more gripping than horror among the purple people-eaters of *Wczył IV*.

5. David Brooks - Canberra-born poet and short-story writer, one-time teacher at the University of Toronto and now with the English Department of ANU.

Brooks's country of the mind is the imagination. In his view, the function of the imagination is to render reality coherent (reversing Janine Burke's procedure but getting the same result), comprehensible or bearable by finding explanatory images, i.e. by relating difficult truths to matters of common understanding.

This might easily deteriorate into a system of imposing your views on others. Having written which, I conclude that this is what a writer seeks to do anyway. I suppose that, faced with a plethora of versions of reality, the reader sorts from it what bits and pieces fit the view as seen from his own huddling place. (I wish it had occurred to me to ask at the time, but I was feverishly putting my own ideas into order and missed the need.)

6. George Turner - you know quite enough about him.

You will have noticed that four of the first five speakers saw the country of the mind as being the real world viewed from a personal angle, though Baxter looked briefly at the imaginative process when he said, at

one point, 'The country of the mind is where imagination begins', i.e. that imagination builds on reality.

If only to produce a different perspective, I hinged my talk on the imaginative process (throwing away a prepared speech), treating the country of the mind as a fluid landscape of desires, fears, uncertainties, and intense curiosity, anchored in the subconscious and creating a constantly-shifting inner world, not always explaining the observed world and indeed sometimes operating perversely against it, even attempting to change the observation of the real world to fit the needs of a perceived 'other' reality - as, at its most flagrant, in schizophrenia.

As the oldest of the speakers I made the point that age does not confer wisdom but has certain historical advantage in providing more varied material to work on and also allows time for eruptions to take place in the landscape of the mind. We pass through stages of perception - in childhood, wish-dreams; in adolescence, fetish desires; in adulthood, attempts to grapple with 'true' reality (whatever that may be); in middle age, the torments of emotional adjustment; at all times, various modes of escapism - until, with luck, we reach the point of accepting sensual reality and putting the imagination to work at understanding it.

So, having passed through fairyland, Boy's Own adventures, science fiction, heroic fantasy and the distortions of various mental traumas, I now accept what I can see, hear and feel, and use that as the jumping-off point for trying to imagine the only thing relevant to today - tomorrow. This seems to me (at this moment - one is subject to further change) the prime use for the inner landscape: to observe as logically as possible the next form its hills and plains will take.

Scientists know we must do this; governments are by their constitutional nature unable to act upon it; the common man and woman is too busy coping with the world to conceive of more than immediate survival action, a sort of continuing first aid. Only the visionary, usually a writer, is left to peer into tomorrow and record in simple language what he sees. He is using his imaginative faculty for a productive purpose. He is, one hopes, beyond a too-wishful thinking and beyond fantasy and escapism amid the stars, knowing at last that an imagination not rooted in reality is a waste of dreams. Imagination must finally be the edged tool with which to reshape the world.

In sum there is much to be said for each of the points of view offered, little to argue against in any of them. The personal attitudes vary in detail and in orientation but I think that none of them precludes the

adoption, for specific purposes, of all the others; each speaker added a feature to the landscape of private turmoil and public dreams.

Little comment was specifically applied to fantasy or science fiction as such. I had the feeling that none of us wanted to tread incautiously into that Slough of Incestuous Despond, but the general trend of commentary was as applicable to mass-produced nonsense as to the aspirations of literary art and the problems of real life.

I have been on many panels over the years but this was one of the few that left me with the feeling that I understood more than when it started. The audience seemed to appreciate it.

I hope I have done no serious violence to the statements of the various speakers, but I was trying to reduce sometimes complex pronouncements to aide-mémoire form and at the same time recast and reorganize my own speech as various parts of it became redundant during the progress of the panel. Being last man on can ruin days of preparation; on this occasion it eliminated more than half of my prepared speech, leaving me to create a new one while listening and scribbling.

However, I think I caught the basic messages.

Prophecy Unfulfilled by Lucy Sussex

Now that the Joh for PM campaign has ended (for our overseas readers, Sir Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, a septuagenarian politician of extreme redneck views, was terrifying everyone to the left of him, i.e. 95% of Australia, by trying to become Prime Minister) let us consider it as an sf prophecy unfulfilled. The prediction was made in Sumner Locke Elliott's *Going* (1975), an elegant dystopia with the usual elements: no books, conformity, mind control for the rebels, etc. Unusually, *Going* also includes a wry comment on Oz politics, with the dystopia due to 'Senator Bjelke-Petersen of Minnesota'. This name became no joke when the real joke (er, Joh) decided to save the country from Communism, AIDS, pornography and cancer. (I am not being facetious - Joh helped promote a fraudulent cancer cure derived from peach pits).

Some clever politics by Australia's excuse for a Socialist government, plus electoral proof that only the rickety Right supported Joh, did for his campaign. Those letting out their breaths undoubtedly included Elliott, who must have been relieved not to be prophetic.

In any case, a dystopia of Joh's would have differed from Elliott's in one important respect: in *Going*, septuagenarians are subject to compulsory euthanasia.

COUNTRIES OF THE MIND (2)

JOHN BAXTER

One of the legends born of my childhood in a country town on the western plains of New South Wales was a philanthropic enterprise called the Far West Scheme. Perhaps it still operates - does anyone know? - but its aim was to convey on Sydney seaside holidays those kids of western New South Wales, perceived as culturally and geographically deprived, who had no personal acquaintance with the ocean.

For years a solid building of red textured brick called the Far West Children's Home stood on the beach front at Manly, facing the ocean - and reminiscent, at least to me, of some decayed concrete caves scattered along the cliffs of less fashionable beaches nearby. These had been built, I was told as a child, by some Aussie John the Baptist of the 'thirties to shelter his flock as they watched Christ's Second Coming through the Heads.

The conjunction of these two childhood myths sometimes threw up some startling images. Christ skimming the waves like Botticelli's Venus, for instance, attended by awed and pallid kids from Cobar and Mount Isa in Chesty Bond singlets and khaki Hard Yakka shorts with tinny metal buckles at the sides: the kind that jingled.

Another one - more a nightmare - I turned into a story. This is years ago, when Australian science fiction was an aberration shared by myself and a few other adolescent fantasists, a literary equivalent of glue-sniffing. The people of this story existed lethargically on Manly Beach, still celebrating the rituals of a resort that used to advertise itself as 'Seven Miles From Sydney And A Thousand Miles From Care'. Their transistor radios had long since ceased to work and their Eskis were as dry and sand-scoured as that Messiah's bunkers on the other side of the headland. But they stayed on the beach because the suburbs behind them had been taken over by some nameless race of pale and bloodless vampires.

The story, called 'Beach', was invoked in preliminary discussions of the last Australian Word Festival, when I was invited, with various other writers (among them George Turner) to speak on the interior reality of my personal Australia. I re-read the story for the first time in years, to find a subtext within it which I had not recognized before.

Thomas Hardy after some decades of depicting scenery announced that Nature was 'played out as a Beauty but not as a mystery'. He went on, 'I don't want to see landscapes. I want to see the deeper reality

underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings.'

Back in 1968, when I wrote 'Beach', I felt, along with a few other writers, that to find 'abstract imaginings' in the Australian landscape was the one sure way to a genuinely local science fiction. I wonder now if this was not as wrong-headed as the activities of the Far West Scheme, bringing kids from Mount Isa to Manly to look at the sea, as if this conferred a special grace. (A kind of baptism? So perhaps that image of the Christ of Sydney Heads has its validity after all.)

But all the time Australian visionary writers were standing on that headland looking out to sea or sitting on the beach waiting for the fallout or the nuclear winter or the invasion of the Yellow Hordes, the real and unmysterious inspiration we needed was in the last place any of us thought to look - and that was behind us.

Literally behind us, because it wasn't the beach that turned out to be the really usable metaphor of Australian fantasy but the plains. And chronologically behind us as well, because it seems to me that the real key to imagining Australia, if that is indeed what Australian visionary writing should do, is less in contemplating the future than in assessing and re-ordering and transmogrifying our past into a durable and resilient myth.

In the end, we writers were beaten to it by the film-makers. They were the first poets of this vision. George Miller took those so-called 'mad miles' of dead straight road outside every country town, crossed them with some sense of the deadly inevitable and the maimed Oedipean hero of his own Greek heritage, and came up with Mad Max, the road warrior, the wanderer of the wasteland.

And then of course there's Gerald Murnane. *The Plains* for me is one of the greatest of contemporary Australian novels and Murnane the poet laureate of a new and - the tag's inescapable, I'm afraid - post-modernist Australia. (Or perhaps it's pre-modern.) I was sorry Gerald was not at the Festival, because his metaphorical Australia is more vivid than any we on the panel could evoke.

It's interesting that, to him, the Australian grassland he loves is not national nor is it locked in any recognizable future. He sees it as continuous with grasslands everywhere. His new novel *Hinterland* is set in part on the prairies of America - an America he's never visited, but which he knows from maps and the films of his childhood. And like a lot of us who grew up in the 'sixties, he found Jack Kerouac a huge influence. Kerouac the translated French Catholic, the loner, the follower and diarist of Cassady and Huenke and all those post-literate lonesome travellers who lived their literature but never wrote it down,

leaving that task to poor Jack, stumbling in their dust. All we Australian writers have become Kerouacs, eating the dirt of visionaries in the other arts who, unencumbered by the need to seek and identify the abstract imagining, moved faster and further than we could.

Who are these new ideologues? Well, to answer by misdirection, I'm a book collector. A few months ago a Sydney newspaper advertised a huge free flea market to be held in a shopping mall car park in the western suburbs. Just load up the car, they said, park, open the boot and start selling.

Scenting books, I went along. But aside from comics and the ubiquitous Readers Digest Condensed, there wasn't much. Well, why should there have been? Kerouac and Cassady wouldn't have expected any. The literature of Australia, I realized, was being written all around me. The language was car accessories, a Mad Max cornucopia of fog lamps and stereos and roof racks and bonnet emblems from FJ Holdens. And tools! Who would have thought there were so many gadgets in the world? I felt like the teacher in *Children of a Lesser God*, isolated at a party of the deaf, all of whom communicate more swiftly in sign language than he can in speech.

Joan Didion in her essay 'Holy Water' quotes Bernard De Voto's definition of the American West as that point beyond which the annual rainfall drops below 20 inches. I'd define the real Australia - post-literate, plains-oriented, non-narrative - as the place where the books disappear and the roads begin. Mad Max's country. Thank God he's out there.

A Cock and Vicar Story by Lucy Sussex

Some years ago, when I was working as a cataloguer of rare books, I was intrigued by a seventeenth-century pamphlet with the title (as I recall): *The Tryal of Isaac Antrobus, Parson of Egremond, before Sir Harbottle Grimstone, Master of the Rolls, for baptizing a Cock by the name of Peter and committing Adultery with a Woman and her daughter.* One wonders what the gutter press of today would make of such an incident, and what the headlines would be. Suggestions for headlines, the racier the better, are welcomed from ASFR's devoted readers.

I KNOW WHO I AM. BUT WHAT'S MY BRAND NAME?

JANEEN WEBB

In adding the extra brand name 'Women's' to the works it publishes, the Women's Press science fiction series claims special status for its books - almost as a sub-set of the sf subculture. Each book is prefaced by a statement that 'Our aim is to publish science fiction by women about women; to present exciting and provocative feminist images of the future that will offer an alternative vision of science and technology, and challenge male domination of the science fiction tradition itself'. The publication of material that has not been 'approved' by male-dominated publishing houses is part of a concerted feminist challenge to patriarchal ideology in social, cultural, and political terms; the choice of sf underlines what Marilyn Hacker called 'the pertinence and necessity of speculative fiction to feminists'.

Why is sf valuable to the feminist movement? The question is probably best answered from a structuralist perspective. If Rosemary Jackson is correct in claiming that sf is primarily subversive, it is easy to argue that feminist sf deliberately uses the form to undermine the usual (read patriarchal) 'dominant philosophical and epistemological orders' of fiction. Jackson claims that the fantastic subverts the 'nominal unities of time, space and character, as well as questioning the possibility, or honesty, of fictional re-presentation of those unities' and that it 'moves towards a dismantling of the "real", most particularly of the concept of "character" and its ideological assumptions' (*Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, pp. 175-6). Such a method is obviously useful in feminist writing, wherein, by positing alternative 'realities', sf challenges existing cultural values, changing women from perceived to perceiver, passive to active, object to subject, and thereby attacking the negative myths that have been internalized as part of social conditioning.

There are many ways in which the feminist sf in this series sets out to subvert patriarchal assumptions in order to build a positive female self-image. They range from wish-fulfilling utopian futures that offer alternative universes where women are dominant, successful, and free (such as Herland, or Whiteaway in *The Female Man*); through worlds in which women simply operate as intelligent protagonists as a matter of course (such as the Hill women of *The Wanderground*); to earnest lectures on the problematic relationship between the sexes (such as occur in *The Travails of Jane Saint*; *Passing for Human*; and *I, Vampire*); and to

admonitory dystopian futures in which women's subjugation and debasement is acute (as in *Native Tongue* and *The Two of Them*).

Such fiction reinforces the feminist critical perspective that places the experience of women under patriarchy at the centre of the text. Discussion of this situation is facilitated by the conventions of sf, which invite investigation of behavioural and cultural conventions: when aliens drop in to visit, study, or just plain interfere, someone has to give etiquette lessons. Accordingly, it is worth looking at some examples of Women's Press sf texts coping with the situation of 'educating the alien' (and the reader) about western sex-role stereotypical behaviour.

In *The Female Man*, Joanna Russ compares Janet, a visitor from the feminist utopian planet *Whileaway*, with Jeannine, a traditionally downtrodden waiting-to-be-married Earth dweller. Janet is introduced to 'male superiority' at a party, and, being an alien who doesn't yet know the rules, she ignores the frantic warnings of the narrator Joanna, and defeats an archetypal M.C.P. on his own terms. At the beginning of this savagely funny scene, the narrator explains the usual rules: 'If you scream, people say you're melodramatic; if you submit, you're masochistic; if you call names, you're a bitch. Hit him and he'll kill you. The best thing is to suffer mutely and yearn for a rescuer, but suppose the rescuer doesn't come?' (p. 45). Janet decides to rescue herself. Things get very interesting when she 'dumps him' on the carpet: his rejoinder is a series of colourful insults, to which Janet responds with 'a come-on-get-your-guard contemptuous slap meant to outrage' (p. 46); then (to wild cheers from her female readers) she breaks his arm in the ensuing fight. The narrator again interpolates the more usual result: 'Girl backs down - cries - manhood vindicated'; 'Man's bad temper is the woman's fault. It is also the woman's responsibility to patch things up afterwards.' (p. 47)

I should note that the Joanna, Jeannine and Janet trichotomy represents the division of the female self in patriarchal society, united here by Jael (Alice Reasoner), who functions as an allegorical embodiment of female rage against the male aggressor. The biblical Jael (Judges 5) killed her lover by driving a tent peg into his brain; Russ's Jael is an emissary from *Womanland*, who treats with, judges, and then assassinates the archetypal 'boss' with her teeth and claws. This is not polite (read male-dominated) behaviour, but it is satisfying fiction.

In Jody Scott's *Passing for Human*, the reader is introduced to Benaroya, a just-graduated anthropologist from the aquatic planet *Rysemus*. The gushingly 'aware' Benaroya has dropped in to Earth to decide whether the cute little native bushmen should be exterminated

before 'The Mousehole' (a version of **Hitch-hiker's Guide** hyper-space bypass) is officially opened. She has a closet full of Earth bodies to choose from, but decides to make her debut manifestation in a Brenda Starr model, 'lush and supple, wearing a thin bikini since the day was a scorcher' (p. 6). Predictably, she learns about male behaviour patterns very quickly: 'Could it be possible? Her lawyer was judging her by this body. All he saw was a big-breasted, sapphire-eyed, sobbing redhead in a bikini! He expected her to apologize, blubber, lie, spread disease, and be cowed by his wisdom' (p. 39). Scott derives a lot of comedy from Benaroya's horror at the human condition, and her 'minor lapses' that offend the mortals (her Emma Peel body, for example, never remembers not to fart in public), but there is no doubt about the feminist perspective in the lessons learned by the alien protagonist. In the sequel, **I, Vampire**, the problems of the archetypal female are again picked up by Scott when Benaroya, now sticking with her Virginia Woolf body, has an affair with the long-suffering vampire, Sterling O'Blivion (whose vampirism dates from her reaching puberty!). There are some great one-liners here, like 'Saints protect me!...I, a good Catholic, have made love out of my species!' (p. 112), but the lessons are plain enough.

My last example of the 'educating the alien' mode of feminist sf comes from Josephine Saxton's delightfully loopy book, **Queen of the States**. Here the protagonist Magdalen - described in the blurb as 'a woman who is on her own planet, out to lunch and on her own trip' - is held captive on an alien spaceship where she is required to explain human mores to a group of aliens who provide her with 'real' fantasies. The plot is a cross between **Slaughterhouse Five** and **I Am The Cheese**, and we follow Magdalen in and out of various fantasies until she finally conjures her ideal encounter with 'a really loving, tender, intelligent, well-educated man who would treat her as an equal' (p. 127). This is all too much for even the aliens, who send her home!

The inverse of the 'educating the alien' scenario occurs when humans visit other worlds. In these cases, human (read male) values are juxtaposed with those of more enlightened societies, so that the human protagonist is educated by the alien culture. This is the traditional method of utopian fiction, and it is used to great effect in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist utopia, **Herland** (the oldest book in this series, first published in 1915). Gilman was a famous and outspoken champion of women's rights, and in **Herland** she demolishes institutions such as 'the sentimentalized home' which she regards as detrimental to the intellectual growth of women. The plot concerns three men who stray into an isolated all-female community, where their patriarchal assumptions are revealed as ridiculous. They begin their education

supposing that 'a superior society inevitably presupposes men' (see p. 14), and are led through a series of encounters with women who clearly demonstrate that this is not the case, until the travellers admit that they have become 'well used to seeing women not as females, but as people ... doing every kind of work' (p. 137). As Ann J. Lane points out in her preface, Gilman uses 'wide-eyed innocence and simple reason' to expose the hypocrisy of men who 'miss not sex so much as the sense of possession' (p. xv).

Joanna Russ offers different versions of the human protagonist functioning in an alien culture in two other books reprinted in this series - *The Two of Them*, and *The Adventures of Alyx*. In *The Two of Them*, Irene, a highly skilled and 'unattractive' (in male-dominance-speak) 'trans-temporal agent' visits a future dystopian society on Ka'Abah, where women are imprisoned in harem isolation and forbidden any function other than the decorative. By way of contrast with the women in purdah, Irene is described as 'an ugly woman ... Her breasts are not large and beautiful ... She has no jewels and her clothes are ugly ... No man is attracted to her' (p. 67). A clash of wills is inevitable when Irene seeks to rescue Zubeydah, a girl-poet being driven insane by her restrictive culture, but this time the reader is able to support 'current' values in the face of something infinitely worse. *The Adventures of Alyx* is a collection of short stories that follow the exploits of a strong female protagonist. The most interesting of these is 'Picnic on Paradise', in which the self-sufficient Alyx is trapped in a future world where women (indeed, people) are useless, and she must operate as best she can, giving the reader another role model of female competence.

Jane Palmer's *The Watcher* provides my last Women's Press sf example of a human confronting an alien civilization. In this case, an androgynous avian culture on the planet Ojal is first threatened and then rescued by an Earth girl whose pre-ordained role as planetary 'watcher' (an inter-planetary law enforcer with limitless power) is gradually revealed. This is adolescent rite-of-passage stuff, providing a bizarre solution to the problem of growing up, and doing little to advance the feminist cause.

Another method of exploring the cultural repression of women is the presentation of dystopian futures derived from our own civilization, such as the future-sexist society of Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue*. In this version of the USA circa 2205, patriarchal power has resumed absolute dominance after the Nobel-winning publication (in 1987) of a treatise in which two (male) researchers offered 'scientific proof of the inherent mental inferiority of women' (p. 73). Needless to say, men

acted swiftly to redress the 'cruel and dangerous burden' (p. 73) of female 'equality' by repealing all legal, economic and social rights for women, effectively legislating them into slavery under a system of institutionalized misogyny.

A more bizarre representation of a misogynist society occurs in Rhoda Lerman's *The Book of the Night* in which Celeste, a strange girl-child who has been disguised as a boy so that she can be raised in a monastery, reaches catastrophic puberty. In this densely allusive narrative, set on the myth-rich island of Iona, Celeste's movement towards sexual potential is extreme enough to unleash something like primal chaos: the old gods walk, and the girl is transformed into a white cow to seduce the sex-denying abbot into bestiality.

Discussion of the ways in which women are presented in feminist sf raises a problem that Jenny Wolmark noted in her *Foundation* (37, Autumn 1986) article on *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind*, when she pointed out that although feminist sf explores alternative non-patriarchal social and sexual relationships, the narrative conventions themselves still contain patriarchal cultural elements. This means that there is tension in the stories arising from the fact that a radical subversion of a particular stereotype may co-exist with other unquestioned assumptions about human (read patriarchal) behaviour and social organization. In some instances, this leads to an uneasy complicity as female heroes deal in patriarchal power and values: in *Passing for Human*, for example, Benaroya is both hero and bait, conducting her own experiments and yet being exploited by her male superiors who manoeuvre her into facing the incarnation of patriarchal evil, Scaulzo.

This structural impasse is nicely picked up by Josephine Saxton in *The Travails of Jane Saint*, which takes a self-consciously critical look at the feminist Quest to change social values. Saxton prefaces this collection of stories with a direct address to her readers in which she craves the indulgence of 'SF fans, who have, like rubber fetishists and gourmets, Special Tastes, and often cannot enjoy anything outside their label. [She puts in] a plea ... for a suspension of strictly labelled parameters', which may indicate some uncertainty about where such a work fits into the sf genre. The title story plays literary games with Jungian archetypes, mythic structures (viz. Eliade and Campbell), and heroic constructs (viz. Raglan). The hero, Jane, operates from a tank of decidedly amniotic fluid, where she is submerged and 'dreaming' whilst being re-programmed to eliminate her subversive feminist activities. Setting off into the Collective Unconscious, she wanders into Tarot country and decides on her own Quest to 'improve [her] position in

relation to reality' (p. 35). Upbraiding feminine complicity in believing in repressive archetypes, she asserts that 'the idea of male dominance was an archetype, one of those "relative truths", not an Absolute... Maybe if she met the right archetypes she could do something about overthrowing the oligarchy' (p. 28).

Since archetypal Quests require the presence of helpers to assist the protagonist who has made it past the threshold of adventure, Jane Saint meets a strange assortment of characters, ranging from Merleau Ponty (a phenomenologist dog), and Zilp (a newly hatched griffin), to Simone de Beauvoir and Saint Joan, who all help her in her confrontation with various male archetypes, such as the Nazi pilot Acrid von Sturmudrang. Jane's task is to find the universal Thought Library and there to install a capsule which will 'act upon the future but also retrogressively' (p. 60) so that women will always have been respected and powerful. Needless to say, after a series of hair-raising adventures Jane completes her quest, and, in symbolic liberation, she is re-born from her amniotic tank to the sound of loud cheering from the multitude assembled beneath her hospital window.

Saxton is clearly interested in the ways in which archetypal role models influence our lives, and the next story in the *Jane Saint* collection provides a different interpretation of this point of view. Titled 'Woe, Blight, and Heaven Laughs', it is a fiendish variation on the Snow White story in which the dying-of-leukaemia Lucille longs for a handsome doctor to rescue her. She is pursued by her evil, computer-mirror-watching stepmother, who poisons her with an apple (rendered lethal by ecological interference); her doctor arrives not as saviour, but as a rapist who uses heroin, hallucinogen, digitalis and concentrated enzymes to whisk her off to happily-ever-after-land. The thing that intrigues me is that this Women's Press version is a cut-down variation on what I take to be the 'original' piece of metafiction which, subtitled 'A Grim Household Tale', included a dual narrative of Lucille and the Writer, in which the two worlds were linked in a quasi-mythic framework. I am indebted to Lucy Sussex for a copy of this version, which was published in *Pulsar 1* (ed. George Hay, Penguin, 1978), and I am puzzled by the changes: the longer version was far more interesting as a challenge to codified fictional forms.

In *The Wanderground*, Sally Gearhart Miller has tried a different method of approaching literary form. This book is a loosely connected series of reminiscences that tell the story of the women who have escaped from the repression of the cities to become telepathic, totally-in-tune-with-nature Hill Women. The series of anecdotes does not make exactly gripping reading, but the text is a worthwhile experiment in structure.

One corollary of the complicity of feminist writers in using patriarchal fictional models is that female protagonists are often shown using stereotypical sex roles as a form of subversion to undermine male-dominated society from within. In *Native Tongue*, the women's language La'Adan is taught in secret so that it becomes a cold-war weapon: the women are transformed by the experience so that they become infuriatingly courteous, reasonable and pleasant. The men decide that 'Women are extinct' (p. 288), and beyond masculine reason, because 'can one accuse a woman, name her guilty, for ceasing to do every last thing he has demanded that she not do, all his life long?' (p. 289). A similar situation is developed in Saxton's 'Gordon's Women' (in the *Jane Saint* collection), where the women have completely outwitted their 'rulers' by supplying the men with controllable androids and the erroneous belief that males control the world. The Gordon of the title is brought to a suitably rude awakening when he oversteps the bounds of the authority allowed by the women.

Is this kind of subversion enough? The fiction in this *Women's Press sf* series offers a number of solutions to the question of female survival under patriarchy. Some texts offer radical feminist utopias in which the men have been wiped out - by war and earthquake in *Herland*; by a very convenient 'plague' (probably biological weaponry) on *Whiteaway* in *The Female Man*. In the latter, the war between the sexes is still literal and bloody in the hostilities between *Womanland* and *Manland*. Joanna Russ also offers a Platonic solution: 'there is only one way to possess that in which we are defective, therefore that which we need, therefore that which we want...Become it.' (p. 139). She explains 'the female man', saying: 'For years I have been saying *Let me in, Love me, Approve me, Define me, Regulate me, Validate me, Support me*. Now I say *move over*. If we are all Mankind, it follows to my interested and righteous and rightnow very bright and beady little eyes that I too am a Man and not at all a Woman...I think I am a Man; I think you had better call me a Man; I think you will write about me as a Man from now on and speak of me as a Man and employ me as a Man and recognize child-rearing as a Man's business... until it enters your muddled, terrified, preposterous, nine-tenths-fake, loveless, papier-mache-bull-moose head that I am a Man... Listen to the Female Man' (p.140). Russ immediately undercuts this logic with a patriarchal comment: 'We would gladly have listened to her (they said) if only she had spoken like a lady.'

When direct opposition fails, many protagonists in feminist sf head for the hills. This is literal in *The Wanderground* where the escapees from male dominance establish new communities (not unlike those in Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* and *Motherlines*). In *Native*

Tongue, the women achieve a semi-separatism in that they are relegated to the Barren Houses - but these new Women's Houses are latter-day harems, and it is clear that the women are still required to serve their patriarchal 'masters'. In Russ's variation on the harem-culture, Zubeydeh is rescued by Irene, so **The Two of Them** ends with at least one escape from bondage. Josephine Saxton's **Queen of the States** ends with Magdalen calling a taxi in which to make a civilized escape from her previous domestic arrangements.

Re-education of the species is the other option favoured by feminist writers in this series. In **Passing for Human and I, Vampire**, Jody Scott suggests radical re-education of the 'cute little earthies' rather than immediate extermination, but with the warning that if humans do not learn quickly the life-expectancy of the species is likely to be limited. Gabrielle, hero of Jane Palmer's **The Watcher**, becomes a sort of intergalactic police officer whose role it will be to oversee changes in basic attitudes. Jane Saint's **Quest in Travails** offers a clever educational solution in re-education through adjustment of the Central Thought computer, so that the liberating changes are retrospective. Then again, Rhoda Lerman's **Celeste** thumbs her bovine nose at all of us, ending **The Book of the Night** with 'To whom it may concern: / Hey, diddle diddle.'

There is no simple way to characterize the texts printed to date in this Women's Press sf series. The books reveal a wide range of talents and approaches to the genre, united only by their variations of the elusive 'feminist perspective'. One can only applaud the existence of this new direction in Women's publishing and look forward to future offerings.

Books from the **Women's Press sf** series reviewed in this article:

Suzette Haden Elgin: **Native Tongue**

Sally Miller Gearhart: **The Wanderground**

Charlotte Perkins Gilman: **Herland**

Rhoda Lerman: **The Book of the Night**

Jane Palmer: **The Watcher**

Joanna Russ: **The Female Man, The Two of Them, The Adventures of Alyx**

Josephine Saxton: **Queen of the States, The Travails of Jane Saint**

Jody Scott: **Passing for Human I, Vampire**

RAY BRADBURY'S IQ

LUCY SUSSEX

In the **Age of Saturday** 7 March 1987 appeared an item of sf interest, a rare occurrence in this publication, Damien Broderick's book reviews excepted. Reporting on the Terman experiment, a classic longitudinal study of the gifted child, begun in 1921, Steven Schwartz stated that one of these children grew up to be 'a leading science fiction writer who has produced dozens of stories and many volumes of fiction' (p. 7).

The identities of the Terman subjects are confidential, but surely it would not be too difficult to pinpoint a 'leading' sf writer who attended school in California during the 'twenties (Terman's subjects were all schoolchildren in the state)? At first the obvious suspect was Ray Bradbury, born 1920, and proudly Californian. He has produced 'many volumes of fiction' in the form of not novels, but screenplays, etc. Unfortunately, examination of Bradbury's biography revealed that he was born in Illinois, only arriving in California in 1934, by which time Terman's selection process was completed.

The Terman sample had a mean IQ score of '150 or above', and were 'between the ages of eight and 12, but a few were younger and several were teenagers'. Investigation of the voluminous Terman literature revealed that the selection process took place between 1922 and 1928, which widens the possible birthdates somewhat. Anthony Boucher (b. 1911) could be a contender, as could Henry Kuttner and Leigh Brackett (both b. 1915). All of these were born in California and have been fairly prolific. C. L. Moore was born in 1911, in Indiana; however, she was educated at the University of Southern California, and may have had earlier schooling there. **Twentieth-Century Science Fiction Writers** does not mention when she moved to the state. Jack Vance was born in 1920, in California, and has a vast bibliography: could he be the mysterious Terman subject?

ASFR welcomes any suggestions on the subject, with the added fillip of prizes for the most convincing case (c'mon, Mr Dowling, we know you think Jack Vance is a genius, now is the chance to prove it). The winner has the choice of a free subscription, or a cat courtesy of the Wolseley Parade Kitten Placement Agency.

REVIEWS

L. Ron Hubbard, *THE INVADERS PLAN*, New Era, 1985, [xvi +] 559 pp., \$A26.95; *BLACK GENESIS: FORTRESS OF EVIL*, New Era, 1986, [x +] 431 pp., \$A26.95. Volumes I and II of 'Mission Earth: the biggest science fiction dekalogy ever written'.

reviewed by Michael J. Tolley

Hissing with Mother

The late L. Ron Hubbard's 'Mission Earth' is a big bad wolf of an idea. It is strictly for the Young Adults group of readers, those who are being weaned off cartoon films. You can get the flavour from the following account of sexual congress between the narrator and a salacious widow called Pratia Tayl, who tells him (while they are bleeping: the story comes translated by a Grundyesque robot) what a wonderful time she had with the hero:

Her slipped foot was hooked behind my boot as I tried to back up.

The jar of my hitting the rug made a grinning cupid rock upon its pedestal. Pratia was saying, 'I just can't thank you enough for bringing him here.'

My hat flew out of the open window as she crooned, 'We had the most wonderful day yesterday.'

I got a glimpse of a manservant sweeping in the hall, a smirk on his face as Pratia prattled. 'And Prahd and I had the most wonderful night.'

My hand was clutching the edge of the rug ineffectually as she said, 'In fact, we had the most wonderful ... wonderful ...'

The cupid was really rocking! Pratia, in a strained voice was saying, '... wonderful ... wonderful ... wonderful ...'

The curtains all fell off the rod as she said, 'Ooooooooooooooh!' with a shuddering moan.

The grinning cupid had settled back, steady once more. In a normal voice, Pratia said, 'He is really quite nice. You should see what he has.'

My tunic was crumpled up on the floor, just out of reach. I was trying to pull it to me. In a more strained voice, she said, 'He was so starved.' My hand had to abandon the tunic.

The cupid was rocking again. Pratia said, 'So starved ... so starved ... so starved ... Oh. Oh. Oh!'

My hand almost broke its fingers on the edge of the rug. 'There!' shuddered Pratia.

The cupid fell over with a crash against the floor.

The servant's broom threw up a cloud of dust.

My hand finally reached my tunic as she said, in a more relaxed voice, 'I just wanted you to know how great he is in bed.'

I was pulling on a boot. 'Well, thank you for telling me,' I said. There is nothing quite so discouraging as going through this sort of thing with a woman telling you how great another man is. Wearing.

(And it, whatever it was, hasn't ended yet. You can see how a book might run to length when filled with so much action.)

The story is told by the villain, whose name is Soltan Gris: he is not to be confused with Harry Harrison's Jim diGriz. Hubbard's stumblebum rat is not so much a villain as a stooge for the hero, Jettero Heller (who is cute enough to get away with wearing pink tights if he wanted). Heller is surely the most nauseating superhero in the whole of space opera. Everyone loves him, including the repulsive members of the Apparatus, for which greasy Gris works, who are supposed, sullenly, to help get Heller off the Planet Voltar so that he can operate as an agent on Planet Earth, where his mission (run by Gris) is supposedly to stop Earth people from blowing themselves up before they are due to be invaded by the Voltar Confederacy.

In *The Invaders Plan*, Gris is in a hurry to get off Voltar because he is terrified of his boss, Lombar Hisst, but everyone conspires instead to further Heller's love-affair with the hitherto untouchable heroine, Countess Krak. Once he gets to Earth, Gris can get on with his own mission, which is to make sure that Heller's mission fails. Gris is no match for the rich, lovable, suave, brilliant, fast-moving, speed-loving, cool, upright, daredevil and, above all, cute Heller. Gris is a patsy. Because the heroine has hypnotized him in the first part of the book, his general ineptitude is compounded by the fact that whenever he tries to be evil he feels sick and his stomach hurts. So when he needs inspiration, where does he turn? He turns to Bugs Bunny, as in Part 6, Chapter 7:

The escape plan the contractors were doing reminded me of dear Bugs Bunny. I wondered what he would do in circumstances similar to mine. I couldn't remember any comparable strip ...

Gris would like to be Bugs Bunny but unfortunately he is destined always to be Elmer Fudd. The identification with Fudd is made unmistakable by Soltan's favourite hobby, which is shooting singing birds. Gris has, however, another hero, Sigmund Freud. He believes that his knowledge of Freud's work gives him an insight into character; whether Freud would tell him that secretly he has a jealous love of the true Bugs-Bunny figure, Jet Heller, is not yet clear, although there is little enough in the characterization of Gris as we have it is so far to suggest any such subtlety. Hubbard may have thought that a judicious invocation of Freud from time to time might suggest that this dreck is worth the attention of college students.

A curious feature of the 'dekalogy', apart from its embarrassing grandiosity of ostensible scope, which bears no relation to the triviality of its action, is Hubbard's provision of an introduction on 'Science Fiction and Satire', which purports to place the work in a long tradition of, not merely satire, but *satura*, because *satura* not only suggests a medley of fresh fruits, 'hearty, healthy, satisfying and fun', it also sounds learned (like mixing Bugs with Freud). In his introduction, Hubbard tries to have it both ways, distinguishing 'Mission Earth' from formal verse satire of the Horatian or Juvenalian type (which is implicitly heavy and hard going) and associating it with Menippean satire, which 'was truly a *satura*'. This leaves him free to associate his dekalogy with the writers he thinks that (young) sf readers will admire, for instance, Voltaire, Swift, Poe and the Orwell of *Animal Farm*. Charlie Chaplin is invoked as a fine comedian (that he was a satirist is not Hubbard's point, because he is using him to drag the scent of farce across the trail) but we are told that satire can be not only funny but critical:

Sometimes, like [he means 'as'] a bitter pill is coated with sugar, the barb is lightened with humor. But even then, the laugh that satire produces is more often a foil aimed at the heart of human folly.

What Hubbard is telling us here is that he is going to be funny but is also going to be respectably critical - and sharp with it. He goes on to point out that

Satire and its related cousins such as wit and the pun require a discernment [but wit and the pun are not cousins of satire, though they may be the tools of satire]. One must first be able to recognize what the joke is about.

Hubbard is not writing for those who will not recognize themselves as his targets. Dangerously, he observes that he is writing 'for others so that, like [he means 'like the boy in'] the fable, they can see that the emperor has no clothes.'

My satirical point would be that this Mother's cupboard is bare, if that were not too kind a remark. Actually it stinks offal. (Pardon my pun.) The genre in which he is working is better described as burlesque than as satire but unfortunately there is a crude irresponsible bigot leering behind the clown mask.

In Volume I, there isn't much of a satirical target, because Voltar, unlike Le Guin's Urras in *The Dispossessed*, say, is not sufficiently like the world we know to serve as a mirror to it. Although Hubbard soundly observes that 'with satire one deliberately strays from the world of pure fact', he brings upon himself more justly than Jonson did the charge that he has invented his own targets: he has witlessly strayed too far into the world of pure fantasy. (You may believe that I consider Hubbard to have been a Witwoud rather than a Truewit.) There is a difference between cartoon and caricature: the one may be funny but the other is always satirical. In his admiration for satire, Hubbard is thus not unlike his own role model for Gris; he keeps shooting down his own craft in flames. He admires Bugs Bunny, which is to say, funny satire that bugs people; he is himself merely fuddy.

When, in Volume II, we get to Earth with Jet and Gris, there are plenty of targets, all obviously labelled but so crudely that they are embarrassingly offensive rather than credibly critical. The button on Hubbard's foil, dripping with crap, swerves from its target and he jabs or rather shits himself in the foot.

In spite of his habitual sloppiness (he scorns Heller's amateur approach to espionage but is himself unalert to the planted bug or the suspicious-looking follower), Gris has succeeded in using the time allowed by the delayed departure from Voltar to arrange for Heller to be implanted with sensors which will show him whatever Heller sees and hears while he is in the USA and Gris is in Turkey. Heller prudently arranges for encoded 'fail-safe' letters to be sent back to Voltar which establish that he is still alive and Gris cannot falsify them because the code works according to a superimposed 'platen' hidden in Heller's room. Thus, as readers, we get everything Heller does (except for his bisexual couplings, which are blocked by euphemistic interference), filtered through Gris's reactions. This adds to the fun and situational irony, as Gris is torn between wanting to see Heller killed and wanting to keep him alive for the sake of his own skin, but robs Heller's actions of all seriousness. The question is not: will Heller save the world? but:

how will Heller increase Gris's embarrassment? Those of us who get a perverse enjoyment from Heller's own difficulties have our money on his idealistic, crusading, and naive college tutor, Miss Simmons, but we have no hope that she will long resist the charm of a man who can singlehandedly rescue her from gang-rape even though he is so unethical as to kill all her assailants in the process.

The fact that Miss Simmons's idealistic regard for life-enhancing values is presented as part of her confused fashionable and stupid knee-jerk liberal politics (in Part XIX, Chapter 5 she delivers a shrill tirade against the United Nations as part of her Nature Appreciation class which simultaneously expresses what I take to be Hubbard's anti-Russian phobia and brands her as a rabid greenie) encourages the adolescent reader to proceed undismayed by Heller's ramboid outbreaks of murder. We are in a world close to Mickey Spillane's, in which the baddies have forfeited a right to live, though there is a difference: Heller kills baddies not because they are bad but because they are on the wrong side. He is indifferent to the lives of those who do not impinge on him, as is most notably demonstrated by the lesson he takes in driving around New York (Part XVI, Chapter 4) with a cabby called (appropriately, as always) Mortie Massacurovitch:

It was horrifying!

They dashed between two cars to make the cars split each way! They squealed brakes to startle people 'because honking was frowned upon.' They swerved to make a car dodge away from its intended parking space and then stole it. They dove in ahead of another hailed cab and when the passenger tried to get in, told him the cab was engaged. They bashed backwards to widen a space to park. They bashed forward to get a place to park. They did a skid 'to alarm a motorist, who then stamps on his brakes and you grab his place in line.' They followed an ambulance to get somewhere quick. They followed a fire engine to really run the meter up fast, 'but setting a fire ahead to get the engines to run is frowned on.'

Heller then got under the wheel. He did all those things Mortie had done, with a few embellishments.

With bent fenders, raw voices and screams of anguish and terror strewn behind them, Mortie now guided Heller to a cabby bar on Eighth Avenue. It was a time of traffic lull and one had better have a sandwich.

This is only the beginning. It is not long before they are engaged in a real car chase with guns blazing at them and in real killing, which is

all right, because the victim, even with the top of his head half off, 'was obviously a Sicilian'.

Here are some samples of the crude abuse which Hubbard thinks is satire.

Psychiatrists (Part XII, Introduction): on Earth 'Anyone who poses a threat is diagnosed by a psychiatrist, which is a profession funded by Earth governments to keep the riffraff in line.' (Gris's heroes are psychiatrists and psychologists.)

Communist Russia (Part XII, Chapter 5): 'They don't let anybody in, they don't let anybody out. They are a bunch of mad nuts. They're run exclusively by a secret police organization called the KGB!'

Turkey (Part XII, Chapter 6): 'Here, I [Gris] was their kind of hero.'

Passports (Part XII, Chapter 7): 'It seemed that during World War I, the rest of the world had begun to adopt a Russian idea called "passports"; it had failed utterly to save the Russian government from revolution and was silly, so, of course, the other governments were avidly taking it up.'

The FBI (Part XV, Chapter 4), by one of themselves:

'Hoover had the greatest imagination in history. He used to dream up,' said Maulin proudly, 'the God (bleepest) dossiers for people. Total inventions! Right off the top of his head. Pure genius! And then he could go out and shoot them down! In a blaze of glorious gunfire! A master craftsman! He taught us how and we are left with the heavy responsibility of carrying on this magnificent tradition.'

Heller waved his hand to include all the most advertised criminals in history. 'He got all these the same way?'

'Every one,' said Maulin proudly. 'And he included the general public, too, so don't think this is complete.'

'Hey,' said Heller. 'There's a really vicious one!' He was pointing.

Maulin blew up. 'God (bleep) it, kid, that's HOOVER!'

I'll spare you the equally subsophomoric satire on the IRS and on educational standards and college text-books.

Hubbard is not alone among sf writers in using the cartoon film as a referent. Philip K. Dick refers to Herbie the Hyena in a story he wrote in 1979 for *Rolling Stone College Papers* called 'The Exit Door Leads In', which is included in *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon* (Doubleday, 1985; Gollancz, 1986). Herbie keeps trying to assassinate the Russian monk Rasputin. Dick (who perhaps recalled the Road Runner rather than Bugs

Bunny), describes an episode in which, in his usual fashion, Herbie the Hyena poisoned his victim, shot him, blew him up six times, stabbed him, tied him up with chains and sank him in the Volga, tore him apart with wild horses, and finally shot him to the moon strapped to a rocket. But Herbie 'was doomed as always to f--k up'.

Dick was a real satirist, and I shouldn't mention him in the same breath with Hubbard, if it weren't that I like applying that last phrase to Gris. Dick cared about the world; he even cared about cats (see 'The Alien Mind' in *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon*) but Hubbard lacked that *saeva indignatio* which Swift expected to leave behind him when he died.

All the same, Hubbard's choice of the cartoon rather than the caricature proper as his analogue in 'Mission Earth' might be better considered than I have wanted to admit. In the real world of spies and American politicians (if it is a real world), after all, people behave as if they were inside a cartoon. Reviewing four books about 'real' spies in the TLS recently (issue of 30 January 1987), Julian Symons observed that the patriotism of E. Howard Hunt, who was the CIA's contact with the exiled Cubans during the Bay of Pigs operation, 'belongs to the fantasy world of the action comic'. After the Bay of Pigs disaster, the CIA considered carrying on the fight by other means, including the idea of dusting Castro's shoes with thallium salts to cause his beard to fall out, thus destroying his charisma. Why his shoes, I wonder?* The CIA, MIS and MI6 have something else in common with Herbie the Hyena and Soltan Gris: they are over-ingenious and they always f--k up.

Did I enjoy the books? Ha! ha! Didn't you find that first extract funny? We all like cartoons, especially Bugs Bunny. On the other hand, do I recommend you to read the books? At those prices, you must be joking.

* A note from YR: The story I heard was that shoes were chosen because Castro had been booked into the kind of hotel where one leaves one's shoes outside one's door overnight and finds them beautifully cleaned for one next morning. Little did the agents lurking outside Castro's room realize that his revolutionary principles did not include getting one's menial tasks done by others. Castro cleaned his shoes himself as a matter of course and they therefore remained inside his room; so the foiled CIA agents had to slink away again, clutching their thallium salts, tugging at their moustaches, and no doubt muttering frightful American imprecations.

LETTERS

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Thanks to whomever sent me ASFR no. 7, March '87. Haven't seen one of these for a long time, and enjoyed it, though I bet you had a terrible time correcting Samuel Delany's notoriously terrible spelling.

I write primarily to express my regret at my old pal John Foyster, one year below me at one time at a Victorian school that shall not be named, moving to Adelaide just when I am returning to Australia.

As you may or may not know I left Australia in 1968 on a Harkness fellowship (during which I worked in Hollywood on fairly OK sf movie *The Andromeda Strain* in menial capacity), and somehow never came back again except for brief visits. I was at the Worldcon there in what must have been 1975, wasn't it?

Anyway, after 20 years away I've suddenly got homesick, and am coming back to live in Melbourne with my incredibly young wife Clare and our son Jack, 1 1/2 years old. We'll arrive in August 1988.

The sf community in London is getting older and more crochety. We've all known one another for more years than I care to count, and at any given party one is pretty sure to meet Christopher Priest, Malcolm Edwards, John Brosnan, Rob Holdstock, Gary Kilworth and so on ad infinitum, with more occasional sightings of the great gods Moorcock, Ballard and Aldiss. I need a change of scenery. It now seems less and less likely that I will ever be able to edit a revised edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. The economics of publishing would put a one-million-word book at too high a price for it ever to find a popular market. One of the reasons I've hung on so long over here is the hope that my co-editor John Clute and I could put a few mistakes in that book right.

In fact I feel a bit less enthusiastic than I used to about science fiction generally. It seems to be going through a flat phase, though I continue to admire Gene Wolfe enormously, and also John Crowley, whose new book *Aegypt* I have just finished. It's extraordinary. It is not, however, science fiction.

I look forward to meeting those of you I've met before, and making the acquaintance of the rest of you.

ASFR cordially invites you to its next party; we'll even make sure John Foyster makes the trek from Adelaide. (A note for overseas readers: despite Peter's denial, Adelaide is actually part of Australia, though only just.) Yvonne has dug up from her archives the following little snippet from twenty-four years ago, when Peter Nicholls reviewed **Melbourne University Magazine**, Winter 1963:

To finish up, I thought that Yvonne Rousseau's article on a museum of nonsense, while adolescent and rather clever-clever, was redeemed by quite a bit of genuine wit and intelligence, and it is here if anywhere amongst the younger contributors to this year's M.U.M. that I find the seeds of an adult writer.

Great oaks from little acorns grow, mate. (JB) (JB is now Jenny Blackford. I have reclaimed my own initials, now that John Bangsund will no longer need them. The confusing JBI. is no more.)

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Thanks much for the three issues of ASFR you've sent [...], it is an excellent publication and I regret that I somehow never got around to responding to the one copy I received of the previous incarnation. And, I wasn't really able to add much to your recent issue [March 1987] which was mostly devoted to Delany, since I don't find recent Delany readable. But the magazine reminds me of **Foundation** (which is a high compliment, whereas if I had compared you to **Science Fiction Studies**, it would not be) both for its hard-hitting literacy and for some of its more conventional stances. It seems to be required in magazines like this that Thou Shalt Revile Anything That Is Both American And Popular. So, Russell Blackford's desperate attempt to find an excuse for liking **Footfall** (in the January 1987 issue) is both predictable and (mildly) amusing. Andrew Whitmore's remarks about Compton and Heinlein are also pretty predictable, though the one sign of provincialism I see here is that he seems to think that Americans don't know how bad recent Heinlein has been. He'll be comforted to know that we have a cruel joke: **Robert Heinlein used to write juveniles. Now he writes seniles.** The general consensus has been that while **Friday** and **Job** showed considerable recovery, with the latter half of **The Cat Who Walks Through Walls** Heinlein has lapsed back into the senile mode (or perhaps less

libellously, the self-indulgent blather mode) of *I Will Fear No Evil* and *The Number of the Beast*.

Whitmore also claims to detect fascism in Gene Wolfe. Tsk, tsk, such clichéd thinking. I think that for many critics 'fascism' means 'any sort of smugness or over-confidence that I don't like' rather than 'in agreement with the economic and political policies of Mussolini or Franco'. I have never detected fascism in the works of Gene Wolfe or - and this may surprise some foreign critics - those of Heinlein, Jerry Pournelle, Larry Niven, or even John W. Campbell. Campbell was reportedly, as de Camp puts it, 'a bit of an old-fashioned imperialist', who in off moments suggested the USA should conquer all of Central and South America (for the good of the natives presumably) but neither he, nor Heinlein, nor Pournelle, Niven etc., let alone Gene Wolfe, seem to be (or to have been, in JWC's case) advocates of big government, a basic requisite for fascism. Wolfe's politics are not clear. The others are apparently libertarians of various degrees - opposed to any strong central government - and about as far removed from the totalitarian camp as it is possible to be.

Whitmore's review of *A Usual Lunacy* provokes a (really unfair) response of 'so that's why Compton doesn't publish anymore'. After all, anti-intellectual books about dull people are not conspicuously commercial. Whitmore has almost gerberized Compton (from American fanspeak: to gerberize - 'to inadvertently blacken the reputation of someone you are trying to defend'), citing as virtues what most people would regard as flaws, and saying little about the author's real virtues. But, seriously, it's a sad thing and a thing worth examining when a good writer is suddenly unable to publish anymore. I can almost see why Compton can't publish in the USA - although if I were him I'd submit my next novel, or best unsold novel, to David Hartwell at Arbor House - but I really wonder why he can't publish in Britain. Is he even trying? If his work is anywhere near his old standards, I am amazed that he can't sell to the more literary-minded British publishers, or at least to Kerosina Press.

Re *Trillion Year Spree* [reviewed by John Foyster in ASFR 6, January 1987], you can read a lengthy discussion of it in my column in the American prozine *Aboriginal SF* ('Oh, the one from Australia?' people ask. No, it's just a very bizarre name for a magazine), but let me hasten to point out that the book contains a major piece of disinformation. Aldiss swallows hook, line and sinker the claim by Sam Lundwall that sf magazines existed in Europe prior to *Amazing* in the USA. All this stems from an article by Lundwall in *Foundation* 34 [Autumn 1985] which may be charitably labelled nationalistic wishful thinking, less charitably a

deliberate hoax. Sam Moskowitz destroys the whole thing (and Lundwall's credibility, permanently, I think) in issue 36 [Summer 1986]. The Swedish magazine, *Hugin*, turns out to have been a science magazine. There is no evidence of fiction in it at all. The German-Austrian one, *Der Orchideengarten* (of which Sam Moskowitz owns a complete run), was a fantasy magazine rather like *Weird Tales*. It had one sf issue, but then it had two detective-fiction issues, so it's more a detective magazine than a science-fiction one. So the answer to the seemingly inexplicable question (by John Foyster on page 34 [of ASFR 6]) of why these European sf magazines did not prevail and influence subsequent sf becomes clear - they weren't sf magazines. So the primacy goes back to Gernsback. Whether this was a good thing is another argument. And this aerogramme forces me to be brief ...

Gee, if that was brief... (JB)

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26 April 1987

Thanks for ASFR [November 1986 and January 1987]. Excellent reviews, particularly of *Trillion Year Spree* and *Always Coming Home*. The review of the latter is the first I've read that really gave me a good idea of what the book is about and why (I haven't read the novel yet). [John Foyster's] review of *Spree* is so detailed I can't think of anything to add, but I think any author should be pleased to be reviewed with such care, even if many of your remarks are negative. ASFR's excellence lies in the fact that its critics take the time to explain at least some of their opinions. At least then you can understand why you disagree.

For instance, Andrew Whitmore's claims for D.G. Compton seem exaggerated and confused. He says that no other sf writer has produced an even remotely comparable body of work, and then dismisses Edgar Pangborn and Dick because they are dead. I did not realize that writers' works and reputations vanished into thin air once they died. I don't think Whitmore can even claim that he is talking about 'current science fiction' either, not when he's reviewing a book from 1978 - and new books by Dick are still being released. His comments about Le Guin and Wolfe don't seem accurate at all (although I admit I'm not very enthusiastic

about the **Book of the New Sun** series). I wonder how many books Disch has to write to be included in this 'comparable body' group; ten? twenty? He doesn't mention Delany, Ballard or Russ at all. My own favourite sf writer at the moment is John Crowley: **Little, Big** is not exactly sf (though part is set in the future), but it is one of the most wonderful books of the past decade. So is Crowley's **Engine Summer**: I've reread both twice. 'Wonderful' is precisely the quality that Compton is missing, and although the novels I've read by him are very worthy, I don't have any urge to reread them. Maybe Whitmore's comparison with Faulkner is apt, except I'd rather read Faulkner for that particular kind of human compassion - the problem is that if an author's work does too closely resemble the mainstream, I'd rather read the originals, Victorian or otherwise. No one else resembles Cordwainer Smith, and I'm sure that he doesn't have that 'comparable body of work' Whitmore mentions, but it doesn't matter. Some critics (and I don't think Whitmore is among them) confuse resemblance to mainstream fiction with excellence in sf, but it's not. As Delany and [John Foyster] suggested in **SF Commentary** many years ago, writing science fiction well may be a lot more difficult than writing other types of fiction.

Lucy Sussex's article 'The Examination of a Fix-Up' is excellent, although I wonder how much of a book's faults one should forgive because it is a fix-up? (She suggests at the end of her article that one should not 'dismiss **Voyage of the Space Beagle** as episodic' because this is a general problem with fix-ups.) If the reader still has to struggle with these problems, perhaps the novel has not, er, been totally 'fixed'. I hope too that she might examine some more recent novel fix-ups in this manner, perhaps Roberts's **Pavane**, although I realize that simpler books may be easier to explicate and thus are better examples of the problems with a 'fix-up'. I suppose that must be the reason that Andy Sawyer chose **The Space Beagle** to write a very similar article about in **Vector** 137 (April-May). I find the coincidence amazing.

Lucy expresses a degree of distaste ('total') for **Pavane**, and Roberts in general, that prevents her from writing anything about it. She would at the very least have to be in the same room as the book. She also casts doubts on the degree of synchronicity involved in the two **Beagle** articles, since hers was first published in 1983. Ah well, grape vines think alike. (JB)

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My first thought on seeing the letter column of ASFR 8 is that you must be pretty hard-up for material if you have to print my postcard. I mean, good God ... So here's a more worthwhile contribution, concerning Lucy Sussex's bit about John Norman - specifically, the SF Chronicle report that Michael Moorcock was trying to convince W.H. Smith to cease stocking Norman's books. I don't read SFC, but it would appear from the quoted report that their summary of Moorcock's action was incomplete, and that as a result the reactions of both Salmonson and Sussex fail to address the central point. This is simply, not that Moorcock - a civil libertarian - is attempting to ban the display and sale of soft porn and John Norman *per se*, but attempting to persuade W.H. Smith to follow a consistent application of their own rules on the display and sale of soft porn. That is, if they won't distribute **Spanking Times** and **Bondage Weekly**, why should they continue to distribute a series of books which pose as science fiction but advocate the same as the two (hypothetical) magazines? Echo replies: but isn't this a bit too jesuitical, and isn't Moorcock just using W.H. Smith's rules as an excuse to enforce a more anti-libertarian ban on John Norman? Well, yes, probably; but that doesn't alter the fact that the SFC summary is incomplete and both Salmonson's and Sussex's reactions miss the central thrust of Moorcock's argument.

But I switch now to Jenny Blackford's letter to me [...]: she refers to visiting England for the Worldcon. It's true that Brighton is in England; but England is also part of Britain, which includes Scotland and Wales; and Britain is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Great Britain differing from plain ordinary Britain in that it includes the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands as well as England, Scotland and Wales). Sound confusing? Well, yes, probably; but - this is the key point - if you trip blithely around the country referring to it only as 'England' you'll make a lot of people very annoyed (like calling Texans 'New Yorkers', or similar). The best way of avoiding such gaffes, therefore, is to say 'Britain' and 'British', or even 'UK'. So for happy, carefree tourist moments on your visit to this historic moth-eaten relic, start practising these terms now.

Next letter: Buying Your Round In A Pub. Or do you know that one already? Let us skip, then, straight to lesson three: Mugging Yuppie Stockbrokers.

For more of the Moorcock-Gor war, see the letter-column in ASFR 9. But on the REALLY serious topic of your letter, actually, Joseph, even all the way down here in the Antipodes, opposite your feet though we are, we are still taught (in a rudimentary and primitive fashion, no doubt) a little geography. Armed with the memory of geography lessons of long ago, I referred to our possible, and anticipated with pleasure, meeting in London or Brighton as being 'in England'. I will admit, however, that there is a dangerous tendency for Aussies to refer to any of the peoples of the ridiculously tiny entity known correctly as Britain, as 'English'. My friend Scott Craigie (guess the ethnicity?) tricked me into calling him English by having a distinctly London accent, then bit my legs off for this ghastly accusation. I'll never do it again, I promise. Oh, and he's taught me to Buy a Round in a Pub, too. I'm quite good at it. (JB)

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[...] Of the many good things I've read in the six issues I have (and thank you for finding copies of the first two for me), I was most taken with John Foyster's instalments of 'The Long View', and the review of Brian Aldiss's *Trillion Year Spree* (and not only because I was described therein as 'eminently sensible', the most flattering compliment that I've received in many a year).

I have and have read *Billion Year Spree*, which brought forth a variety of reactions from me, from gnashing my teeth to crying out 'Hear! Hear!' Excellent; that is the kind of book I like to read and re-read; how dull it would be to read a book wherein I agreed with everything the writer said! I might as well just talk to myself and save the money. But your reviewer convinced me that I'm likely to find more occasions for tooth-gnashing and applause, so I'm going to buy a copy. Thanks again.

