

is really a prerequisite for any sort of survival, but it is a double-edged sword. There is always a certain danger in indiscriminate erudition.

I got to thinking about the classical languages, Greek and Latin. We tend to think of these as languages of scholarship. Some Oxford classes are taught in the Latin language even if the subject has nothing to do with Latin. Latin and Greek seem to be held in awe by scholars as if they were languages of real power and subtlety. But somehow when you actually see what the words mean, they are really fairly crude descriptions. Astronomy means literally "star names." That is really a very crude name for the study. We call a car a car. We don't call it a motor-coach. There is some abstraction in calling something a "car." "Dinosaur" means "terrible lizard." That is not a terribly abstract name. It is kind of like calling an airplane "big silver bird."

On top of which, if you take a word to its Greek and Latin roots, you generally find it a misnomer. Dinosaurs were not lizards and most were not terrible. Astronomy is about a lot more than star names. Take the word "orthodontia." It means "shape of teeth." But only very rarely will an orthodontist change the shape of a tooth. He will change the position, by reshaping the gums and jaws.

English is such a crude language. And how did it get that way? Well, it picked up words from other languages like "astronomy." But enough people were ignorant about the roots of the word that it could take on new meanings without people realizing. We could only do that because enough people were either ignorant of the Greek and Latin roots, or could put them out of their minds when they heard the word used. What makes English such a powerful and useful language is a healthy ignorance of the past.

2. GLORY SEASON by David Brin (a book review by Dale L. Skran):

When I first picked this one up, I groaned inwardly. Not another huge Brin book, this time on the hoary theme of "women on top"! Out of a sense of obligation to buy any "big new Brin book" I ordered this one from the SF Book club, and while feeling bored one day started to read it.

I'm not going to say this is the greatest book Brin's written, or that it's a sure Hugo winner (although it may well get nominated), or that I loved every minute of it. However, GLORY SEASON has many of the strengths of EARTH with few of its flaws. Only a single main character, Maia, tells the story with the exception of a small number of log-book entries and quotes. Thus, the confusing and immense cast of characters in EARTH is dispensed with, and replaced by a single coherent narrative. At the same time, GLORY SEASON shares with EARTH a well thought-out background that is unique to science fiction, not just a retread of some silly scenario where

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all the men died in a plague.

Brin does a good job of suffusing the book with a genuine feminist sensibility while avoiding the production of a propaganda set-piece. The views of Lysos, the founder fem-engineer of Stratos, are well argued, but a fully rounded view of the results is presented as well. This book is best compared to THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, another tale where genetic engineers played around with sex roles to create a rather different society. Unlike LEFT HAND, GLORY SEASON is a slam-bang adventure in the pulp tradition, with pirates, sea journeys, ancient weapons, life and death traps, treachery, and loyal friends. Contrary to the impression some may have, Brin is a very capable pulp writer--see "Thor vs Captain American" or the last chapter of THE POSTMAN.

GLORY SEASON does not fit well into the "man-writing-adolescent-female-coming-of-age" sub-genre (to which some might wish to consign it), which includes PODKAYNE OF MARS and RITE OF PASSAGE since Maia is as much alien as she is human, and the vast gulf between her world and our own allows Brin to write convincingly while being well shielded from the accusation that he just doesn't understand women.

My major complaint with the book is the "alien" spaceman, Renna, from the Hominid Phylum worlds. He lands on a strange world by himself, in a ship that cannot take off under its own power, and with no backup. Thousands of years have passed since Lysos created the pastoral Stratos, but Renna's technology seems more like stuff we'll have a few hundred years from now. Brin apparently focused so much effort on Stratos that the Phylum was given short shrift.

SPOILERS FOLLOW

Finally, the book ends in a rather abrupt fashion with Renna, off-camera, attempting to use an ancient spaceship to return to orbit, and Maia seeing the ship explode. Is Renna dead? Everyone but the reader is convinced. Either the Phylum is full of dunderheads and Renna was sent to meet new civilizations since there was a lack of other jobs he was qualified for, or he's still hiding out in the caves someplace. Merely saying that Renna is expendable doesn't answer the many questions floating through the readers mind at this point, which all have as their answer the word "sequel"!

At this point I wouldn't mind returning once again to this beautifully conceived world (notice I haven't said very much about it!), but I wish Brin would be more honest and just call this the "The First Book of Stratos."

Recommended to fans of: hard science fiction, social-science science fiction, feminist-related fiction, and Brin.

3. THE RISING OF THE MOON by Flynn Connolly (Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38289-7, 1993, US\$4.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

There's a lot that's good in T_h_e_R_i_s_i_n_g_o_f_t_h_e_M_o_o_n. Unfortunately, there's also a lot of extra baggage the story has to carry as well, and this drags it down a bit.

Ian McDonald's B_r_o_k_e_n_L_a_n_d (which I reviewed recently) was

basically the story of Ireland set on an alien planet. T_h_e_R_i_s_i_n_g_o_f_t_h_e_M_o_o_n is set in an Ireland of the future (or of a future, at any rate), but the fact that it is Ireland is almost superfluous. I say "almost" because it has to be set somewhere, and it uses the Irish history heritage well. But if an author sets a story in Ireland, that puts certain expectations in the reader's mind, and these are not fulfilled. One may argue this is a good thing, rather than a bad, but it is disconcerting. The fact that in this future alien contact has been made is a more serious piece of extra baggage; it serves no purpose except to provide a conveniently emotional ending.

The story is one of the misogynist dystopia, the future in which the patriarchy (in the form of the Church) has decided to "put women in their place." As such, it is more reminiscent of such books as Margaret Atwood's H_a_n_d_m_a_i_d's_T_a_l_e and Suzette Haden Elgin's N_a_t_i_v_e_T_o_n_g_u_e than of books centering on the current situation in Ireland. Nuala Dennehy returns to Ireland after fifteen years of self-imposed exile to discover the true situation back home. Only through some extremely unlikely contrivances does she avoid getting arrested or thrown out within a few hours of her arrival--or at several other times. (Things frequently work out too conveniently to be probable throughout the book.) This soon develops into what might be considered the standard "people's uprising" science fiction novel.

This is a strongly feminist book and one major complaint I have is that although the government seems to oppress men as well as women (albeit perhaps not as much), the "revolution" is seen as a strictly female one, and men's assistance is pretty much rebuffed, which seems to me a serious tactical error--but I'm not the author. I also find it unlikely that a Church-dominated government would be as sanguine about sexual assault by the police as this one apparently is. And it's awfully convenient for the story that the Church officials are as corrupt as they are.

These criticisms may make me sound more negative on T_h_e_R_i_s_i_n_g_o_f_t_h_e_M_o_o_n than I really am. Certainly it will appeal to fans who have an interest in Irish history and the real heroes and legends from Ireland, since this draws heavily on them (and not at all on the Irish Celtic mythology that one sees so much of in science

fiction and fantasy). And as political underground science fiction, this is as good as most.

4. MYTH AND MODERN MAN IN SHERLOCK HOLMES by David S. Payne (Gaslight Publications, ISBN 0-934468-29-X, 1992, US\$24.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is perhaps not so much a review as a way to tell people of the existence of this book. In this scholarly work, subtitled "Arthur Conan Doyle and the Uses of Nostalgia," Payne examines the social, economic, and political forces at work at the time Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote his Sherlock Holmes stories, and how those stories fit in, both as a reflection of the times and as an aid to readers to get them through that time of change. His thesis is interesting and even thought-provoking, but seems belabored after almost three hundred pages. The later chapters often seem a mere listing of quotes supporting his contentions about, for example, Holmes (Doyle) and foreigners. While valuable in presenting a more balanced view of Doyle's views, pointing out the negative aspects as well as the positive, I find it hard to recommend this book at full hardcover price. Still, it's unlikely to be available any other way.

5. MY LIFE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Bruce Joel Rubin himself directs the fourth film in his "Dying and the Death Experience" series. Michael Keaton plays a dying public relations executive who videotapes life lectures for his yet unborn child and the tapes lead him to resolve the unfinished business of his youth. Some good believable human drama here is sabotaged by gratuitous mysticism about the nature of death. Rating low +1 (-4 to +4).

Bruce Joel Rubin has previously written the story of B_r_a_i_n_s_t_o_r_m and screenplays of J_a_c_o_b's_L_a_d_d_e_r and G_h_o_s_t, each exploring its own mystical view of life after death. His latest film focuses a little more closely on the dying experience itself. Bob Jones (Michael Keaton) had a sad childhood filled with disappointments and he has tried hard to bury that past. But now he is heading for the biggest disappointment of all. Just when his life was coming together with his beautiful wife (Gail, played by Nicole Kidman) pregnant with their first child, Bob was diagnosed as having terminal cancer. Now in his days remaining he is taking all of his

fatherly advice and putting it on videotape as a legacy for the child that he may never know. Bob wants to be sure his child knows who Bob was. But Bob himself is not sure who he is. He has intentionally buried his unhappy childhood in the Russian immigrant community of Detroit. As part of that burial he had even changed his name to Jones from Ivanovich as part of his escape from the past. Now that he is dying he must come to terms with that past in his few remaining days, or he will never finish that business.

Rubin's script is often moving, as we would expect. It would be difficult to make a film that shows the dying process in such detail without being moving and at some level manipulative. But surprisingly here the experienced Rubin has problems with the very mechanics of script-writing. There are places where the script just does not convey what is going on. For example, the first time we are aware that Gail knows about the tapes, she is watching a tape about herself and she is angry. Why? Is she angry about the project of making the tapes? Is she angry about the content of this particular tape? It is not clear from the script. And with the writer being the director, if Rubin thinks the idea is conveyed, nobody can overrule him. Gail's mother is an important character in the plot, but for several scenes it is unclear if she knows about her son-in-law's condition and the interpretation of those scenes makes knowing important.

This is a story that might well have been done better in other hands, in spite of Rubin's fascination with death. Rubin's previous films assumed a life after death. In some senses that was

the whole point of G h o s t and J a c o b' s L a d d e r. M y
L i f e did not need

any mystical metaphysics to tell its story and it would have been a more poignant story without the nice comforting mystical view of life of life after death. However, Rubin gives in to the temptation to philosophize about survival of the soul and mystical healing processes and in doing so he kills much of the credibility the film had. This is a film that will get people thinking about the death experience and it is probably fairly accurate to the famous Elisabeth Kubler-Ross studies of the psychology of dying, but it also throws in some metaphysical fantasy without leaving it clear that it is fantasy.

_ M_ y_ L_ i_ f_ e has many good points, but often Rubin's screenplay betrays them and compromises. My rating would be a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

6. A BRONX TALE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Calogero is growing up in the Bronx in the late 50s with two father figures. One is his

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honest, hard-working, biological father and the other is a likable hood who takes Calogero under his wing. Robert DeNiro directs the film as well as playing the honest father while the screenwriter of the semi-autobiographical story turns in a winning performance as the hood. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4).

When I think of Robert DeNiro these days, I mostly think about an interview he gave about _ G_ u_ i_ l_ t_ y_ b_ y_ S_ u_ s_ p_ i_ c_ i_ o_ n. His comments about

the blacklisting era were so shallow and so lacking in information and insight that at the time I assumed he was a person with few talents other than line-reading. Now I have to reassess that conclusion after seeing his directorial debut.

Romantic love triangles are a staple of the film industry. For Robert DeNiro's directorial debut he has chosen a story with a different sort of love triangle, one of paternal love. Calogero has two father figures in his life. His true father (played by DeNiro) is a poor bus driver. That does not get a lot of respect in the Bronx Italian community in the late Fifties. What does get respect is being a hood like the local neighborhood boss Sonny (Chazz Palminteri). One day Sonny kills a man and nine-year-old Calogero lies to save his idol Sonny from the police. From that point on Sonny adopts Colgero, after a fashion. Both he and Lorenzo, Colgero's real father, want what is best for the boy, but Lorenzo is a straight arrow and wants his son to have nothing to do

with the hood. In spite of his own profession, Sonny wants to keep Colgero honest and put him on the path to success.

Francis Capra is a little too sharp playing the nine-year-old Calogero. He is just a bit overly clever in his repartee with his parents. But then screenwriter Palminteri is actually writing about himself so might be a little willing to exaggerate his own verbal prowess when he was Calogero's age. And Calogero does have to be a little devious in how he balances his two father figures. The second part of the story has Calogero (now played by Lillo Brancato) seventeen years old and romantically interested in an attractive Black girl (Taral Hicks). The story comes to involve tensions between the Black and Italian communities in the Bronx. Now to Calogero, Sonny seems to be the only sane and tolerant person in the Italian community.

The story of A B r o n x T a l e is based on the Palminteri's semi-autobiographical play which he used to perform as a one-person show. The details of life in the Bronx and the style of storytelling are reminiscent of G o o d f e l l a s and DeNiro even has a cameo for Joe Pesci. Just as earlier this year Mel Gibson proved he had a better hand at directing than most of us would have expected, so too DeNiro's style is surprisingly good for a first-timer. He has a very sure hand at combining music into the action. His direction shows this in one of the first scenes of the film in

which a montage of scenes from a stickball game are synchronized to a do-wop song.

But the real show-stealer is Palminteri himself as Sonny. The same stage presence that worked for him doing the story in his one-man show translates to charisma on the screen. Like Joe Mantegna in H o u s e o f G a m e s, Palminteri is the central attraction whenever he is on the screen. As the hood, Sonny is magnetic while the audience expectation is that he will at some point do something nasty and his relationship with the boy will break down. That may or may not happen, but the character is real enough to transcend stereotypes and the story of the relationship probably more interesting and credible than most fiction writers would have made it. DeNiro proves himself as an accomplished director his first time around.

My rating is a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

7. There is a new SF/mystery show in Montclair, New Jersey: Beam Me Up, Watson! Books, 358-1/2 Bloomfield Avenue, Montclair NJ 07042, 201-744-7343, Mon-Wed,Sat 10 AM-6PM, Thu-Fri 12:30PM-8PM. (This information courtesy of Phil DeParto of the Science Fiction Association of Bergen County. Personally, I think the best in the (wider) area is still the Science Fiction Shop at 168 Thompson between Houston and Bleeker--note new address!--212-473-3010, FAX 212-475-9727). There's also Science Fiction, Mysteries, and More at 140 Chambers west of West Broadway, 212-385-8798, Mon-Fri 11:30AM-7PM, Sat-Sun 2PM-6:30PM, but call ahead to check, as it sometimes does not open at all on weekends. (I have been unable to get to this store because of its hours.) The SF Shop will do mail-order.

On the more local scene, there are a few superstores in the Middletown/Holmdel/Lincroft area: Borders in East Brunswick, and Barnes & Noble in Middletown and West Long Branch. The Middletown store seems to carry all the major SF magazines (including A m a z i n g and T h e M a g a z i n e o f F a n t a s y & S c i e n c e F i c t i o n as well as the more common A n a l o g and A s i m o v' s). Borders used to have monthly discussion groups for horror and science fiction; I don't know if they still have them. Barnes & Noble in Middletown would undoubtedly start them if enough people expressed interest, especially if someone offered to run them. (If anyone hears anything further, let us know.)

On a related note, the book for the January 5 discussion, A M i l l i o n O p e n D o o r s, is now available in paperback. [-ecl]

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Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue
freely according to my conscience, above all liberties.
-- John Milton