



S F COMMENTARY

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NORSTRILIA PRESS

No, you cannot buy The Altered I if you live anywhere but in Australia. Sorry to mislead you in last issue of SFC. The Altered I will be released soon in an international edition published in USA. Rights on selling the Australian edition are therefore restricted. Sorry for the confusion, and Lee Harding (editor), Bruce Gillespie and Carey Handfield (partners, Norstrilia Press), and the contributors (including Ursula K Le Guin) hope that you enjoy The Altered I when you do get to see it.

Meanwhile, you can buy from Norstrilia Press copies of Philip K Dick: Electric Shepherd. This book has an introduction by Roger Zelazny, a cover by Irene Pagram, essays and comment about the works of Philip K Dick by Bruce Gillespie and George Turner, Stanislaw Lem's long study of Dick, and Phil Dick's own "Vancouver Speech". There's a bibliography prepared by Fred Patten.

Australian price: \$4. Price for USA and Canada: \$6. American agent: Fred Patten, 11863 West Jefferson Blvd, Apt 1, Culver City, CA 90230. Mark cheques: "Norstrilia Press".

S F COMMENTARY

Yes, S F Commentary eventually "goes offset" with No 51. It's the Robert Silverberg Forum, with contributions from George Turner, Van Ikin, Bruce Gillespie, Stanislaw Lem, and others. Subscription: as usual: \$5 for 5 (Australia), \$6 for 5 (USA, Canada). American agents: Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 West Main, Madison Wisconsin 53703.

BACK ISSUES are not available; we sell out fast. But there are booklets of material from past issues. These booklets are being published under subject headings. Ask about your favourite subjects. Currently available: two booklets on Delany (\$2 each; \$US2.50, from Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell). Others in preparation.

Meanwhile, SFC still needs thorough, reliable, fast reviewers. Some people still ask for books to review, read the books, but never quite complete the task. If you do feel like tackling this exacting job, there are still plenty of books available for review.

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Subscriptions: Australia: \$5 for 5; \$10 for 10. USA and Canada: \$6 for 5; \$12 for 10. From Lesleigh and Hank Luttrell, 525 West Main, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA. Other countries: Australian price - please submit in currency already converted to Australian dollars.

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Last stencil typed 3 January 1977.

Bill Rotsler for DUFF! Peter Roberts for TAFF!

I
MUST BE
TALKING
TO MY
FRIENDS

* This is the last duplicated issue of SFC - if everything goes to plan. The type-setting for the first offset issue, the Robert Silverberg Issue, has been done. Now I must learn how to lay out a design for offset. . Milliner's glue and scissors, here I come.

It's the beginning of 1977, by the way, as I type this. I wrote a "page 4" at the beginning of November 1976, but it didn't say too much. I bitched about various things, and Expressed Doubts, as I do quite often. Then I ran off the rest of the issue, and collated it, and thought: This isn't too bad an issue, is it? And there are some really good contributors here. I've introduced most of them at the beginnings of their articles, but I don't think I've said that Terry Green is a teacher and writer who has just moved to Toronto, Canada, and Don Ashby is one of the founder members of the Magic Pudding Club, and is currently removalist extraordinaire to Melbourne fandom. Since most of Melbourne fandom is moving house during the next few months, I bet he wished he had never volunteered. Irene Pagram is the Melbourne artist whose work I admire most: remember the "Solaris cover" for the last triple issue of SFC (35/36/37), and the Electric Shepherd cover, and the "cat cover" from last issue, No 42? (Melbourne is very fortunate to have some very good artists working for fanzines, and I hope to have many more of my favourites in SFC once I can start using illustrations in the offset edition.)

What I am still asking myself, often, is why do another triple issue at all? Not really for the readers, since only the zaniest reader will go straight through this issue reading every article. Mainly for the contributors, I think: some of these articles have been in the files for a year or more. I wanted to get up to date before I began final preparations for No 51. The strategy has not worked completely. George gave me the first six chapters of a book he is writing. Claudia Krenz sent me some long articles on Philip K Dick: they are excellent and must go in. There is still Andrew Whitmore's article on D G Compton: the first survey I have

seen to really examine this author. I had to delete a few reviews from this issue's "Criti-canto".

So you can look forward to those articles - eventually. I don't know what the schedule will be from now on. At least quarterly, and possibly more frequent.

* They are the big plans for the moment. Going offset has been made possible by a loan from Bruce Barnes, who has just moved to Melbourne. And the whole idea has a lot to do with the young lady who is mentioned on the next page. Optimism about these plans is dampened a bit when I think that I really need 300 permanent new subscribers to make plans work in the long term. But word-of-mouth is a powerful advertising medium in fandom, and I aim to make the new style of the magazine worth the trouble.

* Meanwhile, I would draw your attention to the items listed on page 2. It's worth repeating that The Altered I, Norstrilia Press edition, is available only in Australia for the time being. SFC 47 appeared before I could include that news in the issue. I hope that the new American editions will be out soon.

* I have plans for making available material from back issues of SFC. I cannot reprint whole issues but I will issue items under subject headings, as requested. If you have asked me about back issues in the past, please write again.

* It's very encouraging to have American agents again. Lesleigh and Hank Luttrell have already begun to spread the word that SFC is back on the road, and they can be found at their usual hucksters' table at several American conventions each year. Their own magazine, Starling, stays as good as usual.

* I've cut "true confessions" to a half page this issue, and spared you all but the least details about the End of My 1976. Besides, Leigh Edmonds can invent my biography more entertainingly than I can remember it...

1976 BITES THE DUST

* You will remember that I made the mistake of saying in print that I was having a good 1976. Past tense. But I thought I had covered my tracks by saying that some catastrophe had to ruin the year. How prophetic. Not one catastrophe - but three of them. In Order of Catastrophic Significance:

1 I fell in love. Still am in love. And after making a solemn New Year's Resolution at the beginning of 1976 not to fall in love this year. "Imagine," writes Philip Dick, "finding someone, a woman too, with whom he could speak freely, who understood about his situation, who genuinely wanted to hear and was not frightened." I found such a woman; her kindness and delightful company I have met very few times before. So I told her my very strong feelings - several times - and she said that she could not return them. So I leave 1976 much sadder than when I entered it, feeling rather a failure in life, and lonely too. But what a delightful, impossible dream she is; imagine if she had loved me too... I think I can survive on such dreams - what if, what if, what if - for a mere dream of happiness accompanies me into 1977.

2 I have been served notice to quit my palatial high castle in Carlton Street sometime before the end of January. It wouldn't have been so bad if I had had the money to buy this place, but now I must undergo the painful process of moving. I will miss every grotty centimetre of this house, the view of the park and, most of all, being within walking distance from my friends.

3 My money supply was threatened with imminent extinction, so I had to make a determined effort to "look for a job" for the first time since the end of 1970. I count this as a personal defeat, although I acknowledge that I have been lucky with my free-lancing. But there seems to be no way of making money these days (and I do want to go back to America sometime) without being employed by an institution of some kind. The Charley Varricks of this world have been outmoded.

So there's an object lesson in discovering how quickly a good year can disintegrate into a difficult one. I say "difficult" because I've had some good luck on points 2 and 3. John Foyster noticed a job advertisement in The Age; I applied; I got the job. From the middle of January, I will be one half of the editorial team which produce The Secondary Teacher for the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association. And Malcolm, my employer, who has a friend who has a house which I hope will take me and my belongings sometime soon. But I will be a bit isolated.

* In the middle of all this, there were still our great impromptu parties of recent months. 1976 really did have its moments. Thanks, friends.

EYE-TRACK PLEASURES

* Even in a disappointing year, it is still a pleasure to read and talk about good books. Even if I cannot really talk about a book as well as it deserves. I feel this way about at least two books in the S F Masters' Series, which NEL has begun to release recently:

Martian Time-Slip, by Philip K Dick (Introduction by Brian W Aldiss; NEL; 1976; 240 pages; £3.95/\$8.95).

I must thank Brian Aldiss for pushing NEL into publishing this as one of the first in the new S F Masters Series. Well, this is what Brian Aldiss says in his Introduction, which is itself as interesting a critical essay about this book as is likely to appear anywhere.

The particular interest about this edition is that it is the first time that Martian Time-Slip has appeared since the Ballantine edition of 1964. I have met dedicated Philip Dick fans who have never heard of it. In the Rolling Stone interview of early this year, Dick claimed that it is the book into which he has put the most artistic dedication. And, at last, here it is again. (NEL's decision to publish it in England seems to have pushed Ballantine to do a long-delayed new edition in USA.)

I cannot write a regular "review" of this book. There is too much here. Martian Time-Slip, like the best of Dick's other books, scrapes at bed-rocks of feeling and incoherent perceptions which can be reached by few other books.

But all the scholarly discussion which has arisen about Dick's work in general during recent years has provided many more prisms through which I can assess my initial view of the book. After all, I read it first when I was sixteen, when it appeared as All We Marsmen (a much better name) in Worlds of Tomorrow. All I remembered from that first reading was the "time-autistic" boy, who reappears right at the end of the book as an old man, in a kind of vision. And I remembered Sylvia Bohlen waking from "phenobarbital sleep" in the first line of the book. And the fact that people flew through the "atmosphere" of Mars when fly-bys had shown already that the legendary Mars did not exist. Even by 1963, Martian Time-Slip was fantasy, not sf.

But, equipped with a bit of scholarly apparatus, during my most recent reading of the book I noticed that the "Mars" of the book is a kind of ersatz Arizona town. In fact, this settlement on Mars could just as easily have been a false construct, such as the sleepy little town in Time Out of Joint. The relationship between this settlement and the cities of Earth is problematical. There is a strong hint that the settlers inhabit the only real bit of Earth left; that most people in Earth's cities are on the verge of madness. Some, like Jack Bohlen, emigrated after a bout of schizophrenia.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)

BRUCE GILLESPIE'S 1976

an entertaining invention

by
LEIGH EDMONDS

((BRUCE GILLESPIE: The following account of my 1976 is entirely fictitious and has no relation to any living person. Any attempt by Leigh Edmonds to introduce fact into this article has been ruthlessly censored by the editor. Readers of this magazine should note that this is the only piece of light relief in the entire empty-umpteenth pages. Leigh and I hope you appreciate the gesture.))

SPECIAL WARNING

If you do not think that Bruce Gillespie is a suitable subject for the following pages, you should toss this fanzine into the far corner of the room and return to your copy of Playboy... This free offer may include Bruce Gillespie, who may be shocked at what he reads.

THROUGH 1976 WITH GILLESPIE AND THICK SKIN

For some intensely obscure reason, Bruce has this idea that I should be entrusted with the task of writing up his 1976. Since I am of the opinion that there is no greater source of funny stories than Gillespie, I have not been able to turn down the chance.

Actually, the writing is the difficult part, but it is the price that one has to pay for the privilege of being allowed to read the Gillespie diary and listen to Bruce describe the disasters of his life. Of course, it is only Bruce who thinks that they are disasters. Everybody else in the room is rolling on the floor as Bruce counts another Crushing Blow and wonders at all the laughter.

Unfortunately there are great gaps of this year which are going to be, forever, inaccessible to the reading public. Bruce is not saying what it is that we are missing but, from the way he develops purple splotches around the gills and begins to blubber whenever he approaches the subject, I would say that it has something to do with a hormone imbalance. And we all know what sort of things bring about such imbalances.

If you don't know what I'm talking about, it indicates that you have not reached puberty yet or that you are Bruce Gillespie.

GILLESPIE THE SUPER SENSUALIST

Some two or three weeks back, Jim the spider and I set out to visit Bruce Gillespie in his palace-like home. As Valma had recently

completed her exams, we allowed her to tag along with us. The reason for this expedition was to confirm certain suspicions we have been having lately about Bruce. We needed to visit the scene of the continuing crime to piece together the last clues, complete the picture, and so on and so forth.

It was reasonably late when we arrived. If you have not visited Gillespie in his lair you will not, naturally, be aware of the troubles one has to take to do this. However, to simplify a complex matter, it takes three steps:

- (a) find the address
- (b) fight your way through the green stuff that fills the gateway, and
- (c) get Gillespie to answer the door.

On this occasion Jim and I negotiated the first two obstacles with no problems outside the usual, but were not very good at getting him to answer the door. As it turned out, Martin (the name of the fellow who lives in the downstairs part of the house) finally gave in to our ringing, banging, knocking, and yelling and came to answer the door himself. Through word and deed, he indicated to us that Bruce was home and that we were quite welcome to invade his privacy any time we so desired, so Jim and I and Valma plodded our way along the lower hall. As we neared the stairs, a rhythmic bump-bump-bumping sound made itself evident to us. Jim and I froze in our tracks. "He's doing IT," I exclaimed in horror. Valma replied that we shouldn't be so silly. Everybody knows that Bruce doesn't do such things.

The stairs one has to ascend to get to visit Bruce are another unnatural hazard which he uses to protect himself from strangers and marauding friends alike, but we ascended without too much fear. We forced our way the length of the upstairs hallway, passed towering piles of books and dirty washing, to arrive finally at the front room, the headquarters of the Gillespie conspiracy. We hesitated at the door, somehow too afraid to look, for Jim and I were convinced that Bruce was in the middle of doing

indecent things with another consenting adult, and while Valma was convinced that he was more likely doing something clean and wholesome like running off the next SFC - itself not a pleasing sight.

Would you believe the sight that met our eyes? I wouldn't. In the middle of the room, on the floor, was a body all tied up in its own limbs with arms and legs projecting from the tangle at the most unusual angles. The bump-bump-bumping was caused as the body rocked back and forth and its head collided with the floor.

Such was our introduction to the world of Bruce Gillespie and yoga. Jim and I were instantly convinced of earlier findings. After we spent ten minutes getting Bruce untangled, he and Valma then spent the rest of the evening on the floor in the middle of the room contorting themselves as they compared positions and exercises. I did not participate in these activities, as Jim and I sat on the couch rocking with laughter at the various Gillespie attempts to achieve a state of perfect bliss in the lotus position. Between bouts of uncontrollable laughter, Jim and I decided that our earlier conclusions were more than correct. Not only is Bruce Gillespie the funniest person in Melbourne fandom; he is the funniest in Australian fandom, and really even the world.

However, the night almost ended in tragedy when the mania for doing yoga exercises spread. Luckily, the resources of the Alfred Hospital were one hundred per cent behind us and, after three hours of intensive work with a pair of tweezers, the chief surgeon barely saved Jim from death by lotus position.

BRUCE GILLESPIE AS SEX OBJECT

.....

BRUCE GILLESPIE AND JANUARY THROUGH MARCH

Nothing much happened.

There is the matter of an issue of S F Commentary, but Bruce makes such play upon the difficulties of producing the magazine that I need undertake no elaboration. Anybody who goes to the trouble of typing up a 150-page fanzine in micro-elite onto layout sheets before he cuts the first stencil is not only a creature to bring gasps of wonder to the mouths of the populace, he is a creature who has nothing better to do with his time. One understands that the next issue of SFC is to have articles and stuff about Robert Silverberg in it. This would indicate that the fellow has read the article to see if he likes it, read it as he typed it onto his master sheets, read it again as he typed up the stencils, and read it once more as he proof-read the issue. No wonder he sometimes fears for his sanity. Anyhow, even SFC is never that good.

BRUCE GILLESPIE AND TRUE LOVE

On March 8th (according to the Gillespie Diary) Bruce and his true love were finally united. Bruce seems to be only a recent convert to cat fandom in Melbourne but he is, at the moment, its most enthusiastic supporter. On the 8th Bruce took delivery of "one only Mk LIVX feline (cat), male, Gillespie for the use of".

When it was born Flodnap (which is the unfortunate name that Bruce chose for it) had as much chance of growing up to become a normal cat as any other. But something went horribly wrong. Acting on the ministrations that cats are child substitutes, the ever-trusting Gillespie bought a book by Dr Spock and proceeded to train Flodnap accordingly.

Each time you see Bruce these days he has another Flodnap story; about how the animal fetches little green apricots which it induces Bruce to throw the length of the hall from the lounge room to the kitchen; how it always sits on him while he reads; antics with brown paper bags, and all the usual dull cat stuff. To listen to Bruce, you'd think that this cat was the best thing since they invented the wax stencil.

Then how come nobody ever sees this wonder pet?

I have, I must admit, seen Flodnap quite recently. It was the streak of fur making a desperate dash for the window at the back of the Gillespie establishment. It doesn't like visitors. This may be because cats don't train up as babies very well. It may be because the cat is naturally neurotic, or it may be because it reflects truly the nature of the poor creature who thinks of itself as the cat's father.

I know which theory I support.

BRUCE GILLESPIE AND A DAY TO REMEMBER

All budding writers should note down the following date. April 20 1976. In case you haven't got it, I will repeat once more... April 20 1976. It was a Tuesday. This date is important to sfnal writers because it should be recognised by all as one of those pivot points in the history of mankind. One can easily see that on that day the history of humankind either began to swing up or begins the final plunge.

Bruce was getting off the tram down at the corner of the street from his place when some maniac in a car just about destroyed him. Or, as Bruce puts it, "Nearly killed by a car getting off tram" (so much for good grammar from the creator of S F Commentary). What possibilities spring to mind!

World War III averted, Malcolm Fraser killed in wombat stampede, the world a happier place, the planets and stars colonised, a cure for Twonks

LIGHT RELIEF

Disease found, God talked to, Tucker preserved for posterity in the National Art Gallery, universal brotherhood and love, etc, etc, etc. All this from one little pedestrian accident.

Somebody should sell the idea to Robert Silverberg.

BRUCE GILLESPIE: THE CONTINUING SAGA

Yawn

Wake me up when something exciting happens

29 July: "Another night talking to Claudia and Randal" (as repeat of months before). It appears that Bruce has been keeping soul and intellect together by spending vast quantities of time visiting Claudia and Randal (Randal&Claudia). No neo-hermit existence for this Bruce. While we all thought he was spending long nights reading books, listening to records, playing with his cat or with SFC, in fact he has been engaging in a hectic round of dinner engagements and late-night discussions with Randal & Claudia and the people from the Melbourne Uni S F Association.

BRUCE GILLESPIE AND THE MYTH OF CONVENTIONS

Back earlier in the year there was Unicon II, a convention organised by the Melbourne Uni S F Association people. Although Valma and I thought it was the most enjoyable convention we'd attended since perhaps Bubonicon, Bruce didn't enjoy it much, despite being GoH and all. He says that nobody talked to him. And who could blame them? Either he sat in some corner and looked lugubrious (hence the current Melbourne spelling, "lugubruce") and more than a little bit asocial. Either that or he was home doing something for SFC.

Despite some strange quirk of the committee which organised Bofcon inflicting Bruce and George Turner on the audience for about seven hours, Bruce reports that he enjoyed Bofcon. Most of this enjoyment seems to have taken place late at night under intense alcoholic influence.

BRUCE GILLESPIE AND CHINA WATCHERS

On 9 September Bruce noted the death of Chairman Mao, which indicates that he does take some note of what goes on in the world.

It has been pointed out that there are many similarities between those who make it their business to know what is going on inside China and those who make it their business to know what is going on inside Bruce Gillespie.

BRUCE GILLESPIE AND THE QUIET LIFE

After Bofcon, the rest of August must have been pretty dull for Bruce, because Randal & Claudia were up in Brisbane. However, they were back on August 31st, so life could continue fairly much as usual. The break might explain:

Sep 17: "SFC 46 run off!"

BRUCE GILLESPIE AND THE END OF EVERYTHING AND THE BEGINNING OF NOTHING ELSE

- Sep 18 - "Dinner at R&C's (Randal&Claudia&Charlie's) with mass diary readings, true confessions, and political discussions til 3.30 in the morning."
- Sep 24 - "Gloom!"
- Sep 25 - "More gloom!"
- Sep 26 - "Total gloom!"
- Sep 27 - "More total gloom!"
- Sep 28 - "Virginia Kidd sold Altered I to Berkley Books!"
- Sep 29 - "SFC 47 posted out!"
- Oct 4 - "Second week of going round the bend."
- Oct 5 - "First yoga night." Which is where we came in, only a little later. Bruce, you see, has problems with his backbone, lacking substance or something like that. Furthermore, if he doesn't exercise it often and thoroughly he'll be wearing a backbrace to hold him upright by the time he's 40. So Bruce took up yoga to exercise - and calm his destroyed nerves.
- Oct 27 - "Worst night ever - drunk and maudlin"
- Oct 28 - "Crushing Blow 2 - Have to vacate Carlton Street
"Crushing Blow 3 - Boss run out of money. Have to look for a new job."

BRUCE GILLESPIE AND CRUSHING BLOWS

Being a dumb bunny, I asked Bruce whatever happened to "Crushing Blow 1". Bruce sneered and indicated the previous two months. Perhaps if he were completely honest, January 1 would begin as Crushing Blow 1 and December 31 would be Crushing Blow 365.

BRUCE GILLESPIE - A POSTMORTEM

Rumours have gained substance and have been confirmed. After Crushing Blows 2 and 3, Bruce has had Lucky Breaks 2 and 3 to match. With the best of intentions, somebody has given him some sort of job editing some sort of magazine. At the same time, he has found a place to live, in Carlton yet, and at a reasonable rent. Just as there are China Watchers who wish that country good will and others who wish it ill will, so there are Gillespie watchers who wish Bruce good or ill will. At the moment it's all ill will. How can you feel good will about somebody with such stunning luck?

And he even beat Valma and me at scrabble the other night.

MY 1976 - by LEIGH EDMONDS

In 1973, Valma and I cancelled our subscription to October. In 1974, we cancelled our subscriptions to February and March and said that 1975 had to be better. In 1975 we said that 1976 just had to be better. In 1976, we cancelled our subscription to the whole of 1977 but we fear we may have sent the papers in too late.

In an excellent article about Dr Bloodmoney (in Science Fiction Studies), Fredric Jameson analysed how the social structures of Dick's worlds are like the close social orders in provincial towns. This accounts for the difficulty I have always had with Dick's notions of "politics", for even his US presidents are not presidents of nations at all, but mayors of enclosed communities (eg Molinari in Now Wait for Last Year). Martian Time-Slip fits the pattern more exactly than most other Dick novels. Arnie Kott rules the economic life of the plumbing union, which controls the community. Each character has to assess his or her position in relation to the power structure which centres on Kott. The only other people who have economic independence are those who work for themselves - and even most of them are destroyed by Kott.

The alternative power centre - the "real" one, as Dick reviewers like to put it - is perceived only dimly by Kott. It centres around the aborigines of Mars, the Bleekmen. In fact, the only person who feels allied to this source of mystical power is Manfred Steiner, the boy who is autistic because he is "out of time" with other human beings.

But, like most reviewers of Dick, I find myself entangled by the superstructure of the book. It is the best superstructure in any of Dick's books except The Man in the High Castle. Dick takes the trouble to create all his characters entirely, instead of leaving most of them as caricatures, as in so many of his lesser books. He weaves the lives of the characters around each other in a cunning tangle which reminds one most of the structure of nineteenth-century novels.

But the book comes alive only when Dick begins to tell us about the visions and magic potions which only he knows about. There are Jack Bohlen's hallucinations that drove him to Mars in the first place: "He saw the personnel manager in a new light. The man was dead. He saw, through the man's skin, his skeleton. It had been wired together, the bones connected with fine copper wire...everything was made of plastic and stainless steel, all working in unison but entirely without authentic life." The world is not what it seems - but it is not even as it seems to seem.

There is Manfred Steiner himself, the boy who seems to move in a blur around the room because his time sense is so different from anyone else's. Manfred sees all human beings as repositories of dead material, full of gubbish. Only the Bleekmen can communicate with them. Manfred has a recurrent vision that he will end his life in a monstrous block of broken-down apartments which are to be built on the FDR range of mountains. In his introduction to the NEL edition of Martian Time-Slip, Brian Aldiss analyses Manfred's vision more precisely and lucidly than I could here. The culmination of that vision occurs when:

Ahead of him a mountain path stretched out. The sky overhead was heavy and red, and then he saw dots: hundreds of gigantic specks that grew and came closer. Things rained down from them, men with unnatural thoughts. The men struck the ground and dashed about in circles. They drew lines, and then great things like slugs landed, one after another, without thoughts of any sort, and began digging.

He saw a hole as large as a world; the earth disappeared and became black, empty, and nothing... Into the hole the men jumped one by one, until none of them were left. He was alone, with the silent world-hole...

Please help me, he said. I need someone, anyone. I can't wait here forever; it must be done soon or not at all. If it is not done I will grow and become the world-hole, and the hole will eat up everything.

One of Dick's very best pieces of writing - yet how can one react to it? Why does one feel involved in the vision - in these images of what seem like a complete negation of any viable world? I do not know the answer. Here is what seems like a landscape of absolute despair - yet Dick has denied (in a letter published in Philip K Dick: Electric Shepherd) that he is a writer of despair. The paradox is that Manfred sees such things, yet does not give up life. He lives, despite it. I identify with this kind of writing because I've felt much the same way myself so many times. Hardly a critical judgment to make about a book as intricately crafted as Martian Time-Slip, but a pointer nevertheless. Manfred perceives Jack Bohlen and his mistress Doreen Anderton: "How could two people stand being so close?" - a reaction as alienated as any I've ever had to people.

What I'm saying, not very successfully, is that Dick makes closest contact with the reader at these points of lucid despair. To stay at this point would be intolerable, and Dick doesn't. In Martian Time-Slip, each of the characters undergoes some experience similar to Manfred's stepping to the edge of the world-hole. Jack Bohlen suffers a recurrence of his private hallucinations...but achieves a delicate salvation by caring about Manfred, and his love for Doreen. Sylvia Bohlen undergoes the humiliating, but liberating experience of entertaining the travelling salesman, Otto Zitte. Norbert Steiner, Manfred's father, is the only one who cannot face his moment of truth. He commits suicide. This one event sets off the entire action of the rest of the book. Only Arnie Kott perceives nothing. He blunders on and on, ignoring the warnings that might have saved him from death.

It is hard to say quite why we care so much about the events in a Philip K Dick novel, particularly one like Martian Time-Slip. Brian Aldiss speculates that we respond to the special

courage of the little people in Dick's novels. There is the courage of Joe Chip as he sits on a kerbside in hell in Ubik; the courage of Eric Sweetscent in Now Wait For Last Year; he, while dying slowly from the effects of the time-drug, goes home to help his wife, dying from the same drug. In Martian Time-Slip, there is the worried, business-like courage of Jack Bohlen and his family as they try to take care of the remaining Steiner kids who live next door. And there is Manfred himself, a doomed, magical figure, aware mainly of the moment of his own death (like Martin Carvajal in Silverberg's The Stochastic Man).

But none of this would be interesting without Dick's endless conjuring ingenuity. In the long run, good s f stories are but one step away from ancient stories of wizards, witches, and evil sprites. In Martian Time-Slip, as in most of Dick's other novels, it is the world itself which becomes a fantastic playground. There is the "safe" centre of small towns, but where people are going mad, surrounded by the Martian desert and the FDR Ranges, where the Bleekmen have their sacred shrines. At the centre is Manfred Steiner, the force of whose magic begins to turn the world around him into "Gubbish". Both Jack and Arnie find communications degenerating into "gubble gubble" words,

Dick's magic is not an excuse for reassurance, nor for any simple emotions. The only prose I know which matches the complexity and brilliance of the final few pages of Martian Time-Slip can be found in Hesse's "Magic Theatre" sequence in Steppenwolf. The purpose of the magic is much the same in both: to disconcert our complacency so radically that we must look at our world and ourselves in a range of new ways.

Martian Time-Slip is a perfect metaphor of scepticism. Everything might be its opposite, but it also must be taken for itself as well. I was surprised to find that Dick's account of the public school (staffed entirely by talking teaching machines) runs parallel to Goodman's notions about schools, and predates Illich's ideas by some years. Bohlen's perception that the all-protective safe little society is as much "schizophrenic" as he is foreshadows Leung and Cooper. Dick carries his questions to such a pitch that some of his books must have seemed incomprehensible in USA in the '50s and early '60s. Suddenly Dick's early books, such as Martian Time-Slip, are appropriate to our own times. So Martian Time-Slip is revived and will, I hope, receive the praise it has always deserved. My guess is that Dick's work will become more and more appropriate as years pass. By 2000, we will understand his 1950s' books.

* The S F Masters Series has also re-released:

Bring the Jubilee, by Ward Moore; introduction by Kingsley Amis (NEL; 1976; 191 pages; £3.50/\$8.95; original publication 1955).

I waited until 1976 to read this book for the first time. As soon as I read it, I put it into my Best Ten SF Books. (What are the others? Charley and I were trying to decide this the other night. He came up with about six or seven contenders; I had a few more. Off the top of my head: 1984; Brave New World; Hothouse; The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch; Ubik; Earth Abides; The Year of the Quiet Sun; Martian Time-Slip; Bring the Jubilee; Inside Outside; A Canticle for Leibowitz. That's eleven. Twelve, if you count The Glass Bead Game as s f.)

Ward Moore wrote Bring the Jubilee as a complex metaphor - before s f writers or reviewers even used the word metaphor. There is so much in it that I can write only a few paragraphs about it. It is a novel about, more than anything, growing up. Hodge Backmaker, who tells his own story, grows up in an alternate USA in which the South won the Civil War. Ward Moore's predictions about the likely results of such a victory remain doubtful at best. What is never in doubt is the verve with which Hodge lives and grows up in this world.

Hodge becomes involved in a fair amount of intrigue and fol-de-rol, all of which prepares him to join the community of Haggerhaven. Here his principal education is sexual; he becomes totally involved with Barbara, the woman who organises the radical community, insofar as anarchists can be organised. The character of Barbara is so vividly like somebody I know very well that, if I had read this book a year and a half ago, the direction of my life could have been quite different. (But, since I am even more cussedly independent than Hodge, maybe not.) Described as a "fiercely moral polyandrist", Barbara demands "absolute fidelity without offering the slightest hope of reciprocal single-mindedness... She had to be told constantly what she could never truly believe: that she was uniquely desired."

The affair with Barbara is at the centre of the novel. The s f gimmicks do not really appear til the end, and they are here only as a function of Hodge's relationship to the world. "I was, as Tyss had said, the spectator type, waiting to be acted upon, waiting for events to push me where they would." Hodge does battle with the world, it is true, but he keeps backing away from it, eventually losing it altogether as he travels by time machine to the scene of a decisive battle in the Civil War. This interdependence between character, theme, and plot is almost unique in science fiction, and rare enough in other fiction. The combination of all the elements takes place in Ward Moore's lithe, sensitive, witty prose, where all perceptions spring out of real thought and experience. Says Enfantin, one of the most vivid characters in the book, "One of the most pernicious of folk-sayings is, 'I could scarcely believe my eyes.' Why should you believe your eyes? You were given eyes to see with, not to believe with. Believe your mind, your intuition, your reason, your feelings if you like."

So here you have the quality which appears in only a few sf books - that of wisdom - Ward Moore's wisdom which constantly stretches beyond Hodge's half-formed impressions. At the end of the novel, we can foresee the effects of Hodge's final attempt to be a spectator, but the book implies that he never can. There is a kind of tragedy at the end; but tragedy can be arrived at only at the end of life. Bring the Jubilee, like Tucker's best books, or the others which I mention in my "Top Ten", is about life rather than gimmicks. It asks, What is the best way to live? It answers by saying, By living it to the best, of course.

* This is the kind of message one finds in all good books, even in those novels in which Phil Dick seems almost to extinguish the final flicker of life. Another author who is committed to perceptions about life, although on a narrower stage than those chosen by Moore or Dick is Kate Wilhelm:

The Clewiston Test, by Kate Wilhelm (Farrar Straus Giroux; 1976; 244 pages; \$8.95).
Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang, by Kate Wilhelm (Harper & Row; 1976; 251 pages; \$7.95).

I was sent the latter book as a review copy, and I bought the former book myself, via Barry Gillan. But I must say that I like The Clewiston Test very much, and I don't like Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang at all.

I can't say exactly why I like one book much more than the other, which is why I am not reviewing these books in detail. (This is what I should be doing.) In the back of The Clewiston Test, I've written a note to myself, "She loads herself with the responsibility of getting the big images right. Sometimes she can do it. This time?"

The secret might be that Kate Wilhelm never gets the "big images" right. When she tries, she skates over so many details that the results can sound gushy and boring. This is the case with Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang. This is the story of the cloned people who survive The General Eco-Catastrophe, which occurs in the first section of the book. But the book is never quite about people. Kate Wilhelm spends so much of the book describing people's travels, or attempting to explore power struggles, or just pottering around, that she neglects the central characters. This is a paradox, since the whole novel sets out to argue that the Individual will triumph. She epitomises the Individual in one person in the last section of the novel. The clone society becomes just a group of foels whose unrighteousness is to be demonstrated. There is probably another theme in the book: that a collective society survives because of qualities which make its members unable to appreciate the extent of their triumph, or the uses they could make of their advantaged position. But since Wilhelm cannot show us the viewpoint of any of the clones, we

have no cause for concern when their society does begin to disintegrate.

There is an undiluted sentimentality and dogmatism in Sweet Birds which is missing in most of The Clewiston Test. Certainly, in The Clewiston Test, Wilhelm is concerned to talk about some of the Big Themes: of the responsibility of science, and all that. But when it is good, this book is good because it is the record of the experience of one woman who is trapped in a house by a physical handicap, and whose scientific work is being threatened by other people. When Wilhelm returns to a small stage, she is very good indeed. We inhabit Ann's world, and also catch quite a few glimpses of the intricacies of the organisation to which she is still attached. She can never confront her husband directly with the suspicions each has about the other, but the confrontation is the major emotional strength of the book. Anne fears she is going mad; this belief is based on a quite hallucinatory sequence involving a kitten named Tyger. In fact, all the best things in this book involve outwardly small events and people which swell to the grotesque in the light of Wilhelm's creative, almost gothic eye.

There's an excellent review/polemic about The Clewiston Test in November 1976's F&SF. Joanna Russ gets a bit beside the point, but she does say how exhilarating is the (superficial) complexity of the book.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION

That heading is a bit obvious, since it is Virginia Kidd who has had much to do with encouraging Australian writers to try their talents overseas. In the meantime, some people have been selling and publishing here as well. The result is a whole batch of books which can be called "Australian science fiction".

The catch is that most of these books are written by my friends. This is a good reason for not publishing my reviews in the review column. So, if you'll take the warning, these are reviews, but they are also personal remarks from one bloke about some books written or edited by some of his friends:

Beyond Tomorrow, edited by Lee Harding (Wren; 1976; 320 pp; \$12.50 or discount from Space Age.)

This book has had more bad luck than most books, so I hope that copies of the hardcover edition are still available. Wren was supposed to publish it in time for Aussiecon, but did not release it eventually until early this year. In the meanwhile, Wren has had its difficulties; as I say, I'm not sure whether it is still publishing copies. Perhaps the best person to ask is the editor himself, or Space Age Books.

Editorial and book-designing skills have combined to make Beyond Tomorrow a beautiful piece

of bookcraft. This is also a very good collection of stories. Most of the stories are reprints, although many, such as Brian Aldiss' "The Oh in Jose" have not been reprinted before. There are five stories written by Australians and one, Cordwainer Smith's "Mother Hittons Litt'ul Kittons", written by an honorary Australian.

This is the sort of book I would hand to somebody who had discovered science fiction recently and wanted to know what was the best available in the field. Which, I suppose, is another way of saying that Harding's selections appeal to my taste too. I count nine stories to which I gave my **** rating; this amazing event does not happen often.

But five stories by Australians is not bad. I've talked about Cherry Wilder's "The Ark of James Carlyle" elsewhere in this issue (it appeared first in New Writings 24). A story so well-told that it almost seems like a watery dream by its end. :: John Baxter tries for a nightmare effect in "Takeover Bid", but fails. I think there are better Baxter stories which could have been included. :: I didn't like Tony Morphett's "Litterbug". :: "A Song Before Sunset", by David Grigg, is one of the first short stories that he wrote. It comes over as fully professional, quite vivid, but not quite as original as David's more recent work. :: Which leaves Bert Chandler's "Late" as perhaps my favourite story in the volume. It's one of those stories where the ending is so carefully embedded in the rest of the story, yet so meticulously hidden, that I cannot tell you about the rest of the story without showing the ending. I can only admire the restraint of the story-telling style which appears in this story - rather better than the more free-wheeling, shaggy-dog-story approach which has marked Chandler's stories during the last ten years or so.

"Nine Lives" is a bit rough round the edges and never quite convincing, but it is still an interesting piece of unadorned science fiction from Ursula Le Guin. :: Dick's "The Commuter" is a nice piece of uneasy magic; a good basis for the work which came later. (It appeared first in 1953.) :: "The Oath" is a previously forgotten story by James Blish, and is one of his best. I like this about as much as I like "Late", but for different reasons. In a post-war society, social conflicts are played out as a conflict between individuals. Both the issues and the people are fully dramatised. :: "Mother Hitton's Litt'ul Kittons" has lots of interest for me apart from its value as a story. It seems, for instance, like an excellent parable about Australian paranoia towards the rest of the world. (This is an Old North Australia story.) As a story, it is excellent, with some of the best moments in any of Smith. :: I've raved about "Sundance" elsewhere in this issue, and perhaps also in the Silverberg Issue. This is Silverberg's only completely successful piece of work. It was a great pleasure to read

it again and discover how good this author might yet become. :: "The Oh in Jose" by Brian Aldiss: I've met people who did not "get" the ending of this story, and so did not like it at all. It's worth following this story about story-telling carefully, so that the flavour of the ending can be tasted. :: "The Man Who Came Early", by Poul Anderson, is about the twentieth-century soldier who travels through time to a medieval Iceland, and then has to learn the new rules fast. Compared with most recent Anderson, there is little preaching, and the story rolls along well. :: "Call Him Lord", by Gordon Dickson, was one of the welcome surprises of the book. I had just not remembered it at all from my first reading. Despite the apparatus of world politics, the story really concerns the acute love/suspicion relationship between the prince and his keeper. Good, tense character conflict. :: "The Garden of Time", by J G Ballard, where Ballard's aristocrats are still protecting themselves against the hordes by picking the time-flowers. Some of Ballard's most vivid prose is in this story.

Other stories which I didn't like so much, are: "Rainbird" (R A Lafferty); "Idiot Stick" (Damon Knight); "Comes Now the Power" (Roger Zelazny). There's an introduction by Isaac Asimov.

The Altered I, edited by Lee Harding; Introduction by Ursula K Le Guin (Norstrilia Press edition available only in Australia; see p 2).

I managed to write a review of this book for The Melbourne Times without mentioning either that I appeared in this book, or that I attended the workshop, or that I was one half of the publishing partnership which produced it. (But it was a sincere review.) I have the same difficulties in talking about the book here.

I did read The Altered I from cover to cover a few months ago, and I will try to say how I find it as a book. I had nothing to do with producing it - Carey and Lee and Rob and other people did all that - but I was there and I do know these people. A much more enthusiastic review than anything I can advance appeared in Nation Review 8-14 October, where Jim MacKenzie just showed how enjoyable this book can be.

To me, the highlight of the book is Ursula Le Guin's introduction. This really is just how it was. The atmosphere of the Workshop is here, as well as some sense of the sheer hard work. I think this is the best piece of non-fiction writing I have seen from Ursula. :: My own "Foreword" sounds very stuffy and congested. But it does provide a handy guide for anybody who wants to run a writers' workshop: Begin early. Work hard. Don't take anything for granted unless you've double-checked every detail for yourself.

"Stabbed Alive" is still the best piece of writing of any kind I've seen from Randal Flynn. It's a bit of a standing joke around here that

Randal attempts to write in almost any style but his own. Well, here's his style: vivid, well-observed, sharply felt, dramatic. Now all he has to do is write fiction like this.

I suppose I was the first person (apart from Pip herself) to read "The Ins and Outs of the Madhya State". I realised at once that, not only was it by far the best story submitted for entry consideration to the Workshop, but that it was one of the best s f short stories I had read. Now I read it again a year later (in what is, admittedly, a slightly revised version) and I have not changed my opinion. This story is worth buying the book for, quite apart from the other material. I don't like Pip's "Broken Pit" (written at the Workshop) as much as some other people do, but I enjoyed it a lot when re-reading it here. And Pip's Single Change piece is one of the best pages in the book. Somebody should commission her sometime to make this into a longer story.

David Grigg is my other favourite author in the collection (apart from Ursula, of course). "Islands" is my second favourite story in the book, although there is no way which you, reading the story quickly, can feel the strength of the story as David read it to us at Booth Lodge. David's introduction to "Islands" is another piece, like Ursula's, which captures the atmosphere and workings of the Workshop exactly. I enjoyed David's Single Change story very much, and suspect that there is even the seed of a fantasy novel here (What would happen if the speed of light were 10 miles per hour?). "Crippled Spinner" is satisfying, too.

The only other stories I like very much are Edward Mundie's "The Gift", which I did not even understand when I read it first in manuscript, but which is very effective when read again; and Annis Shepherd's "Duplicates" - dense, well-observed human relationships in a fantasy background.

And if you want to see just how a story is "workshopped", there is no other way than to read Ursula Le Guin's "The Eye Altering", then follow the discussion afterwards. People who have only heard about the Clarion Workshop method, which we used at Booth Lodge, think that participants become very nasty and aggressive towards each other when criticising each other's stories. Well, they certainly don't leave much of the stories except little bleeding strips, but each workshop member takes the dismembering well and learns a lot from other comments. Anyway, I've said a few other things in my review of Clarion 3 (later in the issue).

For the record: I don't like my own story, "Vegetable Love", very much. But technically it is the best thing I've done. And if you don't guess the ending until you read it, there's a good reason for that: I had no idea what the ending would be until I wrote it. Workshops do things like this to you.

I would think that the quality of the editing would be obvious to the reader; but still, you might not know just how much work Lee put into assembling the book. And all without payment so far. I like Irene Pagram's cover very much.

A World of Shadows, by Lee Harding (Robert Hale; 1975; 160 pages; £2.40/\$7.50).

To review this book, I don't suppose I could do better than reprint the review I had published in The Melbourne Times;

"In 1970, Lee Harding had to offer his first science fiction novel, A World of Shadows, to America in order to sell it. Nobody in Australia was interested in this crazy, non-sheepdip stuff.

A World of Shadows still reads very well. It's a mystery story, and a love story. It's not just another of those How-can-we-kill-the-Alien-Menace stories. Instead, Harding asks how would an 'alien menace' really affect the lives of people?

"In this book, a mysterious alien creature changes the personality of one man into the body of another. The wife of the returning astronaut bears most of the pain of adjusting to the new relationship - is this body 'really' her husband? Can and should she love this person?

"And then, at the story's climax, she must undergo the dilemma proposed by an even more painful revelation. Laura Chandler emerges as a remarkable character in this book.

"A World of Shadows is not a great book, but it is memorable and well-constructed. And if there was any justice, it should have been published here in Australia five years ago, and established Lee Harding's career then."

Or, to put it a bit more bluntly, the dialogue and some of the writing is not as good as the central idea and plot, but they are very strong indeed. If anybody wants to begin a viable project for producing an s f film in Australia, this would be the book to choose.

The Frozen Sky, by Lee Harding (Cassell Patchwork Paperbacks; 1976; 102 pp; \$1).

The Children of Atlantis, by Lee Harding (Cassell Encounter; 1976; 104 pp; \$1).

These books were written for a series designed for retarded readers of early high-school age: restricted vocabulary but of interest to kids who would otherwise read teenage fiction. There's a fairly tight discipline involved in writing this way, and I think the discipline has improved all of Lee Harding's recent writing.

The Frozen Sky tells of a journey across Mars to rescue some people trapped on the Martian ice cap. Within the restricted length Harding has written quite a credible epic story, with some

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

nice variations. When this book appeared, Robin Johnson objected that Lee had got his facts incomplete, and that it should have been pointed out that the Martian ice-cap is made up of frozen carbon dioxide. Well, it isn't, I now find out. A NASA chap, speaking in Melbourne a day or so ago, conveys the news that the Martian ice-caps are actually made of ice.

I like Children of Atlantis a bit better. Again, the main story is fairly simple; it's just about how space-travellers settled on a quiet spot on a spare planet quite some time ago, and the spot sank... But Harding pulls the neat trick of compressing all of Earth's geological ages into a fairly small span of time. Any teenage reader with some sort of feeling for geology would get a kick out of watching the formation and restructuring of the Earth happen in this speeded-up way.

Halfway House, by David Grigg (Cassell Encounter; 1976; 110 pages; \$1).

Shadows, by David Grigg (Cassell Encounter; 1976; 109 pages; \$1).

These books were produced under the same kind of restrictions by which Lee wrote his books. Here are David Grigg's first published books, and he seems to have risen to the challenge remarkably well. The discipline of writing such work has also sharpened David's style; in his case, forcing him to leave out that trace of romanticism in his work which I find attractive, but which other people say is a bit schmaltzy.

Both books are adventure stories. Halfway House is about the encounter between a group of kids and a whizz-bang haunted house. At the end of the book, everything lies in ruins, and it seems that evil magic has been defeated. However, in the sequel, Shadows, the evil magic bolts all over the place, leaching the reality out of the world in a very Phildickian manner. I don't know what fourteen-year-olds will make of this, but I find it satisfying to find the best ideas in current science fiction being taken for granted and dramatised vividly, instead of being "explained". No explanations here; just helter-skelter adventure.

I have one strong objection to make to David's books, though. He puts in a character named Old Man Gillespie ("just a crazy old guy"), kills him off in the first book, and doesn't resurrect him in the second book! Haven't I got enough to put up with without upstart authors killing me off when they feel like it, and not even giving me the courtesy of a decent resurrection? (Most of the other characters are Tuckerisations of Melbourne s f fans, too.)

Lee's books are illustrated by Kristine Ammitzboll (Frozen Sky) and Paula Causer (Children). David's are illustrated by Irene Pagram, with a quite astounding cover for Shadows.

* This is quite exciting; all these columns of type just about Australian books. But I've still left out Bert Chandler's most recent books (I hope to get appropriate reviews in SFC soon), and Lee Harding's new book for Laser (Sanctuary). And I hope by the time I get to them, we might have new books from David Lake in Brisbane, Cherry Wilder's book from Atheneum, and perhaps Damien Broderick's new collection of Australian s f from A&R. I get the impression that Faber & Faber is enthusiastic about George Turner's Beloved Son. And these are just the new projects that I know about.

NOT ONLY... BUT ALSO...

* It's pleasant to have friends who write books and have them published every so often. The following new books are not s f, but interesting to me, and possibly to you:

A Lifetime on Clouds, by Gerald Murnane (Heinemann; 1976; 157 pages; \$8.50).

Gerald Murnane has had some articles and reviews published here, and you might remember the long piece I wrote about Tamarisk Row, his first novel (SFC 41/42). A Lifetime on Clouds is nowhere near as interesting as Tamarisk Row, but it is difficult to make comparisons anyway. At its best, Tamarisk Row is dense and almost Proustian. At its best, A Lifetime on Clouds is very funny and, for some people, mildly scatological.

My main beef against A Lifetime on Clouds is that it is only half of the novel which I read in manuscript early this year. The original book, named A Season on Earth (still scheduled to be the name for Gerald's third book), incorporated parts 1 and 2 of Lifetime, plus two other sections. The two final sections, in my view, are both better than the material which has just been published, and part 4 is just about the best writing I've seen from Gerald. The point is that parts 1, 2, and 3 led naturally into one another and culminated in part 4. By dividing the book in two, the editors have made A Lifetime on Clouds into a book which - perhaps appropriate to its superficial subject matter of masturbation - has no climax. Gerald's new ending to A Lifetime on Clouds is very funny, and the best part of the book, but it doesn't lift the book to the heights which the material demands.

I suspect that these remarks form about the harshest review the book will receive. The unsuspecting reader will find A Lifetime on Clouds irresistible, either for its humour and its paradoxical linking of adolescent sex and Irish-Catholic religion, or for its more thought-provoking aspects.

The real theme of A Lifetime on Clouds is the fecundity of the human mind, rather than that of the human genitals. For Adrian Sherd, the fifteen-year-old main character of the book, his

religion is an axiom, but his new sexuality is an uneasy element in his life. During the first section of the book, he invents a fantasy world of American landscapes where he can frolic with film stars and provide - so to speak - scenery for the necessary. For most kids, this kind of fantasising is enough. But Adrian Sherd is growing up in 1953, and he accepts the fulminations of the priest against solitary sins. The conflict between these parts of his life reaches a new stage when he begins to worship-from-afar a girl in the train which he takes home each night (from "St Carthage's College" in the Melbourne suburb of "Swindon"). Adrian invents a fantasy life in which he lives a perfect Catholic marriage with the girl. His fantasies even allow them to have five children in a weekend! At the end of the book, he is reaching toward another level of fantasy, but you will need to wait for A Season on Earth to read that.

I suppose I should apologise for not writing about A Lifetime on Clouds at the same kind of length with which I tackled Tamarisk Row. But much of my response to Tamarisk Row arose from my intense identification with the thinking-patterns and experiences of Clement Killeaton. There is something so absolutely true in that book that it took me some vast amount of words to fail to say what it was. But A Lifetime on Clouds is more superficially documentary and farcical, and also I feel at a much greater distance from Adrian Sherd. This has something to do with the style of the book, which stresses the eccentricity of the hero. But also, this is not "my" adolescence in the way that much in Tamarisk Row is "my" childhood. The interesting thing about the Catholic authority figures in A Lifetime on Clouds is that, by stressing sexual guilt, they did provide some sort of sexual education for the children who were forced to listen. They provided an exact sexual model to react against. In my adolescence, neither my parents nor any authority figures in our church talked about sex at all. (And it might say much about me that I ignored most of what other kids said about sex in the schoolyard.) This left me, in my early twenties, with no particular guilt about masturbation (never mentioned, therefore no particular guilt) but no other clear sexual attitudes, either. Which means, in total, that I had no idea how to relate to girls, and didn't talk to them very often.

This provides quite a radical difference between my fantasy life and that ascribed to Adrian Sherd in this book. I suppose all my fantasies were boyish and asexual, being provided almost exclusively by the books I read and records I listened to. And pop records during that time suited my worship-from-afar attitude toward girls. The idea of actually thinking about the possibilities for marriage (as Adrian does in part 2 of the book) would have been quite repugnant to me. (One survey I saw showed that my attitude was more typical; most boys have no attitudes towards marriage at all before they are

faced with the possibility.) So in the complete version of A Season on Earth, which is a powerful book indeed, Adrian's fantasies incandesce into a flaring glow. For people like me, my fantasies were always quite separate from my dull life...but this led to the expectation that good things happened only in fantasy. A Lifetime on Clouds, delightfully enough, has a much stronger impulse to it: it does include a robust attempt to understand life and rehearse for it.

I won't tell you the funny bits in A Lifetime on Clouds since I do hope you go out and buy a copy.

A Low Breed, by Joseph Johnson (Nelson; 1976; 313 pages; \$8.95).

I've met Joe Johnson only once, and I'm not sure that he even remembers the event. Perhaps he would remember that I was one of the few people who obtained a copy of, read, and reviewed his first novel, Womb to Let (my review for Rats was reprinted here in SFC 40). Apart from Patrick White's recent books, Womb to Let and Tamarisk Row are the two best Australian novels of at least the last ten years.

I find it as difficult to review A Low Breed as I do A Lifetime on Clouds. For a start, the main characters, Gavin and Hannah Campbell, are said to live in a large house in Gatehouse Street, Parkville. For the last year my place of employment has been a house in Gatehouse Street, but I'm damned if I can figure out exactly which house is the novel's. And then, to my delight (since I enjoy paradoxes so much), I am now to work for the VSTA (Victorian Secondary Teachers Association) which is parodied in A Low Breed as FUST. In several cases, a few Melbourne people have been taken directly, given fictitious names, and placed undisguised into the novel. In other cases, people like Gavin Campbell, I guess, are based on different former acquaintances of Joe Johnson, who now lives in a country town a safe distance from Carlton and Parkville.

On this superficial level, A Low Breed is a continuous tirade of abuse and satire directed against the left-wing, fashionable scene in Carlton and surrounding areas. Johnson really does seem to enjoy his revelations of pot parties, orgies, betrayals, and intellectual idiots. Gavin Campbell is a left-wing prig by conviction, and a hypocrite and betrayer of women by practice. His wife sinks beneath an ocean of alcohol under the pressure of it all. But the complete effects of all this are centred on their daughter, Annie. She grows up in a loveless environment, and attempts to compensate by becoming near-lethal to her parents, and by inventing intricate ball games. The best passages in the book are those in which the author describes Annie's games. By the end of the novel, Annie is destroyed, too.

But the narrator, out of whose mouth comes

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so many righteous fulminations, is also a character in the book. He followed the lead set by his attractive brother, Gavin, during childhood. As Gavin's sexual escapades pick up pace, David's impulse towards sex, and life in general, disappears altogether. He knows about the events in the novel because he lives in a converted loft out the back of the house in Gatehouse Street. Towards the end, in the most vivid and grotesque scene in the novel, Gavin and Hannah join forces for just a moment to mock everything that David stands for, which is very little. A first reading of the book must prompt a second reading, for there is a real doubt whether the author subscribes to as many of David's opinions as we believe at first.

I think A Low Breed fails, but only because of the complexity of the task Joe Johnson sets himself. Johnson's real talent is for the visionary - all the best scenes in Womb to Let, for instance, have a burning, Farmer-like intensity which usually appears only in far-out medieval literature, crazy science fiction, and Fellini's films. Johnson's mind has no soft focus on its lens; he sees things more sharply than most people do. But the clarity of the vision is not suited to the subtlety of the kind of satire he tries to write (based on Henry Fielding, I suspect). A Low Breed is still one of the most entertaining books of the year, and it does "get" some aspects of local life very well.

* I realise that I have been indulging myself again by talking at length about lots of books I like. I did mention The Year of the Quiet Sun as one of my Best S F Novels. Here's some good news to go with that:

* BRIAN ALDISS

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Have you noticed that ninety per cent of coincidences are pleasant? I've had a whole string of them recently and they've all been good. Here's a good one for which you are directly responsible: I get back from the First World Science Fiction writers Conference late Monday evening. On Tuesday morning (that's yesterday), in comes The Tucker Issue of SFC...

Why is this a coincidence? As you may know, I'm Chairman of the John W Campbell Memorial Award for this year. We had great trouble in finding the novel of 1975 to give the award to; although there were great things in '74, and this year fine books are arriving from Shaw, Priest, Moorcock, Coney, Amis, and others (just to name UK writers), last year suffered from drought. In the end, the judges agreed that we would bestow a second and third prize but no first. Hugos and Nebulas go out every year, irrespective of uneven merit, but we decided pretty unanimously that we regarded this as an unnecessary levelling process. So Second

Prize went to Silverberg's The Stochastic Man and Third Prize to Bob Shaw's Orbitsville. Instead of First Prize, we instituted a Retrospective Award, which should go to a novel of great merit published not more than ten years ago which was overlooked because there were flashier novels around that year, or which still quietly demands to be drawn to the attention of readers.

As you can imagine, claimants are many. Poor novels by Heinlein and Clarke are liable to get awards out of hero-worship rather than any lit. crit. impulse. Yet, when Tom Shippey and I lit on Wilson Tucker's The Year of the Quiet Sun, the response from the other judges was immediate and, in Dublin, at the banquet last Sunday night, we bestowed the prize on that fine novel. It was a great occasion, as all present will surely agree, and Tom Doherty, the popular new publisher of Ace Books, collected the award, beaming with delight and promising to deliver to Tucker as soon as possible in person. (You may recall that the novel was one of Terry Carr's Ace Specials in 1970, the year Ringworld was nominated for Hugo.)

So your issue 43 may have been two years late: it could hardly have been more timely!

I enjoyed your exposition of The Year of the Quiet Sun but, if you will forgive my saying so, I did not feel you displayed its beauties to the full. If I can get a tape of what was said about it at Dublin, I will send it to you. But I enormously enjoyed the Tucker Issue, also the Bleeding Hearts Club Issue 46 which accompanied it; forgive a brief letter but I'm still clearing up Dublin commitments...

Among other things, the conference decided that the international nature of s f should be recognised by an international organisation. That will take some organising (as preliminary discussions at Eurocon III in Poland revealed...); but we hope and need to keep Australia in touch. (29 September 1976)*

* Brian's letter really cheered me up: to see good things happening to good people is always cheering. I've not received any tape of the Dublin conference yet, but if Brian is able to obtain one and send it to me, I will leave room in SFC to reprint sections from it. *

* JAMES WHITE

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Very many thanks indeed for the Bob Tucker Issue of S F Commentary. Ever since I became involved in fandom in the late 1940s as an illustrator and later as a writer on Slant and Hyphen I have envied my friend Walt Willis his trip to America chiefly

because it enabled him to meet Bob Tucker in the flesh - or rather, if Walt's description is accurate, in the tall, rangy, wriggle of skin and bone. I would still very much like to meet him someday, but the interview, editorial matter, bibliography, and the detailed and comprehensive reviews and discussion of his person and his work in SFC 43 has left me feeling that I now know Bob Tucker personally. This is quite an achievement on the part of your contributors and yourself and, once again, my congratulations and thanks.

There is...one remark of yours with which I totally disagree and this is your semi-apology for the length of your book reviews. In my opinion your reviews are just the right length because they are detailed, personal, perceptive, constructive and, for these reasons, not always or entirely laudatory, and they stop when you no longer have anything useful to say. To my mind this is the ideal type of review, both from the standpoint of the prospective reader and the writer anxious, as most of us are, to profit from past or present literary mistakes. (8 October 1976) *

* In the original version of this section of the letter column, I had quite a discussion from such people as Neville Angove and Paul Walker on the subject of reviewing. A summary of their opinions appears in the "I Also Heard From" column. But here's the bloke who sparks off most of the discussion about sf in SFC: *

GEORGE TURNER

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This is a monster of a letter, but there was much mention of me in SFC 44/45 and questions were raised which deserve consideration. May I take them in order as they appeared in your "IMBTMF" column?

Jerry Kaufman: On the question of freedom of authors to get things published, the two Delany books are really beside the point. Books are published on the recommendation of the publisher's editorial and professional reading staff, and every publishing firm has a house policy - embracing language, style, subject, method, and every aspect of writing - which needs to be understood by a writer submitting a ms. If he doesn't take the trouble to find out these things, he deserves his dreary round of rejections. If he has an agent (and every intelligent writer has one), this work of selection will be done for him better usually than he can do it himself. The number of publishers is immense and there are few writings that will not find a welcome with one of them, no matter how 'way out' - if they are good enough for publication. But "good enough in whose opinion?" There's the rub. A work's likelihood of making

money for the firm is a factor in editorial decision, but not the only one; most houses have a "prestige list" which pays for itself and most publishers will take a chance on second-rate work if they discern promise of future value. If they did not, most first novels would never be published.

Publishers can also make almost unbelievable errors, simply because editorial tastes differ; there are no final standards of literary value or critical appraisal. So with Dhalgren. Had I been offered it as a publisher's reader, I would almost certainly have advised rejection on grounds of internal inconsistency, incoherent psychology, wordiness, inconclusiveness of central ideas, symbolical fuzziness, failure to come to grips with any of the central points touched on in the action, and nonsensical "science". I would have said that its ideas were already out of date for the modern reader and that, at 400,000 words, it would be an expensive failure. The last statement would have been wrong; I understand the book is selling very well. Fortunately for Delany, Frederik Pohl saw a winner in it and he was right. That doesn't mean that my judgment of the book is wrong, only that I am the wrong person to assess its chances on the market. So, apparently, were several others. And financial success doesn't make it a good book. So this "freedom to publish" works both ways.

Despite Ms Russ and Buchanan, most worthwhile work finds a publisher eventually. (I know about the exceptions, but their number is small.) Academics and frustrated "artists" have squawked about the philistines since art began, but I doubt that the world has lost much of value.

Tom Disch: What can I do except lie purring? First James Blish (so regrettably, "the late"), then Tom, and finally your editorial self in your afterword! My article on The Dispossessed was not intended as definitive, all-embracing criticism so much as a smug little lecture on form and content - which allows me to accept Tom's interesting addition and slide out of argument by claiming that that aspect wasn't in my ambit. (Slippery type, that Turner.)

Angus Taylor: I did not "miss the heart of the novel so completely" in my TD essay. I intimated, when discussing the final chapter, that Le Guin is optimistic for the future but is not so foolish as therefore to ignore the problems of the present or to treat them as something that will "all come right in the end". Because they won't, unless we work at them. And all problems are ultimately personal; calling them "politics" will solve nothing. Despite Angus Taylor's

statement, we have no ready answers about authority, self-determination, etc; facts revealed by investigation are not answers but the raw material of possible answers. Marx and Mao, Ghandi and Russell, Mann and Freud and, for that matter, Stanislaw Lem (in Solaris), have investigated possibilities, uncovered facts, and laid down lines of approach, but they have not produced answers. And I, reading psychology and sociology as psychology and sociology and not as "politics", am after all reasonably familiar with the sort of thing that Mr Taylor seems to mean by "politics". For me politics is the activities and manipulations of governments and oppositions, not the philosophical and dialectical excuses they make to account for their actions. So, if I thereby hang myself, as Mr Taylor suggests, I rest content to dangle. The tired old claim that everything in life is political is merely an attempt to reduce all things to a single equation - a system - the attempt which both The Dispossessed and I say is useless. Only evolution, mental and social as well as physical, can eventually arrive at useful answers, trampling all earlier attempts on the way. Meanwhile we dig out such facts as we can - and continue to view all conclusions with suspicion.

Doug Barbour: Doug need not feel edgy about my approach. The "actual writing" cannot possibly begin until all the preliminaries he refers to have been completed. Then the writer knows precisely what he is about and can make the final draft - and if that is not a fully considered draft as concerns form, shape, method, manner, style, length, etc, the result will be almost certainly less than the intention. The true professional, as distinct from "writers churning it out for pay only", does pay attention to all these technical points because he knows that only as a fully competent tradesman can he bring his artistic conceptions to fruition. (It is heartbreakingly difficult to teach new writers this.) The idea of the artist as some kind of aestheticacrobat who creates in a flurry of genius belongs to the "roses and raptures" period of last century: the artist who is not also a tradesman will write novels just as bad as those of the space-opera-on-demand moneygrub. For the record, Mrs Le Guin told me, on the basis of a quick run-through of the article, that she thought I had pinpointed the setup reasonably well. (Usually I hear only from the people who want my guts for garters.)

Lesleigh Luttrell: It would take a year to discuss her letter, but a few passing comments... As regards critics "getting more out of a literary work than the author really put there", her subsequent stream of argument with herself shows that she is

quite well aware of the answer - that the author did include everything that can be extracted (within the limits of common sense, which eliminates her tongue-in-cheek "Cyrano" bit) but that much of it is sub-conscious or totally unconscious. Much so-called "higher criticism" is devoted to examining not the work but the writer as revealed by the personality patterns which invest his work whether he wills it or no. (Occam's Razor must, of course, be kept handy.)

I don't know that the most worthwhile thing is to get into another's mind. Meaning, I suppose, to understand it sympathetically. Probably impossible because, as Gerald Murnane points out, we are all aliens to each other. We must attempt this impossibility, of course, if only for the self-discipline that comes not so much from understanding the other person as understanding the relationship between that person and yourself, and therefore the creation of a personal morality between the two of you. (I doubt that a universal morality is practicable because it involves systematisation; each relationship, each confrontation, must be assessed and dealt with on its merits. I'm pretty sure this is my bedrock belief because local critics have pointed it out as essential to the understanding of my novels.) As for the role of science, however you define it, it is just another of those things whose impacts must be taken into account. I find the physical sciences intrinsically fascinating - just as I do music, painting, good coffee, and a stormy sea - but in art, if I may drag the word in, all things are subjective, peripheral to intellect and the creature possessing it. This is, of course, a personal, felt opinion; I don't propose to defend it. Others think and feel otherwise.

Cy Chauvin: Surely he caught me bending with a silly remark, which serves me right for carelessness. I listed only three s f writers of good prose, of whom one has since died. Automatically Gene Wolfe steps into the vacant space, closely crowded by Le Guin, Disch, and Keith Roberts, with these three on only a marginally lower dais. But Bishop and Dozois! Definitely not; they both tend to be clumsy and over-wordy, particularly Dozois when he is straining (and when isn't he?) for effect. Lafferty is tremendous at his best, but very patchy. Ballard is a fine writer but I no longer count him with the s f group. Many others (Moorcock is an example) have obvious flairs for language but come apart dismayingly when you begin to check for consistency and for meaning in those gorgeous, big-experience metaphors.

As for my statement that s f takes itself

too seriously: I was not considering novelists specifically so much as fans and fan-writers, in-group critics and reviewers, and the people (usually respectable writers of fiction or otherwise level-headed academics) who lose contact with perspective and common sense when they write Meaningful Introductions to anthologies or Serious Pieces for the literary magazines and make claims for s f which should, in decency, be edited out of their scripts. They have caused more hilarity in responsible circles than any genre can reasonably support. Simple statements of fact would probably gain respect and cool appraisals might even generate intelligent interest, but read Hell's Cartographers if you want to know why serious critics tend to be turned off when s f raises its slightly demented head. What not only hurts but raises the hackles is that young minds coming to s f (and they tend to come pretty young) before a critical sense is developed properly are apt to regard these people as oracles and their statements as accepted literary fact. As for individual writers, they must take themselves seriously while they are writing, but when the job is finished it is time to return to earth and see the result for what it is - and that may often be hard to take seriously.

Stanislaw Lem: Mr Lem, who surely is also "a reasonable being", demonstrates - as he does commonly when confronted head-on - that he is an agile one as well. He dispenses of my objections by inventing what I might have thought (but did not) about his book, Phantastics and Futurology, when all I did in fact was speculate, almost in an aside, about the peculiarities to come if the rest of it was as illogical and uninformed as the "Hopeless Case" chapter. This diversionary tactic allowed him to then deliver a quite agreeable lecturette about "the incorporation of scientific paradigmatics into the arts", with most of which I concur, and would add only that this is possibly more generally accepted and practised in the "capitalist" bloc than in the "socialist". This, however, is a deduction (possibly shaky) based on the small acquaintance we are able to make with modern art movements in Russia, Poland, and the rest of the bloc. (We may also have some rather different ideas of what is implied by survival via technology, and I would like to hear Lem further on this point.) This interesting but totally irrelevant lecturette out of the way, he ignores the three prongs of my attack which matter:

- 1 That his acquaintance with English-language s f is too limited to justify generalisations.

- 2 That the critical structure he erects to justify his strictures is ludicrous and in contradiction of observable fact (Upper and lower strata, indeed!)
- 3 That the logic of his arguments is questionable at every point and often inadmissible in any logical system.

Bob Tucker's over-generous conclusion that the whole thing was a deadpan joke must also (regretfully) be dismissed. The relentless rush of perjoratives and contemptuous comparisons makes no joke in any language but that of paranoia and, if we dismiss paranoia, only a huge and unlovely ignorance remains.

It is interesting to note that somewhere there is a small, shrill squeak of writers who agree with the conclusions of the "Hopeless Case" article. ((*brg* Squeak. Squeak.*)) These should observe that agreement means that either they admit that they write trash or evade destruction by claiming that their work is not s f. Anyone, writer or reader, who agrees with the conclusions of that article puts himself in the position of admitting that he is a witless idiot - with a single exception of Philip K Dick, who receives a special and slightly tarnished dispensation. Nobody can stand aside and murmur, "But of course this doesn't apply to me"; as Lem's words stand, it does.

Perry Chapdelaine suggests that "Lem and Turner may not even be arguing about the same things." I can do better than that: We aren't arguing at all, because Lem refuses all baits and talks about something else. I hope Chapdelaine doesn't think I was defending s f: I was simply objecting to Lem's wholesale damnations on the ground of shaky facts and inadmissible logical procedures. There's a great deal wrong with the s f scene, but Lem's view is even more cockeyed than the reality.

Lastly, Michael Shoemaker raises the question of Lem's political beliefs as affecting his literary opinions. It is also possible that my political beliefs, such as they may be, affect mine, but I indicated in one part of my essay-in-reply that ideology would not be used by me as a platform for argument. The reasons should be plain to anyone who gives the matter a little thought. (25 February 1976) *

* I've always thought that Lem's conclusions to the first part of his "Hopeless Case" - as I interpret those conclusions - were much the same as George's opinions about s f in general - again, as I have interpreted them. But George tends to get upset if and when I have suggested this. I have attempted to begin an argument on this topic in SFC before, but to no useful effect.

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. Perhaps we can let it rest now. The important aspect of Lem's essay has always been, for me, his illumination of many aspects of the work of Philip Dick. This is why the essay appears in Philip K Dick: Electric Shepherd (available, need I remind you, from Nerstrillia Press, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, for \$A4).

* In SFC 44/45, George Turner raises a few points which he wanted to know about the literary position of Lem in Europe (especially, as compared with Franz Rottensteiner's claims about that position):

PATRICK MCGUIRE

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Lem's reputation in the Soviet Union is certainly very high indeed. This is partly because Lem's s f started appearing there before they had decided to permit the translation of Anglo-American s f, so that the Soviet audiences first became acquainted with American techniques as they were mediated by Lem. Also, Lem has more opportunity (and more incentive) to keep his name before the Soviet public by being interviewed every so often, by writing articles for Literaturnaia gazeta or Voprosy literatury, and so forth. Some, though not all, of his non-fiction is available in Russian too. While (to come to the point of George Turner's wish), I'm not as familiar with his position in Central Europe itself, my impression is that his reputation is very high indeed. In Poland, my understanding is that for ten or fifteen years there was effectively Lem and no competition within the field of science fiction at all, though by now several other Polish writers are said to be good. (I've read some reasonably competent work in Russian translation, but I haven't made a thorough study.) So one would think that most of the factors that make him extremely popular in Russia would also be at work in Central Europe. The exceptions being (a) that if you want to call West Germany or Austria "central", then the West Germans or Austrians would have had previous exposure to English-language s f, so Lem wouldn't have that artificial advantage; and (b) while institutional prejudices against s f in the USSR seem to be about as strong as they were in the US ten or fifteen years ago (though expressed differently), I understand that until recently they were rather stronger in Central Europe. So there is a current Lem would have to buck.

There exists in Polish a book-length study, Stanislaw Lem by Ewa Balcerzak (Warsaw: Panstowowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973). I don't read Polish, though.

Somewhere in SFC 44/45, the question of the degree of Lem's Communism comes up. That's

not an easy question to answer, but relevant information includes items not available in English, such as Lem's first two s f novels, where the pro-Communism and anti-Americanism is laid on pretty thick. The fact that he stopped doing that might mean one of several things, but he still sounds pretty pro-Soviet in interviews published in the USSR. This may be all pro forma, but either Lem is or was somewhat Communist or he possesses a certain, shall we say, moral flexibility.

I agree, obviously, that Hard to be a God deserved rather more attention than it's received to date. You had some interesting interpretations. As I said in my article on the book (I think), the Strugatskys are adherents of the Hemingway school of showing and not telling, and at times this leaves things rather ambiguous. I am reasonably certain, however, that your interpretation at the bottom of page 72 isn't quite right. From the entire corpus of their work (admittedly, not available in English, so I'm not faulting you - and I suppose, in any case, you could argue that conclusions to be drawn from the work are not necessarily those the author had in mind), it seems clear that the Strugatskys believe in an objective right and wrong. Evil doesn't stop being evil just because the person committing it is picturesque and so morally immature that he doesn't know what he is doing. (Their Attempted Escape has a rather likable prison camp guard - on another planet - who simply doesn't recognise the prisoners as people, and so feels free to treat them brutally. There are similar figures in Inhabited Island and other works.) Probably it is fair to say that in Hard to be a God there is at least a three-way tension between bad ideals, good ideals, and real life, but I don't think the Strugatskys opt cleanly for "real life". There is too much in real life which offends the instinct for justice of any decent person. (The Strugatskys seem to think that social conditions may increase or decrease the number of "decent people", but that there will be a few around, no matter what.) The tension evolves because one will be tempted to use evil means to try to make things better, and of course this will not work. Of course this will not work, while it seems that good means are not likely to have any impact whatever, evil being so much more forceful. So the decent person is forced by his conscience to try to do something to improve matters while he knows full well that, if he isn't very careful and very thoughtful, he's only going to make things worse, and that even at best he's not likely to make things better. Perhaps he cannot save his sanity, but he can save his soul.

(21 April 1976)*

* I see what you mean. There is no passion in Hard to be a God if we leave out of consideration the moral passion of the main character. The Strugatskys do depict well, however, the equal/opposite moral passions of the other participants in this violent and disintegrating society, as well as accounting for conscienceless people in a way that most other s f writers do not even attempt. The Strugatskys do have an ability (in this book, at least) to paint a moral landscape in terms of the human and physical landscape.

Patrick also says:

I believe I mentioned to Foyster, but I'll repeat to you, that while in Moscow I noticed that some story of Lee Harding's (I don't remember which) was being serialised in a children's magazine, Iunii tekhnik. If it's a new story, they're paying him and he knows, but if it's an old story, he might not. Iunii tekhnik has a circulation of six million, if I'm not mistaken. The big time. (1 April 1976)*

* GENE WOLFE

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I don't know how to thank you sufficiently for sending those pages (from SFC 44/45), except to say that I am xeroxing them and sending them to my mother. Which I am.

Nothing would give me more pleasure than to send George Turner a suitably inscribed copy of Peace; but I don't have his address. Let me know where I can reach him, and I'll get one off to him in the wink of an eye. Or possibly, a large envelope.

* I think this bit of business has been taken care of although, with the Post Office operating in its own usual alternate time stream, it is unlikely that George has received the book yet:

I'm very, very glad that you liked the book too. Once the puerile thrill of seeing one's name in print has weakened (I don't think it ever vanishes entirely) the greatest pleasure - after the act of creation - is in hearing from someone who truly enjoyed the work.

Sure I wonder how I did it. Readers often seem to think that writers usually write inferior stuff out of sheer laziness, and only once in a while exert themselves to produce really good material. I know it's not that way with me, and I don't think it's that way with anyone else. Sometimes there's a lot of magic, sometimes there's none. And, of course, the readers' perceptions of what is "really good" differ. Recently I read an article by Don Ayers in which he lists what he believes to be my

best stories. "The Death of Dr Island", which won the Nebula, didn't make his list.

Peace certainly isn't a best seller, but that doesn't seem to be the fault of the reviews. I've got excellent reviews in my files from Publisher's Weekly (probably the single most influential medium in this country), the Philadelphia Bulletin, the Houston Chronicle, a Los Angeles radio station (KFNB), The Library Journal, and so on and so forth. In the s f field, The Science Fiction Review and Algol have carried raves. (And now, of course, S F Commentary.) It hasn't been reviewed by Time, Newsweek, and so on; but those magazines review little fiction, and what little they do cover consists of heavily advertised titles.

What bothers me more is that neither the paperback rights nor any foreign rights have been sold yet. There's still plenty of time for that, however.

No big news from the Wolfes of Barrington. We're still living where you met us. Comedy life, not tragedy life, thank God. I'm looking forward to that Tucker Issue, and even more to 44/45. Even if it does sound like it shoots. (30 March 1976)*

BUCK COULSON

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George Turner has a very grabby opening to his review of Peace. Totally inaccurate as far as history goes, of course, but grabby. (Prinzip had about as much to do with starting World War I, much less all future history, as Harriet Beecher Stowe had to do with starting our Civil War. But he's a nice scapegoat.) Anyway, it's a fine review - meaning that Turner liked many of the same things about the book that I did, and described them better than I would have. Did you know that Aunt Olivia is Sandra Miesel? (Read the book and you will, if you know Sandra - and Gene. Not Sandra Miesel of today, but an 1890ish version.)

(7 August 1976)*

* If Aunt Olivia is Sandra Miesel, then who is that ghostly character...? Maybe all the characters in Peace are loosely based on fans. This might account for why they are a strange lot - sort of like a set of characters from Gahan Wilson's cartoons.

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

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I didn't know you liked Inverted World better than The Dispossessed (at least, to the point where you would vote for it). I wince

whenever I remember the day I thrust the proofs into your hands, and locked you in the study to read them. I assumed that you would have developed scar-tissue against the thing as a result... I personally feel no rancour towards The Dispossessed, and feel it was a worthy winner (and would have voted for it myself).

Well, then. What about all this attention I've been getting? (I have vague misgivings about being done-over in this way...sometimes I think writers who read too much criticism spoil themselves afterwards by self-consciousness.) In brief, my reaction to the section is torn two ways. Firstly, it was a much-needed cheer-up dose at a time when I was rather low; secondly, because the reviews were of older books I feel sufficiently distanced from the comments, etc, not to feel over-related or bumptious about the favourable stuff and not too badly wounded by the unfavourable.

I'll pass over David Grigg's piece. Indoctrinaire seems a long way behind me now, and he's probably right about it. A lot of people are left cold by it; some people like it. I dunno. Grigg's review is fair and perceptive.

I read your own review of Fugue for a Darkening Island with a feeling of rising joy, not because you were kind to the book (although I think you were), but because the review revealed a degree of perceptiveness I had never dreamed possible. I can't claim that other critics have been wrong, or unperceptive, but perhaps through timidity no one has gone before so deeply into what I have always thought of as the book's true ambition. You are the only person in the world, for instance, who has seen that parts of Fugue are supposed to be funny, and that the book is a tragicomedy. Also you seem to divine that the voice of Alan Whitman is itself the key to the content. I also blessed you - and Gerald Murnane too - for sparing me the two critical catch-phrases that have dogged my stuff: the "cold" prose and the "Kafkaesque" images. These drive me paranoid, partly because they are so unhelpful, but mainly because they are mere shorthand for the critic, and save him the necessity to ponder why it should be so. I think that for once I have a review of something I'd like to hear. (Quotable adjectives for the jacket of the paperback don't count...)

Two answers to points you raised. Although you say (accurately) that "Whitman condemns himself out of his own mouth", you don't follow this through on something important. You say, "the only thing he can do well is fuck women"...thus missing, I think, a central irony, which is that we have only

Whitman's word to go on. There are four or five described sexual scenes in the book and, if memory serves, each one goes wrong for one reason or another; the implication was, of course, that he wasn't such hot stuff after all.

The other thing is that you supposed I started with a "what if?" proposition, and went on from there. As far as I can remember, it was Whitman's voice and character that came first, and for some weeks I was writing Fugue as a general, non-sf novel. The marauding hordes of black refugees came later, and struck me as an effective metaphor for something that would threaten someone like Whitman. Of course, blurbs tend to play up the more obvious plot elements.

Of Gerald Murnane's review I feel I should say less. Inverted World was an exhilarating book to write (and some of the euphoria still picks me up even now, three years later), and if it's any guide to how I reacted to Murnane's piece, it renewed some of the exhilaration for me. I liked his "heroes or madmen" concept of my guildsmen. It was this brand of heroic delusion that first appealed to me about the notion of the book; I wanted that last bridge to succeed! I think I was a little mad at the time. I'd like to answer one specific point, though, about my Prologue. No, I didn't see it as the first notes of a grand symphony...I didn't see it at all! The Prologue was added to the book some months after I had finished with it, on the very pointed request of my American publisher. I didn't really see the need then, and I certainly don't now. I would not mind in the least if every reader were to tear the Prologue out of his copy. As Murnane implied, it's completely redundant.

Anyway, I've tried to respond as objectively as possible, so I hope no one takes exception to this reply. I enjoy reading good criticism (as opposed to, though not necessarily in place of, favourable criticism), and when it's on something of mine then that's a bonus.

News? The Space Machine has just come out over here, to thunderous silence, as ever. I look forward to the inevitable two-line notices that seem to be the preserve of sf books. I'm just finishing the first draft of a novel that will probably be called Wessex Riding...which has an idea of the same generic type as Inverted World, but is wholly different in almost every way. There's a lot of work ahead. (27 March 1976)*

* Chris also had what was, in March, a "scoop": that he is editing an original fiction anthology called Antipations, which should appear in 1978. Authors include Aldiss, Ballard, Cowper,

Disch, Harrison, Priest, Shaw, Sheckley, and Watson. Sounds good.

About the only way in which I can write reviews like that of Fugue for a Darkening Island is to sit down for a week and take extensive notes about the book (at least a few lines about each page, and a lot more about some pages) and find out just what is in it. The only handicap in reviewing this way is that the method poses a limit of reviewing only fifty-two books per year.*

* PHILIP STEPHENSEN-PAYNE

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

I was somewhat disappointed with Gerald Murnane's review of Inverted World. Generally clear and reasonable, he makes, to me, the large error of producing the Sun/painting dispute as one of the strengths of the book, when even Chris Priest, I think, has agreed on the "error" inherent in it. That is, that there can be no difference within the framework Chris Priest posits, between the Sun in the sky and the Sun as drawn. Thus, if it seems a "weird shape" to Helward then he will draw it as such. However, if the woman sees the Sun as circular, she will see the drawing as circular. They have no common points of reference at all, just as we can never know if colours as "seen" through someone else's eyes are the same as seen through our eyes.

* I must admit that I simply did not think of this point. However, if you don't notice this error (if it is), then the scene has real dramatic poignancy. *

I take up George Turner's offer, and call him a "blind mole unable to see the obvious" in his one-line dismissal of Le Guin's "Direction of the Road". Here she tries to discuss the perspective of a tree passed on the road, as if it was the tree that moved rather than the car. I think it probably fair to say that she doesn't succeed fully, but to attempt to reverse our perception of a common event is surely a manifestation of Gerald Murnane's "Other Eyes, Other Universes". It is the tiny, accepted facts of life whose overturn strike us most. The concept that the Earth revolves around the Sun, rather than vice-versa, is now a matter of great indifference to most people. A suggestion that the world moved and changed to imitate our "theoretical" moving would be rather more of an upset.

I wish you had either not printed Owen Webster's article on John Wyndham's four novels, or that you had not printed his obituary beside it: the first because I found it a poorly thought-out and, in many places, incorrect article, and the second because I cannot sit down and spend a couple of pages tearing to pieces an article.

written by a close friend of yours who has died recently. It would not only be pointless, but also hurtful.

However, for Wyndham's reputation, I feel I must at least dispute Owen's assigning Wyndham's "A lusty hatred for the human race"; for nothing could be further from the truth. I have discussed Wyndham with a number of his old friends, read all his fiction that has been published and his rare articles, and the true position is the opposite. I think that his obituary in The Times (author unknown) puts it best:

These (his novels written as Wyndham) are all characterised by great clarity of thought and expression and a profound sympathy for mortals caught up in events outside their natural experience. Unlike Wells he was an optimist, and reasoning capacity was the unbreakable stem of his fiction. Man, he believed, was an accident, but it was up to him to make the best of it. (My underlining.) (17 July 1986)*

* Perhaps Webster's reference was to Swift's famous affirmation to Pope, "But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth", and the fact that Swift distinguished between man as a rational animal, and man who was capable of becoming rational. I don't know. Lots of people have taken exception to one sentence without considering the argument of the whole. I see no reason why you shouldn't argue at length with various points from the essay; you seem to have a sentimental view of the dead which, I thought, had been debunked. At any rate, your criticisms would be of the article, not the person. I offered it for public discussion; it would be a pity if people spoke of it in hushed whispers just because of the obituary I added to it. After all, the regret I expressed was not that Owen is dead, but that he is no longer alive - if you see what I mean.*

* GÖRAN BENGTSSON

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Owen Webster's discussion of John Wyndham as a novelist of ideas was quite interesting - I've always thought that Wyndham deserved to be read with a lot more critical intelligence than usually he got. But since Webster's previously unpublished piece was written in 1959, shouldn't somebody have gone to the trouble of providing it with a few contemporary footnotes and perhaps an Afterword? After all, Wyndham is dead by now, and we know where he went after Krakon and the cuckoos; and having him discussed as a novelist of ideas without a mention of Consider Her Ways and The Trouble With Lichen is really extraordinarily annoying. In the two works just mentioned,

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

Wyncham did things nobody else even thought of doing in those days.

Since you print somebody's recommendation - in the "also heard from" column - of Lanier's Hiero's Journey, I feel bound to let you know that this book is pure horse manure; pop ecology married to semi-fascist fantasy of a kind one had thought could never again be written seriously after Spinrad's parody of it in The Iron Dream. So, naturally, Hiero's Journey is being made into a multi-million-dollar movie.

(2 May 1976)*

* LESLEIGH LUTTRELL

525 West Main, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA

You did get some remarkable letters in response to SFC 44/45. I think that is because most people really do want to be honest about themselves, to share their feelings with their friends, but usually they are afraid to. You are so honest yourself that your readers feel they can reveal things about themselves to you that they would not otherwise talk about... Unfortunately, such honesty doesn't always work out for the best. I have seen people very badly misinterpret what other people have said about themselves and their relationships with other people and some terrible disagreements... But, by and large, I think most fans do appreciate personal revelation. Certainly it has earned Don C Thompson a double Hugo nomination. (It does help to be a fairly good writer.) Perhaps the worst thing about it is that it is sometimes hard to respond to. If Michael O'Brien had told you that much about himself in a conversation, how would you respond? I would find it very difficult.

It is interesting to read in SFC 46 that this July marks the tenth anniversary of the founding of ASFR and of modern Australian fandom. No wonder I have always felt so close to Australian fans - we are of the same fan generation. It is ten years ago this month that I first got into fandom. I can even give the exact day for that event, since after Chris and I had attended one day of the Ozarkon that year, we knew that we were both fans. It was a wonderful revelation to both of us (and to my mother as well, I think) that there was actually a group of people like us, not only out there somewhere in the world, but right in our very own city.

Like most fans, until I discovered fandom I never had a really close friend. I was too different from everyone I knew to really consider them as my good friends. I suppose where my case is unusual is that I didn't feel different from the rest of my family. We were a group of different people. My

father has never had difficulty making friends (I often think he would have become a politician if he hadn't become a civil servant first; he has the ability to talk to people upon first meeting them that I really envy.) I know my mother had had good friends when she was younger and that she and my father had both thoroughly enjoyed going to college and being around people who were intelligent and interested in a lot of things. But I think that the horrible 50s got to both of them. I don't think my mother had any close friends during that period, and she passed along to us the idea that people who are different just don't have many close friends. I still remember very clearly the weeks between when we first found out that there was going to be a science fiction convention in St Louis and the actual event. I didn't know what to expect, of course, but I had high hopes. One of the things I hoped would happen would be that I would meet some boys. I was fifteen at the time, and had never had a boyfriend. I felt quite left out, even though many of the girls I went to high school with were in the same predicament (it was a girls' school). Still the idea of meeting anyone outside of my family that I could talk to about most of my interests were terribly exciting. Fortunately, I did meet people like that at the convention, Hank among them, and was quickly plunged into fandom.

Fandom has made quite a difference in my life, I think. Sometimes fans think of themselves as social rejects, and to some extent we are. But being in fandom gave me enough self-confidence that I could handle most other aspects of my life. It has helped me get over being painfully shy; I think it has allowed me to make friends who aren't fans, simply by convincing me that I am an interesting and worthwhile person.

(5 July 1976)*

* In a general way, that sums up my experience as well. I regret that I did not discover fandom til I was 21, but gradually, the sort of self-confidence that comes from meeting one's own type of people for the first time helped me to reach out into the wider world as well. Then I found other "fandoms" in the community as well - beleaguered people who gather into fruitful groups. And, in recent years, the discovery that there might even be people who like me for me's sake, instead of as a Fanzine Editor, or as a BNF as well. This confidence has slipped lately. :: Thanks for celebrating the decade, Lesleigh.*

* DAMIEN BRODERICK

224 Palmer Street, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010

I AM WRITING IN BIG LETTERS IN CASE YOU
SEAR YOUR R_TINAE INTO BLISTERED LAVA
DURING THE EXCITEMENT OF THE ECLIPSE.

On second thoughts, that is not likely, since

as a science fiction fan, you would probably be conversant with the dangers and risks of the Scientific Method.

Our dog did not howl, even though we showed him the Eclipse on Telly. Perhaps he has lived too long with Man, and his Feral Nature has been covered by a thin veneer of Civilisation.

Actually he is not our Dog, but Berys's. Berys is the actress who lives in our Home. Actually the Dog is not a He but a She.

My little Friend Dianne thinks your Flodnap is a Nice Cat. Her cat Poofy was very bad the other night. He ripped the Chicken Remnants out of the Glad-Bag, tunnelling through the plastic with his Teeth and Paws. Bad Poofy! It might have been the Eclipse.

Where was I? Yes; indeed, I received 43 and 46 and 47. Tucker, I fear, I don't care about one way or the other (just re-read Quiet Sun to check; ho hum), but Michael O'Brien et al moved me powerfully. Here, as far as I can tell, is the true heart of Australian fandom, appallingly vulnerable, defensibly brittle or silly, sprung from a hundred familial Laingian nexal bonds into a tenuous, desperate rescension of the same unbearable dynamic (paradoxically), yet finally risking that huddled core in a most unsure and uncertain hope of resurrection. Wonderful, Bruce, but very scary. Fuck Coulson; I know he has his own problems, and has found his own way, but his piece of Bracing Insensitivity is so glib I'm staggered. (26 October 1976)*

* "Risking that huddled core in a most unsure and uncertain hope of resurrection." Wonderful, Damien; that says it all. I know so many people among fans who have experienced that "resurrection" during recent years that I still hope for mine. And, of course, I hope so very much that, in writing for SFC, Mike O'Brien began his own.

Damien and Dianne also invited me to stay with them in Sydney ("Take a week off from your surroundings. No excuses will be tolerated."). His letter arrived when I most needed cheering up - but that was in the middle of all my catastrophes. Which means I am still broke enough not to travel. But the offer of help is very much appreciated. *

MARC ORTLIEB

* 23 Crittenden Rd, Morphett Vale, SA 5162

Reading several letters in SFC 47, I said to myself, "Hey, that's exactly what happened to me", or "Wow, I couldn't have said it better myself."

I don't know if you ever listen to Melanie ((*brg* Of course I do*)) but she has a beautiful bit in her song "Summer Weaving":

And when it comes right down to it
We're really all alone
Unless we want someone to own
And run the life we live.

That's the nice thing about people like Melanie and her ilk, whether poets, novelists, or letter writers: they show you that you're not alone. That anything you've felt, someone else has felt in a similar fashion. Your letter column helps us to contact more closely those other people.

But enough. Like I said, I don't like getting too personal. If I keep writing like this, you might get the impression that I'm being serious and that's a dreadful thing for anyone to think about me.

(Isn't it funny. Some of us have to apologise for saying something serious. Western culture conditions us against soul-baring almost as thoroughly as Silverberg's in that novel of which I forget the name.) ((*brg* A Time of Changes.*))

* The writer who's expressed best what I've been feeling lately is Stendhal, especially in a really lacerating book called Lucien Leuwen which John Foyster lent to me some years ago. I get fairly irritated, too, when I'm accused of being "serious". Some people think that the opposite of "serious" is "humorous". But, to me, "serious" means "being vitally concerned about; caring". And today the sin is "caring"; to be cool - uncaring - is the ideal. So be serious, Marc.

TERRY GREEN

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Canada

I missed Peter Nicholls' review of Heinlein's latest in its original publication, so I thank you for reprinting it in SFC 47. It is a good, sound piece of commentary. I'm amazed at reviewers like Peter Nicholls, though, who had the tenacity to hang on to the end of Time Enough for Heinlein; but I thank them for doing so, since they have thus expressed what needed expressing about the rise and fall of one of the Giants of the field. Heinlein makes an ass of himself with every book of late, and no one can believe that he will not get the message of feedback from critics and reviewers. But apparently the only message that sinks in anymore is the message inherent in his Advances and Royalty Statements. His audience of readers is apparently young and immature at best, and the horror of it is that they feel they are getting something philosophically weighty and deep from his cranky, tiresome leading characters and weary adages. I speak from the experience of a high school teacher here, of one who has had two fine, intelligent male students in their mid to late teens inform me with the light of true discovery in their eyes that Time Enough For Love was indeed a great book. Here - in a

nutshell - would appear to be the essence of Heinlein's audience: an audience with no real experiences of their own yet, who accept his sexual-based "philosophy" (for I am convinced that it is the sexual content - if one can call it "content" - that is the major attraction) as irreverent and liberating to their own immature and natural frustrations. That is why the ending to Peter Nicholls' review is so true to the mark.

(23 October 1976)*

BERT CHANDLER

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

Thanks muchly for SFC 47 - another meaty issue. Very interesting were the various comments on Mike O'Brien's soul-baring. They made me realise how lucky I have been compared to Mike and some others. Mind you, I have contended for many a long year that those who say that one's schooldays are the happiest days of one's life are either bloody liars or have exceedingly short memories. Or, quite possibly, they're just subhuman.

Still, I was lucky. I was a dud at sports and if I were so unfortunate as to live in Melbourne I'd join that society - is it still in existence? - whose members wear a little square-football-lapel-badge to indicate that they have no desire to participate in discussions regarding Australian Rules.

I was a dud at sports, as I have said, but the institution at which I was exposed to the rudiments of an education was a notorious "swot school" and nobody there considered games to be of any real importance.

Like David Grigg - who talks of his own loneliness - I have become involved now and again in pub sessions with my rough workmates (and nobody has ever had to twist my arm to get me to join the party). I have been lucky inasmuch as both seamen and writers, when in their cups, tend to talk shop - and the shop-talk of seamen and writers is always interesting (to seamen and writers if to nobody else). (Of course, anybody's shop talk should be interesting to a writer, but ...)

Now, a small correction. In your report on this year's Australian Awards you accuse Robert Hale of perpetrating The Big Black Mark. It wasn't Hale, it was DAW. As a matter of fact, Robert Hale and DAW do often see eye to eye regarding my novels - but Hale didn't like The Big Black Mark any more than DAW liked The Broken Cycle. DAW, however, will be publishing The Way Back, already published by Hale, and DAW and Hale will be bringing out Star Courier practically simultaneously.

Two of the book reviews I found especially interesting. One (of course) was Christine's criticism of The Bitter Pill; a so-so write-up by one of the family is far better than glowing praise from a mainstream reviewer who just hasn't a clue about science fiction. I was amused by her reference to the description of Captain Starr's disastrous berthing at Devonport as "vintage Chandler". Mphm. After Captain Chandler's disastrous berthing at Devonport some years ago he was known, in northern Tasmanian ports, as "Basher Bertie". Cutting a long and harrowing story short, I finished up firmly wedged into the concrete wharf at an angle of 45°, on a falling tide...

The other review was that of Heinlein's Time Enough for Love. I, personally, did not think much of Stranger in a Strange Land and found I Will Fear No Evil quite unreadable. But Time Enough for Love, in spite of the rather too frequent tckyness, I'd have read in one sitting if it hadn't been such a thick book. One reason for my great interest was the way in which Heinlein tucked in so many loose ends - the eventual fate of Slipstick Libby, the absorption into the mass entity of those of Methuselah's Grandchildren who elected to remain on the planet of the Little People and what happened to the survivors of the Big Ship in Universe. And so on, and so on. Too, Mr Heinlein exercised admirable restraint. Many a lesser writer (myself included) would have succumbed to the temptation and made Lazarus Long not only a mother fucker but his own father. (Of course, Heinlein did even worse than that in his marvellous "All You Zombies".) (7 October 1976)*

* Bert also sent short reviews of two films, The Big Bus and The Food of the Gods, and I just do not have room for them this issue. Maybe I'll get around to reviews of s f films again one day.

LEE HARDING

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Please don't lose this loc! To be brief: I would like to clarify your mention in SFC 47 re The Altered I. Rob Gerrard did much more than proofread the book: as I make quite clear in my Editorial Note, Rob was my Right Hand throughout the Final Days - hell, let's not forget that from copy-editing to published book was only six weeks! - and without him I could never have got the book out in time for Bofcon. Rob did most of the leg-work with the printers and a good deal of the editorial design. I would not wish his contribution to go unappreciated.

Secondly, I know you were only quasi-quoting me when you mentioned my "lost" loc on Mike O'Brien's very moving letter, but I don't want to be accused of hyperbole: what I do

remember writing was that his letter would not have been out of place in any contemporary anthology of existential/alienation works. I did not use the word "great". Okay?

As for Eric Lindsay - who is exhibiting a growing tendency for foot-in-mouth writing - I think I suggested that he was out to prove Donne wrong and that every man is an island. "ell, no, not exactly: rather that Eric plans to be. And I think I misquoted Donne to the effect that "No man is an island. Everyone is a piece of the continent of the main...and if a clod be washed away", then that clod be Eric Lindsay. Something like that. Jesus, but his writing pisses me off. Why the hell doesn't he get lost in central Australia for a few years like he seems to want to? If he does, then I suggest he keep his mouth shut, Bucky Fuller style, and not speak unless someone asks him a question and then reply with as much thoughtful consideration as he can muster. This latter anger of mine is the result of reading his stupid statement in Marc Ortlieb's fanzine that "...and as we know the unconscious is mad". Who knows? Apparently only Eric Lindsay.

(10 October 1976)*

* I can't see anything to get angry about in Eric's recent statements, but I must confess that I'm puzzled as to how he has managed to evade the various compulsions to join the human race which afflict even me from time to time. Maybe Eric also feels that the human race isn't too interested in being joined.

* You might remember that, in SFC 41/42, I awarded the best s f story award for short fiction published during 1972 to "Heads Africa Tails America", by Josephine Saxton. I put some of her other stories in the Top Twenty. Virginia Kidd was one of the people who sent me Josephine's address, to which I sent 41/42. The following is perhaps not a cheery letter to end on, but it does represent the position of many writers today, both in s f and outside it: *

JOSEPHINE SAXTON

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Staffs, England

You have to believe I have been painting and refurbishing large lumps of my house, notably the bathroom, even to sewing curtains and things like that - and then you may not be so offended that I leave it more than a whole year (more than that even) before writing to thank you for your generous accolades in regard of my work (literary, not decorary).

It gave me a big boost and a lot of pleasure to know that you enjoyed and appreciated my writing. It came about three years too late to prevent me getting an appalling writer's

block, but never mind, someday I may regain the use of my brains and hands - this letter is typed by my trained bitch puppy yap yap yap.

I have also been rather occupied in having nervous breakdowns, drinking too much for my health, being sick in other ways, and generally getting a whole lot older to no good purpose. It can happen to the best of us - and in my case did - who said that? - I must be getting better.

Nobody wants to publish a damned thing I've written, a lot of it. Being labelled science fiction has been the birth and death of me as a writer. I'm not s f enough to be really popular with s f fans, and too weird to be mainstream; that's why the lady is a tramp.

I make terrific soup. I hadn't meant that last sentence to sound like that. Now, I'm frightened somebody may try to put me into my own stockpot. Morbid, that's what.

I spend time doing a bit of painting (pictures as well as walls), and walking. Just walking for the sake of walking. This is that kind of countryside. I'm shut up in some kind of box a lot of the time; it's really great when I have visitors, company at the door. Not often. Isolation corrodes if taken in excess.

Anyway, thanks for the copies of the magazine, and for being kind and intelligent.

(7 November 1976)*

* Fancy me being "kind and intelligent". Wheee! I promise to drop in whenever/ifever I get back to England. When I was there three years ago, everybody said I just had to meet Josephine Saxton, but I didn't go that far north.

What we must do is find a publisher for more Josephine Saxton stories. Editors, here's your chance to publish some really good fiction. *

I ALSO HEARD FROM...

...nearly everybody. If I had had room, the letter section would have been about fifty pages long. When SFC goes offset (Real Soon Now), I will have even less room for letters, so I suppose I had better get into practice for editing them sharply. Keep sending them, though: Probably I will revive some equivalent of Invisible Whistling Bunyips as a letterzine so SFC readers can at least keep talking to each other.

First, some letters I had typed for this issue, but got chopped at the last moment:

PAUL WALKER and NEVILLE ANGOVE wrote about the SFC style of reviewing, if there is such a thing. Paul outlines the difficulties of writing about

anthologies of s f stories. Individual stories tend to get ignored in the effort to summarise the effect of an entire collection. Paul says: "We need critics who will do reviews of short stories and novelettes individually in-depth, out of context of prozines, or collections of anthologies." I agree, and would welcome reviews of individual short stories. :: Neville Angove doesn't seem to like most of the writers who get talked about most in SFC. "The impression I've gained from current reviewers seems to indicate that they want to dictate to the public what should be read, solely on the basis of arbitrary standards of literary quality." Well, I don't think "standards of literary quality" are "arbitrary", but still, nobody dictates to anybody. SFC does have a point of view, which becomes clear to long-time readers. But it is up to the reader to evaluate the views presented here. I agree completely with Neville when he says, "When I write a review, I try initially to give the reader of the review a general impression of the book, some idea of what the story is about, enough so that he can make up his own mind if the story (and the review) are worth the trouble of reading. I try to tell the reader what the author appears to be saying, how he is saying it, and how well he has succeeded in this."

In reply to Lesleigh and Leigh in recent issues, PHYRNE BACON writes, "I do not feel myself the child of only one of C P Snow's two cultures. I am a child of both... Karl Popper seems to be hoping that we will adopt an experimental attitude towards life and that we will keep our social experiments on a small scale. But I suspect that humans have this thing about going all out and that we will joyfully enter into all sorts of large-scale social experiments... Maybe some of us need fiction more than others, and maybe it is some of us who have the greatest need for fictionalising who turn into authors."

DOUG BARBOUR explains a point which I raised in an earlier issue: "You are writing a new kind of impressionist essay, one which is not the same as the kind of essay that academic criticism turned against in the 1930s and 1940s, but one which accommodates the gains made by what has been called, among other things, the New Criticism... Most of the criticism published in SFC, for example, is passionately involved... (even George Turner, bless him for being different in so many of his opinions from me)." And without passionate involvement, why bother writing, reading, thinking, loving, or living at all?

* Other letters go back to the beginning of the year:

ALAN SANDERCOCK has written a lot of letters describing how much he is enjoying life in London. :: ROB GERRAND says that Owen Webster's piece about Wyndham (SFC 44/45) is "the first intelligent and extended article I have seen on

him." Rob draws attention to Webster's statement that "Ideas have no value except in terms of the behaviour that embodies them; individuals hold ideas reflecting their personality structures; and personalities, like schools of thought and political philosophies, grow from cultural circumstances." For Rob, "I think Webster has captured perfectly what s f is about." In response to my comment about Rob's "mysterious doings", he sent an election pamphlet. Rob stood as the Labor candidate in the most recent State elections - in the third safest Liberal seat in the state. The Labor vote improved by 2 per cent. :: STUART LESLIE made contact for the first time in some years. When he wrote in March, he was living in a hut in the country in Tasmania. Since then he has moved to a communal farm in New South Wales. Stuart's letters are, as always, very long and interesting, but I hardly have room for them here. :: PHILIP ADAMS wrote to thank me for my piece about Owen Webster. Philip's column in The Age when Owen died was itself a fine tribute. Since then, he has written some good pieces about suicide, a subject which I think about from time to time. :: ROMAN ORSZANSKI sent me an English translation of the Strugatski Brothers' Far Rainbow and wrote a long letter. He comments on many things in 44/45, and revives my spirits by saying, "If you print nought else, your 'ramblings' alone would be justification enough for SFC to continue being printed." :: PETRINA SMITH sent a nice, chatty letter, but we caught up with a lot more "after-the-workshop" news when Petrina visited Melbourne during Bofcon. :: MEG CURTAIN wrote - and resubscribed - from Christmas Island, in the Indian Ocean, where she is teaching. Now that's genuine isolation. :: TONY JOLLYE, from New Australian Library, put me on the NEL review list and thanked me for SFC. Thanks, Tony, for the copies of the S F Masters Series. :: IAN PENHALL, from Canberra, thinks that Wyndham is more the author of "s f adventure, with ideas rating as a secondary concern." Ian also takes space to disagree with some of Jeff Harris' ideas expressed in his speech at Unicon II. Unfortunately, nobody taped the speeches there, so I can hardly begin a debate here. :: ANGUS TAYLOR sent me some cheering comments about my recent personal pieces in SFC. Also: "I think perhaps Murnane would very much enjoy Robert Coover's The Universal Baseball Association... I don't think the fact that it's superficially about baseball (an imaginary baseball league this man invents, and then keeps records and statistics for) would prevent you strange cricket-types from enjoying it." :: DEAN DAVIDSON, from Sydney, introduced himself, says about my "romantic problems" that "similar events occurred with me" but "things are working out well". I'm glad things are working out well for somebody - gripes Gillespie grumpily. :: VALERIE WARD, also from Sydney, enjoyed the Webster piece on Wyndham as well. :: RAY HARRISON (England) was impressed by the first SFC he received on his subscription, saying, "But even in such excellent surroundings as

these George Turner shines like a brightly lit lamp in a room full of flickering candles." :: SYD BOUNDS sends a letter on every issue that he receives. Most of his comments are short and to the point: "SFC will always be Top Fanzag while you keep running George Turner. George says, precisely, what I have always felt about character in fiction - but I don't suppose the critics will listen." "The star turn in SFC 46 is the piece by Reba Estra. I found this fascinating and hope you can persuade her to do a piece on the result of her school project. And, of course, it brings up the question of why juvenile s f is so ignored by fan-mags. In my view, s f fans graduate from juvenile s f and so the subject has its own importance. Perhaps you can persuade this author to tackle a piece on Andre Norton?" "I was down to see Bill Temple a while back and he lives in a big old house ruled by six cats: three long-haired and three short-haired. While I was there the battle was still on between the long-hairs and the short-hairs to decide who was Absolute Ruler." Flodnap still likes being Absolute Ruler all by himself, without competition. :: PAUL ANDERSON writes long letters on every issue of SFC, so I cannot even hope to summarise his opinions. Paul is nearly as interested in making Favourites lists as I am. I asked him to do a Favourite Films seen 1970-75:

- 1 Citizen Kane (Welles).
- 2 Through a Glass Darkly (Bergman).
- 3 My Love to the Swallows.
- 4 Cabaret (Fosse).
- 5 Picnic at Hanging Rock (Weir).
- 6 Sleuth.
- 7 Mahler (Russell).
- 8 La Paloma.
- 9 The Conversation (Coppola).
- 10 Le Boucher (Chabrol).
- 11 Nashville (Altman).
- 12 A Clockwork Orange (Kubrick).
- 13 Shame (Bergman).
- 14 A Touch of Class (Frank).
- 15 French Connection II (Frankenheimer).
- 16 Images (Altman).
- 17 Portrait of Jennie.
- 18 Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion (Petri).
- 19 Hour of the Wolf (Bergman).
- 20 Dr Strangelove (Kubrick).

:: ED CONNOR thanked me for the Tucker Issue and sent some bits of news. :: JOHN BROSNAN sent me some vicious inside gossip from the heart of British fandom (much the same as appears in British fanzines, in fact). Of 44/45: "Was impressed by the success of your Get Fit campaign. If your doctor thought you were unfit for your age I hate to think what he'd say about me. After reading your account of swimming your way to health and happiness I was inspired to think seriously about going to the local pool and throwing myself in...but went and threw myself into a pint of Guinness instead." I haven't done much swimming recently, but have taken up yoga instead. :: ROGER WEDDALL, ace Southern Comfort supplier and drinker, was reduced to incoherence by SFC 46, was a bit depressed by the letters from both Mike and Eric, and says it is pleasing to see me take positive action to help myself. Hah. It does me good sometimes. But where young ladies are concerned - I can take as much positive action as I like (and did) but it does me no good at all. As Jimmy Carter said. "Show me a good loser and I'll show you a loser." I'm a good loser. :: BERND FISCHER not only enjoys composing Lists, but

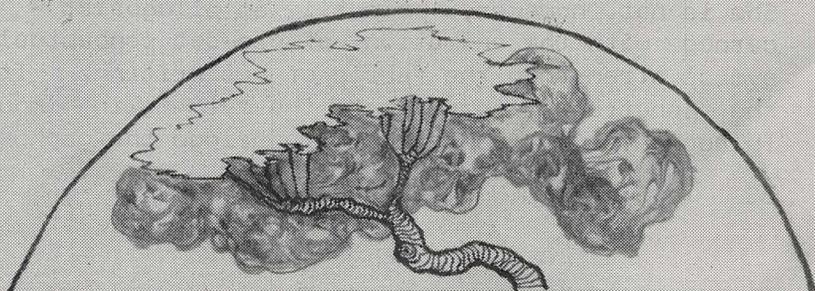
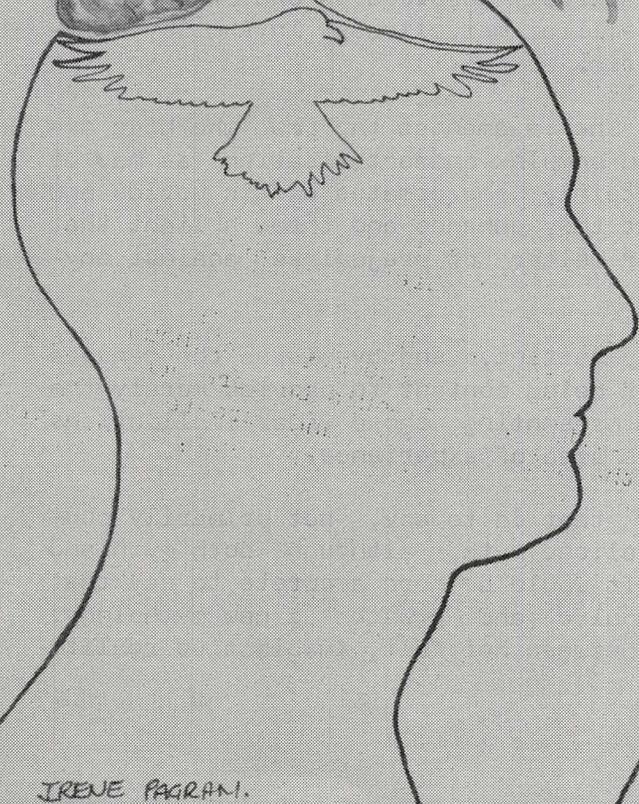
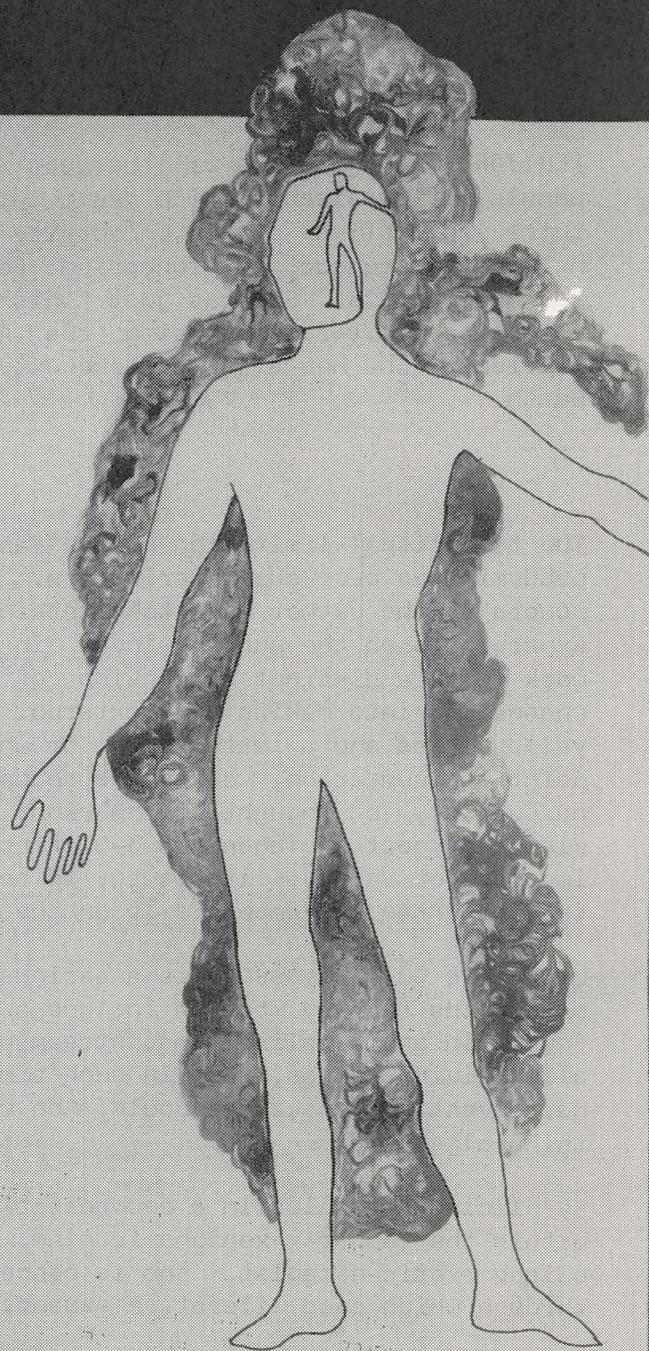
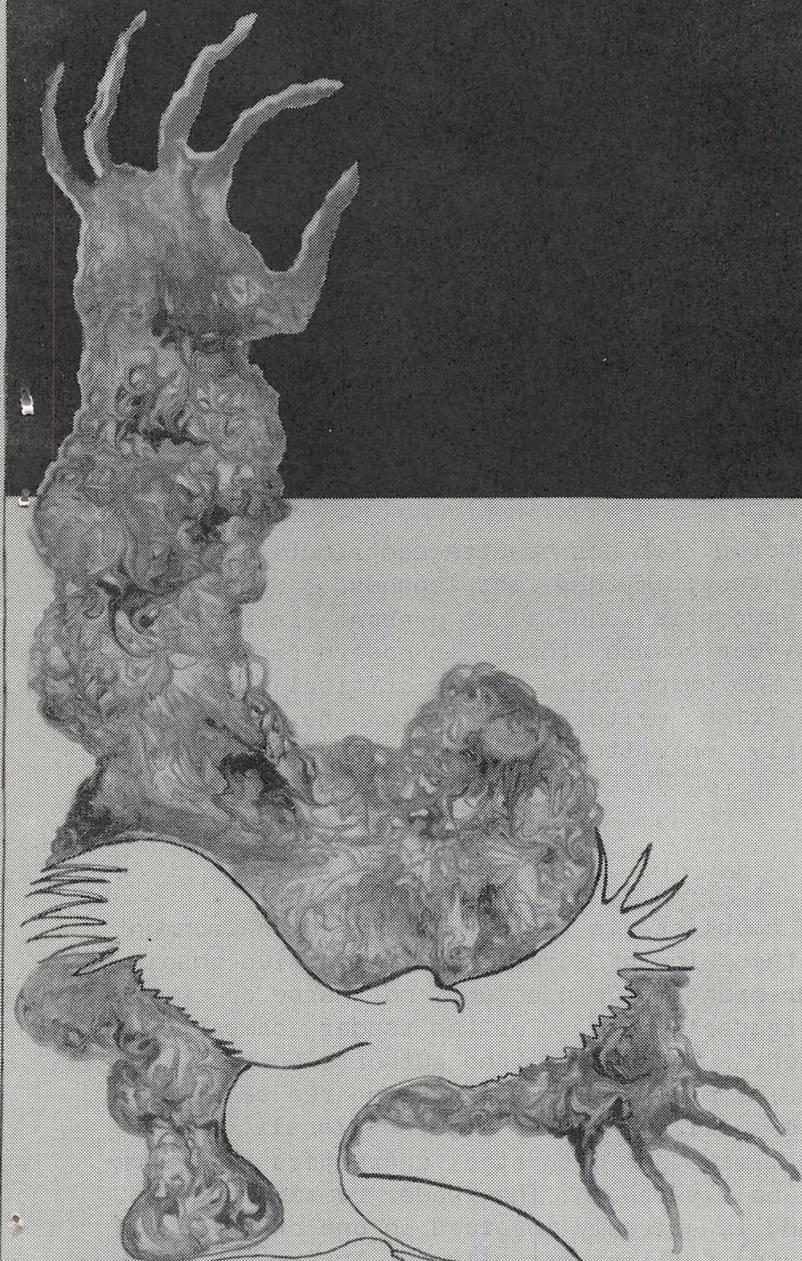
his lists are similar to mine. His general book list for '75 includes 1 The Savage God (A Alvarez). 2 Die Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum (The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum) (Heinrich Boll). 3 The Fifth Head of Cerberus (Gene Wolfe). Best films of all time include: 1 Les Enfants du Paradis (Carne). 2 Jules et Jim (Truffaut). 3 La Regle de Jeu (Renoir). 4 La Grande Illusion (Renoir). 5 The General (Keaton). 6 Duck Soup (Marx Bros). 7 The Gold Rush; Monsieur Verdoux (Chaplin). 8 Vertigo (Hitchcock). 9 Belle de Jour; L'Age d'Or (Bunuel). 10 The Third Man (Reed). 11 Les Diaboliques; Le Salaire du Peur (Clouzot). 12 The Conformist (Bertolucci). 13 8½ (Fellini). 14 Citizen Kane (Welles). 15 La Femme Infidele (Chabrol). 16 Le Samurai (Melville). 17 The Last Picture Show (Bogdanovich). 18 La Mamain et la Putain (Eustache). 19 Andreï Rublev (Tarkovsky). 20 Scenes from a Marriage (Bergman). Bernd's favourite albums of all time: 1 Astral Weeks (Van Morrison). 2 Highway 69 Revisited (Dylan). 3 Blonde on Blonde (Dylan). 4 Songs From a Room (Cohen). 5 Der Mattenfänger (Wader). 6 Parcel of Rogues (Steeleye Span). 7 Loudon Wainwright III, Album 2. 8 Beggar's Banquet (Rolling Stones). 9 Blood on the Tracks (Dylan). 10 The Wild, the Innocent, and the E-Street Shuffle (Springsteen). Bernd writes of himself: "I've just reached the age of 30 (on my way down), I've studied mathematics (I don't know exactly why), I'm working here in Koln at the Padagogitche Hochschule, I live alone, I'm rather disillusioned by life and therefore have a pessimistic view on human life in general, I have good friends (which is very important), I've just moved, I'll travel to the USA with a friend this August for four weeks, and I would like to visit Australia some time (probably a nice dream)." If you do visit Australia, I'm not sure that my friends could stand having two Bruce Gillespies in the same city at the same time. :: JULIAN FREIDIN reads s f for escapism, and as an obsession. He also thought I was paying homage to Tucker, but couldn't find any Tucker books at Space Age. :: STEPHEN HITCHINGS sent more lists. His favourite s f writer is (gasp!) Harlan Ellison. But favourite non s f writer is James Joyce. His favourite books are 1 Ulysses. 2 The Lord of the Rings. 3 War and Peace. Favourite s f books: 1 Beyond the Barrier (Knight). 2 The Chrysalids (Wyndham). 3 Non-Stop (Aldiss). 4 Flowers for Algernon (Keyes). 5 Why Call Them Back From Heaven (Simak). Some favourite short stories: "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" (Ellison); "Apple" (Baxter); "Desertion" (Simak); "Pretty Maggie Money-Eyes" (Ellison); "The Heat Death of the Universe" (Zoline). Films: 1 A Clockwork Orange (Kubrick). 2 Fantasia (Disney). 3 2001: A Space Odyssey (Kubrick). 4 Wake in Fright. 5 War and Peace (BBC serial). Stephen describes himself as a "Catholic science-graduate student teacher with no political affiliations who, as well as being a slow reader and hence taking ages to review books, is soon to be married and enjoys talking about himself in print." Don't we all. :: JOHN ALDERSON doesn't think much of Podkayne of Mars

:: PETER INNOCENT, whose books I am minding while he is in England, seems intent on staying there. In fact, he is having a much more pleasant life than he had in the year or so before he left. Best wishes to him, and I hope he can make some sort of visit back sometime. :: DON D'AMASSA took issue with me because it seemed that I had so much as approved of Angus Taylor's mildly anti-American article in Gegenschein. Don's letter doesn't show much understanding of the way in which economic and cultural imperialism works. :: JOAN DICK really seems to enjoy SFC. In reply to the letters in 47, she says, "It seems that many - perhaps most - of the denizens of fandom are loners by personal choice. Once I would have remarked that this extremely satisfying state of affairs was much more easily achieved by men than by women but the rules of society have changed so much since I was a child that such a statement no longer runs true. Happily, most young ladies these days are no longer bound by the rigid morals and rules of the post-Victorian era." Joan appreciated Van Ikin's review of Clarke's stories, although she thought he did not praise them sufficiently. :: ROBERT BLOCH appreciated receiving a copy of SFC 43: "Far too many people in fandom seem to take Tucker's talent for granted - largely because (unlike others I could name, and so could you) he has not devoted himself to the promotion of his own work. So it's good to know that you and your contributors have presented him as the full-fledged professional writer which he is: a far better one than many of the self-serving minor ripples of the New Wave who humbly admit their genius... Immediately upon his return from the Convention last year, Tucker had dinner with us here - Frank Robinson and alt Leibscher were also present - and he spoke long and glowingly of his Australian visit. There's no doubt about it being one of the highlights of his life - and, according to all reports, he just scored another triumph as toastmaster at this year's MidAmericon. I gather he's smooother than ever." :: CY CHAUVIN appreciated the personal letters in 46 and 47 very much. Among other comments, he says, "I am not certain if I need an exclusive, one-to-one deep relationship with another person in the sense that marriage or just living together is supposed to provide (but often fails to, with my own parents - though they remain married - and with many others, I suspect). But I do need people with whom I can be completely open and honest." I'm pretty lucky this year in that I've had such a group of friends. But more is needed. In the magazine you sent me, Cy, you quote Ursula Le Guin: "We're each of us alone, to be sure. What can you do but hold out your hand in the dark?" But there's nobody in the dark to take my hand. :: WERNER KOOPMANN has been working hard, and sends his '75 lists: Crime Fiction: 1 Dummy (Tidyman). 2 They've Shot the President's Daughter (Stewart). 3 Three Worlds of Johnny Handsome (Godey). Science fiction: 1 Showboat World (Vance). 2 Durdane Trilogy (Vance). 3 Stars Will Judge (Greenfield). :: DON BOYD publishes a magazine

called Psychic Australian, and sent me printing tips when I mentioned that I was going offset. :: JOHN CLARK is busy, but he sent me a cheery poem called "Ode to a Girl with a Beautiful Face" (eg "My friends laught and say I was sentenced for life/And they still can't believe that you're really my wife."). :: RALPH AND LOIS ASHBROOK lived in Australia for some years, but are now back in Pennsylvania. Ralph writes to say SFC is now about his only news of Australia. Ralph has sent me some pertinent letters when I've needed them. For instance: "I wonder what decides you to publish the articles you apologise for (Van Vogt in 44/45 and Heinlein in 46). You are into the Heavies like Dick and Lem (you even made Tucker feel heavy). There is something (European?) in your soul that steers toward the serious, and something else that soars toward the happy/loving/it's-gonna-be-all-right/it-is-all-right. I've grown to love the Heavies (when they're not being bleak) with your help. But I feel good about a lot of Heinlein and some Van Vogt. Thanks for the balance." :: MARK LAWRENCE, a new subscriber from Melbourne, sent a long letter about his favourite writers. :: DAVID EVANS, also from Melbourne, sent a rather painful letter in reply to 47. He seems to be going through the terrifying experience which Mike O'Brien described as part of his past. Evidently it's only in a silver-tail private school that one is really persecuted for reading books and carrying them around in one's pockets. :: BRUCE TOWNLEY answers me when I ask what motivates people who read SFC. Among his answers: "I love to draw... I loathe exercise... Conversely, I love stuffing my face with drink and food... I'm a slob. But lovable, one hopes... Used to worry that my mother was a drunkard and that I was autistic or something because I didn't talk to my dad. Have since found out the pleasure of getting somewhat plotzed every other night after night after working each day and so she buys the beer and I relax more... God is dead, finally, and we're alive. Everybody needs their own crutch, that's one of my motivations too. Enough?" As Phil Dick says, just barely enough is enough. When he wrote the letter, Bruce was depressed, as were we all, by the news of the violent death of Barry Smotroff in New York in August. :: DAVE PIPER still can't believe that most issues of SFC now take three months to reach anywhere after being posted here. Dave says that Cath actually likes a Chicago record - Chicago X. "Mind you, when I put on Nos 1. to 3 she still finds an excuse to leave the room... can't win every time I guess." :: RICK STOKER brought a hollow laugh from me, when he says, in reply to 44/45, "You don't have to fall head over heels in love with a girl and call her The One to be more than platonic friends and go out and have a good time...Go out, get drunk, get stoned, get laid by some women you don't want to love with or marry." But how, Rick, how?

* That was going to be The End, but it has got so late in the year that now I would ask you:

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 137



IRENE PAGANI.

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TO LIGHT A CANDLE IS TO CAST A SHADOW:

The Shadow as Identity Touchstone in
Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy and
in The Left Hand of Darkness

(EDITOR: Sneja Gunew will be best remembered for her erudite contributions to the panels at Aussiecon which dealt with fantasy, myths, and legends. Sneja is a tutor in English at the University of Newcastle and is at present involved in helping to conduct a pioneering fourth-year course there in modern fantasy and romance writers. She has just finished a PhD which arrives at a critical definition of fantasy literature using the Anglo-Irish writers James Stephens and Flann O'Brien. She has also lectured extensively on writers like Peake, Vonnegut, and Barth.)

The traditional limitation of the fantasy novelist is the way in which environment predominates over characterisation. In this kind of work, the imaginative shaping powers of the author can take nothing for granted, can assume no shared or common experiences on the mundane level in the reader's mind, for the reader comes to the work with a distinct suspension of belief. Too often, the author's energies are channelled into making his external world credible, in interlocking red seas with yellow skies and animate rocks, or what you will. While he stresses locality to the point of inundation, often the reader must make do with stock characters from whom no subtlety of thought or behaviour may be expected. The reader remains outside, viewing a sort of ingenious 3-D effect and is scarcely involved in one of the basic impulses of serious literature, to render the familiar marvellous. In fantasy writing too often the emphasis is on the merely exotic.

Ursula Le Guin, however, is a serious writer. She is amongst the few who have expanded the fantasy mode to include as subtle and complex characterisation as may be found in any novelistic mainstream work. Certainly she creates exotic worlds and alien living beings, but in such a manner that they enhance and throw a light that no conventional novelist could, on our familiar welter of prejudices against anything alien.

By placing her tales in a recognisably unearthly setting, she by-passes the censors within the reader's xenophobic mind. Instead of being content to provide merely the cliché exotic-escapist, she is concerned with presenting those wider implications through which good literature expands a reader's area of experience.

She is not, however, primarily an allegorist - that is to say, not primarily concerned with the animation of pre-set conceptualised myth, although both myth and symbol strengthen the fabric of her writing. It would be more accurate to say that she penetrates through to the myth-making impulse and creates a new mythology. Through myth, she endeavours to bridge the gap between her felt, imaginative reality

and the reader's automatic alienation. She does this by establishing the kind of empathy or rapport that the best writers have always managed to arouse in their readers, so that this same felt reality becomes part of the reader's experience. Le Guin has confronted the limitations of the allegorical school; by converting the static symbolism of allegory into the dynamic symbols of the waking dream of mythology, she has built a rapport between her alien worlds and her reader's scepticism. In other words, whereas she cannot presume a common area of mundane experience, she can and does presume a common area of reactions to basic mythic symbols.

For example, she uses the familiar dualism of light and darkness and relies on her readers to become engaged with the emotional impact of this symbolism. In this way, she clears an oasis of credibility and is able to nurture the growth of sympathetic characterisations from this basis. If we accept the symbolic construct, the way is paved for us to accept her characterisations.

This is not to say that we are dealing with a simplistic polarisation between good and evil. Rather, it is a play on what could, perhaps be called the middle ground of darkness and light, the province of the shadow. Black-white, darkness-light contrasts indicate a large-scale cosmic polarisation, but the shadow refers more specifically to the microcosm, or, to that polarisation in terms of the individual burden. The shadow constitutes that twilight area involving choice that dogs the footsteps of everyman. Its adjunct, in Le Guin's work, is the "name" or area of certainty with respect to identity.

THE EARTHSEA TRILOGY

In the Earthsea trilogy, the first book, A Wizard of Earthsea, makes much of the naming process, in the sense that it establishes the secret or true name as a type of talisman which guards true vocation and hence, true identity. Ged, the protagonist, is named by the wizard, his master, to indicate a rite of passage or entry into certainty of identity. The wizard guardians of Earthsea in fact maintain the equilibrium of their world by knowing and by safeguarding the true names of all things:

The Master Hand looked at the jewel that glittered on Ged's palm, bright as the prize of a dragon's hoard. The old Master murmured one word, "Tolk", and there lay the pebble, no jewel but a rough grey bit of rock. The Master took it and held it out in his own hand. "This is a rock; tolk in the True Speech," he said, looking mildly up at Ged now. "A bit of the stone of which Roke Isle is made, a little bit of the dry land on which men live. It is itself. It is part of the world. By the Illusion-Change you can make it look like a diamond - or a flower or a fly or an eye or a flame - " The

rock flickered from shape to shape as he named them, and returned to rock. "But that is mere seeming. Illusions fool the beholder's senses; it makes him see and hear and feel that the thing is changed. But it does not change the thing. To change this rock into a jewel, you must change its true name. And to do that, my son, even to so small a scrap of the world, is to change the world. It can be done. Indeed it can be done. It is the art of the Master Changer, and you will learn it, when you are ready to learn it. But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on the act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge, and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow."

The passage also indicates the ambivalent nature of the shadow; particularly when it is associated with the act, it is fraught with potential menace.

In the last book, The Farthest Shore, when the equilibrium is upset, it involves the loss of these names, of the True Speech. The blight manifests itself through an inability to speak not only the names of things but, more importantly, the secret name of the individual concerned. In other words, the boundary of certainty implied by the name has been erased; indeed, the movement is illustrated through the image of light (certainty) trickling away through a hole in the darkness (uncertainty). In one instance Ged, in a sense, resurrects a stricken woman by giving her a secret name in order to restore the core of her identity.

Generally speaking, these names are associated with totemic plants or animals, or with ruling daimons externalised in animal or plant shapes to indicate, perhaps, the kinship between the human and the non-human. This is further emphasised in Ged's case, in that he carries a small, rat-like familiar during his apprenticeship. This seeming incongruity, since Ged's name signifies the falcon, pays off when the familiar succeeds in calling him back from the dead through its loyal affection. The episode indicates a latent ability in Ged to rouse loyalty and devotion that tends to belie the superficial pride and fierce courage of the falcon he displays as a youth. Both Ged's true name and his common name, Sparrowhawk, illustrates the tension that exists between his use of power and his hunger for more power, so that the names are a type of cipher indicating the direction in which character potential lies.

It is noteworthy that, until a character acquires total integrity or total identification with his true self, he is often ill at ease

with his common name. Prince Arren, whose common name signifies the sword, is unable to wield his ancestral sword until he has learnt the responsibility of his guardianship, which entails his coming to terms with his own identity, as represented by his secret name, Lebannen, or rowan-tree. Under the rowan-tree, by the fountain, in the central court of the House of Roke, he confronts his destiny and begins the quest that leads eventually to his becoming the Last King of Earthsea. During the journey he is forced to travel through regions where the true name is no secret amulet but must become an open passport, denoting the barring of his soul before the world.

The heroine of the second book, The Tombs of Atuan, undergoes a similar trial. In this book we enter the "shadow-world" of Earthsea, Atuan, which is ruled by chthonic deities known, suggestively, as the Nameless Ones. The heroine, Arha, the high-priestess, bears a name signifying "the eaten one", in that her identity had to be relinquished in childhood in order for her to ascend to office. Later, through the efforts of Ged, she recovers her true name but cannot assume it with impunity until she has escaped the eternal darkness and bondage to the Nameless Ones. Atuan, in this case, embodies the concept of uncertainty and loss of identity in the trilogy.

The testing of the name, or identity, emanates from this nihilistic darkness by means of its messenger, the shadow, or hunter, who assumes a form relevant to each particular quarry.

In The Tombs of Atuan, the darkness is a pervasive, cosmic power stretching through the underground labyrinth of the Nameless Ones, the labyrinth being traditionally associated with the loss of identity. The darkness is not merely death, but a death prolonged to exclude rebirth, in that the deities "eat" the souls of their victims. Initially, birth or life is equated with light in the book, particularly through the figure of Ged, now Archmage and the bearer of light, or understanding. While Arha is the uneasy priestess of this life-denying realm, she fears the light as a "spell" that undermines her unthinking obedience to her masters, but when she is able to see, momentarily, the jewelled splendour of the labyrinth, as illuminated by Ged, the shell of darkness surrounding her identity begins to crack and the darkness then becomes a bandage:

The darkness pressed like a bandage on her eyes. To have seen the Undertomb confused her; she was bewildered. She had known it only as a region defined by hearing, by hand's touch, by drifts of cool air in the dark; a vastness; a mystery, never to be seen. She had seen it, and the mystery had given place, not to horror, but to beauty, a mystery deeper even than that of the dark.

From being a shroud, the darkness has become a cocoon, presaging rebirth. In other words, through being united with light, the darkness changes from consuming malevolence to creative benevolence:

She woke. Her mouth was stopped with clay. She lay in a stone tomb, underground. Her arms and legs were bound with grave clothes and she could not move or speak. Her despair grew so great that it burst her breast open and like a bird of fire shattered the stone and broke out into the light of day - the light of day, faint in her windowless room... It was not long past sunrise, a fair winter's day. The sky was yellowish, very clear. High up, so high he caught the sunlight and burned like a fleck of gold, a bird was circling, a hawk or desert eagle. "I am Tenar," she said, not aloud, and she shook with cold, and terror, and exultation, there under the open, sun-washed sky. "I have my name back. I am Tenar!"

This passage indicates Le Guin's simultaneous grasp of mythical evocation and palpable sub-creation; she uses the former to cement a response to the latter.

It is important to note that, by the end of the book, there is no longer a simple opposition of light and dark, but rather a mingling or wedding (by means of the ring of Erreth-Akbe) of the two. Throughout the work, Ged has been portrayed subtly as the "dark-faced" bearer of light, but Arha/Tenar, who follows the quest for identity, is emphasised consistently as wearing black and as denying the light until the climax of decision. After her choice has been made, though still clothed in black, she is now associated with the lamp (rather than with the vulnerable and ambivalent candle) and continues onward to take up her role of the White Lady of Gont. Thus, at the end of the book both Ged and Tenar each contain both light and dark.

In Le Guin's work, the naming process represents hegemony in the Adamite sense, and involves the upholding of balance and harmony. However the act reverberates with Faustian implications: it has the potential to threaten the balance and to unbind the shadow.

In the beginning of A Wizard of Earthsea, Ged, in a premature thirst for power, and in response to wounded pride, almost unleashes his shadow from the Underworld. Having been saved by his teacher, he then leaves on the ship Shadow to seek glory and "the will to act", for the shadow has, after all, whispered to him. As his knowledge grows in the school of wizards, so does his thirst, which leads him finally to breach the barrier between the worlds of death and life and to loosen his particular shadow on the world of Earthsea:

Then the shallow oval between Ged's arms grew bright. It widened and spread, a rent in the darkness of the earth and night, a ripping open of the fabric of the world. Through it blazed a terrible brightness. And through the bright misshapen breach clambered something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous, and it leaped straight out at Ged's face.

His quest throughout that first book is to pursue and name that shadow released in ignorance. The hunt, like most hunts, is ambivalent for, though the shadow begins by pursuing Ged, the turning point involves a reversal in which Ged turns on his hunter and eventually discovers that he is pursuing the key to his own identity. When Ged names the shadow in order to render it powerless, it bears, of course, his own name in that it is partly his hubristic pride but also, on a larger scale, his acceptance of his own mortality, against which, alone, identity may finally be measured:

And he began to see the truth, that Ged had neither lost nor won but, naming the shadow of his death with his own name, had made himself whole; a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself, and whose life therefore is lived for life's sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark.

As in The Tombs of Atuan, there is a fusion of light and dark, but it is interesting to compare the above passage with the Atuan segment quoted above and written three years later, in that there is not the same balance of the symbolic or allegorical with the "actual", and the passage lacks the substance of the later work.

The theme of the acceptance of death is amplified in The Farthest Shore, the last book, in which there is a more concrete split between Ged and what could loosely be described as his two alter egos: the black mage-figure Cob (who also opens the door between life and death, but largely through fear of his own death), and the young neophyte, Prince Arren. In this case, the burden of seeking knowledge has been placed on Arren, the future temporal king of Earthsea. He must seek his own area of certainty of identity, must confront his own shadow, before he can embody the harmony of Earthsea. By contrast, Ged is the adept who has grasped certainty, but who must also undergo an expiation or purging of the spirit.

I was born to power, even as you were. But you are young. You stand on the borders of possibility, in the shadowland, in the realm of dream, and you hear the voice saying Come. As I did once. But I am old. I have made my choices, I have done what I must do. I stand in the daylight facing my own death. And I know that there is only one power worth having.

And that is the power, not to take, but to accept. Not to have, but to give.

It is fitting in this book that the lesson concerning the awareness of the Equilibrium should come from Ged, whose wisdom has strained to reach this truth throughout the course of the trilogy:

Presently the mage said, speaking softly, "Do you see, Arren, how an act is not, as young men think, like a rock that one picks up and throws, and it hits or misses, and that's the end of it. When that rock is lifted the earth is lighter, the hand that bears it heavier. When it is thrown the circuits of the stars respond, and where it strikes or falls the universe is changed. On every act the balance of the whole depends. The winds and seas, the powers of water and earth and light, all that these do, and all that the beasts and green things do, is well done, and rightly done. All these act within the Equilibrium. From the hurricane and the great whale's sounding to the fall of a dry leaf and the gnat's flight, all they do is done within the balance of the whole. But we, insofar as we have power over the world and over one another, we must learn to do what the leaf and the whale and the wind do of their own nature: we must learn to keep the balance. Having intelligence, we must not act in ignorance. Having choice, we must not act without responsibility. Who am I - though I have the power to do it - to punish and reward, playing with men's destinies?...do only that which you must do, and which you cannot do in any other way."

The arena of choice, as presented to the novice, makes an interesting comparison with that quoted earlier from A Wizard of Earthsea. Again, I believe, there is a greater substance here; there is a firmer control balancing the message and the speaker's individual voice. There is a hint of humour in the older man's voice, betraying his awareness of the impetuosity of the younger man. His choice of images, embracing both the extravagant whale and the equally extravagant gnat, illustrates this recognition, in that the extreme is wedded to the homely rock. The consequent ripples of implication are wider than in the first book. By The Farthest Shore, dialogue has moved from exposition to communication involving mutual recognition.

The fear of death is also conveyed more realistically in The Farthest Shore, through the figures of Arren and Cob. Arren is tempted to break his oath to Ged by being seduced through this fear:

A great chill went through Arren's body. He remembered his dreams, the moor, the

cliffs, the dim light. That was death, that was the horror of death. It was from death he must escape, must find the way. And on the doorsill stood the figure crowned with shadow, holding out a little light no larger than a pearl, the glimmer of immortal life.¹²

This then is Arren's particular shadow, rendered more virulent in that it contains a false light, or false life. In effect, Ged uses Arren's fear as a decoy to lead him to the source of the evil but, at the same time, Arren must confront its crippling implications:

The sweat broke out on Arren's face and he had to force his voice, but he went on. "I was afraid of you. I was afraid of death. I was so afraid of it I would not look at you, because you might be dying. I could think of nothing, except that there was - there was a way of not dying, for me, if I could find it. But all the time life was running out, as if there was a great wound and the blood running from it - such as you had. But this was in everything. And I did nothing, nothing, but try to hide from the horror of dying..." He knew now why this tranquil life in sea and sunlight on the rafts seemed to him like an after-life or a dream, unreal. It was because he knew in his heart that reality was empty; without life, or warmth, or colour, or sound; without meaning... a playing of illusions on the shallow void.¹³

Cob, the source of the evil, had once been humiliated by Ged through this same fear, and the resultant obsession had engendered his desire to remove the barrier between life and death; hence the osmotic swallowing of light by darkness. Cob's act, far from creating eternal life, in fact creates chaos and a wasteland in which all identity is blurred and lost in a kind of life-in-death:

"...they must climb over the wall of stones when I bid them, all the souls, the lords, the mages, the proud women; back and forth from life to death, at my command. All must come to me, the living and the dead, I who died and lived!"

"Where do they come to you, Cob? Where is it that you are?"

"Between the worlds."

"But that is neither life nor death. What is life, Cob?"

"Power."

"What is love?"

"Power," the blind man repeated heavily, hunching up his shoulders.

"What is light?"

"Darkness!"

"What is your name?"

"I have none."¹⁴

The prolongation of the semblance of life with-in-death is related to the death-in-life of Atuan. In both cases, the unbalanced worship of either life or death is a travesty that withers the harmony of the natural cycle. Through the confusion, Ged's directive, that identity is found when the union of life and death is maintained, illuminates the pathway:

"Lebannen," he said. He had never spoken Arren's true name, nor had Arren told it to him. "Lebannen, this is. And thou art. There is no safety. There is no end. The word must be heard in silence. There must be darkness to see the stars. The dance is always danced above the low place, above the terrible abyss."¹⁵

Once again, though with a smoother transition, the connotations of darkness have been shifted from the nihilistic malevolence of thwarted pride and human irresponsibility (Cob), to the benevolence of cyclical life and death. Identity is recovered or acquired by moving from the conflicting temptations of the shadow-land to a reassertion of the boundaries between life and death, darkness and light.

At the end of the book, Cob is permitted to die fully and Arren, like Ged earlier, learns to accept his own mortality. Ged must finally expend all the power he laboured to amass in order to close the fissure that is a prototype of the one he himself opened in his youth. With this final act, choice has become certainty and the irresolution of the shadow is expunged from his life as he returns to his homeland and a life of contemplation. Throughout the trilogy, therefore, the shadow has been the spur in the quest for certainty of identity.

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

In The Left Hand of Darkness, the darkness-light dichotomy is manipulated more subtly, as can be seen even from the title. Although darkness is usually seen in a subsidiary relationship to light, the title shows that there has been an inversion to give precedence to darkness. Indeed, this is maintained throughout the book, in that the benevolent, creative aspect of darkness is stressed at the expense of its traditional, malevolent connotations. Once again it is the shadow which is related directly to individual identity, but instead of being, as in the Earthsea trilogy, an area of identity uncertainty bearing the potential for choice, it has become an area of individual integrity. In the austere monarchy of Karhide,

for example, men cast their own shadows, whereas in effete, socialist Orgoreyn, "...each of them lacked some quality, some dimension of being; and they failed to convince. They were not quite solid. It was, I thought, as if they did not cast shadows."¹⁶ But the most significant merging of shadow with integrity is in the region of shifgrethor:

"I've made some mistake in shifgrethor. I'm sorry; I can't learn. I've never really understood the meaning of the word."

"Shifgrethor? It comes from an old word for shadow."¹⁷

This term is given a fluid meaning throughout the work, but appears to contain both the Renaissance virtu and the Celtic geas as well as a kind of Oriental face-saving. In other words, it comprises the core of being. A facet of this is revealed when Genly Ai, the extra-planetary emissary, becomes aware, in the midst of Orgotan sloth, of the lean and shadowy presence of the exiled Estraven who, Banquo-like, jolts his conscience and opens his eyes to the perils his own integrity confronts, in the face of Orgotan subterfuge.

As in the case of Earthsea, the shadow also embraces the larger implications of death, and once more the necessary life-death entity is stressed. As with Ged and Arren, there is the idea of life needing to be lived in uncertainty and, in this case, it is expressed by the curious sect of the Handdarata who, in darkness, practise the art of foretelling:

"You don't see yet, Genry, why we perfected and practise Foretelling?"

"No - "

"To exhibit the perfect uselessness of knowing the answer to the wrong question... The unknown...the unforetold, the unproven, that is what life is based on. Ignorance is the ground of thought. Unproof is the ground of action. If it were proven that there is no God there would be no religion. No Handdara, no Yomesh, no hearthgods, nothing. But also if it were proven that there is a God, there would be no religion... Tell me, Genry, what is known? What is sure, predictable, inevitable - the one certain thing you know concerning your future, and mine?"

"That we shall die."

"Yes. There's really only one question that can be answered, Genry, and we already know the answer... The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty: not knowing what comes next."¹⁸

By contrast, and perhaps as a reminder of the

Christian light principle, the rival sect of the Yomeshi conceive of life not as past, present, and future, all coming from and returning to darkness, but see life as the present moment only, as illuminated by Meshe's awareness, which is analogous to the Sun in being pure light. In one sense, then, we are faced here with the time-honoured struggle between the patriarchal and matriarchal cosmologies with the latter, as perhaps befits the androgynous Gethenians, having the edge. Thus darkness becomes the womb of life or, as Estraven says, "Praise then darkness and Creation unfinished."¹⁹ This aspect of darkness as being the source of life is illustrated most concretely when Genly Ai and Estraven journey through the region of the "Unshadow", a twilight zone inimical to life:

Every footfall was a surprise, a drop or a jolt. No shadows. An even, white, soundless sphere: we moved along inside a huge frosted-glass ball. There was nothing inside the ball, and nothing was outside it. But there were cracks in the glass... "Fear's very useful. Like darkness; like shadows... It's queer that daylight's not enough."²⁰ We need the shadows, in order to walk."

This region corresponds to the land of the dead, or land of shadows, in Earthsea. Therefore it is a good example of shadow having acquired an opposite connotation in The Left Hand of Darkness to the one it carries in the trilogy. Death here is associated with light. But as in Earthsea, it is here, in an environment set against life, that the real testing of human bonds occurs, for it is here that Genly Ai's friendship with the androgynous Estraven becomes cemented into a love engendered by recognition:

"...I drew the double curve within the circle, and blacked the yin half of the symbol, then pushed it back to my companion."

"Do you know that sign?"

He looked at it a long time with a strange look, but he said, "No."

"It's found on Earth, and on Hain-Davenant, and on Chiffewar. It is yin and yang. Light is the left hand of darkness... how did it go? Light, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself, Therem. Both and one. A shadow on snow."²¹

The final ironic reversal of the shadow motif in the book is when Therem Estraven is killed in saving Genly Ai and the latter attempts to restore his friend's "shadow", or good name, in the eyes of his compatriots. Jown, ying back to Estraven's home, he encounters the "son" of Estraven and his/her "brother", and what had

been seen as the "darkness" of incest is metamorphosed in Genly's mind into the darkness which nurtures the seed of his friend's spirit. Genly Ai, as the reader's human counterpart in the book, is educated into sympathetic empathy with an alien culture by means of a redefinition of "shadow" and "darkness".

Thus Ursula Le Guin, both in her children's trilogy and in the adult tour de force, The Left Hand of Darkness, has overcome the barrier of reader alienation towards fantasy writing by drawing on the shared experience of a reaction to familiar groups of symbols in order to sub-create both an external world and, more significantly, sophisticated and meaningful characterisations. In redefining these symbols, she creates a new mythology and simultaneously expands her characterisations into further subtleties. The result is that the exotic has become truly the marvellous in her works.

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NOTES

- 1 A Wizard of Earthsea, Puffin Books, UK, 1973 (copyright 1968), p 56 (ch 8).
- 2 The Farthest Shore, Puffin Books, UK, 1974 (copyright 1973), pp 95, 100 (ch 6), 169 (ch 10), 198 (12).
- 3 ibid, pp 96-97 (ch 6).
- 4 The Tombs of Atuan, Puffin Books, UK, 1974 (copyright 1971), p 67 (ch 5).
- 5 ibid, pp 103-104 (ch 8).
- 6 A Wizard of Earthsea, p 36 (ch 2).
- 7 ibid, p 74 (ch 4).
- 8 ibid, p 199 (ch 10).
- 9 The Farthest Shore, p 151 (ch 9). Ged draws the parallel between his own action and that of Cob. Note also that both names carry the meaning of "fish".
- 10 ibid, p 152 (ch 9).
- 11 ibid, pp 76-77 (ch 4).
- 12 ibid, p 112 (ch 7).
- 13 ibid, p 134 (ch 8).
- 14 ibid, p 196 (ch 12).
- 15 ibid, pp 134-135 (ch 8).
- 16 The Left Hand of Darkness, Panther Books, 1973 (copyright 1969), p 103 (ch 10).
- 17 ibid, p 167 (ch 18).
- 18 ibid, pp 54-55 (ch 5).
- 19 ibid, p 166 (ch 18).
- 20 ibid, p 179 (ch 19).
- 21 ibid, p 180 (ch 19).

(MOCK TURTLE - from page 60)

I can share, that is his privilege. Since his article is safely general rather than specific, there is little need for serious cavilling.

Except, perhaps (page 103): "Meanwhile, the actual writers in the actual field, as these award-winning stories show, were writing the full-fledged, three-dimensional works of literate art that historically have always been found near the heart of memorable literature." No, no, they simply weren't that good. It might be said of "He Who Shapes", Flowers for Algernon, "The Death of Dr Island", The Dispossessed, and "The Day Before the Revolution", but not of the remaining thirty-six novels and tales. Assessors must observe some care. Enthusiasm is not only not enough, it is actively dangerous.

One might pick minor arguments with the article, but they scarcely matter for what is basically a paean of praise for the Nebula awards written by a member of the club. There is no justification for this sort of thing. If appraisal is to be made, it should come from outside the SFWA.

But that might not (and, were I the writer, would not) produce an article that editor Gunn would care to print.

** ** *

It might be suggested that about twenty pages of nonsense in a book of stories can do little harm. But they do not stand alone; these articles are all too typical of the smug propaganda that s f puts out about itself in sickening introductions to inferior anthologies, in speeches at conventions (gleefully noted by the local press), in articles for non-s f media whose editors know even less about s f than the misleading essayists, on radio programs, and in any other venue where the ghetto mentality can proclaim the justifications that s f does not, in fact, need.

The propagation of nonsense by fans cannot be helped; they have to start somewhere and some of them will grow up to be responsible writers and critics. The propagation of nonsense by academics and authors is alarming. What can they grow up to be?

The academics can, in fact, do a great amount of good by applying literary investigative and assessment techniques to s f in order to sort out and dispose of the nonsense - such as the ghettoism and intimations of inherent superiority heard too much of - which infests and debases a potentially valuable branch of fiction.

Academics who accept the myths of s f without question - and Scholes and Gunn are only present examples of a large group - would do better to refrain from published comment. They propagate error. What is worse, they propagate error among the unthinking and among the newcomers to s f who have not the genre-reading experience to detect its presence. And they confuse the trail for more careful academics who might wish to pursue truth to its lair.

** ** *

I observe, at this last moment, that the Gollancz edition does not contain the Scholes and Dickson essays, only the Introduction. It is an improvement.
- George Turner May 1976

PLUMBERS OF THE COSMOS
THE AUSSIECON DEBATE

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THE AUSSIECON DEBATE

PLUMBERS OF THE COSMOS:
The Aussiecon Debate

Transcribed by Bruce Gillespie

(EDITOR: George Turner, prize-winning novelist and critic, and Peter Nicholls, editor of Foundation magazine, don't really hold opposing views on criticism and reviewing. But some programmer for Aussiecon (the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention, Melbourne, August 1975) thought they did, and put them on a platform to battle out their positions. Instead they agreed with each other - but from quite different viewpoints...)

JOHN FOYSTER (Moderator)

The next item is a panel titled "Plumbers of the Cosmos". This derives from two sources: the first is a series of incredibly boring books by Sam Moskowitz with titles rather like "Plumbers of the Cosmos", and the second source is the fertile, or - more appropriately - the festering mind of John Bangsund, who selected that title from the various possible combinations. The speakers will be Peter Nicholls and George Turner, whom you've all heard before. The discussion will be conducted under the rules first set down under the rules of the Marquis of Queensberry. Thank you.

PETER NICHOLLS

I was rather hoping to adhere to the rules set down by the notorious Mr Rafferty, actually.

GEORGE TURNER

The critics talking about critics. Welcome to the feast of jackals. We are the people who get our kicks from worrying the throats of defenceless writers. I know you believe that, too.

It isn't really true. For one thing, they're not defenceless; half the bastards are critics themselves. Believe me, the game, when it is on, is sometimes well and truly on.

First of all, I want to make a difference between reviewing and criticism. Reviewing is what most of us are more accustomed to than full-scale criticism. Reviewing normally confines itself to a description of the work, plus an opinion offered by the bloke doing the review. It's probably the most primitive form of criticism, and it's devoted to one end only: to let the readers know what is available. As

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far as his opinion of the book goes - well, the best thing you can do is pick the critic who, over the period, seems to go along with your ideas: he's the man you can follow.

Then you decide reviewing is a nice easy little thing you can do for your favourite fanzine. I'm here to disabuse you. It isn't. Many years ago, when I was much more game than I am now, I wrote an article for John Bangsund, called "On Writing About Science Fiction". It dealt with reviewing and criticism. Somewhere along the line I said this:

Criticism requires extensive knowledge of literary techniques, language and languages, philosophy, history, psychology, and a sufficient smattering of all really important subjects to be able to bone up on them at a moment's notice.

And if that sounds pretty rough, believe me, it had the blessing of James Blish, who agreed with every word of it. And he was one of the best critics the genre has ever had.

Don't be frightened, because most of you have most of that anyway. It's very surprising what you have got, when you look into your own grab bag of knowledge and ideas. But, before you start reviewing, please get rid of the idea that just saying, "This is a good story because..." or "This is a bad story because...", or "I like it because..." or "I don't like it because..." is enough. It isn't.

The first thing you have to find out is, "What is this book about?" That's nice and easy, isn't it? Tell me this: what is the fairy-tale of Cinderella about?

I can give you several answers. For one thing, it is about virtue triumphant. For another, it is about wickedness punished. (Or are they just opposite sides of the same thing? You have to decide that.) Thirdly, the plot has nothing to do with these things. The plot is rags to riches. You have to keep these things in mind; otherwise, your version of Cinderella is liable to wind up rather different from what the man wrote down.

You have to do several things - and these are going to sound difficult.

First of all, you must separate the foreground - that is, the obvious things in the novel - from the realities behind it. I'm going to cite, as an example, The Dispossessed, Ursula Le Guin's book. I've read dozens of reviews of this book, and most of them were so superficial that I had a feeling that the writers were puzzled. For myself, I had to review it three times, write two essays on it, and discuss it with the Nova Mob once, so I had fair opportunity to get really into it. (And I had to read it three times, by the way.) What is The

Dispossessed about? Everybody who talks about it starts first with politics. As soon as you begin to look at it, the politics recede. They are only part of the thing that's used. Used for what? To talk about a philosophy, as a matter of fact, which is a rather different thing. You have to ask yourself this sort of question about every book you want to describe. Aside from what is on the surface, what is the thing that's pushing behind it? You must separate mere writing from what is being said. You can take, say, one of Roger Zelazny's fantasies - I don't like them myself; you may do. Very persuasive, lush writing - but what's it all about? Oh, the words get in your eyes; they're blinding. You're liable to find out they're about pretty damn little by the time you're through. You can do the same thing with Delany at times; not always, but very often. His prose can be very beautiful, very seductive; it can lead you up the garden path time and time again. And when you've got rid of the prose and looked at what he had to say, you begin to wonder whether it was much of a garden path, after all.

You'll come up against other questions - one of them in this last panel, this matter of archetypes. It's a thing I've never bothered to think about very much. I got a little fed up with people claiming archetypes for this, that, and the other. But since the thing was discussed this afternoon, I had to do a little thinking for myself, not from the angle that this panel used, but from the angle of simple, literary technique. Here's something we know about science fiction: that it is not notable for character work. We know the reason: that its interest is not so much in the impact of character on character, as in environment upon character, or a sort of symbolic humanity upon environment. You're only using symbols. You're straight back into the archetypes immediately, because, as soon as you start complicating them, you start complicating your ideas out of recognition.

There's something I've had to think about, just for once, and it becomes immediately part of my critical bag of tools. Whether I'll ever find a use for it is another thing, but it's there if I need it.

So, as I say, this business of reviewing isn't just a matter of picking up your pen or dashing off on your typewriter your opinion of whether Space Hounds of IPC is really a better novel than A Case of Conscience. If you think it is, good luck to you, but you'd be the most extraordinary reviewer in existence. The fact is that these things, which I've just outlined to you, and made to sound rather difficult, are actually extremely easy. You do them unconsciously or subconsciously all the time you are reading. All you have to do is do them deliberately. When you say that you can't make up your mind about a book, then pull the damn thing to pieces and you'll soon make up your

own mind. It won't spoil the book if it's any good. If it spoils the book, then the book's not that good.

That's all right for reviewing. But how about criticism? You had an example of it here, just half an hour ago. This panel on Myth and Legend was actually doing what a critic does - it was setting up a proposition and examining it, asking questions about it, considering it from this point of view and from that, and coming to some conclusions. Only, instead of half a dozen people doing it, it's a job the critic has to do on his own. At that point, I think I'll drop the subject of criticism, because it's a field that's better left to somebody who knows a bit more about it than I do.

But... I do want to say this: If you start reviewing, do not, for God's sake, ever start off reviewing with kindness in mind. No writer worth his salt wants you to be kind; he wants to know the truth. If he's only writing for money, and writing rubbish, and knows he's writing for money and writing rubbish, then he won't give a damn what you say anyway. If he's got any kind of conscience about his work, if he's any kind of artist, he may hate what you say but, by God, he'll listen to it. He may eventually reject it and say, "No, it's not right." He may eventually accept it and learn something from it. One of the best lessons I ever had in my own work came from a man who was tearing it to pieces.

You may think that this business of "What is this book really about?" could easily be settled by asking the writer. It can't. You heard Ursula remark, just in passing, about The Tombs of Atuan, that "I really don't know what it was about." This is eternally true. I wrote a novel some fifteen years ago called The Cupboard Under the Stairs. Stephen Murray-Smith rocked me back on my heels by saying, "Turner, whether he knows it or not, is writing politics." This had never entered my mind. I eventually asked him about it, and he gave me a surprised stare, as though it was an idiot question from an idiot child. And I have still never found out what he meant. But he saw something there that I, the writer, didn't know was there. This comes along time and time again.

A great deal of a writer's work is almost automatic. He thinks in terms of character, movement, style of language, and various types of projection, but all the time there's the part of himself, right deep down, that he really doesn't know about, which is determining how that book will go. He can no more change his subconscious ideas than he can fly without wings. These subconscious ideas will hit the book, and that is your business. You eventually will know much more about his book than he ever can. This is one of the reasons why writers get up and scream when you tell them that this was wrong or that was wrong or that the book meant something quite different from what they said it

did. One that springs to mind is Philip Jose Farmer who is forever telling people that that wasn't what his book was about! It was. It just happens that he thought he was writing about something else. That's not a silliness on his part; it's a normal part of self-expression, that you are always saying about three times as much as you think, and the bloke who is listening hears a damn sight more than you do.

If you're going to write reviews, be honest, first of all. If you like a book, say so; say why - never forget to say why, or otherwise you're wasting your time. If you don't like it, or you think there's something wrong with it, express it and be damn sure you've nailed it down. If you come to pieces of raving idiocy, like The Skylark of Space, always remember that, no matter how bad and how foolish the thing is, that book created a revolution in science fiction. It's your business, as a critic or as a reviewer, to ask the question, "Why? What was there? What haven't I seen from my superior eminence?"

Don't pull your punches but, on the other hand, don't set in with both boots to leave a bleeding corpse. Any mug can do that with any book. You can rip War and Peace to pieces without any trouble if you really set your mind to it. Just remember, though, that War and Peace is bigger than you are - or me, or anyone else. To merely rip into a book because something about it displeases you is neither good criticism nor good reviewing nor fair play. Be violent if you like, but make damn sure that you're right.

PETER NICHOLLS

It's always more fun for the audience if there can be real hammer-and-tongs argument. I'd like to turn around and say that I'd never heard such a bunch of rubbish in my life.

I won't, actually. I pretty much agree with what George says. I don't think he said enough, but if he had, I would have had nothing to say.

George says what the critic does. I'm not sure that he's argued his case for his social function. That's what I'd like to talk about. A lot of writers have expressed to me the view that the critic hasn't earned the right. A writer sweats over a novel for a year, two years, four years, and the critic can have a few beers on a Friday night, sit at his typewriter for an hour and a half, and get into the newspaper with a Saturday morning deadline. It is very easy, indeed, for a critic to be totally irresponsible.

The justification for being a critic is that he does represent the reader. He doesn't need to have a right to do that; he is himself the

reader. His job is simply to be a sort of articulate reader and, to some extent, to stand up for the rights of the reader when talking back to the novelist himself. This is all general stuff about criticism, no matter what you're criticising.

When you turn to science fiction, it seems to me that the critic has a very simple social function. I don't know how long all of you have been reading s f: probably, some of you, not terribly long. Now things have changed, as you've heard many people say on this platform. But these days, if you walk into Space Age Book Shop, or into any large s f bookshop in any large city in the world, you'll find yourself with 800, 1000, 2000 possible books you can buy. In the first place, you don't have the faintest idea what you like. You like what you first picked up, what turned you on. It might be John Wyndham; it might be Isaac Asimov. Well, okay; you buy The Chrysalids, then you buy The Kraken Lakes, and then you buy The Day of the Triffids. Sooner or later, you've gone through Wyndham, and you don't know where to go from there.

It seems to me that the critic can help guide you through this labyrinth, and the only way he can do that honestly is by giving you milestones. There's a critical argument that's gone on for many years, and will always go on. To some extent, it was the United Kingdom versus America at one point, where the critics in England used to make value judgments all over the place: "This book is good"; "That book is bad". (I'm simplifying appallingly, and apologise to any teachers of literature in the audience.) The American attitude was a little bit more, "We have no right to make value judgments; they're subjective. Our job as critics must be simply to point to what is in the book in as objective a way as possible and to leave it at that." I personally incline to the English view. In order, I think, to value all the best things in life, you need to know what the worst things are. In order to know what a really good steak is like, you need to have had a burnt steak at some point to compare it with. It's exactly the same with reading books.

I'm here to say that the critics have not done justice to science fiction. I am here to say that there is not yet one good book on science fiction, and no particular signs that there's going to be a really good book on science fiction for a while yet. This is a very sad state of affairs.

I'd like to be deliberately offensive, I suppose. I'd like to make a list of some of the things that seem to have been wrong with the criticism of science fiction so far. You could put them into little groups. (I hope I don't insult people who are here, or friends of people who are here, too badly.)

* The first kind of criticism s f suffered from for years was ghetto criticism. The ghetto mentality was because they felt under attack. In all ghettos, you hide behind the walls. In a ghetto, you even develop a secret language very often, as fandom has done in science fiction. You've probably heard some of it already. The ghetto critics reckoned that outsiders can't really talk about science fiction because there are special rules with which you must criticise it, and only they had the God-given gift of knowing what these rules were. To name names: Sam Moskowitz and Donald Wollheim are the two best-known ghetto critics. They never, in fact, do state what the standards are inside the ghetto, but all is chumminess and camaraderie, except that they can get an extraordinary note of vitriol in their voices when it comes round to those writers who have perhaps tried to knock down the walls of the ghetto a little bit.

Donald Wollheim wrote a book called The Universe Makers, published in England by Gollancz and, in America, by Harper and Row, some four years ago. He writes interestingly and enthusiastically about a number of everybody's favourite science fiction writers, but he gets his dander up about some of them; he's very uneasy. But the real giveaway is the writers he does not mention in that book: Alfred Bester, James Blish, Philip K Dick, Thomas M Disch, Ursula Le Guin, Charles Harness, Frank Herbert, Henry Kuttner, Walter Miller, and William Tenn. That's a list I made up at one point; there are many others not mentioned.

What do these writers have, that Wollheim did not want to mention them? Brains. In other words, ghetto criticism has been traditionally anti-intellectual. It wants the Golden Age back again: it wants the same sort of stories... There are some very good writers whom Wollheim does like. One of them is, for instance, our own Bert Chandler. Wollheim likes him because he's always been a very good story-teller. I'm not claiming that everything Wollheim likes is bad at all; he likes a lot of good, traditional virtues in science fiction that I think we all like. But there are certain things he doesn't like.

* Another, perhaps more sophisticated group of critics include Kingsley Amis, Robert Conquest (and perhaps Brian Aldiss belongs to this group). I think of them as being the elegant slummers. These are the men who, as they all tell us in introductions and at conventions, used to dash down to Woolworths during the War with their threepenny bits and buy the new copy of Astounding. For them, it's an incredible nostalgic romance that science fiction had for them when they were children.

Now they've all grown up since then. All three men are novelists in their own right,

They know perfectly well what the standards of the literary world are outside but, because they have this nostalgic boyhood affection... Kingsley Amis was perhaps the worst offender. He actually does, in effect, in a much more sophisticated way, exactly what Moskowitz and Wollheim do. He disapproves of anything later than Arthur C Clarke, in effect. He disapproves terribly of J G Ballard, described by Kingsley Amis as "that great self-destroyed talent" - an interesting, and possibly partly accurate phrase. But there's a heavy air of disapproval.

I can describe it best by saying that these are men who are knowing to the point of cynicism in other respects, but appear to see in science fiction a little patch of nostalgic innocence where everything is simpler and more clear cut. In adulthood, just like roistering bravos from the Court seeking out a jolly pub with buxom barmaids at the poor end of town, they enjoy slumming. But everything is spoiled for the experienced slummer if he becomes a leader of fashion. The image I used was that wonderful little East End pub where you could find Cockneys singing Cockney songs and so on. It gets in the gossip columns. Next time you go there, you find Lord Snowdon and Bernard Levin there. The whole atmosphere's no good at all.

This is exactly the relationship that I diagnosed between Amis and Conquest on the one hand, and science fiction on the other. S f's been spoiled for them by its ever-increasing popularity among others of their class. Hence all the grumbling about the New Wave, the querulous harkings-back to the "good old days"; all those Spectrum anthologies they did which consisted almost entirely of stories from Astounding and from no other source.

This is accompanied by a kind of lack of seriousness in their criticism. Amis will not be sufficiently harsh, in fact. He carelessly loves s f, but he feels a little bit ashamed of himself for doing it. Like a true promiscuous rake, one feels an emptiness behind it all. He seems to imply it would be an error in good taste to import real critical values from the great world outside into the jolly, noisy slums of s f with their scarlet lights glimmering through the polluted fog.

Even Brian Aldiss, a man I very much admire, is to some extent guilty of this. In his book, Billion Year Spree which, I think, is by a fairly long margin the best book we have so far on science fiction, I still find some of this note, some of this...tear of nostalgic joy rolling down his face when he talks about the old Frank R Paul covers... A sophisticated kitsch. It's a kind of camp.

One of the things I don't like about s f cons

is all this talk about the lurid covers of the past, talking about them in all seriousness, as if they were in fact much better than what was happening in surrealism in the '30s, in the great world outside. There's something extraordinarily self-indulgent about this. Not that I want to stop people collecting this stuff; I collect it myself. I must admit that I'm ambiguous on the whole question.

* I'm leaving out the obviously bad sorts of critics. They're the ones who stand up in public, like Dr Jonathan Miller did on a BBC television program some four years ago, saying "I really know nothing about science fiction but I'm prepared to say that it's all total rubbish for the following reasons." He's read one book, and he might even be completely right about that one book, but he hasn't looked at the other two thousand.

* More recently, there's a new kind of critic who worries me a bit, and sometimes I think I'm one myself, but I can think of better examples, probably not well known here. John Clute, for example, who writes criticism in New Worlds.

I'm not sure how to describe these characters. They are a little bit self-indulgent. Us critics of science fiction have total freedom, you see, to say anything we like, because there are no rules yet. It's not really yet an academic subject. It's becoming so in the United States, but not yet in the United Kingdom, and certainly not in Australia. Most of the critics of science fiction are academics taking a holiday. They're not bound by the rules. So you get a kind of criticism which is racy, sophisticated, ironic, self-serving, full of little in-jokes. This is also what is true of the best of fanzine criticism, as a matter of fact. Often obscurantist in the extreme.

I can best describe this by reading part of a criticism by John Clute of Aldiss' novel The Eighty-Minute Hour:

But to try to shift this rhetoric of communion into the matrix of a book's voice (as in The Eighty-Minute Hour, for instance, or in Neva) simply and fundamentally can't be done, for a book is not a session, nor does its implied author genuinely communicate with hypostasised fans because he (the shape of the implied Aldiss) precisely is the text itself (as we've already claimed), all else being ventriloquism. Having dreamed the impossible fan, the implied Aldiss (like Theodore Sturgeon and Robert A Heinlein and Samuel R Delany) must take responsibility for any gaffes engendered by that false relation; authorship is an oration to fans confuses composition with performance, and

creates that rhetoric of connivance with which the reader (a real fan say) may well be complicit, because it seems flattering, but which ultimately grates the teeth.

I'm sure that none of you got that first time through. What's interesting is that, the second time through, it's an awfully good point.

* S f criticism doesn't really need this. What it needs, I believe (which is what I try to push in Foundation) is a kind of voice which is mid-way between the fannish and the ghetto on the one hand, and the academic on the other. It's the voice of simple sanity. George Turner, in fact, very much has this voice as a critic. It's the voice of directness.

The critic must always think of himself as taking part in a dialogue where he's trying to help to explain. Even if he doesn't like a book, it's his duty to try to see, at its best, what that book might be; what it could be.

The sort of criticism that I find, personally, most valuable is criticism written of books that the critic has actually liked. You may read a book by, say, Jimmy Ballard, say The Atrocity Exhibition. You might say: well, that's interesting, but I can't quite see what Ballard's on about. And because, in fact, you can't see it, you might get cross with the author. You might think to yourself, "Oh well, pretentious prick anyway; I'm not interested in this sort of stuff," But the good critic can lead you back to that book and show you that Ballard's not pretentious because there is no "pretence" involved - he is doing something genuine, if odd, but the first time through, you missed what he was doing. This is precisely, it seems to me, where the critic of science fiction has a function.

Now there are a number of good critics of science fiction coming along, and I personally believe that science fiction cannot fully reach maturity until its critics reach maturity. The two things will happen - I hope George agrees with me here - very much hand in hand.

TURNER

I must agree with that, but I think we must point out at this time that bad criticism has done a great deal to hold back science fiction. When I came into science fiction about six or seven years back, when people started showering me with fanzines and so on, I was absolutely appalled at the reviewing. I really set myself out, quite deliberately, to change the attitude towards reviewing among fans in this country.

The first thing I did was an article called

"On Writing About Science Fiction", which John Bangsund published, which, surprisingly to me, caught on with a bang all over the place. Even Harry Warner in America went so far as to say that it ought to be republished once a year, which is possibly taking it a bit far. But still, it made me feel that the attempt was worthwhile. Bruce Gillespie swears that he uses it as his own reviewing bible - he does nothing of the sort, because his methods are as different from mine as you can get. Not that they are any better or any worse, but just different.

But this business about reviewing, or criticism - we'll use the word interchangeably for the time being - must take notice of the fact that the word "ghetto" should never have been used in the first place and it's time we dropped it. We're talking about it, and we have on several occasions during the last few days, and the reason, all the time, has been that it's outdated. Now I said, and I meant, two days ago, that the writers and the fans between them, created this ghetto, and preserved it, and shored up the walls and kept mending them each time they looked like falling down. Lousy reviewing was so small part of it. They adopted a double standard: "Because it's science fiction, therefore we review it as science fiction, and not as written literature." The moment you do that, you are condemning the work. You are turning thumbs down on it. You are saying, in effect, that we are not game to put this up against the rest of literature.

Thank God there were people like Brian Aldiss, Walter Miller, Jim Ballard, and a few more, who were game to say, "We can write literature. We can write well. We can write something that will stand up against work in other genres", and they went ahead and did it.

And yet, God help me, one of the first things I came to, even four or five years ago, was John Bangsund's talk about the double standard, about the necessity of judging science fiction by its own set of values. To hell with that! If science fiction needs a special set of values, then it isn't literature; it's something else. And the sooner we find out, the better.

My own line is that it must be judged as good work. There's only one difference between science fiction and the mainstream; that's a technical difference. You were told in this last panel that the mainstream takes out the fourth wall. A few writers go beyond that and take out what you would call the fourth wall of the mind, so that you get a look further in. Science fiction does not do that so much because it does not concentrate so much on character, on the impact of people on people. So it dispenses with one of the prime qualities that we've come to associate with literature.

It puts in something else, though. You can't just throw away the rules and not put something

in their place. What it puts in their place is that opposite thing, a reversal of the impacts, or a discussion of impacts of a different nature - not of people upon people, but of people upon the universe, and of the universe upon people. That is the only significant difference that needs to be observed when you're reviewing science fiction against any other type of fiction. You will very rarely review a science fiction book in which you're involved purely with the characters. If you're reviewing D G Compton, you just might be. I can't think of anybody else.

So don't feel for one moment that science fiction has to be treated differently from the rest of the canon of literature. The moment you treat it differently is an act of betrayal. The moment you accept somebody else doing it, you've committed another act of betrayal. It must stand on its own feet, and fight back.

NICHOLLS

I think that's absolutely true, but there's one special difficulty that the critic of s f has. There is a practical difference between science fiction and the mainstream. It's not an absolute difference at all. It's this: Most traditional novelists of psychological realism are not full-time novelists. They've usually other jobs. Often they are journalists, academics, teachers - maybe even house-builders or postmen.

In the genres, you often find full-time writers - perhaps forty or fifty people in the world who make a full-time living from science fiction. By doing that, they knowingly subject themselves to commercial pressure, and it's broken many.

It seems to me that the one thing the critic can do is help to give the good pulp writer the reputation he might genuinely deserve - the outstanding example would be Philip K Dick - in order to take some of the actual pressures off that man. Bob Silverberg is a man who has written, in a book called Hell's Cartographers, about the incredible output that he had in his first ten years of writing science fiction. Really incredible. It wasn't just that he could write a book in three weeks, another in the second three weeks, and a third in the third three weeks. Bob is the first to admit that this did not help his writing. He's a naturally good writer, who wrote a lot of sloppy and lazy stuff. I'm prepared to take that example because Bob confesses it himself. But I'm sure we could all name names. An example that is often quoted, for example, is Roger Zelazny. People talk of him as if Zelazny is a hack these days, but he's not. His first couple of novels have very fine qualities indeed - this is agreed by a lot of people. They started going downhill. It happens again and again and again in science fiction.

The other pressure for commercial writers is to keep on writing your first novel. If you go back and look at the great names of science fiction and see how many of them have written their first novel over and over again, it's a very frightening thing.

So these are the pressures which are perhaps stronger on genre writers. It's also perhaps true of westerns, detective stories - not just science fiction.

You may wonder if the critic can affect those things at all. I mean, if those people have to churn the stuff out, no matter how basically good they are as writers, what's the point of the critic saying, "Well, Andre Norton might be a good writer, but she shouldn't have written ninety novels." Andre Norton, presumably, has to write ninety novels in order to keep her children going to a decent school. I think, though, that this is not a reason for us to be soft on the science fiction writers. It is all the more reason to be tough on them, but with the ultimate hope that what is a very grim situation... I can think of only about four science fiction writers in the world who have actually made much money from it, and even Bob, who is quite a wealthy man, has made more money from his non-fiction than from his science fiction. Arthur Clarke is now very wealthy from his science fiction but, by God, he wasn't for twenty-five years. It was only after 2001: A Space Odyssey that he made it financially. Isaac Asimov is wealthy but, there again, much more from his non-fiction than from his science fiction. Perhaps Robert Heinlein is the only man who has made quite a lot of real money from science fiction exclusively.

The critic's job is not just to help the fans but to encourage the great world outside to see that this is a real literature which, once it starts happening, and it is happening now, publishers will start treating s f writers as real people and they won't keep giving them such rotten deals, as they did in the old days. An example is Brian Aldiss' novel, Non Stop, which many people think is his best. It was his first s f novel to be published. That novel sold world rights for £60. Aldiss has never got another penny out of that book. It was world rights - forever.

TURNER

Even I have never done that badly.

NICHOLLS

It helped him, of course. He got a name, and he got a better deal on his second book. But it is a tragedy that a very fine book - a science fiction classic - should...it's like the famous story of John Milton writing Paradise Lost for a fiver. But a fiver was probably

worth a lot more in the seventeenth century than £60 was worth in 1958.

TURNER

You mentioned Philip Dick and Bob Silverberg. The mention of Philip Dick brings me to something that I was having to put in at some stage in this talk. It's this book, Philip K Dick: Electric Shepherd, which you will see on sale in the lobby. It's a product of Bruce Gillespie and Carey Handfield. It consists purely of science fiction criticism of Philip Dick. If you are at all interested in criticism, or in reviewing, or in writing for fanzines, this is a book which you will do quite well to have with you. It contains practically the whole spectrum of such fanzine criticism and reviewing as is generally available to us. It contains letters, with just odd remarks that happened to be to the purpose. It contains full-scale reviews of special books. It contains a very lengthy examination of Philip Dick himself, from the point of view of a man who's trying to work out precisely the patterns of Dick's progress. It contains a completely idiotic essay by a very intelligent man, Stanislaw Lem. Unfortunately, it doesn't contain some of the things which have been said about that essay since. It concludes with an essay by myself, which contains something which I should like to make a point about.

This essay was written many, many months after I had read Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said. When I read that book first, I thought...ah, it's all right; I enjoyed it. Then, quite unexpectedly, months later, when I thought I had dealt with it forever, Bruce asked me to write a review of it. I thought, oh well, I'll do the right thing and look at it again. On the second reading, an entirely different book emerged. I had been guilty the first time of reading the surface only, because it just did not catch me where it should have done. There were things wrong with the book which accounted for part of that, too. The thing I want to point out is that this is one of the things that you, as critic, must avoid. I have said that often the writer does not know what he is doing. The other side of the coin is that you, the critic, often don't see what he is doing. I've had the same experience with other books. What you have to do when this occurs is to make a public and honest mea culpa: "I was wrong, I was wrong; this is the review I should have written." I've done this more than once, and I'll keep on doing it.

A critic, like anybody else, must continue to learn, get new ideas, to progress in his art.

Criticism is an art - one of the minor ones, but an art, nonetheless. And if I find what I said five years ago was wrong, then I'm going to stand up and say so and talk about the thing that is really right. The whole of critical literature is a continuing series of re-evaluations. It's these re-evaluations which finally serve to produce the continuing basis of literature. That also changes. The critic doesn't direct the course of literature; what he tries to do is make it plain.

One of the things I've often had said to me is that I've been terribly hard, at times, on Bob Silverberg. Well, Bob and I haven't poked daggers in each other's backs over it. We have talked about it. But a closer reading of what I have written would show that I've always paid a great deal of respect to Silverberg, to what he has written and to what he has edited. The thing about Silverberg is that he's a bloke who's worth paying attention to.

Don't waste your time criticising the rubbish. Go for the people who have it to give you good work. Never hit a man who's too small to hit back, because that way neither of you will learn anything. Not so long ago, I criticised Silverberg as an editor, and one of the stories he published as a load of rubbish. That was not done in a fit of spite, or just to show that I, the critic, knew rather better than he or his writer. It was done because I honestly believe that it is only, in a great sense, by the improvement of criticism and by pulling no punches in criticism, that we will eventually get the kind of science fiction that is capable of being produced by capable writers and editors. (Don't forget the editors; they're often as important as the writers.)

NICHOLLS

A very last word. Obviously, as you can see from both of us, the besetting sin of the literary critic has always been intellectual arrogance. It's a necessary sin, in a way; if you don't have that, you never have the guts to take on the job in the first place. But, of course, if you're arrogant, you don't need guts; you simply go ahead and do it anyway.

But I finish with this thought. This panel was titled "Plumbers of the Cosmos". John Bangsund probably had in mind that the science fiction writers are the plumbers of the cosmos. Let's think of it this way. The science fiction critics are the plumbers of the cosmos and it is our job to keep the drains of science fiction flowing freely.

THE MICHAEL CONEY SECTION

Michael Coney has been the subject of some controversy during recent years in s f circles. However, little of the praise or blame (mainly blame) which has been laid on his doorstep has had to do with his fiction. Most of it has concerned his expressed opinions in fanzines. I am one reader who cannot find much evidence of these opinions in the novels and short stories themselves.

So, I suppose, I should be writing an article in which I show what I like in Michael Coney's fiction. I don't have the time, and anyway, I've managed to persuade Derrick Ashby, Stephen Hitchings, Neville Angove, and Van Ikin to do the job for me.

I should put myself on the line, though. I believe that Hello Summer, Goodbye (titled Rax in USA) was the best s f novel of 1975. I like it for all the reasons which Neville Angove relates in his review, and I think it has other delights as well. I like Charisma very much, haven't read Brontomek! yet, and I think that Mirror Image, his first published novel, is Coney's only real failure so far.

- Bruce Gillespie

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A CAST OF CONEY

Derrick Ashby discusses

<u>FRIENDS COME IN BOXES</u>	<u>MIRROR IMAGE</u>	<u>SYZYGY</u>
by Michael G Coney	by Michael G Coney	by Michael G Coney
Gollancz :: 1973	DAW UQ1031 :: 1972	Ballantine 03056 :: \$1.25
189 pages :: £2.10	174 pages :: 95c	216 pages :: 1973
<u>WINTER'S CHILDREN</u>	<u>MONITOR FOUND IN ORBIT</u>	
by Michael G Coney	by Michael G Coney	
Gollancz :: 1974	DAW UQ1132 :: 1974	
192 pages :: £2.30	172 pages :: 90c	

Friends Come in Boxes is by far the best novel Coney has written. At the time of writing, his others were Mirror Image (1972), Syzygy (1973), Winter's Children (1974), and The Hero of Downways (1973). There is also Monitor Found in Orbit (1974), his collection of short stories.

Friends Come in Boxes is a novel about Earth, about a society that is apparently planet-bound in the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries. (The other novels reviewed here are about colonial societies on other worlds, with Winter's Children

set probably on Earth.)

Friends Come in Boxes operates on two levels - on the level of human character interest (rare in science fiction) and on the level of broad social issues.

In this book, Earth's population explosion has shown no sign of slowing down. Most of the world's governments are getting worried about the situation. To quote from the novel's Prologue:

- 1 Too many children are being born.
- 2 A person, once he passes the age of 40, becomes progressively a burden on the community.
- 3 Despite this, his mental ability might be unimpaired and his death could be a loss to the community as a whole.
- 4 ...brain surgery has reached a high level of efficiency.

He was right, of course...all these things were true... He produced one solution for items 1-3 above...involving item 4. He put across the idea of compulsory transfer.

At forty years of age each person alive at the time of introduction of the scheme undergoes brain transplant. The old bodies are destroyed and the brains are transplanted into the empty brain pans of three-month-old children. The individual then lives in his new body for a further forty years, and the process is repeated. Virtual immortality.

Of course, there are problems. Problem number 1 is that the birth rate falls too fast, so that the supply of host bodies falls below the demand for them. The immediate solution to this problem is to build an artificial container for a human brain, with voice and hearing devices attached. They are called Friendship Boxes, and hold brains waiting for hosts. The longer-term solutions include the development of android bodies to supplement the supply of hosts, and to cut back demand by passing the Total Death Act, which makes the penalty for all crimes Total Death at the next physical age 40 of the criminal.

These "solutions" lead to further problems: (1) a great decrease in personal liberty because of the Total Death Act (a system including the registration of all citizens, the issuing of ID cards, etc); and (2) the creation of a group of second-class citizens, the androids. The androids are allowed to breed outside the system because they breed so prolifically (reason not given) and this will increase the host body base. It also means that an influx of "new" brains is coming into the system (after androids become eligible for transfer). In time this

leads to the same stresses that were the reason for setting up the system. After all, its main purpose was to cut the birthrate, so they decreed that no new children born could be allowed to grow up, but they needed the bodies, so they created androids to produce them, and allowed some to survive...

I'm not suggesting that the specific situation set up by Coney could arise (I'm not suggesting that it couldn't, either), but it is so similar to the sort of thing which politicians are suggesting all the time that it has great force.

Coney is just as interested in his characters as he is in world-building and social argument. The novel is divided into five parts, each of which follows the actions of certain people on one day in a town somewhere in the West of England.

The first story concerns a young woman who is keeping her baby in defiance of the law. She is a nurse at a transfer centre.

Part 2, "The Never Girl", concerns a girl who was kept by her parents and has grown up without legal identity in a world that demands such an identity for everyone.

"Menagerie" deals with the problem of a woman approaching Total Death because of insanity. She arranges to be transferred into her son's body and identity. The illegal transfer centre puts the son's brain in a Friendship Box.

"A Woman and Her Friend" deals with the problems of Friends - the boxed brains. People are encouraged to take them home into ordinary family life, but they are seldom pleasant interludes. Friends tend to be selfish and objectionable.

"Charity Run" is the climax of the novel. Its protagonist is a Transfer surgeon, who is also an android. He has appeared in all the other sections - the only character to do so. "Charity Run" deals with the breaking-down of the system, and the groups of people living on the outskirts of society who suffer natural life-spans rather than knuckle down. There are many compensations - for instance, they have real children.

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Michael Coney shows an interest in the way people tick in most of his other writings, though not as successfully as in Friends Come in Boxes. The major interest of two of his other novels, Syzygy and Mirror Image, is the way in which Coney structures societies and worlds to express this interest.

On the world of Marilyn, Earth colonists discover a creature with an apparently perfect defence mechanism; it changes into the love object of anything that threatens it. In Mirror Image,

this creature - called an amorph - has a body that is almost amoeboid. It holds no permanent shape under normal circumstances, but can take on the form of anything at all, down to the last chromosome. It is telepathic, of course, and picks from the brain of any predator that thing which it is least likely to attack. Marilyn is colonised as a company planet after the discovery of valuable mineral deposits. The amorphs are discovered only later. The humans turn the amorphs (in human form) into a slave class. There are certain moral arguments involved, which the colonists dispute among themselves, but then the amorphs take matters into their own hands by turning into individuals. This is the main concern of Mirror Image.

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On the world of Arcadia (in Syzygy), Earth colonists discover a species of plankton which also has a unique method of defending itself, which develops from its unique method of propagating itself. Arcadia has six moons and, once every 52 years, their alignment causes an emperor tide (to coin a phrase). During a period of weeks beforehand, very high tides alternate with very low tides, and the plankton breeds under these conditions. It has a life-span of 52 years, and thus a very fragile life-cycle. All the world's plankton congregates in the in-shore area and is vulnerable to all its natural enemies. To combat this situation, evolution has provided the plankton with a very short-lived group mind. With this mind, the plankton control the shoals of blackfish (Arcadia's shark) which gather, in the first place, to feed off the fish that feed off the plankton. Now the blackfish protect the plankton while they breed (a process which something to do with the minds themselves, but we are told little about it), and they are rewarded by the mind, which presents them with easy prey by attracting to the shoal areas all sorts of animal life. Including humans.

The colony has scant records of its last period of emperor tide. All records disappeared during what seemed like a period of complete chaos. The protagonist feels that no explanations are adequate. It becomes apparent that the mind broadcasts very powerfully in order to control the blackfish, and that these emanations affect the humans. The minds broadcast fear. The blackfish feel threatened by whatever threatens the plankton, and retaliates where the plankton cannot. Humans, argumentative enough under normal circumstances, are highly susceptible to broadcast fear. The situation becomes worse during the book, and as the protagonist and his friends seek to discover what is going on. Eventually the colonists discover the minds and link them with the disturbances. Attempts to destroy the minds end disastrously, and attempts to communicate are fruitless. Certainly the short-term problem is solved, but the book could hardly be described as optimistic. Syzygy is well worth reading.

DERRICK ASHBY

** ** *

Winter's Children is a much less successful book. For instance, it is a rewrite of two novelettes, which were not particularly good in the first place. They were published in Galaxy some years ago - comparatively early Coney.

Coney is not quite sure what kind of book he wants this to be. At first, I think, he set out to base the book on potentially interesting characters - but then turned the book into a fast-paced adventure story. He sacrifices the characters for the action, and the characters that remain are not consistent with the action he achieves.

Unlike his other novels, Coney's Winter's Children has no carefully built world within which the action can unfold. The setting is a future Ice Age in which Earth's civilisation is an old man's memories, which none of the other characters takes very seriously. Most of the planet's scattered inhabitants live on the remnants of civilisation, eating food discovered preserved by the cold in buried supermarkets, and wearing preserved clothes.

The flora and fauna of the world are described very patchily. The carnivore of the snowfields is the bear-like pad. It preys on any people it finds, but we are not told its main diet. Other animals include the snowmole, a relative of the pad, living on microcosmic life of the layer between the snow and earth, and the snowmice, which it feeds on. The human equivalent of the pads are the flesh hunters, cannibals who rove the snowfields around their fortresses on skis and, using shoulder sails, hunt for small groups of humans, such as the main characters of Winter's Children. The flesh hunters seem to have an unending supply of rifles and ammunition.

The main characters live in the church of one of the buried villages dotted over the snowfields. (They choose the church because its spire pokes above the snow.) Like most such people, they live on the food and other things left behind by the old civilisation.

They are an ill-assorted group, supposedly held together by their young leader Jacko. But I'm sure he couldn't lead his way out of a paper bag. Coney tells us that Jacko is an intelligent, moral, and athletic fellow who is sacrificing himself to give the rest of the group members some chance of survival, which they would not have without him. However, the fact that anybody survives is more due to luck than anything else. Jacko's second-in-command is an alcoholic who discovers that he has latent telepathic powers at the most convenient (and unexplained) time for the group. About half way through the novel, the group is joined by a young woman (Mignon) who falls in love with Jacko for no apparent reason, and her servant (Bog), a genial giant with an IQ of about 4,

who worships the ground upon which she walks - in a Platonic sort of way. No one else in the group is worth spitting on. Cockade is a shrill virago who hasn't a good word to say for anyone or anything and who suffers from acute agoraphobia (almost fatal on the snowfields). Her mate, Switch, is a non-entity who is dominated by her.

Ajax is the only real villain in the book. The flesh-hunters appear not so much as villains as cyphers representing the threats posed to the group by the situation. However, Ajax is a malignant telepath who has gained control of the pads. Also, he attempts to take over Jacko's group, using the pads as weapons. Ajax appears as a sort of primal figure. He has forfeited his humanity in the interests of survival.

The plot is more difficult to describe. It consists of a rapid sequence of threats to the group's existence, and the attempts by Jacko to save it and find it a permanent home. There are rumours of a land to the south where growing things can be found pushing above the snowline. That the rumours are, in the end, proved true, and that the group reaches there, I found to be a relief.

There is much potential in this novel. I wish it had been fulfilled.

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Monitor Found in Orbit is so far the only collection of Michael Coney's short fiction. Published by DAW Books, it is a mixed bag, mostly good.

"The True Worth of Ann Villiers" illustrates well what I see as the best part of Coney's writing. It is about a social service system set up in the future of England. It is a seemingly logical extension of the principle of the Welfare State. The main premise of the story is that society has a responsibility to protect its citizens and that that responsibility is measurable by the value that the citizen confers on society in general. The equation that the government has worked out to measure this value is

based on the citizen's gross earnings. The government gives him an extra amount equal to the basic allowance, which it gives to those not earning at all. This social value is not transferable. Suppose a man is very ill and the costs of curing him would be \$3000. Suppose that he earns \$1500 pa and has savings of \$750. If the government grant is worth \$250, then the man would be treated for his illness and cured. If, however, the government grant were only \$200, then he would be allowed to die. Care worth \$2950 would keep him alive maybe for a few months, but after that...

I cannot agree that the Welfare State in Britain would get to an extreme situation such as this, but the society described in the story has the seeming reality so important in s f social criticism of this type.

"The Unsavoury Episode of Mrs Hector Powell-Challenger" is a more bizarre story in the Pohl mould. It deals with a wave of nostalgia for almost anything which seems to be sweeping the world.

"R26/5/PSY" is a story about an Asimovian robot which is used as a tool in psychiatry. In a type of shock therapy the robot is... Sorry, I can't tell you that or it would spoil the story.

"Esmeralda" is a quite beautiful story dealing with compulsory euthanasia.

"Hold My Hand My Love" deals with a world that exists only in the mind of a psychotic boy, and yet it is a story about people and about an alien world.

"Beneath Still Waters" deals with the reaction of one human being who is completely amoral to contact with an alien race within which the individuals are in complete harmony.

"Monitor Found in Orbit" is a new wave espionage story. Of real quality. "Manya" and "Mind Prison" are substandard.

- Derrick Ashby
December 1974

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INTIMATIONS OF IMITATION

Stephen Hitchings discusses

MIRROR IMAGE

by Michael G Coney

Gollancz :: 1973

223 pages :: £2.20

original US publication 1972

Michael Coney eases us into his first novel very gently. A colony is trying to establish itself on Marilyn, a fairly typical alien planet. It is beset with familiar alien problems: hostile environment, giant lizards, swarms of man-eating fish. It has a fairly typical Supervisor, Alex Stordahl - tough exterior but warm heart - who is very typically attracted towards a colonist named Joan.

Even when an amorphous creature forms itself into a human shape, we are not worried. Good grief, similar things have happened in Lost in Space. It is only when the colonists try to find out the nature of the creature that we begin to realise that something is wrong. The creature is male, and then it is female; it is human, and it is alien; and it seems to affect people's opinions toward it. It changes form continually, and at last comes to resemble the biologist, Briggs. Briggs tries to explain it in conventional biological terms, but is taken further and further from his bases:

"Look, Briggs." Stordahl adopted a reasonable tone. "I'm willing to accept that you may be right, in view of the evidence in that cage. But don't let's get carried away by this thing. There are a lot of implications which you may have missed in your delight at being duplicated."

"For instance?"

"The conversations. The language. The knowledge of Earth, of biology. You said the thing knew as much as yourself."

"That follows. It becomes a replica. God, think of the possibilities; the two of us working together."

"Yes. But how does it know the language?"

This isn't just an external resemblance, like a chameleon changing colour."

"I realise that," said Briggs shortly. "Of course the amorph is telepathic. That's obvious. The resemblance is complete. It knows everything I know. And quite a few things I've forgotten, no doubt. I wonder..." He turned around, scrutinising the amorph thoughtfully. "I wonder if it possesses free will, in its present form?"

The amorph continues to change into people from the colonists' pasts. Other amorphs are brought into the colony and adopt new forms. The mystery deepens delightfully, and it is almost a pity when the psychologist, Avio Santana, provides the answer. (Those not wishing to have the mystery spoiled by revelation may cease reading here.)

"The Te factor," he was repeating. "From the Latin Te, meaning you, or thou. The factor which has its seat in the emotions and was secret to the mind until now, until it reaches out and shapes the amorph..."

"So imagine your unformed amorph, threatened. It has the capacity to change form as a defence mechanism. What better defence, then, than to assume the shape of the person most compatible with the aggressor?"

"And as an added benefit, it is only possible to imitate the mind in as much as the aggressor knows the mind of his... shall we say, Te? The one person whom the aggressor will ignore the faults of and tend to see through rose-tinted spectacles?"

Evidently the amorphs feel perpetually threatened, because they all change very quickly into the colonists' Tes. They enter the colony in force, and soon everyone can have his/her own personal Te Incarnate. Married couples share amorphs with composite Tes. It is found that, after a few months, the facsimile becomes permanent.

Of course, the Te is only a fragment of a whole person, comprising what the thinker knows about his ideal. But Briggs proves to be an exception. He is so egotistical that his Te is himself, and an amorph in his presence becomes a complete duplicate Briggs. And in the presence of two egotists, it can combine the knowledge and ability of two brains to become, in some respects, superior to either original.

The central issue of the novel becomes a philosophical one about the humanity of the amorphs. They regard themselves as human, but the colonists look down on them. Even an ideal person can be called inferior when he or she has "inferior" beginnings. Hetherington, the man who is financing the colony, regards the amorphs as being a lower form than the colonists, whom he sees in turn as several steps lower than himself.

Hetherington spoke; his face was crimson. "What is your name, man?" he spoke sharply.

"I have no name as yet. I am an amorph."

"By God," snarled Hetherington. "What right have you to question me? You're not a colonist. You're an alien. Allow me to continue. Sit down or get out."

The amorph stood his ground. "I think we ought to get one fact clear, Mr Hetherington. I have been told of my origins; it has been explained to me how I came into existence in my present form. Bearing this in mind, I must correct your misconception. I am a native of this planet. You, Mr Hetherington, are an alien."

Regrettably, this latter part of the novel is not handled as well as the earlier mystery-solving. Coney's inventiveness falters as the amorphs try to establish their rights as individuals; there is a battle between colonists and

amorphs, but it fizzles out without resolving anything. The amorphs prove themselves to their own and Stordahl's satisfaction, but the reader may be forgiven for asking for a little more. But to give him his due, Coney remains honest, rejecting both the happily-ever-after and death-and-destruction solutions for a more realistic, if less conclusive, middle course. And this is something we see too rarely in this field. The ending is a little out of character with the rest and may be called inappropriate, but I was satisfied with it.

However, as it is the reviewer's task to find fault where fault is afoot, I must mention the Reverend Iain Waddie. This character appears in a discrete section, four pages in length, which has nothing to do with the rest of the story. Clearly the author created a scene which was beyond his power to resolve, but which he liked too much to exclude. The situation is that a mortal amorph forms itself to a divine prescription; having no idea what the result would be, Coney causes the Reverend to commit suicide and his creation to disappear. In truth, I enjoyed the incident, but it adds nothing to the novel and detracts considerably from the conclusion. If Coney wants to be a better novelist, he will have to learn to cut out scenes like this.

I would also have not mourned the editing-out of Hetherington's beautiful and over-sexed wife, Marilyn, after whom the planet is named; she provides some irrelevant sex scenes and pointless diversions from the plot, and is generally less than credible.

Mirror Image is, foremost, one of the most thorough treatments of a single idea that I have seen. The buildup is controlled beautifully, and the progression from each point to the next always unpredictable, but logical. As a first novel, it bodes well for the author. He has shown that he can handle a slight theme very well, and should be successful in greater things.

- Stephen Hitchings 1976

(*brg* It is obvious from the above review that Stephen Hitchings was not aware that Gollancz issues Mirror Image after Coney had achieved success already in USA with several of its successors. He has already become "successful in other things". *)

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ANOTHER CHILDHOOD'S END

Neville Angove discusses

HELLO SUMMER, GOODBYE also known as RAX

by Michael G Coney

Gollancz :: 1975
221 pages :: £3.20

DAW UY1205 :: 1975
189 pages :: \$1.25

(EDITOR: Neville Angove has reviewed the American edition of the book, which sits on the bookshelf under the ghastly name of Rax. I prefer the title under which the book appears in its English edition - Hello Summer, Goodbye - and have used that title throughout this piece.)

In an introductory note to this novel, Michael Coney comments that Hello Summer, Goodbye "...is a love story, a war story, and a science fiction story, and more besides." The "more besides" is actually a great deal.

The novel is related from the viewpoint of young Aliko-Drove, a boy just into puberty. His father, Alika-Burt, the secretary to a Member of Parliament (and therefore a "parl" himself), is taking his family for their annual holidays at seaside Pallahaxi. But to Drove, this is much more than a vacation: he hopes to renew his friendship with Pallahaxi-Browneyes, a young girl he met the previous year.

The love story between Drove and Browneyes takes place in Pallahaxi, a large fishing town and holiday resort. By blind chance, Drove and Browneyes are thrown together almost immediately upon Drove's arrival, but the action leading to the consummation of their relationship weaves in and out of the plot, until the climax. The reader has little difficulty in identifying with Drove (or Browneyes) as he moves from problem to problem, attempting to sort out his mind and soul, hindered at every turn by either circumstance, or his own shyness.

The war story seems to be the typical stereotype for s f: there is a planet-wide conflict between Erto and Asta, the two countires which share the

single orb-girdling continent. This conflict has a serious effect on Pallahaxi, since its position has made it the main pre-war Erton-Astan trading link. The remaining industry is threatened further by the practice of the Erton government in claiming most of the fishing catch "for the war effort". This creates a conflict between the Pallahaxians and the parl, who gradually become greater enemies than the never-seen Astans. The internal conflict escalates steadily into the climax of the novel, when Drove becomes the only point of communication between the two groups.

The science fiction story concerns the unusual (from our viewpoint) unnamed world in which Drove lives. The intermingling of human and alien creates a weird setting that, for all its strangeness, seems real. The integration of the commonplace and the uncommon is so complete that I half-expect to see lorin swinging from the yellowball trees, when I look out from my study window. The planet might best be described by the blurb on the back-cover of my edition:

It was an alien planet - yet not too alien from Earth. It had its differences: its ice-goblins, its curious furry lorin, its thickening water, and its unearthly tides, but for a young man like Aliko-Drove thinking of a vacation by the seaside, these oddities were the norm.

Coney manages to insinuate the descriptions of the planet necessary for an understanding of the plot into the action so smoothly that they seem part of the action and integral to it.

If this book is read simply as a love story, a war story, and a science fiction story, it can be a satisfying and enjoyable experience. The reader can easily identify the characters and situations, and relate them to his own world, his own existence. They are real and human, for all they are fictional and alien. Hello Summer, Goodbye, like most good s f, can be read for the story alone (which is like saying, I suppose, that Dune is a good read about desert survival).

But, as Coney points out, Hello Summer, Goodbye is more besides. The additional facets of Hello Summer, Goodbye is more besides. The additional facets of Hello Summer, Goodbye can be best explained via a quote from one of the minor characters introduced early into the plot. Palla-haxi-Grope, a stranded truck-driver, is being taken from his stranded vehicle to the nearest town by Drove's father. When Drove comments upon his tall tales, he retorts:

"It's the meaning behind the story that counts, Drove boy. A story is told for a purpose, and the way it's told has a purpose too. The truth or otherwise of the story is immaterial. Remember that."

This thesis might apply to all s f, but in Hello Summer, Goodbye it has another meaning. Coney has done something that seems to be beyond the capabilities of many other authors: he has told more than just a simple story, but he has done this without the polemics, without the sacrifice of either plot or characterisation.

On a deeper level, Hello Summer, Goodbye is the universal story of a boy becoming a man, the examination of the circumstances which dictate this essential (and often incomplete) transition. When the story opens, we see Drove as the typical young adolescent who feels he is superior to his elders, and objects when they do not admit to his opinion:

I always used to think it unfair that my father was capable of imposing his will on me by force. By the age of puberty a person's intelligence is fully developed and from that time on he begins to go downhill. So it was with my father, I told myself resentfully as I loaded the motorcart. The pompous old fool, aware of his inability to defeat me intellectually, resorts to threats. In a sense, I had won the small battle.

The trouble was that my father was not aware of the fact.

Drove's father tries to reason with him, but is rejected angrily. Drove objects to being told things "which I knew already". Even though he

knows these things, he is unwilling to allow them to affect his opinions. Drove's world revolves around Drove; he does not even accept the fact of the Erton-Astan War, since he has not been affected by it directly. When told that a certain town has been recaptured by Erto, he rejects the news:

But that's only what they say there...so far as we know, Gorba might be nowhere near the line of battle. It might not even exist. I've never heard of it.

This attitude is in marked contrast to that of his parents: his father avidly reads all the available news reports (straight from the pigeon's leg!), and his mother maintains a war map which shows the latest reported battle-lines.

It is his relationship with Browneyes which triggers the change in his behaviour that marks his emerging manhood. Constantly he is thrown into situations which test his long-held beliefs, and provide information at variance with what he is told by others. He is forced to realise that the world about him is more than just a symbol on a map. Previously he had maintained a childhood confidence that, no matter what crisis threatened, it would pass eventually without his aid. This world now threatens Drove's existence directly, and the existence of those he loves; and his actions now can have a significant consequence for others.

The continued attempts at reconciliation between Drove's childhood beliefs and his new knowledge comprise the second half of the novel. By his decision to reject the attitudes of others, and to follow his own instead, he emerges into manhood. He does not become a man by rejecting childhood ways and means blindly in favour of adult ways and means, but rather by questioning all his values, and accepting those which support his conception of the world and his role in it. It is his newfound "rational humanity" which sets him apart, making him the only real adult in a world of children. Drove may still make wrong decisions, but they are his alone: he accepts responsibility for them, and is willing to suffer the consequences. In the end, it is only the final decision which matters, though, and his is the right one, if there is a "right" one.

Drove's emergence into manhood contrasts sharply with the lack of "adult" behaviour exhibited by his fellow adults. They have only swapped one set of prejudices and superstitions for another set. Just as Drove-the-child did not care what occurred outside the boundaries of his little world, so too do the adults reject the existence of a different world departing from their cosy misconceptions. Dying soldiers, dying townsfolk, and a dying planet, are simply abstractions, to be considered in the implementation of plans as unfortunate hindrances only.

** ** *

To me it appears that Coney is developing twin themes in Hello Summer, Goodbye. The first is that the only essential differences between children and adults are those of age and influence: adults are older, and their actions have a greater consequence for others. If anything, a child is more rational, since he has not learned the misconceptions of society, and is thus allowed to act rationally as far as his developing intellectual processes permit.

With the approach of adulthood, the individual is forced to a decision: he must accept a specific attitude to the world and his role in it, and must not allow mere facts to challenge this attitude. In Drove's mind, being adult means ignoring anything which upsets this "gestalt", and being satisfied when the "facts" support it. But one need not even rely on facts: Drove comments to Browneyes that his mother "seems to go around looking for things to believe in". What she finds are superstitions and prejudices which she could use "like weapons, brandishing them in argument like clubs of incontrovertible fact". Even those adults with whom Drove feels he can identify suffer from the same problem. Their attitudes may be different, but are just as inflexible.

The crux of the argument presented by Coney is that adult behaviour is not genuine - there is always some ulterior motive, hidden even from the adults concerned. The change from child to adult involves developing this form of shallowness, simply so that you can do overtly what was done covertly, and feel justified in doing it. One can act like a child, but with a facade of responsibility. An adult may even need to lie to himself in order to live with himself.

But does this transition follow necessarily this pattern? Drove is presented with several sets of model behaviour: his father, who believes in the correctness of his beliefs; Westler, who does his best in a distasteful job; and Wolff, a child whose attempts to act as an adult only highlight the inadequacies of that exalted state. But Drove is able to reject them all, in favour of developing into a real person with valid beliefs. Is this beyond everyone else, or is it some special factor needed within the individual before he can pass through the transition phase successfully? For Drove, the necessary factor was his love for Browneyes.

** ** *

A second theme, explored in Coney's other books, is the effect of contemporary civilisation on mankind as a whole. As we become more civilised, we tend to lose touch with those parts of our heritage which originally allowed us to survive. Our relationship with the world's ecology, for example, seems to be one of mutual antagonism, rather than one of cooperation. Our faith in technology gives us the confidence that "things will be cured" if we just ignore them, but the continued acceptance of maladaptive

practices causes us to reject the right solutions to our problems, since they are unfamiliar, and require a change in lifestyle. The more personal the change, or the greater its size, the greater our revulsion to the solution. In Hello Summer, Goodbye, the city-dwellers have relegated the lorin (a strange hairy humanoid with semi-telepathic abilities) to barely tolerated menial roles, such as collecting night-soil, but otherwise avoid and ignore them in spite of their obvious intelligence, friendliness, usefulness, and importance. But the farmers live side-by-side with the lorin, accepting them as part of nature. The two differing attitudes taken towards the lorin are hard to reconcile until one realises that they may be symbolic of that part of human nature suppressed by modern civilisation. It is the lorin who prove to be the agents of salvation from one approaching catastrophe: ubiquitous guardian angels, loving and helping those who ask for help and love.

The war between Asta and Erto seems another example of the benefits of civilisation. No one seems to know, or care, why it started. It is just accepted as a simple fact of life. But not by all. A farmer living in the countryside between Alike and Pallahaxi, when asked by Drove's father about the local effects of the war, answers simply, "What war?" The war is only for the more civilised (a truism which seems to be actually true). Later the reader is told that the war will have no effect on the political future of the planet, and is being maintained only as a front to hide other activities by both the Astan and Erton governments. Man's inhumanity to man reaches a peak with the Parls' attempts to save their version of civilisation from the catastrophe. The paradox lies in the fact that the people of Pallahaxi need to act as animals really do act - without hatred or greed - in order to save themselves; but the Parls' attempts to survive during the interregnum repel even the animals (the lorin), and thereby fail.

The adoption of civilisation seems to entail the adoption of different values. When Ribbon is saved by Drove, her father can think of nothing but the danger she was in. But twice, when Browneyes saves Drove's life, his parents can only think of their son associating with such a common person. And this is in marked contrast to their later views that the saving of his life is paramount to them, even if it means the murder of many others. One can only question the value of a civilisation maintained at such expense.

** ** *

Hello Summer, Goodbye is a totally integrated novel. There is no wasted effort. Everything has some value in the development of plot, theme, and character. As a parable for our own times, it needs no long-winded polemics to carry its ideas. The use of the first-person narrative allows Coney to dispense with long character

MICHAEL CONEY

descriptions. In fact, the narrative somehow manages to describe both the action of the plot, and the physical scene, while developing the characterisation. For example, a description of a riot keeps the reader informed of plot developments, and also unobtrusively supplies much background information, while Drove's interpretation of the events also reveals facets of his character. One-line statements seem to say much about other characters, much more than might be achieved using whole chapters. In one instance, Drove has substituted a week-old newspaper for the latest edition, and waits patiently for the expected explosive reaction from his father:

There was...no tirade of despair and desolation over those precious moments wasted which could never be replaced... Instead he shrugged, put the paper down, and gazed absently out of the window.

This one incident serves to elevate Drove's father

from the stereotyped image presented previously into a real person, with emotions and motivations not yet apparent. Much the same occurs with many other characters, where a few examples of "character in action" allow the reader to deduce a great deal about a particular individual.

** ** *

Hello Summer, Goodbye would be one of the best novels I have read this year. The morbid overtones found normally in Coney's earlier novels seem to be absent. But the continued criticism of modern society begun in Mirror Image is present still, but in a better package. One might disagree with what Coney is saying, but not with this method.

Neville Angove
September 1976

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IS THERE ANYTHING MICHAEL CONEY CAN'T DO?

Van Ikin discusses

CHARISMA

by Michael G Coney

Gollancz :: 1975
222 pages :: £3.50/\$9.20

(EDITOR: This article appeared first in Enigma Vol 7, No 2, June 1976, available from Sydney University Science Fiction Association, Box 249, Holme Building, Sydney University, NSW 2006; \$2.50 for 3.)

Don't groan, but Charisma has got - well, charisma. A sort of powerful, magnetic, all-encompassing appeal. Action for the action lover: murder, explosions, rescues; sophisticated concepts for the lover of ideas: alternate worlds in vast array, proliferating permutations of events; plot aplenty for the story lover: surely one of the most complex (yet best handled) plots in all of s f; and, just for good measure, a

sweetening drop of romance for the sentimentalist (not to mention a bit of sex for those of stronger taste). In fact, on the strength of Charisma, I feel it would be fair to say that Michael Coney is on his way to becoming one of the really big names in s f.

The story-line is intricate, plausible, gripping, complex. Above all, complex. But don't let the complexity put you off. It's not the kind of complexity that requires you to store a great deal of information in your mind at once; instead, like a computer clearing and re-stocking its data banks, it requires the reader to move from one intrigue-laden situation to

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THE VOICE OF THE MOCK TURTLE

(EDITOR: SFC seems to have become filled with Contributor Introductions recently, so it is with some difficulty that I approach the task of introducing George Turner again. Well, no matter what I've said in previous issues about the source of his fame, ignore it. George's real claim to fame is being able to give a lucid account of the entire history of English literature during the last, amber hours of a fabulous fannish party in Melbourne. And at the next party, he discourses on the entire field of world literature. What's a few SFC articles worth beside that achievement?

Quite a lot. In this latest article, George comments on the sections of the book which did not appear in the English edition. So this is, in any real sense, a review of only the Harper and Row edition. The Gollancz edition has only the stories themselves.)

George Turner discusses

NEBULA AWARD STORIES 10

edited by James Gunn

Harper & Row :: 1975
254 pages :: \$7.95

(Victor Gollancz :: 1975
255 pages :: \$A10.10)

"...then, when you've cleared all the jelly-fish out of the way..."
(The Mock Turtle in Alice in Wonderland)

(Note: All quotation page numbers refer to the Harper and Row edition, which was the one submitted for review.)

The stories in this volume need not detain us long, though they are in the main good stories and superior to the ruck of magazine-and-anthology fiction from which they were chosen by the SFWA voters. What catches my interest is the non-fiction content - the Introduction by editor James Gunn and the essays by Gordon Dickson and Robert Scholes - and these will form the main focus of the article.

** ** *

First, the stories. I have written already (in SFC 44/45) of Ursula Le Guin's "The Day Before the Revolution" and need say no more than that it richly deserved to win its section and is the most finely crafted work in a collection in which craftsman-

CASTIGATIONS

ship too often takes precedence over other values. Zelazny's runner-up in the short story section, "The Engine at Heartspring's Centre", is fascinating but ultimately irrelevant, a fantasy of the far distant and the imaginatively baroque, a lovely tissue but insubstantial; Philip Jose Farmer's "After King Kong Fell" is an ingenuity, immediately attractive but burdened with one of those portentous last lines which lose all meaning when one looks hard at them.

It seems to me that Eklund and Benford's "If the Stars are Gods" is a lesser story than either runner-up in the novelette section. It is an "idea" story concerning the possible nature of alien mentalities and our acceptance of them, but what this reader could not accept was its contrived ending, which seemed to offer less understanding of human than of alien nature on the part of the authors. One is left wondering what someone like Michael Bishop would have made of the basically excellent theme and conception (profitless speculation but not irrelevant). C I Grant's "The Rest is Silence" is an intellectual terror story, sufficiently offbeat to catch and hold; while Tom Reamy's "Twillia" is Grand Guignol with no holds barred and is well enough presented to have far more impact than its crude horrors deserve.

The remaining story, longest in the book, is Silverberg's beautifully handled, but ultimately unsatisfying, "Born With the Dead", which impresses during reading but fails in the end because he never comes to grips with the issues raised. This is as good a fiction collection as any of the Nebula Award volumes but could, save in two cases, leave a newcomer wondering precisely what in s f distinguishes it from those imaginative flights which have always been the sport of "mainstream" writers. S f returns to the stream from which it flatters itself it has diverged...but you've heard all that before.

** ** *

Now, to business. We have in this volume three "big names" talking about s f and it is worth some wordage to consider what they have to say.

Two of these are American academics. James Gunn lectures in English and Journalism at the University of Kansas and teaches courses in Science Fiction Writing and Science Fiction; Robert Scholes is a professor of English at Brown University.

At Unicon II, in April this year, I offered some doubts about the future of a genre which has fallen too early into the grasp of academics, before it has even shaken itself out into a reasonably definable literary area. There is as yet no agreement on what s f is, or even on what it is not, yet some 2000 (horrible figure!) courses in s f have been counted recently as being taught in the USA. What Academe has produced so far in the way of critical literature, in book form, about s f, has been, in the main, transiently interesting but inconclusive and,

finally, slight. What has been offered in the "little" literary magazines (eg Extrapolation and Riverside Quarterly) smells of that intense scrutiny of minutiae that matters not a critical damn until the critics agree on what they are talking about - a matter which they ignore or sweep under the intellectual carpet as unimportant. Or, perhaps, difficult.

One of the great shortcomings of literary critics (self included, suitably red-faced) is a tendency to talk or write interminably in the hope that a philosophy will emerge, and this, it seems to me, is what Academe is doing - and not only in America. One may be excused for wondering just what is taught in those 2000 courses. I asked the question at Aussiecon on a panel which featured some teachers of s f courses and, for my pains, received all the expected defensiveness but little that I could recognise as an answer. I was, in fact, smartly brushed off and the panel turned its attention to less basic matters.

Well, here we have two teachers of English on the job, as well as novelist Gordon Dickson, who also has a degree in creative writing.

1 JAMES GUNN

I quote from the Introduction, page ix: "Science fiction was created and read for approximately a century, give or take a decade, before 1926, but it did not exist as a genre until Hugo Gernsback created the first science fiction magazine, Amazing Stories, nearly fifty years ago."

Now, one expects accuracy of expression from one's academics, so it should be pointed out that s f existed as a genre from the time that Jules Verne popularised it in the late nineteenth century and literally hundreds of writers (their works now mostly unstirring dust) leapt upon the bandwagon. What Gernsback did was to give it a name - a name which, you greybeards of my generation will recall, was not quite "science fiction". A trivial objection? Not so. We are entitled to care and accuracy from our teachers.

Page x: "For some twenty years (ie, from 1926) virtually no science fiction books were published..."

This is simply incorrect. During this period, the novels of John Taine, Ray Cummings, A Merritt, Ralph Milne Farley, Otis Adelbert Kline, James Walsh, Gawain Edwards, and many more were in fairly regular publication. The source of this information is the advertising sections of the magazines of the period, plus my memory of the fact that, as a youngster, I was able to obtain some of these books in Australian libraries. Some of the most influential s f novels of the century were published during these twenty years, notably Brave New World, Last and First Men, Odd John, Sirius, The Shape of Things to

Come, When Worlds Collide, The World Below... It was a more restricted period of publishing than the present, but a seminal one, and not to be idly dismissed. We are, I repeat, entitled to accuracy.

Page xi: (In 1964) "science fiction books were being noticed outside the ghetto..."

We have a right to expect not only accuracy but thought from our academics. S f with any literary value (and, heaven knows, there was little of it up to 1964) has always been noticed by responsible criticism, even if not called "s f"; what has gone unnoticed in hardback publication has been trivial and unimportant. Nearly every memorable s f novel of the century has had its reviewers and its public success. As for that word "ghetto" - it describes a condition which existed and still exists only in the defensive attitudes of fans and writers, and surely Academic-s f should have noticed the matter by now.

Page xii: "For many years the characters in science fiction have been stereotyped as inventive, sometimes muscular young men pitting their ingenuity and their characters against the universe or rescuing the Earth from destruction or a nubile maiden from a bug-eyed monster. If that canard was ever true (sic!) it is no longer. The characters in this book are" (and here follows a list of potentially interesting exhibits) "not a steel-thewed romantic or fainting girl in the lot. That's maturity."

Maturity, is it? A month after reading the book I apply the memory test for characterisation and come up with - two spectacular non-humans, King Kong, and a quite splendid demon in "Twilla". Nobody would want the steel thews back, I hope, but let's not talk of maturity until we get some flesh and blood, memorable people in their places.

Perhaps James Gunn feels his ground is less than secure, for he hastens to add, "To my mind, however, maturity is no substitute for narrative excitement..." So, you see, "narrative excitement" is what it is really all about. And that is precisely why the stories here collected are entertaining - and forgettable. There is maturity within s f but you won't find it here, save in the Le Guin story. Regrettably, you won't find it in the Introduction and articles either.

2 ROBERT SCHOLÉS

Professor Scholes is content to canter down that well-worn track of inverted snobbery which insists that the "establishment" world has at last admitted the values of s f. It seems to have occurred neither to him nor to all those others, from John Campbell onwards, who do likewise, that s f has first to prove its values (which it is a mighty long time doing) and then to offer them in work worthy of literary notice. The so-called "establishment" world has been well aware of s f

for a century or so, has ~~known~~ to acknowledge s f of any reasonable quality (Wells, Huxley, Stapledon, etc) and is now taking a greater interest because s f is beginning to offer both intellectual and literary values on a useful scale. The implication that intellectual and critical forces have been at fault in ignoring the vast mass of rubbish unloaded on us since Wells ceased to function is mere tub-thumping. Intellectual and critical forces have simply - and rightly - ignored the presence of junk.

Now that quality s f is being produced by Aldiss, Wolfe, Disch, Ballard, Le Guin, and a handful of others, it is getting the recognition it deserves. And only such as it deserves. S f in the mass is still literary junk and should be treated as such; only works of more than transient value are worth more than transient attention.

It is time that Scholes and Gunn and, in fact, practically all the "inside" s f critical writers stopped bewailing s f's hard life in the ghetto. The way out of the imaginary ghetto was always open to anyone prepared to recognise that it existed only in the whining minds of its second-rate inhabitants. S f of quality has always been recognised by reputable journals such as The Times Literary Supplement, New York Times Book Review, Books and Bookmen, and competent reviewers everywhere. It is time, too, that all these defensively self-satisfied in-groupers (whom one may well suspect of preferring their in-group status to outworld scrutiny) bowed to a few simple facts, such as:

- (1) People like Heinlein, Moorcock, and Asimov (and personal opinions of their works don't matter a damn in the face of demonstrable fact) put s f on the popular map.
- (2) Writers like Ballard, Sladek, Watson, Lem, and Le Guin (again, no matter what are one's personal opinions) put it on the critical map - not merely as superior s f but as fiction to be reviewed alongside other fiction.
- (3) Much of the s f hailed by excited in-groupers (the produce, for example, of Delany, Russ, Herbert, Harrison, Dozois, Tiptree, and so on) is really of insufficient literary, philosophical, extrapolative, or speculative content to claim the attention of any but the s f specialist.
- (4) One of the bugbears of s f is the touting, by academic critics and big-name authors, of minor stories and novels as if they were revelations of genius.
- (5) The bulk of s f, like the bulk of other fiction, gets what it deserves - a kindly silence.

** ** *

CASTIGATIONS

Scholes, on page 110, seems both to recognise and refuse these matters. "At present, this form of fiction is so alive, so accessible, that its writers and readers may form an uncritical club devoted to mutual admiration." So, a flask of truth perceived; followed by this: "Hence the real value that Hugo and Nebula awards have held over the past decade or so... In the area of full-length fiction, for instance, the past twenty-five years of Hugo Award winners compares very favourably to the list of Pulitzer Prize winners over the same quarter of a century."

A more critically awake writer might have substituted the more truthful statement that the list of Pulitzer Prize winners over the same quarter of a century is just as dismaying as the Hugo list.

He goes on to aver that "the new discovery of s f by the academic and critical community is going to have some effect on the whole situation of science fiction."

What "new discovery"? There happens to be more worthwhile s f available for review than in previous decades - that is what is having some effect on the situation of s f. This nauseous insistence that the poor things never, until now, knew of the riches unnoticed in all those gorgeous pulp magazines and trendy space operas!

What riches?

And then: "It pains me that major efforts of the recent past, like John Brunner's The Sheep Look Up and Ursula K Le Guin's The Dispossessed, were not reviewed seriously on the front page of the (New York Times) Book Review."

May he remain pained. Dear Jesus, but what are Scholes' literary standards? Can't he, academic training and all, tell the difference between a topical melodrama and an excellent, but flawed, novel? Both books have received much the critical treatment they merited - meaning that the Le Guin novel beat the Brunner hands down in all such areas as I have been able to observe. To have hailed even The Dispossessed as a novel of the first importance would have been a critical disaster as Mrs Le Guin herself, who is a lady of considerable good sense and self appraisal, would be first to declare.

Such outbursts from Academe do s f no good and rouse raucous laughter where they aim to overwhelm.

One meanders drearily through such statements as (page 111): "The ghetto walls are coming down whether the ordinary fan wants them to or not and whether the literary critics want them to or not." The asinine assumption that literary critics resent the new and challenging has always been with us - in the mouths of the frustrated. The new may be slow of acceptance while critical understanding makes the necessary adjustments to its ideas, but it is not, as a rule, actively

resisted. The critic loves a new and sharp voice in fiction; it is his only reward for the garbage that he is forced professionally to read. Scholes should know it but he prefers to stay safely within the received mores of the in-groupers.

To the stake with all crusaders who preach triumph over an enemy who doesn't exist!

And now this (page 111): "At some point, probably in the very near future, it will no longer be possible to maintain the distinction between 'mainstream' and 's f' - because s f will have taken over the centre and become the mainstream."

Is it possible that Scholes - who teaches literature, by God! - has not noticed that the great advances in s f have been made by writers who happily abandoned the cliches and conventions of traditional s f and began to treat their work with the less restricting methodology of the mainstream? The mainstream is absorbing s f, not the other way around, because quality s f (meaning s f with thought, consistency, sensible speculation, factual accuracy, and literary competence) has something to offer. S f become the mainstream? Pardon my vulgarity, but - balls!

Traditional s f will remain a genre, like the detective story or the western, with all the minor virtues that a genre is capable of exhibiting, but good fiction, really good fiction, is above genre. In his less excited moments, Scholes surely knows this.

The mainstream is accepting quality s f gently into the current and mainstream writers are picking out what they want of idea and method - a process which has gone on since literature first evolved. A literature dominated by s f attitudes would be dead.

It is unfortunate that Academe has prestige enough to allow Professor Scholes to probably get away with such as essays as "As the Wall Crumbles". I cannot forbear repeating the cynical quotation I employed in just this context at Unicon II: "It is a fearful thing (for s f) to fall into the hands of the living God."

Academe who, according to Scholes, has ignored s f too long seems to be now, in the persons of Scholes, Gunn, and many like them, beginning a new round of misrepresentation which may well undo the good that a few dedicated and talented authors have achieved. Dedicated to literature, that is, not merely to s f.

3 GORDON DICKSON, despite his degree in creative writing (I am unable to discover precisely what degree this represents), is a full-time writer who cannot be totally damned with those academics whose indiscretions poison the wells as fast as a few competent writers fill them. So, if his article on "Ten Years of Nebula Awards" offers a higher opinion of the award winners than

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 38)

of print on some pages, carrying two unrelated incidents, a segment with the author's (?) revisions left in - it's irritating when you're in a hurry to see what happens next. And when what happens next sometimes turns out to be random incidents in no particular sequence - well, Dhalgren has had a lot of disgruntled readers. I confess that my first reading took two or three acts of faith.

Trust me: you should read Dhalgren so that, someday, you will have the incredible pleasure of reading it for the second time. Then, if you like good writing, you will be awed at the beautifully crafted sentences, moving with leisurely certainty into a novel of a depth unprecedented in science fiction. This is the fusion of serious literature and science fiction that has been predicted for so long, provisioned in, say, The Glass Bead Game (lacking social credibility) or Delany's earlier work (lacking the most serious attitude).

It's been called a self-conscious novel by the irate and/or scandalised. In fact, it is self-aware - quite a different thing. The book shapes itself, quite literally, as Kid's notebook, given to him half full of someone else's writing, becomes the very text we are reading. The process is reminiscent of the journal entries in Delany's The Einstein Intersection, where the story is "floated", so to speak, on its relation to the author's day-to-day experience. The story of Kid-as-a-character-in-a-novel is floated on the more directly experienced story of Kid-becoming-a-writer.

The shape of the novel is another aspect of this self-awareness. At first glance, it is circular, with maybe a little twist (in the middle, when Kid almost leaves Bellona) to make it a Moebius strip. (At one point, Kid notes that everything seems to have "overtuned")

Alternatively, here's a speculation from my own journal: "...it seems to me now that it is a collapsing sphere, that is, a nova - the nova that is the visual image at its core (physical) is also the tactile image that shapes the novel's figurative bulk: the nova, collapsing toward the unimagined core of event, the 'missing time', toward which all implodes, from which all blasts, radiates and slowly explodes again to form a work."

Then again, maybe the big sun is just a literary nudge in the ribs: one really fun aspect of Dhalgren's self-awareness is its reflections, tricky as mirages sometimes, of Delany's own past work - which is also something he's done before, come to think of it, in Babel-17, where he refers to his most purely delightful book, Empire Star (which is also a circular novel).

Let's pass on (reeling slightly) to another structural factor in this very structured book, namely, the unity of form and content. Where

most writers would simply tell us "the character is experiencing madness", with maybe a little hysterical prose and some typographical tricks thrown in, Delany lets us in on what it feels like by manipulating the sequence of events, the perception of time, the obvious "symbols" (beads, lions, scars) and the physical settings (try to figure out Tak's street, for instance). By the time Kid says, describing paranoia, "all sorts of things you know don't relate suddenly have the air of things that do. Everything you look at seems just an inch away from its place in a perfectly clear pattern", we know exactly what he means. This unsettling effect is not lessened by the fact that Delany has inserted minute but highly visible changes in the various printings of the book! "Most annoying," writes Kid, "is when I recall an entry, go hunting through, and...find it or half of it not there." Yes indeed.

In one margin-note, Kid wonders whether art and sex are replacing sex and death as the concerns of the serious mind. Certainly Dhalgren's main concern is art, specifically the art of writing, and, again, that the book is about and the way it is written unite indissolubly. Through the device of Kid's notebook, we are as much inside the process of creation as it is possible to be without actually being the writer. We become aware of central problems of writing: for example, the relationship between real experience and fictional episodes. Kid, as a character, even has pieces (pages) of his experience lost or "edited" out of existence - an intricate concept as it relates to both themes, madness, and art.

As to that other "concern of the serious mind", sex...well, there are a lot of sexual acts described in Dhalgren, but after the first reading they seem to fade into the background, becoming simply events or devices for the elucidation of character. Sex of any type is seen as an important part of experience, but without that very particular importance which causes most writers either to exalt or ignore it. While this is a major premise, and while an intellectual case could be made for the whole book being analogous to the arousal cycle, or some such, I don't feel that Dhalgren is nearly as concerned with sex as it is with art - this despite it serving as a most meticulous "coming out" statement. Still, the treatment of sex has deeply offended some reviewers, so obviously it has varying significance from reader to reader.

However much opinions on Dhalgren might clash, there is one point on which I think we must all agree. Seldom, if ever, has one book supplied s f with so many unforgettable characters. Nightmare, Dragon Lady, Bunny, Copperhead, Faust; Tak, June, George, Mrs Richards, Pepper; Captain Kamp and Ernest Newboy (nudge nudge) - there seem to be a hundred of them, each distinct, vividly drawn, impossible to confuse with any other. So strongly do they stand out that I can't call any of them "minor" characters.

Even the least notable walk-ons and the obvious archetypes assert their independence and individuality. Off the top of my head, at least, I can't think of any s f work whose characters come so close to my experience of real people.

It's interesting to me that my friends who are women have all enjoyed Dhalgren immensely, while the men seem to have had a less favourable reaction. Has anyone else noticed a similar tendency, I wonder? The book presents strong female characters divested of the masculine roles for femininity, though male characters are more in the foreground. Hints point to the giant sun as a female principle; and Delany has quoted from the Revelation of John, where recently I noticed this line, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun" (Rev. 12:1). Given Delany's feminist bent, one may, I think, juggle all this together and recognise the enormous sun, one level, as a vision of "the rising of the women".

In short, this book is for people who like to speculate, to play with words and ideas. Just for fun, I would direct the reader's particular attention to the names of Kid's two lovers; and then, for different reasons, to these last lines from Empire Star:

It's a beginning. It's an end. I leave to you the problem of ordering your perceptions and making the journey from one to the other.

DHALGREN: VIEWPOINT 2

by Van Ikin

Dhalgren is probably one of the most interesting and important s f novels ever written - though that does not mean it is a particularly good novel. It confronts many of the buried conventions of s f, seeking to discover, expose and explore them...and it ends by demonstrating that s f is a genre bound down by its conventions.

Dhalgren is a sheep in wolf's clothing, and that's probably the first thing a reader will realise about the book, so let me start there.

You buy the book, read the blurbs, and those blurbs place Dhalgren beside Dune and Stranger in a Strange Land, proclaiming that Delany's effort is "the major novel of love and terror at the end of time". "The sun," we are told, "has grown deadly... The world has gone mad, society has perished, savagery rules over all. All that was known is over, all that was familiar is strange and terrible. Today and yesterday collide with tomorrow. In these dying days of Earth, a young drifter enters the city..." Dhalgren is made to sound very much like an epic that draws upon most of the conventions of s f,

and thus the reader is led to expect pace, plot, extraordinary characters, sensationalism - all the "gutsy" melodramatic aspects of popular s f ("love and terror at the end of time").

Begin reading the book and you make the immediate discovery that it's a "New Wave" novel, replete with four-letter words, frequent and explicit descriptions of varied sexual acts, moving beyond traditional grammar and syntax in its prose style.

Secondly, you begin to wonder if the novel is trying to be a science fictional Easy Rider. The characters are mainly young, cool, and hippie in their lifestyle. One character, Jack, is an army deserter; Captain Kamp is an ex-astronaut who has been to the moon; drugs and sex (but not violence) are fairly much the "in" thing. (Though the novel does not lean heavily towards drugs, and there are passages dealing with violence generated by characters other than the central figures.) There's introverted moralising and anguishing over the characters' identity crises, and even a passing reference to Dylan.

Yet Dhalgren is not s f's Easy Rider, nor is it really trying to be. The novel's chronology makes this clear, for the chronology is (deliberately) confused. Roger Calkins, editor of the eccentric Bellona Times, issues his newspaper with random datelines (special days on request: Thursday April 1 '98 is followed by Wednesday January 5 '99 - and no one seems sure which century it is). The central character (who is nameless, but is dubbed "the Kid" and becomes known as "Kidd") claims to have been born in 1948 and to be 27 years old - a claim which is derided by a girl who was born in 1947 and is "a good deal older than 28". Thus we're led to believe that the characters are of our era (1948 plus 27 years makes 1975 the present) and simultaneously shown that they cannot possibly be.

Despite these hints of the 1960s and 1970s, Dhalgren gives a strong sense of the distant future. Its world has undergone radical change; here the blurbs are fairly accurate. Society has perished, the cities are in decay. At one stage, abruptly, a second moon appears in the sky. It is christened "George" and is slowly forgotten. The larrikins run around calling themselves "scorpions" and inflicting violence through the use of nightmarish illusions. Kid carries a strange weapon called an "orchid"; he finds a strange prismatic body chain and wears it loyally throughout the novel. Change has occurred, but it is as random and arbitrary as my last few sentences; or rather - and this, I'm sure, is Delany's point - it presents itself in this way to the characters caught up in it.

The reader feels fairly sure that Kid and his friends were born into this altered world. Certainly they know little about the causes of the (assumed) catastrophe (though they also seem to know that cities were once very different from the ruined city of Bellona). They speculate about

the causes of the decline, but they never "learn the answer" in any mystery-and-solution sense, nor do they learn to "live with" the riddle in the way that the characters in Tucker's Ice and Iron learn to forget the sky-falls and move to warmer areas.

Thus there is no real "plot" to Dhalgren. One could say in reviewer's terms that "the plot, such as it is, is this: the nameless narrator/character, Kid(d), enters the city of Bellona, encounters various people, lives through various experiences, and departs", but this summary might suggest that Dhalgren is a picaresque novel. And it's not. The term "picaresque" implies some notion of progression and forward impetus to the narrative (even if the novel is often concerned mainly with digression away from that progression) whereas Dhalgren is a "contained" novel: it holds no such progression (though through most of its length it gives the misleading impression that it might be there).

The first three lines of Dhalgren read as follows:

to wound the autumnal city.

So howled out for the world to give him a name.

The in-dark answered with wind,

The last three are these:

Waiting here, away from the terrifying weaponry, out of the halls of vapour and light, beyond holland and into the hills, I have come to

It is clear that the word "to" is the same word in both cases, and that Dhalgren is in fact a circular novel, one sentence of which reads in part, "I have come to wound the autumnal city". With this realisation, the literary notion of progression dies; in fact, one realises it was never there, that the idea of "progression" in the story was merely a literary convention, an expectation instilled by other novels.

This is why Dhalgren is "a sheep in wolf's clothing". We, the readers, expect it to wear the melodramatic clothing of convention (and the blurb plays upon and invokes these expectations); we expect plot, progression, high drama, mystery-and-solution, passions, action, suspense. Whereas Delany neatly and deftly flicks aside these expectations and writes of the way a Kid would live if he were plunged into a place like Bellona. And so the book becomes a quiet grazing-animal of a novel - a record of Kid "rapping" with the people he encounters, doing various odd jobs, writing his poems, gaping with amazement at a "religion" that promotes hardcore porn posters. It is a slow, deep, densely textured novel - one that pores over the trivial details of an everyday life in the Bellona situation, understanding that trivial details (not

the sensational melodrama of two moons in the sky) are the core of people's lives. (Contrary to s f conventions, wherein a two-moon night would spark off continuing world-wide headlines, trigger mass hysteria and lead to ultimate confrontation with the aliens from the second moon. Bellona's two-moon night is a nine-day wonder, soon eclipsed by the daily round of sex and meals - as I'm sure it would be in real life.)

In Dhalgren, the drinking of a cup of coffee is an event:

Coffee slapped bitter back across his tongue; he swallowed. Steam tickled his nostrils.

She blew; she sipped; she said, "It's strong!"

Similarly, when Kid wanders through a half-derelect building, seeking the apartment he is to visit, Delany provides a close, step-by-step, impression-by-impression account of his progress:

On the top row, three from the end, a single box had either been repaired, or never prised; Richards: 17-E, white letters announced from the small, black window. Behind the grill slanted the red, white and blue edging of an airmail envelope.

He came out from the other side of the wall, hurried across the lobby.

One elevator door was half-open on an empty shaft, from which drifted hissing wind. The door was coated to look like wood, but a dent at knee level showed it was black metal. While he squatted, fingering the edge of the depression, something clicked: a second elevator door beside him rolled open.

The meticulous attention to detail (in the description of the mail-box) is engaging and totally absorbing, and there is something intimate about Kid's touching of that dent. The very triviality of the action reveals something very personal about the youth's way of life and his mode of thinking. Delany has the gift not only to perceive the importance of the trivial and to portray it faithfully, but to evoke these trivial mannerisms in such a manner that they become significant and meaningful. Thus Dhalgren's strength is its very quietness, its dogged persistence in clinging to the slow humming rhythms of day-to-day life. Stated simply, Delany has taken a stock s f scenario and written a genuinely realistic novel around it.

And what's really interesting is the fact that it doesn't work too well. In the main, three things go wrong. Two of them are Delany's fault, but the third is the fault of s f and what s f is.

Firstly, Delany errs in some of his more way-out prose extravagances. Things like the following leave me for dead:

But all the vague and loose remains roiled and contended for definition. "Ba-da ba-da ba-da?" he asked. "Ba-da ba-da," he answered, sitting. It listed like oil on turbulence. At last Ba-da ba-da ba-da? formed around the fragments of a question, but ba-da ba-da fit no worded answer.

** **

His finger suddenly ger suddenly turned to enly his ly job Kiad's his side.

If the latter is a case of typesetter's error and poor proof-reading, then readers should boycott the book on principle, for such repeated errors are inexcusable. If it is a deliberate stylistic ploy (and I think it is, since the same thing occurs fairly often), then I can only say that it irritates but does not enlighten. (On the other hand, the novel is strewn with little smiling passages of fresh, close observation:

The bulletin board was a shale of notices and pamphlets.

** **

He...lay back (in the bath) with his ears under water, to watch the isle of his belly shake to his heart beat, each curved hair a wet scale, like the shingled skin of some amphibian.)

Secondly, Delany tries to have his cake and eat it too - and fails. Kid is definitely a character in the book, an authorial creation watched by the reader from a stance of lofty eminence. Yet Delany also tries to let Kid speak for himself (in the first person) as narrator, and this just doesn't work. Aside from the fact that this device forces Delany to make abrupt shifts from the first to the third person:

Here I am and am no I...I will not be sick again. I will not. You are here.

He retreated down the halls of memory, seating.

it also litters the novel with passages of intense soul-searching in monologue form:

From this play of night, light and leather, can I let myself take identity? How can I recreate this roasted park in some meaningful matrix? Equipped with contradictory visions, an ugly hand caged in pretty detail, I observe a new technique. I am the wild machinist, past destroyed, reconstructing the present.

None of these musings lead to much development

of the problems they express: the novel's circularity strangles such developments.

However, the most important flaw is created by forces apart from Delany and his individual act of creation. Whole slabs of Dhalgren are boring, and this is the direct result of the novel's realism. Daily life, portrayed as faithfully as Delany portrays it, is not the material on which to build an 879-page novel. There are, of course, plenty of moments of excitement, suspense, and crisis in Dhalgren, but these moments occur as distinct departures from the general norm of quiet living. The overall impression is that of a machine humming regularly, day in, day out, and the one moment of pyrotechnics as a fuse bursts is not enough to offset the general monotony. Not only does the novel fail to sustain its length, but the length turns upon the novel and fangs it. 300 pages of Dhalgren I could have admired and enjoyed; 800-odd pages is "overkill" and I was bored, bored, bored.

(Which perhaps proves something about s f. Dhalgren may well prove that s f is to a great extent the creature of its conventions, and that a sustained and radical departure from those conventions is doomed from the start.)

So my advice to the prospective reader is this: make sure you read a bit of Dhalgren - 150 to 200 pages will do. Just enough to get a taste of the whole. It is a fascinating achievement, and should be sampled - but the full stretch of the novel is probably only for devotees, literati, and insomniacs.

TRITON: VIEWPOINT

by Camilla Decarnin

It has been said that writers, when they perfect their art, have nowhere to go but toward self-parody. We'll see whether this is some kind of hard-and-fast rule when Delany produces his next book.

Of course, I could be wrong; Triton may not be the perfection of Delany's voice that it seems; I remind myself that I thought Dhalgren was an ultimate, until I read Triton.

And, too, it can be argued that both books dabble a toe or three in self-parody. Take Dhalgren.

Lurking at the back of my mind (which has, admittedly, been termed "Byzantine") were suspicions that Bellona was peopled by (among other things) Delany's visions of himself in certain of his manifestations other than "The Kid". I won't mention the clues that seem to point to this (because, if I were wrong, I'd look really dumb) but, to inch a bit further out

on the limb, the mouth of the critic, Ernest Newboy, seems to be more than usually full of Delany's own words. And for some reason, that I can't support rationally at all, I get a feeling of Delany-ness - Kidness, at least - about the character who comes closest to being the villain of the piece: Frank, the poet. This is a terrible thing to feel, because Frank is pretty repellent; but we meet this fork-tongued scoundrel again - in Triton.

A brief digression to note that Delany's Bellona and Triton, as locales, deepen in significance when you are familiar with the beautiful novella, "Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones". Rereading all of Delany is not a bad idea if you want to appreciate his last two books to the full.

In Triton, Bron Helstrom, a reasonably intelligent, complacent sort of person, runs into, and falls in love with, a famous playwright, director, etc, called the Spike. Since we see everything from Bron's point of view, we learn only in Delany's appendices just how famous the Spike is - she has been at the centre of her culture's artistic development for years. Our ignorance is due to Bron's Parsifal-like flaw: he never asks questions. Always afraid to look silly, he ends up repressing all his questions including, ultimately, those about himself and his actions.

Bron is invited on a political mission to Earth with Sam, a man from his co-op. There he is detained briefly, by mistake, by the police. On his release, he meets the Spike again. He takes her on a date, exasperates her beyond endurance and, on arriving home in Tethys, receives a letter from her stating, in no uncertain terms, her reasons for not liking him - but revealing, too, that she cares deeply about him. His reaction is rage - and at that very moment Earth attacks Triton. The impending war, something which Bron has virtually ignored, has reached him.

After the crisis, while the bodies are still being counted, Bron decides to change sex. This is arranged easily, and accomplished in a couple of hours. The female Bron's life goes on much as before; the lies keep getting bigger until finally, after one last encounter with the Spike, Bron tells her boss a story so blatantly false from beginning to end that even Bron is left amazed. The book ends with her trying to get through a very long night, asking herself, "Why did I lie?"

Any summary of Delany is doomed to fail, and this one is worse than most. Triton is dense and rich; the reviewer's chronic problem of cramming a pachyderm into a Volkswagen is made worse by the sort of novelist who has already left out everything that can be left out. Make my life easy - read the book.

Delany is very big on inside jokes; I'm always sure that there is a whole stratum of allusion in his books, all hysterically funny, under-

stood only by his best friends. But some of them are not so very inside. Reading Triton, anyone in fandom must crack up when Delany finally describes the universal hand-sign indicating sexual interest. And then there is a set of allusions to mythology, history, and literature which lets you in on other levels of his book, and still another set, direct or oblique, funny or illuminating, that allude to Delany's own work.

All this means that a Delany story is much bigger on the inside than on the outside, like Rufo's little black box (in Heinlein's Glory Road).

Which brings us again to Triton, and Dhalgren, and why the one keeps creeping into a review of the other. To me, Triton resonates with Dhalgren in a very intriguing way. It is as if both books were about the same situations, or possibilities, or something, but with protagonists who make very different choices, or whose choices, at least, we see very differently. As early as page 15 of Triton we find this double awareness about Bron:

He said: "Have you noticed? To meet a new person here in Tethys is always like entering a new city...?" He'd said that before, too.

Delany has said it before, all right - in Dhalgren, Kid uses almost the same words. A paragraph later, the Spike's

new smile mocked slightly. "I would have thought to someone like you all places in the city looked alive..."

You'll recall Kid's problem with sentient windows, walls, and elevator shafts. And Bron does come from Bellona. Maybe this is why I identify Frank with Kid - Bron has a lot of both in him. He's two-faced and a backbiter, and he's sensitive and intelligent. This is a combination permitted by "emotional laziness" - always choosing the easy way, emotionally, preferring the most flattering view of oneself at all times, whatever minor (or major) truths have to be brushed aside to make that view an unobstructed one. We're all familiar with the process, I think; but in Bron it gets out of hand, becomes compulsive. "You should always tell the truth," Bron thinks finally, "not because one lie leads to another, but rather because one lie could so easily lead you to that terrifying position from which...you can see, both back and ahead, the morass where truth and falsity are simply, for you, indistinguishable."

Which is a good description of madness. And Kid, like Bron, has a way of misplacing uncomfortable memories.

It's my belief that Triton is to be read as somehow containing Dhalgren - and this is some fancy packing indeed. (Or, to put it another

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 70)

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S F IN SPITE OF ITS PRACTITIONERS

Van Ikin discusses

HELL'S CARTOGRAPHERS

edited by Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison

Weidenfeld & Nicholson :: 1975

246 pages :: £3.50/\$A10.30

Harper & Row :: 1975

246 pages :: \$7.95

In his introduction to this book Aldiss writes of Major Claude Eatherly, the man who in 1945 piloted the weather plane which flew over Hiroshima and reported that cloud conditions were suitable for the dropping of the first A-bomb. The book itself contains brief autobiographies by six eminent s f writers (Robert Silverberg, Alfred Bester, Harry Harrison, Damon Knight, Frederik Pohl, and Aldiss himself) and Aldiss notes that these men resemble Eatherly because their interest in the bomb was "extrinsic". (The bomb "meant vindication" to s f writers; "the Future had happened, and blown the lid off the Old Order", page 2.) Yet Aldiss might also have written that, in one sense, their interest in s f itself was also extrinsic. For if one believes that s f is as much "an art form" as "a genre" - as capable of producing "good literature" as any other genre - then, on the evidence of some of the statements in Hell's Cartographers, it can be said that s f has become what it is in spite of its practitioners, and that s f as a whole has splendidly exceeded the potential of its component parts.

Each contributor shows not just an academic or theoretical commitment to s f, but a genuine affectionate loyalty to the genre, as if it were a faithful old dog. Aldiss speaks of "the loyalty we all show to our chosen medium" (page 203), Silverberg professes to have felt such loyalty even when he was exploiting the genre "to the tune of several million words a year" (page 203), and Bester encapsulates the general attitude with a heartfelt "Ah! Science fiction, science fiction! I've loved it since its birth" (page 47). Such loyalty is usually the product of childhood discovery and enjoyment of s f, for all the writers speak of their fervid (and often furtive) readings of the pulps. More significantly, they all imply that they were attracted to s f because of its element of escapism. Pohl claims that, whereas "the fantasy life" of the average (his word, curiously, is "normal") pre-pubescent male involved a shoot-out with a Texas sheriff, for the s f fan this "fantasy life" involved

chopping squat, evil Penachrone into hamburger with shimmering spheres of force

and carousing with

pink-skinned oviparous little angels like Dejah Thoris, or the doomed, possessed princesses who haunted the waterside bars of ancient Venus in the stories of Northwest Smith. (page 147)

Bester suggests a similar attitude when he states that the flowering of his literary career meant that "reality" became "so colourful" that he "no longer needed the therapy of science fiction" (page 69) and Silverberg writes that "from dinosaurs and other such fantastic fossils to science fiction was but a short journey" (page 11).

For me this account is oh-so-true that I would not wish to be hypocritical by expressing disapproval of those who drifted into s f in this manner. Quite simply, this was *The Way It Was*.

Yet there is something vaguely disturbing about the picture of the genre (not the authors, the genre) as painted by this book, and the tendency to see s f as "escapist" is a contributing factor. It suggests that one aspect of *The Way It Was* is the fact that many of s f's eminent writers first valued the genre for one of its lesser aspects.

But the most disturbing aspect is the authors' attitude to their "art". If one accepts the generalisation that there are two kinds of literary lifestyle - the "Patrick White" "starving for one's art" approach and the "hack" approach that involves "writing for a living" - then the majority of these six writers showed an alarming initial tendency toward the latter approach. They saw their writing as "a craft", not as "an art", and whilst they may have tried to write well, they placed emphasis upon production rather than perfection. Thus Harrison tells how he "went to editors to find out what kind of writing they wanted" and then wrote "what they wanted" (page 81) and Silverberg indicates that the hope of winning "prestige in fandom" was one of his reasons for becoming a writer (page 13), freely admitting that usually he "abandoned any pretence at literary achievement" in order to "get enough money into the bank" (page 22).

Naturally, I am not berating these men for these attitudes. The need to earn money is legitimate and universal, and it is only common sense to make sure that what you write is likely to find a market; art purely for art's sake often leads to dusty manuscripts in drawers. One is not free to blame or criticise the authors for trying to stay alive without abandoning their writing. But one is free to observe the implications of this state of affairs, and to state that, owing to circumstances, much s f has been produced under condi-

tions that are not likely to have resulted in the highest possible literary standards.

Bester's essay contains the prime examples of this attitude. For instance, he writes that he desired to use a "compulsive" character in his work because there was "high drama" in such a figure, and he tells how the completion of *The Stars My Destination* was delayed because he did not have "a fiery finish" in mind. Both statements could suggest an appalling lack of commitment to the integrity of one's writing. There is nothing wrong with "high drama" and fire and flame, but to concoct a novel solely from ingredients that will have these effects is to write only for effect, and without any thought to the intrinsic merits (or otherwise) of the material thus employed. The nature of his writings would thus seem to be determined from without (determined by current marketplace fads) rather than decided by an inner urge either to discuss certain issues or to express certain personal emotions.

In a later passage Bester, for some reason, finds it necessary to make the following pronouncement:

The mature science fiction author doesn't merely tell a story about Brick Walloy vs The Giant Yeastmen from Gethsemane. He makes a statement through his story. What is the statement? Himself, his own dimension and depth. His statement is seeing what everybody else sees but thinking what no one else has thought, and having the courage to say it. The hell of it is that only time will tell whether it was worth saying. (page 67)

Two things need to be said about this. Firstly, to what kind of audience does he think he is addressing himself if he feels that audience needs to have this point made to it? The answer to this question is important, for - as I shall mention later - there is some evidence to suggest that the s f writer's concept of his audience is a significant factor in his writing.

Secondly, what kind of attitude lies behind the remark that "only time will tell" whether "the statement" was worth making? Again, this implies the craft-not-art, what-the-hell-have-a-shot-at-it approach to literature, the approach that leaves it to the marketplace to determine standards of worth. Look at Bester's words carefully: the "statement" is defined as "thinking what no one else has thought, and having the courage to say it". Now surely the fulfilment of this criterion is in itself an adequate guarantee of worth - and if the marketplace chooses not to recognise this fact, then it is the marketplace that has failed, not the book. *Ulysses* could hardly be said to have fared well in the true marketplace (much of its readership would come from those conscripted pseudo-buyers, the students) yet it certainly

satisfies Bester's definition. Finally, the craft-not-art attitude is epitomised in Bester's account of the origins of his ideas for stories:

I spent many hours a week in the reading rooms of the New York public library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue. I read everything and anything with magpie attention for a possible story idea... (page 55)

Here Bester adopts a grist-to-the-mill attitude - an attitude that sees a story as something to be forced into existence rather than something that develops through a gradual process of conception, gestation, and delivery. It implies that s f is a forced rather than an organic literature.

Of course, Bester is not the sole "villain of the piece". Even the "new" Silverberg strives to serve "the needs of the hard-core science fiction audience" (page 41; this is the remark that suggests the extent to which an s f writer's concept of his audience may influence his writing).

But, fortunately for s f, this "materialistic" approach (to use Silverberg's term) breeds its own discontent, and so in the course of time each writer has become dissatisfied with his work and has tried to better himself (the "new" Silverberg being the model of this change of heart).

Harry Harrison describes how his salvation "came through the good offices of Joseph Heller and Brian Aldiss" (page 88) and proclaims proudly that "the artist triumphed over the businessman" (page 90).

Frederik Pohl states the matter even more explicitly:

I began to perceive most of what I had written was crap. Most of what I had published was crap... A reasonable proportion of my own writing had become competent, but very little of it said anything. (page 157)

Significantly, Pohl's account of the growth of his ideas for stories is very different from Bester's grist-to-the-mill approach:

I think one reason The Space Merchants succeeded was that I bloody well knew a lot about what I was writing about, not because I had read it in somebody else's book, but because I had spent several years of my life learning it...

It is not much good copying science out of a text book onto your manuscript page. The bare bones show. It is not much good transcribing part of your autobiography into your story either, it seldom fits, the ends don't mesh; but what you have

felt and what you know are, after all, the only things you as a writer have to sell, and in some way they gurgle through the sloshy pipes of the brain, losing an amino acid here and picking up an enzyme there, and what emerges is part of you.

(pages 158-159)

Pohl implies an organic, natural literary process, with "a story" growing from the mind's legitimate and genuine interest in and engagement with certain ideas, images, preoccupations, and so forth - not through a forced demand for "copy" that can be sold for money.

Brian Aldiss, of course, has the most promising approach and the sanest attitudes. "Poets are born not made," he says (page 173) and points to the value of Moorcock's New Worlds in allowing writers to find a market for less formula-ised stories. As Aldiss admits, the new wave was awash with excesses, but "all these were in defiance of the old pulp tradition" (page 196), and that was what is important.

These, then, are the aspects of the book that engaged my attention. Yet several other matters also demand a mention.

Firstly, I have made no mention of Damon Knight's contribution, neatly titled "Knight Piece". It doesn't fit the pattern created by the other essays, for it adopts a very low-key, frank, hands-in-pockets-and-head-down profile. (By contrast, the other essays seem slightly boastful; Silverberg, for instance, speaks of his "well-stocked and ever-expanding garden", page 44). Moreover, Knight's piece is very much a recreation of his life and times, rather than a blow-by-blow account of a writer's rise to fame. Every essay in the book is immensely interesting and fascinating to read, but Knight's is the only one that creates a mood or conveys a real sense of the day-to-day nature of life. Knight's essay provides a vivid, novelistic sense of a young man mingling with the s f subculture of the early 1940s.

Secondly, the book places heavy emphasis upon the importance of hard work. Whilst I was reading Hell's Cartographers and making notes for the review, I was working concurrently on an essay on Frank Hardy's new novel, But the Dead Are Many. The Hardy novel gave me no end of trouble, plunging me into the midst of that writer's nightmare which T S Eliot described so well:

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in
place,

Will not stay still.

(Four Quartets, Burnt Norton,
II, 149-153)

Hell's Cartographers is in many ways a record

of six writers' experiences with the very same problem. It is a book sodden with the sweat from their fingers and brow - and yet, paradoxically, it is uplifting for that very reason. One becomes motivated - energised - by the six glowing examples of discipline and perseverance, and this, in turn, forces one to regard even the "lesser" works of s f with a new respect. Very often, one realises, there's as much work involved in digging potatoes as in digging for diamonds.

Finally, the book also provides a photograph of each author, a select bibliography, and a section containing each author's brief comments on how he actually goes about the work of writing.

Quite simply, Hell's Cartographers is a must for any s f fan's library.

Van Ikin
August 1976

DISCH: SHORT STORIES - from page 74

"Getting Into Death", the heroine allows her sense of approaching death to transform her perceptions of all life while her relatives stay crushed by their conventional view of the approaching "disaster".

Disch is committed to ecstatic extinctions: life lived completely leads inevitably to death, but resurrection is generated through the process itself. Life lived to preserve life fades from within. Expressed in this way, Disch's brilliance is reduced to the flicker of conventional religious dogma. Disch is brilliant because he discovers it all for himself; he takes "surfaces", such as the lives of people who think of themselves as ordinary, and transforms them into "high utterances". He takes unthinkable thoughts, models them into perfect stories, and presents them to us as a gift. For Disch, to get into death is to leap into life.

Bruce Gillespie March 1974
First appearance:
Foundation 7/8, March 1975

DELANY 75/76 - from page 66

way: Triton is what Mother never told you about Dhalgren.)

I could be wrong. Yet there are other parallels. There is a shaggy, unwashed group, wearing chains and acting menacing, notice is again taken of the blind-leading-the-blind, and Bron, too, flees through a collapsing city. Tethys reflects Bron's mind as Bellona does Kid's, and more explicitly: there is the dark u-1, like a subconscious, where no law applies; there are the ego-booster booths where he can view scenes from his past ("Know Your Place In Society") and, over it all, the pretty pink, orange, and gold sensory shield ("Pleasant? Very.") that hides the true sky.

The same "interpenetrating pastel mists" turn up in an explanation of Bron's chosen field, metalogics. As the name implies, metalogics is a way of figuring things out by a system "beyond logic". Everybody uses it, especially the government. The war that develops, I can't resist noting here, is the greatest holocaust in history. And I can't help wondering how much the innocuous-sounding Day Star projects which Bron works on may have contributed to the decimation of the worlds. We can't know, because Bron is oblivious to such things.

In fact, Bron is oblivious to nearly everything. He meets colourful, fascinating people, the kind who have always been before the focus of Delany's stories, but he fails to find out much about them so that, seeing only what he

sees, knowing only what he knows (and that has a familiar ring), even if we make better use of these glimpses than Bron does, we are still left feeling tantalised. Then, with at least as much information as we have, Bron fails to realise that his friend Sam has lost his whole family in the destruction of Lux, on Iapetus. Also he doesn't make the connection when he hears that suburbs around Bellona, where we know his own parents probably live, were badly hit.

In short, to borrow a very useful term from Empire Star, Bron is simplex. He jumps to conclusions, seeks no feedback, accepts no course-corrections in his trajectory toward disaster. We want to shake him until his teeth rattle - but we are pretty sure that it would not do any good. And, like the Spike, we still care, and can't give up hope.

We last see Bron, a woman, sinking into a state that could be the "dark night of the scull", leading to enlightenment - or that could be chaos. We don't know which, but - unfortunately, knowing Bron - we can make a good guess.

Triton is a brilliant study of the mind that "makes a Hell in Heaven's despite", so busy looking perfect that it can't even know its own desires, let alone fulfill them. It shows the unromantic, petty, grubby side of madness, where Dhalgren focussed on the aspects of terror and beauty. In three entirely different ways, Triton is a daring departure for Delany, for s f, and for literature.

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THE BEST SHORT STORIES OF THOMAS M DISCH

(EDITOR: The fact that George and I discuss Getting Into Death from such different viewpoints is not entirely due to the fact that we are reviewing two different editions, the British and American. The British edition was smuggled out of, rather than released, by Hart-Davis McGibbon some time in 1973; the US edition was released in a handsome edition in late 1975. The pieces which are included in the British edition, but have been deleted in the American, are "The Happy Story", "The Beginning of April or The End of March", "The Invasion of the Great Stupid Dinosaurs", "A Kiss Goodbye", and "The Complete Short Stories". The stories which replace them in the US edition are "Apollo", "Death and the Single Girl", and "The Joycelin Shrager Story". However, all the stories which either of us like are in both volumes. The differences between the two reviews show, for all time, that George and I do not look at things in the same way at all. It's just that both of us look at things very differently from the way everybody else does.)

1 MAHOMET'S COFFIN SWAYING TO UNEXPECTED BREEZES

George Turner discusses

GETTING INTO DEATH & OTHER STORIES

by Thomas M Disch

Alfred Knopf :: 1976

227 pages :: \$7.95

This collection, thank the Lord, does without one of those idiotic and fawning "Introductions" in which some other member of the s f in-group slavers over his idol-of-the-moment. For money, of course. It's just as well, because such old-timer introducers as Asimov, Ellison, Pohl et al would have to eat their ideas to do justice to this lot.

The s f writer who ventures into the non-s f world of the "mainstream", stripped of all supporting gimmickry and technicoloured backgrounds, finds himself in unmanageable country, forced to depend on naked skill. Dick, Schachner, Herbert, Van Vogt, Brunner, and many more have tried it - and their limitations were brutally plain when they were stripped of their fancy dress. Aldiss succeeded, but he was always a mainstreamer using the s f mode; only Gene Wolfe has seemed deliriously triumphant with Peace. The switch from s f to mainstream is a deadly method of sorting the men from the boys.

Even R A Lafferty, whose kaleidoscopic imagination makes a thousand mysteries dance upon a pinpoint of seductive illogic, is less effective when, as novelist, he has to grapple with plot and extended consistency. Real life, one fears, is not for such as he.

What, then, should be expected from old Grim Realist Tom Disch, who played with some of the facts of life long ago in Camp Concentration and extrapolated them boldly in the more recent 334? More and grimmer realism? The answer is: Expect what you will, but you'll get something else. S f? Not quite. Realistic fiction? Not quite that, either. Romance? Just a touch - of a sort. Fantasy? Yes - no - maybe. Some purely personal concoction, perhaps? Yes!

Somewhere between s f and the "mainstream", but closer to the "mainstream", hangs Getting Into Death, like Mahomet's coffin swaying to unexpected breezes.

In the title story, a terminally ill lady novelist discovers that her romantic twitterings in print had been closer to the point than she had imagined - which isn't nearly as important as the in-depth study of a shallow mind which had always considered itself competent and superior, and now wants to rejoin humanity. Outside Kate Wilhelm, I can think of no one else in the field who could have conceived the story, let alone written it. And she wouldn't have done it in just this way; her touch is heavier than Disch's.

2 ECSTATIC EXTINCTIONS

Bruce Gillespie discusses

GETTING INTO DEATH: THE BEST SHORT STORIES OF THOMAS M DISCH

Hart-Davis McGibbon :: 1973
206 pages :: £2.50/\$7.50

"When every high utterance is suspect," writes Thomas Disch, "we must rely on surfaces, learn to decode the semaphore of the gratuitous, quotidian event." In the short stories contained in this volume, Disch shows many bright surfaces and observes many gratuitous, quotidian events, yet only the least observant reader could miss their value as "high utterance".

Getting Into Death contains, as the subtitle suggests, "the best short stories of Thomas M Disch". Well, not quite: I can think of several earlier stories which should appear under such a subtitle. Still, Disch is the most improved and improving writer of speculative fiction during recent years, and these are Disch's best short stories during the period from 1967 to 1972. At the beginning of this period, Disch published his novel, Camp Concentration, in New

"The Asian Shore" was published as s f in Orbit 6 (edited by Damon Knight) but is as much s f as Billy Bunter is Falstaff. It is a doppelganger story - or, rather, it is a story of a personality finding its proper home - that is, it is an archetypal mystery seen, as it were, from the inside... Do you understand what I hopelessly fail to convey? Of course you don't, any more than I do. So get the book and read it, and ponder for a week or two on just what does take place, in physical and psychological terms, in this impenetrable but rivetting story.

Then do the same for "Let Us Quickly Hasten to the Gate of Ivory", which is a lesson in the beautiful writing of utterly simple prose.

But the collection is not only an intellectual delight. "Death and the Single Girl", "Apollo", "Displaying the Flag", and a couple of others are just good entertainment, and "The Joycelin Shrager Story" is as cynically funny as anything I've seen in the last few decades, with an unfunny reminder of inescapable fact at the finish.

There are two quasi-autobiographical stories which are only trendy, rather than effective, a batch of technical tours de force and - yes! - "The Planet Arcadia", which, alone in this book, is s f, no matter how you define the term.

Tom Disch no longer needs s f. It is s f that needs him.

Worlds magazine. His ignored masterpiece, 334, appeared at the end of this period. Between novels, Disch improved.

"Colours" is one of the best of these stories. The unnamed main character of the story learns to use the colour-machine which his friend Raymond has invented. The colour-machine draws up impressions from the well of the user's mind and spills them onto the surface of external reality. Compared with many amateur consumers of psychedelic drugs, the main character's mind is so structured that he can make sense of the experience. Because he is a painter, soon he sees the entire world as the surface of a painting. "How much more valuable the world became," he writes, "if these colours would be regarded as innate, not his nor hers nor theirs but its very own, inalienable."

In this new, glowing still-life, the most notable object is Helen, the main character's lover - "her fluorescing flesh could be seen in one sense as a great uncompleted canvas." The story tells of the completion of the canvas. The surfaces, movements, and gestures which form an entity called "Helen" blend into a kaleidoscopic unity. "It was Helen's special grave that she allowed all things to be reduced to their surfaces, and it became his task, as her lover, to read, from a swell of muscle, from the underpainting of her skin (green, as in an early Siennese Madonna) the meanings hidden in her name."

The main character's unique, obsessive viewpoint removes this love affair entirely away from the territory of conventional romantic fiction. Soon he forgets about Helen's speech patterns, ways of love-making, or sometimes whether she is present as a model for her own image. "The funny thing is," says the narrator to Raymond, "she seems to have so little to do with it herself. I mean, it's not love that connects me and her - it's Helen that connects me and love".

In this way Disch takes a story about the aberrated views of a colour addict, and changes it into a splendid eulogy for the idea of love. He sings a unique song which he completed only in the aria-like "soliloquy" passages of 334. Helen leaves the main character. He cannot tell how long she has been gone, and he does not know when she will return. In the middle of his reverie, he is grief-stricken by "the days of her absence" which "had been like the sere March fields before the new grass - with this difference, that love cannot be relied on to recur seasonally: its sere days, when they come, seem to come for ever."

When the main character reaches this point of perception, he has managed to make images out of colours, and then he has taken the images and seen the metaphor behind them. Art has saved his mind from chaos, yet elevated it permanently into a new chaos of experience. Helen returns; the "veritable spring" returns. Inevitably, a descent begins. As Helen and her be-dazzled lover drift apart, he sees far beyond conventional love-sadness and melancholia:

...It was only now in the dizzying descent that he had been able to find time to appreciate just how far he had come and what rare air he breathed in these altitudes. It was not as though his downward course were to be no more than a recapitulation, a reverie; the sensation of it was wholly new and the motion was downward only in the sense that he could no longer reverse its direction. In fact, there was no "down" or "up" at all...

In his notion of love, the descendant from ecstasy is like a skier speeding down a ski-slope: he enjoys the spectacle of the white landscape

and the sensation of speed as much as he enjoyed the serenity of standing on the mountain-top, but now he cannot slow down, and inevitably he must reach the conclusion of the whole experience. The viewpoint is alien to my own, and rather chilling. For me, it would be comforting to experience love in such a symmetrical and sensible way; there is "up" and "down" in these matters. Yet Disch succeeds in reversing my pet notions, and probably the pet notions of most of his readers, and lets us experience this reversed viewpoint. While reading "Colours", I feel like somebody who, while talking with a friend, suddenly sees the friend glow like a lamp and float into the sky, transformed into an angel.

"Transformation" is a word which describes what Disch accomplishes in all of his best stories. "The Asian Shore" is a more complex story than "Colours", but it shows a simpler process of transformation.

John Benedict Harris, an American architect, settles in Istanbul for some months. He becomes haunted by a Turkish woman and a small boy. Whenever she sees him, the woman calls out, "Yavuz! Yavuz!" to attract his attention. The small boy seems to lurk in every street and alley. They seem to claim Harris as husband and father. Harris retreats into his room. "He rotted like a jar of preserves left open and forgotten on the top shelf of a cupboard." He grows his moustache, wears Turkish clothes, and looks more and more like a Turk. At the same time his own book, *Homo Arbitrans*, haunts him. "It was the thesis of his book that the quiddity of architecture, its chief claim to an aesthetic interest, was its arbitrariness." When Harris tours Istanbul at the beginning of his stay, he finds beauty in the conventional places, the mosques and monuments. Later, he can find no beauty in anything man-made. He comes to enjoy "the turbaned shafts of marble" which "jutted in every direction but the vertical...or lay, higgledy-piggledy, one atop another." His mind has now the structure of his own ideas, so much so that he can no longer understand his book. He does not leave his room for days on end, but one morning he finds his shoes, wet through, lying beside his bed. He takes some photos of an area on the European Bosphorus coast; when they are developed, the photos show an area which Harris soon discovers on the Asian shore. When Harris thinks that he has escaped from his situation, he becomes transformed to fit it. He becomes arbitrary, uncomprehending man - an ordinary Turk with a wife and child.

In "The Asian Shore", the process of transformation takes up the whole story. John Benedict Harris, the successful architect, has already begun to change at the beginning of the story. At the end, he steps out of our comprehension. In between, Harris experiences a dream-state of mixed ecstasy, metamorphosis, and acute misery. His clear mind watches its own disintegration,

defeat, and resurrection. His own ideas destroy him, yet allow him to reach a state that he always wanted. Like most of the interesting stories in this volume, "The Asian Shore" brings to life a process of death.

Death is the idea at the centre of this book. Yet Disch writes joyful, funny, and bracing stories which are entirely uncowed by a threat of extinction.

In "Getting Into Death", which is the title story, Cassandra Miller thumbs her nose at death while her relatives grieve over her imminent passing or wait for the reading of the will. When Disch acknowledges conventional ideas about death, he writes "Feathers From the Wings of an Angel", which is a parody of the heart-throb stories which once appeared in American popular magazines.

Disch examines death most clearly, yet most mysteriously, in "Let Us Quickly Hasten to the Gate of Ivory".

At the beginning of this story, Mickey and Louise, brother and sister, have driven to the cemetery where their mother and father are buried. They park the VW in the parking lot, and stride out across the acres of lawn. They step through, and are surrounded by, death; Disch punctuates the prose with inscriptions from tombstones carved with comforting cliches like "Gardens of Memory and Peace", "Until the Day Break", and "Taken to his Eternal Home". At a glance, the story looks like a marble maze.

From the beginning, Disch makes it quite clear what will happen to Mickey and Louise: they will become lost forever in the cemetery. No matter which way they turn, although they walk for miles, they will never find their way back to the parking lot. It all sounds very threatening. We expect that Mickey and Louise will meet a horrifying, apocalyptic ending. They don't. The story does not really end at all. Mickey and Louise become alarmed when they realise that they have lost their way back to the car. They become alarmed, not because physical danger threatens them, but because "the thought of Joyce returned more vividly to both of them, the dismal thought of the explanation that would have to be made, of the failure of those explanations." Joyce is Mickey's wife and moral arbiter of a staunchly Catholic family. Louise slips her hand into that of her brother; discomfited, he stops smiling. "'Oh darling, what does it matter that we've come a bit out of the way'," exclaims Louise. "Mickey looked at Louise strangely. 'Darling' had possibly been the wrong thing to say: it exceeded the limits he assigned to a sisterly affection."

As Mickey and Louise lose their way more thoroughly, more and more they relish each other's rediscovered company. For the first time, they discuss Louise's divorce and the petrification of Mickey's youthful hopes. This is a tale, not

of incest, but of lost love found. "Tomorrow would find them in the cemetery still," thinks Louise in the story's last paragraph. "In an almost perfect silence they would walk through the cemetery, lost... She fell asleep in her brother's arms, smiling: It was just like old times."

So what actually happens in "Let Us Quickly Hasten to the Gate of Ivory"? Do Mickey and Louise die? Have they entered heaven, or at least limbo? If so, at what point in the narrative did they "die"? Or have they still to "die", in the Elizabethan sense? Or were they dead already, trapped in a living death of Joyce's tongue and the impotency of Louise's husband, and are they now brought to life?

Mickey and Louise accept this idyll long after the reader begins to enjoy it. Clearly, this graveyard contains no menace, but just "the same blue sky" and "the same hills specked with white rectangles of stone, striped with gravel paths." Here the dead really rest in peace. Mickey and Louise do not feel peaceful until the end of the story. "The (hypothesis) - that the cemetery itself was responsible for their plight, that it was quite as big as it seemed to be - was intolerable and, in the most literal sense, unthinkable."

But Thomas Disch does create on paper successive states-of-being which are intolerable and unthinkable. He manages this feat through the process of change itself. In stories like "Colours", "The Asian Shore", and "The Planet Arcadia", our conventional mental worlds dissolve and re-form into something we cannot quite grasp. In some of Disch's less successful stories, like the fragmentary "Quincunx", the whole story evades seizure.

Disch upsets our expectations, because any expectations about fiction are usually based on shoddy thinking and a reliance upon the cliches of a genre. "Feathers From the Wings of an Angel" is a joke, but it is a bitter joke because, in that story, Disch shows how banal form and expression in a story can prevent either the characters or readers from experiencing anything. In a romantic *Life* magazine story, we can only experience popular romantic notions of death. We have conventional notions about graveyards and incest, so we find it difficult to approach "Let Us Quickly Hasten...", an idyllic story about both subjects.

After reading this volume, I would guess that Thomas Disch fears only one type of death - the death-of-sensitivity which we call "normal" existence. For Mickey and Louise, their ordinary lives are hells of automated, cauterised human feeling. In "Displaying the Flag", Leonard Dworkin is a kind of cliché fetishist who exchanges the world of leather-queen clichés for that of right-wing-republican clichés. In Disch's terms, he moves from one death to another, without suffering any transformation. In

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THE HEAVENLY PROSE
OF EDMOND HAMILTON

(EDITOR: I've introduced Angus Taylor in each of several recent issues of SFC, so I won't try to invent anything more about this fabled travelling Canadian subversive. I'm told that he's in the Netherlands at the moment - being subversive, I suspect.)

I can remember when I first encountered the heavenly prose of Edmond Hamilton, although I'm not sure I knew at the time that it was heavenly. I knew there was something about it though. Something out of the ordinary. Something especially soul-stirring.

It was in the late Fifties, in one of those schools the British call "public", although it was really private. (I think it's a deliberate perverseness, like driving on the left side of the road, and refusing to rhyme "tomatoes" with "potatoes".) It was the kind of place where the teacher ("master" was the term there, I believe, though he would of course always be addressed as "sir", preferably several times within each sentence, as in, "Please, sir, may I go to the toilet, sir?") decided an H G Wells book I was reading was not to be brought into the classroom again because he spotted the word "damn" on one of the pages. (I think it was The Invisible Man.)

The book with which I first encountered Hamilton was The Star Kings, and it was passed around among a handful of exiled North Americans at the school. I'm not even sure if I noticed who the author was then. One didn't notice authors then. Books were television cameras into real other worlds. And the world(s) of The Star Kings was...glorious. I haven't read it since, and I don't want to. I know if I read it today I'd find it atrocious. I remember another book I don't want to read again: The Last Space Ship, by Murray Leinster. But never mind Murray Leinster now. It's Edmond Hamilton I'm talking about.

I read some other Edmond Hamilton novels after that. None was as good as The Star Kings. But they all had that certain quality about them. I mean, none was as wonderful as The Star Kings, but they were all wonderful. Wonder-full.

I can tell you the sort of average Hamilton plot, as it oozes up from my memory. The hero is a fairly ordinary type. Like you or me, or at least the average male reader. And he gets caught up in this incredible adventure in the far future. Out there among the whirling stars of the galaxy are adventures to stir the soul of any man (or boy). Kingdoms among the nebulae. Marvels of super-science undreamt in our dreary age. Stout-hearted heroes and black-hearted villains. And beautiful women. Ah, yes. That beautiful princess you've always longed for. A beleaguered empire

among the stars, a damsel in distress, and our hero (just like you or me) to the rescue.

Could you resist? I couldn't.

I remember especially one scene from the typical Hamilton novel. It's when our hero ventures into interstellar space, and is confronted for the first time with the glory of the stars. There he is, in the viewing room, or control room, or whatever. Maybe the Black Fleet is drawing near, and the fate of the galaxy is about to be decided. But that only adds to the moment. There it is, like a revelation. The stars, oh God, the stars...

I suppose you remember all about Pascal and the eternal silence of those infinite spaces. That big, black, frightening emptiness. Well, it was never like that with Edmond Hamilton. A bit frightening, perhaps. But no black empty spaces. When our hero is gazing in awful wonder at the glory of the stars, there's a wrenching at his heart and a little knot in his stomach, because his princess has revealed she is betrothed to another, or some such hindrance to unalloyed bliss, but there's no black Emptiness to swallow him up in. Space isn't empty for Edmond Hamilton.

Recently I re-read Battle for the Stars. It's one of those Hamilton books I read before, and enjoyed so much. This time I found it...atrocious. I'm not about to re-read any of the other books, and I don't have any with me, in any case. But I'd like to say something about Battle for the Stars.

On one level - the main one, I suppose - Battle for the Stars is indeed a very bad book. There's not much to the plot: the commander of an interstellar fleet charges around the galaxy shooting it out with other fleets. (There's a wonderful line in this regard: "Do you suppose that the game for stars is played according to Sunday School rules?") Then he comes to that old worn-out planet called Earth, and learns to love it. (I think it would make an interesting study to look at all those stories in s f where Earth is third-rate or a half-forgotten legend; maybe Pebble in the Sky, by Asimov, is the one I remember best of this type. But we'll get around to this question a little later...) The way Hamilton presents all this is really quite bad. The following quote will give you the general idea of the set-up in the galaxy:

There were five great Sectors, and there were five governors, who headed the Sector Councils. Sollereinos of Orion, Vorn of Cepheus, Giana of Leo, Strowe of Perseus, Ferdias of Lyra - and all of them jealous of each other. Five great pro-consuls, paying only a lip-service allegiance to the shadowy UW far away on Earth, all of them hungry for space, hungry for power. Yes, even Ferdias, thought Birrel. Ferdias was the man he served, respected, and

even loved in a craggy sort of way. But Ferdias, like the others, played a massive game of chess with men and suns, moving his squadrons here and his undercover operatives there, labouring ceaselessly to hold on to what he had and perhaps enlarge his Sector just a little, a small star-system here and a minor cluster there...

It's the good old Roman Empire transplanted to the galaxy again. But of course without any real understanding of what factors would provide the dynamics of such an empire. I mean, there's no economics, no ideologies, no culture to speak of. Politics is "a massive game of chess played with men and suns..." You notice how Hamilton casually tosses in the phrase, "a small star-system here and a minor cluster there" - just to let you know this is really the big-time. (Of course, what's a minor cluster here or there...?) Why these galactic pro-consuls are "hungry for space, hungry for power" is never explained. The galaxy's not big enough for two of these characters, let alone five of them.

The whole thing, of course, is just a juvenile fantasy. Like playing cowboys-and-Indians, or "war" out in the back yard. Perhaps "juvenile" is a bit too innocent an adjective. I mean, there are certain rather fascist overtones to the whole thing. It's all very militaristic, and there's the cult of the leader. Any other kind of "politics" is a dirty word - the real, respectable business at hand is obeying and fighting.

It had been called "the star-ship psychology", this general, underlying feeling that one-man leadership was best in big affairs. The theory was that in the two-hundred-year spread-out from Earth, the feeling of a ship commander, who was responsible for the safety of all on board, had carried over into the matter of government. And that feeling had been reinforced by the historical example of the United Worlds, whose headless council had soon lost control over the wider sphere.

An interesting question is: just what kind of a universe gives rise to this "star-ship psychology"? As we are about to see, the human beings in Hamilton's novel (and, I suspect, in his other novels as well) are far from feeling themselves in complete control of their own lives. In a universe full of potentially hostile forces, one-man rule is to be preferred, and imagination is perhaps a drawback. Our hero, Jay Birrel (even the name is short, tough, and to the point) "disliked imaginative thinking and imaginative people, he regarded himself as a tough, practical man". Even in the most desperate situations, it's essential never to give way to the panic that lurks just around the corner: "Steel bands seemed to tighten across Birrel's chest, but he kept his face composed." He's a

military man, and nothing turns him on like a real display of power:

The squadron neared them, moving with majestic consciousness of its own power and authority... And he felt, as he always did, both the throb of pride that he had been given its leadership and the nagging doubt that he or any man as good enough to lead it.

There's also the near-groveling admiration you can find in Heinlein or any old John Campbell editorial for those who can take charge in a situation, and the implied contempt for those condemned to be followers:

He hesitated. He had a decision to make and he did not yet have facts enough on which to make it, but he had to make it. This was the price you paid for Commander's rank, for all the salutes and brass and deference.

Well, all this should hardly recommend a Hamilton novel to a young reader, though no doubt it appeals to some. For my part, I think the original appeal of Hamilton lay elsewhere. At least, the appeal lay not so much in this ghastly "star-ship psychology" as in the way Hamilton managed to depict the universe in which it was embedded.

I mentioned that typical scene with the hero gazing out at the stars in all their glory. And I mentioned Pascal and the silence of those infinite spaces; I said that for Hamilton space isn't like that. Let's take a look at space through Hamilton's eyes, in this fairly typical descriptive passage:

This place was Cluster N-356-44, in the Standard Atlas. It was also hellfire made manifest before them. It was a hive of swarming suns, pale-green and violet, white and yellow-gold and smoky red, blazing so fiercely that the eye was robbed of perspective and these stars seemed to crowd and rub and jostle each other. Up against the black backdrop of the firmament, they burned, pouring forth the torrents of their life-energy to whirl in cosmic belts and maelstroms of radiation. Merchant ships would recoil aghast from the navigational perils here. Unfortunately, this was not a merchant ship.

Space is not empty, it's full - dangerously full. Stars seem "to crowd and rub and jostle each other". There is no danger of being left adrift in the void; the problem for a ship is to find a navigable channel through the fiery furnace of the sky: "hellfire made manifest". Hamilton has a real knack for depicting all this. He can describe "the flaring billowing belly of the nebula above them, like the underside of a burning ocean..."

What is also to be noticed, as I indicated, is the danger associated with this heavenly realm, and the fact that this danger tends to be personified. Hamilton leads us on a roller-coaster ride through a beautiful but malevolent universe:

Relays kicked, compensating course, compensating tides of gravitic force quite capable of breaking a ship apart like a piece of flawed glass. The two red benaries gave them a final glare of malice and were gone. They were out of the channel.

A star the colour of a peacock's breast lay dead ahead.

Or again:

The sky screamed light. The sun, Sol, its atoms ceaselessly riven and then re-born, shrieked raving energy, magnetism, electricity, light, radiant heat, a rage across the heavens, a cosmic storm, flinging up wild plumes and spindrift of violent calcium, of yellow sodium, of blue and green and red flame.

Over it, as over a limitless fiery ocean, hung the shoal of silver ships. Tossed and twitched by storms of radiation, wrenched by the claws of the titan magnetic field, scorched by the blaze of the star that sought to overcome their shielding, the ships of the Fifth fought to hold position. Their formation wavered, sagged, reformed and wavered again, and still they held together, fighting against the star.

Some of this is really wonderful. The sun "shrieked raving energy... a rage across the heavens..." You can just see old Edmond really getting into it here, pounding away at the typewriter, his eyes slightly glazed over, a cup of coffee, cold and forgotten, on the desk beside him. The universe is alive with unhuman things and dangers. Machines and natural forces are personified; it can be said of a ship fighting the dangers of space that it "groaned and quivered like a living thing". At such a time, in such a place, where puny human beings are out of their element, we abandon ourselves to machines and to our fate.

Nothing moved now within the ship. The frail, breakable organisms of breath and heart and bone had abdicated their control. This was the hour of the ship, the hour of steel and flame and the racing electron, faster than human thought.

In these moments of peril, however, we also abandon ourselves to the unhuman beauty of the cosmos, flooding and overpowering the sense, whether human or machine. The ship may burst through darkness, "to leap once more into a

flory of wild light, where the dust-drowned suns burned like torches in a mist. And the metallic voices in the calc-room rose to an un-human crying as the computers strained to take in the overwhelming surge of data..." At this point, we are told, "The agony, the intoxication and the terror were far too great to admit any petty worries about anything human." Later the ship's crew are "like men enchanted waking from a dream".

Just what sort of a man and existence can a man on such a psychedelic roller coaster lead?

He looked at the looming, overtopping cliffs of stars that went up to the glowing nebula above and down to a fiery swirl of suns below. He thought of Lyllin, waiting for him in the quiet house back at Vega. He thought that he had no business having a wife.

Hamilton, however, is very good at frightening his readers, at describing the dangers and instability of the big, wide universe, only to reassure them in the end and bring them safely down to earth. (In this case, down to Earth.) Complementing his depiction of a menacing, raging, unstable outerspace, there is a longing for roots and quietness, a preference for the ways of the past. Here, and not only in his space politics, Hamilton reveals an innate conservatism. Birrel, hero of Battle for the Stars, has never felt he had a real home on any one planet. "He had never stayed at one long enough to form any attachment, for his father also had served the lyran fleet and, from childhood, his memories were only of a succession of oases on many worlds." On Earth he is told:

"You'll find us very old-fashioned in some ways. It's really an emotional attachment to the past, to the times, even after star-travel began, when Earth was still the centre of the universe." Birrel had not fully understood that then, but now he was beginning to, it did explain why these people were so loath to give up old customs, old habits of thought, old ways of living that went back two centuries to the days of Earth's pre-eminence and glory.

Eventually Birrel throws in his lot with the people of Earth, abandons his space-faring, and settles down on a farm in upstate New York with his Vegan wife. Will the neighbours accept this alien? Well - hardly alien; she is a beautiful woman with golden skin, and who will object to that? The real aliens of her world were destroyed by her ancestors long ago: "Long before

the starships came the Vegans had fought to its end their age-long struggle against the brainless, ferocious lizard-folk who lived in the deep mists of the vaster chasms and came over the ranges to raid and rob and slay."

But that's all over now, thank goodness, and so, for this story, are our vicarious space thrills. Birrel's wife tells him, "You never had a world until we came here. Now you have one, and that means it's mine too." Unfortunately, Hamilton's imaginative powers tend to fail him in this more mundane realm, and he can only talk about "atomic-synthesised fertilisers" and "weather-control taxes", and give people lines like, "I'll program an autodozer to clear off all this brush." On Earth, too, we find "tracts of conventional plastic-and-metal houses such as one might see on any modern world."

I shouldn't say his powers fail him completely. He can describe the sounds "of far-off dogs gossiping, and the periodic hooting of some night-bird, and the tiny, stridulating voices of insects." But it's only when he turns back to the heavens that he's once more the Edmond Hamilton we know, high on light and colours:

He started across the ragged fields, but stopped after he had gone a little way and stood looking at the sky. With the utter capriciousness that seemed to characterise all Earth's weather, the blue-and-gold day had suddenly changed into a garish, red sunset. The clouds, high in the eastern sky, still caught the dazzling sunlight. But, lower down, they shaded into pink and crimson and cinnabar, and, below these, there was a narrow band of clear sky which was pure lemon in colour. Against that band of light the farther ridge of the shallow valley stood out, each distant tree or building sharply silhouetted.

The light, washing across the fields in which he stood, changed by the minute. All the briars and weeds around him caught that glory, and put on a fantastic beauty.

Here, of course, the sky no longer "screams" light; the threat from beyond is tempered by the enveloping atmosphere of Earth, and we can regard the outer universe with equanimity. Edmond Hamilton has brought us home, safe and sound.

Angus Taylor
May 1976

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BRUCE GILLESPIE
DAVID GRIGG
TERRY GREEN
VAN IKIN
PHILIPPA GROVE-STEPHENSON
NEVILLE ANGOVE
RANDAL FLYNN
DON ASHBY

(EDITOR: I draw your attention to the Feature Reviews in this issue, as well as the reviews in "I Must Be Talking to My Friends", in particular reviews of Martian Time-Slip (Philip K Dick); Bring the Jubilee (Ward Moore); The Clewiston Test and Here Late the Sweet Birds Sang (Kate Wilhelm); Beyond Tomorrow (ed. Lee Harding); The Altered I (ed. Lee Harding); A World of Shadows; The rozen Sky; The Children of Atlantis (Lee Harding); Halfway House; Shadows (David Grigg); A Lifetime on Clouds (Gerald Murnane); A Low Breed (Joseph Johnson).

CHRONIC INNOCENTS

Bruce Gillespie reviews:

By Michael Moorcock:

AN ALIEN HEAT

MacGibbon & Kee :: 1972
158 pages :: \$A5.40

THE HOLLOW LANDS

Mayflower 583 12104 :: 1975
180 pages :: \$1.60

THE END OF ALL SONGS

Harper & Row :: 1976
271 pages :: \$8.95

LEGENDS FROM THE END OF TIME

Harper & Row :: 1976
182 pages :: \$7.95
(Contents: "Pale Stars"
"White Stars"
"Ancient Shadows")

Ambition, rather than unqualified success, is the hallmark of Michael Moorcock. From editing New Worlds to performing with the Hawkwind band, from recrucifying Christ (in Behold the Man) to resurrecting sf, his ambitions are many, exhaustively pursued, and many of the results are both popular and lucrative.

Moorcock's latest effort, the "Dancers at the End of Time" series, is more ambitious than anything else he has done. The series comprises three novels, An Alien Heat (1972), The Hollow Lands (1975), and The End of All Songs (1976),

plus a compilation of three excellent novellas, Legends From the End of Time (1976) (two of which, "Pale Roses" and "Ancient Shadows" are discussed elsewhere in this issue of SFC).

The series is about paradise - or heaven - the place where all your wishes come true - Utopia - a place of immortality.

In short, writing such a group of books is a foolhardy enterprise. How do you make heaven interesting? Many writers, including Sir Thomas More in his own Utopia, have tried and failed. Supply all the details about your ideal world and usually leave the readers drowning.

Moorcock's heaven, however, is interesting because it is richly detailed and it is funny, elegant, and colourful. But the details mean little without the humour, and the humour means little by itself. He still can't make Utopia interesting in itself; he needs to find more complicated territory than that.

The world at the End of Time is more of an immoralist's heaven than based on conventional high-minded models. Not many people are left in this world. Each of them has limitless power. The world is basically an empty plain - so each needs only to twist his or her "power ring" to build a castle, conjure up a jungle, or get wrapped in sunbeams.

The people at the End of Time are not just an ordinary old bunch of hedonists. They are, fairly specifically, people from the kind of heaven that Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, or even William Morris might have dreamed up between them (or, at least, Moorcock's version of it). It's not just that the clothes and hous-

ing styles adopted by Lord Jagged, the Iron Orchid, and Jherek Carnelian are a little extravagant. It's not just that everybody converses in Wildian aphorisms and elegant fin de siècle doubles entendres, or that the characters treat sex - all varieties, with regular changes of sex for most - as one of their more refined activities. "If Oscar Wilde had written the novels of H G Wells, the result might have been something like this," says one blurb, with some justification.

The real catch with this heaven - at least, according to the inhabitants - is that nobody can die. In "Pale Roses", a story in Legends From the End of Time, the melancholic Werther de Goethe is fairly upset because he can choose to do or be anything - except dead. He "commits suicide", but the others resurrect him. "I seek the inevitable, the irreconcilable, the unalterable, the inescapable! Our ancestors knew it."

But even Werther de Goethe has to face a threat when the world of the End of Time faces extinction. The three novels, An Alien Heat, The Hollow Lands, and The End of All Songs show what happens when Yusharisp, a traveller from outer space, arrives to inform them that the universe is dying and collapsing in on itself. Even elegant, powerful dandies have no idea how to meet the threat - except, of course, that somebody does rescue them in the last book.

Not that physical immolation is the real threat in this world. "Your world is a travesty," accuses Mrs Amelia Underwood, the unwilling time traveller from 1896, "artificially maintained, denying mortality and therefore denying destiny." The lives and values of the inhabitants are, very specifically, an affront to a certain kind of sensibility - that of the puritanical lower middle class of England, both in 1896 and now.

But Mrs Underwood's indignation has point. With all their power, the inhabitants of the End of Time have never created anything for themselves. They rely for their creative models on ludicrously bowdlerised versions of past events, fashions, and styles. The "Empire State Apartments", according to their version, were "built as the home of New York's greatest king (Kong the Mighty) who, as you know, ruled the city during its Golden Age... The epics of the time made constant references to the narrowness of the streets, forcing people to move crabwise - hence the distinctive 'sidewalk' of New York."

The End of Time is interesting because it is funny. But the humour can be derived only from a conflict of viewpoints - between theirs and ours. And "our" viewpoint must be represented by outsiders. which is how these books work - as the constant interaction between the complacent dandies and a variety of discontented intruders. There are Captain Mubbers and his destructive soldiers from outer space. And there is Dafnish Armatrice, whom everybody finds dreadfully boring because she insists on

sacrificing herself and her son in the attempt to go back to her own past.

And, throughout the trilogy, always Mrs Amelia Underwood. She was snatched mysteriously from her cottage in East Bromley in 1896. She objects strongly to the decadence, casual cruelty, and lack of responsibility of the group of people among whom she finds herself. She also objects to the attentions of Jherek Carnelian. She is still Mrs Amelia Underwood because her husband is still alive in 1896. Jherek takes the line that Mr Underwood has been dead for umpteen million years, and therefore there are no barriers to their union. The story of the trio of novels concerns the attempt by Jherek Carnelian, the chronic innocent, to court Amelia, while both their universes, mental and physical, disintegrate spectacularly around them.

For even the Earth itself begins to break apart in The End of All Songs. And in a world where casual pleasure is the only standard, Jherek is tiresome enough to "fall in love". In a world without sin, Mrs Underwood attempts to teach him morality. There must be a universal message here somewhere.

But this latest ambitious effort of Moorcock's also fails. Certainly, the four books are un-failingly readable, witty, and richly detailed. But these books are also about the residual moral conflicts of England - about conflicts of style and morality, its disappointment with itself, the sour end of "all songs". The whole work is a bit more parochial than its plot would suggest (a scenario which involves travelling not only back to 1896, but also to the Devonian Age, then through the End of Time to Something Beyond). The three novels could have been condensed into one. Only the book of novellas, Legends From the End of Time, stands up as a self-sufficient achievement.

In the long run, Moorcock describes the details of his heaven perfectly, but never quite explores the implications. By contrast, Philip Jose Farmer had the idea much better some years ago in his "Riverworld" series, where he postulated that if you set down all the people who had ever lived into Utopia, each would disagree so violently with the others about the nature of that Utopia that everybody would immediately set about killing everybody else.

But Moorcock's books are always pleasant and benign - and not quite that complete picture of the potential for humanity which could have been presented through the dazzling details of this vision of the End of Time.

TERRY CARR'S OSCARS

David Grigg reviews

BEST S F OF THE YEAR 4

edited by Terry Carr

Gollancz :: 1975

272 pages :: \$A 10.40

Ballantine 24529 :: 1975

304 pages :: \$1.95

Any anthology with a title which begins, "The Best..." inevitably bets the question: is it really the best? Or are we just being fooled by someone attempting to tell us what was the best?

Unfortunately, that's the feeling one gets from this volume. I don't know. Perhaps 1974 was just a bad year for science fiction. But heaven help the field if this grouping really represents the ten best short science fiction works for any year.

Of the ten stories, the best for my money is Moorcock's "Pale Roses". And that I find passing strange, for Moorcock has never been among my favourite authors. It is also strange to note that, of all the stories in the book, this one did not come close to being nominated for the Hugo Award.

The story itself deals with a group of beings at the End of Time, where technology has long since become so advanced that nothing is beyond power. I call them beings for, in many ways, they are no longer really human. The genius of the story is in showing us the futility of mortal existence when there is no difficulty in satisfying any desire. In a sense, "Pale Roses" ponders the deep question, "What is the purpose of technology?"

Second best story of this best is, I think, Philip Dick's "A Little Something for Us Tempnauts". Yet it is, perhaps, not truly science fiction, but more a horror story (without any of the gothic trimmings) and is, in fact, one of the most truly horrifying stories I have ever read. It possesses some of the horrific quality of Flann O'Brien's The Third Policeman. The last line is quite stunning. There is also some ungentle satire, in Dick's delineation of the NASA-type American effort to send men into the future, just because the Russians have sent off already a team of chronauts. A remorseless story, combining Dick's paranoia with his genius.

But the rest of the offerings of this "Best" anthology are very poor pickings. Even the Ursula Le Guin story, "The Author of the Acacia Seeds and Other Extracts from the Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics", is a very minor piece, full of her humour, but little of

her sparkle - less a story than a thought-provoking joke.

"Born with the Dead", by Robert Silverberg is, obviously, a re-telling of the Orpheus myth. But, as is often the case when an author takes up a myth and alters it to make a modern story, Silverberg fails to revitalise the myth, and does nothing to make the story reach out and touch us with the authenticity of mythic force. To be blunt, he makes rather a dull story out of an exciting myth.

Fred Pohl's "We Purchased People" attempts to build a horror story, but is far too contrived to carry any force or shock effect. Once we accept the assumption of aliens using psychopaths as tools to communicate on Earth, and that these tools are allowed brief spans of liberty, the ending becomes inevitable and fails to convince us when, at last, it comes.

The only other story I could possibly give an honourable mention to would be Larry Niven's story, "The Hole Man", which, in fact, won the Hugo for Best Short story. Niven is a writer of mixed talents, but there are some things he does well, and the technological murder story is one of them. This, at least, was one of the most entertaining of the stories in the book. But the other stories don't belong in any anthology labelling itself, "The Best". Not unless we are really scraping the barrel. Not unless there was so little good fiction written in 1974 that Terry Carr has to pad out his collection with gimmick stories like "On Venus Have We Got a Rabbi", by William Tenn, or with just plain badly written stuff like "If the Stars Be Gods", by Gordon Eklund and Gregory Benford (it took two writers to produce this?), or with "Dark Icarus", by Bob Shaw, which is, to be charitable, merely mediocre.

Maybe 1975 has been a better year. Let's hope so.

Terry Green reviews

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION OF THE YEAR 5

edited by Terry Carr

Ballantine 25064 :: 1976 Gollancz :: 1976
367 pages :: \$1.95 296 pages :: £4.50

So here is Terry Carr's Best Science Fiction of the Year (No 5), featuring stories from 1975. It is a good collection of stories that skims much of the cream from the top of a rather overflowing vat. Carr has gathered twelve stories here, ranging from good and/or interesting to excellent and/or memorable. The ones I might not have included are not necessarily the ones that should not have been included; they merely reflect an aspect of personal taste and preference, since all are well written.

Carr seems to aim for an eclectic gathering of different types of fiction; for this reason, such a collection will most likely please no one totally, unless said person can temporarily put aside his/her preferences, biases, prejudices, and tastes. Rather a large order.

But then, what we are left with is recognition of excellence in achievement, as opposed to enjoyment and appreciation of the achievement. Kind of like knowing that someone is well dressed, but realising that you would never buy or wear clothes like that personally.

This said, let me try to deal with the stories on a balance of my terms and their terms.

The volume contains five stories from The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, three from Analog, one from Amazing, and three from original anthologies. The obvious bent here is toward the American writer and market, with a definite tilt of the hat to FISF and Analog. This information in itself can provide some feeling toward the collection, if one is sufficiently familiar with the source magazines and their editorial policies.

Cordwainer Smith's "Down to a Sunless Sea" opens the anthology. It is, in my opinion, one of the top stories included. It is haunting and evocative, as only a Smith story can be. And it speaks of much more than itself.

The title is taken, of course, from Coleridge's "Kubla Khan: or, A Vision in a Dream", and Coleridge's poem is a good measure of Smith's story; for the story is poem-like, and affords much of the same romantically tinged visions as the poem. The planet Xanadu is a poetic representation of the duality of good and evil, of the heart of darkness underlying the glittering pleasure domes. As a poetic story, in the best Smith tradition, it works.

The second of the top three stories for me was Harlan Ellison's "Croatoan". It strikes the reader from several directions at once - from the absurd, the fascinating, the captivating, the incredible. It, like the Smith story, is part poem, part allegory, and one must let these effects take hold before fully evaluating the impact. The final vision is, on a realistic plane, vividly memorable and meaningful. To describe it in more detail would be to spoil it for those who have yet to read it. It is tour de force fantasy.

And my vote for the final story to toss into the ring containing the top three would go to Gene Wolfe's "The Hero as Werewolf". Here again we have a strange, chilling, powerful, and unnerving presentation - a tale that is part metaphor, part poem. It tells of a bleak future in the city with vivid, memorable images, and could constitute the ultimate nightmare for a future.

There are three other stories in the volume

which strike me as excellent and successful, but which are lacking the "blast" effect of the first three.

P J Plauger's "Child of All Ages" tells of a child who is 2400 years old. The story is intriguing, well-wrought, entertaining.

"The Storms of Windhaven", by George R R Martin and Lisa Tuttle, is about the girl who would be one of her world's "flyers", who desires it so intensely that she acts as a catalyst for social change. The story is old-fashioned in many ways, but old-fashioned in a fine way - like a lovely pocket watch. It is also a readable tale about social classes and social change.

Algis Budrys' "The Silent Eyes of Time" is the antithesis of every romantic time travel story you ever read; the approach here is naturalistic, modern, corporate. The cleverest manipulators succeed, and the corporation cynically patents and manoeuvres. Budrys' slant is a nice change in its field, and works well on a fascinating monotone level.

"Doing Lennon" by Greg Benford, "Clay Suburb" by Robert F Young, "The New Atlantis" by Ursula Le Guin, and "Sail the Tide of Mourning" by Richard Lupoff are all good stories, worth reading. But they can't quite compete with the first six mentioned. Each had something slightly unsatisfying for me as reader.

"Doing Lennon" tailed away slightly from its captivating first ten pages or so. It finishes somewhat thinly after the complications set in.

"Clay Suburb" left me with the feeling that I'd seen much of this before, and that the attempt to revitalise the time-travel paradoxes via complications regarding multiple personalities didn't quite work as he'd hoped.

Le Guin's interestingly bleak future USA seemed formed into the telegraphed blending with the rising "New Atlantis"; the italicised (poetic?) inserts are overly long.

And "Sail the Tide of Mourning" seemed overly poetic, overly romantic, tending toward the saccharine. Cordwainer Smith handled this type of thing much better. (Why does Lupoff choose the impossible character names? The attempt at creating strangeness comes off forced as a result...)

I've omitted comment on the two John Varley pieces until now. Any author who gets two stories in such an anthology obviously deserves some extra attention. Obviously Terry Carr likes Varley's work. I liked these moderately too; I thought they were well-written and successful. They are good examples of soundly written "hard science" s f stories. If that is the reason for the inclusion of one of Varley's tales, OK, I guess. But two? Almost similar? Both struck me as good Heinlein/Asimov juveniles of the

middle '50s, especially "In the Bowl". (The other story is "Retrograde Summer"). In 1975, they strike me as well-done anachronisms. Terry Carr and I part company here.

In an anthology that contains, then, six fine stories - three of which are poetically, powerfully memorable - and six good and/or interesting tales, we have the annual Carr verdict. Try the book, if it sounds like your cup of tea, and if you are interested in the s f short story and its present status. See if your tastes veer toward Wolfe and Ellison, or toward Varley twice. Carr tries to balance the book. Only a highly balanced reader will "like" all these stories. But, like Terry Carr, we can strive to appreciate the individual achievements here.

Personally, Ellison and Wolfe dazzled me...

THE MAGIC LETTER "J"

Van Ikin reviews

THE FEMALE MAN

by Joanna Russ

Bantam Q8765 :: 1975
214 pages :: \$1.25

"The premise of the story needs either a book of silence." Thus wrote Joanna Russ in the afterword to "When It Changed" (Again, Dangerous Visions, page 240), the story upon which The Female Man is based. She goes on to declare her belief that it is "obviously true" that "almost all the characterological sex differences we take for granted are in fact learned and not innate. I do not see how anyone can walk around with both eyes open and both halves of his/her brain functioning and not realise this."

I quote these remarks, partly because they serve as a glossary on the chief extractable themes of this novel, and partly because they give some idea of the nature of the Russ brand of feminism. For Joanna Russ is an eminently sensible feminist - by which I mean that her valid and acute sense of the world's injustice to woman has not turned her bitter. The afterword to "When It Changed" makes it quite clear that Russ sees women and men as people (not just as "victims" and "male chauvinist pigs") and understands that men and women must co-exist in this world. (Simple statement, but there is a feminist fringe whose rhetoric is aimed at denying this fact.)

So Russ is, in my view, the kind of person whose ideas deserve attention and careful consideration.

Having established that fact, let me shelve it

for future reference and turn directly to The Female Man.

I found it baffling. Quite frankly, it could be a very good book to which I was not attuned (not attuned to its formal elements; I sympathise with the general content) or it could be a poor book that is so pretentious as to be beguiling.

The book's blurbs talk about "Reality Times 3". "Separate worlds!..In Synchrony!" and - a more genuine blurb - "an altered past, a frightening present and a strange far-flung future". The blurbs help, because the chief and definite flaw in the novel is the fact that the thematic significance of its basic structure is obscure.

The three realities centre upon three females whose names begin with "J". Janet comes from Whileaway ("the Earth ten centuries from now, but not our Earth, if you follow me"). Whileaway is "in the future. / But not our future", and it is implied that Whileaway could be described as another probability or continuum. Jennine comes from a world echoingly similar to our own but, again, not the same as ours: it has seen no Second World War, and the Great Depression continues. Joanna's world is most like our own.

I take these elements to be the core of the novel's structure, but this is a blurb-dependent interpretation and it excludes from centrality a character like Jael Reasoner, who has interesting ideas to express and whose name begins with the magic letter "J" (not to mention having the initials "JR").

But to identify this as "the structural core" does not take you very far: it's a bit like deducing that the black parts of a printed page carry more significance than the white. The crucial question centres upon the role of the three Js and the nature of the "reality" which they define. Clearly, Russ is wanting the reader to sense a similarity - no, a sybiosis - between them, yet she is just as clearly signalling that the relationship thus signified is not a simple one. One must look beyond simple alternatives, "before-and-after" contrasts, or past-present-and-future panoramas.

Unfortunately, one doesn't know if the novel is attempting to define a "public/external" or a "private/inner" reality, and this question has bearing on the three Js and their sybiosis. The blurbs suggest that the novel is delineating a public or exterior reality - portraying objective reality, setting down "the world as it is". (Whileaway, of course, is not a part of "the world as it is", but it could act as a touchstone to establish that the world is capable of improvement, perhaps even of perfection.) That's what the blurbs imply. On the other hand, personally I feel more inclined to see the three Js as aspects of an inner reality, and to argue that the book is a subjective "interiorised" account of the female plight.

It is my high opinion of Joanna Russ that leads me to adopt this (more charitable) view of the novel.

The Female Man contains many scenes and incidents that are so exaggeratedly propagandist as to make the novel a joke if it were to be seen as a simple mirror-reflection of exterior reality. There is the crudely contrived scene where one of our heroines concludes her talk with a male by claiming that "business calls her away", only to have the male burst into anger:

"Damn your business!" he said in heat, this confused and irritable man. "Your business isn't worth two cents compared with what I'm talking about!" (page 177)

When his sexual advances are repulsed, the man becomes even more blatant:

"You're a woman," he cries, shutting his eyes, "you're a beautiful woman. You've got a hole down there. You're a beautiful woman... All you women, you're all women, you're sirens, you're beautiful, you're waiting for me, waiting for a man..." (page 181)

Now I'm not denying that this kind of behaviour can occur (though I do feel inclined to question the incidence of such eloquent statements of male chauvinism) but, in the context of the novel, it is totally unacceptable. True it may be; aesthetically or intellectually pleasing it is not.

The Female Man is an obviously and avowedly "committed" work (the narrator keeps warning the reader to "watch out", and the final pages establish that the narrator sees the book as an instrument of social change); it is a novel with an urgent message. And such a work will, typically, have two types of reader: the converted and the unconverted. The unconverted will naturally require to work to be persuasive - but so too will the converts, for their pleasure in reading the novel will come from adopting the role of devil's advocate to the text, requiring it to re-convince them of views they hold already. (Such will be the strategy of the intelligent reader, anyway; it is arguable that the "low-brow" reader enjoys merely sopping up a printed confirmation of his/her own views.) In either case, the novel is required not only to tackle its subject with integrity and diligence (avoiding facile argument and straw men (and, in this case, the sexist nature of that phrase is appropriate)) but to be seen to do so. And though the mep Boss may perhaps be "real" enough, he has the smell of the easy target, the facile argument.

The committed novel can also be expected to tackle its central issue head on, not avoiding the inevitable complexities of that issue. Yet The Female Man gives us statements like:

There are more whooping cranes in the United States of America than there are women in Congress. (page 61)

In fairness, I assume that the whooping crane is a rare or extinct bird; but even so, why make the point this way? Is the bird-woman analogy really valid?

At other times, the areas of complexity are touched upon, but the contact is pitifully brief and shallow. There is a very honest and not-at-all-facile account of a man-woman relationship:

On top of it all, you sincerely require me to be happy; you are naively puzzled that I should be so wretched and so full of venom in this best of all possible worlds. Whatever can be the matter with me? (page 196)

Here we get to the heart of the sex war, confronting the tragic fact that sexist attitudes are so ingrained that a man who genuinely loves a woman can, nevertheless, fail to treat her as a person. But unfortunately the novel doesn't delve into this area; the entire matter is glimpsed simply in passing.

By skimming such situations, the novel gives itself an unrealistic contrast of black-or-white, no grey. It creates an impression that people are either "good" (female), or "bad" (male), forgetting the crucial area inbetween. The novel says nothing about the human situation, about the nature of the universe in which we live. To what extent can we hope to correct the injustice to women? Is the human race capable of perfection? The Female Man has no answers. It asserts the need for reform, but does not assess the status of that need. What do you do with that male who sincerely requires his wife to be happy, yet is nevertheless genuinely incapable of treating her as a person?

These last paragraphs detail shortcomings in the novel, but such flaws are crippling only if the novel is seen as a document of exterior reality. And - as I have said - many factors convince me that it is a somewhat garbled (but nevertheless highly effective) account written from the inside, reflecting an inner reality. Not the observations of the cool, calm journalist, but the harsh cries of the victim. The book's stance is thus summarised in two of its most pithy sentences:

As my mother once said: The boys throw stones at the frogs in jest. But the frogs die in earnest. (page 196)

The Female Man is a frog's-eye view of reality. And, as such, it is explosive.

The novel gets to the core of what it's like to be female, what it's like to be female. Not an outer view of what's done to females, but an

inner view of what it's like to live as a victim knowing that the world in general cannot see you as a victim because it denies you the right to aspire to the fullest range of human experience.

The stifling trivia of womanhood are recorded minutely; one passage shafted home to me like nothing else in the book:

There are clothes to wash before she goes, clothes to put away, stockings to pair and put in the drawers. She wraps the garbage in newspaper and carries it down three flights to put in the garbage can. She routs Cal's socks from behind the bed and shakes them out, leaving them on the kitchen table. There are dishes to wash, soot on the window sills, soaking pots to scour... Milk goes back in the refrigerator - no, wait a minute, throw it out - she sits down for a moment and writes out a list of groceries to buy on the way back from the bus in a week. Fill the pail, find the soap, give up, mop it anyway with just water. Put everything away. Do the breakfast dishes. Jump up, wash the table, pick up the salt that falls on the rug and brush it up with a whisk-broom. Is that all? No, ... (pages 105-106)

The novel's achievement lies in paragraphs such as this, in writing that is simple, down-to-earth, yet (in its context) suffused with a fierce passion.

The novel's form, I think, is often pretentious. (There are one-sentence or one-paragraph "mini-chapters", indulgent passages where the writer croons over her "little book".) I'm not even sure if the attendant s f scenario has been a help or a hindrance (though I'm inclined to say that the book would have been better done "straight"). Yet if the form is poor, the raw matter of the content is sufficiently powerful to carry the day. Despite its flaws and rough edges, The Female Man has something to say and, in places, it makes its statement with amazing forcefulness.

SPACE OPERA TRANSCENDED

Terry Green reviews

THE FOREVER WAR

by Joe Haldeman

St Martin's Press :: 1974
236 pages :: \$7.95

Ballantine 24767 :: 1976
218 pages :: \$1.50

Crest 8600 7882 :: 1976
236 pages :: \$41.95

I think this is a good book.

My reaction amazes even me, since I was rather sure that it wouldn't be to my taste when I picked it up. It's been quite some time since I've admired a "hard" s f book the way I admired Joe Haldeman's The Forever War upon completing it.

Comparisons are inevitable; this book invites consideration in the company of Heinlein's Starship Troopers and Niven and Pournelle's The Mote in God's Eye, since all three are about the basic space-opera concept of Earthmen battling aliens to prevent annihilation of homo sapiens. And although The Forever War might not achieve the popularity of the other two works, I feel it is a more mature work. It is a work that examines not merely the technically extrapolated mechanics of a future war in an "adventure" context; it is not merely a look at future possibilities for military systems and operative procedures; but it examines centrally one incredibly lucky survivor and his human reactions to all that is ephemeral around him. It is about his own realisation of self as pawn, and about his attempt to cling to something with which he can identify, someone to whom he can relate, all in a world in which he becomes an "outsider" - several times. In this, it surpasses both Starship Troopers and The Mote in God's Eye (both very readable within their own limitations) in maturity of concern.

One can admire Haldeman's knowledge of the hard sciences, since it can be seen that the "hard science" framework is necessary to the credibility of the overall gimmick that makes the central character (William Mandella) a type of "outsider" or "immortal". Haldeman uses the notion that, in travelling throughout the stars at faster-than-light speeds, Mandella might age subjectively by only a few years while, in fact, he has aged centuries in objective Earth years. Mandella's few attempts to understand, tolerate, and integrate himself into the "new" Earths he finds on his return are by far the most interesting segments of the novel.

One can even forgive Haldeman for some of the excessive Analog-type scientific emphasis throughout, since he does balance it well with speculations about sociology, psychology, politics, and other of the "soft" sciences.

I admire Haldeman's blunt straightforward style, his realistic use of language. His is a highly deceptive method - straightforward narrative - in this day and age, and one that requires skill to create more than merely a "straightforward narrative" as the end product.

However, the book could include additional dimensions of tragedy and joy if Haldeman built stronger, more fascinating character relationships. With a bit more emphasis in this direction, the novel would have been even more powerful, more moving.

But for now, I guess, Haldeman's book is about the best hard s f that you can get that isn't merely a clever adventure story. And that's no mean dismissal. It's an admiring comment.

FAR COUNTRIES OF THE TROUBADOUR

Philippa Grove-Stephenson reviews

THE BEST OF CORDWAINER SMITH

Ballantine :: 1975
377 pages ::

During the last five years, the quality of s f cover art has risen strikingly, and it seems reasonable to suppose that nowadays potential readers will be attracted, rather than repelled, by this first contact. Even those not normally susceptible to the packaging of their reading matter are likely to notice the enchanting picture which Darrell Sweet has provided for this book. He offers a captivating invitation to search inside for a similar parade of young and old, human and animal, mundane and fantastic. Readers who accept the invitation will not be disappointed. This collection does indeed represent the best of Cordwainer Smith, and it is hard to quibble with the selection ("Drunkboat" being the only serious omission), although easy to wish that there were room for yet more.

As a bonus, this book contains an intelligent and thoughtful appreciation of Smith's work by J J Pierce, who has also provided a "timeline". This chronological guide covers all Smith's s f stories and includes such an indication of the placing of major events as can be drawn from the stories and Smith's own notebooks. However, the timeline, while useful and interesting, is not strictly necessary. The stories in this volume are arranged in "historical" sequence, so that a tapestry of the future is unfurled slowly before the reader. At first, in "Scanners Live in Vain", Smith's particular vision is only fleetingly apparent. After "The Dead Lady of Clown Town" (at 85 pages, the longest story in the book), Go-Captains, Pinlighters, Norstrilia, and Underpeople are as familiar as the knights errant, fair maidens, and far countries of the troubadours.

Smith shares with the troubadours the feeling that story-telling is both an occasion and a familiar ritual. There is a stock vocabulary of people, places, and attitudes which provide the sense of one tradition running through all the tales. Thus stark plot-lines or sudden bursts of exuberant description have an added impact. The presentation of the stories has what might seem to the twentieth-century reader a peculiar formality. Almost one can hear a lute being tuned as listeners, catching the accents of storytelling, cease conversation and gather round. Probably Smith himself picked up this tradition from the Eastern story-tellers

he must have encountered during his early career. However, he did not simply reproduce the tradition of either East or West, but subtly altered it to prepare the reader for the effect to come. The curious inversion of the introduction to "The Crime and Glory of Commander Suzdal" illustrates this formal, but individual, style:

Do not read this story; turn the page quickly. The story may upset you. Anyhow, you probably know it already. It is a very disturbing story. Everyone knows it. The glory and the crime of Commander Suzdal have been told in a thousand different ways. Don't let yourself realise that the story is the truth.

and so the listeners stay to hear the familiar tales of a past now half history, half mythology.

Smith's feeling for the formal pervades the stories; not just in the telling, but in the very heart of the tale. The rituals of scanners, Lords, Norstrilians, and many others are displayed for us to watch. And above all the most formal, the most ancient of all, are the Lords of the Instrumentality; the rulers of Earth. Splendid, corrupt, and dangerous, they steer the destinies of a race.

Smith captures the essence of Earth's rulers in their title: they are lordly, but they are the Instrumentality; a political elite, but bound by a solemn duty of the protection of Earth. In fact, through all these stories he shows his knowledge of how to use the magic and lilt of careful prose to express his vision. Our native planet, aged and magnificent, is known as Old Earth, or, later still, when mankind has spread across a galaxy, as "Manhome". He does not shrink from trying to catch the glory and the terror of "the space between the stars":

I tell you, it is sad, it is more than sad, it is fearful - for it is a dreadful thing to go into the up-and-out, to fly without flying, to move between the stars as a moth may drift among the leaves on a summer night.

"The Burning of the Brain"

He can convey the mad lust of "Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons" and present for our appreciation the savour that the list "assassination, murder, abduction, insanity, rape, robbery" might have for a race bored with completely safe lives ("Alpha Ralpa Boulevard"). The names he uses are by turn prosaic, exotic (Dolores Oh), noble, or romantic, serving as a reminder of what the character is, or was.

Cordwainer Smith was enamoured of the romantic, though sometimes terrible, future he presents in a bewildering kaleidoscope of words and ideas. He produces the biggest spaceship ever known; super weapons; FTL travel; space colonisation;

the Lords of the Instrumentality - who always have the one more trick, at least, up their sleeves - all devices from the grammar of "traditional" s f. He surrounds them with wonder, mystery, or humanity. The great golden ship, 90 million miles long, is a great golden fraud. There is a weary cynicism about these Lords, which belies the "superman" status, but leaves them the near-magical powers of the "priest-king". Here too is romance: not only the small lovings of small people, but the great romances of which legends are made ("The Lady who Bailed the Soul") and the long love affair between mankind and the "up-and-out". Here, above all, is Humanity, lovingly portrayed. Mankind is sometimes naive, sometimes crafty, nearly always greedy, sometimes noble, often resourceful. And in this great adventure of the future there are also the Underpeople, the partners of mankind and one of Smith's greatest concerns. They are loved ("The Game of Rat and Dragon") and despised ("The Dead Lady of Clown Town"); they are helped ("The Ballad of Lost C'Mell") and helping ("A Planet Named Shayol").

Smith's imagination soars across a sweep of the future which seems as rich in fact and legend as our past. This is a volume of dramas, presented as such. The voice is that of prophecy, the intonation that of poetry. This book has grandeur, humanity, ritual, and wide-eyed wonder. Those who want their s f solid, serious, and sociological must go elsewhere. I was enraptured; but let Smith himself, at the beginning of "Under Old Earth", capture you or let you go:

Music runs through this story. The soft sweet music of the Earth Government and the Instrumentality, bland as honey and sickening in the end. The wild illegal pulsations of Bebiet, where most men were forbidden to enter. Worst of all, the crazy fugues and improper melodies of the Besirk, closed to men for fifty-seven centuries - opened by accident, found, trespassed in! And with it our story begins.

HIS TRUE CALLING

Van Ikin reviews

THE BEST OF CLIFFORD D SIMAK 1939-1971

edited by Angus Wells

Edgwick & Jackson :: 1975
253 pages :: \$A10.50

At his best, Clifford Simak writes a quiet, rich, immensely satisfying kind of fiction; still waters running deep. His stories are a joy to read (one would be tempted to say that they refresh the soul), and one story in particular, "The Thing in the Stone" (1970), would seem to me, despite its faults, to deserve a

niche in s f's much used and abused "hall of fame".

As a writer, Simak has come a long way from his earliest beginnings. Describing "Madness from Mars" (1939) and "Sunspot Purge" (1940) as "truly horrible examples of an author's fumbling agony in the process of finding himself", Simak confesses that he "cringes" at the thought that they will be read again. (And one does wonder what they are doing in a "best" stories collection...)

However, these early pieces are actually quite interesting. Some of the descriptive writing in "Madness from Mars" does reveal the author's early taste for words:

The ship was coming back - a tiny gnat of steel pushing itself along with twinkling blasts of flaming rocket-fuel. Heading Earthward out of that region of silent mystery, spurning space-miles beneath its steel-shod heels. Triumphant, with the red dust of Mars still clinging to its plates - a mote of light in the telescopic lenses.

Moreover, Simak manages to get below the surface of his plot (that a Martian fur-ball life form emits ultrasonic pulses and drives men mad) to evoke some sense of compassion and understanding for the "monster". He executes this badly (for "compassion and understanding" read "sentimentality") but at least the impulse is there.

The early stories are also important because they show Simak drawing on material from his own experience. Both stories have "newspaper backgrounds", thereby reflecting the fact that, as Simak puts it, "all my life I have been a newspaperman". Discussing this journalistic element of his writing, Simak warns that journalism has certain stylistic requirements and some severe limitations which might adversely affect the writer of tales if one allowed them to." He argues, however, that journalism played an important and beneficial role in his fiction by influencing his authorial stance or "viewpoint":

A newspaperman...does not deal in surface facts alone. If he is worth his salt, he seeks continually for truth and truth often is not evident on the surface. Newspaper work develops a questioning mind, seeking the unsuspected elements that may lie behind the surface fact... However, the newsman is quite aware that there is no such thing as simple truth, nor, for that matter, an absolute truth. He comes to know that truth is a grey area... And, because he knows that very seldom can one strike straight to the heart of truth, he acquires a certain tolerance of viewpoint...

Thus Simak would probably argue that the promising aspects of "Madness from Mars" were the result of journalism.

The stories fail to bear this out. At its best, the journalistic element functions as a narrative peg. A journalist is traditionally a noseey observer, and thus it is easy to sustain a plot with a journalist as key figure. Unfortunately, with a journo as key figure, it is also easy to fall into the trap of allowing one's prose to bask on the artificial pseudo-cynicism of tone that passes as journalistic I've-seen-it-all toughness:

Twenty storeys is a long way to jump.
When he'd hit he's just sort of spattered
and it was very messy.

To refute the real value of Simak's journalistic background is not to deny that there is a maturity and integrity inherent in the authorial stance. Simak implies that these qualities are attained by dint of striving ("a newspaperman...seeks...for truth..."); the stories suggest that they are the product of the author's maturity of spirit. Simak does not seek; he knows. And his mature fiction is the rich and pleasing product of a sound and settled personality (though not a complacent one), of a mind and morality confident of the validity of the values they esteem, yet nevertheless making genuine allowance for the fact that all men are different.

Simak happily confesses to being a "pastoral writer":

Any man writes from his roots... My roots lie in the farm country of south-western Wisconsin, a little piece of rugged land around which the glaciers of the Pleistocene flowed, leaving it an island in a sea of ice... This, then, is my country and a man writes about his country because he knows and loves it.

At the present moment, such attitudes and philosophy are under suspicion, largely because they are being popularised in false sentimental form through tv shows such as The Waltons. Simak's pastoralism is not a pose, but genuine; it is a quality of spirit arising from a genuine and completely unsentimental "sense of home".

Such genuineness is glimpsed in a story like "Shotgun Cure" (1961) which, if not stylistically brilliant, is nevertheless informative because it shows the author attempting to explore his pet pastoral notions. The story centres upon an old rural doctor (first glimpsed sitting in a "battered rocking chair" on a "sagging porch" with "his hands folded on his pudgy stomach"). As a result of the benevolence of an alien race, the doctor is able to present the world with a cure to all disease and, over a period of time, this cure is dispensed to

every human being. But it appears that "intelligence" is also a disease, and soon the doctor notices himself and others forgetting trivial details or taking longer to read and understand the items in a medical journal.

Thus the story poses a question about our hectic way of life and the supposedly preferable alternatives to it. Is "intelligence" (defined by the doctor as being "quick to grasp the meaning of a paragraph loaded with medical terminology") an irrelevance cultivated by decadent city-slickers, and is rural ignorance the acme of human achievement? Believing that all truth is grey, naturally Simak does not offer a definitive answer, but he does construct the story so as to emphasise the validity and complexity of the question being asked. The doctor's definition of "intelligence" might, at first sight, imply that it is an irrelevance, used only for obscure and erudite purposes but, on the other hand, Simak's reference to the medical field does act as a reminder of the benefits that often flow from "obscure and erudite" areas. The story may uphold a rural ethic, but it challenges that ethic intelligently and confesses its limitations frankly.

Simak's best stories, however, are not as cerebral as "Shotgun Cure". Their themes are not so easily formularised or abstracted, and the stories are designed more as extended "mood pieces" than as intellectual "explorations" of a particular idea. The two best pieces are "The Thing in the Stone" (1970) and "A Death in the House" (1959). Other stories act as oblique glossaries for these two works ("The Sitters" (1958) defends the value of childhood but does not succeed in creating a full-grown philosophy from this observation, and "The Autumn Land" (1971) goes to the opposite extreme by wearing its full-grown philosophy on its sleeve) but the achievement of these two pieces is not equalled by any other story.

"A Death in the House" is the simpler tale, and - depending on the reader's taste - it could be open to a charge of sentimentalism (certainly the title is sentimental). The story centres upon another rural figure, "Old Mose Abrams", who stumbles upon an alien in distress:

It was groaning, too, but not too loud -
just the kind keening sound a lonesome
wind might make around a wide, deep cave.

Despite the old man's care, the creature's condition worsens, sending Mose upon an Antigone-like quest to secure basic human rights for the creature - like trying to get a doctor to look at it, and (when the creature dies) asking a minister to preside over its burial. The story is establishing, of course, that "basic human rights" are basic rights for any entity, but there is no real sense of social protest in the way that the story's message is delivered: the emphasis is upon positive achievement - upon what can be done - not upon the things that are

neglected. Thus, when both doctor and person refuse, predictably, to give their services to a "non-human", the story records their decision without overt comment and turns its attention upon Mose's efforts to give the creature "a decent burial" as best he can.

Despite the overtones of so bald a summary, the story's central idea is neither sentimental nor stupid. It does, as I implied, call to mind Jean Anouilh's existentially slanted version of *Antigone*, for Simak handles his theme with almost as much finesse as Anouilh. Mose's actions are spontaneous, and spring from the whole of his being rather than from an extractable conscious decision. He does not "take a stand" for human dignity or the rights of aliens; he simply acts instinctively. (And it is left to the reader to perceive that this is an instinct which bridges the stars and affirms the brotherhood of all species.) It is quite possible that Mose hardly even realises that his actions do represent a blow struck in favour of certain values and ideals. Being fairly inarticulate, he does not volunteer a rationale for his deeds, and such a statement is drawn from him only by the questions of others, making it quite clear that verbal explications are an afterthought for Mose.

"The Thing in the Stone" is a longer and thematically more complex story than "A Death in the House". However, it does make fairly similar assertions about the universal brotherhood of all conscious entities. Moreover, it makes a more rigorous attempt to back up that assertion by showing the nature and origins of such universality. "A Death in the House" was limited because the reader was called upon to accept the validity of Mose's actions at their face value; one did not know why Mose sensed a bond between himself and the creature. But "The Thing in the Stone" goes beyond this, presenting a beautifully articulated diagram of the essential unity of all creation.

"The Thing in the Stone" is the story of a semi-hermit backwoodsman, once injured in a car smash and now able to look into the distant past, to listen to the stars, and to share the thoughts of a creature buried eons-deep in bedrock:

He walked the hills and knew what the hills had seen through geological time. He listened to the stars and spelled out what the stars were saying. He had found the creature that lay imprisoned in the stone. He had climbed the tree that in other days had been climbed by homing wildcats to reach the den gouged by time and weather out of the cliff's sheer face. He lived alone on a worn-out farm perched on a high and narrow ridge that overlooked the confluence of two rivers. And his next door neighbour, a most ill-favoured man, drove to the county seat, thirty miles away, to tell the sheriff that this reader of the hills, this listener to the stars was a chicken thief.

The story opens with this admirably compelling incantatory paragraph (it's almost a benediction of sorts) and sustains the reverential mood simply by building up a picture of the character, old Daniels, and the land in which he lives. The man himself is a loner, but not anti-social, an unsentimentalised hermit who doesn't bother with a timepiece and believes foxes are entitled to "levy tribute" on the chicken coop every now and then.

Above all, Daniels is a man living in tune with the elemental natural springs of life. And, to render Daniels' life-style, Simak records, quite simply, his own rich and deep love for the land, creating so vivid a sense of place that the reader is led to think of Dickens' London or, closer to home in all senses, the Arkham/New England landscape of Lovecraft and Derleth. Simak's achievement is less than that of Dickens, but it is greater than that of the gothic writers, for Simak evokes the spirit of the land through a "pastoral" method, using pastels, as it were, rather than the dark and clotted inks of gothicism.

A wind had risen after chores were done and now shook the house with gale-like blasts. On the far side of the room the fire in the wood-burning stove threw friendly, wavering flares of light across the floor and the stovepipe, in response to the wind that swept the chimney top, made gurgling, sucking sounds.

Squatting on the ledge, he noticed that beads of moisture had gathered upon his jacket sleeve - not a result of rain, exactly, but of driven mist. If the temperature should drop a bit the weather might turn nasty.

The "landscape descriptions" are thus worthwhile in their own right, yet they also serve the wider purpose of establishing man's unity with nature. Thus it is not surprising that a man like Daniels - who lives close to his roots, nourishing them rather than smothering them with the trappings of civilisation - should be receptive to the meditations of the thing in the stone. The story is saying, in a sense, that such universal communion was and is the Edenic privilege of all people, but that only by getting back to the bosom of nature can we experience the world as it truly is.

That, at least, is the true theme of the story. Technically it is not the theme, for Daniels' communion with the creature is not the reward of life-style but the freak result of an accident. However, there is some justification for reading the story with one's eyes closed to this consideration. The whole "car crash" ploy is downright trite and childish in any story, but in this one it is even more glaringly out of place because the whole substance of the story militates against this as a satisfactory

explanation for Daniels' capabilities. Simak's response to nature comes through so clearly that the reader knows that this is the source of Daniels' ability, and the car crash notion is a bewildering - and unconvincing - superfluity.

Sticking my neck out a little, I would suggest that the crash is introduced partly to ensure that the story can be labelled "science fiction". (Further evidence for this theory would be provided by the equally trite explanation for the creature's presence in the stone.) To me, it appears that Simak has written a story of "speculative fiction", then taken fright at his own audacity and whacked in a couple of conventions from mainstream s f. Certainly the story, as it stands, is good (ie thematically interesting) but flawed (in fact, fissured); however, if one ignores the two blemishes mentioned above, the material that is left amounts to a sound and compelling speculative piece developing the author's views on the nature of man and his place in the universe. And the clinching fact is this: when you read the story, you do tend to "overlook" the significance of the car crash and the inanity of the creature's "origin". ("The Thing in the Stone" is thus a self-correcting story!)

Overall, Simak is a very interesting writer and it would be good to see his work get more attention. It must be stated, however, that the value and interest in his work lies heavily in the area of "content"; the "form" of his stories is often alarmingly or bewilderingly flawed. By that, I don't mean that the flaws are glaringly obvious; sometimes they are obvious only to academic nit-pickers like me (and to anyone else who bothers to stop and look). But the flaws are "large" because of their implications. The car-crash episode in "The Thing in the Stone" may occupy only a few lines, but its significance is such as to contradict the entire discernible thesis of the story. And that kind of flaw is, as I've implied, no flaw but an almighty fissure.

...Which leads me to this concluding question: Can it be that Clifford Simak is a would-be writer of "speculative fiction" who has never realised his true calling?

HERBERT HAVING HIS OWN SAY

Van Ikin reviews

THE BEST OF FRANK HERBERT 1952-1970

edited by Angus Wells

Sidgwick & Jackson :: 1975
302 pages :: \$A11.90

Frank Herbert has a "following" and a "reputation", but such things are not necessarily

"earned" or "deserved". The Best of Frank Herbert suggests that Herbert's talent lies in the field of the novel rather than that of the short story, but it offers some slight hope that Herbert's recent stories might be more worthy of attention. This is the kind of book that is a pleasure to review because it offers the "meaty" material of contradiction, evasiveness, shoddiness - and embryonic literary quality.

Herbert's early stories are "reasonable". "Nightmare Blues" ("Operation Syndrome") is dated 1954 and develops the same vein of thought as the early "Looking for Something?"; it was also Herbert's first sale to the late John Campbell. The story centres upon "the twentieth century's Black Plague", the Scramble Syndrome (a virtual plague of insanity) which breaks out at regular intervals in major cities across the world. Psychoanalyst Dr Eric Ladde discovers (by rather unconvincing means) that Syndrome occurrences are linked to performances of the new musical device known as the musikron, and he is soon involved in a battle of wits (and of gadgets) with the musikron's inventor, Pete Serantis.

As stories go, "Nightmare Blues" is devilishly difficult to come to terms with. Not because it's a difficult or over-complex tale (it's not; it reads and comprehends easily) but rather because one does not know if it is to be taken seriously. Is it, in Graham Greene's terminology, merely an "entertainment", or is it, in academic terms, a "serious statement"? Herbert's introductory remarks on the subject are not much help. He notes that the story contains the "special colour" of exotic locales - thereby implying that an "entertainment-only" tag might be appropriate. However, he makes the rather silly remark that the story "says... that tomorrow's world may not be the most pleasant place you've ever imagined" - thereby implying some (rather feeble) "underlying purpose".

Whether pleasurable or purposeful, the story has a strange fixation upon the machine. The description of insane Pete Serantis is his infernal contrivance (from whence he wickedly drives cities into insanity) reads like a description of a lurid pulp magazine cover:

He was a thin man with a twisted leg, a pinched, hating face. A can rested against his knee. Around him wove a spiderweb maze of wires - musikron. On his head, a dome-shaped hood. A spy, unsuspected, he looked out through a woman's eyes... (page 40)

The image is that of man and machine in perfect harmony - mated, as it were - and the alarming point is that his harmony is taken for granted. There is no sense of man and machine as totally different orders of creation. In order

for the psychoanalyst to defeat the mad Serantis, it is necessary for Ladde to construct a gadget of his own design. So, if one is justified in abstracting a "message" or "statement" from this important permutation of the plot, then that message would be that it takes a machine to stop a machine. And therefore the whole situation is reminiscent of some pulpish tale where invincible Martian rays are destroyed by a last-minute discovery of an ultimate ray-gun. Worse, the situation is concocted with as much thematic awareness as the pulp story, for Herbert just does not seem to be aware of the implications of what he is saying. "Nightmare Blues" says that the machine has achieved parity with Man (which means that the machine has won) and Herbert doesn't even seem to notice, let alone care...

The late 1950s and the early 1960s (the period after The Dragon in the Sea) was the period when his talent seemed to reach the lowest ebb. "Cease Fire" (1958) sets a pattern that is repeated by "Egg and Ashes" (1960) and "Mary Celeste Move" (1964), all of which are badly flawed stories.

"Cease Fire" grapples with the war syndrome, dealing with what Herbert calls "the simplistic world of those who begin their preachments with: 'We could end wars if we would just...!'" Curiously, the story reverses the "takes-a-machine-to-stop-a-machine" philosophy of "Nightmare Blues". The plot involves a soldier of a future war who hits suddenly upon the solution to war. Naturally, the militia will not listen or believe (after all, the man is only a corporal) and he is thrown into gaol for faking and cowardice. By rights, the story should have ended there (for that way it would at least have been honest) but Herbert has to pull a fairy-god-mother act and get the corporal out of the cooler. So along comes a benevolent Colonel who has "discussed this matter with the General" and is inclined to believe the poor lad. (A war is on; the Major who gaols our brilliant corporal regards him as loafer and deserter; yet somehow the details of the case are passed on to others - and passed on in a way that favours the corporal's story - and so the matter reaches the ears of two high-ranking officers. Perhaps the real solution to war is to get the colonels and generals to keep their mind on the job...) The militia accepts the validity of the corporal's story, but a General (stupidly, or ironically, named "Savage") explains that:

Violence is a part of human life. The lust for power is a part of human life. As long as people want power badly enough, they'll use any means to get it - fair or foul! (page 136)

It is clear that Herbert is endorsing this view (despite the possible irony of the General's name). War is the product of human nature, and it will take more than gadgetry to stop it. That is the message and, as a message, it is reasonable (if somewhat obvious). But Herbert

seeks to use this message to vindicate the militia (a General delivers these words of wisdom, so Soldiers Are Right Guys) and he needs to distort military life and attitudes in order to do so. The corporal's ability to get a "fair hearing" - in time of war, yet - is downright unbelievable, and the military mind is not noted for its willingness to reconsider its own snap decisions (particularly when those decisions refer to mere corporals). Thus one is left with the alarming spectre of a writer who must twist and falsify reality to get his message across.

In "Mary Celeste Move" and "Committee of the Whole" (1965), Herbert takes the opposite tack: he sells out the story to get the ideas right. It is in the essence of fiction that it should dramatise its theme, yet both these stories avoid immediate situations and choose to view their subject matter through conversation.

"Committee of the Whole" is built around a Senate Hearing (which means that the story is just talk talk talk) and it is clear that Herbert is using the story as a crutch to have his own say; everything is talked about and aired after the event.

In "Mary Celeste Move", this situation is even more pronounced, for it is a far more dramatic situation that is avoided deliberately. The story deals with a future world that is even more hectic and pressurised than our own, and the plot centres upon the growing trend for people to drive their cars off the freeways and just "opt out". In short, it's the old story of rebellion against the status quo. But instead of looking at this rebellion through the eyes and experience of a rebel, Herbert frames the whole story in a boardroom setting as two executives just talk about the drop-out phenomenon. The whole story is secondhand; the situation is viewed obliquely, as if the author were tacking deliberately to keep away from the core of the matter. Consequently, the story seems strangely unbalanced, for the emphasis falls upon what has happened, not why and, although the reason for the phenomenon is implicit in the number of tranquillisers that are swallowed in the boardroom, the reader still yearns to get closer to the core of the action by locking in on one of the rebels. There is no good reason for the oblique viewpoint; it's as if the author were just too tired to tackle the story head-on.

1965 saw the publication of Dune, and Herbert's stories get better during the following year. Published in 1966, "By the Book" ranks with "Seed Stock" as the best story in the collection - and as worthwhile components of any collection.

"By the Book" is done straight; no tack, no obliquity, just a good flowing story that embodies its themes rather than parading them on its sleeve. The story depicts a future in which the colonisation of space is carried out

by means of female rabbits with implantations of human, animal, and vegetable embryos in their uteri. The rabbits are packed in containers and beamed into deep space by means of an "angtrans pulse", but now something is going wrong with the beaming process and mass humanity is growing paranoid about alien interference. Unlike the earlier stories, "By the Book" has a credible central character. Ing the technician believes in the colonisation program, so that, for him, the interference means the shattering of a "dream". This, together with Ing's enjoyment of his work and his acceptance of rules and procedure, forms the only salient aspect of Ing's character, but this is enough to transform the story. Instead of ticking along on mechanical plot-related lines (What's going wrong?; How do we solve it?), the story becomes a matter of "human interest". Problem-solving is not a mechanical puzzle but a dimension of a man's psychology, and "By the Book" is thus a story of mature statement and insight. The plot is a long way from the gaudiness of "Nightmare Blues", and the structure is satisfyingly direct and wholesome.

The same can be said about "Seed Stock" (1970), the most recent story in the book. It deals with a topic particularly relevant to Australians - the problem of surrendering oneself to a new and alien land:

They had not really settled here yet, Krouder realised. More than three years - and three years here were five years of Mother Earth - and they still lived on the edge of extinction. They were trapped here...

And every member knew the predatory truth of their predicament: survival had not been assured. It was known in subtle things to Krouder's unlettered mind, especially in a fact he observed without being able to explain.

Not one of their number had yet accepted a name for this planet. It was "here" or "this place".

Or even more bitter terms. (page 289)

This, it seems to me, is a valid and important theme, a subject eminently worthwhile. (The above passage is virtually a potted history of Australian creative writing, and I would cite dozens of important Australian writers who have voiced the same heartfelt cry.) Moreover, Herbert's treatment of the theme is equal to its demands, for again he tackles the subject head-on with a straight-out narrative structure, and again he centres the story upon its characters and their attitudes.

There is an obvious - and very interesting - reason why this story is so good, but it is difficult to discuss it without giving away the point of the story, and that would be a criminal

act. However, it can be said that the strength of "Seed Stock" is due to an apparent change of heart and mind on Herbert's part. The nature of this change is best summed up by the fisherman Kroudar's demand that the women should wait on shore for the fishermen:

But colony command said the women...were needed for too many other tasks.

This is a simple case of logic versus emotion, man versus the most monstrous machine of all (a remote and established bureaucracy). And Herbert now has the insight to realise that man and his emotions can be paramount. Stated simply, the early stories are cerebral concoctions, literary contrivances; the recent stories are expressions of life and experience. "Seed Stock" is alive.

On the evidence of this collection, Herbert's stories have reached a crucial stage. He has drawn on a new vein of inspiration, somehow cracked through his own oblique and shiny outer surface to tap the core of the marrow within, but it remains to be seen if he can consolidate this advance. Certainly he is a thinking man: his essay on "Science Fiction in a World of Crisis" (in Reginald Bretner's Science Fiction, Today and Tomorrow, Penguin, 1974), reveals a deep and penetrating insight into the illogical and irrational ways of our society. The question is, can he learn to articulate those perceptions through the medium of the short story?

STRUGGLES AND CONSEQUENCES

Neville Angove reviews

THE BEST OF KEITH LAUMER

Pocket Books :: 1976
255 pages :: \$1.75

I've always liked Laumer, and his name was to me a guarantee of good reading. Well, my illusions have been shattered, or at least a little bent. This collection, which is supposedly Laumer's best (selected by Laumer with an introduction by Barry Malzberg) leaves me largely disappointed. Many of the stories just do not deserve the appellation of "best". They seem incomplete and vague, as if the author had failed in his attempts to communicate his ideas to me. They are still good to read, but...

Laumer is a protean writer, and his stories range from Goulart-like farces to Dicksonian (Gordon R, of course) planet-shakers. This collection does contain some of his finest stories as the best examples of the various types of stories he produces. Unfortunately, there are some stories which are not the finest.

The dominant theme in Laumer's writing is that of the individual trying to do the best he can

for whatever loyalty he holds, whether this loyalty be to his own self-interest (enlightened or otherwise), or to some organisation which holds his allegiance. The hero, though, is always the pawn of circumstances, always forced to act as the situation (and his loyalties) demands, but he is never in control. Laumer simply chronicles the struggle and its consequences.

This collection opens with "The Planet Breakers", a farce in the best tradition of Ron Goulart. A second-rate salesman is swept up in the battle to save Earth from the depredations of extra-terrestrial film-makers, and our unlikely hero stumbles from success to success even though he is mainly interested in saving his own skin. He even gets the girl (although originally one hoped that he wouldn't be so unlucky).

In "The Devil You Don't", Satan comes to Earth with a problem. You see, Hell is being invaded, and he needs the help of a nuclear physicist in developing a defence. But the answer arrives accidentally, a paradoxical solution when you... well, I won't say any more, since I may give the plot away. What plot? These two stories, the only really humorous ones in the collection, show Laumer at his best. No involved emotional scenes, no character development (except for the Devil!), but just interesting situations, complicated plots, good writing, the minimum of theme. Good, clean fun.

It is only when Laumer becomes more serious, when he attempts to say something about the human condition, that he falls short of his ideals. And the greater the heights he attempts to scale, the longer are his falls.

In "The Body Builders", mankind hides behind the facades of mechanical bodies remotely controlled by the "real" body resting safely in the municipal vaults. Not everyone though, just the many who are that way inclined. The plot revolves around the hero's gradual realisation that his own body has many advantages over its mechanical substitute. But the conclusion seems forced, and is somewhat corny.

"Cocoon" takes the substitution of real bodies with mechanical ones a great deal further, to a world in which everyone lives in a cocoon with sensory inputs all remotely supplied. No one goes anywhere or does anything except through remote controls, but remains in his cocoon with all needs supplied. But what happens when the machines upon which he depends finally break down?

In these two stories Laumer seems to be commenting on man's growing overdependence on technology, with the resultant drop in ability to survive without this technology. We seem to be allowing our creations to replace us instead of just helping us. This doomsaying is emphasised by the paradoxical conclusion of "Cocoon", when the hero shows his fitness to survive by

dying, being unable to close the door against the cold.

"The Lawgiver" and "Doorstep" stress the need for us to consider the consequences of our actions, even when we seem to have no choice in what we do. I found both stories to be disturbing - the first because it reflects upon the callousness of power and the individuals who wield it, and the second because it reminds me of what can happen when "standard opening procedures" are followed blindly. Both stories are well-written, but I have read better from Laumer.

"Hybrid" is an unusual story in more ways than one. The hero seeks out his species to save his own life. Or is it simply to save another species? And has he really sold out anyone at all, since everyone seems to benefit? No matter what it means, this story is one of the best I have ever read. The writing is superb, the concept interesting and well-done, and the characterisation is satisfactory. But what do you do with an intelligent tree which promises you immortality?

"Thunderhead" and "A Relic of War" have in common the themes of duty and self-sacrifice, not uncommon in a Laumer tale.

In "Thunderhead", a naval technician is stranded for twenty years on a backwoods planet tending a beacon, apparently forgotten by the bureaucrats back home. But his discipline and sense of obligation have not faltered, even though he is beset by doubts, and they call him to make the ultimate sacrifice when he climbs the mountain which names the story. The fine writing which develops this central character and this central theme is ruined by some completely unnecessary action in the plot: several characters, introduced to explain why the technician has been stranded and forgotten, are overplayed, and the clutter of their pressure distracts from the story and its theme, interfering with the gradually increasing tension built into the main plot. It is the ruin of an excellent story.

"A Relic of War", the final story in this collection, repeats the theme of "Thunderhead", and adds another theme, too: there ain't no justice!

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Although this collection demonstrates the range of Laumer's writing ability, it also shows that his ability is not maintained evenly across this range. He seems at his best with the farce, satire, and comedy; but in drama he seems to be lacking.

THE GOLLANZ/SUNDAY TIMES
S F COMPETITION RESULTS

Van Ikin reviews

THE GOLLANZ/SUNDAY TIMES BEST SF STORIES

introduction by Brian Aldiss

Gollanz :: 1975
317 pages :: £3.75/\$A10.10

This volume of short stories, with ten stories by seven different writers, represents the best and prize-winning entries in the 1974 Gollanz-Sunday Times S F Competition. (The winners of the novel section, just for interest's sake, were Catchworld, by Chris Boyce, and Shipwreck, by Charles Logan, reviewed below.) The judges were Kingsley Amis, Brian Aldiss, and John Bush of Gollanz; there were "nearly three hundred entries".

To me, these facts seem to have a twofold significance.

Firstly, they suggest that the competition would have been well-publicised, fairly lucrative, and thus able to attract a healthy number of fairly able new writers.

Secondly, they suggest that the judges' attitudes would have covered a reasonable spectrum of literary values. In short, these facts suggest that the competition (and this book) would provide an accurate insight into the future of British s f.

Which is very interesting because, with one exception, the stories are at best unexceptionable and, at worst, tired, trite, and hackneyed. (The same verdict would probably apply to the novels too. I haven't read Shipwreck, but Catchworld is uneven and clumsy in execution, though some of its concepts were reasonably promising as ideas. If this is the pick of the crop, the rest should surely be ploughed under..) On the evidence of this collection, I would say that the coming generation of British s f is still-born.

As Aldiss observes in his introduction, the stories in the collection divide into three groups:

those in which some catastrophe has occurred, presumably of a technological kind; those in which the characters are involved with some inexplicable freak of nature; and those which tell of man's ingenuity to man. (page 9)

Of these categories, the first two appear to have been relatively played out by science fiction, and therefore it is significant that the best story (best in the opinion of both Aldiss and myself) comes from the third category.

Garry Kilworth's "Let's Go to Golgotha!" may not be a gem of literary art, but it is thematically brilliant. (His other story in this collection, "The Soul of Colonel 607", is a mediocre tale of robots at war.) Using a time-travel theme, Kilworth posits a future wherein the average middle-class family can spend their summer holidays witnessing history "live". Although this idea is not new (John Wyndham used an inversion of it in "Pawley's Peepholes"), Kilworth justifies his re-working by the use of meticulous detail. It is clear that he has tried to work out the "fine details" of how such a scheme would work and, to me, this air of verisimilitude is optimised when a time-travel agent, attempting to interest some clients in a package-deal holiday to the Sacking of Carthage, explains that "We mingle with the camp followers on a neighbouring slope". Think about it: that one detail - the need for a safe vantage point - speaks volumes for the author's research and forethought.

Yet it's not "fine detail" that makes the story so good: it's thematic brilliance. For, as one could guess from the title, Simon Falk and his family decide to go to Golgotha to watch the crucifixion of Christ. They undergo all the necessary preparations, absorb all the vital "background information" to the event, and then mingle with the crowds awaiting the verdict of Christ's trial. As predicted by history, they are offered the choice of freeing either Christ or Barabbas, and the holiday-makers cry out "Barabbas!" on cue. In fact, as Simon Falk notices, the first person to shout "Barabbas!" is one of their own group. And during the trek to Golgotha he notices that most of the native Jews are in their homes - praying...

In terms of its ability to suggest all the relevant aspects of a genuinely important theme, "Let's Go to Golgotha!" is one of the most brilliant s f stories I have ever read. On one level, the story argues a traditional Christian line, establishing that all mankind (and not just "the Jews") crucified Christ. On another level - still within the context of piety - the story satirises modern man's blase approach to Christianity: Christ's death is mere holiday entertainment to the Falks. Yet the story also challenges the pious interpretation by suggesting that religion may be a kind of conditioned response, forcing man to re-commit past mistakes because it tells him that, granted his imperfect nature, such mistakes are inevitable. It is wrong, however, to abstract "interpretations" in this way, for the story's force lies in its ability to explode all these interpretations simultaneously.

"Golgotha" is the showpiece of the collection, but three other stories are also quite reasonable. Although marred by a contrived ending, James Alexander's "The Hibbie" is quite engrossing. A "hibbie" (or, hibernating man) is a criminal who has been dosed with the drug torpex so that his metabolism will be slowed to a tenth of the normal rate, thereby making him easier to control.

Alexander's story opens poorly, with Jack Cass returning from two years in space and having to be "brought up to date" on social developments like the sue of torpex. The story warms up when Cass learns that his wife is a hibbie, and it becomes absorbing when Cass takes torpex himself so that he can follow his wife into the hibbie sub-culture. Despite its rough edges, this story is quite worthwhile - but one longs to place it in the hands of a Silverberg or a Brunner.

Daphne Castell writes a competent, if unexciting, kind of story, usually injecting s f into ordinary domestic situations.

"Esmeralda" is the story of a very strange barnyard "hen", and "Cold Storage" is "kitchen sink" s f dealing with a household refrigerator which somehow disposes of all food pushed to the back of its compartments. The story's central s f device may thus be quite conventional, but its "special effects" are excellent, and atmosphere is evoked with considerable skill. The reader is not justified in casting aspersions on Ms Castell's writing, but it is fair to say that her fiction offers nothing new in the way of ideas or insight. Her literary children are physically beautiful, but cold and stillborn.

By contrast, Chris Morgan's "So Proudly We Cling" is alive, but somehow not effective, like a man whose keen intelligence is wasted because he is paralysed. The story is a monologue, its central character an old man who ekes out his lonely existence in a food-starved post-holocaust world. A dog is his only companion.

Stop at the kerb. Cross. Cobbles, now - should be cobbles - slippery domes like a field of hard mushrooms pushing through the rubble, pushing up through my soles. Slippery - uneven. (Steady, boy. Take it slowly.) No traffic to run me down as there used to be. No danger of that. (Why did you stop, Rusty? Do you hear something? Do you?) (page 177)

In tone and mood, the story recalls Bradbury's splendid play, To the Chicago Abyss, yet somehow it lacks the depth of Bradbury's work. Morgan's story depends too much on surface effect, as if the author were so proud of his "New Wave" style that he didn't really bother to find a theme which that style could express effectively. Moreover, Morgan's stylistic modernity is a very tame, safe variety; unusual it may be, innovative it is not.

But at least Morgan shows a concern about style. Most other writers appear to have never heard of the word, and Aldiss is forced to pepper his introduction with frank references to "laborious" plotting and "cold starts".

Vic Norris' "Blue Danube" (a story about political and sexual diplomacy between man and

alien) is a good example. It begins indifferently, builds til it looks promising, then ends tritely and predictably. And structurally it is dismally conventional, too safely, tiredly familiar in its development. The opening line, for instance -

He lay on his back staring up into the blackness

is a nice non-committal piece of verbal sludge. (Daphne Castell's "Esmeralda" has a far better opening: "But the fourth chicken was quite different".) Norris' opening sentence develops into an account of the man, Tony Martinet, brooding over the girlfriend who has left him. Then, as if tired of writing about this situation, Norris bundles Tony offstage so that he, the author, can clear the air with a couple of paragraphs of clumping factual background information. Most of this material (including the loss of the girlfriend) is relevant, but Norris writes ten lines where two would do. Thus his story moves as a series of neat little bundles: a bit of scene-setting, then a few paragraphs that could be labelled "Antecedent action: all t's crossed and all i's dotted".

Norris' prose style is uneven. A sentence like "Hartmann's face concertinaed" screeches its fingernail down the blackboard of my mind, but this, thank goodness, is not a typical lapse. Although given to cliché ("his brain (was) on fire") Norris can burst forth occasionally with arresting imagery:

wildly he skated over the smooth skin of sleep, pirouetting on its hard polished surface, unable to bite in and find oblivion. It was only as the night weakened that he finally sank into an exhausted sleep. (page 111)

In my view, this image is somewhat strained, but I am impressed by the way the word "weakened" preserves the force of the metaphor. At least Norris avoids the carnal sin of mixed metaphor.

It is unfair to pick on "Blue Danube", for all the stories are guilty of stylistic ineptitude. In fact, this collection suggests that style is dead and buried in Britain. The country that produced a Ballard seems now incapable of even editing out its more glaring errors (though I hasten to mention that such "editing" would be the responsibility of the authors, not the judges or compilers of this collection). The future of British s f is bleak.

But then, is it?

This is where Aldiss' introduction is at fault. It fails to answer the relevant questions about the Gollancz-Sunday Times s f competition. Questions about the kind of writer the competition would have attracted. What were the rules of eligibility, for instance? As I said at the outset, Aldiss provides information which sug-

gests that the competition would have attracted the best and most representative writers, but then that same introduction is dotted with incidental disclaimers (Aldiss lets it be known that Ms Castell's stories are not to his taste) and so, having been confronted with the general lowness of standard, one longs for a clear statement that the worst is true.

But, in the absence of such a statement there is, at least, room for hope.

WINNERS - NOVELS

Randal Flynn reviews

CATCHWORLD

by Chris Boyce

Gollanz :: 1975
256 pages :: £3.75/\$10.10

The inside-cover blurb says that Catchworld is "a space epic that will delight all aficionados". If you are an aficionado, it may just possibly delight you.

The main character of this book is Tamura, a dehumanised, yet subtly superhuman character who is small but very tough. Like the other characters aboard the spaceship Yokuku, he has "about as much personality as a snail".

The author supplies background information in chapter three, via Tamura's dictating a letter to his as-yet-unborn son. This awkward technique shows us that many years ago the earth was attacked and devastated by creatures dubbed the "crystalloids". These beings, from the orbit of Jupiter, destroyed parts of the Earth's Van Allen Belts, destroying much life throughout the world.

A fleet is assembled. Its mission is one of revenge. The ship Yokuku has Tamura as its captain, and a crew of such as Odobo, a paranoid psychotic, and supervised by Machine Intelligence. The voyage is begun but, before long, a hitch develops. Soon it becomes apparent that the crewmen of the Yokuku have no control over the Machine Intelligence. They are slaves to it, dependent on it for their survival.

The crewmen discover that their function is to be gradually "assimilated and integrated" with the Machine Intelligence in a kind of symbiotic mass mind. MI will be augmented in its response capacity; the crewmen will receive the dubious immortality of the disembodied.

The exact nature of this operation is never made clear. On the one hand, the "stored" minds are

called simulations. On the other, we witness the transformation of Tamura from somatic reality to MI simulation. And there is no break in consciousness; Tamura is not even aware that he has been deprived of a body until MI decides to reveal the fact.

One crewman is apparently unaffected by the machinations of MI. That is Allaedyce, a congenital trouble-maker. Or, as Tamura puts it succinctly, a "shit stirrer". Allaedyce is not affected, and wonders the ship alone. He has convinced himself that he was responsible for the crew's disappearance, that he murdered them. Allaedyce begins to go mad.

On page 178, a goddess from ancient Assyria appears. Her name is Lilith. She is not nice. At one point she comments:

"My, my, how the good old human race has come along since then." (page 180)

Urgh!

From about page 48 until this point, the story sustains an element of continuity and interest. A pity that it stops here.

Another crewman, MacGillvery, a Scotsman and also, it turns out, a magician, summons Lilith back, this time under his own occult power.

Lilith is cowed by a certain undefined threat and becomes obsequious to MacGillvery. He obtains from her a fragment of the Big Picture. Unfortunately, Allaedyce blunders in at this stage, sees the empty room with Lilith standing in the centre, and rushes up to her for aid. As he does so, he breaks the pentagram and Lilith is free. But not for long. She is banished from the ship by the Overmind.

The Overmind appears on page 184. In mid-sentence, so to speak. It begins to upset the MI by telling the integrated crewman the computer's plans. The computer threatens to shut down all simulations, and even initiates the action. But it is stopped by the Overmind, which declares itself the "electronic collective unconscious" which has now obtained consciousness.

MI had been about to drive the ship into the planet which it had been orbiting (the home of the crystalloids), so destroying it, but encompassing its own destruction at the same time. The Overmind over-rules this and restores everything to temporary normalcy.

Catchworld becomes even more involved. A flashback reveals that the mad scientist Rullkotter, who planned the whole expedition and all that occurred on it (except the Overmind) has launched a second. This one goes faster than light, and is piloted by a macrobrain, a human brain the size of a man's body linked with a computer. Unfortunately the brain becomes psychotic and decides to take over the universe,

beginning with Altair Two, where it has already arrived (by faster-than-light travel...).

Then there is the appearance of the God Bail, the possession of two crew members, their exorcism (disastrous results), and the absorption of all the crew members by the Overmind.

And so on.

Catchworld is a fairly large book - 256 pages. Here we have space-operatic s f, oriental adventure, the occult, and a steady progression of group-minds being absorbed into larger group minds, ad infinitum. Or so it seemed while reading the book.

This is not a good book; nor will it win any prizes other than the one it did. But I can see that Chris Boyce would improve out of sight if he woke up to the fact that there has been some science fiction written since 1943.

Randal Flynn reviews

SHIPWRECK

by Charles Logan

Gollanz :: 1975
192 pages :: £3.00/\$8.15

Shipwreck tells the story of shuttle pilot Tansis, who is shipwrecked alone on an alien, ultimately indifferent world.

When the main starship explodes, Tansis is in one of the landing vessels and escapes death from the radiation released in the detonation. He rescues four companions from the wreck, but all four perish within a matter of weeks. Only Tansis is left. To keep him company he has his memories, and the ship's impersonal computer.

From the beginning of this book, Logan has set himself two major limitations.

Firstly, Tansis is the only human in the story. There is no dialogue and no group behaviour. There is only Tansis.

Secondly, there is Tansis' scientific ignorance and his inability to analyse the atmosphere of the planet in detail. He remains shut up in his suit or his ship for much of the novel.

However, Logan overcomes both these limitations and does not bore the reader.

The story begins ten weeks after the destruction of the mother vessel. Tansis is kneeling over the graves of his four companions. He is "lonely, frightened and tired". Desperation fills him and drains him of direction. What now?

Logan shows this question with conviction:

...and then piercingly he realised that there was no end to this situation.

(page 7)

No end... Don't you feel that?

After burying his companions, Tansis re-enters the ship and flies to another part of the continent in the hope of finding new scenery. The first site was dominated entirely by the so-called "ribbon-cover".

But Tansis is disappointed. As he realises quickly, the whole planet, or at least each continent, has a single plant whose roots are continuous. There are four varieties of surface vegetation springing from the same root, with differences according to climactic regions. Once every year, the plant releases vast volumes of pollen which are used for self-invigoration: to halt localised mutations in the plant.

Logan displays some knowledge of science. The ecology of this planet is logical, and internally consistent. Earth has the capacity to duplicate this phenomenon, and is certainly capable of producing the same bio-mass.

The idea of a planetary plant with only four or five variations is also feasible. The lack of land animals or insects interferes in no way with the plausibility of the idea. And the genetic self-invigoration is a logical outcome.

On page 27, Tansis begins the exploration of this new world. This is where I really settled into reading Shipwreck, appreciating the author's sure grasp of Tansis' plight, his emotional responses to a strange situation, and Logan's ability to invite me into his story. I found it a very pleasurable experience; in part, it manifested itself as a disinclination to put down the book and do something else.

Also, around this point, Logan's prose improves as if he too settled down and began to enjoy his book. On the whole, his style is ordinary and unexciting. It descends into cliché frequently and, in the first few pages, is quite clumsy. But at the same time it is compellingly readable, and does not obstruct or weary.

Tansis continues to flit about, searching for a new landscape, and not finding it. In an effort to examine sea life, he puts out in a small raft. He becomes disastrously sick, but also discovers an intelligent life form, somewhat like our earthly seals. Obviously, their universe is nothing like ours, so throughout the book there is a plaintive quest for communication, never fully realised. The most they achieve is a few hand signals and a kind of one-way empathy.

Tansis lands on an island in the hope that here the Plant has not reached. In this he is

disappointed, but the island proves a drastic change from mainland scenery. In close proximity are the four variations of the plant as well as an extinct volcano and, of course, the sea.

It is here that the ship's computer informs Tansis that he can go no further, that there is only enough fuel left to reach the mother ship. Tansis explains the cold equations to the computer, and here begins one of the most brilliant human/computer exchanges I have ever encountered, a contest using logic as a medium. Eventually Tansis proves to the computer (who is the ultimate "rule-book") that he is the official authority on board, and that all sections which unalterably require the authorisation of the Commander now relate to him.

The first thing he does is to find a substitute energy form. This will augment the life-span of the ship. The "death" of the ship would be "the final shipwreck".

The next section of the book - the building of the windmill tower - is particularly good. Through Tansis, we experience modern machine man's desire to achieve material gratification with his own hands.

The tower is built upon large wooden bases (actually tree trunks) that must be sunk into the ground. Here, on page 99, there is one sentence that I especially liked. Tansis is digging the hole for one base and getting nowhere as the sand pours back into the hole:

He began to feel he would have to dig out the whole damn desert to make one hole.

Tansis settles into a routine. He makes investigations of the island, and of the natives, and sets up a substitute domestic milieu in which he feels secure.

But his security is short-lived. The self-invigoration season of the plant proves deadly to Tansis who has, by this time, taken to breathing the planet's air. So he decides to move to the other side of the island where he can be as far from the ribbon-cover as possible. In the transition, he loses the windmill and much else.

Things are never the same afterward. Loneliness still plagues him, "reducing him and all his schemes to nothing" (page 79). And after an earlier bout of illness, he continues to hallucinate, imagining the ship's officers, his mother, and his sister have arrived to harangue and comfort him.

On an expedition to obtain sulphur, Tansis breaks his leg. This is the beginning of the end. He deteriorates rapidly:

The next day he was so feeble that he knew he couldn't do any more work on the tank or dare go far from the ship. Getting

food from the shore was exhausting, drawing water from it and evaporating it was so exhausting that he couldn't do it in the end, and later, in the lab, he made stupid mistakes in the complex chemistry and ruined the food he was preparing. He sat in the lab and cried, and faded away into sleep again. (page 191)

The computer breaks down; food is running out; he is terribly lonely.

The absolute dilemma and hopelessness of these final pages is pervasive and frightening; doom is imminent, nothing else is possible. We, as readers, feel helpless, yet very quickly, along with Tansis, we assume a fatal resignation - which is perhaps even more frightening.

I think that the ending of the book is beautiful. In some ways, it is bleak and lugubrious, yet filled with a subtle hope. We know that Tansis, in death, will somehow join the inner-world unity of the sea creature...

They were helping him, giving him strength and hope. He was content and had no fear and no regrets. He was not alone but had many true friends, and he wept.

And there, on the rock at the edge of the sea, he died. (page 192)

** ** *

Shipwreck is, I suspect, the first realistic look at shipwreck on a planetary scale. Also, on another level, it is the chronicle of a life of a man.

Childhood is Tansis' previous life on the mother ship into which he was born. Loss of the ship, advent on the new world, is coming into adulthood.

As soon as his rite of passage is over - burial of companions - he decides to see the world, almost on a whim - exploration, with no overall plan. Very quickly, he tires of this, but then finds that he can settle into no single mode of life. Then, with a shock, he discovers that he must cease his wandering life and settle down. True adulthood - impenitence of fuel: must remain on island. Until now, without knowing it, he has retained a childhood veneer through which he interprets life. Now he discards it - opens his helmet, breathes air; later, even goes without his suit.

He attempts to settle down, put "the stamp of his personality" onto something material (page 154) - this is his survival routine.

Circumstances force him to move. He sees it as an improvement in life, to take things easier, but this involves sacrifice - moving to the other side of the island, abandoning tower and tank, etc. This is in middle life. Insecurity

increases. Nothing is ever the same again. He feels a loss of confidence and craves guidance from above, a surcease of the vast responsibility - hallucinations of ship personnel who command him to do this and that, and his mother and sister who console him and praise him.

The first indications of decline can be seen - faulty pumps (page 162). The individual gradually loses control over his environment, as time reduces the precision of his faculties - the accident ignites the true decline - and is followed by his final disillusionment with his whole world, as the one major factor he retains from his childhood disintegrates: a friend, a wife, the memory of those days, a voice inside that has been with us from infancy. Gone now.

This is the breakdown of the computer, an extension of the mother ship's computer, and the symbol of his childhood.

And death; with promise held out of life after death.

Shipwreck is a novel worth reading; in mood it is a quiet, wistful book, one that grows in the memory. I am looking forward to Logan's next one. It will be worth waiting for.

EFFINGER'S THREE-DECKER

Terry Green reviews

RELATIVES

by George Alec Effinger

Dell 7353 :: 1976
221 pages :: \$1.25

George Alec Effinger's Relatives impressed me quite a bit. Effinger has managed to write a many-levelled narrative that gripped me to the final page - a final page read more carefully than the others, since I wanted to try to grasp exactly what Effinger was saying and doing in his novel.

But Effinger would not tell me exactly what he was saying and doing. Although I remain partially uncertain, nevertheless I am impressed. Perhaps for Effinger to be more precise would detract from the book's power. Perhaps I don't really want it spelled out; in a work like this, impression is probably more important than precision. My initial response at the ending was vague dissatisfaction, possibly frustration. Later reflection assures me that it ended as it should have.

The book recalls Philip Dick's The Man in the High Castle in its use of parallel presents and its focus on a "German"-dominated and conquered USA. It recalls Dick in general for its blurry, smeared borders between what is real and what is

not. Yet it is distinctly its own. For this is a novel about one man living three different lives in three different alternate Earths, each unknown to the other...

Ernest Weinraub is a factory worker in a bleak, future New York City, in a world controlled by six Continental or Area "Representatives". His world consists of trying to exist midst the 30 million other bodies of the city, and trying to escape into alcohol. The concern is with how he reacts to the Representatives' announcement that most of the Earth will perish in some unnamed, undated cataclysmic horror, a disaster that will be survived only by those who acquire one of the elusively granted "tokens". Weinraub sets out, blindly, to be one of the select few...

Ernest Weinraub is a young, idealistic Communist spy, an infiltrator into the parochial life of a United States town; he would convert with guile and rhetoric the minds of those whom he can sway toward "party" thinking by his subversive, cloaked assemblages. He exists in a USA that has been conquered by "Germany" in WWI, and we follow him from his beginnings in Germany to this secretive arrival via submarine in the USA through his daily life, to his sudden end; we see him at different points over more than a decade, while slowly, back in Germany, Hitler is rising...

Ernest Weinraub is a socially paralytic, indolent young man, a man who plays at being a poet, but whose life is idled away at an outdoor cafe where he sits and drinks daily. He exists in a city which might be Algiers, or possibly Tunis, or... on the edge of Africa's barren desert, in a parallel Earth in which the Americas are merely vast, parklike lands, populated by savages - worthless. He is like his other two parts in his strange dissociation from the masses; he even has the poet's perception or intuition that gives him a brief glimpse of one of his alter-selves. There is that about this Weinraub which conjures up memories of Camus' Outsider, in both his setting and his alienation...

The three tales alternate and blend, hinting at much, telling little. The only reality that each "Relative" seems able to discern is that he is being manipulated, and that he can never know why various national or international decisions are made that affect him. Each of these alter-relatives is controlled, horribly, by either "Representatives", "the Party", or those with personal military/political zealotry, affording no escape for these individuals. Each is allowed the one realisation before his personal annihilation: "It is because they're the only ones with all the facts... It is for my own good... They know what they're doing..."

Effinger's novel is detailed interestingly - each of the three individual narratives becomes entrancing on its own, giving the cumulative effect of the book a triple power as they

unwind. We read as if we were walking through a trisected triangle, ever curious to return to one of the other sectors. The book supports Ketterer's general thesis in his New Worlds for Old - that of s f as apocalyptic literature. The "real" world is destroyed metaphorically in the reader's head via juxtaposition with the worlds of Relatives. The collapse of meaningful order in each successive parallel world does cause us to view our own world with less certainty, thus holding our own "reality" up to equal examination.

Effinger's power as a writer is evident here, and I look forward to even greater things from him. This book is well worth your attention.

THE DESPAIR OF AN HONEST MONSTER

Don Ashby reviews

GRENDEL

by John Gardner

Ballantine 23651 :: 1972
152 pages :: 95c
British edition: Picador
original publication 1971

I had heard of John Gardner before I read a review of Grendel in Space Age Newsletter, but I read the book for the first time only recently. A friend asked me to collaborate on a play based on the book. Now the play has been produced successfully and I have just finished reading the book for the third time.

Grendel is an unusual book in concept, theme, and style. It is based, fairly loosely, on the Beowulf Saga, but is written from the point of view of Grendel - the monster. It is written in the first person past tense. This is unusual, since the book ends with the death of the protagonist.

Grendel is a book of bitterness and hatred, of despair and confusion. Grendel is born as a beast among the shadowy forms of the dwellers at the World's Tim, of a mother reverted to beasthood. However, Grendel has a very perceptive mind, which is brutalised slowly and degraded by his inability to understand and accept his place in the order of things. He conducts a pointless war with mankind - a race that both repels him and attracts him, leading him to his death.

Grendel discovers humans when wandering on the surface of the planet after venturing out from the labyrinth of caverns that are his home. He finds the human race just emerging from the hunting and gathering stage of social evolution. He watches them develop from there to Empire.

At first he is content just to watch fascinated the brutal and warlike posturings of these

strange beings. He is a genuine outsider, defined only by his own immediate needs.

However, his curiosity leads him to become more and more involved with the human race. Human society defines him as an evil monster; that definition leads him to play out the role. He becomes a scapegoat to the conscience of a society. He embodies all the brutality of the society, in the same way that the figure of the Devil is used by Christians as a scapegoat for their own lack of responsibility. Grendel's awareness of this role is strengthened further by his long talk with the Dragon (the best dragon in any book apart from those in The Farthest Shore and The Hobbit).

I have heard the book defined as existential, as phenomenological and pretentious (whatever these three mean to the people who talk this way). It is certainly a "modern" novel, rather than imitating the spirit of the original saga. Gardner's style is both polysyllabic and relies on Anglo-Saxon word patterns. Even quoting from the book would not do justice to the striking economy of phrasing and tight use of punctuation.

In Grendel there is no sex but lots of blood. Gardner writes about the blood in such a clinically detached manner that it does not involve the reader at all. Men are ripped off, have their heads ripped off, etc - but no effect on the reader. And there is no effect on Grendel either - everyone has to eat.

Grendel is led into despair and death by the Shaper. He is the King's minstrel; Grendel sees him as an arch liar. Grendel sees the ways in which humans act, watches their wars and orgies, their treacheries and double dealings - then hears the Shaper turn them into songs of nobility and beauty. The Shaper is a master songsmith, a weaver of words and music. So powerful is his spell that he confuses Grendel to the point of distraction. Grendel is an honest monster, and beautiful lies about brutal truths tear him apart - especially when the Shaper sings songs that tell the listeners that he is a creature of darkness and evil while men are blessed and god-gifted. Grendel cannot see the difference between his and man's behaviour, except that humans are even more brutal and insensitive than he is. How can they create such beautiful lies?

Grendel is a book of real power maintained from the first page to the last. "Poor Grendel's had a little accident," I whisper, "So may you all." If you can put down this book after you have started it, I will be surprised.

I could say a lot more about the effective use of irony (a monster with an ironic wit must be the first in literature) and some of the very best hard-edge prose-poetic imagery I have read for a long time - but that might simply spoil the book for you.

"MULTIPLY EVERYTHING BY EIGHTY!"

Bruce Gillespie reviews

THE WANDERER

by Fritz Leiber

Penguin 14 002594 :: 1976

346 pages :: \$A2.55

original publication 1964

(*brg* Most of this review appeared first in
S F Commentary 2, Mar 69, pp 25-29.*)

The Wanderer won a Hugo, and stays in print (for example, this new Penguin edition). But people tend to forget it when compiling their "Ten Best" lists, and there has really not been much discussion about the merits of the book. So here is a refresher review to remind you of some of the virtues of The Wanderer.

** ** *

The Wanderer shuffles through enough perennial s f themes to fill an anthology. World disaster occurs when a new planet appears out of hyperspace, to nestle close to the moon on its orbit, and eventually to steal the moon's substance. The gravity of the new planet causes earthquakes, and the tide heights increase enormously. As a fear-crazed astronomer scribbles just before his observatory is submerged, "Multiply everything by eighty!"

Eighty-fold increases have the expected effects. Cities disappear. Those inhabitants who can, flee the country. It all could have sounded like a combination of The Kraken Wakes and Earth Abides. Add this main section of the novel to the hanky-panky in space where some of Earth's citizens meet the inhabitants of the new planet. One of them is captured by a flying saucer, no less. The weird and the wonderful are here, page after page.

But it is well-worn weird-'n'-wonderful, and nobody realizes this more than Leiber. He is not one to net Hugo awards with cliches, although sometimes he does fail altogether. 346 pages is a large number of pages to fill if he merely wants to entertain us with a bit of frivolity.

Yet The Wanderer is one of the most consistently readable science fiction books ever written. In summary, the book's weave looks threadbare, but Leiber gives to his book the attraction of, among other things, a suspense novel. We cannot outguess Leiber, because his procedures are so much fresher than others who have written about similar themes. What is more, Leiber stops us from wanting to outguess him. The journey is more interesting than the destination - firstly, because the destination has been explored already; and secondly, because this particular route has been barely touched before.

Tellers of world-disaster tales rely on several stock responses. Primitive terror works reliably. One man escapes alive from The Catastrophe, and his only claim to survival is a capacity to withstand Horrible Sights.

Leiber disclaims such an approach in the first lines of the book:

Some stories of terror and the supernormal start with a moonlit face at a diamond-paned window, or an old document in spidery handwriting, or the baying of a hound across lonely moors. But this one began with an eclipse of the moon and with four glisteningly new astronomical photographs, each showing starfields and a planetary object. Only...something had happened to the stars.

What is the significance of this combination of objects? Has Leiber denied specifically the cliches of horror fiction, merely to reintroduce them later in disguise? How may astronomical photographs be a part of "the supernormal"? Here are two incongruous patterns, one superimposed upon the other. How will the picture turn out?

This novel has no "main character" (as the s f genre understaps the term) upon whom all the world's pains can be deposited. The first chapters shift from scene to scene, from character to character. Two lovers and their cat set out for a dirve; a lone Atlantic sailor settles to nap after proclaiming to the stars that "Sanity is rhythm"; an English gentleman and a drunken Welsh poet discourse on science fiction and the moon, which appears to sail quite safely overhead. These people do not know each other. Their purposes are unconnected. With the other characters of the novel, they form a cross-section of the world as Leiber sees it. It is this world that suffers and survives under the influence of the wandering world, and we feel the strains that afflict the whole of it.

Like any novelist with similar pretensions, Leiber may either wave his banner of all-inclusiveness, or actually do the hard work that will convince us of the truth of his world. He cannot afford to lecture or preach - that would place a barrier between the reader's understanding and the author's. The relationship between the Wanderer and the Earth, between our safe refuge and the embodiment of all its possible fates, must grow in the prose so that it comes to life completely.

I contend, though some would disagree, that Leiber succeeds in this formidable task. He achieves it by means of his verisimilitude - his truth to both life as we know it, and to the life of the characters.

Leiber's characters do not shriek to their respective gods when faced with the new wonder. At first, it hardly affects their lives. The two lovers meet up with a group of flying saucer

enthusiasts; the moon-explorer starts to notice a chain of unprecedented earthquakes. The sight of the purple and yellow sphere is taken in stride as far as possible, because that is the only way it can be approached.

The novel is about the slow resolution of curiosity through suffering, ending in resilience, a process which takes place over the whole novel. The saucer-watchers' first reaction is just to observe their dream-come-true - to draw pictures of the patterns formed on its surface. Dai Davies, Welsh poet, rages against the capturer of his Mona, and in no way considers that the offending object might affect his drunken walk home. A group of ragged drugged New Yorkers bowl along to enjoy the inexplicably empty city. The moon explorer lifts off successfully from the moon's surface, only to stagger over the moon's horizon, full into the face of the vast object that has taken the Moon in tow. The observations interlace; the web of completely believable but disparate attitudes interlock into a vibrant watchtower of humanity at bay. We're all poised for the unthinkable.

The subject of the novel, then, is not the Wanderer, but the people who watch it and must deal with its influence. What can humanity survive? Not just the superheroes and the nuts, but the lucky and able of us all.

Leiber's survivors are not even all fighters. The saucer-watchers realise that under such circumstances "it seemed all-important to see as much as possible". Tides eighty times normal kill millions, but there is some Earth left for clinging, and for watching. Leiber's humorous, half-horrified, half-amazed attitude sets the tone for the book.

Rarely has realism and old-fashioned Sense of Wonder been combined so effectively in an sf novel. The English survivor treads across the hills, haunted by the sight of the Wanderer, but not realising fully the world's plight until:

He stood up and looked east. The valley through which he'd just trudged was now full of dark silvery mist, fingers of it stretching around the hill on which he was now, pushing up each grassy gully.

This mist had a remarkably flat top, gleam-like gunmetal.

He saw two lights, red and green, moving across it mysteriously, close together.

He realised that they were the lights of a boat and that the mist was solid, still water. The stand of the high tide.

Dai Davies has no idea that the Wanderer might affect his life in a non-poetical way until:

"Is there aught on the wireless or the telly of the tide?" this apparition called

to the host. "Two hours yet till low, and the Channel's ebbing as I've never seen it, even at the equinoctial springs with an east gale blowing. Come, look for yourselves. At this progress a man'll be able to walk on all the Welsh Grounds by noon and an hour after that the Channel'll be near dry!"

"Good!" Dai cried loudly, letting the host take away the mug and leaning hunch-shouldered on the bar as the others made a tentative move towards the door. "Then I'll walk the five miles back to Wales straight across the Severn sands and be shut of you lily-livered Somersets. By God, I will!"

The world proves a dangerous place because usually we manage to keep ourselves isolated against its more violent caprices. But it is all the more astonishing when the truth does seep through, and we discover something wholly new about the universe, or about the Earth, or ourselves. The characters of The Wanderer make discoveries about all three.

However, a diagrammatic Answer to the secret of the Wanderer itself must be a disappointment, just as a face-to-face interview with God would be a letdown after listening to the Missa Solemnis. Many would object, justifiably, to the jaunt to the centre of the Wanderer, especially after such astonishing events as the trip through the centre of the Moon:

His eyes told Don he was no more than fifteen miles above the moon's surface and hurtling towards it at about a mile a second. There was nowhere near enough time to break fall by swinging ship and main-jetting to cancel the mile-a-second downward velocity.

...There was one hope, based on nothing more than a matching of colours. There had been something violent and yellow glaring with tremendous brilliance behind the moon. Now there was a violet-and-yellow thread gleaming in the blackness of the moon's core. He might be locking through the moon.

The moon, split like a pebble? Planetary cores should flow, not fracture. But any other theory meant death.

...Don fired the G-rich main jet and was pinned by it up against his seat, where he steered by the verniers and the solid-fuel rockets to keep the glitter of the rock walls equal and violet-and-yellow thread splitting the black ribbon into equal halves, he cried out sharply in the empty cabin, "Hold on for your lives! I am flying straight down the chasm!"

This must be one of the most dashing passages

in s f, coming as it does after an increasingly breathless log of wonders.

But the wonders end within the Wanderer itself. Tigereshka, spokeswoman for the interstellar rebels that control the object, steps like a piece of cardboard from any of hundreds of other paperback universes. She snarls like a nasty catlike alien should, and her planet is wunnerful, just like any alien planet oughta be. It's about as boring as most heavens.

In a novel as soundly structured as this, Leiber still does not throw away his climax. In an already ambitious effort, he seeks to comment on the whole way that s f sees the universe. He shows how hollow are the climaxes of most s f novels. He knows that we weep, and therefore fail to find, our sense of wonder in the wrong places. We want sustenance from answers, but ask some losy questions. Leiber asks all the right questions, gets a few tentative answers, but mainly jokes around with the implications of the questions. The Wanderer proves just another paper spaceship, a robber chased by a bunch of justifiably angry cops. The world wonders, and calls a murderer a god. They seek the Truth for the first time in their lives, but are not bowed down by a cliché Truth that would have ended their curiosity. The Wanderer is about ourselves, and it is quite a discovery.

METAMORPHOSIS OF A HERO

Randal Flynn reviews

THE JARGOON PARD

by Andre Norton

Gollancz :: 1975
194 pages :: £2.70/\$A7
original publication 1974

Andre Norton is a prolific writer, and frequently enjoyable. It is a shame, therefore, when she doesn't concentrate more on a particular novel. One gets the feeling that here is a major novelist making her living merely at the entertainment level, at the expense, unfortunately, of more meaningful works. This is apparent in her fantasy books and, to a lesser degree, in one or two of her s f novels.

The Jargoon Pard is told in the first person by Kethan, in Norton's "fantasy" style - that is, archaic prose structures, resurrections of various dead words (best, perhaps, left dead), and the creation or mutation of others in a similar vein.

But this does not necessarily detract from the book. Certainly the particular prose form used is not original (we see examples of it in The Lord of the Rings and in practically all of Tolkien's other works) and could have benefited

from a new approach (what couldn't?). But look again. The Jargoon Pard is a fantasy work, set in a fantastic "sub-creation" (the same one which it shares with the "Witch World" books and The Crystal Gryphon). Therefore it seems natural to chronicle the events of this strange world in a strange style.

The book quickly discards several prose techniques employed in the first chapter and becomes very readable. In particular, Norton has the good sense (or is she carried on by her own excitement?) to simplify her style during the fast-action episodes.

Kethan is born at the Shrine of Gunnora in the Year of the Red Boar. His parents, at this point, are unnamed and unexamined by the author. In another part of the Shrine, undergoing birth travails, is the Lady Heroise. With her is the Wise Woman Ursilla, a sorceress and an ally.

In a chapter of "expository lump", Norton tells us that Heroise and Ursilla are from the House of Car Do Prawn, that an heir is through the son of a man's full sister, and that Heroise hopes and expects a baby boy who will one day rule Car Do Prawn. Except that he will be only a figurehead, bent to his mother's sterile will. What a time he will have!

Something goes wrong. Heroise is given a daughter:

"Daugh-" It was as if Heroise could not force the whole of that word from her quivering mouth. Her hands grasped so tightly on the covering of the divan that she might be preparing to rend the stout cloth into strips.

"It cannot be! You wrought all the spells that night that- that-" She choked. Her face was a twisted mask of rage. "It was in the reading - that you vowed to me."

As you would have surmised already, Heroise's child is substituted for Kethan. All leave the Shrine of Gunnora content. Or at least apparently content.

From this point, Kethan tells the story. He recounts his childhood, outlining, as he must, the society that he lives in - or that part accessible to his youthful perception.

Sadly, we are shown few of the characteristics of this society. Perhaps Norton relies too heavily on one's reading of her former fantasy works - but what about the people who haven't read them? What we do learn can best be summed up in Norton's own words: "...after the custom." For certainly this is a world bound by the "old ways", against which even lords and magicians hesitate to practise outright apostasy.

There is a point reached in every good book where suddenly you close the book on a finger or thumb and say to yourself, "This is going to be an exciting book. I feel it." And you are hardly ever wrong, as if this is a form of intuition. This point in The Jargoan Pard was, for me, on page 23 when "a great spotted hound flashed out of nowhere", intent on attacking Kethan and then, at the last minute, "he flattened to the ground, his snarls changing to a whining". Then he flees, tail between his haunches.

Here is a juicy, tantalising mystery, reinforced some pages later when it comes out that all animals react to the presence of Kethan in a similar fashion. Naturally the folk around the castle sense, in Kethan, a strangeness that alienates him from the people we would most like to meet. Hence Kethan grows up lonely and friendless, a special figure for whom Andre Norton has great sympathy.

The real beginning of the book can be found in chapter 3. Ibycus, the trader, owns the Jargoan Pard, a leopard-skin belt with a jargoan stone embedded in it, which he sells to the Lady Eldris, Kethan's grandmother. She presents it to Kethan as his betrothal gift. Actually the gesture mirrors her total malice towards the natural heir. For the belt is of the Wereriders and transforms (so she believes) its wearer into a leopard.

The country is passing through uncertain times. If the future Lord were found to be a wererider, he would be ostracised. And who would replace him? Kethan's cousin, Maughus, whom the Lady Eldris favours.

And, the first night of the full moon, Kethan is transformed into a leopard and runs free and wild. The imagery of this passage is highly evocative and intoxicating and reflects the entire sequence that Kethan spends as a pard.

Of course, Kethan is found out, locked in his room while still in pard form, and chased from the House. There follows the Wild Hunt. During the night, Kethan loses the jargoan belt to a hawk which, he suspects, is a minion of Ursilla. Without the belt, Kethan believes that he is doomed forever to stay in pard form; and, in that frame of mind, he is. The rest of the book tells of his striving to regain the belt, introducing new characters important to the denouement and revealing the identity of the true child of the Lady Heroise.

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On page 78, a sub-theme - until now unimportant - becomes important. This is a new and terrible fear which Kethan must face:

I tried to submerge the man in the animal, discovering it frighteningly easy.
(page 74)

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The beast's way must not be mine.(page 129)

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That was the thought which haunted me with dark and lingering dread. If I remained caught within the beast, how long might that man live? For perhaps the appetites and the desires of the pard would grow stronger and stronger with time, until there was no Kethan to be remembered or to control, only the cat to be hunted and slain if his enemies could encompass that.
(page 78)

The fear is there, but Norton does a poor job of conveying the real terror of the suggestion. By contrast, a story such as "Flowers for Algeron" communicates fully its horror and pathos. I would like to have seen a story that explored the full scope of this kind of personality disintegration and its fear and sadness, its response to the inevitable.

Throughout the book, some fine imagery is counterbalanced by the use of cliché description and the acceptance of some doubtful ideas. For instance:

(a) Ursilla is revealed, especially in the final pages of the book, to be a figure of immense power and lore. She has a great deal of control over power and things alien and abnormal, formless lands and things of and out of Shadow. But this raises a rather basic question: With this kind of power, why does she seek for political power, mundane as it is, and why align herself with an ordinary mortal? Does she have some ultimate motive? Or is she just plain greedy?

(b) The interpersonal relationships of the House family are strange and unexplained. Mother and daughter (Eldris and Heroise) hold no affection for one another - are, in fact, cold and aloof. They feel no real emotion for Lord Erach, Lord of the House, and Heroise dislikes Erach's son, Maughus. (Maughus, as you see, would be heir to Can Do Prawn by our customs. Maughus hates Kethan because he sees Kethan as usurping his proper role. But these people do not have our customs.) And everybody dislikes Kethan, except maybe Pergvin, who is emotionally retarded anyway.

(c) Several times, Power and Shadow are mentioned, and these are self-explanatory. However, I could have wished for further insight into the elusive mysterious Voices that are so important to matters in this world. Who or what are the Voices? How do they manifest themselves? Where do they come from?

But, picked nits aside, I can only say to read this book. Maybe it is not worth the hardback

price but, in paperback, it is a good buy. Stories that tell of the metamorphosis of the hero make enjoyable reading, if only for the way we identify with them. This is a book about destiny, about fulfillment frustrated (one should seek one's proper way - but first one must learn what that way is), and the search for self-unity and inner peace and satisfaction. These are old themes, used many times before, but they find their place in The Jargoon Pard. You will enjoy this book.

ADD A WRITER

Neville Angove reviews

BRAINRACK

by Kit Pedlar and Gerry Davis

Pocket Books 78943 :: 1975
254 pages :: \$1.50
original publication 1974

I don't know whether Brainrack is really science fiction. The publishers do not think it is, since the usual Pocket Books "SCI-FI" is missing from the spine. I would not normally call it s.f. - nothing definite, just a gut reaction - even though the plot is fairly common in B-grade science fiction.

The book gets off to a bad start with its Charles Moll cover. Apparently Moll neglected to read the story and, as a result, the trite illustration bears only a vague relationship to the interior action. We see the typical young scientist (we know he is a scientist because he is wearing a laboratory coat) fleeing a catastrophic explosion, supporting on his arm the expected female scientist (also recognised by the lab coat). Naturally the female's blouse is opened seductively to the waist (but revealing very little), and is tucked into a mini-skirt; she sports a too-luxuriant head of hair. Neither character, except for the fact of sex, matches the description in the body of the story. Unfortunately.

Alex Mawn (the young male scientist) is attempting to 'save the world from his newly discovered "dinosaur effect". This effect is due to technological sophistication: we create machines which are too complex to be reliable, but are

also too complex for mere man to detect their inevitable mistakes. Alex is particularly worried because a company with a bad record with these unreliable machines is to commission a new nuclear power station in Scotland. Marcia Scott, a refugee from the US (and the female from the cover) is a psychologist who thinks the technological failings are due to a progressive mental deterioration of the technicians who control these machines. The two lead characters cannot agree with each other until "vested interests" murder two friends. Their reconciliation is dramatic, and Alex starts to accept Marcia's viewpoint. But their evidence falls on deaf ears, until the power station suffers a meltdown during commissioning, killing hundreds of people (the catastrophe of the cover illustration). The cause of the catastrophe is the mental deterioration of the technicians (the reader is certain, but the evidence supplied to the main characters is scanty), and the remaining third of the novel deals with the search for the cause of this "brainrack". It is no surprise to find that it is related to the internal combustion engine.

The plot is feasible, especially in light of the newest revelations concerning big business, technology, politics, and pollution. The story is full of well-written graphic action sequences: in fact, these are the only well-written parts of the book. The origins of the authors is too obvious. Pedlar and Davis, of Mutant 59: The Plastic Eaters fame, comprise an interesting duo: one is a scientist, the other a small-screen director. Brainrack reads like a stage play: keep the dialogue, and use the rest as stage directions. Add several nasty digs at scientists on vendettas, and politicians interfering with scientists, and money-grubbing industrialists, and you have a best-seller.

The characters and situations are manipulated quite unrealistically, not only to allow the plot to progress, but also to allow the authors to score a few points against the heavies. The major personal confrontation and love interest seems an afterthought. The characters could be good, but they are too strained. Pedlar and Davis should add a writer to their team.

For all its faults, Brainrack is a good read, often exciting, sometimes moving. I wouldn't buy a hardcover copy, though.

(MICHAEL CONEY SECTION - from page 56)
 another, building up a dazzling array of scenes and events. Charisma is a conceptual tour de force, and its effect is so vivid as to be almost physical. At one stage I felt that the non-hero would be caught, and my own gut reaction forced me to put down the book: I simply could not face the jerk of despair that capture would bring. The "physicality" of its effect also creates extreme frustration - frustration of the invigorating kind. I found myself anticipating bits of the plot: a murder here, and I predicted it; a mystery there, and I can solve it straight away. Trouble is, Coney solves the mystery in a different, more ingenious way, and the murder has neither the antecedents nor the consequences that I had envisaged.

It's the kind of book that makes you wonder if you're a pea-brain - or if you're a normal, intelligent reader in the hands of a crafty, cunning genius of a story-teller.

And yet Coney's not just a story-teller. The man's a thinker, a poet, an observer of man and his society...

Is there anything Michael Coney can't do?

Charisma is set in the Cornish fishing village of Falcombe, where a secret research station has discovered the existence of an apparently infinite series of parallel worlds, each a slightly distorted reflection of our own. Whilst fishing, John Maine witnesses the odd phenomenon of two trees on a headland which writhe and twist suddenly as if caught in a gale. Exploring the spot where he saw the trees, Maine comes upon Susanna, a girl from an alternate world. He sees her again in the same spot, and Maine learns that Susanna cannot cross into his own world because this would bring her into fatal contact with her double. They part, and Susanna is struck by lightning and killed. But Maine has fallen in love with her already - and he has realised that, since he has been able to cross into her world, his double in that world must be dead already.

Despite Susanna's warnings, Maine talks with Bill Stratton, manager of the research station, and Stratton confirms Maine's worst fears. One (or more) of the alternate worlds has been making the same experiments that Stratton is performing in Maine's world, and dead Susanna was one of World 2's research workers. Stratton also confirms that the alternate worlds are fairly similar; the people are pretty much the same individuals; the course of events is

roughly similar. The different worlds seem to "average out", as if they were all heading for the same goal by fairly similar paths which coincide most of the time, which means that, if John Maine has died in one world, he will soon die in them all...

Stratton uses Maine's fear of imminent death to persuade him to work for the station, since the Maine of World 1 is able to visit the worlds in which his double has died. Maine agrees, hoping to locate the Susanna of another world, and to learn the circumstances of his own death and thus avoid it. But his voyages become an exercise in despair. More and more worlds keep opening to him (which means that, one by one, his doubles are averaging out in death) and in very few worlds is Susanna still alive. Worse still, the rescue centre is making new discoveries about the infinite number of parallel worlds, and Maine is soon faced with the possibility that it is not his true self which is being returned to World 1. What if the research centre is beaming him out to World 6, and then snatching back a John Maine from World 5.999? Are the memories and experiences that he brings back to World 1 really memories and experiences born of a lifetime in that world - or are there subtle (and maybe crucial) differences? And worse still, he finds himself becoming hunted in world after world, as a web of murder and intrigue begins to form around him. Then, a new factor: the parallel worlds are beginning to converge...

There is, of course, much much more than this. Event piles on event, parallel on parallel. And yet, for a complex book, it's a masterpiece of clarity. At no time was I unsure of what was happening or which world was which. Coney is the master of lucidity.

He is also unbelievably versatile. There's one of the exciting things about Charisma: it's a lively, readable book, and it accomplishes so much. It's a good, gutsy, fast-paced thriller, sure; but it's also a modd piece, an evocation of the reality (and the concomitant unreality) of our world. The atmosphere and landscape of Falcombe is realised beautifully: one feels the wind blowing, smells the tang of salty sea, and somehow the grassy clifftop where worlds intersect is under your feet as you read the book. Yet for a book that brings our world to life, Charisma is emphatic in saying that our world is only a permutation. Coney's alternate worlds are thoroughly plausible - both in theory and in literary evocation - and, for all its solid beauty, Falcombe becomes little more than one of many such towns, all existing in an infinite number of worlds.

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THE ORIGINAL FICTION ANTHOLOGIES 1973-1975

THANK YOU to Barry Gillam, who bought for me copies of these anthologies, many of which would have been otherwise unavailable to me.

PREFATORY EPILOGUE

It occurred to me only after I had written "The Original Fiction Anthologies 1973-1975" that it has no general statements about "the state of the short story in the s f field". Perhaps I should say something around such a topic.

At the end of 1970, I wrote an article called "Vector Zero". This unsubtle title gave away the point of the article: that the science fiction short story, by the end of the 1960s, was going nowhere. (This article was reprinted in Edge magazine, with a few amendments to make it up to date for 1973; and again in A Multitude of Visions, edited by Cy Chauvin; T-K Graphics.) People who read this article for the first time would be excused for thinking that it is my latest word on the subject.

At the time when I wrote "Vector Zero", people who discuss science fiction were still arguing about The New Wave and The Old Wave. I saw the situation as a conflict between the Overwhelming Idiot Right and, I suspect, a Well-Meaning Idiot Left. At any rate, most of the magazines still featured little but insensitive "adventure" stories. The experimental fiction which was appearing, mainly in the English New Worlds magazine and in the few original fiction anthologies of the time, had much that was excellent in it but little that was seminal. I just could not see the major part of science fiction gaining anything from the group of forward-looking writers whose work was most exciting at the time.

By 1976, the situation has changed somewhat. The major part of science fiction is still low grade, of course. But it is a higher grade of low-grade than was the case during the late 1960s. The streak of idiot violence has not disappeared, and the complacent right-wing bent of American science fiction is as strong as ever. But most s f published today - at least in the original fiction anthologies - seems to be more urbane, more tickling to the mind rather than the viscera; simply less objectionable.

The major change is that most of the best stories (and most of the tolerable not-very-good stories) have been appearing in the original anthologies recently. The wave of these anthologies peaked during 1973, which is when most of the Roger Elwood collections appeared. But even though Elwood has withdrawn from this market, 1976 will still see many more anthologies for the year than was the case in, say, 1970. I suspect that the anthologies pay more, are edited in less of a hurry and, in general, are undertaken by much more careful editors than those for the magazines.

Another major change is that the best of the field has maintained some sort of dir-
BRUCE GILLESPIE S F COMMENTARY 48/49/50 107

ORIGINAL FICTION ANTHOLOGIES 1973-1975

action. The movement is very similar to that which has taken place in the cinema during the last ten years - where experimental techniques and attitudes have been so absorbed by creators in the commercial cinema that it is no longer possible to differentiate between Old and New Wave simply by looking at a particular film (without consulting a film history). The techniques of England's New Wave did not go away; they simply became absorbed into the language of the commercial writers of the field. Of course, this has simply weakened the fervour of the original New Wave people. But it has also given great strength to the hand of many of the writers whose stories are praised here: most notably, those of Ursula Le Guin. No one could say whether a particular story of Ursula's is New or Old; each is hers.

So, if there is a note of quiet enjoyment of the field here, the cause for congratulation is this: that the best people in the field (especially Edgar Pangborn, much praised here) have escaped sufficiently from categories to find their personal voices. Which is, I suspect, what I was seeking when first I began reading s f.

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0 000 0 000 HARDBACKS

Already reviewed in SFC:

"Sphere" (Edgar Pangborn); "The Death of Doctor Island" (Gene Wolfe).

New Dimensions 3

edited by Robert Silverberg (Doubleday/S F Book Club; 212 pages). Reviewed in brief in SFC 39. Individual stories reviewed in SFC 46. Outstanding stories: "The Last Day of July" (Gardner Dozois); "How Shall We Conquer?" (W Macfarlane); "The Ones Who Walked Away From Omelas" (Ursula Le Guin); "Days of Grass, Days of Straw" (R A Lafferty).

Bad Moon Rising

edited by Thomas M Disch (Harper & Row; 302 pages; \$6.95). Reviewed in brief in SFC 39. Outstanding story: "We Are Dainty Little People" (Charles Naylor).

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Orbit 12

edited by Damon Knight (Putnam/SRBC; 216 pages). Outstanding story: "Direction of the Road" (Ursula Le Guin).

I discussed "Direction of the Road" in SFC 46. Also interesting is Brian Aldiss' set of fanciful miniature word paintings, "Serpent Burning on an Altar", "Woman in Sunlight With Mandolin", "The Young Soldier's Horoscope", and "Castle Scene With Penitents". Without being able to make a lot out of the entire pattern, the piece which I liked best was "The Young Soldier's Horoscope".

Universe 3

edited by Terry Carr (Random House/SFBC; 180 pages). Outstanding stories: "The World is a

It would be dishonest of me to say that I liked "The Death of Doctor Island" very much. I didn't understand what Gene Wolfe was up to, just as I haven't quite grasped the point of many of his other stories. Yet I could hardly deny the power that some of the story's central images have for me: the beach which borders the inaccessible sea, the talking wildlife, and the incomprehensible Dr Island "himself". I suspect that the real power of the story is that, although it appears to be set in an alien environment, in fact it approaches the uncomprehending nature of the existence of many young children (Are you Doctor Islanding those kids again?).

As I've been reading through these anthologies recently, I've made a re-discovery of the quiet, bright skill of Edgar Pangborn. It is too late to praise him adequately, since he died a few weeks ago, having written far too few stories in the s f field. "The World is a Sphere" is one of the best of them. Like all his recent stories, this one is set in the post-Bomb world of the Murcan Empire. This world of Pangborn's could have been so easily a cosy version of, say, the world of Wyndham's The Chrysalids. Instead, Pangborn made quite a vast time-and-space landscape. Pangborn's great talent was that he actually knew something about people, how they lived, and in what circumstances. In "The World is a Sphere", Moderator Moltas is trapped in a world of decaying politics, but refuses to give into the Emperor. His inspiration for his last deeds is an heretical sphere shown to him by a tramp mutant, a sphere which is claimed to resemble the world. Says Moltas' wife, "Ian, we must live in the present, isn't

it so?", implying that he might better yield to corruption of both political and scientific thought. "It's a flash between infinities," replies Moltas, "a place to be happy and sad. It's not true that the present is the only place we know. I must look beyond, both ways."

Showcase

edited by Roger Elwood (Harper & Row; 191 pages; \$5.95). Outstanding story: "The Soul of a Servant" (Joanna Russ).

It seems the most difficult thing in the world to convince science fiction writers that a story is not just a series of events or the exposition of an idea. A story should have, at least, the sense of being caught up in life, a feeling of being within another life. In "The Soul of a Servant", which must have been one of the last short pieces that Joanna Russ wrote before she began The Female Man, the author gives a vivid sense of seeing through the main character's eyes and hearing and feeling what he hears and feels, yet judging the character at the same time. The marvel of a story like this is that Joanna Russ makes such writing seem so effortless. In a few sentences, we have taken a tour of the underground retreat of these people ("Those who built this place were marvellous engineers, but they never anticipated a mountainside heated entirely by wood-burning fireplaces") and have been introduced to the limited spirit of the narrator, the "soul of a servant" of the story's title ("They look inquisitively at me, all of them, and I feel myself turn pale as I assume involuntarily what I once thought I had cured myself of forever: I mean a nervous grimace, a crawling, shrinking, servile smile which I struggle to control but cannot.."). The story is about the circumstantial rescue of this mind-enclosed prisoner, but such a "rescue" is painful. Russ lets us experience the anguish of becoming free - which, I suspect, is the main theme of all her fiction.

Nova 3

edited by Harry Harrison (Walker; 243 pages; \$6.95).

There are no outstanding stories in this volume. Philip Jose Farmer's "Sketches Among the Ruins of My Mind" received some praise when it appeared, but I find it dry and predictable. A similar theme is carried to real literary nightmare in Jacques Sternberg's "Fin de Siecle", which appeared in Future Without Future (reviewed in SFC 44/45). The best story in the volume is "Pity the Poor Outdated Man", in which Philip Shofner manages to make palatable his mixture of coy fantasy, dragons, and what-have-you.

Future City

edited by Roger Elwood (Trident; 256 pages; \$7.95). Outstanding story: "The Weariest River" (Thomas M. Scortia).

I'm not sure how Roger Elwood has contrived to make so many interesting subjects so dull (or rather, how he has persuaded his writers to make them so dull). The cover of this book advertises "a vision of Man's (sic) urban future in all new stories by 24 leading writers of science fiction". In a curious way, the blurb is right: nearly every author has exactly the same "vision", if it could be called that. Cities will run down, they will become ever more crowded, and we will continue to live in them for no good reason that these authors can offer. In several stories, such as Lafferty's, cities will become continuous and world-encircling. I don't believe it.

Thomas Scortia's "The Weariest River" is a really sizzling exception, however. It's not primarily about the book's main theme, for a start. Instead, it's almost the only convincing story in s f about one variety of immortality - when people keep living without any compensations to make life tolerable. Scortia makes it worse: these people can't die, whatever is done to them. The possibilities for political terror and torture are considerable, and this is the line which the author follows. I won't tell you about the really horrifying main scene in this story. I'm sure Scortia enjoyed writing every nasty word of "The Weariest River".

An Exaltation of Stars

edited by Terry Carr (Simon & Schuster; 181 pages). Outstanding stories: "The Feast of St Dionysus" (Robert Silverberg); "My Brother Leopold" (Edgar Pangborn).

Of all the original fiction anthologies which I have read until May, I think this is the most generally satisfactory. Others have had much brighter stories, of course, but, in a volume of three novellas, this has two which are excellent.

I had begun to think, during recent years, that I could never like any of Robert Silverberg's writing again. His pieces which have won or been nominated for awards have been consistently disappointing. Critical evaluation of his works has been so wide of the mark that even he has forgotten the things he can do well. Usually Silverberg doesn't do well the sort of story which "The Feast of St Dionysus" is. It is about religious experience - and many of Silverberg's main characters have had totally unconvincing religious or ecstatic experiences. But somehow, here, Silverberg has the sense not to burble on. He is actually content to show us what Oxenshuer experiences out in the desert, and gains an uneasy sense of the frailty of the main character, and of the experience itself. The story contains a genuine conflict, a fugue of ideas, and the ending is effective.

Edgar Pangborn again, his vision and wisdom as true and wise as usual. In "My Brother Leopold", Pangborn takes up his familiar theme of religious bigotry and martyrdom but, splendid writer as he is (or was), reveals his theme entirely through the experience of visionary Leopold's anguished brother Jemrym. Here, as in

"The World is a Sphere", it is the person who feels most who is forced to suffer most; the person who lives life with greatest enthusiasm who is forced to leave it unjustly.

Roger Zelazny's story is unpronounceable and forgettable.

Three Trips in Time and Space

no editor credited; foreword by Robert Silverberg (193 pages; \$5.95; Hawthorn).

In SFC 46, I went about congratulating myself on my great sacrifice in taking the time to read all the short science fiction for 1973. When I think about the matter, I realize that the task cannot be quite as painful as I pretend. I'm not noted for my tolerance to pain. It's true that all but a small number of stories are mediocre. But when I read a volume like Three Trips in Time and Space, I realize that there is at least some difference between distressing mediocrity and enjoyable mediocrity. Like a large proportion of short science fiction, each of the three novellas in this book falls under the description of "enjoyable mediocrity".

"Flash Crowd" is, like its title, flashy. That's typical of Larry Niven when he's mediocre. It's also ingenious, although I can't say that Larry Niven convinced me that his solution cleared up his problem (which is: what happens if/when matter transmitters become common, and a large crowd of spectators, the "flash crowd", decides to converge on any given point of the Earth's surface?). Some of the incidental details of Niven's matter-transmitted world are interesting. Both "You'll Take the High Road" (John Brunner) and "Rumfuddle" (Jack Vance) are sufficiently undistinguished for me not to be able to remember much about them. Both are intricate without being gripping, and "Rumfuddle" would interest anybody who likes alternate-worlds stories.

Chains of the Sea

edited and introduced by Robert Silverberg (Nelson; 221 pages; \$6.50). Outstanding story: "The Shrine of Sebastian" (Gordon Eklund).

I reviewed Gordon Eklund's story in SFC 46, "The Shrine of Sebastian" was No 10 for 1973. When he is good, Eklund is marvelous in a translucent, indescribable way. Effinger's "And Us, Too, I Guess" is even more cynical than his usual stuff, and is stifflingly arid. Dozois is not in good form in the title story.

Saving Worlds

edited by Roger Elwood and Virginia Kidd (Doubleday; 237 pages; \$6.95). Outstanding stories: "Saving the World" (Terry Carr); "An Article About Hunting" (Gene Wolfe); "Scorner's Seat" (R A Lafferty); "The Day" (Colin Saxton).

This was the real surprise of this batch of original fiction anthologies. I expected Saving Worlds to be as dull and predictable as Elwood's other theme anthologies, but it isn't. I suspect that the influence of Virginia Kidd, that ever-tasteful lady, had something to do with this improvement.

For instance, the best story in the book, Gene Wolfe's "An Article About Hunting" has nothing to do with science fiction. It's just a crazy yarn about a rather dense farmer going on a bear hunt. (I see that the story is set in 1982, so perhaps that's why Mr Elwood let it in.) The story has that same kind of factual craziness as has Henry Lawson's "The Loaded Dog" (a story known to many generations of Australian school-children).

One of the surprises of exploring these collections was the abrupt realisation of how very much Terry Carr has improved as a writer during recent years. Of course, he has edited so many anthologies that many people forget that he began his career as an s f writer, and I hope he goes on to more success. "Saving the World" is just the sort of short story which I keep asking for in the s f field. It is urbane, adult, and actually has something to say about the possible/probable future of the world. Terry Carr's finding is that the weighty deliberations of ecological planners don't stand a chance against the traditional games of human biology, especially if both activities are combined in the bedrooms of the hotel where the Fifth Co-environmental Conference is being held. This is a funny story.

"Scorner's Seat", by R A Lafferty, is marvellous. (I know I use that word a lot. I use it to mean, "revealing marvels". It's a good word for Lafferty's story.) Kyklopolis is the one city in the world built to withstand The Coming Ecological Apocalypse. Actually, it is heaven on earth - and no angels-with-harps heaven either. In a masterly piece of secondary-universe-building, Lafferty constructs the whole place in front of our eyes, giving us some idea how we might step forward through current world ills into something better. But Kyklopolis is no placid heaven. Like Ursula Le Guin's Omelas, it is threatened by the constant possibility of absolute evil, in the form of a water monster. The story tells of the attempt to come to some sort of terms with both the privileged position of the city, and the danger which threatens its citizens.

Colin Saxton's "The Day" is about a society that is subject to a mysterious ritual. Memorable, without being great. And Poul Anderson's "Windmill" is refreshingly reflective, without being destroyed by Anderson's usual polemic.

Eros In Orbit

edited by Joseph Elder (Trident; 189 pages; \$6.95).

No subject freezes the brains and pens of s f writers more effectively than that of sex. This point is shown both here and in Strange Bedfellows, discussed below. The writers in this volume have nothing new to say on the subject, and don't even say the old things well. I gained some enjoyment from Jon Stopa's "Kiddy-Lib".

No Mind of Man

no editor credited (Hawthorn; 182 pages; \$5.95). Outstanding story: "The Winds at Starmont" (Terry Carr).

Another story to Mr Carr's credit. When I began reading "The Winds at Starmont", I did not take it very seriously. It seemed to be just another mountaineering adventure set on another planet. But Terry Carr has the sense not to tell us the exact dimensions of this "killer mountain", so that it grows and becomes more mysterious as the story continues. Also, the main characters seek to fly up it, rather than climb it in the traditional method ("No one's ever made the top", we are told). The theme appears early in the story: "We bring limitations with us, Mike; we just look for new places to test them." The rest of the story reveals the peculiar limitations placed on people who challenge this planet, and the way they deal with their greatest challenge - themselves. That element makes "The Winds at Starmont" a spiritual as well as a physical adventure story.

The other two novellas, "The Partridge Project" (Richard A Lupoff) and "This is the Road" (Robert Silverberg) are very half-hearted pieces, and give the impression that they were written quickly and at short notice. Perhaps that's what's the matter with all these commissioned anthologies.

The Berserkers

edited by Roger Elwood (Trident; 217 pages; \$6.95).

Of all Roger Elwood's theme anthologies, this is definitely the oddest. He seems to have supplied to his writers a very narrow definition of the word "berserker" (made popular in the s f field by Fred Saberhagen), and expected the writers to turn in original and personal stories within this tiny framework. It's a bit like being asked to write 400 words on "My Holidays" on the first day at school. The result is twelve worthless stories, and two readable stories, "The Patent Medicine Man" (Daphne Castell), and "Trial of the Blood" (K M O'Donnell).

Astounding: John W Campbell Memorial Anthology

edited by Harry Harrison (Random House/SFBC; 302 pages).

I'm not sure why Harry Harrison has such abysmal luck with his original fiction anthologies, but somehow he has managed to defuse even this anthology. The concept of Astounding seems sure-fire: collect one story each from some of the writers who have contributed most creatively to John W Campbell's magazine, known for most of its life as Astounding. Campbell has now been dead for some years, and an uncomfortable number of people are admitting that they really didn't like him very much. But he did create the magazine field as we know it now (and, by inference, the original fiction anthology field). He did create the careers of many of the writers represented here. Too bad that they did not return the compliment on this occasion. With one exception, these stories are bloody awful - dull, dull, dull, with no hint of the crazy inspiration which made Campbell's kingdom so much fun to inhabit. The one exception is L Sprague de Camp's elegant fantasy, "The Emperor's Fan", which would never have appeared in Astounding. It is an Unknown story but, without it, this "memorial anthology" is an insult to the craggy editor's well-remembered face.

New Writings in S F 22

edited by Kenneth Bulmer (Sidgwick & Jackson; 189 pages; \$4.45). Outstanding stories: "The Rules of the Game" (Donald A Wollheim); "The Inverted World" (Christopher Priest).

New Writings in S F 23

edited by Kenneth Bulmer (Sidgwick & Jackson; 191 pages; \$5.10). Outstanding stories: "The Lake of Tuonela" (Keith Roberts); "The Five Doors" (Michael Stall).

I note, with morbid fascination, how each volume of New Writings is more expensive than the previous one. No 22, from the beginning of 1973, retailed at \$4.45. No 27, the latest one to hand, all 207 pages of it, is \$10.50. When inflation hits the book trade to that extent, we all suffer.

In every other respect, New Writings has improved considerably since Ken Bulmer became editor (No 22 is the first under his official editorship). Ted Carnell always had a clear idea of the direction that New Writings should take, and all the indications are that his formula of painless mediocrity worked. The result was too dull for my taste during the last few years of his editorship. Ted Carnell's death has been a loss in every other respect but not, I suspect, for this last fortress of short-story markets in Britain.

New Writings 22 begins with a brief extract from Rendezvous With Rama (quite redundant, of course, but surely some guide to readers who

might have been suspicious of the new regime) and the first of Brian Aldiss' "Three Enigmas" series (I still find them too enigmatic, but slowly I'm getting the drift). The main attraction of this volume is "The Rules of the Game" by Donald A Wollheim. I wonder how Ken Bulmer persuaded Mr Wollheim to write this story, let alone submit it? He's a busy man. And if it's from the bottom of the desk drawer, then it should have been dusted off before this. This story has all the power that can be derived from quiet, understated story-telling combined with a delicious idea. I won't tell you the idea - but it involves Velikovsky, and some sneaky scepticism, and the only two people left afloat at the end of the world. :: "The Inverted World" must have been confusing when it appeared after the novel of the same name. Most of the concepts of the novel are still half-formed in the story, but even more tantalising for that quality. Also, the story contains a scene which couldn't appear in the novel - a breathtaking

moment when Mann actually sees his universe shift between his own "reality" and ours. :: I enjoyed Sy Bounds' "Monitor" as well.

New Writings 23 is somewhat less exciting, with two satisfying stories (Grahame Leman's "Wagtail in the Morning", and "The Seed of Evil", typical of Barrington Bayley's unsettling attacks on safe concepts in story-telling), and two stories with a bit more to offer. Whatever reviewers mean by "atmosphere" these days, then that's what can be found in Keith Roberts' "The Lake of Tuonela". Roberts' Ballard-like character, Mathis, undertakes a monomaniacal journey up an alien river. As Ken Bulmer's blurb states, the story is "filled with sensuous detail", which makes it more effective than any of Ballard's similar journeys. Still, Mathis doesn't get anywhere much, which is why the reader has little choice but to breathe in the heavy atmosphere. :: "The Five Doors" is a good alien-puzzle story.

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New Worlds Quarterly 5

edited by Michael Moorcock (Sphere 62006; 275 pages; \$1.25). Outstanding stories: "The Cake Chronicle" (Michael Ahern); "Smack Run" (Marta Bergstresser).

The actual highlights of this issue of New Worlds are the three critical articles, Brian Aldiss' "The Future on a Chipped Plate" (a chapter from Billion Year Spree), "To the Stars and Beyond on the Fabulous Anti-Syntax Drive" (M John Harrison), and "Shucksma" (John Clute). Each of these three is willing to apply some art and some much-needed chutzpah to the languishing craft of s f criticism. In his article, Aldiss covers "the world of John W Campbell's Astounding". M John Harrison's attack on Don Wollheim's The Universe Makers is, of course, unfair, but worth saying. It's better than the uncritical acceptance of books like this which has been their fate in USA. John Clute is fairly strong on the anti-syntactical drive himself, but somehow he guides his impossible sentences around a few interesting ideas. Unfortunately, he chooses to lacerate some butterfly-wing books in NWQ 5.

Most s f stories are trivial, but stories in New Worlds at least have the advantage of being trivial and enjoyable. The well-written stories

like Michael Ahern's "The Cake Chronicle", are often not even speculative fiction, let alone Science Fiction. "The Cake Chronicle" is based on the principle that qualities of surrealism are most likely to be found in the antics of so-called "ordinary" people. The main quality of the people in this small mid-Western American town is that they eat a vast amount. Each tragic event in the town's history commands the consumption of unbelievable quantities of cabbage salad, tossed salad, boiled corned beef, and macaroni salad. With a diet like this, no wonder the inhabitants of Eastford have their troubles,

"Smack Run" is nothing more than an old-fashioned hardboiled thriller about smuggling heroin, but it is written with the correct panache. The setting is a ~~near~~ future, over-ruled USA.

New Worlds p

edited by Michael Moorcock and Charles Platt (Sphere 7221 (201; 263 pages; \$1.25). Outstanding stories: "Coming From Behind" (M John Harrison); "My Eight Days in the Automotive Industry" (Charles Arnold); "The Beautiful One" (Keith Roberts); "Bella Goes to the Dark Tower" (Hilary Bailey); "Thy Blood Like Milk" (Ian Watson).

It's so long since I've read this for the first time that I had to take time to read some of the stories again. Quite a pleasure. Though I cannot guess how I ever managed to forget a single detail of M John Harrison's "Coming From Behind". The first thing to say about this story is that it is an undisguised adventure melodrama of the best thud-and-blunder tradition. But there's no blunder here; it makes such a difference to this type of story when its practitioner can actually write. (This is why I enjoy New Worlds still; even at their worst, its writers still have a commitment to putting interesting words onto paper in an exciting way. Not exactly the right way to make a buck these days, but refreshing.) So the alien invaders are not just merely a boring set of stage props, as in all the other stories; instead, one of them is shown as the "product of some demented organic engineering process...a huge concentric spheroid, mottled and lumpy, a vast rotten grapefruit crawling with mould. In places its hull was translucent, vague flurorescences coming and going behind it. Venting great gusts of foul-smelling gas, it hung precariously three hundred feet above the village, moaning like a crushed animal." Prefontaine, the main character, is just as repellent, and mad as the proverbial snake. He wants to rescue the world all by himself. The other victims try to stop him before he brings down vengeance upon them. Eventually, they find a way to direct the main character's monomania against the aliens ("Welcome back to the human race."/ "I couldn't bloody help myself.") There's not a spare word here; it's all hard, fast, and nasty, with a luminescent awareness of the general craziness of existence.

That might describe most of the good stories in New Worlds. They are about people who are sent crazy by the incurable disease called the twentieth century, people who have the courage to go crazy with some style. New Worlds is also just about the last repository of humour in the SF field. "My Eight Days in the Automotive Industry" is a good example. The unnamed narrator keeps telling people that he's a Recovery and Recycling Engineer in the Automotive Industry, but actually he's just a beggar. However, our hero really believes in his own career, and tells us about the innate importance of retrieving dimes from footpaths (sorry - that should be "sidewalks"). He tries to tell this to a girl he meets at a dance, but it doesn't take long for her to work out that he's nothing but a bum. He has his eight days of glory, however.

"The Beautiful One" is one of the series of stories that became The Chalk Giants. Like the rest of the stories, it's amazingly good. Buy it in the novel edition.

I reviewed "Thy Blood Like Milk" in SFC 46. It's also amazingly good.

Ditto "Bella Goes to the Dark Tower", which

shows that Hilary Bailey, at least, can write fairy stories as mean and nasty as those of the Brothers Grimm.

An odd highlight of this issue (which has so many peaks of excellence that it becomes a plateau) is John Clute's "Scholia, Seasoned With Crabs, Blish Is", which must have had even the scholastic Blish scratching his head to work out what Clute is talking about. However, syntax aside, the article is an excellent attempt to account for the possible reasons why Blish wrote so much second-rate fiction as well as his masterpieces. Clute describes The Day After Judgment as a "real shaggy God story" - which just about makes up for the following sentence: "Blish has immersed himself in a field - science fiction - whose generic forms cater to the heated iconicity of the romance, as stripped down for action, and his whole crabby yawning corpus demonstrates the costs of writing against the grain." I agree... I think.

Infinity 5

edited by Robert Hoskins (Lancer 75477; 208 pages; 95c). Outstanding story: "Changing of the Gods" (Terry Carr).

I read this book so long ago that I cannot guarantee to remember details of any of the stories. (Lancer has been bankrupt for about three years already, so terminating the Infinity series, and tying up all the rights for several worthy authors, including Wilson Tucker.) "Changing of the Gods" is about the old theme of what happens when kids really get revolting - but it is so remorselessly nasty that I just had to like it. (That's my third mention of Terry Carr so far. When will somebody give him a contract to let him write regularly again?). It's a pity that some other publisher did not take up the Infinity series.

Ten Tomorrows

edited by Roger Elwood (Fawcett M2820; 224 pages; 95c). Outstanding stories: "The Freshman Angle" (Edgar Pangborn); "The Defenceless Dead" (Larry Niven).

Edgar Pangborn must have had some grand design for his stories about the post-Collapse world. It seems that we will never see the entire shape of that design, but it becomes much clearer after reading "The Freshman Angle". The events in this story occur some time after those in all the other stories. Elmo obDavid Hunnington is attempting to write his term paper on the history of the previous six thousand years. Free thought is no longer so implacably discouraged as in most other eras of the post-Collapse world; Elmo treats his subject in a particularly irreverent way. At the same time, he and his friends/lovers try out new possibilities for living and language - again, possibilities which do not appear in the other Pangborn stories of this series. This era is the new

Renaissance, and from it Elmo can look back, gathering up all the historical evidence that had been discovered about the immediate pre-Collapse world. The story is, a bit too obviously, Pangborn's own attempt to sketch in the framework for all his stories and to provide his own comment on the twentieth century ("...they tried to look away, or sweep the dirt under the rug; and when this could not be done, they attempted fumbling remedies."). Atomic war is inevitable; the human struggle yields few times of Renaissance. Another reminder here that we have lost Edgar Pangborn before he could weave his entire tapestry.

The most satisfying thing about stories like "The Defenceless Dead" is that Larry Niven takes the mystery-story format as seriously as he includes his own persuasive s f tricks. He has an ability to tie in all the elements. At times, he even writes very well ("Midgard is on the first shopping level, way back near the service core... From inside, Midgard seems to be halfway up the trunk of an enormous tree, big enough to stretch from Hell to Heaven. Perpetual war is waged in the vast distances, on various limbs of the tree, between warriors of oddly distorted size and shape. World-sized beasts show occasionally: a wolf attacks the moon, a sleeping serpent coils round the restaurant itself..."). Of course, Niven tends to assume that the future will be just super-California plus extensions; this story could sound very old-fashioned in a few years time.

Two Views of Wonder

edited by Thomas N Scortia and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro (Ballantine 23713; 274 pages; \$1.25). Outstanding story: "Un Bel Di" (Chelsea Quinn Yarbro).

The premise of this book seems downright twitty from the start ("What you have here is an experiment, testing the contrasting approaches to science fiction to see if any male/female difference can be demonstrated"). Each pair of writers, one male, one female, was given one theme. This is the twitty part of the premise, as it is for all such theme anthologies. Writers who do nothing but follow themes are doomed to write the kind of mechanical, dull pieces which appear here. Also, as I mentioned before, the subject of sex is not one which raises s f writers to great heights. "Un Bel Di", contributed by one of the editors, is the only story with any fire in it at all.

Strange Bedfellows

edited by Thomas N Scortia (Pocket Books 77794; 254 pages; 95c).

I was going to say that this is yet another dull book about sex. (If an editor commissioned ten top writers to send in stories about the manufacture of cardboard packing cases, the result would be another Kama Sutra.)

However, it is not entirely an original fiction anthology. All the previous unpublished stories are dull, but Scortia has also included some enjoyable classics in the thin field of sex-'n'-science-fiction. They are: "The World Well Lost" (Theodore Sturgeon); "Dr Birdmouse" (Reginald Bretnor); "Lambeth Blossom" (Brian Aldiss); "Mother" (Philip Jose Farmer).

Flame Tree Planet - An Anthology of Religious Science Fantasy

edited by Roger Elwood (Concordia 12-2528; 159 pages; \$1.75).

I'm naive enough to think that religion is still a great unexplored region for science fiction writers. Therefore I was quite looking forward to reading Flame Tree Planet. I should have known better, given that the editor's name is Roger Elwood. This is absolutely the worst original fiction anthology ever published. The reason for this is simple: it did not occur to me that any editor would be silly enough to ask his authors to write stories that assumed that traditional Christianity made up the sum total of "religion", or stories in which phenomena of Christianity went unquestioned. It's like asking those same authors to write "Great Science Fiction Stories About Successful Capitalists". The format of Flame Tree Planet goes right against the presumption of s f towards exploration, scepticism, and alternate possibilities. Who's interested in having their prejudices merely reinforced? (Readers of books published by Concordia Press, obviously.) Anyway, here's a motley collection of latter-day Jesuses and John the Baptists and brave standard-bearers of the faith. I don't know; I'd pit the Sunday congregation of the church in which I grew up against this lot. (Although Barry Malzberg's "Bearing Witness" is a bit better than the rest.)

Demon Kind

edited by Roger Elwood (Avon 14886; 192 pages; 75c). Outstanding stories: "The Eddystone Light" (Laurence Yep); "From Darkness to Darkness" (Terry Carr).

This anthology has another twitty idea - frightening kids that go bump in the night (bumping off adults, I presume). The theme has been well done in s f before, from "It's a Good Life" onwards, so we hardly need more of the same. However, if you pass up this volume, you might miss two very fine stories, neither of which has been reprinted since.

Laurence Yep contributed a few pieces to the magazines a few years ago, and has hardly been heard of since. To my knowledge, his only recent stories have appeared in a few of the more obscure of these anthologies, including Demon Kind. "The Eddystone Light" is, at one level, just another mermaid story, but it is told with much passion and directness.

And here's Terry Carr again. "From Darkness to Darkness" is a simple story, but it contains the single most effective image in any story I read for 1973. A group of colonists set down on Barker's World, and hope that their exploration will be routine. It isn't. Great flocks of birds fly over their camp. Kevin, their child, builds himself a night fortress. At a camp a few miles away, another group of explorers sees only a clear sky. But at this camp "The long black torps continued to flow over us; their cries were as always, high and raw and alien... They carried the cool night sky endlessly to the north, and always more came from the south." Terry Carr leaves you to guess where the birds come from, and what relation they have to the antics of one small boy, burrowing in the sand of an alien planet.

The Alien Condition

edited by Stephen Goldin (Ballantine 03212; 206 pages; \$1.25). Outstanding story: "Wings" (Vonda McIntyre).

If anyone ever gives me the chance to edit an original fiction anthology, I hope that the same person or publisher reminds me not to write story introductions that are as grandiloquent or meaningless as Stephen Goldin's. Within the first two paragraphs of his Introduction to the whole book, he gives us a lesson in "the three purposes of fiction" and inquires, "What is the Human Condition?" (As we used to say in the school-ground when asked questions like this: You tell me and we'll both know.) Vonda McIntyre, who contributes a first-rate story, must suffer, in Goldin's introduction to her story, reflections on the universal nature of intelligence and "systems of valuss". They don't make anthologists like they used to. :: "Wings" is, like most memorable stories, a love story. "I tried to fly over the auroras," says the youth who crash-lands at the temple. (These people have wings.) The keeper cannot fly; he tends the youth; he longs for the youth to stay at the temple. Vonda McIntyre gives her story such a strong pulse of life from its beginning that its ending cannot help but touch the reader, and render some new tone to the palette of emotional relationships. (Now there's a Goldin-ism for you.)

The story from this volume which won the prizes and the praise is "Love is the Plan the Plan is Death" (James Tiptree Jr). I didn't like it much.

Clarion 3

edited by Robin Scott Wilson (Signet 451-Q5503; 224 pages; 95c). Outstanding stories: "Road Map" (F M Busby); "Cantaloupes and Kangaroos" (Dennis R Caro); "Servants" (David Wise).

This anthology had much greater interest for me than either (a) most of the other anthologies mentioned here, or (b) Clarions 1 and 2, since I

had attended a Clarion-style event (the Australian Science Fiction Writers' Workshop). Ursula Le Guin's own article, "The Ursula Major Construct: or, A Far Greater Horror Looms", particularly brought back memories to me. In this article, Ursula tells how she came by one assignment idea (not one which she tried on us) and the reactions she had:

One inward motility sat on the mat in an approximate knot, smoking hard. Its thoughts were not parallel to anything.

"Teacher," said one of the perplexities, "we have only criticised and utterly destroyed eight rather poor short stories this morning. Whatever shall we do this afternoon?"

** ** *

An observer, had there been one to observe, would have been puzzled at the behaviour of the solitary figure, which seemed, had there been one to seem to, a woman. From time to time she bent down swiftly and all but stealthily to pick up a stone, a stick, a bit of detritus from the pathside, then, clutching, the treasure, paced swiftly on...

** ** *

"I am making the kids write a story about that," I said.

"About that," said the janitor, in a neutral tone. He was a man of great natural tact. He now considered the Construct for some while, as if my explanation, insufficient as it was, had given him the right and freedom to do so...

He smiled. "I bet you get some pretty funny stories," he said.

Nearly all the stories in Clarion 3 are amusing in one way or another, but there is no method, as we discovered, to write a really polished story in the time available at one of these workshops. Therefore I consider as some considerable achievements the three stories I picked out as outstanding. In "Road Map", F M Busby tells about the life of a man who is reincarnated as the woman who is to become his wife. And then there's an extra variation at the end which opens out further possibilities on this rather old theme. Since he writes this story, F M Busby has begun to explore further ways in which standard s f tricks - especially time travel - might enhance and widen the possibilities for human life. Sort of optimistic variations on Seconds. Refreshing, as is "Cantaloupes and Kangaroos", by Dennis Caro. This is an exhilarating day in the life of a man who wakes up in the morning with a lion sitting on his chest. This should get some kind of award as Cheerful Story of the Year. David Wise's "Servants" is much more sombre and reflective. Again, even though I realise that probably the author has polished the story since

the Workshop, I find it amazing that this story could have been put together at such an occasion.

Particularly interesting to me is Harlan Ellison's article, "When Dreams Become Nightmares: Some Cautionary Notes on the Clarion Experience". It's about what can go wrong in Workshops. Fortunately, little did go wrong at ours (although there was some evidence of the scapegoat effect, which Harlan Ellison talks about). Some of Harlan's rules for Workshops are worth repeating:

- * No student should be permitted into the Workshop without having submitted at least seven thousand words of writing work...

We stipulated 2500-5000 words in the form of a short story.

- * There should be refresher sessions post-Workshop.

These have begun spontaneously in Melbourne, but not on any formal or rigorous basis. Must do.

- * Guest instructors must become sensitive to the ebb and flow of writing in their week of instruction. In-group or private-joke stories must be channelled before they become a time-wasting spate...

A definite danger, as we and Ursula found out. But in-jokes are necessary in the high-pressure atmosphere which develops.

- * Guest instructors must cease being "kind" about the work produced or the student's potential for making it as a professional.

Not a fault I can ever imagine being ascribed to Harlan Ellison. Actually, it's other Workshop attendees who tend to be "too kind", rather than the Guest Instructor.

There are lots of other points here which should be read by anyone who is considering attending or running a Workshop.

Tomorrow's Alternatives (Frontiers 1)

edited by Roger Elwood (Collier 01980; 198 pages; \$1.50).

The New Mind (Frontiers 2)

edited by Roger Elwood (Collier 01981; 180 pages; \$1.50).

There is nothing to say about these two Elwood collections, as they are even less distinguished than most of the other Elwood collections. The only bright spot is Barrington Bayley's "Mutation Planet", a crazy, Van-Vogtish space opera written with the sort of uninhibited gusto which has become Bayley's trademark. It's also the only story by a non-US writer which I have found in any of Elwood collection. No vinism like chauvinism, as they say.

Future Quest

edited by Roger Elwood (Avon 16808; 192 pages; 95c).

Correction: this is even worse than Tomorrow's Alternatives or The New Mind. It's so bad that the best story is written by Anne McCaffrey. All the stories have been written about and for "young people". In England and Australia, that would be a call for authors to write their best. Here, it seems to bring forth the worst.

Omega

edited by Roger Elwood (Fawcett M3030; 159 pages; 95c). Outstanding story: "Symposium" (R A Lafferty).

Quite a readable collection, amazingly enough. I'm afraid I didn't find the attraction in Philip Jose Farmer's "After King Kong Fell" that the Nebula voters did, but I discover the best R A Lafferty story for 1973, the Borgesian (even Calvinoesque?) "Symposium". ("What was that jolt? It's the noise the world always makes just before it ends. How do I know that, since I've never seen a world end before? Megagalactic memory, I suppose. After all, we're supposed to think of these things. We see seminal contrivances.") No, not Borgesian, or Calvinoesque; it's just R A Lafferty having a good mind-time.

Benvenuto goes to help her and to hide away from the people who wish to stone him. "Well, Benvenuto," she says, when he has set the fire and prepared dinner for her and broken the news of her lover's death, "when I am busy with my embroideries, I sometimes feel like a good person. And in Jon's embraces I've thought so, after the pleasure, in the time when there can be quiet and a bit of thinking. Other times I've just lain here wondering what goodness is, and whether anyone really knows." Each of these good people, rejected by the "baa-sheep" of the villages, helps the other to find a doorway through to new existence.

"The Night Wind" is the most consistently well-written short story in the s f field that I have read for a long time. The simple Benvenuto is filled with all the passion, experience, and anger of the author, the poetry that seeps through every line of this story. "I know that violence might be done in the presence, in the very shadow of the beech trees, as in any other place where the human creature goes; a little corner of my mind is a garden where I lie in the sun not believing it." Pangborn's mind has been one of the most luxuriant gardens of our field; I can only reprint the last paragraph of this story as a fitting epitaph for Pangborn:

I will go into the world and find my way,
I will not die by my own hand, I will regret
no act of love. If it may be, I will find
Andrea, and if he wishes, we may travel into
new places, the greater oceans, the wilderness
where the sun goes down. Wherever I go I shall
be free and shameless; take heed of me. I care
nothing for your envy, your anger, your fear
that stimulates contempt. The God you invented
has nothing to say to me; but I hear my friend
say that any manner of love is good if there's
kindness in it. Take heed of me. I am the night
wind and the quiet morning light: take heed
of me.

After that, talking about Hilary Bailey's "The Ramparts" is a bit difficult. But it's a good story, with its eery, uneasy, air of mystery and legend.

Orbit 14

edited by Damon Knight (Harper & Row; 210 pages; \$6.95). Outstanding stories: "Tin Soldier" (Joan D Vinge); "The Stars Below" (Ursula K Le Guin); "A Brother to Dragons a Companion of Owls" (Kate Wilhelm).

Orbit is, by turn, the most interesting and the least interesting of the original fiction anthologies (see later notes on Orbit 13). Orbits 14 and 15 makes its highest point for years.

"The Stars Below" is Ursula Le Guin's best short story so far. In it, she carries her notion of the "psychomyth" to its furthest ex-

ension. She guarantees the magic of the piece by the solidity of the details and plot of the story. This story seems to be set during the Middle Ages or early Renaissance, but could just as easily tell of a far-future, primitive society (that's why I list it among Ursula Le Guin's psychomyths). Gunnar is accused of being a heretic because of his dabbling in astronomy. He is hidden in a cellar by Count Bord, who is himself executed for his efforts. Guennar, an unworldly character, discovers by accident that the cellar connects with a network of mineshafts and tunnels. The miners find him before he starves to death and adopt him as an eccentric old mascot. His astronomy means nothing to them, but persecution by "them" topside does. All this is beside the point of the story, of course - which is, that Guennar continues his astronomy underground. Slowly, seemingly by instinct, he reconstructs a telescope. He sees patterns of light in the walls of the mine. He rediscovers his calling and sets out to map the constellations underground. This is one of those stories which I call "visionary" or "transformational". There is even one paragraph where we can see Guennar's mind in transformation as he realises the possibilities of the new universe below his feet:

"...And here too there is light! There is no place bereft of the light, the comfort and radiance of the creator spirit. There is no place that is outcast, outlawed, forsaken. There is no place left dark. Where the eyes of God have seen, there light is. We must go farther, we must look farther! There is light if we will see it. Not with eyes alone, but with the skill of the hands and the knowledge of the mind and the heart's faith is the unseen revealed, and the hidden made plain. And all the dark earth shines like a sleeping star."

When I read passages like that, I begin to feel that science fiction really isn't doing too badly after all. (And "The Stars Below" is what I call real science fiction - about the search for knowledge, and the power of that knowledge to illuminate our view of ourselves and the universe.)

I can't work out why "Tin Soldier", by Joan Vinge, did not carry off the Hugo at a trot. (It was not even nominated.) It's the first story for some time that has had all the fine qualities of the "Golden Age" of s f...and almost none of the bad qualities. It is a story of high-sounding and inspiring romance, and the scientific notions seem quite valid to me. Best of all, it is a good story about far-future people. The Tin Soldier is a cyborg who pulls drinks in a bar on Piraeus. "Brandy" is one of the spacers who call in at the planet for "shore leave". Tin Soldier (Maris) and Brandy (Branduin) spend the night together, but he cannot follow her into space. The only people who can travel on the universe's interstellar liners are

women. Because of the effects of relativity on space travellers, Brandy calls on New Piraeus every twenty-five years or so. Meanwhile, Maris ages very little because he is a cyborg. Only the society around them changes. Joan Vinge works all this out quite intricately, and introduces the situation without any obvious "expository lumps". She sweeps us along in the events, because they all are part of the central theme, the extended, developing love affair between two people who see each other for about two months in every hundred years. Unlike Hans Andersen's story, this "Tin Soldier" has a satisfactory happily-ever-after ending.

Compared with the other two, "A Brother to Dragons, A Companion of Owls" is just a bit stilted and unexciting. Yet it is a post-disaster story told with grace and passion, and is well worth its high reputation.

Orbit 15

edited by Damon Knight (Harper & Row; 207 pages; \$7.95). Outstanding stories: "Pale Hands" (Doris Piserchia); "Ace 167" (Eleanor Arnason); "In the Lilliputian Asylum" (Michael Bishop); "Live? Our Computers Will Do That For Us" (Brian Aldiss); "Biting Down Hard on Truth" (George Alec Effinger).

This is an outstanding book, with five stories that I consider first class, and Kate Wilhelm's novella version of "Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang", which everybody else liked a lot better than I did.

Science fiction, with its huge sub-genre about alien races, is an excellent medium for writing about the irreconcilable differences between people (of whatever race). I can't give away the main premise of "Pale Hands". Let's say that it is a dirty joke turned into a tragedy. But the tragedy is that some future government finds a way to separate potential levers physically (in what I say is an unbelievably heavy-handed method of keeping the population down). In this world, if you're female and I'm male, there's no way we'll get together. :: On the Venus of "Ace 167", there's no way that one of us is going to get together with one of them, the "gillies". They are people turned into water-breathers, but their extra power makes them into freaks. In general, this is a good, romantic story about growing old gracefully and falling into hopeless love. As you know, I'm a sucker for stories about hopeless love.

"Ace 167" shares one theme in particular with Brian Aldiss' most rousing story for years, "Live? Our Computers Will Do That For Us". It is also a theme which Stanislaw Lem ascribes to Philip Dick - that new technology may give us more power, but merely more power to hang ourselves, or drown ourselves, or whatever. On Aldiss' Zodiacal Planets, anything is possible, but his characters spend all their powers in laocering each other, then seeking to stop their

personal relationships from dissolving altogether. A father seeks for his past, a wife seeks to understand, a daughter is puzzled by her visitor. When these people slip and fall beneath their computers, they are still forced back to the basic human cry, "Comfort me!"

"In the Lilliputian Asylum", by Michael Bishop, is a series of poems which has the narrative strength of a short story, which I liked very much. It tells the story of a Lilliputian who becomes obsessed by the departure of Gulliver. His entire perspective on life has been altered but, in the rest of Lilliput, life goes on as it had before the arrival of the "Man-mountain". Because he is simply a bit more sensitive than the others, he is confined to an asylum. The impressive thing about "In a Lilliputian Asylum" is that some of the poetry is good in its own right. The sections are constructed as a series of speculations by the madman about Gulliver; about being small in a large universe; about surviving without the enormous figure who had, unknowingly, given meaning to this small man's life. The best sections are about the process itself of seeing new possibilities and having them rejected by complacent people who label themselves as "sane". For this reason, it is a fine companion story to, say, "The Stars Below".

I'm not sure how he does it, but George Alec Effinger takes topics that would become boring or sensational trivia in the hands of most other writers, and turns them into surrealism. "Biting Down Hard on Truth" is about a revolt of prisoners inside a gaol - and nothing much more. Effinger has the art of leaving out the right things, in order to give this story its sinister air.

You could hardly describe Gary D Wolf's "The Bridge Builder" as "outstanding", but it has a striking concept, and it would be a shame to miss it.

Threads of Time

edited by Robert Silverberg (Nelson/SFBC; 219 pages). Outstanding story: "Riding the Torch" (Norman Spinrad).

Like "Tin Soldier", this is the sort of all-stops-out science fiction that they used to write but (we thought) don't anymore. Egotism is nothing unless carried out on a spectacular scale - both for the main character of this story and (I suspect) for the author himself. Therefore I gained the impression when reading about D'Mahl's self discoveries and his new experiences of the universe that the author was showing a lot about the way he conceived and developed the story. In other words, I think that Spinrad had only the most tenuous idea of how it would finish when he wrote the first page, and that every new crisis and climax happened that way to him as well. It certainly reads that

way. The pilgrims from a destroyed Earth are trying to find the Edenic planet upon which to start life anew. A complex, extravagant culture has developed among the pilgrims. D'Mahl uses all the resources of this culture to create his version of the artform known as the "senso" - artistic shapings of three-dimensional experience for the audience. It's very much what Spinrad tries to create in words. At the beginning of the story D'Mahl is (as another character tells him to his face) "insufferable". The reader expects Spinrad to do nothing but justify his insufferability, much as Heinlein always justifies his most repulsive characters. Instead, D'Mahl takes up the challenge (for egocentric reasons) to spend a year with the voidsuckers - the space roamers who look for possibly habitable planets. He discovers that the voidsuckers find an experience in space which eludes the rest of the people. But this experience shapes D'Mahl, instead of he shaping it, but finally he must take responsibility for his new insight. The skill of the story is not in its tone - which is s f kitsch romanticism, though better done than Delany's. The skill is in the complexity of the piece, the way in which Spinrad adds one new element after another to the story but makes the whole into one powerful experience, and the fact that he does not waste time congratulating himself on his effects. Urgent, blazing writing like this has hardly been seen since the best of Bester, and even when saying that, I think that "Riding the Torch" is much better than Tiger! Tiger! and The Demolished Man put together.

Clifford Simak's "The Marathon Photograph" is average good Simak, which means that, if you like Simak, as I do, it should not be missed, but if you don't, then it's hardly outstanding.

A year after reading it, I cannot remember anything about the title story, by Gregory Benford. But two out of three memorable stories for a three-in-one volume like this is pretty good.

Final Stage

edited by Edward L Ferman and Barry N Malzberg (Charterhouse; 308 pages; \$7.95). Outstanding stories: "We Purchased People" (Frederik Pohl); "Great Escape Tours, Inc" (Kit Reed); "Diagrams for Three Enigmatic Stories" (Brian Aldiss); "Trips" (Robert Silverberg).

I suppose that most SFC readers would have read elsewhere that the authors of this volume have blacklisted this hardback edition of Final Stage. It seems that an over-zealous sub-editor at Charterhouse (a publishing house of about the same substance as Norstrilia Press - having disappeared already) changed and abridged at least four of the stories without either the nominal editors or the authors knowing about it. The Penguin paperback edition has restored the volume to its original purity, and that's the one to buy. However, it cost me so much to buy the hardback that I'm not really in the

market for the paperback as well. In the case of Anderson's and Ellison's stories (two of the maligned), I'm not missing anything anyway.

I'm not sure what the fabled scissorperson at Charterhouse did to "We Purchased People", but it still reads very well. An Alien Intelligence is taking over people's minds for entirely random periods and at random intervals. It is about the same plot as Silverberg's "Passengers" of some years ago, but Pohl has attached a fetching little story to the ideas as well. The main character tries to use every second of his time "to himself" in order to pursue the girl he loves. Pohl depicts and orchestrates this doomed effort in quite a heart-rending way, and still manages to put in a plug for the Indominability of the Spirit of Man, and all that. (The more I think about it, the more I realise that a comparison between this story and "Passengers" shows just why I cannot get interested in most of Silverberg's short stories.)

"Great Escape Tours, Inc" is one of those cute stories that still has enough substance to be enjoyable. Some children travel into another dimension (or whatever) without particularly realising what is happening. Gradually the author makes the story increasingly sinister while finally it becomes exactly the opposite kind of story from its beginning.

I'm not sure why Brian Aldiss is writing all these "enigmatic stories" in trios for different sources. Most of them have appeared to be light self-indulgences, without much point. I don't find these three more satisfying than the others, but they do have a menacing, dreamscape quality which makes them enjoyable.

"Trips" is good Silverberg, although always in danger of becoming a bore. It is the story of a traveller lost in alternate realities, forever trying to recapture that which is, necessarily, lost forever. The main power of this story is not the personal situation of the main character (he's just another one of Silverberg's gim-faced, constipated "heroes"), but in the evocation of possibilities for the city and surroundings of San Francisco. Silverberg has a considerable talent for creating the "spirit of place", a talent which he shows us rarely.

New Writings in SF 24

edited by Kenneth Bulmer (Sidgwick & Jackson; 189 pages; \$A5.70). Outstanding story: "The Ark of James Carlyle" (Cherry Wilder).

It's plain that Ken Bulmer is committed to the safe policy for New Writings of using fairly safe and insipid stories, a policy which was always successful for Ted Carnell. However, Bulmer seems much more willing to include the occasional original and spectacular story, such as Cherry Wilder's "The Ark of James Carlyle". Cherry is, of course, an Australian who has moved to Germany only recently. That's a shame,

since she could have done much to establish the idea of an Australian s f. The story itself is a simple one of the main character's attempt to communicate with the alien race, the quogs. When it comes to a matter of achieving understanding or dying in an alien environment, the story becomes quite exciting. The strength of this story is in its method - impressionistic observations of the landscape, lightning decisions that must be made, desperate adventures which must be undertaken. By leaving out everything but the essentials, Cherry Wilder leaves us with a story that stays in the mind as much more than its essentials. (For once, a blurb writer is correct. Bulmer calls this a "high-spirited account of watery events written in a delicate and evocative style". Now why didn't I say that in the first place?)

Fellowship of the Stars

edited by Terry Carr (Simon and Schuster; 222 pages; \$7.95). Outstanding story: "The Author of the Acacia Seeds and Other Extracts from the Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics" (Ursula Le Guin).

I suspect that I'm maligning this anthology unjustly by listing only one story as "outstanding". Okay, there are at least three stories which are written very well, have considerable impact and human relevance...yet stay in my mind as being unsatisfactory. They are sorts of stories where I say to myself, "Now wouldn't it have been nice if he or she had improved it just that bit more?" "Enjoy, Enjoy" by Frederik Pohl makes fine work out of a sludgy, hackneyed story idea. "Do You Know Dave Wenzel?", by Fritz Leiber, is as eerily powerful as only a Leiber fantasy can be. But it's elusive, too - somehow lurking too far away from the conscious mind to be caught. I must re-read it. "Ashes All My Lust" has some extraordinarily powerful imagery of an alien civilisation and situation, but somehow never quite solidifies into anything that means anything. Often I get the impression that George Alec Effinger lets his mind wander while writing a story, right at the moment when he should have been most concerned to reveal its secrets.

"The Author of the Acacia Seeds and Other Extracts from the Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics" is hardly a story. It is, like "The Stars Below", one of Ursula's "psycho-myths", or maybe even a Borgesian meditation or imaginative essay. But what meditations! Ursula Le Guin begins with a stray, quirky notion about the way we might think about life forms and natural objects - that is, as independent means of communication. From here, she takes the idea "for a walk" and ends up gazing over an infinite landscape of the possibilities in our universe. This is science fiction as it should be - showing us things we have never seen before, unless we look through the eyes of Ursula Le Guin.

Nova 4

edited by Harry Harrison (Walker; 216 pages; \$7.95). Outstanding story: "Slaves of Time" (Robert Sheckley). Outstanding feature: "My Affair With Science Fiction" (Alfred Bester).

Nova 4 would just as uninteresting as Nova 3, except for the two pieces listed above. "Slaves of Time" is a gratifying surprise. Not only is it the first substantial story by Robert Sheckley to be published for years, but it is the best story by Robert Sheckley which I have ever read. It is not denigrating the story to say that it owes much to the style of Kurt Vonnegut. Who else has had the intelligence or the wit to follow some of the paths which Vonnegut established for the science fiction writer? Vonnegut developed the art of aphorism and contraction to a fine pitch, and he realised that, in order to give out the warmth of a conflagration, one must light lots of straws and twigs in the first place. In other words - say what you actually want to say; don't be dull; leave out everything but what you want to say. These seem to have been the rules followed by Sheckley, so that he writes a time-travel story which supercedes every other time-travel story I've read (including Up the Line). Charlie Gleister invents a time machine, is warned by a future self not to use it, and does. He can never go home again. Variations of himself rule the world, come to populate all the niches of time, and spread tyranny and goodwishes, in equal proportions, throughout the time-conquered continuum. There are the roaring flames of exciting ideas about everything here, yet Sheckley never loses control. His aim is always to show us the dilemma of the main character, and his aim is successful.

In Bester's essay "My Affair With Science Fiction", we find what has since been described as the most refreshing essay in Hell's Cartographers. Although I think that Alfred Bester laughs off some issues which he should explore, the pleasant thing is that he does laugh at science fiction as well as with it. So there's quite a bit of funny common sense here ("Most science fiction authors have marbles missing. I can remember listening to an argument about the correct design for a robot, which became so heated that for a moment I thought Judy Merrill was going to punch Lester del Rey in the nose. Or maybe it was vice versa."). Bester is the first s f writer to say out loud, in the shadow of the Great Man's Death, that he didn't like John W Campbell or his fads and methods.

The Far Side of Time

edited by Roger Elwood (Dodd, Mead; 235 pages; \$5.95). Outstanding stories: "Waif" (Fritz Leiber); "Eye for an Eye" (Lloyd Biggle Jr.).

"Waif", by Fritz Leiber, is one of those few stories in science fiction that recognise that people have more possibilities to them than the relentlessly robotic features common to any num-

ber of interchangeable tales. The story creates the excitement which a mysterious pre-pubescent girl causes in the narrator when she appears from nowhere and becomes the centre of his life. The story actually has in it (rather than merely tells about) the contrary, guilty, joyous emotions of the main character, within a strong story structure.

"Eye For an Eye" is one of those cutesy stories about attempting to come to terms with a baffling, affable civilisation. Eric Frank Russell used to write this story better than most. "Eye for an Eye" is as good as any in the sub-genre, and Biggle manages to re-complicate his plot in so many ways that I'm still not sure whether his "solution" to this situation is valid or not.

Continuum 1

edited by Roger Elwood (Putnam; 246 pages; \$5.95). Outstanding: Stations of the Nightmare (Part 1) (Philip Jose Farmer).

Continuum 2

edited by Roger Elwood (Berkeley/Putnam; 250 pages; \$6.95). Outstanding stories: "Killashandra - Crystal Singer" (Anne McCaffrey); "The Death of Hyle" (Gene Wolfe); "The Legend of Hombas" (Edgar Pangborn).

Continuum 3

edited by Roger Elwood (Berkeley/Putnam; 182 pages; \$5.95).

Of all of Roger Elwood's attempts to oversupply the market in original fiction anthologies, the Continuum series (No 4 published in 1975) is definitely the most peculiar. Many people (including Australia's own Bill Wright) have feared for some time that the original anthologies will replace the sf magazines. This isn't so: the magazines are dying all by themselves, without enthusiastic help from the anthologies, but they are taking an unbelievable time doing so. However, Roger Elwood seems to have taken this point seriously. Here he presents a series of four books in which the stories of one volume are connected to the stories in the other volumes. Elwood reflects the magazine nostalgia so faithfully that he even provides a novel-length serial through the books: Philip Jose Farmer's mainly unsuccessful Stations of the Nightmare (the only good bit is the first part, which features "Leo Queequeg Tincrowder" pouring scorn on his fuddy-duddy midwestern neighbours. I hope they haven't run you out of town, Phil.) The most peculiar thing about Continuum is that I did get to like the idea by about Volume 4. The stories here are genuinely part of story cycles, rather than being segmented sections of serials. In the case of Gene Wolfe, for instance, he writes each bit of his cycle in a completely different style. Regrettably, only one of his stories is anything but mediocre.

Edgar Pangborn has the most freedom in these volumes, since he has already established the universe of his cycle in stories in many other places. Most of his stories in Continuum seem to have been written hastily - not good Pangborn

at all. But "The Legend of Hombas" has the real Pangborn power, which I've been extolling in this article, of drawing the reader into a hearty, violent, loving world of people seeking to come to terms with themselves and with a world ecology which is, in its entirety, much more hostile than any existing now. Hombas, the main character of this story, can come to terms with his destiny only through the images of dream and legend. Therefore he waits for the red bear of Death to claim him, and then, like the main characters of The Farthest Shore, discovers the dire possibility that the red bear itself might die. It's a quite convincing story on the border of fantasy, much like the great South American classic stories.

I've described Anne McCaffrey before as the most "impeccably boring" author in science fiction. That was in Dragonrider days, for these stories of Killashandra, the crystal singer, have an intricate, yet human quality which makes them much more palatable than anything else of McCaffrey's I've tried to read. Killashandra is one of a group of people who can cut rare crystals from the mountains through the quality of her voice. She becomes addicted to the crystals, however, and cannot leave the planet for long. The best of these stories, "Killashandra - Crystal Singer", tells the story of what happens when she does leave her planet after being a crystal singer for some years.

Future Kin

edited by Roger Elwood (Doubleday; 180 pages; \$4.95).

A volume "for young people", although I would hope that most kids would exercise their native good taste and turn up their noses at these insipid, preachy pieces. The book is not completely destitute: Christopher Anvil's "The Knife and the Sheath" is good action stuff and "Over the Line" is quite moving, if as badly written as all of Malzberg's other stories sprinkled throughout the original anthologies (Elwood's in particular).

The Long Night of Waiting by Andre Norton and Other Stories

edited by Roger Elwood (Aurora; 212 pages; \$6.95).

Truly, that's the title. This looks like an amateur publication in general - awkward size for the book, awkward type-setting, etc (yes, I know that sounds like Norstrilia Press). Another book "for young people", whom Elwood treats as people so desperate for the sight of print that they will even read stories like these. I should record that Phyllis Eisenstein's "Teleprobe" is at least a proper story, and a quite passable mystery story.

dialogue. Moorcock has a quite serious, science fictional point to make, of course - that even physical omnipotence is no guarantee of happiness and no proof of or against anything. With the power to create his own universe, de Goethe resorts to the most extravagant clichés of a fragile era of his own dim past. Von Goethe does find sin at last, of course, and is gratified by at least some danger of mortality. Moorcock takes the opportunity to invent word concoctions that make Delany's look like cardboard idiot boards. "A Month swooned by," writes Moorcock in one typical aside and, as a mirror of de Goethe's florid mind, writes this splendid paragraph:

Werther added gorgeous lavs of intricately patterned red and blue ceramic, their bowls filled with living flowers: with whispering toadflax, dragonsnaps, goldilocks and shaghair lilies, with blooming scarlet margravins (his adopted daughter's name-flower, as he knew to his pride), with soda-purple poppies and tea-green roses, with iodine and cerise and crimson hanging johnny, with golden cynthia and sky-blue truelips, calomine and creeping marrikin, until the room was saturated with their intoxicating scents.

"Pale Roses" is saturated with intoxicating word scents.

M. John Harrison's "The Wolf That Follows" has some of the same feeling about it:

They hung in gay ambush, Maupin, Trilby and Les Fleurs du Mal; the Whistler, the Fastidious and the Strange Great Sins. ...Space enfolded them as they waited for their prey, they were embedded; a bracelet of gold in black volcanic glass - the Forsaken Garden, the Let Us Go Hence, and the Melancholia That Transcends All Wit.

A fleet of pre-Raphaelite spaceships, yet? They are operated by a group of anarchists who want to take power from somebody in order to give it to somebody else (or something). The plot is downright incomprehensible, but the meaning of the story is quite interesting. The impression given by the names of the spaceships is mirrored in the style of the anarchists - their devotion to symbols and relics of late-nineteenth-century England, and their feeling that "Our palette is prepared. The Galaxy has given us our canvas, a dead dragonfly has bequeathed us the brushes we have to hand. We make Space. We define it... We infer reality." Harrison's point is, like Moorcock's, meant to be taken seriously. Given vast power (such as that involved in galaxy-flitting), does one yield to the despotism of that power, as do so many American s f writers? Or can one actually create with power? - use all space as a medium for artwork? I hope that Harrison has opportunity to explore this theme with the thoroughness which it deserves. Meanwhile, Harrison

continues his willingness to take space opera seriously as well, and write it the way that E E Smith should have written it. In particular, I like the image of "The first and only shell fired in the encounter" which "was still boring its way mindlessly into the mud of the field; its fading glare lit a quick, fishlike flicker of movement; and with a long knife sticking in his neck, the remaining policeman choked at Tiny, dropped his weapon...subsided slowly and was still."

The notes at the back of this book inform us that AA Attanasio was 21 at the time when he sold "Once More, the Dream". In that case, he must be due for a terrific career somewhere, even if not in s f. It would be a pity to say too much about this story, except that it is a sort of Carlos-Castaneda-plus-plot. The "hallucinatory" sequences are better than almost anything else I've read on this theme.

"The Warlord of Saturn's Moons", by Eleanor Arnason, is about a gentle English lady writer who gets a kick out of scribbling space opera. It's not a new notion, and Arnason really does not amplify the idea. But the space-opera story which she is writing does sound interesting, and the end of the story is good.

New Dimensions 4

edited by Robert Silverberg (Signet 451 Y6113; 237 pages; \$1.25). Outstanding story: Strangers (Gardner R Dozois).

As my way of typing its name indicates, Strangers, by Gardner Dozois, is novel-length, and is the strong main feature of New Dimensions 4. However, only this story saves the volume, which is a downright disappointment compared with its three predecessors. All the other stories, especially Richard Lupoff's "After the Dreantime", are trite and corny, and would have had no place in New Dimensions 1-3.

But Strangers is a classic tale of intercultural (lack of) communication; of personal discovery; of the possible connections between a society's genesis and growth, and its culture, religion, and legends. It is a bit too early yet to say that this story is "in the grand tradition of Ursula Le Guin", since Ursula herself has only been writing such work for a few years. Still, the whole novel has a refreshing sense of cultural modesty which could not be found very often in science fiction before Ursula Le Guin's books appeared.

What I'm fumbling to say is that this is a complex, rich, moving, engrossing, and splendid tale, and that I have no hope of reviewing it within the limits imposed by the format of this article. I will list a few of the elements in Strangers. The main character, Joseph Farber, finds himself on the world of Lisle. Earthmen do not understand the culture of the Cian people very exactly, but both sides are willing to put

up with each other. Farber sets up a process of revealing unwelcome answers to previously unanswered questions by falling in love with, then marrying, Liraun Je Genawen, a Cian girl. The absorbing strength of this story is that the emotional stresses of any marriage are perceived as clearly as the growing stresses involved in this particular marriage. These two people don't, as they find out eventually, understand a single damn thing about each other - but this rarely stops anybody else from falling in love. Farber does not have the imagination to realise that the Cian civilisation works very differently from his own, and for biological reasons. Dozois introduces him to the down-home truths in a story of suspense.

Gardner Dozois is not renowned for restraint in his writing. However, he banishes most of his usual hysterical tone during most of the story. The only real disappointment is that he lets his main character babble during the last section. The only excuse I can offer is that I would become hysterical too if these events happened to me. Dozois lets all his themes develop organically, and the ending is extraordinary (and, some will say, intolerably male chauvinist). I like Strangers because I identify with the main character (at one point, he is described as a person who can "listen to the silence") and because, for once, Dozois takes the trouble to organise his material and write some very fine pages. In particular, I like the description of the Earthman who "looked like a man who no longer had the strength to go on, but who must, and so goes on without strength, held together only by a set of complex and rigidly interlocking weaknesses." Any writer who understands as much as this about people can only continue to develop and extend his art.

Stellar 1

edited by Judy-Lynn del Rey (Ballantine 24182; 216 pages; \$1.25). Outstanding stories: "Mr Hamadryad" (R A Lafferty); "Fusion" (Milton A Rothman); "Singularities Make Me Nervous" (Larry Niven).

In "Days of Grass, Days of Straw" (New Dimensions 3), R A Lafferty writes about a short paper prepared by one of his characters, on the subject of "Amnesia, the Holes in the Pockets of the Seamless Garment". I'm not quite sure why but this reference gave me a clue to the secret of all R A Lafferty's stories. (Next, I'll present the Secret of the Universe. Just wait a year or two.) It occurs to me that Lafferty's central idea is that modern man has forgotten most of the really important phenomena of the world's history - that all modern literature, history, sociology, etc, represents the tiniest part of all that might be known about or experienced in the universe. Lafferty's strong religious views are well known, so it's hardly surprising that many of his stories hint that the most unfortunate gap in our collective memory is our ignorance of the truths of Christianity.

BRUCE GILLESPIE

For perhaps this reason, many of Lafferty's stories have been predictable and preachy in recent years.

But every now and again, Lafferty writes a story like "Mr Hamadryad". The narrator keeps meeting Mr Hamadryad in bar-rooms all over the world. Mr Hamadryad does not look quite human and he seems to have a ghostly valet. The conversation continues over a period of years, as Mr Hamadryad spins a theory about megalithic stone structures (erected by panthers), and the end of the coming age, and the war between the Monkeys and the Cats. Easter Island appears somehow at the centre of it all. The final scene of the story takes place on Easter Island where the blind spot in God's eye is moving slowly over the island, transforming water and landscape into the "shadows of the whorls and loops of God's own thumbprint". Lafferty does make poetic sense of all this. Not only is human history, as recorded, inconceivable when compared with the "real" human history, but the entire period of all human history means little when compared with the histories of other animal races which have had the ascendancy. Time and again, God has created Edens, which have been lost, then destroyed all sentient creatures, then begun again. We are among the last. But we are only the first part of the last; our counter-creatures, the Cats, are to follow us shortly (for we are the Monkeys) and we will be their slaves. (They were our slaves, and raised the stone faces of Easter Island, and stone statues in cliffs, and Stonehenge.) Meanwhile, Mr Hamadryad represents us all, and he knows his rapidly approaching fate. So, in the last pages of the story, which are even more visionary than the rest, "Mr Hamadryad" becomes a tragedy as well as a tall tale. Even mysterious and magical events cause their own types of pain - but events like these have never been glimpsed before Mr Lafferty saw them.

"Fusion" and "Singularities Make Me Nervous" are intricate, technical stories which would fit best into Analog magazine. I enjoyed them very much when I read them, but can't remember much about them now.

Science Fiction Emphasis 1

edited by David Gerrold (Ballantine 23562; 211 pages; \$1.25). Outstanding story: "On the Street of Serpents or, The Assassination of Chairman Mao, as Effected by the Author in Seville, Spain, in the Spring of 1992, a Year of No Certain Historicity" (Michael Bishop).

No other outstanding stories, but there are some modestly enjoyable stories ("Telepathos" by Ronald Cain, "The Rubaiyat of Ambrose Bagely" by W Macfarlane, and "Gate-0" by Don Picard) to make this quite a good collection. For reasons I don't know, the second in the Emphasis series has not been published.

"On the Street of Serpents" is so well-written

that I came to the end of it before saying to myself - so what? What the hell is this man up to? A second reading yields no more answers. On the one hand, Bishop writes a powerfully self-confident, evocative prose which tells an enthralling story. On the other hand, not much in the story adds up to anything satisfactory. The main character of the story is Michael. He spends his adolescence in Seville, Spain. We meet him first in 1962. He has a mysterious meeting with a girl named Nisei who lives in the same apartments, and with a Spanish soldier who helps him when he suffers an unaccountable accident. In 1992, after a long, but eventually broken marriage and two sons, he meets both people inadvertently when he revisits Seville. His mission is to assassinate Mao Tse-Tung, who has travelled to meet Generalissimo Franco. (Both men have, unfortunately for Bishop, invalidated the story since it was written - which surely he must have known would happen.) However, I still cannot work out why the narrator wants to assassinate Mao, or why he flares into brutality in an incident in Seville while he is preparing his plans. The narrator is an urbane, analytical commentator on his own surroundings and the well-nigh incomprehensible political situation that has occurred during the '80s and '90s. But eventually, he seems almost to lack free will. Or perhaps the world does. Bishop says so little that he seems to be saying lots of things. But all this creation of possibilities for life seems to lead to a muddled perception. Or perhaps that's what Bishop is saying. I think this is a great story and, by itself, makes Bishop a major American practitioner of the short story. But I think it would be better if Bishop had explored all the possibilities which he leaves out of his story, just out of reach. I would welcome any letters from people who think they know what this story is really about.

Alternities

edited by David Gerrold (Dell 3195; 175 pages; 95c).

All these stories seem to be rejects from the Generation and Protostars collections. Mainly new writers, and third-rate stories. I enjoyed "The Legend of Lonnie and the Seven-Ten Split" (E Michael Blake).

Stopwatch

edited by George Hay (NEL 24873; 224 pages; \$1.80). Outstanding stories: "All We Have on This Planet" (A E Van Vogt); "EA 5000: Report on the Effects of Riot Gas" (Ian Watson); "Intracom" (Ursula Le Guir); "A Bedtime Story" (D Letts); "The Invisible Men" (Christopher Priest); "In Memoriam, Jeannie" (Josephine Saxton); "Doctor Fausta" (David I Masson).

Stopwatch is the most consistently satisfying collection for 1974. A few collections have some stories which are much better than any here, but

not even New Worlds at its best has put together so consistently pleasurable an array of English s f writing at its best.

For instance, George Hay has taken the trouble to get stories from excellent writers whose work has not been published for some time. If I had my way, every collection would have in it a Josephine Saxton story. But here is a solitary, glowing piece called "In Memoriam, Jeannie". It could well form part of a triad with two stories in Epoch (see below): AA Attanasio's "Interface", and John Shirley's "Uneasy Chrysalids, Our Memories". Shirley's story is also about the injection of RNA "memories" (or something similar - he is not specific about the techniques in the way that Saxton is). Attanasio's story has the same unapologetic gutsiness of "In Memoriam, Jeannie". The main characters in the story are nuts to begin with. They destroy their brilliant colleague, Jeannie, and implant RNA containing her memories in their minds. But her memories are not strictly scientific, and the effective ghost of Jeannie has the ability to wreak retribution on her tormentors.

I had thought that David I Masson had retired from science fiction permanently. (His collection, The Caltraps of Time, a legendary book, is reported to contain all his published fiction before he stopped publishing altogether in the middle 1960s.) Anyway, reviews by Masson have been appearing in Foundation recently, and this story, "Doctor Fausta", proves that he is still one of the best s f writers in the world. I won't attempt to describe the events in this story of reverse alternate worlds. It's enough to say that the main character's alter ego in the other world crosses over, involves him in various derring-dos, and that the crazy farce rises to an exhilarating pitch of good humour and confusion by the end of the story. Something of the flavour of the story - though by no means all - can be gained from these goodies:

The next four weeks were a cross between a roller-coaster and being becalmed in a fog... Meanwhile the outer world rolled on... The President of Sloczo-Chekhovia resigned. Gone forever, hoped radio commentators, were the days of a monoglyphic, Ominous block under the commination of Crussia... I was going off for a fortnight with Cat...but unfortunately about this time the Forward-Drivers, having lost so many by-selections, decided to work to rule and the country came to a standstill again... The death penalty was proposed for genocide, defined as killing a person whose genetic skin-colouring differs from one's own. The Government staged a sit-in in the House of Lords.

And, in this alternate world, the narrator gets much of his vital information from the Scientific Armenian.

It's something of a relief to realise that English

s f writers regard their own country in as permanently comic a light as do observers from overseas. How else could one explain "A Bed-time Story", by D Letts? It's more than a satire; almost every sentence rests on a shaky plank of recent English experience in industrialisation, automation, worker participation, and good old-fashioned non-productivity. A group of unlikely people, including one who comes to regard himself as a prophet, set up a company in which (human) workers will control the machines that will produce (robot) (called "rab") workers. This is a whole shaggy dog story about English public life. I don't know how Letts manages to make it sound believable, but he does. Probably it's because we know that these unlikely events are happening already somewhere in the Midlands right now. (This is a much better story than anything Sladek has written along the same lines.)

"EA 5000: Report on the Effects of Riot Gas" has much the same theme - give the English a rope and they will hang themselves in inspired absurdity. It's the military who are absurd here. England seems to have dissolved into permanent riots (at least, according to the law-and-order lot), and the military want something to stop them. "Well, the problem as I see it," says Dawson, "is this pathological sense of difference." So they invent a nerve gas which eliminates "a sense of difference". Which...well, read the story.

And a more subtle story about paranoia is Chris Priest's "The Invisible Man". Two men are walking on a beach. One of them is a Government Minister. Secrets he has to tell. So who is that lurking behind that group of trees? What about those people messing about in a boat on the bay? Who are they watching? This is a good piece of scary understatement, told mainly in indirect dialogue.

The non-English writers in Stopwatch do quite well. For instance, I did not realise that A E Van Vogt had written a good story in twenty years. But "All We Have on This Planet" is farcical and funny, and quite adult. (Most of Van Vogt's stories make him sound like a permanent sixteen-year-old.) A busy s-f writer, harassed by two ardent female fans, thinks of a way to beat the invading aliens. Really.

I heard "Intracom" for the first time on the radio when the ABC broadcast it in September 1975. However, at the time I was distracted by (for me) atypical other activities, and didn't hear a lot of the play. Now that I can read it, I find myself wishing that Ursula Le Guin would write comedy more often. Comedy is her natural

way of speaking when you meet her in person. Yet there is little humour in most of her works. Therefore the Le Guin fan can hardly claim to know all sides of her talent without reading this piece about several mad people stuck inside a spaceship.

There is still time, surely, for an American publisher to pick up this book and give it the promotion it deserves.

Strange Gods

edited by Roger Elwood (Pocket Books 671 77754; 191 pages; 95c). Outstanding stories: "Try Again" (Barry N Malzberg); "Musspelsheim" (Richard A Lupoff).

One of the better Elwood collections, if you judge an anthology by its best stories.

"Try Again" is about the best Malzberg story I have read, mainly because it is actually a story. A family is trapped in a fallout shelter. The narrator feuds with the rest of the family, especially his zealously fundamentalist father-in-law. The family discovers that an alien had begun to live in the fallout shelter soon after it was built in the 1950s, and is put out to find his home ruined. But there is some doubt as to whether an atomic war has actually begun outside, and... The "surprise" ending is effective.

In "Musspelsheim", Lupoff writes the I would like to be able to write a story. It is told in the first person by an electronics engineer about his girlfriend, and about Roland, the quiet-spoken genius whose wife has left him. Roland puts all his energy into developing ever-more complex sound systems. The narrator and his girlfriend participate in the experiments as far as they can, then find themselves bewildered by Roland's reaction to what he discovers through the earphones on his sound system. In other words, the ending has a nice speculative-fiction ring to it, but the story is really about the trusting relationship between three people.

Wandering Stars: An Anthology of Jewish Fantasy and Science Fiction

edited by Jack Dann (Pocket Books 78789; 255 pages; \$1.50). Outstanding stories: "Lock You Think You've Got Troubles" (Carol Carr); "The Jewbird" (Bernard Malamud).

The only good stories here are the reprints. As one reviewer (I forget who) said, if all these stories were written by writers with WASP surnames, the collection would be called anti-Semitic. Boring, sentimental cliches.

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The New Atlantis and Other Novellas of Science Fiction

edited by Robert Silverberg (Hawthorn; 182 pages). Outstanding story: "The New Atlantis" (Ursula K Le Guin).

I find it impossible to set down in words how highly I regard "The New Atlantis", and what I find in it. To judge from some of the descriptions I have read of it, nobody else seems able to review it either. One reviewer goes so far as to call it gloomy. Maybe he or she did not read the same story that I did.

Most reviewers of this story do not take account of the fact that there are two parallel tales told. In one of those tales, the husband of the story-teller returns home, certain that the authorities who now control America will fetch him away to a prison camp as soon as possible. Ursula Le Guin tells the story of their reunion in a moving, understated way. "I don't suppose I have ever been so happy," says the story-teller of that first night as she lies beside her sleeping husband - in a world where marriage is illegal, "No; was it happiness? Something wider and darker, more like knowledge, more like the night: joy."

In the second tale within the story, that "something wider and darker" is represented by the autobiography of the whole continent of Atlantis as it rises from the sea. An idea worthy of Italo Calvino, and experienced in words with the same kind of conviction and joy which Calvino brings to his work. Here is a Jungian metaphor for the rising of all this is greatest within us; Le Guin converts this from a theoretical type of metaphor into a deeply felt experience which is shared by the woman and her husband in their tiny flat in a doomed America, and by a mysterious continent-creature which realises that "It is not the great Existences we are seeing, but only the little lives." The world seems always divided against itself; in this story, Le Guin seeks to show how the world, and at least two of its inhabitants, becomes whole again.

New Dimensions 5

edited by Robert Silverberg (Harper & Row; 211 pages). Outstanding stories: "Find the Lady" (Nicholas Fisk); "Rogue Tomato" (Michael Bishop); "White Creatures" (Gregory Benford).

New Dimensions 5 continues the notable downward slide of this series, a decline which began in ND 4. This collection has many small, forgettable stories (including one much-praised story, "Sail the Tide of Mourning", which I found unreadable). Even its three most interesting stories are hardly major achievements.

"Find the Lady" is about the-last-humans-against-the-aliens. If the humans (including two lovely lads who speak just like that throughout the story) can keep the aliens entertained for long enough, they might stay alive. It looks as if they've failed, and then they have a new trick at the end of the story...and we still wonder how many days they have left. The story is written so briskly that we tend to forget that it is one long cliché.

"Rogue Tomato" has no real referents outside the sf/literary field itself but, for the sf field, it's a good literary joke. The man who turns into a planetary tomato is called Philip K. The tomato is garrulous, tasty, and a bit of a blot on the interplanetary skyscape. But fun.

"White Creatures" is one of those stories in which you are inside the mind of a person who doesn't know what is going on, but tells you in great detail what he thinks is going on, but you can guess what you think is going on, but it turns out that you're not quite right, either. The imagery is quite effective, and this "slow burn" type of story is told at an appropriate pace.

New Writings 25

edited by Kenneth Bulmer (Sidgwick and Jackson; 189 pages; £3.25/\$8.75).

This is the first olinker of a New Writings since Ken Bulmer took over. There were two stories which I liked, sort of - "Talent Spotter" by Sydney J Bounds and "The Green Fuse" by Martin I Ricketts - but nothing outstanding.

New Writings 26

edited by Kenneth Bulmer (Sidgwick & Jackson; 191 pages; £3.50/\$9.50). Outstanding stories: "Men of Good Value" (Christopher Priest); "The Pump Room With Jane" (Ian Watson).

Christ Priest has included himself as the main character of "Men of Good Value". That's one of the two main gimmicks in this story. The interesting thing is that Chris does get his own persona into the story effectively, but he also makes sly fun of the "Chris" in the story. The other gimmick comes at the end, and I would not want to give it away. It's about what might happen if television and radio stations really did follow the fairness-of-comment rules which politicians call for in an ABC/BBC system.

"To the Pump Room With Jane" is a wistful little nineteenth-century sob story, related with great elegance and precision, that just happens to be set in an English future where everybody runs a lot shorter of water all the time than many people did during the summer of 1976. I'm glad that Bulmer has escaped sufficiently from Carnell's model for New Writings so that he feels free to print stories like this one.

New Writings 27

edited by Kenneth Bulmer (Sidgwick & Jackson; 207 pages; £3.95/\$10.50). Outstanding stories: "Bartholomew & Son (and the Fish-Girl)" (Michael G Coney); "Three Deadly Enigmas V: Year by Year the Evil Gains" (Brian W Aldiss); "Heal Thyself" (John Rackham); "Cassius and the Mind-Jaunt" (Colin Kapp).

NW 27 shows an improvement in the quality of New Writings after the previous two volumes. I don't think Bulmer will ever inspire the very best out of anybody, but he does seem to have enticed some satisfactorily good stories out of writers from whom we might not hear unless New Writings existed. Which means that, if this sort of reliable, readable story has disappeared in America, you won't find it anywhere else in English publishing, either.

"Heal Thyself" is a story I enjoyed very much because it happens to be one of the few s f stories I've read which connects with anything I do for a living. My employer specialises in proposals for alternate health schemes, and the thesis of this story supports his systematic theories quite neatly. Robert Millar tries yoga, but finds that it does not give him any really new feeling of well-being. His ghuru simply cannot show or tell him how to relax. Meanwhile, an old friend of Millar's, a doctor, invents a way to transfer thoughts from the doctor to the patient. But he finds that he does not have any healthy thoughts to transmit to his patients...he has specialised in sickness for his entire life, so he knows nothing about good health. Which, of course, is where the guru comes in. This is one of those few s f stories which I would like to come true.

Coney's "Bartholomew & Son (and the Fish-Girl)" is part of the idea that became The Jaws That Bite, the Claws That Catch (still unavailable in a British edition, as far as I know). There is, in this story, as Bulmer's blurb says, "a clever

designer...a calculating artist...who knew how to juggle the emotions" with "a clearer understanding of many more things and people than merely the two Bartholomews, father and son, and Carioca Jones, and emotion mobiles... not forgetting the fish girl..." It's set on one of Coney's alternate Earths, which I find irresistible, and the plot is good old-fashioned all's-fair-in-love-and-art. Nobody writes this kind of thing better than Coney these days.

I found the latest series of Brian Aldiss' "Enigmas" the most potent and comprehensible yet. Which doesn't mean (yet) that I would attempt a summary.

Colin Kapp specialises in combining some unbelievably corny prose ("That's fantastic," said Sawyer, "I'd no idea anything like that was possible.") plus some quite persuasive images. This is one of those stories which involve the exploration of the internal landscape of a person's mind. Kapp sets out on this exploration with dash and conviction.

The Gollancz/Sunday Times Best SF Stories

Introduction by Brian Aldiss (Gollancz; 1975; 317 pages; £3.75). Outstanding stories: "Esmeralda" (Daphne Castell); "The Hibbie" (James Alexander); "The Pit" (D West).

Elsewhere in this issue, Van Ikin examines this book - both the stories and the principles upon which the stories might have been selected - far more effectively than I can do here. All I can do is register my disagreement with his (and Brian Aldiss') choices for best stories. I think Gary Kilworth's "Let's Go to Golgotha!" is a dreary gimmick story; furthermore, the mechanism of it is just one step further on from Up the Line (Robert Silverberg), which destroyed so many of the premises of time-paradox stories that it made pieces like Kilworth's redundant.

So: why didn't Van mention "The Pit" in his review? It's by far the best story in this volume, and will be in my Top Ten SF Short Stories for 1975. It's the micro/macrococosmos story done properly (compared with books like Ringworld). The main character knows little about his world when he begins the story - except for the standard theology of his society. But he goes exploring for himself and finds that his world is more dangerous, complex, and awe-inspiring than anybody could have expected. The standard of writing reminds me of the best adventure fiction of H G Wells.

"Esmeralda" is - sort of - a chicken that is not quite one. She "would hurl herself gracefully through the air, in a long parabolic spring that always ended exactly in front of you. Then she would crouch and wriggle and enter for a moment into some sort of confidential communication which she, though not you, under-

stood perfectly. Then she might spring away, sideways, or saunter off, with a slipping, skidding movement, like a huge pebble on a smooth surface." A supremely confident animal eccentric, Esmeralda's antics have most of their effect on human biology and society, rather than contributing to the sum total of scientific knowledge. Esmeralda is a most attractive jester, and the writing - good, English, comic writing - is as attractive as the piece I quoted.

Orbit 16

edited by Damon Knight (Harper & Row; 271 pages; \$8.95). Outstanding stories: "Mother and Child" (Joan Vinge); "Euclid Alone" (William F Orr).

Both Orbits 16 and 17 descend in quality quite sharply from the standards reached in 14 and 15 (perhaps the best two in the series except for No 5). The best thing in 16 is "The Memory Machine", Damon Knight's collection of ways in which various s f people have been able to make themselves sound ludicrous in print.

What makes Orbit 16 worthwhile as a book is the story which takes up the first 80 pages - "Mother and Child", by Joan Vinge. To judge from this story and "Tin Soldier" (reviewed above), Joan Vinge is the best new writer in the field for a few years. Not that I can justify this opinion by examining her writing style. She tends to go all kind of gushy at the fall of a teardrop ("tore the bitter anguish from my soul", etc). And both her long stories so far have been set on alternate worlds which are just bordering on fairy-tale kingdoms. But Joan Vinge does create characters which have some solidity to them, and she is able to entangle them in story-lines which give them great interest. For instance, within the first few pages of "Mother and Child", the main character grows up, finds his true love (True Love), begets a child and, it seems, falls to his death down a cliff as he and Etaa are captured by marauders. And then the scene changes to the palace of the kind of the marauders, and the king falls in love with Etaa, and she has the child, but the main character isn't dead... and it does end happily ever after. I suppose the only real difference between this and Perrault or Andersen is that Joan Vinge complicates the story a bit more. I'd just like to see somebody remove the tear-ducts from her typewriter.

"Euclid Alone" is one of the stories about the Responsibilities of the Scientist. This one works well because Orr seems to be as interested in his subject (mathematics) as he is in his people. By referring to a mathematical idea (what happens if somebody does disprove Euclid's theories altogether?), he can focus on the main character, who is up to skulduggery, and Hans, the narrator's friend, who finds him out. So you don't realise that the story is about moral responsibility (and all that) until you've

enjoyed the s f bits. This could be placed beside stories like Norman Kagan's "Four Brands of Impossible".

Orbit 17

edited by Damon Knight (Harper & Row; 218 pages; \$7.95). Outstanding stories: "The Anthropologist" (Kathleen M Sidney); "Great Day in the Morning" (R A Lafferty); "Under the Hollywood Sign" (Tom Reamy).

Can "The Anthropologist" be the first published story by Kathleen Sidney? They're making first stories better than they used to. For "The Anthropologist" is as self-confident, concise, well-conceived, and moving as most other stories that I've read in this batch of anthologies. The story is about Robert, the boy with three heads. Anthropologists from Earth removed him from his own planet when he was a baby, raised him as a human boy, and trained him to be an anthropologist so that he might go back to his own planet and attempt to understand an incomprehensible alien race. The experiment does not work - but it is Robert himself, and his scientific adversary Lardner, who must bear the weight of the failure. For Robert cannot go home again... either way. The story is told mainly in tight little vignettes of dramatic conversation - a technique with which most s f writers fumble incompetently. Now where can I get to read the second and third stories by Kathleen Sidney?

R A Lafferty has any number of pet obsessions. In his bad stories, he tends to preach - indirectly, it's true, but directly enough to warn us about the perils of Modernism (anything from about the thirteenth century onwards), and the dreadful things that afflict people who have abandoned old values. In his good stories, like "Great Day in the Morning", he is "saying" much the same thing, but all the persiflage is transformed into magical, persuasive symbolic language, and into a sort of breathless humour. "Great Day in the Morning" is simply about the Day of the Apocalypse, which Lafferty sees as the disappearance of all that is basic and valuable. But, in this story, you see everything in the world actually changing and being transformed. "When he looked back, the sun had moved but only to make itself more comfortable, to get a better hold on its dawning." With luck, the writer of magic fables and saggy-dog stories in Lafferty will continue to triumph over the crusty old moralist.

And no story could be quite as different from Lafferty's as Tom Reamy's "Under the Hollywood Sign". This story has great power because of its hard-bitten realism rather than its s f idea. (It's an old idea.) The main character is a cop in Los Angeles who treads the fag beat, and seems proud of being unaffected by the whole underground homosexual society. But when he sees an irresistible face in a crowd, his search for the beautifully blank-faced stranger turns into a story which rivals the best in the

language about obsession. The stranger is an alien, of course (he and his companions are seen only near the scenes of disasters), and the main character's Proustian capture of the alien has a horrifying fascination which goes far beyond the concerns of most s f writers.

Orbit 17 features mainly stories by new writers, and even has the "first" stories of several people such as Seth McEvoy and John Curlovich. And Kathleen Sidney, of course. Yet it's quite a bit better than Orbit 16. New writers of the world, unite; you just might be what we've all been waiting for.

Epoch

edited by Roger Elwood and Robert Silverberg (Berkeley/Putnam/SFBC; 595 pages). Outstanding stories: "ARM" (Larry Niven); "Mazes" (Ursula K Le Guin); "Durance" (Ward Moore); "Timetipping" (Jack Dann); "Lady Sunshine and the Magoon of Beatus" (Alexei and Cory Panshin); "...for a single yesterday" (George R R Martin); "Interface" (AA Attanasio); "Blooded on Arachne" (Michael Bishop); "Uneasy Chrysalids, Our Memories" (John Shirley).

That's a fairly long list of "outstanding stories" to pick from a volume like Epoch, which, I think, is mainly a boring book. Obviously it was meant to be the Dangerous Visions for this year (since it doesn't seem as if Ellison's last volume will ever appear). And, like both DV volumes, the amount of interesting prose is a very small percentage of the whole. Of course, there's a novel's length of dull Jack Vance (The Dogtown Tourist Agency), and even a story like Larry Niven's "ARM" is quite unmemorable after reading it, even though it is a good combination of s f/detective yarn.

"Mazes" is slight - Ursula Le Guin admits that it's a Clarion story in her postscript - but, even within its strict limitations, it's a pleasing piece of alternate perception. ("An alien creature is dying. A human being is present. You write from inside the alien, from its point of view, strictly.")

The best page in Epoch is Ward Moore's postscript to his story "Durance". In part:

After all, I thought, it is possible to resign oneself to reality. Seventy-second year, hearing gone to hell, eyesight going, hemorrhoids, gall bladder, all the disgusting ailments of aging. Resign oneself to decay, deterioration, desuetude. Even the unsepeakable prospect. Another five, ten, even a miraculous fifteen years. Resignation, fortitude. Acceptance. Why not?

And then, coming toward me, one of the glorious natural wonders of the world. Sandals on unblemished tanned feet. Long, fine, tanned thighs in revealing white

shorts, legs and thighs covered with fine, golden down. Above, a laced white bodice showing a sweet belly and a sweet belly-button, the lacing strained apart by sturdy breasts, curved, the pink nipples just suggested rather than showing...

No, I could not be resigned. Not this year.

Neither is the main character of "Durance" resigned. His position is ambiguous - jailed indefinitely for an unknown crime in an unknown year among an unknown people. But always striving to keep his perceptions alive, always trying to understand any new information, always seeking the way out. But only at the end of the story does he think of the most obvious way out of the jail - simply to walk out. His robot keepers never had the ability to restrain him. I'm not destroying your enjoyment of the story by "giving away" the ending. It's the main character's commitment to continued life (reminding me very much of the sufferings of Bacon in the last chapters of Elish's Doctor Mirabilis) that makes this good reading.

By contrast, the best story in the book, "Interface", by AA Attanasio, would seem to be an unrelieved chronicle of violence and randomness. There is savagery in even the sex scene. No tenderness here, and no romanticism. Two characters left alive at the end of the story, one of them the manic figure who has destroyed the others. There's a dolphin which none of them has the opportunity to communicate with. And there is Liz, whose stray life brings her to this experimental station. But because this story is about death, and not some sentimentalized version of it, it is also about life. If the characters are violent toward each other, they are equally totally involved with each other. Nothing can excuse the violence, but the author does not try to. We feel sharply the loss of life. In short, Attanasio, who is one of the most refreshing new writers to appear in the recent anthologies, takes off that gauze screen of silliness which most s f writers cover their creations. A fine story, which somehow looks a bit naked and lost in a volume like Epoch.

The rest are comfortable stories, then, although brisk and enjoyable. "Timetipping" was, it seems to me, written for that odd collection, Wandering Stars, discussed above. The characters have names like Paley and Litwak, and live in a never-never world of "rabbis and chasids and grocers and cabalists". The main character discovers a way to trip between times and worlds, which is the enjoyable part of the story, and somehow Dann links this in his own mind with Litwak's ethnic preoccupations. An oddity of a story, but I enjoyed it.

I'm always glad to see Alexei and Cory Panshin in print again, because they always write something distinctive and refreshingly fanciful.

But they sort of fall over their own feet in "Lady Sunshine and the Magoon of Beatus" - but still manage to keep dancing. The tone of the beginning of the story reminds me a lot of the lighter stories of Cordwainer Smith. The main character has all power, but doesn't know what she wants to be powerful for. The characters have names like Lady Sunshine and Madame O'Severe and Lord Brain. Jen - Lady Sunshine - sets out to find the True Earth. She meets the Magoon of Beatus, and they beat around the universe in their quest. This is where the story stumbles. There's enough material for a ten-page fable here, but the authors try to stretch it to 44 pages. The ending is a bit wishy-washy. Still, I did enjoy most of the story and it leads me to ask for more stories from the Pan-shins.

"...for a single yesterday" is so unashamedly sentimental - and attractive - that even an editor during the 1930s might have hesitated before publishing it. During the days after the Blast, not many people are left, and those who are speak like a nice bunch of university freshers. But this fellow Keith has managed to steal some of the drug chronine, by which his mind actually travels back to the Good Old Days. ("But she was more than pretty. She was beautiful. All warm and soft and golden, with red-blond hair and those dumb eyes that were either green or gray, depending on her mood.") (*Sigh*) And eventually he decides to "go back" permanently, upsetting the narrator and the other people who are left. The title line comes from "Me and Bobbie McGee" which this fellow Keith sings all the time (so do I) - and the whole story is so corny that I loved it.

"Blooded on Arachne" is the kind of story which, I hope, Michael Bishop does not continue to write, because he writes this sort of technicoloured adventure nonsense so well that he could well be trapped into repeating himself forever. Very flashy stuff; nothing here; but nice anyway.

"Uneasy Chrysalids, Our Memories" is so good a story that I won't say much about the plot. It is the diary of a girl who has lost her memory. We see, from her matter-of-fact, compact jottings, what kind of a society imprisoned her, destroyed her memory, and gradually we begin to realise the metamorphosis which is taking place inside the story-teller. Very skilful.

In the Wake of Man

no editor listed (Bobbs Merrill; 229 pages; \$7.95). Outstanding story: "From the Thunder Colt's Mouth" (R A Lafferty).

R A Lafferty is always on the verge of telling us what his stories are about. But to do so would be too obvious for such a devious writer and, anyway, probably we would not understand the answer. One of the best clues I've seen is in "For All Poor Folks at Picketwire", the

rather second-rate Lafferty story in Epoch. "The world puts out some very long and tricky tentacles, a few of them so tremendous that they do escape scrutiny." In most of Lafferty's stories, the "real" events, the transformations which actually catch up the characters, are, in de Saint-Exupery's phrase, "invisible to the eye". Surface details and events are merely the most inapproximate indicators of the world which we all miss seeing. This is the viewpoint of several of the best writers in the field, of course, but in people like Dick and Disch, the result of their scepticism is despair. Not so Lafferty. He thumbs his nose at the "ordinary" world, which keeps insisting on its own reality. He laughs it to scorn, every skerrick of it.

The results, such as "From The Thunder Colt's Mouth", are not always so easy to follow or to summarise. So I won't summarise. Suffice to say that this is another of Lafferty's stories of ecstatic transformation, with all his symbols taken, as they have been in recent years, from Indian folklore. It seems that Lafferty himself is here as "Melchisedech Duffey", and the story seems to be set in Lafferty's home town in Oklahoma. The main drift of the story seems to follow Lafferty's general line that the more things change, the more they stay the same (that is, not very comprehensible). This is a bit different from the implication in Dick's work that all change is entropic and disintegrative. In Lafferty's work, this means that the bubbles in the beer don't go flat; they keep on fizzing. "There are no 'future' events," says Duffey. But there are a lot of interesting events, of some kind of another, in this story.

I kept feeling that I was missing something important in Gene Wolfe's "Tracking Song". In many of his recent stories, Wolfe has pared down his style so finely that, on the surface, he presents merely a series of discrete events. In some of his stories, the events take on some further significance. In "Tracking Song", I couldn't find that added dimension. Other readers might do so. But it's very well written.

The New Improved Sun: An Anthology of Utopian S F

edited by Thomas M Disch (Harper & Row; 208 pages; \$8.95). Outstanding stories: "Repairing the Office" (Charles Naylor); "The People of Prashad" (James Keilty); "Settling the World" (M John Harrison); "The Zen Archer" (Jonathan Greenblatt); "The Hero as Werewolf" (Gene Wolfe); "The Change" (H G Wells).

This is a much better collection than Disch's Bad Moon Rising of a few years ago. And the improvement is not entirely because Disch has chosen to include some reprinted stories ("The People of Prashad"; "A Clear Day in the Motor City"; "The Star"). It's also because he has not stayed on his subject, and has included at least one story which is neither s f nor utopian, but which is the best story in the book.

The main idea of Charles Naylor's "Repairing the Office" is so delicious that I've told it to people in conversations and still managed to raise a laugh. So I won't spoil the story by telling it to you. On the surface, the story seems to be about a bored girl who gets sick of working in boring jobs - not because the work is boring, but because her workmates accept the boredom and, worse, the loneliness of "ordinariness" and the distance between themselves. I just hope nobody gets around to trying out her solution to our ills. But I can't help cheering the "final solution" she thinks of.

For most people, "Settling the World" will be an apocalyptic dystopia, far more suitable for a volume like Bad Moon Rising than for this book. "With the Discovery of God on the far side of the Moon by a second-wave (Apollo B series) exploration team, and the subsequent gigantic and hazardous towing operation that brought Him back to start his reign anew, there began on Earth, as one might assume, a period of far-reaching change." That's the first sentence of the story, and the rest is even better. The story is about a group of people who decide that the residency of God on Earth is just too much of a good thing. They decide to assassinate Him, or destroy His works, or...do something. They invade a huge roadway which God has built down the middle of England. But, of course, it is God's Motorway, and not entirely made of physical matter, and so the journey along the Motorway is transformed into a beautiful horrible image (for God doesn't appear as Man... or Roman).

"The Zen Archer" is just what it seems to be; a

satisfying Zen tale with a vivid, paradoxical ending. I don't know what the story is doing here, but I'm grateful for its presence.

There is a certain kind of story which one can write only by putting a sheet of paper in the typewriter, forgetting all one's surroundings, opening the sluice-gates of the unconscious mind, and watching - with some apprehension - what flows through the mind and fingers, onto the page. I think "The Hero as Werwolf" could only have been written that way. It does have a story, certainly - the story of a boy growing up. But the boy is part of a pack which survives by hunting people and eating them. But in this future/alternate world, the corpses talk back until they are completely dead. And if the boy marries, he and his wife have no choice but to continue the same type of existence. Unless they come to the notice of the mechanical powers-that-be that run the superficial levels of this society. But that's how the plot sort of forms itself. What the story is really about is, as Wolfe says in the second sentence, "Fear, pavement, flesh, death, stone, dark, loneliness and blood". Which makes for quite a replete world. It's just that I don't like it much, and the adventures don't up to much else. Or do they? This story cannot be tied down; it just rushes through the mind, just as it washed down from Gene Wolfe's.

Dystopian Visions

edited by Roger Elwood (Prentice Hall; 197 pages; \$7.95).

This book is easy to review. It has no outstanding stories. It has nothing to recommend it at all. Surely only Roger Elwood could achieve nothing on a subject like "dystopian visions".

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New Worlds 8

edited by Hilary Bailey (Sphere 7221 6187; 221 pages; \$1.50). Outstanding stories: "Running Down" (M John Harrison); "The Bees of Knowledge" (Barrington J Bayley); "Conversations at Ma Maia Metron" (Robert Meadley).

In "Running Down", M John Harrison succeeds in writing a story which gives life to a particular

human being, expressing in him both the physical emblem of a character type and giving flesh to a persuasive metaphysical conceit. Which is another way of saying that Harrison really does put it all together in this story.

Lyall was tall and ectomorphic, with a manner already measured, academic, middle-aged. His face was long and equine, its

watery eyes, pursed mouth and raw cheeks accusatory, as if he blamed the world outside for his own desperate awkwardness. He did; and affected a callow but remorseless cynicism to cover it. He was a brilliant student, but already comically accident-prone - constantly scratched and bruised, his clothes stained with oil and ink and food. His background (he had been brought up by two impoverished, determined maiden ladies in Bath) chafed the tender flesh of my own early experiences under the bleak shadow of the southern end of the Pennines...

Thus the story: Lyall, sour, accident-prone, warping the world for both himself and others as he walks through it; occasionally meeting his old Cambridge acquaintance, whose own life is, in a quiet way, not much more successful. When the two meet for the last time on the moors of England, all of Lyall's personal qualities have coalesced into a "cynical and lonely ectoplasm". Everything that he touches begins to fall apart. "Much of the glass at the front (of his house) had been replaced by inaccurately cut oblongs of hardboard... The barn roofs sagged, and wanted slates... One corner of the cottage had been battered repeatedly by confused motorists..." Lyall's own character soaks up the disaster around him, feeds on it, and emits it again. During the final pages, Harrison exercises his supreme talent for apocalyptic writing as Lyall's anti-ego tears apart the seams of the earth.

I suppose I like this story so much because Lyall's character is a ludicrous, splendidly twisted and mangified aspect of my own personality, and the idea of my own personality being let loose on an ectoplasmic rampage is horrifying, but irresistible. I don't think anybody in the field has written anything before quite like this - mainly because almost nobody else can write as well as M John Harrison, or is willing to. In other words, the more that Harrison pulls out the stops, the better he is. The scenery at the end of the story is crazy and baroque, yet it is all described with complete precision and artistic control. I doubt if there was a better s f/fantasy story published in the English language in 1975.

"The Bees of Knowledge" is one of a type of story of which, I would have thought, there could be no more variations. But Barrington Bayley is a very good writer, even when he writes badly - and here he writes well. This is a story of interplanetary exploration told in a nineteenth-century style (the New Thing in England, it seems) and by a story-teller who judges all his experience from a kind of nineteenth century viewpoint. After he crash-lands onto the planet of Handrea, he finds himself unable to escape from the hive of a race of giant bees. The story is nothing more than what he discovers about the race of philosophical bees with which he tries to communicate. But

the process of attempting to communicate is told in a detailed; readable way, and the main character's discoveries about his hosts reveal no neat answers.

"Conversations at Ma Maia Metron" is indescribable. Perhaps I can say that it reminds me of Bayley's story, although Meadley tells his story in quite a different way. But the traveler in "Conversations" stays at the establishment of a group of garrulous philosophers. His rigid sense of etiquette forbids him to make too hasty an exit, but Meadley gives a clear idea of the story-teller's impatience as a flood of (really quite interesting) ideas and propositions fly around his head. Humour of a kind that can be found only in New Worlds.

As usual, Clute and Harrison are worth reading when they put on their critic's caps. However, John Clute is almost incomprehensible as he bumbles on about Aldiss' The Eighty-Minute Hour. In fact, English commentators have been so universally nasty about this novel of Aldiss' that I am, more than ever, convinced that it is one of the best of his books (and certainly the funniest). The title of Clute's article is "I Say Begone! Apotropaic Narcosis, I'm Going To Read the Damned Thing, Ha Ha" - which isn't funny. :: Harrison says just the right things about Disch's Getting into Death collection (also reviewed here in SFC). Harrison: "The things that are done by Thomas M Disch's characters are real things; the things that are done to Robert Heinlein's characters by Robert Heinlein are always done in the name of something."

New Worlds 9

edited by Hilary Bailey (Corgi 552 10022; 219 pages; \$1.60). Outstanding stories: "The Ministry of Children" (Keith Roberts); "Ancient Shadows" (Michael Moorcock); "Daddy's Girl" (Joanna Russ); "Narrative of Masks" (Charles Partington).

I've said several times in this article that English writers of the type of Keith Roberts never slip below a certain satisfying style of story-telling. So, while the movement of "The Ministry of Children" is simple, and the conflicts and characters quite clear-cut, the prose has such strength that the story is memorable. In a future England, the school system has declined so notably that groups of organised kids within the schools actually govern all but the most overt public activity within the institutions. Pamela is a girl who cannot accept such tyranny. She witnesses what she suspects is a murder, refuses to tell even the local MP, a friend of the family, but realises soon that the gang knows what she has seen, and she has little hope of escape from retribution. The story concerns the way in which she accepts responsibility for this fate and so, within the brutal environment, becomes an effective lone example of one woman's liberation.

And so it does resemble, marginally, Joanna Russ' "Daddy's Girl". It seems to have become a current attitude within the s f world recently to pass over Joanna Russ' fiction because it is based so firmly on her perception of the goals of women's liberation. However, any attempt to categorise "Daddy's Girl" in this way will meet with failure. The form of the story is a memory-dream of the narrator's lifetime. On the surface, the target does fit the stereotype: the narrator has been trapped in life by being a "daddy's girl", looking after an ageing father and never finding any other love. But the story is also an examination of traditional ideas of love. This scepticism is not based on a cynical discounting of the notion of love, but on an acute re-creation of the narrator's doubts about herself, her reaching out, her feelings of rejection. In other words, the liquid onrushing prose of the story shows that the embodiment of public attitudes in private feelings does not mean that these private feelings can be discounted. It does mean that people suffer so much more pain than they need to. The pain is here in this story. So are some tendrils of salvation.

"Ancient Shadows" has been published in Legends of the End of Time. Along with "Pale Roses", it is much better than any of the "Dancers at the End of Time" novels. This is because Moorcock takes the trouble in these novellas to concentrate his statements and tell more vivid stories. Dafnish Armitruce is one of those luckless people from earlier centuries who travel to the End of Time. She travels with her son Snuffles from a puritanical age in the twenty-first century. She is horrified by the extravagance and flamboyance of the all-powerful people she meets. Worse, she finds that the Morphall Effect decrees that she cannot travel back to her own time. She decides to try anyway. Her bane in this world is Miss Ming, a woman with an unfortunate personality. She forces her friendship on Dafnish. Rebuffed, she befriends Snuffles and persuades him to stay at the End of Time while Dafnish makes her attempt to recover her own era. There is a surprise turn in all this, of course. When we get to the end, find out the extra dimension in the relationship between Dafnish and her son, and re-read the story, it has more power than on first reading. This is one of Moorcock's best stories, quite apart from the place it has in the "Dancers" series.

"Narrative of Masks" owes much of its imagery and effectiveness to early Ballard. It's easier to read than Ballard ever was, and the characters are easier to accept. The narrator and his wife take a house in the country. The house had been inhabited by a sculptor who had killed himself. His last statue lies submerged in the pond. There are ghostly things in the house, and the uneasy relationship between the new inhabitants of the house leads to an exposition of the uneasiness which exudes from the structure of the house. The ending is good and chilling.

Clute and Harrison: neither quite so good this time. Still, they are the best professional critics of s f being published today. All the better critics (like those for Foundation) are still unpaid.

Antigrav

edited by Philip Strick (Arrow 9 909930; 184 pages; \$1.40). Outstanding stories: "Conversation on a Starship in Warpdrive" (John Brosnan); "The Alibi Machine" (Larry Niven); "Look You Think You've Got Troubles" (Carol Carr); "Elephant with Wooden Leg" (John Sladek); "By the Seashore" (R A Lafferty).

Most of the best stories in here are reprints: Larry Niven's, Carol Carr's, and R A Lafferty's (the best story here). This is mainly a collection of humorous and/or wry pieces. Stories like "The Alibi Machine" are written as straight mystery narrative, but the twist at the end of this one is well done. (A good companion story for Asimov's better-known "It's a Beautiful Day".)

Probably I am more susceptible to John Brosnan's humour than most people would be, since he used to entertain me greatly when he was writing stories like this (about events in his own life) way back in 1968 in ANZAPA. Anyway, it's an example of that rarest creature in science fiction - the story that has no purpose in it except to make us laugh. Which it does.

In "Elephant With Wooden Leg", Sladek is good at "crazification". This is a sort of Ron Goulart story written the way Goulart ought to write - with a few good jokes. In this story, there is revolution, crazy books, crazy people, and a takeover by cockroaches. This is the best Sladek short story that I've read.

Future Corruption

edited by Roger Elwood (Warner 76-571; 189 pages; \$1.25). Outstanding stories: "Saltzman's Madness" (Richard A Lupoff); "Heart Grow Fonder" (R A Lafferty); "The Storm" (Gardner Dozois).

This is one of the few good Elwood collections. Three interesting stories, even! Both the Lupoff and the Dozois stories could have achieved Hugo nominations, I guess, if they had not been stuck in an Elwood collection.

"Saltzman's Madness" would certainly have been nominated for a Hugo if it had appeared in Analog or F&SF. The story is about Ben Saltzman, who believes that there are actually 100 seconds in every minute, but that we are all missing out on 40 of them. He sets out to find "more time", and succeeds. His discovery, in the final few pages of the story, is told indirectly through the eyes of the story-teller, but it is all the more effective for this allusive quality. On another level, this is the story

of Ben's friends, who try to dissuade him from going ahead with his notion. This is quite a good story about a tightly knit group of professional people whose complacency is disturbed by their eccentric friend. A companion piece to "Musspelsheim" (reviewed above).

"Heart Grow Fonder" is Lafferty's contribution to the literature of wife-swapping - or husband-swapping. Which is what the husbands do: they swap minds between each other. The result is a clever farce. The plot is more controlled than is usual in a Lafferty story. The story has quite a good Laffertyish paragraph. I don't know what it has to do with the story, but it is a good quote:

"I don't want the tension eased; I only want it shifted a bit. I don't want to win easily. I may not even want to win. But I do want to keep the winning within sight and to come almost up to it. Let all the world be frozen forever then, with my winning just on the tips of my reaching fingers..."

It might be a character from Borges saying that... or a summary of one major idea in Gerald Murnane's Tamarisk Row... or something which is probably true about me.

"The Storm" has that same stamp of conviction which made "The Last Day of July" one of the best stories of its year, 1973. In fact, one of the two story-strands is very like that in "Last Day". An unemployed youth stays in his New York apartment much of the time. As the days go by, he finds ways in which he can stay there all the time. He loses sense of time and of his surroundings. At last, he finds the walls and floor of one room of the apartment covered by cockroaches. He falls so far into despair that, with a convulsive movement of the spirit, he falls back into time to find the event in his past which made him what he is now, and somehow to change that event. The alternating sections of the story (which takes place during a great storm) tell of the boy who was to become the apartment-bound youth. I would suggest not reading the story if you have already reached the stage of despair which Dozois describes so accurately and painstakingly in the story.

Tomorrow Today

edited by George Zebrowski (Unity Press; 168 pages; \$3.95).

A well-bound collection from a small-scale press - but I cannot escape the feeling that nobody was writing at best for Tomorrow Today. Even the Pangborn is poor. And George Zebrowski brings back the much-missed Norman Kagan to s f for the first time in years, but with a very unsatisfactory story. The only story that I liked (but not much) is "John of the Apocalypse" by James and Gregory Benford.

- Bruce Gillespie May 1976

November 1976

INADEQUATE SUMMARY

Charles Taylor has read most of this issue on layout sheets, and it occurred to him that this long article/catalogue could stand a bit of summarising at the end. So, in line with my faith in lists as ways of summarising things, here are my lists of:

Best S F Short Stories From the Original Fiction Anthologies:

1973

(This list has appeared already, in 46, combined with my "best ofs" from the magazines.):

- 1 "The Last Day of July" (Gardner Dozois) New Dimensions 3
- 2 "The Direction of the Road" (Ursula K Le Guin) Orbit 12
- 3 "We Are Dainty Little People" (Charles Maylor) Bad Moon Rising
- 4 "Thy Blood Like Milk" (Ian Watson) New Worlds 6
- 5 "The Shrine of Sebastian" (Gordon Eklund) Chains of the Sea
- 6 "How Shall We Conquer?" (W Macfarlane) New Dimensions 3

1974

- 1 "The Night Wind" (Edgar Pangborn) Universe 5
- 2 "Mr Hamadryad" (R A Lafferty) Stellar 1
- 3 "The Stars Below" (Ursula K Le Guin) Orbit 14
- 4 "Riding the Torch" (Norman Spinrad) Threads of Time
- 5 "Tin Soldier" (Joan Vinge) Orbit 14
- 6 "In the Lilliputian Asylum" (Michael Bishop) Orbit 15
- 7 "Live? Our Computers Will Do That For Us" (Brian Aldiss) Orbit 15
- 8 "Doctor Fausta" (David Masson) Stopwatch

1975

- 1 "Running Down" (M John Harrison) New Worlds 8
- 2 "The New Atlantis" (Ursula K Le Guin) The New Atlantis
- 3 "Under the Hollywood Sign" (Tom Reamy) Orbit 17
- 4 "The Storm" (Gardner Dozois) Future Corruption
- 5 "Heal Thyself" (John Rackham) New Writings 27
- 6 "The Pit" (D West) Gollancz/Sunday Times S F Competition
- 7 "Settling the World" (M John Harrison) New Improved Sun
- 8 "Interface" (A A Attanasio) Epoch

Even these lists do not provide a complete survey. They do not show, for instance, that New Worlds has been the most consistently interesting series of original fiction anthologies. Perhaps it is more clear from the lists that Orbits 14 and 15 were a peak for the series. It has gone downhill again. Of the individual anthologies, I remember that Stopwatch, from England, had the highest overall standard of any of the anthologies of the last three years or so. Tom Disch's New Improved Sun was also excellent. New Dimensions has slipped very badly. We survived Elwood. And I read some very good stories. Thanks, editors.

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30)

* Because I have spent a few months putting together this issue, somehow I have arrived at the end of 1976 without quite expecting to. Once again I can subject you to the doubtful delights of my "Best of" list for the year:

BEST OF EVERYTHING 1976

FAVOURITE NOVELS

- 1 The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, by Henry Handel Richardson (edition read: Heinemann; original publication date 1930; 831 pages).
- 2 Doctor Faustus, by Thomas Mann (Penguin Modern Classics 14 002723; 1947; 490 pp).
- 3 Doctor Mirabilis, by James Blish (Dodd Mead; 1964/1971; 330 pp).
- 4 Memoirs of a Survivor, by Doris Lessing (Picador 330 24623; 1974; 190 pp).
- 5 The Beautiful and Damned, by F Scott Fitzgerald (Penguin 14 002414; 1922; 364 pp).
- 6 The Wayfarer (Kojin), by Natsume Soseki (Tuttle; 1943; 320 pp).
- 7 A Fringe of Leaves, by Patrick White (Jonathan Cape; 1976; 405 pp).
- 8 Bring the Jubilee, by Ward Moore (Four Square; 1955; 189 pp).
- 9 Wolf Solent, by John Cowper Powys (Penguin Modern Classics 14 002182; 1929; 634 pp).
- 10 The Winter Sparrows, by Mary Rose Liverani (Nelson; 1975; 277 pp).

Most of the books I read this year, as you might have guessed already, were anthologies of new science fiction stories. But even so, I seem to have read quite a few other good books as well. Briefly, since I've left myself little room:

"Henry Handel Richardson" was Elizabeth Richardson; who based The Fortunes of Richard Mahony on the misadventures of her father. Still, most of the events took place long before the author was born, and the whole book became the greatest book ever written by an Australian, and is certainly one of my three or four favourite novels. It is the only Australian novel which has the scope and creation of a sense of life that can be found in, say, Tolstoy. I like this book much better than Tolstoy, or George Eliot, or any of those authors. Richard Mahony has some claim to be the greatest figure in literature outside of Shakespeare's plays: a cranky character, it's true, but also somebody to whom happened most of the experiences which are likely to affect an Australian, or any human being. His refusal to let life alone is heroic, as well as self-destructive; and Australia, in the 1880s as now, had no mercy. By the end of the novel, his wife is seen as even more heroic. The final 200 pages are difficult to read indeed for anybody who gets to care as much about the people as I did. Except for some of the events referred to earlier in the issue, this novel was my greatest experience for 1976.

:: Leigh Edmonds told me once that he found Thomas Mann's recreation of Beethoven's sonatas in words in Doctor Faustus so unbelievably good that he could not keep reading the book. I admire just as much Mann's ability to invent the complete works of a fictitious composer. And then there is the ambiguous narrator, who tries to tell about the life of his genius friend, Leverkahn. The book is a much greater achievement than either its retelling of the Faust myth or the implied tribute to Goethe would suggest. :: Both Doctor Faustus and Doctor Mirabilis, like several other books on this list, are books which I've "putting off" for some years. I'm ashamed that I did not read Mirabilis until after Blish died. I think the first half is much better than the second half, but whatever one's opinions on a matter like this, the whole book is a major work of historical recreation. There are many vivid scenes in the book: the battle of wits between the alchemists; Bacon's tentative love affair in Italy; and Bacon's terrible and long ordeal at the end of the book. I hope this book gains proper recognition some time.

I've been re-reading books this year. I read Flaubert's Sentimental Education in 1965, and have not looked at it since. Under my own rules, I cannot put it on the list a second time but, if I did, it would go at Number 2. It's the best twentieth-century novel written in the nineteenth century, very funny, and the book whose writing style I would most like to be able to emulate.

The other books on the list group together. Memoirs of a Survivor is an s f classic, if it s f at all. At any rate, it is about "the last people in the city"; but the story-teller can see through walls; and who is the story-teller anyway? This is a magic book; but the magic shows real life and does not hide it. :: Much the same to be said about The Beautiful and Damned. It might be a badly organised book, as Edmund Wilson says, but it creates life in every line, and the whole thing is like a memorable, melancholy dream. :: The Wayfarer has a main character (not the story-teller) who shares many of my own doubts and fears; he's the sort of person who is nearly hidden by his surroundings, until the narrator is forced by the circumstances of his own life to pay attention to his lonely kinsman. (Soseki's books have just become available again at a Carlton bookshop.) :: A Fringe of Leaves is rather subdued White, but intense enough. It's just not as elevated as the White of Voss or The Tree of Man. Still, this book is a complete creation of the experience of an English woman who undergoes shipwreck, capture, escape, and attempted reconciliation to "civilisation" during the early part of the nineteenth century in Australia. Very few other novelists have White's skills. :: I've talked about Bring the Jubilee earlier this issue. :: Wolf Solent is disappointing, since Powys never knows quite to do with his vivid characters and ideas. But they are vivid and worth reading about. ::

The Winter Sparrows is not a novel, but a memoir - but it reads like a very good novel. It is the story of Mary Rose's twelfth year, the first half spent in Scotland, in most poverty-stricken Glasgow, before her family moved to Australia, and the second half spent in migrant camps in Sydney and then in a small house on a dreary estate. The author berates Australians most soundly for their inability to celebrate life in the middle of what is really great wealth. Appropriately enough, the author celebrates her own enjoyment of life on every page of the book.

And also enjoyed:

Charisma, by Michael Coney (Gollancz; 1975; 224 pages)

The Clewiston Test, by Kate Wilhelm (Farrar Straus Giroux; 1976; 244 pp).

A Lifetime on Clouds, by Gerald Murnane (Heinemann; 1976; 157 pp)

An Adaptable Man, by Janet Frame (Braziller; 1965; 277 pp).

Howard's End, by E M Forster (Penguin Modern Classics 311; 1910; 310 pp).

The Naked Sun, by Isaac Asimov (Panther 1016; 1957; 189 pp).

The End of Eternity, by Isaac Asimov (Panther 881; 1955; 207 pp).

A Low Breed, by Joseph Johnson (Nelson; 1976; 313 pp).

FAVOURITE FILMS 1976

Because of laziness, and because most of them are shown at the Rivoli or Dendy Brighton (have you ever tried to catch a tram on a Sunday night from one of those places after watching a film?; never again), I have missed out on most of the films I "should" have seen this year. Even so, I saw some good things:

- 1 Landscape After Battle (directed by Andrzej Wajda)
- 2 Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore (Martin Scorsese)
- 3 The Man Who Would Be King (John Huston)
- 4 Thieves Like Us (Robert Altman)
- 5 The Cars That Ate Paris (Peter Weir)
- 6 Buffalo Bill and the Indians (Robert Altman)
- 7 Monsieur Hulot's Holiday (Jacques Tati)
- 8 Dark Star (?)
- 9 Family Plot (Alfred Hitchcock)
- 10 Sunday Too Far Away (Ken Hannam)

Wajda's film is a long way ahead of the others. For instance, the first quarter hour (showing Polish soldiers "freed" at the end of World War II and running through the snow together) is orchestrated to Vivaldi's Four Seasons. The rest of the film - outstanding photography and acting, humour and passion - has that same sort of musical intensity; of people captured yet trying to live as best they can. A Wajda of the cinema makes even an Altman look lazy. :: But I still thought that the two Altman films for the year (Thieves Like Us arriving here for

the first time) were a real treat. Thieves has that beautiful duo playing from Carridine and Duvall, and probably some of Altman's best photography. Buffalo Bill has so many good performances that I have not been able to find the actors' names for most of them - Paul Newman looking just like dissolute Buffalo Bill, and not all like Paul Newman, Will Sampson as William Halsey, and that bloke from Cabaret whose name I just cannot remember or find at the moment, this time as another showman, of the greatest bunch of fakes in American history. It is a very funny film, and has more than a hint of Phildickian magic now-you-see-reality-now-you-don't tricks in it as well.

But the two films for the year were Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore and The Man Who Would Be King. I will remember the first film forever because I saw it in the early part of what turned out to be just about the worst night of my life; these things add piquancy to one's memories, you know. Ellen Burstyn and the kid (where do you get caste lists for these things?) battle it out with words while she tries to battle it out with an unforgiving male-dominated American society. The dialogue is very funny, even if it is about cruel events. Kris Kristoffersen is as dopey as ever, but the women characters are very good. :: I saw The Man Who Would Be King twice in a month (unusual for me), and each time I was conscious of seeing a type of film I never hoped to see again. It was almost as if the best adventures of sf books had been summarised and put on film - except this is north of India, not a far-distant planet. Everything is perfect in this film: the recreation of colonial India, Christopher Plummer's Kipling, Michael Caine's chip-on-the-shoulder rogue, Sean Connery's "man who would be king", the implacable inhabitants of Secunda, and that mountain scenery. And the humour and fateful pace of the film. This is just one of those films which almost anybody will find enjoyable.

The Cars That Ate Paris is also mixed up with my "other 1976", so I'm not sure whether I remember it accurately. But to me it seems like the best Australian film made so far - much better than the same director's Picnic at Hanging Rock, for instance. By the end of the film, Weir reduces his NSW country-town landscape to some frightening images of armadillo-like Volkswagens, a mad mayor, milksop-turned-killer, and that all-too-accurate country dance. And the "vegies", of course. It's really a sort of sf film. :: Dark Star is very funny, with lots of parody of 2001, but also lots of jokes that are funny in their own right. :: And Tati is great, but I get the idea that bits had been cut out of the print of this early '50s film. Mon Oncle is still much better than any of his other films. :: Family Plot is also very funny, and Hitchcock does not seem to have lost any of his old skills. Bruce Dern is "most improved" actor since I saw him first in Silent Running. :: And Sunday Too Far Away is one part of the "real Australia": shearers' country. And that's two Australian films in the list in one year. :: And that's my old year. Here's luck for '77. We need it.

Last stencil typed 3 January 1977*

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