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The Critical Journal Of The BSFA

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EDITORIAL

Not so much an editorial, but rather a brief discussion on a couple of items concerning the magazine and a few points that might be of interest to you.

I wonder how many of you noticed the tremendous impact the SF Promotion made on the book buying public. Did you see the campaigns by Smiths, Menzies and your local bookshops...? In fact, did anyone actually notice the book selling fraternity take part in it at all? To some extent the media played their part, as I counted two radio talks, one TV programme and three newspaper articles, but I did not see or hear of it in any of the shops I visited. I would dearly love to know if the situation in the South East corner of Britain was typical, because if it was the promotion must have been one heck of a flop.. But, am I being naive? What I expected was the complete list of books chosen for the promotion to be on special display within the shops. What actually happened in the SE was that a few books (Clarke, Cherryh and Donaldson mainly) appeared back on the shelves for the duration of the promotion. Now if that was typical of the whole country, it would not have mattered who was chosen for the promotion, because the bookshop buyers were only going to stock the books they thought would sell. Thus the whole point of linking all the books under one SF Promotional Banner and therefore linking the interest and sales, was a non-starter. Of course there was one way of making the promotion 'work' and that would have been to select only previous best-sellers. To paraphrase myself "Nothing sells better than a previous best-seller".

But, for the time being lets put the promotion behind us, because next year is most probably going to be the most important year in the SF calendar. 1984 should be the year that science fiction comes of age. It should be the year that the publishing industry, in collaboration with the media, has a rich bonanza of science fiction titles. It should be the year that the BSFA takes hold of, and shakes until every ounce of promotional activity is gathered. This is what should happen, but I doubt if it will. (What, for instance, is the BSFA doing to mark 1984?) My concern, however, goes further than the small shores of this organization. Next year will either be a starting point of a new awareness of science fiction or a pinnacle from which there is only one way to go. During 1984 there is going to be a huge amount of publicity of all aspects of the said book, and science fiction will be part of that publicity. If science fiction cannot gather a larger readership during that year, the slump in interest after the razzle-dazzle of 1984, will make the present economic state of publishing seem a gold-mine. This prediction is not just based upon the premise of one book, 1984 is a watershed in other ways as well. Since the first Star Wars film and the coming of age of the small computer, technology has been in vogue and while it is difficult to pinpoint an exact link between these aspects and science fiction, a feeder link must exist. My gut-reaction tells me that at the end of 1984, the film industry will start moving away from SF and technology will again be out of fashion. Thus one of the supporting props of the science fiction publishing industry will disappear and they will become even more conservative in their approach. Let us hope that I am wrong.

To finish two items of news. First of all I hope that all of you are going to vote in this year's BSFA award. It's no good complaining of the state of SF, if you do nothing to promote what you feel is its better points. So don't put the form to one side. Fill it in now. The second item concerns a new organization set up in the States called "The Philip K. Dick Society". This is "an informal, international association of people interested in the writing of Philip K. Dick". If you wish to join the society send a SAE to Ms V. Buckle, 47 Park Avenue, Barking, Essex. IG11 8QU and they will send you details.

Lastly, may I wish you all a very merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. May all my premonitions be unfounded.....Geoff Rippington.....

SNAPSHOT

Compiled By

E. C. BROWN

"How do you currently regard your fiction, and does the finished product live up to anything like your original conception?" Earlier this year I put this question to six leading science fiction writers. We know how we regard the fiction of the authors in question - and we know too the views of the critics - but what do the authors themselves think of their work? I thought it would be a good idea to let the writers speak for themselves. I expected replies citing dissatisfaction with their work - the adage that artists are never satisfied with their completed work I thought would hold true in the case of science fiction writers. In the event, reactions were mixed. Out of the six authors questioned, you can broadly say that two were dissatisfied with their work, two moderately satisfied, and the other two guardedly happy. The problem with making such distinctions is that we are only taking one frame out of a continuous film. At this moment of time, such and such an author had these views on his work...ask him the same question tomorrow and you will most probably get a different answer. Therefore, I would warn you against making any general conclusions on an authors emotional opinion of his own work from this 'snapshot' of views as they could be highly erroneous. But, let us leave that aside because what they do achieve is a fascinating glimpse into writing from the authors point of view. By comparing the six answers to the same question, the way the question has been interpreted is as nearly important as the answers themselves.

Barrington Bayley and James White fall into our first category of authors who were broadly dissatisfied with their work. Barrington Bayley, of course is well known to Vector readers through his column but we should not forget that he has published ten novels and two collections of short stories to critical acclaim within the SF field. His latest novel, The Zen Gun, has recently been published by Daw.

Barrington Bayley; "I am asked whether the execution of my work lives up to my original conception of it. The questioner has put his finger on an agonizing issue for me. I feel qualms when I read remarks such as this one by Ian Watson: 'Any writer worth his or her salt knows if a book is to be any good at all, one has to let it grow... as a separate entity - whatever one's prior vision of it.' I am aware that it is an advantage to write this way, but I am headstrong and often try to tackle things the other way round. At the back of my mind will be a conception, an impression of something I want the reader to retain after he has forgotten the storyline or the names of the characters. I regard it as a challenge to bring this conception to realisation, and I feel bad about letting the story take a turn that departs from it, but instead will sit brooding miserably for six months. In many novels, even by writers of much greater ability than I, one can identify the point where the author has abandoned his original conception for the sake of expediency, or even appears to have forgotten it and surrendered to the mechanics of getting the damned thing finished.



Usually it is in a similar mood that I read on from that point.

My greatest hero of all time is the inventor Nikola Tesla, who had the unusual faculty of controlled hallucination: whatever he thought about appeared before his eyes. This, coupled with total recall, enabled him to complete a device mentally, without plans or prototype, in full detail. He knew in advance of fashioning whether it would run: he could see it running. This is so amazing it is almost a parody of creative genius. To be able to bring a mental conception undeviated into the physical world is practically a godlike power, a successful act of the will. But, lacking this power, it is necessary to find some compromise...and that's the problem. So no, I could not say I am satisfied with my performance so far, and who knows, may never be."

Barrington Bayley, in an interview published in Arena SF 10 (1980), had to answer a similar question. His reply was shorter, but

sums up the writers dilemma exactly; "I oscillate between two immovable positions; an overwhelming belief in my own eventual worth, and a crushing feeling of incompetence."

James White, author of the Sector General stories (and lets not forget at least nine other novels and 58 short stories), is precise in the areas of his work that dissatisfy him.

James White: "... I am never really satisfied with my work, especially when a piece has just been finished. Stories never seem to turn out exactly as intended, and sometimes the characterization and atmosphere fall so far short of the original intention that I want to go away and hide. While talking about this problem to other writers I discovered that it is a common one and the great majority of my colleagues share my feelings of disappointment and self-disgust. The reason seems to be that when one has just completed an ms and compared it with the unique and beautifully crafted piece of writing one had meant to produce, the finished product compares very unfavourably indeed with the mental imagery. Fortunately, the editors are not aware of what one was trying to do and they accept the thing, or do not accept it, on its merits. With the passage of time the dream image begins to fade and the poor reality, on rereading, begins to look halfway decent.

On only two occasions have I been completely satisfied with just-completed work. One was a short novelette called Custom Fitting, which was later short-listed for a Hugo, and a novel, Underkill, which bounced around for over two years before finding a home with Corgi, and subsequently in translations by Moewig and Mandadori. Apparently all the USA publishers' offices were equipped with barge-poles with which they would not touch it. I suppose one right out of two isn't bad, but nowadays I'm not sure whether to like or dislike one of my stories when it is finished. Rare indeed, and fortunate, is the author who can truly evaluate his or her own work."

That brings us to the writers who seem to be moderately satisfied with their

works to date; Michael Bishop and Cherry Wilder. Bishop, at 38, has still not received the commercial recognition that this work deserves, and it is difficult to pin down why. I believe that you can get a glimpse at the reason when you look at the key words in reviews of his work. Words like "downbeat" and "dark" echo across, and as we live in the TV world of downbeat and dark alleys, his fiction will have commercial problems. Which is a great pity as he tackles 'hard' science fiction subjects with originality and I for one would be disappointed if he changed his style for commercial viability.



Michael Bishop: "All I can say is that I am happier with some finished products than with others. My recent novel No Enemy But Time strikes me as very near the best I can do within the specifications - whatever those may be - of the science fiction novel, and yet I am acutely conscious of some of the shortcomings of even this effort. It would be an exercise in masochism, not to mention bibliographical ancient history, to detail those shortcomings (as I see them) for you, and therefore I won't. I can say, however, that I view No Enemy But Time as the culmination of my career in SF to date, and that since completing it the only other novel I have written is a difficult-to-categorize novel with no SF trappings whatever, a book with elements of the contemporary commercial horror novel, of the serious contemporary novel, and of rather savage satire/parody of the horror genre. It is entitled Who Made Stevie Crye?, and it was difficult to sell because it did not conform to editors' and publishers' expectations of the sort of fiction I am 'supposed' to write, and also because it mounts a rather bitter attack on the kind of fiction commercial editors and publishing houses seem pre-disposed to purchase, even if this fiction sometimes fails to achieve what I-would consider minimal standards of craftsmanship and literary competence. I am quite happy with Who Made Stevie Crye?, but if it elicits any response at all, I feel fairly sure it will be mixed, with many readers and critics concluding that I was unsure what I wanted the novel to be - a horror novel, a contemporary novel, or a parody. Actually, it turned out to be what it is, something of an anomaly, and that's what I was striving for from the beginning. The most scathing satire comes near the end, after readers have been led into the book with one set of expectations, and that technique - if I may glorify it with that word - was deliberate, too.

Finally, my fiction is undergoing changes. I am writing more than SF and fantasy without abandoning them, and most of what I have been doing lately is short fiction of many different kinds. I also hope to write a book for young adults, a contemporary SF novel with yet another look at human origins, and a mainstream novel with a muted fantasy element. I do not know precisely where I am going, a condition that does not - now - worry me very much, and part of the excitement of being a writer is discovering my direction after I have set out. And that's all I can say about the matter right now."

I wonder how many of you read Cherry Wilder's short story "Kaleidoscope" in the July issue of Omni? Her first novel The Luck of Brin's Five is available in this country, but for Second Nature you will have to go to a specialist bookshop.

Cherry Wilder: "I am moderately satisfied with my published work. I rewrite and edit my work as I go along and do not make many complete drafts of a novel, for instance. Yes, something of the original conception always remains but the gap between the very first hint of a story that I try and note down, quickly, before it goes away, and the story as written is often very wide. I am sure that I improve on my ideas and characters as I let them simmer and flesh out, to mix a metaphor. I also have a few happy accidents... good ideas and changes that occur to me in the course of the work. I like to plot and plan and get the timetables of a novel right but not to have things so hard and fast that they cannot be altered. I hate to revise, at an editor's request, for example, but I do it... I have wise editors who know what they are about, and the results are fairly satisfying. I get sick of my novels and stories after a while and wonder what it must be like when one has published twenty, thirty, forty novels. What with all the domestic carry on, cats and persons yelling for food etc, I do not think I will ever have the problem of being too prolific... the wonder is that I get anything written at all!"

The two writers happy with their work are John Morressy and Michael Coney. Not so well known over here, John Morressy has had four books published in Britain, and many more in the US. His SF is of the far-future galactic variety, in the manner of Jack Vance and George RR Martin. "How does he regard his fiction?"

John Morressy: "... 'Every writer is a little God Almighty to himself: he looks upon his work and sees that it is good.' Joseph Spence said that in 1744, and it is an eternal truth. With that truth in mind, I will say very cautiously that I am happy with my work. What I intended to be funny can still make people laugh, and what I had hoped would be taken more seriously is taken seriously. I would be greedy to ask more.

The finished work is generally recognizable as a close relation of the original conception, but I don't recall any book that ever turned out to be fully formed at the moment it first occurred to me. I usually know how the book will end, and try to map out a rough path to that destination, but there are always surprises along the way. Characters don't surprise me as often as plot does; I don't feel that people are quite as much in control of their fate as they like to think they are, and I think that shows in my work.

Your mention of 'the finished product' suggests that you wish me to consider the whole book, not just my textual contribution. Here my satisfaction is spotty. Some of my books have been graced with covers that must have sent readers away gagging and retching; the layout of a few has been almost a challenge to decipher. One of my translations was truncated two-thirds of the way through, leaving almost every thread of the plot unresolved. Worst of all, I have on occasion fallen among copy editors who presumed to tidy up my syntax and turned it into gibberish, and then proceeded to use my manuscript as a rough draft of their own book. That is a very exasperating experience, much like finding obscene misspelled graffiti scrawled across one's portrait, but fortunately it can be corrected. On the other hand, I have had a few fine covers (the NEL editions of my science fiction are good, as in the Popular Library cover for Starbrat; the Doubleday jacket for Under A Calculating Star won several well-deserved awards). Some of my books have had first-rate

layout and typography (the Playboy fantasy trilogy of Graymantle/Ironbrand/Kingsbane and the Berkley Mansions of Space in particular. The type face is very attractive), and at least one book, the Doubleday edition of The Addison Tradition, struck me as an artifact that was a pleasure to behold.

All in all, I consider myself a lucky man. Writing is a struggle against the impossible. The perfect book will never be written, but it's what one must try for each time out. Every novel is a first novel, in a sense, and that's probably all to the good. I've come close to doing what I tried to do, and I'm still learning. I make mistakes, but at least I'm making new ones in each book, and learning from them. One day I may get it all right."

Malcolm Edwards in The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction comments on repetitive elements within Coney's work, and the author himself mentions them here. In the mid-seventies he produced a string of novels in which the repetitive elements were West Country fishing villages, diffident protagonists, becoming heroines and public meetings. They were pleasing, satisfying books, and many an author, especially within SF, would have been content to turn out more of the same. It is to his credit that he is getting away from these repetitive elements and trying his things.

Michael Coney: "...I am very happy with the current state of my fiction. Since 1976... I have had three novels published, and have completely changed the direction of my writing. Two of the novels were undistinguished: The Ultimate Jungle from Millington in 1979 and Neptune's Cauldron from Tower in 1981. The most recent, Cat Karina from Ace (1982) I like very much and is selling better than anything I've written before.

Around 1979 I found my SF was becoming very restricted in style, characterization and even locale; everything looked like a Devon village even if humans couldn't breathe the air. The aliens were humans in fancy dress and the style and plotting was an uncomfortable amalgam of John Wyndham and Agatha Christie. I was unhappy, because up to then I'd always thought that SF presented unlimited scope, yet now I was finding it as constraining as a Harlequin romance might be.

So I started work on a monstrous tome. It was to be SF, in that there was a logical explanation for everything, but that would be the end of its similarity to my previous work. The hero would not be me. The story would not resolve around a single character. There would be no restrictions as to the location in time or space; things would be happening from pre-history to the distance future, and from Earth to the ends of the universe, and they would all be in the book. In the end it ran to 120,000 words, received the title of The Celestial Steam Locomotive, and was sent off to my agents - who loved it, but said it couldn't possibly sell.

I didn't think so either, but there had been so many different plots, aliens, societies and gadgets in there that I had enough for a dozen offshoots. I wrote one, Cat Karina, and Ace bought it. (Gollancz have just published it in the UK) I wrote another, The Tigris and The Mole, but it was then put on hold because of what happened next.

Houghton Mifflin made an offer for The Celestial Steam Locomotive, subject to a rewrite. I agreed, but when the contract arrived I found it was not just a rewrite they wanted - it was two complete and stand-alone novels, each of around 90,000 words, roughly dividing CSL in half. This meant another 30,000 words for the first half - meaning more plot and a definite ending; I couldn't just finish the book with the words 'continued in Part 11.' Fortunately I had written two short

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THE REALMS OF FANTASY

Paul Kincaid

Define science fiction! No? Well, it is a tricky problem that has defeated every effort to date. We are in an area where language is used loosely, to say the least. Nobody can define science fiction because everybody uses the term to mean something different. What is more, science fiction is not some single, simple beast, some unified object; it is a portmanteau expression, an umbrella hoisted to cover a multitude of sins. And of these manifold literatures (and, increasingly, non-literary entities) we are just as unable to perceive the boundaries, to say, for instance, that "here begins fantasy!"

Let us, then, look at fantasy. Wittgenstein said one should not look for the definition of a word, but for how it is used. He also pointed out that, for instance, solitaire and football have practically nothing in common beyond the fact that they are games. There is no hard and fast rule to which something must conform to be a game, yet all games are recognisable as such, they are linked by a series of what he terms 'family resemblances'. In Wittgensteinian fashion, therefore, I wish to begin by considering how we use the word 'fantasy'.

At first this may not seem too difficult a question: 'fantasy', quite simply, is any literature which deals with what is not real. A glib, easy answer, but it doesn't help us. In literary terms, unreality is just as much a problem as reality, perhaps more so. Let us try to be a bit more specific. If a reasonable cross section of the population was asked to name a work of fantasy many would, I am sure, choose Lord of the Rings. Others might choose, for instance, The Once and Future King by T.H. White, or something by Moorcock, or one of Thorne Smith's comedies, or Peake's Gormenghast, or one of John Cowper Powys's rambling novels, or George Steiner's The Portage to San Cristobal of AH, or a Borges short story, or The White Hotel by D.M. Thomas, or Angela Carter's Heroes and Villains, or something by Russell Hoban, or the Gene Wolfe quartet, or Robert Coover's The Public Burning, or....or.....

The list goes on and on. Just look through your own bookshelves and you will discover a seemingly endless variety of books that deserves the epithet 'fantasy', yet which bear no apparent resemblance to each other. Consider my own short list: what can link Coover's use of the Rosenberg executions to lay bare the American psyche (much as E.L. Doctorow did in The Book of Daniel), with Borges' intellectual variations on the themes of time and personality, with Tolkien's epic creation of a land of the imagination? How can Steiner, who questions the culpability of Adolf Hitler, and our own reaction to what he stands for; be compared with Thorne Smith, who uses ghosts and witches and Greek gods to play elaborate and hilarious, but essentially lightweight jokes? What is the relationship between White's creation of a medieval world that "never was but should have been", and Thomas's poetic but disturbing conflation of the theories of Freud and the horrors of the Twentieth Century? All are fantasy, all deal, to some extent, with the unreal; yet a more disparate selection it would be hard to imagine.

What is it, therefore, that links these books, that brings them within the global embrace of fantasy? The answer, as I have suggested already, is

that a network of 'family resemblances' is in operation. Fantasy is a world that lies between two vastly dissimilar poles. The various nations of this world may be composed of loose federations, and may from time to time engage in supra-national confederations; but there is no global unity, not even the pretence of a United Nations.

In this article I intend to suggest, as it were, what lies within these polar regions. I am not overly concerned with the works that occupy the equatorial zones between them. Nor do I intend to trace the chain of alliances, or 'family resemblances', that link the poles. I am interested only in the two ends of this chain. I wish to see how fantasy is limited. To change my analogy a little, if fantasy lies along an axis A - B, we will understand its nature more readily if we know what 'A' and 'B' are.

At one end of the chain, I believe, is the sort of fantasy we are most familiar with, that which falls most easily within the loose bounds of science fiction. This is the sort of fantasy that includes such disparate literary forms as heroic fantasy, sword and sorcery, Arthurian romance, the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, and all their endless clones. I shall call this form romantic fantasy.

At the far end of the chain is, I consider, a form that I shall call, for the sake of convenience, literary fantasy. I give it this name simply because it is the type of fantasy normally produced by writers in the literary mainstream rather than by those brought up in a science fictional environment. As always, when talking of literary genres and sub-genres, the terms employed are broad generalisations. There aren't the convenient terms to allow me to specify more accurately what is meant by 'literary fantasy', so I shall try to illustrate what I mean with a list of examples. The novels of Russell Hoban certainly fall into this category, especially The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz and Kleinzeit. Here, too, I would suggest, belongs novels like The Public Burning by Coover and Steiner's The Portage to San Cristobal of AH. Either here or in neighbouring territory I would also place Angela Carter's Heroes and Villains, The White Hotel by D.M. Thomas, and Lanark by Alasdair Gray.

Between these two poles there is, of course, a vast and varied territory, with all manner of books that lie upon the cusp, relating to both broad camps. Here you will find anything from Ian Watson's The Garden of Delight to Christopher Priest's The Affirmation. In this short article, however, I shall conveniently forget these books - undeniably the vast majority of works of fantasy - since they do not materially affect my argument.

So, that is the basis of my argument; I have laid out what I consider to be the two extremes of fantasy. But what is the difference between these two realms of fantasy? What is it that places them at opposite ends of the spectrum of fantasy literature.

In essence it lies in the world created.

The romantic fantasy presents a vividly realised but unreal world. The Arthurian romances, for instance, typified by what is far and away the finest example of the genre, The Once and Future King by I.H. White, are always played out against a medieval backdrop that bears not the slightest resemblance to the real world of that dark and unpleasant era. The world of any real Arthur does not appear in these works; indeed, it has no place in these works. Arthurian romance is not about the dark age hero, but about the magic of the Matter of Britain, one of our most enduring myths. It is this magical, mythological element that softens even that 'medieval' world conjured up by these stories.

There are, of course, some works that attempt to recreate the genuine Dark Ages milieu of the historical Arthur. Examples are Mary Stewart's The Crystal Cave, Catherine Chistian's The Sword and the Flame, and Rosemary Sutcliff's The Sword at Sunset. Even in these cases it tends to be a somewhat anodyne world, especially where, as in Mary Stewart's book, the attempt has been to combine the historical and the magical elements of the story. Yet the

greater the effort to give the book historical accuracy, the greater the tendency to recognise the novel as historical fiction rather than fantasy. I do not, for instance, imagine that many people would call The Sword at Sunset fantasy. The unreality of the world is a vital part of the fantasy.

This is especially obvious in the archetypal works of romantic fantasy, Tolkein's The Lord of the Rings, and its many imitations by people like Julian May and Stephen Donaldson. In each book the heroes occupy a world that may be vividly realised, but it is rarely realistic. For all its unreality, the world is, of course, painted with loving attention and great care for detail. More often than not a map accompanies the book, and the forests and mountains almost take on the aspect of characters. Indeed, there are times when they come across more vividly than the characters.

Heroic fantasy and sword and sorcery novels occupy much the same world. Adventures like Howard's Conan, Moorcock's Elric, and Leiber's Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser travel an almost invariably inhospitable landscape of desert, mountain, jungle and swamp, dotted with mighty castles and mud-and-wattle villages. With its predominantly feudal society, it is a world that most resembles the world of Arthurian romance. It is a world that never existed, but that is part of the vital nature of the beast.

Literary fantasy, on the other hand, goes to the other extreme. It can hardly be said to have a unified backcloth, varying from the world of the first crusade in Russell Hoban's Pilgermann, to the post-holocaust future of his Riddley Walker or Angela Carter's Heroes and Villains. Sometimes there are vaguely exotic foreign settings, a South American jungle in The Portage to San Cristobal of AH, the Middle East in The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz. Yet these are exceptions; overwhelmingly they take place in the contemporary or near-contemporary world, predominantly in an urban environment. It may be New York, or London, or Glasgow; it may be named, or unnamed, or, as in Lanark, thinly disguised as the afterworld; but it is recognizably the world we know and live in.

In romantic fantasy, the landscape is vital to the atmosphere of the story. Sometimes the same is true of literary fantasy; Hoban's Kleinzeit, for instance, gives a voice to all the inanimate objects that populate the hero's world. In general, though, the background doesn't matter in literary fantasy. Sometimes there is virtually no description of landscape; and where it is described it is done with a few brief, bold strokes, there is no loving attention, no building up of detail. Even in Kleinzeit, for instance, the reader can conjure up no vivid picture of the city, though it is clearly London. One is left with a sense of isolation. The scantiness of the detail is a vital part of the fantasy. In romantic fantasy the intent is clearly to create a new reality; in literary fantasy we seem to be more in a world abstracted from reality.

In other words, these two realms of fantasy are distinguished by their understanding of what fantasy is and is doing.

The romantic tradition sets out to create as fully as possible a world of the imagination. Against a landscape of dreams and wishes and fairy stories, with its childhood wish fulfilment of magic and heroism, the human characters operate at their simplest. Basic values and aspects of personality are isolated. In a novel of romantic fantasy, therefore, its subject is the human imagination, its landscape the country of dreams the world of wishes. In general its bold heroes, wily wizards and dire villains are not people; for the personality is the landscape, the characters are only aspects of people, something of our natures simplified, alone in the spotlight, which may be why they are so often one-dimensional.

In this school of fantasy, the fantasy lies primarily in the world creation, a basic science fictional motivation that allows this brand of fantasy to be absorbed most easily into the body of SF.

The literary tradition, however, cares little for the world it creates. It does not set out to show people acting at their simplest against a rich

background; on the contrary, its intention is to isolate the character against the slightest of backgrounds in order to highlight the complexity of their actions. The subject matter is the human condition, so that it is the landscape that is one-dimensional, a mirror reflecting back aspects of the character on display. Conventional reality is dispensed with as a means of heightening not the imaginative qualities of the story, but the author's perceptions. It is not the world that is important, but the symbol and the image.

In Heroes and Villains, for instance, the conflicting social groups are but very thinly disguised versions of conflicting human characteristics. The background is hardly filled in at all, the drama is virtually played out in a vacuum. To account for this vacuum, a future setting is suggested, which allows us to claim the book for SF, much as we claim William Golding's Lord of the Flies for its equally convenient suggestion of an SF setting. Yet neither of these books contain any of the ideative and imaginative virtues we normally look for in science fiction.

In Pilgermann likewise the fantasy elements are there for the convenience of the story, and the point to be made. Thus the eponymous hero is accompanied on his pilgrimage by ghosts, by the friendly presence of Death, and by the shadow of his own death; all of which allows him to speculate on the shape and the purpose of his life. Meanwhile, although specific dates and verifiable historic events play a part in the drama, and much of the story is set in the very real location of Antioch, all of these are more or less shown dismissively in passing. Certainly, the reader comes away from the book with no very clear impression of either the place or the time; they are not vital to what the story is about.

It is interesting to consider Lanark in this light, for it seems to be associated rather tangentially with the literary fantasy I have been describing. The sections set in Glasgow are a grittily realistic account of a life within that city; they contain no element of fantasy whatsoever. The scenes set in Unthank are different. Unlike most literary fantasy, the backdrop is filled out in quite considerable detail. Yet it is largely as a symbolic counterpoint to the real Glasgow, as the events in Unthank seem to be a symbolic counterpoint to the events in the real Glasgow. It is not the creation of the world that is important, it is not the magic of an alien environment that lies at the heart of this fantasy. It is the symbol and the image that is vital, it is the highlight it casts upon the complexity of its characters; it is the reality of the people that is heightened rather than the reality of the imagination.

I have been trying in this article to sharpen our view of fantasy. Returning to my analogy of the globe: because the name 'fantasy' is used indiscriminately to cover everything that lies upon the surface of this world, it is easy to assume that they are all the same. I have tried to suggest, on the contrary, that there are vast differences between the two poles of this world. It is always easy to find similarities between one work of fantasy and the next, and between that second and a third, and so on until a complex network of alliances criss-crosses the globe, and some link of 'family resemblances' can be traced from one pole to the other. But that is not to say that the two poles are in any way similar.

As their use of fantasy differs, I would remark also that the cultural background of the poles differs also. One form, the romantic fantasy, clearly has its roots in myth, fairy story and the SF traditions of world creation, alternate time streams and the conjuring up of the alien. Literary fantasy, on the other hand, may plunder SF for its setting, or more properly for the excuses behind the fantasy, but it seems to have nothing in its development that properly belongs in the world of SF. The real precursors of literary fantasy are those novels which distort reality for literary effect, and in the spirit of literary experimentation. The most obvious examples are the works of James Joyce - especially Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake - and I would consider it no coincidence that many works of literary fantasy - A Clockwork Orange by

Anthony Burgess and The Public Burning by Robert Coover - are also works of literary experimentation.

There has long been a tendency to consider anything that ranked as fantasy as belonging in the SF fold. But fantasy is such a vast realm that I would be highly dubious of any such proposition. Certainly The Public Burning, The Portage to San Cristobal of AH and most, if not all, of the novels of Russell Hoban would seem very out of place if listed as SF. Fantasy, I would suggest, is a world that lies only partially within the universe of science fiction. Where the borderline runs I couldn't begin to say, but it may be that some of those SF or SF-oriented works by writers who have made their name in the mainstream - Lessing, Durrell and Golding spring most readily to mind - really belong in the tradition of literary fantasy rather than that of SF. This might represent a spreading of the SF empire, it might represent the increasing role SF plays in the popular imagination, but I think it would be wrong to claim such authors (as well as people like Alasdair Gray) too quickly as new arrivals in the SF fold.

If anything, they occupy - or occasionally wander into - that vague and ill-defined territory that is the borderland of SF. And that brings me back to my starting point: how do you define SF?

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INTO THE ARENA

SHRINES AND RATHOLES

IAN WATSON

In my last column six months ago, I said that I hoped this time to write about how to become somebody else; how to become other, autre; and how SF might break out of its mental logjam by some such strategy.

For a number of reasons I find that I can't write that particular sequel just now.

Not least, perhaps, because now that the half-year has rolled round, it seems that someone else may have pipped me at the post; for what do I read in the latest Locus but that maybe Philip Dick is not dead after all? Questions are being asked. How did Dick lapse overnight from a mild stroke into a deep coma? Why didn't any family members identify his body? Why was he cremated hastily with no accompanying funeral service? What happened to the thousands of dollars Dick earned in his last years? Dick's eldest daughter, her mother and Dick's father comment that though they do believe Dick is really dead, this is an interesting theory and in character for Dick.

Then, of course, there is the evidence of the text. The epigraph to The Divine Invasion, attributed to a "mysterious voice in the night", runs as follows: "The work is complete; the final world is here. He has been transplanted and is alive."

Is it remotely conceivable that Dick simply transmigrated; that he slipped out of the hospital by the back door into a new anonymous identity? That Philip Dick's ashes are buried but his alter ego Horselover Fat (presumably under a different name!) is alive and well somewhere in America or Mexico right now?

But - to come clean - another cogent reason for not writing the promised column at the present moment is that I'm up to my eyeballs in other commitments; and it's only a few days till our editor's deadline...

So in default of a discussion of how to change your identity, I would like to offer a different kind of sequel to "April In Paris" -- one which does, however, connect with otherness, with the escape from oneself, either into something magical or something quite the opposite.

When I was over in Paris, the monthly magazine "Actuel" asked me to contribute two little essays for a special issue on "The Quest for Paradise", answering two questions.

Number One: Which place has been magical in your life? Number Two: Which was the worst rathole you visited?

Here are my answers.

Question One Just outside Kyoto is a remarkable and magical shrine: the Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine, set upon Mount Inari in Fushimi Ward.

Well now, many Japanese shrines are remarkable places (not least the Shrine of Gratitude for Penis, at Iagata near Nagoya - which is full of enormous polished wooden phalluses!). And in a sense all Shinto shrines are magical. For in Japan two entirely different religions coexist (just as so much else which is apparently contradictory coexists there merrily). One is Shinto, an earth-religion, with its shrines. The other is Buddhism, a religion of the psyche, with its temples. The first is bodily, superstitious, mythic, 'primitive'. The second is abstract, transcendental; and people switch from one to the other, as need be. It's rather as though Europeans were Christians on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, and paid offerings to the Devil, of the old religion, on the other days.

This Inari shrine at Fushimi is dedicated to the gods of human prosperity; so at the Industrial Festival held there every April the Hall of Worship is full of offerings of industrial products: TV sets, video games, whatever... But the really mind-blowing thing isn't the shrine buildings, nice as they are. Nor the sideshows and stalls selling barbecued sparrows, china foxes, masks with phallic noses and TV monster masks. It's the 10,000 torii gateways, painted bright vermilion, packed shoulder to shoulder in a stone corridor that leads up the mountain and then around the top in a 4 kilometre long circuit - through trees with a host of white paper bows tied to them for good fortune, like flocks of butterflies.

Climbing this mountain up the red stone corridor, with the sun shafting through, was a totally numinous experience for me. It was like being a corpuscle flowing through my own bloodstream externalised: a sensory event of far more impact than the calm elegance and aesthetic trance of the Buddhist Golden Pavilion in Kyoto itself; and during the 3 days of the New Year prosperity festival nearly two million people visit Fushimi, and this red corridor is dense with human corpuscles.

But I don't like large crowds. But I don't much care for earth-religions, which remind me of national soil and Nazism. But I have never actually set any story in Fushimi... So why is this place so numinous, and luminous, for me?

It's because, while living in Japan, I found myself as a writer; and for me the shrine at Fushimi is a quintessence of Japan.

Japan switched me on to writing science fiction, the metier in which I found myself. I began writing SF as a psychological survival mechanism, for there in Japan (at the end of the Sixties) were all the seductions and all the terrors of the 21st century; Tokyo where I lived was the science fiction city.

But more importantly, in a deeper sense - I see now - Japan has a genius for making contradictions coexist (as Shinto and Buddhism coexist) - not least the contradiction between traditional past and futuristic present, between the calligrapher and the cyberneticist. Such places as the Inari shrine forced me to perceive analogies, to yoke together contradictions in a paradoxical knot - while at the same time deranging my sense through sheer visual impact.

Didn't the New Year festival, with a 'toothpaste tube' of people squeezing up Mount Inari through the bloodstream corridor, resemble rush-hour on the Tokyo underground? Didn't people accept the crush of life in megalopolis because the pursuit of economic growth had a quasi-religious flavour? Didn't the Japanese accept the transformation of their land from a place of calm, beauty and nature, into a materialistic science fiction fantasy, precisely because there were deep traditional spiritual forces at work in this? Wasn't the psychedelic art of the advertisers not simply a

borrowing from the West, but a reincarnation of the garish fairground colours of Shinto?

In the first three books which I then set out to write, there were two features in common, as regards structure and flavour. Each book contained three very diverse, but intersecting plot-lines. And each book (or at least two of them - Japan itself features in the other one) juxtaposed the ancient or traditional (Amazonian Indians, the Incas) with something hypermodern (alien visitors, a trip to Mars).

The fusion of contradictions! And the reincarnation of ancient traditions in a futuristic setting!

I'd say that Japan rewired my brain to think this way - and rewired my emotions too, since to comprehend a place like the Inari Shrine cannot simply be a cerebral experience but must also be a sensuous and bodily one: a realization that this corridor of red gates is indeed a living bloodstream, belonging to an alien culture, true, but also at the same time for a while it was my own.

So perhaps I can say that Japan helped me to become an alien, by giving me a blood transfusion.

Let's try my hand at a haiku:

A Fushimi
Le sang montent
Vers les étoiles.

QUESTION TWO I guess the ideal rathole to describe would a bug-infested brothel in El Salvador or somewhere else exotic (exotic, so long as you don't have to live there yourself!). But thanks to the world financial crisis, the savageries of our mad British monetarist government, and the way publishing - particularly in the USA - is being run by corporate accountants who couldn't care a piss for art, I've been an economic prisoner in my home island for what seems an eternity.

So I nominate for worst rathole my cursed idea for a brief idyllic holiday last summer with wife and daughter and our three cats (quite a Noah's Ark) on a narrow boat on the South Oxford Canal, and the specific location of the rathole Upper Heyford village in Oxfordshire.

Of course in the context of waterways a 'rathole' ought to be quite a sentimental thing. Here in England we're reared on the picnics and escapades of Ratty and Mole in the classic children's tale The Wind in the Willows. So, abandoning the overcraft, the mortgage, days chained to the typewriter, and exclaiming "La chair est triste, hélas, et j'ai lu tous les livres (or even perhaps: j'ai écrit tous les livres); fuir la-bas, fuir!" away we fled to be caressed by the douce brise humide, on a rural canal, where ratholes are the homes of happy little furry animals.

Hélas, we did not get too far as regards 'fuir' but the 'la-bas' bit was true enough. Canal boats (steered by me) blunder about like bemused elephants; Victorian locks are bloody exhausting to crank by hand, and the very first lock was the deepest on the whole canal, a descent into a dripping stone abyss out of Dante by way of Gustave Dore. Surviving this first ordeal with the help of cans of strong beer, we then got drowned from the sky by one of many lashing thunderstorms; though the arctic gales did dry us out quickly afterwards. Meanwhile, of our three cats, two went catatonic with culture shock; while the third leaped ashore while were choking down our lunch and killed 23 mice in an orgy of murder, leaving corpses littered along the towpath, finally becoming so excited that he tumbled off the boat into the canal; whereupon he did not so much learn to swim, as to launch himself out of the water like a Trident missile, racing back inside the boat to splatter the whole interior with litres of canal water.

Mooring near Upper Heyford, nerves too frayed to try another lock that day, we were of course directly under the flight-path for take-off from Upper

Heyford US Air Force base - rubbing home one basic fact about much of the idyllic English landscape which was never known to Rat and Mole when they played around in boats hereabouts: namely that behind every second cow there lurks a radar dome, a microwave transmitter, an airbase - and soon, soon, we can look forward to cruise missile mobile control centres and launch trucks too, ambling through country lanes.

This was Upper Heyford, so here it was F-111s which hurled themselves thunderously overhead every few minutes, at an altitude of 200 feet or so, preparing for the 3rd World War, while the US and British governments cranked up the Cold War in preparation.

Every year at the 'Promenade Concerts' held in the Albert Hall, London, they finish the concert series by singing William Blake's poem Jerusalem: "...and we will build Jerusalem, in England's green and pleasant land!" But the land is pock-marked with the ratholes of the next war, pockmarked with transplanted enclaves of military America where the US army of occupation eat their burgers and play 10-pin bowling, in between jockeying their jets. (Army of occupation? Is that accurate? Well, what will happen if a future British socialist government tries to carry out its promise to expel all US military bases? How long will that government survive, before the country is destabilised?)

Walk up the lane from the canal, through Upper Heyford village, and you arrive at a Peace Camp outside the airbase gates, of women living in battered little caravans and under plastic sheets on a tiny patch of bridlepath. (Just as at Greenham Common, where 40,000 peace women recently encircled another camp, hand in hand, and where peace women blockade the entrances by tying themselves together in spiders' webs of knitting wool.) Of course, the local councils try to expel them and take them to court; while Margaret Thatcher inveighs against the decline of family life, with mothers quitting their homes and husbands to demonstrate for survival.

Just beyond the Upper Heyford peace camp, behind the wire, commences a slice of Texas or Alabama - and of course the peace camp is a dirty, cold, unhygienic rathole, with its denizens looking like female tramps, while the US base is very neat and prosperous and domestic, God-fearing and elegant. But I know which is the real rathole. It's the foreign warbase in the green and pleasant land, where Rat and Mole and Toad of Toad Hall used to wander and where Rat once exclaimed, "Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats."

Actually, exhausted by lock gates and soaked to the skin, I don't quite agree with Rat's sentiment, but what really put paid to the proposed idyll was the thunder of the F-111s, presaging the thunder of the H-bomb.

Fuir, la-bas! Helas, I only escaped to reality.

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Dangerous Divisions

MICHAEL CONEY,
British Columbia,
Canada.

Many thanks to Vector and David Barrett for a very kind review of Cat Karina. I have some comments on the review, and as Cat Karina is part of a series, it may explain some of David's points if I tell you how it came about. [[[A few points in this letter are covered in 'Snapshot' but I've left them in for continuity.]]]

The narrator in fiction has always bothered me. Just who is this semi-omniscient person who knows everything about the characters and their motivations yet seems to have total amnesia concerning events before and after his little tale? It certainly isn't me, because I know everything. So why not use a narrator who does, in fact, know everything; past, present and future? If we do this, then our storyteller must sit right at the end of Time, so far as humans are concerned.

This has two happy and optimistic results. First, it presupposes that the human race will last for a long time. And second, it makes our present little corner of Time with its piddling problems and wars and religions look pretty small beer when compared to the events surrounding the disintegration of Pangaea, or the sweep of the Ifalong. It puts us in perspective. It could be called escapism and it probably is; but it is also realism. But it calls for a lot of planning, a mass of charts, schedules, maps and encyclopaedias which will never see print. It calls for a commitment of time.

Well, the SF market collapsed a few years ago, and my time became cheap. Instead of dipping my toes into the mainstream or blowing my brains out, I conceived my grandiose plan, and eventually the publishers' desks were groaning beneath the weight of a monstrous thing called the Celestial Steam Locomotive. Then, because I'd really only been joking, I wrote Cat Karina, extrapolating on Locomotive's ideas, and sold it to Ace and Gollancz. Houghton Mifflin are now bringing out Locomotive in two parts. This may explain David's criticism of the Specialist's origins. They were fully explained in Locomotive, where the great Mordecai N. Whirst (was there ever a clumsier anagram?) has a major role. I just don't like repeating myself.

Incidentally, I liked my Specialists a little better than Cordwainer Smith's Underpeople, because I was able to give each variety a good reason for its original creation - whereas I was never sure why B'dikkat, for instance, needed to be a bull. However, an admitted fault with my felinos is that jaguars, on which they are based, tend to be solitary animals. But I was fired with the notion of groups of hunting women squired by big, indolent males, so I cheated and used lion behaviour.

So the similarity of my narrative style to Smith's is coincidental; his arising out of his Chinese studies, mine because it seems to be the only legitimate way to tell this kind of story. But the Specialists are pure Smith, intended as a belated thank you for the delight I derived from my youthful readings and re-readings of his stories, and my regret when I found I'd read them all, and there just weren't anymore, unless I....

Karina is quite clearly the outcome of my love affair with C'Mell, but the

background and atmosphere owes much to the Latin jazz of Antonio Carlos Jobim, another favourite of mine. This explains the Brazilian background; even more Locomotive, which has its Girl from Ipenema, Meditation and Corcovado all appearing as sub-plots.

The words: happentrack, Ifalong, Greataway and others arose partly out of boredom with existing nomenclature and partly because the common words didn't always express exactly what I meant. The Ifalong is not simply the future, neither is it parallel worlds. It presupposes infinitely diverging rather than parallel 'happentracks', and is the sum total of all possibilities. Used loosely, it is the most likely of those futures. Neither is the Greataway the same as Space/Time. It is Space/Ifalong, when viewed from the beginning of Time. So the new words were useful as well as decorative, and in other stories have enabled me to describe unusual methods of space travel convincingly, I hope.

As David suggests, the story of Karina is complete in this book but the Song of Earth is endless. What is useful, though, is having told the story of Karina, it can now be used to lend depth to other stories. I'm beginning to think this letter is endless, too, so I will finish it right now. After David had gone to so much trouble with his review, though, it is only fair that I should respond with equal care. Thank you all very much. [[[The pleasure is all ours. It makes a pleasant change for a writer to reply to a review, especially in such detail.]]]

UNCLE LIONEL'S ADVICE TO POTENTIAL ENTREPRENEURS

LIONEL FANTHORPE,

Rivendell,
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Roath,
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CF2 3QA

While not quite qualifying for inclusion in the BOOK OF MAGNIFICENT FAILURES - I lack magnificence as the result of protracted penury - I think I might make it into a scruffily roneo'd 'zine listing THOSE WHO HAD WHAT SEEMED A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME. It was like this. We'd just moved to Cardiff, and I had a few bob to spare because we'd sold our house in Norfolk. I thought that as a result of my experiences with Spencer's 'Badgers' in the 50s and 60s, the publishers did better than the author - after all, I still held two unsurpassed world records as an output man. I also had manuscript that I'd worked hard on for seven years, that I personally liked very much, that was my kind of story, that was in a sense a sort of psychological autobiography: at least Mark Sable, the Black Lion of the title, was the man I'd have been if the Lord had been unwise enough to let me do my own designing when he gave out the genes and the environments. As no one else was beating a path to my door to make suitable offers for it, I said we'd form a small limited company and publish it as our first book. The result was Greystoke Mobray Ltd. with twelve Directors, of whom the girls and I had the majority shareholdings. I as M.D. and Patricia was Company Secretary. I see in retrospect that this was the first major expensive error. The bureaucrats and tax men attack companies so hard that it takes incredible amounts of cash and time just to be a limited company, even if you never do anything! Then we got as far as printing and cover production. In my extreme naivety, I never really thought that the cover mattered. I honestly believed that people did what I did and read a book because of its contents. A friend who was a sort of an artist offered to do the cover, which didn't look too bad to me - because I'm no sort of an artist at all! So we went ahead and produced the book for about £5,000 for 20,000.

The other major things I didn't know about were distributing and hyping. If a well-meaning park attendant collected all the old newspapers from his bins, shredded them and stuck the pieces together haphazardly, employed Eddie Jones or Frazetta to do a really good cover, got three of his mates to write

encouraging crits on the back, and then spent £50,000 on advertising and hyping, he would undoubtedly have a best seller. By the time we'd spent all we had on the actual production, and realised too late that the cover was a disaster - commercially speaking - we had no cash left to advertise or hype it. So it didn't sell like the park-keeper's pastiche would have done.

Then there was the distribution problem. You have to arrange distribution in advance, and tie it in with the hyping and advertising campaign. I had assumed that, if you had a good story, wholesale and retail distributors would buy it - sale or return - and put it in their shops for you: they don't. I suspect that these things are arranged on golf courses and over expensive dinners in West End restaurants, but perhaps I'm just being cynical!

So, then, in a nutshell, if you want to publish a book you worked hard on and really believe in, don't waste money forming a company. Go the rounds of all the printers and cover makers and get the keenest price you can. Employ the best artist you can afford - his work will affect sales more than yours. Save every penny you can to spend on a hyping campaign: advertise, advertise and advertise again. Do the rounds of the big outlets like W.H. Smiths and the major retailers and distributors - make sure they'll take it before you bother to print it. When you've done all of that, you'll be in with a chance. A well written story will probably contribute about 5% to the profitability of the venture. That's the hard, cynical paragraph out of the way.

The real advice is: if you believe in what you're writing go ahead. Ignore the critics - a sadly large number are supercilious charlatans, who write witty vitriol to amuse their sycophants. There are critics who'll fault a book they admit they haven't bothered to read. As the Bible says, the laughter of fools is as the crackling of thorns under a pot. Their mindless cruelty can rob you of sales, but it won't detract from the real value of what you've written. What matters at the end of the day are courage, integrity and the fighting spirit to go on trying. It's even harder being a small press publisher than it is being a writer - but success at either, pleasant as it is, is outweighed by the double crown of success at both. [[[My thanks for following up our phone call. The perils that you speak of do seem formidable and forbidding, I hope people will take note. For my own part I would only be interested in pursuing the publishing route if there was a large measure of support from the BSFA membership. To date, judging from the letters, it seems that people are happy with the situation as it is. You can draw your own conclusion from that.]]]

IAN MCKEER,
53 Radford Park Rd,
Plymstock,
Plymouth,
Devon.

I am prompted to write to you because I take issue with Paul Kincaid's Guest Editorial. In a way this is unfortunate because I sympathise with his sense of righteous indignation, both over the indiscriminate consumer of SF and the trials and tribulations of soliciting magazine material. In

the latter case I have had very similar experiences to him so appreciate how he feels. I take issue with him in regard to the usefulness of his message in the pages of Vector and with the assumption that the indiscriminate reader is to blame for the parlous state of SF as he sees it, or more precisely how much the indiscriminate reader should be blamed.

Judging from the tone of articles, reviews and letters in Vector and the other publications I'd suggest that Paul is preaching largely to the converted and that therefore his message will make little difference. On the other hand there is the question of all those people we hear about who join the BSFA and then leave it quite quickly, or who never loc any of the publications. These might be the indiscriminate readers Paul singles out but what will they make of the tone of his condemnation? Hardly friendly, or even persuasive in suggesting these characters reform their habits is he? Alas, I suspect that what he (and I) should regard as trash the people who read such material don't

and will keep reading and enjoying it. Beyond the BSFA membership are the majority of SF readers plus the ones who casually pick up a copy of Friday, or whatever the latest 500 page plus 'bestseller' is, to read on a train journey. I think it's these people Paul's message needs to reach and in the pages of Vector it never will. Nice though the thought is that the world will take notice of the opinions in Vector, or even that publishers and booksellers would, I am cynical enough to believe that money counts more than opinions and as long as trash or pot-boilers bring in sufficient returns no amount of railing against them in Vector will change the nature of the SF book market. Look at the BSFA Award. It regularly goes to what I'd consider good quality works of SF (largely, I suspect, because so few people vote for the awards, leaving the dedicated few to determine that it goes to what they like) but has any recipient's novel ever been published with BSFA Award Winner emblazoned on the front cover? Hugo or Nebula, yes, but not BSFA. No doubt the "Award Winner" label is designed to appeal to the consumer so why should publisher's worry whether the prefix to that phrase is Hugo, Nebula, John W. Campbell or BSFA? Yet the last prefix is never seen. What chance then, that opinions in Vector can have any say in the evolution of the SF market? [[[While I would agree that the BSFA has little overall effect on the SF publishing world, you would be incorrect to say that it has no effect at all. Every SF publisher in the UK and most of the USA publishers do get a copy of Vector. A copy of every review in Vector gets sent to the respective author and both the publishers and authors do read it. The reason for this is not so much the pre-eminence of Vector but rather due to the fact that we are one of the few magazines that reviews all the SF published. To give you an example, I have on file a letter from Arthur C. Clarke (to be published next issue) commenting on issue 115. Nothing surprising in that, you would expect him to read it as he was mentioned - but what was surprising was that copies of his reply were sent to MGM and Del Rey books. The link being that Del Rey publish Clarke and MGM are possibly (?) filming 2010. So the magazine does get around. Also you are wrong when you say that no one notices the BSFA award. You only have to look at a recent Gollancz cover to find BSFA Award Winner emblazoned across it and there are many other examples. Only a couple of weeks ago I had a letter from The British Council asking for details of the award. So while we do not have a direct influence, we do add a point of view, which is noticed, which must affect peoples opinions.]]] Indeed, surveying the works published as SF in the past 5 years or so I'd be tempted to argue that things are getting worse, not better and we need to be fighting to preserve the share of the market devoted to what Paul Kincaid regards as quality SF rather than going on the offensive and trying to expand that market share.

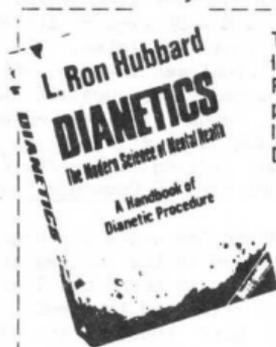
On the other hand I think it's fair to say that he "twas ever thus" argument I used in response to Paul's last editorial can fairly be applied to this one. I believe it has been the case for many years that the fiction market has a sort of pyramidal structure with many works at the base here today and forgotten tomorrow, and a few at the apex which stand the test of time. It is, hopefully, these which attract the attention of the likes of Paul Kincaid and yourself, and perhaps we should be happy with what we've got rather than having nothing at all, which seems to be the case with TV SF judging from Steve Gallagher's article..

[[[Rather a short letter column this issue but looking at the correspondence I have on file next issue will more than make up for it. I've purposely kept back all the letters which referred to last issue's editorial so I can publish all of them at one time. Therefore sitting in the WAHF column until next issue are Roger Waddington, Nigel Richardson, Jeremy Crampton, Dorothy Davies, Philip Collins, Chas Pembleton, Chris Priest and Arthur C. Clarke.]]]

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BOOK REVIEWS



"THE BEST IN THE WORLD"

CY CHAUVIN



[SF COMMENTARY REPRINT EDITION: FIRST YEAR 1969 Edited by BRUCE GILLESPIE.]
Nostrilla Press 1983 (GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia),
152pp., \$40 or £25]

"The issue here is not whether you 'agree' or not. I had and still have not, seen Path of Glory. Greg wasn't trying to 'sell' me a film or book - neither are we in the market place, and this was a private letter (like SF Commentary). These are great reviews because, for a few moments I see clearly with those eyes and feel about the films in the way Greg felt about them. No review can do more...or less." [Bruce Gillespie, p.61]

This is the central tenant, the presiding theme, of the criticism and reviews in SF Commentary. It may not be the approach that James Blish, for instance, took to SF (but we know that Blish and many other writers and critics, such as Delany and Lem and Le Guin and Dick, have respected and followed SF Commentary). This is also how I will attempt to review this volume: my only word about its marketability is that it is very nicely typeset, with yellow card covers and bound with black tape.

Bruce Gillespie does seem determined to preserve SFC: this is actually the second such volume, Nostrilla Press published Philip K. Dick: The Electric Shepherd (subtitled "The Best of SF Commentary: No 1") in 1975. This attempt to make the SFC of the past available is important, although the completeness of the presentation seems a little odd at times (old addresses of letter writers and old subscription prices are included in this completely reset version! -- asterisks on each page identify information that was true in 1969, but is no longer). Readers of more conventional magazines might question the preservation of the letters columns, but as anyone who reads fanzines knows they can be the most important and vital part of the magazine. After 14 years the life in these pages is still there: in part, I am writing this review because I cannot contribute to these pages (I did not read SF Commentary in 1969).

When I first began reading SFC regularly, it made me lie awake at night in anger as I attempted to compose replies in my head to the reviews and letters it published. Science Fiction was more important to me then, but I was inarticulate (I was also mostly wrong, too). SFC always attempted to treat SF in a rigorous fashion; its writers and reviewers also thought it was important, at least in potential. Its competition of the time, except for Peter Weston's Speculation, was less serious: SF was discussed only as a publishing phenomenon. The quality of the actual fiction published was mostly ignored. When SFC first began in 1969, it was one of only three magazines in which the claims for SF were discussed, rather than accepted as given. Even

now, with the tremendous increase in the popularity of SF, and new academic journals like Extrapolation, Science Fiction Studies and Foundation - this skeptical nature is not a consistent attribute. Only Foundation and Vector occasionally feature it in enough quality to make readers feel uncomfortable. But this was SFC's most consistent critical quality.

In terms of actual content, this reprint column includes such items as Damien Broderick's analysis of The Sirens of Iitan; Brian Aldiss' "Where Have all the Spaceships Gone?"; a Jack Wodhams guest of honour speech and discussion; George Turner's "Smith's Underpeople: Slaves or Symbols?"; Bruce Gillespie's "Mad, Mad Worlds" (a series on Philip K. Dick's novels); Guest of Honour speeches from Lee Harding & John Foyster; plus many long book reviews, letters, and reviews of current magazines of the time (which are, surprisingly, very interesting despite their dated nature.)

Probably the best and most consistent critics in SFC are George Turner, John Foyster and Gillespie himself. It is difficult to characterise the differences of all three. Turner's values seem the most traditional of the three - he does not understand the value Foyster and Gillespie place on Cordwainer Smith, for instance - and at a later point in his career criticized Joanna Russ for being too concerned with the function of science fiction in her novel And Chaos Died. He also has very strict ideas regarding the importance of the accuracy of the science in science fiction (he and James Blish have identical ideas in this regard). Bruce Gillespie, on the other hand, is more of a traditionalist when it comes to the structure of his criticism, George Turner called his work "school marmish" in an article in Scythrop. Gillespie seems more academic in tone, more formal (he quotes quite extensively in his longer and more ambitious pieces), especially in his earlier work. Perhaps this formalism was adopted originally because he was less confident of his opinions than Turner and Foyster, who generally write much more casually, and Gillespie was also unaware at first of the cavalier nature of fanzines. Whereas Turner and especially Foyster seem to leap to their insights, Gillespie's seem the result of careful shifting and plodding determination (perhaps he leaps to his insights as well, but puts in ladders of extensive rationalization afterwards for his poor readers). Foyster is the most difficult to characterize: he regards the Blish interest in the accuracy of science in SF an "eccentricity", but has a greater interest in science itself than the other two (at least judging from the material included here). His later articles on the ideal SF writer and ideal SF critic are classics of their kind; and he has published good work on Ballard, Campbell, and Blish (as a critic), but none of this is included here.

Not everything in this Reprint volume is a reprint: one of the best pieces is "Beginnings", an autobiographical essay on how Bruce Gillespie discovered fandom and began publishing SFC. It's the typical tale of a shy and somewhat awkward young reader making the breakthrough, and one I always find fascinating - and Bruce writes it with much candor and detail. One of the notable aspects of SFC throughout its history has been the emotional honesty of its editor: that this should go hand in hand with an otherwise intellectually oriented fanzine may seem unusual to some, but this personality has added greatly to it. When one tires of the reviews, there is "I must be Talking to my Friends" (the editorial and letters column combination, which worked so excellently). The same careful, analytical nature that lead Bruce to write about books in such careful detail gave him the ability to describe his own life and feelings in such detail. Since this is the only way we are likely to meet (except perhaps for some awkward moment at a convention), I'm glad that he has written so much. And because fanzines are participatory, this is not a one-way dialogue - the strange situation that happens to many authors, whose readers feel they know them intimately from their books but whom the writers do not know at all, is not the only alternative here. One could write to the editor (as in Vector, it was encouraged).

I have to write about SFC in the past tense, not merely because this is

a reprint volume, but because Bruce Gillespie has decided to fold the magazine due to financial losses on it and this reprint. This seems a sad fate for what was certainly the best serious fanzine about SF in the world, but material and subscriptions are being passed on to a new Australian fanzine, Science Fiction (published by Van Ikin, English Dept., University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA 6009 Australia). Bruce Gillespie will help edit and typeset this new magazine. SFC was actually born under similar circumstances (as this reprint volume amply documents). John Bangsund's excellent Australian SF Review (the vehicle by which Bruce discovered fandom) was faltering as the first issue of SFC appeared, and then folded during 1969, and Bangsund gave Gillespie most of the leftover material - including even some letters of comment on the last issue. A fanzine phoenix emerging from old ms.

We are lucky that Vector does not need to go through such drastic transformations. And while such an extensive reprint volume such as this seems unnecessary, a collection of The Best of Vector is long overdue. Will anyone step forward to take the challenge?



THE WORM RETURNS

ANDY SAWYER



[THE SONG OF PENTECOST by W.J. CORBETT. Methuen 1982, 216pp., £5.95]

Since the success of Watership Down it looked at one point as if everyone was writing animal fantasies. Furry animals were definitely IN, and no doubt the Tolkien-influenced beast epic would shortly be extended to the amphibious world as well. Fantasy fans waited incredulously for the Great Novel of Earthworm Life. Things got silly. Unfortunately, while animal stories are a perfectly legitimate form of fantasy (and children's stories a perfectly legitimate form of literature, come to that) that kind of fantasy does demand a kind of control of tone which very few writers are capable of. Kenneth Grahame's The Wind in the Willows remains one of the touchstones of this difficult art because, like most great English fantasies, it combines whimsy with an altogether deeper touch of melancholy. George Orwell's Animal Farm, likewise, used the form because only in that particular genre could the nuances of what he wanted to say be expressed. It is against this background that The Song of Pentecost has to be approached.

W.J. Corbett received a certain amount of media attention recently, partly because The Song of Pentecost won the Whitbread Prize, partly because building workers from Birmingham rarely write novels at all, let alone stories involving harvest mice, snakes and frogs. Be that as it may: a naive snake tricked out of his ancestral pond, a family of harvest mice searching for a home, and a poetic fox; an idealistic water vole, a mendacious frog, and an insane owl haunted by the memory of a terrible crime are just some of characters of this marvellous story. Although it concerns animals, and is packaged as a children's book, it is hardly the sort of charming nursery tale that you might expect - although nowadays it seems that it is the adult fantasies which are fey and sickly while kids get all the good stuff: an interesting inversion which there is no doubt a reason for! In fact, it begins and ends with death, and in between is enough treachery and double-dealing to fill a Jacobean tragedy, while the humour is distinctively ironic. The plot-line is conventional enough (there are strong similarities to Watership Down, for instance) the interplay of character and the way the plot weaves in and out of mercurial shifts of personality is a joy. The frog with shooting pains all down one side may remind SF fans of somebody, but WJ Corbett has the gift of crystallizing particular attitudes and reactions so that it is they which come

incidence that just does not ring true. That an undertaking of literally cosmic moment should end up hinging on whether the hero should choose to push the corpse of his enemy towards the entry portal of Orbitville or not, struck me as being so preposterously unlikely that it spoiled the whole book for me.

Secondly, Shaw sets up a marvellous dilemma. It has so many, and such far reaching repercussions, on both a personal and a universal scale, that I would have been happy to spend an entire novel reading it through. Indeed, to do justice to the idea, and to chase up just some of the many strands of thought it generated, I don't see how the idea could be properly handled at anything less than novel length. Yet Shaw wastes it in little more than a paragraph. You are just beginning to grasp the significance of what is happening when it is over.

Finally, the hero, Garry Dallen, is presented with what amounts to a choice between the woman he loves and the possible future of the universe. It is a staggering choice, yet we learn nothing of what goes through Dallen's mind when he has to make the choice; we see him act without knowing how much is blind instinct and how much is thought out; and finally we learn next to nothing of how he is affected by the choice he made.

I finished the book feeling frustrated and disappointed. None of the things I was looking for were beyond Shaw's abilities, indeed they are the sort of things I would normally have expected him to be most interested in. Why, then, did he throw it away so quickly at the end of what is, after all, quite a short novel? Was he just anxious to be rid of Orbitville? The haste with which he finishes it off does rather suggest that to me, so I wonder why he chose to write the book in the first place. Pressure from the publisher?

But all these quibbles arise from one chapter out of 17. What of the rest of the book, then?

Shaw is like Arthur C. Clarke with added humanity. Both writers are deeply concerned with the technological shape of our future. What makes Shaw, to me, an infinitely more interesting writer is the fact that he is concerned with technology only in so far as it affects the lives of his characters. Every one of his books is built around a simple, human drama. This drama may be sparked off by, or played out around, some glittering new scientific idea, whether it be slow glass, or an anti-neutrino planet, or a monumental Dyson sphere; but it is always the people who are centre stage, their history always outweighs that of the idea.

It is a pity, therefore, that, as here, Shaw so often chooses to present this human drama in the form of a crime story. It has its conveniences, allowing a simple conflict between right and wrong, and of course the investigator is able to probe into all sorts of odd corners and in so doing expose the world to us. Shaw is, indeed, quite skilled at writing a suspenseful crime story, one day I would like to see him produce one without any science fictional trappings.

Unfortunately, in combining SF and crime fiction, Shaw is handicapped by the demands of both genres. Orbitville Departure, for instance, is better SF than crime story, and as often as not it seems that the crime story isn't strictly necessary. Indeed, for long stretches it seems that Shaw himself has forgotten it; suddenly remembering with embarrassment that he has a criminal hanging around to be dealt with.

Two hundred years after the discovery of Orbitville the Earth has been virtually depopulated, and the governments want the last of the people off so they don't have to bother with it anymore. It is typical of Shaw that the social consequences of the discovery of Orbitville have been worked out with convincing logic. Dallen's job is associated with clearing the earth. Then a minor government official, while trying to cover up his own graft, accidentally reduces Dallen's wife to the level of an infant. Dallen's search for vengeance brings him into contact with those who refuse to leave Earth, people experimenting to prove that the consciousness survives after death, odd theories about the Big Bang and the nature of the Universe, and eventually, by

staggering coincidence, with the builders of Orbitville.

Somehow it all seems too much for 166 pages. It wasn't just at the end that I felt he was being too superficial. There are times when the whole thing seems to get distracted, when Dallen seems to forget that he is supposed to be seeking vengeance. This is supposed to provide the motivation for so much of what goes on in the book, yet it gets lost too easily. If it had been cut out entirely, or else built up much more, it could have resulted in a much better novel.

Nevertheless, what really keeps the whole thing going is the sparkling array of SF ideas that litter the book. There is always something fresh to be added to the stew, and if there isn't, then Orbitville itself is trotted out at regular intervals, guaranteed to overawe the susceptible. And, indeed, if you like a science fictional goulash this will appeal to the most jaded palate. Yet I couldn't help feeling there were too many spices and not enough real meat.

Whenever we should be caught up in Dallen's quest for vengeance, or examining the conscience of the villain, or enjoying the thrill of the chase; we suddenly find ourselves looking at yet another aspect of this society, or being spoon-fed some new scientific advance or theory. When the SF novelty is waiting to be explored, when the implications of some new revelation are crying out to be followed up; we suddenly find ourselves drawn back to the cops and robbers bit.

Orbitville Departure is an enjoyable read, but it suffers too much to be really good. It suffers from being a sequel. It suffers from too big a climax dealt with too briefly. It suffers from being a mixture of SF and crime story, without getting the balance quite right. Bob Shaw is capable of a lot better than this, let's hope that now he has got Orbitville out of his system he'll produce it.



FACTS, OPINIONS, AND SPUNG!

NIGEL RICHARDSON



[THE COMPLETE BOOK OF SF AND FANTASY LISTS by MAXIM JUKUBOWSKI & MALCOLM EDWARDS. Granada 1983, 350pp., £2.95]

It's a temptation to review this book in list form - Ten Best Lists, Ten Worst, Ten Funniest, Ten Craziest... List are compulsive, both to read and write, and it was inevitable that someone would come up with a book of SF lists. Reviewing list, however, is another kettle of fish; just how do you write a coherent review of 405 different lists?

I could start off by bemoaning the absence of the two most important lists, seeing how the book has neither a contents list nor an index, but this could just be a clever ploy to ensure that the reader goes through the book from cover to cover, from 'Fifteen Important SF Stories about First Contact with Aliens' to 'Six SF Writers Who Have Recorded Rock Music', encountering along the way such items as 'Six SF Novels Discussing Sterility', 'Spider Robinson's List of Silly Weapons', 'Twenty-six SF Writers Who Have Written Pornography', 'Six Writers Who Published More Than a Million Words of SF/Fantasy by Their Thirtieth Birthday', 'Brian Stableford's Ten Most Unjustly Neglected SF Novels Ever Written', to name but five.

As the introduction states, the book is a mixture of useful data and interesting trivia. The useful data includes not only a list of all the nominations for these awards, and the contents of all the yearly 'Best SF' collections from Bleiler and Dikty's in 1949 to Wollheim's in 1982. (These are the lists that I lingered over longest, coming to the conclusion that the

real Golden Age of SF was between 1964 and 1966, when the stories of E.C. Tubb and Jorge Luis Borges rubbed shoulders in Judith Merril's massive annual collection, and thirty one short stories were nominated for the 1966 Nebula, including work by Ballard, Disch, Barthelme, Lafferty, Leiber and Goulart. Those were the days...)

Turning to the trivia you'll find countless odds and ends to impress friends and stultify conversations. Did you know that 'Best of Young British Novelist' Christopher Priest was talked into writing a pornographic novel for Essex House by Norman Spinrad? That Arthur C. Clarke's movie career began and ended with his portrayal of Virginia Woolf's husband? That Harlan Ellison has listed, publicised, and in some cases sold sixteen books over the past twenty years that apparently exist only as titles in his mind even today? That Donald Wollheim didn't speak to James Blish for thirty years because of something written in a fanzine?

Between trivia and data lie the lists of guest contributors. Dave Langford gives us his favourite errors and clichés of SF, ranging from glowing radioactive dust to brass brassieres. Nick Lowe catalogues the consumption of strong black coffee throughout the space-time continuum. John Sladek explains the mysteries science dares not explain! - UFOs, the assassination of Kennedy, the Great Pyramid and Clement Atlee. Ian Watson shares some of his favourite fan mail, most of which seems to come from drug-crazed West Coast sufis. Langford pops up again with some 'Milestone of Bad SF' including some old Vector favourites and those renown spung!-ing, wayward nipples from The Number of the Beast. The ubiquitous Asimov is, of course, present, selecting his favourite Asimov books and stories - further evidence for those of us who hold that the only books he reads these days are his own, and then only in first draft....

The book has its faults; lists like 'Six Novels about Supermen' and 'Eight Overcrowded Futures' aren't much use to anyone as they show neither the first nor the best. "Seven Stories Taking Place in the Mind" lists stories that lose their appeal if the reader knows in advance that they take place in the mind. M. John Harrison's first story wasn't 'Baa Baa Blocksheep'; he appeared in "Science Fantasy" several years before. Avram Davidson and Grania Davis have written together, taking them from that sparse list of husband and wife writers who haven't collaborated in print. (This is just obligatory nit-picking on my part, of course...)

Several of the lists can be argued with - part of the reason for their inclusion, no doubt. Calling Dhalgren unreadable is one thing, but Valis? And I'm sure that a few eyebrows will be raised at the presence of Jakubowski's list of favourite cinematic nude SF scenes. Desperation seems to have set in near the end with such lists as novels with the words 'light' or 'dark' in the title, but on the whole it's as good a book as one could hope for given the limitations of the SF and Fantasy field - and, let's be honest, who could fail to give the thumbs up to any book which tells you that Robert Anson Heinlein is an anagram of 'thin senile bore ran on'?



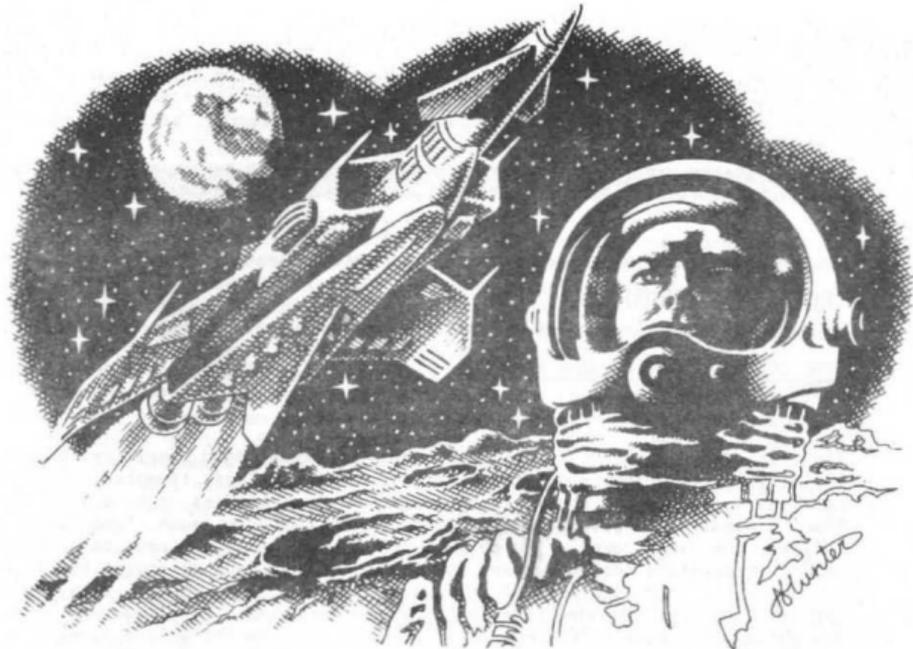
THE BORING BIT

CHRIS & PAULINE MORGAN



[SPACE By JAMES A. MICHENER. Secker & Warburg 1983, 622pp., £8.95]

Space! The final frontier? Yes, and one we shall retreat from if the predictions contained in this novel come true. Without a spur - perhaps the Russians doing something new Out There first - the Space Shuttle will be the last step America will take away from planet Earth. Space is an historical



novel of the ilk of C.S. Forester's Hornblower series. It takes a well-documented period of history - here, the recent past - creates a set of fictional characters and adds their presence to real events. Instead of Trafalgar or the Nile our heroes join the Gemini and Apollo programmes and, like naval battles, it is not presented as an alternative history, merely as something the biographers have overlooked.

Michener uses this technique as a vehicle for teaching us the history and physics of spaceflight. In this he succeeds, though as an entertaining read this work is very patchy. Michener is known for the vast time-scales that his works (Hawaii, Centennial) cover. This one starts in 1944 and follows the lives of four men - a rocket technician, an engineer, an astronaut and a politician - through the space age to 1979. Although all of these four, and a host of minor characters, are well drawn, it is difficult to identify with any of them. We were rushed so rapidly through their lives that there was no chance to get to know them. The two high points of the novel are the flights of the fictional Gemini 13 and Apollo 18, each of which could have formed the basis of a novel of its own. After this interest trails away, partly because the events described are more recent and more familiar, and partly because there is an upsurge in the dispensing of information. Throughout the novel a vast amount of technical information is handed out. Although this is presented in a number of different ways it does detract from the story, particularly as most of it is easily available in books about astronomy or rocketry, or is already known to any reader who cares about the subject.

In part Michener's motives are obscure. For some unknown reason the engineer, Mott, is introduced to early SF and we are treated to plot synopses of Knight's "To Serve Man", Heinlein's "Columbus Was a Dope" and Clarke's "The Star". The virtues of Asimov, Bradbury, Leiber and Stanley G. Weinberg (a real mistake for Weinbaum, or a fictional author?) are extolled. The whole passage seems irrelevant to the plot, and if it was thrown in as a sop to any SF readers who have struggled that far through the book, it fails miserably.

If you want to read a good novel about politics and the space programme, try Allen Drury's The Throne of Saturn, published in 1971 but set in the late 1970s. It does all that Michener tries to, but omits the boring bits.

in some appalling violation of myself."

Indeed. A reader would need to be as perverse as the 'heroine' to enjoy this story, but blind not to be provoked and put to admiration by it.

Way out on the left wing of Harrison's spectrum is "Settling the World", boasting what has to be the last word in 'knock 'em dead' openings.

'With the discovery of God on the far side of the Moon, 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.'

In that single sentence is a microcosm of the writing in this collection, an almost infinitely suggestive statement of the fantastic using the soberest of vocabularies. Harrison does not disappoint after this beginning, giving us an alternate Black Country (an Orange Country) an almost caricatured mittel Europ marxist agent determined to bomb God, a mysterious super-super-highway, and God as a giant beetle. An M. John Harrison comedy? Well, yes, but also a serious story, as pregnant with commentary upon the way we live now as any, and concluding with a glorious twist in the tail which amazes and surprises me even now.

As befits a man who served his time in the entropy factory called "New Worlds" Harrison presents a spectacularly entropic portrait of a man who carries his own destruction within himself, in "Running Down". So powerful is Lyall's entropic energy (?) that when it finally consumes him he literally reshapes geography. While the style and characterisation of this story is as convincingly understated as in the other stories I found this the least satisfying in the collection, and that because of the intrusive quality of the climbing verisimilitude supplied by the narrator (Of course Harrison is an avid climber). There seems no internal compulsion to the story for this background, the narrator being a passive reporter rather than an active component of the plot. While Egerton is thoroughly convincing as a character, I found his trials and tribulations a distraction from the agony of Lyall rather than a counterpoint to it.

Much more satisfying is the climbing background to "The Ice Monkey". One of two stories here benefit of any obvious fantasy, this is a description of an obscure tragedy, a description in which the writer makes no overt commentary, allowing his characters and their actions, realistically flowing from their temperaments, to make his eloquent statement. In 12 pages Harrison conveys physical and spiritual desolation, setting against it the singledminded delight of a man doing the one thing that gives him selfrespect. In terms of the amount of information conveyed relative to the number of words used Harrison's economy is marvellous. He describes the surroundings of the house in which Jones' estranged wife lives thus:-

'For five years or more it had been scheduled for demolition, and now it stuck up with two or three others out of a contractors' waste land a mile across, the enormous floor-plan of a slum, full of lazy fires, silent bulldozers, and trees which seemed naked and doomed without the garden walls they had once overgrown.'

A monstrous reality encapsulated and presented to the reader, solid and appallingly vivid, in fifty eight words, each one of which punches its weight. Against this background the characters - bewildered, embittered, hopefully helpless creatures dimly aware that they are moved by forces they do not begin to understand and vaguely, inarticulately, impotently outraged at their own sense of futility - live out their inevitable, inexorable lives.

It is in the sympathetic but unromantic depiction of life's losers that Harrison excels - Jones, the doomed climber, Clerk, the unravelling writer of

picks up the pieces from where 2001 left them and attempts to fill the gaps which previously were filled by our imaginations, and I think this is a weakness. By answering questions raised by 2001, 2010 reduces the profundity of the former. 2001 was profound simply because it raised more questions that it answered, just as any good work of art should.

The book is staccato in effect - 55 chapters in just over 200 pages. Clarke leaps from one end of the solar system to the other in such a rapid fashion that the reader is left breathless, not through a sense of wonder; but through sheer exhaustion, making mental adjustments as we flit from Jupiter to Earth and back again. Regretably, the first half of the book is also extremely boring. We meet Dr. Heywood Floyd again whom Clarke brings out of retirement from 2001 to join a joint United States - Soviet expedition to investigate the derelict space ship *Discovery* and also to scientifically examine the huge monolith in orbit around Jupiter.

In introducing his characters Clarke gives us the minutiae of their personalities. He shows us Dr. Chandra, the computer expert who designed Hal and tells us that his only vice in life is cigars which he smuggles aboard and smokes in the toilet. If Chandra had set the spaceship on fire there might be some point in this, but it, like all the other mini-biographies of the crew, is a dead end with no impact on the plot. Even these detailed character sketches do not bring the characters to life. Perhaps this is deliberate, for Clarke reserves his full and impressive powers for describing the personalities of Hal and the Star-Child.

Much of the action is seen through the eyes of Dr. Floyd, and Clarke allows us to eavesdrop on his most private thoughts. We also eavesdrop on the thoughts of the Star-Child as he flexes his new-found powers and we share Hal's struggle to regain consciousness after being disconnected. But Clarke is no Joyce, and this book is not a major work of literature, although perversely it has the power to stand as a classic in the genre of science fiction.

2010 does serve extremely well as a platform for Clarke to demonstrate his powerful imagination regarding technical possibilities. For example, Clarke introduces us to the concept of hologram people - surrogate humans as it were. Bowman's mother in hospital is attended by a hologram nurse who brings her a meal:

'Jessie's gnarled hand lifted the walking stick; then with surprising speed, she swept it in a short arc towards the nurse's legs. The nurse took no notice, even when the stick sliced through her. Instead, she remarked soothingly, "Now, doesn't that look nice. Eat it up, dear!"

This certainly has shock value, for only after this do we learn that the nurse is a hologram. It illustrates a most effective characteristic of Clarke's stories - give the reader a powerful unexpected image, and only afterwards explain how it worked.

The gloomy picture of mankind portrayed in 2001 is continued in 2010. In 2001 the most 'human' character was the computer Hal, it was the humans who seemed robot-like. Similarly, in 2010, the most human and sociable 'characters' are human artifacts - the hologram nurse and Hal. We also meet friendly and playful dolphins at Dr. Floyd's beach-side home in Hawaii. The message which comes across is that the world would be alright if it wasn't for people, a glum message from someone who has been so successful in prophesying the future.

The introduction of the dolphins is deliberate. Clarke is obsessed with evolution, and often remarks on the similarity between swimming in the sea and floating in space, and the evolutionary umbilical cord which connects the two. In Clarke's mythology the land of Earth is only a halfway house, a staging post on the odyssey of life on its journey from the sea to the stars. Space will become Man's natural home and we will evolve to fill our new evolutionary niche, just as our ancient ancestors adapted to the harsh environment of the

land after leaving the womb of the sea.

The central 'characters' of 2010 are not people at all, they are the Star-Child and Hal, with the mysterious and powerful aliens, whom we never see, looking over their shoulders. Clarke uses them to explore the concept of consciousness and to question the definition of life itself. Perhaps, having left his earthly body behind him to become pure spirit, Bowman has found out what true life is with his super-human powers. Is Clarke suggesting that Mankind is destined to go the way of Bowman and that our flesh and blood stage is a chrysalis in evolutionary terms and we will only become truly alive when we cast off what he calls the "tyranny of matter"?

Clarke postulates a hierarchy of intelligence, a pantheon of beings, some more god-like than others with the Universe as their plaything. Just as the aliens elevated Bowman almost to their level, mankind, who are themselves the creation of the aliens, in their turn created another from of 'life' - Hal. It is rather touching that these two super-intelligent entities - Bowman/Star-Child and Hal - come together for mutual support in the fulfillment of their master's plan. They are themselves artifacts, given life by beings superior to themselves. This sounds more like theology than science fiction, and perhaps in the hands of such as Clarke the two become interwoven as a result of the huge scope of his imagination. Clarke, like the powerful aliens he created, uses the Universe as his plaything.

According to the dictionary, the word 'odyssey' means "a long and adventurous journey". In the 2001-2010 mythology I take the word to refer to the journey of life on its wanderings from the slime of the primeval oceans to the stars. In this mythology the culmination of evolution will be when life forms have become god-like, with no limitations on their powers. Astronaut Bowman has reached this stage with the help of the all powerful aliens. He returns to our solar system after his odyssey around the universe to bring about the fulfillment of the ancient experiment begun by the aliens millions of years ago at the 'dawn of man'. He does it in a most surprising and stunning way.

However, behind the spectacular ending, can we perceive Clarke playing a subtle joke on us? The Star-Child initiates a chain reaction in Jupiter which makes it rapidly turn into a small star. (Astronomers call Jupiter a 'failed star', as it did not have enough energy to ignite the nuclear furnace necessary for it to become a star.) The Star-Child brings his colossal powers to bear on Jupiter and initiates the process which turns Jupiter into a small star, with Europa, one of Jupiter's moons as an equivalent Earth with an emerging form of life, which will eventually become intelligent under the watchful eyes of the aliens and their sentinels - the black monoliths.

In his epilogue called '20,001' Clarke says of the aliens:

'...And because, in all the Galaxy, they had found nothing more precious than Mind, they encouraged its dawning everywhere. They became farmers in the field of stars; they sowed, and sometimes they reaped. And sometimes, dispassionately, they had to weed.'

The culmination of this epic mythology is that the experiment with man on Earth has been a failure, and that the aliens try again on Europa. At the end of the book we have two worlds in the solar system with intelligent life - Earth and Europa, and Clarke gives a hint that the solar system cannot hold two civilisations, and that one will have to perish. This is Darwinian selection at its most ruthless - the aliens creating two intelligent civilisations in one solar system and waiting to see which one survives, like spectators in a zoo.

Clarke does not give the answer. He ends the book by saying "which it will be, not even the Gods know - yet." Is this Clarke sequel mongering, giving us a deliberately ambiguous ending which will enable him to eke out his mythology yet further in another sequel? Perhaps even Clarke, the giant of

modern science fiction, like the god-like beings he has created, does not know - yet.



AN ASIMOV PRODUCTION

MIKE ASHLEY



[ISAAC ASIMOV PRESENTS THE BEST SF OF THE 19TH CENTURY Edited By ISSAC ASIMOV, CHARLES G. WAUGH & MARTIN GREENBERG. Victor Gollancz 1983, 316pp., £9.95]

Well on their way to helping Asimov pass the 300 mark (in total number of books, not age), Messrs Waugh and Greenberg have recently compiled a host of anthologies, some of them on quite ridiculous subjects. Perhaps one of the more practical, and certainly more rewarding financially (because almost all of the stories are out of copyright), is this offering of stories from the last century. Its title is a little misleading, because it consists totally of short stories - fifteen of them - whereas I believe that most of the best SF of the last century appeared in novel form, and I don't understand why this book couldn't have contained several excerpts from the works of Verne, Lasswitz, Munro and others.

Nevertheless, with that proviso, the book does contain a number of interesting items - though I suspect that Messrs Waugh and Greenberg may have had to make a lesser selection had it not been for the excavations of Sam Moskowitz whose findings are used to great advantage in this book, but with very little recognition. The stories are presented in chronological order, and there are no prizes for the early inclusions. Ernst Hoffman's early horror story featuring a dancing robot "The Sandman", Mary Shelley's poignant "The Mortal Immortal", Poe's mystical "A Descent Into the Maelstrom" and Nathaniel Hawthorne's powerful Hoffmanesque "Rappaccini's Daughter" - those are all stories with which most of us will be familiar, and which are only SF by retrospective grace. There is little of the modern spirit of SF about them and whether because of that, or inspite of it, they are all good, very good, stories.

From that classical foundation, we now turn to the darker recesses of the dig, and to some of the delvings of Sam Moskowitz. "The Clock That Went Backward" is a very enjoyable story by Edward Page Mitchell, which is the earliest use of a time machine yet on record, presaging Wells by at least a decade. The machine in question is only a clock, not the wonderful whirling contraption of Wells's Time Traveller, and there is no attempt to explain how or why it works, other than some philosophical gobbledigook, so the story is strictly fantasy, not SF, but it's a lovely story for all that.

Perhaps Moskowitz's greatest discovery is that of Robert Duncan Milne, an alcoholic Scot who spent the end of his days in San Francisco and who was, by all accounts, the most prolific writer of SF the last century produced. Moskowitz assembled a number of his stories in the volume *Into The Sun*, and it is that title story that is reprinted here. Not the best from that book, it is nonetheless a wonderful inventive story about the sudden increase in the sun's temperature and the attempts to escape the cataclysm by balloon. The use of anti-gravity abounded in last century's fiction, and the example included here is "A Tale of Negative Gravity" by Frank R. Stockton, a readable enough trifle.

Perhaps the most powerful story is "The Horla" by Guy de Maupassant, one that again I've never really regarded as an antecedent of SF, though one could argue that it touches upon the possibilities of an invisible alien intrusion from another dimension. Apart from the power of the writing and vision, part

of the story's strength comes from that dichotomy, as the narrator descends into madness. Is it from an external influence or mental disintegration?

Several years ago Damon Knight translated a turn of the century alien invasion story by J.H. Rosny, and it was included in *F & SF*. I still regard it as one of the best stories of its kind that I've read, and it's presented here in the same form. How much Knight updated the style, I don't know, but nowhere would you believe you were reading a story written a hundred years ago.

Needless to say both Wells and Doyle are represented, Wells with "In the Abyss" and Doyle, surprisingly, with "The Great Keinplatz Experiment", one of his less successful efforts - even the editors call it "daffy", but included, I presume, to ensure the coverage of as many themes as possible, in this case personality exchange, as in F. Anstey's *Vica Versa*. The remaining stories are equally less inspiring: "To Whom This May Come" by Edward Bellamy, "The Thames Valley Catastrophe" by Grant Allen - a typical example of late nineteenth century's growing pessimism - "The Lizard" by Cutcliffe Hyne and "A Thousand Deaths" by Jack London - which, incidentally, was included in an earlier Gollancz anthology, *The Fantastic Pulps* by Peter Haining.

If I was a newcomer to SF and wanted to know something of the genre's history, this is a good representative example of the shorter works. The stories show that feeling of awe experienced by many that science may produce. Moreover there's a feeling of dedication and conviction in the stories that is lacking from most modern day SF. Recently SF has turned too far in looking in on itself. Only when SF has looked outward, to the stars and to the future, does it bring out its best. The rest is depressing and dull. These early stories keep that glow and 'sense of wonder', to coin that old phrase, and that makes them a refreshing read, beyond their novelty value. The anthology is representative of most of the developing themes of SF during the century though I am surprised that nothing by Fitz-James O'Brien was included or, for that matter, W.C. Morrow. But there is, nevertheless, much here to make the book a refreshing change from most modern-day SF.

[SHAPSHOT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9]

stories, as yet unsold, as further offshoots, so I worked those in, and sent the manuscript off.

H-M's reply was more than enthusiastic. 'Downright rhapsodic' is how Virginia Kidd put it.

So the final answer to your question is: yes, I am happy with the finished product now, but my happiness is very dependant on the opinions of others. If *CSL* and the rest of the series do in fact sell well, then I will be completely happy because it will mean that the public is reading the kind of SF I like to write. As regards the second part of your question, the execution of my work always lives up to my original conception in my mind, but experience has taught me that the original conception is not always good..."

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